

INSIGHT: ALBERTA'S CHANGING LANDSCAPE • LESSONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD • MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS MATTER

ANALYSIS: WILDROSE POLICIES BAD FOR LABOUR • JOIN TOGETHER CAMPAIGN SUCCESS • ALBERTA UNION LEADERS SPEAK OUT

SPRING-SUMMER 2010

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INSIGHT & ANALYSIS
AN ALBERTA FEDERATION OF LABOUR PUBLICATION

**LABOUR &
POLITICS**

What does Alberta's
changing political
landscape mean for
workers and unions?



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SPRING-SUMMER 2010

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First Thoughts

The end of the recession may be in sight – but storm clouds are still gathering on the horizon for workers and unions.

Here in Alberta, we're facing the prospect of yet another round of deep cuts and privatization in the public sector. At the same time, the emergence of the Wildrose Alliance Party poses serious threats to many of the things we believe in and have fought for – everything from public health care and public education to workplace safety regulations and balanced labour laws.

At the national level, groups like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business are fuelling an ill-advised and mean-spirited backlash against public pensions. At the same time, the percentage of workers who belong to unions continues to decline as a result of the recession and “off-shoring” of jobs in manufacturing and a growing number of other sectors.

In many parts of the country it's not an exaggeration to say that the middle-class lifestyle that unions helped establish is slipping away. To top things off, the labour movement's once significant political clout is in decline in most provinces and at the federal level.

Despite all of this bad news, the Canadian labour movement is still a force to be reckoned with. We have millions of members, tens of thousands of activists and thousands of skilled organizers, negotiators, researchers, communicators, strategists and other staff. But are we up to the challenges of the 21st century? Do we fully understand those challenges – and do we have the tools, the organization and the vision needed to deal with them?

This issue of *Union* looks at these issues and at how the labour movement can more effectively protect the interests of working people in an increasingly hostile economic and political environment.

Gil McGowan
President



THIS ISSUE'S THEME:

Politics in Alberta are changing

Alberta's political landscape is more fractured than at any time in nearly 40 years – but what does this mean for the labour movement? Are there opportunities as well as risks? What can and should unions be doing?

In this issue of *Union*, Shannon Phillips explores the new political climate in the province and the rise in the popularity of the Wildrose Alliance Party. We also look at some core Wildrose policies and spell out what they really mean.

Jerry Toews writes about his experience working for Join Together Alberta, the coalition of unions, including the Alberta Federation of Labour, community groups and social-services agencies that fought the Alberta government's plan to return to draconian cuts to public-sector spending.

Terry Inigo-Jones looks at lessons that progressives in Alberta can learn from around the world. In Nova Scotia, the NDP was able to grow from three seats in 1993 to winning 31 seats and forming the provincial government in 2009. How did it move from third place to top spot?

In Norway, unions led a victorious drive to halt the right-wing drift in government that favoured privatization, tax cuts and public-sector cuts. In the United States and Australia, the labour movement came together to find ways to help progressive parties come to power. Are there lessons here for Alberta?

In this issue's history article, Winston Gereluk of the Alberta Labour History Institute shows us that, while political action has always been a risky subject for Alberta's trade unions, they have a long history of getting involved.

There's much more to read in this issue of *Union*. We hope you enjoy it.

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS FOR LABOUR MOVEMENT

*Progressive voices must be heard as right-wing
Wildrose energizes political debate*

SHANNON PHILLIPS

On the surface, Alberta's new Wildrose Alliance Party seems to have it all – a charismatic, media-savvy leader, the backing of a growing segment of the oil and gas sector and a maverick-outsider image that suggests this is a party that will do things differently.

Throw in a few public-opinion polls that show their support surging and a sprinkling of Tory MLAs walking away from the comfort of government to sit with them, and it's a recipe for a real challenge to the Stelmach Conservatives.

Or is it? Some argue the appearance of the Wildrose Alliance will, at the very least, shake things up a little and keep the 40-year-old Conservative government on its toes. Others aren't so sure that Wildrose will really be successful in unseating much of the PC juggernaut come election time and worry that it will keep Stelmach's government "on its toes" in all the wrong ways.

It is easy to point to public-opinion polls to build a case that the Wildrose Alliance is on the move. Three polls in four months showed it as the biggest competitor to the government, garnering 30 per cent of Albertans' support, trailing the Conservatives by only a few points. Meanwhile, the Liberals are

stalled in the mid-20s and the NDP is unable to break 10 per cent. If the polls are correct, the only alternative to the creaking Conservative regime is a fledgling Wildrose.

However, many argue that simply reading the polls is a superficial analysis of the impact the Alliance will have on Alberta politics in the long run.

For example, polls between elections are an inaccurate way to measure success at the ballot box, according to Lisa Lambert, a political scientist at the University of Calgary. Lambert studies smaller parties and says there's a powerful trend that shows Canadians are happy to tell pollsters all kinds of things between elections, but a party's success depends far more on its financing and organizational machinery on election day.

"A great national example is the Green Party. Between elections, and even during campaigns, the Greens poll between



10 and 15 per cent, sometimes almost 20 per cent. But they've barely been able to get five per cent of the votes on election day," says Lambert. When it comes right down to it, people are often unwilling to park their votes with a small, untested, outsider party.

Lambert argues that this effect is very much in play in Alberta. "For all the talk of Alberta being mavericks, there is little evidence to support the myth. We don't have a lot of second- or third-party voting, let alone maverick parties outside the mainstream."

She says the Wildrose Alliance is a party that grew out of grievance and ideology, but grievance and ideology don't necessarily raise the kind of money needed to mount a serious challenge to the Conservatives. "The PCs are a big-tent party, where red Tories and extremely right-wing social conservatives can and do co-exist. They also have a multi-million-dollar election war chest. And that is what makes all the difference on election day."

"Let's say these recent polls (showing a surge in Wildrose Alliance support) are accurate," argues Lambert. "Even so, only six out of 10 potential voters in Alberta actually show up to vote. And because there is a powerful default support for the Conservatives, the governing PCs are at a great advantage when almost half of the electorate stays home on election day.

"Many small parties have been born in Alberta, it's true," says Lambert. "But it is equally true that many small parties have also died at the hands of the Conservative machine."

Indeed, the Wildrose Alliance isn't the only new party on the block. A new version of the Alberta Party was recently born by the merger of the existing small Alberta Party with Renew Alberta, a campaign of activists looking to create a centrist political party. It is embarking on a consultation with citizens before announcing any policies, but backers include former Lougheed Tories and a former Liberal organizer.

University of Lethbridge political scientist Harold Jansen says Wildrose's success will also depend on how well the new party's vote is concentrated.

"Essentially, they're fighting for the 60-65 per cent of the vote that right-of-centre parties command in Alberta. They need to pull enough from the Conservatives in Calgary and in rural Alberta to win seats," says Jansen, who adds that it is highly unlikely the Alliance could take more than 50 per cent of the vote in its first election. Serious contention for power will have to come from the right kind of vote splits and strong campaigns against Conservatives.

The Parklands Institute's Ricardo Acuña says that, as cracks emerge in the bedrock Conservative support, there are opportunities for labour

Jansen says that the rise of the Wildrose may end up being a good thing for some opposition candidates in select areas. “In some districts, the rise of the Wildrose Alliance will likely pull enough votes from the Conservatives to let Liberals (and maybe a couple of New Democrats in Edmonton) win, but overall, the Liberals are so far behind the Conservatives, that vote-splitting is not a factor.”

He says that unless Alberta sees electoral reform – changing how we elect MLAs to a proportional system – it is “highly unlikely that the Wildrose Alliance would be able to win enough seats to form a single party majority government ...Were they to form a government under such a system, it would have to be a minority or a coalition with another party.”

Jansen says it's curious that the Alliance talks a big game about democratic reform, including a mechanism to recall MLAs and more referenda – policies that are a staple of right-wing movements since the Reform Party of the 1990s, and one of the big reasons why many people, who feel alienated from politics and politicians, are attracted to parties like Wildrose.

“But (they) don't promise to even look at the way votes are translated into seats,” says Jansen, who adds that

electoral reform and changing to a system of proportional representation would go some length to addressing the grievances of many people that their elected representatives don't reflect their views. Those reforms would benefit Wildrose, as it would all smaller parties in a parliamentary system.

What of the Alliance's actual policies? On this issue, the Conservatives seem to be waiting to 'draw out' the Wildrose and paint them as extreme right-wingers with unsavoury views.

“As the Alliance is forced to define itself, it may show that it is offside of the mainstream,” says Jansen, who argues that there is less room on the right of the Conservatives than most people realize.

“If the Alliance thinks we're spending too much on health care, what would they cut? What would that do to wait times and accessibility of the health-care system?”

Given the last provincial budget, it's clear the Conservatives know that Albertans have little appetite for health-care privatization or big cuts. Their strategy, says Jansen, is to make the Wildrose show its true colours.



The Wildrose Alliance has been coy on its policies in a number of areas, but the ones they have been forthcoming about are most certainly detrimental to organized labour, says Ricardo Acuña, Executive Director of the Parkland Institute, a thinktank housed at the University of Alberta.

According to the Wildrose policy document on its website, the party supports cuts to health care, changes to the labour code, more private schools and undermining the Alberta Teachers Association, and challenging the building trades in the construction industry. All of those policies are bad for wages and working conditions for ordinary people, argues Acuña.

He says there's something more quietly dangerous about the rise of the Wildrose Alliance.

"The party represents a false sentiment of grassroots, populist democracy, and the grassroots membership of trade unions, just like the general Alberta public, sees that as attractive. That is appealing for workers. It is the same formula that made the old Reform Party successful in the early 1990s."

Organized labour needs to find ways to break down the false populism of right-wing movements and instead build truly democratic ways for workers to engage in the political process, he says.

One of the biggest indicators of the Wildrose Alliance's false grassroots populism lies in who funds them. Leader Danielle Smith refused to disclose the list of corporations and individuals that funded her leadership campaign in 2009, but it is clear by their policies on reducing royalties and environmental regulations that the party is very close to Calgary-based oil and gas companies.

Jansen, who researches campaign finance reform at the University of Lethbridge, says the 2008 figures showed the Alliance received about 45 per cent of its contributions from corporate sources, and 2009 figures are similar. If Alberta brought in tough new rules for funding political parties, the

Alliance would likely be hurt worse than any other party.

"What would impact the Alliance a lot is a ban on large individual donations (over \$1,100, as is done federally). The Wildrose Alliance relies on larger donations from small numbers of donors, rather than a grassroots effort that raises small donations from ordinary people."

Jansen notes that the PCs would never ban corporate donations, as their primary source of revenue is from a who's-who of Alberta's largest oil, gas, and construction companies. But they could hurt Wild Rose by limiting large donations from private individuals, as these were a sizeable portion of WRA revenues in 2008 and 2009.

