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No red square for former Quebec student leader Leo Bureau-Blouin in debut PQ news conference

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LAVAL, Que. — Leo Bureau-Blouin's debut news conference as a Parti Quebecois candidate on Wednesday was dominated by what he wasn't wearing: the red square that has come to define

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student defiance in the province.

The former student leader — who was omnipresent on TV during the tuition protests earlier this year — had to fend off questions about the absence of the red square, which symbolizes opposition to the government's commitment to hiking the cost of education.

"I think everyone knows my position on tuition fees....I think that with or without a red square, we can make Quebec one of the nations where education is the most affordable on the world," said Bureau-Blouin, flanked by PQ Leader Pauline Marois.

Many Quebecers support Premier Jean Charest's decision to increase tuition, and the absence of the red square can be interpreted as an attempt by Bureau-Blouin and the PQ not to alienate those people come election day.

"The objective is to represent all of the voters in the riding but I think everyone knows my views on tuition fees," Bureau-Blouin said.

Marois and the PQ were quick to jump on the anti-tuition fee increase bandwagon when the student protests began in February. They stuck to their position despite assertions by opponents they were just being opportunists.

They wore the red square symbol until June when Marois said she was ditching it in favour of the fleur-de-lis for Quebec's Fete nationale.

Critics said she was trying to distance herself from the students as many Quebecers supported the tuition increases.

Meanwhile, the PQ explained over the spring that its decision to wear the red square didn't mean it opposed fee hikes, or supported rowdy protests, but rather was meant as an expression of support for the student cause.

Leo Bureau-Blouin, who until June was president of the provincial federation of CEGEP students known as FECQ, was admittedly not the most radical of student leaders. That distinction belongs to the people at CLASSE, who in their latest manifesto go well beyond education to denounce user fees for all public services, natural resource development, treatment of aboriginals and discrimination against women.

Mr. Bureau-Blouin, who had been accepted to begin law school at Université de Montréal next fall, was a moderate by comparison, someone who was even heard to utter the word compromise. On Tuesday CLASSE spokesman Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois criticized his former counterpart, saying his jump to the PQ — which supports tuition increases indexed to inflation — is proof he never really understood the student movement.

But that is not to say Mr. Bureau-Blouin was a model leader during the months of protest that saw Montreal streets jammed nightly by roving marches and campuses blockaded by masked strikers.

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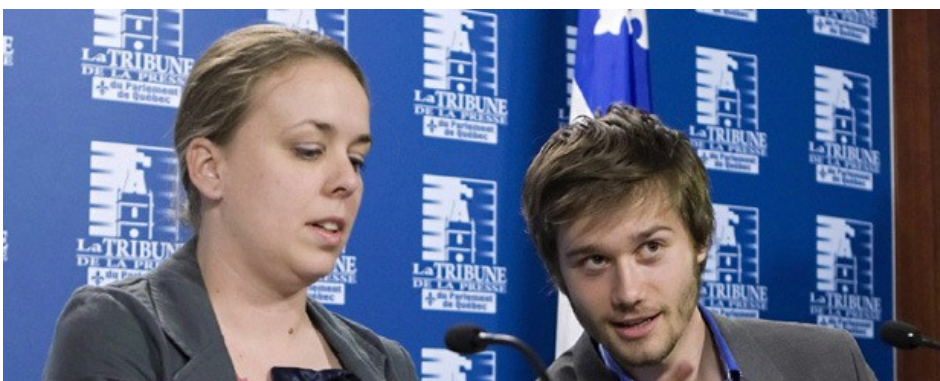
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The PQ is hoping that Bureau-Blouin's candidacy in the Montreal-area riding of Laval-des-Rapides will help attract even more young people to vote for the sovereigntist party at the next election, which is expected to be called next Wednesday and held Sept. 4.

If Bureau-Blouin wins, he will become the youngest-ever member of the national assembly. He turns 21 next December.

Bureau-Blouin, who used social media on Tuesday to announce his candidacy, said he is choosing the PQ because he believes it offers a chance for a Quebec that is fairer, stronger and more environmentally friendly.

"It wasn't an easy decision. I made it after a lot of consultation. But I ended up making it because I believe Quebec is at a crossroads.... I'm worried about the consequences of the Liberals being re-elected. I think they govern not to bring Quebecers together but more to divide them."

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[...] No red square for former Quebec student leader Leo Bureau-Blouin in debut PQ ... THE CANADIAN PRESS/Rogério Barbosa. Student leader Leo Bureau-Blouin and Parti Quebecois Leader Pauline Marois at

a news conference in Laval, Que., Wednesday, July 25, 2012. Bureau-Blouin confirmed that he's running for the Parti Quebecois. Read more on National Post [...]

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