

Trying to make it beyond the fringe

“Beyond the Fringe” was a ‘60s comedy stage review that made household names of Dudley Moore, Peter Cook, Alan Bennett and Jonathan Miller and paved the way for such future British satirical landmarks as “Monty Python’s Flying Circus.” It’s also an apt name for political parties trying to break free from the fringes. And on occasion, they do in Canada.

In 1962, the national Social Credit party came into full bloom on the federal stage, capturing 30 seats in the House of Commons — 26 from Québec — but by 1993 it had disappeared. The Greens are the latest party to make it beyond the fringe, but so far they can only dream of the electoral victories once enjoyed by the Socreds.

But some parties — and political candidates — will always remain on the fringe, and only be granted a brief moment in the sun each election cycle. Such has been the case in Guelph during this federal election campaign, where six of the 10 candidates on the ballot are so marginal they will be lucky — very lucky — to garner enough votes to recoup their election deposit.

But that’s not the name of the game. The purpose is to get their message out, and five of the six fringe candidates did that ably Tuesday during a two-hour all-candidates debate co-sponsored by this newspaper.

Some electors may grumble that the televised debate should have been reserved for the four mainstream parties, but voters are entitled to hear the broadest range of opinions during an election campaign, and they got it this week.

The only absent voice was Manuel Couto, Guelph’s Marxist-Leninist contender — and we don’t mean Groucho Marx and John Lennon. But the international socialist talking points were effectively delivered by Communist Drew Garvie. Two communists in one race — so much for such views being confined to the ash heap of history.

Speaking of ash, the push for decimalization of pot is a movement that seems to have gone up in smoke in Canada, but that’s through no faulting of Marijuana party candidates such as Kornellis Klevering. And who knew a green solution is to be found in hemp.

The seal hunt isn’t exactly front and centre during this election cycle, but we’re grateful for the attention drawn to it by Karen Levenson of the Animal Alliance Environment Voters party. And top marks to Libertarian Philip Bender for admitting what we all know — he hasn’t got a prayer.

And what more can we add about John Turmel, the Clown Prince of the local fringe contingent? In full rant, Turmel — who can’t seem to find enough ridings to run in — reminds us of a low-rent Lewis Black, the gyrating political comedian who’s a recurring fixture on Jon Stewart’s “The Daily Show.”

But when a dram of policy drops from Turmel’s mouth it’s likely to be on the need for monetary reform. Turns out he’s an Independent in Social Credit clothing, so who knows, one day he just may make it beyond the fringe.