The University of Calgary's Lambert says the history of small parties in Alberta – especially right-wing parties – shows that they usually rise out of complaints that the Conservatives are not listening to ordinary Albertans. Over time, the Conservatives usually address some of those grievances, absorb them into the party, and neutralize the grievances in time for the next election. Lambert says it's the formula for what are called "brokerage" or "big-tent" parties.

It remains to be seen if a similar trend will take hold with the Wildrose Alliance. The party found much of its traction and fundraising strength by opposing the Stelmach Conservatives' oil and gas royalty regime, a framework the industry did not like. As the Stelmach government has now back-pedalled on those royalty changes, it is not at all certain whether industry's interest in the Wildrose Alliance will evaporate, along with its financial contributions.

The Parkland Institute's Acuña says that, as cracks emerge in the bedrock Conservative support, there are opportunities for labour and other progressive movements to fill the void – but only if they have a clear vision for the province that is built on real grassroots engagement with their membership.

"What organized labour needs to do is work with their

“In any other place, the views being espoused by the Wildrose Alliance would not be considered legitimate.”

— RICARDO ACUÑA, PARKLAND INSTITUTE

membership and engage their membership in a genuine process of visioning the province. After that process, organized labour is well positioned to legitimately stand up and loudly say: 'This is what we want.' ”

Acuña says that as the Wildrose Alliance is crowding the right of the spectrum and pulling the political conversation only toward ideas that do not reflect the best interests of organized labour.

“In any other place, the views being espoused by the Wildrose Alliance would not be considered legitimate. They would be viewed as extreme, radical and dangerous. But because there is no real counter-balance on the left, the (Alliance) puts Alberta’s political dialogue off-kilter, it pulls everything further right,” says Acuña.

The head of the Parkland Institute notes that the Alberta Liberals, instead of occupying a place to the centre-left of the Conservatives, which is wide-open territory, are also beginning to pile on with right-wing ideas of their own, such as a royalty strategy that is just as generous to large U.S. oil and gas corporations as the Conservative policy.

“Is this (moving the political discourse to the right) a result of the Alliance or is it a failure of people in progressive movements?” asks Acuña.

“The Wildrose Alliance has found the right person and the right moment in time to articulate their views. But progressive movements (unions, groups focused on social policy, environmental groups, etc.) have that same space and opportunity. We need to use it.”

WILDROSE POLICIES SPELL BAD NEWS FOR LABOUR

TERRY INIGO-JONES

The Wildrose Alliance may be a fresh face on the political scene, but its policies will leave a sour taste in the mouths of union members if it comes to power.



Wildrose Alliance
leader Danielle Smith

Want proof? Consider this, from Danielle Smith’s opening remarks at a Wildrose leadership debate last year: “I’m also prepared to stand up, when we need to, to the unions or to the bureaucracy that doesn’t want to change.”

In other words, change is coming and you, the unions, are the enemy.

What kind of change? It’s no surprise that the Alliance wants to shrink the size of government and cut spending, meaning that it will hold an even bigger axe over public-sector workers than the Progressive Conservatives.

“The problem in Alberta is government has become too big and too intrusive for our own good. It has to be reigned in . . .” said Smith in her leadership acceptance speech. “In the fiercely competitive global economy of this century, we must leave behind the popular but totally discredited 20th century delusion that government spending makes countries prosperous or that governments can plan the economy”

So, a smaller public sector, and free rein for industry appears to be on the cards – it’s back to the rollercoaster boom-and-bust cycles that have been so damaging to Alberta’s prosperity.

If you’re a public-sector worker, watch out. Smith thinks you are paid too much, have richer benefits packages and shorter work weeks and, as she told a CBC Radio show in October 2009, “... when you look at the cost of government being principally in wages, this is where we are going to be getting our biggest

savings. I hear across the province wherever I go people talking about austerity measures in companies to avoid layoffs, rollbacks of 10 per cent or more, taking unpaid leaves of absence, having holiday days without being paid – those are the types of things we see in the private sector, we have got to start talking about these in the public sector.”

But is it fair to call Wildrose a party of extreme policies? We should let Smith answer this with her own words from her acceptance speech. “We have been doing a lot of cringing and ducking to avoid being labelled extreme. We should stop now. It’s undignified.”

While the new party has been carefully vague about its policies, what it has said sometimes speaks volumes or at least raises questions, even if you need to know the code to understand. Let’s take a look at a few.

Health Care

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Have timely and affordable access to health care.”

WHAT IT MEANS: Keep the pressure on to open health care to private corporations.

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Provide health-care funding that will follow the service to the health-care provider and approved facility of choice.”

WHAT IT MEANS: Privatize.

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Implement legislation protecting the ‘conscience rights’ of health-care professionals.”

WHAT IT MEANS: Weaken a woman’s right to an abortion.

The Economy

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Have the lowest provincial personal and corporate tax rates to encourage investment and growth.”

WHAT IT MEANS: More tax cuts for wealthy corporations and individuals, and no solution to the province’s unsustainable revenue model.

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Know the prosperity of Alberta is dependent upon the natural resource and energy industries. A stable, price-sensitive and internationally competitive royalty and tax framework must be in place to attract investment.”

WHAT IT MEANS: Continue to sell resources to energy corporations for less than full market value, giving away something that belongs to our children and grandchildren.

Workplace

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Create an Alberta Pension Plan that will offer at minimum the same benefits while giving Albertans control over the investment fund.”

WHAT IT MEANS: An ideological move to appeal to Albertan egos, but which will probably result in increased administrative costs and risk not performing as well at the CPP.

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Allow individual workers the choice to determine their membership in labour organizations.”

WHAT IT MEANS: Get ready for “right-to-work” legislation aimed at weakening unions and collective bargaining. These laws allow workers to opt out of union membership even if they are benefitting from a union-negotiated contract. In American states where right-to-work laws exist, thousands of workers become “free riders” and unions lose the revenue stream they need to remain viable. That, of course, is the whole point.

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Allow competition to the Workers Compensation Board.”

WHAT IT MEANS: Private insurance companies will be moving in, with their concern for the bottom line overwhelming their concern for the individuals.

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Implement a timely and effective Social Assistance to work program.”

WHAT IT MEANS: Work for Welfare.

Education

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Restore education as an essential service under the Labour Code ensuring that no child’s right to an education is denied by school strikes or lockouts.”

WHAT IT MEANS: Deny teachers the right to strike.

WHAT WILDROSE SAYS: “Allow innovation and implementation of new ideas which are key to educational excellence. Implementing ‘School Choice’ legislation is such an example.”

WHAT IT MEANS: Introduce a school voucher program that will weaken public schools and funnel public funds to wealthy private citizens to help pay for private schooling.



Budget fears spark successful campaign

JERRY TOEWS

It may have been the dog days of summer 2009, but Lloyd Snelgrove, the chair of the Alberta Treasury Board was busy. He was calling together union and civil society leaders and warning them of looming cuts.

At issue was the return to deficit budgets in Alberta in 2009 and 2010 for the first time since the mid-1990s. Under Premier Ralph Klein deficits had been made illegal. While it was simple enough to undo that law (they simply passed another to make deficits legal again), for the Tories it was more difficult to live with being in the red.

While virtually every economist advised that stimulus spending, funded by temporary deficits if necessary, was the appropriate way to minimize the impacts of the worldwide

recession, the Alberta government stood almost alone in pushing draconian cuts to public-sector spending.

Hoping to decrease the size of the coming 2010 deficit, the government suggested that it would need to find \$2 billion in “savings.” In this context, the minister called labour and civil society leaders and asked them where they would suggest the cuts be made.

What Snelgrove heard was a resounding: “Nowhere!”

Experience told the leaders that it was likely that their message would not be heeded by a government that never saw a program it didn’t want to privatize, so they were spurred into action. What resulted was something that had never been seen before - a coalition of unions, including the Alberta Federation of Labour, community groups and social-services agencies. Plans for what is now known as the Join Together Alberta campaign began to be formed.



At the same time that our province was facing the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression, the Progressive Conservatives began to feel increasing pressure from the Wildrose Alliance Party, galvanized by the election of a new and dynamic leader. The overwhelming mantra of this group was that the government had lost its conservative direction. The Wildrose party called for more spending cuts to the public service and lower royalty rates for resource developers.

While the press was filled with reports of organizations calling for more fiscal restraint, the partners of the Join Together Alberta coalition were hearing from people across the province who were already hurting from cuts to public services. They decided to organize a series of town-hall meetings in 22 communities across the province to give ordinary Albertans an opportunity to talk about how public services including health, education, support for people with developmental disabilities and seniors, to name only a few, were the fabric that tied their communities together.

The hope was to hold all the town-hall meetings before the budget was brought down, which usually happens in late February or March. When the government announced that this year they would be bringing the budget down earlier than usual – on February 9 – plans for the town-hall meetings had to be fast-tracked.

Two teams were formed to do concurrent tours in the first two weeks of the campaign with a third week of meetings planned for the week of the budget. Two final stops in Calgary and Edmonton were scheduled for the final week.

Join Together Alberta gave them the means to take action and to be heard. As well as taking action through the website, the coalition encouraged people to act in their own communities.

We were concerned about how to get the word out about the town-hall meetings, so we decided to use an interactive voice broadcast to almost every home in Alberta to let them know about the meeting closest to them and/or to express their concern about our province's public services. It also drove them to our website (www.JoinTogetherAlberta.ca) where there is a full discussion of the issues and an opportunity to take action through writing letters, signing a petition, joining our Facebook group or following us on Twitter.

The response to the phone calls was remarkable, but we were still not confident about what turnout would be like at the town halls, especially in rural Alberta, where support for the Tories has been historic and strong. However, beginning with the first night, the rooms we booked were packed with people who were receptive to our message and who had plenty to say.

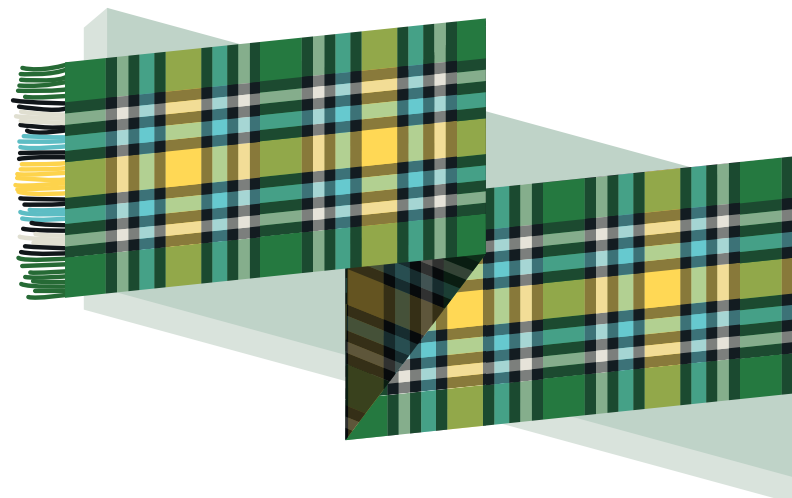
We heard heart-breaking stories along the way of how our government isn't doing what Albertans expect from the richest province in Canada.

