Chinese-origin workers had been brought into Canada to do some of the most dangerous work involved in bringing the CPR across the mountain ranges. Of 18,000 Chinese workers involved in building the railroad, 1500 died in the course of their work.

But when the railway was completed, these workers faced racist restrictions on every front. Shut out of most jobs in the resource and manufacturing industries, they mainly concentrated in the service sector, where employers played up a stereotype of servility of Oriental workers.
“When I had my daughter, and she’s 42, there was no maternity leave. You had to quit. When I first started working for the city and up until about 1970 and both the city of Edmonton and the city of Calgary, you had to quit if you got married, because they assumed that your husband would look after you. How hard we fought to get things!”

—Jean Ross, long-time CUPE activist
Spending his entire childhood as a slave in Texas, John Ware took advantage of the freeing of the slaves in the American Civil War (which ended in 1865) to become a working cowboy, that is, a worker on cattle ranches.

Contrary to Hollywood images, about a third of the cowboys of the emerging American cattle frontier in the western U.S.A. were African-Americans like Ware, welcomed for their horsemanship and physical strength but largely kept from becoming ranch owners themselves. Ware made his way to southern Alberta in the 1880s where he was able to purchase his own ranch. His ranching skills became legendary, though his success did not prevent the federal government from closing the door to most of the African-Americans after him who sought to become ranchers or farmers in Alberta.
“They had quite a system worked out. There were certain legal firms in this province that were well connected with the Social Credit government, who were very instrumental in helping form company unions and setting up constitutions...What the company did was plant people right in the plant. They hired people who were...traveling around from one plant to another, forming company unions.”

—Gene Mitchell, long-time Alberta trade union official
TODAY’S RECOMMENDATIONS

Striking waitstaff outside Edmonton Club, 1961. Edmonton Club locked workers out when they asked for a 5 cent raise (to 80 cents/hour).

NACHOS
Crispy tortilla chips topped with green enchilada sauce, pimento and tomato, green onion and a blend of melted cheese. Serve with sour cream.
I gotta tell you the story about an arbitration we had. If you don't need unions, this is an example. This lady was a helper for the handibus. She had a mentally handicapped child. Her bus used to take her to the school and pick her up at the school. One day when they were going to pick her up, her daughter was gone. Obviously, she got really upset. The van was going to take off and she said, 'I'm not going to go, I gotta find my daughter first.' She was fired... As it turned out, we were successful. I think she got about $6000 in back pay. But things like that have a big impact on the rest of the membership. We organized them, we organized the cafeteria workers."

—Gunter Bruckner, Amalgamated Transit Union, Calgary
Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters convention, early 1940s
"I didn’t know anything. They gave you a rag and a sewing machine and tell you, here, sew. I never sewed in my life before. Those power machines are a little different than you’d be sewing at home. They go like crazy. So you sit down and you have to control it so you don’t sew your fingers…It was piece work, everything was piece work. It depended how many pieces you made, and you got paid so much per bundle…If you didn’t make the minimum wage, that was too bad.”

Anne Oziplko, describing her early years at GWG in the 1940s.

“I believe our pensions and our health and welfare are probably the thing I would be most proud of. We now have a pension plan. The younger people are going to be fairly well looked after and live decently, compared to the older ones. Our older members had to retire with $300 or $400 pensions. Our younger people are going to be much better off. Our health and welfare helps families that need to be helped. Not as much as we would like maybe, but we’re helping them.”

— Wally Shaw, retired member of Bricklayer and Allied Crafts Workers, Edmonton
Relief strikers, Edmonton Alberta, May 1934. Relief recipients were required to do work for the city in return for their vouchers. Relief strikers refused to perform that labour until conditions improved.

“We wanted relief; we wanted work; we wanted food... I knew that in the 1930s in California they were throwing oranges into the ocean. In Brazil they were burning coffee. In the Okanagan they poured gasoline on apples.”

—Ben Swankey, trade unionist and Communist, describing the radicalizing influences during the Great Depression.
March of Unemployed Married Men’s Association (UMMA) during the Depression.

