

## The Cost of Freedom and the Weight of Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt



*Image: protesters throng Parliament Hill in Canada as part of the ongoing Freedom Convoy movement*

Yesterday evening, in an unprecedented act, the Prime Minister of Canada invoked the hitherto [unused Emergency Measures Act](#), in an effort to suppress the Freedom Convoy protest that has occupied the downtown core of Ottawa for the better part of three weeks. Some journalists have mistakenly been referring to this as the “[War Measures Act](#)”, which the current legislation replaced in 1988.

That’s understandable. History has been rhyming like an Eminem record lately, and people can’t help remembering that Justin Trudeau’s father Pierre Elliot Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act during the [October Crisis](#) in 1970, after the Front de Liberation de Québec detonated over 200 bombs and took two politicians hostage, killing one of them.

For many observers - perhaps including the Prime Minister himself - this is his moment to step into his father’s shoes as a political strong-man; invoking his full power as a leader, and finally silencing those who have criticized him for appearing weak in the face of popular protest.

The thing is, while many of the Freedom Convoy protesters are Québécois, they’re not the FLQ. This protest has been categorically and determinedly peaceful. There has been no violence, nor threats of violence. There have been no bombings or kidnappings.

As sure as night follows day, at this point, the what-abouts of the world will be furiously commenting “But what about the thirteen people who were [arrested with guns](#) near the scene of the border blockade in Coutts, Alberta?”

What about it, indeed? It seems uncharacteristic of everything else we’ve seen so far, and it has serious implications.

To those who accept the narrative by the press that these protests in Canada are backed by a shadowy cabal of January 6 protesters from the United States, these arrests will certainly seem like a vindication of that fear. At this point there is zero evidence for this.

Meanwhile, those who support the protesters have been equally quick to claim that this is a set-up by bad actors to discredit the protesters. They point to the curious January 6 plot last year to kidnap Congresswoman Gretchen Whitmer, in which virtually all of the conspirators were [later found](#) to be either FBI agents or informants. There's no evidence for this either.

We'll have to allow the police to finish their investigation, and then see who actually appears in court, and what charges they face in order to understand what this means.

In the meantime, what about it? The police have made their arrests, and the Premier of Alberta has already made it clear that he [does not support](#) invocation of the act, and that the province of Alberta is not requesting that the federal government intervene there. "We don't believe this is necessary in Alberta, we think it could actually be somewhat counterproductive," he said.

## What Happens Next?

This announcement has nothing to do with Alberta. It's about *Ottawa*.

You can see very quickly that the government's entire pre-occupation is with the protesters in front of the Parliament buildings. These are the protesters that everybody sees. These are the people who are being interviewed by Fox News and other international media. These are the people who have humiliated the Prime Minister and his government. These are the people that Justin Trudeau is determined to stop, (the protesters in Alberta and other places can just go hang), and from a political perspective, he's probably right.

To start with, Prime Minister Trudeau has announced that the government will be cancelling insurance on the protesters' vehicles, and freezing their bank accounts.

The Prime Minister has also said that Canada's national police, the RCMP, will be empowered to enforce municipal bylaws and provincial offences. That's telling. The government feels that the local and provincial police haven't been sufficiently severe in policing the protesters, so now the feds will be taking over.

Even more telling is Trudeau's statement that he plans to enact "business support measures" to support Ottawa businesses who have complained that protesters have "repeatedly refused to respect public health measures like masking indoors".

So, if the government does what they say they will do, over the next few days we can expect the government to use the RCMP and the Emergency Measures Act to starve out the protesters by freezing their bank accounts, and to break their companies by cancelling their commercial vehicle insurance policies.

They'll also override the local police force, and directly police protesters and supporters who fail to mask up where required, or who can be said to have trespassed on private property as they protest.

A lot of protesters will likely end up being arrested for trespassing. There are many areas in large cities that look like public sidewalks or courtyards, but are actually owned by shopping malls or property management companies. Anyone who wants to support the truckers will have to be prepared to move along when asked, or face arrest under the Emergency Measures Act.

The CBC has [gleefully pointed out](#) that the Emergency Measures Act allows the government to impose fines of up to \$5,000 or prison terms of up to five years - or both. They've helpfully highlighted that in pink to make sure you notice it.

But don't worry. This won't be permanent. The Prime Minister figures that the emergency measures should only be in place for two weeks or so - Just long enough to flatten the freedom curve.

## You Are a Terrible Person

Clearly, this is meant to scare the hell out of the Freedom Convoy protesters, and anyone who wants to support them. This declaration is meant to de-legitimize *this* protest, while the government assures us that we continue to enjoy the right to "legitimate, peaceful protest".

That's the point being made – that *this* protest is not legitimate. "We cannot and will not allow illegal and dangerous activities to continue", said the Prime Minister. Arrests were made in Alberta, so the protest in Ottawa is "illegal and dangerous" by contagion. "Everyone is tired of the pandemic", said Mr. Trudeau. "There are other ways to express yourselves rather than participating in illegal activities and dangerous activities."

"Illegal and dangerous". You are doing wrong. You are hurting people. This has to stop.

This repeated mantra makes it clear: If you support the Freedom Convoy protesters, you are a terrible person.

Of course, if you don't choose to join the protest, but still don't want to take the COVID vaccine, you're still a terrible person. That's part of the reason many of the protesters showed up in the first place. They have been demonized and denigrated for their choices by the received wisdom of the press, academics, experts, politicians, and even the Prime Minister who for months now has [called them](#) people who "don't believe in science and are very often misogynistic and racist."

## The Cost of Freedom

People often talk about the cost of freedom, but we usually talk about it as if buying freedom was a one-time deal, and that it's a price that has already been paid in full by our forebears.

The price of the freedom we enjoy in the west has been paid in blood many times over, in places like Crecy, Lexington, Concord, Gettysburg, Vimy Ridge, and on the beaches of Normandy, and Okinawa.

But freedom isn't a done deal. It isn't something you can pay for once, and then keep forever. It's a dynamic and delicate thing that must be vigilantly nurtured. Freedom is often depicted as a beacon, but in reality it's more like a candle flame that has to be constantly shielded from the wind.

For Justin Trudeau, and those who think like him, the whole question of liberty in Canada was settled long ago. Canadians have their freedoms, and the people who are disrupting life in Ottawa are not only deluded, but dangerous.

In Canada, politicians of all stripes have a long history of watering down absolute freedoms in the fruitless pursuit of an illusory middle ground. There is no principal that can't be compromised in the name of being "balanced".

As a result, in Canada, we don't have freedom: we have "freedom, but". We have freedom of speech, but not speech that is determined to be hateful. We have freedom of assembly, but not if it threatens commerce. We have freedom of worship – so long as it's in accordance with public health. We have freedom of mobility, except if

we're unvaccinated. We have freedom of assembly, but the police will come to your door if they think that you might be supporting the Freedom Convoy truckers.

We have the right to liberty, security of the person, and bodily autonomy, unless the national, provincial, or regional Chief Medical Officer of Health declares a public health emergency, in which case you [may face arrest](#) for non-compliance if you contravene an emergency health order.

That is why these protests are happening.

Thomas Jefferson, who famously [declared](#) that "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants", asked in the same letter: "What country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance?"

The problem is, the government may have invoked emergency powers, but we're not in a war. Our citizens are not being herded into "resiliency" camps, as is happening to aboriginals in [Australia](#). No one is being asked to lay down their lives.

It's fun to wave flags, and quote rip-snorting old-time freedom fighters like Thomas Jefferson, but it's not Independence Day, and we're not fighting Nazis.

The Freedom Convoy truckers, and the ordinary Canadians who support them, or who have simply decided to push back against increasingly arbitrary and intrusive mandates are not freedom fighters in the same sense that Thomas Jefferson and the soldiers of the Continental Army were.

They're not meeting a tangible army on a real battlefield, and yet there is a real and immediate price to be paid for choosing to take a stand against vaccine mandates. Thousands of people are at risk of losing their livelihoods, and thousands more have already been fired from their jobs. People are seeing their savings wiped out, and are losing their homes.

And there will be greater costs to come. The Freedom Convoy protesters have been given notice that if they continue in their protest, they will be punished severely – by both the Ontario and federal governments.

This doesn't begin to compare with the cost of going to war for your country - of putting your life on the line, and risking terrible injury or death while being shot at. I don't wish in any way to minimize the significance of the sacrifice made by real soldiers and veterans.

But in a way, things were simpler for people who fought in real wars against tangible enemies, like the members of the Greatest Generation, who chose, (or were chosen) to go to war. Things were clear-cut for them. The axis powers were evil, and those who chose to enlist were heroes. The whole power of the state and its propagandists was arrayed to reassure people that their contribution was important, and that the price they paid was worthwhile.

The press, Hollywood actors and celebrities all contributed to mobilizing the allied nations for war. Small towns marched their heroes off to board the buses for basic training with the town band. Propaganda reels played in every cinema. Even Bugs Bunny got [drafted](#) in the fight for freedom.

Sacrifice is never easy, but it's easier to feel good about your choices when all of your peers and neighbours approve.

The Freedom Convoy protesters and many ordinary Canadians are paying a price for freedom without the luxury of being able to be confident that they're making the right choice, or that the price they pay is worthwhile.

It's much harder to believe in yourself when you are fighting in what all your neighbours perceive as pointless struggles over petty things – like being allowed to eat in restaurants or to send your kids to summer camp.

