

**Investigative Report:
Vancouver Island Freedom Movement is a Hate Movement**

June 2023

Abstract

This is a report of findings from a year of research in 2022 to 2023 on the self-described Vancouver Island “freedom movement” (VIFM), with the goal of determining whether or not the VIFM bears hallmark characteristics—beliefs, intentions and actions—of hate groups, as researched and defined by experts in the field. Investigation took place on social media platforms: Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, TikTok, Rumble, and BitChute. Information about in-person events and activities was also obtained directly from people living on Vancouver Island.

The project yielded significant evidence to support the conclusion that VIFM substantially meets hate group criteria.

Introduction

For the purpose of this report, we define the Vancouver Island Freedom Movement (VIFM) as a collective of people with similar views, shared systems of belief, and related political ideologies. Individuals involved may support or identify with the beliefs and culture of the freedom convoy occupation in Ottawa, 2022, whether or not they participated in the Ottawa convoy or in rallies of support across the country. It is important to note that the movement reaches much farther than rallies and convoys—these events merely represent boiling points of action in the social movement. Though many of the individuals who identify with the freedom movement may not consider themselves to be far-right, the movement as a whole is an ultranationalist movement with fascist undercurrents that began long before the COVID-19 pandemic.

People involved in the VIFM frequently express a perception of being actively disenfranchised. Many individuals fear that the government is endangering their children, their livelihoods, and even their lives. These feelings of distrust and perceived persecution worsened during the social isolation caused by COVID-19, and have lent themselves to a well-documented increase in instances of hate towards visible minorities (Statistics Canada 2023).

Because the VIFM includes a complex mixture of specific beliefs, members' anxieties have manifested in fear of and vehement opposition to a remarkable variety of things: vaccines and pharmaceuticals; supposed 'globalism' attributed to the United Nations and other international organizations; immigration specifically from non-European countries; communism; 2SLGBTQIA+¹ people's rights and identities, especially transgender rights; perceived government overreach; and climate policy in general.

Our findings show that the freedom movement in Canada has characteristics of a hate movement and is made up of various factions across the country that continue to organize politically and socially to achieve shared goals. Based on our research as presented in this report, the movement on Vancouver Island is a hotspot for far-right activity and organizing.

In order to address this immediate issue, we must start with acknowledging its existence.

¹The 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym stands for 2-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual, plus other forms of gender and sexual self-identification.

What this report is not about

One of the relevant shared beliefs in the VIFM is doubt about and/or opposition to vaccines or vaccine mandates. Some people who are vaccine hesitant or opposed to the government's COVID-19 vaccine mandates have found a sense of community and belonging in the freedom movement, especially while it was in Ottawa in 2022. Some are pro-vaccination but uncomfortable with the government having power to control aspects of people's daily lives. Government overreach and corruption are valid concerns for any citizen, and the ability to share these concerns and have fair debate about them is a defining aspect of a democracy. However, the freedom movement has since expanded well beyond the issue of COVID-19 mandates and critiquing that policy. This report is not about people who are simply vaccine hesitant, concerned about government overreach, or distrustful of large institutions.

What this report is about

This report is exclusively concerned with the overall freedom movement on Vancouver Island, whose members are actively organizing to achieve hate-aligned goals, seeking to marginalize, disempower, and oppress people who they see as different from them. We do not want to further alienate individuals who have sought a place of belonging in a time of turmoil, confusion and danger. Our goal is to present our research on hate activities within the freedom movement on Vancouver Island and acknowledge the harm that such activities are causing.

Defining "Hate"

Linda M. Woolf and Michael R. Hulsizer are psychologists who are experts on hate movements. Their research showed, in accordance with the findings of the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League, that:

1. Hate groups use beliefs and actions rooted in a desire for oppression of others, which is then aimed at a chosen class or classes of people.
2. Hate groups choose their target class(es) of people based on social characteristics such as sexuality, ethnicity, or race.
3. Hate groups participate in organized public-facing activities like rallies, protests, or publishing newspapers and magazines.
4. Hate groups have a primary organizing focus on the desired oppression of a specific group or groups of people (2004).

We contend that in order for a group to be correctly understood as a social hate *movement* and not just a group, it must be made up of intermingling (but not necessarily combined) factions, forming a larger social movement. **Therefore, this report defines a hate movement as a social movement made up of various interrelated hate groups that share common goals, systems of belief, and members.**

The Origins of the Freedom Movement

The freedom movement we see today is made up of groups and activists who were active long before COVID-19. These groups were attempting to gain power to achieve their political goals before the freedom movement became far more prominent and popular.

Many who turned to the freedom movement during COVID-19 lockdowns and public health orders were previously politically unengaged and inexperienced people. As the COVID-19 pandemic caused isolation and hardship, divisions emerged and intensified in reaction to increased stress, and many people who were concerned about government overreach found a new home in a movement that claimed to be about freedom, personal autonomy, and anti-government corruption. However, as the dust settles from the 2022 Ottawa occupation (and numerous other blockades such as the Coutts, Windsor, and Surrey's Pacific Highway blockade), it is becoming clear that bad-faith political actors saw an opportunity in the distress of those uncomfortable with public health measures and seized the moment by joining the more mainstream freedom movement to introduce and advocate for their far-right beliefs.

First “freedom convoy” was in 2019

As stated in the Report of the Public Inquiry to the 2022 Public Order Emergency, some organizers of the 2022 freedom convoy to Ottawa had attempted a similar political move just a few years before (2023, 30). In December 2018, a group of Yellow Vest² protesters in Alberta began planning a convoy to Ottawa to protest climate and environmental policy, soon after changing their name from the Yellow Vests to United We Roll.

By February 2019, the United We Roll convoy arrived in Ottawa and protested for two days against numerous government policies, like carbon pricing legislation and proposed climate policy (Rouleau 2023, 31). Several of the convoy organizers would go on to become central organizers and influencers in the 2022 freedom convoy occupation: Tamara Lich, Patrick King, and James Bauder. The 2022 Ottawa occupation inspired several Vancouver Island rallies and convoys that continue to this day, some of which organizers and participants call “Walk the Flag”, or simply “WTF”.

Anti-transgender & anti-gay activism originated before the “freedom movement”

In 2016, the BC Human Rights Code was amended to include gender identity and expression, making transgender people a protected class (“B.C. Human Rights Code to include explicit protection for gender identity, expression” 2016). As public attention to gender identity increased, BC schools looked to the Vancouver-based ARC Foundation's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI123), a program that provides age-appropriate resources to help teachers and the school community provide sexual orientation and gender identity lessons and support (SOGI123, 2019) (ARC Foundation, 2019).

² The Yellow Vest protests began in France in 2018 as a populist movement. The movement soon after expanded to Canada where it took roots as a far-right, xenophobic movement (“Factcheck: CBC Misrepresents Yellow Vests Canada Movement, Makes No Mention of Death Threats.” 2019).

This amendment was met by fierce opposition from BC Christian nationalist groups who have fought against 2SLGBTQIA+ rights for decades. Beginning in the early 2000s, conservative Christian organizations like Parents United Canada and Culture Guard protested gay rights and the enactment of the Civil Marriage Act, and shifted their focus to trans rights as governments and institutions worked to recognize diversity in gender identity. This network of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ organizations have continued to oppose transgender rights on the grounds that it is a “perversion”, and that both sexual orientation education and gender identity education in schools will harm young people. Like today’s VIFM members, these groups have described 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education as morally and culturally wrong, and hold beliefs and advocate for policies that function to leave gay and transgender youth isolated and more vulnerable to harm.

