COUNTING BALLOTS
HEU’s convention delegates elected a new Provincial Executive to guide the union for the next two years.

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TABULATING RESULTS: Among those counting the votes were (left to right) Lisa Sami, Kathy Dunn, Gery McIntyre, Nancy Harbicht, and Janice Power.

18TH BIENNIAL CONVENTION
Victoria’s tight funding policies are undermining quality care with a province-wide wave of bed closures and layoffs. HEU convention delegates vowed to take action in their locals, their communities and across the province to protect quality care and jobs.

NEW LABOUR CODE
Tremendous improvements, but problems for HEU.

HELPING THOSE LAID OFF
HEU’s efforts to win aid for those hit by layoffs.

‘CLOSER TO HOME’ STRATEGY
Health unions warn Victoria on strategy for change.
Frontline workers must have a role in reshaping the health care system

H BC delegates from several northern locals were able to sit down Nov. 25 with premier Mike Harcourt and health minister Elizabeth Cull to discuss the funding cuts hitting our northern hospitals.

They told the government how the funding freeze is hurting patients in our health care system. They presented petitions from their communities and appealed for enough funds to maintain services while a transition plan to bring services "closer to home" is implemented.

The dialogue started that day is an important first step. It's vital for frontline health workers and government leaders to work at solutions together.

Many of the current problems flow from the government's concern about "overspecialization" of northern hospitals.

It's true that northern communities use their hospitals a much higher rate than southern communities. But don't blame the patients for that. Don't punish them with bed closures.

Those rates reflect the fact that the hospitals are almost the only source of health services in these communities. Bed closures and layoffs which occur before community services are in place amount to a cut in services - it's that simple.

HBC supports the philosophy of moving to a "closer to home" model. In order to achieve a new system provides equal or better care for British Columbians, the transition to a new model must be planned.

Health care workers must have a role in that planning process. Mike Harcourt and Elizabeth Cull said they agree with that view.

The government's continued determination to hold down the deficit at all costs means it won't be easy to protect quality health care. We'll need pushing Victoria to put the needs of British Columbians first.

But our Nov. 25 meeting proved the possibility of working with Victoria to ensure a better health care system emerges.

With this year-end issue, I want to thank all members, staff and friends of the HBC a happy holiday season and a Happy New Year.

The challenges confronting our union continue to multiply, but our members keep rising to the challenge.

A case in point is the very effective work done by our United Benefits Committee - the resolutions committees - the Constitutional Amendment Committee and the Tubulation Committee.

The 10th Biennial Convention set out a heavy agenda. We're fighting to protect our health care system. We're also determined to improve the working lives of our members with actions on workload and educational programs on issues like homophobia and violence against women.

Those are big jobs, but HBC members are up to it.


Double standards in media coverage?

Watching this debate between the Medical Association and the government over Bill 71 has been interesting.

There is nothing very revolutionary about setting a billing cap of B.C. It is something our doctors do. What I find the most interesting though, is the double standard that seems so prevalent in the editorial content and the public opinions expressed in the media.

In the spring, when the low-wage earning Hospital Employees Union members were on a legal strike to better their lot, the press ran heart-rending stories every day about people needing operations.

The fact that 635 hospital beds have been closed in the last ten months for lack of funds doesn't seem to matter. And what about the health care workers who have to work to survive?

Now this same public opinion is encouraging doctors who do not have the right to strike, and whose skills we need so badly in the spring, to withhold their services for as long as it takes, not to negotiate a contract but rather to force legislation to be rescinded and addiction.

LASLO SOOLTZE
Kamloops

Reprinted from the Kamloops News.

Australian health workers seek links

In October, the Health Services Union of Australia was fixed with the election of an extremely conservative, anti-union state government.

Their industrial relations policy is probably the most serious setback on our workers' wages and conditions - and the union movement - that we have ever witnessed in this country.

Our ability to fight industrially to protect our members' jobs, wages and conditions will be severely restricted due to some horrendous and positively Dikeisan legislation. I am working to seek your assistance in providing us with information on your struggle to your local dis- putes.

The experience of unions like the HBC will be invaluable to us here in Australia.

Don't tell me where to shop

I was an LFNurse aide in extended care units for nine years. Like many others, I ended up on long-term disability.

Through the near devastation of losing my job, my income and coping with illness, I was and always will be grateful to the union for the support they gave me. Without the union, none of us would have that disability pension to live on.

Reading The Guardian, I see much dissonance among the members on several issues, but particularly in regard to our policies and even on cross-border shopping.

The word union to me has always meant freedom. The union has fought long and hard, making many positive advances to allow everyone from thought and speech, along with a good standard of living.

Some of our funds may go to support women's rights and abortion. Those thrown out who disagree with this. They have different views on religion or otherwise, yet we respect the decisions that others make and have to live with.

We all do what is right for our survival. Therefore, I feel we should hold the right as responsible, adults to think and choose for themselves. No one should be telling us what political party we should belong to. People to whom we should vote or where we should be doing our shopping.

Being on disability, I resent the latter in particular. My income goes on a wage I earned five years ago. There is no increase and it will only spread so far. That is why we are so many people falling beneath the poverty line.

I certainly don't need we need the Union Creed written in our face, so make us feel guilty about where we shop. When we start dictating to others what they should do, we cease to be a unified support group and become a dictatorship. Haven't we already seen this in our present government? The result will only be rebellion by our people. At least in The Guardian, we are free to express what we feel.

P. COOK, Surrey

* The Union Member's Creed, which concludes with an appeal to buy Canadian, union-made products, appeared in the letters column in last year's October-De- cember issue.
Malaspina members okay new pact
HEU members at Nanaimo’s Malaspina Lodge used the threat of a strike vote to beat back employer concession demands and win the Pricewater standard agreement in a new contract vote Oct. 1.

When bargaining began, the union tabled pages of redlines and refused to even consider the Pricewater’s last offer. But the threat of job action forced the boss to take a more realistic approach. A new agreement — with three-year terms like the printed size of the contract — was quickly reached.

The new deal marks a long struggle for which the union included strike action — by lodge workers to win standardized industry contract conditions. In 1987, workers were making $5.64 an hour.

Sechelt’s St. Mary’s named best by Chatelaine
A lot of HEU Sechelt local members are beaming, says local chairperson Tom Ray, after St. Mary’s was recognized as one of the 12 best hospitals in the country in an Oct. Chatelaine magazine article.

Named “small but colorful,” the 88-bed facility won top marks for its low-risk obstetrics, psychiatric and cardiac care, as well as for a good reputation for health care delivery.

More money for some lab clerks
A new formula has been developed for lab clerks who work in the shooter line of laboratory work. The formula is based on the average wage earner in the community.

“I think it’s a step forward,” said the lab clerks.

New labour code a ‘flawed’ step ahead
The New Democrat government in Victoria has made good on its promise to replace Bill 19 with a new labour code that does much to restore fairness in labour relations but may finally limit HEU’s ability to exert pressure on employers.

The B.C. legislature was called back in late October to deal with the new legislation, which is also known as Bill 84.

“New labour code takes a modern approach, built on mutual respect and understanding,” said former minister Moe Sihota said when Bill 84 was introduced.

HEU secretary-treasurer Marko Allevato praised the bill as an important step forward for union organizing, but added that the new code does have some defects.

“While the restoration of automatic certification, the new anti-scalp law and many other changes are major steps forward,” said Allevato.

“These changes go a long way to restore fundamental rights that have been stripped by the Vander Zalm Social Credit government with Bill 19.”

“The anti-scalp provisions are very important. Collective bargaining rights are meaningless if employers can simply smash a strike and walk away from their unionized employees by hiring strike-breakers,” she added.

Most of the provisions in Bill 84 were designed to the benefit of three, large employers, including one representing workers and another representing employers.

Bill 19, which contained many provisions designed to foster unionism and was boycotted by B.C. organized labour, was drawn up in secret by the Vander Zalm government.

