

Court File No.: CV-24-00095074-0000

ONTARIO
SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE

B E T W E E N :

EDWARD CORNELL, VINCENT GIRCYS, LINDSAY MILNER, SHAUN ZIMMER, ANDREW MILLER, JONKER TRUCKING INC., ANDREW FERA, WAYNE NARVEY, CLAYTON MCALLISTER, KATHLEEN MARKO, NICOLA FORTIN, ARIELLE FORTIN, THOMAS QUIGGIN, TIMOTHY TIESSEN O'JAY LAIDLEY, ERIC BUECKERT, PETER TERRANOVA, NANCY TERRANOVA, RICHARD OCELAK, and KERRI-ANN HAINES

Plaintiffs

-and-

JUSTIN TRUDEAU, CHRYSTIA FREELAND, DAVID LAMETTI, DOMINIC LEBLANC, BILL BLAIR, MARCO MENDICINO, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF CANADA, JODY THOMAS, ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE, DENIS BEAUDOIN, BRENDA LUCKI, STEVE BELL, ROBERT BERNIER, OTTAWA POLICE SERVICES BOARD, OTTAWA POLICE SERVICE, THE TORONTO-DOMINION BANK, CANADIAN IMPERIAL BANK OF COMMERCE, BANK OF MONTRÉAL, NATIONAL BANK OF CANADA, ROYAL BANK OF CANADA, BANK OF NOVA SCOTIA (SCOTIABANK), CANADIAN TIRE SERVICES LTD. doing business as CANADIAN TIRE BANK, MERIDIAN CREDIT UNION, ASSINIBOINE CREDIT UNION, GULF & FRASER CREDIT UNION, STRIDE CREDIT UNION, SIMPLII FINANCIAL, CANADIAN ANTI-HATE NETWORK, BERNIE FARBER, JOHN DOE, and ABC CORP.

Defendants

AFFIDAVIT OF BERNIE FARBER

I, **BERNIE FARBER**, of the City of Toronto in the Province of Ontario, **MAKE OATH AND SAY:**

1. I am one of the named Defendants in this matter. As such, I have personal knowledge of the information hereinafter deposed. Where I make statements in this affidavit based on information that is not within my personal knowledge, I have provided the source of such information and have stated my belief that the information is true.

Background

2. I am the Founding Chair Emeritus of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network (“CAHN”). I have spent my career dedicated to issues relating to human rights, anti-racism, pluralism, and inter-ethnic/faith/race relations. I publish commentary in the media and am interviewed regularly on these issues. I have also been cited in a number of academic publications and in several books, newspapers and magazines.

3. I was the head of several Non-Governmental Organizations and Foundations, including the Canadian Jewish Congress, the Paloma Foundation, and the Mosaic Institute. I have received numerous awards for my civil rights work, including the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee medal, the Government of Canada’s 125 Commemorative medal, and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police Award for Outstanding Service and Dedication to Policing in the province of Ontario.

4. I have been diagnosed with a health issue for which I am receiving ongoing treatment from medical specialists. Frankly, my health condition should be private. So even releasing it here in this affidavit deeply concerns me that it could be extrapolated and used for inappropriate purposes by those who oppose CAHN and its activities.

5. This litigation, and its requested relief of an order of damages for \$44,000,000, is a source of stress and diversion from what little energy I have during these difficult times. This litigation has caused me unnecessary concern and anxiety at a time when my full attention should be directed towards my health.

6. This litigation also has a chilling effect on my ability to comment on issues of public importance. The important legal fees involved with defending against a claim such as this one limits my ability and desire to speak out on issues relating to hate groups and human rights. Even though I do not believe I have done anything unlawful, the necessity and cost of defending these proceedings necessarily makes me “think twice” before engaging in these actions.

The Public Interest in the Ottawa Protests and My and CAHN’s Expressions

7. I was interested in the so called “Freedom Convoy” movement, which culminated with the protests that occupied the downtown of Ottawa in January and February 2022 (the “Ottawa

Protests”). My interest stemmed from the connections between the movement and various elements of the far right.

8. During that same period, I made several media appearances and provided quotes for various articles found during an online media search, outlined below.

9. On January 30, 2022, I was interviewed on CBC News. A hyperlink to a copy of the YouTube video of that interview is attached as **Exhibit A**.

10. In that CBC News interview, I spoke about the presence of the swastika in Ottawa during the protests. I stated that, in my opinion, the protests seeded the ground for one of the worst displays of Nazi propaganda that I had ever seen in this country (i.e. the swastika). I continue to hold this view.

11. In response to a question posed about protestors who may not be “extremists”, I replied that I was supportive of people’s democratic right to protest issues relating to vaccinations and COVID-19 government responses (even though I did not agree with the positions taken by these protestors). However, by associating themselves with this protest, they were “walking in the shoes” of bigots, Nazis, racists and bullies. I raised concerns about the role “extremists” may have played in organizing or taking over the agenda of the protests.

