

NEW DEMOCRATIC YOUTH NEWSLETTER
MARCH 1973

Fellow Socialist:

The Ontario New Democratic Youth is holding its eleventh annual convention on March 17 and 18 in Toronto, at the Don Vale Community Centre, 30 Winchester Street.

The convention comes at a time when various elements of the party, including ridings, the Intra-Party Communications and Participation Committee, the Party's Youth Committee, as well as party members who can be classified as "youth" are examining and reevaluating the role that young people, and the ONDY, can play in the party.

The ONDY is at a low ebb organizationally, a result of lack of funds from the party, and of organizational problems in the ONDY itself. This convention is seen importantly as an attempt to come to grips with the organizational questions that confront the NDY. While some of these problems of the NDY parallel those faced by riding associations, it is clear that the past approach has not been successful and that new avenues need to be explored.

In order for this to be successful, it is necessary that there be widespread participation in this convention from youth members of the party, defined by the constitution as being those thirty years of age and under, and certainly including those who see the task of involving young people in socialist politics as a priority. (Observers as well as delegates are most welcome.)

The NDY can have a useful role to play. It can give young people the opportunity to develop confidence, political knowledge, and organizational skills together with their peers. It can help to draw young people, many of whom are indifferent or hostile to politics, into socialist politics, in a way that a youth organization can do better than many riding associations. And youth clubs are the logical way of organizing for high school and university students, for example, in carrying on their struggles in the institutions in which they spend most of their time. A club organized in the particular institution is better equipped, often, to carry on this kind of ongoing, day-to-day work than a riding organization focussing primarily on election campaigns. The NDY can be an important intermediate organization between the party and young people, with their often different culture, needs, and problems.

But to do this the ONDY must evolve viable structures, and strategies for organizing, both centrally and on the regional and local levels. And this requires considerable support from local youth members and clubs throughout the province.

Yours in socialism,
Garry Neil, ONDY Chairperson

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COMMENTARY ON 1972

1972 has been the second consecutive year the Ontario New Democratic Youth has existed without any organizational resources or financial support. Not even the rebates on memberships owed to the Youth by the ONDP were paid this year. This is consistent with the established pattern of relations between the Youth and the Party leadership.

These had their origin in the period of the latter 1960's when the national NDY, as a mass social democratic youth movement, came under the influence of the worldwide anti-war, anti-imperialist radicalization, which was reflected in the NDP by the emergence of the Waffle. It was not uncommon at this time for young people to be the first to break from the cold war conformity of the '50's, to pick up the cry for social justice and radical change. No longer content to be an unquestioning training school for labour parliamentarians, the NDY set out in an anti-capitalist direction, seeking to embrace students and young workers in their struggles, and inside the NDP, fighting for Socialist politics.

Party headquarters and the union brass, found little to be desired in this radical development. Soon their rhetorical attacks on the NDY escalated to the realm of material sanctions. In February, 1971 at Waterloo, Ontario, the Provincial Council of the ONDP, in the name of pre-election austerity, eliminated the modest annual grant to the youth that permitted the maintenance of an organizer, an office, and project funds.

The ONDY was never the same again. Its political heterogeneity, the occurrence of similar developments in the other provincial sections, and the eventual dissolution of the Federal Youth structure augmented the difficulties that made fighting the repressive measures less possible.

But the attacks launched by the ONDP leadership didn't cease then. At the now famous Orillia provincial council meeting of June 24-25, 1972 where eliminating the Waffle was the primary objective, attempting to oust the youth wing altogether was an associated aim. However, most of the Party higher-ups felt enough bloodletting was enough, for one weekend, and settled for the establishment of an "intra-party committee" to deal with the sore relations with internal minorities (e.g. youth, women, ethnics, etc.). The seriousness of this bureaucratically stacked committee (onto which only one NDY'er was allowed towards the "reconciliation of poor relations" is amply demonstrated by the fact that it didn't meet 'til nearly six months later, on the eve of the ONDP convention, in Toronto last December. And then, capturing the true spirit of anti-climax, the committee hurriedly threw a report together recommending the scrapping of the present youth structure, and the establishment of some kind of decentralized, 'voluntary' body, which one had to be under 20 years of age to be in, buried in the riding associations. This delightfully fair-minded document was adopted by the provincial council, but failed to reach the convention floor, preoccupied as it was with the Left Caucus' stinging attacks on the leadership's latest sellouts of labour, women, students and progressive movements abroad. It must also be added that incompetent right-wing convention chairing also acted in our interest in forestalling a decision.

