



This project made possible by:

Alberta Federation of Labour
Alberta's New Democrats
Alberta Regional Council of Carpenters
and Allied Workers
Carpenters' Health Centre
Professional Employees

Health Sciences Association of Alberta
Inland Concrete

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 424
International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators
and Allied Workers Local 110
International Union of Operating Engineers Local 955
Ironworkers Local 720
Plasterers and Cement Masons Local 222
Sheet Metal Workers' International Association Local 8
The United Food and Commercial Workers Local 401
The United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1110
United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local

Canadian
Canadian
Ed

United Nurses of
United Nurses of Alb
United Nurses of
Workers' Co

HEALTH AND SAFETY STRUGGLES IN ALBERTA

THE ALBERTA LABOUR HISTORY INSTITUTE
2024

WHAT IS THE ALBERTA LABOUR HISTORY INSTITUTE?

The Alberta Labour History Institute was founded in 1999 to give working people a chance to preserve their own stories in their own words.

We are a group of trade unionists, community activists, archivists, and historians dedicated to collecting, preserving, and disseminating the stories of Alberta's working people and their organizations. Oral history, mainly via videos, has always been ALHI's major form of research. Our videos are available in our office as well as at the Provincial Archives of Alberta. We supplement the oral histories with archival and library research. We post full transcripts on our website, along with podcasts of what we view as the best excerpts.

We've used our oral history materials to create films, booklets, annual calendars, and a book, all of which are available directly on our website or via links from the website. We also provide advice to unions re archiving and re educational materials. Most "deliverables" for the Alberta Federation of Labour centennial celebration in 2012—the book, a booklet, six videos, and various posters—were ALHI creations.

We've also sponsored workshops, conferences, film nights, and labour history tours, educational events that often also provide us with new interviewees. For example, in 2002, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Edmonton Hunger March, participants who were still alive spoke at our commemorative workshop and we recorded their words. We sponsored a conference on Alberta labour history in 2012 as part of the AFL centennial events. It included a combination of activists telling their stories plus academic sessions. We had a similar conference in 2014 and then in 2016, we marked the 30-year anniversary of the Gainers Strike and other major strikes that made up the "Alberta hot summer of '86" with an Edmonton workshop that included the showing of a video ballad by Maria Dunn and our videographer Don Bouzek on the Gainers workers. The video ballad was also performed in Calgary and Red Deer. In 2019 we hosted workshops and concerts across Alberta on "The Centennial of the Great Labour Revolt of 1919" and produced an accompanying video, display panels, and a booklet. A recent ALHI project is our "Indigenous Labour History Project," which involves a major effort to gather the stories of First Nations and Métis people. Many of the interviews from that project are now on our website. We've also produced and had several public showings of a video on the Métis ironworkers who did the most dangerous construction work on the skyscrapers of downtown Edmonton. It's entitled "Waltzing with the Angels" and can be viewed on our website.

If you would like to join with ALHI in carrying out our mission to tell the history of Alberta's working people, please e-mail us at office@albertalabourhistory.org

Or perhaps just tell us a story or send us pictures or artifacts you think should be on our website. If you are interested in learning more about ALHI, starting a Chapter in your community, or making a financial contribution to support our work, please email us at office@albertalabourhistory.org

Please check out our website at albertalabourhistory.org/about-alhi/

You can also contact us at:

ALHI
Suite 603, 12323 Stony Plain Rd NW
Edmonton, AB T5N 3Y5
Ph: (780) 732-0320

Our cover image: The Broken Families Obelisk, unveiled on April 28, 2012, the International Day of Mourning, is a tribute by the trade union movement to workers who died as a result of work accidents or because of the after-effects of inhaling toxic substances in the workplace. It is situated in Grant Notley Park in Edmonton, a park dedicated to the memory of a former Alberta NDP leader who died in an airplane accident as he was flying home. On each of 4 sides, there is a family but with a member missing, a member who died on the job.



HEALTH AND SAFETY STRUGGLES IN ALBERTA

Workers join unions not only to win wage and benefit increases but also to fight for safe, healthy workplaces.

Throughout their history, unions have pressured both employers and the state to ensure that workers can count on ending each workday alive and healthy. Blue-collar workers formed most of the early unions. Their employers, single-mindedly focused on profits, paid little attention to orientation of new workers, maintenance of equipment, and hiring enough workers to make safety practices possible. Frequent coal mine explosions killed thousands of workers while speed-ups in packinghouses, insufficient provision of safety equipment for construction workers, and poor ventilation in pulp mills and foundries killed or injured many more workers.

Unions fought employers for improved working conditions, better ventilation, proper orientation of all workers, and a human pace of work. They campaigned as well to get governments to penalize employers who failed to provide safe, healthy working conditions and to provide workers' compensation for workers injured on the job and families of workers killed on the job.

