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Quebec

# **'Unify the political left without sidestepping the needed debates!'**

- Features -

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**A leading Québécois activist and editor, Bernard Rioux was interviewed by André Frappier in a recent issue of *Nouveaux Cahiers du Socialisme*. My translation is followed by links to a key article by Bernard also available in English. Footnotes are by NCS unless initialled by me. – Richard Fidler**

Bernard Rioux is well known as the editor of *Presse-toi à gauche!* But his activist journey began more than 50 years ago. We asked him to talk to us about his experience in all these years of activism in the Quebec left. This is not only a personal assessment, but also the assessment of an activist generation.

**André Frappier - Can you tell us about your early youth, what influenced you culturally and politically?**

Bernard Rioux - I was born in 1949 in Matane. My childhood took place on a farm, in a self-subsistence economy. I was associated with farm work from a very young age. My maternal grandparents lived with us, uncles and aunts as well: a real extended family. My father had married his neighbor. Over the years, the parents of my father and mother had given parts of their land to their children. Thus, along five or six kilometers of Boulevard Desjardins, there were many cousins all part of an extensive family group.

The family was very religious; every evening, we followed the rosary on the radio. I attended schools run by the Ursulines and the Clerics of Saint-Viateur.

My father left school in grade 2, my mother in grade 6. In addition to working on the farm, my father worked as a truck driver in Gaspésie and as a lumberjack on the North Shore. Often, he would leave for several months while my mother organized -the household. She raised a family of seven children.

When I was 11 years old, in 1960, the family moved to Sept-Îles to join my father who had settled there a few months earlier and where he had found work as a car salesman. For me it was a real quiet revolution: an urban environment, a city of workers who came from all over Quebec and elsewhere. It was also the break with the rest of the family. I soon made reading the center of my universe and this was to be determinative for my future concerns.

During my high school studies at Gamache school in Sept-Îles, I decided to break with the Catholic Church. I defined myself as an atheist, going against the beliefs -of my entire family; this was a first source of radicalization. I read some Marxist texts and was interested in history.

In 1966, Pierre Bourgault came to Sept-Îles to run as a candidate for the Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale (RIN) in Duplessis riding. His speeches confirmed my independentism. beliefs. Although he was not elected he obtained 52% of the votes in the city of Sept-Îles. While I was studying at the Université de Montréal, I worked for two summers maintaining the railway lines in Sept-Îles to help pay for my studies. We could clearly see -the class difference: the yellow helmets were simple workers, French speakers; the white helmets, their hierarchical superiors, were all English speakers. The managers of the Iron Ore Company of Canada or the Quebec North Shore and Labrador Railway Company of Canada were predominantly English-speaking. When I saw the 135 wagons filled with ore passing by, heading towards the port of Sept-Îles, several times a day, I clearly sensed the pillage to which Quebec was being subjected... My independentism was from the outset anti-imperialist. This is why I was never attracted to the Parti québécois (PQ).

### **AF - What were your first activist involvements?**

BR - In 1967, I moved to begin studying at the Université de Montréal. My social and political interests led me to the social sciences, particularly -anthropology. I had to take a foundation course, a preparatory course for university studies set up by the Faculty of Social Sciences, because there was not yet a CEGEP [junior college] in Sept-Îles.

Very quickly I began to become political and to immerse myself in the whirlwind of mobilizations. In the fall of 1968, there was the occupation of the CEGEPs to demand in particular the opening of a second French-language university in Montréal in order to make way for -the numerous CEGEP graduates. The Faculty of Social Sciences at the Université de Montréal was occupied as well. Everything seemed possible. There was the "French May" that same year. Repression came crashing down on the CEGEP movement, but mobilizations continued to proliferate on the national level and in the trade unions.

In the fall of 1969, shortly after the McGill Français demonstrations, [\[1\]](#) I participated in my first demonstration, the one against "Bill 63" which brought together more than 60,000 people in the streets of Quebec. [\[2\]](#) It was a time of many demonstrations and strikes that were critical of the university institution among others.

In 1970, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) struck a major blow with two kidnappings. Its political manifesto was read over Radio-Canada's television network. Pierre Elliot Trudeau proclaimed the War Measures Act and the army entered Quebec. I went to all the meetings organized to denounce this military occupation of Quebec.

