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Terry Glavin: Beijing's Canadian puppets



TERRY GLAVIN | October 5, 2016 4:02 PM ET
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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at a conference in Montreal on Friday, Sept. 23, 2016.

Clément Sabourin/AFP/Getty Images

As a Canadian journalist working in Canada, Yuli Hu didn't expect the sort of indignity she was forced to endure last weekend, after travelling from Toronto to Montreal to cover the triennial proceedings of the International Civil Aviation Organization, the agency representing 191 UN member states that sets worldwide airline safety standards. Hu had already registered with the ICAO and had been advised to pick up her media accreditation at the organization's Montreal headquarters. But when she arrived, she was pulled aside and told she had to leave because her media credentials were issued by Taiwan's state-owned Central News Agency.

"I told them I was Canadian. I brought my passport, as was required," Hu told me. "I don't think it was right for them to reject me." Neither does the Committee to Protect Journalists, and neither does Reporters Without Borders, two prominent international press freedom organizations that have protested the ICAO's conduct. There was not a peep of protest out of the Liberal government in Ottawa, though.

In just one of its many recent forays into the thuggish business of throwing its weight around in Canada — the firings and the chill in Canada's Chinese-language media, the intimidation of ethnic Chinese community leaders across the country, the lavish investment in propaganda initiatives — Beijing had insisted that no Taiwanese organization should be permitted to attend the Montreal conference, which wraps up Friday.

But ICAO also barred another journalist, with no connection to the Taiwanese government. Chia Chang, the Washington correspondent for the privately owned Taipei news organization United Daily News, was told to leave the ICAO building after producing a Taiwanese passport to ICAO media accreditation officials. Canada recognizes Taiwanese passports. Beijing does not.

The only thing Global Affairs Canada has had to say about any of this is that Canada cleaves to a “One China” policy, which is exactly what Beijing requires Canada to say, and which for democratic Taiwan means its continuing international isolation.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, at least 150 pro-Beijing enthusiasts gathered to raise the flag of the People’s Republic of China at Vancouver City Hall to commemorate the anniversary of Mao Zedong’s communist revolution in 1949. On hand for the celebration was Richmond East Liberal MP Joe Peschisolido, who was inconveniently named in a lawsuit only days earlier filed by three Chinese immigrant-investors who claim they were bilked in a \$6.9-million scheme involving Liberal fundraiser Paul Oei, who had just been brought up on fraud charges by the B.C. Securities Commission. (Nothing untoward has been found by any court in Peschisolido’s case, it is necessary to point out.)

Also presiding over the event at city hall was Acting Mayor Kerry Jang, who responded to the uproar the flag-raising spectacle set off in Vancouver’s Chinese community by accusing the event’s critics of racism. This is pretty well standard procedure around city hall. Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson has been resorting to the “it’s racism” dodge for years now, in order to shut down scrutiny of his determined inattention to Vancouver’s housing crisis.

Vancouver is now one of the world’s most expensive cities, housing wise, and Robertson’s office has consistently maintained that the calamity facing the city’s working poor has practically nothing to do with the scandal-plagued federal Immigrant Investor Program that about 100,000 Chinese millionaires have employed to get in on Vancouver’s home-buying frenzy and safely bolthole their money from prying eyes. Last year alone, about \$12 billion in Chinese money was sunk into Vancouver real estate, accounting for about one-third of all sales. Nothing to see here, of course.

Responding to the outpouring of disgust prompted by the weekend raising of the Chinese flag at city hall, Jang said it was “racism, pure and simple.” This dirty insinuation was rather difficult to make stick on resident Li Yi-Ping, a survivor of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, who not unreasonably found Jang’s statements and his involvement in the weekend event to be equally appalling. It was similarly implausible to cast Louis Huang as a racist. Huang, an organizer with a mainly Chinese-Canadian group called the Alliance of the Guard of Canadian Values, made clear that the controversy over the flag raising was not about racism. “The story behind this is China’s influence on society in Canada.”

It’s just as difficult to imagine that Fenella Sung, 58, a former Hong Kong broadcast journalist who emigrated to Canada in 1991, is an anti-Chinese racist. The coordinator of Vancouver’s Friends of Hong Kong group was not at all unwilling to talk about racism during our conversation the other day. But it was about the genteel, soft-palmed sort of racism that animates a great deal of the stupidity about China that one hears these days from the Liberal government in Ottawa and from Canada’s pro-Beijing corporate lobby.

China has got into the thuggish business of throwing its weight around in Canada.

