



We're not going backwards It took decades to win pay equity for health care workers. Now it's on the Liberal auction block. **Pages 8-9**

GUARDIAN



SPRING 2003 • VOLUME 21 NUMBER 1 • THE VOICE OF THE HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

FIGHTING BACK



A year after B.C. Liberals gutted our contract we take to the streets to protest Bill 29. **PAGE 6**

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PINK SLIPPER!

VGH building services worker Caren Cameron says she got the boot from Gordon Campbell.



This past year has seen many rallies like this one in Vancouver on March 1, where more than 2,000 HEU members from around B.C. demanded that Victoria work with their union to avert massive layoffs.

Stay in touch

As the Guardian goes to press, the possibility of talks between health care unions and employers is still very fluid, and because the situation may change dramatically from day to day, it's important to stay in touch with your union – through local activists, our website (www.heu.org) and HEU's bargaining hotline:

- 604-739-1513
- 604-739-1515
- 604-739-1516
- or toll-free at 1-800-663-5813, extension(s) 1513, 1515 or 1516.

Meanwhile, HEU's Charter challenge of Bill 29 gets underway April 14. And, at the end of March, the International Labour Organization ruled the Campbell government had violated the fundamental rights of working people through laws like Bill 29.

PROTECTING JOBS

finding alternatives

Here is what we're proposing

- employment security and contracting out protections for health care workers;
- deferring April 1, 2003 3.2 per cent general wage increase and the 1.2 per cent of payroll pay equity adjustments for a total of 4.4 per cent;
- extending current contract by two years to March 31, 2006, forgoing one per cent pay equity adjustments in each of 2004 and 2005;
- lengthening the work week – from 36 to 37.5 hours – with no increase in pay, for a reduction in the hourly rate of pay by four per cent; and
- additional concessions to protect our jobs and protect public health care.

Our goal? To avert mass layoffs and protect critical health care services

putting a hold on the 4.4 per cent in wage and pay equity increases due on April 1 in return for an undertaking by health employers that all contracting out and privatization initiatives will be put on hold pending the outcome of talks.

Chris Allnutt, HEU's secretary-business manager, said the offer is a good faith effort to bring health employers and government to a table.

"We've been trying, behind the scenes, and in every way we can, to get them to the table. But to date, they have been very reluctant to talk to us," said Allnutt, who is also chief spokesperson for the multi-union association representing 46,000 hospital and long-term care workers.

One day before wage and pay equity increases for health care workers in the Facilities Subsector were set to kick in, the Hospital Employees' Union made public a proposal for face-to-face negotiations to find alternatives to privatization. Our goal? To avert mass layoffs and protect critical health care services for British Columbians.

The unions proposed

Any agreement reached will be subject to a ratification vote of union members

Any agreement reached will be subject to a ratification vote of union members, Allnutt says

With more than 5,000 skilled, experienced health care workers on the verge of losing their livelihoods to privatization, the unions know it is essential that negotiations begin immediately. Allnutt says health workers are worried about the state of health care in the province, not just their jobs, and are prepared to compromise in order to avoid a major crisis in the system.

In a letter to its members, HEU outlined a framework for discussions with health employers that would result in savings of millions of dollars while keeping health care workers in the workplace.

"With this proposal, health care workers have shown they are ready to make sacrifices in order to find solutions that would help the government save money, and employers preserve services.

Victoria's response will demonstrate whether its goal is to save money or whether its real plan is to privatize health care and punish workers," said Allnutt.

"We have an opportunity to leave the confrontation and chaos of the last year behind now," he added. "We've made it clear to health employers that we're ready to roll up our sleeves and find additional savings. It's time for talk. It's time for solutions."



ALLNUTT

We want to talk about saving public health care

More than a year ago, Gordon Campbell's Liberal government legislated changes to our collective agreement – making it easier for B.C.'s health authorities to contract out and privatize services within our hospitals and long-term care facilities.

And for more than a year, HEU members have spoken out loudly against this legislation on the grounds that it puts patients at risk while violating the most basic rights of health care workers.

Initial privatization efforts have been mired in controversy. International evidence showing that contracting out compromises patient care continues to mount, and public opinion has shifted

solidly against the B.C. government's privatization plans.

The province's global reputation is also under fire with the International Labour Organization's late March ruling, condemning our government for violating labour rights that are the standard in democratic societies around the world.

But despite Victoria's isolation on this issue, more than 5,000 skilled, experienced health care workers are on the brink of losing their jobs in the next few weeks as health authorities

award lucrative housekeeping, laundry, dietary and security contracts to multinational corporations.

The loss of thousands more jobs in a variety of fields are at risk.

To date, health employers – and government – have been unwilling to sit down with us to negotiate alternatives that would save taxpayers' investment in these workers and preserve quality public health care.

It's critical that negotiations begin.

That's why on March 31, I wrote to Gary Moser – the CEO of the Health Employers Association of B.C. – with a proposal to jump start face-to-face negotiations. As a sign of good faith we proposed putting on hold wage and pay equity adjustments scheduled to take effect on April 1. In return, we asked that the current contracting out and privatization initiatives also be put on hold pending the outcome of negotiations.

Obviously, the issue of concessions is a position that's not without controversy, but HEU members expect their union to make every effort to protect their jobs and fight health care privatization.

I want to make it clear to our members that if we are able to reach an agreement, they will have the last word. Any terms will be subject to a ratification vote by health care workers.

voice.mail

Thanks for taking risks

On behalf of the executive and members of the Mission HEU Local I would like to extend congratulations to the team that planned and implemented the recent blockade of the K-Bro linen truck in Chilliwack.

We would especially like to thank brothers Fred Muzin, Chris Allnutt and sister Mary LaPlante for their leadership and commitment to our members.

Recent events in the Fraser Health Authority have been devastating to our local members. Layoffs, cutbacks, and Bill 29 have left workers confused and demoralized.

We understand the difficult position that the Provincial Executive finds itself in when trying to fight back against the cuts.

The Chilliwack blockade was a well thought out

response to the privatization of our laundry and it offered a release for some of the frustration our members feel.

Many of our members appreciated the fact that the action did not take place on hospital property and minimized the impact on patients.

I would like to thank the service representatives for their sensitivity to the concerns of those of us participating in this kind of activity for the first time. Many of us did not know what to expect but the reps did an excellent job preparing us.

Morale at what remains of Mission Hospital has been painfully low. It was amazing to see the difference the news of the blockade made on Friday.

Members were very excited and proud of those who 'manned the bales.'

We know you will have

growing support for future actions and Mission members will be there with you.

Thank you all again.

CINDY KELLY

*Secretary, Mission Local
OR Aide, MSA Hospital*

Thank you for January 28 protest

To all the Vancouver locals that went above and beyond to clearly send the message that we will not take this sitting down any longer, the executive and all the membership of Overlander Extended Care Facility sends the biggest thank you we can and we send all the support we can muster to stand strong and united in an ever strengthening front.

Once again, thank you very much for your strong stand and good luck.

STEVE HENDERSON

Chair, Overlander Local

From Revelstoke more thanks

We want to take this opportunity to say thank you for taking part in the job action yesterday, on the anniversary of this Liberal government tearing up our contracts.

This has been a difficult year for us all. We have witnessed the disrespect of our members and the work they do.

We have seen this government close hospitals and care

homes, and harm seniors, the poor and the disabled.

We are watching in horror as they decimate our health system.

They are relentless in their quest to privatize health care.

We, of the Revelstoke local, which includes Queen Victoria Hospital and Moberly Manor, know what it is to fight back.

We applaud you for your efforts on our behalf.

SISTERS AND BROTHERS

Revelstoke Local

Dissenting opinion

Ideology, whether from the right or the left, is one of the most destructive man-made forces in history.

Save for prejudice and racism, it has caused more damage and cost more lives than any other of mankind's mistakes.

Presently, it is tearing apart B.C. and causing greater divisions among our population than has ever been witnessed before.

As any HEU member knows, the far right ideology that is plaguing our province is a threat to all working people.

Our honest and hardworking brothers and sisters are, or are soon to be, the next victims.

What many members may not realize though is that the HEU is also guilty of some of the same offenses that we charge the present

government of doing. The radical leftwing agenda being espoused by a few of our leaders is not only out of step with the vast majority of the population of B.C. but also the majority of the members of HEU.

This has caused widespread division and alienation that has significantly weakened the strength and solidarity of HEU.

To survive as a union we must learn to act smarter and more strategically.

Before the last provincial election when everybody knew there was going to be a Liberal landslide, some of our leaders acted as though the NDP was going to win.

Though we all knew where we stood with the Liberals, they proceeded to deepen the divisions and animosities between them and us to the point where we have become their main target.

We must learn to act smarter to be able to better weather the political storms in the future.

This does not mean abandoning our ethics and principles, it simply means we shouldn't isolate ourselves from the rest of the population.

This I feel is necessary if HEU wishes to survive and prosper in the future.

DAVID PELLERIN

Surrey Local





CUPE's Judy Darcy will step down in October • 4

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Victoria's policies bad news for B.C. women, reports say

Three years into the 21st century, two separate reports severely criticize the government of British Columbia for its treatment of women. They blast Campbell's Liberals for policies that amount to discrimination against women. This is especially true of women of colour, visible minority woman and older women

Simon Fraser University economist Marjorie Griffin Cohen's study, commissioned by the Hospital Employees' union, accuses the provincial government of turning back the clock on decades of pay equity gains made by women health care workers, and the other report by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a condemnation of the same government for its treatment of women in the province.

Cohen's report, *Destroying pay equity: the effects of privatizing health care in British Columbia*, examines the effect of government legislation that threatens to privatize up to 20,000 hospital support jobs.

