

Emboldened by ruling class support, far-right Freedom Convoy lays siege to Canada's Parliament

Keith Jones, Roger Jordan
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Canada's Conservative official opposition and much of big business and the corporate media have seized on the "Freedom Convoy"—a far-right protest ostensibly demanding the scrapping of the federal government's vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers—as a battering ram to shatter all remaining public health measures against COVID-19. This, as Omicron infects, hospitalizes and is now killing Canadians in numbers never before seen in any of the pandemic's previous four waves.

As the Freedom Convoy made its way from Western Canada to Ottawa last week, the hard-right premiers of Alberta and Saskatchewan rushed to endorse it and pledged to quickly eliminate all remaining anti-COVID-19 measures. Business groups, such as the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, amplified their demands for the immediate "reopening" of the economy. The media, meanwhile, accorded the Convoy blanket coverage, depicting it as a genuine grassroots protest. No matter that almost 90 percent of all truckers are vaccinated, and the Convoy's initiators and organisers are far-right activists who espouse viciously anti-democratic and racist views that are anathema to the vast majority of the population.

Emboldened by this ruling class support, the most rabid and determined of the far-right elements who ran amuck in downtown Ottawa last weekend—defying public health restrictions, threatening journalists and invading a homeless shelter—have encamped themselves in Parliament's environs and are vowing not to disperse until their demands are met.

The threat of political violence now looms over Canada's capital.

With unruly far-right activists and Convoy vehicles clogging the streets around Parliament Hill, police are urging people to stay away from the city's downtown core.

Canada Unity, the far-right group that initiated the convoy of independent owner-operator truckers, has publicly called for the unelected Governor-General and Canada's appointed Senate to join with it to usurp the powers of the elected government and abolish all anti-COVID-19 measures.

On Sunday, Canada Unity spokesperson Patrick King told the *National Post* that Freedom Convoy organizers have "contingency plans in place" should police try to shut the protest down. "You pushed the wrong group of people," he declared. A former leader of the now defunct far-right Yellow Vests and Western separatist

Wexit Party, King is a proponent of the white nationalist "population replacement" canard. In a rant against COVID-19 public health measures last month, he declared, "The only way this is going to be solved is with bullets," reports PressProgress.

Convoy supporters have openly compared their actions to the January 6, 2021 storming of the U.S. Capitol, which was a key element in Trump's attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and establish a presidential dictatorship with himself as America's Führer.

Trump has hailed the Freedom Convoy as an example for all Americans, as has his acolyte Jim Jordan, the ranking Republican on the U.S. House Judiciary Committee.

On Saturday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who in July 2020 was the target of a far-right would-be assassin, was moved by his security detail from his Ottawa residence to an undisclosed secure location.

Thus far, police have bent over backwards to be accommodating to the far-right protesters. No doubt one reason for this is that sections of the police are themselves sympathetic to their virulently anti-working class aims. But demands for an end to the protest, including from inconvenienced businesses, whether by police action or "gestures of goodwill," i.e., capitulation, will undoubtedly soon grow. Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson has already declared that the protesters have "overstayed their welcome."

On Monday, Trudeau, who has been forced into self-isolation after himself testing positive for COVID-19, rejected suggestions he meet with Convoy representatives, saying he would not go "anywhere near protests that have expressed hateful rhetoric and violence towards their fellow citizens."

Should there be a violent clash between police and the far-right protesters, it can be anticipated that many of the ruling class elements who promoted the Convoy will seek to blame the government and use the furor to shift politics still further right. This could take several forms, including changing the government's personnel, whether by replacing Trudeau with his deputy, the anti-Russia war hawk, Chrystia Freeland, or engineering the minority government's fall in Parliament.

Whatever the immediate outcome of the crisis sparked by the far-right Convoy's effective occupation of downtown Ottawa and besieging of parliament, it speaks to an unprecedented social and political crisis of Canadian capitalism.

For the past two years, the Trudeau Liberal government has overseen the implementation of the ruling class's "profit before lives" back-to-work/back-to-school pandemic policy. At the same time, it has funnelled hundreds of billions into the financial markets and the coffers of big business to protect profits and investor wealth. Since winning re-election as a minority government last September, Trudeau and his Liberals have all but eliminated pandemic relief for working people and integrated Canada still more fully into the incendiary US military-strategic offensives against Russia and China.

