

Québec Solidaire complicit in ruling-class' intensifying campaign of chauvinist, anti-immigrant incitement

Hugo Maltais
23 June 2024

Quebec's ruling elite is relentlessly stepping up its campaign of nationalist, anti-immigrant incitement. This is a key element in its response to the mounting social anger exemplified by the recent wave of public sector strikes and the ongoing demonstrations at multiple universities across Canada against the genocide of Palestinians perpetrated by the extreme right-wing Israeli regime with the full support of Washington and Ottawa.

Premier François Legault's national-autonomist "Quebec First" Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) is vying with Paul Saint-Pierre Plamondon's pro-independence Parti Québécois (PQ) to see who can be more extreme and inflammatory in their denunciations of immigrants as the source of myriad social problems—all with the purpose of obscuring their real cause, the failure of capitalism.

For its part, Québec Solidaire (QS)—the pseudo-left organization that is the third-party in the Quebec National Assembly—has timidly criticized the virulent tone of the CAQ and PQ's anti-immigrant rhetoric. However, it is lending legitimacy to their xenophobic positions. QS is particularly indulgent towards the PQ, with it which shares the reactionary *indépendantiste* perspective of establishing a capitalist Quebec republic that would be a member of imperialist war alliances like NATO and NORAD and the Canada-US-Mexico trade bloc.

On May 29, PQ Member of the National Assembly Pascal Bérubé tabled a motion in the Quebec legislature aimed at providing "democratic" legitimacy to the anti-immigrant agitation. It affirmed that "debates on immigration policies and reception conditions in Quebec are desirable and legitimate" and "advocating a reduction in immigration levels is not a form of intolerance." QS blocked the motion's adoption on the grounds that the two amendments it proposed had been rejected by the PQ.

After the PQ denounced QS on X (the former Twitter) for scuttling its motion, QS immigration spokesman Guillaume Cliche-Rivard rushed to mend fences with the PQ and adapt to its anti-immigrant campaign. This included grossly lying about the PQ's xenophobia and declaring his party's sympathy for its anti-immigrant policies: "Let's be very clear, the Parti Québécois is not intolerant on the issue of immigration," declared Cliché-Rivard. "Québec Solidaire itself is suggesting a reduction in temporary immigration."

QS leader Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois subsequently added his own apologia for the PQ, with the claim that there is a distinction

between the PQ's declamations against immigrants and portrayal of them as a "threat" to the "Quebec nation" and the "intolerant" rhetoric of far-right figures like Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen. In reality, the openly anti-immigrant chauvinism of Quebec's ruling class is part of an international phenomenon and is animated by the same fundamental class aims—to sow confusion within and split the working class.

All over the world, in response to the crisis of the capitalist system and the growing opposition of the working class to its reactionary policies of austerity and war, the ruling class is turning to the far right, adopting authoritarian forms of rule and attacking the democratic rights of immigrants and the entire population.

Xenophobic agitation not only serves to scapegoat immigrants for the social crisis and divide the working class. It also provides a pretext for strengthening the repressive powers of the state.

This phenomenon is not limited to the far right, such as Trump's Republican Party or Le Pen's Rassemblement National in France. In the United States, Democratic President Joe Biden has just passed an executive order to abolish, in contravention of international law, the right to asylum for migrants crossing the border between the United States and Mexico.

Similarly, the entire ruling class in Quebec and across Canada has launched a full-scale campaign against immigrants as part of a broader assault on democratic rights.

Recent months have seen a pronounced shift in the discourse of the national political elite and mainstream media in English Canada. Claims that Canada's immigration system is "broken" are now omnipresent, and prominent politicians like Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre and Ontario Premier Doug Ford are ever more explicitly blaming the housing crisis and collapsing public services on supposedly excessive levels of immigration.

In Quebec, the ruling elite has not only blamed immigrants for the housing crisis and chronic underfunding of the public education and health systems. They also associate them with crime and generally present them as a threat to the Quebec "nation." The most virulent elements, such as the *Journal de Montréal* and the leader of the PQ, go so far as to speak of a federal government plot to "drown" French-speaking Quebec in a sea of immigrants who are either English-speaking or hostile to "Quebec values"—advancing what is in effect a Quebec nationalist variant of the fascist "Great Replacement" canard.

In a new escalation, Quebec Premier and CAQ leader François Legault declared in a June 4 radio interview that “we have to make a connection” between “the explosion in the number of asylum seekers” and “the explosion in the number of homeless people,” adding that immigration “puts a lot of pressure on our mental health services, homelessness, social assistance, education, everywhere.” Later when challenged on this claim, Legault doubled down, insisting that immigrants are “100% responsible” for the housing crisis in Quebec.

