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# *The Old Mole and the New Democratic Party: Why the NDP is an Impediment to Social Progress in Canada*

Toba Bryant  and Dennis Raphael 

*Marx had this image of a revolutionary spirit that is just below the surface. That old mole is burrowing in there, and it can go in many ways.*

Noam Chomsky (2021)

## **Introduction**

Since the mid-19th century socialist parties in some form or other have existed in western nations (Gilabert and O'Neill 2019). These have ranged from revolutionary anti-capitalist communist parties to reformist social democratic parties (Lexier 2020a). While social democratic parties were initially organized to seek improvements in living and working conditions through parliamentary democracy with the ultimate goal of a post-capitalist socialist society, most eschewed this latter hope in favor of managed reforms within a capitalist economy (Manwaring, 2021). More recently, these parties have embraced neoliberal approaches to governance providing little distance between them and traditional pro-capitalist political parties (Selby, 2019). Przeworski (2001) terms these successive phases of social democracy as revolution, revisionism, remedialism, and resignation.

The “Third Way” – the most important instance being the UK Labour Party under Tony Blair – was one form in which many social democratic parties abandoned traditional concerns of transforming or replacing capitalism through support of working-class power. The “Third Way” was conceived as an ideology of the “radical centre” to bridge state collectivism and market-driven neoliberalism (Bastow and Martin, 2022). It pledged governance based on “principle” as

opposed to so-called “ideological” dogma. Blair distanced the party from the labour movement upon becoming leader. Labour and other social democratic parties shifted centre-right to draw support from existing liberal or outright right-wing political parties. Another more recent manifestation of the evolution of social democracy is a regulatory approach where a corrective state seeks to balance the most egregious aspects of capitalist unregulated growth (Manwaring 2021). None, however, restore the promise of early social democracy for transforming the capitalist economic system into a post-capitalist socialist society.

Canada’s main left party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) followed a similar course. Initially a socialist party dedicated to “the eradication of capitalism”, it was first transformed into a reformist capitalist party – the New Democratic Party (NDP) – which then transformed itself into a neoliberal-confirming party (Lexier 2020b, 2021a; Lexier et al. 2018). Any concern with mobilizing working-class power to confront capitalism is now largely absent. The result is there is no political party in Canada that explicitly identifies the problems of capitalism, much less the need for a post-capitalist socialist state.

Lexier (2021a) argues that this evolution of the CCF-NDP has served to solidify neoliberal governance:

Ultimately, while the CCF and NDP are not entirely to blame for the rise of neoliberalism in Canada, their abandonment of audacious socialist perspectives allowed unfettered capitalism to reassert its dominance after a period of forced restraint and enabled the slow and steady dismantling of the post-war Keynesian welfare state.

In addition, the NDP has actively suppressed those within the party wishing to address the problems of capitalism through reform or transformation, thereby cementing neoliberal capitalist hegemony (Laxer 2019). It has also resisted attempts at ongoing citizen mobilization around pressing issues and limited NDP activities to electoral politics eschewing engagement with social movements (McGrane 2019). In essence, the NDP has become an institutional “whack a mole”<sup>1</sup> by which Marx’s (1852) metaphor of the revolutionary spirit “[W]ho knows so well how to work underground, suddenly to appear: the revolution” is suppressed by the party when it surfaces both within and outside the party.

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1. Whack-a-mole is a fairground game in which players use a hammer to hit toy moles that appear at random from holes.

In this article we provide evidence to support this assertion. After reviewing the transformation of the CCF-NDP from an ostensibly post-capitalist political party into its present form, we show how the NDP not only fails to advance a critique of capitalist society or movement towards a post-capitalist society, but rather actively suppresses such activity. While there are ongoing attempts to reform the party and rediscover its socialist roots to have it play a role in ongoing social and political citizen mobilization, we suggest the best way forward is implementation of proportional representation in Canada's electoral process. Such a reform would first allow some pressure from the left to enact more progressive public policies, but more importantly would enable the emergence of a new left-oriented post-capitalist party that would invigorate the political left in Canadian politics.

## Background

### *Socialism, social democracy, and the demise of the left*

There is an extensive literature on the multiple forms left politics has taken from the time of Marx and Engels's (1848) *Communist Manifesto* (CM) to the present (Gilabert and O'Neill 2019; Wolff 2019). The key aspect of the CM was a need for a rupture with traditional property relations: hence the shift from capitalism to socialism (Meiville 2022). Modern social democracy attained prominence around the time of the Russian Revolution with the explicit purpose of eventually achieving this rupture through parliamentary reforms rather than revolution (Gilabert and O'Neill 2019). It had its greatest successes in the Nordic nations, the subject of which formed the substance of Esping-Andersen's (1985) *Politics Against Markets: The Social Democratic Road to Power*.

More recently however, these Nordic nations have also been subject to the influences of neoliberal ideology such that in addition to abandoning the goal of a post-capitalist state, they have also eschewed many of their reformist social democratic principles and policies (Schrecker and Bamba 2015). They have also adopted market-oriented approaches to service delivery including privatization, competition and new business management techniques (Kamali and Jönsson 2018).

