

Quebec Solidaire joins with the hard-right in promoting economic nationalism

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The *World Socialist Web Site* recently exposed how Quebec Solidaire (QS)—a pseudo-left party that holds ten seats in the 125-member Quebec National Assembly—has supported Canadian authorities' disastrous handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and facilitated their efforts to compel a premature return to work that puts corporate profits before human lives. (See: [Quebec Solidaire backs Canadian elite's disastrous handling of COVID-19 pandemic](#))

The coronavirus crisis has also provided QS with an opportunity to join forces with the province's right-wing populist, "Quebec First" CAQ (Coalition Avenir Québec) government in promoting a reactionary economic nationalist agenda.

Quebec Solidaire enthusiastically applauded the CAQ government's "Blue basket" initiative, a website promoting "Quebec made" products. The "Blue basket" is based on the principle, spelled out by Quebec Premier Francois Legault, that "we should be self-sufficient for goods that are essential." QS, for its part, calls on the CAQ government "to set an example by investing in our local businesses," and advocates that it "replace 40 percent" of the purchases Quebec departments and agencies make from out-of-province firms "with local purchases within four years."

Quebec Solidaire has also responded positively to the CAQ's proposal that Quebec become self-sufficient in medical equipment. QS advocates Quebec take "control of our medical supply" and create a new Quebec government agency, Pharma-Québec. This it claims would allow for a coronavirus vaccine to "be produced here in Quebec as soon as it is ready, with the sole objective of making it quickly accessible to the Quebec population."

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is threatening millions of lives around the world, demonstrating the need for a science-based, internationally-coordinated response, Quebec Solidaire is trumpeting its nationalist egoism and parochialism.

Its reactionary utopia of "buying locally" and "developing a Quebec vaccine" exclusively for Quebecers is part of pronounced shift by ruling elites in Canada, the United States and the world over towards national protectionism, intensified strategic competition, and virulent chauvinism.

This includes all sections of the political establishment—from Trump and the ultra-right to pseudo-left parties such as Quebec Solidaire and the German Left Party, as well as the traditional parties of government, liberal, conservative, and social-democratic.

These forces are exploiting the health and socio-economic catastrophe triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic to promote protectionism, including local production of "strategic resources," and the strengthening of the state—based on the spurious claim that dependence on the import of N95 masks and other medical supplies has been a major factor in the pandemic's deadly impact.

In reality, the current catastrophe is the product of decades of capitalist austerity that gutted the public health system, including stockpiles of medical supplies, and the criminal inaction of ruling elites before the

spread of COVID-19. Although the World Health Organization (WHO) was issuing ever more urgent warnings about the global threat COVID-19 represented from mid-January, only on March 10 did Canada's federal Liberal government contact the provinces to ask them about possible shortages of masks, ventilators and other medical supplies.

As in the 1930s, economic nationalism is a stratagem and a war-cry, through which the rival nationally-based capitalist cliques pursue an increasingly frenzied global struggle for markets, resources, profits and strategic advantage, while massively increasing their military budgets and war preparations.

This is the meaning of the shrill calls from US President Donald Trump for American companies to reduce their presence in China and their dependence on Chinese products, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's recent repudiation of Washington's five-decade old policy of "engagement" with Beijing in favor of a strategic offensive against China explicitly aimed at regime-change.

Along the same lines, Canada's Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland called in a recent interview for a "shift" in the Canadian economic "model" to place "greater emphasis on supply chains that are closer to home."

By enthusiastically taking up economic nationalist demands, Quebec Solidaire is joining anti-globalization forces dominated by the right and the extreme right. In reality, global economic integration massively increases humanity's productive capacities and offers the potential to fully satisfy the social needs of all. The real problem is that the world economy remains chained to the capitalist profit system and the straitjacket of rival nation-states.

Protectionism and economic nationalism are, in the final analysis, only preparations for war.

QS has demonstrated that it is a pro-imperialist and pro-war party. It has supported Ottawa's neo-colonial interventions alongside Washington, whether in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria or Iraq, helping to provide them with "humanitarian" pretexts. It has maintained a complicit silence not only on the drastic increase in Canada's military spending, but also on the Canadian Armed Forces' participation in US imperialism's military-strategic offensives, especially against China and Russia. Underscoring its pro-war character, QS voted at its last convention for an independent Quebec to build its own army.

QS and the reactionary program of Quebec independence

QS's promotion of reactionary economic nationalism is inseparable from its advocacy of the creation of an independent *République du Québec*—the formation of a new capitalist and imperialist state through Quebec's secession from the Canadian federal state.

The claim that Quebec *indépendantiste* nationalism “progressive alternative” to Canadian imperialism had been completely exposed by the actions of its historic champion, the big business Parti Québécois (PQ). Whenever the PQ has formed Quebec’s provincial government during the past half-century, it has imposed capitalist austerity and adopted strike-breaking laws. And over the past decade-and-a-half it has made a pronounced turn further right, promoting chauvinist legislation attacking immigrants, Muslims and other religious minorities.

The pro-independence agenda promoted by the PQ and QS serves to divide Quebec workers from their class brothers and sisters in the rest of Canada, the United States and overseas, while politically subordinating them to the “sovereignist” wing of the Quebec ruling class. This faction seeks to “repatriate” constitutional powers from Ottawa and even a separate state, based on the calculation that it can use them to advance its geopolitical interests on the world stage and intensify its assault on working people at home.

