

Quebec Solidaire embraces the ruling elite's criminal "herd immunity" policy

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— “There were no outbreaks in cinemas. There are more than 100 cases at the Olymel [slaughterhouse]. Why is Olymel open while cinemas are closed?”

— “There are outbreaks at schools, but schools remain open. There are no outbreaks in museums, but museums are closed.”

— “Winter is coming. Can we imagine opening up heated terraces? It is happening elsewhere, in other Nordic countries.”

These comments have been made in the midst of a resurgence of the coronavirus pandemic in Canada, and under conditions where Quebec, with more than 6,600 deaths, has one of the highest COVID-19 death rates in the world (> 775 per million inhabitants).

Their meaning is clear: it is not enough for the government to keep most businesses open and to order public school students to physically attend class. It must follow through on its policy of letting the virus wreak havoc on the population so as not to interfere with corporate profit-making, and lift all restrictions on cinemas, museums and restaurants. The example to follow is that of “Nordic” Sweden, where the authorities officially adopted a laissez-faire attitude in the name of “herd immunity,” leading to a per capita death rate nine times higher than that of neighbouring Finland.

The quotes reproduced above do not come from anti-mask activists and other coronavirus deniers linked to the extreme right. Nor are they remarks of business leaders spearheading the ruinous back-to-work, back-to-school campaign that has led to the current cross-Canada surge in COVID-19 cases. Rather, they were made by the two co-leaders of Quebec Solidaire—Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois (the author of the first two quotes) and Manon Massé (the third quote)—at a recent press conference.

With these statements, Quebec Solidaire (QS) is not just defending and supporting the right-wing CAQ (Coalition Avenir Québec) provincial government's disastrous handling of the pandemic, as it has repeatedly done since last March. QS is emerging as among the most brazen promoters of the ruling class' criminal “herd immunity” policy.

Although generally not openly proclaimed, this policy is being implemented by American and European leaders and by Canada's political establishment —most notably Justin Trudeau's federal Liberal government, Francois Legault's CAQ government, and Ontario's Conservative government. It prioritizes profits over human health and lives.

In Canada, it was Legault's government, with the backing of QS, that took the lead in the campaign for a premature return to

work, when it sought as early as last April to reopen Quebec's schools. Since September, Legault and his CAQ, the hard-right governments of Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and British Columbia's NDP regime have stubbornly persisted with the reopening of schools and businesses even as COVID-19 cases have soared, and workplaces and schools have emerged as major vectors for the virus' transmission.

For their part, sections of the mainstream media, led by the *Toronto Sun*, have enthusiastically echoed the pseudo-scientific call for “herd immunity” made by right-wing scientists in the Great Barrington Declaration.

“Much of Canada is now barreling down the Barrington Highway,” warned the *Globe and Mail*'s award-winning, senior health reporter last week. “In their words and (in)actions,” continued André Picard, governments “have embraced an approach ... that profits matter more than people, that we should let the coronavirus run wild and, if the vulnerable die in service of economic growth, so be it.”

This reckless approach is leading inexorably to a surge in COVID-19 cases and deaths. Since schools reopened at the end of August, cases nationwide have more than doubled, rising from 129,000 to more than 295,000. Government projections show that within a matter of weeks Canada could be recording 10,000 or more new infections per day, which would quickly result in hospitals being overrun with sick and dying patients.

A large majority of Canadians—70 percent, according to a poll conducted last month—support the closure of non-essential businesses to halt the pandemic's “second wave.” Quebec Solidaire, however, is calling for the opposite.

A party of the privileged upper-middle class, QS is opposed to mobilizing working people to fight for the elementary health measures required to halt the pandemic's spread—from closing all schools and non-essential businesses, to pouring massive state resources into systematic testing, contact-tracing and refurbishing a public health system ravaged by decades of capitalist austerity. For QS, it is likewise unthinkable that workers laid off or forced to shelter at home during the pandemic be compensated for all income losses, while the virus is brought under control.

This is because such steps would adversely impact the profitability of Quebec and Canadian capitalism, which underpins the privileges of the social layer for whom Quebec Solidaire speaks, and because they live in trepidation of the growth in class struggle that would be needed to compel implementation of the

requisite measures to protect the population from the pandemic and its economic fallout.

