NEW Workers’ Voice

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The Rally for FREE EDUCATION

Featuring The Young Workers’ Voice

Starting a Small Business

SILICOSIS A Miner’s Disease

MARIJUANA in the WORKPLACE

Building Trades of Alberta

LABOUR DAY 2017
Reach out to all ALBERTA WORKERS

The New Workers’ Voice, Alberta online edition.

A forum for all.

We welcome suggestions for stories, features and guest columns. We accept letters to the editor and other input you would like to have in the

New Workers’ Voice
Make it your voice!

workersvoice@outlook.com
Established in 2001 as the Workers' Voice Magazine print edition, now the online Alberta Edition of New Workers’ Voice Magazine, is a free magazine for all.

It is for workers, unions, associations, business owners, managers and government decision makers and anyone else involved in, or concerned with, workplace issues.

Providing independent context and understanding of workplace issues, we are pro-worker and pro-economic development, both private and public. Articles are aimed at worker progress, social justice, safety and education along with the issues and the personalities involved.

An independent publication, we receive no funding from any government, association, union, agency, political party or individual, as such, our revenue is entirely advertising based.

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Silicosis: Miner’s Disease
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I consider myself an environmentalist! I have always had an affinity for nature and am as concerned about preserving our country’s beauty as anyone. A camping trip to Jasper Park with my wife and a side trip down the Icefields Parkway to Lake Louise is something of a religious experience for me; a feeling at one with nature. As a result, I would be averse to any developments that were not in our overall best interests.

In fact, I have been advocating for years for the retooling of the world using new technologies, so we are all saved from the possibility of global warming. That said, I am not 100% convinced that we are causing global warming, but I do believe we are having an influence on it and as such, we should work to cut down on pollution for two reasons.

First, there is a real possibility that we are in fact causing problems with the environment, and causing global warming. If so, we should err on the side of caution so that even if new studies were to indicate global warming is not real, but actually reversing and/or slowing, we should still advance new technologies to cut down on environmental pollution.

Second, every great worldwide economic revival has been made in part by advances in new ways to do things, new ways to be more efficient, so why not be energy efficient? Retooling the world to build a low-carbon economy for our future is a sound idea, and on top of that, it is good for workers.

However, to proclaim myself an environmentalist does not mean I do not want development in Alberta and across this great country. I want development that uses current technologies as much as possible, while we advance the new technologies to replace the way we do things now.

Unbiased scientific opinion indicates that it will take decades, probably up to forty years, to get to the point where we can begin to throw off our old ways of doing things. Even then, petroleum will continue to be in high demand to produce the myriad of useful products we've become accustomed to from the vast petrochemical industries.

My view, and the angle of the Workers’ Voice, has always been that we are for development and the jobs and prosperity development brings. Only when Canada has an unemployment rate of 4% or less, with no provincial or federal debt, then and only then, should we even think about slowing down development in this country.

Canada is a vast nation with a minuscule population. To have any impediment to development in our country is simply not good for workers, not good for the economy and quite silly, especially as it pertains to energy development. The world needs oil; let's produce it here.

To run our country we need revenue, and revenue can't come from thin air. It has to come from a healthy tax base. Only then can we have great health care, great schools and even free post-secondary education for our students.

In fact, many of our superior national and provincial environmental controls and regulations come from having a great tax base of revenues that allows all levels of government to put them in place and enforce them. Want to compare our environmental and regulatory enforcement with Nigeria, Russia and Venezuela?

We are faced these days with extremist who are a scourge to workers and who are against all development even when that development is good for the environment, as it is in the case of pipelines that cut down on rail transport of oil.

These environmentalist seem not to care about the facts, especially when it comes to oil. The fact is that the world will provide those needed oil supplies somewhere, and as I pointed out in a previous edition, why not have those supplies come from here?

Albertans need more development, not less. Workers need work and opportunities to raise families. If some environmentalist had their way, we would have no development in this country at all. Where do these hard-line environmentalist work anyway? Are they tradesman? Electricians? Pipefitters? Carpenters? I don't think so. Seems like many of them are making a living in other ways, or getting money from government, and are frankly not very concerned with the plight of other workers.

It seems like we are heading for a new type of battle with those who are against development, those who use social media and even have a seeming determination to break our laws if they don't like the outcome of independent tribunals.

What is the answer? The answer has to lie in the ballot box to ensure we elect governments who will be for workers, be for development. As a worker, you can help by voting in a government on all levels that is on your side, the side of workers, progress and development -- now.
A WOLF IN WOLF’S CLOTHING

Dear Editor:

So, the Conservative's are united, all I see is a Wolf in Wolf's clothing waiting to pounce on the sheep.

Jean's and company would do well to remember that uniting political parties should be about policy and not just about getting elected.

While most polls indicate Notley is in trouble for now, Alberta voters will remember why they abandoned the Conservatives and voted NDP when the election comes around, especially without some major policy changes from this United Party.

Some free advice for the United Conservatives, give a damn about people, all people, not just the wealthy and you will stand a much better chance of unseating the NDP.

Joe Aldridge, Calgary

BRIAN JEAN'S PLATFORM WOULD MAKE RECESSION WORSE

Dear Editor:

Independent economic analysis shows the type of austerity measures in Brian Jean's platform would create a second recession in Alberta, with further job losses on top of jobs already lost to low oil prices.

Seen as the "moderate" candidate in a field of hyper-partisan zealots, Jean's platform shows just how radical and out-of-touch the United Conservative Party has already shown itself to be. With an immediate $2.6 billion budget slash and vows to reduce wages and take away workers' rights, Jean's proposals would add pain to a workforce already damaged by low global oil prices.

A budget like Brian Jean's would make unemployment even worse by slashing and burning essential services at exactly the time when they're most needed. With its first leadership candidate platform, the UCP already seems determined to deepen the Albertan recession by cutting thoughtlessly and indiscriminately.

We won't bring back lost jobs in the energy sector by laying off teachers and nurses. We'll just make a lot more people unemployed, while slashing public services that are more important than ever to Albertans who are hurting. This won't help the recession - it will just make it worse.

In "Austerity vs. Renewal," a report prepared by national consulting firm Hugh MacKenzie & Associates that specializes in public accounts and budgeting, Albertans can see the dramatic impact public service job loss would have on the provincial economy.

Analyzing previous Wildrose budget proposals mirrored in Jean's campaign platform, the report shows Jean's proposed cuts would directly affect thousands of workers from the government and arms-length agencies, with additional jobs lost from government suppliers and from businesses that rely on business from government workers.

Overall, the report says the Wildrose spending proposals tabled by Jean in 2016 would shrink the Alberta economy by more than $10 billion per year in 2017 and 2018. Jean's "moderate" UCP leadership platform, with echoes of these 2016 budget proposals, would have the same disastrous results.

We know from decades of world-wide experience and research that austerity budgeting and corporate tax cuts in the face of recession just doesn't work.

Governments need to help citizens cope in hard times, not make life even harder. Jean's plan shows that the UCP's reckless and dangerous agenda that will hurt Albertans, and we can only imagine how less 'moderate' candidates will stack up.

Gil McGowan, president of the Alberta Federation of Labour

EDMONTON DRIVERS HAVE IMPORTANT JOBS??

I guess many Edmonton drivers must have some of the most important jobs in the world based on the way they seem in such a hurry to get to work in the morning. Are they all surgeons rushing to save a life or military people preparing for war?

The aggression with which Edmonton drivers move around this city is baffling, Vancouver has more pleasant drivers.

We all want to get to our jobs safely and home again at the end of the day. Aggressive drivers, slow down, take a pill or do whatever you need to do to calm down, life can be sweet.

Jim Heath, Edmonton
The Building Trades of Alberta and our affiliate unions know that safe worksites are more productive.

That is why we invest so much in training and education of our members.

That is why we develop industry leading safety programs like Stand Up for Safety.

When a job is finished on-time, under-budget and incident-free, everyone wins.
The parades held in support of the Nine Hour Movement and the printers' strike led to an annual celebration.

Yesterday

Labour Day has its roots in an 1872 printers' strike in Toronto. Fighting for a nine-hour work day, the strikers' victory was a major milestone in the changing relations between Canadian workers and their government.

In a time when the news of labour "strife" is dominated by disputes between millionaire athletes and billionaire owners, history provides a useful
perspective on a period when working people had to fight to work less than 12 hours a day. The "Nine Hour Movement" began in Hamilton, Ontario, and then spread to Toronto, where its demands were taken up by the Toronto Typographical Union.

In 1869, the union sent a petition to its members' employers requesting a weekly reduction in hours per week to 58, placing itself among the leading advocates in the industrialized world for a shorter work week. Their request was refused outright by the owners of the printing shops, most vehemently by George Brown of The Globe.

By 1872, the union's stand had hardened from a request to a demand, a threat to strike. The employers called the demand for a shorter work week "foolish," "absurd," and "unreasonable." As a result, on 25 March 1872 the printers went on strike.

On 15 April, a demonstration was held to show solidarity among the workers of Toronto. A parade of some 2,000 workers marched through the city, headed by marching bands. By the time the parade reached Queen's Park, the sympathetic crowd had grown to 10,000.

