

Québec Solidaire prepares merger with right-wing nationalists

Richard Dufour
7 August 2017

Pseudo-left organizations across Canada are hailing Québec Solidaire (QS), the pro-independence “new left” party, claiming that its recent annual congress represented a major advance in the building of a genuine alternative to the pro-austerity parties of the establishment.

Held in Montreal in late May, the congress was the scene of bitter wrangling over a proposal—supported by most of the QS leadership, but ultimately rejected by the delegates—for an electoral pact with the big-business Parti Québécois (PQ).

Writing in *Socialist Project*, Richard Fidler praised the gathering as a “united front against austerity and for independence,” while the International Socialists, the Canadian sister party of the US-based International Socialist Organization, enthused that the “largest convention in its 11-year history” had produced “historic strides” for QS.

Such rhetoric bears no relation to what took place. Despite its “left” populist rhetoric, QS is a party of the well-to-do middle class, hostile to the class struggle and thoroughly integrated into the PQ-dominated Quebec sovereigntist movement. This movement serves as a political springboard for a section of the Quebec ruling class that wants greater autonomy and power for the Quebec state through secession from, or at least a radical restructuring of, the Canadian federation.

The creation of a capitalist *République du Québec* is antithetical to the interests of working people. It would weaken the working class by creating new state barriers to uniting Quebec workers with their class brothers and sisters in the rest of Canada and be used by the Quebec bourgeoisie to strengthen its position on the world stage and intensify the assault on the working class.

At the QS congress, the party’s top brass were virtually unanimous in advocating an electoral pact with the PQ, in the name of defeating the ruling Liberals in the provincial election slated to be held in October 2018.

QS Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Amir Khadir trumpeted a plan to have the two parties field a common candidate in some 30 electoral districts to avoid “splitting the sovereigntist vote.” This, he gushed, could enable QS to at least triple its current three-member delegation in the 125-seat National Assembly.

However, a majority of the delegates felt the QS would be

badly discredited if it entered into a formal alliance with a big-business party that stokes anti-immigrant chauvinism and has imposed savage austerity measures whenever it has held office.

Québec Solidaire’s rejection of a formal alliance with the PQ is a tactical maneuver. It does not represent a break with QS’s basic orientation, whether it be working as an integral part of the PQ-led sovereignty movement or seeking to carve out a place for itself in the political establishment as a “responsible” force—and possible partner in a pro-independence government.

In a decision that highlights that Québec Solidaire remains ready to work with right-wing Quebec nationalists, the congress delegates voted by a massive majority to open merger negotiations with Option Nationale (ON). Formed by former PQ leaders disappointed by its supposed lack of zeal for independence, ON regularly denounces QS from the right for its timid reformist promises. According to ON, QS puts “too much emphasis” on social issues and should instead focus all its energies on promoting Quebec independence.

The QS leadership was clearly taken aback by the rejection of its plans for an electoral alliance with the PQ. But it quickly shifted gears, declaring that the vote showed that QS is among the “left-wing” movements that “are leaving behind the old parties, the old way of doing business in politics,” citing as examples Bernie Sanders in the United States and Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France.

This is part of QS’s efforts to give itself a radical aura, the better to block a real break by workers and young people with the capitalist system and with the “left” political mechanisms that ensure its survival.

This is the type of role played by Sanders and Mélenchon. The former worked to channel the growing anti-capitalist sentiments of millions of young Americans behind the big-business Democratic Party and Hillary Clinton, the preferred candidate of Wall Street, in the 2016 presidential election. The latter, a former leader of the Socialist Party (PS), provided a “left” foil for Emmanuel Macron in this year’s presidential election. Although Macron has been brought to power to intensify the frontal attack launched by the previous PS government of Francois Hollande on the democratic and social rights of French workers, Mélenchon has repeatedly offered to work with him, including by serving as his prime minister.

