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Québec Solidaire's New Party-Movement Model: Stronger Organizational Power at the Cost of Deeper Democracy and Structural Power

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ABTRACT: Based on semi-directed interviews, this paper analyzes the recent changes in the political strategy of Québec Solidaire, characterized by a shift from a so-called "party of the ballots and the streets" to a new "party-movement". With the help of party-based campaigns between elections, this organizational model aims to expand the level of popular mobilization by facilitating the activism of party members and sympathizers through decentralized and easily accessible resources available on a digital platform. In addition, the proponents of this "party-movement" consider it a powerful means to radicalize social struggles beyond the weaknesses of certain social movements. Conversely, other interviewees see this party form as developing a new parallel structure that shortcuts the party's internal democratic structures and grassroots militant networks. We argue that QS's party-movement model may at best develop a strong organizational power but rooted in a weak structural power, thus risking being unable to alter the existing balance of class forces for wining bold reforms and implementing a post-capitalist transition in spite of capital's opposition.

KEYWORDS: Québec Solidaire; Radical Left Parties; Movement Parties; Digital Parties; Left Populism; Class Power.

Introduction

This article analyzes Québec Solidaire's (QS) new party-movement implemented since 2018. To build the party as an independent social actor in protest politics, this organizational model aims to expand the level of mobilization by the party membership and beyond through party-based campaigns enabled by resources easily accessible on a digital platform.

Two main schools of thought influenced QS's shift in political strategy. The first is left populism (Mouffe, 2000, 2016, 2018), which inspired notably France Insoumise (Hamburger, 2018; Marlière, 2019) and Podemos (Errejón et al., 2016; Kim, 2020). This approach advocates a discursive strategy centred around a charismatic leader, the construction of a unified "people" in opposition to an "elite" and the mobilization of popular affects to restore and radicalize democracy away from the depoliticizing neoliberal consensus. The second can be described as the "big organizing" strategy. Experimented and theorized by Bernie Sanders' campaign staff (Gautney, 2018; Lawrence, 2020), it helps resource poor organizations develop a volunteer mass base. A radical political project, combined with minimal barriers to active participation and the delegation of organizational responsibilities to "super-volunteers", encourage the commitment of sympathizers beyond formal members and party militants (Bond & Exley, 2016).

This study suggests that QS has developed a unique "party-movement" model, inspired both by left populism for its media communications and "big organizing" for its mobilization campaigns. Our research shows that this party form was implemented for achieving four interdependent objectives for taking power: 1) win demands between elections; 2) act as a

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radicalizing force inspiring the rejuvenation of Quebec's social movements; 3) create a crisis of legitimacy to posit QS as an electoral alternative; and 4) develop an extra-parliamentary wing to support a QS government in office.

Designing political campaigns to win demands between elections through mass mobilization are legitimate objectives that break with conventional electoralism. However, this party-movement appears limited for building leverage to win bold demands prior to taking power. Certain interviewees critique this strategy for developing a new parallel structure in control of strategic decision-making and operating outside the party's formal democratic structures and grassroots militant networks. Thus, this top-down approach is ill-suited to develop the creative capacities of party members and sympathizers needed for rebuilding the rank-and-file militancy of social movements. By approaching its social base as individual citizens of local ridings rather than as members of a class located at the point of production and social reproduction, this strategy ends up with limited leverage by failing to tap into the structural power this base potentially holds. In turn, this can only impede the radical left project of democratizing the economy and the state.

We begin by presenting a critical literature review on movement parties and QS. After laying out our methodological approach, we analyze the rationales behind QS' new "party-movement", followed by an overview of how these principles operated in practice within QS' extra-parliamentary campaigns since 2019. We conclude by assessing the shortcomings of this strategy in terms of its democratic limitations and of the limited social power it has managed to develop so far.

Movement Parties and Party-Movement Relationships

The revival of interest in radical left parties (RLP) and candidates broke with key arguments developed by social movement and party literatures during the 1980s and the 1990s. Social movements and parties were viewed as organizations operating within distinct institutional domains and representative of fundamentally different forms of politics: the former embodied a "new" protest politics based on "post-material" values and new participatory forms of decision-making (Offe, 2019) whereas the latter were associated with an "old" institutional politics removed from the life of civil society (Katz & Mair, 1995).

Research on new RLPs has challenged these claims by showing how these types of parties overlapped with the goals and practices of social movements (Della Porta et al., 2017; Tsakatika & Lisi, 2013). As Dufour (2009) argues, the relationship between social movements and political parties is better understood when distinguishing analytically the space of political action (i.e. parliamentary and extra-parliamentary) from the political agencies involved rather than associating a priori each institutional space with a distinct political agent.

