

“Three socialists walk into a job interview...and other jokes they told

by Stephen James Kerr, 19th September 2020

In my first report on the subject of the attempt by three ‘socialists’ to hijack a capitalist political party – the Green Party of Canada – by intervening in its leadership race, I noted that these ‘socialists’ were really applying for a job, that of “policy wonks to the ruling class.”

I was roundly criticized for this, and other observations by those who are themselves waiting in the wings with their own job applications for lesser positions in the ‘independent’ capitalist state of the Green’s imagination. Unfortunately for them, their political idols were not done arguing for my case.

During the Green Party’s leadership debate on ‘Canada’s Place in the World’ the ‘socialist’ trio provided mountains of evidence that whatever ‘socialism’ they might profess is pasted on.

There they debated the appropriate ‘independent foreign policy positions’ for an aggressive imperialist capitalist state run by middle class idealists in conditions of encirclement by a much larger and even more aggressive imperialist, capitalist state whose institutions are collapsing. How would our middle class idealists cut a deal with capitalism which would enable their continued survival as middle class idealists?

If only they had been so clear. My task, gentle reader, is to clarify the muddy waters they stirred up so that you may see and avoid the sharp-toothed Canadian nationalists which are lurking just beneath the surface. Careful. They bite.

This was no debate. It was a job interview conducted over Zoom where every candidate – ‘socialists’ included, addressed themselves to the Canadian ruling class, with their impressive CVs clutched firmly to their breasts. Who would be the safest pair of hands to manage the ‘independent interests’ of the Canadian state, and thus of the capitalist ruling class whose state it is? Whose breast beat truest north, beat strongest, beat most free?

Our purpose here is not to name winners, but losers. Loser number one was the working class. To be fair, the working class was never notified, was not invited, didn’t participate, was never mentioned, not a single time in this debate featuring three ‘socialists.’ The independent class interests of workers are international in nature, and thus run directly contrary to the ‘independent interests of Canada.’

This was an exercise in political presto-changeo, on the part of the ‘socialists’ who conflated the interests of the Canadian state with those of the working class, *a class without a country.*

Bankrupt Canadian Nationalism

If the international working class had managed to get a word in, no doubt any one of the debaters would have rushed to

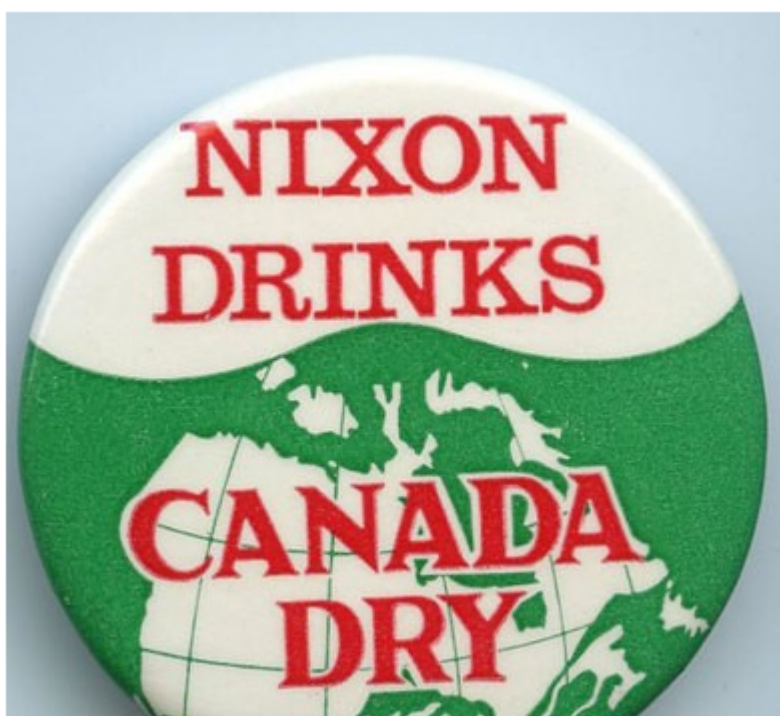
smother it with a Canadian flag.



