

Québec Solidaire open to an electoral alliance with the Parti Québécois

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19 June 2012

Québec Solidaire (QS), the middle-class left movement, is prepared to conclude an electoral alliance with the Parti Québécois (PQ), the principal formation of the bourgeois Quebec *indépendantiste* movement. As the four-month-long student strike and rising social opposition from the working class roil the Quebec establishment, Québec Solidaire seeks to promote the claim that the PQ is “a lesser evil” than Premier Jean Charest and his Liberal government.

This perspective animates the QS’s reply to the appeal made June 5 by Pierre Curzi—a former PQ deputy for Bourdas who now sits as an independent in the Quebec legislature—for a “common front” of “*indépendantiste* parties” with the aim of “promoting the election of a progressive and democratic government.”

Before analysing this reply in detail, one need recall that QS has repeatedly demonstrated its orientation towards the PQ, with which it works in the *Conseil de la souveraineté du Québec* (Council for Quebec Sovereignty.)

In October 2011, Amir Khadir, QS’s co-leader and its lone member of the Quebec National Assembly, said that his party was open to an electoral alliance with the PQ against the Charest government: “We say that [in the constituencies] where there are currently Liberals, we are going to try to do something.” In January 2012, Québec Solidaire declared in a press release that “if the PQ makes an honest proposition, it will be submitted to our members.”

With its renewed offer to form an electoral alliance with the PQ, QS is aiding the ruling class in diverting the student strike into official political channels and behind the perspective of electing an *indépendantiste* government—even though the PQ has demonstrated its hostility to the working class by

implementing austerity measures whenever it has held power.

QS has adopted this position at a time when the ruling elite in Canada and internationally fears that the student strike could provoke a wider mobilization of the working class against the drive to destroy social gains and living standards. Québec Solidaire, founded on a nationalist perspective, is complicit in the efforts to isolate the student strike within the borders of Québec and block a movement against the Charest government.

Québec Solidaire’s response to the appeal for a “Common Front of *indépendantistes*” took the form of an open letter written by Khadir and co-QS leader Francoise David. It was published June 14 by *Le Devoir*, the daily associated with the Québec nationalist milieu.

Khadir and David warmly welcomed Curzi’s initiative, writing in the second paragraph of their letter that “Québec Solidaire salutes the efforts of the MNA from Bourdas [i.e. Curzi], which bear witness to legitimate concerns and a sincere desire to rescue Québec from an impending political disaster.”

The paragraphs that follow bear witness to concerns within the ranks of QS about the risks of too openly orientating to the PQ, which has been widely discredited in the working class.

Founded in 2006 by various “left” nationalist groups, Québec Solidaire is a party of the middle class, dedicated to the defence of the existing order, which it seeks to “improve” through superficial reforms. This mildly reformist program has been enough to make it the target of denunciations from rabid defenders of the dictates of the market. The sympathy shown by QS for the student strike, followed by its timid gestures of defiance towards the Liberals’ anti-strike law (Bill 78), were enough to provoke the police into arbitrarily

arresting Amir Khadir and his daughter, a student activist, earlier this month. (See: Stop state suppression of Quebec student strike!)

In order to maintain this “left” image, QS is at times required to make certain criticisms of the PQ, as is the case in its response to Curzi. In it one can read that the Parti Québécois “played an active role in the neo-liberal turn imposed upon Québec.”

The letter cites as proof of this turn “the emergency law directed against the public sector unions in 1982, unreserved support for the North American Free Trade agreement, massive cuts to health care and education to achieve a balanced budget, reforms that gutted social assistance, tax cuts that benefited above all the rich.”

On its own, this list leaves no doubt that the Parti Québécois is a party of big business and an enemy of the working class. However, QS draws another conclusion: in their letter David and Khadir qualify these measures as simply “mistakes of the past.”

They then call upon the PQ to “make a sincere analysis, without complacency” of these mistakes, as the precondition for the formation of “a progressive and pro-sovereignty alliance that would ensure that the Liberal Party loses power in the next general election.”

In their open letter, Khadir and David invite the Parti Québécois to “show a little humility” and to “no longer try to play a hegemonic role in the construction of Québec as a country.”

QS’s co-leaders explicitly reject an analysis that explains the politics of the Canadian ruling elite by reference to its class interests—interests that are defended by the PQ as much as the Liberals. They write in their letter: “The current state of affairs was not an inevitability...[but the] result of choices and positions taken by the governments of the last decades.”

On June 15, the day after the publication of this letter, Amir Khadir gave a press conference to mark the end of the legislative session.

He began by adopting his habitual pose of a “left” critic of the PQ, declaring that “all that we dislike in the Liberal Party is already there in the Parti Québécois, but in differing degrees...to a lesser degree,” giving as examples “emergency laws” and “massive cuts in public services and social spending.”

But he soon proceeded to his real point: that the PQ can play a progressive role in the defeat of the Liberals. “However, faced with the emergence of a popular

movement, faced with the emergence of strong discontent, the PQ,” affirmed Khadir, “can be an instrument to get rid of a more fundamental, a more important, I would say a worse problem...as [the Liberals are] completely corrupt, and more in the service of big business.”

This is a stock argument of union officials, social-democratic politicians and other opponents of the independent political mobilization of the working class the world over. In the name of fighting the “right,” they tie the working class to the supposedly “left” parties of the bourgeoisie, whether it be the Democrats in the U.S., the Socialist Party in France or the Labour Party in Britain—in the name of the “lesser of two evils.” The results for workers are always disastrous.

There are many obstacles in the way of an alliance between QS and the PQ at least in the immediate future, including the fact that the PQ does not yet consider such an alliance necessary.

Explaining why she opposes a QS-PQ alliance, PQ and Official Opposition leader Pauline Marois declared, “We are more centre-left, but we have, even so, on our right some people who think a little differently, but still adhere to the Parti Québécois.” In other words, allying with a party that the bourgeoisie considers “too radical” would be an encumbrance, as the PQ seeks to convince big business that it is better positioned than the Liberals to implement its austerity program.

Whatever the fate of the proposals for a QS-PQ “common front,” Québec Solidaire, by signalling that it accepts in principle a political alliance with the PQ, has demonstrated that it will participate in a political operation aimed at harnessing the opposition of students and workers to the election of a big business “pro-sovereignty” government—a government which would then carry out further attacks on the working class.



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