



WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND!

HERE'S WHAT HEU
MEMBERS ARE SAYING
ABOUT PRIVATIZATION,
THEIR FUTURES IN HEALTH CARE,
AND WORKPLACE MORALE

PAGE 8





WE'RE READY FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS

Since the union's last biennial convention in 2006, HEU members have been building new skills, taking on privatization, creating activist networks across the regions and celebrating victories.



Convention delegates gather to plot course for critical two years ahead

No time to waste as union prepares for election season and major bargaining

As the *Guardian* goes to press, nearly 600 HEU delegates are preparing for the union's 26th biennial convention in Vancouver.

They'll be debating an action plan to take the union through the next two years – a period that includes a critical provincial election and a major round of public-sector bargaining.

Delegates will also mark some big changes.

One change is the location of this year's convention. After meeting in a huge tent at a hotel parking lot for the last 14 years, the proceedings will move inside a downtown hotel.

Coincidentally, it was at that 1994 convention where provincial president Fred Muzin was first elected to that position – and he has been re-elected by delegates at every convention since.

That's also changing this year as Brother Muzin, the union's longest serving president, has announced that he does not intend to seek re-election.

That means delegates will also be electing a new president, along with 19 other

members of the Provincial Executive.

This new leadership will have to hit the ground running to make sure the issues facing HEU members – cuts to seniors' care, continuing privatization, and a shortage of skilled workers – are front and centre when British Columbians head to the polls next spring and to public-sector bargaining tables the following year.

And in the meantime, the union will need to ramp up its campaign in the community and at the bargaining table for living wages and safe workplaces for members employed by the Big 3 – Aramark, Compass and Sodexo.

To help tackle these challenges and others, delegates will debate a strategic directions paper prepared by the outgoing Provincial Executive – along with more than 200 resolutions and constitutional amendments forwarded by locals.

They deal with issues like building a

community campaign for seniors' care, strengthening the union's shop steward system, and making our workplaces safer.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says that delegates will debate proposals to invest in our members – both as workers and as leaders within the union.

"If we are to make gains in the years ahead, we must take action now to strengthen our bargaining power," says Darcy. "And we must pressure health care decision-makers and government to recognize the reality of staff shortages and act to resolve them."

Darcy says it's time for government to understand just how critical HEU members are to finding forward-looking solutions in health care.

Watch for extensive coverage of the union's 26th biennial convention in the next issue of the *Guardian*.

HEU's new leadership will have to hit the ground running to make sure the issues facing members are front and centre when British Columbians head to the polls next spring.



JUDY DARCY

We've come a long way in two short years

As I reflect on some of our greatest accomplishments since HEU's last biennial convention, I'm struck by the important strides we've made over the last two years.

Despite significant challenges, HEU members have worked together to build new networks, through twice-yearly regional meetings, and create stronger locals on the ground.

Our shop steward base has grown by 60 per cent and about 2,000 members have boosted their skills through the union's education programs. A further 800 members have also received skills training

In all the ways that count, HEU members can take great pride in our collective achievements, knowing we are stronger and ready to take on the challenges ahead.

through the Facilities Bargaining Association's Education Fund, negotiated in 2006.

facility closures, the contracting out of services in housekeeping and the trades, or mobilizing informed participation in the premier's "Conversation on Health," our members have inspired others to stand up and be counted on public policy decisions that affect everyone's lives.

At our work sites, support staff, HEU's nursing team, clerical workers, community workers and

others have worked together like never before to promote the value of their skills and their roles in both health care and community services.

And this spring, women came from all parts of the province to attend the union's first-ever women's conference.

Following the last convention, our Provincial Executive made leadership development a top priority. The result has been renewed energy and a focused team effort to move the union forward.

And of course our Supreme Court victory in June 2007 stands out as a foremost accomplishment – a true testimony to what we can achieve for ourselves and others when we're willing to push forward, despite the odds, in the face of profound injustice.

With all this in mind on the eve of convention, I am filled with optimism and hope. We've come a very long way in just two short years, and we've created not only a foundation, but a springboard for the two years ahead.

In all the ways that count, HEU members can take great pride in our collective achievements knowing we are stronger and ready to take on the challenges of the next two years.

And on a final note, I want to recognize and thank HEU's outgoing president Fred Muzin. For almost 16 years, Fred has given his all to the union's membership. We owe him our deepest gratitude for his commitment to the union, and to social justice, which is unrivaled in the labour movement. Thank-you, Fred.

voice.mail

Witnessing the pressures members face each day

Our members tell us about the challenges they face at work every day. They talk about increasingly heavy workloads. They are frustrated by under-staffing. And they worry about the standard of care they are able to provide to patients, residents and clients.

I know all this – and more. There are too few acute and long-term care beds, overcrowded ERs, long waits for surgeries and diagnostic procedures, a lack of equipment and supplies, and unsafe working conditions.

But there is nothing like first-hand experience to drive home the stark reality of the impact that the BC Liberals' cuts, closures and under-funding have had on health care since they formed government in 2001.

My mother was recently admitted to hospital for an

extended stay. During the many long hours I have spent there with her, I have witnessed the extreme pressures that our members and other health care workers contend with on a daily basis.

My observations have convinced me that the biggest obstacle to providing quality care that health care workers face is chronic under-staffing combined with a lack of appropriate personnel. The affect of this staffing crisis is demoralized and frustrated health care workers, who are unable to give the care they want and are trained to provide.

I watched individual caregivers rearrange their priorities and make very difficult, heart-wrenching decisions every hour of every shift.

For example: should a brief backrub and a kind word be given to a confused senior who has been sitting in the same position by herself all afternoon? Or should a snack be found for another who has been without nourishment and in tests since daybreak, and

now needs something to eat even though it's between meals and no food service is available? All the while, a phone is ringing off the hook with a time-strapped doctor or a harried physiotherapist or a distraught family member on the other end desperate to reach

someone on the floor. And there are a dozen other things to be done – immediately.

How do caregivers choose? And how do they leave this behind when they go home?

The answer is our members do make the best choices possible at any given moment. And when they do go home, they replay the day and weigh their decisions, always asking, "have I done everything I could have for my patients?"

My sisters and brothers, I want to tell you, yes, you have. I have seen you. I am so impressed by you. And I encourage you to advocate for each other in the same way you advocate for your patients.

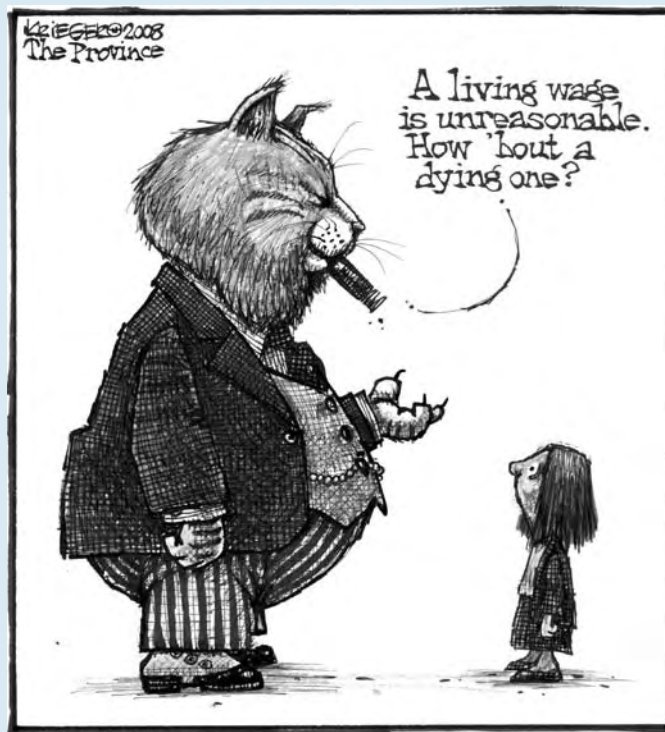
ZORICA BOSANCIC

HEU Assistant Secretary-Business Manager

Thank you for your support

On behalf of the Jack Webster Foundation, I would like to thank the Hospital Employees' Union for supporting the Foundation student journalism program. Since 2006, the HEU has enabled three journalism students each year to attend journalism programs at BCIT, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Langara College, Thompson Rivers University or UBC.

This unique program supports the next generation of



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journalists by encouraging those upon whom we will rely for our news.

Your commitment to furthering the education of student journalists is an excellent

example of your investment in the future of our community.'

NORA NEWLANDS

*Executive Director
Jack Webster Foundation*

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The *Guardian* regularly prints letters from union members on a variety of issues important to them.

Just drop us a line with your name, your local, your address and a phone number.