A similar process of eschewing social democratic principles has occurred in most other social democratic parties. In Canada it is apparent through the evolution of the initially socialist CCF into the post-social democratic NDP. Numerous volumes not only document the rise and decline of social democratic parties in western nations, but also their embrace of many aspects of neoliberal era capitalism.

Schmidt (2012) argues that the economic and political environments that enabled social democratic parties to influence public policy have dissipated such that “Alternatives to neoliberalism and the competition state, it seems, must be built beyond social democratic parties” (43).

#### *The CCF and NDP in Canada*

In Canada, the primary party manifestation of socialist thought was the CCF. The CCF was an explicitly socialist political party founded in 1932 in Calgary, Alberta, as a coming together of socialist, farm, co-operative, labour groups and the League for Social Reconstruction (Lexier 2020a). An important influence on the new party was the social gospel of Protestantism: a number of its founding members were ordained Protestant ministers (Wiseman and Isitt 2007).

The tone and content of the 1933 Regina Manifesto identified its key socialist principle: “No CCF Government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Cooperative Commonwealth” (Canadian Dimension 2018). Even so, critics on the left argued that the CCF, although it called for a socialist transformation, still adhered to a liberal understanding of society that embraced self-interested individuals combined with state regulation of their activities (Teeple 1972). At best, it called for a form of state socialism.

Those on the right also questioned the socialist commitments of the CCF. As early as 1933, a Liberal member of parliament, David Croll, called the CCF “liberals in a hurry” (Bain 1954). More recently, the NDP has been accused of being “orange (the NDP colour) liberals” (Fodor 2022). Nevertheless, the explicit commitment to a post-capitalist socialist state remained CCF policy until 1956 when the Regina Manifesto was replaced with the Winnipeg Declaration which removed any reference to replacing capitalism and downplayed the urgency of public ownership of the means of production (Socialist History Project 2022a).<sup>2</sup>

Since then, there has been further purging of allusions to socialism and more recently, even social democracy, from the NDP’s

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2. The CCF’s greatest success was in the Province of Saskatchewan where it formed the first socialist government in North America in 1944 and retained power until 1964. Since then, the NDP has governed in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Ontario. Analysis indicates that in virtually all cases, such governance was aligned with neo liberal approaches with little evidence of socialist or social democratic values and principles (Evans 2012). The NDP has never been part of any federal government in Ottawa.

Constitution, political platforms, and day-to-day messaging (Cooke 2013). Despite the strong language contained in the Regina Manifesto, by 1956, the CCF had long distanced itself from socialist principles. While the Winnipeg Declaration of Principles (Socialist History Project 2022a) contained section headings like “Capitalism [is] Basically Immoral” and “Socialism is on the March”, any references to replacing capitalism through transformation of economic structures and processes were removed. Evans (2012) argues this distancing was a response to the Red-baiting effects of the Cold War and electoral stagnation (Sanders 2016). The primary response to these setbacks was to rename the CCF the NDP in 1961 and reorganize it as an alliance with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). Although alliances with labour parties were responsible in large part for the electoral successes of European social democratic parties, the NDP-CLC association fell far short of making the NDP a true labour party (Archer 1985). Most importantly, the union movement was never able to mobilize its members to support the NDP at levels greater than members’ support for other political parties (Savage, 2021a, 2021b).

Since its formation the NDP has strayed even further from its socialist and social democratic roots such that by 2013, the phrase “The New Democratic Party believes that the social, economic and political progress of Canada can be assured only by the application of democratic socialist principles to government and the administration of public affairs” was removed from the NDP Constitution and replaced with “New Democrats seek a future which brings together the best of the insights and objectives of Canadians who, within the social democratic and democratic socialist traditions, have worked through farmer, labour, co-operative, feminist, human rights and environmental movements, First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, to build a more just, equal, and sustainable Canada within a global community dedicated to the same goals” (Laxer 2013). Not surprisingly, NDP policy positions, as rated on a left-right dimension, have moved right since the 1960s (Manwaring and Holloway 2022). NDP positions now have an overlap of 66 percent with Canadian right-wing parties.

As these ideological commitments to a post-capitalist society waned, the NDP marginalized, suppressed, and even banned efforts by NDP members to restore these commitments (Carroll 2005; Carroll and Ratner 2005). These included the exclusion of the internal NDP group the Waffle (1969) and the voting down of the New Politics Initiative (2001a,b) and Leap Manifesto (2015), among other actions. NDP electoral platforms and virtually all of its elected representatives

do not make any allusions to social democracy, democratic socialism, capitalism or socialism.

The Waffle put forth a vision of a socialist Canada, the New Politics Initiative was a call for a grass-roots party committed to mobilizing the public behind progressive public policy change, and the Leap Manifesto advocated a commitment to environmentally friendly policies. Most recently the British Columbia NDP disqualified a popular progressive candidate – whose views reflected aspects of all of these previous initiatives – for its leadership under very questionable grounds (Lukacs 2022a). The Ontario NDP removed a community-based disability activist of colour for her outspoken support of the Palestinian cause (Casey and Jones 2023). Each is discussed in turn after consideration of the concept of the “Old Mole”.

