

October 3 Quebec election between inflation and climate crisis - Beating inflation is taming the capitalist matrix of the climate crisis

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The Quebec election on October 3 will be bathed in a situation of inflation (and the threat of recession), which will affect food and housing as much as transport and energy, against a heat wave background hitting all continents of the northern hemisphere almost simultaneously. To put it in electoral terms, the question of the ballot box, the one that presses in the short term, will be inflation while the fundamental question, the one that presses in the long term, one might say, will be the ecological climate-biodiversity crisis. The right-wing parties, in addition to declaring victory following the slightest reduction in the inflation rate, will see in it two issues separated by a Chinese wall whose solution will be to sacrifice the long-term one in order to claim to resolve the short-term one, which can only be done by accentuating the suicidal dynamics of the system: more hydrocarbons, more meat and processed foods from agro-industry, more urban sprawl.

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What will be the solutions on the left? “Québec solidaire is proposing structuring measures including

raising the minimum wage, freezing Hydro-Québec rates, controlling rents and doubling the solidarity tax credit." [1]. If the not yet public electoral platform had been considered, one could add half-free public transport and free dental care. Surprisingly, the party does not even advocate the key demand of combat unionism, namely the indexation to the cost of living of wages, starting with those in the public sector, and social benefits. As for the increase in the minimum wage to \$18 an hour, is it sufficient when last October "[t]he chairman of the board of directors of the communications company Cogeco, Louis Audet, defend[ed] the idea of increasing the minimum wage now from \$13.50 to \$20 [2].

These measures, insofar as they are put forward, are certainly the first line of defense to be promoted, as understood for example by the British trade union movement, which has launched the biggest strike movement in decades [3]. But however essential they may be, their successful implementation would only maintain an inflationary spiral that does nothing to regulate inflation. The monetary authorities won over to capital, educated by the stagflation of the 1970s, would hasten to break this spiral by deflation as they finally resolved to do in the early 1980s, the gateway to the neoliberal era, and what today they are implementing without further delay. And this spiral, tamed or not, does nothing to solve the climate crisis. In the end, we come to the same cul-de-sac as right-wing politicians. Is this squaring the circle or should we not rather understand the root causes of the return of inflation... which would give us the key to linking the fight against inflation and the ecological climate-biodiversity fight?

The worst inflation since the start of the neoliberal era only looks cyclical

Since the advent of the neoliberal era in the early 1980s, the growth in market basket prices [4] in Quebec has never been so high, particularly for transportation and food products and to a lesser extent for rents. The rental segment of the housing market being intended above all for the poorest 40% of the Quebec population, who benefit from only 15% of the total disposable income [5], their ability to pay acts as a brake on the rise in rents, which leads to a shortage of working-class housing, while ground rent continues to rise with the accentuation of urban concentration, to which is added the high cost of construction materials due certainly to the pandemic disorganization but more structurally to the pressure of the American demand for construction wood, despite its regulation by USA tariffs violating the rules of free trade imposed by...the USA, and combined with the looting of forests which is used more for the manufacture of ephemeral newsprint. As for the middle classes who own their homes, if purchase prices are falling, this is due to the rapid rise in mortgage interest rates. 5-year mortgage rates [6] have grown relatively by almost 60% over the past year, increasing by the same amount the debt service, exceeding the rate of 5% for the first time since 2010.

This inflation is primarily global whether it is the world price of oil [7] or the world food price [8] despite a slight drop in recent months, which proves the more speculative than real effect [9] of the Ukrainian War for the greatest profit of the oil companies [10] especially those who also do refining for which there is a significant post-pandemic demand pressure. There are certainly cyclical factors explaining this inflation, such as the pandemic disorganization of supply chains prolonged by China's covid zero strategy... and which could lengthen in the event of a probable fall rebound given the vaccine stinginess of the pharmaceutical transnationals [11] endorsed by imperialist countries, which encourages the proliferation of worrying variants, not to mention the emergence of other zoonoses favored by agro-industry and urban sprawl. However, this slippage, perhaps cyclical, conceals a structural imbalance, namely the fragility of the just-in-time method of neoliberal trade and the US-China trade war which is pushing the latter towards self-centered economic development (and its area of influence) [12] under state coordination and strengthening repression for which its covid strategy serves as a convenient screen.

The global market completed at the beginning of the millennium launched oil and food inflation

However, when we examine the price curve for a barrel of oil, we can clearly see that it has been rising since the beginning of the millennium when the world market was consolidated with the full integration of China into the World Trade Organization (WTO), although interrupted by the 2008-09 crisis, the US-Saudi Arabia oil war [13] between shale oil and conventional oil and finally by the pandemic crisis. The current rebound is only the resumption of this rise in prices, the fundamental cause of which is the irrigation of neoliberal capitalism by plethoric oil, whatever the cost which is determined by the extraction of the most expensive marginal barrel, oil being the rent product par excellence. From now on, however, the rise in the price of hydrocarbons, including that of soaring coal [14] will be increasingly motivated by the pretext of the fight against green capitalism promoting so-called renewable energies, which will lead hydrocarbon producers to speculate, without too much risk, on unsatisfied demand following geopolitical crises such as the war in Ukraine or failures in the supply of renewable energy following either the delays in the gargantuan investments required or its intermittent nature, to which is added the production of plastic which “doubled between 2000 and 2019” [15] while the use of synthetic fertilizers continues to increase [16].