In 1973 union campaigns resulted in passage of the Occupational Health and Safety Act which granted workers the right to know about occupational health hazards, to participate in removing them, and to refuse unsafe work.

Over time, as unions of white-collar workers with female majorities formed and as more women were hired in blue-collar jobs, the notion of workplace health and safety expanded to include worker freedom from workplace violence and harassment. Union women led efforts to include protection against threats and coercion, with a strong focus on sexual harassment, in union contracts and government Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislation. Workplaces were, until relatively recently, viewed as 'a man's world' and employers, unions, and the state ignored pervasive sexism, sexual harassment, and bullying until feminist organizers insisted that women would no longer accept such harmful behaviours as an inevitability in workplaces.

In theory, the right to a safe workplace should be one that all workers enjoy, whether their workplace is unionized or not. The trade union movement has campaigned over many years for legislation to protect all workers on the job. But, as a number of the narratives in this calendar show, most governments in Alberta's history have resisted passing legislation to protect workers' health and safety. Even when they have passed such legislation, workers without unions have little ability to force their employers to comply with such legislation, particularly when government enforcement is lax, as it has generally been.



THE FATAL LEGACY OF COAL MINING

Safety regulations for ventilation in mines were legislated in 1893 by the North-West Territories Council, which governed the areas that became Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905. They were unenforced. The new Alberta government in 1906 appointed two mine inspectors to verify implementation of safety legislation. But violators received only token penalties. Major explosions and slides from 1902 to 1914 killed at least 600 men. Even the worst disaster, the Hillcrest explosion in the Crownsnest Pass in 1914, resulted in no prosecutions despite the coroner's inquest jury concluding that the owner had failed to provide fresh air to each mine seam to defuse explosion-causing noxious gases. Miners who did not experience explosions died before their time from black lung disease, a preventable disease if employers follow precautions to limit coal dust in the air.

Employer and state unconcern for miners fuelled unionization, strikes, and socialist politics among miners. In the 1940s, the unions won concessions from coal companies on the OHS front. But coal jobs soon began to disappear as oil replaced coal as Canada's principal fuel.

JANUARY 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

	1 New Year's Day	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD, 1918

Before 1918, if Alberta's injured workers or their families sought compensation, they had to prove in court that employer negligence had caused injury or death. Few workers could afford to sue. Trade unions campaigned for Alberta to follow other provinces and establish a workers' compensation board. In 1918 Alberta created the Alberta Workmen's Compensation Board. Some working women qualified for compensation but the legislation specifically excluded domestic workers, the largest category of women workers. Farm labourers were also excluded from coverage.

From the start, the WCB has had contradictory objectives. Though tasked with caring for injured workers and their families, it is expected to keep employer levies low. Employer groups demand low replacement wages and a quick return of injured workers to work, often outside their previous vocations. While unions campaign for justice for injured workers, the Board has largely proved pro-employer, with bonuses in the past often given to staff who deny compensation or limit compensation periods. Workers with long-term or permanent injuries are generally treated most harshly.

FEBRUARY 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 Family Day	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29		



CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY WORKERS

Today's construction workers benefit from improvements in OHS won by unions over many decades. In the boom years of the 1960s and 1970s, construction jobs were often extremely dangerous. That was especially the case for the mainly Métis ironworkers who performed the most dangerous tasks in the building of the skyscrapers of downtown Edmonton, including the CN Tower. In ALHI's video, "Waltzing with the Angels," 7 ironworkers describe the self-made harnesses they used as they worked hundreds of feet above the ground. They indicate that they generally provided their own hardhats and used cotton batting as earplugs to stifle the impossible noise as they worked. Many of their fellow ironworkers died because of the lack of safety provisions.

Gradual improvements in health and safety negotiated by construction unions have been compromised by the decision of the Peter Lougheed government during the early 1980s recession to allow employers to spin off dummy non-union companies and transfer contracts from their unionized firm to the non-unionized company faking as an independent firm.

These seven men, six of whom are Métis, were ironworkers from the mid-1960s onwards who were responsible for doing the most dangerous jobs building the CN Tower and other business and apartment skyscrapers that dot the downtown and surrounding areas of Edmonton.

MARCH 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8 International Women's Day	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17 St Patrick's Day	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31 Easter Sunday					Good Friday	



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

On April 28, 1996, trade union delegates attending a United Nations conference in New York held a candle-lighting ceremony to launch an International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) campaign to make that day an annual International Day of Mourning for workers killed or disabled by their work. The Canadian trade union movement was a leader in this campaign, having persuaded its own government in 1990 to declare April 28 a National Day of Mourning. Alberta's Lucien Royer, then an ICFTU official, played a key role in this campaign. Working closely with him was Winston Gereluk, one of ALHI's long-time activists.