### The Old Mole and the NDP

Marx was an aficionado of Shakespeare and was especially enamoured with the concept of the Old Mole in Hamlet (Howard and Shershow 2001; Stallybrass 1998). In Hamlet, the Old Mole referred to the ghost of Hamlet’s father who continues to speak from under the stage, despite Hamlet and Horatio moving to find a secret place to swear their oath. Hamlet states: “Well said, old mole! Canst work i’ th’ earth so fast? A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends!”

In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel (1900) used Hamlet’s dead father’s ghost – the Old Mole – as a metaphor for Spirit:

Spirit often seems to have forgotten and lost itself, but inwardly opposed to itself, it is inwardly working ever forward (as when Hamlet says of the ghost of his father, “Well said, old mole! canst work i’ the ground so fast?”) until grown strong in itself it bursts asunder the crust of earth which divided it from the sun, its Notion, so that the earth crumbles away. (546)

In contrast to Hegel’s concept of Spirit, in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx (1852) applied the metaphor to the spirit of revolution:

But the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still traveling through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By December 2, 1851, it had completed half of its preparatory work; now it is completing the other half. It first completed the parliamentary power in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has achieved this, it completes the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. And when it has accomplished

this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exult: Well burrowed, old mole!

Rosa Luxemburg used *The Old Mole* as a title for a 1917 essay about the state of the socialist movement in Germany and since then, it has been employed to denote the spirit of revolutionary change (Geras 2015). *The Old Mole* was a New Left underground newspaper published in Cambridge, Massachusetts from 1968 to 1970 (Trottier 2020). More recently the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research (2018) publishes a newsletter of the same name to summarize revolutionary movements around the world:

The revolution, for Marx, is the old mole that burrows deep into the soil of history and on occasion pops its head out. It is the fantasy of those who rule that nothing will change. But then, the old mole appears when least expected.

Sadly, NDP history is one of suppressing the *Old Mole* when it appears. Hence our seeing the NDP as an institutional “whack a mole”. Not surprisingly, these events parallel the NDP’s consistent decline in exposition of left-oriented positions since its formation as the CCF (Manwaring 2021; University Laval 2022). The following sections examine the genesis and aims of three of these suppressed movements.

## The Waffle

Formed in 1969, the Waffle movement within the NDP had as its primary goal to “help transform” the NDP into “a truly socialist party” (Blocker 2019; Bullen 1983; Cohen 2020). Spearheaded by James Laxer and Mel Watkins, the movement was based on the *Manifesto for an Independent Socialist Canada* which called for public control over investment, resources, finance and credit (Bullen 1983; Cohen 2020) through wholesale nationalization of large industries and independence from USA economic domination. It recognized the right to self-determination by the province of Quebec and called for the independence of branch-plant Canadian labour unions from their American counterparts. While the Manifesto said nothing about women’s and Indigenous rights – a lament of those looking back on the Manifesto – Waffle motions strongly supported the former (Burstyn 1990). The movement gained the “Waffle” moniker when future NDP leader Ed Broadbent stated: “That if they had to choose between waffling to the left and waffling to the right, they waffle to the left” (Lexier 2018).



The Waffle achieved prominence from 1969 to 1972 (Watkins 1990, 2009). It introduced numerous resolutions at provincial and national NDP conventions concerning NATO, nuclear arms, Canadian economic independence, Quebec self-determination, and women's rights with most being rejected (Burstyn 1990; Lexier 2017; Smart 1990). Its high point occurred when co-founder James Laxer came in second place with 37 percent support for the national leadership at the 1971 NDP national convention. During its existence, it increased its membership, published a newsletter and as noted, introduced policy resolutions at provincial and national conventions. The Waffle's call for independent Canadian labour unions irked many Canadian union leaders, and its explicit call for a socialist Canada was seen as a threat by the dominant party apparatus (Bullen 1983). Affiliated unions applied pressure for the NDP establishment to suppress the Waffle (Blocker 2021).

The Waffle was ordered by the NDP to disband in 1972 and while it enjoyed a very brief existence as an independent party, it soon disappeared from the Canadian political scene. Its members either left the party or were absorbed into the NDP's dominant political ethos (Bullen 1983). The Waffle and its legacy are the subject of numerous analyses (see especially Blocker 2019). Lexier (2017) argues its concern with Quebec self-determination and women's rights were gradually accepted by the party but its promise of a socialist Canada was never revived. Bullen (1983: 283) concluded: "Inside or outside the NDP, the dream of an independent socialist Canada survives. The Waffle died a premature political death. Ideology dies harder." More recently, Michael Laxer (2019) stated: "Had the last fifty years since the Waffle been spent building a serious anti-capitalist alternative to the NDP, socialists in Canada would be far ahead of where they are now."

