



Uniting to Change the World:

**The Alberta Federation of Labour, 1912 - 2012:
A Century of Struggle and Solidarity**





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 Alberta
Federation
of Labour

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Alberta coal miners from the Crowsnest district, ca. 1912 (Photo APA)

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The Alberta Federation of Labour, 1912 to 2012

For the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) District 18, 1911 was a hard year. Over 7,000 coal miners across Alberta and the B.C. portion of the Crowsnest Pass were on strike for eight months.

It was their third major strike in five years, and they still had to win a closed shop, safe working conditions and a living wage. District 18, despite being a militant organization with nearly half of all union members and the allegiance of virtually all the coal miners in the province, could not wrest the bare essentials of life from coal owners in the Western Canada Coal Operators Association. Miners were also convinced that government action or inaction had tipped the outcome of several strikes in favour of their employers.

Unless something changed, it was difficult for even the most optimistic union miner to see a better future.

At its 1911 convention in Lethbridge, District 18 passed two motions aimed at changing its fortunes. They resolved, firstly, to launch a new provincial federation of labour to unite working men and women across the province, and secondly, to make

common cause with the farmers who made up the majority of the Alberta's population.

To accomplish both objectives at once, District 18 leaders invited representatives of all Alberta's trade unions, along with representatives of the recently (1909) formed United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), to a founding convention of the Alberta Federation of Labour in Lethbridge on July 14 and 15, 1912.



The Alberta Federation of Labour is Born

The convention was chaired by Donald McNabb, a Lethbridge coal miner who had served a very brief two-and-one-half month term as Alberta's first independent labour MLA (in which he supported the governing Liberals). W.J. Tregillus and J. Quincey, the president and vice-president of the UFA, were joined by eight other farmer delegates.

Clem Stubbs, the President of District 18 and five other UMWA delegates led the labour contingent,



which included representatives of the Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge Trades and Labor Councils and delegates from other unions, bringing the convention total to 34 delegates.

Farm and labour leaders saw the new organization as an opportunity to build an engine of social and economic change. The preamble to the new Constitution proclaimed:

The modern production of wealth being a social process requiring the collective labor of the working class to put into operation, it therefore follows that if labor is to permanently better its condition, it must achieve the social ownership and control of the means of production, transportation and distribution which are necessary to the well-being of society as a whole.

Believing that a thorough understanding of our class interests is essential to the betterment of our conditions, and realizing that our interest may be best conserved by

a thorough organization of the workers, we hereby unite under the following rules, for the purpose of:

- 1. Carrying on the work of education and organization*
- 2. Giving collective expression to our legislative requirements*
- 3. Rendering such aid as is possible in the efforts of all organized workers affiliated, for the betterment of their condition.*
- 4. To provide a means for the circulation of information of importance to organized labor.*

Both UFA President Tregillus and District 18 Vice-President John O. Jones of Hillcrest contested the presidency of the new organization, with Jones winning by a comfortable margin. Two vice-president spots on the new executive were reserved for representatives of the UFA, with additional vice-presidents elected by each of the four Trades and Labour Councils.

Unity in theory vs. unity in practice

Sadly, efforts at organized farm-labour unity collapsed under the weight of the contradictory objectives of the two parties. Labour strongly supported resolutions calling for workers to be paid every fortnight and to be paid off completely within 48 hours of leaving a job. Farm delegates, on the other hand, spoke and voted against the motions, aware that they were the largest employers in the province.

Unions affiliated to the Alberta Federation of Labor: 1914

Union	Local	Members
Typographical Union	449	160
	551	15
	451	29
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers	348	195
	630	40
	222	30
Int. Alliance of Theatre & Stage Employees	212	30
Moving Picture Operators - Calgary		15
Int. Alliance Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers	371	44
Int. Assoc. of Bridge & Structural Iron Workers	129	70
United Brotherhood of Carpenters & Joiners	2607	100
	1325	370
	1061	16
Journeyman Stonecutters Assoc. of North America		30
Bricklayers and Masons Int. Union Local	3	24
Tile Layers & Helpers Int. Union	73	16
Int. Union of United Brewery Workers	354	35
	314	45
Painters and Decorators		8
Maintenance of Way Employees	125	59
Plumbers and Gasfitters		30
Printing Pressmen		7
Blacksmiths and Helpers		41
United Mine Workers of America District 18	(17 locals)	2340
All other unions		1409
Total		3749

The UFA never again filled its two vice-presidencies in the AFL, and by 1918 the provision was removed from the constitution. Farmers and workers were both producers and frequently suffered similar hardships; however, their narrow economic interests diverged frequently enough to make unification unlikely.

