

Canada's New Democratic Party:

A look at the past

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The New Democratic Party of Canada was founded in 1961 at a convention in Ottawa, which brought together the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and affiliated unions of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). However, the origins of the Party go back to the social reform movement of the early twentieth century and to pioneer social activists.

J. S. WOODSWORTH

Among those pioneers was James Shaver Woodsworth who was born in Etobicoke, Ontario, in 1874 and moved with his family in 1885 to Brandon, Manitoba. The young Woodsworth was ordained as a Methodist minister in 1896 and spent two years as a circuit preacher in Manitoba before going to study at Victoria College in Toronto and Oxford University in England.

Observing industrial capitalism in Canada and Britain and its failure to meet the needs of working people, Woodsworth came to the view that personal salvation alone did not right great social and economic wrongs that were so evident at that time.

Later, while working with immigrant slum dwellers in Winnipeg between 1904 and 1913, he wrote extensively, and spoke of a "Social Gospel" which called for the Kingdom of God "here and now". By 1914 he had become a socialist and an admirer of the British Labour Party. He was also a pacifist, seeing war as a product of capitalist and imperial competition, and he was fired from a government social research position in 1917 for openly opposing conscription.

By 1918 he had resigned the ministry in protest against church support of the First World War. To look after his young family he worked as a longshoreman on the Vancouver docks for a year.

WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE

A pivotal development in the building of the democratic socialist movement in Canada was the Winnipeg General Strike that took place in May and June of 1919.

When negotiations broke down between management and labour in the building and metals trades, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council called for a general strike. At stake were the principles of collective bargaining, better wages and the improvement of dreadful working conditions.

Within hours almost 30,000 workers had left their jobs. The almost unanimous response by working men and women closed the city's factories, crippled its retail trade and stopped the trains. Public sector employees, including police, firefighters, postal workers, telephone operators and employees of waterworks and other utilities, joined the strike in an impressive display of working class solidarity.

A group that called itself the Citizens' Committee of 1,000 organized opposition to the strike. It was funded and supported by Winnipeg's most influential manufacturers, bankers and Liberal and Conservative politicians.

Rather than giving the strikers' demands any serious consideration, the Citizens' Committee, with the support of Winnipeg's daily newspapers, declared the strike a revolutionary conspiracy by foreigners.

The federal government moved to intervene soon after the strike began. Conservative Senator Gideon Robertson, Minister of Labour, and Arthur Meighen, Minister of the Interior and acting Minister of Justice, went to Winnipeg to meet with the Citizens' Committee. They refused requests from the Central Strike Committee for a similar hearing. The federal government swiftly supported the employers. Federal employees were ordered to return to work immediately or face dismissal. The Immigration Act was amended so that any strikers who were immigrant could be deported, and the Criminal Code's definition of sedition was broadened.

On June 17 the government arrested 12 strike leaders and supporters. Among them was J. S. Woodsworth who had returned to Winnipeg to become editor of the Western Labour News.

Four days later, members of the Royal North-West Mounted Police charged into a peaceful crowd of strikers demonstrating in the centre of Winnipeg. They injured 30 strikers and killed one. "Bloody Saturday", as that day came to be known, ended with federal troops occupying the city's streets.

INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY

Acquitted of charges laid against him during the Winnipeg General Strike, Woodsworth soon became involved in organizing the Manitoba Independent Labour Party. With a platform modelled on that of the British Labour Party, the ILP succeeded in electing Woodsworth to the House of Commons in 1921 for the riding of Winnipeg North Centre.

Rejecting violent revolution and any association with the new Communist Party, Woodsworth became a master of parliamentary procedure and used the House of Commons as a public platform. In so doing, he helped establish the Canadian multi-party system.

He documented the government's hostility to labour, its timorous approach to the League of Nations, its refusal to enact social security measures, and its support of the banks and large corporations.

In 1926 he demonstrated the worth of the parliamentary process when he bargained his vote (and that of one colleague) in return for a promise from the minority Liberal government to enact an old age pension plan. Introduced in 1927, the plan is the cornerstone of Canada's social security system.

CO-OPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH FEDERATION

In the 1920's Woodsworth had begun working with a group of political activists known as the Ginger Group. When the Depression struck, they joined with various labour and socialist groups to found a new socialist party.

