

REPORT OF THE AFL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Since our last convention, the Alberta Federation of Labour has continued to campaign for workers rights in Alberta. We supported our affiliates through job actions. We launched campaigns to make Alberta a better place to live and work. We have worked with members in these activities, and in the day to day business of the Federation.

I. POLITICAL ACTION AND CAMPAIGNS

POLITICAL ACTION

The past two years have been busy, politically speaking. Alberta had a provincial election in March 2008, which was quite quickly followed by a federal election in October 2008. The Alberta Federation of Labour was involved in both elections; and worked hard to motivate affiliates, and mobilize the progressive vote in this province.

As part of our activities around the provincial election, the Alberta Federation of Labour launched a campaign calling for change. This campaign included:

- A website with detailed policy recommendations on a wide range of issues
- A brochure that was sent out across the province
- An advertising campaign.

The AFL publication, “**Black Gold, Clear Vision: A proposed policy framework for the Alberta oil sands,**” and a series of fact sheets were part of this provincial election campaign.

Labour activists around the province volunteered and worked tirelessly for candidates... knocking on doors, delivering leaflets, making phone calls.

The AFL also organized a series of breakfast briefings for MLAs in the spring session of the legislature in 2008. These sessions provided the AFL and affiliates with an opportunity to inform Members of the Legislative Assembly on the following topics:

- Public-private partnerships
- Value-added – keeping upgrading jobs in Alberta.

During the fall session of the legislature in November 2008, the AFL mobilized affiliates to participate in a lobby day. Affiliates were grouped into teams and met with MLAs from the New Democrats, Liberals and the Conservatives. The affiliates had participated in a training session before the lobby day and used their meetings with MLAs to convey the concerns of the labour movement about the government’s plans on health care, pensions, and

development of the oil sands. The information gathered by affiliates at these meetings will be very helpful to the AFL in its future political action on these and other topics.

A FOCUS ON ADDING VALUE

In the spring of 2009, the AFL launched its latest research report, **“Lost Down the Pipeline: In these difficult times is the Alberta government doing enough to keep value-added oil sands jobs in Canada?”**

The report makes a strong case to develop value-added upgrading capacity in Alberta and urges the government to take immediate actions to prevent more bitumen from leaving the province unprocessed.

TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

Just before the last convention, the AFL established a Temporary Foreign Worker Advocate (TFWA) to offer assistance to temporary foreign workers needing employment or immigration assistance, and to advocate changes to the program and hired lawyer Yessy Byl to fill the role. In the fall of 2007 the Advocate released a report: **“Alberta’s Disposable Workforce,”** to record and summarize the working and living conditions of foreign workers. The report offered 21 recommendations aimed at ending exploitation of these vulnerable workers.

The AFL is not well-structured to manage active casework, and so it

was decided in 2008 to offer funding to the Edmonton Community Legal Centre to take over the Advocate’s active cases. The Advocate’s role was then shifted to one of education, research and policy advocacy. Through the Advocate, the AFL has been able to remain on top of rapid developments with this issue.

Just before this convention, the AFL released its second Advocate report, **“Entrenching Exploitation,”** which updates the first report and analyzes how the economic downturn is affecting workers. Its recommendations are aimed at preventing the temporary foreign worker program from becoming a European-style permanent guest worker program or an American-style undocumented worker program.

GREEN JOBS

The Alberta Federation of Labour has been working with Greenpeace and the Sierra Club’s Prairie Chapter, along with other partners, on the issue of defining and creating green jobs in Alberta. The current economic downturn has shown us, once again, that our dependence on fossil fuel extraction as the foundation of our economy leaves us vulnerable. The work on green jobs with these partners also draws on examples of similar, successful partnerships between the labour movement and environmental groups in the United States.

The Alberta Federation of Labour, Greenpeace and the Sierra Club have:

- Talked with students at the AFL's labour school about green jobs
- Worked to promote the idea of green jobs in Alberta
- Published the first report on how Alberta can create a green economy.

COALITION – YES

In December 2008, the Alberta Federation of Labour worked with the Canadian Labour Congress to organize a very successful rally in support of the possible coalition between the federal New Democrats, Liberals and Bloc Québécois. Over 450 people attended a rally in downtown Edmonton to show their approval for a coalition government in Ottawa.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE

As part of a regular cycle, the OH&S Code underwent review in 2008. AFL staff sat as part of the labour delegation to the Working Group examining sections of the Code. The labour representatives were successful in preventing any rollbacks in worker safety (despite employer attempts to do so), but were only modestly successful in achieving new protections for workers. The process limited the potential for positive change by giving employers and the Minister

significant weight. The changes come into effect in June 2009.

