

The Green Party of Canada chooses a new leader—multiple political frauds for the price of one

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After a year-long leadership contest, the Green Party of Canada narrowly elected a new leader on Oct. 3, Anamie Paul, a lawyer and former bureaucrat with Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Paul's victory over the "eco-socialist," Palestinian-rights activist, and one-time Wall Street lawyer Dimitri Lascaris was quietly celebrated by the capitalist press. Echoing Paul, it proclaimed the election of a black, Jewish woman to head a federal party "an historic first."

The Greens are Canada's fifth federal political party, having won three of the 338 House of Commons seats and a 6.5 percent vote-share in the 2019 election. In line with other Green parties globally, Canada's Green party is an avowedly capitalist party, based on privileged sections of the upper-middle class. It is neither oriented to nor claims to represent the working class, and has traditionally portrayed itself as "neither left, nor right wing."

Paul was the choice of Elizabeth May, the Greens' leader for the past 14 years, and the rest of the party establishment. May, who remains the party's House leader, is notable for her longstanding close ties to the big business Liberal Party, which she and the Greens invariably promote as fellow "progressives," including under the current Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government.

During the leadership campaign, Paul equivocated on most political issues, pointing to "party policy" when pressed, and emphasizing instead the politics of identity.

The media hype notwithstanding, the rise to prominence of yet another capitalist politician, claiming "progressive" political credentials, and trading on their personal identity, is by now unremarkable. Paul's condemnation of her runner-up, Lascaris, as an "anti-Semite," for his opposition to Zionism and advocacy of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS), is also by now a commonplace of bourgeois politics, though it is no less vile for being common. Such smears are the currency of capitalist politics.

Her type of political operative would be at home in any traditional "centrist" bourgeois party. Indeed, Paul issued a tweet last week in which she gushed over the political legacy of the recently deceased "remarkable public servant" Liberal Prime Minister John Turner. It concluded, "May his memory be a blessing."

Last Tuesday, Paul had what she called a "productive conversation" with Prime Minister Trudeau, in which, according to the new Green Party leader, both stressed the "need for all-party collaboration." In subsequent comments, Paul lavished praise on the government's Throne Speech, but announced that "unfortunately" the Greens would not vote for it in parliament later that evening, because of its failure to provide a plan to protect long-term care residents from COVID-19.

This is typical of the posturing that is the stock-and-trade of

parliamentary politics. Paul knew full well that the New Democratic Party (NDP), with strong backing from the Canadian Labour Congress, Unifor and other unions, had already pledged to vote for the Throne Speech. With the survival of the Liberal government assured, Paul calculated the Greens had an opening to promote their own brand of "progressive" politics and court working people disenchanted with the NDP's right-wing establishment politics by casting a "No" vote whose practical political consequences would be nil.

Paul's other main political action since becoming leader has been to demand that the NDP candidate in the upcoming Toronto Centre by-election stand down, so as not to prevent her becoming the "first black woman leader" to sit in Parliament. More such self-serving, identity-laced appeals are to be expected.

Lascaris and the fraud of "eco-socialism"

The absurd claims of the Greens and the corporate media about the "historic" outcome of the Green Party leadership race have been matched by the celebratory comments coming from various pseudo-left, ostensibly revolutionary socialist organizations, like Fightback and Socialist Action. Only their excitement is about the vote polled by the three self-proclaimed "eco-socialist" candidates in the eight-person Green Party leadership race, especially Meryam Haddad and Lascaris. The latter polled 10,081 votes to Paul's 12,090 on the final ballot.

Fightback and Socialist Action—both of which function as loyal factions of the right-wing social-democratic NDP—are now calling on Lascaris to play a leading role in the development of a movement for an "anti-capitalist socialist workers' party" (Fightback) or a "revolutionary socialist party" (Socialist Action).

Here we have the confluence of multiple political frauds. Among the most glaring are: Lascaris' claim that the capitalist Green Party can be transformed into an instrument to advance the fight for socialism; Fightback and Socialist Action's promotion of Lascaris as a "socialist"; and Socialist Action's suppression, until the morning after the Green's leadership race had concluded, of the fact that Lascaris is a member in good standing of their organization.

Lascaris' politics have nothing to do with genuine socialism: that is, the independent political mobilization of the international working class to establish workers' power, so that the banks and basic industry and resources can be placed under public ownership and production organized under the democratic control of the working class to meet social needs.

What Lascaris touts—with the enthusiastic approval of the pseudo-left,

anti-Trotskyist Pabloite organizations Fightback and Socialist Action—as “eco-socialism” is a sham. It consists of calls for: increased government social spending and environmental regulation; protectionism, including a renegotiated Canada-US-Mexico trade agreement; state support for making Canada a world leader in green industries; and regulatory steps to “reorient Canada’s banks from speculative and international activities and towards productive investment in Canada.”

Lascaris rejects and opposes the class struggle. Like the “eco-socialist” current more generally, he promotes small-scale production, i.e., more backward forms of capitalism, and advances the retrograde claim that the Canadian nation-state can serve as a counterweight to the ravages of capitalist globalization and the power of the transnational corporations. In fact, the nation-state system in which capitalism is historically rooted, constitutes, along with capitalist private ownership, the main barrier to the use of the vast possibilities opened up by the technological developments of the past four decades and an ever more globally integrated economy to raise the living standards and quality of life of people around the world.

