

Social Democracy in Twentieth Century Canada: An Interpretive Framework

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From a marginal current without representation in any Canadian legislature, social democracy grew over the course of the twentieth century into a political force. Its values and policies became ingrained within the electorate, and by century's end social democrats had been elected in every province.¹ At points in the 1990s, parties calling themselves social democrat governed more than three-quarters of Canadians in five provinces and one territory. In Saskatchewan, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and New Democratic party (NDP) held power for 40 of the century's last 56 years. Yet at this moment of apparent strength, Canadian social democracy plunged to its lowest level of federal support since the party's formation. Former NDP vice-president and Waffle leader Mel Watkins questioned whether it would survive at all (2001).

Ideas rejected in one era may be embraced as conventional wisdom in a subsequent era. Ideas may also exhaust themselves. At the end of the twentieth century, the challenge to social democracy in Canada and abroad was more theoretical than electoral. Social democratic thinking seemed at an impasse even while socialist and social democratic politicians held or shared power in 13 of 15 European Union states. Tommy Douglas was celebrated as the "Greatest Canadian," at the same time that the institution with which he was most closely identified—medicare—was increasingly challenged. Although social democracy structured and marketed itself as a mass party, it was not much of one; only in Saskatchewan did party members in the 1990s account for more than 1 per cent

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of the population (Carty and Stewart, 1996: 69). Does this mean that Canadian social democracy had become a spent force? Hardly. Although ideologically wearied, social democratic influence had become too woven into the Canadian political culture to disappear, whatever its partisan electoral fortunes. Social democratic prescriptions for Canada's economy, society and state had edged their way onto the public policy agenda and came to be shared by non-socialist thinkers, public administrators and citizens. Though marginalized and timid against a neoliberal backdrop that shrank the state in response to a fiscal crisis, Canada's social democrats were determined not to go away; their constituency, however shriveled, was well established. As the NDP's partial resurgence in the 2004 and 2006 federal election reveals, the poor performance of the 1990s represented a temporary setback rather than a terminal decline.

Canadian literature on parties has generally neglected a political economy approach, focusing instead on party systems without talking about the ideas and the economic and social conditions driving the parties. Scholars of Canadian social democracy have provided historical and philosophical critiques (for example, Zakuta, 1964; Horowitz, 1968; Young, 1969; Penner, 1992) and assessed the impact of class and economic forces on the CCF and NDP (Lipset, 1950; Brodie and Jensen, 1988; Erickson, 1988). What has been absent is a general model, an interpretive framework that combines history and philosophy in the context of Canada's changing political economy.

This article presents a broad-brush political economy approach, arguing that in Canada social democracy changes when the economic world changes. Changes in policy, ideology, language and strategy reflect economic change—rather than periodic shifts in leadership, membership, or institutional affiliation. Weldon is among the few Canadian theorists to explicitly apply a political economy approach to social democracy's historical development, concluding in 1961 that “ideas have been modified by [the] direct experience of the creatively regulated economy” (1961; 1991: 4). The “new Canadian political economy” deals tangentially with social democracy, often as it relates to larger issues such as “dependency” (Parker, 1980; Drache, 1983; Clement and Williams, 1989) and the nature of the Canadian state (Panitch, 1977; McBride, 2005). Smiley's periodization of “three national policies” (1967; 1975) is instructive but insufficient, while Leslie (1987) dwells primarily on the relationship between economics and federalism. Brodie (1990), Adkin (1994), McBride and Shields (1997), and Carroll and Ratner (2005) illuminate aspects of social democracy's development, but say little of the general picture. Despite the dangers in developing a hard-and-fast periodization for a fluid and dynamic movement, we aim to provide this general framework in the pages that follow. As Clement and Vosko have argued, “political economy aims to trouble and challenge conventional ways of framing issues” (2003; xiii).

Abstract. Social democracy changed over the course of the twentieth century in relation to changes in the structure of Canada's economy, society and state. In the following article, we advance a framework to interpret and understand this process of change, identifying four major periods in the development of social democracy: Social Gospel (1900–1925), Social Planning (1925–1950), Social Security (1950–1975) and Social Movements (1975–2000). These periods are neither exclusive nor rigidly drawn, but they are instructive in explaining the development of Canada's left-wing political tradition. Situating social democracy within the framework of Canada's political economy and intra-party debates, and also in an international and historical context, we trace the transition from a moral crusade against capitalism to the seasoned, yet vulnerable, electoralism of the contemporary NDP.

Résumé. La social-démocratie a évolué au cours du 20^e siècle, en même temps que la structure de l'économie, de la société et de l'État canadien. Dans l'article ci-dessous, nous proposons un cadre pour interpréter et comprendre ce processus en décrivant quatre périodes majeures dans le développement de la social-démocratie : l'Évangile social (1900–1925), la planification sociale (1925–1950), la sécurité sociale (1950–1975) et les mouvements sociaux (1975–2000). Ces périodes ne sont ni exclusives ni rigides, mais elles aident à expliquer le développement de la tradition politique de gauche au Canada. En situant la social-démocratie dans le cadre de l'économie politique canadienne et des débats intrapartis, ainsi que dans un contexte international et historique, nous traçons la transition de la croisade morale contre le capitalisme à l'électoralisme chevronné mais vulnérable du NPD contemporain.

