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Collectif anarchist La Nuit (NEFAC-Quebec City)
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NEFAC has NOT taken a position in favor of Quebec Independence
2006

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Adopted for discussion at the 12th NEFAC conference. A more indepth position will be developed by the Quebec Regional Union with this as a basis and submitted to a future NEFAC conference. Based on a text from Rupture no 4, summer 2004. Published in *The Northeastern Anarchist* Issue #11, Spring 2006.

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Dear comrades,

It appears that a brief communique on our 12th conference has been badly misunderstood by a few international comrades. A rumor is circulating saying that NEFAC decided to take a position in favor of Quebec independence. We are surprised to learn this! If we indeed adopted a discussion paper on the issue of the Quebec National Question, we did not take a position in favor of independence. We are as anti-nationalists as ever. In order to put the record straight we are distributing the text that was adopted in principle at our recent conference.

In solidarity

The NEFAC International Secretary

For nearly 50 years, the national question has been at the heart of debates among the left in Québec. If there are (and

there will probably always be) anti-authoritarians who choose to take a position in favor of Québec's independance, other anti-authoritarians will take positions which do not necessarily support the survival of the Canadian state. We choose to oppose both Québécois and Canadian nationalism without denying the reality of national oppression.

Canada as we know it was formed with the specific goal of assimilating its francophone population, which doesn't share the same history as other communities of European descent on this continent, into a political ensemble that is, by majority, Anglophone. Francophones, whose social standing after the British conquest of Nouvelle France (1759–1763) was changed from colonizer to colonized, were historically denied the status of a nation and were kept in a position of social-economic inferiority by a "colonial democracy" ready to use any means at its disposal to maintain its "territorial integrity." With the national oppression of Francophones a clear reality, Canada indeed became a "prison of peoples." And, just in case we need something to refresh our memories about the past, we can recall The Sponsorship Scandal, with which the Canadian government illegally spent billions to "sell Canada to Quebec" after the narrow "no" victory at the 1995 referendum. If we need another reminder, there is The Clarity Bill, with which the Canadian government was empowered to overrule the Quebec government to dictate what kind of question and what kind of majority would be necessary for a referendum on sovereignty. Francophone survival and existence in Québec today is a direct result of our active resistance to the British project of assimilation.

And there are other pieces to Canada's history. This country was built, from coast to coast, on the "pacification" (with the use of force, it goes without saying) of entire populations, not just of the indigenous and the french speaking métis in the prairies but also of the working class, regardless of whether it was francophone, anglophone or allophone. The nationalist

plete destruction, in the same movement, of all the other states of the region, starting with the American state. Though traces of national oppression remain, in particular in the economic structure of Quebec (why the hell did we end up with textile while Ontario got auto?), there's no politically justifiable reason to make this issue a key organizing point. On the other hand, the social question remains in full. What is the right to self-determination worth without social and economical equality? You'll forgive us if we focus on this.

small business as some have reach the status of world-class corporations, like Bombardier and Quebecor World.)

Why continue to talk about the national question in 2004? Because on the left, independence, coupled with a strong and responsible state, is often seen as a sine qua non condition of social progress. Because in the hand of the ruling class, nationalism is a poison that breeds xenophobia and racism, that creates divisions and forges false alliances between the elite and the rest of the population. The "historical" project of the working and popular classes is not nationalism, it is internationalist socialism. The answer to inequality will never come from a state but from a re-appropriation of the collective wealth by those producing it. Quebec's sovreignty is trapped in a bourgeois deadlock. The nationalist movement is no longer progressive. Social struggle has been conveniently postponed by most nationalist politicians (that is when they dont actively suppress it when in power).

Any revolutionary involvement worthy of the name find its roots in a revolt against all forms of injustice, oppression and exploitation. From there, it is easy to understand why almost a whole generation of revolutionaries gave their support to the struggle for the independance of Quebec. From there, it's also easy to understand, for those who choose to open their eyes, why more and more revolutionaries, including us, are no longer thinking of independance as a central strategic axis. We'll concentrate on the class war. Along the way, down the path of social revolution, libertarian communism, with its emphasis on federalism and democracy, will offer an opportunity to address the whole range of national questions existing in Canada — the Quebecois, what's left of the french canadians, the Indigenious and others.

We are admittedly in favor of the complete destruction of the Canadian federal state, which is only a political fiction after all, and for the self-determination of all the peoples that are imprisoned in it. But why stop there? We are also for the com-

version of Québec's history almost exclusively deals with francophone resistance to the will of central power (for example, in the opposition to the draft) but there is no mention that, elsewhere in this country, people generally took part in many of the same oppositional social struggles. This complicit silence is the product of nationalism. It goes hand-in-hand with an analysis that gives individuals the same interests based on linguistic, racial or territorial characteristics while denying the reality of class oppression.

There have been moments where social and national issues have merged in one progressive and liberatory struggle. The insurrection of Les Patriotes in 1837–38, which fought for an independent liberal republic is one example. The independence movement of the 60's and 70's, which fought on both national and class fronts, is another. But these moments have been rare. Nationalist ideology has mostly allowed French-Canadian (and Québécois) elites to create a balance of power against the monopolistic fraction of the mostly anglophone Canadian ruling class. First reactionary in its religious form, then "progressive" when it cotailed popular movements, and finaly simply neoliberal after a few years in power, nationalist ideology has been able to adapt its discourse to stay "fresh" during changing times. Sadly, the left hasn't managed itself in the same way.

The idea that the national question was the key to social change in Québec, that national liberation and social liberation should come together as part of the same movement, dates back to the 1960's. At that time, proof was abundant that francophones were systematically in a position of social-economic inferiority at home and compared to the anglophones of the rest of Canada. A simple walk from west-end Montreal to east-end Montreal was enough to make one notice how evident the oppression was. It was the independent leftist magazine Parti Pris, in an international context of decolonization that popularized the analisis of Québec as a colony to liberate. Their

political program rested on 3 pillars: the secularization of society, independence and socialism. Parti Pris thought that the national question and the social question could be dealt with in one anti-colonialist socialist revolution. From this foundation, numerous writings were developed to analyse Québec in the context of national oppression. "Stage-ism" was then introduced — independence first, socialism second — as was the transitional program, a series of "just" demands that were meant to raise conscisnous and lead to a break with capitalism.

In the last 30 years, the joint action of the labor movement and a sovereignist party in power corrected the most outrageous forms of national oppression. For example, there is no longer a wage difference between workers from Québec and Ontario employed by the same corporation. Francophones are now present in every economic area and at all levels, from foreman to CEO. Despite some failures, French is now respected as the common language in Québec. Progress has been made in every social area where Québec used to be behind the rest of Canada (to the point of producing envy amongst Anglo-Canadian progressives).

What remains is the question of political independence. An honest analysis of the national liberation movements of the 60s which provided inspiration for the strategy of progressive independence should show that they all failed. Despite seizing power, despite formal independence, decolonization failed and there was no true national liberation or social liberation. Neocolonialism dominates everywhere, as colonialism once did. Countries which for a while escaped the imperialist orbit return to it under the imperatives of globalization. Those on the left who believe that a sovereign Québec could follow a different path than the one traced by neoliberalism are greatly mistaken. If countries like Brazil, South Africa and France have failed to break free, how would a small state whose main economic partners are party to NAFTA show any better success?

One of the central aspects of the revolutionary critique of nationalism is that it's an essentially bourgeois ideology whose goal is to unite two classes with antagonistic interests in a competition against other nations, all the while giving the leadership of the political struggle to a section of the ruling class. This is exactly what happened and what continues to happen in front of our eyes in Québec. It is only in countries without a national ruling class and without a professional political class that revolutionaries have been able to take control of nationalist movements. But thanks to the defectors of the Québec Liberal Party who founded le Mouvement souveraineté-association and then the Parti Québécois (P.Q.), we now have both in Québec. For 30 years revolutionaries have tried to take control of the "Québec national movement" and to give it a progressive orientation — but the left remains marginal. Maybe this is because it is impossible to break away from the P.Q. without breaking away from nationalism. There will always be some activists who will argue that one must support the P.Q. if one supports Quebec independance because, in the last analysis, the P.Q. is the only party that is able to realize it. And they are right!

Brought into this movement by their unions and religious and political "elites", many working people have devoted their lives to defend the only possible solution to solve this identity crisis "once and for all": the sovereignty of Quebec. But this is a false solution to a real problem. Social, political and economical inequality is the result of the domination of a parasitic class over all others, not the result of national oppression. We must recognize that it was mainly the politicians and business owners that first benefited from Quebec nationalism, not the working and popular classes. (Between 1960 and 1990, with the help of the provincial state, the francophone ownership of business in the province rose from 15% to 65%. This new 'Quebec Inc.', as it is sometimes called, is far from being limited to