

REPORT OF THE AFL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

WHO WE ARE

The Alberta Federation of Labour is a voluntary association of unions and employee organizations who have come together to achieve common goals.

The Federation currently represents more than 110,000 union members from across the province and it speaks out on issues that matter to working people. Often these issues relate directly to the workplace. But the AFL is also active on a wide range of broader social issues – like the need to protect public education and public health care.

The Federation's biennial convention is the ultimate decision-making body for the Federation. However, between conventions, the AFL's Officers, Executive Committee and Executive Council set the direction for the organization.

VOICE FOR WORKING PEOPLE

The Alberta Federation of Labour aims to put working people's issues on the public agenda, in part by lobbying the mainstream media. Since the last AFL Convention, the Federation has commented on a wide range of issues, from things like workplace health and safety to wage stagnation.

Most recently, the AFL has: commented on proposed changes to Alberta's minimum wage; lobbied against changes

that would pave the way for mandatory drug and alcohol testing; criticized the government's approach to the idea of a province-wide workplace smoking ban; called for a commitment for "just transition" programs for workers affected by the Kyoto Accord; raised concerns about the growing use of foreign temporary workers on construction projects in the north; spoken out against employers who use "sham unions" to stop their workers from joining real unions; and opposed Premier Klein's latest plans for health care privatization.

In addition to working with the media, the AFL attempts to raise the concerns of working people in other forums. For example, every year the AFL participates in the Alberta Congress Board Conference (which brings leaders from labour, industry and government together for several days of face-to-face discussion and debate).

The AFL also works directly with like-minded groups (like the Friends of Medicare and the Alberta Teachers' Association among others) to draw public attention to issues of common concern.

GOVERNMENT LOBBYIST

The AFL meets regularly with politicians and other decision-makers in an ongoing effort to influence public policy. In recent months the AFL has met and

lobbied the new provincial Human Resources minister on the issues of minimum wage, workplace smoking bans and special treatment for big employers in the Fort McMurray oil sands.

The AFL also recently prepared and delivered a presentation to Edmonton City Council aimed at convincing the City of Edmonton to adopt a Living Wage policy. A presentation on the AFL's concerns about health care policy was also recently delivered at public hearings organized by the NDP opposition.

In addition, the AFL also made submissions to the government's so-called "Firewall committee"; to the provincial Learning Commission; to a legislative committee reviewing the AISH program; to a provincial committee debating a WCB surplus strategy; and to the WCB as they attempted to develop a strike/lockout policy.

The AFL has also been investigating the possibility of establishing a labour sponsored venture capital fund here in Alberta. An Alberta tax credit would have to be created first by the provincial government – so the AFL is considering the value of lobbying MLAs on that issue.

UNION COMMUNICATIONS

In late 2003, publication of the AFL's flagship newspaper, Labour News, was discontinued due to budget constraints. In early 2004, the Federation launched a new website, highlighting information on topics such as workplace rights, how to join a union and the benefits of union membership. Over the summer of 2004,

a literacy website was added, as was a new on-line version of Labour News. The AFL website also has the capacity to send out regular updates and bulletins to leaders, members and activists who sign-up for a special on-line service. However, as a result of staff shortages, this capacity has not been developed.

UNION SUPPORT

The AFL coordinates and mobilizes support for affiliated unions engaged in labour negotiations and disputes. In the past, this has involved such things as financial or picket line support; assistance with boycotts and "hot cargo" edicts; or assistance with research and media relations.

Since the last convention, the AFL worked closely with workers from A-Channel in Edmonton as they struck for (and eventually won) a first collective agreement. The AFL has worked with UFCW on a number of recent campaigns including the Shaw Conference Centre strike and the union's on-going effort to win a first collective agreement at Lakeside Packers in Brooks. In February 2005, the AFL also worked with IAM to draw public attention to the union-busting strategies being employed by Finning in Edmonton.

The AFL has also supported the following unions in recent negotiations and disputes: TWU (Telus), CEP (Celanese), UNA, UFCW (Levis Plant), PSAC, CAW (CN Rail), CUPE 1846 (Blood Services, Calgary). The AFL has also supported events organized by various labour councils around the province, including the EDLC's and the

MHDLC's Labour Day barbeques and the CDLC's Stampede Breakfast.

Most recently, the AFL has been working with a number of concerned affiliates and a number of non-affiliated building trades unions on concerns related to the Horizon project in Fort McMurray. A special coalition meeting was held and a draft provincial action plan was developed.

LABOUR EDUCATION

The Federation sponsors an annual two-week school for union activists. The school offers courses in a wide range of areas – all aimed at building stronger and more effective unions.

The latest AFL school was held in December 2004 in Jasper and attracted more than 170 participants from both public and private sector unions. In 2003, the school had 215 participants.