Most of those jobs are held by women, and together with their union, they

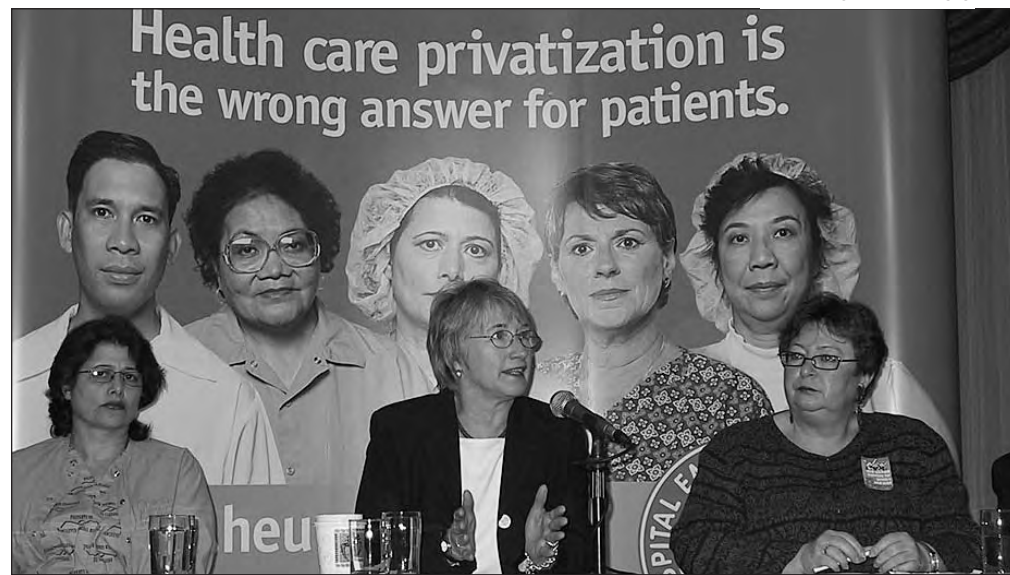
have won substantial gains in pay equity over the last three decades.

Now their jobs are being privatized, which means low wages and minimal benefits – wiping out the pay equity gains that they won.

Pay equity advances were intended to wipe out discrimination against women in the workforce, and the government's moves are bad news for women's equality.

The CEDAW report backs up that claim, saying that discrimination against women is rampant in B.C.

CEDAW B.C. is a coalition made up of 12 non-governmental organizations that work on behalf of women in the province.



Debbie Boyle, Marjorie Griffin Cohen and Zorica Bosancic told a March 6 press conference that Gordon Campbell's privatization agenda is an unwarranted attack on women's wages and women's work.

CEDAW reviewed Canada's 5th report on its compliance with the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women during its 28th session, which was held in New York City from January 13 to 31, 2003.

Canada has been a signatory to the convention since 1980, obligating federal, provincial and territorial governments to comply with its terms and to report on its compliance every four years.

CEDAW B.C. submitted its report called *British Columbia moves backward on women's equality*.

After reviewing that submission, the U.N. committee singled out British Columbia for special criticism.

Upon release of the report, the coalition called on Victoria to reverse policy changes and cuts to social programs that specifically harm women and girls.

Shelagh Day, who represented the B.C. CEDAW Group at the review of Canada's report, said these changes include cuts in funds to legal aid and welfare assistance; the incorporation of the Ministry of Women's Equality under the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services; the abolition of the Human Rights Commission; the closing of a number of courthouses; the cut in support programs for victims of domestic violence and proposed changes regarding the prosecution of domestic violence.

"It is clear that the U.N. Committee understands that the B.C. government, far from advancing women, as the Convention requires, is moving women backwards," says Benita Bunjun of the B.C. Coalition of Women's Centres.

Unbelievably, the B.C. minister of state for women's equality, Lynn Stephens, dismissed the U.N. committee's criticism. Her flippant remark – "My answer to that is there need not be any concern" – is an insult to B.C.'s women.

Cohen's report is available on HEU's website by following these links: Media Room, News Releases, March, *30 years of pay equity progress at risk from government's health privatization plans – study*. And CEDAW B.C.'s submission to the U.N. Committee can be found at <www.fafia.org>.

Two UK witnesses to privatization visit B.C.

Early in 2003, two eyewitnesses to the consequences of massive health care privatization visited B.C.

Scottish union activist Carolyn Leckie told union members how her union successfully fought against the privatization of health care support services in Britain. She gave a detailed picture of the devastating impact that privatization has had on British hospitals, as well as strategies used by hospital workers in Scotland to win a 2002 strike against the multinational corporation, Sodexo.

More recently, Christine Perry, an infection control nurse from Bristol, England, visited the province to talk about her experiences with the effects of the contracting out of hospital support workers. She met

with union members and with health services minister Colin Hansen.

Temporary agencies are often called on to fill the gaps when low wage workers don't stay on the job, she says. Contracts are not being renewed either because the work has been unsatisfactory or because private companies aren't satisfied with their profit margin.

"And it's expensive when a contract comes back in-house because a hospital often has to reinvest millions in the equipment they sold off," says Perry.

A 30-minute video from Leckie's visit to the St. Paul's Hospital local is now available. Her speaking tour was organized by HEU/CUPE with financial support from CUPE national.



COFFEE BREAK

Redneck guide to computer lingo

Log on – making the woodstove hotter

Log off – no more wood

Monitor – keeping an eye on that woodstove

Download – getting the firewood off the truck

Floppy disk – what you get from trying to carry too much firewood

Hard drive – trying to climb a steep hill in the winter

Windows – what to shut when it's cold outside

Screen – what to shut when it's black fly season

Byte – what the dang flies do

Laptop – where the kitty sleeps

Keyboard – where you hang the keys

Enter – northern for "c'mon in y'all"

Network – how you get the fish in the boat after you hook it



Proverbs to live by

"As a matter of fact" is an expression that precedes many an expression that isn't.

A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.

A man with one watch knows what time it is; a man with two watches is never sure.



Actual medical chart notes

- Patient has two teenage children but no other abnormalities.
- Discharge status: alive, but without my permission.
- The patient refused autopsy.
- Patient has left white blood cells at another hospital.
- Patient's medical history has been remarkably insignificant with only a 40-pound weight gain in the last three days.
- She is numb from her toes down.
- On the second day, the knee was better and then on the third day it disappeared.

I'll not run again: Darcy

Judy Darcy, who has served as CUPE's National President for 12 years, announced she won't be standing for reelection at CUPE's national convention in October.

Under her leadership, CUPE has been a progressive, militant union, fighting for the rights of public sector workers and against corporate control of public services.

The hallmark of her leadership has been her commitment to building grassroots activism and to being on

the front line with CUPE members from coast to coast, and that includes HEU members. First elected in 1991, Darcy was for many years the only woman to head a major union in Canada and has been a leader in the fight for women's equality and pay equity.

Darcy plans to move to B.C. with her family. "I don't know what I'm going to be doing next," she says. "I do know there are huge battles to fight against Gordon Campbell and against



our Prime Minister-in-waiting Paul Martin – not to mention against privatizers and warmongers everywhere.

"I am eagerly looking forward to being part of all of those fights. I'm certainly not planning to retire."

Deal flawed, says CLC head

A controversial arrangement between a local of the IWA-Canada and the British multinational Compass covering privatized housekeeping services at Vancouver Hospital is "flawed," Canada's top labour leader has determined. And, in response to complaints lodged by HEU/CUPE, Canadian Labour Congress president Ken Georgetti went even further, urging the IWA-Canada to "reconsider [its] decision to organize in the broader health care sector."

Georgetti said the CLC constitution did not contemplate circumstances like those arising from the IWA voluntary recognition arrangement, which meant he could not issue a formal remedy. But that didn't stop the labour congress leader from concluding that "the process of obtaining a voluntary recognition agreement and establishing a collective agreement directly with the employer – Compass/Vancouver Coastal Health Authority – was flawed."

He also challenged the forest union to sign on to the special organizing procedures adopted by the B.C. Federation of Labour to prevent unions from being divided by the Campbell government's privatization scheme. It's the IWA's refusal to

adhere to the organizing protocol – which gives the union whose members jobs are being privatized six months to reorganize the workers – that's put it in conflict with the rest of B.C.'s labour movement.

HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt says the findings validate the concerns raised by a number of B.C. unions after news emerged of the IWA-Compass agreement that cut wages in half and eliminated almost all benefits and protections. "This is generally a positive finding in which Brother Georgetti clearly supports the moral basis to our complaint and concerns," says Allnutt. "It aids our broad-based campaign to prevent the Liberals from rolling back wages and working conditions for thousands of support workers, and our efforts to organize work that is privatized."

Allnutt says HEU will work within the labour movement to strengthen the CLC constitution to give it the teeth necessary to deal with similar circumstances should they arise in the future.

CUPE National president Judy Darcy has been very forceful in pressing the labour movement to do the right thing.

"The CLC constitution is designed for precisely this situation and it must be made to work," she said.

Ottawa promises health care cash

The B.C. Liberals announced plans for an estimated \$325 million in new federal health care dollars – but until those actually arrive on Victoria's doorstep, the province's 2003/4 health care budget is status quo with more service cuts, facility closures and the loss of thousands of skilled and experienced workers in health care, said HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt.

"New federal health dollars provide government an opportunity to act on the throne speech promise of new cooperative relationships in health care," he said.

"With new resources, government can choose to find solutions to health care challenges by consulting with communities, patients and front-line staff," said Allnutt. "Or it can continue to sell off critical health services to foreign corporations and toss thousands of skilled workers – most of them women – out on the street. That's a loss that would harm health care for decades."

He warned that with no safeguards against privatization in the recent federal-provincial health agreement, money could be diverted from services to bolster profits for big business.



Busloads of complaints

Evidently, the sheer weight of a busload of testimonials about the effects of the B.C. Liberal government's cuts to education was impossible to ignore, and as a result the government made a small but significant retreat in cutbacks to public education.

The idea for the B.C. Teachers' Federation's Caravan Against the Cuts was born after education minister Christy Clark said that she had not received any negative feedback even though her government had cut more than \$210 million from B.C. schools.

"We really couldn't believe it," said Neil Worboys, BCTF president. "Doesn't she read her mail?"

Five school busses traveled more than 5,500 kilometres, stopping in virtually every school district in B.C.