The new labour code will be similar in many respects to the labour code which operated before Bill 19 was passed in 1987. The Industrial Relations Council will again be known as the Labour Relations Board.

“While the government’s decision not to include sectoral bargaining in the new code, sectoral bargaining makes it easier for unions in unorganized industries to organize and sign contracts.”

New essential service rules undermine HEU’s job action rights
“Decision shuts the door on home care workers, daycare workers and many others. We must continue to press for these changes,” said Allevato.

The other area where Bill 84 concerns HEU is its provisions covering essential services.

While part of the law contains some improvements, Bill 84 fails to treat employees equitably as well as it could. As a result, the province has given itself a loophole that employers can use to avoid providing some essential services.

In the area of organizing, Bill 84 restores automatic union certification that protects 85 per cent or more of employees from union cards. Certification votes will take place when between 45 and 55 per cent of employees sign the union cards. A first contract may be imposed by either arbitration or mediation, once employees have taken a strike vote.

Unions will again have the right to negotiate “secondary boycott” provisions in contracts. This will allow for protection members refuse to cross picket lines or handle strike work.

B.C. will have an anti-scalp law for the first time. The law will prevent employers from hiring replacement workers during a strike. At press time, employers’ organizations were demanding deletion of this provision.
Unions warn Victoria on rush to reform

B.C.’s health care unions have called on the NDP government to reconsider the tight money policies which have caused bed closures and layoffs throughout central and northern B.C.

The appeal came in a joint response to the health ministry’s proposed strategy paper for reform of the health care system.

In response, the union joined with other unions in calling for changes in the health care reform process to ensure a voice for health care workers.

The unions emphasized their support for the principles of Medicare in provincial legislation, a major recommendation of last year’s royal commission.

As well, the brief which the B.C. Nurses’ Union, the Health Sciences Association, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the United Food and Commercial Workers submitted to health minister Elizabeth Call urged the government to reconsider its tight money policies.

After the Royal Commission on Health Care and Costs delivered its report last year, the government began a review process which included a ministerial advisory committee which had representation from the union.

The current set out proposed reforms was going to the B.C. cabinet in November for a decision on health care from. The union believes the changes will call for improvements on the reform document, which was produced by the Ministry of Health.

“One reform health care workers would like to see as a priority is the giving health care providers input into the delivery of quality health care services — both at the ministry level and at the local level giving level,” the union brief said.

It calls for elected hospital boards, equal pay, and more rights, restrictions on professional bodies to prevent double jeopardy discipline involving several different health professions, and an end to contracting out and medicare premiums.

“We challenge the government to examine its fiscal policy and the notion of deficit reduction in a time when much of the province is suffering from recession, affecting the health of communities,” the brief said.

Program ready to aid victims of cutbacks

A labour adjustment program to assist laid off health care workers find new work or get retraining is beginning this year.

Although talks between health care unions and the provincial government on the program are not yet complete, the Ministry of Health has sent a memorandum to 136 health care workers, including 72 union members, who have lost their jobs or been reduced to casual from permanent status, outlining their “options” as part of the labor adjustment program.

Health care workers were served layoff notices as early as May 1992.

However, serious consultation between the Ministry of Health, the Health Labour Relations Association and the three health care unions — the B.C. Nurses’ Union and the Health Sciences Association — did not begin until August.

The objective of the program is to assist laid off health care workers through options such as early retirement, relocation or retraining, and by ensuring that displaced workers have access to vacancies in health care facilities across the province.

Under the program, health care facilities that are hiring are expected to give preference before outside applicants to qualified workers who have been laid off from other facilities. Hospitals are required to report to the ministry any vacancies which arise, and displaced workers will be notified of these opportunities.

Training assistance will be made available to displaced workers.

Workers who register in a long-term care aide course, medical office assistant course or any course from an established list will qualify for financial help.

Laid off workers who find work in another geographical location, whether in a hospital or outside the health care field, will be reimbursed for their relocation expenses in line with government guidelines.

Transition financial assistance will be made available to laid off workers through a Supplementary Unemployment Benefits (SUE) plan. The SUE plan will top up unemployment insurance benefits to one year and two-thirds of the worker’s wage before layoff for up to 17 weeks.

In order to open up jobs in the acute care sector, the ministry will offer financial incentives to workers aged 38 or 59 in the same hospitals and classifications as workers facing layoff. These workers qualify for an unreduced pension if their retirement results in the recall of a laid off worker.

HBU, BCU, and HSA are continuing to press for a better labor adjustment program.
Swing a hammer, belt out a poem

BY DAN KEETON

WHEN Geoff Goodfellow read his poetry to Australian hospital workers in the desert mining town of Kalgoorlie, he pulled the usual surprise attack.

"I stopped for all the administration stuff and hit them with a reading and then I moved from nurses station to nurses station, stopping nurses, doctors, cleaners, anyone that was within listening distance or sight. They just absolutely loved it," the quiet-spoken Aussie relates. Goodfellow is a poet with a difference. To begin with, he's a guy who didn't read a book between the ages of 15 and 32. Nowadays, he probably reads a lot, and writes even more. And what he writes is poetry about fellow working people in their language, not in the rhyming lingo of the kind of poetry foisted on unwilling students.

Goodfellow's venues are different, too, from those of many colleagues. Most of his performances are at work sites, often through unannounced visits.

"I guess it's often that surprise attack too that can quickly break down the preconceptions people may have about art and about poetry," he explains.

"Working class people often expect poetry to be couched in the same sort of language that Shakespeare and Byron used, but people don't walk around talking that kind of language. And when they can hear poetry that they can understand, about issues that affect them, then they may grind to a halt and listen."

Goodfellow was in Vancouver last month as a featured artist at the city's Writers and Readers Festival. He wasn't difficult to pick out among the crowd in the Hotel Vancouver when I went to interview him. Dressed in jeans and denim shirt, with close-cropped, fading red hair, his lean, lit frame made him look every inch the former amateur boxer and building contractor he had been in a previous incarnation.

That was before he was sidelined by a back injury in 1982. Told by doctors he wouldn't walk again without an operation, "I basically saw myself out of hospital, went home and crawled around on my hands and knees for about 18 months. It was during that period of time that I picked up a book of poetry that had been left lying on the floor by one of my sons at home, and started reading that."

Goodfellow figured he could do that, too, and began doing so. He found his first audience among the roughnecks who frequented "the toughest bar in South Australia." Goodfellow was working there as a bouncer in 1984, and discovered he could avoid bloodstream and bad feelings by communicating with, rather than whacking or unruly patrons.

"I gained a huge audience of people, so that when I came to work each night as a bouncer they'd say, 'What have you got in your pocket tonight?' Those are blokes that are really heavily tattooed, that are working on building sites, working on labouring jobs in factories, and unemployed blokes, petty drug dealers, a wide range of working-class people." Goodfellow's connection with the trade union movement came in 1987, when he was reciting at the Semaphore Workers Club in Adelaide. Afterwards, a man came up and asked for six copies of Goodfellow's latest book.

"Six books!" I says, 'What a' ya gonna do, eat 'em? And he said, 'No, I'm secretary of the Construction, Mining and Energy Union. Our union has a policy of promoting poetry in our journal occasionally, and our members would love to read that stuff.'"

The member evidently loved it so well, the union made Goodfellow writer-in-residence in 1990. He now has four books of poetry under his belt.

Not that he's achieved that acclaim without opposition. The head of the Chamber of Commerce for South Australia, Lindsay Thompson, termed Goodfellow an international embarrassment for his practice of reciting on workplaces. Goodfellow's response was typical. He wrote a poem, Poetry In the Workplace (abridged here):

They had their chance

in their poetry as school he said
it's a bit late now
...As maybe Mister Thompson knows
a sunset has just fourteen lines
but would Mister Thompson know
the weight of workers steel-capped boots
or just that weight of coin required to replace a pat
& would Mister Thompson know
how families deal with death when a scaffold takes a maiden life
would Mister Thompson then respond
to a union call for increased safety?
or would Mister Thompson simply say
it's a bit late now.

