

WORKERS TRIBUNE

"A nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations."— Friedrich Engels

Newspaper of the Trotskyist League

International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

No. 4

Fall 2025

\$1

Facing Carney's Attacks



"National Unity" or Class Struggle?

Carney's "national unity" means attacks on workers and the oppressed. Indigenous protest against Bill C-5, June 17 (left). In August, striking CUPE flight attendants defied Liberal back-to-work order (right).

Gable/Reuters; PanOlegus

The effects of the trade war with the U.S. are taking their toll as jobless numbers rise and economic uncertainty weighs heavy. It was always going to be the working class that paid the price of the tariffs through layoffs and inflation. Now Carney claims his newly released industrial strategy will "transform" Canada's economy into a force that can withstand the trade shocks of the Trump administration. Don't be fooled!

Just as with the disastrous counter-tariff policies, the government's latest economic plans will prove ruinous for workers and the oppressed. Carney's strategy is to borrow big and pay later. That means more inflation now and screwing over the generations to come, while doing nothing to improve economic growth. The Canadian economy is rotting and living standards are plummeting as part of the decline of the U.S.-led world order, in which Canada plays the role of a junior partner to Washington. Carney's promises of jobs through economic diversification amount to plugging a hole on a sinking ship.

The Liberals push the lie that to stand up to Trump, workers must ally with the government and Canadian bosses. The current union leaders completely support this "national unity" approach. Yet the government has launched a blizzard of attacks on labour as well as oppressed minorities. Tens of thousands of federal jobs are to be axed to pay for vastly higher military spending. The borders have been tightened while refugee claimants face severe new restrictions. CSIS and the cops are getting sweeping new powers. The feds and provinces are tearing up labour, safety and environmental regulations and bulldozing Indigenous rights in the name of infrastructure development. And it took the government only a few hours to invoke Section 107 against the Air Canada flight attendants' strike (see back-page article).

These attacks reflect the priorities of the Liberals: protect big business and the oligopolies while safeguarding the privileged relationship with U.S. imperialism. Carney's policies, including the One Canadian Economy Act (Bill C-5),

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may create some jobs and infrastructure, and may lead to somewhat increased trade beyond the U.S. But they won't fundamentally change Canada's dependence on the U.S. or address the underlying problems of the economy.

The economy was hollowed out by the previous period of globalization, where the free-trade boon for the ruling class led to the gutting of manufacturing, declining productivity and plummeting living standards. And now that Trump has taken a hammer to the liberal world order in his attempt to shore up the declining American empire, Canada is even more reliant on being a pool of cheap resources. At the same time, deep integration with the U.S. means retooling the economy to align with the interests of U.S. imperialism.

Carney has been making all kinds of concessions to Trump in the hope of getting a deal and ending the tariffs that have devastated the auto, steel and aluminum industries. For instance, to support Trump's drive against China, the Liberal government has doubled down on the tariffs against Chinese EVs at the expense of the canola industry being hit with counter-tariffs. To prevent the 200,000 jobs linked to canola from going under, he is "investing" hundreds of millions of dollars of borrowed money. This is the same bankrupt strategy of the Trudeau years, where huge sums of money were printed to keep the economy afloat, leading to a cost-of-living crisis. This is yet another proof that the ruling class has no solution for the fundamental problems of the economy and the decaying world order.

Labour Leaders' Bankruptcy Fuels Right-Wing Reaction

The union leaders claim to be shocked at the depth of Carney's attacks, but their only answer is to beg him to return to a Team Canada approach. Claiming that workers "want the government to succeed against Trump and his attacks on Canada," the CLC bureaucrats keep repeating the same mantra: "we're ready to work with the government." As workers get crushed even further and the labour leaders continue to plead for unity with Carney, discontent

will have nowhere to go but Poilievre—who already claims the Tories are a "workers party." While this is absurd, it is simply a fact that a large section of the working class has shifted to support the Tories in reaction to the empty liberal "wokism" that accompanied the economic devastation of the Trudeau years. They have also turned away from the NDP, whose years-long support to Trudeau led to their worst-ever election result, as workers in industrial areas like southwestern Ontario opted for the Tories.

Poilievre has no better solutions for the Canadian economy. In fact, Carney is implementing much of what Poilievre would do. The Tories voted for the Liberals' Bill C-5, with only shades of difference about opposing cronyism. Where they differ is on how to pay for it. To borrow less, Poilievre would impose even steeper cuts and austerity akin to what Trump is doing. And in the name of fighting for the interests of young workers, Poilievre is pushing to axe the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. This gives the illusion of trying to fix the economy that the Liberals broke, while setting up foreign workers to be the scapegoats. With this, Poilievre is both tapping into discontent about the economy and stoking anti-immigrant reaction.

The Liberals themselves have been shedding their "progressive" pretenses and abandoning the groups they claimed to champion, like immigrants and Indigenous peoples. This reversal from previous positions is a response to the collapse of the liberal status quo; as the economic foundations of globalization have eroded, "human rights" policies have become too costly for the ruling class. There is no way for the rulers to satisfy the needs of all Canadians, so they screw over one sector or another.

There is a burning need for reindustrialization, rebuilding infrastructure, shoring up social programs, constructing affordable housing and so on. But it will take struggle *against* the Liberal government by the working class to get conditions that meet their needs. The current labour leaders won't mobilize to do this because, in one way or another, they *support* the government's "nation-building" plans. Not only are they paralyzing struggle by lining up behind the ruling class, they are also paving the way for right-wing reaction.

The national unity pushed by the union leaders is in fact creating divisions among the working class and oppressed, weakening the unions and undermining labour's power. It is crucial for the left to offer an alternative strategy based on joint class struggle *against* the Liberals. This means showing at every step that all workers have a *direct interest* in defending oppressed groups, since the brutal oppression of one section of society is always used as a battering ram against the conditions of others. And it means that to allow oppressed groups to face the reactionary offensive alone only undermines the fighting capacity of the whole working class.

Fight for Jobs and Indigenous Rights!

The poisonous effects of the capitalists' "divide and rule" schemes can be seen clearly in the reaction to Carney's Bill C-5 and Ontario premier Ford's parallel Bill 5. This "infrastructure" legislation aims to make resources in areas like Northern Ontario's mineral-rich Ring of Fire available for U.S. imperialism, allowing for "special economic zones"

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WORKERS TRIBUNE

Published by the Central Committee of the
Trotskyist League in Quebec and Canada, section of the
International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

Editor: Angie Swanson

Production Manager: Jake Jots

Circulation Manager: Miriam McDonald

Published by Collective Publications, C.P. 583, Succ. Place d'Armes,
Montréal, QC H2Y 3H8. Opinions expressed in signed articles or
letters do not necessarily express the editorial viewpoint.

Legal Deposit - Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2025.

The closing date for news in this issue is September 8.

Printed in a union shop by union labour.

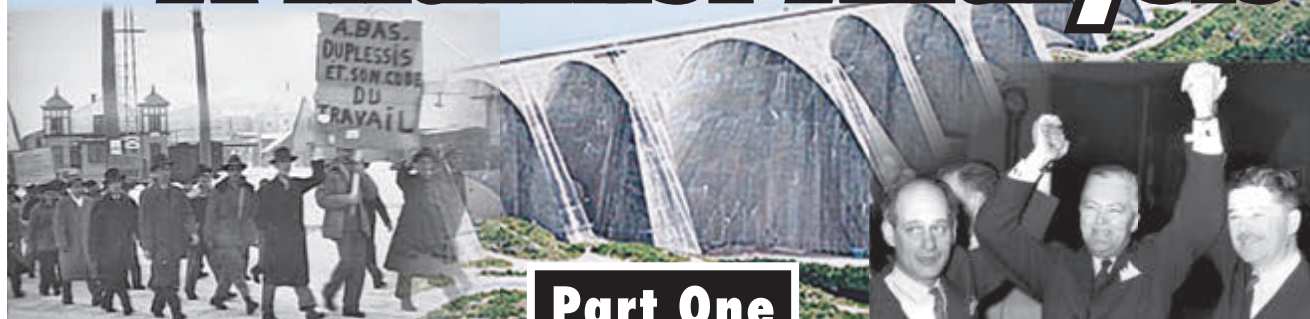
ISSN: 2561-7915

Publications Agreement No. 40050911

Date of issue: September 2025

Quebec

The Quiet Revolution: A Marxist Analysis



Part One

By Charles Gaudreault and Simon Ricard

The following is a translation of an article from République ouvrière No. 6 (Summer 2025), the French-language newspaper of the Trotskyist League in Quebec and Canada.

