

Aboriginal Rights and the Proposed Pipeline Corridor: Why Are Canadian Governments Doing the Kinder Morgan Kowtow?

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Featured image: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, centre, speaks before a meeting about the deadlock over Kinder Morgan's Trans Mountain pipeline expansion with B.C. Premier John Horgan and Alberta Premier Rachel Notley, in Trudeau's on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on April 15. (Source: Justin Tang / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

A thousand years ago, the Chinese Middle Kingdom regarded the regions around it as being made up of barbarians. These areas were either controlled by Chinese military power or regarded as satellites. The custom, and the rule, was that the barbarians had to recognize the imperial supremacy of China. This was done by performing the kowtow (three kneelings and nine prostrations) or by paying tribute.

Faced with the Kinder Morgan pipeline company, Canada is doing both, allowing itself to be given deadlines by a foreign corporation and then jumping to meet them. The federal cabinet convenes an emergency meeting to discuss the corporation's ultimatum. The prime minister flies home in the middle of a foreign tour. Alberta's premier declares a constitutional crisis and rushes to Ottawa. Saskatchewan says, me too.

Now both the federal and Alberta governments have announced that they're going to deliver money from the Canadian taxpayer to the American company, pleading with it at the same time to build its pipeline across Western Canada. Repeated threats are levelled at B.C.'s government, ordering it to drop its opposition to the pipeline, or else. Alberta introduces legislation to punish B.C. by cutting off the flow of oil to that province and Saskatchewan jumps to do the same.

In spite of truckloads of promises from the PM and most of the other politicians involved about Aboriginal rights, not a word passes their lips about Aboriginal title in the proposed pipeline corridor. Three kneelings and nine prostrations to the Texas company are well underway.

In 1870, a country of less than four million people designed, built and ran a transcontinental railway, yet the country of nearly 37 million today can't build a transcontinental pipeline and its governments are only capable of begging U.S. corporations to build and run such a line.

This behaviour is a national shame and a betrayal of the legacy, dreams and the labour of our founding fathers. "Never," said Quebec's great co-founder of Canada, George Etienne Cartier, "will a damned American company have control of the Pacific." He, John A. MacDonald and the other visionaries that conceived and created this country, built an east-

west domestically controlled economy that gave Canadians pride and security. Today, not only Canadian Pacific, but also Canadian National and thousands of other Canadian companies have been delivered into U.S. hands.

Why are we not building our own pipelines under Canadian control, using Canadian money and Canadian know-how? This would mean following our own timetable — and dealing with B.C. and the Indigenous issues fair and square.

Canada, like every other major oil exporter in the world, once had a national petroleum company, Petro-Canada, until it was sold off by some of the same geniuses who have been managing our energy policy over the past three decades. We need such a tool to put some control of and benefits from our energy industry back in Canadian hands.

We could build the infrastructure to supply domestic oil from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland to Canadian consumers from coast to coast to coast. Instead, we offer subsidies to U.S. companies not only to build the pipelines, but also to run them and to deliver the crude to their customers — at roughly half of world price.

Our reward for all this is to receive peanuts for royalties. Alberta, after six decades of massive oil and gas exports, has a huge debt and a deficit to show for it. (Royalties today make up a pitiful eight per cent of that province's revenue). At the same time, almost half of Canada's population is left importing U.S. and Saudi oil and paying world prices for the privilege.

When will our national leaders find the courage to stop doing the kowtow and introduce a national-energy plan that will see Canadian energy made available for Canadian needs, Canadian consumers and Canadian industry?

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This article was first published by the Vancouver Province.

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