During the same period, we witnessed a rise in worker struggles. During the La Presse conflict in 1971, many students took part in a large demonstration organized by the trade unions. Riot police were seen clubbing locked-out workers. It was also the time of the political action committees (CAP) and I joined the one in Villeray. I then contacted the Mouvement progressiste italo-québécois (MPIQ), led by left-wing intellectuals who were publishing the monthly newspaper *Il Lavoratore* with a circulation of 3,000. But I continued -to campaign at the university. I left the MPIQ, attracted by the Groupe marxiste révolutionnaire (GMR), which was active at the university and composed mainly of students.

### **AF - Why did you choose to join a Trotskyist organization, and in particular the Fourth International?**

BR - I had read the publications of the Ligue communiste (founded in 1969 in France) and I was attracted by this current, which defined itself as revolutionary Marxist. So I started to campaign with the GMR which was involved in the formation of student committees for Quebec-Chile solidarity. The GMR defended the need to build an international organization, the Fourth International. And it was independentist. It was also a feminist organization that supported the building of an autonomous women's movement. This programmatic profile completely corresponded to my vision of the world. On May 1, 1974, I participated in the occupation of the Chilean consulate organized by the student committees of solidarity with Chile initiated by the GMR.

The prospect of belonging to an international organization has always seemed essential to me -in the era of capitalist globalization. That the essential problems of humanity can be solved on a local or national basis has always seemed to me to be a mistaken view. The Fourth International's publication *Inprecor* was regular reading. We also received visits from activists of the 4th such as Ernest Mandel, Alain Krivine, Éric Toussaint, etc. The preparatory discussions for the international congresses were the opportunity for important debates.

In 1976 François Cyr, later one of the founders of the Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme, and I participated in the congress of the Socialist Workers Party in Oberlin, Ohio; there were 1,200 delegates. The SWP was an unofficial section of the Fourth International because -American law prevented political parties from being members of an

international. It was impressive to come into contact with the culture of the American left.

### **AF - What criticism did you make of the Maoist movement?**

BR - With the Sino-Soviet crisis and the denunciation of China as revisionist-, a Maoist current had developed on an international scale. In Quebec, it influenced CAP activists in different neighborhoods of Montréal and groups began to form: En Lutte and the Ligue communiste-marxiste-léniniste, which soon became the Parti communiste ouvrier (PCO). This current never attracted me. Soon, the Maoist organizations turned toward Stalinism. This incomprehension of the reality of Stalinism and the degeneration of the Russian revolution seemed to me to be an unacceptable shortcoming. Initially, En Lutte was pro-independence, but it soon broke with this position in the name of the fight against the policies of the PQ and its influence in the union movement.

### **AF - What was the mindset of this activist generation?**

BR - All the excitement of this period and its many mobilizations led -to an exaggerated assessment of the possibilities for social transformation. The development of a revolutionary process was anticipated in the coming years.

### **AF - But what were the concrete prospects for the development of the GMR?**

BR - The essentially student composition of the GMR became an obstacle to its development; we thought we would become a core strong enough to attract activists from the union movement. We soon came to understand that this party-building tactic [tactique de construction] was leading nowhere. It was necessary to carry out a turn and establish ourselves in the labor movement, particularly in the public sector, and beginning in the hospitals. The GMR then created a fraction [groupe d'intervention] in the public sector. In 1974, I left teaching to go to work at Sainte-Justine hospital in the -laundry department. It was quite difficult and I gave up this job after a few months.

From 1975, the GMR set its sights on building branches beyond Montréal. That was when I moved to Québec with a woman comrade to form a new branch of the organization-. In January 1976, I found a job teaching social sciences at the Cégep de Sainte-Foy, then at the Cégep Limoilou. This place is a bit of a crossroads for the left. We met activists from the Office of Political Prisoners of Chile. Some joined us. Little by little, we managed to build a GMR group in Québec. Soon, a bookstore was opened to distribute the Marxist literature brought in from Paris and Beijing.

