



Vice President for Region 3 Report

SIXTH NATIONAL COPE CONVENTION June 7-9, 2019 Hilton Lac-Leamy Hotel, Gatineau (QC)

Good morning/afternoon my friends, and thank you for attending our 6th National Convention. I'd like to begin by welcoming all members and especially first-time delegates. I cannot begin to explain how crucial it is to continue to attend these conventions. I know this will be very beneficial for our membership and will be insightful to all.

I would like to thank Erin McGee COPE 342, Maureen Werlin COPE 458 and Lucille Fedwik COPE 397 for their assistance with my report.

I'd like to take you all back to three years ago, where I spoke of the Saskatchewan Party Government. It is a well-known fact that they were, and still are, attempting to eliminate unions. The party did their best to destroy our crown corporations in Saskatchewan. This, along with publicly owned and controlled corporations such as Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI), were created to make living more affordable for all people in our province. I promised that I would continue to fight privatization of the crowns and public services, and that is exactly what I, and we, have continued to do.

Bill 40 was first spoken about in the fall of 2016. Come spring 2017, the Saskatchewan government passed legislation which would allow the province to sell up to 49% of a crown corporation without public consultation. Bill 40 created a legal definition of privatization, allowing the partial sale of a crown corporation without requiring a vote of support from the people of Saskatchewan. Around 49% of each crown such as SGI, SaskTel, and SaskPower, would have been accessible to private shareholders, without technically being privatized.

COPE 397 came together and realized the severity of this legislation, and how it would have impacted our members, as well as the good people of Saskatchewan. We knew we needed to play a part in this by educating our members, as well as people across the province on the value and importance of all our crown corporations.

As mentioned, COPE 397 decided to play a part in educating the public on Bill 40. Our local organized and hosted both town hall meetings and rallies across the province. We did this with the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and Own It, various union leaders, activists, and Saskatchewan residents. The message from all involved was collaborative – the government must stop Bill 40. Stop roll backs, wage cuts, layoffs, and privatization, as all these are contributing factors in affecting every individual and families in Saskatchewan. The people of our province came out, and really listened. There was an endless amount of support for the crowns and public services.

On May 3, 2017, SGI stated they had met with 11 different companies around possible partnerships with SGI. The discussion was a result to the introduction of Bill 40 and through the direction of the current government. With that being said, our fight continued. It made us work harder.

On August 30, 2017, Premier Brad Wall reported that the Saskatchewan government was reconsidering legislation, thus allowing up to 49% of a crown corporation to be sold. The Premier stated that the SaskParty politicians are hearing concerns from the people of Saskatchewan that any change in ownership constitutes privatization. Only days later, was it announced that part of Bill 40 will be repealed. Our hard work was finally beginning to pay off, but do not be confused, we were not planning on giving up just yet. Together, we required to continuously put pressure on until this legislation is defeated in its entirety and our crowns are protected.

Fast forwarding to October 2017, Premier Brad Wall announced that the government will be repealing Bill 40 and no portion of the crown corporations will be privatized. Although this may have been great news for COPE 397 and the people of Saskatchewan, we still needed to continue with the fight to protect our crowns and public services in Saskatchewan. The fight continues currently.

Here is a shocking fact. The Saskatchewan Coroners Service report 71 people were victims of domestic homicide between 2005 and 2019. With that being said, let's look at the Saskatchewan Interpersonal Violence policy/ program.

The Saskatchewan Employment (Interpersonal Violence Leave) Amendment Act, 2017, provides survivors of interpersonal violence with 10 days of unpaid leave to access services or to relocate.

"We know that Saskatchewan has one of the highest rates of police-reported interpersonal violence across Canada," Labour Relations and Workplace Safety Minister Don Morgan said. "As government and other agencies work toward long-term solutions for this issue, survivors need immediate supports to escape dangerous situations."

In order to be eligible, an employee, employee's child, or a person for whom an employee is a caregiver, must be the victim of interpersonal violence and the Employee requires time off work to:

- Seek medical attention;
- Obtain services from a victim's services organization;
- Obtain psychological or other professional services;
- Relocate, either temporarily or permanently; or
- Seek legal or law enforcement assistance and attend court appearances.

The 10 days of leave can be taken in shorter blocks of a few hours or a few days as needed. As a result, only the time away from work would be considered leave time.

Provincially, there is some protection for those that suffer domestic violence, or interpersonal violence. We then realized that we need to do better, or offer more to our Members. We have been able to negotiate language into a few of our collective agreements offering additional leave allowances. We will continue to negotiate stronger, better language and see that it is covered in all of our collective agreements.

