

Pseudo-left Québec Solidaire complicit in unions' suppression of public sector workers' struggle

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Despite its claims to stand in “solidarity with workers,” Québec Solidaire (QS)—the pseudo-left, pro-Quebec independence party that holds 12 seats in the Quebec legislature—is bitterly hostile to class struggle. This has been underscored by its role in assisting the pro-capitalist union apparatuses in smothering the public sector strikes that swept across Quebec last November and December, in what was one of the biggest and most militant working class struggles in Quebec and all Canada in recent decades.

To secure wage increases that keep pace with inflation, put an end to punishing working conditions and defend public services, most of Quebec’s 625,000 public sector workers went on strike in December, for various durations and at various times. QS Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), including the party’s principal leader Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, made several picket line appearances and trumpeted their “support” for the striking workers in social media posts.

But when a journalist insisted at a press conference on knowing whether QS would support the workers “all the way,” if there were, for example, an unlimited province-wide public sector strike “for two weeks, three weeks,” Nadeau-Dubois replied: “The right to strike, in Quebec, is legally framed; it’s a legitimate right. And yes, we will support them *in exercising their pressure tactics within that framework, of course.*” (Emphasis added)

To put it plainly, Nadeau-Dubois’ carefully chosen words about supporting workers’ rights within the “collective bargaining framework” were meant to signal that if the province’s right-wing Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government felt compelled to resort to emergency legislation outlawing strikes—a common practice in Canada in recent decades—Québec Solidaire would quickly fall in behind it. For all its professions of “solidarity” with the public sector workers, should their struggle go beyond the limits of the state-regulated, pro-employer collective bargaining system, QS would assist Premier François Legault and his CAQ government in using the state’s full repressive arsenal, including the courts and the police, to crush the strike movement.

With regard to the strikers’ wage demands, QS simply said that further worker *appauvrissement* (impoverishment) must be avoided. This position was the same as that adopted by the other openly pro-business opposition parties, the official opposition Quebec Liberal Party and the Parti Québécois. It was tantamount to flouting public sector workers’ central demand for a genuine wage “catch-up” after decades in which their real wages have fallen sharply as a result of repeated concession contracts and government “wage restraint” programs.

Speaking for affluent sections of the middle class, QS is opposed and organically hostile to broadening the struggle of public sector workers by appealing to the entire working class, not just in Quebec but across Canada for support. This would run counter to its long-standing efforts to fully integrate itself into the political establishment, so as to play a direct role in managing Quebec capitalism and policing the working class.

QS wants to prevent the struggle of public sector workers from becoming an explicit political challenge to the ruling class’ agenda of austerity and war upheld by François Legault in Quebec, Doug Ford in Ontario and Justin Trudeau and his union and NDP-backed Liberal government at the federal level.

Such a movement can only develop in complete opposition to the union bureaucracy. Yet QS has been complicit with the union apparatuses in their constant efforts to divide and stifle the public sector workers’ movement. It has never uttered the slightest criticism of the unions’ refusal to mobilize the massive support for public sector workers that exists within the working class as a whole.

What’s more, QS played a key role in trapping the public sector workers in the suffocating nationalist framework of a Quebec-based “collective bargaining” struggle, where the role of striking workers was limited to pressuring Legault to “listen to reason” and to fulfill his “duty” to serve “all Quebecers.”

QS thus sought to camouflage the irreconcilable class divide that is the essence of Québécois, Canadian and all capitalist society, as well as the nature of the Legault government as a ruthless defender of big business. In so doing, it has assisted the unions in both Quebec and English Canada to keep the militant

struggle of the Quebec public sector workers confined within Quebec's borders.

The following are just a few examples of the nationalist-populist rhetoric QS has adopted throughout the conflict:

- “When will the CAQ listen to what Quebecers are asking them to do and save our public services?”
- “We’re going to be on the side of Quebecers, on the side of workers, and we’re going to support them in their pressure tactics.”
- “Quebecers want a head of state, and a real head of state doesn’t bet \$7 million on the 10 percent chance of getting back the Nordiques (a defunct Quebec City-based National Hockey League franchise). A real head of state prioritizes people’s welfare.”