### **AF - Why was so much importance given at the time to union struggles and the “turn to the workers”?**

BR – Between 1971 and 1976 there was a rise in workers' struggles. The trade union centrales (federations) published manifestos. The CSN published *Il n'y a plus d'avenir pour le Québec dans le système économique actuel* [Quebec has no future in the current economic system] and *Ne comptons que sur nos propres moyens* [It's Up to Us]. The FTQ published *L'État, rouage de notre exploitation* [The State is the tool of our exploitation] and the CEQ *L'école au service de la classe dominante* [The school serves the ruling class]. [3] These positions nourished our hope that a new world was emerging. The high point of these mobilizations was the struggle of the Common Front of the public sector of 1972 and the week of mobilizations in May 1972 against the imprisonment of the union leaders.

In the union centrales, debates developed around two tendencies: whether to work for the creation of a workers' party, or to give critical support to the PQ. The Maoists opposed both tendencies; they were building a revolutionary party.

The GMR viewed the building of a workers' party as a reformist deviation-. But in early 1976, its debates led it to break with an overestimation of the possibilities for a qualitative development of the anti-capitalist struggle. Although there was a rise in worker mobilization, we noted that the PQ had managed to turn it to its advantage. This led us to question our position on the workers' party. The GMR then adopted the perspective of a workers' party based on the unions. We participated in the initiatives undertaken by the Rassemblement des militants syndicaux (RMS, 1974-1979), an organization set up by the Groupe socialiste des travailleurs (GST)[5] to defend the need for the construction of a workers' party in the trade union movement. This debate on the workers' party was ultimately lost to what we called "the bureaucratic-PQ alliance," the PQ having managed to secure its influence in the union movement, particularly in its leadership.

### **AF - Wasn't the left beginning to be hegemonized by the Maoist organizations, En lutte and the Parti communiste ouvrier?**

BR - In 1976, the GMR had around 100 members. We understood that a revolutionary organization would be built not from a small core of militants but through a process of fusions and reunifications. The Maoist organizations, instead, had hegemonized some activist layers and overcome their dispersal by highlighting the importance of the party.

The imperative of a process of unification with the other Trotskyist organizations was posed, therefore; this led to the fusion with the League for Socialist Action/Ligue socialiste ouvrière (LSA/LSO), from which the GMR and the Revolutionary Marxist Group, the counterpart of the GMR in English Canada, had emerged. Simultaneously, our debate on the national question led us to consider the need to build an organization on a pan-Canadian scale. The Ligue ouvrière révolutionnaire/Revolutionary Workers' League (LOR/RWL), founded in 1977, brought together several hundred people and experienced significant growth. It became attractive to union activists. In addition, it produced two biweekly newspapers, one in English and one in French. This pan-Canadian orientation led us to define Quebec independence as an essential axis of our strategy for fighting our oppression by the Canadian state.

We intervened in the 1980 referendum campaign under the slogan Yes to independence, no to the PQ, for annulment. We made the struggle for class political autonomy – the break with the PQ – the center of our intervention, our uppermost concern being that the referendum asked if voters wanted to negotiate a new agreement with the rest of Canada. This position served to isolate us from the "independence and socialism" movement with which we identified, since the majority of this movement defended the critical Yes position in the referendum.

A factional struggle quickly developed within the new organization-, the LOR, concerning the turn to the working class. The members who came from the LSA/LSO, under the direct influence of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party, advocated a workerist turn -towards industry. In Quebec, this would have meant that members should leave their jobs in the public sector to go into the factories. The differences were presented by supporters of the turn to industry as a class struggle within the party. There were the "petit bourgeois" of the organization, mostly French-speaking, and the people from the LSA/LSO who were making the turn to industry. These internal battles poisoned the atmosphere and resulted in a split in 1980, three years after the fusion.

### **AF - But, wasn't it the whole of the political left which was going into crisis?**

BR – Indeed. The Maoist left entered a period of rapid demise. En Lutte dissolved in 1982 and the Parti communiste ouvrier in 1983. The anticapitalist militant layers disintegrated. Thinking of the struggle for socialism within the framework of Stalinism was not without causing significant difficulties: misunderstanding -of the Quebec national question, misunderstanding of the radicalization of women, establishment of authoritarian relationships with social movements, organizations marked by bureaucratic centralism. At another level, the slowdown of revolutionary processes in the world had led, for an entire generation of activists, to the crisis of activism itself.

