



Sunny Ways: Learning From Success and Failure in Canada

Labour, the Liberals and the NDP

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August 2016

policy network paper



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Summary

At a time when progressive politics appears to be on the back foot Canada has proved the exception to the rule: Justin Trudeau's Liberal party delivered a new government last year, elected on a bold progressive platform for 'real change' which oozed confidence and positivity.

This paper draws on Labour MP Jonathan Ashworth's recent conversations with an array of Canadian counterparts. It asks what can be learned from the Liberals' successful campaign, as well as contemplating the ill-fated efforts of Labour's sister party, the NDP.

From persuading switchers, to dealing with a separatist threat, and from mobilising new segments of the electorate, to deploying better use of 'big data' – it is clear that there is a lot to learn from the Liberal campaign. This paper considers how these lessons should inform the policy platform, strategy and positioning of the UK Labour party and other social democrats across Europe.

To stand any chance of emulating the Canadian Liberals' success, Ashworth concludes that Labour must urgently engage in a thorough, deep and sustained debate about the party's future.

About the author

Jonathan Ashworth is the Labour MP for Leicester South and a member of Labour's shadow cabinet and ruling national executive committee. He has worked on every Labour general election campaign since 2001 and is a former adviser to Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband.

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Jeremy Thomas

Introduction

“Sunny ways my friends, sunny ways”, Justin Trudeau told buoyant supporters as the Liberal landslide was confirmed last October, “this is what positive politics can do”.

The new Canadian prime minister was referring to the Aesop fable of *The Wind and the Sun* after an election where the warmth and light of hope had, for once, trumped the foul winds of fear.

Back in Britain, I watched the result from the other side of the Atlantic with mixed emotions: excitement at the victory of the Liberal party elected on a progressive manifesto; natural disappointment for our sister party the New Democratic party – at one stage tantalisingly close to forming government; and immense regret at Labour’s failure to win with our positive campaign in our own general election last May.

At a time when progressive politics is on the back foot, Trudeau’s election was a rare sign of progressive energy and advance. He not only won, he did so with a front foot strategy that aligned credibility with confidence in progressive politics and its future.

He constructed a coalition that harnessed the energy of progressive politics with a strategy that won over former Harper voters. To win again, Labour must build precisely this kind of coalition and learn about the strategy and organisation we need to do this.

Labour strategists often seek to learn the lessons of US elections. And yet, despite there being similarities between the British and Canadian electorates, the experience of the northern half of north America is usually overlooked.

The Liberals’ chief opponent in Canada was an incumbent Conservative government which tried to make the deficit the central issue, but also who sought to stoke fears of instability should the ‘separatists’ ever gain influence. Sound familiar? It should do – except that in Canada, a progressive party won.

Of course, no political race can be replicated exactly. But having recently visited Canada and met with some of their leading strategists, I believe there are real lessons for us in the Labour party – and perhaps for centre-left politics more generally – from a country sometimes known as the ‘great white north’.

Canadian politics can be conflicting for Labour members. The Liberals were not the only progressive offer in this election. We are closely aligned to the social democratic NDP, our sister party – I was the guest international speaker at their 2016 convention – and it is a link I will maintain.

The NDP – like the UK Labour party – is having to pick up the pieces of defeat in an election it thought it could win. They are undergoing a process of challenge and change with delegates at their recent convention proudly wearing ‘J’adore Bernie Corbyn’ badges. A radical statement of aims and values – the so called ‘Leap Manifesto’ – has galvanised an activist base hungry for clearer definition. There are obvious parallels with the debates and discussions taking place in the Labour party today. Strengthening the historic links between our two parties will be of mutual benefit.

But the Labour party has always maintained good relations with the Canadian Liberals. We should learn the lessons of Justin Trudeau’s victory because they are too important to be left to Tim Farron. The absolute priority for all of us in the Labour party is to put our time, effort and energy into building again an election-winning coalition. To do that, it is very much worth understanding the lessons from Canada about positioning, campaign process and policy.

