



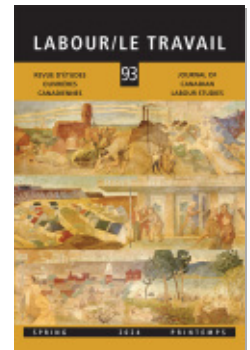
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"What Is Labour's Stake?": Workers and the History of Environmentalism in Alberta

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Labour / Le Travail, Issue 93, Spring 2024, pp. 23-53 (Article)

Published by The Canadian Committee on Labour History



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ARTICLE

“What Is Labour’s Stake?”: Workers and the History of Environmentalism in Alberta

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Abstract: Although counterintuitive for many academics and lay people alike, the Canadian environmental movement has long included significant engagement from organized labour. More surprising, perhaps, the most dedicated labour environmentalists came from unions representing workers in the auto, steel, mining, chemical, and oil industries. This was certainly the case in Alberta during the 1970s. There, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) used their outsized influence within the Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) to conjoin growing concern about occupational health and safety with developing awareness about air and water pollution beyond the workplace. Drawing on fonds at the University of Calgary Glenbow Archives, Provincial Archives of Alberta, and Library and Archives Canada, this article chronicles and assesses efforts by OCAW officials within the AFL to introduce and sustain a labour environmentalist agenda. It also makes an argument for historians interested in the origins and evolution of the Canadian environmental movement to pay closer attention to organized labour.

Keywords: labour, environment, Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, Alberta Federation of Labour, Canadian Labour Congress, Save Tomorrow Oppose Pollution, Neil Reimer, Reg Basken, Jim MacDonald

Résumé : Bien que cela soit contre-intuitif pour de nombreux universitaires et profanes, le mouvement environnemental canadien inclut depuis longtemps un engagement important de la part des syndicats. Plus surprenant, peut-être, les écologistes les plus dévoués provenaient de syndicats qui représentaient les travailleurs des industries de l’automobile, de l’acier, des mines, de la chimie et du pétrole. C’était certainement le cas en Alberta dans les années 1970. Là-bas, les travailleurs du secteur pétrolier, chimique et atomique (OCAW) ont utilisé leur influence démesurée au sein de la Fédération du travail de l’Alberta (AFL) pour conjuguer les préoccupations croissantes concernant la santé et la sécurité au travail à la sensibilisation à la pollution de l’air et de l’eau au-delà du lieu de travail. S’appuyant sur des fonds des archives Glenbow de l’Université de Calgary, des Archives provinciales de l’Alberta et de la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, cet article relate et évalue les efforts déployés par les responsables de l’OCAW au sein de l’AFL pour introduire et maintenir un programme environnementaliste syndical. Cela incite également les historiens intéressés aux origines et à l’évolution du mouvement environnemental canadien à accorder une plus grande attention au mouvement syndical.

Mots clefs : Syndicalisme, environnement, Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, Fédération

Chad Montrie, “What Is Labour’s Stake?”: Workers and the History of Environmentalism in Alberta,” *Labour/Le Travail* 93 (Spring 2024): 23–53, <https://doi.org/10.52975/lt.2024v93.004>

du travail de l'Alberta, Congrès du travail du Canada, Save Tomorrow Oppose Pollution, Neil Reimer, Reg Basken, Jim MacDonald

IN THE EARLY PART OF DECEMBER 1969, Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) president and Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) organizer Roy Jamha directed executive secretary Eugene Mitchell to ask several other provincial union leaders to serve on a new "Pollution Committee." Besides his duties as AFL executive secretary, Mitchell belonged to an OCAW local in Medicine Hat, and the most enthusiastic response to his call came from Neil Reimer, the union's Canadian District director, who was based in Edmonton. When the seven-member committee met later the next year, Mitchell and Reimer were joined by Reg Basken, the OCAW Canadian District assistant director, who would succeed Jamha as AFL president in 1972, a position he held until 1978. At the start, Pollution Committee members also designated Reimer as their chair, a function he served until 1977.¹ Counting Jamha, Mitchell, Reimer, and Basken, then, the OCAW was the primary contingent initiating and advancing the federation's commitment to environmentalism, and the central role these leaders played was indicative of the importance the union gave to the cause. "The employers that we work for are among the major polluters of the world," Basken explained, "and, as employees, we must accept our responsibility." The OCAW's concerns could not be limited to "in-plant occupational health," he insisted, and it was not enough to simply say that a company pollutes. "We must be prepared to take whatever steps that may be necessary to prevent the pollution from taking place, and to ensure that our managements clean up and preserve the environment."²

Even before the Pollution Committee gathered for its first official meeting, in fact, members were already doing outreach with rank-and-file workers across Alberta as well as with the province's main environmental group, Save

1. Roy Jamha was originally a member of a United Packinghouse Workers local in Edmonton but left to become an organizer for the Oil Workers International Union (OWIU) in 1953. By the end of the decade, the OWIU had become the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union. See Cynthia Marie Loch Drake, "Unpacking 'Alberta Beef': Class, Gender, and Culture in Edmonton Packinghouses during the Era of National Pattern Bargaining, 1947–1979," PhD diss., York University, 2013, 173n4; N. Reimer to E. A. Mitchell, 8 December 1969, and Pollution Committee Meeting Minutes, 21 December 1970, p. 1, both in folder 428a, "Standing Committees – Pollution, 1969–70," box 16, Alberta Federation of Labour fonds (hereafter AFL), Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton (hereafter PAA). The four other original committee members were Stan Fritter (International Pulp & Sulphite Workers), Frank Kuzemski and E. Steele (both United Steel Workers of America), and Ted Takacs (International Chemical Workers); "Report of the Committee on Environment," Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) Convention Proceedings, 1971, p. 46, folder 85, "1971 Convention," box 7, AFL, PAA.

2. Reg Basken, "Health and Safety Report" to OCAW District 9 (Canada) Convention, p. 4, folder 69, box 5, "18th Conference, 1971," Energy and Chemical Workers Union fonds (hereafter ECWU), PAA. The OCAW became the ECWU, an independent Canadian union, in 1980.



Figure 1. *What Is Labour's Stake in Environmental Pollution?* (1971), booklet cover page.

Reproduced by permission from Canadian Labour Congress (Calgary Office) fonds, Glenbow Archives, University of Calgary.

Tomorrow Oppose Pollution (STOP).³ To support that outreach, the committee produced a multi-page booklet titled *What Is Labour's Stake in Environmental Pollution?* The booklet was professionally printed, with a striking cover showing an attentive elk against a backdrop of snowy mountain peaks. Bulleted items in the corner answered the title's question: "our lives, our jobs, our community, our country, our world." Endeavouring to "concentrate on problems of environmental pollution from the viewpoint of the worker," the text opened with sections from *Peril on the Job*, a recently published book by Ray Davidson, editor of *OCAW News*, who had toured the United States and Canada interviewing members in petrochemical plants and other industries about modern workplace hazards. This was followed by lengthy excerpts from various speeches as well as the "Policy Statement on Pollution" adopted by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) at its constitutional convention in Edmonton in 1970. "History has taught us that we cannot rely upon profit-oriented private

3. Karen Molgaard (STOP) to John McNevin (AFL), 18 April 1970, folder 428a, "Pollution, 1969-70," box 16, AFL, PAA.

enterprise to institute strong action in social fields," the statement declared, and "it is imperative that we, as the national voice of organized labour, develop a concerted demand for governments to enact without further delay effective and enforceable legislation that will prevent, under severe penalties, the continuance of destructive practices which endanger our environment." To complement the demand for government action, the booklet included model contract language as well, with clauses specifying company disclosure of all pollutants and abatement methods, reduction of pollutants below the "threshold limit value" guidelines set by the Alberta Department of Health, test procedures to monitor pollution levels in the workplace and community, and union rights to participate in that monitoring and do independent testing of their own.⁴

While preparing *What Is Labour's Stake?*, the Pollution Committee was renamed the Environment Committee, at Reimer's suggestion, and members successfully lobbied the AFL executive council to adopt "Our Environment" as the theme for its own annual constitutional convention in 1971. Among the convention's featured speakers was CLC president and former Nova Scotia coal miner Donald MacDonald, who singled out the booklet for praise and congratulated delegates for "enlightened foresight" in selecting their theme. "The same industrial revolution which two hundred years ago, as a result of its excesses, its exploitation, and its oppression of the workers gave rise to our trade union movement," he noted, "also began a process which is by now reaching crisis proportions," with air and water poisoned by industrial and municipal wastes. "I say this advisedly in a province which I realize lives on oil," MacDonald observed, but "we are citizens of this country ... residents of the cities and towns and the villages, and we have a responsibility which goes far beyond our own membership to the community at large."⁵ Alberta Environment Conservation Authority (ECA) chair Dr. Walter Trost expressed similar sentiments, noting how the worker stood at "the focal point of the contemporary environmental problem ... the one who suffers the most from whatever environmental damage might occur both on the job itself inside the factory fence and then outside the factory in his home in the city." He also lauded the federation for its recent brief to the provincial government, calling for more comprehensive pollution controls and centralized coordination of enforcement.⁶ The Environment Committee elaborated on this in its official report, and subsequently, delegates passed more than two dozen resolutions

4. *What Is Labour's Stake in Environmental Pollution?*, pp. 2, 13–14, 16, file #149, "Pollution 71," box 14, CLC: Calgary Office Files (1955–1977) (hereafter CLC), Glenbow Archives, University of Calgary (hereafter GA).