Andrew West

The political tone of the discussion was set by at the open by the leadership candidates on the political right. Ottawa lawyer Andrew West, and Annime Paul, a former government bureaucrat from Canada's Ministry of Global Affairs. West: "The Green Party is in a position to show the world that we can take strong action on climate change. To do that, we need to get elected. Green Party must be a governing party, not an activist party. We need to care about the economy..." Correction – the *capitalist* economy, which he never mentions is the source of the climate change he claims to want to fix. No intervention seriously questioned this general line of political opportunism, in service to Canadian nationalism and Canadian capitalism. The Green Party is preparing itself to govern the Canadian capitalist state, in light of the ongoing collapse of the NDP.

The foreign policy debate was entirely structured around how to solve what has ever been the 'big question' for the Canadian capitalist ruling class. This question is a two-part question. For the big capitalists the question is always how to deal with the United States, the biggest export market for their capital. For this section of the ruling class, a dirty deal must be done which will pit American and Canadian workers against each other.



For the smaller capitalist operators, the dream has always been one of 'independence.' This assumes that the United States – the only country aside from Denmark and France with which we share a border – just wasn't really there, sort of like Denmark and France. [i] How to chart an 'independent foreign policy' is the pipe dream of the Canadian middle class, who see their own fortunes tied to such fantastic notions. They imagine Canada to be 'oppressed' by the United States. In reality, they resent their status as small-time operators. The historical record of their total failure in this enterprise never made it into the Green Party debate.

And so in the discussion of how a Green Party government would deal with either President Donald Trump or President Joe Biden, we are told by the non-binary 'socialist' Dr. Amita Kuttner: "There is a large difference between whether you have Donald Trump as leader or Joe Biden." – a difference which they never explain... "We need to make sure we stop following their lead. We need to make sure we don't continue to sponsor state sponsored violence or coups in other countries. We differentiate ourselves, or separate ourselves. Make sure we're not economically tied. With Biden it's going to be easier..."

This is the doctrine of Canadian left nationalism, frozen since the Waffle movement of the 1970s. It's still inedible, no matter how much maple syrup they pour over it.



Cartoon about the **The Waffle** movement, a wing of the NDP, in late 1960s/early 1970s that espoused nationalism and solidarity with Quebec's sovereignty.

Who are 'ourselves'? Who is the 'we' who is sponsoring coups in Venezuela? Which Canadians are behind the 'state sponsored violence' and which are not? Here Kuttner's blind acceptance of Canadian nationalism renders her incapable of the most elementary socialist political conclusions.

The working class in Canada has nothing to do with, and no responsibility for, the sponsorship of coups in Venezuela. It is not responsible for Canadian imperialist foreign policy. This is the policy of the Canadian ruling class. Why doesn't the 'socialist' Kuttner say so? To frame the question in nationalist terms is to equate the responsibility of workers and their ruling class, when workers have zero control over the policy of the Canadian state. And Kuttner wants us to imagine that somehow it will be different if only we vote for Kuttner, at the head of a capitalist party?

Further, let's imagine what would happen if the Canadian ruling class decided to 'differentiate itself' and no be longer 'economically tied' to the United States, as Kuttner and others in the debate advocate. The economic relationship between Canada and the USA is the largest foreign trade relationship in the whole world. What socialist would want to destroy that economic relationship? Kuttner hasn't even considered this position beyond the opportunistic utility of phrase mongering.



Dr Amita Kuttner

But let's take Kuttner's notions for a moment on their own terms. Where would the Canadian capitalist ruling class turn for an alternative trading partner, under Kuttner's leadership? In their other pronouncements, Kuttner, whose family is from Hong Kong, is all for confronting the second largest economy on earth, China. They also state: "We must be so clear on standing up to the expansionism and the imperialism that China is causing across the entire world right now." Is this not also the policy of the United States, from whom 'we' also must 'differentiate ourselves'? Here is an object lesson in how the pseudo-left lines itself up behind American imperialism.

And further, how is China 'imperialist'? Is Kuttner even acquainted with Lenin's definition of imperialism? "Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired

pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.” [ii] How much capital is China exporting? China is a net capital importer. It is the United States which is the world’s largest exporter of capital, and also the country with more than 1000 military bases in foreign countries. China has one. The largest exporter of capital to China is – the United States. And yet Kuttner wants to line up behind the United States (independently) to go after China? The mind reels.