We heard how a hospital in Pincher Creek was using the same IV pumps that it received when it first opened – 25 years ago.

We hear that the hospital in Brooks no longer offers maternity services and that nurses have heard of babies being delivered in the car on the way to Calgary.

In Hinton, we heard about a man suffering from MS who was left hanging in a lift over his bed at a local assisted-living facility for an hour because of a staff shortage.

In Edson, we heard how some high schools had class sizes of up to 45 students.





Provincial Budget 2010 Overview

- Overall budgeted program expenses up \$1.4 billion (to \$38.4 billion), a 3.9% increase over last year
- \$4.7 billion deficit forecast for 2010/11
- Looking ahead, the government is forecasting a reduction in spending of \$275 million in next year's budget in a move toward a surplus budget in two years
- While this year's budget included increased spending in health and flat spending in education, 14 ministries have been cut by \$1.3 billion cumulatively
- Ministries with flat spending, such as education, are not accounting for negotiated salary increases and inflation, meaning that "holding the line" is effectively a cut
- The government intends to cut a further \$240 million out of this year's budget through "in-year savings" in addition to the cuts already announced
- The government has announced plans to lay off 795 full-time civil servants this year
- Early indications for pending negotiations are that the government will be pushing for minimal increases, or wage freezes
- Any increases will have to be found within departmental budgets
- The government continues to refuse any suggestions that revenue be generated through tax reform or through increased royalties

We heard about one Registered Nurse (RN) who works alone in a hospital emergency room in Grimshaw, near Peace River, and has to dial 9-1-1 when there is a heart attack so that an Emergency Medical Team will come in to treat the heart attack, while the RN takes care of the rest of the patients.

We heard from a parent of an autistic child who is about to turn 18 and, in spite of the remarkable progress he is making, will likely lose most of his services because funding for adults with developmental disabilities has been cut.

We continue to hear about seniors who are at their wits' end because they do not have the financial resources to deal with rising drug and care costs as they age.

People were sometimes unaware of how deep the problems had become in their own communities and were shocked at the stories they heard. For example, one gentleman who had not been to the hospital since the 1980s was shocked to learn about how stretched the staff had become.

Others knew about the problems that exist in their community and are becoming increasingly angry at a government that ignores the needs or continues to break promise after promise. Grande Prairie, where the promise of a new hospital has been the substance of more than one election campaign, has once again had the project delayed. Fort McMurray, a city of over 100,000 Albertans, still is without a single long-term care facility and the Conservative government kicked the local MLA out of the caucus when he dared to speak out publicly on the matter.

There was a growing sense that every issue affects each of us, even if we aren't faced with it on a daily basis. Everyone suffers when schools don't get the resources they need and the entire community is worse off when people with developmental disabilities are left to fend for themselves.

Many of the people who came to the meetings admitted voting for the Conservatives in the past



and continued to support their local representatives. But their anger and frustration with the policy of cutbacks was evident. They were eager to send a clear message that they wanted to the government to change course – and quickly – but they were unsure about how to get the government to listen.

Join Together Alberta gave them the means to take action and to be heard. As well as taking action through the website, the coalition encouraged people to act in their own communities. In each meeting, we took time to break into small working groups to discuss what could be done locally to raise awareness about the issues and to bring pressure on the government to stop cutting funds for the services that matter.

On budget day, a number of people held events at their MLA's office or in their community that received media attention and gave a local perspective what was unfolding in the legislature in Edmonton.

The pressure brought to bear from all over the province, by Join Together Alberta and other organizations, had an effect. To everyone's surprise, the government did invest much more heavily in health care than was anticipated and held the line on education spending. While we are nowhere near what is needed to ensure our public health and education systems become as robust as they once were, most in those sectors had been bracing for far worse. We believe that our efforts focusing attention on these issues were at least partially responsible for the government's budget turnaround.

But, while health care and education may have received a bit of a reprieve, many other sectors experienced significant cuts. In particular, advanced education, children and youth services, culture and community spirit and employment and immigration have received cuts that will hurt Albertans – and the most vulnerable will be hurt the most. The Parkland Institute, a research group based at the University of Alberta, pointed out that the government had robbed Peter to pay for Paul – while attempting to quiet its critics in health and education, it hacked away at other sectors.

For this reason, the partners of the Join Together Alberta coalition overwhelmingly have decided to continue the campaign. There is much left to do and we recognize that the process will be slow as we hope to create an atmosphere of willingness in Alberta to invest in our public services.

People were sometimes unaware of how deep the problems had become in their own communities and were shocked at the stories they heard.



Pieces of fabric with messages written by town hall attendees to the provincial government

We have begun Phase 2 of the campaign where we will once again meet, this time with smaller groups, in every community in which we had a town-hall meeting. We will be forming Community Action Teams that will decide on local actions to address the issues that are of greatest local concern. These teams will bring together neighbours to act as catalysts within their community for the things that matter to them.

Join Together Alberta will continue to support these teams however we can, including by providing some structure, resources and training. The hope is that as these teams become active, they will have an impact on government policy and that Albertans can finally get on the path to a sustainable future in which all citizens and all communities get the services they need.

(Jerry Toews was hired by the AFL and seconded full-time to the Join Together Campaign to act as its Co-ordinator. He can be reached at jtoews@afl.org)



POWER PLAY

How the NDP came to govern Nova Scotia

TERRY INIGO-JONES

It's a long road from third place to being the party in power, so the sooner you start the journey the better.

That's the advice from the NDP in Nova Scotia – and it ought to know. The New Democrats went from three seats in the legislature and 17.7 per cent of the vote in 1993 to 31 seats, 45.2 per cent of the vote and forming the government in 2009.

"It's never going to happen if you just keep waiting for it," says Matt Hebb, who was the NDP campaign manager in 2009 and is now principal assistant to Premier Darrell Dexter. "One of the things that Darrell Dexter likes to say is putting yourself in a position to win is no guarantee that you will, but if you don't you surely won't."

So, how did the NDP grow into government? There are no simple answers or shortcuts, says Hebb. "It's not quick and I think that's an important thing to recognize and that has impacts for the way expectations are managed ... In the course of pursuing the ultimate goal, you have to be able to define smaller victories along the way that are going to keep people focused and motivated."

The NDP's growth in popularity began in 1993, when it saw support rising in some seats, but not enough to win more than three. After that election, the party concentrated its efforts on building a base in the urban seats of



Halifax. Those efforts, combined with a declining Liberal brand, helped the New Democrats win 19 seats in 1998.

That election led to a minority Liberal government (both parties had 19 seats) and, a year later, another election. This time, support for the NDP fell and they won 11 seats.

“I think the lesson at that time was that we didn’t do enough to consolidate the gains that we had made,” says Hebb. “The party moved immediately to a strategy to try and expand on those 19 to get up to what was needed to actually form government but, in fact, there hadn’t really been enough of an analysis on what needed to be done to consolidate those 19 seats and recognizing the fact that they were very, very new and still quite volatile.”

Dexter became NDP leader in 2001 and the party began to rebrand itself, says Hebb. It moved from talking about broad policy issues to talking about issues that affect families – about the problems and solutions that people can really understand and discuss at the kitchen table.

How the party performed in Opposition was also important. It did not oppose every government decision just for the sake of getting easy headlines. It avoided actions that would allow the party to be seen as simply a loud voice in the wilderness.

“What we would do is try to behave like a party that people would trust to run the government ... So, we would try to take positions that were quite pragmatic, quite practical and always guided by whether or not they would actually be of benefit to Nova Scotia families.”

The tone of the political debate was important. When making criticisms, you can be overly aggressive or you can be constructive, says Hebb. Taking a constructive approach shows voters that you aren’t acting simply to boost your party’s fortunes or to tear down your opponents, but that you actually want to accomplish something for the people of the province.

The party worked at modernizing its campaign methods, from the way it selected candidates, to the content of campaign materials and messages. It also focused its resources on seats where

NOVA SCOTIA NDP VOTING HISTORY

YEAR	SEATS	POPULAR VOTE
1963	0	4.1%
1967	0	5.2%
1970	2	6.6%
1974	3	13.0%
1978	4	14.4%
1981	1	18.1%
1984	3	15.9%
1988	2	15.7%
1993	3	17.7%
1998	19	34.4%
1999	11	29.7%
2003	15	30.9%
2006	20	34.6%
2009	31	45.2%



Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter,
speaking at the federal NDP convention in Halifax in 2009

“Rather than focus on the politics of parties, the NDP has focused for years now on what I like to call the politics of people. Every day we concern ourselves with addressing the real, practical problems confronting families. Our focus and our goals had no room for strict party ideology. We had no time for political gamesmanship.”

it had the best chance of winning. In 2003, the party won 15 seats and 30.9 per cent of the vote and in 2006 it took 20 seats and 34.6 per cent of the votes. Support surged in the 2009 election, with the NDP storming to power with 31 seats.

There were two main factors in this victory, says Hebb. The first was that the incumbent Conservative government had become unpopular and voters were ready for change. “I think that’s probably the most fundamental thing, this idea that you don’t really defeat a government, a government defeats itself,” says Hebb. “The question is, who is going to be best positioned to replace it when that happens?”

The second factor was more than a decade’s hard work by the NDP to put

it in a position where voters would consider it as a potential governing party.

The labour movement had a large part to play in the NDP’s march to victory. “We have had a good partnership with the labour movement here for a long time. We have always had significant members of the labour movement occupying important position in the party,” says Hebb.

“One of the things the labour movement was good about was sort of tamping down expectations that somehow voting NDP was also a vote for a massive overhaul of industrial relations in the province.”

The fear of radical change had been used by opponents as a deterrent to prevent people from voting for the

party. Playing down the expectation for sweeping changes didn’t mean that the labour movement gave up on expecting improvements, but there was a recognition that, while the labour movement and the NDP shared certain values, it did not mean that their goals were always identical.

Is the NDP experience in Nova Scotia applicable to Alberta?

Hebb says the Nova Scotia party drew on the experiences of other jurisdictions, including Manitoba and Saskatchewan, in its journey to power. You have to pay heed to your own political traditions and history, but there’s no reason why Alberta can’t learn lessons from other parts of the country, he says.



TERRY INIGO-JONES

You live in a northern region where your economy is dominated by the oil and gas industry. Your right-wing government is pushing full-steam ahead for tax cuts and public-sector spending cuts. The drive to privatize grows ever stronger.