As for the PQ, it combines the same anti-immigrant rhetoric with increasingly hysterical claims that if the Quebec nation does not become independent by 2030, so as to seize control of its borders and limit the use of English, it will be destroyed. At the PQ’s national council meeting in April, PQ leader Paul Saint-Pierre Plamondon asserted that the federal government was “openly and explicitly planning” Quebec’s decline, and that it was trying to crush Quebecers if it couldn’t assimilate them.

Questioned in the days that followed about the extreme nature of his remarks, Saint-Pierre Plamondon elaborated on them. Invoking longstanding Quebec nationalist myths based on half-truths and distortions, he claimed that there is an unbroken “continuity” of federal government/English Canadian attempts to assimilate Quebec, from the “deportations” and “executions” of Francophones by the British colonial regime to the current “assault.”

The PQ fulminations against colonialism are an utter fraud. Like the CAQ government and the entire Quebec elite, it fully supports the predatory actions of Canadian imperialism on the world stage, including Ottawa’s unwavering support for the genocide of the Palestinians, its full participation in the US-NATO war against Russia, massive rearmament drive, and its preparations for war against China.

More recently, the PQ has proposed two McCarthyite-style measures to force the population to rally behind its nationalist campaign, under threat of being denounced as “disloyal.”

First, it tabled a bill in the National Assembly to make the presence of a Quebec flag mandatory in all Quebec classrooms. The bill would also sanction the government appointing “inspectors” who would be empowered to enter classrooms to verify compliance with the law, paving the way for a regime of denunciation and surveillance worthy of a dictatorship.

Then, in response to a federal report that trumpeted the intelligence agencies’ lurid and unsubstantiated claims that “Canadian democracy” is threatened by foreign interference, Saint-Pierre Plamondon laid the blame for the alleged foreign interference on “multiculturalism.” He said the federal government’s multicultural policy had resulted in an “ideological drift,” which encouraged people resident in Canada to be “more loyal to foreign states than to our own society.”

The PQ leader went on to menacingly declare that “in an independent Quebec, all Quebecers will be asked to be loyal.” He also repeated the propaganda used by US, Canadian and European imperialist governments to justify preparations for a Third World War, claiming without any proof that Quebec was threatened by Russia and by “clandestine Chinese police stations.”

None of these statements are “intolerant” enough, however, to

lead QS to frankly denounce what can only be called xenophobia. Playing its role as the left flank of bourgeois politics in Quebec, QS limits itself to making a few polite criticisms of the most extreme anti-immigrant rhetoric and only in order to maintain its own increasingly discredited “left” image.

As the representative of privileged middle-class strata, QS cannot and will not denounce the fundamental reasons—mercenary class interests—behind the universal turn of the Canadian and Quebec ruling elite towards a type of chauvinism historically associated with and restricted to the far right.

Despite its occasional criticisms, when the time comes to take a stand, QS systematically sides with the ruling class. Thus, after Saint-Pierre Plamondon’s statements at the PQ’s April national council meeting—which included the call, “out of loyalty to Quebec,” for a sacred union for Quebec independence uniting “right” and “left” —Nadeau-Dubois simply deplored that the PQ’s discourse was based on “resentment” and “fear.” This, he went on to warn, risked driving “young people away from the independence project” they both support.

Shaken by internal conflicts linked to its turn to the right, QS is trying to revive the myth of Quebec independence as a progressive vehicle for implementing social reforms. Meanwhile the PQ, which represents the most important sovereignist factions of the bourgeoisie, embraces reaction and spells out that it intends to base a new drive for independence on an explicitly anti-immigrant chauvinist and national-exclusivist program.

Workers and young people must reject Quebec nationalism and anti-immigrant prejudice—both in the unabashedly chauvinist forms advocated by the Parti Québécois and the CAQ government and the hypocritically “polite,” ostensibly “inclusive” variant promoted by the pseudo-left Québec Solidaire.

Whatever the tone, their nationalist agitation is aimed at splitting workers in Quebec along ethnic and linguistic lines and dividing them from their class brothers and sisters elsewhere in Canada and around the world, while making immigrants scapegoats for the social consequences of the austerity and war policies imposed by the ruling class.

The urgent task for workers, in Quebec as around the world, is to reject the differences stoked by the ruling class on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender or religion, and unite on the basis of their common class interests, those of the international working class. The working class is the only social force capable of putting an end to the rotten capitalist system responsible for ever widening social inequality and deepening poverty and economic insecurity, the genocide of the Palestinians and the growing threat of a third imperialist world war.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)