The battle for the creation of a workers' party was lost. The union leaderships -obtained certain concessions from the Lévesque government during the first mandate of the PQ such as the anti-scab law and public auto insurance. But the defeat of the 1980 referendum dealt a hard blow to all the hopes for social transformation -as well as aspirations for sovereignty. In 1982, the PQ helped to destroy its alliance with the union movement by harshly attacking the public sector workers.

### **AF - Wasn't the launch of the Mouvement socialiste (MS) by the Comité des cent [Committee of One Hundred], despite everything, a new opening for the left?**

BR - When we left the LOR in 1980, we formed a new organization, Combat socialiste. However, we remained attached to a perspective -of regrouping and unity. In 1981, the Comité des cent published the Manifesto for a socialist, independent, democratic Quebec and for equality between men and women. [4] This initiative opened a new horizon for us at Combat Socialiste, in this period of retreat. We were quick to convince ourselves that we needed to be part of this movement, that we must be where the activists were gathering. Combat Socialiste therefore wrote to the Mouvement socialiste to indicate our desire to be part of the group and we told them that we would defend within it the positions of the Fourth International. But we received no acknowledgment of receipt. Combat socialiste dissolved. The Librairies rouges, our bookstores, were closed. Our publication, Combat socialiste, ceased to appear. We entered the Mouvement individually-. Our goal was not only to build our current, an ongoing concern, but also to build the Mouvement socialiste.

We were well aware that the people initiating the MS were social democrats -and that they hoped other elements of the trade-union leadership would join the movement. But that didn't happen. The period of rising struggles (1971-1979) was over. The MS adopted a ban on the formation of tendencies. We were in fact excluded. The need to build a unitary and pluralist socialist movement was not accepted; the MS leadership refused to open a real programmatic and strategic debate.

Fundamentally, the difficulties of the MS reflected the difficulties of the period, in a context of retreat and demobilization of the labour movement under the weight of the crisis and the crushing defeat imposed by the PQ on the union movement in the public sector.

### **AF - How to continue in such a period of retreat?**

BR - I then wrote a short text, never published, entitled *Le désengagement politique et social* [Political and social disengagement]: "The crisis of activism is the form in which political and social disengagement first appeared. Since the end of the 1970s, this crisis has continued to recur and ultimately affect all sectors of the population engaged in any work of social transformation." The whole text aimed to show that it was only a period of reaction which was a recurring phenomenon in the history of the left, that a new rise in radicalization would return, and that we had to prepare to seize the opportunity. The intellectuals of the bourgeoisie were jubilant at the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. But a few years later, hopes for social transformation were reborn with the rise of the antiwar movement, then the alter-globalization movement at the end of the 1990s.

In Quebec, a whole generation of activists gave up because they were unable to diligently conduct the necessary analyses, because they did not know how to understand the political needs of the activists in the social movements. No doubt it was the programmatic coherence provided by the Fourth International that allowed us to continue the fight. At least that was my conviction. Unfortunately, the Fourth International maintained the same overestimation of the possibilities of revolutionary rupture.

In 1981, I lost my job at Cégep Limoilou where I always held precarious positions. I tried for several months to carry

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out the turn to industry, without success. At the end of 1984, I was living on social assistance, but in early 1985 I found work as a literacy teacher in adult education at the Quebec City Catholic school commission. I remained there until my retirement in 2010. I worked most often with those who were called "the pure," the ones who could barely read and write their names, people who had experienced a lot of difficulties and rejection. Their learning problems were multiple. It was in adult literacy that I really discovered my passion for teaching and that I developed a great interest in pedagogical advancements. That same year, I met Vickie, we had two children, Pascale and Sophie. This too is life-changing.

As a teacher, I was a delegate in the CSQ's local bodies and I published for several years in the local union newspaper, *Le Suivi global!*

### **AF - But the situation was also difficult for the small core of revolutionary Marxists that you represented...**

BR - What gave us strength and allowed us to continue were the programmatic achievements -of the Fourth International. Our social project was that of a socialist democracy, not a party that directs everything as the Maoists defended. Respect for the democracy of the social movements in which we intervened was fundamental for us. The women's movement was not considered an obstacle to the building of the party, on the contrary. These positions nourished our coherence and allowed us to get through difficulties.

