

**CARBON CONVOYS: EXTRACTIVE POPULISM AND THE
CANADIAN FAR RIGHT**

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Abstract

This dissertation offers the first comprehensive analysis of the second phase of the pro-fossil fuel, “extractive populist” movement in Canada across a largely Alberta-based cycle of protest, from 2016 to 2022, with particular attention on the emergence and diffusion of the convoy as a signature protest tactic. Placing Marxist political ecology, Gramscian approaches to far-right populism, and conventional social movement theory into conversation, I ask what the relationship is between “corporate grassroots” campaigns, climate obstructionism, and the rise of the far right. Drawing on a corpus of data including interviews with convoy organizers and far-right activists as well as the social media output of numerous pro-fossil fuel groups, I trace the personnel, organizational, and ideological overlaps between the corporate grassroots ‘extractivist action coalition’ responsible for an increasingly robust pro-oil and gas protest movement from 2016 to 2018, and three subsequent far-right movements: Yellow Vests Canada (from late 2018 to 2019), Alberta separatism (from 2019 onward), and the “freedom” movement (from 2020 onward). In doing so, I document radicalization at multiple levels across the cycle: in movement tactics, as the convoy underwent an “upward scale shift” from the local to regional then national levels, and was converted from a tactic of demonstration into one of occupation; in ideological frames, as climate denial, nativist and Islamophobic opposition to migration, “western alienation,” opposition to public health measures, and evangelical Christianity, became linked in a chain of equivalence to the globalist conspiracy theory, which served as a “master frame” across the cycle, spreading from the far-right fringes to the mainstream; and finally, in the transformation of electoral politics in Alberta, manifested in the movement-ization of the ostensibly mainstream United Conservative Party. Ultimately, I find that corporate grassroots campaigns can play a critical role in fuelling broader cycles of protest marked by radicalization and an uneasy alliance between fossil capital and the far right. Furthermore, I find that, while extractive populism may have

originated as a top-down movement, over time this changed as segments of the population, especially from within the fossilized petty bourgeoisie, became capable of relatively autonomous mobilization. Ultimately, I argue that, without Canadian fossil capital's corporate grassroots efforts to subsidize a pro-oil and gas movement, the convoy would not likely have emerged as a hallmark of far-right populist protest in Canada.

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1. Introduction: The Carbon Convoy Cycle

Introduction: The Far-Right Phase of Denial in Canada

In a global conjuncture characterized by rising temperatures and the rise of the far right, two contradictions of Canadian political economy and culture seem to merge. First, despite being signatory to the Paris Agreement and formally declaring a national “climate emergency” in 2019, the country remains one of the world’s leading producers of oil and gas, with production concentrated overwhelmingly in the western province of Alberta (Natural Resources Canada, 2022, p. 116). The province’s resource sector is not only its main economic driver but is inseparable from its distinct political culture within Canada, premised on populism and an “alienated” relationship with Ottawa marked by perennial conflict between Albertan and federal governments over the direction of the sector. While the country has made emissions reductions in other areas like electricity generation, these have been more than offset by increases in the oil and gas sector, the highest-emitting of the national economy. These emissions increases, especially from the Albertan oil sands, have already put Canada’s 2030 commitments under the Paris Agreement “effectively out of reach” (Sawyer & Stiebert, 2025). Tensions between the climate goals of the federal government and the fossil fuel-dependency of Alberta have been a hallmark of the past decade of climate politics, manifesting in a strong uptick of “Western alienation.”

Second, despite having been widely perceived as an exception to the global rise of far-right populism in the 21st century, especially the strongly nativist kind observed in the US and Europe (Ambrose & Mudde, 2015), in recent years the country has witnessed the growth of far-right politics. Hate crimes have proliferated since 2016, emboldened in part by the “Trump effect,” while the number of far-right groups has risen year-on-year (Perry et al.,

2019; Perry & Scrivens, 2019). In 2018, with the founding of Maxime Bernier's People's Party of Canada, the populist radical right party family common throughout Europe made its Canadian debut. Then, in perhaps the most sensational demonstration of this rise in far-right activity, the Freedom Convoy occupied Ottawa for three weeks in early 2022. Several of the movement's key organizers had ties to the prior Yellow Vests Canada (YVC) movement (Balgord, 2022), which in 2018–2019 grafted Islamophobia onto grievances against the federal Liberals' perceived hostility to the oil and gas sector, bringing together pre-existing patriot and nationalist groups with newly mobilized supporters of the Canadian fossil fuel industry (McLean, 2024; J. E. Tetrault, 2024a). Two contradictions, then, and two very different images of Canada: a country with strong international climate commitments and a tradition of official multiculturalism long believed to inoculate it from the explosion in far-right populist politics documented elsewhere; and at the same time, a country continuing to expand fossil fuel production even as climate targets are exceeded, while at the same time producing spectacular manifestations of far-right populist momentum. As this dissertation makes clear, these two contradictions cannot be understood in isolation.

Nor can the Canadian case be seen in isolation from global trends. A burgeoning literature has documented the convergence between climate obstructionism and far-right political projects (Forchtner, 2020; Lockwood, 2018). Donald Trump's Republican Party is arguably the clearest manifestation of this nexus, reflecting the most advanced form of what Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective describe as a global process of "fossil fascisation"—a tendency in which fossil capital and the far right mutually reinforce one another, producing hardened border regimes, increasingly authoritarian governance, nostalgia for racial and gender hierarchies premised on white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, and an absolute hostility to even modest forms of climate mitigation (Daggett, 2018; Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). Similar politics have been observed in many countries, from

Germany, France, Australia, and the United Kingdom, to Brazil and India (Benoist, 2024; Benoist et al., 2024; Forchtner & Lubarda, 2023; Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021, pp. 206–219; McFadden, 2023, 2024; Söding, 2022).

The Canadian expressions of such politics, however, have arguably been understudied. Malm and the Collective's (2021) transnational comparative study of the political ecologies of the far right classifies Canada as a "notable" exclusion from their study, despite indicating it could be among the countries most likely to produce similar dynamics (p. xv, 241). This dissertation takes up that suggestion: it treats Canada, and Alberta in particular, as an instructive site for examining how fossil capitalist power can be expressed through and mediated by the far right. It also follows Malm and the Zetkin Collective's proposed chronology of organized climate denial and obstruction, according to which climate denial has, since 2016 and the rise of Trumpism, entered a "far-right phase" (p. 38).

Malm and the Collective follow the broader literature on organized climate denial in dating its emergence to the 1989 founding of the Global Climate Coalition (R. J. Brulle, 2014). Founded immediately after the UN's launch of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the lifespan of the Global Climate Coalition marks the first phase of organized denial (*1989-2001, the early corporate phase*), in which fossil fuel companies, facing an "existential crisis" in the form of climate mitigation, generously funded think tanks, conferences, media, front groups, and politicians to cast doubt on climate science. In the second phase (*2001-07, the late corporate phase*), overt denial began to pose some reputational risk, leading some firms to opt instead for greenwashing tactics, while others continued funding denial, albeit largely anonymously. In the third phase (*2007-16, the conservative phase*), denial appeared largely defeated by capitalist climate governance, an approach that accepts global warming but repositions capital as a solution. The apex of this

phase was the 2015 signing of the Paris Agreement, and overt denial's only remaining outpost appeared to be the Republican Party.

The fourth phase (*2016-, the far-right phase*), which overlaps with the temporal scope of this dissertation, was heralded by the first election of Trump and marked by a broader rise in popularity of ethno-nationalist parties which re-circulate discourses from earlier phases of denial while articulating these alongside their core nativist programme. In Malm and the Collective's analysis, it is precisely the apparent lack of pecuniary motive that makes far-right denial successful where previous approaches had stalled out in their efficacy. In this reading, denial has undergone a "migration into the ideology of the ethnic nation," severing some of its more obvious ties to fossil capital, while losing "none of its utility for it" (p. 37). That is, the apparent autonomy of far-right parties *vis-à-vis* fossil capital makes them, perversely, more trustworthy vectors of denial, while the agitation of radical populist rhetoric serves to connect denial with the "mass appeal" of nativism, which itself builds on decades of Islamophobic ideology, particularly since 9/11. Borrowing the term from Cara Daggett, Malm and the collective hypothesize that this far-right phase of denial marks an ominous step towards "fossil fascism." Studies of climate obstruction in Canada have yet to explore whether and how this global far-right phase of denial may have manifested itself domestically.

Following the Corporate Mapping Project, a research project spearheaded by William K. Carroll and Shannon Daub, along with a platoon of scholars and researchers, this dissertation conceptualizes the totality of fossil capitalist power in Canada as a "regime of obstruction" (Carroll, 2021). It is a *regime* because of its multifaceted and dominant position within the power structure of Canadian society—that is, in Gramscian terms, it is "hegemonic," meaning it has a diversity of tactics or "modalities" through which it translates its economic power into political and cultural influence so as to maintain consent for its

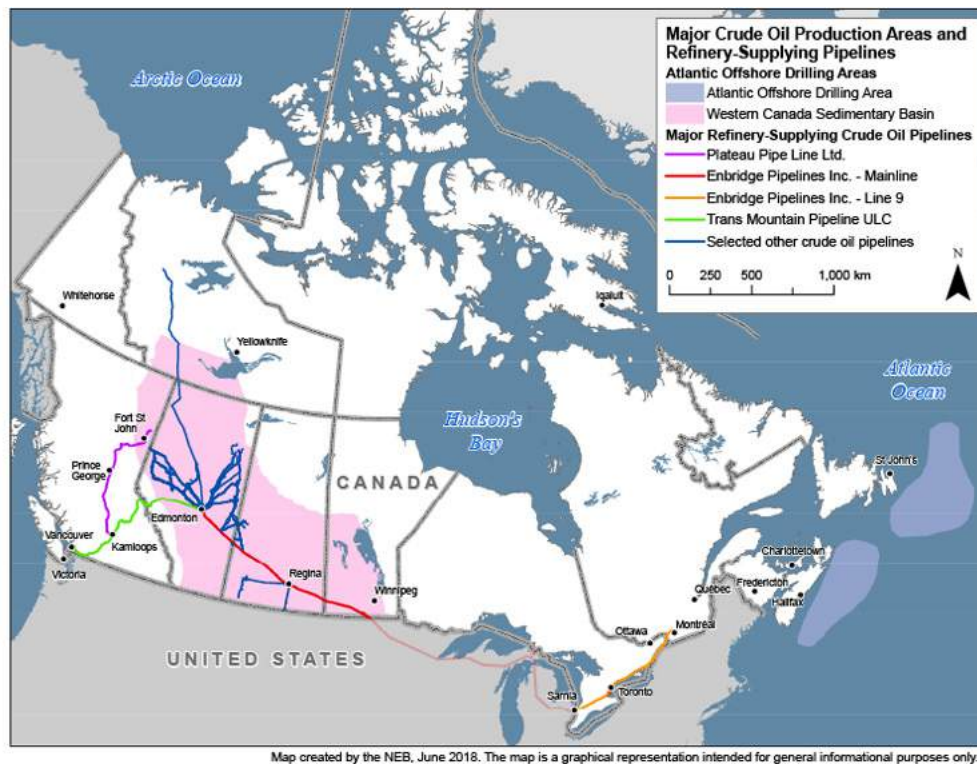
extractive activities (Carroll, 2021, p. 12; Gramsci, 1971). And it is *obstructionist* because its primary interests lay in ongoing fossil extractivism and, by extension, denying, delaying or blocking the urgent necessity of a transition to a sustainable and democratic economy.

Geographically, the sector is concentrated in the province of Alberta, notwithstanding significant production of natural gas in B.C., and of oil in Saskatchewan and offshore oil drilling in Newfoundland (see Figure 1).¹ This geographic concentration has implications for Canadian climate politics, federal-provincial relations, and the geographies of populist far-right mobilization. Just as crude oil production reached historic highs in the years *following* the national declaration of a climate emergency, so too did natural gas production.² The Canadian oil industry is highly reliant on exports, which in 2023 accounted for 81% of total crude oil production, almost all of which (97%) went to the U.S. (C. E. R. Government of Canada, 2024b). Although the natural gas industry is less export-dependent (C. E. R. Government of Canada, 2024a), the single largest domestic consumer of natural gas is the Albertan oil industry itself (S. C. Government of Canada, 2024). The export-driven crude oil industry, then, relies on natural gas to fuel its own production, with the two industries thereby constituting something of a symbiotic unity—once again, a material fact with implications for Canadian climate politics.

¹ Total crude oil production rose 16% between 2015 and 2020, by which point it stood at 4.66 million barrels per day (MMb/d) (C. E. R. Government of Canada, 2023a, 2023c). Of this, Alberta—Canada’s foremost oil producing province—produced the vast majority (81.3%), followed by Saskatchewan (9.3%) and Newfoundland (6.1%) (C. E. R. Government of Canada, 2023b). But just three years later in 2023, *Alberta alone nearly hit 2020’s national total*, producing a record 4.3 MMb/d (three-quarters of it from the oil sands in northern Alberta), accounting for 84% of the 5.1 MMb/d national output (C. E. R. Government of Canada, 2024c, 2024d).

² Total natural gas production averaged 15.5 billion cubic feet per day (Bcf/d) in 2020 (C. E. R. Government of Canada, 2023a), and rose to a record high of 20.3 Bcf/d in 2023 (C. E. R. Government of Canada, 2024a), with Alberta and B.C. consistently accounting for about two-thirds and one-third, respectively (C. E. R. Government of Canada, 2023b; S. C. Government of Canada, 2024).

Figure 1 – Map of major Canadian crude oil production areas and pipelines



Economically, the sector is characterized by heavy concentrations of ownership, control, revenues, and profits, centred around an “oligopolistic core” of major firms whose investment choices shape the entire industry and, by extension, the broader regional economy. The combined gross profits of the ‘big four’ oil sands firms—Suncor, Canadian Natural Resources Limited, Imperial Oil, and Cenovus—typically exceed the annual revenue of the province in which their extractive activities take place (Hussey et al., 2021, pp. 36–39). This economic power is then translated into political power over the state through modalities that include lobbying, regulatory capture, a “revolving door” between industry and political parties, as well as “co-managing dissent and surveillance,” referring to the way industry collaborates with the repressive state apparatus to police environmental and Indigenous opposition to extractivism (Carroll, 2021, p. 10; on the latter, see also Crosby & Monaghan,

2018). At the level of civil society, fossil capital's cultural influence is exercised through media, think tanks, and business activism (Carroll, 2021, p. 10).

A relatively new and consequential modality within the regime of obstruction is the use of "corporate grassroots" campaigns: efforts by firms, trade associations, and public relations companies to "lower the costs of participation for targeted activist groups," with these groups constituting a "subsidized public" whom industry seeks to mobilize in its defense, typically by fomenting and channeling opposition to regulation (Walker, 2014, p. 10). For the Canadian regime of obstruction, use of these corporate grassroots tactics dates back to the early 2010s with the publication of Ezra Levant's book, *Ethical Oil* and the launch of the Ethical Oil Institute (Kinder, 2024). Subsequently, following the lead of its U.S. counterpart, the leading trade association for the Canadian oil and gas industry, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP), launched its own corporate grassroots initiative in 2014 called Canada's Energy Citizens (Wood, 2018).

The founding of the CEC in 2014 represented the formalization of CAPP's increasing pivot towards using public advocacy, long considered beyond the organization's purview. To counter the environmental, climate and anti-tar sands campaigns that had been building momentum since the 2000s, as well as to blunt emerging regulatory efforts, CAPP came to the view that "lobbying was no longer enough" (T. Wood, 2018, pp. 79–81). The CEC was founded on the model of the largest U.S. oil and gas trade association, the American Petroleum Institute's (API) own "Energy Citizens" campaign, which was created in 2009. That year, with the support of Koch brother-funded think tanks, the API's "Energy Citizens" orchestrated protests in twenty states against then-president Barack Obama's proposed introduction of a cap-and-trade program that, had it passed, would have reduced emissions by 83 percent by 2050 (Dunlap & McCright, 2011, p. 154; Krauss & Mouawad, 2009). It would be almost a decade before anything on a similar scale would occur in Canada, but lessons

would be learned directly from the U.S. campaign. In April 2015, for example, Deryck Spooner, senior director of external mobilization for the API, was invited to give a presentation to CAPP. Expressing envy towards environmentalists' passion to "take to the streets," he advised the CEC on how to "motivate and activate" a pro-oil equivalent (Enoch, 2022).

Indeed, the CEC was self-consciously understood by CAPP as a "movement" incubator, whose efforts were intended, in the words of one spokesperson, "to start things rolling by providing tools and resources to help its strongest supporters" (Stanfield, 2015, p. 10). More specifically, CEC sought to mobilize a targeted slice of the public—"employees of member companies and the oil and gas supply chain" (Stanfield, 2015, p. 10)—for whom it would "ease the burden of participation" (T. Wood, 2018, p. 79). To that end, CEC trained its supporters on how to write op-eds, lobby elected officials, host events, and "grow a personal network of pro-industry collaborators" (T. Wood, 2018, p. 82). Concurrently, the CEC operated as a public relations (PR) campaign via social media, especially Facebook, which was used to spread pro-industry news and talking points, direct followers to the CEC website, and document in-person outreach events (T. Wood, 2018, p. 82). Similar and allied organizations began appearing in subsequent years, together constituting what Shane Gunster and colleagues (2021) term the "extractive populist" movement, premised on the idea that the Canadian oil and gas industry is under attack by liberal elites and environmentalists and therefore in need of popular mobilization to defend.

Jordan Kinder (2024) offers a helpful periodization of the extractive populist movement in Canada, which this dissertation adopts and puts into conversation with Malm and the Zetkin Collective's periodization of climate denial. The focus of Kinder's (2024) study is on the first phase (2010-2015), characterized primarily by efforts to develop and disseminate pro-oil discourse on social media (p. 61). The second phase of the pro-fossil fuel

movement in Canada corresponds directly with the beginning of the far-right phase of denial globally (2016-present) and is marked by a transformation in the kinds of discourses being used, “from appeals to balance and reason in phase one to bullying and trolling in phase two,” as well as in the movement’s organizational forms, above all in the turn to on-the-ground protest (Kinder, 2024, pp. 61, 181–182). Since his focus is primarily on phase one, Kinder largely focuses on the social media rhetoric of the movement. But as conventional social movement scholarship makes clear, once new movement tactics, organizations, and frames emerge in combination with the mobilization of sufficient resources, the result can be “diffusion,” potentially leading to longer “cycles of protest” (Tarrow, 2011). By carefully mapping the precise mechanisms of tactical, organizational, and ideological diffusion, **this dissertation offers the first comprehensive analysis of the second phase of the Canadian pro-fossil fuel movement, situated in the increasing sway of far-right denial globally.**

The signature protest form of this phase, the emergence and diffusion of which this dissertation provides the most detailed analysis yet, is, of course, *the carbon convoy*—“a premiere mode of political expression in a time inflected by the fossil fascist creep” (Kinder, 2024, pp. 181, 195).

Research Gaps: The Strange Disappearance of (and Within) Social Movement Studies

Every Canadian knows of the Freedom Convoy of 2022, which dominated national news for months and spawned imitators around the world. Fewer, however, are aware of its predecessor, the United We Roll Convoy, which predated it by almost exactly three years and was the culmination of Yellow Vests Canada (2018-19), a pro-oil, anti-immigrant movement in which several leading “freedom” activists cut their teeth. While the Freedom Convoy put the Canadian far right on the map—drawing glowing praise from the likes of Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and far-right politicians in Europe—less attention has been paid to its forerunner,

thus stymying a political ecological analysis of the convoy as a protest form. Of course, there are understandable reasons for the discrepancy in attention, given the difference in size, length, and intensity of the two convoys, with UWR having been far smaller in duration and scope. Yet, even when connections between the two convoys *are* made—for example, the Canadian Anti-Hate Network (CAHN) (2022) referred to the Freedom Convoy as “United We Roll 2.0”—what is left unexplained is where the idea of doing a truck convoy came from in the first place.

Similar gaps are found in the final report and policy papers of the Public Order Emergency Commission (the official government inquiry into the Freedom Convoy), which makes note of the UWR convoy and a number of other pro-oil and gas convoys in Alberta from 2018 and 2019, but does not investigate where the protest form initially emerged, how it spread, or the possible connections between the convoys and climate obstruction (Rouleau, 2023). Authors who have insightfully treated these connections, meanwhile, have not provided a comprehensive, empirical account. While drawing crucial attention to several personnel and organizational overlaps between the various convoys and corporate grassroots groups with ties to fossil capital, such efforts have generally been cursory, enabling only preliminary analysis of the relationship between climate obstruction and the far right, while not providing a detailed account of the origins of the convoy or its popularization (see Enoch, 2022; Guenther, 2023; Kinder, 2024; Mirrlees, 2022; Szeman, 2024, p. 64-70).³ In such analyses, the convoy appears *ex nihilo*, either in the form of UWR or one of several convoys from late 2018. In the language of social movement research, existing commentary and analysis demonstrates the *fact* of the convoy’s diffusion, but does not explain the form’s emergence or “*mechanisms*” of diffusion (Tarrow, 2010, p. 205). As a result of these blind

³ I am grateful to Tanner Mirrlees for the coinage “carbon convoy,” which has inspired the title of this study.

spots, we lack an adequate theory of the relationship between the Canadian far right and fossil capital.

Such empirical gaps are closely interrelated with two theoretical and methodological shortcomings of the literature on the Canadian far right and pro-fossil movements: in the former, a failure to situate the contemporary Canadian far right in relation to the political economy of fossil capitalism, and across both, a curious lack of conventional social movement theories and methodologies, especially that pertaining to protest cycles. Scholarship on the Canadian far right has produced insights into anti-migrant nativism, Islamophobia, anti-statism, the PPC's electoral campaigns, criminological approaches to violent extremism, and inquiries into pandemic conspiracism, but has generally ignored the interconnections between these and organized climate obstructionism (Leman-Langlois et al., 2024; Medeiros & Gravelle, 2023; Neville & Langlois, 2021; Perry & Scrivens, 2019; J. E. Tetrault, 2024a). Scholars of the pro-fossil fuel movement, for their part, have tended to focus on the social media "echo chambers" constituted by extractive populist groups, to the detriment of studying extractive populism's repertoires of collective action and diffusion processes, reflecting the prevalence of communications and media studies scholars in this field (Gunster et al., 2021; Massie & Jackson, 2020; Neubauer et al., 2023; Neubauer & Graham, 2021). A rich literature exists on the topic of social movement protest *against* the fossil fuel industry in Canada, including the diffusion of the tactics of the blockade (Chua & Bosworth, 2023; N. Klein, 2014; K. S. Richards, 2022), divestment (Belliveau et al., 2021), the student climate strike (Dupuis-Déri, 2021), and settler-Indigenous alliances (Black et al., 2014; Gobby, 2020), to name just a few. Yet, despite CAPP self-describing its Canada's Energy Citizens campaign as trying to kickstart a "movement," there has been a notable absence of social movement approaches within studies of the climate change countermovement in Canada.

Notwithstanding these gaps, there have been calls for utilizing conventional social movement theory and methods in the study of far-right movements (Caiani & Della Porta, 2018), while the existing literature on extractive populism has repeatedly called for more empirically rich accounts of the concrete activities of the pro-fossil movement in Canada. Neubauer et al. (2023), for example, call for studies with a more “historical” account of the interrelationship between right-wing populism and fossil fuels in Canada (Neubauer et al., 2023, p. 650). And although Wood’s (2018) study analyzed both the online and offline activities of CEC, his approach was limited by its narrow focus on one organization over a relatively short period of time (from 2015-2017). This narrow focus reflects Walker’s (2014) own approach (on which Wood builds), which similarly focuses on discrete corporate grassroots campaigns, while omitting the possibility that diffusion processes might lead to broader protest cycles and, in some cases, may overlap with far-right movements. Wood (2018) therefore calls for increased scholarly attention to how multiple groups and campaigns “coordinate, overlap, differ, contradict, and ultimately shape the emergence of new publics in North American petro-politics” (p. 90). This echoes calls from the international literatures on climate obstruction, which indicate a dearth of scholarship on the political activity of trade associations (R. Brulle & Downie, 2022; Walker & Vasi, 2022), notwithstanding important contributions in this area.⁴ No studies, to my knowledge, have explored the interrelationships between fossil fuel trade associations, corporate grassroots campaigns, and far-right social movements.

⁴ Nicolas Graham et al. (2019), for example, find that CAPP and the fossil fuel sector dominate the top lobbyists of the federal government, with lobbying rising sharply in the more interventionist Trudeau decade. Trudeau had come to power in 2015 pledging to modernize the regulatory approval processes for large-scale energy projects like pipelines which, during Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s tenure (2006-2015) had lost legitimacy, becoming widely seen as a “rubber-stamp” for industry’s every whim (Stendie & Adkin, 2016, pp. 422, 441). Trudeau’s efforts to reform this constituted a “policy window” in which the lobbying of Senators “went into overdrive” (Graham et al., 2019, p. 47).

Additional and related gaps in research on the pro-oil and gas movement in Canada were identified by Kinder (2024), whose *Petroturfing: Refining Canadian Oil Through Social Media* is the first book-length treatment of the subject.⁵ Whereas Kinder’s study largely focused on the first phase of the movement (2010-2015), this dissertation can be seen as a companion volume of sorts, picking up in the second phase of the movement (2016-2022), while filling in empirical gaps using a methodological approach rooted in social movement studies.⁶ Although Kinder’s focus is primarily on the discourse deployed by pro-oil social media pages, he offers the following “speculative observations” regarding the movement’s resource infrastructure in the book’s final pages:

More empirical work should be done in order to confirm a hunch of mine that has been at the forefront of my mind since the 2019 and 2022 convoys—that large and small business owners, a bourgeois and petit bourgeois class, are those most enthusiastically participating in the broader petroturfing project. The oil culture wars, in other words, seem to have been ignited not by those laborers toiling in the Patch but by those banking on Canadian oil. (p. 219-220)

According to Kinder’s hunch, workers may be “instrumentalized ... to lend authenticity” to claims that the movement is supposedly grassroots, but they are not the founders or leaders of the movement, and do not represent a significant reservoir from which the movement has drawn activists and organizers. Kinder’s speculation harmonizes with other scholars who find that the figure of the oil and gas worker has been “fetishized” to support extractivist projects throughout the country (Eaton et al., 2024). But the gap he

⁵ Note that, while Kinder does not use the term extractive populism (opting instead for “petroturfing”), the empirical subject matter is identical to that studied under the former framework. The theoretical differences between petroturfing and the preferred term used in this study, extractive populism, are taken up in the next chapter.

⁶ While Kinder’s (2024) book is primarily focused on the first phase of the pro-oil movement, his final chapter offers a treatment of the UWR convoy (p. 189-95), and overlaps with the Freedom Convoy are referenced in passing (p. 192, 209, 218, 222).

identifies is less about clarifying the symbolic role of various class fractions within extractive populism, and more narrowly focussed on their *organizational* role in creating and growing a social movement within which the convoy became a signature form of protest.

Responding to these interrelated gaps, this dissertation weaves the theoretical and methodological tools of conventional social movement theory into research on the relationship between the Canadian far right and fossil capital's regime of obstruction. While helping to fill the aforementioned openings in the literature, this dissertation's Marxian and Gramscian political ecological approach to movements (on which more below) simultaneously addresses what Hetland & Goodwin (2013) call the "the strange disappearance of capitalism from social movement studies" (p. 83). Notwithstanding what Lesley Wood (2019) observes to be "a clear revival of political economy and Marxist approaches to social movements underway in the United States and Europe," conventional or "contentious politics" approaches to social movements—i.e., those associated with the work of Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Doug McAdam—continue to draw criticism from Marxist scholars for downplaying capitalism, class struggle, and the broader structural, historical contexts (or capitalist "totality") in which movements operate (Webber, 2019, 2022). And yet, this dissertation follows the suggestion of Wood (2019) and others in positing that the approaches are not inherently incompatible. This dissertation therefore synthesizes the granularity of social movement theory with a Marxist and Gramscian emphasis on class, (fossil) capitalism, and hegemony, pillars of historical materialist approaches (Carroll & Sarker, 2016). It requires operating at multiple levels of abstraction, toggling between "totality" and the "concrete," everyday practices of movement-building (Barker, 2013). This dissertation therefore examines the second phase of extractive populism in a global context of far-right denial—itself a symptom of an intertwined hegemonic and ecological crisis of fossil capitalism—while operationalizing conventional social movement

studies to “get close to the action” in detailing the “recurrent processes and mechanisms” responsible for the emergence and diffusion of tactics, organizations, and frames across the cycle (Wood, 2019, p. 312). In doing so, I help fill important empirical, theoretical, and methodological gaps in approaches to fossil capitalism, climate obstruction and far-right movements in Canada.

Research Questions, Methodological Overview, and Main Arguments

Responding to and aiming to fill the above gaps in scholarship, this dissertation focuses on the following core questions:

1. **How did the truck convoy emerge as a signature tactic of right-wing populist protest in Canada?**
2. Testing Kinder’s (2024) hunch regarding the primary role of bourgeois and petty bourgeois fractions within the convoy cycle, I ask: **What is the class composition of the carbon convoy cycle, and how does this composition mediate the relationship between fossil capital and the far right as revealed by personnel and organizational overlaps between firms, trade associations, advocacy groups, and far-right movements?**⁷
3. **What mechanisms of tactical and organizational diffusion operate across the cycle of protest, and how did these processes contribute to ideological and tactical radicalization?**
4. Probing the relationship between seemingly unrelated ideological elements found across the cycle, notably climate denial, Islamophobic nativism, globalist

⁷ To be clear, the question is not about whose interests these convoys have served—e.g., are the material interests of oil and gas workers more “objectively” in line with energy transition or with extractive populism? My research question here is more straight-forwardly empirical than that: simply, what is the class background of the individuals and organizations behind the convoy?

conspiracism, and evangelical Christianity, I ask: **How do these ideological forms articulate with climate obstruction and with each other? Is there a “master frame” which emerged and diffused across the cycle, and if so, how does it articulate class, ecology, race, gender/sexuality into a coherent reactionary ideology?**

5. **Did the cycle of protest produce any discernable political outcomes in Alberta or Canada at the level of political parties and policy?**
6. Situating Canada and Alberta into global debates, I ask: **To what extent does the Canadian case fit the model of “fossil fascisation” described by Malm et al., and what modifications does the Canadian case imply for that concept and broader theorizations of the far-right phase of denial?**

Roughly bookended by field research trips to two far-right truck convoys in Ottawa—the United We Roll Convoy in February 2019 and the Freedom Convoy in February 2022—this dissertation seeks to answer the preceding questions through a mixed-methods, multi-case analysis of key movements and events across the protest cycle. Drawing on a corpus of data that includes interviews with convoy organizers and far-right activists as well as an analysis of the social media output of numerous pro-fossil fuel groups, the methodology of this dissertation is oriented towards detailing how corporate grassroots campaigns interact with far-right movements. Operationalizing a Marxist political ecological approach to class analysis and a Gramscian approach to populism, this dissertation utilizes conventional social movement theory’s granular attention to resource mobilization and mechanisms of diffusion as a method for empirically examining broader theoretical questions about the relationship between fossil capital, organized climate obstruction, and the rise of far-right politics. While each chapter has its own unique data set pertaining to a distinct period of the protest cycle,

interview data are drawn on throughout. Proceeding chronologically, I first document the critical period of the convoy's emergence and diffusion within the corporate grassroots 'extractivist action coalition' responsible for an increasingly robust pro-oil and gas protest movement from 2016 to 2018—thereby offering a periodization of the convoy that precedes previous accounts by two years. From there, the study traces personnel, organizational, and ideological overlaps across three subsequent far-right movements: Yellow Vests Canada (from late 2018 to 2019), Alberta separatism (from 2019 onward), and the “freedom” movement (from 2020 onward). Finally, to examine the potential political impacts of the protest cycle, this dissertation examines the role of three extractive populist, far-right organizations in the rise of Danielle Smith: Take Back Alberta, the Alberta Prosperity Project, and the Free Alberta Strategy. Further details on data collection and the research methods are offered in Chapter 3.

This dissertation argues that **the convoy emerged and diffused as a signature form of right-wing populist protest in Canada because of corporate grassroots, “extractive populist” efforts—led by trade associations, industry-connected advocacy groups, and allied supporters in conservative and small business networks—which provided critical organizational capacities, resource subsidization, and collective action frames.** In sum, corporate grassroots campaigning played a central causal role in triggering and sustaining a cycle of protest that ultimately became a vehicle for far-right mobilization and for what I conceptualize as a Canadian and more specifically Albertan variant of the nascent *fossil fasciation* occurring globally in the far-right phase of denial.

The Canadian case, however, introduces several novelties to Malm and the Zetkin Collective's conception of this phase. First, by focusing on far-right movements and not parties, this dissertation finds that, not only does the far-right adopt ideological elements from

the denialist apparatus, but tactical elements too. Second, the Canadian case highlights how fossil fascisation should be seen as an *uneven* process, with evidence suggesting that far-right denial is less powerful as a political force in Canada than in other countries (notably the US); and further, that its strength is uneven *within* Canada as well, concentrated primarily in Alberta, albeit with national ramifications. Third, the Canadian case suggests the need to nuance the concept of mitigation crisis (on which more below), accounting for the role that *partial* mitigation efforts can play in triggering alliance-formation between fossil capital and the far right. This further suggests that the development of far-right denial may be powerfully informed by conflictual regional dynamics, distinct economic geographies, and jurisdictional divisions of power. Finally, the global far right's core theme of nativism remains relatively stigmatized in the Canadian context, forcing both fossil capital and the far right to navigate reputational risks associated with such views, while producing an alternative master frame in the form of the globalist conspiracy theory, which articulates fossil extractivist logics with nativism in more oblique terms than the overt ethno-nationalism characteristic of the European and US far right.

Across the cycle, I document radicalization at multiple levels: in movement tactics, as the convoy underwent an “upward scale shift” from the local to regional then national levels, began intersecting with far-right movements, and was eventually converted from a tactic of demonstration into one of occupation; in ideological frames, as climate denial, nativist and Islamophobic opposition to migration, “western alienation,” opposition to public health measures, and evangelical Christianity, became linked in a chain of equivalence to the globalist conspiracy theory, which served as a “master frame” across the cycle, spreading from the far-right fringes to the mainstream; and finally, in the transformation of electoral politics in Alberta, manifested in the movement-ization of the ostensibly mainstream United Conservative Party. Ultimately, I find that while extractive populism may have originated as a

top-down movement, over time this changed as segments of the population, especially from within the fossilized petty bourgeoisie, became capable of relatively autonomous mobilization. Ultimately, I argue that, without Canadian fossil capital's corporate grassroots efforts to subsidize a pro-oil and gas movement, the convoy would not likely have emerged as a hallmark of far-right populist protest in Canada.

Theoretical Orientation: Marxist Political Ecology of Far-Right Movements

Marxist Political Ecology: Class, Climate, Mitigation Crisis

From Marxist political ecology, I borrow the insistence on the centrality of capitalist social relations for understanding the political economy of the climate crisis. At the highest level of abstraction, Marxist political ecologists like Ståle Holgersen (2024) understand capital's tendency to produce ecological crisis as rooted in what Marx identified as the contradiction between exchange-value and use-value (p. 80). Whereas a rational society would order production according to these use-values—that is, to the “material content of wealth” created for the satisfaction of human needs—this causality is “inverted” in capitalism: instead, the production process is subordinated to the pursuit of exchange-value, expressed as price (Marx, 1990, pp. 125–126, 249). This dynamic, captured in Marx's formula M-C-M' (money-commodity-money prime), contains the germinal form of ecological crisis (Marx, 1990, p. 257).

Building on this analysis, Andreas Malm (2016) proposes the “general formula for fossil capital” to help explain why the contradiction between exchange-value and use-value underpins the political economy of energy transitions and, by extension, the climate crisis. Contrary to neoclassical accounts of the energy transition from waterpower to steam-power in early 19th-century England, Malm convincingly argues that it was not coal's cheapness that

led to its widespread adoption and the concomitant transition to *fossil capitalism*. Rather, expanding on Elmar Altwater's (2007) earlier observations on the subject, Malm demonstrates coal's advantage was profitability: in particular, that coal could be transported easily to sources of cheap labour. Ever since, capitalism as a totality can be understood in ecological terms as *fossil capitalism*, where combustion and CO₂ emissions go along with every M-C-M' circuit: "*self-expanding value passing through the metamorphosis of fossil fuels into CO₂*" (Malm, 2016, pp. 288–290).⁸

This historical account of fossil capitalism's origins informs contemporary debates around energy transition. Brett Christophers (2024) takes up Malm's analytic and argues that renewables have not overtaken fossil fuels because the latter are more profitable. He shows that, while renewables have been cheaper than fossil fuels for years (largely owing to mass production in China), this is not sufficient to effectuate energy transition in an economic system driven by exchange-value. Energy "transitions" under capitalism therefore tend to be "additive," as Adam Hanieh (2025) points out, owing to capital's self-expanding nature (i.e., it must ceaselessly pursue the circuit of valorization described above). Capitalism thus has a "tendency to increase energy throughput" in absolute terms (Hanieh, 2025, p. 24-5). This contradiction is typified in discordant celebrations of the growth of renewable energy even as emissions rise.

From a Marxist perspective, then, the questions of economic power, ownership, and class relations go to the core of the climate crisis. Control of economic production, in this view, is inextricable from control over the human relationship (or "ecological metabolism")

⁸ In fossil capitalism, then, the creation of surplus-value *requires* the combustion of fossil fuels, meaning that, in a sense, all capital is fossil capital. To refer specifically to the class fraction responsible for extracting, refining, transporting, and selling fossil fuels, the term "primitive fossil capital" has been proposed (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). To avoid endless repetition of the somewhat cumbersome term "primitive fossil capital," however, I refer to this class fraction as "fossil capital," while I use "capital" or other modifiers like "finance capital" to refer to either capital in general or specific fractions of it. But even when I merely refer to "capital," the reader should bear Malm's (2016) general formula of fossil capital in mind.

with nature (Foster, 2000; Foster & Burkett, 2016). And yet, as Matthew T. Huber (2022) emphasizes, “ownership is complicated” and there is a vast “middle class layer of managers, supervisors, and other infantry enforcing the rule of capital,” including small-business owners, or the “petty bourgeoisie” (p. 27). In a related effort to develop an “energetics of class,” Elizabeth Chatterjee (2024) examines two convoy-oriented protests, comparing the 1970s owner-operator trucker convoys in the US with farmers’ tractor protests in India in the late 1980s. Chatterjee characterizes these “energetic class fractions” as small, self-exploiting capitalists dependant on state-backed regimes of “productive consumption” (p. 531, 554). Wielding their unique intermediary position within the “diesel-highway-food nexus,” these class fractions can mobilize processions of large machinery “as a tool of infrastructural occupation” (p. 537, 543). In doing so, they defend their immediate material interests tied to provision of cheap fossil fuels, thereby playing an under-appreciated role locking-in fossil fuel dependency

In this dissertation, I draw on Huber and Chatterjee’s work and propose the term *fossilized petty bourgeoisie* to denote these various subordinate class fractions, including: owners and managers of small and medium-sized businesses directly involved in or dependent on the oil and gas sector; including, owner-operator truckers and farmers directly dependent on cheap fuel as inputs. It is with these Marxian insights in mind that this dissertation views the politics of climate change as inextricable from class relations, and builds on these ecologically-inflected, climatic forms of class analysis.

In turn, I apply a class-based analysis of the intersection between fossil capital and the rise of the far right. In their elaboration of possible scenarios in which fossil capital and the far right may form an alliance, Malm and the Zetkin Collective posit the concept of “mitigation crisis” (p. 239). In this hypothetical sequence (which they frame as most likely in major fossil fuel producing countries like Canada and the US), a government plan to

undertake serious climate action and phase-out the fossil fuel sector would trigger the “existential crisis” that fossil capital has been warding off since it first launched the denialist apparatus back in 1989 (p. 239). If at the same time, there was a far-right party picking up momentum—a party which “refuses to believe the hype [of climate change] ... and rather wishes to attend to the health of the ultra-nation”—then the utility of an alliance between the two becomes plain (p. 240). The far right’s ultra-nationalism may seem to have little to do with the narrow economic interests of fossil capital, and yet the political muscle it wields makes it a potentially attractive ally, “fully available for a quid pro quo” (p. 240). In such a scenario, fossil capital may “strike a deal with the far right – through funding, negotiating a coalition [...] or some other act of hiring – so as to protect itself” (p. 240).

While such a speculative theory may appear of little value in contexts where such a mitigation crisis does not present itself, this dissertation applies Malm et al.’s analysis of the “contradictions of capitalist climate governance” to suggest that a *partial* mitigation crisis may trigger similar dynamics (p. 197). In this interpretation, a fossil fuel phase-out need not be on the agenda. Instead, the fusion of fossil capital and the far right may be *pre-emptive* of such a phase-out, and in response to a policy suite associated with capitalist climate governance: market-based solutions like carbon taxes, emissions caps, stricter regulation on pipeline approval processes, selective restrictions on fossil infrastructure (e.g., pipeline cancellations, oil tanker bans), electric vehicle mandates, and the like. Malm and the Collective’s analysis of Obama-era policy is instructive. For them, Obama’s cancellation of two oil pipelines—notably including the 2015 suspension of Keystone XL, a pipeline designed to transport Albertan oil sands to refineries in the US—“demonstrated the instability of capitalist climate governance and the danger that, under the pressure of mass mobilisation, it might go beyond itself into actual limits on extraction” (p. 198). Malm and the Collective argue that it was precisely in response to such decisions that fossil capital “reassessed [its]

tactics and chose to politicize energy *by jumping on the bandwagon of ethno-nationalism*—in short, by throwing their lot in with Trumpism (p. 199).

This dissertation follows and extends this analysis, which suggests that a *partial* mitigation crisis, rooted in the contradictions of capitalist climate governance, may be sufficient to trigger a process of alliance-formation between fossil capital and the far right. Drawing the above insights from Marxist political ecology, this dissertation uses a climatic class analysis—attending not only to the role of big fossil capital, but to that of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie—to examine the relationship between fossil capital and the far right in the second phase of the pro-fossil movement in Canada, in which precisely such a partial mitigation crisis arose.

Gramsci: Hegemony, Articulation, and the Far Right

Gramscian approaches to fossil capitalism and the far right inform the overall approach in three ways, operationalized at a mid-range level of abstraction: first, through the lens of hegemony and hegemonic crisis; second, through use of conjunctural analysis and the concept of articulation; and third, through an understanding of the class composition and relative autonomy of the far right. To begin with, I follow the Gramscian approach of William K. Carroll (2021), the co-lead of the Corporate Mapping Project mentioned earlier (with Shannon Daub), in characterizing the power of fossil capital in Canada as hegemonic. Carroll (2021) asserts that fossil capital's power is not purely economic but expresses itself in a range of modalities through the spheres of culture and politics. In collaboration with leading scholars, Carroll conceptualizes the totality of this power as a “regime of obstruction,” arguing that the source of fossil capitalist hegemony is multi-faceted, located in “economic, political, and cultural relations [that] form the institutional and ideological foundations for

what Gramsci called an *historical bloc*—the basis of a stable regime” (p. 480). These hegemonic practices operate “on multiple scales,” down to the everyday life of individuals, the family, and local community (p. 481). Eaton & Enoch (2021), for example, show how fossil capital, by funding local recreational activities and amenities in rural Saskatchewan (another oil-producing province), constructs a “psychological identification” between individuals and industry, constituting a “hegemonic community economic identity.”⁹ This dissertation takes up this fundamental Gramscian insight that fossil capitalist hegemony (like any other hegemonic project) is multi-scalar.

This dissertation also incorporates Gramscian theories of the conditions in which far-right populism arises, according to which they are structurally connected to crises of hegemony. For Gramsci, a crisis of hegemony (or ‘organic crisis’—they are used interchangeably) occurs when “the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 210). Hegemonic crises can also occur when “huge masses [. . .] have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 210). As Gramsci warns, the interregnum during which an organic crisis is unfolding and the struggle to replace one hegemony with another rages (a situation in which “the old is dying and the new cannot be born”) poses great uncertainty and danger (Gramsci, 1971, p. 276). Indeed, it is precisely in such “dangerous and delicate” situations that “the field is open for violent solutions [. . .] represented by charismatic ‘men of destiny’” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 210). In short, it is precisely in such hegemonic crises that the window opens to the possibility of varieties of far-right populism, including fascism, or what Gramsci,

⁹ Note that while crude oil production is significant in Saskatchewan and Newfoundland (roughly 9% and 6% of the national total, respectively), the vast majority of Canadian production (84%) is concentrated in Alberta (C. E. R. Government of Canada, 2024c, 2024d).

intentionally obscuring his writing to avoid the censorship of his fascist prison, called a reactionary ‘Caesarism’ (Adamson, 1980, p. 627).

Finally, this dissertation adopts Gramsci’s non-reductionist Marxism to an emphasis on conjunctural analysis, the relative autonomy of the far right from capital, and articulations of race, class, and gender. As Stuart Hall suggested, Gramsci’s approach to Marxism is positioned against “reductionism,” or the view of economic relations as “the only determining structure of a society” (Hall, 2019a, p. 28). Hall credits Gramsci for instead emphasizing that “politics has its own ‘relatively autonomous’ forms,” not fully determined by economic relations (Hall, 2019a, p. 51). For Hall, Gramsci’s analysis of historical conjunctures operated at a lower level of abstraction—a level that was “almost *too* concrete,” as Hall (2019) put it (p. 23)—than the primarily economic analyses of Marx (at least the Marx of *Capital*).¹⁰ Gramsci also adopted a wider lens, championing an analysis of “political and ideological aspects,” which had been “neglected dimensions of the analysis of social formations in classical Marxism” (Hall, 2019a, p. 25). This approach, for Hall, enabled a Marxian approach to phenomena that had generally been overlooked in the tradition. Most notably, Hall posited that Gramsci provided “one of the most theoretically fruitful ... paradigms and perspectives in the contemporary studies of racially structured social phenomena” (Hall, 2019a, p. 53). This is because of the emphasis Gramsci placed on the political and cultural realms, analyzing the reproduction of hegemony from a multi-scalar perspective. Gramscian theory therefore informs my understanding of how populist ideology is constructed through chains of equivalence through which economic, political, and cultural elements end up “linking together” and “giving expression to” (or “*articulating*”) themselves

¹⁰ Elsewhere he wrote that, “concepts like that of ‘hegemony’ (the family or level of abstraction to which [authoritarian populism] also belongs) are of necessity somewhat ‘descriptive’, historically more specific, time-bound, concrete in their reference—because they attempt to conceptualize what Marx himself said of ‘the concrete’: that it is the ‘product of many determinations’” (Hall, 1985, p. 118).

in and through one another (Hart, 2024, p. 143; Laclau, 1977, 2005b). A proper analysis of right-wing populism from this perspective must therefore account for “articulations of race, religion, and nationalism with capitalism and class” (Hart, 2021, p. 63). Gramscian approaches to the far right therefore emphasize the various forms of sedimented “common sense” that far-right parties and movements adopt and re-work to their advantage, including but not limited to religious nationalisms (Hart, 2021), nativist ideologies and practices (Denvir, 2020; Short, 2014), and conspiracism (Worth, 2024).

The rise of far-right populism, then, while rooted in capitalist contradictions and crisis—and ultimately premised on a counter-revolutionary defense of property relations—cannot be wholly understood through a class analysis. Applying these insights directly to his own political conjuncture in which fascism was a central pre-occupation, Gramsci argued that contrary to determinist Marxist accounts then prevalent in the Communist International, fascism was not under the direct control of the ruling class. Instead, he argued that, “Fascism is a movement which the bourgeoisie thought should be a simple 'instrument' of reaction in its hands, but once called up and unleashed is worse than the devil, no longer allowing itself to be controlled” (qtd. in Beetham, 1983, p. 9). In this interpretation, the far right had a genuine mass base and appeal, especially within the petty bourgeoisie (qtd. in Beetham, 1983, p. 9). The movement played a fundamentally counter-revolutionary function and yet was not the direct expression of bourgeois economic power or ideology. Relatedly, it had its own organic intellectuals capable of operating on and transforming the ground of popular common sense (Worth, 2024). Both organizationally and ideologically, then, fascism was relatively autonomous from capital. This dissertation picks up Gramsci’s non-reductionist approach to Marxism, emphasizing the relative autonomy of far-right politics from the class relations of fossil capitalism, while exploring how fossil capital and the far right are “articulated” together, both ideologically and organizationally.

Conventional SMT: Opportunities, Resources, Cycles

Conventional social movement theory (SMT) offers theoretical and methodological tools to examine how fossil capital and far-right movements relate at the micro-level. By “conventional” social movement theory, I mean movement scholarship within the overlapping traditions of resource mobilization, political process theory, and contentious politics. These literatures emphasize the political opportunities structuring movement emergence, the mobilization of resources within movements, the tactics and forms of organization movements deploy, and the collective action frames used to diagnose and mobilize around political issues (for a useful overview see Almeida, 2019, pp. 47–57).

This dissertation takes up and puts SMT approaches to corporate grassroots campaigns and protest cycles into conversation. Notably, SMT has been used to study corporate grassroots campaigns. In a foundational study on the topic, Edward T. Walker (2014), who coined the term “corporate grassroots,” finds that industries with controversial environmental practices facing heavy regulation are the most likely type of firm to make the turn to public advocacy. Often relying heavily on public relations firms, in such campaigns corporations and trade associations utilize a diversity of tactics to identify and mobilize an “arm’s length” interest—that is, a group of individuals who have an independent interest aligned with corporate goals (i.e., a specific section of the “public”), which the corporate grassroots campaign will attempt to “subsidize” into action by providing a range of resources (Walker, 2014, p. 46). While multi-organizational campaigns are included in Walker's (2014) study, such examples are usually fairly limited in geographic and temporal scope, and neither diffusion nor radicalization are central analytics; instead, the emphasis is on discrete campaigns by specific firms or sectors. Combining Walker’s (2014) work with the literature on protest cycles, however, creates an opening to consider how elite efforts to initiate and

subsidize a corporate grassroots countermovement might, through the process of diffusion, contribute to a reactive counter-cycle.

Cycles of protest are defined as “a phase of heightened conflict across the social system” (Tarrow, 2011, p. 199). The central feature of protest cycles is what is known as “diffusion,” meaning how features of “early riser” movements are adopted and adapted at an accelerating pace by future movements, bringing more and more layers of society into collective action at an “accelerating” rate (McAdam, 1995, p. 232; McAdam et al., 2001, p. 68). While many movements never diffuse beyond the local level (McAdam, 2003, p. 293), in protest cycles, a movement emerges locally and then diffuses regionally, nationally, or internationally in a process known as “upward scale shift” (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 125). Protest cycles are said to be marked by innovations within the repertoire of contention—that is, novel additions to “the complete set of protest tactics available to a social movement at any given time” (Soule & Roggeband, 2018, p. 242). Indeed, according to Sidney Tarrow (2011), so strong is the connection between cycles of protest and tactical innovation that “different cycles of contention become identified with specific forms of action” (p. 203). Cycles also typically involve diffusion of organizational and ideational innovations and can involve the construction and spread of “master frames”—“schemata that integrate the specific agendas of diverse movements into central interpretive frameworks” (Carroll & Ratner, 1996, p. 411; Tarrow, 2012, p. 128). This dissertation follows the SMT literature on protest cycles by paying close attention to the mechanisms and micro-relations structuring the emergence and diffusion of novel tactics (i.e., the convoy), organizational forms and interpretive frames, while attending to how these diffusion processes may connect corporate grassroots strategies with far-right social movements.

The theoretical approach of this dissertation—which I conceive of as a Marxist political ecology of far-right movements—operates on multiple levels of abstraction to

conceptualize and interrogate the ‘carbon convoy cycle,’ the second phase of the extractive populist movement in Canada. Where Marxian approaches examine the “architectonic” features of global capitalism (Carroll & Sarker, 2016, p. 36), and Gramscian approaches non-deterministically bring these insights into detailed treatment of historical conjunctures (Hart, 2024), SMT operates at a lower level of abstraction, offering “a rigorous empirical analysis of the micro-relations of contention” (L. Wood, 2019, p. 300). Toggling between these levels of abstraction, I posit, is a way to attend to “the dialectical relationship between political economy and mobilization” (Wood, 2019, p. 300). This dissertation therefore interweaves a Marxist conceptualization of the class contradictions at the core of the climate crisis with a non-reductionist Gramscian approach to hegemony, far-right populism, and articulation. These theories are then grounded in the concrete relations of tactical, organizational, and ideological diffusion through which corporate grassroots campaigns intersect with far-right movements across the cycle of protest.

As implied by the synthetic nature of this dissertation’s theoretical framework, neither of the three bodies of theory are sufficient in isolation from one another: with Marxist political ecology we can perceive the centrality of class struggle to the climate crisis, but this can only tell us so much about how ‘consent’ to ecological destruction is won. Gramscian approaches get us a step closer by examining political, cultural, and ideological formations that operate through civil society to articulate popular common sense with fossil capitalist class domination. Yet, to remain here is to risk a too-impressionistic account, as well as to risk scope creep as the entire domains of culture and politics open as potentially relevant determinations. By pairing the above with SMT, then, we can carefully follow the movement actors themselves and better ascertain the relevant cultural and political forms bearing a determinative function within the cycle. Hardly superfluous from a historical materialist perspective, it is precisely by attempting to answer the kinds of questions that SMT raises—

namely regarding the precise mechanisms through which diffusion occurs within protest cycles—that we can provide a fulsome account of extractive populism’s second phase, and by extension of the relationship between fossil capital and the far right. This Marxist political ecology of far-right movements is further elaborated in Chapter 2. Before providing an outline of the study, though, it is necessary to consider in more detail the history of Alberta and its unique political culture within Canada, with a focus on the politics of oil. I therefore turn to a brief pre-history of extractive populism.

Historical Roots of Extractive Populism

While much of the contemporary cycle of protest is novel, it is worth contextualizing it within the *longue durée* of Albertan political culture, and especially elite conflict between the province’s regional bourgeoisie, rooted in the rise of prairie fossil capitalism (Pratt & Richards, 1978; J. Richards & Pratt, 1979), and the traditional economic and political power centres of Canadian confederation, namely Ontario and Québec. Notwithstanding early forays into left populism (Laycock, 1990), Alberta’s right-wing populist “code of freedom” was set during the Social Credit period (from 1935 to 1971) (Wesley, 2011, p. 55). The party’s two most prominent leaders, William Aberhart and Ernest Manning, combined evangelical Christianity, “Western alienation,” individualism, and free market principles, to construct a populist discourse that depicted hard-working, largely rural Albertans as beset upon by Ottawa, the so-called “money powers” (a phrase often deployed with anti-Semitic undertones) (Stingel, 2000, p. 11), and “godless” communism (Finkel, 1989). In a classic study, C. B. Macpherson (2013) argues that the rise of Social Credit was an expression of the “illusion of independence” embodied by the province’s disproportionately numerous small independent farmers, and inherent in the class consciousness of the petty bourgeoisie *writ large* (p. 223).

The roots of Western alienation are said to be found in the province’s lack of control over its natural resources in the first 25 years of its existence (1905-1930) (Gibbins & Arrison, 1995, p. 10; J. Laxer, 1975, p. 89), but this does not explain why alienation has been so persistently important to the political code of Alberta more than other provinces whose position in confederation was identical, such as Saskatchewan and Manitoba. To explain this, we need to appreciate the relationship between a specifically *Alberta* alienation and its oil and gas industry, which had begun in 1947 with the first oil discovery in Leduc (just south of Edmonton), and by the 1970s had nurtured the formation of a “nascent regional bourgeoisie” (J. Richards & Pratt, 1979, p. 11). For this class, there was a function in “keeping old wounds open and old animosities alive, diverting attention from real injustices to imaginary enemies,” as it was through such a narrative they could seek to inflate their jurisdictional claims over the province’s abundant fossil fuel resources (Pratt, 1976, pp. 111–112).

The political “code” set down during the Social Credit years—based on individualism, populism, and alienation—therefore carried into Alberta’s second phase of one-party rule, from 1971 to 2015, this time under the Progressive Conservatives (PC) (Wesley, 2011). The first premier in this phase, Peter Lougheed (’71-’85) honed the tradition of Alberta alienation, grafting it ever-more closely onto the oil and gas industry.¹¹ While pursuing a “relatively Keynesian” approach that partially broke from the US-dependent rentierism of Social Credit (A. Carter & Zalik, 2016, p. 59), Lougheed presented Ottawa elites as stealing Albertans’ hard-

¹¹ Alberta is often thought of as the most right-wing province in the country. Trevor Harrison (2014) refers to the province as a “redoubt” of right-wing politics: “the centre of the revamped conservatism, [and] a Petri dish for the incubation of neo-conservative thought and experimentation” (p. 21). There have been efforts to interrogate this reputation, however, relying primarily on survey data (Stewart & Sayers, 2013, 2023). While these studies offer an important caution against over-inflating or reifying Alberta’s supposedly intractable conservatism, a cursory review of election results going back to the beginning of the Lougheed period indicates enduring conservative strength, not weakness. Right-wing parties consistently form government *with the popular vote*. Only in five elections since the Lougheed era has this not been the case, and in three of those instances (in 2004, 2012 and 2015), it was *due to vote-splitting on the right*. Only the elections of ’89 and ’93 were due to a divided ‘centre-left’ opposition (NDP and Liberals), and even this is a debatable characterization considering that in ’93 the Liberals campaigned to the right of Klein’s PCs (Acuña, 2015, p. 304; T. W. Harrison, 2015, p. 79; D. Stewart, 1995, p. 44).

earned oil wealth to give to the vote-rich East (Harrington, 1981, p. 38).¹² Lougheed is often praised by contemporary scholars for establishing what staples theorists call “forward linkages” in the oil sector (e.g, developing Alberta’s petrochemical industry), while also raising royalty rates and establishing the Alberta Heritage Savings Fund (Acuña, 2015; A. V. Carter, 2016; G. Laxer, 2015, p. 121; Stanford, 2014). His premiership looks particularly good in contrast to the harsh neoliberal turn under Ralph Klein (1992 to 2006), who reduced royalty rates, gutted environmental, labour and other regulations, and drastically cut spending on education, health care, and welfare (Adkin, 2016; T. Harrison & Laxer, 1995).¹³ Thus, in her critique of Alberta’s deeply flawed environmental policy regime, Carter (2016) lists three proposals for reform, of which two are essentially updated and ‘greened’ Lougheed-isms: raising royalty rates and revitalizing the Heritage Fund, which Klein had starved of payments, and which Carter suggests could be used to invest in renewable energy projects (p. 175-6). Despite such retroactively rosy views of Lougheed, it is worth revisiting earlier critiques of his approach to the oil and gas sector, particularly because of the ways in which the discursive and jurisdictional battles Lougheed waged against the federal Liberal government laid down an important precedent for today’s extractive populist cycle.

Lougheed’s fossil-fuelled brand of alienation gained traction in response to then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau who, in the context of a global oil price crisis, made several dramatic changes to Canadian energy policy. Directly following the 1973 oil price shock, Trudeau implemented a price freeze on petroleum products; a federal export tax on oil; announced plans to construct a pipeline to Montréal; and created Petro-Canada, a state-owned oil and gas

¹² For more on Lougheed’s efforts to build what staples theorists call “forward linkages,” meaning sectors of the economy that can process natural resources and upgrade them into finished products, see Acuña (2015, p. 299) and Stanford (2014).

¹³ In an influential study, Trevor Harrison & Gordon Laxer (1995) characterize the government of Ralph Klein as a “trojan horse” for bringing American-style neoliberalism first into the province and then to the rest of the country (p. 4).

company (J. Laxer, 1975, pp. 85–88). In a country like Canada that has differentiated regions of oil producers and consumers, policies favouring one will likely be met with opposition by the other; simply put, the producing regions prefer as high a price as possible, while consuming regions prefer as low as possible, and policy disagreements are perhaps inevitable. And yet, the manner in which such conflicts are carried out is by no means pre-determined and has important reverberations today. Indeed, the policy changes of '73 "set in motion an important power struggle between the federal government and the province of Alberta" (Laxer, 1975, p. 89).

While Alberta gained control of its natural resources in 1930, it was (and remains) the federal government that controls international and interprovincial trade, jurisdiction against which Lougheed and the oil companies chafed. The export tax and price freeze were clearly matters of international and interprovincial trade: they affected the price of oil sold from Alberta to the U.S. and to other Canadian provinces, respectively. Despite this clarity, Lougheed framed the '73 policies as incursion on the provincial government's jurisdiction. As Laxer (1975) writes:

The important historic struggle waged around the alienation of western resources gives the current battle between the province of Alberta and the federal government the aura of a populist crusade. But the chief crusader, Premier Peter Lougheed of Alberta, speaks for the corporate power of American oildom in Canada, not for the farmers of the West who formed the mass base in the pre-1930 struggle for Prairie control of natural resources. (p. 89).

Lougheed's approach to Trudeau's '73 policies was to build on Albertan alienation's legitimate roots and bend them to undermine the federal government's constitutional jurisdiction. Thus, Lougheed remarked, "What seems so difficult to get across to central Ontario is that Alberta crude belongs to the people of Alberta" (Lougheed qtd. in Laxer, 1975,

p. 89). Here we have an identification of ‘the people’ with the (then predominately US-owned) fossil fuel industry, beset by illegitimate Eastern elites—extractive populism *avant la lettre*.¹⁴ While it is true that the export tax would go to federal coffers, the federal government is not “central Ontario,” but rather the government of *all* Canadians, including Albertans. Without the export tax, those monies would have simply gone into the accounts of the oil companies. What Lougheed depicts as the East stealing from ‘the people’ of Alberta, then, is, in fact, the national government claiming a rightful stake in the revenues expected to be generated as a result of the oil price rise, a stake taken not out of the hands of the Albertan people, but out of the oil companies. As suggested in the long passage from Laxer, Lougheed was simply using Albertan alienation as cover for the interests of the oil companies.¹⁵ The year 1973, then, marks a key turning point for Albertan alienation. It is this moment, and particularly in how Lougheed responds to shifts in federal policy, that Albertan alienation transforms in two ways: first, it becomes inextricably wedded to control of fossil fuels vis-à-vis the federal government; and two, it becomes a way for the political ruling class of Alberta to build a populist movement in defense of the interests of fossil capital.

These tensions would continue throughout the rest of the decade and reach their zenith in 1980 with the introduction of the National Energy Program (NEP), which aimed to promote Canada’s energy self-sufficiency by reducing oil prices through price controls and increasing Canadian ownership (G. Laxer, 2015, pp. 40–44; J. Laxer, 1983). Lougheed and fossil fuel companies, alongside the first major wave of a far-right Western separatist movement premised

¹⁴ In a co-authored piece, William K. Carroll, Shannon Daub, and Shane Gunster consider the conflict around the National Energy Program of 1980 as the “origins of Canadian extractive populism” (Carroll et al., 2022, p. 224). In my view, the battle over the ’73 policies represent an important precursor.

¹⁵ It is worth emphasizing that Laxer (1975) was hardly alone in critiquing the Lougheed government’s obsequiousness with respect to the fossil fuel industry. There is also a critique to be made of the way Lougheed handled the development of the oil sands. Larry Pratt (1976), for example, made the case that it was the oil companies, not Canadians or Albertans (or their governments), who were in control of the decision-making process and who stood to gain most from development, while leaving the environmental and social costs to be borne by the public (p. 17).

on fossil fuel-based sovereignty and white Anglo-nativism, were united in deploying Western alienation to challenge Trudeau's policies (Pratt & Stevenson, 1981b; Szollosy, 1983).¹⁶ Although the separatist movement was autonomous from the governing PCs, members of Lougheed's caucus advised him "Alberta is already 'a nation' and that he must act as though he were its Prime Minister" (Pratt & Stevenson, 1981a, p. 11). For Gibbins (1981), Lougheed's position was untenable and inconsistent with the continuation of the Canadian state. He writes, "While provincial governments fanned the flames of western alienation [and he notes Lougheed, in particular], they also began to foster, no doubt inadvertently, the logic of western separatism" (197). Of course, Lougheed was not a separatist, but his jurisdictional claims in opposing the NEP nonetheless "strengthens the logic of the separatist case" (Gibbins, 1981, p. 201). This is because Lougheed was pursuing control over clearly delineated areas of federal jurisdiction: export taxes, pricing, etc.—in short, interprovincial and international trade. If the federal government were to give these areas up, the federal government would be left as a "hollow shell," and independence would seem a natural next step (p. 200-1). Larry Pratt (1981) took a similar view, arguing that, in light of Lougheed's inflated jurisdictional arguments against the NEP, the premier was already engaged in a project of "nation-building," complete with a mythology of "Albertan nationalism" (Pratt, 1981, pp. 157, 165). This new "Albertan nationalism" included the construction of a "mythology of a new nation, struggling to win its

¹⁶ The largest separatist organization in the '80s was the Alberta-based Western Canada Federation, known as West-Fed for short (Szollosy, 1983, p. 36). The second most important "Western" separatist group active at the time, the Western Canada Concept, was B.C.-based, but had its strongest support in Alberta (Harrington, 1981, p. 31). All three other Western provinces were "at best lukewarm on independence" (Harrington, 1981, p. 42). This parallels the contemporary dynamic, in which I consider "Western separatism" a misnomer given its concentration in Alberta. In February 1982, the Western Canada Concept Party elected its first (and last) MLA, leader Gordon Kesler. The movement had a rural, petty bourgeois base (Harrington, 1981). Ideologically, it was characterized by opposition to non-white immigration, multiculturalism (including bilingualism), gun control, abortion, taxes, and a "revival of [anti-]communist conspiracy theories" (Gibbins, 1981, pp. 202–203; Harrington, 1981, pp. 26–35; Harrison, 1995, p. 79; Szollosy, 1983, pp. 36, 45). It also attracted extremist support, including from neo-Nazi groups like the Aryan Nations and its leader Terry Long, who ran as a candidate for WCC in the '80s (S. Gordon, 2003). In 1985, the founder of WCC, lawyer Doug Christie would defend notorious Holocaust denier, the Albertan school teacher Jim Keegstra, in a hate crimes case that reached the Supreme Court (Boyko, 2021; Obad, 2004)

independence but constantly threatened by external enemies with a return to colonial status" (Pratt, 1981, p. 164). This, I suggest, is the germinal form of contemporary extractive populism.

In any case, most of Pierre Trudeau's policies were ultimately dismantled by Brian Mulroney's Conservative government (1984 to 1993). In 1987, owing in part to Mulroney's failure to reincorporate disaffected Western voters, "Western alienation" and Anglo-nativism found a new vehicle in the creation of the Reform Party (Harrison 1995), whose defining slogan was "the West wants in." First led by Preston Manning, son of Ernest Manning, the party underwent several mutations, becoming the Canadian Alliance in 2000 and then forming the dominant portion of a merger with the Progressive Conservatives to become the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) in 2003. After the Alliance's poor showing in the 2000 federal election, Stephen Harper, who would later become Prime Minister under the CPC (2006-2015) co-wrote an op-ed entitled the "Alberta Agenda" (also known as the "firewall letter") outlining how Alberta could "build a prosperous future in spite of a misguided and increasingly hostile government in Ottawa." The authors called on Alberta Premier Ralph Klein to "build firewalls around Alberta, to limit the extent to which an aggressive and hostile federal government can encroach upon legitimate provincial jurisdiction." They had five main proposals: the creation of an Alberta Pension Plan, Revenue Agency, and police force, as well as the rejection of federal control of health policy, and Senate reform.

Although Harper's prime ministership temporarily quelled fossil-fueled "Western alienation" by grafting the fossil fuel industry onto Canadian identity and promising to make Canada an "energy superpower" via the Albertan oil sands (Barney, 2017), these forces were re-ignited by the election of Justin Trudeau in 2015, and especially his re-election in 2019. The Alberta NDP was also elected in 2015 in a surprise victory that ended 44-years of one-party PC rule, and 80 years of conservative governance (Sutherland, 2019). This victory was due in part to vote-splitting on the right, between the PCs and the further-right Wildrose Party

(Steward, 2019, p. 161), which Danielle Smith led from 2009 to 2014. Intent on reducing the chances of a subsequent NDP electoral win, the PCs and Wildrose agreed to a merger in 2017, forming the United Conservative Party under Jason Kenney's leadership, who vowed to "fight back" against Justin Trudeau's environmental policies (Sayers & Stewart, 2019).

Thus, while *extractive populism* may be relatively new, narrowly understood as a corporate grassroots strategy initiated by fossil capital in the early 2010s, the intersection of fossil extractivism and populism is a well-established nexus of Albertan political culture and of Canadian federalism. The elite conflict that fuelled the rise of the contemporary protest cycle, then, needs to be situated in the context of this longer struggle over resources and jurisdiction. Writing at a time when Alberta separatism's 1980 wave was already waning, McKinsey (1981) offered prescient speculation about the issues that might trigger further waves of alienation and separatism:

The future of separatist sentiment will be tied most directly to the issue of oil . . . Oil is the key to Alberta's recent rise in prosperity and, therefore, the key to understanding the accompanying rising expectations that make Alberta vulnerable to separatist ideas. Separatism represents apprehension over losing the wealth almost as suddenly as it came.
(p. 226)

The re-emergence of alienation and separatism in the contemporary cycle of protest bears out McKinsey's conclusion. While separatism is necessarily only one relatively small part of this dissertation's scope, Alberta's populist, fossil fuelled, alienated political culture—including the occasional articulation of these alongside nativism—run like a red thread through the entire carbon convoy cycle. Today, though, the politics of climate change are inextricable from the debate.

Dissertation Outline

In this dissertation, I trace the cycle of extractive populist protest—beginning with the emergence and growth of the extractivist action coalition (2016-2018), moving into Yellow Vests Canada (2018-19), morphing into Alberta separatism (2019 onward), and culminating in the freedom movement and convoy (2020 to 2022)—and place it in the context of fossil capital’s regime of obstruction and the far-right phase of denial. I find that a new modality of fossil capitalist power—namely, corporate grassroots advocacy—played a critical role in innovating and diffusing the cycle’s signature form of protest, the truck convoy. To a degree, however, as I detail, fossil capital lost control over the precise ideological, tactical, and organizational development of the movement, as the public they subsidized into action proved capable of relatively autonomous collective action. This increasing autonomy, I argue, is coterminous with the radicalization of the cycle. As I show below, situating the contemporary Canadian far-right within the political economy of fossil capitalism is necessary to grasp its disproportionate strength in Alberta. Furthermore, it is indispensable for uncovering the climatic dimensions of seemingly unrelated ideologies.

In Chapter 2, I detail my theoretical framework—a Marxist political ecology of far-right movements—for understanding how the corporate grassroots version of extractive populism radicalizes throughout the cycle of protest, articulating itself to seemingly unrelated ideological elements like Islamophobia, “Western alienation,” evangelical Christianity, and pandemic denial and conspiracism, in a nascent process of “fossil fascisation” that serves to entrench fossil capitalist hegemony (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). In Chapter 3, I detail my methodology and the variety of methods and data on which my analysis of each phase of the protest cycle depends. Chapters 4 through 7 present the main findings, with each chapter concentrating on a specific phase in the cycle of protest, which are treated chronologically.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the early period of extractive populism's second phase, the pivot to on-the-ground protest (2016-2018). Focusing on tactical and organizational diffusion, I document the emergence and upward scale shift of the convoy effectuated through the establishment and growth of a network of pro-fossil groups, the "extractivist action coalition." In Chapter 5, I explore how the far-right Yellow Vests Canada movement (December 2018-February 2019) increasingly overlapped with the established extractive populist network. My findings suggest these organizational overlaps were paralleled by the development of an innovative master frame—the globalist conspiracy theory—which was sufficiently flexible to stitch together pro-fossil fuel demands with other hallmarks of the far right (particularly anti-migration and Islamophobia), in turn becoming a master frame for subsequent movements in the cycle. In Chapter 6, my attention turns to the culmination of the Yellow Vests Canada (YVC) movement: the United We Roll convoy of February 2019. I examine the relationship between the established extractive populist groups, YVC, and trade associations, arguing that UWR represents a key flashpoint in the process of fossil fascisation, marked by the assertion of the radicalizing fossilized petty bourgeoisie's relative autonomy *vis-à-vis* fossil capital.

In Chapter 7, I trace the personnel and ideological overlaps between Yellow Vests Canada, Alberta separatism, and the "freedom" movement and Freedom Convoy. Then, in Chapter 8, I follow the cycle as it moved from protest to politics, attending to the role of the overlapping separatist and freedom movements in "movement-izing" the United Conservative Party through the rise of Danielle Smith. The conclusion then summarizes the main findings of the dissertation while discussing what they tell us about the far-right phase of denial in Canada.

2. Marxist Political Ecology of Far-Right Movements

Introduction

In this chapter, I detail my theoretical framework, which I conceptualize as a Marxian political ecology of far-right movements. I begin by detailing each of the three tributary fields in turn—Marxian political ecology, Gramscian approaches to hegemony and articulation, and conventional social movement theory (SMT)—and follow this up with an effort at synthesis. Along the way, I navigate several debates pertaining to the nature and contradictions of capitalist climate governance and the distinction between astroturf and subsidized publics, while also defining key terms.

The theoretical framework is organized around three cycles, each operating at a distinct level of abstraction: at the highest level, the accumulation cycles of fossil capital; at a mid-range, the cycle of conspiracy through which cultural and political anxieties converge in and through their articulation to fossil capital's hegemonic project; and at the lowest level of abstraction, the extractive populist protest cycle, constituted by a set of concrete social relations through which tactics, organizations, and ideologies are diffused and radicalized.

Cycles of Accumulation: Climatic Class Analysis and Fossil Fascisation

Forces vs. Relations

Marxist political ecology emphasizes the centrality of capitalist relations of production as the primary driver of the climate crisis. Such ecological contradictions are captured in Andreas Malm's (2016) "general formula of fossil capital" (p. 288). Recall that, for Marx, capitalism is an "inverted" mode of production, proceeding not according to the satisfaction of human needs, but through the pursuit of profit in the marketplace (Marx, 1990, pp. 125–126, 249). In

Malm's formula of fossil capital, fossil fuel combustion is understood as "*the general lever for surplus-value production,*" meaning that a concomitant and continual rise in CO₂ emissions is a necessary by-product of each M-C-M' circuit (Malm, 2016, pp. 288–289). Disregarding quality (including nature), capital is purely quantitative and, as such, ever-expanding, with each completion of the circuit entailing reinvestment and repetition at a larger scale (Malm, 2016, p. 284). In fossil capitalism, as Malm (2016) puts it, "two cycles [are] ever intertwined": to produce surplus-value, capitalists of all kinds need fossil fuels, which in turn necessitates capitalists of a particular kind—fossil capitalists—to explore for, extract, and bring to market ever greater quantities (p. 325-6). These cycles of fossil capitalist accumulation are the driving force of climate crisis.

Having been in operation since the 19th-century transition to coal, this ever-expanding cycle of fossil capitalist valorization has now reached "ecocidal" proportions (Carroll, 2025). The reserves currently held by global oil companies are ten times larger than the carbon budget of 1.5°C would permit (Allen & Coffin, 2022, p. 5). As Andreas Malm & Wim Carton (2024) emphasize, again drawing on Marx, under capitalist property relations these firms have a legal right to extract and sell these reserves, and, by extension, to plunge the earth system into disequilibrium (Malm and Carton, 2024, p. 113-114).¹⁷ With Malm and other eco-Marxists, this can be thought of as "*exclusive capitalist control over nature,*" and of the ecological metabolism between it and humans (Burkett, 1999; Foster & Burkett, 2016; Malm, 2016, p. 326). In Canada, the concentration of economic and ecological control is expressed in the fact that the big four oil sands firms control 80% of the country's capacity for bitumen production (Hussey et al., 2021, pp. 36–38). Three quarters of proven oil reserves in Canada (the third-largest in the world, the vast majority of which are located in Alberta's oil sands)

¹⁷ They quote Marx's description of landed property as "the right of the proprietors to exploit the earth's surface, the bowels of the earth, the air and thereby the maintenance and development of life" (qtd., p. 114).

cannot be extracted if the country is to meet its targets under the Paris Agreement (McGlade & Ekins, 2015). Thus, the ecological metabolism between Canadians and nature is held ransom to the landed property rights of a mere four firms.

The necessary transition to renewable energy, moreover, despite being more technically and economically feasible than ever, is hobbled by capitalist property relations. Brett Christophers (2024) demonstrates that, despite an “historic reversal” in the late 2010s whereby renewable energy became cheaper than fossil fuels, the latter continues to expand, partially owing to subordination of the electricity generation sector to the profit-motive after decades of privatization (p. x, 263-4). Malm and Carton (2024) characterize the problem as a paradox of the historical conjuncture rooted in a contradiction between the forces and relations of production (p.169, 232). Reviewing the scientific literature on the plausibility of replacing fossil fuels, they find that the energy transition has failed “*for reasons unrelated to technological feasibility*” (p. 188). Renewables are now cheaper, take up less land than fossil fuels, and the techniques of transmission and storage are sufficiently advanced to prevent blackouts (see p.169-80). Despite having developed the technology, or in Marxian terms the ‘forces of production’ necessary for energy transition, such a transition is nevertheless obstructed by the social ‘relations of production’: namely, the inverted nature of capitalist economics, according to which the production process is subordinated to the requirements of the circuit of surplus-value accumulation.

The Fossilized Petty Bourgeoisie

Given their centrality to the climate crisis, a more detailed examination of the class relations underpinning fossil capitalism is necessary. Building on Marx’s concept of primitive accumulation, Huber (2022) proposes an “ecological definition of the working-class” (p. 46). For Marx (1990), primitive accumulation refers to “the historical process of divorcing the

producer from the means of production,” a pre-requisite for the existence of the commodity “labour-power” (p. 874). Necessarily violent, “the expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process” (p. 876). This means that the working-class is defined by alienation not only from the means of production, but from “the ecological means of life itself (most notably the land)” (Huber, 2022, p. 46). Huber’s “proletarian ecology” is defined by this alienation and the attendant requirement that workers must sell their labour-power as a commodity in exchange for money to purchase the necessities of life in the form of commodities (i.e., following Marx’s C-M-C formula) (p. 188).

While the working-class constitutes the majority of the population in any country, we must also attend to the material and ideological function of other subordinate classes and fractions. Extending Huber’s ‘proletarian ecology,’ we must examine *petty bourgeois ecology*. As Huber (2022) emphasizes, “ownership is complicated” and there is a vast “middle class layer of managers, supervisors, and other infantry enforcing the rule of capital” (p. 27). Along with small-business owners, these class fractions “ultimately answer to their corporate overseers, while maintaining some autonomy in terms of dictating the production process on extractive sites, pipeline projects, and fossil fuel-powered factories” (Huber, 2022, p. 27). While fossil fuel production may be controlled by massive vertically integrated firms, “the fossil fuel production complex includes lots of small ‘independent’ oil producers, contractors, housing companies, and retail businesses that serve the reproduction of fossil capital” (Huber, 2022, p. 27). Huber (2022) suggests that petty bourgeois fractions connected to the oil and gas industry form a crucial base of support for the capitalist class writ large and fossil capital, in particular, while also playing an important role in constituting a key support demographic for far-right politics, forming what he calls the “true base” of MAGA politics (p. 27).

Elizabeth Chatterjee's (2024) complementary “energetics of class” framework examines how fossil fuel-dependent fractions of small-business owners add to this political bloc. Starting from the observation that the most common class fractions to protest rising fuel prices are typically petty bourgeois fractions in the transportation sector (including but not limited to owner-operator truckers) as well as farmers, Chatterjee characterizes these “energetic class fractions” as small, self-exploiting capitalists dependant on state-backed regimes of “productive consumption” (p. 531, 554). While hardly among the wealthiest members of society, these fractions nevertheless “own significant stakes in the carbon-intensive means of production” (p. 531). Elaborating on the class position of owner-operator truckers in the US, Chatterjee writes of how they “relied on their expensive truck-trailers and the diesel engines that hauled them along the country’s state-sponsored network of highways, guzzling hydrocarbons left deliberately undertaxed” (p. 531). Her study compares protests carried out by US truckers in the 1970s and Indian farmers in the 1980s, both of which protested rising fuel prices by using their vehicles to block infrastructure and highways, while mobilizing “cultural ideas of rural authenticity and masculine toughness” (p. 531).¹⁸ Both protests ultimately had policy impacts, locking-in carbon-intensive fuel subsidies and raising the “perceived political risks” of changing course in the future (p. 231).

Building on this climatic class analysis, this dissertation proposes the term *fossilized petty bourgeoisie* to describe the constellation of subordinate class fractions materially bound to fossil capital. This includes owners and managers of small and medium-sized businesses directly involved in or highly dependent on the oil and gas sector; landowners in receipt of oil and gas rents; and owner-operator truckers and farmers directly dependent on cheap fuel as inputs. This category illuminates how complex class dynamics mediate the politics of energy

¹⁸ As Mirrlees (2022) notes, the Canadian convoy cycle had strong echoes of the US trucker protests in the ‘70s, which gave rise to “petro-populist” car films like *Convoy* (1978). See also (Wellum, 2023, pp. 103–134).

transition. Attending to petty bourgeois ecology therefore means thinking through how such class positions may structure both climate obstruction and openness to broader reactionary political projects in the far-right phase of denial.

The Partial Mitigation Crisis

Owing to climate policy rollbacks already achieved by far-right parties, one can measure the ecological impacts of far-right governance in tons of CO₂ added to the atmosphere.¹⁹ The approach to the far-right phase of denial here, though, is not to quantify the far right's contribution to the climate crisis, but to reverse the causal analysis: to examine how the climate crisis may be imbricated in the rise of the far right. The concept of mitigation crisis as developed by Malm and the Zetkin Collective (2021) posits that if fossil capital were facing an existential threat in the form of a rapid and planned phase-out (in other words, genuine climate mitigation), then it may strike an alliance with far-right parties and movements (p. 239-249).

Although no such mitigation efforts have materialized anywhere in the world other than contemporary Columbia (Malm & Guez, 2025), Malm and the Collective saw “adumbrations” of this dynamic in the Obama era (2008-2015) (p. 253). While Obama oversaw the shale oil boom which by 2019 made the US a net energy exporter for the first time in 70 years, he also proved to be swayed by the climate movement, most evident in his decisions to suspend the Keystone XL pipeline in 2015 and to do the same for the Dakota Access pipeline in 2016 (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2022, p. 198). These decisions

¹⁹ See Malm & the Zetkin Collective (2021, p. 253). They frame this as a measurement of the far right's “radiative forcing” in the atmosphere. As just one example of this far-right atmospheric composition, consider what is arguably the most significant climate rollback of Trump 1.0: the reversal of fuel efficiency standards for vehicles, a measure estimated to emit almost a billion tons more CO₂ over the lifetime of the relevant vehicles, equivalent to the annual emissions of a medium-sized country (Davenport, 2020; Houser et al., 2018).

