

# National Post

News

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Police seized Mike Rasila's van, arrested him and charged him with six traffic offences, but the incident signaled that the anti-government Freemen on the Land, of which he is a prominent member, had taken root in Canada.

**Stewart Bell, National Post** · Friday, Oct. 29, 2010

**HAMILTON, ONT.** • When Mika Rasila got pulled over by Niagara police in January for driving his white Pontiac Montana without licence plates, he was ready with a defence: he doesn't need plates because he's a Freeman on the Land.

A Freeman on the Land, he explained in a letter he tried to hand the patrol officer through the window, is someone who has revoked his consent to be governed. He has opted out of Canada so the laws don't apply to him.

It didn't work.

Police seized his van, arrested him and charged him with six traffic offences, but the incident signaled that the anti-government Freemen on the Land, of which Mr. Rasila is a prominent member, had taken root in Canada.

**Watch the videos from this story [here](#).**

Across the country, police and officials have been having similar run-ins with "freemen," also known as "sovereign citizens," members of a radical movement that does not recognize government authority and consequently refuses to licence their cars, carry government ID or obey police.

"We have thousands of members now," said Mr. Rasila, who writes on the [Freemen of Canada Facebook page](#), which has over 2,000 members. "We have meetings, we're fairly organized. They're very casual, usually just in someone's living room or we'll rent a hall."

Canada's freemen are a loose collection of true believers, ranging from tax protesters to 9/11 conspiracists to fathers whose children have been apprehended by child welfare agencies. What unites them is their dislike of government.

Self-declared defenders of individual freedom, they are anti-government extremists in the sense that, rather than opposing specific policies, they deny government has any legitimacy at all and want to be left alone to live according to their own rules.

Police aren't sure what to make of the freemen. Are they harmless fanatics or an emerging domestic extremist group? Although police in Ontario say it's too soon to tell, they are concerned about the potential for violence and have begun sharing information and circulating intelligence reports on the subject.

"It's something that we know about, it's something that we need to know about and it's something we need to monitor to a degree," said Sergeant Brian Ritchie of the Hamilton Police Service hate crimes unit.

Who are Canada's 'freemen'?

A freeman is scheduled to appear in court in Toronto in March, but most incidents have been in smaller southern Ontario cities like London and Guelph, as well as in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia.

“Basically what we’re doing is we’re teaching,” Mr. Rasila said. “We’re not here to recruit people, we’re just educating.” That teaching takes place at small seminars and on the Internet. It promotes an ideology that sounds a lot like conspiracy theory.

Over the past century, the freemen claim, Canada went bankrupt and was taken over by a corporation. Ever since, the government has had no authority to make laws — but it doesn’t want you to know that. “Canada’s been co-opted by criminals,” said Mr. Rasila.

The freemen are not openly racist, although their ideology rests partly on the claim, pervasive in the racist right, that Jews secretly control the world through banking and media ownership.

“You’ve got something that’s a little bit more subtle,” said Rick Eaton, a senior researcher at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in California. “Even though a lot of these groups may be associated with hate groups, they’re very careful.”

Freemen claim Canadians are enslaved by government encroachment but that they know the remedy: anyone can simply opt-out of Canada by severing their “contract” with the government and living instead according to a “common law” enforced by other freemen.

“We have our own police force, we have our own insurance company,” Mr. Rasila said. “But what we don’t have is the compliance of the government, so what they’re doing is they’re sending out their mercenary thugs and their criminal judges.”

Mr. Rasila described his activities as “peaceful non-compliance.” On the Internet, however, he doesn’t always sound so peaceful. A letter he posted on-line warned that “there is in fact a war coming and we the people have had enough.”

A YouTube video shows him throwing knives at a painted gunman while captions advise to “be prepared” because the government has been “co-opted by criminals.” Another post encourages unlicensed gun ownership.

He also claims affiliations with U.S. militias and right wing groups like the Oath Keepers. “It is basically us against the government now,” he said. “If we don’t rein them in then they are just going to take over every possible freedom that we have ... I mean if it comes down to defence, we are willing to defend ourselves.”

