

When Boring People Turn Dangerous: Canada's Insane Power Grab

The Canadian government's decision to freeze bank accounts in the trucker protests is a mad leap toward bureaucratic dystopia

[Matt Taibbi](#)



On Christmas Eve, 2018, *New York Times* writer Andrew Ross Sorkin published, “How Banks Unwittingly Finance Mass Shootings.”

Chronicling the credit card history of the man who killed 49 people at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida Sorkin noted Omar Mateen had not merely spent \$26,532 on weapons and ammo in the eight months before the 2016 attack, but had wondered if his doing so had raised red flags:

Two days before Omar Mateen killed 49 people and wounded 53 more at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, he went on Google and typed “Credit card unusual spending...” His web browsing history chronicled his anxiety: “Credit card reports all three bureaus,” “FBI,” and “Why banks stop your purchases.”

He needn’t have worried. None of the banks, credit-card network operators or payment processors alerted law enforcement officials about the purchases he thought were so suspicious.

Sorkin's piece ended up being an argument in favor of credit-card companies, payment processors, banks, and others working together to bring about a *Minority Report*-style panacea in which society's dangerous folk could be cyber-identified and stopped before they commit horrific acts. At one point he quoted George Brauchler, the District Attorney who prosecuted the Century 16 movie shooter in Aurora Colorado, James Holmes:

“Do I wish someone from law enforcement had been able to go to his door and knock on his door and figure out a way to talk their way into it or to freak him out?” he said of Mr. Holmes. “Yeah, absolutely.”

I've never owned a gun and have been sympathetic to gun control ideas for as long as I can remember. Sorkin, however, was not talking about gun control. He was theorizing a quasi-privatized vision of social control that would bypass laws by merging surveillance capitalism and law enforcement.

In a rhetorical trick that's since become common, he described how the failure of companies like Visa to block Mateen's purchases made them "enablers of carnage." Clearly, someone made the mistake of letting Sorkin see Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man*, and Cliff Robertson now whispers from the beyond to him too. If those with power to act don't stop wrongdoing, aren't they just shirking their great responsibility?

By the way, this same Sorkin once suggested he wouldn't stop at arresting Edward Snowden, but go after the reporter who broke his story, too. "I would arrest him and now I'd almost arrest Glenn Greenwald, the journalist... he wants to help him get to Ecuador," he said, on CNBC's *Squawk Box*. It's amazing how selective one can be in one's authoritarian leanings. After Goldman, Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein appeared to commit perjury in 2011 when he told the Senate, "We didn't bet against our clients," Sorkin rushed an apology into print saying "Mr. Blankfein wasn't lying," failing to remind audiences that his *Dealbook* blog at the *Times* was sponsored by... Goldman, Sachs.

Sorkin's Visa piece is suddenly relevant again, after fellow former finance reporter Chrystia Freeland — someone I've known since we were both expat journalists in Russia in the nineties — announced last week that her native Canada would be making Sorkin's vision a reality.

Freeland arouses strong feelings among old Russia hands. Before the Yeltsin era collapsed, she had consistent, remarkable access to gangster-oligarchs like Boris Berezovsky, who appeared in her *Financial Times* articles described as aw-shucks humans just doing their best to make sure “big capital” maintained its “necessary role” in Russia's political life. “Berezovsky was one of several financiers who came together in a last-ditch attempt to keep the Communists out of the Kremlin” was typical Freeland fare in, say, 1998.

Then the Yeltsin era collapsed in corrupt ignominy and Freeland immediately wrote a book called *Sale of the Century* that identified Yeltsin's embrace of her former top sources as the “original sin” of Russian capitalism, a “Faustian bargain” that crippled Russia's chance at true progress. This is *Freeland on Yeltsin's successor in 2000*. Note the

“Yes, Putin has a reputation for beating the press, but his economic rep
is solid!” passage at the end:

It looks as if we're about to fall in love with Russia all over again...