“sent shock waves through primitive fossil capital, reinforcing a narrative of near-death experience at the hands of this president” (p. 198). Fossil fuel lobbyists warned that the environmental movement would be “emboldened” by such decisions, and would push governments to go further still, suggesting that the industry needed to change its approach to pipeline politics (qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 199). In Malm et al.’s view, this re-evaluation led fossil capital to partner with Trump’s far-right campaign and presidency, through donations and cabinet appointments (p. 182-99).

This rightward radicalization, then, represents a partial or “gestating” mitigation crisis, suggesting that the contradictions of capitalist climate governance may be sufficient to trigger a process of alliance-formation between fossil capital and the far right (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021, p. 253). Capitalist climate governance can be understood as a form of denial in that it offers primarily the “illusion” or, at most, a “limited agenda” of action (Carroll et al., 2022, p. 222). Yet, the combination of discursive commitments to urgent action, the limited policy suite presented under such governance models (carbon taxes, increased regulation, electric vehicle mandates, emissions caps, etc.), and the contradictions through which movements mount successful pressure campaigns targeting such governments, form a relatively unstable environment from the perspective of fossil capital as compared with overt denial.

Malm and Carton (2024) refer to this instability as the “spectre” of mitigation, captured in the fear of “asset stranding” (p. 145). The climate movement of the 2010s may not have succeeded in forcing genuine mitigation, but in Malm and Carton’s view it did create “a cloud of uncertainty” for investors, in part due to local victories: pipelines cancelled, coal mines decommissioned (p. 104). They note, for example, that the Canadian movement “caused the scrapping of fossil fuel projects in Canada to the tune of 100 billion

dollars” between 2017 and 2019 (p. 104).²⁰ Such localized victories can erode shareholder confidence, casting uncertainty over the entirety of a firm’s assets (p. 131). Such share price volatility, they write, “is one reason among many that mitigation in the third decade, if not before, took on a quality of all-or-nothing” (p. 131). On top of this, given the self-expanding nature of fossil capital, an ever-greater stock of value is vulnerable to mitigation, tending to harden fossil capitalist opposition even more over time (p. 162).²¹

These dynamics recommend a nuanced view of capitalist climate governance’s contradictions. Although accurately described as a form of denial, it may be an overstatement to suggest that it poses no threat to fossil capital (Carroll et al, p. 222). Evidently, it presents greater direct costs on the sector and creates more financial uncertainty for those who invest in it than does overt denial. This difference in turn forms the basis of an ‘all-or-nothing’ economic conflict through which politics may be strategically driven rightward. Reflecting on the radicalized backlash to Obama’s climate policies, Malm and the Collective write that, “The logic of a mitigation crisis with a fascist outcome appears to have been mildly prefigured” (p. 251). Thus, the contradictions within capitalist climate governance, as well as those existing between it and overtly denialist forms of governance, provide fertile ground for reaction: the partial mitigation crisis generating a bedrock for material alignment between fossil capital and the far right.

Fossil Fascisation and the Radicalization of Extractive Populism

Presenting a conceptual link between political ecology and the study of far-right politics, the term “fossil fascism” was coined by Cara Daggett (2018). The term was developed as a way

²⁰ For details on these figures, see (Strauch et al., 2020; Temper et al., 2020)

²¹ An emissions cap, for example, would get more expensive over time as more fixed capital is sunk into the sector, expanding the size of exploitable reserves and thereby increasing the costs of mitigating the corresponding rise in projected emissions.

of naming something “nascent” within Trumpism, given the way overt misogyny, racism, and authoritarianism were being grafted onto an exaggerated love of fossil fuels (p. 27). Several years after the publication of Daggett’s article—and just days after the January 6th, 2021, coup attempt in the US—historian of fascism, Robert Paxton (2021) wrote, “I’ve hesitated to call Trump a fascist . . . until now,” suggesting that what Daggett had seen as only “nascent” in 2018 had perhaps then reached a new stage of maturity (although Paxton was not focused on the “fossil” side of the equation). With the notion of a specifically *fossil* fascism, Daggett’s concept offers a lens through which to perceive the energy and environmental politics of the far right—a way of focusing our attention on the question of how contemporary far-right politics navigates and is imbricated in the climate crisis. Unlike the term “eco-fascism” (Moore & Roberts, 2022), fossil fascism holds that the far right responds to the climate crisis by doubling down on fossil fuels and climate denialism.²² The far right responds, that is, by “fanning the flames” (Kinga Allen, et al., 2024).

To build out the concept, Malm and the Zetkin Collective (2021) rely on both ideational and historical definitions of fascism: first, as an ideology that conjoins “notions of energy and nation”; and second, as a historical force combining “deep crisis and dominant class interests rooted in fossil fuels (p. 239). Drawing on Griffin’s (1993) widely cited

²² This is not to sidestep the thorny and intertwined histories and contemporary manifestations of far-right politics adopting an ecological valence. For example, the “green wing of National Socialism” associated with the infamous phrase “blood and soil” drew on a “a peculiar synthesis of naturalism and nationalism” pioneered in 19th-century Germany, out of which the very term “ecology” was first coined as a fusion of *volkisch* mysticism, social Darwinism, and anti-Semitism (Staudenmaier, 2001). And to take a contemporary example, both the parliamentary and non-parliamentary far right in France have increasingly championed “far-right localism,” which promotes “nativist rootedness . . . as a prerequisite for effective environmentalism” (Benoist, 2024, p. 112). The concept “far-right ecologism” has therefore been proposed to encompass the spectrum of far-right engagements with ecology (Lubarda, 2020). In this dissertation, however, neither ecofascism, far-right localism, nor other elements within the broader heuristic of far-right ecologism are utilized, and this is for two reasons: first, such variants were not found in my data set; and second, that the theory underpinning Malm et al.’s conceptualization of fossil fascism entails an argument about the subordinate role of other seemingly ‘pro-environmental’ variants of far-right ecologism (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021, p. 470). In this interpretation, notwithstanding the seemingly flexible nature of environmentalist *ideology*, *in practice the far right cannot and has never been ecological*.

definition of fascism as “a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism” (p. 32),²³ Malm et al. suggest that, ideationally, fossil fascism is “an ultranationalism that somehow connects fossil fuels to palingenetic or palindefensive purposes” (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021, p. 274).²⁴ In more concrete terms, fossil fascism can be conceptualized as an ideology that views fossil fuel extraction, transport, and combustion as an essential component of a revolutionary rebirth or defense of the nation, defined along exclusionary lines.²⁵ As a “real historical force,” fossil fascism emerges in crisis conditions (e.g., a mitigation crisis, partial or full), and entails redemptive violence, the erosion and suspension of liberal values and institutions (rule of law, separation of powers, freedom of speech and assembly, etc.) and the overturning of democratic procedures (notably free and fair elections) (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021, p. 229-238).²⁶

The term “fossil fascisation” proposes to see this more as a process of radicalization than a form of politics which suddenly emerges fully formed. In Malm et al.’s view, this processual account focuses attention on “*fascist tendencies* in the present” which are “operating in that direction” (p. 251). Following Ugo Palheta (2025), analytical attention to “fascisation” requires we do not focus too closely on fascists themselves at the expense of carefully examining the potentially more important social and political dynamics from which

²³ Palingenetic means rebirth or renewal, drawn from the Greek *palin* (again) and *genesis* (birth), and can be thought of as a synonym for ‘revolutionary’ (Griffin, 2018, p. 40, 64). Palindefensive would mean a revolutionary defense of the nation, in this case through fossil fuel expansion.

²⁴ Ultra-nationalism is a specifically *illiberal* form of nationalism, meaning one that draws exclusionary boundaries around the nation based on race, religion, ethnicity, or culture (Griffin, 1993, pp. 32, xi). I follow Rydgren (2018a) in using “ultra-nationalism” and other common terms like “nativism” and “ethnonationalism” interchangeably to describe an inherently racist and exclusionary form of nationalism (see also Forchtner, 2020, p. 3; Mudde, 2019, p. 27).

²⁵ Note that, from the Marxist perspective adopted here, fascism is revolutionary against liberal democracy, but *counter-revolutionary vis-à-vis* capitalist property relations—a paradoxical “counter-revolution disguised in revolutionary forms” designed to crush those elements of society who most directly challenge capital (Palheta, 2025, “What Approach to Fascism”), (Neocleous, 1997; Traverso, 2019, p. 117). With Ugo Palheta, it is a See also Neil Davidson (2015, p. 138) and (Traverso, 2019, p. 117).

²⁶ Note that the term “far right” is an umbrella term encompassing both fascism and the populist radical right, the latter of which is illiberal but not anti-democratic (Mudde, 2019, p. 30; Rydgren, 2018b). The boundaries between the two, however, are notoriously slippery (Copsey, 2018; Griffin, 2022).

fascism emerges (“What Approach to Fascism?”). Above all, in the account developed here, this entails attending to the politics of climate crisis and mitigation. Importantly, though, fossil fascisation does not imply that the trajectory is a fascist party, let alone regime. As Paxton (2007) notes, the presence of fascist politics does not inherently mean that it will move beyond the initial stage of forming a movement; in fact, moving beyond this stage is the *exception* (p. 23). Rather, it denotes the totality of the forces at work in driving political economic alliances between fossil capital and a rising global far right. This entails boundary-blurring, an “osmosis between fascism, authoritarianism, and conservatism” (Traverso, 2019, p. 118-19). Fossil fascisation, then, is the name for this process of osmosis in the context of the climate crisis.

In the Canadian context, the process of fossil fascisation represents a radicalization of extractive populism. Shane Gunster et al. (2021) coined the term, suggesting it is “complementary” to right-wing populism more broadly, and defined as:

An emerging effort to position extractivism as under attack from elites, as an economic and political project that demands popular mobilization to defend, and as a democratic expression of the public will to fight for an industry that serves the common good. (p. 198)

What had only been “emerging” during the period of Gunster et al.’s study, however, which examined the social media output of several such groups in Canada for the year 2016, would grow and radicalize in subsequent years (Kinder, 2024). Particularly in its more radical iterations from late 2018 onward, new actors would increasingly be cast, alongside US celebrities and foundations, in the role of external elite—namely, supranational liberal institutions like the United Nations and, increasingly during the pandemic, the World Economic Forum, seen as conspiring with myriad elites and Others to undermine Canada’s

fossil economy (Enoch, 2022). The question emerges, though, as to how far-right ideologies like Islamophobia, globalist conspiracism, and pandemic denialism end up merging with support for fossil fuels. It is therefore to the struggle for hegemony that we now turn, attending to the role of ideology in developing an alliance between fossil capital and the far right.

Cycles of Conspiracy: Many Trucks, Many Articulations

This dissertation utilizes Gramscian theory for three interrelated purposes: first, to conceptualize the links between fossil capital, hegemony, and “organic” crisis; second, through use of the concepts relative autonomy and articulation as ways of indicating complex relations of determination between economics, politics, and culture, including relations of race, gender, and class; and third, to apply these concepts—hegemony, relative autonomy, and articulation—to the study of extractive populism and the far right. This incorporation of Gramsci enables me to “ground” a Marxist political ecological approach to extractive populism “within a non-reductionist historical materialism that attends to the many determinations of environmental concerns” (Loftus, p. 89-90).

Hegemony and Organic Crisis

I follow William K. Carroll’s Gramscian conceptualization of fossil capital in Canada as a leading class fraction within an “historical bloc” that is hegemonic in two senses: first, in that it seeks to extend its economic power through the spheres of civil society and state; and second, that it has largely succeeded in doing so, albeit to an uneven degree (Carroll, 2021, p. 480). Stuart Hall, summarizing Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, wrote that, “Only when a dominant class fraction could extend its authority in production through to the spheres of civil

society and the state could it be said to exercise 'hegemony'" (Hall et al., 1978, p. 203). By this definition, fossil capital is hegemonic in that it engages in a multi-modal hegemonic strategy through culture and politics; but its *exercise* of hegemony within Canada as a whole is debatable and could instead be described as uneven: strongest in particular provinces (above all, in Alberta), while open to a degree of challenge at the federal level.²⁷ As described above, it is this spatially uneven, regionalized nature of fossil capital's exercise of hegemony that produces the partial mitigation crisis, the contradictions of which I argue are a motive force for the emergence and radicalization of extractive populism.

I also follow Carroll, 2025).in conceptualizing the climate crisis as part of a deeper crisis of global neoliberal capitalism: an "organic crisis," in Gramscian terms (p. 84-5).²⁸ I conceive of the climate crisis as contributing to a deeper and broader organic crisis primarily by producing the spectre of mitigation described above, which potentially represents a larger threat to the capitalist system than is sometimes appreciated.²⁹ Given the political economy of asset stranding described above, a growing climate movement centred on the demand of a fossil fuel phase-out represents more than a sectoral threat. Since fossil capital has a hegemonic position in Canada (and elsewhere), and is materially imbricated with the class as a whole, the climate crisis—and, more specifically, the social demand of mitigation—constitutes one tributary of a broader organic crisis of global capitalism. Gramsci (1971)

²⁷ This distinction between characterizing a political project as hegemonic and claiming that it has "achieved hegemony" also draws on Stuart Hall (1985, p. 119). To claim a project is hegemonic is to argue that its "aim is to struggle on several fronts at once, not on the economic-corporate one alone; and this is based on the knowledge that, in order really to dominate and restructure a social formation, political, moral and intellectual leadership must be coupled to economic dominance" (p. 119). For Hall, Thatcherism was hegemonic in this sense, even though, at least as of 1985, he did not consider it to have achieved hegemony, characterizing it instead as "dominant" (p. 119).

²⁸ See Holgersen (2024) for a discussion of organic and hegemonic crisis, understood as a way to "describe situations where crises interact and strengthen each other" (p. 202). Thus, to specify that the climate crisis is a constituent part of the contemporary organic crisis is not to suggest it is the only or most significant element, only that it is the specific crisis I examine in this dissertation.

²⁹ This is not to engage in economic (or ecological) reductionism, according to which the climate crisis will automatically produce the revolutionary subjectivity required to resolve it and, in turn, the commensurate reaction. In fact, this dissertation can be read as an attempt to come to terms with the fact that this has not happened.

characterized such organic crises as situations when “the old is dying and the new cannot be born” (p. 276). Brett Christophers (2024) specifically frames the nascent energy transition in these terms: “the old – fossil-fuelled power – is dying, though not dead, and the new – clean power – cannot be fully born” (p. 303). With Gramsci again, “In this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 276). This dissertation conceptualizes extractive populism and the carbon convoy cycle as precisely one such, uniquely Canadian, “morbid symptom.”³⁰

Relative Autonomy and Articulation

I now turn to the closely connected concepts of relative autonomy and articulation, explaining how these relate to fossil capital’s struggle for hegemony and the populist far right. The concept of “relative autonomy” is perhaps most closely associated with theories of the state (Albo & Jenson, 1989), but it stems from a more fundamental formulation within Marxism for understanding the relationship between capital and politics, or the base and superstructure. Louis Althusser, in whose work the concept first emerged, poses the problem of “the relative autonomy of the superstructure and the action of the superstructure back on the base,” where it is not strictly a question of the relative autonomy of the state (although for Althusser this is part of the superstructure), but of the superstructure more broadly, which includes forms like law, politics, religion, and culture (Althusser, 2014, p. 54). For Althusser, these forms have an autonomy from and can themselves affect economics. However, it is not an absolute autonomy and, “in the last instance,” the base determines the superstructure (Althusser, 2014, p. 54). Stuart Hall, while distancing himself from this “determination in the last instance” thesis, builds on this formulation, crediting Althusser and Gramsci (on whose work he built)

³⁰ Trevor Harrison (2019) also conceptualizes Yellow Vests Canada and the United We Roll Convoy as a “morbid symptom” in the Gramscian sense.

for challenging economic “reductionism” and for perceiving that “politics has its own ‘relatively autonomous’ forms” (Hall, 2019a, p. 51).

Following Hall, I adopt the non-reductionist premise that politics and culture are relatively autonomous from economics, using his conception of articulation to explain how particular cultural and political forms become connected or dis-connected from class in the course of specific historical conjunctures.³¹ Helpfully, Hall uses a truck metaphor to explain how this works:

In England, the term has a nice double meaning because “articulate” means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc. But we also speak of an “articulated” lorry [truck]: a lorry where the front [cab] and back [trailer] can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. ... An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? (Hall, 2019b, pp. 234–235)

In the analysis of the extractive populist protest cycle, therefore, I use this framework to conceptualize how support for the oil and gas industry becomes articulated—that is, “linked together” and “expressed through” (Hart, 2007, p. 91)³²—myriad other ideological elements. I sometimes refer to a series of articulations as a “chain of equivalence” (Laclau, 2005b, 2005a), but with the caveat that not all articulations are equally possible or potent.³³ With

³¹ Both concepts, moreover, are closely related to hegemony: it is precisely because of the relative autonomy of the political and cultural realms that capital must wage a struggle for hegemony in those spheres, articulating diverse ideological forms with its class interests. Otherwise, its economic power alone would be sufficient.

³² For more detailed treatment of the lineage of the term “articulation,” including Ernesto Laclau’s important role in its development, see (Gunster, 2004, p. 219; Hall, 2019b, p. 235; Hart, 2007, p. 91, 2024, p. 140). Also see [Ekers et al. \(2020\)](#) for a discussion of Gillian Hart’s use of the concept.

³³ Note that both Hall had significant criticisms of Laclau’s later work, including with Chantal Mouffe. [Hall \(1985\)](#) argued that Laclau had theoretically achieved the “dissolution of everything into discourse” (not a complement) (p. 122). Gillian [Hart 2013](#)) similarly refers to late Laclau as “a retrogression from ... earlier

Hall (2019), we must attend to “the historical forces which have produced the present, and which continue to function as constraints and determinations on discursive articulation” (p. 242).

This way of thinking about the relationship between economics, politics, and culture therefore informs this dissertation’s analysis of racism (and other forms of hate and bigotry) across the protest cycle. Hall (2019) applied this non-reductionist, Gramscian Marxism to the study of race, arguing against the view that phenomena “experienced and analyzed as ethnic or racial conflicts are really manifestations of deeper, economic contradictions” (Hall, 2019c, p. 175). As Enakshi Dua (2014) explains, Hall’s position was that “race has an autonomous effect on history and society, and thus should be seen as relatively autonomous” (p. 26). This means that race cannot be reduced to political economy either in theory or praxis. As it pertains to this study, this means that the various forms of racism, but also sexism, queerphobia, and other forms of oppressive ideologies encountered through the protest cycle are not directly caused by (and are therefore not reducible to) the class relations inherent to fossil capitalism.³⁴

Yet, the non-reductionist conception of articulation adopted via Hall is not an abandonment of materialism or class analysis. As Hall states, “ideas *do* arise from and *may reflect* the material conditions in which social groups and classes exist” (Hall, 1986, p. 40). Thus, there are “*tendential alignments*” between class and ideology, alignments that are constructed in and through history and class struggle (*ibid.*, p. 40). Thus, with Dua (2014) again, Hall’s position was not “that economic relations were irrelevant to explaining racism,

work” on account of its adoption of an elitist conception of the theorist in contradistinction to the “mindless manipulated masses” (p. 309-11).

³⁴ At the level of praxis, this means an ecological class struggle cannot subsume struggles for racial justice. Rather, a left counter-hegemony would need to articulate them together.

but rather that they were insufficient” (p. 26).³⁵ For example, Hall views nationalism as neither an innately right-wing nor left-wing idea, yet avoids an idealism according to which it is a free-floating concept. Instead, he insists on historicizing articulation, suggesting that historic practices of articulation play a significant role in shaping and constraining the terrain of struggle.³⁶ From this Hallian perspective, analyzing the Canadian far right with a theoretical lens that prioritizes hate, bigotry, and racism without exploring how these intersect with economic relations is inadequate. At the same time, contending that Islamophobia in Canada, for example, is fully reducible to the economic relations inherent to fossil capitalism would be folly. Building on Gramsci, who viewed the far right as relatively autonomous from capital, this conception of articulation is therefore a way through the theoretical impasse of both economic reductionism and cultural or sociological reductionism, or what Hall elsewhere calls “reductionism upward” (Hall, 2019b, p. 241).³⁷

Articulating Far-Right Populism Through Conspiracy Theory

The concept of articulation has direct implications for the analysis of right-wing populism, the far right, and hegemony, both in Hall’s time and our own. Hall (1979) criticized the common view on the British left that Thatcherism and the rise of fascist groups could be read narrowly as “a simple expression of the economic crisis”—that is, as a direct reflection of

³⁵ In a separate essay, Dua (2014) examines Hall’s Foucauldian turn (as well as that of Edward Said), arguing against those who associate it with a “wholesale flight” from materialism (p. 63). Against this interpretation, Dua shows that both Hall and Said expressed and worked through “substantial reservations” with Foucault’s epistemology (p. 65). Both thinkers leaned on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony to navigate these tensions, which ultimately led to their incorporating prior historical materialist commitments into a Foucauldian analysis of power and knowledge: in short, a “syncretism” of Marx and Foucault (p. 65, 77).

³⁶ Thus, British nationalism, in his view, has been “consistently articulated towards the right,” yet this articulation is not arbitrary (the idealist interpretation), but rooted in historical practices: “intimately bound up with imperial supremacy, tinged with racist connotations, and underpinned by a four-century long history of colonisation, world market supremacy, imperial expansion and global destiny over native peoples” (Hall, 1986, p. 40). These historical practices mean that articulating British nationalism with progressive ideas is more difficult than it would be in subaltern countries (*ibid.*, p. 41).

³⁷ For more on the “relative autonomy” of the far right, see (Adamson, 1980, p. 616; Beetham, 1983, p. 3; Poulantzas, 2019, pp. 83–88; Saull, 2014, p. 34; Trotsky, 1944).

recession without any “pertinent political or ideological” elements that may themselves be affected by and “have effects” back on the economic crisis (p. 14). In contrast, Hall (1979) attended to the ideological work performed by Thatcherism, which was not a passive symptom or “reflection” of economic crisis, but an active “response to the crisis” intended to articulate various ideological elements into a new hegemonic project (p. 15).³⁸ Hall’s name for this hegemonic project was “authoritarian populism,” the analysis of which grew out of a longer study, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, which had “forecast” Thatcher’s rise (Hall, 1980, p. 116). In that text, Hall and his co-authors demonstrate that a hegemonic project “from above” was, to a degree, “pioneered by, harnessed to, and to some extent legitimated by a populist groundswell below,” which “served to win for the authoritarian closure the gloss of populist consent” (Hall, 1985, p. 116).

In conceptualizing the wide variety and hegemonic function of the (often phantasmatic) ideological constructions which populate contemporary far-right discourse, I am inspired by Hall et al.'s (1978) discussion of how moral panic cycles culminate in conspiracy theorization. Covering a period from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s, Hall and his colleagues observed how moral panics—understood as phases of intense social anxiety ascribed to particular groups and behaviours seen as a “threat to societal values and interests” (p. 16)—emerge, spread, and end up connecting with each other. Each given moral panic spread by mass media serves to identify often racialized and gendered “demons” or “folk-devils” (e.g., muggings, youth culture, black crime, long hair, sexual permissiveness, attacks on the family, etc.), with the number, frequency, and severity of panics intensifying over time,

³⁸ Note that his treatment of Thatcherism as a hegemonic project was not to reduce it to ideology. In a retort to critics, Hall insisted, “I have consistently struggled *against* any definition of hegemony which identifies it as exclusively an ideological phenomenon. On the contrary, I have repeated *ad nauseam* Gramsci’s argument about hegemony being impossible to conceptualize or achieve without ‘the decisive nucleus of the economic’” (Hall, 1985, p. 120).

constituting a “moral panic cycle” (p. 322-3). Today, this would be updated to entail the spread through social media of panics about white ‘replacement,’ Sharia law, Antifa, George Soros, cultural Marxism, critical race theory, gender ideology, the World Economic Forum, and so on (Butler, 2025; Toscano, 2023).³⁹

What is remarkable about Hall et al.’s analysis is its emphasis on the intensification of these panics and their ultimate “convergence” (p. 223). At this stage, individual panics become seen as:

the thin edges of that larger wedge: the threat to the state, the breakdown of social life itself, the coming of chaos, the onset of anarchy. Now the demons proliferate - but, more menacingly, they belong to the same subversive family. They are 'brothers under the skin'; they are 'part and parcel of the same thing' ... This is the point where the crisis appears in its most abstract form: as a 'general conspiracy'. It is 'the crisis' - but in the disguise of Armageddon (Hall et al., 1978, p. 323).

From Hall, I take the notion that moral panics may intensify over time, constituting a moral panic cycle, which merges the various panics into one general conspiracy which, in turn, serves the formation of a new, authoritarian hegemonic project: the coming of “iron times” (Hall et al., 1978, p. 247). In this view, moulding the popular interpretation of social, cultural, economic (and ecological) crisis through moral panic cycles is crucial to winning consent for a particular vision of how to manage the crisis: namely, on terms favourable to a new hegemonic project (Hall et al., 1978, p. 221).

Returning to Hall’s metaphor for articulation, the ‘articulated lorry,’ the emphasis in this dissertation is on how the “cab” of fossil capital’s economic interests becomes hitched to

³⁹ Tanner Mirrlees (2018) specifically theorizes the US alt-right, which has played a disproportionate role in driving the cultural salience of these moral panics globally, in Gramscian terms as a hegemonic project, waging a ‘war of position’ in civil society, while aiming for a ‘war of maneuver’ in a takeover of state power (p. 51).

the “trailer” of far-right politics and ideologies. With Hall (2019), I emphasize the need to historicize such articulations, concentrating on the conjunctural factors which connect particular ideologies to particular social forces (p. 238). And with Gillian Hart, I emphasize that the social forces and ideologies which become articulated often involve conflict and contradiction (Hart, 2007, p. 93; Ekers et al., 2020, p. 1592). Hall never engaged in the systematic study of a particular social movement or protest cycle, but his comment here in “Postmodernism and Articulation” (1980) suggests an important connection. Elaborating on his concept of articulation, Hall argues that the concept urges attention to “the contingent, the non-necessary, connection between different practices ... between ideology and social forces, and between different elements within ideology, and *between different social groups composing a social movement*” (*ibid.* p. 235, my emphasis). In this dissertation, therefore, I embed Hall’s concept of articulation in the concrete study of the extractive populist protest cycle, which consists precisely of contingent linkages between pro-fossil fuel and far-right social groups and ideologies. This manoeuvre enables a granular and focused treatment of how articulation works in practice. While not discounting the prominent role of media, I suggest that protest cycles themselves can play a role in producing novel articulations which may parallel and intensify the development of a moral panic cycle through which a “general conspiracy” theory emerges. In this framework, the mechanisms through which movement alliances are formed and through which tactics, organizations, and ideologies are diffused become seen as material and cultural practices of articulation. Careful attention to the spread of convoys across a cycle, then, is a way of making good on Hall’s metaphor, a technique for explaining how the class project of protecting fossil capital (the ‘cab’) becomes hitched to the galaxy of ideological ‘trailers’ that are the cultural hallmarks of the extractive populist cycle—Islamophobia, nativism, globalist conspiracism, Albertan alienation, pandemic denial, and evangelical Christianity. Many trucks, many articulations.

Cycles of Protest: Diffusion and Movement-ization

Conventional social movement theory (SMT)—particularly that pertaining to protest cycles and corporate grassroots campaigns—offers tools to conceptualize and examine how fossil capital and far-right movements relate to one another at the micro-level. The latter examines how firms and trade associations borrow social movement repertoires to fend off protest and unwanted policy. In doing so, corporations take “a somewhat Gramscian turn,” adopting “civic tactics” aimed at waging a “struggle for legitimation in civil society,” including by adopting a “populist posture and seek[ing] to mobilize mass publics” (Walker, 2009, pp. 87–88, 2014, p. 21). Attention to this unique modality of corporate power is essential, then, for understanding fossil capital’s multi-pronged hegemonic project. In addition, attending to mobilizing structures and the diffusion of tactics, organizations and frames, the concept of protest cycles enables consideration of radicalization dynamics. By combining the two, the theoretical possibility emerges that corporate grassroots campaigns, in their search for “arm’s length” allies, may attract far-right coalition partners, both radicalizing the campaign and growing it into a broader cycle.

Protest Cycles and Diffusion Mechanisms

While cycles (or sometimes “waves”) of protest is a concept most associated with the conventional social movement theory of Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly (sometimes called the “contentious politics” approach or “political process theory”), the concept has important historical materialist lineages. Marxists have critiqued this body of theory for downplaying class struggle and capitalism (Barker et al., 2013; Webber, 2022). Yet, the framework of protest cycles arguably begins within the Marxist tradition, with many of the key elements of protest cycles having been first elucidated in Rosa Luxemburg’s 1906

booklet, *The Mass Strike* (Barker, 2013, p. 56).⁴⁰ Thus, there is nothing essentially non- or anti-Marxist about the analytic of protest cycles, and Marxists have continued to take up the analysis of protest cycles: e.g., in efforts towards “mapping movement waves” across the *longue durée* of the world-system (W. G. Martin, 2008). The critical thing, however, is not to de-historicize the protest cycle, but rather to root it in class struggle, capitalism, and totality (Carroll & Sarker, 2016; Webber, 2022). For the purposes of this study, this entails toggling between the multiple levels of abstraction contained in this theoretical framework: capital/class, hegemony/articulation, and movements.

As stated in the Introduction, the central characteristic of cycles of protest is the innovation and diffusion of novel protest tactics, organizations, and frames (Soule & Roggeband, 2018, p. 237). The two categories of diffusion are behavioural and ideational, where the former is concerned with how specific *practices* emerge and spread, and the latter is focused on the spread of *ideas or collective action frames* (Givan et al., 2010, p. 4). The spread of particular movement behaviours encompasses both tactical and organizational diffusion. As Tarrow (2012) puts it, “As movements crystallize into organizations, the most successful forms may be imitated and diffused across sectors and even across national boundaries” (p. 128).⁴¹ Movements themselves are not reducible to a single organization, but are typically constituted as “a multi-organization field” (Benford & Snow, 2000), while protest cycles are notable for the diffusion of organizational forms across different movements which, together, can be said to constitute a “social movement family” (Della Porta & Rucht, 1995, p. 115). Social movement organizations (SMOs) may differ in size,

⁴⁰ (Luxemburg, 1906) provides a detailed historical inquiry into the emergence and diffusion of the mass strike tactic, which had led to the first Russian revolution in 1905. Notably, she emphasizes the mass strike’s emergence “in germinal” and small-scale form a decade earlier, highlighting the quickening pace of diffusion as more cities were drawn into the movement by replicating it, even describing it as a “wave” (p. 14-16, 26).

⁴¹ For example, as McAdam, & Rucht (1993) observe, organizational structures of the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movements [...] were brought to the burgeoning women’s movement” in the late 1960s and 1970s (p. 62). In turn, personnel from the 1970s women’s movement diffused theories and practices of how to develop non-hierarchical organizational structures as they moved into the nuclear freeze and peace movements of the 1980s (Meyer & Whittier, 1994, p. 289).

form, and competencies, and a division of labour may therefore develop within a movement's multi-organizational field.

The final category of diffusion to which this dissertation attends is ideational, focussing on the spread of collective action frames. Collective action frames provide the interpretive schemata by which activists define a social or political problem and seek its resolution, and are typically divided into three main categories: diagnostic frames, through which "movement activists attribute blame for some problematic condition by identifying culpable agents, be they individuals or collective processes or structures"; second, prognostic frames, through which movement activists propose "a general line of action for ameliorating the problem"; and third, master frames, which, unlike diagnostic and prognostic frames, are not "movement-specific" (Benford, 2013; Snow & Benford, 1992, pp. 137–138), but rather "sufficiently flexible, and inclusive enough so that any number of other social movements can successfully adopt and deploy it in their campaigns" (Benford, 2013, p. 1). I follow literature on protest cycles in asserting that a key to understanding the cycle as a whole is to examine this latter type, the master frame. As Tarrow (2011) puts it, a cycle functions as a "crucible" in which such discursive innovations "are created, tested, and refined" (p. 204). Thus, Snow & Benford (1992) emphasize that master frames are distinct from diagnostic and prognostic frames in that they are used by "different movements *within a cycle*," with earlier movements pioneering the master frame for use by subsequent movements in the cycle (p. 139, emphasis added).

Students of protest cycles seek to go beyond registering the "fact of diffusion," as Sidney Tarrow (2010) puts it, and explain in detail exactly *how* diffusion occurs (p. 204). Direct diffusion refers to instances of direct communication or organizational linkage, meaning that questions of group membership and networks of contact become critical for pinpointing tactical emulation between people who know each other and have some level of

trust (Givan et al., 2010, p. 10). Indirect diffusion, on the other hand, occurs despite there being no such connections. I follow Lesley J. Wood's (2015) contention that social media, in particular, have increase the likelihood of diffusion, making social platforms a logical space in which to study cycles. Social media play a critical role in delivering information about a local movement to a broader audience, which in turn might stimulate others to take up a similar tactic, especially if there is structural equivalence, an “attribution of similarity,” or movement-identity linkage between the innovator and the adopter (Givan et al., 2010, pp. 11–12; McAdam, & Rucht, 1993, p. 63). Finally, mediated diffusion occurs when “[non-related] actors are similarly connected to a third actor, who is able to facilitate the diffusion of information and actions” (Givan et al., 2010, p. 12). Movements that undergo upward scale shift often utilize all three mechanisms of diffusion (McAdam, 2003, pp. 295–296; Tarrow, 2010, p. 211).

Mobilizing Structures, Resources, and Movement-ization

Social movement scholars consistently find that social movements require *resources* (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). The same is true of diffusion, which requires not only a shared sense of identity or grievance, but concrete networks of relationships and information. Social movements, in short, are catalyzed by “established groups and networks,” also known as “mobilizing structures” (McAdam, 2003, pp. 282–283). Social movements are therefore more likely to emerge in contexts with pre-established mobilizing structures, whether activist organizations (i.e., those with the principal rationale of pursuing social change), or “everyday organizations” (i.e., those with some other purpose, but which can nonetheless become involved in social movement activity) (Almeida, 2019, pp. 66–69). Collective action is thus produced through the connection of these mobilizing structures with “shared meanings and identities legitimating contention,” a process sometimes referred to as “identity-movement

linkage” (McAdam, 2003, pp. 289–290). A successful social movement, particularly one capable of upward scale shift, would have all these components.

Resource mobilization theorists Edwards & McCarthy (2004) identify a taxonomy of five different kinds of resources on which movements rely: moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material resources. Moral resources refer to the stamp of legitimacy provided by some external actor onto a movement, a designation that can also be taken away; socio-organizational resources refer to those collectively held by organizations, both those that are intended for collective action, as well as “everyday organizations” like schools, churches, and workplaces (Almeida, 2019, pp. 66–67) that are not primarily intended for collective action but nonetheless possess resources that are “appropriable” by social movements (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004, p. 127); cultural and human resources appear nearly identical, and refer to the concrete skills, expertise, and leadership provided by individuals, which vary widely based on experience levels; and material resources refer to the physical and financial capital movements require, including money, space, equipment, etc.

Human and cultural capital are particularly important for my analysis of the cycle of protest. These refer to basic things like how to run meetings, hold press conferences, use social media effectively, engage in public speaking, and stage protest events; more abstractly put, it refers to “tactical repertoires, organizational templates, technical or strategic know-how” (Almeida, 2019, p. 70; Edwards & McCarthy, 2004, p. 126). Socio-organizational capital, sometimes just “social capital” refers to the relations of “trust and cohesiveness within communities,” which can be drawn on for collective action (Almeida, 2019, p. 70). As Edwards & McCarthy (2004) note, however, movements are not only “resource expending,” but actively “generate new resources” (p. 118). For example, movement experience can create powerful social bonds and feelings of solidarity between participants, thus *creating social capital* that can be used in further rounds of mobilization. Thus, Almeida (2019)

emphasizes that individuals and groups who have participated in protest activity in the past are more likely to do so again, for both organizational and subjective reasons.

At the organizational level, participation in protest activity increases the “strategic capital” of groups, meaning that their collective experience organizing together results in “a greater ability to mobilize in the present and future” (Almeida, 2019, p. 71). At the individual level, participation in protests can “reinforce a person’s identity with the protesting collectivity and provide additional benefits of emotional energy and positive feelings,” all of which result in “making future opportunities to join in protest mobilizations much more appealing than for those without such experiences” (Almeida, 2019, p. 113). Sometimes, this is referred to as a sense of increased “personal efficacy,” or an individual’s sense that their participation in collective action can help make social change (Almeida, 2019, p. 112). Additionally, participation is more likely when an individual “interact[s] with already participating activists” (Almeida, 2019, p. 111). In short, connection to activists can drive an individual to participate in the first place, and participation itself can increase social bonds, identifications, and concrete organizational skills (human and cultural capital), all of which drives future participation.

In order to understand the cycle of protest, however, we cannot only trace the expenditure and creation of resources as they occur through the development of further rounds of collective action. Instead, we need to follow where and how these resources are used, including in ways that might not resemble protest, let alone convoys. More concretely, we need to follow movement actors as they pivot from protest to party politics. The structure of movement-party alliances ranges from “anchoring” (Schlozman, 2015)—a broad phenomenon whereby movements provide money, time, and networks to parties in exchange for influence—to “movement-ization,” wherein movements become factions within parties, exerting their influence from within (Cohen, 2019). A distinct but related phenomenon is that

of “movement parties,” a hybrid party type involving attempts by activists “to apply the organizational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competition” (Kitschelt, 2006, p. 4).

Social movements’ success in influencing party policies depends on additional factors or “opportunities,” which themselves shift throughout protest cycles. As Tarrow (2011) notes, “different phases of a protest cycle increase, reduce, or produce changes in opportunities,” including when “early risers themselves create opportunities for others” (p. 202).

Theoretically, then, it is possible that earlier movements within a cycle will produce opportunities for party movement-ization later in the cycle. Parties will only accept movement insurgencies, however, if their ideological objectives broadly correspond and if they believe that incorporating the movement will benefit its electoral goals. This belief hinges on whether the movement can demonstrate that it possesses the infrastructure—including connections to the grassroots and neighbourhood-level organizers—needed to mobilize the vote (Schlozman, 2015, p. 33).

Corporate Grassroots: ‘Astroturf’ vs. Subsidized Public

Edward T. Walker’s (2014) foundational study of corporate grassroots campaigns relies on conventional social movement theory to examine how corporate resources are used to emulate social movement strategies. Drawing on resource mobilization theory, Walker (2014) refers to such campaigns as “subsidized publics,” defining them as a phenomenon wherein “corporations, trade associations, wealthy advocacy organizations, and campaign groups utilize the services of public affairs consultants to lower the costs of participation for targeted activist groups” (p. 10). Since these campaigns exist to counter protests, Walker (2014) suggests they can be thought of as “soft repression” (p. 194). Paradoxically, the concept of

corporate grassroots therefore suggests that “mass participation is today used as a form of elite legitimation” (p. 11).

When it comes to corporate-connected, pro-fossil activism in Canada, there is debate concerning which term is most appropriate: “subsidized public” or “astroturf.” Kinder (2024) uses an original portmanteau of the latter—“petroturfing”—while Shane Gunster and others use the former (Gunster et al., 2021; Massie & Jackson, 2020; Neubauer et al., 2023; Neubauer & Graham, 2021; T. Wood, 2018).⁴² In Walker’s (2014) assessment, campaigns that are transparently and wholly directed by corporate sponsors are unlikely to be successful since “audiences are likely to discredit participation that appears to be incentivized or staged on behalf of an outside interest” (p. 45). A successful corporate grassroots campaign is one that can “connect with constituencies that have an authentic interest in the cause, one that is *independent* of the interests of the paying sponsor” (Walker, 2014, p. 44). Campaigns that fail to cultivate “authentic, broad-based community support for the company’s interests ... [are] more open to the charge that their campaign was ‘astroturf,’” or artificial grassroots, and to fail as a result (Walker, p. 185). The key for corporate grassroots campaign, then, is to mobilize individuals at an “arm’s length removed from the sponsor” (Walker, 2014, p. 46), individuals who have genuine grievances that are independent from and yet harmonious with the firm or firms behind the campaign.

Kinder’s (2024) definition of grassroots, on the other hand, is in tension with the very notion of ‘corporate grassroots.’ He writes, “Legitimately grassroots movements exist to challenge dominant relations, not reproduce them” (p. 13). While entirely sympathetic to the politics of this statement, the theoretical framework adopted here recommends a more nuanced view. In part, this is because of the history of Marxist theorization of the far right on which I

⁴² Wood (2018) was the first to do so in his study of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers’ corporate grassroots offshoot, Canada’s Energy Citizens.

draw. Gramsci, as we saw above, emphasized the relative autonomy of the far right; it was not (only) paid thugs beating up socialists, it was also a genuine bottom-up movement rooted in the radicalizing petty bourgeoisie (T. Gordon & Webber, 2023). It is also because of the emphasis my framework places on diffusion and protest cycles. As Tarrow (2011) writes, “protest cycles are not unified movements, and they seldom come under the control of single movement organizations” (p. 208). While astro/petroturf may be suitable terms for particular campaigns or groups subjected to a high degree of control by firms or trade associations, my focus here is on a broader set of interactions across organizations and over time. The concept of ‘astroturf’ loses purchase as the cycle progresses and radicalizes, and as control is partially wrested away from the corporate subsidizers. The term subsidized public, on the other hand, prompts scholars to adopt a two-way model of agency, attending to both the top-down and bottom-up facets of the extractive populist movement (Carroll et al., 2022; Gunster et al., 2021; T. Wood, 2018).⁴³

Conclusion

The theoretical approach of this dissertation—which I conceive of as a Marxist political ecology of far-right movements—operates on multiple levels of abstraction to conceptualize and interrogate the carbon convoy cycle, the second phase of the extractive populist movement in Canada. Drawing from Marxian political ecology, Gramscian theories of hegemony and articulation, and conventional social movement theory, this approach theorizes the far-right phase of denial at the level of social movements. As Stuart Hall (2019) wrote:

“‘sociological theory’ has still to find its way, by a difficult effort of theoretical clarification,

⁴³ Interestingly, a study of a truck convoy in Australia in 2011, which opposed the Labour government’s carbon tax and called for early elections, found evidence of both top-down and bottom-up dynamics, raising “questions about the utility of contrasting “‘real’ populism with “‘fake’ astroturf, when in practice the two appear to merge” (Wear, 2014, p. 64).

through the Scylla of a reductionism which must deny almost everything in order to explain something, and the Charybdis of a pluralism which is so mesmerized by ‘everything’ that it cannot explain anything” (p. 218). If Marxist political ecology may be at risk of falling prey to Hall’s Scylla of reductionism, and if Gramscian approaches to hegemony risk being consumed by the infinite articulations in the Charybdis of pluralism, then the Marxist political ecology of far-right movements theorized here seeks safe passage by grounding both the materialist and historical principles of Marxism in an analysis of the concrete social relations through which social movements are made.

Conceptually, this approach captures three parallel cycles—cycles of accumulation, cycles of conspiracy, and cycles of protest—each marked by radicalization. At the level of political economy, the ecological contradictions of fossil capitalist accumulation mean that climate crisis manifests as all-or-nothing political contests to prevent even modest mitigation. Confronted with a gestating mitigation crisis, fossil capital undertakes a war of position within civil society, fuelling populist discourse that articulates its class interest to national-popular forms of common-sense. In parallel, it seeds a countermovement capable of innovating and diffusing extractive populist tactics, organizations, and frames. These *mechanisms of diffusion function as mechanisms of articulation*, connecting ideologies and social forces. New layers join the cycle as it progresses, especially from amongst the fossilized petty bourgeoisie. Soaked both in extractive populist and far-right ideology, *a cycle of moral panics converges into a general conspiracy, serving as a master frame for the cycle of protest*. This conspiracy theory represents a highly ideological variant of the “spectre of mitigation” haunting fossil capital. Hardly a distraction from the core economic goal of fossil capitalist hegemony, moral panics and their convergence into conspiracy theory motivates movement participation, helping solidify alliances through its discursive flexibility. As the protest cycle proceeds, it creates new opportunities for further mobilization, particularly in

the electoral sphere, movement-izing the mainstream and, in so doing, mainstream-ing the far right.

Arguably, the Tea Party in the U.S. provides an interesting comparative case suitable to a similar theoretical framework. It was considered by some to be “the most prominent” hallmark of an “era of corporate supported ‘grassroots’ movements” (Fetner & King, 2016, p. 36), and is widely seen as having paved the way for the far-right transformation of the Republican Party under Trump by having combined libertarian anti-statism with populist nativism, all wrapped up in a particular hostility for a liberal leader, then-President Barack Obama (Denvir, 2024). Notably, the Tea Party’s biggest corporate backers were the Koch brothers, major fossil capitalists whose wealth came in good part through the refinement of Albertan oil sands (Dembicki, 2010, 2022; Mayer, 2010). Against common, reductive analyses and speculations that billionaire backers straightforwardly controlled the activity of the Tea Party movement, Skocpol & Williamson (2016) insist on the existence of a genuinely grassroots contingent and instead encourage an analysis focused on what the grassroots and elite fractions want from each other, what tensions arose between the two, and how these relations change over time (Skocpol & Williamson, 2016, p. 111). Gillian Hart (2020), moreover, argues that the far-right media entrepreneur Steve Bannon successfully re-directed the movement in a staunchly nativist direction, wresting control away from the main corporate benefactors, the Kochs. The parallels with the carbon convoy cycle do not end there: the Tea Party had a petty bourgeois base, combined climate denial and nativism, corporate grassroots with bottom-up energy, and eventually would play a key role in movement-izing the Republican Party. This is further evidence that partial mitigation crises brought about by capitalist climate governance can stimulate the formation of climate obstructionist corporate grassroots campaigns which radicalize over time, contributing to the development of far-right social forces: the germinal stages of fossil fascisation.

In his study of the early days of Canada's Energy Citizens (2015 to 2017), Wood (2018) notes that participants "had little say in strategy," were unaware of how their participation was being used in the broader context of the campaign, and expressed doubts about the effectiveness of its overly polished, public relations style, and its selection of "relative elites" (typically individuals with communications backgrounds) as spokespeople. "It feels like you're not fighting fire with fire," said one of his interviewees, a CEC volunteer (p. 87-8). In this dissertation, we will see a markedly different form of extractive populism take hold, beginning in late 2018 and through early 2019: a more "fiery" version, if you will. Relatedly, we will see the emergence of fractions of the overall movement, independent of the trade associations, that *did* exert some control over strategy and messaging. A loss of control over the subsidized public, though, is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it satisfies long-standing complaints of the campaign's overly corporate, sanitized, and top-down approach. On the other hand, it risks taking the movement in a direction that poses reputational risks for the corporate sponsors, or into new political terrain (e.g., migration, conspiracy, etc.) that might distract from their primary economic issues.

The extractive populist corporate grassroots campaign clearly connected with an authentic base of support in Alberta. But what happens when a fraction of that base is capable of exerting some level of autonomy from the elite interests behind the campaign? What happens when a subsidized public strategy manages to mobilize those who are perhaps at even more than an "arm's length," such that control slips out of corporate hands? Fossil capital's "struggle for hearts and minds" took to the messy, difficult-to-control terrain of mass politics, in a conjuncture characterized by a rise of the far right. It from within such a conjuncture that extractive populism was radicalized and a nascent fossil fascisation came into view.

3. Methodology and Methods: Mapping the Cycle of Protest

The spark for this dissertation was the Yellow Vest-affiliated United We Roll Convoy in February 2019, which I attended merely out of curiosity, having been in Ottawa at the time visiting family. By the time I decided to pursue this as a dissertation topic and began my interviews, many participants felt obliged to inform me that the movement was long dead. As one interviewee, “Andrew,” told me, “It's basically disappeared in my mind. There's so many different groups now and different people doing different things ... but nobody really calls themselves yellow vests anymore.” While my methodology had originally reflected a narrow focus on YVC and the United We Roll Convoy (UWR) convoy, I became increasingly interested, via my participants, in the trajectory of the movement after the symbolism of the yellow vest had been abandoned. As one report from 2021 noted, “many of those involved in current Canadian anti-lockdown activities were involved in earlier far-right anti-government and anti-immigrant movements,” including YVC (Amarasingam et al., 2021). While these insights drew my attention forward in time to post-YVC movement pathways, I was simultaneously pulled backward, as the more I investigated the origins of the United We Roll Convoy, the more it seemed necessary to understand the broader, largely Alberta-based protest culture of pro-oil and gas convoys out of which it emerged. The methodological framework of protest cycles, then, was arrived at inductively, requiring additional methods and data collection for each phase of the cycle: pre-YVC extractive populism, Alberta separatism, and the “freedom movement.”

The literature on extractive populism in Canada has primarily focused on the online discourse of such groups, reflecting the field's tilt towards communications and media studies. Despite CAPP self-describing its Canada's Energy Citizens campaign as trying to kickstart a “movement,” the methods and frameworks provided by social movement studies have been under-utilized in the scholarship. As stated above, however, there have been calls

for more historical, empirical analyses attuned to multiple groups' overlaps, contradictions, and class dynamics. The methodology used in this dissertation helps to fill these lacunae, utilizing a social movement studies approach to cycles of protest. In this chapter, I further elaborate this methodology, beginning with a treatment of tactical, organizational, and frame diffusion; followed by a discussion of mobilizing structures and party movement-ization; and concluding with a description of my data collection methods.

As mentioned above, the final report of the emergency commission highlights the fact that the Freedom Convoy was not the first time a cross-country truck convoy had reached Ottawa, noting that it was “foreshadowed by the 2019 Yellow Vest / United We Roll convoy” (Rouleau, 2023, p. 93) and that the tactic had been “employed in a range of other protests,” including a pro-oil and gas truck convoy in Grand Prairie, Alberta in December 2018. The report also notes that several individuals involved with Yellow Vests Canada and the United We Roll Convoy became lead organizers of the Freedom Convoy, including James Bauder, Patrick King, and Tamara Lich. Aside from demonstrating this continuity in terms of tactics and personnel, though, the report does not reveal precisely *how* these were carried over from one movement to the next, where and by whom the tactic was pioneered, or how it underwent an upward scale shift. In short, the final report is clear on the *fact* of diffusion but does not reveal its *mechanisms*. That task is taken up here.

While each chapter has its own unique data set pertaining to a distinct period of the protest cycle, interview data are drawn on throughout. Between May 2021 and February 2022, I conducted 12 interviews, including 10 with former yellow vesters and 2 with members of non-YVC extractive populist groups associated with the Resource Coalition Convoy. I also conducted 3 backgrounder interviews with journalists and anti-fascist researchers who covered or monitored YVC. The YVC interviews were recruited on social media and through a snowball technique, with the criteria that they were active YVC

participants both online and offline. Interviews ran for up to 2 hours in length. All except two were held remotely on zoom or the phone, as per pandemic-era restrictions. The remaining two were held in-person at the Freedom Convoy in Ottawa. All interviewees have been anonymized.

To uncover the diffusion mechanisms of the convoy, I have followed existing literature in using Facebook as a key source of data for analyzing Canadian extractive populism. However, I am not primarily interested in the discursive frames of populist pro-fossil fuel groups (Gunster et al., 2021; Kinder, 2024; Massie & Jackson, 2020), or what kinds of information sources are being shared and promoted by them (Neubauer et al., 2023; Neubauer & Graham, 2021). Since it is used not only to disseminate pro-oil and gas messaging, but to orchestrate collective action, Facebook is equally useful for examining extractive populism's mobilizing structures.⁴⁴ Examining relevant accounts can reveal who is involved in organizing convoys and how various groups behind this unique tactic might connect and form alliances, thus constituting a “multi-organizational field” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617). As a result of this distinct focus, attention in chapter 4 is given to Facebook groups and pages that, compared to those examined in the existing literature, may appear marginal. This is because groups with relatively small social media presence—as measured by the number of page followers or group membership—may nonetheless have played an important role in the diffusion of the convoy.

In all cases, groups and pages were identified using a snowball technique, with the main criteria for inclusion being whether they participated in or organized—and thus helped diffuse—pro-oil and gas convoys. To find relevant information from within these pages and

⁴⁴ As Lesley J. Wood (2015) notes, “Facebook is better [than Twitter/X] at facilitating diffusion of symbols, tactics and identities because it uses the offline, bilateral relationships amongst people as its structure, increasing the trust people have for the information and its source” (p. 8). Its ‘groups,’ moreover, allow “potential participants to discuss ideas collectively, adapt them to the local context and propose and organize experiments with them” (p. 8).

groups, I relied on the affordances of the platform. Facebook allows users to search within pages or groups for keywords, a function I used to reveal connections between events, individuals, and organizations. For example, using the search function, I could determine whether a key individual from one organization was a member of a particular group, if two pages ever posted information about co-organizing events together, and identify protest events by searching key terms like “rally,” “convoy,” and “event.” A variety of additional data were also utilized, including industry publications, a small selection of parliamentary records, and a wide selection of news media, ranging from national news organizations down to local, defunct newspapers like the northeastern, B.C.-based *Alaska Highway News*. These data were relied on to produce a protest event analysis (PEA) of pro-oil and gas convoys, a method of counting the number and attendance of protest events for a given movement across time and space (Almeida, 2019, pp. 37–42), from the first such event in March 2016 to the United We Roll Convoy in February 2019. These data were also used to sketch the mechanisms of diffusion as the number of such events increased in frequency as the cycle progressed.

Finally, given that one of the research questions guiding this dissertation pertains to the class character of the convoy as a protest repertoire, I collected information pertaining to the professional background of key participants, relying on LinkedIn, company websites, publicly available information gleaned from personal Facebook profiles, as well as relevant news and social media. For my purposes, “working-class” refers to anyone who does not own their own business and does not possess the power to hire or fire other workers. As a rough approximation for distinguishing “petty bourgeois” from “bourgeois,” I use the number of employees a given firm has, relying on Statistics Canada's distinction between small businesses (1-99 employees), medium businesses (100-499 employees), and large businesses (500 or more employees) (I. Government of Canada, n.d.). Even though there is a vast wealth-differential between the owner of a business with 10 employees and one with 400, I

consider both to be petty bourgeois, along with managers of firms of any size. The term “bourgeoisie” is reserved for those who own controlling stakes in, or are executives of, large firms. For understandable reasons, critical scholarship and environmental social movements have tended to focus attention on this latter category—the infamous “Big Oil”—as well as their allies in big finance capital. However, by closely examining the class character of extractive populism’s signature protest tactic, chapter 4 addresses not only the question of working-class involvement, but also sheds light on the role played by petty bourgeois class fractions within fossil capital’s regime of obstruction.

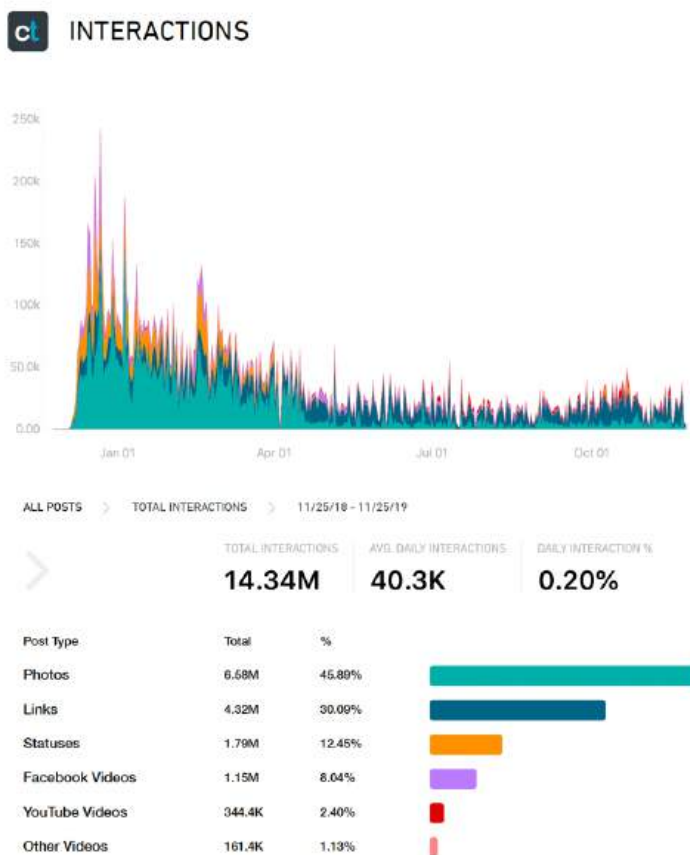
In Chapter 5, attention pivots to the emergence of Yellow Vests Canada, with a focus on the ideology driving the movement, especially its master frame. Since early risers within cycles of protest tend to produce master frames which are then picked up by adopters and adapters, I wanted to discern what the master frame was for YVC, the first properly far-right movement in the cycle. The Yellow Vests Canada movement produced a dizzying number of social media pages and groups, mostly on Facebook. To narrow my study of the movement’s collective action frames, I chose to focus only on the most popular Facebook group, simply called “Yellow Vests Canada,” which had over 100k members. The group was created on December 5th, 2018, and was eventually de-platformed in October 2020, meaning the group or its posts can no longer be seen. I used CrowdTangle, a research tool owned by Meta that was discontinued in August 2024, which gave users the ability to monitor trends across Meta’s platforms. Using CrowdTangle, I identified peaks in activity within the group, as measured by daily total interactions.⁴⁵ CrowdTangle only allowed users to see the top 25 posts for any given day, but it was determined that this would suffice in terms of data

⁴⁵ A note on Facebook terminology. ‘Post’ refers to any content posted to the YVC group, and includes photos, videos, statuses (i.e., public messages written by a user), and links (i.e., web links to external content, often coupled with a status describing the poster’s views on the link). Total interactions refers to the amount of times individuals liked, commented, or shared content that was posted in the YVC Facebook group. Daily total interactions, then, refers to the amount of times individuals liked, commented, or shared content that was posted in the YVC Facebook group *on a given day*.

collection, and would arguably be more representative of the movement, given that it focuses only on posts that were particularly popular, as measured by total interactions. I chose to analyze the top 25 posts for each day there were over 50,000 daily total interactions.

After identifying these posts using CrowdTangle, I captured them using NVivo's NCapture tool, a browser extension through which online content can be gathered and imported into NVivo, which is the software I used for coding. There were 103 days with more than 50,000 daily total interactions, giving me a total of 2,575 individual posts to analyze. Figure 2 shows that these 103 days were mostly concentrated in the first few months of the group's existence, from December 9th, 2018 through March 2019, with only occasional spikes above 50,000 daily total interactions after this time period, notably around the October 2019 election.

Figure 2 – Daily Total Interactions in Yellow Vests Canada Facebook Group



Of these 2,575 individual posts, 690 of them were not included in the analysis, for various reasons. For example, 324 posts were listed on Facebook as “unavailable,” meaning by the time I collected the data, the content of the post had been removed, either by the user or by Facebook. I coded 237 posts as “rally,” which were most commonly photographs of the rallies themselves, and as such, provide very little discursive information aside from where a rally occurred, and (sometimes) how many people were there, making them of limited value for analyzing collective action frames. While some of the photos included protest signs, I determined that analyzing these would be largely redundant, since the political demands and views of the yellow vests are manifested in other types of post. Another 69 posts were unavailable due to an ‘NVivo NCapture Error,’ and a further 53 posts were unavailable due to a ‘Facebook Error,’ meaning these posts could not be seen.⁴⁶ Finally, 7 posts were unavailable because they were videos and NVivo’s NCapture tool does not allow for video watching. In a different data set (i.e., one that includes many more videos), a different tool would need to be used for scraping.⁴⁷ Altogether, then, out of 2,575 posts collected, 690 were not analyzed, leaving a total of 1,885 posts that were.

One of the things I wanted to test in my analysis was the prevalence of pro-fossil fuel discourse. According to Yellow Vests Canada Exposed (YVCE), an anonymous group of anti-fascist researchers who focused on YVC, the top three things discussed in YVC’s Facebook groups were conspiracy theories, Muslims, and Trudeau (Mussett, 2019). Notably, energy and the environment did not crack the top three, with 85% of the content apparently being unrelated to oil and gas, according to YVCE (Mussett, 2019). In a similar vein, the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, relying partly on the analysis of YVCE and other anti-fascist observers, argues that Yellow Vests Canada was not, contrary to mainstream reporting, “primarily being

⁴⁶ I do not know why this occurred, but online forums suggest it could be an internal error on Facebook’s side, or that my data scraping activity was flagged as suspicious.

⁴⁷ In fact, according to a recent NVivo support forum, it appears that NVivo’s NCapture tool may no longer work on Facebook at all.

driven by legitimate economic concerns” (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2019a). In another release, they claim that “oil and economic concerns are an issue, but not their primary concern” (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2019b). Instead, according to them, YVC should be understood as a “hate group” characterized by Islamophobia, xenophobia, conspiracy theories, and violent threats to public officials and left-leaning individuals (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2019a, 2019b).

The scholarly literature on YVC, for its part, has deployed a number of different methods and has reached varying conclusions about the nature of the movement. Justin Tetrault’s work, based on his doctoral research and published across three journal articles, relies on interviews with Albertan activists as well as observation at Albertan rallies, and would seem to echo YVCE and CAHN’s findings. In one of the three articles, he notes opposition to green energy as among the movement’s grievances and refers to one of the movement’s constituencies as “petro-nationalists” (J. E. Tetrault, 2024b, pp. 9–14). However, these passing references to the movements’ climate politics are the only instances in which the topics of energy and environment are broached across his publications on the movement, which are focused instead on debates concerning the role of hate, violence, criminality, and illiberalism within far-right and extremism studies. As such, the impression one gets from his study is that economic resentment surrounding climate policy or fossil fuels was *not* a central rationale guiding his interviewee’s participation in collective action, thus seeming to corroborate CAHN and YVCE’s analysis.

Notable, however, is that his data collection began two years prior to the YVC movement (between 2016 and 2020), as he was initially focussed on the “Canadian nationalist movement,” where his interviewees were recruited from groups that self-identified as “nationalist” or “patriot” groups, or were considered by scholars, journalists, and media as “right-wing extremist” (J. Tetrault, 2021, p. 33; J. E. C. Tetrault, 2022, p. 440). It was only in

December 2018 that the nationalist movement underwent an “aesthetic rebranding” towards yellow vests (J. E. C. Tetrault, 2022, p. 440). As a result, only 8 of the 20 rallies he attended for participant observation used the yellow vest aesthetic (J. E. C. Tetrault, 2022, p. 440). At the same time, he notes that the rebranding resulted in “attracting significantly more supporters to my participants’ on-the-ground rallies and increased (in some cases, dramatically) their online following” (J. E. C. Tetrault, 2022, p. 440). In other words, even though the Canadian nationalist movement played a pioneering role in the YVC movement, the two are not synonymous, since YVC saw an infusion of new energy from previously inactive strata. As a result of this particular methodology, Tetrault’s study might therefore tell us more about the important and pioneering nationalist core of YVC, but less about the YVC movement as a whole.

In a study more narrowly focussed on YVC, Tewksbury's (2021) critical discourse analysis of all posts and comments from the main YVC Facebook group (the same group my study examines) finds that support for fossil fuels was one of the movement’s four key themes. However, his analysis is strictly qualitative, and so it is difficult to compare his findings with YVCE’s, who contended that only 15% of the movement’s posts were about fossil fuels (Mussett, 2019). There are also several ways in which his data collection methods may have skewed the results, having reviewed all posts *and comments* across a more than one-year time period (a total of between 35,000 and 40,000 individual artifacts), which dated from the beginning of the group through to February 2020.⁴⁸ The Yellow Vest movement faded quite quickly after the February 2019 United We Roll Convoy, however, and we know from Figure 2 that so too did Facebook engagement. Unlikely as it may be, it remains

⁴⁸ Tewksbury claims the group was founded in early 2019, but this appears to have been a mistake or a typo, because the main YVC group was founded, as stated above, in early December 2018 (p. 947). I am certain, moreover, that we studied the same group, given that only one YVC group had over 100,000 members, and that he specifically indicates the name of the administrator of his group, and quotes the group description, both of which are the same as mine.

possible that the pro-fossil fuel content found by Tewskbury was not actually that popular. It may have been largely relegated to comments and not posts, for example, or it may have been numerous in terms of the number of posts, but may not have received much engagement in the form of likes, loves, comments, and shares. Arguably, post themes that are numerous but which receive little engagement could be interpreted as less reflective of the movement's core frames, which is why other studies on extractive populist Facebook content have taken into consideration both post volume and engagement (Gunster et al., 2020, pp. 205–206). My method of data collection—focussing on only the busiest days in the group's history, and the top 25 most engaged-with posts from each of those days—can provide a further test of Tewskbury's findings.

In another quite different study focussing on how Canadian mainstream news media covered the Yellow Vests Canada movement, Cillia & McCurdy (2020) echo parts of CAHN's critique of mainstream coverage of YVC, but expand it in important ways. They find that right-wing media outlets generally praised the YVC movement as an expression of support for fossil fuels, while liberal outlets provided *some* critical coverage of the convoy's views on immigration, as well as their alleged violence and lawlessness (p. 667). However, they find that mainstream media provided altogether uncritical coverage of the movement's views on fossil fuels and climate change, thus upholding and amplifying the hegemonic interests of fossil capital (p. 673-5). CAHN and Cillia & McCurdy (2020) provide mirrored critiques of mainstream media coverage of the movement, then. Both critique mainstream media for depicting the movement as motivated by "legitimate economic grievances": the former because such a framing allegedly overlooks the movement's primary motivations, which are apparently rooted in Islamophobia, xenophobia, conspiracy thinking, and violence; and the latter because it does not interrogate the movement's economic demands *vis-à-vis* oil and gas, but merely "echoed and amplified" them (p. 673).

The various existing analyses of the YVC movement are all implicitly raising the question: what was Yellow Vests Canada *really* about? Was it a movement primarily motivated by economic grievances pertaining to energy and climate policy, or was it primarily motivated by Islamophobia, xenophobia, conspiracy theories, and violence? I begin by attending to this question through a quantitative approach to the social media data, based on two rounds of coding in NVivo. I then move onto a more qualitative approach that incorporates both social media and interview data into the analysis, focused on illuminating the movement's master frame. For the most part, findings from interviews are presented in an integrated manner with findings from the social media data. However, my interview with one participant, "Andrew," was deemed to be particularly significant because of the clarity with which it demonstrates the function of the master frame. In the opening and closing sections of chapter 5, I draw on social media and newspaper articles to begin sketching how established extractive populist organizations interacted with the newly emerged Yellow Vest Canada movement in late 2018 and early 2019.

In chapter 6, I draw primarily on interview data to consider the February 2019 United We Roll convoy to Ottawa from multiple angles: drawing on interviews with two organizers of the Resource Coalition Convoy (RCC), I examine how the RCC thought about and navigated their relationship with YVC; then, relying on an interview with a lead organizer of the YVC/UWR convoy, I flip the point of view and explore how the YVC convoy navigated its relationship to the RCC. Throughout, I triangulate with reference to relevant news articles and social media. I then turn to another vantage point on the convoy: that of organized fossil capital, as represented by the two major trade associations. Using social media and parliamentary data, I explore how CAPP, in particular, related to the two convoys.

In Chapter 7, I explore the tactical, organizational, and ideological continuities between Yellow Vests Canada, Alberta separatism, and the freedom movement. I rely heavily

on interview data with former YVC activists who went on to become involved in the separatist and freedom movements. Note that these interviewees were not recruited on the basis of their involvement with separatist parties or anti-lockdown protests, but for having been active in the YVC movement. Their participation in these subsequent movements was a finding only revealed to me in the course of interviewing them. I also rely heavily on the Public Order Emergency Commission's final report and the testimony provided to it by key organizers of the Freedom Convoy.

Chapter 8 relies on a great deal more material. Tracing the role of social movement organizations in “anchoring” Smith’s rise via their impacts on political opportunities and mobilizing structures required examination of a range of data sources.⁴⁹ To identify relevant political opportunities, I traced the pressures exerted by separatist “movement parties” and a self-described “freedom” movement on Kenney’s (2019-2022) UCP government. Identifying the role of mobilizing structures in bringing about the Smith government was a complex task, requiring an inductive approach and purposive sampling. Described as “the centre of the revamped conservatism” (Harrison 2014, 21–22), Alberta is home to a robust and expansive ecosystem of right-wing social movement organizations, including think tanks, movement parties, alternative media, advocacy groups, and protest movements.⁵⁰ The task was to home in on organizations that supplied resources to Smith’s leadership campaign and government in conceptualizing and promoting Smith’s candidacy and her signature policy proposal, the Alberta Sovereignty Act (ASA). I identified three such organizations, tied to the

⁴⁹ Chapter 8 draws extensively from collaborative work with Emily Laxer and Efe Peker ([Laxer & McLean, forthcoming 2026](#); [McLean et al., 2024](#)).

⁵⁰ Trevor [Harrison \(2014\)](#) refers to the province as “a Petri dish for the incubation of neo-conservative thought and experimentation” (p. 21). Many of the conservative movement’s leading organizations, institutions, and key figures of the last several decades have deep ties to the province, including: the “Calgary School,” consisting of influential neoliberal intellectuals and strategists at the University of Calgary—namely, Tom Flanagan, Barry Cooper, Rainer Knopf, and Ted Morton; leading think tanks and advocacy groups like the National Citizens’ Coalition, the Fraser Institute, the Manning Centre (now called Canada Strong & Free Network), and the Frontier Centre; leading far-right media outlets, like the Alberta Report, Western Standard, and Rebel News; key political figures like Preston Manning, Stephen Harper, Jason Kenney, and Pierre Poilievre; ([see also Harrison, 1995, pp. 49–50](#)).

interconnected separatist and freedom movements: The Free Alberta Strategy (FAS), Take Back Alberta (TBA), and the Alberta Prosperity Project (APP).

To assess the roles of the FAS, TBA, and APP in “brokering” Smith’s rise to power, I drew from documents, website pages, videos, podcasts, and social media posts (on Facebook, Telegram, and Rumble) put out by these organizations, as well as from transcripts of interviews by or with their key members, between September 2021 (the launch of the FAS) and May 2023 (the Alberta general election). In examining these sources, I looked for evidence of interactions—in the form of fundraising, invitations to speaking events, endorsements, and other forms of knowledge mobilization or resource-sharing—both among the organizations themselves and between them and Danielle Smith, both before she became UCP leader and after.

In the final section of chapter 7, I move into a deeper look at TBA. The case and methodology here differ from those commonly found in the literature on Canadian extractive populism in five important ways. First, TBA is not a single-issue group narrowly or even primarily focused on oil and gas. Second, during the period under investigation, TBA focused on Albertan politics and did not address a broader Canadian public. Third, unlike typical extractive populist groups covered in the literature, TBA is a registered third-party advertiser (TPA), meaning that it is more directly partisan, with the ability to use its resources to support or oppose specific political parties and candidates, whereas other extractive populist groups must remain non-partisan and issues-based. Fourth, TBA’s objective is not simply to spread pro-oil discourse via social media or to organize pro-pipeline protest actions, but to organizationally channel extractive populism, along with other ideologies, directly into partisan activity. Finally, TBA is led by individuals who are integrated into the milieu of far-right social movement organizing, especially the overlapping freedom and separatist

movements. In all these ways, this case is unique in the literature and suggests the need for an alternative set of research questions and a revised methodology.

Unlike other studies of extractive populism, the aim in analyzing TBA was not to quantitatively determine which frames are most prominent. Nor am I seeking to claim that TBA should be primarily understood as either an extractive populist or faith-based organization, or even necessarily as a freedom group focused on opposing public health measures. A different methodology would be required to rank TBA's most important issues in this way. Instead, the methodology is designed around the following question: what role do extractive populism and religion (fuel and faith) play, both ideologically and organizationally, within TBA and, by extension, within the dramatic events that shook Albertan politics between January 2022 and May 2023?

To answer this question, I began by scraping TBA's Telegram, taking screenshots (337 in total) of all posts from 22 July 2022 (when the account was started) until 18 May 2023, shortly before the Albertan general election on 29 May 2023, when TBA celebrated success in its fourth phase. The TBA Telegram channel is unidirectional and top-down, serving as a platform in which TBA leaders communicate information to the over 4,000 individuals who follow the channel. These data provided me with organizational information on the group, including its leadership structure, personnel, and the frequency, location, and (rough) attendance of its town hall events. TBA held 70 town hall events from July '22 to May '23, but attendance data are only available for 21 of them. In all cases, these data were gleaned from TBA leaders posting either the number of attendees or a photograph that captures the crowd, from which a visual estimate was made. The organization's leader, David Parker estimates that, from January through April 2023, he addressed about 5000 individuals across the province (Tait, 2023). Combined with an analysis of one video recording of a TBA town hall featuring Parker's standard 1 hour speech, which according to the Globe & Mail he

delivered at every meeting (Tait 2023), these data provide insight into the role of extractive populist and faith-based collective action frames within the organization, including the possible presence of the master frame from earlier rounds of the protest cycle.

TBA cannot be understood in isolation, though, as many TBA leaders organize outside of TBA and are prolific content producers across various media. In short, TBA needs to be understood as organically integrated “within a multi-organizational field consisting of various SMOs” (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 617). I aim to situate TBA’s leaders in this multi-organizational field by examining the structures and personal networks that connect TBA to other organizations. I therefore conducted further research into TBA’s leadership, including Parker and the various “regional captains,” who appear to have been hand-selected by Parker rather than elected via a formal leadership selection process. I draw on publicly available information about these individuals—including insights into their demography, network associations, and worldview gleaned from personal websites, social media accounts, podcast appearances, newspaper articles, and op-eds—in order to further assess both the organizational and ideological interconnections of extractive populism and faith amongst the leadership strata of TBA. This corpus includes 9 episodes of David Parker’s podcast, *The Canadian Story*, in which he interviews other TBA leaders, and/or in which the main theme/guest interviewee was pertinent to the themes of religion and fossil fuels.

Ultimately, the methodology has been designed in such a way as to illuminate the critical elements of the extractive populist cycle of protest: the mechanisms of tactical, organizational, and ideational diffusion, with a focus on the spread of the convoy as an innovation within the repertoire of contention; the mobilizing structures, class basis, and resources of the movement family; an examination of the cycle’s master frame; and a probe into the *impact* and *outcomes* of the protest cycle by exploring the extent to which it may have resulted in institutionalization through the movement-ization of a mainstream

conservative party. The analysis proceeds chronologically, beginning with the emergence of the convoy as a pro-oil and gas protest tactic.

4. A History of Convoys: On the Diffusion of an Extractive Populist Repertoire

Introduction

There have been several notable cross-country protest trips in Canadian history, utilizing a variety of transportation means. In 1935, about 1,000 striking workers in the Vancouver Unemployment Relief Camps decided to take their struggle to the capital in the “On to Ottawa Trek,” and rode east on top of rail cars, picking up more disgruntled workers as they went. Eventually, they were stopped in Regina, Saskatchewan and their leaders were arrested, sparking the Regina Riots. In 1970, seventeen women from Vancouver drove to Ottawa on the “Abortion Caravan” to demand legislative reform guaranteeing access to free abortion. They were joined by hundreds upon arrival and, after the Justice Minister refused to meet with them, they stormed the House of Commons—a signal event in the feminist struggle for reproductive rights in Canada. And in 1980, George Manuel, president of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, brought his members to Ottawa by train—the “Constitution Express”—to ensure Indigenous rights were included in the new Constitution, one of the most significant actions in the modern Indigenous rights struggle.

All three of these cross-country journeys were, broadly speaking, progressive in nature—stemming from the labour, feminist, and Indigenous rights movements, respectively, possessing concrete social political demands that, in various ways, championed the exploited and oppressed. None of them used semi-trailers or large trucks. Workers in the ‘30s hopped the train, Indigenous activists in the ‘80s rode as train passengers, and feminists in the ‘70s drove automobiles, including a Volkswagen Westfalia, thus arguably reflecting post-war affluence and Keynesian class compromise, while symbolically tying themselves to the New Left counter-culture. The material, class, and symbolic dimensions of the truck convoys from the contemporary cycle of protest, however, are stark departures from this history.

In this chapter, drawing on social media, news media, company websites, and interviews, I trace the emergence, diffusion, and class composition of the carbon convoy cycle. I find that the first significant pro-fossil fuel convoy protest in Canada was in March 2016, held concurrently in three towns across B.C. and initiated by the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association (ICBA)—a trade association for non-union construction firms who viewed the nascent liquefied natural gas industry as a potential boon to their membership. This protest would prove to be the firing gun of a multi-year process of diffusion, and the direct inspiration for the earliest vision of a convoy to Ottawa. Mapping personnel and organizational connections, I find that, paralleling the formation of an online “extractivist discourse coalition” (Neubauer et al., 2023; Neubauer & Graham, 2021), between the years 2016 and 2018 there developed an “extractivist *action* coalition” consisting of many newly-founded and tightly networked groups. Through a combination of mediated, direct, and indirect mechanisms, these organizations formed the mobilizing structures through which the convoy underwent an upward scale shift, diffusing at a quickening base by late 2018 and setting the stage for United We Roll the following year.

Regarding class composition, I find that, despite working-class involvement, the central agents of the convoy’s emergence and diffusion were trade associations and extractive populist groups with connections to fossil capital, along with conservative politicians, and small business owners and managers in the sector. While some working-class individuals put significant energy and time into the movement, their organizational capacities were often subsidized by such well-resourced individuals and organizations. Notably, as the cycle progressed, the rural, fossilized petty bourgeoisie took on an increasingly autonomous role in carrying out the practical task of convoying, relying on the everyday organization of their business to mobilize pre-existing networks and material resources. In conjunction with this increasing autonomy, the convoy cycle showed early signs of radicalization, evident in

aggressive messaging and the emergence of Yellow Vests Canada. Ultimately, I argue that, without the efforts of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie, trade associations, conservative politicians, and extractive populist groups connected in various ways to fossil capital, the convoy would not likely have emerged in the first place or undergone upward scale shift in subsequent years over the cycle.

The B.C. Rally for Jobs: Emergence of the Convoy

Despite Alberta being the hub of the pro-oil and gas movement, the story of how the convoy was pioneered and then diffused—in particular, the story of how the idea for a cross-country convoy was first conceived—begins not in Alberta, but in neighbouring British Columbia. The “B.C. Rally for Jobs” was held on March 16th, 2016. This event entailed three simultaneous convoys, with 50 trucks in Terrace, roughly 600 trucks in Fort St. John, and “hundreds” more in Fort Nelson (Hixson, 2016). As will become clear, these convoys, known collectively as the B.C. Rally for Jobs, are critical for understanding the diffusion mechanisms of the convoy as a protest repertoire: it was from here that the convoy underwent an upward scale shift, first regionally, and then to the national level.

The story begins with the Independent Contractors and Business Association of B.C. (the ICBA), which describes itself as “the voice of B.C.’s open shop [i.e., non-unionized] construction industry” (*About ICBA*, n.d.). The ICBA was founded in 1975 by the owners of open shop construction companies opposed to the NDP government’s plans to restrict bidding on public contracts to unionized firms only (*About ICBA*, n.d.). Today, it is one of the country’s largest business associations, with 4,500 member companies that collectively employ 150,000 people, or 85% of the province’s construction industry workforce (*About ICBA*, n.d.). Although the ICBA did not at that time directly represent fossil capital and had far fewer members, in 2016 the organization saw fossil fuel development, particularly the

nascent liquefied natural gas (LNG) export industry, as a prospective boon to their membership (Skeena, 2016). That year, the organization launched a TV ad campaign known as “Get To Yes,” which was “designed to spur major project supporters to become more vocal” (Hixson, 2016). As we will see, this campaign was a pioneering force in the development of a pro-fossil fuel protest culture in Canada.

According to then vice-president, Gord Stewart, the “get to yes” campaign prompted many calls from people looking to get involved. After a series of meetings, a truck convoy was planned for March 16th, 2016 in Terrace, a town of about 11,000 located in the Skeena region of the province’s northwest (Hixson, 2016). Unfortunately, it is unclear who, exactly, attended these meetings and how the form of a truck convoy was decided upon. It is worth noting, however, that the ICBA had previously used a truck convoy as a form of political expression. In 2005, the ICBA participated in a “construction convoy” of some 70 trucks, which, months ahead of an upcoming election, circled the legislature in Victoria to show support for the Liberal government of the time, which had overseen a boom in the provincial construction industry (Lillquist, 2005). The convoy, then, was already an established part of ICBA’s tactical repertoire, one of a limited number of political options that was “thinkable” in that particular place and time (Walker, 2014, p. 48). It is also possible the ICBA took inspiration from a recent farmers’ truck convoy in Alberta in December 2015, which protested the Alberta NDP government’s plan to update occupational health and safety regulations on Albertan farms (CBC News, 2015).⁵¹ Regardless of how and why a convoy was arrived at, what matters here is that, to my knowledge, this was the first ever pro-fossil fuel truck convoy. Even more importantly, it would play a critical role in the convoy’s upward scale shift.

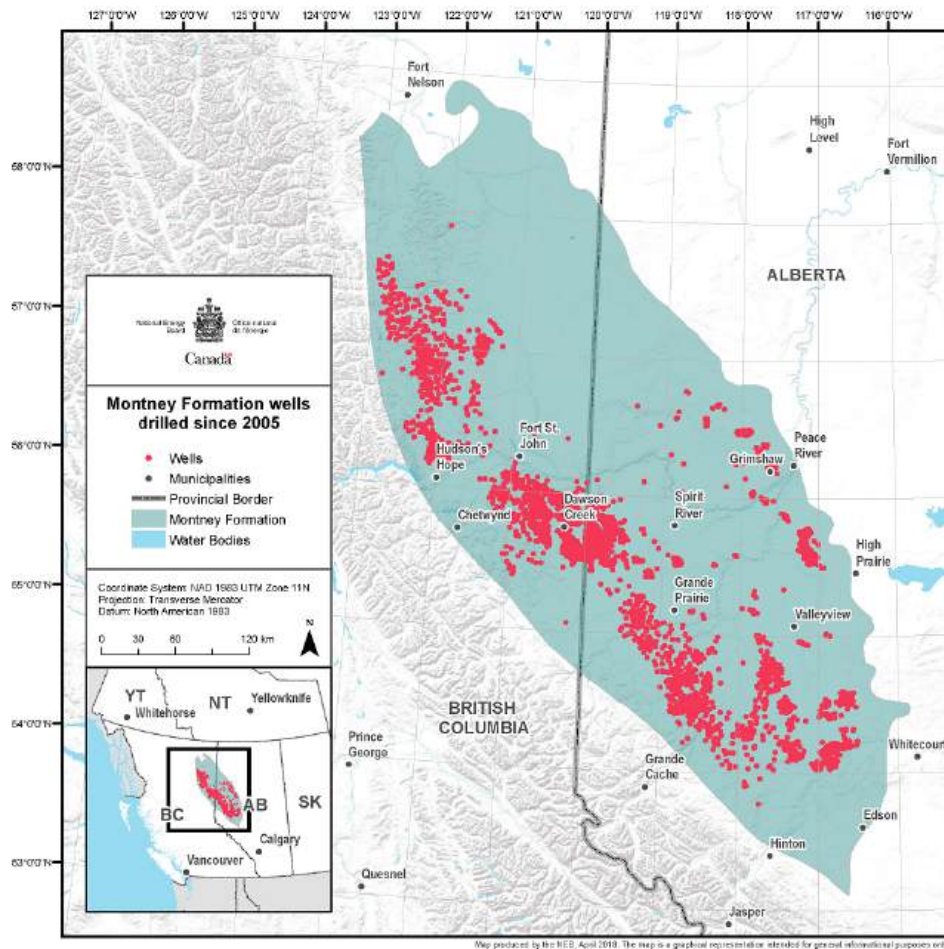
⁵¹ Future research, ideally in the form of interviews with ICBA representatives, would be required to uncover precisely how and why a convoy was decided as the protest tactic for the B.C. Rally for Jobs.