5. Donald MacDonald, in AFL Convention Proceedings, 1971, pp. 11–12, folder 85, "1971 Convention," box 7, AFL, PAA.

6. Dr. W. Trost, in AFL Convention Proceedings, 1971, pp. 21–22, folder 85, "1971 Convention," box 7, AFL, PAA.

on the environment, which President Jamha told the press were the top priority of the convention.⁷ "Labor seeks environmental rights," the *Calgary Herald* declared on its front page – notably, legislation allowing employees to refuse "work which will pollute the environment" without fear of reprisal from managements, as well as a law allowing unions to "to bargain on matters relating to pollution or technological change."⁸

Clearly, by the early 1970s both the OCAW and the AFL had begun to demonstrate an earnest engagement with environmentalism, broadly defined and yet refracted through their interests as workers' organizations. During the rest of the decade, this interest prompted them to collaborate with Alberta environmental groups, often in ways that profoundly magnified workers' adversarial relationships with employers, all the while maintaining a sense of their own distinct "trade union" contribution to an environmental movement. The OCAW's support for government intervention to prevent air and water pollution, as well as to address growing numbers of related workplace hazards, also was aided by union staff and leaders beyond the province and across the Canadian border. Because of its outsized role in the AFL, those interprovincial and international links influenced the federation too. Additionally, their notable embrace of environmentalism put the OCAW and AFL at the centre of a national effort on the part of the CLC to amalgamate organized labour's concerns with full employment, environmental protection, and natural resource conservation. That effort culminated in Ottawa in February 1978 with a conference titled "Jobs and Environment," organized by the CLC's Social and Community Programs Department (SCPD) director Jim MacDonald and including a workshop called "Energy and Jobs" co-led by Neil Reimer.⁹

Given how evident (and relevant) this history of labour environmentalism is, however, its absence from academic (and popular) accounts of the Canadian environmental movement is striking. As their titles suggest, for example, Frank Zelko's *Make It a Green Peace! The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism* (2013) focuses on Greenpeace in British Columbia, while Ryan O'Connor's *The First Green Wave: Pollution Probe and the Origins of Environmental Activism in Ontario* (2014) centres on Pollution Probe in Ontario. Both books associate the start of Canada's environmental movement exclusively with the founding of these separate organizations, and neither investigates the many ways that environmental groups interacted with workers and organized labour in their respective provinces (and there is no comparable study of groups in the

7. "Report of the Committee on Environment," AFL Convention Proceedings, 1971, pp. 46–47, folder 85, "1971 Convention," box 7, AFL, PAA.

8. "Environment Laws Proposed by AFL," *Calgary Herald*, 5 May 1971, 26; "CLC President Speaks: Ottawa Blasted for Unemployment," *Calgary Herald*, 6 May 1971, 21; "Polluting Tasks Likened to War Atrocities: Labor Seeks Environmental Rights," *Calgary Herald*, 7 May 1971, 1.

9. Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), *Report of the Conference on Jobs and the Environment*, Government Conference Centre, Ottawa, 19–21 February 1978, 3–4.

Prairie provinces).¹⁰ Yet one important exception in the otherwise nearsighted environmental historiography is a collection edited by Jonathan Clapperton and Liza Piper, *Environmental Activism on the Ground: Small Green and Indigenous Organizing*, which deliberately concentrates on community activist campaigns. The editors explain that they chose this focus to recover a narrative where “workers, women, small businesspeople, Indigenous activists, and other often marginalized groups feature more prominently”; accordingly, several chapters acknowledge environmental activists’ links to working people and organized labour in Nova Scotia, Ontario, and British Columbia.¹¹ In his chapter on the Society for Pollution and Environmental Control (SPEC), for instance, Clapperton points out that any social movement that wanted to gain support in BC during the 1960s and 1970s had to work with the labour movement, and local SPEC groups formed close ties with unions in “resource-dependent” towns where workers formally joined the organization and informally reported on their employers’ environmental infractions.¹²

Labour historians have done a bit more to chronicle the history of labour environmentalism in Canada, although much of that scholarship makes only passing notice of community-oriented environmental consciousness and activism, and again, Prairie provinces like Alberta do not feature at all. Laurel Sefton McDowell made an early contribution to this historiography in 1998 with “Greening the Workplace: Unions and the Environment,” which lists a few examples of union action on health and safety in the 1970s and suggests that the Canadian labour movement did not link “environmental problems on the job to broader community issues” until the late 1980s. In her 2012 *Labour/Le Travail* article on uranium miners at Elliott Lake, McDowell also addresses only workplace hazards, and oddly, her book published the same

10. Frank Zelko, *Make It a Green Peace! The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). “The Canadian environmental movement did not begin with the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 or the celebration of Earth Day in 1970,” Ryan O’Connor observes, although environmental historians have cited these as the key events launching a movement in the United States. The origins of environmental activism in Toronto, he explains, date to the 1967 television documentary *The Air of Death*, produced by Larry Gosnell for the CBC, which aired on 22 October 1967. Shortly after, activists founded Group Action to Stop Pollution (GASP) and Pollution Probe. O’Connor, *The First Green Wave: Pollution Probe and the Origins of Environmental Activism in Ontario* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 6.

11. Jonathan Clapperton and Liza Piper, “Introduction: In the Shadow of the Green Giants; Environmentalism and Civic Engagement,” in Clapperton and Piper, eds., *Environmental Activism on the Ground: Small Green and Indigenous Organizing* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2019), 3. Of the chapters in this collection, see esp. Mark Leeming, “Local Economic Independence as Environmentalism: Nova Scotia in the 1970s” (pp. 207–230), Liza Piper, “Alternatives: Environmental and Indigenous Activism in the 1970s” (pp. 153–170), and Jonathan Clapperton, “The Ebb and Flow of Local Environmentalist Activism: The Society for Pollution and Environmental Control (SPEC), British Columbia” (pp. 261–288).

12. Clapperton “Ebb and Flow,” 268–269.

year, *An Environmental History of Canada*, makes no mention of workers or unions.¹³ In a 2014 *Labour/Le Travail* article, Katrin McPhee sets out to show the existence of "a distinctly working-class environmental consciousness in Canada between 1965 and 1985," but she relies heavily on *Canadian Occupational Health and Safety News* as a primary source and thus likewise misses the larger scope of labour environmentalism.¹⁴ In another 2014 *Labour/Le Travail* article, Joan McFarland explains that labour and environmental activists in New Brunswick had been working together since the 1970s, but the five occasions she covers are necessarily brief and deal primarily with the 1980s and 1990s, and unfortunately, she did not follow this with a lengthier study.¹⁵ Closer to the mark is the accumulating work of John-Henry Harter, including a 2004 critical class analysis of Greenpeace, published in *Labour/Le Travail* as well, and a second *Labour/Le Travail* article in 2022, "Histories of Environmental Coalition Building in British Columbia: Using History to Build Working-Class Environmentalism."¹⁶ Taken together, Harter's scholarship greatly advances the existing literature about timber union demands for forest conservation measures by identifying that, rather than "the new social movements of the 1960s," as the origin point for "modern environmentalism" in BC.¹⁷

This article, "What Is Labour's Stake?," aims to contribute toward a more complete history of labour environmentalism in Canada by featuring people

13. Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "Greening the Workplace: Unions and the Environment," in L. Anders Sandberg and Sverker Sorlen, eds., *Sustainability, the Challenge: People, Power, and the Environment* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1998), 167–174; "The Elliot Lake Uranium Miners' Battle to Gain Occupational Health and Safety Improvements, 1950–1980," *Labour/Le Travail* 69 (Spring 2012): 91–118; *An Environmental History of Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

14. Katrin MacPhee, "Canadian Working-Class Environmentalism, 1965–1985," *Labour/Le Travail* 74 (Fall 2014): 123.

15. Joan McFarland, "Labour and the Environment: Five Stories from New Brunswick since the 1970s," *Labour/Le Travail* 74 (Fall 2014): 249–266. For a more recent examination of Cape Breton steelworkers' attempts to deal with the toxic legacy of their plant in Sydney during the 1990s and after, see chapter 5, "Labour Environmentalism: Fighting for Compensation at the Sydney Coke Ovens," and chapter 6, "Bury It, Burn It, Truck It Away: Remediating a Toxic Legacy," in Lachlan MacKinnon, *Closing Sysco: Industrial Decline in Atlantic Canada's Steel City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).

16. John-Henry Harter, "Environmental Justice for Whom? Class, New Social Movements, and the Environment: A Case Study of Greenpeace Canada, 1971–2000," *Labour/Le Travail* 53 (2004): 83–119; "When Blue Is Green: Towards a History of Workers as Environmentalists in British Columbia and Beyond," PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2019; *New Social Movements, Class, and the Environment: A Case Study of Greenpeace Canada* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011); "Histories of Environmental Coalition Building in British Columbia: Using History to Build Working-Class Environmentalism," *Labour/Le Travail* 90 (Fall 2022): 203–222.

17. Harter, "Histories of Environmental Coalition Building," 206–207.

and events in Alberta and connecting them to efforts beyond the province.¹⁸ That is important simply as an additive exercise, finding a part of the past that has been almost entirely forgotten – the central role that Canadian workers and labour unions played in making an environmental movement – at a moment in the present when we very much need to remember and reflect on it. The exercise is more than additive, however, because using class to define the initial questions, guide archival research, and craft an interpretation necessarily upends inherited standard narratives. It transforms our understanding of Canadian environmentalism (who was involved, what they did, and what the movement’s participants hoped to accomplish), while at the same time it provides nuance to understanding Canadian workers’ relationship to their employers and evolving sense of themselves (what Bryan Palmer called “the totality of working-class experience”).¹⁹ This is essentially the premise in the mostly rhetorical question “What is labour’s stake?” As SCPD director Jim MacDonald declared in a speech to the Western Federations of Labour Policy Conference, “No person has the option of ignoring the environmental pollution problem.” Therefore, he continued,

it rests with such concerned organizations as the labour movement to place the problem in its true focus; to arouse widespread concern; to involve our members and the public at large in demanding prompt and vigorous action by the public authority, through legislation, enforcement and example; to institute the necessary remedial measures; and to impress on individual citizens that their attitudes and practices in this matter must change drastically and soon, if we are to avoid a literal “hell on earth.”²⁰

“This Grave Danger to Society”

WHEN AFL PRESIDENT ROY JAMHA directed Eugene Mitchell to establish the federation’s “Pollution Committee” at the end of the 1960s, Neil Reimer had been in Alberta (by way of Saskatchewan) for nearly two decades. During those years, Reimer had overseen a multifold increase in the province’s OCAW

18. For a thoughtful and engaging history of the Alberta labour movement, see Alvin Finkel, ed., *Working People in Alberta: A History* (Athabasca, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2012). One chapter in the collection alludes to provincial union interest in environmental issues but isolates that to the 1980s; see Winston Gereluk, “Alberta Labour in the 1980s,” in Finkel, ed., *Working People in Alberta*, 198. On the role workers and organized labour played in making an American environmental movement, see Chad Montrie, *The Myth of Silent Spring: Rethinking the Origins of American Environmentalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); *A People’s History of Environmentalism in the United States* (New York: Continuum, 2011); *Making a Living: Work and the Environment in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

19. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800–1980* (Toronto and Vancouver: Butterworth, 1983), 3.

