Québec Solidaire: A Québécois Approach to Building a Broad Left Party

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A number of attempts have been made in recent years to launch new parties and processes, addressing a broad left or popular constituency, that are programmatically anti-neoliberal if not anti-capitalist, some of them self-identifying as part of an international effort to create a "socialism of the 21st century." They vary widely in origins, size, social composition, and influence. The process has gone furthest in a number of Latin American countries; among the best known are the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), led by Hugo Chávez, and the Bolivian Movement Towards Socialism–Political Instrument of the Sovereignty of the Peoples (MAS-IPSP), led by Evo Morales.

Efforts in Western Europe, such as Italy's Refoundation Party, Germany's Die Linke, or France's Parti de Gauche originated in part in splits in the traditional parties of "20th century socialism," in avowed rejection of both Stalinism and Social Democracy. Many of these parties include members who in the past were associated with one or another of the Marxist currents identified historically with Trotsky's anti-Stalinist legacy. In France, the Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste (NPA) was initiated under their aegis. Parallel developments have not yet occurred in the United States or Canada, where anticapitalist ideas and movements have less presence in the political landscape today than they had a century ago. However, as it does in so many respects, Quebec constitutes something of an exception. A new left party, Québec Solidaire, created during the past decade, is attracting considerable interest and growing support as an anti-neoliberal alternative to Quebec's three capitalist parties. While not explicitly anti-capitalist or socialist, it defines itself

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as a party "resolutely of the left, feminist, ecologist, altermondialiste,[2] pacifist, democratic and sovereigntist." This paper will outline how this party originated, describe how it functions, and explore some major challenges it faces and how it is confronting them.

THE QUEBEC EXCEPTION

Quebec's political evolution has always followed a distinct trajectory within the Canadian social formation. A crucial determinant has been the province's character as the homeland of a distinct nation, with its own territory, language, culture, historical tradition and a well-defined national consciousness as a minority people within Canada and North America. Until well past the mid-20th century, French-Canadian nationalism was essentially defensive, focused on protecting the autonomy of Quebec, the last major enclave of the Francophone presence in Canada, against involvement in imperialist wars and the increasing encroachment on the province's constitutional jurisdiction by the federal state with its expanding economic and social functions. Industrialization and the concomitant urbanization and growth of trade unions aggravated these tensions, disrupting the social and political culture of a Francophone population long dependent on church and parish for the provision of basic social and community services.

In the 1960s a new, more assertive nationalist dynamic gained force as Quebec rapidly moved to modernize its industrial infrastructure, nationalized hydro-electric power resources and expanded and secularized its education, health and social welfare systems. A large provincial state bureaucracy developed, increasingly directed to stimulating the expansion of a skilled labour force and the growth of a Francophone bourgeoisie through the provision of financial and other assistance. Quebec pushed increasingly — but unsuccessfully — for constitutional changes that would give it greater autonomy within the federation, especially in areas crucial to its national identity and development. Union membership expanded exponentially. A veritable cultural revolution occurred with the appearance of many new radical publications and other media, many of them raising the demand for Quebec autonomy, political sovereignty or independence. On the left, pro-independence movements sprouted, their members inspired by the post-war Afro-Asian decolonization and, closer to home, the socialist ideology of the Cuban revolutionists.

2 In French, those who advocate "another world" of global justice and solidarity.

National consciousness and class consciousness have maintained a close and reciprocal relationship in Quebec in recent decades. But this social ferment, both a product and promoter of rising Québécois national consciousness, largely bypassed the parties of the existing "20th century" Canadian left. Their historical failure to sink mass roots in Quebec was directly related to their programmatic orientation toward strengthening the Canadian state and their indifference to Quebec's national oppression and/or hostility to Québécois nationalist sentiment. The Regina Manifesto, the founding document of Canadian social-democracy, omitted any reference to the Quebec national question.[3] The Communist party expelled Québécois members who developed a pro-autonomy interpretation of the party's formal support of Quebec's right to self-determination.[4]

The labour-based New Democratic Party, founded in 1961, has been unwilling to embrace any fundamental alteration to Canada's existing institutional structure that would reflect Quebec's national character, or even to develop a coherent approach that differed significantly from the constitutional priorities of the federal government of the day.[5] Soon after its founding, its Quebec section voted to form a distinct Parti Socialiste du Québec (PSQ). The PSQ advocated that Quebec and Canada be constitutionally recognized as "associated states." If such an agreement proved impossible, it said, "Quebec should declare its independence."[6] But the PSQ was upstaged on its nationalist flank by the pro-independence Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale (RIN), while the Quebec trade unions were still unprepared to drop their longstanding support of the Quebec Liberals in favour of independent labour political action. The PSQ dissolved in the late 1960s.

In the absence of a viable left-wing alternative sympathetic to Québécois national aspirations, this consciousness was politically channeled into support for the pro-sovereignty Parti Québécois. Founded in the late 1960s, the PQ came to hegemonize the national movement as its political expression. Moreover, its increasing attraction for the leaderships of Quebec's three big union centrals — which gradually shifted to seeing the PQ, and not the Liberals, as their preferred vehicle for political

3 Regina Manifesto, 1933. The Manifesto was adopted by the first "national" convention of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).
4 Henri Gagnon, n.d.
5 For a summary of NDP positions in this regard, see Cooke, 2004. For a critique of the NDP's Sherbrooke Declaration, its most complete and recent statement on the Quebec national question, see Fidler, 2011b. See also Fidler, 2011d.
6 Parti Socialiste du Québec, 1966

influence and reform — tended to eclipse early attempts by some union militants to found independent and anticapitalist political formations. A notable effort, the Front d'action politique (FRAP), a radical municipal party initiated in part by the Montréal section of the CSN, foundered in the wake of the October 1970 crisis and repression. An upsurge in mass nationalist and pro-sovereignty sentiment fueled a radicalization in the labour movement that in the early 1970s saw all three labour centrals[7] issue and debate anticapitalist manifestos. But the capitalist PQ was the primary political beneficiary, although a nationalist left within the party that included some prominent union officials often had a problematic relationship to the party hierarchy.

The PQ project was, and remains, to achieve a bourgeois-nationalist form of state sovereignty associated — the political context permitting — with Canada outside Quebec, or if necessary functioning as a fully independent (but thoroughly capitalist) Quebec state. The PQ's popular support derived from its advocacy of sovereignty, its strong defense of the French language, culture and national identity and, initially at least, its promise of social reforms.

During its first term in office, the PQ enacted some important reforms, particularly in the area of French-language rights, although its legislation in this regard has been subject to constant challenges and adverse court rulings over the years. But after a total of 18 years in government (1976-1985, 1994-2003), the party no longer inspires the hopes for change that it once did. PQ governments have on occasion viciously attacked unions, as in 1982 when the Lévesque government legislated a 20% reduction in the salaries of government workers. The PQ has consistently supported anti-worker "free trade" and investment agreements and its governments have imposed harsh austerity programs.

Although opinion polls have registered high and remarkably consistent support for Quebec independence,[8] the PQ has failed to win its two sovereignty referendums. Equally important, ongoing developments in bourgeois politics — such as the 1982 unilateral patriation of Canada's constitution without Quebec's consent; the 1990 defeat of the Meech Lake Accord; or the federal Parliament's enactment of the Clarity Act in the wake of the narrow 1995 referendum defeat — have signalled the

7 The three centrals were the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ), the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) and the teachers' union, the CEQ (now the Centrale des syndicats du Québec, or CSQ).

8 Opinion polls indicate that even today more than 40% of Québécois support independence (more than those who declare support for the PQ), and a substantial majority favour greater autonomy for Quebec.

lack of sympathy in Canada's ruling circles not only for Quebec sovereignty but for any meaningful constitutional recognition of Quebec's national identity, let alone unfettered provincial autonomy in jurisdictions essential to that identity.

The new Francophone bourgeoisie that has developed since the Sixties, with state support (both provincial and federal), functions largely as a subset of the Canadian bourgeoisie and no major component favours Quebec sovereignty. Today the Parti Québécois has less appetite for independence, although the goal of "sovereignty" is still article one in its program. Doubts are growing about the party's ability to capture enough popular support for its program to create the "winning conditions" for a successful referendum vote on sovereignty.

The PQ's commitment to working within the neoliberal order, which has often brought it into sharp conflict with the unions, has fueled disenchantment with the party among the very social layers that are the driving force of the national movement. However, a credible left alternative to the Parti Québécois was slow to emerge within the broad Québécois nationalist and left milieu. Until the early 1980s, when they unceremoniously collapsed, the Mao-Stalinist currents that largely dominated the far left for a decade opposed Quebec sovereignty, which they regarded as a purely bourgeois objective dividing the "Canadian" working class. And although they opposed the PQ, they also opposed proposals within the trade unions in favour of establishing an independent working-class party, advocating instead, in true sectarian fashion, the constitution of their own "proletarian party."[9] Like the CCF and pro-Moscow CP before them, this "far left" was ideologically defined around international events and alliances that had little or no resonance in the conditions of Quebec, where the class struggle tends to unfold within a nationalist framework of opposition to linguistic and cultural oppression.

There was always, of course, a smaller left that favoured independence and rejected the PQ and its capitalist program. Sporadic attempts were made in the 1980s to build new parties of the left, but without lasting success. The trade unions remained resistant to proposals to engage in political action independent of the PQ. And during the 1980s and 1990s, the major labour centrals initiated — with political support and generous tax breaks from both levels of government — investment funds that have enmeshed the unions in the financial industry, company management structures and other strategic "partnerships" with capital.

9 For a critical analysis of this experience, see Moreau, 1986. For a more extended analysis, see Dubuc, 2003, especially chapters 3 and 4.

During the late 1990s, however, some cracks began to appear in the edifice of bourgeois sovereigntist hegemony in the left. Feminists, the one broadly-based social movement that had largely survived the neoliberal onslaught of the 1980s — waging a successful defense of abortion rights, for example — organized a mass "march for bread and roses" that directly challenged Lucien Bouchard's PQ government and its "zero deficit" austerity program. They followed up with further demonstrations and, in 2000, sponsored a World March of Women that mobilized tens of thousands in Quebec and elsewhere. When the government rejected their modest demands for an increase in the minimum wage, women's federation leader Françoise David publicly mused on the need to create a "feminist left-wing political alternative" to the Parti Québécois.

Then, in 2001, tens of thousands mobilized at the Quebec Summit in opposition to the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas. Opponents of neoliberal globalization — "altermondialistes" as they are known in Quebec — were soon joined by hundreds of thousands more in massive demonstrations in the lead-up to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, the largest antiwar mobilization in Quebec history. For the first time in decades, there was now a realistic potential for a new configuration of progressive forces.

REGROUPMENT AND FUSION

The initiative was taken — first separately, then in combination — by three far-left groups:[10]

The Parti de la démocratie socialiste (PDS) originated as the Quebec section of the federal NDP. In 1995 it broke definitively from the NDP; adopted its new name; defined itself as "anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal, feminist, internationalist and independentist"; and campaigned for a Yes to sovereignty in the referendum. The PDS was joined by some independent left-wing nationalists who had left the PQ. Members of Gauche socialiste, a section of the Trotskyist Fourth International, were prominent in the PDS leadership.

The Rassemblement pour une alternative politique (RAP) was founded in 1998, in response to a public appeal for a "political alternative" issued in November 1997 by prominent left-wing personalities including former PSQ leader and union militant Michel Chartrand; Pierre Dubuc (editor of the popular independentist monthly L'aut'journal); and Paul Cliche, a journalist who in 1970 had led the left-wing municipal party

10 The following chronology borrows in part from Dostie *et al*., 2006. See also Lavallée, 2011, p. 202-14.

FRAP in Montréal. The RAP later (in November 2000) voted to change its name to Rassemblement pour l'alternative progressiste.

The Parti communiste du Québec (PCQ), the Quebec section of the Canadian CP, now led by individuals who had once been prominently associated with Quebec's Mao-Stalinist parties.[11]

In the 1998 general election, the RAP ran seven candidates while the PDS contested 97 ridings; their overall vote was small (36,000), although in Jonquière the RAP candidate Michel Chartrand took 15% of the popular vote against the PQ's Premier Lucien Bouchard.

In 2000, a joint public meeting in Montréal organized by the PDS, RAP and PCQ attracted some 650 persons to discuss "unity of the political left and progressive forces." A liaison committee was set up by the three groups along with the Bloc Pot (a marijuana legalization group) and the Quebec section of the Green Party of Canada, with the objective of establishing common positions and actions. In April 2001, just days before the huge protest demonstrations at the pro-free trade Québec Summit of the Americas, independent candidate Paul Cliche won 24% of the popular vote in a by-election in Montréal's Mercier riding. His campaign, supported by the liaison committee, some trade unions and community organizations, indicated the positive potential of left unity. The liaison committee then became the coalition of the Union des forces progressistes (UFP). In December 2001 the RAP voted by a narrow majority at its congress to join the UFP.[12]

At a convention in June 2002 the UFP was founded as "a federated party that seeks to become a mass alternative to the parties of neoliberalism." Those attending included a large number of independent activists in addition to members of the PDS, RAP and PCQ.[13] At a subsequent policy convention in February 2003 the new party adopted a radical platform opposing free-trade agreements and calling for international solidarity (Palestine, Cuba, Iraq), cancellation of third-world foreign debts,

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11 The PCQ separated from the Canadian CP in 2005 when a majority of its members voted to support Quebec independence. Some members of the reconstituted Quebec section of the Canadian CP are members today of Québec Solidaire, but they do not constitute a recognized "collective" within QS.