This article begins by outlining the philosophical underpinnings of social democracy and contrasts it to some competing political philosophies. It then chronologically reviews Canadian social democracy in the twentieth century by way of four sequentially dominant themes: social gospel (1900–1925), social planning (1925–1950), social security (1950–1975) and social movements (1975–2000). We argue that the social gospel represented a moral response to industrialism, and particularly the advent of urban poverty and the monopoly form of capitalism; social planning responded to economic depression and world war with an interventionist program, while social security represented a political adaptation to the conditions of post-Second World War economic growth. Social movements responded to economic globalization and the relative prosperity of preceding decades by pursuing post-material, issue-based politics. In developing this framework, we consider parallel themes that emerged from the socio-economic context of ever-changing national and international developments. The purpose here is to trace the evolution of Canadian social democracy in relation to these structural changes. Themes employed in this schema are neither exclusive nor sharply bounded by time; complex and overlapping currents blur categorical lines, as do regional variations in social democracy's development. Luminaries like J. S. Woodsworth, Tommy Douglas and secondary figures like Manitoba's Ed Schreyer, Saskatchewan's Roy Romanow and British Columbia's Rosemary Brown, the first black woman elected to a Canadian legislature, straddled a number of themes and social interests. The article concludes by assessing the condition of social democracy at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Philosophic Principles

As the world changes, ideologies adjust. Canadian social democracy has never been monolithic. Just as it is often misleading to assess a prolific writer on the basis of a single work, it is false to attribute a singular, unwavering, or linear pattern to social democracy's development. Nevertheless, we search here for dominant themes and related threads. Canadian social democracy is rooted in the socialist tradition, though at times it has tended toward liberalism; to some political activists, such as British Columbia CCF dissident Eve Smith, socialism and social democracy "represent two schools of thought" (Cathers, 1997: 127), the former seeking to eradicate capitalism, the latter satisfied with making it more humane. This dichotomy between transformative politics and reformism traces its lineage to the famous debates in the Second International. Within the CCF-NDP, it has been a persistent source of intra-party conflict. From our standpoint, social democracy and socialism have been fluid and overlapping categories of shifting ideological meaning, depending on conditions inside and outside the party. We employ "social democracy" as a general descriptor of the parliamentary socialist tradition in Canada, acknowledging ambiguity in the term.

Social democrats share some philosophic space with conservatives, liberals and communists. Communists and social democrats have common socialist roots and dreams. Liberals and social democrats have a shared passion for freedom and equality. Classical conservatives and social democrats agree on the centrality of community. According to the socialist philosophy that underpins Canadian social democracy, the cardinal political, economic and social propellant is capitalist injustice. Socialists are committed to equality of condition. The point of socialist thinking, writing and activism is to make people aware of the truth of their position in the capitalist social system. The notion that the main problem is workers versus bosses is not a pure socialist formulation; left-wing liberals, like Mackenzie King, subscribed to it as well (1918). For socialists, however, classes, working or otherwise, are to be abolished rather than harmonized or reconciled. Class amity is a principle shared by classical conservatives and liberals, but not by socialists who seek the solidarity of a single class leading to a classless society.

As the twentieth century unfolded, communism faded as an energetic force while social democracy and liberalism increasingly influenced each other. Their philosophic cores, nevertheless, remain distinct: liberals respond to the protesting poor with social insurance; social democrats identify with them. A classical conservative would respond with charity out of a sense of *noblesse oblige*. Social democrats support the redistribution of income toward egalitarian ends; liberals are at best content to narrow the gap. A social democrat might argue for minimalist

reforms on tactical grounds; however, she would be quick to note that her socialist ideals, as opposed to her short-term programs, are not diluted. A wayward social democrat, one who has made peace with the neoliberal world order, is fading to liberalism. She contends that the world and the essential capitalistic dynamic have changed fundamentally and that social democrats must accept the new reality. Resistance is futile or, as Margaret Thatcher put it, "There is no alternative." This was the conclusion of Frank Underhill who went from drafting the CCF's founding declaration, the Regina Manifesto, to becoming a Cold War liberal supporter of the Liberals and American foreign policy (Underhill, 1950). Philosophic socialists, however, are not content to judge what is right by what is possible or temporarily necessary.

In the early part of the twentieth century, social democracy was attacked as utopian, revolutionary and impossibilist. Toward century's end, it was characterized as becalmed and irrelevant. Has it been both? Neither? Pivotal to answering these questions is the distinction between ideology and policy; the former is essential, the latter ephemeral. The line between genuine and errant social democratic thinking is not determined by policy preferences. Policies change for social democrats, liberals, conservatives and communists. By itself, a policy shift does not render one a spent or turncoat ideologue. What is more crucial is the ideological worldview from which policy emerges. A socialist never surrenders the fundamental transformation away from capitalism as an objective. That is what differentiates a socialist thinker from a non-socialist, not whether they disagree on a specific policy. What distinguishes socialism is the overriding commitment to redistribute income, wealth and economic power. Whoever does not subscribe to this objective is no socialist. The socialist thinker has faded when she no longer believes that the socialist ideals of equality, co-operation, freedom and rational communitarianism are worth struggling for. Frank Scott, the national chairman of the CCF at mid-century and an accomplished poet, summarized the socialist credo:

From those condemned to labour
For profit of another
We take our new endeavour.

For sect and class and pattern
Through whom the strata harden
We sharpen now the weapon.

