



The Bark

Winter 2015

Harold Neth, Editor

News & Events

- Watch for Aspen Foundation Convention Presentations:

- *SWATCA, February 19
- *Palliser, February 20
- *GETCA, February 26
- February – [Black History Month](#)
- February 20 – [World Day of Social Justice](#)
- February 25 – [Pink Shirt Day](#)
- March 1 – [Zero Discrimination Day](#)
- March 3 – [World Wildlife Day](#)
- March 8 - [International Women's Day](#)
- March 13-14 – [Annual ATA Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Conference](#)
- March 21 – [International Day for the Elimination of Racial discrimination](#)
- March 22 – [World Water Day](#)
- March 25 – [International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade](#)
- April 9-11 – Public Interest AB Annual Conference – www.pialberta.org
- April 6 – [International Day of Sport for Development and Peace](#)
- April 7 – [World Health Day](#)
- April 22 – [International Mother Earth Day](#)
- April 23 – [World Book and Copyright Day](#)
- April 28 – [National Day of Mourning](#)

Unemployment Insurance and Trade Unions – Alvin Finkel

Mr. Finkel has written many articles and books on history and social policy and practice in Canada. We invited him to write several articles on topical issues related to workers and the role of unions in social policy. This article is the first of three that will be posted on the Aspen Foundation website as well.

In the inter-war period, the Canadian trade union movement lobbied federal governments to introduce a program of unemployment insurance. Unemployment soared as the country transitioned from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy. Though the economy improved during the second half of the 1920s, unemployment returned in force during the Great Depression that lasted throughout the 1930s. In the depths of the Depression, one of every four Canadian workers was without work and many others had only part-time employment.

The left-wing within the labour movement responded to the Depression by demanding that governments take responsibility for creating work when private enterprises would not and that governments guarantee those unable to find work a living wage. More conservative elements in the trade unions were content to call for workers and employers to pay into an unemployment insurance fund from which the unemployed could, in the future, draw unemployment insurance payments. But the left-wing observed that such a system would ignore the millions of Canadian workers already out of work. Instead, they called for higher taxes on the wealthy and on corporations in Canada to fund an unemployment insurance program. The three Labour MPs supported that position. But Conservative Prime Minister R. B. Bennett was shocked by such a radical initiative, which was supported by a petition of almost 100,000 Canadians. In the end, both Bennett and his successor, Mackenzie King, agreed to support the more conservative vision of unemployment insurance.

The unemployment insurance plan that King introduced in 1940 only covered about 40 percent of Canadian workers. Seasonal workers and domestic workers, the people most likely to be affected by unemployment, were excluded from the system along with most women workers. The trade union movement successfully fought for inclusion of more and more workers within the unemployment insurance plan. By 1971, 90 percent of Canadian workers were covered by the plan. But, beginning in the 1980s,



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reactionary forces were able to reduce UI coverage and today “employment insurance” only covers about 40 percent of the labour force.

Aspen Foundation workshops at Teachers’ Conventions

Teacher’s Conventions are underway. If you are teaching grade 4 or Social Studies 30-1 or 30-2, or know someone who is, plan to attend one of the sessions we are presenting at the following Conventions: SWATCA, February, 19; Palliser, February 20; GETCA, February 26. Barb Maheu, former Staff Officer with the Alberta Teachers’ Association, will present.

The grade 4 teaching resource is entitled *Stories of People Working Together to Build Alberta*. It is designed to meet General and Specific Learner Outcomes in Alberta’s Social Studies Program. Active inquiry strategies help students explore the roles of working people, understand their challenges, learn about improving working conditions, and identify ways communities celebrate workers’ achievements.

The Social Studies 30-1 and 30-2 presentation is based on lessons for *Common Ground: Defending the Public Sector*, a video produced by Tom Radford. Activities are designed to meet General and Specific Learner Outcomes in Alberta’s Social Studies Program. Students assess views of political leaders regarding healthcare, as well as examine past premiers’ views on the future of Alberta, and consider the impact of privatization on public employees and citizens. There is also a contrast between policies and events here with Wisconsin.

The Aspen Foundation and social media survey

We want to expand our social media presence and would like to gain a better understanding of how educators use social media for professional purposes. If you are an educator or you know an educator that you can pass this on to, we appreciate the time it takes to complete the 3-5 minute survey by following the link: <http://goo.gl/forms/z5Owd49nYj>. We look forward to reading your responses and advice.

GWG: Piece By Piece Multimedia Musical Production

Work on making Maria Dunn’s *GWG: Piece By Piece* available to Edmonton and Alberta schools in digital form continues. Make a donation towards its completion at: CanadaHelps.org

Your Support is key to offering Social Justice and Labour Education in our Schools!

It’s friends like you who make Aspen’s work possible. You too think it important that schools teach the perspective that allows for youth to change and build a new, fairer, more kind, and more just workplace, community and society,

Thank you to the unions and individuals who have already made a donation this year. If you have not yet donated, please send us your contribution. Aspen Foundation is a registered charity and provides income tax receipts to individual donors.

To donate, see our website and contact information at the bottom of this page or go to: CanadaHelps.org

Related Links & Info

- [A Day in the Life of Your Taxes](#)
- [AFLE Teaching Resources](#)
- [Kicking It](#)
- [Poverty, What is it?](#)
- [Social Studies Council](#)
- [Global, Environmental and Outdoor Education Council](#)
- [Public Interest Alberta](#)
- [Parkland Institute](#)
- [UN Observances](#)

Always review resources before using them in class.



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