

Québec Solidaire Adopts a Program for Government : New left party debates election platform

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Québec solidaire's 25 "concrete and realizable commitments"

New Left Party Debates Election Platform in First Policy Convention

MONTREAL - Quebec's new party of the left, Québec solidaire, held its first policy convention here on November 24-26. The 320 delegates — 48% of them women — debated, amended and adopted a draft platform for the next general election in Quebec, expected in 2007.

Québec solidaire has grown rapidly since its founding in February of this year. It now boasts 5,100 members in some 70 local associations organized on an electoral constituency basis, as well as student groups on the major college and university campuses. It is registering between 4% and 8% support in province-wide opinion polls, and in by-elections this year its candidates garnered up to 22% of the votes.

The February convention had adopted a declaration of principles identifying the party's key "values"— social justice, equality between women and men, viable development, antiracism, pacifism, and international solidarity, as its statutes proclaim — but not a formal program. So this was the first opportunity for the members to begin spelling out what the party stands for. The adoption of a limited election platform was seen as the initial step in an ongoing process to develop a more comprehensive program for the party.

The overall theme chosen by the QS central leadership, the national coordinating committee, was addressed to what the party proposed to do in the "first 1,000 days of the Québec solidaire government". While this might seem like an ambitious goal for a party that has yet to elect a single member to the National Assembly, it expressed a positive commitment to build a mass party that can fight for political power in Quebec City.

The convention laboured under severe time constraints. Many draft proposals could not be discussed and consequently were referred for further consideration and adoption to the party's policy commission — over the objections of many delegates who argued that this unfinished business should be debated at a forthcoming National Committee meeting open to all interested members.

Social policy reforms Some of the major resolutions that were adopted, as amended, are summarized in the accompanying article. With the exception of the proposals related to the Quebec national question and aboriginal self-determination, they amount to a rather modest set of social policy reforms not substantially different from the kind of progressive reform agenda and Keynesian wealth-distribution concepts once advocated by the social-

democratic NDP in the English-Canadian provinces.

The limited content of this platform may seem surprising in a party that has united cadres from various socialist and left nationalist currents with prominent feminists and community activists. The explanation for the platform's limited nature may lie in part in the current political context.

Québec solidaire resulted from a fusion between the Union des forces progressistes (UFP) and Option citoyenne (OC). The UFP was a coalition of the political left that developed amidst the unitary dynamic of the "altermondialiste" global justice mobilizations of trade-unionists and youth that peaked in Quebec City in 2001 and the massive antiwar movement that mobilized up to a quarter million in a march against the Iraq war in February 2003. Option citoyenne was formed in 2004 by leaders and activists in antipoverty organizations and major popular mobilizations such as the March for Bread and Roses (1995) and the World March of Women. (Background: Socialist Voice #30, Socialist Voice #55)

However, while its founding components originated on the crest of mass mobilizations in the early years of this decade, Québec solidaire was born amidst a serious decline of mass actions by the broad social movements over the last two years, and in the wake of some major defeats of Quebec's trade unions following massive strikes and demonstrations waged in opposition to the vicious right-wing offensive unleashed by the Charest Liberal government immediately after its election in 2003. Even the student movement, which waged the biggest student strike in Quebec history in early 2005, is today in a relative lull.

The women's movement has been placed on the defensive by the Charest Liberal government's moves to undermine childcare through increased privatization of services and huge cuts in funding. The antiwar movement is largely demobilized. Environmental activists are reeling from Charest's moves to privatize Mount Orford parkland and corporate stratagems such as lawsuits designed to muzzle opponents of the proposed liquefied natural gas terminal near Quebec City. As for the trade unions, they are barely present on the political landscape. These setbacks appear to have negatively affected the new left party's conception of what is possible in the current context. In any event, the platform also reflects a deliberate policy choice.

A minimum platform, but linked to a broader perspective? In a remarkably frank directive sent to the members in late spring, François Cyr, the chair of the policy commission, outlined the QS leadership's objectives in developing the election platform. "We are no longer a splinter group or an ideological pressure group but we are still very far from a party of government," he wrote. The task is to develop "a limited number of proposals . . . conceived in terms of a governmental project that is immediately realizable in the present framework — that is, provincial and neoliberal."