In addition to the school, AFL staff organized and/or participated in stand-alone seminars on a variety of topics including, parliamentary procedure, pensions, freedom of information and health and safety.

The AFL also sponsored a union educators' conference in March and a special workshop in April on building bridges between labour and the aboriginal community. The Building Bridges Workshop was the third of three – the first was held on March 2/03 on the Enoch Reserve and the second on April 30/04 at Pigeon Lake.

Finally, the AFL took the lead in holding the first training session of the Prairie Organizing Institute in Dec 2003 (it was

held in conjunction with the annual AFL School). The organizing session attracted organizers and activists interested in organizing from all three Prairie Provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba).

LABOUR RESEARCH

The AFL conducts on-going research on economic and social issues. The research is made available to affiliates to support both their work with members and their work at the bargaining table. The AFL's last major research booklet, entitled "**Running to Stand Still**," was released in early 2004 and examined the issue of wage stagnation in Alberta.

ACTIVIST COALITIONS

The AFL participates in a number of coalitions with other unions and community groups. Over the past year, the AFL played a prominent role in establishing a new progressive activist network, called Public Interest Alberta (PIA). The Federation has also resumed work with Friends of Medicare and other community groups aimed at rallying public opposition to the provincial government's latest push for health care privatization. In particular, the AFL was one of the driving forces behind the recent alternative symposium on health reform – entitled *Weighing the Evidence: International Experience with Health Care Reform* – which was held in Calgary, April 30 and May 1.

In addition to health care, the AFL was also involved in the Women's Equality Forum and the "Big Party for Public Education" (along with several other

meeting and events dealing with education and post-secondary education issues). Finally, the AFL took part in the Parallel Conference to the Western Premiers' Conference. The Western and Territories Federations of Labour Presidents and Linda Silas from the Canadian Federation of Nurses' Unions (CFNU) attended the Conference in Inuvik, July 7-9, 2004.

PENSIONS

The AFL continues to play a leading role in defending and improving Alberta's largest public pension program, the Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP). At the AFL's urging, the labour movement has agreed to resume efforts aimed at winning independence for the LAPP.

POLITICAL ACTION

The Federation of Labour has traditionally played a leading role in supporting progressive parties and candidates during elections at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. The past year saw elections in Alberta at all three levels, so obviously, the AFL was kept busy. AFL staffers were assigned to assist progressive candidates in the municipal elections – and during the provincial election, AFL policy director Jason Foster was seconded to oversee the NDP's central campaign.

The AFL also: established a Political Action Coalition to bring unions together with community groups on political issues; worked with PIA on an issues campaign during the provincial election campaign; and took the first steps with affiliates to develop a political

issues campaign for unions and union members.

BILL 27

In 2003, the Alberta government rammed through a controversial piece of legislation, Bill 27, which forced run-off votes between unions and weakened contracts in the health care sector. As part of its response to this situation, the AFL attempted to show that the new law had comprised the independence of the Alberta Labour Relations Board. In 2004, Federation staffers spend months trying to dig up information on the issue through the provincial Freedom of Information Act (FOIP). A final decision on access to key documents is currently being made by the Freedom of Information Commissioner.

In addition, the AFL and several affiliate unions also challenged Bill 27 in court and under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) where we argued that the law violated protections for free collective bargaining outlined in the NAFTA side agreement on labour.

The campaign against Bill 27 was financed by a special assessment passed at the last AFL Convention. Over two years, more than \$190,000 was raised for Bill 27 research, events and legal costs.

MEMBERSHIP FORUM

In the years between its biennial conventions, the AFL holds membership forums. The most recent forum was held in May 2004. The forum focused on the serious challenges to labour posed by the weakening of the post-War "peace agreement" between labour and

employers (under which unions agreed to labour peace in exchange for a new set of labour laws and rules that recognized and facilitated workers' right to bargain collectively). At this Forum, we took a clear look at the decline of our Industrial Relations system, and began to seriously consider what new strategies and tactics are open to labour in its struggle to effectively advance the interests of working people.

The Membership Forum was also the place where the AFL unveiled its arbitration research project and where affiliates were given their first look at the AFL's new arbitration data base.

KIDS CAMP

The AFL hosts an annual week-long summer camp for the children of union members. It's an opportunity for the kids to enjoy a wide range of summer activities – and learn about unions and social justice at the same time. In 2004, the camp was held at Goldeye Centre in Nordegg and attracted a record-setting number of participants (106 campers, 8 junior counselors and 15 leaders, for a total of 129).

