

# PQ sets tone for Quebec establishment with anti-immigrant incitement

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25 September 2024

After six years in office, Quebec’s “national-autonomist” Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government faces mounting popular anger and disaffection.

Under Premier François Legault, the CAQ has slashed social spending, aggressively cut taxes for the rich and plied big business with massive subsidies, while attacking workers’ rights and pushing through chauvinist laws targeting minorities.

To date, the fall in CAQ support has almost exclusively benefited the big business, pro-independence Parti Québécois (PQ). For the past 10 months, the PQ has led the opinion polls, and with 30 percent support, currently leads the CAQ by six percentage-points.

This commanding lead is all the more notable given that the PQ nearly fell off the political map in the 2022 election, winning just 3 of the 125 seats in the National Assembly.

This debacle marked a new low point for the PQ in a protracted political decline that began with the 2003 election, when it was ousted from power after carrying out a “zero deficit” campaign under Premiers Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry that ravaged education, health care and social services.

The PQ responded to the shattering of its base of electoral support within the working class by lurching still further to the right. Over the course of the past two decades it has shredded all “progressive” pretensions about its independence program—above all the fraudulent claim that a capitalist *République du Québec* would bring social reforms—and has based its separatist appeals ever more openly on Quebec chauvinism and national exclusivism.

Since Paul St.-Pierre Plamondon’s election as party leader in October 2020, the PQ no longer feels the slightest embarrassment about advocating ultra-nationalist politics, historically associated with the far right.

Benefiting from the support of large sections of the ruling class and favorable coverage in the mass media, particularly the tabloids of the Quebecor Group owned by billionaire and former PQ leader Pierre-Karl Péladeau, the PQ sets the tone for bourgeois politics in Quebec with a constant and virulent

agitation against immigrants and immigration.

Attacking the CAQ from the right, the PQ blames immigrants for myriad social ills, from the housing crisis to the collapse of public services, and has promised to soon announce a plan to “drastically” reduce immigration.

Adapting to a Quebec context the fascist theory of the “Great Replacement” promoted by the likes of Donald Trump in the US and Éric Zemmour and Marine Le Pen in France, St.-Pierre Plamondon accuses Justin Trudeau’s federal Liberal government of plotting to wipe out the “Quebec nation” by drowning French-speaking Quebec in a sea of English-speaking or would-be English-speaking immigrants.

In keeping with this far-right orientation, the PQ is promising to “restore” “law and order” in Quebec by hiring a huge number of new police officers. It also advocates adopting McCarthyist-style measures to promote “Quebec pride” and “values,” such as requiring every teacher to display a Quebec flag in the classroom under threat of being reported to “inspectors.”

Despite its incessant denunciations of the Canadian “federal state” as the “oppressor” of the “Quebec people,” the PQ is a diehard defender of Canadian and American imperialism.

In an interview with Radio-Canada in October 2023, St.-Pierre Plamondon reiterated that an independent Quebec would be a member of NATO and NORAD (the North American Aerospace Defense Command), and would always remain “loyal to the geopolitical interests of North America in terms of resources and defense.” Of course, the PQ leader—like the entire Quebec ruling elite, both its “sovereignist” and federalist wings—unreservedly supports Ottawa and Washington in their funding and arming of the genocidal Israeli state against the Palestinians, in their dangerous escalation of NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine and in their economic and military-strategic offensive against China.

The fact that an ultra-nationalist and increasingly far-right party like the PQ is benefiting from growing opposition to

the CAQ government is not a unique Quebec phenomenon. It parallels the strengthening of far-right forces across Canada and internationally.

At the federal level, where Justin Trudeau's trade union and NDP-supported minority Liberal government is discredited by its capitalist austerity measures, its numerous interventions to illegalize strikes (most recently against railway workers) and its bellicose foreign policy (notably its open support for the genocide of the Palestinians), it is the official opposition Conservative Party that has seized the political initiative and is currently dominating in voting intentions.

The Conservatives are led by the far-right demagogue Pierre Poilievre, who wholeheartedly supported the "Freedom Convoy," a fascist-led, extra-parliamentary movement backed by key sections of the ruling class that menacingly occupied downtown Ottawa in January and February 2022 to press for an immediate end to the limited health measures that had been put in place to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Poilievre and his Conservatives have the support of large sections of the ruling class who consider them better positioned than the Trudeau Liberals to impose intensified austerity and war policies and, if necessary, brutally repress any working class opposition.

In the United States, the Republican Party, which has increasingly morphed into a fascist party under Trump, is exploiting the fact that the Democrats have nothing to offer working people but austerity, war and mass poverty to falsely cast itself as the voice of the "forgotten."

In Germany, the neo-Nazi Alternative for Germany (AfD), which recently emerged as the largest and second-largest party in elections in two German federal states, an unprecedented feat since the collapse of Hitler's Third Reich, is benefiting from the rightward march of all the traditional bourgeois parties, which have largely adopted its anti-refugee program. Both the current national coalition government led by the Social Democrats and its traditional conservative rival, the Christian Democrats, are entirely focused on diverting hundreds of billions of dollars from social spending to funding the war in Ukraine and a vast rearmament program.

Similarly, the rise in the PQ's support is not due to the popularity of its chauvinist and xenophobic policies, but to the rightward turn of the entire ruling class. In Quebec, as elsewhere, it is the inability of the ruling elite's traditional parties to respond to the needs and aspirations of working people that makes a section of the population vulnerable to the clarion call of far-right populism.

But first and foremost, the PQ owes its revival to the trade union bureaucracy which, with the political support of

Québec Solidaire, (QS) the ostensible "left" party of the upper-middle classes, has systematically stifled the class struggle while assiduously promoting Quebec nationalism.

The province's major labour organizations advocate "social dialogue" with the Legault government and big business. Under the banner of "national unity, they rallied to the support of the Legault government at the start of the COVID-19 and fully supported its "profits before lives" policy under which workers were prematurely forced back to work so as to churn out profits for big business. They then prevented the outrage aroused by the CAQ and Trudeau government's anti-worker policies from taking a progressive course by sabotaging all workers' struggles—in particular the vast strike movement by public sector workers at the end of 2023.

This has created a social climate in which the ultra-nationalist demagogues of the PQ can exploit mounting popular anger for their own ends.

If the PQ, a big business party responsible for implementing the biggest social cuts in Quebec's history, can still claim to make a pretense of speaking for "ordinary" Quebecers, it is because it can count on the unions and QS continuing to provide it with political cover.

Sharing the PQ's reactionary pro-independence program and allied it with it in Oui Québec and other "non-partisan" pro-sovereignty forums, Québec Solidaire goes so far as to defend the PQ's turn towards openly xenophobic Quebec nationalism. It has repeatedly insisted that the PQ's discourse on immigration is not "intolerant" or "racist," and rooted in "legitimate" concerns.

The danger posed by the PQ and its virulent Quebec chauvinism cannot be fought without a conscious rejection by the working class and youth of the entire program of Quebec nationalism—and its equally reactionary counterpart, Canadian nationalism. Only a unified struggle by all workers—French-speaking, English-speaking and immigrant—in close solidarity with the international working class for workers' power and socialism can defeat the far-right threat.



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