



Bargaining Bulletin

HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

THE HEART OF HEALTH CARE

NDP, independent MLAs attack vicious BC Liberal legislation

Bill 37 an assault on worker's rights, pay equity, says Opposition

The BC Liberal government's mean-spirited Bill 37, rammed through the legislature in a single sitting of the legislature last night, did not go uncontested as the New Democratic Party Opposition and two independent Liberal MLAs launched a relentless attack on the bill in a debate that lasted nearly 12 hours.

Opposition Leader Joy MacPhail and Vancouver Mount-Pleasant MLA Jenny Kwan were especially strong in their defense of health care workers, attacking the government for trying to force HEU members back on the job and remove their fundamental bargaining rights by imposing massive wage rollbacks and allowing for continued privatization.

Earlier in the day, MacPhail had introduced a private member's bill, The Health Care Services Continuation Act, which proposed a moratorium on further privatization so that health care workers and employers could get meaningful negotiations back on track.

But the government countered with Standing Order #81, which would authorize Cabinet, in extraordinary circumstances, to push through all three readings of a bill without adjourning the House. The order passed.

MacPhail attacked Bill 37 for rolling back the clock on pay equity:

...I'm really quite surprised at the female members of the Liberal caucus, quite frankly – how they stand up and vote for this theft from women. This government that's done nothing about pay equity.... They've had a pay equity report on their desk for how long – two years? – and nothing. Their contribution to pay equity is to roll the clock back by almost a decade, and the women in this caucus go: "Aye, aye." Isn't that great...How ridicu-

HOTLINE – 24-HOUR BARGAINING INFORMATION

sign up for e-mail @www.heu.org

1-800-663-5813, ext. 1515 & 1516
739-1515 or 739-1516 (Vancouver)

HEU web site:
www.heu.org



NUMBER

52

lous for this minister to somehow say, with a 15 percent wage cut, that they've protected the pay equity portion. ...It's clear the minister doesn't even understand the concept of pay equity. He thinks because his government protected one pay raise at the same time eliminating 15 percent of women's wages, that he's protecting pay equity....

Kwan addressed the cost-savings myth of privatization:

...The cost savings in contracting-out seldom materialize. This is what other jurisdictions have found when they went down that road. The argument that private business is more efficient usually translates into reductions in front-line staff, the use of inferior products and supplies, and low quality standards. There are numerous examples where this has happened, and we stand to learn from it....The examples in other jurisdictions, where contracting-out actually only cost the system even more money and delivered services that were substandard in the end.... In some instances, those jurisdictions had to actually bring those services back in-house within government....

For Paul Nettleton, Prince George-Omineca MLA (Independent), Bill 37 was a reminder of why he decided to leave the Liberal party caucus:

...Nothing I had seen or heard prepared me – or many of my colleagues for that matter – after the election of 2001 for the shock of my own government's health care strategy as it evolved. There had been no hint of the Premier's real agenda as we moved through a series of situations in opposition that we felt demonstrated conclusively our commitment to work together and not against health care professionals. Following the election, I watched in disbelief as we rejected the McEachern arbitration award for doctors with Bill 9 in the spring of 2001. This was followed by the Health Professions Amendment Act, the lab reform issue, Bill 92 and, more recently, the John Hunt conciliators report, which the minister has indicated he will reject if it adds cost to his health care budget. Nurses, doctors, HEU members and others soon learned that they could not rely on the Premier or their MLAs, for that matter, to keep their word and treat them with respect and dignity in addressing health care concerns....

Elayne Brenzinger, the Surrey-Whalley MLA who quit the Liberal caucus on International Women's Day (March 8), shared stories about some of the HEU members affected by Bill 37 – including one who was prevented from entering the legislature to hear the debate before its passage:

...Laura Ferguson is a pre-admissions clerk at the Victoria General Hospital. She started working at the Royal Jubilee Hospital but later moved to the VGH. She has been working as a health care worker for a total of 17 years. She has specific skills, knowledge and expertise which are crucial to her work as a clerk....Laura is scared that she is on the next list to receive a pink slip. She told us that the hospital has been

the first job where she has not experienced discrimination. Laura is part First Nations. Laura is also a single mum with two children. Faced with higher tuition costs, she is struggling to afford a college education for her daughter. Her son has ADHD and oppositional defiance disorder and requires special care. Both live at home. Laura is a single, working mum trying to support both kids. This is a single-income family trying to make ends meet. Faced with what this government is trying to do, Laura tried to come down to the Legislature to simply hear this debate. She was not even carrying a picket, yet she was told she could not come in to watch debate over a bill that is to have dire implications for her life. She was told the building was not open to the public. She is now at home watching this debate on TV. She was not even allowed as a taxpaying citizen to be privy to this government at work....

April 29, 2004