

Why Ontario Premier Ford wouldn't testify at public inquiry on use of Emergencies Act against far-right "Freedom" Convoy

James Clayton, Roger Jordan
23 November 2022

Ontario Premier Doug Ford has refused to testify at the ongoing public inquiry into the federal Liberal government's use of the never-before-invoked Emergencies Act to end the far-right "Freedom" Convoy's occupation of downtown Ottawa.

Both Ford and his former attorney-general, Sylvia Jones, defied subpoenas issued by the Public Order Emergency Commission (POEC) to appear before the inquiry, ultimately securing a court judgment that struck the subpoenas down on a legal technicality. Ford and Jones had previously refused to voluntarily answer the inquiry's questions.

If the premier of Canada's most populous province has gone to such extraordinary lengths to avoid appearing before the POEC, it is because he is determined to prevent any scrutiny, no matter how limited, of the support that he and a substantial section of Canada's ruling elite extended to the far-right Convoy.

The Trudeau Liberal government invoked the anti-democratic Emergencies Act on February 14, so as to grant the federal government and police forces sweeping powers to disperse with the Convoy. For 23 days, the Convoy besieged parliament and menacingly occupied downtown Ottawa, and for just under a week, starting Feb. 7, its supporters blockaded the Canada-US Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, Ontario, halting all trade and traffic.

The convoy was incited and systematically built up by a significant section of the ruling elite, led politically by the federal Conservatives, Ford, and other hard-right provincial premiers. They used it as a battering ram against the widespread popular support for public health measures to curb the spread of COVID-19, and as a means to push the Trudeau Liberal government far to the right, if not overthrow it.

Ottawa's international allies in the G7 began to question the Trudeau government's ability to retain control over the situation. These concerns rapidly became demands from the Biden administration to break up the occupations, especially after Convoy supporters began blockading the Ambassador Bridge. Throughout the occupation, the "Freedom" Convoy received explicit backing from the federal Conservatives, with interim leader Candice Bergen infamously declaring that the official opposition should make the Convoy "Trudeau's problem."

The Convoy crisis came to a head from February 9 to 14, when Trudeau finally invoked the federal Emergencies Act. Three days

earlier, on February 11, Ford had declared a provincial emergency and over the following weekend police dismantled the Ambassador Bridge blockade.

When pressed to do so, Ford has always defended Trudeau's invocation of the Emergencies Act. This stance sets him apart from federal Tory leader Pierre Poilievre and other hard-right premiers, like Saskatchewan's Scott Moe and former Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, who made no secret of their support for the far-right Convoy and continue to demagogically attack Trudeau for his "authoritarian" use of the Emergencies Act.

In the days leading up to his declaration of a provincial state of emergency, Ford was in conversation with Flavio Volpe, head of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association. Volpe, and no doubt other powerful business representatives, pressed Ford to break up the blockade at the Ambassador Bridge, which was costing the automotive industry many millions of dollars per day in lost profits.

Ford has attempted to cover up all of the political issues in his extraordinary refusal to testify before the POEC with two cynical and dishonest arguments.

First, Ford asserted that the inquiry is a federal government inquiry, and not a provincial matter. For Ontario, "From day one," he told the Ontario Legislature Oct. 26, "this was a policing matter, not a political matter. This is a federal inquiry into the federal government's decision to use the federal Emergencies Act." This is ludicrous on its face. Ford was a central player in both the policing and the politics of the Convoy. Trudeau's resort to the never-before-used Emergencies Act was bound up with the failure of police forces falling under Ford's jurisdiction to disperse the patently illegal Convoy.

Ford's own daughter Krista is a Convoy activist who has compared public mask mandates to the Holocaust. More fundamentally, Ford provided more or less explicit support to the fascistic convoy and its goal of scrapping all COVID-19 public health measures.

Ford and his former solicitor-general also claimed "parliamentary privilege," a legal principle under which members of the Ontario legislature may not be compelled to testify in legal proceedings while the legislature is in session.

