

The Youth Hangover: A Short History of the Waffle

OTTAWA (CUP)—The NDP Youth wielded an enviable amount of power within the party in the late 1960's. They had become a well-organized, driving force in the NDP. But there was a limit to how far the party establishment would go to indulge them, and the limit was the Waffle Movement.

In 1969, a group of NDP members, predominantly students, published the Waffle Manifesto, a document which distanced them from the rest of the party on a wide variety of policy issues. It advocated withdrawal from NATO, greater public ownership of industry, removing the U.S. influence in the economy through government intervention, and recognition of Quebec's right to self-determination. It also stated that 50 percent of the party executive should be women.

Ontario NDP Youth president Andrew McNeill says the Waffles' policies are not much different from the party's policies now but, he says, "back then it caused a very strong reaction."

Reaction against the Waffles was so strong that the Saskatchewan youth membership was told to purge its executive of Waffles or be denied funding. The worst reaction was in Ontario in 1974. There, "the whole youth organization was purged," according to McNeill. All members were forced to leave the party. The formal organization was abolished and replaced by a committee run by two youth chairpersons. The committee, says McNeill, "never did anything."

Why such a strong reaction to the Waffle Movement? A clause in the NDP constitution says that no party within the NDP shall be allowed to exist. The party establishment of 1974 felt that the movement was so distant from them that it amounted to a separate party. Its members had to get out of the NDP.

McNeill also says part of the problem had little to do with the movement's alienation from the loosely-defined party hierarchy. He says the Waffles had a "tactless" approach. "Either you were with them or against them, there was no compromise."

Since 1974, the NDP Youth have made slow, steady gains within the provincial party organizations. But when the youth caucus won convention support for the re-establishment of a federal youth wing at the most recent party convention, they took one of the largest steps yet in their goal to regain the position of high regard they once knew.

By Carolyn Adolph
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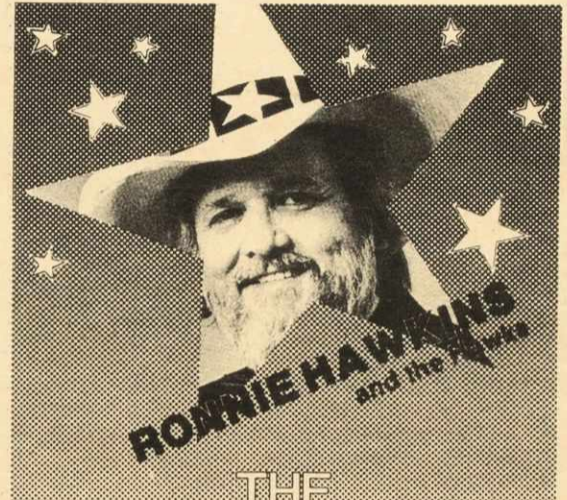
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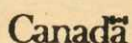
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