Moving forward to the Manitoba Domestic Violence. In Manitoba, there are two parts to domestic violence leave. Part one of the leave allows employees to take up to 10 days in consecutive or intermittent days in a 52-week period, as required by the employee.

The other part allows employees to take up to 17 weeks in a 52-week period in one continuous interval. Employees are entitled to be paid for up to five days of domestic violence leave in a 52-week period. It is the employee's responsibility to notify the employer of the days to be paid. The amount paid to the employee must be no less than the wage he, or she, would normally earn for their regular hours of work.

Alberta Employment Standards allows up to 10 days of paid leave, either intermittently, or in a continuous period, one-time only basis.

Similarly, to other locals within our great organization, the Prairies are no different in terms of being anything but mundane.

2017 was truly a year for the books as we were asked multiple times to open our collective agreement, discussing options to address the 3.5% compensation reduction which SGI had been asked to find. This was to avoid, or reduce, other actions which may have required to meet the budget objectives. No matter how many times we were asked, we stood strong, and said "NO!". This was not something we were going to agree with!

Bargaining in Saskatchewan for crown and public services has not at all been easy. We still face cuts and roll backs across the tables. We see zeros offered. Our members work hard, as they are short-staffed and often come in early, stay late, give up breaks and lunches just to get the work of the corporation done.

I'd like to specifically take some time to shine a light on COPE 458. A handful of these members were recognized with awards within the past three years, Yvonne Bootsman was awarded the Jim Shewchuk United Way Award in 2017, Maureen Werlin received the AFL May Day Award in 2017, and the EDLC Wall of Fame Award in 2017. Their small local had three recipients of the APL Women's Day Award, two recipients for the May Day Award, and four recipients for the Jim Shewchuk Award.

I would also like to congratulate Yvonne Bootsman; she was the President of COPE 458 from 2006 to 2018! She retired on January 4.

The past three years have been extremely busy for COPE 458 which is always a good thing. They have created an active, engaged membership. The attendance at meetings is outstanding, especially when you consider their members are located in Edmonton, Calgary and Fort McMurray. The local has added an educational speaker component to meetings and separate educational sessions. These sessions have been created to provide newer members with any required skills they may utilize. Their first session was everything and anything to do with COPE. There was also an overview provided on the labour movement. COPE 458's focus with these sessions is based off two things: transition and training. With that being said, the local plans on implementing a membership engagement strategy.

In more recent news, COPE 458 has received a new certification, IATSE 210 support staff, and will commence bargaining for a first collective agreement in the near future.

COPE 458 has successfully negotiated several agreements within the past three years. The averaging yearly increases were 2.5, 2.25 and 2 per cent. As per the trades, they have rolled agreements due to the slowdown and loss of their membership numbers.

Another thing COPE 458 has successfully negotiated into most of our agreements is Domestic Violence Leave sweeping 11 unpaid leave clauses the New Democrats introduced when changes were made to the Employment Standards Code. Workers can now take unpaid leaves, some of which can run up to two years, and retain their job. They have negotiated the following:

- Transition into retirement clauses
- Implement salary increases within pay grids based on additional training or duties
- Payout of unused sick leave in a contract that had no severance
- Altered performance evaluations to annual collaborative reviews
- Agreed to Labour Management committees
- Pension plans which are soon to come with our contract

COPE 342 opened a sub-office in Regina to better service their members throughout Saskatchewan. The local holds membership meetings, which are always well received. A flame has been sparked within members to further advance our collective agenda in addition to the labour movement as a whole unit. They are looking ahead and continuously getting involved in activism.

Members all across COPE 342 have bargained close to 40 contracts within the last three years. They have done this successfully, making gains in protective language, pension, and wage increases amidst the current climate with our present provincial government, who are working endlessly to destroy the labour movement. Our Brothers and Sisters in the trades are feeling the pressure with partisan initiatives such as Bill 4, (otherwise known as Bill 28). To say this is an uphill battle is a complete understatement. We have, and will continue to, support our membership as they feel comfortable and confident that we are there for them through our actions.

Although we are currently facing a time of uncertainty, COPE 342 has certified two new units in Saskatchewan. The local has recently hired a consultant to assist with a wide range of labour relation issues, both at the Keeyask project/ Allied Hydro, and with general issues within the local as a whole. This consultant will assist us with any employer/union disputes in an effort to resolve problems prior to filing a grievance, which in turn, reduces the chances of the matter being escalated to arbitration. Using this approach is not only fiscally responsible, but also strengthens working relationships with our member's employers, resulting in all around gains for the membership.

