

# THE HOSPITAL Guardian

## SPECIAL REPORT STRIKE '89



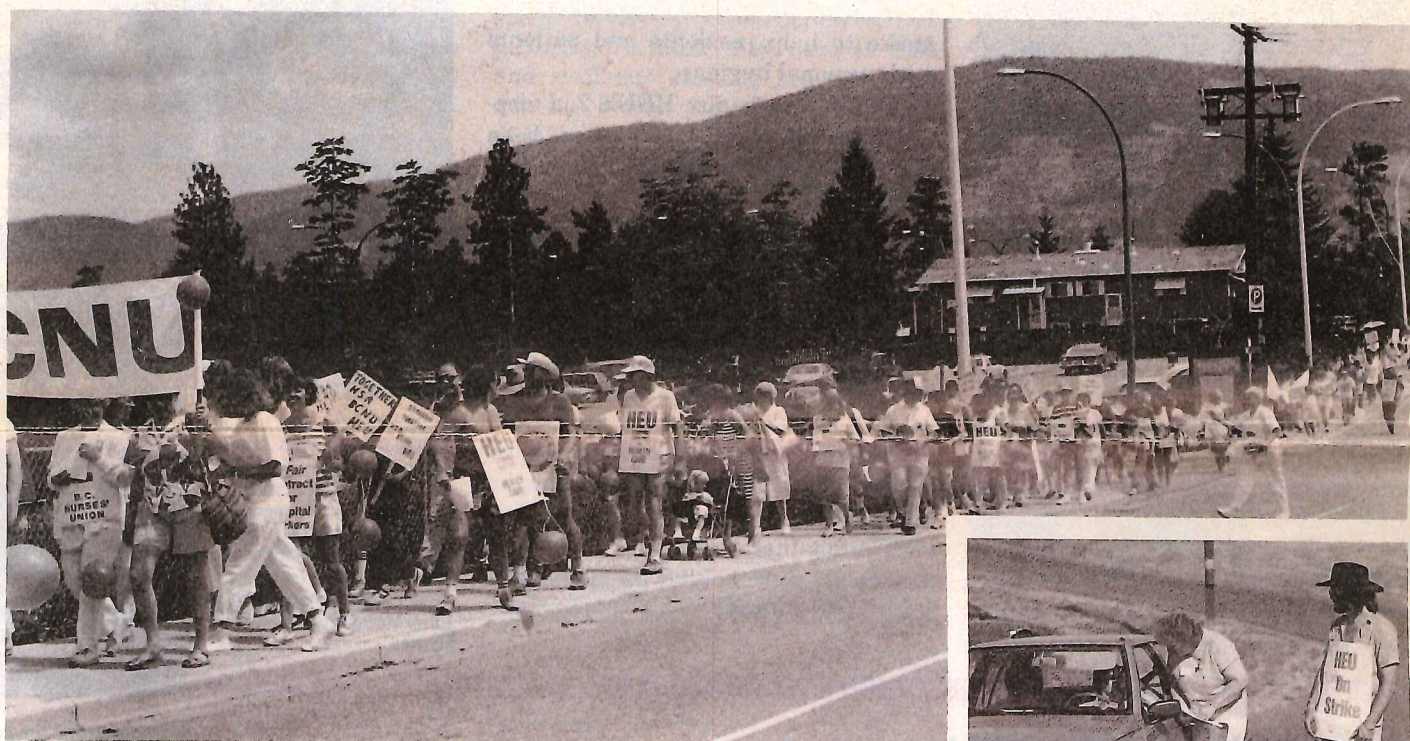
STRIKE ENDS WITH SETTLEMENT

# HEU wins new two-year deal

**I**t took nine days of HEU strike action and 29 continuous hours of mediation but members of the Hospital Employees' Union have been successful in reaching a new master collective agreement.

The HEU strike — the union's first in acute-care since 1976 — began June 22, 1989 following eight days of honoring picket lines set up by the B.C. Nurses Union. HEU's escalating action started with 19 locals but by June 29, 80 locals were on strike and close to 20,000 members were off the job.

The new two-year agreement, was reached Friday, June 30 after five days of round-the-clock bargaining. The tentative deal was to be voted on by HEU members at special meetings beginning July 4, 1989. Both the HEU Provincial Executive and Provincial



HEU 1st Vice-President Alberta Dorval, right, joins with other unions on Ft. St. John picket line.



Around the province, HEU members were called into action for the strike. Clockwise, from the top: A rally in Vernon; HEU's Debby Hills and Wayne Pollard leaflet passing cars; HEU's Provincial Bargaining Committee meets face to face with HLRA.



