

The elusive call of ?Freedom?

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

The sound of the honks was unmistakable as they got closer.

You could feel the energy coming just as they appeared on the horizon.

The closer they got, the louder the distant honks got as people joined in support.

As the noise reached a crescendo, you could see the messages they were carrying.

Some painted them onto flags they waved proudly from the fronts of their trucks. Others took their markers to vividly-coloured pieces of posterboard, gleefully waving them from their windows as they drove by, still honking, still smiling, united by a common cause.

These are the images that I'd prefer come to mind when I think of a convoy: the men, women and children who, less than two years ago, took to the streets to send a powerful message of solidarity with our healthcare workers, the people who tirelessly and without complaint answered the call of their profession and bravely found their place on the frontlines of our shared fright at the beginning of every shift.

People from across the country loaded into trucks and SUVs emblazoned with displays of gratitude for the herculean efforts of doctors and nurses ? their friends, family and neighbours ? behind the walls of every Canadian hospital, all in the face of danger, to keep the wider community healthy and safe amid a host of unknowns.

A lot has changed over the course of the last two years. We know more about what we're fighting. We have tried and tested methods now on the table to help us get through to the other side. Lockdowns have come and gone a few times over, but we know what's at stake and, for better or worse, we've learned how to adapt and pivot if the wind changes against us.

What hasn't changed is the diligence of these frontline heroes in continuing the fight when so many have, unfortunately, shifted focus elsewhere.

These convoys in support of the people who come into work each day to help members of the community hardest hit by COVID-19 come back from the brink have, sadly, stopped. Many of the signs which decorated lawns across the community with messages of solidarity and hope in our first pandemic spring have long since been packed away.

What have they been replaced with? Frustration at our current situation and the inescapable feeling that each step forward brings us half a step back has taken our focus away from the common goal and re-focused it towards improving the lots of ourselves and no one else.

A lot of focus this past week was taken up by the trucker convoy which, after a cross-country trip, set up shop on Parliament Hill on Saturday ostensibly to fight for our ?freedom? against vaccine mandates.

Its cause, as we know, mushroomed from originally-stated intent to demonstrate against mandates for cross-border truckers and, if that wasn't enough, others with questionable ideas of ?freedom? glommed onto the root cause for reasons that are not too hard to fathom.

In the lead-up to the event, close to \$9 million was raised for the procession by members of the public through the Go Fund Me platform.

Organizers said the money raised was to be dispersed to truckers to help them with the cost of their journey such as the cost of fuel (which, presumably, was delivered to gas stations by truckers who decided to stay on the job) and to purchase food along the way (which, presumably, was delivered to grocery stores, convenience stores and the aforementioned gas stations by truckers who decided to stay on the job), and for shelter along the way.

But the money was also to further the message: "We are a peaceful country that has helped protect nations across the globe from tyrannical governments who oppressed their people, and now it seems it is happening here."

While I wonder how many of the participants have ever lived through actual tyranny, what we saw over the weekend was, if nothing else, a dilution of a specific message and the furthering of a misconception that any level of government is forcing anyone to get vaccinated. Perhaps it was a demonstration against consequences of choices, but that too was lost in the cacophony.

Now, don't get me wrong: one of the beautiful things about living in Canada is the right to assemble, the freedom to express one's self, and the freedom to speak up for or against what you do and do not believe in. I'm all in favour of that. I'm also all in favour of people having complete autonomy over their own bodies.

Yet, in an alleged demonstration of our collective "freedom," when people align themselves with the few who were brandishing swastikas, harassing soup kitchen volunteers for grub, and stomping on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the very symbol of every man and woman who fought and died for the freedoms demonstrators claimed they were apparently so intent on preserving, any good motives became questionable.

"The Royal Canadian Legion strongly condemns the shocking actions of protestors who encroached upon the National War Memorial in Ottawa on Sunday," said the Legion in a statement. "They jumped on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and parked vehicles on the surrounding grounds. This sacred memorial site commemorates those who fought and fell for the very freedoms that allow people in Canada the right to protest peacefully. We are dismayed and saddened by this overt lack of respect."

When you've earned the condemnation of the organization dedicated to preserving the legacies of the men and women who fought for the freedoms we hold so dear in an alleged "freedom" protest, maybe that's reason enough to re-assess your choices "and the mandate you've given yourselves.

If this was truly about "freedom," can we expect the same numbers of people to return to Parliament Hill to fight for the inherent right our Indigenous peoples have to access clean water or against systemic racism that infringes on the freedoms of other groups? Somehow, I doubt it.

But, in the meantime, let's salute the 85 "90 per cent of the trucking industry who continued to step up to the plate, as they have since the start of the pandemic, to ensure we have groceries on our shelves, that our small businesses have the supplies they need to keep going in these horrendously challenging times, and to materially support the other 10 "15 per cent of their colleagues were able to pick up supplies on the road to promote the ultimately muddled message in Ottawa.