The 2015 Canadian general election: a brief overview

The 11-week election campaign – the longest in Canadian history – began with the NDP ahead and set to win the biggest share of federal seats, the Liberals in third place and Stephen Harper's Conservatives looking tired and discredited. The NDP began to falter as the campaign reached the halfway point and then succumbed to the 'red surge' of Trudeau's Liberals in the final straight, losing more than half of their seats.

Justin Trudeau attacked the NDP apparently from the left – committing the Liberals to run annual deficits until 2019/20 to fund \$125bn on infrastructure – while simultaneously offering an olive branch to Conservative voters he described as 'neighbours not enemies'.

Tom Mulcair's NDP promise of balanced budgets year-on-year while finding the money to invest in social programmes, like universal childcare, was seen as a defensive strategy against anticipated Conservative attacks on economic credibility.

But that familiar Conservative campaign of negativity ended up confirming a tired, out-of-step and scandal-ridden government's reputation for nastiness. And in the final result it was Justin Trudeau's Liberals who took the prize, increasing their number of seats from 34 to 183.

Owning change – a middle-class tax cut and the deficit

This was an election where 'change' became the mood. Indeed, one poll at the start of the long campaign suggested as many as 71 per cent of Canadians considered it 'time for a change'. The party best placed to capture that mood would determine the outcome.

It should, could, have been the NDP. Traditionally Canada's third party which had never won a federal election, it had enjoyed a breakthrough four years earlier when Jack Layton took them from third place to their best ever result, winning 100 seats and becoming the official opposition. The Liberals, who had for generations been considered the 'natural party of government', finished in third place, with their leader Michael Ignatieff – famous in the UK for his 1990s appearances on the BBC's Late Show – losing his own seat.

But tragedy soon struck. The next summer Layton died from cancer and, although his successor Tom Mulcair quickly proved to be a forensic and heavyweight parliamentary performer, Canadian politics is still the poorer for his absence.

Throughout the 2011-15 parliament the NDP continued to build support in provincial elections, even winning the Conservative stronghold of Alberta in May 2015. There was a sense this might at last be the NDP's year.

Having never formed a federal government they wanted to reassure and remind voters they had a serious contender for prime minister in Mulcair. They developed an extensive offer for government with signature policies on universal childcare and the minimum wage alongside a reassuring pitch on the public finances.

The Liberals, finding themselves in an unaccustomed third place, decided to gamble and 'own change'. They committed to run deficits of up to \$10bn a year in order to fund and leverage investment in

infrastructure. Alongside tax increases for the wealthy to fund a tax cut for those on middle and lower incomes.

By European standards the tax increase on the wealthy is not especially radical and Policy Network's Claudia Chwalisz has argued the Liberal platform was fairly centrist.¹ What's more, the fiscal position of Canada is very different to the UK. Trudeau was able to make his deficit announcement after years of fiscal retrenchment, indeed in 2015 Canada's debt as a percentage of GDP was 26.7 per cent while in the UK it was 80.7 per cent.

But positioning matters too. Announcing the deficit policy Trudeau said "this election is a clear choice between smart investments that create jobs and growth, or austerity and cuts that will slow our economy further." But rather than going heavy on evermore shrill anti austerity rhetoric, the Liberals calmly explained what the extra borrowing would pay for. Trudeau brought alive the ambition of the infrastructure pledge, talking not just of spending billions but of connecting Canadian cities while supporting the middle class with a targeted tax cut and raising taxes on the richest.

The Liberals successfully refused to be caught in a fiscal bind, made for them by the right, by explaining with clarity what investment can do to improve the lives of working people. They simply suffocated the charge of irresponsibility by making specific, positive and tangible pledges about building a more dynamic and just economy.

The Tories said the pledge was "irresponsible" and the NDP branded it "unaffordable" – placing them both on the other side of the argument to the anti-austerity Liberals. After the election the NDP's own report into why it lost noted "our balanced budget pledge was in part responsible for presenting us as cautious change ... Running a deficit became a symbol of change, one that the media and voters embraced."

