



FORGING A REAL UNION

FROM THE CSAA
TO AUPE



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Forging a Real Union - From the CSAA to AUPE By: Jim Selby

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FORGING A REAL UNION: FROM THE CSAA TO AUPE

This booklet is the first in a series outlining the history of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) and its predecessor, the Civil Service Association of Alberta (CSAA) to commemorate the 40th anniversary of AUPE in 2016 and the upcoming 100th anniversary of the founding of the CSAA in 2019.

Introduction

Public employees in Alberta have always operated under more difficult constraints than other workers. The government, as employer, has always been able to make laws that denied public employees equal rights with other workers in the province. Those laws can be temporary or permanent removal of rights to free collective bargaining, restrictions on what can be bargained and limitations or complete prohibitions of the right to strike. Threats of massive fines and legal dissolution of unions that disobeyed have been commonplace.

The very first government in Alberta passed an Act in 1905, the year the province was founded, that said that any provincial employee who asked for a raise was considered to have turned in their resignation. Despite the promises of many governments since then, provincial employees have yet to achieve equal rights with other workers.

Imagine any private sector employer having the right to re-write labour laws to take away rights for their own workers. It would be unthinkable. Yet that is the burden public employees have faced from the beginning. From the Lougheed government's Public Service Employee Relations Act of 1977 to the Redford government's Bills 45 and 46, public employees have persisted and endured despite hostile and unjust laws.



AUPE's deep roots: the Civil Service Association of Alberta 1919

In 1919, during a great upsurge in trade unionism in Canada, twelve provincial employees got together to form an organization to harness their collective strength and improve their pay and working conditions. They

formed the Civil Service Association of Alberta as a society and used that organization to win some real improvements for all government employees. However, those improvements were never finalized in collective agreements, and the CSAA never won legal bargaining rights.

Years later, though, when provincial employees wanted a real union and expanded bargaining rights, the CSAA was there as the platform upon which they could build their new organization. By using the CSAA as the springboard from which to launch their new union, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees preserved over 50 years of experience of advocating for public employees. That sense of tradition and continuity was vital to the success of AUPE.

The world transformed: the new, expanding public sector

After World War II ended in 1945, Canada, along with most other economically developed countries, began expanding social and public services like health care, unemployment insurance, old age pensions, social welfare and post-secondary educational opportunities. These programs were intended to address the broad anger among working people over economic and social inequality that had created deep social unrest in the 1930s. A new legal toleration of trade unions in the private sector at this time was also aimed at reducing social unrest as collective bargaining brought better wages and working conditions to industrial workers.

As the 'welfare state' (as these reforms were called) expanded, so did the number of public employees delivering health, welfare, and educational services. In Alberta, for example, the CSAA had grown from only 3,900 members in 1948 to

over 20,000 by 1970.

But these workers did not join in the better

wages and working conditions other Canadians were getting. As their numbers grew – and with it their collective strength, public sector workers grew increasingly dissatisfied with their lot.

Dismissed as 'servants', public employees were supposed to be grateful for their jobs

7AM-6AM
PASSENGER
LOADING
ONLY
5 MINUTE
LIMIT
8AM-6PM



**CIVIL SERVICE ASSOCIATION
OF ALBERTA AFL/CLC
SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION**

**WE'VE BEEN
UNDERPAID
TOO LONG**



Social Workers walk the picket line during a CSAA job action in 1973

Dismissed as ‘servants’, public employees were supposed to be grateful for their jobs. They were expected to accept inferior wages and working conditions in comparison with workers in the private sector and to accept the provincial and federal governments’ right to dictate the terms and conditions of their employment.

Unprecedented strikes in the mid-1960s by postal workers and other federal government employees shattered traditional views of civil servants and led to new rights for federal employees. These struggles inspired public employees in Alberta and other jurisdictions and ignited a struggle for workers’ rights that would last until the 1980s.

Forged in struggle: provincial workers begin to take action

By the late 1960s, employees of the government of Alberta and its boards and agencies were becoming increasingly unhappy with their wages and working conditions. Their organization, the Civil Service Association of Alberta had become almost completely ineffective at either protecting public employees’ rights or advancing their current interests.

The main reason for the CSAA’s inability to properly represent their members was that their employer, the government, had a stranglehold over the organization. The government bargained with the association – but the law said that whenever the two parties failed to agree on wages or working conditions, the government’s position prevailed.

Also, government management were allowed to be members of the

The strike was a public sensation – and was considered as one of the factors that unseated the Social Credit government who had been in power since 1935.

CSAA, making it very difficult for front-line workers to voice their opinions at meetings let alone get their needs met. The final

straw came when the government actually took ownership of the association in 1968 – changing it from a free association under the societies act into a creature of the legislature dependent upon the government for its very existence and not in control of its own constitution or affairs.