On life-sized self-portraits, students wrote about the services they need but no longer receive. Teachers outlined what larger class sizes, less support and fewer resources actually translate to in their classrooms. Parents expressed their concern over their children's futures.

Final destination for the caravan was the February 11 opening of the legislature, but things started jumping the day before with a surprise announcement from Gordon Campbell of an additional \$50 million for public education.

Clark made no appearance at the arrival of the caravan, inviting Worboys to her office instead and sending the busloads of material to the mailroom. That evening, Campbell announced a further \$100 million reinvestment in public education.

Fighting to keep Ponderosa open

Fighting closures of long-term care facilities is becoming standard fare in many communities in B.C., and Kamloops is no exception.

HEU members brave winter temperatures to press for talks

Despite unseasonably cold weather in some parts of B.C., front-line health care workers across the province took part in workplace demonstrations March 6 calling for face-to-face talks with health employers and government to avert thousands of planned layoffs.

From Delta to the Elk Valley and Terrace to Powell River, HEU members arrived for their shifts early and stayed late to participate in information lines.

In Prince George, where morning temperatures plunged to 27 degrees below zero, HSA and BCNU members joined at essential services desks outside the hospital, signing in with their total years of experience in health care. And when temperatures reached a balmy -22 degrees at lunch hour, the local held a barbeque. Similar operations were in effect in the northern communities of Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Kitimat and Tumbler Ridge.

In Trail, where a record snowfall was expected, members leafleted hundreds of passing motorists while information lines were erected in other Kootenay communities, including Golden and Creston.

On Vancouver Island, HEU members drew attention to imminent job cuts in communities like Parksville, Port Alberni, Cumberland, Nanaimo, Campbell River and Victoria.

There was a strong showing outside health facilities in Vernon, Summerland and Penticton.

A freak snowstorm didn't stop members in Mission or Chilliwack from taking part. And more than 200 workers at the B.C. Cancer Control Agency in Vancouver gathered outside to document their 2,700 collective years of health care experience. Similar lines at Lion's Gate Hospital drew 300 HEU members.



Front-line health care workers like these ones at Children's and Women's Hospital demonstrated and called on the government to talk about saving jobs.

At Children's and Women's Hospital, a noon rally drew support from physicians, civic politicians and women's rights advocates for HEU members targeted by privatization.

"This government's privatization schemes will result in the loss of thousands of skilled, experienced workers

— most of them — from our health care system," said secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt.

"We'll leave no stone unturned in our efforts to work with employers and government to find alternatives to squandering the public's investment in these workers, adds Allnutt.



Millions say, "No war"

The first months of 2003 were witness to the largest mass demonstrations in human history, as the world's citizens mobilized to try and stop the U.S. and Britain from attacking Iraq without sanctions of the United Nations Security Council.

Thousands of British Columbians joined with millions of others around the world to say "No" to war.

A sense of euphoria and hope was born out of the sheer numbers of people, but the leaders of the

Red ink a myth at IHA

A detailed analysis of the most recent audited financial statements for the Interior Health Authority shows the authority diverted \$26.9 million into a special slush fund to pay for what it calls "termination" costs linked to the Liberals' radical plan of health care cuts and privatization.

Far from drowning in a sea of red ink, as top IHA brass forecast last April when the provincial government rolled out their health care restructuring plans, the authority actually amassed a significant profit if slush fund transfers are taken into account.

Both these revelations are outlined in the IHA's financial report for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002.

"We're shocked that such a significant amount of money has been diverted from patient care," says HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt. "How many small town hospitals could have been kept open if the money had been used for much needed health care services? Or how many seniors would have been able to stay in their homes?" he wonders.

American and British governments ignored the cries for peace, including from their own people who did not want this war waged in their name.

They went about their business, attempting to bully or bribe the members of the U.N. Security Council into sanctioning their war. But they failed.

In the end the Coalition of the Willing consists only of the U.S., Britain, Spain and a handful of less powerful nations that have accepted "an offer they couldn't refuse."

coming World War, and 1,600 people died during three hours of bombing.

In 1937 Picasso was commissioned to paint a mural for the World's Fair in Paris. He chose the bombing of Guernica as his subject and it became a symbol of the injustice of war.

Powell must have been well aware of the irony of making his presentation in front of this depiction of the bombing of defenseless people with the very latest in deadly weaponry of the time.

But did he connect the dots between the consequences of that war leading to World War II and the proposal he was making to the UN?

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"The closure of Ponderosa Lodge would throw 241 HEU members out of work and make for an uncertain future for hundreds of seniors," says Marilyn Aleck, Ponderosa Lodge local's secretary-treasurer. "That's why we are fighting back."

The Interior Health Authority says Ponderosa will close in 18 months, to be replaced by a facility in the Vancouver-based Retirement Concepts "portfolio."

The new 142-unit residential care facility will include only 89 publicly-funded beds for seniors that need 24-hour care. Seniors who require varying levels of care will pay out of their own pockets for the other units.

HEU secretary business-manager Chris Allnutt says union members' fears they will be blackballed from new jobs are not unfounded. When RC took over Renfrew Care Centre in Vancouver, they did not rehire any of the HEU members. "We organized the new workers at Renfrew, but that was clearly not in the Retirement Concepts game plan," Allnutt said.

Picasso turns over in his grave

When U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell presented his "evidence" at the United Nations to justify an attack on the people of Iraq he did so with one

of the world's most powerful anti-war symbols hidden from view — a literal cover up. A reproduction of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* hangs outside the UN Security Council.

Maureen Dowd wrote in the *New York Times*, "Mr. Powell can't very well seduce the world into bombing Iraq surrounded on camera by shrieking and mutilated women, men, children, bulls and horses."

In 1936, during the Spanish Civil War, Francisco Franco's fascist troops, joined by Hitler's airforce, bombed a village in the Basque region of Spain called Guernica. The people in the village were defenseless against the bombs that Hitler was testing for the

HEU protests on Bill 29 anniversary

Employer agrees to talks, but then reneges on offer

Thousands of HEU members marked the anniversary of Bill 29 with a march and rally in Vancouver and acts of protest around the province in late January.

Spirits were temporarily lifted when secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt announced that as he marched over the Cambie Street Bridge to the rally, he had received a phone call from the Health Employers' Association of B.C., agreeing to a meeting with the union in face-to-face talks on February 14. This was in answer to a letter Allnutt had faxed to HEABC that morning offering to meet to talk about protecting public health care and seeking alternatives to privatization.

But less than 72 hours later, the government and health employers withdrew the offer.

"It doesn't make sense," said Allnutt at the time, urging officials in the Campbell government and health care administrators to reconsider the move in order to head off the kind of chaos and confrontation that's characterized the past year.

Our health care system is at a crossroads and it's critical that we work together

"This decision was a real setback for our health care system and for B.C., which is at a crossroads," said Allnutt. "It's critical that we work together to chart a new, less confrontational approach."

He said HEU is interested in working to achieve solutions, but it was looking like government and health employers are not. Furthermore, Allnutt is disturbed that



CUPE National president Judy Darcy joined HEU members as they marched to the Plaza of Nations to mark the one-year anniversary of Bill 29.

top health care brass have improperly characterized events during the actions taken by HEU to mark Bill 29's first anniversary.

In Vancouver, more than 4,000 marched to the Plaza of Nations from Vancouver and St. Paul's Hospitals. Essential services were maintained at area hospitals during the protest to minimize its impact on patients.

Other protests around the province included a peaceful occupation of the Vancouver Island Health Authority offices in Victoria during which a number of protesters were arrested including one HEU activist. (Charges were later dropped.)

Throughout the province, HEU members organized information sessions, wore black in the workplace, held rallies, marched on MLA offices and took other creative actions.

"HEU members demonstrated their commitment to protecting public health care and fighting the government's agenda of cuts, closures and privatization," says Allnutt. "They reminded British Columbians that Gordon Campbell broke his promise to front-line health care workers that he'd respect their legal contracts."

Bill 29 shredded health contracts and gives health employers the tools they need to lay off thousands of skilled and experienced health care workers and award lucrative contracts to foreign corporations paying low wages.

The jobs of more than 5,000 workers – mostly women – have been targeted for privatization in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley by June.

RON VERZUH PHOTO



Students, seniors rally

Three thousand students and seniors joined together for a rally at the B.C. legislature on the first day of its spring session.

The protesters wanted the government to know that their cost-cutting measures are having a negative impact on the quality of people's lives. "Honour our future, respect our past" was their joint message to the government.

Students say many can no longer afford a post-secondary education

now that the tuition freeze has been lifted.

The seniors at the rally were there to protest the anticipated changes to the Pharmacare program (which were announced 13 days later).

Especially distressing for seniors is the prospect of income-testing to qualify for Pharmacare. They say this scheme means many B.C. seniors will be forced to choose between taking their prescription medicines and paying the rent or buying food.

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YVR firefighters sounding alarm

Vancouver airport is planning to hire and train its own emergency response specialists and Richmond's professional firefighters say that passengers' and workers' safety will be compromised. Richmond Fire Fighters' Union president Jim Wilkinson says that it's essential that rescue staff be experienced and well-trained. YVR plans to press junior employees into service, he says, and that is not good.

Now Richmond firefighters provide emergency response at the airport, but their contract runs out next year.

Grinch stole the show

The Grinch paid a surprise visit to St. Paul's Hospital at Christmas time – creating delight and amusement, but he carried a serious message to the facility's workers – Providence Health Care plans to contract out critical in-house cleaning and security services to private companies.

The Grinch and his entourage handed out pink-slip warnings and fight-back fortune cookies to privatization-threatened staff as the crew made their way around the facility.

The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority has identified more than 30 areas in health services and support as

privatization targets including: diagnostic lab, diagnostic imaging, pharmacy, plant maintenance/operations, nutrition services, information systems, housekeeping, finance, human resources, health records, laundry/linen, materiel management, research, social work, planning, physiotherapy, admitting, respiratory therapy, security, biomedical, occupational therapy, other therapies, switchboard, telecommunications, communications, volunteer resources, pastoral care, speech therapy, quality assurance, utilization, management diversity and more.



