

WHERE WE COME FROM

How Immigrant
Workers Built Alberta





Alberta's Aboriginal people can lay claim to Canadian ancestries that stretch back many millennia. But the rest of us are relative newcomers. Though European fur traders had ventured into Alberta by the second half of the 1700s, permanent European settlements did not begin until the second half of the nineteenth century. The Aboriginal peoples had created sophisticated civilizations throughout Alberta with the largest section of them making their livelihoods and basing their spiritual beliefs on the hunting of buffalo and then harvesting every part of these animals to fulfil all their material needs. European intervention killed off the buffalo and the Canadian government confined the first peoples to reserves. Treaties were negotiated that the Aboriginal peoples believed would protect many of their rights. But the federal government reinterpreted the treaties in a colonial fashion that left First Nations peoples firmly under the thumb of federal "Indian agents" while the Metis received no recognition of their rights whatsoever.

Canadians of British and French descent dominated the early European settlement of the region, focusing mainly on agriculture. Gradually, other resource industries and manufacturing developed as well. Though Canadian government policies before the mid-1890s were racist and discriminated against anyone not of northern European heritage, a failure to attract sufficient numbers of farmers and workers to make the West viable for its capitalist leaders caused a change in policies. Southern and central Europeans were welcomed, but they found that they

were treated as second-class citizens, expected to settle on the least fertile lands and to do the most dangerous jobs, especially in the coal fields, without the benefit of legislation that would insure either occupational safety or their right to form unions. Such discrimination and exploitation led to the creation of militant unions and socialist parties.

While the door was gradually opened to all groups of Europeans, people of colour were largely unwanted. About 18,000 Chinese immigrants were allowed to enter the country to do the most dangerous jobs in building the CPR railway lines through the mountain passes, and 1500 of them died performing their jobs. But once the railroad was completed, the government did not want them in Canada. Steep head taxes were placed on Chinese immigrants, which prevented surviving workers from bringing their families to Canada. From 1923 to 1947, Chinese immigration was forbidden altogether except for consular and trade officials.

African-Canadians from Oklahoma settled in several areas of Alberta in the early 1900s, creating successful farming communities. But when the immigration authorities got wind of their presence, they quickly closed the door to further entry into Canada of African Americans or anyone else of African descent. Some African-Canadians from provinces east of Alberta did settle in Alberta's cities, with the men often working as railway porters. The porters formed unions but had to struggle with the trade union movement, which shared the common prejudices against non-whites, to get accepted as part of the trade union movement.

During World War 2, a racist decision by the federal government to remove all Japanese-Canadians from the West Coast and seize their property brought many Japanese-Canadians into the sugar beet fields of southern Alberta as cheap labour.

Immigration to Alberta increased dramatically after the Leduc oil strike of February 1947. But until the early 1960s, almost all of the immigrants coming to Alberta were Europeans. That was because Canadian immigration policy retained its racist bias until the European economies, fully re-established from the chaos of World War 2 and its aftermath, no longer produced the numbers of workers that Canadian employers required. Canada began recruiting in Asia and to, a lesser extent, Africa and Latin America. Sometimes skilled workers such as Filipino nurses were recruited to deal with specific shortages of skilled workers. But on the whole, while Canada was only willing to recruit skilled and professional workers, professional associations, trying to keep their services in short supply, made it difficult for individuals with advanced education in the Third World to make use of their talents in Canada. Medical doctors from India and Ukraine ended up driving cabs, while engineers from China served food in restaurants.

Refugees from civil wars also added to Alberta's growing multi-cultural mosaic beginning in the 1970s. Chileans who had supported the socialist government of Salvador Allende sought refuge after a brutal military coup in 1973. Vietnamese "boat people" came to Canada seeking a better life in the aftermath of the Vietnam war. More recently, refugees from wars in Africa have also settled in Alberta.

While most of the new immigrants to Alberta were either landed immigrants or recognized refugees, some immigrants were denied the right to become permanent citizens. Beginning in the 1970s, Mexican and Caribbean farmworkers were imported for several months of the year after which they were required to return home. No matter how many summers they worked in Canada, they were not given the right to become citizens or remain in the country when their work contracts expired.