As for the price of food products, we note a rise also beginning at the turn of the millennium, after a long decline in real prices since at least the beginning of the sixties, except briefly at the time of the crisis of the ‘glorious thirty’ around 1975 following the oil crisis of 1973, a rise which reached a climax in 2011 at the time of the outbreak of the Arab Spring uprisings and other square movements such as Occupy and in Spain, to then come down again, but without reaching the low level of the year 2000, far from it, then start climbing again in the spring of 2020 just as the pandemic was hitting the world hard. This rise in food prices, parallel to that of oil, is partly explained by that of oil which is essential for the agro-industry keen on machinery, input-output transport and fossil fertilizers.

The inflationary crisis reveals the penetration of the real economy by the climate crisis

The recent surge has admittedly been influenced by the pandemic mess. But one factor that is playing more and more is the climate crisis [17] whose extremes and unpredictable variability harm agricultural yields so much so that the world of finance has coined the terms climateflation, fossilflation and greenflation [18]. The simultaneity of extremes affecting different agricultural areas, such as the one that manifested itself this summer by peaks of 40°C in China, Western Europe and the US, not to mention those of India and Pakistan this spring could well cause significant rises in agricultural prices as well as the concomitant droughts paralyze the river transport of goods, of which food is at the top of the list. As for Africa, “...it has been hit by 14 extreme droughts in the past two years alone, far more than any other continent, and the United Nations warns that some 20 million people are at risk in East Africa this year...” [19]. The great poverty of agro-industry in terms of biodiversity makes it even more sensitive to climate imbalances.

In its “liberal” reformist way, the New York Times admits this link between inflation and the climate crisis: “The name, [Inflation Reduction Act, the \$370 billion bill designed to move the country away from fossil fuels and toward ‘solar, wind and other renewable energy] in fact, is appropriate because there is a direct link between climate change and rising prices, wherever you are in the world” [20]. However, as to the scope of this law for the fight against the climate crisis, it is a failure say The

Guardian: “A cost-benefit analysis by the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA), which represents a wide range of urban groups and rural areas nationwide, concludes that the strengths of the IRA are outweighed by the bill’s weaknesses and the threats posed by the expansion of fossil fuels and unproven technologies such as carbon capture and hydrogen generation – which the bill will encourage with billions of dollars in tax credits that will primarily benefit oil and gas” [21].

Threat of recession with a touch of cynicism to match

The traditional monetarist weapon of the rise in interest rates (and the reversal of the policy of monetary creation by the central banks known as quantitative easing) to combat inflation can do nothing against these causes except to drive popular demand towards more poverty and inequality — the rise in interest rates enriches the flow of income for savers, although the initial drop in the value of stock market assets may reduce their movable assets — which forces demand to adjust to a deficient supply, thus reducing inflation and triggering a recession with a touch of cynicism to match, courtesy of the President of the Federal Reserve [22].

The virtue of monetarism for capital is to break the price-wage inflationary spiral [23] before it installs itself permanently, which the labor shortage accelerates especially when it is based on an upsurge in union struggles [24] so as not to undermine the actually existing price-profit spiral [25] which is doing very well. Thus the stock market remains at historic highs [26] notwithstanding the drop in the first half of 2022 which saw some tears and warnings of recession ... which could well materialize just looking at the setbacks in the real estate market [27] of which the Canadian one is in the front line, always the first target of rising interest rates.

The fight against inflation accentuates the contradictions aggravating the very material accumulation

The causes of inflation already stem soto voce, and will increasingly stem, from the climate-biodiversity ecological crisis and more deeply from the crisis of neoliberal capitalism which produces it, more precisely from the accentuation of its contradictions, including the inter-imperialist one and the fundamental bourgeoisie-proletariat one which gives an absolute priority to the safeguard of the rate of profit whatever the anti-crisis policy implemented. Faced with the almost exponential aggravation of the crisis of the earth’s ecosystem drifting irremediably towards the “Hothouse Earth” [28] combined with that of the sixth great extinction of species, capitalism cannot set aside the law of competition between private capitals, and its extension to States , the necessary consequence of which is the accumulation of capital.

This accumulation may prioritize the knowledge economy, such as computer performance which has still not delivered the expected increase in productivity [29], it has not managed to free itself, far from it, from material accumulation. In fact, the development of the productive forces that lies behind the knowledge economy conceals a mountain of often networked equipment at the source of a new infrastructure superimposed on the old outcome of the industrial revolutions of the 19th and 20th centuries. The result is a meteoric rise in fixed capital, reducing the variable cost at the margin, which, in terms of neoclassical price theory, gives a false impression of gratuity, in addition masked by advertising revenues which amortize the fixed capital. This pseudo-freedom in turn gives access to the virtual world of gargantuan data banks and social networks giving an illusion of the non-materiality of capitalist growth.

