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The far-right occupation of Ottawa: January 6 conspiracy hits Canada

Canada's Parliament and national capital have now been under siege for 12 days by far-right and fascist activists, many of them equipped with firearms and other lethal weapons. They are vowing to continue their occupation of downtown Ottawa until all public health measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are abolished.



Protestors show their support for the Freedom Convoy of truck drivers who are making their way to Ottawa to protest against COVID-19 vaccine mandates by the Canadian government on Thursday, Jan. 27, 2022, in Vaughan. (Photo by Arthur Mola/Invision/AP)

The vast majority of Canadians—including truckers, almost 90 percent of whom are fully vaccinated—view the far-right “Freedom Convoy” with revulsion.

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Nevertheless, the Convoy constitutes a grave and imminent threat to the democratic and social rights of workers in Canada and around the world.

There are two essential reasons for this. First, the Convoy has been conjured up by, and is serving as an extra-parliamentary instrument of, powerful sections of Canada's capitalist ruling elite—politically fronted by the Conservative Party official opposition and much of the corporate media. Their aim is to push politics far to the right, beginning with the abandonment of all anti-COVID-19 measures, and to replace Justin Trudeau's minority Liberal big business government with a regime committed to even more aggressively pursuing class war at home and the predatory interests of Canadian imperialism globally.

This anti-democratic and anti-working conspiracy is being aided and abetted by Donald Trump, other leading figures in the failed January 6, 2021 coup and the fascist riff-raff that served as their shock troops in the attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 US presidential election by storming the US Capitol. These forces are providing the Convoy with substantial political, financial and logistical support.

It is, in other words, a cross-border far-right conspiracy. In April 2020, Trump called on his supporters to "liberate" Michigan and other states, organizing fascist-led rallies to demand the end of all COVID-19 restrictions, as the US carried out the premature reopening of businesses and schools. In Michigan, these rallies led to a far advanced plot to overthrow the state government and kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer. It is these forces that then provided the personnel for the January 6 insurrection.

The current conspiracy is seeking to exploit anger and frustration over the Trudeau government's ruinous response to the pandemic. Because it conflicts with the interests of Canada's corporate elite, Trudeau has rejected a science-based Zero COVID policy and only implemented ever more limited mitigation measures, resulting in five waves of mass infection and death.

The second and even more fundamental reason that the elite-incited, far right-led Convoy represents a real and pressing danger is that the working class is being politically muzzled and demobilized by the trade unions and the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).

Already the convoy has been used to shift politics in Canada sharply to the right. The most conspicuous Convoy supporters among the cabal of right-wing provincial premiers, Saskatchewan's Scott Moe and Alberta's Jason Kenney, have pledged to lift all remaining anti-COVID public health measures forthwith, even as the Omicron wave has pushed deaths to levels seen only in the darkest days of the pandemic.

On Friday, Canada's chief public health officer, Theresa Tam, who serves at Trudeau's pleasure, effectively declared that Canadians "must learn to live with the virus." In a statement that would only be music to the ears of the far-right Convoy leaders, Tam proclaimed that all public health policies will need to be "re-examined" in the coming weeks as "this virus is not going to disappear."

Last Wednesday, the Conservatives ejected Erin O'Toole as their leader for not giving full-throated support to the Ottawa occupation. His interim replacement, Candice Bergen, has publicly touted the far-right elements occupying downtown Ottawa as "patriotic, peace-loving Canadians" and called on Prime Minister Trudeau to extend them an "olive branch." Privately, in emails to top party leaders leaked to the *Globe and Mail*, she argued the Conservatives should support the continued occupation of Ottawa so as to make it "Trudeau's problem."

Trump and other leaders of the January 6 insurrection have not only embraced the Ottawa occupation. They are making it the focus of their efforts to mobilize their supporters in a further violent assault on the democratic constitutional order. In a provocative statement Friday, Trump declared, "The Freedom Convoy is peacefully protesting the harsh policies of far-left lunatic Justin Trudeau who has destroyed Canada with insane Covid mandates." Texas Senator and Trump acolyte Ted Cruz, far-right Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, a member of the fascist QAnon group, have all weighed in along similar lines

The Ottawa police has confirmed that a large contingent of the occupiers are Americans and much of the financial resources sustaining the Convoy have come from the US. The far-right American activists besieging Canada's Parliament are either veterans of the January 6 storming of the Capitol or part of the close-knit, North America-wide network of fascist groups, like the Proud Boys, that helped organize it.

From the perspective of Trump and his co-conspirators, the Ottawa occupation is a continuation of their January 6 coup plot. Acting on Trump's call for the Convoy to serve as an example for Americans, far-right groups across the US are now, according to *Politico*, organizing Freedom Convoy protests to occupy state capitals from Alabama to Wyoming, with a plan to converge on Washington D.C during the first half of March.

