Canada's Third Party Is Very Much Alive

[THE NDP HAS RISEN IN THE WEST]

Three of Canada's ten provinces — British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan — have socialist governments.

Canadian labels do not always duplicate American ones and in Canada the word "socialism" does not have the same meaning it has in the United States.

The New Democratic Party's type of socialism is of British origin (with some inspiration from the Swedish), non-Marxist and political. American socialism is, by contrast, of central European origin, Marxist, and more a political theory than a political party.

The New Democrats' rise took time — it began in 1944 when the party's predecessor, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, won control in Saskatchewan, but it was not until 1969 that they took over their second province, Manitoba. British Columbia followed in 1972. Most New Democrats think of themselves as "social democrats," but like Premier Edward Schreyer of Manitoba, they are not overly concerned with names. "If abolishing medicare premiums is socialist . . . then the program is a socialist program," he says.

In national politics the NDP has recently achieved a new standing. The Liberals, who form the Government, and Progressive Conservatives, the official Opposition, have almost equal strength in the House of Commons, the first with 109 seats, the second with 106, so the NDP with 31 seats is pivotal.

The United States has two significant parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, though both have within their folds varying shades of ideology. Canada has had a multiplicity of parties since World War I. The most enduring third (or fourth and fifth) parties have come from the West — the farmers of the Prairies concluded long ago that they were too few and too scattered to survive as rugged individualists and they formed cooperative societies to pursue their common goals. From the West came the Progressives (who later merged with the Conservatives), the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, the Social Credit Party and the NDP. Some were left, like the CCF and NDP, and some right, like the "Socreds." In Québec there have been parties particularly concerned with the status and the future of French-speaking Canadians. Today there are five parties with significant followings in Canada: the Liberals, the Progressive-Conservatives, the New Democrats, the Social Credit Party, which has fifteen seats in the House of Commons, and the Parti Québecois, the voice of the French Canadian "separatist" movement, which exists only in Québec, where it is the Opposition party in the provincial legislature.

In recent years the NDP has shown considerable vitality and has experienced notable successes. Those successes are built on a foundation which began in the Depression.

The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation was founded in 1933 and its stated goal was the "establishment in Canada of a cooperative commonwealth in which the principle regulating production, distribution and exchange will be the supplying of human needs rather than the making of profits." It was as much a populist as a socialist movement and its founders included small businessmen, farmers and workers. It had real but limited success, gaining power in Saskatchewan but nowhere else. In Saskatchewan it ran things from 1944 to 1964, when it lost to the Liberals. During those years it established the first government-sponsored hospitalization program and the first no-fault insurance program in Canada. It began medicare in 1962, it expanded the government-operated telephone and electric power companies and it created and ran at various times a bus line, a tannery, a woolen mill, a box factory, a shoe factory, a seed-cleaning plant and markets for fur, fish and lumber. In 1961 the CCF and the Canadian Labour Congress gave joint birth to the New Democratic Party, which, it is generally agreed, used the Swedish social democracy as a model. The CCF then dropped out of the political picture, willing its strength in Saskatchewan and elsewhere to the NDP.

[SASKATCHEWAN]

The NDP, which lost to the Liberals in 1964, returned to power in June, 1971, led by Allan Blakeney. Mr. Blakeney, forty-eight, born in Nova Scotia, is an attorney, with degrees from Dalhousie University and Oxford. He was elected to the Saskatchewan legislature in 1960 and became leader of the provincial NDP in 1970.