

Canada's governments implement key elements of far-right Freedom Convoy's pandemic policy

Roger Jordan
9 February 2022

As the occupation of downtown Ottawa by far-right thugs demanding the scrapping of all COVID-19 public health restrictions approaches the end of its second week, Canada's federal and provincial governments are moving to put this homicidal program into practice.

The Freedom Convoy has been built up and incited by the Conservative official opposition and much of the corporate media to push politics far to the right, beginning with the elimination of all remaining anti-COVID public health measures.

The Convoy, whose leaders have publicly called for the overthrow of Canada's elected government and its replacement by a 90-day emergency junta, is being used as a battering ram to intimidate and breakdown the widespread popular support for COVID-19 public health measures.

Yesterday, the *Wall Street Journal* published an editorial that claimed the Convoy—which is opposed by the vast majority of Canadians—is proof that “large swaths of humanity are done with Covid-19 restrictions, mandates and excessive meddling in their lives.” It went on to demand governments abandon all anti-COVID measures forthwith.

Emboldened by this support, Convoy supporters have now dramatically widened the scope of their protests. For the past two days, they have shut down most traffic across the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor and Detroit and as of yesterday they also blockaded the Bluewater Bridge between Sarnia, Ontario, and Port Huron, Michigan. As a result, auto production on both sides of the border is beginning to be severely impacted.

The protesters' ability to disrupt key commercial arteries between Canada and the US is not due to the size of the crowds they have mobilized. Rather the police have accorded kid-glove treatment to actions that are manifestly illegal, and which were they perpetrated by left-wing protesters would have occasioned a quick and violent state response.

In Monday evening's emergency parliamentary debate on the Ottawa occupation, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made a major concession to the armed besiegers of Canada's capital when he declared, “Pandemic restrictions are not forever.” The significance of this remark was unmistakable, coming just three days after Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Theresa Tam, a Trudeau government appointee, told a Friday press conference that all COVID-19 measures would need to be “re-examined” in the coming weeks because “this virus isn't going away.”

Within hours of Trudeau's comments Monday, provincial premiers with jurisdiction over close to half of Canada's 38 million inhabitants announced an end to all remaining restrictions—either immediately or in a matter of weeks.

At a Tuesday evening press conference billed as the presentation of a “path back to normal,” Alberta's United Conservative Party premier, Jason Kenney, announced the immediate end to vaccine passports for access to public buildings, the scrapping of mask mandates in schools and

everywhere else for children aged under 12 as of next Monday, and the removal of all other restrictions by March 1. Showing his utter indifference to the close to 150 Canadians currently dying daily from COVID-19, Kenney declared it time to “move on from a widespread pandemic response.”

Earlier Tuesday, Quebec Premier François Legault unveiled a plan that will eliminate all public health restrictions by March 14. As of Saturday, gathering limits for private households and in restaurants will be abolished. Cynically calling his government's decision to abandon pandemic mitigation measures a “calculated risk,” Legault made clear that the ruling elite proposes to allow the virus to circulate forever, at the cost of countless more lives. “We will need to learn to live with the virus,” he proclaimed. “There may be a sixth wave eventually, but we will have to live with COVID.”

Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe, the provincial leader who has most vocally backed the Convoy, also announced Tuesday a plan to scrap the province's vaccine passport as of February 14. Mask mandates will be eliminated at the end of February.

In British Columbia, which is governed by the ostensibly “left” New Democratic Party (NDP), Premier John Horgan indicated at a Tuesday press conference that Chief Public Health Officer Bonnie Henry will present a plan to scrap the province's anti-COVID measures within two weeks. Henry stated January 21 that BC would become the first province to treat COVID-19 like “influenza” or the “common cold,” and subsequently declared that the province was in “a real transition in moving out of the pandemic and learning to live with this virus.”

The driving force behind these reckless decisions is the principle of profits before human life. As has been the case throughout the pandemic, governments at all levels have only tolerated temporary and totally inadequate public restrictions when forced to impose them due to working class opposition or the imminent collapse of the health care system. Yet they have spared no expense in bailing out the banks and big business to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars. As a result, Canada's billionaires increased their wealth by \$78 billion just during the pandemic's first year. Workers, meanwhile, were placed on makeshift rations and then cut off from all pandemic aid, forcing them to return to unsafe workplaces.

Trudeau and his provincial allies have shamelessly sought to portray their policies as being “led by science” and aimed at protecting everyone. In Monday night's parliamentary debate, Trudeau returned to these themes when he declared, “This pandemic has sucked for all Canadians, but Canadians know the way to get through it is to continue listening to science, continuing to lean on each other, continuing to be there for each other.”

This is a pack of lies. The ruinous response of the Trudeau Liberal

government and its provincial counterparts to the pandemic has led to five successive waves of mass infection that have claimed 35,000 lives—including five thousand just in the past six weeks.