FOIP

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP) issues took up a lot of time at the AFL. The AFL submits a number of requests for information to the provincial government in an attempt to learn more about contentious issues. In the past two years the AFL has pursued requests dealing with Bill 27, operations of the Labour Relations Board, Employment Standards enforcement orders, targeted employer lists for Employment Standards and OH&S enforcement, Employment Standards amendments, and other issues.

Not surprisingly due to the controversial nature of the AFL's requests; the government has dragged its feet on most of these files, refusing to release information and forcing the AFL to utilize the appeal process to gain access. A number of the cases remain unresolved, but the AFL was victorious in two that have been resolved.

PENSIONS

The AFL has been an active participant in the Labour Coalition on Pensions, which is made up of the unions representing members in the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the largest plan in Alberta. The Coalition has been engaged in an ongoing dispute over the government's attempts to take control of the LAPP.

The AFL also participated in the consultations held by the Alberta/BC Joint Expert Panel on Pensions. These consultations addressed the possible harmonization of pension standards legislation between the two jurisdictions, as well as fundamental pension issues such as surplus ownership and pension coverage. The AFL made two written submissions to the Panel, as well as an oral presentation.

This spring, the federal government is also holding a nationwide consultation on pensions: and the AFL, as well as making its own submissions, is coordinating the response from Alberta unions.

BOARDWATCH

As part of its ongoing commitment to monitor and assess the performance of the Alberta Labour Relations Board, the AFL has put together a database of over 700 LRB decisions. This database, which will be updated on a regular basis, will allow researchers to examine the Board's records to determine if decisions demonstrate patterns indicating bias. The project forms part of the AFL's larger campaign to confront the issues and institutions of labour law in the province.

2. WORKING WITH AFFILIATES

STRIKE SUPPORT

The Alberta Federation of Labour supported a number of affiliates when they were out on strike. In September 2007, the AFL supported

the rallies organized by construction workers who walked off the job in a wildcat strike. The AFL worked with UFCW 1118 during the strike at the Lilydale plant in Edmonton in the autumn of 2008; supported the PSAC workers at Canada Post when they went on strike in the winter of 2008 and assisted UFCW 401 workers locked out at Old Dutch.

The Federation provides support to affiliates by mobilizing and coordinating support from our affiliates – as and when requested by the unions engaged in job actions. We provide support in terms of communications and media, as well as by working to pressure the government on behalf of our members.

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Affiliates of the Alberta Federation of Labour began working together as part of an Organizing Committee. This committee has met to share information and is planning to develop more advanced training courses for organizers to complement those offered at the AFL labour school and elsewhere. *(The report of the Organizing Committee is attached for your information).*

CLC STRUCTURE REVIEW

The Canadian Labour Congress has launched a review of its structures, in the hopes of updating their institutions to better reflect the realities of today's labour movement. In order to help shape the AFL's contribution to this

process; affiliates were invited to attend a meeting in Red Deer to discuss how the CLC's structures could be improved to better serve its members. The AFL will continue to be involved in the CLC's Structure Review, as will affiliates.

3. WORKING WITH PARTNERS

WAGES CONFERENCE

In the fall of 2007, the AFL and the Parkland Institute co-hosted a conference on wages in Alberta. Called "**Treading Water,**" it examined why wages were not going up during the boom. It also looked at the different dimensions to wages and inequality in the labour market. The conference was attended by 150 people, and is considered a successful example of collaboration with one of our partners.

PROJECT 2012

The last Convention mandated the AFL to embark on an ambitious project to promote the AFL's Centennial in 2012. The AFL has partnered with the Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI) to create Project 2012 (www.project2012.ca). The project celebrates 100 years of workers' struggles and victories.

Work has begun on a number of fronts to produce material for Project 2012. The Centennial year will witness the publication of Alberta's most comprehensive labour history book. In the lead-up, there is a series of historical booklets aimed at popularizing

events and eras in Alberta's history. There are also two series of posters: "Alberta's Radical Past" and "The Making of our Movement," a series of DVDs and a number of other events, contests and commemorative elements to be released between now and 2012.