COMMENTARY ON 1972 (cont'd.)

What can the leadership do now about their 'nagging problem'? Offer the ONDY a bribe? Assassinate its steering committee members? Drive the newsletter underground? Call the vice squad? Or, take over our upcoming convention? The tension builds as we await the outcome - sans membership rebates.

But more seriously, there have been important things for us to do. Before the Orillia exercise, the ONDY held a well attended conference in Toronto on the history and future of social democracy. This aided in beginning to clarify some of the differences on the left that led to the split of the Waffle over its orientation to the NDP. Before and after the split, leading NDY'ers consistently fought for the right of the party's left wing to remain intact and strongly critical, and to continue to challenge for that right inside the NDP, regardless of the actions of the leadership. When the Watkins-Laxer faction exited the struggle (apparently to do research on the national question), we began building the Waffle's fighting successor, the Left Caucus, which enjoyed relative gains at the December NDP convention.

Helping to launch the Indo-Chinese Solidarity Committee, and the Jan. 20th international actions in support of the Vietnamese revolution and against any imperialist treaties or policing troops, was also an important political focus this past period.

At the March 17-18 ONDY convention we will have an opportunity to evaluate all the developments of an eventful year. Ahead of us lie: capitalist cutbacks in education, health, and welfare, more anti-labour legislation, the need to defend the colonial revolution, elections, and a Party federal convention. Whether or how we can relate to these, and the problems of our own organizational existence, will be uppermost on the agenda.

Barry Weisleder
ONDY Steering Committee
ONDP Provincial Executive

The Left in the NDP: Past and Present

The left remains alive and well within the NDP, if not in a position of control as the recent NDP convention demonstrates. However, its character has markedly changed.

This reflects the shifting patterns of radicalization and the way they have expressed themselves within the NDP. It is an important part of the recent history of the Canadian left.

It is perhaps useful to look at what the Waffle was in order to understand its fate at the hands of the party and labour bureaucrats and its own leaders. This will help us draw out lessons for the nature and activities of the future left within the party.

The Waffle reflected the imprint of the radicalization of the sixties within the party and within certain social layers (parts of the new petty bourgeoisie, students, women intellectuals etc.). It arose as an expression of those ideas within the party. It was able to gather behind it much greater forces than had previously been assembled within the left of the NDP. The presence of old style CCF socialism lingered on among some despite the rightward drift of the Winnipeg Declaration. Some attempt was made to contest around question of foreign policy Nato, Norad, Cuba etc. The NDY eventually emerged as a centre of left influence and ideas. Nonetheless, things on the whole were relatively quiet, Within the party. However, the Waffle Manifesto with its vague slogans of independence and socialism was able to crystalize much of the developing nationalist populist and socialist ferment among Canadian intellectuals and leftists. The Waffle rallied a significant number of the party behind its popular new banners. It also served as a domestic focal point for much of the stirrings of the Canadian left. It attracted elements out of the student movement on decline from the heights of the Newleft in 1968-69 as well as more traditional leftists. It was thus a quite heterogenous grouping.

The 1970 convention appeared as a high point of this new grouping's challenge to the NDP entrenched leadership and direction. Laxer ran a stylish and effective campaign, grouped a solid block behind him and created the enthusiasm of the movement. The Waffle emerged as the clear-cut focal point of left opposition within the party backed by a solid 35%.

However the Waffle sputtered in its attempts to go further, reflecting the problems of its position within the party and its own organizational weaknesses.

