

"Enlightened Sovereignty" Nonsense Killed Harper's UNSC Seat

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, October 13, 2010

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The harbinger of Stephen Harper's failure yesterday to fulfill his neo-conservative and neoliberal destiny at the UN Security Council came on September 23, 2010 when he delivered a cynical speech to a nearly empty UN General Assembly hall.

Harper himself is the reason Canada has a black eye in the world. At the General Assembly he [kept talking about](#) "enlightened sovereignty" which symbolized his anti-social perspective on how the world works:

Nations that do not consider the effects of their economic choices on others, may not only hurt their trading partners, but themselves as well. Those who succumb to the lure of protectionism, soon find that trading partners denied a market also lack the means to be a customer.

To recognize that is to understand the need for enlightened sovereignty, the idea that what's good for others may well be the best way to pursue one's own interests.

In business, it is called win-win.

And it is good for business.

In international affairs, it is good for development and for justice.

It didn't matter that most of the representatives of the UN's 192 member states left the hall long before Harper spoke last month. Everyone knew his words would be irrelevant. Harper has shown himself to the world as cynical, demeaning, intolerant and uncooperative, just like his speech to the empty hall.

In this small excerpt above, Harper uses the chamber as a bully pulpit to push the neoliberal agenda by framing it as enlightened sovereignty. Free trade and abrogating domestic economic integrity is enlightened. Thus, nationalism is unenlightened and backward.

Neoliberals like Harper are sometimes so deluded that they forget that the vast majority of the 192 UN members are quite poor and not in love with their World Bank and IMF neoliberal overlords.

This excerpt contains a bald threat as well: open your borders or we will punish you with the special kind of economic warfare that only the developed world can visit upon you.

Then, in a fine Orwellian twist, he argued that countries need to realize that what is good for others is best for them. "Others," of course, are global corporations and their comprador nations who push their agenda in political circles like the UN.

Most governments of the world are largely concerned with keeping their populations from dying. What's good for the global businesses whose annual revenue dwarf that of most nations is simply the wrong message to present to the world.

But the world did its homework.

They didn't need to rush back into the General Assembly hall after filling the hall to hear Obama several speakers earlier to hear what kind of exquisite vision Harper would bestow on the backward world. They already knew that Harper thinks the rest of the world is unenlightened because they won't easily open their doors to corporate rape and pillaging.

They also knew what the [Council of Canadians faxed](#) to the missions of every member state of the UN: Harper's abysmal record on water, the climate and indigenous rights.

So yesterday we lost the election for a spare seat on the grandly undemocratic Security Council. In fact, we withdrew before we could lose, to save face.

But Harper knew he was going to lose the vote, or else why would he schedule a fiscal update to occur yesterday just after the voting. Message control means shifting the story on the domestic front quickly.

But at the top, I wrote about neo-conservatism and neoliberalism in Harper's agenda. His neoliberal agenda is to open everyone's borders to rich countries and rich corporations to have their way.

And while many use neo-conservatism as a synonym, I define it differently. I see neoliberalism as forced economic deregulation. I see neo-conservatism as more of a political tool of hard political empire building, informed by whatever extremist, empire-loving agenda a group may possess.

Harper's social conservatism is well-known throughout the world:

1. He supports prosecuting child soldiers, Israeli piracy in open seas and oppression of Palestinians.
2. He opposes women's reproductive freedom.
3. He deports foreigners and assaults our refugee commitments.

4. He is a climate change denier and a tarsands cheerleader.
5. He is no friend to indigenous freedom or self-determination.
6. He [criminalizes domestic political dissent](#).
7. He spins Tamil migrants as terrorists and incarcerates children.

He is, in effect, a dangerous man who cannot be let loose on the international stage.

[John Ivison's excellent analytical piece](#) in the *National Post* last night captured much of this dynamic, calling Harper attached to principle over populism. But that's too narrow and binary a view.

Sure, Harper is principled, but he isn't principled just because he doesn't want to pander to populist elements to get elected to the Security Council. There is something in the middle: the arrogance of neo-conservatism.

The opposite of being principled isn't being popular. In the case of the UN General Assembly, where, I repeat, most of the member nations are mostly concerned about the survival of their population, what would be a compelling, and popular, view would be one that most of the world share. This is not the imperialism of social conservatism.

So who got "our" seat? Germany got one despite our existence, but we lost to Portugal. Who is Portugal? This can best be summed up by the best Twitter commentary of the day [by Paul Wells of Mclean's](#):

True fact: Portugal is run by socialists. They have a coalition of socialists, socialists and Portuguese socialist socialists.

It seems the majority world knows that a nation can be principled and popular enough to deserve a seat on the UN Security Council.

Stephen Harper's enlightened sovereignty nonsense was the final failure in his deluded campaign for a seat.

And Canada is better for it, black eye and all.