You can contact the *Guardian* via mail:

**5000 North Fraser Way
Burnaby, B.C.
V5J 5M3**

fax: 604-739-1519 or email: editor@heu.org





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Contract talks are now underway with Sodexo, Aramark and Compass

The dirty linen was already piled high when Pauline hoisted the sack of wet, soiled sheets over her head and onto the rack. She didn't notice the 21-pound bag teetering on the edge of the bin because she was already leaning down to pick up the next load.

As she felt the weight slam into the back of her neck and shoulders, Pauline wondered how bad the damage would be, and how she'd manage to support her family if the injury forced her off work.

Addressing health and safety incidents like the ones above are just some of the issues the union's bargaining committees have brought to the table in this fall's contract negotiations with Sodexo, Aramark and Compass (the Big 3).

All major collective agreements between HEU and the Big 3 expired at the end of September. They cover approximately 3,500 workers at 75 different sites – from large hospitals to stand-alone, long-term care facilities – in the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley, on Southern Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast.

At meetings this summer, the bargaining committees agreed on a coordinated approach in negotiations for renewed contracts with the three multinationals.

"Members fought hard for their first contracts and we are proud of those accomplishments," says HEU's secre-

tary-business manager Judy Darcy. "But we always said a united effort was the best way to achieve justice and dignity for our members over the long term.

"Adequate supplies, manageable workloads, stronger health and safety rights, improved sick time, and of course living wages – these are the things we need to improve patient care and to make our health care team stronger," adds Darcy. "That's what's at stake in this round of bargaining."

Crushing workloads, for example, often mean linen racks and garbage pile up, food trays are delivered late, and patients wait for rooms to be cleaned. Inadequate sick days and the absence of a long-term disability plan force workers to choose between coming to work injured or sick and paying the rent.

In a recent survey, 85 per cent of members working for Sodexo at Surrey Memorial Hospital reported coming to work sick, or using vacation or unpaid leave days when they're sick or injured. And in another survey of food service workers at Vancouver General Hospital, four out of five said they are sometimes or always working short.

The committees are using these findings to back up their proposals on major non-monetary items. And on the key issues of wages, pensions and medical benefits, the union is armed with solid research to make the case for significant improvements for Big 3 members.

A UBC research study, for example, shows that more than 70 per cent of



Members from the Big 3 bargaining committees gathered together over the summer to prepare for contract talks covering 3,500 workers at 75 different sites.

these members find it difficult to pay their bills – and more than 30 per cent work two or more jobs in order to make ends meet.

And the union's case for a living wage received a huge boost in September with the release of the living wage rate calculations for families living in the Lower Mainland and on Southern Vancouver Island.

The calculation project, coordinated by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), marks the beginning of a broad-based community campaign for living wages.

The campaign will put pressure on major employers, including health authorities, to institute living wage policies that ensure any staff – employed

directly or indirectly – earn enough to support their families with a basic level of economic security.

In September, HEU members, along with representatives from CCPA and First Call: B.C.'s Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, met with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority Executive Team to make the case for living wages.

In particular, they pressed for a living wage procurement policy that would lead to a stable workforce and improved patient care. Meetings with other health authorities are planned in the coming months.

"Contractors absolutely have a responsibility to pay a living wage," says Darcy. "But the health authorities who engage them must also be held to account for working conditions in their facilities.

"That's why we are working on many fronts to support the right to a living wage both in health care support services and other low-waged sectors in our communities."

Negotiations will continue through the fall at the various tables. Members can find updates at www.heu.org or by calling the Big 3 Bargaining Hotline toll-free at 1-800-663-5813 ext. 1515 or in the Lower Mainland at 604-739-1515.

For more details on the hospital support workers living wage campaign, visit www.bclivingwage.org. Information about the community-based campaign can be found at www.firstcallbc.org/about-currentProjects-LW.html.

OLIVE DEMPSEY

So what exactly is a living wage?

\$16.74 an hour. That's what both parents in a four-person, Lower Mainland family would need to earn a living wage. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released their living wage calculation at a September press conference, in collaboration with First Call: B.C.'s Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, the Community Social Planning Council of Victoria, and Simon Fraser University's Economic Security Project.

The rate of pay is based on the principle that full-time work should provide families with a basic level of economic security. But the researchers caution that this is far from a luxurious income. In fact, the

report describes the budget used to develop the rate as "bare bones".

For example, while the living wage rate calculates actual costs for necessities like nutritious food, child care, housing and transportation, it does not cover expenses such as credit card or other debt, savings for retirement, children's education or mortgage payments.

Still, the report makes clear that living wages not only improve the emotional and physical health of children and youth, but are also essential for raising the floor for all workers, and have long-term benefits for families, communities and employers.



COFFEE BREAK

Tinkerbell busted

Peter Pan's pal Tinkerbell was arrested in a demonstration outside Disneyland in California this summer. Cinderella, Snow White and several other popular fairytale figures were rounded up as well.



The Disney characters were costumed union members fighting for a fair contract at three nearby Disney-owned hotels. Some 2,300 maids, bell hops, cooks and dishwashers were working under a contract that expired three months earlier.

In all, Tink and 31 others were handcuffed, frisked and cited for a series of misdemeanours. They were released pending court appearances.

The hotel workers' union UNITE HERE said management proposals would make health care unaffordable for hundreds of workers and create an unfair, two-tier wage system. (UCS/CALM)

Believe it or not

Less than a week after the United States government gave insurance giant AIG an \$85 billion bailout, the corporation held a week-long retreat for its executives at the luxury St. Regis Resort in Monarch Beach, California where they ran up a tab of \$440,000.

Showing a photograph of the resort, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) told reporters the executives spent \$200,000 for rooms, \$150,000 for meals, and \$23,000 for the spa.

Adidas set new pace in race to the bottom

Adidas CEO Herbert Hainer recently told a German business weekly that the company is shifting its production from China in a search for lower-waged countries.

"[Chinese] salaries, which are set by the government, have become too high," says Hainer, adding that Adidas has already opened its first factory in India. "Countries like Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam will be added."

For years now, corporations have insisted that workers' wages are not the key factor in determining where they source product. But Hainer's comments suggest brands like Adidas are still chasing low wages as a primary factor. (Update/Maquila Solidarity/CALM)

Scotland halts privatization in hospital services

Over the next three years, the Scottish government will be putting an end to the privatization of its hospital housekeeping and food services.

The announcement follows a call by Britain's Royal College of Nursing to bring cleaning services back in-house. Nurses and others have raised serious concerns about the drop in housekeeping standards and the cor-

responding rise in hospital-acquired infection rates since services were contracted out to private interests.

HEU's secretary-business manager Judy Darcy applauds the decision.

"Here at home, our members who work in housekeeping and food services know how hard it is to provide high-quality services under the unacceptable wages and working condi-

tions provided by these private contractors," says Darcy.

"That's why we've called on health authorities to take responsibility for what's happening in their facilities and to ensure that companies like Sodexo, Aramark and Compass provide living wages and safe working conditions for all workers."

Know your rights

Dealing with violence on the job

The *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation* both have provisions in place to protect health care workers from the growing problem of on-the-job violence.

According to the Regulation's definition: "violence means the attempted or actual exercise by a person, other than a worker, of any physical force so as to

If risks are identified at your work site, then your employer must establish procedures and policies to eliminate those risks.

cause injury to a worker, and includes any threatening statement or behaviour which gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that he or she is at risk of injury."

Most commonly, front-line workers encounter violence from aggressive patients, residents or clients, and sometimes by their visitors.

In recognizing violence in the workplace as an occupational hazard, employers are required by law to:

- carry out risk assessments (section 4.28);

- have workplace procedures and policies (section 4.29);
- respond to reported incidents, and
- inform workers of potential risks, provide education (section 4.30), and advise injured workers to seek medical attention.

What should I do if I'm injured by a violent act?

The first step is to seek medical assistance, if required. You'll need to fill out an incident report, contact your occupational health and safety committee (or site rep), and follow up with your supervisor.

What is my employer required to do if I work in a dangerous environment?

Your employer must inform you of any potential risks – and the nature of them.

If risks are identified at your work site, then your employer has to establish procedures and policies to eliminate risks to workers, or if that's not possible, then there must be procedures and policies to minimize and control the risks.

This includes alerting staff to patients, residents or clients with a violent history. There also must be a process for responding to, reporting and investigating violent incidents, and a means for seeking assistance if a violent act occurs.

How do I stay safe at work?

If there's insufficient staff on-duty to provide care as per the "care plan" (i.e. residents known to be violent or aggressive who have a two-person care plan), do not provide care until there's appropriate staffing levels. You cannot be disciplined for refusing unsafe work.

