

Canada's ruling elite applauds Trudeau's use of emergency powers against far-right Freedom Convoy

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The federal Liberal government's invocation of the never-before-used Emergencies Act to end the far-right siege of Parliament and downtown Ottawa and the blockading of Canada-US border crossings has been widely supported by the Canadian ruling class.

Especially enthusiastic have been the country's most important business lobby groups. Business Council of Canada CEO Goldy Hyder praised Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for showing "national leadership" to "end the illegal blockades." Perry Beatty, president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, applauded the government for upholding "the rule of law," which is "critical for our economy's ability to function."

Even before Trudeau announced that he was proclaiming a "public order emergency" late Monday afternoon, the trade union-backed New Democratic Party (NDP) had declared that it would provide the minority Liberal government with the votes it needs to win Parliament's retroactive approval of the government's recourse to emergency measures. Speaking to reporters Monday morning, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh also signalled Canada's social-democrats would be ready to support the deployment of the military to disperse the far right, absurdly named Freedom Convoy, should that prove necessary.

In so far as there is any opposition within the political establishment to Trudeau's use of the Emergencies Act, it is coming almost exclusively from the federal Conservative Party, a cabal of hard-right premiers, the most right-wing sections of the corporate media and Maxime Bernier and his ultra-right People's Party of Canada. That is, from the same forces that encouraged and built up the far-right Convoy with the aim of using it as a bludgeon to shatter the remaining anti-COVID public health measures and push politics far to the right.

The Convoy has negligible popular support, including among truckers, almost 90 percent of whom are fully vaccinated. Most Canadians view the anti-democratic and chauvinist views of its far-right leaders as anathema.

That the Convoy has nonetheless assumed a menacing, outsized presence is attributable to two factors. First, the support and encouragement it has received from a powerful faction of the Canadian ruling class, as well as far-right forces in the US, beginning with Donald Trump and his co-conspirators in the Jan 6, 2021, coup plot. Second, the trade unions and NDP, in keeping with the role they have played throughout the pandemic in supporting the ruling class's prioritization of profits over lives, have kept the working class politically gagged and subordinated to the big business Liberal government.

Workers must beware. History has repeatedly demonstrated that

repressive measures, like the Emergencies Act, implemented by the political representatives of big business in the name of opposing the far-right enemies of the working people, are, as the class struggle intensifies, invariably turned against the working class.

Trudeau and his supporters claim the invocation of the Emergencies Act is "proportionate," upholds the "rule of law" and is subject to the constitutional guarantees outlined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In reality, the law, which is the successor to the draconian War Measures Act, grants the Liberal government sweeping powers. Anyone who enters a government-designated no-go zone can be arrested and is liable to be fined \$5,000 and imprisoned for up to five years. A blanket prohibition on all public assemblies deemed to go "beyond lawful protest" has also been imposed. The government can requisition resources, including tow trucks and any other equipment it deems necessary, to break up occupations or any other activities considered to be violations of the emergency regulations. Banks can be ordered to freeze accounts and prevent transactions they believe will be used to support the Convoy.

Furthermore, the Emergencies Act empowers the government to impose sweeping new prohibitions and orders at will for the duration of the 30-day emergency.

Trudeau claimed Monday that the emergency powers would be "geographically targeted." However, the published text of the order-in-council explicitly states that a public order emergency exists "throughout the country." In other words, the government can employ its sweeping powers anywhere it likes.

The justifications the order-in-council gives for invoking the Emergencies Act underscore that the Trudeau government is acting in the interests of Canada's capitalist elite—to protect corporate Canada's profits, defend Ottawa's alliance with US imperialism, and maintain the authority of the state.

The order published in the *Canada Gazette* says emergency powers are necessary because of "the threat or use of acts of serious violence against persons or property, including critical infrastructure, for the purpose of achieving a political or ideological objective." Further reasons include: "the adverse effects on the Canadian economy recovering from the impact of the pandemic," the "adverse effects" on "Canada's relationships with its trading partners, including the United States," "the breakdown in the distribution chain and the availability of essential goods, services, and resources," and "[t]he potential for an increase in the level of unrest and violence that would further threaten the safety and security of Canadians."