The focus of the B.C. Rally for Jobs was to be on supporting the Pacific North West LNG terminal (henceforth PNW LNG), which was proposed for Lelu Island, located just off the coast, about 140km west of Terrace. The proponent, the Malaysian state-owned company Petronas—one of the world’s largest companies, with nearly 50,000 employees—promised to invest \$36 billion into the project, which would have sent 18 million tonnes of gas every year to the terminal via a new pipeline, the Prince Rupert Gas Transmission (PRGT). The pipeline was to originate in Hudson’s Hope, B.C., a rural municipality in the province’s northeast, located in one of North America’s largest gas resources, the Montney Formation, which stretches from northeast B.C. down into northwestern Alberta (see Figure 3).

At the time, PNW LNG was the first major LNG export terminal in B.C. to have reached the final federal approval stage (Black Press Media Staff, 2016). The project was faced with sustained Indigenous opposition, including a longstanding land defence camp set up and maintained by the hereditary leaders of the Gitwilgyoots Tribe of the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation and their allies, and was also considered by some as “the first big test of the Trudeau government’s commitment to addressing climate change” (Gilchrist, 2017; North, 2015).⁵² In an early sign of Trudeau’s commitment to fossil fuel expansion, the project gained federal approval in September 2016. Despite gaining approval, however, Petronas backed out in July 2017, citing depressed global gas prices (Gilchrist, 2017). But before this drama unfolded, back in early 2016, the focus of project proponents was on cultivating the appearance of social licence ahead of the federal government’s final decision, which was expected imminently.

⁵² Video from Barkved. Cite.

Figure 3 – Map of the Montney Formation, including gas wells drilled (2005-2018)



Source [Government of Canada \(2023\)](#)

The ICBA convoy was originally planned to take place in Terrace, but the idea was quickly diffused to two other locations close to the PRGT starting point, both important resource towns—Fort Nelson and Fort St. John, the latter a mere 85km from the proposed pipeline’s starting point. It is sometimes observed that pipeline routes create new networks and alliances of resistance, as communities along the pathway come into communication with one another to share resources and oppositional strategies (D. N. Scott, 2013b, 2013a). The same can be said, however, of pro-pipeline forces. In this case, proponents near the export terminal in Terrace got in touch with proponents near the site of extraction.

In Fort St. John—sometimes considered the Fort McMurray of B.C. for its reliance on the natural gas industry (ResourceWorks, 2016a)—a new pro-LNG group had been founded

just months before the ICBA convoy was scheduled. FSJ for LNG was founded in January 2016 by Alan Moreno Yu, a recent Filipino immigrant who, after some time and relevant training in Vancouver, moved to Fort St. John in 2015 to pursue “the LNG dream.” He quickly found a job as a two-way radio technician, before being laid off in January 2016 (N. Bennett, 2016). During this time, oil and gas prices were falling globally, leading to a significant reduction of rig activity, with Canada being “the hardest hit region in the world on a percentage basis,” according to government statistics (Government of Canada, 2015a). By summer 2015, oil and gas rig activity in Western Canada reached “the lowest level since the financial crisis of 2009,” and would plunge another 50% by the summer of 2016 (Government of Canada, 2015b, 2016). Alan Yu had clearly chosen a difficult time to pursue the LNG dream.

According to Yu, the ICBA “spearheaded the original truck rally in Terrace,” but played a less direct role in the other two (February 1, 2017). Yu recalls that, after the Terrace convoy was already scheduled, he received a phone call from a former MP, Jay D. Hill, who passed on the information about the Terrace convoy just one week before it was set to go ahead. Hill is a retired, longtime conservative politician who lives in Fort St. John and has a background in the oil and gas industry. His political career followed the history of regional, right-wing populist political parties, representing the northeastern British Columbia riding of Prince George-Peace River first as a Reform, then Alliance, then Conservative MP (Rieger, 2020). From 2008 to 2010, he was House Leader for the Conservative government under Stephen Harper, and in 2020 he would become leader of the Western separatist Maverick Party (see chapter 6). Back in 2016, though, he appears to have played an important role as an intermediary between the ICBA and Alan Yu.

In addition to phoning Yu, Hill was also a member of the FSJ for LNG Facebook group, and posted a call for Fort St. John and Fort Nelson to imitate the Terrace action: “A

truck rally / parade is being organized for Terrace for next Wednesday, March 16th at noon PST... would be terrific if FSJ, FN, PR [Prince Rupert] and any other supportive communities would hold similar truck parades through their cities / towns for the same day!” (March 9, 2016). After the phone call with Hill, with only one week to plan it, Yu and others associated with FSJ for LNG began organizing the Fort St. John convoy to coincide with the ICBA-led convoy in Terrace. Yu, in turn, used Facebook to solicit volunteers to bottom-line a simultaneous convoy in Fort Nelson, eventually landing on the owner of a small pilot truck business, Kristi Leer (February 1, 2017).⁵³ The initial spread of the convoy, then, was via “mediated diffusion,” with Hill playing the role of “a broker that connects otherwise disconnected organizations and individuals,” in this case connecting ICBA with FSJ for LNG, who then solicited volunteers to replicate the action in Fort Nelson (Almeida, 2019, p. 74).

Although the ICBA did not lead the organization of the Fort St. John or Fort Nelson convoys—in part, as we will see, because they were organizationally weak in the northeast of the province—they did provide a number of supports and subsidies. One local newspaper reported that the ICBA had “sponsored” the other two convoys (Black Press Media Staff, 2016). Another reported that all three rallies are “being supported by” them (N. Bennett, 2016). It is unclear what the extent of this sponsorship or support was, but it included sending regional VP Mike Davis to attend the Fort St. John convoy, paying for 600 bumper stickers, and providing “appreciation cocktails” at a Fort St. John hotel after the convoy (Ramona McDonald, May 30th, 2016; Alan Yu, February 1, 2017; 2016-03-26 ICBA stickers). The ICBA’s subsidies of the Fort St. John convoy were not only material, but discursive,

⁵³ Leer owned a small pilot car business (guiding large trucks with oversized loads), based in Fort Nelson. Her business picked up during the oil and gas boom of the early 2010s, but slowed during the downturn of 2015 and 2016, when she had to layoff employees. She felt that the Pacific NorthWest export terminal would revive her business’ fortunes, as well as those of her employees and the broader Fort Nelson community (Kurjata, 2017; O’Brien, 2016). Underscoring her status as petit bourgeois, Leer not only owned this business, but operated it, and in [year] got into a road accident while on a job, which left her paralyzed.

manifesting in the diffusion of ICBA's motivational frames, as evidenced by the echo of ICBA's "get to yes" campaign language on the Fort St. John convoy's Facebook event page, which read, "let the voices of YES be heard!!" (March 16, 2016).

Despite these material and discursive subsidies, another co-organizer of the Fort St. John convoy, Chuck Fowler, downplays the ICBA's role as secondary. Fowler is a local small business owner who, along with Yu, is an administrator of the FSJ for LNG Facebook group. According to Fowler, the ICBA "definitely were there for assistance but the rally was thought of and coordinated by FSJ for LNG" (Fowler, Feb 1, 2017). And yet, Fowler would seem to be overstating his organization's role; we know that the Terrace convoy was planned first, and that the Fort St. John convoy was planned hastily in response to it, and only then after the brokerage provided by Jay Hill. FSJ for LNG may have "thought of" doing a coinciding convoy and may have coordinated it, but it is clear this idea only arose in the context of a resource infrastructure in which the ICBA played a key role as the pioneers of the pro-oil and gas truck convoy.

These were not the only mobilizing structures that FSJ for LNG drew on when organizing the convoy, however. Connections to conservative politicians played an important role, too, and not only for the mediated diffusion provided by Jay D. Hill. The Facebook event page lists Lori Ackerman, the Mayor of Fort St. John, and local conservative MLA Dan Davies as among the event's hosts (March 16, 2016). Chuck Fowler, moreover, specifically names Pat Pimm, B.C.'s former Minister of Agriculture, as among the core organizers (Fowler, Feb 1, 2017).⁵⁴ Notably, Pimm's brothers own a small oil and gas service business that is a member of the ICBA (EnergyNow Media, 2021). Along with Pimm and Ackerman, other notables were recruited as speakers for the rally, including then-Senator Richard

⁵⁴ Before getting into politics, Pimm had a 25-year history in the oil and gas industry. He served as Minister of Agriculture under Liberal Premier Christy Clark. (Note that, at the time in BC, the Liberal Party was a *de facto* conservative party).

Neufeld, Conservative MP Bob Zimmer, and Director of the Peace River Regional District, Brad Sperling (March 16, 2016). Thus, although FSJ for LNG may have been founded by a recently unemployed working-class man, from its very earliest days it was connected with large business associations like the ICBA and many individuals from the local conservative political establishment, without whom the group arguably would not have had the same organizational capacity or legitimacy. There is one final mobilizing structure to mention.

Like the oil sands in Alberta, B.C.'s oil and gas industry consists not only of large firms such as Petronas (then known as Progress Energy), but a plethora of small and medium-sized businesses that service these extractive operations. These service firms played an important role in organizing and executing both the Fort St. John and Fort Nelson convoys. At the time of the Fort St. John convoy, the regional service companies were represented by the business association Energy Services BC, which had been founded in 1977 as the Northern Society of Oilfield Contractors and Service Firms (Preprost, 2017). With respect to the Fort St. John convoy, it was reported that Energy Services BC "helped turn the local rally into a 600-truck event" (Preprost, 2017). Again, Chuck Fowler of FSJ for LNG disputes this characterization, writing, "Energy Services BC did not turn the truck rally into a 600 truck rally. They were informed by the coordinators of the truck rally and passed on the information" (Fowler, Feb 1, 2017). It is difficult to know if this reflects anything other than a wish to not have credit bestowed on pre-existing organizations, but Fowler wishes to make it clear, once more, that FSJ for LNG, along with Pimm, were the prime movers. He nonetheless notes that, in their capacity as rally coordinators, FSJ for LNG "informed" Energy Services BC of the convoy, who then "passed on the information," presumably to their membership of oil and gas service companies. Assuming at least some of the 600 trucks in the convoy were mobilized through this channel, it is evident that Energy Services BC did,

in fact, help with driving turnout for the truck rally, although the precise extent of their role has not been quantified.

Regardless of the precise quantity of trucks mobilized by Energy Services BC, the convoy was not primarily the expression of working-class grievances. Although working-class individuals were involved (and in some cases centrally, as with Alan Yu), the convoy was largely dependent on the mobilization of resources from within the fossilized petty bourgeoisie. A working-class person, unlike in Marx's time, does in fact own more than their labour.⁵⁵ However, by definition, they do not own expensive equipment and trucks like the ones that hit the streets for the B.C. Rally for Jobs. Days before the convoy, Fowler expressed the goal of organizers: "The more equipment we get the better" (March 11, 2016). According to Pimm, who had his staff do a count, there ended up being 240 big rigs/semis, and 340 "trucks/other" (March 16, 2016). One local observer, meanwhile, estimated, "That's over \$200 million worth of equipment out to support LNG" (Eagle Vision Video Productions Ltd., 2016). The convoy, then, was a mobilization by and of capital, not labour—literally, it was capital in motion.

The Fort Nelson convoy was similarly business, not worker-driven. Ahead of the event, the lead organizer, Kristi Leer, along with a co-organizer, together "hand delivered over 100 invites to businesses to come out and support [the] FN for LNG rally" (FN for LNG, March 14, 2016). Far from the "grassroots" that the convoy claimed to represent, this was a convoy initiated and made possible by small business owners with a direct stake in the fossil fuel industry. Of course, many of the trucks may have been *driven* by workers, but it is fairly clear they were being paid to do so by their bosses; the organizers sought the participation of *businesses*, not workers. The workers in the convoy may have genuinely agreed with the

⁵⁵ As Adorno (2019) observed of the post-war boom, "the proletarians today genuinely have more to lose than their chains, namely their small car or motorcycle" – even if many such possessions were already "a sublimated form of chains" as he suggested and, after decades of neoliberalism, are today increasingly only available through the incurrence of high levels of debt (p. 38).

political goals of the protest, but that is beside the point here, which is that the protest was organized and made possible not by workers, but by the petty bourgeoisie. The convoy, though, was not merely a political expression of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie, but also provided an opportunity for consciousness-raising and alliance-formation within that class.

The B.C. Rally for Jobs effected this sort of consciousness-raising and organizational capacity-building amongst two important business associations, the ICBA and Energy Services BC. One reason the ICBA did not directly organize the convoys in Fort St. John and Fort Nelson was due to the structure of their organization, with their membership concentrated in other, more populous parts of the province where construction typically occurs. However, ICBA viewed this as an organizational weakness and was actively pursuing a strategy of regional expansion. Alan Yu of FSJ for LNG reveals that ICBA was transparent about this lack of capacity, recounting how, “In my discussions with ICBA, I was informed that they had no presence in the North Peace” (February 1, 2017). Reflecting on the convoys almost a year later, Yu added, “Now they do” (February 1, 2017). That is, the ICBA simply did not have the capacity to organize convoys in the important northeast region of the province, where the bulk of extractive activity takes place. If the ICBA had the resources to organize convoys in Fort Nelson and Fort St. John directly, it is hard to imagine why they would not have done so, given their willingness to do so in Terrace, closer to the coast. In a sense, ICBA outsourced this organizational labour to a multi-organizational field involving, as we have seen, the conservative political establishment in the region, a longstanding oil and gas trade association (Energy Services BC), as well as a newly-founded “grassroots” advocacy group, FSJ for LNG, which, while fronted by a working-class person, was itself thoroughly integrated with the conservative political establishment.

The successful diffusion of the convoy from Terrace to Fort St. John and Fort Nelson complemented ICBA’s efforts at regional expansion and provided opportunity for

organizational transformation. A month after the convoy, the ICBA had already opened a new office in Prince George, with then President Philip Hochstein noting,

We see lots of opportunity up in the north ... Shovels in the ground are what our industry wants and projects get bogged down in the regulatory system so we're doing what we can to help create some social licence and put pressure on the other side to say yes to those projects.

The Fort St. John convoy served this greater vision of regional expansion into the north of the province and provided an opportunity for networking between the ICBA and Energy Services BC. As Energy Services BC's executive director, Art Jarvis, told a local newspaper, "[The convoy is] when I met with the (ICBA) president and we recognized that the services we advocate and lobby for parallel theirs" (Preprost, 2017). This meeting would prove to be the beginning of a longer relationship. Less than a year after the Fort St. John convoy, the ICBA acquired Energy Services BC. As Jarvis put it, "[ICBA] didn't have the connections. It was the right marriage" (Preprost, 2017). Despite FSJ for LNG organizer Chuck Fowler downplaying Energy Services BC's role in the convoy, it is clear that the ICBA viewed Energy Services BC as an important player in the area, and an asset worth acquiring as part of a broader regional expansion strategy.

The ICBA's "get to yes" campaign had entered a new stage, moving from advertisements to on-the-ground protest, with the convoy adopted as the signature form. The limitations of their organization, however, meant that they were restricted to the role of external subsidizer in the important extractive zone of the North Peace region; they "didn't have the connections," as Jarvis put it. However, in the process of attempting to organize these convoys, the ICBA built these connections—mediated through key figures from the conservative political establishment—and acquired a new membership base. In the process,

the tacit alliance between B.C. construction and fossil capital became formalized in a new organizational structure.

Since this time, ICBA has continued its regional expansion strategy, opening an Alberta chapter in March 2023. Along with expanded services for “group health benefits, training, and wellness programs,” ICBA Alberta president Mike Martens says the expansion will give members “a strong voice in public policy advocacy.” Demonstrating their prowess and experience in this area, the launch page boasts of ICBA’s advocacy having “generated thousands of supportive emails through ICBA’s #Get2Yes petition in support of Alberta energy projects,” and of having “offered a \$100,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and charge of the people who attacked the Coastal Gas Link LNG pipeline construction site in northern B.C.” (*ICBA Expands Open Shop Advocacy and Services in Alberta*, 2023).

For its part, despite the setback of PNW LNG’s cancellation, Petronas remains active in the Montney and has continued to seek new transportation routes. Recently, the pipeline that would have brought gas to the Pacific NorthWest terminal has been revived as a potential supplier for the newly proposed Ksi Lisims LNG terminal. If built, the new terminal—a joint venture between Nisga’a First Nation, Texas-based Western LNG, and Rockies LNG Limited, a partnership of major gas producers headquartered in Calgary—would be located on Pearse Island, just North of Lelu Island, and would liquefy and export 12 million tonnes of gas per year to Asian markets (Simmons, 2024). Despite being cancelled back in 2017, then, an equivalent to PNW LNG—the very project that was the focus of the first-ever pro-oil and gas truck convoy—appears set to go ahead.

Rally 4 Resources: Diffusion of the Convoy

In 2016, Jeff Malchow of Red Deer, Alberta had been in the oil and gas industry for 11 years, working as a general operator—a skilled, blue-collar position—for a large, multinational

oilfield service company.⁵⁶ He had been stationed in Fort Nelson at the time of the B.C. Rally for Jobs and, on a down day, decided to attend a pro-LNG letter writing event, organized by some of the same individuals with FN for LNG, who had been behind the Fort Nelson convoy (CAOEC podcast, 2019). Over 1,100kms away, back home in Red Deer, Malchow's wife, Nicole Wapple—who herself had worked in the industry before having kids, and who describes herself as “third-generation oil patch”—had been growing frustrated by the delays and opposition to fossil fuel projects (CAOEC podcast, 2019). As she recounts:

Being an oil and gas family, we were watching the Northern Gateway [a tar sands pipeline] and Pacific Northwest LNG projects in 2016, found the contentiousness of the two projects rather bizarre, and the things we were and still are hearing about the industries that our family members and friends work in are simply not true. When the activists state incorrect things about our industry, they are actually talking about us, and we take it personally. (CAOEC podcast, 2019)

Wapple was not aggrieved or motivated by any personal financial hardship—in fact, she notes her and Malchow had been lucky to avoid the worst of the downturn—but rather by a sense of loyalty to friends, family, and even personal identity as an “oil and gas family.” From her perspective, a critique of the industry was to be taken “personally,” and so demanded a response. She had seen news coverage of the pro-LNG convoys in B.C. and, her curiosity piqued, sought out contact with the organizers, whose information she asked Malchow to gather while he was still in Fort Nelson.

Thus are the simple beginnings of Rally 4 Resources (R4R), which would become a significant player in the pro-oil and gas movement's second phase, serving a unique role within the multi-organizational field by having “a more direct focus on organizing on-the-

⁵⁶ Founded in 1926 and headquartered in Houston, Texas, Schlumberger (SLB) is, according to *Forbes*, the world's 263rd largest company, with over 110,000 employees globally ('SLB | SLB Stock Price, Company Overview & News', n.d.)

ground events” than most other extractive populist groups (Kinder, 2024, p. 53). Wapple describes how the initial contact made by Malchow quickly led them into collective action:

From there, I connected with one of the organizers [of the Fort Nelson convoy], who agreed that we needed to support each other, and so together we started the Rally 4 Resources Facebook page that would be inclusive of all natural resource industries. (CAOEC podcast, 2019)

The R4R Facebook page was created on April 5th, 2016, less than three weeks after the BC Rally for Jobs, and Wapple makes it clear that the group did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, the group arose from a combination of indirect and direct diffusion—first through news media, from which Wapple learned of pro-LNG activism, then through the cultivation of direct lines of communication, beginning with an in-person meeting between Malchow and Fort Nelson organizers, facilitated by the “everyday organization” of workplace geographies. Coupled with these diffusion mechanisms was a strong movement-identity linkage, with Wapple’s personal identity connected to her and her family’s line of work, which she felt was threatened by environmentalists. From her perspective, the recent mobilization of the B.C. pro-LNG movement was proof that people like her could take action to protect this identity and its economic foundations.

From the very beginning, then, R4R took inspiration from B.C.’s pro-LNG movement. Even the name of the new organization was borrowed from an event organized by FN for LNG just days after the B.C. Rally for Jobs, the “Foot Rally for Resources,” so named because it was on *foot*, and not in trucks (FN for LNG, March 22, 2016). But more than inspiration, R4R directly drew resources from the B.C. movement, both online and offline. Although in the above interview Wapple does not indicate who her contact in Fort Nelson was, it was most likely Jennifer Barkved, who, with her husband, co-owns Gearheads Truck Repair—a small business specializing in commercial truck, trailer, and RV repair. Barkved

was a co-founder of FN for LNG and remains one of two administrators of its Facebook group. She is also featured in the December 2016 issue of CAPP's magazine, *Context*, where she is described as "a member of Canada's Energy Citizens," whose business (Gearheads) had "done well by the local oil and natural gas industry, though the downturn means business has slowed" ('Energy Citizen Profile', 2016). The article vaguely mentions that she "also participated in Rally with Resources [*sic.*]" ('Energy Citizen Profile', 2016). Her role with R4R, however, was more substantial than "participant."

Less than two weeks after the creation of the R4R Facebook page, Barkved posted in the FN for LNG group, adding clarity to her organizational role, while also making plain the upward scale shift of the convoy that was underway. The repertoire of the convoy had already begun its upward scale shift, diffusing, as we saw above, from one to three towns in B.C., thus connecting extractive and export-oriented geographies. But the convoy was set to diffuse beyond provincial boundaries, a scale shift marked by the founding of R4R:

I would like to ask you all to take a look at a group I am involved with. We are organizing a rally to Ottawa, convoy style to take our messages about resources to Parliament. This "Rally for Resources" was inspired by our truck rallies. ... This is something that I have been working on separately and apart from our local FN for LNG group. The FN for LNG group supports this, but it's [*sic.*] main priority is to focus only on the LNG industry. ... Please contact me directly if you are interested in participating or helping to sponsor in any way. (FN for LNG, April 13, 2016)

From Barkved's appeal we can see that, from its very founding, the convoy was R4R's protest tactic of choice, and that its ambition was to effect its upward scale shift, both in terms of its geography and political meaning. The post also makes clear that, although it would take nearly three years to actualize this vision at scale, the extractive populist movement was, as early as April 2016, already ideating about a convoy to Ottawa.

Temporally and spatially, the B.C. Rally for Jobs was relatively narrow in scope, restricted to one province with convoys in three separate towns travelling short distances over the course of a single afternoon. A convoy from Fort Nelson to Ottawa, on the other hand, would need to traverse some 4,400km over the course of an eight day driving schedule, requiring significantly more organizational and financial resources.⁵⁷ In terms of its demands, too, the B.C Rally for Jobs had been relatively parochial in its focus on LNG, and on Pacific Northwest LNG, in particular. Paralleling the geographic scale shift, the proposed convoy to Ottawa reflected ambitions for a political scale shift.

A day after Barkved's post to FN for LNG about the new organization, Malchow and Wapple solicited the FSJ for LNG Facebook group with a similar message, inviting supporters to join: "Hi Fort Saint John, come on over and check out our page! Convoy from Fort Nelson to Ottawa in support of all of our resources. We stand with BC for LNG!" (Jeff Nicole Mal, April 14, 2016). Whereas the previous convoy had been organized by B.C. residents in favour of B.C. LNG, the new group would represent the formation of an alliance between British Columbians and Albertans in support of "all our resources"—in short, an upward scale shift to a regional alliance of Western fossil fuel proponents *tout court*.

In fact, despite only being comprised of British Columbians and Albertans, R4R's ambition was to cultivate a generalized Western Canadian alliance. The convoy to Ottawa was announced in their second-ever post and featured a graphic of the four Western-most provinces with arrows pointing to the capital and a countdown clock set to 53 days, for an arrival date of May 30th, 2016 (April 6, 2016). The new organization's logo also included the flags of the four Western-most provinces, reflecting R4R's ambitions to effect an upward scale shift of the pro-LNG movement in B.C. into a broader movement that could unite the

⁵⁷ April 11, 2016b

regional interests of fossil fuel producing provinces (although the inclusion of Manitoba would seem out of place here). A subsequent post described the convoy's rationale:

All of Western Canada needs to stand in solidarity together to defend and promote our resource based industries future [*sic.*]. Pipeline approvals and construction, tidewater access, LNG and oil sands development, and all other economically viable energy sources. (April 11, 2016)

Now, with the diffusion of the convoy beyond B.C.'s borders, the focus was on cultivating a broader, regional bloc of the four Western provinces, which would advocate for the entirety of the fossil fuel industry. The first "departure city" for this convoy to Ottawa was to be Fort Nelson—the prospective route of the convoy thus retracing the pattern of the convoy's diffusion (April 11, 2016b).

Just as the B.C. convoys emerged from the collaborative efforts of several key individuals and groups, from its very earliest days Rally 4 Resources was enmeshed in a multi-organizational field constituting a resource infrastructure from which it drew its capacity for collective action. Wapple describes how this dynamic played out, noting that, after the initial contact was made with FN for LNG, "it grew quite quickly and so did our relationships with other advocates we didn't even know existed" (CAOEC podcast, 2019). Seeking support for R4R from local businesses in Fort Nelson, Barkved sheds further light on these relationships, and provides details about who these "other advocates" were, noting that the new group had "been recognized already by Canada's Energy Citizens (an online group started by CAPP) as well as Oil Respect (an online group started by the CAODC), and multiple politicians are signing up as well" (FN for LNG, April 13, 2016). Thus, an organization fronted by a small business owner and a working-class couple with seemingly no previous experience in social movements, and which had just been founded less than two

weeks prior, was already organizing a nation-wide convoy that was receiving endorsements from politicians and the two largest oil and gas trade associations in the country.

Oil Respect had been launched in Calgary on February 17th, 2016, just two months prior to their endorsement of the convoy to Ottawa, and can be seen as an equivalent to CAPP's Canada's Energy Citizens—that is, as a separate, corporate grassroots campaign fully funded by a major oil and gas trade association (Oil Respect, February 11, 2016). Where CAPP represents small, medium, and large firms engaged in exploration and production, the Canadian Association of Energy Contractors (CAOEC) represents drilling and oilwell service firms “operating close to the wellhead” (*About*, 2025).⁵⁸ In other words, the companies who make up the membership of the CAOEC are contractors for member companies of CAPP. The press event for the launch of Oil Respect featured four individuals: CAOEC president Mark Scholz; Kevin Krausert, then-president of Beaver Drilling Ltd., a long-standing, medium-sized (roughly 125 employees in 2016), family-run company (Cryderman, 2016);⁵⁹ Duane Carol, president of DC Drilling, a small (35-40 employees) company with offices in Airdrie and Leduc; and Dan Maidens, about whom I was unable to track down information, but who is dressed in a blue-collar aesthetic, bearded and in plaid (Oil Respect, February 17, 2016). Upon the founding of the group, Scholz declined to say how much had been budgeted for the Oil Respect campaign, but told a reporter that the CAOEC would be dipping into its reserve funds for the purpose (Healing, 2016).

We saw above how a large business association, the ICBA, was the original innovator of the convoy as a form of pro-oil and gas protest, and that another business association,

⁵⁸ The CAOEC was founded in 1949 as the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors (CAODC), and in 2021 changed its name to the CAOEC “to reflect its expanded mandate and leading role in the oil and gas, hydrogen, helium, geothermal, and carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS) sectors” (*History*, 2025). I use their current name throughout the dissertation.

⁵⁹ In one of the oddest pieces of data I collected during this study, I found that, just weeks after helping launch Oil Respect, Beaver Drilling Ltd. welcomed Bruno Latour to their office for a “table discussion” on the “future of energy” (2016-10-03). Krausert left Beaver Drilling in 2020 and founded Avatar Innovations, a “clean energy accelerator and venture fund,” and then sold Beaver's assets in 2022 to Stampede Drilling for approximately \$21.5 million (Stephenson, 2020; Zinchuk, 2022).

Energy Services BC, accelerated the adoption of the form, arguably making the B.C. Rally for Jobs bigger than it otherwise would have been. Barkved's revelation that both Canada's Energy Citizens and Oil Respect had endorsed the new organization's convoy demonstrates that this pattern was repeating through the process of upward scale shift. Less than two weeks after announcing the convoy to Ottawa, both groups were already publicly expressing support, with R4R giving a "shout out" to CEC for "endorsing our movement," and with Oil Respect urging its social media followers to *join* the convoy to Ottawa (Rally 4 Resources Facebook, April 11, 2016c; Oil Respect Facebook, April 16, 2016). These public-facing endorsements, of course, are merely the tip of the iceberg, and imply networking behind-the-scenes, the full extent and details of which may never be known, but which evidence suggests likely began in March 2016.

Indeed, connections between Barkved, CEC and Oil Respect pre-date Malchow and Wapple's entry into the movement and appear to have been cultivated in the leadup to the March 22nd, 2016 "Foot Rally for Resources," from which R4R would later acquire its name. Barkved provides details on organizing the event, writing, "We reached out to many oil and gas companies, many oil and gas organizations and local MP, MLA, Senator, the Premiers office, all applicable Cabinet Ministers, as well as some local businesses, long time residents, and some First Nations bands to speak" (Barkved Lines, 2016a). These organizational efforts paid off, and the day before the event was set to take place, Barkved provided an update to FN for LNG, noting that, "Both organizations [CEC and Oil Respect] will have statements for tomorrow's rally. Keep at it Fort Nelson! We are gaining! We are getting noticed! We are being heard!" (Barkved Lines, 2016b). In addition to providing a statement that was read out at the rally, Oil Respect boosted the Foot Rally for Resources on their Facebook page (Oil Respect, 2016a).

Barkved's relationship with CEC would deepen throughout 2016. In April, she informed FN for LNG that CEC "will be holding a Canada's Energy Citizen's Pub Night on them and they want to hear from you, people of Fort Nelson, to talk about BC LNG" (Barkved Lines, 2016c).⁶⁰ Echoing the ICBA's strategy of providing "appreciation cocktails" to local proponents, CEC funded this pub night for FN for LNG, and would do the same for FSJ for LNG in November 2016 (Yu, 2016i). It is unclear what the outcome of such in-person interactions may have been, but one result appears to have been CEC's recruitment of Barkved as an "Energy Citizen." According to Barkved, CEC had "asked me," and despite initially wanting to "to stay more behind the scenes," she felt that agreeing to the profile, which appeared online in June 2016, "would be a great tool to feature our beautiful community, our resource sector and what FN for LNG is about" (Barkved Lines, 2016d).

From its very beginnings, then, R4R was enmeshed in a multi-organizational field that included the two leading oil and gas business associations, representatives of some of the largest and most powerful capitalist interests in the country. Malchow and Wapple are, indeed, working-class, and Barkved, for her part, is hardly a big corporate player. And yet, arguably without the role of major business associations, the organization may never have been founded and certainly would have been far less resourced. Recall, Wapple had been driven to connect with Barkved only after seeing the B.C. Rally for Jobs in the news, an event pioneered by the ICBA then diffused to other individuals and groups, including Energy Services BC, which shortly thereafter became a formal part of ICBA. Simply put, the upward scale shift of the convoy, which was R4R's founding impetus, could never have happened without the pioneering work of B.C. business associations, whose members stood to profit

⁶⁰ Note that Barkved was clearly aware of CEC's corporate connections, opening her post with, "CAPP or as you might also know them as Canada's Energy Citizen's are coming to town in May."

enormously from the development of an LNG export industry. CAPP and the CAOEC, for their part, were supporters of the convoy to Ottawa from the very earliest days of its planning.

Despite the robust resource infrastructure being drawn on to support the convoy to Ottawa, however, it would be three more years until the vision could be realized at scale. The momentum for the original convoy to Ottawa was weakened when, on May 1st, 2016, historic wildfires broke out in Fort McMurray. Later that year, reflecting on her withdrawal from the convoy to Ottawa, Wapple said, “Everybody got sidetracked helping out with [the fire] ... and so it should be” (ResourceWorks, 2016b). R4R’s attention thus pivoted to supporting the recovery, including through a bottle drive (May 11, 2016). The pool of prospective convoy participants no doubt shrunk, too, as the oil patch became pre-occupied with the fire. Aside from these reasons for postponement, there may have been a public relations angle to postponing the convoy. Arguably, the Fort McMurray wildfires—which drew national media attention and became the subject of much climate politicking—would make for an awkward and unsympathetic backdrop to a large, pro-fossil fuel truck convoy to Ottawa.

Seeming to prove Malm and the Zetkin Collective’s contention that increasing climate disasters will not necessarily give rise to calls for climate mitigation, R4R thanked oil companies for their help in recovering from the fire: “Shout out to all the oil companies for their support in Fort Mac!” read one post (May 18, 2016). Ironically enough, the first pro-fossil fuel, cross-country convoy was thus weakened by climate-fuelled wildfire. Climate chaos could not hold off the convoy’s diffusion for long, however, and large-scale convoys would re-emerge two years later as a signature tactic in a string of well-publicized pro-fossil fuel protests. Before that, though, a rump version of R4R’s May 2016 convoy to Ottawa would proceed along the same itinerary. Despite its diminutive size, the “LNG or Bust Convoy” earns the title as the first pro-fossil fuel convoy to Ottawa.

LNG or Bust: The First “Convoy” to Ottawa

Although R4R had to withdraw its plans for a May 2016 convoy to Ottawa, activists from Fort Nelson and Fort St. John would proceed without them. They had kept the momentum going since the initial B.C Rally for Jobs, including with an April 20th, 2016, rally attended by some 400 people, including then-Premier Christy Clark, who echoed the ICBA’s “get to yes” campaign from the main stage. Clark urged attendees “to stand up as the forces of yes,” pitting them against those in downtown Vancouver and Victoria who, by opposing LNG development, are “saying no to your future, they’re saying no to your kids, they’re saying no to our chance to build something better for Canada” (C. Clark, 2016). Even one of FSJ for LNG’s volunteers, local real estate agent Dan Petersen, was surprised at the group’s rapid rise in prominence, reflecting that, “Two short months ago for a couple of cold Saturdays, we had a petition for people to sign in support of developing LNG in [a hardware store’s] parking lot,” and now, just a short while later, the Premier was in town recognizing the group’s efforts (Peterson, 2016). Such are the apparent perks of activism aligned with corporate interests. “We need to make that voice heard in Ottawa,” Clark told the crowd, and a month later, FSJ and FN for LNG would do just that, bringing a small two-vehicle “LNG or Bust Convoy” from B.C. to Ottawa, which departed Fort St. John on May 23rd and arrived in Ottawa eight days later on, May 30th, 2016.⁶¹ While the LNG or Bust Convoy was not to be the grand, pan-Western convoy originally envisioned, it nevertheless contributed to the upward scale shift of the convoy, led to the further consolidation of B.C.-Alberta ties, and reveals the contradictions between the class politics and mobilizing structures on which the pro-oil and gas movement relied.

⁶¹ Debatably, two vehicles do not constitute a convoy, but it is included here because organizers and promoters referred to it as such and, recalling that one of R4R’s earliest Facebook posts was a countdown clock set to the arrival of the convoy in Ottawa on that very same date—May 30th, 2016—it seems that the LNG or Bust Convoy and R4R’s abandoned “Convoy to Ottawa” were likely originally one and the same.

Days before departure, Alan Yu made a slight change of plans. The convoy was originally going to “pass through cities along the way,” but began “attracting a lot of supporters especially in Alberta,” and so would now be adjusting its itinerary, making stops in several Albertan cities to accommodate supporters (Alan Yu, May 20, 2016). On their first Alberta stop, in Grande Prairie—a relatively short, 2.5-hour drive away from Fort St. John—the convoy met up with Jason Dubrule. Dubrule was an underemployed oilfield construction worker who, throughout April 2016, had journeyed 430km on foot from Falher, Alberta to the legislature in Edmonton to call for pipeline approval, a walk he named, “Go Hard or lose your home, job and country” (Snowdon, 2016). “I was just tired of sitting around and watching families get kicked out of their houses because there's no work,” he told the *CBC*, adding that he was considering continuing on to Ottawa (Snowdon, 2016). Fortunately for Dubrule, he would not need to walk. On May 19th, 2016, he reached out to the FSJ for LNG Facebook group, posted his phone number and said “call me”; Yu promptly did, and four days later Dubrule climbed aboard the LNG or Bust van (Dubrule, 2016b, 2016a; Yu, 2016c).

After overnighting in Grande Prairie, the plan for the next day was to take the 4.5-hour drive south to Edmonton, where a rally would be held at the provincial legislature. First, though, Yu, Kristi Leer (of FN for LNG), Dubrule, and one other met up with the second of the convoy’s two vehicles, driven by Dion DaSilva, a truck driver for High Arctic Energy Services (on which more below). Commenting on the additions of Dubrule and DaSilva, who together “represent Alberta’s oil and gas workers,” Yu observed how the convoy’s increasing regional integration was now reflected in the makeup of its participants: “We are no longer just North BC ... LNG or Bust now carries the message of Alberta as well as the message of the North BC for LNG groups (Yu, 2016d, 2016e). Yu’s message to Ottawa likewise framed the convoy as a form of B.C. and Albertan working-class political expression:

To Justin, his cabinet, and the Federal Government, we have this urgent message: We represent the unemployed and under-employed workers of North BC and Alberta whose friends and families are affected by delayed decision on the Pacific North West [*sic.*] LNG, and the Oil and Gas pipelines that will bring our resources to market. ... We are just regular people but we think if people like us tell the government through our convoy or social media or by signing our petition that they will see how important these energy projects are to individuals and communities” (Yu, 2016e).

The convoy, then, was self-consciously portrayed as possessing a working-class character and, indeed, there is some truth to this: Yu, Dubrule, and DaSilva were all oil and gas workers with varying levels of employment, while Leer was a small business owner-operator. In many ways, these four were quite accurately described by Yu as “regular people.” Their benefactors, however, were not.

Oil Respect and the CAOEC were among those Albertan supporters who made it impossible for the convoy to simply pass through the province. Yu directly praised the role of the CAOEC, thanking the organization by name, along with Questerre Energy (on which more below) and Gordon Green “for spearheading the support for the LNG or BUST Road Trip,” and adding that “the supporters of ALBERTA is making this road trip a more effective under taking” (Yu, 2016b).⁶² Oil Respect and the CAOEC played a particularly important role in organizing the convoy’s rally outside the Alberta legislature in Edmonton on May 24th, 2016 (Oil Respect, 2016b). For the occasion, CAOEC member company AFD Petroleum—a medium-sized firm (over 200 employees) headquartered in Edmonton—adorned one of their tanker trucks with a large Oil Respect decal. In photos from the rally outside the legislature, Calgary-based Ensign Energy Services (another CAOEC member) stood out as the only firm

⁶² I have not been able to find information about Gordon Green, but he and another unknown individual, David Steele, were both the top donors to the LNG or Bust Convoy’s GoFundMe page, each contributing \$3,000 out of a total of just over \$15,000 raised.

displaying their logo with two large flags, and as the only *large* oil and gas service business directly participating (Alan Yu, December 1st, 2018). Indeed, as we will see, Ensign seems to have been more comfortable than other large firms in showing public support for convoys throughout the cycle of protest, including through a public donation to United We Roll. CAOEC president Mark Scholz filmed a live video from the rally at the legislature, saying, “I can’t think of a better reason to suggest that there is social license for these projects to go forward,” and that “regular Canadians are behind this industry” (Oil Respect, 2016c). This was one of Oil Respect’s first protest events, and Scholz is transparent that the rationale was to give the appearance of social license for oil and gas; the action was an expression of “regular Canadians”—never mind the business interests involved. The CAOEC/Oil Respect was not the only group involved in supporting the convoy, however, and Yu mentioned two others who helped specifically with the Edmonton rally: Resource Works and Modern Miracle Network (Yu, 2018).

Resource Works was founded in early 2014, stemming from the joint efforts of the Business Council of British Columbia (BCBC) and the British Columbia Chamber of Commerce (BCCC), and describes itself as a “communications and advocacy organization [making] the connection between the resource economy and the needs and concerns of British Columbia residents” (*Where Did Resource Works Come From?*, n.d.). Originally it was directly funded by BCBC, whose CEO was also on Resource Works’ board, although most of its board are “lower-level managers and former politicians” (Carroll et al., 2021, p. 192) and the organization maintains that it is “independent” of both the BCBC and BCCC (*Where Did Resource Works Come From?*, n.d.). From its founding, Resource Works has been headed by Stewart Muir, a journalist, former board member of the Nature Trust of British Columbia (2006-2015), and self-described “serial entrepreneur” (*Meet Our Team of*

Experts, n.d.).⁶³ Among the politicians on its board is Lori Ackerman, the mayor of Fort St. John who was one of five Facebook event hosts for the B.C. Rally for Jobs, and who is a member and regular poster in the FSJ for LNG Facebook group (*Board Members*, n.d.). The full extent of Resource Works' support for the LNG or Bust Convoy (or FSJ/FN for LNG more broadly) is not known, but Yu and Muir "had been in contact digitally for a while" (Muir, 2016), and FSJ for LNG had hosted Muir in Fort St. John earlier in the month, where the latter gave a talk on LNG (Yu, 2016a). Muir was therefore happy to promote the LNG or Bust Convoy on Resource Works' website, describing the convoy as "regular people with a message for Ottawa" (Muir, 2016; ResourceWorks, 2016c). Again, we can see how the fetishization of the "regular," working-class, and grassroots constitutes a recurring and deliberate communications strategy by bourgeois organizations to depict the public they have subsidized as anti- (or at least non-) elite.

Modern Miracle Network (MMN) was founded in January 2016, just four months prior to the LNG or Bust Convoy, support for which appears to have been one of its first actions (Fisher, n.d.). Unlike Oil Respect or CEC, however, which were campaign organizations founded by trade associations representing entire sectors of the oil and gas industry, MMN was founded by a single fossil capitalist, Michael Binnion. According to his *LinkedIn* profile, Binnion's "passion is politics" and, indeed, he has been very active on that front (*Michael Binnion*, 2025). Prior to founding MMN, from 2003 to 2015, Binnion was the Chair of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, a leading neoconservative, populist advocacy group whose alumni includes Alberta Premier Jason Kenney (Lamont, 2016; *Michael Binnion*, 2025). In terms of his accumulation strategies, Binnion is the CEO and founder of

⁶³ Notable among these entrepreneurial ventures is the 2015 launch of his own small public relations company, Headwaters Strategy, which remains active today serving "organizations that need to expand their communications and advocacy repertoire" (Muir, 2025). More recently, Muir has forayed into business activities closer to extractive sites, as co-founder of Tera Earth, a small company that treats acid rock drainage for mining companies, enabling them to retrieve metals from tailings waste, while lowering emissions intensity (Tera Earth: Overview, 2025).

Questerre Energy, a small, Calgary-based, publicly-traded exploration and production firm owned mostly by European banks (G. Laxer, 2021, pp. 18, 30). He is also a minor shareholder and long-time Chair of High Arctic Energy Services, a medium-sized (over 200 employees), Calgary-based, publicly-traded drilling and rig service company ('High Arctic Energy Services Inc Profile', n.d.). By 2019, MMN would be called a "clearinghouse for effective pro-oil and gas advocacy" by Jason Kenney, and would attract some rare public scrutiny after it organized a strategy meeting between CAPP and high-profile Conservatives on how to oust the Liberal government in that year's election (G. Laxer, 2021, p. 30; Marsters, 2019). Back in 2016, however, MMN was busy helping diffuse the convoy by co-organizing the Edmonton rally, and Binnion's involvement explains the addition of the High Arctic Energy Services tanker truck that joined for the journey to Ottawa. Thus, reflecting on this support several months after the convoy, Alan Yu referred to MMN as "a God-send to FSJ for LNG," and encouraged followers to like MMN's fledgling Facebook page (Yu, 2016h).

After being granted an audience with Brian Jean, then-leader of the Wildrose Party, Yu and the convoy left Edmonton for Red Deer, where R4R organized a local rally (Your Liberty Project, 2016-05-20) (Lafratta, 2016; Rally 4 Resources, 2016a). After the event, R4R thanked Yu, Oil Respect, and a number of CAOEC member firms, several of which brought out trucks for this short leg of the convoy (Rally 4 Resources, 2016b). Thus, while they were unable to participate fully in the first pro-oil and gas convoy to Ottawa, R4R nevertheless supported it on its way, gaining valuable organizing skills and connections to various companies and organizations in the process, including the CAOEC and its Oil Respect campaign.

From there, it appears to have been many straight days of driving to Ottawa, without any further rallies along the way. Their arrival in Ottawa was timed to coincide with an

advertising blitz of the capital's downtown billboards. As indicated in Resource Works' profile of the convoy, once in Ottawa, they were "joined by BC MLA Pat Pimm (Peace River North) and supported by poster-ads in Ottawa from 'FSJ for LNG' and bus-stop ads from the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association of BC and from Pacific NorthWest LNG" (ResourceWorks, 2016c). In Ottawa, Yu posted pictures of these various billboards, all of which precisely echoed each another—FSJ for LNG's stating, "Say YES to LNG," the ICBA's stating, "Say yes to Pacific NorthWest LNG #Get2Yes," and Pacific NorthWest LNG's (i.e., the project proponent's) stating, "Say yes to responsible development" (Yu, 2016f). Yu was particularly pleased to see that such ads "dwarfed" the number of anti-LNG ads around Parliament Hill (Yu, 2016f). Pimm, meanwhile, set up meetings with two Conservative MPs, Arnold Viersen (Peace River Westlock) and Bob Zimmer, the latter of which received 9 boxes of FSJ for LNG petitions and took Yu "for a classy dinner at the Parliament Hill formal dining restaurant" (Yu, 2016f).

Several days later, on June 3rd, Yu flew back to Calgary to "represent FSJ for LNG as one of the 24 pro hydrocarbon groups in Canada," before flying straight back to Ottawa after only one night, a trip he was careful to say would not come out of the FSJ for LNG budget (Yu, 2016g). It is unclear what event Yu flew to Calgary for or who paid for his flight, but it was almost certainly one of his well-connected benefactors. After this quick jaunt to Calgary and back, Yu was invited to appear before the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Natural Resources on June 6th, 2016, where two Conservative MPs from Alberta, John Barlow (Foothills) and Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland) gave a warm welcome, echoing Yu's framing of the convoy and congratulating him on his "blue-collar" and "grassroots" campaign (*Evidence - RNNR (42-1) - No. 15 - House of Commons of Canada*, n.d.). While it is impossible to determine the precise effects of such "grassroots" mobilization of support for

PNW LNG, the outcome, as we saw above, was that the proponent got its way, and in September 2016 the federal government approved the project.

The year 2016, then, was a significant one in the development of extractive populism. As described by Kinder (2024), the second phase of petroturfing, which he periodizes roughly as beginning in the second half of the 2010s, involved a pivot “from a largely online, social media-based effort to an on-the-ground one” (p. 180). “On-the-road” might be a more apt description, however, as 2016 saw the first pro-oil and gas convoys, focused on promoting an LNG export industry in B.C. Such efforts were quickly diffused across provincial boundaries and developed into an aspirational, pan-Western, pro-fossil fuel movement, as new networks of support and resource mobilization were cultivated via the convoy’s upward scale shift. The year 2016 not only marked the founding and diffusion of the signature protest repertoire of the cycle, but also *organizational* diffusion, as six new pro-fossil fuel advocacy groups were formed: FSJ for LNG, FN for LNG, Rally 4 Resources, Oil Respect, Modern Miracle Network, and the conversion of the ICBA into a *de facto* pro-fossil advocacy group. The integration of these into collaborative networks would deepen over time and play an essential role in expanding the on-the-ground presence of the movement.

Network-Making and the Extractivist Action Coalition


There would not be another convoy until 2018, but in the meantime, newly established and pre-existing groups would continue developing an increasingly robust on-the-ground campaign. They were engaging in protest with growing frequency and developing a loose division of labour, all of which served to build the momentum that United We Roll would eventually ride to Ottawa. In Walker's (2014) study of corporate grassroots campaigns, the focus is primarily on singular, disconnected public relations campaigns often by a single firm. While some scholarship on the Canadian fossil capitalist “grassroots” has focused on singular

organizations, such as Wood's (2018) study of CEC, others emphasize the “network-making” practices across groups, especially in the construction of online echo chambers trafficking in similar, if not identical content (Neubauer & Graham, 2021). By 2019, the totality of these network-making efforts would amount, in Neubauer et al.'s (2023) analysis, to the construction of an “extractivist discourse coalition” online, particularly on Facebook (p. 637). Evidence suggests that this digital network-making was paralleled at the organizational level, *offline*, comprising an *extractivist action coalition* that relied on collaboration and mutually re-enforcing spirals of influence and diffusion to achieve heightened collective action through 2018. By the end of that year, such ties would even be acknowledged in the establishment of an informal, self-described “resource coalition,” which included many of the groups already described above. While we have seen that network-making was already pivotal for extractive populist action from the beginning—in the tactical and organizational diffusion of the convoy, for example—in this section, we will see how this dynamic proceeded and intensified between the 2016 founding of a new cohort of organizations and the December 2018 outbreak of a wave of convoys that would eventually culminate in United We Roll.

Notwithstanding the small rallies in solidarity with the LNG or Bust convoy, Nicole Wapple of Rally 4 Resources considered a November 2nd, 2016 rally at the Alberta legislature to be the first pro-oil and gas rally in the province (CAOEC podcast, 2019). This rally appears to have played an important role in cohering an informal coalition that would go from strength to strength over the next two years, leading up to UWR. The invitation for the rally, sent out to all sitting MLAs, illustrates the dynamic of network-making (see Figure 4), in which R4R is foregrounded as the apparent lead organizer, “with support from” the corporate grassroots groups, including the newly established Oil Respect and MMN, as well as CEC, Canada Action, and Oil Sands Strong. Notably, the poster exemplifies an effort to

front-stage the most believably “grassroots organization” (R4R), while back-staging the corporate connections—an approach that would recur over the following years.

Figure 4 – R4R’s invitation to MLAs for the November 2016 “Pro-Resource Rally”



Rally for Resources
R4R

Please join us as we celebrate Canada's resource industries.

at a
PRO-RESOURCE RALLY

Wednesday, November 2, 2016
11:00AM - 12:30PM

Alberta Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

Rally for Resources is a grassroots organization that is focused on bringing attention to the need for national pipeline projects, tidewater access, and support for Canada's resource industries.

Canada has the most environmentally responsible, ethical, morally produced natural resources in the world and it is time to take a stand and rally in favour of these industries.

Families and economies in Western Canada are suffering, it is time for people to find their voices and incite change.

With Support from:



OIL RESPECT
STAND UP FOR CANADIAN OIL AND GAS

CANADA'S ENERGY CITIZENS

MODERNMIRACLENETWORK.ORG

I LOVE PIPELINES

OilSands STRONG

I LOVE OIL SANDS

The messaging behind the rally was fairly typical of phase one in that it emphasized the ethical oil frame and does not appear to have engaged in any of the “bullying and trolling” that would characterize phase two discourse, let alone the far-right variants of pro-oil and discourse that would come to the forefront in the latter part of the decade (Kinder, 2024, pp. 43–44). And yet, there were some signs of what lay ahead. In the leadup to the

event, Haley Wile, a Red Deer resident, posted, “Can’t wait!!!”, eliciting a response from R4R, “Awesome Haley, we are looking forward to rallying with you!” (Wile, 2016). In just over two years’ time, Wile would become a yellow vester and one of the core organizers of the United We Roll Convoy to Ottawa. Back in 2016, though, she appears to have been relatively low on the ladder of engagement—not yet an organizer but nonetheless gaining valuable movement experience as a rally-goer. Another individual posted in the discussion forum for the November 2016 rally, saying she would attend the rally, to which R4R responded enthusiastically. The individual’s post was filled with images and text referencing various conspiracy theories, citing “Agenda 21,” “global warming is a hoax,” the “new world order,” the “depopulation agenda,” and “ISIS, trail of terror” (Tischer, 2016). The far-right alternative media outlet Rebel News was also in attendance and produced a highly favourable video segment about the rally (Rebel News, 2016).⁶⁴ Underneath the surface of this corporate grassroots rally, it seems, new, more radical ideologies were emerging, and so too were the personnel capable of and willing to manifest them in new organizational forms.

Future Premier Danielle Smith promoted the event as a radio host, and speakers at the November 2016 rally included CAOEC president Mark Scholz, two Progressive Conservative MLAs, leader of the Wildrose Party Brian Jean, and even the NDP Minister of Municipal Affairs. The MC for the event was Bernard (“the Roughneck”) Hancock, and the rally was also supported by Chad Miller of Oilfield Dads (Rally 4 Resources, 2016d). These latter two individuals, in particular, represent yet another innovation of 2016—the subsidization, especially by Oil Respect, of individual, pro-oil and gas spokesmen, whose interventions online and at heavily mediatized offline spectacles worked to “caricature” the

⁶⁴ Notably, the Rebel encouraged viewers to go to the R4R website, and noted they were “planning a convoy to Ottawa,” indicating that they remained committed to that vision of the convoy’s upward scale shift.

white, male oil and gas worker, as well as associated ideologies of normative masculinity and familism (Kinder, 2024, p. 100; Climenhaga, 2016; Massie & Jackson, 2020).

I spoke with two individuals who were part of organizing and supporting the November 2016 rally, “Greg” and “Troy,” both of whom demonstrate the network-making effects of such events. Troy became involved in pro-oil and gas activism after a bout of unemployment, confirming the social movement literature’s emphasis on biographical availability (Almeida, 2019, p. 108). He told me that, by “going to these rallies ... [I] started to connect with quite a few people,” including the organizations and individuals described above. Greg, meanwhile, described how a division of labour quickly developed between the groups. “We all had our part,” he told me, describing how one group “brought the signs,” another “organized the events, booked spaces, [and] made sure that we did everything by the book,” while some were primarily engaged in promotion or were delegated speaking roles. The network, however, was not egalitarian, and Greg described how one group, in particular—Canada Action—played an outsized role, owing to its size and external funding (on which more below). Despite this hierarchy, Greg added, “We worked very well together for almost two years. It was flawless.” As we will see in the next chapter, this informal coalition would begin to unravel precisely as a new, quasi-autonomous and radical variation of extractive populism emerged in late 2018 in the form of Yellow Vests Canada.

Until then, the loose partnership between extractive populist organizations would continue to mature. In August 2017, a similar image to the November 2016 rally invitation was put out by Oil Sands Strong, indicating that R4R, OSS, and CA’s activities continued to be conducted “with support from” CEC (Oil Sands Strong, 2017). The following year, in particular, would see an intensification of protest events, in terms of quantity, attendance, and tone. R4R’s Nicole Wapple observed this uptick and noted the increase in first-time activists coming out to rallies, which she attributed to frustration with the lack of progress on the

Trans Mountain expansion (TMX), a project to twin the existing oil pipeline running from Edmonton to Vancouver and thereby effectively triple its capacity (Roquette, 2019; The Narwhal, n.d.). By one count, as of December 2018 there had been 28 pro-oil and gas rallies that year, many of which were spearheaded by R4R and Canada Action (Mertz, 2018b). A 2018 year-end summary of protest actions from R4R's Facebook page indicates they helped organize protests in the following locations: Calgary ("at least 10 times"), Vancouver, Edmonton, Kamloops, Red Deer, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Halifax, Kitimat, Terrace, Grande Prairie, and Rocky Mountain House (Rally 4 Resources, 2018j). To give a sense of the scale of these actions, consider that in June 2018, it was reported that R4R and Canada Action's "most successful rally" had been in March of that year, when they drew a crowd of 500 to counter-protest an anti-pipeline protest of 5,000 in Vancouver (Canadian Press, 2018).

As had been the case from the beginning of the extractive populist movement, conservative politicians continued to play a leading role in offering political legitimacy and channeling its energies into the electoral arena. The Wildrose and PC parties merged in July 2017 to prevent another "accidental" NDP government, with Jason Kenney securing the leadership of the new United Conservative Party (UCP). Kenney not only began using extractive populist protest events as *de facto* campaign events ahead of the April 2019 general election, but actively encouraged Albertans to "join the movement," as he did in a December 2018 video released by Canada Action (Kenney, 2018).

Another group came on the scene in 2018, too, adding new tactics to the extractive populist repertoire. Suits and Boots was founded in April 2018 by Rick Peterson, a former Conservative Party leadership candidate and founder/president of Peterson Capital, a small (11-50 employees) Edmonton-based company that provides capital markets advice, corporate communications, and merchant banking services, including for oil and gas firms (*Peterson*

Capital: About, 2025).⁶⁵ Peterson was enraged by Bill C-69, the Impact Assessment Act, as well as by Kinder Morgan’s April 2018 withdrawal from TMX, and so founded Suits and Boots to push back on what he saw as an anti-oil and gas federal government (McCall, 2020; The Narwhal, n.d.). Describing itself as “a grassroots organization founded ... by a group of investment community colleagues (Suits) who support the working families of the resource sector (Boots),” Suits and Boots would contribute further momentum to the extractive populist fight back, not only adding new resources to pre-existing mobilization efforts, but innovating in its own right while playing a role in further protest diffusion (Suits and Boots, N/A).

From its beginnings, Suits and Boots was integrated into the extractive populist coalition and seems to have received early support from pre-existing groups. Troy, for example, claimed to have helped establish this and other groups, telling me he “was very grateful to be part of helping a lot of these little organizations pop up to, to [sic.] support their own, but also their same message is [sic.] the oil and gas industry.” In a further indication of this network-making, Suits and Boots described their first rally, held in May 2018 in Langley, B.C. near the Trans Mountain terminal, as having been “supported by other groups who have led the resource support effort in Alberta and BC over the past several weeks” (Suits and Boots, 2018a). Another one of Suits and Boots’ early activities, reported (incorrectly) as their “first public action” (Ball, 2018), was to attempt to intimidate environmentalists at Camp Cloud—a protest encampment against TMX outside the Kinder Morgan tank farm in Burnaby, B.C. that had been established in late 2017 (Ghoussoub, 2018).

Prior to its dismantlement, Camp Cloud had increasingly become a target of the extractive populist movement. In April 2018, for example, a short-lived extractive populist

⁶⁵ Notably, Kellie Leitch, one of the first Canadian conservatives to give Trumpian populism a try (Perry et al., 2019), was on the board of advisors for Peterson Capital (Ball, 2018).

clothing and lifestyle company, Low Class Oil Trash, visited the encampment and filmed a particularly popular Facebook video (107k views) that identified petroleum products like tents and porta-potties as a way of underlining the supposed hypocrisy of the environmentalists (McLean, 2022, pp. 111–113). The next month, in May 2018, R4R sent a group of four to the encampment and, after getting into a verbal altercation with the protesters, reported to their Facebook followers that the protest was nothing but “sketchy people in various stages of intoxication,” along with some “known agitators,” all of whom were hypocrites for using a gas-powered generator while posing a safety threat to the local community (Rally 4 Resources, 2018b). The R4R contingent, which included Bernard (“the Roughneck”) Hancock, spoke with TMX workers who were “welcoming and appreciative to finally have a public show of support from the majority of Canadians on their site,” and posed in front of the terminal gate holding a large banner that read, “Pipelines to Tidewater” (Rally 4 Resources, 2018b). The banner had made its debut in the offices of the CAOEC, which invited supporters to sign it ahead of the November 2016 Edmonton rally described above, and had since been brought to many R4R protests, filling it with signatures. Along the bottom was featured the logos of Oil Respect, MMN, Canada Action, R4R, AFD Petroleum, and Oil Sands Strong (Rally 4 Resources, 2016c). Symbolically, then, it was not just four individuals visiting the encampment: it was the *extractivist action coalition* and their broader public. Future YVC and UWR organizer Haley Wile concurred with this interpretation, commenting on the post, “GREAT JOB GUYS!!! YOU REPRESENT EACH AND EVERY SIGNATURE ON THAT POSTER!!!” (Rally 4 Resources, 2018a).

The coalition’s attention on Camp Cloud would soon take on a more aggressive character. On July 22nd, 2018, Suits and Boots head Rick Peterson announced that it had successfully raised \$1,500 to send a bulldozer to the encampment, writing, “Camp Cloud we have a bulldozer with your name on it — we will see you very soon” (Ball, 2018). The next

day, Suits and Boots sent two volunteers to antagonize the protesters, filming a short blurry video, shared by R4R, allegedly showing their volunteers being “bumped and pushed and physically manhandled” (Rally 4 Resources, 2018c). The next day, a new, private Facebook group was created, called “Citizens committee to evict ‘Camp Cloud,’” which described itself as “a place for concerned citizens to organize to facilitate energy infrastructure construction if and when authorities lose control of anti-energy activist efforts” (C. Morgan, 2018a). Thus, as the movement expanded, so too did its repertoire, now seeming to carry with it the potential for violence.

The founder of the “citizens committee” was Cory Morgan, a former executive of the Wildrose Party with a long career in oil and gas exploration.⁶⁶ Morgan was inspired to create the group after seeing the Suits and Boots video (Doherty, 2018), and in a post to his blog shortly thereafter characterized the protesters, many of them Indigenous, as “racists, junkies, and sex offenders,” and threatened:

These criminals will be evicted. The only question that remains is by whom. Will it be by the authorities or will it be by the hundreds who have been gathering on facebook [*sic.*] at the group linked below who are planning to do it themselves? (C. Morgan, 2018b).

Morgan sought to pose a credible threat as a way to catalyze law enforcement, but his stated goals had an undertone of violent threat, even when he was not talking about “evicting” the protesters but, for example, merely painting over their graffiti. “[I]f there’s 50 roughnecks painting barriers,” he said, “they [the campers] might scream and shout, but I would hope they wouldn’t be foolish enough to get in the way”: an obvious threat that these roughnecks—i.e., oil workers and their supporters—would be willing to use physical

⁶⁶ Morgan worked for 20 years in oil and gas exploration (Gateway Gazette, 2015; C. Morgan, 2015), and was VP Policy for the Wildrose Party in 2009 when Danielle Smith became leader, while his wife, Jane Morgan, served as the Executive Director of the party from 2005 to 2010 (J. Morgan, n.d.; Western Standard, 2022).

violence (Doherty, 2018). Morgan’s self-described “irregular law enforcement,” however, would ultimately not be required, as on August 10th 2018 the B.C. Supreme Court granted the city of Burnaby an injunction to dismantle the camp, enforced days later by the RCMP (Nair, 2018). While such incipient vigilantism would seem to be beyond the pale, Morgan was granted air time by his former party leader, former leader of Alberta’s official opposition and future premier, Danielle Smith, who hosted him on her radio show in an episode titled, “Camp Cloud Clean Out” (C. Morgan, 2018c). Two years later, Morgan would go on to become Executive Director of Suits and Boots, and in that capacity would return the favour to Smith, hosting her for a March 2021 conference that also featured future CPC leader Pierre Poilievre and MMN’s Michael Binnion (C. Morgan, 2021). Back in 2018, though, with one obstacle out of the way, Suits and Boots pursued a tactical pivot.

Rick Peterson felt that the movement needed to expand its repertoire beyond rallies and counter-protests. “Demonstrations are good,” he said, “but there’s not a lot of listening when there’s a demonstration” (Mertz, 2018a). Instead, “the way to move the needle is to get the prime minister out to listen to the people on the ground” (Mertz, 2018a). To achieve this lofty goal, Suits and Boots organized a letter-writing campaign among business owners in Drayton Valley, a town of about 7,000 people in central Alberta, about 1.5 hours southwest of Edmonton. The signatories called for a “non-partisan,” “informal chat” with the PM about the lack of pipeline capacity and “the right we have to free and open access to world markets for our oil” (Mertz, 2018a). The federal government’s \$4.5 billion nationalization of the Trans Mountain pipeline in May 2018, which effectively resurrected the expansion project after proponent Kinder Morgan withdrew, was viewed by signatories as “a start, but only a start” (Global News, 2018b).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ This figure would skyrocket to \$34 billion by the time the project became operational in May 2024, making it “arguably the single largest government-backed investment in the fossil fuel sector in Canadian history” (Stephenson, 2024; Thornley, 2025).

The chosen location for this new campaign—“the oil capital of the world,” as the Drayton Valley welcome sign indicates—was seemingly meant to provide a more sympathetic backdrop for the pro-oil message. “Justin - You've heard from the 'Suits' in Calgary,” read one Suits and Boots post about Drayton Valley—and, indeed, there had been as many as ten rallies in Calgary that year. “Now it's time you hear from the 'boots' on the ground” (Suits and Boots, 2018b). The campaign may have been initiated and led by an investment banker with close ties to the traditional party of business, but the *staging* of it was intended to cultivate a humble image. The four-year downturn in oil price was evidently impacting the community, and Suits and Boots’ Facebook output from November 2018 was filled with direct quotations from residents detailing layoffs, un- and underemployment, and small business closures. In Suits and Boots’ framing, these were the hardships of “the folks on the frontlines,” the “silent majority,” and of “the Canadian resource family” (Suits and Boots, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e). This was, for Peterson, “as grassroots as it gets” (Mertz, 2018a).

Remarkably, the PMO apparently did respond with a phone call, although a meeting never materialized (Mertz, 2018a). Against Peterson’s expectations, the more consequential outcome of the Drayton Valley campaign would prove to be a large demonstration. The town council had organized a lecture for the evening of December 4th, 2018, featuring Vivian Krause, an oil and gas-funded blogger who argued that opposition to oil pipelines in Canada was largely funded by U.S.-based foundations (‘Vivian Krause’, n.d.). Krause was becoming an increasingly popular “organic intellectual” of the extractive populist movement (Carroll, 2021, p. 11), evidenced in a May 2018 speaking event hosted by FSJ for LNG, and another in November hosted by Canada Action (Canada Action, 2018a; Fort St. John Petroleum Association, 2018). By 2019, the extractivist discourse coalition would be routinely promoting her ideas online (Neubauer et al., 2023, p. 646; Neubauer & Graham, 2021, p. 924). On why he was motivated to help organize Krause’s event in Drayton Valley, county

reeve Bart Guyon said, “We wanted to show our business community that there's outside forces out there that are working against Brazeau County” (CBC News, 2018a). Never mind that Kinder Morgan, the original proponent of Trans Mountain prior to its nationalization, was a Texas-based firm; the real concern for Krause and her audience was U.S.-based charities helping fund Canadian ENGOS.

Ahead of the lecture, signatories to the Suits and Boots letter, now calling themselves Rally Canada, organized a protest, seemingly with the help of Canada Action (Rally Canada, 2018). Attendance estimates varied widely from 800 to 1,300 (McMillan, 2018; Weetman, 2018), but regardless, it was a large turnout. This is true not only for a town of its size, but even in the broader context of extractive populist collective action, the height of which up to this point appears to have been a November 2018 rally in Calgary with up to 2,000 attendees. This Calgary rally was timed to coincide with a meeting held there between Trudeau and oil and gas executives in which the PM characterized the situation in Alberta as “a crisis” (CBC, 2018). Attendance in Drayton Valley was no doubt boosted by the fact that reportedly dealerships, banks, retail outlets and oil companies closed early for the rally—a clear sign of the protest’s petty bourgeois class basis, in which small business owners across the community lent support (CBC News, 2018a). More significant than its turnout, however, was its role in inspiring a rally and convoy in Grande Prairie shortly thereafter, which Wapple would call “the biggest pro Canadian oil/gas/pipeline rally yet!” (Rally 4 Resources, 2018g).

The Grande Prairie Convoy

Two years after the convoy first emerged as a repertoire of pro-oil and gas protest, and after a two-year period in which rallies became the primary tactic, the December 16th, 2018 rally and convoy in Grande Prairie—a city of about 64,000 in the province’s northwest—set off a wave of imitators. As we will see, out of this intense period of rapid diffusion, the vision of a

convoy to Ottawa would once again come to the fore, and this time there would be no wildfires to stop it. While R4R would claim attendance of between 3,000 and 4,000, media reported more conservative figures of 1,500 people at the opening rally in Muskoseepi Park, followed by a large convoy of 600 trucks that drove through the city's west end—in any case, quite probably the largest extractive populist action to-date (CBC News, 2018b; Dionne, 2018; Rally 4 Resources, 2018g). Speakers featured Chad Miller from Oilfield Dads and Bernard “the Roughneck” Hancock, as well as many conservative politicians, including UCP leader and soon-to-be Premier Jason Kenney, and one New Democrat, then-Minister of Economic Development and Trade, MLA Deron Bilous (Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview) (CBC News, 2018b; The Canadian Press, 2018a). Marking the radicalization process underway within the movement, several individuals associated with the Yellow Vests Canada movement, which had emerged just weeks prior, could be spotted in the crowd with signs like “Trudeau = Traitor” and “No to Globalism” (William Vavrek, 2018). Divisions between this more radical wing and the ostensibly mainstream coalition would erupt in the new year, but for now, notwithstanding some tensions, things continued running smoothly.

Prior to Grande Prairie, the protest actions of the extractivist coalition had been fairly tightly controlled and organized in a more-or-less top-down fashion. A relatively small group of organizations and individuals were directly responsible for very nearly all of the extractive populist collective action covered above. In this section, we will see a new organizational logic play out, in which the convoy was *rapidly diffused* across Alberta, far exceeding the capacities and control of the coalition. In this new structure, additional layers of civil society—in particular, the fossilized petty bourgeoisie—will come to the fore, taking on an increasingly prominent role in orchestrating on-the-ground (and on-the-road) action. There was still coordination with established coalition groups in some instances, but even when there was, the collective action relied on the fossilized petty bourgeoisie for its impact and

scale. In other cases, there was *no* or *minimal* coordination with prevailing groups, as newly activated strata, inspired by others, tried their hand. Small towns in particular, perhaps sharing a collective identification, became the locus of this semi-autonomous wave of convoys. This is what made Drayton Valley such a significant location for Suits and Boots to have targeted.

The Grand Prairie rally and convoy was organized by a combination of established groups and Grande Prairie business owners, including Rally 4 Resources, Oilfield Dads, and Canada Action (CBC News, 2018b), along with locals Andy White, Taylor Howarth, and Cole Murphy—who at the time were, respectively, Partner, Operations Manager, and Business Development Manager of 10k Rentals Ltd., a small oil and gas equipment rental business (2-10 employees) (10K Rentals Ltd., n.d.; The Canadian Press, 2018a). In addition, Jarvie Dawson—the Sales Manager of JDA Hauling Ltd., a medium-sized, family-owned oilfield hauling business founded by his father (100+ employees)—was credited as a driving force behind the convoy (Dionne, 2018; *History in Crane & Transport*, n.d.). The Facebook event page hosts also included Brian Meiklem and Ryan William, the President and Vice-President, respectively, of Skyline Well Testing Inc., a medium-sized, family-owned company (250+ employees) specializing in oil and gas well testing (*Brian Meiklem*, n.d.; *Skyline Well Testing*, n.d.).

The idea for the rally appears to have originated with the ownership and management of 10K Rentals. Reportedly, Taylor Howarth had been “inspired to get other Albertans out after a rally in Drayton Valley drew more than a thousand people about two weeks ago” (NewsStaff, 2018). Thus, while Rick Peterson had been skeptical about the impact of rallies, preferring to use Drayton Valley as the base for Suits and Boots’ campaign to meet the PM, it would seem to have been the *protest* in Drayton Valley that would have a longer legacy and greater impact, serving as indirect diffusion for another small oil and gas-dependent city.

With the inspiration struck, rally planning became a focus for the leadership of 10K Rentals, with Cole Murphy telling reporters that “it started out with the three of us” (Dionne, 2018). From there, they received further assistance.

After indirect diffusion inspired Howarth to hold a rally, efforts were made to reach out to some of the well-known players behind the pro-oil and gas rallies that, for anyone in the industry in Alberta, were hard to miss throughout 2018. Troy indicated that, after a year in which rallies had “started to kick off quite a bit,” he became someone who others looked to for advice on how to organize their own rallies, demonstrating how locals with seemingly no prior collective action experience could contact individuals widely known as active in the movement, and from there be plugged into a network of experienced groups willing and able to lend resources. The media and communications strategy behind extractive populism facilitated this role, boosting the profile of individuals like Troy, such that they became sufficiently well known. In this way, there was a synergy between the coalition’s discourse and action. But Troy was careful to emphasize the important role of locals, including Jarvie Dawson of JDA Hauling, who spearheaded the convoy. Dawson used Facebook to organize the convoy, and received “thousands of responses” to his initial post proposing it, with “people from across the province ... contacting him to get involved” (Dionne, 2018).

Underlining Dawson’s central role, the convoy itself departed JDA’s yard in the city’s west end industrial park (Dionne, 2018).⁶⁸

⁶⁸ I do not have specific data indicating where exactly Dawson got the idea of doing a truck convoy. However, it is possible that he was aware of the convoys that had taken place in B.C. For starters, we have already seen that these B.C. convoys attracted the attention of Albertans in the oil and gas industry, which is what prompted Wapple and Malchow to spring into collective action in the first place. Troy similarly recounts the B.C. convoys, singling out the Fort St. John convoy, in particular. The distance from Grande Prairie and Fort St. John, moreover, is relatively small, at just over 250km, or a 2.5-hour drive. Both are situated squarely in the North Montney formation, and local businesses often service both towns. This includes JDA Hauling, whose website indicates the company “provides a 24 hour crane and trucking service to various industries across Alberta, Northern BC and into the Territories” (*History in Crane & Transport*, n.d.). Finally, the Grande Prairie Petroleum Association, of which JDA Hauling Ltd. is a member and whose President at the time MC’d the rally, is listed as an “associate” with the Fort St. John Petroleum Association, the Fort Nelson Petroleum Association, and the South Peace Petroleum Association (*Fort St. John Petroleum Association*, n.d.). This is not to suggest that members of these associations know every detail about the activities of the others, but these organizational

At this late stage in 2018, then, it seems that a new organizational model was emerging, one in which established groups were still instrumental in both inspiring and then helping locals scale-up their own protests, but were not the only or even necessarily the most important organizers in terms of mobilizing others into collective action. The major trade associations and their corporate grassroots outfits, meanwhile, seemingly had no direct involvement with Grande Prairie or subsequent imitators. A CEC post about Grande Prairie, however, which included a short video of the convoy, was CEC's third most popular post ever on Facebook, suggesting that extractive populism's offline protests and online activity were often synchronized and mutually re-enforcing, with offline action serving to boost the online discourse coalition.⁶⁹ Whereas most previous events had been entirely organized by established groups, with earlier events being explicitly "supported by" the trade association-affiliated groups, the Grande Prairie event was a collaboration between the more ostensibly arm's-length organizations and, crucially, the somewhat autonomous efforts of locals, particularly among the fossilized petty bourgeoisie. To draw attention to the role of the extractivist action coalition, then, is not to dismiss the organizational efforts of locals, which were clearly imperative. Rather, it is to highlight the central position of the established groups in the mechanisms of protest diffusion, without which such local initiatives may never have occurred, or at the very least would have been far less effective.

Carbon Copy Convoys

The Grande Prairie rally and convoy would be significant in its own right as it was probably the largest pro-oil and gas protest up to that point, but its importance—like the Drayton

linkages point to the deep economic ties between oil and gas companies in the Peace region, making it more likely that something as notable as a convoy in one part of the region would come across the radar of someone in another. Further illustrating these geographic ties, members of FSJ for LNG and FN for LNG would travel together to participate in the Grande Prairie convoy (Heidenreich, 2018; Stevens, 2018).

⁶⁹ Screen Shot 2023-11-21 at 11.28.03 AM

Valley protest—is primarily to be found in its legacy. While images of the Grande Prairie convoy would be circulated in February 2019 claiming to depict the much-smaller United We Roll Convoy on its way to Ottawa (Associated Free Press Canada, 2019), and again in February 2022, when the same image was said to show the Freedom Convoy (Associated Free Press, 2022), the more consequential spin-offs from Grande Prairie were not to do with online disinformation, but with very real, material interrelationships. As Troy told me:

[Grande Prairie] was obviously on record for ... the biggest start for these convoys.

And it sparked obviously quite a few other towns and cities that wanted to do their own little rallies and convoys. And ... that's how Glen Carritt with United We Roll had got in contact with me because he'd seen what I was doing with these rallies as well as in partnership with [other extractive populist groups] that he wanted to be part of this.

This direct diffusion from Grande Prairie to United We Roll will be taken up in more detail in the chapter 6, but here, the emphasis is on the period of rapid diffusion “sparked” by Grande Prairie. Several days after Grande Prairie, R4R posted a link to the event pages for two upcoming protests, including a convoy in Nisku and a rally in Rocky Mountain House, writing, “Alberta is on fire!” (Rally 4 Resources, 2018h). Indeed, in a short, roughly two-month period—from December 16th, 2018 to February 10th, 2019—at least thirteen convoys rolled through Western Canada: eleven in Alberta, one in Saskatchewan, and one in the Alberta-Saskatchewan border town of Lloydminster (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Timeline of pro-oil and gas convoys, March 2016 to February 2019

Date	Location	Attendance	Organizer(s)	Class Composition
March 16, 2016 – BC Rally for Jobs	Terrace, Fort St. John, and Fort Nelson, BC	50 trucks in Terrace; 600 in Fort St. John;	ICBA; FSJ for LNG (Alan Yu); FN for LNG ⁷⁰	Industry associations and local pro-LNG

⁷⁰ Preprost (2016)

		'hundreds' in Fort Nelson		business coalitions.
May 30, 2016 – LNG or Bust Convoy	BC to Ottawa	2 vehicles (1 bus, 1 tanker truck)	FSJ for LNG; Oil Respect; R4R; MMN; Resource Works	'Grassroots' LNG group, trade associations, and businesses.
April 21, 2018	Fort St. John, BC	Approx. 120 vehicles ⁷¹	Alan Yu (FSJ for LNG)	Local pro-LNG advocates.
December 16, 2018	Grand Prairie, AB	1,500 people; >600 vehicles ⁷²	Oilfield Dads; Rally4Resources; Andy White; Taylor Howarth; Cole Murphy; Jarvis Dawson ⁷³	Owners and managers in small energy services companies.
December 19, 2018	Nisku, AB	Approx. 1,000 vehicles ⁷⁴	Laurie Ryan; Shane Diggins; Clarence Shields; George Clark ⁷⁵	Owner of Laurlee Energy Services and others.
December 22, 2018	Medicine Hat, AB	Approx. 650 vehicles ⁷⁶	Jerry Sabine; Tamara Lich; Keith Vanderloh; Rob Young ⁷⁷	Managers at STEP Energy Services.
December 22, 2018	Estevan, SK	Approx. 450 trucks ⁷⁸	Jay Riedel; Darryl 'Buzz' Shirley ⁷⁹	Owners of local oil services companies (e.g., Bert Baxter Transport).
December 22, 2018	Brooks, AB	Approx. 450 trucks ⁸⁰	Gerald Huber ⁸¹	Owner of small welding company.
December 22, 2018	Edson, AB	Approx. 1,000 participants (rally + convoy) ⁸²	John Godwin ⁸³	Manager of auto parts store.
December 29, 2018	Lloydminster, AB/SK ⁸⁴	Approx. 150 trucks ⁸⁵	Dion Boser; Marc Ouellette	Local small business owners.

⁷¹ Kurjata (2018)

⁷² CBC News (2018).

⁷³ Dionne (2018; The Canadian Press (2018))

⁷⁴ Staff (2018)

⁷⁵ Bartko (2018a)

⁷⁶ The Canadian Press (2018b)

⁷⁷ Root Cellar Food and Wellness Hub (2019; The Canadian Press (2018))

⁷⁸ The Canadian Press (2018b)

⁷⁹ Riedel (2019; The Canadian Press (2018b); Zinchuk (2018a); Zinchuk & Willberg (2018)

⁸⁰ Small (2018)

⁸¹ Clark (2018)

⁸² Small (2018)

⁸³ Global News (2018)

⁸⁴ Lloydminster evenly straddles the border between the two provinces and is incorporated in both.

⁸⁵ Zinchuk (2018b)

December 30, 2018	Whitecourt, AB	1,500–2,000 trucks ⁸⁶	Blaine Lewis ⁸⁷	Not available.
January 6, 2019	Slave Lake, AB	300 trucks; ~1,000 people ⁸⁸	Sonya Andrews ⁸⁹	Wide business participation (i.e., “every company in town”).
January 12, 2019	Red Deer, AB	'Hundreds' ⁹⁰	Dani Howells ⁹¹	Owner of truck permitting company.
January 12, 2019	Grimshaw / Peace River, AB	300+ vehicles ⁹²	Bob Blayone; Frank Light; Samuel Elkins; Mike Ramsey ⁹³	Owners/managers of small businesses.
January 22, 2019	Edmonton, AB	Approx. 100 trucks ⁹⁴	Jack Graham ⁹⁵	Not available.
February 10, 2019	Lac La Biche, AB	'Hundreds' ⁹⁶	Rally 4 Resources, Canada Action, Resource One Aboriginal Business Association	Corporate grassroots groups and business association.
February 19, 2019 – United We Roll	Ottawa, ON	150–200 trucks (approx. 70 in Ottawa) ⁹⁷	Glen Carritt; Haley Wile; Angie Reid; Jack Graham; Jason Corbeil; others ⁹⁸	Small business owners in oilfield and trucking industries.

Note. Sources compiled from social media, company websites, national and local media reports. Full references in footnotes.

⁸⁶ Beaulac (2018)

⁸⁷ Bartko (2018b)

⁸⁸ Kornik (2019)

⁸⁹ Galbraith (2019)

⁹⁰ McIntosh (2019)

⁹¹ *Dani Howells* (n.d.); McIntosh (2019)

⁹² NorFri (2019)

⁹³ *Channico Machine & Millwright Services Ltd.* (n.d.); *Samuel Elkins* (2024); Froese (2019); Ramsey (2019)

⁹⁴ Henry (2019)

⁹⁵ Green (2019)

⁹⁶ Resource One Aboriginal Business Association (2019).