Till power is brought to pooling
And outcasts share in ruling
There will not be an ending
Nor any peace for spending. (1971)

Assuming the label of socialist or social democrat does not make one a socialist or social democrat but it is significant. Self-classification is revealing and meaningful. During most of the twentieth century in Canada, labelling oneself a socialist offered negative political returns. The “socialist” appellation has long been muted in public by its partisans for, while they have won victories, the term itself has been in eclipse and retreat since Hitler used it in his party’s name. Socialism, according to public opinion surveys, is antithetical to dominant mass values. According to the media, it is anathema to the established orthodoxy. In the early part of the last century, the terms “social,” “socialist” and “labour” were appropriated by numerous political movements, sects and parties: Socialist Party of Canada, Social Democratic Party, Canadian Socialist League, Federated Labour Party, Dominion Labour Party, Socialist Labour Party, Canadian Labour Party and Independent Labour Party—forerunners to the CCF and NDP. It was a time of ideological ferment, socio-economic flux and political uncertainty. In the 1930s, the decade of Hitler and Stalin, the word “socialism” was shunned in the naming of the CCF and downplayed by the party’s academic intellectuals, the League for Social Reconstruction (“Proceedings of Calgary Conference,” 1932). In the 1960s the New Party, forged by the joint efforts of the CCF and the Canadian Labour Congress, considered but declined calling itself the Social Democratic Party because it wanted to emphasize its newness rather than its socialism. It did so precisely because “social democratic” sounded too socialist, something adversaries would use to link it in the public’s mind to communism, the Cold War bogeyman (Morton, 1986: 27).

Canadian social democratic ideology in the twentieth century, as in Europe, was diluted and redefined with the passage of time. It was certainly not extinguished. The message was softened, the messengers mellowed. This was neither inevitable nor irreversible. Social democratic thinking went from fellow travelling with more radical forms of socialism and communism to some fellow travelling with liberalism. Even this generalization however is shaky: many early twentieth-century Canadian social democratic figures, such as those in the social gospel tradition, had been liberals who were radicalized by witnessing economic dislocation, the ills of urbanization and industrialization and war. Some mid- and late twentieth-century liberals had been socialists who were conserved by economic growth, capitalist accommodation of the welfare state and the ongoing technological revolution. Like all political thought, social democracy is swayed by setting and context. During the century, the world experienced the meteoric rise and spectacular demise of avowedly socialist communist regimes. Many early socialists became communists after the Russian Revolution, but it proved to be the god that failed. As Canadian communism shriveled, many of its former enthusiasts moved into the social democratic orbit.

TABLE 1
Social Democracy in Twentieth Century Canada

Years	Theme	Economic Forces	Political Context	Intra-Party Conflict
1900–1925	SOCIAL GOSPEL	Industrialization Urbanization	First World War Russian Revolution	Evolutionary Fabianism vs. Revolutionary Socialism
1925–1950	SOCIAL PLANNING	Wheat Economy Depression Drought	Immigration Unemployment & Unrest Second World War	Labourism vs. Agrarianism Movement vs. Party Workers vs. Intellectuals
1950–1975	SOCIAL SECURITY	War-Time Intervention Growth of Welfare State Technological Change	British Labour Government Cold War Province-Building	British vs. American influence Keynesianism vs. Public Ownership Old Party vs. New Party
1975–2000	SOCIAL MOVEMENTS	American Investment Globalization Deindustrialization Privatization	Canadian Nationalism Oil Shocks Rise of New Right Collapse of USSR	Federal vs. Provincial Politics Feminism vs. Status Quo Nationalism vs. Internationalism Welfare State vs. Fiscal Crisis

Social Gospel, 1900–1925

The rise of the social gospel was tied to growing disenchantment with the upheavals and inequalities that accompanied the Industrial Revolution. In the place of rural life grounded in family and home, industrialism forced large-scale migration into cities with the corresponding social problems of slums, tenement housing, child labour, industrial accidents, crime and related social ills. Christianity, the spiritual home for a majority of Canadians at the time, was not immune from the impact of industrialism. Among critically minded clerics and parishioners a distinct body of thought emerged, one which offered a critique of industrial capitalism from a Christian standpoint. Woodsworth wrote in the *British Columbia Federationist* in 1918 that “religion is simply a knowledge of the true principles of living and such knowledge cannot come apart from real life.”

The struggle between capitalism and socialism in western Canadian cities at the beginning of the twentieth century was between the Anglo-Saxon owners of capital and the country’s growing pool of British immigrant workers. They had in common their ethnic and Protestant backgrounds at a time—the century’s first decade—when the urban population exploded by over 60 per cent. In the countryside, there was tension between those advocating compulsory grain marketing and those insisting on competitive voluntary marketing. On the prairies, where non-British immigrants constituted about half the population (in Saskatchewan and Alberta the non-British were double those of British birth), European and American ideas also circulated easily. In logging, mining and fishing camps on the Pacific coast and throughout the interior, exploitative conditions and a frontier environment were particularly conducive to the growth of radical socialist politics. To be sure, the social gospel intermingled with more secular ideological currents, such as Marxism, which played a determining role in social democracy’s development in British Columbia (Resnick, 1974). In central and eastern Canada, earlier patterns of settlement and influential social institutions, such as the Catholic Church, undermined the social gospel’s reach but failed to curb it entirely (Allen, 1974).

In the century’s first quarter, the message of clergymen such as Woodsworth and Salem Bland cut across the fissures between city and country, between wage labourers and small independent farmers who differed on issues such as the eight-hour day. The Labour parties excluded farmers from their organizations and drew heavily on British immigrant workers; every Winnipeg General Strike leader but one was an immigrant Briton. The links between British Labour and Canada’s fledgling social democratic movement were vital and real. Most social democratic parties that arose prior to the First World War were offshoots of the mother country: Britain’s Ramsay MacDonald (Labour’s first prime minister) and

Keir Hardie (Labour's founder) went on Canadian speaking tours in 1906 and 1907 respectively. Douglas and M. J. Coldwell, the national CCF's longest-serving leader, were British born, the latter a member of Britain's Fabian Society, the former a Baptist crusader for the "New Jerusalem."