Despite the important message and the best efforts of management-types to out-Grinch the Grinch, the workers' spirits remained high as they clearly enjoyed the seasonal character's hi-jinx and appreciated the support.

WCB cuts hurt workers

The government of British Columbia is forcing the Workers' Compensation Board to make dramatic cuts that are hurting workers, employers and communities. This includes slashing services that help prevent injuries and

Hydro break-up law, no public dialogue

Despite widespread public opposition to the sell-off of BC Hydro, Gordon Campbell's Liberal government used its overwhelming majority to legislate the handover of the public utility's billing services, information technology, human resources and office management to Bermuda-based Accenture Business Services of B.C.

Opponents say this is the first step in the privatization of BC Hydro, and that details of the deal with Accenture were hidden from public scrutiny.

Critics include one ex-Liberal MLA who says that it sets B.C. on a road from which there is no return. Paul Nettleton, who has been sitting as an Independent Liberal since he broke ranks with Campbell on this issue, wrote in a letter to his colleagues that he is concerned about "the transfer of control over BC Hydro's operations to a private firm, accountable only to the government, under an agreement whose terms are confidential."

The Union of B.C. Municipalities also deplores the lack of public consultation, and at their meeting last fall passed a motion opposing the privatization or sale of BC Hydro electrical generation, transmission or distribution functions, and specifically included their opposition to the contracting out of administrative services to Accenture.

Aims to foil lawsuit

One citizens' group is outraged that the government wrote into the legislation in an attempt to stop what is potentially the largest class-action suit in Canadian history in its tracks.

"The legislation is expressly designed to take away the legal rights of British Columbians to fight the privatization of BC Hydro in the courts,"

said Murray Dobbin, spokesperson for the Citizens for Public Power. In the week following the passage of the legislation the group announced that 52,000 British Columbians had signed letters of intent asking the B.C. Supreme Court to declare a class action lawsuit to fight the privatization of BC Hydro.

The group's legal counsel, Leo McGrady Q.C., concurs that the legislation was specifically written to ensure that the Accenture deal is beyond the scrutiny of the courts.

"The attempt to remove this legislation from any challenge under common law may be an indication of the government's concern that the class action lawsuit is a real threat to its efforts to shield negotiations and other features of the deal from public review."

Record is bad news

This is especially alarming given Accenture's track record. It used to be known as Andersen Consulting, the consulting arm of Arthur Andersen – the same accounting firm implicated in the Enron scandal in the U.S.

In 2000, Andersen Consulting (then a Chicago-based partnership) changed its name to Accenture, went public as a corporation and relocated its head office to Bermuda.

In documents filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Accenture stated, "Shareholders of Bermuda companies do not generally have rights to take action against directors or officers of the company."

The deal goes into effect on April 1, 2003, and on that date Accenture will become boss to more than 1,500 BC Hydro employees, members of the Office and Professional Employees' Union's Local 378.

Their present collective agreement will go with them, but when it expires in 2005, the union will have to negotiate a new contract with Accenture.



MUZIN

We must not lose sight of a better world

Forty years ago, in my family's home in Montreal, we were all huddled around our black and white television set, counting the minutes before the American and Russian governments plunged us into World War III. For months, we had been listening to air raid sirens perched atop tall buildings and preparing to scurry into air raid shelters at a moment's notice should hostilities break out. The Cuban Missile Crisis resulted when the Krushchev administration determined to break the U.S. blockade of Cuba by shipping missiles to Fidel Castro. Only after warning shots were fired across the bow of the Russian freighters did the USSR retreat and allow a return to the uneasy cold war.

As this column is being written, we are counting down the last 48 hours on death row for the people of Iraq. They have already been subjected to more than a decade of sanctions and the death of 5,000 children per month. While there are times when military force is justified to promote peace, this unilateral action of the powerful without international agreement under the auspices of the United Nations, will do incalculable violence to democracy and to Iraqi people.

The clear signal being communicated by U.S. president George W. Bush and British prime minister Tony Blair is that might makes right, the commitment to peace of 15 million world citizens protesting this war are meaningless and that politicians and military strategists have the divine right to sacrifice others.

War is both a workers' issue and a health care issue. The armed forces and support personnel, in the name of defending democracy will almost certainly be ordered to commit murder, including mass destruction if their leaders think that's what it takes to achieve their own political objectives. In the end, we will have the responsibility to hold the real decision makers accountable, but we should also remember that the men and women who may give their lives in carrying out instructions are almost always the sons and daughters of the working class.

The Americans are saying that collateral damage will be contained by an early shock bombardment, but war always creates victims and devastation.

As part of the health care team, HEU members strive to heal, to ensure that pain is relieved and people can be productive in creating a just and humane society. We must support front line caregivers internationally and at home, and assist them in dealing with the deaths, injuries, the physical and emotional trauma and stress.

Our energy and commitment to finding peaceful non-violent solutions is the real path to creating the reality that a better world is possible.

War is both a workers' issue and a health care issue



guard the public's investment in a skilled, experienced workforce."

Last year, government projected it could save \$70 million by privatizing health care services like housekeeping, laundry and food services after passing legislation that removed long-standing protections against contracting out from health care collective agreements.

But Allnutt says those savings will evaporate in the face of corporate profit-taking and the additional cost of new bureaucracies being put in place to monitor private contractors.

contract out the work of more than 5,000 hospital staff – more than 90 per cent of them women – by June. It would be the largest mass layoff of women workers in Canadian history.

"Today, I'm renewing my call to government and health authorities to engage in direct face-to-face talks with us," said secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt.

"We need to put the chaos and confrontation of the past year behind us and work to find solutions that protect public health care and safe-

To top it off, hundreds of WCB employees are losing their jobs – meaning that when people need help to navigate the shell that has been left in services for injured workers, they have to stand in a very long line.

Thousands demand health care talks

More than 2,000 health care workers rallied in Vancouver early March to demand that the provincial government work with HEU to avert massive layoffs expected over the next few months.

HEU members and supporters protested government plans to

deaths in B.C. workplaces, benefits for workers who suffer workplace injuries and services that help them recover.

In October the WCB announced it would be closing its rehabilitation clinic where workers who suffer brain injuries and hand injuries receive the specialized care they need to recover.

"We know from years of experience that those who suffer brain injuries require very specialized care in order for them to recuperate," says Margaret Birrell, executive director of the B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities. "The head injury unit has helped literally thousands of workers recover – the loss of this facility is disastrous."

The historical pay equity victories of the Hospital Employees' Union – with an 85 per cent female membership – are under direct attack from the provincial government, and the time has come to stand up and defend them.

no going back

That was then

In the 1800s and early 1900s, the principle of “family wages” – that only men’s wages support families – institutionalized women’s economic inferiority and dependence.

This is now?

In 2003, Maple Ridge-Mission MLA Randy Hawes suggested in the legislature that HEU’s primarily female membership are secondary wage earners working for pin money.

by Carole Pearson

In 1998, HEU published a 10-year report card on pay equity titled *We’re Halfway There*. If Gordon Campbell and the B.C. Liberals have their way, the next report will be called *Back to Square One*.

Thirty years of progress in achieving pay equity for HEU’s 46,000 members is being jeopardized by regressive legislation like Bill 29 that opens the door to privatization of the province’s health care sector. At risk are the important pay equity gains HEU members have worked hard to win.

The B.C. government wants to slash jobs and reduce wages, saying unionized health care support workers are overpaid. “The Liberals have stated we make 20 per cent more than anywhere else in Canada,” says Brenda Jordison, an accounting clerk and chairperson of the Pacific Rim local in Victoria. “Well, I have news for you. The 20 per cent the

Liberals speak of was negotiated into our collective agreement and it was called pay equity.”

Because over 85 per cent of HEU’s membership are female, the government attack on their wages turns back the clock to the “bad old days” of gender-based wage discrimination, when society was complacent about two-tier wage systems and men were always paid more than women for the same work or work of equal value.

When a government attacks the wages of women workers, especially when a high proportion of these are immigrant women, women from visible minorities and older women who often face discrimination on other levels as well, Jordison says it sends the message, “How dare these women make decent wages – like men!”

It has taken decades to win recognition and redress for the discriminatory wage rates paid to female health care support workers. Through persistence and determination, HEU has led the country in achieving pay equity for women workers. The job value comparison plan alone was the culmination of

Far from being the product of some quickie sweetheart deal, pay equity victories re

1882

Toronto Trades & Labour Council backs equal pay for equal work.

1919 International Labour Organization passes Convention 100 – equal pay for work of equal value.

1936 Female VGH workers form Hospital Workers’ Union; men, the Hospital Branch of the Vancouver Civic Employees’ Union.

1944 Two unions join to create Vancouver Hospital Employees’ Federal Union, Local 180.

1951 HEU’s first convention delegates choose to negotiate separately men’s, women’s wages.

1953 Under B.C.’s new Equal Pay Act, women are required to lodge formal complaint against their employer – too intimidating for many.

1956 HEU delegates back Convention 100 and sepa-

rate minimum salaries for women, men – an apparent contradiction.

1968 Lions Gate Hospital pays \$300/month less to female cook than to male “chef” – management backs down at picket line threat.

1970 HEU wins compensation for gender-based wage discrimination for 25 radiology, physical medicine attendants under the Human Rights Act – a union first.

1972 Canada ratifies Convention 100.

1973 Arbitrator D.R. Blair upholds union’s wage discrimination claim for 12 women LPNs at Kimberley and District Hospital, setting stage to win fair wages using new human rights

legislation. HEU bargains pay raise for 8,400 female hospital workers earning below male cleaners’ rate.

1974 HEU master agreement includes job evaluation program

and eliminates wage discrimination between LPNs and orderlies.

1975 Arbitrator awards a non-discriminatory job evaluation program. HEU bargains further increase based on report.

1980 After contract talks break down, mediator awards \$2,400 lump sum payments, provisions for job classification scheme – intended to achieve comparability with wages paid to government service workers.





