



The New Democratic Party (NDP) is one of four major parties that make up the current Canadian federal political scene. Its official party colour is orange and the current leader of the party is Jack Layton. Before him, the NDP and its predecessor party, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), had many leaders. These leaders contributed a lot to Canadian politics and history and continue to do so today.

Methodist minister J.S. Woodsworth led the CCF from its formation in 1933 until 1941. It was formed in Calgary from various labor and left-wing groups. During his leadership, the party had formed a manifesto of goals, many of which are still on the NDP agenda. These include universal pensions, universal health care, unemployment insurance, and worker's compensation. Woodsworth eventually left the party over its position on WWII. Woodsworth didn't want to support the war. However his successor, M.J. Coldwell had the CCF support the war.

During the 1940's the party gained popularity federally. Provincially in Ontario and Saskatchewan the party did even better. In 1943 it became the first official opposition in Ontario and formed the Government under Tommy Douglas in 1944 in Saskatchewan. This made the provincial CCF in Saskatchewan the first socialist party to form a government in North America.



Tommy Douglas

However, during the cold war, fear of Communism reduced CCF popularity. After only winning only 8 seats in the 1958 election, the CCF and Canadian Labor Congress joined together to form a democratic socialist-labor party. Finally, in 1961 the CCF changed into the New Democratic Party (NDP). They elected the former boxing champion and Baptist minister Tommy Douglas their new leader. He had had great success running the provincial CCF government of Saskatchewan as leader and Premier since 1944. His famous "Mouseland" speech is still very popular today. It has even been made into a short animation. To see it go to <http://www.ufcw247.com/print.cfm?pageName=video.cfm>. During his time as Premier of Saskatchewan he introduced universal free health care which eventually spread and is now operated by federal and provincial governments.



Tommy Douglas (Centre) examining a campaign sign for the CCF during a provincial election in Saskatchewan

The next leader of the NDP was David Lewis. Under his leadership (from 1971-1975) the NDP supported the Liberal minority government of Pierre Trudeau. This allowed them to get many left-wing concepts passed into law, including old age pensions and unemployment insurance. A famous quote that he used to describe large Corporations that got away with paying few or no taxes was "Corporate Welfare Bums". This view is shared by many NDP members and Canadians in general.

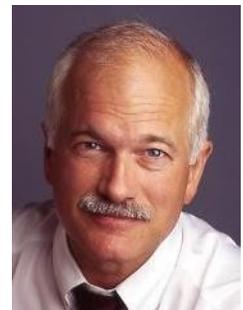


Ed Broadbent

Ed Broadbent then became the leader of the party (1974-1989). Under his leadership, the party was able to bring down Joe Clark's minority Progressive Conservative government and force an election. In the 1988 election the party also won 43 seats federally, the most that it ever had to date. Broadbent stepped down in 1989 after 15 years of party leadership. In the 2004 election he re-entered politics running for office in the riding of Ottawa-Centre. He won but says he will not seek re-election in any future elections for personal reasons.

After Ed Broadbent, the NDP made Canadian history by electing Audrey McLaughlin, the first woman leader of a federal party. However, while she and her successor Alexa McDonough lead the party its popularity dramatically decreased. This was due in part to the unpopularity of Bob Rae's provincial NDP Government in Ontario. The Federal NDP lost official party status in the 1993 election as it had less than 12 seats. In 1997 they regained this status with 21 seats. In 2003, Alexa McDonough announced her resignation and Jack Layton was elected party leader. In the the 2004 election the NDP gained popularity and got 1/3 of the votes. However, due to a concentration of Bloq votes in Quebec the NDP only won 4th place in total seats.

Leadership of the NDP wasn't Jack's first time in politics. For 30 years he has been an activist in social causes. He has written several books, including "Homelessness" and "Speaking Out". In 1982 he was elected as a city counselor in Toronto. He ran for mayor in 1991 but lost to Art Eggleton. He returned to city politics in 1994 and became the president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for a term. His family has a history of being involved in politics starting from his great-great grandfather who was a father of confederation. His great-grand father was a blind activist who campaigned for disability pensions. Gilbert Layton was a minister for Maurice Duplessis and is also Jack's grandfather. This family tradition didn't skip his father who was an activist for the Liberals and a PC MP in the 80's.



Jack Layton

Today the NDP continues to influence the government including a controversial amendment to the budget which was opposed by the Conservatives and the Bloc. The most controversial section deals with removing planned tax cuts to large Corporations.. On May 20, 2005 Parliament voted on the second reading of this bill. The actual budget passed easily however, the NDP amendment barely passed tieing 152-152 among the house members. For the first time in Canadian history, the speaker had to break a tie for a confidence vote. The budget and NDP amendment will go on for a third and final reading. If the budget gets rejected the government will fall and a new election will happen.

The NDP's current policies continue to be left-wing. They also continue to create a "buzz" in Parliament. These include, same-sex marriage legislation that is opposed by the official opposition. The NDP also supports the creation of social programs and government funded day-care (included in the NDP amendment to the budget). They also oppose more right-wing concepts including privatization and corporate tax cuts (as mentioned above also included in the budget amendment).

The NDP and it's predecessor the CCF have made many contributions to Canadian history. Universal Health care, CPP, and other left-wing components of Canada that we take for granted were started by them. They have allowed governments to survive and caused others to fall. Although the NDP became an unpopular party in the 90's with it's current rise in popularity it looks like the NDP will continue to be a major part of Canadian politics for years to come.