

# Québec Solidaire lends legitimacy to PQ's chauvinist Charter

Richard Dufour  
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The ostensibly left-wing Québec Solidaire (QS) is lending legitimacy and support to the chauvinist campaign being mounted by Quebec's Parti Québécois (PQ) provincial government with its Charter of Quebec Values. Last month, the QS tabled in the Quebec legislature or National Assembly its own proposal for a *Charte de la laïcité* (Secular Charter), while stressing its support for much of the contents of the PQ's proposed Charter.

Under the pretext of promoting the separation of Church and State and protecting the equality of women, the PQ's Charter of Quebec Values targets the social and democratic rights of religious minorities, including the right to employment, in order to divert attention from the PQ government's big business austerity measures.

At the press conference called to present their Secular Charter, QS co-leader Françoise David and fellow National Assembly Member Amir Khadir declared their support for many of the specifics of the PQ bill and criticized some others. But all the while, they voiced their confidence in the government's good faith and presented the Charter as a legitimate response to a real and vexatious problem.

Reviewing the QS charter's main clauses, such as "religious neutrality and a ban on proselytizing by all state employees," as well as the denial of health care and other public services to fully-veiled Muslims, David noted that they agree with the "talking points of Mr. Drainville [the PQ minister responsible for the Charter of Values] with which, in any event, we have many things in common." Among these "things in common" is the attempt of the PQ and the ruling elite to project the image of a Quebec threatened by Islamic fundamentalism. This bogus threat has been invoked by much of Quebec's and Canada's ruling elite for years now so as to justify attacks on democratic rights, as well as rally support for the wars of conquest waged by the Western powers—including Canada—in the Middle East and Central Asia, regions that

are rich in oil and natural gas.

Agreeing with this concocted scenario, David insisted that there has been "the rise of fundamentalism and religious conservatism ... including in North America." Stressing that the wearing of the veil in public service "is at the heart of our debates," the QS's co-leader said: "We in Québec Solidaire understand the unease felt by many women, by Quebec feminists, before a religious symbol that is not harmless."

The QS's Secular Charter also serves to legitimize the campaign—first mounted by the right-wing populist ADQ and sections of the corporate media, and now being exploited and fanned by the PQ—against "the undue accommodation" of ethnic and religious minorities. Based on the deliberate distortion of a handful of incidents, Quebec nationalists and the tabloid press have for the better part of a decade been promoting the lie that Quebec's religious minorities are receiving privileges.

Noting that "over the last 20 years, there has been plenty of jurisprudence to determine when to permit or deny accommodation," David said: "Many want it to be enshrined in law; very well, then let us make it so."

David's colleague Amir Khadir denied the obvious political fact that the minority PQ government has introduced its chauvinist Charter in order to woo the right-wing nationalist vote, especially that of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ—the successor party to the ADQ), hoping at the right moment to call an election and win a majority of seats.

In response to a journalist who raised this scenario, Khadir said: "It seems to me that the Parti Québécois, which, unless things change, is still a social-democratic party based upon democratic principles, including respect for minority rights, must stay away from this kind of manipulation."

The Québec Solidaire website has been even more explicit in its defense of the PQ. Noting that the Charter

of Values campaign has resulted in “disgraceful incidents marked by intolerance and xenophobia,” the QS hastened to add: “We do not believe that this result was expected or desired by (PQ Premier) Marois or Mr. Drainville.”

The only real point of contention between the PQ and QS concerns the breadth of a prohibition on the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by provincial state employees. Québec Solidaire wants to limit the prohibition to those with coercive power, such as judges, prosecutors and policemen; while the PQ wants to apply it to all public sector workers, including teachers, nurses, day-care workers, and support staff in schools and hospitals.

The QS “opposition” on this issue is not based on democratic principles, but rather on the calculation that a blanket ban targeting more than a half million workers would be damaging to the drive for Quebec independence. Pressing ahead with such a widespread ban and backing it up with the threat to fire those who continue to wear religious symbols, argues the QS, will foster an “unhealthy environment that polarizes the population” and thus be bad “for the project of (Quebec) sovereignty.”

In other words, the QS is warning the PQ to tread more cautiously on the road of Quebec chauvinism, so as not to expose itself as a xenophobic force and undermine their joint project of establishing a new capitalist state in North America—a project which would serve only to divide the Canadian working class along ethno-linguistic lines. As David noted at the press briefing, “we can always return in a few years [to the issue of a blanket ban on conspicuous religious symbols in the public and para-public sector]. For the moment, it’s a no-go.”

To give a progressive sheen to its own chauvinist charter and its support for PQ Premier Pauline Marois’ anti-democratic campaign, Québec Solidaire invokes the principle of secularism—the “long march of the Quebec people to separate religious power from government power,” in the high-blown rhetoric of Khadir. What a fraud!

The separation of state and church has nothing to do with prohibiting an individual from expressing his or her religious choice, a right guaranteed by international law. Rather, it means that the state should not interfere in religious affairs by promoting one religion over the other, and vice versa, that the Church should not exert influence on the state.

To implement the principle of secularism in Quebec today would require the abolition of state funding for private religious schools as well as tax exemptions for

churches. As David stated at the press conference, these two measures are part of her party’s program, but have not been included in the QS’s Secular Charter because “the discussion is not developed enough.”

If the QS is not prepared to defend the principle of secularism enshrined in its program, it is because it does not actually stand for that principle. It evokes secularism only to justify its own support for the PQ’s chauvinist campaign. This in turn is part of its longstanding efforts to integrate itself into the politics of the Quebec establishment, to prove itself a party that can work with the PQ and the other traditional big business parties.

It is not surprising that the QS participates in the PQ’s sordid machinations to whip up animosity against immigrant workers and religious minorities so as to make them scapegoats for the crisis of capitalism and for the impoverishment of the working class resulting from its austerity measures. Its left pretenses notwithstanding, Québec Solidaire is a party of the privileged middle class, not the working class.

It groups together most of Quebec’s pseudo-left, including community activists, a smattering of union bureaucrats, and a slew of ostensible Marxist groups, including the Pabloite renegades from Trotskyism. Since its foundation in 2006, it has oriented itself to the PQ, of which for all practical purposes, it forms the “left wing.” QS is formally tied to the PQ through their joint participation in the *Conseil de la souveraineté* (Quebec Sovereignty Council) and has repeatedly offered the PQ an electoral alliance.

In June 2012, as the trade unions were working to derail the Quebec student strike and harness it to the big business PQ, QS once again appealed to the PQ for an electoral pact. And just days before the September 2012 election, QS pledged that were it to hold the balance of power in the National Assembly, it would provide unconditional support for a minority PQ government for at least a year. It thus now rightly shares full political responsibility for Pauline Marois’ anti-working class and anti-democratic government.



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