### **New Politics Initiative**

Launched in 2001, the New Politics Initiative was developed to commit the NDP to work directly with social movements and unions, and towards achieving "a more participatory, dynamic democratic process" (Stanford 2011: 2). In short, the aim of the New Politics Initiative (NPI) was to move the NDP to the left. The NPI sought to establish a new formation with parliamentary and extra-parliamentary features to invigorate the party and make it more responsive (Nelson 2020; New Politics Initiative, 2001a, 2001b). The NDP had eschewed connecting with new progressive movements, and relied on mobilizing

supporters only during election campaigns. These efforts rarely delivered the votes.

After poor showings in three consecutive federal elections (Stanford 2011), it was clear that the party was not connecting with voters. It tended to mobilize voters only during election campaigns, and made little effort to maintain and strengthen connections with progressive voters to build more cohesive campaigns on issues of concern to them.

The impetus for the NPI was the emergence of new social movements that were explicitly anti-capitalist (Fodor 2022). The anti-globalization movement, for example, attracted young people. Its efforts culminated in protests in Quebec City and other cities to oppose a summit for a “Free Trade Area of the Americas”. The NPI represented an attempt for the party to leverage these movements and their energy. It could potentially help energize the party and help make it more relevant and distinct from the Liberal Party (see Lee (2011) and Rebick (2011) for post-ten year reflections on the NPI).

The NPI proponents worked out a resolution which was submitted to a special NDP convention on party renewal held in Winnipeg in November 2001. They argued within the NDP and beyond for a “new politics” tied to social movements and embolden the party to move further to the political left. The resolution was defeated with only 37 percent delegate support. At the time it was felt by many that new NDP leader Jack Layton, who had a history of working with social movements, would de facto accept many tenets of the NPI, but this was not the case, and the NPI died on the vine (Fodor 2022).

## **The Leap Manifesto**

In September 2015, a coalition of various groups of environmentalists, Indigenous, labour, faith leaders, and prominent Canadian authors issued a manifesto that called for a series of significant changes to Canadian society that would not only respond to the climate crisis but also growing income and wealth inequalities, racism, and colonialism (Leap Manifesto 2015). While not formally associated with the NDP, many of its framers hoped the NDP would adopt its main components (Bridge 2016). The Leap manifesto contained 15 main points:

1. Implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;

2. Shifting to a “100% clean energy economy” by 2050;
3. A moratorium on new fossil fuel infrastructure projects;
4. Supporting community-owned clean energy projects;
5. A universal program for energy efficiency and retrofitting that prioritized low income communities;
6. High-speed rail and affordable, nation-wide public transit;
7. Re-training and resources for workers in carbon-intensive industries;
8. A national infrastructure-renewal program;
9. An overhaul of the agricultural industry, prioritizing local production;
10. A moratorium on international trade deals that infringe upon democratic rights;
11. Immigration status and full legal protection for all workers, including immigrants and refugees;
12. Investing in “low-carbon” sectors of the economy, including through the development of a national childcare program;
13. A “vigorous debate” on the implementation of a universal basic income;
14. Ending austerity and subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, paid for with cuts to military spending and robust progressive, wealth, and corporate taxation; and
15. Ending corporate funding of political campaigns and examination of voting reform.

The Leap Manifest was generally ignored during the campaign leading up to the October 19, 2015, federal election, but during the following year, there were hopes it would be adopted at the April 2016 NDP policy convention in Edmonton, Alberta (Aivalis 2016; Lukacs 2016). This was not to be (Leedham 2019). The call for a transformation from fossil to renewable fuels was strongly resisted by the governing Alberta NDP and many from the labour movement. The adoption of a resolution that the Leap Manifesto be the subject of local riding association debates effectively derailed the NDP from taking a strong approach to addressing climate change.

In 2017, NDP members formed a grassroots Courage Coalition to build upon earlier support for the Leap seen during the 2016 convention. Hopes to revive the movement during the NDP’s 2018 convention in Ottawa were dashed when the NDP’s new leader, Jagmeet Singh, distanced himself from the Leap Manifesto (Broadhead 2019). In March 2021, the Leap wound down its operations as the COVID-19

pandemic took hold. Still, some hold out hope the NDP will come to adopt aspects of the Leap (Clark 2021; McQuaig 2018; Walkom 2019).

### **The disqualification of Anjali Appadurai's leadership bid for the British Columbia NDP**

Upon the retirement of NDP premier John Horgan, former though unsuccessful NDP candidate for a federal seat, Anjali Appadurai ran for the party leadership under a strong eco-socialist platform. As her campaign gained momentum by signing up new members and appeared to be headed for success, the BC NDP disqualified her using a number of very questionable arguments (Lukacs 2022a). Most commentators saw this as an explicit attempt to exclude from power any movement that questions the status quo whereby the party governs in a manner little different from pro-business capitalist parties. Indeed, Hackett (2022) sees this as just one more instance of the NDP suppressing progressive elements within the party illustrated through its treatment of the Waffle, NPI, and Leap movements.