1871 Paris Commune crushed with 25,000 killed
1899 Eight thousand miners in District 18 join sympathy strike with Winnipeg workers
1830 Mary Harris Jones (Mother Jones) born
1917 Civic Employees Federal Union No. 30 granted charter
1903 International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen grants charter to Local 1 in Edmonton
1919 Western Labour Congress in Calgary votes to dissociate Western labour from Trades and Labour Congress of Canada and form One Big Union
2002 Edmonton United Food and Commercial Workers Local 401 strike begins
1918 Karl Marx born in Trier, Germany
1963 First issue of Alberta’s labour newspaper, Bond of Brotherhood, appears in Calgary

1919 Western Labour Congress in Calgary votes to dissociate Western labour from Trades and Labour Congress of Canada and form One Big Union

1906 Workers demonstrating in Chicago for the eight-hour day are attacked by police on Haymarket Square
1919 Edmonton and Calgary general strikes in solidarity with Winnipeg General Strike begin

1871 Paris Commune crushed with 25,000 killed
1899 Eight thousand miners in District 18 join sympathy strike with Winnipeg workers

1886 Workers demonstrating in Chicago for the eight-hour day are attacked by police on Haymarket Square
1818 Karl Marx born in Trier, Germany
1963 First issue of Alberta’s labour newspaper, Bond of Brotherhood, appears in Calgary
Postal workers, Edmonton’’—In the first decade of the twentieth century, both Edmonton and Calgary grew by leaps and bounds, and without government controls or planning. For many years, neither housing nor government services were adequate to meet the needs of the new arrivals. Many working-class families and individuals lived in tents. Postal workers worked out of tents that housed the mail service until a post office building could be built.
“...it was the coalminers in Drumheller who got together and had a huge shower in the Newcastle Hall and supplied us with absolutely everything we needed for that house, except the big pieces of furniture. Nobody had insurance. Couldn’t afford it, for one thing. The community was there for everybody. That was part of my dad’s philosophy and most of the people who were active in the union there, who were just active in the community.”

— Jan Tarasoff, a coal miner’s daughter from the Drumheller area, describes the community effort for her family after their home burned down in the 1940s.
About 1500 Albertans were among the unemployed marchers who joined the On-To-Ottawa Trek that began with a plan by the Relief Camp Workers Union to take their demands to Prime Minister R.B. Bennett in Ottawa. They demanded work with wages or social assistance at above-poverty levels for the single men.
who had been forced to live and work in remote relief camps under the control of the Department of Defence. As the trekkers’ ranks increased, Bennett became determined to crush this demonstration of the unemployed. He ordered the RCMP to suppress the trek at Regina and force the trekkers to return to their homes or relief camps.

“I’ll never forget that day when the police attacked our demonstration. We were all standing in the square in Regina. I was near a curb sidewalk, and a big truck pulled up. I’ll never forget the name, Peacock Pounder. The tarp went up and it was full of Mounties. They rushed out, hitting left and right with their crops, heavy loaded crops. They didn’t get any order to cease and desist. There was no such order. From the other side of the square, the city police moved in. I was one of those who was picked up.”

—Jack Phillips, a relief camp inmate and unemployed organizer describing the police attack on On-to-Ottawa demonstrators in Regina on July 1, 1935.
A 14-year old boy fixes farm equipment on a farm near Fort McMurray. Farmworkers are presently excluded from the province's labour code, making it technically illegal for them to organize for their rights.
On August 20, 1999, farmworker Terry Rash was found dead in the ditch beside Highway 36. He had been stabbed six times by his employer, irate because of damage to an old farm field truck. That event sparked the formation of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta (FUA), an organization dedicated to equal treatment of farmworkers with other workers in the province. Farmworkers are excluded from all labour legislation, and lack the right to unionize, and the protections afforded by occupational health and safety legislation, including Workmen’s Compensation Board compensation for injured workers. The FUA, though all it asks for is the right to bargain collectively for farmworkers, is, in law, an organization formed for an illegal purpose.

The courts initially treated Terry Rash’s murder as murderously giving him only 14 months jail time with a recommendation for early release. Only FUA pressures forced the sentence to be increased to 34 months.

The mortality rate among farmworkers in Alberta is four times the British Columbia rate in the years since an NDP government brought farmworkers under labour legislation.

Write your MLA and ask your union to lobby the provincial government to end the long history of exploitation and unequal rights of Alberta farmworkers. C.c. your letters and resolutions to Eric Musekamp, president, Farmworkers Union of Alberta, Box 411, Bow Island, AB., T0K OGO.

August 20 has been declared by the Alberta Federation of Labour as Farmworker Day in memory of Terry Rash and in solidarity with the struggle of farmworkers to achieve dignity and respect.

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In 1932 the Crow's Nest Pass was the site of many strikes by coal miners during the Great Depression as the coal operators tried to maintain their profits by cutting workers' wages. Community members rallied together to pressure the mineowners to maintain wages and preserve the communities. Blairmore was the most radical town, electing a Communist-led town council in 1934.
“...it was very common to see women walking around with blackened eyes and bruises. You knew what had happened, but people just took it as part of what life was. It wasn’t all men like that, but some men were very cruel to their wife and children...People would give the women support, we feel sorry for you, or try to help doctor her up. But no one really stepped in and stopped it. In that day and age, every man’s home was his own, and you didn’t enter it or change things.”

—Joyce Avramenko, coal miner’s wife, describing the dark side of working-class life in East Coulee in the 1940s and 1950s.
Provincial government workers, members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, went on strike for better wages and working conditions in 1980 despite Conservative Premier Peter Lougheed's legislation forbidding public service strikes. This was the first major challenge of the legislation.
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Alberta Teachers Alliance holds province’s first teachers’ strike.</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>Unionists in Calgary stage sympathy strike with Calgary freight handlers.</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>Grace Hartman becomes CUPE president, the first woman president of a major union in North America.</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>One Big Union miners begin province-wide strike. Government passes Order-in-Council for miners to accept UMWA as their official representative.</td>
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<td>1945</td>
<td>International Union of Operating Engineers Local 915 granted charter.</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 379 chartered in Calgary.</td>
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<td>1865</td>
<td>Delegates meet and form the National Bricklayers Union.</td>
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<td>1919</td>
<td>Alberta Teachers Alliance holds province’s first teachers’ strike.</td>
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<td>1918</td>
<td>Amalgamated Meatcutters Union formed in Edmonton.</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>Founding meeting of Alberta Labour History Institute at southside Rosie’s, Edmonton.</td>
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In May 1982, eight Alberta Health Unit

all job action by workers in the health sector. Construction workers suffered drastic cuts in pay and benefits as their legal union contracts

fell victim first to provincial legislation that ended the practice of maintaining an existing contract until a new one was negotiated, and then to employer practices, supported by the government, of creating “spin-off companies” that were not bound by union contracts still in force.

In May 1982, eight Alberta Health Unit

United Nurses Associations locked out their nurses, members of the plumbers and pipefitters. When the nurses emerged victorious from this struggle,

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the government responded with Bill 11 (the Medical Health Services Continuation Act), which banned

then to employer practices, supported by the government, of creating “spin-off companies” that were not bound by union contracts still in force.
### November

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- **1934** Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers International Alliance Local 371 re-chartered to become Local 271, Edmonton
- **1995** CUPE Local 8 and Local 12 hospital laundry workers’ illegal strike in Calgary ends with a moratorium on contracting out
- **1902** United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America granted charter as Local 1325, Edmonton, the oldest construction union still operating under its original charter in Alberta

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"But what really got their back up was when the Labour Relations Board had ordered that they couldn’t even take this vote. This isn’t Nazi Germany. We’ll do what we want.”