The capitalist solutions to the crisis of the earth’s ecosystem under the constraint of very material

accumulation of capital worsen the causes of this crisis, of which inflation becomes both the symptom and the accelerator, in addition to depriving neoliberal capitalism of its great victory over Keynesian capitalism whose inherent inflation had degenerated into stagflation.

The green capitalist solution to urban congestion prevents the elimination of private solo driving

The capitalist solution to urban congestion is to superimpose on urban sprawl (and rising gas prices) a superstructure of electrified mass transit. The best way to discourage the use of public transit is to force people to pay a high and rising fare every year to ride a crowded bus, stuck in traffic or infrequent, a tactic of exasperation understood by the capitalism from the beginning of the 20th century to encourage the purchase of a car, first luxurious and then mass-market thanks to the alienating Taylorian production line. Faced with the setbacks of urban congestion, which adds to proletarian fatigue, harming labor productivity and which slows down the circulation of goods, increasingly using the road system, which affects the rotation speed of goods to make profit, capital had no choice but to superimpose a public transport system on the primordial automobile traffic. With this addition, we end up with the worst of both worlds by adding up expensive and time-consuming to build underground (metro) and aerial (REM) transportation system, for the greater benefit of the Quebec “corruption industry”, transnational corporations of means of public transport and of course of Finance, so as not to harm the reign on terra firma of the “little queen” (and increasingly of the large SUV) which monopolizes the road network.

The private solo car quickly became the cause and the pseudo-countryside pretext for the urban sprawl of single-family homes (and townhouses) once again for the greater benefit of the “corruption industry”, transnational corporations road vehicles, which are now joined by the GAFAM and the Tesla, and banks for which mortgage and car loans have become a major asset. Need we add that the monthly repayment of the mortgage and the loan for the car have become a prison for the proletariat conditioned to the ideology of private property which shapes its vision of the world, solicits its thoughts and its free time and monopolizes it with worries while being taken by the throat by the end of the month payments which makes it reluctant to strikes.

It will be objected that it is impossible to get rid of the private solo car quickly enough to be in tune with the IPCC. The Quebec of the Quiet Revolution restructured and boosted in fifteen years its school and health networks, its energy and transport systems and its land use planning, not necessarily for the better it must be admitted, to which it added the achievements of Expo 67 and the 1976 Olympics. If the pressure of capitalist competitiveness mixed with popular aspirations for modernization has been able to achieve such a result, we do not see why the climate emergency — should we not rather say the struggle of the last chance to save civilization if not the survival of humanity and many other species — would be incapable of causing a more rapid and profound revolution. Let us remember that it took only two years to transform car factories into tank factories at the start of the Second World War and ten years to replace the polluting and nauseating transport by horse by the automobile transport in major US cities at the beginning of the 20th century (while ignoring the already existing electric streetcars). Let us remember that the survival of civilization and perhaps even of humanity is at stake.

Wall-to-wall transit blocks new extractivism’s electric vehicle

What is utopian about eliminating by 2030 the private solo car, gasoline and electric, and its alter ego of single-family homes and townhouses and replacing them with a public transport system based

on free, frequent, comfortable, electric buses/tramway/train to the smallest village on the entire axial road network, plus a fleet of minibuses possibly without driver on marked circuits for this purpose in the suburbs being densified — nothing to do with the myth of automatic cars across Montreal's orange cones flaunted by GAFAM and Tesla to attract venture capital and government grants — plus a community car(truck)sharing supplement for special needs that will diminish over time as public transport adapts.

Without forgetting the obvious remedies such as the energy-efficient upgrade of all viable buildings starting with those heated with fossil fuels by 2030, all-round public transport solves the hard core of CO₂ emanation, particularly in Quebec, on the condition of not falling into the green capitalist trap of electric cars fueled by renewable energies, including hydroelectricity (but not nuclear, which even the IPCC promotes), which substitutes the extractivism of electricity for that of hydrocarbons. Already in Quebec, the race for open pit graphite and lithium mining claims [30], which claims in the event of successful exploration give all rights including the right to expropriate, is in full swing to the dismay of the municipalities concerned and the local populations who set up citizen groups, which lead the most aware leaders to question the false solution of private electric vehicles. The so-called renewable energy being diffuse and intermittent, unlike hydrocarbons, requires an orgy of energy-intensive materials upstream per kw/h produced in comparison with hydrocarbons whose energy power is concentrated therefore requiring relatively little fixed equipment but whose consumption in downstream is polluting, including GHG, unlike renewable energies.

It will be objected that this orgy of new equipment, including batteries, is recyclable. First, as long as the new extractivism is growing exponentially, mathematically the majority of materials for new equipment and batteries must come from mining, mostly open pit due to low-grade ores, itself moved by mainly fossil fuels because these account for 80% of the world's energy. Secondly, the recycling of these composite materials, barely implemented for the ion-lithium batteries created more than 25 years ago because it is too complex and expensive, is itself energy-consuming and polluting independently of the boosting of its promoters. Going from hydrocarbon extraction to all-electric is going from Charybdis to Scylla. As a bonus, the two extractivisms generate energy-intensive urban sprawl which blocks the redevelopment of the territory on the basis of densified habitat within walking distance of local services and freeing up "nature parks" including urban agrobiological mixing city and countryside.