More than 60 years after the Quiet Revolution began, all the progress and great hopes of the 1960s and '70s are under constant attack: crumbling infrastructure, healthcare and education systems in disarray, union rights trampled on, and the French language in increasing decline. At the same time, the national question is making a notable comeback in Quebec. At the time of writing, the Parti Québécois is ahead in the polls against the lame-duck regime of Legault's CAQ. The PQ leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon speaks openly about sovereignty. And there is no reason to believe that this is just a flash in the pan. In fact, the current global situation is objectively leading to a resurgence of *indépendantiste* sentiment in Quebec, including among a growing, although still a minority, segment of youth. Indeed, the recent repeated crises around the world caused by the decline of the American empire and Trump reaction are only strengthening the movements of small nations seeking to free themselves from the yoke of imperialism. Be it the genocide in Gaza, the war in Ukraine or Trump's tariff threats, the entire old neoliberal world order of "free trade" and relative peace is collapsing. And with it, so is the idea of "post-nationalism" dear to Trudeau-style liberals, who have always treated Quebec's national aspirations as reactionary tribalism. The struggle for Quebec's national liberation will on the contrary express itself more and more as a fight against this oppressive and crumbling world order.

Asbestos strike, 1949 (left). Victorious Liberal leaders after 1962 election (right). In background, the Daniel Johnson Dam (Manic 5).

Centre d'archives de la région de Thetford; Hydro-Québec; Saint-Jean/La Presse

The question will be whether the next generation of fighters for Quebec's cause will be able to avoid the mistakes of the past and accomplish what the Quiet Revolution only half succeeded in doing: the complete and total national and social liberation of Quebec, linked to the struggle of all the oppressed peoples of the world for their liberation.

For this to happen, it is crucial to study the lessons of the Quiet Revolution. From the early 1960s until 1980, Quebec was the scene of the most intense movements of social protest: National independence was emerging as a real historical possibility for the first time since the Patriotes Rebellion (1837-38); the trade unions were talking revolution; young people were joining far left groups; artists were singing about "*les temps nouveaux* [new times]," etc. Simultaneously and as a result, society was making gigantic and very concrete leaps towards national liberation, women's liberation, trade-union power, etc. The Quiet Revolution was thus uncontestedly the most progressive period in the history of Quebec: In just a few years, this oppressed nation went from a clerical "Great Darkness" similar to a neocolonial regime, to a modern and advanced society. A province that had previously been completely under the thumb of its Anglo-Canadian masters and American imperialism equipped itself with the economic and social levers that had



lczkovits/24heures.ca

Fête nationale 2025 concert in Montreal included a tribute to Serge Fiori of the band Harmonium, one of the great *indépendantiste* artists of the Quiet Revolution.

the capacity to lay the foundations for an independent state. The Catholic Church, which had dominated all aspects of social and political life, was essentially thrown out. Public education and health programs, virtually non-existent at the outset, were established. And the Quebec labour movement, the real driving force behind the entire Quiet Revolution, emerged as a key player. In short, the Quiet Revolution was indeed a revolution in the broadest sense, a collective awakening, a paradigm shift, and the “before” and “after” were tangibly different at every level.

So why has everything been in retreat since then? It is generally understood that the defeat of the 1980 independence referendum and the neoliberal turn that followed broke the momentum of the Quiet Revolution. But this observation, while factually correct, does not explain much. *Why* did the social movements suddenly prostrate themselves, powerless in the face of this turning point? What is generally not understood, however, is that the current stagnation in Quebec has its real roots in the only major *weak point* of the Quiet Revolution: the fact that Quebec’s national and social liberation was subordinated to the interests of its political and economic elites or, as we Marxists would say, the Québécois bourgeoisie. Pushed forward by the masses, these elites led the Quiet Revolution but on the basis of their own interests: to wrest some power for themselves from the Anglo-American rulers, while repressing the workers so that they would not go beyond the framework of private property and subordination to the U.S.-dominated imperialist world order. The great helmsman of the Quiet Revolution himself, René Lévesque, personified this contradiction, denouncing the exploitation of Quebec workers one day, then attacking the unions the next; denouncing American imperialism, of which the Québécois were victims, then running to Wall Street to “reassure” the financial markets!

For a complete victory, the working class would have had to take the lead in the Quiet Revolution. In other words, it would have taken a *workers party* to wrest the leadership of the Quiet Revolution from the hands of Jean Lesage’s Liberal Party and later René Lévesque’s Parti Québécois. But this is precisely what union leaders and

the left, even the extreme left, have always refused to do. At every turn, they have instead promoted or at least conceded that the struggle of the Québécois should be led by these bourgeois forces, even if this meant fighting for socialism “after” independence...which the Quebec ruling class has never been able to achieve.

This is all the more infuriating given that it was the labour movement that was the spearhead, the backbone and the dynamic energy of the nation that made the Quiet Revolution a reality. Ever since the 1949 Asbestos strike, it was the working class of Quebec that was the core of all the *strong points* of the Quiet Revolution, the most progressive period in Quebec’s history. From the early days of industrialization and the union struggles at the turn of the 20th century, workers had become a

force to be reckoned with. At the same time, the Québécois capitalists remained largely insignificant village notables, in every way subordinate to the big English-speaking capitalists who controlled key sectors of Quebec’s economy. The state reforms of the Quiet Revolution were a break with this total subordination and benefited all Québécois. The reforms—the establishment of nationally controlled financial and economic institutions, the nationalization of hydroelectricity, the public health care system, a modern education system, advances for women, etc.—were all the result of the impetus of the working class. It was on the backs of workers’ struggles that the Quebec elite were able to rise and carve out a more comfortable place for themselves vis-à-vis their rivals, eventually becoming the leaders of “Quebec Inc.”

This tension between the drive of the workers on one side and the narrow interests of the elite on the other had always been present in the Quiet Revolution. In fact, the more Quebec’s “democratic catch-up” was resolved, the more the irreconcilable nature of the interests of workers and bosses came to the fore, and the more the underlying class conflict became acute and explosive. The task of the left during this period should have been to advance the working class’ aspirations for liberation, setting them against the nationalist bourgeois leadership—and the union bureaucracies that supported it—by demonstrating that the latter were in fact an obstacle to national and social progress. A revolutionary party was needed to win the leadership of the working class on this basis, demonstrating that only such a leadership would be capable of bringing the national and social aspirations of the Québécois to fulfillment through a struggle to win workers’ power. But in the absence of such a workers’ pole seeking to wrest leadership of the national liberation movement from the Québécois bourgeoisie, it was ultimately the capitalist class under the leadership of the Parti Québécois that was able to break the momentum of the workers movement with its savage attacks on public sector unions in 1982-83 and reverse the progressive dynamic of the Quiet Revolution.

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A Leninist Approach to the Quebec National Question

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We reprint below the presentation by G. Perrault given during a day of debates on the national question between representatives of the International Communist League and the International Bolshevik Tendency held in London in July. For all the presentations, including J. Decker's on Quebec, see "Debates with the International Bolshevik Tendency on the National Question," Spartacist Letters No. 2 (August 2025).

A revolutionary approach to the national question in Quebec must start with a correct understanding of the dynamics of Canadian politics.

I'll start at the beginning: Why does Canada exist? The simple answer is the British Crown and the Quebec national question. These are the two features which historically distinguish it from the United States.

The French colony of New France was conquered by the British in 1760. The first great act of revolutionary disunity between francophones and anglophones in North America occurred during the American Revolution a few years later. After defeating the French and sensing growing discontent in the anglophone colonies, the British gave certain concessions to the newly conquered French population, playing them against the anglophone colonial population of North America. As a result, the Quebec elites overwhelmingly refused to join the struggle against the British monarchy in the 13 colonies. Because of this, the American Revolution did not extend north, and after the victory of the revolution the British loyalists migrated north, forming the province of Upper Canada, now known as Ontario.

However, the same economic and social trends of capitalist development that caused the American Revolution eventually developed in the British provinces. This eventually led to the rebellions of 1837-38; in Quebec we know it as the Patriots Rebellion. It was a bourgeois democratic revolution which united anglophone and francophone in a joint struggle against the parasitic hold of the British monarchy, which was holding back the development of the economy and society. Although the uprising in anglophone Upper Canada was much weaker, this is the great historic example of united class struggle in Canada. Key to this unity was the understanding by the anglophone revolutionaries that their own democratic emancipation was tied to that of the French population.

The physiognomy of modern Canada was directly determined by the defeat of this bourgeois revolution and was enshrined in the Act of Union of 1840. The francophones were placed in an artificial political minority and an explicitly assimilationist policy was implemented. This was in line with the report Lord Durham made after the defeat of the revolution, an infamous report taught in schools to this day in Quebec. In it he stated that:

"A plan by which it is proposed to insure the tranquil government of Lower Canada [now Quebec], must include, in itself, the means of putting an end to the agitation of national disputes in the legislature, by settling, at once and for ever, the national character of the province. I entertain no doubts as to the national character which must be given to Lower Canada; it must be that of the British Empire—that of the majority of the population of British America—that of the great race which must, in the lapse of no long period of time,

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be predominant over the whole North American Continent. Without effecting the change so rapidly or so roughly as to shock the feelings and trample on the welfare of the existing generation, it must henceforth be the first and steady purpose of the British government to establish an English population, with English laws and language, in this province, and to trust its government to none but a decidedly English Legislature.”

At the same time, to avoid further trouble the British enacted several top-down democratic modernizations, which laid the basis for the further capitalist development of both provinces.

The political dynamics of Canada today are directly inherited from this time. English Canadians were pitted against French Canadians, and to this day all social conflicts, whether they be over class, Native rights, or immigration (questions I cannot get into today), are shaped by the national conflict. Let me be clear: I am not denying that class struggle is the main motor force of history in Canada; I am simply saying that class struggle is warped by the national conflict.

In English Canada, the defeat of the Patriots Rebellion effectively killed off the struggles against the monarchy and the solidarity with the national-democratic aspirations of the French Canadians. This in turn shaped the Canadian workers movement, which for the most part grew organically from the United States rather than on the soil of homespun revolutionary traditions. Even in its more radical forms, whether trade-unionist, Communist or Trotskyist, the workers movement generally ignored the Quebec national question or embraced the chauvinist prejudices of the ruling class.

On the side of the francophones, this history has ingrained a deeply felt sentiment for national survival against forced assimilation and anglophone oppression. This brings a peculiar dynamic to the development of the workers movement in Quebec, where national and social aspirations are profoundly intertwined. It is this dynamic which is behind the emergence of the Quebec workers movement as the most militant and organized in North America. The IBT notes that this militancy has a strong positive influence on the English Canadian workers movement. This is true. What it misses is that this militancy is fueled by the struggle against national oppression. Of course, the other result of this national oppression is that the nationalist leaders in Quebec have historically been able to divert the class struggle by presenting themselves as the champions of national rights. And so you have the contradictory situation of a workers movement that is extremely militant and organized but does not view its political interests in class terms.

Political Conclusions

So how are we as Marxists to approach this overall picture?

The first thing to understand is that the historic struggle for the Québécois nation to emancipate itself from national oppression is a progressive cause which has fueled class struggle in Canada. This cause must be supported by Marxists no less than the struggles of other specifically oppressed groups that are not strictly class-based, whether it is the struggle of women, Native people, black people in the U.S. or any nationally oppressed people fighting for their emancipation.

The basic and fundamental mistake made by the IBT is that it places itself in opposition to the progressive and

legitimate democratic struggles of the Québécois nation. It sees struggles to assert national rights as an impediment to the class struggle when in fact the whole history of Quebec and Canada demonstrates that it is a powerful accelerant to class struggle.

The mistake is just as crude as it would be to argue that fighting for the emancipation of women somehow distracts from the class struggle. Of course, the bourgeoisie exploits women’s oppression in all kinds of ways to blunt the class struggle. But to turn your back on the struggle for women’s rights is pure idiocy. This is not the IBT’s position, but on the national terrain it applies the same ultra-left methodology.

To recognize that the struggle against national oppression in Quebec is legitimate and a powerful motor force for class struggle is of course only the first step. The much more difficult task is to construct a revolutionary party which can unite not only English Canadians and Québécois workers but also all the other oppressed groups in Canada.

In Quebec this requires waging a resolute struggle against the Quebec bourgeoisie. Of course, this includes their attempts to pit Québécois workers against anglophones, immigrants, Muslims and Native people. But it is also necessary to show how Quebec nationalists undermine the very cause they claim to represent. If Quebec is not a country, it is because of the servile and treacherous nature of its ruling class, which always puts its economic interests above the fight against national oppression.

In English Canada it is necessary to struggle against the social-democratic leaders of the workers movement, who are ultimately loyal to the ruling class. A key component of that fight must be to champion the national rights of Quebec. This is the only basis on which a binational alliance can be built. Just as it would be absurd to ask black workers to unite with white workers based on continued racial oppression, so too is it absurd to expect that Québécois workers will unite with English Canadian workers based on accepting their national oppression. At bottom, it is the historic refusal of Canadian social democrats to stand for the national rights of the Québécois that is responsible for the national division within the workers movement in Canada. It is also necessary to oppose Trudeauist liberal ideology. Trudeauism and multiculturalism, the Canadian form of liberalism, was born explicitly in order to stem the wave of national liberation, deny national rights for Quebec and mobilize immigrants, Native people and other oppressed groups as a battering ram against Quebec independence.

Some Concrete Questions

From this general Marxist approach let’s get to specific questions.

If one looks at the Quebec national question with a Marxist historic lens, it is obvious that since its conquest by the British, the francophone nation of North America has fought ceaselessly against its assimilation. The natural and progressive outcome of this struggle for national existence is the formation of an independent francophone state, i.e., Quebec independence.

Short of this outcome, it is necessary to defend measures that defend the linguistic and democratic rights of the

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Quiet Revolution...

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In essence, the failure of the Quiet Revolution is also the failure of the Quebec left, which could not apply the lessons of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 to the Quebec context so that the Quiet Revolution could become a revolution in its own right. To do so, it would have been necessary to understand and apply the methodology of permanent revolution developed by Leon Trotsky on the basis of the experience of the Russian Revolution. Indeed, Lenin's Bolsheviks did not simply bring the Russian working class to power by shouting "revolution!" No, for years they fought for the class independence of the workers from the liberals in the struggle against the tsarist autocracy. This was crucial to demonstrate that only the proletariat fighting for power could wage a consistent struggle for the resolution of democratic questions (the reforms in the political system and the economic and social reforms that were a necessity for Russia), especially agrarian reform and the liberation of the oppressed nationalities in the Russian empire. They showed the working class through its own experiences that the liberal bourgeoisie, its provisional government resulting from the February Revolution and its Menshevik and Social Revolutionary conciliators in the workers movement stood as obstacles that had to be swept away in order to resolve the burning democratic issues. In the words of Bolshevik leader Trotsky: "the national current, like the agrarian, was pouring into the channel of the October revolution" ("The Problem of Nationalities," *The History of the Russian Revolution*). Crucially, the Bolsheviks had split from the reformist wing of the workers movement which sought to conciliate the liberal bourgeoisie. This enabled the Bolsheviks to win the leadership of the working class on a genuinely revolutionary basis.