DALE FULLER PHOTO

The B.C. government's plans to privatize health care support services will turn back the clock on women's wages to levels unseen since the late 1960s, according to a new study by Simon Fraser University economist Marjorie Griffin Cohen.

Health privatization plans puts pay equity at risk

Most other Canadian provinces have pay equity legislation, says Cohen, but British Columbia does not, and HEU members — 85 per cent whom are women — have “played a significant leadership role in their efforts to bring about equal pay for work of equal value in B.C.”

“Pay equity settlements achieved by this predominantly female workforce demonstrate an important recognition on the part of employers and arbitrators that work performed by women in the health care sector commands wages equal to comparable work performed by male health care workers,” she says.

The study claims that the privatization of health care support services is a direct attack on those pay equity initiatives won earlier.

Not only is HEU's membership overwhelmingly made up of women, it also represents a larger proportion of immigrant women, visible minority women and older women than is present in B.C.'s working population.

“These workers are recognized as being especially disadvantaged in the workforce and most likely to benefit from pay equity initiatives,” says Cohen. “These membership characteristics indicate that the B.C. government's decision to nullify the HEU contract will leave women workers and their families in precarious economic circumstances.”

An agreement between the British multinational Compass, which was awarded the contract for cleaning non-patient areas at Vancouver Hospital, and Local 1-3567 of the Industrial, Wood and Allied Workers of Canada (IWA) illustrates what can happen to pay equity when HEU jobs are contracted out.

Cohen says this agreement “disregards an understanding that has been in place since the 1950s: women should be paid equally for performing the same work as men. In the IWA master agreement, male cleaners earn \$21.92 an hour — more than twice the wage female hospital cleaners will earn under the Compass/IWA contract.” ■

smaller but significant victories accomplished through collective bargaining, human rights complaints, meetings with government and arbitration awards.

Today, pay equity targets are being met in some classifications and the wage gap progressively narrowed in others through annual pay equity adjustments. This progress will be wiped-out if privatization and scrapping pay equity is allowed to proceed. Instead of fair wages, workers can expect low pay or job loss.

A study by Marjorie Griffin Cohen reveals two-thirds of HEU members support dependent children and/or adults. Only 20 per cent have a partner who works full-time and receives extended health benefits. By passing legislation that jeopardizes jobs and wages of HEU members, the Liberals' policies are not only attacking workers but undermining the economic security of the workers' families as well.

A study by York University says pay equity “remains a low priority for governments and capitalist employers who express a strong ideological commit-

Doreen Plouffe and Tina DeSousa joined other HEU members on International Women's Day who say that women aren't going to give up their hard-won pay equity gains.

ment to removing market rigidities, especially in the labour market.” Conversely, the B.C. Liberals have made it a high priority to eliminate pay equity.

Griffin Cohen warns the Liberals are creating a situation where the wages of B.C.'s hospital support workers could drop to the lowest pay scale in the country. If HEU members lose this battle, other women in similar jobs in the public and private sectors could be next.

“Why are we expected to earn less because we are women?” Jordison wants to know. “We went some years without a pay increase so we could have pay equity and now the government is saying, ‘We're going to rip that away from you.’”

After years of struggle, the goals of full pay equity are close to being realized. These gains are too important to give up without a fight.

There's no going back. ■

Resulted from many years of negotiations and education, and yes, some tough fights.

Classification hearings begin.

1982 Mediator Ed Peck instructs HEU, employer to apply classification benchmarks for clerical workers.

1985

Employer challenges Peck's jurisdiction, hearings suspended until 1986.

1987 Arbitrator Don Munroe adopts employer's proposal for benchmarks and payrates, incorporated in '86-'89 collective agreement.

1991 Pay equity tops bargaining demands for new collective agreement.

Union files policy grievance alleging discrimination in pay practices under HRA, targeting difference in pay between mainly female housekeeping aides and cleaners, mostly men.

1992 Negotiations breakdown, HEU members take to the streets; pay

equity adjustments rise from \$6 million to \$22 million in collective agreement.

1992-93 Massive consultation process. 3,000+ union members in all job classifications interviewed. HEU negotiates annual pay equity equal to one per cent of payroll.

1994 All HEU members receive 3.7 per cent interim comparability increase.

1996 Boss refuses to pay final comparability increases launches appeal.

1999

Arbitrator Stephen Kelleher orders comparability adjustments equaling three per cent of facilities sector payroll — effective April 1996.

2000 HEU, employer agree on \$8.5 million interest on \$100 million in retroactive pay equity payments.

2001-2004 Pay equity adjustments continue: one per cent of payroll in 2001, 1.5 per cent in 2002, and a scheduled 1.2 per cent in 2003.



DEBRA ROONEY GRAPHIC

The solidarity wrap

The 300 women who make gift bags in the Mexican maquiladora owned by Kentucky-based Duro Bag need a shot of solidarity to bring them closer to victory in their struggle.

The women went on strike to fight injustices like limited restroom access, noxious fumes and work speedups. They were harassed and fired. Despite government orders to the contrary, they have yet to be rehired.

Write to the 19th Circuit Court through the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, 530 Bandera Rd., San Antonio TX 78228. Ask the court to order Duro to reinstate the women in their jobs.

Labour Notes

It's a real problem, Coke

CUPE has joined in an international boycott of all Coca-Cola products aimed at getting the company to pay for drugs and treatment for its African workers who are living with HIV – not just those who are among its “direct workforce” of 1,500 people, but also the 100,000 who bottle and distribute Coke.

In 2001, AIDS killed nearly half a million people in southern Africa. Many die because life-sustaining anti-retroviral medications are out of their reach. Responding to pressure from AIDS activists, in September 2002 the company announced it will share the treatment costs with its largest African bottlers. Activists say Coke should extend that benefit to smaller bottlers and to children of workers who aren't covered now.

You can join the boycott by visiting the Health GAP website at <www.treat-your-workers.org>.

CUPE

Legislation slams UBC workers

DALE FULLER PHOTO

The provincial Liberals once again showed their novel approach to labour relations: slam the workers with legislation. On March 12, Victoria trashed the democratic right to strike and freely negotiate a collective agreement of about 5,000 CUPE members at the University of British Columbia.

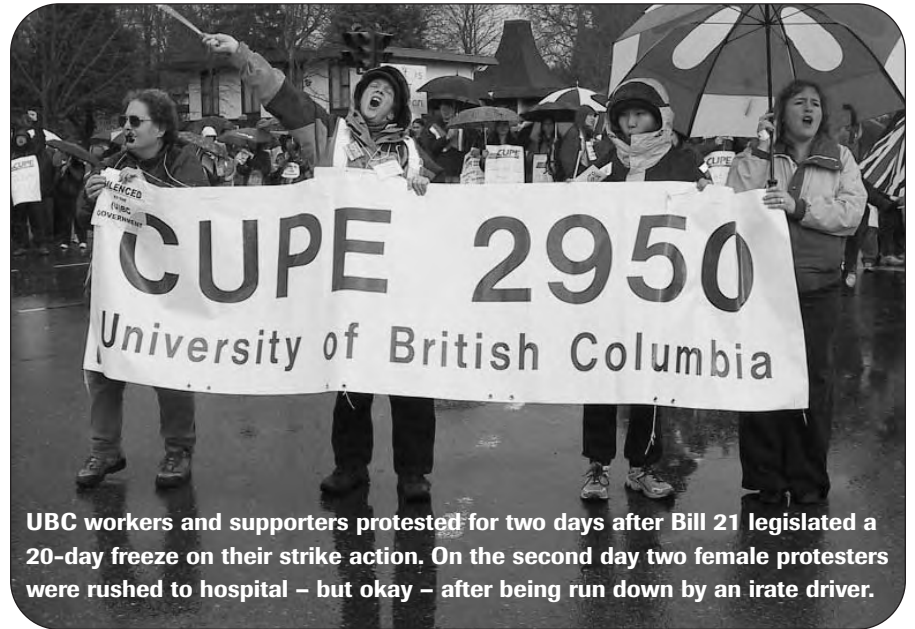
Bill 21 mandates a 20-day cooling off period between UBC and two striking CUPE locals and another still in negotiations with the university, plus the appointment of an Industrial Inquiry Commissioner and an order to resume talks within 72 hours.

Graham Bruce, minister of skills and development, had called the parties together for a discussion on March 10.

Union members thought they were close to a deal when they were blindsided by “the government’s deceitful approach to protecting an employer who is hell bent on introducing American-style universities to B.C.,” said CUPE BC president Barry O’Neill.

Two locals of CUPE 116 with outside, trades, bookstore, aquatic centre and food services workers were still negotiating, and the university was not giving an inch on its position of having the right to contract out – with an eye especially on the construction trades jobs – when the government interceded.

Sixteen hundred teaching assistants, represented by CUPE 2278, had been



UBC workers and supporters protested for two days after Bill 21 legislated a 20-day freeze on their strike action. On the second day two female protesters were rushed to hospital – but okay – after being run down by an irate driver.

staging rotating picket lines since February 24. On March 7, 1,600 clerical and library workers (CUPE 2950) put up their own picket lines after negotiations broke down.

Teaching assistants were holding firm on their principal bargaining demand – the waiver of tuition fees. Alex Grant, president of CUPE 2278, says with tuition fees going up by 20 per cent after the provincial government lifted a six-year-old freeze, having to pay for what amounts to a condition of employment is just not acceptable to his members.

UBC is also demanding the right to contract out Local 2950’s bargaining unit work and despite a stated commitment to its own pay equity targets, totally ignored it in its proposals.

The unions had been following a strategy of throwing up surprise picket lines around selected faculties and buildings for a day at a time. It didn’t shut the university down, but it made an impact.

UBC sought an injunction from the Labour Relations Board that would have prohibited on-campus picketing. The LRB rejected the university’s application, but the government had Bill 21 up its sleeve.

