

Far-right “Freedom Convoy” besieges Canada’s parliament—an inflection point in the breakdown of Canadian democracy

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Powerful sections of Canada’s ruling elite have incited a far-right, extra-parliamentary movement that is now encamped menacingly outside the national parliament and vows to remain until its demands are met.

The threat of political violence looms over Canada’s capital. For a fifth straight day yesterday, unruly supporters of the far-right Freedom Convoy and their vehicles clogged parliament’s environs, disrupting normal life in downtown Ottawa. Yesterday afternoon, Ottawa Police Chief Peter Sloly warned of ongoing incitements to “riotous behaviour” and “the bringing of arms and weapons into the National Capital Region.”

However this crisis plays out in the coming days, it can be said with certainty that this is an inflection point in the crisis and breakdown of democratic-constitutional forms of rule in what has historically been one of the most privileged imperialist countries.

Ostensibly launched to pressure the federal Liberal government into scrapping a newly introduced vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers, the Freedom Convoy is led by far-right and outright fascist elements, whose noxious antidemocratic views are anathema to the vast majority of Canadians. Almost 90 percent of Canada’s truckers are fully vaccinated.

Yet the Conservative official opposition, big-business lobby groups, and much of the corporate media have promoted the Convoy as a popular grassroots movement, if not the authentic voice of “working Joes,” with the immediate aim of using it as a battering ram to shatter all remaining anti-COVID-19 public health measures.

Despite wall-to-wall press coverage for the better part of a week promoting the Convoy as it made its way from Western Canada, no more than 20,000 people took to Ottawa’s streets last weekend. That said, the Convoy must be recognized for what it is—a fascist mobilization. Over the weekend, Convoy supporters, some of them waving Confederate flags and Nazi swastikas, defied public health measures, assaulted homeless people, threw rocks at paramedics, and desecrated monuments. A commemoration to mark the fifth anniversary of the Quebec City Mosque shooting, in which six worshippers were killed by a fascist gunman, had to be canceled due to threats of violence.

Canada Unity, the far-right group that initiated the Convoy and which boasts that it has a “contingency plan” in the event police try to shut the protest down, is publicly agitating for a putsch. It has issued a “Memorandum of Understanding” that explicitly calls for the ousting of Canada’s democratically elected government and the abolition of all remaining anti-COVID measures through joint action between a

“Canadian Citizens’ Committee,” comprised of Freedom Convoy leaders, the unelected Senate, parliament’s upper chamber, and the Governor General, the Queen’s representative in Ottawa. For 90 days, the memorandum explains, the “Citizens’ Committee” would effectively rule as a junta with a veto on all government statements.

While some sections of the media have pulled back, the official opposition Conservatives have doubled down on their support for the far-right mob. In the House of Commons Monday, Tory deputy leader Candice Bergen described the demonstrators as “patriotic, peace-loving Canadians.” Both she and Conservative leader Erin O’Toole, supported by right-wing media outlets like the *Toronto Sun* and *National Post*, are demanding that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau meet with Freedom Convoy leaders so as to work for “national unity.”

The Freedom Convoy has been lauded by key figures—beginning with Donald Trump—who organized the January 6, 2021 coup attempt aimed at overturning the results of the 2020 US presidential election and installing Trump at the head of a presidential dictatorship. Speaking at a rally last Saturday where he vowed to pardon the fascists who stormed the Capitol Building, Trump pointed to the convoy as a model to be emulated.

There can be little doubt that the fascist-minded former President’s support goes beyond verbal declarations. Canada’s Conservatives have developed intimate political and personnel ties with the far-right Republicans in recent decades, with both parties emerging as incubators for outright fascist forces. With their support for the far-right Convoy and de facto resort to political violence, the Tory leadership is taking a page out of Trump’s playbook.

The encampment in the very heart of the national capital of far-right activists, many of them expressing in crude terms violent intentions to Trudeau, is an ongoing provocation and threat. Whilst it cannot be said with any certainty how this will end, what is manifestly clear is that important sections of the ruling class have conjured up a far-right extra-parliamentary movement with the aim of pushing politics sharply to the right, and as far as possible ousting the minority Liberal government.

Their immediate goal is the scrapping of all COVID-19 restrictions, which will lead to millions more infections and thousands more needless deaths. They also are demanding a dramatic escalation of the assault on the working class, with a quick pivot to “post-pandemic” austerity and the implementation of a pro-investor “growth agenda;” and for Canadian imperialism to play an even more aggressive role as an attack dog for Washington in its reckless war drive against Russia. The same politicians who are lauding the Freedom Convoy as a blow

to Trudeau's "tyranny" have been denouncing his government for failing to send lethal weaponry to Ukraine.

