

Québec : Foundations for the consolidation and action of an ecosocialist network

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The following is my translation of the founding statement of principles of the Quebec-based Réseau écosocialiste, the Ecosocialist Network. The text, as amended by the founding meeting of the network, was published in the May 1 issue of the web journal Presse-toi à gauche. For a report on the founding meeting, see “Quebec ecosocialist network - ready for action !” [1] [2]

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A. Context : The global resistance to a crisis-ridden neoliberalism

1. After 25 years, capitalism in its neoliberal version is experiencing a far-reaching breakdown that began with the great recession of 2008. It is a triple crisis :

- economic, accompanied by policies of austerity, brutal cutbacks, bank bailouts, deepening social inequality, and great suffering and frustration. The most adversely affected are women, minorities and the more vulnerable among us.
- environmental, with ravaged ecosystems nearing exhaustion due to unbridled exploitation of hydrocarbons, greenhouse gas emissions and an unsustainable mode of production and consumption.
- but also a crisis of democracy. With the omnipotence of “markets” and the financial oligarchy, capitalist democracy is ever more a hollow shell.

Finally, it is a global crisis of the system that underscores the impasse of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

2. However, the crisis and the attacks on the populace by the ruling classes have produced extensive mass mobilizations around the world. The Arab Spring and the anti-dictatorial revolutions in Egypt

and Tunisia. The indignados of Spain, the repeated general strikes in Greece and Portugal. The massive mobilizations in France and Great Britain. The Occupy movement in the United States. And here in Quebec, the revolt of the student youth in the spring of 2012, which resulted in the largest mass mobilizations since the 1970s.

3. Periods of crisis can also be moments when capital reinvents itself, developing new accumulation strategies. But they are also moments during which the forms of struggle and strategies of the popular classes, the dominated, are reinvented as well.

B. Ecosocialism as a response to the capitalist impasse

4. Ecosocialism is a new political project synthesizing an anticapitalist ecology with a socialism cleared of the logic of productivism. This is the reasoned human response to the dual impasse in which humanity is now confined by the present mode of production, which exhausts human beings and nature. Ecosocialism points to those who are really responsible — the ruling classes, particularly the globalized financial oligarchy — and proposes an alternative way out from the crisis : the deepening and renewal of the emancipatory project of socialism in the conditions of the 21st century.

5. Ecosocialism fights the engines of the capitalist system : exploitation and the endless search for maximum profit, the consumerism and productivism that exhaust ecosystems, globalization with its unbridled competition that encourages social and environmental dumping, imperialism and wars of aggression, racism, colonialism and all forms of oppression. It is a project for building an alternative society to capitalism, one that requires us to reconceive not only the aptness of the system of production and exchange, but also the content of what is produced and the modes of consumption.

6. Ecosocialism differs from the “socialisms” of the 20th century, all of which failed in terms of ecology, democracy and social equity. Arising out of wars and turmoil, they were characteristically militarist, hierarchical and elitist throughout their existence. They confused state ownership with socialization, reproduced the dominating and destructive modes of capitalism, and ultimately deprived the popular classes of any control over the means of production and the state, for the benefit of a privileged bureaucratic class. Ecosocialism, in contrast, must be democratic, self-managing and egalitarian. It proposes to revolutionize the relations of production and the productive forces. It advocates the distribution of wealth, the recognition of ecological constraints, ecological and democratic planning, and popular sovereignty.

7. Ecosocialism refutes the false solutions of green capitalism and the Social Democracy. Green capitalism is a hoax which, in the name of sustainable development, promotes carbon markets and fuels the search for maximum profit, maintains neoliberal globalization, and aggravates the environmental dumping suffered by the developing countries. It is a “green-washing” of the current paradigm that avoids the real debate concerning the liability of the capitalist mode of production for the profound environmental crisis afflicting the planet. The Social Democracy has consistently advocated redistribution of incomes without questioning the foundations of accumulation and thus the power of financial capital. During the golden age of postwar capitalism it was able to develop the welfare state and share the “products of growth,” but it has failed lamentably in the face of neoliberalism, often becoming its best defender. Since the outbreak of the crisis in 2008 it has become the promoter of bank bailouts and the harbinger of austerity policies, well-deserving of the moniker “social liberalism.”

8. Ecosocialism rejects the model of unending growth imposed by capitalism. Ecosocialism defends the need to reduce some production and consumption that leave behind an unacceptable ecological

footprint. Ecosocialism proposes a radical restriction of the sphere and volume of production and, more generally, of extractivist development. This objective will not be attained simply by eliminating useless and harmful production (weapons, etc.), by fighting the planned obsolescence of products, or by suppressing the ostentatious consumption of the wealthiest layers of the ruling class. More radical measures will be necessary, such as the transformation and decentralization of the ways in which goods are produced, the abandonment of fossil energies (oil, gas and coal) and the adoption of a sustainable energy regime (solar, wind, geothermal, etc.), of electrified and accessible public transportation, in order to limit as best we can the damages from climate warming while guaranteeing high calibre human development based exclusively on renewable energies. We are for an economic reconversion that preserves the interests of the popular classes within a perspective of "fair transition." Our project aims for an economy that is democratically managed, serves social needs, and breaks with consumerism, advertising and the generalized commoditization that leads to destructive wastefulness.

