

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Notley, Wynne pandering to unions

Ontarians of a certain age will remember the horrific one-term disaster of Bob Rae's NDP government when, fighting widespread economic malaise, Rae attempted to spend his way out of a recession only to end up creating an even worse situation.

Fast forward to current Alberta NDP Premier Rachel Notley's handling of that province's drastic dip in oil industry activity and you will see that despite her pledge not to 'repeat Rae's mistakes,' she is doing just that, generating an enormous \$11 billion deficit this year through a lethal combination of lower tax returns and wanton spending, forced to borrow money, thereby increasing the tax burden on future Albertans as well.

In a recent speech to the big union Unifor, Notley said, 'We're not just going to cross our fingers and hope that cutting taxes for rich people will magically turn the economy around. That's what Conservatives do.'

That's not true, of course, but it is Holy Grail among New Democrats to portray themselves as champions of the little guy while those damn Tories are only interested in the fatcat, cigar-smoking, pin-striped one percenters, who apparently spend all their time sitting around large boardroom tables figuring out new ways to extract money from the average working man or woman.

The truth, of course, is that if anybody is screwing the average worker ? at least the majority of them not fortunate enough to have landed a public sector job ? it's the NDP and its almost theological reliance on union support.

It should be noted that since 2014 in Alberta alone, almost 35,000 people have lost their jobs in the oil and gas drilling industry. So what is Notley's solution? Impose a carbon tax and increase corporate taxes, both of which will hurt that industry even more. And ? here's the key point ? she has made it clear that unionized public sector workers will keep their jobs and gold-plated pension plans. No such luck for the private sector which, faced with economic setbacks, is forced to let workers go. Government, particularly NDP government, on the other hand, simply borrows more money so it can keep its supportive unions happy.

In an article last week in the National Post, Laval economics professor Stephen Gordon wrote that the percentage of Canadian private-sector workers represented by a union has fallen below 14 per cent. 'But if private-sector employers can downsize and outsource their workforces, public-sector employers cannot. As a result, unionization rates in the public sector have held steady over the past few decades at about 75 per cent in Canada . . .'

As the Post pointed out in a subsequent editorial, the great union myth of the union versus the rich is 'a transparent figment of their own imaginations. The victims of maintaining union privileges will mainly be the ordinary Canadians forced to pay the price of their upkeep.'

In Ontario, of course, many of the same forces are at play. Wild-eyed spending projects ? particularly in the energy sector ? have sent this province sinking further down an economic rabbit hole, yet the unions, especially the teachers' unions, continue to enjoy special privileges at the expense of everyone else.

You'll recall that Kathleen Wynne's Liberals gifted millions of dollars to the extremely wealthy teacher's unions to help them pay for their bargaining team in dealing with recent negotiations for new contracts. Not only are the rest of us paying the cost of the government negotiating, but we're kicking in extra for union negotiators, then picking up the tab on the new deal this shamefully cosy relationship brought about.

But then, should we be surprised with the quid pro quo, since the very same unions, along with some others, have themselves been spending millions of dollars during recent elections to attack Tories and encourage the public to vote Liberal. And why wouldn't the unions do this, since they know that with Wynne ? and Dalton McGuinty before her ? they'll pretty well get whatever their collective hearts desire, the average taxpayer be damned.

It is true that Wynne has recently agreed to limit union spending in future elections, but she was dragged into it kicking and screaming, and no doubt will ultimately find a way around it.

In the meantime, should she be re-elected, you can be sure ? as public sector unions understand ? that whatever inconvenience the new spending rules cause them, she'll more than make up for it after the fact.

As for Notley, we can only hope that Albertans, like Ontarians under Rae's tenure, will take the first opportunity to toss her out. That would be a start, but, alas, it will take decades to get back on a reasonable economic footing. Either way, the public sector unions aren't about to give up any of their privileges. They'll just continue to demand more. And you'll get the bill.

