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## Editorial: Greens not quite what they seem

As the mainstream parties jostle for position in the federal election, there is activity on the fringes that could catch the eye of disillusioned voters, especially younger Canadians, who have lost faith in the old guard.

That is especially true for the Green Party of Canada, which drew the support of 4.6 per cent of decided voters in last week's Toronto Star-La Presse poll conducted by EKOS Research Associates. If those numbers hold firm through voting day, the party could win a seat in British Columbia, where it is strongest, or it could prevent the New Democrats from winning seats in tight races with the Liberals and Conservatives.

Such a strong showing would mark a breakthrough for a party that remains largely unknown as anything except an environmental movement.

But the Greens are more than just a party committed to the environment. In fact, its platform lurches oddly across the political spectrum.

"Because we're fiscally conservative, the left thinks we're right. Because we're socially progressive, the right thinks we're left," says party leader Jim Harris, 43. The Toronto business consultant, who was a Tory before joining the Greens 17 years ago, insists his party is neither left nor right.

Like the NDP, the Greens pledge clean air and water, a commitment to the Kyoto accord on climate control and the development of renewable energy sources. But they go further than the New Democrats, calling for fossil fuels and nuclear power to be phased out within 50 years. They would cut income taxes by \$3.5 billion and hike them on non-renewable resources. They would raise gasoline taxes by a whopping 10 cents a litre, cancel federal subsidies for highways and rebuild Canada's rail service.

They want to make it easier for people to get help from our social safety net, such as more affordable housing and better child care. In a seemingly contradictory move, however, they would also cut thousands of public-sector jobs and decentralize government powers.

Predictably, support for the anti-establishment Greens is highest among the young. Because it has no real political history, and therefore no baggage, the party also will attract people looking to lodge a protest vote.

The Greens have a full slate of 308 candidates. Even so, the party is considered too small to merit a spot in the TV debates tonight and tomorrow. That could change in the next election. Under new federal rules, if they win 2 per cent of the vote, they will qualify for taxpayer-funded financing of at least \$500,000 per year, which would help pay to spread their views.

Until then, voters planning to cast their ballots on June 28 for the Greens because they like their environmental policies, or because they want to register a protest vote against the three major parties, should take a serious look at the full Green platform.

What they see may not be exactly what they had expected.

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