A breathless "green revolution" that contributes a third of the world's GHGs

These nature parks are the sprawling extension of the agrobiological countryside in towns and villages instead of urban sprawl which is the sprawling extension of the capitalist city in the countryside deforested and depopulated by agro-industry. The "green revolution" which globalized the agro-industrial model specific to the imperialist countries certainly caused a phenomenal growth in the yields of the soil and the labor force, but this was at the cost of a strong penetration of agriculture by the fossil energy (mechanisation, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, transport, processing). So much so, as the ten-year report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reminds us [31], this apparently profitable agriculture has an energy balance and very negative GHG — 31% of the world total — in addition to not properly feeding its people, not to mention that it requires a staggering supply of water which in many places around the world empties rivers and groundwater. Finally, it depletes the soils that must be artificialized more and more and it promotes the concentration of ownership given the intensity of the capital required, which is also underlined by the FAO report:

"In 2019, global anthropogenic emissions amounted to 54 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent

(CO₂eq), of which 17 billion tonnes of CO₂eq – 31 percent – came from agri-food systems. [...] After remaining stable for five years, the prevalence of undernourishment increased by 1.5 percentage points in 2020 – to a level close to 9.9 percent. In 2020, more than 720 million people worldwide suffered from hunger and nearly one in three people (2.37 billion) did not have access to adequate food. [...] The net loss of forest cover between 2010 and 2020 is estimated at 4.7 million hectares/year, [...] these figures consider the extension of the forest due to regeneration and afforestation. [...] It is estimated that the set-aside of cultivated land due to soil salinization can reach 1.5 million hectares per year. [...] Farming systems increasingly reflect a divide: large commercial farms take the lion's share of agricultural land use, concentrating the millions of smallholders who practice subsistence farming on land exposed to degradation and lack of water."

The green revolution has dissipated its potential for efficiency while revealing its ecological and social cost. The agro-industrial transnationals would supposedly want to relaunch a second green revolution with GMOs that make us even more dependent on energy-intensive inputs, to which we must add industrialized seeds, while being an additional threat of biological pollution. The result, as we have seen, is a surge in world food prices, aggravated by cuts in support for agriculture in dependent countries under the aegis of the IMF and by the new market for agro-fuels. Add to this the cascading climatic disasters that combine with the pandemic.

Ground rent and indebtedness push back the agrobiological succession that is pushing the door

Canada and Quebec are experiencing a serious problem of access to land and indebtedness which hinders the path of succession, in particular those wishing to free themselves from the climatic dead end of agribusiness:

"Access to land is even more difficult for this new generation of farmers who are abandoning the model of industrial agriculture in favor of small-scale organic production relying on short circuits. Quebec legislation has favored the "merger" of land for decades for the benefit of large farms.

"We have been told for decades that the average age of farmers is high, that it is an aging population, that there is very little succession. On the other hand, in our sector, in the world of market gardening, of biodiversity, the schools are full.' — A quote from Caroline Poirier, president of CAPÉ (Cooperative for ecological local agriculture)" [32]

It is not only the next generation that is affected, but also the system of ownership of agricultural land, according to a report by the Union of Agricultural Producers (UPA): "...with more than 600,000 hectares of land for rent, the ownership rate of Quebec farms is more likely to be between 65 and 70%..." [33]. The cost of land results in a growth in indebtedness to which is added the strangulation upstream and downstream of the large input and processing companies. According to the Solidaire MP responsible for the agriculture file:

"The average value of agricultural land under cultivation has more than tripled since 2007. Farmers must go into debt, sometimes over more than a generation, to buy the land... [...] The next generation of farmers is increasingly doomed to perpetual rental... [...] Agricultural land is the new manna for financial institutions and real estate companies.

"The concentration of the agri-food industry is another problem. [...] In greenhouse production, three actors generate about 80% of the total vegetable production. Same scenario in the milk sector and the processing and distribution of poultry and pigs. Three multinational corporations, including Monsanto-Bayer, control more than 60% of pesticide and seed sales globally." [34].

In Quebec, the quota system for milk, poultry and eggs makes matters worse by causing “unprecedented indebtedness for farmers” [35] relatively more 50% larger than in Ontario and more than triple that in the US and which “has doubled over the last ten years”, which causes “the drop in farm incomes”. This decline has forced farm households, particularly spouses, to work off the farm for two-thirds of their income to stay afloat. A Quebec family farm in debt over its head will not be able to embark on an agroecological revolution.

The concentration of land as well as the upstream and downstream concentration strangles the peasant farm

The corollary of indebtedness is the concentration of farms: “Farms with revenues of \$100,000 or less, i.e. nearly 20,000 farms [two-thirds of existing farms], generated [only] 10% of overall gross revenues .” [36]. One can be certain that the large farms, which benefit the most from subsidies and/or quotas, such as the Tower of Pisa, lean towards the agro-industrial status quo. The consequence is that the UPA has a strong tendency to tense up in defense of achievements, to curb eco-conditionality and to ossify its management of joint marketing plans that finance its specialized federations.

