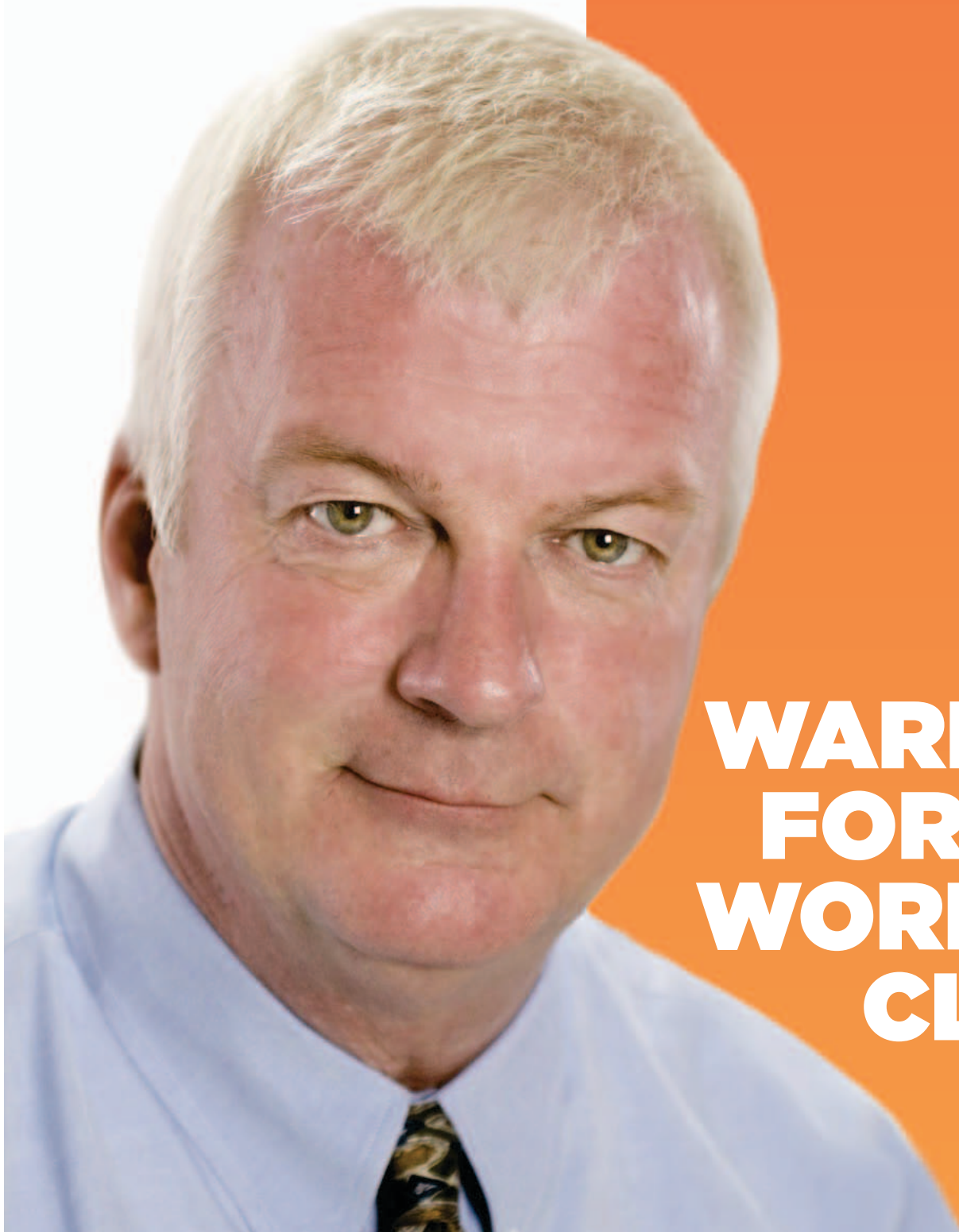


In memoriam
PETER KORMOS



**WARRIOR
FOR THE
WORKING
CLASS**



PETER KORMOS

Welland MPP Peter Kormos – a one-of-a-kind socialist cowboy and a stalwart in Ontario's New Democratic Party for 23 years – hung up his signature cowboy boots on March 30, 2013 when he passed away peacefully in his home at age 60. There is no question that Peter left big boots to fill.

Peter has been eulogized by friends and politicians of every political leaning as a rebel, a maverick and a cowboy. He is universally recognized as a principled champion of the underdog. Peter's unrestrained "give 'em hell" approach earned him the love of his constituents, but his contrarian independent streak often ruffled the feathers of his colleagues in government and in his own caucus.

"There is no question that Peter's firebrand politics, brilliant speaking skills and unwavering convictions earned him a place as the true conscience of Queen's Park," said OFL President Sid Ryan. "Peter was born to speak truth to power and, while in government, he never suffered fools, opportunists or flip-flopers. He saved his loyalty for the working class."

Peter hailed from the blue-collar town of Welland where his father worked in the Atlas Steels plant. He grew up in the union hall and never forgot his roots. Peter's tenacious idealism fueled his commitment to justice and caused him to lead a week-long high school strike against an autocratic

principal and restrictions on students' right to expression. His campaign earned him an arrest and expulsion. Living on his own from the age of 16, Peter put himself through Toronto's Osgoode Hall Law School. He returned to Welland as a criminal defence lawyer where he earned a reputation for his pro bono work and his penchant for long-shot cases.

"Peter was the true conscience of Queen's Park whose first loyalty was to the working class."

- Sid Ryan -

Peter was first elected as the Ontario NDP MPP for Welland in a 1988 provincial by-election when he replaced veteran NDP legislator Mel Swart. He was re-elected in every subsequent Ontario general election until he retired from Queen's Park in 2011 and was promptly elected to the Niagara Regional Council.

Peter served as NDP House Leader from 2001 until his retirement in 2011 and also held numerous critic portfolios in Opposition, including Labour, Justice, Community Safety and Correctional Services, Consumer and Business Services, and Democratic Renewal.



From his first days in office, Peter established himself as one of Ontario's most eloquent and intellectual politicians, with a legendary encyclopedic knowledge of parliamentary procedure. In 1990, Peter launched into a 17-hour filibuster against the Liberal government's no-fault insurance plan that kept politicians sitting through the night as he sermonized without relying on written notes. It was an early signal to his colleagues and opponents that Peter's true loyalties were with the people he represented.

In government, as in life, Peter was, in the affectionate words of former NDP Leader Howard Hampton, "a brilliant man and a stubborn son-of-a-gun." He was a thorn in the side of Premiers of any stripe. In opposition, Peter was a principled watchdog who championed many issues and hounded the party's opponents. In government, he refused to be muzzled when his own party strayed from its values.

When the NDP formed government under then leader Bob Rae, Peter doggedly set upon the NDP Premier for caving on his promise to introduce public auto insurance. Grasping for excuses to silence his internal critic, Rae booted Peter from cabinet in 1991, citing a recent controversy surrounding Peter's fully-clothed pose for a



1952-2013

Toronto Sun “sunshine boy” feature as the cause. For the remainder of Rae’s term in office, Peter acted as part of an unofficial “left opposition” within the NDP caucus. In 1993, he and three other colleagues—Dennis Drainville, Karen Haslam and Mark Morrow—were the only NDP MPPs to vote against the Rae government’s notorious Social Contract legislation that imposed unpaid days off on civil servants.

In 1996, Peter ran for leader of the NDP in a close three-way race with Frances Lankin and Howard Hampton. After Hampton took the top spot, Peter went on to play a prominent role within Opposition. He served as the NDP Labour Critic from 2001 to 2011 and during that time, proudly introduced anti-scab legislation in every legislative session.

Always a man of words, Peter was known for pouring over a thesaurus to find vivid and creative new ways to describe scabs for the government records. “Scabs, union busters, hired goons and other thugs ... earn their pay by busting unions and breaking up union drives,” he said. “To allow corporate bosses to circumvent, to avoid, collective bargaining at the table by importing scabs is an outrage.”

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On another occasion, he declared: “Rats, sneaks, scabs and finks: Nobody likes any of them.” According to Peter, “the most despicable form of life possibly conceivable, [is a scab] who would cross a picket line to steal a job from a worker fighting for a little bit of improvement.”

***“I don’t change
my values
the way some
people change
their socks.”***

- Peter Kormos -

“Peter had a deep respect for working class people that permeated everything he did. He didn’t believe that you could be a part-time supporter of Labour,” said Ryan. “He stood by workers through every labour dispute, regardless of popular support. He defended our right to collectively bargain and when we were killed or injured on the job, he demanded justice and fair treatment for victims and survivors.

Peter respected the NDP’s labour roots and refused to shift his convictions with changing political winds. He was a true warrior for the working class.”

Peter’s deep respect for working people was most evident in the action he put behind his words. His outspoken support for organ donation and health care produced many memorable quotes and his dedication to child support for single mothers almost earned him a criminal conviction. He dressed like a worker in the legislature and insisted on using bank tellers over ATMs. He was a regular presence on picket lines and at plant gates. Peter was truly a man of the people.

When he retired from provincial office, Peter told the Welland Tribune: “I’ve been incredibly lucky. ... I’ve been blessed to work in a job I would have done for half the price. Not too many working people have that luxury. Not too many working people do a job they love, enjoy and that inspires them.”

The labour movement, joins working people across Ontario in mourning the loss of one of their most principled and straight-talkin’ allies.



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