

# More than 50,000 workers demonstrate in Quebec against austerity and anti-strike laws

**Our reporters**  
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Responding to a call from Quebec's main trade union federations, more than 50,000 workers and their families marched through the streets of Montreal last Saturday to protest against capitalist austerity and the authoritarian policies of Premier François Legault and his Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government.

Those joining the November 29 demonstration came from all parts of Quebec. They included construction workers, Canada Post employees, hospital staff, paramedics, public school teachers and forestry, aluminum and steel workers. Small delegations from New Brunswick and Ontario also attended.

Workers' determination to resist the dismantling of public services and the Legault government's attacks on democratic rights—including the right to strike, sharply curtailed by Law 14—was palpable. Many workers held handwritten placards denouncing one or another of Legault's reactionary measures and calling for his seven-year-old government to be ousted.

All this was in striking contrast to the stance of the trade union bureaucracy. As the Socialist Equality Party explained in a statement widely circulated among the demonstrators, the union leaders did not call the November 29 protest to launch a working-class counteroffensive against the combined assault on its social and democratic rights being mounted by Legault and the Mark Carney-led federal Liberal government. For the union bureaucrats, the event was a mechanism for controlling and dissipating growing social discontent. They decried the CAQ government's "bad decisions" and "failure to listen," while deliberately obscuring the fact that the class-war agenda it is implementing is that demanded by the entire capitalist ruling elite in North America and internationally.

This was most apparent in the vapid 2-3 minute speeches that nine senior union officials delivered at the end of the march. None of them offered any serious explanation for Legault's authoritarian measures, his "shock treatment" of public services, or his anti-immigrant chauvinism. In so far as they referred to the CAQ government's sweeping attacks, they attributed them not to the crisis of global capitalism, but Legault's pigheadedness and his cozy relationship with big business cronies.

Their remarks were aimed at channeling the mass working-class anger against Legault behind the push of broad sections of the ruling class to bring to power an alternative right-wing capitalist government in the provincial election that must be held by next October.

Consequently, the union bureaucrats' speeches were devoid of any perspective for working class struggle. In keeping with their orientation to the capitalist establishment, they sought to keep discussion within the narrowest limits, making not a single reference to events outside *la belle province*. The unions' efforts to confine

workers' political horizons to Quebec is an essential element in their systematic promotion of Quebec nationalism, which serves to divide Quebec workers from their class brothers and sisters in the rest of Canada and internationally and to bind them politically and ideologically to the ruling class.

None of the speakers made mention of the numerous workers' struggles that have erupted in recent years across Quebec and the rest of the country, including among postal workers, Alberta teachers, Air Canada flight attendants and Montreal transit workers. Nor was there any reference to the soaring cost of housing, food and transportation.

Legault's austerity measures and anti-strike legislation, build on the right-wing policies of his Parti Québécois and the Quebec Liberal Party predecessors and mirror policies pursued elsewhere, including by Carney at the federal level, Trump in the United States and Macron in France. Yet they were all put down to Legault's personal malevolence.

No mention was made of the Liberal government's use of Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code to all but abolish the right to strike in federal government-regulated industries, although Legault and Labour Minister Jean Boulet boasted that this was their inspiration for Law 14 and many of the workers directly targeted—including Canada Post, railway, Port of Montreal and Air Canada workers—are legally represented by the unions that called Saturday's rally.

Nor did even one of the nine union officials refer to the global trade war initiated the by Trump administration or the broader shift by the ruling class, in Canada and beyond, toward war and mass violence, as exemplified by the imperialist-backed genocide of the Gaza Palestinians and the NATO-instigated war on Russia.

Nothing was said about the massive and accelerating transfer of worker-created wealth into the hands of the capitalist elite, or about the federal Liberal government's almost 40 percent hike in military spending in the current 2025-26 fiscal year and its pledge to increase military spending to 5 percent of GDP, or more than \$150 billion per annum, by 2035.

Instead, the union leaders issued toothless appeals for Legault to "listen to the people."

Mélanie Hubert of the Fédération autonome de l'enseignement (FAE, Autonomous Teachers' Federation) briefly alluded to CAQ measures targeting immigrant communities, particularly Muslims. Discriminatory laws and chauvinist incitement have been central to the CAQ's agenda during both of its mandates, and now with the class struggle sharpening the government is intensifying its efforts to scapegoat immigrants for the social crisis produced by capitalism. In the face of all this, the unions have sat on their hands, while standing shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the establishment in promoting

Quebec nationalism.

Behind-the-scenes, the union bureaucracy is conducting talks with its traditional ally, the big business, pro-independence Parti Québécois. The PQ was almost eliminated from the National Assembly in the last provincial election because of its long association with capitalist austerity. But it has been resurrected by sections of the capitalist elite and now leads the opinion polls. The PQ criticizes the CAQ from the right for allegedly failing to go far enough in promoting anti-immigrant chauvinism and in dismantling what remains of public services.

The unions' efforts to subordinate workers to the PQ and other establishment opposition parties were underscored by the invitation that the Quebec Federation of Labour, the province's largest union federation, extended to the leaders of the PQ, Quebec Liberal Party and Québec Solidaire (QS) to address its bi-annual convention, which concluded just two days before the November 29 demonstration. PQ leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon demonstratively declined the invitation, dispatching a deputy instead, after QFL President Magali Picard refused to shake the hand of the labour minister, as a show of opposition to the Legault government's Bill 3—which among other things would limit the union-dues checkoff system—and, in a demagogic fashion, floated the prospect of a province-wide “social strike.”

One supposedly “left” organization that stood out by its virtual absence from the November 29 demonstration was Québec Solidaire. Its co-leader, Ruba Ghazal, led a small contingent of a dozen or so flag-bearing supporters. This reflects the true nature of QS, a party of the privileged middle classes that is organically hostile to the class struggle of workers and whose political role is to provide a “left” cover for the reactionary program of Quebec independence. This is why QS persists in claiming that its sovereignist “partner” the PQ is “not racist,” and that any comparison between its anti-immigrant incitement and that of far-right forces such as Trump in the United States or Marine Le Pen in France is “illegitimate” and a veritable smear.

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) intervened in the demonstration to politically arm workers with a socialist-internationalist strategy. To fight the austerity and anti-democratic measures of the ruling class it is necessary, they explained, to unite all sections of workers—in Quebec, Canada, and throughout North America—in a common political struggle against the capitalist profit system.

SEP supporters distributed nearly 2,000 copies of a statement titled “For the Unity of North American Workers in *Common Struggle* Against Legault, Carney and Trump.” It read in part:

This rally comes barely a month after mass demonstrations in the United States against Trump's dictatorial measures. It follows a series of strikes across Canada by large contingents of the working class: Air Canada flight attendants, postal workers, drivers and maintenance workers at the STM (Montreal transit system), to name just a few examples.

This demonstrates the potential for a powerful pan-Canadian and North American working-class counteroffensive against the program of capitalist austerity and imperialist aggression being carried out in unison in Quebec City, Ottawa and Washington.

But a warning must be made: this potential cannot be

realized without a break from the nationalist strategy of the union federations organizing today's demonstration. (...)

Workers must take matters into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions and capable of mobilizing the rising social anger in defense of working and living conditions.

Above all, workers must understand that they are engaged in a political struggle, a class war against the entire existing social order. This struggle must be waged outside all the parties and institutions of the establishment, including the pro-capitalist unions.

To oppose austerity, authoritarianism and war, we need a socialist program that tackles the root of the problem head-on: the absolute control that the financial oligarchy exerts over the wealth produced by the collective labor of the international working class. This clique of parasitic billionaires must be expropriated in order to free up the resources necessary to meet the social needs of working people.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with protesters.

Milena, a community worker, and Cédric, who works in the arts, said: “Why is there so much homelessness in Quebec when we are a rich society? Milena added: “We need quality public services.”

WSWS reporters also spoke with Chris, a construction worker from Haiti. He agreed that it is workers who produce all wealth. “We are exploited, and it is the richest and the bosses who have everything.” Denouncing Law 14 for its attack on the right to strike, he said: “Why should we have to fight for our democratic rights when we're in Canada?” SEP supporters explained that the ever widening social inequality capitalism has produced in Canada and internationally is incompatible with basic democratic rights.

Zineb, a teacher from Morocco, was drawn to a placard at the SEP booth calling for the defence of immigrants. She shared her experience as an immigrant who wears the hijab and whose job and right to work in the education sector are now threatened by Law 94 (which extends the discriminatory measures in Quebec's infamous Bill 21). She pointed to the irony that she feels having left Morocco in part because of the anti-democratic nature of the monarchical North African state. Zineb agreed that the escalating attacks on immigrants and minorities are linked to capitalism's crisis, are used to divide the working class, and need to be countered through a unified struggle of North American workers to secure the social and democratic rights of all working people.



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