### **The dismissal of Sarah Jama from the Ontario NDP**

Sarah Jama is a long-term disability activist of colour – with a mobility disability herself – who ran for the Ontario NDP in a by-election in March 2023 but was dismissed from the Ontario NDP caucus by leader Marit Stiles. She is a co-founder of the Disability Justice Network of Ontario (Nicol 2022). It is widely believed that Jama was removed for her outspoken support of the Palestinian cause, although Ontario NDP leader Stiles denies this (Ejeckam 2023). Two Ontario NDP (ONDP) riding associations called for review of Stiles' leadership for removing Sarah Jama from the party. The Hamilton Centre Riding Association, Jama's riding, issued a statement regarding its solidarity with the provincial parliamentarian and a demand that the ONDP rescind her removal and review the leadership of Stiles (DeClerq 2023).

### **Recent critiques**

There are good reasons to believe that Canadians would be receptive to a true party of the left. Many of the problems caused by capitalism were obscured during the "Golden Age of Capitalism" in the post WWII era from 1945 to 1975. The phenomenal growth of economies and government willingness to manage the most egregious aspects of

capitalist economies during this period led to increases in material wealth right across the social class spectrum. We are now in the midst of what Ross and Trachte (1990) term global capitalism.

Ross and Trachte (1990) argued that modern capitalism evolved through three different phases – entrepreneurial, monopoly, and most recently, global – with profound implications for the distribution of economic, political, and social resources. Entrepreneurial capitalism arose during the mid-19th century and saw extensive competition between firms. Monopoly capitalism arose during the beginning of the 20th century as a result of the concentration of firms within large companies and the weakening of price competition between firms. Much of this had to do with the state being willing to exercise its role as a regulator of capital accumulation. During this period labour – and especially organized labour – was relatively well-paid and secure and an emphasis upon stability reigned. All of this began to change as global capitalism was spurred on by technological advances in transportation and communication and the state ceding control to the owners and managers of business. The shift to global capitalism was facilitated by trade agreements that favoured firms moving to the periphery of the so-called first world to obtain lower labour costs and higher profits.

Ross and Trachte (1990) argued that the consequences of this shift to global capitalism were: (1) stagnation in working-class purchasing power; (2) decline in rates of unionization; (3) at all levels of politics, the dominance of a business climate argument whereby working-class demands were marginalized; and (4) a shift of public expenditures towards investors' interests rather than the social wage – that is, how much better off individuals are from social spending by government on supports and services – associated with reduction of the welfare state.

All these observations of over 30 years ago have been verified. The assertion of corporate and business power associated with the neoliberal resurgence has led to rollback of governmental supports and services, skewing of the tax structures in favor of corporations and the wealthy, lifting of restrictions on the flows of capital, and attacks upon the labour movement. The result of these processes has been the growth of income and wealth inequality, deterioration of living and working conditions for many, and the emergence of a polycrisis – the simultaneous occurrence and interaction of multiple interconnected crises across various domains, creating a complex and intertwined web of challenges – that includes the survival of the planet (Damiani 2023).

This polycrisis of deteriorating living and working conditions for many in Canada (see Raphael et al. 2020) and shifting political environment in the USA with democratic socialist Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont making presidential runs and the “Squad” of democratic socialists in the US House of Representatives has highlighted the continuing failure of the NDP to address growing calls for either a profound reform of capitalism or the establishment of a post-capitalist socialist Canada (Lexier 2021b; Lexier and Corbeil 2021; Salutin 2016; Thompson 2021; Wells 2020). This failure has been associated with the now long-standing NDP limited concern with electoral politics and its ongoing unwillingness – as demonstrated in its earlier handling of the Waffle, NPI, and Green Leap initiative, and its more recent disqualification of BC NDP leadership candidate Anjali Appadurai and expulsion of Ontario MPP Sarah Jama – to position itself as a transformative grass-roots, social democratic, democratic socialist, or socialist party (Langford 2020).

Lukacs (2022b) decries the tendency of the NDP as a closed shop of insular consultants: “It has seen the rise of a consultant class, with advisors and operatives moving through a revolving door of organizations like Now Communications that are a vehicle for entrenching this style of campaigning in every province.” There are calls for NDP members to regain control of the party from these “orange liberals” (Noreto 2021; McLean 2020). Others question the value of the NDP and whether efforts for transforming Canadian society might better be directed elsewhere (Clarke 2021; Darrah and Malik 2021; Diemer 1989; Evans 2012).<sup>3</sup>

Another effect of the NDP failing to address the deteriorating living and working situations of many Canadians is the rise of right-wing populism in Canada (Moscop 2022). This is a common development in many western nations as the left has failed to respond to deteriorating living and working conditions typical of late-era capitalism (Allen 2018). Failing reform of the NDP, what are the chances of the emergence of a political party of the left in Canada?<sup>4</sup>

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3. Ever since its founding of the NDP in 1961 there have been those calling for transformation of the party from within and we have documented the major efforts to do so. There are a handful of current NDP federal members of parliament who do not hide from proclaiming themselves as democratic socialists (Matthew Green and Niki Ashton) or socialists (Leah Gazan) (Moscop 2021). There have also been ongoing unsuccessful attempts to win the presidencies of provincial and federal NDP by members associated with the Socialist Caucus of the NDP. We believe the history of the NDP over the past 60 years makes such efforts to transform the party unlikely.

