

Billionaire CEO of Canada's Shopify demands abolition of right to vote for broad sections of the population

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21 August 2026

Social media comments by Tobias Lütke, the right-wing CEO of the Canadian online shopping site Shopify, in which the multi-billionaire attacks universal suffrage have been met with outrage in Canada and internationally.

Lütke declared that voting rights should be stripped from those whom he termed “dependents”—based on their payment of income tax. This would disenfranchise wide swathes of workers on low wages, elderly pensioners, the unemployed, students and the infirm. These proposals were met with support from within the Canadian capitalist oligarchy and international financial elite, including from the fascist Elon Musk.

The posts expose the internationally unified class character of the capitalist assault on basic democratic rights, which finds its most concentrated expression in the campaign of the fascist US President Donald Trump to establish a presidential dictatorship. The reaction to Lütke's comments exposes the political complicity of Canada's social democratic NDP and pseudo-left, who have falsely claim that Lütke's hostility to democracy is merely “un-Canadian.” In fact, attacks on worker rights, including the right to strike, and the promotion of authoritarian forms of rule feature ever more prominently in Canadian political life.

Lütke's remarks came in a series of replies to an X post by Jordan Grimes, a Democratic Party activist in San Francisco. The Democrat attacked elderly San Francisco residents mobilized at a town hall meeting to oppose a high-rise housing development. Grimes characterized the elderly voters as “the living dead,” complaining that they had outlived their democratic rights, and were a far greater obstacle than capitalism to solving the housing crisis.

To these complaints, Lütke responded with enthusiasm to strip people of their democratic rights. He cynically framed this as an inversion of the “New Deal” social reforms in the US in the 1930s:

“New deal: when you get your pension deal it's locked in and guaranteed. But now you are a dependent and that means no voting, just like dependents under age. Enjoy the deal, let people with a stake in the future decide.”

This outrageous proposition drew support from another Canadian, former TD Bank executive Eric Thor: “Interesting... what about weighted voting proportional to the level of income tax you pay? (no income tax paid - 0 vote, \$1-100k - 1 vote, \$100-200k 2 votes and so on... cap it at 5 votes for \$500k+. For those that constantly complain about the wealthy not paying tax/fair share they'd have nothing to worry about right? Why not reward representation of taxation and build a democracy around those that foot the bill?”

Lütke responded enthusiastically that this was a “good system,” and later that “Retired, Unemployed, Unemployable, and useful idiots are the only people who go to these town hall sessions.”

The comments were so ~~Fortune~~ outrageous that even unapologetic advocate for the enrichment of the ultra-wealthy owned by the Thai billionaire Chatchaval Jiravanon, felt compelled to pose the critical question, “Why did a \$154 billion CEO just endorse stripping most Americans of their democratic rights, and taking us back to the 19th century?”

Canada's newly minted leader of the social-democratic NDP, the former journalist Avi Lewis, feebly attempted to answer this question on the live-stream of the pseudo-left video blogger Rachel Gilmore. Lewis, who could barely contain his giggles, characterized Lütke's comments as “...weirdness, the marginal, extreme prejudicial worldview of the trillionaire class in the United States. These are really un-Canadian, gross, anti-democratic views...” Agreeing, Gilmore noted that BC NDP leader David Eby had called Lütke's suggestion “a stupid idea.” In other words, Lütke's attack on democracy arises as the result of an incapacity or a character defect, incompatible with an idealized set of national values.

This is not an analysis, but rather a cover up operation on behalf of Canadian imperialism. The Canadian state arose as the organized political expression of the class hostility of the colonial bourgeoisie and bankers to the most radical democratic revolution of its time, the American Civil War. Democratic rights such as universal male suffrage, which were first won in the United States, even if they were not universally applied, were only granted decades later in Canada.