The Quebec of the Quiet Revolution was obviously very different from tsarist Russia. But there was a similar accumulation of unresolved democratic questions, all stemming from the fact that Canada was founded on the oppression of the Québécois nation. For the Quiet Revolution to go all the way, the working class would have had to break with all wings of the Québécois bourgeoisie and fight to take control of society under a workers republic of Quebec. But the Québécois and Canadian left were never able to put forward such a proletarian, independent and revolutionary leadership. Unable to link the "national question" and the "social question" on a genuinely revolutionary basis, all these groups capitulated either to the nationalist bourgeoisie, advancing a program to ally with and pressure it, or to the Anglo-chauvinist Canadian bourgeoisie, like the Maoists who denied the progressive aspect of the national liberation struggle in the name of a totally rigid reading of Leninism, reducing it to a caricature. This flaw was not unique to the Maoists, by the way. Many Trotskyist groups, including the Trotskyist League at the time, also fell into the same trap. Some small groups sometimes came close to a correct theoretical analysis of Quebec and the Quiet Revolution, but did not know how to apply it, which meant directly challenging the pro-capitalist leaders of the labour movement.

Leftist groups have long broken their heads over this contradiction of a bourgeoisie that paradoxically made progressive advances while playing a reactionary role. First of all, the Communist Party of Canada, which claimed to carry the banner of the October Revolution in Quebec, had always opposed independence and got rid of most of its Quebec members in 1947 for suspected "nationalist deviations." The first Trotskyists, who represented the true revolutionary and internationalist continuity of the October Revolution, defended the international lessons of Bolshevism but did not apply them in Quebec; nor did they take a position in favour of national liberation. Moreover, they were simply not a factor in Quebec at the onset of the Quiet Revolution. When the Trotskyists finally established themselves in Quebec and began to call for national liberation, they were unable to effectively combat the nationalist bourgeoisie and its labour lackeys. Similarly, the other radical left-wing groups that emerged during the Quiet Revolution, including Parti pris and the FLQ [Front de libération du Québec], also capitulated in practice to these nationalist elites. But we will come back to that later.

National question or social question? For the left, everything boiled down to this seemingly insoluble schema: fight for independence by supporting the Québécois bourgeoisie or reject the struggle for Quebec liberation on the pretext of opposing the Québécois capitalists. More than 60 years after the beginning of the Quiet Revolution, it is this false dichotomy that still dominates the Quebec left. To free itself from its impotence, the left must fight against this. We must apply the real lessons of the Quiet Revolution and struggle to lay the foundations for a revolutionary leadership of the Quebec working class. This will not be easy, given all the time that has been lost, but it is vital. And that is the purpose of the study we present in these pages—a result of the political struggle the International Communist League, of which the Trotskyist League is the section in Quebec and Canada, has waged to reclaim a genuinely Leninist position on the national question and the struggle for permanent revolution (see *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 68, September 2023).

The Social Roots of the Quiet Revolution

To understand the course of the Quiet Revolution, it is necessary to first understand how the pre-1960s social structure of Quebec was the product of the English conquest and, more directly, of the defeat of the 1837-38 rebellions of the Patriotes. Quebec's social and democratic backwardness, which stemmed from its national oppression and conditioned the entire course of the Quiet Revolution, was the result of the failure of this attempt at bourgeois-democratic revolution against British colonialism and its monarchical tyranny. The historic events of 1837-38 shaped the fundamentally reactionary character of the Quebec bourgeoisie, the tasks of the proletariat that would develop over the next 100 years and the class relations that existed in Quebec at the dawn of the Quiet Revolution.

The reformers of Upper and Lower Canada (which later became Ontario and Quebec, respectively) fought for democratic republics, the separation of church and state, agrarian reforms, and equal rights and citizenship for all

(all men, at least). The English Canadian radicals understood that the French Canadians' struggle for national sovereignty was inseparable from their own democratic struggle. The revolutionary assembly in Toronto, for example, passed a resolution stating:

"The reformers of Upper Canada are called upon by every tie of feeling, interest, and duty, to make common cause with their fellow-citizens of Lower Canada, whose successful coercion would doubtless be in time visited upon us, and the redress of whose grievances would be the best guarantee for the redress of our own."

—The Declaration of the Reformers of the City of Toronto to their Fellow-Reformers in Upper Canada (1837)

The rebellions were indeed the last time that French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians were truly united in a progressive struggle. They were crushed in blood by British armed forces, their leaders hanged or exiled. The oppression of Quebec became part of the very fabric of Canada. Francophones, who had then formed the majority of the population, were placed in a political minority under the 1840 Act of Union with a conscious assimilationist objective, as advocated by Lord Durham in his infamous report following the rebellions:

"There can hardly be conceived a nationality more destitute of all that can invigorate and elevate a people, than that which is exhibited by the descendants of the French in Lower Canada, owing to their retaining their peculiar language and manners. They are a people with no history, and no literature....

"In any plan which may be adopted for the future management of Lower Canada, the first object ought to be that of making it an English province; and that, with this end in view, the ascendancy should never again be placed in any hands but those of an English population. Indeed, at the present moment this is obviously necessary; in the state of mind in which I have described the French Canadian population, as not only now being, but as likely for a long while to remain, the trusting them with an entire control over this province would be, in fact, only facilitating a rebellion. Lower Canada must be governed now, as it must be hereafter, by an English population."

Wielding this elitist and racist contempt, the British colonial rulers also made sure to pit the two national groups against each other to prevent any further joint struggle against the British monarchy and for the national sovereignty of French Canadians.

The triumphant Anglo-British ruling class established a new "pact" with the Catholic Church, tolerating the language and religion of French Canadians on condition that the clergy guarantee that they would remain docile and never revolt

again. Hence the colossal weight that the Catholic Church acquired in Quebec until the Quiet Revolution. For nearly 125 years, it was the "guardian" of national identity, albeit in a completely reactionary manner, i.e., based on maintaining the national oppression of Quebec and the Roman Catholic faith. From then on, from cradle to grave, every aspect of the Québécois people's social life was subject to the omnipotence of the priests, including schools, hospitals, cultural productions and the bedroom. Women in particular paid the price, subjected to the most abject oppression.

The Patriote leaders themselves were mainly from the petty bourgeoisie: notables and members of the liberal professions inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment, the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. But it was the Québécois bourgeoisie (the class of French-speaking business leaders which was just emerging at the time) that would have immediately benefited from the social relations that the rebellions of the Patriotes would have established: the formation of a nation-state, the development of a domestic market, freedom of enterprise and trade, etc. This defeat therefore also conditioned the stunted development of the Quebec bourgeoisie. Itself suffering national oppression, it developed in a state of subordination and dependence on the rising imperialist powers in the second half of the 19th century (first the British, and later the Americans) as well as their partners in English Canada. National oppression provided even more favourable conditions for foreign capital in the industrialization process, which in turn accelerated the emergence of a powerful Québécois proletariat. By the time something resembling a distinct French-speaking bourgeois class had emerged in Quebec, it was already caught in a vise between foreign imperialism on one side and the Quebec working class on the other. It was no longer in a position to play any independent role in liberating the nation.

Indeed, the defeat of the Patriotes and the subsequent development of the bourgeoisie confirmed, in the context of Quebec, Marx's assessment after the 1848-49 revolutionary wave in Europe: The historically progressive role of the bourgeois class was over. Faced with unfinished democratic tasks on the one hand, and on the other, a proletariat that had entered the revolutionary arena and simultaneously threatened to undermine capitalist class interests, the German bourgeoisie, for example, preferred to side with feudal reaction in order to crush the working class. Similarly, even though the Québécois bourgeoisie also had an interest

**Saint-Charles,
23 October 1837:
The Six Counties
Assembly was a
turning point in
the struggle of
the Patriotes.**

Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec





Deutsches Historisches Museum

Barricades in the streets of Berlin during the 1848 Revolution.

in national emancipation, any serious struggle along these lines risked unleashing the proletariat against its fundamental class interests. This made it a reactionary class, bitter about its national oppression but generally complacent in its role as local henchman for the imperialists.

