

The CSDS Sponsors Sessions at the 2014 Congress



The participants concluded that old research topics like the party's ideology and relationship with labour should continue to be studied alongside emerging subjects such as the NDP's parliamentary activity and its activity within Quebec.

The Study also sponsored an 'Author Meets Critics' with Brad Lavigne on his latest book entitled *Building the Orange Wave: The Inside Story Behind the Historic Rise of Jack Layton and the NDP*. Simon Kiss (Wilfrid Laurier University) noted that Lavigne needed to explore the impact of changing media and information environments on the NDP. David McGrane (University of Saskatchewan) argued that the book concentrates too much on agency of individuals as an explanation for the NDP's breakthrough in 2011, not broader structural changes. Video of these sessions will be available soon on the CSDS website at www.canadiansocialdemocracy.ca.

Every year thousands of academics from around Canada gather at a specific university to present their latest research and discuss the latest developments in their fields. This year Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences was held at Brock University from May 24th to May 30th.

The Canadian Social Democracy Study was very active at this year's Congress. The Study sponsored a double roundtable

entitled "What do political scientists know about the NDP?" The roundtable featured several speakers: Frédéric Guillaume Dufour (Université du Québec à Montréal), Bryan Evans (Ryerson University), Matt Fodor (York University), David Laycock (Simon Fraser University), Larry Savage (Brock University), Byron Sheldrick (University of Guelph), Charles Smith (University of Saskatchewan), and Nelson Wiseman (University of Toronto).



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Blogs Debate the Ontario NDP's Ideology in Recent Provincial Election



Screenshot from the Facebook page of the Ontario NDP during the recent Ontario provincial election.

The website of the Canadian Social Democracy Study was a hotbed for debate concerning the Ontario NDP's ideology during the recent provincial election in that province.

Simon Kiss and Peter Graefe argued that populism represents both a challenge and opportunity for social democrats. The opportunity is that it allows social democrats to gain popularity through stressing progressive policies like tax increases for the wealthy. In a time period where most citizens pay very little attention to politics, such populist appeals on 'pocketbook issues' can break through the fog and connect with voters.

The challenge is that such populist appeals frequently cater to citizens' self-interest as opposed to their sense of collective well-being. In the long-term, such strategies may be self-defeating as they do not build a more inclusive and caring society.

David McGrane wrote a

blog comparing the Ontario NDP and Ontario Liberal election platforms. During the election, some branded the Ontario NDP as traitors to the cause and accused the party of running to the right of the Liberals. McGrane strongly disagrees. He finds that the Ontario NDP's platform fits into the third way variant of social democracy that has been in ascendance in the western world since the election of Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder in the late 1990s. This type of social democracy asserts that the government must intervene in the economy to promote the growth of a vibrant private sector alongside targeting new public services to reduce wealth inequalities. Further, he found no evidence that Liberal platform was to the left of the NDP. He stated that in "several areas, the NDP is slightly to the left of the Liberals: \$11 an hour versus \$12 an hour minimum wage; targeted tuition relief for those on student loans compared to an universal tuition freeze; reducing electricity rates for low-income earners versus taking off the HST on electricity rates for all consumers; and dental

coverage for 70,000 low-income children and dental coverage for 100,000 low-income children."

Charles Smith shot back with a blog opposing McGrane's viewpoint. He claimed that the Andrea Howath has fully embraced the politics of neo-liberalism and that "championing private sector power almost always leads to dramatic increases in poverty and inequality." In doing so, the NDP ignored the two most pressing issues facing Ontario: structural inequity within the labour market and the ongoing crisis of climate change. He concludes that "it is troubling to see the ideological bankruptcy of the Ontario NDP as it moves aggressively away from its core constituency. It is also troubling to see that the party's turn to the right could result in some of the most progressive voices within the Ontario NDP caucus lose their seats." For Smith, social democratic parties cannot offer real alternatives to neoliberalism. As such, we need to "contemplate the best way for progressive alternatives to replace it."

Featured Researcher: Larry Savage, Brock University



Larry Savage's research focuses on the politics of the Canadian labour movement. His recent research has focused on the ways in which labour unions engage with the NDP specifically, and electoral politics more generally. Dr. Savage has published scholarly articles or book chapters on the changing nature of party-union relationships, union-sponsored strategic voting schemes, and labour's varied engagement with local, provincial and federal politics.

Dr. Savage also co-maintains
www.RethinkingLabour.ca.

Selected Bibliography of Dr. Savage

Ross, Stephanie and Larry Savage. eds. (2013). *Public Sector Unions in the Age of Austerity*. Halifax: Fernwood.

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Savage, Larry. (2010). "Contemporary Party-Union Relations in Canada," *Labor Studies Journal*, Vol 35, no. 1 pp. 8-26.

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Canadian Social Democracy Study Hires More Research Assistants



David Blocker is a PhD student studying in History at Western University. He is currently researching the Waffle movement, the NDP and Canada's New Left from 1965-1975. Utilizing a combination of traditional archival sources and oral history interviews, this project examines the links between New Left social movements of the Sixties and the NDP through the lens of the Waffle, a nationalist and socialist faction active in the party in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Other research interests include protest movements and political parties in Canada, women's and gender history and labour history. Active in the NDP for fifteen years, he has helped on multiple campaigns in London and Toronto, fundraised for the provincial party, and attended three federal and two provincial conventions. He is currently serving as President of PSAC Local 610, the Teaching Assistant union at Western.



Alexander Steffen has a Masters in Political Studies from Queen's University and an Undergraduate Honours degree from the University of Saskatchewan. His research focused on Canadian and Comparative Politics, specifically researching the concept of Deliberative Democracy and its potential impact on the Canadian political system. Alex has experience with information gathering and literature reviews, previously serving in that capacity at the University of Manitoba. As part of the Canadian Social Democracy Study team, Alex is focusing on NDP debates between 2004 and 2013 and conducting research on legislative experiences of elected officials around the world.