Asked if he was peaceful, he responded, “I am, yes. But I will defend myself if I have to. I mean, what are we going to do, allow these people to just throw us around? It’s crazy. So we all have to be prepared. We’re not slaves. We are not subject to these laws. We are subject to the laws of nature and the laws of our creator and that’s it.”

How far would he go?

“As far as I’d have to go. Would you allow yourself to be thrown into a cell and be tazed six times when you know this is what happens? Would you?”

“I wouldn’t.”

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Canada’s new radical right is appearing as groups with an almost identical platform are exploding south of the border. American sovereign citizens groups emerged in the 1970s as an outgrowth of the tax protest movement.

Some turned violent. The 1995 Oklahoma City bomber, Terry Nichols, was a member of the “sovereign citizen” movement. In 1996, an armed standoff between the Freemen of Montana and federal authorities lasted 81 days.

Experts said the movement is booming again, fueled by the economic crash, demographic changes symbolized by the election of President Barack Obama and incitement by political and media figures.

“It’s a kind of perfect storm of factors that are driving the continued growth of radical right wing groups, and the freemen or sovereign citizens are very much a part of that,” said Mark Potok, director of the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center in Alabama.

For his part, Mr. Rasila, a 44-year-old self-employed contractor originally from Windsor, said he was first exposed to these ideas on the Internet. Three to four years ago, he said, he decided to live as a Freeman on the Land.

He stopped registering his van, voided his government ID and cut himself off from benefits such as welfare and health insurance. By doing so, he believes he has withdrawn his consent to be governed.

“Nobody can tell you what to do as an adult without your express consent or permission,” he said. “This is why you need to void all your identification, void all your contracts and just live your life with decency.”

The freemen should concern Canadians, Mr. Potok said. “The thing to realize is that the conspiracy theories that animate many of these people seem absurd to most thinking people and it is hard to imagine them motivating people to violence.

Who are Canada's 'freemen'?

“But the fact is, we have seen time and time again that a certain percentage of the people that start to subscribe to these theories will end up acting out in criminal violence, sometimes as extreme as murdering police officers.”

On May 20, two West Memphis, Ark., police officers were gunned down with an AK-47 after they pulled over a pair of hardcore “sovereign citizens,” Jerry Kane and his 16-year-old son Joe, for what was supposed to have been a routine traffic stop.

There has been no major freemen violence in Canada but police are taking the threat seriously and have been educating frontline officers about the issue. Sgt. Ritchie said while at the moment freemen are mainly an officer safety issue, there could also be long-term law enforcement challenges.

For example, should freemen follow through with their vow to set up their own police and courts, to make arrests and impose sentences, they could be considered a criminal organization. Likewise, those that claim in seminars that Canadians don't need to pay taxes or debts might be guilty of counseling fraud.

He said nobody should be fooled by freemen beliefs. “Sometimes you wonder if we're walking on the same planet, have they gone off the edge,” he said. “The Criminal Code is for all Canadians, and the emphasis is on all. They can't step outside the law, because the law applies to them. If the law is broken, then that will be dealt with under the law.”

So far, the freemen are mostly a nuisance to traffic police and courts. They will put phony plates on their cars that read FREEMAN and argue endlessly with police when they get pulled over.

One of their tactics is to modify their names. Mr. Rasila now calls himself Mika of the family Rasila. Freemen do that to distinguish themselves from their “strawman” — the version of themselves recorded in government records.

If they get arrested, they engage in what has been termed “paper terrorism” — clogging the courts with seemingly incoherent documents that use the quasi-legal jargon recommended by the movement's leaders.

“It's growing almost exponentially,” said Derek Hill, a Freeman on the Land from Windsor, “because people are beginning to realize how badly they've been conned, quote-unquote, by the government and by the courts.

“They don't like it. They're fed up with the government lying to them. They're fed up with increasing taxes, police brutality, police state, economic downturn, various reasons, which is very similar to what the U.S.A. is experiencing right now.”

