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Where?s the emergency?

by SAM ODROWSKI

Our government is out of control.

The borders have been cleared of blockades for over a week and the ?Freedom Convoy? protestors were cleared from the area surrounding Parliament Hill over the weekend, yet Prime Minister Justin Trudeau still thinks there's a national emergency.

A 185-151 vote in the House of Commons on Monday (Feb. 21) allowed the Emergency Act to be extended until mid-March, giving extraordinary power to the federal government to bypass typical democratic processes.

This is the first time the act has been invoked since it was created in 1988, and its predecessor the War Time Measures Act, was only used during the World Wars and FLQ crisis ? instances that posed an actual threat to national security.

Trudeau also made the Emergency Act vote a matter of confidence, so if it failed an election would be triggered. This forced some Liberal MPs who publicly opposed the extension of the Emergency Act to vote for it, and undoubtedly had an overall impact on the vote.

Among many things, the act allows the government to freeze people's bank accounts on a whim, if they are suspected to support or be involved with the Ottawa protest.

Even donations as small as $20 to the Freedom Convoy have resulted in bank accounts being frozen.

?If you are involved in this protest, we will actively look to identify you and follow up with financial sanctions and criminal charges,? Ottawa police tweeted Sunday.

Interim Ottawa Police Chief Steve Bell said the investigation around those who attended the Freedom Convoy will continue for months to come. Noting, ?we will hold people accountable for taking our streets over?.

This type of overriding of due process would perhaps have some ground to stand on if Freedom Convoy protestors were causing death and destruction of property, but they weren't. They were simply parked in the wrong place for too long, making noise, and causing a disruption.

It's incredibly short-sighted for the government to claim a national emergency when, if asked, 99 per cent of Canadians would say their daily life hasn't been impacted one bit. Most people wouldn't even know that it's happening if they didn't watch the news. National security isn't at risk.

Of course, I have sympathy for residents in Ottawa who live near Parliament Hill and had their lives disrupted by the protest, but no one's being held hostage. It's not a national emergency.

The freezing of financial assets has been criticized by many worldwide, including Edward Snowden, famous for blowing the whistle on the National Security Agency's (NSA) massive surveillance programs on American citizens.

He tweeted, ?Governments claiming the authority to *freeze people's bank accounts* because they want to crush a protest movement is tyrannical and obscene. If you would oppose China or Russia doing it, you must oppose Canada doing it.?

Snowden's tweet also thanked the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), who recently announced they're pursuing litigation against the federal government for invoking the Emergency Act.

The not-for-profit association acknowledged the difficult, disruptive and complex situation in Ottawa, and that marginalized communities have experienced racial or homophobic intimidation by some members of the convoy, but the government did not meet the high burden necessary to invoke the Emergencies Act.

?Governments already have the lawful authority to address difficult situations and do so all the time. This use of the Emergencies Act is unnecessary, unjustifiable and unconstitutional,? said the CCLA in a statement.

?Our society needs peaceful assembly ? a critical democratic tool ? even though not every person agrees with the content of every movement.?

The CCLA noted that some protests are disruptive, and it's possible for a gathering to be both disruptive and also peaceful, and nonviolent.

While many might not agree with the protests aims, which are to drop all COVID-19 restrictions and vaccine mandates, or the conduct of certain members of the protest, we should all respect freedom of association and freedom to protest. We must protect this right, regardless of our opinions on what people are protesting, so long as they're not calling for violence.

It sets a dangerous precedent when the government gets to decide what type of protests are appropriate.

The coverage of the Freedom Convoy here in Canada, which has been categorized as a ?siege?, ?occupation?, and ?insurrection? by some within the mainstream media, is in stark contrast to how arguably more disruptive protests were handled and labelled in the United States.

While the U.S is a totally different country, mainstream media at large provided positive coverage of the Capitol Hill Occupied protest in Seattle, otherwise known as CHOP or CHAZ, which created an autonomous zone or ?Cop Free Co-op? as it was called, over six city blocks for three weeks (June 8 to July 1, 2020). This was in protest of police brutality after the murder of George Floyd.

There were five shootings over the three weeks that CHOP existed, of which a 19-year-old and 16-year-old were killed, and a 14-year-old was in critical condition from gunshot wounds.

Dozens of apartment buildings and businesses within the autonomous zone were vandalized, and some were even taken over. But during all of this, GoFundMe allowed money to flow to the protest and even promoted CHOP on Twitter, after the multiple shootings and two deaths.

This is in stark contrast to the $10 million of funds that were frozen by GoFundMe for the Freedom Convoy, and the millions more in funds our government is now trying to freeze from GiveSendGo, another crowdfunding platform.

Canada's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland announced new regulations for crowdfunding platforms, forcing them to register with FINTRAC, so nothing like this can happen again.

Now, only government approved protests can receive crowdfunding.

It's also concerning to see the list of individuals who donated to GiveSendGo being doxed online, which has resulted in many people losing their jobs.

A senior staffer for MPP Sylvia Jones was on the list of donors and has since been terminated. Police who donated to it are also being investigated and will face repercussions.

It's shocking to think someone who opposes COVID-19 mandates and was motivated to privately donate to the protest, could now be faced with trouble securing future employment, as well as have their bank account frozen.

It's a scary time to be Canadian.