⁹⁷ CBC News (2019; Dawson (2019).

⁹⁸ Henry (2019)

For R4R, Grande Prairie marked the “kick off” of a six-week campaign focussed on gathering petition signatures against Bill C-69, which were to be “presented to the Senators in February when they go back for spring sitting (Rally 4 Resources, 2018f). Although the recessions of 2015 and 2016 were behind the industry, 2018 marked the first ever year in which oil production exceeded pipeline capacity, and a dip in oil prices late in the year added to the uncertainty (Service Canada, 2019). This added to the urgency with which industry, along with conservative parties, mounted opposition to what they deemed the “no more pipelines” bill. Five days before the Grande Prairie event, R4R was already publicly starting to plan a splashy action to mark the February return of the Senate, and on December 11th, 2018, posted a graphic proposing, once again, a convoy from Alberta to Ottawa. At this point, the convoy appears to have been somewhat hypothetical, and they solicited feedback to gauge interest levels:

Can you imagine how amazing this would be? *This was our original plan almost 3 years ago when we started R4R.* Unfortunately, pipelines weren't on the radar then for a lot of Canadians. Do you think they are now (half joking)? It would take a massive amount of planning, coordinating, fundraising and volunteers (and some time) to organize it but it's doable. Give us some feedback in the comments. If you're really serious, let us know if you would join and/or volunteer to plan. You can also send us a private message (Rally 4 Resources, 2018e, emphasis added).

R4R was clearly aware of the increasing momentum that had built up around the movement since their 2016 founding and sought to channel their newly established following into the old objective of a national upward scale shift of the convoy.

Shortly after Grande Prairie, the hypothetical would become concrete, and the coalition would be assembled, building on the energy and success of this most recent event. On December 19th, 2018, Wapple posted in the discussion section of the Facebook event page

for the Grande Prairie convoy: “Convoy to Ottawa anyone? The hard working, amazing crew from GP and R4R are taking our issues there. Who's in?” (2018-12-19 - proposal to convoy to Ottawa). This was followed up with a public announcement one week later from the R4R page, which announced: “We have a solid group of pro resource individuals and groups, that we have worked with over the years, coming together for the convoy to Ottawa in 2019. We expect many more to come on board in the coming weeks.” The attached picture (see Figure 5) indicates that the members of this “Resource Coalition,” as it was referred to, included familiar names: Bernard the Roughneck, Oil Sands Strong, Oilfield Dads, R4R, Canada Action, FSJ for LNG, FN for LNG, and two newer, marginal outfits, ResourcEd and #TheNorthMatters. At the bottom of the announcement was written, “the Grande Prairie Rally and Convoy Crew” (R4R, December 27, 2018).

Figure 5 – The Abandoned “Resource Coalition” Convoy of February 2019



The reference to Grand Prairie in the poster serves to underline the legitimacy of the proposed convoy to Ottawa. That event had likely been the largest-yet pro-oil and gas rally, a fact that organizers could and did express pride in, and which could be marshalled to give future plans more authority. In response to the announcement of the Resource Coalition Convoy, one individual commented, “Good to see some networking taking place” (2018-12-27). R4R replied, “It has been for a while.” Indeed, the announcement of all these groups forming a “coalition” was perhaps the clearest public declaration of the alliances that, as we have seen in great detail, had long been in effect.

Notable, however, is the absence of the trade associations and their corporate grassroots groups. Most likely, as the intensity of extractive populist action picked up in frequency, attendance, and tone, it made less sense to publicly advertise such corporate connections. As we will see in the next chapter, however, the trade associations, despite this tactical distance, maintained a supporting role. Conservative politicians, for their part, remained vocal supporters. Alberta MP Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland), one of only three Conservatives on the Senate’s standing committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources, thanked R4R for organizing the convoy to Ottawa and for “taking action to stand up for *hard working oil and gas workers!*” [my emphasis] (Stubbs, 2018).

From early on, R4R faced challenges in controlling and managing the organization of the convoy to Ottawa. In an early sign of such difficulties, one individual, “TS,” responded almost *too* enthusiastically to Wapple’s proposal. An exchange between the two illustrates this:

TS: started a go fund me page for fuel cost and also children's hospitals across Canada!!

NW: there is no fundraising being done for this convoy until after the new year

TS: I just started it now

NW: Fundraising for this event will start in January

TS: Ok fair enough start another one then lol

NW: sent you a PM (Stubbs, 2018)

Here we can already see the kinds of organizational problems that would plague the convoy to Ottawa from the very beginning. We do not know what Wapple said to TS in their private exchange, but it is clear from the public-facing communication that R4R would have preferred to have a centralized fundraising campaign, run by themselves and/or the official members of the coalition. Anyone, however, can launch a GoFundMe page and put the name “convoy to Ottawa” on it. The convoy was going to require, as R4R had already put it, “a massive amount of planning, coordinating, fundraising and volunteers (and some time) to organize it.” On the one hand, they were actively seeking support to help pull this off, but this solicitation also came with risks. Arguably, the coalition’s decision to publicly announce their convoy in mid-December, but to not begin fundraising until the new year, created a vacuum into which others could step.

By December 21st, 2018, Wapple already felt that “The response has been good,” adding, “I think it’s going to be big” (Mertz, 2018b). Yet, less than three weeks later, her ambitions for a convoy to Ottawa would once again be dashed, and the Resource Coalition Convoy cancelled. In its place and following its exact itinerary, an edgier, radicalized version of extractive populism would roll into Ottawa. As we will see, the coalition members had become almost *too* successful. The very movement and collective action repertoires that they had pioneered and scaled upward were now moving beyond their control. A new, more truly “grassroots,” leaderless and autonomous movement, Yellow Vests Canada, would pose logistical and public relations challenges, and yet, would serve the fundamental purpose of all corporate grassroots campaigns: to demonstrate social licence. Although not without controversy, extractive populism’s far-right variant would prove capable of organizational feats

that the coalition was ill-equipped to navigate. Its autonomy had liabilities, to be sure, but also clear benefits, including the ability to undermine accusations of astroturfing.

Conclusion

Back in April 2015, CAPP's trade publication *Context* magazine released its "engagement issue," in which it announced the Canada's Energy Citizens campaign, describing it as an effort "to start things rolling by providing tools and resources to help its strongest supporters" (Stanfield, 2015, p. 10). One year later, the movement was "rolling," indeed, with the first pro-oil and gas truck convoy, the BC Rally for Jobs, initiating a chain of events that sparked the initial idea for a convoy to Ottawa and which, as we will see through the progression of this dissertation, would culminate in the Freedom Convoy six years later. In this chapter, drawing on social media, newspaper articles, and other sources, we have seen that this initial event led to both tactical and organizational diffusion through a combination of mediated, direct, and indirect mechanisms, resulting in the upward scale shift of an innovative tactic and the formation of six new pro-fossil fuel advocacy groups in 2016 alone. Through this process, what initially began as a tactic to promote the development of an LNG export industry in B.C. underwent a geographic upward scale shift through alliance-formation and the cultivation of an aspirational, pan-Western, pro-fossil fuel movement.

Over the next two years, paralleling their online network-making practices as a discourse coalition, this ecosystem of organizations mobilized on-the-ground protests with increasing frequency. Far from reflecting a contagious, purely imitative or spontaneous outburst of pro-fossil organization, these groups can be conceptualized as a coherent *extractivist action coalition*, characterized by personnel overlaps, collaborations, resource sharing, division of labour, experimentation, and even hierarchy. It is through the collective efforts of this coalition that 2018 became a banner year for pro-oil and gas protest, fomenting

a robust extractive populist protest culture—with the convoy as the signature tactic—out of which United We Roll would emerge.

Having empirically documented the mechanisms of the convoy’s diffusion, including by tracing the occupational and class status of key actors and organizations, we are now in a better position to make a determination on Kinder’s (2024) “hunch” about the primacy of small and big fossil capital in driving the movement. As has been made evident, working-class people were certainly involved, often putting in substantial amounts of personal resources and time into organizing events, petition drives, and the like; their role is not to be dismissed. However, the central agents of the convoy’s emergence and diffusion were fossil fuel-connected trade associations, conservative politicians, and small business owners and managers. Often, the organizational capacities of working-class participants were subsidized by these better-resourced fractions, as when Rally 4 Resources was immediately connected with a burgeoning network of corporate grassroots groups, or when the LNG or Bust convoy to Ottawa received direct material support from a myriad of fossil capital-connected organizations. While such subsidization was not entirely hidden, it was partially masked by efforts to front-stage the most plausibly working-class individuals and organizations, and by framings that depicted such protest events as the political expression of workers. Based on the preceding evidence, I conclude that, without the collective efforts of organizations and individuals connected in various ways to fossil capital, the extractive populist movement and its signature tactic would likely not have emerged in the first place or undergone upward scale shift.

As the extractivist action coalition expanded its scope and capacities, protests intensified in frequency and tone. By late 2018, a new organizational model was emerging, one in which the coalition took on an increasingly *supportive* function, stimulating and providing a variety of resources to newly mobilized layers. In particular, the rural, fossilized

petty bourgeoisie took a critical role in carrying out the practical task of convoying, relying on the everyday organization of their business to mobilize pre-existing networks and material resources. The major trade associations and their corporate grassroots outfits, meanwhile, receded somewhat from view. The development of increasingly autonomous forms of mobilizing, moreover, coincided with evidence of radicalization, including the use of intimidation tactics against environmental protesters, and the increasing presence of Yellow Vests Canada activists at pro-oil and gas protests. This was the context in which the idea for a convoy to Ottawa re-emerged, but this new organizational form, characterized by the relatively autonomous mobilization of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie, would infuse the convoy's first major national upward scale shift with both resources and risk. In the next chapter, the focus is on the radicalization of the protest cycle manifested by Yellow Vests Canada. This provides the necessary context for understanding the uneasiness of the collaboration between YVC and the extractivist action coalition as the idea for a convoy to Ottawa re-emerged. It is also the phase in which the protest cycle developed an innovative master frame—the globalist conspiracy theory—that would be adopted and adapted by later movements.

5. White Skin, Yellow Vests: Globalist Conspiracy Theory as Master Frame

Introduction

Yellow Vests Canada began in December 2018, borrowing their main symbol (the yellow vest) from the *gilets jaunes* movement in France. Politically, though, YVC bears little resemblance to the *gilets jaunes* movement. The *gilets jaunes* movement began as a protest against the French President Emmanuel Macron's plan to increase fuel taxes, but was quickly transformed into a broader protest against the high cost-of-living, with key demands being lower consumption taxes, higher taxes on the rich, and a higher minimum wage. What is novel about the movement is that it included both far-left and far-right actors, though the left achieved hegemony over the movement, as evidenced by the key demands just listed (Kipfer & Wirsig, 2019). A yellow vest, which all French motorists own and must legally keep in their car at all times in case of emergency, is an apt symbol considering the movement's core participants had been car driving suburban and exurbanites angry about increased costs of living (Chrisafis, 2018; Lichfield, 2019). The symbol was quickly picked up and spread to other countries. According to Kipfer (2019), "across Europe, the symbol of the yellow vest is being appropriated by movements with distinct, even antagonistic purposes (from far right to left)." Within less than a month after the first *gilets jaunes* protest was held, the symbol would be adopted by pro-fossil fuel, anti-migrant protestors in Canada.

While YVC's opposition to the Liberal government's carbon tax policy might seem to echo the *gilets jaunes* protest against the gasoline tax, that is where the similarities end.⁹⁹ In

⁹⁹ It is important to note that Macron's gas tax and Trudeau's carbon tax are different policies and impact the working-class in different ways. The French gas tax was not revenue neutral and featured no redistributive mechanism; it was therefore a pure cost for car-dependent suburbanites. The Canadian carbon tax, on the other hand, was almost entirely redistributed back to households, and was shown to provide a net benefit to working-class and low-income individuals. According to one analysis, "approximately 70% of households will receive more in tax rebates than they pay in carbon costs," while the "top 20% of income earners will pay more in carbon taxes than they receive in rebates" (Dahlby et al., n.d.). In other words, the French gas tax could be seen

late 2018, concurrent with the *gilets jaunes* movement, the global far right increasingly targeted the United Nation’s Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, a voluntary pact signed by Canada on December 11th, 2018, which commits signatories to 23 non-binding objectives, including reducing the use of immigration detention centres and combatting human trafficking and smuggling (Kalvapalle, 2018). The compact was passed in July 2018 after a year and a half consultation, with the U.S.—then under Trump’s first presidency—having withdrawn in December 2017 on the grounds it violated U.S. sovereignty. In one study, alternative far-right media from Germany, the UK, and Italy were found to have simultaneously manufactured indignation over this anodyne agreement, and mobilized their readership into protest activity against it (Rone, 2022). The Canadian yellow vests emerged as something of a synthesis of these two global trends, combining the *gilets jaunes*’ opposition to increased taxation on carbon-intensive consumption with the global far right’s opposition to the migration compact. And yet, as we will see, YVC did not limit its grievances to these alone.

In this chapter, I aim to enhance understanding of both the extractive populist and YVC movements by closely examining their interaction, both ideologically and organizationally. This is a particularly important task since earlier phases of a cycle of protest often pioneer ideological frames that are then picked up and adapted by movements in later phases (Snow & Benford, 1992). If in the previous chapter the focus was on sketching the innovation of a new protest tactic and its diffusion across the early period of the cycle (2016 to 2018), here I make a similar, parallel argument about the innovation of a master frame, which then provides “ideational and interpretive anchoring for subsequent movements within the cycle” (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 144). Relying on a sample of social media data from

as a regressive form of taxation, whereas the Canadian carbon tax was designed to be progressive, hitting high income earners most and redistributing the revenue downward.

Yellow Vests' main Facebook page (p. 77-80) as well as interviews with former YVC activists, I find that YVC's primary grievances pertained to the migration and energy/environmental policies of the Liberal government, but that these were accompanied by a litany of other grievances typical of the global far-right's moral panic cycle, and linked in a chain of equivalence through the master frame of the globalist conspiracy theory.

To be clear, I do not make the case that the globalist conspiracy theory was invented by the yellow vests. The circulation of such ideas is predominantly driven by global (and especially U.S.-based) far-right media ecosystems, while the substance of these ideologies has deep historical roots in fascist and anti-Semitic propaganda, of which I provide a cursory overview below. However, the prevalence of the GCT within my data set is a significant finding that sheds light on the ideological underpinnings of the YVC movement and therefore on the protest cycle more broadly. Whatever its myriad international sources, the GCT was a key interpretive schema through which the yellow vests linked a diversity of grievances connected to a broad spectrum of far-right moral panics which themselves . These grievances may originate from individuals and segments of the population with diverse concerns and worldviews (e.g., nativist and pro-hydrocarbon movements), *but they are brought into alignment and articulated through the master frame's flexibility*. The GCT, then, represents the convergence of many moral panics into a "general conspiracy" (Hall et al., 1978, p. 323). My argument is that Yellow Vests Canada represents a key flashpoint in this convergence process, as it the globalist conspiracy theory was refined as a master frame to be utilized by the Canadian far right across a cycle of protest. As the cycle grew, so too was the general conspiracy mainstreamed. The bulk of this chapter is dedicated to laying out the contours of this conspiracy architecture, and in the next chapters we will see how the GCT was utilized by subsequent movements in the cycle: the Alberta separatist and freedom movements.

By sketching the increasing overlaps between anti-migrant and pro-fossil politics at both the ideological level—through the GCT—and the organizational level, we can better appreciate how frame innovations reflect the protest cycle’s incorporation of new strata. The first and final sections of this chapter therefore provide details on the increasing *organizational* overlaps between the extractivist action coalition and Yellow Vests Canada in the period between the Grande Prairie convoy and United We Roll, a period in which YVC and the coalition first encountered one another. The development and utilization of the GCT within YVC represents an ideological articulation of this concrete organizational phenomenon: the development of an alliance between pro-fossil fuel organizations and nativist far-right ‘patriot’ groups. While it seems to have been the strategy of anti-hate organizations like CAHN to frame the oil and gas issue as a fig leaf for hate, my findings suggest that Alberta saw an exceptional participation rate in YVC precisely because the pre-existing extractive populist movement was gaining significant momentum at that time. This finding supports the broader theoretical intervention of this dissertation, which asserts that the rise of the far right needs to be situated in relation to fossil capitalism. In the first and the final section of this chapter, I carefully sketch the relationship between YVC and the extractivist action coalition, documenting the process of fossil fascisation as the formation of an uneasy alliance between fossil capital and a relatively autonomous far-right movement. In the middle part of this chapter, I trace the relationship between fossil fuel promotion and nativism within YVC’s collective action frames, determining that the stitching together of these two issues within the master frame of the globalist conspiracy theory represented a step in the process of fossil fascisation at the level of ideology.

“Legitimate” Economic Grievances or “Hate”?

Throughout December 2018 and early 2019, the yellow vest’s weekly Saturday rallies held across the country were generally small: usually between 20-30 participants, according to one estimate (Tewksbury, 2021). Often, they were met with environmentalist, anti-racist and anti-fascist counter-protestors (CityNews, 2018).¹⁰⁰ Most observers of the movement, however, identified Alberta as a hotspot, and my findings corroborate this (see below). The movement was short-lived, in part owing to the controversy of its ideas, especially as expressed on social media (Tewksbury, 2021). One YVC activist was arrested for posting death threats against Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the main YVC Facebook page (Mussett, 2018). At its demonstrations, YVC attracted numerous far-right groups and individuals, including: the Soldiers of Odin, an Islamophobic hate group, and other similar splinter groups like the Wolves of Odin and Canadian Infidels (Lamoureux, 2016; Mosleh, 2018); the Proud Boys, who the Southern Poverty Law Center has designated a hate group (Howells, 2019; Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.); the Nationalist Party of Canada, which the Canadian Anti-Hate Network (CAHN) considers a neo-Nazi party (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2019c); Faith Goldy, who was banned from Facebook in April 2019 for posting white supremacist content (Abedi, 2018; Stack, 2019); and Paul Fromm, a neo-Nazi who ran for mayor of Hamilton, Ontario (A. Carter, 2019). The presence of far-right discourse and actors both online and offline led Evan Balgord, the Executive Director of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, to consider YVC as having the “greatest potential for radicalization leading to violence” in the country (Mussett, 2019).

The movement was also very active online, with hundreds of Yellow Vest groups and pages popping up on Facebook, the largest of which (by far) peaked in late January 2019 at about 108K members. Yellow Vests’ social media was filled with a staggering number of

¹⁰⁰ In one instance, at a rally in Toronto on December 15th, 2018, both right-wing and left-wing activists donned the yellow vest, echoing the ideological ambiguity with which the *gilets jaunes* movement began, before the left secured hegemony (Abedi, 2018; Kipfer & Wirsig, 2019). To my knowledge, aside from this one instance, the yellow vest symbol in Canada was entirely appropriated by the right.

complaints that touched on many aspects of political, economic, and cultural life. Journalists covering the movement frequently remarked on the “cacophony of divergent grievances and opinions” and the “flurry of frustrations” being expressed at the rallies, too (Hames, 2019; Issawi & Mosleh, 2019). These grievances were sometimes separated out by sympathetic reporters into “the legitimate concerns about carbon taxation and the oil and gas industry,” on the one hand, and “deeply fringe conspiracy theories about one-world government and the United Nations,” on the other (Dawson, 2019a). In an interview, expert on the Canadian far right Barbara Perry suggested that YVC was not genuinely aggrieved with climate and energy policy, but were “using this as a platform to expand their audience” (Dawson, 2019a). And the Canadian Anti-Hate Network’s Evan Balgord suggested “this convoy is a Yellow Vests Canada convoy, and any well-meaning pro-pipeline individuals involved are in fact legitimizing and breathing oxygen into [the far right]” (Cook & Rabson, 2019). In these interpretations, energy politics was being used by pre-existing far-right nationalist and patriot groups as a disingenuous mobilizing tool and an attempt is made to separate the far-right and pro-fossil fuel activists.

While some participants and supporters made efforts to brand YVC as primarily a pro-oil and gas movement, anti-racist observers argued that YVC was primarily a hate group characterized by Islamophobia, xenophobia, conspiracy theories, and violent threats to public officials and left-leaning individuals (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2019b). Yellow Vests Canada Exposed (YVCE), an anonymous group of antifascist researchers focused on YVC, claims the top three things discussed on YVC’s Facebook are conspiracy theories, Muslims, and Trudeau; notably, energy and the environment does not crack the top three, with 85% of the content being unrelated to oil and gas, according to them (Mussett, 2019).¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ My analysis does not seek to prove or disprove this claim, but it does suggest that oil and gas politics played a stronger role in the movement than YVCE would suggest. This will be explored below.

Like the *gilets jaunes*, YVC was a composite movement, comprised of several different elements with different class and occupational backgrounds. Whereas the *gilets jaunes*' class and social composition led to a left-ward trajectory of the movement, YVC's social composition had no countervailing progressive forces. In his essay on the *gilets jaunes*, Kipfer (2019) writes that, although the initial focus on the gas tax "resonated with the populist and far Right, their demands evolved because of a dynamic of collective mobilization that kept putting the vests in touch with movements rooted in other subaltern social spaces," particularly racialized members of the outer suburbs (p. 212). By contrast, the dynamics of collective mobilization of YVC permitted no such offsetting by subaltern or counter-hegemonic forces. But neither was YVC a homogenous movement.

Building on his own dissertation research on YVC, J. E. Tetrault (2024b) finds that YVC "mobilized broader support in Alberta" because of its development of resonant master frames capable of "uniting sub-movements including discontent conservatives, Christian and petro-nationalists, crime control groups, and more extreme anti-Muslim and White power groups" (p. 14). Tetrault's method and analysis, however, were limited to pre-existing patriot and nationalist groups that subsequently "re-branded" as YVC, and so his passing reference to "petro-nationalists" goes underdeveloped, and nothing is said about YVC's intersection with the extractive populist movement. The Canadian Anti-Hate Network's Evan Balgord has a similar analysis, telling the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in April 2022 that the contemporary Canadian far-right movement was "born out of a racist anti-Muslim movement," oriented around opposition to M-103, a non-binding parliamentary motion passed in March 2017 that condemns Islamophobia. The movement against M-103, which had been "emboldened by Trump's election" the year prior, subsequently "rebranded and started calling themselves Yellow Vests Canada" (*Evidence - SECU (44-1) - No. 19 - House of Commons of Canada*, 2022). With this re-brand, Balgord

noted, “they added new grievances,” including around “oil and gas, and western separation.” Tetrault and Balgord’s analyses are essential for understanding the critical role of pre-existing far-right groups as formative elements of the YVC movement, but neither of their analyses account for how this re-brand intersected with the extractive populist movement, and how previously inactive strata—especially, as we will see, among fractions of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie—provided an injection of energy, resources, and skill into the YVC movement.

At stake in such commentary is how we should understand the relationship between the myriad grievances articulated by YVC, which touched on energy and environment, migration, conspiracy, and many others. Was this, following sympathetic journalists, a movement with a “legitimate” core of economic grievances rooted in the oil and gas industry, but which also over-indulged in embarrassing conspiracies and various forms of bigotry? Or, as per Perry’s interpretation, was it fundamentally a bigoted “hate” group who strategically indulged in economic demands around oil and gas as a recruitment strategy?

Extractive Populism and Yellow Vests Canada

When Yellow Vests Canada emerged in early December 2018, the movement immediately began overlapping with the well-established and growing extractive populist movement. A smattering of YVC activists, for example, were present at the Grand Prairie rally and convoy, holding signs that read, “Trudeau = Traitor” and “No to corrupt government, no to carbon taxes, no to globalism” written on the movement’s signature highlighter yellow cardstock.¹⁰² Some conservative politicians, like UCP candidate Drew Barnes, actively framed the Grande Prairie event as a YVC protest, posting to Facebook, “Amazing turnout in Grande Prairie for the Yellow Vest protest. It is important that these citizens - who are the best in our world resource sector - continue to stand up to the federal government and fight for pipelines”

¹⁰² Support Canadian Oil and Gas Rally - Grande Prairie, AB

(Barnes, 2018). Contra Barnes, it was not, in fact a YVC-organized protest (although YVC activists *did* join). Barnes' confusion, however, raises an important question that speaks to the increasing overlaps between the official, established extractive populist movement, and the new, more genuinely grassroots, autonomous, and radical YVC movement. What constitutes a YVC protest? One entirely organized by YVC activists? One co-organized by YVC activists and others who might not identify with the movement? One in which YVC activists are not organizers, but are nonetheless present? What about a protest seemingly organized by YVCers, but claiming to be focused solely on oil and gas, and not on YVC's other signature issues, notably migration? The methodological difficulty of determining precisely where the established extractive populist movement ends and where YVC begins is, in fact, one of this section's core findings: that there is a blurriness between the two, with one organically growing out of the other.

Arguably, Alberta was more fertile ground for YVC's message of opposition to Trudeau's environmental policies than other parts of the country, likely as a result of the extractive populist efforts to subsidize a public in that province; the Alberta public had been subsidized, in this sense, more than any other. Thus, Evan Balgord, the executive director of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, called Yellow Vests Canada "a very western-driven thing," and is reported to have further observed that "protests in Alberta appear larger and more sustained than in other parts of the country" (Mosleh, 2019). This corresponds to my own observations, and my (limited) protest event data bears this out. My analysis of nearly 100 "rally" posts—i.e., Facebook posts from my data set depicting YVC protest events—reveals Alberta as by far the most active location: 43 posts corresponded to protest events in Alberta, 9 to B.C., 8 to Ontario, 6 to Manitoba, 5 to Saskatchewan, 3 to Québec, and 3 to the Atlantic provinces. An additional 14 posts were related to the United We Roll Convoy, which, again, was organized primarily by Albertans. When I asked William, an Ontario-based activist—and

my only interviewee who was a veteran of far-right organizing—whether or not Yellow Vests Canada achieved its goals, he told me it had not, but that one positive outcome of the movement was that “the West was awoken,” and he described how his list of contacts from the West grew exponentially as a result.

This is not to say, however, that YVC was *just* an Alberta movement, nor that it was the only province in which hot spots of YVC activity arose. In Hamilton, Ontario, for example, the YVC movement carried on for many months longer than in most cities and towns. In a June 10th, 2019, update, for example, CAHN and Yellow Vests Canada Exposed wrote:

Street-level Yellow Vest activity has declined across Canada following their convoy to Ottawa in February. The anti-Muslim groups, which often played a large role in YV demonstrations, have gone back to organizing under their own banners. Hamilton is an outlier to this trend. The Hamilton Yellow Vests are now holding regular demonstrations again that bring out the most militant anti-Muslim hate groups and both the rhetoric and violence is escalating. (Canadian Anti-Hate Network & Yellow Vests Canada Exposed, 2019)

Their update makes it clear that UWR was the ‘crescendo’ of the movement nation-wide, after which most cities and towns saw a reduced intensity of YVC protest events. Hamilton’s YVC activists, on the other hand, kept going strong. The update describes a protest event of between 30 and 50 people that occurred on June 8th, 2019, and which included YVC, Soldiers of Odin, and Canadian Nationalist Party activists. The update also mentions that “violence is escalating,” noting two arrests were made against YVC activists that day, one for headbutting a counterdemonstrator, and another for attacking a CAHN-commissioned photographer. The update report’s statement that “violence is escalating” would prove prescient. After the following week’s YVC protest, on June 15th, 2019, several of the individuals involved went

on to the infamous Pride “counter-protest,” where they initiated violent attacks against LGBTQ and anti-fascist community members.

Notwithstanding the fact that there were ‘hotspots’ of YVC activity outside Alberta, and that there were many protest events scattered throughout the entire country, it is important to recognize where the movement was strongest. Doing so can help us understand the nature of the Canadian far right more broadly, and the political, economic contexts that fuel their rise. That Alberta had a disproportionately strong YVC movement is something that needs to be grappled with and explained. My findings suggest the extractive populist movement played an important role in heightening the YVC movement in Alberta.

YVC was clearly more radical and multi-faceted in its collective action frames, but despite the established groups trying to distance themselves and expressing uneasiness about the new movement, yellow vests would become a recurring sight at events organized and promoted by the more established groups. In the discussion section of Canada Action’s Facebook event page for a December 17th, 2018 rally (the day after the Grande Prairie convoy), for example, one participant commented, “I’ll be there. Are we doing the yellow vests thing?” (Gowler, 2018). CA responded, “No yellow vests please. That’s not what we are promoting!” One participant’s response is instructive: “ouch! The very people wearing the yellow vests are who truly support the pipelines.” CA did not want to be associated with the yellow vests, but the public they had helped subsidize into action insisted on heading in that direction. Against CA’s wishes, yellow vests became a regular appearance at pro-oil and gas rallies and convoys, creating a headache for the extractive populist movement’s efforts to stay respectable and on-message. A smattering of YVC activists turned up to the December 17th, 2018 rally outside Calgary city hall, including Tim Vader, an under-employed wellsite geologist, who told a reporter, “We’ve had enough of the globalist elite determining how the rest of the world and average Canadians are going to live” (The Canadian Press, 2018b). Video from the rally shows

a YVC activist holding a sign reading, “No UN,” while another couple YVC activists hold Canada Action signs, further illustrating the cross-pollination between YVC and “acceptable” extractive populism (Global News, 2018c).

These findings from social media are corroborated by my interview with Greg, an organizer with one of the established extractive populist groups, who characterized YVC as unwanted guests, stating, “Yellow vests crashed some of our events a few times,” while clarifying that, “We never were part of the yellow vests.” In other words, according to Greg, YVC did become a presence at several official extractive populist events, but they remained an autonomous movement, separate from the established groups. I asked him, since he had been a long-time part of the extractive populist movement, whether the YVC symbol was being adopted by other long-time participants, and he stated, “I never really noticed anyone that I know that suddenly became a yellow vest. No, they were a total different crowd than us.” In other words, from Greg’s perspective, YVC activists represented the introduction of new social layers into the pro-oil and gas movement. It was not simply a re-brand taken up by some fractions of the pro-oil and gas movement, but rather seen as the entry of new elements into the movement. Greg was neither in favour of nor opposed to YVC, however, and instead described being “fascinated” by them. In fact, Greg described “getting to know them,” telling me that, “I wasn’t angry with them, I kind of felt sorry for a lot of them.” From Greg’s perspective YVC activists “just felt hopeless in life, and I think ... that was their way of kind of trying to have some control with at the time they felt they have no control of their lives.”

With respect to message discipline, however, the vests were not the only source of problems for the established extractive populist groups. At the December 17th, 2018 rally outside Calgary city hall, centrist mayor of Calgary, Naheed Nenshi (now the leader of the provincial NDP), was booed by the crowd for even mentioning climate change, and was booed again when, at the request of the organizers, he spoke in French to make a pipeline appeal to

Quebeckers, the crowd's unruliness causing Battershill to take the microphone and restore order (Hudes, 2018). Underneath the "positive" and "non-partisan," respectable image that extractive populist groups sought to cultivate, then, the public that they had subsidized into collective action offered a more aggressive form of populism, virulently opposed to the idea of climate change, and hostile towards Québec to an almost nativist and anti-democratic degree on account of that province's opposition to oil sands pipelines. The yellow vests may have been the most visible symptom of this dynamic, but even the white-collar crowd gathered for a rally outside Calgary city hall was proving more angry, denialist, and aggressive than Canada Action would have preferred the movement present itself as.

Despite the efforts of CA and R4R to distance themselves from YVC (further examples of which we will see below), evidence suggests that many yellow vests activists viewed their activities not as a dramatic departure, but as a complementary extension of the burgeoning extractive populist movement. Tamara Lich, for example, whose name would become synonymous with the Freedom Convoy, got her start in social movement organizing as a YVC activist in Medicine Hat, Alberta—a small city in the province's southeast, with a population of about 60,000 (Lich, 2023, pp. 25–27). In her memoir, published in 2023 by Rebel News, Lich is unambiguous that, to her mind, YVC was opposed to Trudeau's energy policies *as well* as other issues, such as the government's media bailouts, which "corrupted our formerly free press," and M-103, which was a form of "speech policing" that "promoted blasphemy laws targeting anyone who the government decided was too Islamophobic" (p. 27). In other words, in her mind, YVC's grievances were clearly not limited to oil and gas, but encompassed a diversity of issues.

Ahead of a busy Saturday in late 2018, on which a simultaneous truck convoy and yellow vest rally were planned, Lich expressed her view on how these protests related to the broader movement and the diffusion of convoys that had been taking place:

It's really great to see everybody supporting each other. What happened in Grand Prairie on Sunday, what happened in Nisku this week when Andrew Scheer came into town, it's been really positive, right? ... We just want our voices to be heard and keep the momentum up with what's been happening across the province. (Chartrand, 2018)

This sense of a common cause between YVC and the broader extractive populist movement was mirrored at the organizational and promotional level, too.

Neither the convoy nor the rally were organized by the established extractive populist groups, further proof that communities reliant on oil and gas were taking inspiration from these groups while demonstrating their capacity to organize autonomously. Indeed, despite not being organized by R4R, the convoy was called the "Rally for Resources Convoy," highlighting its status as a "copycat convoy" by borrowing R4R's name, which itself, as we saw above, had been borrowed from a 2016 event in Fort Nelson—the diffusion of protest slogans and repertoires thus paralleling each other (Cranker, 2018). Among the lead organizers of the convoy was Jerry Sabine, owner of Sabine CO₂ Logistics, a small trucking company specializing in the transportation of carbon dioxide and liquid nitrogen for use in oil and gas recovery (*Company Profile*, n.d.). According to Sabine, speaking on the day of the convoy, "We just put the word out a couple, three days ago, and it really snowballed on us" (*Jerry Sabine*, n.d.; The Canadian Press, 2018c). In other words, once the public had been sufficiently subsidized, and the repertoires and messaging established, a new group of organizers—almost always from the fossilized petty bourgeoisie—could autonomously initiate a convoy without the direct participation of the established "resource coalition" groups. Nonetheless, R4R did play a promotional role, writing, "If you're in Southern Alberta and can make it, the oilfield service companies and community are hosting a convoy in support of pipelines to Canadian tidewater. We wish them a safe and successful event (info in the photo)" (Rally 4 Resources, 2018i). Thus, whether they were aware of it or not, R4R,

notwithstanding future efforts to put some distance between themselves and YVC, were publicly promoting a convoy that had been co-organized by YVC. Indeed, YVC was in many ways indistinguishable from the other players, squarely integrated into the “oilfield companies and community” said by R4R to be the convoy’s lead organizers. The blurriness between YVC and the extractive populist movement, then, was present from the beginning.

The company leading the organizing effort of this convoy was STEP Energy Services—a large, publicly traded oil and gas service company headquartered in Calgary, but with operations across North America, including a small satellite office in Medicine Hat (Chartrand, 2018). At the time, Lich worked there as a service administrator and describes the Medicine Hat base as “a small satellite office, with just about 60 of us there” (Lich, 2023, p. 30). Along with Lich, two of the managers at the Medicine Hat office, Keith Vanderloh (the Site Manager) and Rob Young (the District Manager) were on the organizing committee for the convoy, which used the STEP Energy shop as its muster point (Chartrand, 2018; *Rob Young*, n.d.). A Facebook post from two weeks after the convoy shows Vanderloh and Lich presenting the local food bank a cheque with funds raised by the convoy, the memo reading “Rally for Resources,” suggesting Lich was not some kind of outsider “hijacking” this convoy, as some would later characterize the YVC movement as having done with respect to the convoy movement (*Keith Vanderloh*, n.d.; Root Cellar Food and Wellness Hub, 2019). Instead, Lich, who made no secret of her involvement in YVC, was a lead organizer, fully integrated into the organizing team. Video from the event, moreover, shows a crowd of between 150-200 people, most with yellow vests, lined up along the road, cheering on the convoy, which was estimated at 650 vehicles, as it passed (Community TV, 2018; Drinkwater, 2018; Medicine Hat Oil News, 2018). Some of the truck drivers, too, wore yellow vests, and some individuals wearing yellow vests had CEC and CA apparel. YVC, then, was not external to the diffusion of pro-oil and gas protests and convoys, nor did they “hijack” it; they

were, in the case of the Medicine Hat convoy, a fully integrated part of the movement, embedded at the top of the organizational structure and at the ‘bottom’ in terms of on-the-ground turnout.

In short, YVC was not crashing anyone’s party; they were an important part of the public that extractive populism had subsidized into collective action. While some members of YVC were long-time nationalist and patriot activists, such as those studied by Tetrault (2024b; 2022), others like Lich were first-time activists who got involved “because I knew some of the people helping make it happen” (Lich, 2023, p. 27). This latter element of first-time activists, which was arguably the dominant fraction in the movement in Alberta, was not using oil and gas concerns as some fig leaf for hate. Rather, their participation was driven by myriad concerns, including oil and gas, and their class character was rooted in the radicalizing elements of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie. In this case, the owners and managers of oilfield service companies directly collaborated with a YVC activist, not because they were tolerant of radical outsiders, but because the radicalization was occurring *within* this class fraction. They collaborated because they were colleagues, using the “everyday organization” of the workplace as a launchpad for their collective action. Thus, the distinction between YVC and the Medicine Hat convoy is non-existent, and the distinction between established extractive populism and this convoy is difficult to draw, too, given that the slogans and repertoires were explicitly borrowed from the former, and that a key established group, R4R, actively promoted the convoy.

Importantly for my argument about the cycle of protest, these activities would bolster the organizing experience, strategic capital, and sense of personal efficacy among several Medicine Hat YVC activists who would go on to play important roles in future movements, including the separatist and freedom movements, notably the Freedom Convoy. As Lich herself reflects in her memoir about her experiences in the YVC movement, “I met some

great people there, Cindy Parker and Ken Goldade, who would be a big part of the Freedom Convoy a few years later” (p. 27). As part of her involvement in YVC, she reflects on her role helping organize the Medicine Hat Convoy, adding that it “was a lot of fun, and something else that foreshadowed what would happen a few years later” (p. 27). We will pick up these connections in subsequent chapters.

On the same day as the Medicine Hat convoy, another similar convoy took place in Estevan, Saskatchewan, a small city of roughly 10,000 near the US border in the province’s southeast. This convoy was co-organized by small business owner and YVC activist, Jay Riedel, along with Darryl “Buzz” Shirley, the maintenance manager and co-owner of Bert Baxter Transport Ltd., a small, family-owned oilfield hauling business, whose yard provided the convoy’s muster point (*Bert Baxter Transport Ltd.*, n.d.; *Bert Baxter Transport Ltd.*, 2021; Riedel, 2019a). Like the Medicine Hat convoy, this convoy was directly inspired by the preceding convoys in Grande Prairie and Nisku, and was planned in under 48 hours (Zinchuk & Willberg, 2018). Also like the Medicine Hat convoy, the Estevan convoy was co-organized with YVC activists and routed to drive by a rally of some 170 people, with “many wearing the yellow vests that have become the symbol of the movement” (Brian Zinchuk, 2018; Zinchuk & Willberg, 2018). In addition to the usual concerns about pipelines, the carbon tax, and equalization, “some were also concerned about migration policies and Canada recently signing onto the United Nations Migration Pact” (Zinchuk & Willberg, 2018). According to Riedel, who would go on to participate in the United We Roll Convoy, this latter grievance “is part of the [Estevan] protest,” and he personally “believed the pact surrenders Canada's immigration policy to outside powers” (Drinkwater, 2018). Several trucks had yellow vests affixed to their front, and several others had “images of Trudeau splayed across the front of their grills, like parliamentary roadkill” (Brian Zinchuk, 2018; Zinchuk & Willberg, 2018). One of the lead trucks had a sign on its front reading, “Make Trudeau a Drama Teacher

Again,” written on the YVC movement’s signature highlighter yellow Bristol board (Brian Zinchuk, 2018). Far from the non-partisan, respectable, and positive image cultivated by the established extractive populist groups, the public that had been subsidized into collective action was vehemently anti-Liberal, deployed violent language and symbols, and was thoroughly enmeshed with the YVC movement.

Another similar convoy took place the week after the Medicine Hat and Estevan convoys, on December 29th, 2018, in Lloydminster, a small city on the border of Alberta and Saskatchewan with a population of about 30,000. As with the other two, the Lloydminster convoy had strong overlaps with YVC. It was co-organized by Dion Boser, an oilfield pressure truck operator and YVC activist, along with Marc Ouellette, the owner of Olaco Inc., a small trucking company servicing the oilfield and farm sectors (*Olaco Inc - Heavy Equipment Hauling*, 2015; ‘Truck Driving Jobs’, 2018; Zinchuk, 2018b). Boser, who led the convoy in his own truck, described having “reached out to all the local businesses and business owners to be vocal about pipeline issues we’re dealing with,” and estimates that about 150 trucks participated (Collinge, 2018). Boser had been active online and offline with the YVC movement before and after the Lloydminster convoy and, as with the Medicine Hat and Estevan convoys, the Lloydminster convoy was scheduled for a Saturday, the day on which YVC held its weekly rallies across the country, and was coordinated to pass by a YVC rally downtown Lloydminster (Boser, 2018b; Zinchuk, 2018b). Over a week before the convoy, Boser posted a YVC flyer to the Lloydminster Facebook group, laying out the movement’s goals:

The aim of the Yellow Vest movement is to Educate and bring Awareness to every Canadian about how our way of life is swiftly deteriorating, how our rights and freedoms are being stripped away, how our own sovereignty is being threatened by the UN Mass Migration Pact, how the care for our Veterans and Seniors are ignored by our

government, how the Energy Sector is being dismantled, and how the ever increasing Carbon Tax is going to impoverish us (Boser, 2018a).

In other words, Boser was a YVC activist in the full sense: organizing in-person rallies; posting content in YVC forums online; and articulating grievances not only with respect to oil and gas, but on a wide range of other signature YVC issues. Despite being easily connected to YVC, however, Boser and the Lloydminster convoy received a publicity boost from Canada Action, who promoted the convoy on Facebook by linking to the event page, which listed Dion Boser and “Yellow Vests Canada - Lloydminster Chapter” as co-hosts (Boser, 2018c; Canada Action, 2018b). On the one hand, the established extractive populist groups publicly expressed hesitation about the YVC movement, dissuading people from using the yellow vest symbol; but on the other hand, on several instances they promoted events with obvious YVC connections.

Whereas YVC activists expressed almost unanimous willingness and desire to work with the established groups within the extractive populist movement, the latter presented a contradictory, halting approach, sometimes distancing themselves, other times promoting YVC-connected events. This reflects the uneasiness of the alliance. YVC was an obvious asset to the extractive populist groups in the sense that they were helping grow the pro-oil and gas movement by playing an important role in organizing additional rallies and convoys. At the same time, they were also posing reputational risks as they used their autonomy to veer off-script into xenophobic, conspiracist, highly partisan, and even violent terrain. It is to an examination of YVC ideology that we now turn.

The Great Replacement of Fossil Fuels

Islamophobia, it is worth recalling, had been articulated alongside support for the Canadian oil and gas industry from the earliest days of the extractive populist project. Ezra Levant’s

(2011) *Ethical Oil* and the eponymous institute championed Canadian fossil fuels in orientalist terms, where a central claim of the campaign was that by opposing Canadian oil, environmentalists are *de facto* supporting Saudi Arabian and Iranian oil and, by extension, those countries' human rights abuses. In campaign materials—including social media, television ads and physical billboards—Canadian oil was framed as liberal and democratic, while the alternatives were said to promote dictatorship and women's oppression (Kinder, 2024, pp. 42–51; Pullman, 2011).¹⁰³ Such arguments were often made with gratuitous phrasing and imagery, as in one billboard ad in which a white woman appears alongside the text “Ethical Oil” and “Woman Elected Mayor [i.e., of Fort McMurray],” which is contrasted with an image of a burka-clad woman being buried alive with text reading, “Conflict Oil Countries: Women Stoned to Death.” As feminist energy humanities scholar Sheena Wilson emphasizes, the “burka-clad woman simply stands in as a synecdoche for the perceived oppression of women in Muslim areas of the world,” and the ad thereby visually reproduces Islamophobia while articulating it alongside a pro-oil, “petrosexual” politics (Wilson, 2014, pp. 250–251). The Yellow Vest movement's combination of anti-(Muslim) migration and pro-oil and gas politics, then, was operating in well-worn ideological grooves.

As the Ethical Oil Institute quietly dialled back its activities, appearing to be completely inactive by 2015, its central frame was picked up by the multi-organizational field of emerging extractive populist groups. Although tending not to be as excessive, inflammatory, or openly Islamophobic as the Ethical Oil campaign's output, the same structure of discourse has been found to be a common frame within the social media output of groups like Canada Action, Oil Sands Strong, Canada Energy Citizens, and Oil Respect

¹⁰³ Islamophobic framings of Middle Eastern oil, it should be noted, have a long history. For example, the construction of US and Canadian oil as ethically superior was prevalent in the post-9/11 period, when oil from the Middle East was framed by some as supportive of terrorism (Huber, 2013, pp. 155–6). During the oil price shock of the 1970s, too, a common narrative was promulgated to “simplify what happened into a crisis, for which an outside force – the Arab oil states – could be made culpable” (Mitchell, 2011, p. 173; see also Huber, 2013, p. 107-8).

(Gunster et al., 2021, p. 214). These groups emphasized Canada's liberal democratic elements—including its free press, environmental and labour protections, and robust civil society—as reasons why Canadians should support the country's fossil fuel sector. When Oil Sands Strong posted a meme in 2016 similar to the one described above by the Ethical Oil Institute, it later apologized, demonstrating these groups' relative moderation (Kinder, 2024, p. 114). Throughout its existence, Canada Action's founder and leader Cody Battershill has routinely make it clear that his group aims for a discourse that is “non-partisan, respectful, fact-driven, inclusive, and positive,” thus charting a different course than the Ethical Oil Institute (*Canadian Energy Advocacy and the Global Importance of Canadian Energy*, 2022). Ezra Levant's 2015 founding of Rebel News, however, ensured that the Canadian media landscape would continue to be home to dual articulations of pro-oil, anti-Muslim sentiment. Arguably, the global migration crisis of 2015 and the 2016 election of Donald Trump on a campaign pledge to both boost fossil fuel production and ban Muslim migration provided a global accelerant to such articulations (Kinder, 2024, p. 60; Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021, pp. 181–206). In Canada, as both the extractive populist and Islamophobic ‘patriot’ movements gained momentum in these years, Yellow Vests Canada emerged as a meeting place for the two.

The Yellow Vests' Islamophobia was different from that of the Ethical Oil Institute, however. The latter utilized Islamophobia to make pro-oil arguments: the solicitation was to support Canadian oil or else Muslim-majority countries with human rights abuses stand to gain a greater share of the international oil market. Here, even if grounded in various fallacies, there is a ‘logic’ to the connection—a tight articulation—between Islamophobia and support for Canadian fossil fuels. Yellow Vests, on the other hand, *wanted fewer Muslim migrants*, something the Ethical Oil Institute may have incidentally promoted and dogwhistled for, but which was beside the point for them. Where supporting Canadian oil

would, in the latter's argumentation, ensure fewer profits go to (Muslim-majority) human rights-abusing countries, it is more difficult to imagine how taking fewer immigrants and refugees from Muslim-majority countries could translate into an economic benefit for the Canadian oil and gas industry. It would appear that the dominant demands of the YVC movement—more emissions, fewer migrants (Muslims, in particular)—are somewhat disarticulated. Put another way, we know why the oil industry would hope for more pipelines, oppose the carbon tax, etc., but it is unclear what they stand to gain from hostility to particular forms of migration. The racism of YVC would appear autonomous from the economic demands, seemingly having little to do with one another. The old ethical oil frame would not suffice, then, to link the patriot and extractive populist movements. A new, innovative frame was required.

Indeed, other scholarship on YVC indicates the movement was engaged in the development of an innovative master frame. Although he does not use collective action framing as his analytical framework, instead opting for a critical discourse analysis, Tewksbury (2021) finds that the movement featured four key themes: pro-fossil fuel and anti-carbon tax; anti-immigration/anti-immigrant; opposition to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau; and pro-Canadian sovereignty/nationalism (950-951). In addition to these key themes, Tewksbury (2021) finds that overt racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia were “extremely common,” alongside a general grievance against “political correctness” (p. 953-4). The movement, in other words, stitched together a wide range of social and political grievances, and therefore cannot be defined by narrow diagnostic and prognostic frames, even if some themes are more prevalent than others.

These findings are corroborated by Tetrault (2024b), who does use collective action framing as an analytical framework, and finds that “Canadian nationalists mobilized broader support in Alberta through developing a master frame that resonated across the broader

Canadian Right . . ., uniting sub-movements including discontent conservatives, Christian and petro-nationalists, crime control groups, and more extreme anti-Muslim and White power groups” (p. 14). For Tetrault (2024b), the master frame that united these various movements was “liberal chauvinism,” which he describes as “akin to War on Terror rhetoric but coupled with populist skepticism of governmental and institutional actors” (p. 14). Tetrault's (2024b) “liberal chauvinism” concept is used to describe a variety of far-right grievances that his interviewees communicated using liberal values: e.g., support for democracy, popular sovereignty, and self-determination were contrasted with the threat of globalism (p. 10). Multiculturalism and a “colour-blind” tolerance were embraced as part of Canadian identity, and contrasted with the “divisive,” “racist” and even “hateful” progressive left (p. 10-12). Muslims, in particular, were accused of being intolerant of Canadian culture, Christians, women, Jews, and the LGBTQ community (p. 12). Tetrault thus concludes that the master frame of his participants was liberal chauvinism, since they tended to communicate all or most of their grievances not *in opposition* to liberalism, but through its language, principles, and values. For Tetrault, this is evidence that the dominant paradigms in far-right studies, which understand the far right as, by definition, illiberal, do not hold up to empirical, inductive analysis. For him, far-right ideas emerge from “within liberalism,” and not external to it (p. 15). Liberalism is sufficiently “malleable yet hegemonic that actors across the right-wing spectrum can map their beliefs onto its heuristic framework” (p. 14).

Tetrault’s findings have close parallels to my own, although we have different theoretical and analytical emphases. As detailed in this dissertation’s theory chapter, I subscribe to the dominant conception of far-right taxonomies, which hold that the far right can be defined by its illiberalism. At the same time, like Tetrault, I find that the Yellow Vests routinely express their grievances not in opposition to, but through, liberal values. I square this circle by refusing to take far-right discourse at face value. Tetrault writes that, “perhaps

ironically, tolerance discourse informed how RWAs' [right-wing activists] demonized certain groups," including Muslims (p. 11). Where Tetrault is keen to emphasize the deployment of tolerance as evidence that liberalism is not distinct from the far right, I would emphasize the demonization of certain groups, especially when grounded in misinformation and/or conspiracy theory, as evidence that the far right is fundamentally illiberal. Tetrault is eager to point out that liberalism is racist—a political argument with which I sympathize but nevertheless have theoretical qualms—but in order to do so he claims, unsatisfactorily, that the racists he studies are liberals. This analysis fails to consider the degree to which far-right actors manipulate, sometimes self-consciously, liberal democratic values against liberal democracy, the very heights of which can be seen in Donald Trump, who, under the guise of “stopping the steal” (i.e., preventing a stolen election), tried to steal an election. Ezra Levant, to take an example closer to the subject matter here, considered *Ethical Oil* to be “a liberal book from a right-wing guy,” having self-consciously wrapped his right-wing views on the oil sands in liberal values (Taber, 2011). As Mondon & Winter (2020) put it, Levant and his counterparts like Steve Bannon are adept at “using liberalism to mainstream both white nationalism and misogyny” (p. 32). But for a critical analyst to conclude that the like of Levant are therefore liberal is to miss the more important point that such liberalism is a tactical camouflage.

In a study of the rhetoric deployed by reactionaries to oppose progressive reform, Albert O. Hirschman (1991) identified three main tactics, the first of which suffices to explain why I prefer to read the far-right's liberalism as bad faith. This rhetorical tactic, which he calls "perversity," entails claiming that a progressive reform will have the opposite of its intended effect. Thus, when far-right activists and parties argue that multiculturalism will erode liberalism, a standard Islamophobic argument (Kumar, 2021), I do not view this as indicative of the far right's liberalism, but of their deployment of a well-known reactionary

rhetorical technique. Perversity is everywhere in reactionary politics: Milton Friedman argued that raises in the minimum wage tend to *increase* economic inequality (Lozada, 2022), while Tucker Carlson framed Biden-era environmental justice initiatives as stoking “race hate” (Carlson, 2022). According to extractive populist discourse, meanwhile, Canadian oil is more sustainable on account of the country’s relatively stringent regulations, and so to keep Canadian oil in the ground is to ensure dirtier oil is extracted and brought to market: in other words, Canadian environmentalists’ demands will have the *opposite* effect they desire (Gunster et al., 2021; Kinder, 2024). Following Tetrault’s logic, we would have to conclude that Friedman is a champion of economic equality, Carlson an anti-racist, and the likes of CAPP and Levant are environmentalists. The analyst has a choice when confronted with such perversions of liberal, democratic, and progressive values: Tetrault chooses to emphasize the liberalism of the far right, which advances his theoretical claims about the indistinguishability between the two; my emphasis is on the cynical and bad faith appropriation of liberal, democratic, and progressive values for illiberal, undemocratic, and reactionary ends.

Nevertheless, Tetrault is right to point out, along with Mondon (2024), that “really existing liberalism” is anything but liberal, in the abstract sense. In the contemporary moment, we need look no further than how liberals across the West have united in tolerating and abetting the genocide of the Palestinian people, and increasingly advocate for tight border control. I would prefer to see this as a failure to live up to liberal values rather than proof of liberalism’s inherent corruption at the level of political philosophy (McManus, 2024). Ultimately, the difference is not about empirical findings, but theoretical and analytical emphasis and interpretation.

My analysis is focussed on uncovering a diagnostic master frame that stitches climate and/or fossil fuel-related political problems together with a range of other grievances. In the terminology of collective action framing laid out above, my analysis focuses on how

“movement activists attribute blame for some problematic condition by identifying culpable agents, be they individuals or collective processes or structures” (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 137). I am less interested in providing an exhaustive inventory of the various diagnostic frames YVC used, however, and more interested in uncovering the systemic critique offered by the movement. I ask: what unites their various policy grievances and who/what is ultimately to blame, in their view, for these various problems? Here, too, I build on existing scholarship.

Tewksbury (2021) includes conspiratorial anti-globalism as a sub-heading under his fourth key theme (i.e., Canadian sovereignty), downplaying its connective function in an analysis that otherwise provides insights into how fossil fuel support was a major component of the movement. Tetrault (2024a), although he focuses on so-called liberal chauvinism and does not analyze the movement’s climate politics (other than in passing reference to “petro-nationalists” or the movement’s opposition to green energy), finds that his interviewees “married liberalism with populist conspiracism” and were “united in diagnosing *the core problem* in Canada as the government’s alleged promotion of ‘globalism,’” to which they “*connected nearly all political grievances*” (p. 8-9, my emphases). Rather than analytically focussing on the question of (il)liberalism, my approach centres on this diagnostic master frame: that is, an attribution of blame sufficiently flexible to encompass the gamut of YVC’s grievances and be picked up by future movements with wide-ranging foci. The focus of my analysis is on the *connection* between the movement’s grievances, while foregrounding the way the movement’s signature issues, climate and immigration, were joined—indeed subsumed by—the globalist conspiracy theory.

The Globalist Conspiracy Theory, Climate Denial, and Islamophobia

We should first define more clearly what is meant by “the globalist conspiracy theory” (henceforth the GCT). First of all, by “globalism,” I do not mean globalization, which is a narrower term referring to economic trade liberalization between countries, or, even more broadly, to increasing global connectivity through communications technologies. As (J. E. Tetrault, 2024b) points out in reference to right-wing politics, however, “globalism refers to a political ideology that allegedly puts international institutions ahead of the nation-state” (p. 4). The GCT, then, is a conspiratorial and radicalized interpretation of the trajectory or ends of globalism, understood in this right-wing sense as a sort of anti-nationalism.

The globalist conspiracy theory (GCT) is an umbrella term covering any conspiracy theory that follows the basic logic that an alliance of powerful elites, liberals, left-wingers, and dangerous (sometimes ethnic) Others are plotting to overthrow national governments and replace them with a single, totalitarian, socialistic or communistic regime that aims to govern the whole world. Such an umbrella term is necessary, since the basic logic has, as I show directly below, been applied to many targets and, hence, has gone by many names, such as One World Order, New World Order, Agenda 21, Agenda 2030, and, most recently, the Great Reset. In fact, it can be understood as identical to a longstanding, often anti-Semitic “master conspiracy,” according to which a wide range of organizations and individuals—including the Illuminati, the Masons, the Jesuits, and, especially in the 20th century, communists—are part of an unbroken, centuries-long effort to establish an international one world government (C. J. Stewart, 2002). All these different targets, individuals, and organizations are manifestations of the same way of thinking, and as such I use the term “globalist conspiracy theory” to encompass all iterations.

It is worth noting that these names reference institutions, campaigns, and slogans that do exist, and are not mere inventions of the conspiracy theorists. The New World Order, for

example, is a term used by George H. W. Bush, but which was extrapolated by conspiracy theorists into an all-encompassing deciphering of world history. According to Barkun (2013), “New World Order theory claimed to provide an overarching explanation for contemporary politics by fitting all events into a single scenario: a diabolically clever and unscrupulous secret organization was in the process of seizing control of the world” (p. 66). The New World Order became a popular conspiracy theory on the US far right in the ‘90s in the wake of the Cold War, as a sort of substitute for the Manichean divisions conspiracy theorists had been able to apply to the US and Soviet Union (p. 64). The Oklahoma City bombings, in particular, “more than any other single event,” made the public aware of the New World Order conspiracy theory (p. 80). The story Barkun tells about the ‘90s in the US is one of conspiracy thinking gaining steam, picking up more and more fragments of people, from millennialists, secular radical right militia-types, to UFO believers—arguably, these were early signs of the growing momentum of the kinds of far-right conspiracism that today buttresses Trumpism.

Similarly, Agenda 21 and 2030 are genuine campaigns by the United Nations, not inventions of conspiracy theorists. Agenda 21 was adopted in 1992 by over 178 countries at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil. It lays out a plan for global sustainable development, which it hoped to reach by the 21st-century century, hence “Agenda 21.” Among the many facets of its programme, Agenda 21 sought to reduce global poverty, protect the atmosphere, and combat deforestation (*Agenda 21*, n.d.). Agenda 2030 is essentially an updated version, adopted in 2015 at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York. It advances 17 Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, including goals to “end hunger,” “achieve gender equality,” and “take urgent action to combat climate change” (*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, n.d.). The “Great Reset,” meanwhile, is a slogan used by the World Economic Forum as the theme for their 2021 conference (Christensen & Au, 2023). But all of these various titles—the New/One World

Order in the '90s, or Agenda 21/2030 and the Great Reset in more recent times—are only the latest targets of this master conspiracy.

Indeed, the GCT gains much of its resonance by recycling and dog-whistling pre-WWII anti-Semitic tropes, such as the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, and the idea that wealthy Jews are secretly controlling world leaders (Langer, 2021). In a famous essay on the “paranoid style” in US politics—essentially his term for conspiracy thinking—Richard (Hofstadter, 1964) traces the paranoid style in US politics back to late 18th and 19th century conspiracy theories about the Illuminati, the Masons, and the Jesuits, up through the anti-communism of McCarthyism and the John Birch Society in his own time, conspiracy theories that often carried strong anti-Semitic themes. In a similar vein, in more recent work on conspiracy theories in the US, Michael Rothschild (2021) writes, “what's the secret and all-powerful ‘deep state’ if not a different term for the New World Order that was so feared in the 1990s, which in turn was a new formulation for the fear of the Catholic Church or the Freemasons that drove conspiracy theories in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?” (p. 49). Rothschild (2021) therefore stresses that the basic interpretative schemata of this master conspiracy has its roots in anti-Semitism, but is continuously recycled, albeit with different enemy categories substituted in and out, reflecting new political and historical conjunctures (p. 49).

The globalist conspiracy has particularly deep roots in Alberta’s uniquely right-wing populist political culture. The province’s political ‘code’ had been set in large part during the Social Credit years (1935 to 1971) (Wesley, 2011). The founder of Social Credit theory, Major Douglas (1879-1952) was a notorious anti-Semite, believing that “Jews, Nazis, Communists, socialists, and financiers were all part of one integrated conspiracy to enslave mankind” (Finkel, 1989, p. 82). Thus, William Aberhart, Alberta’s first right-wing populist Premier (1935-1943) and founder of the Alberta Social Credit Party, responded to the creation

of the International Monetary Fund in 1943, condemning it as “an audacious and evil conspiracy by the Money Powers to set up a World Slave State” (Finkel, 1989, p. 83).¹⁰⁴ While Aberhart may have typically avoided explicitly invoking Jewishness as the ethnic character of the “Money Powers,” other prominent Social Crediters did not shy away (Stingel, 2000, p. 70). Under Aberhart’s successor, Ernest Manning (1943-1968), the party drifted further right, turning paranoid, authoritarian, and reactionary (Finkel, 1989, p. 5). Adapting Social Credit’s conspiracist structure of thinking for the new geopolitical realities of the Cold War and the associated ‘Red Scare,’ anti-socialism and anti-communism came to play an ever-greater role in the discourse and thought of the party, as Manning railed against the “socialist doctrines of a supreme State” and the “International Planners” (p. 73, 86).¹⁰⁵ According to Finkel (1989), government policy was “influenced by the famous 'Supreme State' conspiracy which linked communists, socialists, bankers, United Nations supporters, etc.” (p. 109). Social Credit’s opposition to the UN, the “International Planners,” and the “Money Powers” seeking to establish a “World Slave State,” has clear echoes in the present, serving a similar ideological function to contemporary fixations with the One World Order, Agenda 2030, and the Great Reset.

Today, the anti-Semitic legacy of the globalist conspiracy theory is still evident, although Islamophobia has come to take on an increasingly dominant role. Thus, George

¹⁰⁴ With this in mind, it is interesting to note that William Aberhart sought advice from and thought favourably of Father Charles Coughlin, one of the anti-Semitic and quasi-fascist agitators analyzed by Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Guterman (Canadian Press, 1935; Löwenthal & Guterman, 1949, see Appendices I & II).

¹⁰⁵ With Manning’s paranoid worldview in mind, it is easy to see why it would be that the province of Alberta, under his leadership, would become the lone holdout against the expansion of the Canadian welfare state in the post-war era. As Alvin Finkel (1989) put it, “the logic of [the Social Credit] position [. . .] was leading them to regard almost all forms of government interventionism as anathema” (p. 87). For example, the party’s official newspaper in 1944 wrote in the following manner about compulsory insurance programs (i.e., state-run unemployment, old age, and health insurance): “small minded bureaucrats, imbued with the same Satanic lust for power that infects the Nazi hierarchy are attempting to trick us into totalitarianism by back door methods” (p. 88). With her resistance to national pharmacare, Danielle Smith is operating within a long-standing Albertan tradition.

Soros, a wealthy Hungarian-born Jewish liberal philanthropist, is one of the go-to bogeymen of the international far right, and not coincidentally appears numerous times in my data set (Langer, 2021). However, explicit anti-Semitism is relatively scarce, with Yellow Vest's far more regularly referencing Islamophobic ideas, a finding echoed in Tetrault's (2024b) work. Yellow Vests may only have infrequently engaged in anti-Semitism, but I nevertheless believe, again following Tetrault (2024b) and in light of the history of the GCT, that "their conspiratorial statements contribute to anti-Semitism" (p. 17). Islamophobia, however, is far more explicit and frequent, reflecting a broader evolution of the global far right.

According to Kallis (2018), prior to 9/11, Muslims were just one among many groups targeted by the far right, but the movement has since turned Islamophobia into what he calls, "an extreme obsessional prejudice at the heart of its discourses and political programs" (p. 47). Similarly, Worth (2014) observes that "Islam has replaced the International 'Jewry' as the main focal point of religious attack within the far-right" (p. 157). Reflecting this broader transformation, the globalist conspiracy theory, while retaining its anti-Semitic legacy, has increasingly incorporated an "Islamophobic conspiracism" (O'Donnell, 2018). Sometimes, conspiratorial anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are combined, though—for example, in the idea that the 2015 refugee crisis was a deliberate effort by Soros to undermine Christianity in the West through "Islamification" (Langer, 2021, p. 165).

In addition to incorporating anti-Semitism and Islamophobia under its aegis, the GCT is linked to conspiracist forms of climate denial. To begin with, there is a good deal of evidence suggesting an overlap between conspiracy thinking and climate denialism. Lewandowsky et al. (2013), for example, find that, although free-market values and partisanship are stronger predictors of climate denial, predisposition to conspiracy thinking

plays an important role.¹⁰⁶ In another study, Lewandowsky, Oberauer, et al. (2013) find that this correlation applies even for conspiracy theories that have nothing to do with climate science; thus, if an individual believes in an unrelated conspiracy theory—such as the idea that NASA faked the moon landing—they will be more likely to reject climate science. This is not to say, however, that statements like, ‘climate change is not happening’ are always necessarily linked to conspiracy theories.

Uscinski et al. (2017) define conspiracy theories as “unsubstantiated explanations of events or circumstances that accuse powerful malevolent groups of plotting in secret for their own benefit against the common good.” With this definition in mind, the authors contend that climate conspiracies are not the same as climate denial; when faced with the assertion that ‘climate change is not real,’ for example, “we should not assume that that belief is equivalent to believing in a climate change conspiracy” (Conspiracy Thinking section, para. 7). This is because simply asserting climate change is not real may reflect, among other possibilities, mere ignorance, rather than conspiracist thinking. Climate denialism is typically categorized into four types: trend skepticism (global warming does not exist), attribution skepticism (it is not anthropogenic), impact skepticism (it is not cause for concern), and consensus skepticism (scientists do not agree)—and Uscinski would argue that any one of these forms of denial can be expressed in non-conspiracist ways.¹⁰⁷ That is, simply claiming climate change is not real does not necessarily qualify as a conspiracy theory so long as there is no accusation against powerful malevolent groups plotting in secret against the common good; instead, it is simply the expression of a misinformed opinion, devoid of conspiratorial ideation. Claiming climate

¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, despite being conducted well before the pandemic, their study also found the same is true of the relationship between conspiracy thinking and willingness to take vaccines, where individuals who held any number of conspiracy theories were less likely to take vaccines (Lewandowsky, Gignac, et al., 2013).

¹⁰⁷ The first three in this taxonomy were initially established by Rahmstorf (2004). For consensus skepticism, see (Engels et al., 2013; McCright & Dunlap, 2011)

change is a “hoax,” on the other hand, is clearly a conspiracy belief because it implies climate change is a sinister attempt at mass deception.

That said, while the statement by itself—‘climate change is not happening’—is not necessarily a conspiracy belief, it clearly resonates with and has an inherent potential to develop in that direction. For example, if an individual expressing some form of climate denial is presented with further information demonstrating the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change—for example, that over 99% of peer-reviewed climate science papers share the consensus view (Lynas et al., 2021)—they may abandon their earlier position. If they do not, however, their adaptation to this fact could very well move into a conspiracy theoretical direction since an explanation for this scientific consensus would need to be provided. One explanation would be to frame the scientific consensus itself as part of the conspiracy, a move that is possible since conspiracy theories are non-falsifiable: any evidence brought forward to counter the claims of the theory can be enrolled into the conspiracy and come to be seen as further proof (Uscinski & Parent, 2014, p. 41). Just because an individual makes a non-conspiratorial climate denialist statement, then, does not mean they are not also a climate conspiracist. But climate denialism can easily lead to climate conspiracism since one is logically required to develop subsequent theories—if it is either not real, not caused by humans, or not cause for concern—as to why it is claimed that there is scientific consensus, and why liberal and left-wing politicians and movements feel it is an existential threat in need of urgent mitigation. The globalist conspiracy theory offers many answers here.

Like all right-wing populist discourse, the globalist conspiracy operates through a triadic structure—the people, the elite, and the Other—meaning that a key task of this analysis is to identify the ways a certain discourse populates the nodes of this triad. The basic rhetorical move within this triadic structure is to link the elite and the Other as conspiring in some way against the interests of ‘the people’. Combining the concept of master frame and

master conspiracy, the proceeding analysis will seek to uncover the connective tissue between YVC's wide-ranging grievances. I ask: how does the GCT function within far-right ideology to channel climate conspiracism and other far-right grievances into a singular, all-encompassing 'problem-solving schema' or master frame?

Diagnostic Frames on Social Media

Three core topics in the sample—anti-Trudeau, energy and environment, and anti-immigrant and refugee—accounted for 46 percent of all posts (see Table 2). If we include the next most popular topic—the closely-related anti-Liberal Party—then this number rises to just over half of the sample. Thus, my findings elicit two key observations: first, based on a quantitative analysis of YVC's most-engaged post topics, it cannot be said that *energy and environmental* (10%) issues are subordinate in importance to the combined and interrelated topics of *immigration and refugee* and *Islamophobia* (10% combined), or vice versa. In fact, these were the most common topics in the entire data set other than anti-Trudeau and emerged with about the same frequency. The second key observation is that YVC was not limited to one or two core issues but had a diversity of grievances. Excluding one common topic—internal—which is less relevant owing to its unique character, the remaining half of the sample was much more widely spread among a range of topics, including anti-mainstream media, anti-government and politicians, pro-Conservative, anti-UN, censorship and free speech, pro-Trump, pro-gun, as well as a large 'other' category.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ 'Other' was used for topics that did not occur at least 5 times. 'Internal' was used for posts that were self-reflexively commenting on the YVC movement: e.g., posts about movement activity (writing letters to MPs, upcoming rallies), messages of solidarity from non-Canadians (lots of Americans and the occasional French), suggestions for future actions, speculation about Antifa moles within the movement, and roll calls where group members post where they're from (Alberta is over-represented in these).

Table 2 – Volume and percentage of topics in YVC Facebook sample (see Methodology, p. 77-80)

Frame	Number of Posts	Percentage of sample
Anti-Trudeau	558	30%
Energy and Environment	186	10%
Internal	174	9%
Other	155	8%
Anti-Immigrant & Refugee	131	7%
Anti-Liberal Party	95	5%
Anti-MSM	69	4%
Anti-Government & Politicians	61	3%
Pro-Conservative	54	3%
Islamophobia	49	3%
Anti-UN	45	2%
Censorship & Free Speech	38	2%
Welfare Chauvinism	37	2%
Anti-Political Correctness	28	1%
Pro-Trump	28	1%
Pro-Gun	23	1%
Anti-NDP	22	1%
Anti-PPC and Bernier	22	1%
Populism	17	1%
Pro-Gilets Jaunes	16	1%
‘Partly False Information’	15	1%

National Sovereignty	14	1%
Nationalism & Patriotism	14	1%
Omar Khadr	10	1%
Anti-CPC & Scheer	9	0.5%
Pro-PPC	8	0.4%
Anti-Antifa	7	0.4%
Total Posts	1885	100%

We can see why there exists some debate about the true nature of Yellow Vests Canada, given the diversity of topics covered even in this relatively small, curated sample of social media posts. Indeed, nearly 40% of the sample is spread quite evenly across a plethora of topics. Nonetheless, it is clear from this quantitative frame analysis that hostility to Trudeau, energy and environment, and immigration and refugees were the predominant three topics. From a quantitative perspective, then, there is no empirical basis for downplaying the movement's energy and environmental politics as in some way superfluous or tacked on. Yellow Vest Canada Exposed had estimated that 85% of YVC content was unrelated to oil and gas (Mussett, 2019). Within my data set, energy and environment take on an even smaller role, accounting for only 10% of the content. However, to therefore conclude that these were not a major focus of the movement is incorrect; in fact, it was one of the most common topics.

In a second round of coding, I wanted to quantify what was going on inside the most common topic, anti-Trudeau.¹⁰⁹ What were YVC's most common grievances about Trudeau?

¹⁰⁹ It is worth noting that hostility to Justin Trudeau is partially informed by opposition to his father, Pierre Trudeau, whose Prime Ministership (1968-79, 1980-84) was widely discredited in conservative Alberta for his energy policies (see Introduction). In fact, one Yellow Vester posted, "A friend of a friend found this hat from the 1970's in his dad's hat collection. I think it needs to be put in production again!" (December 22, 2k likes). The baseball hat, which was likely not from the '70s but from the early '80s when the NEP was implemented, featured a noose hanging from a tree with the caption, "Come West Trudeau."

Whereas in the first round of coding I only assigned one code for every post, choosing whichever code appeared first, in the second round I did not limit the number of sub-codes a given post could have, searching for a more comprehensive and detailed, textured account of the various topics raised within the group. Within the anti-Trudeau topic, there were 29 unique sub-codes, (see Table 3). The result was that within the 558 anti-Trudeau posts, there were 766 post-code connections, by which I mean instances in which a post was given a sub-code. When a single post had more than three distinct sub-codes, I opted not to code each individually and instead placed those under another sub-code called *litany*.

A second round of assigning sub-codes within the anti-Trudeau frame reveals similar findings to the initial round (see Table 3). The most common sub-code was *general anti-Trudeau sentiment*, accounting for 25% of the sub-themes, and consisting mostly of *ad hominem* attacks, calls for him to resign, hopes that he will not be elected again in 2019, and other similar expressions. Aside from this *general* sub-code, what stands out once again is the relatively even spread of topics, making it difficult to determine which topics are the “primary” focus. Another prevalent sub-code was *SNC-Lavalin*, referring to a major ethics scandal that emerged in February 2019, and which YVC members hoped could weaken or even topple the Trudeau government. The next most popular sub-code was *appeals to military and police*. In this sub-code, YVC members called for the police and military to intervene in bringing down the Trudeau government or by simply removing Trudeau from office. In such posts, Trudeau is thus depicted as a fundamentally illegitimate prime minister who needs to be removed from power. He is “treasonous” (February 21a, 7.3k reactions), and therefore needs to be removed from office by the police and/or military. Other posts in this sub-code echoed the Trumpian MAGA and “lock her/him up” slogans, as with one particularly popular post depicting a baseball hat that read, “Make Canada Great, Make

Trudeau an Inmate” (March 4, 4.3k shares). The *gender and sexuality* sub-code, meanwhile, features posts intended to emasculate Trudeau, often using sexist, homophobic, and transphobic language.

Table 3 – Anti-Trudeau sub-codes

Anti-Trudeau sub-codes	Number of post-code connections	Percentage of post-code connections
General	197	25%
SNC-Lavalin	58	7%
Other	48	6%
Appeals to Military and Police	36	5%
Gender and Sexuality	31	4%
Taxes and fiscal conservatism	31	4%
Terrorism	30	4%
Western alienation	30	4%
Immigration	28	4%
Islam	26	3%
Veterans	21	3%

Globalism	20	3%
Environment	18	2%
Free speech & Censorship	18	2%
Pro-Trump	18	2%
Treason	18	2%
Violence	17	2%
Carbon tax	15	2%
Election	15	2%
Welfare chauvinism	15	2%
Migration Compact	14	2%
Refugees	11	1%
Inoculation	9	1%
Anti-MSM	8	1%
Castro	8	1%
Litany	8	1%
Anti-democratic	6	1%
Bird-dog and convoy	6	1%
Indigenous nations	6	1%
	766	

The combined total of a hypothetical sub-code, Immigration & Refugees—cast in the broadest way possible to include *terrorism, immigration, Islam, migration compact, and refugees*—would include 14% of all posts, and would rank second. And a hypothetical sub-code, Energy and Environment—similarly broadly cast to include *western alienation, environment, and carbon tax*—would include 8% of all posts, and would rank third. Thus, the broad pattern that we found in the initial round of coding—in which the three top codes were anti-Trudeau, Energy and Environment, and anti-Immigrant and Refugee—is repeated at this lower, more granular level of coding, although with the ordering between the latter two reversed. Another similarity between the two rounds of coding is the diversity of topics. Just as these three core topics collectively accounted for 46% of all posts in the sample, they accounted for 47% of the topics within the anti-Trudeau posts. This demonstrates the quasi-fractal nature of the data set, where more or less the same pattern is repeated at every scale, whether larger or smaller. Thus, once again, there is no empirical basis for dismissing or downplaying either environmental or migration politics within the movement; the major finding is that they consistently politicized both as the key categories of grievance against Trudeau, stitching these together with a plethora of less frequently referenced issues.

Examining these data in a quantitative way is necessary, but ultimately insufficient. It is through these quantitative measures that we can begin to see the various grievances of YVC, and to get some sense of their relative weight. It allows us to appreciate that anti-Trudeau, anti-immigrant and refugee, and energy and environment were all important topics, while also seeing that the task of summarizing the grievances of the movement can be daunting, given the relative lack of concentration in topics across half of the sample. Through the technique of secondary coding, we saw how this pattern repeated fractally within the most popular code, anti-Trudeau. However, what remains unclear is exactly how all of these diagnoses are linked together. Quantitative approaches are less suitable for uncovering a

master frame, as they cannot hold onto the slippages between categories, topics, and enemy figures, or grasp the movement's many chains of equivalence. They can reveal the fact of interconnection among many topics but cannot explain why or how they are interconnected.

In Search of the Master Frame

Like that of the American fascist agitators examined by Leo Löwenthal and Norbert Guterman (1949) in their classic study, *Prophets of Deceit*, the discourse of the Yellow Vests often appears as an unending “catalogue of grievances” (p. 11). While no single post could summarize the entire worldview of the Yellow Vests, litanies are a useful place to begin. I have already indicated the fractal nature of Yellow Vests Canada's discourse, in which the same patterns appearing at the highest level of analysis developed in the first round of coding re-appeared at a lower level in the analysis of the anti-Trudeau sub-codes.¹¹⁰ This fractal repetition, I find, continues down to an even lower level in the analysis of individual posts, where within one single post we can see the pattern of the whole. I refer to these posts as litanies. Unlike most posts, which often focus on just one topic, litanies cover a range of issues. As such, they offer a broader view of the Yellow Vests' ideology than most posts allow for. While ‘more emissions, fewer Muslims’ is a useful shorthand because it gets at the core of the movement's politics, litanies provide an overview of how this core is articulated in conjunction with a myriad of other grievances. To give a sense of how these posts work, I begin by providing brief excerpts from many, rather than reproducing full-length posts. The purpose is to give the reader a sense of the dizzying variety of the Vest's political grievances.

In one example, a torrent of disapproval is unleashed against Trudeau, who is critiqued because, among other things:

¹¹⁰ According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a fractal is “a complicated pattern in mathematics built from repeated shapes that become smaller and smaller or larger and larger each time they are repeated, so that *the pattern appears the same at whatever scale (= size) it is seen.*”

- He has purposefully imported illegal immigrants from the middle east (they aren't refugees, save it) . . .
- [He] hires his cabinet based on race and gender rather than qualifications . . .
- [He] says we can't afford veterans benefits when he's galivanting around throwing our tax money (\$650M) for sex education and African abortions? are you friggin kidding bud? They think the cure for AIDS is to rape babies and virgins... It's a lost cause, bro” (February 16, 1.7k shares)

Another particularly popular litany takes a prognostic framing, listing the “first 10 things” this yellow vester would do if they became Prime Minister, of which the first three were: “1) close the border; 2) arrest all ISIS returnees; 3) stop all money going to other countries” (January 30, 7.7k shares). Environmental themes are broached later in the list: “7) get the pipeline built; 8) get rid of the carbon tax.”

Others target the UN, who apparently “want our wealth and sovereignty,” which is the real reason behind the Paris Agreement, the Migration Compact, and the Sustainable Development Goals gathered under the headings of Agenda 21 and 2030 (January 3). Another post in this vein connects Trudeau to the UN by describing Agenda 21 as “Trudeau’s UN Agenda 21,” and lists a series of alleged to-do’s operating under its aegis: “promote climate change scam; support terrorism; begin to destroy energy sector; create dependency on govt; start process of sharia law,” etc (December 12, 1k shares). Even the Facebook group’s description itself takes the form of a litany:

This group is to protest the CARBON TAX, Build That Pipeline and Stand Against the Treason of our country’s politicians who have the audacity to sell out OUR country’s sovereignty over to the Globalist UN and their Tyrannical policies. We are also against the government attempting to buy off the media in an election year and conspire with social media companies to censor our speech. We CANNOT have a free and democratic

society unless WE HAVE FREE SPEECH and the ability to express it as far and wide as we wish. We are Canadian Patriots who refuse to allow this country to walk down the path of Tyranny. God Bless.

One of the most popular posts, a letter from a military veteran to the PM, is filled with a laundry list of complaints. Trudeau is accused of being “pals” with Antifa (i.e., anti-fascists), and of having “attacked free speech,” “ignored our border security,” and “cater[ed] to known and convicted terrorists” (January 4; January 5, 8.8k shares). All of these wrongdoings are apparently being done “in preparation for globalism,” since Trudeau wants to “change Canada into a country aligned with the United Nations, Social Justice Warriors and globalists,” the ultimate aim of which is a “global governing body” that will be “ruled by a dictatorship.” Thus, it is concluded that the Trudeau government is the “most dangerous enemy this country [has] ever face[d].” In a final example, a meme depicts George Soros delivering instructions to Trudeau over the phone: “destroy them with mass immigration, . . . , gender confusion, fixed elections, . . . , impose a carbon tax, . . . destroy Christianity, increase Islam, fund abortions, change the Canadian anthem, more taxes to induce poverty” (September 28; February 10). Soros concludes by saying, “just stick to the plan and I will keep sending the cash. Canadians are clueless!”

Like that of their counterparts in the 1930s and ‘40s, the Yellow Vests’ catalogue of grievances could be “lengthened indefinitely” (Löwenthal & Guterman, 1949, p. 13). Clearly, though, the task of this chapter is not to create an exhaustive list of everything the Yellow Vests called for or opposed. Instead, now that we have encountered a wide range of YVC’s grievances, the task is to uncover the underlying logics that tie them together—to find cohesion in the seemingly unrelated components of their programme. I have come to think of the above litanies as keystone posts because they show, in individual examples, what I will demonstrate

is occurring throughout the whole dataset: the connection of the entire gamut of far-right grievances to the globalist conspiracy theory.

