



Facilities members set key themes and priorities for next round of bargaining

More than 200 delegates gathered from across the province this week for HEU's 21st Facilities Bargaining Conference to debate and vote on demands – submitted by locals, equity standing committees, and the union's Provincial Executive – and to elect a new bargaining committee.

During the two-and-a-half day conference held at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel in Richmond, delegates – representing the union's 38,000 facilities subsector members – addressed issues related to wages, job security, health and safety (including workload and violence), equity, and work-life balance.

“Delegates engaged in serious, respectful and, at times, passionate debate on the issues that matter most to HEU members,” said HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside. “And they particularly emphasized the deteriorating working conditions they are up against every single day after 16 years of B.C. Liberal rule.”

Whiteside is the chief negotiator of the multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association and will be leading contract talks with B.C.'s health employers.

On opening night, delegates saw a presentation on the union's changing demographics, which underline the diversity of HEU's membership. And it showed that nearly 60 per cent of members in the facilities subsector have been working in health care for 10 years or less.

Feminist economist and researcher Iglia Ivanova, from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, also presented a broad analysis of B.C.'s economy, which highlighted the significant changes in budget priorities that are taking place under the province's NDP government.

During her keynote speech, Whiteside spoke about the value of HEU members' work, the many challenges they face on-the-job, and the impact the BC Liberals' anti-labour agenda has had on the union's membership.

“Since 2001, the work you do has been under attack,” said Whiteside. “We've had a B.C. Liberal government that put the wealthy and corporations ahead of everyone else. And when it came to public services, they saw health care, education, community social services and all of our other public services – not as benefits to our society, but as costs.

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“Every hospital, every care home, every supply warehouse and every corporate office has been cut to the bone. No matter what your job is – whether you are a unit clerk, a maintenance worker, a housekeeper, a care aide, or a lab assistant – you do your work without the support and tools that you need.”

Whiteside reminded members that the bargaining process is an opportunity to make gains for health care workers and the crucial services they deliver.

“We can have a more responsive health care system – one that responds to workers, as well as the needs of patients and residents – to deliver the best care, not the cheapest care.”

B.C. Federation of Labour president Irene Lanzinger brought a solidarity message on behalf of her 500,000 members. “One of the fundamental things we do in the labour movement is bargain gains for our members,” she said.

And she told delegates that “our strength lies in our determination to look after each other and to make sure everyone is taken care of... We are here, if you need us, to support you in this round of bargaining.”

Delegates also elected a 10-member bargaining committee, plus 10 alternates. The new committee includes: Jesse Winfrey, Cowichan Valley; Debbie Dyer, Royal Columbian; Erica Carr, PHSA Amalgamated; Dexter Basbas, St. Paul’s; Candace Charalambidis, Victoria General; Donna Thibeault, Boundary; Heather Barschel, Prince George; Ivy Eriksen, Campbell River; Debra Quesnel, Swan Valley; and Barbara Owen, Royal Columbian.

Both HEU president Victor Elkins and financial secretary Donisa Bernardo will join Whiteside and the committee at the bargaining table.

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