AFFILIATES

Since the last convention, many AFL affiliates have passed major milestones in their respective histories. For example, in 2003 the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA) made the big step of joining the AFL. Other unions also marked major anniversaries – including the Carpenters and the Plumbers and Pipefitters. The AFL also participated in major events (conventions, AGMs etc.) organized by the following affiliate and non-

affiliate unions: CEP, UNA, TWU, CUPE, UFCW, ATA, IWA, NUPGE, IBEW, HSAA.

YOUTH

One of the AFL's on-going priorities has been to encourage increased youth involvement in the labour movement and support the work of young people involved in progressive groups in the community. With that goal in mind, in 2003 the AFL formally established a Youth committee and positions for youth representatives were established on the AFL's Executive Council. The AFL also showed its support for mobilizing youth by co-sponsoring (with the CLC) Solidarity Works! in the summer of 2003. The program matched young activists with unions and progressive community groups for a summer of education, work experience and activism.

GLBT

In an effort to promote greater tolerance and inclusiveness within the labour movement – and to give a platform for a group of workers who often find themselves marginalized and excluded – the AFL established a Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgendered Working Group. In March 2005, the Executive Council voted to transform the working group into a formal standing committee.

SPECIAL DAYS

The AFL marks a number of important dates throughout the year including: April 28, the National Day of Mourning (during which the AFL participates in and supports events in several

communities); May 1, or May Day (during which the AFL supports the May Day event organized by various District Labour Councils); and December 6, the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women Events (during which the AFL participates in events and campaigns organized by various affiliates and community groups).

LITERACY

The AFL received \$56,670 from the National Literacy Secretariat for a special Literacy Project. The project involved copying a previously produced AFL literacy video; developing an education package of leaflets and fact sheets; and developing a literacy website. The video and materials were mailed out to every local and Labour Council and Committee. A portable display was also created and the Literacy Committee was expanded to include someone from each of the Labour Councils/Committees to try and further this work around the province. A committee member was also able to participate in the CLC Literacy Working Group because of the funds we had received. The AFL traveled around the province doing presentations on literacy as a workplace issue, showing the video and distributing the materials at the Labour Councils.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

In addition to dealing with the on-going work of the Federation, in 2004 the AFL's Executive Council was also called upon to make some tough decisions about the AFL's financial direction. As a result of mounting shortfalls, Council decided to take a number of actions

(outlined in the financial report) including things like approaching affiliates for grants and interest-free loans, not filling a vacant executive officer position and laying-off one executive staff member. Council's work on financial issues has culminated in the three financial resolutions that will be debated on the floor of this year's convention.

AFL STRUCTURE SUB-COMMITTEE

A sub committee of the AFL's Executive Council was struck at the December 2004 Executive Meeting, to examine possible changes to the way the AFL is governed.

The main objective of this committee – called the AFL Structure Committee – is to review the AFL's current operating structure and make recommendations for improvements. In particular, the committee is looking for organizational reforms that will make it easier for the AFL to fulfill its mandate while, at the same time, improving affiliate participation and internal communication.

The Structure Committee is comprised of: Kerry Barrett (AFL); Diane Hollingshead (CAW); Neil Mckinnon (CDLC); Rick Arsenault (IAM); Mike Semeniuk (IBEW); Jane Sustrik (UNA) and Melissa Field (HSAA).

The committee met in early January to establish a plan. It was determined that a survey of all Federations of Labour across Canada would be conducted regarding structure, dues, governance, etc. A list of questions was developed and committee members were assigned Federations of Labour to question. A

data base was also developed in order to input and analyze the data. We are currently reviewing that data.

In addition, a meeting of the chairs of all the AFL standing committees is being planned to get their input on: how the committees should interact with the executive; how communications between committees, affiliates and executive could improve; and what they feel their roles are with the Federation

The Committee is also planning to:

- Contact past presidents for their input on what worked well during their tenure and what they would have liked to improve.
- Contact Federations in other countries to get some outside comparators.
- Talk with affiliates in other provinces - what types of services they get, how are the services they get from their federation, could it be improved or changed, etc.
- Develop a questionnaire to poll our own affiliates for their thoughts, opinions, and input.

OFFICE, COUNCIL, STAFF

Over the past two years, the AFL office has been a busy place, filled with people coming and going. First, the office itself was moved (from 170 Street to our current address on 172 Street). Then AFL President Les Steel resigned to accept an appointment with the CLC. Then Council made the decision to appoint Secretary Treasurer Kerry Barrett as President and further decided to leave the position of Secretary Treasure unfilled until convention.

On the staff side, Communications Director Gil McGowan was on parental leave for most of 2004; Policy Analysis Director Jason Foster was seconded to the Alberta NDP for several months to help direct the party's provincial election campaign; and Secretary Karen Werlin was seconded part-time to the new activist organization, Public Interest Alberta (PIA) and Friends of Medicare (FOM).

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Council,

AFL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, 2003 – 2005

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