The employers fought the strikers by bringing in replacement workers from small towns. George Brown launched a counterattack by launching a legal action against the union for "conspiracy." Brown's action revealed the astonishing fact that according to the laws of Canada, union activity was indeed considered a criminal offense. Under the law, which dated back to 1792, police arrested and jailed the 24 members of the strike committee.

Brown, however, overplayed his hand. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald had been watching the Nine Hour Movement "with curious interest, his big nose sensitively keen," wrote historian Donald

New York City eight-hour demonstration in September 1871. From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 9/30/1871 (source)
Creighton, "like an animal's for any scent of profit or danger." The scent of profit came from the fact that Macdonald's old Liberal rival George Brown had made himself a hated man among the workers of Canada.

Macdonald was quick to capitalize. In Ottawa, he spoke to a crowd at city hall, promising to wipe the "barbarous laws" restricting labour from the books. Macdonald then came to the rescue of the imprisoned men and on 14 June passed the Trade Unions Act, which legalized and protected union activity. Macdonald's move not only embarrassed his rival Brown but also earned him the enduring support of the working class.

After 1872, almost all union demands included the nine-hour day and the 54-hour week. Thus the Toronto printers were pioneers of the shorter work week in North America. Meanwhile, campaigns for an eight-hour day were already gaining in popularity, and would eventually take hold, in the United States.

The fight of the Toronto printers had a second, lasting legacy. The parades held in support of the Nine Hour Movement and the printers' strike led to an annual celebration. In 1882, American labour leader Peter J. McGuire witnessed one of these labour festivals in Toronto. Inspired, he returned to New York and organized the first American "labour day" on 5 September of the same year.
Throughout the 1880s, pressure built in Canada to declare a national labour holiday and on 23 July 1894, the government of Prime Minister John Thompson passed a law making Labour Day official. A huge Labour Day parade took place in Winnipeg that year. It stretched some five kilometres. The tradition of a Labour Day celebration quickly spread across Canada and the continent. It had all begun in Toronto with the brave stand of the printers' union.

LABOUR DAY TODAY

Today, the workers rights and union movement face a host of challenges. Many of these are old battles still being fought and re-fought: for fair wages, for decent health and safety protection, and for job security.

High unemployment, especially amongst young people brings a host of problems. Workers are made to feel that they have little choice but to accept sub-par wages and working conditions, lest they lose their job to the un-employed.

The unemployed are likewise willing to accept such conditions as the simple price of getting a job.

Today, unions continue to serve the same purpose for which they were originally founded. CEO and executive compensation is skyrocketing, while the middle class suffers from layoffs, unemployment and stagnant wages.

Unions and those involved in fighting for workers rights want increasing wages, raising the standard of living for the working class, ensuring safe working conditions, increasing benefits for both workers and their families.

Someone has to lead the fight and it is unions who fight for all workers who need fair treatment today as much as ever.

Employers are trying to shed responsibility for providing good pensions, reasonable work hours and job safety protections. Additionally, companies are making workers' jobs and incomes less secure through downsizing, part-timeing, contracting out, and sending jobs off-shore.

As the nature of work changes, working people need the collective voice and bargaining power unions provide to keep employers from making the workplace look as it did in the early nineteenth century.

Working conditions at the turn the turn of the 20th century, without worker representation, involved sweatshop conditions, child labour, unlivable wages, seventy plus hour work weeks.

Today, labour unions must continue to play an important role in ensuring justice for all workers.

THE FUTURE

The success of raising the minimum wage to $15.00, initiated by unions is a good example of reasons for optimism. $15.00 is now considered the minimum standard for workers and is being put in place in several provinces with more to follow.

Unions are responsible for this campaign, along with all the other benefits workers enjoy, be they union or non-union workers. Many non-union workers do not realize this.

The future of unions can be assured but the weak link is marketing. Unions have not been good salespeople like Wal-Mart or Microsoft, they will have to become as good or better to survive.

Unions have accomplished so much, for so many, including non-union workers. Yet many workers do not understand or appreciate this fact. This tells us something, it shows that unions need to do more than send out press releases or have a website.

Everything a private company does is heralded to all, every advancement, every product development, every award. People are sold that Wal-Mart is a great place to shop, they are convinced and Wal-Mart and it's shareholders prosper. This marketing many times is a lie but they have no trouble selling those lies.

Why can't unions sell the truth, sell the facts? We need to see more promotions from unions on all levels. They need to market what they have done, what they do, who they are for.

With creative marketing campaigns and massively increased marketing budgets, unions can survive, without it they will fade away as workers slowly forget the truth about why they are better off.
This Labour Day, the more than 90,000 members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE), along with all Albertans, celebrate the contributions made by workers in our province who have made Alberta the stable, prominent and diverse place it is today.

This diversity is one of the many strengths of the labour movement. When workers with different backgrounds and experiences come together and advocate around common interests, they serve a larger good.

We saw this recently when brave seniors care staff at Points West Living Cold Lake held a picket line for 190 days after being locked out of their worksite by the employer in December 2016. While this marked one of the most challenging rounds of bargaining in AUPE’s history, it also highlighted what can be accomplished through solidarity.

For six months, workers fought hard for their rights and stood strong to improve quality seniors’ care in the community. It was this kind of resolve that helped create real change and helped set new standards for labour relations in Alberta.

This level of determination is what Albertans are known for. We stand up for what’s right; we support each other through adversity and find the common ground that builds stronger communities.

Alberta is built on these principles, and they’re also found in the delivery of the front line services that provide daily stability and security to our growing province. As Alberta’s largest union, AUPE proudly represents the dedicated women and men who provide these supports.

As a union, AUPE demands accountability and diligence from ourselves, and from those elected to serve us. Our democracy, economic growth and stability, and our need to break down barriers that divide us are worth standing up for.

As political pendulums swing, and as the ground on which workers’ and human rights shift, unions provide a counterbalance; an alternative voice and a defense of our province’s guiding principles.

So, please take time to enjoy friends and family during this last long weekend of summer, and spare a thought for all that has been achieved, and all that is possible, through the dedication and fortitude of Alberta’s workers and their unions. Happy Labour Day!

HAPPY OVERTIME PAY
HAPPY HIGHER WAGES
HAPPY PAID VACATIONS
HAPPY WORKERS COMPENSATION LAWS

HAPPY LABOUR DAY

AUPE would like to wish all Albertans a happy Labour Day and remind them of the sacrifices made by unionized working people to improve our workplaces, our society and our quality of life.

AUPE
www.aupe.org  facebook.com/yourAUPE  Twitter: @_AUPE_
Unionized labour is at a difficult intersection of time in Alberta, especially the unionized building trades.

On one hand, the current provincial government is the most supportive and willing to listen in several generations, the economy is recovering, and the increased focus on diversification and adding value to the products we export is creating real opportunity in the industry, while on the other hand, movement at the other end of the political spectrum is pushing further right than ever, and the oil price crash in 2015 and the Fort McMurray wildfire last year decimated the industry and created an opportunity for employers to squeeze more from the workers who were lucky enough to remain employed.

Our member locals, collectively have spent half a billion dollars over the last ten years: $200 million on facilities and infrastructure and $300 on...
Despite the difficult times that the trades are experiencing in Alberta currently, the only regret that was noted at all was that the members wished they had gotten into the trades sooner than they had.

We developed an in-house safety protocol, “Stand Up for Safety”, which has been embraced across the industry by employers and members alike, and is even gaining usage around the world. Despite providing this incredible value to owners and contractors, the construction industry seems to be engaged in a race to the bottom, where the focus is on low prices, while ignoring the fact that low quality often accompanies low price.

You could say that it is the best of times and the worst of times, but I think that one has already been used.

In this time of difficulty, a return to the roots of unionized labour is the first order of business. Reconnecting with the men and women who work collectively to build the province up is the most important way to bolster the foundations of the organized labour movement, and it provides an excellent opportunity to remind ourselves of the value that is gained from working in the interests of brother and sister, striving to improve conditions for all.

The Building Trades of Alberta is composed of over 75,000 skilled trades workers: apprentices, journeypeople and leaders who are committed to perfecting their craft, working safely and providing value to their employer partners. The men and women who make up the unionized building trades in Alberta are some of the most dedicated, competent and passionate people you will ever come across. The BTA is a member-driven organization, and as such, we often connect with our members to talk about who they are, why they joined the trades, what they would do differently and what they see happening in the future.

Despite the difficult times that the trades are experiencing in Alberta currently, the only regret that was noted at all was that the members wished they had gotten into the trades sooner than they had. This is a pretty common feeling, as the average
age for entering the trades as a career is approximately 28 years old. That means that many men and women in the trades have spent the ten years since high school floundering as they searched for meaningful work. Or worse, they found work they loved, but got caught up working non-union, not progressing their training and being undercompensated. In fact, Brian Hennessey, a Business Agent for the Construction General Workers Union Local 92 and a transplant from the East Coast who has now lived in Fort McMurray for eight years, had this advice for young people entering the workforce: know your worth as a tradesperson, if you are good at what you do, you will rarely be without work in the Union.

