

# GUARDIAN



SPRING 2011 • VOLUME 29 NUMBER 1 • THE VOICE OF THE HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

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Your right to a psychologically safe workplace.

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An impassioned call to live with dignity.





HERE AT HOME AND AROUND THE WORLD, workers are forging powerful new alliances within their communities and across the labour movement.

## This is what Solidarity looks like

Witness the sustained protests in Madison, Wisconsin where an entire community rose up in defense of public services and collective bargaining rights. That fightback sparked an unprecedented outpouring of solidarity across the nation and from other continents.

In the Middle East, spontaneous uprisings are challenging corrupt leadership and demanding that the extraordinary wealth hoarded by tiny political elites be shared with their citizens.

In Britain and other parts of Europe, mass demonstrations continue to oppose increasingly aggressive right-wing corporate agendas aimed at undoing decades of social and economic gains.

And here in Canada, as the *Guardian* goes to press, another federal election is shining a spotlight on our own struggle to hold onto the core values that shape a genuine democracy. Against this backdrop, HEU members are playing a leading role in advocating for the kinds of changes that will strengthen

public services, improve working conditions, and support a more just and equal society for all.

A resurgent living wage campaign that nurtures solidarity across several diverse communities is rallying support for jobs that can provide all workers with a decent standard of living.

Our Community Social Services members are creating new solidarity networks with clients, families, and community advocates to defend critical programs that support people in times of need.

A new video co-produced by HEU and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives is receiving widespread attention among seniors, workers, family members and community advocates. It challenges the kind of lopsided government priorities that have undercut our ability to provide respectful, dignified care for B.C.'s elderly.

And throughout National Nursing Week, HEU members are celebrating the cooperation and solidarity that reach across the health care team, every day, to provide patients and residents with the best possible care.

As this issue of the *Guardian* shows – whether it's on the job, after the shift, or in our communities – HEU members are drawing on the power of solidarity to reach out to others and help create positive change for themselves and for others.

**OUT IN FORCE**  
HEU members extend cross-border solidarity with American workers; rally in support of Mexican mine workers; and walk in solidarity with individuals and families to raise awareness about cutbacks in B.C.'s community social services sector.



SOLIDARITY at the U.S. border



SOLIDARITY with Mexican miners



SOLIDARITY with families and communities







JUDY DARCY

# Time to fix public sector bargaining

Next spring, collective agreements covering more than 200,000 workers in B.C.'s public sector – including more than 40,000 HEU members – are up for renewal.

In the meantime, teachers, education workers, crown agency employees and others are currently negotiating contract renewals. And at press time, community social services workers were concluding strike votes.

HEU and other unions go the bargaining table with shared objectives. We want secure jobs with fair compensation for our members. We want safer workplaces. We want to ensure that members' rights are protected.

**Too often, creative solutions identified by the parties at the bargaining tables did not receive the approval of higher-up bureaucrats who don't understand what is happening on the front lines.**

And we want to protect the public services every British Columbian depends on. We also want to negotiate provisions that would improve services to the public – like more care staff, better access to training, and smaller class sizes in our schools.

Public sector unions, public employers and government can do that – *if* they work together based on a shared interest in strengthening and improving health care and other public services.

But unfortunately, right from their election in 2001, the B.C. Liberal government approached collective bargaining in the public sector as an obstacle to their agenda of program cuts and privatization, and embarked on a ruthless attack on collective bargaining rights through *Bill 29* and other legislation.

Ultimately, our court challenge to *Bill 29* established in 2007 that workers have a constitutionally

protected right to collective bargaining (and set the precedent for the BC Teachers' Federation's recent successful court challenge to *Bills 27* and *28*).

But rather than take a lesson from the courts, the provincial government tightened its grip on collective bargaining through other means. They established increasingly restrictive negotiating "guidelines" that hamstringing public sector employers' and unions' ability to negotiate common sense solutions at the bargaining table.

That penny-wise, pound-foolish approach has made it nearly impossible for the parties at the table to make progress on key issues like reducing injury rates, environmental initiatives, or reducing prescription drug costs.

That's because government refused to consider the downstream savings from upfront investments.

Too often, creative solutions identified by the parties at the bargaining tables did not receive the approval of higher-up bureaucrats who don't understand what is happening on the front lines.

As we prepare for the next round of bargaining we are working closely with other public sector unions in B.C. And we are taking every opportunity to send government and health employers a clear message.

There is a better way to tap the creativity and experience of all those at the table.

It's time to negotiate directly and constructively on issues critical to our working and caring conditions.

It's time to value the work we do and the services we provide by abandoning the wage freeze.

It's time to restore free collective bargaining in B.C.

## voice.mail

### Health coalition thanks HEU members for their long-standing support

The BC Health Coalition would like to extend our thanks to the Hospital Employees' Union and its members for all their support over the years. This long-standing support has enabled the health coalition to grow and thrive.

Just in the past year, the BCHC's "Medicare: it's got us covered" campaign has been very successful in raising awareness about the growth of for-profit health care and mobilizing public pressure to ensure the provincial government invests in a health care system that really is sustainable and works for all.

Our Home and Community Care campaign continues to

demand quality and accessible health care for seniors and people with disabilities and that the government acts on key recommendations to improve care.

And the health coalition participated as an intervenor in the B.C. Supreme Court case launched by the for-profit Cambie Surgery Centre. Cambie aims to sell necessary health services to patients who can afford to pay a premium to jump the queue and open up B.C. to U.S.-style health insurance.

Our work ensures that the public's interest is well represented and it reminds government of its duty to mount a vigorous defense of the universal public health insurance we all rely on.

2011 will be a critical year for the BCHC. The province has clearly indicated that it plans to further advance its privatization agenda: the recent increase in residential care rates, the implementation of user fees for core hospital services, and a so-called patient focused

funding (PFF) model that threatens to open the door to further expansion of for-profit surgical and diagnostic facilities.

Please help us spread the word so that we can continue this vital work. For more

information about the health coalition, its initiatives, how to get involved – or to make a donation – visit our website at [www.bchealthcoalition.ca](http://www.bchealthcoalition.ca) or email us at [outreach@bchealthcoalition.ca](mailto:outreach@bchealthcoalition.ca)

Together we can stand up

for what the vast majority of people in British Columbia, and Canada, want: a strong, universal public system that is accessible to everyone.

**RACHEL TUTTE  
ALICE EDGE**

*BC Health Coalition Co-Chairs*

## HEU launches new website

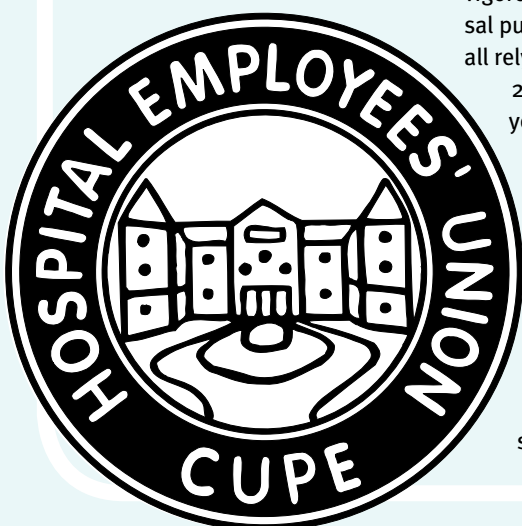
The union's award-winning website has undergone a major redesign, the third since HEU created its first website in 1998.

And thanks to all those members who sent us their ideas and suggestions in on-line surveys, the new website captures many of the changes you told us you wanted to see in a new design.

Features include social media tools, easier access to collective agreements and other member resources, image galleries, embedded videos and more.



If you haven't already – check it out at [www.heu.org](http://www.heu.org)





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## Contract chaos hits Vancouver Island

At the end of March, the Vancouver Island Health Authority announced that it was dumping Compass Group as its housekeeping and food services contractor at a number of sites in the Victoria area.

It was devastating news for hundreds of HEU members who received layoff notices effective this fall when Marquise Group – the new contractor – is set to take over services at Glengarry, Aberdeen, The Priory, Queen Alexandra, Gorge Road, Mt. Tolmie and Saanich Peninsula.

But in a surprise move, Compass announced April 26 that it had acquired Marquise Group – essentially buying out its competitor.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the union has told Compass that they should immediately rescind layoff notices and honour the collective agreement with its employees.

“Obviously, Compass continues to be the contractor for these services and therefore we fully expect that our members will be provided continued employment with the wages, benefits and working conditions that we have negotiated,” says Darcy.

“Our members should not suffer

continued uncertainty because of health authority mismanagement and corporate restructuring. And patients on Vancouver Island should not have to deal with the continuing disruption caused by contracting out.”

Darcy says that the Marquise Group buyout also underscores how little control health authorities are exercising over the services for which they are responsible.

“Privatization isn’t working,” says Darcy. “For seven years, VIHA has had to deal with food quality issues, health and safety violations, inadequate staffing and questions about their ability to effectively manage *C. diff* outbreaks.”

“VIHA should have seriously considered bringing the work back in-house where it could more effectively manage these services and monitor quality.”

