

Far-right “Freedom Convoys” prepare to occupy capitals across Europe

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After a “Freedom Convoy” demanding an end to all public health measures against COVID-19 occupied downtown Ottawa, the Canadian capital, a network of far-right and anti-vaccination activists are planning similar actions across Europe. Occupations of Paris and Brussels, the seat of the European parliament, are planned for February 11 and February 14, respectively.

Like Canada’s Freedom Convoy, linked to far-right forces involved in former US President Donald Trump’s attempted coup on January 6, 2021 in Washington, this is the result of a carefully-prepared campaign. A series of Facebook groups, Twitter pages, and twenty-four Telegram channels were set up on January 26 and 27 to organize convoys to European capitals and thence to Brussels. They feature promotional videos glorifying convoys in Ottawa and at the Canadian-US border and calling for the spread of the movement to Europe.

This action is led by a group named European Freedom Convoy. On Twitter, it denounces restrictions like mask-wearing inside shops or schools and proof of vaccination to enter restaurants as “martial law.” It demands instead the “right to conduct business freely” and to maintain “national pride” and “spiritual beliefs.” It also features a “World Freedom Convoy” Telegram channel linking the movements in North America and Europe, and which is awash in posts on QAnon, anti-Semitic and anti-vaccine conspiracy theories.

This reactionary movement aims to accelerate the elimination of anti-COVID-19 measures that European governments are carrying out despite growing opposition among youth and workers.

Having recorded 1.65 million COVID-19 deaths and 140 million infections, Europe now faces a tsunami of Omicron variant infections, with over 23,000 deaths last week. France, which recorded 691 deaths on

February 8, the highest since March 2021, saw almost 1.5 million cases and 2,302 deaths from COVID-19 last week. Yet governments across Europe are tearing apart masking mandates and self-isolation rules for those exposed to the virus, fully reopening public venues and schools, and thus ensuring that the virus will spread.

The Freedom Convoys’ posturing as an opposition to state policies is a political fraud. They denounce state public health policies such as full or partial lockdowns that were adopted at the recommendation of scientists, after strikes across Europe demanding that workers be protected from the virus. However, they are demanding a more rapid implementation of the policy of “living with the virus” demanded by French President Emmanuel Macron and other governments across Europe, who are determined to boost the stock markets at the expense of human lives.

While the Freedom Convoys present themselves as “apolitical,” they are tied to far-right parties who campaigned against vaccination last year and now for the Freedom Convoys.

Actions are scheduled to take place throughout Europe on Friday and Saturday in the lead-up to the planned occupation of Brussels. In the Netherlands, the convoy’s Dutch Telegram channel has over 32,000 members, in Belgium over 12,000, in Spain over 10,500, and in Austria over 9,500. In Spain and Austria, truckers plan to occupy Madrid and Vienna on Saturday, before heading to Brussels. Telegram channels in the UK, Denmark, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Sweden, and other countries have a few thousand members.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is promoting the Freedom Convoy occupation of Brussels. On Twitter, AfD European parliamentarian Christine Anderson denounced Brussels as “the capital

of lunacy, the origin of this whole digital green certificate madness and all the discrimination, harassment and oppressive measures that came with it.” She pledged to greet the convoy in the streets when it arrived in Brussels.

The largest action organized so far is in France, where the Freedom Convoy has received support from neo-fascists including supporters of presidential candidates Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour, as well as from the “populist” Unsubmissive France party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Convoys of a few dozen trucks, work vehicles, cars, and motorbikes, left the southern cities of Perpignan, Nice, and Bayonne yesterday, as part of a three-day convoy that will reach Paris on Friday. Other convoys from French cities closer to the capital are scheduled to depart today and tomorrow.

Wall-to-wall coverage of the Freedom Convoy and of its launch on Wednesday has been provided by the C-News television station, Zemmour’s former employer, which is owned by billionaire Vincent Bolloré. As a result, the Facebook group providing updates on the convoy in France has swelled to over 320,000 members since it was launched on January 26.

An independent journalist using the pseudonym Remi Monde describes himself as the leader of the French movement. In a video on Facebook, he asks, “Can we block everything?”, before declaring: “We take our destiny in our hands. Let’s get together and head to the capital.” Monde has previously made posts in support of Florian Philippot, head of the far-right Patriots Party, although he has claimed that the Freedom Convoy is apolitical.

Philippot tweeted, “It looks like the global house of cards of corruption has begun to crumble, and it’s starting in Canada! Trudeau is hiding! The wave will break over France!”

On Wednesday, Zemmour supporter Jean-Frédéric Poisson tweeted: “After Canada, French and European truckers are organizing. Support the Freedom Convoy! Everyone to Paris!”

Marine Le Pen said she “understood” the Freedom Convoy, as globalization has “turned our societies into pressure cookers that can explode at the slightest event.” Calling however for her supporters “to vote,” she added: “Demonstrating one’s anger, yes of course, making it clear to the government, yes of course, but

when the time comes, every five years ... it is the presidential election, that is when the great decisions of our country are truly made.”

In an attempt to rally broader support and hide its far-right roots, the French Freedom Convoy also demagogically claims to be an “apolitical” movement opposed to rising living costs. In this, it has received assistance from Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s populist Unsubmissive France (LFI) party, whose national organizer, Adrien Quatennens, endorsed the Freedom Convoy yesterday in a televised interview with France Info.

“Obviously” LFI supports the Freedom Convoy, Quatennens declared, adding: “We must immediately end the vaccine pass and do away with all these measures against liberty, which have no effectiveness.” If LFI supporters “want to go, I encourage them to go,” he said, adding that the Freedom Convoy “has demands addressing other problems, like purchasing power.”

The impact of such false political propaganda could be seen in one *Paris-Actu* interview with an unvaccinated trucker who is considering attending the Freedom Convoy. “I work in a small firm, I see my boss struggle with fuel prices and my bills always going up. ... Plus, I’m seen as a bad citizen because I’m not vaccinated,” he explained. However, he added that he still hesitates to join the Freedom Convoy: “I do not know who will show up, and I don’t like the idea of honking my horn next to the far right.”

Workers’ economic problems cannot be resolved, however, by what are in fact far-right protests, demanding a policy that will make the pandemic, and its attendant mass deaths and economic dislocation, continue indefinitely. The Freedom Convoy is a far-right provocation, abetted by pseudo-left parties such as LFI. Workers must oppose it, seek to influence unvaccinated workers who may join it, and oppose the attempts of the European bourgeoisie to assemble a fascistic movement based on a policy of mass COVID-19 infection.



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