Canadian Truckers Protests Show Strength of Trumpism North of Border

written by Dan La Botz | February 22, 2022

Canadian "Freedom Convoy" opposes all mask and vaccination mandates and is rife with far right white supremacists. Photo from Business Insider.

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[Feb. 9, 2020] Truckers in a so-called "Freedom Convoy" have led protests of hundreds and sometimes thousands in several Canadian cities against pandemic health regulations such as vaccine mandates and testing. The convoy represents a significant movement by the country' growing far right, one that parallels and is influenced by right-wingers South of their border led by Donald Trump.

In fact, Donald Trump issued a statement calling Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of the Liberal Party a "far left lunatic" who had "destroyed Canada with insane COVID mandates." Trump supported the Canadian Freedom Convoy and suggested that truckers in the United States emulate it and bring the protest to Washington, D.C.

The Freedom Convoy criticizes Trudeau as responsible for the health policies they oppose. In a press conference Trudeau pointed out that 90 percent of truckers, like all Canadians, are vaccinated and that the Freedom Convoy represents a "small, fringe minority."

At the center of the protest is a Canadian law that requires truckers returning from the United States, where the COVID runs rampant, to isolate for fourteen days. As in the United States, amongst those protesting the mandates one finds racist opponents of foreign immigrants. Some carried the Canadian flag but others the American Gadsden "Don't Tread On Me" flag commonly carried in rightwing protests in the United States, and some swastikas.

"I wholeheartedly and unreservedly deplore and denounce what is happening in Ottawa with the so-called Freedom Convoy right now," said Conservative Senator Dennis Patterson. "Let me be clear: If you go about waving a Nazi or Confederate flag, you are declaring yourself a person who embraces hate, bigotry, and racism," Patterson resigned from the Conservative Caucus and because of its

support for the protests.

Protests have involved hundreds of trucks, even earth moving equipment, and protestors also created encampments, blocking major city thoroughfares in Ottawa, the capital of Canada.

“It’s not a protest anymore. It’s become an occupation,” Ontario Premier Doug Ford of the Progressive Conservative Party said, “It’s time for this to come to an end.”

Freedom Convoy also protested in cities in Quebec, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and British Columbia. Through GoFundMe the Convoy raised 10 million in Canadian dollars, but GoFundMe has seized the funds because of the group’s violent protests.

Truckers, who usually own their own trucks, represent the classic lower-middle class base of many rightwing movements. They are and consider themselves to be small businesspeople, though their earning and working conditions are often not much different than wage earners. In times like these, facing an unstable economy, higher fuel costs, and government restrictions, some have taken to the streets.

Six years ago, when I went to speak to a U.S.-Canada transportation workers convention, I was surprised to find a few Trump followers among them. Today in Canada, rightwing sentiment has grown. When Trump banned Syrian refugees in 2017, 25 percent of Canadians said that their country should have done the same. In 2018-19, a Yellow Vests movement in Canada attracted tens of thousands of followers on Facebook and organized small protests against a carbon tax, opposed oil pipelines, and stood against United Nations “globalists.” Their ranks were riddled with white supremacists, anti-Semites and anti-immigrant racists.

While Canada has a growing rightwing movement, it still represents a small portion of the population. Canada has strong labor and left traditions, and the left has criticized and organized to resist the Freedom Convoy. In Toronto hundreds of masked health workers protested against the convoy carrying signs reading “Health Not Hate.” In Vancouver, British Columbia, protestors actually blocked the Freedom Convoy. U.S. and Canadian leftist will have to work together to stop the growth of this new right.