

# What is behind the turmoil in the New Zealand Green Party?

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Since the Labour-Greens government's crushing defeat in New Zealand's October 2023 election, the Green Party has been beset by a series of scandals and resignations.

With the resignation of co-leader James Shaw, who left parliament this month, the party has lost four MPs in the space of five months (including the death of MP Efeso Collins in February), and a fifth is now facing several accusations of "bullying." For a party with just 15 seats in parliament, this is a major level of disruption.

The instability comes as the party tries to refresh its brand after six years of being part of a right-wing, pro-imperialist government with both the Labour Party and, from 2017-2020, the far-right NZ First Party.

The Labour-led government oversaw increased poverty, worsening homelessness and soaring social inequality: By the end of 2023, an estimated 600,000 people were regularly relying on foodbank charities. It also integrated New Zealand into the build-up to war against China and the US-NATO proxy war against Russia, sending troops to Britain to train Ukrainians.

Now in opposition, the Greens are seeking to give themselves a more "progressive" veneer and wash their hands of any responsibility for the social crisis. The party has no real differences with Labour's imperialist and pro-business policies; but it peddles the fiction that Labour can be "pressured" to adopt kinder policies, if only the Greens are sitting around the cabinet table.

The aim is to trap young people who are moving to the left in opposition to the political establishment's support for Israel's genocidal war against Gaza and the war on the working class at home.

Shaw's resignation, however, points to tensions over the party's orientation to Labour, which left it outside government despite increasing its votes at Labour's expense. The Greens got 11.6 percent in the 2023 election, up from 7.9 percent in 2020. Labour meanwhile suffered a crushing defeat, its support almost halving from 50 percent to 26.9 percent, due largely to widespread abstention in working-class areas.

Shaw recently declared that the party should have been prepared to consider a coalition with the right-wing National Party, which now leads the government with the far-right ACT and NZ First. Shaw told TVNZ on April 28 that he "would have been very comfortable" proposing a coalition with National and he believed many Green members would have supported a National-Greens government "to stop bad things from happening" under a National-

ACT-NZ First government. He repeated these statements to Radio NZ on May 8.

Shaw also heaped praise on corporations, including major polluters such as dairy giant Fonterra and Cadbury, falsely presenting them as making genuine efforts to address the climate crisis. Shaw has lined up a lucrative job as an operating partner at Morrison, a multinational infrastructure financing company that reportedly manages \$US24 billion in "sustainable" investments.

In March, the Greens elected 30-year-old Chlöe Swarbrick as the party's new co-leader, replacing Shaw. Neither Swarbrick nor any other Green MP publicly criticised Shaw's statements, which laid bare the pro-capitalist politics of the party.

The leadership change, however, has been accompanied by other departures.

In January, the party's foreign affairs spokesperson Golriz Ghahraman resigned after right-wing broadcaster Newstalk ZB reported that she had been accused of shoplifting. She later pleaded guilty to four charges.

In March, the Greens suspended MP Darleen Tana and launched an ongoing investigation into her conduct after news website *Stuff* reported that her husband was accused of exploiting migrant workers at his bicycle hire business.

Most recently, the Greens' transport spokesperson Julie Anne Genter has been accused of "bullying" political opponents and members of the public. On May 7, Parliament's Speaker Gerry Brownlee referred Genter to the Privileges Committee to investigate complaints after she shouted at Associate Transport Minister Matt Doocey during a policy debate.

The Greens have denied any connection between these episodes and the leadership change. The National Party-led government and sections of the corporate media have certainly been active in fomenting these scandals. Ghahraman, who is from an Iranian refugee family, has previously been targeted by the far-right.

Whatever is behind the string of departures, no one should believe the Green Party's propaganda that it is shifting to the "left." A protégé of Shaw and co-leader Marama Davidson, Swarbrick announced her bid for the co-leadership in February, declaring that the Greens were "the leading left-wing voice in our parliament" and that Labour and National "do not represent the future of this country."

The pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation, which campaigned for the Greens in the last election, sought to give Swarbrick "socialist" credentials, citing her self-description as a

“democratic socialist.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. Swarbrick has worked with some of New Zealand’s most right-wing forces: She entered parliament after the 2017 election, when the Greens joined a coalition government with Labour and NZ First—a right-wing, militarist and anti-immigrant party with a long record of racist agitation against Asians and Muslims.

