

Why is Québec Solidaire silent about the betrayal of its “cousin” Syriza?

Richard Dufour**11 September 2015**

From January through the first week of July, Québec Solidaire (QS)—the ostensibly “left,” pro-Quebec independence party—repeatedly affirmed its “solidarity” with Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) and its support for Greece’s Syriza-led coalition government.

On its web site, in press releases and in the declarations of its three Members of the Quebec National Assembly, QS enthusiastically portrayed Syriza as a “left” party engaged in bitter struggle against capitalist austerity.

“A breath of fresh air for progressives,” “a party that puts the interests of its people first,” “a break in the chain of austerity”—QS’s admiration for “the example of Greece” knew no bounds. Syriza, they claimed, “could entirely alter the political landscape throughout Europe.”

A crucial stage in this campaign was reached when Québec Solidaire invited representatives of Syriza and those of the Spanish group Podemos and the German Left Party to participate in a “Solidarity Festival” in Montreal in mid-June.

Several months earlier, Syriza had signed the “Memorandum” of the troika (IMF, European Central Bank, European Union), publicly pledging to continue the drastic budget cuts and other austerity measures carried out by previous Greek governments.

But this did not prevent Amir Khadir, QS’s longest-serving legislator and former parliamentary leader, taking his place alongside a representative of Syriza and applauding his false promises to protect pensions. Khadir also recommended that his organization adopt Syriza as a model so as to become a viable candidate for government office.

Less than a month later, on the eve of a referendum organized by Syriza to camouflage its own submission to the diktats of the troika, Khadir published an open letter to Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. “We admire your courage in challenging European finance and the governments in their pay,” he wrote.

The same day, July 4, Québec Solidaire helped organize a rally in front of the Greek consulate in Montreal in support of the Greek government. Before the hundreds of people present, the president of Québec Solidaire, Andrés Fontecilla, referring to the European powers, said: “Syriza has created a political space that enrages and terrifies them.”

The next day, with the announcement of the massive No vote by the Greek population to the latest version of the austerity plan of the European Union, the euphoria in the ranks of Québec Solidaire reached its peak. QS President Fontecilla hailed the result as “a great victory for democracy” and “the greatest setback that neoliberalism has had until now,” before proudly declaring that “Québec Solidaire has forged ties with its cousin Syriza.”

But since then there has been no reference to the situation in Greece on the web site of Québec Solidaire or in its press releases. Québec Solidaire’s enthusiasm for its “cousin Syriza” and its purported “anti-austerity struggle” has singularly chilled.

Why the sudden silence?

The answer lies in the measures taken by the Syriza government after the referendum: the tens of billions of euros in additional social cuts, the raising of the retirement age from 62 to 67, the hike in the sales tax, a new round of privatization—in short, an even more draconian austerity program than those imposed by previous Greek governments.

This represents a monumental betrayal of the Greek workers who, faced with unemployment and mass poverty caused by the terrible austerity plan of the troika, took Syriza at its word last January when it campaigned for election on an anti-austerity program. These same working masses then indicated by their massive No in the referendum of July 5 their determination to resist the dictates of the European Union and to do so under conditions where the European bourgeoisie, under

German leadership, was threatening to push Greece into a financial and economic abyss.

This capitulation shows what forces such as Syriza and Québec Solidaire are capable of.

These organizations, who describe themselves as “new left parties,” have been established with the stated aim of filling the political vacuum in official bourgeois politics created by the adoption of neoliberalism by the traditional “left” parliamentary parties, the social-democrats and Stalinist Communist Parties.

Despite their diverse origins—Syriza is an amalgam of forces previously associated with PASOK and the Greek Communist Party; the German Left Party brought together the successor organization to the ruling East German Stalinist party and a section of dissident Social Democrats and trade union bureaucrats; and Québec Solidaire is a coalition of “left” Quebec nationalists, community activists and Pabloites and other pseudo-Marxists—all these parties denounce austerity and neoliberalism from a populist standpoint and oppose the struggle for socialism and the revolutionary mobilization of the working class.

These organizations of the pseudo-left represent the interests, not of the working class, but of sections of the upper middle class and petty bourgeoisie. Devoted body and soul to the defense of capitalism, and animated by a profound nationalism that reflects their political subordination to their own ruling class, they will not hesitate to impose social misery on the population, as demonstrated by Syriza in Greece.

From the beginning, the Tsipras government firmly rejected the only possible way of countering the troika’s plans for social devastation, namely a revolutionary mobilization of Greek workers against their own bourgeoisie, and an appeal to the workers of Germany and all of Europe for a common struggle against European big business and its instrument, the European Union.

Québec Solidaire is a political formation of the same ilk. It defines itself as a “citizens’ party,” dedicated to promoting a “feminist,” “ecologist,” “anti-globalization” and “sovereigntist” (pro-Quebec independence) perspective—in other words, to the promotion of all kinds of identity and nationalist politics that articulate the aspirations of sections of the upper middle class and petty bourgeoisie for greater privileges and power within the existing capitalist order, while obscuring the fundamental antagonism between the working class and the bourgeoisie.

QS hopes to reach the corridors of power as an ally of the big-business Parti Québécois, on the basis of their

common support for the reactionary program of Quebec independence—that is, the creation of a third imperialist state in North America.

To convince the ruling elite of its usefulness as a “left” cover for the PQ, with whom it has sought and still seeks to establish an electoral alliance, Québec Solidaire occasionally takes an anti-austerity stance, denouncing the most odious social cuts of the current Liberal government of Philippe Couillard and Treasury Board President Martin Coiteux.

But its credibility has been deeply undermined by the capitulation of its “cousin Syriza.” As Réjean Parent, former head of the Central Trade Union of Quebec, who was at first friendly toward Québec Solidaire (he has already served as a mediator in an attempt to unify the sovereignist parties) wrote in the *Journal de Montréal*: “Alexis Tsipras working to sell the austerity plan imposed by Europe—it is as if Québec Solidaire in power were implementing the austerity plan of Martin Coiteux.”

Québec Solidaire has always worked to strengthen the bureaucratic straightjacket the pro-capitalist unions represent for the working class and to divide workers in Quebec from their class brothers and sisters in the rest of Canada through the promotion of Quebec separatism.

QS’s cowardly silence on Syriza’s betrayal is due to its embarrassment at the exposure of its Greek ally as a political fraud and recognition of the hollowness of its own opposition to austerity. QS’s view of Syriza is effectively “there but for the grace of God go I.”

Above all, QS doesn’t want workers in Quebec to draw the lessons of Syriza’s emergence as the instrument of European big business for further impoverishing the Greek workers—the impossibility of opposing the ruling class drive to destroy what remains of the social conquests of the working class on the basis of a pro-capitalist and nationalist perspective.

The “diplomatic” silence QS has observed on Greece since July 5 must be taken as a warning that should it ever come to power it will implement the diktats of big business just as faithfully and fully as its Greek “cousin.”



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