As challenging as it is to the established order, Goodfellow's poetry sometimes confronts the attitudes of workers themselves. On workplace labours hear the writer's views on the macho attitude and its by-product, domestic violence.

"Sometimes you get heckled. But normally by the time I've finished a poem, the heckler has shut right up. Many of the men I've talked to about domestic violence have come up afterwards and said, 'Yes, there's a major problem and I'm glad that you're talking about it.'"

One rough-looking man told Goodfellow after a reading: "I wasn't going to listen to you today, I thought you were going to be some pooh-bah, but that poem on domestic violence was the one that stuck me as the strongest piece."

He said, 'I work here until four, knock off and go down to the pub, have about six beers, I've got to drive out to Elizabeth (which is about 25 kilometres drive) through heavy traffic and when I walk into the kitchen, if my tea isn't on the kitchen table, I'd just normally give her a backhand and say - Go on the table.' And he said, 'Things'll be different tonight, that's really made me think about what I'm doing in my life.'"

Goodfellow figures about 40 per cent of his readings are for college and middle-class audiences. "I don't want to talk to just working-class people. I want to educate those middle-class Australians and middle-class Australians do die to the struggles and aspirations and the pain and the suffering that a lot of people endure on a day to day basis."

* Geoff Goodfellow has four books out, published by Australia's Wakefield Press. At least some titles are available at Duthie Books in Vancouver, and a deal is in the works with a Canadian publisher.

UNION LOCK-IN: Striking members of the B.C. Nurses' Union and the Vancouver Municipal Employees' Union occupied the Salvation Army's Pendel Detox Centre in Vancouver last month during a labour strike to win a new collective agreement. Standing their ground are (left to right) John McTrey and Reg Epp, VMREU; Fran Sutherland, BCNU; and Allan Stewart, VMREU.
How the media saw HEU’s strike

By GEOFF MEGGS

BEFORE, during and after HEU’s lengthy job action, the union’s local executives wrote to the Provincial Office complaining that our message wasn’t getting out on television.

The union had committed substantial resources, including a new television advertising campaign, to explain the union’s view. It wasn’t getting through. Why?

Some of the answers are contained in a fascinating study of television news coverage of the HEU dispute produced by Simon Fraser University communications student Julius Fisher.

Fisher is an old friend of HEU. He helped produce our Heart of Health Care theatrical show in 1991.

Fisher analyzed 40 television news reports broadcast on the three Lower Mainland stations between March 31 and April 25, 1992. His findings show just how tough HEU locals were when they complained of media bias.

The HEU dispute received substantial coverage, packing up more than 195 minutes — just over three hours — of news coverage. Doctors, administrators and hospital public relations people were interviewed.

In the 40 newscasts analyzed, “not a single hospital worker was ever once asked to report on conditions in the hospital.”

In the 22 newscasts which reported on the employers’ estimate of the impact of the dispute, only three allowed a union代表 in the same show.

Eleven of the newscasts included patients giving their feelings about the dispute, one of which concluded with the question “why should human beings have to suffer like this?”

The most incredible finding in the Fisher study involves pay equity, the critical issue in the dispute.

The total elapsed time of the news reports on our dispute was 195 minutes. The average time dedicated to pay equity was two minutes, five seconds, or 1.46 per cent.

The total time for personal stories of patients affected by the dispute was 13 minutes, 47 seconds.

What’s the solution? Fisher says we may have to lead reporters by the nose, actually producing sample television pieces of how to make our issues visual.

Not surprisingly, that’s what many HEU members have suggested. They asked for tapes of the show, and for stories about their work and their families to friends, neighbours and their local cable channel.

If reporters won’t do the job right, we may just have to do it for them.

Three nations join hands in fight against NAFTA

Trade unionists, community activists and politicians from three nations joined hands at the Peace Arch Oct. 18 to protest the North American Free Trade Agreement.

The rally, organized and sponsored by a wide range of groups including the B.C. Federation of Labour, the Washington State Labour Council and the Action Canada Network, is the first of a continent-wide campaign linking groups in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

“We face a calculated assault on our living standards disguised as free trade,” said keynote speaker Rev. John Jacksom. Multinational corporations are seeking a way to maximize profits in the global economy.

“That means cutting wages, privatizing and deregulating whole industries and services, reducing aging social safety net, expanding agribusiness at the expense of farmers and abandoning environmental standards.”

The solution is solidarity, Jacksom said, to raise Mexican and American workers to the standards enjoyed by unionized workers in Canada. He appealed particularly to Canadians to fight to defend our medicare system, which is seen as a beacon of hope south of the 49th parallel.

NEP leader Andrew McLoughlin told the 3,000 demonstrators his party is committed “to aborting the Free Trade Agreement, say no to NAFTA and to continue to organize and ask Canadians to support us in that goal.

“It’s time for the people to take back our countries, to say no to politicians who would sell out our countries in the name of profit and capital.”

New local members offer unique service

By STEPHEN HOWARD

WITH a first contract in hand, members of one of HEU’s newest locals are in the forefront of cultural change in how native people care for their elders.

Rainbow Gardens, which opened in July — 16 years after local natives leaders first began raising money — is a 30 bed multi-level care facility in Port Alberni designed especially to meet the long-term care needs of native elders in the surrounding community.

HEU steward Ruth Crammer, who was hired in 1987 to coordinate the planning stages of the project, says the facility is a sign of how broader social and economic changes are affecting native families. Elders command much respect within both immediate and extended families. They’re cared for in the home, she said, with compassion to maintain their dignity.

When it’s time for an elder to die, members of their extended family are with them around the clock.

But Crammer, a carer aide, says economic pressures faced by many native families make it difficult — if not impossible — to continue the custom of home care.

The change will be slow and unusual. Crammer acknowledges. It will take time for native people to feel truly comfortable with placing elders in the facility.

It will also take time for elders residents to adjust to new surroundings. To date, five elders — from as far away as Bella Bella and the Queen Charlotte — reside in the facility.

Native culture and beliefs on aging are reflected in the type of care residents receive at Rainbow, says Darlene Amos, a care aide and the union’s local chairperson. Rainbow’s 35 HEU members, half native and half non-native, provide both extended and intermediate care in a different way.

Native meals like seafood and...
'This is our future'

Action on bed closures and layoffs

'We have to be ready to do what it takes.'
Delegates Mike Barker, Vancouver General, and Vicki Bertram, Nanaimo, urge action to protect quality care and jobs during health care restructuring.

ACTION plan to protect health care and workers' rights during the current restructuring of B.C.'s health care system was at the top of the agenda at HEU's 18th biennial convention.

The motion passed after emotional debate in which delegates from locals already facing layoffs and bed closures warned of a bushed convention that every HEU local will soon or later face the problems of declining quality of care, bed closures and layoffs.

The delegates also passed a resolution committing HEU to work with other unions and community groups in actions, including job actions, to defend the principles of Medicare, especially at the next federal election.

Delegates at first considered deleting the reference to job action, then voted overwhelmingly to reinstate it, recalling the vital role of job action during Operation Solidarity and the fight against Bill 14.

"This is the most important resolution to come to the floor," Shaugneaux delegate Blaine Thomas said during debate on the resolution to deal with provincial health restructuring. "This is our future.

"Shugaheeny hospital went through several sets of bed closures which were unopposed," Thomas said, but now the local has stood up to fight.

Delegates from other locals feel the bite of restructuring, particularly locals in northern B.C., also stood up and told their stories.

"We're in the fight of our lives in the North," said Colleen Fitzpatrick of the Prince Rupert local, listing the cuts that have hit her hospital this year. "What this does to a community is devastating it.

Elaine Figueiro of the Terrace local told how a community petition drive in the northwest coast town got 14,000 signatures to defend their hospital against bed closures last year, forcing the Soviets to back down.

"We stopped logging trucks, and we boarded fish boats to get signatures for our petition."

"I do not trust that this NDP government will provide proper funding to any hospital in the province."