At Regina in 1933, the new party adopted a manifesto and chose Woodsworth as its leader. They called their party the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. By 1935, the CCF was joined by a group of academics and professionals called the League for Social Reconstruction.

The CCF quickly established itself in Canadian political life, electing members to Parliament and to several provincial legislatures. In 1935, seven CCF Members of Parliament were returned and the party captured 8.9 per cent of the popular vote. In 1940, eight MPs were returned with 8.5 per cent of the popular vote.

AGNES MACPHAIL

Equal rights and equal opportunities for women have been a major goal of the democratic socialist movement in Canada. Many of the founders of the CCF had fought for the right of women to vote that was won in 1921.

Among them was Agnes Macphail who was elected as the first woman Member of the House of Commons that year.

Born in Grey County, Ontario, in 1890, Macphail was a country schoolteacher involved in the agricultural co-operative movement and the United Farmers of Ontario. She entered politics to represent the farmers of her region. As a Member of Parliament, she first sat as a member of the Progressive Party, with which the UFO was then affiliated, and later as a member of the CCF.

She served in the House of Commons until defeated in 1940. In 1943 she was elected to the Ontario Legislature, one of the first two women there. She lost her seat in 1945 but was again in the Legislature from 1948 to 1951.

Rural issues were always primary for her, but she gave major attention to social issues such as prison reform. She was responsible for Ontario's first equal pay legislation brought in 1951.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

Members of the CCF across Canada stood in the forefront of the struggle against racism in the volatile years before and during the Second World War. Elected CCF legislators and rank and file Party members spoke out against laws that prevented Native Canadians and Canadians of Asian descent from voting or holding public office. In the general election of 1936, the Liberal Party ran advertisements in Vancouver newspapers warning voters that a vote for the CCF was "a vote for the Oriental".

In the same period, the CCF stood with other progressive Canadians and labour unionists who recognized the danger in the rise of fascism in Spain, Italy and Germany. While the Conservative and Liberal parties were silent -- or quietly supportive in the case of the Spanish dictatorship -- democratic socialists spoke out against the threat of these repressive regimes. They pointed out the anti-Semitism and totalitarianism they brought with them.

One of the most outspoken Canadians who called for Canada to open its doors to the victims of Nazi repression in Europe was A. A. Heaps, CCF Member of Parliament for Winnipeg North. But the Liberal government of the time harboured its own anti-Semitism and refused to listen.

When war with Japan was declared, CCF Members of Parliament were among the few courageous enough to stand up against the hysteria of the time. They opposed racist government policy that saw thousands of Canadians of Japanese descent uprooted, interned and robbed of their possessions by the Canadian government. (Later, New Democrats led the fight to recognize the injustice of the internment of Ukrainian Canadians during the First World War and Canadians of Italian heritage in the Second World War.)

M. J. COLDWELL

At the beginning of the Second World War, the CCF was split between supporters of Woodsworth's pacifism and supporters of Canada's entry into the conflict.

M. J. Coldwell, who succeeded Woodsworth as leader, favoured Canada's participation and, under him, the Party began to flourish electorally. It won a critical York South by-election in February 1942 against former Prime Minister Arthur Meighen. It came second in that year's Ontario elections and, under the provincial leadership of T. C. Douglas, took office in Saskatchewan in 1944. In the 1945 federal election the CCF returned 28 MPs and won 15.6 per cent of the popular vote.

Although the CCF had established its reputation as a movement committed to democracy, the press and some religious organizations accused it of being associated with communism. Though false, this charge was very damaging and hard to fight in the period known as the McCarthy era when many otherwise sensible North Americans became caught up on a hysteric fear of communism.

Although in 1956 the Party produced a new manifesto, the Winnipeg Declaration that was seen by many as more moderate than the Regina Manifesto the Party suffered a serious defeat in the federal general election of 1958. Only eight MPs were elected with a mere 9.5 per cent of the popular vote. Both Coldwell and Deputy Leader Stanley Knowles were personally defeated.

Following this disappointment, negotiations began between the CCF and the Canadian Labour Congress to save democratic socialism in Canada. They agreed to found a "New Party".

T. C. DOUGLAS

At the founding convention of the New Democratic Party, Thomas Clement Douglas was chosen as its leader. Douglas had led the government of Saskatchewan, the first socialist government elected in North America.

Douglas's working-class and religious family provided a strong background for both his politics and his faith. His family left Scotland and settled in Winnipeg in 1919 where Douglas witnessed the Winnipeg General Strike that year. Leaving school at the age of 14, Douglas began a printer's apprenticeship, then became involved in church work and in 1924 decided to enter the ministry. He was at Brandon College for six years and it was there that he was exposed to the Social Gospel.

When Douglas moved to Weyburn, Saskatchewan, following his ordination in 1930, he found much suffering caused by the depression and drought. Douglas soon became involved in ministering to people's physical as well as spiritual needs. His studies, along with his experience of the Depression of the 1930s, led him to conclude that political action was necessary to alleviate human suffering.

In 1931 he helped form a local association of the Independent Labour Party, and two years later he attended the founding convention of the new Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Douglas ran unsuccessfully in the 1934 Saskatchewan election. Friends then convinced him that he should be a CCF candidate in the federal election of 1935. This time he was successful.

The Second World War further convinced Douglas that the socialist case was valid. Although he heard it repeatedly argued that money could not be found to put people to work during the Depression, money was found to finance a war.

During his first two terms in Parliament, Douglas earned a reputation as a skillful and witty debater. He claimed as his constituency the underprivileged and exploited and he often took unpopular stands in defence of civil liberties, including opposition to the internment of Japanese-Canadians.

In 1944 Douglas resigned his federal seat to lead the Saskatchewan provincial party in the successful general election campaign.

As Premier of the province for the next 17 years, he became a symbol of what the democratic socialist alternative promised. His government was innovative and efficient and it pioneered many programs that would later be implemented by others, notably in the field of social services.

Douglas became leader of the new party in 1961 primarily because of his success in Saskatchewan but also because he was universally regarded as the left's most eloquent spokesman. He was able to inspire and motivate Party workers and he could also explain democratic socialism in moral, ethical and religious terms.

However, Douglas was defeated in the federal election of 1962, largely because of the backlash against the Saskatchewan government's introduction of Medicare, which had culminated in a long and bitter strike by the province's doctors.

Winning a British Columbia seat in a by-election, Douglas went on to serve as leader of the New Democratic Party until 1971, when he became his Party's energy critic until his retirement in 1979. He died in Ottawa on February 24, 1986.

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DAVID LEWIS

David Lewis succeeded Douglas as leader of the New Democratic Party in 1971.

As a child, Lewis lived through the German invasion of Russia in the First World War and through the Russian Revolution. In 1921 his family moved to Montreal.

He attended McGill and won a Rhodes scholarship to attend Oxford where he established contacts with members of the British Labour Party.

Returning to Canada, Lewis practised law in Ottawa and in 1936 he became National Secretary for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. During these years he also became a key CCF theorist. Efforts to gain election to Parliament in 1940, 1943, 1945 and 1949 were unsuccessful, as a result of a vicious anti-socialist campaign directed against him.

In the 1950s, Lewis practised labour law, held a variety of executive positions in the CCF and helped draft the Winnipeg Declaration. He consistently worked to rid the labour movement of communist infiltration and to forge a link between the Canadian socialist and the labour movement. Through his efforts, the primarily western farm-based CCF was transformed into the more urban and successful New Democratic Party.

Lewis ran for Parliament in York South in 1962, 1963, 1965, 1968, 1972 and 1974, losing only in 1963 and 1974. He quickly became one of Parliament's most skilled debaters and served in a variety of the Party's executive posts culminating in his election as leader at the 1971 NDP Convention.

Campaigning against "corporate welfare bums", Lewis achieved his greatest political prominence in 1972 when New Democrats held the balance of power during the Liberal minority government of 1972 to 1974. This Parliament enacted a new Elections Expenses Act, brought in pension indexing and created Petro-Canada and the Foreign Investment Review Agency, because of NDP support.

Also in this period, the New Democratic Party made a major breakthrough in British Columbia where the NDP under Dave Barrett formed the government for the first time.

Following his defeat in the 1974 general election, Lewis stepped down as leader but remained active in the Party and in the leadership of the Socialist International until his death in 1981.

ED BROADBENT

Following Lewis' defeat in 1974, Ed Broadbent, the Member of Parliament for Oshawa, succeeded him as Party leader.