Building economic credibility will be critical to Labour's future at the next general election. In 2015 Labour had a plan to grow the economy and deal with the deficit. Labour drew a distinction between aiming for a surplus on current spending while recognising the need for borrowing to fund infrastructure spending. Labour has adopted a similar policy in 2016. But Labour in 2015 seemed reluctant to take on the Tory myth that supposed fiscal irresponsibility had caused the 2008 financial downturn. Consequently the Conservatives continued to successfully press home that Labour was responsible for the deficit and not to be trusted on the economy. Canada and the UK have very different fiscal contexts and the Liberals were not perceived as responsible for the 2008 downturn. However, by focusing on the 'struggling middle class', being explicit about a tax rise for the wealthiest and explaining what infrastructure spending was needed and why, Trudeau won permission to make an argument about the deficit. Progressive parties must earn economic trust – which for Labour is likely to include an argument about economic management during Labour's period in government – as a condition for more radical, growth-focused economic policies.

"I'm ready" – projection of your leader

The Conservative attack on Trudeau will be familiar to anyone who watched Ed Miliband being excoriated by the rightwing press in the last election. Stephen Harper's team sought to brand him as lightweight, weak, and ill-prepared for high office. Throughout 2013 the Conservatives attacked Trudeau as simply "not ready".

1. <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/elections/2015/10/canada-hasnt-lurched-left-its-returned-centre>

But, rather than allow opponents to define him, Liberal strategists took a decision to directly take these attacks head on.

In one of their early political broadcasts Trudeau was introduced not as a typical politician but as a former teacher with a very simple promise – to work hard to win people’s trust. This was followed up a year later when the Liberals released another broadcast saying Trudeau, who had been touring the country listening to the concerns of ordinary Canadians, was “getting ready to lead”.

At the start of the election campaign the Liberals then took on directly Harper’s contention that he wasn’t fit to be prime minister with a film that became known by the title “Ready”.

With the Canadian parliament building in the background, Trudeau looked straight at the camera and said “Stephen Harper says I’m not ready,” he then tells the viewers “I’ll tell you what I’m not ready for” and lists a series of attack lines on the Harper government. He finishes with a simple message: “I’m ready to bring real change”.

The strategy was risky and ignored age-old political advice never to repeat your opponent’s attack lines. Yet, by taking the argument on so directly and so early in the campaign, Liberal strategists felt they had performed a “judo move” – turning an opponent’s attack into a vulnerability. The strategy worked because they had recognised their negatives early, put in place a plan to overcome them and so positioned Trudeau as someone on a journey, ‘getting ready’ and then ultimately ‘ready’ for 2015. They displayed iron discipline, sticking to their themes of wanting to help the ‘struggling middle class’ and that having been on a journey he was ‘ready’. In doing so he was able to overcome the attacks by demonstrating his motives were good and in tune with the public.

Elections in the UK with their leaders’ debates, rallies and media coverage are becoming increasingly presidential. Trudeau’s Liberals knew how their opponents would try to undermine him and put in place a well-worked-through strategy to overcome the attacks. Labour’s weaknesses in 2015 around economic credibility means projecting confidence and reassurance is a priority for successful future electoral prospects.

Persuading switchers “Conservatives are not our enemies. They are our neighbours”

An unattractive Conservative election campaign turned ugly when it forced religious identity into the election debate. Following a supreme court ruling that a woman could wear a niqab in a citizenship ceremony, Harper’s Conservatives blew the dog whistle as loud as they could, vowing to ban the niqab in such ceremonies. Both the Liberals and the NDP leadership stood forthright in their support for a woman’s right to choose to wear what she wants. Trudeau managed to convey a posture at ease with modern Canada and diversity. But Mulcair’s position plunged the NDP into a tangle with a key component of their core vote, particularly in Quebec, where polls indicated a degree of support for the Tories on the Niqab. The Conservatives felt this wedge issues was playing well for them and so ‘double-downed’ by announcing proposals to introduce a telephone hotline for citizens to report “barbaric cultural practices”. It hurt the NDP and helped the Liberals. By October, opinion polls showed the NDP losing altitude among those who had switched to them in 2011, especially in Quebec – where the NDP was eventually to lose 43 of its 59 seats.