20. Jim MacDonald, “Our Community: Environmental Pollution,” in *What Is Labour’s Stake in Environmental Pollution?*, 11.

membership, helped to found and then lead the Alberta New Democratic Party (NDP), and become the OCAW Canadian District director. He was enthusiastically elected to the CLC executive board, too, garnering nearly 1,600 of 1,700 delegate votes – far more than any other candidate. “The popular vote,” the OCAW *News* explained to union members in the summer of 1968, “reflects the reputation earned by the OCAW and by Reimer all across the country.”²¹ As Alberta NDP leader, he had become known as an “environmental crusader,” once publicly daring provincial legislators to drink table water from the Saskatchewan River that he knew, from workers at the Western Chemicals plant in Duvernay, was polluted with sulphuric and hydrochloric acid. As a labour leader, he effectively paired his environmental concerns with prescient attention to occupational health and safety. To move the OCAW forward on the latter issue, in the spring of 1969 Reimer invited the international union’s Legislative and Citizenship director Tony Mazzocchi and his team of scientists to bring their health and safety “road show” to the annual Canadian District meeting in Montréal. There, the 212 delegates “poured out their hearts in consciousness-raising fashion” about the deadly dangers they regularly faced on the job, and shortly after, Mazzocchi recalled, the district’s program “was off the ground and running” before any other in the country.²² This early success was also due in no small part to the efforts of Reg Basken, whom Reimer had brought to Alberta (by way of Saskatchewan and then Manitoba) in 1967 and tapped to be Canadian District assistant director. Initially, Basken’s primary task was to organize workers at Suncor and Syncrude oil refineries, although following the Montréal meeting, Reimer broadened that assignment to include serving as the OCAW’s Canadian health and safety coordinator as well.²³

Drawn to the cluster of progressive leadership in Alberta, in May of 1970 the CLC held its eighth constitutional convention in Edmonton, where they announced a wider scope of struggle under the theme “Labour’s Social Responsibilities.” In his opening address, Congress president Donald MacDonald outlined an “agenda for the 1970s” that would match the CLC unions’ growing economic strength at the bargaining table with political engagement and alliance with other organizations working for similarly aligned goals. “The organized labour movement cannot afford to be a passive participant in the life of Canada,” he insisted – pointing to a range of issues that

21. Alvin Finkel, “The Boomers Become the Workers: Alberta, 1960–1980,” in Finkel, ed., *Working People in Alberta*, 166–167; Neil Reimer, interview, 2004, Alberta Labour History Institute, Edmonton (hereafter ALHI); “Reimer Tops 13-Man Field in CLC Race,” *OCAW Union News* 24, 4 (June 1968): 1, file 18, “OCAW News, 1967–68,” box 2, ECWU, PAA. As AFL president, Roy Jamha was also on the CLC executive board.

22. Wayne Roberts, *Cracking the Canadian Formula: The Making of the Energy and Chemical Workers Union* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990), 210–211, 215; C. S. Sullivan and C. Neil Reimer, interview by Dr. Wayne Roberts, on Environment, n.d., pp. 3–4, folder 1202A, “C. S. Sullivan on Sarnia,” box 48, ECWU, PAA.

23. Reg Basken, interview, 2003, ALHI.

needed urgent attention – and he closed with “the hope that this Convention will sound the call for action, and that our Congress will become a major instrument for social change.”²⁴

Undoubtedly, MacDonald and other CLC leaders were sincerely dedicated to this turn, but they also were likely influenced by a small reform caucus that had started organizing in February in Oakville, Ontario. The group’s “Pancake Manifesto,” as they called it, was not as radical as the “Waffle Manifesto” that had pushed the 1969 NDP Convention to the left, but its intent was similar, including recommendations for “labor to get more actively involved in projects for broader social and community betterment” and the “extension of collective bargaining into all aspects of industrial life.” Given the conference theme, and even the phrasing MacDonald used in his speech, the group succeeded in those respects. Besides that, they won unanimous delegate approval for another recommendation, calling on the CLC to support “full autonomous status to the Canadian sections of American unions.” For their precociousness and youth, the *Edmonton Journal* called the caucus the “brains and intellect” and “probably future doers of the labour movement,” while convention guest speaker and popular NDP leader Tommy Douglas boosted their credibility when he proclaimed their generation had “a greater sense of social responsibility than any generation I have known” and implored the CLC to help them transform society into one with “a much better appreciation of social values and human justice.”²⁵

In fact, much of MacDonald’s address focused on the problems of urban decay and environmental pollution, and after a brief interlude following the talk, the more than 1,500 delegates present heard and debated a “Policy Statement on Pollution.” The document began with a vivid description of the “smog and stinking, sulphurous fumes” from industry turning “the famous blue Canadian sky” brown; chemical effluent making what were cold, clear streams “warm and turgid”; and other “human and industrial waste” turning rivers and lakes into a “slimy sewer.” There was some dissent during the debate,

24. *Canadian Labour/Le Travailleur Canadien* 15, 4 (April 1970): 7; *Canadian Labour/Le Travailleur Canadien* 15, 6 (June 1970): 3, 6; Donald MacDonald, “Presidential Address,” in “Report of Proceedings, 8th Constitutional Convention, Edmonton, May 1970, Canadian Labour Congress,” pp. 4–8, folder 544, “Conferences, Conventions + Schools; Conventions – CLC 1970; Correspondence,” AFL, PAA.

25. “MacDonald Acclaimed as President of CLC,” *Toronto Star*, 23 May 1970, 71. “MacDonald described as ‘absolutely inconsequential’ the pressure brought to bear by a group of youthful reform intellectuals in steering congress on to new progressive course of action in 1970s,” the *Toronto Star* reported. “It’s like a gnat on the tail end of an elephant.” “It’s a House Divided,” *Edmonton Journal*, 20 May 1970, 1, 6. The group included convener Boris Mather (executive director of the Canadian Communications Workers Council), Ed Finn (research director of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Transport and General Workers), Gill Levine (research director of the Canadian Union of Public Employees), and John Fryer (former research director for the CLC). “CLC Reformers Leave Meeting with Confidence,” *Edmonton Journal*, 23 May 1970, 53; “Pancake’ Group Won’t Ruffle CLC,” *Globe and Mail*, 16 March 1970, 11.

although all of that was directed at the statement's indefinite recommendations in the face of what amounted to an environmental crisis, with nothing said to suggest any opposition on principle. One delegate from United Auto Workers Local 707 in Oakville explained that his union and the local Labour Council were holding seminars to educate members and residents about pollution, for example, but to get government to act in a timely manner, the CLC needed to call a one-day nationwide strike, with a deadline for legislative assemblies and Parliament to make an adequate response. Buoyed (rather than hindered) by this militant spirit, the motion to adopt the statement carried easily. This at least put the CLC on record in support of local unions forming "Ban Pollution" committees, seeking research assistance from government ministries and universities, demanding "comprehensive pollution control and prevention legislation at all levels of government," and intervening to stop "jurisdictional buck-passing by federal, provincial, and municipal authorities."²⁶

Just days after the CLC convention, the OCAW held its own Canadian District convention in Edmonton too, with the theme "Our Survival," and a headline in the *Edmonton Journal* announced "Union will discuss pollution." "In light of the evidence before us, it is no longer a question of pollution control but of pollution elimination, if we are to survive," Neil Reimer explained in the accompanying story, and the OCAW, "representing workers among the largest pollution producing industries, must be among the leaders in fighting this grave danger to society."²⁷ Later, in his opening address to the conference, the Canadian director commended area councils for following the district's call "to create an awareness and sensitivity to environmental health," and during the week, council reports detailed that work. Among these efforts, Ontario Council president John Kane highlighted a meeting held in January, organized around the dual panels "Air and Water Pollution" and "Environmental Health," both chaired by Mazzocchi. In response to an appeal made by Reimer about directing increasing "awareness and sensitivity" toward practical action, convention delegates approved a resolution he had proposed encouraging area councils and union locals to make representation to municipal, provincial, and federal governments that "no building permit of any new plant be approved until such time as a committee composed of labour and government authorities are satisfied that the new plant makes products that are not injurious to the health of the workers and that it embodies in its system proper pollution control." And, to send the meeting participants on their way, on the last day, Mazzocchi hosted a final general session covering "environmental health."²⁸

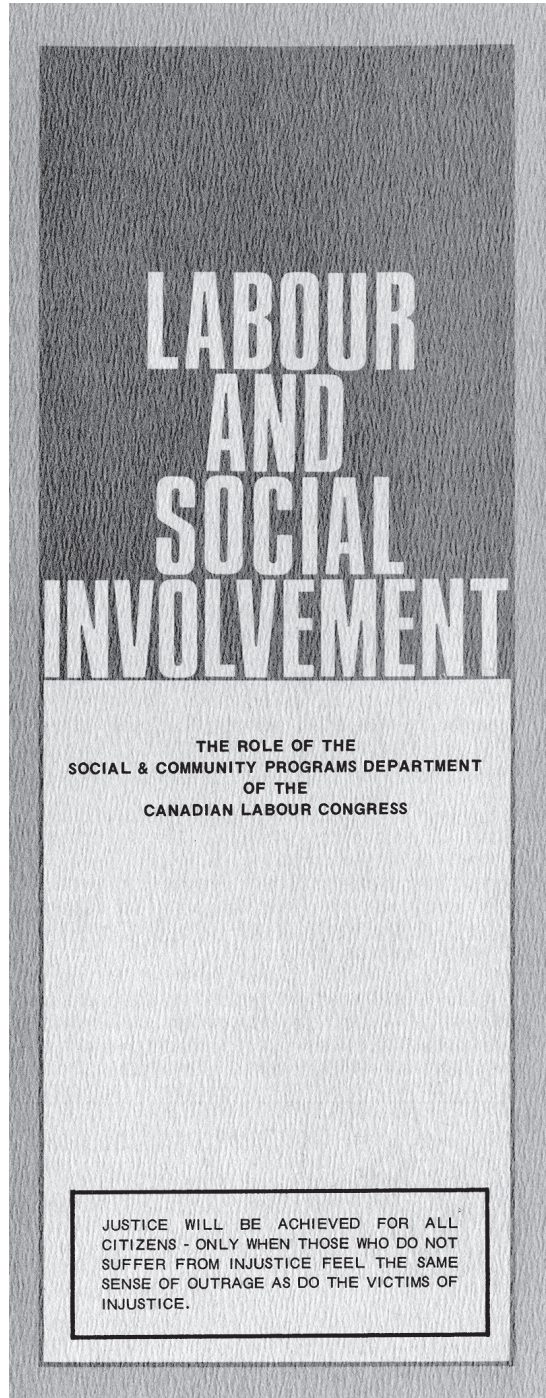
26. "Policy Statement on Pollution," in "Report of Proceedings, 8th Constitutional Convention, Edmonton, May 1970, Canadian Labour Congress," pp. 21–24, folder 544, "Conferences, Conventions + Schools; Conventions – CLC 1970; Correspondence," AFL, PAA.

27. "Union Will Discuss Pollution," *Edmonton Journal*, 23 May 1970, 53.

