

Canadian PM proclaims indigenous “barricades must now come down”

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At a press conference yesterday afternoon, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau demanded that the indigenous blockades that have paralyzed Canada’s rail system for the past two weeks “must now come down.”

By ordering the RCMP, Ontario Provincial Police and Quebec Provincial Police to forcibly remove the barricades, the Liberal Prime Minister is carrying out the dictates of big business, which has lobbied with increasing frenzy over the past two weeks for the protests to be suppressed.

Within minutes of Trudeau concluding his remarks, the Quebec Provincial Police moved in to demolish a blockade set up in St. Lambert, south of Montreal. The right-wing populist Quebec Premier, Francois Legault had been urging Trudeau for days to order coordinated cross-Canada police action to end the blockades.

Trudeau’s press conference was held as the ruling-class clamor for a forcible end to the two-week campaign of solidarity protests in support of the Wet’suwet’en hereditary chief-led campaign against the Coastal Gas Link (CGL) pipeline reached a fever pitch.

On February 6 and 7, armed RCMP officers carried out a violent assault on a blockade of a remote northern-eastern British Columbia road that had been set up by Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs to protest CGL’s plans to traverse their traditional lands. After the RCMP detained around two dozen Wet’suwet’en activists, solidarity blockades of rail lines sprang up at multiple points across the country, including in Ontario and Quebec.

Although Trudeau has repeatedly sought to strike a conciliatory pose over the past two weeks, including insisting he desired a “peaceful” solution, his message yesterday could not have been clearer. “The injunctions must be obeyed, and the law must be upheld,” he declared at the press conference, which followed a meeting of the secretive Incident Response Group—a body made up of cabinet members and senior civil servants that meets during a “national crisis.”

The invocation of the “rule of law” by Trudeau and all those within the business and political elite who have

demanded he unleash police on the protesters is a hypocritical sham. Over several centuries, Canada’s ruling elite has systematically ignored, manipulated, and rewritten the law to seize native land and deny indigenous people basic rights. Moreover, the canard of upholding the “rule of law” is routinely invoked by governments of all political stripes to justify the criminalization of workers’ strikes.

Even as Trudeau publicly sanctioned a police assault on the blockades, he cynically sought to absolve his government of all blame for a decision that could easily result in bloody violence or worse, as shown by the lethal outcome of the Oka and Ipperwash standoffs during the 1990s. “Every attempt at dialogue has been made,” he arrogantly declared, before informing “indigenous leadership” that “the onus is on them.”

Trudeau’s demand for state repression fully vindicates the repeated warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* since the outset of the protests. As we wrote on February 19, “The government’s convening of the IRG—effectively a declaration that the blockades constitute a ‘national crisis’—and its repeated pledges to uphold the ‘rule of law’ are unmistakable signs it is preparing state violence if the native protesters cannot be persuaded to dismantle their barricades” (See: “Behind promises of dialogue, Canadian government prepares state assault on Native protests”).

Corporate Canada made clear over recent days that it would no longer tolerate the protests. A joint open letter from the heads of the Business Council of Canada, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters denounced the protests as “illegal disruptions” and warned that the “damage inflicted on the Canadian economy and on the welfare of all our citizens mounts with each hour.”

In his remarks Friday, Trudeau made clear that he agrees with the business leaders’ contention that the protests were illegitimate. He claimed that there are two kinds of protests: those motivated by genuine “historical wrongs” that seek to promote “reconciliation” between the Native people and Canada; and those, in what was an unmistakable reference to

the blockades, launched by people who “attach themselves” to an issue “to advance a particular point of view.”

In other words, the Liberal government is prepared to tolerate activities that comply with its phony “reconciliation” agenda, which is aimed at cultivating a tiny privileged elite within the native population to provide the Canadian bourgeoisie with “social license” for major energy and natural resources projects. However, protests that challenge the immediate core economic interests of Canadian capitalism will be dealt with ruthlessly.

The Trudeau government’s ordering of state repression will strengthen the most reactionary right-wing political forces, who have whipped up a toxic political climate over recent days against the protests.

On Tuesday, Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer denounced the “illegal actions” of “radical activists,” and urged Trudeau to take swift action to enforce “the rule of law.” He also cynically postured as a defender of working people, denouncing Trudeau for failing to act as CN Rail and CP Rail issued temporary lay-offs to their employees. This fraudulent campaign was amplified by the corporate media, which chose to ignore the inconvenient fact that CN has been laying off workers since last year.

Erin O’Toole, one of the leading candidates to replace Scheer in the Tories’ upcoming leadership contest, declared that as Prime Minister, he would enact legislation criminalizing and imposing harsh punishment for the blockading of “critical national infrastructure.” Such legislation, he emphasized, would enable police to dismantle blockades without having to obtain a court injunction.

Marilyn Gladu, another leadership candidate, stated that the military should be called out if Trudeau feared that the police were incapable of removing the blockades.

Arguably the most politically significant intervention was that of fellow Tory leadership candidate Peter McKay, who explicitly praised the vigilante actions of United We Roll—a far-right group of independent truckers in Alberta. United We Roll responded Wednesday to a small solidarity blockade in the west of Edmonton by tearing it down and transporting the barricades away in a truck. “Glad to see a couple Albertans with a pickup truck can do more for our economy in an afternoon than Justin Trudeau could do in four years,” quipped McKay on Twitter. After a public backlash, he deleted the tweet. However yesterday, he made clear that his remark had been well considered when he stated that the United We Roll activists were “good Samaritans.”

In truth, the group, which organized a convoy from Alberta to Ottawa last year to protest what it perceived as an over-regulation of the oil and gas sector, is a haven for racist and outright fascist forces. The convoy’s protests on

Parliament Hill in February 2019 were dominated by far-right insignia and included demands for an end to immigration to Canada. The movement has been lauded by the right-wing extremist Rebel Media website, which is notorious for its support of British fascist Tommy Robinson.

United We Roll felt able to take the law into its own hands because it has been actively promoted by sections of the Canadian ruling elite. Scheer addressed the group’s protest rally in Ottawa last year. In the course of the ongoing lockout of 750 workers at the Federated Cooperatives Ltd. oil refinery in Saskatchewan, United We Roll activists, openly incited by FCL chief executive Scott Banda and right-wing Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe, broke through a secondary picket line established by workers affiliated with Unifor at an FCL site in Alberta.

United We Roll leaders are well aware of the part that sections of the ruling elite are encouraging them to play in the suppression of popular opposition, whatever form it may take. Leader Glen Carritt drew a direct parallel between the breaching of the FCL picket line and the dismantling of the Edmonton blockade, warning ominously, “Alberta is not going to stand for this. We had the same thing down in Carseland with the UNIFOR blockade and we’re going to continue to fight.”

Predictably, the official “left” wing of Canada’s ruling elite has closed ranks around the suppression of the protests. The New Democrats, which lead a minority government in BC supported by the Greens, endorsed the initial RCMP crackdown on the Wet’suwet’en camp as an operation aimed at upholding “the rule of law.” Trudeau made specific reference to NDP Premier John Horgan in his press conference Friday, remarking on the close contact he had maintained with his NDP colleague since the blockades began. For his part, NDP federal leader Jagmeet Singh offered “progressive” cover to Trudeau’s preparations for the violent crackdown on the blockades by attending a closed-door meeting with the Prime Minister Tuesday to discuss how the protests could be ended.



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