

# There Is a Burning Need to Rekindle Anti-militarist Political Movements in Canada

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*Are soldiers more valuable to society than teachers? Are they more essential than the people who drive buses or clean up our waste? Are their jobs that much more dangerous than firefighters, or psychiatric nurses or loggers? Is what they do more honourable than parenting, caring for elders, providing essential social services or reporting the news?*

These questions arose when reading that British Columbia is currently holding a six-week public consultation on whether former RCMP members should be permitted access to special veterans license plates. The opposition has complained the consultation is only taking place online while some military veterans have [threatened to return](#) their special license if the RCMP are allowed to join their exclusive club.

*"[I am very](#), very proud to be given that particular plate," said Lt.-Col. Archie Steacy of the B.C. Veterans Commemorative Association, which is leading opposition to the change. "Having served in the armed forces for a period of 38 years I feel really good when I am driving my car and people stop me to say thank you."*

Granted a monopoly over the poppy symbol nearly a century ago, the Royal Canadian Legion allows provincial governments to use their trademark poppy on licence plates to signify the driver is a veteran. Much to the chagrin of some military veterans, the Legion's definition of a 'veteran' now includes former RCMP.

In the mid-2000s [every province](#) adopted a special veterans licence plate. Generally Canadian Forces (CF) members, RCMP officers who served under CF command and anyone who served in a NATO Alliance force are eligible.

But special license plates are only one of the many initiatives that reinforce the military's special cultural standing. On August 18 MiWay (Mississauga) transit [offered military veterans](#) a free ride to attend the Warriors' Day Parade at the Canadian National Exhibition. In December Sherbrooke, Quebec, joined a long list of cities that offer [free parking](#) to veterans. In another automotive- centred militarist promotion, a Ford dealership in Kingston, Ontario, offered a special discount package to former or current soldiers. Its January release [stated](#),

*"whether you're a local weather presenter, a plumber or play drums in a weekend cover band, your way of life is possible, in part, due to the brave*

sacrifice of the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces.”

But for men with guns an evil force would prevent you from drumming? Is that really what this is about?

Prioritizing soldiers above reporters, poets, janitors etc., the government set up a [program](#) in 2014 to allow foreign nationals who join the CF to get their citizenship fast tracked. A number of initiatives also benefit students of military families and help soldiers access civilian work. The Canada Company *Military Employment Transition* Program assists CF members, Reservists and Veterans in obtaining non-military employment. It offers companies/institutions the status of [Designated Military Friendly](#) Employer and National Employer Support Awards. Taking this a step further, Barrick Gold hired a Director of Veteran Sourcing and Placement to oversee a Veterans Recruitment Program. According to program Director Joel Watson, “[veterans self-select](#) to put service before self, which says much about their individual character, drive and willingness to work together in teams.”

But no special recruitment program for single mothers?

Underlying all these initiatives is the notion that soldiers (or the military in general) have a unique social value, more than teaching assistants, plumbers, daycare workers, hairdressers and single mothers. Or, if danger is the primary criteria, how about those who build houses or feed us?

Over the past half-century tens of times more Canadian construction workers have been killed on the job than soldiers. While [158 Canadian soldiers](#) died in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014, there were [843 agriculture](#) -related fatalities in Canada between 2003 and 2012.

*Does the CF do more to enable people to “play drums” than those growing our food? Is the “local weather presenter” more indebted to soldiers than those who build homes? Should the “plumber” be more grateful to troops than teachers?*

*The problem with glorifying soldiers is that veterans’ organizations generally use their cultural standing to [uphold militarism and reactionary politics](#). Politicians justify weapons purchases by claiming we need to give the troops the best equipment possible and then demand the public “support the troops” they’ve deployed abroad.*

Is this really the best we can be?

There is a burning need to rekindle anti-militarist political movements in this country. Next month’s [World Beyond War](#) conference in Toronto offers a good opportunity to start.

\*

Yves Engler is the author of [A Propaganda System: How Canada’s Government, Corporations, Media and Academia Sell War](#) and [Canada in Africa: 300 Years of Aid and Exploitation](#). To help organize an event as part of the fall tour for my forthcoming book [Left, Right: Marching to the Beat of Imperial Canada](#) please get in touch at yvesengler [at] hotmail.com [Read other articles by Yves](#).

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