Meanwhile, opposition political parties move to the right in search of centrist votes, but to no avail – while citizens grow increasingly apathetic and voter turnouts fall.

Sound familiar?

This is not, in fact, a description of the current political situation in Alberta. Rather, it's what was happening in Norway in the 1990s. How the labour movement in that country reacted to this situation that parallels our own may have lessons for union leaders in Alberta.

Asbjorn Wahl is the national co-ordinator of the Campaign for the Welfare State in Norway and an adviser at the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees (NUMGE). The neo-liberal offensive began in his country in the 1990s, he says,

with privatization and deregulation high on the agenda and public services under pressure. Attacks on union and labour rights were met by retreats and concessions made at the bargaining table.

The left-wing Labour Party national government of the day reacted by following the dominant political trends and adopted many neo-liberal ideas.

"In Norway, the peak was reached when a Labour government in 2000-2001 carried through some of the most extensive market reforms in modern times, when the state telecom (Telenor) as well as the state oil company (Statoil) were partly privatized – and the entire hospital sector was restructured into a new market-oriented model," says Wahl. "At the same time, the party gave way to competitive tendering of public services at the municipal level."

This move to the right failed to save the Labour Party, which was replaced as the government in the 2001 elections by conservatives.

Faced with a rising right-wing tide, some in the labour movement realized it was time to do something different. "They acknowledged that the trade union movement was



facing a new and defensive situation and discussions started around new ways to meet and to stem the neo-liberal offensive,” says Wahl, whose union was among the leaders of this new movement.

New goals were identified, including:

- Stopping the policy of privatization;
- Changing public opinion;
- Shifting the political hegemony to the left;
- Pushing the Labour Party to the left; and
- Changing power relations in society.

“In other words, it was no longer only a question of a narrowly focused trade union struggle, but a more comprehensive project of changing society,” says Wahl.

Looking back on this drive for change by the labour movement, four main areas of activity can be identified as having contributed to positive results, which include the election of a national centre-left coalition government, moving Labour Party policies back to the left, and changing public opinion on privatization, he says. These four areas are:

- The building of new, broad and untraditional alliances;
- Focusing on our own analyses of current developments, being proactive in the debate rather than reactive;
- The development of concrete alternative policies to the neo-liberal agenda; and
- The development of unions as independent political actors.

Broad alliances

NUMGE played a leading role in the creation of broader alliances in order to drive the new movement. The Campaign for the Welfare State was created when six national trade unions in the public sector – both inside and outside the dominant Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions – joined forces to fight attacks on the public sector.

Later, another nine unions, most from the private sector, joined the campaign, as well as groups representing farmers, retired people, women, students and people who used public services. The campaign grew to include 29 organizations representing more than one million people, out of Norway’s total population of 4.5 million.

Organizers also recruited municipalities to join the campaign. There was widespread discontent among local politicians as municipalities came under increasing financial pressure, with the subsequent threat to public services.

“In the Campaign for the Welfare State we considered the situation to be ripe for a more extensive organization of the opposition. In 2002, together with a number of mayors and local popular movements, we therefore took the initiative to organize the Popular Movement for Public Services,” says Wahl. “Within one year, 90 of the about 430 municipalities in Norway had joined the action.”

This was the first time that municipalities had joined a campaign outside their own association of local and regional authorities and it greatly increased the pressure on the national government.

An initiative was also begun to create a parliamentary alliance between three political parties – the Labour Party, the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party.

Initially, this was resisted by leaders of the Labour Party, who in 2004 were still rejecting any talk of forming a coalition with the Socialist Left Party, and by some in the labour movement, which traditionally had ties with the Labour Party and no others.



But some in the labour movement continued to push and a majority at the 2001 trade union congress voted for the first time to financially support the Socialist Left Party as well as the Labour Party – against the recommendation of the executive board.

This, combined with growing support for the Socialist Left Party in opinion polls, created pressure on the Labour Party to abandon its move to the middle of the political spectrum and return to more left-wing policies.

Our own analyses

It was important to develop clear arguments to counter the success the right wing had enjoyed in pushing such issues as globalization, says Wahl. Even some on the political left and within the labour movement had bought in to the ideas that globalization was inevitable and almost “a law of nature.” Once accepted, this meant that the labour movement would have to adapt to it and accept such measures as privatization or increased competition in the public sector in order to secure jobs.

This approach was rejected by the municipal workers’ union and many of the alliances which were being formed. Through the production of booklets, organizing conferences and joining in the public debate, members of these new alliances portrayed globalization as an attempt to undermine democracy and shift the balance of power in society away from the people.

The greatest success in reshaping public opinion came when discussions were polarized, so people could see the alternatives more clearly, he says. Speaking out loud and clear with messages from the left is vital. “You have to do it if you want to win.”

Alternative policies

In their attacks on public services, right-wing thinkers had been successful in tapping in to discontent among members of the public over the quality or accessibility of those services. In order to fight back, campaigners on the left realized they had to admit that there were weaknesses in public services – but to

also offer concrete alternatives to improve them.

While standing firm against privatization, campaigners pushed for the reorganization and development of public services, as long as they were kept in the public sector. NUMGE took the offensive by creating the Model Municipality Project, in which it signed three-year agreements with a number of municipal authorities to improve the quality of services, but under three preconditions – no privatization, no competitive tendering and no dismissals.

The improvements were driven from the bottom up, using the experience and competence of employees and the experience and needs of users to find better ways of operating. Two independent research firms that examined what had happened in the first model municipality project found that it had led to higher user satisfaction, better working conditions for employees and a better financial situation for the authority.

“More than anything else, this proved that the policy of privatization was not primarily about improving public services, it was a political-ideological struggle to change society in the interest of market forces,” says Wahl.

The centre-left coalition government that came to power in 2005 has since adopted a modified version of the Model Municipality Project as policy.

Politically independent unions

Making the trade union movement more politically independent was difficult for some. In the 1980s and 1990s, union support for the Labour Party had been unconditional and, therefore, the ability to apply pressure on party policy had been limited. The unions accepted whatever came from a Labour government.

The labour movement’s connection with the Labour Party still exists, but it has been relaxed and there is more openness to co-operating with other parties. That co-operation with other parties has helped push the Labour Party back to the left.

The first sign of success of this new approach came in the 2003 local elections in the city of Trondheim.

“The simplistic comprehension that if the voters move to the right, the left parties have to go to the right as well in order to catch the middle votes, has once again been proved wrong.”

– Asbjorn Wahl, national co-ordinator of the Campaign for the Welfare State in Norway



“Before the 2003 elections, the local trade union council turned into an important political actor itself,” says Wahl. “Through a comprehensive democratic process, 19 concrete demands were developed on how Trondheim should be governed in the coming four years. The demands were sent to all political parties – with the following message: We will support those parties which support our demands.

“This had a strong educational effect on a number of the political parties – not least the Labour Party, which could hardly stand to lose the support from the trade union movement.”

The union council threw its support behind those parties that publicly backed its list of demands. It also cancelled its usual contribution to the Labour Party that year, using the resources instead for its own campaign to push its 19 demands.

The result was that the Conservative Party, which had dominated Trondheim politics for 14 years, was ousted, replaced by an alliance of left-wing parties. “A more politicized trade union movement was decisive in revealing the real political contradictions in society, as well as pushing the Labour Party and other smaller parties to the left.”

A similar campaign was headed by the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions for the national election in 2005. It collected 155,000 proposals from 44,000 members and refined this into a list of 54 concrete demands, which were sent to all political parties. The responses of the parties were sent to all 800,000 confederation members.

“Alliance building, new social movements and more politicized trade unions represent the new developments which have contributed most to the important changes on the left in

Norway over the last few years and which have given us some important political victories,” says Wahl.

For example, public opinion on privatization has gone from about half being in favour in the mid-1990s to 70 per cent opposed in 2005. The Labour Party moved from a pro- to anti-privatization platform in the same period.

“Both in the Trondheim example and in the parliamentary elections in 2005, we experienced stronger than usual political polarization between the right and the left. These experiences have in practice confirmed that it is when the political alternatives stand clearly against each other, when the real contradictions of society are exposed, that the left can most successfully mobilize,” says Wahl.

“The simplistic comprehension that if the voters move to the right, the left parties have to go to the right as well in order to catch the middle voters, has once again proved wrong.

“Over the last few years, by means of our alliances, our politicization of trade unions and our alternatives, we have been able to slow down, and partly stop, the policy of privatization and to get rid of the most right-wing, neo-liberal government we have ever had in Norway.”

Now, the global economic crisis has brought an historic opportunity, he says. Neo-liberalism has been discredited by the financial collapse and people are more open to new ideas and solutions.

“If not now, when are we going to turn the defensive into an offensive? In other words, there is no time to lose – mobilize and build alliances!”



It's Time to Get Political

IN THE U.S. AND AUSTRALIA, UNIONS FIND A WINNING PATH

TERRY INIGO-JONES

From Australia and United States, the message coming from labour leaders is loud and clear – it's time to get growing and it's time to get political.

That means reaching out beyond the traditional confines of unions and building bridges to unorganized labour and to working people in their homes. Getting political and getting active can reap huge rewards for the labour movement, if the examples of success down south and down under can be replicated here in Alberta.

In the U.S., a labour-driven group called Working America has recruited nearly 2.5 million members in less than seven years and has been able to make these formerly largely

disenfranchised people an important part of the movement for progressive political change. According to Dave Engledow, field outreach director, the group measures its success in helping get more progressive candidates elected to Congress and in helping Barack Obama's historic victory in the 2009 presidential election, particularly in states where Democrats had fared poorly in previous elections.

In Australia, a campaign led by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) was able to help defeat a four-term conservative government and dump anti-labour laws that government had passed. "We were successful on a number of levels," says Michelle Bissett, senior industrial officer with ACTU. "We engaged the community, we raised the issue (of fairness in the workplace) and we had a major impact on electing a federal Labour government."

Spreading the Word

Though separated geographically, the Australian and U.S. campaigns were close in the way they grew the political influence of the labour movement. Each felt the need to appeal to people outside unions – to reach out to unorganized labour and to the community at large.

Engledow says Working America hired him because of his background in neighbourhood and community organizing. He estimates he spent 15 years knocking on 100,000 doors from Key West, Florida, to Anchorage, Alaska, and many points in between.

In 2003, the percentage of the total workforce that was unionized in the U.S. was at an all-time low. This resulted in decreasing political power for unions and made it more difficult for new organizing drives to succeed. America's national labour central, the AFL-CIO, decided it needed a new way to get massive numbers of people into the labour movement so it could communicate with them. AFL-CIO leaders assumed that people who weren't in unions shared concerns with union members over fundamental issues including protecting jobs, good jobs, fair pay, quality health care, quality education and retirement security.

