

State of emergency declared in Ottawa as far-right Freedom Convoy occupation continues

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As the occupation of downtown Ottawa by the far-right Freedom Convoy entered its 10th day Sunday, Mayor Jim Watson declared a state of emergency for Canada's national capital. Far-right and fascist activists, many of whom are armed, remain menacingly encamped outside Canada's parliament and have clogged downtown streets with some 500 vehicles. They have vowed to remain until all COVID-19 restrictions are scrapped by the federal Liberal government.

A statement from the city explained, "Declaring a state of emergency reflects the serious danger to the safety and security of residents posed by the ongoing demonstrations and highlights the need for support from other jurisdictions and levels of government." Earlier in the day, Watson told a radio interviewer, "The situation at this point is completely out of control because the individuals with the protest are calling the shots."

The Ottawa Police Service also announced Sunday it would start arresting people who bring fuel and other supplies to the occupiers, who have begun building wooden sheds to create a community kitchen and shelter.

The declaration of a state of emergency followed far-right protests Saturday that drew a few thousand people each to Ottawa and provincial capitals across the country. Police estimated that at its high point, about 5,000-7,000 people joined the Ottawa demonstration. Other mostly smaller Freedom Convoy events were held in Quebec City, Quebec; Toronto, Ontario; Regina, Saskatchewan; Edmonton, Alberta as well as Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia. Nonetheless, corporate media outlets provided wall-to-wall coverage of the protest, seeking to create the impression that the convoy enjoys mass popular support.

In reality, the Freedom Convoy's views are anathema to the vast majority of Canadians. Canada Unity, one of the organizations leading the convoy, calls for the overthrow of the democratically elected government and the installation of a Junta-style regime that would rule with dictatorial powers for three months to eliminate all pandemic restrictions. Nazi swastikas and Confederate flags are regularly displayed at Freedom Convoy protests.

Strong support for the convoy has come from former US President Donald Trump and his fascist supporters, as well as

far-right groups internationally. The police have confirmed that a large number of the convoy's occupation force comes from the United States, and announced Sunday that they are investigating the involvement of Canadian, US, and international far-right groups in a series of emailed threats against politicians.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a far-right Republican who is notorious for persecuting scientists advocating for COVID-19 restrictions, vowed to examine legal action against the fundraising platform GoFundMe after it withdrew the Freedom Convoy's fundraiser. Republican Senator Ted Cruz, another Trump supporter, tweeted Sunday, "God bless these Canadian truck drivers. They're defending Canada, America, and they're standing up for freedom."

The convoy has not been able to grind downtown Ottawa to a halt because it enjoys mass support among working people. On the contrary, the movement is a creation of the corporate media and official opposition Conservative Party, which built up the initial protest against a cross-border vaccine mandate and turned it into a far-right extra-parliamentary movement.

Even after the rabble ran amuck in Ottawa on the weekend of January 29, assaulting homeless people and workers, throwing rocks at ambulances, and threatening violence against people commemorating the 2017 Quebec City mosque shooting by a fascist gunman, interim Conservative leader Candice Bergen had the temerity to describe the occupiers as "patriotic, peace-loving Canadians." In internal emails to top Tory Party advisers, Bergen insisted last Monday that the Conservatives should encourage the convoy to stay in Ottawa to make it "Trudeau's problem."

The strategy of Bergen and the Tories is to provoke a violent clash between the far-right protesters and the police or military, blame it on Trudeau's "intransigence," and use it to intensify pressure for the Liberal government to bow to the convoy's far-right demands. Conservative politicians, right-wing media outlets, and the Ottawa Police Service have appealed for a "political solution" to the standoff, i.e., concessions to the fascist demands raised by the convoy's leadership.

Other sections of Canada's ruling establishment and state apparatus are demanding a larger and more aggressive police presence, and have even raised the prospect of deploying the

military. Ottawa Police Chief Peter Sloly, who said Wednesday that requesting support from the Canadian Armed Forces was under consideration, commented at an emergency Ottawa Police board meeting Saturday that the Freedom Convoy demonstration had turned into a “siege” and appealed for more law enforcement resources.

Diane Deans, an Ottawa city councillor who chairs the Ottawa Police board, added, “This group is a threat to our democracy. What we’re seeing is bigger than just a City of Ottawa problem. This is a nationwide insurrection.”

Working people can place no faith in the institutions of the capitalist state to wage a struggle against the far-right and fascist forces currently camped out in downtown Ottawa. The strengthening of the police or extension of military powers on the pretext of combatting the fascistic far-right would create the conditions for the inevitable deployment of these same forces of state repression against striking or protesting workers.

As the Socialist Equality Party explained in its statement published Friday, Canadian workers need a socialist program to defeat the threat of far-right political violence, end the pandemic and oppose war, “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 chief obstacles to the independent political mobilization of the working class are the trade unions and NDP, which continued their efforts over the weekend to suppress all worker opposition to the Freedom Convoy and its ruling class backers.

After health care workers in Toronto announced plans for a counterprotest Saturday against the presence of Freedom Convoy supporters, the Ontario Nurses’ Association (ONA) president issued a miserable statement urging his members not to participate. In Ottawa, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) union intervened to sabotage a counterprotest called for by two Reddit users that had won widespread support. PSAC officials cynically justified their opposition to any protest by citing the threat of violence against black, indigenous and LGBTQ participants. For the professional cowards who populate the union bureaucracy, the real threat of political violence against workers is not an occasion for organized resistance, but the smothering of any and all independent working class opposition.

The union bureaucracy’s bitter hostility to any open expression of working class opposition to the far-right Freedom Convoy and its program of mass infection and death is rooted in its class position. Wedded to its corporatist partnership with big business and the minority Liberal government, which only remains in power thanks to the parliamentary support of the NDP, the unions are more afraid of a mass worker-led

movement from below than they are of the danger of fascistic political violence. This was summed up in last week’s statement by the Canadian Labour Congress, which demanded that everyone “respect the federal election results” and “let elected politicians get down to work.” In practice, this means the continuation of the Liberal/NDP alliance, which has already organized the multi-billion-dollar bailout for the banks and big business, and slashed financial aid for workers amid the Omicron wave of COVID-19.

Despite the unions’ best efforts to block demonstrations against the Freedom Convoy, counter-protests were held over the weekend in Toronto, Ottawa, and Vancouver.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Andrea and Sergio, two students from the University of Toronto, about why they participated. “These anti-lockdown protests have been getting too much attention and too much credit,” said Sergio. “I think it’s important to show your support to ending COVID the right way and not the reckless way. The things I’m hearing are just absolutely insane from these anti-lockdown protesters.”

Andrea added, “It’s about making sure that everyone feels safe and supported, including the marginalized communities that face disproportionate levels of COVID, and lack of support from the government. I want to make sure that the government sees that even though the convoy may have a lot of resources and loud noise, there are people on this side that really care about everyone and their safety.”

Andrea contrasted the police’s kid-glove treatment of the far-right protesters to the ruthless repression she has experienced during left-wing demonstrations. “When the police cleared out the homeless encampments in Trinity Bellwoods, I was there. It was a military style operation and highly coordinated.”



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