Far-right protests target Trudeau's Canadian election rallies

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8 September 2021

Far-right protesters threw gravel and small rocks at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at an election campaign stop Monday in the southwestern Ontario city of London. Since August 27, when Trudeau was forced to cancel a campaign appearance in Bolton, Ontario, after a virulent right-wing mob threatened him with acts of violence, the Liberal leader's campaign appearances have been dogged by anti-vaxx, anti-mask protesters and other far-right elements.

Typically the protests have included no more than a few dozen right-wing extremists. Some have carried signs accusing Trudeau of "treason" and "communism" or chanted "Lock him up!," a slogan popularized by supporters of Donald Trump, the fascistic former US president.

Media observers agree the protests mark something new in Canadian politics. "In two decades covering federal politics, I have never seen the kind of frenzied contempt directed at a politician as that aimed at Justin Trudeau at campaign events in Ontario on Friday," wrote John Iveson, a right-wing *National Post* columnist who can hardly be accused of exaggerated sympathy for Trudeau, following the cancelled Bolton rally. "There's no doubt that had the 200 or so protesters in Bolton, a town 50 kilometres northwest of Toronto, been able to get their hands on the Liberal leader, they would have torn him limb from limb, such was the manic rage."

On September 1, five days after the Bolton events, unruly protests denouncing COVID-19 vaccines and all public health measures to counter the deadly virus were held outside hospitals in more than a dozen cities across Canada. Led and dominated by the far-right, the protests turned violent in British Columbia, where a health care worker was assaulted.

The leaders of all five parties with representation in the last parliament have rushed to condemn far-right violence and tout their "democratic" bonafides. Conservative leader Erin O'Toole had to explicitly distance his party from the Bolton protest, many of whose participants wore pro-Conservative Party T-shirts, and announce that party volunteers who had joined the anti-Trudeau-rally would be excluded from future campaign activities.

The key question these events raise for working people is how is it that far-right forces, mobilized by the likes of the fascist Proud Boys, *La Meute*, and the III Percenters and without broad popular support, can be playing such a prominent role in a Canadian election. The answer to this question is two-fold. Firstly, the far-right has been emboldened by the increasing support it and its chauvinist, anti-social, and authoritarian views are receiving in Canada and internationally from sections of the ruling class, its political representatives, and the military-security apparatus. Secondly, as the result of the systematic decades-long suppression of the class struggle by the trade unions and the social-democratic NDP politicians, the working class has been prevented from politically asserting itself through mass struggle and advancing its own program to answer the deepening capitalist crisis—including the ruling class' ruinous "profits before lives" pandemic policy.

The responsibility of the political establishment

No politically literate worker can take O'Toole's attempts to distance the Conservatives from the far-right protests seriously. Canada's Conservatives, like their US Republican and British Conservative allies, have long-established and burgeoning ties to the social conservative and libertarian right. Broad sections of the Conservative Party were Trump enthusiasts. Ontario Premier Doug Ford styled himself as the Trump of the North during his 2018 provincial election campaign, and sections of the party explicitly endorsed Trump's economic nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism.

A former minister in Stephen Harper's government of austerity, war and reaction, O'Toole won the Conservative leadership by mobilizing the anti-abortion, anti-gay religious right-wing of the party and deriding his chief opponent, Harper's former Defence and Foreign Minister, Peter McKay, as a closet Liberal. During the current election, O'Toole and his Conservatives have made a calculated appeal to the anti-vaxx movement.

Maxime Bernier, who now heads the People's Party of Canada, which openly patterns itself after Alterative for Germany (AFD) and other European neo-fascist parties, came within a hair's breadth of winning the Conservative Party leadership in 2017. After leading every preceding round of voting, Bernier lost the race for party leader to Andrew Scheer, himself a devotee of the far-right Catholic group, the Opus Dei, on the 14th ballot. People's Party activists have appeared prominently at the anti-Trudeau protests.

Conrad Black, the failed media mogul, published a column in his former Canadian flagship, the *National Post*, last Saturday that endorsed both O'Toole and Bernier under the title "Erin O'Toole's platform is imaginative, but Maxime Bernier is the most impressive leader."

Trudeau has sought to turn the far-right protests to his political advantage by painting his party and government as "democratic" bulwarks. Nothing could be further from the truth. Like the "progressive" parties of government of the other imperialist powers, Canada's Liberals long ago abandoned any program of social reform. Instead, they have provided austerity to working people and massive tax cuts to big business and the rich, pursued rearmament, aggression and war in the name of "human rights," and instituted sweeping attacks on democratic rights that lay the groundwork for authoritarian rule. The Trudeau Liberal government has further expanded the draconian powers of the national-security apparatus, routinely criminalizes worker struggles, and has developed contingency plans to deploy the military against native protests.

Trudeau, especially when Trump occupied the White House, has touted the "liberal," "democrats" French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel as his closest international allies. Macron has stoked Islamophobia, connived with Marine Le Pen's fascist Rassemblement National, and ordered the police and military to brutally repress the Yellow Vest protests against social inequality. Merkel's Grand

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Coalition facilitated the emergence of the fascist Alternative for Germany as the official opposition in parliament, and has adopted its key policies on refugees and the coronavirus pandemic.

The truest measure of Trudeau's claims to be a staunch defender of democracy is the close working relationship his government had with the far-right Trump administration throughout its four years in office. With the full-throated backing of Canada's ruling elite, the Liberal government bent over backwards to accommodate itself to Trump, so as to preserve and expand the Canada-US economic and military-security partnership. This included intimate collaboration with the fascistic US Immigration and Customs Enforcement to round up and deport immigrants from war-torn countries and impoverished parts of Latin America. It also involved the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in line with Trump's strategy of making it a more explicit US-led economic bloc to wage trade and strategic conflict with China and Russia.

