Québec Solidaire prepares for provincial election by turning even further right

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With little more than three months to go before Quebec’s provincial election, Québec Solidaire (QS) leads the polls among 18 to 34-year-olds, with 33 percent saying they intend to vote for the party. When other age groups are taken into account, QS’s anticipated electoral support drops to 13 percent.

While opinion survey results shouldn’t be taken for reality, Québec Solidaire’s popularity among younger people does have political significance. A symptom of growing dissatisfaction with the status quo, it indicates that many younger Quebecers have illusions in this party of the affluent middle class, even though its “left-wing” image has been badly tarnished in the decade and a half since its founding, due to its forced march to the right.

It is vital that young workers, and the working class as a whole, recognize QS for what it is—a pseudo-left party oriented to the political establishment—and shed any false hope that it constitutes a progressive alternative to the right-wing populist Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government and its virulent Quebec chauvinism.

The call for Quebec independence that lies at the heart of the QS program is based on the most retrograde nationalism and is a profoundly reactionary project—the reshuffling of the state borders of North America to create the continent’s third imperialist state, a capitalist République du Québec.

At a time when global capitalism is mired in systemic crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic, the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the skyrocketing cost of living, Québec Solidaire is preparing for the elections by further integrating itself into the ruling political establishment.

This was demonstrated at its National Council meeting in late May, the party’s last leadership meeting before it launches its campaign for the October 3 provincial election. At the meeting, QS presented itself first and foremost as a party that fully recognizes the Cesare and “ready-to-govern” that is, a party that fully defends the capitalist profit system.

Not one voice was raised to condemn the imperialist war that NATO—of which Canada is a founding and leading member—is waging against Russia. No QS leader denounced the CAQ and federal Liberal government’s disastrous handling of the pandemic. No one called for a broad working class mobilization against runaway inflation and the employer assault on wages and working conditions that the CAQ government has overseen.

The only criticisms of the reactionary CAQ government that came out of the National Council were timid proposals to deal with the housing crisis and other acute social problems, and for increased environmental protection and a slap on the wrist for Quebec Premier François Legault for “exaggerating” the threat immigration supposedly represents to Quebec. The latter was purely symbolic, since just a few days earlier the 10 QS legislators in the provincial parliament had voted in favour of the CAQ’s Bill 96, which stokes Quebec chauvinism by trampling upon the linguistic and democratic rights of minorities.

QS’s complicit silence on the war against Russia in Ukraine is part of its support for Ottawa’s predatory imperialist actions. In recent decades, the ruling class has dragged Canada into a series of wars waged by Washington to uphold its global hegemony by securing control over critical resources and geopolitical regions. These wars have devastated entire societies and resulted in millions, including in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, being transformed into refugees.

Ottawa has intensified its decades-old military-security and economic partnership with Washington during this period as a means of protecting and expanding its own, increasingly significant imperialist interests. Québec Solidaire has never opposed this in whole or in part, or in any significant way. It has never campaigned against the huge military spending increases implemented by successive governments, especially the current Trudeau Liberal government, which is purchasing new fleets of warplanes and warships, and last week announced plans to spend $40 billion over the next 20 years to “modernize” NORAD.

In so far as QS has spoken about Washington’s and Ottawa’s wars of conquest, it has been to legitimize them, by repeating the lie that they have been aimed at defending “human rights” and protecting the vulnerable.

QS is playing the same role in the current war against Russia in Ukraine, this time under the pretext of defending “democracy.” As the war began in late February, QS tabled a motion in the National Assembly that placed all blame for the conflict on Russia; covered up NATO’s aggressive and provocative role, including its decades-long drive to strategically encircle Russia; and promoted the lie that the war was about defending the “right of the Ukrainian people to live in a peaceful, prosperous and sovereign country.” Not surprisingly, this motion was unanimously accepted by the CAQ, the Parti Québécois and the Quebec Liberal Party, all of which unashamedly defend Quebec capitalism and Canadian imperialism’s interests abroad.

QS’s relentless efforts to integrate itself into the establishment are also evident in crucial domestic policy issues—above all, the
political cover it has provided the Legault government in its
ruinous and criminal response to the pandemic.

While the CAQ pursued a pandemic policy that prioritized the
profits of the corporate and financial elite by doing everything to
keep the “economy” open, QS provided it and the Trudeau
government, which oversaw the same policy across Canada, its full
support.