28. Neil Reimer, "Report and Recommendation of Canadian District Director," pp. 1–4, and John Kane, "Ontario Area Council, Report to District 9 Conference," p. 1, both in folder 68,

Figure 2. *Labour and Social Involvement* (1971) pamphlet front.

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In October, the CLC formalized the commitment to "labour's social responsibilities" it had announced in Edmonton by creating the Social and Community Programs Department, directed by Jim MacDonald and staffed by national representative Pat Kerwin and several regional representatives.²⁹ "As social problems become more sharply evident and the victims of social injustice [are] better able to articulate their sense of outrage," Kerwin explained, "the time is ripe for labour to update the nature and scope of its traditional social concerns." While it was meant to develop programs for a whole host of issues, however, the new department set "pollution and conservation" as its highest priorities and, for the moment at least, they were a primary concern within the longer-established Political Education Department (PED) as well.³⁰

A week after the SCPD was created, PED director George Home sent out a circular explaining that the CLC "Citizenship" theme for 1971 would be "Our Environment," and in a follow-up letter in December, he referenced the Congress "Policy Statement on Pollution" to elaborate what that would entail. The CLC had a duty "to place its influence and resources to the forefront of a national effort mobilized to combat pollution." To make this happen, unions needed to form standing committees to develop "a comprehensive education programme on pollution problems" among members and to coordinate "on-going involvement with other civic-minded organizations in identifying, publicizing, and seeking community support for the swift eradication of environmental hazards at their source."³¹ Yet many affiliated local unions, labour

"17th Conference, 1970," box 5, ECWU, PAA; "Union Seeking Greater Role in Pollution Control," *Edmonton Journal*, 25 May 1970, 41.

29. Pat Kerwin to CLC Officers, Departmental Directors and Assistant Directors, Regional Directors of Organization and Education, Representatives of the Social and Community Programs Dept., General Representatives, 5 May 1971, file #176, "Social + Community Programs (1) 70-71," box 17, CLC, GA. The regional representative for the Prairie provinces was E. W. Norheim, along with Alister MacLeod (Atlantic region representative), Maurice Hebert (Québec region representative), Ralph Ortlie (Ontario region representative), and Jack Radford (Pacific region representative). E. W. Norheim to J. MacDonald, 18 March 1971, p. 1, file #176, "Social + Community Programs (1) 70-71," box 17, CLC, GA.

30. Kerwin to CLC Officers et al., 5 May 1971, CLC, GA. Besides "Pollution and Conservation," the department also developed programs on poor and minority groups, community health centres, consumer affairs, housing and urban affairs, human rights, civil liberties, regional disparities, broadcasting, and bilingualism and multiculturalism. *Labour and Social Involvement: The Role of the Social & Community Programs Department of the Canadian Labour Congress*, pamphlet, file #177, "Social + Community Programs (2) 72-7," box 17, CLC, GA.

31. George Home to All Canadian Labour Congress Chartered and Affiliated Local Unions, National Headquarters, Provincial Federations of Labour, and Labour Councils, 27 October 1970, file #148, "Political Education, 68-75," box 14, CLC, GA; George Home to All Canadian Labour Congress Chartered and Affiliated Local Unions, National Headquarters, Provincial Federations of Labour, and Labour Councils, 21 December 1970, file #147, "Political Education, 64-77," box 14, CLC, GA.

councils, and provincial federations were already doing quite a lot, as Home knew. In February, he wrote again, enclosing a lengthy report with a detailed list of the work, ranging from a labour education conference organized by the Ontario Federation of Labour – with two panel sessions on “pollution and jobs” and “conservation of resources” – to British Columbia Pulp and Paper locals bargaining for environmental control committees and anti-pollution training in the mills they represented.³²

“Our Environment” was the theme for the AFL’s May 1971 convention in Calgary, too, with an entire day devoted to the topic, including the laudatory address by CLC president Donald MacDonald, the panel featuring the provincial ECA chair Dr. Walter Trost, an Environment Committee report by Neil Reimer, and consideration and adoption of environmental resolutions. During the panel, OCAW’s Reg Basken pointed out that oil workers are sometimes asked to put effluent pipes in rivers instead of disposal ponds or to flare gas without adequate controls, and they “cannot refuse to do the tasks without risking reprisals or losing their job.” Given this problem, the *Calgary Herald* reported on its front page, among the resolutions passed was one that put the AFL behind legislation providing protection to workers in those circumstances.³³ Additionally, the Environment Committee’s report gave an accounting of its business over the course of the previous year, highlighting various discussions and preliminary efforts. This work concentrated on increasing labour’s role in occupational health and safety, collaborating with environmental groups to lobby public officials for stronger environmental laws and coordination between levels of government, and bargaining protective contract clauses and establishing government assistance for workers affected by environmental standards enforcement and the shift to renewable energy sources. That three-fold set of concerns then effectively set the environmental agenda the AFL would follow during rest of the decade.³⁴

“Guarding Workers’ Lives”

UNTIL THE END OF THE 1960s, occupational health and safety was handled primarily through provincial industrial health and workers’ compensation boards as well as informal, union-sponsored in-plant “safety committees,” while recognized standards were generally limited to maintaining clean

32. CLC Political Education Department, “Citizenship Month – February 1971, Theme: Our Environment,” pp. 1–12, file #149, “Pollution 71,” box 14, CLC, GA.

33. “Environment Laws Proposed by AFL,” *Calgary Herald*, 5 May 1971; “Polluting Tasks Likened to War Atrocities,” *Calgary Herald*, 7 May 1971; Resolutions Adopted, Committee on Environment Resolutions, AFL Convention Proceedings, 1971, pp. 75–76, folder 85, “1971 Convention,” box 7, AFL, PAA.

34. Report of the Committee on Environment, AFL Convention Proceedings, 1971, pp. 46–47, folder 85, “1971 Convention,” box 7, AFL, PAA; see also Pollution Committee Meeting Minutes, 21 December 1970, p. 1, folder 428a, “Pollution, 1969–70,” box 16, AFL, PAA.

surroundings and keeping equipment in a good state of repair.³⁵ Encouraged by passage of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* in the United States in 1970, organized labour set its sights on enacting similar legislation to provide more coordinated and expansive protection for workers in Canada. Given the country's federalist system, however, this had to happen at the provincial level, and as it turned out, the Prairie provinces were key. In September 1971, the CLC held its seventh biennial health and safety conference in Calgary, and following welcoming remarks from Roy Jamha and Donald MacDonald, CLC National Health and Safety Committee chair Joe Morris spoke to the need for federations, area councils, and unions to press for the "legislative and contractual instruments" to adequately recognize and address workplace hazards.³⁶

That summer, in fact, Alberta had witnessed a historic change of government, when the Progressive Conservatives' general election victory ended the Social Credit Party's 36 years in power. Although the PCs were nominally centre-right, the new premier, Peter Lougheed, was open to long-overdue reform, particularly in terms of environmental concerns. Subsequently, in December 1971, the AFL submitted a brief to the new government calling for workers to have the right to refuse work that causes pollution "without fear of reprisal or discipline by management," labour representation "on all decision-making bodies" affecting working conditions, and provision for negotiating "pollution and technological change" in union contracts. "We believe strongly that pollution should be stopped inside the factory fence, at the source," the brief insisted, and if this were done, "we would not have to worry about industrial pollutants in the community."³⁷

The next year saw varying signs of progress by way of negotiations between the AFL Environment Committee (along with its Industrial Health and Safety Subcommittee) and provincial industry representatives at the Workmen's

35. Reg Basken, "Health and Safety Report," pp. 1-3, Annual Conference of the OCAW Canadian District Council, 1971, folder 69, "18th Conference, 1971," box 5, ECWU, PAA.

36. Joe Morris, "Health and Safety," p. 4, "Summary of Proceedings," *CLC 7th Biennial Health and Safety Conference, 26-30 September 1971*, file #82, "Health + Safety 71-77," box 8, CLC, GA. At the safety conference, both CLC president Donald MacDonald and Ontario Federation of Labour education director Henry Weisbach stressed the need for consolidation of existing federal and provincial legislation, but Weisbach made a point to emphasize working at the provincial level. "Today, in many cases, a variety of inspectors for the departments of labour and their various branches, workmen's compensation boards, operating engineers' branches, mining departments, departments of lands and forests, fire marshalls, departments of transport and highways, as well as other government departments are involved in administering the legislation and carrying out inspections. This conglomeration of inspection and enforcement services has, in many cases, led to overlapping and confusion." To fix this, he advised that each provincial Federation should strive to obtain a single "Safety Code" administered by a central agency with expert inspectors to enforce its provisions. "CLC Safety Conference," *Canadian Labour/Le Travailleur Canadien* 16, 11 (November 1971): 8.

37. "Labor Brief to Cabinet: 'Stop Pollution inside Factory,'" *Calgary Herald*, 10 December 1971, 13.

Compensation Board (WCB). Those meetings led to management recognition of union safety committees, allowance for committee member participation during plant inspection tours, and (with a few exceptions) company agreement to cover costs of union representatives attending WCB safety training courses, which Basken had initiated.³⁸ In September, a special legislative committee held hearings about making revisions to the *Workmen's Compensation Act*, and in December, Premier Lougheed designated Jamha to join and chair the board as well, while Basken replaced Jamha at the AFL.³⁹ At the same time, in Saskatchewan, the NDP government led by Premier Allen Blakeney enacted the first provincial *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, further demonstrating, as OCAW occupational health specialist Jeanne Stillman put it, that "change is possible."⁴⁰

Of course, organized labour could also pursue change through industrial direct action. In the United States, during the early part of 1973, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers waged an extraordinary strike and nationwide boycott against Shell Oil, after the company refused to accept the health and safety provisions that more than a dozen other oil companies had agreed to in pattern bargaining. Part of what made the strike extraordinary, besides the focus on health and safety, was the number of major environmental organizations that declared their support for the OCAW, including the Sierra Club and Audubon Society. For Canadian workers, especially those in industries with notoriously dangerous workplaces, it added even more momentum to their own efforts. "The significance of the strike is not only that it brought about a recognition of the legitimate desires of working people to have an interest and knowledge in their working environment," Basken explained at the OCAW Canadian District's annual meeting that year, but also that it "involved members of the outside community in this very critical subject ... and I'm sure

38. Reg Basken, "Health and Safety Report," p. 1, and "Alberta Area Council Report," p. 1, both in Annual Conference of the OCAW Canadian District Council, 1972, folder 70, "19th Conference, 1972," box 6, ECWU, PAA; "Report of the Industrial Health and Safety Subcommittee," Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) Convention, 1973, p. 1, file #6, "AFL 73," box 1, CLC, GA.