Over the past several years, groups with their own hate-group traits, like Soldiers of Odin³, the Proud Boys, and the Hells Angels, have allied with anti-queer activists by participating in protests alongside them, sometimes assisting them with security (Claxton 2018).



image: Soldiers of Odin at an anti-SOGI protest in 2018. (Claxton 2018)

Culture Guard, a group led by long-time anti-2SLGBTQIA+ activist Kari Simpson, took a prominent role in fighting BC teachers’ ability to use SOGI123 to support their students. Culture Guard rallied around the West Coast Christian Accord, a group that petitioned the BC government to remove SOGI123 from schools back in 2018. The petition was met with renewed support for SOGI123 by many organizations in the community, such as the B.C. Teachers’

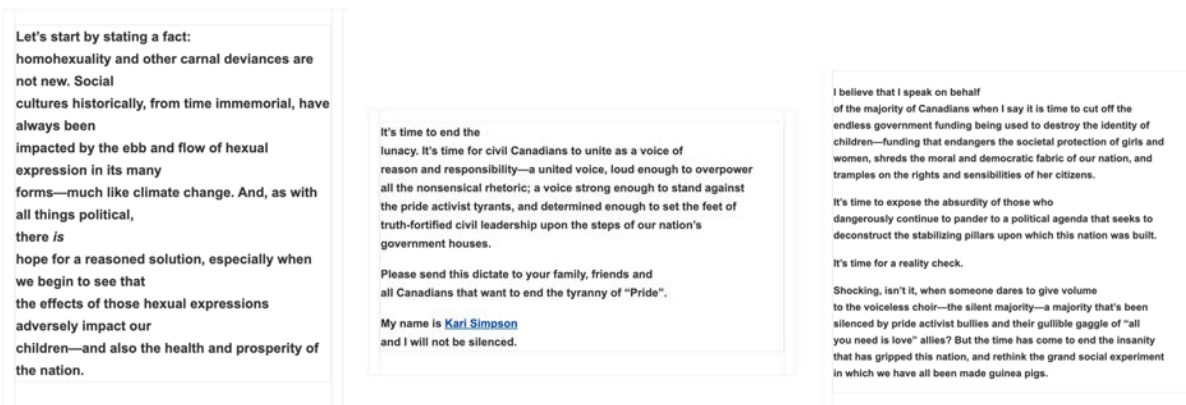
³ Soldiers of Odin is an anti-immigration group that was founded in Finland by neo-nazi activist Mike Ranta (Archambault and Veilleux-Lepage 2017, 272) and that eventually spread to Canada. Though the European counterpart is explicitly white supremacist, the Canadian Soldiers of Odin attempts to be more covert with its anti-Islam and anti-immigration stances.

Federation, the B.C. School Trustees Association, the First Nations Steering Committee, the First Nations Schools Association, and Métis Nation BC.⁴

What SOGI123 is not

It must be noted that there is no evidence that the purpose of SOGI123 is to sexualize or “groom” children, but rather was created and is used to teach children that some families differ from a traditional Eurocentric heterosexual-parented nuclear family, and to encourage education that includes and respects all students.

However, on Culture Guard website, Simpson claims that government funding for 2SLGBTQIA+ programs “endangers the societal protection of girls and women, shreds the moral and democratic fabric of our nation.” She goes on to describe 2SLGBTQIA+ people (whom she refers to as “homohexuals,” likely as a way to conflate gay people with witchcraft) as a “carnal deviance” (“It Ain’t No Rainbow – Pride Is Political Part 1” 2019). Simpson also states that “hexuality” needs a “reasoned solution” because it “adversely impact(s) our children.”



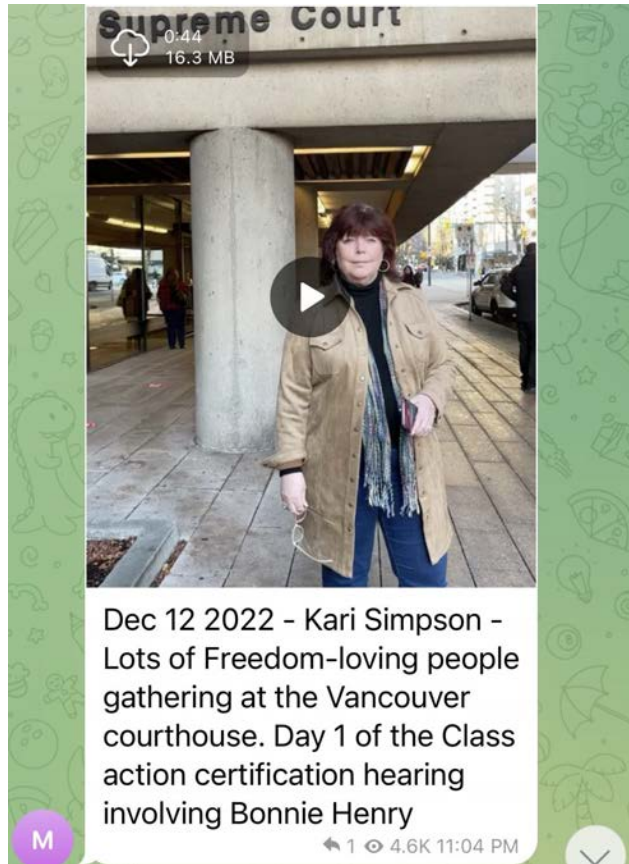
Kari Simpson — images from Culture Guard website

Anti-trans and anti-gay activists join and find support in the freedom movement

The actions of Kari Simpson and others demonstrate a direct link between anti-2SLGBTQIA+ organizations and today’s BC freedom movement: the same influencers are involved and active.

Simpson has found a home inside the contemporary BC freedom movement, where she is supported and assisted in achieving her anti-2SLGBTQIA+ goals. She currently seeks to influence Canadian politics through the Canadian Voters Association and organizes the anti-vaccine freedom tours, Doctors on Tour and Justice for the Vaccinated.

⁴Takeuchi, Craig. (2018, October 2). B.C. government backs LGBT–inclusive SOGI initiative despite Christian-based opposition. *Georgia Straight*.
<https://www.straight.com/life/1144991/bc-government-backs-lgbt-inclusive-sogi-program-despite-christian-based-opposition>



Kari Simpson with Van Isle freedom movement - a Telegram post with a photo of Simpson reads, "Kari Simpson - Lots of Freedom-loving people gathering at the Vancouver courthouse..."

Laura-Lynn Tyler Thompson is a former Christian media personality and leader of the Christian Heritage party of BC. In 2018 she co-hosted a Victoria rally against SOGI123 with anti-SOGI activist Jenn Smith (Takeuchi 2018). She signed the "West Coast Christian Accord", an agreement among hundreds of pastors who committed to "support the biblical perspective of sexuality and gender" (Taylor 2018). Today, Tyler Thompson tours Canada with fellow freedom movement influencer Artur Pawlowski⁵, hosts prominent B.C. anti-vaccine activists like Charles Hoffe⁶ on her livestreams, and appears at other freedom movement events.

⁵ Artur Pawlowski is a freedom activist and pastor from Alberta who participated in the Coutts blockade where four men were arrested and charged with a conspiracy to commit murder ("Prosecutor Says Pastor's Fiery Speech at Coutts Blockade Was Criminal" 2023).

⁶ Charles Hoffe is a doctor and a freedom activist who participated in a mock hanging of elected officials in Victoria BC (Lindsay 2022).

Vancouver Island Freedom Movement's Shared Goals Rooted in Hate

Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ activism has become more prevalent in British Columbia as anti-trans and anti-queer opinions and actions have gained political traction in the USA. Disseminating information via social media, groups like Culture Guard have been able to recruit new members and share dangerous misinformation online and at in-person meetups.

