

# Québec Solidaire ready to govern with pro-austerity Parti Québécois

By Laurent Lafrance  
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In the name of promoting Quebec independence and preventing Premier Philippe Couillard and his federalist Quebec Liberals from retaining office, Québec Solidaire is preparing to ally with the Parti Québécois (PQ), including in a coalition government. No matter that when in office, the big-business PQ has slashed public services, criminalized workers' struggles, stoked anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant chauvinism and supported Canadian imperialism's participation in US-led wars in Afghanistan and Libya.

The political ambitions of Québec Solidaire (QS)—a pseudo-left party that counts Syriza, Podemos and the German Left Party among its allies—were on display at a recent public debate organized by the pro-Quebec independence, Montreal daily *Le Devoir* under the title “QS, PQ: Is the Left condemned to opposition?”

The event coincided with a series of initiatives launched by the PQ to bring about a “convergence” among the different “sovereignist” parties and groups. The debate's two main participants were Jean-François Lisée, a PQ Member of the National Assembly and former cabinet minister, and Françoise David, QS's co-leader and the head of its three-member National Assembly faction.

Throughout the debate, Lisée advocated for a PQ-QS alliance to defeat the Liberals in the next provincial election, slated for 2018. He reminded the audience he has previously worked closely with QS MNA Amir Khadir to create the conditions for a “convergence” of their respective parties.

At first David sought to keep a certain distance from the PQ, citing some of the most unpopular right-wing measures imposed by PQ governments. But it soon became clear that the organization she represents wants nothing more than to join forces with the PQ so as to gain access to the corridors of power and play a direct role in managing the crisis-ridden capitalist system.

The turning point of the QS-PQ debate was when David said that her party would be willing to be the junior partner in a PQ-led government on condition that the PQ move forward with introducing proportional representation—that is, the distribution of at least some National Assembly seats according to the percentage of total votes received, rather than solely on the basis of first-past-the-post electoral constituency contests. “The PQ has proposed this in their program since 1977,” said David. “If they had implemented it, we would perhaps be in power together today.”

This is an explicit commitment by Québec Solidaire to follow

the example of its Greek sister party and role model, Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left). Brought to power early last year on the basis of a vow to end the austerity measures that had ravaged Greece, Syriza quickly repudiated its election promises, refused to appeal to European workers for a joint struggle against austerity and the capitalist order, prostrated themselves before the European Union and IMF and ultimately imposed austerity measures even more draconian than those of the previous governments.

Like Syriza, Québec Solidaire adopts a verbal “left” stance, but has nothing to do with the working class, let alone socialism. It is comprised of elements drawn from upper layers of the middle class, including academics and other professionals, community activists, feminists and other promoters of identity politics, and self-styled Marxists whose “Marxism” is a total sham. QS characterizes itself as a party of “citizens” seeking to “democratize” Quebec and which combines the “politics of the ballot-box, with the politics of the street”—i.e., that seeks to pressure and work with Quebec's ruling elite through parliament and protest-politics and collaborates closely with the union bureaucracy.

The current first-past-the-post electoral system favors the established big business parties, placing a high bar for smaller parties to gain entry into the National Assembly and facilitating the efforts of the Liberals and PQ to polarize the electorate along federalist-pro-independence lines. QS fears that in this context a formal alliance with the PQ will result in its political marginalization, if not dissolution into its sister sovereignist party.

Under a system of proportional representation, QS calculates it would be much better able to counter PQ appeals “not to divide the sovereignist vote” and, once the elections were concluded, would be in a stronger position in negotiating for influence and cabinet posts in a PQ-led government.

Hence, QS's push for a somewhat more democratic electoral system is in reality all about increasing its leverage in horse-trading with the political and big business establishment, especially if the ruling class should consider a PQ-QS government necessary to accelerate its assault on jobs, public services and workers' rights.

Another concern for Québec Solidaire as it ponders closer collaboration with the PQ is its fear that “convergence” could damage its efforts to revive support among workers and youth for Quebec *indépendantiste* nationalism. If QS is too closely identified and allied with the PQ, it will be less able to provide a

“left” cover for the PQ and the reactionary project of a section of the Quebec bourgeoisie to reshuffle North America’s state borders and create a capitalist *République du Québec*.

