

Québec Solidaire gives PQ friendly advice on its chauvinist Charter

Louis Girard and Richard Dufour
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Amir Khadir—one of the two representatives of the ostensibly left-wing Québec Solidaire in the Quebec legislature—recently addressed a friendly open letter to Bernard Drainville, the Parti Québécois (PQ) minister responsible for Bill 60, the so-called “Quebec Charter of Values.” Under the guise of promoting state secularism and equality between men and women, this bill constitutes a frontal attack on the rights of religious minorities to employment and to public services.

Far from denouncing this right-wing populist PQ maneuver, which aims to divert attention from the government’s big business austerity policies, Khadir offered Drainville advice on how best to secure passage of the government’s anti-democratic “secular” Charter.

Khadir entirely accepts the reactionary premises on which Bill 60 is based: the PQ’s claim that immigrants and religious minorities are a threat to Quebec society and its “values” and that the state must develop means to counter this “alien,” “extremist” threat.

In lending legitimacy to the PQ’s anti-democratic Charter, Québec Solidaire is reprising what is, in fact its traditional role—providing the big business, pro-Quebec independence PQ with political cover for its anti-working class and chauvinist policies.

The PQ, with the help of the tabloid press and trade union bureaucracy has conducted its Charter campaign with the express aim of appealing to, and whipping up, anti-Muslim prejudice, so as to divide the working class. However, Khadir suggests at the beginning of his letter that the PQ is animated only by the best of intentions.

“A number of your proposals on veiled women have correctly been denounced as linked to lies that might fuel xenophobia,” writes Khadir in a seemingly threatening tone. Yet he immediately rushes to exonerate Drainville, adding in the same sentence, “which does not in my opinion represent the basis of your thought.”

Even as organizations working with ethnic and religious minorities report an increase in the number of racist attacks on minorities since the beginning of formal discussions on

the Charter last September, Khadir seeks to absolve the PQ of any political responsibility for this situation.

The Québec Solidaire legislator goes so far as to defend Yves Michaud, a well-known figure in the Quebec sovereignty movement and an unconditional supporter of the PQ’s anti-democratic charter. Michaud recently embarrassed the PQ government when he publicly urged public sector employees wearing conspicuous religious symbols to “settle in other lands” if they do not want to remove them in compliance with the charter. Michaud’s vulgar chauvinist statements did not prevent Khadir from praising him as having one of the “best minds,” despite his “confusion.”

After his vain efforts to get rid of the strong smell of chauvinism that clings to the PQ’s Charter, the Québec Solidaire legislator turned to advising the PQ minister on how best to achieve their common purpose: Quebec independence.

Khadir claims that the purpose of the PQ’s hardline against the wearing of religious symbols is to court the nationalist electoral vote, “win a few more” National Assembly seats, gain a majority in the provincial legislature, and thereby advance Quebec independence. But he considers this is a bad tactical choice and “deplores its short-sighted and destructive pragmatism, which will eventually turn against the entire sovereignty (i.e., Quebec independence) movement.”

The truth is the PQ’s xenophobic, chauvinistic, and explicitly anti-Muslim agitation for Bill 60 is the logical outcome of the campaign for Quebec independence that it has led for the past four-and-half decades, with the support of a significant section of the Quebec bourgeoisie. This campaign has been promoted by the union bureaucracy and middle-class pseudo-left elements, who have sought to give it a democratic and progressive aura.

Through the reorganization of the nation-state system in North America and the formation of a capitalist *République du Québec*, the bourgeoisie seeks to realize its own selfish class interests, to strengthen its position against its big

business rivals and the working class. An independent Quebec would be a tool for it to assert its economic and geopolitical interests and to intensify the assault on the working class. Indeed, under a succession of leaders since the 1980s, from the *haute bourgeois* Jacques Parizeau to the current leader and Quebec Premier, Pauline Marois, the PQ has promoted “independence” in big business circles as the best way to impose huge cuts in public services in the name of eliminating the “duplication” of (federal and provincial) services.

A long and bitter experience of PQ governments has unmasked it as a party of capitalist austerity and anti-worker laws. This experience has made it increasingly difficult for the PQ to promote independence as it once fraudulently did as a “social project,” associated with the expansion of social programs and other improvements for working people. Hence it more and more openly relies on rank chauvinist appeals, promoting independence as an “identity project,” as the only means to defend the French language and the “cultural heritage” of the Quebec people.

It is this profound connection between social reaction, chauvinism, and the movement for independence that Khadir seeks to camouflage in his letter to Drainville. By presenting Bill 60 as “going too far,” and a “false step” on the part of the PQ, rather than a manifestation of its anti-democratic, bourgeois *indépendantiste* program, Québec Solidaire seeks to revive illusions in a political project which is hostile to workers’ interests, would intensify divisions between *Québécois*, English-speaking, and immigrant workers, and goes against social and historical progress.

Capitalist private property and the system of nation-states in which it has historically developed, stand in violent contradiction with the harmonious development of the world economy required to meet social needs. This contradiction can only find progressive solution through the united political struggle of workers around the world to overthrow capitalism and reorganize social-economic life so production can be organized to fulfill social need, not enrich a tiny capitalist minority.

The Québec Solidaire legislator also seeks to lend credibility to the PQ’s “secular” charter, by scolding Drainville and Marois for trying to impose the “precepts of the Enlightenment” by the method of “forced assimilation.”

The PQ’s “secular” Charter has nothing to do with the democratic principles of the Enlightenment, which played a key role in the ideological struggle against Absolute Monarchy and religious obscurantism and prepared the great French Revolution of 1789-94. The principle of “secularism” developed during this revolutionary period meant that the state could not impose religious beliefs on individuals and, conversely, that the Church could not

interfere in the affairs of the state.

Under the guise of “secularism,” the PQ is threatening to bar members of certain religious minorities from public sector employment unless they stop wearing head-coverings and other symbols that they believe to be a necessary expression of their faith. The PQ’s hypocrisy and chauvinism is underscored by the fact that the legislation exempts Catholic symbols by allowing public servants to wear “discreet” crucifixes and otherwise protects Quebec’s religious, i.e. Catholic, “heritage.” In linking this reactionary, discriminatory legislation to the Enlightenment Québec Solidaire is providing the PQ with political cover.

When everything is said and done, Québec Solidaire considers that the PQ, at least for the moment, is going too far and fears the damaging impact of the PQ’s open association with chauvinism and anti-democratic measures on their joint promotion of Quebec sovereignty.

Continuously addressing PQ Minister Drainville by his first name, Amir Khadir speaks of a “consensus” in Quebec on the “need to regulate and harmonize the practice of (religious) accommodation.” Agreeing with the PQ that veiled Muslim women should be denied public services and that there “must be limits to the wearing of religious clothing or accessories” by some government employees, Khadir plaintively asks, “But Bernard, is it necessary to ban all religious symbols for all positions in all the public services?”

A final essential purpose of Khadir’s letter is to hide the objective source of the PQ’s assault on democratic rights.

At a time when social inequality is developing to an unprecedented degree, and the living conditions of the masses are constantly worsening, the ruling class seeks to stir up prejudice against immigrants and ethnic and religious minorities. Unable to create a popular base of support for its reactionary policies, it seeks to encourage anti-democratic sentiments, so as to split the working class and channel the mass social anger over ever-increasing economic insecurity and social inequality away from the capitalist profit system that are their source.



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