

Pseudo-left Québec Solidaire reacts to its election debacle by turning still further right

Louis Girard

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Québec Solidaire (QS), the party that passes for the “left” on the spectrum of official Quebec politics, suffered an electoral debacle in the October 3 provincial election.

Although it increased its representation in the National Assembly from 10 to 11, its share of the popular vote fell by 0.67 per cent from the last election in 2018, and its total vote by 15,000 or 3.5 percent. After spending the last four years touting itself as the “real opposition” to the right-wing CAQ (Coalition Avenir Québec) government, QS fell far short of its goal of forming the official opposition.

This electoral setback, coming amid a mounting wave of workers struggles, was the outcome of the sharp right turn the QS leadership made in an effort to prove to the ruling elite that it poses no threat to the existing social order, is prepared to assume direct responsibility for imposing new attacks on the working class, and should, therefore, be accorded a greater role in establishment politics, if not a share of power.

A party based in and oriented to sections of the affluent middle classes, Québec Solidaire has signaled in the election’s aftermath that it intends to intensify its collaboration with the anti-worker CAQ government, which is poised to impose “post-pandemic” austerity while further inciting anti-immigrant chauvinism. QS co-leader Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois boasted that he spoke to Premier François Legault on election night and had pledged to “work with him.”

The reasons given by the QS leadership for its electoral setback are entirely unconvincing. They are designed to hide the fact that Québec Solidaire ran a right-wing campaign, barely distinguishable from that run by the CAQ and the other capitalist parties on the major issues facing the working class—inflation and growing social inequality, the US-NATO war on Russia, the pandemic, and the danger of fascism. The QS election campaign was hailed as “responsible” by financial circles and the most right-wing commentators in the bourgeois press, including the *Journal de Montréal*. This tabloid’s writers are well aware of the crucial role that QS is increasingly called upon to play in providing “left” cover for the anti-working class policies of the ruling class.

One of its columnists, Mario Dumont, even published an article after the election in which he urged QS to “go on the offensive again,” despite its disappointing election results. Dumont is one of the principal architects of the pronounced turn to chauvinism the Quebec ruling class made beginning a decade-and-a-half ago. As leader of now defunct right-wing populist Action Démocratique du

Québec, he and the corporate media whipped up a “scandal” over so-called “unreasonable” or “excessive” “accommodations” for immigrants.

In his post-election comments, Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, who has not missed an opportunity to shed his image as a “radical” ex-student leader, said his party resisted a “CAQ wave,” thus accepting this gross exaggeration repeated by the CAQ and the mainstream media. In fact, the CAQ increased its share of the popular vote by a modest 3.5 per cent. And if one factors in the one-third of voters who didn’t go to the polls (the election saw one of the lowest turnouts in the province’s history), it received the backing of just 27 percent of all eligible voters. The CAQ only elected two National Assembly members (MNAs) from Montreal, the province’s most populous, cosmopolitan and working class city.

Andres Fontecilla, another Québec Solidaire MNA, said, grotesquely, that the CAQ’s re-election showed that the public “didn’t want to change things that much.”

In fact, there is a great deal of opposition to the CAQ’s right-wing, anti-worker and chauvinist policies. This is shown, first and foremost, by the growing struggles of workers in Quebec who, like their class brothers and sisters around the world, have mounted a wave of strikes over the past year-and-a-half to fight for better wages, improved hours and workloads, safer working conditions, and to defend their pensions. In Quebec alone, major strikes and struggles have taken place in the agri-food, manufacturing, seaport, construction, health and education sectors.

But this growing opposition finds no expression through the right-wing parties that contested this fall’s provincial election, including Québec Solidaire. QS used the election campaign to repudiate its image as a “protest” party, which it considers to be a hindrance to its full integration within the capitalist establishment.

Québec Solidaire, which describes itself as pro-Quebec independence, environmentalist, feminist and anti-globalization, rejects the class struggle and any working class challenge to the domination of the capitalist elite. It largely ignores workers’ struggles, and when it does talk about them, it is to support the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy in its long-standing efforts to isolate these struggles and keep them within the framework of the pro-big business “collective bargaining” system. QS rarely mentions the regular use of draconian anti-strike laws by the Quebec and Canadian ruling class and resolutely opposes any and all calls for the political mobilization of the working class to defy and defeat

these anti-democratic laws.