I show that this process of lumping-together through the dynamic articulation of all reactionary politics into a dense, cohesive web reflects at the ideological level what has been occurring at the level of organizational alliance-formation. Linkages were being built between the multi-organizational field of extractive populism, the conservative establishment, and YVC—an uneasy yet effective alliance that marked an important sequence in the process of fossil fascisation. The YVC movement was a meeting place for a newly subsidized extractive populist public and re-branded patriot and nationalist groups. The movement, then, represents a laboratory for the construction of chains of equivalence stitching together the grievances of its diverse participants, adding up to a new, innovative master frame. While YVC did not invent the globalist conspiracy, its uptake was an important part of cohering the movement ideologically, and would influence the cycle going forward. If the increasing cross-pollination between the extractivist action coalition, pre-existing patriot and nationalist movements is a flashpoint in the process of fossil fascisation at the *organizational* level, the cultivation of a master frame connecting these groups reflects the process of fossil fasciation at the *ideological* level.

Climate Denialism, Islamophobia, and the GCT

The corporate grassroots groups connected to trade associations tend not to directly deny the existence of climate change, instead positioning Canadian fossil extractivism as comparatively sustainable and boasting of efforts to reduce emissions (Gunster et al., 2021; T. Wood, 2018, p. 86). Arguably, however, a narrow focus on these top-down communications tells us little about the role of climate denial within the subsidized public. I argue that YVC,

as a bottom-up group, offers a better understanding of the ongoing function and omnipresence of overt and conspiracist climate denial within the type of public who was mobilized to defend fossil capitalist interests. While fossil capital may acknowledge climate change is a concern, its most ardent defenders in the streets do not.

Despite making a variety of non-conspiratorial denialist claims, the YVC movement was not merely climate denialist. That is, their denialist statements are not free-floating, but rather connected to a broader conspiracist worldview. The social media presence of Yellow Vests, too, was filled with climate conspiracies, meaning most group members would have been exposed to them. These conspiracies were not only present but flourished: going unchallenged and spreading beyond the group through Facebook's share feature. Interviews, moreover, are particularly helpful in this regard because we can, by probing for further information, examine whether the same individual who holds climate denialist views also holds climate conspiracist views

In some ways, testing for climate denial entails a simple 'yes/no' question: 'do you trust the science of anthropogenic climate change?' The Yellow Vests' overwhelming response to this question, both in interviews when directly asked and in social media where the subject was regularly opined on, was negative. Sometimes the answers were succinct.

"I don't trust anyone's science," Tracy told me flatly.

"No, I think that the sun is the greatest effect on climate," William responded.

Other times, the answers were more convoluted. Whereas for a group of people who accept the science, we would expect uniformly short answers like, 'yes, of course,' my participants often gave long-winded responses that mixed varieties of denial, conspiracy, and occasionally even "discourses of climate delay" (Lamb et al., 2020)—that is, discourses that accept the science (or at least do so implicitly), but serve to deflect away from solutions, a tactic that has elsewhere been referred to as "the new denialism" (Daub et al., 2021). As we

will see, though, discourses of climate delay were only ever deployed cynically and in combination with overt denial and conspiracy.

In my interview with Fred, for example, he started by declaring that Extinction Rebellion and Greta Thunberg are exaggerating the scale of the problem of climate change. This response at least carries the implication that he agrees there *is* a problem. However, he then proceeded to rhyme off a dizzying variety of denialist statements: the Earth *is* currently warming, but it cannot be proven that it's human-caused, since “the whole solar system is heating up,” a result of solar flare activity; and that, contrary to what climate scientists warned in the past, polar bear populations are thriving. Fred's response is impossible to neatly categorize using the typologies of skepticism that have been developed in the literature, instead combining multiple types at once. A ‘yes/no’ question thus elicits a ‘throw-everything-at-the-wall-and-see-what-sticks’ kind of response. Even if Fred's opposition to climate activists seems to stake a claim to an ‘anti-alarmist’ position that at least implies he believes climate change does pose *some* level of problem, which we would then have to categorize as a discourse of delay, this delay-ism is promptly washed away in a torrent of denialist talking points.

This is similarly reflected at the macro level, where expressions of denialism are delivered with nearly endless variety throughout the Yellow Vest' social media. We learn, for example, that the science has been “debunked,”¹¹¹ that the planet has, in fact, *cooled* 0.7 degrees Celsius in the past century,¹¹² and, in a more attribution-skeptic vein, we learn that global warming is real, but that it is caused from nuclear testing¹¹³ or else is part of a natural cycle.¹¹⁴ On the impact-side of things, we learn from alternative experts that it is not an emergency,¹¹⁵ and that all that is required for mitigation is more trees, the ultimate “carbon removal device”—

¹¹¹ Facebook (374)

¹¹² Facebook (387)

¹¹³ Facebook (629)

¹¹⁴ Facebook (780)

¹¹⁵ Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (136)

this despite the fact Canada’s forests are now a carbon *source*, not sink.¹¹⁶ Carbon pricing, meanwhile, is illegitimate because “carbon dioxide is not pollution. It is a harmless, non-toxic, colourless natural gas that is the essential food for all plant and is exhaled by every human.”¹¹⁷ Animal agriculture, too, is *good* for the environment, as can be seen in a meme contrasting photos of green, bucolic cow pastures—“livestock has a high carbon footprint”—with photos of smog and car-filled highways—“says the guy who lives here.”¹¹⁸

Occasionally, Yellow Vests claimed that belief in global warming can be attributed to a general reduction in intelligence said to be afflicting society. One post rhetorically asks how people could be so “daft” as to believe in climate change, and answers, “Never mind, I’ve read the studies on the average IQ being in a steady decline, I have my answer.”¹¹⁹ Another post lists a number of environmental issues that, over the decades, have been claimed to be increasing, with acid rain and the ozone hole in the ‘80s and ‘90s, and now the temperature; “The only thing that has been decreasing over this last 40-50 years,” one yellow vest writes, “is the average intelligence of the masses.”¹²⁰ Those who accept the scientific consensus on climate change are thus framed as unintelligent dupes.

The question presents itself, though: what exactly are people being duped by? Within the flood of denialist talking points marshalled by Fred, the globalist conspiracy, which he circled back to towards the end of his response, stands out. The “climate change narrative,” Fred opined, “is widely being used to transition us towards a one world governing body.” Of all his other statements, the globalist conspiracy theory is the only one that offers an explanation as to why, if anthropogenic climate change is not real, the elites are claiming it is. Once a foundation of denial is laid, it requires an entire edifice of conspiracism to maintain.

¹¹⁶ Facebook (647)

¹¹⁷ Facebook (1649)

¹¹⁸ Facebook (171); Facebook (728)

¹¹⁹ Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (171)

¹²⁰ Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (168)

Explanations must be provided as to what is *really* behind this climate agenda and all these so-called ‘experts’ and left-leaning politicians claiming we need to act urgently.

The movement from denialism to the GCT evident in my interview with Fred is reflected, once again, at the macro scale, where climate policy is regularly framed not only as a hoax or a cash grab, but as part of a more sinister plot. According to one post, climate change is “baseless fear-mongering to siphon off billions of dollars from taxpayers, expand government power, and advance the left’s agenda.”¹²¹ “I’m not worried about global warming, but I’m terrified of global government,” read another post, a meme from Turning Point USA, one of the leading youth-focussed MAGA groups in the US, whose March 2025 conference would be attended by Alberta Premier Danielle Smith (Pasiuk, 2025).¹²² Big government is not opposed for merely financial reasons, but is seen as part of a broader “agenda,” that the yellow vests opposed. Expanding national government power is also seen as evidence of the GCT, thus providing an analytical link between big government and international conspiracy (Stewart).

Climate denial was also occasionally combined with reactionary gender and sexual politics. “Liberal scientists can prove climate change is real,” says one character in a political cartoon. The other retorts, “They can’t tell the difference between boys and girls!” (January 29, 2.1k shares). The same cartoon re-appears in another post, with Trudeau replaced with the figure of “liberal scientists,” garnering even more engagement (December 21, 3.1k shares). The logic of the joke is something like this: how are we supposed to believe in climate change when it is clear, based on their insistence that gender is not biologically determined, that all these so-called ‘experts’ have an unscientific view of the world? Here we see the populist triad working to produce a fossilized transphobia, where the elite (“liberal scientists” and Trudeau)

¹²¹ Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (168)

¹²² Facebook (336)

are discredited by their perceived alliance with the Other (trans, gender fluid, and nonbinary people), while the righteous people are invoked as cis-gendered *men* and *women* whose common sense gives them unique access to some fundamental truths: that boys are boys, girls are girls, and climate change is nothing but a “hoax.”¹²³ Thus, a chain of equivalence is created between trans, gender fluid, and nonbinary people and climate science, such that all become perceived as enemies.

A fossilized homophobia was also in effect, paired up with the GCT. In my interview with William, I asked him why the Yellow Vests opposed the carbon tax. He responded, “It was deindustrialization. It was part of Agenda 2030.” I asked him to clarify what he meant.

Agenda 2030 is a United Nations plan and, basically, it's to deindustrialize the West. It's . . . the same way that, you know, the environmental movement . . . just like any other movement, has been hijacked to the point where now it's become authoritarian. So, you know, gay rights. When I'm talking about gay rights, that's fine. You have gay rights, have protections for gay people: don't discriminate against gay people. But at the same time, I don't need to see gay flags in my bank for an entire month. Right? And they become such a protected class that any criticism of them . . . You know, you come out and you go downtown, and you have people in assless chaps and children around and stuff.

Astonishingly, a simple question to William about one of the movement’s central demands—repeal of the carbon tax—produced a long homophobic rant about how “authoritarian” the gay rights movement has supposedly become. While he does not say the gay rights movement is part of the globalist agenda, a chain of equivalence is nonetheless made; the carbon tax is part of the environmental movement, which itself is a front for Agenda 2030, and which operates “in the same way” as the gay rights movement. The fight for freedom, then, is implicitly a fight against both. Thus, William described for me how, on an afternoon in June 2019, he attended

¹²³ The word “hoax” was applied ubiquitously to climate.

both a Yellow Vests rally and a Pride counterprotest led by fundamentalist Christian preachers, which he described as “killing two birds with one stone.”

In a similar way that more familiar forms of climate denial are undergirded by conspiracism and linked through chains of equivalence to myriad other social grievances, seemingly respectable and mainstream positions with respect to immigration and refugee policy were frequently driven by the logic of the GCT. The distinction between legal and ‘illegal’ (or ‘unvetted’) immigration is routinely made by yellow vesters as a way to make their politics appear more mainstream and common-sensical. And, in many ways, the pro-legal immigration argument does appear rather harmonious with a liberal multiculturalism: they support immigration, but believe it should be done through legal channels and processes, which is hardly a fringe position. However, the label ‘pro-legal immigration’ is rather slippery. A closer reading shows that yellow vests regularly subject *all* migrants, and especially Muslims, to a discursive process of “illegalization,” casting doubt about the legality and legitimacy of their presence in the country, and associating them with various forms of illegality, especially violent crime and terrorism, and, ultimately, globalist world plots.

The word ‘refugee’ appears in scare quotes, for example, when it is argued that “these ‘refugees’ mostly came from safe places like Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon. They were already in safety.” In other words, refugees to Canada are not *real* refugees, but are here on false pretenses. In a similar vein, it is said that that most refugees to Canada come from “jihadi hotspots” that are filled with ISIS fighters looking to “use the refugee crisis to infiltrate the West.” Or, in response to a post asking, “Do you believe that Muslim Culture and Western Culture are incompatible?,” the top comments, almost unanimously affirmative, say, “Everywhere this plague goes it results in terror. They should be forced out immediately,

before they start the violence;” “Kill them all, let god sort it out”; and “Well, if you’re a pedophile, rapist, and murderer you’d love Islam.”

Such discourse dovetails with paranoia about the establishment of Sharia Law in Canada. One interviewee, for example, expressed concern that “barbaric practices” like female genital mutilation were on the rise in Canada, and he cited Tom Quiggin’s apparent claim that there are more honour killings by forced suicide in Ontario than anywhere else in the world.¹²⁴ But opposition to Sharia Law should not only be understood as opposition to these abhorrent acts.¹²⁵ It is, rather, a way to channel fear and/or hatred of Muslims *in general*, since all Muslims come to be seen as potential advocates of Sharia. For example, one interviewee, concerned about the “flood of immigrants” coming to Canada, was particularly worried about advocates of Sharia law who do not respect Canadian law with respect to women’s and gay rights. When I asked him how to tell whether a Muslim was a Sharia advocate or not, he could not answer. Opposition to Sharia, then, seems to function like an Islamophobic paranoia, casting all Muslims under a pall of suspicion. In this way, anti-Sharia politics more closely resembles a witch hunt than a policy proposal. Behind every Muslim there lurks a potential threat, with no real way to tell whether they accept ‘Canadian values’ or have come here to spread Sharia.

Another interviewee shared similar concerns and believed that Syrian refugees were not properly vetted for belief in Sharia. She added that Muslims were “infiltrating our parliament,” the evidence for which was Liberal MP Iqra Khalid, targeted for her lead role in advancing M-103, the non-binding motion on systemic racism and religious discrimination. Here as with other interviewees, her apparent embrace of “legal” immigration blends into a

¹²⁴ Tom Quiggin is a somewhat prominent figure on the Canadian far right. He is a former military intelligence officer and ‘counter-terrorism expert’ who has long maintained that there is a global Muslim conspiracy to take over Canadian and American politics (Khan, 2014). More recently, he gained media attention for his role in the Freedom Convoy, and has written a novel about the Great Reset conspiracy (Trinh, 2022).

¹²⁵ This is much in the same way that the far right’s opposition to pedophilia should not be understood *only* as opposition to pedophilia (see chapter 6).

more general anti-immigrant and refugee politics; Syrian refugees were brought into Canada, by definition, legally, and yet they are rendered suspect by casting doubts on the screening process. Perhaps most concerning of all, though, is the way in which opposition to Sharia Law here slips into conspiratorial thinking, falling into the perception that the goal of “taking over” is not just the aspiration of some extremists, but is actually at the core of the religion. From this perspective, the election of a Muslim MP in Canada is viewed not as the legitimate democratic expression of Canadians, but as Muslim “infiltration.” Here, the line between anti-liberalism and anti-democracy blurs.

Opposition to migration was not only rooted in paranoid and bigoted views of the supposed incompatibility of Muslims with Canadian culture, but was also grounded in economic arguments. In such discourse, migration was depicted as a zero-sum affair, in which any material support for migrants was seen as a net-loss for Canadians. “Every dollar Trudeau commits to an illegal refugee or supporting the UN migration compact,” argued one post representative of its kind, “must first be taken from you and your family.” Other posts in this vein complain about the cost of flights for Syrian refugees and their exemption from loan repayments, for example; the cost of temporary housing and food allowances for asylum seekers and refugees; or the payments made to compensate residents of Roxham Road—a busy irregular crossing point in Québec—for the increased traffic and noise associated with policing irregular crossings there.

Several anti-immigration posts explicitly invoked the great replacement theory. “The Great Replacement enters its final phase. Immigration to Canada will be boosted 50% per year to keep wages low in rural communities & to ensure that Conservatives can no longer be elected there.”¹²⁶ One post simply asks, “Why is our government allowing mass

¹²⁶ Facebook (489)

immigration?,” inviting a torrent of comments.¹²⁷ One comment read, “MORE VOTES, WASH AWAY THE WHITE RACE, AND U.N. AGENDA!” Another post featured a picture of Trudeau and was captioned, “I will cater to the UN and bring in masses of people to displace the patriots of this country so I can build my Post Nation State without any resistance.” And another in the same format had Trudeau stating, “The very concept of a nation founded by European settlers is offensive to me. Old stock White Canadians are an unpleasant relic, and quite frankly, replaceable. And we will replace them” (December 19, 1.1k shares). Yet another in this vein had Trudeau saying, “I don’t care what you want. I have my own plans for Canada, and they don’t involve Canadians.” The most liked comment on the post was, “So he's a genocidal, racist monster. This man is a cold blooded murderer. We need to eliminate radical leftist ideology from this planet... whatever it takes. Time for real war. #EliminateLeftists.”

In another discursive variation, a chain of equivalence is constructed between Islam, globalism, and Trudeau. One interviewee, for example, believed that the UN was largely controlled by predominately Muslim countries, a claim echoed in a post referring to “the Islamic run U.N.”¹²⁸ Once this chain was constructed, then Liberal support for the UN could be understood as simultaneously a treacherous embrace of Islam. Thus, one post claimed, “no Canadian ever voted for the UN to become our masters, why on earth should we surrender our sovereignty to an unelected organization, predominantly made up of corrupt dictatorships and Muslim despots. The Liberal Party, also known as the globalist UN party, sold us out! Share if you want out of the U.N.” Trudeau is not only connected to this UN-Islam dyad by his support for the UN, but is sometimes directly linked to Islam, to the point where he is almost Islam-ified himself. One post in this vein, for example, superimposes an Islamic

¹²⁷ Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (279)

¹²⁸ Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (447)

crescent onto Trudeau's lapel.¹²⁹ Another post featured Trudeau in jail and says, "You'll have plenty of time to pray to Allah now Justin" (February 9a). In still other posts, Trudeau is referred to as, "OUR MAN FROM ISLAM,"¹³⁰ and it is claimed he "embraces Sharia Law."¹³¹ One of my interviewees believed Trudeau "has direct connections to multiple Muslim Brotherhood ... proxies or organizations," citing, once again, Tom Quiggin's work, who aided the Freedom Convoy.

While often linked to climate denial, Islamophobia, and Trudeau, stand-alone criticisms of and opposition to the UN were also present. One extremely popular post depicted the UN flag flying against a blue sky, with the caption, "I do not recognize this flag as my country's flag, and I do not support the United Nations Compact Agreement. Sharing this FB post shows my 'social media vote' against Canada supporting the UN and their dangerous agendas" (December 20a, 37k shares). Note here that it is not just the migration compact that sharers of this post were opposed to, but the UN's various "dangerous agendas." Thus, a post that has seemingly no relevance for climate politics is best understood as trafficking in a conspiracy theory with anti-climate underpinnings. Many posts expressed opposition to the UN flag, with one adding a caption to a picture, "The UN flag is already flying in our country. I saw this in Hamilton today - I'm fuming!"¹³² Several posts were by parents concerned about school assignments in which their kids were asked to write about the UN's sustainable development goals, with one taking this as a sign "they are infiltrating our schools ... to ease [children] into the idea of Agenda 21."¹³³ Thus refracted through the interpretive schemata of the globalist conspiracy theory, the innocuous turns suspicious: the UN flag, a child's school assignment—all proof that the globalist invasion has already begun, and that the hour is late.

¹²⁹ Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (158); July 11

¹³⁰ Facebook (430)

¹³¹ Facebook (185)

¹³² Facebook (1247); Facebook (472); Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (431); Facebook (963); Facebook (796)

¹³³ Facebook (583)

Opposition to the UN was not grounded in anything like a rational assessment of its role or power in international relations, and was instead framed in urgent, conspiracist, and existential terms. There was a widespread sense, for example, that the UN poses a direct and imminent threat to the physical well-being of the people, including via the threat of military force. One recurring meme showed a picture of UN soldiers with their signature blue helmets and read, “By the time you see this it will be too late.”¹³⁴ Jay Riedel, an organizer of several “carbon copy convoys” and a UWR participant, believed Trudeau was intentionally destroying the economy through the carbon tax and the phase out of the oil and gas industry, while also “flooding” the country with illegal immigrants, all so that UN troops would “collect” Canada legally (Riedel, 2024). The sense that the UN is poised to engage in widespread violence against Canadians was echoed by William, who told me:

In terms of Canada, when we go into chaos soon, soon, a couple of years. When we go into mass chaos and mass starvation like Venezuela, we will have the UN come in the rest of the world will think that the UN is doing good here, but at the same time, the UN will be raping my daughter and raping her [*sic.*] and killing me and doing nothing and taking advantage.

According to William, the UN will first weaken the population through economic sabotage and deindustrialization, including the phase-out of fossil fuels, which will provide a cover for the UN to send personnel into Canada, at which time they will engage in mass violence, including sexual violence, while claiming to be engaged in humanitarianism. The notion that the UN engages in mass sexual violence was repeated in the social media data set.¹³⁵

Throughout the data set, the UN is framed as a fundamentally undemocratic force on the world stage, as the agent of a drive towards communistic totalitarianism who seeks to

¹³⁴ Facebook (450); Facebook (853)

¹³⁵ Facebook (1329); Facebook (585); Facebook (1306); Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (576)

systematically destroy the sovereignty of all nation-states. “The UN wants our wealth & sovereignty,” read one post accompanied by an image of a checklist featuring the Paris Agreement, Agenda 21 and 2030, and the UN Migration Compact.¹³⁶ Another post marking the occasion of Trudeau’s signing of the migration compact declared, “Canada has just lost its sovereignty.”¹³⁷ Flirting with the great replacement theory, one frequently shared article in the data set, authored by future Alberta Premier Danielle Smith, featured the headline, “UN Migration pact part of the plan to extinguish Canadian identity.”¹³⁸ The threat posed by the UN was not only visceral and existential, but urgent. In an inverted sense of the urgency often demanded of climate action—2030 being a key milestone in the Paris Agreement, by which emissions must decline by 43%, as well as the target year for achieving the UN’s sustainable development goals—many posts warned, often with this exact phrasing, that, “The United Nations wants a one-world government in less than twelve years”¹³⁹ In light of this urgent and existential threat assessment, YVC members unsurprisingly celebrated Donald Trump’s undermining and defunding of the UN, unfavourably contrasting this with the Liberal Party’s ongoing support for the UN’s various initiatives.¹⁴⁰

In their study of the speeches of American fascist agitators in the ‘40s, Löwenthal & Guterman (1949) argued that agitation works to psychologically prepare the listener for the necessity of violence, amounting to a verbal “rehearsal.” “By depicting the enemy as vicious and violent and describing it vividly,” they wrote, “the violence of the people becomes understood as ‘retaliatory’”(Löwenthal & Guterman, 1949, p. 128). While no such intention can be inferred in a data set such as this, which is the product of many disparate individuals and not a single aspiring political leader seeking to whip up a subservient mob, in the

¹³⁶ Facebook (1091)

¹³⁷ Facebook (1672)

¹³⁸ Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (109)

¹³⁹ Facebook (1595); Facebook (1696); Facebook (98); Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (19);

¹⁴⁰ Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (106); Facebook (1327); Facebook (1024); Yellow Vests Canada ~ Facebook (232)

dystopian, existential, and urgent depictions of the UN's ambition, not to mention those of the other enemies linked in an equivalential chain, we can arguably see a similar dynamic of rehearsal taking place.

In this section, we have seen that the globalist conspiracy theory functions to explain the ultimate rationale for both climate mitigation efforts and migration policies. Climate and migration policies, along with their chief proponent, Trudeau, are linked through chains of equivalence with various globalist initiatives, especially the UN, which is framed as an existential and urgent threat to the nation and the security of its people. Thus, while seemingly having little to do with one another, YVC's supposedly "legitimate" economic grievances pertaining to oil and gas were discursively articulated alongside and interwoven with Islamophobia and conspiracism. Efforts to separate the two—either as a way of sanitizing the movement as largely based on core economic grievances, or as a way of delegitimizing it as primarily an anti-Muslim hate group with "little to say" about energy (Dawson, 2019a)—do not hold up to empirical scrutiny. My analysis suggests the movement was equally focused on climate and migration, synthesizing their collective action frames regarding both into a master frame of conspiracist anti-globalism.

We have seen above that climate policies were seen by some Yellow Vesters as a front for a globalist plan to deindustrialize the West, and as part of a broader plan to effect a one-world order, and that a parallel logic was at work in the way Muslim migration was framed. If climate-motivated deindustrialization involves eliminating the industry of 'the people,' then Muslim migration means eliminating their culture and demographic prominence. Throughout my interview with Andrew, a 17-year veteran of the oil and gas industry in Alberta who participated in the United We Roll Convoy and went on to play a prominent role in the Freedom Convoy, these connections were explicit. He clearly articulates how the GCT

functioned within the YVC movement as a discursive tool to bridge together the hallmark grievances of the movement.

Andrew viewed his province's economic downturn and Canada's signing of the UN Migration Compact as interlinked:

Once you dive in deeper onto why they were doing it, there was a larger, more grander scheme afoot within the political establishment: the onset of the migrant compact agreement, when they were destroying and stopping our industry here, when we couldn't even go to work, or provide for our families, but yet they were flooding us with—and we say this appropriately—*illegal* immigration rather than vetted immigration, when they were just pumping them in and bringing them in by the hundreds of thousands.

Here, both the downturn in the oil patch and the increase in migrants are framed as intentional and as connected in a mysterious plot by the “political establishment.” While the ultimate goals and motivations of this “scheme” are left vague, the conspiracy clearly entails economic and demographic changes. While others are left wide-eyed and bewildered about historical events like the oil price downturn and the migration crisis, Andrew claims to know the secret truths underneath it all.

Andrew was self-aware that some of his views smack of conspiracy theory, and throughout the interview he acknowledged that “the general population calls us crackpots or tinfoil-hat-wearers,” as he put it. Nonetheless, he doubled down:

You know what, we're running out of conspiracies now because all of it's coming true. And we're seeing it and it's coming to fruition. And unfortunately, Canada is in one hell of a mess, and something needs to be done really quick, or we are going to be destroyed. And I mean destroyed economically, financially, and culturally, we're going to be overtaken.

This is where it starts to become clear that the conspiracy theories in which Andrew is trafficking are hardly innocuous. They deal not with harmless curiosities, but with an epic and pressing struggle for the life of the nation itself.

Through the remainder of the interview, Andrew described white Canadian culture as at-risk. He conjured a masculinist mythic past of European-descended miners, lumberjacks, and soldiers who were the “heroes of Canada,” and who created a national identity that is now endangered. Andrew was unambiguous that the cause of this decline was the “flooding” of the country with immigrants that “don't want to adopt Canadian lifestyle or Canadian values,” and who “manipulate our governments ... to appease what their culture is.” The stakes of current immigration policy, in this view, could not be higher; they are quite literally a matter of cultural life and death. He never said ‘white replacement’ or ‘white genocide,’ but such conspiracy theories—which hold that white people are being “deliberately replaced at an ethnic and cultural level through migration and the growth of minority communities”—were nonetheless clearly at work here (Davey & Ebner, 2019, p. 7). Unlike the “old-school” Canadians, the contemporary immigrant was framed as unassimilable.

Highlighting the stakes of this unassailability, Andrew told me he believed that Islam permitted murder and rape and that, moreover, Canadian laws have been sufficiently bent to accommodate such religious exemptions that Syrian refugees who commit these crimes are unlikely to be convicted: “they get off on the charges because it was their religion.” Here, the cultural destruction of which Andrew warned blurs into something more literal in the threat of physical violence. By trafficking in what Deepa Kumar (2021) considers one of the key ideological frames of post-9/11 Islamophobia—the idea that “Islam is an inherently violent religion” (p. 91-4)—the distinction between cultural and physical destruction is muddled. An increase of Muslims living in Canada, by this logic, will result in both.

At another point, reflecting on the economic downturn in the Alberta oil patch, he said, “then you *delve* into more of the *deeper, darker sinister* things that are going on, you know, these United Nations Agenda 2030, One World Government kind of things” [my emphases]. At another point still, reflecting on the #ShutDownCanada protests of 2020, he said, “then we do some *investigative* journalism on it, and find out it’s a *bigger, more sinister plot behind* these Wet’suwet’en First Nations Hereditary Chiefs” [my emphases]. In other words, both Muslim migration and various obstacles to the growth of the oil and gas industry are framed as part of a profound and evil plan.

Taking the interview as a whole, what becomes clear is that, for Andrew, the world is split into appearance and reality. In the world of appearances, we have increased Muslim migration, economic hardship in the oil patch, Wet’suwet’en-led pipeline protests: in short, the unfolding of historical events. But, for Andrew, there is always something *behind* these appearances, and the driving cause is never what it seems or what we have been told—the civil war and associated refugee crisis in Syria, for example, the inherent volatility of oil prices, or the ongoing struggle for Indigenous sovereignty within a settler colony. There is always something deeper, darker, bigger, and more sinister at work. It is the job of people like him—as part of “the last generation of real, true critical thinkers,” as he put it—to cut through the fog of appearance. It is up to the likes of him to “think outside the box and put two and two together,” to go “down rabbit holes,” to peak behind the curtain of the secret world and re-emerge to inform ‘the people’ about what is “*really*” going on. “I wouldn’t call it like superheroes,” he told me, “but we’re trying to save everybody.” The globalist conspiracy, then, functions as a universal causal explanation, the prime mover behind anything and everything the far right opposes, from Muslims to climate action to, as we will see later, public health measures.

Having now got a sense of the ideological content of the yellow vest movement, we are in a position to explore how this decidedly more radical form of pro-oil politics interacted with the growing extractive populist movement in Alberta.

Uneasiness in the Lead Up to United We Roll

This contradictory approach would continue to be evident throughout December and into the new year. Rally 4 Resources, for example, posted on December 27th, 2018, a long statement against extremism in the movement:

Recently, some individuals & groups, unassociated with us, have been advocating for violence and attaching our resource worker's coalition to their antics. This is not us, and it is not what we stand for ... Our coalition of resource workers will never approve of violence including in messaging on social media and signage at our rallies ... Recently some advocacy groups are proposing more aggressive, and even violent measures to amplify their voices. We disagree, there is never a place for violence ... We work closely with authorities like police and community officials to ensure our activities remain safe and constructive. (2018-12-27)

Thus, despite R4R and CA promoting yellow vest events on multiple occasions throughout December, and despite yellow vests being present at several of their rallies, the “resource coalition” that had started the movement and built its momentum was uneasy about losing control to more militant elements. They no longer had a firm grip on movement messaging, either offline or online. Offline, they lost control of rally signage. Online, whereas most of the resource coalition operated Facebook *pages*, meaning only select individuals could post, YVC operated on Facebook *groups*, meaning anyone could post, offering a more horizontal

communications structure that permitted, as we will see in the next chapter, a much more radical version of extractive populism to develop and flourish.

The resource coalition's anxiety about their new movement allies also expressed itself through efforts to discipline the messaging and symbolism of YVC activists at events. Ahead of a rally in Rocky Mountain House, a town of about 6,000 people west of Red Deer, scheduled for December 29th, 2018, one local who was helping co-organize wrote in the discussion section of the event page, "Do you have your vest for tomorrow??? Canadian tire is well stocked!"—attaching a photo depicting a bin of yellow vests. R4R's Nicole Wapple responded, "Vests aren't necessary. We just need to stand in solidarity for our industry" (Drake, 2018). In other words, even though locals wanted to adopt the vest, viewing it as part and parcel of the movement, R4R, which had become aware of YVC's radicalism and violent language, sought to dissuade participants from adopting the symbol.

Controlling symbols is easier than controlling speech or behaviour, however. Thus, one individual posted to the event discussion page indicating that the "Yellow Vests of Sundre [a nearby town] are coming to support!" (Hekate, 2018). Based on photos and video from this Rocky Mountain House rally, a sizeable fraction of attendees (albeit a minority) wore vests, and many used highlighter yellow cardstock for signs. And while most of the signage at the rally was focussed on energy, YVC-specific themes were nonetheless present, such as, "No UN," "Make Alberta Great Again," and "Build the Pipe, Protect Our Border" (C. Miller, 2018; OpdenDries, 2018). Thus, despite R4R's efforts to discourage it, YVC was an unmistakable presence in Rocky Mountain House on December 29th, 2018.

The extractive populist groups' efforts to discipline the messaging of their supporters would continue and intensify in the new year. Ahead of a January 8th, 2019 rally outside the legislature in Regina, Saskatchewan, at which premier Scott Moe would give a speech while dressing up like an oil and gas worker in coveralls, Battershill brought this disciplinary message

outside Facebook discussion forums and into the public, using the media to relay his point: “Wear your hard hats, wear your work coveralls, but please don’t wear the yellow vests, because that’s not what our movement’s about,” he said (White-Crummey, 2019). The rally was organized by Canada Action and Rally 4 Resources, while being supported by the local Chamber of Commerce, who likewise wished to see a “clear distinction” between the two movements (White-Crummey, 2019). Battershill was concerned the focus on energy would be diluted by the range of grievances behind YVC, stating, “[t]here is no room for racism. There is no room for some of these viewpoints in our movement” (White-Crummey, 2019). The ban on yellow vests worked, with almost no yellow vests in the crowd of over 200 (Zinchuk, 2019a). One individual, however, expressed frustration with being told not to wear his vest, and wore it anyway (Zinchuk, 2019a).

Instead, the most conspicuous signs at the Regina rally were Canada Action’s standard, while the most conspicuous apparel were toques and jackets with the logo of Brandt, a large, privately owned and family-run, Regina-based company specializing in machinery manufacturing, including for the oil and gas industry (*Brandt Group of Companies*, n.d.). Brandt also provided signs with slogans like, “Pipelines = jobs,” “Carbon tax hurts farmers,” and “Our prosperity is built on resources” (Zinchuk, 2019b).

There was also some presence from organized labour. A large banner, for example, had Canada Action’s logo alongside that of the United Steelworkers, Local 5890, which represents 1,100 workers at Evraz, a large business that manufactures steel products, including for the energy industry (Zinchuk, 2019b). And there were two flags representing Local 179 of the United Association, whose members work in plumbing and pipefitting (Zinchuk, 2019b). The president of USW Local 5890 as well as the executive director of the Saskatchewan Building Trades both spoke at the event (Zinchuk, 2019a).

Despite the participation of some elements of organized labour, however, photographic evidence suggests that, without Brandt, the rally would have been much smaller and less impactful. Not only did Brandt bring the what was probably the largest contingent of rally attendees, they also supplied key elements of the rally's props, namely a large sideboom pipelayer, manufactured in Regina, carried on a lowboy trailer and towed by a heavy-duty Kenworth truck manufactured by Edmonton-based Camex, which Brandt had just acquired in November 2018 (Zinchuk, 2019b). This is what is referred to by consultants as the "grass tops" model of corporate advocacy, in which firms directly channel their employees into a political activity, such as a rally (Walker, 2014, p. 36). During his speech, Battershill made what some considered an "oblique reference" to YVC, when he insisted that his movement was "positive, non-partisan, and respectful," adding, "That's why we're focusing on our issues, energy and our energy families, and *we're not talking about other issues*" (Zinchuk, 2019a). Yellow Vests in nearby Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan expressed disappointment with the ban on vests, highlighting YVC's lack of a "head honcho," meaning no individual was in a position to tell others what to do, while appealing for unity with Canada Action, stating, "We all need to work together" (White-Crummey, 2019).

Despite efforts to create distance between the extractive populist and YVC movements, the overlapping nature of the two continued to be clear. A convoy of over 300 vehicles held on January 12th, 2019, in Peace River, Alberta—a town of roughly 6,000, two hours north of Grand Prairie in the province's northwest—also had ties to YVC. The Facebook event page, however, reads, "Due to the controversy of immigration and UN, we would like to focus our rally around resources not immigration. So we have decided to change the name" (Ramsey, 2019). It is unknown what the original name was, but the implication is that it encompassed both signature issues of YVC—resources and immigration—the latter of which, as we have seen, had become increasingly controversial and subject to disciplinary measures from the likes of Battershill,

who had been encouraging the movement to stay focussed on oil and gas. As a result, the organizers changed the event name to Rally 4 Resources—further evidence of the rapid diffusion of the movement’s slogans and repertoires—even though R4R does not appear to have helped organize this convoy (Rally 4 Resources, 2019b). R4R did, however, play a promotional role. Despite the name change and the effort to pivot away from concerns about migration and the UN, YVC was still a presence at this convoy, with a number (albeit a minority) of the trucks having put yellow vests on the grill of their vehicle (Langford, 2019; NorFri, 2019b).¹⁴¹ Politicians from the federal Conservatives, the UCP, and the provincial NDP also spoke at the rally (Henihan, 2019).

As with other convoys, the fossilized petty bourgeoisie played the lead role in the January 12th, 2019, Peace River convoy, which would provide collective action experience that would be built on throughout the cycle. The convoy was organized by four individuals: Frank Light, the owner and manager of Channico Machine and Millwright Services Ltd, a small business specializing in machining, millwrighting, welding, and pipefitting for the oil and gas industry (*About Us*, n.d.; *Channico Machine & Millwright Services Ltd.*, n.d.); Samuel Elkins, the founder and owner of Strategic HSE Systems Inc., a small business that provides consulting services to the forestry, energy and transportation industries (*Samuel Elkins*, 2024; *Strategic HSE Systems Inc.*, n.d.); Mike Ramsey, about whom I was unable to gather occupational information; and Bob Blayone, described as a Peace River “business owner,” and as someone who has “spent decades in the oilpatch” (Froese, 2019). Several of these organizers would collaborate with United We Roll and Vivian Krause just months later, and Bob Blayone, in particular, would go on to be a major player in the separatist and freedom movements as co-founder and first president of the Alberta Prosperity Project, a leading separatist organization (see chapter 7). Like so many who went on to play key roles in these future movements,

¹⁴¹ Rally 4 Resources Peace River, 0:40;

Blayone appears to have got his start in collective action with the overlapping extractive populist and YVC movements.

The Peace River convoy reflected the uneasy cross-pollination between the YVC and extractive populist movements, with YVC activists and sympathizers being a clear presence—the convoy’s lead truck had a yellow vest affixed to it, for example—but nonetheless comprising a minority of attendees. Yellow vests, however, were not the only marker of the movement’s increasing radicalism. For example, one of the trucks contributed by co-organizer Strategic HSE Systems Inc. had a large sign affixed to the top reading, “Out of my way, there’s pipe to lay” (Strategic HSE Systems Inc., 2019). Affixed to the grill of the truck was not a yellow vest, but rather a shirt holding a protest sign, designed to seem as though the truck had just run over a protester, with the company commenting from its own account, “No one was harmed... the eco-terrorist pinned to the grill is recovering nicely tonight in hospital with family and friends.”

Despite R4R and Canada Action denouncing violent rhetoric and calling for the movement to remain “positive” and “respectful,” the movement they had pioneered was now slipping beyond their control. Protest actions were now proceeding without their direct involvement, and a more aggressive politics was asserting itself. Arguably, however, this more aggressive style was a predictable (and perhaps even desired) outcome of the discursive repertoires championed by extractive populism. In their frame analysis of the more established extractive populist groups, for example, Gunster et al. (2021) find that “attacks on opponents” had been the second most common frame, with environmental protesters depicted “not as political opponents,” but as “devious political enemies whose ideas and actions represent an existential threat to Canadian prosperity” (p. 218). Arguably, the effects of this discourse on its intended public can be seen in the increasingly aggressive style of the movement as it became autonomous from its corporate-backed and connected progenitors. The established extractive

populist groups might stop short of issuing violent threats against environmentalists and may even publicly denounce such rhetoric, but the discourse that they spread online logically lead to the conclusion that something *exceptional* must be done to stop the destruction wrought, not by fossil capital, but by environmentalists.

Thus, the pro-oil and gas movement was slipping from the control of the established groups. On the one hand, this posed reputational risks for these groups, who sought to present a non-partisan, positive image. On the other hand, it was coterminous with a dramatic upward scale shift of the convoy and of pro-oil and gas protest more generally. Although it came with risks, their movement was growing exponentially. Yellow Vests Canada was an important part of this growth. Not only were they mobilizing in cities and towns with weekly rallies every Saturday, where they echoed the extractive populist demands around energy and environment, they were also adopting its signature repertoire, the convoy. As a result, many of the copycat convoys between Grande Prairie and UWR were organized, co-organized, or in some way affiliated with YVC activists. Additionally, YVC activists began attending the protests organized by the established groups. As the movement grew, it slipped out of the control of the established groups, and “frame disputes” resulted. The established groups wanted a narrow focus on oil and gas, whereas YVC presented a broader critique of the Liberal government, targeting not only Trudeau’s energy and environment policy, but his policy pertaining to immigration and refugees, Islam, terrorism, the media, the UN, Canadian sovereignty, and “globalism.” Where YVC activists expressed almost unanimous willingness and desire to work with the established groups within the extractive populist movement, the latter presented a contradictory approach, sometimes distancing themselves, denouncing violent rhetoric, or requesting rally-goers not to wear yellow vests, while at other times promoting events with clear connections to YVC.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I drew on extensive social media and interview data to identify the key collective action frames of Yellow Vests Canada, with special attention to identifying a master frame. I found that energy/environment, anti-Trudeau sentiment, and anti-migration politics were the dominant topics, but that these were accompanied by a wide variety of other far-right grievances. In searching for a master frame, I found that the globalist conspiracy theory functions to create chains of equivalence between them all, while the focus was necessarily on migration and climate. Fears of demographic and cultural replacement were stitched together with the threat of deindustrialization by attributing both to globalism, understood as a sinister plot to instate a one world government. Domestic elites were viewed as traitorous agents of this world-wide conspiracy, the stakes of which were framed as urgent and existential. I have suggested that this conspiracy theory cannot be understood as pure discourse or ideology, but as reflective of the material, organizational process of alliance-formation between a burgeoning extractive populist movement and an increasingly robust patriot and nationalist movement. Drawing on social media, news articles, and interviews, I found that this alliance was both uneasy and effective: on the one hand, frame disputes emerged as the mainstream extractivist action coalition navigated the radicalism of YVC; but on the other hand, there was plenty of evidence suggesting shared personnel and resources, such that YVC cannot be understood as entirely separate from the corporate grassroots campaign. In the next chapter, the focus is on this dynamic as it played out—and ultimately came to a head—in the planning and execution of the long-standing ambition of a national upward scale shift of the convoy.

6. United They Roll?: Convoys, the Far Right, and Social Licence for Extractivism

[Fascism is] a movement which the bourgeoisie thought should be a simple "instrument" of reaction in its hands, but which once called up and unleashed is worse than the devil, no longer allowing itself to be dominated, but proceeding on its own account. – Gramsci

Introduction

United We Roll was not the convoy big fossil capital wanted, but it is the one they got, and they welcomed it regardless. We have seen how the idea for a convoy to Ottawa had been an ambition of the movement from its very earliest days, as the foundational goal of Rally 4 Resources who, back in 2016, sought to build on the BC Rally for Jobs and effect a national upward scale shift of the convoy, an ambition that immediately received support from the major trade associations. We then saw the development of an increasingly effective coalition of individuals and organizations—a multi-organizational field constituting an extractivist action coalition—capable of orchestrating well-attended rallies, momentum for which was building dramatically throughout 2018. As momentum built, the time seemed right for the coalition to flex their organizational muscles and finally execute on the original vision of a convoy to Ottawa, just in time for the scheduled debate in the Senate on Bill C-69. Within a month after its announcement, however, the Resource Coalition Convoy would fold, and the Yellow Vest-affiliated United We Roll Convoy would take its place.

In this chapter, I examine why the extractivist action coalition that started the movement—consisting of groups that, in some cases, had sophisticated public relations campaigns and evident ties to trade associations and corporate backers in the industry—ultimately walked back their grandest collective action yet, leaving newcomers to largely go it alone. I also explore what the implications of this case are for the theory of extractive populism's subsidized public strategy and the relationship between fossil capital and the far right. I consider the convoy to Ottawa from multiple angles, drawing on interviews with

organizers associated with both the aborted Resource Coalition Convoy and the YVC/UWR convoy, while triangulating with reference to news articles and social media. I also draw on social media and parliamentary data to explore how the major trade associations related to both the RCC and YVC/UWR convoys. I find that the extractivist action coalition was internally divided on their stance towards the yellow vests, with at least three contradictory positions held by various coalition members before the final decision to cancel: the parallel-but-separation position, which attempted to co-opt and de-radicalize YVC, or otherwise construct a *cordon sanitaire* between the two convoys; the unity position, which advocated for an unconditional merger; and the right-of-way position, which encouraged the RCC to cancel, thus leaving YVC to go it alone. The coalition, I find, was rather hierarchal, with one groups—Canada Action—taking a leadership and decision-making role. I find that the RCC was ultimately cancelled because they had been out-organized by yellow vests and wished to avoid the stigma of publicly associating. The ability of YVC to out-organize the coalition, I suggest, is a critical moment in the radicalizing and autonomizing of the extractive populist movement, a process inseparable from the petty bourgeois class composition of the movement's radical wing; simply put, this class fraction had the resources necessary to execute on their more radical vision in a relatively autonomous fashion. Despite the petty bourgeoisie class composition, the convoy mobilized blue-collar aesthetics to present itself as a working-class expression.

Moving beyond mainstream accounts of the supposed separateness of the two convoys, I find evidence of sympathy and even outright support for the yellow vests within the RCC. And within YVC/UWR, I find evidence of support for the RCC, including good faith efforts to unite. I also find that each group was conscious of the stigma associated with YVC's nativism and sought to navigate around this through tactical distancing and obfuscation. This was also evident in the approach of CAPP, which had promoted the idea of

a convoy to Ottawa from the very first sign of its emergence back in 2016, with the founding of Rally 4 Resources. The date of the convoy to Ottawa—February 19th, 2019—was set to coincide with Senate hearings on the Impact Assessment Act, colloquially dubbed by the fossil fuel industry and supporters as “the no-more-pipelines bill.” CAPP’s president Tim McMillan was set to appear before the Senate that day, advocating for substantial amendments to weaken the bill. Thus, the convoy needs to be seen as part of a broader inside-outside strategy: while CAPP works the halls of power, their subsidized public blares their horns outside. While CAPP promoted the RCC publicly on social media, they took a more oblique approach to YVC/UWR after RCC’s cancellation. Nevertheless, McMillan used the convoy for its initial purpose—generating social license—and praised the UWR convoy in the Senate.

Ultimately, I argue that these findings suggest corporate grassroots campaigns can reach a scale beyond which a degree of corporate control is lost. In contexts characterized by rising far-right politics, control may be partially lost to such groups. Obfuscation, though, is a critical dynamic throughout, with each fraction displaying signs of image-consciousness, navigating the stigma of far-right ideas largely through omission and deception. Even as partial control is lost, I argue, the relatively autonomous far-right offshoot arguably serves the initial purpose of the subsidized public—demonstrating public support for corporate interests—while weakening counterclaims of astroturfing. In a perverse way, the far right grants a veneer of grassroots legitimacy to the subsidized public.

Unity of the Diverse

The United We Roll convoy is what started this research project. I was in Ottawa visiting family and decided to attend the convoy, whose scheduled arrival had been forecast in the news as an “angry Albertan convoy” making its way to the capital to express regional

grievances rooted in its fossil fuel-based economy. I had also read about its association with the far-right YVC movement and had many questions: what could motivate people to drive so far in order to protest *in favour* of one of the country's most powerful industries and lobbies? And how is it that such an effort came to be articulated alongside a litany of far-right grievances? Curious, I went to Parliament Hill with my partner, took photos and videos, listened to speeches, and generally soaked up the (loud) atmosphere. In one way or another, I have been trying to understand this event ever since.

The UWR convoy was the peak of the YVC movement, both in terms of offline and online activity, and in terms of media attention. They left Red Deer on February 14th, 2019 with about 170 trucks, singing "Oh Canada" before departure, as had been custom at pro-oil and gas rallies and convoys (CBC News, 2019). Only about 70 of those trucks would carry on to the first stop in Regina (Dawson, 2019b). They arrived in Ottawa on February 19th, 2019, greeted by a counter-demonstration of approximately 50 Indigenous activists, environmentalists, students, and anti-fascists. Then leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, Andrew Scheer, addressed the crowd, as did leader of the populist radical right People's Party of Canada, Maxime Bernier. United We Roll activists returned to Parliament Hill the following day for a small rally, reported to have "fewer than 100" in attendance, and departed the capital the next day (Deachman, 2019).

The title of this chapter takes its name from the event, of course, but it is also presented in the form of a question, probing the articulation between fossil capital and the far right. On one level, an answer was given in the immediate form of appearance of the convoy, when it was already evident that, to some extent, "united they roll," indeed. One need not look any further than reporting from the event, in which participants declare their desire for "closed borders, open pipelines" (Osman, 2019). A makeshift sign propped up in the flatbed of a pickup truck captured the confluence of issues, "'Trudeau! Your job: protect our borders

like you protect your own home and family. Do your job! No carbon tax. Canada absorbs more CO² than it produces!!! No migration pact. No illegals. No United Nations. Canada Strong!” In other words, the convoy, like the Yellow Vests more broadly (as we saw above), stitched together anti-migration and pro-fossil fuel politics through the master frame of anti-globalism.

But the question here is rather more complex and pertains to how we should *characterize* this unity. One reductionist option would be to collapse all difference such that we see the far right as no more than instruments of big fossil capital. The theoretical framework of this dissertation, however, which is rooted in a tradition of Marxist theories of the far right which stress its relative autonomy from capital, would recommend against this, as would a wide variety of empirical observations reflecting the *uneasiness* of this alliance. But neither does simply stating that the far right had “relative autonomy” from fossil capital provide much satisfaction.

Another approach, all too common in the analyses of liberal scholars, anti-hate groups, centrist politicians, and pro-oil pundits alike, was to emphasize difference to the point where any affiliation between the far right and fossil capital was formally denied. As we will see throughout this chapter, such a view cashes out in efforts to formally distinguish ‘good’ extractive populism (i.e., the original liberal democratic type practiced by the resource coalition), from the ‘bad’ (i.e., the far-right variant practiced by YVC). It could be said that in such analyses, the far right enjoys “absolute autonomy” from fossil capital (Hall, 2019d, p. 64). That is, the articulation between nativism and extractivism—both ideologically and organizationally—is theorized away as an unfortunate random combination, while the causes of this articulation are mystified, and the naïve call to promptly dis-articulate them holds sway in a sort of “reductionism upward” (Hall, 2019b, p. 241), where white supremacy, hate, racism, conspiracism, etc. are purely ideational, without any definite relation to capital or

class. Both types of liberal analysis encountered in this chapter—one that looks at the convoy and mostly sees hate (while explaining away oil) and another one that sees mostly oil (while explaining away hate)—appear willfully ignorant of “the historical forces which have produced the present, and which continue to function as constraints and determinations on discursive articulation” (Hall, 2019b, p. 242). By failing to consider the historical forces that produced the convoy to Ottawa, such interpretations cannot account for the articulation, not only in discourse but in personnel and resources, between the far right and fossil capital.

The methodological task here, though, is to avoid over-correcting by impressionistically concluding that, with respect to the convoy, “united they roll”—no further questions. As Hall, quoting Marx’s *Grundrisse*, states of the base/superstructure relation, “the ‘unity’ which these processes exhibit is not a unity of identity, but ‘unity of the diverse’—the ‘concentration of many determinations’” (Hall, 2019d, p. 161). Following this, we must avoid flattening fossil capital and the far right into a “unity of identity” by engaging in economic reductionism. Yet, if capital and far-right politics reflect a “unity of the diverse,” we need language that can account for both sides of the seemingly paradoxical formulation. Above, we explored the analytic of relative autonomy, which I have proposed operationalizing to help explain the relationship between the far-right element of the protest cycle and fossil capital. The methodological application of such an abstract term begins with close attention to the convoy as a “concentration of many determinations.”

As a starting place, I take YVC to stand in for “the far right,” given that it was widely (and, in my view, *correctly*) viewed as a far-right social movement. And I take the ‘resource coalition’ as a stand in for fossil capital, given its well-established links with the trade associations. This taxonomy is merely a heuristic starting place based on an ‘official’ narrative about the distinction between the two, the “duelling convoys,” which posits a *cordon sanitaire* between a liberal democratic convoy (the RCC) and a far-right convoy

(YVC). While the notion of a *cordon sanitaire* is a laudable political strategy with respect to containing the far right, I will demonstrate that, in this case, it was a fictitious boundary-making claim, which, owing to its incorrect or even deceptive nature, had the opposite effect, leading to contagion not containment. While I start by having YVC stand in as representative of “the far right,” throughout the analysis this identity begins to melt away, and “the far right” emerges not as a single actor or group, but as a set of social relations, a dialectical “unity of the diverse.”

“Duel of the Convoys”? The Coalition and Yellow Vests

We have seen above that, throughout December 2018, the extractivist action coalition had a contradictory relationship with YVC: on the one hand, criticizing some of their language, calling for people to avoid wearing yellow vests and to keep their rhetoric respectful, while on other hand, occasionally promoting YVC-related events online. A similarly contradictory position was taken with respect to the convoy to Ottawa. In a January 7th, 2019, article, for example, Battershill told a reporter:

People are upset. It’s a tough time right now, and people want to get involved. We’re going to do a convoy, other people want to do convoy too; it is what it is. We just need to make sure that the message that’s being sent around supporting the energy sector is not lost in conversations around other issues (Jaremko, 2019).

While Battershill insisted his convoy was in no way connected to YVC, he acknowledged the identical itinerary of the YVC and RCC convoys and still intended to proceed. While repeating his call for the movement to remain “positive, respectful, fact-driven and non-partisan,” he recognized “people want to get involved,” showing he was aware that the movement he had done so much to grow was moving beyond his control, with new actors coming to the fore.

Thus, Canada Action entered into a phase of trying to discipline and coordinate the messaging of the YVC convoy. In another interview, Battershill, referring to the YVC convoy, said,

They've assured us that they're very much focused on energy and resources and pipelines, and I've just expressed to them that ... for me personally I just look at the yellow vests as being a French thing from France. And I think we should stay focused on Canadian symbols. And let's make sure that our signs we bring to these rallies are positive and respectful (Rieger, 2019).

Battershill here makes it clear that he had been in dialogue with YVC activists to try to impose message discipline, having sought and apparently received assurances of YVC's willingness to stay focused on oil and gas. "If they are yellow vest, we will not be doing anything with them and I've made that clear to them," Battershill said, reportedly adding that, if the YVC convoy "decided to shed the moniker, he would be willing to travel together" (Laing, 2019a). In other words, Battershill was taking the position that YVC activists themselves were not the problem *per se*, but that, for the purposes of this convoy, they needed to abandon the elements that made YVC distinct: namely, their symbolism and collective action frames, which encompassed a wide variety of grievances in addition to oil and gas concerns.

Put into the language of social movement theory, Canada Action pursued the "cooptation" of the YVC convoy, defined as an "elite strategy of using apparently cooperative practices to absorb those who seek change" (Holdo, 2019). Movements are co-opted in contexts where "those who seek change alter their positions when working with elites, hoping to gain new strategic advantages through compromising, but those advantages do not come and instead the elites' position prevails" (Holdo, 2019). What Canada Action was demanding of YVC was the pacification of the movement, and the surrender of its autonomy, in exchange for unity.

For a brief period in early January, this became something of an official narrative regarding the impending convoy(s) to Ottawa, described as a “duel of the convoys” (Rieger, 2019a). According to this narrative, there were two entirely distinct convoys: the Resource Coalition Convoy (RCC) being organized by the established extractive populist groups, who, led by Canada Action, were narrowly focused on oil and gas; and on the other hand, the YVC convoy, which combined oil and gas concerns into a larger, more radical critique of the Liberals’ policy agenda, including on migration.

The official narrative, in short, was that these two convoys—one mainstream, and one radical—were entirely distinct: parallel, but separate. This narrative was peddled by both UCP and NDP politicians in Alberta, who aimed to discursively separate the ‘good’ convoy from the ‘bad’ by encouraging the groups to focus their demands on energy and avoid the issues of immigration, the UN, ‘globalism,’ etc. Even Alberta NDP leader, then-Premier Rachel Notley, participated in this discursive project. In January 2019, Notley was asked by a reporter, "What concerns do you have about the growing militancy of the yellow vest movement in Alberta?" She responded:

Well, I'm not necessarily sure that it's growing, one way or the other as people become more and more aware of what some of the underpinnings of that movement are. You know, some of the folks that are working on putting together the convoy, the Canada Action group, I think that they're working very hard to provide a forum for working people [. . .] We need to be reasonable and stick to the issues and not let these kinds of protests be taken over by people with more extreme views. (Hames, 2019)

Thus, Notley sought to mark a clear boundary between the two convoys. On the one hand, there was the YVC convoy, which was not “sticking to the issues” (i.e., oil and gas), and was associated with “extreme views.” On the other hand, there was “the Canada Action group” (aka

the Resource Coalition Convoy), who was providing “a forum for working people.” Notley thereby elides the RCC’s corporate connections, falsely depicting the group as worker-, not capital-oriented. Notley sought to simultaneously criticize the YVC movement and convoy, while legitimizing the RCC. But was the relationship between the two convoys so clear cut?

Contrary to the simplistic, binary image of a mainstream, liberal democratic convoy at risk of being “taken over” by a far-right convoy, my findings paint a more nuanced picture. As we will see, despite differences of opinion internally, the coalition as a whole was hardly unsympathetic towards their more radical doppelganger. Comparing media appearances by Cody Battershill, the public face of the coalition, with interviews I conducted with two coalition members, “Greg” and “Troy,” I find that, before the RCC was eventually cancelled on January 14th, 2019, there were at least three distinct positions within the coalition *vis-à-vis* YVC: the dominant or official ‘parallel-but-separate’ position described above, the ‘unity’ position, and the ‘right-of-way’ position. While the official narrative sought to depict a clear demarcation—a sort of cosmetic *cordon sanitaire*—between the Canada Action-led convoy and the YVC movement, as we will see, reality was far messier. Delving into how coalition partners viewed the YVC movement reveals far more sympathy toward YVC than the official narrative would suppose. Far from a unanimous opposition to YVC, within the coalition there was a significant amount of disagreement with respect to how to relate to YVC. As Greg, reflecting on the period, told me, “the internal conversations got quite heated.”

The Unity Position

Troy had been a part of the growing momentum of the pro-oil and gas movement, having got his start in 2015 during a period of unemployment. Having occupied a range of positions in the industry, from journeyman pipefitter, heavy equipment operator, safety consultant, to laborer, Troy’s periods of un- and underemployment during the downturn were converted into

on and offline advocacy. By attending various rallies over the years, Troy became connected with other like-minded individuals and organizations, including those that would go on to form the Resource Coalition Convoy. Troy described the coalition as “not even [an] organization,” but simply a “group of people,” suggesting the coalition was somewhat loose and informal. As a member of this group, Troy sheds light on the internal dynamics, especially with respect to how the coalition dealt with the YVC convoy.

One of Troy’s key insights was that the YVC convoy took direct inspiration from the activities of the coalition. “They [i.e., YVC/UWR organizers] were at our rallies as well, before [the convoy to Ottawa] happened, that’s why they ... were intrigued obviously,” he told me. Indeed, social media data shows that at least one of the lead YVC/UWR organizers, Haley Wile, had been attending coalition events in 2016 and 2017 (Rally 4 Resources, 2017, 2018d; Wile, 2016, 2018). Thus, elements of the core organizing team behind the YVC/UWR convoy had previously been involved in extractive populist protests. As Troy reveals, YVC/UWR convoy organizers not only had experience with past extractive populist collective action, but were specifically inspired by the coalition’s convoy.

Not only had UWR organizers first become “intrigued” by the pro-oil and gas movement after having attended “our rallies,” but this intrigue manifested in an effort to join the RCC:

Glen Carritt was part of this, obviously, the yellow vest movement, and he had seen what we had done with Grand Prairie and whatnot, and he really wanted to be involved. You know, we had actually talked about a convoy before the Yellow Vests. And that’s how Glen Carritt had come to me and said he wanted to be part of that.

Here, Troy makes it clear that YVC/UWR was not trying to “take over” the RCC, but was actively seeking to join it after having been directly inspired by the coalition’s Grande Prairie convoy. Far from rebuffing Carritt’s efforts to join, Troy offered to bring the proposal forward

to the coalition. In fact, Troy was of the opinion that it would “be awesome” if YVC activists like Carritt would join, and hoped his coalition partners would “get on board with this,” since “it’s going to take all of us to do it.”

Whereas others in the coalition were worried about the optics of being associated with YVC, Troy told me, “I could care less. You know, I’m all about unity, and togetherness, regardless, you’re always gonna have some bad apples.” While tolerant of these hypothetical “bad apples” in the YVC movement, Troy spoke highly of the lead UWR organizers, saying of Glen Carritt that “he’s a wonderful man, I have great respect for him, we’ve chatted many times, he’s a good friend,” and, with respect to another lead UWR organizer, commented that “she is a tremendous advocate and supporter of the oil and gas [*sic.*].” Far from the official narrative of a mainstream convoy under siege by a far-right convoy, the YVC convoy was directly experienced in and inspired by the rallies and convoys that the coalition partners had organized, notably the Grande Prairie convoy. YVC convoy organizers did not attempt to “take over” the RCC, but rather sought to *join* it, a prospect that at least one of the coalition members embraced and advocated for internally.

From Troy’s perspective, the main obstacle to unity between the RCC and YVC was not the YVC movement itself, but its misrepresentation in the media. For Troy, the YVC movement had become the victim of a smear campaign by the mainstream media, who sought to “take control of the narrative” by depicting the movement as “radical” and “fascist.” While he dismissed and trivialized such concerns as only so much “blah, blah, blah,” he nevertheless noted that such misrepresentations had real effects on individuals’ willingness to be associated with YVC. Troy had joined the YVC Facebook group “just to see” the discourse. He acknowledged that some conversations were “really hateful,” but determined that one would have to “really want to go down and get involved” to find such conversations, and that other conversations were “really great.” Once again, YVC’s radicalism is thereby

dismissed as a case of a few bad apples. He expressed understanding for why some would want to stay away from YVC, but ultimately did not place blame for this on the YVC movement or its activists, but on “the narrative and the mainstream media that push that forward.”

In some ways, this line of thinking is not far off from some of Cody Battershill’s comments on YVC. In a January 6th, 2019, article in the *Calgary Herald*, for example, Battershill was quoted as having expressed concern about some “very extreme opinions” within the YVC movement, even as he qualified this by adding that, “It’s not accurate to say those opinions are held by all people who identify as yellow vest” (Laing, 2019a). His proposed solution, as seen above, was to encourage the YVC convoy to remove their vests and thereby shed the stigma of these extreme opinions, regardless of how representative (or not) they may be. “For us, yellow vest is from France — we are Canadian, we are focused on Canadian families. . . . In France, they were rioting and that’s not Canadian, either” (Laing, 2019a). Where Battershill tempered his criticism of YVC by saying not all participants have these extreme opinions, Troy simply took this logic further by framing “hateful” content in online YVC spaces as being but a minor fraction of the movement’s discourse, while ascribing an ulterior motive to anyone who would emphasize such insignificant details. But where Canada Action felt as though the presence of radical views within YVC would make it impossible to unite with them (unless they shed their symbolism and collective action frames), Troy, although he expressed understanding for this position, nonetheless found it “disheartening” that the media’s false narrative would prove so powerful as to prevent unity.

The Labour of Separation

Even though Troy’s unity position was defeated and efforts were made to establish a cosmetic *cordon sanitaire* between the two convoys, there was widespread confusion amongst the

coalition's supporters about what the difference between the two convoys was. That is, even though Troy's unity position was ultimately defeated, coalition partners had to work hard to combat the appearance of unity. From early on in the planning process, confusion between the two convoys posed problems for the established groups, who undertook efforts to coordinate their followers and clarify the divisions. On December 22nd, 2018, for example, R4R posted a picture of a GoFundMe for the "Convoy to Ottawa," organized by yellow vester CJ Clayton, writing, "FYI: This is not our fundraiser. We will not be fundraising until after the new year. We have no affiliation with this go fund me account. Many people are sending us this link and asking..." (2018-12-22). R4R then fielded a number of questions in the comments section. One individual sought to defend the YVC convoy, writing, "it is not a scam," prompting R4R to respond, "We're not suggesting it is a scam. It's just not our fundraiser. We're starting in the new year." "Not sure why groups can't band together," complained another individual. "We don't know the organizer," replied R4R. (2018-12-22). In short, the RCC had announced the convoy to Ottawa, but had not yet started fundraising, arguably leaving an organizational vacuum into which the YVC movement stepped, resulting in confusion about who the 'real' convoy organizers were, and what the relationship was between them.

Similar efforts at clarification were undertaken by others who had played a role in the first "convoy" to Ottawa, the two-vehicle LNG or Bust Convoy from 2016. AFD Petroleum, for example, the Edmonton-based, medium-sized CAOEC member company that had helped Oil Respect greet the LNG or Bust Convoy in Edmonton back in 2016, released a statement on January 6th, 2019 in support of Canada Action's RCC, writing, "AFD has been a long time supporter of Canada Action, and to clear up any unintended or accidental confusion we are confirming that we are joining the Official Resource Convoy Coalition to Ottawa with Canada Action" (AFD Petroleum Ltd, 2019). Alan Yu similarly tried to ensure that supporters of FSJ

for LNG knew to support the RCC and not the YVC convoy, on the grounds the latter was promoting “other things unrelated to oil and gas”; in contrast, Yu stated, the RCC was focused on “purely oil and gas concerns,” which ensured “we will have the support of law makers” (Alan Yu, January 2, 2019). Yu’s comment here suggests that politicians may have had a behind-the-scenes role in directing the messaging of the movement away from YVC-related grievances.

This is notable in light of the fact that CPC leader Andrew Scheer had publicly criticized Trudeau’s signing of the UN migration compact, which even some conservative pundits viewed as “embarrassing” evidence of Scheer’s “pander[ing] to the populist-nationalist right” in an effort to avoid being outflanked by the PPC (Coyne, 2018). Scheer’s politicization of the migration compact, it was argued, was an “embrace of far-right fear-mongering” designed to appeal to the “conspiracy-minded,” for whom the compact was a flashpoint and seen as a “fiendish plot to dictate immigration policies to national governments, if not to eliminate them altogether” (Coyne, 2018). In her capacity as a media commentator, future Premier Danielle Smith endorsed YVC and penned an article about the migration compact popular in the movement’s online communities, in which she dog whistled the great replacement theory by arguing that the migration compact was “part of the plot to extinguish Canadian identity” (D. Smith, 2018). Despite openly engaging in and promoting these ideas, however, conservative politicians seemingly wanted to avoid combining these conspiracist migration politics with the pro-oil and gas movement, a desire further evidenced in the various speeches delivered by right-wing politicians at UWR (detailed below), which studiously avoided the subject of migration altogether. The seeming desire of conservative politicians to stoke and dog whistle anti-migrant xenophobia through a conspiracist interpretation of the migrant compact, while simultaneously keeping it distinct from messaging around oil and gas, was further reflected in the divisions (and confusions) between the two convoys to Ottawa. Alan Yu, as we saw above,

believed staying focussed on oil and gas was critical to ensuring the convoy had support from politicians, and therefore sought to marshal his following away from the YVC convoy. This is how the official parallel-but-separate position was maintained.

The stakes of the confusion between the two convoys were relatively high, given that each convoy had its own GoFundMe page, and any mix up could result in, say, a supporter of one of the resource coalition groups giving money to YVC, or vice versa. This was made manifest when, in early January, former conservative Premier of Saskatchewan, Brad Wall, tweeted his support for the convoy, but linked to the fundraiser for the YVC convoy, not the RCC convoy, a mistake he had to publicly reverse (Jaremko, 2019). After this correction was reported on by JWN (an oil and gas news source), with Wall clarifying his support for the RCC and not YVC, R4R posted a long excerpt of the article, adding, “Thanks to JWN and Brad Wall for clarifying” (Rally 4 Resources, 2019a). The JWN article highlighted R4R and Canada Action’s long-term collaboration on oil and gas advocacy, noting that “their work gained significant momentum in 2018, together organizing more than 30 rallies across the country,” and contrasted this with the “recent phenomenon” of yellow vests, which it associated with violence and radicalism.

The parallel-but-separate position, then, had to strike a difficult balance. On the one hand, it had to undertake various efforts—the labour of separation—to assert its independence from its more radical cousin, manifested in distinct messaging, symbols, fundraising, and organization. On the other hand, it had to navigate the fact that the YVC convoy was on track to proceed and refused to be co-opted. Even coalition members pointed out the borderline absurdity of the position. As Troy put it, “it was going to be a mixed message, obviously. What, is there one convoy or two?” Greg, another coalition member with a different perspective than either Troy or Canada Action, put it this way: “If we did the convoy with the yellow vests, would it destroy us? Yes. So we wouldn't do a same convoy.

But how does two convoys going to Ottawa make sense at the time?” As we will see, Greg viewed unity as untenable from a public relations perspective but also saw the official parallel-but-separate position as folly.

The Right-of-Way Position

The tight boundaries Battershill sought to construct between YVC and the RCC were far blurrier in practice. This was an aspirational, optics-based dissociation cultivated by Canada Action (as the lead player in the coalition), and by a wide range of other voices in media and politics. Other coalition partners, however, took a more sympathetic view of YVC. Greg, who “drove truck” for one of the ‘big four’ for five years before starting his own marketing company, got his start in the movement with Canada Action, before branching out on his own, having grown frustrated by Canada Action’s overly timid approach and preferring to start something “spicier.” He was the head of one of the organizations in the resource coalition.

Far more than Troy, Greg emphasized that the question of how to relate to the YVC convoy was the source of considerable tension within the coalition. I asked him to elaborate on these internal debates. “That was a very difficult time for us,” he responded. In short, Greg’s position was that the RCC should bow out and give the YVC convoy the right-of-way. From his perspective, there were “similar beliefs” between the two convoys anyway, and he did not want the coalition to be perceived as insinuating they are “better than” YVC. Whereas other coalition members were, as he described, “motivated and upset” by the rise of the YVC convoy, not wanting YVC “to take credit for the convoy that we were planning for so long,” Greg was not overly attached to the idea of doing a convoy, saying he could “take or leave” it. Whereas the dominant view of the coalition was, as he put it, “Why should we let the

yellow vests hijack our convoy when we had it planned first?”, Greg adopted a far more passive position.

It is not as if he was unaware of YVC’s radicalism, however, and nor did he think it would be wise to unite the two “duelling” convoys. Indeed, Greg made it clear that he viewed unity between RCC and YVC as an impossibility:

One of the things that pissed us off about the yellow vests was that our movement was very, very non-partisan and anybody, and I mean anybody ... was welcome on our stage. ... And one of the reasons that we didn't like the yellow vests is the yellow vests brought us to the point where our credibility with the other parties [trails off] ... So the yellow vests with their anti-NDP and anti-Notley to the point where it was just, you know, kind of vile, hurt us. So joining them in any way would hurt us, but at the same time, we look like bullies by doing a rival convoy.

Greg told me that he felt “it takes courage, especially if you’re NDP, to come on our stage,” and recounted the coalition maintaining its non-partisan stance by being “vicious to people that went after the NDP,” adding that, “we protected anyone on our stage.” Greg also said that his own followers on social media would regularly complain about any pro-NDP post he might make. Thus, while the coalition strived to be non-partisan and would welcome anyone who champions oil and gas, their base was generally anti-NDP. The development of new autonomous organizing efforts therefore brought the issue of partisanship to a head. As Greg makes clear, YVC was hurting the coalition’s credibility with the governing NDP, making it impossible for him to imagine uniting the RCC and YVC. But unlike the dominant view in his coalition, Greg was not of the opinion that the RCC should proceed, and expressed concern that, in continuing, “we look like bullies.” If the other coalition partners viewed it as a hijacking and sought to fight the hijacker, then, Greg’s preferred strategy was a passive one: back out and give YVC the right-of-way.

It is not as though Greg shared all of YVC's political views, however. Throughout the interview, he articulated a number of differences between his views (and that of the coalition's) and YVC. One set of differences pertained to democracy and violence. As he told me, "We don't have signs at our rallies that say 'Hang Trudeau', we don't encourage violence to any of the political leaders, even if we strongly disagree with them. That's the difference ... We weren't as anti-establishment as they were." And, speaking personally, he said, unlike YVC, "I don't think Justin Trudeau should be charged with treason. I don't believe that. He's duly elected." In other words, Greg positioned himself and the RCC as democratic and opposed to violence, unlike YVC. Elsewhere, he characterized the coalition as "more socially liberal than they were," including being "pro-gay." Moreover, the coalition, in his view, did not have immigration as "one of our issues," and they "never felt the need to talk about the UN, other than maybe when they meddle with oil sands." In sum, Greg viewed his own politics and that of the coalition to be more liberal and democratic than YVC. His right-of-way position did not mean he shared YVC's politics *tout court*, mostly just the pro-oil and gas elements of it. These "similar beliefs," however, were enough for Greg to feel comfortable ceding ground to the YVC convoy.

Despite his wish to cancel, Greg's coalition partners were adamant that it would go ahead. Greg thought it was a mistake, even "stupid and counterproductive," but, as he put it to me, "I'm also a team player." Greg would continue to chafe against the dominant player, Canada Action, and its mode of relating to YVC. There was some history behind this, as Greg had got his start in pro-oil and gas advocacy with Canada Action before branching out on this own, telling me, "I was a little dissatisfied with Canada Action for a little bit, because they got a bit boring and I wanted to be little bit more juicy and spicy." In early 2019, this "spicier" approach to extractive populism was manifesting not only in differences in terms of

the style or content of social media posts, but was taking on an organizational form, with implications for how the coalition should relate to radical elements within the movement.

On January 6th, 2019, Cody Battershill appeared on an episode of “The Weekly,” a *CBC* television news show, and criticized YVC. Host Wendy Mesley asked Battershill about the involvement of YVC in various pro-oil and gas rallies and in the upcoming convoy to Ottawa, saying, “They’re joining the convoy. You’ve been very clear that that’s not part of your group. Why do you want to make that distinction?” After initially recycling his polished message about remaining “positive, inclusive, fact-driven, respectful, and non-partisan,” and not wanting to “get distracted or to talk about other issues,” Mesley interrupted him, “Like the migrant issue? Is that the one that bothers you?” Battershill continued:

You know, there’s been many things said out of people by people wearing yellow vests that I think are are, uh, horrible, and, umm, you know [*sic.*], there’s no room for racism, there’s no room for some of the slogans and some of the signs that we’ve seen in a country, in our country and in this conversation, so we need to focus on the women and men that work in this sector that need to put food on the table and stay focussed on this issue. Canadian energy is a good news story for our national economy and for the global environment, and we gotta stay focused on staying positive, respectful, and non-partisan.

As can be seen by the transcript, Battershill struggled somewhat with the question about migration, stumbling over his words in an otherwise smooth interview. Although the program probed the convoy’s ties to YVC, Battershill was given a platform to present his preferred image of the convoy as entirely distinct from YVC and rooted in liberal democratic values of inclusiveness. No other interviewee was brought on to challenge Battershill’s messaging, and his representation of his organization as focused “on the women and men that work in this sector” went unquestioned. Thus, Battershill was able to successfully use this media

appearance to distance Canada Action from both fossil capital and the far right, when in fact his movement had become a meeting place for the two. His efforts to distance the RCC from YVC, however, faced pushback from his own coalition partners.

Greg's right-of-way position had a communications angle, too, and was connected to his desire to avoid having the coalition be seen as arrogant or as "bullies." Repeatedly in the interview with Greg, it was clear that he felt as though the coalition was a more sophisticated group than YVC, that he perceived a power imbalance both within the coalition and between the coalition and YVC, and that he felt a certain sympathy for the latter. Even though Greg viewed YVC's politics as more radical than his own, his position was that the coalition should have "let [YVC] have their convoy and stay out of it." On these grounds, he critiqued Battershill for having "attacked [the YVC] convoy," adding that, in doing so, "we became the elitists." I found it interesting that he used the word "elitist" to characterize such behaviour, and asked him, given that Canada Action receives corporate money (to be discussed below), whether he considered them to be "elites." He adamantly rejected the idea, however:

No, no, Canada Action needs money ... I don't know where they get their money ...

But no, no, the amount of money that the other side has received compared to what the pro-oil advocacies get is insane ... We didn't get no \$1.3 billion for our groups. I mean, it's insane. No, they're not elites. They're just trying to function. And they need money to function, that's all. So they're not elite at all.

In this response, Greg makes it clear that he views pro-oil and gas advocacy as the true underdog, citing the \$1.3 billion figure arrived at by Jason Kenney's "Anti-Alberta Inquiry" into foreign funding of the environmental movement, which built on Vivian Krause's research. In other words, from Greg's perspective, even though the coalition was not representative of "elite" interests, it was "elitist" to criticize the more autonomous pro-oil and gas movements. Thus, we arrive at the remarkable position that, from Greg's perspective,

publicly criticizing a far-right movement is elitist. A distorted anti-elitism is thereby channeled into tacit support for a far-right social movement; not only should YVC be given the right-of-way, but they should not be critiqued.

“They Got the Jump on Us”: Collapse of the Resource Coalition Convoy

Even though it was the preference of the dominant coalition partner, Canada Action, the separate-but-parallel position was ultimately defeated, and on January 14th, 2019, the RCC announced its cancellation. Publicly, the coalition was tight-lipped about the reasons for cancellation, and released only the following, sparse statement:

We would like to recognize the overwhelming support and courage that so many Canadians from coast to coast have expressed in their desire to participate in the Resource Coalition Convoy to Ottawa. This event was planned in response to the overwhelming momentum that's been building from our resource rallies. Unfortunately, we have come to the decision that it is no longer viable to proceed with our planned convoy. We cannot confidently mitigate the unexpected challenges associated with this event. As such, we will be issuing full refunds to all of our donors. We greatly appreciate your support (Boser, 2019).

The statement offered very little information, citing only “unexpected challenges.” Coalition spokespeople were equally guarded in comments to the press. “There were a few different challenges that we didn’t think were in our control,” said R4R’s Nicole Wapple, adding, “It’s disappointing. But last year was a huge year for us and the whole coalition in terms of advancement and advocacy” (Mertz, 2019). Battershill, for his part, was similarly taciturn: “Unfortunately, just listening to feedback from our supporters and volunteers and looking at all the details, there’s a number of unexpected challenges that we’re just not able to mitigate.” The message box for the cancellation was clearly very narrow, with Battershill repeating the

official line re. “unexpected challenges,” but here he provides a further piece of information: that it may have had something to do with feedback from supporters and volunteers, although the nature of this feedback is left obscure.

In other press comments, Battershill was even more short, with the *Calgary Herald* reporting that, “Organizer Cody Battershill said he couldn't discuss the reasons for the cancellation” (‘One of Two Planned Protest Convoys to Ottawa Hits the Brakes’, 2019). A reporter with an industry publication, *Pipeline News*, was able to get a little more information by speaking with the office manager for Canada Action, James Robson, who stated that, “There was a lot of confusion in the public. We didn't feel we could mitigate that confusion” (Zinchuk, 2019c). And yet, as seen above, confusion between the two convoys had been a factor throughout December and early January, and, as Greg and Troy both acknowledged, was a predictable outcome of the parallel-but-separate strategy. Why was this confusion now, in mid-January, suddenly a decisive factor?

The same *Pipeline News* reporter also noted that logistical challenges could have been part of the reason for the cancelation, writing:

The practicality of a convoy to Ottawa has been an issue from the get-go. Pipeline News has spoken to oilfield service companies that would like to attend, but found sending a big rig to Ottawa, in February, typically the busiest time of the year, had its problems. It's a ten day round trip from Alberta (eight from Saskatchewan). There are issues with fuel costs, commercial vehicle licenses, permits, hours of service, accommodations, and the possibility of a blizzard coming in off the Great Lakes that could stall the convoy. As a result, one company in Estevan determined it would be much simpler to take a pickup truck, instead, but that would take away some of the desired impact. Robson acknowledged this, saying they were working with the Ontario

department of transportation, and that pickups were more practical, but they don't have to worry about it now (Zinchuk, 2019c).

This bit of reporting certainly provides insight into the logistical challenges associated with a cross-country convoy, challenges that James Robson of Canada Action clearly acknowledged existed. However, all of these obstacles were entirely predictable and, as seen above, R4R acknowledged back in December that spring breakup would have been preferable in terms of ensuring participation. What remains unexplained is why these foreseeable difficulties were ultimately not overcome by the well-resourced RCC, while the grassroots YVC convoy seemingly trucked ahead.

Some speculated that the RCC was cancelled because of the YVC convoy and fears of associating with the far right. The notion that the RCC was cancelled “because of YVC” has a ring of truth to it, but it arguably conceals more than it reveals. Let us consider some counterfactuals: if YVC never existed, would the RCC have gone ahead? I see no material reason why it would not have, and this is what the “hijacking” narrative gets right about RCC’s cancellation: in this narrow sense, it seems true that YVC was the “reason” for the RCC’s cancellation. However, this narrative elides a much more profound analysis of the situation, which is that the YVC convoy was both created by the RCC, and in turn overtook it. Another counterfactual: without the RCC, would the YVC convoy have ever existed? Here, I am convinced the answer is *most likely no, there would never have been a YVC convoy without the RCC*. More broadly, I am convinced that, without the efforts of the coalition to create what they described above as “the overwhelming momentum that's been building from our resource rallies,” YVC, while it may still have existed in some form, would almost certainly have been a weaker movement. It may be true, then, that YVC destroyed the RCC, but to focus on the moment of destruction is to miss the more powerful moment of creation. It is like Dr. Frankenstein’s monster. It is true that the monster killed Dr.

Frankenstein, but what makes the story powerful is the fact that Dr. Frankenstein *created* the monster.

Despite his efforts to distance RCC from the YVC convoy, Battershill's early January media appearances arguably gave the convoy to Ottawa more attention and legitimacy than otherwise would have been possible. It created a rivalry—"duel of the convoys"—that the media could report on, drumming up intrigue. Canada Action is the most sophisticated player in the coalition, and Greg told me they likely hire their own PR services, as opposed to the other groups, who "did our own PR." Battershill had a media savvy that the other groups, and certainly the YVC convoy lacked. Whether it was the intention or not, Battershill's media appearances had the effect of promoting a convoy that YVC was a part of. That is, Battershill's media appearances seemed to have two intentions: first and foremost, to promote the upcoming convoy; and second, to distance the RCC from YVC. One (perhaps unlikely) possibility is that Battershill never firmly held the parallel-but-separate strategy, and knew all along they would eventually have to fold the RCC, but nonetheless pursued the parallel-but-separate strategy as a way of promoting the convoy to Ottawa. As head of the lead organization in the RCC, Battershill was best positioned to do this promotional work. YVC activists were not as sophisticated and most likely lacked the connections to make this type of appearance on national TV. It is possible (though perhaps unlikely) that Battershill pushed the parallel-but-separate position disingenuously. Either way, Battershill's media appearances had the effect of promoting and creating buzz—an essential component of corporate grassroots public relations strategies (Walker, 2014, p. 40)—for the upcoming convoy to Ottawa, regardless of who was in the driver's seat. In other words, one of the effects of the parallel-but-separate strategy was that the YVC Convoy received residual promotional subsidy from Canada Actions' publicity efforts in early January.

