



The Alberta Labour History Institute Calendar 2020

The 1920s: Austerity and Labour's Response

JANUARY

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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APRIL

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MAY

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SEPTEMBER

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OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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The 1920s in Alberta: Workers' Struggles During a Mythical "Roaring" Decade

After violently suppressing the Winnipeg General Strike, Canadian governments strove to weaken the trade union movement. In Alberta, workers fought back both in workplaces and electorally.

Trade unions created an Alberta wing of the Canadian Labour Party. In 1921, Labour won four provincial constituencies. The United Farmers of Alberta formed government and included Labour MLA Alex Ross in cabinet. The alliance with the UFA divided the labour movement. Opponents denounced UFA use of police to crush strikes. Alliance supporters highlighted the UFA's establishment of a minimum wage board for women workers in 1922 and improvements to workers' compensation. They argued that Labour required allies, however fickle, in a farmer-dominated province.

Alberta's trade union movement shrank as neither governments nor the private sector replaced war-related jobs. In 1921, manufacturing jobs fell from 11,000 in 1920 to 7000. Coal production dropped from 7 million tons to 6 million. Eight percent of unionists were unemployed versus 2 percent in 1919 and wages were in free fall. Non-union workers fared worst, with farm labourers' wages declining from \$697 per year in 1920 to \$367 in 1922.

While organizations of the unemployed demanded relief, unionized workers fought paycuts, work speed-ups, and deteriorating safety conditions. Crowsnest Pass miners

struck in 1920 and Drumheller miners in 1922. Meat cutters in Calgary and Edmonton struck in 1920 but growing joblessness produced scabs to defeat strikers. But Edmonton teachers struck successfully for union recognition in 1921, and an Edmonton café workers' strike in 1922 forced employers to soften a pay cut.

The recession lasted till 1924 and affected workers differently. Women's employment in manufacturing increased as employers searched for cheaper labour. Public employment of nurses rose as the province hired them to provide various services in rural areas. Proscriptions against hiring married women nevertheless persisted. African-Albertan men were largely limited to menial work as porters and "shoeshine boys," scarce work during five years of recession. Chinese-Albertans were mostly restricted to restaurant and laundry work.

The North American economy recovered in 1924 and productivity soared as automobiles and household appliances were produced, stimulating many economic sectors. A weakened trade union movement encouraged a near doubling of profits while wages barely rose. Credit hid the shortfall for a while, but by 1929, the gap between production and sales halted investment. In October, the New York stock market crash heralded the beginning of a 10-year Depression. Government austerity and a maldistribution of wealth converted the "roaring twenties" into a purr.



1920: A Tightening Noose

Construction workers for St. Albert Trail Bitumized Road Experiment, 1920.

Provincial Archives of Alberta, A11246.

The general strikes of 1919 were a response to exploitation of labour and repression of workers' rights to organize and strike. The state and employer violence that defeated the Winnipeg strike and the Alberta miners' strikes failed to sap workers' desire for justice. But state violence that included deportations and arrests for "sedition" plus rising unemployment made labour victories scarce.

Alberta miners continued to strike for recognition of the One Big Union and for better working conditions. But an alliance of the federal government, employers, and the United Mineworkers of America defeated them.

The Amalgamated Meat Cutters local in Calgary struck Burns and two smaller plants for six weeks but the employers found sufficient scabs to break the strike and the union.

The Civil Service Association of Alberta (CSAA), formed in 1919, elected a strong executive. But the provincial government rejected its employees' right to collective bargaining.

JANUARY 2020

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TUE

WED

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FRI

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			1 New Year's Day	2	3	4
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1921: Electoral and Strike Victories

Labour Party candidates won four seats in Alberta's 1921 provincial election, an election in which the United Farmers of Alberta ousted the provincial Liberals, who had governed Alberta continuously since 1905. Elected were printer Fred White, secretary of the Calgary Trades and Labour Council and a Labour alderman; stonemason Alex Ross, the former president of the CTLC; Medicine Hat railway worker William Johnson; and the province's leading mineworker OBU organizer, P.M. Christophers, in Rocky Mountain (the Crowsnest Pass). Labour advocated social insurance programs, maximum hours of work, minimum wages, and nationalization of utilities.

In the 1921 federal election, William Irvine was elected as a Calgary MP. A Unitarian minister, he worked as a railway labourer and was active in the Calgary General Strike.

Apart from electoral victories, the labour movement could boast of an Edmonton teachers' strike that won union recognition for the Alberta Teachers' Alliance (now Association) from the Edmonton School Board.