Born to an autoworker's family in Oshawa in 1936, Broadbent studied at the University of Toronto and the London School of Economics before joining the political science department at York University in 1965. He was first elected to the House of Commons in 1968.

As leader he emphasized economic issues and helped the Party recover from its losses of 1974. Although New Democrat support appeared to decline prior to the 1984 election campaign, Broadbent waged a brilliant campaign, emphasizing tax reforms, lower interest rates and equality for women.

The New Democratic Party emerged with 30 seats, only 10 fewer than the Liberals, including 13 seats in Ontario.

The Broadbent years of leadership were marked by great changes in Canadian politics in which New Democrats played major roles. It was the period when the Canadian Constitution was patriated, when Canadian Confederation was dearly tested by separatists in Quebec and when rightist elements pushed for rapid globalization of the economy which, in Canada, was highlighted by the North American Free Trade Agreement.

In the 1988 federal general election campaign, Broadbent again led New Democrats in a campaign that gained 43 seats in the House of Commons, the largest ever to represent the New Democratic Party. Ed Broadbent retired as leader in December 1989 and went on to become the founding President of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.

AUDREY MCLAUGHLIN

Born in Dutton, Ontario in 1936, Audrey McLaughlin had a strong background as a community and social worker, serving as Executive Director of the Metro Toronto branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association and teaching for some years in Ghana. She moved to the Yukon in 1979 and ran a consulting firm in Whitehorse.

She was first elected to the House of Commons for the Yukon in a by-election in 1987 and re-elected in the general elections of 1988 and 1993.

Chosen as Leader of the Party on December 2, 1989, Audrey McLaughlin became the first woman to lead a major federal party in Canada.

For the next six years she led the Party through a tumultuous time during which the NDP formed the provincial governments in Ontario in 1990, under the leadership of Bob Rae, and in British Columbia in 1991, under Michael Harcourt. The NDP returned to government under Roy Romanow in Saskatchewan.

But Canadians, distressed by nine years of government under Conservative Brian Mulroney, turned to the Liberals in the 1993 general election and, as a result, only nine New Democrat Members of Parliament were elected, three less than that required for official party status in the House of Commons.

Audrey McLaughlin stepped down as leader in October 1995 and announced she would not seek re-election. She later served as President of the Socialist International Women and special representative for the Government of the Yukon on Circumpolar Affairs.

ALEXA MCDONOUGH

The Leadership of the New Democratic Party of Canada passed to Alexa McDonough at a national convention in Ottawa in October 1995.

Born in Ottawa in 1944, while her father, Lloyd Shaw, served as the CCF's first National Research Director, Alexa McDonough's family returned to their native Nova Scotia soon after her birth.

She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Dalhousie University in 1965 and a Masters degree from the Maritime School of Social Work in 1967. Her work experience includes community development with the Nova Scotia Social Services department, social planning with the City of Halifax, and teaching at Dalhousie's Maritime School of Social Work.

Elected leader of the Nova Scotia New Democratic Party in 1980, Alexa McDonough until 1984 was the only New Democrat and only woman in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. She was re-elected in 1984, 1988 and 1993.

She earned a reputation as a tenacious advocate for Nova Scotians by leading the fight for -- and winning -- the first ban on extra Medicare billing in Canada, worker health and safety improvements and human rights protections.

In the federal general election of June 2, 1997, Alexa McDonough and 20 other New Democrats were elected Members of Parliament, including six, the largest number ever, from Nova Scotia and, for the first time, two from New Brunswick.

A few months later, New Democrats became the official opposition in Nova Scotia electing 19 members to the Legislature under the leadership of Robert Chisholm.

Since then, the NDP parliamentary group in the House of Commons has pursued a determined course, demanding the Liberal government set targets to reduce unemployment in the same way governments set targets for reducing deficits.

They have been in the forefront of the fight to save Medicare, the Canada Pension Plan and Canada's unemployment insurance system. At the same time they have been the strongest force in Parliament in opposition to the Multilateral Agreement in Investment (MAI) and schemes to merge major Canadian banks.

