

FROM PROTEST TO PARTISAN POLITICS: WHEN AND HOW COLLECTIVE ACTORS CROSS THE LINE. SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPEC- TIVE ON QUÉBEC SOLIDAIRE*

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Abstract. This article builds on the social movement perspective to explain the birth of Québec Solidaire, a self-proclaimed left political party founded in February 2006. We maintain that Québec solidaire decided to cross the line and enter partisan politics because certain contextual elements changed in Quebec society, modifying the relationship dynamics between social and political actors. We propose an analytical framework that articulates these two sets of variable (context and relationships), focusing on logics of political action (nature of the preferred relationships with the state, modalities of political participation) and of the preferred place of action (electoral or nonelectoral). More specifically, we argue that during the last 10 years, a shift occurred in both the electoral and social conflict arenas, allowing new coalitions to form and new logics of political action to emerge. Québec solidaire is the result of these changes.

Key Words: social movements; political parties; left politics; political representation; Quebec political life

Résumé. Cet article utilise l'approche des mouvements sociaux pour rendre compte de la naissance de Québec Solidaire, un parti de gauche auto-proclamé, fondé en Février 2006. Nous soutenons que si Québec solidaire a décidé de « traverser la ligne » et d'entrer en politique partisane c'est parce que certains éléments de contexte ont changé au Québec, modifiant la dynamique des relations entre acteurs sociaux et politiques. Nous proposons un cadre d'analyse qui articule ces deux ensemble de variables (contexte et relations) et qui met l'accent sur les logiques de l'action politique (nature privilégiée de la relation à l'État, modalités de la participation politique) et sur le lieu privilégié de l'action (électoral ou non). Plus spécifiquement, nous montrons que durant les 10 dernières années, un changement s'est opéré au sein de l'arène électorale et au sein de

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l'arène des conflits sociaux, qui a permis la formation de nouvelles coalitions d'acteurs, prônant de nouvelles logiques d'action politique. Québec solidaire est le résultat de ces changements.

Mots clefs: Mouvements sociaux; partis politiques; représentation politique; vie politique en Québec

The main objective of this article is to examine the complex relationships between the protest and partisan fields of collective action by analyzing the emergence of a new left political party, *Québec Solidaire* (Québec solidaire), founded in Quebec in February 2006. How and when did this collective actor decide to cross the line and become active in partisan politics? We adopt a social movement perspective of political party emergence to make a case that the decision to become a political party was linked to two processes of change that occurred in Quebec society between 1995 and 2006: (1) changes in the political context and (2) changes in relationship dynamics among political and social actors.

From the late 1960s until 1993, Quebec's political party system was organized around a central issue, i.e., Quebec's political status. Two dominant parties went head-to-head during provincial elections: the Quebec Liberal Party, a supporter of Canadian federalism, and the *Parti québécois* (PQ), an advocate of Quebec sovereignty. However, two new parties have since been created, making the political equation more complex. In 1993, the *Action démocratique du Québec* (ADQ) emerged from internal disputes within the Quebec Liberal Party during the 1992 federal referendum on the Charlottetown constitutional agreement and Quebec's status under the Canadian constitution. In 2006, another party, *Québec solidaire* (Québec solidaire), emerged at the provincial level. One could argue that analyzing Québec solidaire is of little interest, considering the results this new party obtained at the polls in the 2007 provincial elections, where it received less than 4% of the total vote and did not succeed in having a single candidate elected. However, we are not interested in Québec solidaire as a potential political challenger to other political parties.¹ Instead, we consider Québec solidaire as a sociological subject. From the collective action perspective, this marginal party in the political arena (yet supported by thousands of activists) is a very fascinating topic.

The building of this new party is intriguing for several reasons:

1. A discussion of the "real" impact of Québec solidaire on the political scene is beyond the scope of this paper. For some observers, Québec solidaire remains a marginal actor with no impact on other political forces. Others believe, however, that the presence of Québec solidaire in some ridings, especially in Montreal, had a negative impact on the results obtained by the Parti Québécois. For details concerning the 2007 election results, see Directeur Général des élections, Québec, *Results by electoral division*.

1. Political sociology literature has documented a new trend in western democracies, i.e., political parties are considered to be in a state of crisis (Perrineau 2003; Manin 2000; Norris 1999), while renewed interest appears to be developing in protest politics (Norris 1999; Ion 1997; Péchu and Filleule 1993). In this context, the building of a nonextreme left party by social-movement actors might appear unseemly, especially in a North American context where “left” politics have long been eyed with suspicion.
2. Québec solidaire was not created from a schism of former parties, but rather from the merger of two groups: a left political party, *Union des forces progressistes* (UFP), which itself resulted from the merger of tiny extreme-left parties, and a group of activists that formed a political movement, *Option citoyenne*. Therefore, Québec solidaire was driven in part by activists who traditionally showed reluctance toward partisan action and institutional politics. They originally chose to contest institutional politics by becoming involved in contentious politics, preferring the street as a medium for presenting their claims to the National Assembly. Their strategy was usually considered quite successful, with the governing structure in Quebec being relatively open to social demands (White 2003; Laforest and Phillips 2001; Bélanger and Lévesque 1992). Why did these activists choose to enter the electoral arena in 2006?
3. Québec solidaire emerged in a provincial context where electoral rules are extremely hostile to third parties. Quebec, like the other Canadian provinces, uses the single-member district plurality voting system, which is notorious for creating a system of two dominant parties (Duverger 1951). In addition, the local scene was rather discouraging for left parties. The history of Quebec’s left is not one of success at either the provincial or municipal level (Lévesque 1984; Hamel 1991). The probability of electoral success in this context is very low, and the decision to forge ahead with a left party is extremely risky.

We propose to examine this counterintuitive emergence by focusing our analysis on the social and political dynamics at work in Quebec during the last 10 years. In the first part of this paper, we review the major trends in the social movement literature regarding the relationships between protest and partisan fields of action, analyzing our case study in light of the dominant theory of social movement. In the second part, we present the history of Québec solidaire in relation to the political context of Quebec society. The third part of this paper presents a discussion of

Québec solidaire as a case study. What does it tell us about transformations of political actions in today's democratic societies?

Our research is based on semistructured interviews with key actors (Amir Khadir and Molly Alexander for *Union des forces progressistes* [UFP]; Françoise David, Lorraine Guay, and Manon Massé for *D'abord solidaires* [DS] and *Option citoyenne*) conducted by the author in 2003, 2004, and 2006 in Montreal. Three themes were discussed during the interviews: (1) From the perspective of the actor, why was establishing a party considered the best strategy? (2) At the time of the interview, which barriers were encountered in implementing the strategy? (3) At the time of the interview, what were the prospects of the movement/party? Some informal interviews of activists were also conducted during Option citoyenne and Québec solidaire events. The author relied on a systematic press review (*La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, *Le Soleil*) for the years 2000–2006, direct observation of key events from *Option Citoyenne's* founding convention to *Quebec solidaire's* founding convention, short documentaries concerning various Option citoyenne conventions, as well as written documentation obtained from the Internet (Option citoyenne, UFP, and Québec solidaire websites as well as publications distributed during events, such as pamphlets and programs). We validated factual information with the “triangulation method,” locating three different sources to confirm one piece of information.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: LINKING PROTEST TO PARTISAN POLITICS

In social movement literature, several perspectives may be distinguished with regard to the relationships between the protest and partisan fields of collective actions. They are not equally relevant for the purposes of our case study.

A first perspective considers the conflict between social protest actors and institutional actors as inherent to the very existence of social movements. The former are “outside” the political sphere and are in a situation of conflict with actors who are on the “inside” and engaging in “conventional” politics. In the 1970s, the new social movement literature associated political parties with “old” politics, while social movements were “representative of a creative *statu nascente*” (Tarrow 1990:256). This perspective has been challenged by empirical research demonstrating how protest activism generally goes hand in hand with strong “conventional” political participation at the individual level (Fillieule 1993; Fillieule et al. 2004). This perspective has also been challenged by case studies showing how, at the level of organizations, parties and social

movements have interpenetrating relationships (Tarrow 1990:271). Borders between political parties and social movements, or between conventional and unconventional politics, are permeable. Québec solidaire is an excellent example of this permeability, with one branch originating from a social movement background and the other from left parties.

A second perspective defines the institutionalization of collective action as the progressive transfer of actions from the terrain of unconventional politics to more and more conventional forms (Della Porta and Diani 1999; Hamel et al. 1999, 2000). This transfer is the result of growing resources and increased access to the state and the political process. The emergence of a political party from a social movement is, therefore, the culmination of the institutionalization process. These notions have been employed extensively to analyze the emergence of green parties in Europe in the 1980s as well as the role of women's movements in the emergence of left libertarian parties (Eder 1996; Kitschelt 1989). Part of Québec solidaire's trajectory may be viewed from this perspective. One of the main Québec solidaire leaders was the former head of the main women's group in Quebec. She tried, relatively successfully while she was leader, to obtain legitimacy and direct access to the Quebec state and the political process. The shift to partisan politics and the emergence of Québec solidaire could be considered, in this respect, as the "normal" (and inevitable) progression of the trajectory of the women's movement under her leadership. However, this perspective (i.e., institutionalization) does not explain why the shift occurred specifically in 2006 — not before or after — nor why the other branch of Québec solidaire, a left party anchored in institutional politics for a number of years, decided to merge with this new citizen's movement.

A third perspective, which is far from dominant in the literature, answers some of these shortcomings. Sensitive to the environment of social protest, it defines the political opportunity structure (POS) that is either favourable or unfavourable to mobilization and considers the importance of a specific sequence of events in explaining a mobilization (see the development of this approach in the work of Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994; Kriesi 1995). For example, in his study of Italy, Tarrow (1990:271) demonstrated how the previous realignment of the party system contributed extensively to the emergence of social movements in the 1960s. Kriesi et al. (1995:110) showed how "differences in the political context can help to explain contrasts in movement development within countries and similarities across countries." More recently, Della Porta and Diani (2006:201–206) attempted to summarize how institutions and social movements are intertwined and how specific political contexts will either favour or discourage certain types of mobilization. In addi-

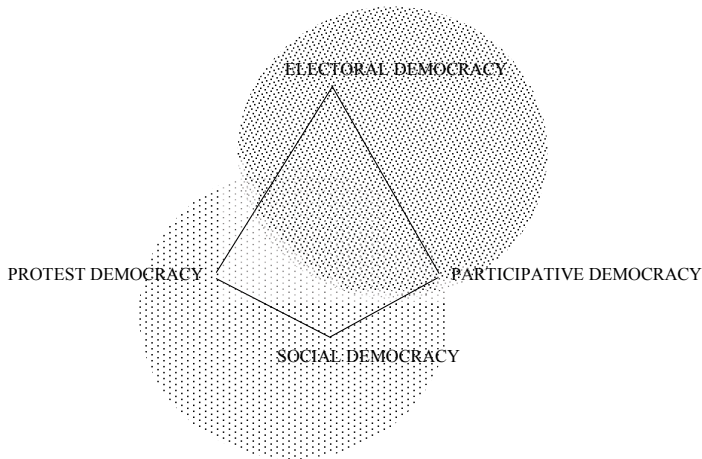
tion to the focus on the political environment (the state as a set of formal institutions, the type of government in power, the nature of the party systems, etc.), these studies also mention the central role of allies in the existence of social movements. In particular, numerous studies have paid specific attention to “left” allies in the political system, demonstrating how the support of left parties appears to influence levels of mobilization and the strategies adopted (Della Porta and Diani 2006:218).

This perspective does not directly answer the question of how and when a movement becomes a party, but it focuses our attention on two aspects that are particularly relevant to our case. The first aspect is the more structural dimension of the collective action context. The second involves the dynamics of relationships between the various collective actors involved (especially parties and social groups and their potential alliances). In this paper, we maintain that the emergence of Québec solidaire is directly related to changes of certain *contextual elements* and to changing *relationship dynamics*. We articulate these two sets of variables, alleging that Québec solidaire decided to cross the line and enter partisan politics because certain contextual elements changed, modifying the relationship dynamics between social and political actors and allowing new types of political action to emerge.

In the case of Québec solidaire, we must clarify the sequence of changes that occurred between the various types of actors involved (small precursor political parties, social groups and their coalitions, individuals) and the multiplication of places in which actors were participating (National Assembly and electoral arenas, street and protest politics, the state and its institutions). As mentioned above, Québec solidaire has the distinction of originating from two separate fields: the electoral field and the social movement field. At a certain point, it was both a party and a movement. Therefore, Québec solidaire history is not simply a story of a movement that became a party; it is also the story of extreme-left parties that chose to merge with a movement. It is less an issue of change at the level of organization, and more an issue of logics of political action (nature of the preferred relationships with the state, modalities of political participation) and of the preferred place of action (electoral or nonelectoral). During this transformation, the objectives of collective action did not change drastically. For example, for Québec solidaire leaders in 2006, the objective was not to take power, at least in the short term, but rather to have an impact on the political process. The objective was the same as it had been in the past, but using a different vehicle, namely, a stronger left political party.

In order to clearly delineate these elements, we propose a political action diamond in which we trace the complex trajectories of key ac-

The Political Action Diamond



 Social conflicts arena

 Electoral arena

<i>Pole of Political Action</i>	<i>Arena</i>	<i>Logics of Action</i>
Electoral democracy pole	Electoral arena	Delegation of power Confrontation and collaboration
Participative democracy pole	Electoral arena	Direct participation Confrontation and collaboration
Social democracy pole	Social conflicts arena	Delegation of power Collaboration
Protest democracy pole	Social conflicts arena	Direct participation Confrontation

tors without being confined by organizational affiliations or watertight divisions between places of political action. More specifically, we argue that during the last 10 years in Quebec, a shift occurred in both the electoral and social conflicts arenas, allowing new coalitions to form and new logics of political action to emerge. Québec solidaire is the result of these changes.

QUÉBEC SOLIDAIRE AND THE POLITICAL ACTION DIAMOND

We define an analytical framework organized around four poles of political action. Each pole is characterized by an arena and logics of political action.

An arena is an organized system of institutions, procedures, and actors in which social forces can be heard and use resources to obtain responses to the issues they raise (Neveu 2005:16). Like Neveu, we distinguish the electoral arena, where elections take place, and the social conflicts arena, which operates as a forum for mobilizations (Neveu 2005:17). Logics of political action include two dimensions: (1) type of political action: by delegation of power to a representative or direct participation and (2) type of relationship with the state and its institutions: confrontation or collaboration.

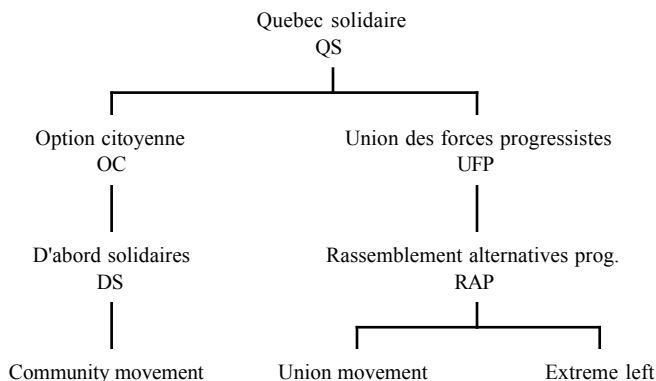
The intersection of these elements defines four poles: two in the electoral arena and two in the social conflicts arena (see table and illustration). These poles are analytical constructs, and the distinctions between them might appear artificial. For example, the protest democracy pole and the participative democracy pole are very closely related. What distinguishes them is the type of arena mobilized (the social conflicts arena for the protest democracy pole and the electoral arena for the participative democracy pole). They share a common conception of political action as best served by direct participation in the political process. These poles have grown significantly in western democracies over the last 10 years, especially with regard to global justice movements (Della Porta et al. 2006; Della Porta and Diani 2006), and in certain election campaigns as well (for example, the attempt to present a citizens' electoral list that was 100% alterglobalist in the European elections in France in 2004). Certain empirical cases might also fall under several poles, such as a citizen's committee collaborating with municipalities (Patsias and Patsias 2006; Della Porta and Andretta 2002). Between the social democracy pole and the protest democracy pole, these committees intervene in the social conflicts arena, using a strategy of collaboration with the local state, often organized on the basis of direct member participation. Despite a heavy presence at the local level in Quebec, they did not play a central role in the history of Québec solidaire.

The political action diamond allows us to consider different social forces at different times, their presence at/absence from certain poles, as well as their movement from one pole to another. In this framework, an actor may be involved in different poles simultaneously. For example, a union might be active during an election campaign (electoral pole) while negotiating labour legislation reform with certain state institutions (so-

cial democracy pole) and working with a coalition to organize a major demonstration against a specific policy (protest democracy pole). In this context, the *places of action* and the *type of actors* are distinguished, and the division of tasks is not fixed in time and space (i.e., political parties present solely at the electoral pole, unions present solely at the social democracy pole, with social movements having the monopoly in terms of protest). Rather, it becomes an empirical issue. Furthermore, this categorization transcends the “in/out” division that is generally presupposed in the study of protest versus partisan politics (Friedberg 1993; Meyer and Tarrow 1998). In our framework, an actor could be “in” and “out” at the same time or strike a balance between “in” and “out” strategies.

As a result, the diamond could be used at different times, in different places, for different phenomena (and not just left political party emergence). However, this framework does not provide a clear-cut answer to the question of political party emergence; the specific answers are dependent upon the particular context and the specific times the actions take place. The diamond is not an explanatory model with a predictive aspect, but a method for systematically organizing and analyzing the complexity at work by sorting social and political dynamics. In applying the diamond to the history of Québec solidaire, we highlight two contextual changes in the electoral and social conflicts arenas that correspond to one major change in the dynamics of relationships between one main party and a significant portion of its traditional allies.

Quebec solidaire Organizational History



EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Since 1993, the political game in Quebec has been played by three main actors: the Quebec Liberal Party, the *Parti québécois* and the *Action démocratique du Québec* (ADQ). These parties compete primarily on

the issue of the political status of Quebec within the Canadian federation. In the 2003 election, the ADQ became a serious challenger to the other two parties for the first time, not so much with regard to the federalist/sovereignist cleavage, but more in pushing for a right electoral platform on social issues (Boismenu et al. 2004; Pottie 2004). The trajectory of Québec solidaire is closely intertwined with this right shift in the electoral arena. However, this “major” change, highly visible in 2003, is rooted in the past, beginning with the loss of the referendum on Quebec sovereignty in 1995. This first stage also marked the appearance of actors who would later play a major role in the birth of Québec solidaire. We begin by examining how new borders of political action allowed the emergence of new social and political actors and new dynamics among them (Stage 1: 1995–2003). Then we analyze the crystallization period (Stage 2: 2003–2006), when Québec solidaire was officially formed.

Stage 1: 1995–2003. New Borders of Political Action

In the year leading up to the 1995 referendum, most progressive social forces were unified around the concept of building a new country and were campaigning for Quebec sovereignty as “Partners for Sovereignty” with the PQ (Salée 2002:163; 2003:39). The referendum loss led to a reorganization of alliances. Not only was the perspective of sovereignty disappearing (at least in the short term, even if the PQ remained in power), but the new premier and PQ leader, Lucien Bouchard, set in motion a period of cutbacks, launching the “zero-deficit strategy.” This situation triggered a new political cleavage in which social issues superseded the national dream of sovereignty for an increasing number of progressive activists.² This first contextual change is central in Québec solidaire genealogy.

As we mentioned in the introduction, the birth of Québec solidaire is the result of two parallel processes that merged in February 2006 (see diagram). The first branch of Québec solidaire materialized in this first stage, in the electoral arena, with the creation of the UFP, a coalition of very small left and extreme-left parties and new nonaffiliated activists. Based on the accounts of UFP members, UFP began in 1997 when the left newspaper *L'Aut'journal* published a text by Paul Cliche that called for the creation of a political alternative. This invitation was followed by a first meeting in Montreal on November 29 and 30, 1997. Approximately 500 people attended the meeting, and several progressive individuals

2. Of course, there are multiple reasons for the progressive development of this new cleavage, and the loss of the referendum on Quebec sovereignty in 1995 is one of many. We mention it because it was a structural element in the history of Québec solidaire. For a discussion of this issue, see Salée (2002, 2003).

were actively involved, including Paul Cliche (active in municipal politics, he was the founder and first president of the *Front d'action politique*, the first left municipal party in Montreal in the late 1960s); Michel Chartrand (a union leader who was active in provincial politics in the late 1950s through the *Parti social démocratique du Québec* and later as founder and first president of the *Parti socialiste du Québec*); and Pierre Dubuc (director and chief editor of the newspaper *L'Aut'journal*). One year later, on November 7 and 8, 1998, the *Rassemblement pour une alternative politique* (RAP) movement was formed. At the general elections held on November 30, the RAP presented 7 candidates, while the *Parti de la démocratie socialiste* (PDS) presented 97. These left candidates received 35,000 votes, which the activists considered to be a victory (Directeur Général des élections, Québec 2006).

From the time it was first founded, the RAP's objective was to develop a citizen's political movement dedicated to the creation of a progressive political party (Molly Alexander, interview by author, 2003). In May 2000, the RAP invited the *Parti Communiste du Québec* (PCQ), the PDS and members of the Quebec progressive movement to participate in a conference on left unity. Six hundred and fifty people were in attendance. It was the first meeting between activists involved in the RAP movement and activists who were more closely connected to the political action of social movements. At the end of the conference, the *Comité de liaison de la gauche politique* [Leftist Liaison Committee] was established. It was founded by the RAP, the PDS, the PCQ, the *Bloc Pot* and the Quebec section of the Green Party of Canada. The objective of the liaison committee was to foster closer ties among the parties, specifically by adopting common public positions and common actions.

The convention at which the RAP went from a movement to a political party was held from November 24–26, 2000. The *Rassemblement pour une alternative politique* became the *Rassemblement pour l'alternative progressiste*. The founding of the UFP was also accelerated by another key event, i.e., the by-election of April 9, 2001 in the Montreal riding of Mercier. On the strength of their new unity, the three main left political parties organized a common front and obtained 24.6% of the vote. Candidate Paul Cliche finished ahead of the ADQ (Directeur Général des élections, Québec, 2006). Finally, following the negotiation of a memorandum of understanding concluded in late May and ratified in June, the RAP, PDS, and PCQ, as well as the *Conseil central du Montréal métropolitain* (CSN), formed the coalition *Union des forces progressistes* for an undetermined term. During the RAP convention of December 8, 2001, the following resolution was adopted by a majority of 55% of delegates: That the RAP, gathered at this special convention

on December 8, 2001, declare itself in favour of the creation of a federated left party as soon as possible and, if possible, before the next general elections (author's translation) (Rioux and Bouchard 2003).

The *Union des forces progressistes* was officially founded June 15 and 16, 2002 in Montreal. It comprised the *Rassemblement pour l'alternative progressiste*, the *Parti de la démocratie socialiste*, the *Parti communiste du Québec*, and a group of activists that had not, until then, been members of a party. Two-thirds of UFP members originated from former left parties and groups, while one-third were individual members, mainly young activists who were first-time party members.³ During the second UFP convention, held on February 1 and 2, 2003, key elements of the electoral platform were adopted: the UFP is a left party, favours Quebec sovereignty, is closely related to social movements taking place on a global scale, has an internal decision-making process that encourages direct member participation, and acknowledges specific streams within the coalition.

The history of the UFP could have ended there. However, a second disruptive element at the electoral pole changed the playing field, and progressive activists who were not previously involved in partisan politics entered the scene (Stage 2). First, however, we turn to the changing dynamics that occurred in the social conflicts arena between the state of Quebec and some social groups during this first stage.

The postreferendum period and the financial austerity plan spearheaded by the PQ government leader constituted breaking points between the party and social groups, redefining the dynamics within the social conflicts arena. In 1996, the new premier, Lucien Bouchard, was looking for a major social consensus from the largest possible coalition of social actors to validate his decision to reach a zero deficit by the year 2000. To do this, he convened a socioeconomic conference in March of 1996⁴ and a socioeconomic summit in October and November of 1996. At the November summit, the government "recognized [community] organizations of this sector as full-fledged partners" (Quebec 1996), but at the same time refused to agree to demands for a "zero-impovertism" clause by women's groups and antipoverty groups to counterbalance the

3. According to an internal UFP study cited by Amir Khadir, 56% of members are under the age of 35 and 29% are under 29; 50% of them are first-time party members; there is a minor yet real presence of Anglophone activists as well as several members of Montreal's cultural communities (Amir Khadir, interview by author, March 2006).

4. Initiated by the premier, it brought together the various social and economic partners of Quebec, or at least the partners convened by the government. Youths, through the *Conseil permanent de la jeunesse* (Permanent Youth Council) organized a parallel summit because they were not invited to the Economy and Employment Summit. See *Forces* (1996:41).

government's zero deficit.⁵ This refusal was the breaking point in the consensus that had prevailed during the summit and led to the departure of the president of the Quebec Women's Federation, Françoise David, from the bargaining table. Others left as well, including representatives of the National Coalition of Women against Poverty and of *Solidarité populaire Québec*. François Saillant was among them and later played a key role in the birth of Option citoyenne (Pichette 1996:A8). This event constituted a major challenge in the history of relationships between the PQ and certain community leaders. From this point forward, the implementation of social democratic policies was no longer automatically linked with the PQ's political action, and the opportunity to oppose the PQ or to be critical of its actions for social reasons was revived.

This falling out with the PQ was exacerbated during the Quebec mobilizations of the World March of Women in 2000. Encouraged by the success of the 1995 Bread and Roses March and by the positive response of the government to their claims at that time (Graefe 2005), feminist activists in Quebec, who had worked for three years in organizing a world march uniting 159 countries and 5000 women's groups, were expecting a positive response by the government to their demands here as well (Giraud 2001). The Bouchard government's refusal to address almost all of the 10 issues raised by the march in Quebec was a bitter disappointment (David 2004). The government's main concession was to raise the minimum wage by 10 cents. It was regarded as "a slap in the face" according to Françoise David. As a result, a number of feminist leaders and activists began to look at collective action in the field of partisan politics, and Françoise David publicly raised the idea of building a feminist party.

This fundamental rift between the PQ and principal leaders of Quebec's women's movements is central to understanding the emergence of Québec solidaire. The response of the Bouchard government to the Quebec women's march in 2000 also triggered an organizational crisis within the main feminist federation, with the very limited gains made by the activists calling into question the whole strategy of the mobilization. With most leaders of the march leaving the organization, they became available for another form of activism. In this respect, *D'abord solidaires*, the other branch of Québec solidaire created in 2003, served as a trampoline for feminist leaders to enter partisan politics. The perceived failure of mass protest politics on the Quebec political scene, which is historically quite open to the initiatives and claims of social actors, has encouraged feminist leaders to become directly involved in the electoral

5. The clause involved giving society a law prohibiting the impoverishment of the poorest 20% of the population, regardless of status (workers, unemployed, students, or other) (Labrie 1996:A7).

arena. Because they were not comfortable with the existing political parties, they chose to create their own political entity.

Investment in the PQ was, at that time, unthinkable for feminists. Why did they choose not to join the UFP? The immediate reason was that they wanted to form a feminist party with feminist values and a feminist organizational structure, which was not the case for the emerging UFP (Manon Macé, interview by author, 2004; Françoise David, interview by author, 2006). The individuals who founded the RAP had three characteristics in common, which would hinder the development of the UFP: they were activists from partisan parties or unions, they resided in Montreal, and they consisted mostly of men.⁶ In contrast, Option citoyenne was characterized by activists from a different background. Women involved at the beginning of the movement were, for the most part, members of the community movement, and the women's movement in particular.⁷ They had a history of street activism and political protest, in addition to social service management, as a result of their involvement in community actions.

The distinct activist histories of the movements go hand-in-hand with their styles of operation, which were also distinct in the two political organizations. The UFP and Option citoyenne claimed to represent renewed ways of doing politics. Consequently, both movements agreed on the necessity of adopting specific parity measures to guarantee a place for women within the party (however, according to Françoise David, this principle was not applied by the UFP). Both emphasized direct democracy and consensus decision-making, and both favoured collective leadership instead of a single powerful leader. Nevertheless, the Option citoyenne movement refused to give special weight to collective organizations within the future party, preferring one member/one vote, and was willing to ensure full autonomy of the party (and vice versa) from all social groups (briefing document for the national meeting, Option citoyenne, November 2004, on-line). The involvement of feminist leaders with some extreme left parties in the 1970s and the failure of these movements due to internal disputes among distinct streams also played a role in the decision to launch their own project.⁸

6. Three men have played a key role: Paul Cliche, Michel Chartrand, and Pierre Dubuc.

7. Françoise David, Alexa Conradi, and Manon Massé were major figures in the women's movement. François Saillant (key activist for social housing) and Arthur Sandborn (union leader in Montreal) were also key supporters of the Option citoyenne initiative.

8. Françoise David was a Marxist-Leninist activist in the 1970s. See the documentary *Le Québec rouge*. This element is generally invoked to explain why activists who have experienced old-left tactics and organizational structures are reluctant to forge alliances with left parties today. For example, see Della Porta et al. (2006:197–231).

During this first stage, two poles were gradually changing: the electoral democracy pole appeared to be increasingly open to debates that did not involve the political status of Quebec, and a new left-coalition-party emerged with the UFP. The social democracy pole was perceived as less efficient (or sufficient) by social leaders, and some of them seriously considered the possibility of crossing the line and becoming involved in the electoral arena. During the second stage, these changes were reinforced and Québec solidaire was born.

Stage 2: 2003-2006. Crystallization of Changes

The 2003 general elections were marked by the increasing popularity of Mario Dumont's right-wing party, the *Action démocratique du Québec* (ADQ). In polls conducted a few months before the elections, 32% of voter intention favoured the ADQ (see polls published in *Le Devoir* and the *Globe and Mail*, 31 May 2002). The party's growing popularity provoked strong reactions. A citizen's movement was created, and all unions were involved in the campaign to prevent the "Quebec model"⁹ from disappearing, with some abandoning their traditional neutrality in the electoral arena (Collombat and Gagnon 2003:8-9). Even within the PQ, some activists attempted to push the party toward the left.¹⁰ This contextual element played a crucial role in the crystallization of the changes set out in the first part of this article.

Following this trend, during the fall of 2002, research chair holder Léo-Paul Lauzon (who was also present during the first RAP meeting in 1997) organized a conference entitled "Social Movements and Political Action: Which Left Are We Talking About?" During the conference, Françoise David launched the idea of a popular movement to counter the right-wing notions that were growing in public opinion polls (*Le Devoir*, 31 May 2002). After the conference, several personalities from the community movement, and in particular many former members of the Quebec Federation of Women, as well as a number of artists, launched the "*Appel pour un Québec d'abord solidaire*," published in *Le Devoir* on 28 January 2003. One thousand four hundred people signed in support of the *Appel* (*D'abord solidaires*, nd). *D'abord solidaires* (DS) quickly became a citizens' movement and launched a popular education campaign

9. The expression "Quebec model" refers to the Quebec state's relative openness to the claims of social actors and to the relative and constant degree of cooperation between the two. Thus, elements of neocorporatism can be found in the Québec mode of governance, such as the two Summits organized in 1995. They are not formally organized but more a question of political practices.

10. In June 2005, Pierre Dubuc and other union members founded *Syndicalistes et progressistes pour un Québec libre* (SPQ Libre), which became a political club inside the PQ. Its explicit mandate was to create a thriving left alternative within the PQ.

on the issue of the elections announced for the spring of 2003. DS developed as a nonpartisan actor whose main task consisted of presenting the programs of the major political parties from the perspective of the common good. During the campaign, the DS website compared the parties' programs, allowing citizens to become informed and to understand the differences between the parties. The results of the 2003 elections could be considered a victory for DS given that the ADQ did not perform as expected, winning only 18.2% of votes and four seats in the National Assembly (Directeur Général des élections, Québec, 2006).

In the fall of 2003, the DS citizens' movement conducted a postelection analysis. Three tendencies were emerging from within the movement. Some of the activists wanted to form a political party that would become a "left, feminist, alter-globalization, and ecologist party." Others preferred to remain a citizens' movement for popular education. Yet another group of activists favoured the emergence of a libertarian movement focused on local networking and more direct action (Lorraine Guay, interview by author, 2005). At the November meeting, the three options were proposed, and all three were adopted. DS continued as a nonpartisan movement, involved in the social conflicts arena (primarily at the protest democracy pole). *Option citoyenne* was created around Françoise David and François Saillant for the purpose of entering the electoral arena and actively participating in the electoral democracy pole. Lastly, the libertarian option, developed in Montreal and in the regions, created a network of self-managed libertarian collectives.

In 2003, the main goal of DS was to produce tools for citizens to enhance their participation in the general elections and to become a place where citizens would be able to reappropriate politics and political proposals. The birth of DS was a manifestation of the desire to be independent of traditional and hierarchical parties for the purposes of representation and, instead, to propose a do-it-yourself style of politics. In this sense, DS came into existence in the participative democracy pole, as we have defined it. Today, DS remains a place where citizens debate political issues and propose original solutions to the political problems they identify. However, between elections, they are not directly involved in the electoral arena.

In the spring of 2004, Françoise David and her collaborators published a short book entitled *Bien commun recherché: une option citoyenne*, which examined possibilities for social change. The book outlined the values driving the members of Option citoyenne with respect to democracy, culture, sovereignty, the economy, the distribution of wealth, and state and public services. The book was viewed as a tool for dialogue between Option citoyenne and the population of Quebec. It served as a

basis for a tour of the Quebec regions during the summer of 2004. The first national meeting of Option citoyenne took place in Quebec City from November 12–14, 2004. Four themes were on the agenda: (1) a responsible economy; (2) a party for the common good; (3) a sovereign Quebec; and (4) a pluralist and democratic party (*Option citoyenne*, online). Fundamental decisions regarding the movement's vision were made during the first meeting of 300 delegates: Option citoyenne was a feminist political party and a left party. No consensus was reached regarding the issue of Quebec's political status, but formal negotiations began with the UFP to merge the two political entities in the short term.

According to internal statistics, Option citoyenne grew from 300 to 2000 members in one year. The second national meeting, held in April 2005 in Montreal, centred on the party's fundamental vision and its relationship with Aboriginal people. Much of the time was monopolized by debates on the sovereignty issue. It was during the third national meeting, in October 2005, that Option citoyenne members adopted a proposal in favour of Quebec sovereignty. However, they insisted that sovereignty remain a secondary objective and that the pursuit of the common good continue to be the main focal point (Robitaille 2005; Option citoyenne official documents, online, 2005). During this third meeting, Option citoyenne also formally adopted the proposal to merge the movement with the UFP, as well as the terms and conditions of the merger. *Québec solidaire*'s founding convention took place in February 2006, with 1000 members in attendance. They elected two spokespersons, Françoise David and Amir Khadir (previous UFP leader), and a national coordination committee composed of nine women and seven men.

At this second stage, the 2003 election served as a crystallization catalyst, and it is the most important of the changing contextual elements that need to be taken into account. It reinforced the new dynamics among social and political actors that emerged during the first stage and sparked the creation of DS as a citizens' movement. These changes are quite new in Quebec's political history. First, from the time the PQ was founded, the coalitions that formed among social actors in Quebec never crossed the boundaries of the social conflicts arena to enter the provincial electoral arena because of loyalty to the PQ and the sovereignist cause. Second, coalitions were usually formed on the basis of organizations in the social conflicts arena. At the social democracy pole, this was directly related to the "Quebec model" developed by the state of Quebec in the 1960s, characterized by progressive inclusion of unions and other social actors in the political process (for example, see Bourque 2000; Salée 2002, 2003; Graefe 2003). At the protest democracy pole, large coalitions were (and continue to be) driven by large unions or large coalitions

of community organizations (for example, the coalition *Solidarité Populaire Québec* in the 1980s, the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* in the late 1990s and the *Réseau de Vigilance* after the 2003 elections). Nevertheless, since 2003, the rules of the game have changed. Citizens have been involved in DS, Option citoyenne members refused to provide special status to founding organizations within the future party, and in 2007, the Quebec Social Forum (Québec solidaireF) event was driven in part by activists with no traditional organizational affiliation (Québec solidaire website, 2007).

DISCUSSION

Québec solidaire history demonstrates the growing fluidity among political action poles during the last 10 years. Three dimensions appear to be central in this respect.

Changing Contextual Elements

The shift from a sovereignist/federalist monopolistic debate to more fuzzy divisions, where the left/right cleavage became more present in public debates, marks the starting point of Québec solidaire history. This shift was sparked by the 1995 referendum loss as well as connections to the sovereignist party's strategies after the referendum. The PQ played an active role in shifting the balance in the electoral arena by choosing to govern using an approach of financial austerity. These two contextual elements allowed social actors (and especially certain women's activists) to forge new alliances with small left parties in an attempt to bring the left political alternative to life on the Quebec political scene. At the end of this period, the presence of a party with a clear right agenda, the ADQ, reinforced this shift in political cleavage and provoked a reaction at the participative democracy pole, with the creation of the citizens' movement, DS.

As the literature on political opportunity structure demonstrates extensively, when the political game changes, new alliances are possible between actors (Kriesi et al. 1995). In addition, new discourses based on different issues have an opportunity to emerge and exist on the public scene. We noted above that Québec solidaire defines itself as a left, feminist, ecologist party that supports global social justice and peace and represents a wide array of interests. All of these issues were deliberated during the emergence of Québec solidaire and continue to define it. During its first electoral campaign, Québec solidaire leaders introduced their party as the systematic, "solidarity" counterpoint and counterforce

to the “so-called rational” discourses on social, economic, cultural, institutional, and environmental dimensions.¹¹

Elements of Changing Dynamics among Collective Actors

The second process concerns the dissolution of the bonds of trust that linked social groups, and women’s movements in particular, with the PQ. This link was a traditional key element in Quebec politics, and its progressive breakdown between 1996–2000 had a considerable impact on the protest democracy pole. Even if it did not radically change the way unions continued to deal with the PQ and the sovereignist cause (Salée 2003:45), it did create a cleavage inside the social democracy pole between the major unions (who remained very loyal to the PQ) and the leaders of the major social groups. Interestingly, in the case of Québec solidaire, it was precisely because some of the social actors lost the opportunity to create alliances with what was viewed as the sole progressive party on the electoral scene that they were able to “cross” the line.

By examining the activist trajectories of Québec solidaire leaders, we have demonstrated that this transformation enabled the transfer of human resources from protest action to partisan politics. Because the social conflicts arena was no longer effective from the point of view of feminist and other social activists, they invested in the electoral arena using the political party as a medium. A party needs resources in order to develop a political organization structure, including money, members, and networks (Lucardie 2000:178). While material resources were not very abundant at the time Québec solidaire emerged, it is clear that the presence of two charismatic leaders, Françoise David and Amir Khadir, who were also political entrepreneurs, were responsible for the success of the project. However, the strong, extensive networks of activists on whom they were able to rely are also an integral part of the explanation. Québec solidaire benefited from the transfer of human resources from the Quebec Women’s Federation to Option citoyenne following the 2000 World March of Women and the defection of activists from the organization. These women also entered the political arena with huge networks of enthusiastic activists originating from women’s movements and, more generally, from the community sector in which they had been involved all their lives. They had much to offer in terms of human energy and

11. In October 2005, a group of economists, academics, and personalities in the business and cultural milieus launched a “Manifeste pour un Québec lucide,” a document that proposed radical changes to Quebec governance, adopting a truly rightist tune. This group was led by Lucien Bouchard, Quebec premier under the PQ government from 1996–2001. A couple of weeks later, social group leaders, including Françoise David and Amir Khadir, launched the “Manifeste pour un Québec solidaire” in response. The left/right debate is now framed as a lucide/solidaire debate in Quebec.

know-how. As Agrikoliansky (2002) has demonstrated for the League of Human Rights, the processes of “activist reconversion” are central to understanding the emergence of new terrains of social protest, in his case, from partisan involvement to human rights activism. In the case of Québec solidaire, the reconversion operates from the social conflicts arena to the electoral arena.