As if attempting to provide more evidence for my argument, Kuttner continues: “I think we also need to stand up for everyone’s right to self-determination... Be ready to take on refugees from across China, but leave open all of our diplomatic channels so that we can even with the clarity of our stances, so we can work together on climate action” – so Kuttner stands ready to use the power of the Canadian imperialist capitalist state to break up China, presumably by supporting Tibetan and Uighur separatism, (though Kuttner doesn’t state this explicitly) create a massive Chinese refugee crisis, and also simultaneously ‘work together’ with China to stop climate change?

One wonders how a future Prime Minister Kutner would handle the US announcement of a massive new expansion of its navy fleet to confront China. Which contradictory ‘principle’ would they abide by? Steer an ‘independent course’ and not participate, or contribute Canadian warships? Kuttner’s appeal to human rights is the thinnest veil for Canadian imperialism. Perhaps before launching a crusade to liberate Tibet – independently of the USA of course – Kuttner might want to take a few deep breaths.

The biggest enemy confronting the Canadian working class is not China. It's not an administration of either Donald Trump or Joe Biden. It's not Russia, as Glen Murray avers. It is Canadian nationalism, and all of its manifestations. It is the Canadian ruling class. It is the role of socialists to mobilize workers *against* nationalism. These three wallow in it.



Meryem Haddad

Meryem Haddad, the Montreal immigration lawyer also frames her 'socialism' in exclusively nationalist and identity politics terms which would be amenable to Justin Trudeau. Witness her statements on a response to climate change: She declares that "the climate crisis is a continuation of colonial violence."

Let's unpack this statement. This type of moralizing against 'settler colonialism' has usurped any analysis of the role of capitalism in the Canadian discourse of the pseudo-left, framing contemporary problems in terms of racial conflict, between 'white settlers' and 'First Nations' not class conflict. We are asked to be morally appalled by 'settler colonialism' but not capitalism, by 'socialists.' Today's

workers are thus commanded to share an equal burden of guilt and moral responsibility for the very real crimes of colonial conquest along with capitalists and 19th century imperialists, the better to pave the way for moralizing middle class social climbers to ascend to positions of power – within the existing capitalist state. Never mind the fact that socialism is premised upon the conquest by the *world working class* of all of the accumulated capital and technique built up in all previous stages of historical development. By the low level of the debate, one imagines that neither Haddad, Kuttner or Lascaris have heard of this basic concept. They would rather workers feel guilty for those previous stages of development over which the working class had zero control. We are supposed to deeply regret the previous stages of development, wishing they had never occurred, never mind the fact that these provided the only material foundation upon which the working class could possibly build socialism! And of course there is the idealist longing on the part of many Greens for a return to pre-industrial conditions of life, which they mystify, absent all understanding of the extremely unequal social relationships which such relations of production must necessarily engender.

And so Haddad declares that “The people at the forefront of climate change are not the ones responsible for climate change.” And she’s right. But she only refers to indigenous peoples while implying that all ‘Canadians’ are culpable. Working people feature exactly nowhere in her statements.

This ‘socialist’ doesn’t mention the responsibility of corporate polluters, who are actually responsible for the majority of GHG emissions originating in Canada. 8% of emissions come from ‘leaks’ from the oil and gas industry, which is more than all the emissions from heating and powering

the homes of the Canadian working class, which account only for 6%. 14.5% of emissions come from mining and oil and gas exploration. [iii] But she lumps workers and capitalists together – under the Canadian flag, when she declares next that “It’s *countries like ours* who are the biggest emitters of greenhouse gasses who are responsible. If we don’t act on climate change, there is going to be a sea of climate refugees and blood on our hands. Canada must take responsibility for its role in this crisis. We have the wealth, we have the technology and we have the means of production to phase out fossil fuels.”

Who exactly has ‘the means of production’? A curious choice of words for a ‘socialist’ who never once mentions the working class or its interests. Who exactly ‘has the wealth’? She doesn’t say. A curious omission for a ‘socialist’ in a country where 1% of the population owns 25 % of the total wealth, and the bottom 40% have only 1.5%. [iv] Canadian nationalism obscures these realities.

Uncritical Idealism vs Historical Materialism

Dimitri Lascaris is widely hailed as the most ‘socialist’ of all candidates for the GPC leadership. But his ‘socialism’ is framed by idealistic appeals to concepts such as ‘the rule of law’ – laws made by and for the ruling class. He is a very successful lawyer. The law pays his bills. But he errs when he imagines that lawyers can bring about ‘socialism’ from comfortable leather seats in national parliaments.



