

Tribute

MEL WATKINS: A VISION OF SOCIALISM

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The Waffle Movement for an Independent Socialist Canada was formed in 1969 with Mel Watkins as a principal leader. In 1972, I was privileged to hear Mel speak to a packed crowd, for the first of many times. He argued for a perspective that would challenge the limits of capitalism as well as social democracy, and envisioned a new kind of socialism in Canada. With this vision came the birth of a vital new party, the Waffle. Mel was steady, articulate, highly informed and determined. His careful analysis and condemnation of US imperialism touched something in me. It was a kind of political approach that I had never heard, at the time a young recent immigrant from the US.

The Waffle was formed the year after I moved with my family to Toronto. I remember the summer of 1968 in Chicago as my family prepared to leave the city we called home – packing boxes through tears as I witnessed the khaki pup tents occupying the Chicago Midway in anticipation of the Democratic Party national convention. I was one of six children, and my oldest brother was draft age.

I was scared and worried and lonely and, in a teenage hippie kind of way, political – yearning for ideas and direction that could change a world crushed by violence, war and racism. Over the next few years I would attend three universities in two countries, eventually settling in Toronto and committing to Canada as my permanent home. Finding a political space in the Waffle was part of that.

I came to distance my views from the Waffle's nationalist politics, and we parted ways politically. But the inspiration of a socialist future has stayed with me for a lifetime.

Mel Watkins contributed to many other political causes. But the early years of the Waffle and the inspiration it brought will always be part of his legacy. I was one of a generation that will never forget that.

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