

Québec Solidaire leader Françoise David quits politics

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The parliamentary leader of Québec Solidaire (QS), Françoise David, has announced that she is leaving politics, citing health reasons, specifically “exhaustion.” David, 69, has been one of the principal leaders of QS and its most prominent spokesperson since the ostensibly leftwing, pro-Quebec independence party was founded more than a decade ago.

Quebec’s political establishment and media responded to David’s resignation with gushing tributes.

Quebec Liberal Premier Philippe Couillard, who has presided over sweeping social spending cuts, praised David for having “contributed greatly” to helping “maintain a civilized tone” even when “we...disagree on the political orientation of Quebec.”

Jean-François Lisée, the leader of the big business, *indépendantiste* Parti Québécois, said “She (David) has been able to make our political mores gentler.”

The Montreal daily *Le Devoir*, which serves as a house organ for Quebec’s pro-independence political establishment and intelligentsia, hailed David as “a pragmatic politician,” who was ready to work with her political opponents in the National Assembly.

These ruling-class representatives sized up David accurately, recognizing that her rhetorical “leftism” posed no threat to the existing social order.

Rejecting the fundamental division of society into antagonistic social classes, David promoted the fiction of a “Quebec people” united by a common language (French) and able to act collectively to achieve social progress through parliamentary action—perhaps facilitated by occasional friendly pressure from “the streets”—but without serious social conflict or ever challenging capitalism.

Since its founding in 2006, QS has sought to revive the discredited program of creating a capitalist *République du Québec*, while working with the trade union bureaucracy to suppress the class struggle and prevent Quebec workers from joining forces with workers in the rest of Canada to oppose the revival of Canadian militarism and the big-business assault on jobs, wages and social and public services.

Québec Solidaire’s hostility to the struggle for the political independence of the working class was highlighted during the months-long student strike in 2012, when it helped the trade unions divert the opposition to the austerity measures of Jean Charest’s Liberal government behind the Parti Québécois and its campaign for the September 2012 election.

While QS proclaims itself a party of the “left,” it describes itself

neither as a workers’ or a socialist party, but rather as a “citizens’ party,” based on feminist, Quebec sovereignist, anti-globalization and environmentalist values. With its identity-based appeals focused on gender, sexual orientation, language and culture, Québec Solidaire articulates the grievances of sections of the upper middle classes and seeks to carve out for itself a place within the political establishment.

David was at the forefront of Québec Solidaire’s attempts to groom itself for government, by advancing “fiscally responsible” and “economically credible” policies—i.e., by declaring its readiness to impose austerity—and to give the PQ a “left” cover. Quebec’s alternate party of government, the PQ has seen its support in the working class hemorrhage over the past two decades, because it has slashed public services and attacked workers’ rights whenever it has held office.

At the press conference at which David announced her retirement, she enthused over the QS’s decision at its last National Council meeting to intensify “dialogue” with other “progressive” *indépendantiste* parties, above all the PQ. In her final act as QS leader, David thus emphasized her support for the union leaders’ longstanding efforts to politically suppress the working class by subordinating it to the PQ, this time under the pretext of “defeating the Liberals” in the next provincial election, slated for October 2018.

Françoise David’s political evolution, from one-time student radical and Maoist to capitalist politician, is emblematic of a whole layer of the middle class, which was radicalized in the 1960s and early 1970s, but always denigrated and opposed the struggle to win the working class to a socialist-internationalist program.

In the 1980s, this layer turned abruptly to the right. Many have openly embraced “free-market” capitalism, imperialist war, and Québécois chauvinism, such as Gilles Duceppe, the former leader of the separatist Bloc Québécois (BQ), the PQ’s sister party in federal politics. Others, like Françoise David, have retained a vaguely “progressive” posture, based on the promotion of identity politics.

David comes from a politically influential, bourgeois family. Her grandfather, Athanase David, was an important member of the Liberal provincial government led by Louis-Alexandre Taschereau from 1920 to 1936. Her father founded the Montreal Heart Institute in 1954 and sat as a Conservative Senator from 1985 until his retirement in 1994. Her sister, Hélène, is the Minister for Higher Education in the current Couillard Liberal government, and

one of her brothers, Charles-Philippe, is considered a Canadian foreign policy expert.

