

# GUARDIAN



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## Strength. Unity. Justice.

Delegates attending HEU's 16th Wage Policy Conference vowed to protect jobs and defend publicly delivered health care services in upcoming contract talks.

Thousands of  
health care workers  
fired without cause

# UNDER ATTACK

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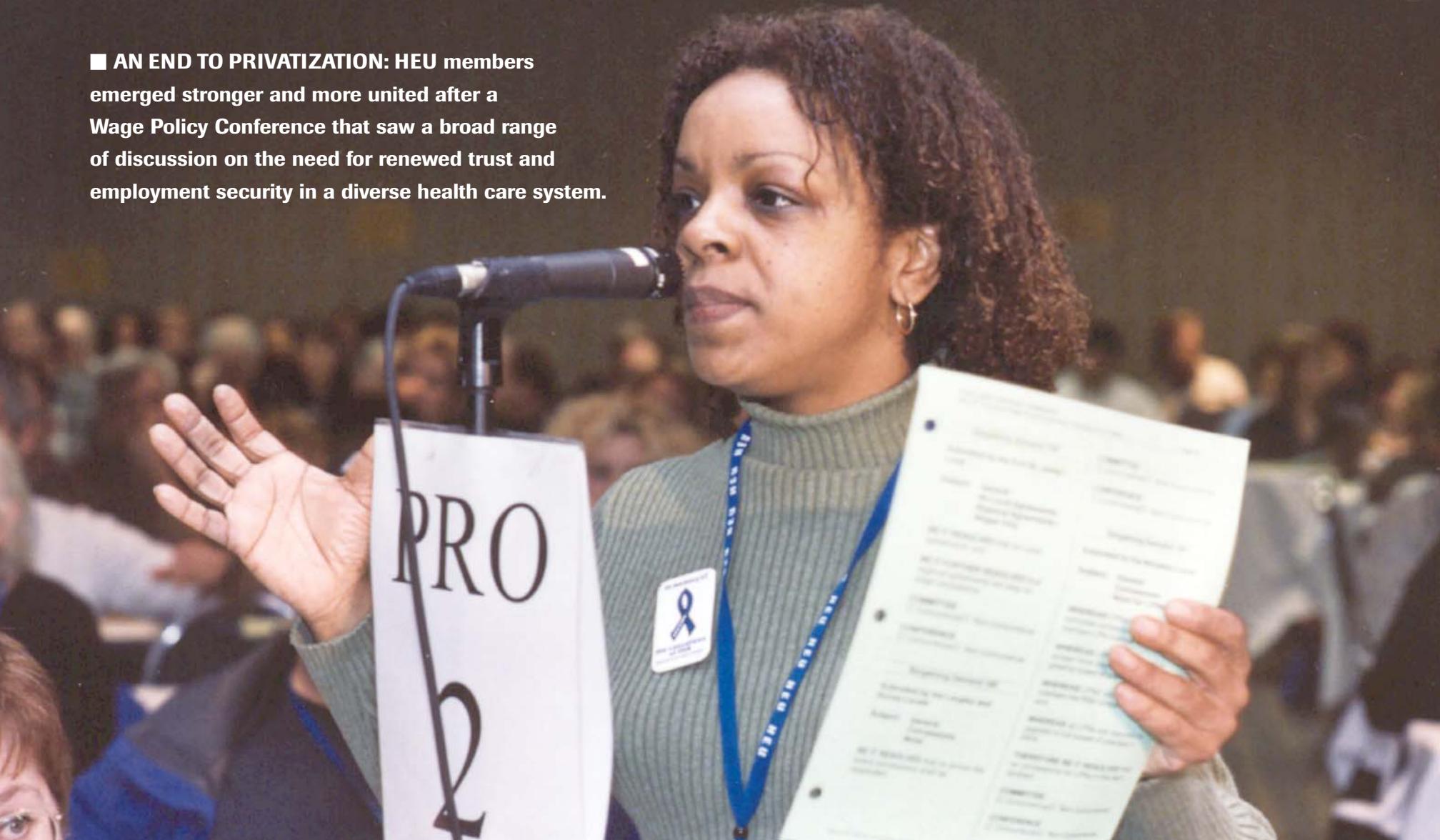
BARGAINING FOR JUSTICE PAGE 7

DAN TOULGOET PHOTO/VANCOUVER COURIER

Regional health boards: The B.C. Liberals' new gravy train PAGE 4



■ **AN END TO PRIVATIZATION:** HEU members emerged stronger and more united after a Wage Policy Conference that saw a broad range of discussion on the need for renewed trust and employment security in a diverse health care system.



KATE WILLIAMS PHOTOS

# Bargaining for justice IN UNJUST TIMES

**F**ollowing three days of open debate and frank discussion, delegates attending HEU's 16th Wage Policy Conference pledged strength and unity in the face of a government that wants blood from a stone.

As the *Guardian* goes to press, HEU's bargaining committee has tabled a proposal with the employer based on nearly 200 resolutions brought forward for discussion by the union's province-wide membership.

It's a package aimed at ending the chaos and disruption now plaguing B.C.'s health care system and restoring quality health care services for all British Columbians.

It emphasizes the need to re-establish the trust between health care workers and government that was shattered with the passage of Bill 29 – legislation that effectively gutted key provisions of the union's freely negotiated collective agreement.

Along with other measures, that means an immediate freeze on contracting out while talks are underway and a public commitment to respecting a free collective bargaining process.

In the wake of massive contracting out of health care services in acute and long-term care facilities, delegates brought forward a series of resolutions to protect the public delivery of medicare services. The union's bargaining proposal includes demands that would put an end to privatization, protect seniors' care, and ensure full disclosure and monitoring of private health care contracts that are already in place.

With thousands of health care workers now fired without cause and thousands more at risk, employment security is a lynch-pin to retaining a skilled and experienced workforce. That requires a series of initiatives to address retraining and education-



al upgrading, hiring practices, successorship, severance, bumping and early retirement.

And a new collective agreement must do more to recognize the occupational and geographical diversity of HEU members in an increasingly complex health care environment. Measures needed include new benchmarks, pay rates, and improvements

for casuals along with other protections and adjustments.