This early experiment helped to lay the groundwork for a working relationship, however. The UFA launched its own political wing and shocked the mainstream Liberal and Conservative parties by winning the provin-

cial election and forming government in 1921. During the UFA's first term of office (1921-26), there was even a labour representative in the Cabinet.

If unity between farmers and workers proved almost impossible, unity within the ranks of labour itself was also troublesome. Although all delegates to the founding convention agreed that solidarity in political action was necessary to create a better world for working people, sharp differences about specific aims and methods would plague the Federation for the next 100 years.



The front page of The Morning Albertan, 1921 (Photo GAA)

Charting a course for the new federation

Union leaders charged with defining a course for the new federation had few places to look for guidance. They resolved to support each other because they knew that they could not rely on anybody else to do it. One delegate put it this way: *“The miners must know something of the condition of the farmers and the farmers must know about the miners, so they could get together. The miners had been misrepresented by the capitalistic press to prejudice the farmers against them. It was the object of the capitalist class to divide the working class in every possible way.”* (Lethbridge Herald, June 10, 1912).

The British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFL), the only other provincial federation in existence at the time, had been launched two

years earlier. New Brunswick trade unions followed in 1913. All other provinces made do with a ‘provincial executive’ elected at national conventions of the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) to represent them at the provincial level. It wasn’t until unions organized by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) began to form provincial organizations in the 1930’s and 40’s that other provinces followed suit.

With no guidelines or precedents, the future was an open book for the two western federations. When over 1,000 troops were dispatched to suppress a district-wide coal strike on Vancouver Island in 1913, the BCFL held a plebiscite for a general strike to support the miners.

AFL President John Jones contemplated this kind of activism with trepidation, however, telling del-

legates at the 1914 convention in Calgary, “I do not think it [calling a general strike] is within the scope of our Federation, and we should go no further than giving our moral and financial support.”

A Split Between Radicals and Moderates

From the beginning, the Alberta Federation of Labour was divided between unionists who wanted to pursue a moderate political program of reform and those who wanted to radically transform society.

‘Moderates’ tended to come from the Anglo-Canadian dominated skilled craft unions affiliated to the American Federation of Labor and Canada’s TLC. These small, fiercely independent units of workers were defined by rigidly prescribed job skills. Workers within the same



Socialist Party of Canada MLA Charlie O'Brien, 1911 (Photo GAA)

industry and even the same company were separated from each other, with separate collective agreements. Although rank-and-file members

might support the strikes and job actions of other unions, their own collective agreements often compelled them to cross picket lines and continue working while their job site was being struck.

For the most part, craft unions demonstrated little interest in the great majority of workers, many of whom were unskilled or semi-skilled. Skilled workers could normally extract a better standard of living and make ends meet; for them, gradual improvements in wages, working conditions and social benefits made sense. They could concentrate on protecting their craft and reinforcing their social status as honest, respected working men. They could also exercise political influence through lobbying or by running candidates for either of the two mainstream parties (Liberals or Conservatives) or as independent labour candidates.

The radicals, on the other hand, tended to come from unions of the unskilled and semi-skilled, as well as the few combinations that included skilled workers. The United Mine Workers of America, the Industrial Workers of the World, and the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees provide good examples of these unions, many of whom had a broad ethnic makeup, with Anglo-Canadian workers in the minority. Members typically had little job security, frequent periods of unemployment and very low incomes. Daily hardships and the privations of home and working life gave them



Skilled vs Unskilled: Left, Garment workers at the GWG plant (photo APA) Right, Stone masons building the provincial legislature (photo GAA)

little reason to find hope in the gradual reformation of the social and economic system. They had good reasons to seek radical change.