Over time, this employer resort to "temporary foreign workers" has expanded. Tens of thousands came to Alberta during the oil boom of the first decade of the 21st century and were denied the right to become Canadian citizens. The message seemed that these mainly non-white workers were good enough to work in Alberta and Canada but not good enough to become citizens. The temporary foreign workers were denied the human rights and social services that others living in Canada enjoyed. The trade union movement, which was racist before World War 2, had become by the 1960s a major player in efforts to win human rights legislation and an end to racism in immigration, employment, and housing policies.

Though a majority of new immigrants to Alberta are now people of colour, the work force is increasingly racially stratified with people of colour, including Aboriginal peoples, over-represented in the most dangerous and poorly paid positions. Labour legislation could make these jobs more palatable, with unions better able to organize these workers and defend their rights. And human rights legislation could end the discriminatory practices of professional associations against workers from countries other than the United States and western European nations. But Alberta has had seven decades of anti-labour, pro-employer governments. So the labour movement and the organizations of people of colour have a long struggle in front of them to get legislation on the books that would create a more egalitarian society from which racism has been extirpated.

JANUARY

1909 poster issued by the federal government to entice settlement of western Canada. Once they arrived, many immigrants found that the promised image did not match the reality of the hardships they faced.

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OTTAWA, CANADA.

ARMSTRONG BROS.

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New Year's Day 1

1966 The Canadian Pension Plan went into force on this date

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1905 Conference of industrial unionists in Chicago leads to the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World

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1963 The 1,000,000th claim for compensation by an injured worker is filed with the Alberta Workmen's Compensation Board in its 45th year of operation

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1973 Negotiations for a first contract at Wardair fail. A two-month strike starts

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1929 Martin Luther King born in Atlanta, Georgia

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1906 Founding meeting of the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council

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1915 Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) poet Ralph Chaplin writes Solidarity Forever

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1962 Alberta New Democrats founding provincial convention

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1975 Canadian Air Line Flight Attendants (CALFAA) lobbying campaign defeats proposal by Transport Canada prohibiting female flight attendants from working beyond 13th week of pregnancy

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1850 Samuel Gompers, first president of American Federation of Labor, born in London, England

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1954 Workers at Fort Saskatchewan's first chemical refinery are chartered as ICWU Local 530. Now known as Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Local 530A

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1946 Supreme Court Justice Ivan Rand, dealing with an autoworkers dispute in Ontario, rules that unions have the legal right to collect dues from all members of a recognized bargaining unit, when the majority votes to create a union local

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FEBRUARY

Thousands of Chinese workers came to Canada in the early 1900's to help build the Canadian Pacific Railway. Many ended up toiling in Alberta's mountain passes. In addition to dealing with dangerous work, they also had to deal with racist attitudes.



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JANUARY

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MARCH

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Groundhog Day
1989 African National Congress allowed to operate legally in South Africa after 29-year ban

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Chinese New Year

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1965 The closing of the Standard Mine at Shaughnessy, Alberta ends the coal-mining era in southern Alberta
2002 Alberta's largest teachers' strike begins; receives strong public support

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1906 Lethbridge Trades and Labour Council granted charter
1974 General strike in Grenada leads to independence; US invades 10 years later

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1947 The gush of Leduc #1 oil well marks the beginning of a new stage of petroleum development for Alberta

Valentine's Day

1949 5,000 workers begin a four-month, illegal strike in Asbestos, Québec, a strike that marked the beginnings of militancy and secularism for the "Catholic" union federation in Quebec

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1944 PC 1003, a federal order-in-council, provides federal government recognition of collective bargaining rights for Canadian workers

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Family Day

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2001 Calgary's longest transit strike begins, ending 49 days later

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1848 Revolution begins in France, inspiring revolts across Europe
1965 District 1199 Health Care Workers becomes first U.S. labour union to oppose Vietnam War
1942 Canada forcibly removes all Japanese from the West Coast