Every April 28, Alberta's trade unions commemorate workers injured on the job, killed, disabled, or suffering from occupational illnesses. They also reaffirm their commitment to pressure governments to force employers to follow practices that will eliminate situations in which workers leave home for work in the morning but too often either return home disabled or never return home again.

APRIL 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

	1 Easter Monday	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT, 1973

Union campaigns resulted in the Loughheed government passing the Occupational Health and Safety Act in 1973. It recognized workers' rights to know about workplace hazards, refuse unsafe work, and participate in joint worker-management Health and Safety committees. Non-unionized workers lacked means to access rights which the government enforced laxly. Unions responded militantly when employers violated the Act. In 1980, for example, 26 Canadian Paperworkers Union members in Hinton were fired for refusing to work in a snowstorm. The company relented after the union closed all the camps in the woods. In 1997 Hinton paperworkers closed their plant to force management to rid the workplace of asbestos.

OHS concerns contributed to a mainly racialized immigrant workforce striking the Lakeside Packing plant in Brooks in 2005. Peter Jany, an immigrant from southern Sudan, was forbidden by a supervisor from going to see a doctor after he slipped on a wet floor in the plant because management wanted to limit injury reports. "When you get injured, cut yourself or whatever, they fire you," noted Jany.

MAY 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

			1 International Workers' Day	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12 Mother's Day	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20 Victoria Day	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	



PREGNANCY IS A HEALTH ISSUE: SUSAN PARCELS CASE

In 1989 the Supreme Court ruled in a case involving three Manitoba Safeway workers that pregnancy must be treated as a health issue. All health benefits must be extended by employers to pregnant employees. The Alberta government and its agencies ignored the ruling. The Red Deer Auxiliary Hospital therefore informed nurse Susan Parcels that, while on maternity leave, she had to prepay all of her benefits. Supported by the United Nurses of Alberta, Parcels asked the Alberta Human Rights Commission to rule that her benefits should be automatic as for other employees on a sick leave. She won the case and Court of Queen's Bench upheld the Commission ruling when the hospital appealed its decision.

JUNE 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Father's Day					National Indigenous Peoples Day	
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

FULL IMMIGRATION STATUS FOR ALL!

We are all essential!



**DEMAND ACTION:
CALL PRIME MINISTER
JUSTIN TRUDEAU:
613 • 992 • 4211**

<http://www.migrantrights.ca>

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS AND UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS AND OHS

The most vulnerable workers in Alberta are temporary foreign workers and undocumented workers. While OHS legislation nominally applies to TFWs, they are rarely in a position to require its enforcement. Their contracts are tied to a single employer. If that employer fires them for whatever reason, they face immediate deportation. A lawyer's study for the Alberta Federation of Labour in 2007 showed that 60 percent of employers of TFWs violated provisions of either the Employment Standards Code or the Occupational Health and Safety Act. TFWs with expired contracts who stay in Canada to continue their financial aid to families back home become "illegals" with no human or labour rights. Their employers generally ignore labour standards legislation, including OHS legislation. Organizations like Migrante have demanded an end to the Temporary Foreign Workers program and its replacement with a commitment to give all those who come from abroad to work in Canada a pathway to citizenship rather than a hidden brand on their backs that permits employers to impose unfair and unsafe working conditions.

JULY 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

	1 <small>Canada Day</small>	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



OHS IN HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Most patients in hospitals, residents in care facilities, and clients in social services offices treat staff with respect. But attacks, including fatal attacks, of clients against staff do occur. The potential of harm for staff makes prevention of such attacks an OHS issue. Unions in healthcare and social services have fought for comprehensive orientation, adequate staffing, security personnel, and the right to refuse service to violent clients in their efforts to protect the health and security of staff and clients alike. The unions have also fought to protect workers as they provide services to clients that sometimes require them to exert considerable physical effort as they deal with clients with compromised mobility. Amanda Whillans, an AUPE activist, and a health aide at Points West assisted living facility in Cold Lake, indicated in an ALHI interview that she has pressed management to fully train staff about how to avoid musculoskeletal injuries.

Amanda Whillans was active in the Cold Lake assisted living home strike in 2017. She told ALHI that understaffing and poor training before the strike endangered the health and safety of residents and staff alike.

AUGUST 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

				1	2	3
4	5 <small>Heritage Days</small>	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31



OHS IMPROVEMENTS UNDER NDP GOVERNMENT

In 2017, the NDP government legislated union-demanded joint workplace health and safety committees for all employers with 20 or more workers. Employers of 5 to 19 workers would have to meet with a worker-chosen representative regarding OHS matters. Alberta was the last province to pass such legislation. The NDP also enshrined the right to refuse dangerous work and guaranteed workers their paycheques while their concerns were investigated.