Bodyless Heads, Truck-less Drivers

Greg repeatedly described the YVC convoy as having been further along in the planning efforts than RCC, indicating this had something to do with the reason RCC was cancelled. “We shouldn't have been involved,” he said. “[YVC] got the jump on it. They're the ones that did it first. That's fine. Let them have their moment, we should have just backed off. And that's what ended up happening anyway.” Thus, from Greg’s point of view, the parallel-but-separate position was untenable from the beginning, and the inevitable folly of this position was ultimately proven in the course of time, with his right-of-way position vindicated. In describing the moment of RCC’s cancelation, Greg revealed two important pieces of information: first, that the YVC convoy was at a more advanced stage of logistical organization; and second, that Canada Action was, at times, acting on behalf of the coalition unilaterally. In Greg’s mind, the YVC convoy was “already going,” whereas the coalition was still “trying to put it together.” While it appears as though the coalition was coming around to Greg’s view that “one of [the convoys] had to go,” and that it made sense for the less developed convoy to drop out, this decision was arrived at unilaterally by Canada Action’s Battershill who “doesn’t even tell us about it” and “cancelled it on his own.” This gives us further insight into the power dynamics within the coalition, with Greg considering Canada Action to be the dominant player, in part owing to their greater size and funding, which, he admitted, caused “a little tension.”

The idea that the RCC may have ultimately been cancelled in part because they were less organized than the YVC convoy may seem hard to believe. Greg, however, repeated this claim, stating, “They were just able to organize a little bit quicker than us ... I don't want to say they stole our idea. ...we had the idea first, but they executed it first, if that makes any sense.” How is it possible that a coalition of the most experienced pro-oil and gas protest organizers could be out-organized by a movement that only emerged roughly a month prior,

and whose activists were mostly novices? Greg speculated that the coalition was “possibly too careful” in its approach, and detailed a number of concerns related to insurance, logistics, and finance that the coalition was attempting to ensure were done “properly,” whereas the yellow vests, he suggests, “got nothing to lose.” He also highlighted that YVC began fundraising before RCC, and so got a leg up there.

Greg’s sense that YVC had out-organized RCC is corroborated by “Todd,” one of the organizers of the UWR convoy with whom I spoke. Todd told me he had never been part of a protest movement before YVC, and was motivated to join because he was opposed to Canada’s purchasing of foreign oil, as well as Trudeau’s claim “that we have a climate emergency in Canada and in the world,” which he believed was unwarranted because “we have the highest environmental standards in in the world and [in] Canada with our oil and gas industry.” Todd also opposed Bill C-48, Bill C-69, and the UN migration compact, and opposed Trudeau on the grounds that he “continues to try and stifle the oil and gas industry.”

Reflecting on the time period, Todd told me he believed “Trudeau wasn’t paying any attention to the convoys we were doing out in Alberta,” and described feeling as though “we’re not gonna make any difference unless we take these trucks to Ottawa and park them on Parliament Hill, so that’s when we started organizing the convoy to Ottawa.” While, in fact, the upward scale shift of the convoy was timed by the RCC to coincide with Senate debates on Bill C-69, Todd envisioned the upward scale shift in more general terms as a way of ensuring Ottawa could no longer continue ignoring the wave of convoys that had been building across Alberta.

Todd corroborated and expanded on Greg’s sense that the RCC was an organizational laggard. I asked Todd his opinion on why the RCC was ultimately cancelled, and he told me:

Because they didn’t have any trucks. Everyone was getting behind United We Roll. I had all the permits, I had all the organization, I did all that organizing with the police,

with the DoT [Department of Transportation], with the scales, etc. so they decided to pull out because they didn't wanna work together. I asked them to work together with us. They didn't wanna work with anyone else, they just wanted to do it on their own. So it was their doing for not wanting to co-operate with other people.

Confirming Greg's sense that YVC had "got the jump on us," Todd posits that RCC had failed to address the practicalities of organizing the convoy in a timely fashion, and that, because the YVC convoy had begun coordinating logistics earlier and more efficiently, their convoy was able to garner more support—"everyone was getting behind UWR," as he put it. From Todd's point of view, once all of this organizational work had been accomplished by the YVC convoy, it left RCC with only two real options: one, the unity position (his and Troy's preference), or two, the right-of-way position. Ultimately, the latter was chosen, demonstrating, in Todd's mind, a lack of willingness on the part of the RCC to co-operate. Todd acknowledged the RCC's lack of co-cooperativeness may have been because of the stigma associated with YVC as a far-right movement, but he himself, like Troy, rejected that label, blaming it on the media: "There were some people in the movement that could have been far right, but that's the way it goes with any movement ... the media twists it every time to make it look like they're far-right extremists." From Todd's perspective, there was no good reason why the two convoys should not have co-operated. The stigma of YVC was the result of the media's specious claims and so should not have been heeded. And the RCC's lack of organization should not have been a problem, either, since Todd offered to unite with them in good faith. Ultimately, then, from Todd's point of view, the RCC collapsed due to two main factors: first, a lack of organization; and second, a refusal to co-operate with YVC based on the fallacious grounds that the latter was "far right."

I wanted to probe the relationship between the YVC convoy and the RCC further, and so asked Todd if he stayed in touch with any of the coalition members following the RCC's

cancellation. He told me “I still talk to [Troy],” but added, “The thing with Canada Action is they’re paid by every political party that has come into existence ... They’re not a grassroots organization.” Here, Todd substantiates Greg’s sense of the internal power dynamics of the coalition, but channels this into a more overt criticism of the lead player. I asked him to elaborate, and he told me that, in addition to receiving donations from industry, they have received donations from political parties. Unlike Canada Action, Todd asserted that YVC/UWR was authentically grassroots and never received money from political parties or industry. The strong impression I got from Todd was that, had Canada Action been truly grassroots, they would have been more likely to support the unity position that was being advanced by YVC and by Troy, with whom he remained in contact even three years after UWR.

The above exchange, taken together with Greg’s chafing against the unilateral decision-making of Canada Action, sheds light on the dynamics of organizing within “corporate grassroots” campaigns. In his study on CAPP’s Canada’s Energy Citizens campaign, (T. Wood, 2023) finds that “new members frequently grow frustrated by their lack of input into campaigns, which are wholly directed by paid public relations professionals” (T. Wood, 2023, p. 3). It is difficult to determine whether the RCC was “wholly directed” by Canada Action, but it is clear that Canada Action’s parallel-but-separate position was not widely agreed upon by other coalition members and that, at times, Canada Action was seen by its coalition partners to be acting unilaterally. We have seen how both Greg and Troy were at times exasperated by the coalition’s decision-making, echoing Wood’s finding that members of corporate grassroots campaigns can become frustrated by their lack of input. However, whereas Greg and Troy remained somewhat constrained by their coalition relationship with Canada Action, Todd and the YVC convoy organizers faced no such limitations.

Ultimately, Todd's testimony suggests the YVC convoy's strength was not on account of the organizers "having nothing to lose," as Greg put it, but quite the opposite: on account of what they *did* have—namely, their possession of particular forms of property (large trucks) and the unique skillset derived from their class and occupational background. This calls to mind Tarrow's point that a protest repertoire is comprised of "not only what people *do* when they are engaged in conflictual relations with others; it is what they *know how to do*" (Tarrow, 1993, p. 70). It would appear that YVC succeeded where RCC failed in part because this tactic was something the former, more than the latter, *knew how to do*. This finding is echoed in the social movement literature, which emphasizes that movements can resist co-optation by elites when they are able to bring to bear "some form of countervailing power," usually in the form of unique "resources and organizational skills" (Holdo, 2019, p. 445). In the case of the YVC convoy's efforts to resist being co-opted by the RCC, this countervailing power was rooted in the unique organizational skills and resources of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie.

Todd was a small business owner with connections to the oilfield and told me that most of the trucks that rode in the YVC/UWR convoy also belonged to small business owners, once again giving the lie to the oft-repeated misconception (or, in some cases, intentional misrepresentation) of the convoy as a working-class form of political expression. Indeed, upon reviewing the many photographs I had taken on the day of the United We Roll Convoy rally in Ottawa, I started to take note of the company names printed on the convoy trucks: the Big Four were nowhere to be seen. Instead, the convoy was dominated by small and medium-sized businesses.¹⁴² In order to pull off a protest convoy of industrial vehicles,

¹⁴² Small fossil capitalists included: DD2, Jerry Mainil Ltd., Johner Oilfield Construction, MasTec Canada, OP Fire & Rescue, Pongo Holdings Ltd., Schell Equipment, Tankers Transfer Services. Other small capitalists included: Hamilton Haulage and Landscaping, Kel-Can Mechanical Ltd., National Motor Coach Systems Ltd., Stu's Trucking, Summit Motors Ltd., and The Tree Whisperer. Note: this list is not comprehensive, but rather pulled from photographs the author took of the convoy's Ottawa rally.

one first requires access to these vehicles, access that regular workers do not have. In several cases I know of, a driver was actually being paid by their boss to participate in the convoy.¹⁴³ In addition to drawing its participants from the ranks of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie, the convoy was directly funded by small companies, including many oil and gas service companies, who gave large amounts in their own name to the convoy's GoFundMe page.¹⁴⁴ Todd underscored the unique affordances of his class fraction. Reflecting on this, he told me, "That's my truck, I can decide. I own it, it's my business, I can drive it wherever I want, right? That's out of my pocket." Unlike the RCC, which was led by a former real estate agent (Battershill) who founded a non-profit advocacy group (Canada Action), the YVC convoy was organized by someone who owned his own large truck, and who had a unique and related skill set.

It was not only the fact that these individuals owned the necessary equipment to pull off a convoy. They also possessed related skills. I asked Todd how he moved from being a regular YVC protester, attending the weekly rallies in Alberta, into becoming one of the organizers of the YVC convoy. He responded:

Well, my job for my business—I mean, that's what I do, I organize crews, I organize trucks, I organize things, so yeah, I had the expertise to do that stuff. Because I'm an expert at it, I was able to do it and, uh, I'm not saying other people didn't help, don't get me wrong. It was a team ... but it was me that made all the connections with the DoT, the OPP, etc.

¹⁴³ In one instance, Jason Leblanc, owner of a large farm in Saskatchewan, sent a "hired hand" to drive one of his farm trucks with the UWR convoy (Willberg, 2019). Another such case was relayed to me by a journalist who covered the convoy, and who interviewed numerous participants. Suits and Boots also sent a truck on UWR.

¹⁴⁴ List of companies among top donors to United We Roll, retrieved from GoFundMe, which shows the top donations to any campaign: Alberta Auto and Truck Repair Inc., Black Gold Fishing Services, CD Oilwell Servicing Ltd., Collicutt Energy, Connate Water Solutions Inc., DAZ Management Inc., DHH Dynamic Heavy Haul Ltd., Drewberry Hotel Yellow Vests Lloyminster, Ensign Energy (the only big fossil capitalist company to donate in their own name), PipeSak Incorporated, Starco Ag. Ltd., and Subterra HDD.

Todd demonstrates here that the “everyday organization” of his oil and gas service company provided the basis from which to organize the YVC convoy. While the RCC was arguably led by more skilful communicators adept at public relations, YVC convoy organizers like Todd possessed a skillset that was better suited to the logistical challenges associated with this undertaking. It was the unique resources and skills of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie that enabled the YVC convoy to “get the jump” on the RCC.

The class composition and skillset of the RCC members was rather different. In their study of the online activity of several of the coalition members, (Gunster et al., 2021) argue that “one of the core functions of these groups” is “meme labour,” meaning “the ideological and rhetorical work of mining news media, trade publications, [etc.] ... for ideas, images, and soundbites that can be circulated quickly and easily,” and which have the effect of promoting “pro-industry world views” (p. 207). This core competency of the coalition—meme labour—arguably reflects its white-collar, petty bourgeois class composition. While Greg (who is associated with one of these groups) used to “drive truck” for one of the ‘big four’ oil sands producers, he eventually left the industry to start his own marketing company, which contracts with CAPP and other industry players (although not exclusively), which is how he funds his extractive populist efforts. In contrast with Greg’s previous and decidedly proletarian position in the industry, from which he would have lacked the resources and skills necessary to organize and execute a truck convoy, and in contrast with his white-collar skillset as owner of a small marketing company with five employees, Todd’s class background had the right affordances, in terms of resources and skills, to take up a core function within the movement that was quite different than meme labour: *convoy labour*, we might say.

We saw above that, although the extractivist action coalition had become highly adept at organizing rallies, soliciting impressive speakers’ lists—including politicians from both

major parties in Alberta—and publicizing and promoting these events online as part of an extractive populist digital strategy, they had always relied on others outside their core group to pull off the convoys. Recall that the logistical side of the Grande Prairie convoy was organized by local elements of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie, as were the various copycat convoys. With respect to its organizational form and capacities, the coalition, especially Canada Action, was an organizational “bodyless head,” i.e., top-down and professionally run, but lacking “ground game” and organic connection to a membership capable of holding them accountable (Skocpol & Williamson, 2016, p. 88). Canada Action may have wanted to co-opt the YVC convoy, but, as Todd put it, “they didn’t have any trucks.” “Bodyless head” works well, then, but with respect to the convoy to Ottawa, “truck-less driver” is more like it.

To be clear, the RCC has powerful allies who themselves *did* have trucks and the associated organizational skills. We have seen how CAOEC member company AFD Petroleum, for example, had signed up to participate. The point here, however, is that the *organizers* of the RCC lacked such resources and skills, meaning they had to orchestrate the activity of those who did possess them, along with their public relations concerns. By contrast, the other convoy was spearheaded by members of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie who directly possessed these resources and skills, and who themselves were members of YVC. Even these individuals, however, would soon learn to navigate the stigma associated with their movement.

Triumph of the Unity Position?

The YVC convoy would appear to have been granted the right-of-way after the RCC was cancelled, and yet there was to be one further bend in the road. On January 26th, 2019, it was reported that the YVC convoy was experiencing internal division, once again over how to navigate the stigma associated with their own movement (Laing, 2019b). On one side were

those who wanted the convoy to be a purely YVC convoy, such that, as Glen Carritt put it, “if there wasn’t 100 per cent commitment to the movement, the people shouldn’t be allowed into the convoy” (Laing, 2019b). On the other side was Carritt’s own position, which was, “yellow vest or no yellow vest, everybody is welcome if they have an issue with the government” (Laing, 2019b). The result was that Glen Carritt left the YVC convoy behind and started United We Roll, the name of the convoy that would ultimately arrive in Ottawa some three weeks later, on February 19th.

How should we understand the convoy’s name change in light of the preceding discussion about the relationship between the mainstream and the far right? Existing scholarship has tended to flatten the distinction between the two. (Cillia & McCurdy, 2020), for example, view UWR as the culmination of the YVC movement, highlighting the continuity in leadership between the YVC convoy and UWR, while noting that protest signs at the convoy’s Ottawa rally “extended beyond oil and gas” to include demands and grievances associated with YVC (p. 661). Similarly emphasizing continuity, (Kinder, 2024) claims the difference was “in name only” and “purely semantic” (p. 193-5). I largely agree, but in this section, I want to explore what this semantic shift accomplished, and what the apparent need for it says about the relationship between the far right and fossil capital.

If the difference was entirely semantic, we cannot fully explain why the YVC convoy was unwilling to make these changes in early January. Recall, earlier in the month, the YVC convoy had been pressured to engage in a similar shift, with Canada Action publicly and privately encouraging them to ditch the yellow vest in favour of “Canadian symbols,” and to stay focussed on a positive message about oil and gas, in exchange for which the RCC would be willing to collaborate with the YVC convoy. As we saw, however, the YVC convoy was resistant to this and successfully asserted their autonomy, thus avoiding co-optation. It seems possible that, after the cancellation of the RCC, when the full weight of the convoy was put

on the YVC convoy, the pressure mounted to de-radicalize, at least in appearance. If the main finding of the previous section was that the YVC convoy had organizational autonomy from the established extractive populist movement, in this section I argue that this autonomy was *relative*.

As we have seen, the foundational impetus for a convoy to Ottawa had been to demonstrate social licence for extractivism, a vision that had been articulated by R4R as early as 2016 and endorsed by the major trade associations, CAPP and the CAOEC. The YVC movement had a broader vision than merely providing social licence for fossil extractivism, however, and sought to incorporate this into a radical critique of the Liberal government and, arguably, liberal democracy as such. Although the carriers of this more radical vision had organizational autonomy from fossil capital's traditional extractive populist partners, they also threatened to distract from the underlying, long-standing objective. My findings in this section suggest that the YVC convoy was ultimately partially disciplined by their elite allies, who successfully exerted pressure on the movement's collective action frames and symbolism. Thus, the YVC movement proved incapable of carrying out a fully autonomous protest. The autonomy of the far right *vis-à-vis* fossil capital, in the end, was a *relative autonomy*, determined in the last instance by economic considerations. While I do not dispute that the difference between YVC and UWR may have been largely (although not *entirely*) semantic, I argue that these semantics mattered, creating opportunities for the convoy in terms of participation and legitimation that it otherwise may not have had.

When UWR departed Red Deer on February 14th, 2019, the messaging offered by Carritt (and echoed in sympathetic media) intentionally distanced itself from YVC, while appealing to an anti-radical sensibility. The *Calgary Herald* reported that the RCC had been cancelled because YVC was “muddying the message with racist issues,” adding, “But Carritt, who does not wear a yellow vest, says those yellow vesters were kicked out and that issue is

in the rear-view mirror now” (Corbella, 2019). In this style of reporting, which characterized UWR as a “beautiful sight,” the convoy is given a public relations assist by allowing Carritt to go unchallenged in his efforts to distance the convoy from YVC. Carritt stated:

All respectful, peaceful, non-radical Canadians are welcome to join in this rally. We will not tolerate any racism, hate or anyone with those views ... They are not part of this movement. I’ll be very upset if someone like that attaches themselves to us and this convoy. They have nothing to do with us. We’re proud of our oil and gas, a product every Canadian uses and benefits from in a huge way. That’s what this is about.

(Corbella, 2019)

The story thus does nothing to confront Carritt’s depiction of the convoy as non-radical, anti-racist, or squarely focused on oil and gas. The *Herald* thereby presents a positive image of the convoy that is close to what Canada Action had originally laid out as concessions that the YVC convoy would need to make in order to unite with the RCC: distanced from YVC, committed to respectable discourse, and focussed primarily on oil and gas. Days before the convoy was set to depart, though, it was reported that UWR is “welcoming protesters from the now defunct Yellow Vest convoy, after parting ways over philosophical concerns with that group’s affiliation with the controversial movement” (Laing, 2019c). As Carritt stated, “(My goal from the start) has been to have everyone to join together ... No radicals, no racists, no hate people (are welcome) — yellow vest or no yellow vest, everyone is welcome” (Laing, 2019c).

If it is head-spinning, that is part of the point. On the one hand, there were no radicals allowed, but on the other hand, “everyone is welcome,” including YVC activists, widely seen as a racist and radical movement. These rules, moreover, were laid down by YVC activists themselves, who had only recently engaged in a tactical de-centring of YVC messaging and symbolism, and who themselves did not consider YVC as far right. Indeed, as we have seen,

YVC activists and sympathizers tended to reject the label of radical or far right as pejoratives imposed by left-leaning media and intellectuals. We saw this above with Todd, for example. Thus, in this sanitized narrative about the UWR convoy, the far right only appears as an absence, a spectre whose non-existence is loudly proclaimed.

All of this raises the question of whether UWR is properly understood as an extension or even the “culmination” of the YVC movement, or if it is distinct in some way, perhaps less radical, along the lines of what the RCC originally intended: i.e., a protest that denounced racism and was narrowly focussed on oil and gas to the exclusion of other, more controversial issues. My findings suggest that YVC convoy organizers became aware of the stigma attached to their own movement and sought to navigate that stigma by a re-branding into UWR. Given their earlier unwillingness to move away from the YVC branding, however, which had been a condition of uniting with the RCC, this sudden pivot by some on the YVC board towards a re-brand requires explanation.

My interview with Todd, who helped organize UWR, sheds light on this dynamic. From his perspective, YVC was unfairly treated by the media, but the stigma nonetheless was real and needed to be navigated. According to him:

[YVC] were toted unjustfully [*sic.*] as a far-right group, but nevertheless, that's the way they were toted. I didn't, I don't believe that's what they were. There was some some people in the movement that that could have been far right, but that's, that's the way it goes with any movement. And that's why we moved away from yellow vests and started United We Roll, just because of the stigmatation [*sic.*] that was created by media. And that's why I was very clear with you to make sure because the media twists it all the time to make everybody look like they're far-right extremists.

In this way, Todd self-inoculates against assessments that the YVC movement, taken as a whole, can be characterized as far right, deflecting such analyses as the product of an

intellectual class who is either ill-informed or malicious. Despite his objections, however, for Todd, the stigma of being labelled far right needed to be manoeuvred around. A name change, it was hoped, could de-stigmatize the convoy.

The name change appears to have been sufficient to convince Greg that UWR was not identical to YVC, but “kind of in the middle” between the RCC and YVC, while noting YVC was a “component” of UWR. From his perspective, UWR “were separate from” and not “as out of touch as the yellow vests were.” Whereas the RCC had a message focussed on oil and gas, he believed UWR had a broader critique of the government; it was “their way of saying 'fuck you' to Trudeau.” Once again disproving the notion of a *cordon sanitaire* between the RCC and the YVC/UWR convoy, Greg actually provided some limited public relations advice to UWR organizers and even *ended up joining the UWR convoy*. He did not drive, however, but flew, and was invited to give a speech on day two. Ultimately, he praised UWR: “To [their] credit, [they] got the convoy there.”

Despite being invited by the lead organizers and having “wholeheartedly wanted to be part of it,” Troy did not ultimately attend UWR. He did not want to appear as disloyal to his coalition partners by “jump[ing] on the bandwagon” of UWR, and nor did the pivot from the YVC convoy to UWR assuage such concerns. He expressed regret for having not gone, however, and, referring to the lead truck of the convoy, which all participants and supporters signed, said, “I'm feeling terrible today because, you know, I was supposed to put my name on that truck.” Despite his disappointment that his unity position failed, and his regrets about declining the invitation to join UWR, Troy had glowing praise for the convoy, telling me it was “fantastic what they did.” To him, UWR “proved that ... a small group of people can change the world.” Moreover, he felt as though the convoy was able to successfully navigate the stigma that had surrounded the YVC movement and that it didn't “come across as a far-

right, separatist or far-right fascist or whatever you call them, anti- anti- anything group. It was, it was a *coming together*” (emphasis added).

We have seen that, initially, Canada Action’s Cody Battershill held the parallel-but-separate position, Greg held the right-of-way position, and Troy held the unity position. By the end, all three would switch positions, with the parallel-but-separate position falling to the wayside. Greg wound up holding Troy’s unity position and found himself on Parliament Hill with UWR, while Troy ended up adopting Greg’s right-of-way position, staying back in Alberta and watching with pride from a distance. The case of Canada Action is interesting. We have seen that they were the *de facto* leader of the coalition, with then-Premier Notley referring to the coalition as “the Canada Action group” in order to mark a strong distinction between them and the YVC convoy. We have also seen that Canada Action’s parallel-but-separate position, despite internal opposition, was the *de facto* position of the group, until they unilaterally cancelled. It is worth considering the terms by which Canada Action cancelled, which reveal once again, that the neat narrative of a *cordon sanitaire* between the two convoys does not hold up to empirical scrutiny. We have seen how tight-lipped Canada Action was about the reasons for cancellation. Consider one further point on this, as reported by *Global News*: “When asked if the yellow vest convoy had anything to do with the decision to cancel the other convoy, Battershill said it wasn’t related to any other people or groups and that he was ‘not going to comment on any other groups or activities that are going on out there’” (Mertz, 2019). And yet, findings suggest that RCC’s decision to cancel had *almost everything to do with the YVC convoy*.

Canada Action was not *opposed* to the YVC convoy so much as it sought to co-opt it while presenting it in a more polished light. This effort at co-optation, however, served to legitimize and promote the YVC convoy. Upon the cancellation of the RCC, Canada Action had every opportunity to denounce the YVC convoy. They could have articulated publicly

that they felt as though the convoy had been hijacked by radicals, and that the YVC/UWR convoy did not reflect the values of the pro-oil and gas movement. Instead, they cited only “unexpected challenges,” and publicly insisted that YVC had nothing to do with the cancellation. An outright denunciation of the YVC convoy would have likely hurt their credibility with their base and their benefactors. It would have contradicted the entire premise of the convoy in the first place, which, as we saw above, was timed with the opening of the spring session of the Senate, during which Bill C-69 was set to be the focus. Denouncing the YVC/UWR convoy, then, would have damaged the ability of industry and their political allies to instrumentalize the convoy in the way that had been originally envisioned: as a demonstration of public support and social licence. Ultimately, industry wanted a convoy and they got one, even if their preferred advocacy partners had been “hijacked” and a new set of allies were now in the driver’s seat.

The Convoy and the Obfuscatory Transparency of the Corporate ‘Grassroots’

Setting aside the relationship between the coalition groups and YVC, it is necessary to consider how industry itself, particularly the two major industry associations, related to the “duelling convoys” to Ottawa. From the beginning, even as far back as 2016 (as we saw in the previous chapter), both CAPP and the CAOEC endorsed the idea of the convoy’s upward scale shift to the national level. But we have not yet explored how they related to the 2019 convoy to Ottawa, though, nor how the development of a relatively autonomous far-right social movement may have affected their level of engagement. As I will make clear in this section, with a particular focus on CAPP, the trade associations expressed overt public support for the RCC, but this approach was somewhat complicated by the rise of YVC/UWR, after which they pivoted to mediated, implicit, and quieter forms of support. Before detailing this shift, however, it is worth emphasizing that the timing of the convoy was very much

coordinated with industry's efforts to undermine and weaken Bill C-69 by lobbying the Senate to propose amendments.

The Senate had been on break since December 2018, and was set to return in February 2019, with Bill C-69 at the top of the agenda. The extractive populist movement was oriented around this. The Grande Prairie rally and convoy, for example, marked the “kick off” of a six week campaign focussed on gathering petition signatures against Bill C-69 which, as R4R stated, “will be presented to the Senators in February when they go back for spring sitting” (Rally 4 Resources, 2018f). Suits and Boots head, Rick Peterson, articulated the mood of industry during this period in a January 24th, 2019 post, ahead of the Senate's scheduled return, writing that this was, “the single most important 90-days in Canada's resource sector” (Suits and Boots, 2019). In fact, Suits and Boots would send one trucker along for the UWR convoy. While the timing may have been ripe politically, this was not an ideal time for a convoy *materially*, and not primarily because of winter driving conditions.

When R4R posted about plans for a winter convoy, several individuals complained, indicating it would be better for them if it could happen in spring “breakup,” a seasonal downturn in the industry when the ice is thawing and many productive regions become unworkable. Nicole Wapple acknowledged the timing was not ideal but explained the rationale: “It's being timed for when parliament and the Senate goes back to sit and around BillC69. I get that it sucks, break up is when it would be best for us too.”¹⁴⁵ Another individual advised R4R, “would get more people if it was in the break up,” to which Wapple gave a similar response, indicating, “It's timed for when the Senate goes back in and before Bill C69 goes to third reading.”¹⁴⁶ This was apparently a dealbreaker for this individual, who responded, “I see, too bad tho [*sic.*] , I would have love [*sic.*] to participate.”

¹⁴⁵ CleanShot 2025-01-15 at 17.39.23@2x

¹⁴⁶ CleanShot 2025-02-11 at 14.10.28@2x

In other words, the RCC was not timed for maximal participation, but for maximum parliamentary effect. A February convoy was immediately recognized by prospective participants as a non-starter, and even R4R—whose Jeff Malchow was himself an oil and gas worker—acknowledged the timing was not ideal for them. The imperative of the convoy, however, was not to send as many trucks as possible, but to make a spectacle of public support for oil and gas in Ottawa, just as the Senate was beginning its long series of hearings on Bill C-69. Besides, as Greg told me, “We’ve never cared about large numbers.” He recounted an event the coalition held in Vancouver, organized to counter-protest against a Greenpeace protest. The coalition had a crowd of 500 compared to Greenpeace’s 10,000, but, as Greg told me, “we still kicked their ass in the media.” Here, Greg reflects a common truism of social movements that, as Koopmans (2004) put it, “It is sometimes more important that a protest practice is portrayed in the media as successful than whether it really is so” (p. 27). While spring break up would have got higher numbers, it was irrelevant from the perspective of the organizers, who were laser-focused on the Senate schedule around Bill C-69. Greg’s comment also sheds new light on the RCC’s decision to pull out; since they did not need a large convoy to achieve a media splash, there was little to gain in adding their delegation to the already underway YVC convoy.

Prior to the withdrawal of the RCC, the trade associations publicly endorsed it. On January 4th, 2019, CEC advertised the RCC via Facebook by linking to the GoFundMe, writing, “Our friends at Rally 4 Resources - The Movement and Canada Action are organizing a convoy to Ottawa. Please help if you can!” (Canada’s Energy Citizens, 2019a). Then again, on January 6th, 2019, CEC shared the RCC fundraising link, writing: “Great news! If you can, please help - as little as \$5 or \$10 can go a long way” (Canada’s Energy Citizens, 2019b). Despite being institutionally connected to some of the deepest pockets in the country, then, CAPP/CEC was publicly soliciting its social media following to help fund the RCC, raising the question: if

CAPP wanted to see the RCC funded, why would it choose to publicly fundraise? Why would it not have simply financed the convoy directly, either publicly or covertly? We will take up this question below.

After the collapse of the RCC, CEC pivoted its support to UWR, although in a less overt form. On February 15th, 2019, CEC posted a link to a sympathetic *Calgary Herald* article about UWR's departure from Red Deer the previous day, excerpting the following sentence: "Thursday's convoy is the latest and largest in a series of similar protests across the province in recent months, including one in Edmonton and another in Nisku" (Canada's Energy Citizens, 2019c). Thus, CEC shared favourable news coverage about UWR as a form of tacit support, with this article serving to hype and amplify UWR as "the largest" convoy yet, while sanitizing its integration with YVC.¹⁴⁷ The CAOEC took a similar tact. Despite AFD Petroleum (a CAOEC member company) having gone out of its way to publicly distance themselves from the YVC convoy and to express support for (and an intention to participate in) the RCC, they too ended up providing tacit support for UWR. On February 17th, 2019, while UWR was making its way towards Ottawa, Oil Respect posted a link to a news article by *JWN Energy* that favourably profiled two UWR participants, excerpting the following: "We're going to Ottawa to support the oil industry, to let this guy know we're not happy with what they're doing" (Oil Respect, 2019). While CAPP and the CAOEC did not provide as vociferous public support for UWR as they and their member companies had done for the RCC, they were nonetheless able and willing to provide tacit support for UWR by directing their social media followers to sympathetic media coverage.

The choice of news source is highly relevant, too. *JWN Energy*, for one, is an industry publication offering "news, analysis, data, research and marketing services" for its target

¹⁴⁷ Note that UWR was the "largest" pro-oil and gas convoy as measured by kilometres travelled (except for 2016's LNG or Bust Convoy), but it was far from the largest in terms of the number of trucks (see Table 1 in chapter 4).

audience of oilfield production and service companies; in other words, it does not have a public interest mandate to report news objectively. The *Calgary Herald*, on the other hand, *does* have “a mandate to provide objective coverage of the news of the day,” and yet this is in tension with the fact that it is simultaneously “the Canadian daily newspaper that is most closely associated with the oil sands” (Gunster & Saurette, 2014, p. 335). In a study of the social media output of CEC and three other groups (Oil Respect, Canada Action, and Resource Works), (Neubauer & Graham, 2021) found that Postmedia news outlets, of which the *Herald* is among the most widely circulated, are a key reference within the “echo chamber” of “extractivist discourse coalitions” on social media, where the same sources of content are repeatedly shared by a tight “networked public” of pro-extractive accounts (p. 930). Indeed, such is the ideological overlap and material reliance (through ad revenue) between Postmedia and the fossil fuel industry, that in 2013 the former pitched the latter on a “joint initiative” that would see the two organizations collaborate on content that would be “directed by CAPP and written by Postmedia” and published in the latter’s many imprints across Canada (Uechi & Millar, 2014). And in 2019, when Jason Kenney launched his “energy war room”—effectively a state-led extractive populist agency—Postmedia lobbied the government to be part of it (Bellefontaine, 2019). In short, the CEC’s decision to share a sympathetic *Calgary Herald* piece about UWR hardly reflects an apolitical effort to share industry-related news.

At the same time, news sharing is clearly not as full-throated as CAPP’s support had been for the RCC and might even have a ring of plausible deniability about it. One can imagine that CAPP would reject the argument that this post represents an endorsement of UWR, for example. And yet, the gesture was rooted squarely within CAPP’s subsidized public strategy, wherein industry utilizes “digital platforms to program networked publics whose members are then connected with curated information,” within which Postmedia

outlets and the *Herald*, in particular, play a critical role (Neubauer & Graham, 2021, p. 913). Therefore, given the highly curated nature of what CEC shares with its subsidized public, this post is arguably best understood as an effort to promote UWR, and even as a *de facto* endorsement. Through this post, the CEC sought to elevate the profile of UWR as evidence of social licence for their extractivist activities, an effort that also manifested in its parliamentary activities (see below on ‘legitimizing UWR’). Nonetheless, the fact that CAPP’s public support for the RCC had been expressed *directly*—referring to the organizers as “our friends,” for example, and actively helping them fundraise—while, by contrast, their support for UWR was only ever expressed in this *mediated* way (i.e., channeled through their extractivist discourse coalition allies) suggests the need to re-think dynamics of transparency and concealment within industry’s subsidized public strategy.

In his study of CEC, Wood (2018) argues that, contrary to the assumption that industry attempts to conceal their funding of and support for ostensibly ‘grassroots’ campaigns, the CEC actually “foreground[s] its members’ professional backgrounds [including in PR] and connections to the oil sector” (p. 75). It is argued further that this “transparency does ideological work in the campaign, framing pro-oil advocacy as a licit social aim, and public relations labour as a normative model of citizen political participation” (p. 75). In a shorter, political/strategic piece building on these insights, T. Wood (2023) re-states his key finding—that “today many industry-backed groups openly identify their corporate sponsors”—and from this concludes that industry’s shift towards transparency “renders critical exposé moot” (p. 1). In other words, for Wood, critical terms like ‘front group’ and ‘astroturf,’ or even the investigative work of uncovering industry funding for self-identified grassroots groups, are all “necessary but grossly insufficient” in a context in which all or most of these participation subsidies are transparent, and even *foregrounded* as an ideological tool to legitimize oil and gas advocacy and its reliance on PR professionals (p. 3).

As Wood puts it, “Calling out the corporate sponsorship of front groups lacks political punch when the organizations under fire proudly name their funders on their websites” (p. 2). And yet, Wood may be at risk here of overextending his otherwise illuminating analysis, with the effect of simultaneously *overstating* industry’s transparency and, relatedly, *understating* the ongoing power of exposé.

Returning to the question of CAPP’s relationship to the “duelling” convoys, if industry were as transparent about its sponsorship of advocacy groups as Wood claims, then how do we explain the discrepancy between its full-throated support for RCC and its mediated support for UWR? In their study of the *Herald*’s reporting on oil sands, which focuses on a period in 2011, *well before* CAPP’s turn to the subsidized public strategy of corporate grassroots engagement, (Gunster & Saurette, 2014) note the divergence in tenor between industry and their ideological “vanguard.” They write, “the paper’s discourse is often very different from the meticulously crafted banality of industry and government public relations that strives to avoid controversy. The *Herald*, in contrast, has no such inhibition” (p. 335-6). Whereas industry’s PR strategy at the time was more reserved, the *Herald* was positioned on “the front lines of the battle over the legitimacy of oil sands development,” attacking industry opponents and deploying “populist vernacular” to convert industry news into resonant (and highly ideological) stories (p. 336). Following Gunster & Saurette (2014), we could say that, prior to the extractive populist strategy, there existed a discursive division of labour, in which industry’s public relations techniques remained stuck in longstanding, unadventurous patterns, leaving media like the *Herald* as the ideological vanguard most capable and willing to cultivate and spread hegemonic ideas about industry, wrapped in populist garb.

In many ways, this division of labour became blurrier with the rise of extractive populism as an official, industry-backed PR strategy, with industry-connected groups like

Canada's Energy Citizens and Oil Respect taking on increasingly populist rhetoric and working to mobilize publics. And yet, it appears that the vanguard role of the *Herald* may have continued, with the new frontier being the legitimation not of the oil sands *per se* (although this remained as critical as ever), but legitimation of the far-right movements that had sprung forth from the new extractive populist strategy as among the industry's most vociferous defenders in the streets. As we have seen, industry retreated somewhat to a more cautious approach by declining to transparently endorse UWR, thus arguably reverting to the old division of labour in which the *Herald* serves as its vanguard. Notwithstanding industry's increasing brazenness and the "strategic benefits" they have found with respect to "openness," it seems that the rise of a far-right, relatively autonomous wing within the pro-oil movement gave industry some pause, driving them back (at least temporarily) into a more familiar division of labour, wherein their support for UWR was mediated through their ideological vanguard.

And with respect to financial subsidization, if industry were as transparent about its sponsorship of advocacy groups as Wood claims, then how do we explain the CEC's solicitation of small donations for the RCC convoy? On the one hand, this would appear to bolster Wood's argument about industry's transparent backing of advocacy groups. Here was the industry's largest trade association publicly helping fundraise for an initiative organized by a number of groups within the 'resource coalition,' all of whom claim to be 'grassroots.' It would seem correct, following Wood, to argue that it is of limited value to critique the resource coalition as 'astroturf' when they have such transparent corporate backing from the likes of CEC/CAPP. And yet, if CEC/CAPP were entirely comfortable with transparently supporting the resource coalition, then why would they not have publicly announced they were *fully* funding it? They and their member companies clearly have the money. Instead, the CEC's transparency is limited, in this case, to the solicitation of small dollar donations. Is the

spectacle of the country's most powerful trade association asking its 'energy citizens' for \$5 and \$10 donations really evidence of openness, or does it hide as much as it reveals? Wood is certainly on to something with his contention that transparency increasingly performs "ideological work" for the industry, but such openness is arguably more mystifying than he suggests.

I offer the term "obfuscatory transparency" as a hypothesis about the ideological role transparency plays in the subsidized public strategy of extractive populism.¹⁴⁸ While we must by necessity enter the realm of speculation here given the paucity of publicly available financial information, it seems entirely possible that such public fundraising was largely an effort to *appear* transparent, made to give the impression that the CEC and its "friends" are just like any other social movement and require grassroots public support, including small monetary contributions. Let us dismiss the possibility that CEC simply did not have the budget. This notion is laid to rest by several empirical points. First, Wood's own findings show that, owing to institutional changes to the internal structure at CAPP, funds were increasingly being made available for grassroots engagement on a "pay to play" basis, collected and allocated separately from the standard dues all members of CAPP must pay (p. 81). As one former employee put it, as a result of these changes, "all of a sudden you did have room to start hiring people to engage with the grassroots" (p. 81). In addition to CAPP's increased and more flexible 'pay to play' advocacy budget, evidence suggests CAPP's member companies had been independently funding organizations within the resource coalition, casting doubt on the RCC convoy's need to publicly fundraise in the first place.

Even as industry had been increasingly open about its support for political advocacy groups, there were still clear limits to what they were willing and able to do in this sphere, at

¹⁴⁸ As the work of Anna Zalik and co-authors has demonstrated over the past decade, the oil and gas sector uses transparency as a discursive cover in multiple intersecting ways (Ciupa & Zalik, 2020; Watts & Zalik, 2020; Zalik, 2015a, 2015b, 2020).

least *publicly*. Indeed, as we would learn in the summer of 2020 (thanks to reporting by *The Narwhal*, supported by the Corporate Mapping Project), ARC Resources Ltd.—a large, Calgary-based, publicly-traded firm whose assets are centred in fracking operations in the Montney—had given \$100,000 to Canada Action in 2019 (Linnitt, 2020). Non-profits such as Canada Action are not required to disclose their funding sources, and this information was only revealed due to a reporting error (“a case of over-disclosure”) made by ARC Resources in its filings to the Canadian government (Linnitt, 2020). Unfortunately, this reporting error has only been committed once, and so we remain in the dark about the extent of Canada Action’s corporate backing, or that of other ostensibly ‘grassroots’ groups.¹⁴⁹ Nor do these filings indicate the precise date on which ARC’s donation to CA was made, only that it was made in 2019, meaning it is impossible to say if CA was in possession of these monies ahead of the RCC, which had been scheduled for February of that year. We can only speculate that ARC’s contribution to CA was not the latter’s first corporate donation. If this is the case, it would appear that the pro-oil and gas movement’s offline activities were at least partially corporate-sponsored through the heady days of 2018-19.

Why does this matter and what are its implications for debates about transparency within corporate ‘grassroots’ strategies? CEC’s relationship to industry, Wood is correct in asserting, is hardly a secret. And yet, the full extent of industry’s role—including their trade associations, ‘grassroots’ campaigns, and member companies—in subsidizing the extractive populist movement remains unknown. ARC’s donation to CA may have been one among

¹⁴⁹ The ARC donation is not Canada Action’s only documented corporate overlap, however. The same year of the Narwhal investigation, it was reported that Canada Action was incorporated by the same law firm as CAPP, and Canada Action’s Chief Operating Officer, Lynn Exner, openly acknowledged (for the first time, to my knowledge) that the group receives funding from oil and gas companies, mining companies, farmers, and forestry companies (Rocha et al., 2020). I have found, moreover, overlaps in personnel: James Robson was the Operations Director for Canada Action between 2017 and 2019, before joining CAPP as a social media and brand advisor from 2019-present; and Casey Amatto was Operations Manager in 2016, before moving directly into an internship with Suncor, followed by positions at Trans Mountain and TC Energy. Taken as a whole, these findings negate Canada Action’s grassroots claims. Relying on and sharing industry resources (financial, legal, and human), they are better understood as a civil society outpost of big fossil capital.

many made by CAPP and CAOEC member companies, or it may have been a one-off. My bet, however, is on the former. Why else would CA not come out and share their financial records? If the records indicate most of their revenue comes from small-dollar, individual donations, then full transparency here could be a boon to Canada Action's self-image as "grassroots." Their refusal to be transparent, combined with the revelation of corporate support, casts the entire operation under suspicion, and quite justly so. Unfortunately, Wood generalizes from the transparent relationship between CAPP and the CEC, overextending his analysis to apply to the whole sphere of pro-fossil fuel corporate grassroots campaigns.¹⁵⁰ Clearly, secrecy is still critical for the inner workings of the subsidized public.

I agree with his strategic imperative that the environmental movement should look to identify (and then address) the root causes of why individuals choose to participate in such campaigns, and my methodology has been designed, in part, around answering that question, relying on interviews with rank-and-file participants. I would add, for clarity's sake, that Wood is not calling for us to stop engaging in exposé, which he argues still has a role; as he states, "knowing which oil companies fund which advocacy groups is undeniably useful information" (p. 3). Our differences are methodological, analytical and strategic. As I hope is clear, I take no issue with Wood's methods and findings with respect to CEC, which reveal precisely what he claims: i.e., that industry is increasingly transparent in its support for public advocacy, and that this serves to legitimize oil and gas advocacy and its reliance on PR professionals. However, I believe he *overextends* these findings and this analysis to the entirety of fossil capital's subsidized public strategy, with the effect that he exaggerates the role of transparency, which in turn leads to the faulty political strategic calculation that exposé ought to be deprioritized. If transparency is the new dominant mode of industry public

¹⁵⁰ Kinder (2024) echoes my critique when he writes that, "the opacity of which Wood absolves CAPP's campaign is performed elsewhere" (p. 13). And, I would add, only performed selectively within CAPP's activities.

relations, then, as he puts it, “revelation is redundant” or even sometimes “counterproductive” (T. Wood, 2023, p. 3). And yet, as we have seen, industry is still far from transparent, reverting to a mediated and tacit form of support in the case of UWR, and most likely secretly funding what was arguably the leading group within the extractivist action coalition during its peak years of offline activity.

While industry is increasingly brazen and transparent in its sponsorship of advocacy, this transparency itself, perhaps ironically, needs to be exposed as a highly selective and tactical part of an overall strategy in which concealment remains critical. *Contra* Wood, I would, if anything, call for the environmental movement to redouble its efforts at exposé. While Wood is correct to argue that we ought to examine the underlining motivations of movement participants, social movement scholars routinely emphasize that political opportunities and shared grievances alone are not sufficient to give rise to movements. What is needed is the pairing of these with resources, mobilizing structures, the construction of collective identities, and resonant collective action frames. It is with respect to extractive populism’s mobilizing structures, in particular, that revelation remains critical. Only through an expansive methodology that combines exposé with attention not only to a single group, but to the dynamic interaction, ideologically *and* organizationally, between the various actors within the multi-organizational field can we see the selective and obfuscatory nature of the new transparency.

On February 19th, 2019, just hours after UWR had vacated Parliament Hill, Tim McMillan, then-President and CEO of CAPP, appeared for an evening session of the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources. Held in the Senate of Canada Building, a mere 500m from where UWR had held its protest earlier that day and well within earshot of the now-quiet horns, McMillan had one of the first appearances in a long series of committee meetings on Bill C-69, on its way to becoming the Senate’s most-amended

piece of legislation in Canadian history (Tasker, 2019). Conservative Senator Percy Mockler asked McMillan, “Do you feel that the government has had proper or completed proper consultation with First Nations and also with Canadians at large?” McMillan’s response is worth quoting at length:

I can’t speak to the First Nations issue. I have heard concern from First Nations leaders that they don’t feel that they have been consulted on this bill as much as they would like. I’ve had First Nations leaders talk very specifically about Bill C-69 and the effects that it will have on their communities. I can speak more knowledgeably about Canadians at large. We most certainly are seeing Canadians at large standing up and wanting to be heard. It’s the type of Canadian who may never have been to a rally in their life. Today here in Ottawa, there was a truck convoy that started in Alberta and Atlantic Canada and converged here. There were licence plates from Saskatchewan and Ontario, people that were focused around the oil and gas industry, people that are hurting, and families that are unemployed. They look and see the rig they were working on two years ago has now moved to Texas or Oklahoma. The company they used to work for has sold their assets in Canada to invest in the Middle East or in offshore Brazil. They feel that if the next barrel of oil or gigajoule of gas heating a home in China comes from Canada, the world is a better place than if it comes from Qatar or Azerbaijan. It doesn’t seem fair. They want a regulatory system they can trust and operate within to become productive and to contribute globally. Right now there’s a lot of frustration. (*Proceedings of the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources*, 2019)

McMillan thereby incorporated UWR into his efforts to convince the Senate to weaken Bill C-69, claiming the convoy was proof that “Canadians at large” support his companies’ extractive activities. He literally spoke for the convoy in a form of “corporate ventriloquism”

(Bsumek et al., 2014), saying “they” are this, “they” want this, “they” think that, etc. Thus, with the diesel fumes from their subsidized public still hanging in the air of the nation’s capital, CAPP worked the parliamentary process from inside the halls of power. In this hyper-sanitized and mystified depiction of UWR, it appears as a pan-Canadian, working-class revolt against an elitist, unsympathetic government. This mystified form of appearance permits CAPP to symbolically pilfer the popular mobilization of far-right activists, while claiming plausible deniability. In this framing, UWR represents the material interests of unemployed oil and gas workers (and little more). Yellow Vests Canada, including both its ideological and class dimensions, is disappeared entirely. As Clara Zetkin said, commenting on the relationship between capital and fascism, “the bourgeoisie naturally greets its new allies with joy.” Here, McMillan provides, in the Parliament of Canada no less, a hearty welcome to his newfound allies, confirming what Zetkin viewed as the bourgeoisie’s “tacit patronage” of fascism. Not necessarily the allies CAPP had counted on, the Yellow Vests were the ones they got, and they could be instrumentalized just as well, if not better.

Legitimizing United We Roll

Media played a powerful legitimization role with respect to UWR. Cillia & McCurdy (2020) observe that the mainstream media provided social cover for the convoy. As an example of how this worked, here is how one misleading article in *The National Post* began, “A convoy of oil workers arrived in Ottawa on Tuesday to deliver a message to the Liberal government about the province's desperate need for more pipelines” (Snyder, 2019). While right-wing outlets owned by Postmedia explicitly praised the convoy, liberal mainstream media followed a pattern that echoed efforts to separate the good parts of the movement from the bad, providing some critical coverage of the convoy’s associations with the xenophobic and far-right YVC movement, while providing generally uncritical coverage of the movement’s

association with industry, and thereby upholding the hegemonic interests of fossil capital (Cillia & McCurdy, 2020, pp. 673–675). The Canadian Anti-Hate Network, on the other hand, argues that the mainstream media’s coverage of the convoy largely ignored the hundreds of examples of overt racism and death threats directed at Muslim Canadians on YVC social media, and thereby whitewashed the convoy as driven by “legitimate economic concerns” and not hate (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2019). However, this latter critique overlooks the extent to which climate denialism and its twin, fossil fuel boosterism, are far from being expressions of legitimate economic concerns, but have instead become central to the political project of the contemporary far right, as recent scholarly research has begun to uncover (Forchtner et al., 2018; Hultman et al., 2019; Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021). By trying to separate out the movement’s racism from its fossil fuel boosterism, politicians and mainstream media dangerously legitimized the climate denialist aspects of the movement. Inversely, in its attempt to discredit the movement, the Canadian Anti-Hate Network downplayed its fossil fuel boosterism, and claimed the movement was mainly an anti-immigrant one. The downside to this strategy, though, is that it does not challenge the legitimacy of fossil fuel boosterism and climate denialism, and overlooks the extent to which they have become key planks of the far-right’s political worldview. Moreover, it is simply not true that YVC was “mainly” an anti-immigrant hate group, as was made clear in the previous chapter.

Liberal political scientist, the University of Alberta’s Duane Bratt (2019), penned a mostly celebratory op-ed about UWR for the *Globe & Mail*, titled, “How the pro-oil United We Roll protest was—almost—a perfect demonstration.” In it, he asked, “why was a convoy to Ottawa so important,” and repeated the organizers’ logic that similar protests were being ignored in Alberta and so needed to scale up to capture national attention. He even approvingly situates UWR in the same historical continuum as the On to Ottawa Trek. “Unfortunately,”

Bratt (2019) writes, “the convoy’s pro-oil and gas message was diluted by two factors.” First, the SNC-Lavalin scandal, which meant that “the convoy was the media’s second item, instead of leading the coverage.” And second: “the infiltration within the convoy of white nationalists who used it to protest the UN Global Compact, immigration, and racist causes.” Bratt (2019) elaborates:

By not properly vetting participants, a percentage of the media coverage and social media commentary was not about oil and gas policy, but about the more odious aspects of the convoy. In addition, because the convoy lacked one key spokesperson, it allowed everyone to claim to speak for the group, even on matters that were unconnected to the stated goal of promoting oil and gas. This meant at best a disjointed message, and at worse [*sic.*] a racist message. (Bratt, 2019)

Thus, Bratt retro-actively participated in the broader disciplining project undertaken by the likes of Canada Action and Rachel Notley, advising UWR to tamp down and *mask* such views. For Bratt as for members of the coalition, the main problem was optics; it might not have mattered how many bigots were in the crowd, if only UWR had the correct media strategy. Rather than see UWR for what it was—an autonomous, grassroots YVC convoy that had been rebranded at the last minute—Bratt raises the laughable objection that convoy organizers should have “vetted” participants to ensure they were not aggrieved about the migration compact, immigration, or any “racist causes” (Bratt, 2019). In reality, the convoy was *organized* by such individuals.

It is highly unlikely Bratt was unaware of the convoy’s origins in the YVC movement, a connection that had been widely reported, and yet the column does not mention the movement once. I am not doubting Bratt’s preference for the tightly controlled astroturf rallies put on by the coalition throughout 2018, nor his relative distaste for elements of the autonomous, far-right outgrowth of that very same movement. However, whether intentionally or not, op-eds

like these play a role in legitimizing industry's extractive populist strategy amongst liberal audiences. They also go easy on extractive populism's far-right offshoots, with Bratt ultimately championing UWR as "worthwhile," even if he felt it would have been "even more powerful" without the "missteps" (Bratt, 2019).

Notwithstanding the important work of conservative and liberal media, arguably the foremost public political legitimators of UWR were conservative politicians, with Andrew Scheer, Doug Ford and Scott Moe all sending video messages of support to UWR while the convoy was making its way to Ottawa (CCMBC West, 2019; Doug Ford [@fordnation], 2019). Both Andrew Scheer and PPC leader Maxime Bernier spoke at the convoy, along with other Conservative MPs. While UWR protested outside Parliament, inside the House of Commons, Conservative MPs called their cause "principled and worthy," making no mention of the convoy's connections to Yellow Vests Canada, saying "Canadian energy workers deserve a government that supports their industry and champions it worldwide."

"Establishment" Conservatism vs. "Grassroots" White Nationalism

The presence of politicians at the convoy, however, was not unanimously celebrated by YVC participants. Another interviewee, William, an unemployed man in Ontario and one of the only long-time activists I spoke to, was not an organizer of the convoy, but was a Yellow Vest activist in his area and attended the convoy rally on February 19th, 2019. He perceived a marked distinction between the "establishment" and "grassroots" elements of the convoy. The former referred to the narrowly pro-oil and gas rally that happened on Parliament Hill, at which conservative politicians spoke, including CPC leader Andrew Scheer and PPC leader Maxime Bernier. The grassroots event, in his mind, was not on the Hill, but on Wellington Street, where some YVC activists had appropriated a scissor lift as a makeshift stage, and faced off directly with counter-protesters. William was highly skeptical of Andrew Scheer, in particular, and

accused him of trying to co-opt the protest. William and about 50 other YVC activists stayed in this position the whole time. He commented:

There was a clear clear difference between people that were like-minded that I was networked with, that just wanted to make sure that we had a safe event and people could speak, versus a political agenda that was up on the Hill that we weren't even privy to.

In his mind, then, the rally on the Hill was an electoral event, where politicians sought to use the event to gain political clout. The “grassroots,” or “the good guys,” as he put it, were not on the Hill, but on Wellington Street, “holding Antifa at bay.” This makeshift stage, not the main stage, was where white nationalist Faith Goldy spoke. At one point, with Goldy still on the stage, Maxime Bernier was “climbing up the stairwell ... [and] he's grabbing the microphone, he's ready to speak, and then all of a sudden [a lead UWR organizer] basically dragged him off.” This moment, where Bernier is led by a UWR organizer away from sharing a stage with Goldy, illustrates again how the boundaries between the far right and mainstream were policed in real time. For William, the definition of “establishment” was working with political parties, *especially* the CPC, and he therefore considered some UWR organizers to be “bought and paid for,” “working with the establishment to sabotage [the grassroots],” and as having “sold out.” The “real deal” convoy, by contrast, was down on Wellington Street.

William’s testimony shows that it is not enough to simply say ‘the far right is relatively autonomous from fossil capital’ and to move on. We must avoid “purely impressionistic correlations” (Laclau, 1975, p. 87), and specify the degree of this autonomy which is by no means pre-determined. Just as not every capitalist state is equally relatively autonomous from capital, not every far-right movement, or even fractions of a movement, are equally autonomous. The radical wing of the YVC movement may have been more autonomous from elite actors, but it was also *weaker*. It proved incapable of carrying out a

properly Yellow Vest convoy, and took up a self-imposed marginality, sidelined from the main action on the day of the convoy's main rally, left alone to taunt "antifa," listen to an infamous white nationalist, and simultaneously protest the counter-protest *and* the main protest, which was taking place on the Hill, out of ear shot.

The sense that the convoy had been co-opted by politicians was echoed by Jay Riedel, a YVC activist from Saskatchewan who, as we saw above, played a key role in organizing a YVC-affiliated convoy in Estevan in late December, 2018. Even though many of the trucks were not present and attendance was far smaller, Riedel felt that the second day of the convoy was when "things really took shape." He added:

That's when the Grassroots Hearts came in play. Women and Men like Glen Carritt got their opportunity to speak for and represent the Convoy Of Heart For The People Of Canada. (United We Roll For Canada, 2019)

For Riedel, day one of the convoy was less grassroots, a fact reflected in the speakers' list, which was dominated by politicians. Day two, by contrast, provided opportunity for more grassroots activists to speak. Carritt's speech is worth elaborating.

Carritt had strategically removed his yellow vest for the entirety of the journey from Red Deer, a move that allowed, as we saw above, a more mainstream framing of the convoy to take hold, one focussed on oil and gas. This pivot was not entirely disingenuous, either, as it was calculated to widen the sphere of participants and to strengthen opportunities for legitimation, from both media and politicians. Indeed, the two stages became yet one more way of constructing a divide between the far right and the mainstream. Carritt himself went down to the Wellington Street scissor lift stage and encouraged "anyone focussed on oil and gas" to come up to the Hill for speeches. The speeches, in fact, were limited to oil and gas, even though both Scheer and Bernier were vocally opposed to the UN migration compact.

The narrowness of the focus forced Bernier to try to outflank Scheer as even *more* supportive of the oil and gas industry than the CPC.

For his part, Carritt avoided wearing a yellow vest even during the convoy rally on day one. He did, however, take the opportunity to pivot away from oil and gas when interviewed by a reporter. He continued to foreground the standard litany of energy and environment grievances but also indicated his opposition to the “UN compact.”¹⁵¹ The CPAC reporter asked him if he viewed immigration as a “distraction” from the movement, to which he responded:

It’s not a distraction. My question is why do we have so many issues with the current government? There’s such a disconnect, there’s overspending, there’s issue after issue, so you know what, the UN compact is an issue that needs to be addressed and we need our borders controlled by the Canadian government. That’s what the Canadian people want.

I have come to read this as Carritt reclaiming some autonomy. He had been forced to circumnavigate what he saw as mis-informed stigma surrounding his association with YVC, and he did so in order to widen the participation pool and to gain further legitimacy, including that which would derive from having mainstream politicians speak at the convoy. He had himself abandoned the yellow vest and stayed focused on a message box that centred oil and gas. He had done so at some cost, too, burning bridges with the board of the original YVC convoy. Here, though, Carritt arguably re-asserts some autonomy over the protest. Whereas the formal speeches on the Hill steered clear of the issue, Carritt took the opportunity of a media interview to insist that calls for a stronger border were very much part of the convoy’s message.

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On day two of the convoy, when he kicked off the speeches, he asserted this autonomy even more. He began with a hockey metaphor: “when you have the puck, you get hit. And guess what, we got the puck.” In other words, the various attacks on the convoy, which sought to discredit it as far right, were re-interpreted as evidence of the convoy’s importance. He then proceeded with what I have come to think of as a sort of yellow vest burlesque performance. He placed a hard hat on his head and said, “Guess what? Same guy.” Next, a large red safety jacket, customary in the oilfield. “Guess what? Red jacket. Same guy. Peaceful, respectful, hard-working Albertan, Canadian. Same guy.” Next he removed his toque. “Guess what? I’m bald! Same guy!” After that, he donned a pink scarf. “Hey, hey, look at this, I can wear a pink scarf. It doesn’t matter. Same hard-working, Canadian Albertan businessman that brought these trucks all the way across the country, and I’m proud of everyone that came out here.” Then, for his last transformation, he took off the pink scarf and put on a yellow vest. “Guess what?”, he asked, one final time. The crowd now shouted in unison—“Same guy!”—and broke into applause and cheers.

There is a clownish quality here, revealing truths that the powerful are incapable of uttering, namely that, regardless of whether he was going to roll with the RCC, which he had originally wanted to do before being rebuffed, or whether he was going to go as the YVC convoy, or as UWR, he is ultimately the same person. Across these various identity markers and symbols, which had been so politicized, he asserts the unity of his politics and movement. Carritt’s yellow vest burlesque points out the hypocrisy of elite interests in the extractive populist movement—namely, individuals like Battershill, who wanted to co-opt the energy of YVC while disguising its outward appearance in moderate signs and symbols. But it also serves as a rebuttal to those, like William, who saw UWR organizers as having “sold out” to politicians. It is true that, in the end, Carritt de-centred YVC signs, symbols, and frames. But, as his burlesque performance suggests, he remained unchanged underneath.

In this performance, we can read a theory of the far right's relationship to the fossil capitalist mainstream: there is tension, conflict, and uneasiness. There are efforts to co-opt, and resistance to cooptation. At multiple scales, there are efforts to claim the mantle of the 'grassroots,' and finger-pointing at the sell-outs within the movement. There are moments of assertiveness, and moments of tactical retreat. Ultimately, however, *united they roll*.

Conclusion

This chapter shed light on the theoretical question of the Canadian far right's relationship to fossil capital by using the case study of the convoy to Ottawa. One of the central findings is that it is difficult to determine precisely where the "radical" elements might begin and end. This blurriness is in some cases actively cultivated by movement actors, who kick up sand to muddle the distinction between radical and mainstream. The radical elements do not want to be stigmatized as radical, and so at times strategically distance themselves from radical symbols and frames. More mainstream actors do not want to be associated with radical elements and yet seek to co-opt their energy.

In my analysis, obfuscation is multi-scalar. At the top, organized fossil capital, as represented by CAPP and CAOEC, obfuscated their relationship with and degree of support for the convoys. The mainstream convoy (RCC) did the same in relation to the far-right convoy (YVC). Within the far-right convoy, certain actors obfuscated their relationship with and support for the far right, pivoting from YVC to UWR. Within UWR, those without vests obfuscated their relationship with and support for YVC (Carritt's yellow vest burlesque), and those *with* vests did the same regarding radicalism within their own movement, diminishing it as either a malign misrepresentation on the part of a biased liberal media, or as a case of a few bad apples, about whom little to nothing could be done. By the end of this downward funnel of obfuscation, "*the far right*"—as a single entity supposedly somewhere inside the

movement—nearly slips out of one’s hands entirely. We are left with limited analytical purchase on the totality of the convoy, which becomes primarily understood as a pro-oil and gas convoy that “offers inroads to extremist elements” (Issawi, 2019). At this point, the public relations boost that conservative commentators provided the convoy converges with the liberal critique of the convoy: in the former, we are reassured that radicalism has been denounced and, wherever possible, expelled. In the latter, we are told that this is not the case, and that there remains an opening for far-right elements in the movement. In the liberal case, our critical attention is funnelled down and down, to the point where we are focussed on the presence of a member of the Northern Guard on day two of the convoy. In this, we ignore the leader of the convoy, who slips on and off the identity marker of the far right. We ignore the CPC, who granted the movement legitimacy by speaking at its event. And above all, we ignore the president of CAPP, who used his time in the Senate to champion the convoy as an expression of social license.

We cannot understand the Canadian far right without understanding its relationship to fossil capital. Analyses that emphasize how far-right actors use pro-fossil fuel politics as social cover are far too narrow. To be clear, I am not denying that this dynamic is part of the story. Indeed, it is an important finding of Tetrault’s, for example, that previously existing nationalist and patriot groups began wearing yellow vests in early December 2018, thus constituting one important source of YVC personnel. However, to focus our critical attention too narrowly on how some neo-Nazi and Islamophobic patriot groups re-branded themselves as YVC activists risks missing the forest for the trees. We must also attend to how this pivot enabled cross-pollination between these groups and other elements, including, as I have shown, newly mobilized fractions of a radicalizing, fossilized petty bourgeoisie, interpellated by extractive populism’s years-long ideological and organizational momentum. To say the extremist elements infiltrated this otherwise liberal democratic movement is to miss the

radicalization dynamic internal to extractive populism, as well as that which arose precisely through the construction of a meeting place for all of these previously dis-articulated elements to ‘roll united.’

The liberal analysis also refuses to interrogate why a pro-fossil fuel movement exists in the first place and thus takes its availability to the far right (either as a smokescreen or as that which may be infiltrated) for granted. Implicitly, but often *explicitly*, the liberal analysis of UWR legitimizes the existence of the extractive populist movement, in form and content, by insisting on the legitimacy of the economic demands of the movement. Even progressives fall into this, as when [Harrison \(2019\)](#) described the convoys as the expression of “oil and gas workers and their supporters.” Such analyses mis-recognizes the class politics of the extractive populist movement and convoys. Of course, it is true that some oil and gas workers were involved (notably Pat King, who would go on to be a leader of the Freedom Convoy). One of my interviewees, Andrew, was indeed working-class, but he did not own a truck and his participation in the convoy depended entirely on being able to hitch a ride with someone else who did. Notwithstanding working-class participation, my findings illustrate that the foundational impetus for the convoy emerged from within the fossil capital-backed extractivist action coalition, endorsed as far back as 2016 by CAPP as a technique of demonstrating social license, and that the resources required to execute the convoy were drawn primarily from the fossilized petty bourgeoisie.

Liberal assertions that the convoy was a working-class expression not only mis-recognize the resource infrastructure of the movement, but also implicitly flatten class differences, such that expanding fossil fuel production comes to be seen as mutually beneficial for capital and labour. Never mind the exploitation in this sector, the companies’ increasing use of automation which problematizes job growth claims ([Hussey, 2022](#)); the myriad health and safety concerns (including mental health) associated with fly-in fly-out

work (Dorow et al., 2021); the gendered and racial hierarchies that structure the workplace (Alook et al., 2021; O’Shaughnessy & Doğu, 2016); the obscenely high profits extracted (Dryden, 2022b) and the historically lenient royalty regime which ensures that the bulk of these profits flow to shareholders and financial investors rather than public coffers (A. Carter & Zalik, 2016); the environmental, health, and economic harms Albertans face from increasing extreme weather events due to climate change, including wildfires (Vaillant, 2024); and disregard, too, the credible pathways for a just transition for oil and gas workers (S. Klein, 2020). A movement whose primary organizational resources stem from a corporate grassroots campaign and the fossilized petty bourgeoisie, and whose demands primarily benefit capital, is nonetheless successful in mobilizing the *image* of the worker, such that many come to see its major protest events as expressions of the working-class.

Finally, we can say that, although extractive populism and its associated elite actors played a crucial role in subsidizing the movement—especially big fossil capital and conservative politicians—the movement itself is hardly an “instrument” in their hands. Rather, the YVC movement had a degree of autonomy, which occasionally made the alliance rather uneasy. What we can conclude from this is that big fossil capital plays a critical role in getting the movement off the ground, but will tend to retreat to the shadows once sufficient momentum has been built. Big fossil capital and its allies continue to provide subsidy for the movement on a number of fronts (this is what Scheer’s speech was, in effect—a major legitimization of UWR), but the actual street movement comes to take a life of its own, independent from it. The street movement, then, is rather like Frankenstein’s monster, the metaphor hit on by Simon Enoch to describe how the oil industry subsidized the far-right, leading to the Freedom Convoy (2022).¹⁵² The “monster” version of the movement is far less top-down than the official extractive populist protests, and also far more radical. Big fossil capital’s official groups back

¹⁵² Enoch interviewed me about my research and read an earlier version of this chapter to develop his argument.

away at this point, and the movement comes to be carried out by small fossil capital, fossilized proletarians, and others. These class fractions, in turn, form a core nucleus of further social movement activity. Referring to the early extractive populist protests, Enoch writes, “these early protests (and others that followed) would be the incubator within which the personnel, tactics, strategy, networks, and organization of the Freedom Convoy would gestate.” Indeed, this is consistent with the literature on social movements. As Almeida (2019) puts it, “those with previous organizing experience can offer a major boost in launching a movement campaign” (p. 49). Extractive populism and Yellow Vests Canada, then, were the training grounds for future mobilizations.

The extractivist action coalition, Greg told me, largely came undone as a result of the fractious internal politics regarding the convoy to Ottawa. Indeed, late 2018 was clearly the peak of activity for the coalition, while the relatively autonomous far-right elements continued to mobilize. United We Roll activists, for example, held a counter-demonstration against an environmental rally in Edmonton at which Greta Thunberg spoke (The Canadian Press, 2019). And in early February 2020, they visited a picket line of refinery workers in Saskatchewan, not to support them, but to intimidate them, urging them to get back to work, further demonstrating the petty bourgeois character of the movement (Leedham, 2020). Pat King, who would go on to be a leading organizer in the Freedom Convoy, stayed active after UWR, co-hosting dozens of town halls with fellow Yellow Vester Jay Riedel to spread the pro-pipeline, anti-“illegal” immigration message, although not without attracting controversy (R. Miller, 2019). And when the pandemic hit, United We Roll would be part of the very earliest ‘freedom’ protests.

7. More Trucks, More Articulations: From Alberta Separatism to the Freedom Convoy

We live by the market, we die by the market. That's fair. That's freedom. – Tamara Lich

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic was declared in March 2020 by the World Health Organization and would go on to kill over 7 million globally, including over 50,000 Canadians. Its effects were not only on public health, however, but on politics and economics, too—disrupting global supply chains while proving to be particularly fertile ground for far-right conspiracy thinking and organizing. While many Canadians engaged in symbolic acts of recognition for essential workers or built movement organisations for mutual aid that in many ways became “essential services” (L. Wood, 2022), others mobilized for entirely different reasons. The enormity of the crisis, the speed with which it took hold, and the drastic measures taken by states to combat it were seen by a segment of society as part of a broader plan that had little to do with public health. In such conspiracist interpretations, the pandemic was not to be understood as “zoonotic spillover,” a consequence of a world-system tearing through ecological hinterland at an unprecedented rate and kicking a proverbial hornet’s nest worth of once-sequestered pathogens in the process (Malm, 2020). Nor was it seen as a lab accident, a natural disaster, or even the will of God. Instead, some segments of the population saw something more nefarious at work—they saw the groundwork being laid for a totalitarian, communistic one world government, or “Great Reset,” named after the World Economic Forum’s 2021 conference theme and the latest in a long-line of names for the globalist conspiracy theory (Christensen & Au, 2023).

In this chapter, we will see how the cycle of protest culminated in 2022 in one of the largest right-wing populist demonstrations in Canadian history, the Freedom Convoy. From late February through mid-March 2022, trucks occupied large swathes of downtown Ottawa, inspiring copycat protests and truck blockades across the country. One of the most significant

of these was in Coutts, Alberta, a small village on the border with Montana, which saw a 17-day blockade. Together, these protests, along with the blockade of the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, Ontario (another border crossing to the US), led to the federal government implementing the Emergencies Act.¹⁵³ Far from a singular and discrete event that can only be understood with reference to pandemic politics, I show how the Freedom Convoy had its roots in the radicalizing extractive populist movement. Of course, the freedom movement was much larger than YVC, UWR, or even Alberta separatism, and so the point of the “cycle of protest” framework is not to collapse the distinctions and simply state that they are all one in the same. The story is rather more like a snowball, growing as it is rolled. Indeed, in this chapter, I show how one major new element of the freedom movement was the mobilization of faith communities, especially evangelical Christians, whose entry into the cycle of protest gave it additional organizational heft and new ideological underpinnings.

Like YVC, the freedom movement was national in scope. Nonetheless, as with YVC, evidence suggests that it was strongest in Alberta. The Public Order Emergency Commission (POEC), launched automatically in the wake of the Emergencies Act, commissioned 17 reports by relevant experts on a range of topics, from policing, private security, crowdfunding, cryptocurrency, to supply chain disruptions. Only 1 of the 17 commissioned reports deals specifically with the ideological contours and political culture of the movement within a single province: Jared Wesley's (2022), *Alberta Separatism and the Freedom Convoy: A New Brand of Western Alienation*. Clearly, in the view of the Commissioner of the POEC, only Alberta warranted specific attention. Wesley's (2022) report makes it clear why this is the case:

¹⁵³ The Emergencies Act is a statute passed in 1988, authorizing the Government of Canada to take extraordinary measures to respond to public welfare, public order, international and war emergencies.

The Freedom Convoy movement has deep roots in Western Canada. Many of its key organizers reside in the region, having coordinated several large protest events in the past five years. Public opinion polls illustrate that sympathy for the movement is also strongest in the West, especially on the prairies and specifically in Alberta. (p. 1)

Further evidence of Alberta's disproportionately strong freedom movement can be seen in the role it played in the province's policy-making and electoral process, particularly the way the overlapping separatist and freedom movements underpinned Danielle Smith's rise to power.

In this chapter, the focus is on tracing the cycle's tactical and ideational diffusion, along with its mobilizing structures, beyond United We Roll and into the separatist and freedom movements, which together "anchored" the rise of Danielle Smith. Attention throughout is given to what Meyer & Whittier (1994) identify as the key routes for "social movement spillover," or "movement-movement transmission": coalitions and overlapping social movement communities, including shared personnel; and changes in the opportunity structure produced by an earlier movement, which can then be capitalized on by future movements (p. 278). The chapter is divided into two main sections. In the first, I trace how the extractivist action coalition and Yellow Vests Canada "spilled over" into separatism, and in the second, I do the same for the freedom movement and convoy.

The first section, 'Fossilized Separatism,' draws on interviews, YVC social media, and reports from anti-fascist observers to examine the Alberta separatist movement's position within the cycle of protest. First, I find that a fossil fuel-inflected Albertan alienation was a potent motivator for some joining YVC and that, in turn, YVC and United We Roll were training grounds for future separatist organizing. Second, I find that several individuals who played key roles in the diffusion of the convoy—stretching back to the beginning of the cycle in 2016—went on to play leadership roles in the separatist movement. These findings further erode the argument that support for oil and gas on the far right is trivial or merely tactical.

They also suggest that, despite not producing a convoy of its own, Albertan separatism is an important spin-off movement of the carbon convoy cycle. Third, I find that the movement harboured radicals and self-identified fascists, along with ostensibly mainstream conservatives who offered the movement a veneer of legitimacy and respectability. In light of these findings, I argue that separatism is not exogenous from mainstream Alberta conservatism or extractive populism; rather, it represents a radicalization of these tendencies, emerging from within them and, in turn, exerting significant right-flank pressure.

Throughout the second section, 'Fossilized Freedom,' by closely studying the continuities in personnel between the cycle of protest and the freedom movement, a new interpretive lens comes into view, which sees the Freedom Convoy as the pinnacle of fossil capital's corporate grassroots strategy. While public health measures like vaccine and mask mandates may have been the proximate target of the freedom movement, I find that corona politics were often interpreted through the lens of the globalist conspiracy theory, increasingly articulated with faith-based framings, and deeply enmeshed with support for ongoing fossil fuel production and opposition to nearly all climate mitigation strategies. Rather than see the Freedom Convoy as a singular event, an aberration, or a result of two years of pandemic restrictions that created a pressure cooker in which frustrations finally boiled over, I argue it is best understood as an upward scale shift of the carbon convoy cycle. From a review of the Public Order Emergency Commission reports and transcripts with key organizers, I find that the convoy would not have taken on the size, longevity, or intensity it did without three individuals—Tamara Lich, Pat King, and James Bauder—all of whom became activists via the radicalizing extractive populist movement: specifically, Yellow Vests Canada and United We Roll. This prior experience, and their continued involvement in activism in the years leading up to the Freedom Convoy via separatism and the freedom movement, are how they accrued the knowledge, personal efficacy, resources, and social

capital to pull off the Freedom Convoy. I therefore conclude that the Freedom Convoy would not have occurred without the prior activation of a corporate grassroots, pro-oil and gas strategy. Also echoing the YVC/UWR movement, I find that radical, racist, and violent rhetoric was met with uneasy tolerance, largely owing to the reliance on resources possessed by individuals holding such views. By seeing the freedom movement and convoy not as discrete phenomenon related solely to the pandemic, we can better appreciate its implications beyond the narrow interpretive lens of corona politics, contextualizing it historically and spatially within the extractive populist cycle and the convoys that preceded it. Of course, this is by no means to suggest the Freedom Convoy was in some way a direct instrument of fossil capital. To the contrary, its organizers possessed a great deal of autonomy from fossil capital. And yet, this autonomy was *relative* and arguably made it all the more effective in serving fossil capital.

Fossil Separatism

YVC and Alberta Separatism

A post to the Yellow Vests Canada group on the day of Trudeau's October 2019 re-election, just five months before the Covid-19 pandemic was declared, captured the mood of many alienated Albertans:

The Alberta Separatism movement now has wings! Canada means nothing to me now, but inequality and catering to Quebec at the expense of all others. To all of you who voted Liberal, I denounce you in the strongest terms! NDP and Green voters are beyond hope anyway! (October 21, 2.1k likes).

Echoing a core grievance of Albertan alienation—namely, that the province's oil wealth flows to less productive regions, especially Québec, through federal equalization transfers—the post evinces a lack of “loser's consent,” or the willingness to uphold democratic procedures

regardless of outcome, that animates much separatist sentiment and organizing (Young, 2025). No other region-specific discourse was nearly as prevalent in my social media data set of YVC posts, further evidence that Alberta was the beating heart of the movement, the energy for which would be channeled into separatism in the wake of Trudeau's re-election.

As discussed in chapter 5, the Canadian Anti-Hate Network and related researchers depicted oil and gas as a relatively trivial component of the YVC movement, and even as a form of camouflage used to gain legitimacy. While this may have been true of some elements of the movement (particularly pre-established patriot and nationalist groups), my findings suggest Albertan alienation—underpinned by climate obstructionist ideology—was a powerful motivating factor for joining YVC. I asked Sandra why she initially got involved, and she told me, “You have to get off the keyboard sometimes and stand for what you believe in. And I believe that Alberta was getting screwed hard.” The sense that her province was being dealt a bad deal drove her into the streets in the hopes that she could help “initiate change.” I asked her who Alberta was “getting screwed” by, and she said, “Ottawa. Ontario. And, like, look at our transfer payments. Québec. Like, we have been taking a beating and a beating and a beating and they're very, very frustrated. This separation issue is real.” The political enemies within her worldview, then, are the nation's capital, along with the two most populous provinces, Québec and Ontario. She specifically mentions the “transfer payments,” known formally as equalization payments, a constitutionally enshrined program designed to ensure “reasonably comparable levels of public services at reasonably comparable levels of taxation” across the country (Canada, 2000). Although at first she mentioned equalization, it became clear that these “beatings” centrally involved the fossil fuel industry.

It is worth reproducing the rest of her response at length:

You're cutting off . . . our ability to support ourselves and we're still sending the money out to provinces that are doing better than we are. . . . The industry was already being hit

hard. And then Trudeau comes in with these policies that just slashed it. . . . We're not ready to be independent of oil and gas. We may want to be in the future, but the reality is, right now we are still very dependent on it. We live in a large, cold country, and we need fossil fuels at this point. So, we might as well be getting them from our own backyard where we're doing it ethically, where we're doing it as safely as you can, environmentally friendly as anybody in the world, and at the same time generating these awesome incomes that are sending the transfer payments to the Maritimes, to Québec, to the have-not provinces that we've been feeding off the oil and gas. We're quite frustrated.

When she finished, I asked Sandra if her reasons for participating in YVC ever changed, and she said, simply, "no." This sense of her province receiving "beatings," then, triggered her initial participation, and was her ongoing motivation for participating throughout the entirety of the movement; she only missed one Saturday from the beginning of the movement in late 2018 to the end of April. This narrative of Albertan victimhood, then, was powerful enough to drive Sandra into the far-right Yellow Vests Canada movement.

What becomes clear from Sandra's invocation of Albertan victimhood is that there is an absolute identity between Alberta, its 'people,' and the fossil fuel industry. In the abstract, it is not immediately clear why a federal government's efforts to regulate a province's leading sector would automatically trigger backlash from a working-class person such as Sandra, who may have as much or more to gain from environmental conservation and climate mitigation. Reflecting a remarkable degree of success in extractive populist efforts to cultivate a "hegemonic community economic identity" (Eaton & Enoch, 2021), Sandra continually refers to the activities of oil producers as if it were her home team, invoking the collective "we" and "our" to describe the industry's supposedly ethical practices. From this perspective, energy transition is perceived as misguided and, more importantly, as a direct threat to her province. She would appear to have adopted a moderate perspective, which acknowledges the need for

energy transition while emphasizing our current dependence, such that the transition needs to be thought through carefully. And yet, invocation of a collective desire to eventually be independent of oil and gas, coupled with a ‘realist’ emphasis on our present dependence, cashes out in demands for unrestricted fossil extraction, where even the modest reforms initiated by Trudeau are deemed an existential threat to the province’s economic security.

What this makes clear is that Sandra’s participation in YVC was motivated by a sense that the fossil fuel industry was threatened and needed defending; victimization of Alberta is victimization of the fossil fuel industry; this victimization of the fossil fuel industry, moreover, was based on the supposedly false premise that an urgent energy transition is required and feasible. In other words, Albertan alienation functioned as a narrative capable of enrolling Sandra into a far-right social movement arrayed against even moderate efforts to regulate the fossil fuel industry. Sandra did not indicate whether she supported the idea of separation from Canada, stopping short of this by noting merely that “this separation thing is real,” and lending credence to its underling claims of Albertan victimization. The official extractive populist discourse, moreover, served as a complement to Albertan alienation. Much of the last part of her response is simply a rote recital of extractive populist frames—energy lifeworld, ethical oil, government and tech/corporate sustainability, Canadian/public interest (Gunster et al., 2021, p. 212)—that shows how extractive populism functions as a complementary discourse to Albertan alienation. If Yellow Vests can be understood as a radicalized extractive populism, then Albertan alienation and separatism can be seen as this ideology’s regionalized variant.

Another one of my interviewees, Troy, makes this connection clear on an organizational level. Troy, as the reader will recall from chapter 4 and 6, got his start in politics through an extractive populist group and was an organizing member of the cancelled Resource Coalition Convoy. When I spoke with him, he had recently become involved in a separatist organization, the Alberta Unity Project (AUP), which would shortly thereafter become the Alberta Prosperity

Project and is covered at some length later in this chapter. Troy told me that the AUP was pursuing “freedom through independence,” a slogan that hitched the mantra of “freedom,” particularly popular on the Albertan far-right during the pandemic, to the separatist cause. He told me that separation “cannot happen” right away, and so the AUP was dedicated to “getting people together and educating and uniting people to understand how we can and why we should [separate].” Not only was the extractive populist movement a conduit for the YVC movement, then, as we saw in the previous chapter; it was also a training ground for future Alberta separatists like Troy.

Todd, who we also met in chapter 6 as one of the YVC/UWR convoy organizers, had likewise joined the separatist movement when I spoke with him, although he took a different approach than Troy. Whereas Troy had joined an organization dedicated to education around the need for separation, Todd had joined the Alberta Statehood Party, a small party advocating for Alberta to become the 51st state. I asked him why he felt joining the US was the right choice for Alberta, and he responded:

Because we'd have no carbon tax. We'd have \$30 billion of equalization payments in our pockets, instead of giving it to the east. We would have \$300 to \$600 billion worth of investments coming into Alberta. Our agriculture would flourish. We would have no trade tariffs . . . 86% of our trade in Alberta right now is done through United States, and we sell our oil at a discounted rate to them . . . we would get rid of that. Keystone pipeline would go through. We would become world leaders. We would be bigger than OPEC, with Alberta, Texas . . . [and] North Dakota . . . So, we would be world leaders on the world markets for oil and gas instead of buying from blood countries . . . we could trade at a world market price instead of a discounted price.

