

Trudeau's wretched smear-job of truckers highlights sorry state of Canadian leadership



by Conrad Black

The official response to the truckers protesting COVID restrictions is one of the most disgraceful political episodes in the history of Canada as an autonomous country. The prime minister's statement that the truckers were probably homophobic, trans-phobic, misogynists and racists was an outrage that was unsupported by evidence. Instead of dealing with these truckers and the issues that propelled them across the country in a serious way, the prime minister attacked them en route as a "small fringe minority" who hold "unacceptable views." There is no justification for any of this and polls show the truckers represent approximately as many Canadians as the number who voted for this government in September. The government propaganda machine followed with a smear job highlighting Nazi and racist imagery, though there is very little of that, and a Confederate flag-waver was led away by the truckers.

Former governor of the banks of Canada and England and apparent Liberal office-seeker Mark Carney denounced the protesters in the *Globe and Mail*, accusing them of "sedition" and "insurrection," and announced that their goal is

“undermining our democracy and the rule of law.” In fact, they are just trying to avoid two weeks of quarantine when crossing the border, not overthrow the government. Taking on the august airs of a central banker, he wrote: “I know from experience that crises don’t end by themselves. You can’t spin your way out of failure.” That is particularly apposite coming from someone who was a total failure as the governor of the Bank of England when he became a mindless parrot of the Cameron government in claiming that Britain would be devastated if it approved Brexit, and when he tried to turn the bank into an authoritarian enforcer of a green ecological despotism, a public policy area that is no business of a central bank and where his views are moonshine.

There are some problems with the truckers’ stance. Their initial grievance was that the approximately 10 per cent of them who are not vaccinated would be quarantined for 14 days when they re-entered Canada from the United States. This is a legitimate complaint and the government could easily have substituted a strict testing system for a two-week layoff. The policy could be a serious threat to the supply chain of this country. These are highly skilled men with lonely and challenging jobs performing a vital national function. The truckers’ procession across the country was good-natured and contained no hints of violence or sociopathic or bigoted motives.

With that said, the truckers seem to be suffering from mission creep and have broadened their complaints to a general demand for an end to the entire oppressive complex of compulsory anti-COVID measures. This, too, is not unreasonable. The length and extent of lockdowns was misconceived from the outset. This government’s tardy and ineffectual pursuit of a vaccine, starting with a Chinese confection that didn’t pan out, was nothing less than a national scandal as we trailed approximately 50 countries, including some under-developed states, for months in terms of the percentage of the

population that had been vaccinated. We were unconscionably late moving to protect the elderly, long after it was clear that they were the demographic group most vulnerable to lethal infection. Instead of making the federal government's management of the issue a primary factor in the autumn election, the opposition parties cowered in fear of seeming to criticize the ruling party during a national crisis. Docile and invertebrate opposition generally assures complacent, incompetent and abusive government. That has been Canada's fate.

The appropriate official response, apart from immediately removing the most objectionable anti-COVID policies, would have been to invite a delegation of the truckers to meet with the prime minister and appropriate members of his government to discuss their grievances. The defamation and the attempt to incite public hostility against them was contemptible demagoguery. The most egregious actors in this saga are Ottawa's police chief, Peter Sloly, and its mayor, Jim Watson, who have been terminally self-pleased by having intervened with the corrupt American left-wing fund-receptacle GoFundMe, to seize the truckers' money. This was simply theft. The truckers quickly attracted heavy support from other quarters and their original supporters received refunds, though the Ontario government managed to persuade a court to block the US\$8.4 million (\$10.6 million) that was raised through another site.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has needlessly escalated the state of anger and division in the country and has disserved everyone. But the truckers now have to act carefully. It is not acceptable for anyone to obstruct normal business in the centre of the country's capital, or in any other city, for more than a brief period, to call attention to their grievances. The public are the victims of all the disruption the truckers are causing, and the public is not their enemy: it is precisely the gallery the truckers need to impress. If Trudeau or other senior members of the government won't meet

with a delegation of the protesters, the truckers should make that point loudly and disperse. Public opinion would rightly support them, especially if Trudeau continues with his smear job and his unctuous pieties about national unity, which his own intransigence is fragmenting.

No closing of the U.S. border, as truckers are now doing at three crossings, for more than 30 minutes is tolerable, and neither is impassable congestion on the Trans-Canada or other major highways. The truckers can win this confrontation by exposing Trudeau's pompous posturing and his slander of the truckers as a fraud. But they can't win by trying to intimidate the government and by so inconveniencing the public that they demand the government make concessions to end the truckers' protests. In that scenario, the public will demand that the truckers go home; not that the government cave to all their demands. The government, incompetent and largely contemptible though it is, is the elected and legitimate government. The truckers are right to rail against authoritarian mandates, but they should remember that they have no mandate from anyone to do anything, and their hold on public support is tenuous. What is much more worrisome than the conduct of the truckers or even the asinine and now thoroughly discredited official response to the coronavirus is that the federal government's reflexive response is not to recruit public opinion by making a goodwill effort to listen to the truckers' complaints and respond to them reasonably, but to defame this approaching host of aroused citizens supported by millions of their countrymen as a wretched mob of thugs, bigots and perverts.

It is all depressingly illustrative of the great national malaise: the government isn't governing and the Opposition isn't opposing. Our political leaders are incompetent. They are a nuisance as well as a disappointment, and in a democracy we get the government (and Opposition) we deserve. It is this vacuum that provides much of the receptivity for the protests

of the truckers – they're the only player in this drama that is showing any leadership.

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