Due to the immense political vacuum on the left created by the unions' suppression of the class struggle and Québec Solidaire's phony "progressive" nationalist politics, the right-wing CAQ has been able to profit from the popular alienation from the federalist Quebec Liberal Party (PLQ) and the pro-independence Parti Québécois (PQ), the two parties that dominated Quebec provincial politics and alternated as its government from 1970 to 2018. In the October 3, election the PLQ and PQ both recorded their worst ever election results, continuing to hemorrhage support after decades during which they imposed round after round of austerity and tax cuts for big business, the rich and super-rich.

This same process is taking place internationally, where many right-wing populist parties have managed to get elected by presenting themselves as "anti-establishment" parties. As in Quebec, these forces take advantage of the right turn of all the "left" parties, including the so-called "new left"—in reality pseudo-left—parties formed during the last two decades, the latest example being the election of the fascist Giorgia Meloni in Italy. And when the nationalist and pro-capitalist parties of the pseudo-left come to power, such as Podemos in Spain, Die Linke in Germany or SYRIZA in Greece, they predictably grovel before capital and impose savage austerity, while intensifying militarism and fanning anti-immigrant chauvinism.

Québec Solidaire fully accepts all key aspects of the anti-worker agenda of the ruling class. It supports NATO's war against Russia which, as recent events have underlined, could quickly spiral into a nuclear conflict. It is completely silent on the massive increases in military spending made by Justin Trudeau's trade union-backed federal Liberal government, and it has supported the CAQ government's disastrous handling of the pandemic. Like its provincial counterparts and the Trudeau government, François Legault's CAQ government has systematically prioritized profits over lives and spread all sorts of anti-scientific falsehoods about COVID-19 so as to impose its deadly "live with the virus" policy.

On the issue of Quebec chauvinism, QS has criticized some of the most outrageous anti-immigrant comments of Premier Legault and his ministers. But the party always takes care to characterize the chauvinist and anti-immigrant debates around "Quebec values" and "secularism" as "necessary." It never exposes these debates and the CAQ's chauvinist laws for what they really represent—conscious efforts by the ruling class to scapegoat immigrants for the immense social crisis caused by capitalism and to divide the working class along ethnic and linguistic lines.

QS refused to campaign against Bill 21, discriminatory legislation that specifically targets Muslim women, and voted in favor of Bill 96, a law that is fully in line with the CAQ's attempt to stir up chauvinism. Bill 96 aims to reinforce the status of French as the province's only "common" and "official" language.

QS advocates timid social measures to be financed by equally timid tax hikes, which it does not even intend to fight for. Highly sensitive to criticism from the capitalist media, QS MNAs, including the newly elected ex-banker Haroun Bouazzi, have indicated that the paltry tax hikes they proposed during the election campaign will be part of the "discussions" surrounding the causes of the party's poor election results.

In response to the environmental catastrophe threatened by climate change, the key theme of its election campaign and its attempt to project a "radical" image, Québec Solidaire advocates a "green capitalist" program. This program is tailor-made for sections of Quebec's ruling class who see the energy transition as a golden opportunity to exploit the province's vast natural resources, develop their geostrategic interests, and pile up more profits. In fact, QS received positive feedback from the Board of Trade of Montreal when Nadeau-Dubois, just days before the election, accepted an invitation to speak before this big business lobby group.

As QS turns resolutely and inexorably to the right, pseudo-Marxist groups like Fightback and Gauche Socialiste, which have worked within QS since its founding and have eagerly assisted it in its reactionary attempt to revive *indépendantiste* Quebec nationalism, now seek to hide their own responsibility for promoting this right-wing nationalist vehicle. In the wake of last month's election debacle, they are raising timid criticisms of the QS leadership in a vain attempt to bring QS back to the "left-wing" program and orientation it supposedly advocated in its early days and retained until recently—a political fiction that is increasingly difficult to maintain.

For several weeks, QS MNAs stood shoulder to shoulder with the right-wing Parti Québécois in refusing to swear an oath of loyalty to King Charles III, a reactionary requirement all members of the federal and provincial legislatures must fulfill before being allowed to take up their parliamentary seats. Instead, the QS MNA proposed to swear allegiance to the "Quebec people," a fraudulent phrase that masks the deep and irreconcilable class divisions in capitalist society, in Quebec as everywhere—between the workers, who produce everything necessary for society to function and who bear the brunt of the crisis of the capitalist system, and the ultra-rich, who exploit the working class and reap ever more grotesque wealth.

It is this class reality that Québec Solidaire seeks to hide. As a nationalist party, it advocates solidarity *between* the classes as part of its reactionary project for the creation of a third imperialist republic in North America, rather than working class solidarity, that is, between all workers regardless of nationality, language, gender or skin color, in a common struggle against the bankrupt capitalist system.



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