"These are issues that the Bush government and the conservatives in our country were adamantly opposed to," says Engledow.

The AFL-CIO launched Working America to target working-class neighbourhoods and what they called Reagan Democrats –

the kinds of people who had traditionally backed Democrats, but had switched to the Republicans in the last 20 or so years, against their own self interest.

"So, the idea was to go into these communities, to go to the same neighbourhoods where union members live and knock on all the doors in between and talk to people about mom-and-

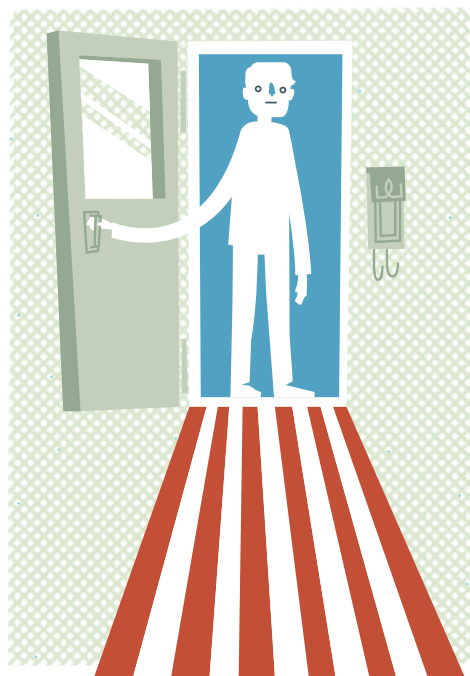
apple-pie issues like jobs, the economy, health care. What we found out is that no matter where we organized, no matter what community we were in ... we'd get two out of three people to sign up with the organization."

An important element in their success, he says, was to recruit local people to run campaigns in their own communities. "When we go to set up a program in a community, we go in and we recruit, hire and train a local staff. So, that way, if we are in Ohio, we have Ohioans who are talking to Ohioans."

Working America also strategically picked where to concentrate its efforts, in order to have the maximum impact. "In a little

less than a year we recruited 900,000 members, primarily in Ohio and Florida because those were very important states," says Engledow.

A similar strategy was applied in Australia. Rather than dissipate its efforts by campaigning everywhere, the Australian campaign selected 24 seats held by the ruling conservative government with a margin of less than 10 per cent. It would have been pointless to waste resources on campaigning in seats that were safe for either Labour or conservative candidates.





"We needed to craft a message that went to some of the core values of trade union members and to the core values of the community."

– Michelle Bissett, senior industrial officer with the Australian Council of Trade Unions

For the first time in its history, the ACTU directly employed campaign co-ordinators in each of the 24 seats to organize the local activities. More than 5,000 activists joined the campaign in those 24 seats. They knocked on 93,000 doors, had nearly 40,000 conversations with voters and dropped 2.7 million leaflets.

The Right Message

Focusing on the message was just as important as focusing on the right locations. In Australia, the right-wing government introduced legislation that removed some of the most basic worker rights, including the right to bargain collectively, says Bissett.

"The campaign could not and would not be about union rights in the workplace or about the rights of union officials. These were messages, in Australia, that turned people off. The public in Australia is very cynical about who they perceive to be union officials and what they perceive union officials to be about. So, we needed to refocus the messages that we were putting out there. We needed to craft a message that went to some of the core values of trade union members and to the core values of the community."

The campaigners decided to focus on fairness in the workplace as an issue that resonated both with union members and the wider community. Campaigners branded themselves as Team Orange and that colour was found on every component – every ad, poster, leaflet, bumper sticker and T-shirt worn by volunteers.

Campaigners refrained from backing one political party. "We weren't telling people ... to vote Labour because we weren't campaigning for the Labour Party. We had to tell them that we could vote for what we were campaigning for and that was fairness at work."

The non-partisan approach was successful for Working America, too, says Engledow. "The reason our program is so effective politically is because we don't talk about politics the first time that we come around to the door and we become a trusted messenger."

Instead of talking about party politics, they talked about the issues of concern to most people, including the economy and health care. Everyone has been affected by the economy, everyone knows someone whose job has been outsourced and everyone knows a senior citizen forced to choose between buying food or prescriptions.

Measuring Success

Working America found that it did two things very well in every election. Firstly, says Engledow, they won over the undecided voters. Every election, between of 95 and 100 per cent of those undecided on Labour Day in September voted for the labour-endorsed candidate in the elections in November. Secondly, the group succeeded in getting non-traditional or dropout voters to actually show up at the polling booths.

"We succeeded most because we had a high degree of discipline and unity across the unions."

– Michelle Bissett, of the Australian Council of Trade Unions

Part of this success is due to the determined follow-up contacts after their initial drive to get people to join. From among the millions who sign up, organizers determine who are the most important – the ones who need to keep hearing from the group. In 2008, those people were contacted anywhere between six and 38 times after the first knock on the door.

The first success for the Australian labour movement was in raising awareness of the anti-labour legislation and then changing public attitudes towards it. In 2005, polling showed that only 38 per cent had any understanding of the proposed laws and only 30 per cent were opposed. By the end of 2005, awareness of the laws had risen to 80 per cent and opposition had grown to 64 per cent.

But the real victory came in the next election in November 2007. Of the 24 seats targeted by the ACTU, 21 were won by Labour. They lost one of the remaining three seats by only 12 votes. In those 24 seats, the swing to Labour was 7.1 per cent, compared to an average swing across the country of 5.3 per cent.

The Labour party was returned to power and the former conservative prime minister John Howard lost his seat. The new government passed much-improved labour laws.

There were a number of reasons for their success, says Bissett. The labour movement committed more money and resources to the campaign than was normal; they had a clear message that was relevant to a wider community and stuck to the message; and they campaigned on shared values, not on party politics.

"We succeeded most because we had a high degree of discipline and unity across the unions. The process of bringing unions together and developing a single united message and developing a single united front was absolutely critical to success in the campaign," she says.

The Future

Labour leaders in both countries agree that what has happened so far is just the first step. In Australia, the ACTU is using the campaign structure it created to push for new policies, including giving women the right to paid maternity leave, and to keep pressure on the Labour government.

Engledow says that Working America now has in place an infrastructure of leaders in communities across the country who can be called on at a moment's notice to undertake political actions or take part in emergency campaigns or push for legislation.

"We are really working to become not just a force in politics, but a force for organizing and an aid to affiliates who are running organizing campaigns. From the outset, Working America was never intended to be a substitute for collective bargaining, was never intended to be a replacement for the union. The idea is to bring more people into the labour movement and to help the other affiliates to organize and for us to win election of labour-friendly candidates."

The question remains – can the same successes be found here in Alberta?

Yes, says Engledow. But it will take time.

"I firmly believe that grassroots organizing, one-on-one communication does need to happen. You need to start educating people. I don't think you're going to see in Alberta an instant turnaround, but I do believe it's something that needs to happen."



Q1. Can unions in Alberta afford to ignore politics?

Q2. Does the emergence of the Wildrose Alliance raise the stakes?

Elisabeth Ballermann

President, Health Sciences Association of Alberta

Q1 I frequently remind myself and others that in my election speech 15 years ago, I said: "Nothing we do is not political." This is particularly true for public-sector unions. Not only is our labour-relations structure predicated on legislation (here in Alberta mostly bad legislation) but public-sector employees are directly affected by the decisions made under the dome. The current climate demonstrates this very clearly – threats of, or demands for, wage freezes, practically daily policy reversals by the Minister of Health, cuts to funding, and the list goes on. If we ignore politics, we simply are not fulfilling our obligations to our members.

Q2 The impact of the Wildrose Alliance is two-fold. Firstly, we know that the sentiments of the key activists, including leader Danielle Smith, favour market fundamentalism, small government, privatization, etc. In other words, they want to move the political debate to the right, in clear conflict with the goals of the labour movement. Our goal

has been to demonstrate to voters that the Conservative regime has not served them well. One can argue that the goal has been met, in that support is shifting from the governing PCs to the Wildrose Alliance. It is, of course, obvious that in achieving the goal, Albertans are heeding the voice on the right, the "new kids on the block", and dismissing the centre and left political parties. Clearly, the left, whether partisan or non-partisan, has a major challenge in making itself more relevant to Albertans. We need to expose the Wildrose Alliance and its goals, and we need to present cogent and credible alternatives.

Don Boucher

Administrative Vice-President Western region, CEP

Q1 Unions in Alberta cannot ignore politics. A lot of policies affect unions, their members and families, including labour laws, the Workers Compensation Board, education and health care. Imagine if we sat silent and let the government do whatever it wanted! An example of how we can get involved is the Join Together Alberta campaign, which toured the province and educated

Albertans on the changes the government was going to impose. It woke people up and their voices, along with unions, had an effect. The government backed down and changed the direction it was taking with the budget. We can make a difference, but we need to get off our butts and get out and vote.

- Q2** The Wildrose Alliance will change our way of life like no other party in Canada. The choices in Alberta are slim, but we have one party that would work towards our best interests and that is the NDP. The Wildrose would try to destroy the labour movement in this province. The interests of all Albertans will be decided by the boardrooms of many corporations and by wealthy people. We cannot let this happen.

Albert Johnson

President, UFCW 1118

- Q1** No, we in the labour movement cannot afford to ignore politics! I learned my lesson in 1988. Before that, I used to believe that they were separate issues. In 1988 we were in negotiations with Fletchers Fine Foods in Red Deer when the company cancelled a date with us to make an announcement with the government. That announcement was that the government had given the company \$20 million dollars to expand their business. They bought plants in the U.S. with some of the money and used the rest as a war chest to fight us. We were locked out a few days later and remained locked for eight months. When questioned, the government couldn't explain why the timing was so perfect for the company and they would not pressure the company to resolve

the dispute. No one will ever convince me that the government didn't know what was going on and that they were doing it to hurt its citizens and to help the company. That taught me a lesson I have not forgotten.

- Q2** The Wildrose party makes it more important that we keep focused on who really represents workers, as it will be easy for our members to jump on to the new bandwagon out of frustration or lack of knowledge. We must not let this happen.

Dennis Mol

President, CUPE Alberta

- Q1** No. If unions ignore politics, then laws get passed that hurt working families. It's critically important that the AFL, its affiliates, and union members across the province give full backing to the only party that has consistently stood up for regular families – the NDP. It's been the NDP that supports and defends the public services working people rely on – health care, schools, long-term care, parks and recreation facilities and others. The political situation in Alberta won't change until we make it change – and that means a concerted, long-term campaign to elect more NDP MLAs to represent us.
- Q2** No. And yes. No it doesn't raise the stakes, because one more right-wing alternative on the ballot doesn't change the fact we are governed by a right-wing party already. It's important to remember that the Wildrose Alliance is made up of many of the same people who have been running Alberta and implementing policies that hurt regular Albertans. The Wildrose Alliance doesn't raise the

stakes because they don't represent any kind of change from the government we have. They do raise the stakes in a strategic way, however. With another conservative party splitting the right-wing vote in Alberta, we have an opportunity to elect more NDP MLAs. We have to jump on this chance by getting more active in politics at every level.

