

# **Spinal Atrophy a Problem When Dealing With a Tyrannical Regime**

*Commentary by John Robson*

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There's this mysterious new disease out of China with strange symptoms that poses serious risks. No, I don't mean SARS-CoV-19. I mean the one causing intermittent failure of the senses among Canadians in positions of authority.

The latest victim is our semi-self-quarantined prime minister. But it has also hit our foreign minister, health minister, minister of innovation, science and industry (that's one person), deputy MP, and a senior Canadian adviser with the World Health Organization. And although it "presents" as selective deafness or aphasia, specifically an inability to hear or speak the words "China" or "Taiwan," or a chronic blind spot when it comes to Chinese government misconduct, it seems to originate in quite another body part: the spine.

At a May 8 press conference, Justin Trudeau was asked: “The former Prime Minister of Australia, Malcolm Turnbull, says China is a bully, and that the way for Canada to deal with China is to stand up for it instead of backing down. Is your government standing up to China, or is it backing away from China?”

Before I proceed, is there anything unclear about that question? OK, smarty-pants, the syntax is garbled. It’s standing up “to” not “for” and “backing down” not “backing away.” But is the question in any way difficult to understand?

No? Good. Now let’s hear the answer. “My responsibility as prime minister is to make sure that we are providing for Canadians and keeping Canadians safe. That’s the job people expect me to do and that is exactly what I’m doing. We’re going to ensure that Canadians have the equipment, the supplies, the support they need to make it through this pandemic. Of course at the same time we will be asking difficult questions about how we’re making it through this pandemic, how this came to happen, how we can learn from this. There will be plenty of time for questions in the months to come. My focus, rightly, is on doing everything I can to help Canadians through this,” Trudeau said. Then he walked away.

Is that answer in any way easy to understand? Of course, you might attribute the PM's lack of clarity to cunning. It might simply appear that his handlers had him memorize some anodyne incomprehensible boilerplate to be deployed in the event of an awkward question. Even the bit about it being important to ask difficult questions while dodging one, before patting himself on the back in case no one else felt inclined. But it's not an isolated case.

In early April, health minister Patty Hajdu exhibited both blindness and logorrhea. She didn't just say there was no evidence that Chinese Communist Party data on COVID-19 was unreliable. She said asking about it fed "conspiracy theories." And sadly she infected her colleague, Deputy PM Chrystia Freeland. When asked, in context of Hajdu's puzzling performance, whether she'd seen intelligence data questioning Chinese government claims, Freeland replied, "we have very frequent security and intelligence conversations with the United States. A reason we are able to have those conversations—which are very important in the crisis that the world is experiencing today—is because those conversations happen in private and so I am not able to share details of what is discussed in those conversations."

You see? A normal answer would have been “Yes I have” or “No I haven’t” while avoiding elaborating in ways that compromised confidentiality. Instead she either did not hear or could not say “China.” Whereas our foreign minister, Francois-Philippe Champagne, personally thanked China on Twitter for sending us (defective) medical supplies, but not Taiwan. And when asked in Parliament last week, “Will the minister now do the right thing and on behalf of Canadians, recognize the generosity of Taiwan and thank its government for that timely donation?” he replied, “Canada is grateful to all who have given supplies to Canada. This is a common endeavour.”

It is not certain whether Champagne could not hear or could not say “Taiwan.” But something was characteristically wrong. As it was when Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry Navdeep Bains was asked on April 23 about defective equipment from China and did a deer-in-the-headlights response involving “challenges,” and “building up strong domestic capacity” and “made-in-Canada solutions” that failed to acknowledge let alone answer the bit about China or defective equipment. The exasperated CBC interviewer put the question a third time, pointing out that he had not answered it, and he failed again, stammering about “challenges” and “domestic capacity.”

Finally there's poor Bruce Aylward, a Canadian doctor with WHO whose condition is far more acute, possibly because it struck him earlier. Back in March he first could not hear a reporter's question about "Taiwan," then could not speak, then suffered a spasm and disconnected the call, but still couldn't hear or say it when reconnected. And now he's actually become invisible, having failed to appear before the House of Commons health committee despite two requests followed by a summons, and inaudible: He can't or won't say why. (And in its response WHO apparently couldn't even type "Aylward," instead emailing the committee that "Over the past weeks, we have received requests for information from several different Governments, parliamentary bodies and officials. With a view to facilitating the work of the Committee, WHO stands ready to consider any list of technical questions which may be provided in writing by the Committee".)

So eyes, ears, fingers, and tongue fail. But the core problem is atrophy of the spine. As Aristotle said millennia ago, courage is first among virtues because without it we only exercise the others when convenient, safe, and painless. Whether the PM was standing up "to" China or possibly even "for" it, backing away or up or down, he didn't dare say what he was doing or what he was thinking.

This disease has hit Western governments before. But this wave comes straight from China because its government is indeed a bully and one who thinks its moment has come. The Politburo is throwing its weight around in big ways and small, from the Belt and Road Initiative to claiming the South China Sea to threatening commercial boycotts. And from warning Western universities about loss of foreign-student revenue while undermining free speech on their campuses to that weird business where their consul-general crashed a press conference by Australia's health minister. The question is, what are we going to do? And the answer must not be to pretend it's not happening.

To be fair and end on a positive note, the Canadian government has finally joined the American one in pushing to include Taiwan in the World Health Organization. So there's one vertebra. And let's hope it's the start of an entire spinal column because we're going to need one.

The world is a dangerous place in any number of ways, from geopolitics to pandemics. And we need people in full possession of their senses to keep us as safe as possible. In the literal as well as figurative sense. And we're not going to be kept safe by anyone whose nervous system has collapsed.

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*[https://www.theepochtimes.com/ottawas-spinal-atrophy-when-it-comes-to-the-beijing-regime\\_3347037.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/ottawas-spinal-atrophy-when-it-comes-to-the-beijing-regime_3347037.html)*