



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/CDZS3895>

**‘Jacob Robbins-Kanter, Royce Coop, and Daniel Troup (Editors),
The Working Class and Politics in Canada’**

Patrice Dutil

To cite this book review: Patrice Dutil, ‘Jacob Robbins-Kanter, Royce Coop, and Daniel Troup (Editors), The Working Class and Politics in Canada’, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 6 (September 2026): 162-163, <https://doi.org/10.52230/UXYK8090>

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Jacob Robbins-Kanter, Royce Koop, and Daniel Troup (Editors), *The Working Class and Politics in Canada* (University of British Columbia Press, 2025), 352pp. Hardback. C\$110. ISBN: 978-0-7748-7178-5.

One realizes the yawning gaps in our understanding of 'class politics' in Canadian affairs in reading this book. There is much to appreciate in this volume's ability to explain the limited impact of the working class in Canada, but I was left asking even more questions.

The editors clearly knew what they were getting into. Canada has a long history of working-class awareness and has witnessed many instances in its political evolution when workers voted for the people who could legitimately claim to speak on their behalf. But those were exceptions, in turns out. Most of the time, at the federal level, the people who typically punched a time clock have voted for the Liberals, Progressive Conservatives, Social Creditors, Reform, Conservative, and the Bloc Québécois. On occasion, they voted for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and, after 1962, for the New Democratic Party (NDP). Most of the CCF voters were farmers—a completely different political dynamic—and it cannot be said that the NDP was all that successful at the federal level. The editors of this volume sum it up flatly on the very first page: the NDP 'reliably fails to attract a plurality of working-class support.' (It is worth noting that the NDP has formed government at the provincial level in all provinces except Québec and Atlantic government: the least wealthy areas of the country, but provincial politics are hardly broached in this collection.)

So, who votes NDP? Again, at the federal level, it is mostly urban middle-class residents who live outside Québec and who typically belong to a public-sector union. Ironically, those are people who earn comparatively good salaries, do not punch clocks or work with their hands, and earn enviable pensions. There is trace evidence that the NDP is also well supported in the LGBTQ community, among environmentalists and among Indigenous peoples living on Reserves.

There is no doubt that identifying the 'working class' in Canada is not an easy thing to do. Certainly, income levels matter a great deal, but money does not answer every question, as Dennis Pilon points out in his chapter. He also offers a stinging accusation to the field of Canadian political science in documenting how little it has offered in terms of understanding the politics of class. Daniel Troup, in his chapter, finds it quickly among migrant or newly arrived workers but, as he concedes, they are not yet allowed to vote.

Jacob Robbins-Kanter and Semra Sevi offer a fascinating and useful examination of working-class candidates and MPs over the last century and document a dramatic drop in representation since the 1961 election. They show that if any formation could claim to represent workers since 1961, it is the Conservative Party. Indeed, Royce Koop and Jim Farney also offer a fascinating analysis of how the Conservative Party of Canada has attracted with great success the working class' support.

Is the NDP to blame? Daniel Troup and Bryan Evans point out that the NDP has largely evacuated radical thinking in its successive manifestos, effectively making it a marginal player that cannot get any traction as it actively supports the capitalist system. Daniel Westlake, on the other hand, makes the case that Liberal Party has largely been successful (at least equal to the NDP) in representing the aspirations of the working class precisely because of its moderate programs. The ideological mismatch between the NDP and most voting class voters is blinding.

The problem of discerning the actual voting behaviour of the working class is covered in several equally captivating chapters. Matthew Polacko, Simon Kiss, and Peter Graefe find that the working classes do support the NDP more than the middle-class or the 'upper classes', but that the Conservative Party has won far more votes from workers than other parties. Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant examines the impact of gender and finds that it is working-class men who are mostly driving this trend. Alex B. Rivard and Jocelyn McGrandle note how the issue of identity in Québec has successfully muscled out class concerns though Valérie-Anne Mahéo and Marie Fester, using fresh data, confirm that working class voters are not as likely to vote. Spencer McKay offers some ideas on how democratic innovations could boost that participation.

The Working Class and Politics in Canada is a strong book, and one can only hope that more scholars will be encouraged by its publication. The subject of working class voting continues to scream for attention.

Patrice Dutil, Toronto Metropolitan University