The position of the Waffle within the party became increasingly hardened and polarized. The problem was not so much ideological despite the Waffle's sometimes radical rhetoric as political. The Laxer leadership remained firmly implanted within the camp of left social democracy, the problem was it had a different political strategy than the exiting party leadership.

Laxer sought to align the NDP behind the new independence and socialism programme. It was resisted by powerful blocks within the party. The trade union brass was particularly strong in opposition, to this direction as well as the alien style of ideology of the Waffle. At the moment they represent a conservative block within the party and will probably continue to do so until the working class comes into motion and begins to exert pressure on them to move to the left. At this moment in time the Waffle ran into the reality of the differential rate of radicalization that was taking place with the working class still remaining fairly quiet. There was also considerable opposition from the parliamentarist electoral wing of the party leadership which sought to water down its socialist content in order to make an appeal to a supposedly broader electoral base (for instance Stephen Lewis Ontario Campaign in 1971). The result of such opposition was that the Waffle found itself with a solid base and the road forward temporarily blocked. One result was an increasing organizational emphasis on the Waffle per se as its own grouping within the NDP. This was to be the pretext seized upon by the party leadership in their attempt to carry out a political move against the Waffle.

As an organization the Waffle did not prove very healthy. It was proved incapable of solving the organizational questions it created for itself. It had large paper membership, however there was little way of developing effective actions for it and little way for it to exert effective control over the organization. This reflected the fact it tended to vehicle personal political ambitions and strategy. Given its looseness, the Waffle was easily subject to organizational manipulation. This created a differentiation around the democratic question although other political differences underlay the internal division.

The Waffle stayed in unstable equilibrium with the party for a year after the convention. However, it finally moved to attempt to break the stalemate ironically precipitating its own downfall. The Waffle leadership never understood what "working class politics" was all about - they still don't. Laxer didn't think in terms of a "working class base" - those same working class people - most of them like rare animals or prize catches to give credibility to him. That's of course, why he didn't understand what the consequences of the Autopact - OFL intervention etc. would be. Political history in labour movement - is almost all ex CP'ers - no young militants (except O'Dell) at all - all products of last working class radicalization. It formed the Waffle Labour Caucus which moved out against the brass at the OFL convention. In a related move the Waffle moved ahead to organize an Auto Pact conference in Windsor which attracted considerable number of working class militants and oppositionary forces. The Waffle was in effect, treading on the labour bureaucracy toes and the labour bureaucracy screamed loud and clear with McDermott hitting the front page. This gave impetus to the Hamilton Mountain Resolution and the MacKenzie's etc. moved to the fore.

The Waffle had violated a sacrosanct principle of social democratic and labour parties, the separation between political action (the parliamentary wing) and economic action (the trade union wing). In doing so, it had challenged the fundamental alliance of the top Ontario party. Unfortunately the Waffle leadership lacked any consciousness of the implications of its action (its opposition was clearer).

Much to its surprise, Stephen Lewis and the party executive under the pressure of the trade union brass, Hamilton Mountain wing came down heavily on the Waffle, initiating a messy purge. Perhaps it was against their better judgment. They were certainly in trouble with party for their measures. In fact, Lewis remains unpopular as the recent opposition at the convention in terms of spoiled ballots etc. indicates. Nonetheless, the NDP Leadership was able to carry out its purge without a full struggle.

Part of the responsibility for this defeat for the left must be laid at the feet of the Waffle leadership. After all, as you have pointed out, the Waffle was largely a paper organization. By this time it was the Waffle leadership and counter-leadership () who were active in formulation of strategy - in no way can we say 'The Waffle' as an organization, was in any way formulating directions (remember fight over holding Waffle conference that we conducted?) It lacked any conception of how to fight an effective campaign which would mobilize the rank and file of the party around clear political issues. They failed even, to democratically mobilize their own ranks. They instead turned to the so-called centre leaders of the party, sought to negotiate or manipulate a compromise. However, the party leadership chose not to compromise and pushed Riverdale through. Thus these people walked out of the provincial council convinced of their defeat within the party.

