

# 'Freedom Convoy': at the end of the day, everyone loses



Police arrest a man on Wellington Street on Feb. 17, 2022, during the Freedom Convoy's occupation of downtown Ottawa. Police started arresting protesters after three weeks here. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

As the details of who these people are emerge, any person who was associated with their cause is going to suffer residual damage. The 'Freedom Convoy' will roll out, but in its dust, Ottawa is left in political chaos.

Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner



OTTAWA—At the end of the day, from city hall to Parliament Hill, there is no winner coming out of this so-called "Freedom Convoy."

The truckers will claim victory, because several premiers announced a relaxation of their vaccine requirements at the height of the tension.

But when the dust settles, the story of Canada's trucker siege is going to cast them in a very negative light.

One leader of the siege fled just as the new emergency law was announced, claiming his work had been done and he needed to move on to the Maritimes.

Another organizer went to YouTube, tearfully announcing she expected to be imprisoned because of her involvement, but claiming she was not afraid.

As the details of who these people are emerge, any person who was associated with their cause is going to suffer residual damage.

And the effect on the body politic is even more profound.

The Ottawa police chief was fired and a new one chosen by the Ottawa Police Services Board without consultation with city officials. That prompted city council to implode as board chair Diane Deans was voted out of her position by a 15-9 council vote.

Councillors were calling for the immediate resignation of Mayor Jim Watson,

even though he has already announced that he will leave city hall at the end of this term.

Ottawa residents are not the only ones who have lost confidence in the capacity of politicians to protect them from harassment as they are left to their own defences.

But with the state of hooliganism reigning in an area inhabited by more than 30,000 citizens, the city was hardest hit by the occupations.

A friend of mine, who is 80 years old and recovering from cancer, was out for his daily constitutional near the grounds of the University of Ottawa when he was accosted by three roving hoodlums demanding that he remove his mask. He politely declined, telling them he had pre-existing conditions and they responded by telling him that he was full of shit and that they wanted the mask off.

He turned away from the confrontation by reversing his path, shaking in fear and wondering what has happened to the city he has called home for more than 40 years.

Another friend is the head of a major Canadian non-governmental organization. One of his organization's members posted some of the "Freedom Convoy" links to international white supremacist groups on social media.

My friend's address and unpublished personal phone number were found by the supremacists, and then linked to the posted research. He started receiving hundreds of death threats on his cell phone. Police were contacted. At press time, the investigation has not been concluded.

In Alberta, two Edmonton police officers were suspended after participating in the international blockade at Coutts. Near the site, police uncovered multiple assault weapons and four people have been charged with conspiracy to murder after a raid on the blockade.

While politicians prognosticated, citizens acted. Ottawa residents are suing convoy organizers and participants for \$306-million and counting, with an additional \$15-million in personal harm and charges every day it continues.

At Queens's Park, it was revealed that a senior member of the solicitor-general's staff was one of thousands who funded the convoy. Director of communications Marion Isabeau-Ringuette was fired without further comment.

As the donation list becomes public, there will definitely be more questions

around support for occupiers from senior politicians and law enforcement officials.

Interim Conservative Leader Candice Bergen embraced the protesters and then claimed the prime minister was at the divisive centre of this debacle.

The prime minister waited far too long before making the decision to invoke special authorities to quell the violence and mayhem.

According to *Toronto Star* reporter Robert Benzie, recent polling shows that two-thirds of Canadians support the imposition of the Emergencies Act. But that isn't the end of the story. Eighty-two per cent said the protest has gone on too long, and seventy one per cent say that Canada's handling of the situation was an international embarrassment.

Fifty-six per cent also say that premiers caved by lifting vaccine passports and other mandates at the height of the occupation.

So, the prime minister and the premiers have all been damaged by this debacle.

When the dust settles, Canadians will not forget one thing.

Only one party embraced the protesters. And who could forget the image of Conservative Michael Cooper, smiling away for photographs in front of a swastika on an upside-down Canadian flag?

Sheila Copps is a former Jean Chrétien-era cabinet minister and a former deputy prime minister.

*The Hill Times*

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