For a half-year, beginning with Trump's June 1, 2020 attempt to invoke the Insurrection Act to deploy the military to crush mass protests against police violence, Trudeau and the Canadian government remained conspicuously silent about Trump's very public attempts to subvert the American constitution and establish a presidential dictatorship. After the events of January 6, 2021, when a fascist mob stormed the US Capitol in a bid to stop the certification of Biden as president and enable Trump to hold onto power, Trudeau and the Liberal government followed the example of the Democrats in the US by downplaying the coup attempt, and covering up the role substantial sections of the Republican Party and military-security apparatus played in facilitating and organizing it.

For like reasons—that is out of fear that the exposure of the growth of the far right within the putrefying institutions of capitalist democracy would galvanize working class opposition— Trudeau, his government and the corporate media were at pains to trivialize military reservist Corey Hurren's July 2020 attempt to assassinate the prime minister. Although there is strong evidence of significant support for, and an active far-right presence within the Canadian military, the political establishment united to bury the affair.

In pursuit of Canada's predatory global interests, Ottawa and the Canadian Armed Forces, under Liberal and Conservative governments alike, routinely collaborate with far-right forces. This was true in 2004, when Canadian imperialism collaborated with the remnants of the Tonton Macoutes in ousting Haiti's democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide; and remains true in Ukraine where Canada helped sponsor a fascist-spearheaded coup in Kiev in 2014 and now is helping integrate the political descendants of the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera and his Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists into the Ukrainian military and security forces.

At home, ruling circles have also cultivated fascistic forces, with the aim of intimidating working class opposition to savage attacks on their jobs and living standards. Last year, management at the Federated Cooperatives Ltd. oil refinery in Regina, Saskatchewan, deployed far-right "United We Roll" activists against picket lines established by locked-out workers and their supporters.

Over the past eighteen months, every Canadian government, from Horgan's NDP in British Columbia to the hard-right Kenney government in Alberta and Trudeau's Liberals at the federal level have responded to the pandemic by systematically prioritizing corporate profits over saving workers' lives, resulting in 27,000 officially recorded COVID-19 deaths. If excess deaths are taken into account, the true figure is closer to 50,000. In promoting their homicidal back-to-work/back-to-school campaign and the elimination of all social-distancing, Canada's ruling class, as in the US and Europe, has increasingly relied on anti-vaxxers and other anti-science far-right forces as their shock troops.

It is within this fetid political environment that far-right thugs feel emboldened to threaten Trudeau, and exploit the distress of ruined small businesspeople and other backward layers of the middle class by denouncing all public health measures.

The political suppression of the working class

But this is only part of the story. The key factor in maintaining the political environment in which far-right forces can act with virtual impunity is the political suppression of the working class. The New Democrats and trade unions have systematically sabotaged every expression of independent working class opposition to the ruling elite's policies of war abroad and attacks on living standards at home, and its homicidal "profits before lives" strategy in response to the pandemic.

The New Democrats have spent the past two years propping up the Trudeau Liberal minority government, ensuring that it had a parliamentary majority to implement its massive $650 billion bailout of big business and the rich. The trade unions have enforced the ruling class' policy of keeping the economy "open" through one devastating pandemic wave after another; systematically isolated every working class struggle that has erupted; and deepened their collaboration with the government and big business to make Canadian capitalism more "competitive." By preventing the working class from mobilizing its social power to impose a science-based pandemic policy that puts people before profit, and unifying its myriad struggles into a counter-offensive against capitalist austerity, lay-offs, and wage and benefit cuts, the unions have left the field open for far-right forces to assume political prominence completely disproportionate to their minuscule popular support.

This state of affairs can and will change swiftly, provided that the most class conscious workers and youth, organized in a revolutionary party, wage a determined struggle to mobilize the independent political power of the working class and win it to a socialist program. Recent months have witnessed a rapid upsurge of working class struggle in Canada and internationally—an upsurge characterized by a rebellion against the unions and a determination to claw back concessions given up over the past four decades. This wave of strikes and job actions found its most conscious expression to date in the formation by Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which fights to unify autoworkers on an international basis and mobilize the working class in opposition to the corrupt, pro-employer and nationalist trade unions. The committee strengthened the self-confidence of the workers, helping to unify the six-week strike in Virginia with Volvo Cars workers in Belgium, who waged their own wildcat job action against a company-union effort to lengthen the work week.

The lessons of these struggles must inform working people seeking to combat the threat posed by the far-right. The decisive question is to intensify the struggle to mobilize the working class independently of all representatives of the capitalist class, including the New Democrats and trade unions, which act as the chief obstacles to such a fight. Workers should resolutely reject any attempt to align them with the likes of NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, Unifor President Jerry Dias, and the Canadian Labour Congress, the very leaders and organizations whose smothering of working class opposition has emboldened the far-right. Dressed up as means to unite "democrats" in opposition to "fascism," these rotten alliances invariably become new mechanisms for the unions and "left" parties to prevent working people from asserting their own independent class interests in the struggle against the far-right. They are modelled on the disastrous "popular front" politics pursued by the Stalinist Communist Parties in the 1930s, which led to the bloody defeat of the Spanish revolution, disarmed the French working class following the 1936 general strike, and paved the way for World War II and all of its associated

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atrocities.

Workers should instead intensify their efforts to build rank-and-file committees to coordinate and organize workers' struggles in every workplace. This must be combined with a political fight for a socialist and internationalist program aimed at putting an end to the capitalist profit system and the threats of militarism, social inequality, authoritarianism and fascism to which it gives rise. This struggle must find its highest expression in the building of the Socialist Equality Party as the mass socialist party of the Canadian working class.

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