“This employer has given generous wage and benefits settlements to university elites, including a 63 per cent wage increase for UBC president Martha Piper,” says O’Neill. “Add to the UBC’s removal of already promised pay equity, contracting out of public services, and British Columbians start to get a picture of what this government is determined to do to public institutions.”

The government had Bill 21 up its sleeve

One January night in small town B.C.



There have been many protests and demonstrations in this small community

On the evening of January 27 and into the morning hours of January 28, 2002, while most of B.C. was asleep, Gordon Campbell’s Liberal government was busy ripping up contracts and in the process, communities and people’s lives.

I was not asleep, and neither were the people in my family. We were at my dying father’s bedside at Sechelt’s Totem Lodge. We had the television on, watching what passes for debate in our legislature since the Liberals won their overwhelming victory in the last election.

The health care workers did their work all through the night, looking in on my father to see if he needed anything, if he was comfortable, and they would occasionally stop to listen for a moment or two.

They were in shock. They could connect the dots and knew many people were going to lose their jobs because of Bill 29. But they seemed confident it wouldn’t be them.

On the Sunshine Coast the jobs that hold the local

economy together are at the hospital, the mill, the schools, the Sechelt Indian Band’s quarry, and the ferries – and in tourism during the spring and summer.

It seemed unimaginable that health care jobs would be cut on the Sunshine Coast. St. Mary’s Hospital – Totem Lodge is the extended care ward there – serves the entire Coast from Port Mellon to Earls Cove.

More than a year has passed. And yes, since they now belong to the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, health care workers on the Sunshine Coast are threatened with job loss. Since that fateful night, when Gordon Campbell broke the promise he had made to health care workers, there have been many protests and demonstrations in this small community – where the loss of jobs will be deeply felt.

This government either doesn’t understand or care that they are ripping communities apart. To people in towns like Sechelt, this government has no heart at all.

DALE FULLER • HEU COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Time for a Wal-Mart reality check

For many low-income earners bargain stores like Wal-Mart can seem too good to be true. Well, maybe they are.

The largest employer in the United States, Wal-Mart enjoys \$300 billion in annual sales and employs more than one million workers.

They plan to add 800,000 jobs worldwide by 2007, and some of those jobs may be in Vancouver if the new city council approves.

Already, there are 21 outlets throughout British Columbia, including five in the Lower Mainland. These are relatively new, but in the U.S. the company has had ample time to rack up an atrocious labour relations profile that Vancouverites may want to consider as they mull Wal-Mart's petition.

Greg Denier, communications director for the United Food and Commercial Workers' International Union says workers can't live on a Wal-Mart pay cheque, and 40 per cent of Wal-Mart workers can't afford the company's medical plan.

Workers in 27 states are suing for violation of wage-and-hour laws.

Another lawsuit charges the company of wrongly denying promotions and equal pay to 700,000 women.

The gross disparity between the company's profits and the workers' pay inevitably leads to people looking to correct the injustice – something anticipated by Wal-Mart, it seems.

The company uses interrogations, surveillance cameras and a specialized team of union busters if there is even a whiff of union organization.

Martin Levitt, a management consultant who advised Wal-Mart on anti-worker tactics and then went on to write *Confessions of a Union Buster*, said, "I've never seen a company that will go to the lengths that Wal-Mart goes to, to avoid a union."



People with all sorts of disabilities receive therapy from a whole team at G.F. Strong

Nationwide strike in U.S.

Employer raised health care premiums mid-contract

When 20,000 General Electric workers from California to New England went on strike for two days in January, the major issue was health care.

The company's August 2003 announcement that it was going to increase costs to workers and early retirees enrolled in Health Care Preferred – the company's own managed care insurance plan – for prescription drugs, medical specialists and emergency care plus introducing a co-pay for in-hospital admissions effective Jan. 1, 2003 is what sparked the first national strike against GE in 33 years.

The current contract expires on June 15, 2003 and negotiations are due to begin in May 2003 for a new collective agreement, but an option in the agreement that allows the company to raise the cost to employees of benefit premiums, also says the

unionized workers can stage strike action should that happen.

The two unions involved – the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) and the Communication Workers of America (CWA) – voted overwhelmingly in favour of a strike in late 2002.

Steve Tourney, chairman of the UE/ GE Conference Board, suggests, that as the world's largest manufacturer of medical equipment, with \$8 billion in sales in 2003, GE's interest is not in keeping costs down.

He also said that the company opposed the Patient's Bill of Rights, federal legislation that sought to marginally increase the American public's access to affordable health care.

Big business predicts that a battle is looming between U.S. corporations and their workers over health care – a problem that neither Canadian workers nor employers share with their

counterparts – because of Canada's universal health care system.

The union knew that the two-day strike would not result in the cancellation of GE's cost increases to U.S. workers.

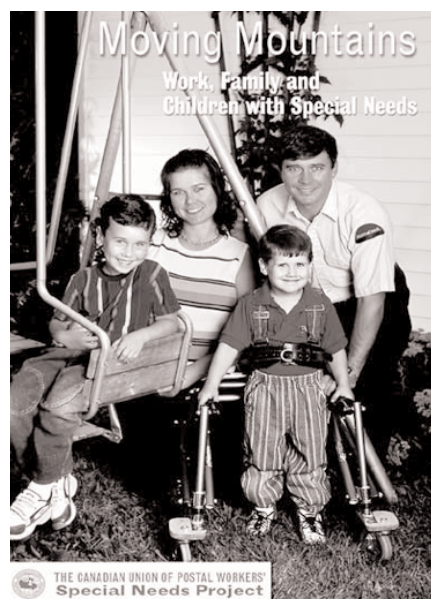
But, said John Hovis, general president of UE, "The strike was intended to demonstrate the membership's opposition to GE's cost-shifting, to exact a price from GE for its action and to mobilize

resistance to GE's stated intention to seek additional cost-shifting in contract negotiations to be held later this year."

A sad note: On the first day of the strike, a picketing worker was struck and killed by a police car outside a GE plant.

Forty-year old union activist, Michelle Rodgers, a single mother of three, was a member of UE Local 761 and worked at the GE Appliance Park in Louisville, Kentucky.

GE's interest is not in keeping costs down



CUPW's helping hand

An internationally acclaimed work and family project that meets the needs of children with disabilities and helps ease financial, physical and emotional stresses on the families is described in *Moving mountains: work, family and children with special needs*.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers' project addresses the challenges of workers who have children with special needs.

The book describes the positive difference the CUPW Special Needs Project has made for these families and even employers.

The program provides financial assistance to parents for extra costs directly related to a child's disability. Families also receive personal support and resource materials. The money comes from the union's Child Care Fund, negotiated with Canada Post in the 1990s.

G.F. Strong more than spinal cord rehab

The *Sun's* coverage of Mike Harcourt's rescue, rehabilitation and progress has been inspiring and much appreciated by those of us who work in the field.

What's missing are stories of people with severe arthritis, strokes, neuro diseases and brain injuries who also come through G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre and need comprehensive rehab. These people do not have the same visibility or profile as those with spinal cord injuries, yet the need for quality, team-based rehab and research is just as essential for them.

Right now, people with all sorts of disabilities receive therapy from a whole team at G.F. Strong – from physiotherapists to nurses, to social workers, to vocational counselors to name a only few. None of these services are billed to the person or their family.

Will this range of services provided by a whole team of therapists at no cost to patients continue if people with

spinal cord injuries are pulled out from G.F. Strong Rehab Centre and moved into Rick Hansen Institute ICORD facility? Not likely.

These are the days of budget cuts and cost shifting to patients and their families. G.F. Strong depends on a critical mass of services for people with all sorts of disabilities to continue to operate. Separating out spinal cord injury or splitting acute rehab from outpatient services may spell the end of G.F. Strong. What just may happen is outpatient services (and likely only physio and occupational therapy) will be provided solely in the private sector – at considerable cost to patients.

I hope that everyone concerned about the future of public rehab services at G.F. Strong and across B.C. will have the chance to have their voices heard by the Rick Hansen Institute and the Health Authority.

SHEILA ROWSELL • CHAIRPERSON, G.F. STRONG LOCAL

More Sodexo workers join HEU

The Hospital Employees' Union is 19 members stronger following its fifth certification of employees of the French multinational Sodexo.

The workers provide contracted dietary and housekeeping services to the residents in the 120 unit assisted living suites at Shannon Oaks, a private for-profit retirement living facility in Vancouver.

The workers voted 93 per cent in favour of joining HEU in late February. The Labour Relations Board gave the nod to certification change, but they won't get a chance to negotiate better wages or benefits until 2006 when a contract agreed to by the

workers' previous union, the Service Workers' Union, expires.

"We will go to bat to enforce the current contract," says HEU's secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt. "But we'll negotiate something better for these workers when it runs out."

New Year's baby for Kimberley?

Due to the closure of the town's hospital, Kimberley's first baby of 2003 wasn't even born in Kimberley but in Cranbrook. Kate Cecilia Lyda Corneliuson, seven pounds, three ounces, was born at East Kootenay Regional Hospital on January 5 to HEU members Ian and Rachel Corneliuson. Dad

works at Kimberley Special Care Home and mom at Cranbrook Society for Community Living.

One hour for justice

Hundreds of HEU members held One Hour for Justice information lines and rallies at Vancouver Hospital, Children's and Women's Hospital, Victoria's Gorge Road Hospital and White Rock's Peace Arch Hospital and Evergreen Baptist in late January.

Early in the morning and later in the afternoon, as workers were coming onto and off their shifts at Vancouver General Hospital, they put up an information line to protest the hospital's

and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority's refusal to back down on the contracting out of thousands of hospital jobs. Workers joined the line for one half hour before and after their shifts.

And workers at Children's and Women's Hospital in

Vancouver also had an information line going outside the facility in response to the January 20 announcement by the Provincial Health Services Authority that it had taken the next step towards privatization by issuing a Request for Proposals for a range of housekeeping and food services.

The RFP will affect more than 500 workers at C&W, the B.C. Cancer Agency and Sunnyhill Health Centre for Children.