## The way forward

There is an abundance of scholarship suggesting the strength of social democracy as both transformative political ideology and political practice is crumbling (Benedetto et al. 2020; Keating 2013; Polacko 2022; Evans and Schmidt 2012). This has much to do with the shift of many western nations from Keynesian welfare states to competitive states, usually with the complicity of existing social democratic political parties (Schmidt 2012). The embrace of neoliberal approaches to governance across all nations – and its associated adverse effects of health and well-being – has made more obvious how capitalist practices of capital accumulation, resource extraction, and corporate dominance of all aspects of public policy are leading towards a crisis where the Earth becomes uninhabitable (Flanagan and Raphael, 2023).

Transformation to a post-capitalist socialist society is therefore now a necessity for survival.<sup>5</sup> Enabling this transition will require a variety of activities with the key preliminary ones being popular education, political mobilization, nationalization of major industries, and erosion of capitalist institutions through the strengthening of alternative democratic structures. None of these involve the NDP as it is currently constituted. We believe for these activities to move forward will require the establishment of a new party of the left. The success of this new party will require adoption of proportional representation in the electoral process. We consider each in turn. As shown in [Figure 1](#), the first-past-the-post, Westminster Electoral System inherited from the UK has consistently distorted downward the percentage of seats to Parliament versus the percentage of the vote awarded to the CCF-NDP (Simon Fraser University 2023).

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4. Winlow and Hall (2022) and McGrane (2018) suggest that when social democratic parties give up on presenting a compelling economic and political vision, they are reduced to claiming they are more moral or honest or caring than the other parties. Salutin (2023) comments regarding NDP leader Jagmeet Singh apparently following this playbook:

This week, asked about the political value of his alliance with Trudeau, Singh said that, hard as it is for many to comprehend, the NDP are in politics only to do good for ‘people’ unlike other parties, who’re there solely for power. This tedious crap will be his legacy. It proves forever that the NDP is a spent force.

5. See DuRand (2016), Wolfe (2019) and Gindin (2018) for what such a post-capitalist socialist society could look like.

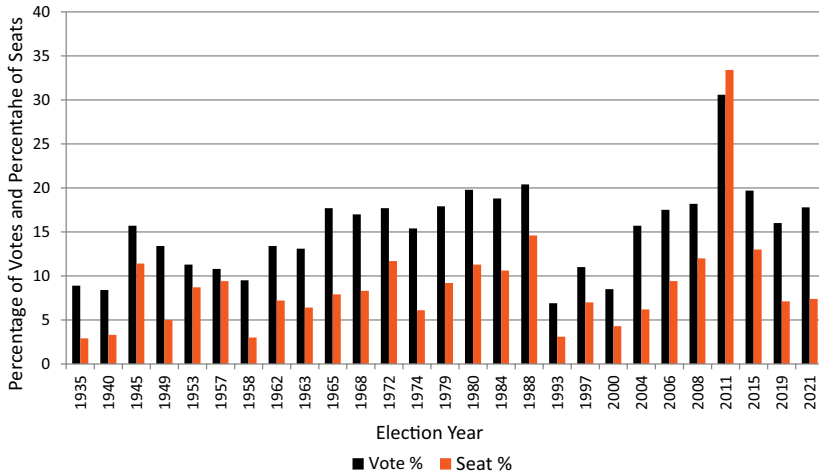


Figure 1. Voter Support and Seats in Federal Parliament (%), CCF-NDP from 1935-2021.

Source: Simon Fraser University (2023). Elections. Retrieved from <https://www.sfu.ca/~aheard/elections/1867-present.html>

### *Popular education*

The first step in building a post-capitalist socialist society requires a systematic attempt to debunk the logic of neoliberalism to which Canada have been subject the past three decades. We have no expectation that the corporate-dominated mainstream media will communicate the profound problems created for Canadians by the current economic system, nor the need for a post-capitalist socialist society. Such a task must be taken on by the alternative left media. There has been a steady growth in such forums. The established magazine *Canadian Dimension* and on-line *Rabble* have been joined by *Breach*, *Passage*, and *Orchard*. The on-line *Socialist Project*, *Rank and File*, and *Jacobin* also offer left-wing perspectives. Political parties could play such a role in educating the public on the inadequacies of the capitalist economic system and the advantages that would accrue from various forms of collective ownership of resources in a post-capitalist society. However, the NDP, as presently constituted is not such a party. Only a very few elected NDP members place themselves as social democrats, democratic socialists or socialists. In addition, NDP electoral platforms or political statements make no reference to capitalism or socialism or even social democracy (University Laval 2022).



