Ideas, Intellectuals and Social Democracy in Canada

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Ideas, Intellectuals, and Social Democracy in Canada*

NEIL BRADFORD

Canada's social democratic party, the CCF/NDP, has always looked to intellectuals for practical ideas and policy expertise. Claiming to base themselves on principle and program rather than the ad hoc pragmatism associated with the two “broker” parties, the CCF/NDP, historically, has shown an interest in intellectual work critical of capitalist social relations and their legitimating ideologies. The party's concern for maintaining a theoretically-informed analysis of society's institutional arrangements, as a guide to political strategies and electoral calculations, has not been overlooked by Canadian intellectuals. Dating back to the League for Social Reconstruction in the 1930s, many progressive academics seeking to enter the political fray have focused on the CCF/NDP as an outlet for their ideas and theoretical knowledge.

This chapter traces the evolving relationship between Left intellectuals and the federal NDP since the party's inception in 1961. The NDP's history has been shaped dramatically by the turbulence and uncertainty marking Canadian politics over the last three decades. In the 1960s, the "national question," erupting around Quebec's place in Confederation and Canada's relationship to the United States, presented new challenges and opportunities to the NDP. In the 1970s and 1980s, the collapse of the post-war economic boom and the demise of Keynesianism as an economic strategy exposed weaknesses in social democracy's post-war formula for progressive governance. Indeed, these broad socio-economic changes have structured the terms of recent Canadian political debate, lending credibility to certain ideologies, programs, and policies while, at the same time, eroding the popularity of others. In this context, our study highlights the role played by different “intellectual formations” in shaping discussions about important adaptations in the political themes embraced by the NDP leadership (Swingewood, 1987). Simply put, we explore how the party has tried to "make sense" of this rapidly-changing world, in which many familiar politico-economic notions are being called

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mobilizing alliances grounded on more explicitly class-based understandings of politics and social change. This tension between approaches focusing primarily on the party's program for economic management and approaches viewing the party in a broader context of strategies for the transformation of society's power structure, is a recurring theme in our account of the ndp's dialogue with left intellectuals.

planning for Affluence: 1961-1964

"The hard fact," frank underhill wrote, "for political propagandists of the left in the affluent society of the 1960s is that it is very difficult for a party of the left nowadays to find a distinctive role for itself" (underhill, 1961:35). Highlighting the uncertainty surrounding the new party's place in Canadian politics, underhill's judgment suggests the changes in the post-war world which were forcing left parties everywhere to reassess both their analysis of capitalism and their strategies for change. In particular, two new realities worked to discredit the apocalyptic, "system transformative" rhetoric of the 1930s. First, the onset of relatively continuous growth in the 1950s provided evidence to support the popular claim that Keynesian techniques could solve basic socio-economic problems. Second, the virulent anti-communism accompanying the cold war and, indeed, the evident failures of the Soviet experiment, offered little support to socialist intellectuals and political activists. Against this backdrop, then, the NDP leadership in the late 1950s confronted the challenge alluded to by underhill: to create a distinctive option on the left in Canadian politics. In seeking to position the party as a major electoral force in Canadian politics, the leadership committed itself to the "modernization" of the intellectual underpinnings of the social democratic agenda.

The basic guideposts for this modernization can be found in Social Purpose for Canada, a book endorsed by the new party. Essays by J. C. Weldon, Michael oliver, and Pierre trudeau, in particular, stand out as significant indicators of new directions in social-democratic thought accompanying the formation of the ndp. The book's fundamental theoretical innovation is the support given to the "revisionist" argument that institutional changes in post-war capitalism had undermined the cogency of the earlier socialist critique (crosland, 1955). In essence, revisionists asserted that the modern corporation was no longer run by the exploitative capitalist depicted in Marx's descriptions of the nineteenth century; rather, the accumulation process was now controlled by a technically-skilled, managerial bureaucracy. The moral basis for advocating nationalization, as a political end in itself, the argument ran, appeared increasingly dubious. Further, the advent of the interventionist state to sustain full employment and redistribute wealth suggested that a judicious com-
bination of market-led investment and public control could draw together the hitherto competing claims of efficiency and equity.

On this basis, social democracy’s concern shifted from attacking capitalism in itself; instead, criticism was directed at the conservative political elite who, it was charged, were wedded to outdated free-market ideologies which emasculated the system’s potential to deliver abundance for all. The result, as John Kenneth Galbraith pointed out, was the persistence of poverty amidst affluence and the distortion of public priorities through a political failure to “counteract” effectively the power of private corporations (Galbraith, 1958).

Both Michael Oliver and J. C. Weldon presented this line of analysis in *Social Purpose for Canada*, arguing that, in the context of the “affluent society,” it provided the appropriate ideological course for the NDP. In these discussions the old shibboleths of nationalization and centralized planning were recast as pragmatic policy questions about instrument choice. Both writers emphasized the excessive bureaucratization resulting from wholesale nationalization. They also suggested that Keynesian fiscal policies provided a more efficient mechanism for steering investment flows than did direct controls, which distorted the workings of the price system (Weldon, 1961:176). The compromise they reached on the relationship between the public and private sectors featured a “dirigiste” federal-provincial planning authority, the removal of a wide range of social services from the market, and a selective nationalization program to facilitate a state presence in capital markets.

In short, social democracy’s “imaginative leadership” would offer to capitalists support for the steady modernization of production and to workers a growing share of an expanding economic pie (Oliver, 1961:434). Consistent with the revisionist view that the major barrier to “planned affluence” was the obsolete ideas of the ruling parties and their supporters, Oliver concluded that the strategic focus of social democrats must be to wrest control of the apparatus of government from the hands of the power elite and ensure that the bureaucracy did not sabotage the party’s reformist legislative policy (Oliver, 1961:434).

This revisionist thrust in economic policy was mirrored in the book’s treatment of federalism. Pierre Trudeau offered a spirited defence of provincial rights in the face of the CCP’s historical commitment to centralized economic planning. Castigating the League for Social Reconstruction for its paternalism toward the provinces and for its political naivete in dismissing the salience of regional, ethnic, and cultural differences in Canada, Trudeau warned that social democratic planning must involve the construction of administrative channels for intergovernmental cooperation. In terms of political strategy, he argued that the Left’s long-standing focus on the central government underestimated the degree to which the building of socialism in Canada may be contingent upon prior foundations being established in the smaller units of the provinces. In justifying this position, Trudeau (1961:378) departed from conventional Left thinking:

"The true socialist will also be a humanist and a democrat, and he will be quick to realize that Canada is very much a federal society from the sociological point of view; people from various parts of Canada do hang together on a regional basis which very often supersedes the class basis."

