

Quebec Solidaire renews appeals to big business PQ

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Taking its lead from the demagogic campaign the Yes camp mounted in the recent Scottish referendum, Québec Solidaire (QS) is appealing to the big business Parti Québécois (PQ) to give it and other “left” forces a greater place in their joint push for an independent or “sovereign” Quebec.

With the PQ largely discredited among working people due to its repeated imposition of massive social spending cuts, the QS is seeking to convince the PQ that it needs to mobilize a broader, popular coalition if it is to revive support for the creation of a third imperialist state in North America.

Amir Khadir, one of the three QS deputies in the Quebec legislature, published a statement on his blog on the day of the Scottish referendum, gushing with enthusiasm for the Yes campaign of Alex Salmond’s Scottish National Party (SNP). “At the heart of the concept of independence” in Scotland, declared Khadir, “is the defense of public services and generous social policies that affect ordinary people.”

Echoing these thoughts, Françoise David, the QS’s parliamentary leader, declared that the Yes camp in Scotland based itself “on a rejection of austerity, the advocacy of a system of health care for all and the development of renewable energy.”

In reality, the SNP is a right-wing nationalist party, traditionally known in working class circles as the “Tartan Tories.” It speaks for a section of the Scottish ruling class that dreams of making Scotland a magnet for foreign capital and a hub of international finance by creating a new capitalist nation-state based on cheap labor and low taxation.

That is why the SNP focused its campaign on a pledge for a massive reduction in taxes for big corporations. At the same time, it promised that an independent Scotland would join NATO—currently at the center of the provocations the Western imperialist powers are mounting against Russia over the Ukraine—and immediately seek membership in the European Union, the main instigator of the austerity measures that are wreaking devastation throughout Europe.

Québec Solidaire’s praise of the SNP is an overture to the PQ and an attempt to convince it to emulate the mainline Scottish nationalists in giving the “left” a prominent role in the push for Quebec sovereignty.

One of the Quebec elite’s two government parties for the past

four decades, the PQ advocates independence as a means of advancing the economic and political interests of Quebec big business at the expense of their rivals in English Canada, especially the Bay Street banks and Calgary oil barons. Quebec *indépendantiste* nationalism is also a weapon for maintaining the bourgeoisie’s political-ideological control of Quebec workers, dividing them from their class brothers and sisters in the rest of Canada, the United States, and around the world.

That Québec Solidaire is eager to offer the PQ its help in giving a “progressive” gloss to its Quebec independence project is spelled out by Khadir in his blog. “The formula used by the SNP,” he writes, “is reminiscent of the combativeness of [former PQ Premier Jacques] Parizeau, who was fully aware of the liberating potential, regarding social policy, of the campaign for independence. He placed great emphasis on the social question in the Yes camp [in the 1995 Quebec referendum], looking to the Partners for Sovereignty to rally support, if not a craze, for independence.”

Khadir is here celebrating the pro-independence “rainbow coalition” Parizeau created in the run-up to the October 1995 referendum on Quebec sovereignty. This purported multi-class alliance brought together the Parti Québécois, to which several of the current leaders of Québec Solidaire then belonged; the Bloc Québécois of Lucien Bouchard, a former federal Conservative cabinet minister; the Action démocratique du Québec, a right-wing populist party that would later evolve into the CAQ (Coalition for Quebec’s Future); the Quebec Federation of Labour (QFL), Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU) and other unions; and most of the pseudo-left groups in Quebec, including the Pabloite *Gauche Socialiste* (Socialist Left)

Parizeau, himself the scion of one of Quebec’s big bourgeois families, remains today at the age of 84 a charismatic figure in the Quebec separatist movement. At the end of September, in a speech recorded for an independence rally in Montreal, Parizeau criticized the “lack of clarity” in the PQ’s current stance on achieving independence and argued “that the independence cause” needs to “be bolstered by an autonomous movement of civil society.”