The blurring frontiers between political parties and social movements are most recognized and researched by the literature on "movement parties" (Cervera-Marzal, 2018; Della Porta et al., 2017), defined as parties influenced by the modes of organization, ideologies, and repertoire of action of social movements. What still distinguished RLPs from social movements was their explicit goal of "taking" power, based on the recognition that nation-states and their parliamentary institutions remained a central arena where social conflicts were resolved between classes (Panitch et al., 2006).

According to Brenner (1985) and Piven & Cloward (1979), however, the participation of political parties to electoral systems and parliamentary regimes under capitalist liberal democracies faces significant constraints. Given that an electoral campaign is limited in time, the priority will be accorded to a more "centrist" electoral platform that can secure a majority of votes rather than

engage in more contentious proposals and patient transformative politics. Additionally, to preserve their parliamentary recognition, left parties will be pressured to reject disruptive forms of politics that have proven historically more transformative than electoral politics. Still, recent research recognized that the bureaucratization of RLPs was neither inevitable (Mudge & Chen, 2014), neither was bureaucratization an exclusive feature of political parties, since this process also affected various social movements (Bensaïd, 2009).

Historically, three main types of relationships developed between social movements and parties (Della Porta et al., 2017): 1) "vanguard", where parties control civil society groups from the top down through their ancillary organizations; 2) "electoral", where parties turn to the representatives and social bases of movements only during elections, in an effort often to coopt and deradicalize movements; 3) "organic", where linkages between parties and social movements are more blurred and cooperative, based on political, financial or logistical mutual supports. In this latter case, parties do not take part in movements but become a part of them. Whether through loose leadership, membership overlap or decentralized networks between movements' struggles and party initiatives, these ties can be used to recruit cadres and involve members into protest and party politics. The "organic" party-movement relationship produces a new political culture that fills the vacuum left by the decline of the mass party. In this way, RLPs are better positioned to legitimately present themselves as the credible allies of social movements (Della Porta et al., 2017; Keith, 2019; March & Keith, 2016; Tsakatika & Lisi, 2013).

Beyond "environmental" linkages, that is, the relations between the party and organized groups in civil society, we also need to analyze "participatory" linkages, namely relations between the party leadership and party members and sympathizers (Tsakatika & Lisi, 2013). It matters if parties are top-down organizations, more integrated with states than with civil society, structured to preserve and enhance the discretionary power of party leaders and staff or bottom-up organizations enabling the democratic power of party militants (Mudge & Chen, 2014). Significant innovations have been developed by certain RLPs for stimulating bottom-up participation, favour the participation of sympathizers and less committed members and encourage the involvement of younger cohorts in new social movements and solidarity initiatives. These modes of organization broke with the reliance of mass parties on the active role of party militants (Tsakatika & Lisi, 2013). However, the implementation of digital platforms for decision-making processes and mobilization campaigns, contrary to their democratic pretentions, can come with new forms of hierarchical political relationships (Gerbaudo, 2019).

An important limit of the above literature on RLPs is its tendency to disincarnate party-movement relationships from the strategic challenges of democratizing the economy and the state (Gray, 2018; Panitch & Gindin, 2020; Wainwright, 2017, 2018). Much of this research fails to investigate the types of skills, know-how, and wider political capacities parties nurture or impede for achieving emancipatory projects. Thus, a critical political economy approach is needed to map the social roots from which collective action can be developed.

Distinguishing analytically between structural and organizational power is crucial to analyze the type of class capacities parties can potentially or fail to develop (Wright, 2016). Structural power refers to the power conferred by a social agent's differentiated location within capitalist social relations. What social actors can do depend not only on the nature of their organization, its internal power relationships, and the extension of its membership but first and foremost their location within the power relationships of society. For capitalists, their structural power refers to their control over the investment process and their power to hire and fire workers, capacities that are enabled by their private hold over the means of production. Labour's structural

power derives from the dependence of capitalists on the living labour of workers to extract surplus value. If workers strike to protest their conditions of work, this will disrupt the "normal" operations of capitalist production and the sustained flow of profits. In comparison with capitalists, the structural power of workers is not given and a great deal of organizational power is necessary to develop the collective agency of the working class (Davis, 2020, p. 8).

Social reproduction theory (SRT) (Bhattacharya, 2017) expands the conception of structural power beyond the point of production, by highlighting the vulnerabilities of capital at the point of reproductive labour. Capital's dependency on living labor to produce profitable commodities itself depends on life-making processes that reproduces labourers each day and for each generation. Viewed from the lens of SRT, women's strikes in paid and unpaid reproductive care work can disrupt the inflow of labour-power to force the state and capital to concede to better working and living conditions while fighting sexual harassment on the job. An encompassing theory articulating the patterns of dispossession, production, and reproduction within capitalism can point toward the various vulnerabilities of capital accumulation (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018). In turn, this can better illuminate the material terrain upon which adapted political organizations can be effectively developed.

