

Ottawa police mull appealing for military support to end far-right occupation of Canada's capital

Roger Jordan, Keith Jones
2 February 2022

Far-right and outright fascist forces mobilized under the banner of the so-called Freedom Convoy continued to occupy much of downtown Ottawa, including the environs of Canada's parliament, for a sixth day Wednesday.

Ostensibly launched to oppose the federal Liberal government's vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers, the Convoy was systematically built up by sections of the political establishment and given wall-to-wall coverage in the corporate media in order to push for the scrapping of all remaining anti-COVID-19 public health measures.

In a threatening statement released yesterday morning, Convoy organizers vowed to stay in Ottawa "for as long as it takes for governments across Canada to end all mandates associated with COVID-19." Canada Unity, the far-right group that initiated the Convoy, has publicly called for a putsch against the elected national government. In a "Memorandum of Understanding" published on its website, it advocates that the unelected Governor General, the Senate, the appointed upper house of Canada's parliament, and a junta of Convoy leaders seize power so as to abolish all anti-COVID measures and restore "freedom."

Steve Bell, Ottawa's deputy chief of police, told a Wednesday press conference that the remaining few hundred protesters are more like an occupying force, describing their behaviour as "highly volatile."

At the same press conference, Ottawa Police Chief Peter Sloly said his force was considering requesting help from the Canadian Armed Forces to clear the remaining vehicles and protesters. According to the CBC, Sloly said that "all options remain on the table" to end the occupation, from negotiations and a court injunction, to forcible removal of the protesters, "But all approaches come with significant concerns, including rioting, injury and death."

Sloly added that a significant contingent of the protesters who remain are from the United States. Given that Donald Trump, the fascist-minded ex-US president, gave a full-throated endorsement of the Convoy over the weekend, it is reasonable to assume that many of the American participants are far-right activists who were involved in the January 6, 2021 storming of the US Capitol Building, when Trump and much of Republican Party leadership attempted to overturn the 2020 presidential election through a coup.

Far-right protesters began besieging Canada's parliament last Friday. On Saturday, the day slated for the Convoy's official arrival in Ottawa, an estimated 9,000-15,000 people joined what can only be described as a fascist mobilization. Participants bore Confederate flags and Nazi swastikas, attacked workers, threatened religious minorities, and flouted public health rules.

The Conservative Party, right-wing media outlets like the *Toronto Sun* and *National Post*, and sections of big business deliberately incited this far-right extra-parliamentary movement to use it as a battering ram to smash through the widespread popular support for COVID-19 public health measures. More broadly, they are seeking to use the threat of far-right political violence to shift official politics sharply to the right.

One of the first indications of that shift came yesterday, when the Conservative parliamentary caucus voted by 73 to 45 to ditch Erin O'Toole as party leader. Although a far-right faction of the party had long criticized O'Toole for his "moderate" positions during last year's federal election campaign, the final straw appears to have been his initial reluctance to unequivocally endorse the Convoy.

Significantly, the *Wall Street Journal*, the premier publication of Rupert Murdoch's media empire and traditional voice of America's rapacious financial elite, published one of its rare editorials on Canadian affairs just hours before O'Toole's ouster, urging his removal. Entitled "Truckers and Canada's Conservatives: Opposition leader Erin O'Toole has earned a leadership challenge," the editorial called the Convoy "a mixed bag," but signaled its support for instrumentalizing the far-right protest to press for the end of all public health measures and a more stridently rightwing, pro-big business Conservative opposition. "Liberals," the *Journal* declared, "tar the protest as racist, but the peaceful populist uprising is notable and some of the protesters' gripes are legitimate."

Since the Convoy's Jan. 24 launch, leading Tory politicians have been lining up to hail it as a movement of "patriotic and peaceful Canadians." Adopting the language of the fascist protest organizers, Tory finance critic Pierre Poilievre, who is seen as a frontrunner to replace O'Toole if he enters the Conservative leadership race, has denounced Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for spreading "fear" and lauded the far-right Convoy as "bright, joyful and peaceful Canadians championing freedom."

There can be little doubt that whoever replaces O'Toole will continue to court the far-right forces mobilized by the Freedom Convoy. The Conservative Party—which was founded in 2003 through the merger of the remaining Progressive Conservative rump and the right-wing populist Reform Party cum Canadian Alliance—has, like its US Republican ally, become an incubator for far-right forces. In the 2017 Conservative leadership contest, Maxime Bernier, who would go on to form and lead the ultra-right People's Party of Canada, was only narrowly defeated on the 13th ballot, by Andrew Scheer, himself a fervent social conservative and devotee of Opus Dei. Bernier was a featured speaker at Saturday's Freedom Convoy rally and his People's Party has played a prominent role in promoting it.

