The CCF-NDP:
From Mass Party to Electoral-Professional Party

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The historical trajectory of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation has been commonly depicted as the shift from movement to party (Zakuta, 1964; Young, 1969; Cross, 1974). These studies depict the grassroots CCF movement evolving into an institutionalized bureaucratic electoral party dominated by an oligarchical leadership. Typical is Zakuta's assertion that the CCF "underwent considerable change in character during its life span. It began as a rather radical and spontaneous political movement but eventually developed much of the outlook and structure of the 'old parties.' It became, in brief, a somewhat conventional political party itself" (1964: 4). These readings of CCF history invoke, explicitly or not, Michels' theories on oligarchical political parties. For example, according to Walter Young, "The CCF provided an example of the operation of Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy" (1969: 140). The formation of the New Democratic Party then represents the victory of the party over the movement.

Alan Whitehorn has been one of the few to directly challenge this depiction of the CCF as shifting from a movement to a party. Instead he has argued that the CCF should be seen as an organized and institutionalized mass political party that from its formation was engaged both in electoral politics and extraparliamentary activities such as education (1992: 24). Whitehorn rightly insists that the CCF was, from the beginning, a political party aiming to elect members and form governments. As described below, the CCF was initially a federation of political parties and other organizations, many of which had been engaged in electoral politics well before 1932. Whitehorn also points out that institutionalization need not be viewed entirely in a negative light. The development of the party's organizational structures helped build and sustain the party.

Following Whitehorn's lead, it is useful to examine the CCF as an example of a mass party. The CCF was initially not only an ideological challenge to the mainstream political parties of the day, but it presented an organizational alternative. The CCF was formed with the intent of creating a mass party, with its extraparliamentary organization, democratic structures and educational emphasis. The limitation of Whitehorn's approach is that he does not directly address the evolution of the CCF-NDP as a mass party and the extent to which the mass party characteristics of the party have withered.

The CCF as a Mass Party

Parliamentary or Extra-Parliamentary Origins?

The origins of the CCF can be found both within parliament and at a more grassroots level. By 1924 a small number of Progressive MPs were cooperating with the two-member labour caucus of J.S. Woodsworth and William Irvine in what became known as the "Ginger Group" (Young, 1969: 29). In May 1932, the members of the Ginger Group gathered in Irvine's office on Parliament Hill to discuss the creation of a national political formation. The parliamentarians agreed upon a name, the "Commonwealth Party" and chose Woodsworth as their leader. Woodsworth had a national profile and gave the party an established leadership. These parliamentary beginning characterize the path usually ascribed to the formation of cadre parties. There was a top-down element to the formation of the CCF and it was born with a parliamentary elite at the top.

An additional impetus to the formation of the party had been created through the formation of the League for Social Reconstruction in January 1932. Formed and led by intellectuals headquartered primarily in Montreal and Toronto, the leadership of the LSR was aware of the rising tide toward the formation of a new political party and hoped to create a Canadian version of the Fabian Society providing intellectual guidance and ideological coherence to the new political force (Horn, 1980: 21). While remaining formally independent of the CCF, the LSR would become closely associated with the

party, and the leadership of the LSR would be highly influential within the party. Walter Young argued that the LSR "was more influential in shaping [CCF] policy than constituency resolutions or the convention itself in the period 1932-1940" (Young, 1969: 71-72).

At a more grassroots level, a growing spirit of cooperation was emerging between various small labour parties in Western Canada and, at least in some provinces, between labour parties and farmers' groups. The Conference of Western Labour Political Parties brought together delegates from political parties and labour councils for annual meetings starting in 1929 (Young, 1969: 24). The formal decision to create the CCF was taken in Calgary in the summer of 1932 at a joint meeting of the Conference of Western Labour Political Parties and farmers' groups from Alberta and Saskatchewan (Zakuta, 1964: 43). The party's name became the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (Farmer, Labour, Socialist) and "Woodsworth was automatically named president" (McNaught, 1959: 261). After the Calgary conference, Frank Underhill of the LSR was given the role of drafting a state of principles for the new party. With a few amendments Underhill's draft was approved by the CCF at the 1933 convention and became known as the Regina Manifesto (Young, 1969: 43). The same conference would see Woodsworth's leadership re-confirmed without a challenge.

Mass Membership

On the basic issue of the numerical strength of its membership, the CCF clearly failed to become a mass-based, Canada-wide political party. As Carty, Cross and Young point out, the CCF "never developed a mass membership and had no significant presence on the provinces east of the Ottawa River." (2000: 18-19). Even west of the Ottawa River, the CCF failed to become a major political party in Ontario in terms of membership or political support (Caplan, 1973; Morley, 1984; Azoulay, 1997).

Western Canada proved to be more fertile territory for the CCF, and its clearest success in achieving a mass membership occurred, of course, in Saskatchewan. "The Saskatchewan CCF had succeeded in involving more people in direct political activity than any other party in American or Canadian history, with the possible exception of certain similar farmers' parties" (Lipset, 1968: 244). Nationally and in Saskatchewan, the party grew rapidly during the Second World War. From 4,460 members in 1941, the Saskatchewan section grew to 31,858 in 1945 (Lipset: 1968: 159, 244).

The CCF's national secretary estimated party membership to be slightly more than 20,000 in 1938, less than 30,000 in 1942 and over 90,000 in 1944.[1] After the war, party membership declined rapidly. In 1950, there were only 20,238 members and through the 1950s the CCF membership would never reach 30,000 (Young, 1969: 320).

Yet, as Duverger insisted, the definition of a mass party is not a quantitative question. "The distinction between cadre and mass parties in not based on their dimensions, upon the number of their members: the difference involved is not one of size but of structure" (Duverger, 1959: 63).

Grassroots Financing

In Duverger's discussion of the mass party, the nature of a party's fund-raising is central: "from the financial point of view, the party is essentially based upon the subscriptions paid by its members: the first duty of the branch is to ensure that they are regularly collected…The mass party technique in effect replaces the capitalist financing of electioneering by democratic financing" (Duverger: 1959: 63). Reliance upon

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[1] The national party did not have membership records until 1946.

membership fees and a large number of small donations contrasts with a party funded by a small number of wealthy benefactors.

The CCF was certainly committed to grassroots funding. Of course, it had no other options. In 1944, David Lewis boasted that "We have not accepted anywhere, at any time in the history of the party, a financial contribution from a corporation as such" (1944: 178). The party considered this a matter of principle and one of its selling points with the public. According to Lewis, "The way in which the CCF is financed is one of the important and basic guarantees that the CCF will always remain a people's movement dedicated to its program of democratic socialism and to nothing else" (1944: 178).