Compared to the ailing, drink-addled figure Boris Yeltsin cut in his later

years, his successor, Vladimir Putin, in the eyes of many western observers,

*seems refreshingly direct, decisive and energetic... Tony Blair, who has
already paid*

Putin the compliment of a visit to Russia and received the newly installed

president in Downing Street in return, has praised him as a strong leader

with a reformist vision. Bill Clinton, who recently hot-footed it to Russia,

offered the equally sunny appraisal that “when we look at Russia today . . .

we see an economy that is growing . . . we see a Russia that has just

completed a democratic transfer of power for the first time in a thousand

years.”

To be sure, some critics have lamented Putin’s support for the bloody second

war in Chechnya, accused him of eroding freedom of the press... and

worried aloud that his KGB background and unrepenting loyalty to the honor

of that institution could jeopardize Russia’s fragile democratic

institutions. But many of even Putin's fiercest prosecutors seem inclined to

give him the benefit of the doubt when it comes to the economy...

Years later, she is somehow Canada's Finance Minister, and what another friend from our Russia days laughingly describes as "the Nurse Ratched of the New World Order." At the end of last week, Minister Freeland explained that in expanding its Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada (FINTRAC) program, her government was "directing Canadian financial institutions to review their relationships with anyone involved in the illegal blockades."

The Emergencies Act contains language beyond the inventive powers of the best sci-fi writers. It defines a "designated person" — a person eligible for cutoff of financial services — as someone "directly or indirectly" participating in a "public assembly that may reasonably be expected to lead to a breach of the peace." Directly or *indirectly*?

She went on to describe the invocation of Canada's Emergencies Act in the dripping-fake tones of someone trying to put a smile on an insurance claim rejection, with even phrases packed with bad news steered upward

in the form of cheery hypotheticals. As in, *The names of both individuals and entities as well as crypto wallets? Have been shared? By the RCMP with financial institutions? And accounts have been frozen?* As she confirmed this monstrous news about freezing bank accounts, Freeland burst into nervous laughter, looking like Tony Perkins sharing a cheery memory with “mother”:

 **Steve Saretsky**
@SteveSaretsky

Regardless of your political views, this is rather disturbing. Next up, CBDC.



February 18th 2022

154 Retweets 953 Likes

When HSBC got caught laundering over \$800 million for groups like the mass-murdering Sinaloa drug cartel, no government official asked any financial companies to “review their relationships” with Europe’s largest bank. Nobody leaned on any firms to stop doing business with Too Big to Fail scumlord who laundered money for terrorists, gouged customers in a foreign exchange scam, manipulated energy prices in California, or did any of a thousand other serious things.

If anything, the pattern has been opposite. Here in the U.S., Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, and Citigroup were repeatedly busted for violating federal fraud statutes, but authorities showered all three with billions in cash and logistical aid to help them acquire Merrill Lynch, Washington Mutual, and Wachovia. *Because it’s awesome? To help rich crooks? Get even richer?*

Freeland appeared with me on a long Bill Moyers segment once to discuss this very issue of non-enforcement of large-scale corporate wrongdoing. She did a good job evincing concern for all this unchecked corruption, recalling themes of *Sale of the Century*. Yet here she is now, deciding the

moment to break glass and deploy incredibly dangerous emergency powers is, of all things, a protest of the great unwashed.

Deciding to seize funds is a major leap in the manic progression of a certain type of disordered authoritarian personality who's suddenly everywhere. They're coming out of decades-long disguises as milquetoast center-left careerists, and they all seem to believe now that all things on earth happen or don't because of them. It's as if Raskolnikov's madness seized a generation of Western yuppies simultaneously.

It started after 9/11, when a sizable portion of the West's intellectual class — even some who protested initially — accepted the idea that in the face of a big enough threat, everything is permitted. It started with small things like allowing the government to access library records, progressed to the shrugging acceptance that “We tortured some folks,” and moved quickly to the secret mass-surveillance programs that Sorkin wanted Greenwald and Snowden arrested for exposing.

For certain kinds of people, for the McKinsey consultants and Ivy League lobbyists and corporate lawyers and diplomats and Senate aides who get aroused watching the deskbound exploration of moral gray areas on shows like *The Good Wife*, the Giant Database we ostensibly built to fight Islamic terrorists long ago stopped being a terrifying super-tool of the kind Promethean legend warned humanity against. Instead it began to represent, to them, the righteous power that properly redounded to them for being so much smarter, wiser, and better educated than everyone else. They were put in charge of it for a reason!