Mr. Hill, 23, said he was saddled with \$800 a month student debt payments when he went searching on the Internet for a solution and found the lectures of Freeman on the Land guru Robert-Arthur:Menard (note the added colon).

A former Toronto street comic, Mr. Menard wants to build a Freeman Society of Canada with its own justice system and police force but Mr. Hill dismissed comparisons to U.S. militias.

“Some people have guns because they fear for their lives, because when you're doing these things and you lawfully win, that doesn't sit easy with cops,” he said.

“And I've heard stories that cops actually go in and physically assault them. So some people had to buy guns in order to secure their personal safety. But I personally don't believe in guns.”

—

A week before, he was to appear in court in St. Catharines, Ont., on Oct. 19 to face charges stemming from his arrest in January, Mr. Rasila wrote a letter and posted it on his Facebook page.

It called the officer who pulled him over a “mercenary employee of the corporation of Canada” and said Mr. Rasila had cancelled his “contract” with Canada.

“As is with all Freemen in the freemen society of Canada we simply want to be left alone without interference from the state,” it read. “We will not consent to be governed by you.”

Mr. Rasila never showed up in court but the case went ahead without him. He was convicted on three counts — driving without valid plates, driving with a suspended licence and driving while using an electronic device (the video camera he used to record his arrest).

He was fined \$1,250 but he says he won't pay it.

“Never, absolutely not,” he said. “Would you pay a ransom demand if you didn't have to?” He called it extortion, since the police are still holding his van and the carpentry tools inside.

He said he was moving west.

“I'm just going to continue living my life peacefully,” he said, “and I'm going to continue to educate people.”

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**THECOMMUNIST100**

Score: -32

[Report Abuse](#)

3:24 PM on October 29, 2010

We need communism and we need it now, this is what capitalism supports. Pff, why dont you go up to a police man, say to his face "im a communist" and do absolutely nothing else, and then see how he reacts. it'll go one way, it begins with a batong, and ends with metal bars. You call that freedom of speech ? HAH! who ever calls that freedom of speech is mental. PS. i have freedom of speech, so i can post this, no ? "smirks".

[7 replies](#)

**NO ROSE COLOURED GLASSES**

Score: 5

[Report Abuse](#)

3:28 PM on October 29, 2010

No problem. As they do not believe in government they should not have access to any of the services the government provides and runs. Electricity, roads, health care, police protection, etc. They agree to that, then let them live free from taxes and other regulations.

[7 replies](#)

**DGC58**

Score: 8

[Report Abuse](#)

3:31 PM on October 29, 2010

stay off our roads, get sick? stay out of our hospitals, don't go to our schools....we'll see how well you can live "freemen" This is disgusting and an indication of nothing other than how lazy and irresponsible some can be, society works when we all contribute what ever we can!

[5 replies](#)

**2RJ**

Score: 6

[Report Abuse](#)

3:39 PM on October 29, 2010

There is always a small grain of truth in any of these fringe groups. The fact is government (nanny state) is becoming pervasive as they say. How you deal with it is the issue. Some lie down and accept it, some fight it in politics, some go over the edge and rebel it. I think we all know government is too much a part of our lives today and it's not like the government is backing off. Maybe we need to think more about that. Freedom is never free.

[3 replies](#)

**IVANHOE5**

Score: 4

[Report Abuse](#)

3:46 PM on October 29, 2010

Such a noble thought to be free. Something most of us have given up long ago as we become slaves to materialism tax and government agendas. The Natives were free to a large extent when the Europeans showed up, and to a large extent many of the early Europeans enjoyed freedoms that we can only imagine. Even in my lifetime, I have seen freedoms that we took for granted extinguished one at a time by government. As for freedom most urbanites have no idea what it is, they cannot even dream it any more.

[3 replies](#)

**ANONYMOUS66**

Score: 7

[Report Abuse](#)

3:50 PM on October 29, 2010

Then you can build a home-made dirgible to get around rather than drive on taxpayer-financed roads.