Should there be a violent clash between police and the far-right protesters, those in the ruling class who have promoted the Convoy will seek to pin the blame on the government. Trudeau will be denounced for failing to "prevent violence" by "talking" to the protesters, i.e., making concessions to their fascist demands. This could then become a lever by which the Conservatives, other sections of the establishment and their far-right allies push for further shifts in policy or to engineer the government's downfall.

Canada's ruling elite increasingly views the democratic forms of rule that it has traditionally used to mitigate social tensions and provide an aura of legitimacy to its class rule as an impediment. Strikes are routinely illegalized and the powers and reach of the national-security apparatus have been vastly expanded.

In December 2008, just weeks after the global financial crash, the then Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper prevailed on the unelected Governor-General to use her vast, arbitrary powers to shut down parliament to prevent the opposition parties from voting his minority government out of office. The ruling class overwhelmingly supported Harper's "constitutional coup," demonstrating that it was ready to run roughshod over the most basic democratic norms to ensure a "strong government" capable of imposing sweeping attacks on the working class remained in office.

Class tensions are far more advanced today than they were in 2008. Canada's ruling elite has seized on the pandemic to enrich itself fabulously while allowing the deadly virus to run rampant. Workers are being radicalized and have begun to fight back in a series of militant strikes and protests, demanding COVID-19 protections and an end to decades of concessions and austerity.

The Trudeau Liberal government has spearheaded the ruling class' profits-before-lives back-to-work/back-to-school pandemic policy that has led to five successive waves of mass infection and caused more than 33,800 deaths to date. It has funnelled hundreds of billions into the stock market and big-business coffers to prop up profits and investor wealth. Since scraping back to power in last September's election with a second minority mandate, Trudeau and his Liberals have moved still further right, eliminating virtually all pandemic relief for working people, further integrating Canada into the US military-strategic offensives against Russia and China, and allowing Omicron to spread like wildfire.

Yet powerful sections of the ruling elite are angry, frustrated, and fearful. They are angered and frustrated by the continuing strong popular support for public health measures, including lockdowns, and by the deep-rooted opposition to their warmongering against Russia and China. Their fear is driven by the growing resistance of the working class. The Trudeau government has relied on a close partnership with the corporatist trade unions to suppress the class struggle, but the unions are increasingly discredited and facing growing rank-and-file opposition. In response, sections of the ruling class favor pre-emptive action. To gird Canadian capitalism for a head-on collision with the working class, they want to bring to power an avowedly reactionary government, unbridled by traditional democratic constraints, and cultivate fascist thugs as shock troops against the working class.

The events in Canada underscore that the breakdown of bourgeois democracy is a universal process. Unprecedented levels of social inequality, great-power conflict and imperialist war, and the murderous policy of herd immunity are incompatible with democratic

forms of rule.

This is why ruling elites in all the major capitalist countries have systematically brought forward far-right and outright fascist forces. In Germany, the neofascist Alternative for Germany was built up by the media and political establishment, effectively dictated government policy on refugees, and played a leading role in mobilizing far-right protests to demand an end to COVID-19 lockdowns. Coup plots within the ranks of the military in France and Spain underscore that bourgeois democracy is at death's door across Europe. And in the United States, the centre of the world capitalist crisis, Trump remains free to speak to rallies of thousands of far-right supporters over a year after he and much of the Republican Party leadership sought through a fascist coup to overturn the presidential election and install a Führer in the White House.

In Canada as around the world, the danger posed by the far-right comes from the fact that it is promoted from above, by significant sections of the ruling elite. The fascist thugs like those leading the Freedom Convoy enjoy virtually no popular support. The vast majority of workers observe the events unfolding in Ottawa with a mixture of disgust and outrage.

These entirely healthy sentiments find no expression in the trade unions and the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP). In fact, it is the continued ability of these rotten, pro-capitalist organizations to politically muzzle the working class that enables the ruling elite and its fascist allies to go on the offensive. The unions have worked to sabotage every expression of worker opposition to the profits-before-life pandemic policy, while the NDP has propped up the minority Liberal government in parliament since 2019, voting for its bailouts for the banks and big business, cuts to pandemic relief for workers, and military spending hikes.

Everything now depends on the building of an independent political movement of the working class to oppose the ruling elite's policy of mass infection and death, the drive to war, and the threat of the fascist far-right. The defence of democratic rights is inseparable from the struggle to break the stranglehold of the financial oligarchy over all aspects of social and political life, which requires the socialist transformation of society. Workers in Canada must wage this struggle on an international basis by unifying with working people in the United States, Europe, and around the world, all of whom confront the twin threats of dictatorial forms of rule and imperialist war.

We strongly appeal to everyone ready to fight for this program to join and build the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) and its sister parties around the world.



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