12. I noted in the interview my concern with the protestors who defaced the Terry Fox statue and the “malcontent” people urinating on the National War Memorial. I also spoke about the response (or lack thereof) of various politicians. I stand by these views.

13. Unless the Plaintiffs are individuals that are captured by my above-noted comments as having partaken in certain undesirable and inappropriate activities, the Plaintiffs were not the subjects of my comments.

14. On January 31, 2022, I gave an interview to NBC News, and it then published an article on its website entitled “Police investigate 'illegal' acts at Canadian anti-vaccine mandate rallies”. The article quotes me as stating that “while the protests may have started with the intention of demonstrating against COVID vaccine mandates, by the end of the weekend, they had effectively been co-opted by the far-right”. I also spoke about the presence of swastikas on Parliament Hill. A copy of the article is attached as **Exhibit B**. None of the Plaintiffs are the subjects of my comments.

15. On February 8, 2022, the Toronto Star published an article on its website entitled “Why banning hateful symbols like the swastika is nearly impossible”. The article quoted me and concerns enacting legislation to prohibit or penalize the display of hateful symbols, such as the swastika. A copy of the article is attached as **Exhibit C**. None of the Plaintiffs are the subjects of my comments.

16. On February 11, 2022, the Toronto Star published an article on its website entitled “Honk if you love Jesus — Why so many Evangelical Christians have joined the 'Freedom Convoy’”. In the article, I am quoted as dismissing the false equivalence drawn by certain protesters between how anti-vaxxers were being treated by reference to those who suffered through the Holocaust. I expressed my view that I would not feel safe setting foot on Parliament Hill. A copy of the article is attached as **Exhibit D**. None of the Plaintiffs are the subjects of my comments.

Response to Specific Allegations

17. I have no knowledge of speaking with any of the other individual Defendants (or representatives of the corporate Defendants) to this action about the “Freedom Convoy”, the Ottawa protests, or the invocation of the Emergencies Act, prior to that legislation being invoked on February 14, 2022.

18. I have no knowledge of signing any contract and do not otherwise have any contractual relationship with any of the Plaintiffs.

19. I have no knowledge of any contractual relationship between the Plaintiffs and the other Defendants prior to the issuance of the Statement of Claim.

20. I do not hold any public office.

21. I have no knowledge of having seized or disturbed any of the Plaintiffs’ chattels.

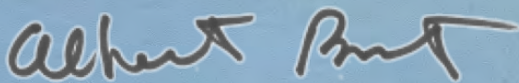
22. I have no knowledge of having initiated any form of legal process against any of the Plaintiffs.

23. I have no knowledge of having been in physical proximity to any of the Plaintiffs during the “Freedom Convoy” or the Ottawa Protests, particularly since I live in Toronto.

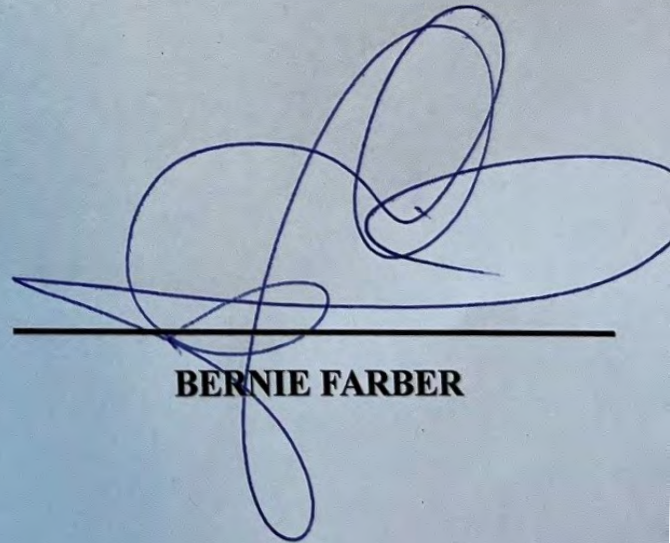
24. I made no threat to injure any of the Plaintiffs.

25. I have no knowledge of making any untrue or malicious statement to a third party disparaging the Plaintiffs' businesses or property.
26. I have no knowledge of any agreement between any of the co-Defendants to cause harm or damage to any or the Plaintiffs, or any agreement whatsoever.
27. I did not receive from any of the Plaintiffs a Notice of Libel or any other document purporting to be notice pursuant to the provisions of the *Libel and Slander Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. L.12.
28. I swear this affidavit in support of the motion to dismiss this action pursuant to s. 137.1 of the *Courts of Justice Act* and for no other improper purpose.

SWORN REMOTELY by Bernie Farber, stated as being located in the city of Toronto, Province of Ontario, before me in the city of Ottawa, Province of Ontario, on the 31st day of May, 2024, in accordance with O.Reg 431/20, *Administering Oath of Declaration Remotely*.



A Commissioner of Oaths, etc.