Not only does the concentration of ownership concern the farm’s upstream and downstream as almost everywhere else in the world, but it is very strong at the distribution level: three distributors, two of whom are outside Quebec, control 90 to 95% of the market plus Walmart and Costco which are entering this economic field. Without questioning the indebtedness of peasant farms and their concentration/transformation into capitalist farms, monopolization throughout the agro-industrial sector, and without questioning consumption and housing patterns, including city-country relations, we will be stuck between the Charybdis of free trade and the Scylla of protectionism. Historically, the use of cooperatives in a capitalist environment has been a failure. Desjardins, Coop fédérée/Olymel and Agropur participate like other banks and other suppliers in the suffocation of the peasant farm, not to mention their notorious anti-unionism.

Not only is the peasant farm strangled by finance, but it is also wedged between the transnational fertilizer, seed and equipment corporations on the one hand and the large processing and distribution companies on the other, not to mention integrators in pork. It is condemned, to survive, either to niche agriculture normalizing self-exploitation and working outside the farm, or to enlargement and the hiring of temporary foreign workers. The pandemic has highlighted the overexploitation, and often the health risk, of workers in slaughterhouses and large vegetable farms, a large portion of which in Canada and Quebec are temporary Mexican and Guatemalan workers.

The meat diet, like the private solo car, are the elephants in the room that are rarely denounced

To these evils, the agro-industry adds those of food waste and the meat diet. The fight against food waste would allow a significant reduction in GHGs: “Nearly 60% of the food produced in Canada, or 35.5 million metric tons, is lost and wasted each year. Of this number, 32% - or 11.2 million metric tons of food waste - is avoidable and constitutes edible food...” [37]. Add to this a strong attenuation of the carnivorous diet to go another step further, because “[t]he animal feed market is by far the most important user of grains in Quebec.” It accounts for more than 80% of uses [38]. According to the specialist journalist from Le Devoir:

“The fight against climate change inevitably involves a major change in our diet. Above all, this

means substantially reducing our meat consumption, concludes a new study published on Wednesday in the scientific magazine Nature [...]

"On average, the inhabitants of the planet should thus reduce their consumption of red meat by almost 75%. For Canadians, this decline would be more of the order of 85%, taking for granted a switch to a single meat-based meal per week [...]

"...this production alone is responsible for 72 to 78% of all GHG emissions from the global agricultural sector, according to the data presented in the study. For example, the production of a single kilogram of beef generates 32.5 kg of CO₂. For lamb, the balance is estimated at 33 kg per kilogram produced, and at 2.9 kg for pork. Conversely, the balance is 0.1 kg for soybeans, 0.06 kg on average for vegetables, 0.7 kg for nuts and 1.18 for rice.

"In addition to GHG emissions, animal products monopolize large areas of farmland, averaging four to six square meters for every kilogram of beef, chicken, lamb or pork. However, new agricultural land is made available by resorting to deforestation. In the Amazon, for example, almost 75% of the vast natural areas lost have been lost to the production of meat or the cereals needed to feed animals. [And deforestation is also a factor of zoonosis, Editor's note] [39]

Agrobiology commands a revolution in land use planning and working arrangements

If the reduction of food transport, which is a substantial part of the trade of goods because we eat three times a day, goes through the fight against food waste and the reduction of meat consumption which swells and complicates the matrix of transformation, it also concerns urban-rural and national-international relations. Vegetarian food alone by the significant reduction of the surfaces to be cultivated (and that of the extensive pastures devastating the tropical forests) will contribute to a large part. The maximization of short journeys calls for both the use of the diversity of local products including cereals, legumes and oilseeds adapted to the local soils and climate and urban agriculture based on the interpenetration of the city and the countryside so as also to facilitate organic recycling up to and including human feces.

The generalization of the agroecological revolution has always come up against massive state support for industrial agriculture. As for soil productivity [40], agrobiology, as it reconstitutes the humus of the soil, can overtake agro-industry and reduce some more cultivated areas. Urban agriculture, including the school curriculum, would begin to create a link between urban dwellers and the land through its youth. This experience would encourage the appearance of a workforce that would stay or return to the village to become co-owners or cooperators of peasant farms based on agrobiology. These farms need abundant labor because it aims to maximize soil productivity under the constraint of maintaining its fertility and not that of maximizing labor productivity at the expense of artificial soil, such as industrial agriculture. It is this characteristic which makes it an anti-capitalist agriculture.

The peasant farm would be supported as much as the agro-industrial farm is today, by a socialization of its finance and its distribution of food, which would prevent the strangulation of agriculture by the bank denounced by the Pronovost report. This would make it possible to set up short circuits and farmers' markets as the main means of distribution and not as a marginal method in the shadow of the Metro-Sobey-Loblaw-Walmart oligopolies which control supply according to standardized mass consumption.

The peasant farm needs cheap access to land, which would be possible through the constitution of a

state land fund made available to them based on a guaranteed right of use as long as the farm retains its vocation as an agro-organic farm. As a workforce, we should start by offering temporary workers and their families landed immigrant status while granting them better wages and working conditions, including full labor code protection and the right to unionize. Thus, would be met the conditions for a return to the land of Quebec youth.

