

Québec Solidaire courts big business ahead of provincial election

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Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, Québec Solidaire's (QS) principal spokesperson and candidate for premier, was invited to speak before the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal (CCMM), the city's most prominent big business lobby group, four days before Quebec's October 3 provincial election.

The former student leader seized on the opportunity to tone down, to the point of virtually discarding, Québec Solidaire's image as a "left-wing" party.

Quebec Solidaire's posture as a "protest" party—a "party of the street and the ballot box"—helped it gain a popular following, especially among young people, and to advance its efforts to resurrect the discredited and politically retrograde Quebec *indépendantiste* (separatist) program. But the pseudo-left party's leadership now sees its image as a party of "protest" as detrimental to its aspirations to play an even more important role in establishment politics.

Nadeau-Dubois took advantage of his appearance before the CCMM to reassure his audience that QS is a "responsible" party, fully committed to defending profits—one that be trusted with the role of official opposition in Quebec's next parliament. Currently polls show QS, which won 10 seats in the 125-member National Assembly in 2018, virtually tied with the Liberals for second place in voter support.

According to press reports, the QS leader told the CCMM that "the real economic issue" is "the risks of not acting quickly enough—the risks of climate passivity."

Behind its "pro-environment" rhetoric, Québec Solidaire's central objective is to make the province a "world leader" in the lucrative field of "green energy." Its website states that it is committed to "making strategic investments in two key sectors of the ecological transition: residual forest biomass and the battery industry."

In a tweet published after his September 29 speech to a blue-chip audience of Montreal-area corporate executives and business lobbyists, Nadeau-Dubois said, "Thank you to the @chambremontréal for the invitation and the opportunity to discuss our economic vision." He explained that "the heart of our campaign is the fight against climate change: We must invest to accelerate the ecological transition."

With its "climate-friendly" rhetoric, QS seeks to mask the material interests of the Quebec business elite, whose interests it proposes to advance by providing strong state support for growth in the global renewable energy sector. Its argument is that Quebec

is well-positioned to succeed in this promising market thanks to its natural resources, its lithium reserves (an essential component of the modern electric battery), its vast river system and its expertise in hydroelectricity. Disguised by QS as a concern for the environment, its "green" capitalist program overlaps in many ways with that of both the Parti Québécois (PQ), a fellow Quebec sovereignist party, and the Liberals.

QS's program for making Quebec a "clean energy" power was well received by the CCMM. After making polite criticisms of the derisory tax increases proposed by QS (such as a 0.1 percent annual wealth tax increase on assets over \$1 million), CCMM President Michel Leblanc welcomed QS's proposals. "Your message," he told Nadeau-Dubois, "in terms of challenges and probably solutions speaks to the business community."

Le Devoir, a daily newspaper with close ties to Quebec nationalist circles, ran an article on the QS leader's speech to the CCMM under the approving headline "Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois: from the streets to the Chamber of Commerce's top table."

Even more tellingly, QS was applauded last week by none other than Mario Dumont. Now a leading columnist for the *Journal de Montréal*—the right-wing populist daily of wealthy businessman and erstwhile PQ leader Pierre Karl Péladeau—Dumont played a leading role, as head of the Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ), in a virulent agitation against religious minorities in 2006-2007. In his column, Dumont congratulated the QS leadership for its "seriousness" and its ability to keep its "extreme left" on a leash.

Those now heaping praise on QS are representatives of a Quebec ruling class that has spent the last four decades making massive cuts to education and health care; cutting taxes for the rich while telling the working class that there is "no money" for wages and pensions; fanning anti-immigrant chauvinism; and supporting the Canadian government's turn to militarism.

Far from dissociating itself from its new admirers in the ruling elite, QS is actively seeking their blessing. This fact underscores that QS is a party of the affluent middle class. It is largely composed of university professors, small business owners, doctors, lawyers and managers, etc.

These social layers enjoy a comfortable existence within a capitalist system that subjects masses of workers to the scourges of unemployment, precarious work and poverty on a daily basis. This is why the most vital issues for the international working class—the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine, the COVID-19

pandemic, the danger of fascism and the re-emergence of mass social struggles—have been totally excluded from QS’s election campaign.

