

## The Waffle Manifesto

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## **Preamble: A Waffle Manifesto History**

by Mel Watkins December 2009<sup>1</sup>

The Waffle is long dead and little remembered. Forty years ago, at the very tail-end of the fabulous decade known as the 60s – if you missed it, too bad – it burst on the scene as a radical grouping within the NDP with a Manifesto calling for an independent socialist Canada, no less, and did so to media attention the likes of which the Left has yet to match.

The 60s were already in trouble, Richard Nixon having been elected president of the United States and leader of the free world in 1968. Here at home, by 1972 the NDP establishment, an alliance of party and trade union brass, was unwilling to tolerate the Waffle talk inside and outside the party.

It was even less willing to tolerate the Waffle walk as it pushed the choice of David Lewis as federal leader in 1971 to a fifth ballot, and joined strikers on picket lines whether or not the union was affiliated with the NDP.

Too weak to win and too strong to be tolerated, the Waffle was, in effect, turned out of the party. It struggled on, like a dead man walking, and by 1974 was no more. By then the 60s were also truly dead and buried.

## **A Vibrant Sovereignty Movement**

Forty years later, does the Waffle have anything to show for its brief but luminous existence? Its discourse was that of left nationalism, of opposition to foreign ownership, and of calls for public ownership, particularly in the energy sector. In the 70s, the Trudeau government went tentatively down that road and Wafflers could imagine they had had some influence, but the Mulroney government undid it all and tossed in a free trade agreement with the U.S. to boot. (I wonder who paid Mulroney in what hotel room to do that?)

Nothing to take credit for there, you say, and you're right, except that the concern about Canadian sovereignty, got a huge jolt of energy out of the 60s, so the Waffle can claim some credit. That rejuvenated nationalism, in its turn, though unable to stop free trade, made it a very close thing and has since been able sufficiently to sustain itself to keep us out of the Iraq war and the missile defense system.

The Waffle should be judged as part and parcel of the still vibrant sovereignty movement: think, for example, of the Council of Canadians, Parklands Institute, Polaris Institute, and

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the Rideau Institute – and the growing self-confidence that Canadians have about Canada's survival independent of the United States.

There are two specific and substantial matters on which the Waffle showed remarkable prescience. The Manifesto insisted that Canada consisted of two nations – there was no notion then of the rights of the First Nations and the Waffle was as bad as the rest on the issue of aboriginal rights. Even two nations was one too many for then Prime Minister Trudeau, yet it is now embraced even by Harper. James Laxer, in his campaign as Waffle candidate for federal party leadership in 1971, courageously made Quebec's right to self-determination a centrepiece. Even many English Canadian nationalists would not buy that at that time.

And then there was the matter of the very real contradiction that existed within the NDP where Canadian nationalism was lauded everywhere except in the trade union movement itself. The Canadian labour movement, unlike any other trade union movement in the known world, was dominated by unions domiciled outside the country, namely, so-called international unions with headquarters in the U.S.

The Waffle deserved its name because it waffled on this issue: the Canadianization of the Canadian labour movement. It was not even mentioned in the Manifesto. But there quickly emerged within the Waffle a Labour Caucus of militant trade unionists supporting independent Canadian unions.

### **The Pull between the Party and the Movement**

The movement to purge the Waffle was led by the Canadian leaders of these branch plant unions. Yet in a matter of two decades, almost all these Canadian branches of international unions had broken with their American masters and Canada had, for the first time in its history, a sovereign trade union movement. I note simply that, again, the Waffle was on the side of history and, again, good history.

From the days of the CCF down to today, there has been constant discussion about the "party" and the "movement." The CCF, at least in the West, was able to put these together, but the creation of the NDP out of the CCF was in some part intended to purge the movement.

The Waffle was in the party but, with its commitment to day-to-day activism, acted like a movement. It activated riding associations. It organized around issues relevant to Canadian workers without deferring to union leaders, notably in the case of the auto-workers. That, more than anything else, pushed the leadership of the Canadian auto workers to lead the charge against the Waffle. To its great credit, after the CAW was created as a breakaway from the UAW, it apologized for its role in the killing of the Waffle.

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The point was often made, particularly by critics of the Waffle that it mostly consisted of university students and young professors. That was an overstatement, but it's hardly surprising that the Waffle had a strong campus orientation given that that was true overall of much of 60s activism.

In the longer-run, there was the considerable virtue that Wafflers, then and later, made a significant contribution to the creation of the New Canadian Political Economy, a paradigm that has left its stamp down to the present day on numerous academic disciplines.

The case can be made that the most important movement that came out of the 60s was women's liberation. Again, to its discredit, the Waffle Manifesto was silent on this issue, but a Women's Caucus emerged early on and played an active role.

The Waffle died. What happened to the Wafflers? Some left the NDP for good. Others, like myself, drifted back over time. Some became active in the newly emerging social movements.