The ideological framework outlined in *Social Purpose for Canada* structured the NDP’s founding declaration. Trudeau’s resistance to centralization manifested itself in the party’s new doctrine of “co-operative federalism,” emphasizing the need to accommodate the special place of Quebec within Confederation. Support for the mixed economy was reflected in the proposals for a Canadian Development Fund and the Federal-Provincial Planning and Development Council. These agencies were presented as mechanisms allowing for political direction in domestic capital formation, thus ensuring that investment (both private and public) served the interests of Canadians rather than the foreign-dominated corporate sector.

This conception of social democracy, formally unveiled at the 1961 convention, generated considerable interest amongst progressive intellectuals. The magazine, *Canadian Forum*, provided a popular vehicle for the presentation of competing interpretations of the NDP’s ideological development. Between the years 1961 and 1964, the key debates about the party reflected, on the one hand, the hesitation of ex-socialists to endorse the Crosland-Galbraith analysis and, on the other hand, the enthusiasm of those who identified with the so-called “Democratic Left” for a more pragmatic style of centrist-reformism. In effect, the NDP caucus was steering a middle course between these two positions. The first was represented by Kenneth McNaught in his celebration of the memory of Woodworth and his rejection of “Professor Galbraith’s handy intellectual barbiturates” (McNaught, 1961:281). The second view was advanced by Ramsay Cook and Walter Young who endorsed “social revisionism” and believed that the principal “idea was to create a party that would appeal to the progressive middle class” (Cook, 1961a:25–27).

Tensions between the “socialists” and “liberal progressives” assumed a greater significance after the NDP’s second convention in 1963. The convention statement introduced a more hard-edged, radical language into the party’s analysis of the system and its prescription for change. Unlike the 1961 program, the word “socialism” was used. Further, a new prominence was given to the old CCP call that “production be for use, not for profit.” An important figure in drafting this document was Charles Taylor, a young McGill University political science professor (Taylor, 1963:150–152). Taylor had recently returned from England.
where he played a part in the formation of New Left Review, a journal recognized for its critical perspective on social-democratic revisionism. It was clear, however; that Taylor's influence in pushing the party to rethink its earlier moderation was noted but not appreciated by the liberal progressives. In Canadian Forum, Walter Younig assessed the new intellectual influences:

'The NDP, at its second convention, in Regina, finds that it has adopted a statement of aims and principles prepared for it by a group of Eastern intellectuals—the members of the political science department of McGill University...the principles of the party are those determined by a group of young left-wing intellectuals apparently untroubled by the realities of politics...Indeed a total stranger arriving at some of the sessions would have assumed he had stumbled upon a rump gathering from the Learned Societies meetings—upon a veritable conference des savants. The draftsmen of this modern Regina Manifesto have set out what they as intellectuals and academics of left-wing socialist persuasion, think ought to be the state of Canadian society (Young, 1963:125).

By 1963, this ideological rift within the community of NDP intellectuals was providing the momentum for a new alignment of political forces seeking to encourage dialogue between "all sections of the liberal left." Increasingly aware of the issue of Quebec and federalism and increasingly dismayed by the socialist rhetoric appearing in NDP publications, Cook and Young, along with a number of intellectuals associated with the University League for Social Reform, began to explore avenues for dialogue between Liberals and non-socialist New Democrats. In May of 1964, "The Exchange for Political Ideas in Canada" (EPIC) was established, with Frank Underhill, the long-time supporter of a coalition of pragmatic "reform liberals," presenting the keynote speech on "The Role of the Democratic Left in the Crisis of Confederation" (Canadian Forum, July 1964:73–74). While "independent-minded" politicians from both parties assumed key roles in EPIC, the NDP leadership supported David Lewis' boycott of the organization on the grounds that it was a front for formal merger.

The formation of EPIC reflected deeper changes occurring in Canadian political life in the mid-1960s. The urgency of the bicultural question, combined with the disappointing showing of the NDP at the polls, made earlier Left debates about the merits of revisionism and nationalization seem less compelling. The original intellectual coalition (attracted by the NDP's call to "modernize" social-democratic thinking and culminating in the publication of Social Purpose for Canada) was coming apart. By 1964, Pierre Trudeau had rejected clearly the ideological commitments of the NDP and had cast his eye on the Liberal Party as the most relevant vehicle for dealing with the energies released by Quebec's Quiet Revolution. Similarly, Ramsay Cook, fearing that the NDP's flirtation with the "two nations" concept might encourage "separatist tendencies," effectively endorsed Trudeau's position. Michael Oliver, perhaps the most important party theoretician in 1961, assumed new responsibilities with the Royal Commission on Biculturalism and Bilingualism established by the Pearson Liberals. Meanwhile in the NDP, a new generation of intellectual activists were preparing to enter the fray. The newly-created magazine, Canadian Dimension, would provide the access point for Carl Horowitiz, Cy Gonick, Charles Taylor, Kari Levitt, and others to present new ideas about the relationship between nationalism, imperialism, and socialist politics in Canada.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION AND SOCIALISM: 1964–1972

If the Trudeau-Cook social-democratic school of thought was positioning itself for a link-up with the Liberal Party, another intellectual formation was constructing a new political discourse designed to move the NDP in a decidedly leftward direction. By the mid-1960s, the Cold War conservatism which defined the parameters for the earlier debate about the NDP's ideological direction, had been fractured by new social movements questioning many aspects of the prevailing power structure. Civil rights protests, opposition to American intervention in Vietnam, the rise of anti-colonial ideologies in the Third World, and a more diffuse cultural backlash against the spiralling growth accompanying the continuing postwar economic boom, were global forces challenging not only centrist and conservative governments, but also the foundations of the "planning for affluence" conception of social-democratic politics.

In Canada, these new forces combined to produce an impressive burst of creative intellectual activity on the Left. Significantly, this theorizing addressed itself to the real world of politics through the NDP, while at the same time providing a powerful methodological challenge, within the universities, to the dominant post-war social-scientific paradigms. This movement, building momentum through exchange and debate in Canadian Dimension, turned on two central theoretical innovations—the "creative politics" approach to national unity, and the "political economy" approach to Canadian-American relations. These two schools of thought effectively introduced class and dependency analyses into Left politics in Canada. In so doing, they rejected conventional modes of analysis—the brokerage model of the party system, the "sterile formalism" of behaviourism, and the neo-classical equilibrium analysis of the economy. Similarly, they opposed the political strategy erected upon these foundations—continental integration and a resistance to nationalism (both Canadian and Quebec). In this regard, as a leading member of the movement explained in 1965, the NDP represented the "only realistic
hope for change in the Canadian political system” (Taylor, 1965:11). The relationship between these intellectual developments on the Left and the NDP will now be highlighted.