The most popular social platform used by the VIFM is Telegram, an encrypted, cross-platform messaging service. There are many Telegram groups and channels created by members of the freedom movement that are regionally-focussed on Vancouver Island and BC as a whole. These groups are used to share alternative news, systems of belief, events, and ideologies.

Topics discussed range from weekly "Walk the Flag" meetups (waving flags and banners at highways and overpasses with various VIFM messages); parents discussing and organizing against what they view as the sexualization and perversion of children; and general "freedom" content (a grab-bag of conspiracy theories related to government overreach and racist conspiracies like the Zionist Occupation Conspiracy⁷). Some of the activities are spun to appear less extreme— presented as building community or discussing government overreach— but they house and deliver beliefs which enter into the territory of advocating hate.

Hateful content shared in VIFM Telegram groups falls into 4 categories:

1. Homophobia/transphobia
2. White supremacy/racism
3. Targeted dehumanization of non-freedom movement people and politicians
4. Conspiracy theories and pseudoscience

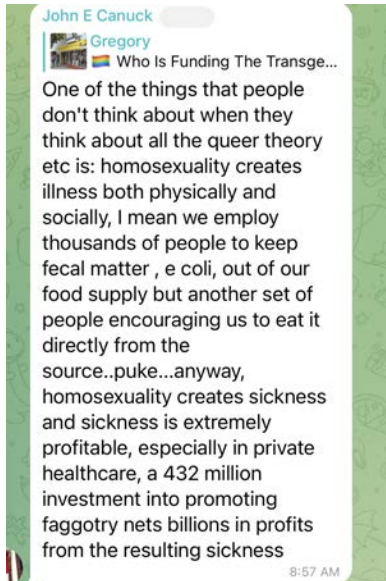
(1) Homophobia and transphobia:

In VIFM Telegram groups, memes depicting transgender people as pedophiles, perverts, and social deviants are often shared.

In March 2023, a member of a VIFM group on Telegram stated: "homosexuality creates illness both physically and socially ... we employ thousands of people to keep fecal matter , e coli, out of our food supply but another set of people encouraging us to eat it directly from the source.... Homosexuality creates sickness."

The individual goes on to say "432 million investment into promoting faggotry nets billions in profits from the resulting sickness."

⁷ The Zionist Occupation conspiracy theory is an anti-semitic theory suggesting that a Jewish cabal secretly runs the world through infiltrated governments and organizations. Sometimes this is also known as the New World Order or simply "The Cabal."



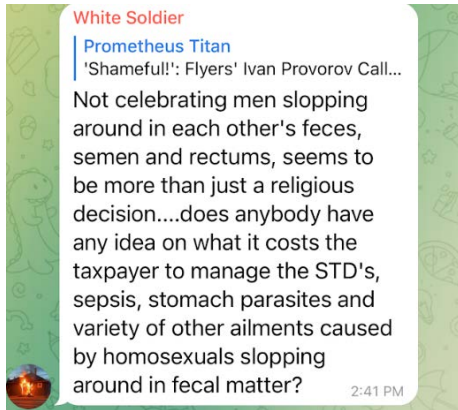
[image: message sent in a Vancouver Island freedom movement Telegram group]

Such content is commonplace in these Telegram groups and is rarely challenged for being hateful or harmful. However, there is sometimes discussion on how to approach certain aspects of identity that the movement is opposed to. One activist responded to a transphobic message with “I don’t hate trans people. I hate the agenda and the people that [sic] indoctrinated our society...”



[image: message in Vancouver Island freedom movement Telegram group shows nuance around their opposition to transgender identity]

Organizing against SOGI123, 2SLGBTQIA+ visibility, and transgender rights has become a priority for VIFM on Telegram as activists take the hateful rhetoric from online into the community.



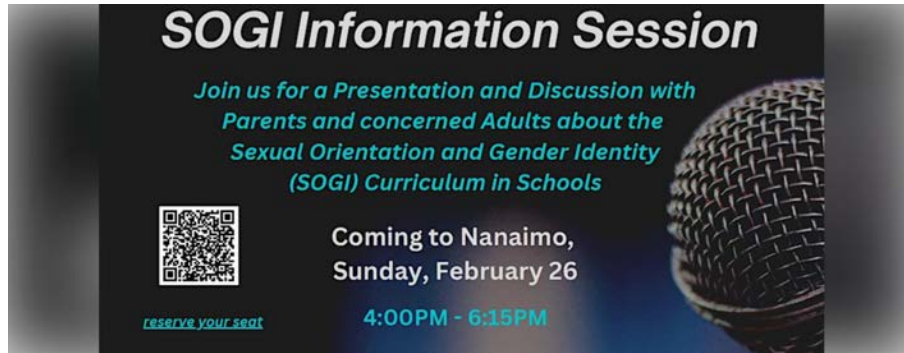
[image: self-declared white supremacist in Vancouver Island freedom movement Telegram posts homophobic comment]

In addition to sharing memes and posts online, many of these groups are dedicated to taking political action against transgender and gay people. The SOGI123 International Taskforce (SIT) is an organization that sits under the freedom movement umbrella: SIT was founded in part by the Canadian Freedom Coalition (Rumneek 2022).

According to its website, SIT's goal is to "expose the truth about the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity agenda being pushed in school curriculums around the world." In February 2023, SIT planned to hold at least two events on Vancouver Island: one in Nanaimo and one in the Cowichan Valley. The event in the Cowichan Valley was canceled due to community pushback. Although the venue did not provide a specific reason for cancellation, they released a statement that read in part:

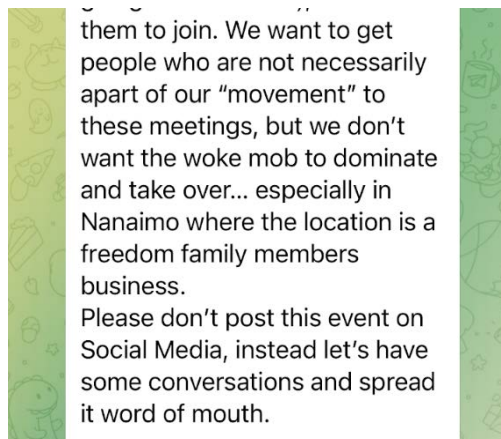
"When considering rental requests, we assess all by the same set of criteria: the activity must be legally acceptable; the rental standards and procedures must be met; the activity must not cause harm to individuals, living creatures, the building & grounds, or the community" (Cowichan Station Area Association 2023).

The SIT events were promoted as a presentation and discussion about SOGI123 in schools, but the event itineraries did not include any SOGI123 educators, 2SLGBTQIA+ researchers, or members of the school district in which the events were planned. While claiming expert status on SOGI123, in their advertising organizers either misunderstood or misspelled 2SLGBTQIA+ as "LGBTQ+2", which is inaccurate in reference to non-heterosexual people.



