

Québec Solidaire makes new overtures to big business PQ

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The pseudo-left Québec Solidaire (QS) reaffirmed its participation in OUI Québec, the pro-Quebec independence coalition led by the big business Parti Québécois (PQ), at its National Council meeting held in late November. The QS National Council also proclaimed its readiness to explore “the possibility of convergences and alliances with other political and social movements,” so as to hasten Quebec’s “exit” from the “deadend” into which the provincial Liberal government of Philippe Couillard has led it.

These positions constitute a transparent overture from QS to the pro-austerity, pro-war PQ for an alliance in the name of “defeating the Liberals” at the next provincial election, slated for spring 2018. They were accompanied by a recitation of the reservations that QS—a party of the upper middle class, which, despite certain grievances, defends the existing capitalist order and is intent on integrating itself into the ruling elite—usually makes when it talks about its relations with the PQ. For example, Françoise David, the QS parliamentary leader, declared: “People will not be satisfied with a pale copy of the Quebec Liberal Party.”

In the newsrooms of the corporate media and ruling class circles, precisely no one was fooled. The political establishment unanimously interpreted the QS National Council’s decisions as a step toward closer collaboration with the PQ. “Québec Solidaire accepts the hand of the PQ,” was the headline that the Quebec City daily *Le Soleil* gave to its report on the results of the QS leadership meeting. For his part, the PQ’s new leader, Jean-François Lisée, welcomed the outcome of the National Council’s deliberations, saying it was a “message” from QS that “the absolute priority is to get rid of the Liberal government.”

Although the Couillard government is detested among the population for its right-wing policies, including drastic public service cuts, welfare-benefit cuts, and attacks on

public sector worker pensions, the Official Opposition PQ continues to lag in the polls because it itself is so closely associated with the program of capitalist austerity.

Workers remember the tens of thousands of jobs that the PQ government of Lucien Bouchard eliminated in health care and education in the mid-1990s. And students and younger workers saw how the six-month-long 2012 Quebec student strike was politically hijacked by the PQ—with the indispensable assistance of the trade union federations and Québec Solidaire. The Pauline Marois-led PQ government that came to power as a result of this maneuver quickly accelerated the dismantling of social services, while whipping up anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim prejudice with its chauvinist Charter of Quebec Values.

It is in this context that the QS National Council has closed ranks with the PQ in order to give it a “left” cover. The QS leadership is well aware of the explosive character of class relations. They are turning to the PQ to prevent popular anger against the austerity measures of the Liberal government from developing into an open working-class challenge to the entire class program of the ruling elite in Quebec and across Canada.

As in 2012, the goal of QS is to help the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracy channel the rising opposition to the Liberals behind the Quebec elite’s other traditional party of government, the PQ, while working to resuscitate the discredited project of a separate capitalist Quebec and to prevent Quebec workers from uniting their struggles with those of their class brothers and sisters in the rest of Canada and internationally.

This is the meaning of the remarks Françoise David made at the end of the National Council meeting. “After years of austerity,” said David, “we are called on by ... intellectuals, union leaders, citizens, all concerned about the future of our society. These progressives want to build bridges with other movements, other parties. Yesterday’s

answer from the members of Québec Solidaire is: We have heard you; we are ready to dialogue.”

In an attempt to portray its plans for a union-backed, “anti-Liberal” electoral bloc with the PQ as a “progressive,” “anti-austerity” alliance, QS has listed a series of so-called conditions for its participation. Needless to say, these conditions in no way call into question the subordination of socio-economic life to big business. In fact, they are so vacuous a run-of-the-mill PQ or Liberal politician would have no trouble signing on to them.

They include a vague commitment to “reinvest in public services,” the recognition of “feminism as a shared value,” the desire to see “the end of the development of hydrocarbons on Quebec soil,” and a preference for “a proportional voting system.” They make no call for opposition to the Canadian Armed Forces’ major and growing role in Washington’s wars and military-strategic offensives in the Middle East and against Russia and China—an expansion of Canadian militarism and imperialism that is supported by the PQ and the rest of the Quebec sovereigntist movement.

Welcoming Québec Solidaire’s call for an anti-Liberal “progressive,” pro-Quebec sovereigntist alliance, the head of Option Nationale—a small right-wing nationalist party founded by an ex-banker and former PQ legislator—declared the “enumerated conditions”...“interesting.”

The only real points of contention between QS and the PQ relate to tactics concerning the accession to Quebec independence, particularly the timing of another independence referendum. “The PQ of Jean-François Lisée wants to put off a referendum indefinitely,” said David’s co-official QS spokesperson, Andrés Fontecilla. “So Québec Solidaire is now the only party represented in the National Assembly which places the independence of Quebec at the center of its priorities.”

These tactical differences aside, QS and the PQ have a shared vision for the reshuffling of the North American nation-state system to create a capitalist *République du Québec*, that is, a state more exclusively focused on promoting the economic and geostrategic interests of Quebec’s French-speaking bourgeoisie. They both invoke nationalism as a means to politically subordinate Quebec workers to “their” ruling class, insisting that Quebecois workers have more in common with the Quebec bourgeoisie—including the PQ’s ex-leader and media and telecommunications magnate, Pierre-Karl Péladeau—than with their English-speaking and immigrant class brothers

and sisters in the rest of Canada and the United States.

In a recent speech, QS National Assembly deputy Manon Massé promoted “national unity,” that is the suppression of the class struggle. “The responsibility of a credible political movement,” said Massé, “is to foster social dialogue and bring Quebecers together around collective interests, not to divide them according to their differences.”

Many of the most virulent nationalists are to be found in the Pabloite and other ostensibly Marxist groups that have dissolved into Québec Solidaire and function within it as a loyal fraction, helping give it a “radical” tinge.

A typical representative of these tendencies, QS Gatineau spokesperson Benoît Renaud, recently invoked the global “rise of the radical right”—the “xenophobic parties” in Europe and the election of Donald Trump as US president—to argue that Québec Solidaire should carry out a more aggressive campaign for Quebec independence. This he claimed is the only way “to strike a blow in favor of a more democratic, egalitarian, ecological and peaceful humanity.”

Renaud concluded his nationalist diatribe by adopting Trump’s economic nationalist rhetoric. He issued his own call to “assert our national sovereignty, to say ‘No’ to treaties which claim to promote free trade but which actually protect the interests of multinationals.” This position has nothing to do with the struggle for the unity of the international working class against the transnationals and world capitalism, which requires implacable opposition to all forms of nationalism and the struggle to mobilize the working class as an independent political force. Rather, it echoes ultra-right-wing forces, such as Trump and the neo-fascist National Front in France, who condemn free trade treaties from the perspective of certain sections of their own national bourgeoisie, who fear losing out in the struggle for markets and profits.

The language adopted by Renaud highlights yet again the reactionary character of the Quebec independence project, as well as the growing similarity between the political positions of the pseudo-left and the extreme right.



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