9. Ecosocialism is an internationalist struggle because globalized capitalism must be answered with the solidarity of the peoples of the world. We recognize the responsibility of the capitalist countries of the North for the environmental problems now afflicting the peoples of the South, while we are critical of the model of retroactive and belated development that perpetuates an unsustainable mode of production. We denounce unfettered and polluting industrialization and its effects on the global climate ; the pillage of natural resources ; the hoarding of arable land ; and the militaristic expeditions conducted in order to plunder resources. All decisions made in one location concerning the production of goods, transportation or energies have repercussions on a world scale. Ecosocialism acts within a perspective of North-South climate justice in the struggle for the protection of the planet's environment. Ecosocialism likewise notes that capitalist globalization has also been fuelled by militarization and regionalized wars. Women especially have suffered rape and the generalization of violence. Racism has been exacerbated by globalization and the policies of militaristic plunder, and the struggle against racism is also at the centre of the ecosocialists' struggle.

10. Ecosocialism must also include among its objectives the abolition of patriarchy. Women produce 80 percent of the food consumed in the poorest countries of the world, but they possess only 1 percent of the lands. Because women are primarily responsible for household food production, they are the first victims of climate change : drought, flooding of lands, erosion of riverbanks, etc. Establishing a fair and equitable society requires taking into account the demands of women. They are poor and capitalism benefits from the exploitation of their unpaid labour in family and child care. More than thirty years of neoliberal policies have been devastating for women. The right wing has mobilized against the right to abortion. It has attempted, with relative success depending on the country, to limit choice for women. The rights of gays and lesbians have evoked mobilizations against their right to marriage. Violence against women has become a global axis of mobilization for the women's movement. But it is above all the generalized contempt for women's bodies expressed in the new media and capitalist globalization that has clearly illustrated the close links between capitalism and patriarchy. The commoditization of women's bodies by prostitution and pornography has assumed unprecedented scope.

11. Ecosocialism is not a utopia that we await with folded arms. We participate in social and environmental struggles alongside all those who resist. Opposition to the exploitation of shale gas and petroleum exploration in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Support to the struggles of the aboriginal peoples against the government's Plan Nord, for the defence of their ancestral territories and their right to self-determination. Rejection of austerity policies, the struggle to preserve jobs or to guarantee a decent income, a reduction in labour time without loss of salary. Defence of trade-union rights. Development of renewable energies and electrified public transportation. Fight for free

education. Defence of the commons and public services as a means of struggle against women's impoverishment and the sexual division of labour. Struggle against violence against women. So many battles and immediate struggles that enable us to build the necessary relationship of forces to lead the longer-term fight for ecosocialism.

C. Conditions for the implementation of ecosocialist perspectives

(a) Democratize the economy by reorganizing the energy and natural resources, industry, agriculture, trade, transportation and finance sectors to make them serve the common good.

12. The ruling class will stubbornly resist efforts to establish a truly democratic management of the economy through redistribution of wealth, a freeze on privatizations, and the establishment and expansion of free public services guaranteeing access to fundamental goods and services such as education, health, water, energy, housing, transportation and culture. This resistance can only be broken by the democratic nationalization and socialization of natural resources, strategic industrial sectors, and the banks in order to build a public economic and financial system that eliminates the blackmail of capital flight and restores priority to peoples' needs and the protection of the environment.

13. Ecological and participatory planning will be the result of collective decisions guided by the substantive needs of the population and respect for ecosystems. It will allow us to put an end to decision-making on production by the major owners of companies and the banks that will benefit only them. Ecological and democratic planning starts with establishing needs democratically within companies and at the local, regional and national levels, guaranteeing the right of everyone to live in a healthy environment that is protective of ecosystems.

(b) Revitalize democracy in an independent Quebec by giving it economic, social, participatory and representative content.

14. The defence and reconquest of democracy begins with the dissolution of the repressive bodies (anti-riot police, professional army) and the struggle to expand the democratic rights of the social organizations (right to trade-unionization, right to strike and to demonstrate through direct action and civil disobedience if necessary). But beyond these essential defensive measures, a real ecosocialist democracy would seek :

□ to enable all citizens to make the economic and environmental decisions that are strategic to the life of our society ;

□ to generalize gender (male/female) parity in political representation and to struggle against the various forms of patriarchal domination ;

□ to introduce participatory democratic procedures at all levels within the institutions of the state (participation in the development of budgets, etc.) and to generalize the principle of eligibility for various positions of responsibility ;

□ to block the ways by which elected representatives escape the control of those who are represented and to impose popular control over elected officials within the context of representative democracy.