Brian Dort, a Business Agent with the Millwright Local 1460 believes that “we have a tremendous opportunity to get more of our younger generation interested in the trades. What we need to do is educate them, tell them the advantages of trades, the financial benefits of it, and to dismiss the myths about trades. Tell them that taking a trade in Alberta cost you nothing as apprentices get grants from the federal government of $1000.00 a year for completing each term until they get their journeyman ticket, and the Provincial government also provides grants for apprentices in their first and second terms. This is what we have to do, this has to be instilled into them at an earlier age to get them thinking.”
Recruitment doesn’t stop there for Brian: “The stigma about the trades being a man’s job is way past us; we have to promote this and get more women interested in taking a trade. We have the people out there, half of the population are women … so why aren’t we trying to get more women active into the trades. I’ve been doing this a long time and every woman I’ve seen in the trade field, whether it be Millwright, Pipefitter, Welder, Electrician etc. excelled at it.”

The BTA has a group called Build Together: Women in the Building Trades which is composed of and run by women representatives from each of the BTA Locals, and they are having great success at raising the profile of the trades among women and increasing the awareness of the absolute need for respect in the workplace, but advocates like Brian are essential to help get more qualified people into the trades.

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I’ve been doing this a long time and every woman I’ve seen in the trade field, whether it be Millwright, Pipefitter, Welder, Electrician etc. excelled at it.”
The commitment to professional development and continuous learning has been the lifeblood of the unionized trades and this was exemplified in comments such as:

“Learn every facet of your trade, study hard in school”

John White, Business Manager, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 424

“Learn as much as you can and never stop learning. You learn something new every day. You have to experience [work on-site] first-hand because what you hear [in the classroom] is different from what you see. Everything is bigger and can be dangerous.”

Robert Letendre, Ironworkers Local 720

Good mentorship flows from good leadership, because good leaders understand the value of effectively passing along the information needing not just to keep the trade alive, but to maintain the forward momentum of the organized labour movement. Learning about the “nuts and bolts” of the trade is extremely important, but there is a growing appreciation for the value of engaging with owners, government and the community at large as partners and collaborators. We do not operate in a vacuum and it is time that we developed the skills required to

The level of brotherhood / sisterhood is something that draws many into the trades.
share our successes with the rest of the province – to help them see not just the value in working with the unionized trades, but to appreciate the value that the trades bring to the province. Value such as the construction of projects which provide energy, shelter, transportation or any other essential need of the province, or the contributions that result from participation in the Building Trades of Alberta Charitable Foundation, which, in 16 years has donated over $6.5 million to worthwhile Alberta charities, or the individual contributions and selfless giving that our members provide when others need our help.

This generosity has never been more evident than in the wake of “The Beast” wildfire that roared through the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo last year and decimated 20% of the city of Fort McMurray, causing the evacuation of the city and of the stoppage of work at the various sites in the region.

Many of our members who worked and lived in the region were involved in that evacuation, such as Dave Gillis, an electrician job steward for IBEW 424 and working with Norcan Electric at Syncrude. He was one of the thousands of people evacuated when the fire struck.

Dave is a resident of Cape Breton, who lives in Fort McMurray when he works, returning home to his family in the off-season. He recalls the day he was evacuated:

“I swiped out at Syncrude and as I was approaching the parking lot there were numerous women and children arriving to pick up their significant others and they were mostly all crying and telling the men that their homes either burnt down already or were on the verge of burning. That is when the impact of the tragic situation hit me and literally brought me to tears.”

Barry Hennessey was also evacuated from Fort McMurray, and he was floored by the outpouring of support and kindness that he and others received:

“The day of the evacuation, we fled, first to the Anzac Recreation Centre, and tried to settle in there for the night. But the fire was very close behind us and with a change in the wind before we knew it we were running from the Anzac shelter and off to Lac La Biche and the Bold Centre Evacuation Centre where I stayed for one month. The people of Alberta are the most generous people in the world. They gave us everything we needed.”

When the fire hit, many members left their homes in Edmonton, hitched up their trailers, drove to Costco and filled up with food and necessary
goods to deliver to the people suddenly made homeless. Donations came from locals across the country and were put into the Rebuild McMurray Hope Fund, managed by the BTA, which is used in consultation with the city of Fort McMurray to provide support for the rebuild effort. Support and a willingness to roll up sleeves and get to work helping those in need is something that the unions have always done and always will.

The level of brotherhood / sisterhood is something that draws many into the trades. Often, members experience this camaraderie as children by witnessing it through their parents or other family members who are active participants in the union, and this draws them in to join as well. Many current members are seeing their children follow the same path: Brian Dort has two teenaged daughters who are both exploring becoming millwrights themselves.

As noted at the beginning of this article, there are many challenges facing the unionized building trades in Alberta. Some are recurring challenges that are the result of working in a cyclical industry, others come up as a result of politics or changes in the way the industry operates.

John White, who has been in the trades for over 20 years, has found his biggest challenge to date has been “finding employment when economic situations take a downturn in construction and maintenance work.”

Dave Gillis, our brother from Cape Breton has found, not surprisingly, that his biggest challenge is being away from his friends and family for months at a time while he works, although, if given the choice, he would choose to do things the same way, knowing that he can provide a good life for the people he loves.

This generosity has never been more evident than in the wake of “The Beast” wildfire that roared through the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo last year and decimated 20% of the city of Fort McMurray, causing the evacuation of the city and of the stoppage of work at the various sites in the region.
Looking to the future, everyone agrees that for unions to survive and to continue fighting for the rights of workers, the members need to come together. A concerted effort to pursue opportunities not traditionally in our wheelhouse can help to increase market share. Opportunities such as diversifying into renewable energy and advanced technology (John) and expanding into commercial and residential employment opportunities (Dave). We need to do what we can to support the development export pipelines to get product to tidewater to ship and sell overseas (John). We need to maintain our focus on providing top-notch training and mentorship opportunities, creating world-class apprentices, journeypeople and leaders in industry (Robert). We need to keep pushing to end double-breasting and to establish a fair playing field (John, Barry & Brian).

No matter which direction that unions take, or how far we are able to go, the single message that came from everyone is that we have to do it together.

Like Brian said, “The reason why we have such a great country is what the Unions have fought for over the last 100 years or so. Universal health care, employment insurance, the 40 hour work week, weekends off, overtime pay, holidays etc. We all have to remember what Unions did for the working people, it created a middle class society.” It is the middle class that drives the economy. It is up to us to ensure that the middle class can continue to exist.

Join a union. Explore the trades. Support unions. Vote with your dollars – be mindful of where you spend your money. Get involved – talk to your provincial leaders. As much as the middle class was created by unions, unions cannot survive without the support of the middle class.

About the BTA - The Building Trades of Alberta coordinates and promotes the interests of 16 Alberta trade unions whose 75,000 members work in the residential, commercial and industrial construction, maintenance and fabrication industries.
“Make a list for yourself every day and accomplish it. You will feel great about yourself at the end of the day. You might even give yourself a raise!”

Jamie Pettem

Over the last few years, the economy in Alberta has suffered and many people have been forced to forge a new career path for themselves. In this article, we speak with Jamie Pettem, a recent Web Design graduate who is starting her freelance web design business called PixelPeak Designs.

Jamie started in the early 2000’s, working in the grocery industry right out of high school. In 2002, she started working for a large grocery retail chain in Saskatchewan and would continue with that company for more than 15 years.

She started at the bottom and began to work her way up, moving to Alberta in 2008 for a greater chance for promotion, because Alberta was booming and opportunities for advancement were plentiful. Eventually she moved up to a store management position and from there, was promoted to a job in the corporate head office.

Things were looking up. She had a great job, pension, benefits and even a company car. Unfortunately, as the Alberta economy took a downturn, so did the company that Jamie was working for. In 2015, Jamie was told that the company, like so many other companies in Alberta at the time, would be going through a restructuring process and her job would be eliminated. In the beginning of 2016, she was given a severance package and left the only field of work she had known for the last 15 years. Like so many others who had come to Alberta to reap the benefits of bountiful high-paying jobs, she was back at square one, wondering what to do with her future.

While she had an abundance of professional skills, the job market seemed flooded with other highly qualified people who were also looking for employment. In a province where you could once make top dollar, highly skill professionals with...
degrees and diplomas were now lined up, hungry for a job anywhere.

So what does one do when faced with the challenge of entering a highly competitive market with the same skill set as everyone else? Jamie decided to start fresh. She had received a fairly decent severance package and it was a great opportunity to take some time away from working full time and go back to school.

Jamie had always been interested in art, blogs and the design aspects of many websites. She took some time to research many schools and programs and decided that taking the Web Design diploma program at the Centre for Distance Education would be the best route for her future. Jamie spent the next year working vigorously on her diploma, and graduated with high honours on the President’s List. Once again, she was finished school and faced with the dilemma of entering yet another, highly competitive employment field.

Except this time, she was new, starting from the bottom again and competing with people who had skills and experience far greater than her own. Jamie was faced with yet another choice -- to brave the workforce and seek out a job, or to work for herself and enter the highly competitive field of freelance web design.