So far, three posters and one booklet have been released under the Project. All are available at the AFL office.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

UNION MAGAZINE

One of the highlights of the past two years has been the launch of **UNION: Insight and Analysis**, the AFL's seasonal publication. The magazine is a flagship of the AFL's communication tools. Edited collectively by the AFL Executive staff, and with contributions from guest contributors, it takes a deeper look into some of the issues of interest to working people in Alberta.

Union is aimed at union activists, local leadership and interested rank-and-file. It is distributed free-of-charge both electronically and in paper. There have been 5 issues of **UNION** to date examining: wages, labour law, pensions, health care, and solidarity in times of crisis.

It will continue to be published three times a year.

WEBSITE

After six years, the AFL has finally overhauled our website, www.afl.org, to make it fresher, easier to navigate and more user-friendly. The website is more than just a new look and adds interesting new features, such as discussion pages, RSS feeds, and a powerful search function. The new website is being launched at Convention.

5. EVENTS

MEMBERSHIP FORUM

The 2008 Membership Forum was held in Edmonton with the theme **“Building Union Power.”** The 150 delegates spent the weekend exploring strategies for strengthening unions and creating active membership. Keynote speaker, University of Montreal Professor Gregor Murray kicked off the event with an exploration of what unions need to do to renew and rejuvenate.

Breakout sessions looked at effective union leadership, improving union education and how to mobilize union members. The Forum closed with a discussion about possible future political directions for labour in Alberta.

LABOUR LAW SEMINAR

In September 2007, the AFL held a half-day seminar examining the consequences of the Supreme Court decision that struck down B.C. legislation restricting collective

bargaining. The decision was widely seen as an important victory for labour, as it included the right to free collective bargaining as part of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms provisions on freedom to associate.

The AFL asked a group of lawyers; Leanne Chahley, Gwen Gray and E. Wayne Benedict, to discuss potentials for labour to take advantage of this groundbreaking decision. About 50 union leaders attended the event held in Edmonton.

LABOUR SCHOOL

The AFL-CLC Labour School was held at the Jasper Park Lodge in Jasper, Alberta in January 2007 and 2008. The School continues to be a very popular and important opportunity for labour activists to build on their skills and tackle new topics.

In 2008, 196 students participated in 13 courses over the two-week period (January 14–25, 2008) of the school.

In 2009, 188 students participated in 13 courses over the two-week period (January 26–February 6, 2009) of the school.

KIDS’ CAMP

The AFL sponsors a kids camp every summer which is open to youth, ages 8-15, of affiliated unions. For the past two years the Camp was held at the Goldeye Centre in Nordegg; at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. The kids enjoy the

outdoor activities, and are provided with an interactive introduction to the labour movement. In 2008, a decision was taken to broaden the Kids' Camp planning committee and to build in a thematic approach to the introduction to unions and the labour movement.

In 2007, the camp was held from August 6–10 and had 75 campers with 14 leaders and junior leaders.

In 2008, the camp was held from August 11–15 and had 83 campers, and 18 leaders, junior counselors, nurses and camp director.

AFFILIATIONS:

Union	No. of Members
ACTRA Alberta	22
CUPE 8	965
CUPE 37	3,478
CUPE 2545	250
CUPE 3550	1,553
CUPE 4731	272
IRONWORKERS 720	1,304
PSAC 30027	67
PSAC 30334	18
PSAC 30402	141
PSAC 30851	711
PSAC 30902	319
UUWA	1,120

CONCLUSION

Working with affiliates and partners, these have been two exciting and successful years for the Alberta Federation of Labour. Our campaigns have given a voice to workers' concerns on a range of important issues: from the elections; to temporary foreign workers; to pensions; and jobs. We have worked well with our partners to put on a successful conference, and to start the ball rolling for the centennial celebrations in 2012. Our communications tools have been improved to better serve affiliates and promote labour issues in Alberta. We have been busy these past two years and are excited about working together for the next term.

6. OFFICE AND AFFILIATES

The Alberta Federation of Labour moved offices in October 2008 to 10654 – 101 Street The new offices, formerly occupied by CUPE 30, provide the Federation with more meeting space and are centrally located.

NEW AFFILIATES

The Federation expanded to welcome a number of new affiliates over the past two years:

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Council,

AFL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, 2007 – 2009