Quebec Premier endorses the French state's violent crackdown on student-worker protests

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Following an October 26 telephone conversation with French President Emmanuel Macron, Quebec's newly elected premier, Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, published a message on his Facebook page stating that he had "expressed the full support and solidarity of the Government of Quebec and our condemnation of the unrest fomented by the far left."

By adopting the Élysée's rhetoric about "seditious acts" attributed to "organized far-left groups," the leader of the Quebec separatist Parti Québécois (PQ) is endorsing a narrative aimed at smearing social protest and justifying the state violence deployed against it. This is a clear signal that his own government and the entire ruling elite—pro-Quebec independence and federalist alike— will resort to the same methods against the working class in Canada.

The youth-led protests sweeping France and Europe express the universal opposition of workers and young people to sweeping social spending cuts, the high cost of living, militarism and war, and police repression. The Macron government is trampling democracy underfoot by criminalizing protests in order to defend the interests of the capitalist oligarchy, whose wealth has soared since the 2008 global financial crisis, and especially during and after the COVID pandemic.

The movement launched by French high school students against dilapidated schools and a chronic teacher shortage has fueled broad pan-European protests in opposition to the rising cost of living, the housing crisis and rearmament. From Spain to Serbia, Portugal, Italy, Germany and Greece, young people and the working class are entering into struggle against the state-big business assault on their living and working conditions.

In France, the government has responded with dictatorial measures. Tens of thousands of police officers and soldiers have been mobilized; thousands of demonstrators have been arrested, most of them under the age of 18; and numerous protesters have been maimed by crowd-control weapons.

Unable to suppress social anger despite banning gatherings and imposing curfews, the Macron government is brandishing the threat of a state of emergency and putting forward "anti-vandalism" laws aimed at terrorizing the population so as to silence all social opposition.

St-Pierre Plamondon's enthusiasm for the French state's repression and the ruling class campaign to turn reality on its head and smear those opposing rule by the financial elite as "anti-democratic" follows an especially right-wing election campaign in Quebec, during which the PQ and all the establishment parties vied with one another over who could best impose reactionary measures. The PQ's program for Quebec "sovereignty," based on austerity, militarism and the continual demonization of immigrants, was explicitly presented to the ruling class as the best means of slashing public spending and building an "entrepreneurial Quebec" allied with US imperialism.

With its pro-business nationalist program widely unpopular, the PQ has sought in recent years to broaden its support within the ruling elite by aligning itself with the far right, going so far as to echo the anti-immigrant diatribes of fascists such as Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen.

In addition to blaming refugees and asylum seekers for the housing crisis and the disastrous state of public education and healthcare, the PQ promotes a Quebec version of the fascist "great replacement" theory. It accuses Ottawa of seeking to destroy the "Quebec nation" by "swamping" it with immigrants and refugees.

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For years, the PQ leader has railed against the "radical left" and "wokeism" in schools, universities and the public sphere. Like the entire Canadian political establishment, he has condemned protests and student encampments against Israel's imperialist-backed genocide against the Palestinians by slanderously branding them antisemitic and supporting efforts to criminalize them. As in France, his denunciation of the "far left" is aimed at sowing confusion, dividing workers, stoking reaction, and diverting attention from the capitalist crisis, while justifying state repression of opposition to austerity and war.

The Canadian ruling elite is well aware that its agenda of rearmament and imperialist aggression—which requires drastic cuts to public services to finance a massive increase in the military budget to 5 percent of GDP by 2035—is deeply unpopular.

Under conditions of growing social inequality and the continued erosion of what remains of the welfare state, the ruling class knows that it is sitting on a social powder keg. But confronted with intensifying inter-imperialist tensions and an unsustainable economic situation, it neither wants to nor can offer concessions.

Since social spending cuts and the assault on workers are incompatible with democratic forms of government, the ruling elite—in Canada as in the United States and Europe—is turning to authoritarian methods to impose its diktats and increase worker exploitation.

Across Canada, austerity imposed at both the provincial and federal levels has been accompanied by an unprecedented attack on workers' democratic rights, particularly the right to strike.

In 2024, Justin Trudeau's federal Liberal government arbitrarily "reinterpreted" Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code to criminalize a series of strikes, without even the fig-leaf of a parliamentary vote.

Taking its cue from this move, Quebec's previous CAQ government passed its own anti-strike measure, Bill 14. It extends the concept of "essential services" to municipalities, public schools and the private sector, and allows the government to illegalize by decree any worker job action deemed not in the "public interest" and use binding arbitration to impose "collective agreements."

In Alberta and Ontario, governments have used the notwithstanding clause of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to criminalize strikes and attack democratic rights. Last month, Mark Carney's federal Liberal government tabled legislation (Bill C-39) that will enshrine its predecessor's practice of criminalizing strikes, with the labour minister empowered to unilaterally outlaw strikes if they judge them contrary to the "national interest."

The working class cannot defend its fundamental democratic rights—including the right to protest and the right to strike—by appealing to the very capitalist state that is abolishing them in order to preserve the wealth and power of the capitalist oligarchy.

What is needed instead is a unified struggle by workers on both sides of the Atlantic against St-Pierre Plamondon, Carney, Trump and Macron—and their common turn toward dictatorship to crush growing social opposition and restructure class relations for war.

This requires a political break with the union apparatuses that isolate and sabotage workers' struggles—with the full support of establishment "left" parties such as the NDP and Québec Solidaire—in order to maintain "social peace," that is, capitalist order.

English-speaking, French-speaking and immigrant workers in Canada must unite with one another, and with their class brothers and sisters in North America and Europe, in an independent political mobilization against police repression, austerity and war—and their common source, bankrupt capitalism. The basis for this struggle is a socialist and internationalist perspective and the struggle for workers' power.



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