

timescreen/thoughtspace 1974 by Charles Gagnon

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Forum, December 2021

Like many who worked in the Pearson Building, I passed by this work of art in the lobby for decades, too busy to pay it much attention. Only in retirement did I learn about its significance and its highly regarded creator, Charles F. Gagnon (1934- 2003). We have here a major work by a first-rank Canadian artist that merits a close reading. It should be more appreciated by employees and visitors, as well as millions of Canadians who may glimpse it as a backdrop for ministerial press events.

The work honours the legacy of L.B. Pearson (1897-1972) as diplomat and statesman. In the brochure distributed at its inauguration, the artist declared: “The form relates somewhat to an obituary in telex form with spiritual dimensions.”

Gagnon also wanted his creation to inspire and challenge Canadians. The painting includes text in English and French, but only one phrase is translated, the final quote from a 1968 speech by Pearson, significantly placed toward the lower end of the right hand panel where one would normally conclude a scan of the text going from left to right and top to bottom. In this space Gagnon inserted and translated: “Everything that is possible in the world is possible here. Tout ce qui est possible en ce monde est possible ici.” This could only be designed to encourage Canadians to believe in their own country.

The texts are not listed chronologically. They are interspersed with quotes from a few philosophers such as Montesquieu and Camus, illustrating Pearson’s humanistic world view, and his strong attachment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Overall, they reflect Pearson’s belief that humanity could address its differences in a spirit of dialogue, and his belief in Canada’s bright future, provided there was creative engagement and commitment by its citizens. On his use of text in this and (sparingly) in a few other works, Gagnon wrote: “The value of a word is, that if meaningful spiritually, it is timeless and its true interpretation remains a personal experience, therefore, truly provoking and rewarding.”

I was alerted to the work’s significance by a former colleague, Eric Bergbusch, who had interviewed the artist and published an article about the painting in the *Ottawa Citizen* on August 27, 2000. Eric generously shared his notes and encouraged me in this project. Additional sources were available in the Charles Gagnon fond at the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives. There it was possible for the first time to determine in more detail Gagnon’s thinking behind the work and the sources for the text.

In 1973-4, in conjunction with planning for the new Pearson Building’s interior, Public Works organized a national competition with a blue-ribbon jury of departments, architects, curators, academics, cultural critics, artists and a representative of the Pearson family. (The official name of the selection body was the Advisory Committee on

Art to the Fine Art Program of the Department of Public Works.) The initial selection of artists and art forms was based on the recommendations of the Building's architects WZMH (Webb, Zerafa, Menkes, Housden). Eleven artists were then invited by the jury to submit proposals and ten responded. The call for submissions allowed for a work in either 2 or 3 dimensions to be integrated into the interior of a working foreign ministry, visually enriching the spaces, while allowing for personal expression and "maintaining elegance and simplicity." The space was a lobby wall 8'6" high, 45' long, surfaced with Champlain Red stone from the National Granite Quarry in Northern Quebec. The budget, including design, insurance and installation was \$45,000.

Gagnon prepared his submission meticulously, visiting the lobby twice to assess the site and its lighting, and observing people moving. He wrote his winning proposal by hand (in English) in block letters. In parallel, he was careful to clarify what expenses would be covered and his degree of artistic freedom. He agreed to consult the Pearson family on any quotations chosen. Gagnon was a proud Quebecer, classically educated, but had also studied in New York City (1955-60), including at the time Pearson was awarded his Nobel Prize.

Experiencing the vibrant New York art scene in the 1950s allowed him to assimilate avant-garde developments at a time when the city had replaced Paris as the global centre of the art world. He was also exposed to jazz and classical art, describing the Metropolitan Museum as "my main feeding station."

The work is a triptych, i.e. composed on three panels, 7'4" high. When asked by Bergbusch about this particular form, Gagnon remarked that threes occurred throughout his work and have "a certain spiritual quality." He may have been thinking of the Trinity in Catholic theology, or the tradition of church triptychs illustrating biblical scenes and the lives of saints. The medium is oil on canvas, mounted on board with an aluminum frame. Gagnon designed special brackets to deal with the work's considerable weight.

The work is signed on the back, a common practice with abstract works, so that the signature does not distract from the overall effect. Gagnon was confident that his name would at some point be identified in a nearby plaque. It was, and the image is reproduced below.

The title was capitalized on the plaque, although given in lower case in Gagnon's original submission, which I have used in this article. 3 (It is sometimes cited without the date with the words hyphenated, and two parts separated by a comma or hyphen, with the first letters capitalized.) The title may imply imagined new dimensions, as well as suggesting that the viewer can enter into the mind of Pearson while contemplating the work as a time screen.

When viewed from a distance, the work appears as a horizontal abstraction. On approaching closer, text emerges with two lines of text per defined zones. The backgrounds of all the panels are dominated by a grey-tan-white-pink-ivory tone, with

occasional black accents. Subtle differences distinguish the individual panels with cloud-shaped splashes of yellow on the left panel, teal green in the middle, and sky-blue on the right.

The overall muted palette reflects the preference of diplomacy for non-confrontational language. Thus, no strident or contrasting colours were used. The artist based his lettering on the fonts from one of Pearson's old typewriters, retrieved by one of the late Prime Minister's secretaries. According to Bergbusch: "Gagnon made high-contrast copies of the typeface in metal. The metal shapes were then used to cut rubber stamps: these were dipped in paint and applied to the canvas..." Each 1.75" letter was then carefully mapped within its line's 6" height, some words being hyphenated. The artist preferred a hand-crafted look in order "to retain the quality of vibration I am seeking."

The use of text in modern art harkened to a classical theory dating at least to Horace (65-8 BCE), to whom the following quote is attributed: *ut pictura poesis* (as in painting, so in poetry). Both painting and poetry employ metaphor, repetition and other rhetorical techniques. Similar turns were employed in Pearson's speeches.

The unveiling of this work on June 11, 1975 was reportedly an animated public event. Former SSEA Mitchell Sharp stood in for his successor, the Hon. Allan MacEachen. PM Trudeau attended along with former PM Diefenbaker, members of the Pearson family and former colleagues. There was thunderous applause after the speeches, but technical glitches in unveiling the three panels outlasted the applause, and the painting was greeted with silence. Gagnon remarked: "It seemed they enjoyed it all — except for the painting!" Geoffrey Pearson nonetheless wrote reassuringly to Gagnon on June 23, 1975 to express the entire family's appreciation and his personal pleasure with the result: "The original idea was not easy to grasp for many people but there is no doubt it was perfectly appropriate."

Before and following this prestigious commission, Gagnon pursued a productive and successful career involving experimental film and photography in addition to painting. He was also interested in linking his creations to music, philosophy, mathematics, architecture and design. His influence as a teacher was important, as he taught photography, film, video, sound and mixed media at the University of Ottawa from 1975-96. In 1978, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts organized a solo exhibition of his work, which toured nationally. In 1995 he received the Borduas Award, Quebec's highest distinction in the visual arts. In 2001, he was honoured with a career retrospective at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. In 2002 he was awarded the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts. The supporting documentation cites *timescreen/thoughtspace 1974* among his major achievements. For readers who would like to see more examples of his work, a well documented and illustrated site can be found at: [http:// charlesgagnonartist.com/artist](http://charlesgagnonartist.com/artist)

When the lobby of the Pearson Building is again open to employees and the public, I would happily volunteer to lead a group discussion about the work and its texts. Art

should be about the conversation; not only a solitary contemplation. All the texts quoted in the painting are given below with the key.

FIRST PANEL

The recognition of individual man as the fundamental criterion of all things temporal has been / one of the most liberating forces of history. Elected in Algoma East, nineteen forty-eight. Nobel Peace Prize. nineteen fifty-seven.

Pearson quoted an unnamed Greek philosopher as the source in a speech on Christian Foundations for World Order given to the National Council of the Churches of Christ in America, Boston, 2 December 1954. See: L.B. Pearson, *Words and Occasions: An Anthology of Speeches and Articles Selected from His Papers by the Right Honourable L. B. Pearson* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 128. The original idea, controversial in its time, comes from the pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras, as cited by Plato: "Man is the measure of all things" in *Theaetetus* (c. 369 BCE).

Sooner and better than his contemporaries he had come to understand that the world for all its diversity was one... that no nation even the most powerful could escape a common creaturehood and a common peril.

Bruce Hutchison, Editorial Director, *Vancouver Sun*. "A Tribute to Lester Bowles (Mike) Pearson, delivered at a Memorial Service in Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria, B.C. 30 December 1972." Memorial Service Booklet, Charles Gagnon fonds, File Pearson Memorial: Final cards and notes (1974), National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives.

Ce qui donne précisément à la vie, à l'histoire, et à la politique son importance c'est la possibilité qu'ont toujours les hommes et les nations, même s'ils ne le font pas, d'agir sur le milieu plutôt que de simplement y réagir.

L.B. Pearson, speech to the National Council of the Churches of Christ in America, 2 December 1954, cited in *Words and Occasions*, p 130.

French translation by Gagnon. The English original reads: "For precisely what gives significance to life and history and politics is the possibility which men and nations always possess, though they by no means always use it, of acting creatively in their environment, rather than merely reacting to it."

The best defence [,however,] against totalitarianism in any form is to prevent or remove the conditions upon which it feeds.

L.B. Pearson, "The Implications of a Free Society," speech to the Canadian Institute of Public Affairs summer conference at Lake Couchiching, 13 August 1949, *Words and Occasions*, 92

SECOND PANEL

History is indeed full of turbulence and terror but throughout the ages wise and brave men have been able to find within themselves resources to keep that terror at arms length and the courage to keep their spirits unclouded, and their integrity intact.

L.B. Pearson "On My Installation as Chancellor of Victoria College, 4 February, 1952, *Words and Occasions*, 110.

In 2000, the Hon. John Manley was struck by the painting when he first took up his office as Minister of Foreign Affairs. At a particularly challenging period in world affairs following 9/11, he cited the above phrase in an important address on October 11, 2001 to le conseil des relations internationales de Montréal.

He knew that in this world no work is ever finished, that the best is never good enough, that the reach always exceeds the grasp, that the future of our strange species always eludes its brief authority.

Hutchison tribute cited above.

Camus écrivait: La vraie générosité envers l'avenir consiste à tout donner au présent.

Albert Camus, *l'Homme Révolté* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1951) 376.

In the end, the whole problem always returns to the people: to one person and his own individual response to the challenges that confront him. Korea and Suez.

L.B. Pearson, "Nobel Lecture The Four Faces of Peace, 11 December 1957," *Words and Occasions*, 18.

The words "Korea, and Suez" were added by Gagnon, perhaps to illustrate the point with historic examples from Pearson's life; they are not in the original text of Pearson's speech at this point. The full speech is available on line:

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1957/pearson/lecture/>

Misunderstanding [of this kind] arising from fear remains the greatest enemy of peace.

Pearson, Nobel Lecture The Four Faces of Peace, *Words and Occasions*, 17.

THIRD PANEL

La plus grande chose du monde c'est savoir être à soi. Montaigne.

Michel de Montaigne, *Essais* I, 39.

I love my country. It is strong and beautiful and good. It is rich in resources of man and nature. It is greatly blessed among the nations of the world. Everything that is possible in this world is possible here. Tout ce qui est possible en ce monde est possible ici.

L.B. Pearson, "At the Liberal Party Convention, 4 April, 1968," *Words and Occasions*, 292. French version of last sentence by Gagnon.

Lester Bowles Pearson born on the twenty third of April, eighteen ninety-seven, Newtonbrook Ontario. Married Maryon Moody of Winnipeg. Two children. Taught Modern History at / U of T. Joined Department of External Affairs nineteen twenty-eight. Ambassador to U.S. nineteen forty-five. Secretary of State for External Affairs, Prix Nobel. Premier Ministre. Prime Minister of Canada nineteen sixty-three to nineteen sixty-eight. Retired. Died in Ottawa on the twenty-seventh of December nineteen seventy-two.

Maryon Pearson noticed a spelling mistake in the word "Winnipeg" and pointed this out as a proud native of that city. The artist corrected his spelling by overpainting, thereby underlining the hand-crafted nature of the work.

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1973. Vietnam. L'aventure CICS/ICCS (Commission internationale de Contrôle et Surveillance)

Gabriel Lessard

Forum, December 2021

Je suis entré au ministère des Affaires étrangères le 6 juin 1972 après une courte carrière comme responsable des examens pour la Commission scolaire régionale Côte-Nord. Huit mois plus tard, le 30 janvier 1973, mon agent du personnel me convoque pour me demander si j'acceptais de partir à pied levé pour le Vietnam du Sud afin de servir sur la nouvelle Commission internationale de Contrôle et Surveillance qui naîtrait des Accords de Paris signés le lendemain. Je répondis : « toujours prêt ». Ainsi le lendemain, mon agent du personnel me convoque à nouveau pour me dire que je serai le plus jeune membre de la délégation canadienne près la Commission internationale de Contrôle et de Surveillance (CICS) et que j'avais 24 heures pour me préparer.

J'ai atterri à Saigon vers 11h30 le 6 février 1973, une date qui a marqué l'histoire. Car à 14h00 se réunissait pour la première fois la Commission. Saigon, de ce fait, devenait le

point chaud de la scène internationale: un des moments clés de l'histoire de la guerre froide allait s'y dérouler. La première session de la Commission mettrait donc en place les mécanismes de mise en œuvre des Accords de Paris qui éventuellement devait ramener la paix dans la péninsule du sud-est asiatique et apaiserait les tensions de la Guerre froide.

Toute la presse américaine et internationale était en ce jour présente à Saigon pour cet événement majeur. Il est difficile aujourd'hui d'imaginer la taille imposante que pouvaient représenter les équipements de communication de l'époque. Étant arrivé vers 11h30 et sachant que cet événement aurait lieu, dès les procédures aéroportuaires complétées, je demandai au personnel qui m'accueillait de me conduire directement à la délégation canadienne.

Environ 150 mètres séparaient les bureaux de la délégation canadienne des bâtiments de la salle de réunion. Ces 150 mètres étaient bordés d'arbres, mais surtout bondés de journalistes et d'équipement de communication sur les 100 derniers mètres avant le bâtiment même. Tous les acteurs étant déjà en session, la meute de journalistes, les caméras, les microphones et tutti quanti se rabattirent sur ma personne, me posant multiples questions sur ce qui allait se passer... Or, je n'en savais strictement rien et je me sentais écrasé par cette presse qui semblait vouloir ma peau...

Qu'ai-je retenu des sessions de la CICS? Tout d'abord, la maestria de notre chef de délégation, mon maître, l'ambassadeur. Qu'il était beau de le voir opérer! Lorsqu'il intervenait, tous les participants devenaient attentifs, en particulier les chefs des autres délégations indonésienne, polonaise et hongroise. Il s'exprimait tant en français qu'en anglais avec une aisance et un panache qui désarçonnaient, en particulier les interprètes qui étaient tous des pays de l'est. Il prenait un malin plaisir à les tenir sur le qui-vive, reprenant au besoin des traductions lorsqu'il jugeait que sa pensée n'avait pas été bien interprétée.

Mon ambassadeur était un personnage hors norme. Ses soirées se terminaient toujours très tard. C'était un oiseau de nuit. Il aimait le bridge et les échecs. À mon avis, il n'excellait ni dans l'un, ni dans l'autre, mais il aimait le jeu. Après une victoire aussi surprenante que rapide aux échecs, il voulut m'enseigner le bridge, ce sur quoi je ne l'ai pas suivi. Car son horaire et le mien ne pouvaient se concilier. Étant l'agent junior, je devais arriver tôt au bureau pour aider à préparer les briefings du jour. Lui, se levait toujours plus tard, mais absorbait très vite tous les derniers développements et attaquait de pied ferme toutes les réunions de la CICS.

La CICS a été un outil de la Guerre froide. Elle été conçue en fonction d'un monde divisé entre l'Ouest et l'Est, entre le capitalisme et le communisme. Ainsi, deux délégations représentaient chaque bloc, soit le Canada et l'Indonésie pour l'Occident et la Pologne et le Hongrie pour l'Est. Cette composition devait en assurer l'objectivité. Le Canada avait beaucoup hésité à s'engager dans cette deuxième commission internationale. Il jugeait que la première Commission, celle qui avait suivi les accords de 1954 sur le destin de l'Indochine, n'avait pas été un succès. Or, le Canada en avait fait partie durant toute son

existence en compagnie de l'Inde et de la Pologne. Une faiblesse de la structure de cette première commission avait été que les rapports d'incidents militaires n'étaient transmis à aucun organisme qui eut pu rectifier ces situations.

Le Canada jugeait donc à priori que cette nouvelle commission, la CICS ne conduirait pas aux résultats escomptés, ce qui effectivement fut le cas. Cependant, suite aux pressions énormes des USA, des membres de l'administration, le Canada a accepté d'y participer. Le Canada espérait qu'au lieu d'être tout simplement acheminés aux protagonistes, les rapports des incidents militaires trouveraient d'une façon ou de l'autre leur chemin jusqu'au Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies qui pourrait prendre les mesures appropriées. Le Canada possédait aussi d'autres avantages. Tout d'abord, il connaissait bien le terrain du fait de sa participation à la première commission. De plus, le professionnalisme des forces armées canadiennes était reconnu de tous.

Le Canada accepta donc de s'engager pour une période de six mois afin d'évaluer la fonctionnalité de la CICS et de mettre en place les modalités sous lesquelles elle opérerait. C'était principalement la tâche des 250 militaires de l'armée canadienne et des 50 membres du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères.

J'ai déjà souligné que la composition de la CICS en quatre délégations devait en assurer son objectivité. Encore cette notion restait-elle à définir. Pour le Canada, l'objectivité signifiait rapporter la réalité telle qu'elle était vécue ou perçue par des observateurs militaires qui devaient décortiquer la dynamique d'un incident. Si un militant du Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire avait été à l'origine d'une escarmouche, il fallait le signaler et éventuellement condamner le ou les responsables. La même logique devait s'appliquer tant dans le cas d'incidents provoqués par le Gouvernement du Sud Vietnam que par les troupes du Nord Vietnam dont la présence factuelle au sud n'a jamais été admise, sauf en expliquant que le Nord pouvait répondre à une demande du Gouvernement révolutionnaire provisoire.

Pour les tenants de la philosophie communiste, soit les représentants de la Pologne et de la Hongrie, pour le Nord Vietnam et pour le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire, notre philosophie de l'objectivité ne s'appliquait tout simplement pas. Car, pour eux, l'objectivité se concevait dans le contexte de la réalisation du Grand soir rouge, c'est-à-dire de la victoire totale du communisme, de l'égalité pour tous, etc. Nous étions en pleine Guerre froide et les communistes avaient une foi absolue en leur supériorité philosophique et historique. Étaient donc objectifs ceux qui avaient compris le sens de l'histoire qui nécessairement conduirait à la réalisation du Grand soir rouge. Pour la Pologne et la Hongrie, leurs alliés, le gouvernement du Nord Vietnam et le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire, ne pouvaient donc être coupables d'aucun manquement aux Accords de Paris.

Nous faisons ainsi face à deux conceptions inconciliables de l'objectivité. La CICS pouvait condamner unanimement le gouvernement du Sud Vietnam, mais jamais l'allié du gouvernement du Nord Vietnam, soit le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire. Le Canada, par sa simple présence contribuait à projeter sur la scène internationale une

image négative du gouvernement du Sud Vietnam qui devenait le mauvais larron. Il était le coupable, l'acteur de mauvaise foi qui ne voulait pas réellement mettre en œuvre les Accords de Paris, en mettant fin aux escarmouches et à la guerre. Le Canada était le jouet d'une dynamique à laquelle il souhaitait mettre fin.

La CICS connut un moment de grande tension lorsque, par mégarde, un rapport d'incident préparé par les quatre délégations militaires condamnait unanimement 7 le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire. Les délégations de Pologne et de Hongrie dont un premier échelon avait approuvé le rapport, ont alors mis leur veto à la transmission de ce rapport aux protagonistes. L'inénarrable ambassadeur canadien a alors demandé une suspension sine die de la session de la CICS et a fait valoir qu'elle ne reprendrait pas tant qu'une solution à la transmission de ce rapport n'aurait pas été trouvée.

Encore une fois, je souligne que nous opérons sur le point chaud de la scène internationale. Tout ce qui touchait la CICS faisait les manchettes de la presse mondiale. Les gestes de la délégation canadienne étaient commentés dans tous les journaux, particulièrement au Canada, et ne recevaient pas systématiquement l'appui de la presse. Alors a commencé avec la centrale un dialogue qui nous a fait beaucoup réfléchir. Ce fut d'abord le directeur qui attira notre attention, demandant de réviser notre copie; puis le directeur-général; puis le sousministre... l'ambassadeur réunissait son équipe et discutait des tenants et aboutissants de toute cette affaire. Puis, un jour il nous dit : « Les gars, nous avons épuisé toutes nos cartouches. Nous avons résisté jusqu'à maintenant, mais je m'attends à recevoir des instructions du Ministre. Il nous faudra capituler ». Sauf que les instructions du ministre n'ont pas eu le temps de nous parvenir. Car les délégations communistes avaient finalement accepté de transmettre le rapport. Nous étions soulagés et heureux.

Il y aurait certes d'autres anecdotes à raconter, mais elles n'ont pas la même signification. Étant le plus jeune agent sur le terrain, j'avais été désigné comme agent de liaison avec le Gouvernement Révolutionnaire Provisoire que le gouvernement du Canada ne reconnaissait pas. Cela m'a parfois donné l'occasion de corriger des notes et de participer plus directement à la conception de l'action.

Le Canada n'avait donc pas réussi à faire valoir que les rapports de la CICS devaient trouver leur chemin jusqu'au Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies. Il s'était engagé pour 6 mois et voyait que rien ne changeait, que la guerre se poursuivait de façon différente et plus subtile. Le Ministre canadien vint en mission dans la région pour évaluer la situation. Il était accompagné d'une importante délégation de la presse et son avion fit escale dans les pays de la région pour entamer des discussions avec les gouvernements, y compris celui du Vietnam du Nord. Je fus pour ma part envoyé au Laos pour aider notre chef de mission, en particulier avec la presse. Ma première mission fut de discuter avec le directeur de l'aéroport qui était de sang royal. Il me fallait donc donner de la « majesté ». C'était plutôt cocasse...

