

Quebec “left” hails media mogul Péladeau’s entry into the PQ

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Pierre-Karl Péladeau has long used his Quebecor media empire to loudly demand a frontal assault on the working class, including massive social spending cuts, the privatization of health care, the gutting of worker rights, and further lavish tax cuts for big business and the rich. In announcing last month that he is standing in the April 7 Quebec election for the ruling Parti Québécois (PQ), Péladeau said that in addition to “reviving” Quebec’s economy his goal in entering electoral politics is “to make Quebec a country.”

The fact that this arch-right-wing billionaire has proudly proclaimed himself a staunch supporter of Quebec sovereignty underlines the reactionary class character of the *indépendantiste* movement. Through the promotion of Quebec *indépendantiste* nationalism a section of the Quebec bourgeoisie is pressing for a reorganization of the capitalist nation-state system in North America so as to strengthen its hand against its big business rivals in English Canada and intensify the exploitation of the working class.

Quebec’s secession from Canada is also supported by privileged petty bourgeois layers—trade union bureaucrats, managers, professionals, and small businessmen—who calculate that an independent Quebec will better their own social position by pursuing protectionist policies and opening up new administrative positions.

Because Péladeau’s emergence as a “star” PQ candidate and heir apparent to the PQ leadership speaks volumes about the true nature of the Quebec “sovereignty” (independence) movement, much of the trade union bureaucracy and many of the pseudo-lefts who gravitate around them have sought to drown out its meaning with thunderous applause.

For its part, Québec Solidaire—an ostensibly left, pro-independence party founded in 2006—is complaining that the PQ’s embrace of Péladeau is a repudiation of the PQ’s “progressive” and “social-democratic” traditions. The QS’s angry reaction is rooted in the recognition that the PQ’s further lurch right undercuts their efforts to promote the QS as an instrument for pressuring the PQ in the National Assembly and, even more fundamentally, that it complicates their attempt to give the call for a capitalist *République du Québec* a “left” covering.

Gérald Larose and Marc Laviolette, two ex-presidents of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU), were among the dozen signatories of an open letter that welcomed Péladeau’s PQ candidacy and argued, in the naming of defending Québécois enterprise, that he should not be forced to sell off his media

empire. Other signatories of the open letter included two former right-wing PQ premiers, Jacques Parizeau and Bernard Landry, and Gilles Duceppe, the former head of the PQ’s sister party at the federal level, the Bloc Québécois (BQ). A Maoist in the 1970s and early 1980s, Duceppe was a CSN bureaucrat before becoming the BQ’s first-ever elected MP.

Laviolette, who now heads the SPQ Libre (Trade Unionists and Progressives for a Free Quebec), a political club within the PQ that is patronized by the union bureaucracy, co-authored, with Pierre Dubuc, another former Maoist and the SPQ Libre’s secretary, a second statement welcoming Péladeau into the PQ and the leadership of the *indépendantiste* movement. Titled “The SPQ Libre and Pierre- Karl Péladeau’s Candidacy,” the statement criticized the Quebecor boss for his “arrogant attitude” toward his employees and claimed that “the SPQ Libre will never try to whitewash (Péladeau’s) anti-union record.” However, in the very next breath it argued for a “united front” with this “illustrious representative of big business.”

“Our struggle is a struggle for national liberation,” declared the SPQ Libre leaders, “and as we have frequently written, this struggle involves, by its very nature, different social classes and social groups in a united front.”

“In our history, the PQ has constituted the rallying place of this united front... Only the bringing to power of a majority Parti Québécois government, can pave the way for the independence of Quebec.”

Some union bureaucrats, such as the current CNTU president and the top leaders of the Quebec Federation of Labour (QFL), felt compelled to criticize Péladeau and somewhat temper their traditional enthusiastic election-time boosting of the PQ, so as not to deplete what little remaining credibility they have with rank-and-file workers. However, even as he deplored the PQ’s renunciation, clearly at Péladeau’s request, of a pledge to tighten the province’s “anti-scab law,” CNTU President Jacques Létourneaux said, “We can’t presume to know...how [Péladeau] will act if he is ever elected or ever becomes a minister.”

Létourneaux and his counterpart at the QFL pointedly refused to criticize Larose and Laviolette or the other members of “the group of twelve” for their open letter enthusing over the entry of this filthy rich, arch right-wing corporate boss into the political arena.

In Quebec, as around the world, the unions have systematically suppressed the class struggle for decades. They have torpedoed one militant struggle after another, imposed concessions and job

cuts, supported the slashing of public services, and politically subordinated the working class to the big business PQ and through it to the Canadian ruling class as a whole.

If Péladeau was able to impose defeat after defeat on workers at his newspapers and Videotron cable company—during the first decade of this century Quebecor was responsible for more than half of the province’s lockouts—it is because the unions refused to mobilize the social power of the working class for fear it would disrupt their cozy relations with big business and its political representatives in government.

