



49TH CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION ENERGIZES WORKERS

More than 400 labour activists, leaders, educators and allies gathered over four days at the Telus Convention Centre in Calgary for the Alberta Federation of Labour's 49th constitutional convention.

From April 16-19, the Federation welcomed guests and speakers from around the world, speaking on China's fledgling labour movement, Norway's oil industry, and the movement of labour through guest worker programs — and bringing the subjects home to how they impact Albertans.

"This is a reflection of how important global solidarity is. Workers across the world need to be able to rely on each other," Alberta Federation of Labour president Gil McGowan said. "Alberta's workers are affected by these global forces. And when our unions in Alberta work together, we can affect global change."

The convention was one of the most technically complex, engaging, dynamic and most successful in the history of the federation. Resolutions were debated and passed on subjects ranging from worker training, to youth internships, to indigenous rights, and Canadian politics.



"The debates have been feisty, intelligent, passionate, and will help inform the Federation of Labour's priorities for the next two years," McGowan said. "I'm proud that our federation has such an engaged membership."

By the end of the event, there had been more than 500 tweets to the event's hashtag #NoLittleDreams2015, and videos uploaded on YouTube had been viewed more than 1,000 times.

MAY DAY AWARD. ALBERT JOHNSON



Albert Johnson, the late president of UFCW 1118, was awarded with this year's May Day award for his exemplary service and leadership in the labour movement. Brother Johnson's family members, wife Tammy Johnson and son Ryan accepted the award on his behalf.

Earlier this year, the labour movement lost a great leader when Brother Johnson passed away. His leadership was honoured and remembered by all affiliates at the AFL convention Saturday.

"I want to assure you that brother Johnson's spirit is here today," current UFCW 1118 president Peter Frost said. "Albert was the longest serving president of a UFCW local in the history of UFCW, becoming the president at twenty-four years old."

"Albert was committed to the labour movement day and night," Frost said. "He consistently said this isn't a job, it's a belief and you don't put your beliefs on the shelf at the end of the day."

"Albert grew a local from 400 to over 5,000," said Frost. "That is an incredible feat."

On the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), Johnson provided leadership, ensuring that members of UFCW 1118 who were non-Canadian were guaranteed mandatory sponsorship to become Canadian citizens.

"Albert always said guest workers have a vested interest in our movement—they are our members," Frost said. "Bargaining mandatory sponsorship for all temporary foreign workers was one of Albert's proudest achievements. Albert wasn't in favour of the program, but he provided a model of how to do the best in the face of very bad situation."

"If you want to follow in Albert's footsteps, you don't put your beliefs on the shelf," Frost said. "You follow them through every single day."

Johnson's wife and son accepted the May Day award on his behalf and graciously shared their memories of Brother Johnson and his legacy.

"Albert will be forever known for his work on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program," Tammy Johnson said. "Albert believed that every worker in Canada deserved the same and equal rights."

"Albert never went to fight for the members alone — he always went with the full force of the union with him," Johnson said. "No matter how many irons he had in the fire, he was first and foremost a union brother, and nobody stood alone."

"On behalf of UFCW 1118, we thank you for honouring Albert with this May Day award."

CITIZENS NOT SERFS. GIL MCGOWAN



Alberta Federation of Labour President Gil McGowan addressed convention delegates on the vital work the labour movement has undertaken to oppose the Harper government's dramatic expansion of the exploitative Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP).

"Stephen Harper said that Canadians wouldn't recognize their country when he was finished with it," said McGowan. "With the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the Harper government has shown that they won't be satisfied until they have disciplined the labour movement to a degree never seen in Canada's history."

McGowan focused on the ways the program has been used to suppress wages by flooding the labour market and exploiting migrant workers, and how the AFL has successfully opposed the program every step of the way.

"The Harper government now admits that employers are using the Temporary Foreign Worker program to suppress wages," said McGowan. "The Harper government knew this all along, but because of our work they have been forced to own up to the fact the AFL was right all along."

