

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? Premier Li's visit to Canada raises questions

Following his recent official visit to China, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invited Li Keqiang, premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, to Canada.

He visited from Sept. 21 to Sept. 24. During the official visit, the two leaders had several meetings, which included their first Annual Dialogue, resulting from the Prime Minister's recent trip to China with the aim to build "stronger, more stable long-term" relations between the two countries. However, the visit raises more questions and concerns for Canadians, as the Prime Minister appears to be giving into China's demands, while potentially sacrificing Canadian interests and values.

The issue of free trade was raised during Premier Li's visit to Canada. The two leaders agreed to begin negotiations for a possible Canada-China Free Trade Agreement and a bilateral extradition treaty. In taking these steps, the current Liberal government is moving Canada closer to free trade without free markets and extradition without the rule of law. This is most concerning, as the Chinese government has not only performed cyber-attacks against the Canadian government, but has also, according to CSIS and the RCMP, sent foreign agents into Canada without the government's permission. The previous Conservative government was always pragmatic when it came to Canada's relationship with China. Our previous government sought to build our country's prosperity and to do everything possible to bring job opportunities to Canadians, but at the same time, remained firmly committed to not compromise on Canadian values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This standard was always adhered to by our previous Conservative government in its relations with China and should be maintained by the current Liberal government.

It is difficult to understand how the current Liberal government would begin negotiations with the Chinese government on a bilateral extradition treaty when human rights groups, such as Amnesty International, have drawn attention to the country's oppressive justice system. The use of torture is widespread and systematic, while dissent and human rights advocacy is repressed. Furthermore, China is the world leader in the use of the death penalty. During his visit to Canada, Premier Li defended his country's use of the death penalty, stating it's required to address violent crime.

We, as Conservatives, in the role as Official Opposition, will continue to advocate for a principled foreign policy that places democracy, fairness, human rights, and the rule of law first and foremost. It remains to be seen if the current Liberal government will take the same stand or will give in to pressure from the Chinese government and be a complaisant bystander to a country that doesn't share the same high standards on human rights.

In addition to concerns about the current Liberal government beginning talks about an extradition treaty with China, there is also concern about the agreement to begin exploratory talks on a possible Canada-China Free Trade Agreement. A free trade agreement must be mutually beneficial for both Canada and China, while also ensuring a level playing field for Canadian companies and workers. China presents immense commercial opportunities for Canada; however, it's difficult to have free trade with a country that doesn't practice it. Should the current Liberal government take the next steps to pursue a free trade agreement with China, it will face the enormous challenge of protecting Canada's interests, including jobs, while also trying to avoid jeopardizing our relationships with our closest allies. This would be a next to impossible feat for the current government. The current Liberal government should instead be working with like-minded allies, such as the United States and Japan to implement the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The TPP has enforceable labour and environmental standards, strong protections for intellectual property, and rules requiring state-owned companies to compete on commercial terms; all of which align with Canadian values.

Canada has a long history of defending human rights here at home and abroad. The previous Conservative government consistently used our shared Canadian values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law as the guiding principle in all our relations with other countries. Following the recent visit by Premier Li, it remains to be seen if the current Liberal government will apply these high standards in its approach to China when negotiating a Canada-China Free Trade Agreement and a bilateral extradition treaty.