Most importantly, learn to identify violent and aggressive behaviour. All incidents, including those involving family members and visitors, must be reported to your supervisor and documented.

The purpose of reporting violent and/or aggressive behaviour is to make your work site safer for you, your colleagues, and the residents, clients, patients in your care.

Violence is not part of the job. Everyone wins when our workplaces are violence-free.

QUICK FACTS:

- In B.C., 40 per cent of WCB compensation claims from violence are filed by health care and social services workers.
- Thirteen per cent of time-loss claims in health care sectors result from violence.
- Injury from violence is the third highest cause for filing a WCB claim.
- Many violent acts are not reported if the health care worker considers the incident as unintentional (i.e. the patient has an illness or injury that may lead to violent behaviour).

Source: Occupational Health and Safety Agency for Healthcare in British Columbia

<<newsbites>>

B.C. for Sale

A two-day conference on the perils of privatizing public services and assets, organized by the Parksville-based Oceanside Coalition for Stronger Communities, drew some of the country's best speakers to the Island town, including journalist and author Linda McQuaig and former Socred cabinet minister and talk radio personality Rafe Mair.

On the first day, participants were welcome to comment on, and challenge, points made by McQuaig, Mair, Nelson-Creston MLA Corky Evans, and publisher Mel Hurtig in their presentations. The lively interactions carried over into workshops by the BC Health

Coalition and the Columbia Institute.

On the second day, participants worked together to identify specific actions that could be taken in their communities and across B.C. to counter the federal, provincial and some local governments' growing promotion of, and reliance on, private-sector involvement in health care, education, transportation, hydro, corrections, and other public services and resources.

The Oceanside Coalition for Stronger Communities brings together union activists (including HEU members), community organizers, seniors and other concerned citizens dedicated to keeping our public services and

resources healthy and intact for the common good, now and into the future.

Power for the people

Early in October, more than 150 leaders from First Nations, environmental, labour and community groups came together for the MORE POWER TO YOU conference in Vancouver.

Organized by the grassroots advocacy organization Citizens for Public



Beyond the addiction: helping people get healthy on Vancouver's "mean streets"

The challenges that come with helping people stay alive, and get healthy, on Vancouver's infamous "mean streets" can be overwhelming.

Poverty is extreme. Addiction and disease are rampant. Hunger and homelessness are an everyday reality.

But for HEU members Manny Cu and Mandla Sibiya, who work for the Downtown Eastside Youth Activities Society (DEYAS) needle exchange program, there's a lot of hope in the small successes that come from supporting some of Vancouver's most marginalized citizens.

"When you're able to get a person into a detox program, for example, and then you see them, and the differences even a few weeks has made in their lives, it's heartening," says Sibiya. "What we're doing really sticks... We're seeing how lives can change."

Cu and Sibiya, along with six other members, work for one of Canada's first harm reduction programs. Last year, the program safely disposed of more than 1.2 million needles.

"We try to meet our clients where they're at, not just geographically, but emotionally and mentally as well."



So, how does the exchange work?

"A big part of what we do is operating Vancouver's only mobile van service," explains Cu. "We have a route and a schedule that's based on input from clients and information from drivers who know the places where users congregate."

"We'll set up in a particular place, where people know where to approach us, and we'll exchange clean syringes as well as provide condoms, water, alcohol swabs, vitamins, filters and other materials that an addict might use or need."

The service also provides information on communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and TB, as well as referrals to clinics, detox centres, STD nurses, housing advocates, and other services.

People who live outside of the Downtown Eastside area are also able to access the mobile van's services by calling 604-657-6561. Staff will respond within 24 hours.

Cu says the needle exchange is one of the most critical harm reduction tools available to help people with drug addictions stay alive and free of disease. But because addicts are often resistant to seeking help, or going to mainstream health clinics, it takes time and a lot of "non-judgmental" interactions to help them feel safe enough to access the van's services.

"People have a lot of trust issues because of their lifestyles," says Cu. "They're very suspicious. So to do our job, we need to build relationships with our clients that are based on trust. That means we don't preach. We don't look down on them. And we try to meet them where they're at – not just geographically, but emotionally and mentally as well."

He points out that a lot of workers have had their own personal experiences and struggles with addiction. "So right there you have some credibility. They're able to see the positive



JOSH BERSON PHOTOS

Members say it takes time, trust and a lot of "non-judgmental" interactions with clients to help them feel safe enough to access the van's needle exchange services.

changes a worker may have achieved and it gives them some hope, some drive to try and clean up."

Sibiya says it can be difficult for the general public to get beyond the behaviours drug-users are engaged in, but "it's important to realize that people aren't just junkies, or criminals, or addicts. They may be in active addiction, with all the negative activities associated with that, but fundamentally they're no different than anyone else. You can't just label them and dismiss their humanity."

In addition to providing services to drug-users, the program offers education, training and needle disposal services in the broader community. Examples include collecting syringes from hotels and other housing projects, providing people with sharps containers, training staff in other agencies, and collecting discarded needles when contacted.

"We also have a lot of requests from schools and community policing programs who want us to come and talk about the dos and don'ts of handling discarded syringes, and we provide 'tours' of the downtown eastside to at-risk youth," says Cu.

"We take them onto the streets and through the alleys to show them what life is really like on the street. Some of our clients may talk to them, and when they do, they try to convey that life on the street isn't a party. They tell them

the hard truth about what drug addiction really means."

For more information on this or other DEYAS programs, check out their website at <www.deyas.org>.

PATTY GIBSON



Hope in shadows

Every year, HEU partners with the Pivot Legal Society to support their "Hope in Shadows" portrait calendar, which includes winning images from a unique photography contest in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Now in its sixth year, the project provides about 200 local residents with disposable cameras and a chance to take a winning photograph. All proceeds from the calendar's sale go toward the contest's prize money for both photographers and subjects, as well as the costs involved with mounting the exhibit and printing the calendar.

You can view the full exhibition online at <www.hopeinshadows.com>.

Power, participants came from every region of B.C. During the two-day conference, they heard speakers – including Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, and John Calvert, author of *Liquid Gold Energy Privatization in British Columbia* – attended workshops that added to their knowledge of the need for public power and equipped them with campaign tools and skills.

Citizens for Public Power executive director Melissa Davis said that participants developed plans for new, citizen-driven campaigns against private power to be launched this fall in their home communities.

"Watch for British Columbians

actively monitoring rivers and creeks in their communities that have been licensed for private power project development," says Davis. "This is the start of a new defence of our waterways across the province."

You can learn more about the fight for public power in B.C. and support Citizens for Public Power by going to <www.citizensforpublicpower.ca>.

Dwindling drinking water access on campus

Water fountains are becoming an endangered species on university campuses across Canada.

That's one of the findings of a national online survey, *Corporate*

Initiatives on Campus: A 2008 Snapshot, designed to document the commercial and corporate presence on Canadian campuses.

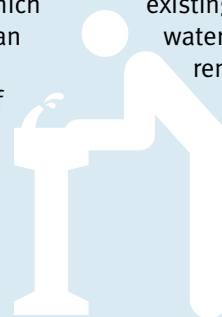
Responses to the survey, which was developed by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Polaris Institute, paint a picture of rapidly decaying water fountains and a lack of access in educational institutions across the country to clean, portable tap water.

Thirty-three per cent of respondents noted a reduction in the number of drinking water fountains on campus.

Forty-three per cent cited delays in repairing existing water fountains. Others said that new buildings are being built without water fountains, existing water fountains and cold water taps in washrooms are being removed, and vending machines are blocking access to water fountains.

One respondent from Brock University in St. Catharines explained, "There are no water fountains" in new buildings on campus, "only Pepsi machines."

"Commercialism on campus is a trend we know is on the increase," says Erika Shaker of the CCPA. "The



New activist heads to convention

Accounting assistant Marina Beauchamp is one of 2,000 HEU members who enrolled in union workshops over the past two years. She's now a chief shop steward, who's putting her skills to practice at her Kelowna Amalgamated local.

And she's excited to be a first-time delegate to the union's 2008 convention.

"All of the members I talked to at our regional meetings in April and September told me how wonderful [convention] is, and I want to learn more about the union and how it works," says Beauchamp, who's in the process of finishing her Bachelor of Science degree. "I think it'll be a great learning experience for me... I also think we need to have some more female leaders out there."

Beauchamp initially got involved in HEU when a colleague began mentoring her on the workings of the union.

"One of my co-workers thought I was a little too feisty and got me to go to an HEU meeting with her," says Beauchamp, who works at Kirschner Plaza. "I got very passionate about union activities, and that was that. After my third meeting, I was elected to be our secretary-treasurer."

