



## **Energy and Progressive Continentalism in North America**

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*The humane man, desiring to be established himself, seeks to establish others: desiring himself to succeed, he helps others to succeed...*

*A government is good when those near are happy and those far off are attracted.*

Confucius, *Analects*, nos.44 and 99

### **Introduction**

How to relate well to the United States of America is a dominant foreign policy question for most countries, not just for Canada. No country in history has had more global influence or power than the U.S.A. It is not surprising that coping with the reality of America particularly preoccupies its adjoining neighbours to the north and south.

Canada has some natural advantages and some disadvantages in its relationship with the

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## **Intertwined Destinies**

Isolationism cannot work because from the beginning Canada has been shaped by reference to the U.S.A. The shaping begins ten years before there even was a country called United States of America. By 1763, after the end of the Seven Years War, which had global dimensions, Britain had won Canada from France. There was some discussion during the ensuing peace treaty negotiations between those European powers of ceding Canada back to France. One prominent colonist from Philadelphia named Benjamin Franklin was opposed to that idea due to the essential connection between Canada and the Thirteen British Colonies.

Self-described as a “loyal Briton”, Franklin wrote “The Interest of Great Britain Considered with Regard to her Colonies”. In it, he argued that keeping control of Canada would benefit the British Empire and help protect the Thirteen Colonies from harassment by France and her First Nations allies.<sup>1</sup> To make his point Franklin used sarcasm. One of his ten reasons why Canada should be restored to France is particularly relevant for its anticipation of what followed:

We should restore Canada because an uninterrupted trade with the Indians throughout a vast country, wh



## **Oil and gas is energy from carbon that drives climate change**

Oil and gas is energy from carbon that comes from decomposed life forms. Climate change is being primarily driven by humans releasing carbon dioxide through burning oil, gas, methane and coal. Canada is a contributor of these greenhouse gases to the global commons in its own right and the biggest foreign supplier of oil and gas to the United States.

**Cultural engagement is not cultural surrender**

Today, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Canada has successf

## **The U.S.A. is not a conservative monolith**

The U.S.A. is not a monolithic horde of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney acolytes. There is a deep and strong progressive element in America. Canadians should embrace and support it. Canadians did once when they let in anti-Viet Nam War immigrants. These immigrants enriched Canada in many ways, bringing social activism and citizen-led debate into a sleepy society (think of Jane Jacobs in urban planning, Stephen Herrero in wildlife conservation, and Elizabeth May in the environmental quality field.) Indeed, if one looks at voting patterns in the U.S.A., the progressively inclined Democratic and Green candidates received a larger percentage of the vote in the 2000 federal presidential election than did the Republican candidate (remember Al Gore, the Democrat, won the popular vote). But the Republicans won the presidency and control both houses of Congress by small margins. In Canada, the progressive parties in the form of Liberals, NDP, Bloc Quebecois, and Greens received the vast majority of the vote in the 2004 federal election. Viewed only through an American lens, there is a deep split between progressive and conservative elements. Factor in Canada and there is a clear progressive majority in North America.

Canadians have nothing to fear from progressive Americans, many of whom are anti-globalization and pro-foreign sovereignty. They do not want other countries to become like the U.S. so they are often “hands-off”, thinking it is best to leave other countries alone. Progressive Americans should not follow that logic when it comes to Canada. Progressive Americans should be investing in Canada to help Canada get things right. They can bring about change at home by helping to make things work in Canada first and then import them to the U.S.A. For example, Canadian workers are now more productive in building American-brand cars and parts than their southern neighbours and in that industry Canada exports twice as much as it imports partly because public health care reduces labour costs. Public health care has also created greater worker freedom and mobility in Canada than the U.S.A. Labour with freedom of mobility is essential to a properly functioning market. Why not take steps to let the Americans in on the secret? The best way to protect universal health care in Canada is to have the Americans adopt it. And there is a chance they would.<sup>12</sup>

## **Progressive Continentalism**

It is time for a doctrine of Progressive Continentalism. We should have a shared North American vision of progress. Here is my take on what it should be. It would consist of free exchange of ideas, labour, capital and goods. It would promote continental stewardship of shared resources like clean air, fresh water, and wildlife (we are trashing all of them on both sides of the border with our separate management regimes while trucks full of SUVs and pipelines full of oil flow freely across the line). Each country's unique cultural institutions would remain. In Canada, they include public health care, public schools, public land use planning, and seamless engagement of ethnic diversity among our citizens, a domestic news media, and reconciliation with and empowerment of

Aboriginal people. Inspired to do these things exceptionally well, with support from progressive American capital and institutions, Canadians could take pride in perfecting them. Canadian ideas could then find a ready market in the U.S. Americans are geniuses at picking up good ideas and they love excellence (basketball was invented by a Canadian and National Public Radio has embraced much of the CBC's style and hired many of its people.) An effective way to ensure the survival of Canadian values and institutions is to have Americans embrace them and replicate them at home.

Regarding energy, Canada should work with progressive elements in the US to reduce oil and gas consumption across the continent through adopting continent wide vehicle efficiency standards like those in California. Canadians should also work to create awareness in the US of the carbon emissions and resulting climate impacts of their growing dependency on Canadian tar sands to encourage a shift to less carbon intense energy. Canadians should invest heavily in developing our strong fuel cell industry and our renewable energy industry, which could together could facilitate a North American switch away from an economy based on carbon energy to one based on hydrogen developed from renewable energy sources (such a policy is being pursued in Europe). Together these Canadian actions would be giant steps towards solving the climate change problem and serve our country economically. The acute threat that cla633renewaindlto

of the new age: each had proved himself able to combine a visionary sense of progress and practical identification with the existing order of things. Each in his own way would become a midwife to the Rockefeller rebirth...’’<sup>14</sup>

The “Rockefeller rebirth” led to that family becoming a major force in progressive philanthropy around the world, including donating land in Manhattan for the creation of the United Nations after World War II. Another major U.S. institution, the Carnegie Foundation, endowed by industrialist Andrew Carnegie, would also retain King to help examine labour issues. It also funded public libraries in small centres across North America, like the old Central Library in Calgary.

As Prime Minister of Canada, King would later embrace President Franklin Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbour” policy. He also adopted Roosevelt’s “New Deal” social policies, which were much more progressive than Canadian policies at the time. Ultimately, King and Roosevelt agreed to a Joint Board of Defence for the protection of the northern hemisphere. For the first time the isolationist U.S. had pledged to protect Canada from invasion during the dark years of World War II.<sup>15</sup>

In more recent times, environmentalists from coastal British Columbia have attracted U.S. philanthropy to protect the environment from the ravages of Canada’s own old-growth-liquidating forest industry. Without it there would be very few tall trees left on Canada’s west coast. American philanthropy has now become a mainstay of our wilderness and wildlife efforts across Canada (for example, the Canmore, Alberta based Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative gets far more financial support from the U.S. than it does from Canada even though two thirds of the area it deals with is in Canada).

Many Americans have abundant wealth and a powerful impulse to make the world a better place. They love to invest in opportunity. Canadians can give it to them. Canada has attracted a lot of human and investment capital from America for business reasons; it should do so for social and environmental reasons. If a critical mass of Americans were to see Canada’s success as important to their success, they would be more likely to respect Canada’s independence.

## **Conclusion**

Canada’s best strategy for maintaining its sovereignty and institutions is Progressive Continentalism. Such a policy of engagement and friendship that helps to strengthen the



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1 Walter Isaacson, 2003 ,Benjamin Franklin: An American Life, Simon and Schuster, New York p. 202

2 Isaacson, p.200-01

3 United States Energy Information Agency, count