Today's Canadian government is rolling back these rights. The right to strike now exists at the whim of the Labour Minister, who can invoke Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code to force workers back to work without passing legislation, but with the full collaboration of the union bureaucracy for which NDP leader Avi Lewis is the paid political spokesman. The use of the “notwithstanding clause” of the Constitution, which permits governments to violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms if expedient, has become commonplace. The government relied on a secret interpretation of the law to suspend democratic rights during the occupation of Ottawa by the fascist, misnamed “Freedom Convoy.” The government has moved to criminalize statements of principled opposition to Israel's genocide.

The Canadian ruling class' “opposition” to Trump is bound up solely with the fact that his fascist “America first” agenda cuts across the interests of Canadian imperialism. On social policy and militarism, however, Canadian big business shares much common ground with Trump. Prime Minister Mark Carney has appealed for the establishment of a new “grand bargain” with the United States as a junior partner in a Third imperialist World War for the redivision of the world. Under Carney's government, official politics has moved sharply to the right, with intensified austerity, the outlawing of strikes, and the commitment to spend 5 percent of Canada's GDP on the military and related industries

by 2035.

The effect of Lewis' contention that Tobi Lütke's hostility to democracy is "un-Canadian" is to cover all of this up, when in fact his comments expose the fact that the Canadian capitalist class indeed shares the "extreme, prejudicial worldview of the trillionaire class in the United States" and is moving to embrace fascism as part of an international political process.

This was demonstrated by Gilmore herself in the same podcast episode. Multiple Canadian corporate executives have defended Lütke's attack on democracy. Lucy Hargreaves, CEO of the far-right corporate think tank "Build Canada" declared that "maybe we should have an age-out age for voting." Build Canada, which has the ear of Carney, has also attacked immigrant rights and demanded further reductions in capital gains taxes.

Shopify board member Lulu Chen Meservey complained that Lütke's "accomplishments don't count if you engage in wrongthink," trivializing his attack on basic democratic rights, and attempting to cast his critics as Orwellian state censors.

Fellow board member David Heinemeier Hansson also defended Lütke on the basis of his "accomplishments," boasting that "Tobi is the sole seeding reason that there is a Shopify, that it has prospered beyond the wildest shareholder imaginations, and that it has its stellar reputation among merchants and customers alike. Our care and appreciation couldn't be greater!" Elon Musk responded with "100%. Tobi is a national treasure of Canada."

This raises the question—what is the nature of Lütke's company? Shopify is Canada's version of Amazon—a merchant retail platform reaping profits as a middleman between producers and consumers. It creates no new value at all, but privately appropriates value socially created by workers across industry by virtue of its ownership of payments technology, from which it extracts fees. It is a rent-seeking operation from start to finish!

And it is a very profitable one. Shopify President Harley Finkelstein recently took to X to boast that, "Q2 is in, and it was a monster quarter. \$116B in merchant sales, up 32% YoY. \$3.6B revenue, up 34% YoY. \$654M free cash flow, 18% margin. Five quarters running, GMV has grown more than 30%. The bigger story underneath the numbers, every shift AI is creating plays to Shopify's strengths."

If the French *ancien régime* had issued quarterly reports, one can imagine Marie Antoinette similarly waxing poetic about her many happy returns. Shopify's "tech bros" live at the opposite pole from the working class whose labour is the only source of their massive profits and luxurious lifestyles, insulated, for the moment, from the growing social misery and rapidly escalating political rage which the capitalist system is generating at the other pole.

Marxists understand that social being determines social consciousness. Lütke's attack on democracy, and the support it finds among investors and corporate executives, arises not out of some shared character defect, though they may share many such defects, but as the attitude corresponding to the parasitical mode of life of the now dominant section of the global capitalist oligarchy, which engorges itself via stock market manipulations, cryptocurrency Ponzi schemes, fees, and bare-faced swindling. The continued social existence of this parasitic layer depends upon the ever more ruthless exploitation of the working class and the extraction of ever greater profits from their labour power.

Every democratic victory and social concession won by the working class over two centuries of struggle thus now constitutes an intolerable barrier to capitalist profits, and is therefore being dispensed with. The most advanced expression of this process is underway in the United States, where the financial oligarchy has elevated Donald Trump to the presidency twice, in order to align the state apparatus politically with the already-existing oligarchic organization of economic life, dominated by a handful of mega-billionaires and its first trillionaire, Musk.