Miss Fagan, a school teacher in Castor, 1920. A majority of school teachers were members of the Alberta Teachers Alliance in the 1920s, the predecessor to today's Alberta Teachers Association.

Provincial Archives of Alberta, A13379.

FEBRUARY 2020

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					Valentine's Day	
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	Family Day					
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1922: Fighting Back During a Recession

Portrait, likely of a nurse, who is identified as Lund, from the Burgess Photo Shop, Edmonton. Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 3192.

Though high unemployment favoured employers, workers resisted wage cuts. UMWA miners in Drumheller struck without support from UMWA headquarters in Indianapolis. Slim Evans, the local secretary, used union dues earmarked for Indianapolis to feed starving miners' families on strike. The UMWA charged him with "fraudulent conversion" and he spent three years in prison.

Edmonton café workers, members of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, struck four city cafés to fight a 27.5 percent wage cut. After 39 days, three cafés reduced that cut to 12.5 percent.

Many employers hired women at low wages in jobs traditionally reserved for men such as manufacturing jobs. The Labour MLAs successfully lobbied the UFA government to legislate "An Act to Provide a Minimum Wage for Women." It established a tripartite board—government, employers, workers—to set minimum wages for women workers. Significantly, domestic servants, the largest category of women workers, were excluded. That highlighted the fact that the male-controlled labour movement worried more about protecting men's jobs than raising pay for women workers.

MARCH 2020

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International
Women's Day

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St Patrick's Day

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1923: Women's Rights

Picnic of GWG employees, Edmonton, 1928.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, A16146

The United Farm Women of Alberta convention in 1923 endorsed legalization of contraceptive devices and a government campaign to disseminate information about contraception. But the provincial government, with only one woman Cabinet minister, refused to act. The UFWA also supported the right of married women to work. On both issues they were more progressive than the provincial Labour Party which opposed reproductive choice and regarded married women's work as an attack on labour's longstanding call for family wages for male workers. But some women workers did have union representation. The Civil Service Association was open to provincial workers regardless of gender. The largest union representing a predominantly female labour force in Alberta in the 1920s was the United Garment Workers Local 120, which had organized the Great Western Garment (GWG) workers in 1911.

APRIL 2020

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1924: Hints of Prosperity

A transient harvest worker on a horse-drawn wagon heads from Dalum to Wolf Creek, c. 1927.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 10745

The brutal post-war recession across North America and Europe gave way to the “roaring twenties” thanks to technological innovations that bolstered the manufacturing sector. Automobiles, electric household appliances, industrial machinery, and much more could be manufactured in unprecedented quantities. But five years of corporate and government repression of unions and left-wing political parties left workers in a weak position in efforts to win wage increases that would allow them to become purchasers of the sudden expansion in availability of goods. Most of the benefits of industrial expansion went to a relatively small group of owners and shareholders. An emerging credit industry provided a short-term solution that made it possible for modest-income workers and farmers to purchase the goods associated with modern living. But by 1929, workers steeped in debt could not get new credit to buy what their own hands produced, and it became clear that the “roaring twenties” were a mirage.

MAY 2020

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Mother's Day						
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	Victoria Day					
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1925: Rebellion in the Mines

Mountain Park miners on strike in 1927
help with harvest in Castor area.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, CL315.

Miners demonstrated once again that they formed the leading edge of Alberta workers who demanded better wages and working conditions and were willing to go on strike to win their demands. The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) continued to agree to management demands for wage cuts and limited strikes in coal country. The miners' response was to create the Mine Workers Union of Canada (MWUC) in Drumheller and then the Crowsnest Pass. By the end of the year, the MWUC, with 4000 members, was larger in Alberta than the UMWA despite joint employer-UMWA efforts to use both persuasion and intimidation to prevent UMWA locals from breaking away to join the MWUC.