Québec Solidaire similarly seeks to keep the working class within the straitjacket of establishment politics. During the province-wide student strike in 2012, QS helped the union bureaucracy channel a youth revolt that threatened to trigger a working-class upsurge against the austerity program of Jean Charest's Liberals behind the election of a PQ government. Two months before the election, when the strike was at its height, QS urged the PQ to join it in an electoral alliance and just days before the vote, QS pledged its unconditional support for a PQ minority government.

Even without a formal agreement with the PQ, QS is continuing to promote this right-wing party. The congress had barely ended when the two newly elected spokespersons of Québec Solidaire, Manon Massé and Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois (one of the principal leaders of the 2012 student strike), were again reaching out to the Parti Québécois.

"This is a period when we are going to have to reestablish links, to learn to trust," Massé said in an interview with the *Le Devoir*, a daily close to sovereignist circles.

She then responded favorably to the PQ, which was demanding that QS leaders "dissociate" themselves from criticisms leveled against it on the congress floor—the fact that some delegates had pointed to the austerity measures imposed by PQ governments and to the anti-Muslim appeals it made in promoting its chauvinist Charter of Quebec Values. While saying she "understood" why QS members might make such criticisms, Massé sought to minimize them by declaring that "the Parti Québécois is clearly not racist."

As for Nadeau-Dubois, he quickly distanced himself from any criticism of the PQ. "I invite all sovereignists, all progressives to focus on the party in power that has weakened Quebec over the last 15 years," he said after being elected to the National Assembly in a May 29 by-election, held due to the retirement of QS leader Françoise David.

In a June 8 press briefing Nadeau-Dubois explained that the decision taken at the QS congress was simply to present candidates in all ridings, and not to "not work with the Parti Québécois in any context and under any conditions."

The president of Québec Solidaire, Nika Deslauriers, spoke in the same vein, declaring after the congress: "We would like to reaffirm that we will continue to collaborate in the work of YES-Quebec at the appropriate time."

YES-Quebec (United Organizations for Independence) has served for years as a mechanism through which Québec Solidaire maintains close ties with the entire Quebec sovereignist movement. This includes the trade union bureaucracy, which for decades has politically subordinated workers to the PQ, while stifling working-class opposition to employer attacks, including recently scuttling a province-wide strike of 175,000 construction workers.

The turn of QS towards a more aggressive promotion of Quebec nationalism through its proposed merger with ON is deeply reactionary. Daily life is demonstrating ever more

clearly that the fundamental problems facing Quebec workers—capitalist austerity and war—are those facing workers in English Canada, the US, and around the world and that their solution requires the mobilization of the international working class on a socialist program. Yet QS is working with the unions to isolate and divide Quebec workers from the international working class and bind them to the pro-sovereignty wing of the bourgeoisie.

Moreover, Québec Solidaire's decision to prepare a merger with Option Nationale is intended primarily to facilitate a future rapprochement with the Parti Québécois.

"Negotiations for the YES-Quebec road map will have to succeed, because independentists will need a common strategy more than ever before," Option Nationale head Sol Zanetti wrote recently. He then went on to conclude on this note: "QS and the PQ will have to consider the idea of temporary electoral pacts in the light of the new conjuncture."

In spite of the "progressive" or even "left" label that is attached to it by the numerous pseudo-left groups that have dissolved themselves into it, Québec Solidaire stands revealed as being, like Option Nationale, a right-wing nationalist party.

The anti-worker content of the independence program was openly articulated by Jean-Martin Aussant, the investment banker who founded Option Nationale with the political support of Jacques Parizeau—an ex-PQ Premier, who until his death in 2015 was seen as the leader of the "hardliners" who demand a complete break with the Canadian federal state.

"Independence will enable us to better manage all the other issues: health, education, infrastructure, economic development," said Aussant in 2012. This was followed by an explanation that unmasks QS's fraudulent attempts to present Quebec independence as a democratic project and vehicle for social progress.

"When we talk about restructuring school boards and health agencies, rationalizing the state," said the founder of Option Nationale, "it is associated with a certain right administratively and economically."

In other words, the reorganization of the state apparatus required for the achievement of Quebec independence would be used by the ruling class to launch an all-out assault on what remains of public services and workers' social rights.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact