

Quebec government shifts further right amid collapsing support

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The Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), which has governed Canada's second most populous province for seven years under Premier François Legault's hard-right leadership, is presently facing mounting public discontent. According to recent polls, if an election were held today, the CAQ would suffer a crushing defeat and be reduced at best to a rump in the National Assembly.

Meanwhile, the ruling elite has grown increasingly frustrated with what it perceives as the Legault government's failure to fully implement its reactionary agenda, especially massive social spending cuts.

Last month, Legault responded with a "relaunch" of his government intended to signal a further shift to the right. In a speech delivered on September 10 alongside a cabinet shuffle, Legault—a multimillionaire former Air Transat CEO—declared open war on the social and democratic rights of the working class.

Declaring his intention to administer "shock therapy," Legault announced that his government will "cut deeply into bureaucracy." This is a euphemism for slashing and privatizing what remains of essential public services, particularly public health care and education, and eviscerating all social supports.

He also targeted environmental regulations in a clear signal to big business that it will be given carte blanche to rake in profits by ignoring and trampling on the most basic environmental protections.

The CAQ is also intensifying its frontal assault on immigrants and religious minorities, as part of its ongoing efforts to make them scapegoats for the social crisis engendered by bankrupt capitalism.

In his September 10 speech, Legault repeated the fraudulent claim that Quebec is being "overwhelmed" by an "explosion of immigrants," then went on to announce that he "does not rule out any means to reduce the pressure on our public services and our identity."

This language echoes the "Great Replacement" theory promoted by the European and North American far-right. It claims that there is a plot to replace Western countries' "white" and Christian majorities with immigrants, especially from predominantly Muslim countries in Africa and Asia. In the Quebec version of this conspiracy theory, Canada's federal Liberal government and sections of the Anglo-Canadian elite are said to be seeking to overwhelm the French-speaking "Quebec people" with a flood of immigrants, hostile to "Quebec values" and inclined to speak or learn English.

The Legault government has already threatened to cut off access to public services for asylum seekers if Ottawa does not reduce the number of refugee claimants entering Quebec. While the CAQ points the finger at one of the most vulnerable sections of society, its austerity policies designed to benefit the rich—massive budget cuts and sharp tax cuts for large corporations—are the true source of the "pressure on public services."

In order to divert workers' attention from this social reality, the ruling elite, led by the CAQ and the Parti Québécois (PQ), have for years incited Quebec chauvinism, fueling xenophobia and racism, particularly through their promotion of Islamophobia.

The CAQ government banned teachers and others in the public service "in positions of coercive authority" from wearing the hijab and other "ostentatious" religious symbols under Bill 21 in 2019. Underscoring the completely hypocritical and anti-democratic character of the government's crusade for "state secularism," Bill 21 provides an exemption for "discrete" crucifixes and, in the name of protecting "Quebec's heritage," otherwise protects the Roman Catholic symbols that are omnipresent in the province's public spaces.

Now, claiming that Quebec is under threat from "radical Islamists," the CAQ government is moving to "reinforce" Bill 21. In April, it introduced legislation (Bill 94) to extend Bill 21's religious symbols ban to all school staff and anyone providing services in schools. In his September 10 speech Premier Legault promised further measures, including banning "public prayer."

In the coming weeks, the government will either introduce amendments to its Bill 94 or table a new bill banning the wearing of religious symbols in daycare centers and engaging in public prayers. Immigration Minister Jean-François Roberge justified the latter measure by pointing to a supposed "proliferation of street prayers." The government and media have whipped up a furor over the fact that some participants in demonstrations protesting Israel's imperialist-backed genocide of the Gaza Palestinians have engaged in public prayer as a form of protest and to honour the dead.

It is not necessary to endorse such a practice, which does not contribute to the political clarification of workers and youth, in order to emphatically denounce any bill aimed at banning it. The ban is part of the growing efforts by the ruling class around the world to criminalize the rising popular opposition to the Zionist state's genocidal assault on Gaza, which has been carried out with the political support and military assistance of Washington, Ottawa

and the European imperialist powers.

The Legault government has been especially provocative and repressive: It has slandered protesters opposed to Israel's genocide as antisemites, and last spring it pressured the police to intervene and dismantle pro-Palestinian encampments set up on several Quebec university campuses.

Citing the persistent budget deficit and the downgrading of Quebec's credit rating by the US credit rating agency S&P Global, the CAQ is carrying out devastating austerity measures. It has already announced cuts of around \$1 billion in public health care and more than \$500 million in education.

Anticipating mass opposition among workers, Legault announced in his September 10 speech that his government will change the rules governing strike votes in order to strengthen state control over the process and further limit workers' right to strike. "We must have the courage to modernize the trade unions," he declared.

This new attack on workers' rights follows closely on the heels of last spring's passage of Bill 89, which gives the government and the province's Administrative Labour Tribunal, vast, arbitrary powers to limit workers' participation in strikes and outright ban them.

As part of its "modernization" of Quebec's unions, the government is also planning to make changes to the union dues check-off system (the Rand Formula) to limit unions' ability to launch political campaigns and legal challenges. The Legault government and the Quebec chauvinist far-right are incensed that the Fédération autonome de l'enseignement (FAE, Autonomous Teachers' Federation) has joined and helped finance a Supreme Court challenge to Bill 21, which bars its public school teacher members from wearing the Muslim hijab, Jewish kippah and other religious symbols.

The Quebec ruling elite's promotion of chauvinism and nationalism is part of a global ruling class revival of the far-right, heralded by the likes of Le Pen in France, Meloni in Italy and the pro-Nazi AfD in Germany. In the United States, the Trump regime has declared war on immigrants, employing the federal immigration police (ICE) to track down and deport, Gestapo-style, hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers of all origins and legal statuses. Trump's persecution of immigrants is a key component of his broader drive to establish a fascist presidential dictatorship, which is meeting with no opposition from the Democratic Party or union bureaucracies. This assault on democratic rights has gone hand in hand with unprecedented vandalism against public infrastructure and services, overseen by the infamous US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), from which Legault and his CAQ have taken inspiration.

Under the cover of Trump's tariff war and his threats to annex Canada, the ruling elite in Canada has itself made a rapid lurch right.

Under former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the Liberal government had already drastically reduced immigration rates in the name of combating the housing and public services crisis.

Continuing in the same vein, the Liberal government, now headed by the former central banker Mark Carney, has moved to slash the number of new permanent residents, limit the number of

temporary residents to 5 percent of the population, and curtail the rights of refugee claimants in flagrant violation of the Canada's commitments under international law. This has been accompanied by the announcement of a 15 percent cut in federal discretionary spending, and an immediate 17 percent hike in military spending.

Apart from a few demagogic denunciations, the Quebec unions' response to the assault on workers' social and democratic rights has consisted of pathetic appeals to the CAQ government for "social dialogue," i.e., for it to continue to use the union bureaucracy's services in imposing its attacks.

Although they have characterized it as a "declaration of war," the unions have not organized a single mass demonstration, let alone a campaign of industrial action, against Bill 89. Rather they are urging workers to take "revenge" on Legault by supporting another of the parties of Quebec's capitalist elite in the provincial election to be held in October 2026. Magali Picard, the president of the FTQ (Quebec Federation of Labor), recently revealed that the province's largest labour federation is in talks with the PQ about the possibility of supporting this big business party in the upcoming elections—even as it attacks the CAQ from the right for "out of control spending" and competes with it as to which party is the most aggressive in denouncing immigrants and inciting Quebec chauvinism.

Following Legault's September 10 speech, Québec Solidaire (QS), a party of the upper middle class that occasionally raises timid "left-wing" criticisms, announced through its spokesperson Guillaume Cliche-Rivard that Legault had made "another declaration of war on workers." However, QS's concerns have nothing to do with advancing workers' interests and waging class struggle.

QS has played a key role in stifling and paralyzing worker resistance. QS does this not only through its promotion of the project of an independent capitalist Quebec and apologies for the strident chauvinism of the PQ, but also through its promotion of the pro-capitalist union apparatuses.

Legault's speech is a serious warning. In order to respond to this declaration of war with their own counteroffensive, it is essential for workers in Quebec to repudiate nationalism in all its forms and recognize the international character of their struggle.

They must launch, in close alliance with their class brothers and sisters across Canada and internationally, a worker-led counteroffensive against capitalist austerity and in defence of jobs, public services and democratic rights. This must be combined with a new political perspective: the socialist reorganization of the economy to meet social needs, not private profit.



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