• Find out more on page 7. Download HEU's full bargaining package at <[www.heu.org](http://www.heu.org)>.

## Protecting public delivery of Medicare services requires an end to contracting out



CHRIS ALLNUTT

## Health employers have crossed the line

On February 19, health employers tabled concession demands that leave no member of HEU unscathed.

In delivering their concession demands health employers said that ability to pay was not the issue. They're just not prepared to pay. They told us the cost of labour is too expensive.

**Health employers have reached a new level of arrogance. They believe they can abuse health care workers without consequence.**

Liberal government, these health employers have reached a new level of arrogance.

They believe they can abuse health care workers without consequence.

Health employers put more than 100 pages of concession demands on the bargaining table. They spelled out an extreme government campaign to strip away fundamental provisions in our contract.

Armed with legislation that's brought international condemnation on the B.C.

Well, they're wrong about that. Their agenda of conflict and confrontation is destroying the lives of dedicated women and men on health care's front lines, causing chaos and uncertainty throughout the system.

Government and health employers should know better. They should know that HEU members will not stand by while public health care and decent jobs are destroyed.

Our commitment to better health care is clear. In stark contrast to health employers plans to clear-cut our contract, we've put forward a package that proposes a problem-solving approach to fixing the post-privatization chaos that's infecting our health care system.

We've also reached an agreement with the Northern Health Authority that's resulted in the scrubbing of privatization plans and preserved decent jobs and quality services.

While health employers have fired workers, our members' actions have saved jobs and protected services to the public. On February 19, health employers crossed the line.

And they went too far.

We're up to that challenge.

**HEU members will not stand by while public health care and decent jobs are destroyed.**

## voice.mail

### Job fair or cattle call?

Recently, Aramark (the multi-national corporation given housekeeping contracts in our hospitals and care facilities) held a "job fair" in our community – a nice, politically correct term for what could be called a "cattle call" to round up cheap labour.

Although I have no intention of working for Aramark, I attended this "job fair" on behalf of my laid off HEU sisters and was permitted to examine the application form. It asked such questions as: do you speak English?; have you ever been convicted of a crime for which you have not been pardoned?; and will you sign a waiver authorizing Aramark to deduct from your wages any cash shortages for which you may be found responsible?

Wages were not mentioned, but apparently were discussed when applicants were escorted to another room and asked to sign an IWA union card – the union that used to represent forestry workers and used to try to negotiate decent wages and benefits for its members. Obviously those days are gone.

The contract the IWA and Aramark negotiated on behalf of its employees (who had not yet been hired) pays a base rate of \$10.25 per hour, increasing to less than \$12 over six years – the length of the contract.

The IWA was invited by Aramark to represent their employees, who were asked to sign before they were given the job. This collaboration is immoral.

In the meantime, these people are being exploited by their potential employer and the union. The job they are being asked to do is a backbreaking daily routine that requires fastidious hygiene and attention to detail. When Campbell declared B.C. was "open for business" what he meant was he was going to create a cheap labour

pool for corporate giants like Aramark.

We're not "open for business" – we're up for sale – at bargain basement prices!

**MARILYNN GREEN**  
*Kiwanis Local  
Gibsons*

### Strategy questioned

Ideology, from the right or the left, is one of the most destructive forces in history. Save for prejudice and racism, it has caused more damage and cost more lives than any other of mankind's mistakes. Presently, it is tearing apart B.C. and causing greater divisions than has ever been witnessed before.

As any HEU member knows, the far right ideology plaguing our province is a threat to all working people. Our honest, hardworking brothers and sisters are its next victims. What many members may not realize is that HEU is also guilty of some of the offenses we charge the government with doing. The radical left-wing agenda espoused by a few of our leaders is not only out of step with the vast majority of B.C.'s population but also the majority of HEU members. This has caused widespread division and alienation that has significantly weakened the strength and solidarity of HEU.

To survive as a union we

must act smarter and more strategically. Before the last provincial election, when everyone knew there would be a Liberal landslide, some of our leaders acted as if the NDP would win. Although we knew where we stood with the Liberals, they proceeded to deepen animosities to the point where we have become their main target. We must learn to act smarter to better weather future political storms. This does not mean abandoning our ethics. It simply means we shouldn't isolate ourselves from the rest of the population. This I feel is necessary for HEU to survive and prosper in the future.

**DAVID PELLERIN**  
*Chair, Surrey Local*

### A tribute to MSA housekeepers

My heart is aching at the political decisions that have brought us to this day. It is a mad mind that will take the bread and butter of our work community and give it up to a profit-minded, multi-national in the guise of a cost saving measure.

These actions deny the friendships and work relations we have built – some over 25 years. I say this also on behalf of the extended care residents and families who are hurting as deeply as the staff. We all have to say goodbye.

Although they have fought to try and preserve their jobs, they have lost to the powerful, political, decision-makers who have determined they are not worthy of an hourly rate that can support their family. This is shameful.

They held their heads up high in the face of their adversity and have kept a happy environment while watching the clock tick away to their layoff date.

I have had the privilege of being in a position of leadership that's been supported by these women and men. I have never seen a more caring and united group.

Our hospital is losing a very special department. They have gone out of their way to support other departments in our hospital, to resolve local issues and to fundraise for the benefit of Abbotsford's less fortunate. They have a wonderful support network among themselves that radiates to all they come in contact with. I'm sure it helped them get to their last week in such a professional manner.

I want to thank each one of you for the friendships, the support and the admirable way you conducted yourselves in your last days of work. We wish you blessings and much success in the new ventures you all must take.

**TERRY BROADWORTH**  
*Abbotsford*





KEN JOSEPH PHOTO

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## Monitoring privatization

### The declining state of care in British Columbia

**T**wo years after the passage of contract-breaking Bill 29, the Campbell Liberals' privatization agenda is deeply affecting public health care in the province. Increasing numbers of British Columbians are expressing grave concerns about the negative impact of contracting out on patient and resident care, and HEU members from health care's front lines are confirming those concerns.

"One of our top priorities at this time is tracking what's happening on the ground with contracted services and monitoring the effects of privatization on patients and workers," says HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt.

"Our members are the eyes and ears of B.C.'s health care facilities. Everyday, we're getting reports about the rising health and safety risks that are occurring with contracting out, the exploitation of contract workers, the turnover that is resulting from it, and escalating workloads that keep staff struggling to keep up."