### *Political mobilization*

This is a much more difficult task. The only viable parties on the middle-left are the NDP and Greens. Since 1956, debate has centered on the means by which the NDP could be made into a truly socialist party. When attempts to shift the party take place within the party, such efforts, as we documented earlier, are strongly suppressed. The very soft-left position advanced by the NDP apparatus has now been extended to other organizations that had the potential to offer a post-capitalist analysis of society. These developments are detailed in the Appendix. What would be some of the actions that a new party of the left would propose?

### *Nationalization of major industries*

Carroll's (2021) recommendations for energy democracy can be generalized to include democracy in a wide range of sectors. These would include public and social ownership of major industries such as energy, finance and banking, and telecommunications and transportation among others. These would lead to democratic control, within new forms of public ownership by municipalities, citizens' collectives, and workers. McBride (2022) calls for a "radical transformation" whereby popular sovereignty comes to control capital; there is a rebuilding of the public domain and state; and socialization of capital investment. A new regime would respect human rights and create a state where meeting peoples' needs are primary.

Concretely, this would mean the nationalization of these industries and the imposition of participatory budgeting at the local level. This of course would require the election of "left" parties committed to promoting an equitable distribution of economic and social resources. This will require the balancing of power between the public and Canada's major corporations.

### *Erosion of capitalist institutions*

Gindin (2018) calls for a greater government role in planning the economy and socialization of financing through state-owned enterprises. Gindin also sees a role for smaller community enterprises which would provide high quality goods to consumers. Comprehensive public services would be decommodified and stronger unions would allow for raises in wages. Jackson (2021) cites Wright's (2019) advocating greater civil society control of the post-capitalist economy.

Wright (2019) suggests that a post-capitalist future can also come about by eroding capitalism by strengthening competing institutions such as credit unions, workers cooperatives, and introducing new

governmental structures such as participatory budgeting. There are good reasons for such a transformation.

The example of credit unions provides a model for such erosion of capitalist institutions. Credit unions offer all of the services major profit-making banks do. Since they are non-profit all proceeds stay within the organization and are not paid to wealthy shareholders. They are led by member-elected boards of directors. They represent all of the positives of a non-profit non-capitalist oriented institution and can serve as a model for a variety of other industries.

Finally, Meiville (2022) in a discussion of the impending climate catastrophe states:

Socialism, wherein the astonishing scientific and technical powers of humanity are harnessed to need, for all the uncertainties and errors that would occur, would give an infinitely greater likelihood of sustaining a habitable world than more of the same system that got us here. (161)

### **Getting to there: proportional representation**

Esping-Andersen (1985) identified the early institutionalization of proportional representation as one of the reasons for social democratic dominance in Scandinavia. Its absence in liberal welfare states enables for domination by business-oriented political parties. In Canada, the first-past-the-post electoral processes allow the business-oriented Liberal and Conservative parties to rule with majority governments even when their vote proportions are as low as the low-40s. Institution of proportional representation would allow for the emergence of a new political party of the left whose presence would serve a variety of purposes.

First, it would provide a vehicle for the left in Canada to contribute to governance. Similar to what is the case in many European nations, such a “left party” would in many cases be asked to join coalition governments as any party attaining 50 percent or more the vote would now be very unlikely. Second, a new left party could force the NDP to shift left in its policy positions to avoid bleeding support to this new party. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it would provide an ongoing platform for the dissemination of post-capitalist pro-socialist information and provide, at election times, a vehicle for left political views to be translated into political representation and, hopefully, public policy.

Importantly, under proportional representation any support for this new party would not weaken the left as any newly gained

support would translate into parliamentary seats. In Sweden the “left” party” receives around 7 percent support and received 24 seats in the last national election (Swedish Government 2022). In Norway the “Socialist Left Party” gained almost 8 percent of the vote and received 13 seats in the last election (Norwegian Government 2022). In Germany “The Left” holds 39 seats in the Bundestag, the federal legislature of Germany, having won 4.9 percent of votes cast in the 2021 election (Britannica 2023).

### **Some further considerations**

There are those who suggest socialists remove themselves from a concern with electoral politics with the assumption that the movements the NDP has suppressed over time would have significant traction on their own to transform capitalist structures into a post-capitalist socialist society (New Socialist 2017). Certainly, the building of alternative institutions such as credit unions, workers coops, and citizen’s participatory budgeting would have benefits (Wright 2019). Perhaps even over time they would erode some capitalist structures and institutions.

But it seems to us that these processes in themselves would be unlikely to dismantle the existing capitalist structures of corporate control of the economy maintained through the election of pro-business liberal parties. Additionally, we agree with Wright (2019) and others that the prospect of a socialist revolution that would transform Canada – as well as other jurisdictions – into socialist states is unlikely and, in any event, would be suppressed by governing authorities. It is therefore necessary to engage in ongoing electoral politics to place into power political parties of the left that are committed to transforming capitalist structures and institutions and challenging neoliberalism and global capitalism.

