

Parti Québécois promotes chauvinist, anti-immigrant agenda

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The Parti Québécois—the *indépendantiste* party that long has served as the Quebec elite’s alternate party of government—has placed the so-called identity issue at the center of its campaign for next Tuesday’s Quebec election.

In the name of defending Quebec values and the French language, the PQ has pledged to enact a series of anti-democratic measures. These include a Quebec citizenship law that would strip newcomers to the province deemed not proficient in French of certain basic political rights and a “secular charter” that has been expressly designed to target symbols of minority faiths, while exempting Roman Catholic ones.

In 2006-7, the right-wing populist Action-démocratique du Québec (ADQ) and sections of the corporate media raised a hue and a cry against “reasonable accommodation,” a government policy aimed at the integration of immigrant and religious communities, claiming that “Quebec values” were being marginalized, if not trampled upon, in deference to the province’s minorities.

The furor raised the profile of the ADQ, hitherto a political also-ran, and in the March 2007 election, the ADQ displaced the PQ as the Official Opposition. The subsequent rapid collapse of ADQ support—it won just 7 seats in the Dec. 2008 election—underscored that the ADQ’s 2007 surge was not the outcome of a sharp shift to the right on the part of most Quebecers. Rather the ADQ was the temporary beneficiary of popular anger with the political establishment, federalist and sovereignist (pro-Quebec independence) alike.

However, the PQ concluded from its 2007 election debacle that it had to ensure that it would never again be outflanked on the “identity issue,” that it needed to become even more explicitly chauvinist.

Speaking to reporters on Aug. 21, following a meeting with the president of FIQ, a union representing nurses and other health care professionals, PQ leader Pauline Marois vowed that a PQ government would bar persons deemed insufficiently proficient in French from standing as candidates in provincial and municipal elections.

After a public outcry, especially from the province’s

aboriginal groups, Marois said she had misspoke. Only newcomers to Quebec would be threatened with the loss of certain political rights.

Under the PQ’s proposed Citizenship Act, persons moving to Quebec, whether from elsewhere in Canada or abroad, would be reduced to second-class citizens if they failed to meet a state-established minimum of French proficiency after three years’ residence in Quebec. In addition to losing the right to stand as candidates, those who failed to acquire Quebec citizenship due to their poor French would be barred from donating to provincial and municipal political parties and from initiating or signing petitions to the National Assembly.

The PQ is also championing a “secular charter.” The charter would bar public employees from wearing “ostentatious” religious symbols, like a Sikh turban, Jewish yarmulke, or the Muslim hijab. But the PQ has made a point of declaring that there would be no interdiction on public employees wearing “discreet” crosses (a traditional Catholic symbol). And it has vigorously opposed calls to purge public buildings of Roman Catholic symbols, including the crucifix that the arch right-winger Maurice Duplessis had hung in the National Assembly in 1936 to symbolize the close ties between the Catholic Church and state. Such symbols, asserts the PQ, are part of Quebec’s “cultural heritage” for which no apology need be made.

This is not only hypocritical. It is deeply reactionary. Like the PQ’s proposed citizenship law, its secular charter is aimed at asserting the primacy of the ethnic Québécois over others, and it is in keeping with the media and state stigmatization of Muslim immigrant communities that has accompanied, and been used to justify, the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan, in which Canada has played a leading role.

Last spring the PQ, taking its lead from the French fascist National Front, sought to make an issue of the purported spread of halal butchers in Quebec. In the run-up to the Sept. 4 election, it has not returned, at least in its “national” campaign, to this issue.

The PQ is also vowing that within its first hundred days in office it will further restrict access to education in English and extend provisions of Bill 101 that make French the language of work to companies employing 11 to 50 workers. The PQ wants to extend the current restrictions on English-language elementary and secondary school education, so as to bar native-French speakers and immigrants (including those whose first language is English) from attending CEGEP (pre-university and technical college), and adult and professional education courses in English.

The PQ has expressed alarm over the decline in the percentage of native-French speakers living on the Island of Montreal and is pledging to give urgent attention to introducing policies to reverse this decline. “The weakening of the French majority places in peril our collective capacity to integrate new immigrants into French,” declared PQ star candidate Jean- François Lisée on Wednesday.

The PQ’s chauvinist policies exemplify the reactionary character of its program to create a capitalist République du Québec that would be a member of NATO, NORAD and NAFTA.

Through its base chauvinist appeals, the PQ seeks to exploit and channel in a reactionary direction the anxiety and frustrations of professionals, shop-keepers and other sections of the middle- and working-class under conditions of deepening socioeconomic crisis and growing social inequality.

The PQ’s main big business rivals have their own nationalist-chauvinist planks.

Should they be reelected, the Liberals are promising to pass Bill 94, legislation that targets the tiny number of Quebec women who wear the niqab or burqa. Unless they remove their religious headdress, such women would be denied service by provincial public agencies, including schools and hospitals. An exception would be made only in “emergency situations.”

Several Liberal candidates, including at least one sitting cabinet minister, praised the mayor of Saguenay, Quebec’s fifth-largest municipality, after he denounced a foreign-born PQ candidate saying that as an outsider she had no right to intervene in the debate over reasonable accommodation.

The CAQ (the successor party to the ADQ) wants, for its part, to slash the number of immigrants received by Quebec for at least the next two years, and to carry out a review of the province’s immigration and language policies. It has suggested creating a temporary immigration status that would enable the state to strip immigrants who failed to find work or learn French after two years of the right to reside in Quebec.

Québec Solidaire (QS), an ostensibly left pro-Quebec independence party that enjoys the support of the pseudo-

left, lends legitimacy to the bourgeois political establishment’s use of chauvinist appeals. Rather than labeling the entire “reasonable accommodation” debate a reactionary diversion aimed at promoting nationalism and dividing the working class, QS has termed it important and necessary, and in that vein criticized the PQ’s secular charter for not going far enough. QS opposes the PQ’s proposed citizenship law, but it supports strengthening Bill 101 and has joined with the PQ in making a hue and cry over the hiring of unilingual Anglophones as CEOs of some of Quebec’s largest companies, including SNC-Lavalin.

QS responded to the Quebec student strike, which at its height in late May threatened to trigger a mass movement of the working class, by proposing an electoral alliance with the big business PQ. During the current election campaign its leaders have repeatedly made clear that their fondest hope is that come Sept. 5 they will be able to prop up a minority PQ government.

For decades, the Pabloite renegades from Trotskyism and the Quebec pseudo-left as a whole have promoted Quebec nationalism as “progressive,” and worked to corral the Quebec workers behind the drive of a section of the Quebec bourgeoisie to create a sovereign Quebec, while assisting the union bureaucracy in isolating Quebec workers from their class brothers and sisters in English Canada and internationally.

Virulently opposed to the struggle for the political independence of the working class, the pseudo-left has echoed the claim of the rival factions of the bourgeoisie that there are only two camps in Canada’s chronic constitutional wrangling—Quebec sovereignists and federalists. They have peddled the lie that opposition to the program of Quebec independence from the standpoint of the fight to unite the working class—French, English and immigrant—against all factions of the bourgeoisie constitutes support for the reactionary Canadian federal state.

The PQ’s anti-immigrant, chauvinist platform attests to the retrograde and anti-democratic character of the political forces to which Quebec’s pseudo-left has given succor.



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