In 1965, Gad Horowitz drew from John Porter’s The Vertical Mosaic an argument about the need for a more polarized class-based politics in Canada. The creative-politics school provided the Left with a response to charges that its world view ignored questions about national unity. Echoing C. W. Mills’ claim that “politics is the transformation of personal troubles into public issues,” Horowitz argued that the “democratic class struggle” would direct political energies toward developing integrative, national solutions to basic socio-economic questions; energized by a major party of the Left, political discourse in Canada would focus on “Who gets what, when, how?” (Horowitz, 1968:241-256). Rejecting the assumptions underpinning the prevailing brokerage view of “cleavage accommodation” and also Trudeau’s earlier support for regional and provincial interests, Horowitz (1968:254) suggested:

A class politics in Canada would take for granted that the nation exists and will not be dismembered...Non-class politics translates popular discontent into provincialism or separatism. Non-class politics perpetuates the power of the established elites and endangers the existence of the nation. The unity of the country will be assured only when...the regionally segregated victims of our society can be united by a set of common ideals and symbols based on class...we must strengthen the only left-wing party we already have—the New Democratic Party.

In making the case for class politics, Horowitz pushed the logic of the argument one step further and formally introduced the rationale for “Two Nations.” Moving beyond the NDP’s tentative steps in the direction of more decentralized federal structures, Horowitz, in a 1965 article, urged the Left to recognize that the foundations were being laid for “two arenas of class politics—an English arena and a French arena—rather than for one Canadian arena” (Horowitz, 1965:15). In effect, he set out the theme later popularized by the Waffle—“Two nations, one struggle”:

English and French Canada are two distinct societies...separately [they] have the pre-requisites for class politics and national unity. Together they may not. What this means is that our persisting efforts to preserve a high degree of political integration of the two societies may prevent the development of class politics in both by perpetuating a unity-discord problem which will never be susceptible to a final solution (Horowitz, 1965:14, 28).

Complementing these formulations emphasizing class politics and nationalism, the work of the political economists presented the second major theoretical innovation influencing the ideological direction of social-democratic politics in this period. By 1966, Kari Levitt and Cy Gonick (to be followed in 1968 by M. H. Watkins) were developing an unorthodox interpretation of Canadian history emphasizing the political, economic, and cultural costs of dependence on the United States. Following the publication of George Grant’s Lament for A Nation and the serious political setbacks suffered by Walter Gordon in the Liberal cabinet, the simmering issue of foreign economic ownership became central to a broader socialist critique of the Canadian capitalist class, the multinational corporations, and the reductionist doctrine supported by the political elites. The political economists argued that inflows of American capital distorted Canada’s industrial structure and exacerbated regionalism by consolidating north-south trade flows; in light of this analysis, their prescriptive remedies were nationalist and statist. “The implementation of a serious programme of Canadian independence,” Gonick wrote, “would doubtless require public ownership of the leading links of the economy” (Gonick, 1967a:18).

What then was the nature of the relationship between the NDP and the new political sociologists and political economists? In terms of formal consultation between the intellectuals and the party, the caucus research bureau organized “policy seminars” where these new issues and perspectives were presented. Kari Levitt, for example, explained in the preface to Silent Surrender that her research developed, in part, through exchanges with the party. (Levitt, 1970:xix). It is reasonable to surmise that Levitt’s work received a sympathetic hearing from the party elite; the 1967 federal convention featured a “12-point economic independence program” which reflected much of the substance of Levitt’s critique of foreign ownership and “branch plantism.” Specifically, the program’s “Canadian Capital Resources Fund” was proposed to mobilize domestic capital for rationalizing the fragmented industrial structure, and “to expand the public sector...as a means of increasing Canadian independence” (Gonick, 1967b:4, 38).

Significantly, Levitt points to Charles Taylor’s role in facilitating her contact with the party. In this period, Taylor—the NDP vice-president, candidate, and respected member of the new intellectual movement—emerged as the key figure mediating the relationship between the NDP and the “radical intellectuals.” Taylor sought to bring their ideas to bear on the political course charted by the leadership of the NDP. Sensitive to the contingencies of electoral politics, Taylor effectively modified the prescriptive message flowing from the critical analyses presented by Horowitz’s political sociology and Gonick’s political economy. The 1967 convention provides evidence for this interpretation. Taylor produced the final draft of the resolution calling for recognition of Quebec’s “special status”; while not completely embracing Horowitz’s “two nations” concept, Taylor was instrumental in engineering the party’s endorsement of a position which moved beyond the bounds of conventional discourse about renewed federalism (Morton, 1986:77). Similarly, Taylor’s own
writings at the time indicate that he accepted the burden of the dependency-school argument, but, in urging policy responses for the party, he clearly steered away from advocating the outright nationalization of American firms. Instead, he argued against Cy Gonick that the best political strategy for Left intellectuals was to focus on "gradual repatriation" through instruments such as the Canadian Development Fund. Not unlike their response to the Quebec question, the party officials arrived at a position on "Americanization" which reflected Taylor's somewhat pragmatic "appropriation" of the radical intellectual currents.

Of course, this interaction collapsed following the formation of the Waffle. The Waffle's direct attempt to mobilize support for an alternative conception of social-democratic politics eventually polarized the intellectuals; in the end, Taylor sided with more traditional social democrats such as Desmond Morton against Watkins, Gonick, and James Laxer. Clearly, the Waffle's refusal to compromise on issues, its more or less explicit denunciation of international unionism, and its failure to develop a mass base are necessary components in explaining its rather hasty demise.

Also important, however, was the fact that these intellectuals were guided by an analysis of capitalism and social change which was fundamentally different from the party's approach. Since 1961, the NDP had explicitly pursued a parliamentary-focused strategy stressing the party's capacity to govern the economy in the "public interest." To this end, it promoted intellectual work providing "technically sound," social democratic proposals for more innovative modes of Keynesian planning, fiscal federalism, investment steering, and the like. In contrast, the theory guiding the Waffle's politics situated the dynamic for social transformation in society—the state was not the appropriate focal point for struggle. As Gonick (1967a:18) explained:

Electoral politics is an adequate strategy for political parties that are primarily interested in administering the existing political economy. It is not sufficient for political parties, whose purpose it is to fundamentally change it.... Political office must be seen as the conclusion to a widespread politicization of the population; politicization which gives the government a mandate for fundamental change.

