

The Bouazzi affair: Québec Solidaire legitimizes Quebec chauvinism and anti-immigrant incitement

Laurent Lafrance
12 December 2024

Québec Solidaire Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Haroun Bouazzi has been vilified by Quebec's political establishment and mainstream media for daring to point an accusatory finger at them for their unwavering support for the Israeli state's genocide of the Gaza Palestinians.

In early November, Bouazzi, who has been a legislator for the pseudo-left Québec Solidaire (QS) since 2022, was invited to address a gala organized by the Club Avenir Foundation, a non-profit organization working to integrate North African Maghrebin immigrants into Quebec society.

In his speech, the QS MNA alluded vaguely to the Quebec political elite's anti-immigrant chauvinism, declaring that he saw "in the National Assembly every day the construction of this 'other' who is Maghrebin, who is Muslim, who is black, who is aboriginal, and his culture which, by definition, would be dangerous or inferior."

He then attempted to draw a link between this and the Israeli state's genocidal assault on the Palestinians, which is being carried out with the full support of Washington and Ottawa, saying: "The more we humanize the 'other' [...] the more we will de-normalize the complicity that exists in our society and unfortunately in the National Assembly when it comes to dehumanizing our brothers and sisters in Palestine."

Bouazzi had already drawn the ire of the political establishment for criticizing the demonization of immigrants and highlighting that the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, a vital financial instrument of the ruling elite, "invests in companies complicit in war crimes and crimes against humanity in Palestine."

His critical remarks at the November gala provided the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), the Parti Québécois (PQ) and the ultra-nationalist journalists at the *Journal de Montréal* with a long-awaited pretext to settle scores with Bouazzi and try to silence him.

He was vehemently denounced for "attacking" Quebec and, horror of horrors, impugning the honour of his fellow politicians. PQ leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon accused Bouazzi of "mudslinging," "negative politics" and "populism based on lies." The *Journal de Montréal's* star far-right columnist, Mathieu Bock-Côté, called Bouazzi an "islamogauchist" (Islamic leftist) who "hates Quebecers."

What's most striking about this fabricated controversy is not so much the virulent nature of the campaign against Bouazzi, as Québec Solidaire's craven adaptation to the chauvinist agitation of the Quebec nationalist right and far right and its participation in the political flogging of its own MNA.

The official co-leaders of QS, Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois and Ruba

Ghazal, rushed to distance themselves from Bouazzi's "polarizing" and "frankly clumsy and exaggerated" remarks. In a motion adopted at their mid-November National Council meeting, QS reiterated that the party "does not and has never maintained that the National Assembly and its members are racist."

In the typical fashion of a middle-class pseudo-left organization seeking to camouflage its capitulation to the most reactionary forces, the QS motion "strongly condemn(ed) the threats, violence and smear campaign directed against MNA Haroun Bouazzi and offers him its support in the face of these circumstances."

But this was all hot air. In reality, the QS leadership flirted with the idea of suspending Bouazzi from the party's legislative caucus. But after running up against organizational impediments (such action would have needed to be endorsed by the entire QS membership), the QS finally decided to compel him to publicly retract his remarks. Bouazzi complied, declaring on several occasions that the National Assembly and its elected representatives "are not racist." To placate his fellow QS MNAs he even went so far as to proclaim his "esteem" for the right-wing CAQ and PQ politicians he had previously condemned.

At the National Assembly, two motions denouncing Bouazzi's remarks—one from the PQ and the other from the Quebec Liberals—were passed unanimously. The Liberal motion said the Assembly "dissociate(d) itself from any statement implying that elected officials are racist," while the PQ motion called on the Assembly to "strongly denounce" any such suggestion. These motions received the full support of all QS MNAs, including Bouazzi himself!

The conduct of the QS in the Bouazzi affair demonstrates yet again that this supposed "left" party is turning ever more sharply to the right and adapting to and legitimizing, when not openly embracing, the chauvinism and national-ethnic exclusivism of the CAQ and pro-Quebec independence PQ. This is far from surprising. Time after time over the past decade or more, QS has publicly intervened to whitewash these parties' chauvinist declarations and anti-immigrant agitation, declaring that they are "not racist" even as they promote one chauvinist, anti-immigrant policy after another.

Since the "reasonable accommodation" controversy in 2007 and the PQ's "Charter of Values" in 2013, which inspired the CAQ's Bill 21, Québec Solidaire has consistently tried to give a "progressive" veneer to the discriminatory, anti-immigrant policies advocated by the ruling elite under the pretext of guaranteeing the "secularity" of the state. This has served to normalize the type of chauvinist and xenophobic politics that were traditionally the sole preserve of the far right and to

legitimize the ruling class' turn towards discriminatory and anti-democratic forms of rule.

QS systematically downplays the scale and political import of the CAQ-PQ led agitation against immigrants. This includes adamantly insisting that their attempts to scapegoat immigrants for the housing crisis and collapse of public services and their claims immigrants constitute an "existential" threat to the Quebec nation are not part of the same international, far-right campaign to demonize immigrants that is being led by the President-elect Donald Trump in the US, Marine LePen in France, Giorgia Meloni in Italy, the AfD in Germany and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands.

QS provides "left" cover for the political establishment as a whole. But especially important is its role in covering up the ultra-reactionary tendencies developing among its allies within the sovereignist movement, principally the PQ, with which it maintains close ties through its support for the retrograde project of creating an independent capitalist République du Québec.

Bouazzi propagates the erroneous, identity politics-rooted notion of "systemic racism"

There is an element of truth in Bouazzi's criticism of the complicity of the Quebec and Canadian ruling class and political establishment in the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Their blithe indifference to the ongoing slaughter and starvation of the Palestinian, which has already costs tens of thousands and possibly hundreds of thousands of lives, cannot but provoke disgust and outrage.

But, contrary to what the QS MNA claims, their complicity is not the product of "systemic racism."

The Israeli Zionist regime could not carry out its genocidal policy without the active financial and military support of Washington and its imperialist allies like Canada. The State of Israel was itself created by the United States and Great Britain in the aftermath of the Second World War precisely to serve as imperialism's attack dog in the Middle East.

If the Canadian state, with the full support of Quebec's ruling elite (both its federalist and sovereignist wings), supports, finances and arms Israel, it is to advance the predatory interests of Canadian imperialism in the region as Washington's junior partner.

Racism is not the cause of the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Just as it was historically developed and used to defend the colonial subjugation and capitalist exploitation of the peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas, today it forms part of the imperialist ruling classes' political-ideological weaponry, serving as a justification for their ruthless campaign to establish their unbridled domination over the world's principal oil exporting region.

More broadly, the capitalist ruling elites, Quebec's and Canada's among them, use anti-immigrant and chauvinist politics to divide the working class along ethnic, racial and religious-communal lines to prevent its unity against capitalism and imperialism, which are the real source of wars and genocide. By blaming immigrants for all the social problems caused by capitalism, the ruling class tries to divert attention from its own responsibility and channel mounting social anger and frustration into reactionary channels.

The "systemic racism" theory, developed by petty-bourgeois defenders of identity politics, distorts reality and obscures the real

class issues behind the complicity of the Quebec capitalist elite in the Gaza genocide and its increasingly virulent promotion of Quebec chauvinism and anti-immigrant agitation at home. According to this "theory," the racism propagated by the political establishment permeates Quebec society as a whole and, consequently, all of society is guilty of complicity.

Without minimizing the impact of the anti-immigrant campaign, popular disgust at the genocide in Gaza demonstrates that, contrary to Bouazzi's assertions, the efforts of the ruling class face real opposition among workers and young people.

From the superficial perspective of "systemic racism" also flows Bouazzi's futile proposal to end this complicity with moral appeals to the ruling class to show more "humanity" towards minorities.

In reality, what's needed is the political mobilization of the international working class against the entire capitalist profit system that is the root cause of war. But such a political orientation, based on the working class—the only social force capable of putting an end to imperialist genocide and war—is completely opposed by Québec Solidaire.

Despite its "progressive" pretensions, QS is an organization of privileged sections of the middle class, which—like its "cousins" SUMAR in Spain or SYRIZA in Greece—is rooted in a profound hostility to Marxism and to the economic and political emancipation of the working class.

While it may occasionally deplore Netanyahu's actions and the plans to open a Quebec government office in Israel, QS says nothing about Ottawa's massive rearmament drive, and promotes Canadian imperialism, its federal state and Quebec government as a "force for peace" in the world. While timidly criticizing Israel out of one side of its mouth, it proclaims its supports the US-NATO instigated war against Russia over Ukraine and Canada's leading role in it.

Workers and young people seeking an alternative to the bankrupt capitalist system must reject QS's nationalist, pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist policies. To counter social inequality, war, genocide and the descent into barbarism, the task of the hour is to build an independent political movement of the working class, animated by a Trotskyist perspective, i.e. one that is internationalist and socialist.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact