

Factional warfare engulfs Canada's Green Party

Roger Jordan, James Clayton
7 May 2021

Bitter factional conflict has erupted inside Canada's Green Party. As the fifth-largest party in parliament with three MPs, the Greens remain a relatively minor player in bourgeois political life. But the dispute, fuelled by a heavy dose of racist identity politics, has been picked up by broader sections of the privileged middle class and small-l liberals around the *Toronto Star* to bolster their reactionary narrative that race and gender, not social class, are the key divides within contemporary political, economic, and social life.

Aggressively leveraging her status as a "black Jewish woman," Annamie Paul won a hotly-contested election last fall for the position of Green Party leader. As the successor to long-term Green leader Elizabeth May, who along with the rest of the Green Party establishment backed her candidacy, Paul became the first black woman to lead a federal political party in Canada. Predictably enough, this development prompted a torrent of favourable media coverage. In unison, the media hailed the "historic" character of Paul's victory, even though this former Canadian diplomat and "human rights" lawyer had no discernible political differences with May, whose close ties to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's big business Liberal government and support for Canadian rearmament and imperialist wars in the Middle East are widely known.

The exaggerated trumpeting of Paul's "historic" achievement cannot be understood outside of the major role identity politics has come to play in establishment politics, with blather about "human rights" and a "feminist foreign policy" used as "progressive" cover for the aggressive assertion of Canadian imperialism's predatory interests on the world stage.

In early April, the *Star* ran a sensationalist "investigation" claiming that Paul was the victim of "systemic racism" within the Green Party. The article reported that allies of May in party leadership bodies were obstructing Paul's leadership, that Paul had been asked to pay back \$50,000 for a by-election campaign she lost, that she worked for three months without an employment contract, and that her opponents had rejected some of Paul's nominees to leading positions.

In truth, the *Star* piece rested almost entirely on a deliberate leak by a single Paul loyalist, Sean Yo. The manager of Paul's unsuccessful Toronto Centre by-election campaign, Yo himself unintentionally exposed the flimsy nature of the allegations. He could point to no concrete racist incident, and no political issue—only the skin colour of Paul's political opponents! "I want

to be very clear that I'm not trying to paint this organization as overtly racist. I'm saying that there's been prolonged, profound challenges in Annamie being effective in this role ... and I observe that the leadership level of this organization is primarily white. In 2021, that means something," Yo asserted.

For representatives of the prosperous middle class like Yo, who aspire to leadership positions within the political and corporate elite, this most certainly does "mean something." Accusations of the disproportionate number of white people on leading committees or boards, whether they be in the Green Party or a major corporation, are one of the mechanisms by which privileged members of the black and other minority middle classes weaponize the charge of "racism" for their own personal advancement. Their goal is "equity," i.e. an "equal" distribution of positions of power and privilege within the capitalist state, academia and private corporations among the wealthiest 5 or 10 percent of the population based on categories of gender, race and sexual orientation. Meanwhile, the widening social gulf between the working class majority and the top 10 percent and its capitalist foundations remain untouched.

No major political disagreements between the faction around Paul and the loyalists of former leader May have yet been made public. On the contrary, both factions have supported the continuation of the Green Party's right-wing course, including by supporting the ruling-class drive to keep nonessential businesses open amid the pandemic, lavishing praise on US President Joe Biden and providing very vocal support for the Canadian ruling elite's vicious anti-China campaign. At most, there appear to be certain divisions over electoral tactics, with the faction around Paul seeming to advocate a more confrontational approach towards the Liberals on the campaign trail, and making identity politics appeals more central to the Greens' electioneering.

At its core, the faction fight revolves around positions within the party leadership. Paul reportedly objected to a decision by the faction around May to appoint five new members to the Green Party Fund, which is responsible for carrying out the party's commercial transactions, without opening up the positions to nominations. Matthew Piggott, a Paul loyalist, was also terminated as national field director for the upcoming federal election campaign under unclear circumstances in early March, and Dana Taylor was appointed by the Greens' federal council as the party's national executive director over Paul's objections. May's allies, for their part, have countered the charges of race-based opposition

with their own identity politics-based claims, circulating an open letter that denounces the “counterproductive scapegoating of women.”