12 RAP founder Pierre Dubuc, in the minority, abandoned the project of building a political alternative to the PQ. In June 2005, he joined with some trade union leaders and "left" PQ members (péquistes) to found Syndicalistes et Progressistes pour un Québec Libre (SPQ-Libre), which for a time was officially recognized as a "club" within the PQ.

13 According to an internal UFP study cited by Amir Khadir, 56% of the members were under the age of 35 and 29% were under 29; 50% of them were first-time party members; there was a minor yet real presence of Anglophone activists as well as several members of Montreal's cultural communities (Amir Khadir, interview by Pascale Dufour, March 2006), cited in Dufour, 2003.

defence of the environment, extensive social and educational reforms, electoral reform, labour rights, First Nations self-determination, and a constituent assembly to draft a constitution for a "progressive, republican, secular and democratic Quebec."[14]

The UFP adopted a pluralist structure recognizing the right of organized tendencies ("political entities") to "promote specific orientations compatible with the platform and statutes of the UFP." The PDS was now a political entity called Démocratie socialiste (later Québec socialiste), although it soon dissolved as such. The RAP, for its part, simply dissolved into the UFP, while the PCQ became a recognized political entity within the new party.

In the April 2003 general election the UFP, now registered as an official party, ran 73 candidates (26% were women) and obtained just over 40,000 votes — barely attaining the 1% of the popular vote required to qualify for partial rebate of expenses under the Elections Act. The highest vote was Amir Khadir's 18% in Mercier riding. This campaign was considered a success; some UFP candidates were endorsed by unions, and a post-election report noted that a considerable number of students had been recruited. The party now claimed a membership of some 1,800 members, almost double its membership in 2002.

At a June 2003 meeting, the UFP Council adopted an ambitious agenda of social movement participation, antiwar mobilizing, unification talks with the Parti Vert (a resuscitated Green party), and fighting for an electoral regime of proportional representation to help overcome Quebec's "democratic deficit." The members voted to investigate possible participation in municipal elections and creation of a "youth organization... both independent of and in solidarity with the UFP."

Meanwhile, during the fall and winter of 2002-03, D'abord solidaires, a "non-partisan collective" of activists from the women's and other social movements, had been formed independently of the UFP to mount a public campaign against a rise in right-wing politics that was aimed primarily against Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ), a party that split from the provincial Liberals in the early 1990s on a pro-autonomy program and at one point in the months before the 2003 election was registering 40 percent support in public opinion polls on a platform centered on "family values" and "old-stock" Québécois identity issues. D'abord solidaires was officially indifferent between the governing PQ and the opposition Liberals, not opposing a vote for either as a "lesser evil" to the ADQ. As it turned out, the ADQ polled just 18%, the PQ was

14 See Fidler, 2003.

defeated — its vote dropped by 10 percentage points from its previous result — and the Liberals led by Jean Charest formed the government.[15]

In May 2004, one of the three component collectives in D'abord solidaires, led by feminist leader Françoise David and social housing activist François Saillant, founded Option citoyenne (OC–citizens' choice). It favoured political action to the left of the PQ but initially rejected an invitation to join the UFP.[16] David toured Quebec promoting her book Bien commun recherché ("seeking the common good") and probing support for a new left party. David encountered much support for uniting the political forces to the left of the PQ, and considerable openness to the idea of joining with the UFP in a new party — notwithstanding the reservations of many of her supporters, and David herself,[17] about the UFP's strong commitment to Quebec independence.

In December 2004 Option citoyenne began negotiations with the UFP to explore the possibility of forming "a single progressive, ecologist and feminist party." The year-long fusion process posed some major challenges to both groups. Each had its distinct constituency or corporate culture. The UFP's membership included young people from the global justice movement — internationalist and strong supporters of Quebec independence, which they saw as essential to their anti-capitalist politics — along with an older layer of members, many with long experience in left and far-left politics. OC members, on the other hand, were primarily active within feminist and community organizations (60% were women) and in local grass-roots organizing around tenants' rights, food and housing co-ops and the like, a milieu in which the politics of consensus and accommodation of conflicting views and interests are valued. OC members tended to radicalize around anti-poverty concerns, and were less likely to be concerned with Quebec's national question. But the UFP was adamant that the new party must advocate Quebec independence.

Over a year, beginning in November 2004, Option citoyenne held three "national [Quebec] meetings" of its membership to develop a programmatic basis for negotiations with the UFP. Draft position papers were circulated and resolutions adopted on feminism, democracy, plu-

15 In the 2007 election, the ADQ managed to displace the PQ as Official Opposition until the following year's election, when it was reduced to 7 seats.

16 UFP leader Pierre Dostie later explained that his party would have preferred that OC simply join the UFP. "But reality is very often more complex than we imagine. Once we found that this political movement, given its composition and what it represented, had to comply with its own process, we sought areas of convergence and we entered into a dialogue." *À Bâbord !*, February-March, 2005.

17 David was once a member of En Lutte, a Mao-Stalinist group that opposed Quebec independence.

ralism and economic questions.[18] A typical resolution declared that "a party of the common good, inspired by feminism" should be oriented around "values of social justice, equality, peace, solidarity, respect for the integrity of individuals and the environment, while recognizing the importance of struggles against forms of exclusion, racism, discrimination and violence, including those that continue to be exercised against women in the private and public sphere."

A resolution on economic issues, adopted unanimously, proposed that the "private-public" economic model be replaced by a "plural model" based on "the domestic economy" of family and gratuitous or volunteer services, the "social economy" of non-profit community or cooperative agencies, in addition to "private undertakings... that agree to function in accordance with collective (social, environmental, etc.) rules," and a "public, state and parastate" sector providing equal and accessible services to the entire population. These positions differed substantially from the explicit anti-capitalism of the UFP's program.