*Margaret Ethier, president of the United Nurses of Alberta for much of the 1980s, describing why nurses struck in 1988 "illegally."*

1912 Alberta Federation of Labour founded in Lethbridge

1967 Maple Leaf pork plant (formerly Gainers) workers strike despite company threat to close plant if workers strike

1982 Edmonton Shaw Conference Centre workers UFCW Local 401 strike ends with workers winning first contract

1992 Canadian Paperworkers Union, Communications Workers of Canada, and the Energy and Chemical Workers Union merge to create Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP)

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1995 CUPE Local 8 and Local 12 hospital laundry works...
Workers at Oil Well,
Turner Valley, Alberta
“You never forget the sound of heads being clubbed…There were people gathered…None of us could understand why people were starving in a big beautiful half empty country…Then the police got off their horses…People ran for shelter in the pyramids of Christmas trees that were on sale. The clubbing went on. The heads were being clubbed inside the shelter of those trees…a lot of people were injured.”

—Clare Botsford, who was 8 years old at the time of the Edmonton Hunger March on December 21, 1932.
Edmonton and District Labour Council

The Edmonton Trades and Labour Council (ETLC), which began operation in 1905, received a charter from the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) on August 6, 1906, to represent the interests of workers at the municipal level. Construction unions, the railway trades, and printers provided the bulk of the members before World War One, but unions of barbers, musicians, retail clerks, journeyworker tailors, garment workers, and hotel and restaurant employees figured among the membership.

The ETLC lobbied governments, especially the city council of Edmonton, for legislation favourable to workers' interests, and made unionization of city workers and companies receiving city contracts a priority, along with public ownership of utilities. By World War 1, the ETLC was endorsing candidates for city council. In 1917, the ETLC sponsored the formation of the Labour Representation League, a political arm of the Council which established a formal platform for candidates endorsed by labour. Edmonton's League, along with Calgary's, also the creation of the local Trades Council, fought conscription during World War One, demanding that wartime corporate profits be disallowed before young men were forced to risk their lives.

After the war, the ETLC leaders played a large role in sponsoring the creation of a province-wide Labour Party, which had representation from Edmonton in the provincial legislature from 1921 to 1935 when the Social Credit tide destroyed the party. In the early 1930s, a majority of Edmonton's city councilors, including the mayor, had won election as Labour candidates pledged to a platform devised by the ETLC.

As urban and industrial development occurred beyond the formal borders of Edmonton, the ETLC invited participation from union locals within the Edmonton-based region, eventually renaming the organization as the Edmonton and District Trades and Labour Council. When the building trades left to form their own council, the name was changed to Edmonton and District Labour Council (EDLC). Today that district includes the City of Edmonton, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, St. Albert, Leduc, Vegreville, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and the counties of Sturgeon, Strathcona, and Parkland.

The EDLC is now chartered by the Canadian Labour Congress, which was formed in 1956 when the TLC merged with the Congress of Canadian Labour. It is run by its 80 affiliated union locals via their elected delegates. It still lobbies municipal governments in the Edmonton region on behalf of workers. But it also participates in a variety of community events. It organizes the annual Labour Day barbecue for the the unemployed, runs an annual labour school, and participates actively in the Edmonton May Week Festival, the United Way, the Alberta Labour History Institute, and other community organizations.
Alberta Building Trades Council

Until 1958, the building trades played a key role in the deliberations of the Edmonton and District Trades and Labour Council. That year, the building trades decided to create their own organization to represent the interests of construction workers. Though the Alberta Building Trades Council, like the urban labour councils, saw its role as one of lobbying governments, it also made the training of tradespeople one of its key roles.

The Building Trades Council has fought an uphill struggle since the 1980s to prevent developers from using sweated, non-union labour in construction projects. The downturn of the provincial economy throughout that decade and into the 1990s favoured employers, who, in turn, had provincial government support in their anti-union efforts. The gradual recovery of the economy from the late 1990s benefited unions and their members, but the state and employer offensive in favour of “open shops” and the management-friendly Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) continued unabated. The Council organized labour’s effort to oppose bringing temporary foreign workers to Alberta on the grounds that Canada has enough construction workers to meet the demands of construction employers in Alberta, and that immigrants to Canada should be free to choose their jobs and unions, as temporary workers most pointedly are not.

The Alberta Building Trades Council includes unions of boilermakers, bricklayers, operative plasterers and cement mixers, elevator constructors, heat and frost insulators, iron workers, operating engineers, painters, plumbers and pipefitters, sheet metal workers, teamsters, tile and terrazzo workers, electrical workers, carpenters and joiners, and millwrights.
The Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI) was formed in 1999 by a group of trade unionists, community activists, archivists and historians, who decided to take the first steps to collect, preserve, and publicize the stories of Alberta’s working people and their organizations. We incorporated under the Societies Act and are governed by a board that has been growing steadily.

ALHI has done considerable work to spread the story of unions and cultural communities by capturing the life stories of workers and trade unionists on film and in print, collecting and archiving records and artifacts of trade union and working class history, organizing Labour History Day as part of Edmonton’s History Week, and publishing and distributing a Labour History Calendar. We also provide speakers, displays, and walking tours on labour history for conferences, meetings, and other events, and are committed to building research capacity for history students. Some examples of recent and ongoing projects include:

- **An Oral History project:** As part of our ongoing efforts to preserve our history, ALHI has been interviewing labour activists of years past. This project has captured the voices and stories of dozens of Albertans who have played a vital role in union and working class history.

- **A City Called Home website:** ALHI contributed pictures, oral history clips, timelines of events and other information to “A City Called Home,” Edmonton’s 2004 centennial project. Our contributions ensured that the struggles and successes of the working people of Edmonton were not forgotten.

- **Piece by piece—the GWG story:** The Great Western Garment (GWG) Company was established in Edmonton in 1911, becoming a wholly owned subsidiary of Levi’s in 1972. In September 2003, Levi-Strauss announced that it would be moving all of its North American manufacturing jobs to Haiti. The Edmonton plant closed in March 2004, marking the end of an important era in Edmonton’s history. In partnership with the University of Alberta’s Work and Learning Network and Don Bouzek of Ground Zero Productions, we have been working to preserve the history of the GWG/Levi’s plant and the stories of its workers.

- **Labour History Map:** A new effort, this travelling map will be built by rank and file members who contribute their insight and experiences helping to define where we are today.

ALHI began its work with funding from a number of sources, including Alberta Culture, unions and individuals. Even though volunteers conduct most of our work, we require on-going support to continue our activities. Please consider some of the following ways in which you can become part of the effort:

- **Make a financial donation to support the work of ALHI.**
- **Submit a bulk order for our next Labour History Calendar, either for resale or distribution to your officers and members.**
- **Invite a representative of ALHI to make a presentation at your next meeting or educational event (PowerPoint and video available).**
- **Provide names and contact information of individuals who should be interviewed.**
- **Form a Labour History Committee to spearhead union history work in your organization. ALHI can provide technical assistance in this regard.**

For further information
Contact our President, Dave Werlin, at 780-483-8999 or dwerlin@telus.net.

To donate, send a cheque to:
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#206, 1012 - 105 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 1C9
Phone: 780-420-1400

ALHI Calendar 2006
This is the sixth edition of the Alberta Labour History Institute calendar. The purpose of the calendar is to create an awareness of the Institute and the work with which we are involved.

Photos courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.
Calendar Committee: Alvin Finkel, Jack Huhler, Ron Patterson, Gordie Thomas and Dave Werlin.
Calendar designed by Rob Butz / Oxygen Smith. (www.oxygensmith.com)

Cover—“Spain Defends World Democracy”
In 1936, the Spanish people elected a Popular Front of left-wing and centrist parties, causing the aristocrats and bourgeoisie of the country to support a military coup to protect the privileges of the rich. The opponents of democracy were led by General Franco, who was, in turn, supported financially and militarily by Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, the leading fascist leaders of Europe. International brigades of volunteers from a variety of countries, including Canada, came to Spain to defend Spanish democracy and workers’ rights. Doctor Norman Bethune of Montreal became famous for his organization of battlefield medical teams. But the right-wing governments in most of the democracies, including Canada, refused to back democracy in Spain, and the fascists established a brutal dictatorship that lasted from 1939 to 1975.