Corrections officers during the first CSAA strike, on August 27, 1971

For many years, the CSAA had been dismissed as a timid organization under their employer's thumb. However, that was about to change permanently in 1971.

The CSAA's first ever anti-government protests took place in April 1971 when Alberta Liquor Control Board workers demonstrated against a



ALCB workers protest at the legislature during the CSAA's first anti-government protest in April 1971.



very small imposed wage increase. At the peak of their protests, over 500 members protested at the legislature.

On August 27, 1971 correctional officers from five different jails went on the association's first strike. The strike was a public sensation – and was considered as one of the factors that unseated the Social Credit government who had been in power since 1935. The election took place on August 30 while the strike was still on – and the new era of Peter Lougheed and the Conservatives was ushered in during the province's first provincial employee strike.

Meet the new boss - same as the old boss: provincial employee militancy grows

There was an initial period of cooperation with the new government – largely based on Peter Lougheed's promises as the leader of the opposition to give public employees the same rights as other workers in Alberta. Sadly, when he became Premier he proved just as heavy-handed as the previous government. Lougheed amended the law to impose compulsory arbitration as the only dispute resolution process for employees of the government, its boards, agencies and commissions in 1972. This may have been a small step up from simply imposing wages and working conditions like the previous government but the whole arbitration was so controlled and restricted that workers saw no gains from it at all.

But, times had changed. Provincial employees had started to realize their strength and the effectiveness of job action. When the government reclassified its skilled trades workers, reducing many workers' wages, they answered by having study sessions in 1973 that took them off the job for long periods, and by organizing a major rally when the legislature resumed that fall. In the face of their growing protest, the Lougheed government backed down and rescinded the reclassification scheme.

In December 1973, 1,200 psychiatric nurses and aides in Crown hospitals and institutions began job actions over an arbitrary ruling that took away vacation entitlements. After voting down an employer compromise, the workers won full reinstatement of their rights.

In April 1974, Alberta Liquor Control Board workers went on strike



Premier elect Peter Lougheed meets with outgoing Social Credit Premier Harry Strom, 1971.

against imposed wage rates. They stayed out for 10 days until a court injunction forced them back to work, but their strike won them a much bigger wage increase than the employer offered.

Then, on Oct. 1, 1974, 12,500 government general service workers went

Having directly experienced the benefits gained by job actions, gaining full union status and the right to strike for everyone became the goal of the CSAA leadership and activists.

on strike for three days, protesting the government's unilateral wage increase of \$50 per month, just before

they were supposed to negotiate a wage reopener with CSAA. Again, the government backed down, agreeing to give workers \$75 per month. This was the largest job action ever by the association, and it was a win.

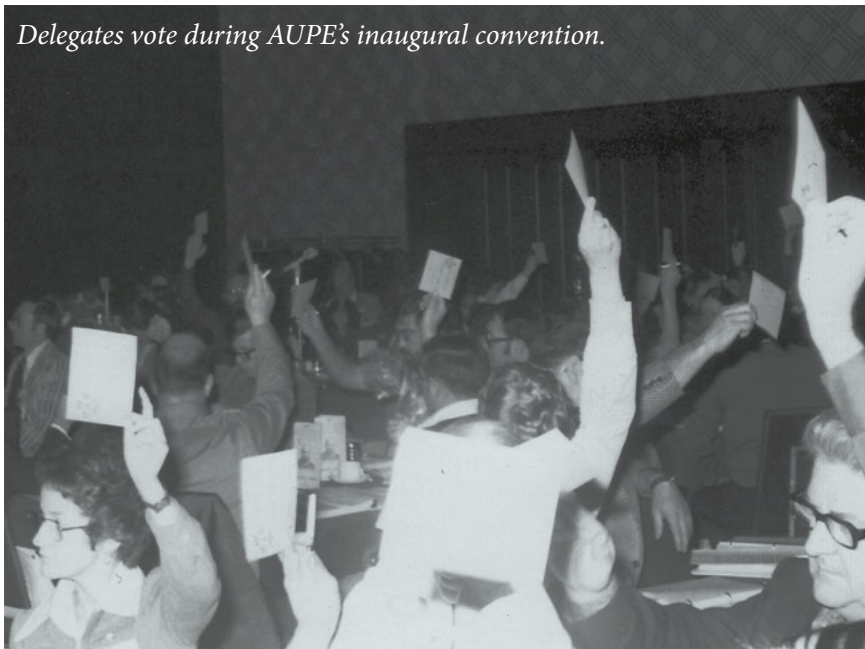
Despite the fact that the government considered all of these job actions illegal, the benefits of collective action were not lost on the membership of CSAA. When they took strike action in 1973 and 1974, they won important gains, despite the constant government attempts to punish workers and their organization during the disputes.

Becoming a real union: the CSAA pursues the right to strike

Having directly experienced the benefits gained by job actions and gaining full union status the right to strike for everyone became the goal of the CSAA leadership and activists. In pursuit of legitimacy as a trade union, the association joined the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) in 1973 and the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) in 1974. The CSAA was also instrumental in founding the new National Union of Provincial Government Employees (NUPGE) in 1976. These affiliations also dealt with CSAA fears of raiding by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) who were very active in Alberta at the time. Affiliates of the CLC and AFL were formally prohibited from pursuing the members of other affiliates.

At the 1974 convention, a resolution calling for a strike by all CSAA members on March 31, 1975 if the government had not granted the CSAA

Delegates vote during AUPE's inaugural convention.



full union rights by then had very broad support from the membership.

However, the resolution was watered down with the deadline removed when the Lougheed government offered a Union-Government Task Force on Legislation to the CSAA. The Association was fooled into thinking the government might give them the right to strike if they could only prove their case with the Task Force. But internal government documents of the day prove the government was simply trying to reduce unrest and prevent strikes by the CSAA prior to the upcoming 1975 election. They planned all along to introduce permanent legislation stripping provincial employees of the right to strike after the election.

The birth of a new union: the CSAA votes to become AUPE in 1976

In 1975, the CSAA held its last convention, unanimously passing a motion

to reconstitute itself as the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and to fight for full union status under the Alberta Labour Act. The Task Force was still going through its sham investigation of public sector labour legislation and the union leadership still believed they might be granted full union rights.

By 1976, when AUPE held its first and founding convention, the union had finally realized that the government had been misleading them. As Bill Broad, the last president of the CSAA and first elected president of the new Alberta Union of Provincial Employees concluded at the convention: “Well, so much for the promises of politicians. Peter Lougheed, MLA., when leader of the Opposition promised the members of this Union ‘basic bargaining rights as enjoyed by organized labour in the Province’. As you should be aware, nothing has been done – indeed the opposite has been threatened.”

The new union also had to confront federal wage controls put in place by the Trudeau government that restricted pay increases to far below the inflation rate. The Lougheed government even intervened to deny the union access to the Anti-Inflation Board where they could have presented a case for higher increases based upon their lower than average wages. The average wage of provincial government employees represented by AUPE that year was only \$11,000 per year – very much in the lower income levels for the province.

Despite government opposition, the new union focused on a positive, ambitious agenda. There were resolutions supporting union sponsored cooperative housing for the membership, the pursuit of equal pay for work of equal value for women on the provincial service, and strong support for forcing the government to act on occupational health and safety issues. The union was also continuing to grow. By 1976, membership passed the 30,000 mark.

Women in the public sector: transforming the face of unionism in Canada

The growth of the public sector in Alberta was critically important for women seeking secure full-time employment. Women were filling many

Issues like pay equity, childcare and harassment on the job and in the community became union issues as women union activists promoted their cause.



International Women's Day protest at the Alberta legislature, 1976.

of the jobs in the growing health care, social welfare and educational sectors. These jobs offered economic security for both single women and those partially or fully supporting families, and unions proved to be the way to transform these permanent jobs into well-paying jobs with benefits.

The trade union movement, which had been largely confined to skilled trades and semi-skilled industrial workers before World War II was transformed as the public sector unions grew in size to rival both the craft and industrial unions. Issues like pay equity, childcare and harassment on the job and in the community became union issues as women union activists promoted their cause.

The impact of women workers on the CSAA became evident with a new focus on issues like pay equity in the early 1970s. The union held its first Women's Conference in 1975. By the time AUPE was formed in 1976, women were very close to becoming the majority within the union, and by 1980, half of the unions 43,000 members were women.

Provincial employees as second-class citizens: conservatives put AUPE in a legal straightjacket

Before the next convention, however, the government launched a major assault on AUPE members. In May 1977 the government passed Bill 41, the Public Service Employee Relations Act (PSERA). It specifically outlawed strikes by AUPE members and imposed a biased compulsory arbitration process that blocked negotiations over vital work issues like workloads, job classifications, hiring, transfers, promotions, training, and pensions. The Act was to be overseen by a Board appointed solely of government-selected representatives. Thousands of employees were arbitrarily excluded from membership by the Act.

As President Broad noted at the second convention of AUPE in 1977, "The primary purpose of the PSERA is clear. It is to hold down the AUPE and to reduce its effectiveness."

That second convention is referred to as the second and re-founding convention of AUPE because the union, having realized that being

registered under the Societies Act meant still having their by-laws (constitution) scrutinized and approved by government, legally stopped being a society and became an unincorporated trade union under the law in 1977.

Alberta condemned by United Nations, still refuses to withdraw PSERA

AUPE, through the Canadian Labour Congress, made an official complaint about Alberta's new public sector legislation to the International Labour Organization (ILO) a body affiliated with the United Nations, which has treaties protecting workers' rights that are signed by the Canadian government.

Although the Lougheed government reluctantly defended itself before the ILO investigators, when the ILO concluded in 1979 that PSERA violated ILO treaties, the government chose to ignore the ruling. Despite embarrassing Canada internationally, the government would not loosen the restrictions on the right to strike or change its biased arbitration rules as recommended by the ILO.

Given the booming oil economy in Alberta and runaway inflation (averaging 9% per year between 1975-1979), public employees were being forced, by legal constraints on job action and a skewed arbitration process, to accept inferior wage increases in relation to other workers in the province.

AUPE's first job action: the Apples and Oranges Strike of 1980

Then one of Lougheed's ministers lit a fuse that ignited the largest strike in the union's history. He said that comparing the generous raise MLAs were giving themselves with the miserly increase offered to provincial employees was like comparing apples and oranges.

AUPE began a province wide "apples and oranges" public education campaign that garnered widespread public support for AUPE members.





PETER, PETER
APPLE CHEATER
TESTED THE
UNION BUT
COULDN'T BEAT
ER

*AUPE members during the 1980
Apples and Oranges strike.*

On July 2, 1980, 186 Alberta Liquor Control Board warehouse workers walked off the job in Edmonton and Calgary protesting the employer's wage offer. Support staff joined them. Five days later 1,000 correctional

By July 18 more locals had joined and over 4,000 AUPE members were on strike

officers walked off the job at nine centres and set up picket lines. The “apples

and oranges” strike was on. On July 8, AUPE held a massive support rally for the strikers at the legislature. The next day a judge ordered the strikers back to work, but the workers ignored the court order. On July 16, 2,000 members of Local 1 (clerical and support staff) join the strike lines. By July 18 more locals had joined and over 4,000 AUPE members were on strike. The union said it would challenge the legitimacy of PSERA's strike ban in court.

The strike continued to build. The motor vehicles branch walked out followed by all the retail liquor store employees on the province. On July 24, all of the provincial employees in Peace River also joined the strike, the same day that a demonstration at the legislature drew over 3,000 AUPE members. The next day the government promised to resume “real” negotiations and the union agreed to come back to work and back to the table – but made it clear that if negotiations were not genuine, everyone would be back out. Another “illegal” strike – another win for the union.

A new union with the courage to act

The Alberta Union of Provincial Employees was born from the unwillingness of rank-and-file public employees to accept second-class treatment. The front-line workers took matters into their own hands, walking off the job again and again in the face of the government's insistence that strikes were illegal. The members' hunger for justice and equal rights with other workers in the province transformed the staid, quiet Civil Service Association of Alberta into a new, militant union.

By rising and defying the Public Service Employee Relations Act in the “apples and oranges” strike of 1980 – an Act designed to permanently

cripple their organization - the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees served notice that the new union would not be intimidated or controlled by government. Although many challenges lay ahead, a new era of provincial workers' rights had begun.

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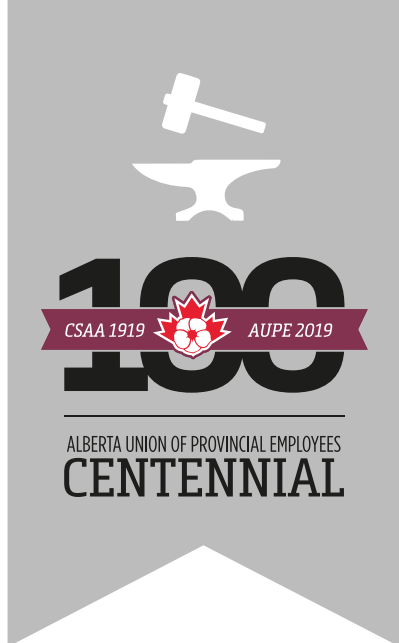
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Note: The staff at the Provincial Archives of Alberta were endlessly helpful in the research for this booklet: polite, professional and patient.



FORGING A REAL UNION FROM THE CSAA TO AUPE

Collecting, preserving & sharing the
stories & struggles of working Albertans

The Alberta Union of Provincial Employees Centennial Project's mandate is to preserve and celebrate the lives and contributions of Alberta's working people in general, and AUPE members in particular. AUPE was founded in 1976, but our history goes back much further. Our union's predecessor, the Civil Service Association of Alberta (CSAA), was founded in 1919.

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