Although she's only been an HEU member since 2005, Beauchamp jumped in feet first, taking a number of educational courses, including OH&S, classifications, Know and Enforce Your Rights, union activism and summer school. She also attended her first B.C. Federation of Labour convention last November.

Beauchamp describes her road to activism as "a whirlwind", adding that

she's inspired by leaders like Judy Darcy and Donisa Bernardo.

"It's really good to see a lot more female leaders, but we're still in what we call the Pink Ghetto. I'm a working mother and I'd like to inspire young workers. I used to be a single mother, so I understand the struggles. But you can move forward, you can move up."

The 35-year-old Kamloops native says her financial background brings a different perspective to the labour-management table. "I know how fiscal decisions are made and how they impact members and patients, so I have a different understanding of how things work."

With a background in science, infection control and medical terminology, Beauchamp says her knowledge of hospital systems makes her more effective as a shop steward.

Beauchamp, who has a six-year-old son, admits it's

not always easy to put yourself forward as an activist. "I am a voice for people who are afraid to speak up," she says. "At first, I was a little concerned because I deal directly with management as part of my finance job. Sometimes, my manager is cautious talking to me about work-related things. There's a fine line between my union duties and my job. But it's my professional responsibility to differentiate between the two roles."

Beauchamp says it's important for members to get informed so they know their rights, become active, and don't get intimidated. "People give up hope. They think things won't change, and that [attitude] impacts everything. People don't file grievances because they think they won't get resolved. They try to keep the peace so their jobs won't get privatized. It's important not to give up."

BRENDA WHITEHALL



"I think it'll be a great learning experience for me... I also think we need more female leaders out there."



FRED MUZIN

PRESIDENT'S DESK

The spark that ignites our flame

Creativity. Spontaneity. Solidarity.

When we function as a collective, HEU members have the ability to create a better workplace for ourselves, improve caring conditions for our patients and residents, and a more

equitable society for all. Our power derives from focused, united and strategic action in conjunction with other workers and our community allies. We have the strength to overcome our adversaries, but the struggle is not easy. Our challenge, always, is finding the energy and commitment to succeed.

When I reflect on my more than three decades as a proud HEU member, the times that were most invigorating were when we took action – together. From sit-ins in housekeeping to work-to-rule protests in pharmacy, from occupations in cafeterias to blockades at linen distribution centres, from massive rallies like "Solidarity" to picket lines and burning barrels.

However unpredictable our actions may have been for bosses and governments, we never wavered in our dedication to our patients and residents, or the services we provide.

Our power derives from focused, united and strategic action... our challenge is finding the energy and commitment to succeed.

In recent years, we've been up against many challenges that weaken our collective energy: bullying by draconian governments; the aftermath of 9/11 where right-wing interests use fear to stifle legitimate protest; increasing bureaucratic demands on our movement, and the relentless privatization of public services by a government that breaks the law so it can throw workers onto the streets.

The result is that many of us have become too disenchanted even to vote. We have just experienced the lowest voter turnout ever in the federal election.

But the tide is turning. The Living Wage Campaign, for example, is infusing us with a new-found energy while educating the public and government about the negative impact on service delivery when workers are forced to struggle to eke out a basic living.

That's why our demands for justice must include money to house the homeless, instead of tax cuts for the rich or limitless funding for the Olympics spectacle. It means feeding the needy, eliminating child poverty and providing transition centres for women rather than welfare for the banks.

The desire to create a better world is the spark that ignites our flame. While it is important that we fully participate in influencing the outcome of elections, it is not enough. We need to mobilize, take risks and build unshakeable bonds between HEU members. That's what will sustain us in the long term.

It has been a tremendous privilege to have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with you on the frontlines for 15½ years as your president. Carry the HEU torch proudly.

<<newsbites>>

responses to this survey provide a preliminary look at the effects of this trend on campus life, from sponsored activities and research to the most basic – access to tap water." *CCPA/CALM*

'Tis the season for elections

Fall 2008 will be remembered as a season of elections. First, there was the federal election on October 14, followed by two by-elections in the provincial ridings of Vancouver-Fairview and Vancouver-Burrard.

Now, in many cities and

towns across B.C., there are municipal elections on November 15, the day when citizens elect their mayors and councillors.

It's those on our city councils who govern "closest to home". They make decisions on property taxes; residential, commercial and industrial growth; zoning mixes and changes; garbage and recycling collection; sewer and water systems; parks and recreation; transportation needs, and much more.

Our sisters and brothers in the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) are

responsible for delivering most of the programs and services at the municipal level. And many CUPE locals endorse progressive candidates, who understand the value of public services and the importance of maintaining them.

HEU members know how important it is to elect politicians, who value public services and the workers providing them. If you'd like to find out who CUPE locals may have endorsed in your area, check out their website at www.cupe.bc.ca. Then, head out to vote on November 15.



Paramedics call for action on emergency medical services

B.C. paramedics, members of CUPE 873, took a strong message to the streets and into MLA offices in early October. The week-long action was prompted by serious concerns about the quality and

quantity of services paramedics are able to deliver.

In Vancouver, hundreds of CUPE 873 members rallied at the provincial cabinet offices on October 7 to demand the B.C. government take action to improve the province's ambulance services.

Carrying signs that read "An Atco trailer is not an ambulance station" and "Help Us Help You", paramedics voiced their concerns about a lack of sufficient resources and the problems they face in delivering prompt, quality services to those in need.

Cabinet shuffle and mandatory I.Q. tests betray commitment to community living

Build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors.

B.C. Liberal Party election platform, 2005

The tangled web of broken promises and failed opportunities that have plagued the community living sector for the past several years are well-known to HEU members working in the field.

They are the ones who provide front-line care to some of the province's most vulnerable citizens – people with developmental disabilities. And they've pretty much seen it all.

They've watched the Campbell Liberals' lofty promise – to deliver services with more choice through their new crown corporation Community Living BC (CLBC) – wither under the weight of cutbacks and chronic under-funding.

They've seen programs close. Services disappear. And agencies pushed to the brink.

They've seen their own wages and working conditions deteriorate to such an extent that there is now a full-blown retention and recruitment crisis throughout the sector.

And most of all, they've seen the people they support relegated, once again, to the back of the proverbial bus.

But they hadn't seen everything... not yet.

Earlier this past summer, Premier Gordon Campbell had another double-whammy in store for the beleaguered sector.

In June, he stunned the community living movement by taking all responsibility for children and youth with special needs out of the hands of the CLBC, while transferring the crown corporation from the Ministry for Children and Families to the new Ministry of Housing and Social Development.

The new ministry, headed by Rich Coleman, includes a mishmash of services ranging from the B.C. Lottery Corporation and the Liquor Distribution Branch, to welfare, adult community living services, mental health, and more.

Response was swift and critical from families, care-providers and advocates.

In a widely published editorial commentary, advocates Michael J. Prince and Tim Stainton put it this way: "The recent provincial cabinet shuffle and associated restructuring of ministries shatter the vision for providing an integrated, lifelong set of services for people with developmental disabilities."

The two respected academics echoed the outpouring of anger from families who had been counting on CLBC to create an "integrated system of service delivery" so that youth turning 19 would be able to transition to adulthood without losing critical services.

The Family Support Institute, a non-profit organization that supports families of children with special needs, called on the premier to reconsider.

"By moving CLBC's reporting relationship to the newly formed Ministry of Housing and Social Development, any connection between services to children and youth and adult services has been broken," wrote the Institute.

"We are hearing loud and clear that families are feeling as though this government has turned its back on them and chaos and confusion are once again surfacing in their lives."

Little did they realize that when they wrote to the premier on July 8, the government was preparing to pass an order-in-council behind closed doors that would deny services, including housing, to people with developmental disabilities who register an I.Q. over 70.

Before month's end, the order was signed by Premier Campbell and Minister of Children and Families Tom Christensen.

Again, the move was condemned by families, advocates, care-providers, and many in the media.

In a column titled "Liberals' moral failure on services for the disabled" *Times Colonist* editorialist Paul Willcocks stated, "When government passes a cabinet order so it can abandon people with developmental disabilities to the streets – or worse – that's just callous and irresponsible."

HEU member Marilyn Rust has worked with adults with developmental disabilities for the past 20 years. She also has a grandson with autism.

"It's frightening to think that government could force people to take an I.Q. test, and then arbitrarily cut them off the supports and services they need for their day-to-day living," she says.

"Right now, my grandson has the care and support he needs. But when he turns 18, he could have those taken away. What will happen to him then? Will he be left to the streets with no support? If this doesn't change, I fear for my grandson's future."

Rust points out I.Q. tests are considered archaic, and are only one indicator of need.

People with conditions like autism and Asperger's syndrome, she says, may register a higher I.Q. score, but be without the skills to cope with the demands of daily and social life.