In the context of our analysis, then, the expulsion of the Waffle in 1971 marked the end of any institutionalized dialogue between the party and the radical intellectual movements coalescing around political sociology's creative politics and political economy's dependency framework. Indeed, the fate of the Waffle reflected the dominance of a particular "state-oriented" social-democratic discourse within the party, and the related marginalization of a "societal transformation" perspective. As two intellectuals active in the Waffle concluded: "The NDP proved to be a less than flexible dialectical instrument for socialist strategy" (Panitch and Whittaker, 1974:52). Throughout the 1970s, many intellectuals committed to this latter conception directed their attention increasingly to theoretical refinement, divorced from the partisan world of party politics. Others began to direct their political energies toward the so-called "new social movements" which offered avenues for engagement outside the boundaries of the traditional party system. From the perspective of the NDP leadership, the breakdown of the post-war boom transformed the context of political-economic debate, resulting in a more urgent demand for "concrete" policy interventions from social scientists. In the 1970s, Left intellectuals and the party began to travel down diverging rather than the converging paths which had characterized the pre-Waffle experience of the 1960s. It is to this story that we now turn our attention.


In 1973, leading intellectuals formerly associated with the Waffle published a collection of essays, (Canada) Ltd. The Political Economy of Dependency. They argued that the material basis for a new working-class politics in Canada was emerging because of the growing awareness of "de-industrialization"; as resource shortages and unemployment stranded prosperity in the industrialized world, "dependent countries" like Canada would be the first to experience plant shut-downs and layoffs. Two lengthy reviews of this book, one published in Canadian Forum and one in Canadian Dimension, are important in demarcating the course that the relationship between intellectuals and the party would follow in the 1970s. Writing in Canadian Forum, Charles Taylor (1974:28) challenged the theoretical and practical contributions of the analysis:

For the authors of (Canada) Ltd. there is no question that independence requires socialism, and of an all-embracing kind. But any anxious questioning as to how much of this program can be made a real option to Canadians is dismissed as so much social-democratic pusillanimity.... the Waffle settles itself firmly into sectarian politics, whose pains—anonymity, overwork, and recurrent bankruptcy—are compensated for by the absence of those agonizing dilemmas which beset a party once it tries to act on the real world.... An adequate programme for independence linked to a winning political strategy—this is the circle we have yet to square in Canada.... what seems quite pointless is to go on trying to apply the unreviewed Marxist criterion of class to modern political economy.... (In this book) attempts to devise politics which can both meet the problems and generate majority support are dismissed as gratuitous and craven compromise.
On the other hand, Leo Panitch and Reg Whitaker (1974: 51, 53) applauded what they saw as the book's theoretical strength and endorsed its dismissal of the NDP. They explain:

"(Canada) Ltd." theoretical coherence stems directly from a Marxist foundation which is now much more solid than it was in the past. Socialist analysis without Marx—as the history of political pirouettes of the Frank Underhill school of social democracy so sadly illustrates—is inevitably like a plant without roots: in a word, huskless. Marx's theory of surplus value, the scientific analysis of class inequality in capitalist society, is the irreducible basis of any critique of capitalism—and is precisely what is rejected by the NDP mainstream.

These differing reactions to (Canada) Ltd. permit us to distinguish between the two intellectual formations consolidating their positions in the 1970s. Taylor's call for innovative thinking at the level of policy, supported by a pragmatic assessment of the potential political support for new projects, reflected the party's increasing attraction to the ideas developed by economists affiliated with the Science Council, the Canadian Institute for Economic Policy, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and most recently, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). In contrast, leftist political scientists and political sociologists, as the Whitaker-Panitch review suggests, were consumed with neo-Marxist debates emerging in Western Europe about the structural constraints on state autonomy. In this context, little theoretical attention was paid to political parties, and when non-revolutionary parties were discussed, they were usually collapsed into the broader matrix of institutions functioning to reproduce the capitalist system. For these intellectuals, the NDP was of no theoretical importance, opposed to what they saw as the steady rightward drift of social democracy, they did not regard the NDP as a relevant political vehicle for the Canadian working class.

Of course, these broad transformations within the intellectual community and between the party and its main "idea banks" were unfolding in the context of a political-economic environment quite unlike that of the 1960s. In the 1960s, a common thread running through all of the social-democratic debates was the assumption that economic growth would continue. Under such conditions, public-policy questions, for the Left, invariably returned to the issue of strategies for redistributing an expanding societal surplus. However, the impact of the international economic crisis and the deteriorated response from the Right perceptibly altered the terms of political discourse in advanced industrial nations. By the mid-1970s, pronouncements from the Left about "planning for affluence" had about them a particularly anachronistic ring. The OPEC oil shocks, stagflation, increasing competitive pressures between national economies, and state fiscal problems all combined to limit the apparent "room for manoeuvre" open to individual governments. These years witnessed the resurgence of "neo-liberal" nostrums arguing in favour of "less government and more market." Furthermore, in Canada, the NDP's "space" on the political spectrum was challenged, in a programmatic sense, by the Liberal government's incorporation of a number of the economic policy issues long associated with the NDP; proposals which, in many cases, were kept on the political agenda through the party's dialogue with Left intellectuals. Outstanding examples of this "borrowing" by the governing party include the establishment of the Canada Development Corporation (CDC), a review agency to screen foreign capital inflows, and a publicly-owned oil company. Meanwhile, in Quebec, it was apparent that the still largely Anglophone NDP had been dismembered by repeated electoral failures. The emerging struggle between Trudeau federalists and Lévesque nationalists only reinforced the obvious marginalization of the party in Quebec political life.

These factors—principally, the international economic crisis and the Liberal government's effective incorporation of some leading elements of the nationalist policy agenda—presented a serious challenge to the NDP. Following the disastrous 1974 election, the party leadership set its sights on asserting a strong policy presence in the coming "post-Keynesian" world (Morton, 1986:192). Where did the party turn for aid assistance in this project?

In this context, five key sources can be identified. First, the Science Council's research studies documenting the technological backwardness and export impotence of Canada's branch-plant industrial structure provided a policy focus to the economic nationalist critique. Second, the party's chosen European social democratic "model" switched from the British Labour Party to the Swedish Social Democrats. As the NDP's focus shifted from redistributive to productivity and investment issues, it is not surprising that the Swedish case became more attractive (Morton, 1986:192). Forty years of Social Democratic economic adjustment policies were credited with sustaining Sweden's international industrial competitiveness along with near full employment. Third, the CLC, called upon to respond to the Liberal government's corporatist overtures assumed a more active role in developing alternative policy positions for the Left. After an initial flirtation with "social corporatism" which, if sustained, would have altered the relationship between the NDP and the labour movement, the CLC realigned itself more firmly with the party in opposition to the Liberals' incipient monetarism. Fourth, leading into the 1980s, the CCPA announced its commitment to the Left by dedicating its research to the "classic problem of integrating theory and practice during a period of tumultuous change" (Ingerman, 1981:18). In the CCPA's inaugural publication, McGill labour economist, Sid Ingerman, argued that the NDP, in the face of the growing monetarist challenge, must reaffirm its support
for state-directed full employment. The CCPA’s board members included prominent party researchers such as Carleton University economist, Steven Langdon; future caucus research director, George Nakissa; and long-time contributors to party policy development such as Michael Oliver and J. C. Weldon.

