

# MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER – COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY TO: A RESPONSE TO THE RISE OF THE ALT-RIGHT IN CANADA

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It has been two years since Canada declared a pandemic on March 11th, 2020. Twenty-four months of social distancing requirements, restrictions on travel and entertainment. And, twenty-four months of frontline worker exhaustion, fear, illness and loss. COVID-19 fatigue is real, and it is impacting our ability to feel compassion for one another's suffering as we focus on dilemmas closer to home. Many people are weary of not being able to gather with family and friends, and are tired of vaccine mandates and the requirement for face coverings at indoor spaces. Some who have lost jobs over vaccine mandates are outraged by the intrusiveness of 'big' government. Others have felt left out by government because of the deregulation of the trucking industry and the mis-classification of truckers as self-employed gig workers. While the media spotlight has touted the so-called "Freedom Convoy" as one led by truckers, the bigger issue in the trucking industry is the abuse and wage theft from shady labour practices.

Some who are pandemic-weary or left behind by an unjust economy have been co-opted by the far right. A minority of unvaccinated workers are feeling frustrated about their termination by employers, and anxious about rising inflation, housing shortages and growing economic inequality, have become vulnerable to the mis-information and hate speech of the alt-right. This far-right group, which includes white supremacists, has manipulated some workers' anxieties to create a deeply troubling situation in this country.

For three weeks, communities in Ottawa were subjected to huge trucks in their streets spewing out toxic diesel fumes and the blaring of air horns. Ottawa residents were subjected to bullying, intimidation, harassment, racism, anti-Semitism, misogyny and homophobia. The fact that it took three weeks for the authorities in Ottawa to handle and clear out the Convoy occupation is revealing of the double standard in how Indigenous or BIPOC communities are policed. Residents in Ottawa had to stand in the streets in order to block parts of the downtown core from further occupation of the Convoy; in Toronto, residents protested against harassment of healthcare workers and the takeover of streets. Organized labour supported these actions. Premier Ford only intervened at the Ambassador Bridge when the blockade made an impact on business – not ordinary citizens, as in Ottawa.

On February 20th, 2022, Community Solidarity Toronto brought together hundreds of people at Toronto City Hall to denounce these actions and rally in support of healthcare workers, and on the values of social, economic, racial and climate justice. The Labour Council played a key role in convening this group. The creation of Community Solidarity TO was inspired by Community Solidarity Ottawa, that took to the streets February 13, stopping trucks from reinforcing the Ottawa trucker occupation.

At a time when rallying cries of the left – "Our Streets!" and "Our bodies, our choices!" – are being appropriated by a far-right movement to propel the "Freedom" Convoy and to spew out politics of division and hate, Community Solidarity Toronto, a coalition of progressive labour, anti-racist, and social organizations, affirm our deep belief in equity, human rights and social solidarity with all communities and all those who work on the front lines and behind the front lines. This Labour Council respectfully challenges those who are stirring up hate, division and dissent in our society, especially stands opposed to those who are subjecting healthcare workers to abuse, and acknowledges that there is another way to fight for a just economy and a just society that includes all people from all walks of life.

Recognizing that the effects of this pandemic have been tough, and that there is a growing social and economic inequality in our country that needs to be addressed, the solution to ending this crisis is not through more hate or division, but through a lens of community love. Seeing others – even those who hold a different political ideology and ideas on resolving this pandemic – as human, as worthy of love and compassion, is how we will resolve this crisis: together, stronger.

We are all tired of this pandemic. We all want a secure and just future.

The way forward is not to exclude certain groups of workers while raising the floor for others. What we want, we want for all. We understand the anger and frustration of truckers and other workers who have been mis-classified as independent contractors, and about the rampant abuse and wage theft in the trucking industry. We stand with you in improving the rights and benefits of ALL gig workers.

We must reach well beyond those who already agree with our politics and our vision of the world. We need to engage those who don't think like us, to do deep organizing and to stop the spread of Conservative populism.

We will especially challenge those here, and south of our border, who weaponize their wealth to support a dangerous political movement that will likely focus its hate on immigrants, Indigenous peoples, workers, and equity-deserving communities for years to come.

Labour Council resolves to:

1. Urge all delegates and their unions support events and activities reflecting the vision of Community Solidarity Toronto
2. Continue to demand of Ford's Conservatives what working people and communities really need, including ten paid sick days, fully funded public services, repeal of Bill 124, and other initiatives we have pressed for already
3. Call on the federal government to expand eligibility for Employment Insurance, including those who have lost jobs due to the vaccine mandate
4. Call on employers to protect workers' health and safety through a full range of protection, including full access to hygiene (including washrooms), ventilation, masking as appropriate, and other mechanisms
5. Call on the media and journalists to label the ringleaders (e.g. Pat King) of the so-called Freedom Convoy as *white supremacists* – it is what they are, and those adjectives need to be added to their name each time they are reported on
6. Provide courageous leadership to our union members. Engage our membership and dedicate resources to education and organizing / mobilizing
7. Organize our members. Invest in deep organizing. Bridge the divides between our members and find a way to re-build our unions from these internal divisions set by the pandemic
8. Work with our community allies in all regions of the GTA to build solidarity not just from within labour, but also throughout this country and region