PATTY GIBSON

>> factfile

- B.C. closed Woodlands, its last remaining institution for people with developmental disabilities, in 1996.
- Government provides services to only 28 per cent of the 36,000 adult British Columbians living with a developmental disability.
- More than 1,300 eligible individuals are waiting for services.
- Community Living BC was officially established in 2005. At the same time, provincial funding for adults with developmental disabilities was reduced by \$150 million.
- An estimated 1,800 B.C. families have parents between the ages of 50 and 85 caring for a developmentally disabled adult at home.
- In the last three years, more than 1,300 children with developmental disabilities turned 19.

"When government passes a cabinet order so it can abandon people with developmental disabilities to the streets, or worse, that's just callous and irresponsible."

responsible."

"We don't need to exaggerate or embellish problems with the ambulance service," says CUPE 873 president John Strohmaier. "They are all there to be seen by anyone who cares."

In a letter delivered to MLAs across B.C., the union says the demand for ambulance services has risen by an astonishing 25 per cent in the past four years alone.

Alberta seniors file class action suit

A multimillion-dollar class action suit filed by Alberta

seniors over significant residential care rent increases will have its day in court.

More than 13,000 seniors living in long-term care homes launched the lawsuit when their fees jumped by 40 per cent in 2003. And they've had two rent hikes since that time.

An Alberta judge ruled the class action suit can proceed on the grounds that the province's health authorities violated the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* by charging residents fees already covered by the *Canada Health Act*.

Plaintiffs say they're being over-billed for their accommodations, while the Alberta government defends the rent hikes as necessary "to improve the quality of resident care and services."

One senior is paying \$1,683.38 per month for a room with no shower and a bathroom that also serves as her clothes' closet. And another saw her monthly rent rise from \$800 to \$1,200.

The plaintiffs and government will meet to negotiate an out-of-court settlement or decide if they'll proceed to trial.



The "mothers of the disappeared" hold their weekly march in Buenos Aires' Plaza de Mayo on September 18. For 30 years, the "mothers" have been demanding answers about the disappearance of their children during the Argentinian military dictatorship in the late-70s and early-80s. On September 30, the United Nations opened an exhibition in New York to honour their work.



Here's what HEU members say about **key issues**, and the pressures of

what you do, where you work, how you feel...

a

bout every two years, HEU hires an independent polling company to seek out answers to those very questions. This year, Viewpoints Research talked with

802 randomly selected members about everything from their employment status to the union's performance representing its various occupational groups, to how they read their *Guardian*.

The results of the poll are considered accurate to within 3.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

"Taking stock of where our members are at is always important," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. "But with thousands of members employed by the Big 3 heading into bargaining this fall, and tens of thousands more preparing for public-sector bargaining in 2010, the member survey also gives us a lot of information we need to advocate for our members at the negotiating table."

Darcy says the polling results also help the union better respond to members' changing needs.

"Much of the information gathered through the survey helps us to improve services for our members," she says, adding that polling results are also used "to inform our discussions with government on human resource needs – such as future retirement and pensions – as well as health policy planning issues."

Some of the issues that are top of mind for HEU members are privatization, health care worker shortages, and low morale in the workplace.

For the record, here's a closer look at what the polling information reveals about who our members are, what they think, and some of the challenges they face.

Who is HEU's membership?

HEU's membership is 86 per cent women. More than half of the union's total membership is working in regular, full-time positions. Twenty-five per cent work in regular part-time jobs and 22 per cent are casuals.

One in every five HEU members is now over the age of 55. In the last 10 years, the percentage of HEU members in the 35-44 age group has dropped from 33 per cent to 23 per cent while those who are over 55 has risen from 15 per cent to 21 per cent.

That means 20 per cent of HEU's membership could be retiring in the next 10 years.

Making ends meet

Despite rising food, fuel and housing costs, more than half of HEU's membership live in households with a total pre-tax income of less than \$50,000 – the same as a decade ago. About 25 per cent have a total household income of \$70,000 or more.

On the homefront

Twelve per cent of HEU's membership are single parents, 40 per cent are couples with children, 20 per cent are single with no children, and 27 per cent are couples without children.

Almost one in five HEU members speaks a language other than English at home. After English, the most frequently spoken languages are Tagalog, Punjabi, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) and Hindi.

More than 70 per cent of HEU members know who their union steward is and over 60 per cent have contacted a steward about a work-related problem.

On the job

About half of HEU's total membership works in acute care hospitals, another 35 per cent work in long-term care, and eight per cent are in community health and community social services.

More than half of HEU's membership works in direct patient, resident and client care. Within the patient care team, 56 per cent are care aides, 26 per cent are LPNs and 17 per cent are activity aides, recreation aides and porters.

Seventeen per cent of the union's total membership works in support services. More than half of those HEU members who are working in housekeeping, dietary and laundry are still working for public-sector employers – but interestingly, 23 per cent are now employed by one of the Big 3 – Compass, Aramark and Sodexo.

What's the temperature in your workplace?

Forty-three per cent of HEU members surveyed say morale in the workplace has worsened over the past year, with 16 per cent of those



saying it's gotten a lot worse. Forty-two per cent say there has been no significant change over the last year, and only one in 10 say morale is improving.

At the same time, 57 per cent say that what's happening in their workplaces is negatively affecting the quality of care provided to patients, residents and clients. Of those, 32 per cent strongly feel that way.

Worried about the future?

One out of every three HEU members doesn't think they'll be working in health care two years from now. And more than half of those surveyed say they have already received training or will be looking for training to upgrade their positions or change careers in health care.

2010 bargaining

HEU members who are thinking ahead to the next round of public-sector bargaining in 2010, say the most important factor influencing the outcome of those negotiations will be the current shortage of health care workers.

Under the weather?

Thirty-three per cent of members surveyed report that they have been injured on the job during the past five years. This number is up slightly from our 2006 member poll, but down from 39 per cent in 2005.



Public postal service at risk for privatization

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) is sounding the alarm over a federal government-appointed review panel that's looking into the viability of deregulating Canada's postal service.

Warning against the potential for future service cuts and post office closures, CUPW has mounted a coast-to-coast campaign calling for Canada Post to remain a fully public service.

As part of that campaign, the union commissioned an Ipsos Reid poll earlier this fall that shows 69 per cent of the public opposes allowing private companies to deliver letters through Canada's public postal service.

Historically, Canada Post has had the exclusive responsibility of providing affordable postal services to Canadians, regardless of where they live – be it a large urban centre or a rural community.

However, the Canada Post Corporation Strategic Review Panel is currently deliberating on the possibility of deregulating the crown corporation. The panel is expected to announce its recommendations in December.

The Canadian Labour Congress and others have condemned any attempt by the federal government to deregulate all or part of Canada Post.

Learn more at <www.cupw.ca>.



U.S. workers mobilize for change

In the midst of skyrocketing prices, stagnating wages and mounting corporate instability, American workers are fighting for a new law that would make it easier for workers to join a union.

If passed, the *Employee Free Choice Act* (EFCA) will mean that a union can be certified once the majority of a bargaining unit signs union cards. If bargaining does not produce a first contract within 90 days, the union or the employer can apply for mediation or arbitration. If that fails, the arbitrator can direct a contract to be put in place for up to two years.

Co-sponsored by presidential candidate Senator Barack Obama, the EFCA has become a major issue in the U.S. presidential campaign. Nearly three-quarters of a million workers have signed postcards and petitions calling on the new Congress and president to enact the legislation when they take office in 2009 – something Obama has pledged to do if he is elected president.

"We will pass the *Employee Free Choice Act*," Obama has stated repeatedly. "It's not a matter of if – it's a matter of when. We may have to wait for the next president to sign it, but we will get this thing done."

The AFL-CIO has made the bill its top law reform priority, and has launched a massive campaign to build support for the legislation. Rallying a vibrant coalition of national orga-

nizations and churches of all faiths, the coalition demonstrates that the EFCA is far more than a management-labour dispute – it's an initiative that affects the entire community.

Under current law, EFCA advocates say employers are able to use intimidation and harassment to bust

the bill passed the House with a vote of 241–185.

At the same time, the American Chamber of Commerce and the right-wing Heritage Foundation are mobilizing to kill the bill. Home Depot co-founder Bernie Marcus leads the corporate opposition saying that,

if passed, the bill, "would generate billions of new dues dollars that will translate into unprecedented political power for labor unions."

That may be so, but since the early 1980s, surveys show a steady increase in public support for unions

with 65 per cent of Americans now saying they approve of unions.

Polls also indicate that tens of millions of American workers would join a union if they had the choice.

On average, union workers' wages are 30 per cent higher than their non-union counterparts.

