

# Would-be putschists and other leaders of Canada's far-right Freedom Convoy

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A powerful faction of Canada's ruling elite, including the official opposition Conservatives, much of the corporate media and sections of big business, have incited and promoted the far-right Freedom Convoy, which has been besieging parliament and downtown Ottawa for the past 22 days.

They have used the Convoy as a bludgeon to overcome widespread popular support for anti-COVID public health measures and to push politics in Canada far to the right.

A crucial element in this political conspiracy has been the promotion of the Convoy as a grassroots movement of truckers. Even after Convoy protesters ran amuck on the streets of Ottawa on the weekend of Jan. 29-30—flouting COVID restrictions, intimidating workers, and waving Confederate flags and swastikas—leading Conservatives, Sun Media and the *National Post* leapt to the Convoy's defence. Interim Conservative leader Candice Bergen has hailed the Convoy's participants as "patriotic, peace-loving Canadians" and repeatedly demanded that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau meet with Convoy leaders and offer them an "olive branch."

The Convoy's leadership—as this article will document—is in fact comprised of notorious right-wing extremists and outright fascists. The most prominent Convoy organizers and representatives are drawn from a cesspool of far-right, anti-Muslim, Christian fundamentalist, Alberta and western separatist, and libertarian groups. Many were previously active in the far-right truckers' group United We Roll or in the Yellow Vests (which, despite its name, shares next to nothing in common with the 2019 uprising of working people in France against social inequality and economic insecurity).

The claims that the Convoy is a movement of and for truckers are no less a fraud. Some 90 percent of Canadian truckers are fully vaccinated. In so far as the Convoy does involve truckers they are largely "independent," owner-operator truckers, a generally better-off and distinct petty bourgeois social layer.

Earlier this week, the *World Socialist Web Site* documented how the Convoy has benefited from significant political, financial and logistical support from the American far right. The ex-president and coup-plotter-in-chief Donald Trump and his co-conspirators in the attempt to nullify the 2020 presidential election, such as Texas Senator Ted Cruz, have hailed the Convoy. Fox News has given it saturation coverage. Many of those now occupying Ottawa are active in the cross-border network of far-right organizations that provided the shock troops for the January 6, 2021, storming of the US Capitol. (See: Donor list leak exposes business and far-right forces sponsoring Canada's Freedom Convoy)

The Ottawa Police has warned that Americans constitute a significant portion of the core group of Ottawa occupiers, and that many of that core group could be heavily armed. Earlier this week, the RCMP seized a cache of weapons and body armour from a group of more than a dozen right-wing extremists participating in the now dispersed Freedom Convoy border blockade at Coutts, Alberta. Four have since been charged with conspiracy to commit murder.

## Far-right and fascist activists

James Bauder is the founder of the group "Canada Unity," which initiated the Convoy. He also authored a document prominently displayed on Canada Unity's website—a so-called Memorandum of Understanding—that calls for the country's democratically elected government to be overthrown via a putsch and replaced by an emergency 90-day junta regime.

Bauder, a far-right QAnon supporter, is also a member of United We Roll, a group of far-right truckers responsible for acts of violence and intimidation against locked-out oil refinery workers at Federated Co-operatives Ltd. in Regina in 2020. Earlier that same year, the group attacked Indigenous protesters who were opposed to a proposed gas pipeline, earning them praise from Conservative Party politician and former cabinet minister Peter McKay. On Facebook, Bauder has propagated the Wuhan lab leak conspiracy theory regarding the origins of the coronavirus.

Tamara Lich is a self-described spokesperson for the Convoy and organized its now defunct GoFundMe page. She is a former member of the far-right Wildrose Party in Alberta and served as the right-wing western separatist Maverick Party's secretary, until she stepped down earlier this month to focus on the Convoy. Lich previously was an organizer for Yellow Vests Canada, where she promoted conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2019, she had to propose a change in the name of the Yellow Vests group in Medicine Hat, Alberta, because it had been associated with repeated death threats against Prime Minister Trudeau.

Benjamin Dichter is a podcaster and truck driver who stood as a candidate for the Stephen Harper-led Conservatives in a Toronto riding in 2015. Immersed in far-right politics, he subsequently joined Maxime Bernier's ultra-right People's Party of Canada (PPC), which models itself on European right-wing extremist parties like Germany's AfD and Marine Le Pen's *Ralliement national*. Dichter gave a speech at the PPC's national convention in 2019 in which he decried the "stench" of "political Islam" in Canada. Like Lich, he describes himself as a spokesperson for the Convoy and was listed with her as a co-director of its GoFundMe page.

Pat King, another key Convoy organizer and Canada Unity leader, is prominent among those encamped outside Parliament. A far-right provocateur, he has gained notoriety for his racist comments online towards Jews, Muslims and Chinese people. King claims there is a plot for "the depopulation of the Caucasian race." Asked in an interview late last year how COVID-19 measures could be ended, he responded, "The only way that this is going to be solved is with bullets." He has claimed that the virus is a "man-made bioweapon" and the vaccine is a government surveillance mechanism.

Jason LaFace is listed on the Canada Unity website as another Convoy organizer. According to Global News, his Facebook page carries far-right

images, including one that refers to “Canadian politicians who are not born in Canada” as “traitors.” In another, he poses in a hat with the initials of the Finnish neo-Nazi group the “Soldiers of Odin.”

Chris Barber, another organizer, is a Saskatchewan trucker who was fined \$14,000 last year for violating provincial health measures. He was invited to appear on Fox News as the guest of far-right host Tucker Carlson. Barber, like Pat King, was photographed with Conservative MP Jeremy Patzer.