We saw hints of what was coming after Brexit and around the time of Donald Trump's election, via op-eds with headlines like, "Bring Back the Smoke-Filled Room." The people needed saving from themselves.

Leaving democracy in their hands was like letting a macaque run loose with a hammer. There was a significant heightening of "Democracy is overrated" rhetoric after Trump's election, but the "No More Screwing Around" bugle-call didn't really sound until the coordinated removal of Alex Jones from Internet platforms in August, 2018. This move was celebrated almost universally because Jones is a demented lunatic, but it

was still a deeply un-American kind of move. Jones was a perfect fit for the old-school “Even a goddamned werewolf is entitled to legal counsel” defense of civil liberties, but Facebook, Apple, and YouTube put a very public kibosh on that, and it proved a turning point.

Once the GoodThinkers realized all it took was a few phone calls to a few pals in a few Silicon Valley boardrooms to eliminate a major social irritant, they immediately began looking around and asking (I predicted this at the time) what other public annoyances might need disappearing. In their minds, the fact that they had the power to remove purveyors of extremist rage and “It makes the frogs gay!” conspiracism at any time essentially made it their fault that any of those people were still on the air.

This is when you started to hear previously liberal intellectuals use language like, Why are we *allowing* this? A perfect recent example is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wondering aloud “why Tucker Carlson is allowed” to be an asshole on television, or *Washington Post* media writer Margaret Sullivan asking how Joe Rogan dodged “accountability” for his

unacceptable vaccine views. Sullivan's column reads like a confessional monograph on the authoritarian mind, implying Rogan was to blame for the death of her unvaccinated former *Buffalo News* colleague Miguel Rodriguez, even though "I have no idea whether he had ever listened to Joe Rogan's podcast."

It couldn't be that Rodriguez simply came to his own decision, perhaps even a wrong decision, about getting vaccinated. To Sullivan, Rodriguez died because Rogan was allowed to speak, and because Spotify, which "enables him," didn't crack down on his BadThink before it reached Rodriguez's apparently childlike mind.

Abroad, we've seen the mania for control in the refusal to leave Afghanistan (as GoodThinkers refused to accept they couldn't force the cooperation of the local population), in the "Yats is our guy" intervention of our diplomats to prevent a common boxer like Vitali Klitschko from assuming too big a role in Ukraine's post-Maidan government, and in our constant scrambling to intervene militarily everywhere from Niger to Syria to Libya and beyond. At home, we see it in Facebook hiring

intelligence officials to “disrupt ideologies underlying extremism,” in efforts to make sure Amazon doesn’t sell Irreversible Damage, in PayPal teaming with the ADL to disallow transfers to and from “evil people,” and in countless other campaigns to use credit-card companies and processors and Internet platforms and other bureaucratic tools to stop “illegitimate” activity. People like writer C.J. Hopkins saw this coming years ago, but mainstream pundits were silent when it came to the possibility of overreach, so long as a threat such as Trump existed.

The more furiously they played at speech Whac-a-Mole, the more BadThink they found, usually in the form of people protesting their crackdowns. Disallowing all discussion of Stop the Steal somehow didn’t prevent people from believing the election was stolen, nor did removing Donald Trump from Twitter, but these people kept pushing harder.

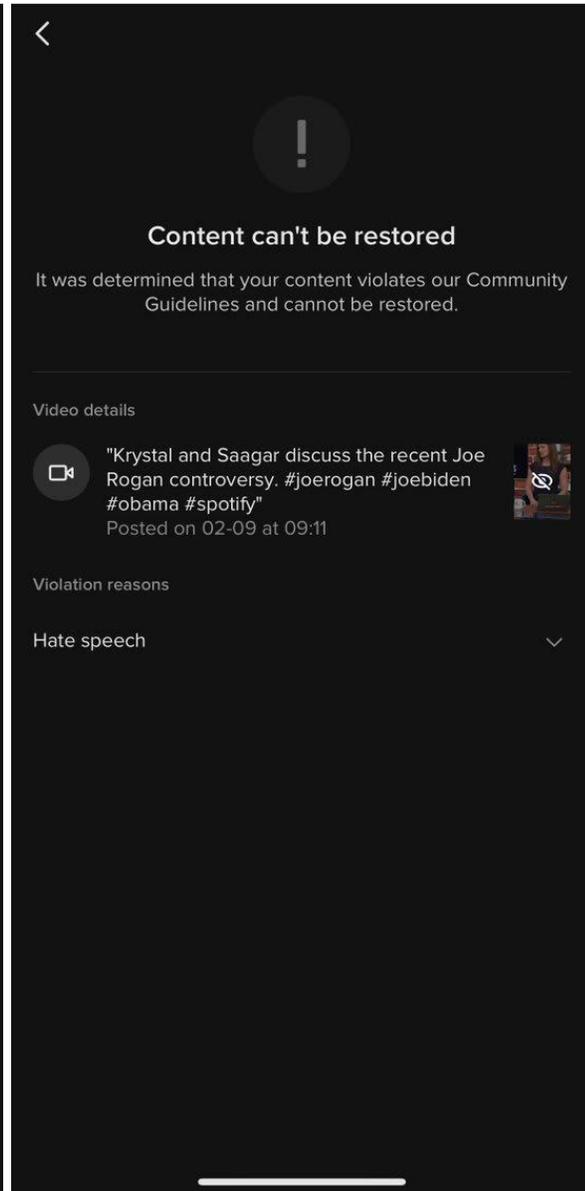
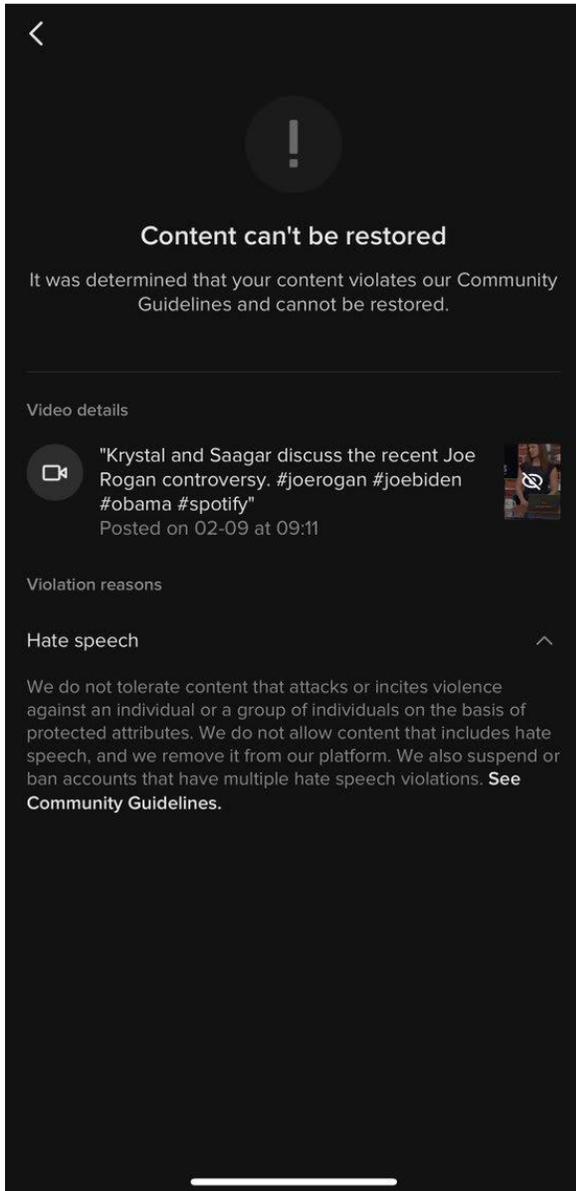
Maybe, Sullivan and others wondered, Fox should be banned, even if Fox had actually called the election for Biden? Harvard law professor Laurence Tribe is currently arguing Fox broadcasts are treason; sooner or later, there will be a serious effort to yank the channel from the air, because these people are delusional enough to think an extreme move

like that would change hearts and minds. The situation long ago passed the point of absurdity. A recent example of how preposterous this has all gotten is TikTok locking Krystal Ball and Saagar Enjeti's "Breaking Points" account for "hate speech," the "hate" being a defense of Rogan:

Saagar Enjeti

@esaagar

Our Breaking Points @tiktok account which amassed 50k followers in just 3 weeks has been locked for "hate speech" violation. To be clear the clip is a defense of Joe Rogan from 2 weeks ago which includes ZERO hate speech



February 21st 2022

513 Retweets 3,615 Likes

Virtually any media figure who doesn't work for a major corporate outlet and who has unconventional ideas about anything long ago had to accept that their Internet presences — which in some cases double as businesses — can be shut down at any time, for any reason, without any real right to explanation or appeal. That's been troubling enough. This development in Canada takes this to a new level. We're already seeing reports that people with family members in the "Freedom Convoy" are having "difficulty banking":

Mackenzie Gray

@Gray_Mackenzie

A senior police sources tells our [@grahamctv](#), that they expect to break the back of the protest today and that some family members of convoy folks have had difficulty banking because a family member has been involved in the protest [#cndpoli](#) [#ottnews](#)

February 19th 2022

776 Retweets3,057 Likes

This Soviet concept of guilt by association will now put it in the minds of everyone — not just in Canada but everywhere, since we've already seen these efforts reach into the pockets of American GoFundMe donors —

that not only speech but their *money* might be disappeared, or frozen, because of their views, or the views of someone they know. This is madness, the kind of thing that sparks revolutions. It also forces a second look at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's much-panned remarks from 2013 about having a "level of admiration" for "the basic dictatorship" of China.

What Trudeau said he admired back then was China's speed in turning its economy around, but it's starting to seem like the admiration ran deeper. For years now Western thought leaders have been moving toward a Chinese-style social credit system, with labor more and more stripped of political rights and citizens algorithmically scored for financial and, now, political correctitude.

Remember at the outset of the pandemic, when a pair of Harvard professors wrote in *The Atlantic*, "In the debate over freedom versus control of the global network, China was largely correct, and the U.S. was wrong"? That was no blip. What the likes of Trudeau, and the Harvard profs, and Sorkin, and Freeland, and all the rest are saying is no

different from George W. Bush's infamous "If this were a dictatorship it would be a heck of a lot easier, *he he he...* just so long as I'm the dictator, *he he he.*"

 Bush Dictator

We killed Bush for saying that out loud, and rightfully so. But in the age of Trump, Brexit, January 6th, and Covid, we're more and more being asked to sympathize with the authoritarian urges of the Trudeau set. How hard they have it, surrounded by Rogans and Honkers and other saboteurs, while tasked with stopping Covid, Putin, and white supremacy. If only we'd just shut up and give them more tools!

Because these dingbats don't recognize the legitimacy of alternative beliefs, they can't see that the trucker protests, for whatever else they are — according to some reports, annoying, costly, and inspiring a growing

number of detractors — are grounded in fears of exactly this kind of bureaucratic credit system, where you need a stamp of social approval to travel or order a cheeseburger. This kind of thinking is supposed to be an anathema to Western democracy, even in Canada. The basic tensions between viewpoints came out in a bail hearing for Tamara Lich, the Alberta woman charged with “counseling to commit mischief” for organizing the \$10 million GoFundMe campaign.

CBC described a confrontation at the hearing, when Lich’s husband Dwayne made the mistake of citing an American rights concept to the incredibly named Judge Julie Bourgeois:

“Honestly? I thought it was a peaceful protest and based on my first amendment, I thought that was part of our rights,” he told the court.

“What do you mean, first amendment? What’s that?” Judge Julie Bourgeois asked him.

“I don't know. I don't know politics. I don't know,” he said. “I wasn't supportive of the blockade or the whatever, but I didn't realize that it was criminal to do what they were doing. I thought it was part of our freedoms to be able to do stuff like that.”

“Can you tell me if what they did is really legal?” Lich asked. “If this is something that they can be doing?” he said. Meanwhile, news came out that Trudeau was announcing the Emergencies Act would need to stay in place for a while, because of potential “future blockades.” Open-ended preventive autocracy, in *Canada*. Who had that on a Bingo card? Justin Trudeau? Chrystia Freeland? Christ, it's like waking up to learn the cast of *The Office* has declared the Fourth Reich. Boring people are dangerous, too.