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Kelly McParland: Free trade with China is one thing, corruption-free trade is another



KELLY MCPARLAND | Sep 11, 2012 12:12 PM ET

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China is a place where any corrupt official can buy his son a Ferrari

PETER PARKS/AFP/Getty Images

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper has apparently never met a potential free trade partner he didn't like. Europe, Thailand, India, the entire Pacific Rim — other than perhaps Iran or North Korea, his door is open.

At the moment he's keen on China. When he first became prime minister he was very chippy towards Beijing, repeatedly making the point that rights and freedoms had to



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POST MORTEM

Tory tough-on-crime proposal struck down



Changes that would make it easier to declare a criminal a dangerous offender have been struck down by an Ontario judge as unconstitutional. (WFP)

GOP lets Romney hear it



The day after damaging video of "inelegant" remarks by Romney surfaced, prominent conservative

come before commerce. Silly him. Once he grew to appreciate China's enormous hunger for Canadian commodities, the sale of which has kept us out of recession, he quickly realized the need to be "flexible" and "understanding" on these things. As in, no more photo ops with the [Dalai Lama](#) when you're trying to sell more oil.

The prime minister had been considering the potential of a free trade deal with China for some time. On Sunday he signed the Foreign Investment Protection and Promotion Agreement, which aims to protect investors from either country against "discriminatory and wholly arbitrary practices," and to establish a system for resolving disputes. One [report](#) said the pact contains the widest range of investment agreements China has ever signed with any country. Now, as the Post [reported](#) Tuesday, Ottawa is considering exploratory talks on a full-blown free trade deal with the world's most populous country.

It's an ambitious plan, and one well worth seeking. But no one should make the mistake of thinking that free trade with China will resemble the arrangement Canada long ago worked out with Mexico and the U.S., or is likely to work out with Europe. China has the trappings of a modern western business culture, but you don't have to scrape the surface much to bump into the more familiar version, a country where the law is what the government says it is, on any particular day.

A Chinese court just recently completed the trial of [Gu Kailai](#), wife of rising political star Bo Xilai, for the murder of a British consultant she feared was about to reveal the extent of the family's corruption. The murder itself might have been covered up, except for a bit of bad luck in which a local police official approached the U.S. seeking protection from Bo. Last week the son of a top-ranked Communist official was [killed](#) in a car crash, apparently caused while he and two female passengers were having sex in his Ferrari. Officially, China's most powerful people make only a pittance in salary; unofficially they can buy their kids Ferraris.

Today attention is focused on the mysterious disappearance of [Xi Jinping](#), who is about to become president. Xi hasn't been seen in nine days, has skipped scheduled meetings with foreign leaders — including U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the prime ministers of Singapore and Denmark — and may have been the reason President Hu Jintao was delayed from attending the opening of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation gathering.

Beijing won't say what's up. Xi may have hurt his back swimming, or be suffering some other minor ailment. Asked to confirm he was alive, a Foreign Ministry spokesman retorted: "I hope you can ask a serious question."

It *was* a serious question. If Xi was visiting Washington, and Clinton didn't turn up for an expected meeting, you can bet an explanation would be sought and quickly supplied. Even the Prime Minister's Office, which hates telling *anything* to the press, would feel obliged to offer a reason if Mr. Harper simply disappeared for nine days.

But China operates by its own rules. It is willing to comply with international norms when it suits its needs, but resents any questioning of its domestic activities and sees no reason to comply with accepted behaviours just because *other* countries do. It may be increasingly wealthy and commercially sophisticated, but it is a very long way from providing the legal certainty and political reliability needed for the kind of trade pact Canadian business would expect.

National Post

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surgeon, prominent conservatives are speaking out against their chosen candidate.

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After a two-year wage freeze, the government is set to offer MPs a raise, to match the rise in pay for the public service. This will be offset by pension reform. (Global)

Liberals, CAQ already blocking PQ moves



Quebec's opposition parties have already given notice that they will not support the PQ's efforts to expand the reach of Bill 101, the controversial language law.

Time to arm British police?



After two police officers were gunned down in the U.K., there are renewed calls for British police to carry sidearms. But the police don't seem interested. (BBC)

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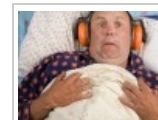
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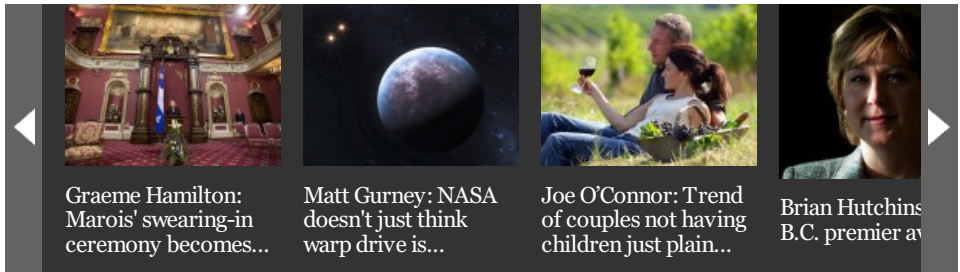