Reliant on grassroots funding, the limited success of the CCF in attracting a mass membership had a debilitating effect on the party's finances. For most of its history, but especially in its early years, the CCF ran a shoe-string operation. In Paltiel's words, the CCF "was continually starved of essential funds…Only in the special ambience and political culture of the agrarian movement in Saskatchewan can 'grass roots' fund-raising be said to have been successful" (1970: 48). The thriving Saskatchewan section, and to a much lesser extent the Ontario and BC sections, subsidized the national party and the weaker provincial sections. The Saskatchewan section generally provided around half of the total funds received by the CCF national office (Lewis, 1981: 128). The most detailed account of CCF finance in this era concludes that "it was essentially Saskatchewan which provided the financial backbone of the party…Countless financial crises within the CCF were avoided by a timely cheque from Saskatchewan" (Paltiel, Nobel and Whitaker, 1966: 392).

Initially, the national party was completely reliant upon the transfer of funds from the provincial sections. Relying on the provincial sections to raise and then transfer funds was highly unreliable and unpredictable from the perspective of the national office (Zakuta, 1964: 50). As Lewis describes, "the arrangement…placed the national office at the mercy of provincial executives as far as finances were concerned" (Lewis, 1981: 129). Thus it was a significant step forward in terms of strengthening the party centre when a national membership fee was introduced in 1946. This meant that one dollar per member was transferred to the national office by the respective provincial sections (Young, 1969: 149).

Gradually, union contributions and affiliation dues became a significant source of funds for the CCF. It is possible that growing reliance on trade union funds may have reduced the incentive for the CCF to seek out individual members and contributors both inside and outside of the unions, but it seems clear that the struggling CCF was kept afloat in the 1950s by the increased financial resources provided by organized labour.

Overall, the ability of the CCF to compete with the Liberals and Conservatives was compromised by the CCF's relative lack of funds. During the 1945 federal election, the highpoint of CCF strength, it spent around $300 000 while the Liberals spent approximately 10 times that amount (Wearing, 1988: 187). In terms of its financial structure the CCF was a mass party reliant on individual donations, but with a growing share of its funds coming from organized labour.

Centralization and Institutionalization

Before 1932 Canadian socialism was highly fragmented and regionalized. The great achievement of the founders of the CCF was to pull together the fragments of the non-Communist socialist and labour left within English-speaking Canada into a larger political structure that had nation-wide aspirations. Gradually, at varying speeds and with varying degrees of struggle, the old identities were abandoned, expelled or swamped by subsequent recruits attracted to the new political organization.

As a federation the CCF brought together a diverse group of constituent organizations, many of which were quite reluctant to abandon their distinct identities. The Calgary Programme of 1932 declared that "The object of the Federation shall be to promote co-operation between the member organizations and to correlate their political activities." The only way to join the new party was to join one of these constituent organizations. The extent of autonomy held by the constituent parts and the lack of a central party structure suggest that it might be accurate to describe the early CCF as a confederation of groups. Gradually, the federation of provincial (and in some cases, local) organizations gave way to an undifferentiated party membership based simply on provincial sections.

Initially, there was very minimal institutional presence beyond the affiliated organizations. According to Caplan, the CCF was hindered by its lack of central coordination: "No adequate direction was forthcoming from the top…aside from the tiny parliamentary caucus, there was no centre which could be said to represent the party as a whole" (Caplan, 1973: 47). Of course, financial resources were scarce, but the lack of organization tended to make fundraising difficult in return (Zakuta, 1964: 45). Institutionalization of the party structure was not a priority for Woodsworth (Lewis, 1981: 111-112, 124-125). Other leading members of the CCF and LSR such as M.J. Coldwell, David Lewis, Frank Scott and Frank Underhill pushed for a centralized institution and a national office. Some degree of institutionalization was clearly necessary for the new entity to become a coherent political force.

Despite his wariness about institutionalization, Woodsworth wielded his leadership to maintain discipline. He was capable of strong and swift action to ensure his vision of party unity. In 1934, after the United Farmers of Ontario[2] withdrew from the Ontario CCF, Woodsworth dissolved the provincial council and re-organized the provincial section (Naylor, 1993; Campbell, 1999: 151-159; Caplan, 1973). Henceforth, the Ontario CCF would have a unitary rather than a federated structure with direct individual membership to the provincial party rather than through affiliated organizations. According to David Lewis, Woodsworth acted "in consultation with the National Executive, but the decision was made without express constitutional authority" (1981: 125). This episode provides an example of the extent to which leadership in the early CCF was personalized rather than institutionalized.

Institutionalization and bureaucratization proceeded slowly during the 1930s. The CCF headquarters, to the extent that there was such a thing, were in Edmonton until 1934, then in Regina until it moved to Ottawa in 1936 (Horn, 1980: 60, 127). For two years the CCF national headquarters in Ottawa were in a small lean-to with a dirt floor (Lewis, 1981: 116-118). After serving two years on a part-time basis, David Lewis became the CCF's first full-time national secretary in 1938, the same year that the CCF moved into regular, rented office space. Lewis remained the party's only full-time official at its national headquarters until a research director and an assistant to the leader were appointed in 1943 (Lewis, 1981: 139). Finally, in 1946, the CCF purchased a building in Ottawa and hired a librarian and a publicity and education director (Lewis, 1981: 324-326). These developments were assisted by the aforementioned introduction of the national membership fee in 1946.

Within the provinces, centralization was similarly slow to develop. In his capacity as federal secretary, Coldwell had written in 1937 that in Ontario, "There is no effective

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[2] The UFO, which had been lukewarm in its support for the new party, was alarmed by the radicals within the Ontario Labour Conference. The breaking point was the issue of cooperation with Communists and Communist-led groups. The Labour Conference would be purged from the CCF by Woodsworth's restructuring of the Ontario party.

organization anywhere. The Clubs are inefficient as a rule and quite unsuited for the conduct of a campaign" (Zakuta, 1964: 56). It was not until 1942 that the Ontario CCF selected its first official leader.

In Saskatchewan the CCF had minimal organization or money through the 1930s. During the 1935 federal election and the 1938 provincial election, there were local efforts at cooperation with Social Credit in Saskatchewan. In 1938, the CCF nominated candidates in only 31 of the province's 52 ridings, completely abandoning the urban areas. These efforts at cooperation led to "the near destruction of the CCF in some constituencies" (McLeod and McLeod, 1987: 98). Like the federal party, the Saskatchewan leadership was highly personalized. From 1935 to 1941 George Williams dominated the Saskatchewan CCF, in part due to the fact that two other prominent Saskatchewan CCFers M.J. Coldwell and Tommy Douglas had been elected to the federal parliament in 1935. Williams led the caucus as party leader in the legislature and he led the party organization including the executive and council as party president (McLeod and McLeod, 1987, Shackleton, 1975; Stewart, 2000).