I was out of the party for a decade and returned because I loved politics and felt sidelined. I twice ran, in 1997 and 2000, as a federal candidate in what was thought to be a winnable riding but turned out not to be. I was sometimes asked how radical like I was could now run for the NDP.

I like to recall what Cheddi Jagan said. He had been a Marxist chief minister of then British Guiana and was pushed out with a little help from the CIA. Years later, he was elected president of an independent Guyana as a social democrat. When asked by a reporter why he had changed, he said "I haven't changed but the world sure has."

A question that no one has ever asked me but I will answer anyway is: If I were writing a manifesto today, what would I write about? The Waffle Manifesto railed against American imperialism and called for public ownership to counter it, but was silent on environmental matters like almost everybody else, though there were voices within the Waffle, which the rest of us chose to ignore.

Today's manifesto should rail against corporate globalization and call for the building of viable local economies, both in their own right and to lessen carbon emissions and mitigate the global warming and climate change that now haunt us.

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## **The Waffle Manifesto: For an Independent Socialist Canada (1969)<sup>2</sup>**

### **Waffle Resolution 133**

1. **Our aim** as democratic socialists is to build an independent socialist Canada. Our aim as supporters of the New Democratic Party is to make it a truly socialist party.
2. **The achievement of socialism** awaits the building of a mass base of socialists, in factories and offices, on farms and campuses. The development of socialist consciousness, on which can be built a socialist base, must be the first priority of the New Democratic Party.
3. **The New Democratic Party** must be seen as the parliamentary wing of a movement dedicated to fundamental social change. It must be radicalized from within and it must be radicalized from without.
4. **The most urgent issue** for Canadians is the very survival of Canada. Anxiety is pervasive and the goal of greater economic independence receives widespread support. But economic independence without socialism is a sham, and neither are meaningful without true participatory democracy.
5. **The major threat to Canadian survival** today is American control of the Canadian economy. The major issue of our times is not national unity but national survival, and the fundamental threat is external, not internal.
6. **American corporate capitalism** is the dominant factor shaping Canadian society. In Canada, American economic control operates throughout the formidable medium of the multi-national corporation. The Canadian corporate elite has opted for a junior partnership with these American enterprises. Canada has been reduced to a resource base and consumer market within the American Empire.
7. **The American Empire** is the central reality for Canadians. It is an empire characterized by militarism abroad and racism at home. Canadian resources and diplomacy have been enlisted in the support of the empire. In the barbarous war in Vietnam, Canada has supported the United States through its membership on the International Control Commission and through sales of arms and strategic resources to the American military industrial complex.

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8. The American empire is held together through worldwide military alliances and giant monopoly corporations. Canada's membership in the American alliance system and the ownership of the Canadian economy by American corporations precludes Canada's playing an independent role in the world. These bonds must be cut if corporate capitalism and the social priorities it creates are to be effectively challenged.
9. **Canadian development** is distorted by a corporate capitalist economy. Corporate investment creates and fosters superfluous individual consumption at the expense of social needs. Corporate decision-making concentrates investment in a few major urban areas, which become increasingly uninhabitable while the rest of the country sinks in underdevelopment.
10. **The criterion that the most profitable** pursuits are the most important ones causes the neglect of activities whose value cannot be measured by the standards of profitability. It is not accidental that housing, education, medical care, and public transportation are inadequately provided for by the present social system.
11. **The problem of regional disparities** is rooted in the profit orientation of capitalism. The social costs of stagnant areas are irrelevant to the corporations. For Canada, the problem is compounded by the reduction of Canada to the position of an economic colony of the United States. The foreign capitalist has even less concern for balanced development of the country than the Canadian capitalist does with roots in a particular region.
12. **An independent movement** based on substituting Canadian capitalists for American capitalists, or on public policy to make foreign corporations behave as if they were Canadian corporations, cannot be our final objective. There is not now an independent Canadian capitalism and any lingering pretensions on the part of Canadian businessmen to independence lack credibility. Without a strong national capitalist class behind them, Canadian governments, Liberal and Conservative, have functioned in the interests of international and particularly American capitalism, and have lacked the will to pursue even a modest strategy of economic independence.
13. **Capitalism must be replaced by socialism**, by national planning of investment and by the public ownership of the means of production in the interests of the Canadian people as a whole. Canadian nationalism is a relevant force on which to build to the extent that it is anti-imperialist. On the road to socialism, such aspirations for independence must be taken into account. For to pursue independence seriously is to make visible the necessity of socialism in Canada.