It's easy to believe that maybe your determination not to conform is selfish, or at least out of proportion to what is being asked of you.

No matter how strong your convictions might be, it is very easy to doubt yourself when your choices bring you into conflict with your employers, your peers or your family.

In addition to the immediate costs for non-compliance, those who oppose vaccine mandates face the criticism that they are fearful, or selfish. They face the disapproval and often open contempt of politicians, public officials, the press, celebrities, late night talk show hosts, and pretty much all of the People who Matter.

Most painfully, they face honest and forthright rejection from their peers and co-workers; from their friends, and even their own families.

It is difficult to believe you're doing the right thing when people you value most believe you are wrong. It is doubly hard to make a decision that causes suffering and privation for your family when you can't be sure of your own motivation.

## Fear Uncertainty, and Doubt

The sort of nerds who paint figures of civil war soldiers, and own their own copy of *The Art of War* often like to talk about the use of FUD (Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt), in psychological warfare.

The government of Canada, like other governments world-wide, has been waging a steady campaign of psychological warfare against their own citizens. They have spent millions of dollars on public information campaigns and social media influencers.

They have literally [deployed](#) the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC) to conduct and test propaganda campaigns in support of the government's COVID policies. These are the same people they sent into Afghanistan to confuse and undermine the Taliban. The federal government also tried to enlist the army to [monitor](#) citizens' tweets about the pandemic, until Canada's top general found out about the program and shut it down.

The press has waged its own propaganda war against people who object to lockdowns and mandates. The vaccines are safe and effective, they say. Those who don't take them put others at risk.

The Prime Minister has savaged those who refuse to get vaccinated, and has done his best to pit other citizens against them, claiming that the unvaccinated are to blame for hospital backlogs, delays in treatment, and continuing restrictions across the country: "When people are seeing cancer treatments and elective surgeries put off because beds are filled with people who chose not to get vaccinated, they're frustrated", [he said](#). "When people see that we are in lockdowns or serious public health restrictions right now because of the risk posed to all of us by unvaccinated people, people get angry."

He's right. People are angry. They've been told that the fact that they can't get treatment for life-threatening illness is not because of government policies and lack of funding, but because of the selfishness of fearful anti-vaxxers.

That's objectively a lie. Hospitals were overwhelmed in Canada long before COVID was a thing. Canada has on average fewer than 2 ICU beds per 100,000 of population. One bad traffic accident could overwhelm a city's hospitals.

But this is a lie that has been repeated on every platform, in every editorial, and on every late night talk show in North America, and lots of people believe it. For many Canadians, the unvaccinated are hurting people, and need to be punished. Propaganda works. That's why armies use it.

Recently, the Canadian army [discharged](#) dozens of soldiers for refusing to get vaccinated, and have put hundreds more on notice. Many of my acquaintances approve of this. They believe that these soldiers are self-centered because they won't do a simple thing to help protect themselves and their fellows. The fact that some of these soldiers are veterans who have hazarded their lives for their country while under fire doesn't even register with them.

I'm not a psychology guru, but I understand from my own work in communications just how effective propaganda can be, and how it's done. This is how Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt works:

1. You make people **fearful**. You exploit the ongoing crisis by reminding people constantly of the danger they face. You promise a course of action that will protect them, and then threaten them with consequences if they don't comply. This is as true in advertising as it is for government policy. The "Help I've fallen and I can't get up!" [ads](#) worked in exactly this way. "You don't want this to happen to *you*. Call now!"
2. You plant **uncertainty** in the mind of your target audience. People might be pretty sure they never faced lockdowns or mandates to take an experimental vaccine before, but you can make them doubt their own recollections, and question their own understanding.
3. You overcome resistance by sowing **doubt**. If you can make people doubt their convictions or their motivations - or the motivations of others you can often overcome their resistance. People want approval. They want to do the right thing. If you meet resistance, you can make people hesitate while you work on overcoming their objections.

This kind of pressure tactic works: even when you see it coming and you know what's happening. Even if you passionately believe in liberty, it's hard to know if you're doing the right thing when you choose to protest a policy or defy a mandate. It's hard to know if you're fighting for freedom, or merely being selfish.

## Am I Doing the Right Thing?

Over the past few months I've talked to several friends who have been tortured with uncertainty about what to do about COVID vaccine mandates. Some didn't trust the vaccines. Some of them were worried about what side-effects they might encounter. Others had already had COVID and recovered. Most just felt that it was wrong to be compelled to take them. None of them felt that taking the vaccine would benefit them in any way.

Most of them went ahead and got vaccinated anyway. Some of them liked their job and didn't want to lose it. Some had sick relatives they wanted to visit. Some of them had young families to support, and didn't want to make them suffer hardship.