Ma visite au Laos me valut une autre expérience avec la presse. Le Ministre devait en effet à chaque étape donner une conférence de presse. Le plus respecté de tous les journalistes, le représentant du Devoir, était celui qui donnait le ton, du moins en ce qui concerne la substance. Pas toujours très fier de ses condisciples, il me dit : « Gabriel, si tu n'as jamais vu une meute de loups affamés, prépare-toi, ce sera pour aujourd'hui ». Il a ainsi parfait mon éducation en ce qui concerne la presse... Je demeure toujours méfiant.

Le Ministre canadien, rentré à Ottawa, fit son rapport au cabinet et le Canada annonça sa décision de se retirer de la CICS. Il sera remplacé par l'Iran. L'expérience canadienne aura duré exactement six mois. Je faisais partie du groupe des derniers agents à quitter le Vietnam du Sud le 6 août 1973. Moins de deux ans plus tard, le retrait du Canada se révélait prémonitoire avec la chute de Saigon le 30 avril 1975. Entre temps, le Canada aura permis aux États-Unis de se retirer « dans l'honneur » et de contribuer à mettre fin à un chapitre pas nécessairement très glorieux de leur histoire.

Le Vietnam, après avoir été deux entités reconnues internationalement sous deux commissions internationales redevenait un seul pays avec la victoire du Nord sur le Sud. Le Vietnam a beaucoup compté dans ma vie. J'y ai vraiment eu le sentiment de faire partie de l'histoire en marche. Il a été le terrain de mon apprentissage et une école de formation sans pareil. J'y remettrai les pieds comme ambassadeur 32 ans plus tard. Je craignais que mon expérience de la CICS soit perçue négativement par mes interlocuteurs. Ce fut tout le contraire. Les Vietnamiens valorisaient que j'aie été un témoin de leur histoire.

J'en reviens à ma première nuit à Saigon. Compte tenu de l'arrivée massive de militaires, de diplomates, de journalistes et de curieux de toutes sortes, la capacité hôtelière de la capitale sud-vietnamienne était complètement débordée. La délégation canadienne n'ayant pas pu me retenir une chambre dans un hôtel décent, je me retrouvai dans un hôtel de troisième catégorie où des blattes énormes se mettaient en action dès que la lumière était éteinte. J'ai souvent été logé dans de beaux hôtels, mais je me suis aussi retrouvé dans des hôtels de deuxième ou troisième ordre où le « canadien moyen » n'aurait pas accepté de rester. La fonction et le devoir ont toujours primé sur les conditions matérielles. C'était vrai pour moi, mais aussi pour la très grande majorité de mes collègues. Je tiens à le souligner pour tenter de mettre fin à certains mythes qui minent nos instruments diplomatiques en les réduisant au champagne et à la vie facile.

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China's CPTPP Application: Serious Economic Move or Strategic Political Gambit?

Hugh Stephens

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China's formal application to join the CPTPP, filed on September 16 with CPTPP depository state New Zealand, was an unexpected development coming after more than a year of Chinese musings about interest in applying to join the trade pact. Potential CPTPP membership for China was first formally acknowledged by Premier Li Keqiang back in May of 2020, an expression of interest reiterated by President Xi Jinping at the APEC Summit in November of last year. Many observers considered China's interest more of a placeholder than a serious intent, but after conclusion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement in 2021, a 15 nation plurilateral trade pact of which China is a leading member, China has continued to put flesh on the bones of its expressed commitment to trade liberalization.

There are informed commentators who argue that Beijing is ready to meet the high standards of entry to the CPTPP, has been preparing for some time to do so, and that domestic policy adjustments would be minimal. That said, there are a number of areas of the CPTPP that will give China pause such as labor rights, disciplines on State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), and digital trade. China would not be the only member country with strong state-owned entities (Vietnam, Singapore and Mexico all fit into this category), but the role of SOEs in China's domestic economy far outweighs the role of state capital in current CPTPP members. The Agreement brings SOEs under "WTO Plus" disciplines, including commitments regarding commercial considerations, transparency, non-discrimination and non-commercial assistance (subsidies).

China reportedly began checking with CPTPP members on technical aspects of the agreement back in May of this year and will have a detailed knowledge of what is expected. Adoption of CPTPP standards would assist domestic economic reformers within China in advancing their agenda. On the other hand, China may consider that its economic weight is such that it may be able to negotiate exceptions and special

treatment, long transition periods and other concessions. If it entered formal negotiations and pursued this negotiating strategy, this could result in rifts between CPTPP members and undermine the integrity of the Agreement. CPTPP members are already issuing differing reactions regarding China's application, with Australia and Japan expressing caution while Malaysia and Singapore were more welcoming. Malaysia's endorsement comes with a caveat since Malaysia itself has not ratified the Agreement. Not having implemented its signed commitment, Malaysia will not have a say or play a role in negotiating with new entrants until such time as it completes ratification and brings the Agreement into force in Malaysia.

There is another potential reason for China's formal application at this time, and that is strategic. Under this scenario, China realizes that it would be difficult to meet the standards of the CPTPP given current Chinese economic policy, yet has little to lose by making an application knowing that either (1) its application will not be endorsed by all members, yet China will have "demonstrated" its willingness to promote economic liberalization or (2) more likely, there will be cautious endorsement but negotiations will be difficult, protracted, and may not reach a conclusion. After all, China's WTO accession negotiations took over 15 years. Under this scenario China not only buys time, but it shines a spotlight on the absence of the United States from the CPTPP, while scrambling the cards on Taiwan's entry.

Taiwan has been preparing a CPTPP bid for some time but has proceeded with excessive caution. When the UK launched its own bid to join the CPTPP earlier this year, Taipei took this as an opportunity to further delay, wanting to take stock of how the UK's negotiating process played out. In addition, President Tsai Ing-wen's government is facing domestic political constraints arising from the influence of the protectionist agricultural lobby as well as health and safety concerns regarding food imports. However, within a week of Beijing formally submitting its CPTPP application, Taipei also filed its request with New Zealand. With Beijing's foot in the door first, however, Taiwan will now have to contend with the formula that was invoked when both China and Taiwan joined the WTO. China joined first, with Taiwan following almost simultaneously. While CPTPP members are not obliged to follow the WTO precedent, it will be a powerful factor and as long as China drags out the negotiations on its own entry, the longer Taiwan will have to wait.

Having successfully checked Taiwan's application with its gambit, China has also rubbed salt into a self-inflicted wound that the Trump Administration brought about when it cancelled U.S. membership in the CPTPP's predecessor, the twelve nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The TPP, U.S.-led and inspired, was often seen as a trade

counterweight to China in the region. When the U.S. abandoned--on Trump's first day in office--the TPP Agreement that it had successfully negotiated and signed, it dropped a large rock on its foot (to use a Chinese expression). The Biden Administration must now consider how best to restore U.S. economic leadership in the Asia Pacific region. Unfortunately for Biden, most Democrats have little appetite for further trade liberalization and many Republicans are still beholden to Trump's policies, destructive as they have been for American interests.

There is a great deal of irony in seeing China use a trade pact originally developed and promoted by the United States as a means to expose the lack of U.S. commitment to the region. At the same time, China could potentially benefit from accepting trade disciplines consistent with CPTPP standards. Its application also gives the current CPTPP members some negotiating leverage with China, while at the same presenting them with a dilemma in terms of deciding how to handle Beijing's application--and Taiwan's.

As a strategic move, China's application is a clever master stroke. It reflects China's long-term view of its role in the region and is both a serious economic move and, at the same time, a strategic political gambit.

CHINA'S CPTPP APPLICATION: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR CANADA?