Like Sadiq Khan’s victorious Labour mayoral campaign in London, Canadian Liberals moved to target Conservative voters repelled by such divisive tactics.

They claimed that Harper's Conservatives had abandoned the Canada's 'progressive Conservative' tradition. Trudeau reached out to them, saying: "Conservatives are not our enemies. They are our neighbours. They are our cousins and uncles and parents. They are our friends ... We don't need to convince them to leave the Conservative party. We just need to show them how Stephen Harper's party has left them." The move not only helped win over Conservative switchers but also acted as a mobiliser to those who felt Trudeau best symbolised the rejection of divisive fear-based politics.

Fabian research has explained how Labour will need to win back Tory switchers to form a government at the next election.² This does not mean Labour must 'turn right'. It is simply about accepting and understanding that voters may have switched from Labour to Conservative in 2010 and 2015 and we need to win them back in 2020. In the same way Trudeau successfully drove a wedge between those who had in the past voted Conservative and the Conservative party, Labour needs to demonstrate how the Conservative government has let those who switched to them in previous elections down.

Winning back voters from the Conservatives does not demand Labour shape themselves in the image of the Conservatives. The Liberals' election and indeed Sadiq Khan's have shown us that. It demands a robust demonstration of how the Conservatives have failed voters who placed their trust in them, how they are at odds with modern Britain – in its diversity just as much as its geographic deprivation – and how Labour would serve people better.

Dealing with the 'separatist' question

But there are even bigger questions on how to deal with 'separatism'.

In 2008, when an NDP-Liberal coalition looked a possibility with backing from the Francophone Bloc Québécois and again in the 2011 general election, Harper had played on people's fear of being dictated to by a nationalist minority. On both occasions he warned Canadians that a 'weak' Liberal-NDP coalition could only govern with the support of the separatists from Quebec, successfully framing the issue as a choice between the 'stability' of a Conservative government verses the 'instability' of such a coalition.

To puncture the Harper attack lines required a long-term political and organisational response because both the NDP and the Liberals knew they had to show they were reasonably competitive in Quebec to be viable options for federal government.

Although Harper won a majority in 2011, the NDP swept the board in Quebec winning 58 out of 75 seats. They had a leader in Layton who knew the power of symbolism, bringing the NDP's convention to Quebec, securing the defection of Mulcair, previously a Quebec Liberal and then making him his deputy. He also knew the importance of organisation, seeking out a new generation of candidates to stand for the NDP across the province such as Ruth Ellen Brosseau and Matt Dube. Finally, he understood strategy, honing a message aimed at left-of-centre Bloc Québécois voters.

In 2015 the NDP fell back in Quebec and the Liberals made considerable advances. That was because they had studied and learnt from the NDP's success.

But despite the 2015 setbacks, the experience of the NDP could be instructive for the Scottish Labour party as it seeks to rebuild in Scotland after a UK general election where, for the first time in well over 50 years, constitutional questions played a central role. The Tories played, with devastating effect,

2. <http://www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/The-Mountain-to-Climb.pdf>

on the fears of undecided voters in English towns and suburbs convincing them that a Miliband government could only survive with the support of SNP MPs. It was enough for voters in classic marginal constituencies like Bolton West, Lincoln and Swindon to worry that a Labour government would somehow neglect the concerns of Bolton in favour of the concerns of Banff and Buchan. It was, of course, nonsense, but the Tories successfully worked the strategy for all it was worth. Labour was caught out like a rabbit in the headlights – on the one hand wanting to ‘lock the Tories out of Downing Street’, on the other hand not wanting to appear beholden to the SNP.