These Convoy leaders are drawn from a broader far-right and fascist milieu that has developed in Canada in recent years with the support of sections of the political establishment and state apparatus. Rebel Media, a prominent far-right website with an international audience, was founded by Ezra Levant, a onetime rising star in the Conservative Party. Since the middle of the last decade, and emboldened by Trump’s election in 2016, white supremacist and fascist groups, such as La Meute in Quebec and the Proud Boys, have markedly increased their public profile.

Among the lesser known sitting politicians who have expressed support for the Convoy is Ontario MPP Randy Hillier, who sat in the legislature as part of the governing Progressive Conservatives for more than a decade prior to being removed from the party in 2019. He founded the group No More Lockdowns and plans to run for re-election to the provincial legislature this year under the banner of the far-right Ontario First Party. His daughter ran unsuccessfully as a PPC candidate in the last federal election. Hillier’s No More Lockdowns group is supported by the fundamentalist preacher Henry Hildebrandt, who has appeared at the encampment in Ottawa. He has described public health measures as a harbinger of the “End-times” and has repeatedly flouted them.

While 63 percent of the donations to the Convoy’s GoFundMe page reportedly came from the United States, various Canadian businesses also provided significant financial support. In examining the figures, the investigative news outlet *PressProgress* noted the common thread was a consistent and vehement anti-socialism. Andrew Jakubow of Marine Tech Industries, a ship repair company, donated \$5,000, telling *PressProgress* that life during the pandemic was akin to living under “communist” dictatorship. Leslie Buzzell, the CEO of ESI Rail, gave \$5,000 to the Convoy and has expressed support for the People’s Party. Describing most Conservatives as “in Trudeau’s pockets,” he is now backing Pierre Poilievre, the most outspoken Convoy supporter on the Conservative frontbench, for the party leadership. His LinkedIn profile says the company employs 72 workers and boasts that revenue has doubled every year since its founding in 2010 through 2018.

Support for the Convoy has also come from the far-right academics Jordan Peterson, known for his self-help blather and virulent hostility to socialism and equality, and his associate Dr. Julie Ponesse, who was terminated from her teaching position for refusing to get vaccinated. In Ottawa, the occupation was addressed by Sandra Solomon, an anti-Muslim bigot, and the anti-Semitic holocaust denier Chris Sky (real name Saccoccia). Roger Hodgkinson, a pathologist from Alberta who has disseminated COVID-related conspiracy theories on the website Rumble, where he refers to the disease as a “hoax” and akin to the flu, also spoke at the occupation in Ottawa.

Convoy leaders boast that they have received “scientific” advice about the pandemic from Dr. Paul Alexander, a former Trump administration official who, in the name of achieving “herd immunity,” argued people be actively encouraged to get COVID-19. According to a Feb. 10 CBC report, Alexander had been at the Ottawa Convoy occupation site “for days,” had appeared at Convoy press conferences and spoken to Convoy supporters alongside PPC leader Bernier.

Another key constituency of support for the Convoy consists of military veterans and former police officers.

Tom Mazzaro, a Convoy leader, is a software developer who spent decades as an officer in the military. He is a member of the group “Police on Guard for Thee,” which describes itself as “a group of concerned retired and active duty peace officers looking to see the end of unconstitutional public health orders.” As the most polished and media-savvy figure, Mazzaro has been front and centre during the group’s choreographed press conferences.

Tom Quiggin, another Convoy organizer, is a former military intelligence officer and former employee at the Canadian Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies. He was also an adjunct lecturer at the Royal Military College. During a stint with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Quiggin was posted to the Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET), a post-9/11 security panel that includes members of CSIS, Canada’s principal domestic spy agency, the Canadian Border Services Agency, and various municipal police forces. An author, he has penned far-right screeds, combining Islamophobia with red-baiting. He has peddled conspiracy theories such as the “Great Reset” and has claimed the pandemic is a secret plot to bring about economic collapse. In 2019, he claimed that “Islamist entryism” is “rotting away at our society like syphilis.”

Daniel Bulford, another organizer, is a former RCMP officer who quit due to his refusal to get vaccinated last year. He is associated with the “Mounties for Freedom” group, which has called for the government to be unconstitutionally removed from office. In a news conference held by Convoy leaders, Bulford pointed to their close relationship with local police, the RCMP and the Parliamentary Protective Service. Addressing law enforcement officers directly, he said, “We’re doing this all for you as well.”

Support for the Convoy is not restricted to former members of the military and police. Many commentators have noted that their logistical expertise suggests they have considerable support from members of the security forces. The military has admitted that six active duty soldiers are being investigated for their connections to the occupation. The *Ottawa Citizen* reported that two soldiers from the elite counterterrorism unit JTF2 are under investigation. The army also announced last Friday that they were investigating an officer in New Brunswick who in uniform denounced the government as “traitors,” vaccine mandates as “genocide,” and called on military and police to rise up in opposition to them.

The group Police on Guard, formed during the pandemic and composed of former and active police and military members, has endorsed the occupations and its members have taken part. These revelations indicate the role of the security establishment in incubating far-right forces, a trend the government has conspicuously done little to address despite the near attempt on the Prime Minister’s life by a far-right army reservist less than two years ago.

One of the largest donations to the Convoy’s fundraising drive (\$18,000) came from The Range Langley, which hosts an indoor shooting range. It describes itself as a “proud supporter and employer of Canadian military and police.” The range is managed by a former sergeant in the armed forces and carries a statement in support of the Convoy on its website.

This rogues’ gallery exposes the real social composition of the Convoy and its supporters. The claim that they represent workers is a transparent lie, designed to shield their reactionary efforts to scrap even the mildest restrictions on business during the pandemic and to shift politics in Canada far to the right.

## Ex-military personnel and police officers



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