The most contentious issue among OC members was the national question, and it was not resolved until the last OC national meeting in October 2005, when the 300 delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of Quebec sovereignty, thus fulfilling a key condition for UFP consent to a merger. The coordinating committee's position paper justified its position largely on the basis that there was no credible or workable perspective for a renewed federalism that would allow Quebec the additional powers it needed in order to resolve its social problems, but insisted that the defining characteristic of the new party should be its "social agenda" (projet social) and not its position on the national question. The delegates then voted unanimously to join with the UFP to form a new pro-sovereignty party.

Just three days earlier, on October 19, a right-wing manifesto had been published by former PQ premier Lucien Bouchard, some other prominent péquistes, and equally prominent Liberals. Entitled Pour un Québec lucide (For a clear-eyed vision of Quebec), it castigated "big unions" and called for lifting the freeze on university tuition fees, raising electricity rates and consumption taxes, focusing on debt reduction, opening the doors further to private sector investment in public infrastructures and ending the "unhealthy suspicion of private business that has developed in some sectors." The important challenges facing Quebecers, it proclaimed, were declining demographics and increasing global competition from Asia — not sovereignty. The manifesto reflected

18 Option Citoyenne, 2004.

a strong rightward drift of both the neoliberal PQ and its federal counterpart the Bloc Québécois.[19]

Thus, while the traditional pro-sovereignty parties were shifting further to the right and some prominent péquistes like Bouchard were retreating from their previous commitment to a sovereigntist perspective, there was a perceptible trend developing in the opposite direction on the left, which now tended overwhelmingly to see a sovereign Quebec as the framework for its social agenda.

During 2005 Option citoyenne and the UFP participated in some common actions and published joint briefs on sustainable development and electoral reform. And in response to the lucides' manifesto, they initiated a counter-manifesto, Pour un Québec Solidaire, that garnered more than 2,500 signatures.A special convention of the UFP in November 2005 voted unanimously in favour of a fusion with Option citoyenne, and in February 2006 the two organizations held a joint congress to establish the new party, Québec Solidaire. The founding declaration of principles defined it as a party "resolutely of the left, feminist, ecologist, altermondialiste, pacifist, democratic and sovereigntist." It was an impressive achievement — uniting leading activists in the women's movement, some prominent trade-union militants, grassroots community organizers and long-standing leftists around a project to build a new Québécois political movement based on popular and national sovereignty grounded in general principles of solidarity with the oppressed and exploited.

A WORK IN PROGRESS

Québec Solidaire celebrated its fifth anniversary in February 2011. How has it fared? The balance sheet is uneven. During its first year, Québec Solidaire's membership rose from 3,000 to just over 5,000, about 50% of them women, but since then has remained fairly stable. The party has just over 70 local associations organized on the basis of their respective electoral ridings as well as some university campus sections. About one third of these associations are considered "very active," another one third less so, while the remainder function only minimally.[20] In the last

19 At its convention in October 2005, the Bloc voted to support NATO membership, an EU free-trade (and investment) agreement, and the development of a Quebec army and air force that would participate actively in international "peacekeeping", as in Canada's occupation of Haiti. At about the same time, Pierre Dubuc, the left-wing SPQ-Libre candidate, received barely 1% support in his campaign for the PQ leadership.

20 Information provided at the party's Fifth Convention, November 2009.

election, in 2008, the party nominated candidates in almost all of Quebec's 125 electoral counties, or ridings.

Québec Solidaire strives for male-female parity in its structures and representation at all levels, and is headed by two "co-spokespersons": Françoise David, the party president, and Amir Khadir, currently its sole member of the Quebec legislature, the National Assembly. The party has an office with a small full-time staff, a web site and members' intranet, and makes ample use of modern communications media such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs and videos. However, it has no newspaper, although this deficiency is partially compensated by various independent alternative media published by members and sympathizers of the party.[21] The party lacks an internal discussion bulletin or email list, so there is little horizontal communication at the general membership level apart from organized pre-convention discussions, which are held in general assemblies in areas of greater membership density such as Montréal and Quebec City.

A national (i.e. Quebec-wide) Policy Commission is composed of a dozen or so theme committees, responsible for drafting papers and proposals for program development. A national Women's Commission is composed of delegates from the various regions of Quebec, and is charged with ensuring adherence by the party to the values of feminism. In the December 2008 general election, Québec Solidaire scored a major breakthrough. Despite an undemocratic first-past-the-post electoral system, it managed to elect a member to the National Assembly. The election of Amir Khadir in Mercier riding brought welcome media attention to the party. His effective interventions in the National Assembly have given the party considerable media exposure, and he has been able to speak out on many issues not previously associated with the left.[22] However, his high media profile and popularity — opinion polls recently rated him the "most popular" MNA in Quebec! — have not translated into corresponding support for the party as a whole. Although some recent polls have attributed 8-10% or more support to QS among the electorate, the overall score of its candidates in the two general elections since its founding (2007 and 2008) has been just under 4%. A handful of individual candidates, including David, have won electoral scores of between 10% and 30%, however; in each such case they are well-known activists in trade unions or other social movements.

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21 Presse-toi a gauche, http://www.pressegauche.org/ (on-line webzine), À Bâbord! http://www.ababord.org/ (bimonthly magazine), and Nouveaux Cahiers du Socialisme, http://www.cahiersdusocialisme.org/ (semi-annual journal, which also hosts a webzine).

22 To see Khadir's interventions in the Assembly (there are hundreds of them since his election), see: http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/deputes/khadir-amir-25/interventions.html.

Although it styles itself "a party of the ballot-box and the streets" — a party of mass action as well as elections — this has not been an easy balance to establish or maintain. The political context, at least until Khadir's election, has been a difficult one in which to find opportunities to establish a visible presence in Quebec's political landscape.

As in other parts of North America, Quebec experienced a general downturn in extra-parliamentary mobilizations after 9-11, with the notable exception of the massive antiwar actions prior to the Iraq war. Added to this was the political demoralization of many militants following almost a decade of neoliberal austerity under a Parti Québécois government that for many discredited the very idea of Quebec "sovereignty" as envisaged by the PQ. The trade union movement has suffered major defeats in the face of an antilabour offensive orchestrated since 2003 by the Liberal government. The student movement has been relatively quiescent since a successful mobilization against tuition fee increases in 2005. Although antiwar sentiment remains high, mass actions are fewer and smaller. Thus, Québec Solidaire has had to build itself in a period of general retreat for the very movements that generated its existence.