Hugh Stephens

November 8, 2021

University of Calgary, School of Public Policy, November 1, 2021

China's application on September 16 to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the eleven state plurilateral trade agreement that was signed in 2018 after the United States withdrew from its predecessor, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, is a clever political and strategic move on China's part. It also raises the question as to whether China is making a serious bid to join the CPTPP or is putting forward its candidacy primarily as a strategic political gambit. If the former, it would appear to indicate a willingness to change, or at least to consider changes, to some fundamental aspects of its state-led economy, thus providing support for economic reformers within China. However, China may consider that its economic heft will allow it to water down some of the CPTPP rules and obtain concessions and exceptions, either in form or timing of implementation. China may also have no real expectation of entering serious accession negotiations but has instead put forward an early application in order to shine a spotlight on the absence of the United States from the Agreement, and from Asia-Pacific trade architecture generally, as well as to scramble the cards on Taiwan's entry.

China's bid raises some questions as to its motives given that the CPTPP's predecessor, the twelve-member Trans-Pacific Partnership, was essentially developed as a counterweight to China's growing economic and political influence in the region, although that objective was never explicitly stated by the negotiating partners. What has changed is the withdrawal of the United States from the TPP and generally from its longstanding commitment to trade liberalization, the completion of part of the trade architecture for the region with the conclusion of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) which groups China, Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the ten ASEAN states, and, possibly, a desire by China to accept additional economic reforms as part of its longer term strategy to encourage balanced domestic economic growth.

China's application poses some immediate issues for Canada in the aftermath of the resolution of the Meng Wanzhou/Two Michaels case. As a founding member of the CPTPP, Canada will need to take a position on China's application. This presents Canada with both an opportunity—with regard to leverage on China—as well as a dilemma. Canada will need to develop its position in consultation with other CPTPP members while acknowledging the nature of its relationship with the United States. In this regard, the terms of the CUSMA Trade Agreement ([Article 32.10](#)) and the state of US-China relations will need to be taken into account.

There are informed commentators who argue that Beijing is ready to meet the high standards of entry to the CPTPP, has been preparing for some time to do so, and that the necessary policy adjustments would not be overly onerous. Nevertheless, based on current Chinese practices, labour rights, disciplines on State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and digital trade would present obstacles for China. China would not be the only CPTPP member country with strong state-owned entities (Vietnam, Singapore and Mexico all fit into this category), but the role of SOEs in China's domestic economy far outweighs the role of state capital in current CPTPP members. The Agreement brings SOEs under "WTO Plus" disciplines, including commitments regarding commercial considerations, transparency, non-discrimination and non-commercial assistance (subsidies).

China reportedly began exploring technical aspects of the agreement with CPTPP members back in May of this year and as a result will have a detailed knowledge of what is expected. While adoption of CPTPP standards would assist domestic economic reformers within China to advance their agenda. However, judging by current policy settings, reformers do not appear to be in the ascendancy at present. Despite its strong performance through the first 18 months of the pandemic, China is facing some of the same economic challenges as other economies in terms of economic disruptions from lockdowns, port backups etc. Its highly leveraged property development sector is facing a liquidity crisis. Rolling power outages have been the most recent issue as China grapples with the need to reduce dependency on coal in order to meet environmental targets. Its tepid response to COP26 suggests that the issue of economic growth at all costs versus the need for greater action on the environment remains to be settled. China's domestic policy setting to date has been to strengthen central state control and government intervention, rather than to relax the heavy hand of the state and give freer play to market forces as would be required under the CPTPP.

If China's main objective is to water down CPTPP standards as a condition of its entry, this could result in rifts between CPTPP members and undermine the integrity of the Agreement. Already there have been differing responses from CPTPP members regarding China's application with Australia and Japan expressing caution while Malaysia and Singapore were more welcoming.

There is another potential reason for China's formal application at this time-strategic. Under this scenario, China realizes that it would be difficult to meet the standards of the CPTPP given current Chinese economic policy yet has little to lose by making an application, knowing that either (1) its application will not be endorsed by all members, yet China will have "demonstrated" its willingness to promote economic liberalization or (2) more likely, there will be cautious endorsement but negotiations will be difficult, protracted and may not reach a conclusion. After all, China's WTO accession negotiations took over 15 years. Under this scenario China not only buys time, but it shines a spotlight on the absence of the United States from the CPTPP, while scrambling the cards on Taiwan's entry.

Taiwan has been preparing its CPTPP bid for some time but has proceeded with excessive caution. When the UK launched its own bid to join the CPTPP earlier this year, Taipei took this as an opportunity to further delay, wanting to take stock of how the UK's negotiating process played out. In addition, President Tsai Ing-wen's government is facing domestic political constraints arising from the influence of the protectionist agricultural lobby as well as health and safety concerns regarding food imports. However, within a week of Beijing formally submitting its CPTPP application, Taipei suddenly moved and filed its request with New Zealand. With Beijing's foot in the door first, however, Taiwan will now have to contend with the formula that was invoked when both China and Taiwan joined the WTO. China joined first, with Taiwan following almost simultaneously. One was linked to the other. While CPTPP members are not obliged to follow the WTO precedent, it will be a powerful factor and as long as China drags out the negotiations on its own entry, the longer Taiwan will have to wait. China may have just spiked Taiwan's cannon.

Having successfully checked Taiwan's application with its gambit, China has also rubbed salt into a self-inflicted wound created by the Trump Administration when it cancelled US membership in the CPTPP's predecessor, the twelve nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The TPP, US-led and inspired, was often seen as a trade counterweight to China in the region. When the US abandoned—on Trump's first day in office—the TPP Agreement it had successfully negotiated and signed, this action seemed to signal that the US had turned its back on the region, at least economically. (The Trump Administration replaced its regional approach with bilateral negotiations, or re-negotiations, with key trading partners such as Korea, Japan and China. This allowed it to exert maximum direct pressure as well as achieving, in some circumstances, managed trade rather than liberalized trade). The Biden Administration now has to consider how best to restore US economic leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. Unfortunately for Biden, most Democrats have little appetite for further trade liberalization and many Republicans are still beholden to Trump's protectionist policies, destructive though they have been for American interests.

There is a great deal of irony in seeing China use a trade pact originally developed and promoted by the United States as a means to expose the lack of US commitment to the region. At the same time, China could potentially benefit from accepting trade disciplines consistent with CPTPP standards.

In developing its response to China's application, Canada will need to consult its CPTPP partners but also keep the position of the US in mind. The biggest obstacle, faced by both Canada and Mexico, is Article 32.10 of the CUSMA. This is so-called "poison pill" clause inserted at the insistence of the United States, that, in effect, gives the US a veto over a "free trade agreement" with China signed by any of the other CUSMA partners. The wording doesn't say this in so many words, but that is the ultimate result. If the US does not like the terms of any future agreement signed by either Canada or Mexico with a "non-market economy" (as specified by any of the CUSMA members on the date of entry of the Agreement), it can withdraw from the trilateral agreement. The only country that meets the definition is China. Article 32.10 also requires a CUSMA member to inform the other partners of its intent to enter negotiations 90 days before doing so, to share negotiating information and the full text prior to the conclusion of negotiations. The US does not want China gaining access to North America through its CUSMA neighbours without having a final say on the terms. Yet if Canada hides behind CUSMA to deny China's entry, it risks alienating other CPTPP members in addition to closing the door on an important opportunity to bring China into closer alignment with Canada's trade objectives.

Would the CPTPP fit the definition of a "free trade agreement" as per CUSMA? Most likely. The Global Affairs Canada site describes the CPTPP as a "a free trade agreement between Canada and 10 other countries in the Asia-Pacific". This issue will have to be handled with great care.

