

Ten years of Québec Solidaire: The record of a pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist party

Part one

By Louis Girard and Richard Dufour
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This is the first part of a two-part article. The concluding part will be posted Tuesday, January 3.

At a party conference held last May to mark its tenth anniversary, Québec Solidaire (QS—Solidarity Quebec) set itself the goal of forming Quebec’s government within the next decade, on the basis of a program geared to “economic growth.” By using this code word, long associated with right-wing opposition to social spending, wealth redistribution and constraints on big-business profit-making, QS was sending a clear signal to the ruling elite that if entrusted with the reins of power, it will impose austerity and seek to make working people pay for the capitalist crisis.

QS was founded in 2006 by feminist, environmental and antipoverty activists, along with other “left” nationalists disappointed with the Parti Québécois (PQ), including the *Union des forces progressistes* (Union of Progressive Forces). From the get-go, it enjoyed the full support and active participation of the Pabloites and other pseudo-Marxist groups.

Québec Solidaire has since evolved entirely within the PQ-dominated Quebec “sovereignist” (pro-Quebec independence) milieu. It has repeatedly sought to forge an electoral alliance with the big-business PQ, and, at its most recent National Council meeting in November, responded to the PQ’s call for a “progressive” alliance to defeat the Quebec Liberal government at the next election by proclaiming its readiness to enter into “dialogue.”

Although it occasionally bemoans certain excesses of “neoliberal capitalism,” QS is a pseudo-left, pro-capitalist party that articulates the aspirations and grievances not of the working class, but of privileged sections of the upper-middle class—academics and other professionals, trade union functionaries and small business owners. It aspires to gain respectability in the eyes of the ruling elite and become a major player in official bourgeois politics.

Québec Solidaire’s emergence is rooted in several interrelated global processes: the growing crisis of world capitalism; the mounting popular opposition to austerity and war; and the discrediting and increasing crisis of the moribund social democratic, Stalinist and trade union apparatuses, which for more than three decades have worked hand-in-glove with big business in slashing jobs and workers’ living standards and dismantling public and social services.

Under these conditions, the ruling class needs new political mechanisms to suppress the class struggle. Over the past decade, “new left” parties have emerged throughout the world—the Left Party in Germany, Podemos in Spain and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, to name a few—with the stated goal of “filling the space” created by the discrediting of the traditional “left” parties of government. These new parties adopt left rhetoric so as to channel mounting social opposition into protest and parliamentary politics and block the emergence of an independent, that is,

a revolutionary socialist, political movement of the working class.

A pivotal experience in this regard is that of Québec Solidaire’s Greek sister party, Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left). Syriza came to power in January 2015 pledging to end austerity. Predictably, it quickly capitulated to the demands of international capital and imposed a program of privatization and public service, pension and wage cuts far beyond that implemented by its right-wing predecessors. As a result, Greek workers and youth today confront conditions of social misery not seen in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

Common to all these new pseudo-left parties is hostility to the class struggle, rejection of the working class as the driving force of social progress, and the promotion of identity politics—focused on nationality, race, gender or sexual orientation—to divide workers and block the development of a socialist alternative to decrepit capitalism. It is no accident that Québec Solidaire, while posing as a party of the “left,” presents itself as neither a workers’ nor a socialist party, but rather as a “feminist,” “ecologist,” “sovereignist,” “antiglobalization” and non-class “citizens’ party.”

Québec Solidaire: A proponent of “human rights” imperialism

Québec Solidaire and the “new left” parties that it touts as its sister parties are pro-imperialist.

Syriza supports Greece’s membership in both the US-led NATO war alliance and the European Union, the instrument through which the most powerful sections of the European bourgeoisie have imposed brutal austerity since 2008 and are remilitarizing Europe. Germany’s Left Party has joined with the rest of the country’s political establishment in promoting German rearmament and foreign military interventions and the call for Germany to once again act as a “world power.”

Québec Solidaire, notwithstanding its advocacy of Quebec’s secession from Canada, focuses almost exclusively on Quebec provincial politics. It rarely comments on—let alone criticizes—Canada’s imperialist foreign policy, including Canada’s participation in virtually every war that the US has waged over the past quarter-century and the massive escalation in Canadian military spending since the turn of the current century.

This is not simply parochialism. It is a silence that bespeaks support—a support rooted in QS’s class orientation and outlook as a nationalist, pro-capitalist party of the upper-middle class.

