

Charm offensive will do little to change steel and aluminum steel tariffs

By DAVID TILSON

Prime Minister Trudeau's disastrous handling of the renegotiation of NAFTA led to massive concessions to the United States (U.S.). On September 30, 2018, negotiations for the new United States Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) were finalized, but did not include relief from the U.S. tariffs of 25 per cent on steel and 10 per cent on aluminum that went into effect on June 01, 2018. Since then, Canadian industries have suffered immensely from these punitive measures. The current Liberal government now plans to carry out a new 'charm offensive' in an attempt to convince the U.S. to lift the tariffs; however, Canadians have little faith this last ditch effort will have any impact.

The Prime Minister and his government have failed Canada since we first learned the U.S. imposed the steel and aluminum tariffs. They were clearly unprepared while also being slow to respond with retaliatory tariffs and their dithering has since continued, leaving Canadian industries and workers in a vulnerable position. On November 07, 2018, Canada's ambassador to the U.S. told journalists that Prime Minister Trudeau would not attend a signing ceremony photo op in an effort to pressure U.S. President Donald Trump into ending the tariffs. Later, on November 30, 2018, he signed the USMCA at the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires with no assurances as to when steel and aluminum tariffs would be lifted, failing Canadian workers in these industries.

We, the Conservative Official Opposition, stand with Canadian workers employed in the steel and aluminum industry as we respond to the devastating tariffs being imposed by the United States. The fact that the Liberal government failed to resolve steel and aluminum tariffs while negotiating the USMCA doesn't mean that these are two separate issues. President Trump used tariffs as a bargaining chip in the negotiations from early in the process.

Prime Minister Trudeau signed the USMCA without assurances that current destructive tariffs on steel, aluminum, and softwood lumber will be lifted. Considering that the Prime Minister's only leverage was to threaten to withhold attendance to the signing ceremony photo op at the G20 shows the weak negotiating position he has left Canada in, as a result of his own (and his government's) inaction and unpreparedness since the beginning of the NAFTA negotiations. There is little reason to be confident in the effectiveness of his latest 'charm offensive' given this Liberal government's track record on tariffs and trade.

Canada's Conservatives' top priority is to have these tariffs removed on Canadian steel and aluminum. We will continue to demand concrete action on tariffs and relief for Canadian workers, as we've continued to do. This is the strong and decisive leadership Canadians expect and deserve.