The great thing about Web Design is that it can be done from virtually anywhere. Your laptop is your office. Jamie decided to start her own freelance web design company called PixelPeak Designs. From being in management for a large corporation, she already had some of the much-needed skills needed to run and organize a successful business.

We asked her what some of the differences are between working for yourself and working for a large corporation. Jamie said that one of the biggest misconceptions is that you are working for yourself. In reality, you are not working for yourself. You do have a boss, and that boss is the client. Your client has the same expectations of you that any boss or supervisor does if you were employed by a company. With that said, it is nice to be able to work from home and set your own hours, as long as you can meet the deadlines set out by your client.

“When you are working for yourself however,” Jamie says, “you do miss out on some of the many benefits of working for a company.”

That includes a steady paycheck, health benefits, pension plan, and all the other perks that come with working for a large successful business. If you want to work freelance, you have to be prepared to still work elsewhere until you can make enough money to fully support yourself. Jamie

www.pixelpeakdesigns.ca
works a part-time job as well, to supplement her income until her freelance business really gets off the ground.

Jamie talked to us about some of the challenges and rewards that come with starting a small business in Alberta and working on your own. Jamie said the main challenge is the financial aspect because when you start out, you have to be prepared to be broke for a while. You have to look at how you are going to manage your business and still pay your bills. No small business starts out making enough money to pay your mortgage and put food on your table. You may have to work another job to make ends meet.

The next challenge Jamie struggled with is time. Starting a small business takes up almost all of your free time. Clients have deadlines that need to be met, and if you are working another job to pay those bills, you will be working on your own business during all of your free time. That means that your evenings and weekends will be dedicated to working on your projects.

Although it sounds challenging, there are also many great rewards that come from starting your own business. Jamie tells us the greatest reward that comes with her new business is being able to set your own hours. Being able to work when you want to is great, because you are able to be home if you have family members who are ill. There is no need to take sick time or a vacation day. You are not limited to spending the whole weekend trying to fit in all those chores that need to get done around the house. If you want to have lunch with a friend on a Tuesday afternoon, you are free to schedule yourself to do that. The biggest reward, Jamie states, is being able to choose the projects that she wants to take on for herself, and truly choose what she wants for her future.

We asked Jamie what she hopes to accomplish for PixelPeak Designs and how she sees the business growing in the future. Jamie told us that she hopes to help other small businesses start their journey by building them fantastic websites to get their business on the web. She wants to grow as a designer, increase her skills and work on a variety of different websites. Along the way, she hopes to make some great connections through her business. Most importantly, she wants to be able to grow the business and eventually be able to support her family with PixelPeak Designs.

So how does Jamie see her business growing in the future? Jamie told us that she hopes to get clients through word of mouth and through some Facebook advertising. She also hopes to collaborate with other designers and gain more knowledge and experience from her peers. Finally, we asked Jamie what advice she would give to others starting a new chapter in their careers or venturing to start a business of their own. “Be prepared to be broke for a while, and to work late at night when everyone else is sleeping. For me, this is when I get my best work done. Also, coffee, lots of coffee. Having a routine helps, get up every morning and start your day like you would if you were going to work. Your new business is your job, and you are the boss.”

She adds: “Make a list for yourself every day and accomplish it. You will feel great about yourself at the end of the day. You might even give yourself a raise! Make sure that you time the hours you are working -- if you are in web design this is crucial so you invoice your clients properly.” Lastly Jamie spoke about always learning. Web design in particular is a market that is forever changing. Be prepared to change too, to never stop learning and growing, to stay up to date on the latest trends and to learn new skills.

You can learn more about Jamie and see some of her work at her website www.pixelpeakdesigns.ca
With so many young people struggling to break into the working world, Labour Day is something that needs to be acknowledged; a day to recognize the importance of all workers, but it is hard to celebrate being a worker if you can't get any work.
It falls on the first Monday in September. Most people can be found hitting the road for the long weekend, packing bags and tents and coolers for one last excursion before Summer ends. The big “hoorah” for most young adults before settling in for another semester hitting the books. The unofficial “goodbye to Summer” weekend that people look forward to the entire month of August.

People know it as labour day weekend, and people know that it’s a national holiday, but I find myself wondering… how many people know why?

Labour day is a holiday to celebrate workers. Most of us, at some point in our lives, will be nuts and bolts in the wheels of our society. Labour day is for us. It’s a day for workers to lay back and rest up for the cold months to come. A day for our hard work and dedication to be celebrated, a day to thank our unions for standing up for us when we needed it most.

For young adults, many of us have only held meagre part time jobs thus far in our short lives, but they are to be celebrated nonetheless. We are the next generation of professionals, poised to take over as the older population ages towards retirement, the part time jobs we hold now are stepping stones to positions we will accept in our futures.

Now is the time for us to celebrate labour day.

“We are on the cusp of joining the professional world, our time spent in school only helps to prepare us more for what life will be like into adulthood, we are the future.”

Labour day is a day for us to celebrate ourselves, our lives, our accomplishments, the things we have yet to accomplish but aspire to, our work ethic and determination, the drive the older generation sometimes does not see in us but we know is there.

It’s important that we realize our importance.

Many young adults know labour Day as an excuse to getaway with friends, one last wild weekend before responsibilities kick back in, one last chance to break away from it all. It is so much more than that.

When asked what Labour day means to them, most young adults gave varying versions of the same answer.

“The holiday at the end of the Summer?” said one interviewee, rather unsure himself.

“Time to get the by’s together and go camping!” another said, with a chuckle.

According to Stats Canada young people aged 15-29 make up a whopping 19.4% of the population, with an unemployment rate of young adults almost as high at 14%. Young Canadians are finding themselves unemployed and overeducated, unable to move...
out of their parents' home 'til past the age of 30. This is an epidemic in Canada.

Young adults are forced to take jobs well below their abilities after years of post secondary either because there is nothing available in their fields, they don't have enough experience or someone with seniority claimed it first.

We work hard through years and years of college or university, rack up thousands of dollars in student loan debt only to graduate and be forced to accept a position at McDonalds well below our pay grade.

Young adults face a tough future of clawing our way up the food chain to try to obtain for ourselves a portion of what our parents were able to achieve without any formal schooling or even a grade twelve diploma, in a lot of cases.

Sam Green is a 23-year old-woman after completing a nine-month welding program, Green searched for months to find an entry level position within her field... to no avail.

“I grew up in a house with a single mom and two brothers. We all went to high school, graduated and went on to college. Money wasn't always around but we made it work,” said Green. “My mother worked 3 jobs at a time to make sure that the bills were paid, that we had a roof over our head and that we never did without anything—including brand name clothing.”

Growing up watching her mom work so hard to keep her family thriving, Green wanted to ensure her financial future.

“All my life I've been told that trade programs were the thing to do because it's in such high demand and pays so great.” said Green. “Doing a 9 month program and coming out of school to be able to make good money seemed pretty sweet to kid just outta high school.”

But it turns out, it wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

“I spent two years on the waiting list to even get into the welding program.” Green shared.

“Once completing the program I received my first aid, my welding diploma, a CWB ticket - a ticket that shows you've passed a test and you're

Young Canadians are finding themselves unemployed and overeducated, unable to move out of their parent's home 'til past the age of 30.
certified to weld in a certain position - and WHMIS.”

“After passing out and emailing hundreds of resumes, I only ever got one interview for welding,” said Green. “The company was only looking for someone that was subsidized and unfortunately I was not because I haven't had a job or any hours worked in my trade.”

Green's story is one that echoes that of many other young adults who work hard throughout school to gain the knowledge and instruction to begin their careers and work their way up the “ladder”.

But they never get past the first rung, unable to even obtain jobs due to lack of experience and a flooded market.

“There was 15 people in my class if I recall exactly and only two have jobs in the welding field. It's been a couple years since I've graduated... WHMIS, first aid, CWB ticket has all expired.” said Green.

It's not just trades people finding themselves unable to get jobs after school.

Chelsea Taylor is a 22 year old after completing a two year business administration program specializing in accounting, Taylor expected to be able to snag a job right out of school.

“Every business needs an accountant, this is something you need to have, so I didn’t think it was going to be so difficult to get a job considering it’s something I figured was in high demand.” said Taylor. “But apparently not.”

Currently, Taylor is working, but not in accounting. She says the position she's in currently has nothing to do with what she did in school.

I don’t have a job because I don’t have experience; I don’t have experience because I don’t have a job...
After graduating in June of 2016, Taylor said she spent three months applying to jobs and filled out as many as 60 applications before accepting her current position.

“Everywhere wants experience.” said Taylor. “And you can't really get experience if no one will hire you.”

Trying to budget rent, car payments, insurance and the basic necessities on not much more than minimum wage, Taylor says, is almost impossible.

“Having a life is pretty much little to none.” said Taylor. “My little bit of social life that I have pretty much comes from my boyfriend being able to support me.”

Though she is grateful for the extra help, it's not an ideal situation and certainly not one she could have seen coming at the start of her program.

“It's stressful, I like to be able to look after myself.”

Taylor is now readying herself to go back to post-secondary to obtain her degree in hope of finding a position once finished.

With so many young people struggling to break into the working world, Labour Day is something that needs to be acknowledged, a day to recognize the importance of all workers, but it is hard to celebrate being a worker if you can't get any work.

“It's beyond disappointing when you go to school for something you have an interest in, you spend the money to get yourself through and you have big dreams when you get out, just to be working at Walmart.”said Green.
New Workers' Voice magazine approached students from all over Canada to ask them about the impact free tuition would have on their lives.

Here's what they had to say...

**Q&A**

**PART 2**

Interviews By: Erica Yetman

**THE QUESTION:** New Workers' Voice is calling on the federal and all provincial governments to initiate a process whereby FREE post-secondary education would be available to all. What impact would this have on your life today and into your career future?
SAMANTHA MERCER
Age: 26
Hometown: St. Margaret’s Bay, Nova Scotia
When I graduated from high school, a group of friends and myself decided we wanted to go to Memorial University. Now that I have graduated with a B.A. and a B.Ed and am now working on my M.Ed, free post secondary education would have a huge impact. I started with $40,000 in student loans with a massive interest rate. Education is supposed to be the answer to a lot of troubles. How to move forward in life and better your own situation and the future generations of your family. I can see why, in a lot of cases, generations of families cannot leave the cycle of poverty. A $40,000 student loan, with very high interest, to enter a profession where the salaries are not rising with the cost of living.

If post secondary education was free people would be in the position to better themselves and their families. As it stands right now, it is a privilege only very few can afford.

ABIGAIL HUDSON
Age: 23
Hometown: Saint John, NB.
If I had free post secondary it would have been much less stress throughout school and more time to focus on studying. It would mean less pressure to do overtime shifts to pay off my line of credit, to pay interest on
and save my current money for future investments like a home, car, etc. I am currently living at home to try and save money and free education would allow me to be out on my own and overall be much happier and independent.

**John Buckley**  
**Age:** 19  
**Hometown:** Quispamsis, New Brunswick.  
My tuition was very expensive for my family so free would be awesome. It would help me get on my feet faster. As paying off debt would not be there.

**Ellen Mersha**  
**Age:** 23  
**Hometown:** Toronto, ON  
Free post secondary would put my bank account balance approximately $14K higher than it is right now, as I have had to pay out of my own pocket for approximately 2 years. It would help my overall credit score improve, as I would be able to begin paying back the loans I've taken out, thus bettering my credit score for future significant purchases, such as a home or a car.

**Rebecca Nolan**  
**Age:** 22  
**Where you’re from:** California  
I am extremely lucky in that I have parents who saved up enough money for me to have a bit of a college fund. But if I stayed in the US it wouldn't get me through my first two years of my undergrad. I needed to find a way to make the money that I had last as long as it could. There were times in high school and University where we thought we may lose our house. And I begged my mom to use my college money to help with it. She wouldn’t. And so I felt like the least that I could do was make sure that the money would go as far as it could.

That's why I chose Canada, because I crunched the numbers and it would get me through my masters if I budgeted right and worked while I was at school. I guess that this is a long way of saying that it would have meant a lot to me, if I hadn't had to make that choice just based on money. Sometimes I wonder if my life would have been different or better if the price tag hadn't have played such a huge role in my decision. If I had free post secondary university I would have been saved from a lot of stress.

**Katherine Benda**  
**Age:** 25  
**Hometown:** North Delta, British Columbia  
If I were able to have free education I would not be as stressed about graduating as I am right now. I am about to have to start paying off my debts having graduated with a second degree and still a low prospect of finding work. As I enter the world of work I realize that it may all be for nothing as the only work I can find at the moment is minimum wage.

**Catherine K**  
**Age:** 27  
**Where you’re from:** Originally
Windsor, Ontario
I wouldn't be nearly as stressed about my finances while studying, to study a topic I actually enjoy instead of what will make me money. I would be able to continually enhance my knowledge with the rapidly changing industry and be able to keep up to date on new expectations for my field of work.

Katelyn C
Age: 23
Living: Thunder Bay
Free post secondary education would have a huge impact on my life. As someone who graduated from a program and entered the work field I'm now returning to school to expand on that education but access to loans and student aid are much more difficult to obtain then I'd expected. Moving away from home and paying for rent, utilities and all other costs associated is expensive enough but when you add tuition it would be almost impossible to cover without some type of loan.

Blair Kerr
Age: 23 (Brock University)
Hometown: Smiths Falls, Ontario
I'll be one of the first people to confess that I can see why education is expensive, and I am even a proponent of students paying for education. I think people are encouraged to work harder and stay committed to their work when they have a financial investment in it. I realize that schools require funds to properly pay professors, administration, and teaching staff, as well as provide the necessary maintenance to buildings and technology for teaching. I do however believe that education should be affordable. I saved my own money while working in the summer, my parents put money into an RESP while I was growing up, and I was also fortunate enough to earn scholarships throughout my university career in both my BA and my MA because of my grades and extracurricular activities. My academic achievements and involvement in extracurricular activities would have been much more difficult though if I had to work a near full-time job just to survive, or deal with the stress of knowing I would have incredibly large loans to payoff upon graduation. Free or affordable tuition means that I have the ability to choose jobs that are in my field and provide valuable experience, especially early in my career, without having to focus entirely on the position's salary.

Kass Baird
Age: 22
Hometown: Alberta
I have about 10K in debt, and have just started my family. It's a huge deal for us because trying to afford such a high cost of living on one salary AND making payments on student loans can make a budget pretty tight. When you need to make payments on such a massive debt and afford to be able to live and take care of your family, you take a job where you'll be making more to start because you can't afford not to.

Holly M
Age: 21
From: Calgary
Free education would have given me the opportunity to have more of a social life and gain more volunteer experience while still having lots of time to study, because I wouldn't have to work quite as much. However, I feel like I would not have developed the same time management skills and financial responsibility because working to pay for tuition and textbooks has taught me how to balance work, school, money, volunteering and still maintain a social life.

Shaina Adams-Suggashie
Age: 24
From: Red Lake, Ontario
I had to move 100km away from home and find a place to rent. I missed the deadline to apply for free education with the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council and had to apply for a student loan. I struggled with rent, buying groceries, and paying for gas. I didn't buy books my first semester because I didn't have enough to pay for rent. Now I am approved with NNEC and it is a huge stress relief, I have been able to focus on my studies and it's showed in my marks.

Warren Crane
Age: 23
From: Upper Island Cove, NL
If there was a free education opportunity I believe it would've benefited my years in study and also the years after graduating where you're in the work force. Getting student loans to attend post secondary is stressful but it is even more cumbersome when you're in repayment while still trying to save.
Where is our next leader, our next Visionary?

Our society is sorely in need of another Tommy Douglas. Our country deserves a visionary who will make it his (or her) goal to provide government-funded post-secondary education for all, regardless of financial, social, ethnic or any other status.

By Jean Moses

Our society is sorely in need of another Tommy Douglas. Our country deserves a visionary who will make it his (or her) goal to provide government-funded post-secondary education for all, regardless of financial, social, ethnic or any other status.

Tommy Douglas
1961–1971

PART 3
By Jean Moses

Tommy Douglas, long recognized as the father of Medicare (government-funded health insurance), was a visionary! A Baptist minister before moving into politics, Tommy Douglas believed government had a responsibility to improve the lives of ordinary people.

It wasn't easy to translate his dreams into reality, but he never gave up. As he put it, “We should never, never be afraid or ashamed about dreams. The dreams won’t all come true; we won’t always make it; but where there is no vision, a people perish. Where people have no dreams and no hopes and aspirations, life becomes dull and a meaningless wilderness.”

More than 50 years later, our society is sorely in need of
another Tommy Douglas. Our country deserves a visionary who will make it his (or her) goal to provide government-funded post-secondary education for all, regardless of financial, social, ethnic or any other status.

That visionary leader won't have an easy job. Pushing for free education for everyone will be difficult, and frustrating, and even thankless at times. The road will undoubtedly be very bumpy. Objections will be loud and diverse – those who can afford it should pay; those self-centred teens don't appreciate anything they don't have to work for; students can always get a student loan; and so on. Other objections will argue against including immigrants, for fear that "they" might take jobs away from "us".

That's the type of thinking used to try and derail medicare. An unspoken theme throughout was that people with money somehow deserved better medical care than those without. Translated to education, it's that people with money are somehow more intelligent and will contribute more to our growing country than lesser people will.

When that special leader does surface, we'll likely hear all sorts of seemingly-valid arguments to keep the status quo. People will argue there are scores of scholarships, bursaries and grants available to post-secondary students – but how many go unawarded through a lack of applicants, or applicants unable to meet the specific qualifications?

Many overworked school counselors simply can't keep up with the myriad of awards available to students, so can't tell students about them. Perhaps, although the student is very bright, final marks don't truly reflect intelligence or ability because he or she gets tense when taking exams.

When marks are a major deciding factor, only students with 95+% win those many awards. What about the intelligent student who falls into the 80% range instead? Don't they deserve a chance? Financial need isn't even considered for some awards, and until recently, that award money was taxed. That meant that even when much-needed funds were advanced, the student wound up being able to
use only a portion to pay school costs.

