

No oil meets no copyright

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The pipeline proposal and the SOPA copyright protection law are being derailed by remarkably similar radical ideologies

Whatever one might think of the merits of Trans-Canada's Keystone XL pipeline to Texas or of U.S. Congressional bills to stop internet piracy, there is plenty of reason to be worried about how these two subjects are playing out in the U.S. Even if one were to agree that both projects are economically and/or politically wrong-headed, the fact remains that the pipeline proposal and the SOPA copyright protection law are being derailed by remarkably similar radical ideologies that go far beyond the narrow impact of the pipeline and Internet legislation.

Behind the Keystone campaign is the No Oil movement, which aims to shut down fossil fuels as a source of energy to save the planet from climate change. Behind the anti-SOPA campaign stands No Copyright, which wants shut down intellectual property as a right and make information free. Both movements are at root religiously anti-corporate and share a deep conviction that the current economic regimes must be overthrown.

It is no surprise, for example, that the website of green activist Bill McKibben's 350.org movement, now credited with almost singlehandedly rousing President Obama's administration to reject Keystone, on Wednesday carried a tag that said "Stop American Censorship" with a link to Wednesday's Wikipedia-led anti-SOPA blackout campaign.

When the ideological starting point of these movements is to blow up the underpinnings of economic activity, foreclose corporate interests and abandon certain fundamentals in favour of some fantastic radical idea of how the world should work, there is little that can be gained engaging them in debate and discussion, never mind nitty-gritty policymaking.

Let's begin with SOPA, the U.S. Senate's Stop Online Piracy Act, and its House sister, the Protect-IP Act (PIPA). President Obama recently poured cold water in

the bills, which are aimed at curbing off-shore internet piracy of U.S. intellectual media property.

In the view of the libertarian Cato Institute, the SOPA/PICA bills would turn the U.S. government into a centre of global censorship. The laws would “kill the Internet to save Hollywood,” deter innovation, interfere with legal free speech and probably wouldn’t work. The Wall Street Journal, in an editorial, sharply disagrees. It sees piracy of intellectual property as a serious issue and said the proposed bills appear to be legally sound approaches to an important problem that is escalating while Internet liberationists are fulminating. The bills, moreover, “are far more modest than this cyber tantrum suggests. By our reading they would create new tools to target the worst-of-the-worst black markets. The notion that a SOPA dragnet will catch a stray Facebook post or Twitter link is false,” the WSJ says.

Internet activists, including Canada’s, used Wikipedia’s blackout as a public relations opportunity. By coincidence, CBC Radio’s The Current was out ahead of the pack this week with a half-hour report on something called The Church of Kopimism, an alleged new religion founded in Sweden based on the religious premise that file-sharing over the Internet is a “holy” experience and “the right to copy information” as the “central ritual” and one of Kopimism’s “holy values.”

I’m not making this up. As if to prove that Kopimism is not a hoax, The Current tracked down some experts to fill in the theological gaps. They found followers who said “information must be free” and that the right to download HBO content at no cost, one way or another, is the way of the future.

An academic by the name of K. Matthew Dames — a research fellow in Telecommunications Law and Management at Michigan State University and a copyright advisor at Syracuse University — said the new attitude toward copyright and intellectual property is based on the emerging premise that “the corporate is evil.” A new paradigm is shaping up around the world, based on the idea that “information should be free” and that corporations must be eliminated as the middlemen in the new world of open and free information. According to Mr. Dames, the new paradigm is a direct threat to the very idea of ownership.

Anybody who spends time trolling through Open Media and scores of other activist and academic centres extolling the new thinking on intellectual property can’t escape the fact that the objective is turn the system upside down. Nobody has the slightest idea of what the new era will look like. All they know is that the existing regime does not allow them to do what the technology seems to say they can do, which is download stuff for free. It’s a religious experience.

Also into religious experiences of a different sort is Bill McKibben, the representative figurehead of the anti-Keystone movement. Mr. McKibben’s

books — *The End of Nature*, *Deep Economy* and many others — are filled with intellectual wanderings out into the ideological wilderness. He hasn't officially founded a new religion, but he is closing in on one.

His organization, 350.org, aims to reshape economic activity and curb greenhouse gas emissions to the point where the carbon in the atmosphere is held to 350 parts per million, an extreme objective that would force a crippling reduction in fossil fuel use. Such a reduction — current levels approach 400 ppm heading toward 450 in a few decades — would entail a dramatic fall-off in economic growth — a subject Mr. McKibben has little interest in. A chapter in *Deep Economy* is titled “After Growth.”

Uniting the No Oil and No Copyright movements is a belief that corporations are evil, intellectual property is a scam, fossil fuels are a curse, growth is bad and the world can be made a better place by shutting much of it down.