[image of SIT event poster]

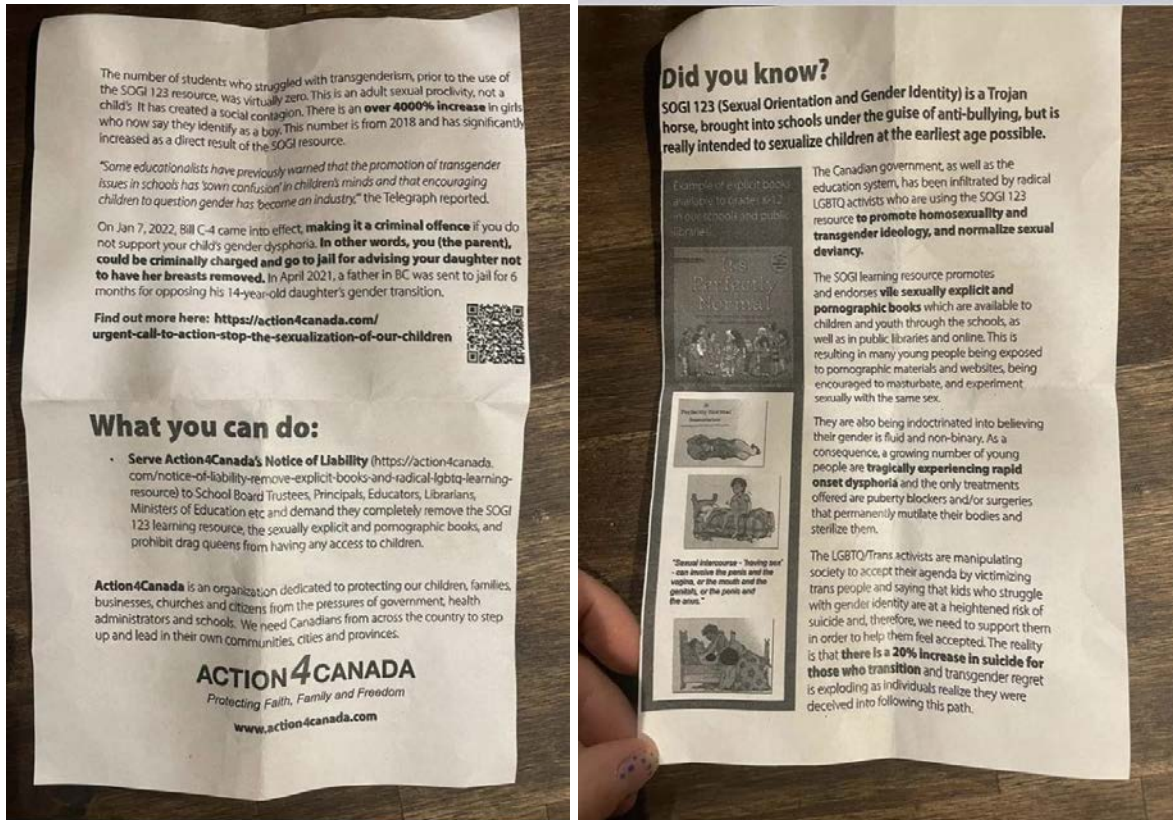
As with most of the content they share on Telegram, VIFM members did not promote the SIT events publicly, apparently wishing to host the anti-SOGI123 event without public awareness to avoid community pushback. In a Telegram post promoting the event, a freedom movement activist stated, “We want to get people who are not necessarily a part[sic] of our “movement” to these meetings, but we don’t want the woke mob to dominate and take over...”



[image: Vancouver Island freedom activists did not want the SIT event to be publicly known]

On Halloween night, 2022, parents on Vancouver Island reported finding flyers from a group called Action4Canada⁸ in their children’s Halloween candy. Activists had passed out the flyers to children without the knowledge of their parents. The flyers made false and derogatory claims that SOGI123 is “brought into schools under the guise of anti-bullying, but it is really intended to sexualize children at the earliest age possible.”

⁸ Action4Canada is a freedom movement organization that has been banned from attending school board meetings in Mission, BC for deliberately distributing discriminatory and triggering anti-trans material (White 2023).



[flyers distributed on Halloween night to children who were trick-or-treating on Vancouver Island]

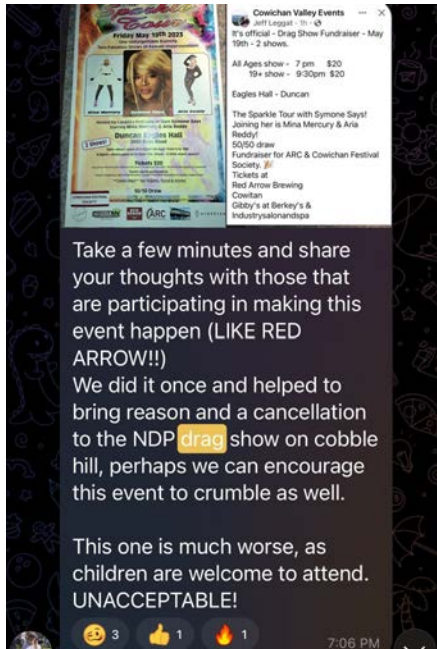
A month earlier, Courtenay Board of Education trustee candidate Anita Devries allegedly distributed Action4Canada's anti-SOGI flyer while campaigning. In an interview, Devries stated that SOGI education promotes "gender confusion."⁹

⁹ Farrell, Terry. (2022, September 29). Courtenay school board trustee candidate distributing anti-SOGI material. *Comox Valley Record*. <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/community/courtenay-school-board-trustee-candidate-distributing-anti-sogi-material/>.

Escalation from online to real-world anti-2SLGBTQIA+ harassment

Online rhetoric attacking 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples in VIFM is now emerging into a new stage of organized confrontational and defamatory activism in our communities. VIFM members mounted a targeted smear campaign against a community fundraiser assisting refugees, and also against local businesses and organizations supporting it (Cawson 2023, Mehta 2023).

On Telegram, a VIFM member encouraged other members to send messages to and boycott the businesses supporting the fundraiser.



Several business owners in the Cowichan Valley reported feeling upset at the hate and homophobic messages they had received for sponsoring the drag show.



Canada's first lady of glam Symone Says will be hosting 'The Sparkle Tour' Drag Show fundraiser which will be held at Duncan Eagles Hall on May 19. (Courtesy of The Sparkle Tour)

Organizers rise above smear campaign set on taking sparkle from Duncan drag show

Group spreading misinformation about fundraiser

CHADD CAWSON / May. 17, 2023 5:45 a.m. / ENTERTAINMENT / LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT

[Image: Vancouver Island Free Daily, May 17 2023](#)

Duncan drag show backlash met with community support

Event sponsors received threatening calls and emails, but 'there's more love than hate in the world, in Duncan and in Cowichan.'

BY SHALU MEHTA • COWICHAN VALLEY • MAY 18, 2023



[\[image: The Discourse May 18 2023\]](#)

In May 2023, a man in the Vancouver area posted a video to a Vancouver Island Telegram group stating he cut down a gay pride flag and was going to set it on fire. In the video, the man proudly states, "I just cut down that fucking ugly pedo, fucking ugly rainblow flag ... I just climbed up there and I cut that fucking piece of shit down ... we're going to fucking burn this."



[screenshot from video obtained from VIFM Telegram channel]

During the same week, a freedom movement member from the Lower Mainland stated on Facebook that a pride flag was burned in a bonfire at a freedom movement event. These flag burnings are undoubtedly motivated by hate and could be considered hate crimes, similar to a case where three young boys burned a pride flag in Nova Scotia and are now facing charges for their hate-related crime (“3 youths charged in burning of Pride flag at N.S. high school” 2023).

(2) White supremacy & racism:

Though not everyone who identifies with the freedom movement is a white supremacist, our research shows that white supremacy is embedded in the movement. One of the fundamental characteristics of the freedom movement is ultranationalism—a “radical loyalty and devotion to a nation” (Miriam Webster).

Through this radical loyalty and loathing of those outside their group affiliations, ultranationalists favour the needs, wants, and culture of their self-identified group within the nation state above all others. VIFM aligns with this mode: the movement articulates wishes to uphold an exclusive, Eurocentric, colonial version of Canada. Movement participants exhibit the view that all other cultures and ethnicities are inferior.