In addition, Québec Solidaire has found its attention, energy and finances absorbed by election organizing, often to the detriment of extra-parliamentary mobilization. In its first three years the party faced two general elections and more than a half-dozen by-elections. Besides meeting the demanding legal requirements of a registered party, it had to find and train candidates, raise funds, and hold successive delegated conventions to cobble together interim election platforms.

The 2007 election platform,[23] was limited to modest reforms that (as the party admitted) could be implemented within the "neoliberal and provincial framework." It featured proposals for modest social reforms, free education, a publicly-owned pharmacare (prescription drugs insurance) agency, repeal of antilabour legislation, electoral reform through institution of proportional representation, tax reform, nationalization of wind power and expansion of public transit. However, this platform did not even reflect the minimal basis of agreement between the party's founding components. For example, it called for a constituent assembly to determine Quebec's political and constitutional future, but did not call for sovereignty or independence.

23 http://www.quebecsolidaire.net/files/25EngagementsQS.pdf. Summarized in Fidler, 2006.

The 2008 platform[24] was much more elaborate. It called for "making Quebec a country by way of popular sovereignty," and included detailed proposals on language rights, intercultural secularism and international solidarity (for example, replacing free trade agreements with "new international treaties based on individual and collective rights, respect for the environment and a widening of democracy (such as the ALBA[25])." But it also contained some notable omissions; for example, it opposed "Canadian imperialist intervention" in the war in Afghanistan but did not mention NATO or Canada's other military alliances.

In the 2008 election, more than half of Québec Solidaire's 122 candidates were women — a first for a party in Quebec and possibly in Canada. The party was endorsed by the Montréal Council of the CSN, and some candidates were endorsed by other unions.

ADOPTING A PROGRAM

In 2009 the party launched a lengthy process aimed at producing a formal program setting out Québec Solidaire's proposals for a "democratic transformation of the whole of society over the medium and long term." The program is distinguished from an election platform, which applies to a single government mandate, or an emergency program, a plan of action addressed to a specific context or issue.[26]

Over a three-year period, culminating before the next Quebec election, a series of delegated conventions are being held, each to debate and adopt sections of the program organized according to subject matter. The first convention, in November 2009, adopted resolutions on the national question, electoral reform, immigration policy and secularism. A second convention, held in March 2011, was addressed to the economy, the environment, and labour. Other topics — health and social services, education, social and formal justice, culture, agriculture, and international solidarity and altermondialisation — will be addressed in subsequent conventions.

Under the complex procedure the party has chosen for conducting its program debates, initial written submissions by the members (or by "citizens' circles" composed of both members and non-members) must

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24 http://www.quebecsolidaire.net/files/QS-Commitments-2008.pdf (in English). Discussed in Fidler, 2008.

25 Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America), a progressive economic and social alliance for fair trade and mutual assistance initiated by Venezuela and Cuba, which now comprises eight countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

26 See Québec Solidaire, 2009b.

not exceed 800 words in length. The policy commission then compiles a "perspectives booklet" presenting concise demands based on what it considers the "principal orientations" in these submissions. These are discussed and amended or added to by QS local associations and general assemblies, following which the policy commission produces a "synthesis booklet" that arranges the revised demands by topic and, where appropriate, lists differing resolutions addressed to a particular issue as "options" (a half-dozen or so, in some cases) for debate and decision at the convention — first in topic workshops, then in plenary session, where delegates are limited to two or three minute interventions from the floor.[27]

At each stage the draft documents are published on the members' intranet. (In the lead-up to the first convention, written contributions to the debate by individual members or groups of members were published on the QS web site; however, it appears this practice is no longer being implemented.) Whatever the democratic merits of this procedure–and there are some, to be sure–it effectively precludes lengthier written contributions within the party structures that could outline a general strategic or programmatic framework on the given subjects and allow a broader debate among opposing approaches. As noted earlier, the party has no public or internal discussion bulletin or even an email discussion list that would allow such debates.

The main topics for debate at the first program convention, in November 2009, were the national question and reform or creation of "democratic institutions." The three hundred delegates agreed, by large majorities:[28] that the Quebec "nation" includes all residents of Quebec, and is based not on ethnic origin but on voluntary membership in the political community, with French as the common language of public communication; this nation being composed historically by the successive integration of people originating from other communities, including the Anglophone community. QS also acknowledges the sovereignty of "the ten Amerindian peoples and the Inuit people who also inhabit Quebec territory," and their fundamental right to national self-determination, however they choose to exercise that right.

27 In the most recent discussion, prior to the Sixth Convention held in March 2011, the policy commission received about 150 submissions. Following publication of the perspectives booklet, members submitted about 600 amendments and new proposals or comments from about 40 local associations or committees entitled to representation at the convention. (Introduction to the *Cahier Synthèse–Programme*) This suggests that most of the internal preconvention discussion was on the basis of the perspectives document, with its succinct specific demands.

28 For a full report, see Fidler, 2009.

that "Canadian federalism is basically unreformable. It is impossible for Quebec to obtain all the powers it wants and needs for the profound changes proposed by Québec Solidaire." A new relationship with the rest of Canada can only be negotiated once the Québécois have clearly established their intent and ability to form an independent state.

that independence should be achieved through a process of participatory and representative democracy, through election of a Constituent Assembly composed equally of women and men, with "proportional representation of tendencies and the various socio-economic milieus within Quebec society." The Assembly would conduct an extensive consultation of opinion and, following its debates, its conclusions — in effect, a draft Constitution — would then be put to a popular vote in a referendum.

These positions mark a major advance in the party's understanding of the national question, when compared with the minimal agreement on this question at its founding. And they clearly delimit it from the PQ's sovereignty-association and ethnic nationalism, as well as its referendum strategy which limits popular input to a vote on a question negotiated between the parties in the National Assembly.

The convention also addressed another of Québec Solidaire's founding "values" — laïcité, or secularism — basically, separation of church and state. This is a hot-button issue in Quebec, where right-wing ideologues, narrow nationalists, and some leftists and feminists have campaigned in recent years against "reasonable accommodation" of ethnic minority practices. Those particularly targeted include Muslim women wearing "ostentatious symbols" of their religious faith such as the hijab, or scarf, which are deemed threats to national identity or challenges to women's rights. The QS delegates ratified the party leadership's concept of "open" and "intercultural" secularism and opposed proposals for state-enforced dress codes that would effectively outlaw the wearing of symbols of religious belief. Debate continues in the party on some related issues such as the growing demand by many nationalists and feminists that the government adopt a "Charte de laïcité," a charter to control more generally the expression of religious beliefs in the public sphere.

