



Hudson – Political History

The Honourable Leo Bernier (born 1929) is a former politician in Ontario. He served in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario from 1966 to 1987, and was a cabinet minister in the governments of Bill Davis and Frank Miller. Bernier was a member of the Progressive Conservative Party.

Bernier was born in Hudson in Northern Ontario and educated in the area. He became the general manager of Bernier & Sons Contractors, and served as President of the Hudson Chamber of Commerce. He is an honorary member of the Royal Canadian Legion and the Knights of Columbus.

Bernier first ran for the Ontario legislature in the 1963 provincial election, and lost to Liberal-Labour candidate Robert Gibson by 840 votes in Kenora. Gibson died in 1966, and Bernier was elected in a by-election to replace him. He was returned by an increased margin in the 1967 provincial election, and served as a backbench supporter of the John Robarts administration. When Bill Davis succeeded Roberts as Premier, he appointed Bernier as his Minister of Mines and Northern Affairs.

Bernier was easily re-elected in the 1971 provincial election and he was given additional responsibilities as Minister of Lands and Forests. During the same year, his portfolios were restructured as the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Bernier was re-elected without serious opposition in the elections of 1975, 1977, 1981 and 1985. He was named Minister of Northern Affairs in February 1977 and held this position for more than eight years. Bernier was the most powerful minister for Northern Ontario in the Bill Davis government, and was sometimes called the "King of the North". Like most Progressive Conservatives of his time, he supported government intervention in economic matters.

Bernier initially supported Dennis Timbrell in the Progressive Conservative Party's January 1985 leadership convention, but crossed to Frank Miller after Timbrell was eliminated. Miller retained him in the Northern Affairs portfolio after becoming Premier of Ontario in February 1985. The Progressive Conservatives under Miller were reduced to a tenuous minority government in the 1985 election, and were defeated in the house in June 1985. In opposition, Bernier served as his party's critic for Natural Resources and Northern Affairs and Mines. He did not run for re-election in 1987.

Leo and his wife, Marjorie, both passed away in Sioux Lookout in 2010.