Yet powerful sections of the ruling class are dissatisfied. They are demanding an even more aggressive policy against the working class, beginning with the immediate abandonment of all measures to impede the spread of the virus, and a more aggressive assertion of Canadian imperialist interests overseas.

Sensing their own isolation and fearing the incipient growth of social opposition, these ruling class elements have brought forward the far right and incited an extra-parliamentary movement in an attempt to intimidate working people.

Saturday's protest brought together a wide range of right-wing extremist political forces, including a far-right faction of the Conservative Party sympathetic to Trump, Maxime Bernier and his ultra-right People's Party of Canada, and outright neo-Nazi and fascist groups. Far-right and fascist symbols, including Nazi swastikas and Confederate flags, were prominent at the demonstration. Participants defaced monuments, threw rocks at paramedics, and flouted public health regulations as they invaded the Rideau Centre, a nearby shopping mall.

Threats of violence were issued against an event commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Quebec City mosque shooting, when a right-wing extremist and self-professed admirer of Trump and France's Marine Le Pen massacred six people on January 27, 2017. Fearing for their safety, organizers of the commemoration called it off.

Almost as extraordinary as the aggressive and arrogant behaviour of the far-right crowd was the timid kid-glove treatment they received from the police. A police spokesperson declared late Saturday that not a single arrest had been made. Although reports claim that criminal investigations are ongoing into who urinated on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, only one arrest related to last weekend's ruckus has been made to date.

The authorities' decision to let these far-right dregs run rampant through downtown Ottawa stands in stark contrast with their response to left-wing and working class protests. In 2010, when tens of thousands demonstrated peacefully in Toronto against the G20 summit, they were brutally beaten, kettled and abused by 7,000 heavily armed police officers in full battle gear. Police deployed tear gas, rubber bullets and pepper spray as they arrested over 600 people. Many were detained in small makeshift holding pens akin to cages.

With Saturday's protest still in full swing, Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe positively referenced the Freedom Convoy as he announced the dismantling of all remaining public health measures in his province. The Conservatives doubled down on their support for the far-right protesters Monday, with deputy leader Candice Bergen telling the House of Commons that they

were "patriots" and that she had met with protest leaders Sunday night.

The media has played a no less pernicious role. The hard-right *National Post* and *Toronto Sun* carried glowing reports of the convoy's progress across the country. Even state-funded broadcaster CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) gave a political platform to Tamara Lich, a far-right activist and member of the Western separatist Maverick Party who heads the protest's GoFundMe campaign, to assert that no "extremists" would be tolerated.

If, following last weekend's events, some media outlets are now toning down their support, it is only because they recognize that the violent far-right movement they have conjured up will prove increasingly difficult to control.

The ability of a few thousand far-right protesters to bring downtown Ottawa to a standstill for days cannot simply be explained by the support they have received from the most right-wing sections of the ruling elite. The ostensibly "left" New Democrats and the trade unions have played a pivotal role in helping create this state of affairs, through their systematic sabotage of all working class opposition to the Trudeau government's criminal profits-before-lives pandemic policy.

The New Democrats have propped up Trudeau's minority Liberal government since the 2019 election, including by helping to pass the multibillion-dollar bailouts for the banks and big business in early 2020. The trade unions have strangled efforts by educators, food processing workers, autoworkers and others to oppose life-threatening conditions in their workplaces and collaborated with governments at all levels in enforcing reopening policies. Recent months have witnessed an upsurge of workers struggles and often in open rebellion against the union bureaucracy. But the pro-capitalist unions' stranglehold over the working class has yet to be politically broken. It is this that has left the way open for a vocal minority of far-right thugs with backing from sections of the ruling elite to play an increasingly oversized and menacing role in official political life.

Workers across Canada must take the events of recent days as a serious warning. The fascistic far right does not have a mass base of support, and its pandemic policy of mass infection and death is widely opposed. However, unless the working class takes up an independent political struggle to break the power of the financial oligarchy over all aspects of social and political life, the ruling elite will press forward with its fascistic program of "herd immunity," which will mean mass infection and death in perpetuity. Opposition to this can only come from a mass movement led by the working class and guided by a socialist and internationalist program.



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