

Quebec election called amid intensifying Canada-US trade war

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Quebec Premier and Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) leader Christine Fréchette last week officially launched the provincial election slated for Monday, October 5. Opinion polls show widespread popular anger over dilapidated public services and a severe shortage of affordable housing, as well as great volatility in voting intentions.

Voters are expected to elect representatives from five parties to Quebec's National Assembly. But with none of them currently enjoying more than 30 percent support, there is a distinct possibility the election will result in a minority government.

The election comes amid an intensifying Canada-US trade war. After trade talks collapsed August 21, US President Donald Trump carried through on his threat to impose 50 percent tariffs on more than \$US 20 billion worth of Canadian goods. Asserting that Canada was now "at war," Prime Minister Mark Carney responded by announcing equivalent "dollar for dollar" tariffs on American products, prompting Washington to announce that tariffs of Canadian-assembled cars and trucks will rise to 50 percent at the beginning of January 2027.

This economic war is only one front in an expanding global war. Faced with an historic crisis—exemplified by a record national debt of \$40 trillion—the American ruling class is seeking to redivide the world by force in order to assert control over markets, resources, production networks and strategic chokepoints. NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine, the US-Israeli conflict against Iran and the genocide of the Palestinians are battlegrounds in a developing global conflagration whose principal target is China.

A second-rank imperialist power that historically profited from its ties to the British Empire and then from its post-1940 close military-security and economic partnership with Washington, Canada finds itself plunged into the heart of this emerging third world war. Hard hit by Trump's tariffs, the Canadian bourgeoisie does not oppose the would-be American dictator on principle, but only because his "America First" program cuts across its own predatory interests. Like Canada and for the same reasons, European imperialism is engaged in a massive campaign of aggression to escalate the war on Russia and rearmament.

Under the cover of Canadian nationalism and using Trump as a pretext, the Liberal governments of Justin Trudeau and then Mark Carney have shifted official politics far to the right. They have massively hiked military spending, pledging to spend more than \$150 billion on defence by 2035. They have provided huge tax cuts and subsidies to big business and the financial elite, and

launched a frontal assault on the right to strike.

It is the working class that will pay for the orgy of military spending through the imposition of austerity policies and the dismantling of workers' democratic and social rights.

These fundamental issues—the descent into world war, savage austerity at both the federal and provincial levels, the destruction of jobs and wages, the rising cost of living, the shortage of affordable housing—will be buried during the Quebec election campaign under a deluge of reactionary Quebec and Canadian nationalist appeals.

Despite the resignation of CAQ founder François Legault last January and his replacement by Fréchette, the CAQ government remains deeply unpopular. Since 2018, it has waged a veritable class war against workers: cutting real wages, dismantling and privatizing public services, prioritizing profits over human lives at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and mounting ever-greater attacks on the right to strike—notably through Bill 14, which allows the labour minister to arbitrarily end any strike under the pretext of protecting the "well-being of the population."

To divide the working class and deflect the anger provoked by its austerity policies, the CAQ has whipped up Quebec nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism, particularly in its anti-Muslim variant. It adopted discriminatory laws on "state secularism" and the "protection" of the French language.

Four other parties are vying to form the next government. Leading in the polls since last year, the Parti Québécois (PQ) is considered by many observers to be the favourite to win the October 5 election—even with only a third of the popular vote.

Abandoned by workers after the massive social spending cuts of the Parizeau/Bouchard/Landry years (1994–2003), the PQ has rebuilt itself under Paul St-Pierre Plamondon around an explicitly chauvinist Quebec nationalism and a virulent xenophobia, scapegoating immigrants for glaring social problems. In 2026, St-Pierre Plamondon gave an hour-long interview to *Rebel News*, a far-right media outlet linked to the MAGA movement and European fascists. In that interview, as elsewhere, St-Pierre Plamondon promoted a Quebec variant of the fascist "Great Replacement" theory, claiming that Ottawa seeks to "drown" the francophone Quebec "nation" under a flood of anglophone immigrants.

After nearly disappearing in 2022, the PQ was revived not by a popular movement, but by sections of the ruling class, its allies in the corporate media—notably the *Journal de Montréal*, owned by

billionaire Pierre Karl Péladeau—and the trade union bureaucracy.

Having long since abandoned any progressive pretensions, the PQ now promotes Quebec independence as a historic opportunity to take an axe to social spending under the pretext of ending federal-provincial program “duplication” and drastically reducing bureaucracy and the number of public servants.

