

Canada's Freedom Convoy Truckers Go on Trial

Tamara Lich and Chris Barber face up to 10 years in prison

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This week, the [trial](#) of Canada's two main leaders of the trucker protests began. The lead prosecutor has argued that Tamara Lich and Chris Barber "crossed the line" and "committed multiple crimes" while insisting that this trial will not be about the truckers' political views. The pair face charges including mischief, counselling others to commit mischief, intimidation, and obstructing the police. They face a maximum of 10 years in prison should they be convicted.

The trial is just beginning and has so far featured testimony from Crown witnesses. As is common for criminal trials in Canada, it is not overseen by a jury and will be ruled upon by a judge only. The facts of the case are not in dispute — the protests and its leaders heavily documented their experience and spread it widely through social media. The issue at stake is whether their actions were criminal. Lich and Barber maintain that they were not seeking to commit crime.



Instead, they were exercising their Charter right of peaceful protest to oppose the years-long Covid-19 vaccine mandates. As Lich and Barber's lawyers [explained](#):

"We do not expect this to be the trial of the Freedom Convoy. The central issue will be whether the actions of two of the organisers of a peaceful protest should warrant criminal sanction."

Nonetheless, the Canadian media has done much to paint the peaceful 2022 winter protest as violent, commonly using hyperbolic words such as "[occupation](#)" and "[sedition](#)" to describe the event.

Yet the demands of the truckers were fundamentally peaceful, asking for a return to the pre-pandemic status quo. Indeed, these demands were not even out of line with multiple jurisdictions at that point — for example, the United Kingdom had dropped the majority of its Covid protocols — and yet its main leaders are facing time in prison.

The Freedom Convoy was the high watermark, and for a time, many (including myself) were convinced that the truckers would finally bring the government to the table. Instead, the protestors were completely rebuffed and, eventually, violently quashed. What was meant to be an intrinsic part of the democratic process — that is, the protection of fundamental minority rights and open discourse — was replaced with undemocratic tactics involving political and physical force, trials presided over by judges, and perpetuated by both the media and politicians.

This trial will no doubt have a chilling effect on future protests against the next bureaucratic overreach, the frontier of which seems to be on the [limits](#) of free expression. The truth is that Canada can only thrive when it respects the rights and opinions of all its citizens, offering venues for an airing of differences. But with no venues remaining, the only way forward seems to be the criminalisation of reasonable deviations from the party line, which means a less peaceful and cohesive nation. This future is nothing short of frightening.

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Featured image: Freedom Convoy organizers Tamara Lich and Chris Barber wait for the Public Order Emergency Commission to begin, on Nov. 1, 2022 in Ottawa. (The Canadian Press/Adrian Wyld)



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