VIHA first signed a commercial contract with the British-owned Compass Group in 2004 and fired more than 1,000 of its housekeeping and dietary staff using the provisions of *Bill 29*.

Most Compass staff were paid \$10.25 an hour, with few benefits and no pension.

In 2005, these employees joined HEU and the union has since negotiated two successive collective agreements which have brought hourly wages to

**“VIHA should have seriously considered bringing the work back in-house.”**

**HEU Local 4673 chair Samantha Biggins tells local TV news how contract flipping will impact workers and residents.**



\$14.20, in addition to improved benefit coverage. When the current agreement expires in 2012 the hourly wage for most employees rises to \$14.75.

With Compass’s buyout of Marquise, the union is insisting that the collective agreement is honoured at the seven sites awarded to Marquise in March.

But the collective agreement won’t apply to housekeeping services at Royal Jubilee, where Compass has lost their contract to Acciona Facility Services.

VIHA hasn’t yet said if Compass will continue to be the contractor for housekeeping at Cowichan District, Victoria General and Nanaimo Regional hospitals – and for dietary services at Victoria General and Royal Jubilee hospitals.

HEU Local 4673 chair Samantha Biggins – a dietary worker at Priory

Hospital – says members are hopeful that Marquise Group’s buyout by Compass means they’ll be able to keep their jobs. But she adds that the uncertainty has made many members take a hard look at leaving health care.

“It’s been a rollercoaster ride for our members,” says Biggins. “People’s lives have been on hold for almost a year, and they still don’t know what’s happening with their jobs this fall.”

Biggins says most Compass employees are in single-income households and many are single parents.

“We fought for seven years to win wage increases and move towards a living wage,” says Biggins.

“We don’t want to go backwards.”

**MIKE OLD**  
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

## Scottish hospitals dump privatization and cut infection rates

TWO AND A HALF YEARS AGO, Scotland banned its health authorities from signing or renewing contracts with private cleaning and food services contractors as part of a high profile campaign to reduce the rate of hospital-acquired infections (HAIs) like Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and *Clostridium difficile* (*C. diff*).

This past April, the Scottish health secretary, Nicola Sturgeon, reported that the number of cases of hospital acquired *C. diff* among seniors had fallen by 37 per cent between 2009 and 2010 – and had fallen by 45

per cent among those under 65 years.

MRSA infection rates also decreased dramatically over the same period.

In addition to ending 20 years of privatization that began under former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the Scottish government also hired 1,000 additional hospital cleaning staff and brought in rigorous new inspection standards.

These standards included announced and unannounced audits that included citizen observers, interviews with patients and staff, and evaluation of staff training and cleaning protocols. The audit process is carried out by an agency of government.

In stark contrast, B.C.’s cleaning audits – used to evaluate private contractors and assess financial penalties for poor quality work – are based on visual inspections only and carried out by a private contractor.

It is estimated that the additional costs of caring for each hospital patient infected with *C. diff* during their hospital stay runs at more than \$13,000.

Nanaimo Regional General Hospital has experienced four high profile *C. diff* outbreaks over the last three years, including a major outbreak in 2008 that affected 100 patients and was blamed for four deaths.

A report by the B.C. Centre for Disease Control into the outbreak concluded there were “insufficient numbers of cleaning staff to meet the basic daily needs of the facility and they were not adequately trained in appropriate cleaning procedures for a healthcare facility.”

Compass Group, responsible for cleaning NRGH, passed an external audit during the outbreak, and has faced no related financial penalties.







## COFFEE BREAK

### You Oughta Know

Canada is changing. And there are things about those changes that *you oughta know*. Here are some interesting facts compiled from various reports issued by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

- A universal, public pharmacare plan could save Canadians up to \$10.7 billion on prescription drugs.
- Canadian military spending is higher now than at any time since the end of WWII.
- In 1992, 45 per cent of workers had a workplace pension. That's dropped to 38 per cent.
- 14 per cent of Canada's women seniors, who live independently, are in poverty.
- Canada's municipal buildings and road, water, waste and transit systems needed \$123 billion of maintenance in 2007.
- From 2000 to 2005, average earnings for workers from visible minorities declined by 0.2 per cent compared to other workers whose wages rose by 2.7 per cent.
- In 2005, workers from visible minorities earned only \$0.81 for every dollar paid other Canadian workers.
- In 2009, the richest 3.8 per cent of Canadian households controlled 66.6 per cent of financial wealth. And the portion of financial wealth controlled by this richest group of Canadians is headed for 70 per cent by 2018.



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workers from visible minorities declined by 0.2 per cent compared to other workers whose wages rose by 2.7 per cent.



is headed for 70 per cent by 2018.

## Health education grant supports care aide and LPN training

A \$2.5 million grant from the BC Health Education Foundation will support the province's health authorities to ensure more effective utilization of care aides and LPNs.

HEU, along with its union bargaining partners and health employers, applied for the grant during last year's contract negotiations.

The joint application was supported

by chief nursing officers and human resource executives from all health authorities.

Monies will provide education and training for acute care aides; enhance clinical competencies for care aides and LPNs in residential care; develop LPN leadership in residential care; and provide training for LPNs in renal, emergency, mental health, maternity

and peri-operative specialties.

This funding is distinct from the FBA Education Fund in which the union receives and provides training support money directly to members. HEU will provide input and receive reports on how the money is put to work. Health authorities will have the overall responsibility for projects and distribution of the funds.

## Know your rights

### Safe and respectful workplaces

Every worker has the right to a safe, respectful work environment, under WorkSafeBC's *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*.

But more and more HEU members are raising warning flags about the mounting incidence of violence, harassment and bullying on the job.

#### The many faces of occupational health and safety

Although musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) are the most commonly reported causes of medical leave among health care workers, a growing number of equally alarming "invisible" health and safety risks have been identified, including mental health.

In today's climate where workers are "always running from behind" to catch up with overwhelming workloads, stress levels can escalate to dangerous proportions. And that can lead to illness, injuries and communication meltdowns.

#### Heavy workloads

Because HEU members care about their work, they often skip breaks or stay late without claiming overtime to get the job done. This is considered "invisible work." It doesn't alert the employer about the actual volume of work, and eventually the employer will expect that level of productivity.

It's the employer's responsibility to prioritize your work, review staffing levels and authorize overtime, if required.

But trying to balance union rights with job responsibilities creates a high-pressure atmosphere. If not all staff work in solidarity by taking their scheduled breaks and by not working late, members can be pitted against one another. And over the long haul, this sets up unsafe, unhealthy working conditions, adversely impacting physical, mental and emotional health.

In the facilities (Article 37), community social services (Article 22) and community health (MOA 14) collective agreements, there are provisions to protect workers from safety-related workloads and work-related illnesses.

If you have workload concerns, including insufficient staffing levels, you can file a workload incident report and contact your OH&S committee, which also handles workplace violence, safety issues around working alone or in isolation, and provides resources for members who have experienced "critical incident stress" or trauma at work.

#### What we don't want to talk about

Although bullying and harassment complaints are escalating, many incidents still go unreported because the target of the aggression may feel embarrassed, afraid or intimidated to formally step forward.

In the community social services (Article 22.5; Article 29), community health (Articles 1.4 to 1.7) and facilities (Article 4.02) contracts, harassment is defined by the terms of the *Human Rights Code of B.C.* This includes sexual harassment and discrimination for union activism.

The B.C. Human Rights Coalition defines bullying as "the act of intentionally causing harm to others, through verbal harassment, physical assault or other more subtle methods of coercion such as manipulation, including ignoring and isolating the person."

Bullying also includes "comments that make fun of or belittle or insult people, any unwelcome behaviour such as starting rumours... unfairly criticizing their work, psychologically harassing someone, keeping information from them so that they fail at their work."

#### What can you do?

Talk to a shop steward and arrange a meeting with your manager or supervisor. You may be advised by your steward to file a harassment grievance. Many employers also have respectful workplace policies with a detailed conflict investigation process to resolve such issues.

You can find more information by visiting the B.C. Human Rights Coalition at ([www.bchrcoalition.org](http://www.bchrcoalition.org)) and [BullyFreeBC.ca](http://BullyFreeBC.ca).

## <<newsbites>>

### The real pirates of the Caribbean

In today's globalized world, tax evasion is occurring on a massive scale, writes Peter Gillespie in a recent edition of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' publication, *The Monitor*.

As corporations and wealthy individuals shift their assets into offshore tax havens, the annual loss in global tax revenues is more than \$500 billion. This huge revenue shortfall is restricting the ability of governments to provide vital services to their societies.

Gillespie reports that in 2002, Canada's Auditor-General warned that corporate "tax arrangements with foreign affiliates have eroded

Canadian tax revenues of hundreds of millions of dollars in the past ten years."

A June 2008 study by the University of Quebec at Montreal concluded that the five major Canadian banks avoided \$16 billion in federal and provincial taxes through offshore affiliates between 1991 and 2003.

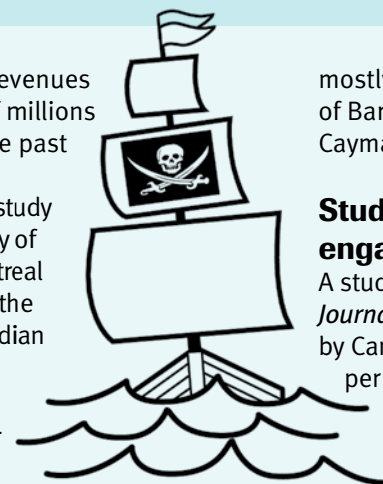
And Statistics Canada reported that \$88 billion of Canadian corporate assets were held offshore in 2003,

mostly invested in the tax havens of Barbados, Ireland, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, and the Bahamas.

### Study shows private clinics engage in illegal practices

A study published in the *Canadian Journal of Gastroenterology* and funded by Cancer Care Ontario found that 31.7 per cent of patients in private clinics are being charged for access to colonoscopy services. It also found that private clinics instructed patients to return for repeat follow-up testing more frequently than is recommended.

"Given the small but potentially serious risks of colonoscopy, as well



# Union activists set priorities for future action, pledge support for equity issues

“IT’S TIME WE HAVE A SOCIETY WHERE EVERYBODY ENTERS BY THE FRONT DOOR.”

**T**hat was the primary message delivered by keynote speaker Linda McQuaig during HEU’s equity conference on March 9 in Richmond.

“We need a strong moral campaign – about redistributing wealth, having stronger union rights and pay equity – and a return to progressive taxation in Canada,” said McQuaig, an award-winning journalist and co-author of *The Trouble with Billionaires*.

“Canadians care about equality... and support social reinvestment. We want to protect strong social programs to benefit everyone in society.”

That inequity theme was front and centre throughout the three-day conference as more than 100 HEU members from across the province gathered to discuss equity issues and challenges they experience at their work sites, within the union and also their communities.

HEU’s financial secretary Donisa Bernardo welcomed participants, emphasizing the significance of the union’s diverse membership and how critical equity is in achieving our collective goals.

“Look around this room, look at all the diversity,” said Bernardo. “All our conferences, meetings and conventions should look like this because this is what our membership looks like.”

During the conference, delegates established priorities for a two-year action agenda – including education, political action, outreach, leadership training and mentoring – and elected members to HEU’s five equity standing commit-



**Jamaican-Canadian slam poet Scruffmouth**

tees – People with disAbilities, Pink Triangle, Women’s, First Nations, and Ethnic Diversity.

Secretary-business manager Judy Darcy provided the context for the caucus workshops with a review of the union’s 2010-2012 Strategic Directions document – approved by delegates at our last convention – specifically outlining equity’s role in local building.

“HEU’s strength is in our diversity,” said Darcy. “Our union and our equity activists have long been leaders in promoting and addressing equity issues. When the women’s movement is stronger, we are stronger. When the gay rights movement is stronger, we are stronger. When the anti-racism movement is stronger, we are stronger.”

When the anti-racism movement is stronger, we are stronger.”

McQuaig echoed that sentiment. “The union makes us strong. Individual voices are hard to get out there, but as a group you can be heard and make a difference.”



**Award winning journalist Linda McQuaig**

Conference participants listened intently when McQuaig spoke about the wage inequities that still exist for women, women of colour and Aboriginal women in Canada despite pay equity initiatives. She says the damaging impacts of inequality and poverty are clearly linked to the “health and well-being of society” with higher infant mortality, teen pregnancy and crime rates.

“We need to redistribute power as well as income,” said McQuaig. “As long as [the rich] have economic clout, they have power and that undermines our democracy.”

Delivering social and political messages through spoken word poetry, Jamaican-Canadian slam poet Scruffmouth captivated delegates with his interactive style, humour and strong sense of unity.

“I respect union folks because they use their voice, so continue to speak,” he told the enthusiastic crowd.

Scruffmouth encouraged HEU activists to continue empowering ourselves by speaking up for our rights, but also stressed the importance of choosing our words carefully.

“Knowledge is power. With great power comes great responsibility.

Knowledge brings great responsibility, so please speak wisely.”

Fellow slam poet Adelene Da Soul entertained delegates on the opening night of the conference – International Women’s Day – by honouring her heritage and the most influential women in her life – her mother and grandmother.

“My writing reflects the wisdom, humour, positive spirit and strong will of my mother,” said Adelene. “She always told me to share my words with the world.”

Other guest speakers included Vancouver District and Labour Council president Joey Hartman (a former HEU servicing representative), discussing the history of women’s equality, and assistant professor at Thompson Rivers University Shelly Johnson (Keeseekoose First Nation), who brought the reality of life for Canada’s indigenous people to the conference.

“This was our biggest and best conference ever,” says HEU’s equity officer Sharryn Modder. “About 40 per cent of the members at this conference were first-time delegates. That says a lot about the outreach work our equity caucuses have been doing across the union.”

**BRENDA WHITEHALL**

as the expense, it is neither safe nor efficient to recall patients more frequently than needed. The benefits simply do not outweigh the harms,” said Irfan Dhalla, a physician at St. Michael’s Hospital and board member of Canadian Doctors for Medicare.

Doctors at private clinics also appear to be engaged in the questionable practice of self-referral – initially seeing a patient in a hospital and then referring the patient to follow up with them in their own private clinics. Ten per cent of private clinic patients said the doctor who delivered the care at the private clinic was the same one who initially referred them there from the hospital.

The risk of conflict of interest involved in referring patients to private, fee-charging clinics, in which the referring doctor has an interest, has been raised in the growing discussion about private clinics in Canada.

Charging for medically necessary services is a violation of the *Canada Health Act*, as well as provincial law. For more information, visit [www.canadiandoc-torsformedicare.ca](http://www.canadiandoc-torsformedicare.ca). (CDM/CALM)

## **B.C. network condemns community living cutbacks**

A network of B.C. family groups, advocacy organizations, unions and other community living stakeholders is demanding increased provincial fund-

ing to meet the support needs of adults with developmental disabilities.

The BC Community Living Action Group was formed in 2010 in response to a growing funding crisis in community living services, which has caused program and group home closures across the province.

Respite, day programs and other supports have also been cut, they say, leaving individuals and families strug-



**Dawn Steele speaks about the struggles families face at community living press conference.**

gling to cope. Many remain on lengthy waitlists or face significantly reduced choices when they are finally able to access services.

During an April 27 press conference held in Vancouver, BC-CLAG released a hard-hitting report – *Reaching Out, Weighing In* – which calls for increased funding for services, meaningful consultation with families and other stakeholders, and legislation to protect the inclusion rights and support entitlements of adults with developmental disabilities. (more p. 6)



# Union investing in member services

The union's new provincial executive has approved a \$34 million budget for 2011 to carry out the priorities delegates approved at HEU's convention last fall.

HEU financial secretary Donisa Bernardo says first and foremost, the union continues to invest heavily in direct services to members.

"Our locals have been clear that direct servicing support to help shop stewards and members enforce our contracts is a top priority," says Bernardo.

"Almost a third of our budget is committed to these efforts."

The union will also spend about \$2.9 million preparing for upcoming bargaining in the facilities, community health and for the growing number of members covered by independent contracts – as well supporting ongoing bargaining in community social services.

This includes a third round of occupational conferences scheduled for the fall – and a first-ever independent bargaining conference in June.

"Last fall, convention delegates made a number of important changes to our bargaining structure," says Bernardo.

"As a result, the PE has made sure that the resources are in place to ensure that HEU members in every sector have a voice in collective bargaining."

In addition, the union has also set aside resources to support a major



**HEU financial secretary  
Donisa Bernardo**

public relations campaign in support of the union's bargaining efforts.

"We also want to provide our local executives, shop stewards and health and safety activists with the tools they need to defend our members' rights on the ground," says Bernardo.

"That's why the union has put additional resources into education for stewards' training, local executive orientation and OH&S training. We've also put more emphasis on building stronger locals."

While most of HEU's revenue comes directly from union dues, the union will receive support from its national union – the Canadian Union of Public Employees – to help cover the costs of organizing new members and fighting off another raid by the BC Nurses Union.

HEU's annual budget has been provided to locals where they are available to any union member.



**KEN ROBINSON**

## PRESIDENT'S DESK

### Vote YES to extinguish the HST

Are you in favour of extinguishing the HST (Harmonized Sales Tax) and reinstating the PST (Provincial Sales Tax) in conjunction with the GST (Goods and Services Tax)?

This will be the question on a mail-in referendum ballot that will be sent out in mid-June.

Before looking at the reasons why we need to take this opportunity to get rid of the HST, I'd like to say something about the incredible, uphill effort it has taken to get here – to this point where the public will finally be allowed to have its say.

The last time I looked we were still living in a democracy. But you wouldn't know it when you think back to how the HST came about. Basically, it was slipped in through the back door, after the last provincial election, with no public input.

Instead of being honest and allowing voters a chance to discuss the issue, the Campbell Liberals misled voters by keeping us all in the dark about their plans.

They knew that if they were truthful, voters would reject the HST and it would hurt their chances at the ballot box.