The Quebec sovereignty movement long ago renounced its pacifist pretensions and emerged as a vocal proponent of Canadian military intervention in the Middle East and Central Asia. The Bloc Québécois (BQ), the PQ’s sister party in federal politics, hailed Canada’s decade-long, neocolonial counterinsurgency war in Afghanistan as a “noble cause.” In the 2015 federal election, the BQ joined with Stephen Harper and his Conservatives in denouncing the New Democratic Party

(NDP) for proposing that Canada's "combat mission" in Iraq be wound down.

On the rare occasions that QS speaks about Canada's role on the world stage, it echoes the PQ and BQ in lauding the so-called "Pearsonian tradition" in Canadian foreign policy. Under 1960s Liberal Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, Canada took a leading role in US-backed United Nations peacekeeping missions and promoted itself as a "middle power" and "honest broker" in world affairs, while serving as an anchor of the US-led NATO and NORAD war alliances against the Soviet Union.

Like the pseudo-left internationally, QS specializes in repeating and amplifying the liberal imperialist rhetoric that Canada, the US and other Western powers use to provide a "humanitarian" veil for the aggressive assertion of their predatory economic and geostrategic interests—including the wars that have blown apart entire societies such as Iraq, Libya, and now Syria.

This can be amply demonstrated by a review of Québec Solidaire's sparse, but highly revealing, public record on key foreign policy questions.

QS and American and Canadian imperialism's wars and "regime-change" operations

In early September 2006, just months after the formation of QS, its representatives attended the federal convention of the NDP, Canada's social democratic party, as special guests. In a demagogic maneuver aimed at appealing to mounting antiwar sentiment and concealing the NDP's longtime support for Canada's role in the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, the NDP leadership introduced a motion calling for the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan. When asked to cast a consultative vote, the QS leaders in attendance refused to support the motion, declaring, "If our soldiers can help protect Afghan people and assist in reconstruction, so be it."

This amounted to unequivocal support for the Canadian Armed Forces' intervention in Afghanistan. This intervention had the double goal of staking a role for Canadian imperialism in energy-rich Central Asia and strengthening Canada's reactionary strategic partnership with Washington, including by freeing US troops to wage war in Iraq.

QS later sought to cover its tracks by calling for NATO's intervention in Afghanistan to be replaced by a "new multilateral initiative" under the supervision of the United Nations, another tool of imperialism.

Québec Solidaire went on to welcome the efforts of Washington and its allies to mount a "regime-change" operation against Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was deemed insufficiently subservient to Western interests. In early 2010, in the midst of a Western media campaign that denounced Ahmadinejad's reelection as illegitimate and cast the opposition Green movement as the fount of democracy, a QS spokesperson said, "It is clear to us that the Iranian opposition movement is a grassroots independent movement."

In fact, the Greens' support came almost entirely from the most privileged sections of Iranian society, those most eager for an accommodation with US imperialism and the dismantling of what remained of the social concessions granted the working class and poor in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution. Self-consciously employing Reaganite and Thatcherite rhetoric, the Green leaders railed against Ahmadinejad's "wasteful" social spending.

The following year, QS backed the NATO war that, with the help of Islamist militias, overthrew the Libyan regime of Colonel Gaddafi. The NATO intervention was aimed at strengthening imperialist domination of the oil-rich North African country, strategically located between Tunisia and Egypt, where popular uprisings had just brought down pro-US dictators.

Amir Khadir, then Québec Solidaire's lone Member of the Quebec National Assembly, stood out for his vitriolic denunciations of Gaddafi.

In February 2011, he authored a National Assembly motion in support of the "civilians demanding genuine reforms and the end of dictatorship in Libya," thus painting Québec's legislature, an integral part of the Canadian imperialist state, as a defender of the Libyan people. The following month, when NATO, under the leadership of a Canadian general, launched its air war against Libya, Khadir rushed to give the imperialist regime-change operation Québec Solidaire's support, shamelessly declaring that "the Libyan people demand an intervention."

QS has similarly been complicit in the regime-change operation that Washington, with Canada's support, has sought to carry out in Syria, once again using Islamist militia as its proxies. Since 2011, the US, with the support of Saudi Arabia, other Gulf States and Turkey, has been seeking to overthrow Bashar Al-Assad's Russian- and Iranian-backed regime by funneling weapons and billions in financial aid to anti-Assad Islamist groups, including those linked to Al Qaeda and those that went on to form ISIS.

In 2011, the QS supported the imperialist campaign for international sanctions against Syria, claiming they constituted material support for a popular "revolution" against Assad.

In October 2014, QS formally opposed the Harper Conservative government's decision to send Canadian fighter jets, in the name of opposing ISIS, to join US forces in bombing Iraq and Syria. But this stance had nothing to do with mobilizing the working class against imperialism, as attested by Québec Solidaire's praise for the federal opposition parties' attempts to get the Conservatives to "listen to reason." In fact, the opposition had only tactical differences with Harper over how best to uphold US hegemony over the Middle East and position Canada to partake in, and profit from, an imperialist repartition of the world's most important oil-producing region.

The Liberals supported the Conservatives' plans to deploy Canadian Special Forces to train Western-allied Kurdish militia in northern Iraq (and soon after coming to power in the October 2015 general election tripled their number), while the NDP wanted Canada to support the US war by arming the Kurds and providing humanitarian aid.

Subsequently, in March 2015, when questioned about Harper's extension of the Canadian Armed Forces' Mideast combat mission for a further year, QS parliamentary leader Françoise David affirmed her party's support, as a matter of principle, for "any Canadian action aimed at providing aid to societies striving to establish democracy." She criticized the government only for a lack of transparency as to its goals, while raising concern that its "aid"—participation in a US-fomented war for regime change that has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions—might benefit the "current government of Bashar al-Assad."

Québec Solidaire has also given tacit and at times explicit support to NATO's military-strategic offensive against Russia, which threatens to ignite a conflict between the world's principal nuclear powers.

Canadian imperialism, under Harper and now the Trudeau Liberal government, has played a leading role in this campaign. Canada is one of the staunchest allies of the anti-Russian Ukrainian government that was brought to power in February 2014 by a US-orchestrated, fascist-spearheaded putsch. The Canadian military is training Ukrainian Army and National Guard troops and, in a show of political support for Kiev's government, Ottawa has negotiated a free trade agreement. Canada has also played a leading role in NATO's threatening deployments on Russia's borders, including taking responsibility for leading one of four new NATO "forward deployed" battalions to be stationed in the Baltic States and Poland.

One would search in vain for any exposure, or even mention, of Canada's aggressive and provocative role against Russia on Québec Solidaire's website or in its leaders' speeches. However, QS was quick to denounce the referendum that resulted in Crimea's Russian-speaking majority voting to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia, lending its

“left” voice to the imperialist campaign to label Russia an “aggressor.”

Ignoring the putsch that had overthrown Ukraine’s elected president and the long record of provocations by Washington that had preceded it, including the expansion of NATO hundreds of kilometers eastwards up to the borders of Russia, QS spokeswoman David condemned “the military intervention of Russia in Crimea,” which she termed a “coup.”

As for Canada’s support for Washington’s military-strategic offensive against China, QS has uttered not a word. It opposes the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade and investment agreement, which the Obama administration has touted as the “economic arm” of its anti-China “pivot to Asia.” But it does so only from the standpoint that the TPP will impinge on “national sovereignty” and hurt weaker sections of the Quebec bourgeoisie, not that it is part of an imperialist military-strategic offensive that threatens world war.

The second and concluding part of this article will examine Québec Solidaire’s role in seeking to revive Quebec *indépendantiste* nationalism, which has been widely discredited within the working class due to the austerity policies of successive PQ governments, and in assisting the trade union bureaucracy in isolating and smothering the struggles of the working class.

But one further point needs to be made about Québec Solidaire’s pro-imperialist character. In the 2015 federal election campaign, QS was a leading proponent of the trade union-spearheaded “Anybody But Conservative” campaign, which resulted in the return to power of the Liberals, long the Canadian ruling class’s preferred party of government.

Over the past 14 months, QS has remained studiously silent as Justin Trudeau and his Liberals have continued and accelerated the resurgence of Canadian militarism. This has included the aforementioned expansion of Canada’s role in the US-led Mideast war and its leading role in NATO’s military build-up on Russia’s borders. But in addition, the Trudeau government has announced its intention to deploy troops to Africa, where Canadian mining companies have some \$30 billion in investments. It has also ordered a defense policy review that is meant to lay the political groundwork for a more aggressive military posture, including major military spending hikes and Canada’s participation in the US antiballistic missile shield.

To be continued

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