

British Columbia Greens prepare for government role by pledging loyalty to corporate elite

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This week's counting of the absentee ballots in British Columbia's provincial election has confirmed the provisional result announced late on the evening of May 9. No party obtained an overall majority, with the right-wing BC Liberals finishing with 43 seats, the New Democratic Party (NDP) with 41, and the Green Party with three.

The election result underscores the utter bankruptcy of Canada's social democrats, who failed to oust a deeply despised Liberal government that has ruled the province for 16 years, imposing devastating cuts to public services and workers' wages, while handing out multi-million dollar tax breaks to the corporate elite and super-rich. This failure was bound up with the systematic suppression of opposition to the Liberals by the NDP and their trade union allies, and the right-wing character of the NDP's election campaign, which embraced nationalist economic policies and xenophobia.

The election outcome leaves the Greens holding the balance of power. They have advanced three key demands in determining which of the larger parties to support in government: the adoption of a proportional representation voting system; the granting of official party status to the Greens in the provincial legislature; and a ban on corporate and trade union donations to political parties. None of these proposals would do anything to improve working people's lives or lessen social inequality in BC, which has the highest poverty rate in Canada, at over 13 percent.

Green Party leader Andrew Weaver has refused to rule out propping up either a Liberal or NDP government and on Wednesday said talks are ongoing with both parties. This only underscores that far from representing some sort of alternative to the political establishment, as they often claim, Canada's Greens, like their sister organizations around the world, are an integral part of it. They speak on behalf of a privileged section of the upper middle class and share the ruling elite's indifference and hostility to the working class.

Weaver's record exemplifies this. He voted in favour of two Liberal austerity budgets during the 4-year term of the last legislature, in which he was the lone Green representative. During the campaign for the May 9 election he attacked the

NDP's meagre spending promises from the right as being "irresponsible."

Weaver's actions since the election have continued along this right-wing path. As the Greens' principal strategist for their negotiations with the other parties, Weaver appointed Norman Spector, a former chief of staff to Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and a top aide to BC Premier Bill Bennett, who led a right-wing Social Credit government from 1975 to 1986. Spector acted as Bennett's chief adviser when in 1983 he mounted a sweeping Thatcher-inspired attack on public services and worker rights. This provoked mass opposition, including widespread strikes and growing demands from rank-and-file workers for a general strike. The Operation Solidarity movement was cruelly betrayed by the unions and NDP, enabling Social Credit to continue in power and implement its right-wing agenda for a further eight years.

Under conditions of a global crisis of the capitalist system, and with BC's economy threatened by the protectionist measures that the Trump administration has adopted targeting Canada's lumber industry and the impending renegotiation of NAFTA, the Greens' appointment of Spector is a signal to the ruling class that any government propped up by them will have carte blanche to press ahead with ruthless attacks on working people.

It is in this context that the role being played by so-called "progressive" advocacy groups like Leadnow becomes clear. On Wednesday, Leadnow, which played a major role in the "Anybody but Harper" campaign that helped propel Justin Trudeau and his Liberals to national office in 2015, brought a petition to the BC legislature calling for the NDP and Greens to join forces in replacing Christy Clark and her Liberals with a "progressive" government.

Were a government to be formed by the NDP in alliance with the Greens, whether as the result of a formal coalition or a Green pledge to support a minority NDP administration, it would offer nothing to BC workers. The NDP made clear in its election campaign that it has no intention of reversing the regressive tax cuts and attacks on public services the Liberals implemented, let alone enact significant social reform. Its

pathetic 1 percent corporate tax increase would leave BC with among the lowest corporate tax regimes in Canada.

The NDP's pledge to balance the budget for its first three years in power, which leader John Horgan boasted was based on the Liberals' pro-big business fiscal plans, demonstrates that under an NDP-led government public services would continue to operate on austerity budgets. The NDP's token promises of affordable child care and social housing would only be implemented in full in 10 years' time and Horgan has repeatedly sidestepped the question of how they would be funded.

The Greens' role in pursuing austerity and war

Workers in BC seeking to understand the character of an NDP-Green government should consider the record of similar alliances internationally. In Germany, the Greens joined with the Social Democrats (SPD) in 1998 to form the national government. Over the course of the subsequent seven years, the SPD-Green government introduced a series of welfare and labour market reforms known as the Hartz laws, which created one of the largest low-wage sectors in Europe and slashed benefits for the unemployed. In foreign policy, the SPD-Green government led Germany's first foreign military intervention since World War II when it ordered the German army to join NATO's 1999 bombardment of Yugoslavia.

Lest anyone believe that things might be different in BC, a recent column by Green federal leader Elizabeth May for the online edition of *Policy Magazine* should dispel such illusions. May specifically cited the participation of the Greens in a coalition government in Germany as an example for the party in BC to follow. May enthused, "German Greens served in a durable coalition in the government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder from 1998 to 2005. The popular Green politician Joschka Fischer served as foreign minister and vice-chancellor for the duration of the coalition."

Fischer's record as foreign minister was to oversee a revival of German militarism, not only in Yugoslavia, but also through the German army's participation in the US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Fischer now regularly calls in interviews and op-ed columns for Germany to play a major role in world geopolitics, including through the building of a German-led European army, bristling with advanced weaponry.

May was a key figure in the "Anybody but Harper" campaign that helped the Liberals, pose as a "progressive" alternative in 2015. Since coming to power, Trudeau's government has expanded Canada's military operations in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, deepened the attack on workers by preparing the privatization of public infrastructure, and pledged to cooperate closely with the Trump administration, the most

reactionary government in modern American history.

The other Greens praised by May for their roles in various governments are highly revealing. She lauds the critical role played by a single Green politician in propping up the Labour minority government of Julia Gillard in Australia from 2010 to 2013. This government gave crucial support to support the Obama administration's military-strategic offensive against China (the US "Pivot to Asia"), by allowing the Pentagon to station warplanes and troops in Australia. It also enforced a brutal refugee policy, including the detention of asylum seekers on isolated islands in the Pacific Ocean.

In Sweden and Ireland, two other countries referred to by May, the Greens also served in government. Under Social Democrat Prime Minister Göran Persson, the Greens collaborated in the privatization of public services, the dismantling of important parts of Sweden's much-vaunted welfare state system, and the ending of the country's more than 200-year-old neutrality by deploying troops to Afghanistan.

In Ireland, where the Greens governed with the right-wing Fianna Fail, they oversaw the collapse of the country's economy and banking sector in 2007-08 and a subsequent "bailout," in which workers were forced to endure brutal austerity so as to pay for the billions handed over to the country's banks. In the 2011 election, the Greens fittingly lost all their seats.

May's enthusiasm for this record of militarism and attacks on the working class should come as no surprise. In 2008, she endorsed the abortive federal Liberal-NDP coalition, which would have brought to power a government committed to "fiscal responsibility (i.e. austerity), \$50 billion in additional corporate tax cuts, and the waging of war in Afghanistan through 2011.



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