"Make no mistake, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and the abuses, exploitation, and negative effects on Canadian and migrant workers is on the political map because of the hard work of the Alberta labour movement," said McGowan.

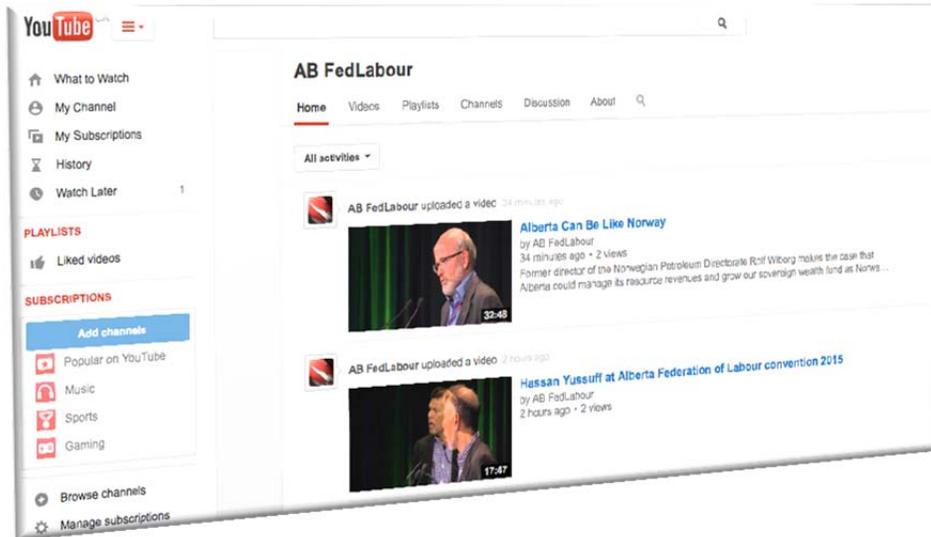
In spring of 2014 due to the heavy lifting of the AFL, the Harper government announced an "overhaul" to the TFWP to crackdown on employers abusing the program, but major problems persist and have actually become worse despite the Harper government's rhetoric.

"We knew from the early stages when we saw the program being abused more and more aggressively that the labour movement had to take the lead in opposing it," said McGowan. "Now that the Harper government has made changes to the program, we must redouble our efforts because while they may have closed one door, they've opened others."

"Canada is a country that was built by immigrants who became," said McGowan. "But what happened with Harper took over in 2006; they began building it by exploiting precarious guest workers."

"We will continue to take up the fight against the unfair and exploitative Temporary Foreign Worker Program until it is finally scrapped."

#NOLITTLEDREAMS2015 WILL PERSIST ON YOUTUBE



If you missed one of the guests at #DreamNoLittleDreams2015, check out the AFL's YouTube page at [Youtube.com/ABFedLabour](https://www.youtube.com/ABFedLabour).

Videos are being posted, featuring great speakers, prescient analysis, and rousing rhetoric on politics and labour in Alberta.

"AFL Convention 2015 features some first-rate speakers, whose timely knowledge, experience, and wisdom should inform the public debate," AFL president Gil McGowan said. "It would be sad if the only people in Alberta who got to hear some of these speeches were the 400 people who were in the room."

So far speeches from AFL president Gil McGowan, CLC President Hassan Yussuff, and Norwegian oil expert Rolf Wiborg have been uploaded.

"Over the next few days and weeks, more of these presentations will be shared on the YouTube channel," AFL Secretary Treasurer Siobhan Vipond said.

This is the second time that the AFL convention has been shared widely through YouTube. Videos from the 2013 convention have been viewed tens of thousands of times, and have enduring value. The 2013 keynote speech from Allan Gregg was featured on the Huffington Post, and was watched by more than 10,000 people.

A video featuring Shannon Phillips speaking about the Temporary Foreign Worker program in 2013 has 16,000 views, and is still viewed by about 100 people every month.

"Clearly these presentations have struck a chord with Albertans," McGowan said.

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