

The Eco-Socialist Network Is Ready to Move into Action

By Bernard Rioux, Tuesday, March 12, 2013

On Saturday, March 9, it was with enthusiasm that more than 75 male and female militants of Quebec Solidaire, coming from different regions of Quebec, met in Montreal to found the Eco-Socialist Network. Participating in its launch were members of some existing collectives within QS, such as Critical Mass, Socialist Left, Socialist Alternative, and International Socialism. But it was – by far – militants who were not members of any collective who were the most numerous. The meeting was able to adopt a basis of unity and some by-laws, as well as electing an executive. Far from a simple ideological regroupment, the Network defined itself above all as a centre for initiatives, geared toward action.

The Assembly was opened by four panelists who provided much-appreciated contributions on eco-socialist fundamentals, the major ecological concepts, the role of social movements in the process of social transformation, and the eco-socialist experience in different parties on the left of the left, particularly in Europe.

What Are the Bases of Unity and Action of the Eco-Socialist Network?

After the presentation of the document on the basis of unity, the assembly followed up by discussing its analysis, then put forward a series of proposed amendments.

Let us summarize the main points of the basis of unity. They identify a triple crisis in the period opened by the great recession of 2008: an economic crisis, an environmental crisis provoked by an unsustainable mode of production and consumption, and a crisis of democracy, emptied of all content by the omnipotence of the financial oligarchy. In sum, we live in a systemic, global crisis which demonstrates the impasse of contemporary capitalism, more and more incapable of responding to the fundamental needs of humanity.

Eco-socialism is a new political project which responds to this impasse. To get out of the current crises, it is necessary to put an end to the quest for maximum profit, to consumerism and to productivism. If eco-socialism undertakes to deepen and renew the emancipatory project of socialism in the conditions of the 21st century, it is distinguished from the "socialisms of the 20th," which failed as much on the ecological and democratic levels as on that of social justice. This is why it defines itself in terms of democracy, self-management, and egalitarianism, and rejects the green capitalism defended by social democracy, which pretends that it can get through the present ecological crisis without challenging the source of this crisis, capitalism itself. To that idea it is necessary to counterpose a democratically run economy that breaks with consumerism, along with the commodification and privatization of all areas of life. Eco-socialism poses the necessity to take part in the social and environmental struggles of all those who resist.

To re-organize the economy on a radically democratic basis, to renew democracy at all levels, to promote the convergence of social and political struggles — these are the essential conditions for

the realization of eco-socialist objectives. We must go from a situation where everything is privately owned to an ecological and participatory planning process, guided by the real needs of the people and by respect for eco-systems. We must break with production choices by the big owners of energy, mining, or industrial enterprises and by the banks, imposed solely for their own profit.

The basis of unity of the Eco-Socialist Network insists particularly on the necessity of linking Quebec Solidaire with social movements, not only by showing them a necessary solidarity, but by participating in their debates in order to define together common perspectives of resistance to the plans of big capital. To do this, Quebec Solidaire must create the means to put forward its ideas by tuning in to its militant members, who are located in the different social movements.

Some Tasks of the Eco-Socialist Network....

These tasks will be organized around the following axes:

- To become a centre for elaborating eco-socialist perspectives, in order to take part in the programmatic and tactical debates of Quebec Solidaire;
- To propose campaigns and activities against the dominant classes' anti-ecological and patriarchal policies of austerity;
- To defend democracy within the party and contribute to its deepening;
- To build and consolidate the presence of Quebec Solidaire in the different social movements and create structures facilitating this task;
- To stimulate debates and organizations around eco-socialist perspectives;
- To weave links with eco-socialist organizations around the world.

The debates highlighted a large unity of views on the proposed orientation. The discussion made explicit the fact that the eco-socialist current in the world was marked by a variety of sensibilities, but the proposed basis of unity were sufficiently flexible to bring these different sensibilities together. A good part of the discussions focused on reinforcing the anti-patriarchal dimension of the eco-socialism that we fight for. For the Network Assembly eco-socialism must also include among its dimensions struggles for the abolition of patriarchy. Establishing an eco-socialist society requires recognition of women's demands and of the necessity for fighting against patriarchy.

The By-Laws Gave Rise to Important Debates

The By-Laws defined the pre-requisites for becoming a member, the role and power of the general assembly as the supreme body of the network, the place of regional assemblies and of the inter-regional leadership. Regarding this last category the By-Laws defined the tasks of the Executive Committee and the division of labour within it.

The debates were focused primarily on two questions: the pre-requisites for membership in the Network and the statutory creation of working committees in which the militants can become involved.

The first of these questions was summed up as follows: "members of the Network are members of Quebec Solidaire who agree with the basis of unity and contribute to the finances and the activities of the Network.

It is a question of how open the Network is. If the previous paragraph sets as a task to work specifically for the development of Quebec Solidaire as a party of the street, it flows from this, according to the supporters of this option, that participation in the Network must be limited to members of Quebec Solidaire. For others, who stressed that the eco-socialist perspective could radiate more widely, it appeared desirable that any person who could define herself or himself as an eco-socialist would be able to join the Network. From the debate a compromise solution emerged: every member of Quebec Solidaire or anyone in political solidarity with the party would be able to join the Network. This is what has been adopted.

As regards working committees, the founding meeting decided to set up the following ones: a women's committee, a communications committee, and education committee, and a party of the street committee. The committees showed the militant will to engage in action as rapidly as possible. Furthermore, these committees, filled on a volunteer basis, recruited a good number of members, especially the party of the street committee.

The Election of the Executive

The version of the by-laws submitted to the discussion proposed to elect an executive committee "composed of six persons of whom at least three are women" and having to "assure representation to all the regions." In its determination to guarantee the best representation of the diverse militants, the assembly decided to enlarge to eight the number of committee members, of whom at least four are women. The election really gave us a surprise, which was very well received. In the end the executive will consist of 5 women and 3 men. Unfortunately, very valuable candidates were not elected, but there is no shortage of jobs to be done in the Network.

The Eco-Socialist Network: A Step Forward for the Left of the Left, A Step Forward for Quebec Solidaire

The founding of the Eco-Socialist Network is an important moment in the regroupment of the left of the left in Quebec. It is engrave as part of the process of unifying the political left in Quebec, which has been going on for more than a decade. It's going to be a step forward because it will reinforce the ability of Quebec Solidaire to insert itself into the debates and the battles which are essential to carry out in the face of the ecological crisis of the capitalist system and because it will help attract to the party sectors of youth who were radicalized during the Maple Spring.