Québec Solidaire seeks to convince this faction, whose political instrument has long been the PQ, that a “rainbow” coalition, affording more exposure to the elements of the middle class active in QS, will promote Quebec independence by giving it a greater appearance of all-class support and popular legitimacy.

Significantly, at the most recent meeting of the PQ’s National Council, Pierre Karl Péladeau—the telecommunications magnate and notorious rightwinger who captured the party’s leadership last year—proposed a resolution to revise Quebec’s voting system. In doing so, Péladeau said it would help promote a “real convergence” with Québec Solidaire and Option Nationale (ON), a pro-independence party established in 2011 by the investment banker and one-time PQ MNA Jean-Martin Aussant.

In advocating collaboration with the so-called left sovereigntists, the PQ is clearly trying to burnish its popular image, which has been severely marred by the right-wing policies it has pursued whenever it has held office.

The last time was for 18 months between September 2012 and April 2014. The ruling elite turned to the PQ to defuse the political crisis engendered by the 2012 Quebec student strike and the explosion of working class opposition to Jean Charest’s Liberal government when it passed emergency legislation outlawing the strike and illegalizing demonstrations over any issue throughout Quebec.

QS played an important role in assisting the pro-capitalist unions in politically diverting the opposition to Charest’s austerity program and state repression behind the PQ. In June 2012, when the unions were pressing for an end to the student strike under the watchword “After the streets, to the ballot box,” QS formally proposed that the PQ join it in an electoral alliance. And just days before the September 4, 2012 provincial, the QS announced it was ready to support a PQ minority government unconditionally for at least one year.

The result was an electoral victory for the PQ. It rescinded the Charest government’s university tuition fee hikes, then brought forward its own raft of austerity measures including tuition fee increases. Headed by Pauline Marois, the PQ government also introduced a “Secular Charter” designed at whipping up anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant chauvinism so as to divide the working class and divert attention away from its social spending cuts. Quebec Solidaire termed the Charter and the reactionary debate over “religious accommodation” that had preceded it as legitimate and necessary, with its only caveat being that the PQ had gone a bit too far.

Ten years after its founding as an ostensible left pro-independence party, QS continues to view the PQ as a fellow sovereigntist party and once and future ally. Recently, QS President Andrés Fontecilla boasted that QS is having an “ongoing” internal debate and “very fruitful dialogue” about prospects for working with other pro-independence parties. Following a day of reflection “March 19 on its strategy for winning independence, QS issued a press release that urged the “other sovereigntist organizations,” including the PQ and its sister

party in the federal parliament, the Bloc Québécois (BQ), to do the same. This, said the QS press release, would “establish a basis for discussion.”

QS has in fact long been in a de facto alliance with the PQ, BQ and Option Nationale through its participation in YES Quebec (formerly the Council for Quebec Sovereignty). Chaired by former Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU) President Claudette Charbonneau, YES Quebec is a “non-partisan,” “civil society” organization that aims “to develop a common roadmap so as to advance together toward independence.”

YES Quebec states that it has learned from the example of Catalonia and the coalition “Together for the Yes” (*Junts pel si*), in which the forces of the Catalan pseudo-left and what they call “citizen organizations” joined forces with the openly pro-austerity, nationalist right to win increased seats in the Catalan parliament.

In September 2015, the PQ, QS and ON sent emissaries to Catalonia to take part in an “observer mission” during the campaign for the Catalan legislative elections. The representative of the PQ, Daniel Turp, said at the time: “We have several organizations here (the National Movement of Quebecers, the St.-Jean-Baptiste Society, YES Quebec) that could, in our own debate, play a role similar to that of the Catalan National Assembly and [the Catalan separatist] Omnium Cultural” in promoting convergence and joint action among the various pro-independence parties.

*Presse-toi à Gauche* (Hurry up and move left), a nationalist web site largely directed by the anti-Trotskyist Pabloites of Gauche Socialiste, has launched a debate on how QS can rally and reinvigorate the Quebec sovereigntist movement, including on the pertinence of “tactical” and “strategic” alliances with the PQ. The Communist Party of Quebec, which like Gauche Socialiste is an integral part of Quebec Solidaire, responded by baldly calling for QS to enter into a “no-compete” agreement, i.e., a formal electoral bloc, with the QS and ON for the 2018 elections.

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