
Canada

Economic growth wins in Quebec

by Dr. Pierre Beaudry

The April 24 landslide victory of the Parti Québécois in the Quebec provincial elections demonstrates the will of the French-Canadian population to reject "laissez-faire" economics and vote for a program of growth.

Less than a year ago, the fiery French-Canadian premier of Quebec, René Levesque, had lost his bid by referendum for the creation of a Sovereign Association status for the province. This failure to rally his fellow citizens has now been turned around. The April 14 results gave the PQ 80 seats against 42 seats for the Liberal party and none for the National Union Party. The PQ picked up significant support from the non-Francophone voters.

At the opening of his electoral campaign March 13, Prime Minister Levesque launched a strong attack on the Liberal Party's promotion of free enterprise economics to put through austerity. Levesque was replicating an attack earlier last month by French President Giscard on the economic disease of monetarism in his campaign for the presidency of France.

In early March, high-level ministerial officials in the PQ government began public discussions over the fact that the zero-growth birth rate in Quebec will mean that Quebec would have to import labor in 20 years.

Also in the first week of March, an economic summit was held between the PQ government and the administration of the City of Montreal along with other mayors and officials of the Montreal Urban Community, including the cities of Laval and Longueuil, and the North and South Shore communities. Notably, the federal government in Ottawa was excluded from the discussions.

The week-long conference drew up a plan to massively expand the port facilities from Montreal to Quebec City to Sept-Iles City. These three St. Lawrence River superports would provide Atlantic export facilities for industrial and agricultural output from the U.S. Midwest and Canada's prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Reports from officials in Quebec City indicated that they were viewing the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway as the major channels of transportation for grain and coal, especially to Europe, over the next decade. The Quebec government suggested

building 100 cargo boats for the St. Lawrence Seaway which would transfer their loads to oceangoing vessels at the superports.

Coupled with the port expansion program, which proposes removal of all federal government control over the port of Montreal, were plans for:

- the renovation of industrial parks in Montreal;
- the building of a major biomedical engineering research facility in the City of Laval, to be coupled with a Louis Pasteur Institute of France;
- the development of a regional and municipal mass transit system throughout the Montreal area—already approved with an investment of about 1.5 billion Canadian dollars, including the completion of the Montreal subway system, suburban transit-rail links, and the building of a high-speed line from Montreal to Mirabel International Airport;
- government financing of 50 to 75 percent of new, high-technology industries across the province;
- government funding of low-interest home loans up to \$10,000.

In a speech he gave in the city of Three-Rivers on March 20, Levesque emphasized the importance of government financing of new industries stating that "the governments of France, West Germany, Japan are all talking about research and development, are all making investments in R&D. Now, we in Quebec are only 6 million people, we may not all do basic research, but we have brains and what we are saying is that R&D is the direction we should go." In an interview with the *Montreal Gazette* newspaper in early April, Levesque said, "We think also that when there is something like the worst recession in the Western world, there was no reason to retrench the spending power for people. It is part of the necessary impetus you have to give to economic development when things are not going so well all over, that you don't compress peoples' spending power."

Perhaps the greatest weakness in the PQ program stems from its pandering to an antinuclear line fed from its own left wing. In fact the federally controlled Atomic Energy of Canada, Ltd. (AECL) has sabotaged progress on the three plants in Quebec, and refuses to give it the Candu reactor plan, because AECL representatives say the province may give it to the French government.

Beyond separatism

John Buchanan, prime minister of Nova Scotia, emphasized that Levesque won the elections on the basis of his economic opposition to the Trudeau policies. Minimally, this indicates the potential for a wider Canada fight against zero growth and Trudeau's constitutional reform proposal that would institutionalize Ottawa's no-growth policies by removing economic powers from the provinces. Voter response in Quebec is thus a signal that such support can be mobilized throughout the other provinces.