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MARCH

Many Ukrainian immigrants formed organizations that organized social and cultural activities in their communities, such as this group in Alberta's Crowsnest Pass. (c. 1930)



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1978 Canadian Human Rights Act takes effect, outlawing discrimination on the grounds of age or marital status
1906 Seven-month United Mine Workers strike in Lethbridge begins, resulting in anti-labour Industrial Disputes Investigation Act being passed by federal government in 1907
1908 First International Women's Day started in New York City by garment workers

6 7 8 9 10 11 12

International Women's Day
1917 Calgary establishes Labour Representation League to nominate candidates in elections to all levels of government

Daylight Savings Begins 13 14 15 16 *St. Patrick's Day* 17 18 19

1919 Delegates from most union locals in western Canada meet at the Western Labour Conference in Calgary and form One Big Union
1913 First convention of the Provincial Council of Carpenters
1951 Local 630 of Oil Workers International Union certified in Edmonton, the first local in the oil industry to last for some time
1918 Government of Alberta passes province's first workers compensation legislation
1977 Members of CUPE begin lengthy strike at Parkland nursing home
1911 New York Triangle Shirtwaist Fire
147 workers, the vast majority women, perish after being locked in the factory by the employer
1919 Civil Service Association of Alberta (CSA), precursor to AUPE, formed

1'st Day of Spring 20 21 22 23 24 25 26

1980 United Nurses of Alberta organize program of action to publicize nurses' low wages
1918 Women win vote in Canadian federal elections

27 28 29 30 31

1912 IWW launches strike on Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific lines
1927 Cesar Chavez born near Yuma, Arizona
1949 Last major strike of Canadian Seamen's Union

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CANADIAN PACIFIC



African-Canadian workers doing road work in Edmonton during the Depression.

Amnesty
Spencer
 AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR
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Paul Reid
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MARCH

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MAY

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1966 The Canada Assistance Plan provides federal cost-sharing to provinces for social services

1902 United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners granted charter for Local 1055 in Calgary

1917 Strike by 7,500 Crow's Nest Pass miners belonging to the United Mine Workers of America

April Fool's Day

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1983 Bill 44 introduced: removes the legal right to strike for all hospital workers

1919 The Edmonton Free Press, journal of the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council, begins publication

2001 Amalgamated Transit Union Local 583 ends Calgary transit strike

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1907 Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers International Alliance Local 371 formed in Edmonton

1982 The Constitution Act is proclaimed, along with the Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms

1984 The Canada Health Act penalizes provinces that violate the provisions of the Medical Care Act

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1980 United Nurses of Alberta begin legal strike at 79 hospitals

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1914--Ludlow, Colorado massacre of U.S. miners

1980 Nurses defy back-to-work order, winning a negotiated settlement six days later

1951 Civic, school board, and healthcare employees form the Federation of Public Employees, forerunner of the National Union of Public Employees

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Good Friday

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1956 Canadian Labour Congress is formed as a merger of two competing trade union federations

Easter Sunday 24

Easter Monday 25

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27 International Day of Mourning

1933 Fourteen leaders of a Calgary relief strike are arrested

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1903 76 people are killed in Frank, Alberta when Turtle Mountain, weakened by mining, collapses

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1900 First Alberta local of the International Association of Machinists (IAM 357) formed in Calgary

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MAY

Japanese immigrants to Canada, as well as those born in Canada to Japanese parents, were interned during WWII and permanently stripped of their property and possessions. Many ended up working in southern Alberta's sugar beet fields under extremely harsh conditions.



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Many Italian immigrants who came to Alberta ended up working in the coal mines as well as in the building trades. (c. 1930s)

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MAY

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JULY

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1986 "The Battle of 66th Street"
United Food and Commercial
Workers (UFCW) Local 280P begin
six-month strike at Gainers meat-
packing plant
1986 UFCW workers at Fletchers in
Red Deer begin strike

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1902 United Brotherhood
of Carpenters and Joiners
granted charter for Local
1055 in Calgary

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1935 The On-to-Ottawa
Trek reaches Calgary from
Vancouver

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1381 Wat Tyler leads
march of English
peasants to London

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1872 Trade unions provided first
recognition in Canadian law but
severe restrictions force most of
them to forego registering
1912 First convention of newly-
formed Alberta Federation of
Labour begins in Lethbridge

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Father's Day

1914 Hillcrest mining disaster
leaves 189 dead, the
worst mining disaster in
Alberta's history
2002 Alberta Teachers
Association reaches deal that
ends dispute with the
Conservative government

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1st Day of Summer
National Aboriginal Day

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1919 "Bloody Saturday"
police repression of workers
in Winnipeg General Strike
results in two deaths

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St. Jean
Baptiste Day

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1869 Emma Goldman,
famous anarchist-femi-
nist, born in Kovno (now
Kaunas), Lithuania

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1926 Six Labour members
win seats in Alberta provincial
election

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1919 Government raids unions
across Canada, enforcing new
"sedition" legislation meant to
restrict unionism and
fend off socialism

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CANADIAN PACIFIC
TELEGRAPHS

C. I.
45

DOMINION OF CANADA
DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND COLONIZATION

CHINESE IMMIGRATION SERVICE

Glen Mah Poy

No. 45769

This is to certify that Ponoka, Alberta.

whose photograph is attached hereto, has
registered as required by Section 18 of the
Chinese Immigration Act, Chapter 38,
13-14 George V.

Dated at Ottawa, Ontario.

this 24th day of June 1924

CHIEF Controller of Chinese Immigration.

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After the completion of the CPR, the federal government effectively prevented immigration from China by placing a steep head tax on Chinese immigrants. The head tax was ended in 1923 and replaced with an even more racist policy, the Chinese Immigration Act which forbid most immigration from China.

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Photo courtesy: Glenbow Archives

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AUGUST

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Canada Day 1

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1919 A mass arrest of One Big Union members is coordinated by federal government
1935 On to Ottawa Trek violently repressed by RCMP in Regina
1958 Alberta proclaims its Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act

1968 Federal Medical Care Act comes into force but Alberta does not yet participate
1969 Alberta agrees to provide a provincial program that meets requirements of the federal Medical Care Act

1968 Canadian Union of Public Employees 474 in Edmonton is granted a charter
1980 AUPE "wildcat strike" at Alberta Liquor Control Board

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1977 2,500 Alberta nurses begin legal strike at seven hospitals
2000 After eight months of a bitter first contract fight, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Local 115A strikers lose fight for union contract at the Calgary Herald

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1949 International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers Local 720 charter issued

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1918 Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union organizes two hotels and six restaurants after Calgary Trades and Labour Council threatens strike
1953 Sheet Metal Workers Local 558 formed in Lethbridge

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1997 United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1118, meatpackers at the High River, Alberta plant go on strike

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1961 Amalgamated Association of Street Electric Railway and Motor Coach Employees of America Local 583 strike Calgary Transit July 11 to August 22

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1912 Woody Guthrie born in Okemah, Oklahoma

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1936 Spanish Civil War begins

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1921 United Farmers of Alberta government is elected; four Labour members are also elected

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1933 The first national convention of the CCF adopts the Regina Manifesto, pledging a socialist transformation of Canada

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1966 Canada Packers strike by United Packinghouse Workers of America

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1948 Canadian Air Line Flight Attendants Association (CALFAA) is certified

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1997 Canadian Auto Workers Local 4050 go on strike against Marriott Food Services, Michener Center, Red Deer

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AUGUST

Many Scottish immigrants facing extreme poverty immigrated to Canada in the early 1900's. Here well wishers wave goodbye to the entire Clan Donald from the Hebrides region of Scotland, who immigrated to Alberta to homestead.



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1

Heritage Day

1932 The CCF is founded in Calgary by labour, farmer and socialist parties and the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees
1906 Edmonton Trades and Labour Council granted charter
1918 With trade union pressure the Workmen's Compensation Act becomes effective for the coal mining industry.

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1997 United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1118 settles strike

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1908 Two-month national rail strike of CPR shop and yard workers begins

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1981 Wardair locks out its 700 flight attendants for 13 weeks, with the company using scabs and a strike-breaking security firm
1945 U.S. drops nuclear bomb on Hiroshima.

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1940 The Unemployment Insurance Act receives royal assent. Labour had fought a long battle for a federal program of UI

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1905 Formation of the first Medicine Hat Trades and Labour Council

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2005 Alberta Federation of Labour declares August 20 Farmworker Day in memory of Terry Rash and in solidarity with the struggle of farmworkers to achieve dignity and respect

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1911 Amalgamated Transit Union 569 granted charter
1961 Amalgamated Association of Street Electric Railway & Motor Coach Employees of America Local 583 Calgary Transit strike ends
1980 Solidarnosc founded in Poland

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1927 Execution of Sacco and Vanzetti by state of Massachusetts

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JULY

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SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER

African-Canadians who immigrated to Alberta's cities often found work as railcar porters. They were successful in forming a union but often faced prejudices within the trade union movement.

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AUGUST

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1905 Alberta becomes a province

1907 More than half of Calgary's population attends Labour Day parade organized by the Calgary Trades and Labour Council

2004 First IWW World North American General Assembly in Alberta begins in Edmonton

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1920 Edmonton Free Press becomes Alberta Labour News; serves as official paper for AFL

Labour Day 5

1946 Alberta Farmers Union begins 30-day strike demanding minimum fixed price for wheat

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1886 Alberta's first union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, is founded in Medicine Hat

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1991 Canadian government workers stage 9-day strike

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1904 Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 488 receives first charter: largest plumbers and pipefitters local in Canada and one of the largest in North America

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1973 Democratically elected government of Salvador Allende overthrown by CIA backed Coup.

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1956 Convention begins in Edmonton leading to the merger of the Alberta Federation of Labour and the Industrial Federation of Labour of Alberta

2003 CEP Local 1900 walk out in Edmonton in effort to ratify first contract with A-Channel

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1909 Civic Service Union 52, representing City of Edmonton inside workers is founded

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1st. Day of Autumn

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1963 Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) is formed by a merger of National Union of Public Employees and National Union of Public Service Employees

1918 IWW declared illegal in Canada

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1918 Borden government outlaws publications and meetings in 14 languages. Canada's radical and labour press are key targets
2003 Levi Strauss announces closure of Edmonton's GWG plant founded in 1911

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1912 IWW organizes a strike of 250 Edmonton sewer construction workers

1918 Borden government bans 14 organizations, including IWW, Social Democratic Party, Chinese Labour Association and Ukrainian Social Democratic Party

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1931 RCMP murder 3 coal miners in Bienfait, Saskatchewan during peaceful strike demonstration

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OCTOBER

Many recent immigrants to Canada from countries such as the Philippines work in Alberta's service sector in low-wage jobs despite the fact that many are qualified to work in professional occupations such as nursing.



Photo courtesy: G. Christie

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SEPTEMBER

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NOVEMBER

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1918 Amalgamated Meat-cutters Union formed in Edmonton

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1958 Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 379 chartered in Calgary

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1919 Alberta Teachers Alliance holds province's first teachers' strike

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Thanksgiving Day

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1918 Unionists in Calgary stage sympathy strike with Calgary freight handlers
1975 Grace Hartman becomes CUPE president, the first woman president of a major union in North America

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1976 Canadian Labour Congress holds national day of protest against the Trudeau government's wage-control policy

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1919 Alberta Teachers Alliance strike resolved

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1865 Delegates meet and form the National Bricklayers Union

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1999 Founding meeting of Alberta Labour History Institute at southside Rosie's, Edmonton

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1995 Federal Government workers win major pay equity claim after 16 years of struggle

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1737 Thomas Paine, Anglo-American revolutionary writer, born in Thetford in Norfolk, England

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Halloween

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NOVEMBER

Edmonton's GWG plant, which opened in 1911, was one of the few places in Alberta where many immigrant women found unionized work. The first workers came from a number of European countries, followed by workers from China, Vietnam, India and other Asian countries.