Social democratic thinking took root because the Britons carrying it were culturally acceptable; they enjoyed a social status in British North America that foreign-language speaking continental Europeans did not. American socialists, like presidential candidate Eugene Debs, who also toured Canada, benefited from this cultural acceptability for they were generally Anglo-Saxons and spoke English. This American strain of socialism was relayed northward through militant unions such as the Western Federation of Miners. Among farmers, American influences such as the Grange, Farmers' Alliance, and Non-Partisan League left their distinct mark, imbuing agrarian populism with a more left-wing face, one critical of finance capital and the state-protected industrial-transportation interests of central Canada (Laycock, 1990).

Under the philosophic sway of Salem Bland at Winnipeg's Methodist Wesley College from 1903 to 1917, a generation of social activist clergy went on to spread his message championing *The New Christianity* (1920). Bland's social gospel, drawing on its British and American counterparts, depicted private property rights, motivated by a competitive individualism, as an impediment to the realization of genuine democracy. He preached an internationalist, ecumenical Christianity that deprecated theological complexities and put itself at odds with most Christians' attachment to their particular denominational traditions. His message was reinforced by the Canadian Methodist Church's call in 1918 for "a complete social reconstruction" in the war's aftermath. Bland's disciples included William Irvine, the future Calgary MP instrumental in securing the United Farmers of Alberta's affiliation with the CCF, and William Ivens who founded labour churches across the west. Woodsworth, another Wesley graduate, established Winnipeg's All Peoples' Mission in the heart of that city's polyglot North End and tended to its poor immigrant classes (McNaught, 1959). Some of them, also familiar with socialism from the Old World, formed a Social Democratic Party organized around five different language locals and detached from the distinctly Anglo-Saxon Protestant social gospel.

In this era, social gossellers were associated with sundry causes, including prohibition, pacifism, free trade, the single tax, direct legislation, working conditions and urban reform. The peak of their influence coincided with worker and farmer unrest at the end of the First World War and was reflected in the Labour and Progressive electoral victories at the turn of the 1920s in Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba and the House of Commons. The new United Church, the fruit of church union of various Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists in 1925, was built on

the social gospel's humanitarian ethic, involved substantial lay participation and was led by a highly trained pastorate. By the 1930s, however, the social gospel suffered a backlash against its prohibitionism and encountered stiff competition from evangelicals such as William Aberhart and his Prophetic Bible Institute (Smiley, 1962: 122). Two other factors mediated against the social gospel and impelled social democracy in new directions. Atheism, a growing strain within the Anglo-Saxon working class, had always resonated among Marxists and was invigorated by the Russian Revolution of 1917. As well, the electoral successes of 1919–1921 brought into focus the need for concrete proposals on public policy. In place of the social gospel's sweeping indictment of capitalist society, social democrats moved toward more specific solutions to social problems. Invested with the responsibility of political power, and successfully ensconced in the legislatures of the country, socialist pioneers like Woodsworth, Irvine and their provincial peers began the task of formulating a socialist approach to the administration of government.

Social Planning, 1925–1950

Social planning responded to the economic upheavals of the Great Depression and the Second World War. In the second quarter's social planning phase, innovative social programs such as the Old-Age Pension were skillfully extracted from Mackenzie King's Liberals. Socio-economic policy was expanded upon by urban intellectuals in the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR) who served as the "brain trust" when the CCF was organized in 1932. Economic depression and another world war exposed basic defects in the capitalist system and generated public support for socialist alternatives. Responding to drought and collapsing prices, the Bennett Conservative government was pressured to form the Canadian Wheat Board. Responding to fascism in Europe and Japan, the state intervened in the manufacturing sector and assumed a direct role in planning the distribution of food, labour power, energy and raw materials. Social democrats pointedly asked why the same effort that was needed to win the war was not sustained during peace in pursuit of economic security and an end to poverty. This logic resonated among large numbers of voters, particularly those in Saskatchewan who propelled the socialists into power.

The university professors from Toronto and Montreal who organized the LSR became the intellectual vanguard for a shapeless movement of regional labour parties and farmers' organizations as they crystallized efforts to form a national political party, the CCF. The LSR's intellectual Fabianism shaped CCF policy in these formative years, at the same time that social gossellers, including T.C. Douglas and Stanley Knowles, rose

to positions of leadership. The robust co-operative movement of the Maritimes and Prairie Provinces helped mobilize voters toward the CCF (MacPherson, 1979). The LSR's books, *Social Planning for Canada* (1935) and *Democracy Needs Socialism* (1938), attracted substantial readership and commentary. The shift from workers to intellectuals, however, was not seamless; some grounded in the labour movement, like Winnipeg MP Abe Heaps, distrusted the "academic isolation" of the LSR's professors (Heaps, 1970: 117). At this time of intellectual and electoral ferment, CCF campaign literature hailed the British, Australian and New Zealand Labour governments as models for emulation.

Where the LSR and CCF deviated from their British mentors was on agricultural policy, steering clear of Labour's insistence on land nationalization. The divergence acknowledged the reality of agricultural organization in the New World with its mainly freehold farmers; it also acknowledged the role of the United Farmers of Alberta and Saskatchewan's Farmer-Labour Party as founding units of the CCF ("Proceedings of the Calgary Conference," 1932). The idea was to keep a political door open for farmers, a class that British and European socialists, following Marx, had dismissed as hopelessly reactionary. LSR members made contact with several British socialists, sponsored a trip to Canada by Sir Stafford Cripps, and named after him the press they purchased to publish *The Canadian Forum* to which they regularly contributed. Cripps, a socialist who favoured nationalizing the coal and steel industries, came to serve as Chancellor of the Exchequer, assessed the LSR's social planning as "a form of Socialism which, despite an occasional use of Marxian or class-war phrases, is essentially moderate and evolutionary" (Horn, 1980: 93).

The LSR's orientation was less religiously inspired than the social gospel but such inspiration was not wholly absent. Eugene Forsey, for example, the research director of the Canadian Congress of Labour and three-time CCF candidate in the 1940s, fused the credo of national economic planning with Christian faith in the context of a British constitutional monarchy. For Forsey, labour's struggle was meaningless without a spiritual base (Milligan, 2004). He and fellow thinkers such as J. King Gordon formed the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order that produced *Towards the Christian Revolution* (Scott and Vlastos, 1936). This orientation, however, paled against the relentless secularization of society and became weaker as growing numbers of non-Christian immigrants settled in Canada.

The socialist-planning creed proved indispensable during the Second World War. For a brief moment, the CCF led the national opinion polls and nearly won power in Ontario, narrowly losing to the flexible Conservatives who promised "planning" and "social security from the cradle to the grave." Federally, the Liberals, even more flexible, also

shifted left to try to co-opt the CCF's growing appeal: David Lewis and Frank Scott's *Make This Your Canada* (1943) became a best seller with its formulae for a planned economy and economic democracy. At the same time, CCFers embraced Britain's welfarist blueprint, the Beveridge Report. The Saskatchewan CCF captured 47 of the province's 52 legislative seats and 53 per cent of the vote in 1944; however, as Lipset (1950) observed, initial moves toward nationalization and a planned economy soon gave way to a more modest social-welfare orientation. The ensuing Cold War's atmosphere of hysteria directed at all forms of left-wing radicalism, together with British Labour's difficulties with nationalization (Jenkins, 1959), discredited the idea of national economic planning. So too did a postwar boom which undercut the CCF's denial of that reality; one-time social gossamer and Winnipeg General Strike figure Fred Tipping reported to the 1946 convention of the Manitoba CCF that "time is short. This spell of industrial activity will not last much longer, and then will come the day of depression" (1946). But economic growth and the rise of a consumer society proceeded unabated and the lie was given to the CCF's analysis. "The aspirations of the people do not seem to go beyond the status quo, that is, the policies of the Liberal party," Vancouver MP Angus MacInnis lamented in a 1950 letter to Coldwell. "The new society seems so far away" (1950).

Growing industrial unions helped sustain the CCF while in the countryside agrarian radicalism faded as the decline of the agrarian way of life gave way to agribusiness and to the more rightist outlook of large corporate farming. Farmers helped elect the Saskatchewan CCF, but they quickly came to play a marginal role. The party and its ideas in every province consistently fared better in the large cities than on farms and small towns. CCF-NDP governments in Saskatchewan (and, later, Manitoba) won office in spite, rather than on account, of rural voters.

Social Security, 1950–1975

Social security was a political response to conditions of postwar economic growth, increasing American investment and an ideological narrowing in Cold War North America. In the third quarter, Keynesianism and the welfare state promised to repair rather than replace capitalism. The new paradigm did not require public ownership but "functional socialism" (Adler-Karlsson, 1970), using the instrumentality of government, as in Scandinavia, to manage and manipulate the economy rather than direct it. This was consistent with socialist thought for it held out the possibility of moving in a socialist direction. Roosevelt's New Deal was retrospectively hailed and came to supplement British models as a reference point for Canada's social democrats. In the 1960s, young

self-styled radicals similarly looked south to America's then blossoming "New Left" for inspiration (Laxer, 1970).

The reach of government expanded dramatically with the construction of the Keynesian welfare state, at the same time that the CCF's program of state ownership and centralized planning grew increasingly unpopular with the electorate. In an era of postwar economic expansion and rising incomes, support for government intervention in the economy waned. The Douglas government in Saskatchewan abandoned early forays into social ownership in wood, fisheries and manufacturing and turned instead toward social-security programs (Larmour, 1984).

The expansion of government in relation to the welfare state followed different patterns in Canada and abroad. In other western industrialized states, power gravitated to the central government where social democratic thinkers had focused their planning efforts. In Canada's decentralized federal system, however, welfarism meant the spectacular growth of the provincial state, a move that has been variously interpreted as benefiting capitalists and workers (Panitch, 1977). The focus on social security following the CCF victory in Saskatchewan produced an impressive array of social services but left the basic structure of private property unchanged. Saskatchewan pioneered public hospitalization and medical insurance schemes and, by the end of the planning era, created the largest network of provincial crown corporations in the land. It passed showpiece labour legislation and enacted Canada's first bill of rights. It also developed the "institutionalized cabinet" (Dunn, 1995)—a structural innovation in the executive management of government, creating a collegial cabinet-committee system—which came to be adopted federally and in all the provinces. Provincial governments had been neglected in the social planning era in favour of a nationalist, centralist orientation. Now, as social democrats jealously guarded their provincial beachhead in Regina, they were looked upon more favourably. Whereas *Social Planning for Canada* (1935) devoted only 10 of its 524 pages to issues of federalism, Michael Oliver's *Social Purpose for Canada* (1961), the conscious successor to the earlier tome, committed 36 of its 472 pages to the subject.

Social democratic thinking expanded, too. David Lewis, the party's national secretary and principal motor, penned *A Socialist Takes Stock* in 1956, the same year that the CCF adopted the Winnipeg Declaration. It served as the successor manifesto to the Regina Manifesto and responded to capitalism's unanticipated recovery after the war and the deepening of the Cold War. Lewis cited the Scandinavian states and Roosevelt's programs as templates for an economic planning that eschewed public ownership in most spheres. Simultaneously, he condemned the Soviet Union for shackling freedom. The CCF's questionable viability after its decimation in the 1958 federal election was seized upon as an opportunity to attract new elements such as the recently merged Canadian Labour

Congress, to bring about “a new alignment,” as Tommy Douglas described the idea (“Notes on National Council Meeting,” 1956).

On a strategic level, social democrats hoped to engineer a reprise of Britain’s partisan evolution. There, Labour began as a small upstart third party that came to overtake, partially absorb, and replace the flagging Liberals in a bipolar system of left and right, Labour versus Conservatives. The spectacular rebuff of Canada’s Liberals in 1958 encouraged prognoses among social democrats of a parallel development in Canada. Fractured multiparty minority parliaments of the 1960s also led some on the right to call for a crystallized left-right realignment in Canadian politics (Manning, 1967). A baby step taken in that direction on the left, one of Liberal-NDP rapprochement that went nowhere, was the Exchange for Political Ideas in Canada (EPIC). Schreyer, whose own philosophy (like Lewis’s line in the 1950s) was a mixture of New Deal liberalism and Swedish-style social democracy, endorsed it (Wiseman, 1983: 119).

The CCF, refurbished and rebranded as the NDP, embarked on a “broadening out” strategy. The New Party (the party’s interregnum name at the turn of the 1960s) pitched itself to labour unions, farmers’ organizations, professionals, small business owners, “liberally minded persons,” and pursued those harbouring potential affinity with social democracy. George Grant, in one of his reddest moments, and Pierre Trudeau, in one of his most socialist ones, contributed to *Social Purpose for Canada* (Oliver, 1961). Trudeau pointed out that federalism offered the prospect of building socialism from the provincial ground up rather than holding out for its top-down development from the federal centre. He observed that centralized federalism with its vast aggregation of economic and political power in the national capital, the CCF’s historic preference, would only hasten Quebec’s secession. The party’s most serious foray into that province was in the 1960s and BC’s NDP premier Dave Barrett ventured there in the 1970s to make common cause as fellow social democrats with René Lévesque’s Parti Québécois, but nothing came of that. The PQ’s application to join the Socialist International was looked on favourably by the SI, but was denied on the grounds that the organization recognized only one party per country and the NDP filled that niche while Canada was still one state.

America’s growing corporate presence in Canada during this period and its war in Vietnam tapped and fed nationalist consciousness. That provided the impetus for the Waffle, a leftist faction in the party that characterized the US as a bully abroad and racist at home (“For an Independent Socialist Canada,” 1969; Bullen, 1983). Despite its expulsion in the 1970s, the Waffle’s ideas favouring an independent socialist Canada influenced public policy and public sentiments on issues such as foreign ownership of Canadian industries and American influence on national culture. The Waffle’s analysis also influenced the NDP’s

campaign critiquing “corporate welfare bums.” At the same time, the party increasingly commended the Scandinavian and other continental social democratic governments—more so than British Labour—as models for emulation. The Manitoba party, for example, asked Sweden’s prime minister to address its convention and twice invited West German Chancellor Willy Brandt to do the same (Uskiw, 1969).

To be sure, the ideological ferment associated with the New Left and emerging left-nationalist critique of American investment spurred deviation toward the older social-planning emphasis. In Saskatchewan, the NDP nationalized the potash industry (Richards and Pratt, 1979); in federal politics, Lewis’ NDP took advantage of the 1972–1974 minority Parliament and pressured the Trudeau Liberals to create Petro-Canada, a publicly owned oil company. In BC, the NDP government in the 1970s embodied some characteristics of the earlier social planning phase, nationalizing car insurance and natural gas distribution and instituting a land freeze that led to the establishment of an Agricultural Land Reserve. These aggressive legislative endeavours reflected the relative radicalism of the BC NDP within the federal party and also the militancy of its labour base in the coastal province; Barrett and several members of his cabinet had been signatories to the Waffle Manifesto. Nonetheless, the Barrett government focused primarily on expanding welfare-state programs such as Mincome, the main thrust of the social security period (Kavic and Nixon, 1978).

Social Movements, 1975–2000

In the fourth quarter, the Keynesian consensus that had modified social planning and facilitated social security unravelled. This change was related to the internationalization of capital—what Gary Teeple described as the unhinging of capital from the nation-state (2000)—which contributed to a prolonged fiscal crisis in North America and fuelled neoliberalism’s assault on the state sector and long-established workers’ rights. Responding to currents spawned out of the New Left and demands from diverse social groups for recognition and equality, social democrats moved away from established institutions and embraced more fluid forms of issue-based coalition politics (Archer and Whitehorn, 1997: 176–93). The NDP’s electoral support was increasingly diversified beyond its labour base. At the same time, labour came under assault by an ascendant corporate sector (Panitch and Swartz, 2003).

Party thinking became confused. NDP research director Jim Laxer, a former Waffle leader and runner-up for the party leadership in the 1970s, criticized resolutions passed at conventions as often contradictory and “locked in the 1950s and 1960s ... [clinging] to a Keynesian

formula long after it had ceased to be a useful guide to analysis and policy” (Laxer, 1984: 2–5). Keynesianism’s last gasp in the NDP came in the 1990s under its Ontario government which, after initially pumping up spending to stimulate growth, reversed course and opted for imposed restraint as a recession lingered and public debt ballooned. Breaking collective agreements with public-sector unions caused a bitter rift between the party and much of its historic labour constituency (McBride, 1996; Rae, 1996). Some New Democrats called for a “social democracy without illusions” in a collection of essays sponsored by the Douglas-Coldwell foundation (Richards et al., 1991). They expressed frustration with “parochial” (i.e., socialist) thinking on the left. One, John McCallum, left the party to eventually become the vice-president of a bank and then a Liberal cabinet minister. Their prescriptions appeared to be social democracy without social democracy.

Social democratic thinking had already laid the intellectual and operational groundwork for Canada’s social safety net. The Douglas government had groomed a cadre of professional public administrators in tune with social democratic objectives (Cadbury, 1971; Brownstone, 1971). Some went on to serve provincial NDP administrations across the country and others, like Tommy Shoyama and A.W. Johnson, were recruited by Ottawa to help construct national social security programs, such as the Canada Pension Plan and Medicare. Social democracy became increasingly identified with the effort to preserve and embed established social security programs in the face of retrenchment as the fiscal crises of provincial and federal governments became acute. An example was NDP premier Bob Rae’s campaign for a social charter in a revised Canadian Constitution, one that would enshrine positive rights to social programs along with the negative liberties protected in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. In the 1990s, the NDP’s electoral successes in the provinces (Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba) occurred against the backdrop of federal cuts to provincial transfer payments. NDP premiers, like other premiers, defended provincial interests and powers but were sympathetic, while neoliberal premiers in Alberta and Ontario were less so, to the equalization payments that enable poorer provinces to deliver comparable social services at comparable levels of taxation. This signified social democrats’ continuing commitment to moving in the direction of greater equality of condition for Canadians.

The fourth quarter’s influx of immigrants from the global South occurred in a setting of increasing globalization of finance, trade, manufacturing, and communications. Women also entered the paid labour force in unprecedented numbers. In this evolving cultural and economic context, the socialist conception of dominant and subordinate classes became more varied and complex. Ethno-religious groups, racial minorities and women had long been defined as victims of capitalism’s

exploitative system, but socialists increasingly determined that victimization could not be ascribed solely to capitalism. Racism and patriarchy came to be seen as much more autonomous of capitalism than had been imagined. Despite advances in human rights, individual freedoms and the prohibition of discriminatory practices, socialists decried systemic discrimination: the persistent institutional under-representation of certain groups. Socialist ideology, however, does not stress “identity” politics *per se*; it sees class lived as race, ethnicity and gender, adding these social dimensions of exclusion and exploitation to the older analysis of economic class. Socialism would eliminate exploitation and discriminatory results based on such distinctions. This was a giant leap in thinking from the first quarter when Woodsworth (1909), an advocate for non-British immigrants, employed what are now regarded as crude ethnic stereotypes to describe them, and Labour newspapers ran job advertisements that solicited “whites only” to apply. Ed Broadbent, the party’s leader in the 1970s and 1980s—and at one time the most popular national political leader in the opinion polls—wrote of social democrats’ preference to recognize “collective cultural rights for minorities” and to respect “divergence in sexual orientation” (1999: 84–5).

Social democratic thinking and the CCF-NDP had earlier made special allowances for co-operatives’ and unions’ representation in the party, but in the fourth quarter there was the purposeful pursuit of others, especially those in the women’s and anti-globalization movements. Women won entitlement to equal representation in the party’s executive organs and the party decided that 50 per cent of its candidates should be women (Bashevkin, 1993: 86–89; Young, 2000: 165; Whitehorn and Archer, 1995). Two women in succession served as federal party leader in the 1990s. In government, the Ontario NDP cabinet featured a higher percentage of women than any Canadian cabinet before or since. Visible minorities, Aboriginals, women and francophones were privileged in the NDP government’s employment equity policy imposed on the public and large private corporate sectors. The NDP was the first party to endorse gay equality rights and same-sex marriage. In Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where they make up well over a tenth of the population, Aboriginals became a solid constituency for the party, pivotal to the NDP election victories in those provinces in the 1990s. Frank Calder had become Canada’s first Aboriginal legislator in 1949 when he won election as a CCF MLA in BC; Rosemary Brown and Emery Barnes, members of the BC NDP caucus, helped pioneer the political participation of black Canadians. Throughout this period, the historic organic link with the labour movement continued to loosen. Manitoba’s NDP government, for example, prohibited union as well as corporate contributions to political parties.