Prince George delegate Nancy Lang had a blunt warning: "It's coming to you. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

Children's Hospital delegate Louise Hutchinson said the Royal Commission on Health and Costs has called for the closure of 2,000 hospital beds, and warned that the health ministry supports this recommendation.

HEU's convention delegates pledged the union's resources to defend quality care and workers' jobs

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HEU ‘up to challenge’

Although HEU members are seeing change everywhere from their own union to the workplace as a result of provincial and international forces, HEU president Bill Macdonald told convention delegates Oct. 6 that he is confident HEU members can meet the challenge.

“The rank and file membership of this union has proven again and again that there’s more leadership ability in the smallest HEU local than there is in a dozen hospital boardrooms.

“When health employers told Victoria this spring that HEU rank and file members had no stomach for a battle, no ability to strike and no wish to fight for fairness, it was the grassroots members of this union who taught them a hard, harsh lesson,” Macdonald said.

“The collective agreement achieved by our union this year is much less than our membership deserves — but it is far, far more than health bosses thought they would have to pay.”

The new NDP government is making major changes, including a new labour code, and reform of the health care system, which Macdonald said is taking place “in a way that is somewhat surprising and often unacceptable to us.”

Macdonald recalled NDP leader Mike Harcourt’s pledges to the last HEU convention to bring in a new labour code, take action on team nursing and make an all-out effort to defend Medicare.

“I don’t recall him saying anything about layoffs, cutbacks and underfunding,” Macdonald said, “but I remember very well what I told him about our union and our independent attitude to political parties: I reminded him of our determination to participate in the political arena to advance our own union agenda.”

HEU faces trends such as the push for larger unions and bargaining agents. But these problems also include opportunities for organizing and having a voice in changes being made by the provincial government, he said.

On the national level, the Tory government in Ottawa is slashing contributions to health care.

“This is a direct result of the corporate pressure to cut social spending, reduce taxes and integrate our economy with the United States.”

“We’re in a fight for our lives, we’re in a fight for our jobs, and we’re in a fight for our medical services.”

Members key to HEU success

HEU will continue to work together with other health care unions and with communities to fight bed closures, HEU secretary-business manager Carmela Allevato told convention delegates.

"It is unacceptable that decisions are being made about cutbacks behind closed doors," she said, "and it's only because HEU is there that communities are even hearing about them, and getting a chance to fight to preserve services."

While the new government has provided HEU with several disappointments, particularly its fiscal policy, Allevato said she can't imagine what problems HEU would face today if the Socialists or the Liberals had won last year's election.

In a wide-ranging report, Allevato said HEU will also face major changes with the disappearance of the anti-labour provisions of Bill 19 and the work of the Kurkin Commission, which will examine HEU's call for a single bargaining agent in health care.

As HEU turns its 50th anniversary in 1994, she said the union is strong because it is democratic and bases its work on the needs and hopes of its members. "This was most apparent in the most recent round of bargaining."

"The strategy adopted by the union wasn’t adopted behind closed doors, detached from the membership. It was based on the daily experiences of our membership in the workplace and it was carried out in a manner that reflected the level of confidence and respect the leadership of this union has for its members."

Allevato said HEU will continue to work hard to make sure the terms of collective agreements are respected. Many areas, such as pay equity, are still being negotiated by committees established under the Master Collective Agreement.

Allevato's appointment as secretary-business manager was ratified by convention delegates in a secret ballot.

'Make medicare an election issue'

Canada's medicare system is in mortal danger, says the president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and health care workers must be in the battle to save it.

Judy Darcy told HEU convention delegates that her union's spring campaign about the threat to medicare—which was supported by HEU in B.C.—sparked a strong response among Canadians, especially those in older generations who remember the hardships of life without universal access to care.

(HEU is affiliated to the Canadian Labour Congress as the result of a special relationship with CUPE, which represents health workers in most other provinces.)

"Saving medicare must be the key issue in the election," Darcy said. "We must judge politicians by their stands.

Convention cuts dues, increases rebates

The issue of dues was at the top of HEU's convention agenda Oct. 5, but delegates voted to discuss the issue last.

They agreed with Victoria delegate Stan Hambley, who argued that the debate on dues should be postponed until the convention had resolved all matters with a serious cost implication.

So it was late in the day Oct. 9 before convention received the Provincial Executive's recommendation to reduce dues to 2 per cent of gross income from the current rate of 2.6 per cent.

Under the union's constitution, 25 per cent of dues income (or $6 per cent of each member's gross income) had been channelled into HEU's strike fund.

With that fund now holding more than $6 million and the union's outstanding debts cleared off, delegates agreed a reduction was in order.

But the need to mount a major effort in defence of quality care and members' jobs during health care restructuring had dominated convention discussion.

In the end, delegates decided to reduce dues to 2.1 per cent of gross salary with 1 per cent of gross salary allocated to the strike fund.

That will leave the remainder to fund the many new HEU programs established by convention.

Notice of the dues change was sent to employers later that month.

The convention also voted to increase local rebates. This means that union locals will receive a larger share of dues income to finance their local activities.

Locals with 99 members or less will receive $170 a month, up from $120. Locals with 100 members and over will receive $1.70 per member per month, up from $1.25.

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CONVENTION '92 • THE HEART OF HEALTH CARE

CONVENTION GAVEL was awarded to UBC local for its solidarity during last spring's job action.

Few decisions are as difficult for the HEU's Provincial Executive as the determination of which local should be awarded the convention gavel. At the end of each convention, the gavel is presented to delegates from the local which has best epitomized HEU's traditions of solidarity and militancy.

This year, the gavel went to the UBC local, which had to strike three times while the rest of the union struck once. UBC took action first in support of striking CUPW workers employed in the facility. Then, the Monroe award failed to give the local full protection of the master collective agreement, UBC struck again to win that long-sought goal.

Health Sciences Association president Jackie Henwood brought her union's greetings to the HEU's convention Oct. 5. HEU and HSA have been working closely on many fronts, including organizing on Vancouver Island.

John Fitzpatrick, secretary of the Vancouver and District Labour Council, brought greetings to the convention and urged all locals to affiliate to their local labour councils. Labour councils provide vital service on a regional basis, Fitzpatrick said. In Vancouver's case, educational programs, conferences and local picket line solidarity are all coordinated by the labour council. HEU assists smaller locals to affiliate by covering their affiliation costs.

The long struggle of Canada's First Nations for recognition of their rights took centre stage Oct. 8. with a joint appearance by Chief Ed John and Chief Wendy Grant, of the B.C. First Nations Task Force. HEU First Nations delegates held their first caucus during the convention to consider establishing a network for native Holden members.

MEXICAN NURSE Margarita Domínguez Murrufo told of the plight of health workers in her country.

B.C. Fed welcomes NDP initiatives

Labour shouldn't lose sight of the gains achieved under the NDP government, says B.C. Federation of Labour president Ken Georgetti. Improvements to the minimum wage, funding of abortion clinics, changes to the Human Rights Code and community input to many government boards would have never occurred under Social Credit, he said. "It's easy to forget how bizarre and unpredictable that government was." At the same time, he said, while the NDP and labour share a common vision, "our views on how to reach our goals and our priorities may be radically different."

BCNU welcomes new solidarity

The growing solidarity between HEU and the B.C. Nurses' Union has been a major achievement of the past two years, BCNU president Debra McPherson told HEU convention delegates.

In a brief address, McPherson paid tribute to HEU members for their dug-in determination during last spring's job action. HEU's tactics went a long way to building support and understanding among BCNU's members, McPherson said.

That solidarity would be needed, she predicted, in the coming campaign to save the health care system from an arbitrary and unplanned conversion to a "closer to home" model.
**HEU moves on job-sharing**

HEU’s longstanding policy against job-sharing (in any form) was ended Oct. 8 by convention delegates who voted in favour of a policy permitting voluntary job-sharing under strict guidelines.

The policy change came after spirited debate in which delegates spoke of the strong demand for job sharing while others raised concerns about employer attacks on full-time jobs.

In the end, delegates agreed that the issue was one of fairness to women, who need the job-sharing option to enable them to carry out childcare and homemaking responsibilities.

The resolution passed by convention call for the Provincial Executive to draw up a policy that would permit job sharing “within strict guidelines which preserve full-time work where a shared job would return to a full-time job should one of the employees vacate the shared job.”

Such a policy must not lead to the elimination of full-time jobs and must be different from job spreading, the technique used by employers to replace full-time jobs with part-time jobs.

Many delegates said the policy change is necessary because job sharing is already becoming a fact of life.

“Job sharing is going on whether we like it or not,” said Kathy Mofat of the Squamish local.

**Education programs to be improved**

HEU’s ambitious education programs need still more work, said convention delegates, with more emphasis on new members.

The convention overwhelmingly approved a proposal from the Victoria Jubilee local for an orientation video for new members on the union’s policies, structure and history.

They also approved a resolution calling for the appointment of a full-time staff education officer to ensure educational work continues year-round.

Orientation videos are long overdue, said Whonnock delegate Della McLeod, and would be especially useful in small locals.

To general laughter she proposed videos on union history, convention procedure and even “a mystery video on what becomes of our grievances.”

The delegates also supported continuation of the union’s unique residential summer school program, which brings about 200 members a year for up to two weeks of instruction.

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**New delegates enjoy rough and tumble of debate**

Of first-time delegates Doreen Fraser and Bever Saggar, both of Vancouver’s Grace Hospital local, HEU’s biennial convention was a week of intensive learning and building new friendships.

But by the end of five-day meeting in Richmond, both declared themselves delighted to have been elected.

“I’d tell people in my local not to be afraid to go out and experience these new things,” said Fraser, a licensed practical nurse.

“We got a lot out of it and seeing the reaction of the members and the way they debated was really educational for us.”

Both Fraser and Saggar, a caseworker at Grace, headed out to Richmond the evening before the convention for a crash course in the rules of order by union president Bill Macdonald.

Then it was onto the floor and into the debate. With the help of more experienced delegates, both women soon found themselves “working through the muddle of ‘wheresoever’ and ‘therefore’.”

Saggar was astonished at the blunt way delegates demanded information from the leadership, right down to details of their salaries. And she was impressed by speaker Margarita Dominguez Mendoza, who told of conditions in Mexico hospitals.

Although neither delegate took the opportunity to speak, they closely followed the debate.

By week’s end, Fraser said, both had “developed a lot of friendships from around the province” and benefitted from discussion both on and off the floor.
A question of freedom

Defending the rights of lesbians and gay men

Last summer, HEU’s Provincial Executive advised locals that the union would sponsor two delegates from every region to attend OUT-Sights, a national conference for gay and lesbian rights.

“We posted those notices,” Royal Jubilee delegate David Ridley told convention delegates. “The effect was incredible and instantaneous. “Homophobia came out of the closet. Those notices came down so quickly that we had to repost them.”

“People stopped me in the corridors, we had discussions, we had arguments. We have an educational job to do.” Those discussions carried onto HEU’s convention floor with a resolution committing the union to combatting discrimination against lesbians and gay men in the legal system, immigration system, education system and in the media.

The resolution, which was carried unanimously, was amended by delegates to call for an HEU campaign “to combat homophobia in the workplace.” No one spoke against the resolution.

Homophobia – an unreasoning fear or prejudice against lesbians or gay men because of their sexual orientation – is a reality in our society and in our health care system.

One gay male delegate brought that home to delegates with the story of his battle against fear and hatred in a small, rural local. Rumours circulated that he was dying of AIDS and one fellow worker refused to work alongside him, forcing him to find someone else to help lift patients.

“Homophobia is a big problem,” he said, “and it’s not just in the media, it’s in the workplace as well.”

Here are excerpts from the comments of two men who spoke on this important resolution.

One is a gay man, who spoke with emotion and gentle humour. The other is a born-again Christian who spoke with equally compelling honesty.

A gay man’s view

RICHARD DIENIS, YALESTOWN HOUSE

THESE are very emotional issues for us. I’m a somewhat opinionated person, I do what I can to make this a better world. That’s why I’m here.

I believe in all the causes you believe in, all the struggles that we’re engaged in and I’m proud of what I believe in. I’m proud of who I am. I think I’m a good man and brothers and sisters, I will be judged for my beliefs, I don’t mind that.

HEU’s gay/lesbian caucus

By EDWARD DENSLEY and GWENDA PECK

THURSDAY, Oct. 7, 5:50 p.m., just before adjournment at the HEU’s 18th Biennial Convention, an announcement: “Immediately after adjournment today there will be a lesbian and gay caucus.”

Silence initially, then an audible discomfort. In the hall full of 500 brothers and sisters there were whispers, loud gestures, laughter and sarcastic comments. Meeting adjourned.

Shortly thereafter, an historic event. It was/it’s a beginning of a new chapter in HEU, one that is long overdue. The lesbian and gay caucus met.

We sat and shared stories of harassment and discrimination, directly attributed to homophobia in the workplace.

How many untold or unheard stories are out there? How many have given up, quit their jobs, run away and/or committed suicide?

How can we as lesbian and gay union members win the battle of homophobia in the workplace?

We can’t, but as individuals in a minority group, we can begin to educate our brothers and sisters, and together we can win this battle.

We all know people who tolerate us, but tolerance isn’t enough!

From this caucus we formed the first HEU lesbian and gay committee with GWenda Peck and Edward Densley as co-chairs.

The committee would like “all” to come forward and join in a united voice to fight homophobia in the workplace. We invite you to write and place your name on a mailing list for a newsletter so that we can share with you our victories on the issue of homophobia.

Write to Edward Densley, 106-2328 Cambridge St., Vancouver, V6L 1E7.

Friday, Oct. 8. It was unanimously resolved that HEU would “implement a campaign to combat homophobia in the workplace.”

Another historic event. HEU is now not only verbally committed to fighting homophobia but financially as well. It takes education to fight any wrong and education costs money.

We thank all of our brothers and sisters across the province and particularly those who are at the end of the day rope, unanimously, in support of what is right and just.
"Until we are free, nobody is free."
RICHARD DENNIS

CONVENTION '92 • THE HEART OF HEALTH CARE

Gay/lesbian conference offers national network
BY DOREEN DAVIDSON

OUTRIGHTS GROUP: HEU’s delegates to the PanCanadian Conference on Gay/Lesbian Rights (top row, second from left) Edward Densley, Louise Hutchinson, June Boyce, Ronnie Nielsen, Robert MacDonald, Robert Reid; (bottom) Doreen Davidson, Gwendol Peck, Kevin O’Neill.

A born-again Christian’s view
KELLY COOK, HARDY VIEW LODGE

I WOULD like to stand in agreement with the communi-
ty’s concurrence but I would like to explain why.
This is a little bit difficult for me. Since HEU summer school I have had to deal with a lot of issues in my life and homophobia is one of them.
I would like to point out that in order for us to really deal with homophobia, we’re going to have to look at the second paragraph (which says “HEU is committed to the principles of human rights and equity.”)
Once we get that right, the rest is going to fall into the line. This is not a condemnation of my brothers and sisters who attended this week, but I am a born again Christian, a small ‘o’.
My relationship with God is very real to me and very personal but several times this week I heard brothers and sisters using the words “Goddamn” and “Jesus” and “Christ” and some even said a thing.
What do you do to my rights as a Christian? What do you do to my respect for God? You put it lower than your respect for human existence.

Brothers and sisters, unless we have our rights preserved, I would like to point out that in this room we will never be sensitive to the people who are gay and lesbian.
I have two girls. When they grow up if they choose to be lesbian women, that is their choice and I want their rights preserved.
But I can guarantee that’s never going to happen until all of us in this room take this issue and put it right here, right in your heart.
This a country, Canada is a coun-
try that is pluralistic. My rights are equal to your rights. You know, back in World War II, I can’t quote this exactly, but it kind of goes like this: “When they came for the Jews, I stood there and watched them. When they came for the Catholics, I stood there and watched them, and so on and so forth, and when they came for me I was all alone, there was no one left.”
Brothers and sisters, if we don’t band together now, in this country of Canada, the extremists are going to take over and we’re not going to have a say in anything. We need to realize this.
I believe this (resolution) does it and I wholeheartedly support the committee’s recommendation of concurrence.