REDUCED RATES
THIRD CLASS ROUND TRIPS & ECONOMICAL TOURS
 TO EUROPE AND RETURN BRITISH PORTS
 Norway, Sweden, Denmark, \$162
 FRANCE \$162

CANADIAN PACIFIC



...FEDERATION OF LABOR
When Requested this Card must be Shown.
 ARMSTRONG BROS. BEST PRINTERS

Chu P. Reidm
 CHIEF - Controller of Chinese Immigration.
 This certificate does not establish legal status in Canada.

DECEMBER

Lakeside Packers in Brooks employs many recent immigrants from the Sudan who were integral in the fight to unionize the notoriously anti-labour plant.



REDUCED RATES
THIRD CLASS ROUND TRIPS & ECONOMICAL TOURS
 TO EUROPE AND RETURN BRITISH PORTS
 Norway, Sweden, Denmark, \$167
 FRANCE \$162

CANADIAN PACIFIC

ARMSTRONG BROS. & CO. BEST PRINTERS
 When Requested this Card Must be Shown.

CHIEF Controller of Chinese Immigration
 This certificate does not establish legal status in Canada.

Photo courtesy: Don Crisall

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

NOVEMBER							JANUARY 2012						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
27	28	29	30				22	23	24	25	26	27	28
							29	30	31				

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1921 William Irvine of Calgary wins first federal labour seat in Alberta for Canadian Labour Party

6

1896 International Union of Steam and Operating Engineers is issued a charter by the American Federation of Labor

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8

1869 Knights of Labor founded
1910 Bellevue Mine disaster, resulting from poor maintenance of the mine, claims lives of 31 miners in explosion

9

1886 American Federation of Labor founded

10

11

1883 Railway engineers and firemen in Calgary strike against wage cuts

12

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18

1944 Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1374 at Greyhound chartered in Calgary

19

1966 Proclamation of federal Medical Care Act

20

1st. Day of Winter

1932 Edmonton Hunger March is ended by police violence with over 100 arrested

21

22

23

Christmas Eve
1904 United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 496, Calgary granted charter

24

Christmas Day

25

Boxing Day

26

27

28

29

1886 Knights of Labor establish first Alberta base with an assembly in Calgary

30

New Year's Eve

31

Let's Celebrate 100 Years of Alberta Labour



June 2012 marks the centenary of the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL). Project 2012 was born in 2007 when AFL convention delegates unanimously passed a resolution to sponsor events and projects leading up to their centennial and asked ALHI to play a key role. Components of Project 2012 to date include: two poster series - Alberta's Radical Past and The Making of our Movement - each of which will include five posters; a series of historical booklets and a series of videos on key events and issues in Alberta's history; a comprehensive book on Alberta labour history due to be released in early 2012; and a website where you can go for more information about Project 2012 as well as to download other components of the project.

We have also begun planning for events to take place in 2012 that will spread the story and celebrate Alberta labour history right across the province. The AFL's centenary provides a unique opportunity to draw attention to the role that Alberta's workers, their unions and their community organizations have played in building this province so we invite you to join us to ensure that your story is told. If you are looking for suggestions on how to celebrate 2012 in your community or have an idea you would like to discuss, please contact us soon at:

780-483-8999 or kwerlin@telus.net.

The Alberta Labour History Institute thanks the following individuals and organizations for their generous contributions towards the production of this calendar:

Blair Chahley, Lawyers
Chivers Carpenter, Lawyers
McGown Johnson, Lawyers

McManus & Hubler, Lawyers
Brenda Kuzio, Lawyer
Seveny & Scott Lawyers

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To order additional calendars, contact us at 780-483-8999 or kwerlin@telus.net
Cost: \$12 or \$10 for orders of 50 or more.

Visit us at: www.labourhistory.ca and www.project2012.ca