Wouldn't it be a better society if every student with the ability to go beyond high school could? It shouldn't matter which school or career they chose, tuition and books should be provided without cost. Some students will opt for university, becoming doctors, teachers, dentists, lawyers or engineers. Others will prefer an apprenticeship in much-needed trades. Still others will opt for the specialized training required for a career in technology or arts.

In a country as rich as Canada, no one with ability should be denied the opportunity for higher education. Unfortunately, though, that won't happen without someone willing to devote time, effort, and maybe even reputation to push for free post-secondary education. It will indeed take a unique person to make it her or his life mission.

To turn free education into reality, we need someone (not necessarily a standing politician) who is persistent enough, courageous enough and thick-skinned enough to question the status quo. That person, like Tommy Douglas, will have to face adversity with humour, as well as vocal opposition from all sides, probably including both social and mainstream media.

Our visionary must want to make Canada a better place for all, paying special attention to the less fortunate in our country. That includes people whose children never consider an education beyond high school, knowing their parents can never afford it. Even when stubborn young adults are determined to sacrifice and make more of themselves in spite of the financial challenge of fighting for that education, they are hampered after graduation by the mountain of debt accumulated through student loans.

Now, consider what our world might be like if that much-needed visionary, our modern-day Tommy Douglas, were to appear in our country, and even succeed. Our next generation wouldn't be dependent upon parents for a further education. Those students wouldn't have to work all summer, scrimping and saving so they have enough money to cover even a portion of the education costs involved. Young people wouldn't have to sacrifice study hours to a part-time job to get an education.

It shouldn't be the students' responsibility. It should be ours! Our government should bear a responsibility to provide the best (and longest) education that each student is capable of, and wants!

Tommy Douglas' words still apply all these many years later: “We are all in this world together, and the only test of our character that matters is how we
look after the least fortunate among us. How we look after each other, not how we look after ourselves. That's all that really matters.”

We know that the visionaries, the leaders of this world, are rare. The majority of us, politicians and non-politicians alike, simply drift through life trying to do our best for ourselves and our families. It makes us uncomfortable to consider those without advantages that we've worked hard to provide for those we love. We don’t want to think about those first-generation Canadians who've sacrificed much to begin a new life here – those whose children have the potential to contribute to Canada but are unable to because the family hasn't been here long enough. We tend to downplay the ability of those students from smaller centres who haven't had the options of large, urban schools.

But what if our badly-needed leader were to step forward? What if he or she was courageous enough to go against accepted thinking and push for free education for everyone? How might that affect our society after a generation? Perhaps the child down the street who’s so painfully shy that they seldom speak in class will become a Nobel prize winner. Perhaps the child of those people you tend to avoid because of their poverty will return to your community to contribute as a caring doctor or dentist.

When no doors are closed, when the future is open-ended, children will be able to dream of becoming whatever they wish. With an entire generation dreaming, there is no limit to the benefits society and our great country will reap. We need that leader, that visionary, willing to swim upstream against public opinion, and articulate enough to convince others to believe in the dream! With government-funded education for everyone, regardless of station or family resources, Canada and our world will become a better place for all.

“Courage, my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.” Tommy Douglas
PART 4
The Extreme Centre Cannot Hold

It's time to embrace free education!

Tuition fees are essentially a flat tax on learning, levied equally on students irrespective of their financial status. Free education on the other hand, would mean a transfer of wealth from the top down.

Politics is broken. Across the industrialized west, parties of the left and right have converged in mutual defence of neoliberalism. Social democratic governments wedded themselves to deregulation, privatization of state assets, and cuts to public expenditure. As politics became less about a clash of different visions for what constitutes the good life, and more about narrow managerialism, cynicism increased and electoral participation correspondingly declined.

The iconoclastic author Tariq Ali refers to this convergence as the “extreme centre”. Emerging in the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it has reigned unchallenged for almost three decades but is finally showing signs of breaking down.

By Peyton Veitch
One of the most striking examples of this convergence revolves around tuition fees. Following the Second World War, free or nominal tuition was an indispensible element of newly established welfare states in Europe and North America. This was the case in Canada, as high levels of public funding allowed working class students to access post-secondary institutions at minimal cost for the first time.

By the 1990s, this model began to fall apart, and it was often social democrats who wielded the axe. Free education in Britain survived Margaret Thatcher, but its death blow was delivered by Tony Blair in 1997, when his Labour government introduced tuition fees. The acceptance of tuition fees by social democratic parties, including by provincial NDP governments, is part of a broader retreat from universality in favour of means tested programs, and has given a progressive veneer to arguments against a universal model of post-secondary education.

In Canada, providing post-secondary institutions with greater “flexibility” to raise tuition fees has been an unfortunate hallmark of nominally social democratic governments. Led by Bob Rae, Ontario’s first NDP government increased tuition fees every year they were in office during the early 1990s, allowing them to more than double.

Despite assurances to the contrary, Manitoba’s NDP government lifted a tuition fee freeze in 2008, eventually restricting increases for domestic undergraduate students to the rate of inflation.

In 2011, Nova Scotia’s first NDP government did likewise, allowing tuition fees to rise by 3% per year. In all three of these cases, a common narrative was put forward: reducing tuition fees is a subsidy to the rich and funding should be targeted towards financial assistance for low-income students.

Darrell Dexter, Nova Scotia’s former NDP Premier summed up this view, stating in 2012 that he rejected lower

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Cracks are starting to appear in the seemingly impenetrable extreme centre, as a return to the politics of solidarity starts to demonstrate impressive electoral results.
tuition fees because “It disproportionately benefits people who have more means, who come from higher income levels...”

This encapsulates the retreat from universality by social democratic parties in government. The same argument advanced by Dexter against tuition fee reductions could be made against universal healthcare, insofar as even billionaires receive care free at the point of use under our system. Yet far from being a sop to the rich, universal programs are redistributive in nature.

What detractors overlook when they assert that free education subsidies the wealthy is how its funding is predicated upon a progressive tax system where those who have more to contribute pay more. Tuition fees are essentially a flat tax on learning, levied equally on students irrespective of their financial status. Free education on the other hand, would mean a transfer of wealth from the top down.

Paradoxically, countries that have maintained universality as the guiding principle of their respective welfare states, including Norway and Sweden, boast dramatically lower rates of inequality than those emphasizing means testing. Not only is this a product of

**These encouraging numbers echo support for free education that the Canadian Federation of Students uncovered during its round of annual polling this year.**

higher marginal tax rates on top earners, it also illustrates something about the nature of universal programs. Since the number of people they benefit is much greater than targeted assistance to the poor, a large and powerful constituency is created. This means that if politicians have the temerity to slash funding or raise user fees, they risk provoking the wrath of a broad cross section of society.

Means testing divides people up into categories, between recipients who are stigmatized, and non-recipients who resent their tax dollars only benefiting those poorer than them. Universal programs, including free education, build coalitions across classes and engender solidarity.

Cracks are starting to appear in the seemingly
impenetrable extreme centre, as a return to the politics of solidarity starts to demonstrate impressive electoral results. In 2016 Bernie Sanders galvanized millions of Americans and nearly won the Democratic presidential nomination by campaigning on universal healthcare and free education.

Most recently and encouragingly, the Labour Party in Britain came within an inch of power by recommitting itself to a dramatic expansion of the welfare state.

Led by Jeremy Corbyn, Labour put forward a platform that included elimination of tuition fees as a key pillar of this expansion. In a remarkable turnaround for a party that introduced tuition fees while in government during the 1990s, Labour campaigned on free education and promised to implement it during their first year in office.

The embrace of this policy helped fuel a significant increase in youth voter turnout, to the Labour Party’s immense benefit. More than half of youth aged 18-24 voted, a 16% increase over the 2015 election. Fully 60% of this cohort cast their ballots for Labour.

Labour’s platform contained a number of proposals including scrapping precarious zero hours contracts, introducing rent controls and a national living wage which all appealed to a generation facing the very real prospect of enduring lower living standards than their parents. The one policy that appeared to have the greatest impact of all was a pledge to eliminate tuition fees.

By returning to a kind of politics that seeks to transform the system rather than simply running it more efficiently, they can cease being obstacles in the way of free education and start being allies in the struggle for it.

According to polling done by YouGov, scrapping tuition was the most memorable policy in Labour platform. It also enjoyed wide popularity. Not only among 18-24 year olds, 58% of whom supported it, but also among the general population where 49% said it was a good idea, 36% were opposed, and 15% didn’t know.

These encouraging numbers echo support for free education that the Canadian Federation of Students uncovered during its round of annual polling this year. Working with Nanos, we surveyed Canadians on their views regarding post-secondary education. To our astonishment, 71% of respondents agreed with raising taxes on the wealthiest 1% of Canadians to fund the elimination of university and college tuition fees.

Despite years of being lectured to by pundits and politicians about the need for government to “live within its means”, Canadians are open to a large-scale expansion of the welfare state financed by progressive tax increases.

The Overton Window, a term coined by a political scientist of the same name to describe a range of ideas deemed common sense, reasonable and realistic, is shifting rapidly. Five years ago, few would have imagined the rapid progress made by the Fight for $15 movement, with a number of states and
provinces, the latter including Alberta and Ontario, committed to the implementation of $15 an hour minimum wages. Likewise, the idea that millions of people would vote for candidates in the United States and Britain supporting free tuition, or indeed that NDP leadership aspirants would make it a core part of their platform, would have seemed equally farfetched.

Why has this happened? Years of stagnant or falling wages, deteriorating public services, and soaring consumer debt levels has left people weary with the status quo and increasingly open to radical alternatives.

Wage growth in Canada is barely keeping pace with inflation. At the same time, we have earned the dubious distinction of becoming the most leveraged nation in the G7, with household debt sitting at 171% of income. A significant portion of this debt, to the tune of $28 billion, is made up of public student loans. The powder keg represented by this debt bubble can hardly be overstated. If interest rates rise by a mere 0.25%, over 700,000 Canadians will be pushed in to a negative cash flow situation.

Meanwhile, life at the top has never been more lucrative for Canada’s economic elite. This year, Oxfam reported that two billionaire families, the Thompsons and the Westons, own as much wealth as the bottom-earning 11 million Canadians. As well, the country’s top earning CEOs now earn 193 times the average worker’s wage.

It’s this grotesque disparity, and people’s awareness of it, which provides fertile ground for a populist alternative with free tuition at its centre. Free education would provide significant relief to households drowning in debt.

Closing tax loopholes, taxing capital gains at the same rate as income and raising corporate tax rates from their current depths (the lowest effective rates in the G7) would generate more than enough revenue to cover the $10.2
billion in tuition fees paid by students in Canada, while simultaneously reducing inequality.

This is not the kind of populism that scorns immigrants, religious minorities and racialized communities while protecting the interests of a rarefied ruling class. It's a populism of the left: one which addresses the real causes of people's insecurity while redistributing wealth and power from those who have amassed it in obscene quantities. In a word, it's called socialism.

We can't rely on a political party to advance the cause of free education. Wherever that fight is being won, whether in Germany or Chile, it is the result of sustained organizing efforts involving thousands of students and workers. We must however push our politicians on the centre-left to abandon the extreme centre for good. By returning to a kind of politics that seeks to transform the system rather than simply running it more efficiently, they can cease being obstacles in the way of free education and start being allies in the struggle for it. ♦

Peyton Veitch is National Treasurer Canadian Federation of Students
The speaker is Ron Thomas, president of United Steelworkers Local 5795. He’s talking about the mining byproduct that causes silicosis, which the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety describes more clinically this way: “... an incurable lung disease caused by inhaling dust that contains free crystalline silica ... Silica dust particles are small in size and can reach deep into the lungs (to the alveoli). The dust particles which land on these surfaces are removed by white blood cells known as macrophages. However, particles of free crystalline silica cause the macrophages to break open, which form scar-like patches on the surface of the alveolus. When a large number of these ‘scars’ form, the alveolar surface becomes less elastic. This effect reduces the transfer of gases, which can lead to shortness of breath.”

Silicosis can take decades to develop in a person’s lungs to the point that it can be detected by medical personnel. And we have a history in Canada, as elsewhere in the world, of denying it’s work-related.

“Do you know what silica is? It's like shards of glass. It gets into your lungs, where it cuts and heals up, cuts again and heals up again, and eventually it turns into cancer. You can’t get it out of your lungs. All they can do is get you out of a dusty [work] area and into one with less dust.”

Ron Thomas
Silicosis is not a new phenomenon. The word itself has been in use since 1870, when Achille Visconti named it as a specific form of pneumoconiosis found in miners and others who worked with silica, which is one of the most common elements on earth. Even in ancient Rome and ancient Greece, people recognized that breathing in dust (including from work as a sculptor) could cause work-related respiratory problems.

In 1713, Bernardino Ramazzini (a.k.a. “The Father of Occupational Medicine”) described the lungs of stone-cutters, including his observations of their asthma-like symptoms and the observable deposits of sand-like material in the lungs, in the second edition of his definitive work De Morbis Artificum Diatriba [Diseases of Workers].

Silicosis became much more frequent as technology progressed. Both the pneumatic hammer drill (introduced to workplaces in 1897) and the process of sandblasting (introduced around 1904) increased the volume of dry dust workers were inhaling.

Iron ore has been mined in Ron’s part of the world since 1954, when the first ore left Schefferville, Quebec, 200 km north of Labrador City. First ore was mined by the Iron Ore Company of Canada (then shortened to IOCC, later IOC) in Labrador West in 1962; by 1989 a billion tonnes of ore had been extracted.

Ron Thomas is 46 today; by the time he was born in Labrador West, the mining operations there were well underway.

For as long as he can remember, dust – the particular reddish-purple dust of the iron mine – has been a part of his life. One of his earliest memories is of playing in dust-infused snow.

“You’d be out playing in a snowbank and you’d get the different layers of dirt in the snow,” he says. Every snowfall would leave a fresh white surface. Inevitably, the stacks would spew out dust to leave a layer of colour in the snow. Like a geological record, you could read the alternating layers of snow and dirt.

In those days, Labrador West ore was all “dry grind” – it
was processed without the use of any water at all. Water, as you’d expect, keeps the dust levels down, both inside and outside the mine. The dry grind creates more dust, and it was everywhere.

IOC started switching to a complete, and safer, wet grind process in the late 1980s; the last of the dry mills was shut down in 2013, as a massive and atypical boom cycle in the mine was ending.

Canadian workers have travelled a long road to linking silicosis with workplace conditions.

We’ve known what silicosis is – and what causes it – for a long time. In 1931, a Dr. J.G. Cunningham, Director of the Division of Industrial Hygiene, Ontario Department of Health published an article in the Labour Gazette.

“The subject of silicosis has deservedly received increased attention within the last few years,” he wrote. The lung diseases due to dust inhalation referred to … as pneumoconiosis, or as miners’ phthisis and silicosis, are designated as compensable in the Workmen’s Compensation Acts of Ontario and Alberta. They are compensable in Nova Scotia and British Columbia under the heading of diseases due to occupation, while in Manitoba and Saskatchewan legislation in regard to compensation is pending.”

His division had surveyed Ontario miners in the 1920s. They found few cases of silicosis in Sudbury (where nickel, copper and silver were mined) and Cobalt (where, despite its name, silver was the main ore mined at the time) where “the amount of free silica in the ore and country rock is low,” Cunningham concluded.

“Cases were also few in Kirkland Lake where the camp is of recent origin” – remember that we know silicosis can take 30 years to develop – “while in Porcupine [a gold mine in the Timmins area], among 236 workers nearly all with over five years under ground exposure to silica dust, there were 46 cases of silicosis” – about 20% of the workers tested.

It’s difficult to fathom that in some parts of the country – in Newfoundland and Labrador, for example, and Western Labrador where Ron Thomas represents the Steelworkers – miners and their unions still have a struggle to prove that workers with silicosis should be eligible for workers’ compensation.

The first step, Ron says, was convincing doctors that their patients were ill because they worked in a dusty environment with a high silica content. It didn’t take the doctors long to get on side, and then commenced the long, frustrating work of

But silica is a very common element, found in all kinds of sand and rock. Silicosis is a risk in other kinds of mining, including the mining of metals, such as gold, copper and zinc. But it's also a hazard in other industries.

Ron Thomas: “...there's a monument in the town, and a lot of my co-workers have their names on the monument.”
convincing the company and the government.

Hired at the mine in 1990 as an electrician, Ron has been a full-time union employee since 2006; he spent five years as Vice-President, and has been president for six. He’s helped a lot of people win workers’ compensation cases. A lot of them are retired miners, his father’s contemporaries, but not all.

You’d think it would be straightforward. Basically, says Ron, “If you’ve got fibrous material in your lung, it’s either asbestos or silica.” There’s no asbestos in the iron ore in Labrador. There was some used in buildings on the site years ago, but it’s long gone. A couple of mechanics in Labrador City developed asbestosis from working on brakes over the years, but they were rare cases.

Silicosis starts with a person having trouble breathing. In an environment as hyper-aware of the condition as Labrador West is now, this sort of symptom will trigger an X-ray. Particular types of spots on the X-ray image call for a biopsy. If the biopsy’s results look like silica, the worker puts in a claim with Workplace NL, the Newfoundland and Labrador government division that handles workers’ compensation.

There are then often years of grievances and appeals to file, all while a worker’s incurable condition continues to progress. Even a win isn’t always final.

“When it comes to an appeal – there’s one case we won in 2013-14, the company is appealing that,” he says. It’s clear that this is a process he’s far too familiar with, and thinks very little of.

“A lot of our members are frustrated. The retirees are really upset. They keep getting their lungs checked.”

People who spent decades working at IOC never know when an X-ray will show a spot that will require a biopsy. And then they’re going down the road so many other Labrador iron workers have travelled.

Ron and the Steelworkers have had to fight for regulation and legislation that will help their cause. Progress does come, slowly.

In 2006, a Silica Code of Practice was adopted for industry in the province (it’s the only result you get when you search “silicosis” on the Workplace NL website).