By promoting economic nationalism as a key part of its “national project,” Quebec Solidaire is aligning with the most reactionary elements, including the right-wing populist tabloid *Journal de Montréal*. Owned by former PQ leader and media and telecommunications mogul Pierre Karl Péladeau, the *Journal de Montréal* regularly spews out anti-immigrant and anti-refugee rants. One of its star columnists, far-right ideologist Mathieu Bock-Côté, was quick to take up cudgels to promote Legault’s protectionism. “A nation that does not control the levers of its sovereignty and relative industrial autonomy in strategic areas,” he wrote, “puts itself at the mercy of its foreign suppliers in times of crisis.”

QS makes common cause with the right-wing nationalist CAQ

Quebec Solidaire has been largely silent on the two chauvinist laws passed by the Legault government: Bill 9 which lowers immigration quotas and adds “cultural criteria” to the selection of immigrants; and Bill 21 which in the name of promoting “secularism,” targets ethnic minorities by prohibiting the wearing of Islamic headscarves or other religious symbols by teachers, and deprives Muslim women with face-covering veils of essential public services.

QS proclaimed itself the “real opposition” when intense popular hostility to the Liberals and PQ, the parties that had alternately governed Quebec since 1970, catapulted it to third place in the October 2018 provincial election. But the fraudulent character of this claim was demonstrated within days, when it conspicuously absented itself from a demonstration of immigrant workers denouncing the CAQ’s chauvinist policies.

Since its founding in 2006, Quebec Solidaire has pursued a political alliance with the “sovereignist” wing of the Quebec bourgeoisie—first with the big-business PQ, and now increasingly with the CAQ.

Quebec Solidaire’s occasional criticisms of the CAQ are completely hypocritical. At a press briefing on May 26, for example, QS spokesperson and House Leader Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois accused Legault of being “part of [the] political class that has pushed the austerity narrative for years.” But how can one talk merely of a “narrative” for a man who has been running the Quebec government since October 2018 and previously served as a PQ minister?

A millionaire, former CEO of Air Transat, Legault has spent his entire political career as a staunch advocate of privatization, deregulation, and the gutting of public services. Before becoming Premier of Quebec, he was successively Minister of Industry, Minister of Education, and Minister of Health under the PQ governments of Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry, which implemented the greatest social spending cuts in

Quebec’s history. These, combined with the extensive cuts made by subsequent Liberal and PQ governments, have reduced the health care system to its current dilapidated state, thereby facilitating the rapid spread of COVID-19.

Nadeau-Dubois is falsifying not only Legault’s political past, but also his current political role. “The CAQ government,” claimed the QS spokesperson, “came to power in a situation where it could enjoy a [budgetary] surplus created by years of austerity. So, it didn’t have to do it itself.”

In fact, the entire policy pursued by the CAQ since it came to power is one of brutal capitalist austerity. It has staffed the government with business leaders dedicated to deregulation and privatization; cut taxes on big business and diverted vast sums from public services to paying down the provincial debt; introduced chauvinistic laws targeting immigrants and ethnic minorities; and denounced “excessive” wage levels in Quebec’s manufacturing sector.

The Legault government took advantage of the coronavirus crisis to invoke a state of health emergency and arrogate to itself extraordinary powers allowing it to override collective agreements, reassign employees in disregard of job definitions, extend working hours, and cancel vacation days and holidays.

With the blessing of Justin Trudeau’s federal Liberal government, the Quebec premier has organized a premature return to work that puts thousands of lives at risk, under conditions where the coronavirus continues to spread like wildfire across North America. The main goal of Legault’s back-to-work drive is to allow his friends and partners in big business circles to continue to enrich themselves on the backs of workers.

Legault is now seeking to impose, with the full complicity of the public sector trade unions, new collective agreements that will reduce real wages and worsen working conditions for more than half a million government employees. All this under conditions where thousands of health care workers have been infected, and many have died, due to a lack of PPE (personal protective equipment).

Quebec Solidaire’s statement that Legault’s government is not pursuing capitalist austerity is not just political nonsense. It is a serious warning to workers that this pseudo-left party, which represents privileged layers of the middle class, will do everything in its power to stifle rising opposition to the CAQ and the entire Canadian ruling elite. Moreover, it is an acknowledgement that should it ever hold governmental power, QS will implement no less ruthless attacks on working people to defend the interests of big business. Anyone in doubt about this should recall the role of QS’s Greek ally Syriza, which came to power in January 2015 posing as a “left” alternative. Once in power, Syriza enforced even more savage austerity policies than its predecessor conservative and social democrat governments.

The criminal negligence of the authorities in the face of the coronavirus has exposed the incompatibility between the profit system and the most basic needs of the masses, including the right to life. This is fuelling growing resistance among workers.

But the more intense the class struggle becomes, the more QS turns to the right. It is thus preparing to play a role even more pernicious than it did during the 2012 Quebec student strike and the 2015 public sector workers’ struggle, when it spread the poison of nationalism and helped the unions contain the explosion of social anger within the existing capitalist framework.

Workers and youth seeking a way out of the bankruptcy of capitalism as a world system must reject the nationalist and pro-capitalist agenda put forward by Quebec Solidaire. The only progressive answer to the current crisis lies in the international unity of the working class and the struggle for world socialism. This is the program for which the Socialist Equality Party is fighting in Canada, in close collaboration with our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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