Canadian workers need a socialist program to defeat the threat of far-right political violence, end the pandemic and oppose war

Socialist Equality Party (Canada)
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With the support and encouragement of a significant faction of the ruling class, far-right thugs have besieged Canada's parliament and downtown Ottawa for the past week and vow, menacingly, to remain until all COVID-19 public health measures are abolished.

These extraordinary events underscore the urgent necessity of the independent political mobilization of the working class. Armed with a socialist and internationalist program, the working class is the only social force capable of implementing a science-based Zero COVID policy to end the pandemic once and for all, stop the reckless drive to imperialist war, and halt the danger of authoritarianism and fascistic political violence.

The so-called Freedom Convoy is a far-right rabble whose views are anathema to the vast majority of the Canadian population. It is spearheaded by fascist activists who have assaulted homeless people and workers trying to enforce anti-COVID measures and brought guns and other weaponry into downtown Ottawa. Canada Unity, which initiated the Convoy and whose leader co-heads its GoFundMe campaign, publicly calls for a putsch that would replace the democratically elected government with a junta.

If these far-right, virulently anti-worker forces have suddenly assumed an outsized role in official political life completely at odds with their true popular support, it is because a powerful section of the ruling elite, led by the Conservative Party and right-wing media outlets like the *National Post* and *Toronto Sun*, built up the protest Convoy and fashioned it into a far-right extra-parliamentary movement.

They did so with the aim of using the Convoy as a battering ram against the widespread popular support for strict public health measures, including lockdowns, to prevent COVID infections and save lives. But their ambitions go far beyond this. They are determined to push politics far to the right—to intensify the assault on the working class at home, through a quick pivot to "post-pandemic" austerity, and to give Canada an even more prominent and frontline role in the incendiary US military-strategic offensives against Russia and China.

Such a sharp lurch right, it must be warned, is already well under away. The most conspicuous Convoy supporters among the cabal of right-wing premiers, Saskatchewan's Scott Moe and Alberta's Jason Kenney, have pledged to lift all remaining public health measures forthwith, even as the Omicron wave has pushed deaths to levels seen only in the darkest days of the pandemic.

On Wednesday, the federal Conservatives ditched Erin O'Toole as party leader, because he was deemed insufficiently supportive of the Convoy. His interim replacement, Candice Bergen, has publicly touted the far-right elements occupying downtown Ottawa as "patriotic, peace-loving Canadians," and called on Prime Minister Trudeau to extend them an "olive branch." Privately, in emails to top party leaders leaked to the *Globe and Mail*, she argued the Conservatives should support the continued occupation of Ottawa so as to make it "Trudeau's problem."

Bergen, the Conservatives, and right-wing corporate media voices are demanding Trudeau meet with the Convoy leaders as part of a so-called "political solution" to the crisis. This is all a subterfuge. If and when a violent clash erupts between their fascist allies and security forces, they and the sections of the capitalist elite for which they speak will blame it on Trudeau's "intransigence," and seek to use the ensuing crisis as a lever to extort right-wing concessions, or better yet engineer the government's downfall.

The readiness of a substantial faction of the ruling class to instrumentalize the far right and employ fascist violence to achieve their political objectives marks an inflection point in the breakdown of Canada's bourgeois democratic order. For decades Canada's ruling elite postured as leaders of a "gentler, kinder" capitalism than that of the rapacious dollar republic to the south. But the pandemic has laid bare the true state of Canadian society, after decades of deepening social inequality, capitalist austerity, and Canada's participation in one US-led war of aggression after another. The more than 34,000 pandemic dead are victims of social murder perpetrated by Canada's capitalist elite and their political hirelings. Not only was the health care system on life-support even before the pandemic struck due to decades of cuts; governments whether nominally left or avowedly right have systematically prioritized profits over lives.

Now, faced with the inevitable growth of social opposition, the ruling class is turning towards authoritarian forms of rule—as manifested in the battery of anti-strike laws—and cultivating the far right as shock troops against the working class.

Watching these events unfold, millions of workers must be asking themselves: How is it possible that despised right-wing figures within the ruling elite have been able to take the offensive by mobilizing a small, ragtag mob of fascistic thugs to aggressively push for unpopular policies? The answer lies in the foul role of the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) and the trade unions. For decades they have systematically suppressed the class struggle, enabling the ruling class to impose wave after wave of austerity and concessions.

The unions' and NDP's response to the pandemic, the greatest crisis of global capitalism since the Great Depression and the Second World War, has been to deepen their alliance with the Trudeau Liberal government and their corporatist integration with big business and the state. They supported the Liberal government and Bank of Canada in funneling more than $650 billion in bailout funds to the banks and big business and have enforced the ruling class's back-to-work/back-to-school policy that has led to five successive waves of mass infection and death. When workers have sought to take action to defend their health and very lives, the unions have quickly intervened to suppress any strikes or walkouts and misdirect

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workers into the bankrupt pro-employer provincial labour relations systems.