39. "Probing Murky Waters: Journal Writer Ralph Armstrong Looks at the Workmen's Compensation Board," *Edmonton Journal*, 8 February 1973, 5. Under the Social Credit government, C. M. Macleod chaired the WCB for 25 years. Roy Jamha replaced him and joined John H. Halls, who had been a construction company executive, and C. R. Gilbert, who had served as AFL president as well as president of the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council. Before this, there had been an unwritten agreement that the commissioner seats would be shared evenly among labour, management and neutral representatives.

40. Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1996), 100; Dr. Jeanne Stelman, "Saskatchewan Leads Way in Job Health Legislation," *OCAW Union News* 29, 2 (April 1973): 11, file 22, "OCAW News, 1972-73," box 3, ECWU, PAA.

in Canada we can benefit directly from their experience to win some battles which yet have to be fought here."⁴¹

In June, the AFL's Environment Committee organized its first annual health and safety conference in Edmonton, using the opportunity to take stock of the changes at the WCB in the previous year as well as amendments the legislative assembly was set to make to the *Workmen's Compensation Act* in October.⁴² The full upending of long-standing "Socred" policy, however, began in November, when the Lougheed cabinet established an Industrial Health and Safety Commission. This was chaired by former Calgary Power general manager Fred Gale, and the other members included three corporate safety managers; an Edmonton physician and past president of the Alberta Medical Association, Dr. Charles Varvis; as well as organized labour representatives Neil Reimer and I. C. Nessel. The latter was a past president of the Alberta Building Trades Council, a member of the International Union of Operating Engineers, and like Reimer, a member of the AFL Environment Committee. The commission's task, Labour minister Bert Hohol explained, was to conduct a six-month study and propose "a total co-ordinated program of occupational health and safety functions which will meet the needs of the growing industrial work force in the province."⁴³ To do that, the Gale Commission (as it became known) solicited input from 850 labour unions, trade organizations, and safety groups and heard 76 briefs at public meetings in Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, and Red Deer. This was in addition to doing field interviews and plant visits, reviewing existing legislation in other provinces, and even making a study tour to Europe.⁴⁴ Challenged to bring everything they had learned into some kind of order, though, the commissioners allowed Reimer to independently craft several rough drafts of

41. *OCAW Union News* 28, 12 (February 1973): 1, 3, *OCAW Union News* 29, 1 (March 1973): 8, and *OCAW Union News* 29, 2 (April 1973): 1, all in file 22, "OCAW News, 1972-73," box 3, ECWU, PAA; Reg Basken, "Health and Safety Report," pp. 1-3, Annual Conference of the OCAW Canadian District Council, 1973, folder 71, "20th Conference, 1973," box 6, ECWU, PAA.

42. "Highlights of the AFL Health and Safety Conference, 13-14 June 1973," folder 18, "Health & Safety Conference, 1973-1978," box 1, AFL PAA; "Workmen's Compensation Board: Proposed Changes in Act Would Strip Away Power and Free Board to Emphasize Accident Prevention," *Edmonton Journal*, 10 July 1973, 5; "Tougher Safety Laws Sought," *Calgary Herald*, 19 October 1973, 19.

43. "Industrial Safety Probe Set," *Calgary Herald*, 28 November 1973, 62; "Calgary Man to Head Study of Industrial Health, Safety," *Edmonton Journal*, 28 November 1973, 82. The three corporate representatives were Paul Lawrence (manager of the Alberta Safety Council), Don Cuthbert (safety supervisor for Imperial Oil Ltd.), and Allan McCagherty (director of industrial relations and safety for Poole Construction Ltd.). "Labor, Management Want Health Agency," *Edmonton Journal*, 1 May 1974, 82.

44. "He Aims to Make Industry Safer," *Edmonton Journal*, 13 June 1974, 94; "Safety Ministry Recommended," *Calgary Herald*, 13 February 1975, 1, 2.

a report, which he revised based on their own comments and with rewrite help from Varvis.⁴⁵

The final report the Gale Commission delivered to Labour Minister Hohol in February 1975 confirmed that Alberta's system for "guarding workers' lives on the job is 'disjointed,' poorly financed and generally behind the times," and it made several recommendations for improvement. Most importantly, responsibility and jurisdiction needed to be given to a single occupational health and safety department, with separate divisions for health, research, education, inspection, and administration. Beyond that, the commission insisted, any new system's efficacy hinged on establishing mandatory joint labour, management, and government health and safety committees at all work sites; granting workers the right to know all potential health and safety hazards and the right to refuse unsafe work without fear of discipline; and defining "tougher and more sweeping" penalties to deter violations of safety standards and rules.⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, that spring, delegates to the AFL's health and safety conference registered their unanimous approval for the report, and annual convention delegates adopted an executive council resolution that declared the report faithful to the federation's brief to the commission and called on the government "to reflect the content in enabling legislation."⁴⁷

For the most part, the Lougheed government accepted the recommendations, too, and the amenable premier and new Labour minister Neil Crawford spoke at the AFL's annual health and safety conference in March the next year. Several weeks later, Crawford introduced the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, which the legislative assembly passed, making Alberta the second province in Canada to do so. As proposed, the legislation established an industrial health and safety department in the Labour Ministry and granted workers the right to know if they are working with hazardous substances, what safe exposure levels for those might be, and what protective measures should be used in handling them, as well as the right to refuse unsafe work.⁴⁸ In a significant

45. Roberts, *Cracking the Canadian Formula*, 216–217.

46. "Safety Ministry Recommended," *Calgary Herald*, 13 February 1975, 1, 2; "New Department of Health, Safety Urged for Alberta," *Edmonton Journal*, 13 February 1975, 21; Roberts, *Cracking the Canadian Formula*, 217.

47. Reg Basken, "President's Address," Alberta Federation of Labour, Annual Convention, 1975, p. 4, and "Report of the Environment Committee, Resolutions," Resolution #B-30, Alberta Federation of Labour, 19th Annual Convention, 1975, p. 9, both in file #7, "AFL 75," box 1, CLC, GA.

48. "Health, Safety Standards on Review," *Calgary Herald*, 26 September 1975, 4; "Legislation Promised in Industrial Health," *Edmonton Journal*, 26 September 1975, 21; "Major Changes Coming in Industrial Safety," *Edmonton Journal*, 16 March 1976, 39; "Report of Environment Committee," 20th Annual Convention, 1976, pp. 1–2, folder 89, box 7, AFL, PAA; "Scope Widened in Health Division," *Edmonton Journal*, 27 April 1976, 18; "Proclamation Due This Month: Alberta to Provide Right to Refuse Perilous Job," *Globe and Mail*, 3 November 1976, 50. Ontario enacted the *Employees Health and Safety Act* (EHSA) in the very latter part of 1976,

departure from the report's recommendations, however, rather than making joint health and safety committees mandatory at all workplaces, the act empowered the Labour minister to order their establishment at selected work sites. Even two years later, there were still only 90 committees across the province.⁴⁹

"A Common Front"

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY, and its links to the environment beyond the workplace, was also at the heart of organized labour's relationship with Save Tomorrow Oppose Pollution, a relationship that began in 1970 (just months after both the AFL Pollution Committee and STOP were established) and continued through the decade. The federation's John McNevin had called the environmental organization's director, Karen Molgaard, in mid-April, and she followed up the very next day with a lengthy letter "detailing what we suggest the AFL could do to aid STOP and the people of Alberta in the fight against pollution."⁵⁰ But the notion that organized labour would simply help environmental groups with their own agenda was wholly absent in future interactions. In fact, at the time, Save Tomorrow founder and director Mary Von Stolk was initiating a multi-faceted project on asbestos that centred on workers – an approach to environmental problems that was much more characteristic of the organization in the years to come. In the fall of 1971, STOP released "A Study of Asbestos in Canada: Its Uses and Dangers" and a documentary film, *Asbestos*, both based on interviews with miners in Cassiar, BC, and Clinton Creek, Yukon, as well as longshoremen and construction

also after the government established a commission to study the deficiencies of occupational health and safety policy in the province. That commission, led by James Ham, was primarily a response to the illness and death affecting uranium miners (and their families) in Elliott Lake, but its report called for changes that would cover all Ontario workers. The law the assembly passed was like the one in Alberta but considered temporary; two years later, in 1978, the legislature passed another, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, amending and strengthening the prior legislation. "Recommendations from Ham Report: Bill Is Introduced Giving Miners the Right to Refuse Unsafe Work," *Globe and Mail*, 27 October 1976, 4; "Stand Firm on Safety Law, OFL Urges," *Globe and Mail*, 25 November 1976, 3; "Safety Bill Called Open to Abuse," *Globe and Mail*, 2 December 1976, 51; "Workplace-Safety Bill Is Near Final Approval," *Globe and Mail*, 15 December 1978, 5.

49. "Safety Committees Urged at Job Sites," *Edmonton Journal*, 16 November 1976, 33; "Report of the Environment Committee," Alberta Federation of Labour Annual Convention, 1977, p. 1, file #8, "AFL-CONV 77," box 1, CLC, GA; "Alberta 'Dragging Its Heels' on Health and Safety: AFL," *Calgary Herald*, 20 January 1978, 29.

50. Molgaard to McNevin, 18 April 1970; see also Louise Swift, "From Nuclear Disarmament to Raging Granny: A Recollection of Peace Activism and Environmental Advocacy in the 1960s and 1970s," in Leon Crane Bear, Larry Hannant, and Karissa Robyn Patton, eds., *Bucking Conservatism: Alternative Stories of Alberta from the 1960s and 1970s* (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2021), 241–252.

workers in Vancouver.⁵¹ The controversial documentary was soon banned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, following lobbying by the asbestos industry, although the Alberta WCB held a private screening for provincial government ministers and department heads at the board office in 1973. The screening was meant to coincide with release of an updated report, "Asbestos Kills: Its Uses and Dangers," written by research director Lucien Royer, a student who had joined STOP and was the primary link between the organization and organized labour. Moreover, the updated version provided the opportunity for Socred MLAs to question Conservatives in the legislative assembly, citing STOP about the dangers of asbestos and lack of government controls.⁵² Royer fine-tuned the report again two years later, in collaboration with asbestos workers' unions, retitling it "Asbestos: The Unknown Assassin" and releasing it in a joint press conference with Local 110 of the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers.⁵³

Save Tomorrow also aligned its environmental perspective with organized labour when the group promoted legislation to protect workers from employer reprisal for refusing to perform work that caused pollution or for reporting "pollution infractions," which the AFL had endorsed at its 1971 "Our Environment" convention.⁵⁴ "During the three years that STOP has been in existence," the organization explained, "we have received numerous telephone calls from men who work in industry who have told us of instances where their company was breaking the law." In most cases, however, the men were reluctant to report these "wrongdoings" to their superiors because they were afraid to risk their jobs. The proposed protective legislation would "make it possible for them to do their duty with a clear conscience." To remedy this, in August 1972, STOP sent draft legislation prepared by NDP MLA Grant Notley to various organizations, the federation and union affiliates among them, welcoming comments and asking for support. Additionally, in the lead-up to a federal election in October, the group sent a questionnaire to all candidates.