Quite apart from possible constraints imposed by CUSMA, Canada must consider its overall Indo-Pacific strategy in formulating a response to China's CPTPP application. The US is heavily engaged in forging strategic structures in the region to contain China. These include the "Quad" (a loose political grouping among the US, Japan, Australia and India that has conducted some joint military exercises) and now the AUKUS security pact (Australia, UK, US). This is centred on nuclear submarine technology, but also involves sharing cyber capabilities and other undersea technologies. The US under the Trump Administration also developed an overall Indo-Pacific strategy that has been criticized as likely to lead to confrontation with China. Other countries in the region, including Japan with its "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", have developed their own regional strategies that are specifically framed as being "non-exclusionary".

To the extent that the CPTPP can be seen to be an extension of its own Indo-Pacific strategy, Japan's ultimate response to China's application must surely be to welcome its participation provided that China demonstrates it is ready to meet the high standards of the Agreement. Also worth noting is the fact that both Japan and China (but not Canada or the US) are members of another recently-concluded regional trade pact, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP).

Canada has not yet formulated an updated strategy for the Asia-Pacific, or “Indo-Pacific”, the latter a term coming into increasing use. However, in recent congratulatory remarks to the new Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, the Canadian government used the term “Indo-Pacific” twice to refer to Canada’s shared interests with Japan. This appears to mark a subtle change in Canada’s approach to the region, and is an acknowledgement of the growing strategic nature of regional relationships.

With a new government settling into place, Canada does not need to take the lead in responding to China’s CPTPP gambit. It can bide its time and let other CPTPP members with clearer views, such as Australia, take the lead in setting the conditions for China’s entry. However, at some point Canadian officials are going to have to respond to Chinese (and Taiwanese) overtures and the Government of Canada will need to publicly articulate its position. Canada should insist that all applicants seeking CPTPP entry, whether the UK, China, Taiwan (as a customs territory) or any other country, clearly indicate a readiness and willingness to meet the existing entry conditions, with very limited derogations and phase-ins. If China can be induced to engage on the CPTPP’s terms, this would be positive not only for Canada but also for the international trading system.

It also cannot be excluded that at some point the US will also be able to re-engage. This would entail some negotiation over the CPTPP’s suspended provisions. These are several articles that were included in the original twelve-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) but which were put in abeyance after the US withdrew, given that they were measures that were of primary interest and benefit to the United States. Apart from agreeing with the other CPTPP members to suspend certain provisions, Canada also sought and obtained side letters from each CPTPP signatory clarifying the exclusion of measures affecting Canadian cultural industries from the terms of the Agreement. Presumably Canada will make acceptance of similar side letters by new entrants a condition for its agreement to begin negotiations.

It is yet to be determined if China’s unexpected interest in joining the CPTPP is a short term, tactical, politically motivated ploy or whether it represents a longer-term strategic economic move. It is likely a combination of both. Canada and other CPTPP members will not be able to assess the *bona fides* of China’s application until they have held preliminary discussions with Chinese officials. In doing so, Canada should adhere to a couple of core principles; China should not be allowed to subvert the terms of the Agreement nor should it be allowed to dictate entry conditions for other potential members. At the same time, China’s bid deserves to be taken seriously and Chinese officials should be given every opportunity to explore thoroughly the conditions relating to China’s potential accession. Canada earned its seat at the CPTPP table through a prolonged and at times difficult negotiation and we should not hesitate to use this position to advance Canadian trade, economic and strategic interests vis a vis China.

Canada will also need to pay special attention to its relationship with the United States with respect to China’s application. Non-members of the CPTPP should not have a veto over prospective applicants although CUSMA Article 32.10 presents a hurdle. The US may eventually come to appreciate the potential benefits of an agreement that could

prod China further in the direction of market opening and may one day itself add CPTPP membership to its repertoire of other security-focused initiatives in the region.

China's gambit to join the CPTPP presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Canada. Canada needs to avoid being caught between the US and China (as happened with Meng Wanzhou and Huawei). At the same time, we have the opportunity to use China's application to make the CPTPP—where Canada has a “founder's seat” at the table— more central to both economic and strategic relations in the region, and to use it to help resolve the ever-growing and increasingly dangerous rift between China and the United States.

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New approach needed to our broken biosolids plan

Hugh Stephens

Last year, residents of Greater Victoria welcomed the good news that the Region's new sewage treatment system was operational. The bad news is the plan for disposing of the biosolids byproduct from the treatment process has gone badly awry. The CRD needs to fix this by prioritizing technical solutions such as gasification.

Biosolids are the residue extracted from sewage before the treated water is released back into the ocean. The treatment process is supposed to remove toxic elements and produce what are called “Class A” biosolids, but the Province's “Class A” standard fails to test for emerging “contaminants of concern”, such as PFAs, PCBs and other toxic “forever chemicals”.

In 2011 the CRD wisely banned the land application of biosolids in the Region because of their serious environmental and health side-effects. Given this ban, the CRD found a “beneficial use” for the new treatment plant's biosolids by shipping them to the Lafarge cement plant in Richmond for use as fuel in the cement making process. The CRD planned to landfill the biosolids during the 4-6 weeks annually that Lafarge is closed for maintenance.

However complicating matters, the CRD was ordered by BC's Ministry of the Environment to find a “beneficial use” for the biosolids during the maintenance period. Suddenly, and without any public consultation, the CRD Board reversed its long-standing ban and agreed to spread biosolids at Hartland Landfill. This, despite the application area being close to the heavily used recreational area of Durrance Lake, nearby farms, a major regional tourist attraction (Butchart Gardens) and an elementary school, leading to public concerns regarding inevitable air and water-borne contamination.

The CRD excused its action by blaming the Ministry for imposing the beneficial use requirement. The Ministry argues that it did not require the CRD to spread biosolids at Hartland, only that the CRD must find a beneficial use for them although Environment

Minister Heyman required the CRD to examine scenarios under which land application could be utilized, thus questioning the Region's 2011 ban.

Despite widespread opposition from regional districts, elected officials, and environmental organizations, the Ministry continues to push land application of biosolids. The sad irony is that when Mr. Heyman was President of the Sierra Club of BC, prior to being elected, he strongly opposed the application of biosolids on farmlands and other land surfaces due to environmental and health concerns.

Since the new sewage treatment process began operating, things have not gone well. First, 130,000 litres of semi-treated sewage leaked into Mount Work Park next to Durrance Lake. The toxic sludge was contained but came close to flowing into the Tod Creek watershed. Then the biosolids digester ceased to function and when it did, the product did not meet Lafarge's specifications. As a result, there were no shipments of biosolids to Richmond for several months; the end product remained at Hartland.

By September of this year the treatment plant finally started to produce dried biosolids consistently, but only half went to Lafarge while the remaining tonnage was spread at Hartland. The problem is apparently on the Lafarge end. We now have a residual treatment plant costing several hundred million dollars that works only sporadically, shipping to an end-user that is unreliable and unpredictable, with no plan to dispose of the biosolids other than to continuously spread them at the Landfill within sight of residential homes, schools, and our region's farm belt.

Under pressure from a coalition of concerned citizens, businesses, elected officials and environmental organizations the CRD Board agreed to ask the Ministry to release it from its obligation to spread the biosolids at Hartland. The Board also unanimously voted to support Esquimalt's plan to explore the feasibility of gasifying solid waste and kitchen scraps and to test biosolids in the gasification process as an option for disposal.