It was not until the upsurge in CCF popularity during the war that the Saskatchewan CCF developed an institutionalized structure. The positions of party leader and party president were separated and a full-time organizer was hired (McLeod and McLeod, 1987: 103-106).

Local Organization: From Clubs to Riding Associations

At the local level, the early organization of the CCF was generally haphazard. In Saskatchewan, the Farmer-Labour Party provided the basis for the CCF and was organized on a constituency basis. Elsewhere, CCF clubs were formed to accommodate those who did not belong to and did not want to join an affiliated provincial organization (Young, 1969: 143).

Many of these CCF clubs were engaged in various non-electoral activities. In at least some parts of the country, the party provided its members with "a way of life, like belonging to a church group" (Melnyk, 1989: 136). Zakuta suggests that "Many…found the movement so close to the centre of their lives that no clear distinction existed between politics, sociability, entertainment and even work" (1964: 53). Avakumovic goes so far as to suggest that "it is possible to speak of a democratic socialist subculture in some parts of Canada in the 1930s" (1978: 118). These authors describe local CCF groups meeting frequently and involved in educational activities and community events such as lectures and book groups complete with reading lists and study guides along with cultural and social activities including theatrical productions, musical performances, choirs, songbooks, poetry recitals, picnics, dances, bazaars, card games and various sports events and teams (Avakumovic, 1978: 117-118; Melnyk, 1989: 136). These activities may have been assisted by the provincial or national office, for example through the provision of literature or study guides, or they may have been purely local initiatives.

These CCF clubs did not follow or necessarily respect electoral boundaries. A report to the Ontario Provincial Council in 1942 complained that "Several clubs…might exist in one geographical area, such as a city ward or a federal riding…[while] one club might have members in several ridings" (cited in Morley, 1984: 101-102). The presence of multiple clubs within a given riding without a proper co-ordinating mechanism resulted in "a lack of concerted effort at elections and many jurisdictional and ideological battles" (Zakuta, 1964: 46). As a result, there was a leadership effort to shift the local basis of organization to the constituency or riding associations. In 1941, the Ontario CCF's provincial convention passed a resolution requiring the formation of riding associations (Zakuta, 1964: 56). After 1947 the CCF Clubs in Ontario no longer qualified to send

delegates to provincial conventions (Morley, 1984: 106). Thus clubs were not banished but their right to direct representation and participation with the larger provincial party was removed. "The party's landslide victory in Saskatchewan was taken as the final proof, if any were needed, of the value of riding and poll organization" (Zakuta, 1964: 66).

Thus, the basic organizational unit changed from CCF clubs based in neighbourhoods or workplaces to riding associations based on electoral districts. For critics, the larger riding associations were less personal, more formal and more inclined to follow the calendar of electoral activities rather than engaging in discussion and debate about politics (Zakuta, 1964: 62, 64). Certainly the demise of the clubs was symptomatic of the increasing prevalence of electoral politics over other forms of political activity.

The postwar period saw a significant decline in CCF support and local activity. Even in Saskatchewan where the CCF was repeatedly re-elected, local activity declined. By 1964 when the Saskatchewan CCF government was defeated, constituency level politics within the party had "degenerated to a ritual or a purely executive responsibility" (Richards, 1968: 372). Richards suggested that "This does not mean that the CCF has become ossified relative to the norm of North American politics, merely that its activities have fallen below the extraordinary level of involvement generated in the 1940s" (1968: 373).

The situation was much worse in Ontario. "A comprehensive riding report of April 1951 indicates that, in almost every riding, membership had fallen dramatically since 1948 – from 8,164 at the end of 1948 to 4,128 at the close of 1950 – and that in a large number of ridings the constituency associations had all but disappeared…Membership levels recovered slightly in 1951…but by year's end the CCF had still lost approximately 43 percent of its members since 1948" (Azoulay, 1997: 19).

Research and Education

One of the fundamental characteristics of classic socialist mass parties has been their focus on education as a method of politicization. As Duverger wrote: "the political education of members assumes considerable importance alongside the purely electoral activity" (1959: 2). After all, the role of the socialist party is to encourage the formation of class consciousness.

From its beginnings, there were currents within the CCF strongly committed to political education including the discussion of socialism. A number of the parties which joined together to form the CCF, in particular, the Socialist Party of Canada in BC, were firm believers in this task. Woodsworth himself was deeply committed to political education.

During the 1930s and the into the Second World War, the intellectuals in the League for Social Reconstruction engaged in research to provide educational materials for the party membership and advice for the parliamentary caucus (Young, 1969: 221). The LSR published numerous pamphlets and the books *Social Planning for Canada* in 1935 and *Democracy Needs Socialism* in 1938. One can detect a degree of paternalism within the writings and activities of the LSR. Their view of socialism was highly technocratic and centralized. Like the expert socialist planners within the state to which they applied such significance, the members of the LSR saw themselves as the intellectual elite within the CCF. Their prominence was not always appreciated by working class members of the party, including Winnipeg MP, Abe Heaps (Heaps, 1984: 117). The central position of the university-educated leadership of the LSR was an affront to the tradition of working class intellectuals such as Ernest Winch, a stalwart of the SPC (Campbell, 1999).

Yet, the LSR provided a detailed Fabian socialist programme for the party and attempted to promote that vision among CCF supporters and the Canadian public (Horn, 1980). The LSR acted as the research and policy centre for the CCF. Despite its achievements, the LSR withered away by 1942 as many of its members and leaders became directly involved in CCF activities.

The strengthening of the CCF's national office, including the hiring of a Director of Research in 1943, allowed it to takeover the research and educational tasks previously performed by the LSR (Young, 1969: 221). The national CCF launched *News Comment,* which provided commentary on current events in March 1941 (Lewis, 1981: 196-197). Subsequently, the CCF national office produced books such as *Make This Your Canada* (1943) written by Lewis and Scott, and *Left-Turn Canada* (1945) written by Coldwell. As well, a members' bulletin *Across Canada* was introduced in 1947. By 1945, the "CCF Literature List" included 35 leaflets and books (Young, 1969: 125). The Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement began producing a monthly magazine called *Horizon!* in 1947 (Goldstein, 1996: 15). In 1947, research director Donald MacDonald introduced a series of three-month correspondence courses for members on the topics "Group Activities" "Educational Techniques" "History of Canadian Trade Unions" "Agriculture" and "Socialism" (Melnyk, 1989: 184; Young, 1969: 125).