Aware that this restriction would not sit well with many party activists, Cyr offered a mollifying thought. "However, we should link each proposal for immediate realization with a broader perspective opening the door to profound structural changes." As an example, he suggested, "we may propose a large immediate increase in the minimum wage and paid vacations, but we should also commit to opening an extensive public debate on work, its remuneration, its increasing insecurity in our society including the notion of minimum wage, reconciliation of work and family responsibilities and a reduction in the work week." In the adopted platform, however, Cyr's example is reduced to the following trite phrase: "Québec solidaire will undertake a consultation on the various options to reduce poverty in a

sustainable and respectful way, such as, for example, the citizenship income [revenu de citoyenneté — essentially a guaranteed annual wage].”

To begin the process, the QS National Committee appointed a dozen or so “theme commissions”, each to develop policy on a particular program topic. All party members were invited to participate in the work of these commissions, which met through the summer. In mid-October, their discussion papers were published on the QS intranet; they totalled more than 100 pages!

In early November, the national leadership released a draft election platform that purported to synthesize the key ideas in the theme commission reports — a 38-page document including texts outlining the thinking behind each proposal. QS members in the local associations discussed this platform, adopted amendments and elected delegates to the convention. The final compendium of proposals with literally hundreds of proposed amendments, an 88-page document, was handed to the delegates as they arrived at the convention.

Attempts to strengthen platform

Needless to say, it was impossible for the delegates to fully digest or process this mass of materials in two days of deliberations. However, the convention debates did indicate a clear desire by the membership to strengthen the final document by incorporating some key demands advanced by trade unions and the women’s, student and other social movements — many of which had been expressed in the theme commission reports but ignored in the draft platform.

For example, while the draft said a QS government would “reduce” school fees and state subsidies to private schools, the delegates voted to “eliminate” fees at all levels of education and stop private school funding. The draft’s proposal to create a new corporate entity, Éole-Québec, to develop wind-turbine power did not address the role of the privately owned companies, which are now busy signing contracts with the government — a much-disputed issue in Quebec. The convention voted in favour of nationalization of this sector of the power industry, a popular demand that is put forward by major trade unions.

On the other hand, some proposals to radicalize the platform failed, often by narrow margins, after debate. For example, many delegates wanted to nationalize the entire pharmaceutical industry, a major industry in Quebec; however, the adopted proposal to create a state-owned agency, Pharma-Québec, would limit its role to drug purchase, research and partial production of (generic) drugs while leaving intact the multinational drug companies. Proposals to implement a \$10 per hour minimum wage immediately, not gradually, and to extend access to free drug care to all low-income Quebecers, not just those on welfare, were defeated when party leaders argued it would be precipitous and “cost too much”.

What about Afghanistan? There is a striking omission in the adopted platform: its lack of an international dimension.

The theme commission on international questions had proposed that a Québec solidaire government would support the antiwar movement, quit the imperialist military alliances NATO and NORAD, abolish the army and replace it with a “civil force of territorial surveillance to protect national sovereignty but not intervene abroad”. It called for

withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan, no participation in the “supposed war on terrorism alongside the United States”, conversion of the war industry to civilian production, abolition of security certificates and opening Quebec’s doors to “refugees fleeing the war or objecting to participating in it” as well as to victims of sexual violence and sexist or homophobic persecution.

The commission, in a discussion of “the globalization we want”, suggested that a QS government would, among other measures, “consolidate relations of cooperation with progressive governments” and create an international agency to promote endogenous development based on food self-sufficiency, fair trade, and economic development focused on co-operative principles and local production. It called for a government review of existing international trade and investment agreements such as NAFTA, although it did not call for their repeal.

This international dimension was missing from the draft platform. Because debate in the membership and the convention was confined to the draft, there were no amendments and no real discussion of these issues and demands at the convention. It seems that the determination to limit the platform to what is possible within a “provincial and neoliberal” framework is being interpreted quite narrowly.

That orientation by the QS leadership is surprising, however. International issues figured prominently in the last Quebec general election, in April 2003. Two months earlier, up to a quarter million Québécois had marched against the impending invasion of Iraq — the largest antiwar demonstration in the history of Canada. Antiwar sentiment was so strong that the leaders of all three capitalist parties sported white ribbons, the symbol of opposition to the Iraq war, on their lapels. The fledgling UFP made the war a central issue in its election campaign.

A major issue in Quebec politics today is the Canadian army occupation of Afghanistan. The majority antiwar sentiment in Canada is highest in Quebec. The Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment is now being sent to Afghanistan, and soon the caskets will be returning to Quebec towns and cities. Shouldn’t a Québec solidaire government have something to say about that?