The miners themselves provide a good example of the deep split on political direction. Many District 18 members supported the Socialist Party of Canada, having elected Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) candidate Charlie O'Brien to the legislature from the coal-dominated Rocky Mountain constituency in 1909. The SPC was a Marxist group dedicated to democratically transforming Canada's economic system towards socialism, with public enterprise as the main driver of the economy. According to District 18 President Clem Stubbs, the most in-

fluent union leader in Alberta at the time, miners wanted to "abolish the wage system altogether...if that's what the Federation would do, the miners were all for it."

No union consisted entirely of reformists or radicals. Just as there were leading socialists in craft unions, some miners were in favour of gradual reform. For many, a labour party or even a liberal-labour alliance that might provide working families a chance to earn a living wage was a sufficiently ambitious goal - an approach that very much defined the political strategies of the craft unions who made up the majority of affiliated members of the Federation.



A liberal-reform group was largely in control when the founding convention voted to apply for a charter from the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC). By seeking and gaining official admission into the TLC, the AFL was obligated to exclude any unions that had either been refused admission or evicted from the TLC. The TLC had already declared war on such union organizations as the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World for rejecting craft union exclusivity. For the next 50 years, unions most frequently excluded from the AFL were the industrial unions that championed a radical program for labour.

Despite its minority position, however, the radical wing of the move-

ment continued to play a vital role in the affairs of the AFL, stimulating debate, challenging complacency, demanding self-examination and insisting that labour look beyond its specific concerns into the broader social, economic and political issues confronting working people.

Constructing the Labour Movement

Bringing together active members and leaders from many different unions in a forum where they could exchange ideas, debate and learn from each other on a regular basis is one of the single most important objectives of any labour central. It has certainly defined the mission of the Alberta Federation of Labour.



Pulling Together - Edmonton workers hoist a beam, ca. 1912 (Photo CEA)

Left in isolation, bargaining units are easily fixated on specific workplace issues with their employer, and on the narrow politics of a local union. It is easy to forget that every union and union member is affected for good or ill by a broad array of economic, social and political forces; for example, by labour laws, policies on unemployment insurance, health care, pensions, international trade agreements, wars and economic depressions.

History has repeatedly shown that no single local or union has the capacity to affect these larger forces so crucial to the lives of working people. It is only through the pooling of the collective strength of

of any single union or its members can be advanced.

From the beginning, the Alberta Federation of Labour has brought union leaders and activists together to debate policies and take collective action on issues and events critical to workers and their families. It is the body that has repeatedly transformed what might otherwise be mere groupings of workers seeking specific gains into a **LABOUR MOVEMENT** fighting for the welfare of all working people.

Early Successes

From 1912 to 1983, the Alberta Federation of Labour held annual meetings with the provincial Cabinet



gains won by the Canadian Labour Party (CLP) in Alberta through school board, municipal, provincial and federal elections.

An uneasy alliance of liberal-labour and socialist activists, the CLP in those years was virtually synonymous with the leadership of the AFL. The Party hit its peak in 1926 when it elected six MLAs, as well as a number of city councilors and school board members. Alex Ross, a Calgary stonemason and past-president of the AFL, was elected as a Labour MLA, but served as both Minister of Public Works and Minister of Labour in the United Farmers of Alberta government.

Legislative gains in those years included a new Workmen's Compensation Act, followed by many amendments; safety provisions governing scaffolding and building construction; a prohibition on work for children under the age of 16; changes to the Municipalities Act to provide a tenant's franchise; a fair wage policy; abolition of property qualifications for civic office; and the eight-hour day for all government contracts. As a result, during the pre-World War II era, Alberta's labour laws were amongst the best in the country.

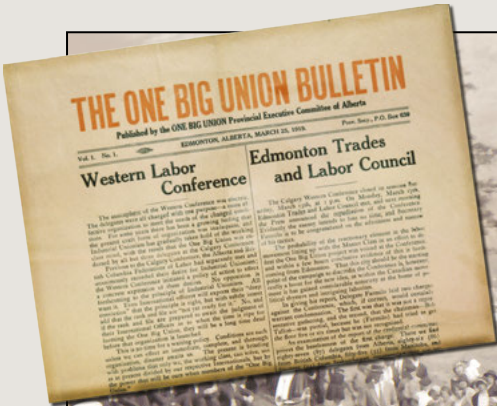


Alberta Labor News article on successful election of labour candidates (Photo APA)

to present labour's agenda as established by its annual conventions. With the original Liberal government, and particularly with the UFA government during the 1920's, the AFL was able to win modest but significant legislative gains for working people through this annual lobby. In this, it was aided and abetted by

Coal miners and the Federation

From 1912 to 1939, coal miners were the dominant force in Alberta's labour movement; the twists and turns experienced by their unions



Crowsnest Pass rally during miners strike (Photo CM) One Big Union news bulletin, 1919 (Photo MPA)

therefore had a major impact on the Federation. When present in strength, they pushed the boundaries allowed by the craft unions, formulating demands for first a socialist and then a communist political allegiance. They passed AFL resolutions during WWII calling for the nationalization of all war industries, as well as the banks and other key industries, for free universal health care, and for national unemployment insurance. In 1923 the Nacmine union local proposed that since the “burden of poverty and unemployment fall with crushing effect upon

the children of the working class... that all children will be assured of food, clothing, shelter and education, by making every child the first charge against the state.”

Coal miners were also the major force behind the formation of the One Big Union (OBU) in 1919 in Calgary, when 95 per cent voted to leave the UMWA to join the new radical union. In most places, the OBU never really got off the ground, as it was caught up in the suppression that followed the Winnipeg General strike. In District 18,

however, the entire UMWA executive, save one, declared itself District One, the Mining Department of the OBU. Only the combined forces of the mining companies, the state and the UMWA prevented the miners from staying in the OBU. Despite a federal directive ordering miners back into the UMWA, it was not until 1923 that the majority were again within the ranks of the UMWA and the Alberta Federation of Labour.

This reunification was short-lived, however, as the new communist-led Mine Workers Union of Canada (MWUC) took 4,000 coal miners out of the AFL in 1925, leaving District 18 with only 1,500 members. The new union applied for membership in the AFL, but was refused; as a consequence, Frank Wheatley had to step down as Federation President since he had also been elected national President of the MWUC. The majority of coal miners would remain outside the AFL for the next ten years. As a consequence, the Federation found itself financially insolvent by 1926, forcing Secretary-Treasurer Elmer E. Roper to propose cost-cutting measures.

When the MWUC joined District 18 in 1935, the union was once again the leading affiliate of the Federation. Again, it was a brief reunion, as by 1939 the UMWA, along with the rest of the new industrially organized Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) unions had been expelled, firstly from the

American Federation of Labor, and then on American orders, from the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada and all its bodies.

District 18, along with the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA), the industrial union that was soon to eclipse the miners as Alberta's largest most militant union, was instrumental in establishing the Industrial Federation of Labour of Alberta (IFL) as a rival to the AFL in 1949. This would be the swan song for the UMWA, however, as the collapse of the coal industry left it with only one working mine by the late 1950's. Leadership of the AFL and the labour movement passed to the new industrial unions, as well as the rising public sector.

A drift to conservatism and the McCarthy era

With the departure of the UMWA in 1939, the Alberta Federation of Labour entered a conservative period. It's largest affiliate, the Civil Service Association of Alberta (CSA), had been affiliated to the AFL since 1927, hiring long-time



union bureaucrat Alf Farmilo as executive-secretary in 1928. In 1944, it paid dues on 2,000 members, and by 1958, it had grown to 5,000

members, many of whom were upper level government officials.

Farmilo served as President of the AFL from 1940 to 1944, developing close ties to the Social Credit government, and once describing Premier William Aberhart as a “beloved leader and personal friend.” Carl Berg, Secretary-Treasurer of the Federation in the 1930’s and 1940’s, complimented the Federation on “the very close cooperation that had been enjoyed by the officers of affiliated unions with the government during the last year.”

It was the habit of the Federation to invite the Minister of Labour, the Premier and other government leaders to speak at its conventions. It was in this context that Labour Minister Dr. J. L. Robinson complimented the Trades and Labour Congress in 1949 for its enthusiastic endorsement of the McCarthy era as evidenced by its expulsion of the Canadian Seamen’s Union and other communists, and urged the AFL to follow suit. AFL President, Herbert G. Turner, member of the Edmonton local of the musicians’ union, agreed. It was good, he said, that “the Congress has been completely purged of the reactionary forces.”

The AFL’s retreat from radicalism and militancy reached its nadir in 1948 when the Federation endorsed amendments to the Alberta Labour Act that severely penalized unions engaging in illegal strikes, including provisions to declare collective

agreements null and void. The rival Industrial Federation of Labour accused the AFL of being an unofficial arm of the Social Credit government.

Industrial organizing and re-unification

During this conservative period, the new industrial unions affiliated to the Industrial Federation of Labour, and the Canadian Congress of Labour nationally, were increasingly successful in organizing workers despite an increasingly anti-union Social Credit government.

As one example, the TLC had set up a directly chartered Local to organize all meat packing plants in Edmonton, but it was considered as little more than a company union by the workers. So when the more militant United Packinghouse Workers (UPWA) came to Alberta, workers quickly switched allegiance to it, beginning with the Edmonton Burns plant in 1943 and Canada Packers a year later. With Vancouver and Toronto already organized, the UPWA began a campaign for a national contract which it won after a national strike of meat packers in 1947. Workers in the Calgary packing plants soon followed their Edmonton counterparts into the union.

Neil Reimer came to Alberta in 1951 as an organizer with the Oil Workers’ International Union (later to become the Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers; today, the Communications, Energy & Paperworkers’ Union). That year, he organized



Union recognition vote at Canada Packers Edmonton, 1946 (Photo APA)

Local 630 at Union Carbide, and a year later organized the Husky refinery in Lloydminster, despite open opposition from the government and company. By 1955, industrial unions had established a base of over 8,000 members in the Industrial Federation of Labour, which included workers in the mines, steel plants, packinghouses, energy sector and on the railway.

Organizing along industrial lines was not the only important difference between the industrial unions in the Canadian Congress of Labour and the craft unions in the TLC. While both used undemocratic means to purge communist-led unions, their

political stances differed. The Canadian Congress of Labour remained a faithful supporter of the socialist Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, while the TLC and its provincial body, the AFL, steadily retreated from political involvement. It had become decidedly non-partisan, extremely reluctant to denounce Social Credit policies affecting its members, even when these restricted their right to organize and strike.

Unity in Alberta's union movement was spurred by developments south of the border. In 1955, the American Federation of Labor and the industrially-based Congress of Industrial Organizations resolved their differences



Canadian Labour Congress convention Edmonton 1960's (Photo APA)

to merge into one union central. A year later, their Canadian counterparts, the Trades and Labour Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour, followed suit forming the Canadian Labour Congress.

The Alberta Federation of Labour and the Industrial Federation of Labour also merged that year. Although a craft unionist, Charlie Gilbert, the first President of the new body, was a supporter of both the CCF and industrial unionism. The first Secretary-Treasurer, and later President from 1960-63, was Edmonton meat packer Jack Hampson.

The new federation and the CCF

By 1957, the new Federation had grown to about 34,000 members, and was actively challenging the anti-union laws and practices of Ernest Manning's Social Credit regime.

That year, its convention passed resolutions calling for a legal ban on strikebreakers, and condemning a right-to-work campaign launched by the Canadian Manufacturers Association and Chamber of Commerce.

This political stance allowed the CCF and organized labour to formalize their relationship. Following dismal electoral showings provincially and nationally, the two sides launched negotiations and organized political clubs which resulted in the creation of the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 1959. Unfortunately, when the new party was declared the official political arm of the labour movement, the huge Civil Servants Association withdrew from the AFL, its executive firmly committed to remaining apolitical.

Just as the new party was being organized, Social Credit won a massive provincial majority, electing 51 members on June 18, 1959 against one Liberal, one Conservative and one independent Social Credit. The CCF was completely wiped out. The victorious Social Credit government immediately moved on Alberta's Labour Act, with changes that were all detrimental to workers.