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14. **Those who desire socialism** and independence for Canada have often been baffled and mystified by the problem of internal divisions within Canada. While the essential fact of the Canadian history in the past century is the reduction of Canada to a colony of the United States, with a consequent increase in regional inequalities, there is no denying the existence of two nations within Canada, each with its own language, culture, and aspirations. This reality must be incorporated into the strategy of the New Democratic Party.
15. **English Canada and Quebec** can share common institutions to the extent that they share common purposes. So long as Canada is governed by those who believe that the national policy should be limited to the passive function of maintaining a peaceful and secure climate for foreign investment, there can be no meaningful unity between English and French Canadians. So long as the federal government refuses to protect the country from economic and cultural domination, English Canada is bound to appear to French Canadians simply as part of the United States. An English Canada concerned with its own national survival would create common aspirations that would help to tie the two nations together once more.
16. **Nor can the present treatment** of the constitutional issue in isolation from economic and social forces that transcend the two nations be anything but irrelevant. Politicians committed to the values and structure of a capitalist society drafted our present constitution a century ago. Constitutional change relevant to socialists must be based on the needs of the people rather than the corporations and must reflect the power of classes and groups excluded from effective decision-making by the present system.
17. **A united Canada** is of critical importance in pursuing a successful strategy against the reality of American imperialism. Quebec's history and aspirations must be allowed full expression and implementation in the conviction that new ties will emerge from the common perception of "two nations, one struggle". Socialists in English Canada must ally themselves with socialists in Quebec in this common cause.
18. **Central to the creation of an independent socialist Canada** is the strength and tradition of the Canadian working class and the trade union movement. The revitalization and extension of the labor movement would involve a fundamental democratization of our society.
19. **Corporate capitalism** is characterized by the predominant power of the corporate elite aided and abetted by the political elite. A central objective of Canadian socialists must be to further the democratization process in industry. The Canadian trade union movement throughout its history has waged a democratic battle against the so-called rights or prerogatives of ownership and management. It has achieved the important moral and legal victory of

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providing for working men an affective say in what their wages will be. At present management's "right" to control technological change is being challenged. The New Democratic Party must provide leadership in the struggle to extend working men's influence into every area of industrial decision-making. Those who work must have effective control in the determination of working conditions, and substantial power in determining the nature of the product, prices and so on. Democracy and socialism require nothing less.

20. **Trade unionists** and New Democrats have led in extending the welfare state in Canada. Much remains to be done: more and better housing, a really progressive tax structure, a guaranteed annual income. However, these are no longer enough. A socialist society must be one in which there is democratic control of all institutions, which have a major effect on men's lives and where there is equal opportunity for creative non-exploitative self-development. It is now time to go beyond the welfare state.
21. **New Democrats must** begin now to insist on the redistribution of power, and not simply welfare, in a socialist direction. The struggle for worker participation in industrial decision-making and against management "rights" is such a move toward economic and social democracy.
22. **By strengthening the Canadian labor movement**, New Democrats will further the pursuit of Canadian independence. So long as the corporate elite dominates Canadian economic activity, and so long as worker's rights are confined within their present limits, corporate requirements for profit will continue to take precedence over human needs.
23. **By bringing men together** primarily as buyers and sellers of each other, by enshrining profitability and material gain in place of humanity and spiritual growth, capitalism has always been inherently alienating. Today, sheer size combined with modern technology further exaggerates man's sense of insignificance and impotence. A socialist transformation of society will return to man his sense of humanity, to replace his sense of being a commodity. But a socialist democracy implies man's control of his immediate environment as well, and in any strategy for building socialism, community democracy is as vital as the struggle for electoral success. To that end, socialists must strive for democracy at those levels that most directly affect us all — in our neighborhoods, our schools, and our places of work. Tenants' unions, consumers' and producers' cooperatives are examples of areas in which socialist must lead in efforts to involve people directly in the struggle to control their own destinies.
24. **Socialism is a process and a program.** The process is the raising of socialist consciousness, the building of a mass base of socialists, and a strategy to make visible the limits of liberal capitalism.



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25. **While the program must evolve out of the process**, its leading features seem clear. Relevant instruments for bringing the Canadian economy under Canadian ownership and control and for altering the priorities established by corporate capitalism are to hand. They include extensive public control over investment and nationalization of the commanding heights of the economy, such as the essential resources industries, finance and credit, and industries strategic to planning our economy. Within that program, workers' participation in all institutions promises to release creative energies, promote decentralization, and restore human and social priorities.
26. **The struggle** to build a democratic socialist Canada must proceed at all levels of Canadian society. The New Democratic Party is the organization suited to bringing these activities into a common focus. The New Democratic Party has grown out of a movement for democratic socialism that has deep roots in Canadian history. It is the core around which should be mobilized the social and political movement necessary for building an independent socialist Canada. The New Democratic Party must rise to that challenge or become irrelevant. Victory lies in joining the struggle.

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## References

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<https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/once-upon-a-waffle>

<sup>2</sup> Reformatted without changing content from  
<http://www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/Waffle/WaffleManifesto.htm>

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