This was the extent of his response, and it is remarkable how much of his reasoning has to do with oil. It is clear that, for Todd, joining the US is primarily about escaping various

environmental regulations that Canada has in place, and about unleashing Albertan fossil capital. Albertan oil wealth should be accumulated without intervention (no carbon tax), without being shared (via equalization), and without being slowed down by a lack of pipelines to tidewater. I asked if he participated in the Wexit movement after the October 2019 election, and his response was only slightly less oil-centric:

Independence won't work. We'll be landlocked. We won't have a militia. We won't have a currency. We won't have a constitution But as a state . . . we'll have a constitution, and we'll have access to the United States with Keystone and no tariffs. And we'd have their militia's support. As an independent country, it won't work.

It is unclear why he believes that Alberta joining the US would make Keystone XL more likely to be built, given successive Democratic Presidents' opposition to it. But the issue of Alberta being landlocked is a common argument against separation, repeated by then-Premier Jason Kenney in his rationale for opposing separation, on very similar grounds as Todd: "Landlocking ourselves through separation is not a solution to the problem of a campaign to landlock Alberta [a reference to environmentalist campaigns against the oil sands]," he said in the wake of the 2019 Federal election when separatism was surging (Kirby, 2019). While the solution of joining the US may seem extreme, it was built on an analysis championed by the Premier himself: that there exists within Canada a nefarious campaign to landlock Alberta oil, and that the solution to this cannot be to separate, since this would merely entrench the province's land-locked status. Again, the radical views of movement activists are at times a short and (somewhat) logical step away from dominant extractive populist narratives.

Separatist Movement Parties

While separatism has overlaps in personnel and ideology with both the extractive populist and YVC movements, its organizational form differed. Despite some early debate about the

merits of this form, the separatist movement came to be primarily crystalized within movement parties. Organizing efforts to that end had already been increasing during the final years of Justin Trudeau’s first term (2015-2019). In late 2017, for example, the long-dormant Alberta Independence Party (AIP) was revived by a Trump-loving businessman and welder named Dave Bjorkman (Graney, 2019a; Maimann, 2019a). Bjorkman had taken over the party name from Cory Morgan, the same individual behind the Citizens Committee to Evict Camp Cloud (see chapter 4), who had founded the party in 2000 in response to the re-election of Jean Chrétien as Prime Minister, only to disband it a year later after a drubbing in the March 2001 provincial election (CBC News, 2001; C. Morgan, 2019a).¹⁵⁴ Although Bjorkman was leader of the AIP starting in late 2017, he retained ties to the UCP and in the Fall of 2018 was swept up in a controversy surrounding a UCP constituency association’s interaction with members of the Soldiers of Odin (SOO). While Jason Kenney and a local constituency president tried to distance the party from SOO, even going so far as to disqualify one of the UCP candidates who had taken photos with them and refused to apologize, Bjorkman, who had been an active member of the UCP prior to founding the Alberta Independence Party, defended the SOO as “not racist” and accused Kenney of throwing them “under the bus” (Bellefontaine, 2018; PressProgress, 2018).

Despite this controversy, by March 2019, Bjorkman and the AIP had done what the party’s previous iteration under Morgan had failed to do; by nominating candidates in at least half of the province’s 87 ridings, they secured official party status, an important milestone for any fledgling party, especially given the generous tax rebates that come with it. The AIP was

¹⁵⁴ Cory Morgan is now a columnist for *Western Standard*, author of a recent separatist book called, *The Sovereignist’s Handbook* (2023), and an occasional speaker at Alberta Prosperity Project events. Directly prior to joining the *Western Standard* full-time in January 2022, Morgan was the Executive Director of Suits and Boots, a minor extractive populist group (*Cory Morgan*, n.d.). Before this, he worked for 20 years in oil and gas exploration (Gateway Gazette, 2015; C. Morgan, 2015). He was also VP Policy for the Wildrose Party in 2009 when Danielle Smith became leader, while his wife, Jane Morgan, served as the Executive Director of the party from 2005 to 2010 (J. Morgan, n.d.; Western Standard, 2022).

thus characterized in the *Edmonton Journal* as having had “something of a meteoric rise” (Graney, 2019b). Morgan himself, although he had become a skeptic about the merits of separatist “fringe” parties, described it as an “impressive organizational feat” (C. Morgan, 2019a). Despite the success of gaining official status, however, the Bjorkman-led AIP captured only 0.71% of the vote in the April 2019 provincial election that saw Kenney become Premier, faring no better than the party had under Morgan in 2001. Within a year, though, separatist fortunes would rise with the tide of alienation brought on by the re-election of Justin Trudeau, leading to the foundation of two new separatist parties.

In the leadup to the October 2019 federal election, Peter Downing—a former RCMP officer, military reservist, and one-time candidate for the Christian Heritage Party—founded Wexit Alberta. Downing had been placed on probation by the RCMP for uttering threats against his ex-wife, and so left the force in 2015 to join the military reserves, before pivoting to politics (D. Anderson, 2019). Between 2015 and 2019, Downing served on conservative party boards, worked as a campaign manager for Wildrose, and was involved with a “parental rights” group. Directly before Wexit, he created a registered third-party advertiser called Alberta Fights Back and spent thousands of dollars of his personal money to put up billboards in Edmonton and Calgary agitating for separation (Rieger, 2019b). One billboard asked whether Trudeau was “leading us into civil war,” accused the Prime Minister of “normalizing pedophilia,” and linked Trudeau to “mass migration,” “eco-hysteria” and “globalism” (Maimann, 2019b). The same billboard included a link to VoteWexit.com, suggesting that as early as June 2019, well before the concept went viral and led to an explosion of interest, the early groundwork was being laid. Despite the radical politics espoused by Downing, though, he was an active member within establishment conservative politics, and even as he was building the separatist parties, maintained his membership in the UCP (Rieger, 2019c). His

movement would prove capable of attracting prominent members of the conservative political establishment.

Prior to the election, on August 10th, 2019 at one of the first small Wexit meetings organized by Downing, former Conservative MP, Jay Hill, was in attendance and told reporters he believed support for separatism would rise if Trudeau were re-elected (Kury de Castillo, 2019). Recall that Hill had been House Leader under Stephen Harper (2008 to 2010), and in 2016 played an important role in the mediated diffusion of the convoy as a tactic of pro-fossil fuel protest, acting as a broker between the pioneering ICBA and the newly established group, FSJ for LNG (see chapter 4). Hill's attendance at this early Wexit meeting can be seen as a continuation of these efforts to cultivate a regional, right-wing populist movement capable of defending fossil capital. His prediction about separatist sentiment rising in the event of Trudeau's re-election, moreover, would prove prescient.

Within hours of the election being called for Trudeau, “#Wexit” was trending on Twitter, and, over the next few days, the Wexit Facebook group doubled in size to over 250,000 members, although it was suspected that some of that growth could be attributed to Russian bots (Zhou, 2019a, 2019b). Polling, too, showed a rise in support for separatism. Just prior to the election, Albertan support was already on the rise, reaching as high as 25%, and it would climb still further in the wake of Trudeau's re-election to a “historic” level of 33%—a higher level of support for separatism than was found even in Québec at the time (D. Anderson, 2019; Shah, 2019).

Downing seized on this momentum and used post-election townhalls, now attracting hundreds of attendees, to build membership lists, sell “Make Alberta Great Again” hats, and collect the requisite signatures to form a new party (Antoneshyn, 2020; Rieger, 2019c; Wagner, 2021, pp. 105–106). The decision to channel separatism into the organization of “movement parties” was the source of some early division in the movement. Pat King, for

example, whose had participated in United We Roll Convoy and Yellow Vests Canada, was an early supporter of Wexit and held a position on the Board. As we will see later in this chapter, he would go on to be one of the five lead organizers of the Freedom Convoy. But back in late 2019, despite describing himself as Downing's "right-hand man," King was opposed to the formation of separatist parties, arguing the focus should instead be on organizing citizens into a movement that would force Kenney to hold a referendum on separation (The ARC Collective, 2019). This disagreement eventually led to King's removal from the Wexit board, although he continued to be a supporter (The ARC Collective, 2019).

Against King's wishes, by mid-January 2020, Wexit Canada was an officially recognized federal party, envisioned by its founders as a Western equivalent of the Bloc Québécois (Antoneshyn, 2020). Not long after, in June 2020, Jay Hill, who Downing called the "perfect person to lead the new party into its next chapter," took over the leadership of Wexit Canada, thus providing the party, and the separatist cause in general, with an important stamp of legitimacy (Rieger, 2020). As in the separatist movement of the '80s, the entry of an establishment conservative figure with ties to the oil and gas industry was once again giving the movement an air of respectability, despite its ties to the far right.¹⁵⁵ Hill would later denounce Downing's extremism, but rather than view such distancing as proof the separatist movement was shedding its far-right fringes, we should consider that such purification is largely about optics. Rather than view it as the de-radicalizing of the far-right, we should see it as the mainstreaming of the far right. A few months later, in September 2020, the party

¹⁵⁵ Denise Harrington (1981) considered Carl Nickle's joining West-Fed, a leading separatist organization in the 1980s wave, "the single event which made separatist talk respectable in the west" (p. 28). Carl Nickle was a former PC MP for Calgary South ('51 to '57), the founder of the Daily Oil Bulletin, which had been "regarded as the most widely read authority on Canadian oil," and was, at the time, the President of an oil and gas exploration company, Conventures Ltd. (Nickle, 1984). Nickle's joining West-Fed provided Alberta separatism with a large measure of legitimacy and respectability, which it had up to that point lacked (McKinsey, 1981, p. 40; Szollosy, 1983, p. 211).

ditched the “Wexit” branding and changed its name to the Maverick Party, which remains its name at the time of writing (Dryden, 2020).

While the separatist movement now had a *federal* party, merger discussions got under way between various pre-existing right-wing fringe parties at the provincial level. Downing initially rebuffed the proposal, stating that other parties “are not 100 per cent committed to separation” (Naylor, 2019a, 2019b). Cory Morgan, meanwhile, used his column in the *Western Standard* to agitate for unity, and characterized Downing’s refusal as an ego-driven attachment to the “Wexit” brand (C. Morgan, 2019b). In advocating for the union of the various independence parties, Morgan looked ahead to the 2023 provincial election, writing, “Three-and-a-half years will go by quickly. It would be really nice if a well-organized party was coming up the right flank of the UCP to keep them on the straight and narrow” (C. Morgan, 2019b). In other words, while independence may have been the long-term goal of the movement, for Morgan, the near-term objective of a separatist party was to provide right-flank pressure on the UCP. Written before the pandemic, these words would prove more prescient than Morgan could have realized.

Downing’s opposition to the merger proposal was ultimately short-lived, and in February 2020, he penned a guest column in the *Western Standard* calling for unity among separatist organizations and critiquing Kenney for predicting a “gradual shift” away from fossil fuels, which he characterized as “the language of socialist deindustrialization and faux-environmentalism” (Downing, 2020). As an alternative to mainstream conservatives like Kenney, who was not sufficiently pro-oil, Downing proposed that Albertans ought to form a United Independence Party, consisting of a merger between the unregistered Wexit Alberta and the three registered right-wing fringe parties: The Independence Party, the Freedom Conservative Party, and Alberta Advantage. A referendum on equalization, which had been one of Kenney’s hallmark initiatives channeling Albertan alienation, Downing rightly pointed

out, was toothless and had no constitutional power. Instead, Albertans should elect an independence party, which would “unilaterally implement firewall-style legislation on taxation, pensions, immigration, firearms, and policing,” and which would also be “willing to hold a binding referendum on the independence of Alberta from the rest of Canada” (Downing, 2020). It is not clear what led to Downing’s reversal on the question of party mergers, but it was a crucial step in building a powerful provincial separatist party capable of exerting the right-flank pressure on the UCP that Morgan and others had called for.

By late April 2020, the Freedom Conservative Party and Wexit Alberta had reached an agreement in principle to form the Wildrose Independence Party of Alberta (WIPA), subject to the approval of their respective memberships in a June vote.¹⁵⁶ Upon the announcement of the merger agreement, Downing continued to heap scorn on what he perceived as Kenney’s failure to stand up to Ottawa: “Albertans have given Jason Kenney a chance to get a ‘fair deal’ for his people, and after one year, all we have seen is talk” (Mertz, 2020). The new WIPA would serve as right-flank pressure to ensure Kenney moves beyond talk. Between the April agreement and the June membership vote, an interim board was struck consisting of 15 members from each of the two parties, including two individuals from Wexit—Tamara Lich and Dennis Modry—who would go on to play prominent roles in the separatist and “freedom” movements, respectively (Gateway Gazette Contributor, 2020). Lich, the reader will recall, got her start in activism a year prior in the YVC movement in Medicine Hat, where she helped organized a convoy (see chapter 5). As we will see below, Lich would go on to be, along with King, one of the five lead organizers of the Freedom Convoy. Dennis

¹⁵⁶ Although the agreement between FCP and Wexit Alberta indicated that “other like-minded parties may join the unification agreement at any time,” neither The Independence Party nor Alberta Advantage ever did (Mertz, 2020). Throughout Spring 2022, The Independence Party (TIP) and the newly formed Wildrose Independence Party (WIPA) held a series of merger talks, but these were stymied over disagreement about the timing of a referendum on independence. As a precondition of merging, TIP demanded the new party’s constitution include a commitment to a referendum on independence within one year of forming government, something the WIPA would not commit to.

Modry, for his part, after serving on the first board of WIPA, would go on to found the Alberta Prosperity Project, which Troy had joined following his time in the extractivist action coalition, and which, as we will see below, would play a leading role in “anchoring” Danielle Smith’s rise.

In addition to the presence of former Yellow Vesters in the early leadership of the separatist movement, there was also a small contingent of self-identified neo-Nazis. Research by the Canadian Anti-Hate Network (CAHN) determined that one interim board member, Sam Bell, was a member of the Alberta Separatist Youth League (AYSL), a group of 20 young men practicing, via their involvement in independence-minded parties, what they called “optics friendly national socialism” (Simons & Adby, 2020). As CAHN reported, “[western separatism] is appealing to the white power movement—with a strong stance against immigration and extremely socially conservative values, they see it as the next best thing to a white ethnostate” (Simons & Adby, 2020). In addition to being elected to the interim board of WIPA, Sam Bell was an invited speaker at Wexit town halls and was featured in a March 2020 profile of the separatist movement for *The Walrus*, where he explained the rationale for separation: “Sovereignty and the right to govern ourselves—I think that’s what it comes down to” (Gundlock, 2020). If in large public fora like *The Walrus*, Bell focussed on more palatable issues like “sovereignty” and the “repression of our resource-wealth generation capacity” (a reference to fossil fuels), online he was far more radical. He administered a Facebook page called Make Alberta Great Again, featuring memes celebrating the murder of Black Lives Matter activists and fantasies about “nurturing a beautiful family and organizing a militia.” In the presumed safety of the private AYSL Telegraph channel, the logs for which were leaked, Bell used even more extreme rhetoric, defending his practice of quoting Hitler and celebrating colonial violence against Indigenous

people as a justified measure undertaken by his “ancestors” to “ensure I had a future,” an echo of the fourteen words (Adby, 2020).¹⁵⁷

When CAHN’s findings about the extremist activity of some of the movement’s participants and leaders were presented to Downing by a progressive journalist, Downing dismissed them. “As soon as you guys get rid of your bad apples, your communists and your perverts, then I will be more than happy to denounce neo-Nazis—if they exist in the Wexit movement,” he rebutted (Kinney, 2020). When Jay Hill, leader of Maverick, was read Downing’s comments, he responded, “now you know why even before I joined Wexit Canada I made sure Peter Downing had left” (Kinney, 2020). But despite the efforts of Hill to sanitize the Wexit movement at the federal level by distancing himself from Downing, Downing considered Hill the “perfect man for the job.” And Hill here ignores his own attendance at a Wexit rally in August 2019, when Downing was still the head of the movement. The narrative of sanitization is all too convenient for mainstream conservatives and should not be taken at face value. When considering the relationship between mainstream and far right political actors, the feelings of both parties towards one another ought to be weighed; to only accept the mainstream actors’ attempt to distance themselves, while downplaying the far-right actors’ sense of comradeship, is problematic for two reasons. First, it is simply inaccurate, as it only tells one side of the story. Second (and far worse), doing so reflects an uncritical acceptance of a self-serving narrative promulgated by mainstream conservatives that they have purged the cranks and fascists, which can in turn obfuscate the degree to which far-right ideas are being mainstreamed through the legitimization offered by such ‘mainstream’ actors. When considering the Wexit Alberta movement, it is important to see that the interim board

¹⁵⁷ The fourteen words is a neo-Nazi slogan, the same one spoken by former Rebel News reporter Faith Goldy on a neo-Nazi podcast during her trip to Charlottesville for the “Unite the Right” rally, for which she was ultimately fired (Harris, 2019).

of WIPA was a place where future separatist and “freedom” movement leaders, ‘mainstream’ conservative politicians, and self-identified fascists all worked side by side.

By July 2020, the interim board had appointed Paul Hinman (the founding leader of the Wildrose Alliance) as interim leader of the WIPA (Gilligan, 2020). Hinman clearly articulated the right-flank pressure strategy of his new party, stating, “If we can grow this party fast enough, hopefully Premier Kenney will move on these key issues and we will not have to wait till 2023 to start” (Gilligan, 2020). At the time, then, Hinman and the WIPA did not view Kenney as a political opponent with an entirely different worldview who must be defeated, but as something of a fellow traveller who simply needed a push in the right direction. They felt that, if they pushed him hard enough, their agenda had a chance of being enacted under a Kenney government.

Separatism may be a far-right movement, then, but it is not exogenous to mainstream conservatism. Many of the founders and leaders of separatist and quasi-separatist parties have all been active members within mainstream conservative party politics, and in a number of instances, maintained their memberships even as they took part in separatist organizing. Separatism is perhaps best thought of as a radicalization of mainstream conservatism. This is evident in the way extractive populist arguments re-appear in separatist collective action frames, only taken to their ‘logical’ conclusion. It is also evident in the way separatists self-consciously and publicly position their movement as a pressure group on mainstream conservatism, not as a purely oppositional force. It is not exogenous from conservatism, then, but rather emerges from within it as its radical flank.¹⁵⁸

We have seen how the separatist movement was a landing pad for former activists in the YVC movement and extractivist action coalition. Along with shared personnel, both the

¹⁵⁸ This dynamic is paralleled in the emergence of the far-right People’s Party of Canada out of the narrowly defeated leadership ambitions of prominent Conservative Party of Canada MP, Maxime Bernier.

globalist conspiracy theory and extractive populist frames were carried over from earlier movements, and the alienation that was prevalent in YVC was re-directed into a new movement with new organizational forms: namely, movement parties. Later in this chapter, we will see how these movement parties, particularly WIPA, would help reshape the political opportunity structure in favour of organizations not yet conceived (i.e., from the overlapping separatist and freedom movements), which themselves would anchor the rise of Danielle Smith. Before attending to the way the protest cycle began to have effects within the party system and, in turn, within the Albertan state, we move now to an examination of the transmission between Yellow Vests Canada and the Freedom Convoy, with a focus on shared personnel, the diffusion of the globalist conspiracy theory, and, especially, the upward scale shift and adaptation of the convoy as a tactic.

Fossilized Freedom

It is important to remember that anti-lockdown protests did not begin with the Freedom Convoy. In fact, protests against pandemic restrictions had been held across the country, including at legislatures in Ontario and Alberta, and in Vancouver's west end as early as April 2020, just one month after the World Health Organization (WHO) first declared a global pandemic on March 11th of that year (POEC final report, p. 85). Therefore, the Freedom Convoy cannot be seen in isolation as a spontaneous expression of people fed up with two years of pandemic restrictions. Instead, many of the early players in the freedom movement cut their social movement teeth before the pandemic even began, during YVC. Through this experience, they would accrue the moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material resources that would help fuel the freedom movement (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004).

YVC and the Freedom Movement

Seven months prior to the Freedom Convoy, William told me, “Now the yellow vest movement has become the anti-lockdown movement. Because it's the same people, it's the same people, and it's just growing in numbers.”¹⁵⁹ Unlike most of my interviewees, who were first-time activists during YVC, William had been active since the early 2010s, engaging with a number of patriot groups, homophobic Christian street preachers, and Islamophobic provocateurs. He spoke of the growth of the movement during the yellow vest period, when the usual suspects (mainly his friends) were joined by many new faces. “It grew more during anti-lockdowns,” he said. “And there was a new group of new people with new ideas. And every single time that you get this new wave, you get a new initiative.” The perspective William gives is valuable because it sheds light on how, from his vantage point, the far right was able to build momentum, moving from a somewhat close-knit group to something much larger in the YVC period, and then even larger during the freedom movement. From his standpoint, we can observe the cycle of protest picking up steam, with each successive wave catalyzing further growth as new elements of the population become drawn into and articulated alongside a pre-existing formation. Indeed, the majority of my interviewees, despite never having participated in a social movement prior to yellow vests, continued their activism through the anti-lockdown protests.

This continuity is reflected in the final report of the emergency commission in its description of the first freedom protest in Alberta, outside the legislature in Edmonton in April 2020:

The Alberta protest, which took place in Edmonton on April 30, was notable for its connection to pre-existing protest movements. One media article reported that vehicles

¹⁵⁹ Kurt Phillips of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network concurs, noting “Every single prominent Yellow Vester that I’m aware of is now an anti-vaxxer” (Orr, 2021).

associated with the United We Roll movement participated in the protest by driving around the Alberta Legislature while honking their horns (Rouleau, 2023, p. 85).

From the very beginning, then, the freedom movement in Alberta was intersecting with the far-right wing of the extractive populist movement. For individuals associated with UWR, the repertoire of trucks and horns was familiar, only now a new set of grievances had been added.

I asked Todd, who the reader will recall from chapter 4 had helped organize the United We Roll Convoy, what kind of activism he had engaged in since. He told me that he had been very active since UWR, having “probably gone to hundreds of rallies,” at a rate of about one a week. Notably, he specified his participation in the Coutts border blockade. Thus, even though “yellow vests is a thing of the past,” as he put it to me, its legacy arguably lived on in the continued mobilization of its cadre throughout subsequent waves of the protest cycle.

Dylan, an equipment operator in Alberta, also had his first collective action experience during the YVC movement. Prior to this, he had not been political and, although he described himself as “slightly conservative,” had only ever voted once, in a municipal election where there are no parties. He had seen footage of the *gilets jaunes* protests on Facebook, and from there went searching for Yellow Vests Canada. Having become increasingly concerned about the UN migration compact and “this climate emergency stuff,” he became a regular attendee at the small (roughly 20-person) weekly YVC rallies in his city. When I spoke with him in January 2022, he was on EI and described himself variously as a “full-time humanitarian,” “a patriot,” and a “freedom fighter.” Aside from a six-month break, he had been active ever since joining YVC. While many yellow vesters had previous involvement in patriot groups before they rebranded into YVC (J. E. Tetrault, 2024b), Dylan is an example of having been recruited into patriot groups *through* YVC. With his new patriot “brothers,” Dylan described doing “street patrols,” “helping the vets,” “cleaning up needles,”

and “making sure the neighbourhood is safe.” “I’ve been three years strong now,” he told me. “I’m still going out there every single weekend.”

As he moved between various patriot groups in the years following YVC, what remained was his commitment to a newfound set of moral principles, including his dedication to offering protection for protesters—“if someone wants to put hands on somebody, well, my oath says that my body has to go in between those two people”—which had, on at least one occasion, landed him in an “Antifa brawl.” These principles also included more overtly “humanitarian” ones, particularly within communities of drug users and unhoused people, and he described being known as someone who would give someone the shirt off his back or who would buy someone a \$3 coffee if he only had \$4 to his name. This persona was cultivated through YVC, prior to which he described himself as “selfish,” “entitled,” and as a typical subject of “Western programming.” The YVC movement was a period in which Dylan formed a new identity, made new connections, and underwent a shift in his values. The movement gave him a sense that he was not alone, a sense of community, both within his locale and, via social media, across the country and the world. He described being very active online, posting on Facebook between 5 and 15 times a day, and viewed these activities as part of his activism; he was a “digital warrior” who, by sharing political content with his followers, created a “ripple effect” that reached distant locations and, cumulatively, could create change. He had no desire to return to his old ways, saying, “I never want to go back to blue collar, I want to use this organization and, you know, change the community.” While the details of Dylan’s story might be unique, what he had in common with other interviewees was that YVC was his first movement, and he stayed active afterwards.

Near the end of the interview, I asked if he had participated in any anti-lockdown or anti-vax rallies, and he responded enthusiastically, “Oh, man, I’ve absolutely, yeah, no, I’ve led a couple of them. ... I’m the first person in the march you know, big smile on my face. ...

I even went as far as getting myself one of the anti-mask tickets.” He was more circumspect about vaccines, saying he understood why some individuals might choose to vaccinate, but was particularly upset about vaccines for children, believing that non-GMO food, non-fluoridated water, and multi-vitamins would have sufficed. In the language of climate denial and skepticism, he was an impact skeptic, meaning he did not deny the existence of the pandemic, but believed it was not cause for much concern, and on that basis strongly opposed a range of public health measures. This opposition led to his encounter with another constituency, faith groups.

Despite not being Christian himself (he was a “proud pagan and Norse”), Dylan collaborated in various ways with faith communities. He described how the freedom movement and faith groups began overlapping:

So I'm still going out there every single weekend ... We're doing kind of like six events a week, so it's not all freedom events. I think there's three or four different freedom events and then I do a lot of work with like the street church and that kind of stuff. ... Like it's all a family now, right? Like the freedom people help the church people, the church people come out with the freedom stuff.

The pandemic, then, appears to have marked the formation of a new alliance in Dylan’s city, with the freedom movement increasingly intermingled with Christian street preachers, in one “family.” If YVC had been something of a composite movement (comprised, in Tetrault’s terms, of “discontent conservatives, Christian and petro-nationalists, crime control groups, and more extreme anti-Muslim and White power groups”), then one of the hallmarks of the freedom movement would be the intensification of faith-based mobilization, especially among evangelicals. This intersection of faith and freedom is taken up at greater length below in the discussion of Take Back Alberta, but to close this section, I turn to one final

interviewee to further elaborate the overlaps in personnel and ideology between YVC/UWR and the freedom movement.

Andrew had never participated in a social movement or protest prior to UWR. He got involved because a friend and fellow oil worker was already participating. He describes the experience as transformative, recounting how the convoy scooped up a variety of people into its structure, many of whom did not know each other, and how they developed deep personal connections and organizational skills *en route*. Of special importance is his discovery of social media skills, which he would go on to further develop:

Once I got onto this convoy . . . I kind of was adopted . . . I never joined up and went, ‘Yahoo, Yellow Vests.’ They kind of brought me in, and basically gave me a voice and for that I’ll forever be grateful because I have a pretty loud voice across Canada, to the point that, you know, I’m making some big moves and getting some real solid things changed in this country.

According to [Almeida \(2019\)](#), social media have become a primary tool driving participation in social movements. As a central technique for advertising upcoming protest events, social media “provide a tremendous expansion in scale and mobilization potential by instantaneously reaching large portions of the sympathy pool that are connected online or via mobile networks” (p. 114). Learning how to use social media for this purpose, first at the UWR convoy, “gave [Andrew] a voice,” which in subsequent months and years he continued to use, gaining a real sense of “personal efficacy”—or the “confidence that [...] individual efforts can make a difference” (Almeida, 2019, p. 105). Two years after UWR, when I interviewed him, Andrew believed that his voice on social media was helping to make social change.

Andrew elaborated on how his adoption of social media tools led to an increase in his sense of personal efficacy during UWR, and how this encouraged him to continue activism after the convoy:

In each small little community we went through, it kind of fed into the machine that is now [“Andrew”]—it kinda boosted the message that I was trying to bring across . . . [I was] getting feedback through my live feeds, and it was [that] interaction with people across Canada . . . that gave me that drive to keep doing what I'm doing. You know, at one point, we were trending on Google. Like, it was crazy. When we were rolling into Ottawa, I had 14,000 people on my live feed watching us . . . and in doing that, it was like, “wow, people are really behind us on this, this is pretty good . . . You know, like people actually feel the same way” . . . And so, from then on, I felt obligated to carry on with some of the stuff. So, what I did was I financed my own tour across Canada after the convoy and I went and held little townhall meetings in little communities to educate those communities on why we did what we did . . . and in doing that it kind of snowballed a little bit more.

In this excerpt, we can see how social media became a major draw for Andrew to stay involved in the movement. It was seeing how many people agreed with his message online that made him feel “obligated” to continue, seeing himself as something of an “independent journalist.” His use of social media, however, was somewhat tenuous and he ended up being de-platformed from Facebook in the wake of the January 6th, 2021 insurrection. He covered the events for 48 hours straight:

I was awake the whole time . . . exposing the false flag that was going on, and I had Antifa and their videos, and I was showing you, ‘Hey, this is an Antifa video.’ And they're right in with the crowd. And they're doing what this has happened. And I exposed a lot of that. And all of a sudden I got shut down.

His account was only suspended for a short period, but from this we can make a number of important observations. Andrew felt censored by mainstream social media, but nonetheless relied on them, having built his following using them. His output, moreover, was by no means limited to Canadian politics, and he directed his following into support for pro-Trump election denialism. If one of the hallmarks of fascism is an outright assault on basic democratic procedures, the overt support for Trumpism amongst the Canadian far right, during and after January 6th, is noteworthy.

When I spoke with Andrew in mid-2021, he told me he had become “very politically active when it comes to the pandemic.” He had refused to wear a mask up to that point and described having gone to and spoken at numerous anti-lockdown protests, while becoming “kind of the advocate for some of ... the businesses here in Alberta to stay open through COVID.” When asked why he went from yellow vests to protesting lockdowns, he told me, “I know the bigger scheme of things and I know why they're doing what they're doing. And it's to achieve their goal of a one world government, Agenda 2030.” Viewed through the lens of the globalist conspiracy theory, then, the onset of the pandemic was viewed almost as the fulfilment of prophecy. He elaborated:

We knew there was a plan [. . .]. It was either going to be a biological weapon, or it was going to be a dirty bomb. We didn't know which it was going to be. Now when [the pandemic] first hit, everybody in our network was all like, ‘oh shit, here it comes, this is how they’re going to do it.’

The globalist conspiracy theory, as I have shown above, is a master frame reflecting the radicalization of the cycle of protest, meaning that it is not restricted to a single issue, grievance or movement, but is sufficiently flexible to accommodate changing political

circumstances, and can be adapted as a frame for seemingly diverse movements over time.¹⁶⁰ From the moment of the pandemic outbreak, Andrew used the GCT to interpret it, seeing it as validation of his dystopian predictions. “We're running out of conspiracies now,” he told me, “because all of it's coming true.”

Evidence suggests some of the more autonomous elements of the extractivist action coalition were also beginning to adopt this radical master frame. Rally 4 Resources, for example, which had played a critical role in the earlier period of the cycle (see chapter 4 and 5), viewed the onset of the pandemic through the interpretive schemata of the GCT. Already by July 2020, R4R was warning that the WEF, UN, along with others including Greenpeace, had “announced a proposal to reset the global economy,” including through a Green New Deal and socialist policies (Rally 4 Resources, 2020a). In another post from 2020, they warned that, “Justin Trudeau's government is planning on using COVID19 to push through the ‘Great Reset’ and Agenda 2030 initiative bypassing democracy” (Rally 4 Resources, 2020b). Notably, R4R’s use of the GCT contrasted with the approach taken by Canada Action, whose Facebook page appears not to have amplified pandemic conspiracism.¹⁶¹ In an August 2021 post about Covid-19, R4R attempted to justify its pivot away from the narrow focus on oil and gas, writing, “No this isn't a pipeline post but it's all related... Difference between us and other pro industry groups? We have the balls to post and discuss” (Rally 4 Resources, 2021b). R4R would become increasingly critical of other extractive populist groups for failing to see how, through the lens of conspiracist anti-globalism, corona and climate were connected to the same, sinister agenda.

¹⁶⁰ This argument is echoed in Nomi Claire (Lazar, 2022) report for the Public Order Emergency Commission, in which she finds that “extremist conspiracy theories connect diverse concerns of convoy participants in a single *master narrative*, enabling frame alignment for diverse worldviews” (p. 4, my emphasis).

¹⁶¹ This observation is based on a keyword search for “great reset” and “agenda 2030” within Canada Action’s Facebook page.

Further evidence suggests that R4R's radicalization in collective action frames was paralleled by tactical radicalization. A personal post of Wapple's from late 2020 depicts her two young sons holding guns, apparently as Christmas presents, which she forecasts might be needed in the event of "civil war" (Nicole Mal, 2020). On August 20th, 2021, less than half a year before the Freedom Convoy, R4R posted:

If you haven't put 2 and 2 together yet and figured out that covid has everything to do with destroying our industries, economy and life as we know it, this isn't the page for you. If you are angry that we've been posting anything but pro pipeline and oil and gas info, this isn't the place for you. If you still think wearing pro industry swag, sharing positive, populist op-eds and memes for our industry, will save us, this isn't the place for you. You might just need to admit that those you voted for aren't really on our side.

If you can't, THIS ISN'T THE PLACE FOR YOU. (Rally 4 Resources, 2021a)

By this point, R4R was radicalized against the ideology, political alliances, and tactics of the broader extractivist action coalition and was agitating for escalation. They viewed the political struggles to promote fossil fuels and resist public health measures as intimately connected, framing them in existential terms. They began using their page to direct followers towards freedom protests, and even showed some signs of opposition to big fossil capital, as when they called it "absolutely disgusting" that LNG Canada had announced a mandatory vaccination program in October 2021 (Rally 4 Resources, 2021c). When the Coutts blockade began shortly after the Freedom Convoy rolled into Ottawa, R4R would post from the border, encouraging followers to join or to "start a slow roll of your own" (Rally 4 Resources, 2022). During this time, R4R even changed its name to "Your Liberty Project," reflecting the more radical frames and tactics around which it was now oriented, where 'liberty' could be seen as consonant with the broader freedom movement of which it was now a part.

YVC and the Freedom Convoy

From January 22nd to February 23rd, idling trucks took over the streets of downtown Ottawa, filling the air with diesel exhaust and the blaring of horns. Sustained by millions of dollars of online donations, roughly 400 trucks permanently occupied the core, including many from a 480-vehicle “Western convoy” that formed a significant part of the first wave (Rouleau, 2023, pp. 137, 384–385; Staff, 2022). In addition to trucks, the occupation also attracted large concurrent rallies, with peak attendance estimated at between 8,000 and 15,000 (Dickson et al., 2022). The Freedom Convoy also inspired many smaller concurrent convoys and rallies across the country, most notably truck blockades in Coutts, Alberta, a small village on the border with Montana, and on the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor, Ontario, a border crossing and major trade route with the US. Combined, these three blockades led the federal government to invoke the Emergencies Act on February 14th, granting extraordinary powers to law enforcement to quell the protests. In this section, I examine the personnel and resource infrastructure of the Freedom Convoy’s leadership.

The personnel overlaps between the extractive populist, YVC, and freedom movements meant that the truck convoy was an already-established part of the latter’s repertoire. The final report of the emergency commission makes this continuity clear. It identifies five key individuals—Chris Barber, Brigitte Belton, Patrick King, James Bauder, and Tamara Lich—and observes that “it is largely through their combined actions and experience that the convoy to Ottawa assumed the shape it did” (Rouleau, 2023, p. 106). Out of these five, the latter three all had some involvement in UWR:

Mr. King testified before the Commission that he was one of two individuals in the pilot truck that led the United We Roll convoy. Mr. Bauder was a participant in the United We Roll convoy. Tamara Lich, the individual who would in many ways become

the face of the Freedom Convoy, participated in and became one of the organizers of the Yellow Vest rallies in Medicine Hat, Alberta. While she did not come to Ottawa as part of United We Roll, she helped put participants in touch with one another while that convoy was being organized. (Rouleau, 2023, p. 82)

While the Freedom Convoy mobilized many first-time activists and, owing to its significantly greater size, necessarily only included a small fraction of individuals who had previously participated in YVC or UWR, its leadership was disproportionately drawn from these ranks.

The commission report explains that the idea and planning for a convoy to Ottawa emerged in large part from this core, experienced group (Rouleau, 2023, pp. 102–107). Some inspiration was taken from Australian truck drivers, who in August 2021 began blockading highways, and in response to which James Bauder launched his call for a convoy to Ottawa (Rouleau, 2023, pp. 93–94). What the report does not mention, however, is that Bauder had been agitating for anti-lockdown convoys as early as April 2020, for example in a post that described “how to protest mini convoy style,” which instructed followers on what type of signage to use, e.g., “end the shutdown,” and, in a foreshadowing of the Freedom Convoy, to use Canadian flags attached to their vehicles as a central symbol (Bauder, 2020). The report also omits that, even before the pandemic, Bauder was eager to get another convoy together, seemingly electrified by his experience in UWR. Thus, on March 6th, 2019, just several weeks after United We Roll, he posted:

For those that missed out and wanted to come..... DRUM ROLL!!! I am planning on something EPIC. MASSIVE and it launches from Calgary in May and goes right back down the same route, right back down the TransCanada all the way to Parliament in Ottawa just in time for Election Time in October [*sic.*]. This time instead of Trucks - HORSES, COMBINES, TRACTORS, CAMPERS, Campfires every night, live music

every night and not one politician is invited Who is interested? Details coming soon on www.Canada-Unity.com. (Bauder, 2019a)

In this new (and ultimately abandoned) convoy to Ottawa ahead of the October 2019 election, we can already see the cultivation of a new imaginary; unlike UWR, this hypothetical convoy would not have politicians speak, and would be multi-day, with a more festive atmosphere.

After the October 2019 election, Bauder once again resumed agitation for convoys:

What if folks from out west got ahold [*sic.*] of the list of every riding that voted Liberal and we took a Massive Convoy of Love to each and every riding and gave out I Love Canada Oil and Gas bumper stickers [*sic.*], hat's n shirt's [*sic.*]? (Bauder, 2019b)

To do so, he hoped to find a sponsor rather than using GoFundMe and proposed tapping into Kenney's "war room" money (Bauder, 2019b). Thus, James Bauder, who would become one of five individuals the commission identified as playing a critical role in the Freedom Convoy, was ideating about more convoys ever since he participated in UWR. The general thrust of these hypothetical convoys, like UWR itself, was pro-oil and gas and anti-Trudeau in nature. The pandemic, then, was not the spark for such a vision, but rather an opportunity for its realization.

Bauder partially realized his longstanding vision through the Canada Unity Convoy (also known as "Operation Bearhug"), which arrived in Ottawa on December 6th and stayed until December 10th, 2021—just about a month prior to the Freedom Convoy. This convoy had about 100 participants, who attempted to blockade the residences of the Prime Minister and Governor General (P. Smith, 2023). It is worth noting that the Canada Unity Facebook group, which was used to organize this convoy, was initially created in January 2019 ahead of UWR as "Canada Coast2Coast Unity Drive," and changed its name to "Canada Unity" in March 2019 ahead of Bauder's aborted plans for a pre-election convoy that year (*Group History*, 2022). The Canada Unity Convoy of December 2021 was the realization of this well-

established ambition. Bauder was disappointed, however, with the turnout and began planning to do it again:

We did all this with less than 100 people. We called for 10s of thousands of Canadians to show up so that we could completely shut down Ottawa (vehicle gridlock) and then apply pressure for the Senate to sign the MOU (Rouleau, 2023, p. 96).

The MOU refers to a document drafted by Canada Unity that called for the government to remove most public health measures, in exchange for which the convoy would be called off (Rouleau, 2023, p. 96). It was updated ahead of the Freedom Convoy and became the source of much controversy.¹⁶² Bauder was eager to do an “Operation Bearhug 2.0,” and soon came to the attention of Chris Barber and Brigitte Belton.

Belton was an independent owner-operator trucker and aspiring trucking entrepreneur who had grown deeply frustrated with various public health measures (Rouleau, 2023, pp. 102–103). The cross-border vaccine requirement would have put her and her husband out of work (Rouleau, 2023, p. 103), and she took to TikTok in December 2021 to start advocating for the idea of a series of “slow roll” convoys in provinces across the country in the new year. After sending a number of direct messages to fellow truckers on TikTok trying to gain traction for her “slow roll” idea, Belton made contact with Chris Barber, owner of a small trucking company in Saskatchewan and self-described “internet troll,” who agreed to participate (Rouleau, 2023, p. 102). This provided the “spark” for the Freedom Convoy in the very first days of January (*Public Hearing - Volume 14*, 2022, pp. 74, 249). And yet, Belton had every intention of heading to Ottawa with or without the support of others and had even set the date: January 23rd, 2022. As she put it, “That [date] was set prior to even Chris Barber agreeing. I was going forward whether he agreed or not” (*Public Hearing - Volume 14*, 2022, p. 255). Thus, had Belton not connected with Barber, she may still have taken her truck to

¹⁶² This is partially because it included calls for the Prime Minister to resign, arguing he was “committing treason” (Osman & Fraser, 2022).

Ottawa for a “slow roll,” and may even have been able to mobilize some others in her network to join her. Such a protest, however, would likely have been even less consequential than Bauder’s Operation Bearhug.

Belton’s resources were relatively few and she acknowledged the importance of others—particularly Barber, Bauder and King—in the mobilization:

We were growing very, very fast. Pat King had a huge media presence, so he claimed. His claim is true. And that helped us reach out to more people. James Bauder also had a huge media presence, which helped us reach even more people. At the time convoy started [*sic.*] I had less than a thousand followers, I was new to TikTok. Chris [Barber] had explosive numbers. ... So these gentlemen had the numbers to get going. I had the passion, the drive, and the heart. (*Public Hearing - Volume 14, 2022, p. 253*)

Thus, it is doubtful Belton would have been able to mobilize substantial numbers on her own. Even James Bauder, with a larger following and more experience than Belton, had been unable to, with his Canada Unity “Operation Bearhug” Convoy of December 2021, come close to the size, impact, or longevity that the Freedom Convoy achieved. Without the combined efforts of these leading organizers, the “slow roll” would have ended up just another minor freedom movement protest.

Within days of Barber coming on board, Belton was put in touch via a family friend with Bauder, who was still itching for a “Bearhug 2.0.” After a phone call, Belton agreed to unite with Bauder. “I wasn’t planning on working together. However, James is a good salesperson, and he told me he had a lot of resources, and that we could work together” (*Public Hearing - Volume 14, 2022, p. 251*). These resources included routes and maps that he had already developed through Canada Unity. As Belton put it, “[Bauder] stated that he would provide us with support, places to park, information, a group of people that would welcome us and assist us. I don't think he failed on that” (*Public Hearing - Volume 14, 2022,*

p. 259). Even once on the road, Belton was following Bauder's lead in terms of where to go once they got into Ottawa, stating, "He had done this before. I was following his direction" (*Public Hearing - Volume 14*, 2022, p. 264). Bauder's role, then, was not only amplifying the convoy via social media, but was also logistical.

Thus, Belton brought Bauder on because of his prior experience in convoy organizing, who in turn connected Belton to King, who Bauder knew from their mutual experience during the United We Roll Convoy (*Public Hearing - Volume 16*, 2022, p. 197; Rouleau, 2023, p. 106). The three had a call on January 12th, 2022, and, the very next day, King hosted a Facebook live event promoting the convoy, at which Belton, Barber, and Bauder were all present, and which attracted up to 3,000 live viewers (Rouleau, 2023, p. 106). The event was called, "All Canadian truckers from all provinces going to shut down Canada and heading to Ottawa JAN 23rd"—a title whose phrasing "shut down Canada" can be read as an inversion of the Indigenous-led protests against the Coastal GasLink natural gas pipeline that had swept across the country in January 2020, protesting the RCMP invasion of Wet'suwet'en traditional territory. King's social media following was substantial, which was one of the reasons fellow organizers looked the other way despite his violent and racist rhetoric (Rouleau, 2023, p. 109). For example, in one of his Facebook live rants from late 2019, King warned about "the depopulation of the caucasian race [. . .] because they are the ones with the strongest bloodlines," and added that Muslims are trying to "infiltrate [. . .] into the Western world" (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2022a). Despite both Barber and Lich having some reservations about King's rhetoric, which at other times seemed to condone violence, the final report notes that "because of Mr. King's large social media and personal following within the movement, they were reticent to disavow him outright" (Rouleau, 2023, p. 110). As Bauder testified before the commission, "That's what we brought Pat King in for, was social media. And he was really good at it. Plus, he also had a background in convoys, and logistics, and

stuff like that" (*Public Hearing - Volume 16*, 2022, p. 238). The reticence to disavow King was both for fear of losing his social media following and losing a certain number of trucks believed to be his followers (*Public Hearing - Volume 14*, 2022, pp. 42–43).

The same day as the Facebook live event, Lich contacted Chris Barber, having been put in touch via Glen Carritt, the lead organizer of United We Roll (*Public Hearing – Volume 16*, 2022, p. 275). As Barber recounted: “[she] told me she had a little bit of experience in the department of protesting and convoy [*sic*]. ... We needed help and I acknowledged that” (*Public Hearing - Volume 14*, 2022, p. 27). The next day, Lich set up the convoy’s main Facebook page and GoFundMe, and within days had already received substantial sums (Rouleau, 2023, p. 107). Lich would go on to lead the convoy’s finance committee, along with four other individuals, including Cindy Parker, whom she had first met at YVC protests in Medicine Hat, Alberta (Lich, 2022, 2023, p. 27).

Based on findings presented in chapters 4 and 6, I argued above that UWR would not have happened without fossil capital’s pivot to a corporate grassroots strategy. Based on the preceding evidence, I argue that the Freedom Convoy would not have happened without UWR and, more broadly, extractive populism. *Some kind* of convoy may have happened without the involvement of the three experienced individuals who had participated in YVC or UWR—Bauder, King, and Lich. But a “slow roll” organized solely by Belton and Barber would have most likely been a relatively inconsequential protest. As the final report of the Public Order Emergency Commission makes clear, along with the testimonies provided to it by the leading figures, it was the *combination* of these individuals’ efforts that made the Freedom Convoy what it was. And the efforts of at least three of these individuals were enriched by prior experience in convoy organizing via YVC/UWR. Without that prior experience, it is doubtful they would have had the knowledge, personal efficacy, resources, or

social capital to pull it off. The two convoys, then, cannot be understood in isolation, but are properly understood as two flashpoints in the same cycle of protest.

When I spoke with Todd, the Freedom Convoy had just been broken up by the invocation of the Emergencies Act by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. While the Public Order Emergency Commission ultimately determined the government had met the threshold for invoking the Act, the Federal Court ruled in January 2024 to the contrary, finding that the Act's usage was unreasonable and a violation of constitutional rights to freedom of expression and the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure. For Todd, the Act itself was interpreted through the globalist conspiracy theory, as revealed in his wide-ranging response when asked why YVC was opposed to the UN migration compact:

Why do you think? It's because of the 20- 2030 agenda, the sustainable, sustainable agenda, and the great reset that's being controlled and if you don't see that now with George Soros and Klaus Schwab controlling Justin Trudeau to have a great reset and having trying to have control over this country with the Emergency Act that we have right now. That's what ... but the trouble is, is that they were ahead of, just like we're ahead of the game, ahead of the curve, I guess, with the convoy, I think a lot of the yellow vest people were very much ahead of, and they saw this coming for a very long time, but people weren't ready to accept it, to realize it. Now they, now they're seeing it.

From Todd's perspective, the UN migration compact was an early harbinger of globalist efforts to take control of Canada, which had only accelerated during the pandemic. In this view, the government of Canada was not a democratic one, but rather a puppet of supranational organizations like the UN and the WEF pursuing the "sustainable agenda." Seen through the lens of the GCT, such organizations are ciphers for a suite of reactionary political grievances, from climate to migration to public health. As mentioned above, Todd attended the Coutts border blockade that occurred in parallel with the Freedom Convoy, but

did not himself participate in the Freedom Convoy to Ottawa. Despite being somewhat removed from the main action, however, he felt there was a strong connection between United We Roll and the Freedom Convoy. “People were fed up with the government three years ago [during YVC/UWR] and look at us now,” he told me. Referring to the Freedom Convoy, he went on, “We set the foundation for what went on in the last two weeks.”

Conclusion

This chapter has explored two “spin-off” movements and organizations that adopted and adapted the tactics, organizational forms, and collective action frames of earlier, “initiator” movements in the cycle (McAdam, 1995). First, it was found that both the extractivist action coalition and Yellow Vests Canada shared personnel with later movements in the cycle, Alberta separatism and the freedom movement. These personnel overlaps would prove particularly important in the organization of the Freedom Convoy, which relied on the cultural, social-organizational, human, and material resources of three key organizers with experience accrued from earlier periods in the cycle, most notably Yellow Vests Canada and United We Roll.

As the cycle progressed, it was found that the hallmark tactics and frames were both adopted and *adapted*. As Soule & Roggeband (2018) note, “Tactics and frames are not simply transplanted from one site to another, but are often adapted and modified as they diffuse across movements and borders” (p. 241). The extractive populist cycle bears this out. First, the tactic of the convoy was radicalized. It was no longer to be oriented around politicians’ speeches on the hill (which, as we saw in chapter 6, may have had a moderating impact on the United We Roll Convoy). Most notably, it was no longer to be limited to a single day, but converted into an open-ended, occupy-style tactic.

Second, the globalist conspiracy theory appears to have been “sufficiently flexible” to adapt to the needs of the separatist and freedom movements by adding new valences and frame extensions (Benford, 2013, p. 1). With respect to separatism, Albertan sovereignty became framed as a way not only to protect the province from federal overreach, but from globalist agendas; thus, separatism became the prognostic “solution” for the diagnostic problem of a federal government seen to be under the control of globalists.

8. Taking Alberta Back: Faith, Fuel, and Freedom in the Rise of Danielle Smith

Introduction

So far, the analysis in this dissertation has tended to sidestep the question of *impact*—that is, whether the cycle of protest has produced any meaningful *effect* in Canadian politics.¹⁶³

While not the focus here, it could be said that the protest cycle contributed to the downfall of Conservative Party of Canada leader, Erin O’Toole, who was ousted by a caucus revolt during the height of the Freedom Convoy, in part because of his lukewarm embrace of the convoy. O’Toole had proven insufficiently opposed to carbon taxation and had been seen as too moderate by many in his party. Arguably, his insufficiently adamant embrace of the Freedom Convoy accelerated his removal, and in this sense, the cycle of protest could be said to have co-produced a political opportunity for Pierre Poilievre, who strongly identified his political brand and campaign with the movement’s messaging and tactics (Lukacs, 2025, p. 66; Vivès et al., 2023). The events that led to the downfall of Premier Jason Kenney, however, were arguably more impactful, and more directly attributable to social movement activity. O’Toole had just led his party to another defeat in the October 2021 snap election, and so his grasp on leadership had already been dealt a significant blow. Kenney, on the other hand, was a sitting Premier and the leading figure of a successful effort to unify the Albertan conservative movement and thereby prevent another NDP government. His position should have been far more secure than O’Toole’s, but the cycle of protest proved sufficiently forceful to unseat him nonetheless.

In this chapter, we follow the cycle as it moves from protest to politics. I begin by demonstrating how two issues championed by the intersecting freedom and separatist movements—autonomy from Ottawa and ‘freedom’ from public health restrictions—eroded

¹⁶³ This chapter draws extensively from collaborative work with Emily Laxer as well as Efe Peker, with the Observatory of Populism in Canada (see E. Laxer & McLean, forthcoming; McLean et al., 2024).

support for a premier who, just two years prior, had seemed to be the very incarnation of extractive populism at the level of the state (Kinder, 2024, p. 199). These developments were critical in forming Danielle Smith's political opportunity. From there, I show how these movements anchored themselves to Smith's campaign (and she to them), providing her with resources to help her seize her political opportunity and become leader of the UCP and Premier of Alberta in October 2022, followed by a general election win in May 2023. I do so by attending to the mobilizing structures of three organizations: the Free Alberta Strategy, Take Back Alberta, and the Alberta Prosperity Project (see Methodology, p. 85-88). In the final section, I do a deeper dive into Take Back Alberta, which played a critical role in channeling the combined energies of the separatist and freedom movements into direct party organizing in a sort of far-right entryism into the UCP.

Given this prominent role in movement-izing the UCP, a process on which Smith rode to power, Take Back Alberta makes for an ideal case study into the organizational dynamics and ideological underpinnings of the Albertan far right as it pivoted from convoys to conquering state power—that is, as the cycle of protest began to have concrete effects at the level of the provincial state and its relation to the rest of Canada. In particular, a case study of TBA—ostensibly a freedom group designed to remove Kenney from power for his pandemic restrictions, which were said to be overly restrictive—can reveal the prevalence of extractive populism as a major current, both ideologically and organizationally, of the freedom movement, including its articulation with a new layer of movement activists drawn from Alberta's particularly large evangelical community. By thoroughly situating Take Back Alberta in the cycle of protest, it becomes clear that Smith's rise to power owes much to extractive populism's second phase and to far-right denialism.

Ultimately, I argue that that the cycle of protest transformed the Albertan party system by “movement-izing” the governing UCP, with ramifications for the nature of the Albertan

state and its relationship to the federal government. While longstanding aspects of Albertan political culture were pertinent (Sayers et al., 2023), these alone cannot explain Smith's rise. Instead, the doors to Smith's premiership were opened when Jason Kenney's previous UCP government failed to appease the demands of the separatist and freedom movements, who successfully mobilized to force his resignation, thereby creating a political opportunity for Smith and the Alberta sovereignty act. Far-right social movements, then, particularly the overlapping separatist and freedom movements, played a critical role in creating a political opportunity for Smith, and then in anchoring her leadership campaign and subsequent government. Additionally, I argue that these movements advanced a radicalized version of extractive populism, articulated with evangelical Christianity, which played an important ideological role in the social movement context behind Smith's rise to power. Thus, the process of movement-ization was also a process of far-right radicalization, as further evidenced by Smith's flagship policy, the *Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act*.

Passed by the governing United Conservative Party (UCP) in late 2022, the bill allows the legislature to direct provincial and municipal bodies to defy federal laws or legislation that it deems "unconstitutional" or "harmful" to Albertans. Legal critics warn that the sovereignty act's defiance of federal law is unconstitutional and that the enhanced powers allotted to the cabinet are undemocratic (Braid, 2022; Olszynski & Bankes, 2022). In its first iteration, the bill gave cabinet unilateral power to decide how its provisions would be enacted, amounting to "Henry VIII powers," so-called because they allowed the King to circumvent parliament in 16th-century England (Chini, 2022). Although these "powers" were removed before the bill's third reading, the substance was left intact and, thanks to the UCP's parliamentary majority, the bill passed by a margin of 27-7 on December 8, 2022. What follows, though, is not about Smith's government or policy, *per se*, but rather the social movement forces—political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and collective action frames—that anchored her rise and

made this enhanced form of Albertan sovereignty possible in the first place. While the extent to which Smith's approach to Albertan sovereignty will be materialized remains to be seen, there is a great deal of evidence suggesting a more radical approach than that of Jason Kenney.

Danielle Smith's Political Opportunity

Jason Kenney was elected in April 2019 on a campaign to “fight back” against Trudeau's environmental policies, which were perceived as a threat to Alberta's fossil-fueled prosperity. To that end, he launched an “energy war room,” a public inquiry into “anti-Alberta energy campaigns,” and re-packaged key points of the “Alberta Agenda” into the “Fair Deal Panel,” whose final May 2020 report recommended Alberta explore establishing its own police force and pension plan, but advised against independent tax collection.¹⁶⁴ Doubt has been cast regarding Kenney's sincerity in advancing these ideas, however, with one co-author of the firewall letter, Tom Flanagan, reflecting that, “I had the impression he wanted to appear to act on it without actually doing so,” adding that, “Danielle [Smith] is more of a true believer, I think” (Appel, 2023). Indeed, whereas Kenney deferred the police force and pension plan to future rounds of consultation and study, Smith publicly critiqued this move and advocated for an expanded vision, including a provincial tax collection agency and employment insurance program. Smith's more vociferous support for provincial autonomy positioned her as more closely aligned with the separatist movement than Kenney, who came to be seen as disingenuously using autonomy “as a talking point to earn [separatist] votes in the next election” (Appel 2024, 242).

The formation of a new “movement party” in July 2020, the Wildrose Independence Party of Alberta (WIPA), served to channel this right-flank critique into electoral competition,

¹⁶⁴ Kinder (2024) helpfully characterizes the inquiry as the “rationale,” and the “war room” (formally known as the Canadian Energy Centre) as the “practice” of this state-led extractive populism (p. 200).

and would play an important role in the erosion of support for Kenney's government. Reflecting its position as a pressure group on the right-flank of Kenney, Paul Hinman, the WIPA's first appointed leader, took aim at Kenney's tepid support for Alberta autonomy, stating, "The time for asking Ottawa for a fair deal is over" (Naylor, 2020). This position would prove popular with former Wildrose voters, who grew even further alienated from the UCP as the pandemic wore on.

Kenney's half-hearted support for provincial autonomy eroded support for his government, but it was this in combination with his response to COVID-19 that dealt the fatal blow to his premiership, setting the stage for Danielle Smith and the sovereignty act. The pandemic raised a challenging dilemma for Kenney: meet the general Albertan public's demand for firmer restrictions or bend to pressure from the UCP's far-right wing, who embraced the anti-restriction stance of a burgeoning freedom movement (Young, 2023). One of the most robust in Canada, this movement included several autonomous clusters, including protest groups, a judicial wing focused on legal challenges to pandemic restrictions (Steward 2023, 86–87), as well as high-profile preachers and restaurant owners who saw restrictions as impeding their activities (T. Harrison, 2023).

In this context, Kenney's poll numbers began to plummet as voters aligned with the separatist and freedom movements migrated to the WIPA, raising the prospect of another NDP victory. Eventually, dissenting voices within the UCP were able to trigger a leadership review, which took place on May 2022. Just as she had on the issue of provincial autonomy, from the early days of the pandemic Smith aligned herself with the far-right wing of the UCP. Aware of the potential electoral potency of these overlapping issues, at an October 2021 separatist conference at which Paul Hinman was speaking, Smith said of her "dear friend" that "he's not in the legislature yet, although I suspect if things keep going the way they are, he will be very

soon” (Freedom Talk, 2022). But it would not be the WIPA who would benefit from the potency of the combined separatist and freedom movements’ grievances against Kenney.

Months later, in a March 2022 by-election that would be Hinman and the WIPA’s first big test, another former Wildrose leader, Brian Jean, secured the UCP nomination against Kenney’s preferred candidate, and successfully campaigned as “the anti-Kenney,” securing a crushing victory over the NDP and Hinman (Appel, 2024, p. 237). Hinman’s dismal third place showing rocked his leadership and set off a downward spiral of internecine conflict within the party (K. Martin, 2023), while simultaneously demonstrating that the UCP, not the WIPA, could be used as a successful electoral vehicle for autonomist and freedom-based grievances. In this way, the WIPA became, as former UCP MLA and founder of the Western Standard Derek Fildebrandt put it at the party’s 2024 convention, a “victim of its own success” (Fildebrandt, 2024). Having demonstrated the electoral potency of separatism in a series of strong polls throughout 2021, the WIPA’s following was scooped by more savvy political actors looking to channel (quasi)-separatist and freedom grievances against Kenney into a right-flank challenge *within* the UCP.

Kenney’s grip on power would be further eroded when a recording was leaked of the premier disparaging the right-flank of his party in a meeting with caucus staff. “I will not let this mainstream conservative party become an agent for extreme, hateful, intolerant, bigoted and crazy views,” Kenney stated (Scheel, 2022). Clearly, Kenney was aware that his ostensibly mainstream UCP was in the process of being “movement-ized.” His transparent hostility to a wide swathe of his own party, however, further damaged his reputation ahead of the leadership review. Sensing opportunity, just one week after the recording was leaked, Smith announced her intention to run in the event of Kenney’s defeat (Appel, 2024, p. 237). Ultimately, Kenney obtained just 51.4 percent of the vote, causing him to step down (Bellefontaine, 2022).

Danielle Smith quickly emerged as a frontrunner in the race to replace Kenney. Courting the UCP's right-wing, her campaign's flagship policy was the then-named *Alberta Sovereignty Act*, and it drew harsh criticism from the outset. Smith's leadership opponents broadly opposed the bill, calling it a "false bill of goods" (Dryden, 2022a). Kenney, too, lambasted the ASA, repeatedly denouncing it as "risky", "dangerous", "half-baked" (D. Bennett, 2022), a "disaster for Alberta" (Melgar, 2022), and an unconstitutional "step to separation" (Melgar, 2022). Despite these objections, Smith secured the UCP leadership on the sixth ballot, with 53.77 percent of the vote, and assumed office as Alberta Premier on October 6, 2022. Objections to the bill faded from view after she appointed most of her leadership rivals to Cabinet (A. C. Green, 2022; A. Smith et al., 2022). Following a compressed debate in parliament in late November-early December 2022, Bill 1, by then renamed the *Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act*, was passed on December 8, 2022.

On its surface, the sovereignty act appeals to longstanding elements of Albertan political culture, namely populism, "Western alienation," and the fusion of these elements with support for fossil fuels. However, these forces alone cannot wholly account for the bill's passing. Even though Kenney, too, appealed to Alberta's populist political code through his "fight back" and Fair Deal strategies, he never proposed anything as radical as the ASA, which he staunchly opposed. The findings presented above suggest that electoral pressures exerted by separatist "movement parties" and a robust freedom movement shifted the landscape of opportunity, paving the way to Smith's leadership victory and subsequent premiership. In the next section, we show that organizations associated with the overlapping separatist and freedom movements seized this opportunity to broker influence in Smith's leadership campaign and subsequent UCP government, supplying resources in exchange for ideological patronage.

Danielle Smith's Mobilizing Structures

Interviewing Rob Anderson for her radio show on April 30th, 2022, just weeks before she officially launched her UCP leadership campaign, Danielle Smith asked:

How do you feel about the level of traction [the Free Alberta Strategy is] getting?

Because you're quite right. I talked about the Alberta Prosperity Project, there's [FAS], there's Take Back Alberta, there's I think, you know, literally dozens and dozens of freedom groups out there wanting to have a change. It feels to me like there's some momentum behind us. (D. Smith 2022)

The “momentum” that Smith felt behind her at the very outset of her campaign was, in her own acknowledgement, fueled by social movement organizations tied to the separatist and freedom movements, foremost among them the Free Alberta Strategy, Take Back Alberta, and the Alberta Prosperity Project. In this section, I demonstrate how these three interconnected organizations brokered influence with Smith's leadership campaign and subsequent government by supplying beneficial resources, in terms of networks, personnel, research, and knowledge mobilization. Each, in its own way, helped to lay the groundwork for the eventual sovereignty act.

The first is the Free Alberta Strategy (FAS), spearheaded by Rob Anderson, a former Wildrose Party MLA and close adviser to Danielle Smith. This group's primary contribution to Alberta's right-wing social movement ecosystem was a proposal put out in September 2021—also titled the “Free Alberta Strategy”—to secure Alberta's political autonomy and economic prosperity, through a quasi-separatist agenda centered around an “Alberta Sovereignty Act.” In proposing this Act, the FAS authors (Rob Anderson, Barry Cooper, and Derek From) emphasized the need to protect Alberta's fossil fuel industry by “prohibiting any provincial enforcement of the federal carbon tax, the No New Pipelines Act, and attempts by federal agencies to regulate our Province's energy sector in any manner” (R. Anderson et al.,

2021, p. 9).¹⁶⁵ In lieu of such measures, the authors proposed that Alberta form an “independent nation” (R. Anderson et al., 2021, p. 10).

Take Back Alberta was founded in December 2021 by David Parker, a 35-year-old veteran of the conservative and extractive populist movement, with the principal goal of ousting Jason Kenney based largely on his handling of the pandemic. I provide further details of Parker’s background in the next section, including: his faith-driven activism; his role in the extractive populist movement; and how he recruited leaders or “captains” for Take Back Alberta directly from the freedom movement, including prominent figures from the Freedom Convoy and the Coutts blockade. What matters here is the organization’s role in anchoring Danielle Smith’s rise. Since its founding, TBA has mobilized the overlapping freedom and separatist movements and those sympathetic to them—largely rural, white, conservative Christians—to become active within the UCP and re-shape its direction in line with movement principles. This work has occurred in a series of “phases.” Phase One involved mobilizing Albertans to join the UCP ahead of the leadership review vote in May 2022. Phase Two involved mobilizing more Albertans to join the UCP, with the intent of voting for a new “solid freedom leader” in the October 2022 leadership race, with Danielle Smith as the organization’s clear preference. Phase Three involved electing TBA members to the UCP Board of Governors at the November 2022 AGM. Phase Four entailed mobilizing TBA’s resources to defeat the NDP in the May 2023 general election.

The Alberta Prosperity Project (APP) also emerged in late 2021 as a leading Alberta separatist organization. Whereas most separatist organizations have taken the form of “movement parties” (Pratt & Stevenson, 1981b; Wagner, 2009, 2021), the APP reflected a pivot away from these often-fractionous efforts and towards “advocacy groups” as the “prime

¹⁶⁵ Barry Cooper is a leading figure of the so-called “Calgary School” of neoliberal thinkers, and has a long history of participating in Alberta’s conservative and climate denialist think tank eco-system. He was one of three individuals commissioned to write a report for Kenney’s “Anti-Alberta Inquiry.”

drivers” of the movement (C. Morgan, 2023, pp. 161–166). Like the FAS, the APP maintains that federal government intervention is the key impediment to provincial prosperity and thus proposes measures to secure Alberta’s self-determination. The APP’s strategic plan includes advocating for an Alberta Pension Plan and Police Force, asserting the province’s right to manage natural resource development, taxation, immigration, and employment insurance. More than the FAS, which proposes independence as a last resort, a referendum on independence is a central plank of the APP’s mission. It has devised a “Rationale for Alberta Independence,” which centers on the need to right the historical injustices that have hindered Alberta’s interests, freedoms, rights, and prosperity, including equalization policy (Modry 2022b).

Take Back Alberta describes itself in characteristically populist terms as a “grassroots movement built to advance freedom and transfer power from the ruling elite to the people of our province,” and claims to have “led the fight to remove Premier Jason Kenney” (Take Back Alberta). While it is impossible to corroborate this claim with much precision, TBA dedicated significant resources to ensuring Kenney’s removal. Given the close margin of Kenney’s defeat in phase one (the leadership review), TBA’s claim of having mobilized 15,000 disaffected voters to join the UCP and vote against Kenney, even if greatly exaggerated, would likely have been impactful (Bellefontaine 2002). Indeed, during the leadership race, Smith herself said as much, crediting the organization with ousting Kenney and providing her with an opportunity to become Premier. As she put it to TBA regional captain Vince Byfield: “I must say, I think you guys did the work of rallying the forces to make the change that we’re in the middle of now” (Byfield 2022).

Beyond their role in bringing down Kenney and helping create Smith's opportunity to become Premier (phase one), TBA continued to mobilize ahead of the October 2022 leadership race (phase two). To that end, from July to the August 12th, 2022, deadline to join the UCP to vote in the leadership election, TBA held 12 town halls that collectively attracted well over 1,000 attendees. These included one of TBA's largest ever events, held at Church in the Vine in Edmonton, a prominent church in the freedom movement, with what Parker described as an "amazing turnout" of over 400 (Parker 2022). In this phase, TBA stopped short of explicitly endorsing Smith as its preferred UCP leadership candidate, vowing instead to help "elect a solid freedom leader". However, in a two-way race in which Smith's main opponent was Jason Kenney's finance minister, Travis Toews, the organization's preference was clear, and Parker conveyed his own preference for Smith through his personal social media and in TBA communications (see "framing processes" below).

TBA's campaigning in phase two also proved successful. Shortly after the August 12th deadline, Parker reported to the TBA Telegram that "it looks like TBA supporters have bought over 22,000 memberships in the United Conservative Party" (Parker 2022b). While it is unknown how Parker arrived at this figure, and although his claims to this effect may be inaccurate, the fact that the final run-off ballot between Danielle Smith and Travis Toews came down to 5,943 votes suggests that TBA supporters would have played a significant role in Smith's election as UCP leader.

Beyond the leadership race and the AGM, at which TBA-backed candidates obtained the nine available board positions (phase three), TBA campaigned vigorously to defeat the NDP in the May 2023 general election (phase four). During this time, from January to May 2023, TBA held at least 53 town halls, with Parker estimating he addressed about 5,000 individuals (Tait 2023). Amid this intense campaign period, Smith, who Parker considers a "friend", was one of 75 guests at Parker's March 2023 wedding (Tait 2023). Several TBA

supporters and captains also temporarily stepped away from the organization to serve on various UCP campaigns. The close inter-relationship between TBA, Parker, and Smith's UCP eventually led to the launch of an investigation by Elections Alberta in November 2023 to determine, among other things, whether TBA should be classified as "affiliated" with the UCP (Smith 2024).

While TBA "brokered" the ASA indirectly via resources dedicated to securing Kenney's downfall and Smith's UCP leadership, the FAS, partially rooted in Alberta's long-standing eco-system of right-wing think tanks (see p. 84), played a far more direct role in providing the intellectual resources behind the ASA. Long before the UCP leadership race, in 2021, its members began advocating for a more radical approach to Albertan autonomy (Wesley, 2023, p. 125), specifically, an accelerated and quasi-separatist version of the "Alberta Agenda." The FAS's central plank — the Alberta Sovereignty Act — would give Alberta the "absolute discretion to refuse any provincial enforcement of federal legislation or judicial decisions that, in its view, interfere with provincial areas of jurisdiction or constitute an attack on the interests of Albertans" (R. Anderson et al., 2021, p. 22). In particular, the FAS authors placed heavy emphasis on the need to minimize the effects of federal climate and energy policies on Alberta's fossil fuel industry (p. 9).

The FAS's manifesto was released in September 2021 and the organization held several online (and offline) town halls promoting it. Smith attended "a couple" of these events, and in an April 2022 interview with Rob Anderson on her Western Standard podcast, expressed her view that the FAS "has a real chance of changing Confederation and changing Alberta's relationship with the rest of the country" (D. Smith 2022). In the same interview, Anderson revealed that the FAS, which had partnered with the Alberta Institute, a libertarian think tank established in 2018, had polled its 100,000-person email list in an effort to "narrow our focus to one or two things ... instead of the entire strategy as we have the first six

months.” As Anderson reported to Smith, “70 percent came back overwhelmingly for the Alberta Sovereignty Act.” The interview concluded with Smith thanking Anderson for his work, noting its “perfect timing,” and stating, “I’ll be in touch with you on May the 19th [the day of Kenney’s leadership review] and we’ll see if we can work together on a strategy.” Indeed, Smith announced her candidacy that day and, after first considering running for UCP leader himself, Anderson was brought on as Smith’s Campaign Manager (CPAC, 2022).

While it has received less attention than Take Back Alberta or the Free Alberta Strategy, the Alberta Prosperity Project was an important piece of the resource infrastructure that brought Smith to power, serving a unique “brokering” role within the field of separatist and freedom organizations. Like Take Back Alberta, the Alberta Prosperity Project mobilized its resources heavily throughout 2022. By August 2022, they had held between 80 and 90 events, with attendance ranging from 100 to 1400 people, and membership had grown to 8,000 individuals, including 1,000 active volunteers across 137 “educational chapters” (Scott 2022).

In the three months preceding Kenney’s May 2022 ouster, the Alberta Prosperity Project toured the province endorsing both the Alberta Sovereignty Act and the broader Free Alberta Strategy from which the policy emerged, framing the strategy as the short-term objective of the separatist movement. At these events, Modry stated that the APP’s first goal was to elect an “independence-minded government” in 2023, which, as its “first piece of legislation,” would “implement something along the lines of the Alberta Sovereignty Act” (Alberta Prosperity Project 2022a, 2022b). In this way, the APP served as a sort of pre-campaign for Smith, who as early as April, in the interview with Anderson, began publicly signaling her intention to use the sovereignty act as the lynchpin of her prospective campaign.

The Alberta Prosperity Project’s championing of the sovereignty act continued after Smith became UCP leader. In June 2022, the organization congratulated UCP leadership

candidates Danielle Smith, Todd Loewen, and Bill Rock for endorsing the sovereignty act (Bradley 2022). And in a July 2022 op-ed, Modry attempted to assuage concerns about sovereignty act by proposing a “modified FAS [Free Alberta Strategy]” that would culminate in a referendum on independence by 2025, which, it was argued, would provide “a legal pathway” through which to accomplish the same ends, while avoiding time-consuming constitutional battles with Ottawa, “time which we do not have given the WEF-UN Agenda 2030” (Modry 2022a).

While the APP’s interventions into the FAS and UCP leadership race might be read as those of a marginal, conspiracist political organization with little influence, we need only examine the behaviour of Smith and other candidates vying for the “anti-Kenney” vote to see that the APP was understood by these prospective leaders as possessing resources worth courting. The most significant evidence of this came in August 25th, 2022, at a UCP leaders’ debate hosted by the APP and moderated by Rebel News’ Ezra Levant. The APP used the event as a fundraiser, attracting roughly 500 attendees who paid \$150 for dinner tickets or \$350 for VIP tickets, the latter of which included access to the candidates (Markusoff and Lirette 2022). Levant asked each of the candidates, beginning with Smith, whether they would take the example of Québec in their approach to constitutional negotiations with Ottawa, specifically with respect to a referendum on succession via the Clarity Act. “Do you have an ‘or else’ in mind?” asked Levant. “What is it and what would make you use it? And if not, how are you serious?” Smith’s response is worth quoting at length:

The “or else” is Dennis Modry and the Alberta Prosperity Project [massive applause]. It's true. We proclaimed into law on April the seventh the Citizen Initiative Act, which gives the people the power to collect signatures for a petition campaign to propose an amendment. If it's a simple matter of policy, it's a 10 percent threshold. If it's a constitutional change, it's a 20 percent threshold. That would mean 600,000 signatures

and, as I understand it, Dr. Modry has a million people on his database. So, part of when I decided I wanted to run, I knew how important it was to make sure that we addressed the issues of autonomy, and I talked to Dr. Modry as one of my first steps. I said, “Let's try this together. Let's get as much autonomy as we can”—full well knowing that he's got the power, you've got the power, if we're not successful. And this is why I take your movement very, very seriously, and why Justin Trudeau should take it very, very seriously too, because you have the power to be able to be the “or else”.

(Alberta Prosperity Project 2022e)

In addition to arguably being a high-water mark in terms of the rhetorical legitimization of the Alberta separatist movement, Smith's statement demonstrates that she viewed the APP as an organization possessing resources and “power” that would be critical for her campaign, both to become premier and, once in office, to achieve her vision of Albertan autonomy. Despite exaggerating the APP's capacities and refusing to commit to a referendum as premier, Smith offered tacit support for the APP's efforts to that end, framing them as potential allies in future constitutional battles with Ottawa. After Smith secured the leadership, so enthused with the party's new direction was Modry that, in March 2023, he stepped down from his role as APP CEO to consider his prospects as a UCP candidate, which he would ultimately not pursue (Bradley 2023). While Smith's speech praising the APP could be read as mere flattery and perhaps typical of politicians on the campaign trail, this explanation cannot account for other leading candidates' refusal to attend on the grounds that doing so would promote separatism, nor can it properly explain subsequent events. Ahead of the 2025 federal election, Smith warned of a “national unity crisis” if the next government did not revoke nine hallmark climate policies of the Trudeau era (D. Anderson, 2025). The day after Mark Carney's victory, Smith significantly lowered the threshold for triggering citizen-initiated referenda on constitutional matters (Johnson, 2025). As of today, the APP is

preparing to launch a petition to separate under the new rules (Gonzalez, 2025). Her praise for the APP on the campaign trail, then, was hardly fleeting or narrowly opportunistic; instead, subsidizing and legitimating separatism appears to be at the core of Smith’s ideological and strategic framework for combatting federal climate policy.

Together, these three organizations—Take Back Alberta, the Free Alberta Strategy, and the Alberta Prosperity Project—undertook a division of labour to “anchor” Smith’s campaign and government. While the FAS delivered policy development and market research, the APP validated Smith as a champion of Albertan autonomy, and TBA enabled the overlapping separatist and freedom movements to capitalize on the hollowness of Kenney’s UCP, executing a kind of far-right entryism. Given its particular role in this division of labour, a closer look at Take Back Alberta is in order. While it is commonly understood as a freedom group dedicated principally to ousting Jason Kenney, the following findings suggest it needs to be situated in the broader cycle of protest.

TBA and Extractive Populism

To better appreciate the extent to which Take Back Alberta drew on mobilizing resources developed during the cycle of protest, a deeper dive into the movement’s personnel and collective action frames is required. Although the immediate focus and apparent cause of the “freedom” movement was opposition to public health measures during the Covid-19 pandemic, TBA cannot be understood as a single-issue organization, but must instead be situated within the broader context of Canadian extractive populism. The analysis begins with leader David Parker and then moves onto the regional captains (see Table 4).

Table 4 – Leadership of Take Back Alberta¹⁶⁶

Name	Position(s)
David Parker	Founder and Executive Director
Marco Van Huigenbos	Chief Financial Officer (Van Huigenbos, n.d.). Regional Captain for Southern Alberta (former).
Jarrad McCoy	Regional Captain for Southern Alberta
Roy Beyer	Regional Captain for Calgary
Vince Byfield	Regional Captain for Edmonton (former)
Blain Cellars	Regional Captain for Calgary
Tim Hoven	Regional Captain for Central Alberta
Mark Hunt	Regional Captain for Northern Alberta (former)
Mitch Sylvestre	Regional Captain for Northern Alberta
Benita Pedersen	Regional Captain for Edmonton

David Parker’s worldview and career are both steeped in support for the Albertan oil and gas industry.¹⁶⁷ Recounting his excitement about the 2011 election of a Conservative majority government, which coincided with his graduation from university and which he had ambitions to work for, Parker told a crowd of TBA supporters: “I felt like my team just won the Stanley Cup and I’m going to play for them ... I believed the Conservatives are in, we’re gonna change Canada, we’re going to fix the problems. We’re gonna get our oil to market.” Parker here exemplifies a hegemonic identification with the fossil fuel industry, in which

¹⁶⁶ For leadership structure, see (McCoy, 2022f; Van Huigenbos, n.d.; *Your Regional TBA Captains*, n.d.). There have since been changes to the leadership of TBA, but the focus here is on the leadership during the first four phases, up until the election of Danielle Smith in the general election on May 29th, 2023 (Magusiak, 2023).

¹⁶⁷ Unless otherwise specified, all details from Parker’s biography in (*TBA Event - Grand Prairie*, 2023).

environmental and climate impacts are ignored and the interests of fossil capital and citizens are flattened into one and the same—it is “our oil” and ‘we’ need to get it to market (Eaton & Enoch, 2021). After a range of political gigs, both in Ottawa and Alberta, including a stint in the Prime Minister’s Office working for his ‘Stanley Cup-winning team,’ Parker’s career became more overtly related to oil and gas advocacy during the Trudeau years.

For most of 2018 and 2019, Parker was directly involved in fossil fuel promotion, first as a senior advisor to the Conservative Opposition Critic for Environment and Climate Change, and next as a manager at an “extractive populist” organization, the Modern Miracle Network (MMN). In the former role, he managed a staff of five and recalls “working 16-hour days trying to fight” Bill C-69, the Impact Assessment Act, which proposed to overhaul the federal approval process for large industrial projects. As we have seen above, industry and conservative parties alike dubbed it the “no more pipelines act,” and argued that it laid out such a restrictive review process that it was a *de facto* ban on future oil sands pipelines. During this same period, “extractive populism” grew from a *discursive strategy* aimed at mobilizing support for the industry via social media, and began demonstrating some *organizational* heft, manifesting in a wave of sometimes large protests and convoys, some of which intersected with the far-right Yellow Vests Canada movement and many of which were specifically targeted at Bill C-69 (McLean, 2024). In the effort to weaken or kill Bill C-69, while United We Roll blared its horns and CAPP lobbied the Senate, David Parker was helping to lead the fight on another front, from within the conservative party itself.

Rather than see Parker as a “dupe” or “corporate ventriloquist,” though, it is clear he had his own vision of how to advocate for the sector, which differed from that of fossil capital. Not yet the public-facing firebrand of TBA town halls and protests, at this point Parker was behind-the-scenes. Reflecting on his time in this role, Parker recalls feeling that industry was not sufficiently defending itself:

I got very angry at oil and gas executives. They would show up at these meetings and they would say, ‘maybe change a few things, you know, we can probably live with some of this.’ They would not say, ‘this is horrible. It’s going to destroy our industry, it’s going to destroy our way of life.’ They wouldn’t even fight back when they were being attacked themselves (*TBA Event - Grand Prairie, 2023*).

In other words, while industry proved amenable to certain regulatory mechanisms laid out in Bill C-69, for Parker, this reflected not a strategic calculation or compromise, but an unacceptable and existential risk. Once again reflecting the relative autonomy of the far right *vis-à-vis* fossil capital, this more existential and radical way of advocating for the oil and gas industry would be given full rein just several years later in the context of TBA.

After leaving this position, and despite his frustrations with oil and gas executives, Parker continued fossil fuel advocacy and joined the Modern Miracle Network (MMN), which, as he puts it, “probably sounds like an evangelical Christian organization, but actually they talk about the modern miracle of hydrocarbons—of oil and gas—how it’s lifted more people out of poverty than any technology in the history of the world” (*TBA Event - Grand Prairie, 2023*). As the reader will recall, MMN was founded in 2016 by Michael Binnion and helped with the first-ever pro-oil and gas convoy to Ottawa, the LNG or Bust Convoy (see chapter 4). Parker describes Binnion as “one of the key players in the Canadian conservative movement,” while Jason Kenney described MMN as a “clearinghouse for effective pro-oil and gas advocacy” (Marsters, 2019; D. Parker & Gerber, 2022a).¹⁶⁸ In an interview with a former colleague at MMN, Parker describes the organization’s mandate as “changing the narrative that has been pushed by basically radical environmentalists claiming that Canadian

¹⁶⁸ Binnion is currently the Chair of the Board of the Canada Strong & Free Network (formerly the Manning Foundation). He has also served on the board of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, was the former Chair of Canadian Taxpayers Federation, and is the CEO and founder of Questerre energy, along with a number of other business ventures (G. Laxer, 2021, pp. 18, 30). That MMN primarily solicits donations from businesses and wealthy individuals, rather than ordinary citizens, is clear from its donation page, which asks for contributions beginning at \$12,000 and up to \$100,000.

oil is dirty, whereas it's actually the cleanest in the world” (D. Parker & Gerber, 2022c).¹⁶⁹

Within less than a year after leaving MMN, Parker took his first-ever long-term break from politics—a break that was interrupted, as we will see in the following section, when his faith drove him back and spurred him to found TBA.