Despite this, and specific provisions in the province’s workplace safety regulations, the incidence of silicosis in Labrador West continued to increase. In 2010, the government agreed to a medical review of X-Rays, put out a tender for the service – and nothing happened for several years. And when it was finally conducted, the people of Labrador City are not particularly reassured. The silica dust study has caused more confusion than clarity. Of 636 participants, 86 showed dust exposure requiring follow-up, and 36 showed signs of silicosis.

Those numbers are nowhere near the 20% found in 1930 in Porcupine, but they’re far from reassuring. Especially when you consider that some of the people who were told by the study they didn’t show signs of silicosis are actually previously confirmed to have it.

“We have four members who’ve actually had lobes removed and they came back with a clean bill of health,” Ron says. “Four still have silica in their lungs, but the study said they were fine.
“They were pissed. They were absolutely pissed.”

That's a lot of disparities for a study that covered only 700 people. “And that's just the ones I know of.”

The miners of Labrador West are poised to start another cycle of educating workers. The workforce at IOC right now is a relatively young one.

Ron with his 27 years of experience is number 200 in seniority from the top of a list of about 1400 workers. A decade or two ago, he would have been much nearer the bottom of the seniority list. But today, most of the mineworkers have 12 years or less experience. It's hard, as always, for the young to absorb the threat of a disease that might or might not hit them 30 years down the road seriously.

“It's hard to beat that into their heads. They don't really take it as serious as we would like,” says Ron.

I ask Ron what it's like dealing with the deaths of co-workers and friends.

“We had a rougher time last year with the suicides.” In 2016, five people in Western Labrador – all connected with IOC – killed themselves. At the time, people in Labrador West said the deaths were reflective of the hostile work environment at the mines. Ron and his colleagues were dealing with thousands of grievances.

But there's a monument in the town and “A lot of my co-workers have their names on the monument.”

It's as dusty now in Labrador City as it was when Ron Thomas was playing in those snowbanks with the layers of dust. “You can't leave furniture out on your patio overnight for the dust,” he says. “I tore down a clothesline this year. What's the use? You can't use it.” Anything that stays outdoors for any length of time attracts the silica-laden dust.

Ron tells me about the deck he built with pressure-treated lumber, which he coated with a good layer of Thompson's Water Seal – a wise course of prevention anywhere else. In Labrador City, the Thompson's creates a surface for dust to adhere to, and now Ron has a deck the distinctive purplish colour of the Labrador iron ore.

One final point: Ron Thomas and his co-workers in Labrador West know silicosis as a devastating illness of miners.

But silica is a very common element, found in all kinds of sand and rock. Silicosis is a risk in other kinds of mining, including the mining of metals, such as gold, copper and zinc. But it's also a hazard in other industries.

J.F.S. Sauve points out in a 2015 article in the American Journal of Industrial Medicine that inhaled sand is a risk in fracking, engineered countertop manufacturing, and construction – and particularly difficult to control in the latter because the worksites are temporary with small numbers of employees, which combines with the varying amount of silica dust to make it tricky to identify who is at risk of contracting silicosis and how great the risk is for any individual worker.
Weed, Pot, Reefer, Grass, Dope, Ganja, Mary Jane, Herb, Skunk.

Marijuana in the Workplace

Call it what you want but with legalization it will affect Canadian workplaces.

By Erica Yetman

The usage of recreational marijuana among Canadians young and old is higher now than during the era of free love and free smoke in the 60's, with a 2012 report claiming 53% of Canadians aged 18-44 have used marijuana at least once in their lifetimes.

Marijuana has been an ever increasing problem in our country, not because of the danger it poses, but because of the lack of knowledge about how to handle its users.

In less than a year it will be as easy to come by as a bottle of wine or a pack of cigarettes. And then what?

Most professionals know that you can't down a bottle of Merlot and head into the office, but what about smoking a doobie on your way to work? A midday break for a puff from your pipe? What if that's your medicine, the same to you as taking an advil for a headache?

The Liberals campaigned on the promise of legalization and though we might bleed red, Canada is seeing green.
These are questions that need to be answered before marijuana becomes legalized. But even then, what will the workplace standards be for recreational marijuana use?

Employment lawyer David Whitten, in an interview with CTV, said that employers have to be aware of their legal obligations when dealing with an employee with a medical marijuana prescription.

“Employers are going to ignore Mary Jane at their own peril,” Whitten told CTV News in an interview. “She’s coming to the dance whether they like it or not.”

In Canada, marijuana is the most commonly used “illicit” drug with one third of young adults aged 15-24 reporting usage in the last year according to Stats Canada.

Whitten suggest that employers who are faced with medical cannabis in the workplace should first read up on the plants medicinal abilities.

“The reality is that we’ve recognized this as having medicinal qualities,” Whitten said to CTV News.

“So keep a straight face when somebody comes to you with a prescription, understanding that it needs to be treated legally like any other medication.”

Health Canada reports show that at the end of 2016 there was up to 130,000 Canadians legally using marijuana for medical purposes, a stark difference from the just 7,000 patients prescribed medical cannabis in 2014.

The increase in users comes with recent acceptance of the various medicinal purposes the cannabis plant can offer. Canadians are using it for a

“Employers are going to ignore Mary Jane at their own peril,” Whitten told CTV News in an interview. “She’s coming to the dance whether they like it or not.”
Workers Voice had the opportunity to speak with an occupational health and safety nurse working in a high level position with a major Canadian based oil and gas company, who is responsible for the drug and alcohol program. For the purposes of this article he will be referred to as Mr. OG (Oil & Gas).

“It’s really about trying to manage fit-ness in the workplace. All protocols with regards to drug testing, drug panels and drug screening will remain unchanged.” Said Mr. OG.

“Current protocols follow the department of transportation in the United States model, which tests for the most commonly found substances in North American workplaces.”

Several states in America have legalized marijuana for recreational purposes including California, Ohio, Nevada and Washington.

“One of the big limitations in testing THC is you cannot measure impairment with alcohol and drug testing as it pertains to marijuana.” said Mr. OG.

“All it will tell you is presence or absence in the test. It will not tell you if someone is impaired or not.”

According to the Canadian Centre for occupational health and safety some of the major side effects of marijuana include distorted sense of time, impaired memory, impaired coordination - all of which would be a safety hazard in the workplace.

“The only approach can be a zero tolerance test, if you test positive you fail the test.” said Mr. OG.

Exceptions can be made, however, for employees with authorization from their doctor to use cannabis as a medical treatment. Each employee is assessed on an individual basis, as cannabis may have a different effect on each user, due to the various factors involved with the plant.

“It’s the same approach as we would look at any drug that’s being prescribed that may have an impact on health and safety because of its side effects.” said Mr. OG.

“We put a plan in place to assess the impact of the drug on the person, just like we would if someone was coming in with a sleeping pill or an opiate.”

The difference between an employee using medical cannabis and a pharmaceutical is a big one. Most drugs on the market have a fairly predictable list of side effects, only last for a certain amount of time and are available in supply dosages.

Marijuana however, can have a different affect on its user during every usage. It can be
Ingested through various means, dosages are almost impossible to determine given the variation in THC and CBD levels across strains, and it has an accumulative effect that other drugs do not.

Given the unpredictable nature of how cannabis will impact its users, it makes it more difficult for employers to put a plan in place for dealing with employees using medical cannabis. Because of this it is crucial employees are looked at on a case by case basis.

“We would look at the job role, the risks of the job as it pertains to safety and cognitive ability and we would work with the healthcare providers to either accommodate the person, find an alternate solution or - if it was determined that there was no risk - we would send the person back to work.” said Mr. OG.

While being impaired in the workplace is a big no-no, there are ways employees can work with their employers to determine the best route for which they can continue their treatment while not endangering the workplace.

“There's a very limited suite of illnesses that there's actually any evidence that it (medical cannabis) works for, and the majority of those illnesses are not compatible with someone going to work.” said Mr. OG. “But if you are someone using cannabis for medical purposes, Mr. OG says the best thing you can do is be upfront and honest with your employer.

“So keep a straight face when somebody comes to you with a prescription, understanding that it needs to be treated legally like any other medication.”

“Have a very candid and informed conversation with the physician about your requirement, and the evidence that this is the best or the only way to treat whatever their illness is…” said Mr. OG.

And certainly if they're considering going into a safety sensitive job I would suggest they look for an alternative treatment or at the very least understand the impact it might have on them being hired in that type of role.”

If an employee did chose to keep it from their employer and the information was to come out, Mr. OG said it's likely most companies would dismiss the employee.

“If it comes out after an incident or during a drug test most employers will absolutely take the action that you didn't disclose and probably terminate with cause,” said Mr. OG

“And it would leave the person in a very weak position.”

Employers have a duty to accommodate, if you don't make your employer aware of your situation, they are unable to accommodate your needs.

“If it's impacting your ability to do your work, or to be at work, you should really be upfront with your employer and have that conversation.” said Mr. OG.

Given the unpredictable nature of how cannabis will impact its users, it makes it more difficult for employers to put a plan in place for dealing with employees using medical cannabis.
Where do we grow from here?

The New Workers’ Voice is your voice.

Speak out and be heard.

Let’s build something great together.