The fifth and final contribution to the debate about new programmatic directions for the NDP in this period came from regional and provincial spokespersons, particularly Western Canada, who returned to Pierre Trudeau’s 1961 argument for a more decentralized federation. In the context of the natural resource boom and the renewed constitutional negotiations, John Richards urged the federal NDP, in its deliberations about “industrial strategy,” to be sensitive to its populist heritage and to avoid Fabian centralism (Richards and Kerr, 1986:1-10). As we shall see later, Richards continued to press this position in the 1980s.

Drawing on all of these sources, the NDP, under Ed Broadbent’s leadership, presented itself as the party with a politically viable industrial strategy to address the underlying weaknesses of the Canadian economy. Inflation and unemployment, the party argued, must be understood as manifestations of deeper problems embedded in the country’s industrial structure. As the Liberal government lurched from economic nationalism in the early 1970s to wage and price controls and then finally monetarism, the NDP followed a more consistent path. The NDP’s industrial strategy sought to integrate the various policy alternatives put forward on the social-democratic Left in response to the unravelling of the Keynesian consensus.

The principal features of the industrial strategy can be quickly summarized. Recognizing that language using terms such as “planning” and “public ownership” were politically problematic, the party followed the policy lead provided by the Science Council. In particular, reports authored by Pierre Bourgault and John Britton and James Gilmour set out attractive arguments in favour of “supply side” state intervention: the task was to manipulate fiscal policy to support and consolidate indigenous private firms in key sectors where there were reasonable grounds to assume that technological innovation could assure long-term international success (Bourgault, 1972; Britton and Gilmour, 1978). Under the direction of Steven Langdon, the party’s Policy Review Committee added to this basic approach an innovation drawn from the Swedish experience (Morton, 1986:192). A Canadian Investment Fund would be created to encourage corporations to divert profits into new projects meeting criteria established by the state. Major tax savings would then be available to firms responding to the government’s call for more investment in basic research and new technologies (Gonick, 1978:6-11).

Faced with an increasingly difficult political and economic environment, the NDP, as a small party operating in a country with an international-ally vulnerable economy, believed that it had little choice but to work within the new discourse of productivity, industrial restructuring, and technological innovation. The party’s own vulnerability in these circumstances was obvious: the Right, particularly in the international context, was making great inroads in building support for the neo-liberal view that the post-war “social-democratic state” was itself the source of these new problems. Against this position, which had its adherents in the Canadian party system and in some Canadian policy institutes, the NDP and its idea banks argued that the problems were located in the peculiar features of Canada’s industrial development, revealing an unstable base for sustaining Canadian prosperity in a changing global economy. The solution lay in state-directed initiatives to counter this past legacy rather than in free-market proposals which, from the NDP’s perspective, promised only to reinforce the existing unsatisfactory structural arrangements.

Thus, it is somewhat ironic that, as the NDP struggled to maintain its legitimacy in the practical world of party politics, Leftist theorizing was experiencing a prodigious boom in the universities. John Meisel (1979:15-17), writing from the perspective of a “non-participant” in both the party and the intellectual movement, offered an interesting reflection on the state of the Left in English Canada in the late 1970s:

We have, on the one hand, socialist and social democratic movements and parties; on the other hand there are various socialist ideologies and schools of thought. The former appear to be in a static state whereas the latter enjoy vitality and vigorous growth. There is little evidence that the two interact very much or benefit from their respective existence. The striking fact is that the links between socialist thought and socialist action (at least with respect to political parties) should be so tenuous. The intellectual excitement just noted has not nourished or mobilized visible socio-political movements, let alone political parties... What is in some respects quite odd is that the two aspects of the left in Canada—its intellectual underpinnings and its political organizations—should be so unrelated.

Meisel’s comments clearly reflected the hegemony which the rising tide of Western European-inspired theorizing on the capitalist state had established in Leftist political science and sociology in the 1970s. Developing their approaches without any evident attachment to a social base in Canada, these intellectuals spoke primarily to one another and to a larger international academic audience, through theoretically sophisticated journals such as Studies in Political Economy and New Left Review. In our conclusion, we will ask whether the questioning of certain aspects of “structuralist” theorizing evident today amongst socialists, scholars, combined with the party’s recent attempt to transcend neo-liberal and supply side discourses, suggests possibilities for a more productive exchange between what Meisel described in the 1970s as “the two ghettos.” First,
however, we must complete our analysis of the evolving relationship between the party and its ideas banks by reviewing the final period—the uncertain 1980s, when the NDP staggered through its most difficult years and emerged from the 1984 election to embrace new strategies emphasizing decentralized economic development, on the one hand, and a full employment program, on the other, modelled on the examples provided by successful social democratic states in Western and Northern Europe.


The early 1980s were a period of crisis for the NDP. The “dangerous currents” flowing in the 1970s ceased to flow on the party after Trudeau’s return to power in 1980. Two interrelated factors can be identified as particularly troublesome for the party. First, insofar as the Canadian party system experienced its own version of the post-Keynesian polarization between neo-conservatism on the Right and more nationalist interventionism on the Left, it was clear that the two key players articulating the different strains within the neo-liberal discourse were the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals. In this respect, despite its own contributions to the productivity-investment debate, the NDP remained vulnerable to the popular perception that its solutions were statist, centralizing, expensive, and addressed mainly to the bygone days of redistributive politics. In this context, policy innovators affiliated with the party recommended a more pronounced commitment to the neo-liberal “politics of productivity.”

Second, hardening regional tensions within the country manifested themselves in the NDP federal caucus, not only as power struggles between different levels of government, but also as more profound questions about the social-democratic approach to federalism. This battle, publicly aired in the constitutional debates of the early 1980s, can be characterized as a political and intellectual debate between Allan Blakeney and John Richards on the one side, and Ed Broadbent and Garth Stevenson on the other (Richards and Kerr, 1986:1–10).

