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Response to David Mandel:  
**The challenges must be met**



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Since David wrote his contribution in the November/December issue of Relay, the public sector unions leadership has collapsed in the face of the Québec Liberal government’s special law in mid-December — although the large CSN general health-care employees union, the FSSS, without even a last-minute settlement on non-wage issues and first in line for the privatization block, was ready for an illegal general strike. (Who knows, they might still bounce back.)

It is in this demoralizing context that the UFP and Option citoyenne will merge in February. As a balance sheet of the UFP, I agree with David who says that *“the [UFP] has a marked electoralist orientation [which] risks growing stronger with the upcoming merger... with Option Citoyenne.”* Hence we must expect an independantist NDP as the final result. But because the membership is *“vaguely left and not clearly defined politically”*, that most probable result is not yet crystallized. A happier result might occur, depending on the direction of the social struggles but also on the capacity of the socialists to work together for the UFP to be a “party of the street” to which the party of the ballot box is subordinated on the basis of a clear anticapitalist platform of emergency measures.

To bring the membership more in this direction, David proposes *“to develop a strong enough presence to force debate and education on the fundamental questions [...and] organizing the trade unionists in the UFP in order to work out forward-looking alternative union strategies and to offer each other support...”* Theoretical education on the nature of the State, on strategy, on independence, on the kind of party and so on is certainly necessary. Such education was done in the fall of 2004 but dropped in 2005 by both the UFP and its internal organized tendencies. I would suggest, though, that the most important education, given the *“vaguely left”* characterization of the membership, would be to enhance the

political debate within the party on a year-round basis around current events such as, for example, the public sector struggle.

The two tendencies that David does not mention — the Québec branch of the International Socialists (IS) and Québec Socialiste (QS), the remaining non-Trotskyist core of the old PDS — did that education systematically, especially through proposals and interventions in the Conseil de l'Union, the leading UFP body between congresses. Plus, the IS does it through its newspaper, *Résistance*, and QS through contributions to the “tribune libre” of the UFP Web site when it is not censored. Strangely, the two tendencies that David does mention, his own Gauche socialiste (GS) and the PCQ, which has recently split from the Canadian CP, were in no way critical of the UFP's majority leadership and very rarely made proposals. Moreover, David's comrades had practically stopped publishing any written literature, not even their own members' contributions, on their web site.

As for organizing trade unionists, such a proposal was voted for in the fall of 2005 by the Conseil de l'Union but the leadership undemocratically failed to act on it because they “*oppose treading on 'union territory' for fear of alienating potential support from union leaders.*” Not only that, but realizing that “*the Québec labour movement seems in a dead end, its leaders having allowed it to be pushed even further (than it already was) onto its knees by the Liberal government...*”, this same Conseil de l'Union proposed a campaign on the necessity of a “general strike, public and private [sectors], all together”. Again the leadership completely ignored the adopted resolution. These decisions, albeit ultimately not implemented, did not come out of the blue. They were proposed and argued mainly by QS and IS. GS and the PCQ did not back these proposals and did nothing to implement them although GS was the first, earlier on, to advance the idea of organizing the trade unionists within the UFP.

Maybe David would explain this contradiction by the fact that there was not a “*strong enough presence*” of socialists in the UFP... and that there will be still fewer in the new party. More broadly, the two tendencies mentioned by David have uncritically and systematically backed the leadership that they were part of, having four members out of 15 on the executive board, the Conseil exécutif national. Considering that ratio and the fact that the four socialist tendencies altogether had probably more than 50 members out of around 1200 members of which only a minority are activists, the socialist presence was not that weak. The other side of this unconvincing argument, mentioned by David in an intervention at the Conseil de l'Union, is the isolation of left unionists. But doing nothing to bring together these isolated individuals to give them a collective voice makes the situation a catch-22 outcome unless one believes in spontaneity.

I suspect that David would answer that the proof of his point of view is in the pudding of the failure of organizing the left in the unions and elsewhere on the basis of a general strike campaign. I would suggest that the refusal of his

tendency and the PCQ to commit themselves probably made that failure a self-fulfilling prophecy. Does this mean that such a UFP campaign would have averted the unfortunate outcome of the public sector struggle? Because of the absence of an organized left tendency in the union movement right from the beginning and because of the weak links between the UFP and the union movement, no overall modification of the correlation of forces would have occurred. But that should not have been the short term aim. The aim, possible and realistic, should have been to make the UFP a meaningful presence within the activist wing of the unions and to organize an embryonic left union tendency around the UFP.

It is tempting to see the contradiction between David's well-meaning proposals and the actual behaviour of his tendency as typical straightforward opportunism: no criticism, hard work and get-those-leadership-positions. And who cares about the unavoidable result shown by the nationalist-neoliberal evolution of the Brazilian PT — and “*the fate of the socialists*” within it — or simply the Canadian NDP. That assessment is probably too black and white. For the first time in eons, in late January 2006, fully realizing the very probable right-wing evolution of the merged party, David's comrades published a mild critique on their web about the danger of electoralism, of making links with the PQ and the necessity of an emergency platform.

But they did not carry that critique to the “Manifeste des solidaires”, a well publicised response in opposition to the pro-Liberal “Manifeste des lucides”. The “solidaires” statement was in fact initiated by the four spokespersons of the UFP/OC and signed by four PQ and Bloc MPs. Since the new party will be born without a platform or program, this manifesto will be the de facto platform of the new party. To the “neoliberalism is still possible” of Lucien Bouchard and the eleven other so-called “lucides”, the apostles of the left answer, in effect, “another capitalism is possible”... à la Lula. The first proposal of the so-called “solidaires” is an unbelievable “Support businesses that meet criteria of social utility and general interest, businesses with an ecologist and social conscience....”

Obviously, it is “high noon” for socialists. QS, of which I am a member, proposes organizing an anticapitalist pole within the new party. Are David and his comrades willing to work in that direction?

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*Marc Bonhomme is an activist in the UFP-Outaouais, in Gatineau, and in Québec socialiste*