During the first year of the pandemic, Manon Massé, then the
top leader of the QS, regularly held secret consultations with
Premier Legault on the implementation of the province’s “profits
before lives” back-to-work/back-to-school policy. This policy has
resulted in 15,500 official COVID-19 deaths in Quebec, the
infections of millions, of whom an untold number are now
suffering from Long Covid, and chronically overburdened
hospitals.

To the extent that Québec Solidaire criticized the Legault
government over its handling of the pandemic, it was from the
right. QS attacked the CAQ for its supposed lack of zeal in
reopening schools—veritable hotbeds of coronavirus transmission—and in mandating in-person schooling for all, under the
outrageous pretext that students (and their parents) had to be
exposed to a potentially deadly virus in order to preserve their
“mental health.”

QS’s full support for the Legault government on the pandemic
issue was so compromising that last year, party members felt
compelled to publicly rebuke the leadership for its all-too-visible
collusion with the CAQ.

QS may occasionally present itself as a “left” party, but it is a
party that is organically opposed to the class struggle. It rejects the
mobilization of the working class as an independent political force
in a struggle against the capitalist social and political order.

Underscoring that the QS is determined to repudiate any
association, however flimsy and symbolic, with working class or
even popular struggles, the party leadership has made a point of
recruiting a new layer of candidates from affluent professional and
business circles—mayors, lawyers, doctors, small businespeople
and financial executives.

The “solidarity” of which Québec Solidaire speaks has nothing
to do with class solidarity among workers, regardless of
nationality, language or other differences. It is rather solidarity
“between the classes,” in which the “better-off” help the “less
fortunate” and the working class is politically subordinated to the
petty and big bourgeoisie.

This finds expression in Québec Solidaire’s attitude to the
resurgence of the international class struggle, as workers rebel
against decades of austerity, contract concessions and attacks on
democratic rights now compounded by the impact of the pandemic
and the US-NATO war in Russia.

Whether these struggles take place outside Quebec, as in the
recent eruption of mass social unrest in Sri Lanka and Peru, or the
strike waves in Spain and the US, or whether they occur in
Quebec, as at Olymel, ArcelorMittal, Rolls-Royce, or Molson-
Coors, to name but a few, QS has little or nothing to say about
them. It lives in constant fear that working class struggles for
better wages, safe working conditions, and quality public services
will break out of the straitjacket of state-regulated collective
bargaining and parliamentary politics and become a class-
conscious movement that challenges the capitalist order it defends.

Thus QS allies with and courts the trade union bureaucracy,
which for decades has played a pivotal role in isolating and
suppressing workers’ struggles. When unions impose rotten
contracts, as they did in the public sector last year, QS refuses to
criticize them.

The nationalist, pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist agenda of QS is
highlighted by the politics of the parties with which it is allied on
the international stage. In Spain, PODEMOS has forged a coalition
with one of the two governing parties of the Spanish ruling class,
the PSOE, in order to impose capitalist austerity and let the
pandemic rip through the population. The PSOE-Podemos
government has repeatedly used state repression and violence
against striking workers. In Germany, the Left Party supports the
return of German imperialism to the world stage, including the
leading role it is playing in the NATO war against Russia.

Québec Solidaire has nothing to do with socialism, or for that
matter real left-wing politics. If it did, it would recognize that the
capitalist system has entered its worst crisis since World War II. It
would lead a principled opposition to chauvinism, war and
fascism. It would denounce growing social inequality and
welcome the growing opposition of working people to capitalism
around the world.

QS does none of this and accepts entirely the framework of
capitalism and the system of rival nation-states in which it is
historically rooted. These national rivalries are an absolute brake
on the harmonious and rational development of the world
economy, posing a mortal threat to humanity that today takes the
form of the pandemic, imperialist war and an impending
environmental catastrophe.

As a representative of the affluent middle classes, QS may
complain about certain aspects of capitalism and occasionally
deplore the dictatorship of the financial elite over society. Its goal,
however, is not to fight the ruling capitalist class on the basis of a
socialist program, but to court it and carve out a place for itself
within the political establishment. Québec Solidaire wants to
convince the ruling elite that its “left” image can be used to
preserve “social peace,” assisting it in suppressing working class
struggles and diverting mounting social anger and frustration along
reactionary nationalist channels.

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