There is a large concern that seems to be at the forefront for COPE 342. The issue that is coming to light involves respectful workplace problems. Bullying, sexual harassment, abuse of power, are just some of the concerns surrounding Local 342. This is coming from employer representatives, both union and non-union alike, and amongst our very own membership within the workplace. These issues truly test the solidarity of the membership. Only through perseverance can we continue to keep the flame alive. It is not without casualties as some find it too stressful, thus, resulting in them resigning from their position. In certain workplaces, Respectful Workplace Consultants have been hired in order to work with all parties involved, to make it a much safer working environment. In some instances, we have reached out to the Manitoba Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress for guidance. We like to consistently encourage members to bring issues forward. If they remain silent, these unacceptable behaviours will only continue.

I now would like to touch upon the subject of politics in Alberta. I'd like to speak about May 5, 2015. That is the day Rachel Notley brought the "Orange Crush" to Alberta, ending a 44-year Conservative Party reign with her NDP majority win. In the throes of a recession, with plummeting international oil prices, the "Notley Crue" MLA's battled back with the following:

- A minimum wage raise, which increased over the four-year term to \$15 on October 1, 2018
- The piloting of a \$25 a day daycare program
- Although demonized for introducing a tax that Suncor, Husky, and Shell suggested over 15 years ago, the carbon tax has been used to fund local green projects in every corner of Alberta. Rebates were provided to lower income Albertans

- The Coal Workforce Transition Program which provides financial assistance for re-employment, retirement, relocation, and education as workers prepare to begin new jobs, or retire
- WCB rules changes to include coverage for farm workers, where Alberta was the only province which previously excluded them
- Money was allocated to build much needed new schools, as well as to provide repairs and upgrades to existing schools
- Calgary received funding and approval for a new cancer centre, which is currently under construction
- The Employment Standards Act was amended, supporting vulnerable workers without protection
- The union certification process was changed to level the playing field
- Gay/Straight Alliances were implemented in all high schools where requested by students
- Money was allotted to infrastructure, improving roads, and transportation
- 2000 beds were added to long-term care facilities
- Construction of a "super lab" at the University of Alberta was started
- Capped post-secondary school tuition

Now, I'd like to take some time to reflect on the recent election that took place within Alberta. Elections Alberta reported that the voter turnout was 64%, which is the highest ever in the province. The United Conservative Party won a majority government, claiming 63 seats. The NDP won 24 seats. There was no other party or independent candidate which won a seat.

Those who were frustrated with the continuing unemployment rate due to the stalled pipeline to tide water and continuous low oil prices on the international market, turned their wrath on the NDP Government and elected a majority United Conservative Party Government led by Jason Kenney, with the promise of jobs for all. Edmonton, with the exception of one seat, remained NDP. But rural Alberta voted UCP as Kenney promised to repeal the WCB coverage of farm workers.

Jason Kenney as so far, promised to do the following things:

- Repeal the carbon tax legislation
- Reduce business taxes from 12 to 8 percent
- Reduce the youth minimum wage to \$13
- Halt construction on the super lab in Edmonton
- Invite third-party surgical clinics to bid into the publicly insured system, thereby contracting out surgeries to these clinics
- Repeal the Gay/Straight Alliance legislation
- Increase the weight of diploma exams, ignoring educator's recommendations
- Lift the cap on private charter schools

Education is something that has become more of a priority across the provinces. This has been done by sending members to labour council schools, CLC Winter Schools, Spring Schools, Prairie School for Union Women, CLC Convention/Conferences, Harmony Brunches, United Way workshops, the December 6 commemorative events, and lastly, our own in-house training.

Within the prairies, we see pensions, benefits, vacation, sick leave, accrued sick leave, and severance being a constant issue at the table by the employer. It's highly unfortunate that union workplaces have become stressful for our members. With that being said, doing more with less workers does not world workload, harassment, and mental health issues are becoming more frequent than anticipated. We are also finding that some employers are attempting to infringe on bargaining unit work. A trend is emerging, and it is emerging quickly.

Employers would much rather take us to mediation or arbitration than settle quickly, and fairly. This has become extremely hard to believe, for all of our union members.

We have truly embraced social unionism, as well as the significance of local unions and Stewards. Our members feel empowered. Our members have innovative, creative ideas. It is the grassroots, bottom-up model, which makes our locals, our union, and the trade union movement as well as other movements, more successful.

In closing, I'd like to remind everyone of how strong we are when we work together. If you can take anything from my message today, it is that we need to continue to work together, as a union, and as a province, to ensure the prairies remain as great as they have always been. Let us continue to stand in solidarity, and fight for what is right. Together we are stronger!

Thank you

In Solidarity, Kim Wilson

Vice President Region 3