That strategy helped them win the election. But it didn't win them any friends. When the HST was introduced, people knew the wool had been pulled

over their eyes.

**The HST isn't bad for B.C. because it's a tax. It's bad for B.C. because it's an unfair tax.**

As trade unionists we understand that taxes, overall, are a good thing. Without them we couldn't fund all the important services that keep our communities and our society going. Whether its highways, health care, schools or public water – these services are all paid for by our taxes.

So the HST isn't bad for B.C. because it's a tax. It's bad for B.C. because it's an unfair tax.

It's a tax that shifts about \$2 billion from corporations onto individual British Columbians. That's on top of the huge tax cuts this Liberal government has already given to corporations, which so far add up to \$1.5 billion.

This is why the labour movement calls the HST the wrong tax, at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons.

Our current tax system simply isn't fair. It isn't working for most British Columbians, it's working against us. By shifting more taxes onto individuals and working families, and giving corporations huge breaks, we are widening the gap between the rich and the poor. And we're starving many of the critical services we need.

No matter how you look at it, it's time for a change. That change starts by voting yes to get rid of the HST and by advocating for fair tax reform.

On behalf of your Provincial Executive, I urge every HEU member to learn about the issue and to vote in the referendum. Ballots go out in June and must be returned by July 22.

Your voice and your vote can make a difference.

## EVERY SHIFT COUNTS!

The work you do now contributes to your future retirement income from the Municipal Pension Plan.

Review your Member's Benefit Statement when it arrives in June to confirm you are being credited for all the time you have earned.



LEARN MORE AT [everyshiftcounts.pensionsbc.ca](http://everyshiftcounts.pensionsbc.ca)



## <<newsbites>>

It also recommends the creation of an independent provincial advocate to provide monitoring, oversight and the public reporting required to protect the rights and safety of adults with developmental disabilities.

Representatives at the press conference had a strong message for the province's new premier, asking that she make good on her "family first agenda" by including the rights and needs of adults with developmental disabilities.

A major concern, they say, is that changes to community

living programs are being driven by cost-saving imperatives, which ignore the real needs of individuals and their families.

The report warns that sweeping cuts to residential and other services are violating the fundamental rights of people with disabilities to autonomy, independence, choice, and support. And they impose a crushing life-time burden on families.

According to the report, 33 group homes were closed in Victoria, Maple Ridge, Chilliwack, Surrey, Kamloops, Williams Lake, and Terrace

between March and December, 2010. At that rate, it's estimated that about one in every three group homes will be closed within the next five years.

Despite government assurances that no one is being forcibly moved, the report notes numerous complaints documenting such occurrences.

"Forcing people from their homes, denying them choices and cutting them off from families, friends and communities, against their wishes and the pleas of their families, violates every commitment the B.C. government made

when it established CLBC," says BC-CLAG member Dawn Steele of Moms on the Move.

HEU is one of several organizations involved in the newly-formed network.

### HEU meets with B.C.'s new health minister

The Hospital Employees' Union met with B.C.'s newly appointed health minister, Mike de Jong in mid-April to raise a number of issues of concern to union members.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the union wanted to impress upon the health minister that

those who work on the front-line of health care must be part of efforts to strengthen service delivery.

The union discussed several issues with the minister including ongoing contract flipping in both long-term care and hospital services, better utilization of the skills and experience HEU members bring to the health care team, and 2012 public sector bargaining.

"I believe that the minister was receptive to our message," says Darcy. "We will continue to work with him and his ministry to improve working and caring conditions in

# From the frying pan into the fire

European trade deal threatens Canada's public water, health care, energy resources and more.

It's been described as NAFTA on steroids – another trade deal built along the same lines as the notorious *North American Free Trade Agreement* of the 1990s. And according to analysts, it's even more threatening to Canadians' democratic rights and freedoms.

The deal is called the *Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement* between Canada and the European Union – CETA, for short.

And in a new twist, our provincial and territorial governments are players at the negotiating table, right along with their federal counterparts. That's because European Union negotiators want a whole lot more out of Canada than the U.S. got under NAFTA.

They want unrestricted access to virtually all of Canada's public resources and services, including those that fall under provincial and municipal governments. This time, crown corporations, school boards, health authorities, public utilities, transportation authorities, regional districts and many others are part of the package.

NAFTA was generally limited to resources and services that fell under federal jurisdiction. CETA, on the other hand, is seeking much deeper access. And if they get it, a clause in NAFTA will open provincial and municipal jurisdictions to the Americans as well.

Scott Sinclair in a Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' report *Negotiating from Weakness* puts it this way: "European negotiators are working to downgrade regulatory standards and break up some of the public services Canadians so value, in order to increase profit opportunities for European multinationals."

He says those objectives are in line with Conservative federal government initiatives to promote the privatization of public services and reduce government regulation of corporate activity in key aspects of the Canadian economy.

It's also expected that CETA, like NAFTA, will include an investor rights enforcement mechanism allowing corporations to sue governments if domestic laws or regulations stand in the way of profit-making opportunities.

**It's also expected that CETA, like NAFTA, will include an investor rights enforcement mechanism allowing corporations to sue governments if domestic laws or regulations stand in the way of profit-making opportunities.**



Earlier this year, a delegation of trade union and community activists travelled to Brussels and Strasbourg, France where they met with European unions, environmental groups and civil society organizations, who have their own reasons for opposing CETA.

According to Sinclair's research, that mechanism has already cost Canadian taxpayers \$157 million under NAFTA.

And of key concern to public health care advocates is the global pharmaceutical lobby to extend patents and data protection on brand-name drugs.

If successful, it's estimated those new rules would add \$2.8 billion to Canada's annual drug expenditures,

a cost that would put even more pressure on our public health care delivery.

While it's no surprise that most Canadians are very much in the dark about a deal that is being put together behind closed doors, an expanding network of activists on both sides of the Atlantic is working hard to get the word out.

The Seattle to Brussels (S2B) Network – a pan-European NGO network formed in 1999 – is actively mobilizing opposition to CETA.

Here in Canada, a broad coalition of social justice groups is also sounding the alarm about what's at stake if European multinationals get their way.

It's called the Trade Justice Network, and includes the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Council of Canadians, the Sierra Club, and more than 25 other organizations who are exposing the

irreversible damage CETA could wreak on Canada's ability to control its own social and economic destiny.

Earlier this year, the Network sent a delegation to Brussels and Strasbourg, France where the sixth round of negotiations between Canada and the European Union were being held.

While there, Network representatives met with European unions, environmental groups and civil society organizations, who have their own reasons for opposing CETA.

Like their Canadian counterparts, they're deeply opposed to any international trade agreement that puts the rights and profits of global corporations ahead of the responsibilities of democratically elected governments.

And they definitely don't want oil from Canada's tar sands in Europe.

Currently, a European Fuel Quality Directive defines petroleum from the tar sands as "unconventional" or "dirty" oil. That directive discourages the use of Canada's tar sands oil in Europe, and it's something Canada wants changed under CETA.

At press time, Prime Minister Stephen Harper had pushed ahead with the seventh round of negotiations, despite strong criticism that he did not have the mandate to carry out those talks in the middle of an election campaign.

For more information about CETA and how you can add your voice to the growing number of Canadians opposing the deal, go to <[www.tradejusticenetwork.ca](http://www.tradejusticenetwork.ca)>.

PATTY GIBSON

our health care system."

Earlier in the month, HEU also met with B.C.'s new labour minister, Stephanie Cadieux.

## Day of Mourning

On April 28, the National Day of Mourning honouring killed and injured workers, B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair was among the family members, union representatives and elected officials who gathered in the Workers' Memorial Sanctuary at Vancouver's Hastings Park to remember the losses and call for stronger health and

safety provisions.

"Workers in B.C. continue to pay far too high a price for simply going to work to support themselves and their families," said Sinclair.

HEU president Ken Robinson, who attended the ceremony, said health care workers experience more incidents of on-the-job injuries than any other sector. The union continues to press for stronger enforcement of existing laws and regulations to ensure health facilities become safer places to work.

The Federation is calling on the provincial govern-

ment and the Workers' Compensation Board to:

- hire more prevention officers, with a focus on enforcement in high-risk industries;
- develop a comprehensive public awareness campaign on workplace and public hazards of exposure to substances;
- provide stricter enforcement of the regulations surrounding occupational chemical hazards;
- establish a registry of public buildings and workplaces that are known to contain asbestos; and
- increase criminal prosecu-

tions of employers who willfully ignore worker safety.

## Community Social Services members take strike votes

At press time, strike votes were underway at worksites throughout the community social services sector.

Talks between the provincial government, employers and the nine unions representing community-based social services workers in B.C. collapsed March 30 following a "last-ditch" effort to reach an agreement.

Union bargaining representatives say the Community Social Services Employers' Association refused to budge on key employment security issues which are critical for members facing job loss and displacement throughout the sector.

Efforts to reach a deal with CSSEA began more than 18 months ago.

Community social services workers provide a wide range of assistance to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. HEU is one of nine unions representing CSS workers.



