

## Supporting Our Troops...by Daniel Peters

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, July 18, 2006

<http://politicsrespun.org/2006/07/supporting-our-troops/>

Not long ago, I was at the National Defence HQ in Ottawa on business. Considering where I was, and given Canada's role in the current conflict in Afghanistan (not to mention our unofficial and mostly unacknowledged role in Iraq), I should not have been surprised to see the banners proclaiming, "We Support Our Troops." Yet I was taken aback.

Afterwards, I started noticing the proliferation of car magnets that echo that sentiment of "support". And now we hear rumblings of encouragement to wear something red on Fridays, as a sign of "support" for the troops. Again, I find this trend disturbing.

What, you may ask, is the problem with declaring support for our troops? Indeed, whatever my misgivings about the Afghanistan mission, I have little doubt of the courage and dedication of our military personnel there, nor of the sincerity (for the most part) of their desire to bring about a peaceful and stable democracy, in a land where people have suffered for far too long, either under oppressive regimes or through periods of dangerous chaos.

I have plenty of respect for the men and women of the Canadian Forces. That isn't the problem.

But what does it mean to "support" our troops?

Our taxpayers support our troops in a real and substantial way regardless of their political opinions. (Arguably not enough, though that is a different question.) But I don't think the banners are talking about material support. Typically, governments do not raise banners to remind people of where their tax dollars are going. (Maybe they should, but again, that's a different question.) Nor do taxpayers attach messages to their cars to remind people of where their tax dollars are going, unless they are complaining about something.

No, the banners I saw at NDHQ show that we are being encouraged, by our government, to adopt a certain attitude. The car magnets are signs of success. But what, specifically, is the attitude being promoted here? Furthermore, why is the promotion of that attitude (whatever it may be) being expressed in those exact words?

We don't have far to look. We only need to go back to 2003, when the US and the UK attacked Iraq.

There was (and is) debate over that war, of course. And wherever there is debate, there is propaganda: Words are creatively manipulated with the object of touching our emotions directly while bypassing rational thought. So in the US, at least, the phrase *we support our troops* was somehow recast as a shorthand for *we support the mission on which our troops are being sent*. And presto! Those who did not support the war were tainted with the stigma of failing to respect those patriots who put their lives on the line to serve their country. One can dispute the applicability of the phrase *to serve their country*, of

course, but such nuances are lost on those who buy into patriotic propaganda. And that is precisely the point.

Now the phrase *we support out troops* has migrated into Canada, bringing its mind-virus with it. The idea, apparently, is to suppress dissent against our government's policy on Afghanistan by smearing such dissent as a personal affront to the honour of our men and women in uniform.

Fortunately for Canada, the efficacy of patriotism as a trigger of mental shutdown is not as great here as it is in the US. But even so, it is worthwhile to pause and untangle this Orwellian madness.

Agreeing with a military adventure means agreeing to put the troops in harm's way. Surely, any meaningful "support" for our troops should not automatically mean that we want to put them in danger every time our government is inclined to do so! To the contrary: We can show support for our troops by carefully, soberly considering the pros and cons of any mission on which they are sent. Sometimes, sober consideration leads to opposition. True support for the troops is therefore perfectly compatible with opposition to their mission, even if the troops themselves are sold on that mission.

This conclusion is very simple and straightforward, yet I wonder whether the Harper government understands it. If they do, then their importation of a Bushite mind-virus into Canada is apparently deliberate, and is therefore all the more appalling – regardless of what merit there may be in their Afghanistan policy.

Am I just being paranoid? If so, then maybe those who love to proclaim their "support for the troops" can spell out for me what they mean by it. I'm listening.