A self-proclaimed pro-independence, environmentalist, feminist, anti-globalization “citizen’s party,” QS says next to nothing about the struggles of the working class and is utterly hostile to mobilizing this social force against bankrupt capitalism. One would search in vain for any serious comment or even references by its candidates to the many bitter contract struggles that have recently erupted in Quebec, whether in the public sector, the agri-food industry, construction, the ports of Montreal and Quebec City or the manufacturing sector—let alone workers’ struggles around the world.

The orientation of QS is to the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy, which has been suppressing rank-and-file resistance for decades, and has developed a vast network of lucrative corporatist partnerships with big business and the capitalist state. But apart from a few isolated cases, the union apparatus has rebuffed Québec Solidaire’s advances. The unions have instead either maintained their historically close ties with the PQ or moved closer to the right-wing CAQ (Coalition avenir Québec), which has been in power for the past four years.

On international developments, now dominated by bitter geopolitical conflicts and the mounting threat of nuclear war, QS has little to say, despite its advocacy of Quebec independence. It has never criticized, let alone led any campaign against, the sharp increases in Canadian military spending, or the federal government’s procuring of new fleets of warplanes and warships. It has fully supported Ottawa’s participation in US-led imperialist wars and interventions for control of raw materials and geostrategic regions, whether in Afghanistan, Haiti, Libya, Iraq or Syria.

QS supports the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine, in which Canadian imperialism plays an important role. At the beginning of the conflict, it tabled a motion—unanimously adopted by the other capitalist parties—that camouflaged the aggressive and provocative role of the US and NATO, placed all the blame on Russia and repeated the lie that the war was about defending the “right of the Ukrainian people to live in a peaceful, prosperous and sovereign country.”

Throughout the pandemic, which is far from over, QS has supported the Legault government in its homicidal “live with the virus” policy. Its co-spokesperson Manon Massé even participated with other opposition party leaders in months of closed-door discussions with Legault during the pandemic’s first year. The ties between QS and the government were so close that rank-and-file members raised concerns that the party was being brought into disrepute. The result of the pandemic policy supported by QS is that more than 16,000 people have died from COVID-19 in the province, and hundreds of thousands are likely to be affected by the potentially debilitating impacts of Long COVID.

QS has also played a key role in legitimizing the chauvinist turn the Quebec ruling class has taken for over a decade, with the aim of dividing workers along ethnic lines and scapegoating immigrants for the social crisis caused by capitalism. This found expression under the Legault government in a series of anti-

democratic laws targeting immigrants and minorities. QS voted in favour of Bill 96, which reinforces the privileged status of the French language. It is formally opposed to Bill 21, which discriminates against religious minorities—with Muslim women a special target—but announced that it would not make an issue of it in the election campaign.

On the economic front, QS has boasted that it has put forward “credible” budget proposals, including a timetable for balancing the provincial budget that is more ambitious than that set by the CAQ and the Liberals.

While QS is forced to acknowledge the socio-economic crisis affecting the vast majority of the population—deepening economic insecurity and social inequality, rampant inflation, an acute housing crisis, etc.—it has nothing serious to offer, as it accepts the capitalist framework that are their cause.

All that is left of its previous, already timid, “reform” agenda are half-measures. The party has abandoned more substantive proposals, such as free public education at all levels, which was the central demand of the massive 2012 Quebec student strike that propelled Nadeau-Dubois to the political forefront.

QS’s meagre election promises will quickly be cast aside, as evidenced by the record of Québec Solidaire’s “sister” parties—Syriza in Greece, the Left Party in Germany or Podemos in Spain—which have ruthlessly imposed the brutal austerity measures demanded by the ruling elite once they entered government.

Workers and young people looking for a real alternative to the historic crisis of capitalism must turn to the Socialist Equality Party and firmly reject QS.

Its initial orientation to the chauvinist PQ, its promotion of Quebec independence so as to establish a third imperialist state in North America, its social composition based on the affluent middle class, its opposition to the class struggle, its quest for “respectability” within the *establishment*—all of this, under conditions of global capitalist crisis, has definitively exposed Québec Solidaire as a right-wing nationalist party utterly hostile to the working class.



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