

# THE POLITICS OF THE FLAG

There was a stark contrast on display recently about how the Canadian flag has been used to convey significantly differing messages to the country and the world.

One was the fervent flag waving after one of Canada's athletes won an Olympic medal in China. It was done in celebration for the athlete, the country of origin, and happiness for family and friends.

The other saw protesters from the self-styled Freedom Convoy using the Maple Leaf as agitprop for their own political ends, co-opting the flag's singular message of patriotism and freedom.

In the 57 years since the Maple Leaf was first raised in 1965, the flag has become a recognized and welcome symbol of national unity, of heart-filled symbolism and, for moments of grief, draped over the coffins of soldiers. It has been worn on hats sewn on backpacks, symbolizing hope, honesty, growth and comfort.

The Ottawa protesters may not have been the first to use the flag for their own purposes. Still, it has become the most visible and searing example of how a patriotic symbol of unity can be used to support anti-democratic and hateful ideas. The flag has been plastered across their vehicles and persons in Ottawa and at the border blockades with the intended statement that they are the "real" Canadians.

And if "you" attack "us," you are not Canadians. Despite their vile, hate-filled and unpatriotic ideas, they wave the Maple Leaf for protection attempting to be "respectable" and "legitimate" in their demands. It is as if the meaning of the Canadian flag has been stolen from the rest of the Canadians.

To be sure, the Maple Leaf has been having a difficult workout over the last few years. When the difficult news of burial sites was discovered at former residential school sites in Canada, flags were flown at half-staff for months in an effort at solidarity. There is also a recognition that the Canadian flag doesn't represent all of Canada's nations.

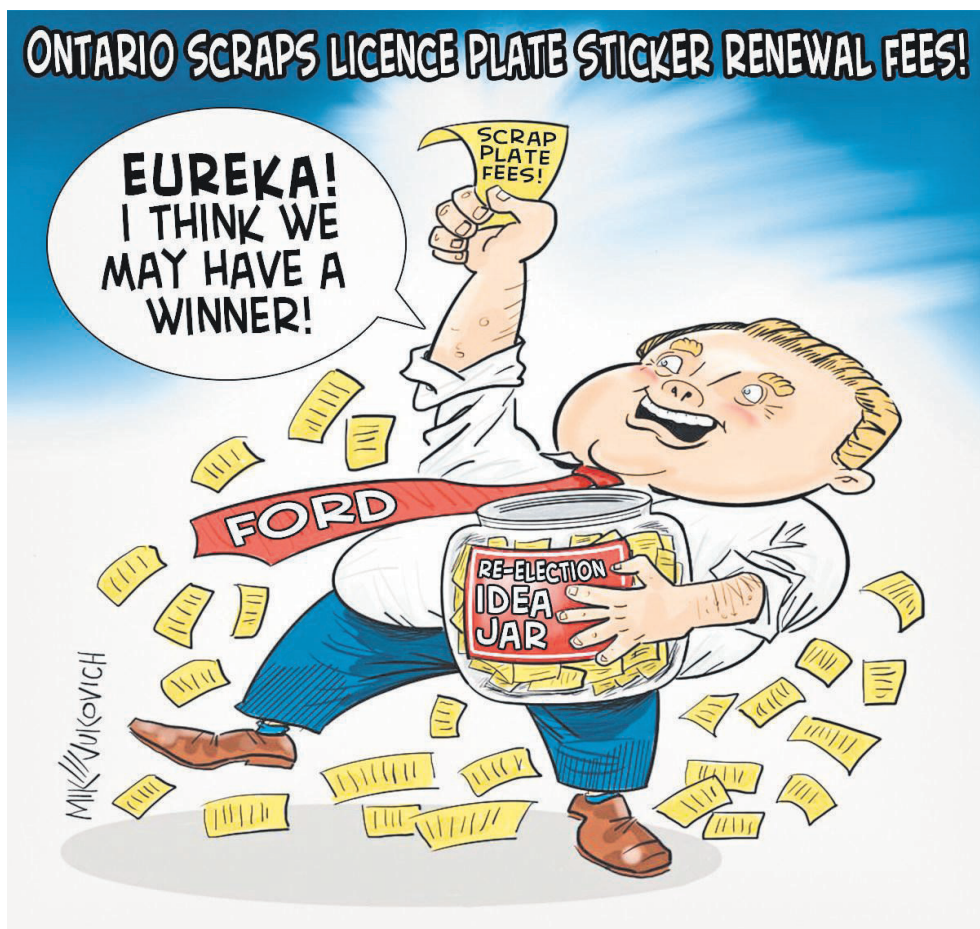
Government buildings have been flying Indigenous flags, LGBTQ+ and others to recognize their importance to the Canadian experiment.

While Canadians have historically been wary of any hint of nationalism, there is a deep pride in being Canadian, despite its complexities, controversies and curiosities.

As the world plunges further into darker times, if nothing else, the Maple Leaf should be looked upon as a continuing symbol to unite Canadians as a shared nation, allowing for varied interpretations and deeply held beliefs, a powerful symbol of togetherness that does allow the bearer to infer whatever meaning they want with it.

Canada's Maple Leaf is a relatively youthful symbol for a still-emerging nation. Any country's flag always has more than one meaning and tells numerous stories of a country. The older the flag is, the more complicated its story, but it is also a deeper and richer narrative for the country as a whole.

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## LETTERS & COMMENTARY

### SIDEWALKS, NOT BIKE LANES

Without general public input, the planning department is designing major changes to the Dundas Sydenham Hill escarpment access. Construction is expected to start in the spring of 2022.

The hill has seen a steadfast increase in pedestrians and hikers attempting to safely navigate to downtown Dundas, the Sydenham Look Out and the Bruce Trail. The bridge walkway is the only safe area. A sidewalk on one side is clearly needed. There is no public transit.

The steepness prevents everyday bicyclists from using this route. World-class cyclists train on this hill. Being confined in upward and downward bike lanes (going 50-65 km/h) is not feasible and potentially dangerous.

Without a safe area, people will walk in these lanes. There are more suitable ar-

reas for bike lanes, or existing lanes could be improved.

The road cannot be significantly widened. The slower vehicle right lane should not be removed. Doing so would increase EMS, police and fire response times. The curves prevent safe passing. Bike lanes will prevent snow removal to the side of the road, also with disastrous results.

Extensive modifications to this project must occur immediately. Repeated requests to make these proposals widely known, and a means to provide valuable input have gone unanswered.

Contact your city councillor and Hamilton's transportation operations and maintenance division with your thoughts.

DIANE ROBERTSON,  
DUNDAS

### LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Re: Who elected Becky

*Buck vice-chair? (Feb. 10)*

One of the marvelous things about Canada is we live in a democracy.

Some wish to know who elected Becky Buck as vice-chair of the Hamilton public school board. It took many years (1874) before a secret ballot was allowed in Canada. Is this really the right way to go, to publicly announce this particular vote? If so, what about future elections? Would we be undoing all the work it took to achieve a secret ballot?

Wikipedia states: The ability to vote without one's choices being revealed to others is considered an essential characteristic of legitimate democratic systems. The secret ballot helps protect voters from fear of intimidation or coercion. As has been said, let's work together to encourage a fair and positive board.

JACQUIE REID,  
HAMILTON

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