If Trump, Cruz and their far-right allies can organize so openly and publicly, it is due above all to the criminal role played by Biden and the Democrats. In the more than a year since the failed January 6, 2021 coup, the Democrats have systematically covered up the role of the Republican Party in backing the putsch and refused to charge Trump or any of his leading co-conspirators.

The Freedom Convoy's occupation of Ottawa marks an inflection point in the breakdown of Canadian democracy. It is part of a shift by ruling elites around the world towards dictatorial forms of rule.

Throughout the past two years of the pandemic, the governments of the imperialist powers of North America and Europe have systematically prioritized profits over lives, leading to millions of deaths. While the billionaires and top one percent gorged themselves on government bailouts and the never-ending pumping of funds into financial markets, workers were provided at most makeshift pandemic relief. Amid this horrendous health and social crisis, US and Canadian imperialism, together with their European allies, are seeking to goad nuclear-armed Russia into a catastrophic war, even as they ratchet up tensions with China.

Lacking popular support for their criminal program of mass infection and death, militarism and ever greater social inequality, the capitalist ruling elites are mobilizing the far right to intimidate the working class. It finds in the fascists, with their toxic brand of nationalism, vicious anti-egalitarianism and veneration of brutality, the distillation of their own single-minded pursuit of profit and indifference to human life.

In every major capitalist country, from the US in April 2020 to Germany, France and now Canada, the ruling class has used far-right and fascistic forces to spearhead and enforce the dismantling of all anti-COVID-19 public health measures.

The ruling elite's patronage of far-right forces is motivated above all by its fear that the working class, radicalized by the pandemic and decades of attacks on its living standards, is taking the road of mass struggle across the globe.

The great danger is that this growing working class rebellion has yet to find its political articulation in the form of a mass movement for socialism in opposition to the entire political establishment, including its phony "left" parties and corporatist trade unions.

Absent the political intervention of the working class, all possible outcomes to the current standoff in Ottawa will produce only a further lurch to the right, imperiling the most fundamental democratic and social rights of the working class.

If Trudeau reaches a "political solution" with the far-right mob, this will only embolden the fascists and their reactionary backers in ruling circles. Should the Trudeau government call in the military to break up the occupation, the armed forces will assume an unprecedented role in Canadian political life, with the government's continued viability dependent on placating the military top brass and national security apparatus. And a violent clash between protesters and the police will be exploited by the Conservatives and corporate media to intensify their attacks on Trudeau and their push to bring to power a Boris Johnson-style Conservative regime aligned with the far right.

The struggle for the political independence of the working class now acquires burning urgency. The cutting edge of this fight must be an unrelenting exposure of the role of the trade unions and NDP, which have supported the Trudeau government and its "profits before lives" strategy throughout the pandemic.

The unions and NDP have systematically covered up the role that the Conservatives and other important sections of the ruling elite have played in inciting the Convoy and fashioning it into a far right-led extra-parliamentary force. While denouncing the occupiers as "racists" and "white supremacists," they never mention the fact that the Convoy aims to dismantle all COVID-19 public health measures. This omission should come as no surprise given that the unions and NDP have enforced the back-to-work/back-to-school drive throughout the pandemic in partnership with Trudeau.

Trade unions in Ottawa and Toronto intervened in recent days to sabotage and shut down counter-protests against the Convoy planned by rank-and-file workers. The union bureaucrats' outlook was summed up by the Canadian Labour Congress, which ordered everyone in a statement to "let elected MPs get down to work." In other words, they want the Liberal/NDP alliance to continue working on infecting the entire population with COVID-19, slashing pandemic aid to workers and preparing for war with Russia.

The actions of the unions and NDP demonstrate that they fear the prospect of a mass worker-led movement from below against war, austerity and the threat of dictatorship much more than they do the danger of political violence from the fascistic far right.

The stranglehold exercised by the unions and NDP over the working class must be broken through the construction of a network of rank-and-file committees in every workplace. These committees must decisively repudiate the program of mass infection and death spearheaded by the Freedom Convoy, take up the fight for a strategy of global COVID-19 elimination, and wage a political struggle to break the grip of the financial oligarchy and its political servants over all aspects of social and economic life.

This struggle necessitates first and foremost the construction of a socialist political leadership in the working class. Only a revolutionary party, steeped in the historical lessons of the Trotskyist movement's decades-long record of intransigent struggle against Stalinism and capitalist barbarism, can provide this leadership. We strongly urge everyone in Canada ready to fight the threat posed by the far right and the ruling elite's ruthless class war agenda to join and build the Socialist Equality Party as the Canadian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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