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A SHORT STORY BY DAVID WRIGHT

Tom held the soap to his nose and sniffs. It smelled like oranges.

"Is that for your mother?" Lea, his wife, asked.

"I always get her soap. She loves it," Tom said.

"Didn’t you get her exactly the same thing last year?"

"No." Tom stuffed the soap back into its box.

"It was a yellow daisy soap last year.

The phone rang. As Lea went to get it, Tom wrapped the Happy Mother’s Day paper around the little box. Tom was never very good at taping corners so he twisted the excess paper into a pony tail at the top and secured it with one long piece of tape.

Lea peeked her head around the corner: "Tom, your mother. She’s fallen again.

They caught the 6:30 ferry that evening. When they got to the Nanaimo General Hospital, Tom’s sister, Esther, and her husband were sitting by mom’s bed.

"She’s been asleep," whispered Esther. "We thought she broke her hip because of the way she fell. She landed on her side and she had a lot of pain up around here." Esther pointed vaguely to her rear end. "But the doctor says it’s just a bad bruise. Thank the good Lord it wasn’t her hip because the way she fell..."

"Tommy," mom said as she tried to sit up.

Tom stepped forward. "No, don’t sit up, mom. You’ve had a bad fall."

"Don’t sit up, mother," Esther said. "For goodness sake, don’t sit up."

"It’s nice to see you, Tommy," mom said, her eyes wide and alive. "And how are you doing? Lea, Lea?"

"She’s right here," Tom stepped out of the way.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Sheridan? Are you in much pain?"

"Not as long as I don’t sit up," mom said.

"Mother, you can’t stay at that big old house all by yourself anymore," Esther interrupted.

"I thought the doctor said it’s just a bruise," Tom said.

"Yes, but what if she falls again? What if Ted and I are up in Ladysmith visiting our kids and mother can’t get to the phone? She could be lying there for hours or days. We can’t be there all the time."

"Maybe mom could move in with one of us for a while, Tom said.

"We can’t take care of her," Ted stood up. "We only have a small house and we’ve got kids all the time."

"We can’t be there all the time," repeated Esther.

The nurse walked in. "I’m afraid visiting hours are over, people."

"Oh, okay," Tom said. "Lea, the presents."

"They’re right here. Mrs. Sheridan, these were for Mother’s Day but we thought we’d give them to you now so you can enjoy them."

"Oh, thank you, mom," said when mom saw the little box with the wrapping paper ponytail she smiled and looked up at Tom.

And Tom spent the next couple days while mom was in the hospital, packing her things into boxes for the move. It was an impossible task. mom had been filling that old house full of things for 60 years. A lifetime as long as that doesn’t fit in just one box. By the time Tom had filled his tenth Osler orange crate, his careful system of organization had been reduced to dumping whole drawers, unsorted, into the cardboard containers.

Lea was just about finished in the bedroom so Tom proceeded to the bathroom. It always smelled like mom in there. On the bathtub ledge was the same half empty bottle of Johnson’s Baby Shampoo. In the medicine cabinet was the same assortment of home remedies that she always had on hand...Bayer Aspirin, Vaseline Intensive Care and Alka Seltzer. The yellow daisy soap. Tom had bought her last year was by the sink, still unused. Tom dropped the items in the box and opened the cabinet drawers. He should have put the towels in before the bottles but at this point he couldn’t have cared less. By the time he’d emptied the first three drawers, the box was already full. He opened the last drawer. It was filled with soaps. Some Tom recognized. Some he didn’t. He stirred his hand through the waxy colours...flowers, hearts, stars, bunnies, ducks, little girls, little boys. His mind jumped back 20 years — playing in the front yard in the sunshine. The ball landed in among the flowers of moon’s garden...A million different colours — the smell so thick it itched his nostrils and made him sneeze.

"Gesundheit," yelled Lea from the other room.

There was one brown soap at the bottom of the drawer. Tom pulled it out. There were dents and marks from the other soaps and the ties were worn down, but it was definitely the football — the soap football. Tom had bought for mom when he was six.

Tom remembered going with dad to the drugstore and picking it out himself. He remembered wrapping it, twisting the paper and taping it with a long piece of see-through tape. He remembered mom’s face when she opened it — the smile, the happy, almost mischievous look in her eyes as if hidden in the soap, there were actually diamonds or gold that only she and Tom knew about.

"Tom," Lea was standing over him. "What’s wrong?"

She looked blurry through her wet eyes. "Nothing," Tom laughed. "It’s just those soaps. My bad.

She knew, your mom’s never going to have time to sort through all this stuff. Why don’t we put all the disposable items in one set of boxes? What have you got there?"

"A football. A funny thing to give my mother," Tom laughed again as he wiped the tears from his eyes. "Lea, I was thinking...if I remodeled that spare bedroom downstairs and maybe..."

"Lea’s face was blank.

"I mean we have a pretty big house," Tom continued. "And two full bathrooms."

Lea still didn’t answer.

"Well, what do you think?"

"Tom, I like your mother very much. I mean, she’s a wonderful person but...she’s always into everything. She arranges my drawers and sorts my tupperware and tells me how to cook. I don’t cook my vegetables long enough and ‘Tommy always likes his eggs turned’.

"I do," Tom said.

"That’s not the point," Lea picked up one of the empty boxes. "It’s not her job anymore, it’s mine. Sometimes after your mother has been over I almost go insane. And that time she was over for two weeks, I swear I almost had a nervous breakdown. Maybe it’s me, I don’t know. Besides Tom, if you get that sales rep job, we might be moving around a lot.

"Yeah, I know," Tom spun the football on the floor.

Lea held out the box in front of her. "Do you think your mother is going to need all those soaps?"

Tom looked at the soaps for a second. "I guess..."
She smiled. "What do you think?" Esther asked as she looked around the room.

"Mom's head was turning from side to side. "Where's the kitchen?" The creaker was down the hall, the hostess said with a smile. "Meal times are at 8:00, 12:00 and 4:00 every day. The nurse will assist you if you need help."

"Isn't that great, mother?" Esther asked. "No more slaving over a hot stove. And there's lots of people your age, you'll be better for you. You can make friends. And the nurses are right here. All you have to do is ring the bell and they'll come and help you."

"I don't need any help walking, mom," mumbled as she turned to look out the window. There was a moment of silence.

"Well, ma, mother, Esther repeated. "What do you think?"

Mom didn't answer.

"Mother," Esther's voice rose. "It's nice," mom said finally. "Who will be making the arrangements?"

The hostess asked.

"I will," Esther said as she followed the hostess down the hall.

"What's that?" mom turned around.

"It's our potted plant," she asked.

"That's it", mom said.

"What's that?" mom turned around.

"I've packed your belongings," she said.

"But we can't bring it all here."

"What's going to happen to my house and my garden?"

"You can keep some of your things in a sunny box and I'll have it in to have to sell the house. Ted and Esther said they'd take care of that for you, "

Tom said.

Tom was sitting on the edge of the bed. Tom thought she was going to cry.

"Mom," Tom touched her shoulder. "Mom, are you all right?"

Tamara said as she walked down the hall.

"What's that?" mom turned around.

"It's our potted plant," she asked.

"But we can't bring it all here."

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"Mom," Tom touched her shoulder. "Mom, are you all right?"

Tamara said as she walked down the hall.

"What's that?" mom turned around.

"It's our potted plant," she asked.

"We can go to Hawaii until we visit her next weekend?"

"What about Hawaii?"

"What about Hawaii?"

"How are you doing? Didn't Ted move your stuff in? Your room is so empty and you didn't have your presents yet."

"She put the gifts on her lap."

"No, no," she reached down with her thick fingers and held her hand."

