

Martyn Brown: Justin Trudeau declares war on British Columbia

Written by Joan Russow

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Alberta premier Rachel Notley and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's alliance on pipelines could cause federal Liberal fortunes to crash in B.C.

"That pipeline is going to get built," Justin Trudeau on Edmonton's CHED radio.

"We will stand by our decision. We will ensure that the Kinder Morgan pipeline gets built."

With that, Canada's prime minister has declared war on British Columbia's efforts to stop that widely unwanted project, which our provincial government has taken new actions to frustrate, further to its other announced and ongoing efforts.

In pandering to the all-powerful interests of Big Oil—and to the voters of Alberta—yet another Trudeau has given British Columbians the finger.

It is an appalling political intervention, aimed at placating the increasingly antsy shareholders of Kinder Morgan and the other wealthy purveyors of dirty fossil fuels, whose industry is choking our planet and threatening our oceans.

"We can't be simply trapped in the American market and that's why getting this pipeline built, which has been waited for a long time, is something that this government is serious about," Trudeau brayed. The environment, Aboriginal rights and title, and B.C.'s coastal communities be damned.

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Think of it as his own new national energy program—one that stands his father's NEP on its head.

In contrast to Pierre Elliott Trudeau's NEP plan, the son-of-P.E.T.'s own pet project is more about selling out to international oil interests and helping Canadian oil prices and profits soar than about capping those cost burdens or newly protecting Canada's oil reserves for Canadians.

This time, young Trudeau is gunning for British Columbia, ironically, largely to curry favour with Alberta and to win more seats in that province, which was for so long a Liberal wasteland.

He is determined to push through a pipeline that stands to threaten the very fabric of Super, Natural British Columbia, which our provincial government is rightly trying to protect with long overdue regulatory reforms that accord proper protections for our environment.

I expect that Trudeau will get a very rocky ride at his town hall meeting tomorrow in Nanaimo. And deservedly so.

Though if his reception in Winnipeg was any indication, he won't much care, confident as he is that his security detail will rapidly silence any dissenting voices. Out of "respect" for everyone else in the audience, don't you know?

The federal Liberals are about to get a rude awakening. The great thing about living in a democracy is it allows us all to get vocal and actively engaged in shouting back at those who would silence our voices.

Trudeau has laid down the gauntlet to all those who oppose the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion project and Kinder Morgan's plan to turn Metro Vancouver into a major exporting hub for unrefined bitumen.

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He has irresponsibly implied that British Columbia's opposition to that project, and to the shockingly deficient National Energy Board approval process—currently the subject of Federal Court of Appeal challenge—is basically irrelevant to him.

Damn us all to hell, it will be built, he pledges.

He deems it to be a project that is required “in the national interest”, one that he will presumably support with all the constitutional muscle available to his federal government.

Them's fighting words, I suggest, figuratively speaking.

They beg for a swift and ardent political response from B.C. premier John Horgan that is equally bold and unequivocal as his friend Alberta premier Rachel Notley's response was to the measures announced by B.C. Environment and Climate Change Strategy Minister George Heyman.

Horgan's initial response today to Notley was a good start, but with respect, the prime minister's vow to impose the Kinder Morgan project goes way beyond her “sabre rattling”, as Horgan characterized it.

It should be answered directly as the dismissive assault it is on B.C.'s autonomy, presuming as it does that nothing we say or do will stand in the way of that dubious enterprise.

It is clearly not in the national interest for the prime minister to personally draw the line in the sand that he has. Least of all, in the midst of a monumental court challenge, which B.C.'s provincial government has engaged as an intervenor.

It is frankly wrong of him to say what he did, in the face of an ongoing legal challenge from seven First Nations, the City of Vancouver, the City of Burnaby and environmental organization to the NEB process that approved that project.

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It is absolutely not in the national interest to put Big Oil's desire for higher profits ahead of all the needed shift to renewable energy that our country must support if it is to have any hope of meeting Trudeau's own Paris climate accord commitments.

To suggest that the Kinder Morgan project and its implicit vision for massive new oil sands development is in any way consistent with Canada's climate action imperatives is duplicitous and also dangerously deceptive to all Canadians.

A seven-fold increase in oil supertanker traffic in the Salish Sea that would further threaten Canada's coastal communities and marine wildlife is clearly not in the national interest.

Especially without the due scientific research about the true nature of heavy oil spills that the B.C.'s NDP government has now rightly committed to undertaking, along with new regulatory environmental safeguards for oil spill prevention, response, remediation, and compensation.

It is not in the national interest for the federal government to run roughshod over Aboriginal Canadians' constitutional rights and title, by declaring as a "done deal" a project that is so vehemently opposed by the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs and First Nations fighting it in court.

This is exactly the same attitude that recently resulted in the Federal Court of Appeal ruling against the federal government and Kinder Morgan on the Coldwater Indian Band case. It was wrong then, as it is wrong now, morally, if not also legally.

Is Trudeau really so young, reckless, or insensitive to those Aboriginal Canadians' legitimate concerns and passionate opposition to that project that he would use whatever might it might take to impose it in the face of their legal, moral, political, and – heaven help us—even physical resistance?

All Canadians should take a long overdue trip down memory lane, to see the havoc that "my

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way, or the highway” attitude from senior governments produces.

These 16 snapshots on CBC News should help to jog Trudeau’s decidedly lacking memory.

They should remind us all of the lengths that Aboriginal Canadians have gone to in years past, to protect their interests from myopic governments that discount their rights and resolve.

Is Trudeau really so contemptuous of his government’s obligations under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that he would sanction a pipeline built over the objections of so many Indigenous Canadians, come what may?

Let us pray that’s not the case.

Yet for a guy who claims to be against bullying, his salvo on Kinder Morgan as our country’s highest elected official is a slap in the face to all Canadians who view that project as an affront to so much of what they hold dear about this country.

Trudeau may think it is national interest to ram through that pipeline that would see up to 890,000 barrels a day of diluted bitumen shipped to tidewater, whatever its risks to our sensitive terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

He may think it is in the national interest to saddle Canadians with added carbon taxes that will be needed to offset the massive greenhouse gas emissions associated with that project—which the NEB failed to even consider in its approval process.

He may believe it is in Canada’s interest and in the planet’s interest to pad the pockets of Big Oil with a project that would generate more than 100 million tonnes of greenhouse gases into our atmosphere, as its dirty oil is burned for filthy energy.

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British Columbians, by and large, do not.

We say, it is not in our province's interest, or indeed in the national interest, to build that pipeline and expanded heavy oil export facility.

It stands to threaten B.C.'s sensitive land and marine environment, to undermine British Columbia's tourism economy, and to destroy Vancouver's global "brand".

It makes a mockery of Vancouver's "Greenest City" vision and action plan. Even a single bitumen spill resulting from that project could impose incalculable economic costs that Trudeau's government has refused to properly contemplate or prevent.

In short, by so overtly siding with Big Oil in assuaging Alberta on this issue, Canada's prime minister has exposed himself and his government for what it really is: a gutless wonder, with more brute power than brains or common sense.

Perhaps it is all bravado and nothing more than a stalling tactic, of short-sighted appeasement, to calm Canada's energy markets and to reassure the big-monied interests to which the federal Liberal party is also beholden.

I sure hope so.

But if Trudeau is as serious as he would have us all believe about his unswerving commitment to Kinder Morgan, Canada's investment climate is about to get a whole lot rockier, not the opposite.

If he is as really dug-in on this fight as his words would suggest, so are we, who oppose this project for the dire menace it really is—to our economy, to our environment, to reconciliation, and above all, to our national interest.

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Back off, Trudeau. We mean it.