Similar efforts existed at the provincial level. The Ontario CCF published a collection of essays entitled *Planning for Freedom* in 1944. The Ontario Woodsworth Memorial Foundation was inaugurated in 1944 as an independent association, closely associated with the party, which would hold public seminars and produce frequent publications.

The BC CCF was influenced in its educational activities by its heritage in the Socialist Party of Canada. For example, in 1953, the Provincial Education Committee of the BC-Yukon Section of the CCF produced a series of six pamphlets. Even amid the growing Cold War hysteria, the introduction to socialism pamphlet recommended reading *Capital* and pointed out that Marx was "the first to understand…the inner workings of capitalism" (MacDonald, 1953: 8,12).

In the late 1940s, the CCF had weekly newspapers in Saskatchewan, BC and Alberta, fortnightly papers in Ontario and Manitoba and a bimonthly paper in the Maritimes. There were also periodic attempts to sustain a French-language paper in Quebec. Controversial content, particularly from BC, led the national party to enforce an editorial line upon the provincial papers (Young, 1969: 148). Conformity had its costs. One contemporary observer noted that "Possibly the papers would be more interesting if they permitted more controversy" (McHenry, 1950: 93).

By 1950, with the CCF popularity and finances in decline, the national party's educational program went downhill. No more book length efforts emerged from the party. One by one, the periodicals were sacrificed, *Horizon!* ceased publishing in 1949, *Across Canada* in 1950, and *Comment* in 1959. The national office workforce began to shrink. Efforts to revive the LSR or to create a similar body failed.

In Ontario, the focus of the provincial office shifted from education to survival in the lean years of the 1950s. It was considered imperative to renew memberships, recruit new members and raise money (Azoulay, 1997: 8). All other activities became secondary concerns. "To some extent, the low level of membership education between 1950 and 1952 was due to the demise during the Second World War of the League for Social Reconstruction, which used to provide the CCF with ample material for membership discussion…In any case, the decline in educational activities by 1952 was unmistakable" (Azoulay, 1997: 37).

CCF Conventions: Democracy in Action?

Another distinctive feature of the CCF as a mass party was its democratic structure. The national CCF constitution of 1933 declared, "The Annual Convention shall be the supreme governing body of the Federation and shall have final authority in all matters of policy and program." Unlike the two main parties, which were starting to experiment with conventions as a tool of leadership selection, only the CCF held frequent policy conventions. The federal CCF initially held annual conventions, before shifting to biennial meetings in 1938.

The democratic structures of the CCF became one of its main selling points. In their descriptions of CCF democracy, the partly leadership were effusive. Lewis declared that "This organization and structure of the CCF is probably the most democratic that exists even in the labour and socialist world." (1944: 176). But that wasn't all: "the CCF is not just another party. It is a new venture in the technique of applied democracy" (1944: 172). Lewis and Scott suggested that "the structure of the CCF shows that it is, in truth, democracy in action" (1943: 140-141).

CCF spokespersons insisted that the party membership which would always remain in control. An editorial in the *Ontario CCF News* in December 1946 explained that

> Our Provincial Council and its Executive are but the servants for the year of the convention. They make no policy. Our Provincial Leader, too, is but the servant of the convention. He is the political mouthpiece of a people's movement operated and controlled entirely through the democratic decisions of our delegate convention resting upon the riding associations, the riding clubs and the affiliated economic groups…Thus our CCF convention is the supreme body of democratic socialism in the province (cited in Engelmann, 1954: 51).

This theme was echoed by Lewis in his insistence that "It is impossible for any CCF leader, national or provincial, at any time to change, alter or modify policy in any fundamental way. It is possible for them, it is their duty, to interpret policy and it will be the duty of the CCF in power to apply it" (1944: 180). Here at least there is some recognition of the wiggle room involved in having leaders interpret and apply policies. Occasionally, CCF leaders admitted that the ideal of party democracy was difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. In December 1944, the Ontario leader, Ted Jolliffe noted that "the rank and file simply cannot be doing their ordinary full time job and still expect to keep up on everything that is being done in Parliament or the legislature, much less be consulted at every step by the elected MLAs" (Engelmann, 1954: 73).

There is no doubt that structure and the culture of the CCF made it a more democratic political organization than the Liberals or Conservatives. Yet, there were limitations that prevented the CCF from living up to the idealized descriptions quoted above. First, the party conventions, which were constitutionally the pre-eminent authority in the party, had their own limitations as tools of democracy. Second, the party leadership, both within the legislatures and within the party apparatus, had significant room to manoeuvre beyond the control of the membership.

As CCF conventions grew in size, they became more formal. Time limits on speeches were introduced. A resolutions committee was introduced in 1937 (Avakumovic, 1978: 123). Many resolutions would not be presented to the convention for debate. Prioritizing resolutions would become a highly contentious process. The formal process of the convention, with its rules of procedure, could be alienating, did not encourage participation and gave an advantage to those familiar with the rules (Engelmann, 1954: 77).

After holding conventions in 1932, 1933 and 1934, the CCF began holding its national conventions every two years. This shift to biennial conventions gave the

leadership more breathing room (Avakumovic, 1978: 122). According to the party constitution, in between elections the highest authority in the party was the National Council. The National Council was a relatively large body with representation from across the country. It was difficult and expensive to bring this large group together, therefore it did not meet frequently, generally about three times a year (McHenry, 1950: 41). In theory, power rested with the membership through the convention, but in reality the table officers of the party and the caucus held the most power and influence (Young, 1969: 146-147).

The leadership core maintained a great deal of control over party policy and electoral platforms. It has already been noted that the Regina Manifesto was primarily the work of the LSR and in particular Frank Underhill. Such was the subsequent method of devising the CCF's electoral platforms. They were drafted by the small leadership group and then presented to convention. This process of ratification allows for some ultimate democratic approval but the process itself is not participatory. Ultimately, even this degree of democracy was reduced. During the 1948 convention debate over the party's electoral platform, delegates overturned a national council decision to delete a plank advocating the nationalization of the banks (Young, 1969: 124). This was too much to take. During the subsequent election campaign in 1952, the federal convention was not given final say on the platform (Engelmann, 1954: 167).

Some issues were too immediate and perhaps too controversial or divisive to be handled by convention delegates. In particular, foreign policy was largely determined by the party leadership during and after the war. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the CCF hammered out its policy at a National Council meeting rather than an emergency convention. Later the CCF caucus demonstrated that it was not bound by the party's national council when it accepted the Liberal government's proposed referendum on conscription (McLeod and McLeod, 1987: 90). Coldwell consulted with Mackenzie King and personally granted the CCF's support for Canada's declaration of war against Japan (Stewart, 2000: 144-145). After the war, Coldwell pushed the party firmly toward accepting American military leadership despite widespread opposition in the party (Stewart, 2000: 181-184).