Organizational power refers to the resources and repertoire of collective action social actors can tap into irrespective of their location within the web of power relations. Thus, a political organization or a left government can have, in certain cases, strong organizational power rooted in weak structural power (Rojas, 2018). Critically, this point is lost in most analyses of movement parties who fail to ask if and how movement parties contribute to the development of class power that can actually shift political outcomes. While left populist parties have at best a "class focused" politics, by politicizing inequalities through the antagonism of the 1% and the 99% for example, they often lack a "class rooted" politics which can tap into the structural leverage of popular classes (Panitch & Gindin, 2017).

Developing a party form oriented by a "class rooted" politics, able to push against the capitalist constraints within liberal democracies, will be tributary of the political ideology and practice driving social actors involved in RLP formation (Lafrance, 2023). As a corollary, misinterpretations of the configurations of social power underlying capitalist states, and of the forms of collective action most suited to confront them, can result in a politics maladapted to alter these power relations. These theoretical insights inform the analysis of QS's party-movement model that follows.

Québec Solidaire: An Overview

Created in 2006, QS is the fusion of two small parties: Union des forces progressistes, itself a prior effort of unifying Quebec's political left, and Option Citoyenne, which was created by community and feminist organizers. The party can be seen as a thoughtful combination of social and political activists, rather than resulting from a schism within a traditional party (Dufour, 2009, 57). Unlike Podemos and France Insoumise, QS has a stronger formal internal democratic structure, which allows members to express their views and exercise their dissidence within the boundaries of the party's program (Lavallée 2011, 205).

Limited to 7.6% of the popular vote and three MPs after the 2014 election, QS made its most important electoral breakthrough during the 2018 election, where it won ten seats out of 125 in the provincial national assembly and 16.1% of the votes. Comparatively, the following 2022 election represented a relative political stagnation for the party, winning only one extra seat and 15.43% of the votes, while losing its only non-urban riding (Rouyn-Noranda). Soon after, a by-election in a Montreal riding allowed the party to increase its MPs to 12. The actual twelve MPs

of QS are concentrated in urban ridings, nine of them representing segments of the Montreal population. As of January 2024, QS membership stands at 25 000 members, only second to the Parti Québecois' membership (Duval 2024). Using a reference outside an election year, QS' expenses were near $2.5 million in 2021, with more than 55 000$ spent on extra-parliamentary political campaigns and mobilization (Directeur général des élections du Québec, 2023, 9).[3]

The founding principles of QS combines feminism, ecology, social justice, alterglobalization, and Quebec independence (Thériault, 2009). The party's political program is oriented toward a green and socially just transition, based notably on the public ownership of renewable energies, low-cost electrified public transit, and an expansion of quality jobs in public services and the new green sectors. QS also proposes a constituent assembly to redefine Quebec's constitutional status and foundations as a means to break with Canada's "petro-state". This program is the result of a long-term democratic process shaped by the confluence of various currents within the party, such as social democracy, democratic socialism, and degrowth.

The literature on QS remains thin vis-à-vis other left parties internationally. Most authors have focused on analyzing the party's programmatic orientation, electoral results, voter profile, and modes of communications. Studies suggest that QS's voters are significantly more educated, younger, have a lower income, and composed of a higher proportion of women (Bélanger et al., 2013, 57 and 196). QS's voters tend to support Quebec sovereignty, although in a lower proportion than the supporters of Parti Québécois, wealth redistribution, accessible education, a phaseout of oil and gas, and strengthening the political and social rights of immigrants (Savoie et al., 2020). Privileging the use of social media as a communication tool (Sullivan & Bélanger, 2016), QS tends to diffuse a large number of "social" tweets, which aim to encourage a dialogue between citizens and a more inclusive democracy, rather than "diffusion" tweets, which are unidirectional communication messages (Bélanger, Bastien, and Gélineau 2013: 137–48; Bélanger 2019). The role of movement activists in the emergence of QS, the influence of the political culture of movements on QS's organizational form, the selection of candidates from movements, and the input of movements in QS's program and electoral platforms have all been analyzed in various articles and books (Dufour, 2009; Saillant, 2020).