At a recent bargaining session of

the facilities subsector, several members underlined those concerns in presentations about their work and the impact of privatization on quality care.

"The stress level at work has become tremendous," says cardiology technologist Tilly Hiscock. "This leads to increased sick time, low morale and an increased potential for mistakes."

"That concerns me greatly because in my discipline you can't afford to make a mistake. The results could be devastating."

Merv Schmit, now a cleaner in the renal unit at Royal Jubilee in Victoria after 32 years as groundskeeper at Queen Alexandra Hospital, talks about



MARGI BLAMEY PHOTO

**A January 28 march and rally, led by members at Vancouver General Hospital, was one of many ways that HEU members across B.C. marked the passage of Bill 29 two years ago, and the resulting loss of health care jobs through cuts, closures and contracting out.**

the pressures and responsibility of his new job. "I clean isolation rooms after a patient with an infectious disease leaves. I do a terminal clean. That means that I wear gloves, a gown and a mask and completely clean the room from floor to ceiling, all the equipment there and the bed."

"I shudder to think what kind of standards will exist when housekeeping is contracted out to a private, for-profit company. You get what you pay for," says Schmit.

Allnutt says reports that are called or faxed into the union are being tracked as part of the union's larger monitoring effort. "It's critical that we know where the mistakes are. And we're counting on members in all facilities

where contracting out has occurred to help us track those mistakes."

Since Bill 29 was enacted, more than 5,000 health care workers have lost their jobs due to cuts and closures and the contracting out of direct care and

support services across B.C.

Major privatization includes:

- security, housekeeping and laundry in the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and Fraser Health Authority;
- housekeeping and food services in the Provincial Health Services Authority;
- retail food services in the FHA;
- health support and direct care services in numerous long-term care facilities in the province; and
- most recently, 900 food services workers in VCHA and Providence Health after the health authority rejected a union cost-saving proposal.

Contracting out and privatization are also looming:

- in the Vancouver Island Health Authority where a \$21 million cost-saving proposal affecting 1,200 central and south island health workers, primarily in housekeeping and food services, was rejected;
- at VCHA's Tilbury Regional Hospital Laundry in Delta where more than 120 workers stand to lose their jobs.

**MARGI BLAMEY**

HEU COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

## NHA agrees to put privatization on hold

The Northern Health Authority has reached an agreement with HEU and other health unions that puts contracting-out on hold in that region. The NHA has cancelled requests for proposals for laundry, food services and housekeeping and will instead focus on finding cost-saving measures that do not alter the terms and conditions of the current collective agreement.

An important part of the process will be using the expertise of front-line workers to help find more cost-effective ways to deliver health services in the North. The letter of understanding recognizes that both the NHA and health unions have a strong desire to avoid the contracting out and privatization of services that

are currently provided in-house. HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt says, "Northern Health's commitment to work cooperatively with our members to strengthen health care and protect jobs is a model other health authorities should consider."

In a recent press release, NHA CEO Malcolm Maxwell said, "This understanding will be a significant step in helping management and unions work together to meet both service needs and cost pressures."

With the signed letter of understanding, local agreements modifying the terms of the province-wide collective agreement at four HEU and two BCGEU sites in the North have been cancelled.



## COFFEE BREAK

All stories guaranteed factual.

### Harry Potter's Hermione gets union lesson

It's not often that trade union organizing features in children's literature. However, J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books are an exception as readers are drawn into socially conscious student Hermione Granger's attempts to organize the house elf community at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

House elves are magical creatures that are enslaved to wizard families and institutions. They are not paid, face terrible working conditions and have no sick leave, paid holidays, pensions or protections. Her first thought is that the house elves need a union.

While Hermione does her background research, crafts a public awareness campaign called SPEW (for the Society of the Promotion of Elfish Welfare) and forms a campaign committee, she leaves the last and most important step to the end talking to the house elves.

No rank and file support meant no support for her campaign.

### Honors for medicare pioneer's daughter

On Oct. 24, 2003, actor and social activist Shirley Douglas – a tireless crusader for public health care – was made an Officer of the Order of Canada.

As a national spokesperson for the Canadian Health Coalition, Douglas has traveled extensively to speak in local communities and international forums in support of Canada's universal health care system, which she views as symbolic of Canada's identity.

Douglas follows in the steps of her late father, medicare pioneer and Saskatchewan Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) premier Tommy Douglas.

From federal government press release

### ... and a role for grandson?

Kiefer Sutherland, winner of a Golden Globe for his role in the hit series "24," is strongly considering portraying his late grandfather, Tommy Douglas, in a four-hour television series about the prominent politician's life. The Canadian actor and his mother, Shirley Douglas, are collaborating on the series for CBC Television and Minds Eye Entertainment. The production is set to begin in this year and will be shot in Saskatchewan.

From CBC Arts News and TV Guide



# Legal roundup

### PHSA violated labour code

A Labour Relations Board official has ruled that the Provincial Health Services Authority violated the *B.C. Labour Code* because it refused to meet in good faith with HEU to consider union proposals for alternatives that could have prevented the privatization of hundreds of support service jobs.

PHSA was ordered to provide all information requested by the union and to meet to discuss alternatives to contracting out.

Health employers were ordered to cease and desist from any further Code violations.

### HEABC's contempt bid fails

The Health Employers Association of B.C.'s attempt to have the courts impose legal and financial penalties on HEU has failed. HEABC's contempt of court application centered on a community-led protest against privatization last summer at the Salvation Army's Sunset Lodge, opposing the Army's decision to contract out the work of dozens of long-serving HEU

members. The contempt bid was withdrawn when Justice Pitfield ruled key parts of HEABC's evidence inadmissible.

### Compass injunction set aside

An injunction Compass Group won last summer to stop HEU from picketing their job fairs has been set aside by Madam Justice Garson. Her decision referred to the important protection picketing has under the freedom of expression section of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

## Health authority boards: the new B.C. Liberal gravy train

Finance Minister Gary Collins' February 17 budget speech was long on platitudes about how the Liberal government is restructuring health care delivery and management "to make sure that more of every health care dollar goes directly into patient care."