A post-materialist ethos emerged in the fourth quarter, stemming from both the economic boom of the third quarter and the emerging

economic crisis of the fourth. Post-materialism and the collapse of the Soviet Bloc challenged prevailing assumptions within the international left. Materialists value economic growth, fighting inflation, maintaining social order and boosting military capacity; post-materialists place a premium on protecting nature and on moving toward a more humane, less impersonal, less competitive and less money-driven society where there is more participatory decision making in government. New social movements contested the established verities of political discourse. Peace movements, labour unions, ethnic fraternal organizations and “new social movements”—propounding feminism, gay and lesbian rights, anti-globalization, environmentalism and disability rights—augmented traditional women’s associations. The NDP stood in solidarity with them. Sometimes this occasioned conundrum and conflict within the party. British Columbia’s “new left” environmentalists and “old left” labour unions, for example, initially forged an alliance against corporate interests in the 1980s when the party was in opposition. In office in the 1990s, however, the party and alliance were strained by the nature of BC’s economy: environmentalists intent on conservation and fighting ecological despoliation clashed with unionists seeking to maintain their jobs in the highly competitive, profit-driven, efficiency-maximizing, resource-extraction industries (Salazar and Alper, 2002; Harrison, 1996). The corporations that controlled the resources, not surprisingly, emphasized divergence rather than convergence between the interests of these two groups, and the governing NDP accepted this logic. The result was that much of the environmental vote moved outside the NDP and directly into the party system, giving rise to the Green Party. This eroded the social democrats’ constituency, especially in BC.

This fourth phase of social democracy’s development was the most contradictory to date. Social gospel, social planning and social security had been embraced as the official doctrine of the leadership, and enjoyed considerable support among militants and supporters. Social movements, however, were always out of step with the structures and practices of the NDP. It was in the final quarter of the twentieth century that Walter Young’s movement-party dichotomy revealed itself most explicitly or, to employ Zakuta’s terminology, the process of “institutionalization” reached its logical end (Young, 1969; Zakuta, 1964). The issue-based coalition politics of the new social movements was difficult to reconcile with the institutional exigencies of the NDP as a governing political party.

Social Democracy at the Millennium

At century’s end, social democrats struggled to differentiate themselves from welfare liberals; notions of equality, freedom and making democ-

racy more inclusive espoused by both were often difficult to distinguish. Where social democrats continued to stand apart in theory—a theory whose operation was not always easy to discern in practice—was in challenging capitalism as the last word in progress, in disputing that entrepreneurial profit-making and material self-interest were the highest human values. Many social democrats had reconciled themselves to the capitalist system, at least for the medium term, as one generating the wealth necessary to sustain full and rewarding lives. The core values of socialism were repressed, socialist spirits flagged. Perhaps they were in abeyance, temporarily in remission, or, perhaps, like a recessive gene, they await a robust return in the future. Canada's social democrats had long ago muted the social gospel, then lost their faith in social planning, and witnessed social security embraced by others (Chandler, 1977). The causes of new social movements, like those of women, gays and lesbians, environmentalists and visible minorities, championed first by social democrats, were absorbed into popular discourse, co-opted by the political mainstream, and found expression among liberals and some modern conservatives too.

Social democrats' quandary was what to put in the place of social planning and a social security system battered by fiscal crisis. British Labour had long ceased to provide an appealing model with most Canadian social democrats shunning Tony Blair's "Third Way," charging that it was a liberalism devoid of socialism, allied with America's militarism and an international neoliberal agenda. Rooseveltian welfare liberalism had long been exhausted and America's "New Democrats" under Clinton failed to inspire the Canadian left. Even Swedish social democracy, long celebrated as the orderly and visionary path toward socialist equality, was rarely mentioned in party circles. The result is that Canadian social democracy is more indigenously inspired and less influenced than it once was by sister parties elsewhere.

At home and abroad, social democrats appeared in an increasingly defensive posture, reacting to corporate globalization from above which had fermented an anti-globalization movement from below: an amorphous, decentralized and growing global network of social movements that shunned electoral solutions to social and economic ills. The new thinking of this activist left-wing appears non-theoretical, reflexively supporting whatever movements of poor and oppressed groups arise on the ground. Seeking an escape from this theoretical impasse, social democracy has gravitated toward a downgrading of systematic thinking and theorizing itself. This is occurring in a world where the whole political spectrum has shifted to the right even as nominally socialist and social democratic parties win office. As one of the older parties in the Socialist International—the world's largest coalition of political forces with approximately 100 million members in 140 states (Rocard, 1999)—the NDP

retains the strongest international connections of any Canadian party. At the same time, its economic policy remains the most staunchly nationalist of the major parties. Canada's social democrats are challenged to re-examine both their internationalism and their economic nationalism, striving toward a synthesis of the two in order to articulate a coherent alternative to globalized capitalism.

In the preceding pages we have advanced a broad-brush political economy framework to explain the development of social democracy in twentieth century Canada, connecting four major periods and their particular economic and political contexts. The social gospel represented a response to the inequities of industrialism and urbanization. Social planning reacted to economic depression and the mobilization of the country's resources under conditions of total war. Social security occurred in the context of an expanding postwar economy, increasing American investment, and the ideological narrowing that accompanied the Cold War. Social movements coincided with the liberation of capital from the nation state, domestic fiscal crises and a diversification of progressive politics from economic to social concerns. Throughout its four phases, equality of condition and a questioning of market forces provided common threads around which social democrats marshalled their forces, even as the structure and priorities of Canadian society changed. In the evolving economic and political climate of the twenty-first century, social democracy seeks to develop fresh responses to enduring problems, transcending a reflexive Keynesianism without abandoning the historic objective of transforming Canada in a more egalitarian direction.

Note

- 1 Social democrats have been elected far less frequently in Quebec, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick than in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta, and Nova Scotia, where the party has governed or formed the official opposition. (See Morton, 1986; Whitehorn, 1992: 71–100; *Statement of Votes* for the various provinces and territories.)

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