

Donor list leak exposes business and far-right forces sponsoring Canada's "Freedom Convoy"

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Data from the crowdfunding website GiveSendGo was leaked online Sunday. It provides insight into the right wing donors who have helped bankroll the far-right "Freedom Convoy" movement, which has occupied the neighborhood around Canada's parliament in Ottawa for more than two weeks and set up blockades at border crossings with the US.

Endorsed by former President Donald Trump, various January 6 coup plotters, Fox News and the world's richest man, Tesla CEO Elon Musk, the Convoy organizers have been flooded with donations from across Canada, the US and the rest of the world. A GoFundMe initiative raised US \$7.9 million before it was shut down for violating the crowdfunding site's terms of service which prohibit the use of funds to promote violence and harassment.

Following the suspension of the GoFundMe initiative, Convoy organizers moved to GiveSendGo, a self-proclaimed Christian crowdfunding site. GiveSendGo has been used by the far-right in the United States to raise funds for the defense of fascist shooter Kyle Rittenhouse, members of the Proud Boys, a designated terrorist group in Canada, as well as the insurrectionists who took part in the invasion of the US Capitol in Washington D.C. on January 6, 2021.

On Sunday night the GiveSendGo website was taken offline in an apparent hack and redirected to GiveSendGone.wtf. A message posted on the site read in part, "You helped fund the January 6 insurrection in the US. You helped fund an insurrection in Ottawa. In fact, you are committed to funding anything that keeps the raging fire of misinformation going until that it [sic] burns the world's collective democracies down." A file was released which exposed the data of all the donors, including their names, businesses and addresses.

According to the leaked data, \$8.4 million had been raised from 92,844 donors. An analysis by Queen's University Professor Amarnath Amarasingam, an expert on terrorism and political violence, found that 56 percent of donors are based in the United States. The second largest group of

donors, 39 percent, are from Canada.

Among other countries, donations were also given by individuals in Great Britain, Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, Sweden, France and Norway. Nine individuals donated \$7,600 from addresses in the Cayman Island, a popular tax haven utilized by the ultra-rich. Despite the significant international support for the convoy the majority of funds, \$4.31 million, came from donors based in Canada while \$3.62 million came from the US.

Monmouth University graduate researcher Sara Aniano found that among statements left by donors were: "I look forward to the day you tyrants are swinging from a noose."; "We have 2A [Second Amendment] here in America send your mounties and see what happens."; "CABAL PIGLETS ARE CORRUPT CRIMINALS WHO NEED SEVERE PUNISHMENT UNDER LAW"; "Death to all liberal traitors." Donors also left messages of support using language associated with the fascist QAnon movement.

The largest single donation was for \$215,000 but the donor remains unidentified. This was followed by \$90,000 from US tech billionaire Thomas Siebel, a prominent Republican Party funder. The next largest donation came from Brad Howland, the owner of a power washing business in Sussex Corner, New Brunswick.

Howland, who has posted statements in support of Trump on Facebook, confirmed to CBC News that he had made the donation. "We are thankful to be blessed enough to support their efforts to do what they have to do in a peaceful way until the government removes the mandates to restore all our freedom as pre-COVID," he explained.

Ben Pogue, the CEO of a construction company based in Dallas, Texas, gave \$20,000 to support the Ottawa occupation. Pogue and his wife gave over \$200,000 to Trump's reelection campaign in 2019 and posted photos with the Trump family on social media. Pogue's father subsequently received a pardon from Trump in 2020 for evading \$400,000 in taxes.

A vice-president of an AutoCanada car dealership in London, Ontario gave \$25,000 and another \$20,000 was given by the chair of a community and family support organization in Cannington, Ontario. Other donors used email addresses associated with the Correctional Services of Canada, US Bureau of Prisons, US Department of Justice, Transportation Safety Administration and NASA.

Significant business donors to the scuttled GoFundMe identified by news outlet PressProgress include: the Range Langley, Canada's largest shooting range, located in Langley, British Columbia which gave \$18,000; Marine Tech Industries, a ship repair company in Surrey, British Columbia, which provided \$5,000; and Murray Wedge, a portfolio manager at National Bank Financial based in Toronto provided \$5,000.

Another significant stream of funding for the convoy has come in the form of Bitcoin. The popular cryptocurrency allows for anonymous payments, which has allowed Convoy organizers to utilize donations despite their bank accounts being frozen. *Bitcoin Magazine* reported Monday that nearly \$1 million had been raised so far from 5,511 donors in a campaign operated by the libertarian group HonkHonkHodl.

With the backing of the Conservative Party official opposition and sections of the mainstream corporate media, a rabble of small business owners, anti-vaccine conspiracy theorists, religious fundamentalists, fascist thugs and owner-operator drivers have been mobilized under the "Freedom Convoy" to demand the scrapping of a vaccine mandate for truck drivers crossing the US-Canada border and as a wedge for ending all COVID-19 mitigations. Organizers have openly discussed plans for overthrowing the government of Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and replacing it with an unelected junta.

Despite the outsized attention given to the protests and their demands, the majority of Canadians are vaccinated, including almost 90 percent of truck drivers, and COVID-19 mitigation measures remain popular.

At its peak, 5,000 to 8,000 have gathered in downtown Ottawa, while several hundred trucks block city streets where hooligans have run amuck. Occupiers have been allowed to set up hot tubs, barbecues and full music stages with video screens. The protests and blockades have been treated with kid gloves by the police from the local to federal level, with active duty and retired officers expressing their open sympathy. Organizer Tamar Lich responded to Trudeau's invocation of the Emergencies Act on Monday by declaring that the occupiers will "hold the line."

The exposure of the Convoy's financial backers is another confirmation that, regardless of the involvement of a smattering of confused or backward workers, the protest is not a working class movement. It has drawn support from

sections of the Canadian and American ruling elite who backed Trump and his coup attempt and mobilized enraged sections of the middle class and small business owners.

The GiveSendGo data also exposes the effort to turn the crisis of the Canadian government outward and manipulate popular anger into support for the anti-Russia war drive being pursued by Canadian and American imperialism in Ukraine. The Canadian Press published an article Tuesday with a headline which asked, without providing any evidence, "Are Canadian protest over COVID-19 restrictions a factor in Putin's Ukraine timeline?"

The homicidal calls for an end of anti-COVID-19 measures and a "return to normal" are the opposite of what the working class requires and has been demanding. Teachers and students across Canada have been protesting the unsafe reopening of schools and demanding more, not less, protection from a virus which has infected over 3 million and killed more than 35,500, thanks to the "herd immunity" strategy which has been pursued by every party in government, including the New Democratic Party.

In response to the Convoy, provincial, territorial and federal governments are moving to rip up all remaining mitigation measures including vaccine passports, indoor crowd limits and masking requirements. Workers in Canada and around the world must oppose the rightward shift in Canadian politics now underway and take up the demand for a science-based elimination strategy to stop the spread of COVID-19 and save lives by bringing the pandemic to an end.



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