By its programmatic orientation, social base, and linkages with social movements, QS is part of the new wave of RLPs but has been little analyzed within the literature on this party family. With the partial exception of Dufour and Savoie (2014), the relationship of QS to extra-parliamentary politics remains under-analyzed. Beyond programmatic differences, QS differs from the PQ and NDP within Quebec's and Canada's party system by intervening more proactively on the terrain of social struggles. To use a typology introduced above, QS's "organic" relationships with movements thus differs from the "electoral" orientation of these parties and their practices of cooptation (Collombat & Lafrance, 2022; Savage, 2010).

Sources and Methods

Twenty-three semi-directed interviews were conducted with influential members and spokespersons of QS from March to June 2019. The selection of interviewees relied on a snowball process and their number was determined by saturation (Bowen, 2008; Guest et al., 2006; Low, 2019). Each interview lasted two hours on average. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with the software NVivo according to a thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). In addition, selected QS documents,

[3] This number excludes the salaries of QS' staff paid to elaborate and implement QS' political extra-parliamentary campaigns, which is not readily available in QS' budget.

including reports of the party's parliamentary wing and of the National Coordinating Committee, press releases, emails to members, Facebook posts and events, were used as complementary qualitative sources to understand the operationalization and evolution of the party's new forms of extra-parliamentary politics. This research has also drawn upon our past experiential knowledge as members and activists of QS and social movements. While this grounded knowledge helped stimulate interview questions, this new research material was systematically confronted to the academic literature on party politics and RLPs to generate new insights relevant for rethinking left party strategy and organization (Sears, 2014, 24-28).

The Rationales Behind QS' Turn Toward a "Party-Movement"

The "party of the ballots and the street" as a wait-and-see attitude. From its origin to the mid-2010s, QS has developed as a "party of the ballots and the streets", namely presenting candidates to win elections and mobilizing the party behind struggles led by social movements. QS's parliamentary wing used media coverage and its limited time to intervene in the National Assembly to increase the legitimacy of social struggles. While this "party of the streets" mobilized its MPs and membership at demonstrations organized by movements, QS rarely developed its own interventions to build additional leverage in a sustained way. The party did initiate autonomous political campaigns: Courage politique on fiscal alternatives, Gratuité scolaire on free tuition, Pays de projets on Quebec sovereignty, and Sortir de l'or noir on the ecological transition. These were limited, however, to advocating political proposals in the public sphere.

By limiting the party to a political relay of the demands and struggles of civil society, the "party of the ballots and the streets" approach led to see the social movements as the main locus where mobilization could be developed. According to an interviewee behind QS's new "party-movement" strategy, this resulted in under-developing QS as a political vehicle for militancy:

"The party of the ballots and the streets … doesn't say anything about how you articulate the ballots and the streets together … During a long period … what prevailed was the theory of the transmission belt … There was [on the one hand] the social movements … where the real social change occurs and [on the other hand] we [QS] are here … to bring this [the demands of the social movements] to the National Assembly. This was a passive vision where we [QS] were social movements' thrall. [I]t was a wait-and-see attitude toward social movements. The [more recent] idea ... that we [QS] also need to do extra-parliamentary mobilization … this truly expresses the party of the ballots and the streets…" [I15-M].[4]

Given that the "party of the ballots and the street" presupposed constantly thriving social movements, a view sometimes attributed to the legacy of the Trotskyst influence inside QS [I11-M], this approach made QS vulnerable to the weakening of movements during critical conjunctures. To illustrate this point, our interviewees pointed to a relative downturn in Quebec struggles prior to the 2018 election: "The problem when social movements don't take the initiative anymore, like we are witnessing since three or four years, is what do we do?" [I22-M]. In addition, this previous model was critiqued for exposing the party to the lobbyist and bureaucratic tendencies dominating multiple movements: "Our social movements are pettifoggers. We are facing an [ecological] crisis, which necessitates radical actions, and Équiterre is still negotiating with the government of Quebec" [I13-F].[5]

[4] The interview quotations are randomly numbered, preceded by "I", followed by "M" or "F" to indicates the interviewee's gender, for example "I00-F". All interviews were conducted in French and the selected quotations were translated by the authors.

[5] Équiterre is a professionalized advocacy environmental organization.

In response to these problems, QS's leadership implemented a new party-movement model to develop a stronger extra-parliamentary wing driven by QS's own political campaigns. Note that many party leaders behind this strategy were key organizers of the 2012 Quebec student strike: "This is the experience of 2012. People were in student associations at that time and later became activists within the party, bringing with them all this experience. I think the whole concept is from there" [I12-F].

