

## Labour History Celebrations Planned for 2012

2012 will be labour's year in Alberta.

It will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL), an organization that has touched the lives of millions of union members and positively influenced the lives of many more Albertans. Celebrations are being planned that will go far beyond the Federation itself to draw attention to the role that all of Alberta's workers, their unions and community organizations have played in building this Province.

In 2007, the AFL formed a partnership with the Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI) to ensure that education about our history would be a major ingredient of the celebrations. ALHI is a research institute formed in 1999 by trade unionists, community activists and historians to preserve and tell the story of Alberta's working people and their organizations.

Four years of research, interviews, community visits and meetings have exposed a remarkable story of Alberta labour of which strikes and protests were only one part. A much larger story grew out of the communities that workers and their families built.

The Alberta Federation of Labour itself was founded in 1912, when a group of railway workers, miners, farmers, typographers and tradespeople met in Lethbridge, Alberta to unite in the struggle for better wages, working conditions and political reform. The AFL has been guided since then by the dream that, one day, all workers in the Province could be organized under of one organization to represent and protect their common interest.

Since 2007, ALHI has worked with the AFL and the Labour Councils to plan celebrations that will begin in the Spring 2012 and last throughout the summer. Historical events, people, places and organizations will be commemorated in exhibitions, concerts, projects and banquets in communities across Alberta, from Ft. McMurray to Medicine Hat, wrapping-up with a Celebration of Labour in Edmonton in mid-June.

Labour's story is being told through a variety of media including: a new labour history book, historical booklets specific events, posters publicizing key themes in our history, short videos capturing stories of events and people, videotaped interviews with over 400 trade unionists and community leaders, a Project 2012 Website (<http://www.labourhistory.ca>), brochures or pamphlets publicizing the celebration, and labour history displays in art galleries, museums, libraries and with historical societies.

Committees have been organized in communities across Alberta to plan events and projects for local areas, beginning with Lethbridge, the birthplace of the AFL. Most will include a musical tour by Maria Dunn from the end of April in to the first week in June 2012. For its part, Edmonton's Labour Council is planning to unveil an obelisk entitled 'Broken Families' in Grant Notley Park on April 28, 2012 that will draw attention for many years to come to the families of workers who are injured or killed by unsafe workplaces.

A focal point for 2012 celebrations will be a day-long Celebration of Labour on June 16, for which the old Blatchford Field Hanger and other venues in Ft. Edmonton Park have already been booked. Union displays and presentations speeches, musical performances, theatre, kid games and a dance will all be kicked-off with a Banner Extravaganza for which local and national unions, labour councils and community organizations are all being encouraged to produce banners.

It will be preceded by a two-day labour history conference on June 14-15 that will begin with presentation of papers by labour historians, and culminate in a story-telling session in which long-time leaders and activists are invited to take part.

Project 2012 is the latest initiative of ALHI, which in its 14-year history has interviewed hundreds of Albertans; preserved records, photos and publications; produced Labour History Calendars; provided materials for city and provincial Centennials; made presentations to trade unions, schools and other organizations; assisted in the production of television shows, videos and audiotapes; responded to requests for university-level research and teaching purposes, and helped a number of Alberta unions celebrate their anniversaries.

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