

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 *Républic 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 is "responsible" 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 geostrategic 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 unabashedly 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 businesspeople 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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