The organizational form of the "party-movement." Another justification for this political shift was to move away from the party's "inner-oriented" culture, centred on the party's internal debates. As the elaboration of QS's political program span over ten years, internal democracy became associated with a time-consuming process repelling younger generations: "I am not in the streets, I am just writing meeting minutes and voting for whatever a person should be allowed to do or not in an independent Quebec. Thus, we have to free ourselves of this [way of organizing politically] and go directly to people. [For example], you want a plan on climate action? Then, we blockade, we protest, we canalize this youth activism" [I06-F]. The goal was therefore to create an "outer-oriented" political culture that could channel militant energies toward mobilizing for various issues: "[As]a member of QS, your first mission… should be 'I am an activist who goes outside the organization, participate in social struggles, and grow [in return] the party'" [I15-M].

To favour easier ways to become involved politically, QS set up a digital platform called "Mouvement" to connect members to form mobilization teams in their local ridings to do actions such as phone calls, signing petitions, and leafletting. Militants could find on this platform printable resources that could facilitate the multiplication of small-scale actions related to the party's campaigns [I15-M; I16-M; I22-M]. In the eyes of its architects, this party-movement model was more democratic and horizontal by facilitating the "self-organization" of party members. Inspired notably by the book Rules for Revolutionaries (Bond & Exley, 2016), this strategy encouraged the development of a mass volunteer base invested with a greater autonomy for action. Within the parameters of the campaigns' demands, this party-movement model encouraged the creativity of its members [I13-F]. While sometimes imperfect, hundreds of small actions across the province were seen as always better than one large and well-staged event.

The "party-movement" and its relationship to social movements. QS' new organizational model also aimed to transform the party as a radicalizing force capable of inspiring the rejuvenation of Quebec's social movements: "The necessity of becoming a party-movement is based on an observation: social movements are situated at the right of QS politically. People who sit on the board of civil society organizations are making requests that are more reformist than the program of QS. If QS had followed closely the union movement, QS would have become a centrist party. Thus, there is a necessity for QS to force struggles to become more radical" [I21-M]. At a conjuncture level, this claim refers to a relative exhaustion of mass movements in Quebec around the mid-2010s, in comparison with the anti-war demonstrations of 2003, the 2005 and 2012 student strikes, and the anti-austerity mobilizations of 2009-11 that preceded and followed the creation of QS in 2006. At a more structural level, it refers to the lobbyist and bureaucratic character of certain social organizations, such as trade unions and advocacy environmental groups.

To radicalize social movements, QS wished to defend and reach out to people as individual citizens rather than organized groups. By doing so, QS was attempting to bypass the bureaucratic officialdom of social movements and connect directly with their rank-and-file membership [I22-M]. This is one indication of how left populism and party-movement politics are articulated by QS, with the objective of revitalizing movements and heightening the level of political conflict more effectively:

"QS is living a populist repositioning toward a party that is oriented toward more mobilization… I think that the transformation we should look at with QS since several years is not a party that conforms to a populist logic, in the European style with France Insoumise and Podemos. It would be very problematic to endorse the theoretical postulate according to which QS only aims for a populist reconversion toward a "discourse party". The difference with someone like Errejon, it's that everybody in QS is still talking about activism, grassroots political organization, which is something very close to what the people around Sanders are doing. We should not oppose the populist logic of QS and its radicalization. The logic of the party-movement is a logic that allows the emergence of the populist discourse because it's a logic that radicalizes the base in a broader sense" [I21-M].

By drawing upon different experiments of other RLPs, QS' party strategists bridged in practice left populist narratives and "big mobilizing" to favour a radical left politics beyond parliamentarism and communication-centred parties. According to the party's leadership, successive campaigns involving mass mobilizations could create a societal movement beyond QS. When reaching this threshold, the party's social base would be in a better position to reclaim and transform their movements in more militant ways.

The strategic goals of the "party-movement". This party-movement model is viewed as a catalyst to a mass popular movement that could spark a crisis of legitimacy favouring the election of QS [I16-M]. In this process, winning reforms prior to taking power is seen as a crucial element to establish QS's credibility as a radical left alternative.

These ambitions required to elaborate political campaigns with clear sets of demands winnable through an escalation of tactics. Initially, petitions would help gather a large contact base that could not only be used during elections, but also for inviting people to participate in the next steps of the party's extra-parliamentary campaigns. Certain party leaders claimed that QS should organize mass actions, from demonstrations to civil disobedience, on a scale greater than anything accomplished yet by the party [I11-M]. Beyond favouring the election of a QS government, a longer-term strategic goal of the party's mobilization campaigns was to build a sustained mass movement that could serve as an extra-parliamentary force during a left government in power [I22-M].