The remaining protesters are more than capable of provoking a violent clash with the police, which right-wing sections of the ruling elite would exploit to push Trudeau to make concessions or engineer the Liberal government's downfall. In addition to abolishing all pandemic-related restrictions, the ruling class elements that have promoted the Convoy want an intensification of austerity for the working class and for Canadian imperialism to assume an even more prominent and aggressive role in the US military-strategic offensives against China and Russia, including by sending lethal weapons to Ukraine,

On Tuesday, Ottawa Police Chief Sloly noted that “arms and weaponry” have been brought into the “national capital region” by the demonstrators. Workers and local residents report being assaulted, berated for wearing masks, insulted with racial slurs, and threatened with sexual violence. They have also noted the light-touch approach to the far-right activists taken by the police, who have only charged three people since the protest began. The Ottawa Police Service has had to officially deny that its officers have taken food and other supplies to the protesters.

The comparatively small number of fascistic protesters have received extensive financial and political backing from far-right forces and their patrons in Canada and internationally. A GoFundMe page set up by Tamara Lich, a spokesperson for the western separatist Maverick Party, has raised over \$10 million. A significant portion of the donations were made anonymously or under fake names, which suggests that well-known far-right operatives wanted to conceal their identity so as not to undermine the public presentation of the Convoy as the authentic voice of “working Joes.” Many other donations came in from small business owners in rural Alberta and Ontario, according to a CBC analysis.

With substantial financial resources at their disposal, convoy organizers are threatening to mount similar protest actions across the country. Convoys have been announced for Quebec City and Toronto this coming weekend, and protesters are expected to return to Ottawa.

In Alberta, a blockade by Freedom Convoy supporters of the Coutts border crossing with the US state of Montana ended on its fifth day with RCMP officers clearing two lanes of the roadway. The previous day there had been violent clashes between protesters and police officers. Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, one of the most vocal supporters of the Freedom Convoy as it traversed Canada to reach Ottawa last week, felt compelled to condemn the protesters'

violence and called for the blockade's end, which has had a significant adverse economic impact.

A section of Kenney's United Conservative Party (UCP) legislative caucus lent support to the illegal blockade, some explicitly and others implicitly. Soon after the blockade was lifted the UCP caucus chair, Nathan Neudorf, issued a statement denying its rural caucus had “negotiated an agreement to temporarily end the Coutts blockade” in exchange for scrapping proof-of-vaccination requirements. But even as he did so, Neudorf reaffirmed that the government will soon abolish the requirements.

If hard-right sections of the ruling elite are able to go on the political offensive by mobilizing violent far-right elements whose anti-democratic views are anathema to the vast majority of the population, it is because the working class is being systematically demobilized and politically suppressed by the pro-capitalist trade unions and the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).

The NDP has condemned the Freedom Convoy's “dangerous rhetoric,” accused “extremist elements” of attempting to turn it “into a Canadian version of the terrorist attacks on the US Capitol,” and lamented that “by default” Conservative MPs supporting the Convoy are aligning with “extremists who wish to subvert the democratic process.”

What the NDP does not and will not say is that powerful sections of the ruling elite and political establishment have conjured up a far-right extra-parliamentary movement to violently enforce the abolition of pandemic public health measures and push politics far to the right.

Like the US Democratic Party, which refused to call for any popular mobilization against Trump's plot to overturn the presidential election and hold onto power as an authoritarian strongman, the NDP has nothing to say to the millions of workers across the country who are disgusted and outraged by the fascists running amuck in Ottawa.

Throughout the pandemic, the NDP's principal focus has been guaranteeing Trudeau's minority Liberal government a parliamentary majority. They have voted for the Liberals' massive bailouts of the banks and big business, cuts to financial support for workers, and increases in military spending. In British Columbia, where the NDP forms the government, they are pursuing a pandemic policy of mass infection and death just as ruthlessly as their Liberal partners at the federal level, or for that manner Kenney and his UCP. Their response to efforts by the political right to disrupt the Liberal/NDP alliance—which rests on the union bureaucracy's ability to smother worker opposition to social inequality, attacks on democratic rights, and the drive to war—will be to double down on their support for Trudeau and the reactionary state apparatus.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)