The response of the unions and NDP to the Freedom Convoy's occupation of Ottawa is a continuation of this criminal course. NDP leader Jagmeet Singh and various union officials have bleated about "hate speech" and "racism" and even the possibility of a "terrorist attack" akin to the January 6, 2021 storming of the US Capitol. What they do 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. Nor do they offer any strategy for the working class to fight the danger of authoritarianism and the far right.

To the contrary, they have doubled down on their support for the Trudeau government, even as it has shifted further right. Several days after the Ottawa occupation began, the Liberal government signaled it will bow to a months-long campaign fronted by the Conservatives and supported by the entire capitalist media for Ottawa to deploy lethal weaponry and additional troops to the Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

A statement from the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the country's largest trade union federation, appealed for everyone to "respect the outcome of the federal election" and let "elected MPs get down to work." In practice, this means allowing the NDP to keep propping up the minority Liberal government, which it has done since 2019, as it implements the dictates of the financial oligarchy at home and abroad.

This leaves the most right-wing sections of ruling class a free hand to continue to use the far-right extra-parliamentary movement they have sponsored to foment political violence and spearhead a deepening of the onslaught on the working class.

The same basic tendencies are present internationally. Ruling elites are cultivating far-right and outright fascist forces to ruthlessly enforce their class war agenda, while the unions and social-democratic parties keep the working class in a political straitjacket.

This is underscored by the enthusiastic support given to the Freedom Convoy by fascist-minded ex-US President Donald Trump, and the participation of many far-right American activists in the Ottawa occupation. Over a year after Trump's failed fascist coup of January 6, 2021, which aimed to overturn the presidential election, he remains free to address audiences of thousands thanks to the union-backed Biden administration's determination to cover up the Republican Party's involvement in the coup plot.

The turn of capitalist elites in all of the major imperialist democracies to the promotion of far-right forces is a sign of their weakness, not strength. They recognize that they sit atop a social powder keg with an already lit fuse. Moreover, there is no popular support for the militarist policies and imperialist intrigues needed if they are to prevail over their great power rivals in the ever-intensifying struggle for markets, profits and strategic advantage. In Canada, as elsewhere, there is increasing ruling class support for using authoritarian measures and far-right political violence in a pre-emptive strike against the eruption of mass working class struggles.

These conspiracies can and will be defeated. Provided, that is, the growing global counter-offensive of the working class—now in its initial stages—against the ruling class's murderous pandemic policy and its decades-long assault on workers' social and democratic rights is armed with a socialist-internationalist political program. In Canada, recent months have witnessed a series of militant workers' struggles that were characterized above all by growing rank-and-file opposition to the trade unions' efforts to suppress them. Workers in the United States, Germany, Britain, Turkey, Australia, and elsewhere have created independent rank-and-file committees to coordinate their struggles outside of and in opposition to the pro-capitalist unions. These are the initial indications of the mass support in the working class for a genuine fight to put an end to the domination of social and political life by a tiny super-rich oligarchy. No such support is present for the mad ravings of the fascistic Freedom Convoy and the policies of more social inequality, COVID-19 deaths, and war pursued by its enablers in the ruling class.

The fight for a socialist and internationalist program in Canada necessitates an unrelenting struggle for the political and organizational independence of the working class from the pro-austerity, pro-war NDP and the pro-capitalist trade unions. The claim that workers must support the "progressive" parties, i.e., the Liberals or NDP, to stop the hard-right Conservatives has been used for decades to prevent workers taking the road of independent political struggle. The events of the past week have demonstrated that if the Liberal/NDP/union alliance remains unchallenged and therefore able to smother working class opposition, this will only further embolden reaction and pave the way for the far-right to exploit the deepening social crisis to mobilize support among backward sections of the middle class.

A crucial step in mobilizing the social power of the working class in opposition to the deepening crisis of Canadian bourgeois rule is the formation of independent rank-and-file committees in every workplace to fight for a Zero COVID strategy, the overturning of all wage cuts and other concessions, and safe and secure jobs for all. These committees must be oriented to the struggles of working people in the United States, Europe, and around the world, and wage a political struggle for workers' power and socialist policies. None of the burning issues that confront working people—from stamping out the pandemic to overcoming social inequality or preventing a catastrophic war—can be confronted on a national basis or within the confines of the capitalist profit system.

The success of such struggles depends above all on the construction of a socialist political leadership in the working class. A mass socialist party must be built to raise workers' political consciousness and unify their struggles into a conscious struggle for socialism, the reorganization of socio-economic life under workers' power to make fulfilling human needs and not profit its animating principle. We urge all workers and young people who wish to participate in this struggle to join the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) and help build it as the Canadian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

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