QS' "Party-Movement": Practices, Evolution, and Outcomes

This new political strategy was implemented for the first time in QS' ecological campaign Ultimatum 2020. This mobilization was structured around three demands: 1) no new fossil fuel project; 2) to force the government in adopting an ecological plan; and 3) to subject this plan to the critical scrutiny of an independent committee. If the government did not satisfy these demands by October 1st 2020, the party would initiate a "parliamentary blockade": "The Ultimatum 2020 is a good example of how far we can go as a political party. We have an ultimatum date which will be used to short-circuit a maximum of the National Assembly's normal operations. In parallel, there will be extra-parliamentary action. For now, we are at the early stages of the campaign where we are mostly gathering contacts but the objective is to translate this in more militant actions in the Spring and in the Fall of 2020" [I16-M].

The main material of this campaign was a petition to constitute a mass base backing these demands. More than a hundred teams were set up to gather signatures for QS' petition (Québec solidaire, 2019a). By late October 2019, 17 assemblies, where 750 persons participated across more than 12 Quebec regions, had been organized to spur this mobilization (Québec solidaire, 2019b). Other means of action included sending a predefined email to François Legault, Quebec's

Prime Minister, and calling the Coalition Avenir Québec's (CAQ) MPs to pressure the government in satisfying Ultimatum 2020's demands (Québec solidaire, 2019d, 2019e).

In parallel, Quebec was home to historic climate strikes. On September 27th 2019, a one-day strike led by students and teachers unions resulted in a demonstration of 500,000 people in Montreal (Savard, 2019). Following this day of action, the Quebec student movement then began to plan a one-week strike during the Spring of 2020. As the CAQ government ended up elaborating an environmental plan, albeit a neoliberal "green" industrial policy, a resolution was adopted at the party's national convention in November 2019 to reorient the campaign toward promoting QS' own ecological transition plan and to better coordinate its actions with the more militant ecological mobilization (Québec solidaire, 2019a; 2019d). The campaign, however, was suspended following the outburst of the global Covid-19 pandemic (Québec solidaire, 2020).

In the face of this new conjuncture, QS adopted in September 2020 a new campaign structured around three themes: 1) a post-Covid recovery based on a green growth stimulus policy; 2) a revalorization of public services; and 3) tackling inequalities and discriminations. Dozens of virtual and in-person public assemblies and workshops were organized throughout 2021 on the themes of QS' post-Covid plan. A web and paper version of the plan was produced and micro-websites presenting specific measures helped gather supporters. This campaign was mainly about advocating for QS' proposed solutions to problems created or exacerbated by the pandemic.

As with Ultimatum 2020, this campaign was grounded in multiple local and regional struggles. One of them was the opposition to GNL Québec, an industrial project to liquify natural gas in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean. QS' role in this struggle culminated on March 14th 2021, when 29 mobilization teams composed of 93 militants performed "visibility" actions (e.g. picketing buildings of Hydro-Québec, banner drops at selected bridges) across 14 different cities, organized as part of a week of action called by environmental groups. The popular opposition to this project ultimately succeeded. Added to a rebuttal from Quebec's environmental agency charged with evaluating the environmental impact of the project (Shields, 2021a), the government decided in July 2021 to block the authorization of this natural gas plant (Shields, 2021b).

Another significant regional struggle was the "3e lien", a Quebec City bridge project that would have substantially increased car use and suburban development. In addition to a leaflet and a poster (Québec solidaire, 2019c), QS MPs in the Quebec region coordinated with neighborhood councils and environmental associations against the project. QS organized public assemblies where citizens expressed their worries about the "3e lien", which helped develop a popular opposition to the project (Dorion 2023, 251-52). These assemblies also built support for urban public transit alternatives, such as a tramway project in Quebec City. While the "3e lien" was abandoned by the CAQ by April 2023 (Québec solidaire, 2023c), this government recently revived the project in the name of "economic security".

Beyond the environmental front, QS directed its political interventions toward tackling an acute housing crisis in the post-Covid context. QS produced and diffused a guide with legal information on how tenants could challenge arbitrary rent hikes and evictions (Québec solidaire, 2022a). In-person and virtual public assemblies were also organized on how tenants could defend their rights, to gather testimonies, learn how to mobilize against renovictions, and explore solutions to this crisis (Québec solidaire, 2021). In March 2022, QS organized a "visibility" action consisting of setting up placards on vacant or abandoned land, calling to construct social housing on these sites (Québec solidaire, 2022b). QS MPs were also present at different rallies of solidarity in support of evicted tenants. More recently, QS set up a petition pressuring the government to abandon its project to ban the ability of tenants to pass on their lease to other tenants (Québec

solidaire, 2023b), considered one of the few still existing legal protections to prevent abusive rent hikes. Ultimately, the ban on tenant lease transfers passed the legislative process as part of a new government bill on housing (Bélair, 2024).