For Labour to win a majority at the next general election without Scotland would mean gaining 94 seats across England and Wales. This is not arithmetically impossible but, to say the least, is certainly challenging. Because of the NDP success and to a lesser extent the Liberals, the Canadian Conservatives were not able to run an attack message that voting Liberal or NDP would lead to weak government in hock to ‘separatists’.

To avoid the UK Conservatives getting any traction with the same line of attack in the next UK general election, the Labour party needs to show it can be competitive again in Scotland. Following the recent Scottish parliament elections where Labour came third, there is no easy path. But over the coming years Scotland must be an organisational and strategic priority for the party. Organisationally the NDP targeted Quebec with resource and symbolic moves focused sharply on Bloc Québécois voters, successfully convincing them they shared the same values of social justice and equality while also crucially reminding them that only the NDP could implement such values in government. To drive home the message NDP persuaded two former Bloc party figures to campaign for them telling voters “For the first time in our political lifetimes, social democracy is at the doors of parliament. It would be sad if Quebecers did not take that opportunity to send MPs in Ottawa who will carry Quebec values of solidarity and justice.”

Mobilising the vote

Highly contested elections often result in an increased turnout across virtually every single age group. But the rise in the number of young voters in Canada last year was, by any standards, remarkable.

In the run up to 2015, Liberal strategists made a deliberate decision to target young people and those who had not engaged in the political process before. This decision paid off. Research for Abacus Data showed that 45 per cent of young people aged 18 to 25 voted Liberal, compared with 25 per cent for the NDP and 20 per cent for the Conservative party.³ Forty three per cent of young voters who supported the NDP in 2011 switched to the Liberals in 2015. Overall the increase in support for the Liberals represented a 30 point swing to the Liberals among those aged 18 to 29 and a 31 point swing for those aged 30 to 44. Turnout was up 12 per cent for 18- to 24-year-olds, and 11 per cent for 25- to 34-year-olds.

Two years earlier Justin Trudeau and his advisers had starting putting in place the building blocks of a young voter strategy. They started with focused tours of college and university campuses and the development of a distinctive policy platform for young people. It was dismissed at the time as doomed to fail. Opinion polling – even when the Liberals were ahead with other age groups – showed that young people felt the NDP were more in tune with their concerns and the Liberals were seen as tired and arrogant.

Undeterred, the Liberals continued working on a fully integrated youth vote strategy. They developed

3. <http://abacusdata.ca/the-next-canada-politics-political-engagement-and-priorities-of-canadas-next-electoral-powerhouse-young-canadians/>

a targeted social media campaign branded as ‘#matters’ focusing on a number of policy areas such as youth unemployment, LGBT issues and affordable higher education. In an election where owning the ‘change’ brand was so important, such a high-profile youth strategy helped reinforce Trudeau’s positioning as the leader best placed to deliver on ‘real change’. Keen to maintain this image in tune with millennials, one of Trudeau’s first acts as prime minister was to appoint himself as minister for youth.

Naturally it helped the Liberals to have a young, charismatic leader effortlessly confident on social media and with young people. Attacks on Trudeau from the Conservatives and NDP highlighting his callow inexperience only heightened his change message.

The UK Labour party also hoped to mobilise young people in 2015 but failed. Although it secured a significantly higher share of those who voted, turnout remained low even among those who were registered. We can learn lessons from how the Liberals targeted campuses and built a distinctive social media campaign aimed at young voters over the course of years, not weeks.

Some have pointed out how simply increasing the turnout of first-time voters and non-voters still will not be enough to ensure Labour win Tory held marginal seats. “There aren’t nearly enough first-time voters to offset any potential losses amongst the rest of the electorate in those seats”, says Ian Warren of Election Data. “They tend to cluster in already safe Labour seats so the additional impact of their engagement is dampened. In a party with finite campaign resources it would be irresponsible to divert time and money from Tory marginals or target seats to fund an effort which only increases Labour’s strength where it is already strong.”⁴

But we still need to take seriously the lessons of the Liberals’ campaign. And, in the next UK general election campaign, winning demonstrable support among young voters will be of huge symbolic significance for any party seeking to own the future.

