

Quebec's ultra-nationalist media hails the rise of France's Rassemblement National and promotes fascism

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4 August 2024

French President Emmanuel Macron recently called early parliamentary elections. These were held in two rounds on June 30 and July 7. Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National (RN) came out on top in the first round, winning over 11 million votes. However, the RN suffered a surprise defeat in the second round, as workers and youth rallied round the New Popular Front (NFP), led by Jean-Luc Mélançon and his pseudo-left La France insoumise (LFI–France Unbowed), to prevent the fascists gaining power in France for the first time since the World War II Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime.

Ultra-nationalist columnists in Quebec's mainstream media, who have spearheaded the virulent anti-immigrant campaign waged by the entire ruling elite, warmly welcomed RN's rise. They seized on it as a means to amplify their chauvinist agitation, but most importantly to banalize and openly promote fascist forces.

Influential columnists at the *Journal de Montréal* (JdM), a tabloid owned by Pierre-Karl Péladeau, a multi-billionaire and former leader of the Parti Québécois (PQ), were the most outspoken in expressing their sympathy and support for the French far right.

In a series of jubilant comments published after the RN's victory in the first round, the columnists sought to legitimize the far right by fraudulently presenting Marine Le Pen's party as a democratic grassroots movement, rooted in "la vraie France" (real France) and fighting for the interests of "ordinary French people."

Mathieu Bock-Côté, a columnist with well-known fascist sympathies, dismissed any link between the RN and fascism. He termed the definition of the RN and like anti-immigrant parties that support militarism and bray for a massive build-up of the repressive apparatus of the state as fascist "absurd." "Fascism," claimed Bock-Côté, "died a long time ago," but the "extreme left" uses the term to illegitimately demonize their opponents. Bock-Côté, who in recent years has become a fixture on France's right-wing Fox News-style CNews, said the RN is properly understood as belonging to the "national right." He went on to praise it for expressing "a desire to protect our borders, to preserve our cultural identity [and] not to give in to every whim of radical minorities."

In a July 3 column entitled "C'est l'immigration, stupide! [It's immigration, stupid]", Richard Martineau, another JdM columnist well-known for his harangues against immigrants and Muslims,

wrote that the "rise of the right" in France was solely due to the immigration "problem." True to form, he castigated most immigrants as people who "reject France" and its "fundamental values, such as secularism, equality between men and women and the freedom to criticize religions."

This enthusiastic promotion of the RN serves to normalize the far right, and thereby, an even more explicit emulation of its fascist policies, especially in respect to immigration, citizenship and the inculcation of "national values." The normalization of fascism also serves to justify the strengthening of the state's repressive apparatus. In the name of fighting crime and "illegal" immigrants, the fascists agitate for building up the state machine so its might can be directed, first and foremost, at quelling rising working-class opposition to ruling class austerity and war policies, including the protest movement against Israel's imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza.

The right-wing ideologues of the JdM, it should be noted, seek to exploit the confusion created by the pseudo-left's promotion of identity politics, in opposition to the class unity of the working class and the fight for social equality. They use identity politics as a scarecrow, to lend legitimacy to their own promotion of chauvinism, racism and bellicose nationalism, while urging Quebec's political elite to openly embrace the French far right. Terming the RN an "inescapable, democratic political force called upon to influence France's destiny," Bock-Côté pressed Quebec's politicians to hasten to "develop ties" with Le Pen's party.

A similar line was taken by Christian Rioux, the long-time France-based foreign correspondent of *Le Devoir*, which caters to Quebec's nationalist upper-middle class. Rioux hailed the RN's supposed transformation into a credible "party of government" under the "presidential-looking" Marine Le Pen, and lauded the extreme-right as the legitimate representative of "la France profonde" (the real France.) Writing more like a fascist thug than a newspaper columnist, Rioux warned that if French workers and youth rejected the RN at the polls they would face "violence" and "chaos," as the far right would ultimately be forced to end the current political "regime," a transparent allusion to a fascist coup.

For years these and other ultra-nationalist columnists have been in the forefront of an intense nationalist-chauvinist agitation against immigrants and immigration to Quebec.

To give just one example, Bock-Côté, Martineau and the JdM

mounted a far-right provocation in May 2023, with the issuing of a special dossier in the tabloid's bumper weekend issue in which they accused the Trudeau government of seeking to destroy the "Quebec nation" and its French-character by flooding the province with immigrants. This was nothing less than a Québécois version of the fascist "Great Replacement theory."