# DEPRESSION. anxiety. B

## Your right to a psychologically safe workplace

**W**HEN PEOPLE THINK ABOUT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY, the first things that come to mind are usually associated with physical injury or illness. But recent and growing evidence shows emotional and mental health disorders are now the leading cause of absenteeism in the workplace.

In health care, where injuries due to slips, trips and lifts – and more recently violence in the workplace – have been the focus for many years, sick leave and disability claims are demonstrating how the increasing demands of the job are taking a toll on workers' mental health.

**F**or health care workers, the main causes are out-of-control workloads due to the chronic practice of short-staffing, years of budget cuts, and the more complex care needs of patients and long-term care residents.

And the effects of depression, anxiety and burnout don't stop at the workplace.

The repercussions of these and other mental health conditions reach beyond the job and impact workers' personal well-being, their families and their communities.

### Union members ahead of the curve

HEU members have long recognized the pressures of working in health care and community social services, and the need to address those pressures in order to prevent emotional and psychological distress.

That's why, when HEU bargaining committees go to the negotiation table – public or private sector, large or small employer – they work hard

to win rights and protections that contribute to a healthy workplace and healthy work-life balance.

Those include: occupational health and safety provisions, shift scheduling and rotations, employee and family assistance programs, health benefits, long-term disability, sick leave and special leave, and more.

“Rolling back benefits and working conditions is a common theme with employers these days,” says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. “But good mental health is key to a healthy workplace. Employers ignore this fact at their peril.

“In spite of all the solid research and evidence available today,” she says, “We're still experiencing a head-in-the-sand response to this well-documented problem from most health employers.

“In the last two rounds of bargaining for the facilities sub-sector collective agreement, health employers were determined to reduce our benefits. We pushed back, held our ground and even made improvements, particularly around work-life balance issues.

“In community social services, a sector where stress is high and staff recruitment and retention is a serious problem, sick time and benefits were reduced in 2004 and have yet to be recovered.

“And employer demands to cut benefits repeatedly occurs in negotiations for independent collective agreements with de-accredited residential care facility owners and private contractors across the province,” says Darcy.

### Employers are slow to act

Absenteeism due to unresolved psychological conditions has become a major concern for employers. Whether workers are off for a few days at a time or longer periods, the costs to health benefits and disability plans are going up.

And there are related human resources costs. If absent personnel are not replaced, workload increases for their coworkers. This can lead to reduced productivity, poor morale – and in turn, more absenteeism.

In B.C., where health authorities wrestle with provincial government-imposed budgets, many managers and senior officials are focusing on getting employees back to work quickly rather than preventing an absence in the first place.

Health employers are turning to rapid return-to-work programs and more punitive measures like a doctor's note for one day of sick leave, to address absenteeism instead of

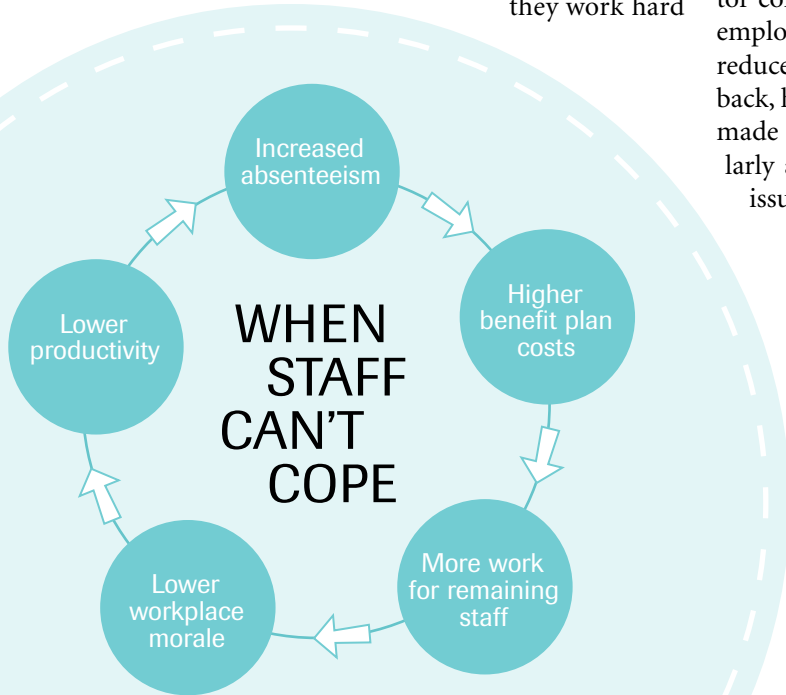
vigorously implementing mental health promotion and prevention initiatives. And while high demands and heavy workloads in all areas of health care may be acknowledged, little is being done to relieve this.

Ana Rahmat, HEU's occupational health and safety officer, says that employers talk a good talk about mental health issues but falter when it comes to walking the walk.

“Unions, employers, mental health experts all agree that the number of workers affected by depression, anxiety and other psychological or emotional conditions is growing, and that this is taking a toll in our workplaces,” she says.

“But when it comes to being pro-active

**If absent personnel are not replaced, workload increases for their coworkers. This can lead to reduced productivity, poor morale – and in turn, more absenteeism.**









## Chile backtracks on mine safety reform

From August to October 2010, the world was riveted to the spectacular rescue of 33 Chilean copper miners from a collapsed mine in northern Chile.

Four days after the last miner emerged from the two-month ordeal in the San Jose mine, Chilean president Sebastian Pinera pledged to reform mine safety and monitoring laws and adopt United Nations safety standards in mines (*ILO Convention 176*).

And he promised those reforms within 90 days. But with the cameras gone, along with international press coverage and oversight, Pinera's not making good on any of those promises.

In early 2011 when the International Federation of Chemical, Energy & Mine Workers (ICEM) met with senior leaders in the Chilean government, they discovered the promised reforms will not be pursued.

Since then, the international labour movement has been pressing Pinera's administration to ratify *ILO Convention 176*. You can help. Take a minute to email your message calling on the Chilean government to adopt global mine safety standards at <[www.labourstart.org](http://www.labourstart.org)>.



## Another LPN raid – seriously?

Despite their decisive failure in 2009 to raid Licensed Practical Nurses from HEU and other unions, the BC Nurses Union is again preparing to spend millions of dollars to try and bring LPNs into their ranks.

That plan, confirmed at the BCNU's spring convention, has a lot of people shaking their heads.

Two years ago, BCNU mounted an all-out, costly campaign that could not get enough support in any single health authority, or province-wide, to back their raid applications. As a result B.C.'s Labour Relations Board dismissed all their applications and barred them from making any further applications until October, November 2011.

"This second raid attempt doesn't come as a big surprise," says HEU's secretary-business manager Judy Darcy, "although it is very disappointing that BCNU has chosen to ignore LPNs' clear decision to remain members of HEU."

Earlier this year, Darcy wrote the BCNU leadership urging them to respect LPNs' independent professional interests and to "put the mutual interests of our members and B.C. patients ahead of another divisive raid."

"Our shared history demonstrates that when all health care unions work in cooperation with one another to defend quality services and public health care – we are stronger," she wrote.

"Our unions are also dealing with



LPN activists say BCNU must accept its 2009 defeat and respect LPNs' decision to remain members of the Hospital Employees' Union.

complex changes to nursing care in B.C.'s health authorities – changes that impact the professional practice of both LPNs and RNs. Another raid attempt, however, can only compromise our collective ability to collaborate in a professional manner on these and other important nursing practice issues."

Provincial Executive member Jacqueline Zilkie is a member of the union's LPN advisory committee.

"For decades, BCNU has resisted LPNs' utilization," she told the *Guardian*. "But you can't fight the future. Health care needs LPNs as much it needs RNs. Our unions should be working together to deal with the challenges we face in health care delivery." Zilkie says LPNs have a critical role in modern nursing care. "We're

coming into our own. Let's respect each other's independent professional practice and put patients' needs first."

That sentiment is echoed by PE member Debera Willis, an LPN from 100 Mile House. "I had the privilege of being on HEU's bargaining committee in 2010 negotiations. We made huge strides for LPNs including wage increments and training dollars.

"The prospect of another raid is tiresome, but frankly, we're focused on more important goals – not only for ourselves, but for health care."

Darcy says LPNs have come a long way as nursing professionals and HEU will continue to make sure LPNs have the full support and backing of their union.

"It's never too late for BCNU to change course," says Darcy. "My door is always open. I know there is so much we could accomplish by working together for the greater good – for our respective memberships, our patients and residents, and the future of public health care."

**"You can't fight the future. Health care needs LPNs as much it needs RNs. Our unions should be working together!"**

## >>notebook>>



**Thanks to HEU members all Canadian workers now have a charter-protected right to collective bargaining.**

## Attack on teachers' contract ruled unconstitutional

On April 13, B.C.'s new premier was reminded by B.C.'s highest court of her role in sponsoring two pieces of legislation that shredded teachers' collective agreement nine years ago.

As education minister, Christy Clark introduced *Bills 27 and 28* in January, 2002 which eliminated provisions in the teachers' contract and prohibited future bargaining related to class size and composition, workload, and the required number of librarians, counsellors and other "non-classroom" teachers.

The third bill, jammed through the legislature that same weekend, was *Bill 29* – which cleared the way for a massive privatization of health care services.

Those three laws facilitated the firing of 8,000 health care workers, the closure of hospitals, nursing homes and schools, and the conversion of family supporting jobs in health care to low waged, privatized ones.

All three bills were passed unilaterally without consultation with the affected unions.

That lack of consultation weighed heavily in the landmark 2007

ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada which struck down key parts of *Bill 29* and established for the first time that collective bargaining is protected by Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

On April 13, the B.C. Supreme Court relied on that precedent setting decision in striking down provisions of *Bills 27 and 28*. And like *Bill 29*, the provincial government has one year to deal with the consequences of their unconstitutional attack on collective bargaining.

The province paid out \$85 million in compensation and retraining monies to impacted health care workers as a result of the *Bill 29* ruling. In the case of *Bills 27 and 28*, the BCTF is demanding the restoration of class size and other quality education measures.

In Wisconsin and other U.S. states, public sector bargaining rights are under fierce attack. We're not immune to those attacks either, but thanks to HEU members all Canadian workers now have a charter-protected right to collective bargaining.

MIKE OLD • HEU COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR



# We are ALL Wisconsin

American workers are pushing back against a pack of newly elected Republican governors who have unleashed a full-on attack against public services and public sector collective bargaining rights.

**T**hinly disguised attempts to hold the public sector responsible for the country's fiscal crisis, however, aren't holding water. Community outcry shows the American public knows the economic meltdown had everything to do with over-the-top corporate greed – not the neighbour-next-door who teaches public school or cares for the elderly.

It's also become a matter of public record that many of the new governors had their election campaigns bankrolled by the mysterious billionaire Koch brothers, who spent enormous amounts of money to ensure a virulent anti-union agenda would hold sway once the elections were over.

Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin was first out of the gate, with a no-holds-barred assault on his state's public servants. What he didn't expect, was a community-wide uprising where thousands of workers and their supporters took over the state legislature building for more than a month.

"There's this amazing solidarity," says Thomas Frank of *Harper's Magazine*. "I've written about all manner of labour disputes, but I've never seen anything like this, where you've got people from all over the city – from all over the state – including farmers, showing up to protest Governor

Walker's war on collective bargaining."

While Wisconsin citizens rallied in Madison, Democratic members of the legislature left the state for weeks, denying Walker a quorum. Eventually, the Republican-dominated legislature passed the offending laws, but at press-time they were being challenged in the courts.

At the same time, other Republican governors followed suit with their own versions of union-busting legislation: Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Maine, Idaho, Florida and others. According to Allison Kilkenny of *The Nation*, more than 700 anti-union bills are now on the dockets across the U.S.

What no one anticipated, however, was the extent to which the Wisconsin protests would become a lightning rod for the American labour movement.

**No one anticipated the extent to which the Wisconsin protests would become a lightning rod for the American labour movement.**

In state after state, workers are mobilizing to protect the fundamental collective bargaining rights they had fought so hard to win. Most of it is under the media radar.

Under the banner "We Are One", the

Labor Council for Latin American Advancement and the United Food and Commercial Workers hosted a breakfast in Austin, Texas on March 27. "Wisconsin and Ohio workers are on the frontlines of fierce attacks that could unleash a wave of anti-worker and anti-union legislation throughout the country," stated Milton Rosado, LCLAA's national president.



Dale Anderson, president of the Wisconsin Amalgamated Transit Union Local 519 (second from left) with HEU's president, Ken Robinson, secretary-business manager, Judy Darcy and financial secretary Donisa Bernardo during solidarity rally at Peace Arch Park.

With that, they were off and running.

The Jackson, Mississippi branch of the NAACP said "We Are One" as they kicked off a month-long voter registration drive on April 1, linking it to the defense of workers' rights.

On April 2, more than 1,500 Canadians and Americans said "We Are All Wisconsin" as they gathered at Peace Arch Park in an expression of cross-border solidarity.

In the U.S., April 4 is the anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, who lost his life defending the rights of striking sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968. It was an appropriate date for Americans in hundreds of cities and towns to show that they are ready to stand up and defend their right to collective bargaining. And they did.

Sometimes hundreds of supporters showed up – like in the San Francisco Bay Area where union members from

the central labour and building trades councils of Contra Costa County marched from one side of the Zampa Memorial Bridge, meeting their counterparts from the Napa/Solano and North Bay councils in the middle.

In Artesia, New Mexico, Sue Keller was the lone protester. "I am disabled," she wrote. "I do not know anyone in this town, all tea baggers. I will paint a message on my car and drive up and down Main Street."

Over a thousand events took place on that day – from Honolulu to Puerto Rico; Anchorage to Miami; Los Angeles to Baltimore; and overseas in Guam, Mongolia, France.

For more information on solidarity actions in the U.S., check out these websites: <http://local.we-r-1.org/> or <http://www.we-r-1.org/>.

DALE FULLER

## >>voices>>

### It's time to pull together and risk solidarity

International Women's Day is a day for celebrating women and our accomplishments, but it is also an important day for reflection and reckoning.

I am surprised when I look back, because I did not think we could move so far backwards so fast. Let's just talk about Stephen Harper. In the last four years, he has cut programs and spent money in ways that do not take women's lives and needs into account.

This includes cancelling national child care agreements with the provinces; creating a stimulus budget that offered nothing to women; eliminating the Court Challenges Program; and changing Status of Women Canada's funding criteria so that women's organizations can no longer receive money for advocacy, lobbying or research. As a result, many women's organizations have closed their doors or are struggling to stay alive.

Women need social spending. The general erosion of social programs and social protections has particularly harsh impacts for women because they have been fundamental creators of equality. Income security programs soften women's economic

dependence on men. Health care, home care and child care shift some of the burden of caregiving from individual women's shoulders to the state, permitting us to move in greater numbers into paid work and higher education.

The pattern that's emerged under Harper's administration is clear: silence critical voices, suppress information, block avenues for asserting rights, and, at the same time, spend money on corporate tax cuts, fighter jets and jail cells. All of these policies push women back.

It is time to shift the paradigm, to allocate our resources to fulfill the basic human rights of Canadians, to construct a budget, and install a government that values adequate food, clothing and shelter for everyone, adequate incomes, child care, access to rights, and the safety that comes with equality and collective responsibility for everyone's well-being.

It is time for us to pull together and risk solidarity. It is time to fight.

SHELAGH DAY • POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE



YUKIE KURAHASHI PHOTO

**I am surprised when I look back, because I did not think we could move so far backwards so fast.**



## Education program boosts activism

HEU's education department hit the ground running earlier this year.

So far, hundreds of members from all regions of the province have attended training sessions for shop stewards, Provincial Executive sub-committee and equity committee chairs, table officers and living wage activists.

"It's been particularly inspiring to see so many new members interested in taking on shop steward responsibilities," says HEU director of education Juli Rees.

"Participants expressed a lot of enthusiasm about a new shop steward course component that links newly-trained stewards with experienced

mentors who can support them when they return to their locals."

She says about 180 new local officers – chairs, secretary-treasurers and assistant secretary-treasurers – also received hands-on training to help them build stronger locals.

Table officer training workshops included everything from how to create a welcoming environment – that broadens representation across HEU's many occupations and diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds – to running a meeting, keeping the books, building leadership and dealing with conflict.

In May and June, about 150 members will be attending the union's occupational health

and safety workshops.

Members interested in HEU's training program should contact their local executive officers and watch local bulletin boards for announcements.

Also watch for upcoming details on this fall's sectoral and occupational conferences in secretary-treasurer mailings, the HEU website, and the *Guardian*.

## South Delta supports community fundraiser

HEU's South Delta local helped sponsor the first annual Laura Szendrei Walk/Run/Roll fundraiser in early April. Laura was a 15-year old North Delta girl who was slain in Mackie Park last year.

Local chair Donna Ayres says, "We thought this was



**South Delta local chair Donna Ayres at the first annual Laura Szendrei Walk/Run/Roll fundraiser.**

a very worthwhile cause that would give HEU and our local an opportunity to have a voice against violence against women, and show our support for the local youth community."

The community event also gave members an opportunity to raise awareness and engage with the public about issues of concern to HEU members.

Ayres, local co-chair Kathy Sicard and member Jackie Woodley hosted an HEU display table with union banners

and information.

PE members Carolyn Unsworth and Louella Vincent also came out to support the event. They provided Earth Day information, HEU frisbees, treats for the children who entered a coloring contest, and they encouraged people to complete a form letting Stephen Harper know their wishes for the environment.

HEU members and their families also participated in the event's 5k run.

## HEU members hit the campaign trail

Congratulations to two HEU members who ran great campaigns in the recent 2011 federal election. Vernon Jubilee's **Nikki Inouye** ran as the NDP candidate in Okanagan-

## BALANCING IT ALL

PATTY GIBSON

Community advocate **ERICA DAY** is reaching out to young people and adults about the crucial need to raise awareness about teen suicide, and prevent it.