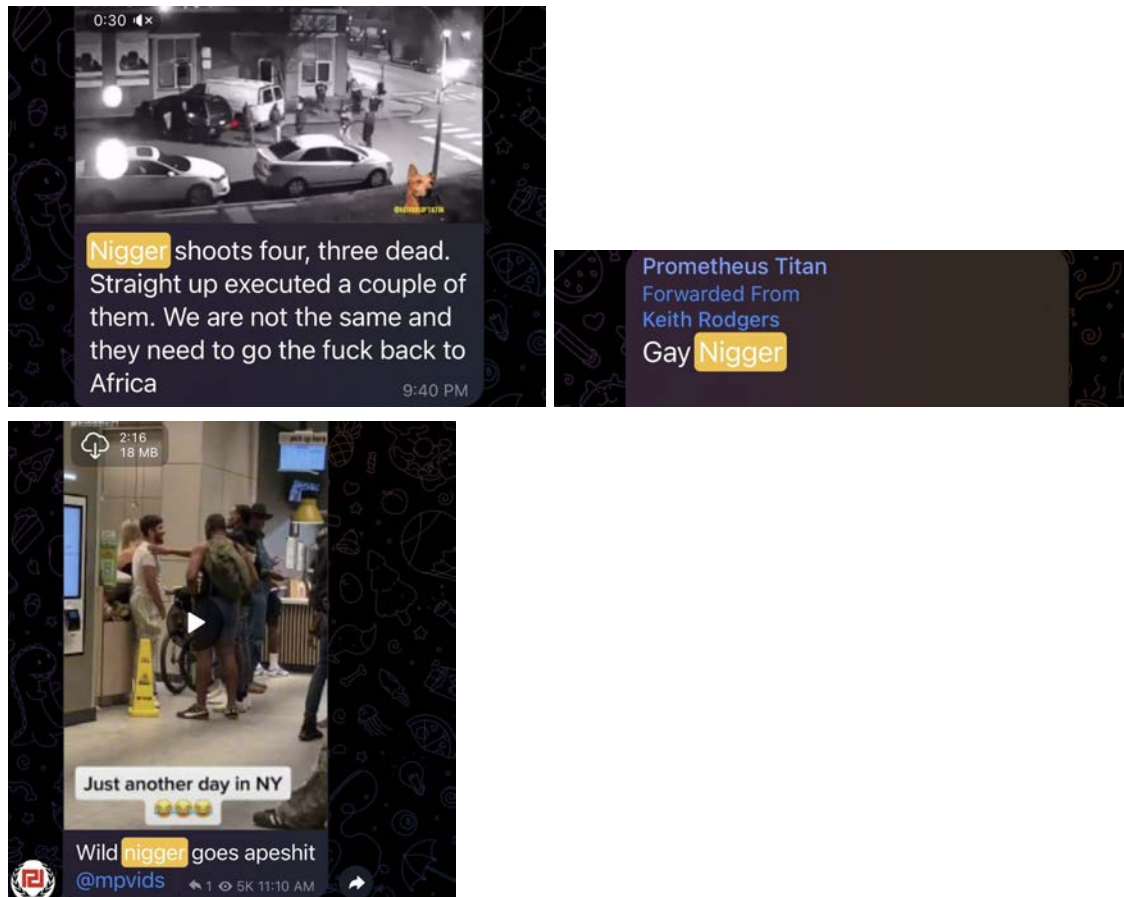
[image from a Vancouver Island Telegram group]

White supremacy and racism manifest in different ways throughout VIFM’s online communication. Some individuals, who self-identify as white supremacists through usernames, symbols, and explicitly National Socialist¹⁰ or neo-nazi content, are direct about their desire for a

¹⁰ National socialism as we know it today began as the *völkisch* movement in the late 1800s. It is rooted in a desire for “ethnic purity”, namely from Jews and Black people. National Socialism would go on to be the political ideology of the German Nazi party. It is an ideology that is still followed by many Canadians today, many of whom have now found a home in the freedom movement. Despite its name, National socialism is a right-wing ideology whereas socialism and communism are left-wing ideologies (Stanley 2020, 130).

more white-controlled society. White supremacist content typically involves claiming that non-white people are actively seeking to harm white people.

Some VIFM members are neo-nazi members who regularly share content from white supremacist groups with violent videos of Black people being assaulted or dehumanized. The group titles often have explicitly racist titles like “n**gers aren’t people” and “dumb n**gers”.



Nazi and white supremacist activist groups use the more mainstream “freedom movement” to further their messages of a white-only Canada, often cross posting content to the VIFM Telegram groups. In 2022, a white supremacist group called White Lives Matter¹¹ hung a banner in Campbell River that read “Secure a future for white children” (Kitteringham 2022). White Lives Matter recruitment posters were also found in the Cowichan Valley in October 2022 with QR codes to send people to a white supremacist manifesto that outlines the group’s desire and plan for a white-only world.

¹¹ White Lives Matter (WLM) is a global white supremacist faction that uses slogans, posters, and banner drops to recruit members. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/white-lives-matter>



[White Lives Matter recruitment sticker found in the Cowichan Valley reads “do it right, make it white”]

Another explicitly anti-semitic VIFM Telegram post reads, “Funny how fast everything is changing. Last year everyone was being accused and shamed for being antisemitic when they weren’t. Now they are finding out what it really means and who the Jews really are and what they’ve done to us and are becoming proudly anti semitic.”



[Image from Vancouver Island Telegram group]

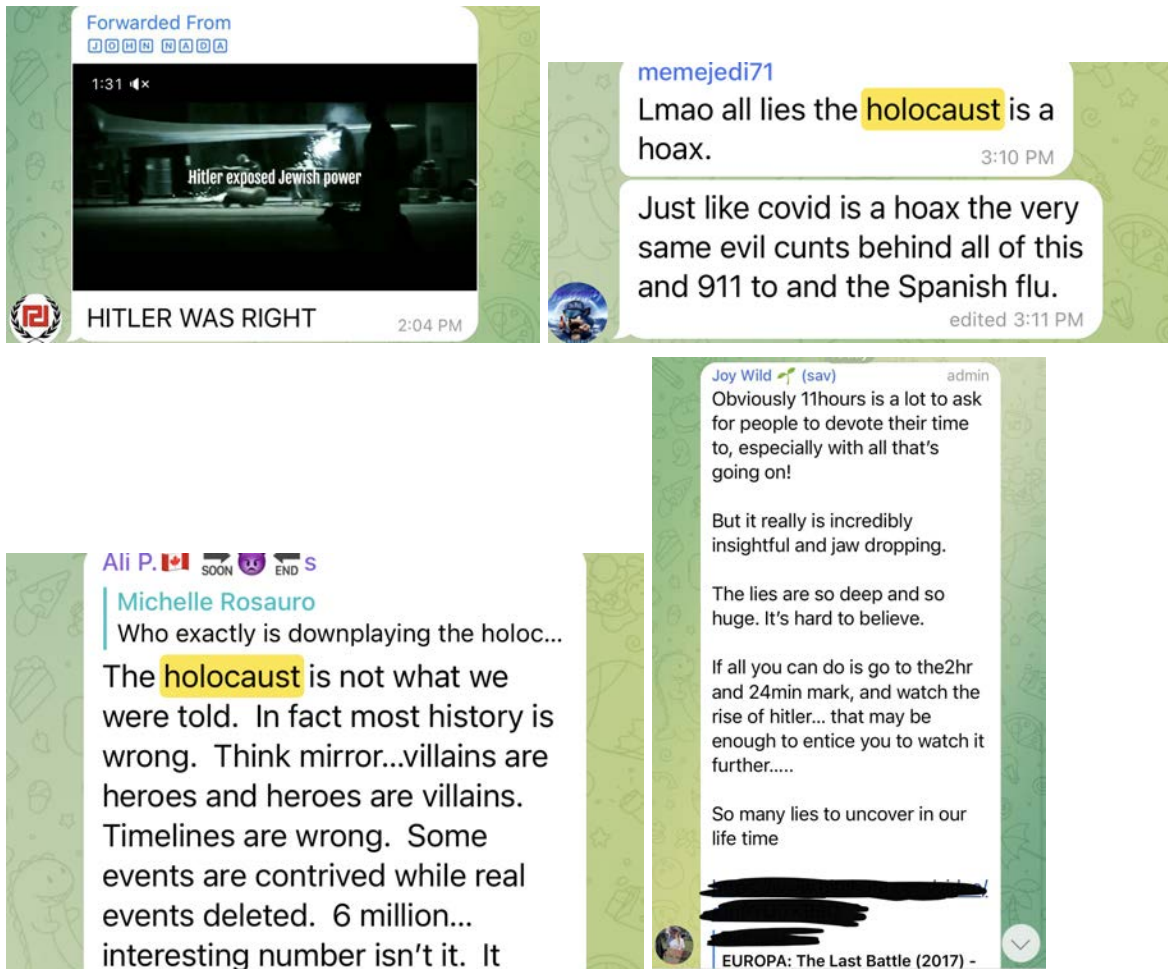
In racist and anti-Semitic content, members of VIFM Telegram groups share conspiracy theories with the purpose of causing mass panic about Jews, non-white immigrants, and Black people. Anti-semitic conspiracy theories are notably common and include obsessing about “Judeo-Bolshevism” and presenting Holocaust denial and pro-Hitler propaganda.

