

Québec Solidaire seeks electoral pact with big business Parti Québécois

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22 December 2011

Under conditions where the Parti Québécois (PQ) and the entire Quebec *indépendantiste* movement are in profound crisis, Québec Solidaire, a party that purports to be of the left, has multiplied its offers of support to the big business PQ and is submerging itself ever more completely into the PQ-led movement for a capitalist *République du Québec*.

In recent months, Québec Solidaire (QS) and its lone Member of the [Quebec] National Assembly (MNA), Amir Khadir, have courted a group of newly-minted dissident PQ MNAs, expanded their ties with various pro-Québec independence splinter groups, and offered to form an electoral alliance with the PQ.

Speaking at the end of October about the need for an electoral pact with the PQ to “defeat the right,” Khadir said, “We [the QS and the PQ] can agree. If the PQ doesn’t want François Legault and the Liberals, Québec Solidaire doesn’t want them either. We say,” in those electoral districts, “where there are Liberals now, we should try to do something.”

Françoise David, QS’s other “co-leader,” has been no less forthright than Khadir in promoting a PQ-QS alliance. Following a Liberal victory, in a by-election earlier this month, David voiced her dismay that “the leadership of the PQ, at least for the moment, can be so disinclined to a dialogue” with the QS about an electoral alliance.

As Khadir’s remarks illustrate, QS counter-poses the PQ to the “right,” which it defines as the Liberals, who have formed Québec’s government since 2003, and the *Coalition avenir Québec* (CAQ—Coalition for Quebec’s Future), the party formed last month by Legault, an ex-PQ cabinet minister and one time pretender for the PQ

leadership.

But the PQ, no less than the Liberals is a big business party. When in office, the PQ has come into headlong conflict with the working class. In 1982-83, René Lévesque’s PQ government imposed sweeping contract concessions on public sector workers and when teachers rebelled threatened them with mass firings. The PQ governments of Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry (1995-2003) eliminated tens of thousands of jobs in the health care and education sectors in the name of eliminating the annual provincial budget deficit. Then, when the books were balanced, the PQ introduced massive tax cuts to benefit big business and the most privileged sections of society.

In recent years, in lockstep with the bourgeoisie’s increasingly virulent demand for the leveling of what remains of the welfare state, the PQ has moved still further right. Under Pauline Marois,

it has repeatedly attacked the Liberal government of Jean Charest for not cutting the province’s deficit fast enough. It has also made increasingly strident chauvinist appeals, successfully pressuring the Liberal government to introduce legislation to ban the provision of public services to Muslim women wearing the *niqab* or *burkha*.

The PQ’s leading role in the assault on the social position of the working class has caused its popular support to hemorrhage. In the May 2 federal election, the PQ’s sister party, the Bloc Québécois, was reduced to 4 seats in parliament, from 47 at dissolution, and saw its share of the popular vote fall to just 23 percent. Moreover, despite the unpopularity of the Charest Liberal government, opinion polls have indicated for months that the Liberals would garner more votes than the PQ and that both mainline parties risk being reduced to rumps by

Legault's CAQ.

Québec Solidaire has responded to the PQ's crisis by running to its rescue, offering it an electoral alliance, but just as importantly helping the discredited rightwing PQ politicians and their allies in the trade union bureaucracy perpetuate the lie that working people can defend their interests, or at least blunt the attack of big business, through the PQ.

In reality, the reputed "left-right" division between the Liberals and PQ has been a key instrument of the bourgeoisie for the past four decades, a mechanism for managing class relations so as to safeguard its rule. Precisely because the PQ has projected itself as a "social democratic" party and enjoyed the steadfast support of the trade union bureaucracy, big business has often found it a better vehicle for imposing sweeping attacks on working people.

Lucien Bouchard, it should be recalled, urged Quebecers to vote for sovereignty (independence) in the 1995 referendum as a bulwark against the "rightwing wave" sweeping North America, then promptly implemented the exact same program of massive social spending cuts as his chief federalist rival, Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

Workers in Quebec will only be able to defend their jobs and rights by mounting an industrial and political offensive against the entire big business establishment, including the PQ, and by joining with workers in the rest of Canada in the fight for a workers' government.

An aspiring establishment party, QS is utterly opposed to this perspective. It promotes the reactionary canard that the essential divide in Quebec and Canadian politics is between federalists and Quebec sovereignists—not between the big business elite that dominates economic life and the working class whom it exploits—and systematically seeks to divide Quebec workers from their class brothers and sisters across Canada and around the world.

The PQ leadership has curtly dismissed QS's overtures. Marois calculates that a pact with the ostensibly leftist QS would undermine her efforts to convince big business that the PQ will be its best vehicle for carrying forward the offensive against the working class.

But the QS's call for an alliance has been welcomed by the *Syndicalistes et progressistes pour un Québec libre* (SPQ Libre—Trade Unionists and Progressives for a Free Quebec) a PQ faction patronized by sections of the union bureaucracy. And QS has organized common meetings and actions with a group of dissident PQ MNAs who have quit the PQ's parliamentary caucus but remain within the party. This group includes cabinet minister Louis Beaudoin and Lysette Lapointe, the wife of former PQ Premier Jacques Parizeau.

While Khadir and David have presented themselves as the proponents of a new "grass-roots" politics, they function like any other bourgeois politician on the make, treating the wishes of their party's membership with disdain, while seeking to convince the corporate media and Quebec's elite of their moderation and responsibility.

Thus they have pursued a QS-PQ electoral pact in express violation of a resolution adopted by a QS Congress last March that stipulates that the QS should not enter into any electoral alliances.

This resolution, it need be said, is less than meets the eye. The QS's membership is overwhelming petty bourgeois and largely comprised of lapsed *Péquistes* (PQ members) and others who championed the PQ-led drive for a sovereign Quebec in the early 1990s.

Moreover, the QS is already part of the PQ-led *Conseil de la souveraineté du Québec* (the Quebec Sovereignty Coalition).

At a three-day QS Congress held earlier this month, delegates—including the Pabloites of *Gauche Socialiste* and other pseudo-socialists—gave implicit support for Khadir's and David's actions by failing to hold any debate on their violation of party policy



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