

Quebec Solidaire abets big business assault on workers

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Amir Khadir, the sole legislator of the ostensibly left *Québec Solidaire*, recently joined with the other Members of the Quebec National Assembly in unanimously endorsing a right-wing motion authored by Quebec Labor Minister Lise Theriault. The motion denounced the “work stoppages, vandalism and intimidation” supposedly used by construction unions to close down construction sites across the province on October 24-25 in protest against the provincial Liberal government’s Bill 33.

Bill 33 seeks to reduce the power of the union bureaucracy, by ending the “hiring hall” system where the unions regulate the labor force available to employers at construction sites. This task will now be given to a provincial agency—the Construction Commission of Quebec (CCQ)—in which the government and business entrepreneurs have the predominant voice. Under the new bill, the CCQ, not the unions, will provide employers with lists of potential workers for hire.

According to the Quebec Construction Association (ACQ), one of the chief business federations: “The change will be more than semantic; it transfers control of the workforce from the unions to allow employers the full exercise of their right to manage.”

In its reporting on the construction protests, the corporate media went wild, frothing at the mouth against the construction unions. This outrage is part of a broader campaign to promote a right-wing political climate and implement changes to the provincial Labor Code that strengthen the hand of the employers. The Quebec Manufacturers and Exporters (MEQ) welcomes Bill 33 as a first step in revising the province’s labor laws, eliminating Quebec’s “anti-scab” law and otherwise gaining greater labour “flexibility.” MEQ President Simon Prevost declared, “the productivity of this sector [construction] can only be improved” with the adoption of Bill 33. “This is essential in the actual economic context.”

After decades of right-wing measures, enacted with the

complicity of the unions, the ruling class is being forced by the profound crisis of world capitalism to go much further in attacking the working class. The trade union bureaucracy only appears to be the target of this assault; its true goal is the working class, which is being made to pay for the bankruptcy of the profit system through the destruction of jobs, lowering of wages and the destruction of what remains of social programs.

In supporting the big business campaign against the construction trade unions, Québec Solidaire (QS: Solidarity Quebec)—a self-described “left,” pro-Quebec independence party—provides Quebec’s political establishment a badly-needed “progressive” veneer.

Following his vote in favor of the Liberal minister’s motion, Khadir said that he supports unions, but not “anti-democratic practices such as violence, intimidation and discrimination”—thereby lending legitimacy to the government’s campaign to “clean up” the industry by strengthening employer rights.

La Presse, the mouthpiece of the billionaire Desmarais family and Montreal’s most influential daily, quickly and demonstrably welcomed Khadir’s vote. In an editorial whose chief purpose was to criticize the Parti Québécois (PQ) for not unconditionally supporting Bill 33, chief editor André Pratte wrote: “In a remarkable intervention, the co-head of Québec Solidaire, Amir Khadir, denounced the behaviour of the two largest construction unions.”

While fighting against the anti-working class campaign of the ruling class, the Socialist Equality Party of Canada strongly opposes the union bureaucracy, which has strangled and isolated working class struggles for decades and functions as an essential political prop of both the provincial and federal governments. The construction union bureaucracy, especially the FTQ, the largest union in Quebec’s building industry, has used its control of hiring to feather its own nest, while employing tactics of intimidation against workers who defy their authority.

Only when their privileges are threatened, as with Bill 33, will they organize limited work stoppages. And these limited actions are not meant as a springboard to fight the ruling class attacks, but rather as a means of preserving their privileges and showing the ruling class that they have the means of controlling the workforce and stifling all working class opposition.

In response to the media furor over the two-day construction walkout, Jocelyn Dupuis, the former Director-General of the FTQ's construction wing, gave an interview to *La Presse* which illustrates the true role played by the unions in suppressing the class struggle: "If we look back over the past twenty years, there wasn't really a conflict with the construction industry. I think that we had a really good social peace." The former union bureaucrat also expressed his fear that the unions are being marginalized and that this could be to the detriment of both the bureaucracy and big business elite: "We had a fine collaboration between the associations of the bosses and unions. I fear that they are destroying our unique system, which was one of the best in North America."

While claiming to oppose "anti-democratic" union practices, Québec Solidaire has no interest in exposing the "fine collaboration" that prevails "between the associations of the bosses and unions." Although it has sided with the Quebec elite in attacking the construction union bureaucrats—a campaign meant to strengthen the employers and lay the groundwork for a broader attack on worker rights—Québec Solidaire very much views the union bureaucracy as an ally. At present the union bureaucracy is largely oriented towards the Parti Québécois, but QS is eager to court it. Like the Liberals and PQ, Québec Solidaire promotes the claim that the unions are "workers representatives," rather than the instruments of a privileged pro-capitalist caste that polices the working class, smothering dissent and imposing ever-deteriorating conditions of employment on their members.

After providing support to the Liberal government's campaign for Bill 33, Khadir expressed the hope that the current construction industry hiring-hall system would not be replaced by "another system of favoritism by the employers." No matter that is the express purpose of Bill 33.

This is by no means the first time Quebec Solidaire has given support to a right-wing offensive, lending legitimacy to the pretexts invoked by the right, while adding a rhetorical caveat that given the forces mobilized is absurd.

Thus last March Khadir announced QS's support for the

NATO war on Libya, on the grounds that the Libyan people—in reality the NATO-sponsored National Transitional Council (a collection of defectors from the Gadhafi regime, Islamacists, and longtime CIA assets)—had appealed to the western powers for a "humanitarian intervention."

Khadir said his endorsement implied "certain risks" because it couldn't be certain "the Western powers truly want to help." "It is still to be proved that the United States and France are not advancing their own political and military agendas."

In fact, it was patently obvious given their actions and the nature of capitalist imperialism, that the Western powers, Canada among them, were utterly indifferent to the plight of the Libyan people; just as it is certain that the Quebec's elite is raising a hue and a cry about union abuses in the construction industry as a pretext to implement an anti-worker agenda.

The NATO intervention in oil-rich Libya was all about imperialist "political and military agendas"—securing an even more pliant regime in Tripoli and thwarting the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia.

But Khadir and Quebec Solidaire lent the war their support, at the outset accepting and legitimizing the "humanitarian" pretexts invoked to dupe the public. Thereafter they fell silent, indicating their acquiescence, as the imperialist rape of Libya proceeded.



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