The programmatic conclusions Marx drew after 1848-49 apply equally to Quebec. Speaking of the German workers, Marx said:

“But they themselves must do the utmost for their final victory by clarifying their minds as to what their class interests are, by taking up their position as an independent party as soon as possible and by not allowing themselves to be seduced for a single moment by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeois into refraining from the independent organisation of the party of the proletariat. Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence.”

—“Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League” (March 1850)

In other words, the working class must no longer subordinate itself to the bourgeoisie under any circumstances, not even in the initial stage of accomplishing democratic-national tasks but must fight completely independently of the bourgeoisie to accomplish these democratic tasks in a continuous (permanent) struggle toward the seizure of power and for socialism. This is also the program that should have guided revolutionaries throughout the Quiet Revolution.

It was only with the arrival on the scene of the working class, bringing its own class interests to the forefront of society, that Quebec’s national liberation once again became a historical possibility. But this struggle was no longer led by the bourgeoisie, whose historical task is simply to establish a nation-state; it was now led by the working class, whose historical tasks are socialist and whose fundamental interests clash with those of the bourgeoisie. The real driving force behind the Quiet Revolution was indeed the workers, whose social and national aspirations “poured into a single current,” breaking the reactionary political structure inherited from the defeat of the Patriotes and opening the path to independence and socialism.

After World War II, the old European colonial empires, including the British, were in tatters and national liberation struggles were breaking out all over the world. It was against

this backdrop that struggles erupted in Quebec, where the working class had achieved a level of organization and strength sufficient to challenge the regime in power. Its massive strikes and hard-fought struggles, although often triggered by basic economic demands, immediately confronted the entire reactionary political structure: English-speaking bosses, a subordinate French-speaking bourgeoisie, and the Catholic Church, which was completely intertwined with state power and supported the whole edifice. Under the regime of Maurice Duplessis’ Union Nationale, all the tensions in Quebec society were pushed to their limits and reached a tipping point. The strikes of the Asbestos miners (1949), the Louiseville weavers (1952), and the Murdochville miners (1957) almost immediately escalated to

the point of confrontation with the government itself and they polarized the whole of society.

The enlightened petty bourgeoisie also sided with the working class. Already in 1948, the *Refus global* manifesto laid the groundwork for an intellectual revolt against Duplessis. But it was the workers’ struggles that would, in a way, give these intellectuals the means to achieve their ambitions. A young lawyer, fresh out of Harvard and the London School of Economics and now back in Quebec, wrote about the Asbestos strike the following year:

“It offered a proof in the Province of Quebec, for the first time and once and for all, that a *united* labour movement need not back down in the face of any combination of forces, whatever they might be, and however deep their roots in tradition, or great their support by the prevailing mores. In this way, a new and contemporary power asserted its control over our destinies, the demons that bedevilled the course of history in our province were exorcised, the spell cast on our present by our past was broken, and a host of creative powers were unleashed in all fields.” [emphasis in the original]

This (admittedly rather pompous) prose is none other than that of...Pierre Elliott Trudeau (“Epilogue,” *The Asbestos Strike*, 1956, English edition, 1974)! It is not by chance that Trudeau, later one of the most hated figures in Quebec history, was able to walk alongside workers on the picket lines in Asbestos at the time. In fact, a whole layer of future personalities of the Quiet Revolution—from Trudeau to René Lévesque to Michel Chartrand—cut their teeth in the labour movement before the Quiet Revolution. This clearly demonstrates what more or less everyone was saying at the time: It was the working class that was profoundly shaking up Quebec and paving the way for progress. It was only a question of: “Where will this lead us?” and, above all, “Who will take the lead in this outpouring of combative energy?” When Duplessis died in 1959, Quebec was already on the verge of social explosion...and everyone knew it.

The First Dead End: Support for the Liberal Party

Jean Lesage’s Liberals ran in the 1960 election under the slogan “It’s time for a change!” But social change was already well underway, and it had reached a point of no return. The success of Jean Lesage and his Liberal Party was that



BAnQ

Quebec premier Maurice Duplessis with his clerical cabal. The Quiet Revolution largely accomplished the separation of church and state in Quebec.

they had the foresight to realize that “we, the Quebec ruling class” must take the lead in this movement, use it for our own ends, and keep it within the limits we impose on it. The contradictory role and position of the Québécois bourgeoisie could not be clearer. It was not the driving force for social change and national emancipation; it was the working class that gave it the impetus and confidence for this. But the bourgeoisie also had its own interest in national emancipation and in placing itself in a better position vis-à-vis the English-speaking imperialists. Lesage explained these interests clearly in his message to Quebec capitalists in the run-up to the 1960 elections:

“[Business leaders] must realize before it is too late that the Union Nationale is blocking the path to economic progress, that it is engaging in electoral blackmail at their expense, and that every day, through its favouritism and encouragement of abuse, it is creating new enemies for the free enterprise system. They must also convince themselves that if the liberation movement goes ahead *without* them, it could perhaps—and this would be regrettable—also go against them.” [emphasis in the original]

—Quoted in Roch Denis, *Luttes de classes et question nationale au Québec 1948-1968* (1979)

When Lesage spoke of the Union Nationale “blocking the path to economic progress” and of its “favouritism” and “abuses,” everyone understood that he was referring to the despised policies of the Duplessis regime, which was closely

allied with the clergy: anti-unionism, brutal methods against all forms of opposition and, above all, policies that squandered Quebec’s resources for the benefit of American and English Canadian companies. Lesage told the Québécois bourgeoisie that things had to change, that we must favour “our” economic development, that of the Québécois capitalists. At the same time, he understood that the Québécois bourgeoisie had to place itself at the head of the opposition to Duplessis and the democratic and national aspirations that were driving the working class forward in order to channel all this toward its own class interests. Otherwise, this movement could indeed overthrow it as well.

The fact that the social and national aspirations of the working class were channeled into support for the Liberal Party was by no means predetermined, and the responsibility for this betrayal rests squarely on the shoulders of the union leadership of the time. They had all been educated in the school of labour conservatism. On the one hand, there were the leaders of the “international unions” affiliated with the American Federation of Labor or the Congress of Industrial Organizations, who were hostile to the national demands of the Québécois people and followed the conservative and anti-Communist directives of their bureaucracies in the United States. On the other hand, there were the leaders of the Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada (CTCC, predecessor of the CSN union federation), who were organically linked to the Catholic Church and preached “good relations” between bosses and workers. Both tendencies sought in one way or another to balance the interests of workers with those of the leaders of Quebec’s reactionary regime in order to maintain “social peace.” To give just the most glaring example of this perspective of class collaboration, we’ll quote the first constitution of the CTCC, which stated:

“The CTCC rejects in principle and in practice the theory of those who claim that capital, capitalists and employers are the natural enemies of labour, workers and wage earners. On the contrary, it asserts that employers and employees must live in harmony, helping and loving one another.”

It was under immense pressure from the union rank and file that such arch-conservative leaderships were forced into struggle. From the Asbestos strike, where workers defied calls from the CTCC leadership to submit to arbitration, to the Louiseville strike, where the leadership backed down in the face of a potential province-wide strike, to the Murdochville strike, all the major conflicts that triggered

SPARTACIST

An Organ of
Revolutionary Marxism

Theoretical and documentary
journal of the ICL, published
under the direction of the
International Executive
Committee

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English Edition No. 70, May 2025

Women & Revolution

A Spartacist Publication
A journal for women’s
liberation and social
emancipation

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No. 46, February 2025

the Quiet Revolution went well beyond the intentions of the labour leadership of the time.

Thus, it was not the union bureaucracies that were driving the working class forward, quite the contrary. Absolutely committed to maintaining the capitalist order on the one hand, but in the most immediate contact with the force pushing against the limits of that order on the other (the workers), the union leaders were simply on the crest of the rising wave of the working class that was crashing against the reactionary regime in Quebec, and they were therefore the first to respond and adapt. They did so in the most conservative way possible: by offering the Québécois bourgeoisie a way out to resolve the problems raised by the working class in a way that would remain firmly within the limits of the capitalist order. Thus, the political program put forward by the unions in the second half of the 1950s—essentially a reformist-nationalist program in health, education, the nationalization of certain resources, and the “readjustment” of federal-provincial relations within the framework of the constitution—were, for all practical purposes, identical, line by line to the electoral platform that brought Jean Lesage to power.