Public transport, densified housing, non-meat agrobiology solve the plague of inflation

The revolution of the transport system in tune with that of housing and urban development, which must be combined with the revolution of agriculture, including that of the diet — in Quebec, overflowing with hydroelectricity, on condition of not squander it on 5G server farms and exports, the energy revolution can wait except for the obvious energy efficiency and a complement of solar energy integrated into the habitat and wind energy respecting the landscapes and under community responsibility — requires the popular takeover of national savings.

This crucial task presupposes the conquest of national independence by the left to expropriate and socialize banks and tutti quanti. Reorient national savings and on this basis carry out an in-depth tax reform at the expense of the rich and upper middle classes (the 1% and the 10%) — their gargantuan and luxurious consumption is responsible for most of the GHG emissions giving rise to exceeding 1.5°C [41] — is impossible within an oil and gas Canada not recognizing the Quebec nation and hindering the development of the French language (just like a Quebec betting on the mining extractivism of green capitalism for which independence is optional).

As for the working classes without solo cars, they will see their budget relieved by at least \$20,000 a year, which will make it possible to resolve the contradiction between the end of the world and the end of the month while being anti-inflationary. Ditto for the substitution of collective housing integrated into neighborhoods and villages freed from the servitude of the “little queen” and the good health of an essentially vegetarian diet made cheap by the abandonment to the forest and the meadows of the less productive and furthest from places of consumption.

The anti-capitalist revolution ensures the achievement of IPCC targets and a higher standard of living

Realists will claim that this pro-climate and pro-biodiversity society is a completely disconnected world, whereas it is the one in which we live that it is, starting with Canada-Quebec, one of the largest emitters of CO₂ per capita in the world. And there is no need to discard it on Alberta: we consume almost as much oil per capita in Quebec as in Alberta, except that we import the oil consumed, which allows us to exclude its production from our GHG balance sheet. The IPCC-UN has more than demonstrated that there are less than 10 years left (in 2030) to reduce GHGs by at least 50% in order not to cross the fateful 1.5°C to avoid the “Hothouse Earth”, which means at least 65% for formerly industrialized countries like Quebec-Canada as a historical responsibility and because of their economic capacity.

Claiming that this pro-climate society would lead to a drop in the standard of living forgets that living in sufficiently large quality housing in an apartment block with local services (nurseries, schools, food, etc.) within walking distance and surrounded by green spaces (playground, nature park, community gardens) with easy access to free, frequent, comfortable, electric public transport to the smallest village provides more well-being and at a much cheaper price (without the burden of

a private solo car) than a bungalow in a remote suburb. The loss of enjoyment, defined as accumulated wealth and power of domination, would only be that of the 1% and 10% in tow, the almost sole responsible for excess GHGs.

It is the task of the 90% to strip their control of wealth and drive out of government this deadly capitalist elite and its minions to take control of strategic sectors of the economy such as finance, energy, transport, communications, urban planning, food distribution, health and agricultural supervision to revolutionize the organization of society in ten years. The uprisings, armed or unarmed, which began in 2011 and which continue today in Sri Lanka, Ecuador, Myanmar (Burma), Ukraine and still in Palestine, under the pressure of the popular youth are the spearhead. When they will have understood that it is not enough to decapitate the authoritarian neoliberal regimes that are leading the world to ruin, but to destroy the capitalist and bureaucratic state that is its foundation in order to replace it with the power of self-organization emanating from places of work and study and from neighborhoods and villages, the world will have changed its basis and will be able to repel the final catastrophe.

Québec solidaire: Timid anti-inflation measures disconnected from an absent climate plan

For its election campaign, apart from the timid and defensive anti-inflationary measures mentioned in the introduction, Québec solidaire has promised to set up “a historic project of 50,000 social housing units” [42], commitment however not included in two subsequent press releases about social housing and never associated with their “energy-efficient” feature as stipulated by the not-yet-publicized 2022 election platform and nor associated with a term that is presumed to be five years given its connection to the platform. It would be necessary because the Liberals made the same ten-year commitment. Without their energy-efficient specificity, that is to say with (almost) zero energy consumption, these social housing units, which are presumed to be of a certain density, lose part of their pro-climate quality. To overcome the obstacle of the availability of land, the platform promises the expropriation of “urban land left vacant” but only for green spaces.

Québec solidaire has no commitment regarding the cost of gasoline, the spearhead of the surge in inflation. According to IRIS, in Quebec “[d]irect energy spending explains more than 52% of the excess annual inflation observed since the start of the pandemic. [43]. While wages do not rise or barely manage to keep up with the rise in prices, “companies seem to have largely taken advantage of the context of inflation to raise their prices. This maneuver would have allowed them to reap record profits while contributing to the acceleration of inflation. [...] In the first quarter of 2022, after-tax profits for all businesses represented 18.8% of GDP, an all-time high. [...] Companies [have] earned more than \$91 billion in additional net profits over the past year. The raw materials sector stands out with an additional net profit of around 60 billion.”