With its incessant references to “Québécois” and “Quebec,” QS seeks to obscure the fact that society is divided into social classes with opposing interests, and that French-speaking workers in Québec have far more in common with workers in the rest of Canada, across North America and around the world, whatever their mother tongue, than with Quebec’s French-speaking bourgeois and their political representatives.

In contrast to the reactionary nationalist conceptions promoted by QS, the *World Socialist Web Site* fights for public sector workers to recognize that their struggle is part of a growing international upsurge of the working class.

The Quebec public sector workers’ struggle has unfolded amid mass demonstrations around the world against the genocide in Gaza, perpetrated by Israel and supported by the US and its imperialist allies, including Canada. In Germany, over a million people have demonstrated against the ruling class’ plans to deport immigrants en masse. Mass struggles and strikes are continuing and intensifying everywhere. In the last few months alone, there have been strikes among British Columbia dockers, autoworkers in Canada and the US, and railway workers in Britain and Germany to name but a few.

QS frequently refers to certain aspects of the growing social crisis, such as the housing crisis, but detaches them completely from the global crisis of the capitalist system. Legault’s determination to press ahead with his assault on public services is not simply a “bad policy choice,” as QS claims, but part of a class war aimed at making workers bear the cost of further enriching the wealthy and the waging of imperialist war abroad.

Continuing and intensifying the anti-worker program of his *pro-Quebec independence* predecessors in the PQ and his *federalist* predecessors in the PLQ, Legault aims to make workers pay for the crisis of the capitalist profit system. He is acting in the same manner as capitalist rulers the world over, whether they call themselves “left,” “liberal” or avowedly far-right like Milei in Argentina or Meloni in Italy.

For QS, there is no “international working class” and no crisis of the global capitalist system. For this pseudo-left “citizens party,” the public sector workers’ struggle is a “feminist” and “Quebecois” struggle but not a class struggle.

Convinced of the permanence of the capitalist system, Québec Solidaire—much like Jagmeet Singh and the social democratic NDP—trumpets itself as a party that aims to “help people.” The solidarity it advocates has far more in common with Christian charity than the solidarity forged by workers in common struggle against the capitalist order.

QS’s complicity with the union apparatuses and its staunch defense of Quebec nationalism have played a key role in helping resuscitate the discredited Parti Québécois (PQ). The PQ, with which QS long sought an electoral bloc, is setting the tone for the Quebec ruling class’s ever more pronounced turn to chauvinism and far-right incitement, by blaming immigrants for the social crisis caused by capitalism and denouncing them for imperiling the “Quebec nation.”

It is in this context that the various pseudo-Marxist groups that operate within Québec Solidaire are urging the latter to move even closer to the union bureaucracy as a way of better projecting a phony “pro-worker” posture. Fightback (recently renamed the Revolutionary Communist Party), the International Marxist Tendency’s Canadian affiliate, for example, is calling for “inter-union common fronts” in which workers would be subordinated to the corporatist unions and their bureaucratic apparatuses. Fightback is unwilling and unable to learn a single lesson from the role played by the “inter-union Common Front,” which, as the WSWS warned it would, has run the Quebec public sector workers struggle into the ground.

Public sector workers must reject Québec Solidaire’s Quebec nationalist program and its orientation towards the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy. They must turn to their class brothers and sisters, not only in the province but across North America, in a common struggle against capitalist austerity and war. A vital first step in this direction is the construction of rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the union apparatuses and tasked with mobilizing the collective social power of workers in defense of wages, working conditions and public services. This struggle is being led by the Quebec Public Sector Workers Rank-and-File Coordinating Committee, which you can contact by filling out the form below.



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