It is no coincidence that the same forces that have spearheaded Quebec's virulent anti-immigrant campaign, and led the charge in pressing for discriminatory language laws under the guise of defending the French language, now openly support a far-right party like the RN. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has long explained, Quebec nationalism is a reactionary ideology used by the ruling class to divide the working class.

Anti-immigrant and explicitly chauvinist rhetoric has become central to the politics of the entire ruling elite, including those of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government of multimillionaire Premier François Legault. An admirer of Bock-Côté, whom he once labeled a "great intellectual," Legault has claimed his chauvinist "Quebec First" policies are vital for "social cohesion," i.e., to maintaining the ruling class' political-ideological grip over an increasingly angry and disaffected working class.

The CAQ is fraudulently blaming immigrants for a host of mounting social problems, including a housing crisis, the collapse of public healthcare and education, and violent crime, while portraying them as a threat to "Quebec values" and the predominance of the French language.

The twin aims of this campaign are to divide Quebec workers—among themselves along ethnolinguistic lines and from their class brothers and sisters in the rest of Canada—and to find a scapegoat for the pitiful state of public services and rising poverty, caused in reality by the austerity policies pursued by all political parties for decades and the deepening capitalist crisis.

The CAQ is encouraged in its ever more aggressive chauvinism by the pro-Quebec independence Parti Québécois, a right-wing capitalist party long lauded by the union bureaucracy and much of the pseudo-left as "progressive." Currently leading in the polls, the PQ combines anti-immigrant rhetoric with hysterical Quebec nationalism. According to its leader, Paul Saint-Pierre Plamondon, the federal government, which hasn't changed since the "deportations" and "executions" of Francophones in the 18th century, is using "excessive immigration" in a "charge" to "crush Quebecers."

Québec Solidaire (QS), the party of Quebec's pseudo-left, has responded with complacent indifference to the Quebec mainstream media's promotion of the far right, demonstrating once again that its role is to politically chloroform the working class in the face of the bourgeoisie's embrace of war and reaction.

QS Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Ruba Ghazal campaigned for the New Popular Front (NFP) among French citizens living in Quebec, urging them to vote to "bar the road to the extreme right." However, she failed to mention several key political facts. These include: 1) the NFP includes the Socialist Party (PS), as well as its traditional allies in the Stalinist PCF (French Communist Party) and the Greens, who have carried out massive attacks on the working class whenever they have formed

the government; 2) the NFP entered into an electoral alliance with Macron, the "president of the rich" notorious for his pension cuts, his support for escalating NATO's imperialist war on Russia, and his admiration for Marshal Pétain, the leader of the pro-Nazi Vichy regime; and 3) it is the austerity and militarist policies of Macron and the official left (from which he hails) that have enabled the neo-fascist RN to exploit popular anger by adopting a demagogic posture of opposition to social cuts and war.

Even as she criticized the RN, Ghazal insisted that there is no similarity between its far-right policies and the chauvinist anti-immigrant agitation in Quebec. The "immigration debate" in Quebec, she declared, has not been conducted "as a far-right debate," but in a "healthy and peaceful way."

In June, in response to a motion introduced in the National Assembly by the PQ to legitimize the Quebec ruling elite's anti-immigration campaign, QS argued that "the Parti Québécois is not intolerant on the issue of immigration" and made a point of proclaiming that "Québec Solidaire is itself suggesting a reduction in temporary immigration."

QS constitutes the "left flank" of capitalist politics in Quebec. As such, it legitimizes xenophobic agitation and provides political cover for the CAQ and PQ as they turn to ever more extreme forms of Quebec nationalism and chauvinism.

By denying the far-right character of the Quebec political elite's chauvinist politics, QS seeks to prop up Quebec nationalism—an ideological tool, not only of the Quebec bourgeoisie but of Canadian capitalism as a whole—to keep Canada's French-speaking, English-speaking and immigrant workers divided.

Québec Solidaire wants to politically silence the working class, the only social force capable of fighting the rise of the far right. Class-conscious workers must respond by developing an independent working class political movement that strives to unite workers in Quebec with their class brothers and sisters across Canada and internationally, to attack the common source of fascism, austerity and war: capitalism and its outmoded system of nation-states. This requires the decisive repudiation of capitalism's pseudo-left defenders like QS.



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