And only 14 per cent of non-union workers have guaranteed pensions as compared to 68 per cent of the unionized workforce.

In a *Chicago Sun-Times* editorial, CEPR co-director Mark Weisbrot predicts the EFCA could "change Americans' lives more than any legislation since the New Deal brought us Social Security. The political influence of new union members would also bring us closer to such basic reforms as universal health care."

ESTHER SHANNON



Billboards like this one are part of a massive campaign by American unions to change collective bargaining laws in the United States.

union organizing drives. The Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) estimates that, on average, one in five union supporters is fired during an organizing campaign. Penalties for employers who break the law are considered so minor that employers can factor them in as part of the cost of doing business.

If the EFCA becomes law, however, workers trying to organize a union, or secure a first contract, will gain important protections while employers will face substantial penalties.

Employees who are fired or discriminated against will be eligible to receive awards of up to three times their back pay. Employers who violate employee rights can be fined up to \$20,000 per violation.

Earlier this year, Republican senators used procedural maneuvers to stall the legislation in the Senate after

>>notebook>>



If Sodexo really wants to make a difference, it should endorse the growing call for a living wage.

Corporate responsibility is a good thing

In fact, it's such a good thing that Sodexo, one of the Big 3 multinationals now providing health care support services in B.C.'s public health care system, has gone to considerable effort to brand itself as a global leader in the fight against hunger.

If you believe the corporation's glitzy new website and the promotion of its Stop HUNGER program, Sodexo is "making every day a better day" and it's all about corporate responsibility.

Through Stop HUNGER, Sodexo boasts "around 229 major initiatives and developed partnerships with more than 153 NGOs, associations, and charities" in 22 countries, including Canada.

Pretty impressive. It would be even more impressive if it wasn't so hypocritical.

In British Columbia, Sodexo has been responsible for driving down the wages of hundreds of hospital housekeepers and food service workers. These used to be good jobs with decent wages and important benefits, like pensions. Now, these workers are struggling just to make ends meet. Many are working two or more jobs, and have to decide between buying enough nutritious food for their

families, or paying their utility bills.

If Sodexo really wants to make a difference, the corporation could join groups like the Dieticians of B.C. – an association that understands the social determinants of health, and knows the importance of healthy eating – and endorse the growing call for a living wage.

Now there's something worth boasting about.

Or, Sodexo could immediately make living wages – an estimated \$16.74 an hour for workers living in Vancouver's Lower Mainland – part of the new collective agreements it's currently negotiating with HEU members.

Ironically, if Sodexo actually paid HEU members a living wage, many of these workers could afford to support the corporation's Stop HUNGER program.

How about it Sodexo? Are you up to the challenge? Are you ready to get your own house in order and put corporate responsibility into practice right here in B.C.?

MARGI BLAMEY • HEU COMMUNICATIONS

Wal-Mart workers world-wide turn to the courts in ongoing battle for basic rights

Going up against a global retail giant, with a reputation for being ferociously anti-labour, takes a lot of courage and determination.

But more and more, Wal-Mart workers – both individually and collectively – are standing up for their rights and achieving victories.

This summer, workers at a Tire and Lube Express outlet in Gatineau, Québec became the only Wal-Mart employees in North America to secure a union contract, when a three-year collective agreement was imposed by a Québec arbitrator.

The eight members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW Canada) had begun their struggle for a first contract following union certification in 2005.

At the time, UFCW Canada National President Wayne Hanley said efforts to achieve a first contract had been fraught with legal delays and stalled negotiations with the company.

Then, in mid-October, Wal-Mart Canada announced it was shutting down the Gatineau outlet because the union contract didn't fit with its business model.

"For Wal-Mart to say its employees are free to unionize but then declare that a contract produced through mediation

just doesn't work for their business model, means as far as Wal-Mart is concerned, the rights of its American shareholders are more important than the human rights of its workers in Canada."

It's the second time Wal-Mart has shut down a Québec store after its workers decided to form a union. In April 2005, Wal-Mart closed its store in Jonquiere, Québec days before an arbitrator was poised to impose a union contract.

Three years later, in August of this year, the Supreme Court of Canada agreed to hear two cases of alleged union busting brought forward by former employees at the Jonquiere store.

At issue is whether or not Wal-Mart violated the *Québec Labour Code* and the Jonquiere workers' right to freedom of association protections under the law.

In the same province, unionized workers in St. Hyacinthe are currently in binding arbitration for a first contract.

"Wal-Mart has virtually made a science of recycling their workers," says UFCW spokesperson Andy Neufeld. "As soon as there's an organizing drive in place, the company will tie things up in the courts for as long as it can. Basically, they're more than prepared to invest

huge amounts of money in lawyers, but they're not prepared to invest in their own employees."



Meanwhile, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled in early September that Wal-Mart de Mexico violated that country's constitution by paying employees, in part, with gift cards that were only usable in the company's stores.

The lawsuit was brought forward by one employee. At this point, the ruling only applies to that individual. However, other employees could decide to launch similar suits.

In reprimanding the country's top retailer, the Mexican court compared Wal-Mart's voucher program to corrupt labour practices during the dictatorship of president Porfirio Diaz in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. That was when bosses paid workers with vouchers that could only be redeemed at the stores they owned.

Those stores were ultimately abolished under Mexico's 1917 constitution.

In Massachusetts, the state's Supreme Judicial Court recently reinstated a class action lawsuit filed against Wal-Mart by employees who

claimed they were denied breaks and forced to work off the clock.

That lawsuit was launched in 2001 by two workers who filed a complaint on behalf of other employees. The suit alleged, among other things, that Wal-Mart illegally altered timecards in order to decrease payroll expenses.

Although the case was twice certified as a class action suit in 2004 – covering 67,500 workers – it was decertified in 2006 by a Middlesex Superior Court judge. With the Massachusetts Supreme Court's latest decision, however, the case will go ahead.

And in the midst of the U.S. presidential election, labour organizations have filed a formal complaint with the Federal Election Commission.

The complaint follows an August 1 story in the *Wall Street Journal* where Wal-Mart is accused of holding mandatory meetings with employees to discourage them from voting for a labour-friendly administration.

For more information on Wal-Mart's labour practices, check out walmartwatch.com and wakeupalarm.com.

"As soon as there's an organizing drive in place, the company will tie things up in the courts for as long as it can. Basically, they're more than prepared to invest huge amounts of money in lawyers, but they're not prepared to invest in their own employees."

>>voices>>



With B.C.'s provincial election looming, the timing of the 2008 UN CEDAW review is opportune.

Time for B.C. to meet its international obligations

The United Nations (UN) gave Canada a black eye in 2003, and it was mostly due to British Columbia. Why? Because, within the first couple of years of forming government, the BC Liberals enacted laws – remember *Bill 29* – and made policy changes that negatively and disproportionately impacted women.

This October, for the second time, a coalition of B.C. women's equality-seeking groups are at the UN in an effort to pressure our provincial government to do what it failed to do five years ago – live up to its international obligations to women's equality.

When Canada signed on to the UN's *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) in 1981, all levels of government in the country – including the B.C. government – agreed to uphold this international bill of rights for women.

The last time the UN CEDAW reviewed Canada, the B.C. coalition (of which the Hospital Employees' Union is a member) presented evidence of the destructive policy changes introduced by the newly elected provincial Liberal government. The UN

Committee responded, expressing pointed concern about such issues as legal aid availability, welfare rates and eligibility reduction, the abolition of a human rights commission, and changes to the prosecution of domestic violence.

The B.C. government did nothing, ignoring its international human rights obligations and the condemnation of the UN's expert review panel.

This year, the coalition is focusing on government's ongoing failure to respect women's human rights. It has documented the disproportionately high poverty rates for B.C. women, the lack of effective pay equity legislation, inadequate child care services, and more. It will also talk about government's outright rejection of the UN Committee's 2003 recommendations.

With a provincial election looming, the timing of the 2008 UN CEDAW review is opportune. Hopefully, the results will empower B.C. women to claim their human rights entitlements and bring about political change on May 12, 2009.

MARGOT YOUNG • UBC, FACULTY OF LAW

Union education fosters leadership

Since the last convention, HEU has invested substantial funds in educational workshops to support our members in building their advocacy and leadership skills. More than 2,000 members have enrolled in union training, and our local shop steward base has grown by 60 per cent in just two years.

Over the next couple of months, the union is holding courses on Introduction to Occupational Health and Safety, Know and Enforce Your Rights, LPN PRF advocacy, and a special two-day course presented by the Nursing Team called Rights, Recognition Respect: a workshop for care aides, recre-

ation and activity workers.

Course descriptions, applications and deadlines are on the HEU website, under the education section, or on your local union bulletin board.