Doug O'Halloran

President, UFCW 401

Q1 No. Unions exist is to advance workers' interests – to improve wages, benefits and working conditions. A lot of blood, sweat and tears goes into the kinds of agreements that we negotiate at the bargaining table, but that which is negotiated can easily be adjusted, amended or literally stricken down by the stroke of a legislative pen. When things go bad in the workplace, union members – regardless of what party they like or do not like – turn their attention to unions and say: Do something for us. It is critical for unions to be involved in the political process, critical to say to people that we must do something for ourselves.

Q2 Yes it does. The Wildrose Alliance supports right-to-work legislation, which is bad news for unions. So, it's more important than ever for unions to be active in politics. The danger is not just the possibility that the government will shift further to the right if the Wildrose gets into power, but that people will stick with the existing Conservative party because it seems a more moderate-seeming alternative, but the Conservative party is still bad for unions.

Heather Smith

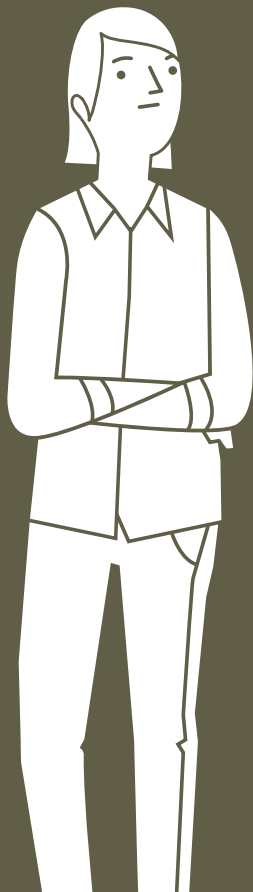
President, UNA

Q1 Unions and citizens ignore politics at their own peril. Governments are responsible for many services and circumstances that affect working people. Our labour and employment legislation is determined through the political process, as are the public services, education and health care that Albertans all depend on. It's no surprise that unions have always been engaged with the political process, it's one way the members work for better jobs and better lives. Unfortunately, public health care is under political attack. Unions were a big part of creating universal medicare in the first place. Unions have to be a part of saving it and making sure it gets better to meet our needs.



Next Up Alberta Youth Leadership Program

Naomi Achus and Taryn Hancock are both participants in the Next Up program, in the Alberta chapter. This is the program's third year since it was started in B.C. and its first year in Alberta. Next Up provides youth with the skills and tools needed to become effective leaders in movements for social and environmental change. Next Up is a partnership between the Global Youth Education Network Society, the Parkland Institute, and a number of Alberta-based environmental, labour and social justice organizations.



Youths rejecting party politics

"Voting is...the most minimal form of participation. We need to be informed...we need more education...and more participatory institutions." –*Anonymous youth*

NAOMI ACHUS

The hot new trend sweeping the nation isn't a type of clothing or car – it's staying at home on Election Day, and youths are proving themselves to be trendsetters.


Researchers at Elections Canada have witnessed a steady decline among all voters in federal and provincial elections. The official turnout for the last federal election was, at 58.8 per cent, the lowest since Confederation. Alberta's last provincial elections fared even worse, with Elections Alberta reporting a record low turnout of 41.3 per cent.

The rates of participation are even more dismal among youths aged 18-24. Numbers from Elections Canada show youth turnout hovering at a mere 37.8 per cent in 2008. It appears that the majority of youth have rejected electoral forms of political participation.

The question is: Why is this happening among the future leaders of Canada?

Researchers show that low youth voter turnout cannot be attributed to a single factor. Work and school-related obligations can take precedence over a trip to the polls. A lack of knowledge, mobility, registration problems and illness were some other identified barriers. Such obstacles can make the democratic process appear as another errand, as opposed to a civic duty. Youth also show less interest in politics and feel a greater sense of powerlessness.

However, accepting apathy as the cause of low youth turnout is a simplistic solution that does not address the failure to inform and engage young people. If this trend is allowed to continue, an imminent democratic deficit is on the horizon.



In spite of low voter turnout, the myth needs to be dispelled that declining youth engagement translates into an inactive citizenry.

On the contrary, youth have become instrumental in other forms of civic participation. The Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) shows that youth are gravitating towards issues that individually concern them, rather than the partisanship of political parties.

Issues related to climate change, anti-globalization, animal and human rights are a few that connect with youth. Overall, they are far more likely than other age groups to volunteer, participate in advocacy, demonstrations, boycotts/buycotts and other forms of civic engagement. It is through these forms of grassroots mobilization that they are able to voice their concerns and become democratically active. Assisting this shift is the ability to communicate and mobilize through sophisticated networks of social media and technology.

This was most obviously demonstrated during the 2008 campaign of Barack Obama. His message of change resonated with American youth and that translated into action at the grassroots level. Young volunteers seemed to act as troops on the battlefield making sure that Obama's message was sent through text messages and networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Online donations made from the public also boosted the campaign, collecting more than half a billion dollars. This strategy of engaging young voters worked as Obama captured more than 68 per cent of the youth vote in his election as president.

It is worth noting that social media will act only as a mobilizing tool. Clicking and texting alone will not improve rates of youth turnout. In order for this to translate into electoral participation, Canadian youth will need to be genuinely engaged and offered a 'civic education.'

Civic education has to happen early in schools and Ontario is taking the lead in introducing a Grade 10 civics course. Earlier grades are also reached through mock elections staged by Student Vote.

These are positive steps, but the CPRN has suggested that strategies need to develop at a national scale involving the input of educators, all levels of government, parties and community groups. This cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach, but must respect the diversity of youth's age, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background.

Youth must also be engaged at an institutional level, with traditional hierarchical structures allowing their input. Political parties must work hard to incorporate young voices in designing their platforms so as to attract and retain them. The CPRN has also pointed to the need for government to support youth-based organizations so that links can be made between their actions and public policy.

These suggestions just scratch at the surface of possibilities, but it is time to turn the political monologue into a dialogue.

Unions must reach out to young people

TARYN HANCOCK

Weekends off; 40-hour work weeks; improvements in pay equity and tolerance in the workplace – unions have done a great deal for which today's young workers can be grateful.

However, the level of youth involvement in the labour movement has long been disappointing. In 2007, a total of 74.4 per cent of union members in Canada were 45 and older,

according to Statistics Canada. Back in 1997, a study by the Centre for Research on Work and Society at York University said that “only 10.7 per cent of workers in Canada between the ages of 15 and 24 are union members, compared with 34.9 per cent of those 25 years and older.”

The lack of unionized young workers can largely be attributed to the kinds of jobs they do. A higher proportion of these workers tend to be in casual or part-time employment, working at small companies or in the low-wage retail and service sectors in which unions have low representation.

But this does not mean that youths aren’t interested in unions. In fact, according to a report in 2002 in the British Journal of

The labour movement must fight the myth that all the battles have already been won

Industrial Relations, the opposite is true. A Canadian survey showed that even though union density for youths stood at 13 per cent, compared to 36 per cent for older workers, there was a greater desire for unionization among the younger workers. A total of 56.7 per cent of young workers said they would prefer a union, compared to 49.8 per cent for older workers, according to the report Comparing Youth and Adult Desire for Unionization in Canada.

The question is: How can the labour movement attract more young people?

A youth’s involvement in any type of activity must begin with a personal awakening. An individual must come to realize how an issue affects him or her personally, and understand the need for affecting justice. In other words, an individual must see “the point”.

Many people, especially youth, are not educated on their labour rights and often their rights are being ignored or violated.

Making a connection between these two does not take much of a leap and will inspire people to turn to unions to fight for their rights.

For example, B.C. has the most lenient labour laws for children in North America. This province has seen work-related injuries of children aged 12 to 14 increase by 10 times since the laws changed five years ago, according to First Call, a coalition of child and youth advocates. Certainly, laws like this give young people reason to speak up and get involved.

Labour unions must re-brand themselves as relevant and dismiss the idea that they are archaic structures no longer needed in today’s workplaces. The labour movement must fight the myth that all the battles have already been won – in areas including feminism, racism and worker rights. These views are common, but anyone educated on the roles unions play knows otherwise.

However, simply reaching out to young workers may not be enough. Unions should rethink their structures to keep youths engaged, to ensure that they feel their voices are being heard and to make them feel empowered. Many younger people are moving away from hierarchical structures and favour groups where power and responsibility is shared, where they feel that they, and all other minorities, can effectively communicate their needs, ideas and opinions.

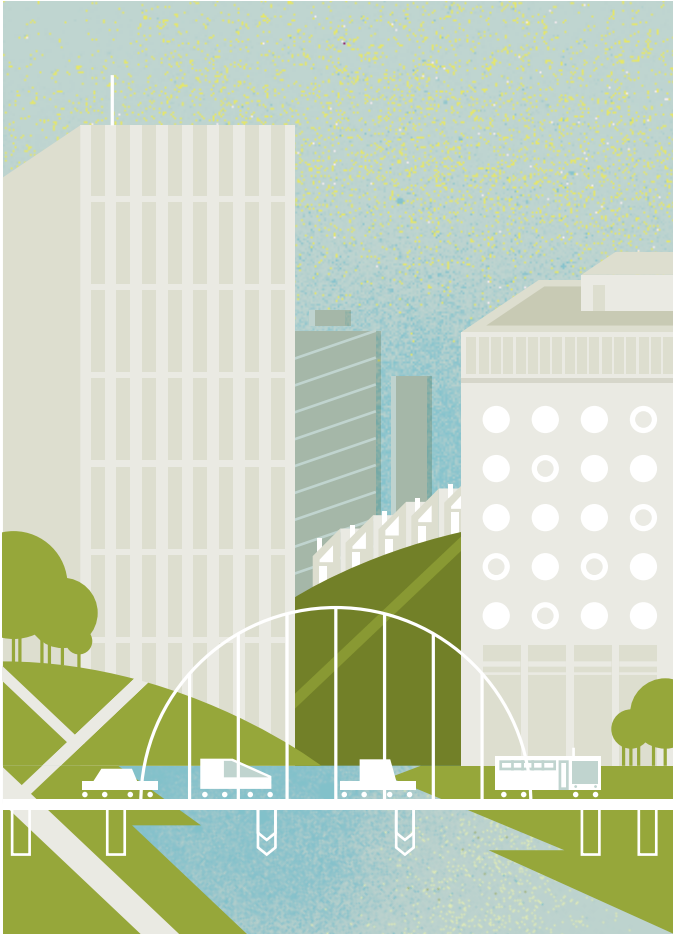
Although initiatives to mandate a youth presence at union meetings is a step in the right direction, unions must consider why more young people are not becoming regularly involved in these meetings – it may be because it does not feel like a welcoming or progressive environment for youth.