Dimitri Lascaris

Many of Lascaris' stated policy goals are developments socialists would warmly welcome.

Lascaris: "I think that our foreign policy is a combination of extraordinary and frankly disgracefully deference to US government foreign policy, but also it is heavily influenced by the extractive sector... We aren't going to deal with the climate emergency without confronting the fact that the capitalist system is at the core of this crisis. And that means that we're going to have to deal with corporate power, and with the billionaire class, we're going to have to break up monopolistic organizations, we 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, and we're going to have to reform our legal system so that ultimately the Canadian government is not pursuing foreign policy which caters to the needs of big business while sacrificing the people and the planet."

Nice speech. But how possible are such reforms as he imagines, under a capitalist system in serious crisis? In my previous article, I pointed out how capitalism in its current stage of development requires a higher rate of exploitation of labour power, not the lower one he promises, so we will not explore that question here. But what social force could bring Lascaris' dreams into being? Lascaris never mentions the working class. But our collective agency is the ONLY force which could possibly bring about the changes he promises. And further, we could only do so on *an internationalist basis*.

Lascaris' idealism is bound in national fetters. And so he gives the Canadian ruling class the quarter they require to maintain themselves. Instead of overthrowing capitalism – necessary if we're to solve the climate crisis – he'd 'deal with corporate power.' How exactly? He'd only deal with 'the billionaire class' and not the multi-millionaire class? That would leave the capitalist ruling class – and thus the exploitation of the working class and the natural world completely untouched and in place, despite any 'serious constraints on corporate power' that one might imagine. Such constraints as he promises would inevitably be negotiated away as a blood sacrifice in the service of some parliamentary compromise or other.

Fortunately, we don't have to do a thought experiment to consider what would be the likely results if Lascaris were to lead the Green Party, and further, if he were to come even close to power. We merely have to look to the failed Corbyn experiment in the UK.

Corbyn was elected leader of the Opposition by [fostering illusions in social reform](#), but without the participation of the working class. His 'progressivism' was always wrapped in

the Union Jack, and organized around identity politics, and appeals to 'decency' across the class divide, and across the aisle of the House of Commons. These fell on predictably deaf ears. Yet the Stalinists at the Morning Star and the various pseudo-left liberal tendencies were agog. Now, they have a fist full of nothing, [just as socialists predicted](#).



Corbyn's politically bankrupt strategy could not advance a single one of its professed aims, and its spectacular defeat – via an internal party coup d'etat justified by [completely fraudulent accusations of anti-semitism](#), pushed the entire spectrum of British politics, not to the left, but to the hard right. Much can be made of Corbyn's personal fecklessness and cowardice. But the root of the failure of Corbynism lies in its bankrupt, nationalist and reformist perspective – the same one shared by the Green Party's 'socialist' fraction.

If one were in any doubt that a similar fate would befall Dimitri Lascaris, should he be elected leader, one only had to follow the heated discussion around the GPC's party of sanctions on Israel, of which Lascaris is the author. He noted: "When Elizabeth May came back from the West Bank in

2018, she said that what Israel is doing is much worse than the Apartheid in South Africa. This is not a political judgement. Apartheid has a specific definition in international law. This is a legal judgement which must be based on international law. We are the only party today that calls for economic sanctions on Israel.”

This statement was followed by vehement denials from the right wing candidates that such was even the adopted policy, even though it in fact IS [the policy](#), which 91% of GPC members supported. One is reminded of all of the fine sounding policies of the Labour Party which went up in flames under Corbyn. The failure of Lascaris’ policies can be predicted by the political idealism with which he describes them, and the nationalism which frames them. He declares that Israeli apartheid is ‘not political’ but rather a technical definition, based on law. As if the law were apolitical! As if the state and the law ‘stood above society.’ As if the United Nations, as if the International Criminal Court – to which he appeals, and which specializes in the criminal prosecution of the enemies of western states, were not the political tools of imperialism.