The convention also adopted progressive proposals on measures to integrate immigrants into Quebec society and on democratic reform of electoral institutions. In regard to the latter topic, QS advocates a system of proportional representation that would elect 60% of MNAs as individual riding representatives, the other 40% of the seats being allocated to the various parties in proportion to their respective shares of the popular vote.

The second program convention, held in March 2011, focused on environmental, economic and labour issues.[29]

Environment. The 350 delegates voted for a major turn to "green energy," including:

A reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2020 compared with 1990 levels, and by 95% by 2050. Abandonment of fossil fuels by 2030.

Opposition to carbon taxes, carbon trading and storage schemes, biofuels, and geo-engineering.

"Public control" over energy firms, defined as majority participation of the state up to and including 100% nationalization as needed.

Prohibition of any new hydro-electric development. Production of renewable energies: solar, geothermal, wind, to limit to the maximum any supplementary resort to hydro-electricity.

An end to all exploration and development of fossil fuels, such as petroleum in the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Old Harry), shale gas, and LNG ports. Elimination of Quebec's nuclear reactor system, and an end to the exploration and development of uranium mines.

Development of electrified transportation to ensure the accessibility, universality "or even gratuity" of public transit.

Support for a new, legally binding international agreement, and participation in the world movement linking climate and social justice. It was noted that this movement is inspired by the alternative peoples' summit on the environment held at Cochabamba, Bolivia in April 2010.

Natural resources. The convention voted by large majorities that the mining and forestry industries should be placed under "public control," with up to 100% nationalization "as needed." In addition:

All resource industries to be subject to strict environmental regulations, and no project to be approved without meaningful public consultation in the communities concerned and a veto by local or regional authorities over development plans. Mining royalties to be increased and shared equitably between the resource region and the government.

In the forest industry, elimination of laws allowing clear cutting and cutting in the boreal forest north of the 49th parallel. A reduction in disparities between natural and managed forests, and a need for prior agreements with the indigenous people in all regions under aboriginal treaties or land claims.

Fresh water, whether surface or underground, to be considered a

29 See Fidler, 2011a.

"non-commodified common good accessible to all but the property of no one," with the state as guardian. Water used by industry and businesses to be considered a "loaned" public property subject to royalties and post-treatment controls.

Trade union and labour rights. Among the programmatic demands adopted by the convention — usually by large majorities, in some cases unanimously — are the following:

Constitutional protection of the right to join unions, bargain and strike, including the right to political and solidarity strikes (strikes for political objectives and in solidarity with striking workers and students).

Prohibition of lockouts, and strict controls on layoffs and shutdowns — including mandatory justification before a government agency, protection of company pensions, compulsory retraining and re-employment in similar jobs, etc. State assistance to employees wishing to form local worker coops when companies relocate.

Union rights for farmworkers and self-employed workers, and the right to multi-employer certifications.

Right of full employment in safe, stable, socially useful, ecologically sound work free of discrimination, with social protection in case of loss of employment, incapacity and ageing. Affirmative action for women, disabled, visible minorities and indigenous.

Immediate reduction in the workweek to 35 hours, and "gradual" transition to 32 hours with no loss of pay, compensatory hiring and no speed-up in workload or pace. Legal restrictions on the use of overtime work.

An immediate increase in the minimum wage to the low-income (poverty) threshold for a person working full time, with a "gradual" increase to 50% over this threshold, indexed to the cost of living. This would mean a gradual increase from $10.66 to $15.99 per hour.

Expanded public employment in social services, construction, infrastructures maintenance and environmental clean-up.

Accessible programs for job retraining, free and funded by employers and government.

Virtually all of these demands have been raised by the unions and social movements; Québec Solidaire sees itself as their political and electoral representative.

BEYOND CAPITALISM?

Introducing the preconvention debates, the policy commission asked QS members to consider a question that goes to the very heart of

the party's conception of its overall objective:

"As we work on our program, we should spell out the nature and limits of the system, and ask ourselves the following question: isn't the capitalist system, based as it is on maximizing profit and irresponsible exploitation of nature, the main obstacle to social progress and a healthy relationship to the environment? We need a serious debate on the question so we can determine whether our social problems can be corrected by reforms that respect the logic of the system or if we need to adopt the perspective of going beyond the system."[30]

This was also the question put by the Québec Solidaire leadership in a Manifesto issued for May Day 2009, entitled "To emerge from the crisis, should we go beyond capitalism?"[31] The Manifesto's anticapitalist rhetoric met with a very favourable response in QS ranks.This defining issue was debated briefly during the preconvention period, although not in official party publications. Some members argued that QS should remain a "rainbow coalition," fighting "for immediate changes realizable within the framework of the present capitalist state and system." Others, however, argued for a more radical perspective: "ecosocialism," and an explicit attention to "the class interests of the workers' movement."[32]

Judging from the debates at the March convention, these questions remain open for "serious debate" in Québec Solidaire. In the plenary session on "general orientations," delegates voted by a large majority for a statement declaring that "QS ultimately intends to go beyond capitalism," and calling for a "plural economy" and "an eventual socialization of economic activities, based on a strengthened public economy (state-owned companies and nationalization of major enterprises in some strategic sectors), a greater role of the social economy (cooperatives, community-owned firms), and a controlled private sector, with much greater emphasis on promoting small and medium enterprises (SMEs)."

No relative weight was assigned to any of these sectors. A number of delegates objected that many SMEs are low-wage sweatshops, the proprietors being bitter opponents of trade unions. Their alternative motions were outvoted after brief debate.

Delegates voted as well that:

Nationalized enterprises are to be operated in a framework of national and democratic planning, with decentralized management including

30 Québec Solidaire, 2010, p.5
31 Québec Solidaire, 2009a.
32 For excerpts, see Fidler, 2011a.

representatives of employees, the community, and First Nations where applicable. Forms of self-management are to be promoted in place of bureaucratic oversight.

Economic growth must cease to be considered an objective in itself. A QS government will take immediate legal, regulatory, fiscal or other measures to discourage over-production, over-indebtedness, and over-consumption.

The emphasis on the "social economy" is not surprising, perhaps, given the traditional prominence within Quebec society of farming co-operatives, the caisses populaires (originally, parish-based credit unions), and similar service-based not-for-profit organizations, with self-defined "social missions" and relatively democratic decision-making structures.[33] The attention to the "domestic economy" reflects as well the traditions and roots of many QS members in the feminist movement and its recognition that many important economic functions of society go unpaid or underpaid relative to other economic sectors.