It is campaigning for independence on an explicitly far-right basis: a 20 percent tax cut for “Quebec” businesses, privatization of public services, massive reductions in immigration, the creation of a Quebec army to be funded by the equivalent of 5 percent of Quebec’s GDP, and participation in NATO and NORAD. Representing sections of the Quebec bourgeoisie seeking a direct deal with Washington, St-Pierre Plamondon has carefully avoided criticizing Trump over the tariffs.

The PQ’s program aims at the creation of a third imperialist state in North America, designed to divide Quebec workers, along ethnolinguistic lines, from their brothers and sisters in the rest of Canada and the Americas.

Québec Solidaire (QS), another pro-independence party, represents the Quebec pseudo-left. Pro-capitalist, it expresses the aspirations of privileged layers of the upper middle class. Although it has no chance of forming the government, QS will play an important role in providing a “progressive” veneer to Quebec nationalism and channeling workers’ opposition behind the overtly pro-big business parties, particularly the PQ, with which it is prepared to ally. QS has pledged to support the “Yes” camp led by the PQ if the latter keeps its promise to hold a third referendum on Quebec independence before 2030.

While occasionally criticizing St-Pierre Plamondon’s most blatant anti-immigrant scapegoating, QS legitimizes his chauvinism by presenting the “debate” over immigration as “healthy and peaceful” and by claiming that the PQ “is not intolerant” and should not be compared to Trump or France’s Le Pen.

Historically, the Quebec Liberal Party (PLQ) has been the party most openly associated with big business. The last time it held power, between 2014 and 2018 under Philippe Couillard, the PLQ imposed sweeping social spending cuts in one of the worst waves of austerity in Quebec’s history.

In a sign of the scale of the rightward shift in Quebec politics, the PLQ, led by former Federation of Chambers of Commerce CEO Charles Milliard, presents itself as a party of the moderate “centre,” more liberal on immigration and less inclined to chauvinism. Yet it was the PLQ that first proposed, in its Bill 62, to deny public services to anyone with a “covered face,” thereby inspiring the CAQ’s infamous Bill 21. Opposed to independence, the PLQ mobilizes Canadian nationalism and opposition to Trump’s tariffs to rally workers behind the federal state and “their” bourgeoisie.

The Conservative Party of Quebec (PCQ), led by Éric Duhaime, advances a thoroughly reactionary program and competes with the CAQ for the support of the hard-right electorate opposed to the PQ’s separatism. Duhaime vehemently opposed COVID-19 public health measures and supported the far-right “Freedom Convoy” that menacingly occupied downtown Ottawa for three weeks in early 2022. The PCQ advocates massive cuts to social spending,

accelerated deregulation, increased privatization of health care and education, and “record” tax cuts for corporations and the rich. Despite its weak popular support outside Quebec City and the Beauce region, it enjoys extensive media coverage, because a section of the ruling class wants to use its ultra-reactionary program to push all of Quebec politics even further right.

Quebec workers have no interest in supporting any of these parties on October 5: all of them have in store austerity, cuts to wages and jobs, the dismantling of public services, deepening social inequality, inaction on climate change, and attacks on social and democratic rights.

Only the development of an independent political movement of the working class, in a break with the parties of big business and the pro-capitalist unions, can enable workers to defend their true class interests.

The role of the union bureaucracy is to systematically isolate and sabotage the growing struggles of workers—such as those waged recently in the Quebec public sector, by postal workers, or by Air Canada flight attendants—and to bring them politically back under the sway of Quebec nationalism and into the fold of the PQ.

In a move that demonstrates once again how far the bureaucracy is prepared to go to tie the working class to the PQ, FTQ (Quebec Federation of Labour) President Magali Picard participated in the PQ’s policy convention earlier this year. There she endorsed the “pro-worker” posturing of this pro-austerity and pro-imperialist party—demagoguery reminiscent of that of federal Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre or the fascist Donald Trump, who drawing on Hitler’s playbook is trying to establish a presidential dictatorship.

In opposition to the reactionary nationalism of the union bureaucracy in Quebec and in English Canada (where it waves The Maple Leaf and gives full-throated support to Carney’s Team Canada), all sections of the Canadian working class—francophone, anglophone and immigrant—must unite and join with their class brothers and sisters in the United States and overseas in a struggle for power and for the socialist reorganization of society.



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