

“When right is wrong” By IAM Canadian General Vice-President



Dissent and protest are as much a part of democracy as elections, participation and debate. The right to protest has been a vehicle for many movements that ultimately changed our society for the better; the labour movement is a testament to the collective power in fighting for a better society.

In recent weeks, a movement has emerged in Ottawa and elsewhere as an outcry in response to the pandemic and how heavily it's been weighing on the shoulders of Canadians. The pandemic has shone a bright spotlight on the weakest points of our system, like access to healthcare, redistribution of wealth, affordable housing and working conditions.

Poorly conceived policies that cut social programs, funding to key public systems, unemployment supports, to name a few, have only been made worse by COVID-19, illustrating that our public system, one we so badly needed, has been chiseled away over the last several decades. It is not surprising that after two years of uncertainty and system failures, people feel betrayed, angry and outraged, and in need of change.

The impetus for the initial rally was rooted in discontent with politicians and inadequate policies that have deprived us of services so many Canadians needed, but couldn't count on. Unfortunately, a genuine protest against poorly tailored policies has been overtaken by a movement that is fueled by hatred, racism, Anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia.

We must not confuse this protest with movements fueled by a desire to achieve justice, equity and fairness; movements that strive to make things better for all of us. Any movement rooted in hatred and exclusion is one we should be weary of.

This isn't a movement that is inclusive and aims to achieve justice and equity. Nor is this protest a trucker convoy, it ceased being that long ago. Most truck drivers do not condone the violence and hatred expressed in this protest; their concerns were genuine and related to their livelihoods, which have now been delegitimized through actions of right-wing extremists.

A legitimate protest in Ottawa has devolved into a right-wing uprising by groups who espouse beliefs and principles that the vast majority of Canadians do not support. The protest is now funded by international extremist groups, showing just how disconnected the riot has become from the real issue. Simply put, a legitimate protest has become a Trojan horse for extremist groups who are exploiting uncertainty over vaccine mandates to push through an ultra-right wing political agenda.

Let's use our collective voice for making our society and country better by engaging with issues of the day, by voting, by speaking out. The power of political action shouldn't be underestimated, and those with legitimate concerns should speak to their local MP.

Don't let them use confusion, uncertainty and discontent for their purposes. Right-wing extremists are no friends of trade unionists, much of what unions have fought for would be lost, if they had their way. We ask you not to get swept up with the crowd, stand firm for what you know and believe in, and surely, we will show those stoking the flames of hatred and division that their vision is not ours.