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## REPORT of the EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

### INTRODUCTION

Greetings to all the delegates attending this convention. On your behalf I am pleased to present this report - outlining the activities of your Federation over the past two years. On one level the environment in Alberta for working people the Alberta Federation of Labour has not changed. We could have copied from last convention.

The Alberta economy is still growing. We are still recording unprecedented financial profits. Unemployment is still relatively low. Our political and business leaders, while ignoring our growing social deficit, are bragging about the "Alberta Advantage". Alberta has just come through a provincial election and in realizing Albertan's frustration with a change in government, we saw a larger Conservative majority. Legislation has been passed paving the way for private hospitals and our public education system is at risk.

The Alberta Federation of Labour has responded to these challenges. We have been on every picket line; we have challenged this government on the policies. We played a major role in the campaign to save our public health care. We have demanded lower class sizes and lower tuition for post secondary education. Throughout this convention you will be given reports, hear speeches and participate in discussions, debate resolutions and pass policy papers. All of these reports address the challenges facing us and the actions proposed and taken by your Federation.

On other levels, however, the environment is very different. In the past we have seen a growing militancy by our members and the public around issues that are broader in nature - trade agreements. Albertan Canadians are becoming increasingly concerned about our government and corporations taking away our right to a fair and democratic decision making process. We have seen the activism in Vancouver, Seattle, Windsor, and here in Alberta around the Bill 11 campaign. More and more we are seeing Canadians taking action against governments that they do not believe are in the best interests of all Canadians. And working people in Alberta are taking action. That means the AFL needs to be a part of the action.

Another challenge for the Labour movement over the past two years has been internal. The Canadian Auto Workers have been sanctioned by the Canadian Labour Congress for their activities around raiding. The Alberta Union of Employees have been suspended by their national union, the National Union of Government and Public Employees Union, for their activities with regard to workers' abilities to move from Union to Union. Both these actions had a direct effect on the AFL. It has meant a significant drop in our membership. That translates to a significant drop in our revenue. The AFL executive committee has responded in several ways. You will hear about them and be a part of the discussions and decisions throughout this convention. A drop of revenue will impact the work of the federation. Make no mistake - the face of the Federation will change. How is up to all of us. We must find ways to ensure that the people of Alberta continue to be represented by a strong labour centre and that the Federation is active.

But the impact on the labour movement, both here in Alberta and across the country is not just financial. We are not a united labour movement at this point. We have serious concerns and we need to be a part of the solutions. We need to bring these issues on the table and talk about them. We need to work out solutions

disputes. And in the end, we need to have rules, our constitutions that abides by. These are big challenges for us. It is never easy working through internal issues. But work through them we must!

### **Labour News**

The Alberta Federation of Labour continues to publish its monthly tabloid newspaper, Labour News. Circulated free to all Federation affiliates, Labour News covers economic, social and political events from a labour perspective.

Over the past two years, Labour News has won a number of awards from the Canadian Association of Labour Media (CALM) - including the awards for best feature writing and best news photo. As a result of the high quality of reporting and writing going into Labour News, it has earned a reputation as one of the best labour publications in the country.

Since our last Convention, Labour News has been published thirteen times. Each edition has contained at least 20 articles written by either AFL staff members or volunteers from affiliated unions. Labour News has also been successful in attracting advertising - enough revenue has consistently been generated to cover printing costs.

In terms of content, Labour News continues to print a wide variety of commentaries, editorials, news stories, reviews and features of interest to labour activists. The newspaper makes a special effort to cover the activities of local unions, Labour Councils and labour's social partners.

### **Strikes and Job Actions**

The AFL continues to play an instrumental role in mobilizing affiliates to support striking workers. The Federation has been particularly effective in organizing support pickets and arranging for financial support for striking locals. Below is a list of job actions taken by unions in Alberta over the past two years.

**Communication Energy and Paperworkers (CEP) Local 855 - Spring 1999**  
Workers at the Weldwood Pulp Mill and Hi-Atha Sawmill in Hinton won wage and benefit improvements after a short strike.

**United Steelworkers of America (USWA) Local 6034 - Spring-Summer 1999**

After a seven-week strike, workers at Caradon Indalex West of Calgary won a new contract and a 15 percent wage increase over five years.

**United Steelworkers of America (USWA) Local 5220 - Fall 1999**

After a strike that lasted several weeks, 260 workers at AltaSteel in Edmonton won a new contract which addressed their concerns about wages, benefits and job security.

**Grain Services Union (GSU) - Fall 1999**

In the fall and early winter of 1999-2000, grain-handling workers employed by Agricore walked off the job in communities across the province. The reasons for the job action were concerns about job security and opposition to concessions being demanded by the employer.

**Communications Energy Paperworkers (CEP) Local 115A and GCIU Local 34M - Fall 1999**

In November 1999, about 160 editorial workers went on strike against the Edmonton Herald in an effort to win a first collective agreement. The editorial workers were joined on the picket line by production workers (members of GCIU) who were hoping to renegotiate their existing contract.

The strike quickly became a battle between democratic freedom and control. On one side, the workers were taking a stand in defense of their rights and the right to organize. On the other side, there was media mogul (the Herald) asserting his "right" to use or misuse his power as he saw fit.

The workers received substantial support from the public and the Alberta labour movement. However, the Herald took advantage of Alberta's labour law (with no provisions for first-contract arbitration) and simply refused to bargain.

The GCIU members eventually settled and went back to work. In June eight months on the picket line CEP members voted reluctantly to accept a no-work agreement that dissolved their bargaining unit. In the end, the agreement was yet another example of how Alberta's labour laws undermine the right of workers to organize by putting virtually unlimited power in the hands of employers.

#### **Boilermakers Local D-513 - Winter 2000**

Workers at the Georgia-Pacific plant in Edmonton won an important victory in 2000 after walking the picket line for several weeks. The workers won after the company - the largest building products manufacturer in North America - demanded cuts in overtime pay and benefits as well as a move to a non-union system that would have thrown several union members out of work. The union eventually forced the company to back down on all their concession demands.

#### **United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 401 - Spring 2000**

In March and April of 2000, about 165 workers at Canbra Foods shut down the company's canola processing plant in Lethbridge. The workers won a new contract with wage and benefit improvements.

#### **Communication Energy Paperworkers (CEP) Local 447 - Spring 2000**

In April 2000, about 120 workers went on strike at Weyerhaeuser's original board plant in Edson. The workers succeeded in winning a new contract that included none of the concessions originally demanded by the employer.

#### **Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) - Spring 2000**

On May 24-25, 2000, more than 10,000 AUPE members staged a dramatic strike at hospitals and health care facilities across the province. The strike was deemed illegal under Alberta law - but it led to a new contract with substantial wage and benefit improvements for workers.

#### **Retail and Wholesale Workers - Canadian Autoworkers (CAW) Spring-Summer 2000**

Warehouse workers and drivers employed by the Edmonton branch of Distributors Ltd. (BDL) were locked out by their employer early in the year 2000. BDL then contracted out all deliveries of Molson and Labatt products in northern Alberta to a non-union company called MTE Logistix. The union was eventually able to secure a generous severance package for all its members whose jobs were lost. The union also won a precedent-setting decision from the Labour Relations Board (LRB) regarding secondary picketing. The LRB ruled that Alberta Labour Code's prohibition on secondary picketing contravenes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

#### **Union of Canadian Transportation Workers, a component of the Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) - Summer 2000**

During the summer of 2000, about 120 PSAC members working at the International Airport went on strike against their employer, the Edmonton International Airport Authority. The main issues of the strike were job security and wages.

#### **United Steelworkers of America (USWA) Local 9302 - Fall 2000**

The staff of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees took to the picket line for two-and-a-half months last fall after their employer demanded significant cuts in benefits. The workers eventually agreed to a contract that provides for a 5 percent wage increase over two years. Unfortunately, the agreement also included significant benefit reductions.

#### **Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 583 - Winter-Spring 2001**

Bus drivers and trades people working for the City of Calgary's transit department went on strike for seven weeks between February and April 2001. The main issues were to halt the expansion of the City's lower-wage shuttle bus service and to seek wage and benefit improvements for drivers and trades people.

