

Trudeau Government Moves to Make Expanded Surveillance Powers over Financial Transactions ‘Permanent’

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Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at a news conference as truckers and their supporters continue to protest against Covid vaccine mandates in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, February 11, 2022. (Patrick Doyle/Reuters)

As all eyes were trained on the aggressive police sweep of the Ottawa trucker convoy this week, Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau's administration was quietly moving to implement a sweeping expansion of surveillance power at the federal level.

The Trudeau government's financial war against the truckers has been [covered](#) at [length](#). But one underreported aspect of this broader assault on Canadian civil liberties is the effort to bring crowdfunding and payment service providers — two of the most prominent routes for financial transactions on the Internet — under the *permanent* control of a centralized government authority.

In a [February 14 news conference](#), Canadian finance minister Chrystia Freeland said that the government was using the [Emergencies Act](#) to broaden “the scope of Canada's anti-money-laundering and terrorist financing rules so that they cover crowdfunding platforms and the payment service providers they use.” That broadened power requires all forms of digital transactions, including cryptocurrencies, to be reported to the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Center of Canada. (I.e., “Fintrac”). “As of today, all crowdfunding platforms and the payment service providers they use must register with Fintrac, and they must report large and suspicious transactions to Fintrac,” Freeland said. She justified the move as a way to “mitigate the risk” of “illicit funds” and “increase the quality and quantity of intelligence received by Fintrac and make more information available to support investigations by law enforcement.” Trudeau, standing behind Freeland at the press conference, nodded his head in agreement.

Freeland said the trucker convoy, which had assembled to protest coronavirus restrictions, had “highlighted the fact” that digital assets and funding mechanisms “weren't captured” by the Canadian government's pre-existing surveillance powers. As a result, she said, “the government will also bring forward legislation to provide these authorities to FinTrac on a permanent basis.”

Freeland reiterated that point in a [subsequent press conference this past Friday](#). “We reviewed very, very carefully the tools at the disposal of the federal government, and we used all the tools that we had prior to the invocation of the Emergencies Act, and we determined that we needed some additional tools,” she said. “Now some of those tools, we will be putting forward measures to put those tools permanently in place. The authorities of FinTrac, I believe, do need to be expanded to cover crowdsourcing platforms and their payment providers.”

We already know what the Canadian government would do with that permanent power. They’re showing us as we speak. As Kevin Williamson [wrote earlier this week](#), Trudeau has promptly weaponized his expanded Emergencies Act powers to “invest himself with the unilateral power to freeze bank accounts and cancel insurance policies, without so much as a court order and with essentially no recourse for those he targets.” That punitive action against political dissidents expands beyond the truckers themselves: On Wednesday, Trudeau’s justice minister suggested that private citizens who donated large sums to the convoy “[ought to be worried](#)” about the possibility of a freeze on *their* bank accounts, too. At least one young woman has already been fired from her job in the Ontario provincial government for making a \$100 donation.

All this, of course, flies in the face of Trudeau’s promise that the Emergencies Act powers would be temporary. When he announced his invocation of the order, he promised the Canadian people that his expanded authorities would “be time-limited, geographically targeted, as well as reasonable and proportionate to the threats they are meant to address.” Not a single part of that sentence has proved to be true.

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