In White Rock, health care workers, seniors and other community supporters marched from Peace Arch Hospital for a rally to the Evergreen Baptist Home, where up to 50 HEU members are set to be laid off.

BALANCING IT ALL

PATTY GIBSON

New Vancouver Parks Board member **LYNDSAY POAPS** says young people don't have the tools to actualize democracy and she wants to change that.

WORKING THE DEMOCRACY MUSCLE

GEOGE ORWELL'S QUOTE, which opens the youth organization Check Your Head's website, aptly describes one of its co-founder's strongest motivations – to unearth real information on a range of global and local issues and make it accessible to youth.

At 23, Lyndsay Poaps is an extremely busy young woman with several competing interests and responsibilities.

Not only is she a newly elected member of the Vancouver Parks Board, she is a current director of Check Your Head. A passionate advocate for social justice, she has worked for the Sierra Club of British Columbia, the People's Summit on APEC and has served as co-chair for B.C.'s Environmental Network.

As to how she keeps it all together, her answer is quick and direct. "My community and my friends."

Originally from Ottawa, Poaps says her political awareness was seeded during her teen years, first by environmental issues and then by Mike Harris' Conservative government.

"I was 15. I had a sibling who was very, very sick, and my mom was a single mom. I could see how she was being squeezed dry by the system, and began to realize the safety net that I had thought existed just wasn't there anymore."

Hence her involvement with Metro-Toronto's Days of Action, which she credits with catalyzing her current activism. "It was such a powerful protest

where people just poured into the streets to voice their opposition to Harris' cuts," says Poaps. "I remember how incredibly inspiring it was for me to see the isolation that so many people were feeling being broken down by people coming together in a common cause."

Through her involvement with Check Your Head, Poaps continues to work with others to help youth break down that sense of isolation.

In fact, Check Your Head, which was founded by youth in 1999, has organized more than 600 workshops and speaking engagements on such topics as globalization, international trade, sweatshops, media awareness, commercialization of education and genetic engineering.

Poaps believes youth are the key to making social change, and that while there is a growing movement among youth that understands what is happening globally, and wants to build a better society, she says many young people just don't have the tools to engage in meaningful dialogue – tools she believes are essential to "actualizing democracy."

"Democracy is like a muscle," she says. "If you don't work it, atrophy sets in. Then, when you go and try to move something heavy, you strain it and something snaps.

"I believe democracy is like that. If you don't work at it, it doesn't work. And what I'm really afraid of is that the way things are going, most people won't even know about their rights and responsibilities until one day they're gone."

Poaps says that when she speaks with youth she finds a huge gap in their understanding of democracy and citizen engagement. "They can write a resume or pay their taxes but they don't know how to be an intentional citizen."

Instead of the three Rs: reading, writing, and arithmetic – young people are growing up with the three Cs: corporations, capitalism, and consumption. And in that equation, corporations are seen as the new authority; while governments are perceived as lacking the power and ability to do anything.

For Poaps, that has to change. And the way to make that change is by bringing youth together on their own terms, respecting where they are at in the world, and collaborating with non-youth organizations. In this, her work is tireless.

"It's like seeing a car crash," she says. "If you saw a car crash unfolding in slow motion, and you thought you could do something to stop it, you would, wouldn't you?"

As to why she ran for the Parks Board, Poaps says she saw an opportunity to affect policy from the inside, instead of working only on the outside, and she cares deeply about the institutions and facilities run by the board.

"Our community spaces are important intergenerational ground where youth and seniors, people of all ages and backgrounds, can gather and interact with one another," she explains.

"Those interactions help make for better community members and healthier neighbourhoods. So I think it's very important that people have a real say in how those facilities are run."



POAPS

Pink slips at Gorge Road

Approximately 300 HEU members who work at Gorge Road Hospital have received their pink slips as the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) proceeds with its plans to close the Victoria facility.

The 287-bed extended care part of the hospital will be closed by September but residents are already being moved to other facilities.

The rehabilitation component of the hospital is being closed at a later date.

Mount St. Mary's in Victoria will only be able to take 74 of the residents, says HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt.



In January Gorge Road workers began staging rallies every Wednesday to inform the public that the hospital will be shutting down and that the relocation of the residents is going to be traumatic.

In the scramble to locate care for the remaining residents, many will be placed inappropriately.

He also criticizes St. Mary's refusal to take on any of the trusted experienced staff who now provide care and support to Gorge Road patients.

"The loss of familiar and committed caregivers means the loss of continuity and friendship for these residents and their families," he says.

The laid-off workers will be exercising whatever options they have left in their collective agreement under Bill 29,

which says that those with more than five years seniority can bump those with less than five at southern Vancouver Island facilities, including Lady Minto Hospital on Saltspring Island, Saanich Peninsula Hospital, the Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health, Royal Jubilee Hospital and Victoria General.

The roster of health care workers with less than five years seniority will quickly be exhausted with all the layoffs that are anticipated in the region.

"Then, under the provisions of Bill 29, it won't matter if you have decades of experience – you will be out of a job when the layoffs continue," says Allnutt.

HEU's current featured website

The B.C. Coalition of Women's Centres' whose mission is to seek an end to the violence, poverty and other human rights abuses experienced by women in British Columbia, by supporting and promoting both independent and coordinated social change action among women's centres and other equity-seeking organizations.

By visiting their website, you can find the name and contact information for a centre in your community: www.telus.net/bcwomen/BC_CWC_information.html. Or you can click on "links" on the HEU website; it is HEU's current featured website.

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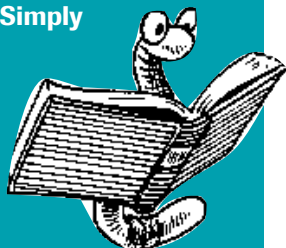
>> factfile

THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE

The Maquila Solidarity Network's People's Choice Award for the company most connected with sweatshop abuses in 2002 went to Wal-Mart, with 56 per cent of total votes. The giant multinational contributes to the notorious global sweatshop problem, and it is also known for bad treatment of its North American employees. Among other practices, workers have accused the company of requiring them to work overtime for free. According to MSN, Wal-Mart has even profited by taking out life insurance on employees, with benefits payable to the company!

FOR UNION BOOKWORMS

A unionized bookstore in Portland, Oregon will ship books free to Canada for orders U.S. \$50 and up if you place your order through their website at www.powells.com. Simply select economy shipping or USPS international surface while setting up your account. The standard shipping fees will be automatically deducted. Powell's is one of the largest bookstores in the world.



NOTABLE QUOTABLES

"We must believe in luck. For how else can we explain the success of those we don't like." ... *Jean Cocteau*

"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."

... *Will Rogers*

"Happiness is good health and a bad memory." ... *Ingrid Bergman*

ON THE JOB

DALE FULLER

Her housekeeping job is a matter of pride for **KAREN LAHEY**. She wants to keep it, and is urging other front-line workers to join her in the fight to protect their livelihoods.

DUSTER UPPER

WHEN THE VICTORIA Liberals started making noises about contracting out what they called "hotel services" in the province's health care facilities, Vancouver Hospital housekeeper Karen Lahey stood up and took notice.

Like all health care workers, she knows that a hotel and a health care setting are two different worlds. She realized there was a fight on the horizon, but she had a hard time convincing some of her colleagues that their livelihoods were threatened.

"They thought it would never happen to us," she remembers. "Either that or they were fatalistic and said there was nothing they could do about it."

But when the government actually put out a request for proposals for a housekeeping contract at the facility, there was an about-face. "Suddenly even the meekest housekeepers were saying, 'This isn't right.' They were ready to do something about it," says Lahey.

More than 300 health care workers marched from Vancouver Hospital to the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority offices on West Broadway in the first of a series of rallies and marches to fight the contracting out of VGH support services jobs. Their attempt to present a letter to VCHA CEO Ida Goodreau, asking her to meet with them to discuss the issue was spurned. She passed up the opportunity to talk to the front-line workers – the ones who know what the on-the-ground effects of privatization on their jobs will be. At the rally outside the offices Lahey spoke to the crowd about her love for her work. And how she resents health services minister Colin



DALE FULLER PHOTO

Fight for your children and for those who fought the battles before us, Vancouver Hospital housekeeper told a rally outside the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority on January 15.

Hansen's remarks that she is paid way too much. "I like my job. It's not glamorous, but for the first time in my life I am paid well and treated decently. I do a damn fine job," she says.

She feels that respect for a job well done will disappear when a private company takes over the cleaning at Vancouver General Hospital.

"They will care about how much of a profit they make. Workers who are not well-paid won't stick around. A lot of experience and skill will go down the tube, and expertise counts on this job – it's what makes the hospital safe and clean," says Lahey.

She sees this taking place in context of an attack on working people. "Me, I don't like being told that I'm not worthy of a decent life. So I am going to fight. We will not lose if we stand and fight together for our jobs, our colleagues and our health care system. We need to remember our parents and grandparents fought these battles before we did. We can't just let it go."

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HEATHER ARNOLD PHOTO



First thing January 28, the anniversary of the passage of Bill 29 that revoked HEU's facilities contract, Kelly Evans McKay, Cheryl Halbert and Josie Lofting brought their HEU balloons to Vernon Jubilee Hospital, where they festooned the fence around the perimeter of the facility.

Blue poppy honours killed, injured workers

In 1991 the federal government ordained April 28 to be the Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or Injured on the Job. This date was chosen as it marks the anniversary of the first substantial Workers' Compensation Act that was passed in Canada in 1914. As our WCB is under severe attack by the provincial Liberals, it's more important than ever to highlight this important day.

In British Columbia an average of 182 workers are killed on the job each year. An average of 472 are injured every day in B.C.



The People with disAbilities Standing Committee asks HEU members to wear their blue poppy button to commemorate this day. The buttons are being distributed to all the locals. Hold on to them year to year to wear each April 28th.

