

Every now and then, we win a battle or two [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As a die-hard socialist living in pretty capitalistic times, I take a good shot of left-wing Prozac with my orange juice every morning. God knows, some days I need two — just to restore my gumption for challenging the rich and powerful.

The year that passed, however, offered lefties like me a considerable quotient of natural anti-depressants — because it seems to me that we actually won a few battles last year. Here's my Top 10 list of the greatest things to happen to the left in 2005:

1. Minority government: Minority government makes for great drama. It also makes for good policy. This minority government lasted just 17 months, but brought more new social spending than any government in a generation, made genuine progress on equity issues, and protected workers' contracts under corporate bankruptcy. In fact, I liked this one so much, I want another.

Ironically, despite the left's success extracting this progress from the Liberals, NDP strategists lose sleep worrying about the diluting impact of minority on their party's brand. But from the perspective of what actually happens in society, minority government was the year's greatest gift to the left....

7. Child care: It took a minority government to get the Liberals to follow through on their 12-year-old promise of national child care. And we're not quite there yet: There's not nearly enough money on the table, and Ottawa's kowtowing to privatizers in Alberta threatens the whole principle. But a national child-care program — our first new national social program in decades — is about to be delivered. (And just as my own kids are graduating from daycare. Rats.)

10. World Economic Forum: Strange to see this tony institution on a left-wing hit list. But its 2005 Global Competitiveness Report says it all: It listed five high-tax, egalitarian, cradle-to-grave European welfare states (topped by Finland and Sweden) as among the most competitive economies in the world. Indeed, these jurisdictions took fully half the top 10 spots, proving there's nothing uncompetitive about taxes or welfare programs — as long as they're smart and innovative.

Whether society is moving to the left or to the right depends on far more than just which party is in power. It depends on deeper trends in social attitudes and social structures. To be sure, the power of global corporations and elite leaders is pretty daunting. But every now and then, the good people fighting for a better world actually win a battle or two.

If I can assemble a similarly optimistic Top 10 list next New Year's, that would prove the pendulum is swinging back our way.

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