

JOINT STATEMENT FROM CANADA'S UNIONS ON THE OTTAWA OCCUPATION

Canada's unions have fought for generations for the right to protest. This is a cornerstone of our democratic system. But what we have witnessed on the streets of Canada's capital over the past thirteen days is something different altogether. This is not a protest, it is an occupation by an angry mob trying to disguise itself as a peaceful protest

We have seen an occupation of city streets and parks, disrupting workers, businesses and residents. Frontline workers, from retail to health workers, have been bullied and harassed. We have witnessed noise attacks keeping families up at all hours. We have seen right-wing extremists spreading messages filled with racism and intolerance, flying the Nazi and Confederate flags, alongside other symbols of violence and hate. We have seen organizers not only demand the end of all public health rules, but also call for the overthrow of our democratically elected government.

The leaders of this occupation include people who espoused Islamophobic, Anti-Semitic and racist hate on social media, organizers of the notorious far-right yellow vest protests, and people spreading extreme conspiracy theories and calls for violence. This is an attack on all of Canada and not just the people of Ottawa.

Canada's unions stand together, unequivocally opposed to these vile and hateful messages and condemn the ongoing harassment and violence against the people of Ottawa.

This occupation of Ottawa streets, on top of the latest wave of the pandemic, is having a devastating effect on the livelihood of already struggling workers and businesses. Workers are being harassed and bullied for just trying to stay safe while serving customers. Other businesses are being forced to close, which leaves them and their employees suffering economic losses they can ill afford.

This occupation has also raised serious questions about an uneven application of policing. Authorities spent the first week taking a hands-off approach to the occupation of city streets and parks, not even handing out parking tickets as big rigs blocked busy intersections and local businesses were forced to shutter. This is a far cry from the kinds of crackdowns we have seen in the past towards Indigenous land protests, Black Lives Matter and other equity-seeking activists or striking workers.

Over the past thirteen days, we have seen an unacceptable lack of leadership from those charged with maintaining the peace and defending public safety. Once this situation has been resolved, Canada's unions believe it is vital that there be a full investigation into the response by all levels of government to this occupation.

The Omicron wave is still affecting our communities and Canada's health care systems are inundated with patients and plagued by shortages of nurses, doctors and health care workers. Canada's unions believe it is absolutely critical that public health

decisions are based on science, and not on politics or an angry mob. We continue to call for strong occupational health & safety measures for all workers.

Canada's unions call on the federal and provincial governments to work together and quickly deliver urgently needed direct supports to the workers and businesses affected.

It is time for all levels of government to work together to help the people affected and put an end to this occupation of our nation's capital.

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