The crucial catalytic force exposing the vulnerability of the NDP on these issues was the resurgent Trudeau government of 1980. Not only did the Liberals ride to power on a strongly nationalist platform emphasizing energy self-sufficiency, a new industrial strategy constructed around a more uncompromising position vis-à-vis multinational corporations, and a new Constitution, but, almost immediately, they ran into major political problems attempting to engineer these rather ambitious changes. This became particularly evident as the international economic crisis intensified and upset many of the assumptions about sectoral growth central to the nationalist economic strategy. Not surprisingly, the backlash from the business community, from the provincial premiers, and from the American government undermined the credibility of the Liberals, but perhaps even more striking was the degree to which these problems challenged the legitimacy of the NDP’s place in Canadian politics. The party was trapped by the widely-held view that the Liberals were following its agenda, and that if they had been in power, the problems would only have been exacerbated. The serious setbacks suffered in France by the socialist government of President Mitterrand did little to counter this perception (Jenson and Ross, 1983:71–105), and there was at least some evidence to support the argument that the 1986 Liberals were embarking on a Lettist course. Prominent Left intellectuals from the Waffle era publicly endorsed the Trudeau policies (Smiley, 1981:18–20). In Canadian Forum, Mel Watkins commended the Energy Minister, Marc Lalonde, for the National Energy Program (Watkins, 1981:6–9). In a similar spirit, James Laxer concluded his book, Canada’s Economic Strategy (1981:195, 202), with the argument that it was the Liberals rather than the NDP who had the clearest post-Keynesian vision for the 1980s:

The New Democrats…remained unrepentant Keynesians, more concerned with distribution than with production in the nation’s economy…the NDP was not prepared for the great upheaval in Canadian politics and debates about economic strategy that began at the end of the 1970s….The Liberal Party’s rejoinder to the new conservatism in 1980 placed a different conception of Canada on the agenda of national politics….The economic and constitutional reshaping of Canada that has emerged out of the stormy debate of the last several years has made Pierre Trudeau an historical architect, similar to Macdonald. Despite the long and tortuous route by which he has reached his current policies, he has understood the fundamental imperatives of Canada, in its present epoch, more clearly than any other political leader.

Laxer’s views are particularly significant because almost immediately after penning these words he left York University to become the NDP’s research director. As the above passage suggests, Laxer’s project was to expunge any remaining traces of Keynesian demand-side stimulative spending from the party’s economic analysis and to encourage tactical political support for the Liberals. Under his intellectual leadership, party spokespersons talked more and more about the government deficit and the need to channel private and public investment funds into selected industrial “winners.” Embracing the language of neo-liberalism, Laxer believed that the party had to impress on the public consciousness that it too was prepared to restrain the labour movement and streamline state expenditures in order to steer the country through the “leaner and meaner” times of the 1980s and 1990s. In this scenario, the party’s primary political constituency was identified as domestic business and middle-class technocrats rather than the “workers,” organized or unorganized. These views, while demonstrating a curious insensitivity to much of the
industrial strategy work of the 1970s, certainly could not be dismissed by the party—especially with the publication of Laxer’s critique just prior to the 1984 election (Laxer, 1984).

Another related response to the party’s plunging popularity and programmatic uncertainty came from the West, where John Richards spearheaded a movement to identify the NDP with a “new social contract” (Richards and Kerr, 1986:8–9). Like many Western European examples of social contracts, the Richards proposal—drafted with Grant Notley and Allan Blakeney—featured an incomes policy. It also contained specifically Canadian references to “defending provincial rights so that provinces [might be able] to act as laboratories for social change.” While clearly departing from the centralist thrust in Laxer’s analysis of federalism, Richards echoed his critique of the party’s economic policies. Indeed, common to both positions was an endorsement of the neo-liberal position that organized labour was a “special interest group” hindering Canada’s adaptation to the new international economic realities. Explaining the logic behind the new social contract, Richards (Richards and Kerr, 1986:8) expressed the by-now familiar scepticism about Keynesianism and, as well, made reference to the underlying tension between the competing conceptions of economic development strategy embraced in the regions and central Canada:

Federal NDP spokesmen slipped rather too easily from making the legitimate case for government planning via an “industrial strategy” into advocacy of permanent protection for low productivity manufacturing jobs. They attacked the undeniable problems of open markets and international trade and extolled the virtues of Canadian economic independence, implicitly denigrating the export-oriented resource economy of Western Canada as mere “hewing of wood and drawing of water.” Without ignoring the human costs of dislocating people from existing jobs, we were convinced the NDP must construct a more forceful response from the left on issues of productivity and comparative advantage in international trade.

As it turned out, the 1984 election intervened before the NDP leadership had the opportunity to address, in a substantive way, the implications of these policy debates swirling around the party. In the event, the 1984 campaign program was not explicitly organized around coherent policy ideas; instead, after extensive polling, the party, sensing an opening on the centre-Left in the post-Trudeau era, developed a populist theme focusing on an appeal to the “ordinary Canadian.” The chief architect of this strategy was the federal secretary, Gerald Caplan. Indeed, Caplan’s 1973 book, The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism, contains a sustained defence of the kind of approach followed in the 1984 campaign. The socialist’s dilemma, Caplan declared, resides in the fact that too often the party’s message is communicated in a language that either alienates or threatens majority opinion. Of course, it could well be argued that this approach is followed by parties primarily seeking to mask bankruptcy or confusion at the level of policy. In this sense, the relatively “contentless” campaign strategy perhaps reflected more of a fundamental uncertainty about the social democratic project than a conscious decision to substitute image for substance.

Since the 1984 election, however, the NDP has made two major moves to respond creatively to the challenges posed by the apparent exhaustion of traditional post-war social democratic approaches. The first bears the stamp of certain Western European strains of “autogestion” (economic self-management and participatory democracy). Countering the notion that Left politics means statism and centralized bureaucracies, the NDP’s 1985 report, Canada Unlimited, emphasized decentralizing themes such as “community initiatives,” “local investment funds,” and “self-directed and self-reliant economic development” (NDP, 1985). Interestingly enough, this conception of decentralization does not address the concerns identified by John Richards and other advocates of extended provincial autonomy. Consistent with the autogestion principles, Canada Unlimited stresses the new role to be played by local and municipal governments in responding to community needs. The report (NDP, 1985:14) explains this new partnership between national and local governments:

The national government must set out an institutional and policy framework which endorses our communities to direct their own economic future, and to rely less on corporate and foreign decisions for jobs. Specifically, our national government must implement policies which give our communities greater access to resources to develop their potential and a greater say in the decisions which affect their lives.

In addition to the rather astonishing absence of discussion about the program’s implications for federalism, it is worth noting that, in the preparation of this major policy statement, intellectuals played a marginal role. The policy ideas informing Canada Unlimited followed from the work of a national task force whose mandate was to “consult with a wide range of Canadians.” The overwhelming number of submissions came from voluntary associations, trade-union locals, women’s groups, and social-planning councils. As these groups become more organized and active in public-policy networks, it is likely that political parties, realizing the potential political payoffs from this “democratic engagement,” will consult them with greater frequency. In the 1970s, the think tanks and policy research institutes established themselves as key resources for political parties. Canada Unlimited suggests that the voluntary sector and other policy-focused community groups may play an equally central role in the future. Perhaps anticipating the increasing political signifi-
cance of these newly-mobilized constituencies, the NDP has moved to integrate their concerns into social-democratic economic thinking.

The second initiative undertaken by the NDP to reinvigorate progressive politics emerges from the party's support for the proposals elaborated by economist Diane Bellemare, an associate of the CTV. Bellemare was one of the three "exceptional Canadians" chosen for their involvement in examining and developing creative responses to challenges of the next decade, and invited to address the party at its "Forum 2000" conference in 1996. Bellemare's research provides an examination of Canada's economic performance, in a comparative context, since the onset of the global economic crisis beginning with the first oil shock in 1973. What makes her work attractive to the NDP is her argument that a "full employment strategy" can once again become the central policy issue, synthesizing the claims for economic efficiency and social equity in a manner consonant with social-democratic ideals. She rejects the arguments from neo-liberals or neo-conservatives that Canada's unemployment record results from trade-union militancy, the "inevitable constraints imposed by the new international economy," or too much government. Instead, Bellemare emphasizes the importance of political will in undertaking reforms to achieve full employment. "A full employment strategy," she writes (1985:16) "is in need of a political party to sponsor its implementation."

Bellemare reaches this conclusion through a review of various policy approaches followed in small European states, such as Sweden and Austria, governed by social-democratic parties for much of the post-war period. These countries have managed to sustain employment and non-inflationary growth throughout the difficult years of the 1970s and 1980s. She argues that this relative success stems from co-operation between "all the social partners," and innovative modes of state intervention—particularly with respect to labour-market and regional development policies. Bellemare adapts this framework to the Canadian setting by proposing new federal-provincial structures institutionalizing community input into national economic strategies. Decentralized policy making guided consistently by "employment criteria," Bellemare suggests, can create a national economy that is flexible enough for industrial adjustment to occur and, at the same time, politically driven by "positive-sum bargaining" to ensure that the burdens of change are distributed equitably. In this way, economic renewal can be achieved without marginalizing workers in declining industries or abandoning depressed regions.

In effect, her message to the NDP is that the party should be prepared to usher in a new political-institutional regime, tailored to the specifics of Canada's historical development, but following, at least in part, the "democratic corporatist" principles associated with the small European states. Recognizing the likelihood of increasing global economic interdependence, Bellemare's model assumes an essentially market-led form of development, with the government's commitment to full employment providing "adjustment and support measures...to ensure the retraining of displaced workers and the restructuring of dislocated industries" (Bellemare, 1986:15). Just as Western European social democracy was the political vehicle for the Keynesian revolution in the 1930s and 1940s, the NDP should strive today to construct new political institutions and forge new understandings amongst economic actors to re-energize full employment politics. As Bellemare (1986:16) writes:

It is obvious that such a strategy cannot be implemented overnight. But experience elsewhere has shown that it can be successfully put into effect. Besides, Canada's post-war experience has demonstrated that economic and political reforms can be undertaken. In fact, the Keynesian revolution called for major reforms with respect to institutions, the sharing of economic powers, and the economic policy instruments, all of which Canada succeeded in carrying out. Given the current economic climate, reforms are needed now...since it would achieve both fairness and effectiveness, a full-employment policy should obtain a national consensus.

Interestingly enough, at the March 1987 federal party convention, Ed Broadbent announced that the full-employment issue would be the cornerstone of the NDP's next election campaign. Broadbent's rejection of the position that full-employment strategies are unrealistic because "we don't have the perfect map [or] don't know all the details" follows Bellemare's contention that the essential ingredient in achieving this goal is political will. To reinvigorate social democracy in an era of economic change and uncertainty, Bellemare's "nouveau regard economique" proposes broad reforms to existing political arrangements and policy frameworks. This strategy for economic revitalization, stressing enhanced democracy and reduced disparities between social groups and across regions, is likely to assume greater prominence in the NDP's long-range thinking about new ideological approaches for Left politics in Canada. One of the party's main challenges will be to mobilize support for these policy departures amongst both workers threatened by industrial restructuring, and the popular groups and new social movements contributing to the recent Canada Unlimited economic statement.

CONCLUSION

This discussion of Canadian social democracy has been structured around an analysis of the relationship between the NDP and Left intellectuals over the course of the party's history. We have analyzed the evolution of the party's political-economic thought, situating this dynamic process within
the broader fabric of national politics and the changing international environment.

From our analysis, it is evident that, since the 1961 founding convention, important modifications have occurred in the relationship between the party and the intellectual community. Broadly speaking, political scientists, historians, and political sociologists were most active in party circles in the 1960s. Social Purpose for Canada featured leading contributions from Michael Oliver, Pierre Trudeau, Kenneth McNaught, and John Porter; similarly, Gad Horowitz, Walter Young, Ramsey Cook, and Charles Taylor aired their interpretations about the party's direction in journals such as Canadian Dimension and Canadian Forum. Debates about the place of social democracy in the "affluent society" and the Left's approach to federalism attracted many intellectuals from these disciplines. In general, the 1960s were a period of ideological experimentation for the NDP as it moved through the heyday of revisionist thinking to consider, at least, more radical conceptions of social change associated with the creative politics, two nations and dependency frameworks.

Beginning in the late 1960s, however, intellectuals whose principal training is in economics have been ascendant. Our review has pointed to a number of factors to explain this change. The Waffle experience disillusioned many leftist political scientists and political sociologists about the party and about social democracy. Moreover, theoretical developments on the Left, particularly the flowering of a particular kind of neo-Marxist theorizing, reinforced this estrangement. Preoccupied with specifying the structural mechanisms which produced the capitalist mode of production, the neo-Marxists tended to overlook or disregard many aspects of political conflict. Certainly, they exhibited little enthusiasm for the electoral battles and reformist projects carried on by the NDP.

At the same time, the party's focus shifted to a sustained consideration of narrower economic questions, centered on the concern to develop a national industrial strategy. In this period, we saw the beginnings of a more fundamental recasting of the relationship between Left intellectuals and the party. The NDP increasingly sought the "policy-relevant knowledge" available in conveniently packaged form from agencies such as the Science Council, where nationalist economists continued to pursue the critique of continentalism first set out in the 1960s. Intellectuals affiliated with policy think tanks and research institutes provided a much more "digestible" and relevant analysis for the party than did the neo-Marxists. Moreover, against the backdrop of the broader sweep of post-war history, it is apparent that the party's increasing reliance on economists reflected new material realities, principally the arrival of a protracted international recession that revealed structural weaknesses in the Canadian economy. Operating in a difficult political climate where Keynesianism was suddenly unfashionable and there was little sympathy for statist solutions, the party moved to reassess its programmatic commitment. Indeed, by the early 1980s, a market-oriented, neo-liberal discourse, sponsored by conservative political parties throughout the capitalist world, had emerged as the new orthodoxy.

