

Called to arms

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amended to include new uranium mines as well provided the most dramatic fight of the convention. Lined up against the amendment were the United Steelworkers of America, obviously unhappy with any move that could restrict the employment of miners; the Saskatchewan NDP. counting on uranium to elevate them to Alberta status among the provinces; and the party establishment, eager to avoid embarrassing the only NDP government in the country as well as big labour. Supporting it were the British Columbia NDP, which is leading the fight against uranium mining in the province; many Ontario riding associations and the left caucus.

The left caucus action was led by Saskatchewan MLA Peter Prebble, the only NDP MLA from the province to publicly challenge Premier Allan Blakeney's move to develop the uranium industry. Prebble said it was inconsistent to call for a moratorium prompted by considerations about safety while continuing to allow potentially hazardous new mines to open. Joining Prebble in the debate was Regina East MP Simon de Jong, who said the major corporations involved in the nuclear industry cannot be trusted to store radioactive wastes that will "affect the next 3,000 generations of humankind," and Evelyn Gigantes, Ontario NDP energy critic.

Ontario MP Donald Mac-Donald was the most vociferous critic of the amendment, labelling it politically irresponsible, presumably because it would affect the electoral success of the Saskatchewan NDP. "What you are saying to the province of Saskatchewan is shut the whole thing (uranium mining) down," he exclaimed, to scattered cheers from some delegates who would like nothing better. When the final vote came after several hours of debate the amendment was defeated, with 537 against it and 402 in favour. Watching from the convention floor it was clear that only the mass bloc voting of the labour delegates was able to stop the amendment from going through.

Even the steelworkers proved that they couldn't be taken for granted when it came to supporting the party establishment. When steelworkers District 6 director Stewart Cooke ran for one of the party's seven vice-presidential spots, a campaign was llaunched against him from within the union and informally supported by the left caucus. Cooke made himself unpopular last year when he publicly urged USA Local 6500 workers at the Inco operation in Sudbury not to strike and remained lukewarm until support began to flow in from across the country. Local 6500 president Dave Patterson nominated Hamilton steelworkers Cec Taylor so that there were eight candidates for the seven spots, hoping to

bump Cooke off and make a point to the NDP and labour leadership. Cooke survived the challenge with a bare 28 vote majority, showing that despite the fact that few steelworkers would openly oppose him, the secret ballot was another matter.

At the conclusion of the convention the left caucus dispersed with new ties established across the country and a vow made to continue fighting for the promotion of socialist and environmental issues within the NDP. And they expect to continue gaining support from the grassroots of the party, working on expanding their power base at the riding association level.

"The left has reorganized, says Toronto alderman Dan Heap, a strong supporter of the Waffle since its birth ten years ago and now a left caucus member. "We made a little progress. We're as strong as we were in 1969 and perhaps a little smarter. I don't think we're going to make the same mistakes as the Waffle." Jim Turk sees the success of the left caucus at the convention indicated in its recognition by the party as a group with the power to influence delegates on issues the leadership would be happier avoiding. "They're going to be more cautious, knowing more controversial motions can come up at the next convention that we can win,' he said.

John Rodriquez summed up the left caucus position in an interview at the convention's end. "We're not there to polarize. We're there to mobilize the party to the left, not keep it in the radical centre. That's already crowded," he said, referring to Pierre Trudeau's recent statement that the Liberals are the party of the "radical centre".

"We're at the fork. Down one road are the Liberals and Conservatives and their fellow travellers. Down the middle are the trees. We've got to go down the other road. We have to take the less travelled road," Rodriquez concluded with an impish grin. The reason for the knowing smile was Rodriquez's clever rewording of the key phrase in Ed Broadbent's closing address to the delegates. Broadbent had quoted a Robert Frost poem that ended . .Two roads diverged in the wood, and I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference." Rodriquez and others in the left caucus clearly feel that rather than a different road, the NDP leadership is leading the party down the garden path, to a position only slightly left of the Liberals. Whether the left wing of the NDP can stop such a move without a major confrontation with the party establishment would seem to be the question both groups will ponder as the NDP enters the most critical stage in its development as Canada's only viable alternative to the two parties that have run the country since Confederation.

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