"Mom," Tom bent down to look in her eyes. "Aren't you going to see me?"

"No, no, I don't know you. Leave me alone."

Tom put his hands on her shoulders. "Mom, it's me, Tom."

She began to shake her head. "No, I don't know you. Leave me alone."

"It's your son, son, Tom. Look at me."

Tom shook her shoulders to look in her eyes but she tossed her head from side to side and began to scream.

Tom could see the nurse in the corner of his eyes. He screamed back at the old woman. "I'm your son. Don't you remember me? Your son."

"He let the woman go. She screamed as the nurse helped her into a wheelchair."

Tom looked at Les. She was crying. She tried to speak but couldn't get the words out. Tom knew what she wanted to say. He would have hated her if he could. He felt a blind hatred against everybody and everything - his mother, his family, himself. He wanted to break the chains into pieces and dash out the old people in them, the nurses and the smiling hostess.

Tom watched as they wheeled his mom away. She was still unrecognizable. She watched as she opened the box, took out the paisley-shaped scarf, held it to her nose and sniffed. As they wheeled him out the door, he thought he heard her say, "Les,"

* David Wright based this story on the experiences of his wife Laura, an MDU member at Central Park Lodge, Burnaby.
Protest continues against northern health cuts

More than 125 Prince Rupert health care workers and concerned citizens took to the streets Nov. 14 to protest proposals to close one-third of Prince Rupert Regional Hospital beds to balance the cash-strapped facility's budget.

Flanked by local motorcycle club members, the demonstrators marched through the city to NDP MLA Dan Miller's office, where Hospital Employees' Union leaders, community officials, and native elders pledged to gear up the fight to maintain quality health care in Prince Rupert.

The closure recommendations were outlined in an internal Ministry of Health review of the hospital's $800,000 deficit. The report recommended the closure of 24 of PRH's 77 beds, and laying off 25 to 30 caregivers.

While blaming the hospital's problems on administrative waste and "eurocharacter" of services, government officials acknowledged that the health care needs of Prince Ru-

Prince Rupert review admits more services needed

port of affected cabinet ministers. HEU, which is not affiliated to the NDP, supported the party in the last provincial election. Fourteen HEU members and staff who were delegates at the convention met regularly to discuss matters of concern to health care workers.

The resolution on labour adjustment program in health care was based on a report from former health minister Dennis Cokco, who complained it would "hasten" the minister of health.

But health minister Elizabeth Call spoke in favour of the resolution, which then passed.

"Before we lay off any more work-
ers, before we send any more patients home, before any more patients are kept out of hospital, we must have a system in place in the community," Victoria delegate and HEU fifth vice-president David Ridley told the convention.

HEU has called for a labour adjustment moratorium before hospital work-

WHAT ABOUT US?: Residents and health care workers show their con-

Funding curbs are cutting services, not waste

HEU activists tell politicians in Victoria

Fifty health care workers from northern B.C. pressured the NDP government to provide sufficient funding to maintain hospital services until a new plan is in place for an orderly transition to a "complete home health care model.

In meetings with premier Harcourt, cabinet ministers and MLA's in Victoria Nov. 25, HEU activists told MLA's they support the "closer to home" theme to provide better, more efficient health care. But they made clear the impact of government funding cuts on their communities and the problems caused by cutting hospital services without the necessary community services being available.

Northern hospitals were hard hit by budget cuts, bed closures and service cuts this year. Almost 25 per cent of all acute care services in northwestern B.C. communities were eliminated because of budget shortfalls.

The HEU delegation demanded that the government freeze bed closures until a proper transition plan is in place, and all possible savings — especially reduced administration waste and improved health and safety — be realized.

While the politicians were reluctant to make immediate commitments, HEU secretary-business manager Carmela Allevato said the lobby effort was constructive. "It was important for health care workers from the North to relay con-
cerns from their communities directly to premier Harcourt," she said.

The union's demands received strong community support at a Prince George public forum the night before the Victoria lobby. An overflow crowd of more than 200 heard heartbreaking stories from residents chronicling the decaying quality of care in Prince George and surrounding communities.

The union delegation to Victoria included representatives from HEU locals in Prince Rupert, Terrace, Kitimat, Mackenzie, Prince George, Williams Lake, Quesnel, 100 Mile House, Fort St. James, Vanderhoof, Hazelton, Smithers, Dawson Creek and Ft. St. John.
The unknown reformer

Helena Gutteridge: women's organizer

BY TRISH WEBB

When young Helena Gutteridge moved from her London birthplace to Vancouver in 1911, she was a woman with a mission.

Although only 32, she was already a veteran of Britain's Woman Suffrage movement, which was dedicated to winning women the right to vote. She was determined to bring that fight to Canada.

Her life not only benefited HEU members, it served as an inspiration. Until now, it has been ignored.

The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge the Unknown Reformer, by Irene Howard, is the story of Gutteridge's life and her struggle to win the vote for women. But there are other struggles recorded here, too, and Gutteridge had a hand in all of them.

With painstaking research and an obvious love of her subject, Howard recounts 50 years of activism in B.C. Gutteridge is present as a participant, organizer or leader in major social democratic initiatives of her day.

Born in a dirt-poor London working class family, she had earned her living as a department store sewer and then as a tailor. She left home at the age of 14 and became swept up in the turbulent political struggles of London at the turn of the century.

Her emigration to Canada stemmed from a desire to help spread the fight for Woman Suffrage to this country. In 1917, Canadian women won that battle.

But Gutteridge was already deep in new work, this time for Vancouver's working women.

In August, 1918, she organized workers in the Vancouver laundry industry. In September she led them out on strike for better wages, collective bargaining rights and a closed shop.

During the strike the newly-formed Minimum Wage Board met to set wages for various sectors of the economy.

With her forceful, well-reasoned arguments Gutteridge helped win a minimum wage for laundry workers that exceeded their bargaining demands.

Gutteridge's position at the bargaining table mirrors HEU's in many ways.

She successfully argued that wages should reflect the cost of living, and that women's wages were not just pin money.

She fought hard to eliminate pay increments intended to keep women's wages down, and to strike down age discrimination.

Gutteridge won recognition from the Minimum Wage Board that society should not subsidize industrial profits with wages that did not meet the cost of living.

Incidents of class struggle are common in this biography. Gutteridge was definitely class conscious, having been born poor in a London suburb.

Her orientation left her on the outside of the British suffrage movement.

Many British suffragists sought the vote for women with property only, and single women at that. Married women whose husband's owned property would get double representation, they argued.

Gutteridge fought for voting rights for women and men of all classes.

In Canada she formed her own Evening Work Committee to allow working women to participate in the fight for woman suffrage.

Defining herself as a social democrat, Gutteridge found support for her beliefs in the Common Wealth Co-operative Federation (CCF) which she joined right after its formation in 1932.

Gutteridge was born into the working class and would remain there all her life. She owned property for only two brief periods in her life, once just to gain eligibility in an Vancouver aldermanic contest.

When the CCF decided to run aldermanic candidates in Vancouver in 1936, Gutteridge was nominated, but she could not run.

Although her house-mate Edith Sneves made Gutteridge co-owner of her Triumph Street house, she was two hours shy of the required six months of property ownership in the city. The setback was only temporary, however.

In 1937, Helena Gutteridge became the first woman elected to Vancouver City Council.

It was a fitting prize for a woman who fought so hard to win suffrage for women 20 years earlier.

The book encapsulates 50 years of Vancouver labour history through the life story of one woman.

It is valuable beyond that because it celebrates the life of a strong, self-confident woman whose driving passion was justice. Such stories are far too often forgotten or ignored.

Justice for women, for working people, for visible minorities, and for the poor. Many of the issues facing progressives in Gutteridge's time are still debated at bargaining tables and in legislatures today.

Irene Howard's biography of Gutteridge is an important step toward changing history's prejudices. It is also an inspiration to women and men who hunger for justice.

Webb is a Vancouver journalist currently working on a history of the HEU.

November/December 1992 • CITRANE
Arbitrators rule Wicca a religion

When a Toronto community college professor, a member of the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union, tried to take part in religious holidays guaranteed in his contract, his boss turned him down.

"Why? Because Charles Arnold, a clerk, is a witch, a second-degree priest of Wicca."

Arbitrators upheld Arnold's grievance, ruling that "Wicca is the modern survival of the ancient pagan religions of Western Europe which were suppressed following the conversion in Roman times to Christianity."

Not-so-miraculous work practices in Japan

Japanese medical specialists have coined the word "karoshi" to describe a new occupational hazard: working yourself to death.

The government, faced with a health crisis and insurance claims filed by families who say a member died from overwork, are turning down. But last year, a Japanese court ordered the labour ministry to pay $210,000 to the family of a post-office manager who died of a brain haemorrhage after putting in several months of overtime.

40 pages a day and no stretching

Ward attendants at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre in Toronto must achieve a daily rate of 10,000 words—about 40 pages—per day. They must also log everything they do, including trips to the toilet, and provide the information to their supervisor in a memo. To ensure that they have time for all this, management issued a list of acceptable and unacceptable work interruptions.

Not so easy walk for charity

When her husband announced he was walking from England to Scotland on behalf of disabiled youth, Mrs. Jason Wheel was enthusiastic. "I was quite relieved to have a lot to do around the house," she told the British press. "However, as Jason took the first stage of his 1,000-mile walk, he fell over the starting sign and broke his leg."

"Perhaps it is just as well. On a previous walk he got wanderlust and was in the hospital for five days."

Airline safety note of the week

When the American Airlines' Association complained to Boeing about the inherent dangers of flying two-engined jets over the Pacific, they received this reply from Frank Fickson, Boeing's chief engineer:

"When you have two engines, you have two engines that can fail to bits. When you have four, you have four that can fail to bits. The less engines you have, the safer you are."

Buy union and help yourself!

Undertaking some home renovations!

The following products are on the "Do Buy" list of the Canadian Labour Congress because they are built by union labour:

- American Standard for bathroom fixtures
- Reynolds Aluminium for siding and shutters
- Telyphone Stillman for stove tops and heaters.

Foreign trade outside the law

Proposed B.C. Freedom of Information legislation developed by the NDP government is a "major advance," says the HEU, but will have to be tightened to ensure health employers comply.

In particular, the union is concerned about a clause in the law which would allow the head of any public body to keep information secret if he believed it "could reasonably be expected to harm the financial or economic interests of a public body or the government or the government's ability to manage the economy."

This exemption could be used to withhold almost anything, the HEU says.

The new law now is being circulated for discussion by NDP Burnaby North MLA Barry Jones. It would require a vast amount of government information to be available for public review.

Government and hospital officials got an earful at a packed public meeting from HEU members, doctors, registered nurses and community people about the clouds hanging over the future of Shaughnessy Hospital in Vancouver.

The hospital, which is now run by University Hospital together with the UBC site, is closing wards and is slated for further downsizing, according to leaked documents from the Greater Vancouver Regional Hospital District.

Members of the HEU Shaughnessy local have lobbied hospital management and politicians in Victoria and at the regional hospital district for a voice in the future of the hospital.

Along with other unionized workers and people in the community, the Shaughnessy local helped form the Save Our Shaughnessy coalition, which held a public meeting Sept. 17 at the hospital. More than 200 people showed up at the standing-room-only meeting.

Vancouver Councillor Libby Davies summed up the feelings of many people when she said, "I have one question: Does anyone know what's going on? We are dealing with 17 years of confusion and a lack of hospital planning."

Coalition co-chair John Janssone told the meeting that the hospital has been funded for 343 acute care beds, but the hospital administration plans to make Shaughnessy a 250-bed facility offering mainly surgical and short-stay surgery.

"We see the hospital being dismantled before our eyes," Johnstone said. "What we as health care workers have been told so far, and what we have seen happening, are two different things."

Millions are being spent to renovate wards that are later closed, said Johnstone, who demanded that the bed closures and layoffs be rescinded until the hospital's future is set in an open process.

Assistant deputy health ministers Steve Kenny and Peter Cameron told the meeting about the government's plans for health reform, and advanced education minister Tom Perry, the MLA for the area, defended the government's tight money policies.

HEU member John MacKenzie asked University Hospital president Dr. Lionel MacLeod why hospital workers have been kept in the dark. MacLeod said: "We have a vision, but we don't have a detailed plan yet."

Several hospital workers and physicians criticized the secretive decision-making at University Hospital, and veterans asked about the future of veterans who have lived in the hospital for years and now are being forced to move to other facilities.

A few days after the meeting, the Shaughnessy local was granted a meeting with the board of University Hospital.

"We are dismayed by the hospital board and administration's insensitivity toward health care workers, especially those of us who have received a layoff notice," the Shaughnessy local said.

The local called for an open decision-making process at Shaughnessy, but the board has yet to respond to this demand.

HEU urges changes to 'freedom of info' law

The law would also open up hospital society activities to greater public scrutiny.

But the HEU advised Jones Oct. 21 that the new law will have to include tough penalties for non-compliance if it is to be effective.

The government will have to educate employers about the law, the union warned.

When HEU has sought salary information under existing laws, some hospital administrators have defied the rules and suffered no consequences.

The cost of access should not be borne by individual applicants, HEU said, and a plain language guide is needed to help people determine where information is located.

The public consultation on the bill was to conclude in November and an amended law is expected to be introduced during the spring.
PUZZLE

The Winter Crossword

Across
1. Sit-down vehicles for winter hills
3. Warm snow
5. "Put another log on it"
6. Go-karts on skis
9. How they measure snow in Montreal
10. Hockey rink worker

Down
2. Dog
3. Ski’s attire
4. Below zero
5. Falling body temperature, get warm quick
6. You need these to go down or cross
7. Warmer than gloves
8. Severe snowstorm
9. Winter sleep
10. Best spot to warm toes
11. Winter footwear
12. Slippery Hot
13. Heat warrner
14. Can’t skate without it
15. Hockey rink worker

Solution

12. Staying indoors all winter causes this (2, 6)
13. Weather reports give this factor
16. Snow melter
17. Shoe with blade
18. Winnipeg nickname
21. Frozen skin
22. Hard part to warm

CALENDAR

The Guardian welcomes insertions for Calendar. Mail to 2066 West 10th Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V6J 4S5 or phone 734-2431.

HEU members get priority in the space.

FEBRUARY

26, 27 SATURDAY and SUNDAY, Queenie Labour Council Weekend Seminar.
13, 14 SATURDAY and SUNDAY, North-South Okanagan Labour Council Weekend Seminar.
20, 21 SATURDAY and SUNDAY, Prince George Labour Council Weekend Seminar.

MARCH

6, 7 SATURDAY and SUNDAY, Peace River Labour Council Weekend Seminar.
27, 28 SATURDAY and SUNDAY, Campbell River and Victoria Labour Council Weekend Seminar.

Saying no to NAFTA

With contributions from Canada, Mexico and the U.S., ‘Crossing the Line’ is the centre on the NAFTA. ‘An essential read for Canadian workers and trade union activists’—KIN LUCKHARDT, Education Department, Canadian Auto Workers

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New labour code
The NDP's new labour code is a dramatic improvement over the Socred version, but it falls short of HEU's hopes.

Page 3

The fight of our lives
HEU's 18th Biennial Convention put the fight to protect quality health services and jobs at the top of the union's agenda.

Page 7

Gay and lesbian rights
HEU convention delegates debate the union's response to "an issue of freedom."

Page 12

Soap flowers
A short story by David Wright examines one family's response to a mother's growing infirmity.

Page 14

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THE SPIRIT OF SHARING

This community clinic in Canton San Jose, Guatemala, serves a remote region. HEU convention delegates at the convention donated $3,800 to help the clinic continue its work.

urging of HEU members who fled Guatemala to escape death squad execution, donated $3,800 to help the clinic continue its work.

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