Some of them were racked with doubt and asked me "am I doing the right thing?" That's not for me to say. I can't even adequately answer that question for myself.

There's a sort of moral calculus you can do when wrestling with a decision like this. There are four basic questions that you can ask yourself when you're confronted with the choice of whether or not to refuse to comply with a demand you believe is wrong:

**1. Will complying with this demand hurt me?**

If the matter in question is wearing a face mask to enter a store, the answer is "no". If it's a matter of taking an experimental vaccine, and you're in a group that's susceptible to side effects, the answer is "possibly yes".

**2. Will failure to comply with this demand hurt others?**

This is an important question. If you choose not to take the COVID vaccine and lose your job, you have to weigh the cost to your family of the financial uncertainty that results. With regard to the safety of others, we are told that the vaccines keep us safer, but only if everyone takes them.

You will have to determine for yourself how much weight to give this risible claim, but you can't ignore it either.

**3. Will complying with this demand hurt others?**

This is an important question. If you choose to get vaccinated yourself, you only put yourself at risk. However, if you choose to vaccinate your young children so they can get access to sports or summer camp, then you must consider possible side-effects and evaluate the risk to them.

**4. Will taking a stand on this serve as a purposeful example to others? Will it further the cause of liberty?**

This is the toughest question to answer in a satisfying way. If you choose to lose your job rather than get vaccinated, or choose to attend a protest where you get arrested, most people won't know and won't care unless you're somebody important.

But at the same time, if no one chooses to push back against things they know are wrong, and if no one is willing to pay the cost required to stand up for freedom, then the mandates and lockdowns will continue, the penalties for non-compliance will increase, and our liberties will continue to slip away.

Sometimes this will be an easy choice. For example, most places in Canada require you to wear a face mask when shopping at the supermarket. You might feel that mask mandates are stupid. You may believe that if the COVID virus is airborne, a cheap fabric mask won't be any more effective in protecting people than a chain link fence is at stopping mosquitos. You may believe that but lots of other people don't.

Many people are terrified of getting sick. They also have no more choice than you do about going to the supermarket. They won't understand why you're not wearing a mask and won't be sympathetic to you even if the cops show up and stomp on you. This is a case where the harm to other people outweighs any benefit your example of principled defiance might serve.

As with all things, these questions can be played on, and the answers can be distorted. The Prime Minister has claimed that the Freedom Convoy protesters are hurting people by denying them their rights and forcing the closure of downtown businesses.

That's true in one way: the downtown core is a mess, and most of the downtown shops are closed. However, a lot of this misery is self-inflicted in an effort to make the protesters move on. I noticed that the few businesses that

chose to stay open in support of the protest were thronging with shoppers and had line-ups that backed out onto the street.

Nevertheless, this can't go on indefinitely. At some point soon, the Freedom Convoy organizers will have to make the decision that they have accomplished their purpose, and pack up and go home.

But in the meantime, this is a case where taking a stand does serve as a purposeful example to others. The Freedom Convoy protest has furthered the cause of liberty, and has inspired people all over the globe. The whole world is watching it.

In invoking the Emergency Measures Act, Prime Minister Trudeau has upped the ante. He has changed the moral calculus of this protest.

Now, if the Freedom Convoy chooses to capitulate to his demands because they fear the threat of arrest and punishment, the cause of liberty will be hurt, and Canada's push for freedom will collapse. I hope that they choose to hold the line, and if they do so, they must clearly communicate to the world what the government must do in order for them to leave.

On the other hand, if the Trudeau government proceeds to use the blunt instrument of the RCMP to remove the protesters, then he may succeed in silencing the protest, but he will have made it abundantly clear to the rest of Canada that our liberty is indeed under threat.

In the meantime, the rest of us can only try to determine what the right thing is for us to do in our own lives.

You can comfort yourself with the realization that this situation isn't unique to this time, and to this place. People who struggle for freedom often do so in the face of opposition from their government, and the press, and the elites. We just haven't been in that situation in the west for a few generations.

And if you doubt yourself because you're fighting for small issues or for freedoms that might seem unimportant because they are not yet life and death, remember this: all tyranny starts as petty tyranny. All tyranny ends in death.

When I told my former employers that I wasn't going to comply with their vaccine mandate, and explained why, they were unsympathetic. This was such a small thing to ask of me. Why didn't I just comply? "Why choose this hill to die on?" my boss asked me.

Why indeed. I still doubt myself. I still think that maybe I was a fool, but I've done foolish things before, and likely will do so again. I've failed at a lot of things, and I'm not afraid of consequences.

Some people live their entire lives paralyzed by doubt - searching for the right hill to die on - only to end up dead in a ditch. Sometimes you just have to say "this is where I stand".