The unions’ strong support for the PQ has been bound up with its role in instituting and sustaining a corporatist system under which unions have been ever more tightly integrated with management and the state. In return for policing the working class, for what they euphemistically call “upholding the social peace,” the union bureaucrats have been rewarded with plum positions on employer-government-union boards and control of multibillion-dollar investment funds that benefit from special tax breaks (e.g. the QFL’s Solidarity Fund and the CSN’s Fondation.)

One of the main reasons relations between Péladeau and the union officialdom have been strained is that he has pressed for some of their corporatist perks—especially their control over the more than \$10 billion in union-sponsored investment funds—to be curtailed, even eliminated. But that has not stopped the union bureaucracy from backing some of Quebecor’s business ventures. The Solidarity Fund, for example, joined with Péladeau in 2009 in an unsuccessful bid to buy the Montreal Canadiens hockey team. And it will not stop the union bureaucracy from continuing to support the big business PQ and working alongside Péladeau to divide Quebec workers from, and incite them against, workers in English Canada in the name of an independent Quebec.

Enthusiasm for Péladeau’s PQ candidacy did not just come from the union bureaucracy. The Communist Party of Quebec (PCQ), a remnant of the Stalinist Communist Party of Canada, and one of many pseudo-left groups working within Québec Solidaire, was quick to declare its readiness to work with this ultra-rightwinger. “His arrival,” wrote PCQ head André Parizeau, “also helps, indisputably, to restore credibility to the project of sovereignty... In fact, it fits quite well with another aspect of our program, which is to push for the broadest possible alliance of all sovereignist forces.”

For decades, the pseudo-left has promoted the reactionary claim that workers in Quebec have more interest in common with the Péladeaus, Desmarias and the other Quebec capitalists than with their class brothers and sisters in the rest of Canada, the United States and around the world.

The “national liberation” invoked by the PCQ, SPQ Libre, the Pabloites and other Quebec nationalists has nothing to do with the anti-imperialist struggles of the twentieth century in colonial and semicolonial countries. The separation of Quebec is the project of a section of the ruling class in Quebec looking for a better position within the imperialist system, including a closer alliance with Wall Street. The *indépendantistes* have always maintained that their *République du Québec* would be a part of NATO, NORAD and NAFTA and adopt the Canadian or U.S. currency. Moreover, with their push for further antidemocratic legislation in the name of

asserting the supremacy of the French-language and promoting state secularism (e.g. the PQ’s chauvinist, anti-immigrant Charter of Quebec Values), the *indépendantistes*, have made clear that they would use the powers of a “sovereign” Quebec to further attack the rights of immigrants and minorities.

For her part, Québec Solidaire leader Françoise David has feigned indignation and amazement at Péladeau’s entry into the PQ, saying that it is *now* clear that the PQ “is not the party of the workers.”

David’s remarks only serve to illustrate the extent to which QS operates in the orbit of the PQ.

For years, QS has sought an electoral alliance with PQ, assiduously promoting the lie that it is a “lesser evil” to the Liberals and CAQ because it is a sovereignist party. In 2012, when the Quebec student strike threatened to precipitate a mass movement of the working class, the QS worked with the unions to harness the opposition to the Charest Liberal government to the PQ. When the strike was at its height, it offered the PQ an electoral pact and on the eve of the September 2012 election, it promised to sustain a PQ minority government in office for at least one year.

Only last year, after the PQ had brought in an austerity budget that went far beyond that of Charest, did QS formally renounce its efforts to forge an electoral pact with Pauline Marois’s PQ. But David quickly made clear that the door has not been permanently closed to such an alliance.

For all their denunciations of Péladeau, QS is committed by its history, program and right-wing class orientation to working with him and the PQ in realizing Quebec’s secession, thereby helping erect a further barrier to the unification of the struggles of the working class and threatening to embroil it in a civil war between the rival reactionary camps of the federalist Canadian and sovereignist Quebec bourgeoisies.

In the 1995 referendum, the current leaders of Québec Solidaire, and all the pseudo-Marxist organizations now embedded in QS, were part of the official, PQ government-sponsored Rainbow Coalition, which expressly supported the PQ’s project for a capitalist Quebec, allied with US imperialism. The coalition was led by a triumvirate of right-wing capitalist politicians: the *haute bourgeois* Jacques Parizeau, then the PQ premier of Quebec; Luicen Bouchard, BQ leader and former federal Conservative cabinet minister; and Mario Dumont head of the far-right Action Démocratique du Québec (since absorbed into the Coalition Avenir Québec).

Dumont went on to spearhead the reactionary campaign over the “reasonable accommodation” of immigrants and religious minorities—the political-ideological inspiration of the PQ’s chauvinist Charter of Quebec Values. He is now a columnist for one of Péladeau’s right-wing tabloids.



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