51. "A Study of Asbestos in Canada: Its Uses and Dangers," 10 November 1971, folder 20, "Reports and Publications, 1971," box 2, Save Tomorrow Stop Pollution fonds (hereafter STOP), PAA.

52. Lucien Royer, interview, 2009, ALHI; STOP Press Release, 4 April 1973, and Mary Van Stolk to no recipient, 13 April 1973, both in folder 38, "Copies of Press Releases, 1973," box 3, STOP, PAA; "Asbestos Kills: Its Uses and Dangers," March 1973, folder 20, "Reports and Publications, 1973," box 2, STOP, PAA; "Asbestos Controls to Be Reviewed," *Calgary Herald*, 20 March 1973, 11; STOP Press Release, 9 June 1975, folder 40, "Copies of Press Releases, 1975," box 3, STOP, PAA.

53. "Asbestos: The Unknown Assassin," folder 20, "Reports and Publications, 1975," box 2, STOP, PAA. At the press conference, union representative Norman Pon cited "five deaths and 15 cases of lung ailments in Edmonton since 1969 directly attributable to asbestos," and Royer called on the government to classify asbestos as a "hazardous substance," requiring labelling and safety measures. "Five Deaths from Asbestos in Edmonton," *Calgary Herald*, 10 June 1975, 8.

54. "Polluting Tasks Likened to War Atrocities," *Calgary Herald*, 7 May 1971.

Its first question addressed workers' right to report companies' "pollution infractions," and all but one of those who responded (a Liberal Party candidate from Edmonton) agreed this right should be protected by law.⁵⁵ Then, in the spring of 1973, Notley introduced Bills 203 and 204 as amendments to the provincial clean air and water acts. Environment minister Bill Yurko professed to support the bills in principle but called them "premature" and not properly drafted. He likewise claimed that any such amendment had to be made to the *Labour Act* "since it mainly affected labor relations," while at the same time declaring that he knew of no cases in Alberta where an employee was dismissed for making a complaint.⁵⁶ Weeks later, at the AFL's next annual convention, Environment Committee chair Neil Reimer emphasized the need for the legislation in his report, which the 400 attending delegates approved.⁵⁷ Still, the bill remained stalled.

For the rest of the 1970s, the work of STOP and the AFL continued to overlap in various other environmental campaigns, often at least demonstrating close agreement and sometimes actively collaborating. When the Environment Conservation Authority held public hearings on surface coal mining in December 1971 and January 1972, for instance, the briefs submitted by STOP's Karen Molgaard and the AFL's Eugene Mitchell were nearly identical in their recommendations. Each advised setting standards to protect water quality and control soil erosion, requiring performance bonds to ensure reclamation, denying future permits to operators that forfeit those bonds, and prohibiting mining in recreational and other select areas.⁵⁸ Similarly, when the Loughheed government began to undermine the ECA's independence, the two organizations rallied with other groups to defend it. Initially, the government had

55. E. M. Jablonski, August 1972, and STOP Press Release, 12 October 1972, both in folder 37, "Copies of Press Releases, 1972," box 3, STOP, PAA; STOP Press Release, 5 March 1973, and Louise Swift to All Members of the Legislative Assembly, 5 April 1973, both in folder 38, "Copies of Press Releases, 1973," box 3, STOP, PAA.

56. "Protection Demanded for Staff," *Calgary Herald*, 6 April 1973, 11.

57. "Unions Want Right to Refuse to Pollute," *Edmonton Journal*, 11 May 1973, 38.

58. Karen Molgaard (STOP) in Environment Conservation Authority (ECA), *The Impact on the Environment of Surface Mining in Alberta: Proceedings of the Public Hearings, Part I, December 1971, January 1972* (Alberta: ECA, 1972), 289–297; Eugene Mitchell (AFL) in ECA, *The Impact on the Environment of Surface Mining in Alberta: Proceedings of the Public Hearings, Part II, December 1971, January 1972* (Alberta: ECA, 1972), 638–649. Irvin Nessel, representing the International Union of Operating Engineers, and who later joined the AFL's Environment Committee, voiced similar sentiments in support of land use regulations and prohibition of mining in some places, although he was less specific. Nessel (IUOE) in ECA, *Impact on the Environment ... Part I*, 431–432. United Mine Workers representative Albert F. Pearce agreed with the need for better reclamation but resisted the idea of restricting surface mining anywhere. Pearce (UMWA) in ECA, *Impact on the Environment ... Part II*, 735–737; "Report of the Committee on Environment," Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) Convention Proceedings, 1972, pp. 9–10, folder 86, "16th Convention 1972," box 7, AFL, PAA; "Report of the Environment Committee," AFL Convention, 1973, p. 1, file #6, "AFL 73," box 1, CLC, GA.

expanded the environmental authority by establishing a public advisory committee, and its appointments included both Neil Reimer and Stan Fritter, a member of the Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers union local in Hinton and an original member of the AFL Environment Committee.⁵⁹ Mid-decade, however, the ECA began insisting on the need for “full scale public hearings into ‘all aspects’ of the tar sands.” Environment minister Dave Russell responded by introducing a bill to replace the permanent board with a single executive officer and to give the minister sole power to call hearings. The government was pursuing “its industrial growth strategy at the expense of the environment,” AFL president Harry Kostyuk declared, and doing so was “short-sighted and unacceptable to the labor movement.”⁶⁰ STOP leaders agreed and joined with the federation – along with several other environmental groups, fish and game associations, and farm organizations – to establish the Committee for Environmental Public Participation (CEPP) to block the changes. By then, the federation’s Environment Committee chair was Jack Hubler, from an International Union of Plumbers and Pipefitters local in Edmonton, and he attended the CEPP meetings with Eugene Mitchell.⁶¹ But, in the end, the group was unsuccessful, and the ECA became the much-weakened Environmental Council of Alberta, although in the wake of the defeat, Hubler’s local officially joined STOP.⁶²

Save Tomorrow and the AFL also found variable common ground in campaigns focused on some of the province’s worst industrial polluters, which, not coincidentally, were among the most hazardous places to work. “As a direct result of the now pending court actions against Great Canadian Oil Sands and the Northwest Pulp and Power Mill in Hinton,” Louise Swift wrote to Reimer in November 1976, “we have been quick to realize our ever-increasing dependence on the in-plant worker for valuable information.” This reliance would continue, she explained, “as STOP gets more involved in the vinyl chloride

59. “Advice Sought on Environment,” *Calgary Herald*, 13 October 1971, 67; “Report of the Committee on Environment,” AFL Convention Proceedings, 1972, p. 2, folder 86, “16th Convention 1972,” box 7, AFL, PAA.

60. *STOP Newsletter* 1, 1 (November 1977): 4, folder “STOP Newsletters – 1973–77,” box 2, STOP, PAA; “Government Downgrading ECA, Labor Head Charges,” *Calgary Herald*, 5 August 1977, 51.

61. Meeting Minutes, Edmonton Inn, 6 August 1977, folder 136, “Alberta Federation of Labour: Committees – Environment, 1977–1978,” box 5, AFL, PAA; “Environment Committee Minutes,” 26 September 1977, file #240, “Environment 77-80,” box 24, CLC, GA; Jack Hubler, interview, 2003, ALHI. AFL executive secretary and OCAW member Eugene Mitchell and Alberta Fish and Game public affairs director Elmer Kure held a joint news conference in November where they claimed that the ECA’s reorganization was because it “stands in the way of the PC’s ‘Grand Design’ for a totally industrialized Alberta.” “Conservation Groups in ‘Save ECA’ Blitz,” *Edmonton Journal*, 3 November 1977, 3.

62. “Environment Committee Report,” pp. 2–3, file #209, “AFL 78,” box 20, CLC, GA; *STOP Newsletter* 2, 6 (September 1978): 3, folder “Copies of Newsletters – 1977–79,” box 2, STOP, PAA.

issue at Fort Saskatchewan." The organization's leaders were of the "strong opinion" that they "must not work in isolation from the unions that are themselves affected by the very environmental contaminants we are fighting," and they were hoping to explore the benefits of forming "a common front." Reimer was, of course agreeable, and he persuaded the Environment Committee to invite a STOP representative to the next meeting.⁶³

By that point, as Swift alluded to, Lucien Royer had already developed "unofficial relations" with the OCAW, beginning when he was putting together the lawsuits directed at Great Canadian Oil Sands plants in Fort McMurray. This co-operation apparently carried over to STOP's work in Hinton, where Save Tomorrow acted as a facilitator, helping locals (including Northwest Pulp and Power Mill workers) establish Residents Investigating Pollution (RIP).⁶⁴ In both of those campaigns, the primary concern was sulphur dioxide and hydrogen sulphide emissions, whereas in Fort Saskatchewan, it was exposure to vinyl chloride. The emission standard for vinyl chloride monomer set by the provincial government "does not provide ample margin of safety to protect the health of workers exposed to this proven carcinogen," STOP research director Jean Poulin wrote to Labour minister Neil Crawford in the spring of 1978, although full proof of that "will come only in the form of more dead workers in the future." A year later, AFL president Harry Kostiuik expressed similar yet more expansive sentiments. "We cannot standby [*sic*] and have operations such as Dow Chemical use residents and workers at Fort Saskatchewan as guinea pigs for the next 25 years," he declared, adding that the "possible experience of altered pregnancies and breast and liver cancer is an unacceptable price to pay to entice industry to develop in Alberta."⁶⁵

63. Louise M. Swift (STOP) to Neil Reimer (Chairman, Environment Committee, AFL), 23 November 1976, and Environment Committee Meeting Minutes, 24 November 1976, p. 1, both in folder 135, "Alberta Federation of Labour: Committees – Environment, 1977," box 5, AFL, PAA. In January, the AFL Environment Committee also established an oil sands study committee, mainly to investigate "underground seepage" and sulphur dioxide emissions. Environment Committee Meeting Minutes, p. 2, 18 January 1977, folder 135, "Alberta Federation of Labour: Committees – Environment, 1977," box 5, AFL, PAA.