Bargaining Committee recommended acceptance of the package.

HEU Secretary-Business Manager Sean O'Flynn said the settlement was reached as a result of the actions taken by HEU members at picket lines around the province. "It was their determination to put the pressure on HLRA while still maintaining essential services that won this agreement."

O'Flynn said the tentative agreement calls for an overall wage package of 13.85 per cent compounded over two years plus 100 per cent payment of retroactive classification monies.

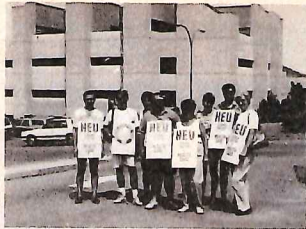
Full details of the settlement were distributed to the members in a Bargaining Bulletin.

Throughout the strike, the union maintained essential services in accor-

dance with a process worked out with the employer's bargaining agent, Health Labor Relations Association. In that process, an arbitration panel chaired by private mediator Stephen Kelleher heard submissions from all three unions in health care and then designated essential services at each facility.

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## OKANAGAN REGION

# Okanagan members prove they care!

**W**hen members of the Hospital Employees' Union make a pledge to provide essential services during a strike, they really mean it!

Just ask Dennis Jeffery, chairperson of the Penticton Regional Hospital local, who helped quarterback the HEU strike at that facility.

Jeffery says it was the members' commitment to health care that saw eight Practical Nurses and Orderlies trade their picket signs for sponges and return to bedside duties of bathing residents and patients.

"These members decided on their own to go in and bath all those people who couldn't get out of bed," says Jeffery. "It took over four hours and they did a fantastic job."

None of the members were paid for their work but Jeffery says the important thing was for the residents to get

their bath.

In fact, the team continued to undertake the bathing duties throughout the strike to help residents and patients with personal hygiene.

Jeffery, who is also HEU's 2nd vice-president, says it has always been HEU policy to provide those important services.

The extra efforts of HEU members appeared not to have gone unnoticed by the patients either.

One Keremeos man, recently released from the Penticton Hospital, provided a gourmet coffee machine and stocked it daily for the picketers.

And to top things off, he supplied the strikers with boxes of fresh Okanagan cherries.

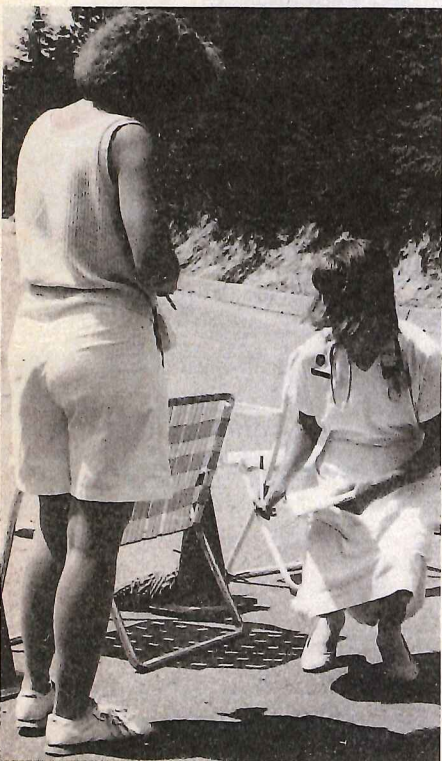
"We felt that both the patients and the public were behind us in this dispute," says Jeffery.



Above, Penticton Chairperson Dennis Jeffery addresses a crowd of HEU members. Right, members of the Kelowna Essential Services Committee, left to right, Maureen Shepherd, Mary Kwasnki, Harry O'Neill, Walter Perekudoff, Ethel McSorley and Helen Burnell.



## KOOTENAY REGION



# Staff shortages a big issue

**T**he reality of being on strike was not something that Shelley Wedderburn had ever really considered before.

"It never really hit me until I put on my picket sign and then I just thought

holy crow," says the Sparwood local shop steward.

But Wedderburn says her determination was strengthened by her duties on the picket line.