. . . and capitalist globalization? Also in the 2003 election, then Premier Bernard Landry of the Parti québécois made his party’s support for the U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) a central plank in his campaign. The PQ has consistently supported NAFTA, the FTA and other neoliberal trade and investment deals in the belief that improved access to foreign markets and foreign investment would open up more elbow room for a sovereign Quebec. The UFP argued strongly to the contrary, noting that further subordination to the dictates of capital undermined democracy and national sovereignty.

One conceivable response to capitalist globalization was indicated in a recent issue of *Résistance*, a magazine published by the International Socialists. QS member Benoit Renaud suggested that Québec solidaire advocate in its platform Quebec’s participation in ALBA, the agreement for barter arrangements and low-price exchange of badly needed goods and services between the revolutionary governments in Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. “We could send buses, trains, planes and inexpensive drugs to the other three countries in exchange for oil, natural gas, sugar, medical personnel . . . and thousands of Spanish teachers!”

The failure of the QS platform to address such issues seems inconsistent with the party's goal to be a political voice for the grassroots organizations and mass movements from which it has emerged.

When some delegates sought to amend the draft platform to include opposition to imperialist military alliances and capitalist trade and investment deals, QS leader Françoise David opposed the motion as "premature", saying the party needed more time to debate these questions. But the QS leadership has in fact addressed international questions — as it should — although not altogether coherently. For example, David and co-leader Amir Khadir, in an article published in *Le Devoir* March 18-19, criticized the "hijacking" of the Canadian army's "mandate" in Afghanistan, but expressed Québec solidaire's support for Canadian participation in "a genuine UN peace initiative . . . to counter the influence of the warlords". After the federal NDP convention adopted a resolution calling for withdrawal of Canadian forces from Afghanistan, the QS National Council in late September echoed the NDP's call for withdrawal. But the Council, in the same resolution, endorsed the David-Khadir call for Canadian participation in a military force under UN rather than NATO auspices. These contradictory positions have not been debated, let alone adopted, by the membership.

For a Constituent Assembly The platform's position on the Quebec national question is another contentious item. Although the national question was addressed in only one of the five "themes" in the draft platform, it was a defining issue in the creation of Québec solidaire. The fusion of UFP and OC was programmatically based on the latter's evolution toward the UFP's pro-sovereignty position. As the declaration of principles adopted at Québec solidaire's founding convention stated:

"Quebec must have all the powers necessary to its full development socially, economically, culturally and politically. It is denied this within the federal framework. Our party is therefore in favour of sovereignty. Although it is not a guarantee, sovereignty is a means of providing Quebec with the tools it needs to implement its social agenda and to fully develop as a people." [An English translation of the declaration is posted on the QS website.]

The election platform's position on the national question is centered on the proposal for a specially elected assembly to lead a vast public consultation and discussion on Quebec's political and constitutional status and draw up a proposed constitution for a sovereign Quebec. This draft constitution would then be submitted for adoption in a referendum. The initial draft of the platform, however, omitted any reference to sovereignty in its call for a constituent assembly, sovereignty being mentioned only as a defining "value" in the preamble to the platform as a whole. A sovereign Quebec was inserted as a specific goal on the eve of the congress, in response to numerous amendments to that effect from local associations.

There are in fact lingering differences among QS members over the role and importance of Quebec independence or sovereignty in the party's program. Some, possibly a majority, favour an independent Quebec and many would cast the party's entire program in the framework of a national liberation struggle. Others are more diffident or uncertain on the question and a few are opposed to Quebec sovereignty. In many ways, these differences reflect similar differences within the population as a whole and the fact that sovereignty as it has been predominantly defined by the Parti québécois is seen by many as little more than a change in constitutional status not clearly linked to meaningful improvement in the social conditions of most Québécois. To some degree the QS platform's focus on process — the constituent assembly — rather than the objective, sovereignty or independence, bridges

these differences.

“Beyond provincialism”? That said, the concept of a constituent assembly is a powerful feature of the platform. It radically demarks Québec solidaire from the PQ’s “étapisme”, or stages strategy — first “sovereignty”, then (maybe) later we define the new country — in which Quebecers are simply asked to vote yes or no to a constitutional formula, devoid of social content, “astutely” cooked up in government backrooms with little if any possibility of themselves influencing the content of the question.