Socialists know that the state and the laws, and yes international laws are merely tools for the rule of one class by another. We are happy to use those laws to advance the cause of socialism, but with open eyes, and not based on what are ultimately moral appeals to the ruling class to ‘obey the law.’ The ‘rule of law’ has a class character, and has developed historically. What Lascaris fails to realize is that the rule of law is now a barrier to the further accumulation of capital for a growing section of the ruling class, and this is why it is being abandoned. Yet Lascaris wants to run a capitalist party?

The Squad – to which Lascaris appeals as political allies, cannot guarantee the rule of law. The only force capable of defending the rule of law is the organized international working class. And there is another aspect which is critical to the struggle for socialism. Laws are neither a political or moral absolute. One merely needs to point out how many such laws have had to be broken when injustice wore the mantle of the law. And that is where the struggle against Israeli apartheid is being waged – in the Occupied Territories by Palestinian resisters. Israeli Apartheid is perfectly legal – in Israel, and also in the United States, and pretty much every other capitalist state which accepts it. The question is therefore NOT one of legal technicalities, but of political power. It is Israel's political power and its military violence which enforces its unjust laws. A countervailing *power* must be applied. This is exactly the opposite of what Lascaris avers. Power makes laws. Laws do not make power. Lawyers are merely power's uppity stenographers.

Just once during the debate, Lascaris offered a faint hope that perhaps he might appeal to the working class. Such hopes were dashed immediately. After listing the many war crimes of Joe Biden and the Obama administration, and bemoaning the Trump administrations attack on the International Criminal Court, he states "At the same we have to realize that we have allies in the United States. People who want to see a humane foreign policy. People like Bernie Sanders, people like [Alexandra Ocasio Cortez](#), people like [Ilhan Omar](#), [Rashida Tlaib](#), Senator Merkely, and we have to reach out to them and build alliances and make clear that the American people are not our enemies. The problem here is the US Government, which oppresses people in the United States just as it does in developing countries." Yes it does. But what kind of 'allies' can Lascaris imagine, in the fight against US imperialism? Only the political enablers of Joe Biden. Not the working class. Further, he calls for an "alliance of non-belligerent

countries.” His notions would contain the working class inside obsolete national borders.

Working Class Political Independence

After my initial critique, some of the easily impressed drew the erroneous inference that I was advocating that socialists should abstain from electoral campaigns, and this was a ‘[Left Wing Communism / Infantile Disorder](#)’ type affliction. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Socialists welcome electoral political contests, but not for the reasons and not using the means and methods deployed by Kuttner, Haddad and Lascaris. Where these three use such a campaign to promote their CVs as policy wonks to the ruling class, socialists use electoral campaigns to build the class consciousness of the international working class.

A socialist election campaign would therefore look and sound completely different from the campaign of these three middle class radicals. Firstly, it would not be focused on a parlour coup inside a capitalist political party. Following on from that, it would be founded on a Marxist historical materialist analysis which raised the consciousness of the international working class of its own aims. It would be politically independent from all factions of the ruling class. One could refer to the [campaign of Joseph Kishore and Norissa Santa Cruz](#) in the United States for an example. It’s a campaign based upon socialist principles.

Unlike the campaigns of Lascaris, Haddad and Kuttner, a

socialist campaign would not foster illusions in the reform of capitalist social relations – a lower rate of exploitation, a ‘nicer’ capitalism. All such illusions are just that, illusions. A socialist campaign might use very similar demands to those Lascaris suggests – cut military spending by 50% immediately – *fund climate change mitigation! Stop Canadian interference in the Lima Group!* for example. But it would use such demands not to foster illusions in the working class that they could be achieved under capitalism, by a reformist government, but precisely in the opposite way – to educate the workers that they can never be achieved on such a basis.

(Further reading: [A. Badayev. The Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma](#))

Lascaris, Haddad and Kuttner need to confront the socialist tradition, and also the history of political bankruptcy in which they have chosen to stand. So far, no sign of that. In the meantime, socialists will continue to speak the uncomfortable truth.

[i] Canada shares a border with only three countries, the United States, Denmark via Canada’s border with Greenland, and France, which still owns the Islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Canada does not share a border with Russia, which is separated from Canada in the Arctic via international waters.

[ii]

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/ch07.htm>

[iii]

<http://prairieclimatecentre.ca/2018/03/where-do-canadas-greenhouse-gas-emissions-come-from/>

[iv] <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/06/30/ineq-j30.html>