

No to the Quebec Liberals' Bill 3!

## For a working class counteroffensive to defend pensions and public services!

The Socialist Equality Party (Canada)  
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*The following Socialist Equality Party (Canada) statement was distributed at Saturday's mass demonstration in Montreal against the Quebec Liberals government's Bill 3—legislation that would slash the pensions and wages of municipal workers, including transit, office and blue-collar workers and firefighters. A report on the 50,000-strong demonstration can be found here: [Quebec: Mass protest against gutting of municipal workers' pensions](#).*

The Quebec Liberal government's Bill 3 is not only a direct assault on the wages and pensions of municipal workers. It is part of a broader campaign to dismantle all public services, in particular health care and education.

By targeting the workers who provide essential public services—today at the municipal level, tomorrow throughout the public sector—the ruling class aims to make the working class pay for the crisis of the world capitalist system.

The new Liberal government has already announced that social expenditure is to be drastically cut and whole programs eliminated. Premier Philippe Couillard has compared the current situation to the Quebec fiscal crises of 1982 and 1997, which the Parti Québécois (PQ) governments of Lévesque and Bouchard “solved” through public sector wage and job cuts, ravaging the education and health care systems.

Attempts to mobilize the population against the municipal workers by depicting them as “selfish” are a repeat of the campaign mounted against the 2012 Quebec student strike. At that time, the Liberals of Jean Charest tried, with the help of the corporate mass media, to present the students fighting to defend public education as “spoiled children.” Today as in 2012, resistance to capitalist austerity is denounced as “violence” to justify the use of repressive measures.

The fight to defend the pensions of Quebec's municipal workers must become the starting point of a broad working class counteroffensive against the whole ruling class austerity program. This will require not only militant actions—occupations, strikes, a general strike—but above all the independent political mobilization of the working class to impose its own solution to the capitalist crisis. The abundant resources that exist must be used to meet social needs, not to enrich the banks and big business.

Such a mobilization demands a political and organizational break with the pro-capitalist unions, which impose the concessions demanded by big business and politically subordinate workers to the PQ, the other government party of Quebec big business. Time and again over the last three decades, the union bureaucrats have channeled worker opposition into ineffectual protest campaigns. And when the bureaucrats have not been able to prevent the eruption of mass struggles, they have torpedoed them in the name of “social peace.”

To cite only the most recent example, the unions isolated the student strike in 2012 before channeling it behind the PQ. In the case of Bill 3, the union leaders have repeatedly declared that they are ready to accept pension cuts and increased workers' contributions (an effective wage cut), in exchange for a place at the negotiating table.

The lessons must be drawn from these bitter experiences. In opposition to the pro-capitalist and nationalist perspective of the unions, workers must base their struggles on an internationalist perspective aimed at mobilizing workers in Quebec, across Canada and around the world to impart their own solution to the social devastation caused by the profit system.

The austerity programs of the Quebec and federal Conservative governments are in line with those put

forward by the ruling elites throughout the world in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse. The result has been the same everywhere, reducing large sections of the working class in the “rich” countries to conditions similar to those in the “Third World.”

In Detroit, once the center of the North American auto industry, thousands of impoverished workers are having their water supply cut off because they are unable to pay their bills on time. In Europe, the rate of unemployment for young people has reached Depression-era levels. In Greece, after six years of austerity measures, it stands at 60 percent; in Spain it is nearly as high.

In Canada, social inequality continues to increase while social services are dismantled. The top 100 best-paid CEOs earn more than 200 times an average worker. At the same time, the need for food banks is increasing, while less than 38 percent of the unemployed receive unemployment benefits, compared to 85 percent in the 1980s.

“Pension reform,” one of the watchwords of the ruling elite throughout the world since the crisis of 2008, is also at the center of the austerity measures being implemented by Stephen Harper’s federal Conservative government.

Altogether, these austerity measures represent a veritable social counterrevolution. In order to impose them in the face of immense popular opposition, the ruling class is using anti-democratic methods and putting in place the scaffolding of a police state in anticipation of mass social unrest.

For all intents and purposes, the right to strike no longer exists in Canada. Over the last few years, the federal Conservative government has repeatedly criminalized strikes, including by railway, Canada Post and Air Canada workers.

For the last few weeks, the City of Montreal has been engaged in a witch-hunt against dozens of firefighters and other municipal workers for the “crime” of having loudly demonstrated their opposition to the destruction of their pension rights under the Couillard government’s Bill 3. One of the first acts of this government, it should be recalled, was to announce that a special law would be immediately imposed if construction workers went on strike again as they did in the summer of 2013.

The reaction of the ruling elite to the 2012 Quebec student strike exemplified the capitalist elite’s turn toward authoritarian methods of rule. The students fighting to defend public education were the target of virulent denunciations by the Charest government, a smear campaign in the media, injunctions limiting picket

lines, arbitrary mass arrests, deafening tear gas attacks and finally Bill 78, which became Law 12, outlawing for all practical purposes all demonstrations on any issue throughout the province.

But these police state methods actually strengthened popular support for the students. Tens of thousands of workers joined the students on the street raising the possibility that the student strike could become the catalyst for a mass movement of the working class against the destruction of jobs and social programs.

At that point the unions, which had isolated the student struggle from the start, intervened—with the political assistance of Québec Solidaire—to channel the movement behind the election of a PQ government, under the slogan “After the Streets, to the ballot box.” Once in power, the PQ lost no time in imposing a program of deep social spending cuts, which included a permanent increase in university tuition fees. To foment reaction and split the working class, the union-backed PQ fanned anti-Islamic chauvinism with its Quebec Charter of Values.

Municipal workers and their supporters must draw the lessons of this crucial experience. The defense of pensions requires the mobilization of workers across Canada—French, English and immigrant—in a working class offensive to defend all jobs, wages and public services.

This requires a decisive break with the pro-capitalist unions. A first step in this direction is the formation of rank-and-file committees of struggle, from which the union bureaucrats and their hangers-on must be excluded. Above all, workers must launch an independent political struggle for a workers’ government to reorganize the economy to meet social needs, not produce profits for a tiny, obscenely wealthy minority.

We urge all those interested in learning about or fighting for this perspective to read the *World Socialist Web Site* and contact the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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