BERNIE FARBER

This is **Exhibit « A »** to the Affidavit of Bernie Farber, sworn remotely by Bernie Farber, stated as being located in the City of Toronto, Ontario, before me in the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario, on May 31, 2024, in accordance with O. Reg 431/20, *Administering Oath or Declaration Remotely*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Albert Bunt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

A Commissioner of Oaths, etc.

CBC News – Interview with Bernie Farber
VIDEO LINK

This is **Exhibit « B »** to the Affidavit of Bernie Farber, sworn remotely by Bernie Farber, stated as being located in the City of Toronto, Ontario, before me in the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario, on May 31, 2024, in accordance with O. Reg 431/20, *Administering Oath or Declaration Remotely*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Albert Burt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

A Commissioner of Oaths, etc.

WORLD

Police investigate 'illegal' acts at Canadian anti-vaccine mandate rallies

Former President Donald Trump commended the Freedom Convoy protesters Saturday for “resisting bravely these lawless mandates.”

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Jan. 31, 2022, 1:21 PM EST / Updated Jan. 31, 2022, 8:08 PM EST

By Chantal Da Silva

Police in Canada's capital have opened “several criminal investigations” following reports of demonstrators urinating on the country's National War Memorial, desecrating a statue dedicated to Canadian hero Terry Fox and carrying flags with swastikas during weekend anti-vaccine mandate protests.

Dubbed the "Freedom Convoy," hundreds of trucks and other vehicles blocked downtown streets as demonstrators also rallied on foot.

The protests initially started with plans to protest a vaccine requirement for cross-border drivers. However, the rallying cries appeared to quickly shift focus to broader opposition to the Trudeau government and vaccine mandates across the country.

In the midst of the chaos, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his family left their downtown Ottawa home on Saturday because of security concerns, according to [Reuters](#).



— Protesters in Ottawa rally Saturday against vaccination mandates for cross-border truck drivers. Patrick Doyle / Reuters

Speaking [at a virtual news conference Monday](#), Trudeau said he believed that many of the demonstrators did not represent truckers or "the vast majority of Canadians." He also revealed that he had [tested positive for Covid-19](#).

In the days before the protest, Trudeau [said that the convoy represented only a "small fringe minority,"](#) and that it's "important to underline that 90 percent of truckers in this country are

While the protests had been considered largely peaceful, the Ottawa Police Service said in a [tweet](#) Sunday that several criminal probes had been launched in connection to the demonstrations.

Specifically, police said they were investigating the alleged "desecration" of the National War Memorial, as well as of a statue honoring Fox, a cancer patient and amputee who gained national fame after launching a fundraising trek across Canada in 1980 to raise money for cancer research.

Fox died of cancer in 1981 before he was able to complete the journey, but he is remembered as a national icon whose campaign has seen millions of dollars raised in his memory.

In photos shared on social media, an upside down Canadian flag could be seen on the statue with a sign that said "mandate freedom."

Sharing a [tweet with an image of the desecrated statue](#), Brad West, the mayor of Fox's hometown in British Columbia, Port Coquitlam, condemned the incident, writing: "Whatever your cause, you don't get to appropriate (Fox's) legacy and you don't touch his statue. Ever."

Police said they were also investigating reports of “threatening/illegal/intimidating behavior to police/city workers and other individuals.”

“Illegal behavior will not be tolerated and will be fully investigated,” the department said, adding that it had “investigative and evidence-gathering teams in place to support the management of the demonstration.”

A number of Confederate flags and flags bearing swastikas were also spotted among the crowds, according to Canadian officials and witnesses, with photos also appearing to confirm the presence of Confederate flags.

‘The ultimate sign of evil’

Transport Minister Omar Alghabra [told Canadian broadcaster CTV](#) that while not all of those at the rally appeared to express hateful views, those who did should be condemned.

“Some of the images and the voices that we heard come out of that protest were alarming. Canadians saw for themselves. We had swastika flags, we had the Confederate flag, we had voices that called for the overthrow of the government,” Alghabra said. “Canadians saw for themselves that some voices are really disturbing and unacceptable.”



— Supporters arrive at Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Saturday for the Freedom Convoy demonstration, which blocked city downtown. Lars Hagberg / AFP - Getty Images

The Canadian Anti-Hate Network, a nonprofit group that monitors hate groups, far-right groups and hate crimes in Canada, asserted that some of the organizers of the protests, including people behind crowdfunding initiatives to support them, appeared to be associated with "the far-right movement" in Canada.

In a [statement on its website](#), the network said multiple organizers and individuals promoting fundraising efforts to support the protests were "previously known figures in Canada's far-right ecosystem."

In an interview Monday with NBC News, Bernie Farber, chair of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, said that while the protests may have started with the intention of demonstrating against Covid vaccine mandates, by the end of the weekend, they had effectively been co-opted by the far-right.

"I think that this particular so-called Freedom Convoy really was able to take advantage of that frustration and it did ... allegedly start out as a protest against health mandates and vaccine mandates," he said. But, he added: "You don't need a large number of people to co-opt a protest like this. You need a few instigators, you need a couple of Nazi flags and Confederate flags, and the media quite rightly so starts focusing in on that."