In 1985, I attended with a woman comrade the 12th congress of the Fourth International in Rimini, Italy. Hearing Pakistani, Indian, Colombian, Japanese, French, Italian, North American and other comrades share their experiences of struggle gave us the full measure of what these exchanges could bring and concretized what true internationalism meant.

Through our transition to the *Mouvement socialiste* we had lost our links with revolutionary Marxists in the rest of Canada. But we had not abandoned our plan to form a pan-Canadian organization. After a few years of exchanges and contacts, we founded a new organization, *Gauche socialiste/Socialist Challenge Organization*, present in Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Montréal and Québec. But we continued to pursue the objective of a broader regrouping of the left in Quebec.

### **AF - How was *Gauche socialiste* able to realize its desire to unify the left of Quebec at that time?**

BR - The adoption by the NPD-Québec [\[5\]](#) of the goal of Quebec independence, and the openness of Paul Rose, the NPD-Québec leader, to accommodation of the left in the party without requiring that member organizations dissolve encouraged us to carry out this new turn. *Gauche socialiste* entered the NPD-Québec as a component of the party, and in the Quebec elections of 1989, some of our members ran as candidates of this party. We helped to redefine the programmatic and strategic bases of the NPD-Québec and its transformation into the *Parti de la démocratie socialiste* (PDS). I was at the time responsible for maintaining the PDS website.

### **AF - The process deepened with the initiative of *L'aut'* journal and the *Regroupement pour l'alternative politique (RAP)*...**

BR - At the turn of the 2000s, there was the mobilization against the U.S. government's move to impose a Free Trade Area of the Americas. A large demonstration of 60,000 people took place at the Summit of the Americas in Québec in 2001. A new period of rising struggles began. On May 1, 2004, more than 100,000 workers took to the streets to say no to the neoliberal policies of the Liberal government of Jean Charest.



In the discussions leading to the founding of the PDS, we defended our conception -of democracy, including the recognition of different political currents, the idea of spokespersons instead of leaders, arrangements allowing the inclusion of women in the life of the party. The Gauche socialiste members had given this a lot of thought. This helped to give the Union des forces progressistes (UFP) party a particular profile when it was founded in 2003, and was also a legacy passed on to Québec solidaire. I was a member of the national coordination of the UFP, and I worked on defining the party's position on the constituent assembly. In 2005, I wrote, in collaboration with Denise Veilleux, a document entitled Trouver ensemble les contours d'un Québec indépendant. [\[6\]](#)

The process of unifying the left proceeded further with the initiative of the left-sovereigntist newspaper L'aut'journal to hold a symposium on this subject. We participated in the symposium as a component of the PDS, like the entire left motivated by the desire for unity. And we participated in a symposium later organized by the Regroupement pour l'alternative politique (RAP). Negotiations were undertaken for an eventual fusion of the PDS, the Parti communiste du Québec (PCQ) and the RAP. This fusion resulted in the creation of the UFP.

However, Pierre Dubuc, the editor of L'aut'journal, and Marc Laviolette, a former president of the CSN, were quick to mount opposition to these processes. In 2004, they launched Syndicalistes et progressistes pour un Québec libre (SPQ-Libre) as a club within -the PQ. Instead of appealing to trade union members to join the UFP, they called on them to join the PQ. "They just chose the wrong party," I wrote in a polemic against this initiative. PQ leader Pauline Marois eventually excluded this political club from the PQ, in 2010, but Dubuc and Laviolette remained in the PQ.

During this period, the UFP ran some candidates in elections and we moved towards a fusion with Françoise David's Option citoyenne party to form Québec Solidaire in 2006. We had learned some lessons from the past. We proposed a very broad programmatic orientation in the declaration of principle, which made it possible to include all currents.

### **AF - Did the fusion process of the Union des forces progressistes and Option citoyenne also take the fast track?**

BR - Drawing conclusions from the rejection by Lucien Bouchard's PQ government of most of the demands of the World March of Women in 2000, Françoise David had raised the need for a feminist political party. With the creation -of the D'abord solidaires movement, the first steps were taken in that direction. But there was a continuing debate over whether to build a social movement or build a party. Ultimately, Françoise David opted for the founding of a party, which would be called Option citoyenne. At first, this new organization did not necessarily consider itself independentist, but it did eventually adopt this position.