Trudeau came under immense pressure last week from big business

on both sides of the Canada-US border and from Washington to end the border blockades. With traffic across the Ambassador Bridge—which connects Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, Michigan—shut down, disrupting hundreds of millions of dollars in trade each day and forcing the closure of auto plants, US President Biden and his top officials made repeated phone calls to their Canadian counterparts to press for police action to reopen the border.

With the invocation of the Emergencies Act for the first time since its passage in 1988, a significant “political taboo” has been broken. If the ruling class is ready to use emergency powers to suppress small, far-right protests that are disrupting trade, how will it respond to the eruption of mass working class opposition to its criminal pandemic policy or a new round of capitalist austerity? As it is, the legal right-to-strike has all but been abolished for broad sections of the working class, from teachers to railway workers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has insisted throughout its coverage of the Ottawa occupation that absent the independent political intervention of the working class, the outcome of the present crisis, however resolved, will be a lurch of official politics sharply to the right. This warning has already been confirmed in spades.

The Trudeau government responded to the Convoy’s demand for the scrapping of all COVID-19 measures by greenlighting an unseemly scramble by all provinces to jettison the few remaining public health measures as quickly as possible, including mask mandates, capacity limits, and vaccine passports. On Tuesday, the day after it invoked the Emergencies Act, the Trudeau government declared that PCR tests will no longer be required for travelling to Canada.

At the same press conference at which he unveiled the government’s recourse to emergency powers, Trudeau announced a major escalation of Canada’s involvement in the war drive against Russia. Bowing to a months-long campaign led by the Conservatives and backed by the media, Trudeau confirmed that his government will send lethal weapons to Ukraine and provide the unstable Zelensky regime with a loan of C\$500 million.

Since Monday, the new emergency powers have had their desired effect on the border blockades. The blockade at the Coutts crossing in Alberta ended Tuesday, while another blockade at Emerson, Manitoba, ended Wednesday after police promised to press no charges. Four participants in the Coutts blockade have been charged with conspiracy to murder after the police seized a cache of weapons and body armour.

In Ottawa, fewer than 150 occupiers and about 360 vehicles remain in the area around Parliament Hill. Facing widespread criticism for the police’s kid-glove treatment of the occupiers, Ottawa police chief Peter Sloly tendered his resignation Tuesday.

Liberal government officials have indicated they want the occupation over before the weekend to prevent a further growth in the Convoy. Asked Wednesday whether force would be used to clear the streets, Trudeau stated that this would be a decision for the police to make.

NDP leader Singh reaffirmed his party’s support for the government’s use of the Emergencies Act yesterday. This stance has created an opening for the Conservatives to cynically posture as defenders of democratic rights. Interim Tory leader Candice Bergen stated yesterday that the official opposition will refuse to support the government’s invocation of emergency powers. She combined this with an appeal for the remaining occupiers to go home.

The Tories have been joined in their opposition by the Quebec-

sovereignist Bloc Quebecois (BQ), which cynically warned of the threat to democratic rights. The BQ’s right-wing record includes whipping up Islamophobia and backing Canadian imperialist wars.

Opposition to Trudeau’s invocation of the Emergencies Act has also come from the hard-right premiers of Alberta and Saskatchewan, Jason Kenney and Scott Moe, who played leading roles in building up the Freedom Convoy. Their attempt to pose as “democrats,” while courting the far right, is absurd. The Kenney government passed a draconian anti-protest law in 2020 that, much like the regulations the Liberals have enacted under the Emergencies Act, prohibits protests at locations deemed to be “critical infrastructure.” The law was adopted in response to left-wing anti-pipeline protests and demonstrations against police violence.

As for Moe, he promoted the far-right United We Roll truckers group, which intimidated and carried out acts of violence against locked-out oil refinery workers at Federated Cooperative Ltd. in Regina, Saskatchewan, in 2020. United We Roll is one of the leading groups within the Freedom Convoy.

The events of the past three weeks underscore that bourgeois democracy is collapsing in Canada, as in all the historically privileged imperialist states, under the pressure of ever-deepening social inequality, mounting popular opposition, and escalating global geopolitical tensions. Increasingly the ruling elite is turning to openly authoritarian forms of rule and bringing forward far-right and outright fascist forces as shock troops against the working class.

The only progressive way out is through the independent political mobilization of the working class. As the Socialist Equality Party wrote in its statement, “Canadian workers need a socialist program to defeat the threat of far-right political violence, end the pandemic and oppose war”:

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.



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