15. These democratic demands, and the battles they will entail, will come up against the federal state's domination of Quebec, which is reduced through national oppression to the status of a

political minority. A genuine democratic reconquest of Quebec society cannot avoid the struggle for the independence of Quebec and an end to the domination of the federal state. The economic, social and democratic struggles can culminate in the election of a constituent assembly, the election of which will itself constitute the beginning of a break with the domination of the Canadian state over Quebec and can, through the exercise of popular sovereignty, enable us to end our status as a political minority, secure the independence of Quebec and define institutions that expand citizen power in all spheres of society. Quebec's independence is for us indissolubly linked to the social project of going beyond capitalism.

(c) Promote the convergence of the social and political struggles.

16. During the "maple spring" [printemps érable] the student movement challenged the neoliberal school and the subordination of education to the interests of the dominant economic minority. The women's movement challenges the unequal division of labour and of salaries, the oppressive nature of social roles, and violence against women — in short, the patriarchal domination that structures capitalist society. The indigenous peoples are mobilizing in defence of their ancestral territories and recognition of their national rights. The trade-union movement is every day engaged in fighting employer arbitrariness in both the private and public services sectors. Popular movements are waging increasing struggles on the consumption front (housing, urban development, etc.). The ecology movement is mobilizing to protect the environment. Left-wing political parties must draw on these experiences in order to go beyond partial struggles and outline in their programs the paths toward a redistribution of powers in the direction of civil society.

17. An ecosocialist orientation rejects the artificial separation of labour promoted by the Social Democracy between the work of the party, limited to the formal political sphere, and activism in the social organizations. The transformation of society will not be achieved by fragmented social activism or political action limited to the electoral arena alone. Only the convergence of social and political struggles in a comprehensive overall movement will enable us to build the necessary relationship of forces to be able to challenge the policies of the ruling class. To secure the convergence of social and environmental struggles, we must promote as best we can the emergence of unitary and democratic forms of self-organization and self-management of these movements.

18. In the trade-union movement (and sometimes in other social movements) there is generally majority support for a strategy of social consensus-building with the ruling class and the state. Ecosocialism, given its analysis of the responsibility of the dominant classes for the economic, political and environmental crises, criticizes this strategy and opposes to it a strategy of class-struggle unionism. The wage-earning class cannot adopt as its own the objectives of the ruling class, or it will find itself in an impasse. Union militants who are ecosocialists must promote the class independence of their mass organizations in which they are active and try to build unity in action, including with the other social movements. As a political party, we cannot avoid participating in the strategic debates within the social movements that can have an antisystemic dynamic essential to social transformation.

D. Tasks of the ecosocialist network

19. The tasks of the Réseau écosocialiste will be organized around the following axes :

(a) Form a centre for the development of ecosocialist perspectives and participate in the programmatic debates of Québec solidaire to advance the orientations of the network within that party's local, regional and national bodies. Ecosocialism is aware of the links between patriarchy and capitalism. Within that perspective, the Réseau écosocialiste must develop its thinking on the fight

against patriarchy and promote the position of women in the organization, recognizing the achievements already made on this issue and remaining vigilant against any regression.

(b) Ensure the implementation of such orientations and policies and work to get Québec solidaire to engage in campaigns and activities in opposition to the anti-ecology, austerity and patriarchal policies of the dominant classes and neoliberal political parties. In this sense, the Réseau écosocialiste must do everything it can to open spaces for involvement and mobilization within Québec solidaire, in non-electoral as well as electoral periods. The network will therefore work to transform the party's structures, to reinforce its democracy and combativeness ; this implies promoting greater participation by the rank and file.

(c) Build, expand and consolidate the presence of Québec solidaire in the social movements and, within this perspective, help to make our party a party of the streets capable of forging solid links with the social movements. That is our starting point for contributing to its construction and expansion. The network will work for the establishment of a trade-union collective within the party, a national QS-campus student coalition, and a network of feminist activists in various regions and within the different authoritative bodies of the party.

(d) Organize debates and educationals on ecosocialist perspectives both as party activities and on an independent basis. Within the party, promote democratic, transparent and decentralized structures and encourage rank-and-file participation.

(e) Forge links with ecosocialist organizations world-wide and relay international campaigns on environmental and social issues within Québec solidaire and Quebec society.

P.-S.

* <http://lifeonleft.blogspot.ca/2013/05/foundations-for-consolidation-and.html>

Notes

[1] See on ESSF (article 28311), [Québec solidaire : The Ecosocialist Network - ready for action !](#).

[2] The Réseau écosocialiste is on Facebook at <http://tinyurl.com/dynmdk3>.