For upcoming training opportunities available across the province, watch for the union's 2009 education calendar to be posted on our website in early December.

Support workers lobby provincial politicians

Over the past year, living wage activists have mobilized support – from nurses to church leaders to community organizations – for the campaign to ensure health authorities make contractors pay a living wage to hospital support service workers.

Activists have built a strong foundation for the campaign's next steps – taking the living wage message directly to those in power, B.C.'s MLAs.

Throughout the fall, workers employed by the Big 3 – Sodexo, Aramark and Compass – are meeting with MLAs in key ridings to educate and inform them about the issues facing hospital housekeepers and food service workers.

Workers will share personal accounts of things like missing supplies and huge workloads, while providing concrete numbers based on recent research by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, UBC sociologists, and HEU's own research department.

MLAs will also hear about



the more than 13,000 people who have signed the living wage petition, and about the HEU poll that shows nine out of 10 British Columbians believe hospital contractors should be required to pay family-supporting wages.

In each meeting, the message will be clear – decision-makers cannot absolve themselves of their responsibility for the quality of care, the wages, and the working conditions in our public health care facilities.

Lesbian and Gay Standing Committee raises funds for AIDS

HEU's AIDS WALK for LIFE team raised about \$3,000 in September by hosting a fund-raising dance and participating in the 10 km walk around Stanley Park.

This year's walk raised more than \$430,000 for the B.C. Persons with AIDS Society (BCPWA), a local organization that provides support and services to people living with HIV



HEU'S LONGEST SERVING

“While we face many challenges, our strength as a union comes from our membership. We must re-energize and involve more of our members and community organizations in the struggle.”

When Fred Muzin stepped into the position of HEU president in 1993, the union was on the eve of celebrating its 50th anniversary. It was a year dominated by the provincial government's health care restructuring strategy, which had sparked a tenacious – and ultimately successful – battle for job security protections.

And it was a year when the union had joined the massive coast-to-coast fight to challenge the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) and its threat to Canada's medicare system.

In the midst of it all, then-HEU president Bill MacDonald announced he was resigning due to health reasons. The Provincial Executive's first vice-president Muzin, a biomedical electronics technician at St. Paul's Hospital, took on the role of acting president that spring, until he was elected by convention the following year.

Right from the start, Muzin characterized his presidency with a desire to strengthen the union from the ground up, and to build relationships with community groups and organizations working in common cause with HEU members.

In his first *Guardian* column, published in September 1993, he stated: “While we face many challenges, our strength as a union comes from our membership. We must re-energize and involve more of our members and community organizations in the struggle.”

And he pledged his intention “to visit as many locals as possible right across the province in order to learn from you and to assist in this process of transition.”

Right from the start, Muzin characterized his presidency with a desire to strengthen the union from the ground up.

For the next 15 years, those core commitments distinguished Muzin's approach to the full-time position. Whether it was attending local meetings, walking picket lines, joining rallies and marches for justice and peace – he walked the solidarity talk and exhorted others to keep their eyes on what could be accomplished collectively.

Throughout his tenure, Muzin also presided over huge changes, challenges and successes in the union's recent history. Some of the most noteworthy

included the extension of the *Employment Security Agreement* to the long-term care sector; HEU's affiliation with CUPE as its health care division in B.C.; the founding of HEU's four equity caucuses; the implementation of government's newly created bargain-

and AIDS across the province. In the past five years, HEU's Lesbian and Gay Standing Committee has participated in fundraising initiatives for BCPWA, pledging more than \$15,000 in donations.

Locals reach out to young workers

Involve. Educate. Inspire. That was the message of HEU's first annual Young Workers' Month of Action in September. It was a call across the union to reach out to the next generation of activists – something many unions and members of the labour movement are turning their attention to, as more and more workers head toward retirement.

A recent HEU poll found that one in five members is now over

the age of 55, and that 20 per cent of the union's membership could be retiring in the next 10 years. The same poll found that 15 per cent of HEU members are under the age of 34.

Fortunately, efforts by groups like the B.C. Federation of Labour, who are hoping to have at least 100 young people under the age of 30 at their November convention, are helping to prepare the labour movement for this transition.

The B.C. Fed's convention will also have a day-long young worker forum, open to all young delegates, alternates and observers. Like the Month of Action, this forum will explain and review union structures and processes, while leaving space to discuss

the issues affecting young workers and their ideas for moving the labour movement into the 21st century.

Improving conditions with the PRF tool

Since negotiating Professional Responsibility language in 2006 bargaining, the union has provided ongoing workshops and resources to assist LPNs in using the PRF process at their work sites across the province.

"The PRF tool is providing many LPNs with an important new avenue for addressing workload and care-related concerns," says HEU research and policy director Marcy Cohen. "We've been getting positive feedback from our members, as more LPNs do

the training and facilities implement the PRF process."

Cohen says that several LPN PRF stewards have been holding workplace in-services, posting information, and making the forms more accessible at nursing stations to help educate their peers on PRFs.

"By filing PRFs, members have been successful in a number of areas," says Cohen. "They've reported back on improved staffing levels, increased replacement coverage, and better access to specialized training at their workplaces."

For more information on LPN PRFs and upcoming training opportunities, please visit the HEU website's education and member resources (HEU's Nursing Team) sections, or talk to your local executive.

Ombudsman launches seniors' care probe

In the midst of the most recent turmoil in seniors' care – sparked by long-term care bed cuts on Vancouver Island, at Ponderosa Lodge in Kamloops, and the complete closure of Duncan's Cowichan Lodge – B.C.'s Ombudsman has launched a systemic investigation into seniors' care.

At the time of the investigation announcement, the Ombudsman's office had received more than 50 individual complaints about seniors' care since late June, including neglect; accessibility to services; placement decisions; separation from spouses, and facility closures.

The province-wide investigation covers residential and

continued on page 14

After 15 years as the union's president, **Fred Muzin** is stepping aside to make way for new leadership and to explore new possibilities. Muzin has held office through some of HEU's best years, and has led the union through some of its biggest challenges.



PRESIDENT PASSES ON THE GAVEL

ing associations; the long-standing fight against the Campbell Liberals' health care privatization agenda, and the successful decision by Canada's highest court to strike down key provisions in *Bill 29*.

While Muzin always kept a strong focus on grassroots organizing, he was also known for his passionate involvement with global justice issues.

And while Muzin always kept a strong focus on grassroots organizing, both in the workplace and in the community, he was also known for his passionate involvement with global justice issues.

Just before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, he wrote in the *Guardian*: "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... War is both a workers' issue and a health care issue... 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."

In announcing his intention not to run for president at the union's upcoming biennial convention, Muzin told staff and the executive that he had no intention of retiring, but was looking forward to having time to reflect and explore other avenues.

He underlined his appreciation for "the extraordinary opportunities and experiences" HEU brought to his life, and reminded people that ours is a collective movement dedicated to creating economic and social justice.

The *Guardian* wishes Fred all the best in his future endeavours, and thanks him for his many contributions to HEU over the past 15 years.



continued from page 13

assisted living facilities, and home support services. It also includes an examination of standards of care and the monitoring and enforcement of those standards, and how information about seniors' care services is provided to the public and those impacted by decisions.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says that this is welcome news not only for seniors and their families, but also for health care workers.

"In recent years, HEU members working in long-term care have been speaking out about a range of problems affecting their ability to deliver quality care to our seniors," says Darcy. "Under-staffing, short-staffing, heavy workloads and

lack of supplies are among the problems many of our members have brought to the attention of their union and their employers.

"Now, we're encouraging our members to participate in the investigation and let the Ombudsman know the obstacles they face in trying to deliver quality care and support to our seniors."

Darcy points out that the investigation process is absolutely confidential. She says the union has sent letters to all members working in long-term care so they know the investigation is underway.

"Their experiences and insight will help shine a light on what's needed, throughout the system, to improve seniors' services in our health authorities."

HEU members can write the Ombudsman and fax it to the Ombudsman's office at 250-387-0198, or mail it to P.O. Box 9039, Stn. Prov. Govt., Victoria, B.C. V8W 9A5. For more information, visit <www.ombud.gov.bc.ca>.

IHA privatizes Okanagan trades

Over the past year, Okanagan HEU trades and maintenance workers have staged a comprehensive, multi-faceted campaign to keep their valuable, money-saving services in-house at Vernon Jubilee and Kelowna General hospitals.

But in August, the Interior Health Authority (IHA) fell in line with the B.C. government and its P3-promoting machine Partnerships B.C.

by handing the hospitals' plant and maintenance services over to a private contractor as part of the VJH and KGH public-private partnership expansion projects.