In the twisted pro-capitalist logic of the QS leaders, dozens of cases and one death in a slaughterhouse, and outbreaks at hundreds of schools, become reasons for a further easing of lockdown measures—not the other way around.

This apology for “herd immunity” comes after the QS leadership was criticized by party activists at a September conference for their conciliatory and complacent attitude towards François Legault, an ex-big business CEO, and his right-wing, “Quebec First” CAQ government. But, whether some members like it or not, QS views the pandemic as a golden opportunity to integrate itself even more fully into the political establishment, as evidenced by its defense of Legault’s disastrous handling of the pandemic and its advocacy of “herd immunity.”

Since the beginning of the pandemic, QS has promoted the official lie that Legault and the entire Canadian ruling class were “surprised” by the pandemic, and that such an event was unforeseeable. In reality, many warnings were issued by the scientific community and government institutions long before 2020, including in Canada after the SARS outbreak of 2002-2003. The World Health Organization (WHO) was warning of the immense dangers posed by the coronavirus in mid-January. Yet it was only on March 10 that the Trudeau government even asked the provinces to check for possible shortages of ventilators, PPE (personal protective equipment), and other vital equipment.

Quebec Solidaire joined the corporate media, the New Democratic Party and the unions in covering up the vast sums (more than \$650 billion) the Trudeau government and Bank of Canada poured into the banks, big business, and financial markets at the beginning of the lockdown in March to bail out the rich and super-rich. And QS has regularly reiterated its “faith,” to use Massé’s words, in Quebec’s Public Health agency and its director, Horacio Arruda, who has served as Legault’s right-hand man throughout the pandemic.

A serious response to the health crisis requires the rejection of the social principle defended by Arruda, his political boss Legault, Prime Minister Trudeau, and the entire Canadian ruling elite—the primacy of profit over human life. It also demands coordinated measures at the international level, in close cooperation with scientific experts from around the world—an initiative diametrically opposed to the Quebec nationalism and parochialism that animates all of Quebec Solidaire’s politics and actions.

Defeating the pandemic requires the independent political mobilization of the international working class, which produces society’s wealth, including health care and the equipment essential to the functioning of modern society. If these resources are to be used rationally in the interests of working people, rather than deployed to produce private profit and increase the already gargantuan wealth of the 1 percent, they must be placed under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class as the result of a revolutionary struggle against capitalism and the establishment of workers power.

Quebec Solidaire has no plan to curb the pandemic. Faced with a global pandemic that has revealed the full extent of the economic, social and moral bankruptcy of capitalist society, QS seeks to hide

fundamental class divisions by promoting the reactionary myth of “national unity,” thereby helping bind working people to big business and the capitalist state. “If we want to defeat the virus,” said the QS legislator Nadeau-Dubois, “we need a social contract between the people and the government.” The same call for “national unity” would be used in an independent Quebec, of which QS is an ardent promoter, to subordinate workers to the Quebec ruling class and impose austerity and militarism (see: Quebec Solidaire joins with the hard-right in promoting economic nationalism).

Quebec Solidaire’s support for “herd immunity,” for allowing the pandemic to run rampant, infect masses of people and inflict mass fatalities, is in keeping with the political line advanced by its international sister parties.

In Spain, Podemos is the junior partner in a Socialist Party-led government that has enforced a criminal policy of reopening all sectors of the economy and schools. The result is that Spain has among the highest numbers of infections and deaths in Western Europe. In Germany, leading Left Party politicians have declared their support for the “Swedish model,” i.e., a rejection of all lockdown measures in favour of letting the virus rip through the population. Bodo Ramelow, the Left Party minister president in the state of Thuringia, recently dismissed the threat posed by the virus, claiming that it does not represent a greater danger than a normal lung infection.

In September, *Jacobin*, the semi-official organ of the Democratic Socialists of America, with which QS has fraternal ties, published an interview article that advocated the adoption of the Swedish “herd immunity” policy. One of the two epidemiologists featured in the *Jacobin* article, Harvard University Professor Martin Kulldorff, subsequently helped co-author the Great Barrington Declaration, and in early October was invited to the White House to confer with Trump officials responsible for America’s COVID-19 response.

These experiences are a serious warning to working people. QS now lends support to the right-wing CAQ government and urges that its criminal “herd immunity” policy be expanded still further. Were QS to be successful in following Podemos’ path, and secure a direct role in government, it would be no less ruthless in attacking the working class.



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