The Federation responded with a huge campaign, organizing meetings across the province and a letter-writing campaign to include every MLA. Trade unionists lobbied Ministers and other MLA's in person, and the AFL presented a massive brief at the annual Cabinet meeting outlining



Neil Reimer (right) with Tommy Douglas (left) at a CLC convention, 1960's (Photo APA)

labour's objections. In his report to the 1961 Convention, AFL President Frank Bodie said, "We now know that Legislation established by hard work, time, effort, and real sacrifice by our Trade Unionists of yesteryear can be taken away on very short notice."

The rise of the public sector

The 1960's and 1970's saw a renaissance of the labour movement across Canada stemming largely from the growing political influence of the New Democratic Party and the unionization of the public sector. NDP governments appeared in

British Columbia, Manitoba and the original CCF stronghold of Saskatchewan. The major accomplishment of the Party, however, occurred at the federal level, where it was able to pressure the governing Liberals to adopt many of its policies in order to stay in power. Medicare, major improvements in unemployment insurance, the institution of a national contributory pension plan and improvements in advanced education and social security can all be attributed to the NDP.

Meanwhile, public sector workers were improving their own standard of living by unionizing. A bitter



NDP youth activists support Packinghouse workers strike, Edmonton, 1960's (Photo APA)

strike by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) in 1965 led to the passage of the Public Service Staff Relations Act (PSSRA), thus opening the door to collective bargaining for government workers across Canada.

This invigorated a public sector that had previously had little influence in the AFL. Municipal and transit workers' locals in Calgary, Lethbridge, Edmonton and Medicine Hat had been members since 1919 as independently-chartered locals.

By 1954, Calgarian Pat Lenihan had

spearheaded the creation of a provincial council of municipal workers 3,000 strong. In 1963, this became part of a new national union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), unifying municipal, school board and hospital employees.

In the early 1970's, as well, an increasingly militant CSA was able to recast itself as the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) and rejoin the Alberta Federation of Labour. By the end of the decade, public sector workers in CUPE, AUPE, CUPW, the Public

Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the Letter Carriers Union of Canada (LCUC) represented half the membership of the AFL. By this time, nurses and other professional healthcare workers had unionized in the United Nurses of Alberta (UNA) and the Health Science Association of Alberta (HSAA). However, they did not join the Federation until the turn of the century, and today are leading members of the House of Labour.

Not only did public sector workers swell the ranks of organized labour in Alberta; they also raised the militancy and social focus of the movement. Unfortunately, the dream of unity suffered a setback in 1981, when the construction trade unions left both the CLC and the AFL in a dispute over voting power and politics. To this day, most have yet to re-affiliate.

With the influx of public sector unions, women became an ever-larger proportion of the membership, and gender issues emerged as a focus for the Federation. Meat packers had taken job action in the 1940's to win equal pay for equal work for women. However, the AFL could now tackle the systematic undervaluation of 'women's work' with campaigns for pay equity. Unions and labour centrals at all levels formed women's committees to highlight this and other women's issues.

Although both the environment and human rights had been addressed

at AFL conventions as early as the 1950's, a sustained focus on these issues began in the 1980's, demonstrating a new outward-reaching perspective for the labour movement. Human rights committees were separated into components dealing with gender, sex, racism and other equality issues. The Federation itself launched social coalitions focused on Medicare (Friends of Medicare), economic and social equality (Solidarity Alberta, Unemployed Action Centres) and the environment.

Globalization and labour restraint

An increasingly effective labour movement met a head-on attack by the corporate sector in the mid-70's, when the federal Liberals took a sharp right turn from progressive policies to invoke wage and price controls aimed directly at organized labour. A wage control program from 1976-78 was immediately followed by '6&5' restraints on federal public sector workers lasting to 1984. At the same time, a deep national recession in the early 1980's, due in part to monetarist policies adopted by the federal government, constrained bargaining in the private sector

Canada's corporate elite developed even more effective strategies to promote its political agenda. It formed the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI) in 1974 to lobby governments for the kind of neoliberal policies that had emerged south of the border. To convince a post-War public skeptical of busi-



AFL organize rally to oppose Bill 41 which restricted public sector worker's rights, 1977 (Photo AFL)
Button from AFL "War on 44" campaign, 1983

ness self-interest, think tanks with such academic-sounding names as the Fraser and C.D. Howe Institutes were created to present business's case, supposedly grounded in scholarly research. A corporate-controlled media reported their findings as if they were something other than business-funded propaganda.

A labour movement which had enjoyed growing legitimacy in the 1960-1975 period found itself caught without a coherent response. A national day of protest against wage and price controls in 1977 did little to stem the attack on bargain-

ing rights. Likewise labour opposition to free trade with the United States as proposed by Liberal Finance Minister Donald MacDonald proved ineffective when Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney moved to implement the trade pacts.

In Alberta, an anti-labour Social Credit government had been swept out of power by Peter Lougheed's Conservatives in 1971. Conservatives have remained in power to this day, passing increasingly negative labour legislation to allow employers to undermine or by-pass unions. They began with the Public Service

Employee Relations Act in 1977, which stripped bargaining rights from provincial and other public sector employees. Unimpeded access to a 24-hour lock-out and spin-off companies devastated construction trade unions in the early 80's, and regressive revisions to labour legislation in 1983 and 1988 introduced massive fines and threats of decertification, unconstitutional bans on secondary picketing, and excessive court interference in disputes, all hamstringing labour organization in the province.

Fighting back in the new world economy

The labour movement fought back with renewed leadership from the Alberta Federation of Labour. A series of walkouts by government workers and other trade unionists in the early 1980's culminated in 1986 in strikes at the Gainers plant in Edmonton and Fletchers in Red Deer, as well as strikes-lockouts at Suncor in Fort McMurray, the Alberta Liquor Control Board, and Zeidlers in Edmonton and Slave Lake.

The Federation played a strong role in mobilizing support for all of these, including organizing the largest labour rallies ever held in Alberta. Following an illegal strike in 1988 by nurses in the new United Nurses of Alberta, the AFL was instrumental in gathering donations from across the country to help pay over \$450,000 in fines levied against the union for contempt of court.

Alberta's trade unions also looked to the AFL for leadership when Ralph Klein became Premier in 1992, launching an era of full-blown neoliberal challenges to Alberta's public sector and its unions. In an ideologically-motivated war against the provincial debt, Klein engaged in massive budget cuts, imposing a 20-per-cent cut on all the vital public services in 1993 alone. These combined with a determined program of privatization which did not slow until hospital laundry workers walked off the job in Calgary in 1995. The Federation of Labour once again mobilized picket line support and was actively working toward a general sympathy strike when a settlement was reached.

Today, the Alberta Federation of Labour is championing the rights of workers on such basic issues as retirement pensions and quality public services financed by government revenues based on a fair system of taxation and energy royalties. It has become a respected defender of rights for the increasing numbers of temporary foreign workers in the province, at the same time as it continues to speak out on behalf of the province's aboriginal people.

By reaching out to all communities of working people on issues that range from quality public healthcare to government accountability, the AFL has regained its rightful place as a leader in the fight for social and economic justice in Alberta.



AFL plays lead role in organizing a massive rally in support of workers on strike against Gainers, Edmonton, 1986 (Photo Edmonton Journal)

Conclusion: One Hundred Years in the Cause of Unity

Over the last 100 years, the Alberta Federation of Labour has earned a solid reputation for its efforts to unify support for workers wherever they fight to preserve or improve working and living conditions. Whether led by President Dave Werlin in the 1980's or by Gil McGowan today, unions have come to expect leadership from the Federation on subjects which concern their members as well as working people in general.

21 Through its highs and lows, the

AFL has lobbied for just labour laws and other measures of benefit to all workers. It has won protections, and has also seen some of them removed at the stroke of a pen.

It was an important part of a great movement through which workers won the 40-hour week, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, safety regulations at work, child labour laws, minimum wages, equal pay for work of equal value, and human rights protection at work. It has also seen these gains attacked and eroded by



governments and employers.

The Federation has helped organize workers, and has given voice to their collective aspirations. It has provided education for workers and trained activists. It has mobilized support for both affiliates and non-affiliates, and has been a forum for open discourse and honest debate between their leaders and activists.

At its best, the Alberta Federation of Labour has kept alive the age-old dream of a better province in which workers could live and work

in dignity. It is this broad vision, as well as the unity which transforms it into reality, that is necessary if trade unions are to be more than a means to protect the narrow interest of specific groups of workers.

The Alberta Federation of Labour has proven to be an essential part of a movement that has focused labour's ambitions on broader ideals and principles. It has inspired workers to mobilize and organize, to struggle, sacrifice and build a better world for themselves and their children.

Presidents of the Alberta Federation of Labour

July 1912 - Oct. 1913	John O. Jones	UMWA	Coal miner, Hillcrest
Oct. 1914 - Jan. 1916	Alex Ross	BMIU	Bricklayer, Calgary
Jan. 1917 - Jan. 1919	J. A. Kinney	UBCJA	Carpenter, Edmonton
Jan. 1919 - Nov. 1926	Frank Wheatley	UMWA	Coal miner, Bankhead
Nov. 1926 - Nov. 1940	Fred J. White	ITU	Typesetter, Calgary
Nov. 1940 - Feb. 1944	Alfred Farmilo	JSANA	Stonecutter, Edmonton
Feb. 1944 - Nov. 1946	D.B. MacKenzie	MPO	Projectionist, Calgary
Nov. 1946 - Nov. 1948	George McDougall	UBCJA	Carpenter, Calgary
Nov. 1948 - Oct. 1949	Herbert G. Turner	AFM	Musician, Edmonton
Oct. 1949 - Oct. 1950	Harry Boyse	Leth. TLC	Union staff, Lethbridge
Oct. 1950 - Oct. 1953	R. P. Rintoul	ATU	Transit driver, Calgary
Oct. 1953 - Oct. 1955	Robert Scott	IBTCWHA	Teamster, Calgary
Oct. 1955 - Sep. 1956	Charles Gilbert	ITU	Typesetter, Edmonton

Presidents of the Alberta Industrial Federation of Labour

Jan. 1949 - Jan. 1952	Jack Hampson	UPWA	Meat packer
Jan. 1952 - Jan. 1953	Robert Atkin	CBRE	Railway worker
Jan. 1953 - Sep. 1956	Jack Hampson	UPWA	Meat packer

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 CM - Crowsnest Museum, GAA - Glenbow Archives of Alberta,
 MPA - Manitoba Provincial Archives

Presidents of the Alberta Federation of Labour



Sep. 1956 - Oct. 1957	Charles Gilbert	ITU	Typesetter, Edmonton
Oct. 1957 - Nov. 1958	David L Erickson	IBTCWHA	Teamster, Edmonton
Nov. 1958 - Oct. 1960	Frank C. Bodie	ATU	Transit driver, Calgary
Oct. 1960 - Oct. 1964	Jack Hampson	UPWA	Meat packer, Edmonton
Oct. 1964 - Oct. 1966	G. Doug Murdoch	BMIU	Bricklayer, Calgary
Oct. 1966 - May 1973	Roy Jamha	UPWA	Meat packer, Edmonton
May 1973 - May 1977	Reg Basken	ECWU	Energy sector, Edmonton
May 1977 - Feb. 1983	Harry Kostiuik	UFCW	Meat packer, Edmonton
Feb. 1983 - May 1989	Dave Werlin	CUPE	City worker, Calgary
May 1989 - May 1993	Don Aitken	PSAC	Federal worker, Edmonton
May 1993 - May 1995	Linda Karpowich	AUPE	Social worker, Edmonton
May 1995 - May 2001	Audrey Cormack	CEP	Energy sector, Leduc
May 2001 - April 2004	Les Steel	CUPE	City worker, Edmonton
June 2004 - May 2005	Kerry Barrett	UFCW	Retail clerk, Medicine Hat
May 2005 - Current	Gil McGowan	CEP	Reporter, Edmonton

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Project 2012 is a joint project of the Alberta Federation of Labour and the Alberta Labour History Institute. The project will produce materials which celebrate the AFL's 100th anniversary in 2012, and will record the history of working Albertans.

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