

## Canada's NDP: What's up, Jack?

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Maybe I missed a story or a headline somewhere but I am having trouble finding much media reference to the NDP these days – and by these days I mean the days of a new democracy movement (they are the New Democrats, after all), the decline of Stephen Harper, the public anger at prorogation and the elephant in the room – the March 3rd tighten-our-belts budget. I know that the NDP see the Liberals as their natural competition so I am curious as to why they aren't competing.

Michael Ignatieff, for whom I have endless mistrust, is out-maneuvering Jack Layton these days (especially on the prorogation issue) and that should worry NDP supporters and progressives in general. It may come to nothing, but if the tentative forays into the realm of real issues by Ignatieff continues, he will be out there with a list of progressive policies while the NDP is still tinkering with tactics.

The other day Ignatieff made a [bold statement](#) on child care, saying that he would not let the deficit stop a wise program:

“[The Conservatives] are saying you can't invest in anything that makes this a fairer country because we have a \$56-billion deficit. Well, who created it in the first place? I am not going to allow the deficit discussion to shut down the discussion in this country about social justice.”

Social justice? Whoa...these words coming from a New Millennium Liberal? I haven't that kind of talk from a Liberal since their Red Book of 1993. That election platform document became known within a couple of years as the Liberal Book of Lies – but it got the slippery Liberals elected. Such talk could do so again.

Then we had another trial balloon released by the darling of the left-wing Liberals, Gerard Kennedy, who said on the CTV show [Power Play](#), that Canadians were actually supportive of tax increases if the money went to rebuilding municipal infrastructure. Kennedy could not be cornered into supporting a GST hike or any other tax hike – but it was clear he was putting it out there, softening up the public for the eventual conversation about tax increases. His boss did the same thing last spring – but it was a one shot effort.

Kennedy quoted from [a poll](#) done by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and showed “that 32 per cent of Canadians would support raising the Goods and Services Tax (GST) to pay down the federal deficit, but up to 70 per cent would support an increase dedicated to local infrastructure repairs and upgrades.”

Canadians almost always support tax increases by a similar margin if the poll says the

money would be targeted to Medicare, education or poverty reduction. All this should be heartening for the NDP because these are NDP values bolstering what should be NDP policies.

Then, today, Ignatieff took on the Conservatives hard-core support by going after Harper directly on the abortion issue. Anticipating a possible Harper bone-toss to his right wing constituency at the G8 summit, Ignatieff did a pre-emptive strike. Harper's highly suspicious pledge to make women's health a new international priority got an aggressive response from the Liberal leader. Daring Harper to mimic George W. Bush (who banned federal funding to international NGOs that provided information about abortion) [Ignatieff stated:](#)

"We want to make sure that women have access to all the contraceptive methods available to control their fertility because we don't want to have women dying because of botched procedures, we don't want to have women dying in misery."

This is gauntlet being thrown down, not to the Conservatives, but to the NDP. But the NDP team has an excess of tacticians who aren't very good at strategy. Unless the House is in session and they can do their magic to get that day's 15 seconds of TV coverage, they don't know what the hell to do. It's time to trade a few of them in - and put the strategists in charge. Otherwise the Liberals could leave them in the dust - like they did in the 1993 election when the NDP came away with nine seats.

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