Far from “listening to science,” Canada’s governments have refused to adopt a Zero COVID elimination strategy and justified their “profits before lives” policy through the promotion of pseudo-scientific lies and disinformation. These include claims that droplets not aerosols are the principal means of COVID transmission, that cloth and normal medical masks provide adequate protection from the virus, that its impact on children is benign, and that schools are not important vectors of transmission.

For two months after COVID was identified in early January 2020 as a potential pandemic threat, Canadian authorities did essentially nothing to bolster the country’s already dangerously overstretched health care system or to set in place the infrastructure for mass testing, contact tracing, and quarantining. Only on March 10, 2020, just two days before Quebec initiated the first lockdown, did the Trudeau government even write the provinces to inquire about potential shortages of PPE (personal protective equipment) and vital equipment like ventilators.

After the first wave of infections in the spring of 2020, the Trudeau government disregarded all scientific warnings and championed the provincial government-implemented back-to-work/back-to-school campaign. Soon after schools reopened in September 2020, over the objections of many teachers and parents, cases began to rise and by mid-October rapidly. Nevertheless, the provinces, cheered on by the Trudeau government, which had announced in its September 2020 throne speech that any future lockdowns should be local and short-lived, persisted in keeping schools open. This led to a devastating crush of infections and deaths in and December 2020-January 2021.

Whilst scientific research from Montreal demonstrated that transmission in schools fueled Canada’s second wave which killed more than 10,000 people, the Trudeau government joined with the provinces in continuing to promote the lie that schools were “safe” and not playing a major role in COVID transmission.

The Trudeau government also disregarded the science showing that COVID-19 is transmitted through aerosols. It took Tam till November 2021, almost two years into the pandemic, to publicly declare airborne transmission the primary source of infection. In the meantime, governments at all levels denied workers’ requests for high-quality personal protective equipment to guard against infection by aerosols, tiny particles that can remain suspended in the air for hours.

Trudeau and his provincial counterparts grossly misused the availability of vaccines from December 2020 onwards to intensify their push to force workers back on the job amid the pandemic. Their vaccine-only strategy, which dismissed the warnings of scientists that vaccines, while critical to preventing serious illness could not stop virus transmission alone—especially under conditions when an important segment of the population was unvaccinated, including young people for whom as yet there were no vaccines—led Canada into the third and fourth waves of infection during the spring and late summer of 2021.

Alberta Premier Kenney, who now claims to be acting “prudently” and “carefully” as he dismantles all public health restrictions, already declared the pandemic over once before in July 2021. His “best summer ever” reopening plan produced a catastrophe, with thousands of deaths and hospitals implementing triage during Alberta’s deadly fourth wave.

With the emergence of Omicron in late November, the entire political establishment adopted a more or less explicit policy of mass infection. Trudeau waited three weeks after Omicron’s discovery to speak publicly to the population about its implications, despite the fact that its ability to evade vaccine immunity and spread more easily were recognized almost immediately.

Now, with the seven-day average of daily deaths near record highs, the

Trudeau Liberals and all provincial governments are declaring common cause with the most ardent advocates of “herd immunity,” and are declaring it is possible to manage COVID-19 in an “endemic” state.

At every stage, these policies were endorsed and imposed by the trade unions and the NDP, which has propped up the minority Liberal government since 2019, on the grounds it represents a “progressive” alternative to the Conservatives. Unions in the education, food processing, and industrial sectors forced their members to labour in dangerous workplaces and smothered all attempts by workers to resist the back-to-work drive.

The political establishment’s consistent flouting of a science-based approach to the pandemic, together with their refusal to provide adequate financial and social support to workers and small business owners, has played directly into the hands of the anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists, and anti-science far-right who dominate the Freedom Convoy.

It is significant in this regard that at a February 7 press conference given by the Convoy leaders, one of those present was Paul Alexander, a former Trump administration official who infamously declared in July 2020 with reference to the American population, “We want them infected.” While such statements were widely criticized at the time by sections of the “liberal” media and by those in government who advocated mitigation measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, there is now no discernible difference between the pandemic strategy pursued by Trudeau, Tam, and Canada’s provincial governments, and Alexander’s July 2020 remark.

The same is true across North America and Europe. Everywhere the ruling elite is determined to remove all remaining pandemic restrictions and “normalize” death as part of their drive to intensify profit extraction from the working class.

This fact underscores that the fight to put an end to COVID-19 once and for all through the systematic implementation of a global Zero COVID elimination/eradication strategy is first and foremost a political struggle that requires the development of a mass working class-led movement to break the grip of the capitalist oligarchy over social and economic life. This struggle must be conducted against the far-right Freedom Convoy and its direct backers in the Conservative Party, as well as its indirect enablers in the Trudeau government, trade unions, and New Democrats.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact