

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? A new means of burying issues

Back in a day ? as those of us of a certain age like to say ? Ottawa had a routine way of burying issues which they didn't want to deal with.

They set up a Royal Commission, a process which a)- cost untold millions; b)- gave people a chance to vent; c)- dragged on for years; and d)- gathered enough dust on official shelves to have a direct impact on global climate.

In other words, as the saying goes, much sound and fury signifying nothing.

Things have changed. We are now in the modern era.

And so, Royal Commissions have been deftly replaced by ? wait for it ? government reviews, particularly environmental reviews. Just as Royal Commissions gave the impression that the government of the day was dealing with a sticky issue, government reviews suggest that the wider public, i.e. the ?stakeholders? as they're called now, will have their say before the shovels hit the ground. The reality is, of course, that most of the time the intent is to appear to be dealing with an issue, all the while having absolutely no intent upon doing anything about it beyond stalling until the next government comes along and has to deal with it.

U.S. President Barrack Obama, (in)famously, used this technique to block the Keystone Pipeline, calling for reviews and more reviews ? then even more reviews when early returns debunked his fallacious ?environmental? concerns ? until finally, nearly eight years later, he did what he had always wanted to do, i.e. he killed the project.

Fast forward to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's neophyte government, which last week announced ?interim? changes to the National Energy Board's system of pipeline reviews ? which were already extraordinarily cumbersome ? including a rule to consider the CO2 impacts of projects, virtually condemning a host of job-creating projects to a virtual halt for years to come and, more likely, forever. That followed a very public declaration from Montreal mayor Denis Coderre, a former federal Liberal cabinet minister, that the Energy East pipeline ? which would convert an existing pipeline from natural gas to oil feedstock ? is too dangerous to the environment to be built.

Never mind that we already have hundreds of thousands of miles of pipelines operating quite safely in Canada ? certainly far more safely than trucks or rail, which is what the anti-pipeline forces continue to perpetuate ? and that it would feed western oil to refineries in Montreal, Quebec and Saint John, enabling them to replace more costly ? and more environmentally risky ? shipped-in oil from abroad.

Coderre ? whose city recently soiled the St. Lawrence river by pouring tons of its garbage into it, with Trudeau, alas, giving his approval ? is suddenly so worried about virtually non-existent dangers that he's prepared to champion real and present dangers. So too, it seems, is Trudeau's new ?sunny? Ottawa.

The whole exercise is a dream come true for the well-financed environmental lobby ? which loves to portray itself as little people versus ?big oil,? and has succeeded brilliantly in this propaganda ruse ? but an absolute nightmare for the thousands of workers who have already lost their jobs in the embattled oil industry and the thousands more who will suffer the same fate as the essentially endless review process continues.

The fact is, the international environmental movement wants no development of those resources. Period. Full stop.

But short of Trudeau acceding directly to their real wishes, imposing an endless review process will do just fine.

In a column last week in the National Post, former Tory finance minister Joe Oliver put it this way:

?Very few countries have vast natural resources like Canada, but if they do, they are actively developing them for the benefit of their people. If we do not take advantage of our good fortune, our oil and gas will be stranded in the ground and our legacy will be lost. What kind of fools would we be? I believe Canadians are far too smart to let that happen.?

I don't. Not as long as we keep electing both federal and provincial governments who would rather take applause from the well-heeled champions of environmental purity than actually use our natural resources to create jobs, economic growth, prosperity and, let us not forget, dependence upon energy supplies from a part of the world which, as we all know, is not exactly an oasis of stability.