In November 2000, Alexa McDonough led the New Democratic Party in a critical federal election campaign in which she focused on the threat that Medicare would be replaced by a U.S. style two-tiered health system. In this campaign the new far right Canadian Alliance challenged the incumbent Liberals led by aging Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. When the vote was counted it appears thousands of Canadians were so frightened by the extremist views of the Alliance's Leader, Stockwell Day, they voted for the Liberal rather than New Democrat candidates. The result was that only 13 New Democrats were returned to the House of

Commons with less than nine per cent of the popular vote. This was enough to give the NDP official party status in the House of Commons but it prompted a major re-examination of the Party's operations and policies in a national discussion. That process is now underway.

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SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL

The New Democratic Party is a member of the Socialist International, a worldwide association of democratic socialist and labour parties founded in 1951.

Its origins go back to The Workingmen's International Association (known as the First International), founded in London in 1864. This organization was reconstituted as the Second International at a congress in Paris in 1889 but this organization broke up over different views of the First World War and the Russian Revolution.

After the war, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union spearheaded the establishment of a Third International, or Komintern, to which most Communist parties of the day ascribed. This organization was unacceptable to democratic socialist and labour parties that then banded together in 1923 into the Labour and Socialist International.

In the years leading up to the Second World War, the Labour and Socialist International concerned itself primarily with the European economic crisis, Communist attacks against democratic socialism and the threat of fascism and war.

In 1940 German forces occupied Brussels, the headquarters of the Labour and Socialist International. Hitler's invasion of Western Europe left only a handful of socialist parties legally in existence in Europe, but these parties, along with national groups of exiled socialists, gathered in London and laid the basis for the new Socialist International founded in Frankfurt in 1951.

Although the movement first centered in Europe, the S.I. has sought, particularly since 1976, under the leadership of Willy Brandt, to become a global movement for social and economic justice, and a political resource for helping to solve problems in troubled areas of the world such as Central America and Africa.

Today, parties affiliated to the Socialist International form the governments or are in government coalitions in most member states of the European Community. They include the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Sweden.

MISSION STATEMENT

The following is the Mission Statement adopted by the National Convention of the New Democratic Party in 1993.

New Democrats seek fundamental change. We will apply the resources of government and the strength of cooperation and community to advance our society toward the goals of equality, social justice and democracy.

A political alternative

The primary purpose of the New Democratic Party is to offer a vision for Canada where people come first; a clear democratic socialist political alternative. We seek to govern, to be a strong force electorally, so that we can implement our agenda of economic, political and social change. We recognize that our electoral success, whether as an opposition party in Parliament, as the balance of power, or as government, provides us with the opportunity for significant and lasting change.

A force for empowerment and representation

Whether in or out of government, our purpose must be to influence the public agenda, to establish cooperation, caring, and compassion as legitimate and essential values in the development of public policy, and to win support for progressive political alternatives. A central task of the Party is to empower Canadians to speak up for and work for social change. We seek to empower and represent all those members of our society who wish to live in a better, more cooperative and compassionate society.

A force for education

Societal change comes out of broad-based understanding and knowledge. Our task is to foster information sharing, open dialogue, and political education. These are the keys to building support for an alternative political agenda. The strength of global corporate forces makes it imperative that education be a major focus of our activity.

We will develop new educational tools and improve our means of communication with Canadians to create support for the values we hold in common and for the alternative policies we seek to implement.

A political model

Our fundamental principles apply as much to the rebuilding of our political Party as they do to our task of creating a democratic socialist society. Our Party must be a model of the principles that we preach. Our actions must match our words. From an informed and involved membership and active riding associations we must move to thoughtful policy development, active debate and dialogue, open, inclusive

and democratic decision-making and consistency between Party policies and public actions.

A broad movement

The New Democratic Party is part of a greater national and international movement that seeks to challenge the dominant political agenda of market globalization and resulting environmental, social, and economic problems. We are committed to working with our partners in the labour movement, our allies in social movements, and all those who share our vision of a society based on human dignity and social justice. We offer Canadians a renewed sense of community and a new vision of government. Internationally, our mission is to cooperate with democratic socialist organizations and other groups who share our values and our mission of building a global community.

Our challenge

Our challenge is to make Canada an example to the world of the nation that best combines sustainable prosperity with social, economic and political equality. We want to make this nation one which truly belongs to all its people; we seek to create a society in which all individuals have the opportunity to realize their full potential. We pledge ourselves to working with those the world over who seek to build a global society respectful of human rights and cultural diversity: a society in which every world citizen shares sustainable prosperity, democracy, equality, and peace.

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