#### **International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 1681 - Winter 2001**

About 35 IAM members working for an airplane-maintenance company in Edmonton called Air Terminal Services have been on strike for a first time since an agreement since late December 2000. The employer, a U.S. based company,

an anti-union history, is taking advantage of Alberta's lax labour laws negotiating a deal with the workers' duly elected bargaining agent.

### **Bill 11 Campaign**

In January 2000, the Alberta Federation of Labour and a coalition of unions and community groups launched a province-wide campaign against the government's controversial private health care law, Bill 11. The coalition paid for radio and TV ads, information booklets, a website and a series of information forums - all aimed at revealing the dangers posed by private health care.

But while the campaign to stop Bill 11 was started by organized opposition groups, it quickly became a true grassroots movement. Thousands of Albertans with little or no past history of activism joined the campaign. It reached its high point in mid-April with two major rallies in Edmonton.

Naysayers predicted that the events would be flops - even many of those who were worried about filling the halls. But 3,000 people packed into the Stambaugh Centre in conservative Calgary and nearly 7,000 filled the AgriCom in Edmonton, overflowing.

The rallies also acted as a catalyst for two-and-a-half weeks of protests in the Alberta Legislature. Night after night, thousands of people kept coming back to demonstrate their opposition to Bill 11 by singing, chanting and banging pots and pans.

Significantly, protests were not restricted to Edmonton and Calgary. There were also vocal demonstrations in smaller communities like Fort McMurray, Red Deer and Lethbridge. The scope and energy of the opposition surprised almost everyone. Even government spokespeople publicly admitted they had "lost the communications war."

As a result of the campaign against Bill 11, the government was forced to make a number of important concessions. For example they promised to open up more MRIs; they announced \$180 million in new spending; and they extended health coverage to include soft lens for cataract surgeries.

Unfortunately, despite all these victories, the AFL and our coalition partners were unable to achieve our main goal - stopping Bill 11. In May 2000, the Bill received royal assent by the Lieutenant Governor, Lois Hole. So far, no private hospitals have applied to set up private hospitals under the new law - but that is a matter of time until they do. In the meantime, the AFL will continue to monitor the situation and work with groups like Friends of Medicare to draw attention to the spread of private health care.

### **Membership Forum**

More than one hundred delegates participated in the first Alberta Federation of Labour Membership Forum on May 12 and 13, 2000. The Forum, which is mandated by Convention to be held in those years where no convention is scheduled, is intended to accomplish two main objectives. The first goal of the forum was to provide educational and mobilizing opportunities to the membership. The second goal was to stimulate debate, and to provide a forum for informal exchanges of views between the executive and union activists.

This year's Forum was organized around the theme, Labour and the Law. It featured several keynote speakers, expert workshops on current labour law and a panel and plenary on the arbitration process.

University of Calgary Industrial Relations Professor Alan Ponak opened the conference with a strong presentation on the benefits of the Rand Formula for trade unions.

"It is unlikely that labour can convince this government to ban the use of strikebreakers or provide first contract arbitration," said Ponak. "But, it is possible for labour to get the Rand Formula - which I consider to be as important to labour as the other two provisions."

At an organized lunch, labour lawyer Lyle Kanee of Chivers, Greckol & spoke about negotiating family friendly collective agreements. He urged deal with the growing conflict between work and family demands on C workers, and offered several thought-provoking solutions.

On afternoon of May 13, delegates attended workshops by legal experts variety of topics ranging from video surveillance in the workplace to misconduct. In the morning plenary, the membership enthusiastically Federation's threefold action plan for the next twelve months, as outlined President Audrey Cormack. The plan focused on promoting organization a booklet on Alberta's economic situation, told from a labour perspective preparing a concise and complete analysis of why workers need union laws that protect unions.

### **Administration**

As usual, the AFL's activity on social and labour issues has created an amount of administrative work for the Federation's office staff. We will take this opportunity to thank all staff members for their hard work over two years.

The year 2000 brought a major change in staffing at the Federation. employee Felice Young literally left the AFL for "greener pastures." Her partner Larry are currently in the process of starting their own buffalo wish them the best of luck!

Felice's position at the AFL was filled by Lydia Lanman, a recent grad University of Alberta. Lydia has taken on responsibility for both the W Committee and the International Solidarity Committee.

