



Gélinas Goes to Bat for Nurses

NDP Health Critic France Gélinas went to bat for Ontario's nurses during Question Period on March 5, 2009.

On the same day that the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) marched on Queen's Park, Gélinas quizzed Health Minister David Caplan on recent nursing cuts across the province.

"ONA was forced to launch a media campaign called *Cutting Nurses, Cutting Care*, to try to stop the McGuinty government cuts to nursing positions and nursing hours of care, which threaten patient care," said Gélinas.

"ONA has received notice of hundreds of cuts to nursing positions and expects the numbers to balloon as Ontario health care facilities grapple with balancing their budgets," she added.

"In the last election, McGuinty promised 9,000 more nurses. But now the Minister has said that the promise would have to wait. But in order to maintain good quality care with our aging population we need a minimum of 3,000 new nurses this year. Instead, nurses are being laid off, and patient care is suffering. My question again: Is the Minister denying that nurses are being laid off right now?" asked Gélinas.

Caplan was left fumbling for an answer, which provided little comfort to the throngs of nurses who congregated outside the Legislative Assembly wondering if their jobs will be next to go.

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Change at Queen's Park

The Legislative Assembly returned for its spring sitting on February 17, two weeks after Premier Dalton McGuinty called a by-election in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. The by-election was prompted by the resignation of sitting Conservative MPP Laurie Scott, in order to open a seat for Progressive Conservative Leader John Tory.

Hampton Steps Down

On March 5, Howard Hampton, MPP for Kenora-Rainey River, asked his final question in the Assembly as NDP Leader.

It had been a week of devastating job losses in Hamilton, Windsor and Sudbury, and on his last day, Hampton was hammering away at themes he has championed for so long: Fighting for the rights of average workers and warning the government not to cave in to multi-nationals and give them billion-dollar bail-outs without job guarantees.

John Tory Resigns

Later that evening, John Tory lost the by-election to Liberal Rick Johnson by 906 votes. This was Tory's second consecutive attempt to get a seat in the Legislature.

He subsequently announced he would step down as leader of the Ontario PCs once his successor is chosen at a leadership convention in late June, 2009.

Howarth New NDP Leader

On March 8, Andrea Howarth, MPP for Hamilton Centre, emerged the winner at the ONDP leadership convention in Hamilton, garnering 60 percent of the vote on the third ballot of the Ontario Party's first One-Member-One-Vote election.

Howarth has served as an MPP since 2004. Previously, she was a city councillor in Hamilton and a community organizer.

Horwath Hits the Ground Running

On her first day at Queen's Park as NDP leader, Andrea Horwath used Question Period to hold the Premier's feet to the fire for his government's sorry jobs record.

"I've just spent the last six months travelling across Ontario. I've met thousands of workers who have lost their jobs. In northern pulp and paper mills, Windsor auto plants, Mississauga parts factories and Hamilton steel mills, workers and their families are scared," said Horwath.

"They've worked hard, but now worry about keeping a roof over their heads and food on the table. With all the tools this government has at its disposal, how could the Premier let this happen?" she asked.

McGuinty struggled for an answer, before Horwath pounced again, referring to the personal sacrifices workers are making to try and preserve their jobs.

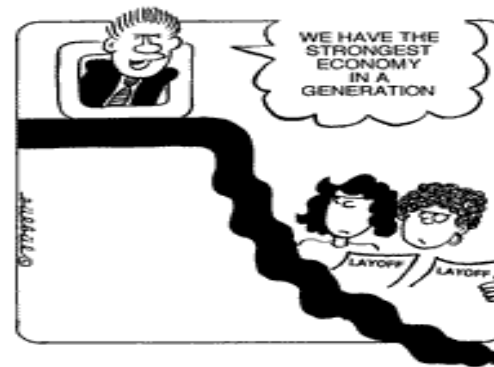
"Ontario workers and their families know very well that we are in the midst of a terrible recession and they are prepared to make the necessary sacrifices and to do their part. But they want to know if this government will demand the same sacrifices from the high-flying corporate executives who got us into this mess in the first place?"

Hamilton NDP MPPs Blast Stelco Closure

NDP MPPs Paul Miller and Andrea Horwath issued the following joint statement on the shutdown of Stelco's Hamilton operations:

"As someone who spent 32 years at Stelco, I'm shocked. This closure will have a devastating impact on our community. Stelco provided jobs that helped families pay off their mortgages and put their kids through school. I shudder at the economic toll this will take. With the Stelco pension plan already precarious, I fear for the impact on the pensions of these workers. I'll be working closely with my Steelworker brothers and sisters to help wherever I can," said Paul Miller.

"My thoughts are with the workers and their families. This shutdown is affecting people who worked hard each and every day to try and get ahead. They are victims of a deepening global recession. What's troubling is that the McGuinty government still has no jobs plan to deal with this recession," said Andrea Horwath.



Budget Leaves Workers Holding The Bag

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath blasted the government's decision to give corporations a broad tax cut in the spring budget, while doing nothing to protect workers' back pay, severance and vacation pay. "The McGuinty government had an opportunity to reassure Ontarians that a lifetime of blood, sweat and tears

for a company would count for something," she said.

"But there are no worker protection measures in this budget. Workers are left holding the bag yet again. And, to make matters worse, they and their families will be paying more for the essentials of everyday life while the corporations that slash jobs in record numbers walk away with more than \$2 billion in tax cuts.

The budget also merges the GST and PST into a single regressive 13 per cent sales tax. Ontarians will pay 8 percent more to put gas in their cars, heat their homes, read a newspaper and enjoy a morning coffee and donut, among many essential items that were previously tax exempt.

"As Ontario families worry about their jobs, savings and pensions, Dalton McGuinty is going to whack them with another tax hike," said Horwath. "The McGuinty government is adding to the burden of average families who need help the most and giving corporate handouts to those that need help the least."