"Our biggest problem in health care

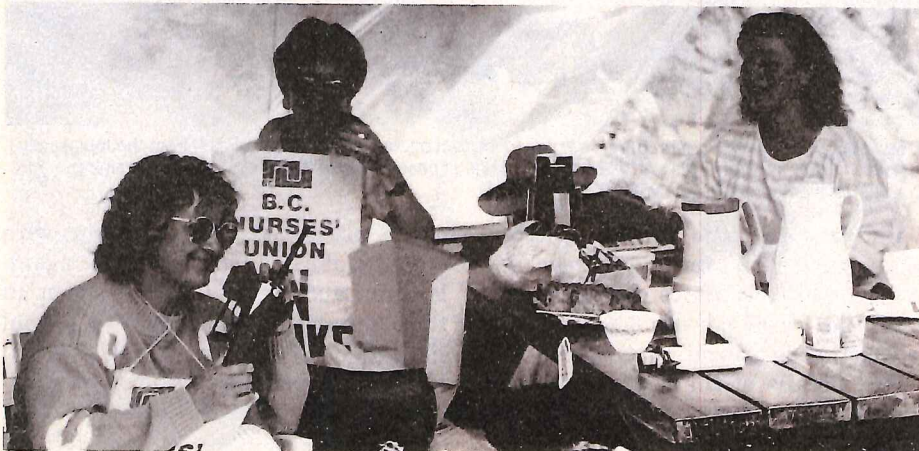
today is the lack of staff and the constant cutbacks," says Wedderburn. "We've been hit hard with layoffs and now we're being hit again."

Wedderburn, who herself faced layoff effective July 1 after 9 years work in dietary, says the employer is regularly combining jobs, cutting back in clerical departments and eliminating LPNs.

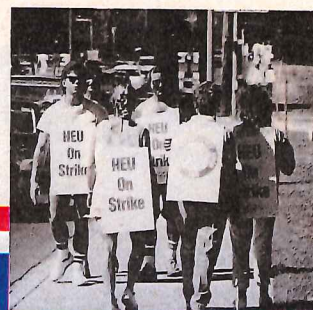
"Those of us who are left to do the work are burning out more quickly than ever. There just needs to be more staff."

In addition to the staff shortages, Wedderburn feels that recent cost of living increases have meant less disposable income for all health care workers.

"We're all finding it harder to make ends meet."



HEU members from the Kootenays on the picket line.



## ISLAND MEMBERS CITE UNDERFUNDING

# Government spending questioned



Melanie Hallberg, Victoria General local.

**T**he lack of adequate money for health care stems directly from backward government funding policies, according to HEU member Sheryl Rankin.

Rankin, a rehabilitation assistant at Glengarry Hospital in Victoria, says she simply cannot understand how the government can have endless money for the military but never enough for health care.

"The government (provincial and federal) has got to spend more money on health. It's much more important than nuclear weapons or highways."

Rankin, a single mother with four children under age 10, is particularly angered by the recent federal government advertising blitz aimed at selling the budget.

"They spent more than \$2 million in advertising alone."

Marianne Davies, a cook at the Cumberland Diagnostic Treatment Centre on Vancouver Island agrees the government spends its money in "pretty stupid places sometimes."

"There have been times in our hospital kitchen when we ran out of five and six things a day — real basics," Davies says.

That, she says, is frustrating when you see the government continue to spend money on construction of new facilities. "I think they need to fund and staff our existing hospitals adequately before they build any new ones."

The most recent statistics available provide ample evidence of a steady decline in government contributions to hospital operating costs. Hospital funding in B.C. is the lowest in Canada, on a per capita basis.

As well, provincial government contributions to the B.C. Medical Service plan have dropped by 15 per cent since 1981 alone.

These cutbacks, though, are attracting public attention.

HEU's Sheryl Rankin is hopeful the health care strike has helped even more people to realize that the system is overworked and underfunded.



Picketer at Victoria's Royal Jubilee Hospital.

## MEMBERS UNITE IN KITIMAT

# Strike brought new challenges

**F**or Kitimat's Cindy Russell, the HEU strike was nothing short of miraculous.

"We ran a 24-hour picket line, kept it fully staffed day and night and had fun at the same time," says Russell, chairperson of the 120-member local.

"Before the strike started, we all wondered if we could really pull it off. But it was great."

"People fit right into the strike. People who have never bothered to come to union meetings were lining up to help."

Russell, also a member of HEU's Provincial Executive, says that personally, the strike presented her with a new challenge.

"I'd never been in this position before and I have to admit I loved it."

During normal operations, Russell says it's common for members from dif-

ferent departments to never meet one another. "But the strike brought all sorts of people together for the first time. They really got to know each other."