Farber, whose father survived the Holocaust, described his own horror seeing flags bearing swastikas on Ottawa's Parliament Hill.

"To me, the swastika is the ultimate sign of evil, poison and hatred," he said. "To see one swastika flag flying on Parliament Hill is as shocking and bewildering to me as it is to most Canadians."

Protesters harassed soup kitchen workers, mayor says

In an [interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation](#), Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson said some demonstrators had harassed workers at a soup kitchen, demanding free meals because their refusal to comply with mask mandates meant they were unable to order food in restaurants.

"These kinds of actions, the swastikas, Confederate flags and the like ... really hurt the credibility of the organizers," he said.



— A Confederate flag with an image of a truck across at a demonstration protesting Covid vaccination mandates in front of Parliament in Ottawa. Dave Chan / AFP - Getty Images

On the official Facebook page for the rally, organizers condemned some of the actions reported over the weekend, writing: “We do not condone any disrespectful behavior.”

On Saturday, the Canadian Trucking Alliance, which represents truckers in the country, issued its own statement condemning reports of demonstrators having desecrated the National War Memorial as a “disgusting act” and a “dishonor to those soldiers who have given their lives for our country and those Canadian soldiers who continue to fight for our freedom today.”

In an earlier statement, it also made its stance on the backlash to rules requiring truck drivers to be vaccinated clear, saying: “The only way to cross the (U.S.-Canada) border, in a commercial truck or any other vehicle, is to get vaccinated.”

“As an industry we must adapt and comply with this mandate and the vast majority have,” the alliance said.

By early Monday morning, Farber said trucks remained parked on the streets near Parliament as lawmakers were expected to resume work after a winter break.

Some truckers said they would not leave until vaccine mandates were overturned, Reuters reported. Meanwhile, the Ottawa Police [said residents should avoid traveling](#) into the city's downtown core.

The protests come as Canada continues to battle a recent rise in Covid cases fueled by the spread of the omicron variant.

Covid cases surged to their highest numbers so far in the pandemic in early January, reaching tens of thousands of confirmed cases in a single day, before continuing to decline over recent weeks.

As of Sunday, the Canadian government [said it had recorded a total of 102,735 confirmed Covid cases](#) within a seven-day span.



Chantal Da Silva

Chantal Da Silva reports on world news for NBC News Digital and is based in London.

Reuters and Associated Press contributed.

This is **Exhibit « C »** to the Affidavit of Bernie Farber, sworn remotely by Bernie Farber, stated as being located in the City of Toronto, Ontario, before me in the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario, on May 31, 2024, in accordance with O. Reg 431/20, *Administering Oath or Declaration Remotely*.

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A Commissioner of Oaths, etc.

