

Some thoughts on the Freedom Convoy 2022



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LIKE EVERYONE ELSE across the country, and around the world for that matter, I have been closely watching the Freedom Convoy 2022, the convoy of truckers that have arrived in Ottawa to protest the vaccine mandates for truckers who cross the Canada-U.S. border. While initially it was about the mandates affecting cross-border truckers, it has now expanded to protest all COVID-19 restrictions and to call for them to end. The right to peacefully protest and the right to free expression are part of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, while the Charter guarantees the right to peaceful protests, it does not protect riots and gatherings that seriously disturb the peace, nor the right to physically impede or blockade lawful activities. While the protest in Ottawa seems to have begun as peaceful and law abiding, although inconvenient for residents living in Centretown near Parliament Hill, there has since been some alleged unruly and illegal behaviour. By Feb. 6, seven people have been charged with criminal offences, 100 tickets have been issued and Ottawa police say there are now over 60 active investigations into the protesters' conduct which allegedly includes harassing residents, bothering Ottawa businesses and displaying hate symbols in the form of Nazi and Confederate flags. The constant din of the truckers' air horns led some residents to file for a temporary court injunction to get them to stop, which was approved in an Ottawa court on Feb. 7 for the next 10 days. A continuance of this order will be discussed when the court reconvenes Feb. 16. This type of behaviour is of course unacceptable and runs contrary to peaceful assembly and protest. The city of Ottawa declared a state of emergency due to the ongoing protest on Feb. 6, and on the following day Ontario Liberal leader Steven Del Luca called on the Ford government to initiate a provincial state of emergency due to the protest. Here in Bancroft, we had a local truck convoy that showed support for the Ottawa Freedom Convoy 2022 on Jan. 29 and again on Feb. 5, but was entirely peaceful and law abiding. It went through the downtown core, up north of town to Bird's Creek and back again. Two of the truck rally participants, Mike McKee and Brad Musclow, say they were very impressed on how the community came together and how many vehicles showed up Jan. 29, and they estimated around 120 vehicles participated the first time and approximately 160 vehicles partook the following weekend. McKee said on Jan. 29 that it's just about their freedom to be able to go out and do what they want to do. "As truckers, we are just fighting for everyone's freedom. It's time to open up and live our lives," he says. Constable Susanne Cox with the Bancroft OPP says that there were no issues locally with either event on Jan. 29 and Feb. 5. "The OPP respects the right of everyone to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and also recognizes the rights of the general public, all road users, local residents and businesses to a safe environment. Locally, our OPP worked with involved persons to minimize the impact of the travelling public to ensure order and public safety," she says. As Evelyn Beatrice Hall (writing under the pseudonym S.G. Tallentyre) wrote in her 1906 book *The Friends of Voltaire* (and often erroneously attributed to Voltaire himself); "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." I certainly disapprove of the truckers' protest demands to end all COVID-19 restrictions and believe that continued vaccinations, booster shots and adhering to distancing, mask usage and hand

sanitation are the best way to get us through COVID-19 and back to some sense of normalcy. I understand that people are angry, frustrated and disillusioned with COVID-19 restrictions after two years, especially considering the negative physical, mental and economic impacts of the pandemic lockdowns. There should be no more lockdowns because of this, as I feel they are of dubious effect. Some experts agree. Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, said on Feb. 4 that a more sustainable approach to COVID-19 needs to be adopted as the virus will likely be with us months and years from now. A study last year by Simon Fraser University Economics Professor Douglas W. Allen that concluded that the harm of lockdowns was hundreds of times higher than the benefits, damaging people's physical and mental health and our economy in the long term. Regarding damage to people's mental health, in the spring of 2021, according to the Survey on COVID-19 and mental health, 25 per cent of Canadians aged 18 years and older screened positive for depression, anxiety or post traumatic stress disorder, up from 21 per cent in the fall of 2020. From an economic standpoint, the first year of the pandemic gave Canadians a \$343 billion federal deficit due to the lockdowns and the payments to housebound workers who could not earn a living otherwise. This massive government spend has contributed to a currently rising inflation rate and a possible recession to contend with down the road due to these lockdowns. In January, according to Statistics Canada, 200,000 jobs were lost in this country due to the lockdowns, most of them here in Ontario and in neighbouring Quebec. So, even if I don't agree with everything the truckers' protest wants to accomplish, I feel that if they protest in a peaceful and law-abiding manner, and disavow the actions of those who protest by breaking the law and wreaking havoc in Ottawa, they should be allowed to continue to have theirs, as guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.