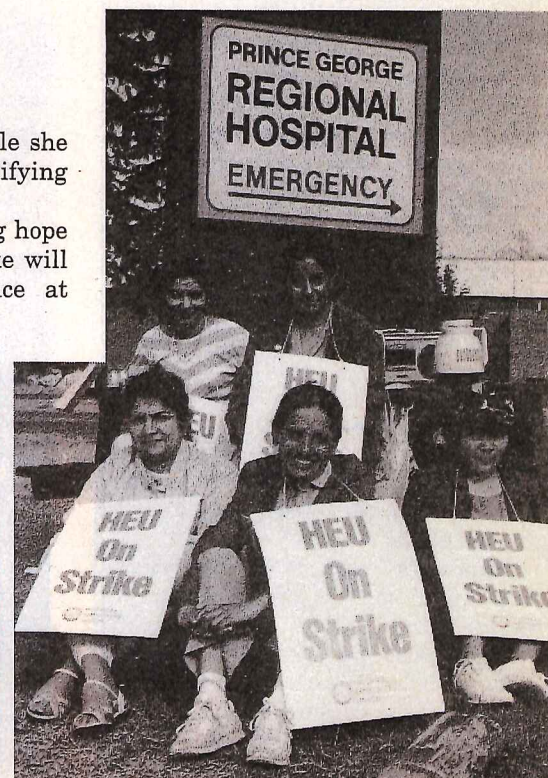
While Russell admits there will always be those who complain

throughout a strike, on the whole she says the strike has had a unifying affect in her local.

Like so many activists, her big hope is that participation in the strike will translate into better attendance at future union meetings.

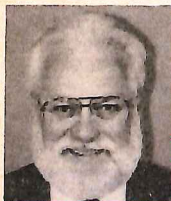


Support from other unions was high throughout the strike as shown in this photo of a rally held in Prince George.



Pickers take a break at Prince George Regional Hospital.

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**Sean O'Flynn**  
Secretary  
Business Manager



**Mary LaPlante**  
Financial Secretary  
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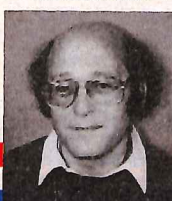
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**Melanie Iverson**  
Regional Vice-President  
Vancouver Island  
(Lady Minto Local)

## MAKING TECHNOLOGY WORK FOR HEU

# St. Paul's local goes high tech for HEU strike

The HEU strike went high tech for HEU members at Vancouver's St. Paul's hospital.

"We launched our strike organization into the 90s," says Rey Umlas, chairperson of the St. Paul's local. "Between the computer, cellular telephones, and high powered walkie talkies, we tried to use all of the tools available to ensure efficient strike operations."

St. Paul's set up a fully equipped

modern office complete with photocopying equipment and the local's computer as soon as the strike began.

"The only thing we were missing was a FAX machine," said Umlas.

The local used the computer to keep their picket pay records and produce bulletins to the membership.

Strike headquarters was housed on the 20th floor of the hotel next to the hospital. And with the BCNU next door, the HSA down a couple of floors,

there was close communication and co-operation between the three unions.

Management came to the headquarters for daily meetings, and provided the cellular telephone in response to a request for more phone lines.

Walkie Talkies have helped to protect the safety of picketers, as the hospital is located in Vancouver's West End. All three Unions used Walkie Talkies to stay in contact with picket captains and get instant reports of

situations.

"All of this high tech helped us," says Umlas. "But even without it our strike would have still worked. Because it was about people."

"Machines can't picket the hospital, machines can't talk to the public, and machines can't ensure essential services. Our members made this strike work."

## PATIENT PRAISES HEALTH WORKERS

Some B.C. hospital patients were on the front line of the recent health care dispute in more ways than one.

Take Nick Lippa, for instance, a retired resident of Elkford, B.C., who joined picketers at Sparwood General Hospital to show his support.

Lippa, who is confined to a wheelchair, said his recent 50 day stay in the Sparwood Hospital proved to him that health care workers deserve more respect and more money.

"Now that I've been a patient, I know what they (health care workers) go through every day," says Lippa. "I got fantastic care but everyone is so overworked because there are not enough people to go around."

The elimination of the nursing team is also apparent, according to Lippa. "Before, there used to be orderlies to help with the work but now they're gone and the registered nurses are left to pick up the work."

This, says Lippa, is not an efficient use of staff and has affected the level of care.

Lippa also believes most of the patients are sympathetic to the concerns of health care workers.

"I'm in support 100 per cent and I think they should keep fighting for what they believe in."



**HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION**

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The Hospital Guardian is published by the Provincial Executive of the Hospital Employees' Union, under the direction of an Editorial Committee whose members are: **BILL MACDONALD, SEAN O'FLYNN, MARY LaPLANTE, ALBERTA DORVAL, FRED MUZIN, DENNIS JEFFERY, CLARKE GARDNER.**

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