

CONVENTION NEWS

Convention gets underway with messages of solidarity and a vision for the future

November 6, 2012

More than 630 HEU delegates gathered at Vancouver's Hyatt Regency Hotel Monday to kickstart the union's weeklong 28th biennial convention.

On Day One, delegates unanimously adopted a concrete plan to make the union more responsive to sectoral, occupational and equity-seeking groups within the union.

HEU's allies were also present to express their solidarity with HEU members and the work they carry out every day on the front lines and behind the scenes.

With last week's news of the contracting out over 90 HEU members at George Derby – a seniors' care facility for Canadian veterans – fresh on the minds of those assembled, Musqueam elder Jewel Thomas, a former HEU care aide, acknowledged the importance of the deep relations formed between patients and front-line health workers.

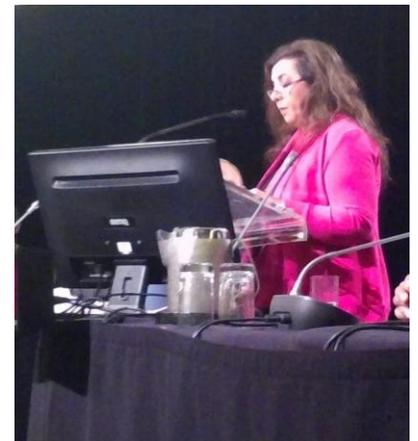
Vancouver & District Labour Council president Joey Hartman recognized the strength that HEU has, especially in times of adversity. "I know firsthand how resilient HEU is – and what could be a better demonstration of that resilience than the 96 per cent strike vote!"

CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill gave a spirited address on behalf of his 85,000-strong union, saluting HEU members for their integrity and passion for what they do.

HEU in solid financial shape says Bernardo despite challenges of 2012

Financial secretary Donisa Bernardo delivered her report, outlining the state of the union's finances since last convention. Although HEU recently lost 7,000 LPNs, she says that investing resources during the raid was critical and that the union is still on solid financial ground.

Bernardo reported on the union's healthy strike fund and strong financial reserves that will enable the union to move forward in a thoughtful and balanced manner.



She also thanked HEU members for returning a strong 96 per cent strike mandate. "You have told us consistently that you do not want to pay for your benefits for a modest wage increase. It's not reasonable, and it certainly isn't fair. Health care workers have paid more than their fair share. And the only way we're going to be treated more equitably in the bargaining process is by changing our provincial government when we go to the polls next spring."

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George Derby layoffs bad for workers and seniors says BC NDP's Dix

The afternoon began with a rousing speech from BC NDP leader Adrian Dix who kicked off his address to the packed convention with a story about the extraordinary care HEU members gave to family friend Wes Jensen.



A war veteran who lived out his final years at George Derby, Jensen depended on the care HEU members like Giuseppina Bosco provided said Dix— in her case, day-in and day-out for 35 years.

The layoffs at George Derby and many other long-term care facilities over the past 11 years are not only bad for union members, they are bad for seniors and bad for health care he said.

“Wherever you are in British Columbia, the consequences of constant turnover of staff on health and the health of seniors is not a good approach,” warned Dix. “And it’s something surely we need to change.”

Dix also reaffirmed that one of the first acts of a BC NDP government will be to get rid of what’s left of Bill 29.

And the NDP leader was not alone. His support for HEU and public health care was vigorously applauded by many sitting NDP MLAs and provincial candidates including health critic

Mike Farnworth and former HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy who is running for the NDP in New Westminster.

CUPE National secretary-treasurer Charles Fleury offered our national union’s support for the vital services HEU provides, including protecting social services, defending seniors’ rights, and preserving patient privacy in the form of the Medical Transcription Fightback Campaign.

“It’s incredible that health authorities are prepared to move this work not just out of this sector, but out of the country if the price is right,” said Fleury. “You care about the services and the people who receive them.”

He spoke about the importance of unions to stand together to fight governments’ privatization agenda federally and provincially.

“Unions will continue to fight the good fight... We will continue to stand up and fight for our members for the goodness of public services,” said Fleury.

A consistent theme throughout the first day was that our membership and workplaces are changing rapidly.

Delegates directed the provincial executive to canvass members on the necessary changes to the union’s structure and member services that would make HEU more responsive and representative.

The convention also committed the union to a strong defence of defined benefit pension plans, the fight for a comprehensive child care strategy, anti-bullying awareness and strengthening international solidarity.