If debates about social democracy within the NDP tended to be dominated by economists in the 1970s and early 1980s, then it is worth noting that recent trends point to a more constructive and open dialogue between the party and political scientists and political sociologists. Within these disciplines a new consensus seems to be emerging about the need to rethink many of the functionalist assumptions underpinning modes of theorizing based on "structural determination." This rethinking, demonstrated in the concern to reintegrate political actors and their projects into theoretical understandings of historical processes, has opened important space for consideration of social-democratic parties and labour movements. At the same time, within the party, the recent move toward political world views and strategies emphasizing decentralization, local control, and the ideas of the "popular sector" suggests an openness to diverse ideas about new strategies, and indeed, new visions for Canadian social democracy. Thus, as political scientists and political sociologists begin to develop new frameworks for analyzing the potential as well as the limits of reformist political movements, the NDP is seeking to move beyond the rather narrow preoccupation with national industrial strategies and neo-liberal responses to the repudiation of traditional Keynesianism. At a minimum, these recent departures indicate that the NDP will once again become theoretically interesting to Leftists scholars in political science and sociology; and that the party, in turn, may renew its interest in the theoretical work produced by scholars in these disciplines. It remains to be seen whether these trends portend a new era of engagement similar to that of the 1960s, when the party and many Left intellectuals sought to merge their concerns for political and social change.

NOTES

1. Recent theoretical work on social democracy, primarily undertaken with reference to the Scandinavian experience, has emphasized the linkage between state policies and strategies for social change. Gösta Esping-Andersen's Politics Against Markets: The Social Democratic Road to Power is a good example of this perspective, effectively moving the debate about social democracy beyond the traditional split between policy thinkers and advocates of societal transformation. We will argue that Leftists intellectuals in Canada today are also
beginning to merge these concerns by relating concrete policy proposals to the mobilization of new alliances supportive of social-democratic reforms.

2. J. T. McLeod, (1963:175). McLeod, a founding member of the University League for Social Reform, argued for the building of an “idea generating Canadian Fabian Society.” The model he had in mind was the non-partisan Exchange for Political Ideas Committee, at that point in time just establishing itself as a viable organization.

3. By this time, Trudeau had aligned himself with another movement in Quebec. See the manifesto presented by “The Committee for Political Realism” in Canadian Forum, (Trudeau et al., 1964:29–34). Its appeal for pragmatism rather than ideology and planning in politics revealed a closer affinity with classical liberal thought than with social democracy. Ramsey Cook wrote a sympathetic preface for Canadian Forum’s English-speaking audience. Other signatories to the manifesto included Marc Lalonde, Albert Breton and Maurice Pinard.

4. Along with his interest in the Committee for Political Realism, Cook also expressed concern about the NDP’s approach to Quebec. For an early example of this writing see Cook (1963).

5. Another very clear example of this kind of nationalist “methodological critique” can be found in Ellen and Neal Wood, “Canada and the American science of politics” (Lumsden, 1970:179–197).

6. This interpretation of Taylor’s pivotal position is corroborated in Desmond Morton’s history of the NDP (Morton, 1986:75–98).


8. The clearest statement of these theoretical concerns remains The Canadian State, edited by Leo Panitch in 1977. These comments are not meant to challenge the view that the consolidation of a Marxist political economy was a significant addition to the social sciences in Canada. The wide-ranging body of interdisciplinary research inspired by this theoretical approach in recent years clearly attests to its scholarly importance. However, in the context of our explanation for the “mutual disregard” which has characterized the relationship between the NDP and Left intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s, two general points about the impact of this approach should be made: first, neo-Marxists tended to assume that reformist political parties primarily assisted the state in its “legitimation function,” thereby stabilizing the existing class structure; second, assumptions about structures and functions ensuring capitalism’s reproduction meant that, in one way or another, neo-Marxist explanations for political outcomes returned to the objective requirements of the mode of production, rather than to the interventions made by social actors (such as Left parties and trade unions) to transform the balance of political forces in particular historical situations. From these assumptions, it follows that neo-Marxism in Canada has been critical of social-democratic views of the state and strategies for advancing change, and generally dismissive of the NDP.

9. This trend culminated in Ed Broadbent’s much-noted speech in October 1982, where he effectively argued that the NDP was no longer adhering to the principles of “deficit financing” in its policy approach.

10. These are the words used in the party’s promotional brochure for the event. The other two “exceptional Canadians” were pollster, Kristin Shannon, publisher of Canadian Trend Report and Roman Catholic Bishop, Remi DeRoo.


12. A discussion of these developments within the social sciences can be found in Robert Brym (1986b). Suggesting reasons for the “abandonment of the structuralist, qua functionalist, paradigm,” Brym (pp. 72–74) writes:

Electoral politics can matter, and hard-won reforms, including unemployment insurance, may indeed add up to “fundamental” change... It is ironic that some Marxists should minimize the significance of class and other group conflict...[working people and their political parties] may, after all, frequently elect to engage in “mere” reformist action because that strategy assures them of more certain benefits and fewer likely costs than other possible strategies.

REFERENCES


The Systems Approach to Political Parties*

VINCENT LEMIEUX

The study of political parties and party systems in recent years has not been characterized by bold methodological analysis and theoretical innovation. The classical works of Michels (1911) and Ostrogorski (1903), focus on the central concept of organizational tyranny which is formulated by them respectively as the law of oligarchy and formalism. However, despite the contributions of McKenzie (1963), Elgersveld (1964), Duverger (1951), and Sartori (1976), a general theory of political parties based on the idea of organizational tyranny has not been forthcoming.

Although the highly acclaimed comparative work of Duverger and Sartori establishes a number of general propositions, these have not been formally grouped in an integrated theory. In spite of timid contributions towards a more systemic analysis of parties by Sorauf (1964) and Lavau (1968), there does not exist, to my knowledge, a consistent and decidedly systems approach to parties and party systems that is comparative in nature. While Sartori has promised a second volume that may remedy this gap in the literature, it is slow in coming. It is as if the complexity of parties and party systems has discouraged more systematic attempts at theory building.

The burden of this chapter is that the systems approach is an appropriate method of studying political parties. It is capable of managing the numerous dimensions of parties and party structures in a theoretical framework that provides a good understanding of this level of political activity. The first part of this chapter will present briefly some uses of the systems approach in the study of Canadian parties. The second part, The Systems Approach and Party Phenomena, will discuss the principal dimensions of the systems approach as it is currently employed by systems practitioners. This section on the theoretical dimension of the systems approach draws on the recent work of Lemieux (1985). Part three, Parties and Party Systems in Canada, will demonstrate the extent to which Canadian political parties and party systems can be understood through

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