64. Royer, interview, 2009, ALHI; STOP Press Release, 20 October 1976, folder 41, "Copies of Press Releases, 1976," box 3, STOP, PAA; "Advisory Force to Look at Mill," *Edmonton Journal*, 23 July 1976, 9; "Hinton Pulp Firm to Face Charges," *Edmonton Journal*, 20 October 1976, 70. On Northwest Pulp and Power workers' involvement with RIP, see Linda Duncan, "Eulogy for STOP: A Decade of Environmental Activism," *Alternatives: Perspectives on Society, Technology and Environment* 11, 1 (Fall 1982): 19.

65. Jean Poulin (STOP) to Neil Crawford (Labour Minister), 24 April 1978, p. 1, folder 290, "Alberta Federation of Labour: Committees – Environment, 1978," box 11, AFL, PAA; "Trade Unionist Seeks Tougher PVC Rules," *Calgary Herald*, 25 August 1979, 50.

“Jobs and Environment”

THE CHALLENGE IN THE CAMPAIGN against Dow, as Reg Basken explained, was that the plant was not unionized, making it even easier for the company “to persuade workers that tightening health standards would jeopardize their jobs.”⁶⁶ This kind of corporate blackmail was a long-standing concern among Alberta’s labour environmentalists as well as those in other parts of Canada and the United States, and they developed a range of proposals and strategies in response. At its very first meeting in December 1970, for example, the AFL Pollution Committee focused on the idea of bargaining union contracts with “clauses to protect workers’ wages in the event of shutdown due to pollution.” The *What Is Labour’s Stake?* booklet the committee published the following year also highlighted the idea of government responsibility for relieving the burden that “eliminating pollution” might have on working people. University of Toronto professor Leonard Waverman addressed this in his speech from a 1970 Farmer-Teacher-Labour “Solution to Pollution” conference, excerpted in the booklet. “Governments can implement policies which will minimize the costs which you as groups and individuals must pay,” he explained, including “research into the significance of pollution control costs on the reduction of the rate of growth of employment in key sectors” and “positive macroeconomic policies to ensure that this impact on employment is reversed.”⁶⁷ And, given the principal role the OCAW leaders played in the AFL and on the Pollution Committee, it was not surprising to see the proposal so prominently featured.

By 1971, the OCAW International was far ahead most other unions in its advocacy for legislation that would both address “environmental pollution” and support workers facing hardship due to enforcement of environmental regulations. President Alvin Gropiron and Legislative and Citizenship director Tony Mazzocchi made a lengthy case for this in May, speaking to a US Senate Subcommittee – “Pay workers laid off by polluters,” the *OCAW News* frontpage headline declared – and delegates at the union’s biennial convention at the end of the summer affirmed the position with several environmental resolutions.⁶⁸

66. “Cancer Spectre Haunting Two New Petrochemical Plants: Critics Charge Vinyl Chloride Standards Are Lax,” *Calgary Herald*, 17 July 1979, 22.

67. Pollution Committee Meeting Minutes, 21 December 1970, p. 1, folder 428a, “Pollution, 1969–70,” box 16, PAA, AFL; Dr. Leonard Waverman, “Our Jobs: Pollution and Economic Growth,” in *What Is Labour’s Stake in Environmental Pollution?*, 6, 9. NDP “Waffle caucus” delegates from the four western provinces met in Banff in April 1970 in preparation for a Canada-wide caucus meeting in Toronto later in July. During the preparatory meeting, they adopted several resolutions meant to infuse the environmental movement with a socialist perspective. One called for the gradual nationalization of all industry and another demanded “compensation for anyone whose health, welfare or livelihood is affected by pollution.” Although there was considerable resistance to the Waffle within both the NDP and organized labour, these proposals mirrored Canadian Labour Congress policy by the end of the decade. “Pollution Compensation Backed by NDP Delegates,” *Edmonton Journal*, 27 April 1970, 43.

68. “Pay Workers Laid Off by Polluters, Senate Panel Told,” *OCAW Union News* 27, 4 (June

One resolution outlined fourteen points of action, which keynote speaker Ralph Nader called "the strongest and most specific" list ever endorsed by any union, and another declared the need for government assistance for workers "displaced from their jobs due to measures taken to stop industrial pollution." In his address, Nader also made a point to connect environmental problems to the occupational health and safety hazards that Mazzocchi was becoming especially known for highlighting in the United States and Canada. "It is all one phenomenon, it comes from the same source, it affects the families on the one hand and the workers on the other," Nader noted, and "if we don't link it together, the divide and rule technique being developed by some major companies is going to work."⁶⁹

In Canada, nationally, it was the CLC's Social and Community Programs Department that took the lead in promoting government intervention to aid adversely affected workers. Established in October 1970, following the CLC constitutional convention in Edmonton, the SCPD was tasked with addressing more than a dozen social issues – president Donald MacDonald's "agenda for the 1970s" – but the environment quickly became the primary focus. Likewise, following the first meetings of a government-sponsored "Man and Resources" (M&R) conference in 1972, the "jobs or environment" dilemma emerged as one of the department's principal preoccupations. Just before the preliminary M&R workshop in Montebello, Québec, SCPD director Jim MacDonald called a select group of labour leaders to his office. They designated OCAW International representative Henri Gauthier as their delegate and instructed him to prioritize "the impact of job elimination resulting from environmental concerns."⁷⁰ Gauthier was the only union delegate allowed at the workshop, however, among 125 total participants. Initially, the secretariat had also invited only Jim

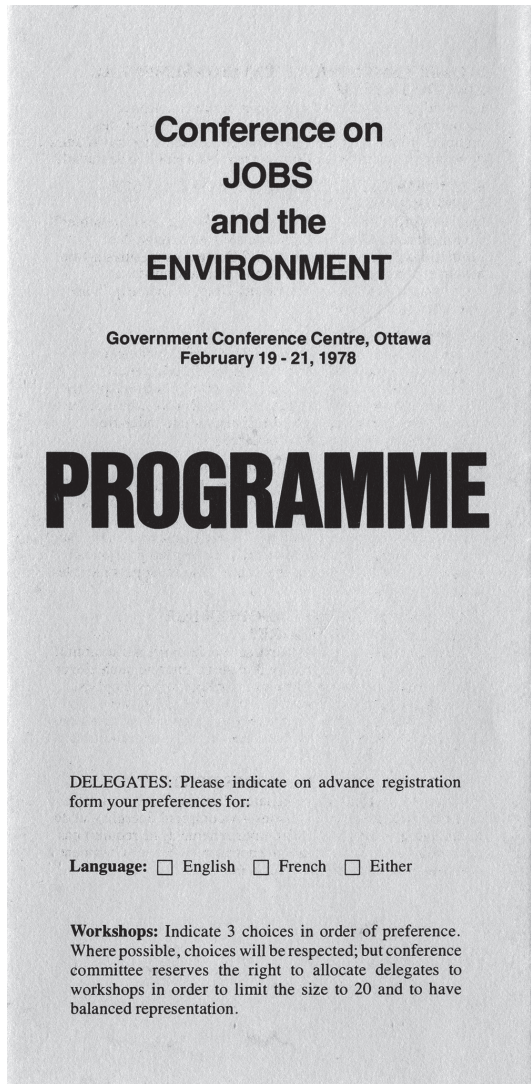
1971): 1, and "Grospron Spells Out Labor's Role in Pollution Fight," *OCAW Union News* 27, 4 (June 1971): 2, both in file 21, "OCAW News, 1971–72," box 3, ECWU, PAA; "Union Resolutions on Policy Blueprint Progressive Action," Energy and Chemical Workers Union fonds, 98.903, box 3, file 21, "OCAW News, 1971–72," p. 1, *OCAW Union News* 27, 7 (September 1971): 9, and [No title], *OCAW Union News* 27, 7 (September 1971): 9, both in file 21, "OCAW News, 1971–72," box 3, ECWU, PAA.

69. "Pay Workers Laid Off"; "Grospron Spells Out"; "Union Resolutions on Policy," 1, 6, 9.

70. Those attending the first meeting were Jim Dowell (Canadian Union of Provincial Employees), Rene Prudhomme (Public Service Alliance of Canada), S. Hughes (Canadian Food and Allied Workers), Jim McCambly (Building and Construction Trades Department), Henri Gauthier (Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers), William Parsons (Newfoundland Federation of Labour), and Jim MacDonald (SCPD), although the group expanded during the next two years to include William Brassington (PSAC), Andy Paulick (United Auto Workers), William Kidd (Canadian Union of Postal Workers), Ken Valentine (United Steelworkers), John Delaney (United Mine Workers), and Neville Hamilton (United Paperworkers). Labour Committee on Man & Resources Program, "Meeting Minutes," 18 October 1972, pp. 1–3, and membership list, n.d., both in folder 8, vol. no. 672, "Environment – Man and Resources Program," Jim MacDonald (Social and Community Programs) files, Canadian Labour Congress fonds (hereafter JM), Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

Figure 3. Conference on Jobs and the Environment program (1978) cover page.

Reproduced by permission from Canadian Labour Congress (Calgary Office) fonds, Glenbow Archives, University of Calgary.



MacDonald to sit on one of twelve different task forces for the main conference in Toronto, set for November of the next year. When the committee met with the secretariat in early January, they negotiated three additional spots on other task forces – yet that was among 60 total participants, 30 of them from industry.⁷¹ Frustrated by this continued underrepresentation, that spring

71. Henri Gauthier to Jim MacDonald, 5 November 1972, p. 1, folder 18, "Environment – Canadian Council of Resource Ministers," vol. no. 671, JM, LAC; Labour Committee on

the labour committee began to plan its own two-day "Jobs and Environment" conference in Ottawa. In a handwritten program draft for the event, produced later in September, Jim MacDonald specifically emphasized proposing a compensation fund for workers affected by "environmental concerns." This would be funded by government and industry and would cover lost wages, retraining, and relocation; moreover, if comparable alternate employment was not possible, then there would be a pension. "If workers are protected financially," MacDonald noted, "they will be able to view more objectively environmental evidence against their industry," stripping away the power that companies had to blackmail them into silence and continue polluting.⁷²

Although delayed a few years (for a complicated set of reasons), the SCPD's Jobs and Environment conference did eventually happen, in February 1978. It was attended by 200 delegates from labour unions, environmental groups, First Nations organizations, co-operatives, and churches, along with representatives from four federal government departments (Environment, Labour, Manpower, and Health). The conference title, the final report explained, intentionally used "and" rather than "or" to reject the notion that protection of jobs and protection of the environment "were mutually exclusive objectives," and the meeting's primary aim was "to reconcile the livelihood of workers faced with environmentally induced unemployment." Among the delegates was the new AFL president, Harry Kostiuk, who had just replaced Reg Basken, as well as Neil Reimer, whom Jim MacDonald tapped to co-lead an "Energy and Jobs" workshop with American scientist Barry Commoner. Not surprisingly, Reimer and Commoner's workshop emphasized the need for developing renewable energy sources as well as retraining and other government support for workers in phased-out industries, which was very much in line with the conference's main recommendation: to establish a government- and industry-funded Environmental Unemployment Compensation Fund.⁷³ After orchestrating

Man & Resources Program, "Meeting Minutes," 8 December 1972, p. 1, folder 8, vol. no. 672, "Environment – Man and Resources Program," JM, LAC. The preliminary task force assignments were MacDonald on "Growth Ethic," Valentine on "Citizen Participation," Dowell on "Education," and Hamilton on "Foreign Ownership." Labour Committee on Man & Resources Program, membership list, n.d.; Jim MacDonald to Donald MacDonald, 12 January 1973, folder 9, vol. 672, "Environment – Man and Resources Program," JM, LAC.