Unions have often led progressive change and they now have the opportunity attract a new generation of activists in the labour movement, as well as the political sphere.



MUNICIPALITIES MATTER!

Why labour's plan and labour's involvement in municipal politics is important



THE CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS

Canada is an increasingly urban country, with more than 80 per cent of its people living in cities – and this means that the labour movement must play a role in municipal politics.

Our communities face unprecedented change because of the economy, environment, population growth and a growing infrastructure deficit, but Canada is one of the only developed countries without a national urban strategy or a national transportation strategy.

The bottom line is that our members work, live in, play and build our communities. We need municipal politicians and their organizations to support labour's vision for our communities.

We, in the labour movement, are weighing in on this debate by concretely proposing five issues that, if addressed, will take us down the path of building vibrant and sustainable communities: Public Infrastructure, Procurement, Municipal Revenues, Fair Wages and Working Conditions, and Sustainability.

Our Issues:

1: PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Creating Jobs by Building Communities We Need for the Future.

Whether we live in an urban or rural, small or large municipality, we require our local governments to build and maintain infrastructure for clean water, wastewater facilities, roads and bridges. Our communities need public-transportation systems. We depend on community centres, libraries, immigrant settlement houses, recreational facilities, parks, social housing and cultural centres. The list is endless.

Well over half of all infrastructure in Canada is the responsibility of municipalities. It would cost \$12 billion each year for the next 10 years to fix crumbling municipal infrastructure. To meet outstanding transit needs, we need another \$8 billion each year for five years.

Municipalities are ill-equipped to deal with the recent downturn in the economy, as a result of the decision to simply cut taxes during “surplus” years. Major investments are needed to support communities. It took a “crisis” in parliament to shake up the federal government to move toward investing in this infrastructure. Still, cash-strapped municipalities are being asked to come up with their own funding to contribute to this program.

Additionally, the federal government decided to promote public-private partnerships (P3s) as a solution to the problem. Public-private partnerships allow the private sector to profit from financing, maintaining and operating public infrastructure. The weaknesses of P3s have been magnified because of the lack of private credit during the recent global financial crisis. This is not the way to go.

THE CHANGING FACE OF MUNICIPAL FUNDING

The City of Edmonton spent \$2,163,282 in 2007 providing services for citizens and the City of Calgary spent \$2,763,995, according to a study by the Canada West Foundation (CWF).

More and more of the money municipalities spend is raised by property taxes levied by councils. In the 1990s, provincial grants to municipal authorities were slashed. In inflation-adjusted 2007 dollars, per capita funding from the province to Edmonton was cut to \$64.39 from \$153.96, a drop of 58.2 per cent, says CWF. In Calgary, per capita funding fell to \$158.82 from \$246.50, a 35.6-per-cent drop.

The Western Centre for Economic Research says municipalities responded by increasing property taxes. "Property and related taxes increased in all types of municipalities after 2001," says a report from January 2010 called *Alberta Municipal System Overview*. "Between 2001 and 2007, after a prolonged period of relative stability, the average amount paid per Albertan increased from \$759 to \$983 (or by 29 per cent). The largest increase, \$637 per person, was in the rural municipalities."

We call on our local governments to choose public reinvestments and economic renewal that is sustainable, equitable and democratic. By building and rehabilitating public infrastructure, municipal governments can help create jobs. We need elected municipal leaders who will take our communities in this direction.

2: PROCUREMENT

A "Made-in-Canada" Purchasing Policy

Governments and not-for-profit institutions funded by government spend tax dollars in order to deliver the public services that are needed across Canada. Governments of all levels spend money for repairs and construction. They buy professional and financial services. They are significant purchasers of goods and services. They account for 21 per cent of all wages in the country. In fact, public-sector spending represents about 23 per cent of the value of all goods and services produced in Canada.

One area where we can confront the economic crisis at the local level is by working to have municipal councils adopt "Made-in-Canada" purchasing policies. This would create local jobs now and support our communities. Many municipalities have done just that. We need elected municipal leaders who will do this in their communities.

3: MUNICIPAL REVENUES

Building a Sustainable Fiscal Base for our Communities

Our cities and communities face many challenges. Probably the most important is the serious and ever-growing mismatch between growing program and investment responsibilities on

the one hand, and financial resources on the other. Most simply, municipalities are cash-strapped. They only get eight per cent of all taxes raised in Canada, yet are expected to deliver a huge amount of services to the public. Many services have been cut back as a result of past funding cuts. Almost all provinces will be running deficits and will choose to cut transfers to municipalities.

Unlike senior levels of government, municipalities are not usually allowed to run a deficit to cover operating costs.

We need to have a serious discussion within our communities about what kind of resources our cities and towns need to thrive. A few provinces have introduced limited revenue sharing with municipalities, like a gas-tax transfer, but only Manitoba shares personal and income tax revenues.

The bottom line is that we can't build vibrant cities based on an outdated model of funding. We need a new fiscal arrangement. Cities and communities need a long-term and predictable source of revenue in order to do their job.

4: FAIR WAGES & WORKING CONDITIONS

Respecting Workers

We live in a country where earnings are distributed very unequally and many lower-paid and insecurely employed workers struggle to make ends meet. Growing wage inequality is the root cause of many social problems that communities confront on a daily basis. Anti-poverty groups have identified low wages and job insecurity as one of our key social and economic problems.



Most direct municipal employees are unionized and enjoy decent wages, benefits and working conditions. While local governments have limited budgets, they can and should resist any attempts of contracting out core work to low-wage, private suppliers.

Progressive municipal governments should join with labour and anti-poverty groups to raise the minimum wage.

More than 130 municipal Living Wage Ordinances have been passed in the United States, including cities such as New York, Detroit and San Francisco. The basic concept of a living wage is that wages should provide sufficient income to meet basic needs. These ordinances have been the result of joint campaigns by community groups and labour to raise wages for the working poor. We need our elected leaders to step up to the plate.

5: SUSTAINABILITY

Labour's Green Agenda

The way we are living cannot be sustained on the only planet we have. We need to live, work, and play closer to one another, stop wasting so much energy, and shorten the distance between the production and consumption of goods. We need to have domestic production for domestic consumption.

By purchasing fuel-efficient, domestic cars for municipal fleets, investing in public transportation, reducing our exposure to toxic chemicals and making our homes more efficient, we can live more sustainably. We need to work to convince our local governments to represent us on these issues.

We need to stop urban sprawl and build neighbourhoods by developing an integrated public-transit strategy, increase density and encourage walking and cycling.

We need to use energy better by retrofitting public buildings and using clean energy.

We need to create healthy cities by reducing and recycling our waste, banning the use of cosmetic pesticides and organizing farmers' markets.

Through their practises and policies, municipalities have tremendous ability to affect our environment. We need our elected leaders to lead the way.

How Do We Get it Done?

We in the labour movement must get involved in municipal politics by electing local politicians who share our values and will fight for issues, not only important to labour, but to the community.

Our members are community activists, hockey coaches, swimming instructors, artists and block parents. We share common values with most people in our towns.

We are also good organizers. We know how to bring people together. We know how to use our trade union skills to find common ground. We know how to work hard to make our communities better places for everyone.

Our first step is to take our vision into the community. We need to bring together people who share our values. We need to reach out to community groups, environmental groups, youth groups, women's groups, new-immigrant groups, faith groups and others to talk about creating vibrant and sustainable communities. We need to be bold and reach out and invite people in.

Secondly, we need to recruit, train and support candidates for municipal offices who will take on our issues. We need to ask our brothers and sisters to take the step and become mayors, councillors and school-board representatives.

Thirdly, we need to let our members know who we are supporting. We need to get the message out and get our people to the polls on election day.

Lastly, we need to keep the dialogue going with those we elect. Our issues of building communities through public infrastructure, "Made-in-Canada" policies, building a fiscal base, fair wages and sustainability need to be reflected in the initiatives taken by our elected politicians.

Across Canada, our movement is being successful in community after community. We are electing people who share our values and are fighting on our behalf and on behalf of our cities, town, districts and schools.

We can do this!

(To find out more, contact your local CLC representative Tom Kehoe at tkehoe@clc-ctc.ca or 780-483-1812.)



POLITICS: It's In Our Blood

Unions have a long history
of being involved

WINSTON GERELUK

Above: Neil Reimer, right of Tommy Douglas, was Canadian Director of the Oil Chemical Atomic Workers when he agreed to serve as first leader of the Alberta wing of the New Democratic Party in 1962.

Photos courtesy of Alberta Labour History Institute

Political action has always been a risky subject for Alberta's trade unions. In fact, unionists in this province have been more reluctant than their counterparts in other parts of Canada to engage in the business of changing governments and government policy.

Politics is essentially about the exercise of power, and everyone knows that the relationship at the workplace has and always will be political – with the balance of power clearly in favour of the employer.

Trade unions are, therefore, political by nature, as their prime purpose is to correct this imbalance through collective action. Problems have sometimes arisen, however, where they have taken steps to change the power relationship in the rest of society – particularly to change governments that support the employer's monopoly on power.

The tendency to avoid this type of action has been rewarded by a succession of unfriendly governments that have passed one piece of anti-labour legislation after another, with the result that union density in Alberta today – the percentage of workers represented by a trade union – is only 22.7 per cent, the lowest in Canada.



Politics at the birth of Alberta Federation of Labour

The need for political action (if not a Labour Party) was clearly recognized by the 23 miners, carpenters, municipal employees, railway workers and farmers who gathered in Lethbridge on June 15-16, 1912, to form the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL). The headlines in the Lethbridge Herald said it all: "WILL UNITE TO FORCE POLITICAL REFORMS: Farmers, Miners and City Toilers Decide to Form a Federation to Force Demands on Legislative Bodies – Won't Start Separate Party."

Whatever their original intention, trade unions became extremely political during the First World War, pushed by members who opposed conscription and the unabashed profiteering that took place while workers died in the stinking trenches of Europe. In March 1919, leaders of the four western Federations of Labour met in the Labour Temple on 10th Avenue South Calgary to form a One Big Union (OBU) opposed to the conservative policies of the eastern-dominated Trades and Labour Congress, and dedicated to radical industrial unionism based on socialist principles.

Two months later, on May 15, the OBU demonstrated its ultimate weapon, the General Strike. Workers in Winnipeg not only walked off the job, they took over the government of the city. This "political experiment" was smashed on June 19, "Bloody Saturday," by the combined might of the Northwest Mounted Police, the vigilantes of the "Citizens' Committee," and others opposed to the rights of labour. Labour Councils in Edmonton and Calgary voted to strike in support.