Digital, data and field organisation

Both the NDP and Liberals invested heavily in organisation in the field to help target key voters. They increased their numbers of organisers, relied on more face-to-face voter contact and used national campaign action days to help mobilise in key races.

They started their doorstep constituency work over a year out from the general election and were both able to boast of having engaged voters in millions of doorstep conversations. Because of the effort the Liberals had put into member mobilisation and training they were also able to highlight how thousands more party members were out campaigning on the streets.

All that – and more – is true of the Labour party at the last election. We had a record 5 million doorstep conversations. We increased membership. We invested millions of pounds in a field operation which, we believed, would give us a real edge on the Tories.

The difference was in data analytics. The Canadian Liberals invested hugely in this area, spending three times as much as they did in 2011. Not only were their canvassing teams finding information about voting intentions they were also tasked with discovering detailed demographic information all of which was fed into their custom-built database. They trained their canvassers to use smart phones and tablets to record data on not only voting intention but also preferred language, issues

4. Ian Warren blogs about election strategy at <http://election-data.co.uk/>

of concerns and email and telephone contact details. Analysis of this alongside nationally available datasets and information mined from social media and petitions allowed for highly targeted communication. At any given moment Liberal strategists were able to 'health check' progress in target constituencies and assess campaign tactics based on central analysis of the trends. Similarly the NDP also invested heavily in data and analytics, working with 270 Strategies, the team behind Obama's campaigns. The NDP database they built was considered one of the success stories of their campaign.

After the UK general election of 2015 the Tory strategist Andrew Cooper tweeted "Big data, micro-targeting and social media just thrashed '5 million conversations' and 'community organising'". He was partly right. Labour's 2015 election campaign also used data analysis and targeting. But the lesson from both the UK Tory and Canadian Liberal successes in 2015 demands Labour urgently prioritise serious investment in data analytics, developing its use of data to inform campaign strategy to complement Labour's traditional ground campaign. Successful political parties that win elections still need a compelling overall vision that commands and earns the support of a plurality of voters, but in an electoral battlefield where our opponents are taking full advantage of so called 'micro-targeting' Labour must not allow itself to be outpaced by the Tories.

No political party can succeed in the modern era without a fully integrated digital campaign. Alongside data analytics, the Liberals also invested heavily in their digital team. In 2011 the team had three members. In the 2015 campaign the Liberal digital and data team had 45-50 people working in it. The data and digital team worked closely together to produce engaging and relatable content for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube. They had tested images of Trudeau and concluded setting him talking to voters in relaxed settings played best. They quickly pushed out debate clips, rebuttal ads and targeted get-out-the-vote ads at people identified as supporters. The digital campaign was absolutely integral to their campaign.

Labour at the last election was slow to move on digital and although by the election itself it had dramatically increased staffing in this area, the team was still not properly integrated with Miliband's inner circle or the campaign strategists. Labour also released debate clips and broadcast on Twitter but the Tories dedicated huge resources to targeted digital messaging aimed at supporters and switchers on Facebook.

The importance of an innovative digital campaign will increase in the UK with Labour needing to organise across a number of social media platforms. Today, two thirds of UK adults are said to own a smartphone, with Ofcom estimating we spend two hours a day browsing the internet, on social media or online shopping. Our use of smartphones is already affecting our TV viewing habits. While the overwhelming majority of people still watch TV increasing numbers also get content from smartphones. For example most 16- to 24-year-olds watch on-demand and catch up platforms on computers and smartphones rather than TV. UK voters will increasingly become dependent on smartphone and tablets, checking news more and more and receiving political content on these phones. Bernie Sanders, Hilary Clinton and Justin Trudeau are all in 2016 breaking new ground using snapchat to target a younger audience. Labour must now become competitive on every social media platform.

Where next for the NDP?

The 2016 NDP convention was an extraordinary gathering. ‘Bernie Corbyn’-supporting delegates complained how they had been outflanked by the Liberals and then voted to allow a leadership challenge to Mulcair.

The NDP is now beginning a debate about its future and what a social democratic party stands for in a world of globalisation and digitalisation which is shaking old certainties.

The debate has similarities to that which propelled Jeremy Corbyn to victory in the Labour leadership election last summer and drove the insurgent candidacy of Bernie Sanders for the US Democratic presidential nomination.

Many look to the so-called ‘Leap Manifesto’ - a green-social democratic statement of aims and values spearheaded by Naomi Klein and her husband, documentary maker Avi Lewis.⁵ It declares that the time is now for the NDP to be bold, adding: “small steps will no longer get us to where we need to go ... we need to leap.” The manifesto has been endorsed by academics, union leaders, celebrities, NGOs as well as environmental activists. It emphasises the need for the NDP to place tackling climate change as central to its policies for growth and social justice, calls for massive investment in renewables, a large scale programme of energy efficient house building and an expansion of low-carbon jobs in childcare, education, social and public services generally.

But a manifesto which opposes building of pipelines and other infrastructure projects has run into fierce opposition from many established NDP figures such as Alberta premier Rachel Notley, who argues the NDP needs to support oil pipelines and industry jobs in her province. Nonetheless, for a shell-shocked party searching for renewed purpose and vision the manifesto is proving a provocative basis for the NDP to really examine what it stands for.

Back in Britain, Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour leader promising three clear themes for the party: a commitment to “a more democratic, engaging and kinder politics in both the Labour party and society”; a new economic approach that builds “a fairer and sustainable society”; and a foreign policy that “promotes mutual co-operation, conflict prevention and resolution rather than military aggression”.

Labour members share with their NDP counterparts an appetite for bold change, rejecting the supposedly cautious incremental approach offered by both parties in 2015. The question for Labour is how to capture the energy of ‘real change’ as Trudeau’s Liberals did, while also securing credibility which voters believed we lacked at the last election.

Not all the themes in the Canadian Leap Manifesto would command consensus across the Labour movement. The UK is in desperate need of infrastructure renewal and it is telling that Trudeau won ‘permission’ to run a deficit by promising capital spending alongside offering tax cuts for those on middle incomes.

But we can still learn from the boldness of Leap Manifesto’s themes; insisting that tackling climate change is central to economic policy; a strong focus on closing widening inequality and restating our belief that quality public services are drivers of social justice.

5. <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/>

Conclusion

Justin Trudeau's "sunny ways" was a positive message of change. He promised "hope and hard work" but also focused on the "struggling middle class" – not just the very bottom – to show his offer was majoritarian.

The Liberals' electoral coalition mobilised core support, young voters and progressive minded people from other parties, as well as winning Conservative switchers. Rather than traduce the motives of those who had supported Harper in the past, Trudeau reached out, reassured them and drove a wedge between them and the Conservative leadership – not 'enemies', but 'neighbours'.

The Liberals took head on the central attack line of their opponents against Trudeau, who used every opportunity to say and look like he was ready.

And they broke new ground by mining data and pushing digital content to depths and breadths not seen before in the progressive politics of either Canada or Britain.

Crucially, they did all this several years out from a general election, giving their candidates, staff and activists room to innovate and test different strategies so they were battle ready when the time came.

Labour's habit of constantly changing and reversing strategy in the last parliament needs to cease.

We need a strategy for Scotland that will utilise the organisational heft that progressive parties had in Quebec to neutralise not only separatism but Conservatives playing the separatist card in future elections.

Finally and most importantly, the success of Trudeau shows Labour has nothing to fear about all-encompassing debate about the future.

After being pushed into third place, the Liberals were forced to ask themselves serious questions about their future as a party.

The NDP are now embarking on a similar debate about what they stand for.

I would not advocate a third-placed finish for Labour. But we do need a thorough, deep and sustained debate about our future: our policy platform, our strategy and our positioning. This debate is now more urgent than ever.

I want us – the whole party – to engage in a process of intellectual renewal to offer credible change with the conviction that we can come back from devastating defeat to win first place and earn the right to govern again.