This is exemplified by the surge in global tensions among rival capitalist states vying for markets, resources and geostrategic influence, the growth of militarism and the threat of war, and the manifest failure of all efforts to develop an internationally-coordinated global response to climate change.

The would be “socialist” Lascaris espouses the type of corporatist labour-management collaboration that has seen Canada’s unions enforce the ruling class drive to force workers back on the job amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and lend their support time and again to capitalist restructuring at workers’ expense. “We have come a long way,” he declared in his leadership platform, “from the wage slavery and subjection to employer whim of the early Industrial Revolution. Today, we expect workers to have a shared relationship with management. It is the combination of management and workers that will determine the success and sustainability of Canadian firms.”

Lascaris’ loyalty to Canadian capitalism and its state and his readiness to protect the interests of the corporate elite against a radical working class movement from below were underscored by his remarks at the Greens’ foreign policy debate. There he made abundantly clear that at the very most he is proposing to try to constrain corporate power through the capitalist state, not overthrow it. “We aren’t going to deal with the climate emergency,” said Lascaris, “without confronting ... corporate power ... [W]e are going to have to put serious constraints on corporate power, and ensure that our regulators are independent and sufficiently resourced to hold them accountable.”

Lascaris’ politics flow from and are bound up with his previous career as a corporate lawyer, which saw him represent major financial institutions like Goldman Sachs. In 2013, *Canadian Business Magazine* named Lascaris one of the 50 most influential persons in Canadian business, and described him as “the fiercest legal advocate for shareholder rights.”

If Lascaris and others sought the Green Party leadership by posing as socialists, it is clearly because they sense a political opportunity under conditions of the greatest crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression—one that is already producing a political radicalization around the world, especially among young people.

In this regard, it is important to note that the NDP, which once postured as “socialist,” has long eschewed that label. To the consternation of Fightback and Socialist Action, which continue to promote the fraudulent claim that the NDP is a “workers’ party,” its convention in 2013 even expunged the word “socialist” from the party’s constitution.

By recasting the Greens as “left,” and even “socialist,” Lascaris and his fellow “eco-socialists” calculate that they can exploit the growing but as of yet inchoate anti-capitalist sentiment to gain political influence—much as Bernie Sanders has done in the US, only to channel it behind the Democratic Party of Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden.

The Green Party’s right-wing record

In exchange for a place at the table, the Greens, whether led by Paul or an “eco-socialist” à la Lascaris will prove more than willing to enforce vicious anti-worker, pro-war policies. This is illustrated by the Greens’ record in Canada and internationally.

In Germany, it was Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer who, as part of a Social Democrat/Green coalition, organized the first foreign military intervention by German imperialism since World War II during the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999. The Social Democrat/Green coalition also imposed a devastating assault on the working class with the Hartz labour market reforms and Agenda 2010, which created the largest low-wage market in Europe and resulted in the skyrocketing of poverty and precarious employment.

The BC Greens have supported the provincial NDP government’s reckless back-to-work and back-to-school drive, which has now produced a second wave of COVID-19 in the province, with new cases escalating by more than 150 per day.

The new leader of the BC Greens, Sonia Furstenu, has declared that another NDP minority government with Green support would be “good for BC.” After flirting with the idea of keeping the Christy Clark-led Liberals in power, the Greens for the past three years have propped up John Horgan’s NDP government as it enforced budgets modelled on the austerity framework laid down by their right-wing Liberal predecessors.

The federal Greens have repeatedly provided their services to the Liberals, including by promoting the pro-Trudeau “Anyone But Harper” campaign in 2015. The Greens voted for Trudeau’s Bill C-59, which provides a “democratic” fig leaf for previously adopted Conservative legislation (Bill C-51) that vastly increased the powers of the national security apparatus, including by giving CSIS the power to break virtually any law in “disrupting” vaguely defined “threats” to national security.

During last year’s federal election campaign, the Greens signalled their support for the Liberals’ 10-year, more than 70 percent military spending hike. Their election platform claimed that due to the “precarious” global security situation, Canada requires a “general purpose, combat-capable” Canadian Armed Forces with “stable” funding.

Former leader Elizabeth May has stated that the Greens would be willing to work with the Conservatives “if they were serious about climate change.” In other words, the Tories need only to frame attacks on the working class in environmental terms to receive Green Party support.

When May stated in the 2015 leadership debate, “We want to go to work for you in a more collaborative Parliament ... We believe in a Canada that works together for all of us,” she reasserted the basic myth of Canadian nationalist ideology that the federal state serves the interests of society, not those of Canada’s imperialist capitalist rulers. Lascaris’ bluster about establishing “sufficiently resourced” capitalist state “regulators” to check “corporate power” underscores that the Greens’ “left”-talking “eco-socialist” is at one with the pro-Trudeau “moderate” May on this fundamental point.

It therefore should come as no surprise that, contrary to the wishes of his “comrades” in Socialist Action, Lascaris has indicated he intends to make a career for himself as the Green Party’s “left” face. After wishing Paul, in a congratulatory tweet, every “success” in “building on the foundation created” under May’s leadership, Lascaris told the *Hill Times*, “I think we can emerge from this difficult period a much stronger party and a better party.”



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