Government-Party Relations in Saskatchewan

The challenge of maintaining democratic structures within a political party is most difficult when that party forms a government. Thus, the experience of the CCF in Saskatchewan after 1944 is particularly important. The CCF government was faced with challenge of combining internal party democracy with the tradition of parliamentary government in which the cabinet is responsible to the legislature (Eager, 1963). In a broader sense, the government was torn between acting on behalf of its popular base and acting on behalf of all of the people of Saskatchewan.

The CCF government was also confronted with the contradiction in CCF ideology between democratic participation and expert planning. Initially, the CCF government could rely on a mass membership with a strong culture of grass-roots participation particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, the party had a number of mechanisms to ensure democratic control. When it won the provincial election in 1944, the Saskatchewan CCF had a constitutional provision that gave the local party groups the right to recall their CCF MLAs and force their resignation (McLeod and McLeod, 1987: 126). Douglas himself had provided his riding association with a signed recall notice during the 1934 provincial election and the 1935 federal elections. The utility of this provision was never tested.

A more modest step was the introduction of a Legislative Advisory Committee in 1941 to provide a liaison between the legislative leadership and the party (Avakumovic,

1978: 178; Richards, 1968: 381). The committee was initially comprised of 3 members appointed by and from Provincial Council and two MLAs elected by caucus (Engelmann, 1954: 207). The committee's role was according to the Saskatchewan CCF constitution "to assist the CCF Legislative group in preparing legislation in conformity with CCF policies" and to advise the premier on the composition of the cabinet (quoted in Johnson, 2004: 39).

After the CCF won the 1944 election, many in the party expected that the party through its convention and the provincial council would direct the government. However, "From the cabinet's point of view, the ministers were constitutionally responsible to the Legislative Assembly and through it to the people of the province as a whole. This responsibility was clearly incompatible with any formal responsibility to the CCF Party as such" (Johnson, 2004: 98). After some initial struggle over the relationship between party and government, a pattern of consultation between the two was established. Rather than maintaining the right to determine policy or dictate cabinet or other personnel choices, the party was granted the right to frequent consultation with the cabinet and premier. For example, in selecting his first cabinet, Douglas met with the Legislative Advisory Committee before announcing his choices. In reality Douglas had made his choices and the committee endorsed his decisions (Johnson, 2004: 63).

The provincial convention remained an important instrument of accountability. The Saskatchewan CCF used panel sessions at its conventions. The convention would be divided into five panels, all of which would hold closed sessions. At least one cabinet minister was expected to attend each panel meeting. By breaking down the convention into groups, this allowed for discussion of a higher number of resolutions (Engelmann, 1954: 52). Panel reports were then placed before a plenary session and moved as a report and rarely amended (Engelmann, 1954: 57). It is conceivable that the participation and criticism of leaders may have been freer in closed sessions, but this was also an opportunity for the government to defend and explain their actions (Engelmann, 1954: 90).

For a party that was so insistent upon internal democracy, there were surprisingly few major battles between the membership and the government. This reflects the impressive record of reforms introduced by the government, particularly in its first term, but it may also reflect a certain deference toward the party leadership. One member of the Saskatchewan Provincial Council suggested that "The tendencies toward leader worship, and the magnetism of speakers like Douglas (powerful as they are in the direction of keeping us in power in Saskatchewan) are factors which tend to work against grass-roots participation in policy discussion and policy-making" (quoted in Engelmann, 1954: 78).

Ultimately, the initiative for government policy-making came more from central advisors and the bureaucracy than from the party membership. In 1946, the Douglas government established the Economic Advisory and Planning Board. Some CCF activists felt that the new planning board pushed the CCF organization aside (McLeod and McLeod, 1987: 169). Calls for opening up the Board to submissions from public groups and broadening the composition of the board were rejected. The Douglas governments were much more successful at developing technocratic expertise than they were in developing new forms of democratic participation.

The CCF and the "Iron Law of Oligarchy"
There is no doubt that the federal CCF developed a small dominant leadership group. Young concludes that, "the ruling elite of the CCF consisted of no more than 12 people: Woodsworth, Coldwell, Lewis, Scott, Grace and Angus MacInnis, Knowles, Andrew Brewin, George Grube, Lorne Ingle, Carl Hamilton, and Thérèse Casgrain"

(1969: 168). Morley points to a similar ruling group within the Ontario CCF (1984: 173-200). In Saskatchewan, the CCF elite consisted of the Premier, the inner circle of cabinet ministers, the central planners and the top level of the provincial bureaucracy. While all of this appears to be accurate, the movement-to-party thesis tends to ignore or downplay the extent to which there was a ruling elite within the CCF even before the Regina Manifesto was approved in 1933.

It should also be remembered that the position of these elites was largely maintained through democratic procedures. Internal party democracy within the CCF can hardly be said to have lived up to its ideals ("democracy in action"), but the party retained the basic democratic structures that differentiated it from the Liberals and Conservatives. As Michels would lead us to expect, the CCF was notable for the deference afforded its political leadership. Between them, Woodsworth and Coldwell led the federal party for twenty-eight years. Both were elected leader unanimously without any challengers. Even after the party rejected Woodsworth's position toward the Second World War, the party refused to explicitly reject his leadership. Once Woodsworth died, the parliamentary caucus elected Coldwell leader. This decision was then unanimously confirmed by the national convention of 1942. Despite the electoral disappointments of 1949 and 1953, and a minor heart attack in 1957, the CCF refused to consider a new leader. Even after the devastating 1958 election, in which he lost his seat, Coldwell was talked out of resigning.

The CCF: A Mass Party in Transition

Rather than being seen as a shift from movement to party, the history of the CCF should be seen as the institutionalization and growth, then the decline, of a mass party. From the beginning, the CCF was a political party seeking electoral success. The exceptional circumstances of the 1930s led, at least in Saskatchewan, to the development of an active membership base. The international ideological shift brought upon by the Depression and the Second World War gave a vital boost to the CCF. Yet, beyond Saskatchewan there would be no other victories for the CCF. CCF electoral support would decline in the postwar period. In all jurisdictions, including Saskatchewan, membership levels and activism would suffer.

Centralized control and structural changes such as the dissolution of the various political tendencies within the party and the shift from CCF clubs to riding associations had specific negative consequences for the CCF's ability to sustain an extra-parliamentary culture. However, this does not mean that the institutionalization of the party was inherently a negative process for the CCF.

Institutionalization of the party helped it survive the transition from its original charismatic leader. Institutionalization of the party facilitated its electoral growth during the Second World War. Institutionalization of the party allowed it to survive through the 1950s as a minor party in federal and Ontario politics.

In fact, the party was hindered by its organizational weakness. At the 1952 national convention Donald C. MacDonald the National Treasurer and Organizer reported that "Outside the province of Saskatchewan, and a few isolated pockets elsewhere, we have no real organization. In most ridings we have a club or so, but usually no effective riding association with the result that the best we can put on is a token campaign – even in areas where we get a good popular vote" (Engelmann, 1954: 95). Finances remained a serious problem. Poor finances and the prioritization of electoral activities combined to restrict the CCF's research and educational activities. The one hopeful sign was the increasing support of organized labour. The need to strengthen that support led in large part to the transformation of the CCF into the NDP.

The NDP: An Electoral Professional Party

The Formation of the NDP: An Elite Process

The formation of the NDP has been portrayed as the culmination of the transition from movement to party. According to Young, "The new party laid increasingly less emphasis on education and the notion of the NDP as a movement was one held only by those who had been long active in the CCF" (Young, 1969: 10). Furthermore, "The New Democratic Party, successor to the CCF, is less democratic than the CCF because it is much less a movement than the CCF" (Young, 1969: 175). Yet, if one is comparing the NDP of the 1960s to the CCF of the 1950s these statements make little sense. The so-called movement aspects of the CCF had already been in decline well before 1961. The ideological transformation and moderation of the CCF had already taken place in the 1950s, as indicated by the Winnipeg Declaration of 1956. The process of modernization and the transition to a catch-all party, which was a common feature of social democratic parties around the world was already well advanced in the CCF of the 1950s. In many ways the most notable feature in the formation of the NDP was continuity, particularly in leadership but also in ideology, from the CCF of the 50s to the NDP of the early 60s.

The goal in forming the NDP was to formalize a new relationship with the labour movement and to present a new, modern image for the party. The initiative for the transformation of the CCF into the NDP came from the top of the party and labour establishment (Azoulay, 1997: 128; Young, 1969: 133). From 1958 to 1961 the party and labour leadership sought to build a consensus in favour of a new party through an extensive series of conferences, seminars and consultations.

Though it was initiated by the leadership, the process of forming the NDP did result in significant grassroots activity and enthusiasm, particularly through the formation of New Party Clubs (Knowles, 1961). By the summer of 1961, supporters of the New Party boasted that 8,500 members belonged to some 300 New Party clubs (Morton, 1986: 21). However, the CCF leadership was ambivalent toward the New Party clubs. They liked the image of reaching out to a broader constituency, but they resisted any attempt to dilute their control over the organization (Azoulay, 1997: 182). After the formation of the NDP, the New Party clubs were dissolved and little attention was paid to the newcomers into the party (Morton, 1986: 28-29). Azoulay gives the example of the Stormont New Party club, at one point the largest in the country with over 300 members, but by the spring of 1962 it had dwindled to only seventy-three members 1997: 187).

Despite short-term growth in membership and a temporary surge in membership activism, the NDP quickly returned to the relative stagnation that had characterized the CCF of the 1950s. Of course, there was one significant change in party membership. With increased union affiliation and indirect party membership, the NDP became, in Duverger's terminology a semi-mass party. For Duverger, the distinction between direct individual membership and affiliated membership was an important one. He argued that "collective membership remains quite different from individual membership: it involves no true political enrolment and no personal pledge to the party. This profoundly alters the nature of the party and of membership" (1959: 65). In fact, Duverger insists "indirect membership is not true membership" (1959: 77). The main impact of the strengthened relationship with labour would be in party finances.

Party Finance

The growth in union affiliations gave the NDP a stronger financial base than the CCF ever had, though union funds never became a majority of its revenues. Financial support from unions in non-election years was typically about 13 to 20 percent of total federal revenue over the period of 1974-1990. In election years, it was higher, but

declining, from 32.5 percent in 1979, to 25.6 in 1984, 19.8 in 1988 (Stanbury, 1991: 167).

Overall, the NDP's financial situation was altered not only by internal developments, such as the partnership with labour, but also by external changes to Canada's party finance regime. A major transformation of Canada's political party finance regulations occurred in 1974. However, it was preceded by a number of minor changes that granted greater financial resources to Canada's parliamentary caucuses. In 1963 an amendment to the Senate and House of Commons Act gave leaders of parliamentary parties other than the PM and the Leader of the Opposition a special stipend (Courtney, 1992: 357; Canada, 1991: 238). Reforms enacted in 1968 granted opposition parties research money (Courtney, 1992: 371; Canada, 1991: 239).

The *Election Expenses Act* introduced in 1974 had a significant impact on the NDP. A major innovation was the provision of two types of financing for parties and candidates: the reimbursement of part of candidate and party 'election expenses' and an income tax credit for individual and corporation donations (Stanbury, 1991: 225). The NDP was able to influence the *Election Expenses Act* during the Liberal minority government (Stanbury, 1991: 35). According to David Lewis the NDP won three concessions, on the criteria for reimbursement of expenses on advertising; the scale of the tax credit; and the threshold for reimbursement of candidates' expenditures, from 20% down to 15% though NDP wanted it to be 10% (Seidle, 1985; Stanbury, 1991: 35).

Overall, the changes introduced in 1974 significantly reduced the financial gap between the NDP and the two main parties. State support for political parties is particularly important for those parties that do not rely extensively on corporate funds. The tax credit for political contributions has encouraged individual donations and the NDP has consistently received a high number of contributions from individuals. The party finance reforms "allowed the New Democrats to compete more or less evenly for the first time" (Carty, 1992: 637). As a result, the NDP was, by the 1980s, increasingly able to present itself as a major party and become more professionalized in its election campaigning.

Professionalized Campaigning

NDP election campaigns have come to closely resemble those of the other major parties in terms of their focus on the party leader and their reliance on images and sound bites developed through polling, focus groups and public relations experts. It useful to note however that the embrace of modern campaign technologies and strategies has been resisted within the NDP at every step.

Despite the impact that television was having on Canadian political campaigns by the late 1950s, in the early 1960s the NDP still resorted to large campaign rallies in places like Maple Leaf Gardens to rally the troops and attempt to gain media attention (Morton, 1986: 37, 43, 65). To some extent this reflected on-going financial constraints. Even with improved party finances, early NDP election campaigns paled against their competitors. In his initial campaign as federal leader, Tommy Douglas relied on commercial airline flights, while Pearson and Diefenbaker had access to chartered aircraft (Morton, 1986: 35). Not until 1974 did the NDP campaign have the use of its own plane (Morton, 1986: 142).

While the other Canadian parties were studying the modern campaign strategies behind John F. Kennedy's American presidential bid in 1960, the NDP was emphasizing the role of grassroots election volunteers. The method of multiple rounds of mass canvassing took on mythological proportions within the NDP in 1964 through a pair of by-election victories; provincially in Ontario's Riverdale and federally in Waterloo South (Morton, 1986: 53-54). The NDP's labour-intensive method of electioneering became

known as the 'Riverdale model' and it was codified and celebrated in party publications (ONDP, 1964; Morton, 1966).

The NDP's grassroots, volunteer-driven campaigns were celebrated as a contrast to the approach of the other parties. This can be seen in the party's campaign guide from 1972:

> In recent years, political contests in Canada seem to have been taken over by the professionals. Enormously expensive mass media campaigns are used to sell us carefully packaged personalities. Party programs are based on market research, not principle…The New Democratic Party exists to fight this trend. Over the past ten years, it has learned how to fight successfully. Repeatedly, the NDP has won against big odds because it concentrated on meeting people face to face (Morton, 1972: 3).

While this language appealed to the prevailing sentiment within the party membership, NDP campaigns were also being turned over to the professionals.

In 1965, the federal NDP campaign shocked CCF traditionalists by engaging in a modest survey effort and hiring an advertising agency, Dunsky Advertising Limited of Montreal (Morton, 1986: 62). These efforts were copied in the subsequent federal and provincial elections (Morton, 1986: 71-72, 82, 141). The financial resources provided by the party finance reforms of 1974 allowed the NDP to professionalize their campaigns to a greater extent. The 1979 election, the first under the new party finance regime, also saw the NDP with a new leader that was proving popular with the public. These factors facilitated the party's turn toward a leadership based campaign centrally managed by the federal party headquarters.

Alan Whitehorn notes that "The Broadbent era…saw the party introduce direct-mail fund-raising and systematic polling" (1992: 203). In 1984, the NDP obtained the services of American pollster, Vic Fingerhut. He was credited with helping revive the NDP's chances in the 1984 federal election. In the subsequent 1988 election, Fingerhut was a central figure in the party's controversial decision not to make the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement the centerpiece of its campaign. Reliance on polling played a part in turning the 1988 NDP campaign into a cautious and dull affair. In 2000 the NDP campaign stayed so focused on one issue, namely healthcare, that the media and the public seemingly got bored and quit listening (Whitehorn, 2001: 129-130).

On the other hand, advocates of polling and other related electoral tactic would point out that the 1988 election campaign was the NDP's electoral height and the 1993 defeat was due to certain specific conjunctural events, including an unpopular NDP government in Ontario. Then, the NDP's poor results in 1997 and 2000 can in part be attributed to the very weakness of the party's finances and its inability to run a full or modernized campaign. For example, in 2000, the NDP was able to produce only three television commercials, none of them in French (Whitehorn, 2001: 123).

Riding Associations

The local riding association remains the basic building block of Canadian political parties (Carty and Eagles, 2005; Sayers, 1999). Riding associations nominate candidates and wage the electoral campaign at the local level. The riding association is the primary conduit for individuals to become active within a political party. In an electoral party, the ridings spring to life primarily during at elections, with other bursts of energy around leadership campaigns and party conventions. The ability of a political party to be an avenue of extraparliamentary politics is dependent upon the vitality of local riding associations between election campaigns.

Overall, NDP riding associations do not stand out from the other parties as avenues of membership education, mobilization or activism. In their study of party membership, Cross and Young found that "Canadian parties are generally in a less than healthy state" (2004: 428). Surprisingly, Liberal party members report being more active within their party than New Democrats (Cross and Young, 2004: 438). In fact, their data suggests that three-quarters of NDP members spend less than one hour per month engaged in party activity, with fifty-five percent of members indicating zero time spent per month. Fifty-nine percent of New Democratic members stated that they had not attended any party meetings or functions in the past year.

Previous studies of the NDP membership have found similar results. Carty's survey of riding associations found that "the distinction between the NDP as a mass party with engaged activist, as opposed to the Progressive Conservatives and Liberals, as cadre parties active only at election time, is overdrawn…perhaps the NDP is able to maintain a more stable, albeit smaller membership, in its local associations precisely because it makes fewer demands upon it" (Carty, 1991: 58).

As in the other Canadian political parties, the activity of NDP riding associations is highly related to the electoral cycle. With a wide range of variance across the country, they spring to life to life at election time to attract the volunteers to wage the local campaign of canvassing and phone calls. However, with the media attention focused on the national leaders and campaigns, the influence of local campaigns is questionable.

Research and Education

The NDP's internal research capacities are limited. Political parties in Canada generally lack the capacity to engage in medium or long-term research or to engage in political education. One reason for this is the lack of partisan or affiliated think-tanks in Canada. In many other countries, there are closer relations both formal and informal between parties and think-tanks (Baier and Bakvis, 2001).

After the 1968 federal election resulted in a significant party debt, the federal NDP scrapped its central newspaper and dissolved its research department. As noted above, state funding for opposition parties allowed the NDP caucus to sustain some basic research activities but these are directed to the daily cut and thrust of parliamentary debate. According to Morton, the loss of the research department "was a more serious loss than the party could immediately realize for its was a sacrifice of its only internal mechanism for policy generation and innovation…the absence of a clear, uncluttered lead from the party's own internal resources would leave an intellectual vacuum" (1986: 85).

In 1991, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (RCEF) recommended that Canadian political parties establish (and the state provide tax incentives for) party foundations or think tanks to foster political education and policy research. The RCEF noted that the NDP does have an affiliated institute, the Douglas-Coldwell Foundation. However, the RCEF described the links between the party and the foundation as "weak, in part because the Douglas-Coldwell Foundation does not wish to compromise its charitable tax status, and in part because the Foundation undertakes only limited activities. In addition, the leadership of the NDP has not been able to develop a strategy that would make effective use of the research and policy resources of the Foundation" (Canada, 1991: 297). Instead short-term research and policy development are left to senior party officials who report to the leader or the caucus. The RCEF suggested that "The presence of the Douglas-Coldwell Foundation and the limited use the NDP has made of it show the inability of the Canadian party system to establish a strong institutional basis that develops and presents cogent, long-term and well-developed policy alternatives to Canadian voters" (Canada, 1991: 297).

Tellingly, the federal NDP has not been able to produce and sustain a national newspaper or magazine. The last attempt at a national NDP magazine was the short-lived *Alternative* in the early 1990s. Writing in 1992, Whitehorn pointed out that "the national party's publication programme in recent decades has often been non-existent except at election time. An enduring national party newspaper remains only a dream, while a national magazine has survived only intermittently" (1992: 158).

Federal-Provincial Relations

Like the CCF, the NDP retained a federated party structure in which provincial sections were responsible for electoral activity at both the provincial and federal level. Individuals could not join the federal party directly, but only through the provincial sections. The federal NDP came to be rather subordinate to its provincial sections. The structures of the NDP, including the Federal Council, gave a great deal of power to provincial representatives. While the federal NDP could never improve upon its third place position, the provincial sections gained office in Manitoba (1969), Saskatchewan (1971) and BC (1972) and formed the Official Opposition in Ontario (1975). Along with the general trend of decentralization within Canadian federalism, these electoral successes gave the provincial realm of politics increased importance for the NDP. The more successful provincial sections became largely autonomous in policy terms from the federal party. At the same time, the powerful provincial wings became divided along regional lines over economic and constitutional issues. Constitutional changes introduced in 1991 gave federal ridings greater representation upon the Federal Council, but much of the power continues to reside in the powerful provincial sections (McLeod, 1994: 14-16).

There are benefits of the NDP's integrated structure. The federal party and the various provincial sections closely cooperate sharing information, skills and organizers whenever there is an election somewhere in Canada. One downside for the federal party in the 1990s was that it was unable to distance itself from the unpopular provincial sections of the party. When individual MPs tried to criticize the provincial governments, they were disciplined. For example, in 1993 Steven Langdon lost his finance critic position after criticized the Rae government's constraint and Social Contract legislation.

In general, the federal party is unable to create policy positions above and beyond specific provincial concerns. When combined with the power and influence of the trade union leadership within the party, and to a lesser extent the institutionalized presence of the women's movement within the party, the federal NDP leadership is a battleground for competing elites. As a result, the federal party has trouble maintaining coherent or consistent position of its own on many topics and has tended to merely 'muddle through' on major issues such as economic policy or the Canadian constitution.

The Party in Convention: Democracy in Action?

Like the CCF, the NDP maintains that its biennial national convention is highest authority in the party, responsible for choosing leaders, setting the party direction and determining party policy. The NDP constitution states that the party convention "shall be the supreme governing body of the Party and shall have final authority in all matters of federal policy, program and constitution." Between conventions, Federal Council, which is required to meet at least twice a year is the highest authority. Beyond, the Federal Council is the Executive. Of course, much of the day to day operations of the party are determined by the table officers of the party.

Party conventions tend to be carefully managed. As Joseph Wearing cynically described, Canada's traditional political parties have handled intra-party disputes and the challenge of creating policies via convention in their own way: "the Conservatives

deal with this problem by not having policy conventions, the Liberals have policy conventions but forget the resolutions once the conventions are over and the NDP leadership makes sure it gets the resolutions it wants" (1988: 195). At NDP conventions, the Resolutions Committee plays an important role in this as can the presiding convention chair. Yet, NDP conventions are not quite so neat as Wearing implies, on numerous occasions the NDP leadership has resorted to the Liberal tactic of ignoring resolutions, with anti-NATO and pro-public ownership resolutions being two examples at the federal level. There are many more examples at the provincial level where the NDP has been in government. Nelson Wiseman's description of the Schreyer government in Manitoba could apply to any of the NDP provincial governments: "The government took note of party policies passed in convention, but it was clear to all that the cabinet and caucus, not the party, took responsibility for making government policy" (1983: 132). It would be foolish for anyone to think that the federal or provincial conventions of the NDP actually determine the party's policy.

The NDP and the "Iron Law of Oligarchy"

Traditionally, federal CCF-NDP leadership races were coronations. From Woodsworth, through Coldwell to Douglas, the selection was overwhelming, if not unanimous. In 1971, the party establishment was challenged by the new left, but a united party establishment was able to withstand the challenge. Similarly, in 1975, the party establishment coalesced around Broadbent in opposition to the socialism and feminism of Rosemary Brown.

Yet, as noted above, the 1960s and 70s saw the growing strength of the NDP's major provincial sections and growing regional divisions within the NDP. Economic difficulties since the 1970s have also led to growing tensions between the NDP and the labour movement, particularly where the NDP has been in government. Contrary to the depiction of the oligarchical leadership of the CCF-NDP in some of the classic works on the party, there appear to be a variety of elites within the NDP, sometimes competing and sometimes compromising.

By 1989, the party establishment was divided to an unprecedented degree. Audrey McLaughlin, the eventual winner was for the most part, the favourite of the party establishment. But by this point, the NDP was clearly facing a situation of competing elites, in which labour was one of those elites, and was itself divided.

In 1995, Svend Robinson made a significant challenge for the party leadership. This marked the first time that a radical candidate for the party leadership had the support of a significant section of the labour movement, traditionally a component section of the party establishment. The labour support for Robinson clearly signified the extent to which sections of labour had taken an oppositional or critical role within the party. In 2003, the success of the Jack Layton campaign was that he forged a diverse coalition that included support from the left including critical unions, while gaining much support from sections of the party establishment.

At election time, there is no doubt who is in charge within the NDP as an "electoral-professional party" (Panebianco, 1988). Election campaigns are highly centralized. They are directed by a small inner circle within the party's Election Planning Committee. Pollsters and advertisers become central figures in the party. The professional campaign advisors take precedence over the membership, the local party leaderships, the labour leadership and even the parliamentary caucus.

Conclusion: Hollow Centre, Competing Elites, Dormant Grassroots

Through union affiliations and changes to the federal party finance regime, the NDP was able to achieve a degree of financial stability unheard of in the CCF era.

Through its financial stability the NDP was able to institutionalize and professionalize its political organization. This is not inherently negative. However, the NDP used much of its financial resources to strengthen its provincial sections, which were in the process of becoming the primary focus of the party. Moreover, at the federal level, the party formalized itself as an electoral machine to the exclusion of other functions. The NDP did not develop its research capacities. This became highly problematic as the economic and political climate changed and the party needed new ideas that could not be generated simply through party conventions as they are currently structured.

As an electoral machine whose ties to its social base have become more tenuous, the party's electoral success becomes increasingly reliant upon the leader's appeal. In the 1980s the NDP's campaign style became increasingly focused in its leader Ed Broadbent. Relying on a leadership-based campaign style became less successful under the leadership of Audrey McLaughlin and Alexa McDonough, who did obtain the same degree of personal popularity as Broadbent. The weakness of the NDP's attachment to its electorate, resulted in NDP voters moving either to the right-wing populism of the Reform Party/Canadian Alliance or to the centre, brokerage politics of the Liberals.

As the neo-liberal offensive gained strength, the NDP needed not only new ideas, but it required membership activism and mobilization to defend past gains and continue the struggle for social democratic reforms. The weakness of the party's mobilizational and research capacities put the party on the defensive both at the provincial and federal levels. Rather than leading the struggle against neo-liberalism the NDP was left to accommodate itself to the new political reality.

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