Greater Victoria has no suitable places for biosolid disposal and spreading them in the restricted space at Hartland has no public licence. The provincial Ministry is intransigent while the disposal strategy pursued to date by the CRD is badly broken. Common sense tells us that technical solutions such as gasification need to be pursued immediately. This is what now needs to be done.

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The politics of language and the Quebec premier's quest to revive hockey

By GAR PARDY

DECEMBER 30, 2021 HILL TIMES

Today it is a courageous political leader who attempts to make an observation or statement or, heaven forbid, policy, about our languages.

Language is "humanity's greatest invention" but with it came controversy and the two

are never far apart in either lexicon or politics. Their long-standing relationship makes them lovers of some familiarity and today, language is politics and is often a matter of deep anguish. This is the essential collegial familiarity in our understanding of Canadian history and daily events.

Long before the Vikings decided northern Newfoundland was not a place with today's reputation of hospitality or the Basques chasing whales around Red Bay, Labrador, or Cartier sailing the St Lawrence, Indigenous peoples walked the land with a complexity of languages many of which are enjoying a welcomed resurgence.

The arrivals of others, at first settlers from the lands of Europe, and later, those from the far reaches of the world, added to the existing complexity. Today it is a courageous political leader who attempts to make an observation or statement or, heaven forbid, policy, about our languages.

But it is always an easily available shibboleth in our politics and policies. In recent days, this was inadvertently emphasized when the CEO of the national airline, decided to speak, largely in English, to an audience of business leaders in Quebec. Needless to say, the stupidity of doing so was enhanced by his subsequent explanation.

The Prime Minister stated the speech was “unacceptable” and his deputy was quick to write to the board of Air Canada suggesting knowledge of French be added to the attributes of the CEO. The Premier, François Legault spoke of being “insulted” and before the day was out a language tutor became a member of the CEO's executive suite.

The Air Canada's contretemps was not an unusual event in the ongoing efforts to ensure the survival of French as an official language. As with all language issues, AC's CEO *faux pas* occasioned restatements of well-trodden forked roads with some seeing the matter as “ludicrous” or an example of “Quebec fragility.” Others with a sense of the history of language involving AC's service emphasized justification for the outrage.

Unfortunately, the tribulations of the Air Canada executive overshadowed an effort by the Premier of Quebec to give attention to an even more serious lacunae in Canada's French speaking nation. This was one where language and the ‘heart and soul’ combined for those who remembered the National Hockey League of only one team – *les Canadiens de Montreal*.

Ignoring the AC CEO, the Premier voiced a disaster even more fundamental to Quebec - the diminishing number of young French speaking hockey players or *hockeyeurs* seeding the teams of the National Hockey League.

The Premier's preliminary thoughts on such matters were as traditional as *poutine* at truck stops. Noting hockey was more than a “sport in Quebec;” it was part of Quebec's “identity,” the Premier struck a 14-member investigating committee under the chair of, appropriately, a former goalie, Marc Denis. The committee is to examine why there are fewer successors for the Richards, Geoffrions, Belliveaus, Lafleurs, Plantes, Savards,

Dionnes, Lemieuxs, Roys and Bossys among the ranks of the 721 players of the NHL. The committee is to report before next years playoffs for the Stanley.

Maurice ‘the Rocket’ Richard remains an ikon of Quebec larger than most. His suspension during the 1955 playoffs remains a seminal event in Quebec history. The consequential rioting was seen by many as the first ‘unquiet’ event in Quebec’s transformation reflecting the view that French speaking hockey players were unfairly treated in a league dominated by English. In 1995, *La Presse* in remembering the associated riot, wrote “Forty years ago began one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of Quebec.”

The Premier’s concern while noted by a few beyond Quebec created little to no interest as to its importance. But surprisingly, the ***New York Times*** saw the issue for its importance and gave the Premier’s concerns a full page of text and pictures with the headline “Quebec Has Fewer N.H.L. Players Than Sweden!”

Language is the essence of the culture of Quebec and there is some irony in having an American newspaper detail the importance of hockey in that culture. The associated statistics to the ***Time’s*** story demonstrated the problem. Today, only 7% of the players in the NHL come from Quebec and while 43% of all players are Canadian, Quebec players are outnumbered by those from Sweden, even though the populations of both are roughly equal. Even more disturbing, the national home of Quebec hockey, *Les Canadiens*, did not dress a single player from Quebec in a game last year.

It is appropriate our language wars find popular expression with the troubles the Premier of Quebec expresses when he does not see *Les Hockeyeurs* in the numbers needed to maintain an important element of Quebec culture. The Premier is right to see if something can be done to alter the power internationally, professional sports engage for the youth of Quebec.

Last year one NHL team started the season with players from the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Finland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France and Latvia. The quality of hockey and interest in our national sport has, appropriately, moved far beyond preoccupations centered on language. It illustrates, for the Premier and others, the lesson that Canute knew when he stood on the shore of the North Sea pretending that he could alter the tides. The tides did not change and while Canute is largely forgotten, he does provide a lesson that sometimes offering to do something impossible is worth the effort.

The Verdict on COP26: Keeping Hope Alive

Jeremy Kinsman
Policy Magazine, December 2021

After decades of incremental progress, intermittent two-steps-back and occasional triumphs, COP26 took its place in the history of COPs at a time when existential urgency has never been more acute. Veteran diplomat Jeremy Kinsman explores the twin challenges of COVID-19 and climate change, and what was revealed in Glasgow about our global coping mechanisms.

The “aliens invade Earth” movie genre has plumbed a couple of themes over the last many years. The more thoughtful – Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey and Steven Spielberg’s Close Encounters of the Third Kind – offered evolved extraterrestrial civilizations with benevolent motives to save earthlings from our crude inclinations for self-destruction. More sensational blockbusters, though, depict aliens as malevolent attackers. In the box-office champ Independence Day, humanity unites to repel the invaders. Earth wins.

Which trope most accurately mirrors global reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to global warming, stress tests of international cooperation in our collective self-defence?

Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown called the competitive selfishness of nations over COVID: “The greatest moral failure of our time.” On global warming, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warns, “We are at the edge of the abyss.”

Our need to be saved from our destructive nationalist and selfish inclinations is obvious, though salvation will have to be sourced here on Earth, not from aliens. Alas, unity in face of the threats has been absent.

The issue here is whether the world’s multilateral and collective behavioural and institutional equipment is up to working in the collective self-interest of humanity. No doubt, competitive nationalism has been on the rise. But did COP26 show a slight turning of the tide toward cooperation?

The two intersecting crises are worth comparing. Time frames differ. Human pandemics come and go. COVID’s costs are mostly immediate. But they have landed just when the costly challenge of weaning Earth from what Guterres called “life support” in the race to a survivable climate is at its most urgent.

The stark threat of COVID’s latest variant surge was vividly depicted by German Health Minister Jens Spahn as he urged the unvaccinated to get

jabbed, warning that, by the end of winter, “pretty much everyone in Germany will be vaccinated, cured, or dead.”

In the global response to vaccine distribution, governments primarily took care of their own citizens. Donations to the Covax scheme improved somewhat as vaccine production and supply stabilized, but they are still inadequate and not assured.

Unless the developed world makes effective vaccines more globally available, deaths will scale way beyond the current and undoubtedly understated toll of five million, depending on the severity of the Omicron and no doubt subsequent COVID variants. Still, the pandemic is a “once in a century event” — tragic but transient. Climate change is unfortunately anything but.

Global warming is also a borderless adversary, but one for which there is no protective vaccine. Its full destructive effect will be decades hence, though loss and damage and costs of adaptation are already vast.

Climate change impacts everything: growth, debt, weather, drought, health, migration, conflict, equity, communications, science, humanity’s capacity for trust in one another, politics and geopolitics.