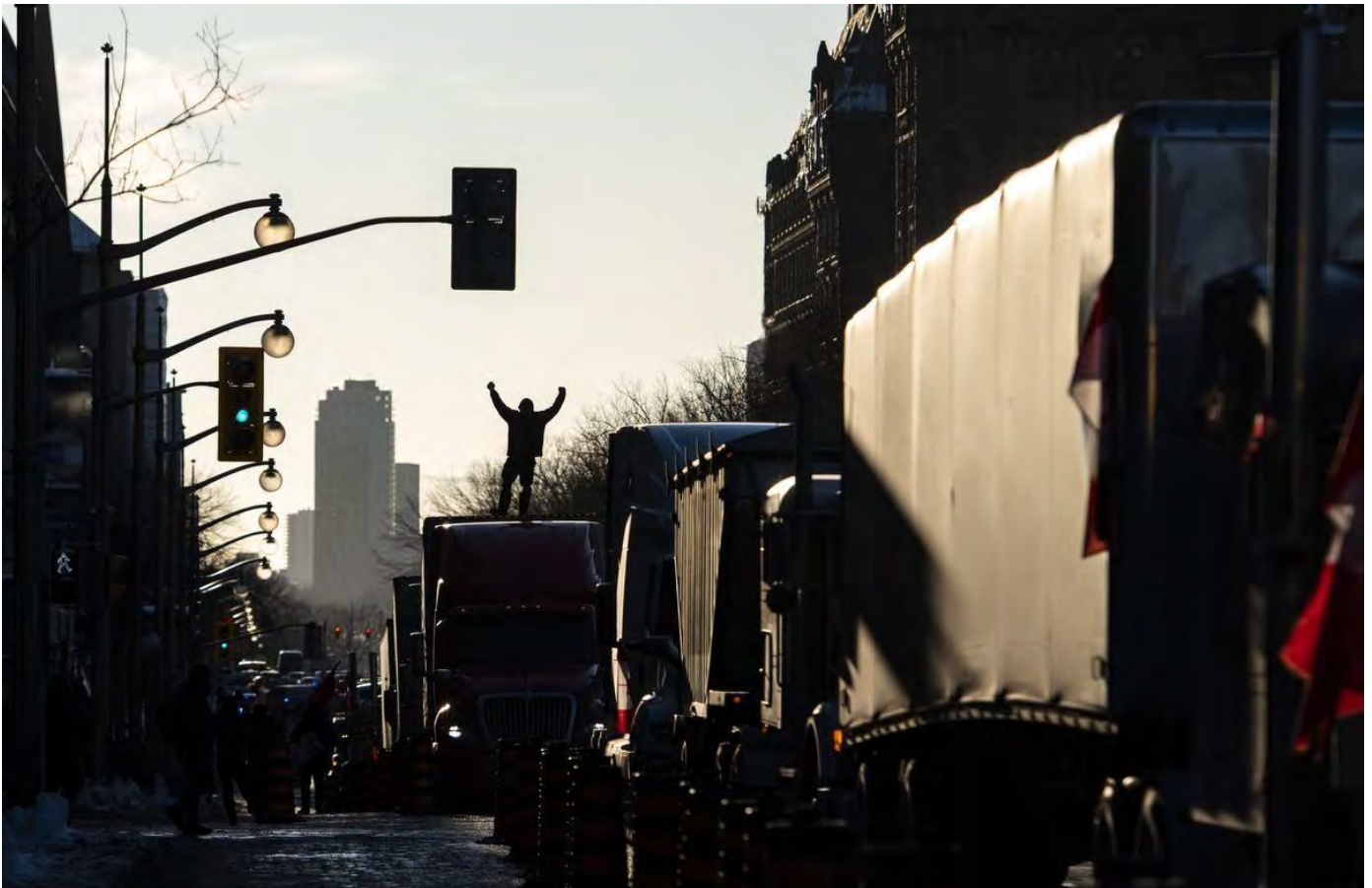
Home / News / Canada

CANADA

Why banning hateful symbols like the swastika is nearly impossible.

NDP MP introduces a bill to prohibit hateful symbols, but Bernie Farber, a supporter of the move in principal, concedes there would be practical obstacles to enforcement.

Feb. 8, 2022  



A person pumps both fists while standing atop a transport truck after arriving in front of on Parliament Hill as part of the 'Freedom Convoy' in Ottawa, on Friday, Jan. 28, 2022.

Justin Tang / The Canadian Press

By Omar Mosleh Edmonton Bureau

Bernie Farber is no stranger to the swastika.

fighting antisemitism and hate through his previous role at the Canadian Jewish Congress and now as chair of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network.

He said he sees hate symbols and swastikas more than he wants to think about — he’s accustomed to seeing them hanging in dingy basements, scrawled on pay phones or proliferating in the darkest corners of the internet.

“But when you see them at the seat of your Parliament, when you see them at the head of government, surrounded by thousands of people walking right by it as if it’s just another flag? It’s horrifying to me,” Farber said.

The appearance of a Nazi flag at the “Freedom Convoy” in Ottawa drew widespread condemnation from across the political spectrum. Opponents of the protest said it was proof of white supremacist sympathies lurking beneath the movement’s surface, while supporters said it was unfair to paint the entire convoy as hateful because of a few bad actors.

Last week, NDP MP Peter Julian tabled a private member’s bill to prohibit the sale and display of hateful symbols. However, law experts say an outright ban on certain symbols would present legal and moral complexities and could take the government down the slippery slope of criminalizing people for their beliefs rather than actions.

Others point out that there are already provisions in the Criminal Code to penalize hateful speech and actions, but anti-racism advocates say sometimes the threshold needed to be met is so high the law is effectively useless.

Farber, who is equally committed to stamping out all forms of hate as part of his day job, admits the sight of a Nazi flag hits him particularly hard. His father’s entire family was murdered in the Treblinka extermination camp in Poland, including his wife, two children and all his relatives.

Max, Farber’s father, managed to survive by prying out a board in a Nazi cattle car and jumping off, before fleeing and finding a Russian farmer who agreed to hide him. He spent three months lying prone in a makeshift grave

Max was the only Jewish survivor of his town. Farber remembers his mother telling him it took her five years to teach Max how to smile again.

“So you can understand that when I see a swastika and I understand what it did to my family alone, never mind thousands of other Jewish families, families of Roma, LGBTQ people in Europe,” Farber said.

“And that’s what the swastika represents. And when people walk right by it, in the country that my late father chose to come and stand for freedom? It’s soul destroying.”

Farber said he supports Julian’s bill in principle but he also acknowledges it would be challenging to list every hate symbol and decide which ones should be prohibited.

Furthermore, he points out that there are already provisions in the Criminal Code that criminalize certain forms of hateful expression, such as the charges of public incitement of hatred and wilful promotion of hatred. However, “the rare times that it is applied, the police and sometimes the Crown make it so onerous that it’s almost a worthless law,” Farber said.

