



THE ELEPHANT IN THE MILKING PARLOUR

Dairy farmers should be wary of the way Canada is entering into Trans-Pacific Partnership

AN "ELEPHANT IN THE room" is an English metaphor for an obvious truth that's ignored or an obvious problem or risk that no one wants to discuss.

For Canada's dairy farmers, the elephant in the milking parlour is the Trans Pacific Partnership.

On Nov. 13, following a Honolulu lunch with U.S. President Obama on the last day of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit, Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper announced Canada will join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a multi-lateral trade agreement that aims to reduce all tariffs to zero by 2015.

Like the NAFTA, the TPP covers trade in goods, rules of origin, trade remedies, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical barriers to trade, trade in services,

intellectual property, government procurement and competition policy.

Considered a pathfinder for the proposed Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP), original signatories to the TPP were Brunei, Chile, New Zealand and Singapore. It now includes Australia, Malaysia, Peru, Japan, the U.S. and Vietnam. Japan and Canada has applied to join. All are members of APEC.

Historically, Canada's entrance into the TPP has been blocked by the US and New Zealand over their opposition to Canada's agricultural policies. Specifically supply management and in particularly as it relates to dairy products.

According to both Maclean's and the National Post (Nov. 14 and 13, respectively) when questioned about

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this, "The Prime Minister said Canada can 'easily meet' the broad strokes of the agreement unveiled Saturday by Mr. Obama, even if it means throwing into the mix a supply management system that forces Canadians to pay higher prices for products like milk, cheese, chicken and eggs..."

Harper is quoted as saying: "Whenever we enter into negotiations...we always say that all matters are on the table. But of course Canada will seek to defend and promote our specific interests in every single sector of the economy."

But of course...Any dairy farmer who doesn't see this one coming should go out and listen to the barn mice. They know foes wear many faces.

Whether covert (just these pesky trade rules) or overt (the CWB) is of little consequence. It comes to the same: flagrant disregard for farmers, the communities they serve, public policy, food security, and (oh yes) democracy. Dairy farmers need only look to their neighbours in the grain sector to understand just how much deception and treachery the Harper government is capable of delivering.

On Oct. 18, after years of harassment that included interference in elections, removal of directors from office, firing of the general manager and millions of taxpayer dollars spent on a massive propaganda campaign, Bill C-18 was tabled to kill the Canadian Wheat Board — an institution representing the economic interests of Prairie grain farmers since 1935 — expropriating in the process some \$200 million in assets owned by the farmers.

In a sharply-worded decision rendered Dec. 6, Federal Court Justice Douglas Campbell ruled the Harper

government's conduct was not only a violation of the law, but moreover "an affront to the rule of law."


Undaunted, Harper pushed ahead: Bill C-18 flew through the Senate and passed into law Dec. 15. According to Ned Franks, professor emeritus of political studies at Queen's University "as long as that appeal process is

underway, the government cannot implement the provisions of the law."

Yet within hours of its passage, the eight elected CWB directors were fired.

In the best-Christmas-present-ever category, multinational grain giants Cargill, Viterra, ConAgra, ADM and others now have access to Canada's

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It comes as no surprise that right wing governments embrace neo-conservative ideology.

We get that. But surely the global economic collapse — precipitated in 2008 and with no end in sight — demands that leaders of integrity and vision re-examine the legitimacy of such rhetoric?

International markets dominated by a handful of concentrated economic players are not competitive. Global investment flows that race through the night seeking profits from financial derivatives may increase GDP, but add nothing to productivity.

Jobs exported to offshore factories with low wage rates and no environmental standards serve the interests

of investors at the expense of communities. The income gap between rich and poor is absurd.

Credit ratings of once powerful nations are in the tank. The Euro is in trouble. The Occupy movement is on the march, resonating with many who sense legitimacy behind its youthful messaging.

Add to this global concerns regarding peak oil, climate change, food security, sovereignty and safety, the buy-up of farmland by foreign investors and the transition to fuel crops and it is beyond clear that governments have a profound responsibility to enact good public policy to ensure the sustainability (read permanence) of our farm sector.

In the 2011 federal election, the

majority of Canadians — six out of every 10 — voted against Stephen Harper's Conservatives. Thanks to Canada's multi-party political system, Harper's 39.6 per cent support in the polls translated to a Conservative majority.

In such circumstances, a true leader would steer a collaborative and democratic course reflective of the interests of all Canadians. Instead, Harper has lashed the Canadian ship of state alongside that of the Americans, jettisoning democratic farm legislation in the process and dashing Canadian farmers and Canadian public policy to the rocks.

Incompetence or agenda, it matters not. If these guys worked for us, we'd fire the lot. Oh wait... They do... Talk amongst yourselves. ☹

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