So then why did the government last year alone cough up more than \$1 million in payoffs to its corporate friends sitting on regional health boards?

Before the B.C. Liberal government reorganized regional health authorities in late 2001, board members did not receive directors' fees. But last year, government appointees to B.C.'s six health authority boards pocketed \$1,002,572 in directors' fees and \$102,271 in expense payments.

Financial documents obtained by HEU under provisions of the *Financial Information Act* also reveal several generous donors to the B.C. Liberal Party among the ranks of forestry executives, financiers, resort owners and other representatives of B.C.'s corporate elite that dominate

the province's six health authorities.

In the five years leading up to their appointments to health authority boards in April, 2002, 30 of the 57 directors – either individually or through companies and organizations with which they're associated – donated \$1,145,103 to the Liberal party's campaign war chest.

For example, Terasen's Vancouver Island CEO Jac Kreut: \$44,500 in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2003, for chairing the Vancouver Island Health Authority board of directors.

MacMillan Bloedel's former chief operating officer and executive vice-president Keith Purchase: \$37,265 for chairing the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority board of directors.

On average, the six health authority board chairs were paid \$35,318 in fees while the 51 directors were paid \$15,503.

By comparison, the Calgary Health Region paid its board chair \$8,000 in fees during the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002 (the latest information available).

Directors serving a full year were paid between \$2,000 and \$12,000 a year and averaged \$6,000.

## Lapping up the dollars

B.C.'s six health authority boards of directors, charged with reducing health care costs throughout the system, don't mind spending on themselves:

- Fraser Health Authority CEO Bob Smith racked up nearly \$75,000 in expenses during the last fiscal year – including \$14,000 for one month's living expenses after his move to B.C.;
- The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority racked up a \$1.37 million tab in consulting fees for advice on how to cut services;
- Last year B.C.'s health authorities spent \$125,000 on logo development and \$3,934,560 on lawyers fighting for privatization while signing off on 148 executive severance packages.
- If Bob Smith was let go tomorrow – after less than two years on the job – he'd get two years' worth of severance, or about \$650,000. But a FHA housekeeper who earns \$18.90 an hour would get nothing if she were laid off after nine years and no more than \$22,097.88, including sick pay, after 40 years.

## <<newsbites>>

### Don't mess with success

The resident council of Evergreen Extended Care at Powell River General Hospital is urging Vancouver Coastal Health to stop its privatization initiative in hospital housekeeping and food services.

In a letter to the health authority's CEO Ida Goodreau, families warn that eliminating skilled, experienced staff will "disturb the excellence that presently exists" at the hospital and take "its toll on the entire staff."

"The housekeepers and food services staff are an integral part of the hospital team," they say.

"Can we not celebrate our success in recruiting and nurturing these fine

people and recognize that a hospital is only as good as the people who work in it and run it daily?"

### Mortality rate soars for Penticton seniors

One out of every five residents transferred out of the special care unit at the soon-to-close 122-bed Penticton Retirement Centre died within three months, according to the HEU local's chairperson Della McGaw. Compare that to the 42 residents who remained in the facility – during the same period only a single resident died.

But McGaw is worried that the mortality rate of this group of more

physically frail seniors will be even higher when the IHA moves them out of the complex care unit by the end of June when the PRC will close its doors for good.

The residents are being moved to the new 100-bed Good Samaritan care facility – also in Penticton.

### Saving Saint Mary's

Supporters from the Save Saint Mary's Coalition were among the more than 300 people who packed a recent Fraser Health Authority board meeting in New Westminster to tell the health bureaucrats to keep the 117-year old Catholic hospital open.

# Union peers offer a helping hand

**W**hile HEU continues to fight the Campbell government's privatization agenda, the union is also opening up resources for members who are losing their jobs or who want to upgrade their skills.

In the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island, HEU has trained several members from various facilities to act as "peer counselors" – people who are assisting their union sisters and brothers with applying for employment insurance (EI) benefits, writing a resume, building interview skills, accessing training, and connecting to community resources.

In Vancouver Coastal Health, for example, HEU secured an agreement that allows union peer counselors to operate out of Pearson Centre's Employment Transition Services Centre.

Peer counselor Dave Moody, an OR assistant at Vancouver General, says, "This is a vital program. When people are upset it helps to talk to someone who's part of the union family. It's a safe place to unload your emotions and get support to move forward."

Peer counseling is also available at other locations throughout the Vancouver Coastal and Fraser Health regions, as well as at HEU's Provincial Office.

The union has also been working with Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) to facilitate members' access to funded training opportunities while they are receiving EI benefits. HEU peer counselors can assist members with the forms and requirements they need to successfully access HRDC sponsorship funding, which is targeted to employment growth areas like LPNs and cooks.

And through a partnership with Douglas College, HEU has been help-

ing care aides increase their employability by getting additional skills in such areas as palliative care, mental health and assisted living. Interested members should contact Priti Shah at HEU.

Through a new partnership with the Burnaby School District, HEU is offering grade 10 and 12 equivalency (GED) classes and career planning courses, free of charge.

The classes give members, their families and friends an opportunity to upgrade their educational qualifications, while career planning classes focus on job opportunities and personal career plans.

"Our aim is to create supportive learning environments where members can get the additional training and credentials they may need to continue their careers in health care," says HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt.

**This is a vital program. When people are upset it helps to talk to someone who's part of the union family.**



**New partnerships with school district are helping HEU members get additional training and credentials.**

"These classes recognize individual learning needs and encourage participants to learn at their own pace."

A similar partnership has been created with the Greater Victoria School District where registrants can obtain their high school diploma, access educational counseling, and learn about current and future job demands and

upgrade their computer skills.

And by linking with the United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 247's training centre, HEU members can enroll in that union's cook certification program, if they are interested

in seeking employment in the hospitality industry. (Call 604-522-1459 for more information)

Other resources developed by HEU include *Tools for Change*, a resource guide for displaced workers, *How to become an LPN*, a handbook for anyone interested in pursuing a nursing career, and a research report on *Expanding Areas of Employment Within Health Care for Health Support Staff*, which documents current and emerging job opportunities in the health care field.

• For more information about these programs call HEU's Provincial Office at 604-438-5000 and ask for Action Centre support; or call 250-480-0533 on Vancouver Island.