72. Labour Committee on Man & Resources Program, "Meeting Minutes," 2 February 1973, p. 2, folder 8, vol. no. 672, "Environment – Man and Resources Program," JM, LAC; Labour Committee on Man & Resources Program, "Meeting Minutes," 5 March 1973, p. 1, folder 8, vol. no. 672, "Environment – Man and Resources Program," Jim MacDonald (Social and Community Programs) Files, JM, LAC; Jim MacDonald to Joe Morris, memo, 9 March 1973, and Jim MacDonald to Pat Kerwin, 14 September 1973, both in folder 1, vol. no. 674, "Environment – Jobs versus the Environment, 1973–1980," JM, LAC.

73. The main reasons for delay in holding the conference were challenges in getting funding and meeting space from the federal government, inopportune reshuffling of leadership at participating ministries, and the onset of significant unemployment and inflation, which Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau attempted to curb in part with wage controls. Labour Committee on

such a clear and consistent presentation of a common agenda, though, the CLC was blindsided by widespread misreporting in the press. Focusing on one part of a speech by secretary-treasurer Donald Montgomery, newspapers ran headlines like “Jobs rank ahead of environment, CLC official says” (*Globe and Mail*) and “CLC job concern: Environment ‘no excuse’” (*Calgary Herald*). And this, perhaps, was a sign of what was to come in the decade ahead – one difficulty among many that organized labour would encounter in continuing to promote a broadly defined environmentalism.⁷⁴

“Acquiescence of the Worker”

A FEW MONTHS AFTER the gathering in Ottawa, the AFL held its sixth annual health and safety conference in Calgary, with the theme “Environment, Health, and Jobs,” and Jim MacDonald was one of the featured speakers. In his remarks, he highlighted the roles that Reimer and Kostiuik had played in the Jobs and Environment conference, reiterated the notion that pollution abatement and “alternate energy sources” would produce jobs, and outlined the multi-faceted compensation fund necessary to deal with harmful impacts of environmental enforcement on workers. The hope, MacDonald said, was that over the next three years, the necessary provincial and federal policies would be in place to make the fund a reality.⁷⁵ AFL past president and OCAW

Man & Resources Program, “Meeting Minutes,” 21 September 1973, p. 2, folder 8, vol. no. 672, “Environment – Man and Resources Program,” JM, LAC; Jim MacDonald, “Environment and Jobs,” pp. 23–24, Alberta Federation of Labour “6th Annual Health and Safety Conference, Summary of Proceedings,” file #262, “Occupational Health + Safety 76-9,” box 26, CLC, GA; CLC, *Report of the Conference on Jobs and the Environment*, 3–4, 25.

74. “Jobs Rank Ahead of Environment, CLC Official Says,” *Globe and Mail*, 8 February 1978, 8; “CLC Job Concern: Environment ‘No Excuse,’” *Calgary Herald*, 21 February 1978, 27. The British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFED) reacted with outrage to the misreporting, which happened in the *Vancouver Sun* as well. The newspaper’s front-page story about the conference, secretary-treasurer Len Guy said, had “implied that the trade union movement, through the Canadian Labour Congress, feels that jobs are more important than the environment.” But the BCFED and CLC did not think that. “There is growing consensus in the labour movement that the idea of either or, the idea of jobs vs. the environment, is a false proposition,” Guy noted. “This view was clearly indicated at our own B.C. Federation of Labour Convention last fall when delegates voted overwhelmingly to adopt the report of the Federation’s Pollution and Environmental Protection Committee. The committee report stated bluntly that ‘jobs at any cost is not proper (as a concept).’ BC Federation of Labour, “News from the B.C. Federation of Labour,” press release, 23 February 1978, folder 2, vol. no. 674, “Department Files, Environment – Jobs & the Environment Conferences,” JM, LAC.

75. Jim MacDonald, handwritten notes for speech, “Environment + Jobs – Luncheon Address by J Mac to Alta Fed’s annual Health & Safety Conf – Calgary, May 29/78,” folder 2, vol. no. 674, “Environment – Jobs & the Environment Conferences,” JM, LAC; Jim MacDonald, “Speaker – Environment and Jobs,” pp. 24–27, in Alberta Federation of Labour, “6th Annual Health and Safety Conference, Summary of Proceedings,” file 262, “Occupational Health + Safety 76-9,” box 26, CLC, GA.

representative Reg Basken spoke, too, as part of an "Environment and Jobs" panel. In characteristic fashion, he encouraged delegates to recognize the links between "the inplant [*sic*] health and safety conditions that you discussed this morning, and the environmental and job conditions that we are discussing this afternoon." His panel was followed by another, "Energy Development, the Conserver Society, and Jobs," which included Seppo Nousianen, CLC assistant director of research and legislation and a workshop leader at the Jobs and Environment conference, as well as Neil Reimer. Additionally, adding to what Reimer covered, executive secretary Eugene Mitchell reviewed the persistent deficiencies of Alberta's occupational health and safety program, particularly the limited number of joint health and safety committees established and the fact that coal miners were still not covered under the same legislation. The next day, conference delegates approved recommendations to government that included heavier penalties for "environment infractions," legislation to stop plant operation if pollution problems were not corrected, and protection for employees from discipline or discharge for reporting environmental offences, as well as income compensation and retraining programs for workers who lost jobs because of environmental standards enforcement.⁷⁶

By the time the AFL met for its annual convention in 1981, though, the Environment Committee had been folded into an Occupational Health and Safety Committee – one casualty of organized labour's general hesitation in the face of increased unemployment and a rightward shift in government at both provincial and federal levels. The new context put unions on the defensive and, as the AFL's executive council noted at a retreat two years later, stoked fear among the membership "to get involved and fight back." This "acquiescence of the worker" made it difficult to maintain a heightened interest in "social responsibilities," including environmental problems, and as a result, the "jobs or environment" pitch by industry gained traction. Still, the professionalization and institutionalization of occupational health and safety allowed that narrower concern to persist and evolve. At the same retreat where AFL leaders worried over workers' resilience, and even questioned the effectiveness and cost of standing committees, they entertained a proposal to establish an Occupational Health Centre as well. Moreover, the health and safety committee began publishing a bimonthly newspaper, *The Sentinel*, and continued to organize conferences, with increasingly sophisticated attention to detail. For the 1983 conference in Calgary, in fact, the committee provided delegates with a strikingly comprehensive workbook, *Beyond Legislation: Bargaining for Your Health*.⁷⁷

76. Reg Basken, "Panel – Environment and Jobs," p. 32, and Eugene Mitchell, pp. 16–18, file 262, "Occupational Health + Safety 76-9," box 26, CLC, GA; "Summary of Recommendations to the Government," in Alberta Federation of Labour, "6th Annual Health and Safety Conference, Summary of Proceedings," p. 39, file 262, "Occupational Health + Safety 76-9," box 26, CLC, GA.

77. Report of Health and Safety Committee, p. 33, folder 88, "25th Annual Convention, 1981,"

Of course, ominous tensions had existed within organized labour's ranks from the beginning, a glimpse of which showed in 1969 when Alberta Provincial Council of Carpenters president J. McNeil refused Eugene Mitchell's request for him to serve on the Pollution Committee, in what would become a typical response to environmental activism from some building trades unions. Later, after the Jobs and Environment conference in 1978, when SCPD director Jim MacDonald encouraged federations to host their own, similar conferences, he faced outright refusal from the Atlantic provinces, which he blamed on the region's chronic unemployment, jurisdictional fragmentation, and high energy costs, besides the fact it was what he called a "pollution haven."⁷⁸ This kind of worker resistance never entirely suffused organized labour, however, and it is important to recognize that sentiment could and did change over time.

Most importantly, the narrative that emerges from recovering the history of labour environmentalism in Alberta during the 1970s is one that contrasts starkly with a now common contemporary view that assumes long-standing worker disengagement. Despite what "just transition" critics like Premier Danielle Smith might have us think, labour's commitment to environmentalism has deep roots in the province, and contrary to many critics' assumptions about who can be an environmentalist, this was largely due to leaders from the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union. Perhaps we should keep this in mind as political leaders dither on fossil-fuel-driven climate change, which has overtaken worries about a shrinking supply of non-renewable energy sources. As the recent United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change "Synthesis Report" makes clear, we do not have much time left to figure this out, but 50 years ago, organized labour in Alberta and across Canada showed us the way for making any energy transition a worker-centred one.⁷⁹

The author would like to thank University of Calgary history professor Petra Dolata for arranging the Fulbright Canada Research Chair that made this article possible. Curtis Frederick at the University of Calgary Glenbow Western Research Centre greatly aided the archival work. Labour/Le Travail

box 7, CLC, GA; *The Sentinel: AFL Health and Safety News* 2, 5 (September 1983), folder #225, "Calg Labour Council 82-3," box 22, CLC, GA; "Alberta Federation of Labour Executive Council Retreat," p. 1, folder #214, box 20, CLC, GA; *Beyond Legislation: Bargaining for Your Health*, workbook, folder 21, "Health & Safety Conference, 1980 + 1983," box 1, AFL, PAA.

78. J. McNeil to Eugene Mitchell, 15 December 1969, folder 428a, "Pollution, 1969-70," box 16, AFL, PAA; Jim MacDonald to Julien Major, memo, 14 November 1978, "re: Refusal of Atlantic Federation to sponsor follow-up conf on J&E, not for circulation," p. 1, folder 2, vol. no. 674, "Department Files, Environment - Jobs & the Environment Conferences - Provincial, 1978-1979," JM, LAC.

79. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Synthesis Report of the Sixth Assessment Report: A Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC, 2023), <https://www.ipcc.ch/ar6-syr/>.

editor Kirk Niergarth at Mount Royal University was particularly supportive of the project, and he and several anonymous readers helped me revise the manuscript. The journal's managing editor, Kathy Killoh, and copy editor, Alison Jacques, also played important roles getting the article into proper shape.