

CONVENTION CHARTS RENEWAL

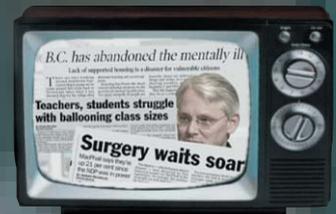
Change was in the air as more than 500 HEU delegates reviewed the last two tumultuous years, elected a new Provincial Executive and launched another chapter in the history of the 60-year old union. PAGE 8



GUARDIAN



WINTER 2004 • VOLUME 22 NUMBER 4 • THE VOICE OF THE HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION



GORDON CAMPBELL'S AD CAMPAIGN HE ISN'T FOOLING ANYBODY



time's up

AS THE PROVINCE COUNTS DOWN TO A MAY 17 ELECTION, HEU MEMBERS ARE GETTING READY TO HOLD GORDON CAMPBELL'S LIBERAL GOVERNMENT TO ACCOUNT.

SEE PAGE 5



KATE WILLIAMS PHOTOS

Restoring justice, the theme of HEU's 24th biennial convention, was top-of-mind for delegates as they elected a new Provincial Executive and established an agenda for change.

Delegates to the October 18-22 gathering spent a half-day reviewing the union's response to Bill 37 before embarking on an ambitious agenda that reflected the need for change – both within the union and at the legislature.

Union turns the page

for delegates attending the union's 24th biennial convention, it was as much about the future as it was about the past. As they took time to consider the intense and divisive events of this past spring, they vowed to make changes that would strengthen the union if faced with a similar situation

in the future.

The first day featured a review of last spring's job action and the events leading up to May 2.

Skillfully moderated by CUPE national secretary-treasurer Claude Généreux – who committed himself to work with delegates to “turn our minds, hearts, commitment and determination to the future” – the session gave voice to the frustrations felt by members during that difficult time.

In all, four dozen delegates spoke openly and candidly about their experiences on the lines, and their expectation that the union's decision-making process in future circumstances needs to be more broadly communicated to rank-and-

file members. Then delegates put in place a plan to reinvigorate the union and elected a new Provincial Executive to carry it out.

HEU president Fred Muzin and financial secretary Mary LaPlante were re-elected. Delegates also installed eight PE members who had never before served on the 21-member body.

Muzin says that he was proud to receive the support of a membership that's shown such tenacity and courage in the face of a government that's cut their wages, fired their co-workers and privatized the services they deliver.

“Convention delegates were determined to strengthen the union and restore justice to our members,” says Muzin. “I'm confident that our new PE is up to that challenge.”

And they've wasted little time getting down to the members' business. High on the list is delegates' call for a Task Force to review HEU's struc-

ture. The eight-member task force will include five members to be recruited from the general membership of the union by the end of February (see page 2). They'll be joined by first vice-president Sheila Rowsell, fourth vice-president Doris Gripich and trustee Harold Burns.

With a new round of bargaining just around the corner, the new Provincial Executive has decided to hold component-based bargaining conferences later this year.

The Task Force has a mandate to travel throughout BC soliciting members' views on topics such as servicing, support for new members and approaches to bargaining. It will report its findings to the 2006 convention. But with a new round of province-wide bargaining just around the corner, the new PE has decided to hold component-based bargaining conferences later this year.



ZORICA BOSANCIC

Bargaining starts now

When ex-finance minister Gary Collins recently promised to end his government's public sector wage freeze in 2006, I was reminded of his boss' now infamous pre-election promise four years ago that he wouldn't rip up collective agreements.

No worker can take their right to free collective bargaining for granted.

Most working people will continue to be skeptical of commitments like these – and recognize that collective bargaining rights must be defended at every turn.

But Collins' comments also serve to remind us that by this time next year, we could be at the table negotiating our province-wide facilities collective agreement along with contracts for community health and community social services workers.

Traditionally, HEU's bargaining priorities are hammered out at the Wage Policy Conference based on wage policy demands submitted by locals.

But there's an emerging consensus among HEU local activists that this approach – on its own – doesn't reflect members' diverse needs. And it doesn't generate proposals that speak to the unique requirements of the various job families and sectors within which our members work.

That's why the Provincial Executive is planning for a series of occupational- and sector-based bargaining conferences before next October's Wage Policy Conference in order to provide additional opportunities for members to develop contract proposals.

The details are still being finalized. But the plan is for reps from occupational groups – for example the nursing team, patient care technical, or trades and maintenance – to meet to develop demands for the Wage Policy Conference.

There's no shortage of workplace issues to be addressed at these meetings, for instance, the looming retention and recruitment crisis resulting from the Campbell Liberals' 15 per cent wage rollback. Or their short-circuiting of contract talks last spring leaving proposals that would have strengthened health care delivery to die on the vine.

I'm confident that the union's opening position in the next round of bargaining will benefit from this new approach.

And for our newest members – those who work for private contractors – the task ahead has its own challenges. These workers are fighting for their first contracts and for the most basic of union rights and health and safety protections.

If the last three years have shown us anything, it's that no worker can take their right to free collective bargaining for granted. And that we all have a responsibility to make sure that members' voices are heard at the bargaining table.

• *Zorica Bosancic is HEU's acting secretary-business manager*

voice.mail

December 6, an irony for HEU members

Regarding December 6 – Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women – the irony was not missed!

In May, 2004, when Gordon Campbell and the other thugs in our BC Legislature robbed hospital employees of 15 per cent, they sent a message, loud and clear, about how they value (not) and respect (not) women.

The first step in the hard work of ending violence against women is to first value and then respect women.

The vast majority of HEU members are women. CUPE is participating in the CLC campaign "15 Days and 15 Ways to End Violence Against Women". Is there any chance that HEU members will get

back the 15 per cent in stolen wages, which is mostly hard-earned pay equity and COLA?

Not one other union has had their wages slashed 15 per cent.

It starts there. No respect, no value, no justice, and no safety for HEU members, who are mostly women.

And what about the *Charter of Rights*? Are HEU members only entitled to 85 per cent of that? Who is speaking up for our sisters in HEU?

ANITA ARBEZ
Victoria General

Cleaning concerns the tip of the iceberg

I was a housekeeping worker and a union shop steward for 14 years prior to my layoff last November. In response to the concerns about infection control that are now coming out in the media, it's important to remember that we were completely up front about what would happen if

housekeeping, food and security were privatized. But no one was listening. No one was paying attention. Now, this entire situation must be placed at the doorstep of the provincial government

whose foresight, or lack thereof, has brought our forecast to fruition.

As unionized workers we had our own systems of ensuring that patients were not put into life threatening situations. Our management and supervisors ensured that the quality of work was being maintained. Communications between hospital workers and management worked quite well. Most employees on average had been working in the health care system for between 15 and 20 years.

We were proud of our work and our places of employment.

Now, as a result of contracting out, the bottom line in health care is, just that, "the bottom line". It's all about money.

How on earth can the system maintain any kind of continuity when most of the contractors' employees have come from other job classifications, fast food restaurants and the like. Their starting pay rate is less than what I started with in 1990, and half of what I was making when I left in 2003.

In fact, why would the contractors even worry about the quality of the work they do? After all, they think there's always another hundred people (getting kicked off welfare, EI, etc.) who can be "easily trained" to do this work.

I've heard numerous stories from HEU members who went to work for some of these contractors and who were completely disillusioned with what they saw, how they were treated and the quality of work being put out.

I can guarantee you that the stories from Surrey Memorial and other hospitals are only the tip of the iceberg. And

they are a result of the issues that were initially raised by HEU, BCNU and HSA when talk first surfaced about the consequences of laying off qualified, experienced health care workers.

The great irony is, we wanted those concerns dealt with before they became life-threatening issues.

MARNEE KLINTWORTH
Laid off Housekeeper

TASK FORCE TO REVIEW HEU'S STRUCTURE

Provincial Executive seeks Expressions of Interest

As mandated by this year's convention, a Task Force is being formed to examine HEU's structure and bring recommendations to the 2006 biennial convention.

The Task Force will be comprised of three PE members and five local activists from HEU's general membership. It will look at all areas of HEU's operations, including:

- how the PE, regions and locals are structured
- support for newly organized members
- component/industrial bargaining and the composition of the Provincial Bargaining Committee
- and more

Are you interesting in serving on the Task Force?

If so, please submit your application to President Fred Muzin (fmuzin@heu.org) and/or Financial Secretary Mary LaPlante (mlaplante@heu.org), outlining why you want to be selected.

Task Force members must be available for evening meetings and some travel throughout the province.

Application deadline: February 22, 2005.

For more information: www.heu.org





PHOTO FROM WWW.EPDIVISION.COM/DW.HTML

Wal-Mart must obey the law • 4

Unions call for full audit of hospital cleaning practices • 7

US election strengthened union activism • 10

Uruguay sets precedent: water is a human right • 11

Students gear up to rock the BC vote • 12

HEU welcomes 800 Sodexho workers

2,000 other contract workers still waiting for ballots to be counted

It took months for nearly 800 Sodexho employees providing food services in the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority to have their right to choose their own union respected, but on November 22 the ballot boxes were finally opened.

The result? Ninety per cent voted in favour of joining the Hospital Employees' Union. In Powell River, and in other locations, the vote was unanimous.

For Laurie Robertson, who is a lead cook at Powell River's Olive Devaud residence, the wait was frustrating but worth it.

"I'm so glad we're in the HEU now," she says. "I feel like we finally have some protection, that we finally have a voice."

Robertson, a former HEU member who lost her job to contracting out, told the *Guardian* she believes HEU will stand by the workers. "Everybody I've talked to really wanted to be in HEU."

Some workers had cast their ballots

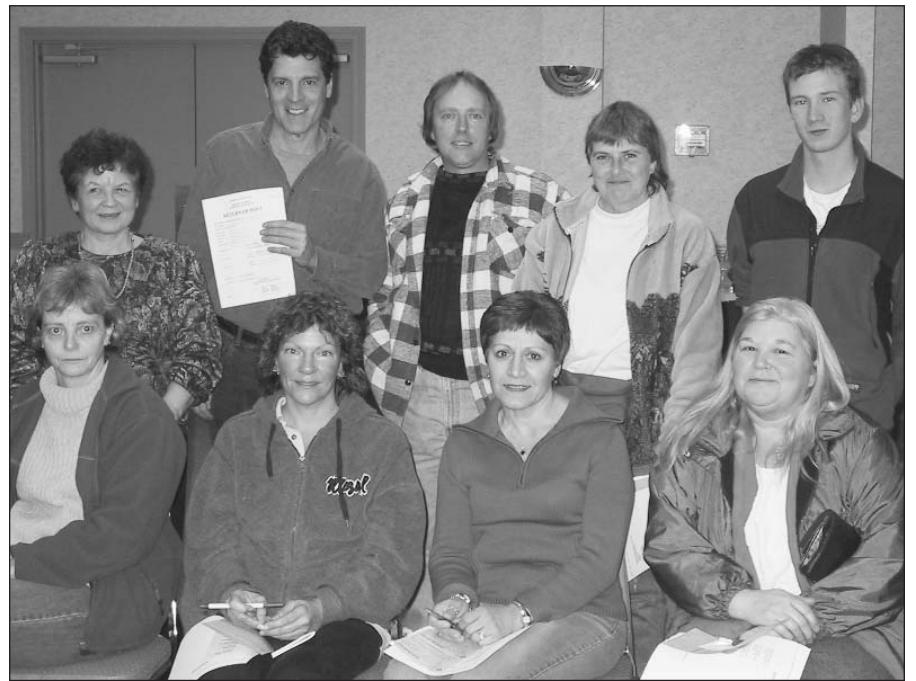
Many workers are dealing with serious health and safety issues – they need union representation now, not six or eight months from now.

on union membership as far back as July, but the ballot counting was stalled by a series of objections lodged at the Labour Relations Board by French-owned Sodexho and the Industrial, Wood and Allied Workers Union (IWA) Local 1-3567.

And more than 2,000 other privatized cleaning and food services workers employed by Sodexho, UK-based Compass Group, and US-based Aramark are still waiting for their votes to be counted. And for the same reason.

Some of those workers have waited more than a year.

"These corporations and the IWA continue to throw up legal roadblocks at every opportunity – regardless of



ELTON NORDMARKEN PHOTO

These new members from Powell River waited a long time to have their right to choose their own union respected. But when the ballots were counted Powell River had voted unanimously to join HEU.

the cost – which unnecessarily drags out the process and leaves workers in a kind of limbo," says HEU's acting secretary-business manager Zorica Bosancic.

"They've signed cards, they've voted on union membership, but then their ballots are held up for months," she explains. "It's extremely frustrating for the workers and the union, because until those votes are counted HEU has no formal representation rights."

"And many workers are dealing with serious health and safety issues – they need union representation now, not six or eight months from now."

Bosancic is encouraged by the vote counts, however, and says that while

HEU may not be able to stop the corporations or the IWA from using the labour relations process to block workers' rights, "In the end, when these ballot boxes are opened up, workers are voting overwhelmingly to join HEU."

Bosancic says the union is pushing hard for all the votes to be counted. In the meantime she says she is pleased to welcome new members into the HEU family and looks forward to getting bargaining underway.

HEU organizers predict the vote counts for 700 Aramark housekeepers working in Vancouver Coastal will occur in January. Meanwhile, LRB hearings have been scheduled throughout January to deal with Compass Group's objections to HEU's certification application in the Provincial Health Services Authority, which affects 500 housekeeping employees; and Sodexho's objections, which affect 700 housekeepers in Fraser Health.

LRB hearings for Windermere, a stand-alone certification application are scheduled for mid-February. Other outstanding certification applications include Evergreen and Normanna care homes, where vote counts have been held up since the fall of 2003; seven other long-term care homes; and Nanaimo and Cowichan hospitals.

PATTY GIBSON • HEU COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

New health minister urged to change course

As the *Guardian* goes to press, the resignation of BC's Finance Minister Gary Collins has prompted a mini-cabinet shuffle which has resulted in Shirley Bond becoming the province's new health services minister.

HEU was quick to encourage Bond to take government health care policy in a different direction.

"Minister Bond has a massive challenge in front of her," says Hospital Employees' Union acting secretary-business manager Zorica Bosancic.

"Her government has privatized critical

health services, cut back on seniors' care and closed hospitals. More than 8,000 health care workers have been laid off and thousands more have had their wages slashed. Staff morale has never been lower."

Bosancic says she hopes the minister will take a different approach "and respond to the genuine concerns being expressed by patients, the public and health care workers about her government's direction."

HEU is asking for a meeting with the new minister as soon as she has had an opportunity to settle in to her new portfolio.



COFFEE BREAK

Hospital cutbacks

In an effort to reduce costs this year, the following are effective immediately. Please share this information with your patients and physicians as soon as possible.

- Our switchboard operators have all been let go, so if you are walking through the lobby and hear the telephone ringing, please answer it.

- We have found it necessary to make substantial reductions in our transport team so we ask the cooperation of all patients. One transporter will take at least six patients in wheelchairs at a time to radiology, PT and other services. Please form a "train" by holding tightly on to the handles of the wheelchair in front of you.

- Housekeeping and physical therapy are being combined. Mops will be issued to those patients who are ambulatory, thus providing range-of-motion exercises as well as a clean environment.

- The cost of hospital gowns continues to escalate so patients are asked to bring their own pajama top which nurses will be happy to slit up the back for you. Pajama bottoms are not permitted on patient units.

- Administration is assuming responsibility for groundskeeping duties. If an administrator cannot be reached by calling the administrative offices, it is suggested that you walk outside and listen for the sound of a lawn mower, weed-whacker, etc.

- Physicians will be informed that they may order no more than two x-rays per patient stay. This is due to the turnaround time required by LOBLAW'S photo lab. Two prints will be provided for the price of one, and physicians are being advised to clip coupons from the Sunday paper if they want extra sets.

- Taking a cue from the airlines, respiratory therapists will be replaced by oxygen masks which will, should the need arise, automatically drop from the ceiling over patient beds. If this occurs, please place the mask over your nose and mouth and breathe normally.

Court orders Wal-Mart to obey the law

The Saskatchewan Appeal Court has struck down a lower court decision and ruled the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board (SLRB) was within its rights when it ordered Wal-Mart to deliver evidence that outlines the company's anti-union strategies.

The order was originally issued to Wal-Mart during the Board's hearings last June on an application by the UFCW Canada to represent Wal-Mart employees in Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

The UFCW Canada Local 1400 had applied for certification in May 2004 after a majority of the Weyburn employees had signed union membership

cards. During the initial hearings the board ordered Wal-Mart to turn over internal anti-union strategy materials to the SLRB to determine if the company had breached Saskatchewan labour laws during the campaign.

Wal-Mart refused to comply and in July successfully appealed to a judge of the Saskatchewan Queen's Bench to set aside the SLRB order.

Now, the appeal court ruling has overturned the July decision. The Weyburn certification hearings, which were suspended pending the appeal, can proceed. If Wal-Mart refuses to deliver the material, the company

could be charged with contempt.

Contract negotiations have begun at a Wal-Mart in Jonquière, Quebec. These UFCW members are the only unionized Wal-Mart workers in North America.

UFCW has also applied for certification at other Wal-Mart stores in North Battleford and Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan; Saint-Hyacinthe and Brossard, Quebec; Terrace, BC; and at seven Wal-Mart Tire & Lube Express departments in Surrey, Terrace, Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Quesnel, Kamloops and Langford, BC.

From UFCW/CALM

Provincial Executive approves union's 2005 budget

HEU's operating budget for the union's next fiscal year – ending December 31, 2005 – has received approval from the Provincial Executive.

"Once again it has been a difficult year to project in precise terms what will be in store for our union next year, and how changing circumstances will impact us financially," says HEU's financial secretary Mary LaPlante.

Although the PE approved an operating budget with a proposed deficit of \$447,054, it plans to take stock of actual expenditures and revenues in June 2005, and make revisions if necessary.

"This budget reflects our current projections and the anticipation of some declining revenue in the coming year," says LaPlante, "but that could change depending on several different factors."

LaPlante says CUPE National has just concluded its budget discussions, and has committed \$500,000 toward HEU's ongoing efforts to restore jus-

tice for its members. And she notes that with this budget, HEU locals will still be able to access monies (\$500,000 has been earmarked) from the union's fightback campaign fund which was adopted at the recent biennial convention.

LaPlante says she is very pleased with the results of various cost savings measures in several areas that have been taken to control HEU expenditures, and says there are new spending areas included in the 2005 budget that will help strengthen the union provincially and locally.

Those areas include: job family conferences, regional meetings, amalgamation of regional seniority, first contract bargaining and conference; Task Force meetings, new provincial

committees (benchmark, clerical, and pension), regional caucus provincial meetings, and others.

LaPlante says that despite a projected deficit "our union is in a solid position to take on challenges now and in the future."

She says the PE will "continue to be vigilant regarding spending practices" and ensure our members are well supported, particularly in areas like servicing and education.

"If we continue to keep a close eye on our finances, we will remain on a sound financial footing, and be able to take on the struggles

that will rebuild the union and restore justice to our members," says LaPlante.

Copies of the budget will be sent to all HEU locals.



LAPLANTE

If we continue to keep a close eye on our finances, we will be able to remain on a sound financial footing.

Newfoundland ruling helps Bill 29 charter challenge

A pay equity ruling handed down in late October by the Supreme Court of Canada makes it clear that targeting the rights of women hospital workers is a breach of equality rights contained in Section 15(1) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

That's good news for BC health care unions who are pursuing their own constitutional challenge to contract-shredding legislation brought in by the Gordon Campbell Liberal government in 2002.

The court ruled that the Newfoundland and Labrador government's

violation of a pay equity agreement with hospital workers in 1991 was an infringement of their Section 15 equality rights but could be justified by the serious economic crisis it faced at that time.

No such crisis faced the BC government when it imposed Bill 29 in January 2002 – a move that shredded existing collective agreements, cleared the way for contracting out and resulted in job losses for more than 8,000 health care workers, most of them women.

HEU and BCGEU had intervenor status in the Newfoundland and Labrador court case. The two unions, along with the BC Nurses' Union, have

filed for leave to appeal a lower court dismissal of their Bill 29 charter challenge to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Health board appointees pocket millions in expenses

Believe it or not board members in the province's six health authorities pocketed more than \$2.2 million in fees and expenses during the last two years.

According to documents recently filed by the health authorities under the provisions of the *Financial Information Act* and compiled by HEU, the 60 board members were paid \$1,063,418 in fees and expenses for the

The clock's ticking and HEU members are getting ready

Ranjit Mann is angry. The Surrey single mom lost her job as a housekeeper at St. Paul's Hospital last year when the health authority privatized cleaning.

She loved the hard work because of the camaraderie with other health workers. And it provided her family with a decent life.

Mann now works two jobs to make ends meet – as a contract worker at another hospital, and in a factory. Her house is for sale and her youngest daughter had to put off college plans.

"I got pissed off and stressed," says Mann. "(Gordon) Campbell ruined my life."

But Mann found a way to deal with the stress – by working in the recent by-election in Surrey-Panorama Ridge. She phoned voters on behalf of the NDP's Jagrup Brar.

"In my mind I'm working through my anger," explains Mann. "I would get on the phone and tell people my story and I found that a lot of people are in a worse situation than me."

Brar swept to victory in the October 29 by-election convincing Mann that she can have an impact on the outcome of an election campaign.

She's already getting set for May 17 by helping out with fundraising and phoning in support of Surrey-Green Timbers NDP candidate Sue Hammell's campaign to unseat Liberal MLA Brenda Locke.

Mann's not alone. With just over four months to go before ballots are cast, HEU members are getting ready for the election – volunteering in local campaigns or making sure that union members are registered and ready to vote.

And some HEU members and staff are even seeking seats in the legislature.

That's the case with Raj Chouhan – HEU's director of bargaining – who



Ranjit Mann lost her job to privatization. It's an experience she'd like some Liberal MLAs to share on May 17.

won a close NDP nomination race in the riding in Burnaby-Edmonds and will now face off against Liberal backbencher Patty Sahota.

Other members and staff seeking

nominations include:

- Dawson Creek and District Hospital unit clerk Pat Shaw, who wants to unseat Liberal Blair Lekstrom in Peace River-South;

- Community health worker Carol Bunch, seeking the NDP nomination in Alberni-Qualicum on January 30;

- Lion's Gate Local chairperson and HEU Provincial Executive member Cathy Pin-sent is looking for the NDP nod in North Vancouver-Lonsdale;



CHOUHAN

- HEU northern director Kathy Jessome, who wants the NDP members of Prince George-North to let her deliver an electoral pink slip to Pat Bell. The nomination meeting has been set for February 13; and

- Lower Mainland servicing rep Jacquie Janum, who hails from Holyrood Manor in Maple Ridge, is seeking the NDP nomination in Maple Ridge-Mission. She'd take on Randy Hawes.

MIKE OLD • HEU COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Election toolkit

Make sure you, your family, friends and co-workers are registered to vote. It's easy to do:

- Register on-line or update your information at www.elections.bc.ca;

- Download registration forms at www.elections.bc.ca and print them off. They can be mailed, faxed or scanned and emailed back to Elections BC; or

- Call Elections BC at 1-800-661-8683.

Can't keep track of the Gordon Campbell Liberals' broken promises? We can help. In January, check out the new HEU-sponsored website at www.deceivebc.ca for tons of fibs, broken down by category.

The BC Federation of Labour will launch its "Count Me In" member mobilization campaign on the web in January. It features one-stop shopping for phone scripts, volunteer forms, issue sheets and much more. You can access the site at www.bcfed.com.

CUPE BC also has its own election site – www.cupe.bc.ca – where you can download the BC Liberals' Dirty Deeds Calendar for 2005.

And check out www.heu.org, your union bulletin board and the next *Guardian* for up-to-date information on HEU's preparations for May 17.

Fund supports local campaigns

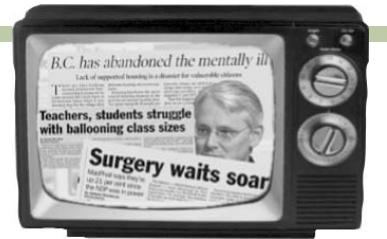
HEU locals will get support for efforts to mobilize members to get involved in the May 17 election and mount public information campaigns in their communities.

Delegates to the union's October convention approved guidelines under which local executives can apply for support for campaigns from a \$1.5 million fund, which will also underwrite a province-wide union campaign focused on May 17.

"There are great campaign ideas coming in from around the province," says HEU financial secretary Mary LaPlante.

"And we're going to make sure that our local activists have the resources they need to hold this government to account for its record in health care."

HEU is also pooling resources with the BC Federation of Labour to mount a member-to-member



organizing campaign to identify key issues for working people – and hold politicians to account at election time and after.

HEU and other unions also took aim at the millions of tax dollars being spent by the Gordon Campbell government on pre-election advertising with a TV ad highlighting the government's broken promises.

fiscal year ending March 31, 2004.

In the previous fiscal year, board members racked up \$1,145,103 in fees and expenses for a two-year total of \$2,208,521.

Dominated by the ranks of B.C.'s corporate elite, individual board members charged health authorities as much as \$29,500 in fees and \$6,700 in expenses for attending board meetings in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2004. Part-time board chairs billed for as much as \$40,500 in fees and \$6,800 in expenses

Hundreds of volunteer health board members, who were fired by the Campbell government when it reorganized health care in 2001, did not

receive remuneration for their service on 52 health boards and councils.

Labour voted Kerry

During the US presidential campaign, union members received information from their unions on issues crucial to working families, causing an overwhelming percentage of them to vote for the Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry.

Separate exit polls by news organizations showed union households accounted for one in four voters, totaling 27 million union household voters.

Union households provided a 5.8 million vote advantage for Kerry.

Sixty-five per cent of union members voted for Kerry, with an even bigger margin – 68 per cent – voting for Kerry in battleground states, according to the election night survey conducted for the AFL-CIO.

Over all, 62 per cent of union members surveyed said they disapproved of President George Bush's job performance, 67 per cent saying they have very little confidence that Bush will look out for working families. *CALM*

IHA moves to centralize laundry services

The Interior Health Authority (IHA) has finally "broken ground" for its new stand-alone laundry site in

Salmon Arm. That central facility will handle all the laundry for Kamloops, Vernon, Kelowna, Penticton and Salmon Arm. And the jobs will be offered to HEU members who are currently working in existing laundry facilities.

The union is hopeful that the IHA will continue to work collaboratively to find solutions that will ensure members are able to continue to work in their chosen field.

And in the Kootenays, the consolidation of laundry services is now complete. All of the laundry for the east and west Kootenays is now being handled in Nelson.

continued on page 6



FRED MUZIN

Provincial Executive gets down to work

Costs for Abbotsford P3 spiraling out of control

Bosancic predicts Abbotsford Hospital will become Gordon Campbell's fast ferry

The Campbell Liberals are pushing ahead with their plans to use a public-private partnership model (P3) to build the new Abbotsford hospital even though the province's capital costs have skyrocketed by a whopping 70 per cent since those plans were first announced.

Calling it "Gordon Campbell's fast ferry," HEU's acting secretary-business manager Zorica Bosancic says escalating costs "threaten to drain resources from other hospitals and services in the Fraser Health Authority."

Construction costs for the 300-bed hospital are now estimated to be \$355 million – \$144 million more than government's initial cost projections when the project was first announced in December 2001.

In fact, construction cost estimates have soared by nearly 25 per cent since the request for proposals (RFP) was issued 14 months ago and by another 10 per cent since Access Health Abbotsford – the only consortium to bid on the project – was picked as the preferred bidder in July.

A financial analysis of the RFP commissioned earlier this year by HEU

concluded that BC taxpayers' will shell out more than \$1.4 billion in lease payments to the private consortium over the next 33 years.

As a result of increased construction costs, payments to the consortium – which includes the Dutch bank ABN Amro and French cleaning and food services giant Sodexo – are also likely to increase.

"Not a single brick has been laid and costs are already spiraling out of control," says Bosancic.

Costs for the 300-bed hospital are now estimated to be \$355 million – \$144 million more than government's initial projections.

In November, a research study published by the Association of Chartered Accountants in the UK concluded that privately-financed hospitals are not affordable.

The study found that annual capital costs were more than CDN \$105 million higher in privately financed hospitals than in those directly financed by government and that the de facto costs of borrowing for private consortiums were double.

British health authorities with privately-financed hospitals were more likely to be in a deficit position which has serious implications for service provision and access to health care.

For more information visit our website at <www.heu.org>.

The new year promises to be full of opportunities for HEU members to participate in progressive change and renewal, both within our union and in our province.

Delegates to the October HEU biennial convention were forceful and clear. We must dramatically improve communication with the membership, especially during difficult times, such as the discussions around the May 2nd memorandum. And we need to have Provincial Executive (PE) members accessible at the local level, listening to members' issues and strategizing around campaigns and actions that we can initiate and coordinate at all levels to achieve success.

Your executive, as part of our 2005 budget discussions, has already started the ball rolling. We appointed three members to the newly created Task Force, and are already advertising for five grass roots members. The committee will travel the province, survey members and hold regional forums to develop proposals for the 2006 HEU convention. They'll look at how we can best integrate newly organized members who work for private contractors. They'll debate the

pros and cons of component style bargaining, including alternate ways to elect our Provincial Bargaining Committee. And they'll look at ways to improve contract enforcement.

After 60 years it is time for HEU to conduct an internal structural review.

After 60 years, it is also time for HEU to conduct an internal structural review. Do our executive structures, both provincially and at the local level, represent the diversity of our membership? Should we consider entrenching equity seats or assure

representation from different occupational groups? Given that many locals continue to experience difficulty in reaching quorum at monthly meetings, are there more effective ways to involve members in decision-making?

What is the ideal size for the PE, especially given the reduction in our membership as a result of Bill 29? Should we have more regional VPs? And as we begin the process of recruiting for a new secretary-business manager, should the role and function of that position change in relation to the PE?

On the BC front, the May 17th provincial election will be especially critical for HEU members. This will be our next big opportunity to overcome the oppression, the lies and the disgraceful wage rollbacks imposed on us by the BC Liberals. In order to derail the ideological agenda of wholesale privatization of public services, it is critical that we succeed in restoring balance to the legislature.

The PE has set aside funds that locals can access for political action, to increase our members' ability to engage in the democratic process. There is much that can be done. Friends and families must be encouraged to both register and vote. Activists need to look at how they can be involved in local election campaigns. And in every way possible, we need to continue raising our issues with the public – reminding people about the devastation this government has imposed on seniors, women, the poor, the disabled, First Nations, and others in our communities. By working together, we *can* overcome.

Abbotsford P3 hospital: Capital costs versus bed numbers

Feasibility study Dec. 2001	Request for proposals Sept. 2003	Announcement of preferred bidder, July 2004	Construction begins Nov. 2004	Change from 2001 to present
Capital costs \$211 million	\$286 million	\$325 million	\$355 million	68.2 %
# of beds 300 beds	300 beds	300 beds	300 beds	No change

continued from page 5

Seniors want a direct voice to government

Seniors must be listened to, and their voices must be heard. That message came through loud and clear at the second Seniors' Summit, where more than 350 seniors gathered from across the province to talk about issues affecting themselves and their communities.

Building on the successes of the inaugural summit five years ago, the November conference once again provided a forum for seniors from a variety of organizations and groups

to talk about a wide range of issues affecting their lives.

These included issues related to health, housing, pharmacare and income.

Joyce Jones, co-chair of the Seniors' Network in BC enjoyed the opportunity to meet with so many other seniors across the province, but said it is clear that government needs to hear from seniors and take their concerns seriously.

"Seniors are wanting a direct voice to government," said Jones. "Right now there is no voice for seniors at the government level."

Jones said she hopes that delegates

attending the Summit will return to their communities ready to create action plans that will advance seniors' issues at all levels of government.

They did it anyway, MSP privatized

Despite mounting controversy and a report from BC's Privacy Commissioner confirming people's worst fears, Gordon Campbell's Liberal government finalized a deal in early November that will hand over the administration of the Medical Services Plan (MSP) and Pharmacare to an American company.

And once again, they locked taxpayers into a 10-year contract – this time, with US-based Maximus Inc., to the tune of \$324 million. Concern over the impending deal was validated in late October when the province's Privacy Commissioner confirmed that the USA *Patriot Act* could impact the privacy of British Columbians.

The controversial law could be used to force American companies to share personal information, held by their subsidiaries in Canada, with U.S. authorities such as the FBI.

Visit www.righttoprivacycampaign.com for more information.

Privatization gets two thumbs down

Was it worth the hassle? That's the question the BC government should be asking itself after months of critical media stories and adverse WCB reports centered on health privatization schemes. Examples include:

- At Nanaimo Regional General Hospital, the local paper reported that cleaners were required to place cards in managers' offices asking if they had

special cleaning requests. Meanwhile, RNs at the hospital say cleaning has gone downhill and workers aren't receiving enough training.

- Citing French-owned Sodexo for a number of OH&S infractions, a September WCB inspection report documents several concerns including the company's failure to have an exposure control plan in place in the event a worker is exposed to blood-borne pathogens or other biohazardous materials.

- The Delta mayor's "Hospital Hotline" has generated calls from citizens who reported "dirty laundry stacked up in a doorway (while another)

encountered a filthy bathroom with dried blood and urine all over the floor, walls and toilet," according to the *Surrey Leader*.

The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority could face big fines for various WCB infractions related to the performance of Initial Security.

According to published reports, the company failed to conduct adequate incident investigations and violence-risk assessments or to implement an emergency plan in the event of a biohazard exposure. Although security was privatized over a year ago, VCHA says they're just "teething" problems.

What's happening with cleaning in BC's hospitals?

HEU FILE PHOTO

Report paints a disturbing picture of unsanitary conditions and inadequate infection control training at St. Paul's Hospital

Barely a year into Gordon Campbell's privatization gamble, the hidden costs of privatized cleaning services in BC hospitals are quickly emerging.

And while the BC Liberals continue to turn their back on evidence from around the world verifying the critical link between infection control and sub-standard cleaning practices, the consequences of dumping thousands of skilled, experienced health care workers onto the streets are now painfully visible.

Frustrated by government's unwillingness to acknowledge – let alone address – deteriorating cleaning standards in the province's health care facilities, HEU and the BC Nurses' Union, in collaboration with the Health Sciences Association, conducted their own research into the issue at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver.

Their final report, released in late November, paints a disturbing picture of dirty conditions and the problems that affect over-worked, poorly-

trained workers who no longer have a direct working relationship with either hospital staff or the infection control department.

Falling Standards, Rising Risks details the observations and escalating concerns of health care workers regarding key problems that have surfaced in the St. Paul's emergency department since US-based multinational Aramark took over the hospital's cleaning services.

Observations included: old feces on curtains for several days; bedsides and bedside tables sticky with juice, again for days; no cleaning of monitor cables or IV poles; concerns about inadequate cleaning in the TB rooms, and more.

The report's key recommendation called for a full-scale, independent audit by the health authority.

But that call largely fell on deaf ears. Although the province's chief medical officer John Blatherwick introduced a hasty, three-week investigation into privatized cleaning in Vancouver Coastal, he refused to release either the terms of the audit or the name of



Working as part of the health care team, former HEU housekeepers were paid decent wages, received ongoing training in infection control procedures and participated in making their workplace safe for colleagues and patients.

the firm conducting it.

Since then, HEU and the BCNU have asked BC's Auditor General to step in and conduct a thorough investigation into cleaning practices in four health authorities: the Fraser Health Authority, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, including Providence Health Care, the Provincial Health Services Authority and the Vancouver Island Health Authority.

That call was issued in the wake of several high-profile incidents at other hospitals that raised concerns with cleaning standards and infection control, and in response to the unions' survey results at Burnaby Hospital, which also revealed substandard cleaning practices and a lack of attention to infection control issues.

In fact, cleaning standards have become an ongoing, highly publicized issue that doesn't look like it's going away any time soon. Letters are pouring

into local newspapers. Talk shows are hearing from angry patients and their families. And the public isn't buying into the inadequate, internal "quality assurance audits" being undertaken in various health authorities.

At Surrey Memorial, where questions were raised about the link between cleanliness and infections affecting several women who underwent caesarian sections, BC's former Health Minister Colin Hansen was forced to order an investigation. But the investigation fails to include an examination of either cleaning standards or infection control procedures.

"This patchwork, inadequate response will fail to reassure the public, patients or health care workers that health officials are taking the problems seriously," says HEU's acting secretary-business manager Zorica Bosancic. "That's why we need BC's Auditor General to get involved."

Britain ends two-tier hospital cleaning

Amid growing public anxiety over dirty hospitals, the British government has announced it will end cut-rate cleaning by private contractors.

UK health secretary John Reid, who told health authority executives in September that "cheapness can never be a substitute for cleanliness," said private contractors will be forced to pay their employees the same wages and benefits as in-house cleaners.

And in December, the UK brought in tougher guidelines to review private contracts after cleaning inspections showed that more than half of those hospitals rated "poor" or "unacceptable" had contracted out their cleaning.

Hospital cleanliness has emerged as a major issue for the Labour Party administration of Tony Blair. In 2001, his government was forced to pour nearly CDN \$75 million into upgrading hospital cleaning and ended the requirement that hospitals contract out cleaning.



FRED MUZIN
President



MARY LAPLANTE
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Third Vice-President



DORIS GRIPICH
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JOHN EVANS
Fifth Vice-President



KELLY KNOX
Senior Trustee



DONISA BERNARDO
Senior Trustee Elect



HAROLD BURNS
Trustee



MARGI BLAMEY PHOTO

It wasn't all work for the 500 delegates attending this year's convention. One of the more popular events was Equity Night's demonstration of the ancient art of Japanese drumming by Vancouver's own Katari Taiko.

HEU members vow to have impact in upcoming election

While many issues sparked debate during the 24th biennial convention, there was no disagreement about where delegates stood on the Campbell government's record.

Time and again, delegates expressed their profound outrage about the way health care workers have been treated by the Campbell Liberals and the harm they have inflicted on their lives, their communities and their workplaces.

So when NDP leader Carole James addressed the convention banquet on Thursday evening, delegates listened very closely to what she had to say.

"I want you to know that a Carole James government will have no need for legislation that makes it easier to privatize health care services – because we won't be privatizing health care," she said.

"And legislation that the Campbell government has introduced to make that



MIKE OLD PHOTO

CAROLE JAMES

happen will be repealed."

James told her audience that the NDP strenuously fought Bill 29, the legislation that paved the way for Campbell's privatization agenda. And just as vigorously fought Bill 37, which legislated a 15 per cent wage rollback for health care workers.

Convention takes stock, plans for Delegates call for

a

s more than 500 delegates from 200 locals streamed into "the tent" to open HEU's 24th biennial convention, one thing was crystal clear – debates on and off the plenary floor would be frank, impassioned and challenging.

How could they be otherwise? Between last convention and this, delegates had seen more than 8,000 sisters and brothers tossed out of their jobs and the rest suffer a 15 per cent wage rollback.

Many still wanted answers about why they had been directed to stand down from job action last spring, just hours before an anticipated province-wide strike. Others wanted changes in the union's structure, leadership, bargaining strategies, and tactics for defeating the Campbell Liberals.

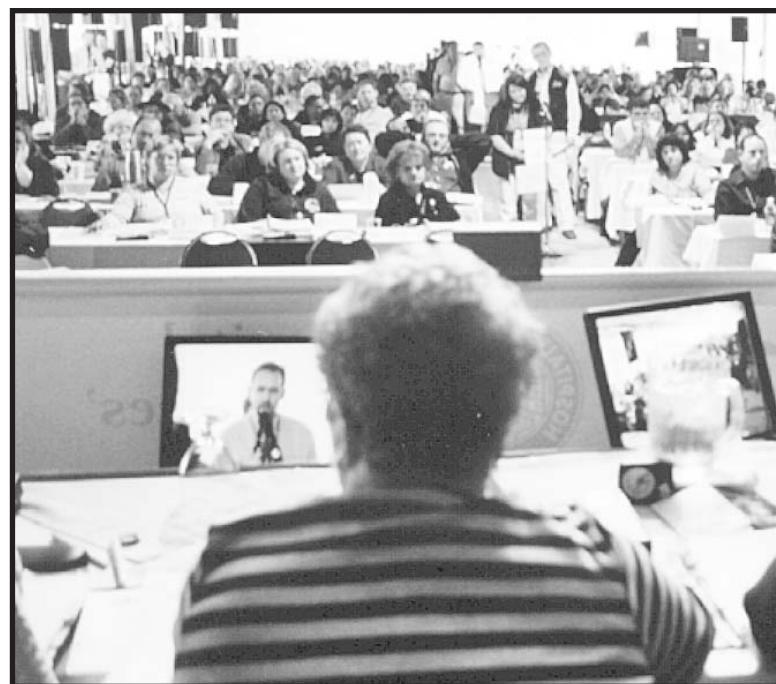
All wanted better lines of communication.

What finally emerged from five days of debate and procedural wrangling (that often proved frustrating for first-time delegates) was a strategy for change aimed at improving the union's structure and bargaining process.

As directed by convention, the union's newly-elected Provincial Executive will create a Task Force to examine HEU's current operations and bring recommendations for structural change to the 2006 biennial convention.

The Task Force will travel to the regions to seek members' input and set up other mechanisms to ensure strong participation from the membership.

A newly created task force will examine HEU's current operations and recommend structural changes to the 2006 biennial convention.



And while the bargaining structure remains the same, convention adopted changes in the process to ensure the concerns of HEU's diverse occupational groupings are included in future bargaining strategies.

Convention also passed a resolution affirming support for the New Democratic Party.

In addition, delegates directed that locals be given financial support from a special political action fund to assist in carrying out fightback campaigns in their communities.

Other resolutions passed included: reinstating a staff position for LTD appeals, affirming support for the union's charter challenge on Bill 29, creating a communications protocol to ensure locals receive timely information in critical situations, and estab-



DOREEN PLOUFFE
Member-At-Large #1

DAN HINGLEY
Member-At-Large #2

LAREE RUSSELL
Regional VP
Fraser Valley

WARREN EACRETT
Regional VP
Kootenays

TILLY HISCOCK
Regional VP
Lower Mainland
Centennial

BONI BARCIA
Regional VP
Lower Mainland
Central

CATHY PINSENT
Regional VP
Lower Mainland
Coastal

BECKY JACOBSEN
Regional VP
North

GEORGIA MILLER
Regional VP
Okanagan

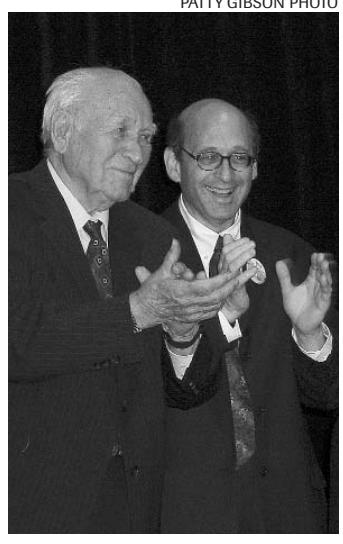
JESSE WINFREY
Regional VP
Vancouver
Island

“Joy and Jenny couldn’t stop Gordon Campbell,” she said, “but for a two-member opposition, they put up an historical struggle.”

James acknowledged the anger felt by many HEU members saying Campbell’s legislation has “inflicted a deep wound that will take years to heal.”

“Under a New Democrat administration,” she pledged, “you will once again have the right to free collective bargaining.”

It’s a promise HEU members will hold her to.



PATTY GIBSON PHOTO

Respected activist Ben Swankey with HEU’s president Fred Muzin.

A special tribute

During this year’s convention banquet delegates paid tribute to Ben Swankey, a long-time friend of HEU and a man who has dedicated his entire life to social activism.

At the age of 91, Swankey continues to inspire young and old alike, in all social movements, to keep up the fight for a better world.

change renewal



KATE WILLIAMS PHOTO

lishing regional caucuses as well as local solidarity committees.

In all, delegates passed 21 resolutions and adopted nine constitutional amendments. Several other resolutions and amendments were referred to the Task Force, the next wage policy conference, or the Provincial Executive for consideration and/or implementation. A full copy of the proceedings will be sent to all locals and they can be viewed at HEU’s website.

Convention also heard from sister unions and labour groups who brought greetings of solidarity and who expressed appreciation to HEU members for their bravery during last spring’s job action.

Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians gave a rousing speech about important national and international movements that are working hard to stop privatization on a global level, reminding delegates that they too are part of those struggles.

Having just returned from Uruguay, where the citizens of that country were poised to pass a referendum declaring water as a human right (see page 11), Barlow asked delegates to keep their eyes on the outcome, as it would be a precedent-setting step in the fight to stop the privatization of water world-wide.

Alfonso Naranjo, exiled leader of ANTHOC, which is a union of health care workers in Colombia, made a passionate appeal for support for his country’s health care workers. He spoke of the atrocities that are being visited upon trade unionists throughout Columbia and gave a graphic description of the oppression facing health care workers in their daily efforts to provide medical attention and save lives. (see page 10)

And in a particularly moving tribute, this year’s Convention Gavel was awarded to the Compass employees at Beacon Hill Villa in Victoria – members of a small new HEU local that has fought long and hard to choose their own union. Brother Gerry Best accepted the gavel on behalf of his local to thundering applause and a standing ovation.

PATTY GIBSON • HEU COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

HEU’s 24th biennial convention commemorated the union’s 60th anniversary, and it marked a decade of meeting “under the big top.”

Solidarity greetings!



The strike waged by HEU was one of the most heroic labour battles I have ever been involved in. You are the only labour organization since Operation Solidarity to stand up to oppressive legislation and defy the government.

BILL SAUNDERS, President
Vancouver and District Labour Council

The greatest gift we can give to the next generation of British Columbians, wherever they work, is to make Gordon Campbell a one-term wonder and defeat this government in May.

JIM SINCLAIR, President
BC Federation of Labour

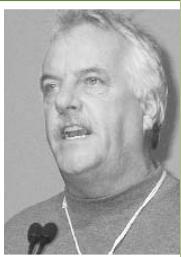


The challenge for our memberships, in fact all of the labour movement, is to stay focused on our adversaries – the politicians whose so called ‘new era’ has caused so much misery for so many British Columbians.

DIANE WOOD, Secretary-Treasurer
BC Government and Service Employees’ Union

Thank you for your activism. I think it goes without saying that my members in support of you would not have been there had it not been for your resolve ... You led the way to make us all understand we need to push back.

BARRY O’NEILL, President
CUPE BC



Just by surviving the onslaught of the Liberal government you have won a victory – a victory for yourselves and for all working people in this province.

IVAN LIMPRIHT, Vice-President
United Food and Commercial Workers-1518

To be connected in unity is more than emotions and common purpose, it is a way of life. It is a lifestyle that is lived day-by-day with perseverance and purpose by us, with you, our brothers and sisters of HEU.

ANDREW CHARTIER, President
CEP-468



Know that we love you and we honor the work you have done and we honor the fight you’ve put up and we honor the smart tactics you’ve used and the information that you’ve got out about what this government is doing.

MAUDE BARLOW, Spokesperson
Council of Canadians

Right now, approximately 18 members of my union, ANTHOC, are in Canada between Quebec and British Columbia. We would like to link our hands and arms with you, our brothers and sisters in Canada.

ALFONSO NARANJO, Spokesperson
ANTHOC, a Colombian Health Care Union



Colombian trade unionists need your help

When Alfonso Naranjo, a Colombian health care union leader with ANTHOC, asked for support from HEU delegates attending our 24th biennial convention, the response was overwhelming. Almost \$3,000 was raised on the plenary floor and in the days immediately following convention.

Naranjo told delegates that thousands of health care workers have been fired, jailed, assassinated, or forced to leave their homes and families out of fear for their lives.

You can help our Colombian sisters and brothers by e-mailing an “urgent action” letter to the President of Colombia, Dr. Alvaro Uribe Velez, (auribe@presidencia.gov.co). Demand that his government respect the human rights of his country’s trade unionists.

And you can invite Naranjo to speak to a meeting of your local by calling Barbara Wood of Co-Dev: 604-708-1495 (ext.114)

Urgent action needed

Everyday, working sisters and brothers around the world are fighting for their rights. And sometimes they are up against repressive, brutal regimes.

At LabourStart, an online news service, you can get up-to-date information about what is happening to working people in every part of the world.

You can also find out where urgent action is needed and how you can help. Just click on www.labourstart.org for more information.

US election strengthens union activism

In the wake of November’s US presidential election, HEU communications officer, Margi Blamey talked with Kim Patterson of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1199P in Pennsylvania about the union’s political action campaign and how it will shape future mobilizing efforts. Patterson was a special guest at HEU’s 24th biennial convention.

SEIU mobilized a massive political action campaign for the recent election. What was most successful?

SEIU mobilized 2,017 members (we called them “heroes”) to work full-time on the election campaign across the country. Here in Pennsylvania we had over 700 working in the last weeks of the campaign. And in our union, SEIU District 1199P, we had 65 working full-time. These “heroes” left their families and homes to educate members, register voters, and talk to people door-to-door about the importance of the election.

Although John Kerry lost nationwide, he won in Pennsylvania and we are very proud to have been on the front lines of that fight. While we may not have a “purple” President in the White House, the work we did brought our union to a new level of activity, prominence and respect in Pennsylvania. Most importantly, this new level of political activism in our chapters can only make us stronger in our fights on important issues like ending mandatory overtime, safe staffing ratios and finding a solution to the health care funding crisis.

What did you learn about your members’ needs and future goals?

Our members are a pretty clear sample of the nation in terms of politics – that is, the ratio of republicans, dem-



Kim Patterson, vice-president and public sector team coordinator for SEIU Local 1199P in Pennsylvania.

ocrats and independents. What was clear in this campaign is that our members need education about politics and how it affects their daily lives.

What was very interesting to me came from discussions early on with our members about what was important to them personally. Their answers were clear – family, health care, secure jobs and the economy. But when they were asked how they were voting it quickly came down to issues like abortion, gun control and gay marriage. The disconnect was amazing. That’s why we’re so excited about having 65 well-trained activists who are returning to their facilities with a new perspective on how politics can change their lives and who are ready

to help build a political program in our union.

What does a George Bush, Republican administration mean for workers and their families over the next four years?

Unfortunately, more of the same. We have seen enormous attacks on working families in the past four years and we expect to see more. So it means that we must work very hard, starting now, to build a political program that reaches out beyond party lines to make a difference.

We are scheduling regional planning sessions around the state with our campaign “heroes” to get ideas about how to continue building a political program so that we will be ready for the next election. As part of that program we have created a committee called “Republicans, fighting for our future” which will be important in developing relationships with the more conservative politicians and educating them about working family issues.

We will also be building relationships with other groups, many of which we started working with during this recent campaign. We will also be using our “heroes” and their incredible experience to help recruit more member political organizers.

It’s a daunting task ahead of us, but we think our members are up to it.

Check out <www.seiu1199p.org>.



BC Liberal policies have done real harm to women and girls.

Has the Campbell government no shame?

It’s the height of arrogance and hypocrisy that the Campbell Liberals are sharing the glory of a recent report on women’s and girls’ health produced by the BC Women’s Hospital and the BC Centre of Excellence for Women’s.

Advancing the Health of Girls and Women promotes health research and initiatives to meet the needs of women. It clearly states that social determinants like poverty, violence and sexism have a negative impact on women’s and girls’ health. In fact, you’d have to be living under a rock not to know that BC Liberal policies have done real harm to women and girls.

Caryn Duncan of the Vancouver Women’s Health Collective summed it up well in a recent *Georgia Straight* article, “You can’t read this document in isolation from everything that’s been happening in the province in the last three years. Cuts to child care and legal aid, the closing of the Ministry of Women’s Equality, the increase in MSP premiums, home care cuts, the loss of good health care jobs ...

All of that has had a negative impact on women.”

That impact has been noted before – by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In 2003, CEDAW stated that it “is concerned about a number of recent changes in British Columbia which have a disproportionately negative impact on women” and urged government to “analyze its recent legal and other measures as to their negative impact on women and to amend the measures, where necessary”.

Government basically dismissed the CEDAW report.

And to date they have callously fired more than 8,000 health care workers – most of them women – paid their replacements half the wages, viciously legislated a 15-percent wage rollback for tens of thousands other health care workers, cut funding to women’s centres, reduced welfare assistance and pushed women’s equality back a generation.

It’s no wonder the Campbell government is suffering from such a gender gap in public opinion polls.

MARGI BLAMEY • HEU COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Uruguay first to declare water a human right

There was an important election to the south of us this fall. No, not the American, George Bush one. Look further south, down to that other America, South America. There, sandwiched between Brazil and Argentina, is Uruguay.

On October 31 Uruguay not only elected the country's first leftist president with more than 51 per cent of the popular vote, but passed a referendum with absolutely global significance. More than 60 per cent of Uruguayan voters cast their ballots in favour of a constitutional change that establishes water as "a natural resource essential to life" and names access to piped water and sanitation services as "fundamental human rights".

The constitutional amendment, which enables the people of Uruguay to take back control of a vital natural resource, also guarantees citizen participation at every level of management required to run the country's water resources.

It's both a precedent-setting step and a slap in the face to the global privatization agenda.

So while the world was busy watching Bush and Kerry battle it out in the days leading up to the US election, the people of Uruguay took a stand that has dealt a severe body blow to global corporate interests. In so doing, they defied the so-called wisdom of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, who dictate the terms of economic aid to small countries and often require a move to privatization as a prerequisite for loans.

Despite corporate opposition, the new Uruguayan government says it is confident that the country will be able to manage its public utilities prudent-

ly and effectively, without being driven by the bottom line.

According to all reports, it was a hard fought campaign. The pro side was led by the National Commission for the Defense of Water and Life – a coalition made up of citizens' organizations and Obras Sanitarias del Estado (OSE), the trade union representing the employees of the state-owned water and sewage company.

The OSE will now manage the country's water resources.

Although direct control might be in the hands of some local governments, or certain jobs may be contracted out, OSE will be the primary overseer.

Here in Canada, the Walkerton inquiry taught us the hard way that access to clean water is not guaranteed under Canadian legislation. In Uruguay, not only was clean water not guaranteed, it was being put in the hands of large multinational cor-

It's a precedent-setting step and a slap in the face to the global privatization agenda.



PHOTO FROM WWW.FARMERSINFO.COM.AU

porations. Before the referendum, these corporations were responsible for astronomical rate hikes in part of the country, and water with dangerously high fecal e-coli counts.

But the water privatization issue is not unique to Uruguay. It is estimated that in a few years, a global wave of water privatization could leave a handful of companies controlling almost 75 per cent of all water for human consumption in the world. At present, two French firms, Vivendi-Générale des Eaux and Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux, already control 40 per cent of the market.

While Uruguay's referendum sets an important precedent on the water

privatization issue, it is but one part of an international movement to improve and protect access to clean water. Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia are all home to active anti-privatization movements.

On World Water Day in 2001, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said, "Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and therefore a basic human right. Contaminated water jeopardizes both the physical and social health of all people." The right to water has been recognized through the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Now look northward. Sadly Canada stands alone in refusing to accept water as a human right at the annual UN Human Rights Commission.

EMMA KIVISILD • ARTIST AND WRITER LIVING IN VANCOUVER

US proposal threatens Canadian waters

Canada manages huge freshwater resources, and in particular shares jurisdiction with the United States over the largest freshwater ecosystem in the world – the Great Lakes.

That shared jurisdiction, however, is now under threat. In 2001 an American group, the Council of Great Lakes Governors, released a series of agreements called the Great Lakes Annex. It includes a proposed bind-

ing agreement that would authorize the diversion of Great Lakes waters, as requested by the eight bordering states.

That agreement has been condemned by the Council of Canadians on the grounds that it undermines Canada's jurisdiction over the Great Lakes and prevents Canada from stopping water diversions, regardless of the duration, scale, or impact

on the lakes' ecosystem.

Council of Canadians spokesperson Sara Ehrhardt calls the Annex "nothing more than a US scheme to drain our Great Lakes dry".

Are you concerned? The Council is urging citizens to fight the Annex and demand that the Canadian government recognize water as a human right. For more information: <www.canadians.org>.



Things are very bleak indeed. So forgive us if we're not exactly ecstatic about \$70.

People with disabilities still live in poverty

The recently announced \$70 a month increase to the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) benefit may sound good on the surface. But for a realistic assessment of its impact on people's lives, it must be seen within the context of all that has happened to our community over the last four years.

I can assure you, things are very bleak indeed.

Even with this increase, the PWD rate falls far below what is required to live with dignity in BC. In 2002, the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC) estimated that the minimum amount a non-disabled person needed was \$1,159.66. With the \$70 increase people with disabilities will receive substantially less than that – \$856.42 a month.

Over the last few years, PWD recipients' access to health goods and services has also seriously narrowed. For example, fewer people may now apply for a \$40 monthly supplement for a high protein diet. Previously, all PWD recipients could apply. Now only those with specific medical conditions can ask for the extra \$40.

Crisis grants have become more difficult to access. Now the ministry will only provide people with a maximum of \$20 a month in cases where people do not have enough money for food.

More PWD recipients are paying for medications that are no longer covered by Pharmacare. Examples include muscle relaxants, asthma medication and skin medications.

Massive cuts in the ministry's budget have resulted in fewer financial assistance workers and offices for people to access their benefits – something that has had a particularly severe impact in BC's rural regions.

And of course we must not forget that thousands of people with disabilities were put through an excruciating reassessment to determine if they were really disabled. This debacle cost taxpayers millions of dollars only to find out that, yes, people receiving disability benefits are in fact disabled.

So forgive us if we're not exactly ecstatic about \$70.

JEANETTE ANDERSEN • PRESIDENT BC COALITION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Food furor heats up in Fraser Health

The ruckus raised by HEU's White Rock local over poor quality rethermalized food in some Fraser Health Authority facilities is emerging as a major political problem for Liberal MLAs in the area.

Things heated up when CKNW talk show host Jennifer Mather dedicated two shows to the poor quality of food being served to patients and seniors in the extended care at Peace Arch Hospital in White Rock.

Mather even showed up unannounced to interview elderly residents and their families about the food.

The resulting public furor forced Surrey-White Rock MLA

Gordon Hogg to announce a five-step program to rehabilitate food quality.

But a month and a half later, Langley MLA Lynn Stephens admitted to a reporter that despite small improvements in the menu, "I'm not a big believer in these frozen meals."

Even Gary Collins had to admit during his post-resignation interview on CKNW's Bill Good show that he was unhappy with the food situation.

White Rock local chairperson Megan Korol, who contacted Mather about the ongoing food problems and was interviewed on her show, says the exposure is all good.

"I'm not sure where Hogg's plan to fix the food is going," says Korol. "But I don't think residents and their family members are going to let politicians or the health authority sweep this one under the rug. And we won't either."

HEU supports Downtown Eastside photo project

HEU's \$1,500 donation to the Pivot Legal Society helped support a resident-based photo contest and portrait calendar in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

"When the money came in, it was the eleventh hour and we hadn't met our target. When we saw it was from

HEU members, we were really happy, because it was just enough to put us over the top," said one Pivot employee.

Operated in a similar way as last year's contest, low-income residents of the Downtown Eastside were given disposable cameras and asked to snap pictures in their neighbourhood.

The cameras were then returned for processing and printing.

In all, more than 3,500 images were returned and entered into a photo contest. Winning photographers received prizes and a selection of the most compelling images was printed in the 2005 Portrait Calendar.

Calendars can be purchased from several retail outlets in the Downtown Eastside, or from some of the residents who sell the calendars for \$20 each, but are able to keep \$10.

Proceeds go toward funding Pivot's ongoing legal, educational and strategic efforts to improve the lives of marginalized persons.

For more information check out <www.pivotlegal.org>

Right-wing lobby group wants to see HEU in court

The Canadian Taxpayers' Federation – well-known for its anti-union views – is mounting a fundraising campaign to underwrite a

BALANCING IT ALL

PATTY GIBSON

For student leader **LISA MACLEOD**, access to education is a top priority. So with a provincial election just around the corner, she's working hard to mobilize young voters.

STUDENTS ROCK THE BC VOTE

DURING THE LAST PROVINCIAL election only 25 per cent of young eligible voters – people between the ages of 18 and 30 – made it to the ballot box. But if the Canadian Federation of Students has anything to do with it, we can expect a boost in those numbers on May 17, 2005.

As BC chairperson, Lisa MacLeod is committed to making sure students and their issues are front and center of the province's spring election campaign.

And she's excited about the wheels her organization has already put in motion. "Rock the Vote BC is our primary campaign," she explains. "Our goal is to register more young people than ever before, to raise awareness of their issues – with both youth and the political candidates – and to make it fun and engaging."

It's a fascinating campaign with a lot of different elements. Modeled after "Rock the Vote USA", it involves everything from voter registration to a series of spring concerts. "The campaign is being run on campuses all over the province and on the internet," says MacLeod.

"It's trying to blend culture and politics and talk with people in a language they can relate to."

She admits that it takes a lot of time, just like other aspects of her involvement with the student movement, but she's passionate about increasing accessi-

bility to higher education and she's enthusiastic about working with so many "incredible people" who are linked by their common desire to create a more just society.

Modeled after 'Rock the Vote USA', the campaign involves everything from voter registration to a series of spring concerts.

A student of photography at Vancouver's Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, MacLeod was inspired to get involved in student politics three years ago by what she saw as the strength of the student movement in Canada.

"I was enthused by the excellent and effective work people were doing on so many issues – tuition, grants,

peace issues, anti-racism – and by seeing students working together all across the country," she says.

But she credits her mom with sowing some important seeds early on.

"My mother worked in the public school system, so I grew up knowing how important education is, knowing how much access to a good public education system can improve people's lives, and the life of our whole society."

MacLeod admits that her work in the student movement takes a lot of time, but she says she tries to keep focused on the future "on what it is we're working to achieve" when she finds her energy dipping at the end of a long day.

"Being part of something so much bigger than myself is a powerful thing," she says. "And I'm always amazed when I look back and see what students can achieve by working together, in solidarity."

When asked if anything in particular comes to mind she's quickly recalls last February's rally against tuition fee increases.

"It was incredible how much time and effort my campus – Emily Carr – put into educating our members and bringing people together. When it came to the actual rally day, so many people showed up. People who had never been part of something like that before," explains MacLeod.

"As we marched from our campus to the rallying point downtown, I realized 'this is what it's really all about' – people coming together from so many diverse places and points of view and finding out how much they share in common with others."

For more information about the student campaign, click on <www.rockthevotebc.com>.

MICHAEL GARDINER PHOTO



Lisa MacLeod with fellow student organizers – getting ready to rock the vote.



Members take union activism workshops on the road

HEU member Julia Bambrough (above left), a community social services worker with Western Human Resources Society, tests out her newly acquired facilitation skills with union servicing rep Kim Zander. Julia is one of 20 HEU

members who recently received facilitators' training to help bring one-day union activism workshops into communities across the province. You can arrange for the course to be presented at your workplace or another community venue by contacting your servicing representative. The only requirement is that you have a minimum of 10 registrants.

Public wants health care services restored

Two out of three British Columbians want the billion dollar budget surplus forecast by the Campbell Liberal government to restore services like health care and education, according to a poll commissioned by HEU in late October.

The Mustel Group poll of 507 British Columbians also shows that support for health care and education services is particularly high among women at 73 per cent.

Twenty-five per cent of those polled support money going to reduce the provincial debt. And only 12 per cent want the projected surplus to be used to cut taxes.

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class action lawsuit its trying to mount against HEU.

After last spring's job action, the CTF launched a radio ad campaign appealing for litigants to participate in legal proceedings against the union based on the alleged impact of the walkout.

In a fundraising letter sent by the organization's BC director in November, the CTF says that action "will send a powerful message to government unions that taxpayers refuse to be held hostage by unreasonable demands and radical actions".

A Global TV poll held the day after job action ended showed that the public sided with the HEU as opposed

to the Gordon Campbell government in the dispute by a two to one margin.

There is currently an application at the Labour Relations Board which appears to be CTF-funded for a ruling that would allow a lawsuit to proceed to the courts.

In calling for a dismissal of the application, HEU argues that: "The impetus for this action came not from citizens, but from the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation. We submit that this organization's 'intermeddling' is motivated by a desire to diminish the influence of public sector unions in society and not by desire to see that justice is done."

HERE'S SOME INTERESTING STATISTICS ABOUT RECENT BC ELECTIONS:

Percentage of the popular vote for the two major political parties in the 2001 provincial election:
BC Liberals – 58 per cent
NDP – 22 per cent

Percentage of seats won by the two major political parties in the 2001 provincial election:
BC Liberals – 97 per cent (77 seats)
NDP – three per cent (two seats)

Corporate donations to BC Liberals during 2001 election: \$4.3 million

Trade union donations to NDP during 2001 election: \$684,105

Vote margin by which Jagrup Brar won Surrey-Panorama Ridge by-election for the NDP: 2,546

Number of HEU members in Surrey-Panorama Ridge: about 1,000

Cost per registered voter to hold elections in BC: about \$7

Cost of holding MLA's to account for the damage they've done to health care: Priceless

*ALL FACTS FROM ELECTIONS BC, EXCEPT FOR THE LAST ONE.

AFTER THE SHIFT

PATTY GIBSON

In the next provincial election British Columbians will decide if they want a new electoral system.

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY PROVES A POWERFUL EXPERIENCE

JUST OVER A YEAR AGO HEU member Edith Davidson, a renal technical supervisor at St. Paul's Hospital, received a piece of mail that she almost threw in the junk pile. It was a letter asking if she would be interested in looking at how BC's electoral system might be improved.

She replied. Then attended a few selection meetings. And with the luck of a draw (in the end her name was pulled out of a hat) Davidson joined with 159 fellow British Columbians to form the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

Their mandate was to consider whether or not they wanted to recommend a change to BC's current voting system, and if so, to choose an alternative model that would go to a referendum vote in the next provincial election.

It was a huge commitment that took every second weekend from January to March – that was the learning phase – attendance at several public hearings held throughout the province, and another six weekends to deliberate on which model, if any, would be selected.

For Davidson, who says she was "pretty naive politically" it was a powerful learning experience. "I feel like I now have the equivalent of a third level course in political science," she says.

But why did she get involved in the first place? "Basically, I was interested in looking for something better," says Davidson. "I don't think you could find

a voter anywhere in BC who at one time or another hasn't thought there is something wrong with our electoral system."

Like everyone else on the Assembly she counted on her family's support to give up so much of her personal life. "There was lots I couldn't do. I couldn't go on the dragon boat team every second weekend. I didn't have the same family time. And I couldn't go on trips on certain days."

But in the end Davidson says those sacrifices were all worth it. "I learned so much about British Columbia and the problems people face in other regions."

She also said she was astounded by the lack of animosity in the Assembly's discussions, even though there were people from all political persuasions and points of view.

"It was remarkable that 160 people could hold discussions and come to a decision without the bickering and antagonism you would expect from such a large, diverse group," she says.

Davidson urges people to learn more about the Single Transfer Vote (BC-STV) system that will be on the May 17 ballot.

"I really want people to understand the system we are proposing, however they vote, and not just to have a knee-jerk reaction."

A copy of the Assembly's recommendations will be mailed to every person in BC in January. And you can check out the Assembly's website at <www.citizensassembly.bc.ca>.



DAVIDSON

continued from page 13

MARY LAPLANTE PHOTO



Health unions pledge solidarity, action

"Absolutely phenomenal!" was the way HEU's financial secretary Mary LaPlante described a mid-November meeting of Health Unions of the Americas, held in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

"The solidarity that was expressed in small ways – between individuals – and

in large gatherings was something I'll never forget," said LaPlante, who attended as part of the CUPE national delegation.

Sponsored by CUPE's Global Justice Fund, the meeting provided a critical opportunity for Canadian trade unionists involved in health care to meet with 11 countries from Central and South America.

It also produced a statement of principles and an action plan that will promote health care as a fundamental right, fight privatization and free trade agreements, and establish a communications network to distribute information and strengthen the movement.

Hosted by Asociacion Trabajadores del Estado (ATE) in Argentina, the conference built on an initial meeting hosted by CUPE in Niagara Falls in 2003.

LaPlante says she was impressed with the commitment people had to continue working together and believes the actions agreed upon are "definitely doable".

While there, delegates attended a rally and march

to the Ministry of Health in Argentina to protest the impact of trade agreements on health care.

The next meeting of health care unions in the Americas will convene in Cuba in early 2006.

Having problems with your WCB claim?

If you receive a decision letter from the Workers' Compensation Board that you do not agree with, remember that the decision can be appealed.

However, it must be appealed within 90 days of the date of the letter.

HEU has set up a "hot-line" for members who have difficulties with the WCB.

A representative in the union's WCB department will provide information and assistance through what can often be a confusing and intimidating process. Just give us a call.

In the Lower Mainland phone 604.456.7186.

Vancouver Island members can call 250.480.0533 or use the toll-free number at 1.800.742.8001.

For toll-free calls in the rest of BC: 1.877.438.5550.

What are you up to?

If you have news to share from your local the *Guardian* wants to hear from you. Contact Patty Gibson at HEU's Provincial Office.

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

JANUARY 3

Statutory holiday for New Year's Day, HEU offices closed.

JAN. 16-FEB. 11

CLC Pacific Region Winter School, Harrison Hot Springs.

JANUARY 26-28

HEU Provincial Executive Meeting.

FEBRUARY

Black History Month.

FEBRUARY 9

Chinese New Year.

FEBRUARY 23-25

HEU Provincial Executive Meeting.

MARCH 8

International Women's Day.

MARCH 21

International Day for the Elimination of Racism.

MARCH 21-APRIL 1

Spring Break.

One more take on privatization

Argentina is thousands of kilometres from BC. In distance, language and culture, this South American country seems very removed from our shores on the Pacific West Coast. Add to that the fact that Argentina is officially bankrupt, that it has billions in unpaid international debt and that its population now faces staggering unemployment and starvation-level poverty. All of this can make BC's problems seem distant and even paltry.

But are they? When viewing *The Take*, the much talked about documentary from Toronto filmmakers Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein, the links between these two widely separated pieces of geography become clear.

In order to make the film, the pair spent the better part of a year in Argentina following a group of laid off factory workers who reclaimed their jobs by taking over the closed factory where they used to work.

It's 2001, shortly after the devastating economic collapse that made Argentina, once the envy of Latin America and much of the rest of the world for its economic success, a basket case. Thousands of workers who had enjoyed a reasonably prosperous life were reduced to paupers. And still are. Along with the country's similarly affected middle and professional classes they stage massive, street-jamming demonstrations giving a powerful voice to Argentinians discontent.

In an amazing series of actions, groups of workers have begun occupying and eventually reopening the factories abandoned by their still-wealthy owners. This, then, is the "take" – the takeover, or take-back – of a manufacturing sector that never should have been allowed to close.

The film concentrates on one particular group who seize the Forja auto parts plant and restart its machines. As with fellow workers who are successfully operating other taken-back enterprises, they face a host of obstacles, from riot police wielding nightsticks and tossing tear gas grenades, to the courts and powerful owners with their banks of lawyers and endless funds.

A documentary works best when the story is told not just by the masses in their thousands, but through individuals – in this case, the key movers of the Forja takeover, most notably Freddie



ANDRES D'ELIA PHOTO

Film makers Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein spent the better part of a year in Argentina filming workers who are taking back the factories, and with them their hope for a future.

Espinoza, his wife and their two young daughters. Other political activity is represented by a feisty young woman who joins street demonstrations while her middle-class mother works for the Peronist candidate in upcoming state elections.

Cast over these proceedings is the dark shadow of Carlos

Menem, the disgraced former president whose policies of privatization, wage cutting, social-service cutbacks and downsizing caused the economic devastation. Menem is attempting a political comeback, promising more of the same kind of "neo-liberal" globalization. If he wins, the workers' cooperative factory enterprises will be crushed, once and for all.

So what's the comparison with BC? Menem's policies come from the same well that produced the cut-

backs and privatization agenda of this province's Liberal government. And while we may be thousands of kilometers away from Argentina, thanks to our current government we have not escaped the reach of global privatization or the greed of international corporations.

It's that reality that links us with the struggles of Argentinean workers who are part of a movement currently sweeping through other Latin American nations – the tremors of which can be felt all the way to British Columbia.

The Take will be available soon for sale or rental. Check out the website at <www.nfb.ca/thetake>.

DOCUMENTARY

The Take

A film by Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein

reviewed by Dan Keeton

Interested in joining a committee of the Provincial Executive?

Secretary-treasurers at all HEU locals will soon receive information about how members can apply to participate on several subcommittees of the union's Provincial Executive. Most committees are composed of three PE members and four local activists, who are appointed for two-year terms.

Committees play an important role in broadening discussion within HEU's leadership on a variety of issues as well as providing the PE with detailed background information.

Committees also undertake activities in their particular area and help to raise awareness throughout the general membership. Committees seeking member involvement include:

- International Solidarity Committee
- Women's Committee
- Men's Committee
- Nursing Team
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Political Action Committee
- Professional Association and Technical Workers
- Trades Committee
- Young Workers
- Anti-Privatization Committee (formerly the Regionalization and Workplace Restructuring Committee)
- Pension Committee (newly created)
- Benchmark Review Committee (newly created)
- Clerical Committee (newly created)

If you are interested in putting your name forward, and want more information, contact your local secretary-treasurer. At the Provincial Office you can talk with President Fred Muzin or his assistant Joey Hartman. Applications should be sent to Susana Esposito.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

Special thanks goes out to these members at Burnaby Hospital who took part in a recent photo shoot. Their pictures were featured in ads celebrating our 60th anniversary and in ads promoting the diversity of our members' work.

PHOTOS BY KATE WILLIAMS



EQUITY PHONE LINE

1.800.663.5813, ext. 7192
Lower Mainland 604.456.7192

PRESS 1



First Nations

First Nations members would like to hear from you! Please call if you would like to help educate our union brothers and sisters on issues that affect First Nations people.

PRESS 2

Ethnic Diversity



One union, many colours! Working across our differences! To participate, please call and leave us your name!

PRESS 3



People with disabilities

If you are on WCB, LTD, or if invisibly or visibly disabled in the workplace, let us know how the union can better meet your needs.

www.alberni.net/PeopleWithDisAbilities

PRESS 4



Lesbians and Gays

For support: afraid of being identified, feeling isolated, want to know your rights? Call for information on same sex benefits, fighting homophobia and discrimination.

www.pridepages.org

ALL CALLS ARE CONFIDENTIAL

Surrey brother will be missed

Sisters and brothers at the Surrey local are mourning the sudden death of long-time tradesman and local activist, **Des Grieg**, who passed away just before Christmas. Des was 63 years old.

A painter by trade, Des began working at Surrey Memorial in the early 80s. Over the years he held many positions, including two terms as local chair. He also served on the Provincial Executive (1988-1990), the Resolutions Committee (1986) and the Tabulations Committee (1988).

Co-workers say Des will be remembered as someone who fought for what he believed in and for his caring, compassionate nature. Des was also known for his excellent sense of humour, his passion for gardening and his love of history. Des is survived by his wife Marie-Helene, and his two sons.

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GUARDIAN

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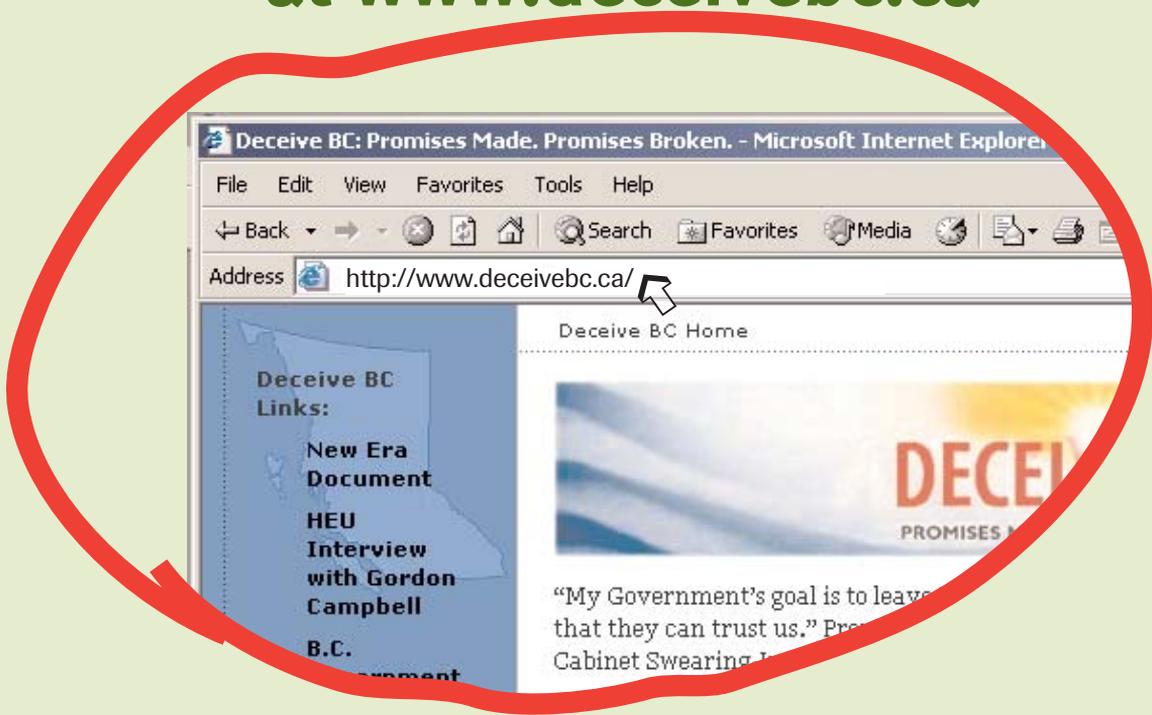
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GOING LIVE IN JANUARY 2005