Some analysts from the Quebec left—foremost among them Roch Denis, a former member of the Groupe socialiste des travailleurs du Québec—lament the fact that the union actions of the 1950s did not lead to the creation of a social-democratic party (such as the NDP) in Quebec (see Denis’ otherwise highly informative book on the Quiet Revolution cited above). Anyone with a truly Marxist understanding of class relations and the development of the Quiet Revolution should immediately grasp how futile this endeavour would have been. Moreover, all attempts to create an organizationally independent expression of the working class on the basis of a reformist program have failed in Quebec. Given the very dynamics of the Quiet Revolution, it was the nationalist bourgeoisie that had an interest in implementing reforms and putting the program of social democracy into practice. The Liberal Party really only had to pick the fruit that the union leadership had ripened for it over the years. Hence Jean Lesage’s message to the unions before the elections:

“[The union leaders] must be convinced that the province will not be able to rid itself of the occupier if they do not actively participate in the liberation movement or if they decide to join political parties that may theoretically better satisfy their ideals but have no chance of success in reality.”

—Quoted in Roch Denis, *Luttes de classes et question nationale au Québec 1948-1968* (1979)

In other words, Lesage called for unity in the national struggle rather than division along class lines. At the end of the 1950s, a large part of Quebec’s union leaders were in fact in favour of the new labour party that was being formed in Canada (the future NDP). But this project presupposed the abstention of the Québécois union movement on the question of Quebec’s national rights, which would always be ignored, or even denounced, by English Canadian labour leaders. Lesage pointed out that his program of social reforms was in line with that of the unions and that he could implement it now, so why waste time creating a workers party? Lesage’s Liberals therefore urged the unions to join the national movement...under his leadership!

The unions rallied to these arguments. No labour party contested the 1960 elections and the union leaders gave



no credit

Then-Liberal cabinet minister René Lévesque addresses a conference of the FTQ union federation in 1960.

at least implicit support to the Liberals, support that would become explicit in the coming years. Yet the choice should not have been reduced to either building a social-democratic party disconnected from the national struggle or supporting a member of the upper bourgeoisie (and a federalist!), Jean Lesage, as the nation’s great helmsman. His slogan “*Maîtres chez nous* [masters in our own house]” actually meant that Québécois bosses would be the half-masters of a Canadian province.

The left should have shown that the price of an alliance with Jean Lesage was to sacrifice the nation’s and the workers’ interests. It had a duty to resist the very strong pressure to simply follow in the wake of the Liberal Party and the national elites. On the contrary, it was necessary to break this alliance and build a workers party by opposing the Liberals with a program that corresponded to the social *and* national interests of the working class, for the workers to be “masters in their own house,” that is, a program for the Workers Republic of Quebec!

The Reforms of the Quiet Revolution

In 1962, the Liberals called an election focused on the nationalization of electricity. In his speeches, Jean Lesage presented nationalization as the “key” that would make it possible to counter the “economic colonialism” supported by the “political clique” of the “*roi nègres* [leaders like Duplessis]”; nationalization would allow the whole population of Quebec to “determine its own economic future” (quoted in Stéphane Savard, *Hydro-Québec et l’État québécois 1944-2005* [2013]). Calling for the nationalization of electricity combined with their campaign slogan “*Maîtres chez nous!*”, Jean Lesage’s “*équipe du tonnerre* [dream team]” and his star minister René Lévesque spoke directly to the national aspirations of the working class. The labour movement was already well harnessed to its class enemy when the Liberal Party took power in 1960, but this time the leaders of the trade unions openly called to vote “for the nationalization of electricity,” which simply meant voting Liberal. This was the culmination of the subordination of the working class to the Quebec bourgeoisie during this period.

The Québécois bourgeoisie had every interest in modernizing Quebec's social structure. It needed engineers, a state bureaucracy and educated technocrats, and a health care system capable of meeting the minimum requirements of an advanced industrial society. Teaching Latin and Thomist philosophy to the educated petty bourgeoisie is useful for training priests who can debate the sex of angels; it is less useful when it comes to building hydroelectric dams and high-voltage power lines or handling economic statistics. To be sure, the nationalization of electricity in Quebec was "a highly progressive measure of national self-defense" (to use Trotsky's words when he spoke of the similar case of oil nationalization in Mexico). Hydro-Québec, the subsequent development of the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec and the centralization of political and economic power in the hands of the government: To the extent that these reforms were directed against the national oppression of Quebec, they were fundamentally progressive. This is what enabled Quebec to have the economic base necessary for a future independent state and to finance the catching-up of the Québécois relative to English Canadians.

The nationalization of electricity in Quebec was a measure that ran counter to the interests of some imperialists (such as the eleven companies that were nationalized), but it remained, necessarily, within the framework of domination by imperialism and finance capital. Jean Lesage was very clear about his motives at the beginning of the 1962 election campaign, when he said:

"Not only is the nationalization of electricity not the beginning of a campaign of general socialization throughout Quebec, but I would even say that nationalization is an essential condition for the growth of private enterprise in the province."

Even though the Quebec bourgeoisie had already nationalized the Montreal area's electricity grid and created Hydro-Québec in 1944, the economic development of the entire territory and of its own private enterprise continued to elude it almost entirely. It needed an anchor in the industrial and commodity production process from which it could influence its own development. Electricity, a strategic commodity in almost constant demand and with the greatest development potential in all of northeastern America, seemed a logical and necessary choice. To buy back the foreign companies that owned the fragmented power grid, Jacques Parizeau went to...Wall Street (after being flatly rejected by all Canadian banks) and borrowed \$300 million to buy back these companies listed on...Wall Street. Willis Armstrong, then right-hand man to the U.S. ambassador in Ottawa, had this to say about nationalization: "I was amused by the fact that people talked it up as something that might get everybody angry, and you know our position had been, if you pay for it, you have the right to do it." He added:

"US interest [Wall Street] was developing the money to pay for it and US interests [shareholders of electricity companies], were being bought out, which is fundamentally a vindication that in North America you have a financial common market anyhow."

—Quoted in Jean-François Lisée,
In the Eye of the Eagle (1990)

Do we emancipate ourselves nationally from the imperialists by becoming indebted to them, allowing them to strangle us? No, obviously not! In the case of the nationalization of electricity, the Quebec bourgeoisie, backed by the

strength of the working class, managed to take advantage of this relative and temporary complacency of American imperialism. But these nationalizations under capitalism are not the program of socialists. Revolutionaries defend these measures, not because they are a step that will "gradually" lead to socialism, but because the defense of oppressed nations against imperialism is inexorably linked to the revolutionary struggle. The proletariat had an interest in supporting the nationalization of electricity, not because it was a step toward socialism, but simply because it benefited Quebec's national sovereignty. At the same time, the nationalization carried out by the bourgeoisie served to contain and hold back the struggle of the proletariat, rallying it behind Lesage's Liberals. With the support of the trade-union leadership, this ensured that the workers did not go beyond the limits imposed by the ruling class. Because of the latter's position as a propertied class, it cannot wage a decisive struggle against imperialism, to which it is bound by a thousand ties, without calling into question the foundations of its own class domination in private property. And it is pushed ever more into the arms of the imperialists by the working class fighting for its own interests. In fact, nationalization was the highest point of the great reforms of the Quiet Revolution. Its implementation, along with the support of the treacherous labour leaders and the absence of a revolutionary pole, actually allowed the Quebec bourgeoisie to better betray the struggle for national liberation (independence) in the long term, a theme that would recur throughout the Quiet Revolution.