In the midst of the militant struggles of the international working class in the 1960s and 1970s, David became active in the student protest movement, graduating from the University of Montreal in 1972 with a degree in social work. A few years later, she joined and became a prominent leader of the Quebec Maoist group *En Lutte!* (In Struggle!). Gilles Duceppe, the son of a prominent Quebec actor, was also active in the Maoist movement during this period.

The attraction Maoism had for these radicalized middle class elements was based on its essential nature as a variant of Stalinism: extreme nationalism; the rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class in favor of peasant populism; unconditional support for Stalin and his bloody repression of the defenders of international socialism (Trotsky and the Left Opposition); and the political subordination of workers to the “progressive” wing of the bourgeoisie (Mao’s “bloc of four classes”).

The political orientation of these elements underwent a profound transformation with the decline of the international student protest movement against the Vietnam War and the restabilization of world capitalism after 1975.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the coming to power of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in Britain marked the rejection by the ruling class, under the weight of the resurgent contradictions of capitalism, of its post-Second World War policy of class compromise in favor of class war. The former radicals of the 1960s and 1970s made their own sharp turn to the right and broke any association they might have had, however limited, with Marxism and revolutionary politics.

Reconciling themselves with capitalism, they now aspired to the highest echelons of society, whether by enriching themselves in business and the stock market or obtaining management positions in the public services, unions and universities. Their ascent was eased by the policies of success Quebec governments?including the PQ’s Law 101 with its “affirmative action” type measures—to promote Québécois-owned companies and open up managerial positions for French speakers.

In Quebec, the militant struggles of the working class in the preceding period had been diverted, by the unions, with the help of the Stalinist Communist Party, the Maoists, and the Pabloite renegades from Trotskyism, behind the Parti Québécois and “left” nationalism.

It is in this environment, deeply hostile to the interests of the working class, that David subsequently made her political career.

After *En Lutte!* collapsed in 1982, David immersed herself in the community-activist movement, which has always moved in the political orbit of the Parti Québécois. In 1994, she became the president of the main feminist organization in Quebec, the Quebec Women’s Federation (QWF), thus completing her passage from Maoism, superficially oriented towards workers’ struggles, to feminism, based, like all identity politics, on the explicit rejection of the class struggle.

As head of the QWF, David organized the “Bread and Roses” march in 1995 and the World March of Women against Poverty

and Violence in 2000. In a telling commentary on the fundamentally conservative character of David’s politics, focused as it was on pressuring the establishment, Quebec’s then PQ Premier Jacques Parizeau said of the 1995 march: “Thank you for disturbing us to this extent.”

David was part of the “rainbow coalition” in favor of Quebec independence that Parizeau created to fight the 1995 referendum on Quebec’s secession from the Canadian federal state. Under the banner of the “Yes Committee,” this coalition formally bound together the Parti Québécois, the Bloc Québécois, the right-wing populist ADQ of Mario Dumont, Quebec’s trade union federations, and many pseudo-left groups, including the Pabloite *Gauche Socialiste* (Socialist Left.)

In 2006, David played a central role in the founding of Québec Solidaire, through the merger of the *Union des forces progressistes* and *Option citoyenne*, an organization largely comprised of feminist and antipoverty activists that David had founded in 2004.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained in its evaluation of Québec Solidaire’s first decade, “Although it occasionally bemoans certain excesses of ‘neo-liberal capitalism,’ QS is a pseudo-left, pro-capitalist party that articulates the aspirations and grievances not of the working class, but of privileged sections of the upper-middle class—academics and other professionals, trade union functionaries and small business owners. It aspires to gain respectability in the eyes of the ruling elite and become a major player in official bourgeois politics.”

On numerous occasions, QS has provided indirect and even outright support for Canada’s participation in US-led imperialist interventions and wars, including in Afghanistan and Libya, and for NATO’s claims to be responding to Russian “aggression” in Ukraine.

The goal of QS is not to overthrow rotting capitalism but to safeguard it. In a context where support for the traditional political parties is collapsing because of their association with austerity and war, the ruling class needs new mechanisms to suppress the class struggle.

SYRIZA, a pseudo-left party that QS rightfully describes as its “cousin,” won office in Greece in 2015 by promising to end capitalist austerity, only to impose cuts to pensions, public services and the minimum wage even greater than its openly rightwing predecessors. Françoise David’s political legacy is to have prepared Québec Solidaire to play a similar role.



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