Multiple posts on Vancouver Island Telegram read:

- “HITLER WAS RIGHT”.

- "...the holocaust is a hoax. Just like covid is a hoax the very same evil cunts behind all of this and 911 to and the Spanish flu."
- "The holocaust is not what we were told. In fact most history is wrong. Think mirror...villains are heroes and heroes are villains. Timelines are wrong. Some events are contrived while real events deleted..."

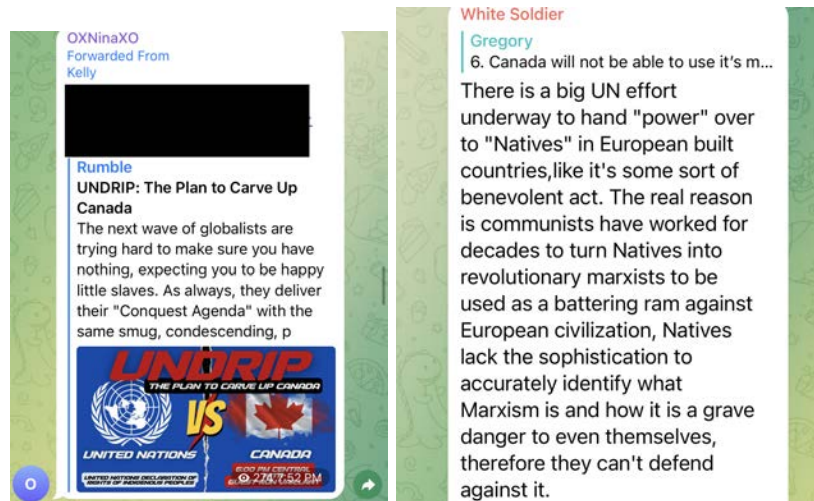
In May 2023, a prominent leader in the Vancouver Island freedom movement promoted the neo-nazi propaganda film series *Europa: The Last Battle*, encouraging all other freedom movement members to watch it. The film is used by prominent contemporary nazi groups to spread white supremacist Holocaust denial ("A Holocaust Denier Is Travelling across Canada Building up the Country's Newest Far-Right Militia Movement" 2022).



[Images from a Vancouver Island Telegram group]

Other members of the VIFM participate in and promote white supremacy in more nuanced ways, such as by rejecting and fear mongering about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The freedom movement has been planting disinformation related to this international treaty, claiming that it will be used to take land away from white Canadians. They go further, fantasizing and warning that anyone around the world could self-identify as Indigenous to acquire land in Canada, while white people would be denied both land and compensation for property transferred to new claimants by government in the process.



[two images from Vancouver Island Telegram groups regarding UNDRIP]

One Telegram post about UNDRIP reads, “The next wave of globalists are trying hard to make sure you have nothing, expecting you to be happy little slaves.”

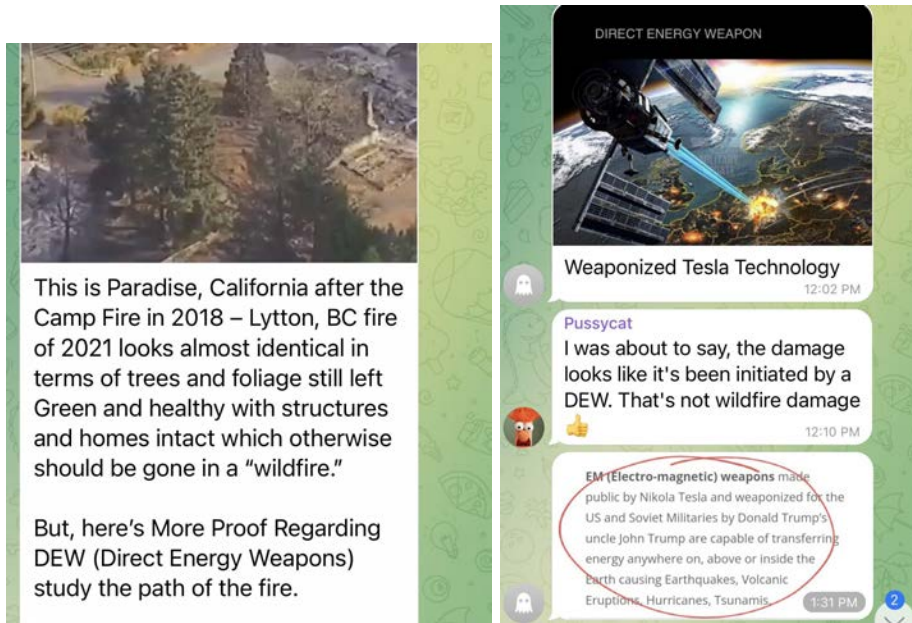
“There is a big UN effort underway to hand “power” over to “Natives”,” another post reads in reference to UNDRIP. It continues: “The real reason is communists have worked for decades to turn Natives into revolutionary marxists to be used as a battering ram against European civilization, Natives lack the sophistication to accurately identify what Marxism is and how it is a grave danger to even themselves...”

VIFM members often leverage Indigenous peoples’ struggles for their own ends. Indigenous resistance is often misused as a platform from which to attack government leaders or validate conspiracy theories— but never from an understanding of or care for Indigenous rights or justice.

For example, a conspiracy theory posted on Facebook claims that the community of Lytton, which was destroyed in 2021 by an out-of-control wildfire following record heat, was actually destroyed by the government using laser technology.

A 2022 Telegram post claims that the remnants of a forest fire in California looks identical to what was left in Lytton, BC after the wildfires. The post goes on to theorize that the Lytton fire was caused by “DEW (Direct Energy Weapons)”. Individuals in the VIFM claimed this

destruction was necessary so the government could rebuild the town using smart technology and digital identification.



[\[images\]](#)

This online conspiracy theory inspired the 2022 “Convoy to Lytton”, which was marketed as an event in support of National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. Photos of the Lytton convoy uploaded to Facebook show freedom movement members holding signs that read “Land of we the people the free,” and “a direct energy weapon destroyed this town”.