The NDP also expanded WCB coverage to include psychological injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder. Workplace violence and harassment rules were expanded to include sexual harassment and threats and coercion more broadly. This was the first time in Alberta's history that sexual harassment was treated as an OHS issue.

A fair practices officer and medical panels would be appointed to help workers navigate the WCB system. For the first time a cap on insurable earnings was removed, and employers were required to reinstate workers with over 12 months of service after their WCB compensation period ended. Earlier, the NDP had extended WCB coverage to farm labourers.

In 2019, when this picture was taken, Siobhan Mangal was an apprentice in the Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association, Local 222 and an apprentice with the Heat & Frost Insulators & Allied Workers, Local 110. She described her positive experiences with mentoring on the job and in the union, and gave detailed descriptions of the training and work in rope access and of the importance of health and safety training.

SEPTEMBER 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Labour Day

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30



UCP RIPS UP MOST NDP CHANGES TO OHS

The UCP government, elected in 2019, got rid of much of the NDP legislation for OHS and the WCB. At the WCB, they shuttered the Independent Fair Practices Office and the Medical Panels Office. They restored a cap on insurable earnings and removed the requirement for employers to reinstate workers with over 12 months of service. For OHS, they reduced the power of Joint Health and Safety Committees and gave employers the right to name worker representatives. Restrictions were placed on the right to refuse dangerous work. Psychological well-being was removed from the health and safety definition. Contract workers lost rights as workers. Employers, not farm labourers, would decide if workers received WCB coverage though larger-scale operations had to continue to provide some form of workers' compensation coverage.

Train wrecks, whether literal, or figurative as in the case of the UCP's collision with the NDP's OHS and WCB legislation, marked the history of workers' struggles for OHS justice in Alberta.

OCTOBER 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14 Thanksgiving	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31 Halloween		



THE PANDEMIC AND JOB SAFETY FOR WORKERS

Government and employer unconcern for worker safety were evident during the COVID pandemic. The meatpacking industry proved deadly. The largely visible minority workforce of Cargill in High River received no protective masks and 900 of 2000 contacted COVID in May, 2020. Two workers and the father of a third died from COVID. In early 2021, three Olymel workers in Red Deer died from COVID. Long-term care workers were infected in large numbers.

Hospital worker unions successfully demanded personal protective equipment for their workers. But understaffing resulted in worker stress and exhaustion. Anti-vaxxer demonstrators at hospitals uttered threats and sometimes physically attacked hospital workers as did some COVID patients who had embraced conspiracy theories.

NOVEMBER 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11 Remembrance Day	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30



FITTING OHS INTO LARGER ECONOMIC POWER CONTEXTS

[Canadian Pacific Railway] Black Porters, 1920s. Courtesy Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 9167.

The unfettered power of employers in workplaces in any social system translates into the likelihood of workers being injured or dying in what we call “accidents” but are really, in most cases, the result of employer greed and indifference to workers’ lives. Employers frame these incidents to appear to be the result of worker inattention but far more frequently they result from unsafe working conditions, including speed-ups, unsafe equipment, and limited worker orientation. “In 2003, six hundred and thirty thousand Canadian adults were injured on the job severely enough to limit their activity. Approximately 300,000 of these injured workers required time off to recover,” writes Athabasca University professor labour studies professor Bob Barnetson in his book, *The Political Economy of Workplace Injury in Canada*. Powerful trade unions and anti-corporate governments are the answer to unsafe, unhealthy workplaces. As long as “productivity” and “profits” are valued more than workers’ health and safety, and until all workers have union protections, unnecessary injuries and deaths on the job will continue.

The evils that come with unfettered employer power over workers are evident in the life-threatening racist treatment of Black railway porters in the decades before they were allowed to unionize. During three-day runs, they were given a maximum of three hours a day to sleep and not on a sleeping berth but in the smoking car with its unhealthy air.

DECEMBER 2024

SUN

MON

TUE

WED

THU

FRI

SAT

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

Christmas Eve

Christmas Day

Boxing Day

29

30

31

New Year's Eve



HEALTH AND SAFETY STRUGGLES IN ALBERTA

THE ALBERTA LABOUR HISTORY INSTITUTE
2024

THE ALBERTA LABOUR HISTORY INSTITUTE WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE
OUR PARTNERS WHO HELP US MAKE THIS CALENDAR POSSIBLE:

Blair Chahley, Lawyers | Chivers Carpenter, Lawyers | McGown Cook, Barristers & Solicitors
Nugent Law Office | McManus & Hubler, Lawyers | Brenda Kuzio, Lawyer | Severyn Scott, Lawyers

To order additional calendars, contact us at 780.732.0320 or kwertlin@telus.net