

## **“To mount in Quebec a political project of national sovereignty with social content”**

Tuesday 27 January 2009, by [KHADIR Amir](#), [MONASTERIOS VITOLS Maya](#), [MOUTERDE Pierre](#) (Date first published: 24 July 2008).

**Last July 24, 2008, Telesur, the Bolivarian TV news broadcaster took some interest in interviewing two members of Québec solidaire about their views on Quebec sovereignty, the indigenous question, and (very briefly) other aspects of QS’s platform.**

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As a left-wing, ecologist and feminist political movement, Québec solidaire proposes, among other things, to call free elections to elect the members of a constituent assembly with full powers which will reflect the plurality of tendencies, be a symbol of male-female parity and represent fairly all the regions and cultures.

The situation of the 11 indigenous peoples in Quebec, who live in reserves that are totally separated from the rest of society, is another of the problems of concern to Québec solidaire.

To get briefed on the ongoing experiences in South America with respect to constituent assemblies, Khadir and Mouterde travelled last June to Ecuador and Venezuela. Both leaders are seeking to establish ties with the progressive governments in the South and to work for the political and social integration of Québec solidaire with Latin America.

### **Q: How did Québec solidaire come into being and what does it propose?**

**Amir Khadir:** Since the Sixties we have had a broad social and cultural movement that has sought to provide a distinct identity to the people of Quebec, who speak French and have been attempting to achieve recognition for our language as a strong cultural feature and part of our heritage.

Quebec had, and still has today, an historic memory of the colonization process, the intervention of the British armed forces in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who occupied the territory that we now know as Quebec.

The British consistently imposed their political leadership on Quebec, their institutions, and tried to assimilate it, but the people resisted until, in the 1960s, there was a social change that exposed the influence of the right wing in the society. That was when people began to think about a free and independent nation.

Out of that movement there arose a new political party, the Parti québécois (PQ), a product of the alliance of liberal (centre) forces, some right-wing nationalist forces, and many left-wing national forces seeking social progress, all of them with the object of self-determination.

Although the PQ managed to become the government in the Seventies and is still fighting for

independence, it began to apply neoliberal policies, which is why some of us began to think about the need for a political alternative, around the time when progressive movements were beginning to raise their voices against, for example, commercial globalization and in favour of the environment, or in very successful struggles against the war in Iraq in 2000 and 2003.

So when these forces saw that there were no definitive or feasible independence projects and that the PQ, which had electorally supported them in the past, was not doing what had to be done, we decided to begin a process of building a political alternative, which is now called Québec solidaire.

### **What is the essence of your political project?**

**Pierre Mouterde:** We think we can rebuild the left in our party, which defines itself as pluralist, ecologist, altermondialist, feminist, and that will be able to replace the old PQ and thereby mount a political project of national independence, national sovereignty, but with a social content based on a left-wing point of view.

### **Why should Quebec be independent?**

**Pierre Mouterde:** Quebecers, along with Puerto Ricans, are the only people on the American continent who did not obtain their independence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was a rebellion in 1837 which was crushed by the British. This sentiment for national liberation, for emancipation, is strongly felt among the people of Quebec, and is like the spontaneous consciousness people have of wanting to be more autonomous, to want self-determination for themselves, to want to be in charge of their own country and its destiny.

### **And in the Canada of today, are you not sufficiently autonomous?**

**Amir Khadir:** There is some degree of autonomy, but not at the level of the expectations of the people of Quebec. In many respects Quebec lacks sufficient power because what it wants to do in terms of culture, immigration policy, environmental legislation, always conflicts with the legislation and reforms of the federal government.

This has meant that a major portion of Quebec's political elites, for 50 years now, have been saying that we don't have sufficient powers. We want a level of autonomy, of self-determination greater than that. In our province, there are independentist governments, there are federalist governments that want to continue with the present Canadian model, but we lack the power we need, and it is not possible to gain this under the present Constitution of Canada, which favours federalism controlled from the English side.

Canada is a federation of provinces. The province of Quebec has no military power, no power to represent the country abroad, not much economic power. The idea of the Québécois is to increase their own political powers and in doing so to declare a country with full decision-making power over its own laws.

Canada was founded in 1867 on the basis of two nations: one French-speaking, the other English-speaking. It is a construction. It was a confederation that originated on the principle of equality, but in practice the economy and armed forces were controlled by the English. This practical imbalance little by little grew to become an institutional imbalance.

### **What is your party's thinking about the indigenous peoples?**

**Amir Khadir:** It is said that the Canadian confederation is the prison-house of the peoples, of the peoples of French origin, but also of the native, the indigenous peoples. In Quebec there are 11

native nationalities, and many descendants of the Eskimos, who still speak their languages but constitute a small group of inhabitants, only one percent of the total population of 7.6 million persons.

What everyone has forgotten is the indigenous nations. They have rights that were recognized in writing by the colonial power, which they rely on it demanding their rights to greater autonomy, to control over natural resources, to territories. There is a whole fight in Quebec around the native peoples and we support their demands.

Our aboriginal peoples live in enclosed and isolated reserves which has resulted in serious social problems: alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution and domestic violence. These are some of the consequences of this kind of policies which were also applied by the governments of British origin in countries like Australia and the United States.

We in Quebec solidaire think that the indigenous peoples have a major political role and while we maintain contact with their leaders they do not at present want to be part of a government dominated by the whites.

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**P.S.**

\* Interview by Maya Monasterios Vitols. Translation from the Spanish by Richard Fidler.

\* Amir Khadir is a francophone Iranian-Québécois activist and politician, the MNA-elect for Mercier, and a spokesperson for Québec solidaire. Pierre Mouterde is a QS member in Quebec City as well as a leader of Gauche socialiste, the Quebec section of the Fourth International.