However, many of these undertakings operate in low-wage ghettos, and they often serve to legitimize the privatization of public services. And although some sectors, as in the childcare industry, have managed to unionize, some major proponents of Quebec's "social economy" are heavily implicated in collaborating with the trade union-sponsored investment funds such as the FTQ's Solidarity Fund or the CSN's Fondaction, which have served as a major economic and ideological bulwark for the conservative union bureaucracy.[34] The "social economy," as it actually functions in Quebec society, is an integral part of its capitalist economy. And some of its components, such as the massive Desjardins Movement, a dominant player in retail banking and insurance in the province, are major institutions of "Québec Inc.," the new Francophone corporate elite.

A packed agenda did not allow time for debate on important resolutions on banking and the financial industry — where some draft proposals called for complete expropriation — and taxation, where pro-

33 In Quebec as a whole, the "social economy" comprises more than 7,000 "collective enterprises (cooperatives and non-profits)" employing 125,000 workers and accounting for 8% of the province's GDP. See: http://www.chantier.qc.ca/?module=document&uid=871. A recent study of the "social economy" in Montréal alone lists close to 4,000 establishments with $2 billion in revenues and employing more than 65,000 salaried workers (women occupying about 59% of full-time and 66% of part-time jobs). They encompass a wide variety of undertakings: housing cooperatives, child-care centres, caterers, domestic care agencies, as well as some major operations in the retail, finance and insurance sectors. See Université du Québec à Montréal, 2008.

34 See, for example, Neamtam,2010.

posals included, inter alia, rejection of consumption taxes and radically shifting the tax burden from individuals to corporations. These topics were left for future debate and decision.

A PARTY OF THE BALLOT BOXES... AND THE STREETS?

Aware that "politics" is conventionally viewed as electoral and parliamentary activity, Québec Solidaire has established itself as an officially recognized party under Quebec law. Since its founding, and particularly since Khadir's election in 2008, the focus has been increasingly on a strategy of building the party through the ballot box, to the neglect of extra-parliamentary action "in the streets." A "development plan" adopted at a National Council meeting, in June 2010, summarized the objectives for the next two years as "advancing our ideas in the population, gaining a greater presence in public debates, electing more MNAs and appreciably increasing our percentage of the vote in the next general elections."

A draft resolution of the QS policy commission, still to be debated and adopted in a future convention, addresses "the relations between Québec Solidaire, the trade-union movement and the social movements in general." The draft text outlines a strategy by which QS, "as a party and as a government, should seek to strengthen the capacities of the social movements, encourage their unity in action and participate in them on the basis of a program of social transformation." It proposes that QS members who belong to the various social movements be encouraged to "network" within the party — that is, coordinate their activities within the unions and other movements around a strategy of reciprocal reinforcement of the movements and the party while respecting "the organizational and political autonomy of the social movements." This draft text addresses an important lacuna in Québec Solidaire's activities.

Québec Solidaire works alongside the unions and some social movements in a number of coalitions, such as the pro-independence Conseil de la Souveraineté. But its modest campaign in relation to the public-sector unions' negotiations with the Quebec government last year, labelled "Courage politique," failed to mount a clear defense of the unions' demands and was largely confined to arguments in support of existing social programs and opposition to privatization. The party has no organized presence as such in the unions.

As the policy commission puts it, the conquest of political power requires "a structured political organization whose program integrates

the demands of the social movements and an overall projet de société [program for society]." And thus it is important to think in particular about the party's relation with "the trade-union movement, which occupies a central place within Quebec's social movements."

The undemocratic first-past-the-post system in Quebec (as in every other jurisdiction in Canada) poses some formidable obstacles to a new party with radical ideas facing a hostile mass media in a multiparty environment. Québec Solidaire promotes a detailed proposal for a system of proportional representation, but recognizes that there is no early prospect of its adoption. With this in mind, the party leadership asked delegates to the March convention to consider whether QS should seek electoral agreements with other parties under which each party would agree not to contest certain ridings in which the other stood a better chance of electing its candidate. Two options were on the table: (a) a possible tactical agreement with the Parti Québécois and/or the Verts (a small Green party); or (b) a possible tactical agreement with the Verts alone, a "strategic alliance" with that party being deemed conceivable if based on the Global Greens Charter, but ruled out for "practical reasons pertaining to internal decisions of the Verts in Quebec."

After an intense debate, the delegates rejected any such alliances, despite appeals from both Amir Khadir and Françoise David, among others, in support of either option. Opponents noted that such alliances would blur Québec Solidaire's programmatic differences from the other parties, particularly the PQ, and in any case were impractical — the PQ is apprehensive of the growing popularity of QS among many of its traditional supporters, and PQ governments have always resisted implementing any form of proportional representation. The vote also reaffirmed the members' determination to build Québec Solidaire as an independent left-wing political alternative to the Parti Québécois.

A 'COUNTRY OF PROJECTS'

The unexpected surge in support for the New Democratic Party in the May 2 federal election, and the sharp decline in the Bloc Québécois vote,[35] have underscored the volatility of the Quebec electorate and stimulated hopes in Québec Solidaire, which does not run for federal office, for major gains in the next provincial election. It has also given

35 The NDP took 43% of the popular vote in Quebec, electing 59 of the province's 75 MPs. In 2008 it had polled only 12.2%, electing one MP. The Bloc vote fell from close to 40% in 2008 to less than 24%, and it elected only 4 MPs, although it had elected a majority of Quebec's MPs since 1993. See Fidler, 2011b. The Bloc's collapse has touched off a profound crisis within the Parti Québécois and traditional pro-sovereignty movement: see Fidler, 2011e

a powerful boost to the party's campaign "for a country of projects," launched in mid-April of 2011 pursuant to a resolution adopted at its November 2009 convention.[36] The campaign web site sets out the party's vision of sovereignty and the approach it favours for achieving it. It also outlines the party's approach to strengthening the status of the French language, especially in Montréal. As the web site explains:

"Some of these projects can be achieved here and now, without affecting Quebec's constitutional status. However, the people's ambition to realize many other projects will soon be hobbled by the total or partial absence of any latitude for Quebec in areas as fundamental as the environment, foreign policy, foreign trade and even language. The full mastery of our destiny is therefore indispensable for achieving all of the projects of our dreams."

Associated materials (all on-line) include a historical survey that dates a Québécois quest for sovereignty back to the 18th century, a critique of Canadian federalism and the failure of past efforts to reform the system, and a critique of "the impasse of the PQ and its referendum strategy," to which it counterposes Québec Solidaire's proposed grassroots campaign to build support for sovereignty and, eventually, the election of a democratic non-partisan Constituent Assembly to adopt a constitution for an independent Quebec. Associated articles describe parallel "inspiring experiences" in Bolivia, Ecuador and, most recently, in Tunisia.