## IWA actions are under the microscope

The role of IWA Local 3567 in helping the Campbell government and multinational corporations privatize health care services in B.C. will be back on the agenda when the executive council of the Canadian Labour Congress meets this spring.

CUPE National president Paul Moist says he's been securing broader support from union leaders nationally to push the CLC to take strong action against the woodworkers' union.

"Our priority is to defend HEU contracts and jobs," Moist says.

Meanwhile, Sonny Ghag – the IWA leader who signed the sweetheart deals with the multinationals – has landed in even deeper trouble.

It's alleged Ghag led a mob of 150 people in an attack on fellow IWA members at a Vancouver sawmill.

Scores were injured. Now Ghag and his local face a lawsuit launched by the owner of the mill and two dozen workers who were hurt in the attack.

In January, Local 3567 executive members roughed up a Global TV reporter on camera after he tried to interview Ghag. Members of Ghag's local are now calling for his resignation. Media reports say 800 signatures have been collected from members to back up their resignation call.

As well, Ghag suffered a legal defeat in late January when the Labour Relations Board rejected an IWA 3567 application for certification with Sodexo.

R. MORAN/CIEA PHOTO



### Thousands protest tuition fee hikes

The Canadian Federation of Students' February 'Day of Action' against sky-rocketing tuition fees brought thousands of students and their supporters into the streets of Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo, Kelowna, Cranbrook and Prince George.

An estimated 4,000 students rallied for a fair and accessible post-secondary system in Vancouver, and another 2,000 took their opposition to the steps of the provincial legislature

in Victoria. Students say that the Campbell government's policies have doubled tuition fees and turned away thousands of qualified applicants from B.C.'s colleges and universities.

### Falling care standards exposed at Sunset Lodge

Just months after dozens of HEU members working for Sunset Lodge lost their jobs to British multinational Compass Group, an investigative report by Victoria's *Monday Magazine* points to falling standards of care in the Salvation Army owned facility.

The article details a litany of complaints by residents' families, which led to an inspection by the Vancouver Island Health Authority and a subsequent "high" health and safety hazard ruling. The article was published in the magazine's Feb. 5-11, 2004 edition.

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# 'Son of Bill 29' gives corporations in health care more power

New legislation passed in December by the Campbell Liberals further erodes health care workers' right to organize by providing private corporations with new ways to break union contracts.

Bill 94 – the *Health Partnerships Agreement Act* – picks up where the two-year old Bill 29 left off by exempting private corporations operating inside the public health care system from basic labour regulations that apply to other unionized workers.

For example, the planned Abbotsford Hospital public-private partnerships and future health care P3s won't be required to honor existing collective agreements. And under the new law, private corporations can attempt to sidestep union efforts to organize workers and bargain contracts by subcontracting out union members' work.

"Bill 94 is a union-busting law designed to keep wages low and corporate profits high," says Hospital Employees' Union secretary-business

manager Chris Allnut. "But it won't prevent workers from unionizing and HEU will be there to help them."

Allnut notes that the Abbotsford Hospital P3 project is already behind schedule and overbudget. The recently released request for proposals for the project promised the bidding consortia exemption from basic labour laws for more than 30 years.

Bill 94 attempts to deprive workers of their continued right to union representation in situations where health authorities contract out services; undermine union organizing and bargaining by giving private "partners" carte blanche to sub-contract out services at will; and eliminate the application of the "true employer" provisions of the labour code throughout the health sector, effectively overriding decades of legal precedents that have prevented employers from undermining workers' rights through contracting out.

The union is studying the legislation and is considering whether it can be included in a broader constitutional challenge of Bill 29 that is heading to the B.C. Court of Appeal.



FRED MUZIN

## The employer has unleashed a vicious attack

The 109 pages of concession demands, presented at the facilities bargaining table by the Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC), clearly demonstrate the extent of the unjust times that we must confront. HEABC and the health authorities are unelected and unaccountable. HEU even had to go to the courts to ensure that the public had an opportunity to attend board sessions. After utilizing the contracting-out provisions of Bill 29 to fire thousands of dedicated health care workers, primarily women, for no cause, HEABC is attempting to further marginalize, demean and intimidate the remaining workforce.

The employers' demands are a vicious attack on women and people with disabilities and parallel ideological initiatives promoted by our dictatorial B.C. Liberal government. While government is slashing funding for transition centres and

women's programs, HEABC wants to eliminate benefit accumulation while on maternity leave, axe special leave provisions to look after ailing parents, and entrench discrimination by eliminating any funding for pay equity adjustments.

Similar to the inexcusable panic created by the Liberals through requiring people receiving disability benefits to fill out a 28-page reassessment form, HEABC wants to redefine disability, reduce benefits and re-evaluate the thousands of members on long-term disability, no doubt in an attempt to toss them onto the streets.

Rather than agreeing to renew the OSHAH, which has saved millions of dollars by reducing injury rates, our employers would rather reduce benefits and shift any responsibility for workers who are injured on the job to the WCB.

In 2002, the B.C. Liberal government created the only jurisdiction in Canada without a Human Rights Commission. Now, HEABC is demanding the removal of contract language that protects our human rights and combats harassment.

Oblivious to the fact that employers' insistence on shifting the cost of health care benefits onto the backs of workers is the number one factor leading to workplace disruption in the U.S., HEABC wants to increase deductibles, down-load premium costs and reduce benefits.

We must defeat the employers' attitude – that public services are a cost liability – and their threats of contracting-out, meant to make health care workers beg for their jobs. By standing up against the HEABC, HEU members will also be taking a stand for patients and residents, seniors, women, the poor, youth, people with disabilities and others who depend on critical public services.

Have we had enough yet? HEU members, the trade union movement and our social justice partners must dramatically respond and take back our civil society and our collective agreement.

### HEABC and the health authorities are unelected and unaccountable

## Liberals flip-flop on private clinic bill

The provincial government won't put into force a new law to help it police private clinics – a clear signal that the Campbell Liberals will tolerate the practice of charging patients for publicly insured medical services, says the BC Health Coalition.

The medicare advocacy group says the premier and the health services minister lost their resolve to enforce the *Canada Health Act* in the face of a powerful private health care lobby.