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Topics: **Full Comment, Bo Xilai, Chinese Corruption, Chinese Government, Chinese Trade, Free Trade Agreements, Gu Kailai, Steophen Harper, Xi Jinping**

17 comments

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 **DSB111** • 9 days ago
If you in the media understand just ONE thing, its this:

There is no such thing as "free trade". Its a phony cliché that you fall for every time.
Just *try* to cross the US border and say, "I'm going to sell things in your county."
Just *try* to bring items from the US into Canada and say, "I'm an entrepreneur and I'm brin

There are multitudes of obstacles, red-tape, paper-work, monies to pay; lawyers, state govern
And when the US doesn't benefit, they just break the rules anyway. And China is the leader in

There IS such a thing as 'freer trade', and 'reciprocal' trade. i.e. both parties benefit equally. Th
11 ^ | 3 v • Share >

MexicoGuy • 9 days ago • parent
Not true. I owned a small manufacturing business in Calgary for 12 years (now retired) ;
shipping my product to the U.S. with little red tape, and no taxes or customs fees. Abou
wide. If it wasn't for the free trade agreement between the two countries, I would not h
meeting customers and attending trade shows without one incident of being questione
talking about.
4 ^ | 8 v • Share >

Adam Smith • 8 days ago • parent
The U.S.A. is NOT China.

China doesn't do free-trade, they never have and they never will. China
does mercantilism and they do it well; we're going to get eaten alive,
it's that simple.
8 ^ | 2 v • Share >

 **Sontourian** • 8 days ago • parent
I think the better conversation or discussion is there is one thing as free tra
country can compete freely with the Chinese way of business. Labour laws
country in the world can remotely come close to China or India. Sure the c
but no one else will. Whatever manufacturing we have left will be dust in th
pirate s/w reverse engineer hardware goods and then re-sell it on the chea
1 ^ | v • Share >

mel from surrey • 9 days ago
Free Trade with dictatorships? If the people of the otther country have no say it can't be assu

Besides these "deals" don't create jobs or increase wages.
9 ^ | 2 v • Share >

Anonymous66 • 9 days ago • parent
That's not the point - selling more resources is the point. I suppose a few more resourc
driving interest.
2 ^ | 5 v • Share >

mel from surrey • 9 days ago • parent

You don't need free trade deals to sell resources.

7 ^ | 2 v • Share >

Skeptik • 9 days ago

Free trade with China is one thing, the other thing is that China is Iran's biggest trading partner. Harper hypocrisy?

9 ^ | 3 v • Share >

Powell_Lucas • 9 days ago • parent

No it's not. Harper tried the principled line and all he saw was Canada's competitors, including the US, zipping past him as they tried to cut deals while mouthing platitudes for the home crowd. His attempts to reform the senate. Since the provinces and the opposition won't get on board, only harder.

2 ^ | 1 v • Share >

Skeptik • 8 days ago • parent

So your conclusion is that Harper abandons his convictions because others don't? Or that his convictions demand. Does that mean he's better than others or bereft of principles?

1 ^ | v • Share >



Sontourian • 8 days ago • parent

Canadian companies can legally sell to Iran, as long as the goods are not intended for nuclear or military use. Besides you can't sell nuclear or military products to the Chinese through China to get to Iran.

0 ^ | v • Share >

Michael from the real world • 9 days ago • parent

Do you not think that a trade agreement is rather larger than any one man? [and there are many of them]

1 ^ | 3 v • Share >

J Villain • 9 days ago

I sure hope the writer isn't trying to make the case that there is no corruption in Canada. That's a stretch.

3 ^ | v • Share >

jefffff • 8 days ago

Mr, Harper would do well to remember that he is representing all Canadians, not just the large corporations, when he is dealing with the cruel Chinese Communist Party.

The

Chinese Communist Party is a brutal corrupt gangster regime that has murdered eighty million of its own people since 1949 and since 1999 has been attempting the genocide of tens of millions of innocent Falun Gong practitioners by the use of torture, slavery, organ harvesting and murder. Our governments and media say nothing about these heinous acts because of corporate greed. This is the truth about Red China, thank you.

2 ^ | v • Share >

Average Canadian • 9 days ago

dear leader harpo will do whatever he can to ensure as much communist ownership of Alberta as possible.

Sadly the people of Alberta support the dear leaders plans to make sure the Chinese military remains in the north.

7 ^ | 6 v • Share >

ibmetom • 9 days ago

Stevie hated a State owned oil company with such passion that he made it his life's work to do away with it. Now that the State owned oil company may dictate policy in the patch and this time it will have Stevie's blessing.

9 ^ | 8 v • Share >

Hugh Jorgan • 9 days ago

Like it or not folks, we may have to trade with some countries whom we don't particularly care for. I have a friend who runs a very successful business, he doesn't like all of his

back on track. I have a friend who owns a very successful business, he doesn't like all of his clients as everyone else'."

3 ^ | 3 v * Share >

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