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Quebec opposition leader drops red square

By Staff

The Canadian Press Share this Article

MONTREAL – Pauline Marois’s little red square is being replaced by a blue fleur-de-lis.

The square, which is the symbol of the student protest movement, has been prominently displayed on her lapel during the last session of the legislature. In fact, all members of the Parti Quebecois caucus wore it.

But those days are over.

“I won’t wear it anymore,” the Quebec opposition leader told a radio interviewer in Montreal on Wednesday. “I wore it every day in the legislature.”

She said with the June 24 provincial holiday approaching, “I have chosen to wear the fleur-de-lis.” Something else might also be approaching: a provincial election, with a campaign call possible as early as August.

Marois denied she’s abandoning students, who according to polls do not have majority public support for their tuition-fee fight. Premier Jean Charest, on the other hand, appears to have backing from most Quebecers on the fee-hike issue even if his party is struggling in the polls.

“I have said I will continue to support the student cause because they have a point,” Marois said during the interview.

Marois and the PQ were quick to jump on the anti-tuition fee increase bandwagon back when the protests began in February and stayed there despite assertions by opponents that she and her party were just being opportunists.

As polling data emerged in recent weeks, the government took delight in repeatedly pointing out the presence of red squares on Pequiste lapels.

Premier Jean Charest, who is at the environmental summit in Brazil, said Marois' latest move now makes her the winner of the "championship of hypocrisy."

"If she doesn't wear the red square, she's won the championship of hypocrisy, after wearing the red square, having 10 different positions on the issue of university funding and tuition," Charest said.

"Quebecers feel very strongly about that kind of political hypocrisy."

The PQ has had the most nuanced policy on tuition of all the major parties. The Liberals and CAQ support the fee hikes; the left-wing Quebec solidaire deeply opposes them and casts the issue as a historic social-justice battle.

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.

Marois has said that if she's elected, she will rescind Charest's hikes, but introduce smaller ones.

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