As an example, he pointed to the [conviction of James Sears](#) on charges of wilful promotion of hatred for publishing an antisemitic newsletter that was mailed to homes in East York. Even then, Farber said, it took eight years of advocacy from several professional bodies to bring Sears to trial.

Farber praised Julian for tabling the bill but said at the end of the day, it requires people to enforce it. He also has concerns about whether it would meet a constitutional challenge.

Whenever there is talk of banning or prohibiting anything, there is inevitable pushback citing freedom of speech. But freedom of speech in Canada comes with limits.

There’s an extremely high bar for convicting someone of hate crimes because the courts recognize the importance of liberty and the potential lifelong consequences of a criminal conviction, said Eric Adams, a

THE KEY DISTINCTION THAT BRINGS HATEFUL CONDUCT INTO CRIMINAL TERRITORY IS criminal intent, known in legalese as *mens rea*. There has to be a clear intention to “spread hate” — to effectively sway others. This is why an antisemitic newsletter mailed to people’s homes would meet the threshold, but a lone wolf standing at a protest with a Nazi flag may not, because it could be defended as simply expressing one’s own beliefs.

“You don’t have a right to conduct yourself in a violent manner and call that expression,” Adams said. “But even something as hateful as a Nazi flag or a Confederate flag, which have a certain degree of violence standing behind them, are still acts of speech rather than acts of violence — at least in the characterization of our jurisprudence.”

Another argument against prohibiting symbols is the importance of their use in education, which is currently playing out in Tennessee after a school board voted to remove “Maus,” a graphic novel about the Holocaust that depicts Jews as mice and Nazis as cats, from its eighth-grade curriculum. The resulting furor led to the book enjoying a huge spike in sales and galvanized some Jewish groups to defend it.

There are some who defend the swastika as an ancient symbol used by many cultures for millennia before it was turned into a symbol of hate by the Nazis.

Richard Marceau, with the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, said any legislation on hate symbols must be mindful of the swastika’s different significance to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Zoroastrians, while also recognizing it can be used as a convenient excuse.

“There’s a certain level of common sense that should be used ... If you’re in a demonstration and you’re flying a swastika, unless it’s a Buddhist or Hindu march, the signal you’re sending is ‘I hate Jews,’” Marceau said.

Germany, which criminalizes public display of Nazi flags and Holocaust denial, has an exception for educational and artistic purposes.

MEET THE CRIMINAL THRESHOLD, ADAMS NOTED. PROVINCIAL HUMAN RIGHTS
tribunals. While there's no criminal sanction, there's still value in the state unequivocally condemning hate.

The free and open ability to express controversial views is a “key underpinning of our democracy,” Adams said — but he acknowledged that symbols of hate can cause real harm to those they target.

“Some of what people are going to say and do are going to be upsetting, hurtful, scary, and harmful to others ... when do you cross a threshold in which the speech and expression results in a degree of harm that justifies a state from prohibiting it?” Adams said.

“People always assume that their definition of harmful is going to be the one where the line is drawn,” he added. “And I think history shows that that's not always the case.”

While Farber supports strengthened legislation on hate crimes, especially in the online space, he believes all Canadians and all sectors of society have a role to play in fighting hate.

Antisemitism is the number one driver of police-reported hate crime in Canada. And while acts such spraying a swastika on a synagogue or waving a Nazi flag at a protest are condemned, antisemitism also manifests in subtler ways.

Farber pointed to a poll by the American Anti-Defamation League that found one-third of children between the fifth and 12th grade either believe that the Holocaust was exaggerated or never really happened.

He can only imagine what his father would think, or how Max would feel seeing a Nazi flag raised in Ottawa, where he operated a shop after moving to Canada.

“To him it would be unthinkable, in this country especially,” Farber said. “It would mean that people didn't learn the lessons of the past.”

*resistance group was operational when Max Tardif joined. A previous version
misstated that he helped start it.*



Omar Mosleh is an Toronto-based reporter for the Star. Follow him on Twitter:
@OmarMosleh.

REPORT AN ERROR

JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS

ABOUT THE STAR

This is **Exhibit « D »** to the Affidavit of Bernie Farber, sworn remotely by Bernie Farber, stated as being located in the City of Toronto, Ontario, before me in the City of Ottawa, in the Province of Ontario, on May 31, 2024, in accordance with O. Reg 431/20, *Administering Oath or Declaration Remotely*.



A Commissioner of Oaths, etc.

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Local News

Honk if you love Jesus – Why so many Evangelical Christians have joined the 'Freedom Convoy'

Blair Crawford

Published Feb 11, 2022 • 9 minute read

10 Comments



Members of the Calgary-based Billy Graham "Rapid Response Team" circulated among the demonstrators offering prayers. PHOTO BY BLAIR CRAWFORD /Postmedia

Street preacher Solomon Ikhuwu arrived in Ottawa on the first day of the "Freedom Convoy" protest saying God called him to the capital to spread the Gospel.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

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Down Wellington Street at the “Meeting Tent” Christian evangelist Shannon Laurent slings muffins and coffee, helps a street person find a mask so he can ride the O-Train and praises the Lord.