There is no principled reason why the Green Party should refuse to join a National-led government, which is continuing and deepening the same agenda of war and austerity implemented by Labour, the Greens and NZ First.

Swarbrick and her pseudo-left cheerleaders, however, are highly conscious of the growing anger towards the National-led government—which is slashing thousands of public sector jobs, has cut funding for school lunch programs, and is expanding the police, prisons and the armed forces.

The Greens are concerned that a movement could erupt outside the control of the parliamentary parties; the party is determined to prevent young people, in particular, from turning to the perspective of socialism and fighting to mobilise the working class against the capitalist system and the entire political establishment.

This is the role Swarbrick and Davidson have played in addressing protest rallies against Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza. On May 8, Davidson again appealed to the government to “use all diplomatic channels to push for a ceasefire.”

This is sheer hypocrisy. The Greens were fully prepared to rejoin a Labour-led government even after Labour justified Israel’s genocidal onslaught as “self-defence.” The Greens are now encouraging illusions in “diplomacy,” knowing full well that all such appeals are ignored by the Netanyahu regime and its imperialist backers.

When they were in government, the Greens supported strengthening New Zealand’s alliance with US imperialism, which is a full partner in Israel’s genocide.

In 2022, the Greens backed the government’s alignment with the US and NATO, after the imperialist powers provoked the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Shaw glorified the authoritarian Zelensky regime, which is infested with fascists, and told parliament in December: “We have to acknowledge that Ukraine’s response to Russia’s violence will itself involve some violence.”

Shaw hailed Kiev for seeking to “minimise harm to civilians” and conducting its war within “civilised” norms. This is an utter fraud. The Zelensky regime is a puppet for US-NATO imperialism, whose aim is to inflict a devastating military defeat on Russia, even at the risk of nuclear war. Hundreds of thousands of young lives have already been sacrificed for this agenda. Opponents of the war, including the socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, have been imprisoned, and some have been subjected to torture.

In recent weeks, the Greens and Labour have expressed concerns about the government’s push to join the AUKUS (Australia, UK, US) military pact, warning that this could imperil relations with China, New Zealand’s major trading partner. Yet the Labour-Greens-NZ First government welcomed a stronger US military presence in the Pacific region.

As Climate Change Minister, Shaw worked closely with NZ First’s Defence Minister Ron Mark to produce a document in

2020 calling for the expansion of the military. The Green Party co-leader provided an “environmentalist” justification for spending billions on new warships and air force planes, absurdly claiming that these were needed to carry out relief operations following climate-related disasters in the Pacific.

The real reason, spelled out by Labour’s Defence Minister Andrew Little last August, is to equip and prepare the armed forces, in case they are “called on to play a role” in a war in the South China Sea, that is, against China.

The drive to integrate New Zealand into US war plans is linked to the country’s position as a minor imperialist power in the Pacific, for which the New Zealand ruling class depends on US support. The Greens call for a greater military focus on the Pacific region and have supported New Zealand troops joining Australian-led interventions in East Timor and the Solomon Islands. The party has also endorsed NZ participation in the criminal US-led war in Afghanistan, fraudulently presenting it as a “peacekeeping” mission.

The billions of dollars needed to bolster the military is being deducted from vital public services including healthcare and education, which were starved of funds under the Labour-Greens government and are facing more cuts under National.

Workers and young people who are looking for a way to fight against genocide, the developing world war, the climate crisis and soaring social inequality should not be taken in by the phoney “progressive” posturing of the Greens.

Whatever tactical repositioning takes place in the coming months as the party seeks to distance itself from Labour and National, the Green Party must be judged not on its hollow rhetoric but on its record. The key political lessons that must be drawn from the experience of the Labour-Greens government are that none of the established parties represents a “lesser evil,” and that capitalism cannot be reformed but must be abolished.

The only way forward is by taking up a conscious political struggle against all the capitalist parties, as well as the pseudo-left groups and union bureaucracies that seek to chain workers to Labour and the Greens. This means joining and fighting to build the only genuine socialist alternative, the Socialist Equality Group, the New Zealand supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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