These prominent illustrations of extra-parliamentary politics between 2019 and 2023 were shaped by QS' strategic turn toward a "party-movement". The Ultimatum 2020 campaign stands out in terms of a clear set of demands to be won through an escalation of tactics, even if the full range of actions associated with this campaign remained to be seen. By contrast with the claim that this strategy would radicalize social movements, QS promoted actions that were significantly less disruptive than the growing climate strike movement, at least prior to suspending its campaign.

The aforementioned campaigns often involved one or many of these means of actions: an informative website, a petition, a leaflet, posters, public or virtual assemblies or calls to MPs or the Prime Minister. In some cases, "visibility" actions were used to raise consciousness, delegitimize existing policies and advocate alternatives. Still, this political arsenal did not reach the threshold of disruptive collective action. In none of these cases did QS come close to a mass demonstration or civil disobedience, as imagined by some of the architects behind QS' new "party-movement". Also, many of these campaigns did not appear to have a clear set of demands winnable through an escalation of tactics. If QS contributed to win certain political battles between elections, it is doubtful that QS attained two of its other objectives, namely act as a radicalizing force rejuvenating Quebec's social movements and create a crisis of legitimacy positing QS as an electoral alternative. As argued below, this is due to the democratic limitations of this organizational model and the inability of this party form to overcome structural barriers in the way of exercising disruptive collective action.

The Strategic Shortcomings of QS's Party-Movement

Centralizing Strategy, Distributing Tasks. As part of its organizational model, QS used a digital platform called "Mouvement" to facilitate the mobilization of supporters. The use of such technological tools is legitimized as favouring more democratically open parties, where e-democracy promises to break with bureaucratic and opaque modes of organization characteristic of traditional parties.

In practice, this type of platform does not lead automatically to the increase of internal party democracy, on the contrary. In fact, several interviewees argued that this way of organizing circumvented the democratic structures of the party [I23-F; I19-M]. Matters of strategic decision-making, such as setting the demands, means, and goals of the party-movement's campaigns, were mainly decided by a select inner circle: "The effect is to give a very vague resolution to be adopted in national conventions, and to keep everything referring to the details of political strategies in the hands of ad-hoc committees nominated by the CCN"[6] [I04-M]. Several interviewees have mentioned the Ultimatum 2020 as an illustrative case of top-down decision [I19-M]. This was consistent with the orientations defended by the Sander's campaign organizers, one major influence on QS strategists, who argued that a "centralized plan" is needed while the organizing work is "distributed to a network of volunteer leaders" (Bond & Exley, 2016, Chapter 6).

QS's party-movement shares certain common characteristics with other "digital parties" analyzed by Gerbaudo. As in the Podemos and France Insoumise cases, the alienation of local party "associations" from actual control over strategic questions regarding their party's orientation

[6] CCN stands for the *Comité de coordination national*, an executive committee composed of fourteen elected representatives, including the two national spokespersons, the president, the general secretary, one women representative, and other members responsible for different mandates such as communications and mobilization.

and goals led them to focus on small scale and uncoordinated actions (Gerbaudo, 2019, Chapter 5). Gerbaudo (2019, Introduction) argues that the hierarchical mode of organization typical of digital parties transforms party members and supporters as passive agents. The promise of a "participatory democracy" through digital platforms rather leads to a "reactive democracy", in which an amorphous mass base passively reacts on social media to the online interventions of "hyperleaders". The disintermediation advocated by left populists, in an era of weakening traditional social and political organizations, has rather led to a form of reintermediation in the form of centralized power in the hands of party leaderships (Jäger & Borriello, 2020). Supporters are viewed as foot soldiers, enrolled to execute the party's actions, rather than being treated "as knowledgeable and productive citizens on whose capacities a government committed to radical social change depends" (Wainwright, 2017, 83).

Stronger Organizational Power, Weak Structural Power. It is doubtful that QS's party-movement model can, on its own, win bold demands. Many interviewees expressed an ambivalence regarding the range of actions that could be deployed to force a government to concede major reforms. Even if QS managed in the future to organize a demonstration of hundreds of thousands of people, as one interviewee suggested, one-time mass demonstrations have rarely, by themselves, led to significant reforms historically.

According to the adherents of this model, QS would also act as a catalyst of social change through various campaigns, by inspiring others to emulate QS's mobilizational capacities within their own movements. This vision is based on a sort of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), in the sense that it presupposes that the skills learned through this party-movement model are sufficient to take on the radicalization of Quebec's social movements. True, party militants can call members and sympathizers, sign petitions, distribute leaflets, go door-to-door, organize demonstrations and public assemblies, and these skills can effectively be transferred from parties to movements (the other way around being also true). However, disruptive forms of protest politics, such as mass strikes, require additional capacities to sustain mass action on an expanding scale and for longer periods of time, while overcoming potential repression and hostility.