Québec solidaire, in contrast, starts from a profoundly democratic perspective of what it terms “popular sovereignty”, a process through which the masses of Québécois can themselves determine the kind of country they want to build. It has deep roots in Quebec history, going back to the demands of the Lower Canada rebels in 1837 and reflected more recently in the popular Estates General organized by nationalist organizations in the late 1960s.

The QS approach has the potential to appeal to many sovereigntists frustrated by the PQ’s inability to create “winning conditions” around that party’s neoliberal program. Moreover, it points to the need to go beyond the “provincial and neoliberal” context. Even the modest reforms projected in the QS platform may not be “immediately realizable” without a major shift in the relationship of forces, both within Quebec and between Quebec and Canada.

As a number of speakers noted in the convention debate, compelling support for Quebec independence will be won only through a vast “pedagogic exercise” in which a strong majority of the population can begin to see the relevance of state independence to their own liberation from exploitation and oppression.

Given the differing political dynamics between Quebec and the rest of Canada, it is clear that no program of fundamental social change, still less socialism, could be implemented in Quebec today without a radical change in Quebec’s constitutional status — freeing it from the constraints of limited provincial jurisdiction, residual and largely unfettered federal spending power, and ultimately the federal courts, military and police authority. This reality is the driving force behind the quest for an independent Quebec among Québécois progressives. These issues were strongly addressed in the report of the theme commission on sovereignty, which advocated “going beyond provincialism” and spoke of “defining our proposed society in the framework of economic and social liberation”.

Beyond electoralism? Québec solidaire is attempting to fill a wide space that exists to the left of the three capitalist parties (Liberals, PQ and ADQ) that now dominate the Quebec political landscape. But will it be filled by a small party that offers little more than a kinder, gentler version of the neoliberal PQ and yet another, but smaller, pro-sovereignty alternative to the other capitalist parties?

Like its predecessor the UFP, Québec solidaire has sometimes defined itself as “a party of the streets and the ballot boxes”. But it is the party’s electoral aspirations that have prevailed since its founding. This convention confirmed the electoralist orientation. The exclusive focus on the general election is problematic, however.

For one thing, it is unlikely that any QS candidate can be elected in the forthcoming election, given the vagaries of the first-past-the-post system. The Charest government has yet to table its promised electoral reform bill, but the prevailing sentiment in the National

Assembly is to limit any semblance of proportional representation to parties with at least 15% of the popular vote — far more than the opinion polls attribute to QS. And even this limited reform is not slated for implementation until the next decade.

If the party bases its entire activity on hopes for an electoral breakthrough within the next few years, it risks seriously disorienting and disappointing many of its members and supporters.

More fundamentally, if Québec solidaire confines its appeal, electorally or otherwise, to the neoliberal and provincial context, it may undermine its potential to build a strong base among union militants, *néo-Québécois*, and young people looking for a fighting alternative to environmental destruction, capitalist repression, racism, and national and gender oppression, and offering a realistic perspective of “another world” free of oppression and exploitation.

A work in progress At this point it is not easy to define the new party. To be sure, its values are feminist, ecologist and sovereigntist. But it is not clearly anticapitalist or even consistently anti-imperialist. There is a wide spectrum of views within the party, and an unresolved and still not clearly articulated tension within it between a social-democratic current, predominant in the leadership bodies, and a more militant and largely anticapitalist left.

This leadership, to give it its due, has immense authority and respect among the party’s membership. It has managed, through hard work and dedication, to merge two quite distinct “corporate cultures” — the remnants of an often fractious left with a feminist movement that privileges dialogue and consensus — into a new party in which the founding components no longer simply coexist but are united around a compelling vision of social solidarity. This is a major achievement, unprecedented in Quebec and Canadian history.

Québec solidaire is perhaps best viewed as a work in progress. It has assembled much of the “political left”. The party has attracted older militants from the Mao-Stalinist and Trotskyist parties and groups of the past. And it has made room for groups like *Gauche socialiste*, the International Socialists and the Quebec Communist Party to join as “collectives”, although these collectives are not given formal representation in the leading bodies. The collectives have not to this point functioned as overt political tendencies within the party. Nor have they projected a clear alternative to the party’s present course that can help to transform the party into an effective vehicle for anticapitalist mobilization. However, many of the more progressive amendments to the draft platform were proposed by QS associations in which the radical collectives are well represented. These included Taschereau and Jean-Lesage ridings in Quebec City, Mercier in Montréal and Outaouais in Gatineau.

A truly remarkable feature of the party is the high proportion of the membership who are women. This was very evident at the convention. The prominent presence of women members in the debates and chairing the proceedings seemed to create an atmosphere of genuine dialogue and a lack of demagoguery that has been very uncommon in other left-wing organizations. This is an extremely positive feature of Québec solidaire.

Another promising feature is the participation of students and other young activists in the party. The younger delegates at the QS convention contributed an infectious enthusiasm to the proceedings and they were often the sponsors of the more progressive amendments.

However, the party has been less successful in winning wider layers of the “social left”. In particular, it has almost no presence in the trade unions in a province with the highest rate of union membership (almost 40%) in Canada. Among the delegates to the QS convention were Arthur Sandborn, president of the Montréal Central Council of the CSN; André Frappier, a leader of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (and a former federal NDP candidate); and Serge Roy, Québec solidaire candidate in Taschereau riding and former president of the Quebec civil servants’ union (SFPQ). But the party as a whole pays little attention to developments in the unions. And there is a small layer of union activists who have chosen instead to join SPQ-Libre, a left ginger group now a recognized “political club” within the Parti québécois — the party supported by most politically-minded union members and leaders.

Equally important, Québec solidaire does not appear to have much influence in Quebec’s minority ethnic and immigrant “cultural communities”. There were very few non-white faces at this convention, a glaring contrast to the multi-ethnic composition of Quebec today, particularly in Montréal where QS has its strongest presence.

To overcome these and other limitations, QS might be well advised to pay less attention to what is “immediately realizable” in a “provincial and neoliberal” context, and focus its attention more on becoming a tribune and mobilizer for all those social forces that are seeking a way to challenge and go beyond provincial status and neoliberalism.

Clearly, the members of Québec solidaire have only begun to tackle the difficult task of building a broad party of the left that can present a viable alternative, both “at the ballot boxes and in the streets”, to capitalist exploitation and national oppression. This convention, for all its limitations, marked an important initial step in this long march. Socialists in English Canada and elsewhere have every interest in following closely the development of this new party with concern, sympathy and solidarity.

Québec solidaire’s 25 “concrete and realizable commitments”

The adopted platform is grouped around five themes, each theme including five major proposals for the program of a Québec solidaire government in its first term of office. Here are some of the key proposals.

Governing together election of a constituent assembly “to consult the people of Quebec on their political and constitutional future”. Based on this consultation, the assembly will draft proposals on Quebec’s constitutional status and political institutions. A referendum will then pose two distinct questions: “one on Quebec’s political and constitutional future, the other on a Quebec constitution”.

- electoral reform to institute some form of proportional representation with two votes in general elections: one for constituency representatives, the other for party choices. Smaller parties will be represented in the National Assembly on the basis of their standings in the latter vote.
- recognition of the right to self-determination for the 11 aboriginal nations already recognized in Quebec law; nation-to-nation negotiations on autonomy and aboriginal claims to resources and territory; measures to improve the living conditions of native peoples living off the reserves. Growing together adoption of a comprehensive family policy including payment of a universal parental

allowance; tax deductions for parents working full-time in the home care of preschool and school-age children to the age of 12.

- gradual elimination of school fees and private schools, and adequate funding to guarantee everyone a free, secular and quality education; elimination of student debts and establishment of a public financial assistance program for students corresponding to their needs. Living together in a Quebec without poverty
- gradual increase in the minimum wage to \$10 an hour indexed to the cost of living; increase in social assistance to cover all essential needs; abolition of waiting periods for immigrants' access to medicare; construction of 8,000 units per year of ecologically produced social housing; free drugs for social assistance recipients.
- establishment of Pharma-Québec, a "public pole for the purchase, research and production of pharmaceutical products".
- a national campaign to counter violence against women, including state financial support for women's groups. Building together in a just Quebec full taxation of capital gains and greater taxation of dividends, adjustment of personal income tax brackets to tax the wealthy more and the poor less; lowering the RRSP contribution limits; lowering the Quebec sales tax on critical consumption goods while raising it on luxury products.
- repeal of the anti-union legislation imposed by the Charest Liberal government; promotion of trade-union organization and access, especially in sectors occupied primarily by women; reform of the Labour Code to allow trade union organization and bargaining by sectors and industries with more than one employer.
- three weeks of vacation after one year of employment, five weeks after five years, and a broad debate on how to reduce hours of work. Living together in a green Quebec nationalization of wind-power to create Éole-Québec, a publicly owned company like Hydro-Québec.
- establishment of local forestry committees, non-profit agencies to manage ecologically the province's public forests, collect royalties and promote value-added transformation industries in the forest industry.
- massive investment in public transit and energy efficiency to fight climate change and go beyond the Kyoto protocol limits. Promotion of renewable energy sources in place of fossil fuels.
- fighting privatization of water by making water a public property under the Civil Code.
- mandatory labelling of genetically modified organisms and a moratorium on their cultivation; increased support to organic farmers and implementation of green technology practices.

In and around the convention

Québec solidaire has a web site and an intranet site for members, but has no other publications. This void has been filled to some degree by independent publications that are sympathetic to the party. The major one is À Bâbord (the name roughly translates as Portside), a large-format professionally produced bimonthly magazine founded in 2003, which carries extensive news and debate on Quebec and international developments from a generally socialist and feminist perspective. Another is Presse-toi à Gauche (PTàG, "Quick, to the left"), an on-line "tribune" initiated earlier this year by QS members in Québec City, many of them identified with Gauche socialiste, a collective within the party.

PTàQ produced an 8-page print version for the convention, and its editors say they plan to start publishing a monthly newspaper next year. In the period leading up to the QS convention, PTàG was the only medium that provided a forum for public debate of the draft resolutions.

Another publication that supports Québec solidaire is Résistance, produced by the Quebec wing of the International Socialists.

Both the IS and Gauche socialiste maintained literature tables in the convention foyer, GS distributing an introductory pamphlet and selling copies of Inprecor, the international French-language publication of the Fourth International. In addition, the QS women's commission sponsored a used-book sale featuring many old classics of the Quebec workers and feminist movement.

Will NDP split Quebec left? Québec solidaire leader Pierre Dostie writes in the November-December issue of Canadian Dimension that the Quebec section of the federal New Democratic Party is contemplating the launch of a "provincial" wing of the party that would compete with Québec solidaire. Dostie briefly reviews the tangled history of previous attempts to found a Quebec NDP — none with lasting success — and warns that "if the NDP ventures onto the Quebec provincial scene, this may seriously harm the unity process currently underway within the Quebec Left." He asks:

"How would the creation of a Quebec NDP contribute to the unity of progressives across Canada if it divided the Quebec Left? The simple adoption of a resolution recognizing Quebec's right to self-determination is not enough to rehabilitate the NDP in the eyes of Quebecers. At several points in its history, the CCF-NDP has recognized this right — only to abandon this position under pressure from various sources in the party.

"The credibility of the federal NDP in Quebec depends not only on a clear position that will link Quebec's national question to social questions, but also on the party's subsequently sticking to this position over time! Wouldn't it be better for the NDP to invest in a process that developed alliances with existing organizations in Quebec? These kinds of relationships would offer a good opportunity to put the principles of self-determination and asymmetry into practice." [Not on line. French version in Presse-toi à gauche]

In fact, a convention of the Quebec section of the federal NDP in mid-November rejected a resolution to found a provincial NDP. The resolution is reported to have won the support of some 40% of the delegates, however. And its supporters are maintaining a web site to agitate for their position.]

The debate among NDP members over whether to "go provincial" and compete with Québec solidaire is being pursued there and on two other sites: the official Quebec NDP's, and on rabble.ca.

As these debates indicate, a "provincial" NDP would be distinguished from Québec solidaire primarily by its support of the federal regime — hardly the basis on which to construct any kind of alternative to the capitalist parties. Previous attempts over the last 75 years to mount a federalist party of the left in Quebec have all failed.

An overdue apology Last summer Ginette Lewis, a leader of Québec solidaire and of Gauche socialiste in Quebec City, was widely denounced in the corporate media when, in a speech

to a demonstration protesting Israel's assault on Lebanon, she defended the "staunch resistance" of the Lebanese led by Hezbollah. Party leader Françoise David and Amir Khadir issued a press release dissociating the party from the comments attributed to Lewis. While conceding that there had been "an overabundance" of bombing by Israel, David said the left must consider "all of the victims" — apparently an allusion to Israeli casualties. The local party leadership was told to investigate the matter, and there were hints of possible disciplinary sanctions against Lewis.

At a plenary session of the QS convention, party president Alexa Conradi went to the podium and expressed a public apology to Ginette Lewis on behalf of the party's national executive. "Unacceptable things" had been said by some party leaders, she said. The delegates spontaneously rose in a standing ovation for Lewis.

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