In the absence of constitutional power to control the price of gasoline and food, there remains the possibility and the need to tax 100% the superprofits of oil companies and other profiteers of inflation to finance rebates for the price of gasoline while claiming, as we have seen, a wall-to-wall public transport system that is free, hydroelectric, frequent to the smallest village by 2030 and a complement of inexpensive car-sharing. Is this the “gigantic public transport project to allow all Quebecers to abandon their cars if they wish within a few years” that Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois revealed during an interview with La Presse? [44]? More worrying, however, is tackling the housing crisis “by reinvent[ing] home ownership for young families” without even mentioning social housing.

And what about the inflationary and retrograde carbon markets and taxes, which arouse “gilets

jaunes” outcries, to which Québec solidaire does not oppose nor does it oppose subsidies for private electric vehicles at the heart of the new extractivism and mass consumption renewal. Ditto for food, on which Québec solidaire remains silent: Tax 100% of the excess profits of companies in the food sector to finance a rationing of essential non-meat products (cereals, fruits and vegetables) at subsidized prices.

Break with the mirage of the PQ of René Lévesque more center-right than center-left

Very zen and confident, many among the Solidaire militancy compare the party to the so-called social-democratic Parti Québécois (PQ) of René Lévesque-Parizeau of the 60s-70s-80s versus the neoliberal Bouchard-Landry of the 90s-00s that has finally become the identity one of Boisclair-Marois-Lisée. But facts are stubborn. "In 1979, the government of René Lévesque will have recourse, like its predecessor, to special laws against certain unions (for example, the withdrawal of the right to strike at the Common Front) [45]. Should this be seen as a reason for the failure of the 1980 referendum? The PQ has been neoliberal authoritarian since 1982 with the 20% cut in public sector wages and tutti quanti [46], a “feat” never repeated by any other Canadian party since then.

Regardless of its pro-Aboriginal blabla, René Lévesque’s PQ stood out for its brutal “salmon war” in 1981-82 [47] against the Mi’gmaq of Listuguj and the Innu of Nistassinan. It took René Lévesque, then the only deputy of the PQ in 1969, the popular pressure of the important pro-French mobilization during the crisis of Saint-Léonard [48], so that it gives up defending the assimilator free choice of the language of instruction. Should we add the proverbial submissiveness of René Lévesque vis-à-vis the economic and linguistic domination of the English-speaking minority [49] including its Jewish component [50] by its confusion between rejection of anti-Semitism and “a certain admiration for the State of Israel”.

The PQ, which came from the nationalist wing of the Liberals, like Mario Dumont’s ADQ later, has always been a (petit-)bourgeois party whose primary goal was to strengthen Quebec Inc., a project that failed miserably and which the CAQ-ADQ has given up returning to a federalist neoliberalism with an identity flavor. To take as a reference or as a model the so-called “social-democratic” PQ of René Lévesque would be for Québec solidaire to sink into authoritarian neoliberalism, in proportion to the intensity of the economic and social crisis worsened by the climate crisis, once head of government regardless of the soothing center-left rhetoric that the party holds today. The alternative is the anti-capitalist path implied in the program, glimpsed in the electoral platform not yet made public but completely absent from the speeches of the spokespersons and deputies.

The internationalist immigration test that Québec solidaire does not pass

The current trajectory of Québec solidaire leads it straight to this centrist cul-de-sac. The party, now a second opposition, never had to undergo the test of being the government or even the official opposition. What will happen if the next elections change all that? To find out, it is not necessary to wait but to make the party pass the immigration test. The CAQ restricts it by reducing it to the strict minimum of 50,000 a year, a little more in the short term to make up for the pandemic delay but it is rarely mention that it favors just like Ottawa but more than any other province a temporary immigrated labor force [51] without the possibility of access to citizenship. Thus, it hopes to satisfy the Conseil du patronat, which wants up to 100,000 people per year to solve the labor shortage resulting from low wages in a context of population ageing. Faced with this sleight of hand on the backs of immigrants to resolve the contradiction between the neoliberal bourgeoisie and the

identity-based petty bourgeoisie, the left, including Québec solidaire, tends to dodge the problem, that is to say to stick with the CAQ policy.

A left-wing solution would be to agree with the target of the Conseil du patronat on the basis however of permanent immigration in the radical spirit of the free movement of people, and under left-wing working conditions, that is a strengthening of labor legislation and collective agreements in the public sector, as well as the facilitation of unionization in low-wage sectors (catering, retail trade, agriculture, domestic work). Thus, the left in an internationalist spirit would avoid the nationalist-identity trap... while strengthening the nation through the demographic, economic and cultural contribution of immigration and fully taking into account the rise of refugees due to climate, wars and of economic collapse.

A Solidarity horizon of green capitalism that leads to the abyss of the “Hothouse Earth”

We are a month away from October 3 and there is still no Solidaire plan stipulating how to “reduce Quebec’s emissions by at least 55% compared to 1990 levels by 2030, by getting as close as possible to the 65% target encouraged by social movements” as voted by the November 2021 convention and clearly included in the 2022 platform... and finally mentioned by Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois in his interview with La Presse while pledging to make known the necessary measures early in the election campaign. Not to mention that such a plan, which cannot be other than audacious, not to say revolutionary, needs time to be popularized, discussed and assimilated. We are light years away from an ecofeminist society of taking care of people like of mother earth, which ensures full ecological employment of “buen vivir” and free time, therefore reduction of time of work. That is not at all the horizon to which Québec solidaire invites the people of Quebec. The party does not have the courage to raise taboo subjects such as subsidies for electric vehicles, the ban on the construction of single-family homes and townhouses, and that of the meat diet but also of 5G technology and pseudo motorized leisure of particularly polluting two-stroke engines that infest our forests, lakes and lawns to be converted into gardens. Should it be noted that this new way of life would be the most anti-inflationary there is.

