

Bloc Québécois campaigns for Canada's Sept. 20 election by boasting of its "convergence" with right-wing populist Coalition Avenir Québec

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During the campaign for Canada's Sept. 20 federal election, the pro-Quebec independence Bloc Québécois (BQ) has once again demonstrated that it is a right-wing party that speaks for a section of the Quebec bourgeoisie. The Bloc's anti-worker character has been underscored by its trumpeting of its affinity with Quebec's Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ—Coalition for Quebec's Future) government, which promotes an explicitly chauvinist, pro-big business Quebec nationalism.

BQ leader Yves-François Blanchet has repeatedly boasted that his party is "in convergence" with Quebec Premier François Legault and his CAQ. Since taking office three years ago, the Legault government has implemented a series of discriminatory measures, including adopting Bills 9 and 21, which in the name of defending "Quebec values" target religious minorities, particularly Muslims.

The Bloc has placed at the very centre of its election campaign its demand that the other federal parties pledge to give no support of any kind to a court challenge to the constitutionality of Bill 21. This discriminatory law prohibits public sector workers deemed in positions of "authority," including tens of thousands of public school teachers, from wearing religious symbols. It prevents anyone from giving or receiving public services with their face covered, a measure explicitly directed against Muslim women. Showing the hypocrisy of Bill 21's supposed promotion of "secularism," it includes in the name of defending Quebec's "heritage" exceptions for Catholic religious symbols and place names.

Blanchet also defends the Quebec government's disastrous response to the pandemic, which has systematically prioritized profits over human lives. The Legault government, with the blessing of Justin Trudeau's federal Liberal government, rushed to reopen nonessential businesses and schools in the spring of 2020, even while the province was reeling from one of the worst COVID-19 death rates per head of population on the planet.

One of the CAQ's key demands is that Quebec be given more control over immigration matters, including full control over family reunification. This has long been a demand of the Quebec sovereignists, such as the Bloc and its provincial sister party, the

Parti Québécois (PQ). The latter imposed brutal austerity measures when in office and turned to unbridled Quebec chauvinism in the 2000s after suffering a hemorrhage in its electoral support, especially in predominantly working class constituencies. Echoing another of the CAQ's chauvinist, anti-immigrant goals, the Bloc has included in its election platform a pledge to introduce legislation to "make sufficient knowledge of French a condition for obtaining citizenship from Quebec."

Both the federalist and pro-independence wings of Quebec's ruling class have been active in stoking Quebec chauvinism for more than a decade. This includes the Bloc, the CAQ, the Quebec Liberal Party, the PQ, the big business media (such as the right-wing *Journal de Montréal*) and the pseudo-left Quebec Solidaire.

The promotion of national chauvinism is a global phenomenon. Facing growing opposition to deepening social inequality and economic insecurity, the ruling class is turning to the most right-wing elements, including fascistic forces, with the aim of using them to intimidate and repress the working class and divert social anger and frustration along reactionary lines. This is the case in Germany, with the pro-Nazi AfD (Alternative for Germany), in France with Marine Le Pen's National Rally, and in the US, where former President Donald Trump used far-right militias to storm the Capitol and spearhead his January 6 coup attempt.

The fanning of national chauvinism has already had deadly consequences with the Quebec City mosque massacre in January 2017, which left six dead and many injured, as well as last June's London, Ontario, attack, where four members of the same Muslim family were brutally killed in a hit-and-run.

That said, criticism of Bill 21 by the corporate media and ruling class outside Quebec reeks of hypocrisy and self-interest. Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party, Erin O'Toole's Conservatives, Jagmeet Singh's social democratic NDP, right-wing populist politicians like Doug Ford in Ontario or Jason Kenney in Alberta, and corporate mouthpieces like the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star* all bear enormous responsibility for the rise of chauvinism and Islamophobia.

In the last two decades, all parties in the House of Commons have supported Ottawa's participation in wars of conquest

alongside Washington under the guise of the “war on terror” and “human rights.” These wars targeted energy and mineral-rich countries in the Middle East and Central Asia such as Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and Syria. They have caused social devastation and forced millions of people to flee their homelands.

The Bloc and the Quebec nationalists have fully support Ottawa's imperialist crimes. The Bloc has lauded the participation of the Canadian Armed Forces in the neo-colonial Afghan war as “a noble cause.” It supports the massive hike in military spending being implemented by the federal Liberal government, which will increase the armed forces’ budget to nearly \$33 billion a year by 2026, demanding only that Quebec get its “fair share” of lucrative military contracts.

The Bloc has repeatedly joined the Conservatives in denouncing Trudeau's supposedly “too soft” and “conciliatory” stance on China, even though the Liberal government has fully integrated Canada into Washington's campaign against its “strategic rival” Beijing. In this spirit, the Bloc recently sponsored an anti-China motion in the House of Commons, based on lurid and patently false claims Beijing is carrying out a genocide against China's Uyghur minority. All of this is designed to mobilize the Canadian public behind a confrontational policy whose logic is a catastrophic military confrontation between the world's two leading economic powers, both of them armed with thermonuclear weapons.

The Bloc seeks to disguise its right-wing, anti-worker agenda with a few vague promises of social reforms (increased old age pensions, a “special tax” on the wealthy) which it has no chance, nor intention, of implementing. Even if these proposals were adopted, they would not begin to solve the immense social crisis caused by bankrupt capitalism.

The fraudulent character of these “progressive” promises is highlighted by everything that is missing from the Bloc's platform. There is no criticism of the Trudeau government's anti-democratic laws, such as Bill C-59 which gives draconian powers to the intelligence services. Nor is there any mention of the back-to-work laws the Trudeau government, like Harper's before it, has adopted to criminalize and suppress workers' struggles. This is not surprising given that the Bloc's traditional provincial ally, the PQ, passed numerous anti-strike laws when it was in power, and that its new ally, the CAQ, has threatened to implement similar “emergency” laws against Quebec public sector and construction workers.

The right-wing, anti-worker character of the Bloc Québécois did not prevent the Quebec union bureaucracy from regularly supporting it in the past. Although none of the union federations has officially endorsed it this time, the Bloc has six candidates from the top echelons of the union apparatus, including Louise Chabot, the former president of the 175,000-member CSQ (Quebec Union Federation). Having long ago repudiated any association with working class struggle and served as a vital instrument for imposing the attacks of big business, the union bureaucracy has supported the government of the right-winger and former airline CEO Legault, including its disastrous response to the pandemic.

As for the Bloc's pro-environment posture, it is centered on

hypocritical denunciations of oil exploitation in Western Canada, from which Quebec big business has little to gain. Instead, it seeks to position Quebec's ruling elite to take advantage of lucrative new markets linked to “green capitalism” with increased hydroelectric production and an “industrial cluster” project in Quebec for the manufacture of batteries for electric vehicles.

The Bloc's stated goal in this election, as in previous ones, is to hold the “balance of power” in a minority parliament, which it will use to advance the “interests of Quebec,” i.e., the Quebec ruling elite.

Depending on the parliamentary arithmetic in the aftermath of next Monday's election, the Bloc could well help bring to power and prop up a minority Conservative government, as Quebec nationalists have done several times in the past and as Legault himself advocated last week. Under the guise of blocking the “too centralist” Liberals, Quebec's ultra-nationalist wing has no qualms about allying itself with the Conservatives, who are not only Canada's traditional party of the right but also of Anglo-chauvinism.

The Bloc's toxic “Quebec identity” rhetoric is designed to obscure the fundamental class divisions that run through society and to subordinate Quebec workers to the right-wing agenda of the ruling class—tax cuts for the rich, attacks on working conditions, the dismantling of social programs, militarism and the defense of sky-high profits. It is based on the reactionary notion that French-speaking workers have more in common with French-speaking multi-millionaires and billionaires—such as former CEO and current Quebec Premier François Legault or media mogul and former PQ leader Pierre Karl Péladeau—than they do with English-speaking or immigrant workers in North America who are facing the same crisis of world capitalism and with whom they are closely united in a global production process.

Quebec workers entering into struggle against the austerity program of the Quebec and Canadian ruling elite must reject all forms of chauvinism and nationalism and join with their powerful allies, in the Canadian and international working class, in a counter-offensive to defend workers' jobs and social rights and to fight for socialism. This means firmly rejecting and repudiating the Bloc Québécois, which is a right-wing party of the ruling class.



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