Elmer Roper, President of the Calgary Trades & Labour Council and later leader of the Alberta CCF and mayor of Edmonton.

Trade Unions in Electoral Politics

The following two decades witnessed the most political period in Alberta labour history, as workers and their unions joined committees, leagues and parties. These attracted widespread support in spite of the fact that the original organizers of the Trades and Labour Councils in Calgary (1901) and Edmonton (1905) had in mind organizations that would be dedicated to the "adjustment of difficulties arising between employers and employees in different trades."

Anything akin to socialism was viewed by many as a dangerous distraction from "union business" and a source of disunity – but not everywhere. In the mining districts of Lethbridge and the Crowsnest Pass, socialists were elected on labour tickets to the provincial legislature. When the Trades and Labour Councils finally amended their constitution in 1911 to include political change as an aim, they began to endorse trade unionists for political office. Several of their candidates were elected between 1912 and 1917.

Forming a Labour Party

Movement towards an actual labour party began with the election of Calgary trade unionist Alexander Ross to the Alberta legislature in 1917. Elmer Roper, President of the Calgary Trades & Labour Council (later leader of the Alberta CCF and mayor of Edmonton), pressed his council to establish a permanent Labour Representation League. He was joined by William Irvine, a Unitarian preacher and the guiding force behind the farm-oriented Non-Partisan League, to form the league financed by an assessment on affiliated union members. The Edmonton Labour Council followed suit.



The United Nurses of Alberta strike in 1980 challenged the Conservative government and won major gains in wages and working conditions, as well as securing important professional demands.

Some electoral progress was made by trade unionists who supported the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), which formed the government in 1921. At the same time, however, they were forming an Alberta branch of the Dominion Labour Party (DLP), fuelled by anger over conscription, war profiteering and a national clampdown on radicals and committed to a new social order. The DLP gave way two years later to the Canadian Labour Party composed of affiliated organizations, including trade unions, socialist societies, co-operative societies and local labour parties.

The Communist Party played an important role in building of the Canadian Labour Party (until it was expelled in 1930), sponsoring unemployed organizations, rallies, speakers, and demonstrations. In the 1926 general election, the CLP garnered a major percentage of the popular vote; e.g., Calgary 28.7 per cent, Edmonton 19.6 per cent, Edson 41.1 per cent, Lethbridge 37.1 per cent, Rocky Mountain House 52.7 per cent and Medicine Hat 20.1 per cent.

HISTORY INSTITUTE KEEPS OUR STORIES ALIVE

WINSTON GERELUK

THE ALBERTA LABOUR HISTORY INSTITUTE

For the last 10 years, the Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI) has brought together trade unionists, academics, labour archivists, political activists and writers to preserve and tell the story of Alberta's working people and their organizations, and to counter a history that is dominated by the narrative of corporate bosses and their friends.

Since its founding in 1998, ALHI has undertaken a growing number of activities and is now widely recognized in Alberta's labour community and the public at large. Among other

things, it has interviewed more than 300 leading trade unionists and community activists; preserved and archived records, photos and publications; produced Alberta Labour History Calendars; hosted Labour History Days; provided material for city and provincial centennial celebrations; and made presentations to trade unions, schools and other organizations.

It has also played a role in the production of television shows, videos and audiotapes, responded to requests for university-level research and teaching purposes and helped a number of unions and organizations celebrate their anniversaries.

In 2007, ALHI partnered with the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) in Project 2012: 100 Years of Alberta Labour to provide an historical and educational foundation to the centennial that the AFL will celebrate in 2012. As the title indicates, the scope of the project extends beyond the AFL and its affiliates to include



The success of this political strategy was also evident at the municipal level. Margaret Crang, a self-described socialist, became the first woman labour representative to be elected to the Edmonton City Council in 1927, where labour elected the whole slate of eight councillors in 1932 under Mayor Don Knott.

Relations with the UFA government soured considerably after the 1926 election in spite of the positive gains it had won for labour. It did not help that Edmonton lawyer J.E. Brownlee, who replaced Greenfield as premier that year, failed to appoint a single labour representative to his new cabinet.

The Great Depression saw renewed political activity. Perhaps the most significant development occurred in Calgary in 1932, when workers, farmers and socialists met to discuss the formation of a new party. A year later, a much larger group met in Regina to adopt the Regina Manifesto and form the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).

The new party would do well in Saskatchewan, forming a government in 1943 that gave labour, among other things, one of Canada's best trade union acts and state-controlled single-payer health systems. It would struggle for a foothold in Alberta, however, a quirk of history which some blame on labour's disappointment with the UFA Party that had turned on workers and the unemployed during the Great Depression.

In any case, as years passed, the leadership of the Alberta labour movement grew less radical, actually supporting the new Social Credit government of Bill Aberhart which had swept to power in 1935 – and even his successor, E.C. Manning, who was openly opposed to unions. "Labour and government must work together," AFL president Harry Boyse declared in 1950.

The political muscle labour flexed briefly during the Second World War gave rise to PC 1003 in 1944, an act of parliament known as the "Great Compromise" through which the shrewd

groups, individuals, families and communities that have played an important role in building our province over the last century.

An Oversight Committee oversees a number of other Project 2012 activities that are either planned or under way. These include:

- a series of short videos on selected events, people or developments to culminate in 2012 with a DVD portraying 100 years of Alberta labour history;
- two large posters for each of the five years of the project portraying key themes in Alberta's labour history;
- community visits across the province to hold meetings, talk to trade unionists and other community leaders, conduct research and collect materials for local sources;
- a dedicated Project 2012 website to serve as a focal point for collecting and disseminating news and stories on the project;
- preparation for celebratory 2012 events around the province to culminate in a major history conference and a special AFL function. Preparation for these will begin with community visits in Fall 2012;
- promotional materials, including brochures or pamphlets, advertisements, etc.;
- a comprehensive book on Alberta labour history since 1912 that will contain much of the research undertaken during the five-year project;
- A number of other possible activities, including a CD of labour history music by such Alberta artists as Maria Dunn and the Notre Dame des Bananes choir.

The ALHI board meets once every two months and in intervening months meets with friends and supporters to view films, hold discussions and socialize. New members and observers are always welcome. Visit ALHI at www.labourhistory.ca



Delegates gathered in Regina in 1933 for the first CCF national convention

Liberal Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King sought to contain the militancy of a working class that was able to turn a wartime demand for labour to its advantage – one-third of Canada’s industrial workers had gone on strike in the previous year.

The act extended collective bargaining rights to most private-sector workers, providing a template for collective-bargaining legislation that was taken up by the provinces after the war – even Alberta, where a reluctant E.C. Manning (who saw trade unions as part of an international conspiracy of Jews, bankers and communists) finally passed the province’s first Labour Relations Act in 1948.

Labour fully expected to be part of a “New World Order” after the war, which would see workers who had fought in the trenches and laboured in Canada’s war industry become equal partners in the shaping of a new society. The Cold War and McCarthyism made short work of these thoughts, however. As Neil Reimer, Canadian Director of the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union and first leader of the provincial NDP points out, the North American Cold War scare was not really directed at the Communist Party of Canada. Its major effect was directed at “friends” of the CP, including supporters and social partners in the CCF.

Forming a ‘New Party’

The CCF was completely eliminated from Canada’s Parliament in the Conservative Party sweep led by John Diefenbaker in 1958. The lesson was that a new party was needed and the New Democratic Party was created after a period of grassroots organizing by clubs in which trade unions were a full partner. The national NDP was officially formed in a convention in 1961, with Saskatchewan’s Tommy Douglas elected as its first leader. A year later, Reimer was elected leader of the Alberta party.

Since then, debates have raged within and without the labour movement about the advisability of formally affiliating with a political party. Many union members wanted nothing to do with a “socialist” party or disagreed with specific policies. Others argued that that the affiliation would have a divisive effect and accomplish little that could not be achieved through strategic support and lobbying of other parties.

Those who favoured the liaison pointed out that unfriendly governments have, with a stroke of the pen, wiped out decades of gains for which unions have struggled, while a friendly government could promote the aims of the movement; e.g.,



with the introduction of Medicare, anti-scab legislation and other positive moves.

Supporters also pointed out that NDP candidates are typically the ones who are from or have been close to trade unions and their struggles; that they are usually the only candidates who have ever been on a picket line, attended rallies or sat at the negotiation table on the trade union side. As well, policies adopted and promoted by the party most often reflect the objectives of the labour movement – in contrast to policies of the old-line parties.

Particularly appealing to Albertans who are cynical about the chances of the NDP ever winning an election is the argument that we must ensure the election of opposition parties to the legislature. Democracy suffers in Alberta, because it has tended so strongly to one-party government. It is particularly crucial in the current context, they say, as the right-wing Wildrose Alliance Party threatens to form either the next government or the Official Opposition, both of which would be disastrous for the labour movement.

While Alberta's trade unions may not have done well at the

polls, they have succeeded in forming in a number of coalition movements that have few equivalents in other provinces.

Trade unions have worked with progressives in churches, social agencies, the arts, and poverty groups to support such organizations as the Friends of Medicare (FOM), Public Interest Alberta (PIA), and the Parkland Institute, all of which have an undeniable effect on the politics of this province.

A new coalition, Join Together Alberta, unites existing coalitions with even more organizations and individuals to challenge the Stelmach government's fixation on eliminating the provincial deficit without increasing taxes.

According to Bill Moore-Kilgannon, executive director of PIA: "We have brought together an unprecedented amount of organizations and individuals who are joining together because they're deeply concerned about what \$2 billion in proposed cuts will mean for public services here in Alberta."

Gil McGowan, president of the AFL, says the labour movement played a leading role in the formation and success of the Join Together Alberta coalition, because it has the infrastructure and resources that other groups lack. "Thanks to labour, the coalition was able to take the message from communities all over the province to the governing Tories that there was no appetite for massive cuts to public-sector spending and that important services, including health care and education, must be protected."

Winston Gereluk is vice-president of the Alberta Labour History Institute.

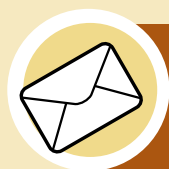
(Note: While material was taken from many sources, I am particularly indebted to Alvin Finkel's "The rise and fall of the Labour Party in Alberta, 1917 – 1942". Labour/Le Travail, 16 Fall 1985, and to Warren Caragata's, Alberta Labour: A Story Untold.)



J.E. Brownlee, who became Alberta premier in 1926, failed to appoint a single labour representative to his new cabinet



Margaret Crang, a self-described socialist, was the first labour candidate to get elected to Edmonton City Council in 1927



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