Is human governance up to it? Glasgow revealed a lot of what is wrong, but also showed glimmers of hope for enough political will to emerge to point to a way out.

Both crises reflect generational divides, but with inverse levels of concern. Those insistent on urgent and maximum protection from COVID are older, more vulnerable citizens, while the younger are less concerned, and resent the costs of immediate lockdown. Global warming’s longer time frame means older people object most to carbon mitigation taxes and consumer costs now, preferring to kick costs down the road. Younger people want infrastructure costs more front-loaded, not landed on them a few decades hence.

Increasingly, courts agree that climate change mitigation is a human rights issue, preventing re-election-driven governments from shifting economic and political burdens to the next generation.

The definitive judgments of objective science make virus and vaccine denial minority positions, but the minorities are large enough to stymie the remedy of near-universal immunity, animated by disinformation campaigns.

Evidence, and extreme weather events have undermined the credibility of climate change deniers, making climate change denial increasingly a fringe belief, much as happened with tobacco.

But it is useful to remind ourselves of how recent the scientific imperative really is.

The first concerted global focus on natural sustainability at the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm failed to acknowledge global warming as a dire threat. It was at the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit that the link between burning fossil fuels and climate change moved firmly onto the international agenda, though strong resistance blocked naming the oil and gas industry as explicitly responsible.

Most significantly, the Rio Summit adopted the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change that committed the 154 signatories to reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases to combat “dangerous human (anthropogenic) interference with the climate system.” To monitor progress, it created annual Conferences of the Parties (COP). COP1 in 1995 led to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which established industrialized country targets for mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, mainly focused on removing fossil fuels from transportation and industrial power generation.

After the disappointment of the 2009 COP15 conference in Copenhagen, which failed to widen common ground between the US and China, the US Congress did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the Harper government withdrew Canada in 2012, and other countries including Japan and Russia ducked targets.

However, the 2015 Paris Agreement (COP 21) revived a sense of global progress, bringing all nations into a common effort to limit global warming to “well below 2 degrees C, preferably to 1.5 degrees C, compared to pre-industrial levels.” In order to reach the goal of a carbon-neutral world by mid-century, countries (“parties”) agreed to submit “nationally determined contributions” (NDCs).

Though NDCs are voluntary and non-binding, the Paris conference was hailed as a landmark success. But the Trump administration infamously announced the withdrawal of the US in 2017. After Joe Biden’s administration put the US back in, declaring climate change a national security threat, COP26 enabled the first major audit of performance. It confirmed that almost all state parties are behind in their commitments.

Closing the gap in warming is the central task facing the world community. Before the Paris Agreement, the world was on course for a catastrophic 4 degree C rise by 2100. Paris and Glasgow commitments reduced the rise to 2.4 degrees C.

The enduring political problem is that the biggest emitters of carbon have national mitigation targets that promise global failure:

China – 23.8 percent; meet net zero target by 2060

USA – 11.8 percent; by 2050

India – 6.8 percent; by 2070

Russia – 4.1 percent; by 2060

(Canada – 10th in 2018 – 1.5 percent, net zero by 2050)

Progress in the COP process is staggered.

Coal was a lightning rod at Glasgow. It is a reality that China and India account for 70 percent of coal burned globally today. They depend on cheap coal-fired energy to meet economic requirements for 1.4 billion citizens each.

China puts off reaching “peak coal production” until 2025. India rejects a carbon reduction obligation as historically unjust, But they are also both alert to domestic needs to cut emissions. China has the world’s biggest renewable energy replacement program, and ambitious adaptation defences to cope with much higher monsoon rain volumes. Indian politicians confront grim data on smoke pollution’s impact on life expectancy.

Almost universal disappointment was channeled by British conference chair Alok Sharma: “China and India should explain themselves.” But their tactical move was nothing new for COP. Ever since Saudi Arabia insisted at COP’s inception in 1972 that all decisions must be by consensus, the process has been hostage to those with national political interests at stake.

COP26 went along in knowledge that progress comes in incremental steps and because it was the only way to save the whole package.

Meanwhile the new German Government offered the world a more hopeful counter-example by pledging to end burning of coal for electric power eight years earlier than previously announced.

So, what’s the verdict on the package?

Even before COP26 assembled, climate activists were calling it “dead on arrival;” at its end, many labelled COP26 a “cop-out.” Professor of atmospheric science Michael Mann acknowledges “It isn’t perfect, but COP26 is all we have. Climate change is a global problem that requires a global solution. Let’s make it work.”

Quite a lot did emerge.

COP26 brought the adaptation/finance issue to the fore, not to weaken the emphasis on mitigation of carbon emissions, but as a basic necessity for the most vulnerable countries.

Side-deals among groups of committed countries agreed to cut one-third of methane emissions by 2030 and halt deforestation and land degradation by 2030 while the conference as a whole agreed to aim for zero-emission-only car production by 2040.

The “Glasgow Alliance for Net Zero Private Investors” – 450 financial institutions (grouped under UN Special Envoy Mark Carney) – asserted belief it can influence more than \$5 trillion of investment toward green solutions for global private business (though distrust of corporate “greenwashing” lingers).

Ultimately, Glasgow’s main job was to point the way to close the fatal gap between 1.5 and 2.4 degrees of global warming given that national commitments still fall way short of the 1.5 degree C target, which Johan Rockström of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Change specifies should not be viewed as a negotiable number, but rather as an absolute “planetary boundary.”

COP26 was not meant to deliver a definitive solution. COP27 in Egypt will try to ratchet commitments upward, and every year thereafter until the gap in overall targets is closed.

Glasgow did turn up the pressure to get much more done by the end of this decade.

Parties were responding to heightened public opinion pressure in much of the world driven by the evidence of destructive weather events, against the growing influence of the environmental movement and especially its young “fighters for the future.” Their case for action had been recognized by a growing number of high court decisions that termed climate protection a “human right” under UN and EU conventions.

Nonetheless, Greta Thunberg and her impatient young activist cohorts criticize the international process as just “blah-blah-blah”.

Compromise is essential to reflect the reality that the world economy still runs on fuel. Recent energy supply bottlenecks resulting from drops in new oil and gas investment before alternative renewable energy sources are sufficiently scaled to replace them, have lifted energy costs and slowed growth, rattling confidence and political will.

Confidence in the multilateral system needs boosting. There will always be push-back from countries whose interests are threatened, oil and gas states,

those still reliant on coal, who lack the confidence, political will, financing, or technical ability to reduce their dependencies on fossil fuel. They can't be allowed to hijack the system but the system has to come together to support their transition to more favourable global outcomes.

It's a slow process but COP26 bent its arc toward climate justice. To advance the process, experts from Germany and Canada who met before the conference urge the formation of smaller affinity groups to reach out to build support for higher ambition and confidence. They urge outreach especially to the UN's "silent majority" of low-income states, many of which are the most vulnerable to climate change whose leaders like Mia Mottley, prime minister of Barbados, inspired Glasgow.

Can political leadership emerge to make sustainability the theme of governance everywhere, for the sake of all?

Difficult issues, like the creation of a fair UN-sanctioned global carbon market with carbon border adjustments lie ahead. The new Omicron coronavirus variant will divert attention in the short term from the imperative to change our environmental ways.

But we must. Climate change is bigger than the environment. It's the ultimate stress test of the abilities of the world's nations and peoples to work together in our collective defence and existential interest.

COP26 has at least helped keep hope alive.

Links

Jeremy Kinsmen

CTV News – Diplomatic Community, December 07, Biden vs Putin on Ukraine; and US vs China on Winter Olympics - Is the world a safer place?

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2339085>