A security faux pas

Gordon Campbell has been making appearances at places like Chamber of Commerce meetings — trying to convince people he can be trusted even though he has been charged with a felony. When Peace Arch HEU

and BCNU activists heard he was going to appear at the Surrey Chamber of Commerce in late February, they reserved a table to hear what the man had to say.

His RCMP security handlers figured the women were going to heckle the poor guy. They dispatched the Chamber's CEO to tell them to behave. Megan Korol, HEU chair of the Peace Arch local, said the women were quite offended.

As a matter of fact, there was no disruption. The CEO later sent them a letter of apology and a note to Campbell telling him the women had no intention of protesting. But it seems that just being there is statement enough.

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

MARCH 21

The Elimination of Racism Day

APRIL 10-13

B.C. Federation of Labour Organizing Institute, Parksville

APRIL 18

Good Friday, HEU offices closed

APRIL 20

Easter Monday, HEU offices closed

APRIL 28

National Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or Injured on the Job

APRIL 30

Deadline to register for Pharmacare at <<http://pharmacare.moh.hnet.bc.ca>>

MAY 1

International Workers' Day

MAY 11-16

CUPE Spring School, Naramata

MAY 19

Queen Victoria Day, HEU offices closed

Labour's point of view

Sixteen years as a bus driver and labour activist taught Julius Fisher that the media is not objective in its treatment of unions and working people, and that's what eventually led him to launch *Working TV* — an alternative voice to the mainstream media.

Back when he was in his twenties and just getting involved in his union, he was shocked at the atrocious coverage meted out by the local press. "As a young man, it just seemed so unfair to me, so prejudiced," says Fisher.

He worked on the union newsletter, extending that to helping out with the NDP newspaper, honing his skills in information gathering and dissemination. Eventually it led to him enrolling as a student in communications at Simon Fraser University.

Then in 1992, Fisher had an interesting conversation with Geoff Meggs, HEU's communications director at the time (and editor of this newspaper). Meggs was lamenting the fact that he had just had to spend a phenomenal amount of money on a TV advertisement.

Fisher — rather naively — said, "Why don't you just start your own TV show? Rogers Cable makes time, studios and equipment available. It's there for the asking."

A week later Meggs called him up and said, "Let's go for it."

Well, it was there for a little bit more than just the asking — a whole lot of work was involved. And know-how that Fisher did not have. But he parlayed his experience in music and events production into crafting what became a well-regarded show.

The beginning was rocky for *Working TV* for more reasons than his inexperience, too. After broadcasting two shows, the unionized workers at Rogers began what was to become an eight-month strike.

Working TV was off the air for the duration. "But I had gotten the bug, so when the strike was over I was back producing *Working TV*," says Fisher.

Over the years the sponsorship and support of *WTV* grew to include many unions, although HEU has always been one of its biggest contributors. The on-air broadcasts lasted until September 2001, when Shaw TV brokered a deal and took over Rogers Cable.

"Shaw didn't have the same commitment to community TV that Rogers had here in B.C.," says Fisher. He's talking about the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Comm-

ission guidelines that held that in exchange for lucrative monopolies there needed to be a return to the community through a dedicated channel to "ensure that members of the communities they served had access to the broadcasting system."

When the regime changed, *WTV*'s on-air broadcasts were axed.

by Dale Fuller

But, says Fisher, relentless lobbying by Sid Tan and the Independent Community Television Cooperative of the CRTC resulted in the reinstatement of *WTV* in February 2003.

During the 20-month hiatus, however, Fisher continued to produce shows — not for television but for the Web on <www.workingtv.com>. And that will continue.

Fisher is back at school, trying to finish the communications degree that was interrupted when he had that bright idea to produce a television show for unions back in the early '90s. He's also studying web design through BCIT's distance education program.

"Right now, the Web is part and parcel of popular movements. It's pretty unregulated and that's good. We can get our message out there."

He's heard predictions about the future of the Web as it exists now, but he's cautiously optimistic that the experts' dire forecasts of corporate control of the Web is just so much hot air.

WORKING TV

Julius Fisher
Videographer
Webcaster



Fisher films the October 8 rally at Point Grey Private Hospital, protesting the wholesale layoff of the facility's care aides.



Patricia Charter (centre in hat) was delighted when American social activist Angela Davis came to Vancouver to speak in February 2000.

Community, union activist dies

Patricia Charter passed away suddenly on Jan. 20, 2003 at the age of 54 years. Her death came as a shock to her colleagues at St. Paul's Hospital and at HEU's Provincial Office where she did a short stint as a temporary representative.

Her varied pursuits encompassed theatre, dance and the music scene as well as politics and travel.

A 1980s trip to Asia fostered a love of Japanese culture, and she welcomed many Japanese exchange students to her home in the years that followed.

At her memorial service at St. Paul's Hospital her friend, BCNU member Frank Gillespie, talked about the love of literature that they shared, Japanese literature in particular. It formed the basis of a great rivalry over

who could find the latest book first. He said she was the only person he knew who had the flag flown at half-mast after she died, referring to how the City of North Vancouver, her residence for over 20 years and

where she was the chairperson of the public library's board of directors, honoured her after her untimely death.

At HEU's Provincial Office, Charter was known as a strong activist. She was a feminist and one of the movers and shakers on the NDP's and the union's women's committees. Many will miss her laughter and passion.

Nicola Valley nurse retires

Carol Sterling, an HEU member from the Nicola Valley Health General Hospital, where she worked as both an LPN and a nursing unit clerk, retired in November 2002. She's enjoying life and continuing her work as the chair of the Lower Nicola Indian Band.

Liberals hurt injured workers

Liberal government changes to Workers' Compensation Board legislation will severely curtail workers' rights to compensation for their injuries or to appeal any WCB decisions.

Now, there are two levels of appeal: one internal to the WCB and the other to the Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal (WCAT).

The first-level appeal will be to the newly-formed Review Division.

This will usually not involve a hearing and will be

an informal process, but the timelines will be extremely short and allow little flexibility.

As of May 1, 2003, the WCB department at HEU will provide assistance to help our members through the initial appeals to the Review Division only in the form of pamphlets and telephone information.

However, we encourage members to contact us immediately if their appeal is denied, so we can represent them further at WCAT.

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Broadway Printers

The *Guardian* is published on behalf of the Provincial Executive of the Hospital Employees' Union, under the direction of the following editorial committee:

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Ethnic Diversity

One union, many colours! Working across our differences! To participate, please call and leave us your name!

PRESS 2

First Nations

First Nations members would like to hear from you! Please call if you would like to help educate our union brothers and sisters on issues that affect First Nations people.

PRESS 3

Lesbians and Gays

For support: afraid of being identified, feeling isolated, want to know your rights? Call for information on same sex benefits, fighting homophobia and discrimination.

www.pridepages.org

PRESS 4

People with disabilities

If you are on WCB, LTD, or if invisibly or visibly disabled in the workplace, let us know how the union can better meet your needs.

www.alberni.net/PeopleWithDisAbilities

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Talk to us Toll-Free!

You can call any HEU office toll-free to deal with a problem or get information. It's fast, easy and free.

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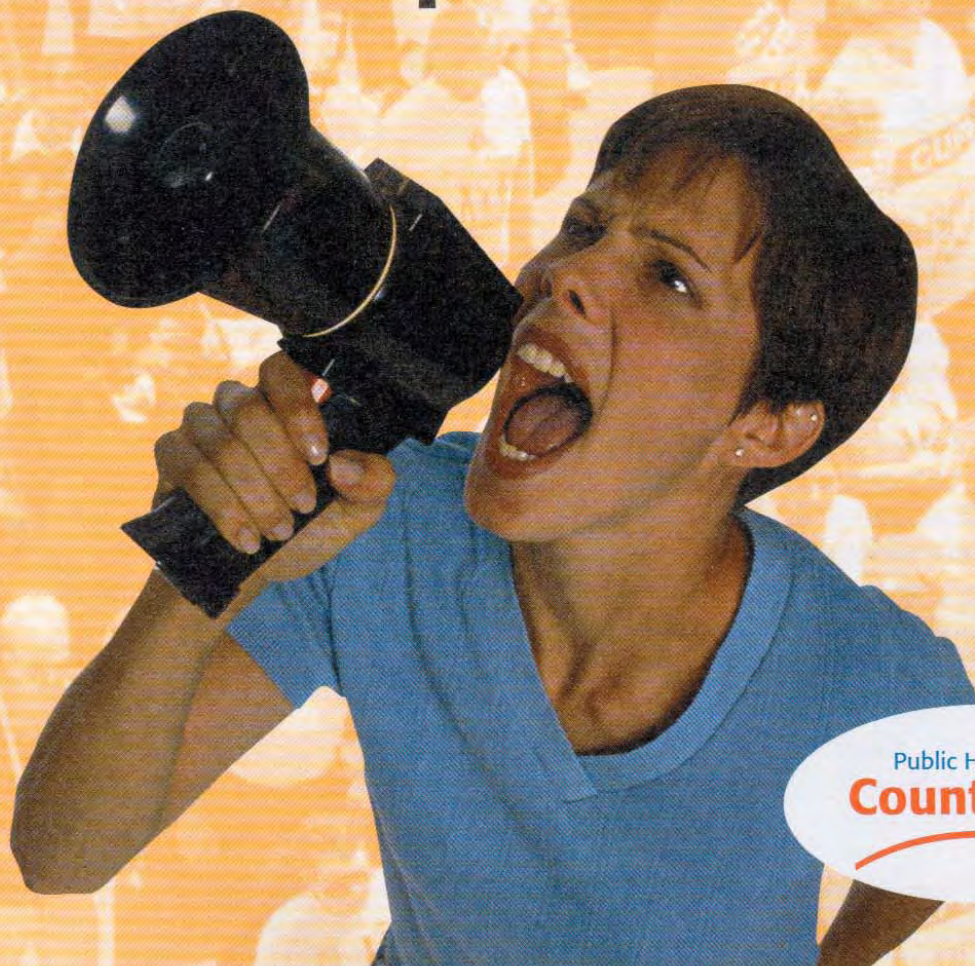
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