“Five people a day get saved around here,” Laurent says, as one demonstrators drops off freshly filled propane tanks and another hands in a battered Bible she’s found.

“It’s incredible how God has worked. It’s so amazing.”



Shannon Laurent distributes muffins, scripture and prayer Wednesday from an evangelical meeting place on Wellington Street. Credit: Blair Crawford/Postmedia PHOTO BY BLAIR CRAWFORD /Postmedia

Confederate flags and swastikas among the demonstrators. At one point on Wellington Street you could get buttons with the yellow Star of David, including the plight of Jewish people in Nazi Germany to the unvaccinated.

Supporters of the demonstration say those reports have been overblown.

“I thought it was a peaceful protest,” Ikhuiwu said. “I thought it was very different than any other protest that I’ve been to. The media was twisting stories and making into something it wasn’t. When I arrived in Ottawa I was getting all sorts of messages about violence, about ANTIFA, and I thought, ‘Are you guys talking about the right protest? Because the one I’m in is different.’ It’s peaceful. It’s excited. There’s honking. Everyone is just having a blast.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

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“I know this is being tagged as White nationalism, but I don’t think it’s true,” said Ikhuiwu, who is Black. “I’ve seen Sikhs, I’ve seen Chinese, I’ve seen brown people. It’s very diverse. I won’t say it’s in the thousands, but I have seen them.”

Bernie Farber has a very different view. The son of Holocaust survivors, Farber is chair of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network and former head of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

“I don’t feel welcome there. That’s not a place for us,” Farber said.

“The correlation between the yellow star and anti-vaxxers, as if it’s somehow equivalent to being rounded up, jammed into cattle cars, starved on a three-day journey, arriving at a death camp, picked for life or death, then thrown into a gas chamber where six million of your people are murdered,” he said.

“Evangelical Christians, who are supposed to be about acceptance and Christ’s love and peace, when they say, ‘Every faith should feel welcome,’ I can tell you that I wouldn’t set foot on Parliament Hill right now.”

The “Freedom Convoy” arrived in Ottawa on Jan. 28, a day before the fifth anniversary of the murder of six men at a Quebec City mosque by a killer who espoused hatred of Muslims. Gatineau’s Fareed Khan organized a candlelight vigil to mark the occasion that had to be cancelled because of security concerns.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

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Posters with scripture and Christ references are a common sight on Parliament Hill. Credit: Blair Crawford/Postmedia PHOTO BY BLAIR CRAWFORD /Postmedia

“They will proclaim that it’s their right to freedom of expression and freedom of religion. And it is to some extent. But when your rights trample on my rights, my safety, my freedom of expression, my freedom to live safely — you know, people being accosted for wearing masks — that’s where your rights end. Your rights do not supersede my rights,” Khan said.

“I’m fed up with the pandemic. I’m dealing with mental health issues too as a result — as are millions of other Canadians. What I’m not doing is disrupting the lives of other people, destroying their ability to work and earn a living and I’m certainly not trying to disrupt the Canadian economy,” Khan said.

“The presence of faith communities (in the demonstration) is problematic and disturbing and it’s scarily reflective of what’s going on in the U.S.”

The Ottawa demonstration has drawn the attention of the U.S. right-wing and Christian media and Ottawa police report that much of the financial support of the “well-funded” demonstration has come from the U.S. A “Trump 2024” flag-waving protester rode through the streets on the first weekend of the demonstration and Trump signs and American flags are still on display.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

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When GoFundMe shut down the \$9.8-million fundraising campaign, organizers quickly shifted to the American Christian fundraiser, GiveSendGo. However, the Ontario government moved to choke off funding to convoy protesters Thursday, successfully seeking a court order preventing anyone from using the millions of dollars raised for the convoy through GiveSendGo.

But Don Hutchinson, a former executive with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, said the Canada-U.S. link has been overblown.

“The first thing to note is that Canadian evangelicals are not American evangelicals,” said Hutchinson, who has studied voting trends among evangelical Christians.

“And the concerns that there’d be a Trumpian type invasion from evangelicals participating are vastly overstated. The two groups both originated in Great Britain but have grown in vastly different directions, separated by the 49th parallel.”

Even defining what makes an evangelical is difficult, but is generally accepted to involve four principles: strict adherence to the Bible; a focus on Christ’s crucifixion; a belief that people are in need of being saved through conversion; and activism. Evangelicals make up 8-12 per cent of the Canadian population or between 3-4.5 million people.

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Hutchinson said evangelicals have split on the issue of vaccines and COVID-19 measures, with some following Bible passages that say believers must gather together to worship, while others follow verses that urge obedience to the government.