## SPEAKING UP FOR YOUTH AT RISK

**F**our years ago, at the age of 19, Erica Day lost a close friend to suicide. His name was Rielly.

Today, Erica is a passionate advocate for suicide prevention and awareness.

A featured speaker at this year's third annual Walk for Community Social Services in Victoria, Day stressed the importance of government support for agencies such as NEED2, which runs the only suicide prevention program in Greater Victoria.

Like many community social services programs, NEED2's funding is threatened.

"Suicide prevention and awareness is something we can't let fall between the cracks," she told her audience. "It's life and death... If we lose these services, our youth will have nowhere else to go."

Day point out that suicide is the second leading cause of death in young people. And yet, it continues to be a taboo subject.

"We don't talk about it," she says. "We don't want to look at it. We don't want to sit down with our children and talk to them about it because the idea scares us to death."

"Youth, who are having suicidal thoughts, most likely already feel isolated, damaged and alone," Day continues. "We need to get them talking. We need to

get the facts out there, and we need to help kids feel okay about talking about suicide. Because that talking, that connection, that reaching out for help might just save their lives."

It's that deep concern for young people at-risk that has motivated Day to take her own devastating experience into the schools, where her presentations help both youth and educators to gain a greater understanding about how to prevent suicide and support those who have lost a friend to suicide.

"I've always been the kind of person who, when something bad happens to me, has to find a way to make something good come out of it. After Rielly passed away, I knew I wanted to do something to help others. It was just a matter of finding the avenue and the time."

The opportunity to make a difference initially arose when the B.C. Council of Families decided to produce a video on the subject – *Left to Live* – and Day was asked to take part in the filming.

From there, she began doing presentations, first for educators at the University of Victoria, and then for youth in high schools.

"It's all been unfolding serendipitously," she says. "One thing keeps evolving into another. Every time I've done a presentation, I've gotten in touch with more and more people who are involved."



Talking with Day, it's not long before you realize how much she's juggling in her own young life.

At press time, Day had just finished her practicum and was preparing to graduate from the Community, Family and Child Studies Program at Camosun College. She also works part-time at a Victoria day-care centre. And in her spare time, she's a songwriter and musician who plays the guitar and mandolin, and is learning the fiddle.

She's also involved in putting on benefit concerts, like the one she organized when a friend needed a medical treatment that wasn't covered. When the proceeds were in, she'd helped raise \$18,000.

"It was really powerful," she says. "It's one of the most rewarding things I've ever been a part of."

As for the future, Day says, "it took a while before I realized that I have a need to help others, and that helping others could be my profession. Right now, I'm looking at different possibilities. I have a lot of dreams and aspirations."

Whatever job opportunity arises, however, Day says she will always be an activist at heart.

"When something ignites my passion, I become an unstoppable force," she says. "When I feel there's something that needs to be done – when something tugs at my heart strings – I jump on board."

For more information on suicide awareness and prevention in Canada, check out <[www.suicideprevention.ca](http://www.suicideprevention.ca)>.

## NEED2 needs you!

NEED2 is the only agency in Victoria with a focus on suicide awareness and prevention education. But unless funding is reinstated, this agency will close its doors forever.

In 2010 the Ministry of Children and Family Development cut the agency's funding saying NEED2's programs are not a priority for children and families.

### YOU CAN HELP.

Contact Minister of Children and Family Development Mary McNeil and tell her suicide prevention must be a top priority.

e-mail: [mary.mcneil.mla@leg.bc.ca](mailto:mary.mcneil.mla@leg.bc.ca)

phone: 250-387-9699



Shuswap and the union's first vice-president **Victor Elkins** ran as the NDP candidate for Vancouver-Quadra.

Both Inouye and Elkins strenuously campaigned on important issues for HEU members – safer workplaces, stable future health care funding, improved pensions, and equality rights in the workplace and the community.

Inouye and Elkins are long-time progressive activists with HEU and within their communities.

Elkins hails from Edmonton, Alberta. Since relocating in Vancouver in the 1990s he has worked for 14 years as a perfusionist assistant (Children's local). He is also a foster parent to four teenagers.

Inouye, an HEU member

for 15 years, works as a cook (Vernon local). She is a native of the Okanagan Valley and is married with a grown daughter.

### Living Wage Campaign builds support

The union's four-year campaign to champion living wages for all workers is picking up steam across the province with a number of exciting events and public forums.

HEU regional vice-president Rhonda Bruce was invited by Alex Atamanenko, MP for B.C. Southern Interior, to speak on a panel at a few stops on the *Poor No More* film tour.

The Canadian-produced documentary, hosted by actress/activist Mary Walsh, explores the plight of Canada's low-waged workers,

tackles the global economic crisis, and examines the social impact of poverty.

Bruce took the living wage message to audiences in Oliver, Osoyoos and Princeton.

"It was a really good experience," says Bruce. "It was a great opportunity to talk about the Hospital Employees' Union and our leadership role in the Living Wage Campaign. It also brings a face into our community."

In preparation for future opportunities to promote the LWC, the union hosted a two-day leadership training workshop in April for about 25 activists. Part of the agenda included public speaking and media relations exercises.

HEU's Living Wage working



MIKE OLD PHOTO

**First Call's living wage organizer Michael McCarthy Flynn presents HEU with a living wage employer accreditation during an April 12 ceremony at Provincial Office.**

group also met with Deborah Littman, national officer of the U.K. trade union UNISON, where she shared the groundbreaking work she's doing in London's living wage campaign.

Littman later delivered her message to well-attended public forums in Vancouver and Surrey.

"In 10 years, the living wage has gone from unrealistic to an idea whose time has come," says Littman. "Over 100 employers have agreed to

pay a living wage. [The campaign] has gone from marginal to mainstream. The result is £70 million more in workers' pockets."

Closer to home, about 20 organizations have been certified as living wage employers in Metro Vancouver. And on April 12, HEU was proud to officially join that growing list during a ceremony at the Provincial Office.

In March, the latest living wage calculations were

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# >> factfile

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day (IWD), which took place on March 8, HEU is taking a look back at the history of the day.

IWD was first recognized in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on March 19, 1911. More than one million people rallied for women's right to work, vote, hold public office and receive an education.

The U.S. first observed IWD in 1914.

Canada didn't start widely celebrating IWD until the 1970s.

On March 8, 2011, IWD events took place in more than 170 countries.

IWD has spread around the world and now honours women on every continent.

In some countries – Armenia, Belarus, Cambodia – IWD is an official holiday.

In Cameroon and Croatia, it is not a public holiday. However, it's become customary for men to give the women in their lives flowers and small gifts on IWD.

In some countries – China, Madagascar, Nepal – it's an official holiday only for women.

In Bulgaria and Romania, IWD is observed much like Mother's Day, where children give small gifts to their mothers and grandmothers.

## AFTER THE SHIFT

SHARON NEUFELD

When her shift is over at Port Alberni's West Coast General Hospital, HEU veteran **WENDY KERR** is busy making change happen in her union and her community.

## A CHAMPION FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

If you want something done, give it to a busy person. Wendy Lee Kerr, chair of HEU's Port Alberni local, is such an individual.

A passionate advocate for women's rights, Kerr's boundless energy and great sense of humour helped earn her a nomination for Port Alberni's 2011 Volunteer of the Year.

An HEU veteran of 34 years, the Nanaimo-born Kerr has enjoyed working in a variety of positions at West Coast General Hospital, and has spent the past decade in the stores department as a receiver.

As every HEU member knows, the demands of the job never end. But when the shift is over for Kerr, the mother of an 18-year-old son, another set of commitments begins, including union and community activism.

Local chair for the past four years, Kerr has held most positions on her local executive during her career. Active with the Port Alberni District Labour Council (PADLC) since 2003, Kerr is the current chair of the PADLC Women's Committee, and a member of the Board of Alberni Valley Continuing Care Society.

Kerr has also organized PADLC's International Women's Day events, which filled Port Alberni's Capitol Theatre to capacity for the past two years.

In advertising for 2011's event *In Praise of Women*, which took two months to plan, Kerr promised, "If you love women and you love fun, this is the hottest ticket in town." And by all accounts, this promise was fulfilled.

The celebration featured a volunteer cast and crew of more than 60 magicians, singers, musicians, celebrity cooks and comedians, and at the end Alberni-Pacific Rim MLA Scott Fraser presented Kerr with a crown and a plaque for "Queen of Social Justice."

And every woman in the audience was given a rose as part of the bread and roses symbolism that marks International Women's Day.

"What ultimately mattered most was the women had fun, and we honoured them," says Kerr.

She credits HEU for her involvement with pay equity and for motivating her social activism. Witnessing the financial struggles of single, retired women has spurred Kerr to action, because, as she says, women's lower wages result in impoverished retirement years.

Kerr believes inspiring change starts with using humour to capture people's attention. "I've listened over the years to so many dry reports, and I've realized we've got to have humour to get people's attention."

She's also proud to have followed her passion to finally perform onstage. "Give me a microphone – I like to tell stories, entertain, make [people] laugh. It makes me happy. When you really enjoy something, don't worry about what people think. Just do it."

