

Canadian media and Conservatives promote far-right trucker protest to push for scrapping of remaining anti-COVID-19 measures

Roger Jordan
28 January 2022

Anyone following the Canadian corporate media's news coverage in recent days will have been bombarded by reports about a relatively small protest initiated and led by far-right, owner-operator truckers against a federal government-imposed vaccine mandate.

Mainstream media outlets have breathlessly reported the progress of the "Freedom Convoy" as it has traversed the country from Vancouver on the Pacific Coast to Ottawa, where the protest concludes today. Leading politicians from the official opposition Conservative Party have made pilgrimages to the convoy as it passes through cities across the country, hailing it as a movement for "liberty" and "freedom."

The protest targets a federal Liberal government vaccine mandate for truckers crossing the US-Canada border that came into force, after months of warning, on January 15. The mandate has little, if any, practical significance for most truckers, including those who own their own rigs, since close to 90 percent are already fully vaccinated. Moreover, the Biden administration has imposed a similar vaccine mandate, barring Canadian truckers who are not fully vaccinated from entering the US.

Nevertheless, the vaccine mandate has been bitterly denounced by a small minority of owner-operator truckers, many already active in far-right politics and conspicuous in their opposition to all anti-COVID-19 containment measures, including mask mandates. Egged on by other far-right and outright fascist forces, including the likes of Rebel Media, they launched their cross-country Freedom Convoy.

The claims advanced by this unrepresentative minority, made up overwhelmingly of far-right activists, conspiracy theorists and anti-vaxxers, are fatuous and absurd. Tamara Lich, an official in the far-right, western separatist Maverick Party and the organizer of a GoFundMe campaign that to date has raised more than \$6 million to support the convoy (much of it from anonymous donors), rails against the government "overreach" and "tyranny" of elementary public health measures.

In truth, no individual has the "right" or "freedom" to go around infecting others with a potentially deadly virus. To the extent that vaccines are freely available, there is no legitimate reason for workers to refuse them. Arguments to the contrary are based on a combination of unscientific nonsense and social Darwinist and fascistic conceptions of "survival of the fittest."

The only "freedoms" the protesters support are the freedom of the virus to run rampant and the "freedom" of big business to keep operating at full tilt, herding workers into unsafe workplaces amid a raging pandemic, so as to maximize profits.

This is why the protest is being trumpeted by broad sections of the ruling elite, who view any impediment to profit accumulation, no matter how small, as intolerable. For the mainstream media outlets, opposition Conservative Party and business leaders who have backed the protest, the trucker vaccine mandate is not the real issue. Rather they have rallied round the "Freedom Convoy" with the aim of using the far right as a battering ram in their push to end all pandemic restrictions. They are deeply frustrated that despite their relentless efforts to promote the lie that there is no alternative to "living with the virus" and the elimination of most pandemic income relief, the majority of the population continues to support lockdowns to halt the spread of COVID-19.

The list of prominent Conservative Party politicians endorsing the convoy has grown throughout the week. Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, notorious for comparing COVID-19 to the flu and triggering a devastating wave of infections and death by scrapping all pandemic restrictions last summer, claimed the vaccine mandate was creating "a crisis" in the food supply chain and solidarized himself with the convoy. Former federal Conservative leader Andrew Scheer, who participated in a rally as the convoy passed through his hometown of Regina, Saskatchewan, attacked Trudeau as "the biggest threat to freedom in Canada." Tory Finance critic Pierre Poilievre claimed "power-hungry authorities" were using COVID-19 to "replace our freedom with their control," and accused Trudeau of imposing a "vaccine vendetta" that was "emptying grocery shelves" and causing Canadians to "go hungry."

After being criticized for his refusal to explicitly support the convoy, Tory leader Erin O'Toole announced Thursday he would meet with the protesters in Ottawa, while claiming absurdly that he would not engage with "extremists."

Support for the Freedom Convoy has also come from Canada's top boardrooms. Perrin Beatty, head of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, accused the government of failing to prove with statistics that truckers are a major source of COVID-19 transmission and demanded a "delay" of the mandate. The Canadian Manufacturers Coalition, which represents over 30 associations in the manufacturing sector, called for the mandate to be scrapped. Coalition President Dennis Darby asserted that it was making "supply chain bottlenecks worse" and demanded "concrete action by the government ... starting with reversing the trucker vaccine mandate."

This bunkum turns reality on its head. The true source of supply chain problems is not a vaccine mandate that impacts less than 10 percent of the country's truckers but the mass infection of millions of

workers *every single day* around the world by a potentially deadly virus due to the reckless policies pursued by the ruling elites of almost every country.

The embracing of the ragtag assembly of far-right activists and COVID-19 deniers by the mainstream media has been no less fulsome. The hard-right *Toronto Sun* and *National Post* newspapers have filled their pages with enthusiastic reports of the “frontline workers” protesting “authoritarian” government policies.

The state-funded broadcaster CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) gave Tamara Lich a prominent platform from which to assuage concerns about “extremists” in the Freedom Convoy. Conveniently omitted from the CBC report was vital information about Lich’s far-right political career, which includes representing the now-defunct far-right Alberta separatist Wexit party. In her capacity as head of the Yellow Vests in Medicine Hat in 2019, she felt compelled to propose the group change its name because it had been associated with so many death threats against Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

The anti-democratic, anti-worker and outright authoritarian views animating the Freedom Convoy are underscored by a so-called “memorandum of understanding” issued by protest organizers. It calls for the Governor General—the unelected representative of the Queen, Canada’s head of state—and the Senate, Canada’s unelected upper chamber of parliament, to join with “the people of Canada” to usurp the powers of government and abolish vaccine mandates.

Online posts from protest participants have urged the military to abide by its “oath” to the “Canadian people” and reject orders from the elected civilian government. Other participants have explicitly compared the truckers’ protest, which will culminate with a rally today on Parliament Hill, with the January 6, 2021 storming of the Capitol building in Washington D.C. by far-right and fascist supporters of Trump. The seizure of the Capitol was part of a carefully prepared coup attempt supported by substantial sections of the Republican Party and military security apparatus aimed at overturning the 2020 presidential election and installing Trump as an authoritarian strongman.

One of the leading groups in the convoy is United We Roll, a group of far-right truckers previously used to intimidate workers. During the seven-month lockout of oil refinery workers by FCL (Federated Co-operatives Limited) in Regina, United We Roll thugs were encouraged by the police, company management and the provincial government to breach solidarity pickets at isolated gas stations and provoke picketing workers outside FCL’s main facility.

Trudeau and other Liberal ministers have denounced the Freedom Convoy protest as a “far-right” mobilization and chastised the Conservatives for courting such forces in unseemly competition with Max Bernier, the former Harper Conservative cabinet minister who now heads the far-right, anti-vaxx People’s Party of Canada.

But it is the Trudeau Liberal government that bears chief responsibility for emboldening the far-right and fascist dregs. Throughout the pandemic, the Liberal government has prioritized the protection of corporate profits and investor wealth over protecting lives. It has pressed for the rapid “reopening” of the economy, resulting in successive waves of mass infection and death, while funnelling a never-ending supply of cash to the banks and big business. Meanwhile, pandemic aid to workers, if accessible at all, has been slashed to a meagre \$300 per week, and small business owners have largely been left to fend for themselves.

The Trudeau government has effectively let the virus run rampant,

especially since the emergence of the more infectious Omicron strain. It has allowed hard-right governments like Doug Ford’s in Ontario and Kenney’s in Alberta abolish virtually all public health protections and implement in its essentials the murderous “herd immunity” policy long advocated by Trump, Britain’s Boris Johnson and their far-right supporters.

The promotion of the far-right independent truckers’ protest by substantial sections of Canada’s ruling elite marks a further intensification of this process. As the nation’s daily COVID-19 death toll approaches levels never before seen during the pandemic, the political establishment wants to create conditions where it can abolish all regular reporting of COVID-19’s spread and impact, relegating it to the status of the flu and other endemic respiratory diseases. This homicidal policy, which will mean mass infection and death in perpetuity, requires violent bands of far-right thugs to enforce it in the face of mass popular opposition.

Far-right protests have been similarly used by capitalist elites internationally. In Germany during the summer of 2020, the so-called Lateral Thinkers’ protests, led by fascist forces around the right-wing extremist Alternative for Germany (AfD), were systematically promoted by the media and sections of the political establishment to enforce the abandonment of lockdowns. This paved the way for the country’s second pandemic wave, which killed more than 60,000 people in the winter of 2020-21. Protesters enjoyed so much support within the police and security forces that they were able to mount the steps of the Reichstag Building, which houses Germany’s federal parliament, while waving the flag of the German Empire.

In the United States, small anti-lockdown protests in April 2020 dominated by far-right activists were blown out of all proportion by the corporate media to paint a fraudulent picture of a mass movement demanding “freedom” from pandemic restrictions. In truth, these staged mobilizations of fascists, military veterans and conspiracy theorists served as a breeding ground for violent plots, including the plan by a fascist militia to kidnap and kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Many of the forces involved went on to play prominent roles in the January 6, 2021 storming of the Capitol, serving as shock troops for Trump’s attempted coup.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact