

The Green Party of Canada is facing a crisis.

In the most recent election, it failed to gain more seats than in 2011. Bruce Hyer one of its deputy leaders failed to get re-elected. Some candidates came second, but none other than Elizabeth May came first.

In addition the total percentage of the vote nationally fell. In 2015, the Green Party failed to match its percentage in 2011, and fell well below its standing in 2008. Its overall poll in BC grew, but stagnated or fell throughout the rest of the country.

Elizabeth May's victory with an increased majority, reflects her remarkable abilities. She has been recognized several times by her parliamentary peers as one of the best orators, and one of the hardest-working MPs. Her grasp of the environmental portfolio is second to none. Her grasp of many other topics that she addresses both in the house and outside is equally exceptional.

There are not many party members in disagreement.

There is, however, considerable disappointment in our failure to make a breakthrough. A breakthrough had been anticipated throughout the campaign, confidently predicting ten to twelve seats. This disappointment is tempered by the recognition of the success of the electorate in finally removing the conservatives, under Stephen Harper, from office. All parties campaigned on this subject, none more than the NDP. My view is that the electorate was put off by the negative approach of both the NDP and the Greens in this respect and punished both of them.

The liberals campaigned positively, came through as a reasonable compromise and have become our government.

In the process they have borrowed most of the platform of the greens. Their embrace of nearly all the environmental and many of the social planks in the green platform is remarkable. The greens can take considerable satisfaction in the fact that their policies are part of what the Trudeau liberals plan to do. It remains to be seen if they succeed, and vigilance will be required to keep them to the task, a significant role for their one MP to play, potentially a role that will consume all of her time.

What this means is that the policies of the green party need an overhaul. If they propose to enter the next election in 2019 with the same policies, they will do no better than in 2015, in fact worse, since much of their current policies will have been implemented.

It also means, as Elizabeth May has admitted, she will not have much time for internal party politics. Yet considerable effort of the party executive, including the leader, will need to be spent rejuvenating the party and preparing for 2019.

The approach of the greens to this last election, has received considerable criticism in the party. The decision was made to focus on those dozen or so ridings where they had the

best chance of winning. With limited funds this was not unreasonable. However, it meant that most ridings received little or no support. Candidates, seasoned and fresh, were in essence left to their own devices. Except that where they were close to one of the targeted ridings, they were constantly, and at short notice asked to support their star candidates, candidates who in turn did little for their neighbours. This has left a bitter taste throughout the country. Despite significant spending, the party failed to make any impact in Quebec.

The extent to which these failures can be laid at Elizabeth May's feet is open to debate. The party has a collegial government style which means that several senior elected officials are involved in the direction of the party.

But Elizabeth is the public face of the party. She is nominally the leader, albeit described in the constitution as the party's "spokesperson." As that public face she has done enormous work in presenting the case for the green party. So much so that she is identified with the green party. She is in many peoples' minds the green party.

But the green party is more than its leader. It is at least 20,000 members strong. It ran candidates in all but 2 ridings in 2015. It has strong local organizations in a number of constituencies. It ran a number of high profile candidates. Far from enough,

All of which argues, not for a leadership race, but for a constructive review of the leader's performance. The party has provided no mechanism for such a constructive review.

A review is mandated in the constitution, as a vote by members in which a 60% endorsement level is stipulated as the minimum for the leader to retain his or her position. The vote has to be completed by April 19th to be consistent with the constitution. The party would essentially like to sweep this upcoming leadership review under the carpet, as rapidly as possible. The argument is that now is not the time to change leaders. There are too many other higher priorities for the leader to be engaged in to allow time for a potential race, including proportional representation, being an MP, and not least, keeping the pressure on the liberals to meet their commitments.

But this is not what a leadership review is: the review is not a leadership race. No alternative is proposed. The question is whether the members want the leader to continue, whether the members have enough confidence in the leader to allow her to continue. It is also a judgment as much on the performance of the party as it is of the capabilities of the leader. Like any referendum, the answer can be either yes, no or abstain. It is an endorsement or a vote of confidence.

But unlike any referendum, no arguments against the endorsement are officially included in the review. This means that inevitably, those arguments will be presented outside any official party mechanisms, Facebook, the press and other communication tools.

The party has asked members to provide their views on the election to the party, views to be analyzed and presented back to the members by party officials. Those views have been collected and the summary is awaited.

This, however, is a one-way street: the views are not yet shared with all members. Members are not in a position to make their own judgments.

Instead, it is proposed that the Biennial General Meeting this summer will be the opportunity to present and debate the direction of the party. So it may be, but that is far too late given the leadership vote to be held in April. Without an open discussion now on the role of the leader it is hardly a democratic way of doing things.

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