 Justin Gordon is with Marius Malciu. ...
Sep 23, 2022 · 🌐

Rumor has it that Lytton is slated to become a smart city. The government is definitely up to something there. Residents and First Nations still displaced by what I consider to be very suspicious fires... zero access permitted. Action plan for answers is underway. Join the convoy on the 30th.



(3) Dehumanization of people is a key method of hate groups

Researchers have shown that fascistic activists strategically stoke and channel people's pre-existing frustrations and fears into full-blown blame and hate, then aim it at people they consider to be outsiders and enemies. Among hate groups, this solidifies into a characteristic tactic: both perceiving and portraying people as less than fully human, as contaminants, and as disposable and deserving of violence or annihilation. Fascist and hate groups have proven that they can build influence and power by cultivating and directing degrading hate to those they see as inferior and as threats. Willingness to advocate, tolerate and even enact violence against perceived enemies is often present. Groups with fascist-tinged hate values usually present themselves as pure, righteous, and both victimized and potentially contaminated by groups they hate and by existing governments (Baker 2023).

As we've seen, VIFM members have been writing about their fear and loathing of:

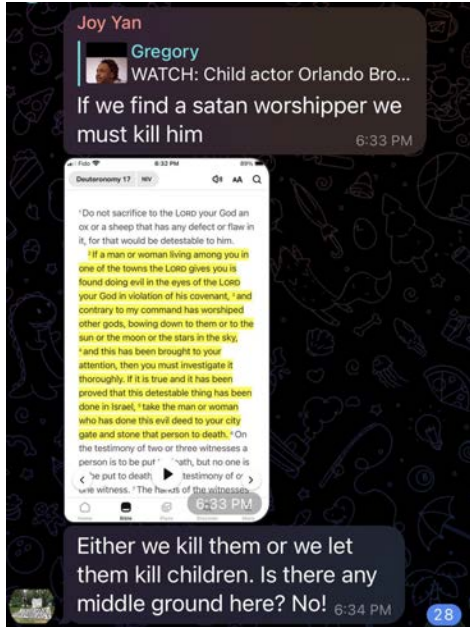
- transgender people and 2SLGBTQIA+ people generally
- non-white people, with a focus on those who are immigrants and not Christian
- Indigenous people, communities, and their rights
- "Globalists", "communists", and "Marxists" (all codewords for Jewish people)
- people who have had vaccines
- citizens and elected officials who pursue political goals that are different from their own

The choice to take this step into dehumanizing people appears commonly in the VIFM's internal communications. Members refer to those they view as opponents as:

- "the wokemob"
- "sheep"
- "brainwashed"
- "evil"
- "villians"
- "demon"
- "pedo"
- "satanic", "satanists", and "satan worshippers"
- "Luciferian"

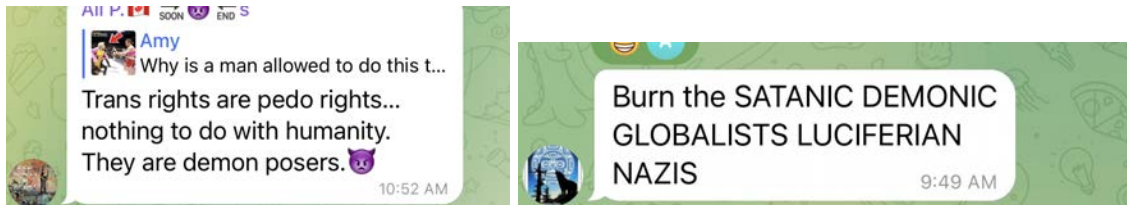
Members are on record using this weaponization of speech to attack the humanity of chosen human targets outside their movement. Some posts contain straightforward incitement of violence against others, straying far from the expression, explanation, or debate of political perspectives. Posts often play on the theme that anyone with differing political views must be killed or imprisoned.

For example, one Vancouver Island Telegram user stated, "If we find a satan worshipper we must kill him... Either we kill them or we let them kill children. Is there any middle ground here? No!"



[image from Vancouver Island Telegram group stating that any Satan worshiper must be killed]

Other members refer to transgender people and globalists as “satanists”. One post reads, “Trans rights are pedo rights... nothing to do with humanity. They are demon posers.” Another says, “Burn the SATANIC DEMONIC GLOBALISTS LUCIFERIAN NAZIS”.



[Images from a Vancouver Island Telegram group and a BC Telegram group]

These posts demonstrate that the VIFM is working from a belief that 2SLGBTQIA+ people, “globalists” and “communists” are satan worshipers who are actively harming children. “Globalist” and “communist” are two well-documented dog whistle terms used to point at Jews (Kaplan Sommer 2018). In light of these posts and members’ reactions to them, it appears it is accepted in the VI freedom movement to talk about the desire to kill other humans on social media. These posts received no pushback from other community members.

Keeping in mind that the goal of this report is to objectively evaluate the Vancouver Island freedom movement for alignment with and adoption of hate speech and tactics, it’s important to highlight the fact that members of this movement spell out their advocacy for incarceration and murder of fellow citizens for the explicit reason that it’s the only way they can see to preserve or “save” the ethnic and/or cultural purity of whites in Canada from the threat of those they dehumanize. Immigrants, Jews, Two-Spirit / LGBTQIA+ people, and those who are vaccinated are openly described as dirty, impure, or dangerous (or all three), and deserving of violent

retribution. Members display a belief that they and their movement represent righteous white people against both non-white people and evil, contaminating white people. This is a textbook demonstration of the use of weaponized hatred and violent speech to build in-group bonds and to focus anxiety and rage on the “other”.

In internal online discussions the term “pureblood” is occasionally used to describe members of the freedom movement who have never been vaccinated. “Pureblood here,” reads one Telegram post, “Not vaccinated from birth and not now...”

Another reads, “... any type of swapping of bodily fluids can cross-contaminate the purebloods.”



In conspicuous contrast to members’ silence in response to fully-articulated anti-semitism, homophobia, and racism, the use of the term “pureblood” receives some pushback— apparently because it alienates other freedom movement members who have had a vaccine. One Telegram post reads, “I personally find [the term “pureblood”] divisive and aggressive... Hold that pride silently and internally but this just divides people...”



[Image from Vancouver Island Freedom Telegram group]

Much of the VIFM's violent speech is aimed at politicians, and this pursuit is not limited to online activities. On January 25, 2023, federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh came to the Cowichan Valley for an event at a local church.

The VIFM recruited people to attend the event to protest against government overreach. Multiple videos from the event show a crowd screaming at local Member of Parliament Alistair MacGregor and Mr. Singh. Videos posted online by freedom movement influencers used racist and violent discourse. For example, one comment states, "We need to give him an active grenade taped to his chin. Handcuffed to a pole."



[Image from a Facebook account associated with a Vancouver Island freedom movement influencer]

Violent opposition aimed at elected officials is not a new escalation for the VIFM. In December 2021, anti-mandate and anti-vaccine activists held a rally at the Victoria legislature. The event featured prominent freedom movement speakers and included a mock execution of identifiable individual elected officials, using effigies (Sajan 2021).

