

The Parti Québécois' immigration plan: Normalizing the chauvinism and xenophobia of the far right

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In a more than 100-page, glossily printed document released in late October, Quebec's big business, pro-independence Parti Québécois (PQ) pledged to drastically reduce immigration should it form Quebec's next provincial government.

The likelihood of it doing so is high, given that the PQ currently has a more than 10 percentage point lead in the opinion polls.

The policies that the PQ outlines in "Un Québec libre de ses choix: pour un modèle viable en immigration" (A Quebec free to choose: a viable model for immigration) place it at the extreme right of the political spectrum. The PQ has emerged as the most unbridled promoter of the anti-immigrant Quebec chauvinism that the ruling class as a whole has promoted for well over a decade as a means of diverting attention from its brutal austerity measures and dividing the working class.

What's more, by putting its plans to slash immigration at the heart of its argument for Quebec independence, the PQ is scrapping once and for all the old "progressive" pretensions associated with what it once called its "social project." This was associated with the fraudulent idea that a "sovereign" Quebec, independent of Canada, would be a vehicle for social progress in an "open" and "inclusive" society.

Under the leadership of Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, the PQ is now openly basing its separatist appeal on the ultra-reactionary foundations of national exclusivism. The Quebec separatists have abandoned their honeyed phrases and "democratic" mask to speak the crude and brutal language of xenophobia.

The message is clear: the establishment of a capitalist *République du Québec* would not just be a means to accelerate the dismantling of public services and for the Quebec ruling class to participate more actively in the crimes of imperialism as full NATO and NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) partners. The new state, its borders and its security apparatus would be fashioned from the get-go through the chauvinist witch-hunting of migrants and refugees.

Under the PQ's new immigration plan, the number of temporary immigrants in Quebec—a category that includes foreign workers, international students and asylum seekers—would be slashed from 600,000 to between 250,000 and 300,000 during the first four-year term of a PQ government.

The PQ is also proposing to cut the permanent immigration threshold or ceiling to 35,000 per year (from around 50,000 under the current anti-immigrant CAQ government), and to impose a four-year moratorium on accepting any new permanent immigrants under the "economic immigrant" category.

Beyond the numbers, the PQ plan is above all a political manifesto that continues and amplifies the political establishment's effort to demonize immigrants. Prepared by the PQ leadership and signed by its leader, it enshrines in an official political document theories hitherto confined to far-right circles and the ultranationalist columnists of the *Journal de Montréal* (JdM), a tabloid owned by billionaire and former PQ leader Pierre-Karl Péladeau.

The PQ's plan is built around a Quebec version of the fascist and antisemitic Great Replacement theory. It claims that the federal Liberal government is using "massive" immigration to destroy the Quebec nation, by diluting its French-speaking majority and diminishing Quebec's political power. In putting forward this lie, the PQ is adopting the ideas of JdM star columnist Mathieu Bock-Côté, a right-wing extremist who makes no secret of his admiration for European fascist politicians like Marine LePen, Éric Zemmour and Giorgia Meloni.

In May 2023, the JdM published a "special report" initiated by Bock-Côté on the Century Initiative—a proposal from a group of big business lobbyists to increase Canada's population through immigration to 100 million by 2100, which the Trudeau government denies wanting to implement. In this dossier, the JdM claimed that the federal government was seeking to "drown" French-speaking Quebec in a "sea" of English-speaking immigrants.

The PQ plan is subtitled "Réplique à l'Initiative du siècle" and devotes an entire chapter to the subject. It thus explicitly incorporates the radical right-wing hoax promoted by Bock-Côté and Péladeau's JdeM into the PQ's program. It describes the increase in the number of immigrants to Canada as a "pure ideological delusion" on the part of the federal government. Ottawa's "immigrationism" (a French far-right neologism adopted by Bock-Côté) would, it claims, "sabotage" Quebec's societal "model," which is based on the chauvinist conception that French must be "predominant," in favor of "Canadian identity."

What's more, the document repeats and intensifies the ruling class's accusations that immigrants represent an existential threat to the Quebec nation and are responsible for all its social and economic ills. The PQ plan accuses them of causing the decline of the French language and Quebec culture, the housing crisis, rising welfare costs, the collapse of the public health and education networks, and the deterioration of public infrastructure.

In reality, these problems have been accumulating for decades and are now becoming acute. They are the result of the crisis of the capitalist system and the draconian austerity policies put in place by the various levels of government in Canada, of all political stripes, including those led by the PQ at the provincial level.

The PQ and the fascistic "Great Replacement" theory

The global war on immigrants

The reactionary attacks on immigrants contained in the PQ plan, and its normalization of far-right policies, are part of a national and international trend.

At the federal level, the Trudeau government, which its allies in the NDP and trade union bureaucracy seek to portray as “open” and “progressive,” has in recent months announced a whole series of measures to radically restrict immigration. A few days before the unveiling of the PQ’s plan, the Trudeau government announced a 21 percent cut in the number of permanent immigrants by 2024, with further significant reductions in 2025 and 2026.

In the United States, President-elect Donald Trump based his election campaign on demonizing immigrants and promising to deport at least 10 million of them. His first appointments show that he intends to follow through on this promise.

In response to the likely arrival at Canada’s borders of thousands of immigrants fleeing Trump’s crackdown, Quebec Premier and CAQ leader François Legault has promised to deploy Quebec Provincial Police officers if the federal government fails to assume its “responsibility” to “protect our borders.”

All this shows how anti-immigration agitation is being used to strengthen the repressive powers of the state for use against the entire working class in the context of intensifying class struggle—marked notably by a massive strike by 600,000 Quebec public sector workers last December and an ongoing national strike by 55,000 Canada Post workers.

In “Fortress Europe,” the ruling classes deploy violent border security forces, lock migrants up in squalid concentration camps or let them drown by the thousands in the Mediterranean and the English Channel, while politicians demonize immigrants using language associated with the far right.

Visiting France in early October, Legault called on the federal government to emulate brutal European policies and deport half of Quebec’s asylum seekers to other Canadian provinces.

Fully endorsing these brutal policies, the PQ plan praises more than a dozen European countries, including Italy, France, Germany and Poland, where the far right is in power or dictates immigration policy, for the way they have restricted immigration.

To disguise the true nature of the European policies it wants to emulate, the PQ doesn’t breathe a word about violence and repression in its plan. It even goes so far as to downplay the anti-immigrant riots unleashed by the far right in England in July. The plan describes them as mere demonstrations that degenerated into an “outbreak of violence” for which the “counter-demonstrators,” i.e., the workers and young people who opposed the anti-immigrant attacks, were as much to blame as the “demonstrators.”

Ignoring completely the violence against immigrants, the PQ nevertheless criticizes Europe for not having a discourse on immigration as “serene” as that prevailing in Quebec. This dishonest description requires erasing from the collective memory the fateful date of January 29, 2017, when a young right-wing extremist armed with an AK-47, Alexandre Bissonnette, opened fire on worshippers at the Quebec City mosque, killing six innocent Muslims and severely wounding several others. The toxic and hateful nature of the Quebec “debate” on the (supposedly excessive) place of religious minorities in society was thus exposed to the world.

The PQ reserves its most enthusiastic compliments for those European countries that have attacked refugees—the most vulnerable immigrants fleeing the wars and misery caused by the interventions of American imperialism and its European and Canadian allies. The PQ stresses the effectiveness of measures aimed at imprisoning them as soon as they

arrive on national territory, deporting them without delay and preventing them from benefiting from social services.

Taking up another lie that emanates from the far right, the PQ accuses the majority of asylum seekers in Quebec of not being genuine refugees, but criminals who “hijack” the right to asylum. In response, it promises to implement policies similar to those in Europe to “tighten” the right of asylum.

Deploring the fact that as a province within the Canadian federation Quebec does not have the requisite powers to fully impose and enforce its own immigration policies (in this case, a ferocious campaign of repression against refugees and migrants, patterned on the “European model”), the PQ pledges that if it forms the next provincial government, it will hold a new referendum on Quebec independence in its first mandate. Only an independent Quebec, it argues, will be truly able to counter the threat immigrants and immigration represent to the Quebec nation.

The union-backed PQ’s transformation into a party of the far-right

The tabling of the PQ’s new immigration plan underscores the urgency of class conscious workers drawing a definitive balance sheet of Quebec nationalism, and in particular of its most assiduous promoters within the “sovereignist family” that includes the PQ, the trade union bureaucracy and supposedly “left-wing” middle-class organizations like Québec Solidaire.

The nationalist lie that Québécois workers have more in common with their French-speaking bosses and the province’s capitalist elite than with English-speaking workers in the rest of the country is, along with the Anglo-Chauvinism long advocated by the English Canadian establishment, at the heart of the political-ideological mechanisms the ruling class has historically deployed to maintain its domination over the working class.

During the last wave of revolutionary struggles by the international working class during the late 1960s and 1970s, which in Canada took its most explosive forms in Quebec, Quebec nationalism served to keep militant Quebec workers isolated from their class brothers and sisters in North America.

Through the trade union bureaucracy, and with the full-throated support of the Stalinist Communist Party and a host of middle-class left organizations including the Pabloites, a militant working class upsurge was channeled into the cul-de-sac of Quebec separatism, and brought under political control. René Lévesque’s PQ, swept to power in 1976 with the support of the union apparatuses, was quick to stifle calls for social change in favor of the nationalist program of Quebec sovereignty, including increased state support for Quebec-owned businesses and affirmative action-type measures to open more managerial positions for the petty bourgeoisie.

Following the defeat of the PQ’s May 1980 referendum on sovereignty, and in line with the repudiation of social reformism by the imperialist ruling classes worldwide as epitomized by the coming to power of Thatcher and Reagan, Lévesque and his government moved sharply right, imposing brutal austerity and antistrike laws. These policies would characterize the actions of all subsequent PQ governments.

This right-wing record, coupled with the vast expansion and integration of the global economy, discredited the Quebec *indépendantiste* program among working people, causing a veritable hemorrhaging of its working-class electoral base, especially after it imposed the great social spending cuts in Quebec history between 1995 and 1998.

The Parti Québécois’ response has been an increasingly pronounced “identitarian turn,” leading it today to openly adopt the kind of

xenophobic rhetoric and policies historically associated with the far-right.

At a time when the collapse of the world capitalist order is ushering in a new period of revolutionary struggle that poses the alternative “socialism or barbarism,” as witnessed by the Israeli genocide in Gaza supported by Washington and Ottawa, the workers and youth of Quebec must definitively reject the poison of Quebec nationalism, as well as the death trap still represented by the independence project.

Instead, they must adopt an international perspective that corresponds to the integrated nature of the global economy, which politically means uniting all working people in Canada—Francophones, Anglophones and immigrants—in a common struggle, alongside their class brothers and sisters in the rest of North America and overseas, against bankrupt capitalism and for socialism.



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