In the fall of 2011, the campaign will feature a tour of Quebec by QS president Françoise David and public meetings "on themes chosen by local party associations."

This campaign has the potential to boost Québec Solidaire's profile as the left wing of the independence movement, with a "project for society" and a "country of projects" that points toward an anticapitalist alternative vision that breaks sharply with the PQ-Bloc strategy for independence — a strategy "based on alienation from Canada," and "fuelled by resentment," as Amir Khadir described it in a recent analysis of the federal election results.[37]

21ST CENTURY SOCIALISM?

The rightward evolution of the traditional sovereigntist parties, the PQ and BQ, has left a very broad space to their left, one that Québec Soli-

36 See Fidler, 2009. The interactive campaign web site may be accessed at: Quèbec Solidaire 2011.

37 *Le Devoir*, May 14, 2011. Translated in Fidler, 2011c

daire aspires to fill. The party has managed to cast a wide net, encompassing leading activists from the women's movement and community social action groups, veterans of previous but unsuccessful attempts to found viable parties of socialism and a Marxist left, and some trade unionists.

It cannot (yet) be classified as anti-capitalist, or a party of 21st century socialism as that concept has generally been conceived. But it is clearly much more than a Québécois version of the federalist NDP, notwithstanding hopes expressed by QS leaders that the NDP will some day prove a valuable Canadian interlocutor for Quebec as it moves to independence.

Québec Solidaire's support of Quebec independence means that its strategic framework is not limited to the existing form of the state; it opens the party's imagination and perspectives to conceiving another, very different Quebec based on the "values" or principles upheld by the party. This is not a line of march that facilitates accommodation with the Canadian bourgeoisie or its Quebec component. This independentism is one of Québec Solidaire's strongest programmatic assets, offering it the potential to build a party that encompasses and represents the driving forces for progressive social transformation within the Quebec social formation.

There are other important features of the party, however, that underscore its sui generis nature in the Quebec, and indeed Canadian, political landscape and that offer hope for its evolution and development into a mass socialist party with deep roots among Quebec working people.

The party's strong commitment to feminist principles has given it a compass in navigating through the shoals of the public debate over Quebec identity and "reasonable accommodation." Despite some backsliding by the party leadership,[38] QS has generally stood firm behind its support of "open secularism" in the face of harsh criticism from some on the left. The near parity of women with men in the party's membership and structures is unique in Quebec, and in Canada.

Québec Solidaire's internationalism has been given limited expres-

38 QS has given critical support to the Charest government's Bill 94, which would deny government-funded health care, education and child care services to all whose clothing prevents disclosure of their face, and would bar them from government and public-service employment. The bill patently targets a tiny number of Muslim women who wear niqabs or burqas. And when some Sikhs sought to appear before a parliamentary committee to express their opposition to Bill 94, Amir Khadir added his vote on a PQ motion, supported by the other parties, to exclude them from the National Assembly because they were wearing their ceremonial dagger, the kirpan. This action is arguably inconsistent with the resolutions on laïcité adopted a year ago, mentioned in this paper.

sion in its opposition to capitalist trade and investment deals, its opposition to the war in Afghanistan, and in its sympathy toward progressive governments in Latin America. The party has been harshly attacked in the mainstream media for its participation in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign against Israeli apartheid, which the delegates to its November 2009 convention voted unanimously to endorse — a position that demarks Québec Solidaire from the NDP's strong support of the Zionist state.[39]

The party's commitment to defence of the environment, if adhered to consistently, points it toward anti-capitalist solutions and the formulation of a radical ecosocialism that can link up with the worldwide movement developing in the wake of Bolivia's Cochabamba conference of 2010.

Last but not least, the pluralism of Québec Solidaire, its desire to include within its ranks all those in Quebec who wish to fight for another, better world, opens space for revolutionary socialists and Marxists to join the party and to fight for their perspectives within the party as organized "collectives" democratically recognized by the party's statutes although not represented as such in its leadership bodies. Although they have maintained a rather low profile so far, some of these collectives could play a leading role in helping to bring theoretical understanding and clarity to the evolving debates on the party's program and its activities. Perhaps more importantly, they could help to overcome a glaring deficiency in the party: its lack of any coherent organized educational effort among its members and the larger left constituency.

This paper has described in considerable detail the process of formation of Québec Solidaire because it has features that can serve as guides for other processes in other settings. The left groups that initiated the process recognized a shift in the objective situation — in this case the growing disillusionment with the PQ, the new vibrancy of the women's movement, and the appearance of a new altermondialiste movement mobilizing young people in opposition to capitalist oppression and injustice. They laid down a minimal set of principles for regroupment and consolidation: a strategic framework of striving for the independence of Quebec; feminism, both programmatically and organizationally (as in male-female parity in party structures); pluralism, inclusion of all who agreed to support and work to implement the party's "values" and general orientations, and respect for minority opinions including the right

39 Québec Solidaire was a strong supporter of the recent "Boat to Gaza" solidarity project, delegating a QS leader, Manon Massé, to participate personally on the party's behalf in the international attempt to breach the Israeli blockade of the Palestinian statelet.

of members with particular perspectives to organize within the party in support of their views; internationalism — placing anti-imperialism, solidarity and global justice at the core of the new party's politics.

And throughout, they were willing to let the process follow its own rhythm. As Pierre Dostie said, in describing the UFP's approach to fusion with Option citoyenne, the latter "had to comply with its own process, [so] we sought areas of convergence and we entered into a dialogue." (note 15, supra)

The goal is to build a party that encompasses and represents the leading militants in all those movements that are, in various ways, engaged in struggles against capital.

The future of Québec Solidaire is closely linked to its ability to become more integrated in Quebec's broad labour-radical subculture, and to develop the "reciprocal relationship" with the trade union and popular movements that is outlined in the policy commission proposal.

To the degree that it does this, the social and ethnic composition of the party will change. QS is still a "white" party, for example. Neither its membership nor its leading bodies reflect the diverse ethnic and immigrant composition of Quebec. It is no accident that its major achievements so far, the election of Amir Khadir, an Iranian-Quebecois with deep roots in the independence movement, was scored in one of Montréal's most ethnically diverse constituencies. Québec Solidaire cannot yet be characterized as an anticapitalist party. But it is fair to say that it is much more than a Québécois version of, say, the federal NDP. Some important features of the party underscore its sui generis nature and offer hope for its evolution and development into a mass socialist party with deep roots among Quebec working people.

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