Changes in Political Action

The emergence of Québec solidaire was also symptomatic of larger changes occurring in Quebec society and, more generally, in western democracies. The political action diamond, with its focus on places as well as logics of actions, is useful in this regard. Québec solidaire history is the result of renewed articulations of the electoral and social conflicts arenas and new methods of engaging in politics for most of the activists involved.

Beginning in 1998, Quebec, like most western democracies, experienced a rise in protest demonstrations against free-trade issues, which sparked renewed activist interest and influenced the direction Québec solidaire was taking. The UFP’s organization of the People’s Summit, held in April 2001, was a response to the Summit of the Americas, which brought together 24 heads of state to negotiate a treaty on a Free-Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in Quebec City, and directly inspired by the RAP election campaign slogan in the Mercier riding: “A Different Quebec Is Possible” (Amir Khadir, interview by author, March 2006). Similarly, the election of Brazilian President Lula and the formation of a Workers’ Party in October 2002 was a model and tangible example of the potential renewal of left politics during the debates of the 2002 convention that united certain progressive activists from Quebec and English Canada. This global movement toward renewed left activism undoubtedly influenced the decision of Françoise David (who participated in the 2002 convention) and her collaborators to embark upon the Option citoyenne journey. At a very general level, therefore, Québec solidaire was fully immersed in this global context, searching for “another possible world.” However, the relationships of the UFP and Option citoyenne with the alterglobalist shift in Quebec are more complex. On one hand, after 2001, the UFP appeared to be a potential place of activism for a party of young alterglobalist activists. Their involvement in this new political entity had a lot to do with the UFP being something other than an “old left” political party. In addition, several young activists involved in the April 2001 demonstrations were not on good terms with the future Option citoyenne leader, who publicly dissociated herself from activists

promoting the “diversity of tactics” approach.¹² OC’s appeal to young activists waned considerably.

Be that as it may, Québec solidaire was viewed as a concrete political expression of the common will of several progressive activists to renew how politics was done: its internal operations, which were indicative of representation as well as direct participation; the place of women in the organization, parity at all party levels and in the selection of election candidates; the importance of consensus in the decision-making process; emphasis on collective leadership in the young political entity. These elements demonstrate how Québec solidaire fits into a more general context of political action transformation, as seen in the alterglobalist movement.

At the same time, the concrete connection of Québec solidaire with the principal actors of the alterglobalization movement in Quebec (NGOs and unions) became increasingly problematic as the party became immersed in Quebec politics. For instance, the recent experience of the Quebec Social Forum (Québec solidaireF) demonstrated that Québec solidaire had no natural allies in the social conflicts arena, but that it would have to work to build them given that political parties had no real opportunity to exist in the space created by the Québec solidaireF (as in all social forums). This example is symptomatic of the debates that permeate the alterglobalist shift’s connections to political parties and, more generally, partisan political action (Andretta and Reiter 2007). However, in Quebec, a new political actor was born when this shift was occurring. Elsewhere, and in Europe in particular, the social actors had connections to the left political parties that have shaped the electoral arena for years.

The idea of the “welfare diamond” originated from the notion that responsibility for welfare has always been shared by different sectors (public, family, community, and commercial responsibility), which are characterized by specific logics of intervention (Evers and Svelick 1991; Evers et al. 1994). By transposing this grid to political action, and by producing a “political action diamond,” we demonstrate that responsibility for the representation of the interests and identities of citizens (whether direct or by delegation) has always been shared by different poles as well. Of course, the importance, preeminence, or dominance of certain poles with respect to each other depends on the places and times being considered. Québec solidaire history provides an accurate recount of these transformations. What remains to be seen is whether the forma-

12. The “diversity of tactics” approach implies activists’ tolerance vis-à-vis violent tactics of protest. Statements made at a press conference and reproduced in the radio documentary of Alain Chénier and France Émond, “La répression atteint un sommet à Québec,” 23 April 2001, CIBL Radio, Montreal.

tion of a political party, which represents the interests and identities of the “new left,” will be viable in the Quebec context.¹³

CONCLUSION

To our original question of how and when collective actors cross the line and enter partisan politics, we have offered a multifaceted response that highlights the specific history of Quebec society. But is the Quebec case unique?

We suggest that the contextual transformations we have underlined are less an issue of the distinctiveness of Quebec society and more the process through which the political scene in Quebec is increasingly comparable to other western societies. In light of this analysis, the 2007 provincial elections appear to be less of a “rupture” with past political dynamics and more the result of a process that began in the mid-1990s. This process could be characterized as a “normalization” of the Quebec political scene, which is less dependent on the issue of the political status of Quebec alone and more permeable to social cleavages that have had an impact in other societies for a long time, such as the left/right and open/closed cleavages. Furthermore, the new dynamics created by the emergence of Québec solidaire among social and political actors on the left side of the political spectrum are quite unique. The objective of Québec solidaire is to implement a renewed conception of democracy, both in its concrete form of participation and in its substance, influenced largely by political debates occurring in today’s world of social movements, especially the global social justice movement fighting for “another world.” Considering the context surrounding its appearance, Québec solidaire is a pioneer, experiencing the possibilities and limitations of applying “another style of politics” on a daily basis.

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