"Last November, health services minister Colin Hansen said amend-

ments to the *Medicare Protection Act* were necessary because B.C. is obligated under the *Canada Health Act* to ensure patients get the medically required care they need without paying user fees or other charges," says BC Health Coalition coordinator Terrie Hendrickson.

But in December, the premier said he has no intention of proclaiming Bill 92 – which amended the Act – even though it was passed by the provincial legislature under the advice of his health services minister.

## <<newsbites>>

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### The opposite of big media

Tired of what big media is feeding us here in B.C.? Then check out *The Tyee*, a feisty online source of news and views for British Columbians.

The new electronic publication promises original investigative reporting that "takes seriously the lives of working people and the poor," and "political and economic analysis that blows a hole" in the rigid right-wing approach of big media.

Surf to <www.thetyee.ca> to check out this alternative source of news and views which is updated daily. Or

follow the subscription signup directions – it's free – to get a weekly edition of *The Tyee* sent to your email.

### Rolling back women's equality in B.C.

One year after the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) singled out B.C. for failing to uphold its human rights obligations, the Campbell Liberal government is poised to further set back women's equality by ending funding for the province's women's centres.

The B.C. CEDAW group, a coalition of 12 prominent women's orga-

nizations, sounded the alarm about the deteriorating state of women's equality in the province during a recent news conference in Vancouver and called upon the Campbell government to halt plans that will gut the province's women's centres.

### Hotline helps victims of private clinics fees

The BC Nurses' union has set up a special hotline to help patients who have paid sizeable fees to private clinic operators in B.C. for medically necessary surgery.

The number is 1-800-667-1079.

The union says the extra costs for

surgeries performed at private clinics – called facility fees – are illegal.

And BCNU says it will help people who have been victimized get their money back by applying to the government's Medical Services Plan.

BCNU president Debra McPherson said her organization has already helped a registered nurse win back more than \$3,000 she paid in so-called facility fees for a medically necessary procedure.

McPherson says the great hue and cry from private surgery operators against legislation to enforce provisions of the *Canada Health Act* shows clinics have been violating the law for some time.



## Health employers demand massive concessions

Just before press time, the Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC) tabled a massive concessions package that – if allowed to stand – will strip health care workers of critical protections and hard-won gains. Virtually all classifications are at risk. Demands include:

- wage rollbacks ranging from 35 cents an hour, to between eight and 12 per cent for most workers;
- a longer work week resulting in a four per cent pay cut;

- vacations slashed by five to 15 days;
- workers to pay \$2,000 to \$3,000 for benefits;
- cutting sick leave accumulation by one-third;
- cutting sick leave pay by 25 per cent;
- part-time workers to pay 50 per cent of MSP, dental and extended health benefits; full time workers to pay 25 per cent; LTD claimants to pay 100 per cent;
- ability for employer to increase job qualifications with no raise in pay;
- ability for employer to cut worker's hours by

7.5 hours per week, every year, with no bumping or posting;

- reassessment of all existing LTD claimants with a drastically reduced definition of disability;
- mandatory return to work programs;
- redefining part-time work as casual for less than 15 hours a week, resulting in a loss of benefits;
- and more; a lot more.

HEABC's full set of demands is available at [www.heu.org](http://www.heu.org).

Wage Policy delegates hammer out a bargaining package that strengthens health care

## A strategy to protect hard won gains

**H**ow do health care workers bargain in the toxic labour relations environment created by the Campbell Liberals? With a strong declaration of unity and a renewed commitment to preserving 60 years of hard-won gains.

That's what 340 representatives of HEU locals across B.C. did in Richmond last month as they met to create a bargaining package that takes on contracting out and restores quality working and caring conditions on health care's front lines.

Following three days of hard discussion, delegates provided their new bargaining committee with the raw material for a bargaining package that rebuilds trust, builds stronger public health care, provides employment security, and recognizes the diversity of health care workers.

### Re-establishing trust after Bill 29

A care aide from Vancouver's Windermere Retirement Lodge – where housekeepers and kitchen staff lost their jobs in February – told delegates that broken promises have shattered workers' lives and will result in poorer care for seniors. She bore witness to the feelings of many delegates – that in the aftermath of Bill 29, health care workers don't trust collective bargaining.

To rebuild that trust with health care workers, health employers must commit themselves to free collective bargaining and no concessionary demands. HEU's bargaining package also includes:

- a privatization freeze during negotiations;
- early renewal of the joint Occupational Health and Safety Agency;
- a two-year agreement; and
- reinstatement of the binding tribunal provision so that outstanding bargaining issues can be referred to a third party for resolution.



### Protecting public delivery of medicare

The attack on HEU members in the workplace is an attack on medicare. Critical support services have been contracted out to foreign corporations that each take in more revenue annually from global privatization than B.C. spends on health care.

On the conference floor many described how quality care suffers because the corporations cashing in on privatization put profits first. From poorer cleaning standards in operating rooms to higher costs for seniors, delegates said that the price of privatization was far too high.

"Our health authority is closing two public long-term care facilities," said William's Lake LPN Paula Bainbridge. "A private company is building a new facility with assisted living where it will cost residents \$150/day. The residents are so scared. Privatization is taking everything away from residents, their families and the workers."

Delegates adopted a number of proposals to protect public delivery of medicare including a stop to privatization and immediate steps to bring this work back into the public sector.

The union's bargaining package also calls for a fair wage policy and ethical treatment of contract-

### Members spent three days charting a course aimed at achieving a fair collective agreement in health care.

ed out workers along with full public disclosure of all privatization contracts.

### Employment security

A poll of HEU members confirms employment as a top-of-mind issue. Protection against contracting out was ranked a very important bargaining issue by 86 per cent; 84 per cent also rated maintenance of employment security as very important.