TBA’s origins, too, are connected to pro-fossil fuel advocacy. In his standard town hall speech, Parker tells the story of a “yak farmer” from Olds, Alberta by the name of Chris Kinnear, who became involved in politics in 2015 when “he watched the NDP win, and he watched our industry tank.” According to Parker, after the 2021 UCP AGM, Kinnear became convinced that Kenney was likely to cause another NDP government and was soon put in touch with Parker through a fellow UCP member. The two men met up shortly thereafter to talk strategy, and agreed to hold an event in Sundre, Alberta; Kinnear would bring the crowd, and Parker would bring the plan. Kinnear managed to bring out 280 people to what would be TBA’s first town hall.

Missing from Parker’s account is Kinnear’s connection to the oil and gas industry. In 2018, Kinnear co-founded the organization Sustaining Alberta’s Energy Network (SAEN), which was dedicated to promoting what it called the “RStar program,” a policy proposal that would incentivize oil and gas companies to clean up old wells by offering them a reduced royalty rate on new drilling (Kaisar, 2023). In other words, RStar proposed a public subsidy for new oil and gas drilling in exchange for companies cleaning up old wells, which they are already legally obligated to do. As president of the Alberta Enterprise Group, an influential Calgary-based business lobby, Danielle Smith became a proponent of RStar, lobbying the Kenney government and publishing an op-ed in mid-2021 in favor of the proposal (Kaisar,

¹⁶⁹ Compared to other extractive populist groups, MMN neither has a particularly large social media following nor have they organized protest actions (at least not in a public-facing way). Instead, MMN’s main contribution to the ecosystem is to serve a networking function, particularly by organizing and hosting a series of private events bringing together figures from the oil and gas industry and conservative movement to develop co-ordinated political strategy with an eye to bringing down the Trudeau government (Lewis & McCarthy, 2019).

2023; D. Smith, 2021). Kenney’s government, however, rebuffed the idea, with the then-Minister of Energy, Sonya Savage, writing in June 2021 that “the proposal does not align with the province’s royalty regime or our approach to liability management and upholding the polluter-pays principle” (Savage, 2021).

Thus, while Kinnear may have sought to remove Kenney from the premiership for the reasons identified in Parker’s telling (namely, to avoid an NDP government), it is evident that Kinnear had another bone to pick with Kenney: his refusal of SAEN’s signature program. Less than half a year after helping launch TBA, Kinnear became Campaign Coordinator for Smith when she announced her bid for UCP leadership in May 2022. When Smith became Premier in October 2022, she included RStar in the mandate of the Minister of Energy, while rewarding Kinnear with the vague position of Special Project Manager, a position he has held since, according to his LinkedIn. While Kinnear’s role in TBA beyond the initial meeting with Parker is unknown, TBA’s original momentum was clearly drawn from the resource infrastructure of Kinnear and the SAEN, a pro-oil and gas group with a unique business case against Kenney’s government.

In addition to these organizational connections with pro-fossil fuel advocacy, TBA routinely invokes climate and energy politics in its collective action frames, as well as in organizing efforts outside of TBA. During phase two, for example—the “election of a solid freedom leader” to head the UCP—Vince Byfield, TBA’s one-time regional captain for Edmonton—shared a list of questions to the Telegram, which he planned on asking the candidates in a series of upcoming interviews, including: in light of Trudeau’s efforts to “block Alberta energy companies from getting their oil and gas products to the world market ... will you begin negotiations with the US to get in pipeline from Alberta to the closest available tidewater port?” (Byfield, 2022c). Byfield simultaneously shared these questions with the Alberta Statehood Party (ASP), a short-lived far-right fringe party of which he was

an active supporter and which advocated for Alberta to become the 51st US state (Byfield, 2022b). Byfield, who wished to join the US because the Canadian government is “seemingly hell-bent to destroy our province’s primary industry [i.e., the fossil fuel industry],” does not appear to have lost any political capital within mainstream Albertan conservatism for having adopted such views (Byfield, 2020a).¹⁷⁰

Throughout phase four, Byfield was granted one-on-one interviews with several major candidates for UCP leadership, including Smith, which were held in-person in “the Byfield home” (Byfield, 2022d). And in October 2022, he was elected to the 18-member Board of the UCP, a body that includes the Premier herself. Although his new position meant he must step aside from his role as regional captain, Byfield maintained posting privileges on the TBA Telegram, to which he sent pictures of a UCP canvas in Edmonton during phase four, adding, “BTW, Danielle says it's a great photo 😊” (Byfield, 2022f). In sum, Byfield’s support for the oil and gas industry was so strong that it led him to campaign for Alberta to join the US, including through an open letter to Premier Jason Kenney arguing his “fair deal” approach was too slow, which he published in the far-right alternative news site, the *Western Standard* (Byfield, 2020b).¹⁷¹ When TBA later developed a plan to remove Kenney and replace him with the more autonomist (even quasi-separatist) and “freedom-minded” Danielle Smith, Byfield’s radical support for oil and gas was re-directed into the UCP.

¹⁷⁰ This is partly due to his family name. His father, Ted Byfield, founded the *Alberta Report*, one of the most successful far-right publications in Canadian history. Both Jason Kenney and Danielle Smith attended Ted Byfield’s funeral in 2021, and Smith, along with Preston Manning, Stephen Harper, and Pierre Poilievre will be speaking at an upcoming event in his honour. Vince Byfield’s brother, Link Byfield, moreover, played an important role in Albertan conservative politics, too, having been, among other things, a founder of the original Wildrose Party and the person Danielle Smith calls “my first supporter,” crediting him with recruiting her to become Wildrose leader (Byfield, 2022e).

¹⁷¹ The *Western Standard* is a revival of Ezra Levant’s failed attempt (prior to his founding of *Rebel News*) at a successor to the *Alberta Report*. Parker considers the founder of the revised *Western Standard*, Derek Fildebrandt, a friend, and helped raised capital for the project, in part because it could serve as a medium through which to attack Kenney (*TBA Event - Grand Prairie*, 2023). In a forthcoming publication, we show that *Rebel News*, *Western Standard*, and *True North* (Rachel Parker’s outlet) managed to increase their social media views and following more than any other Canadian news media during the early 2022 height of the “freedom” movement.

David Parker, for his part, channeled his background in oil and gas advocacy directly into his collective action frames for TBA. During phase four, for example, Parker composed a list of “Nine Reasons that the NDP must be stopped,” including: “The NDP have already proven that they do not support the oil and gas industry.” However, now that Parker was head of an organization and did not have to answer to anyone higher, he was free to advocate for fossil fuels using the more radical discourse he had longed to in his earlier employment. A common slogan used as a diagnostic frame, for example, was, “You are the carbon they are trying to reduce” (D. Parker, 2022c). In his town hall speeches, this was accompanied by a diatribe against the “anti-human society” that Parker told his supporters they were living in, evidence of which was to be found in low birthrates caused by climate alarmism and feminism: the former because it “teaches our children that they are a disease on this planet,” and the latter because it has given women the sense that “their careers are more important ... than the continuation of the human race.” By thus equating “the people” with carbon itself, Parker goes a step further than “extractive populism’s” hegemonic identification with the fossil fuel industry. This is achieved, in part, by discursively constructing an “inverted crisis,” where the existential threat facing society is not climate change, but what “they” (elites and nefarious Others) are going to do about it (The Zetkin Collective, 2024).¹⁷² To reduce carbon, in this framing, is a quasi-genocidal act against “the people” jeopardizing the “continuation of the human race.”

This is where standard “extractive populist” fare—e.g., “fossil fuels are good for the Canadian economy”—makes a qualitative leap into the realm of far-right conspiracy theorization. Although most of the Telegram posts by Benita Pedersen, another TBA regional captain, were logistical in nature, one featured a picture of a roadside billboard she had made,

¹⁷² The author co-wrote this piece, which is currently being expanded into a book, *The Great Driving Right Show: Cars, Climate Collapse, and the Inverted Crisis* (Verso, forthcoming Spring 2026).

reading, “#RejectAgenda2030,” and linked to her personal website, “AllFiredUpForFreedom.com” (McCoy, 2023c). There, supporters can learn that global elites, via institutions like the World Economic Forum (WEF) and United Nations (UN), are waging a “war on fossil fuels” as part of their plan to abolish nation states, create a “one-world government,” and depopulate the earth using vaccines (Pedersen, n.d.). By depicting the threat level as existential, the globalist conspiracy theory offers a radicalizing interpretive frame with which to (mis)understand climate politics.

This far-right, conspiratorial version of extractive populism served as an ideological “anchor” for TBA’s collective action frames, including support of Danielle Smith’s UCP leadership campaign. During phase two, Parker shared a Smith tweet to the TBA Telegram, in which she announced, “no one in my government will be permitted to have any ties to [the WEF],” characterizing the organization as “anti-democratic elites” who “want to destroy our economy with carbon taxes,” who support Trudeau and Notley, and from which the Alberta Sovereignty Act, her signature policy proposal, would offer Albertans protection. In this way, the widespread “great reset” conspiracy theory of the pandemic (synonymous with Agenda 2030, ‘one world government,’ etc.) was coupled with Albertan regional grievances and given a quasi-separatist colouring. Parker praised Smith’s announcement, writing that, “we need to demand that the WEF has zero sway over Alberta going forward” (D. Parker, 2022a). In this way, Smith’s campaign not only offered the extractive populist subject—i.e., ‘the people’ as constructed by this discourse—protection from Ottawa’s environmental regulatory overreach, but by extension, from nefarious globalist elites linked in a “chain of equivalence” with domestic political opponents (Laclau, 2005b). TBA’s collective action frames worked to mobilize support for Smith on these grounds.

By “anchoring” the Smith government in these ways, TBA has thus served as an organizational conduit for turning the UCP into a vehicle for far-right “extractive populism”.

Danielle Smith herself would seem to concur with this interpretation (if not the terminology). In her interview with Byfield during phase two (the leadership race), Smith credits TBA with Kenney's downfall: "I must say, I think you guys did the work of rallying the forces to make the change that we're in the middle of now" (Byfield, 2022e). Indeed, given the close margin of Kenney's defeat in phase one (the leadership review), TBA's mobilization of 15,000 disaffected voters was almost certainly decisive (Bellefontaine, 2022).¹⁷³ Of course, TBA did not manufacture anti-Kenney sentiment or the far-right ideologies and movements fuelling it. Separatist organizing had been on an uptick since 2019, and the "freedom" movement held numerous large protest actions against Kenney during the pandemic. Polling, moreover, clearly shows that anti-Kenney sentiment was hurting the UCP and was causing "freedom-minded" voters to swing to the separatist Wildrose Independence Party of Alberta (WIPA). TBA did not manufacture that migration. Rather, TBA's unique political contribution was to channel that anti-Kenney sentiment back into the UCP. It did so, among other things, by drawing upon and fuelling collective action frames consistent with a radicalized version of "extractive populism" and turning those frames into "anchors" that support the Smith government and its climate policy.

TBA and Faith

The majority of Take Back Alberta leaders are evangelical Christians, including, most importantly, founder and leader David Parker.¹⁷⁴ Parker was born on April 8th, 1989 in Lacombe, Alberta, a small city between Calgary and Edmonton, to Mac Parker, a pastor, and

¹⁷³ 34,298 UCP members voted in the leadership review. The question put to members was, "Do you approve of the current leader?" 17,638 members voted 'yes' and 16,660 voted 'no,' giving Kenney a 51.4% approval rating. While Kenney initially said he would stay on if a majority of voters approved, he resigned anyway. Given these narrow margins, even if TBA's claim of having mobilized 15,000 individuals to participate in the leadership review was inflated, the organization would most likely still have made a decisive impact.

¹⁷⁴ Of the 10 identified leaders (see Table 4), six are confirmed evangelicals, but we have not been able to confirm the religious background of the remaining four: Blain Cellars, Tim Hoven, Mark Hunt, and Mitch Sylvestre.

Lorraine Parker, a homeschool facilitator.¹⁷⁵ As a home-schooled child in this environment, Parker claims to have memorized the book of Romans and to have “read the Bible end to end over a dozen times” (Kennedy-Glans, 2024). After home-schooling, Parker left Alberta to attend Trinity Western University, an evangelical Christian university in Langley, British Columbia.¹⁷⁶ These early experiences laid the foundation for a political life fuelled by faith. As Parker describes it to TBA supporters, at least two of his major political moves were driven by faith, both of which brought him into close contact with Danielle Smith.

The first of these was his opposition to then-Premier Alison Redford’s education reforms in 2012, which Christian homeschoolers interpreted as forcing them to teach their kids about evolution and gay rights and therefore as a violation of their “divine” parental rights (Wingrove, 2012). Although at the time he was working in Ottawa for a Conservative MP, Parker describes how he “took [Redford’s policy] personally,” and began drafting letters denouncing it. In one letter to the editor of the *Lacombe Globe*, his hometown’s local paper, Parker asked, “When did parents lose the right to educate their children?” and proclaimed, “Freedom starts and stops with the family. Do not hand over your children to the state, fight for the only thing that is truly yours” (D. Parker, 2012). Here, as in many future speeches and interviews, Parker identifies “freedom” with the expression of individual and family choices, and counterposes this with the state, which is framed as antithetical to this construction of freedom and rights.¹⁷⁷ One of Parker’s letters opposing Redford’s education reforms caught the attention of the Wildrose Party, which promptly recruited him on that basis to join leader

¹⁷⁵ For most biographical information, see TBA Event – Grand Prairie, March 21st, 2023.

¹⁷⁶ Trinity Western is a well-known hub of evangelical social conservatism. Although as of 2018 it is optional for students, faculty and staff at TWU must still sign the university’s Community Covenant Agreement, a “solemn pledge” to not partake in, among other things, “sexual intimacy that violates the sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman” (Lindsay, 2018).

¹⁷⁷ The defence of this particular expression of ‘freedom’—the family’s “right” to educate their children—is also a recurring focus of Parker’s politics. Later, Parker would join far-right protests against LGBTQ education in public schools, oversee the launch of a new Take Back Alberta phase focused on electing anti-LGBTQ candidates to Albertan school boards, and launch a “parental rights tour,” featuring James Lindsay, an American MAGA extremist who the Southern Poverty Law Center describes as “a leading voice in the reactionary anti-student inclusion, anti-LGBTQ, and conspiracy propaganda movements” (SPLC, n.d.).

Danielle Smith’s “war room.” This seems to have been the first time Parker would have met and worked with Smith, thus beginning a relationship that would deepen over the years into friendship and culminate in an important synergy between TBA and Smith’s eventual rise to power.¹⁷⁸ This relationship would not have begun when it did if not for Parker’s faith-driven defense of the “rights” and “freedoms” of homeschoolers. More germane for our purposes, though, is the second major faith-based political move made by Parker, the founding of TBA.

Immediately before founding TBA, Parker was on his first-ever extended break from politics following his role as Director of Field Operations for Erin O’Toole’s CPC leadership campaign, a move that was in part motivated by his desire to defeat O’Toole’s main competitor, Peter Mackay, on the grounds that Mackay opposed social conservatives and “people of faith.” After the O’Toole campaign, Parker moved to Hamilton, Ontario, started a podcast, and “several businesses,” including a roofing business with his cousin. “I was actually kind of happy and things were doing well,” he recalls, “and then Jason Kenney started arresting pastors,” which he viewed as an attack on religious freedom, the “cornerstone of Western civilization.” It has been speculated that perhaps this was not Parker’s complete rationale for founding TBA, and that personal grievances with Kenney, on whose UCP leadership campaign he played a leading role before a falling-out, may have been a factor. Even if faith was not the prime mover in Parker’s choice to found TBA, though, he clearly felt that the “Kenney started arresting pastors” origin story was powerful enough that he ran with it as his “official” narrative, repeating it in interviews, emails to supporters, town halls, and on Telegram. At the very least, Parker felt that such a story would sell well with his target audience, which itself tells us something about the importance of faith to TBA, its

¹⁷⁸ Parker considers Smith a “friend,” and the Premier was one of 75 guests at Parker’s March 2023 wedding to Rachel Parker (formerly Rachel Emmanuelle), a reporter for the far-right news outlet True North (Tait, 2023).

demographic base, and its political mission. Parker’s faith-based rationale for founding TBA is mirrored by religious connections at the organizational level, too.

Churches served as important resource infrastructure for TBA and for the “freedom” movement more broadly. Social movement scholars have found that movements often rely not only on the resources of activist organizations, but also “everyday organizations” whose primary purpose is not necessarily social change. Such organizations “provide the mass base to an emerging social movement, especially in regions without many activist organizations or at points in history when a new type of movement is surfacing on the political landscape” (Almeida, 2019, p. 67). In the context of the pandemic, when a new type of movement emerged—the “freedom” movement—churches served this role as an “everyday organization,” with a pre-existing mass base that could be mobilized to protest public health measures. In part, this was because the everyday operations of churches were disrupted by public health policies limiting in-person congregations.

As a result, some of the most intense protest events of Alberta’s “freedom” movement occurred at or outside churches. In April 2021, for example, during the province’s biggest-yet wave of Covid-19 infections, 500 individuals gathered outside the GraceLife Church on the outskirts of Edmonton to protest and physically obstruct the raising of a fence around the perimeter (T. Harrison, 2023, pp. 107–108).¹⁷⁹ One of the individuals later arrested in connection to the GraceLife protest was Alex Van Herk, the best friend of future TBA regional captain and Chief Financial Officer Marco Van Huigenbos, and who, in a viral photo, is seen trying to take down one of the fences (D. Parker & Gerber, 2022b; R. Parker, 2022).¹⁸⁰ Given these personal connections, it is unsurprising that, when Van Herk was arrested in August 2022—long after both GraceLife and Coutts (on which more below)—

¹⁷⁹ The pastor of the church, James Coates, is described by Parker as “the first pastor arrested by Kenney” (D. Parker & Gerber, 2022b).

¹⁸⁰ Van Huigenbos resigned from TBA in June 2023, just one month after the conclusion of phase four, the election of Danielle Smith (Braid, 2023).

TBA mobilized. “RCMP are arresting one of the Coutts boys right now,” Parker informed supporters. “Please pray. Flood the detachment with calls. Anyone close enough, peaceful protest gathering there ... We built this group for moments like this” (D. Parker, 2022d).¹⁸¹

The church thus provided a mass base for some of the “freedom” movement’s most significant protest events like the one at GraceLife, from which Van Herk emerged as a notable activist willing and able to escalate tactically. In turn, the close personal connections between Van Herk and the TBA leadership meant that the latter’s resources were used to mobilize in his defense—*through prayer and action*, a task TBA was “built for.” The “everyday organization” of the church thus intersects with TBA, the two mutually complementing and reinforcing each other.

Faith also fuelled the Albertan “freedom” movement’s most dramatic protest event—the border blockade in Coutts—from which TBA recruited two new captains, Marco Van Huigenbos and Jarrad McCoy. In early 2022, Van Huigenbos and Van Herk saw the “Freedom” Convoy take off and became determined to be a part of it, but, unable to travel to Ottawa owing to family commitments, instead joined a local “slow roll” convoy heading south on Highway 4 towards Coutts (D. Parker & Gerber, 2022b). As the “slow roll” escalated into a two-week border blockade, the two friends became “key players” and spokespeople, a position that later found them, along with one other, convicted of mischief over \$5,000, which carries a maximum prison sentence of 10 years (Graveland, 2024a). The most serious charges, however, were laid against Anthony Olienick and Chris Carbert, who were charged with conspiracy to commit murder for having brought stockpiles of weaponry to the blockade, believing it to be their “last stand” against the UN, Chinese communists, Trudeau (“the devil”), and the RCMP (the “devil’s arms”) (Graveland, 2024b). The blockade

¹⁸¹ Parker added that, “I think TBA needs to demand that the next government remove the RCMP from Alberta immediately,” thus linking this call to action with Danielle Smith’s sovereignty act and the related call for an Alberta police force, the implication being that a truly *Albertan* police force would never have arrested Van Herk, and that his arrest is yet another example of the federal government’s tyranny (D. Parker, 2022d).

lasted from January 29th to February 15th, 2022, and David Parker, who had his eye on the upcoming March 19th deadline to join the UCP and vote against Kenney, would use the protest to recruit for his new organization.

Jarrad McCoy, another TBA regional captain as well as a pastor and carpenter from Milk River, Alberta, saw public health policies as an infringement on his freedom of choice, a freedom he described as “fundamental for faith” and the reason “why a lot of Christians had red flags” about such policies (D. Parker & Gerber, 2023). Aside from refusing to suspend in-person congregations—“I wasn’t going to forsake the gathering of the Saints,” he explained, adding “Jesus broke the law by healing lepers [*sic.*]”—McCoy had not been directly involved in any protest events until the convoy to Coutts swept him along, showing him how “regular Canadians ... could impact the world, if they trusted God and took action” (McCoy, 2022d). It was during this experience that McCoy met Parker, who was in the area, in part to deliver a speech in Milk River in support of Coutts. Shortly after the blockade came down, McCoy and Parker spent a “a refreshing day gopher hunting” together, after which Parker invited McCoy to become a TBA captain (McCoy, 2022d). About McCoy’s role, Parker later stated, “Jarrad is an absolute rock of this organization, it would not have continued into Phase 2 without him” (D. Parker, 2022e). In sum, McCoy’s faith-based opposition to public health measures was transformed into collective action when a protest, led by individuals with previous experience in faith-based activism rooted in the “everyday organization” of the church, emerged in his area, an event which in turn connected him with further collective action opportunities via TBA, within which he went on to play a leading role.

The faith-based emergence of TBA continued to inform the movement’s resource infrastructure throughout its phases. A number of TBA events were held at churches, including the Third Day Church in Lethbridge, the Church in the Vine in Edmonton, the Southside Victory Church in Calgary, the River of Life in Milk River, and the Red Deer

United Church (McCoy, 2022c, 2022a, 2022b, 2023b, 2023a). Of course, churches are somewhat common sites for SMOs across the political spectrum to hold meetings, and it does not necessarily mean the organization and church share a political vision. It is also worth noting that the majority of TBA events were *not* held in churches, but in community centres and halls, in homes, farms, restaurants, and stores. One of the single largest TBA events, though, was held at Church in the Vine, with what Parker described as an “amazing turnout” of over 400 (D. Parker, 2022b). The pastors of the church were among those who faced criminal charges for violating public health measures, and TBA used the opportunity to help fundraise for the related legal fees, with Byfield encouraging TBA supporters to “bring along some cash to aid in their fight with AHS [Alberta Health Services]” (Byfield, 2022a). The Church in the Vine, then, was not simply a politically neutral host of TBA, but provided a mass base, resulting in one of TBA’s largest town halls with an audience willing to hear the organization’s plan of action, in turn for which TBA offered financial support. The church and TBA were thus linked within the broader multi-organizational field of the ‘freedom movement.

Faith also played a major role in the collective action frames used by TBA leaders. In particular, we find a theologically grounded, anti-statist interpretation of “freedom,” which is in turn linked to far-right extractive populism. During phase three (electing TBA-backed candidates to the UCP board), for example, McCoy cites scripture in order to frame participation in the UCP’s governance structures as backstopped by God, who leads the movement on for the sacred purpose of restoring freedom, “Jesus’s idea” (McCoy, 2022e). “Freedom” for McCoy is not merely the individual freedom to refuse a mask or vaccine, then, but a far broader and fundamentally theological concept, the violation of which is simultaneously a violation of God’s will. Benita Pedersen takes a similar view, describing to a

Christian podcaster live from the “Freedom” Convoy how she found God about one year into the pandemic:

I surrendered to Jesus and said, ‘your will, not mine,’ . . . and since I did that, I’m all in for the freedom movement, because the freedom movement goes 100% with Jesus. He wants us to have free will. He wants us to have free choice. He gave it to us. (God A Minute?, 2022)

Similar to McCoy, we have here the equation of “freedom” with free will/choice, understood in sacred and individualistic terms. From this perspective, vaccine mandates, border closures, curfews, and masks are all seen as a violation of divine freedoms and therefore theologically unjustifiable. If individual free will is divine and state-mandated restrictions on the individual are therefore understood as anti-Christian, it is not difficult to see how such a theology might apply to climate politics.

We saw above how TBA espouses a far-right form of extractive populism by incorporating the globalist conspiracy theory within its collective action frames, which present an existential and radicalizing view on pandemic and climate politics alike. With respect to faith, what we find is that the evangelical, anti-statist conception of “freedom” touted by TBA leaders is consistently framed as the opposite of and antidote to globalism; that is, in the Manichean view of TBA’s far-right populism, ‘the people’ are identified with a theologically grounded conception of “freedom,” while the ‘elites’ and various ‘Others’ are identified with globalists seeking to use the state to crush individual freedoms. Pedersen was convinced, for example, that the “Freedom” Convoy was just a first step for the movement, since further mandates would likely be forthcoming under the auspices of climate change (Barrera, 2022). Thus, about one year later, in the middle of phase four, she found time for activism outside of TBA and co-organized a protest in Edmonton against 15-minute cities,

where speakers and signage warned of imminent “climate lockdowns” (DJBenita, 2023).¹⁸² Given the capaciousness of the globalist conspiracy theory, moreover, and its many internal chains of equivalence between enemy categories, Pedersen could similarly see evidence of the UN’s “depopulation agenda” in the efforts of local teens to paint a rainbow crosswalk, against which she organized a successful plebiscite in her town of Westlock, just north of Edmonton, thus banning pride symbols and mandating “neutrality” on municipal property (McKay, 2024). In short, Pedersen’s theologically grounded conception of “freedom” is counterposed to globalism, the effect being a radical far-right politics opposed to all forms of state-led or ‘mandated’ progressivism, whether social or ecological.

Roy Beyer—another TBA regional captain, former pastor, and founder/executive director of Taking Back Our Freedoms (TBOF)—also espoused a theological conception of “freedom,” which he likewise counterposed to globalism.¹⁸³ As with other TBA captains, for Beyer, “freedom is a fundamental Christian value ... God gave us the gift of freedom and that is being ripped out of our hands unless we stand and say, ‘this belongs to us’” (Faytene TV, 2023). Appearing on a conservative Christian web show to mobilize the faithful into praying and volunteering for Smith’s campaign, Beyer presented a dire diagnosis of what awaits should the NDP prevail:

I don’t believe it’s an overstatement. I believe that what we’re talking about is nationhood. Us as a nation being free, and it’s not just about individual freedom, it’s much bigger than that ... God celebrates that there’s nations in the world. And that’s a

¹⁸² The concept of the ‘15-minute city’ was coined in 2015 by Carlos Moreno, a Colombian French business professor. The idea is to design cities so that citizens have all their basic needs, including their workplaces, within a fifteen-minute walk or bike ride from their home. However, this relatively benign sustainable urban planning concept became the target of conspiracy theorization and protest in the wake of the pandemic, a mutation of the “freedom” movement into overt climate denialism observed across the global far right, which has increasingly cathected onto a defense of fossil-fuelled mobility (The Zetkin Collective, 2024).

¹⁸³ TBOF’s board featured a range of far-right figures including Maxime Bernier, leader of the People’s Party of Canada. According to the head of the Emergencies Act Inquiry, Justice Paul Rouleau, one of the prominent leader’s of the “Freedom” Convoy, Tamara Lich, viewed TBOF with suspicion and believed they were “attempting to take over the movement” (LeBrun, 2023).

beautiful thing. The globalists have an opposite view. They're going to eliminate nationhood and turn it into this grand scheme of a global government. (Faytene TV, 2023)

Here, Beyer ties his anti-statist conception of “freedom” into a theo-nationalistic opposition to globalism. His contention that “God celebrates ... nations,” moreover, has roots in the *longue durée* of Albertan evangelical conservatism, which views the state’s role as being to “ensure that individuals were free and thus granted the potential to seek out God” (Banack, 2016, p. 202).¹⁸⁴ By incorporating the globalist conspiracy theory into his diagnostic frames for phase four, Beyer depicts the provincial election as an existential event of tremendous religious importance: a stark choice between good and evil, freedom and tyranny. Although he does not specifically address climate change here, the reference to “globalists” is enough to set off the whole chain of equivalence in the minds of the initiated. No surprise, then, that, shortly after finding success in phase four, Beyer’s theologically grounded notion of “freedom” led him to found yet another organization, this one opposed to liberal mayor of Calgary, Jyoti Gondek’s efforts to increase urban density via blanket re-zoning. Hardly tangential to his work in TBA, this new organization works on many of the same fronts: first, by obstructing climate-oriented policy; and second, by continuing to anchor the UCP, in this case by eroding support for Gondek, which he views as critical to electing a conservative city council and thereby providing the conservative movement with a more formidable apparatus in the city ahead of the 2027 provincial election (Alberta Prosperity Project, 2024).

¹⁸⁴ It also echoes a Christian nationalist conception of “divinely ordained nations,” which has played a role in the US evangelical movement as well as in providing ideological support for apartheid in South Africa (Hart, 2021, p. 63).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that, not only did the cycle of protest accelerate as it morphed into the separatist and freedom movements, but it began to produce substantive impacts on Canadian and especially Albertan politics. The construction of separatist movement parties following Trudeau's 2019 re-election had the effect of co-producing political opportunities which future organizations—the Free Alberta Strategy, Take Back Alberta, and the Alberta Prosperity Project—took advantage of. These three organizations provided mobilizing structures which “anchored” them to Danielle Smith's rise, “movement-izing” the UCP in the process. Without such efforts, I argue Smith would not likely have become Premier, suggesting that far-right movements in Alberta have come to play a significant role in shaping the politics and policy of the province. Thus, the radicalized extractive populism we have seen develop over the cycle of protest came to express itself in a radicalized form of provincial statecraft, with implications for Canadian federalism and climate politics in the years to come.

The investigation further revealed that evangelical Christianity played a significant, and under-appreciated, role in establishing this dynamic. The omission of religion in Canadian studies of extractive populism is a notable lacuna, especially given the well-documented connections between evangelical Christianity, right-wing populism, and climate denialism (Sheldon & Oreskes, 2017). This is particularly true given the significant role of Christianity, and evangelical Christianity in particular, within Albertan conservatism, both historically and at present, as well as its role in the development of the province's fossil fuel economy (Banack, 2016; Dochuk, 2013, 2019, pp. 346–352). The preceding analysis has helped to fill this research gap. While it is not a primarily faith-based organization, TBA's membership and organizational infrastructure were heavily influenced by the church's role as an everyday

organization. In addition, it was found that a religiously inflected discourse of “freedom” informed TBA’s representation of fossil fuel as good for “the people,” and added an apocalyptic, evangelical valence to the protest cycle’s master frame. The globalist conspiracy theory came to be articulated alongside and counterposed to a theologically inflected conception of freedom, reflective of the addition of new social forces into the cycle. In this adaptation, the impositions on individual freedoms posed by public health measures were not only expressions of larger, sinister globalist agendas, but were also framed as contrary to the will of God. This echoes Hart (2021), who finds that Christian nationalism plays a significant role within the US far right “as part of a hegemonic project, intimately linked with US forms of racial capitalism and imperialism” (p. 67). In my findings, evangelical Christian nationalism is articulated through a specifically Albertan nationalism, linked to the hegemonic project of fossil capitalism. Given these results, future research would benefit from an examination of which other far-right social movements “anchor” governments’ “extractive populist” agendas. Indeed, as the above findings have indicated, these movements can play a role in climate denialism that goes beyond astroturf.

Future research might explore the ways that a broader range of religious faiths, or inter-faith alliances, intersect with extractive populism. Indeed, evidence suggests that evangelicals and conservative Muslims may be uniting around anti-LGBTQ stances. Take Back Alberta’s sixth phase, for example, is focussed on taking over school boards with the aim of restricting LGBTQ education, and Parker has described having had “amazing conversations with the Muslim and Sikh communities and they’re all on board” (C. Scott & Lambert, 2023). This fledgling alliance between Take Back Alberta, a predominantly white, rural organization made up of many evangelicals, and other religious minorities around issues of gender and sexuality could pose novel research problems. In addition to exploring potential sources of disagreement or rupture, with particular attention to Islamophobia, future

research might investigate whether and to what extent Muslim organizations are participating in extractive populism, and the extent to which the separatist and freedom movements deploy nativist frames.

9. Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have examined a range of interconnected movements and organizations stretching from 2016 to 2022, resulting in the first comprehensive analysis of the second phase of Canadian fossil capital's extractive populist strategy, the carbon convoy cycle, situated in the rise of far-right denial globally. My theoretical approach—a Marxist political ecology of far-right movements—operated at multiple levels of abstraction, synthesizing Marxist political ecological approaches to the climate crisis; Gramscian and Hallian approaches to populism, hegemony, and articulation; and conventional social movement theorizations of protest cycles and corporate grassroots campaigns. Drawing on a corpus of data including interviews with convoy organizers and far-right activists, as well as social media pages of numerous pro-fossil fuel groups, I found that the cycle of protest was marked by radicalization at multiple levels—in movement tactics, ideological frames, and ultimately in the movement-ization of an ostensibly mainstream conservative party, the UCP—and I have characterized this as an incipient Canadian and more specifically Albertan manifestation of a global process of fossil fascisation. Above all, Canadian extractive populism's second phase was marked by a pivot to on-the-ground protest in which the convoy emerged as a signature tactic, “a premiere mode of political expression in a time inflected by the fossil fascist creep” (Kinder, 2024, pp. 181, 195). Thus, the contradictions within Canadian political economy and culture with which this dissertation opened—namely, strong climate commitments yet ever-rising emissions, and a reputation as being tolerant yet giving rise to the morbid symptoms of far-right mobilization in recent years—are deeply interconnected and cannot be understood apart from one another.

Since the bulk of research and writing for this study was conducted, the far-right phase of denial has only deepened across North America and Europe. Organized climate

denial and obstruction has always had its epicentre in the US, and despite being repeatedly pronounced dead or dying, breathes new life still with the 2024 re-election of Donald Trump. Elected on a promise to “drill, baby, drill” and to carry out what he boasted would be “the largest deportation operation in our country’s history,” the world’s most powerful state appears to be undergoing wide scale authoritarian transformation, with dramatic implications for global capitalism, as well as for Canadian politics, sovereignty, and economic security. The rightward drift has continued apace in Europe, too, where leader of the “post-fascist” Brothers of Italy, Giorgia Meloni secured that country’s highest office in September 2022. In November 2023, Islamophobic firebrand Geert Wilders and his Freedom Party came out on top in the Dutch general election. And more recently, in the fall of 2024, the extremist Alternative for Germany became the first far-right party to win a state election in Germany since the fall of Nazism, and carried the momentum into its best ever performance in a general election in February 2025—this despite the controversy surrounding their plans to “remigrate” millions out of the country, including “unassimilated” German citizens. In the UK, meanwhile, the moribund Conservative Party has been outflanked both ideologically and in the polls by Brexiteer Nigel Farage’s upstart Reform UK. In all cases, such parties have embedded populist climate denial and obstruction directly into their appeal to electorates, through campaign materials and policy. In short, they seem to rise not despite their climate denial, but because of it. With such global trendlines firmly entrenched, it would frankly be surprising if Canada—a settler colony with histories of nativism and white supremacy, and one of the world’s largest producers of fossil fuels—did *not* produce similar politics.

Key Findings and Contributions

Perhaps the most significant finding of this dissertation is the context it provides for understanding the Freedom Convoy, which, given its headline-grabbing scale, most

Canadians remember well, and which became a touchstone for the global far right.

Movements do not arise in isolation but are often directly inspired or influenced by those which precede them. The stronger the links between “early risers” and “adopters,” the stronger this chain of influence or diffusion will be (McAdam, 1995, p. 232). By closely tracing these network connections and mechanisms of diffusion, this dissertation has been able to comprehensively detail the linkages—overlaps in organizational, ideological, and human resources—between fossil capital’s pivot to corporate grassroots advocacy and the Freedom Convoy.

Many Canadians may have a narrow understanding of the Freedom Convoy and related events, perhaps assuming it was mainly a protest by truckers upset about pandemic-era restrictions. The better informed may add that faith groups, especially evangelicals, joined the cause, along with a smattering of far-right and extremist individuals and groups, and will perhaps note the presence at the convoy of some pro-fossil fuel discourse. Very few will be attuned to the analysis suggested by the findings of this dissertation: in short, that without Canadian fossil capital’s pivot to a corporate grassroots strategy, the Freedom Convoy likely would not have happened.

The burden of this argument, summarized in as simple terms as possible, is as follows: first, fossil capital’s extractivist action coalition catalyzed a process of tactical and organizational diffusion through which the convoy emerged and underwent an upward scale shift over the period 2016-2018 (the central finding of chapter 4); second, this diffusion process culminated in a nation-wide convoy, the United We Roll Convoy of 2019, carried out primarily by a relatively autonomous spin-off movement, Yellow Vests Canada, but which would likely not have occurred without the previous efforts of the extractivist action coalition (the central findings of chapters 5 and 6); and furthermore, that the Freedom Convoy would not likely have materialized—at least not at the scale, duration, or intensity that it did—

without the social, cultural, and human resources accrued by key organizers during previous periods of the protest cycle, including the Yellow Vests movement and associated convoys, both before, during, and after United We Roll (one of the main findings of chapter 7).

The significance and implications of these findings are many. For starters, these suggest that the widespread practice of corporate grassroots advocacy can have unintended consequences far beyond the narrow policy goals of the firm or sector behind a given campaign. The necessity for such campaigns to find allies with distinct but complimentary grievances means that they may function as a magnet for a wide variety of civil society actors. Indeed, fossil capital's subsidized public strategy effectively worked to prime the pump, so to speak, of a broader protest culture in Alberta. Since there were already in existence other fringe groups—including from the patriot and nationalist movements—with strong grievances against the Trudeau government, the potential for alliance formation was strong. The globalist conspiracy theory functioned as a master frame—a convergence of many moral panics into one—with which to bridge this alliance in the ideological sphere, while organizational and personnel networks grew denser as the two movements increasingly overlapped at protest events. These mechanisms of diffusion, then, functioned as mechanisms of ideological articulation in practice.

Within the framework of the regime of obstruction, fossil capital achieves hegemony by channeling its economic power into the spheres of the state and civil society (Carroll, 2021). At first glance, it would seem far-fetched to suggest, as my findings do, that the Freedom Convoy was an expression of a new modality of fossil capitalist hegemony, located in the streets not the boardrooms. The former would seem exogenous to the political economy of fossil capitalism, reflecting merely the contentious politics of an acute public health emergency, fuelled by panic, conspiracy, and disinformation on social media. Even the rise of Danielle Smith poses difficulty for the regime of obstruction model because her

predecessor, Jason Kenney, arguably already represented the expression of extractive populism through the state (Kinder, 2024, p. 199). If fossil capital was already more or less fully expressing itself through the Albertan state—representing the erosion of any ‘relative autonomy’ the provincial state may have had *vis-à-vis* fossil capital in a manner similar to the effect of Trumpism on the US state (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021, p. 205)—then how do we explain Kenney’s downfall and replacement by an equally pro-fossil leader. This is where an understanding of the far right’s relative autonomy is critical.

One of the key findings across the dissertation was therefore that far-right social movements grew out of the extractive populist movement and yet radicalized beyond its direct control. In chapters 5 and 6, this took the form of contradictory articulations between the nativism of Yellow Vests Canada and the narrower pro-oil boosterism of the more corporate-connected of the extractive populist groups, notably Canada Action. In chapter 7, I found that a similar dynamic played out with respect to Albertan alienation/separatism and Covid-19 conspiracism: having fed the extractive populist movement which in turn was a major tributary of the separatist and freedom movements, Kenney was ultimately out-mobilized by his far-right flank for failing to heed their radicalized demands. In part, this dynamic was achieved through the articulation of extractive populism in and through evangelical Christianity, which provided both ideological and organizational resources to the campaign to remove Kenney and replace him with Smith (a key finding of chapter 7).

Throughout the cycle, I found that the fossilized petty bourgeoisie played a key role in the diffusion of the convoy. Indeed, the convoy can be thought of as an inherently petty bourgeois form: necessarily undertaken by the owners of large trucks and diesel engines. From the emergence of the convoy in 2016 to the heady period of rapid diffusion in late 2018 (see chapter 4), it was small business owners, often of businesses directly involved in oil and gas production or services, who played the lead role in diffusion. In the Yellow Vest/United

We Roll Convoy of February 2019, this pattern was repeated, with Todd informing me that most participants with trucks were business owners.

While I have not undertaken a systematic analysis of the class composition of leading separatist and freedom organizations like Take Back Alberta, a cursory examination of their leadership indicates a thoroughly petty bourgeois and middle class character, albeit lacking representation from the *fossilized* petty bourgeoisie in the case of Take Back Alberta (TBA) and the Alberta Prosperity Project (APP): serial entrepreneur and political staffer (TBA's David Parker); farmers (TBA's Jarrad McCoy and Marco Van Huigenbos); surgeon (APP's Dennis Modry); sporting goods store owner (TBA/APP's Mitch Sylvestre); lawyer (APP's Jeff Rath); restaurant owner (APP's Chris Scott), and so on. Nor did I do a comprehensive class analysis for the Freedom Convoy itself. Several observations are in order: first, note that Teamsters Canada, which represents 15,000 long-haul truck drivers across the country, denounced the convoy, noting 90% of its members were vaccinated (Meunier, 2022); second, reflecting the petty bourgeois nature of the protest form, a crowd-sourced online database lists all the many businesses who sent trucks on the convoy (Traitors, n.d.). As labour studies professor Adam D. King writes, "The trucker convoy is a 'revolt' of petit-bourgeoisie owner-operators, financially backed by wealthy right-wing grifters — not the vast majority of exploited trucking workers" (King, 2022). Overall, then, my findings show that neither the extractive populist movement nor its various far-right offshoots were worker-led, thus confirming Kinder's (2024) hunch about the bourgeois and petty bourgeois nature of the movement (p. 219-220).

The Cycle of Fossil Fascisation: Key Contributions Continued

Carbon Convoys: Extractive Populism and the Canadian Far Right set out from the observation that Yellow Vests Canada could not be understood in isolation but needed to be

situated in the context of the extractive populist movement out of which it grew, and the separatist and freedom movements into which it carried forth many key personnel and frames. A central argument of this dissertation has been that the subsidized public strategy of Canadian fossil capital formed an important component of the mobilizing structures behind this cycle of protest and, further, that this cycle was characterized by a process of radicalization, which can be thought of as an incipient fossil fascisation. This process was tracked at multiple levels, ideological and organizational.

It has been a methodological difficulty, however, to pinpoint the precise delineations between a mainstream extractive populism and radical or even fascistic variations. There are a number reasons for this difficulty, but this dissertation has taken an approach that does not get bogged down in this taxonomic task, eschewing ‘bad apple’ models of analysis. Instead, one of the findings of this dissertation is precisely that, in fact, the boundaries between these are a lot blurrier in practice than the abstract categories may presuppose. This finding has repeated itself for every movement examined in this study. For example, despite his white nationalist rhetoric, Pat King was considered an indispensable part of the organizational operations of the Freedom Convoy. There were those among the leadership who felt his discourse at times went too far, and yet they were unwilling to confront him for fear of losing his social media following and logistical support, including a number of trucks believed to be among his followers. With regards to separatism, respectable conservatives rubbed shoulders with conspiracist cranks warning of impending civil war and self-identified fascists practicing ‘optics-friendly’ Nazism. And during Yellow Vests Canada, the extractivist action coalition provided a number of subsidies to the movement, and fossil capital engaged in various forms of tacit patronage. Throughout the cycle, then, I find an osmosis and collaboration between these elements. Rather than get lost in the confusion, the confusion is one of the findings: that there is a large degree of overlap between mainstream forms of extractive populism and its

more radical elements. Indeed, the process of fossil fascisation is marked precisely by an osmosis between ostensibly mainstream conservatism and far-right actors and ideologies.

The development and spread of the globalist conspiracy theory reflects this process at the level of ideology. Ideationally, fascism is a revolutionary (i.e., palingenetic) form of ultra-nationalism. The justification for the revolution is based on what Paxton (2007) described as a set of “mobilizing passions,” which “form the emotional lava that set fascism’s foundations” (p. 41). Among these passions were “a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions,” and an obsessive sense of group victimhood that “justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external” (p. 41). Roger Griffin (2018) likewise provides a definition of fascism’s “core myth,” which is that “an organic ‘people’ forming an ‘ultra-nation’ is in crisis and needs to be saved from its present state of disintegration and decadence through the agency of a vanguard” willing to fight the enemy (p. 46). When it comes to thinking through what a specifically *fossil* fascist variant of this core myth might be, and what it would look like at the ideological level to see these mobilizing passions put toward a defense of fossil capitalism, my argument is that the globalist conspiracy theory is fit for purpose.

The GCT raises the threat-level communicated by extractive populism to an existential level: the nation has been betrayed and is at risk of complete dissolution—indeed, of being essentially conquered by supranational organizations set to impose deindustrialization, cultural ‘replacement,’ and a totalitarian communist style of global governance. In this decidedly conspiracist form of climate denial, defending the nation against the UN or the WEF, along with their entire gamut of dangerous ‘agendas,’ is an urgent necessity. Opposition to climate action is thereby articulated with and through opposition to migration, such that to defend national sovereignty is to promote the fossil fuel industry and a nativist conception of national belonging. The globalist conspiracy theory makes the

gestating mitigation crisis faced by fossil capital *feel like* a crisis for the nation, too. Indeed, it is a distorted and highly ideological variant of the spectre of mitigation haunting fossil capital. By grafting calls for climate action onto apparently unaccountable and undemocratic global institutions, they are thereby delegitimized as part and parcel of a broader, sinister agenda. Domestic liberal elites, social democrats, and environmentalists, meanwhile, are framed as either ignorant or, worse, willing (even paid) servants of such agendas, and traitorous to the nation. By raising the stakes of political conflict to an existential level—which *inverts* the very real existential stakes of climate mitigation (The Zetkin Collective, 2024)—combatting globalist agendas becomes urgent, warranting exceptional measures.

The literature on protest cycles suggests that earlier movements in a cycle cultivate innovative master frames which are then adopted and adapted by future movements. As McAdam (1995) puts it, “the presence of a highly visible initiator movement makes the ‘framing work’ of all later struggles much easier” (p. 228). Indeed, the “diffusion and creative adaptation by latecomers of the ideas of the early risers” is said to be “among the most important impetuses to the development of a protest cycle” (McAdam, 1995, p. 228). Of course, Yellow Vests Canada did not invent the globalist conspiracy theory, which I have suggested is, in fact, a recitation of earlier anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. But what I have shown is that this conspiracy theory, while used and spread by the transnational far right, was picked up by Yellow Vests Canada and transmitted through the cycle. When it was adapted by the Alberta separatist movement, for example, globalism became seen as a threat to Alberta only insofar as it remained a part of Canada, attached to and subordinated to the irredeemably liberal (and, by extension, *globalist*) political and economic centres of Ontario and Québec.

One major contribution of this dissertation was in theorizing the connection between the concepts of subsidized public, cycles of protest, and fossil fascisation. The theory of fossil fascisation holds that this process entails an “act of hiring,” or efforts of the big bourgeoisie

to cultivate a “wide protective circle” around itself (Malm & the Zetkin Collective, 2021, p. 241; Zibordi, 1983). Corporate grassroots advocacy *writ large*, I have suggested, can be seen precisely as an act of hiring: that is, an effort to financially, organizationally, and discursively subsidize targeted elements of the public into political action in defence of the pecuniary interests of a firm or sector, especially ones with particularly controversial accumulation practices and which have been targeted by progressive activism and threatened with state intervention (Walker, 2014). Of course, corporate grassroots advocacy as such does not always lead to cycles of protest (in fact, this appears to be the exception), let alone fuel a process of fossil fascisation.¹⁸⁵ In the case under study, however, these elements were articulated alongside one another. The social forces that mobilized within the broader umbrella of the extractive populist movement included not only the newly activated fossilized petty bourgeoisie, but pre-existing anti-migration groups.

Thus, my findings suggest that subsidized public strategies can produce unintended spillover effects, in which corporate-subsidized movement activity helps foment a regional protest culture conducive to far-right organizing. As the corporate grassroots campaign develops, more and more layers of civil society are exposed to the tactics, organizations, and frames of the cycle, adopting and adapting them for their own purposes. In this process, these mechanisms of diffusion function as mechanisms of articulation—connecting ideologies and social forces in highly contingent, historically-specific ways. Riding the contradictions of a long-simmering organic crisis, fossil capital’s pivot to movement-making ends up driving through conjunctural crises—notably, boom-bust economic cycles, migration ‘crisis,’ and a pandemic—through which its pool of potential recruits increases. Where Walker (2014) emphasized the necessity of corporate advocacy campaigns targeting arm’s-length

¹⁸⁵ As mentioned in the Theory chapter, the Tea Party stands out as one example where these dynamics may be observable.

constituencies to add to and widen their coalition, my evidence suggests that such coalition-building may occur in an autonomous way, beyond the calculations of the corporate subsidizers or their public relations firms.

Building on analyses of the “network-making” efforts of extractive populism’s online manifestations, termed an “extractivist discourse coalition” (Neubauer et al., 2023; Neubauer & Graham, 2021), and observing the tight organizational co-operation across groups in organizing protest events, I identified an “extractivist action coalition” responsible for coordinating and diffusing most of the pro-oil and gas protests between 2016 and 2018. The online and offline activities of these extractivist coalitions appeared to be mutually reinforcing in several ways, with protest events driving online engagement and vice versa. Having established a well-trafficked echo chamber of extractivist content producers, these groups in turn directed their followers to increasingly frequent protest events throughout 2018 and 2019. Evidence suggests offline ‘action’ boosted online ‘discourse,’ as when a video of the Grande Prairie convoy in late 2018 became one of Canada’s Energy Citizens most-engaged posts. Although increasingly effective at mobilizing its subsidized public into the streets, however, the extractivist action coalition lost some control over the direction and activities of those they had mobilized.

Canadian fossil capital’s pivot to public advocacy closely paralleled an explosion in global far right popularity, marked by the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and by far-right movements and parties across Europe stoking nativist panics about the Syrian refugee crisis. During this time, Canada too saw the rise of Islamophobic street movements, emboldened by the “Trump effect” (Perry et al., 2019). Despite migration seeming not to have much to do with the narrow economic interests of big fossil capital, the Canadian patriot and nationalist movements proved to be an effective layer within the wide protective circle, particularly when they re-branded as Yellow Vests Canada in late 2018. The global far right during this

time was mobilizing against the United Nation's migration compact, and Canada was no exception (Rone, 2022). When Islamophobic patriot groups re-branded into Yellow Vests Canada, their in-person protests and online fora began attracting far greater participation (J. E. Tetrault, 2024a). While YVC was a pan-Canadian movement, it was strongest in Alberta, a fact best explained with reference to that province also being home to the most robust extractive populist movement, notwithstanding the convoy's origins in B.C. and numerous similar protests in Saskatchewan. Yellow Vests Canada, then, functioned as a meeting place for the Islamophobic patriot movement and the extractive populist movement.

Nativism and support for fossil capitalism thus became articulated in a single social movement. While Islamophobia had been discursively sutured together with oil and gas promotion earlier in the decade through Ezra Levant's 'ethical oil' book and institute (Kinder, 2024; Wilson, 2014), Yellow Vests Canada channeled these articulations into on-the-ground protest. To paraphrase Stuart Hall's (2019) dictum about the articulation of race and class, we could say that, with respect to Yellow Vests Canada, white supremacy became the modality through which extractive populism was lived. But such articulations were not without controversy. The extractive populist groups with close ties to big fossil capital tended to present a liberal democratic, non-partisan, and self-described 'positive' style of messaging. This came into conflict with the violent, racist, hyper-partisan, and conspiracist messaging of the YVC movement. These tensions came to a head as both YVC and the extractive populist movement began to intersect, growing in momentum as plans began to take shape for a major convoy to Ottawa—what would become United We Roll.

Two main interpretations of the convoy emerged. The first was what I termed the 'bad apple' framing, in which the convoy was understood primarily as based on 'legitimate' economic grievances pertaining to the oil and gas industry—even as an expression of the working-class—while certain 'bad apples' in the movement were dismissed as a minor

nuisance or aberration, accused of attempting to ‘hijack’ the convoy, and subjected to rhetorical discipline. On the other hand, anti-hate groups and researchers adopted the inverse position, which I termed the ‘rotten core’ perspective, according to which the Yellow Vests were primarily an Islamophobic hate group, using oil and gas grievances as a fig leaf for bigotry; in such views, the climate denialist and pro-fossil fuel politics of the movement were seen as a cynical tactic used by the far right to recruit and gain legitimacy.

What both framings share is that they downplay the concrete historical determinations of this discursive articulation (Hall, 2019b, p. 242). Inverting economic reductionism, such liberal analyses engage in a “reductionism upward” (i.e., to the superstructure) (Hall, 2019b, p. 241), according to which the far right is absolutely autonomous from capital, a purely ideational expression of hate, bigotry, intolerance, ‘phobia,’ and so on. My findings suggest that neither the bad apple nor rotten core framings accurately reflected the YVC movement’s ideology, resource infrastructure, or relationship with the extractivist action coalition, thus resulting in distorted and misleading interpretations of YVC and the United We Roll Convoy. To an under-appreciate degree, the pro-fossil fuel and far-right movements articulated one another through concrete practices of diffusion. YVC was a genuine fusion of the two, and often the lines between the pro-oil movement and the far right were blurry: the radicalizing fossilized petty bourgeoisie, for example, were both a typical arm’s length constituency for corporate grassroots subsidization *and*, through their radicalization, increasingly shot through with overtly racist, sexist, homophobic, violent, and conspiracist ideology. In a way not dissimilar to Steve Bannon’s fascist re-direction of the Tea Party (Hart, 2020), the very same petty bourgeois cohort mobilized by corporate interests proved to be amenable to rightward radicalization.

Petty bourgeois fanaticism is an essential ingredient in such processes, running ahead of the corporate grassroots tactically and ideologically. This partially reflects the relatively

secure position of big fossil capital, whose size and adaptive capacity means it can accumulate even in recessions and oil price downturns. The fanaticism of the fossilized petty bourgeoisie partially reflects their relative economic precarity; volatile economics produces volatile politics. It also reflects their more parochial social milieu. Where big fossil capital is organically integrated with Eastern finance capital and the broader transnational capitalist class, the fossilized petty bourgeoisie is insular, *provincial* in both senses of the term. From this mystified class consciousness, disruptions to the sector are experienced as assaults on not only the economic underpinning of the class, but its identity as independent. The market is fetishized as the only legitimate determinant of economic development, and any efforts to reshape markets away from fossil fuels (or public health) are experienced as nagging reminders of the existence of society, politics, and ecology. What Macpherson (2013) called the “illusion of independence” that emanates from this class position finds its apotheosis in the political movement for the independence of the Albertan state. Future research should empirically discern, ideally through extensive interviews, which fractions of fossil capital are more supportive of Albertan autonomy and separatism. The speculative hypothesis presented here and rooted in elements of the preceding analysis of the class dynamics of extractive populism, would suggest separatism’s prime mover is the fossilized petty bourgeoisie.

Relative Autonomy of the Far Right

A good deal of discussion during the pandemic was about science denial as a broader phenomenon, inclusive of pandemic conspiracies, vaccine skepticism, but also stretching out to climate denial. This study suggests there is not only a logical overlap between pandemic conspiracism and climate denial, but in fact a rather material, practical and organizational overlap. What I found is that the denialist apparatus itself created the material conditions through which the freedom movement grew. What this study suggests is that, in some ways,

the connection is a lot more concrete than we might think, and not based on patterns of thought or particular proclivities to conspiracism, but rather that such proclivities are nurtured and generated, in part, through the techniques of organized climate obstruction. The ideological and organizational resources that this outlet provides to its public (i.e., the subsidies provided by organized denial to the public) generate returns in excess of the narrow focus on climate or oil and gas. They produce broader forms of organizing and ideating that are relatively autonomous from the narrow pecuniary motivations of the initial corporate grassroots campaign, but which nonetheless articulate themselves with and through fossil capital's class project.

The need for an arm's length group with compatible but different grievances can result in corporate grassroots campaign moving ahead with far-right allies. In the cases under study, this included articulation with the patriot movement and evangelical Christians, which had their own rationales for opposing the Trudeau government—including nativist and faith-based reasons—that were autonomous from the cold, calculating hostility of big fossil capital. But in flooding the communications sphere with calls for a populist mobilization against dangerous environmentalist Others and hostile liberal elites carrying out a reckless international agenda, the corporate grassroots campaign provided collective action frames that were harmonious with these other groups. And in converting these frames into protest activity, the extractivist action coalition enhanced many Albertan communities' human, social, cultural, and moral resources—making them better-equipped for mobilization. Once “called up and unleashed,” as Gramsci put, there was nothing to stop these social forces from mobilizing in semi-autonomous directions, hitching diverse grievances to the truck of obstruction.

I have argued (and empirically demonstrated) throughout that the Canadian far right is relatively autonomous from fossil capital. What makes the far right capable of influencing

Canadian politics more broadly is precisely the *relativity* of its autonomy: its ability to enter into coalition and articulate itself with and through ruling class interests and to be partially shaped by this coalitional activity. It should be emphasized that this ability, moreover, is predicated on the need of the ruling bloc for allies. This is where fossil capital's use of a corporate grassroots strategy is pivotal: a new modality of corporate power which puts out a clarion call for arm's length allies to take to the streets. In the ensuing rush, new identities and frames were forged; new social and human capital accrued; and the movement which fossil capital helped launch develops its power to begin shaping events.

What my results indicate is that this relatively autonomous movement, in turn, shapes the actors who helped shape them. This dynamic is well illustrated with the movement-ization of the UCP. Jason Kenney's entire political brand was premised on fossil-fueled Albertan alienation, and he used extractive populist protests as campaign events, encouraging Albertans to join the movement. These efforts to call up and unleash a populist movement in defense of fossil capital, however, would be *too* successful, creating a Frankenstein's monster which would undermine Kenney's premiership. Kenney came to power on an extractive populist wave that he helped build, but he was ultimately pulled under that same wave as it radicalized and grew.

The Frankenstein's monster metaphor is useful for articulating this dynamic (Enoch, 2022), but is defective in one crucial respect: namely, that in Mary Shelley's novel, the monster is eventually responsible for the death of several of Dr. Frankenstein's loved ones and, indirectly, for his own. The monster, that is, becomes *fully* autonomous, even running counter to its creator's wishes. However, the variety of far-right movements covered here—particularly the Yellow Vests Canada, Alberta separatist, and freedom movements—are not, as I have stressed throughout, autonomous to that same degree, but only *relatively* so. This makes them decidedly unlikely to turn against their most potent benefactor. The various

articulations between fossil capital and the far right have at times produced contradictions, as with the controversy around overt Islamophobia and nativism during the YVC phase of the cycle. But such contradictions appear to have been ironed out in subsequent phases, with movement participants becoming savvier about navigating such stigma.

These historical albeit “non-necessary” articulations (Hall, 2019), are essential for understanding the politics of the conjuncture.

Alberta separatism, if it were pure ideology without any definite relation to fossil capitalism, could hypothetically pursue an independent Albertan republic with a platform emphasizing the need to cherish and protect the province’s natural environment, implement a plan for a just energy transition, building on the province’s burgeoning renewables industry.¹⁸⁶ But the preceding findings should make it clear why this is an impossibility: the movement has its very origins in an elite-led effort to cultivate a populist resistance against threats to fossil capital, the most pressing of which tend to emanate from Ottawa, and the movement continues to express itself primarily in these terms. This movement itself builds on decades of articulations between fossil capital, the Albertan state, and its alienated relationship to the federal government. As Hall (2019) wrote, we must attend to “the historical forces which have produced the present, and which continue to function as constraints and determinations on discursive articulation” (p. 242). Albertan alienation and separatism cannot be understood without reference to the historical force of fossil capital weaponizing the Albertan provincial government to undermine Canadian democracy’s capacity to, among other things, control its ecological and atmospheric metabolism. Analysis of Alberta separatism which prioritizes solely the role of self-identified fascists in using the

¹⁸⁶ Perfectly illustrating the way historical forces constrain discursive articulation, the idea of a “left wexit” was a common joke on the excellent Alberta Advantage podcast (Advantage, 2020).

movement to spread hate are necessary but insufficient. Separatism must be understood as articulated with the political economy of fossil capitalism.

A similar position can be taken with respect to the freedom movement. If the freedom movement were entirely ideational—amounting only to pandemic conspiracism, vaccine skepticism, misinformation, etc.—then it would not follow that the movement would also be actively climate obstructionist, and we might expect movement participants and organizers’ views on climate change to be representative of the population at large: that is, to vary widely and even to include many proponents of climate action. Once again, the preceding analysis makes it clear why the freedom movement was *necessarily* denialist: its most prominent organizers and legitimators all had connections to extractive populism. The upshot is that while the various far-right ideologies encountered in this study—anti-migration politics, Islamophobia, queerphobia, separatism, covid denialism, etc.—may all appear to be, to varying degrees, unrelated to and possibly even irrational from the perspective of fossil capital’s narrow pecuniary interests, they are, in fact, articulated as part of the elite-led project of extractive populism, albeit in a relatively autonomous fashion. These various ideologies serve not as distractions, but as articulations: ideologies tied to social forces with separate but harmonious grievances against fossil capital’s main political opponents. While such articulations may produce contradictions at times (Hart, 2007), they also serve to build a powerful, even genuinely grassroots, populist coalition mobilized around a diversity of issues articulated in and through the class interests of fossil capital, both big and small. In short, such articulations are essential for the reproduction, via populism, of fossil capitalist hegemony.

The Limits of Cyclical Analysis

In emphasizing the cyclical nature of convoy protests, my attention has been focused on the diffusion of tactics, organizations, and a master frame. While I have demonstrated how this master frame encompasses a wide variety of reactionary ideological elements, this analytical and methodological approach has several shortcomings. It has not been able to produce anything close to a detailed analysis of the history, origins, and diffusion of the globalist conspiracy theory. Where I was able to provide painstaking detail on the emergence and diffusion of the convoy, the globalist conspiracy theory is a much larger and older object of analysis. I have referenced its anti-Semitic history and emphasized that I do not consider the carbon convoy cycle to have invented the frame. The role of global far-right media in fuelling it was gestured towards, but it remains a (daunting) task to try to specify the degree to which the GCT's increased popularity in Canada is 'homegrown' or 'imported.'

Second, by foregrounding a master frame, I have not been able to do justice to specific far-right discourses contained within it. Islamophobia and racism more broadly, for example, were not isolated as variables to be tracked in detail across the cycle. More work should be done to examine their role in the Alberta separatist and freedom movements. One potentially fruitful approach would be to examine the potential overlaps between media and think tanks associated with climate obstruction and Canada's "Islamophobia industry," with a good starting place being Ezra Levant's Rebel News (Zine, 2022). Anti-black racism was a particularly underdeveloped analytic, but nonetheless present in my data set. Pat King, for example, intimidated and counter-protested Black Lives Matter protests in Alberta in 2020. And in my interview with him, Todd lumped BLM in amongst the paid opposition to oil and gas. When I asked about those who counter-protested United We Roll and yellow vests, he responded, "With Black Lives Matter and Antifa? Again, bought by the narrative to make us look like far-right extremists when BLM and Antifa are far-left extremists to claim that

there's an environmental emergency. They're paid by people like George Soros, Klaus Schwab, and Bill Gates.” In this response, Todd articulates climate denial through reactionary opposition to Black Lives Matter, a highly conjunctural articulation that deserves greater attention. Finally, anti-Indigenous racism was an under-examined element. Canada Action led online advertisements opposing the #ShutDownCanada protests in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en anti-pipeline struggle, second only to the pipeline owner itself, Coastal GasLink (Rocha et al., 2020). Rally4Resources also counter-protested #ShutDownCanada events (Kinder, 2024, p. 1). While militant Indigenous resistance was demonized, the promotion of ‘economic reconciliation’ was evident at times across the data set: essentially, oil and gas were framed as economic opportunities for Indigenous peoples.¹⁸⁷ Such articulations deserve isolated and sustained treatment.

End of the Cycle?

According to Koopmans (2004), “there is no typical way in which protest waves end” (p. 36). Tarrow (2011), though, suggests common outcomes include criminalization and institutionalization, or sometimes a “combination of selective repression and partial reform ... to normalize the situation” (p. 204). In the cycle of protest examined in this dissertation, both outcomes have occurred. The freedom movement was subjected to heavy state repression and surveillance, and has arguably been weakened as a result, albeit not without setting dangerous precedence with respect to the use of emergency powers, which could have a boomerang effect on progressive movements (Ceric & Kalajdzic, 2022). At the same time, the cycle has arguably been institutionalized through the movement-ization of Danielle

¹⁸⁷ For incisive treatments of the settler coloniality of various elements of extractive populism and the carbon convoy cycle, see (Guenther, 2023; Kinder, 2024, pp. 121–150; LaDuke & Cowen, 2020).

Smith's United Conservative Party and, albeit to a lesser degree, Pierre Poilievre's Conservative Party of Canada.

As we have seen throughout this dissertation, protest cycles depend on tactical diffusion. It is precisely this dynamic which repression can disrupt. Lesley Wood (2007), for example, finds that the success of "Seattle tactics" like black bloc and blockades led to imitation and diffusion, but that this process was stymied by the recalibration of repressive techniques, thus putting a halt to the Seattle cycle of protest against international meetings like G20. This follows Tarrow's (2011) contention that, "The forces of order may be temporarily disoriented when they face unexpected masses of challengers on the streets, but when elites regroup, tactics that seemed unassailable at the height of the cycle can be easily crushed or discouraged" (p. 204). As Wood (2014) shows, diffusion of specific tactics across waves of protest can, in turn, lead to the diffusion of innovations within the repressive apparatus or additions to the "repertoire of repression": e.g., through increased use of militarized tactics and gear like pepper spray, tasers, and the like (p. 19-20, 41).¹⁸⁸ This process would seem to fit the case of the Freedom Convoy fairly well. It is clear the convoy's transformation into an entrenched occupation took authorities off guard, describe by the emergency commission report as a "failure to translate intelligence into the operational plan" (Rouleau, 2023, pp. 137–138). Following Tarrow and Wood, though, we would expect for the 'forces of order' to have recalibrated. My guess would be that repression of the freedom movement will prove to have been significant enough to limit further diffusion of the convoy as a tactic of occupation, such that a similar event in scale and duration would be quite unlikely in the short and medium term.

¹⁸⁸ Thinking of Walker's (2014) contention that corporate grassroots campaigns constitute "soft repression" (p. 194), it is fascinating to consider that such soft repression could diffuse into such a potent political force that it in turn requires adaptations in the repertoire of repression of other levels of government. This dynamic arguably reflects the elite conflict between Alberta and fossil capital, on the one hand, and the federal Liberal government. The incipient pro-pipeline vigilantism evident throughout the cycle also captures this dialectic.

This is, in part, because leading organizers have had a number of legal restrictions placed on them, meaning their capacity to further transmit their skills and knowledge has been curtailed. The leading Freedom Convoy organizers, for example, have faced restrictions on their use of social media, as well as travel restrictions and limitations on their ability to contact certain individuals associated with the movement (CBC News, 2025; Fraser, 2025). As Wood (2007) notes, diffusion can be halted when movement resources end up being absorbed by court cases rather than organizing efforts (p. 386). Indeed, at the time of writing, a number of Freedom Convoy leaders have been found guilty of mischief, counselling mischief, disobeying court orders, and counselling others to obstruct police (BBC News, 2025). Ironically, given this movement's general hostility to migration, James Bauder now considers himself an "asylum seeker," and fled to the US seeking official refuge from the Canadian state (LeBrun, 2025). While there have been a variety of smaller convoys in the time since the Freedom Convoy, the upward scale shift of the tactic—particularly its radicalization into an occupation-style tactic—appears to have climaxed. This echoes findings across the literature which suggest that protest cycles tend to follow an 'S' curve, with "early adoption leading to a period of rapid adoption and then tapering off" (L. J. Wood, 2014, p. 18)

That said, this dissertation has not traced transnational diffusion or diffusion after the Freedom Convoy and associated protests like the Coutts border blockade. This was one limitation of the study, particularly since "protest cycles are not necessarily restricted by national boundaries" (McAdam, 1995, p. 226). Multiple instances of transnational diffusion have been noted, as with the American Petroleum Institute's role in establishing the "energy citizens" campaign in the US and then spreading the tools to Canada, or in the use of the reflective yellow vest pioneered by the French *gilets jaunes*. Evidence suggests that transnational elements not only influenced the Canadian protest cycle, but vice versa as well. A cursory overview of news articles suggests that, while the radicalization of the convoy as a

tactic into a technique of occupation has likely been blunted by repression, its diffusion continued during and in the wake of the Freedom Convoy. Indeed, the Freedom Convoy was said to have “inspired protests around the world” (CNN, n.d.). In the US, for example, a Freedom Convoy copycat drove to Washington, DC in March 2022 (Jester & Madani, 2022; Ling, 2022). Canadian flags began to be spotted at anti-lockdown protests from France to Australia and New Zealand (Aziz, 2022). In Paris and Brussels, convoys of automobiles were declared illegal after an initial outburst of imitators (Khalidi, 2022; Xu & Kent, 2022). One former leader of the *gilets jaunes* movement was arrested during a Paris freedom convoy, bringing the transnational dimensions of the protest cycle full circle.

Later that summer, when farmers’ protests broke out in Europe against various environmental policy proposals pertaining to the agricultural sector, Canadian activists staged solidarity convoys across the country, including in Ottawa (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2022b; Dyk, 2022). Canadian flags were not an uncommon sight amongst the European farmers’ protests either (Molas, 2022). And in 2024, there were protests and convoys across Canada against the rise in the carbon tax (Fawcett, 2024). This reflects what McAdam (1995) observes to be the “accelerating” quality of protest cycles (p. 232). “As more groups mobilize,” he writes, “more and more of the overall population is exposed to the behavioral, ideational, and material innovations associated with the cycle,” meaning that “ever more diverse population segments are likely to be drawn into the cycle” (p. 232). As the cycle accelerates, of course, it becomes an ever more daunting task to trace the mechanisms of diffusion. Further research could explore the mechanisms of transnational diffusion for the Canadian extractive populist protest cycle’s signature tactic.

The cycle of protest seemed all but guaranteed to produce a change in government and a victory for the Conservative Party. Pierre Poilievre appeared poised to become Prime Minister in what he dubbed the “carbon tax election,” but the Liberals, under new leader

Mark Carney, conceded to one of the core demands of the protest cycle by scrapping the carbon tax and thereby deflating the CPC's central frame of the contest. This confirms the social movement literature's suggestion that protest cycles can produce concessions to movement demands (Koopmans, 2004, p. 36). This may have played a role in securing Carney's victory, but the far more significant reason was Donald Trump's trade war and threats of annexation, which forced a convergence of the centre-left vote that collapsed NDP support nation-wide as progressive voters sought to curtail the rise of Trump-lite politics. Although he largely side-stepped direct nativism in favour of dog-whistle references to the globalist conspiracy theory (E. Laxer et al., 2025), such was the degree of Poilievre's imitation of certain elements of MAGA-style politics that it produced a cottage industry of opinion pieces making the comparison. Long-time *Toronto Star* journalist Chantal Hébert even publicly expressed relief when Poilievre did not follow in Trump's election denialist footsteps and accepted defeat (Newman, 2025).

Perhaps paradoxically, as a global process centred in the US, accelerating fossil fascisation in one place appears to have slowed the process in others. The same dynamic appears to be playing out in Brazil, where opposition to Trump and his trade war has strengthened the position of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva relative to that country's fascistic right-wing bloc formerly represented by Jair Bolsonaro (Ionova, 2025). This may point to a contradiction at the heart of fossil fascist politics: that its spread is halted by its own progression, a reflection of how 'America First' policies, if taken to their extreme, are sure to harm other countries, thereby potentially disrupting the advance of the far right in those countries. This would suggest that fossil fascisation is a necessarily uneven process. This contradiction could potentially be exploited to undermine such a politics, although it would require global co-ordination, rather than the individualist approach taken by states as they seek one-off trade agreements with the US.

On the other hand, the political and economic pressure put on by Trump's tariffs has already resulted in a more Trumpist approach to statecraft taken by Carney. While it is difficult to determine the degree to which the Carney government's approach reflects exogenous pressure versus internal predilection, his short time in government has been characterized by increased military and border spending, climate rollbacks, tax cuts for the rich, massive spending cuts, and trampling on Indigenous rights in ways reminiscent of the Harper years. Particularly striking is Bill C-5, the Building Canada Act, which concentrates power in the Cabinet (in a similar manner to Danielle Smith's sovereignty act) to declare large resource projects in the "national interest," allowing them to bypass federal environmental regulations. Previously, I characterized such a move, in the case of Smith's sovereignty act, as an example of "fossil separatism"—that is, the 'desire' of fossil capital not to be subject to federal law. This interpretation may need to be rethought in a context in which the federal government itself appears desirous of such legal exemption too. Capital itself, it would seem, is seeking to break from the fetters of Canadian federalism. Also notable is that Keystone XL, the pipeline Obama cancelled and in so doing triggered a partial mitigation crisis with a proto-fossil fascist outcome, is back on the table. To get out from under some of the most severe of Trump's tariffs, Carney has proposed revitalizing the project, no doubt simultaneously seeking to quell Alberta separatism in the same brush.

Despite Carney's openness to large resource projects, including new pipelines, Danielle Smith warned of a "national unity crisis" in the event of another Liberal government. To avoid such a crisis, Smith demanded the new government immediately revoke a number of laws that had been at the centre of the partial mitigation crisis driving the protest cycle, including the Impact Assessment Act, the oil tanker moratorium, oil sands emissions cap, clean electricity regulations, electric vehicle mandate, and others. In response to Carney's election, Smith has launched another Fair Deal-style panel, called Alberta Next,

and appears poised, unlike Kenney, to follow through with various elements of Albertan autonomy, including on pensions and policing. Notably, the panel also includes a proposal for Alberta to take more control over immigration to “insulate the province from the damage of out-of-control immigration policy” (*Policies and Actions for Discussion*, n.d.).¹⁸⁹ While Smith pursues this Albertan nation-building, she has also lowered the threshold for the number of signatures required to trigger a referendum, thus opening the door for a referendum on separatism.

As I have suggested at various points in this dissertation, the Alberta separatist movement is under-studied. We lack empirical examination, for example, of its base of support: its demographics and especially class basis, including its relation to the oil and gas industry. We also lack a comprehensive analysis of its relationship to MAGA politics. Worth noting is that much of the new energy in separatism is being channeled into a new fringe party, the Republican Party of Alberta. Here it is worth recalling that Trump’s threats of annexation were preceded, two years prior, by prominent MAGA voices calling for the US to “liberate Canada,” a discourse that emerged during the Freedom Convoy, when Canadians were depicted as subjects of a tyrannical, woke, liberal regime. Tucker Carlson was a leading proponent of this idea, and not long after was brought up to Alberta (by David Parker) for a series of speaking engagements with Danielle Smith. In my data set, I found an instance of Alberta separatists in 2022 visiting Mar-A-Lago, Trump’s Florida residence and resort, and meeting with Trump advisors about their cause. Recall also that Todd, an organizer with United We Roll, had become an advocate of Alberta joining the US. In 2025, moreover, the three leading figures of the Alberta Prosperity Project—Dennis Modry, Jeff Rath, and Mitch Sylvestre (previously a captain with Take Back Alberta)—travelled to the US twice to build

¹⁸⁹ The founder of the Modern Miracle Network and mentor to David Parker, Michael Binnion, is one of the panelists.

support for Alberta separatism, including a September 2025 meeting with cabinet-level officials in the Trump administration who reportedly indicated “early expressions of support for Alberta independence” (Moran & Mohamed, 2025). While these pieces of evidence (and many others besides) suggest the MAGA and the Alberta separatist movement are more than just ideologically aligned, we lack a comprehensive assessment of these organizational ties and, as a result, lack a theory of its nature and possible trajectory.¹⁹⁰ Further research is needed to develop a comprehensive sense of the degree to which Alberta separatism may be functioning as a Canadian outpost for MAGA. The tacit and at-times explicit alliance between Trump and Smith also warrants further investigation as the far-right phase of denial proceeds.

Overshoot: Hegemonizing the Climate Left’s Defeat

The world is set to “overshoot” the Paris climate targets (and by a wide margin) (Malm & Carton, 2024). That agreement already relied on nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) which never added up to the 1.5-degree target in the first place, and now those NDCs, including Canada’s, are being surpassed. All while the far right fans the flames, opposing any and all forms of mitigation. From this perspective, it is difficult not to conclude that the environmental movement globally and in Canada has been defeated. The protest cycle covered in this dissertation was initiated and subsidized by Canadian fossil capital to create a countermovement against what was then a surging environmental left and Indigenous

¹⁹⁰ In a prescient op-ed from 2022 titled, “A contingency plan for the death of American democracy,” [Gordon Laxer \(2022\)](#) warned that a return of Trump could result in an imperialist US with designs on Canadian sovereignty and resources. He also observed that, in such an event, the freedom and separatist movements could be the source of “fifth columnists.” Without detailed, comprehensive empirical accounts of the relationship between the US and Alberta far right, however, Laxer’s analysis is relegated to speculative hypothesis, one that many would likely characterize as hyperbolic. Part of the analytical problem here is that both Trump’s annexation threats and Alberta separatism tend to be perceived as empty threats, bluster, or even as humorous

resistance movement. The Canadian climate movement followed the trajectory of the global movement and peaked in fall 2019 with a massive outpouring of support for the climate strike, including 400,000 in Montréal alone. The radical wing of the movement peaked just months later, as #ShutDownCanada emerged in response to yet another RCMP raid of Wet’suwet’en territory. And then the pandemic hit. As the Zetkin Collective (2024) put it, “demonstrations turned into webinars, blockades into strategy discussions, and the lost momentum has yet to be regained” (p. 86). And then multiple wars were started; “The stage is crowded ... movement energies re-routed” (The Zetkin Collective, 2025). Canadian oil production continues to post record-highs, and Danielle Smith has vowed to “unapologetically double our oil and gas production” (Danielle Smith, 2024).

Stuart Hall (1988) suggested that the rise of fascism is said to “hegemonise the defeat” of the revolutionary left. Is something like this occurring now? There are many potential pitfalls to such a formulation, not least of which the absence of a revolutionary left. And yet, as I have suggested above, the increasing momentum of the environmental left and Indigenous opposition to fossil fuels, including their ability to exploit the contradictions of capitalist climate governance, did represent a significant (if partial) threat to fossil capital. Another problem would be the concept of “defeat.” What does it even mean for a revolution to be defeated? With respect to the climate movement, it seems fair to say that the proposed ‘revolution’—i.e., the phase-out of fossil fuels in a planned but urgent energy transition designed to limit global warming to reasonable, internationally agreed-upon levels—has, indeed, been defeated. If the return of Trump marks the hegemonizing of that defeat, then we would need to ask when the defeat occurred. In the Canadian context, I have come to view the defeat as connected with the end of the #ShutDownCanada movement, and in particular with the repression of the Wet’suwet’en, who for so long represented the vanguard of the

radical edge of the movement—the model that, if the ‘revolution’ were to succeed, would need to be scaled up across the country, continent, and beyond.

I have also come to see the Freedom Convoy, two years after the #ShutDownCanada movement, as a symbolic prelude to the hegemonizing of that defeat.

Recall that my interviewee, Andrew, a participant in United We Roll and a prominent organizer within the Freedom Convoy, claimed to have discovered “a *bigger, more sinister plot behind* these Wet’suwet’en First Nations Hereditary Chiefs.” He elaborated, saying, “I actually have them on camera admitting their fault that they're taking money from an outside non-government organization to discredit and destroy the potential of having an oil industry through B.C.” Todd, another one of my interviewees and an organizer of the United We Roll Convoy took a similar view of the Wet’suwet’en, claiming elected bands are the true representatives of the nation, and that “hereditary chiefs are paid off to lobby against oil and gas.” Recall further than in the early days of planning for the Freedom Convoy, one of the first online organizing events was called, “All Canadian truckers from all provinces going to shut down Canada and heading to Ottawa JAN 23rd”. Given the hostility of my interviewees to the Wet’suwet’en protests and the leading role played by extractive populist groups like Canada Action in opposing #ShutDownCanada on social media, I read this as non-coincidental. I read it as tactical inversion: just as the extractive populist movement had done from the very beginning, its radical wing was adept at picking up language, organizational forms, and tactics pioneered on the left, emptying them of their progressive content, and inverting their meaning for the purposes of shoring up fossil capitalist hegemony.

Consider this paragraph from the foreword to Tamara Lich’s (2023) memoir, *Hold the Line*:

There were Canadian flags everywhere. Everyone there believed fervently that there was a Canadian identity to be cherished and protected. They didn’t believe Trudeau,

when he claimed a few years back that Canada was now a ‘post-national’ state, and therefore had no cultural identity. Trudeau had gone so far as to lower the national flag on Parliament Hill for months on end, in an act of national self-flagellation for the supposed sins of the past. For Trudeau, as for the woke progressive elite, Canada was a racist and colonial settler state. The Freedom Convoy protesters from all parts of the country—and from every conceivable ethnicity—were there to reclaim the flag and assert that Canada was a country worth fighting for (p. 7-8).

The veracity of this account (notably lacking in its depiction of the protest as multicultural, when in fact it was overwhelmingly white) is not as important as what this suggests the meaning of the convoy was for participants and supporters. It could not be clearer that public health measures were, if anything, a subordinate concern. Rather, the inverted version of #ShutDownCanada had come to re-assert hegemony, to ‘reclaim the flag.’

Of course, no defeat is final, and even while the task of meeting our climate targets has slipped out of reach, there is still much damage and destruction to prevent. The balance of forces are arguably as unfavourable as they have been at any previous point in recent history, and in this sense extractive populism would appear triumphant. But the resurgence of Indigenous protest movements against the Building Canada Act suggests a new cycle may yet emerge. What this dissertation has made clear, however, is that any possible resurgence of Indigenous land defence and environmental protest or direct action is guaranteed to produce a response from the countermovement. We face a formidable alliance: not only fossil capital and the settler state, which is largely (albeit unevenly) ‘captured’ and *dependent* on it, but also a wide protective circle of relatively autonomous far-right movements capable of contesting the battle for hegemony in the streets and transforming the terrain of electoral politics—all this with the tacit and explicit support of the most powerful state in the history of the world, the rapidly fascisizing US. In the face of this, we can take inspiration from those

who confronted fascism in its initial period. Clara Zetkin (1923), who in 1923 saw a growing fraction of the international working class falling under the sway of fascism, called for her comrades to “initiate the most energetic campaign” to gain their allegiance, and to set about bringing over the petty bourgeoisie as well. Indeed, the anti-fascist campaign today must be ‘energetic’ in two senses: urgent and aimed squarely at energy transition. The choice today, it seems, is as stark as it was then: eco-socialism or climate barbarism.

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