Anger over anti-COVID-19 measures flared up last winter at the evangelical Grace Baptist Church in Edmonton when the minister, a former RCMP officer, refused government orders to cancel public gatherings. A similar clash over masking rules occurred in Aylmer, Ont., at the Church of God in 2020. The Church of God’s fire and brimstone preacher, Henry Hildebrandt, is in Ottawa

“A significant number of evangelical churches — the vast majority — have followed government guidelines in response to COVID-19 and have even hosted vaccination clinics,” Hutchinson said. “And then there’s a significant minority who’ve said ‘No. We shouldn’t forsake the assemblage of ourselves together.’

“Where those two camps have found a meeting ground is on the issue of freedom. As government measures have increasingly jeopardized people’s employment and their freedom to access restaurants and stores and things, combined with the mask vs. no mask issues.”

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Although evangelicals are strongly identified with Canada’s political right, that’s not always been so, he said. In the 60s and 70s, many supported the NDP because of its social justice platform. That shifted right with the arrival of the Reform Party under Preston Manning — himself an Evangelical Christian. The tilt right grew stronger under Stephen Harper’s Conservatives and became a stampede with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s strong stance on abortion rights.

“There was a feeling in many in the church that Mr. Trudeau was targeting Christians,” Hutchinson said.

Malloy finds the alliance between coarse and aggressive truckers and evangelicals a curious one.

“The people downtown, even if they’re not religious themselves, there’s a certain strong respect for religion,” he said. “The way I’ve heard social conservatives described is that they don’t necessarily go to church, but they think it would be a good idea if everyone else went to church.”

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It was a nod to religion that made organizers impose a Sunday morning ban on horn blowing before a court injunction silenced the horns by law.

“They even said it was for ‘The Lord’s Day,’” Malloy said. “The Lord’s Day? Who says that’s anymore? It’s pretty archaic language.”

Malloy also said that mainstream Canadian evangelicals take pains to distance themselves from their American counterparts.

“The small more radical group is pretty open to American influence and cross border stuff. But the more mainstream groups are very sensitive about American influence and they’re very careful to emphasize their Canadian roots, their Canadian money.”

On the ground, that’s sometimes hard to see. The appearance of the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team, though based in Calgary, is part of the vast American evangelical network.

Team manager Merle Doherty, said the team helped provide disaster relief during last month’s flooding in B.C. Fraser Valley and also attended the 2,000-strong anti-mask rally at the Church of God in Aylmer, Ont.



Merle Doherty, manager of the Calgary-based Billy Graham "Rapid Response Team" photographed on Parliament Hill. Credit: Blair Crawford/Postmedia PHOTO BY BLAIR CRAWFORD /Postmedia

"We bring that peace. There's a peace in Christ and we bring that wherever we go," Doherty said.

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"We never take a leadership position — or even take a position. We are so far under the radar, we don't make waves. We're just here to pray for people."

And in the "Meeting Tent" near the west side of Parliament Hill, Shannon Laurent says her group is doing its best to keep the demonstration calm and peaceful.

"If somebody is being rowdy, we go over and make sure they're not bothering the police and they're not bothering the politicians. We minister to them," she said.

"Our area, we don't get the rowdies, the music, the drugs, the alcohol. The odd person might bring alcohol, but it's not the same here as in the other areas. People keep coming back to us because the atmosphere is very different. It's very loving. We're all Christian."

But she doesn't condone the obscene language used by some of the protesters.

"With the language, we go over and say 'Look. We're here to keep the peace. We get them to calm down. We tell them yelling and screaming like that, it's just going to get the media to lie. Then they understand."

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Solomon Ikhuiwu says he'll be back in Ottawa this weekend to minister to the multitudes through his street preaching.

"Obviously, with a protest this big, there will be a few people in disagreement. Or maybe you have one person who's drunk and misbehaving and then the story gets made saying that everyone is like that."

Ikhuiwu says he's attended a Black Lives Matters protest as well, but won't compare it to his experience at the "Freedom Convoy."

"As a Black male, I've been a victim of racism too. But does that mean every person is racist? No. It doesn't mean I have to treat every white person as a racist," he said.

"I prefer not to compare. It's like comparing chicken and steak. Each had its own mission and its own cause. With BLM they're saying no to racism. This protest, they're saying, 'We want freedom.' I like to think the heartbeat of both groups is good intention and good motives."

Fareed Khan likens the "Freedom Convoy" to sedition. He hasn't gone to see the scene, but it's not out of fear.

"It's not about being uncomfortable. I am a racialized person, but I don't stand out as much as a Black person or a Muslim woman in a hijab. The reason I haven't gone down there is that I don't want to be exposed to the toxicity," he said.

"I don't know why (faith communities) would go there unless it was to be with the far-right and against Justin Trudeau. Their hatred for Trudeau is almost pathological," he said.

Khan says he knows Muslims have attended the demonstration, but he can't understand why.

"If he (the Prophet) were alive today he'd be telling people to get vaccinated for the common good," Khan said. "Better to pray at home. God will still hear your prayers."



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EDWARD CORNELL et al.
Plaintiffs

-and-

JUSTIN TRUDEAU et al.
Defendants

Court File No.: CV-24-94733

ONTARIO
SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE

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