Québec solidaire is reduced to inviting the people of Québec to change everything so that nothing changes either to an all-electric green capitalism that ensures the continuation of material growth to guarantee the Moloch of capitalist accumulation. This will result in the renewal of mass consumption based on electric vehicles and general 5G connectivity accessible to the rich and middle classes and on gargantuan CO₂ capture and sequestration technologies, which have not proven themselves, and even on the sorcerer’s apprentice modification of the atmosphere and the oceans despite the fact that the Solidaire program “[rejects] the means of action which would lead us towards maintaining the status quo, such as the false technical solutions which do not involve real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions (agrofuels, geo-engineering, carbon storage, etc.)”. This relaunch of capitalism after-me-the-deluge, largely subsidized by governments, requires permanent austerity leading inevitably to a reinforcement of social polarization and its corollary of authoritarian and identity-based governance.

Vote Québec solidaire and take to the streets with the Workers for Climate Justice

If we have to vote for the least bad, so much the CAQ government embodies the most traditional neoliberalism without ecological concerns and tinged with a barely veiled racism, that the new

Conservative party exposes without embarrassment its ultra-right program of wall-to-wall privatization, that the Liberals, reduced to their Anglophone and ultra-federalist base, are ready to promise everything, including populist tax cuts just like the CAQ and the Conservatives, and that the moribund PQ has come to the end of its forfeiture, remains to bet on the social mobilization to which the Workers for Climate Justice (TJC) invite us in the middle of the official electoral campaign.

TJC together with the organization La Planète s'invite au Parlement, responsible for the major pre-pandemic climate demonstrations, call for a "Global Strike for Climate Justice", as promoted by Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Futur, in Montreal, Quebec, Gatineau, Sherbrooke, L'Assomption on September 23. In a horizon of climate justice and social justice, this demonstration demands "a complete exit from fossil fuels by 2030" including its consumption and "a massive taxation of wealth, and a massive reinvestment in social programs and services." So far, eight CEGEP teacher unions have approximately 5,000 members and one student employee union also with 5,000 members have voted or announced a participation vote. Expect several such votes in late August and September.

Integrating rank-and-files demands and rallying to consensus would facilitate mobilization

Although the radical nature of the demands are in line with the climate emergency explained by the IPCC-UN, one can think that they could be articulated with more immediate demands for mobilization on the ground, including those for example for the L'Assomption nature park in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve district of Montreal, which means the expropriation of the property of the rail-truck transshipment company Ray-Mont Logistique and also the allocation for this purpose of the fallow land of the Ministère des Transports, Hydro-Québec and Canadian National, to which the Montreal component of the mobilisation agreed. We also think of many other local struggles for the preservation of wetlands and urban woodlands... and the inevitable rejection of the third link of the City of Quebec under the St. Lawrence River. This kind of dialectic of demands makes it possible to maximize mobilization.

It must be admitted, however, that the key demand for a complete phasing out of fossil fuels by 2030 is problematic as both too much and too little radical. Too radical because it is more demanding and above all more inflexible than the IPCC, which demands a 50% reduction by 2030, which translates, given the historical responsibilities and the economic capacity of the former industrialized countries, into a reduction of 65% for the Quebec according to the Canadian Climate Action Network [52] which was joined by the Quebec Federation of Labor (FTQ), Équiterre, Greenpeace, Nature-Québec, the David Suzuki Foundation and Oxfam-Québec [53] and that Québec solidaire followed with a caveat.

This formulation unnecessarily repels to certain social movements and also to Québec solidaire, which risks by reaction to water down the claim by returning to the non-compromising flatness of the climate emergency which does not commit to anything. In addition, this claim is ambiguous vis-à-vis green capitalism because it opens the door to electric vehicles whose energy is derived from hydroelectricity and nuclear while GHG reductions with target and deadline are holistic. This formulation in terms of hydrocarbons is all the more surprising on the part of TJC that the organization had the good idea, in view of the next round of negotiations of the entire public sector which will begin immediately after the elections of October 3, to propose a collective agreement clause in terms of a GHG reduction target, to be determined, by 2030 combined with an annual reduction target applicable to workplaces.

Even if it is narrow, the path is marked

A success of the climate strike-demonstration of September 23 combined with a strengthening of the climate positions of Québec solidaire, in connection with the fight against inflation, could result in a defeat or at least a serious setback for the CAQ — which would make the current polls lie — so as to prepare the ground for a rematch of the great Common Front of more than half a million union members for an employed population of 4.4 million. Even if it is narrow, the path is traced.

Marc Bonhomme, August 18, 2022 updated on August 27

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