"Trades and maintenance workers are the unsung heroes of our hospitals," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. "Yet, the IHA is going to toss them aside in favour of a private firm that will never be able to deliver the same high quality of services at the same level of commitment that our members do."

More than 53 trades and maintenance members – including electricians, plumbers, power engineers, electronic technicians and maintenance workers – will lose their jobs in 2009.

Bill 29 claims in final stage of approval

A joint union-employer committee – chaired by arbitrator Vince Ready – is in the final stages of reviewing the processed claims submitted by current and former members who believe they were impacted by *Bill 29*.

As part of the review, the committee will determine the compensation payment for each claim. Those payments come from the \$68-million fund secured from government, by the union, earlier this year as partial settlement for last year's Supreme Court of Canada ruling on *Bill 29*.

Claimants can expect payments before the end of December.

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

NOVEMBER 1

International Volunteer Women's Appreciation Day

NOVEMBER 2-7

HEU's 26th Biennial Convention

NOVEMBER 11

Remembrance Day (HEU offices closed)

NOVEMBER 15

Municipal Election Day

NOVEMBER 20-21

Provincial Executive orientation meeting

NOVEMBER 24-28

B.C. Fed Convention

DECEMBER 1

World AIDS Day

DECEMBER 6

National Day of Remembrance & Action on Violence Against Women

DECEMBER 8-12

Provincial Executive/budget meeting

DECEMBER 10

International Human Rights Day

DECEMBER 25-26

Christmas/Boxing Day (HEU offices closed)

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Weaving the personal and political

In introducing his autobiography *What's New: Memoirs of a socialist idealist*, 95-year-old author, lecturer, researcher and political organizer Ben Swankey writes: "The need for fundamental social change is greater today than ever, now that a relatively small number of powerful corporations control the global economy... I cannot predict how and when fundamental economic and political changes will be brought about. The timing will be decided by the people who make the changes. But I remain optimistic they will come."

Perhaps one could add "prophet" to Swankey's long list of occupations, for at this point in time, October 2008, the world is facing a financial crisis so deep that nothing short of "fundamental economic and political changes" are likely to set it right.

Swankey's sense of optimism must be soaring.

That optimism, along with Swankey's humanity and humility, are the key ingredients that set the tone for his autobiography – the distilled product of decades of his notes, journals and records.

For many HEU members, who personally know Swankey, this book provides an opportunity to discover the personal experiences and historical events that shaped the man they know and admire.

Born in Steinbach, Manitoba of immigrant parents, Swankey grew up on the Canadian prairies and at 17, "after a childhood in which I made close friends, watched my family break down and experienced some hard times, I moved on, hitchhiking to Vancouver and the promise of a better future."

It was an adventurous and bumpy ride to that better future, and Swankey's journaling chronicles it all, from the most personal details to the broadest of world events.

His editor Geoff Meggs describes the project like this: "For me, the book is a unique document of one person's life seen against the backdrop of history. And that life has personal dimensions which we seldom find in political books, and a willingness to move back and forth between the personal sphere and the political sphere..."

In his straightforward style, Swankey recalls the elements that shaped his life. There are the personal segments with such



Ben Swankey

Book Review

What's New: Memoirs of a socialist idealist

by Ben Swankey
Trafford Publishing
2008

headings as "My friend Streak and the secret boys' club", "Learning to drive" and "Family life from the 1960s to the 1980s". There are the political components: "The Estevan Strike", "Alberta Hunger March, December 1932" and "Khrushchev's revelations about the crimes of Stalin".

And then, there are those that encompass both: "LPP (Liberal Labour Coalition) candidate in the 1945 federal election", "Founding the Committee of Progressive Electors (COPE)" and "The Solidarity Coalition and Operation Solidarity".

All weave together seamlessly.

On meeting the "love of my life", his wife of 45 years Hantzi Wiseman, Swankey writes, "The first time we met alone was under a big tree in a Winnipeg park. It was ten minutes to five in the afternoon... Right to the last weeks of our life together, we would draw attention to it with a happy smile and a meaning all our own whenever the clock showed ten to five."

Hantzi held Swankey's heart. Social justice and socialism held his mind. Swankey was 18

when he joined the Young Communist League. Years later, in 1989, he travelled to the German Democratic Republic and witnessed the last days of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc.

"While still mourning Hantzi's death, I was offered an extraordinary opportunity to travel to the German Democratic Republic as a representative of the Canadian Communist Party... I heard a major address by Mikhail Gorbachev, who spoke of the reforms he was introducing... Within weeks of my return to Vancouver, the Berlin Wall fell, and the GDR was swallowed up by West Germany. Two years later, I resigned from the Communist Party..."

Swankey's book concludes with two pivotal events – Hantzi's death and the fall of communism – but his passion for social justice flourishes into his ninth decade. Now living in a Lower Mainland not-for-profit care facility, Swankey, who was a member of the BC Health Coalition for many years, remains a tireless champion of medicare. HEU honoured Swankey for all his work with a special award presented to him at the union's biennial convention in 2004.

MARGI BLAMEY

In memoriam

Long-time union activist **Baljit Singh Bhatia** passed away in June.

Brother Bhatia worked as a residential support worker for Western Human Resources in Victoria since 1992.



BHATIA

In 1995, he was instrumental in helping to unionize his local at Lands End Group Home. Baljit said he wanted workers to have more job security, improved benefits, and better working conditions.

His co-workers credit him for his dedication, hard work and skill for uniting members, particularly during their sector's 16-week strike in 1999, and say he was an excellent teacher and leader.

Over the years, Baljit served as chair, vice-chair and shop steward for the Community Support Workers United (CSWU) local. A strong union activist, he also represented his co-workers at HEU's biennial conventions.

"We will all miss his insights, fortitude and wonderful sense of humour," says co-worker Helen Zeilstra. "He was a loving father, grandfather, husband and friend."

The Lands End Group Home also bid a sad farewell to **Len Hayes** who lost his long battle with cancer in July. Hayes had worked for

Western Human Resources in Victoria since 1994.

Western Human Resources worker **Carol-Ann Mann** of Victoria's Mainwaring Group Home passed away suddenly in September. She is survived by her husband and three-year-old twin daughters. Carol's local is organizing a benefit for a trust fund that has been created for the twins.

Retirements

Members and residents at Central Care Home send happy retirement wishes to care aide **Joyce Barrett** after 14 years of dedicated service. Colleagues say, "We will all miss her."

Staff at Vernon Jubilee Hospital wish pharmacy technician **Louise Schwingenschloegl** (formerly Turner) a wonderful retirement.

Louise retired at the end of May, after 32 years of service and union activism. She has served as her local secretary-treasurer, trustee and conductor.

Co-workers say, "She was very knowledgeable and fun-spirited." Louise is moving to New Westminster to be closer to her family.

And HEU congratulates LPN/patient service aide **Susan Leslie**, who retired from Cowichan District Hospital this summer, after nearly 40 years in the health care industry. Susan's been a union and community activist during her years of

service, and held positions as local trustee and shop steward. She first became an HEU member in 1968, working at Lions Gate Hospital.

Susan says she plans to travel, volunteer at her local hospital auxiliary, and continue to raise money for cancer and children's charities.

New faces

HEU welcomes administrative manager **Peter Pang** to the Provincial Office to oversee the union's administrative matters, including building maintenance and support services.



PANG

Born and raised in Hong Kong, Peter moved to Canada in 1975. He has spent 18 years with the B.C. provincial government, working in a number of ministries.

As a manager of corporate services, Peter worked at the B.C. Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Forests, and the Ministry of Environment, before heading to Prince George as a regional manager at the Criminal Justice Branch.

Prior to joining HEU's staff team, Peter worked as regional manager at the Vital Statistics Agency in Kelowna.

He and his wife have three adult children, all in university.

Welcome, Peter.

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Fred Muzin, Judy Darcy, Donisa Bernardo, Ken Robinson, Victor Elkins, Boni Barcia, Doreen Plouffe

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UNION OFFICES

Provincial Office
5000 North Fraser Way
Burnaby V5J 5M3
604-438-5000
E-MAIL heu@heu.org
INTERNET www.heu.org

Regional Offices

VANCOUVER ISLAND
Victoria Site
201-415 Gorge Road East
Victoria V8T 2W1
(250) 480-0533

Comox Site
6 - 204 North Island Highway
Courtenay, V9N 3P1
(250) 331-0368

INTERIOR REGION
Kelowna Site
100-160 Dougall Rd. S.
Kelowna V1X 3J4
(250) 765-8838

Nelson Site
745 Baker St.
Nelson V1L 4J5
(250) 354-4466

NORTHERN
1197 Third Ave.
Prince George V2L 3E4
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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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