The fact is, the national bourgeoisie's leadership of the national liberation struggle will always be timid and limited. What was needed was an independent proletarian movement, a workers' bloc fighting against the liberal leadership of the Quebec elites by mobilizing to implement nationalizations *by the workers' own methods*, preserving their political independence from the bourgeoisie and carrying out reforms through class struggle means. To advance the interests of the working class in defense of reforms and in opposition to the liberals, including on the electoral level, a workers party would have fought for the working class to take the leadership of the movement to win what it was due: first and foremost Quebec independ-

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Schoolhouse in 1953 (left). The construction of the Université du Québec à Montréal, for which the Saint Jacques church was partially demolished, symbolized the Catholic Church losing its reactionary grip on the education system.

ence (which, incidentally, no wing of the bourgeoisie was fighting for at the time); but also the cancellation of the debt for which the bourgeoisie has made the workers pay; and the expropriation without compensation of the electric companies, as well as other key sectors of industry, mining, banking, transportation, etc. Promoting and advancing such measures would have exposed bourgeois nationalism as an obstacle to the national liberation struggle and to the promotion of the interests of the working class. Instead, the price paid for the subordination of the union bureaucracy and the nationalist left to Jean Lesage's program was to ensure that the central economic interests of the bourgeoisie would not be challenged and that Quebec's national emancipation would remain incomplete.

Fundamentally, the same conclusions apply to the social reforms of the Quiet Revolution and the struggle for women's emancipation. The sociologists behind the Castonguay-Nepveu Commission report (which led to the 1970 health insurance reform) themselves spoke of the need to attack the social roots of ill health in poverty and general living conditions. Similarly, the Parent report on education recommended free education through university to train citizens capable of participating fully in political life and societal decisions while nurturing a nascent national industry with a skilled workforce at all levels. Indeed, solving health and education problems cannot be done solely at the level of managing institutions and administrative structures, but has to involve every aspect of society from physical infrastructure to working conditions, housing, research, the cultural level of the population and so on. But even carrying out such basic reforms will raise the hostility of Anglo-Canadian and American capital (and their allies among Quebec capitalists). Once again, leaving responsibility for such reforms in the hands of one or another party of the Québécois bourgeoisie guarantees defeat. The working class certainly has an interest in supporting any reforms of this kind that may nevertheless be achieved. But it must above all mobilize on an independent basis, fully aware that the Quebec bourgeoisie and its political representatives will betray it under pressure from capital.

Subordinating the working class to the "progressive" parties of the Quebec bourgeoisie (the Liberals and then the PQ)

meant condemning the reforms of the Quiet Revolution to remain firmly within the limits imposed by the Québécois bourgeoisie including: modernizing the completely dilapidated social services that were holding back the development of the Québécois bourgeoisie itself, developing a health care system to maintain a workforce that could be exploited at the lowest possible cost, and developing an education system to train a workforce that was just competent enough to meet the needs of the market, again at the lowest possible cost.

Once again, it was not the bourgeoisie that was the driving force behind these changes. It was only the impetus of the militant proletariat, which had become hostile to the clergy, that forced the bourgeoisie to get rid of the latter as a tool of social control and giving it a point of support for major social reforms. Not only had the clergy become an obstacle to the development of the productive forces as a whole, but it had itself become one of the main causes of the constant revolt that was shaking the entire base of society. It no longer fulfilled its role of maintaining a docile and submissive working class, and the bourgeoisie had to get rid of it in order to continue to contain the working class and suppress its drive.

The more the issues of Quebec's "democratic" backwardness were resolved (with the end of medieval Catholic institutional control over society, or access to education in one's own language), the more the social aspect of these issues was raised, and the more the clash between capitalist interests and those of the working class became apparent. Relying on the Liberal Party for social progress only served to shackle the motor force behind these advances, the working class, diverting it from the only path to advancing its aspirations. Marxists would not only have fought to break the working class from the nationalist bourgeoisie, but would have also waged a struggle against all political forces that sought to maintain unity with them. Ultimately, despite Quebec's real social progress during this period, all the deep aspirations that animated workers and the oppressed were inevitably disappointed at the end of the Liberal years. These aspirations would erupt in even more "explosive" ways in the years that followed, only to be disappointed even more drastically by the years of PQ rule.

[To be continued.]

Carney...

(continued from page 2)

where Indigenous rights will be trampled underfoot along with labour, safety and other regulations.

First Nations leaders have rightly denounced the laws as an assault on their treaty and other rights. In contrast, labour organizations like the CBTU, representing 600,000 construction workers, support the legislation in the name of creating jobs and the “national interest.” Other labour groups oppose the laws but have no means to address the very real concerns about jobs. The Ontario Federation of Labour states that Bill 5 “violates First Nations sovereignty, guts workers’ rights, and greenlights corporate overreach” (ofl.ca, 6 June). True enough. But the OFL’s liberal appeal for governments to “honour reconciliation” with Indigenous peoples does nothing to add jobs nor advance social conditions for anyone.

Both the CBTU and OFL positions lead to defeat because they don’t challenge the ruling-class framework that sows divisions among workers and minorities: native-born vs. immigrant, labour vs. First Nations, English Canada and Indigenous peoples vs. Quebec, old vs. young, etc. The starting point for any successful struggle must be to emphasize the *common interests* of the oppressed against the big-business parasites. From the impoverished Indigenous communities to the big cities there is a massive need to build homes, infrastructure, public works, etc. But the biggest obstacles to this—and to the hundreds of thousands of construction and other jobs that would come with it—are the big contractors and real-estate speculators, for whom the profit motive drives all investment decisions. A serious fight for decent housing and services for everyone requires taking on these parasites and their government backers.

The OFL’s appeal to the Liberals for “reconciliation” is also a dead end for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous dispossession and oppression, rooted in the history of British colonialism, is maintained by the Canadian state to this day. The Attawapiskat and Neskantaga First Nations in Northern Ontario, whose lands are part of the Ring of Fire, have not had potable water for **30 years**, despite promise after promise from Liberal and Tory governments. The nearby Victor Diamond Mine generated huge profits for the DeBeers mining company before its closure in 2019—and pumped contaminated water from the open pit into the water system, causing dangerously elevated mercury levels.

The Liberals always try to cover up their crimes with fine words about justice. But “reconciliation” with the Canadian state and the British Crown will not bring Indigenous liberation. The fight for Indigenous rights, including whatever treaty rights that can be wrested from the government, requires a confrontation with the ruling class. The union leaders’ feel-good tokenism and crawling before Carney are obstacles to united class struggle, without which workers and the oppressed are left to squabble over the ever-diminishing crumbs that fall from the bosses’ table.

The labour movement must defend treaty rights for First Nations peoples, along with sovereignty/full regional autonomy where there is a land base. It must oppose all forms of discrimination and assimilation attempts while fighting

for jobs and massive public works projects under union control. These struggles go hand in hand, but they require a new leadership that mobilizes for class struggle against the government, not “reconciliation” or “multiculturalism” with the ruling class!

Resisting Trump Means Resisting Team Canada

The profit-gouging bosses are not going to just hand over the things we all desperately need. Neither will Liberal, Tory or NDP governments. They can’t be made to be allies in the struggle against unemployment and economic crises, nor for defending the oppressed, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, women, LGBTQ+ and more. Only class struggle, against both Trump and the Canadian capitalists, can strengthen the unity of all working people and improve the conditions for everyone.

There will be more attacks as the U.S.-led world order breaks down, dragging Canadian capitalism in its wake. And unless the current collaborationist labour leadership is challenged and replaced, there will more defeats. Forging a class-struggle alternative to these labour traitors is the central task facing the left today. ■

Quebec...

(continued from page 6)

francophone minority. This includes insisting that immigrants who settle in Quebec should learn and be educated in French. This is not a privilege for French but a basic measure of self-defense against the historic policy of national assimilation by the anglophone ruling class. The Quebec language laws do not oppress the historic anglophone minority in Quebec, which remains the most privileged sector of society. Opposition to the language laws in Quebec is not a defense of the equality of languages but a defense of the privileges of English over French. The Quebec working class will never follow a party which defends this position.

Conclusion

Throughout my presentation I have sought to pedagogically explain the dynamics of the class and national struggle in Canada. I have not responded to demagogic slanders on the part of the IBT against me and other comrades from Quebec, accusing us of being unrepentant bourgeois nationalists.

If I have followed this approach, it is not because I have any doubts or illusions about the reactionary implications of the IBT’s approach to the national question, but rather because it is my internationalist duty as a Québécois communist to do the utmost to build unity across the national divide by convincing comrades from the English Canadian workers movement that it is their duty to champion the national rights of Quebec. This is a huge historic challenge which cannot be solved with epithets. Ultimately, class struggle will resolve the debate. But it is our duty now in the current preparatory period to make the political contours of this debate as clear as possible in order to build the revolutionary movement in Canada on solid foundations. ■

Strike...

(continued from page 16)

would have created a crisis for Carney, making it harder for the government to carry out a counteroffensive not only against this union but in other strikes as well. This would have strengthened the position of labour overall, posing the need to push aside leaders who are getting in the way.

Rather than looking to cause Carney trouble through determined union action, the CUPE leaders paralyzed the strike by accepting the framework of the capitalist government and its arbitration and other boards. One top union official put it baldly, claiming the union faced a “dilemma” because of the government’s threat of forced arbitration and that the only way forward was to negotiate on wages “in isolation” from other issues, including unpaid work, so members could vote on the deal. What a load of garbage! The striking workers had the edge, but they were stabbed in the back by their leaders. Flight attendants have massively voted down the agreement. Now it is necessary to wage a fight against Air Canada in *opposition* to the misleaders who have led them down a blind alley.

Militancy is Not Enough: For a Revolutionary Strategy!

The Air Canada strike did land a blow against Section 107. But given the way the union leaders directed the struggle, this partial victory will do nothing to advance workers’ strategic interests. The fundamental contradiction of the strike was that the union leadership adopted a militant tactic—an illegal strike—while holding firm to a class-collaborationist strategy.

This was also the case during the 2022 CUPE-led Ontario education strike, when workers defied a back-to-work order only to end up with a sellout deal. It is common practice for governments in Canada, Liberal and Tory alike (and sometimes the NDP provincially), to use laws to break strikes. And on occasion union leaders are forced to stand up to the government. But their aim is to channel struggle back into the safe confines of institutionalized play-fighting where the labour leaders make noise, blow off steam at the base, and then return to being “reasonable” at the bargaining table. They turn the weapons of class struggle into spectacles.

In the short term, Carney will think twice about invoking Section 107 to break a strike. But he will use other means to reassert authority over the union movement, likely by returning to the old days when back-to-work legislation had to go through Parliament. This delayed things slightly while the NDP grandstanded as a defender of the workers, but the net effect was the same: broken strikes and a continued deterioration of wages and working conditions. Rather than prepare workers for this, the union leaders are doing the opposite. They will continue to channel opposition to strikebreaking into lengthy court battles and impotent PR campaigns, fueling illusions in rights supposedly guaranteed in the constitution while complaining about “excesses” like Section 107 or Ontario premier Ford’s use of the notwithstanding clause against CUPE in 2022.

Worse yet, the union leaders are chaining the labour movement to the Liberal government. The Canadian Labour

Congress gathered the heads of all the major unions purportedly to stand with the flight attendants, but the central message to Carney was get back to the business of “national unity” to fight Trump. The CLC is doing the dirty work for Carney, whose measures to shore up the economy come at the direct expense of the workers and the oppressed (see article, page 1). In fact, CLC president Bea Bruske used the popularity of the Air Canada strike to declare that the importance of unions in this period is in negotiating layoffs! Both the more left-talking CUPE leaders and the mainstream CLC bureaucrats share the same framework: pacify workers to take cuts during tough times to help the bosses.

It is crucial that union militants and the left draw the correct conclusions and see that defying the law is not enough. Yet more militancy is the be-all and end-all of what many left groups demand. In an article titled “Flight Attendants Victory,” Socialist Alternative whitewashes the sellout and claims Air Canada and the government were defeated in a “win for all workers” (socialistalternative.ca, 21 August). The Communist Party hails the lousy tentative agreement as a “significant victory” which “proves that a united and militant membership and a united labour movement can win” (communist-party.ca, 20 August).

For its part, the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) does oppose the bad deal and is critical of the union leadership but reduces the issue to a lack of union democracy. It is surely a problem that the union leaders conduct negotiations in secret, then present the results as a *fait accompli*. And, yes, rank-and-file committees are necessary for workers to take matters into their own hands. But it is disarming to narrowly present the task as one of keeping the leadership in check at the bargaining table. Essentially, the RCP presents a formula: militancy plus democracy plus abstract critiques of the capitalist system equals revitalization of the labour movement.

The RCP and others miss the central lesson: there is no alternative other than building an opposition to the union leaders by offering a counterposed strategy aimed at defeating the bosses and the government. Any leadership that won’t lead struggle around such a perspective will only maximize defeats and push workers into a dead end, while driving increasing numbers toward Poilievre and right-wing reaction. It is the task of the Marxist left to bring a revolutionary strategy into the unions by waging a relentless fight against every act of treachery and the reformist illusions pushed by the current leaders. This is the way to deepen the struggle, uncover revolutionary tendencies, thrust the conservative leaders aside and make the left a factor in the labour movement. ■



How to Lose a Winning Strike

The strike by Air Canada flight attendants put the government in a vise. CUPE was in a position to make real gains, win a livable wage, put an end to unpaid work and land a blow against government strikebreaking under Section 107 of the Labour Code. The strike was wildly popular, with workers across the country cheering for a union victory. But rather than squeeze the bosses and the government to get as much as possible, the union leaders wasted this position of strength. Instead, they signed an agreement that *maintains* most unpaid work and includes wages that don't make up for a decade of losses due to inflation, not to mention the junior positions that are still below the poverty line. The question is: why did this happen?

To understand how the CUPE leaders could go from ripping up a back-to-work order to pushing a rotten deal in less than 48 hours, it is necessary to contrast their strategy to one based on the class struggle. Their starting point was never about posing a real challenge to Air Canada or Carney. In fact, they *opposed* this, since a victorious strike in defiance of the law would have meant a crisis for the government. Rather, their strategy was, and still is, rooted in establishing "labour peace" in *collaboration* with the bosses and government. That is why they cut the legs out from under the strike.

This bankrupt outlook was laid bare by CUPE national president Mark Hancock during the town-hall style union meeting on the eve of the settlement. In 2015 the CUPE leadership saddled flight attendants with a ten-year contract that rolled back wages and pensions. Hancock described this sellout as the product of "generous" unionists "helping the company" during "tough times." In return, he implored, Air Canada's "good financial position" today means it should "give a good contract to members" and stop seeking binding arbitration from the government.

This idea of mutual respect and reciprocity is a dangerous illusion. It is part of a framework of coexistence with the bosses that leads to conciliation at every stage of the struggle. The results came just hours later, when CUPE leaders scuttled the strike in favour of a rotten deal. For them, defying the government order was only about getting Air Canada back to the bargaining table. So, they caved as soon as the corporate execs made the tiniest move.

Flight attendants were angry and bewildered by the tentative deal. They didn't even get to vote on the whole agree-



Makowichuk/Postmedia

Air Canada flight attendants were in a position to win but were sold out by their own CUPE leaders. Picket lines, Calgary, August 18.

ment, only the wage portion. And to make matters worse, their leadership blocked any kind of fightback in advance, warning that if they voted it down there would be no strike, and outstanding issues would go to arbitration!

In contrast to the dead-end of conciliation, a class-struggle strategy starts with how to advance the interests of workers *against* the counterposed interests of the bosses. It means fighting for immediate gains by employing tactics that can maximize partial victories while strengthening the labour movement to better face the battles ahead. In a 17 August *WT* supplement distributed to strikers, we warned against "backward steps or rotten compromises," and called for active solidarity from the entire union movement: "In the first instance, this means that the other thousands of unionized workers at the airports must *honour the flight attendants' picket lines!*"

It was necessary to maximize the confluence of factors that made the strike popular and clearly winnable and make things difficult for the weak minority government. Both the bosses and the Liberals expected this largely female workforce to bow down when they snapped their fingers to order up a back-to-work ruling, and when the union didn't comply, they had no back-up plan. Continuing the strike until Air Canada met the flight attendants' demands

(continued on page 15)