This isn't an idealist. This is a freeloader who wants all the benefits of socialized living without any of the costs or rules.

[9 replies](#)

**ANONYMOUS66**

Score: 15

[Report Abuse](#)

3:54 PM on October 29, 2010

As for the one who signed on to get out of his \$800 a month student loans ... you knew what you were doing when you borrowed someone else' money. As far as I'm concerned, premeditated waffling like that merits either jail time for defrauding the lender.

[7 replies](#)

**DAVE-O**

Score: -3

[Report Abuse](#)

4:03 PM on October 29, 2010

Bless the Cops the things they have to put up with jeepers and as a 9/11 truther don't lump us in with these nut jobs and one more thing the Oath Takers are not strictly right wing a lot of them are your common everyday cop and soldier, go on you tube you will see them fighting in the middle east for their country America.

[2 replies](#)

POLYMATH

Score: 8

Report Abuse

4:05 PM on October 29, 2010

@TheCommunist100, I'm pretty sure if I went up to a policeman and said to his face, "I'm a Communist," he'd either shrug, or think I'm a nutcase who likes to go around with a smug sense of satisfaction and say random, idiotic things to policemen in a challenging tone.

These nut jobs like to feel important and in control - like they have impact, and that their lives actually mean something. Some telltale signs of this infantile fanaticism include not knowing how to spell the word "baton," thinking being a communist is still different and confrontational, and throwing around terms like 'freedom of speech' and their 'right' to it, despite the fact Canadians only have freedom of expression, not the American-style no-holds-barred freedom of speech.

3 replies

PATCHES09

Score: 8

Report Abuse

4:19 PM on October 29, 2010

TO THECOMMUNIST100: Please! You cannot possibly have posted this believing what you wrote. Now on the other hand if you walked up to a police officer in Canada and said it in an overly-aggressive manner, and you were verbally abuse, that might get their attention. Welcome to Canada.

MADIC

Score: -5

Report Abuse

4:32 PM on October 29, 2010

People like Mr Rasila should carefully examine what he is doing. He tries to have all the benefits of a civilized society, while assuming none of the responsibilities. And he has the nerve to complain about how oppressive the government has become? In comparison to what? Perhaps, he and the likes of him should make a short trip to the past and consider how much freedoms and responsibilities people had under feudal lords, monarchies, and theocracies. He's not someone, who likes freedom, he is a spoiled, selfish fool.

8 replies

PAULCERAR

Score: 9

Report Abuse

4:35 PM on October 29, 2010

Do these "Freemen" use Canadian money?

6 replies

MIKAOTFRASILA

Score: 0

Report Abuse

4:58 PM on October 29, 2010

So if anyone has any questions about how you have come to be enslaved by the government have at it . I am here to answer any questions you might have since this article left it all a bit sketchy . First of all we are fighting for you human rights and People . You need to know the difference . I'm sure you are afraid of the government and their policy officers because they have guns and very little knowledge of the true law ... The common law . They only know how to steal from you .

5 replies

XIVERO

Score: 7

Report Abuse

5:00 PM on October 29, 2010

So you're calling these groups "hard right?" Groups that consist of 9/11 conspiracy theorists who think that the government has been taken over by corporate interests? Reducing political thought to a one dimensional left-right divide does lead to some interesting terminology.

3 replies

BUCK3099 FUJIKATS

Score: 8

Score: 2

Report Abuse

Rep

5:04 PM on October 29, 2010

Canada is one of the most corrupt and of the most corrupt nations in the world. We all might feel as they do sometimes about taxes. Do our unaccountable judges and politicians, really think that and the rest of the world are the majority of people are "decent" people and that's why groups like this never win. You have no free speech in Canada! If you're a Christian or Jew... you have no right of lawful assembly in Canada! These 'Freemen' are people who have simply had enough!

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 2 replies

**BOWSERTHEBROWSER**

Score: 4

[Report Abuse](#)

5:19 PM on October 29, 2010

REVOLT!

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