It was also a priority for delegates who approved a series of proposals for the bargaining table, which included:

- a new joint union-management body to oversee employment security;
- restoration of bumping rights, access to contracted out work and the right of workers to keep their union and collective agreement;
- better severance for those who lost their jobs due to Bill 29;
- a trades apprenticeship program in health care along with better professional development and educational leave provisions; and
- an annual cost of living adjustment.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

**OUR 2004  
BARGAINING TEAM**



**Chris Allnutt**  
Secretary-  
Business Manager  
HEU

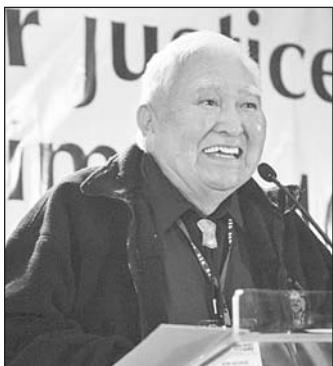


**Fred Muzin**  
President  
HEU



**Mary La**  
Finance  
Secret  
HEU

## Delegates map out future in a complex and diverse system



**“Don’t give up until you win. You deserve a good wage and a decent way of life.”**

**Tsleil-Waututh (Burrard) Nation Elder, Bob George**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

### Our work is diverse

HEU members are part of an increasingly complex health care system that requires increased training, improved credentials and more responsibility.

“We want to be recognized for the work we do,” said Queens’ Park Local delegate and LPN Eileen Montgomery. “That’s not superior – just fair.”

Delegates agreed. The union’s proposals call for new pay rates recognizing LPNs’ full scope of practice and provisions for professional responsibility protection and in-charge pay.

There was also broad recognition that trades qualifications don’t get the recognition they deserve from health employers and proposed that premiums for these qualifications be raised to \$1,000 – and to \$500 for maintenance workers.

Penticton Regional Hospital cook Ken Robinson prepares thousands of meals every month. “Anyone of those meals could have killed a patient and my career,” he told delegates, adding that cooks, like the building trades, power engineers and biomed, also require trades qualifications.

Delegates also adopted proposals that call for premium

adjustments for classifications where shortages are an issue as well as new benchmarks or rates of pay for unit clerks and for cardiology, OR and orthopedic technicians.

HEU’s diversity isn’t just about what members do – it’s about where they live.

Delegates want adjustments to allowances for workers in isolated communities and to the transportation allowance. Impassioned pleas were made for better treatment of LTD claimants.

Outgoing bargaining committee member Sheila Rowsell told delegates that community health employers in negotiations said that “people



on LTD were making enough money and that they should be paying more for their premiums and their drugs.”

“We are already on fixed incomes,” an LTD claimant told the conference. “We’re also feeling the effects of this government’s taxes and user fees – these are not fair.”

Delegates adopted a demand that cost of living protection be extended to those who’ve been on LTD.

Another proposal called for improvements to benefits for casual workers including the right to register for work in more than one department.

“Delegates have put forward a constructive and reasonable bargaining package that health employers should consider carefully,” said the union’s chief bargaining spokesperson Chris Allnutt. “Underlying it is a desire by all our members to be involved in meaningful discussions in their own work-sites about ways to improve health care delivery. The boss would do well to tap into our members’ knowledge.”

At the same time, HEU has tentative agreements in two other sectors. Nearly 15,000 community social services workers in B.C. will soon vote on a tentative agreement reached with the Community Social Services Employers Association.



## A strong united front is the key to meeting the challenges we face

Secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt opened his report to delegates with a clear message: while HEU members have been hard hit by a government obsessed with privatizing public health care, the union is not alone in its fightback and over the past two years that fightback has successfully thrown the Campbell Liberals’ off their original agenda.

He commended activists for the intense “wall of resistance” they’ve built with scores of protest actions in workplaces and communities across the province, reminding them that HEU has had to fight more in the last two years than at any other time in the union’s 60-year history.

“That’s taken a punishing toll on activists like you, but it’s also produced results,” he said, pointing to plummeting support for the premier and the government and growing support for health care workers. “Today, a solid 55 per cent oppose the contracting out of health support services. And seven out of 10 British Columbians simply don’t believe that you can replace thousands of existing staff with private contractors and maintain high quality services.”

He recognized the tragic loss of all those whose jobs have been sacrificed to contracting out and highlighted the union’s numerous efforts



### “We are negotiating a transition from now until voters deliver t

to save jobs or keep workers in place longer than employers planned. Referring to local Memorandums of Understanding negotiated at 42 worksites, which have saved 2,900 jobs, he chastised those long-term care employers who refused to look for alternatives and chose to contract out all workers – including LPNs and care aides – harming over 1,000 workers and hundreds of seniors in the process.

Turning to the future he told delegates this will be an extremely difficult round of bargaining, with concessions and rollbacks top the government’s agenda. “Really, we are negotiating a transition agreement,” he said. “One that takes us from now until British Columbians deliver their verdict on the Liberal, corporate agenda in May 2005.”



Plante Social Secretary J  
**Barb Burke**  
 Admitting Clerk  
 Penticton  
**Chris Duckett**  
 Plumber/  
 Maintenance  
 Powell River  
**Frank McCann**  
 Distribution/  
 Transport  
 Royal Columbian  
**Doreen Plouffe**  
 LPN  
 Vancouver  
 General Hospital  
**Ian Walker**  
 Technical Support  
 Royal Jubilee  
**Victor Elkins**  
 Perfusion Asst.  
 Children's and  
 Women's  
**Tami Broughton**  
 Dietary  
 Cranbrook  
**Harold Burns**  
 Care Aide/  
 Mental Health  
 Penticton  
**Carol Bunch**  
 Community Health  
 Care Worker  
 Qualicum Beach  
**Pat Shaw**  
 Unit Clerk  
 South Peace  
 (Dawson Creek)



As we go to press, HEU's Provincial Executive and Provincial Bargaining Committee are reviewing the tentative deal before recommending whether or not the union's 1,500 members should accept or reject the proposed contract. Details of the tentative two-year agreement will not be released until after all members of the sector's 13 unions have voted on it.

And in the community health subsector, HEU's Provincial Executive and Provincial Bargaining Committee have recommended that the union's 1,500 members vote no to a tentative agreement that includes significant concessions and insufficient improvements on job security. The tentative deal fails to adequately counteract the Campbell Liberals' contract-breaking Bill 29 and gives up equity adjustments – a key element of the 2001 contract in which comparability/standardization, or equity adjustments were gained.

While HEU's recommendation to its community health members is to reject the deal, the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, the largest of the sector's nine unions, has recommended acceptance to its members. Ratification vote results for all 13,000 unionized community health workers will be announced on March 19.