Ford's objections are a pathetic smokescreen, designed to prevent public exposure—from the horse's mouth—of his

government's conspiracy with the Convoy to end all COVID public health measures. At the same time, if at all possible, the Ontario premier wants to avoid talking publicly about how his government bowed to pressure from big business and the Biden administration to lift the blockade on the Ambassador Bridge—which was costing hundreds of millions of dollars in cross-border trade every day—because to do so could alienate his far-right supporters.

Testimony at the POEC from various witnesses has alluded to the political sympathies of the Ford Government and sections of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) for the fascist Convoy activists.

A declassified OPP “Hendon” intelligence report dated February 6 noted that “The apparent support from Canadian political figures is certain to further embolden those organizing and participating in the blockade, lending credibility and validating their tactics.” This report specifically named the Conservative Party as a culprit.

Former OPP Chief Superintendent Carson Parly testified that former Ottawa Police Chief Peter Sloly, who resigned amid the occupation due to criticism over the police's kid-glove treatment of the fascist mob, told him that elements within Ford's Cabinet “wanted him to fail... and he had sources within the Ministry letting him know that.”

Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson's testimony revealed a conversation between himself and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on February 8 in which Trudeau stated that “Doug Ford has been hiding from his responsibility for political reasons.” In the wake of this testimony, Trudeau tried to downplay its significance and present a display of unity for the entire capitalist ruling class. He stated that there were times during the Convoy crisis when governments “weren't working as tightly as would have been ideal ... But the important thing is that we all stood together and put Ontarians and Canadians first and we resolved the situation.”

Trudeau is lying—to protect not only himself, but also Doug Ford. The Canadian ruling class is desperately trying to conceal the fact that a substantial faction within its ranks eagerly seized on the Convoy, working to develop a far-right extra-parliamentary movement led by would-be putschists.

Moreover, Trudeau and his opponents within the ruling elite would rather avoid a public airing of their disagreements over which tactics should be used to crush the upsurge of working class opposition to their policies of war abroad and capitalist austerity at home. While the Tories and the most right-wing sections of the ruling elite are actively promoting fascist forces so they can be deployed in the future to smash strikes and mass protests; Trudeau would prefer to rely on his “partners” in the trade union bureaucracy and, when necessary, the existing state apparatus, including the Emergencies Act, to suppress the class struggle.

Little more than a month after the New Democratic Party and the trade unions had supported Trudeau in his invocation of the authoritarian Emergencies Act, the NDP, with the full-throated support of the trade unions, entered into a “confidence and supply” agreement with the minority Liberals, under which they have pledged to keep the Trudeau government in office until June 2025.

On February 10, with Ford refusing to participate in coordination meetings between the federal Government and the City of Ottawa

to bring the Convoy occupation to a halt, Ford was recorded on a phone call by a far-right activist promising to give the Convoy exactly what it was demanding. Ford declared: “We're pulling these (vaccine) passports. We're going to get back to normal. I can't get you the exact date, but it's going to be very soon. I'll be speaking over the next few days. Friday I'm going to put out a statement. Monday I'll be giving some dates. And we're going to move forward.”

This call was immediately leaked to the far-right news outlet Rebel Media. But the capitalist press has buried it, in the same spirit in which Justin Trudeau has attempted to paper over the raging pro-Convoy “insurrection” within elements of the state and police.

Who was Ford speaking to exactly? Rebel Media has blurred the original video, no doubt to “protect the guilty.” But another source has exposed the original video file, which indicates that Ford may have been speaking to George Roche, a far-right opponent of COVID public health measures who operates a conspiracy website and a self-styled “civil liberties” group called “The Line.” Roche has organized multiple violations of COVID public health measures, notably in St Thomas, Ontario, in November 2020.

There are also serious questions about the extent of the Ford Government's participation in back-channel negotiations with the Convoy, allegedly conducted via Ford's former Chief of Staff and personal friend Dean French. On February 13, Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson announced that a deal had been brokered to get the Convoy to vacate certain downtown residential areas and move their trucks to commercial streets such as Wellington—the effect of which would have been to *reinforce* the Convoy's siege of parliament. But all records of calls between French and Watson have magically been “lost.” This is likely the same deal referenced by the Ontario Provincial Police in their testimony before the POEC, in which OPP negotiators participated, and which was allegedly scuppered by the invocation of the Emergencies Act the following day.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)