A major flaw in QS's "mobilizing" model is that the type of power it relies on is based on the numbers of people mobilized irrespective of their embeddedness in different social relations. The failure to act upon these material roots of collective action is a limit both of left populism and "big organizing", the two currents influencing's QS' party-movement model. This party form cannot tap into the kind of structural power needed to build and increase leverage because it treats its social base as individual citizens rooted in a particular local riding rather than as social agents embedded in workplaces, schools, and communities. A party organized according to this formal legal form cannot participate in organizing disruptive forms of collective action, such as mass strikes. This structural power cannot be activated if a party organizes independently from the democratic structures of social movements where strikes, for example, can be decided. Thus, if this party model certainly increased QS' organizational power, it has remained rooted in weak structural power.

As mass struggles have tended to recede after decades of neoliberalism (Sears 2014), this raises how can an RLP contribute to rebuilding the power of popular classes. In this regard, Wainwright (2017, 83) asks critical questions: "'what are the capacities of these new members and supporters, and what sources of power and transformation do they bring?' Moreover, 'how can we as a party support these – perhaps new – sources of power?'". As an alternative path to the type of party-movement model analyzed in this paper, an RLP could equip activists on how to transform reformist and bureaucratized organizations into rank-and-file militant movements (McNally &

Post, 2021). By contributing to these patient efforts in organizing from below, this could nurture the political abilities necessary to democratize the economy and the state and overcome the hostility of capitalists and top-ranked functionaries within the state to such a political project (Gray, 2018)."

In this vein, QS has notably an ecology and a union militant networks. These forms of organization were set up to facilitate the "sectoral" networking of activists to strategize, build power, and transform society. These intra-party organizations help nurture skills both through political education and struggles. However, these networks lack sufficient financial and logistic support from QS's national headquarters, despite their official recognition by the party since 2014. Interviewees raised how this situation impedes the ability of the party to develop the type of power necessary to win bold reforms:

"QS's militant networks should not only be active within the party but also in their milieu. If you gather people who have preoccupations with unions and they want to know what's happening elsewhere, they network on the basis of their local union and formulate propositions based on diverse experiences in different workplaces. Then, you start to circulate information, you reinforce the capacity to resist. It's not just about being a QS's political agent but rather, it is about being a development agent on the field to build this network. ... I think that, if we do the work in different milieux, we will be able to accumulate forces but now, we are accumulating nothing. QS, at best, will be elected, but it will not have any entrenchment, and will no be able to proceed to the political transformation the party wishes" [I09-F].

Conclusion

This study has shown changes in QS's strategy since 2018, which moved from the "party of the ballots and the streets" to a new "party-movement" paradigm. Through party-based mobilization campaigns, QS hoped to win demands between elections, act as a radicalizing political force, and better posit QS as an electoral alternative. While QS certainly developed a stronger extra-parliamentary wing between 2019 and 2023, it still fell short of some of these objectives.

Although some interviewees showed strong enthusiasm about the possibilities offered by this model, others highlighted the democratic shortcomings and the limited power this model can develop to help QS implement its program once in government. These promises and critiques are consistent with the academic and political literatures on left parties in Western countries. While QS retained its formal democratic structures, this organizational model mimics other digital parties who centralize strategic decisions and decentralize the tasks of mobilization, in accordance with the precepts of "big organizing".

While this party-movement model has developed a stronger level of organizational power, based on the resources and militant energies channelled in party-led actions, it still ended up with limited leverage to alter the balance of class forces. It remains to be seen if QS will in the future develop more disruptive means of actions than those analyzed in this paper. However, by failing to tap into the structural power of its members and larger social base, QS will continue to limit its capacity to win significant reforms that develop the skills, confidence, and new solidarities necessary to implement the party's "radical left" program.

Further research could notably provide an analysis of if QS still applies the principles of left populism principles in its communications strategy, as these seemed absent from QS' electoral campaign in 2022 in comparison with the 2018 election. Moreover, complementary interviews conducted among key actors involved in social movements could provide a more complete picture of the evolution of QS's relationships with Quebec social struggles. A longer-term case study of

QS could assess to which extent this party-movement model is still prominent within the party's politics, based on new interviews of the party's leadership reassessment of the initial objectives of this strategy in light of its actual outcomes, including QS' deceiving electoral results in 2022. Such a larger case study could further contribute to enrich comparative analyses of the protest politics of RLPs, their campaigns, results, and effects on the type of capacities that are developed in light of the central issues of class and state powers.

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