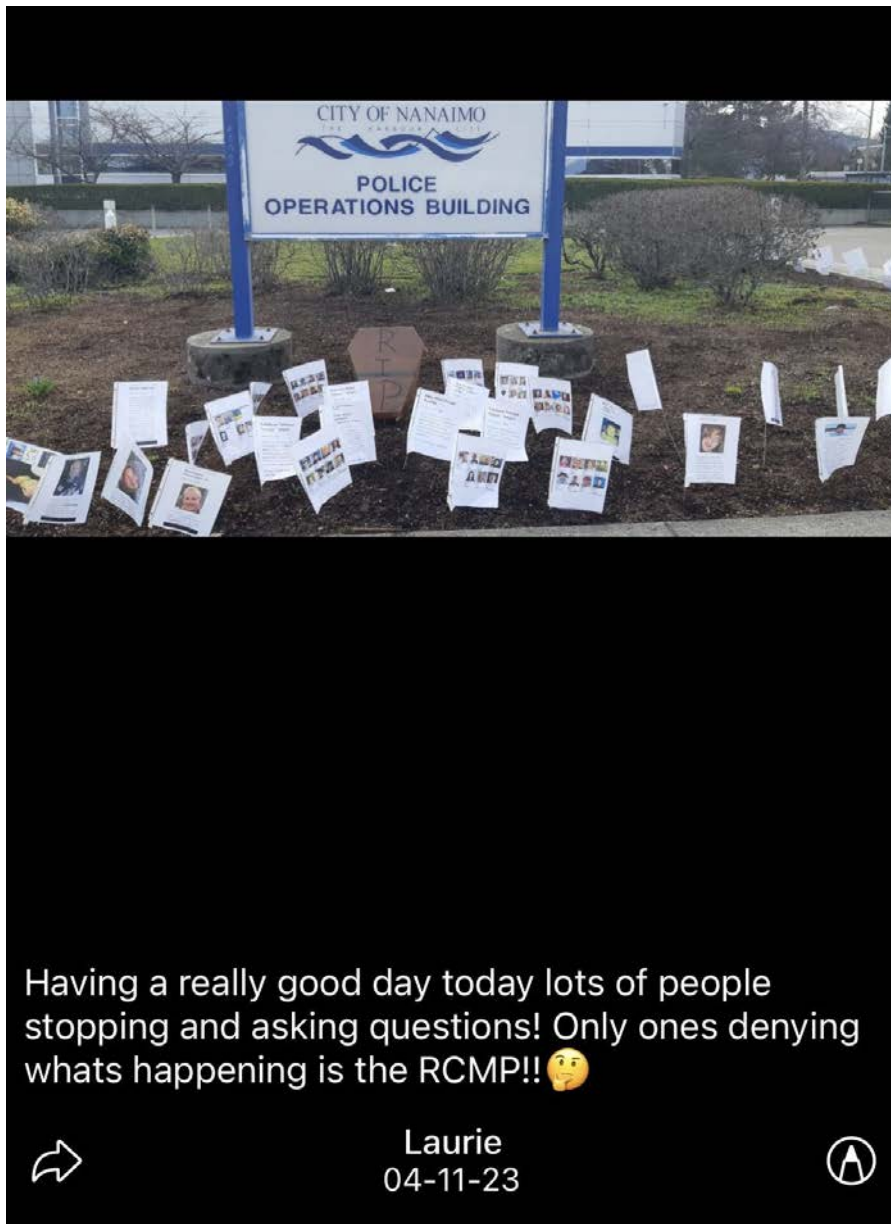


[image of effigy with the face of former BC premier John Horgan]

(4) Conspiracy theories and pseudoscience

Conspiracy theories and pseudoscience shared and discussed in the VIFM include a wide range of concerns: climate heating and science denial, flat earth beliefs, many strains of QAnon content, and various conspiracy theories about vaccines.

In some instances conspiratorial thinking and pseudoscientific beliefs have gone from social media to in-person activism. Freedom movement activists have staged events where they hung many posters outside media offices and police departments. They claimed the people pictured in the posters “died suddenly” from a secret government eugenics program using COVID vaccination. The freedom movement has also demonstrated in front of police and healthcare institutions in Vancouver Island communities to demand responses to their conspiracy theories.



[image of posters placed outside the Nanaimo Police Operations Building, claiming that all of the people on the posters died from vaccines]

Vancouver Island Freedom community denies being a hate movement

“When you do arrive and you wake up to this... we will be here with open arms and we will welcome you... You were a part of the greatest psy-op in this world, ever. And we understand why you are so mad at us. When I look at the news. I get it. I totally get it. But we are here waiting for you and when you wake up, we are here with open arms and all we're gonna say is we got here before you and we love you.” – Excerpt from video of an activist in a Walk the Flag protest in Nanaimo, BC (Freedom Productions: “Freedom Freedom Rally Nanaimo - Bastion St. Bridge” 2022).

Though the freedom movement on Vancouver Island shows several characteristics of hate movements, its members do not acknowledge the discrimination and harm that results from activities within the movement. VIFM activities provide some elements of a caring community—for like-minded individuals only—with “freedom BBQs”, events, speed-dating, and networking opportunities. The VIFM also internally promotes job opportunities and housing rentals for fellow movement members.

While dehumanization of others who are different is frequent in the movement’s underground online discussions, movement members scrub these beliefs and intentions from public-facing messaging, like the quote above.

Unwillingness to call out hate within the movement

Though not every member of the freedom movement may agree with every system of belief that is prevalent within the movement (homophobia/transphobia, white supremacy/racism, religious extremism, dehumanization and violent hate of non-freedom movement people including politicians), our investigation has found virtually no pushback to explicitly hateful activities within the movement.

We have observed members praising Adolf Hitler and the nazi regime, denying the existence of the Holocaust, advocating for the termination of transgender people, demeaning Black, Brown, and Indigenous people and People of Colour, and strongly encouraging violence against politicians.

For white supremacists and Christian nationalists who have been largely denied social tolerance of their views after the fallout of the Second World War, acceptance into the freedom movement is a breakthrough that has emboldened them and brought new legitimization to their opinions. So far, VIFM members have proven themselves unwilling to publicly name, confront, and put an end to the hate speech and actions that are circulating both in their spaces and in public. As long as its membership stands silently by and condones hate by allowing its expression to go unchallenged, hate-motivated convictions, organizing, and actions within the VIFM face no obstacles from within to continuing to gain strength and prominence.

The freedom movement claims to welcome with open arms anyone who becomes “awake”. They claim to be organizing for freedom for all people. However, as their online and in-person activities on Vancouver Island show, in practice they only welcome people who share the same desire for an ultranationalist, heteronormative, Christian, white-controlled society. They do not express any desire to co-exist peacefully with people who are different from them.

Conclusion:

The BC Office of Human Rights Commissioner released an in-depth report (“From hate to hope: Report of the Inquiry into hate in the COVID-19 pandemic”, 2023), addressing the rise of hate speech and actions during the pandemic. The report makes recommendations under three themes: understanding and acknowledging hate; building safety and belonging; and fostering accountability and repairing harm. We agree with this assessment.

VIFM members express acute feelings of disenfranchisement and a sense of risk to their lives. They are afraid that the lives of children are being taken away by malevolent operatives and organizations. Many individuals in the movement have expressed personal worries that there is a real, literal war between good and evil playing out in our communities. Some consider the evil to be the work of Satan, while some consider it to be more political in nature. These feelings of precarity, danger and mistrust have led VIFM members to attempt to relieve their distress by projecting rejection, blame, and hate onto 2SLGBTQIA+ people, Indigenous peoples, Black people, immigrants, Jewish people, Muslim people, politicians, and vaccinated people.

No matter how understandable the roots of people’s alarm and disorientation are in very difficult and uncertain times, hate must never be ignored or accepted in our communities. We must start with acknowledging its existence. We must seek to understand the origins of hate and why it is growing. The Covid pandemic has been a time of additional trauma, suffering and isolation. The difficulties and breakage in our communities and society need to be met and addressed. We must do better and act as citizens to lift up our most vulnerable, to stand beside each other in community, and we must be dedicated to repairing harm.

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