

The Fight for Workers After the Convoy

CUPE Union Education resource sheet

Introduction

Many of us witnessed the so-called “Freedom Convoy” in-person, online, or through our television. And many of us may be left feeling confused, overwhelmed, or concerned about what we saw. This resource sheet seeks to address some of those concerns. It covers many of the most common misunderstandings and questions about the convoy.

We have compiled these responses after talking to convoy participants, reading their materials online, listening to police and community members in Ottawa, speaking with racialized and equity-seeking members and allies, and reading reports. We have also listed trustworthy resources for further learning.

Our union strongly condemns any acts of racism, hatred, or violence. We do not have any common ground with protesters who used the convoy to advance such division.

However, we agree with many convoy participants and supporters who share our concern about the growing inequality in our country and around the world. We also share the concern about the shrinking of the middle class and the inability of many to access opportunities to better their lives and their families’ lives. And we understand the frustration many feel with governments that seem unresponsive and out of touch with the struggles that workers face.

Like many, our union wants to see all of this changed by a democratically elected government that responds to economic and social challenges.

We hope you find this resource helpful as you explore your own feelings and responses to the convoy – and to the rise of the organized right in Canada.

This is a very uneasy time and can be fraught with fear and social isolation. If you find yourself needing some support, please consult the mental health resources that may be available to you through your collective agreement.

Additional external resources are available. Find them on cupe.ca, or by copying and pasting this link:

<https://cupe.ca/mental-health-resources-external>

Q&A

1. Who and what was behind the convoy?

The Canadian Anti-hate Network has documented the people behind the so-called “Freedom Convoy”. The four main organizers are connected to organizations that support conspiracy theories, Covid-19 origin myths, separatist and ethno-nationalist political groups, racism, and white supremacy. These types of organizations are on the far-right side of the political spectrum. Many of them believe in racially exclusive nationalism, traditional patriarchal values, and have outright racist views.

The Fight for Workers After the Convoy

CUPE Union Education resource sheet

At the beginning of the convoy, organizers released a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a series of political goals. The problem is that the arguments behind their demands rested on debunked data and/or misinformation. As the convoy gained momentum on its way to Ottawa, it included a demand to dissolve and replace the federal government.

2. Was everyone who was involved racist, Islamophobic or antisemitic?

No. Many of the people who took part in the convoy were protesting public health restrictions and vaccine requirements that the federal and provincial governments have taken since the emergence of Covid-19 in Canada. Many of the people who occupied Ottawa were convinced that the pandemic health protections were nothing more than governmental overreach and unreasonable abridgements of personal choice. Still, these views are often grounded in misinformation.

However, the feeling of grievance can be legitimate. The fact that many of the convoy organizers had emerged from far-right groups was either unknown or ignored by many participants.

3. Isn't protest a legitimate way to influence the government?

Absolutely. CUPE supports the right to protest and to engage in peaceful civil disobedience. But the Ottawa occupation was not peaceful or civil. Many convoy participants engaged in disruptive, threatening, and violent behaviour – for weeks. Ottawa quickly became unsafe for residents, largely because police seemed very reluctant to enforce bylaws and restore public order.

Things changed after police raided the homes of people associated with the border blockade at Coutts, Alberta, where they found a large cache of weapons. Police then charged four individuals with conspiracy to murder members of law enforcement.

The convoy movement quickly devolved from protest to political violence, with organizers of the Ottawa occupation publicly suggesting they would resist removal until their demands were met.

4. How can we know if what we see, hear, and read in mainstream media is trustworthy?

The Internet is awash in misinformation. This has profound effects on how we talk about the issues of the day. We all live, more and more, in an information environment that is exposed to conspiracy theories and “alternate facts.” This is especially true online, where misinformation has found fertile ground.

Our best response is to build our ability to critically evaluate what we see or read online. We can do this by checking our sources and evaluating their credibility.

For example, to determine if an article is trustworthy, check its **source**. Is the article from a reputable publication? Is the article a report, or an opinion? Are there other articles from trusted sources that back up the information? If it's an academic publication, has it been peer-reviewed by other experts in the same field?

Another strategy is to evaluate the **credibility** of a person or a statement or claim online. Does the author have expertise in the subject? Is the claim backed up by data or research? Is the person making

The Fight for Workers After the Convoy

CUPE Union Education resource sheet

an argument that may fall apart if we look closer? Approaching online information with a critical eye is vital to maintaining a shared understanding of the truth.

5. What do we do about the misinformation that is already out there, on social media for example?

Improving our own media literacy and civics education will help combat misinformation. Start by building your critical skills by checking the source and confirming its credibility. Consume a wide range of media. Check out progressive media as well as mainstream sources.

The key thing is to keep building solidarity, in our locals, workplaces and communities. The best weapon against the corrosive effects of misinformation is to continue working to maintain good-faith dialogue based on shared values. When we share a social framework, it's easier to discuss differences and resolve conflicts, too.

6. How do we counter the polarizing effects of the far-right and work towards solidarity?

Many Canadians gravitate toward the far right for many of the same reasons that we gravitate toward unions: we all want greater control over our own lives. The elites in power work very hard to maintain their position over the working class. People join unions to push back against the exploitative nature of capital and to demand a better society where everyone has the chance to build a decent life.

Similarly, many people drawn to the far right feel alienated from the economy, from politics, from opportunity and from society. Often, they're looking for some way to push back against that alienation. They see the rich getting richer and the politicians encouraging and benefitting from this inequality. Unions should always have space to welcome those who have been drawn to the far right, and we should keep the door open to them.

At the same time, there are many at the extreme edge of right-wing politicians who do not share our vision of a just society. Many of them support ideologies like white supremacy and Christian nationalism that say some people are better than others. CUPE absolutely rejects such ideologies. There is no common ground to be found here. The key is to advocate progressive solutions to our collective challenges and to reach out to all our members.

7. What's next?

The labour movement needs to speak to those influenced by the far right. We can do this by addressing peoples' economic and political anxieties, highlighting solutions that help workers, and continuing anti-racism education and activism. These efforts will build the strength of organized labour and weaken the ability of the far-right to influence our members and communities.

The Fight for Workers After the Convoy

CUPE Union Education resource sheet

Keep Learning

Key organizations

The **Canadian Anti-Hate Network** counters, monitors, and exposes hate promoting movements, groups, and individuals in Canada using every reasonable, legal, and ethical tool at our disposal. Read more about the far-right at antihate.ca

MediaSmarts is a Canadian organization for digital and media literacy dedicated to helping people of all ages build critical thinking skills to engage with media as active and informed digital citizens. Combat misinformation and fake news with their tools and resources at mediasmarts.ca/break-fake.

The **News Literacy Project** is an American organization that provides programs and resources to teach, learn and share the abilities needed to be smart, active consumers of news and information and equal and engaged participants in a democracy. Find tools and resources to build your media literacy at newslit.org/for-everyone.

Key resources

PDF: The Conspiracy Theory Handbook

PDF: A feminist analysis of the rise of the alt-right in Canada

Video: Seven traits of conspiratorial thinking

Video: How to tell what's true online

Video: How anger, faith and conspiracy theories fuelled the trucker convoy (CBC's The Fifth Estate)

Podcast: The convoy is an occupation (Conspirituality podcast) Find more resources debunking conspiracy theories and misinformation at conspirituality.net/

Find many more resources at this excellent **public google folder:**

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QantMT6JeCmeNjcntAkU5KFRJtelAOiph_uxm2Rsvl4/edit?usp=sharing

:np/cope 491 2022-03-30