Unfortunately, not all the news on the staffing front is good. As a result unexpected loss of AUPE as an affiliate, the Federation has been forced ways to cut costs. The officers and the Executive have been doing everything their power to reduce the impact - but they saw no way to avoid at least temporary lay-offs for some staff. Lay-off notices were given to Maurice and Lydia Lanman at the beginning of April. Unless new sources of revenue found, they will be without jobs immediately following the Convention

The cash crunch has also had an effect on other aspects of the Federation-day operations. For example, instead of leasing new computer equipment been planned, then AFL is now planning to buy-out the lease on the current computer system. This measure is expected to save the Federation several thousand dollars in the coming year.

The AFL's tight financial situation has also made it difficult to proceed contract negotiations with the staff. The agreements for both support executive staff (members of OPEIU and CEP respectively) have expired negotiations are currently scheduled - at least until after Convention.

### **World March of Women**

Women and labour have been the largest victims of neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies. In an effort to fight these governments, and overcome barriers, the Alberta Federation of Labour joined the World March of Women

The concept of the World March was born out of two Canadian experiences Women's March Against Poverty organized by the Federation des Femmes Quebec in 1995, and the National Women's March Against Poverty organized the Canadian Labour Congress and the National Action Committee on Women held throughout Canada in 1996.

Women from 154 countries waived their differences, built a consensus and marched in solidarity against poverty and violence against women in the 2000. The actions implemented in the campaign raised the conscience of leaders to the millions of women who must fight for basic needs, and physical, emotional and sexual abuse on a daily basis.

Levels of action began on March 8, 2000, International Women's Day concluded on October 17, 2000, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

The Federation was involved in the march on several levels that include participation in national and international lobbying efforts, participatio organization of localized and national World March events, and produc distribution of World March information and educational materials. Du World March of Women, the AFL endeavored to implement the deman of the march into the Federation's communications materials and plan raising awareness of the march, provincially.

### **Day of Mourning**

The AFL has continued to raise the profile of the International Day of around the province, commemorating workers who were killed on the is now marked in every Alberta centre by ceremonies, flags at half-mi minutes of silence in workplaces. The AFL has made a point in each of three Days of Mourning to release new research relating to workplace fatalities, showing that the scourge of workplace death has not left us workers are being killed in Alberta than ever before. The AFL has also in a number of regional ceremonies as well as the Calgary and Edmon ceremonies.

### **WCB**

The AFL has continued to push for change at the Workers Compensat There has been much to change at the WCB in the past two years. Th been vocal in challenging WCB actions, such as the \$100,000 donatio and Field games and questioning the President's large salary increase when injured workers are being denied their right to fair compensatio priorities have been to push for more accountability from WCB and su group Medicine Hat workers who filed a lawsuit for their workplace illr has taken a lead role in the WCB Labour Coalition, which includes AFL Building Trades and independent unions. Most recently the Coalition h pushing the Minister of Human Resources to implement recommendat two review committees which criticized WCB policy and practices.

### **International Women's Day**

The Alberta Federation of Labour launched its World March of Womer with an International Women's Day march on March 11, 2000. The ev Together: Against Violence and Poverty" included speakers, performe displays all focused on an effort to raise awareness about local and in women's issues. In 2001, the Federation used International Women's highlight the importance of female voters in the provincial election. T was also represented at IWD events in Edmonton and Calgary on Mar

In addition, the Federation presents an IWD award to a sister who ha women's issues in the Alberta labour movement. In 2000, Sister Corn presented Sister Yvonne Schmitz of the Calgary and District Labour C award at an activity in Calgary on March 8th. Sister Frankie Nash of L the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union was the 2001 I recipient.

### **CONCLUSION**

Brothers & Sisters, I think you will see, through this report and other convention, that the Alberta Federation of Labour has been active ove two years. That is you - you are the Federation! And we are counting just as active over the next two years. As we have discussed the issue challenging - maybe more so. But our activism is critical to governme wanting to recognize workers and their contributions and rights. And resolve our internal issues - because we know that together we are st executive council of the Alberta Federation commits itself to that strug

Solidarity!



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