

Québec Solidaire: An ally of the ruling elite

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Through its response to the crisis in the Québec sovereignty movement and to Canada's imperialist intervention in Libya, as well as by the close links that it maintains with the big business Parti Québécois (PQ), Québec Solidaire, has demonstrated that its ambition is to secure a place in Quebec's and Canada's bourgeois political establishment.

Quebec's rightwing tabloid press paints Québec Solidaire (QS) as a "radical," "leftist," even "communist" organisation. But Amir Khadir, the co-leader of the QS and its sole legislator in the Quebec National Assembly, has demonstrated in numerous official statements on the crisis engulfing the Bloc Québécois (BQ) and the Parti Québécois (PQ) that the QS is a party that does not question, let alone challenge, the established order.

Last May, in the federal elections that brought to power a Conservative majority government, the BQ, sister party of the PQ at the federal level, suffered an historic electoral defeat, with its parliamentary caucus reduced from 47 to just 4. In a protest vote, driven by a long and bitter experience with alternating PQ and Liberal provincial governments, the Quebec electorate turned to a party essentially unknown in the province, the ostensibly social-democratic NDP (New Democratic Party).

During the election campaign, QS called for a vote against the Conservative Party of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. In other words, the bourgeois electoral opponents of the Conservatives, that is to say the BQ, NDP, and the Liberals, were (in the political judgement of QS) all viable choices for Quebec workers.

This position harkened back to the support that QS and the Quebec trade unions gave to the aspiring governmental coalition formed by the Liberals Party and NDP with the support of the Bloc Québécois in late 2008. This coalition, aborted by the constitutional coup carried out by the Harper government in December 2008, was to be led by the Liberal Party but was dependent on the support of the Bloc parliamentarians. The coalition agreement committed a Liberal-NDP government to implementing a right-wing programme, including the continuation of the war in Afghanistan and the imposition of further massive tax cuts for big business.

The day after the BQ's debacle in the May 2011 federal election, Amir Khadir—himself a defeated BQ candidate in the 2000 election—telephoned Gilles Duceppe, the leader of the Bloc, to propose the implementation of a renewed strategy for Québécois sovereignty (independence) to prevent, according to Duceppe, "...the federalists from declaring victory." In a column published in *Le Devoir*, Khadir wrote that he felt "sad" for Duceppe and that the latter "...did not deserve this."

The "sovereignty strategy" so desired by Khadir is, in fact, the subject of longstanding discussions between Québec Solidaire, the BQ and the PQ. Through its participation in *Conseil de la souveraineté* (Sovereignty Council), QS works directly with these discredited political formations and gives their right wing programmes a thin coat of "left" paint.

The programme of Québécois sovereignty, that is to say the creation of a separate capitalist nation-state of Québec, is the principle means through which QS attempts to bind the working class to the PQ and the BQ, the twin *indépendantiste*

parties of the Quebec bourgeoisie. This programme also serves to divide Québécois workers from their class brothers and sisters in the rest of

Canada and internationally, promoting the illusion that Quebec workers can defend their interests on a nationalist basis and have more in common with the Demarais, Peladeau's and other French-speaking capitalists than they do with workers in English Canada.

Whilst Québec Solidaire occasionally criticises the PQ, describing it as a right wing party, it constantly attempts to camouflage the link between the PQ's right wing programme and its demand for Quebec independence, a demand supported by an important section of the Québécois capitalist class. The fact that the elite who would rule an independent Québec would have a programme just as right-wing and pro-capitalist as the PQ is deliberately suppressed by Québec Solidaire.

In this regard, there was a revealing exchange at the end of May between Khadir and Lucien Bouchard, an ex-premier of Québec and former leader of the PQ and the BQ, who now heads the Quebec Petroleum and Gas Association (l'Association pétrolière et gazière du Québec). The two had an angry exchange outside a parliamentary commission on hydrocarbon exploration in the St. Lawrence River estuary.

In front of Bouchard, Khadir declared, "For sovereigntists such as ourselves, it is inconceivable that we can serve the interests of our nation while working to protect the interests of foreign multinational companies that seek to exploit our natural resources... Unfortunately, you [Bouchard] were not faithful to this obligation [that] we have to serve the public good..."

Bouchard replied by telling Khadir, "You have no right to pass judgement on my loyalty to the Québécois!" He then went on to expound on the necessity "...for the Québécois nation and for Québec to receive investments... We must absolutely assure that the economic development of Québec, the development of the Québécois nation, can take place particularly with the contribution of private investments that come from corporations..."

This exchange deserves close examination. Khadir's remarks demonstrate that the programme of Québec Solidaire is not to oppose the profits of the capitalist class, but to use nationalist criticism to give their party a pseudo-left cover. Québec Solidaire defends the profits of capitalist enterprises if they are extracted by the *Québécois* bourgeoisie—which it deems would be easier within an independent Québec that could adopt its own protectionist measures.

Bouchard, for his part, played his role as defender of the Québécois capitalist class efficiently and conscientiously: employing the traditional demagoguery of the Québécois ruling elite about the defense of the "interests of Québec" and the "Québécois nation" as camouflage for big business' naked pursuit of profit.

In affirming that there is no contradiction between the "defense of the interests of Québec" and his role as head of the Petroleum and Gas Association of Québec, which represents one section of Québécois capital and "private investments that come from [foreign] corporations," Bouchard is remaining true to the nationalist ideology of the Quebec bourgeoisie. He differs from Khadir in that he finds it natural and necessary that, in a globalised economy in which the ruling elites of each nation enter into increasingly fractious competition for markets, resources,

and profits, the Québécois capitalists must ensure that Quebec attracts foreign capital investment to the extent that it is also profitable for them.