Just one recent eruption occurred when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was not otherwise busy arranging happy photo opportunities for Li Keqiang during the Chinese premier’s recent visit to Canada, like the stunt with Trudeau and Li donning identical Montreal Canadiens jerseys and sliding around on the ice at the Bell Centre in Montreal. In response to reporters’ questions about the absurdity of Canada entertaining the idea of an extradition treaty with China, Trudeau said: “Canada and China have different systems of law and order and different approaches, and it’ll be very important that any future agreement be based on reflecting the realities, the principles, the values that our citizens hold dear in each of our countries.”

By Sung’s rather higher standards, there is something more than just a bit distasteful about the suggestion that torture, forced confessions, a 99 per cent conviction rate, with no presumption of innocence, no independent judiciary and other such tyrannies are “values” that the oppressed peoples of China “hold dear” in some inscrutable fashion.

“That’s the most racist approach in dealing with mainland China,” Sung told me. “And that’s exactly what the Chinese government wants to hear: ‘Let us do things in our own way.’ And we are falling into this trap.”

The recent surge in China’s influence-peddling in Canada has been distressing to Sung, but she’s still got a spring in her step. “I still have hope,” she says. “I still believe in democracy. My greatest fear is about the Chinese government’s encroachments into foreign lands. I am just hoping that what we say and what we do can at least stall some of these encroachments into Canada.”

Sung's parents fled Mainland China for Hong Kong during the revolution that brought Mao's Communist Party to power in 1949, and Sung fled Hong Kong to Canada in 1991 when it became obvious that the threads of limited-autonomy under Hong Kong's Basic Law would likely be stretched by Beijing's bullying to the breaking point. So far, Hong Kongers appear to be holding on, against terrifying odds.

"But I am worried. I've already run away once," she said. "Where else can I run? Canada is home to me. And we should be defending our homeland, here."

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Nick Carmine · Groove consultant at Strategic Planning Solutions

This is why Communism isn't a big thing in China, anymore. They discovered that one can have an industrial, profit-driven nation, without having to be hemmed in by the notion of 'human rights'. The current emphasis on trade, without criticism, only reinforces this lesson.

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Hugh Whittington · Works at Self-Employed

Trudeau craves photo-ops to feed his massive, though undeserved, ego. Unfortunately, the media stumble all over themselves to feed that ego by shoving his face at us on a daily basis.

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Earl Gateman

The Chinese are no doubt enjoying this immensely, they now have an idiot they can control...just smile and shake his hand...he smiles back, hugs you then turns around and bends over. The subject matter of any discussions is of no importance as long as there are lots of photos taken.

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Bill Kowey · Edmonton, Alberta

Trade will be great for CANADA112DUH!!Every country in the world now gets CHINESE products or for the Chinese to manufacture!!

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Stephen Cullen

This has been a revealing year. After the love-ins at the orgasmic Paris conference, handing out billions to Africans, flirting with Obama, Ban Ki Moon, First Nations, Putin, Yi, the Royals, Environuts and the Premiers, finally the cracks are showing. Business leaders, the unemployed, First Nations and at least 4 of the Provincial Premiers are upset. And its isn't going to be too long before the US will get pissed that its Northern neighbour and member of Nato doesn't see Russia as a threat and is desperately bending over to newly aggressive China. What goes though this man's head ?

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Teresa McBride · Calgary, Alberta

Not much, Maggie Jr. is more his mother's son than his father's. The only things he inherited from the old man is his name and his arrogance. Daddy picked the wrong woman to make babies with.

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Bill Kowey · Edmonton, Alberta

STEVE CULLEN---TRADE and maybe saving us from harpers selling out everything of worth in a firesale to foreign interests.We own very little of worth!!It is hard to create wealth when you own nothing!Diplomatic relations and setting up export trade is VITAL to prevent us from third world status--- People know so little of living in a GLOBAL ECONOMY__SHEESH You are just as mindless economically nd a shrinking GDP every year for 10nyrsand a declining dollar means we have to act quickly--DUH!!!If thatisn't telling people something then they deserve to be poverty stricken it would appear.

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Arturo Daly

Bill your lack of a solid grasp of politics and history is outshone only by your horrendous grammar. Our so called free trade has resulted in a massive influx of cheap, sub-standard products produced in many cases under absolutely horrifying conditions. Manufacturing is outsourced and lost forever and displaced workers are not mobile enough to just pick up and move. North American manufacturing in areas like textiles, furniture etc have been decimated. Real wages have not increased and the only thing keeping the economy from total stagnation are artificially low interest rates that have been ... See More

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Steve Richards

"Also presiding over the event at city hall was Acting Mayor Kerry Jang, who responded to the uproar the flag-raising spectacle set off in Vancouver's Chinese community by accusing the event's critics of racism. This is pretty well standard procedure around city hall. Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson has been resorting to the "it's racism" dodge for years now, in order to shut down scrutiny of his determined inattention to Vancouver's housing crisis."

People only play the race card because they know it works. Stop letting it work!

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