

Quebec Solidaire moves still closer to big business PQ

Louis Girard
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Quebec's leading dailies have published a series of articles over the past two months revealing that the leadership of Quebec Solidaire, a party that proclaims itself a "party of the left," has held exploratory talks with the big business Parti Quebecois (PQ) on an electoral alliance.

Originating from sources inside the PQ, the articles reveal that over the course of several months last fall, Quebec Solidaire (QS) and PQ emissaries discussed standing joint candidates or a seat-sharing arrangement—QS offering to provide the PQ with a "left cover" under conditions where the PQ and the province's *indépendantiste* movement have been thrown into profound crisis by the near elimination of the PQ's sister party in federal politics, the Bloc Quebecois, in last May's federal election.

As these revelations seriously undermine QS's pretension to represent an alternative to the traditional parties of the Québécois political establishment, the leaders of Quebec Solidaire have sought to downplay their importance.

Amir Khadir, the sole QS Member of the National Assembly (the Quebec provincial legislature), denied the claim of PQ MNA Nicolas Girard that he had "approached the majority of the PQ caucus (last fall) to indicate that he desired an alliance." Instead, Khadir claimed that it was two PQ MNAs who had approached him on the subject of an electoral pact. He openly admitted, meanwhile, to having held discussions with three other PQ MNAs, discussions he claimed he had entered into so as to invite them to join Quebec Solidaire.

Khadir's denial, however, is simply not credible. Last October, Khadir publicly indicated his openness to an electoral alliance with the Parti Quebecois. He publicly proposed that the two parties collaborate in defeating the Liberals in a by-election, declaring, "If the PQ doesn't want Francois Legault [the leader of Quebec's third

party] and the Liberals, Québec Solidaire does not want them either. We say that [in electoral ridings] where there is a Liberal, we should try to do something."

The other leading figure in Quebec Solidaire, Francoise David, has also denied that there have been discussions on a QS-PQ electoral agreement. "Neither in the fall nor presently have there been negotiations between the QS and the PQ leaderships regarding an electoral pact," declared David.

But in her denial she admitted that the QS has always been orientated to some form of collaboration with the PQ, declaring, "Since our founding, we have repeatedly indicated our willingness to listen to what the PQ leadership eventually proposes." Indeed, the two parties are formally politically aligned through their co-membership in the *Conseil de la souveraineté du Québec* (Council for the Sovereignty of Quebec), a PQ-founded and led coalition of pro-Quebec independence parties and groups.

For its part, the PQ has remained hesitant to acknowledge Quebec Solidaire's overtures. Its staunchly pro-business leadership fears that open association with a self-proclaimed "left" party would undermine its efforts to convince Quebec's business elite that the PQ is the best vehicle for pressing forward with its class-war assault on the social rights of the working class.

But the PQ's interest in exploring such an alliance is indicated by the person PQ leader Pauline Marois chose as her emissary, Jean-Francois Lisée. A former top aide to two PQ premiers of Quebec, Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry, Lisée is a trusted member of the PQ establishment.

Even while denying that they have held talks with the PQ leadership on an electoral pact, Khadir and David have justified collaboration with the PQ on the grounds that it is necessary to defeat the "right." In fact, the PQ, no less than the Liberals, the party with which it has

alternated as Quebec's government over the past four decades, is utterly beholden to big business. But its function has been to use its ties to the trade union bureaucracy and its misbegotten image as a "party with a favorable prejudice to the working class" to politically divert and control the working class.

Every time the PQ has been in government, it has come into direct conflict with the working class. Indeed, because of its links to the union bureaucracy, the PQ has frequently been able to impose anti-working class measures that go far beyond those implemented by the openly pro-big business Liberals. In 1982-83, René Lévesque's PQ government imposed harsh concessions, including wage cuts of up 20 percent, upon the province's public sector workers. When the PQ returned to power, forming the provincial government from 1995 to 2003 under Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry, it eliminated tens of thousands of jobs in healthcare and education as part of their campaign for a "zero deficit." Then, when the deficit was eliminated, the PQ slashed taxes for big business and the rich.

In recent years, the PQ has lurched even further to the right. Under Pauline Marois, the PQ has repeatedly criticized the Liberal government of Jean Charest for reducing the provincial budget deficit too slowly.

In an effort to distract attention from their massively unpopular economic programme, the PQ has greatly increased its appeals to anti-immigrant sentiment and religious chauvinism—most recently pressuring the Liberal government to introduce legislation barring access to public services for Muslim women who wear a niqab or burqa.

Quebec Solidaire promotes the illusion that the Parti Québécois differs in a fundamental manner from the other parties of the political establishment, the Liberal Party of Quebec and the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ—Coalition for Quebec's Future). The only real difference between these big business parties is tactical: the PQ argues that the Quebec elite would be better able to defend its interests if Quebec formed a third capitalist nation-state in North America, which as the PQ rushes to assure the bankers of Rue St. Jacques and Washington, would be a partner of NAFTA, NATO, and NORAD.

And Quebec Solidaire agrees. It argues that the principle division in Canadian society is between "federalists" and supporters of Québécois sovereignty—not the gulf between the ruling elite that dominates economic life and the working class which they exploit.

Today, as the Parti Québécois is more and more discredited in the eyes of the working class, QS seeks to provide it life-support, by offering an electoral pact and boosting the PQ's claims to be an alternative to the "right," but also by seeking to boost illusions in the reactionary project of a capitalist "République du Québec."

Quebec Solidaire counts among its members a diverse combination of pseudo-socialist organizations, including the Pabloite Gauche Socialiste (Socialist Left), that have fully embraced the program of the bourgeois sovereignty movement and seek to give it a "left" coloration.

Bernard Rioux, a prominent leader of Gauche Socialiste and founding member of the web site *Presse-toi à gauche* (To the Left!), has opposed an electoral alliance between QS and the PQ. This opposition, however, is not of a principled character. In an article posted on the above mentioned web site, Rioux declared, "this [opposition to an electoral alliance with the PQ] does not mean that we cannot make tactical alliances on shared objectives and around specific mobilizations."

During Quebec Solidaire's three-day congress held in December, Gauche Socialiste and the other pseudo-socialist members of the party made no criticism of Khadir for having publicly called for an electoral alliance with the PQ last October, although this was in flagrant violation of a resolution adopted by the previous QS congress last March that stipulated that QS would not take part in any electoral alliance. Nor have any of the pseudo-socialists who operate in Quebec Solidaire opposed its participation alongside the big business PQ in the *Conseil de la souveraineté*.



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