JUNE 2020

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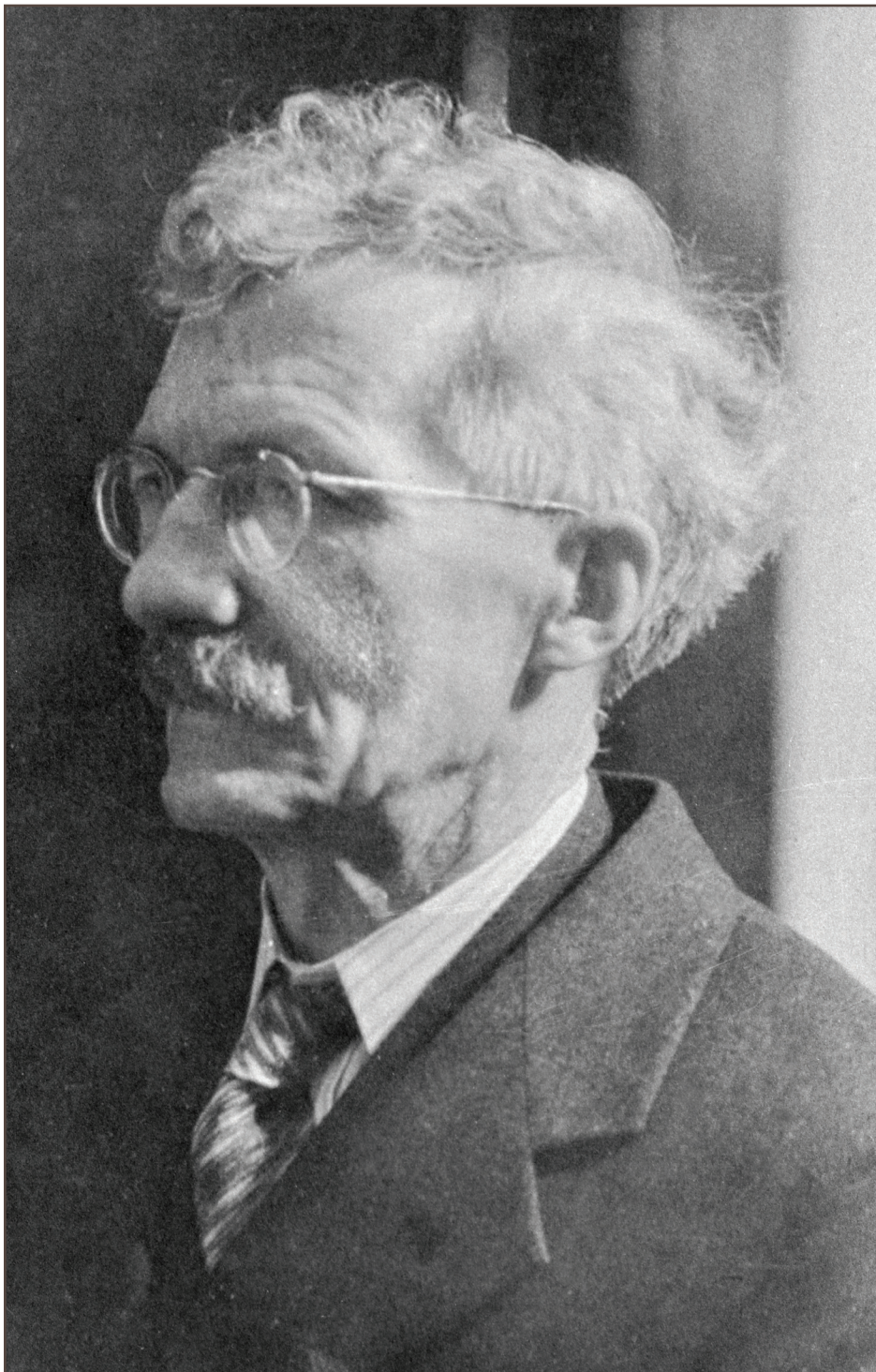
27

Father's Day
National Indigenous
Peoples Day

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1926: Labour's Electoral Success

Labour's election of six members in the provincial election of 1926 would prove the major electoral victory of the labour movement in Alberta until the election of 16 NDP members in 1986. Mineworker leader P.M. Christophers won easy re-election in Rocky Mountain, and printer Fred White was re-elected in Calgary. Robert Parkyn, an Independent Labour candidate, who opposed the Labour Party's collaboration with the UFA, won over Alex Ross, who epitomized such cooperation. Also elected were school teacher C.L. Gibbs in Edmonton, miner Chris Pattinson in Edson, and steam engineer Andrew Smeaton in Lethbridge. Despite the surge in Labour members, the UFA failed to invite any of the Labour members to join its new government. Cooperation between Labour and the UFA nevertheless persisted though it continued to cause dissension within party ranks. In 1929, the strongest supporters of collaboration purged Communists from the Labour Party ranks partly so as to minimize efforts to force Labour to adopt a standalone policy.

P.M. Christophers, Labour member for Rocky Mountain, 1921-1930.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, A3606.

JULY 2020

SUN

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TUE

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FRI

SAT

			1 <small>Canada Day</small>	2	3	4
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1927: A Labour Movement in Motion

Construction crew at the Fabyan railway station in the 1920s.

Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 2354

The Civil Service Association joined the Trades and Labour Congress and the Alberta Federation of Labour, and created the position of executive secretary, appointing veteran labour movement official Alf Farmilo. Local branches would decide whether to join local trades and labour councils. These were efforts to persuade the provincial government that it had to deal collectively with provincial workers rather than simply consult with them and then do whatever it wanted, which had been the provincial government's approach to that time. Meanwhile, the UFA provincial government, pressed by Labour representatives, had passed the Labour Disputes Act, which established a tripartite board with a mandate to attempt to settle labour disputes in sectors under provincial control with a proviso that employers of 10 workers or less were excluded. It began its work in 1927.

AUGUST 2020

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

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1928: Suppressing the Miners

While labour called for equality of all “races,” Indigenous children were taken from their parents and forced into residential schools. Here, school boys of St. Peter’s Anglican school in Lesser Slave Lake and their teacher wear masks during the 1928 influenza scare.

Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 14803.

The limits to UFA willingness to make concessions to working people were evident in the Coal Miners’ Wages Security Act of 1928. It extended the federal government’s Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (Alberta), which allowed the federal government to prevent workers in essential industries from striking before a long mediation process, to public utilities where the dispute only involved Alberta companies and workers. The Labour Party convention that year endorsed policies of “social ownership and effective control of the means of production, distribution and exchange to the end that the results of productive industry may accrue to the whole social membership and bring about a wider distribution of private ownership in the instruments of well-being and happiness than has ever yet been seen.” Also they called for “the abolition of class and privilege based upon economic power, to the end that such mental and physical qualities as may differentiate one man from another, and one race from another, may never again function as the instruments of social and economic advance.”

SEPTEMBER 2020

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6	7 Labour Day	8	9	10	11	12
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1929: Grim Working Conditions

Mine rescue workers in 1920s: seven men stand in a field, five wearing mine rescue equipment. Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 1401.

Poorly enforced regulations on mine operators were Alberta's only occupational health and safety laws. The result was that work accidents were all too common. The Alberta Labour News reported in January, 1929 that of 1000 men employed in logging operations in the province during the previous month, 143 had been victims of work accidents: 30 were caused by falling timber, 18 involved frostbite, while 20 involved tools and machinery and 14 were the consequence of falling or tripping.

A union organizer described putting dried blood in sacks in an Alberta slaughterhouse: "you would have one man holding a gunny sack and the other fellow with the scoop shovel, scooping out the blood and putting it in. ..The whole area, the whole room, would be just thick with fine dust, blood dust, and sometimes you would do this for four hours non-stop. All the time you're breathing this. For two days after that, you're spitting and choking and coughing blood out of your lungs."

OCTOBER 2020

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TUE

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Labour Solidarity in the 1920s

The Alberta Federation of Labour convention, 1920.
The AFL was the chief organization representing
solidarity of Alberta workers in the 1920s.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, A3756.

There were no general strikes in Alberta during the 1920s. But unions continued to demonstrate solidarity with striking workers and with union workers in difficult to organize sectors. In July 1924, the Calgary Trades and Labour Council held a benefit concert for UMWA, District 18. The Musicians' Union provided a 40-piece orchestra. Stage employees and operators also provided their services free.

Then, in May 1925, Edmonton and Calgary unions demonstrated their support for striking Nova Scotia miners, with \$1014 collected at a tag day and concert in Edmonton and a tag day in Calgary. Calgary sponsors included the TLC, the Labour Party, the Local Council of Women, the Salvation Army, the Hebrew Ladies' Aid, the Federation of Parent-Teachers' Associations, the Communist Party, and the UMWA.

In June, 1928, the Edmonton Motion Picture Projectionists, Local 360 resolved "that any member of Local 360 found in a non-union café be fined one dollar for each offence." Several other unions passed similar resolutions.

NOVEMBER 2020

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

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			Remembrance Day			
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29	30					

ALBERTA LABOR NEWS

OFFICIAL PAPER OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN ALBERTA

Vol. 37

EDMONTON, ALBERTA, SATURDAY, MAY 8, 1926

\$2.00 Per Year: 5c

**Personal
Stuff**
THE EDITOR
any letter is given to
or any letter by return

of an idea interesting story
of the industrial revolution
in, when the transition from
to the factory or machine
revolution took place. The
for they are concerned with
interest in the student of
history. Suddenly there
on the minds of men ideas
to be revolutionary, the
industrial life. The revolution
we constituted the greatest
the world had ever seen.
ideas that could do the work
of men came into existence
to which. It was could have
seen upon the face of the
men even at that time, and
knowledge of what was to
have been allowed to come
to benefit which might save
a world from the use of the
new machines that had
been used by the genius of man,
serious pictures might have
ad.

would be the laboring hand
men and women must have
known that the world was
they themselves may have
seen were magic things
the attendance of a few
old men and cloth by the
time that the factory work-
ers had been would receive
part of the same material
a giant spinning machine
the old wheel took the
might be the plaything of
And here were revolutions
in the power of a multitude
to eliminate slavery and
save the wheels of industry!

Edmonton Labor Party Candidates



A. Farnilo



Elmer E. Roper



J. W. Findlay



E. L. Gibbs

Edmonton Labor Elects Five Candidates to Run in Provincial Election

Farnilo, Roper, Findlay, Gibbs and Lakeman Carry Convention—Vote Largest and
Most Representative in History of Edmonton Party—Convention Wires
Congratulations to British Workers on Strike

COLEMAN MINERS

Casting the largest and most representative vote ever polled
in the selection of Labor Candidates in Edmonton, members of
the Edmonton Central Council of the C.L.F. on Tuesday selected
five representatives to run in the provincial election.



A. Lakeman

CALGARY LABOR

Industrial Life of Britain at Standstill Due to General S

Miners are Standing Firm in their determination not
Any Cut in Wages or Lengthening of Work Day
guaranteed Workers are Backing up the Miners
Their Struggle for Better Conditions—Scottish
Yard Seizes Plant of London Daily Herald

Great Britain, according to the
effect of organized labor's refusal
the attempt to cut wages and
the miners. The miners' intention
one of a standstill as a result of the
general strike of the nation's work-
ing men which became effective
on Monday, May 3.

According to the daily press here
perhaps labor leaders have decided
that the best economy to have the
miners from flooding will be to let
their ports. The labor has been
forced to act in bringing new work-
ers to the people, having recognized
that the right to not work against the
people but against the strike of the
government in the process of strike.

A. J. Cook, president of the British
Federation of Great Britain issued the
following statement at the beginning
of the general strike:

"The government ought to be the
best has taken the side of the miners,
and has interpreted the moral mean-
ing of their report to mean an immediate
reduction of wages for the miners.
That we have refused to accept, and
will continue to refuse by the side of
the whole trade union movement."

"The only terms of peace that are
possible are terms that will ensure
the secure way for the miners in the
coal fields while negotiations are
taking place."

The daily press here has been
carrying news of the strike and other
developments but due to the strike

The responsibility of the
system of capitalism is to
draw the same from the
Daily Herald paper for the
as a result of the strike the
paper is not being published.

"What is not making
any sense until a right
"They want to have
whether they are to be
there now here."

"They want more and
get a step in the direction
as one worker should be a
on the industry and that a
we shall be directly paid."

"By striking to shut
the gates—most of all of them,
the greater, however—
through the industry in it
side. Now they expect to
strike and children will not
results of their transportation
stop."

The Wednesday (the 11th)
London Daily Herald was
the plant owned by British
behalf of the Government
and, even being that the
national statements had
"appeal" the Government.

The Alberta Labour News

A front page of the Alberta Labour News in 1926.

In the 1920s, labour had a media voice to challenge the pro-employer perspective that dominated the daily newspapers in the province. The Alberta Labour News had its origins as the Edmonton Free Press in 1919, the organ of the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council. In 1920, its editor, printer Elmer Roper, remade the newspaper into the official organ of the Alberta Federation of Labour. It appeared weekly and focused not only on strikes, organizing drives, and elections but also on Labour Day and May Day parades, labour-organized social events, and on the international progress of the labour movement. While the News highlighted a labour movement that called for greater rights for workers and for universal social programs, it was, like the labour movement as a whole, largely silent in attacking white supremacist notions in Canadian society that the labour movement generally embraced. It was also largely indifferent to women's issues and never raised any defence of workers whose sexual orientation was other than straight.

DECEMBER 2020

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

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				Christmas Eve	Christmas Day	Boxing Day
				New Year's Eve		

THE ALBERTA LABOUR HISTORY INSTITUTE CALENDAR 2020

The 1920s: Austerity and Labour's Response



Cover Image: Ponoka Mental Hospital laundry workers, 1928.
Provincial Archives of Alberta, A11845

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