This parasitic social layer, epitomized by characters such as Musk and the CEO of Palantir Peter Thiel, openly embrace the ideology of the "dark enlightenment" promoted by the software engineer Curtis Yarvin, who advocates the transformation of bourgeois democracies into openly fascist, corporate monarchical city-states dominated by the super-rich.

The notion that Canada is some happy island insulated from these processes by an artificial line drawn across the 49th parallel is a nationalist myth. The Canadian state constitutes an executive committee for managing the affairs of the capitalist ruling class, in order to increase its profits. This reality is revealed in the details of Lütke's own financial arrangements and dealings, which his critics have ascribed merely to Lütke's apparently boundless personal shamelessness.

Fortune's Nick Lichtenberg noted that in 2022, Lütke arranged a "'Founder's Share' structure for his holdings in Shopify which guarantees Lütke 40% of the company's voting power regardless of how much equity he actually owns..." Further, Lütke avoids paying any income taxes at all, which apply at a maximum rate of 50.5 percent. As Shopify CEO he takes a \$1 annual salary in favour of stock options which are taxed in Canada at an effective rate of 15 percent. One rule for elderly pensioners and the poor, quite another one for Tobi Lütke!

These arrangements are not merely the work of a colossal hypocrite, though that is certainly an apt description of the man. They would not be possible without the legal support of the Canadian capitalist state, to which Lütke enjoys preferential access.

Heavily redacted briefing notes supplied to Mark Carney for a January 2026 meeting with Lütke reveal that the PM had sought the CEO's advice about tax credits for "scientific research and development," a dubious tax shelter scheme in which corporations classify all kinds of ordinary business activity as "research" and deduct these expenses from taxable income.

The working class must draw the appropriate political conclusions.

While it conspires with CEOs to cut their taxes, the Carney government is preparing Canadian imperialism to participate as a belligerent in a Third World imperialist war for the redivision of resources and trade routes. It has commenced a multi-hundred-billion-dollar campaign of rearmament to defend the capitalist social order, and the profits of social parasites like Tobias Lütke. These costs will be borne by the working class in the form of the destruction of the welfare state and the imposition of crushing regimes in workplaces.

Carney's government has no mandate to wage this war. It was elected on a wave of revulsion against Trump and the expression of Trumpism in Canada's Conservative Party. It won a minority it subsequently turned into a slim majority by shifting so far to the right that it was able to attract several Conservative MPs, who crossed the floor to the government benches.

Carney is now implementing many Trump-style policies—attacking democratic rights, engaging in wars of aggression, abandoning plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and fast-tracking massive resource extraction projects over the heads of local communities. Lütke's remarks are thus a particularly concentrated expression of the contemptuous attitude towards basic democratic rights which already animates the Carney government and the Canadian ruling class as a whole.

The same process which is driving the capitalist oligarchy to attack democracy is driving hundreds of millions of workers and youth towards socialism around the world. While CEOs celebrate record profits, the experience of working-class life under capitalism is intolerable. A process of mass radicalization and class struggle has begun.

The NDP and trade union bureaucracy promote Canadian nationalism in order to bind the working class to the Canadian capitalist oligarchy, and to prevent them at all costs from drawing revolutionary socialist conclusions. They are openly collaborating with the government and the state in a corporatist alliance to smother opposition and suppress the struggles of the

working class. Their promotion of “Team Canada” to fight Trump means partnering with the former central banker Carney and multi-billionaire opponents of democratic rights like Lütke.

The growing movement of the working class and youth requires political leadership, armed with an internationalist revolutionary socialist perspective and program. The social power of the working class of Canada and the United States must be mobilized in a joint struggle for a socialist society which can expropriate the billionaire oligarchs in both countries, stop the war and place political power in the hands of a workers’ government. This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Parties, the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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