This appeal was not lost on Amir Khadir, who was present at the event, which was co-sponsored by the *Conseil de la*

souveraineté (Council for Quebec), an organization led by the PQ and to which the QS belongs. Like Parizeau, Khadir bemoans the fact that “the sovereignty movement is not in great shape at the moment.” The solution for “reviving the independence flame” is, he claims, “to give the initiative to all those members throughout Quebec who are prepared to think and work together.”

The new coalition for sovereignty proposed by Parizeau is music to the ears of Québec Solidaire, who believe it will give them access to positions of power and influence. But for workers it constitutes a trap—a mechanism for once again subordinating them to the PQ and for preventing the emergence of a working-class political movement in opposition to capitalist austerity and orientated to uniting the struggles of Quebec workers with those of workers across Canada and internationally.

Parizeau’s 1995 “rainbow coalition” prepared the political ground for a massive post-referendum assault on the working class, in which the unions, in the name of “national unity,” joined big business in endorsing the PQ’s “zero deficit” drive and the elimination of tens of thousands of health care and education jobs.

In the years that followed, the PQ government imposed massive social spending cuts and, once the budget was balanced, huge tax cuts for big business and the rich; that is, they followed the same path as their reputed federalist opponents in the federal Liberal government of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin.

The PQ lost power in 2003 to the Liberals under Jean Charest, which over the next 10 years intensified all the attacks launched by the PQ on public services and the wages and jobs of the workers who administer them.

The PQ’s long anti-working class record—it also imposed brutal social spending cuts in 1982-83—in no way deters Québec Solidaire from seeking to ally with this big business party. In his blog on Scotland, Khadir whitewashes the reactionary PQ governments. “The women and men who led this movement often acted to the best of their ability, in all sincerity,” he writes. “But major mistakes were made in power and these have cost the independence movement dear.”

For Québec Solidaire, the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs in health and education—a terrible blow from which these essential public services have never recovered—and its promotion of anti-Muslim bigotry with its so-called Quebec secular Charter are just “errors.” Not measures aimed at implementing the austerity program demanded by the whole ruling class, Quebecois and Canadian.

Oriented towards the PQ and the pro-capitalist unions, QS speaks for privileged sections of the middle class, who resent the massive increase in the wealth and power of the top 1 percent and the transnationals, but above all fear and seek to prevent a working class challenge to the capitalist system.

Despite its “left” pretensions, carefully cultivated by the

media, Québec Solidaire has already shown its readiness to support wholesale attacks on workers in order to gain acceptance as an establishment party and win a major place within the PQ-led sovereignty coalition. Like the unions, QS has responded to the Liberals’ Bill 3 by saying it is ready to support major cuts in the pensions of municipal workers and the take-home pay of municipal workers as long as these cuts are “negotiated.”

During the province-wide 2012 student strike, when tens of thousands of young people were in the streets for seven months and a real possibility existed for the development of a working-class counter-offensive against capitalist austerity, Québec Solidaire intervened to help the unions suppress the movement and corral it behind the election of a PQ government. In June 2012, QS proposed that the PQ join it in an electoral alliance and on the eve of the September 2012 election it pledged unconditional support to a PQ minority government if QS were to hold the balance of power.

Québec Solidaire then feigned disappointment over the huge budget cuts imposed by the PQ government of Pauline Marois in order to continue its role as “left” ally and friendly critic of the fellow sovereignist PQ. And in the face of the frontal assault on public services being mounted by the Liberal government that was elected this spring, QS has made it known that it accepts the necessity to control and limit social spending, thereby lending legitimacy to a new round of draconian austerity measures.

The dismantling of jobs, public services, and social rights is the programme imposed everywhere by the financial markets to make the working class pay for the historic crisis of world capitalism. To confront this, workers must reject every attempt to divide them along ethnic, linguistic and national lines—including the Scottish and Quebec separatism promoted by Québec Solidaire—and build their international unity in the common struggle against the global profit system.

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