A major faction fight developed inside the Waffle. A significant group wanted to stay and fight inside the party on the politics of the issues. However, the Waffle leadership used its control of the organizational apparatus to gain a majority for its abandon the struggle position at the Delaware Conference. The result was a split, with Misc and a new Left caucus emerging. The political differences of direction were clear.

Laxer's plans to effect a re-alignment of the party behind an independent socialist Canada programme had been thwarted. Thus the logical alternative of moving outside the party and sitting awaiting a new nationalist re-alignment (left tinged) to which the movement might attach itself. In the process some interested in extra parliamentarist and populist politics were drawn into the swampiness of Misc.

The Left Caucus is quite a different grouping both in terms of its operation within the party and its political direction.

A decision was made to remain within the party. The NDP was seen as a useful place to work at this point in time from a socialist perspective since it contained and still contains at least part of the more class conscious workers in Canada. It is a useful position to address the working class with left wing politics.

This decision obviously affects the mode of operation of the Left Caucus. Its efforts are at a much lower key organizationally although hopefully its political message is clear - indeed clearer than that of the Waffle. It has no desire to repeat the mistakes of the Waffle leadership in its sometimes imagistic high profile organizational politics. IT is seeking to win people to its political

positions and ideas and will work through the appropriate party organs such as riding associations. It has deliberately chosen not to create an elaborate structure for its work. However, it has reached basic agreement around a programme of political work within the party. At the moment its efforts are not dramatic - nonetheless they are politically solid and prepare the groundwork for future left activity in the party.

The Left Caucus is much tighter around the questions of socialism and class politics than was the Waffle in this sense it represents the genuine left alternative. It intends to carry a clear class perspective within the NDP. This is reflected in its analysis of the NDP which focused on its role within the working class as its primary importance. Thus the political decision was made to concentrate on labour issues (and the failure of the party leadership to take a clear class perspective on this score). This emphasis fitted in with the analysis of the Caucus that there would be at some time during the coming period, a radicalization of the Canadian working class. The basis of this assessment was the fact that increasing pressures of inter-imperialist competition would lead to a generalized attack on the standards of living of the working class in advanced western capitalist nations - including Canada. It was seen as necessary to fight against its manifestations the growth of strikebreaking the coming wage freeze etc. and produce a clear left wing class opposition to such measures. However, it is important not to limit oneself to economist interventions. The caucus saw the importance of raising issues which affect broad layers of society. The most salient were seen as Quebec (the twin issues of defense of workers' struggles and the right to self determination) given its importance to future radicalization in Canada and significance for the NDP, Viet Nam given its centrality in international politics and the socialist struggle and women. These were slated as the main political priorities.

The position around Viet Nam was well received at the convention where a large majority indicated its opposition to Canadian peace keeping forces in Viet Nam. The issue of women - i.e. a women commission proved non controversial at this time. The work around labour was less clear cut in reception because of the limited time for debate. The Left Caucus, effectively participated in a very important debate around the question of tax reforms - off the corporate welfare bums (i.e. in energy resources) vs the clear socialist position of public ownership with workers control. It gained considerable support in changing the recent direction of the NDP leadership in the federal election campaign etc. It also attempted to develop a socialist analysis and solution around the question of housing and the development industry. The Caucuses reception at the convention indicated there remained a clear base for socialist ideas within the party. Its strength on some question 35% indicated support parallel to that the Waffle enjoyed within the party.

The Left Caucus attempted to run candidates for its party presidency, secretary and executive. This offered an opportunity to put forward its politics and indicated its relative voting strength.

The Left Caucus will continue along the path of developing its politics and pushing them within the party. It will continue to take a class focus. On some issues such as the nationalism which so pre-occupied the Waffle, the caucus lacks a firm position. However, many of its members have a clear internationalist perspective of socialism and are opposed to the narrowly Canadian focus of Misc independence and socialism.

The Left Caucus is completely open to members of the NDP, it will probably attract those elements interested in the development of a left focus in the party.

The Left Caucus is putting out a regular Newsletter to keep supporters in the party informed of its activity. If you wish to be on the mailing list, please write.