The fusion between the UFP and Option citoyenne to form Québec solidaire was ultimately achieved -through adoption of a very general declaration of principles leaving open the entire process of defining the program, which was to extend over ten years!

### **AF - Why did the process of developing the QS program take ten years?**

BR - When we began the process of developing the program, we had two choices: to clarify our political positions on some questions such as our conception of socialism and our relationships with the main currents of the international socialist movement -or to opt for a program centered on specific demands for the various sectors of our society. We had learned lessons from our past experiences. If we started with ideological debates, we would quickly provoke polarization, which would not really reinforce the new organization.

We opted for what was most exciting, which was to initiate a process of programmatic development by seeking to involve the members as widely -as possible through a process of repeated back-and-forth debate.



However, from a certain point on, the absence of any discussion of an ideological nature prevented us from reaching a clearly defined strategic direction and from specifying the political alternative that we were proposing to Quebec society. This was a weakness in the approach which would become apparent later.

### **AF - Why did you launch the Réseau écosocialiste [Ecosocialist Network] in Québec Solidaire?**

BR - The August 2012 Gauche socialiste conference adopted the perspective of launching an ecosocialist network. The idea was to counter an orientation that neglected intervention in social movements and to promote an orientation toward a break with capitalism. The idea was to unite the various anticapitalist collectives within the party around this approach. The Réseau écosocialiste, created in 2013, advanced the need for Québec solidaire to define itself as a party aspiring to form a government that would break with capitalist society and to try to build a party that is active in the social movements. To do this, it was necessary to build activist networks in QS. This is why the militants of the Réseau écosocialiste, [\[7\]](#) along with others, set up the Réseau militant écologiste (RME) and the Réseau militant intersyndical (RMI).

### **AF - After the 2014 election Québec solidaire was at a crossroads, wasn't it?**

BR – The party's electoral base increased from one election to another, but in 2014 it polled only 7.63% of the votes, a small increase from the previous election (6%), although it did manage to elect Manon Massé, its second deputy (after Amir Khadir). For some, this progress was too slow. If we wanted to make a qualitative leap and think about -taking power, we had to make changes in the party's electoral practices. The report of the Coordination Committee proposed a series of leads: single out winnable constituencies, professionalize communication strategies, define platforms with more concrete proposals, question the importance given to independence, choose candidates not primarily according to their involvement in social movements, but above all according to their notoriety. Applying these proposals, the party made a qualitative leap in 2018, electing 10 deputies. QS spokesman Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois expertly implemented this orientation.

### **AF - Aren't there some unresolved debates in Québec solidaire?**

BR - Relations with the PQ, the definition of secularism, our conception of the constituent assembly-, our relations with the social movements, the anti-racism struggle and the relative importance of Quebec independence are debates that come up regularly. For example, in 2017 a QS congress debated for the third time the party's relationship to the PQ. Rejecting any [electoral] alliance with the PQ were the members of the Réseau écosocialiste, along with other delegates. Once again, after about a year of discussions in different bodies, QS took an unequivocal position against any alliance with the PQ, which allowed us to elect 10 deputies and not to go down with the PQ, as Paul Cliche asserted in his book: "This type of electoral pact would not only have stopped the development of QS in constituencies where it did not run candidates, it would also have endangered its survival." [\[8\]](#)

Debates on the environment constantly arise on issues such as support for carbon trading, the carbon tax, and on reducing the target for greenhouse gas emissions. In this area, the ecosocialist positions defended by the Réseau militant écologiste have been outvoted. I report these debates in detail in issue 28 of NCS. [\[9\]](#)

### **AF - Why did you launch Presse-toi à gauche! ?**

BR – When it was founded in 2006, Québec solidaire did not provide itself with any independent press. The QS website aims to disseminate party positions and, in the part reserved for members, to encourage exchanges between members. The newspaper La Gauche socialiste was not widely distributed and its site, which I maintained, remained relatively unknown. It was absolutely necessary to build a site which would constitute a real forum for debate which

the Quebec left greatly needed if it was to respond to the challenges of the period. Presse-toi à gauche! was launched in 2006 by a team of activists of different tendencies, most of whom were active in Gauche socialiste. But the team quickly expanded. At the beginning, we even hoped to also publish a paper version, but this goal was abandoned after the publication of two issues.