There exist within the capitalist class sharp divisions on the best way in which to defend their interests. One section of the Quebec bourgeoisie, represented by the PQ, views sovereignty to be the best strategy for the promotion of their class interests. Another section, represented by the Liberal Party and other political formations even further to the right like the ADQ (Action démocratique du Québec), prefers, at least for the moment, that Quebec remain within the Canadian federal state.

Even though these parties differ on the national or constitutional question, the sovereigntist and federalist wings of the bourgeoisie are united on the key class questions: the necessity of launching a sweeping assault upon the living standards and social rights of the working class, in order to improve the position of the capitalist class in Québec and Canada in the context of the world economic crisis.

Following his exchange with Bouchard, Khadir publicly called on Bouchard to apologize for the massive social spending cuts that the PQ government he led imposed, with the complicity of the unions, in the name of eliminating the provincial budget deficit. “Mr. Bouchard,” said Khadir, “owes us collectively an apology for the mistakes he committed when he cut social spending, when he forced retirement upon doctors, nurses, and teachers...”

Again refusing to expose the real class orientation of the PQ, Khadir portrayed the brutal austerity measures implemented by the PQ under Bouchard as a political “mistake,” as an aberration in the history of PQ, rather than the inevitable outcome of its role as a political instrument of the bourgeoisie.

The QS leadership, it need be noted, has repeatedly signalled its readiness to enter into an electoral bloc with the PQ.

And in a further demonstration of the QS’s proximity to the PQ and the sovereignty movement it leads, Québec Solidaire has not rejected the idea of an alliance with Pierre Curzi, a renegade PQ Member of the National Assembly. Curzi, who quit the PQ’s parliamentary caucus in June, has long been associated with the most chauvinist wing of the party. He led the successful push for the PQ to adopt as part of its program a pledge to extend the provisions of Bill 101 to CEGEPs (junior colleges). This would have the effect of barring most Quebecers from attending CEGEP in English.

Responding to a statement by Curzi that he is sympathetic to Québec Solidaire, Khadir declared, “We must always be ready to consider offers that respect our principles, and to work on projects and towards objectives we hold in common.” Khadir added that QS isn’t in favour of extending Bill 101 to the CEGEP system “in isolation,” but is ready to work with Curzi to restrict language rights in other areas.

Québec Solidaire and the imperialist assault on Libya

Although Québec Solidaire promotes itself as a “left” nationalist party and will at times denounce big business, it has repeatedly demonstrated that it is ready to join hands with sections of the ruling elite and even the bourgeoisie as whole.

This has been exemplified by QS’s attitude toward the NATO war on Libya—a war in which Canada is playing a leading role.

In March, Khadir, joined all the federal opposition parties—the BQ, Liberals, NDP and Greens—in declaring support for Conservative government’s decision to order the Canadian Armed Forces to join the US- NATO bombing campaign and blockade: “If the Western powers truly want to help, it implies certain risks. The interventions must be well targeted.”

In spite of his professed doubts about the “humanitarian aims” of the US and its military allies, Khadir eagerly gave his support to the “rebel” forces and the Transitional National Council (TNC), the self-proclaimed Libyan government-in-waiting that was put together by the US, French and British governments from a collection of ex-Gaddafi regime officials,

Islamists connected to al Qaeda, and long-time CIA assets. Noting that the TNC had urged NATO to wage war on Libya, Khadir declared, “One must absolutely respect the will of the Libyan people that says, ‘This revolution is ours’.”

Now, as the US-NATO military intervention has become bogged down and the imperialist character of the war has become ever more evident, Québec Solidaire’s website maintains a guilty silence on the war in Libya.

The Montreal daily *La Presse*, the best barometer of the political opinion of the Québécois elite, has taken the measure of Québec Solidaire. Of Amir Khadir, André Pratte, *La Presse*’s editor-in-chief, wrote recently that, “every society needs people like this, incorruptible, idealistic, impervious to criticism. There comes a time when they play an essential role, being the only ones who can combat injustice or denounce scandal.” In other words, Khadir is a politician who can give credibility to a political system that has thoroughly alienated the working class and can be counted on to help divert any popular movement that might threaten the capitalist order into safe political channels.

Far from representing a political alternative for the working class, QS is an aspiring “left” party of the establishment that seeks to revive illusions in the discredited program of Quebec *indépendantiste* nationalism, and, moreover, that has already demonstrated its readiness to ally with the PQ and even more rightwing forces in the name of creating a capitalist *République du Québec*.

In 1995, the Union of Progressive Forces (a predecessor of QS) and *Gauche socialiste* (a Pabloite organisation that is now an integral part of Québec Solidaire), and many other “left” nationalist groups joined the right-wing ADQ in rallying behind PQ Premier Jacques Parizeau’s “Rainbow Coalition” for a “YES” vote in the Quebec sovereignty referendum.

In a political analysis that has entirely retained its validity to this day, the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) observed, “The Popular Campaign for YES and other groups criticise the PQ for not having a ‘social project’ and affirm that an independent Québec will serve as protection against the pressures of international capital.

“The truth is that the PQ has elaborated a very clear and explicit ‘social project’: the establishment of an independent Québec with the goal of better positioning and supporting the Québécois bourgeois class in the global capitalist economy.”

The working class must reject both Quebec and Canadian nationalism, both the program of an independent Quebec and a strong or united Canada, all of which serve the interests of one or another section of the bourgeoisie. To counter the offensive being waged by all sections of the bourgeoisie in Canada and around the world on jobs, public services and worker- and democratic rights, the working class must forge its class unity through the building of a mass socialist and internationalist party and the fight for a workers’ government.



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