\$1,500 of the net proceeds from this year's event was donated to Port Alberni's Transition Centre/Women's Centre for women in need. The remaining proceeds are seed money for next year's production, says Kerr.





continued from page 13

released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. To earn a decent wage, workers need to make an hourly rate of \$18.81 (Metro Vancouver) and \$18.03 (Greater Victoria).

## Independent, private sector bargaining conference

HEU's first bargaining conference for members working in independent, private sector seniors' care homes will convene June 5-7 in Vancouver.

During the union's biennial convention last October, delegates unanimously supported holding a bargaining conference for members working in independent long term care and assisted living facilities.

Organizers say the confer-

ence will facilitate greater member participation in this expanding sector and over the three days will develop the strategies and actions needed to improve working and caring conditions in seniors' facilities.

## LPN immunization – break the log jam

Health care unions have written B.C.'s new health minister, Mike de Jong, asking for his assistance in fully implementing a provincial regulation that would allow Licensed Practical Nurses to play a bigger role in providing immunizations.

The regulation governing LPNs practice under the *Health Professions Act* was amended last November to allow LPNs to independently provide immunizations

within appropriate limits.

Unfortunately, the health ministry and the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of B.C. have not been able to agree to the Standards, Limits and Conditions (SLCs) that must be in place in order for the amended regulation to have any widespread impact.

As it stands, LPNs are limited to independently providing immunizations for a very limited number of diseases like flu and pneumonia.

But there are no SLCs in place that would facilitate LPNs' participation in school-based immunization programs and other immunization programs.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says



MIKE OLD PHOTO

**While in Kamloops, HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy toured Royal Inland Hospital and talked with members working in the sterile supply department.**

**Darcy was in Kamloops to meet with HEU care and support staff from several of the city's residential care facilities, and hear firsthand about the challenges workers face as they strive to provide quality services to seniors.**

LPNs in other jurisdictions are providing this service independently, within certain limits.

In B.C., LPNs played an important role under a special agreement in providing H1N1 immunizations.

"The lack of progress in establishing the necessary SLCs runs counter to the goal of effectively utilizing these nursing professionals to the full extent of their training," says Darcy.

MAY

JUNE

JULY

### MAY

National Asian Heritage Month

### MAY 9-13

CLC Convention  
Vancouver Convention Centre

### MAY 16-17

HEU Fraser Regional meeting

### MAY 19-20

HEU Vancouver Island Regional meeting

### MAY 25-26

HEU Interior Regional meeting

### JUNE 1-2

HEU North Regional meeting

### JUNE 6-7

Independent Bargaining conference

### JUNE 9-10

HEU Vancouver Coastal Regional meeting

### JUNE 10-12

B.C. Fed Young Workers' Retreat  
Camp Jubilee, Deep Cove

### JUNE 27-29

Provincial Executive meeting

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## Impassioned call for better care

Many people view their approaching senior years with trepidation. And it's not hard to see why.

For the past decade, services to seniors in B.C. have plummeted at all levels. Long-term care facilities are full. Insufficient staffing means residents' needs are often unmet. Lack of community and home-based care means the elderly are ill more often, hospitalized more than they need to be, and because of overcrowding in acute care facilities, sent home, even when they do not have appropriate support.

A new 30-minute documentary, *The Remaining Light*, is a moving expose of the reality facing B.C. seniors today. Co-produced by the Hospital Employees' Union and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, this film weaves together interviews with seniors, their children, caregivers and research experts to present a unified call for properly funded seniors' care.

The film makes it clear – in very human terms – that a decade of cutbacks and underfunding in seniors' care has taken its toll. And the consequences are not only heartless, when seen through the eyes of those most affected, but self-defeating. Underfunding in seniors' care results in greater, not lesser, costs to the health care system overall.

At its core, *The Remaining Light* is an impassioned call for the funding needed to ensure seniors can live their declining years, and die, with dignity.

Frank, for example, lives in an assisted living facility in Vanderhoof. "The people that run it are good people. They make you feel like they care. And they do," he declares. "I would say the effect of this community has a great deal to do with my health... I've got a reason to keep on living."

But with a shortage of care facilities and home support, life isn't so great for others. Sisters Rebecca and Jessica Maurer relate how their mother was treated in an extended care facility where understaffing meant it could take half an hour to get someone to assist her to the lavatory; and another 30 to 40 minutes for someone to help her back to bed.

"I would walk the floor looking for anyone," says Rebecca, "And sometimes I couldn't find a single staff member because the only one or two were tending to someone else."

Care aide Carolyn Unsworth talks about how her workload is so stacked up that she can't always take the time to comfort a dying resident. One of the lowest points for her, she says, is finding out that someone died on her shift and "I wasn't there for them."

Director Clemencia Gomez of the South Granville Seniors' Centre discusses the obvious benefits of home support services for seniors who can live independently and who do not have to go into a long-term care facility. But government cut those

services by 30 per cent between 2001 and 2007.

HEU researcher Marcy Cohen points out that in the 70s B.C. was a recognized leader in community supports, not only by other provinces but other parts of the world. One of her greatest concerns now is that government cuts throughout the system have result-

ed in a patchwork of programs instead of "a seamless continuum" among all the services that are needed.

The human impact of this decline in community-based seniors' services is brought home by Bess, a regular participant in a popular lunch program that's facing the axe. Expressing both sadness and fear, she says she doesn't know what she will do if the program closes. "I might become sick. I might become very blue. I don't know what's going to happen to me. I don't like to think about it, really."

For anyone who is working to raise awareness about the urgent need to improve seniors' services, this film is an excellent tool. Those interested in organizing a screening in the community or at a worksite should contact CCPA at [bcseniors@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:bcseniors@policyalternatives.ca) or call 604-801-5121 x223.

DAN KEETON



***The Remaining Light* is an impassioned call for the funding needed to ensure seniors can live their declining years, and die, with dignity.**



## Retirements

Colleagues of care aide **Terry (Theresa) Belzer** (Morgan Place) wish her well in her retirement. The 20-year HEU veteran, known for her sense of humour and sharing gardening tips with co-workers, retired in July 2010.



**BELZER**

Staffing clerk **Diane Baxter** retired from Nanaimo's Kiwanis Village Lodge in December, after 15 years as an HEU member. Her retirement plans include travelling to California and Arizona with her husband and enjoying life as a "snow-bird".

Care aide **Linda Berridge** retired from Central City Lodge in January. An HEU member for 20 years, Linda held a variety of local executive positions, including shop steward, OH&S officer, trustee, warden, chairperson and secretary-treasurer. She plans to move back to her native United Kingdom.

**Catherine (Cathy) Kwan**, also of Central City Lodge, retired in February. She worked as a dietary aide at the Lodge for almost 30 years. Active for many years in her community, she also served on her local executive in a variety of positions – trustee, OH&S officer and senior trustee. Her retirement plans include travel to China for possible church mission work.

*Correction:* **Diane Usselman** (Kiwanis Village Lodge, Nanaimo), retired August 1, 2010. She was an HEU member and dietary aide for 33 years (not 14 years, as incorrectly printed in the Fall-Winter 2010 *Guardian*).

## In memoriam

Retired HEU member **Eva Wollenberg** passed away January 30, 2011 at the age of 77. She began work as a care aide at New Vista in 1976, and helped organize her local two years later. She served on the local executive for most of her career, including chairperson, until going on LTD and later retiring in 1999.



**WOLLENBERG**

Wollenberg is remembered as a strong and dedicated advocate.

"Long before it became union policy, Eva was vocal in advocating for 'one contract for all,'" recalls HEU servicing representative John Hardie. "She believed that workers in long-term care homes and the community should be paid the same as those who work in hospitals. She was also a strong advocate of LTD issues and worked diligently in the late-1990s to bring those issues to the forefront in bargaining."

Sadly, residential care aide **Gail Vowles** passed away from cancer on December

29. She was 53. Gail began her HEU career in 1982 at Gorge Road Hospital in Victoria, and later got a job at Peace Arch Hospital (White Rock local).



**VOWLES**

Gail is remembered by co-workers as an extraordinary caregiver and a kind-hearted woman with boundless love for family. They recall her donating countless hours of hairdressing to patients and residents. Gail will be deeply missed by friends, family, patients, residents and colleagues.

## Congratulations

In early March **Joey Hartman**, HEU Provincial Office servicing representative and former assistant to the president became the first woman elected president of the Vancouver and District Labour Council (VDLC).

Dedicated and energetic, Hartman has over 30 years' experience as a trade union and social activist. She worked at HEU for 15 years.

Some of her many elected positions include, president of CoDevelopment Canada, vice president of the Pacific Northwest Labour History Association and member of the B.C. Federation of Labour Executive Council.

We wish Joey all the best as she continues her important advocacy work.

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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 sisters and brothers on issues that affect First Nations People.

### PRESS 3

## Pink Triangle

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

### 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.

### PRESS 5

## Women's

The HEU Women's Standing Committee works with women's groups, coalitions and other union committees to advance women's social and economic rights. Want to get involved?



## 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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