Along similar lines, Brady (2009) argues that any efforts to expand the welfare state and implement progressive public policies require the implementation of left institutional power. While Brady applied this argument in relation to the reduction of poverty using the Nordic nations’ commitment to equity – accomplished through their public policies favouring redistribution, social spending, and management of the workplace – we believe it also applies to the socialist project.

The view that the state must play a role in the transformation of capitalist structures towards a post-capitalist socialist society is advanced by Pilon and Savage (2021) who argue that electoral politics aimed at gaining control over government has an essential role in any

attempt to effect significant transformation towards a working-class politics.

Another concern is that under proportional representation, Canada would go the same route as the Nordic nations towards neoliberal models simply, replication of their experience. We have argued elsewhere that implementing proportional representation would certainly move Canada towards more progressive politics (Bryant and Raphael 2020). This has been the argument behind the success of the Nordic nations' implementation of social democracy in Esping Andersen's 1985 volume, *Politics Against Markets: The Social Democratic Road to Power*. We agree with Chibber (2022, 150) that "The gains made by the most advanced social democracies, like the Nordic countries, are quite extraordinary." We also believe they can serve – if we learn the disturbing lessons from their acceptance of neoliberal principles – as a way-station towards socialism.

Achieving even the current state of Nordic public policy would certainly be a significant achievement from Canada's present state, as the distribution of resources such as power and influence, income and other resources is certainly more equitable. While there would always be a concern that parties such as the NDP – even with its gained influence upon governance in a proportional representational electoral system – would adopt neoliberalism as a guiding ideology, we argue implementation of proportional representation would also allow the emergence of a true "left" party. And as living and working continue to deteriorate under neo liberal global capitalism this new party would provide an outlet for supporters of a new post-capitalism socialist society.

### **Conclusion: restoring socialism as a viable future for Canada**

There is evidence the emergence of a new party of the left would meet with popular support in Canada. Increasingly, Canadians recognize that the capitalist economic system is the root of many of Canada's problems. A 2019 Forum poll found 58 percent of Canadians held positive views towards socialism, with only 40 percent holding negative opinions (Baneres 2019). There is also growing support for economic transformation. In 2021, an Innovative Research Group poll showed 53 percent of Canadians supported the transformation of the economy and 35 percent supported shifting away from a capitalist model (Innovative Research Group 2021). This also suggests that Canadians are ready for a bold left party that will challenge the market system and will not accept politics as usual.

While there are current calls for the establishment of a new left party even within the parameters of the present Canadian first-past-the-post electoral system, it seems to us that the establishment and success of a viable left party will require the implementation of some form of proportional representation. There is increasing recognition of the shortcoming of the present electoral system and periodically referenda are held on such a shift. Those hoping for a rupture with our present capitalist economic system should focus their attention on changing the electoral system as it seems the best way to break the stranglehold on Canadian politics of Canada's dominant business-oriented political parties and the complicit NDP.

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## Appendix: NDP Control over Social Democratic Foundations

*The Douglas Coldwell Layton Foundation* (<https://www.douglascoldwelllayton.ca/>). The mission statement of the Douglas Coldwell Layton Foundation is "To promote the principles of social democracy while reclaiming the legacies of its founders and other social-democratic thinkers, writers and leaders." The President of the Foundation is Irene Mathysen who served as an NDP Member of Parliament for 13 years.

The Vice President is Karl Belangere, a former National Director of the NDP and a senior advisor to NDP Leaders Alexa McDonough, Jack Layton, Nycole Turmel and Thomas Mulcair, all of which have been associated with the de-emphasizing any elements associated with socialism in the NDP.

The Executive Director, Josh Bizjak, is a former Head of Stakeholder Relations and Fundraising with the Ontario NDP at the Ontario Legislature. Like the Broadbent Institute below, neither the word capitalism nor phrase economic system appears on its website.

*Broadbent Institute* (<https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/>). The Institute defines itself as furthering social democracy: "Social democracy is an array of social movements promoting equality and recognition of differences, including feminism, anti-racism, the environmental movement and struggles for the recognition of disability rights and Indigenous rights."

Interestingly, the Broadbent Principles for Canadian Social Democracy, while consisting of six principles of: (1) Furthering economic and social rights in addition to political rights; (2) Creating a green economy that leaves nobody behind; (3) Understanding the transformative potential of electing social democratic governments responsive to robust social movements; (4) Strengthening workplace democracy including the right to a trade union and the fundamental role of the labour movement; (5) Dismantling structural systems of oppression; and (6) Fully implementing the rights and title of Indigenous peoples and supporting their goal of achieving self-governance also does not mention the word "capitalism" nor phrase "economic system".

Chair of the Board of Directors is Brian Topp who served as chief of staff to Alberta NDP Premier Rachel Notley; deputy chief of staff to Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow; and national campaign director to federal NDP leader Jack Layton. Jen Hassum is now the Executive Director coming from being publisher of PressProgress, a progressive news outlet. She is one of the few staff without NDP connections having replaced Hen Hassum who had been Director of Communications for the NDP Caucus in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for three years. Four other Board Members are former NDP members, candidates or elected NDP representatives to federal or provincial parliaments.