Presse-toi à gauche! is based on a short platform that defines the publication as anti-capitalist, feminist, ecological, independentist and internationalist. We wanted it to be a site for debate and information that stands in solidarity with Québec solidaire. And we hoped that QS would use Presse-toi à gauche! to conduct its debates and encourage the expansion of its audience.

At the beginning, we wanted to be a forum for the left on the move. Now, we are more a media outlet that publishes a wide range of articles concerning Quebec, Canadian and international politics -as well as news releases from social movements and union centrales. It is in fact a platform as we would have liked a Québec solidaire publication to be, a publication that gives priority to intervention and mobilization with the social movements. Activists in the unions, the environmentalist, feminist and popular movements, and some intellectuals provided us with contributions.

Presse-toi à gauche accompanies debates on the programmatic development of QS and does not hesitate to take a position as a collective or as activists. This is not too appreciated by the leadership of QS, because we do not put our critical thinking aside.

We have been publishing weekly for 17 years. We can count nearly 10 million visits to our site; these now exceed 2000 clicks per day. Presse-toi à gauche reports on the struggles of social movements, conducts interviews, publishes videos, reproduces articles from various media outlets around the world and does extensive translation work -to broaden its coverage. We work hard to provide information and stimulate debate. As time has gone by and the climate crisis has developed, we have taken positions that are more and more clearly ecosocialist.

### **AF - What are your projects now?**

BR – Ecosocialism and mobilization to block GHG emitting projects seem essential to me. In short, this mobilization must aim to stop the ecological and social destruction due to capitalism. As Brazilian activist Chico Mendes said: "Environmentalism without class struggle is gardening!"

### **AF - How do you view the recovery of the left?**

BR - We must completely rethink the meaning and ends of the battle for the independence -of Quebec. The current situation of climate chaos calls on us to define a new conception of the nation's territory. The independence of Quebec must be presented as that of a territory liberated for the terrestrial community to use the expression of Achille Mbembe, a Cameroonian historian. This implies a radical break with conservative nationalism. We must conceive of independence -within a truly decolonial and cosmopolitical horizon. This is thinking to which I hope to be able to devote myself.

More than ever we are in a situation where, as they say, it is not necessary to wait before acting. A first step is to bring together the entire ecosocialist milieu and make that the perspective of all anti-systemic social movements.

Also by Bernard Rioux

Les organisations marxistes-révolutionnaires au Québec depuis le début des années 70

English translation: Revolutionary Marxist Organizations in Quebec Since the Early 1970s

## [Life on the left](#)

PS:

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[1] Faced with the anticipated lack of French-language university placements, the students mounted a huge campaign including a demonstration in Montréal on March 28, 1969, to make McGill a French-language university.

[2] "Bill 63" was Quebec legislation that called for French schooling for the children of immigrants, but did not make it mandatory. It was enacted in response to mobilizations for French-only public education in a Montréal suburb where many Italian immigrants tended to enrol their children in English schools.

[3] English translations of some of these documents can be found in Daniel Drache (ed.), *Quebec – Only the Beginning: The Manifestoes of the Common Front* (Toronto: New Press, 1972). CSN: Confédération des syndicats nationaux. FTQ: Fédération des travailleurs du Québec. CEQ: Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec, later the Centrale des syndicats du Québec. (RF)

[4] An English translation is available here: <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/13917>

[5] The NPD-Québec was a provincial party associated with the federal New Democratic Party but autonomous from it.

[6] This is apparently the text published in *La Gauche*, without attribution of authors, as "Une Assemblée constituante pour tracer ensemble les contours d'un Québec indépendant," [<https://www.lagauche.ca/Une-Assemblee-constituante-pour-tracer-ensemble-les-contours-d-un-Quebec>=>  
<https://www.lagauche.ca/Une-Assemblee-constituante-pour-tracer-ensemble-les-contours-d-un-Quebec>].

[7] Bernard Rioux, "Une démarche politique qui refuse une véritable radicalité," [Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme, no. 28, Fall 2022](#).

[8] Paul Cliche, *Un militant qui n'a jamais lâché* (Montréal, Varia, 2018), p. 412.

[9] Bernard Rioux, "Une démarche politique qui refuse une véritable radicalité," [Nouveaux Cahiers du socialisme, no. 28, Fall 2022](#).