The Green Party endured a divisive leadership race in 2020, pitting the party’s establishment, represented by Paul, against various pseudo-left elements. These forces included Socialist Action, which deployed its own member, Dimitri Lascaris, into the leadership race. The “ecosocialism” advocated by Lascaris had nothing whatsoever to do with socialism, amounting to “Green New Deal” type calls for timid social reforms and economic protectionist measures aimed at promoting “green capitalism.” Lascaris’ strong result in the contest, finishing with little more than 2,000 fewer votes than Paul, triggered absurd claims among various pseudo-left groups that the Greens could become an instrument for radicalizing workers and even fighting for socialism. In reality, this small party of the privileged petty bourgeoisie, like Green parties around the world, does not and has never had any connection to the working class. To the extent that it can attract the interest of a small section of politically disoriented youth, this is above all due to the rightward lurch of the social democratic NDP and its trade union backers over the past four decades. (See: The Green Party of Canada chooses a new leader: Multiple political frauds for the price of one)

That being said, sections of the ruling elite view the Greens as a useful political mechanism that may be called upon to play a more prominent political role sooner than many may think. The ruling class’ criminal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has included the mass infection of the population by keeping businesses and schools open, the funnelling of hundreds of billions of dollars in “bailout” funds to big business and the financial oligarchy, and the provision of little more than emergency rations to workers and the health care system has deeply discredited the entire political establishment. As working class strikes and protests against dangerous working conditions, and attacks on wages and jobs grow, the ruling class may determine that it is necessary to bring forward a new political trap for young people and sections of the middle class, replete with a pseudo-progressive garb of racist identity politics to cover up the Greens’ essentially right-wing program.

This explains why the *Star* has given such prominence to the entirely unsubstantiated allegations made by Yo, Green Party diversity coordinator Zahra Mitra, and other unnamed individuals. Underscoring the extent to which rabid racialism and identity politics dominate the political outlook of the upper-middle-class elements and “progressive” sections of the ruling elite associated with the *Star*, it favourably reported Yo’s laughable declaration that Paul—a run-of-the-mill bourgeois politician on the make—is “one of the most important figures in Canadian political history.”

Within a matter of hours of the publication of its “investigation,” the *Star* threw fuel on the fire of the factional dispute. Senior columnist Bob Hepburn urged Paul’s opponents to resign their leadership positions within the party, no doubt to ensure that they be “equitably” occupied. “Paul needs to take command of the federal council,” intoned Hepburn. “She can do that by convincing May loyalists ... to voluntarily step aside, clearing the way for party members to elect Paul loyalists...” For good measure,

Hepburn demanded May give up her British Columbia seat so Paul can enter the House of Commons by winning “likely the only safe Green seat in the country.”

In other words, May and her allies either surrender their positions voluntarily or be driven out through a filthy campaign based on unproven allegations of “racism.” As Zahra Mitra put it in an email, the continued presence of May and her loyalists is “sending equity-seeking participants the message that the party is not a safe space for them.”

While the eventual outcome of this unsavoury spat remains uncertain, what is clear is that the Greens are marching in lockstep with the rest of the political establishment ever further to the right. None of the competing factions deserves any sympathy, let alone support from the working class.

That the Greens represent no alternative to the status quo of pro-war, pro-austerity right-wing politics is shown by developments in Germany, the country that first gave rise to a Green Party. There, the Greens are emerging in the current federal election campaign as the frontrunner to nominate the successor to Chancellor Angela Merkel. Green Party lead candidate Annalena Baerbock has made a name for herself as a vociferous proponent of NATO’s and Germany’s military rearmament to confront “Russian aggression,” and along with the rest of the Greens’ leadership has fully endorsed the German ruling elite’s COVID-19 policy of prioritizing business profits over saving lives. When the Greens last served in Germany’s federal government between 1998 and 2005, they were responsible for organizing the first foreign military intervention by the German armed forces since World War II, and cooperated with the Social Democrats to impose an onslaught on the social welfare system and workers’ wages and working conditions under the banner of the “Agenda 2010.”

The Green Party in Canada would play a no less reactionary political role were it ever given the chance.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact