

recent years, the Party has worked overtime on measures to rein in the Web, recast Confucian notions to make the promotion of “harmony” a central propaganda theme, and mounted “red culture” extravaganzas to remind people of a time when the Communist Party stood for youthful idealism not a corrupt old power structure. But it will take more than dusting off old songs and updating old homilies to keep locally focused, angry microbloggers from taking the next step into much broader demands for accountability. Even Hu admits as much. If the Party hopes to remain in power, it must adopt a fresher approach. If not, a decade that began with slogans like “Love Dalian, Reject Poison” could end with middle-class calls for some-

thing very different: “Love China, Reject Autocracy.”

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Return of the New Democrats

Canada's Socialists Re-invent Themselves

JORDAN MICHAEL SMITH

When Canada's New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jack Layton died of prostate cancer at age sixty-one in August, the outpouring of grief was extraordinary. Thousands attended his funeral and lined the streets, wearing the orange colors of the social democratic party he led. Layton was granted a state funeral, his body lying in state for two days in Toronto. Such ceremonies are reserved for prime ministers, governor generals, and active members of the cabinet, not opposition leaders. Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper offered Layton's family the honor, however, sensing the public mood. Harper is nothing if not a shrewd politician, and he knew much of the country felt it had suffered a great loss.

The thousands who attended Layton's funeral were grieving for a man who passed away only four months after leading his party to unprecedented electoral success. The NDP had just thirteen seats when Layton took over

as party leader in 2003, and when he died that figure stood at a hundred and three, the best in the party's history. But Layton's death eliminated the party's greatest asset. The future success of the New Democratic Party, both in the near and longterm, is now very much in doubt.

The modern NDP resulted from a merger of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1961. A populist, agrarian party based in Western Canada, the CCF was the first socialist party to govern in North America, when it took power in the province of Saskatchewan in 1944. The era's optimism about leftist economics was epitomized in the CCF's founding convention, in 1932, which declared that “No CCF Government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Co-operative Commonwealth.”

The CCF premier of Saskatchewan and the first leader of the NDP is one of the few

historical figures still known to today's Canadians. In a 2004 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation poll, Tommy Douglas was voted the greatest Canadian ever. His reputation derives from his role in pioneering the country's (indeed, the continent's) first universal health care program. Implemented in 1962 despite a ferocious strike by Saskatchewan doctors, Medicare was adopted countrywide within a decade.

Douglas embodied the best of postwar social democracy. He had sterling antifascist credentials, having volunteered in Canada's army during the Second World War. At the same time, Douglas was hostile to communist doctrine. He and the CCF won five straight majorities in Saskatchewan from 1944 to 1960.

The CLC brought together the two major Canadian labor groups, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) and the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL). The TLC was nonpartisan, but the CCL included many communist militants. In the late 1940s, however, the CCL expelled its communists; it merged with the TLC in 1956.

These origins matter because they help to explain the NDP's success relative to other socialist and labor movements in North America. The NDP Constitution says that "Affiliated membership shall be open to trade unions, farm groups, co-operatives, women's organizations and other groups..." The NDP has had from its creation a deep relationship with the labour movement, whose influence is still reflected in the party's conventions. Affiliated trade unions send delegates on a formula based on their number of members; about one-quarter of the delegates have been from labor groups. As a result, even as union membership in Canada has declined, and unions have become less intertwined with the NDP, there has been no mass exodus of working-class supporters from the party.

At the same time, the Western provinces that were once the NDP's base have largely been lost. In the 1980s and 1990s, the right-wing Reform Party succeeded for a time in portraying itself as the true heir of Canadian populism, coopting NDP rhetoric against the elite. More recently, Western Canadians have mostly supported the low-tax Conservative Party (Reform changed its name and merged

with the Progressive Conservatives in 2003). Harper exemplifies this trend; hailing from the heart of Alberta, he has adopted a small-government perspective and been wildly popular in doing so. In March 2011, Layton kicked off his federal election campaign in Alberta. He had good reason to do so—in 2006, the Conservatives won all of the province's twenty-eight seats.

Equally rooted in its history are the NDP's principles. The party maintains its left-wing bent, if less strongly than in the past. In fact, the New Democrats, like the Conservatives, call for tax cuts for small businesses—because being branded the pro-tax party is never a wise electoral strategy. Still, current positions include the expansion of national health care to cover prescription drugs and dental work, an increase in corporate tax rates, stronger environmental regulation, and an increased minimum wage. The NDP's foreign policy platform has called for the removal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan since 2006—a position that earned Layton the nickname "Taliban Jack" but is now embraced by the entire political spectrum. The NDP is consistently the most dovish party in Canada, favoring humanitarian aid and peacekeeping over the use of force. Libya, however, is an exception; the NDP twice supported Canada's participation in the NATO mission—before withdrawing that support in September once Gaddafi was removed from power. Such schizophrenia reflects a deep divide within the party over whether anti-imperialism or human rights promotion should be the guiding foreign policy force. The divide shows no signs of being bridged.

The NDP has never formed a national government. What it has done is what many minority parties do in informal and formal coalition governments: use its power beyond its numbers to get what it wants. The party played a crucial role in supporting Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's minority government from 1972 to 1974. Together the two progressive parties passed a host of historic left-wing legislation, including a national affordable housing strategy and new laws governing pension indexing and

campaign finance. In 1980, the NDP voted against the Progressive Conservative's budget, forcing an election that brought Trudeau's Liberals back into power. Crucial to this success was leader Ed Broadbent, who was frequently voted the most popular leader in Canada, despite his party's consistent third-place showing. In the decade following Broadbent's retirement from politics, the federal NDP declined significantly in popularity.

The NDP has had more direct success at the provincial and municipal levels. Provincial NDPers have governed in five of the ten provinces and one of the three territories. They currently govern Manitoba and Nova Scotia and form the Official Opposition in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. They have previously formed governments in Ontario, British Columbia, and in the Yukon Territory. Municipal office-holders in Canada are usually elected as independents or with autonomous municipal parties, but they are frequently former NDP members.

Postwar Saskatchewan aside, where the NDP has taken over the provincial reins, results have not always been positive. Unlike most other Canadian parties, the NDP is integrated with its provincial and territorial parties. Membership lists are maintained locally, so that membership in a provincial or territorial section of the NDP brings with it automatic membership in the federal party. This contributes, for good and ill, to a conviction among voters that city and provincial NDPers represent the national party. As a result, voters will hold national NDP leaders accountable for the actions of lower-level party members, though the two can often be out of sync. The deep unpopularity of NDP governments in Ontario and British Columbia contributed to the national party's devastating losses in the 1993 elections. If the national party's lack of success has been offset by the success of its provincial brethren, the knife has sometimes cut both ways.

Layton's first electoral victory was in Toronto's City Council, in 1982. In the 1980s, he became a prominent professor and activist

against urban blight, writing a book called *Homelessness: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis*. At City Council, he became known as one of the panel's most left-wing members, initiating campaigns to ban smoking in certain public places and promote alternative energy sources. Between 1991 and 2004, there were a string of defeats—an ill-fated mayoral campaign and two losing campaigns for a seat in Parliament. But he did win election to the regional Metropolitan Toronto Council and became a leading national figure at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, a position that enabled him to win the NDP leadership in 2003. Finally, as party leader, he was able to win a seat, in the Toronto riding.

Layton took over a party in shambles. In the 2000 elections, the NDP had won just thirteen seats, barely enough to qualify as a federal party (in 1993, the NDP actually had lost official status in the House of Commons, winning only nine seats). Layton slowly rebuilt the party. Under his tutelage, forcefully attacking the Conservatives and arguing that the Liberals had moved too far to the right, the NDP began doing better in the polls. He showed a shrewd understanding particularly of the difficult province of Quebec. Running up to his first election as leader, in 2004, he promised to recognize any declaration of independence by Quebec following a referendum and supported repeal of a bill that made it more difficult for the province to secede from Canada. The NDP ran French-language ads in the province featuring Layton, who spoke decent Quebecois French. Partly as a result of these efforts, Layton led the NDP that year to a 15 percent popular vote, its highest in sixteen years.

But Layton was flirting with the wrong side of the most contentious issue in Canadian politics. The question of Quebec's adherence to or secession from the Canadian federation has been by far the most volatile and destructive issue in the country's history. Even Layton's predecessor as NDP leader castigated his views, as did the party's leader in the House of Commons. He later moderated his views somewhat. They suggested an inexperienced leader playing (albeit with some success) with French-Canadian fire.

Layton continued to perform well in the

2006 and 2008 national elections. It helped that the Liberal Party was in the midst of a historic meltdown. It is difficult to overstate the Liberal dominance of Canadian politics for much of the country's history. It governed Canada for sixty-nine years in the twentieth century, making it the winningest party in all the western democracies. So long was the shadow it cast over the nation's political scene that one of Canada's most respected commentators, Jeffrey Simpson, spoke in 2001 only partly in jest of a "friendly dictatorship."

But when Prime Minister Jean Chretien retired in 2003 after a decade of governing, his three successors were all far less gifted. Paul Martin, Chretien's finance minister, was nicknamed "Mr. Dithers" by *The Economist* magazine for his waffling style and his response to political scandals. Next on the chopping block was Stephan Dion, a former political science professor with a poor command of English and little charisma. Finally, there was Michael Ignatieff—I will come to him in a moment.

Though it is counterintuitive, the NDP's progressive success in the 2000s was aided by the rise of the Conservatives. Harper, a sharp strategist and an even better tactician, was able to adopt many Liberal proposals while sanding off the rough edges of his right-wing coalition. So the Liberal Party lost much of its identity, and voters turned to the NDP as a viable alternative. Layton chose the controversial strategy of attacking the Liberals as much as the Conservatives, which further eroded support for Canada's traditional centrist party. In effect, the Liberals had to defend themselves against the Left and the Right, but without leaders able to navigate the in-between space.

A crucial component of the Liberal collapse was Chretien's decision to adopt a publicly financed electoral system in 2004. Though one of the bravest political decisions of the decade, it devastated the Liberals' traditional fundraising base. In 2008, the Conservatives brought in over \$21 million (CAN) from more than 112,000 contributors. The Liberals, conversely, took in less than \$6 million from only about 30,000 contributors.

All of these factors combined for a perfect electoral storm in 2011. Despite his high

intellect and undeniable charisma, Michael Ignatieff proved too much of a carpetbagger for Canadians to stomach. A series of unanswered television ads attacking Ignatieff's thirty-four years of living abroad proved fatal. Harper benefited from Canada's relatively mild recession, though these were the result of Liberal economic decisions in the 1990s. Had Harper had his way—he presided over a right-wing think-tank during that time—Canada's banks might have been deregulated as disastrously as America's were.

In February of 2010, Layton announced he had prostate cancer. He continued his duties as parliamentarian and party leader, running the 2011 campaign with characteristic optimism. Carrying a cane, wearing his trademark moustache and a perennial smile, he performed superbly in debates, shooting NDP poll numbers skyward. The NDP also embarked upon the largest advertising campaign in its history, focusing on the government's health care record and Ignatieff's frequent absences from Parliament votes.

Surprised by NDP support, the Liberals and Conservatives both targeted Layton, often resorting to personal attacks that backfired. One poll showed recognition of Layton's personal "trustworthiness, competence and vision for Canada" to be at an astonishing 97 percent, compared to Ignatieff's 39 percent.

Layton's NDP became the Official Opposition for the first time in the party's history. It more than doubled its previous seat record. It swept Montreal and Quebec City, making historic gains in the province. Going into the election, it held only one seat in Quebec and had held only one other in party history. The Liberals had their worst showing in a century. Ignatieff resigned as party leader the next day and took up a post at the University of Toronto. The Bloc Quebecois was brought down to four seats, without official standing in Parliament—this last result brought great pleasure to Canadians outside Quebec who want to see the secessionist party demolished.

Just two months after the election, a frail Layton announced his cancer had returned

and he was taking a leave from his post. Less than a month later, he was dead.

The party Layton left behind is greatly strengthened but also very fragile. Among the new MPs added to the party's Quebec roster were nine students and recent graduates, one of them just nineteen years old, another the assistant manager of a campus pub. But there are also former members of Parliament, a former cabinet minister, a former deputy chief of the Cree of the James Bay nation, and the first Innu lawyer from a community in northern Quebec. Many of the new MPs are recruited from union ranks, the Canadian Auto Workers particularly. Along with the MPs came more than 250 parliamentary staffers, many of them also union-supplied. This will attract greater support from Canada's unions, but less than a third of working Canadians still belong to a union. The NDP has worked hard to distance itself from its radical roots, and highlighting its union bona fides probably won't help.

By far the major fault line in the party caucus is that fifty-seven of the sixty-six new MPs will represent ridings in Quebec. Put simply, the Quebec-nationalist positions these new members will defend, at least to some degree, are anathema in the rest of the country, which was why the NDP had only one seat in the province prior to the election. A full forty-five of the Quebec seats the NDP gained were previously held by the Bloc Quebecois. Certainly the NDP will try to avoid the Quebec issue. But the tension between Quebec nationalism and Canadian nationalism is potentially explosive. If anything tears down what Layton built up, it will be the Quebec problem.

Whoever becomes the new leader will succeed or fail in large part on how he or she straddles this problem. In Canadian politics, the party leader is able in large part to force

the caucus to vote a specific way. As a result, the leader wields tremendous power. The NDP will choose its leader at a convention in March 2012. As with American politics pre-1970s, the outcome of a leadership race is often in question right up to the party convention. Strong contenders include deputy leader Thomas Mulcair, the party's best-known voice in Quebec; former party president and veteran strategist Brian Topp; and previous Opposition Critic for Foreign Affairs Paul Dewar. Three other lesser-known candidates have also signed on for the race.

Of the major candidates, Dewar is by far the strongest on international affairs, having been instrumental in crafting the NDP position on Afghanistan and in silencing the far Left within the party. Mulcair questioned the truthfulness of the U.S. account of Osama bin Laden's death, a provocative position that forced Dewar to intervene. All the NDP hopefuls support the party's comparatively pro-Palestinian and UN-oriented approach, strongly opposing Harper's foreign policy. None of the potential victors are expected to deviate significantly from Layton's dovish internationalist approach, for the obvious reason that the approach worked in electoral terms.

Layton's family released a letter he had written two days before he passed away. "Unfortunately my treatment has not worked out as I had hoped," it read. "My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world." It is far from clear that the NDP can maintain its strength without the man who wrote such sweet, clichéd words.

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