## Final agreement that takes us their verdict on the Liberals”

And with lessons learned from last spring's Tentative Framework Agreement, Allnutt said the union leadership is committed to involving members more; insisting on a longer ratification period; and reaching out to members and groups who don't usually attend union meetings.

“We need to discuss other ways to involve all members – going out to them rather than always expecting them to come to us.”

The union's demands and the employer's concession rollbacks will be taken directly to members, he said. “And we'll do it in a way that involves everyone, builds unity and confidence and overcomes any sense of hopelessness.”

“By working together, we will fight for justice in these unjust times.”

**“Delegates have put forward a constructive and reasonable bargaining package that health employers should consider carefully.”**

**Chris Allnutt**  
 Secretary-Business  
 Manager

## What first-time delegates said:

**“I have had a wonderful time at this convention learning about my union, my fellow brothers and sisters, and meeting the Provincial Executive in person.”**

**MANJIT SAHOTA, CARE AIDE**  
 ST. MICHAEL'S CENTRE, BURNABY



**“This has been a great experience hearing everyone's stories and different points of view. That's especially important coming from a small community.”**

**MARILYN MACLEOD, ADMIN CLERK**  
 GOLD RIVER HEALTH CLINIC



**“The diversity of opinions gives a better understanding of the topic being discussed. I can take back a fuller explanation as to why delegates voted on resolutions the way they did.”**

**STU PIKE, FINANCE CLERK**  
 STIKINE HEALTH CENTRE



**“What I will take home with me is how important it is that we stand together and back our bargaining committee so that we are able to keep all that has been fought for in the past.”**

**LENNIE WILSON, REHAB ASSISTANT**  
 KELOWNA AMALGAMATED LOCAL



**“This is a real learning experience. There is so much I can take back to my local to explain about bargaining.”**

**AMALJEET JHAND**  
 FOOD SERVICE WORKER  
 FORT ST. JOHN HEALTH CENTRE



## The public is on side

A February poll by the Mustel Group showed strong support for public health care workers. Respondents were asked which of two statements they agreed with more:

- Health care unions say that thousands of workers have already been laid off as a result of government policy and that more contract rollbacks will further erode quality of care and result in fewer services to the public.

**68.9%**

- The government is demanding that workers in hospitals and long-term care facilities take pay cuts and other contract rollbacks so that government can meet their fiscal targets.

**19%**

- Other

**12%**

In the same poll, 72 per cent of respondents with annual household incomes of \$55,000 or higher opposed the contract rollbacks, with only 17.8 per cent of that category supporting the government's policy. Even in non-union households, 67.1 per cent of respondents supported health care workers.

The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.3 per cent, 19 times out of 20

## Quebec Labour laws: shades of Campbell/Klein

The news keeps getting worse for Quebecers in the wake of their Liberal government's introduction of regressive new laws attacking unions, supporting contracting out and gutting the social safety net.

Despite mass protests in mid-December, premier Jean Charest pushed ahead with legislation that follows the Campbell/Klein model of labour relations and harkens back to the "Padlock" days of Maurice Duplessis.

### Turning back the clock

Among the new laws introduced in mid-December:

Bill 7 removes the hard-earned right to organize for staff in health care centres and other community-based agencies.

Bill 25 proposes the creation of local health and social services network development agencies to succeed the regional boards within a given territory.

Bill 31, where an undertaking is "transferred" (contracted out), the employees' collective agreement rights are not transferred, unless the main purpose of the transfer is to undermine an association of employees.

### Legal disappointment

On January 29, the Supreme Court of Canada overturned two lower court rulings that prohibited the hiring of replacement workers during a strike. In a unanimous decision, Canada's top court ruled that an employer can get rid of striking employees as long as it can prove it has abandoned the affected part of its operations.

## Support builds for U.S. supermarket workers in health benefits fight

VIRGINIA LEE HUNTER PHOTO

**F**ive months into a bitter and hard-fought strike to preserve health benefits by 70,000 supermarket employees in Southern California, consumer support for the strike continues to grow.

The workers, all UFCW members from "Big Three" chains Safeway, Albertson's and Kroger, went on strike October 11 to protest Safeway's plan to effectively eliminate all health benefits for future employees and cut health benefits contributions in half for current employees. (Albertson's and Ralphs', a division of Kroger, locked out their employees shortly after Safeway workers went on strike.)

Safeway wants to cap its contribution for medical care to only \$1.35 an hour from the current \$5.00 an hour, hire new workers at lower wages and impose an insurance plan most employees wouldn't be able to afford. By the end of the contract, workers would be asked to pay up to \$95 a week when the average weekly wage for a Los Angeles supermarket worker is \$312. In each of the last three years, the premiums charged by private health care insurance firms have gone up 15 per cent. The predicted future rise is 12 to 14 per cent annually.

Although the strike has been costly for the workers, the growing public support and union solidarity for their cause has been encouraging. Workers in other sectors, from hotel room cleaners to hospital nurses and dieticians, know they will face similar



UFCW strikers in Los Angeles stand up to 'Big Three' supermarket chains.

demands from employers. That's why the Teamsters and the Longshoremens have supported the industrial action. Northern California's 50,000 supermarket workers have been watching the case with growing concern, as their contract is up in September.

Despite governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's desire to play "terminator" of Bill SB-2 – a law introduced by his predecessor, Gray Davis, which requires large employers to provide health care coverage for their employees – the workers' cause has attracted its share of Hollywood celebrity muscle. Actors Martin Sheen, Danny Glover and Janeane Garofalo have all lent their support, and Ellen Degeneres pledged not to cross picket lines.

"The community is behind you. That's why they're not crossing the picket line – they know if you lose

your health benefits, they're next," Los Angeles mayor James K. Hahn told a rally of nearly 14,000 union workers and supporters on January 31.

On February 1, California Attorney General Bill Lockyer launched a lawsuit against the three chains, saying their profit sharing agreement may be a violation of anti-trust laws.

Meanwhile, pressure was building on Safeway CEO Steven Burd, who's leading the campaign for the Big Three. Some shareholders are calling for him to resign as the company has lost more than \$100 million since the strike began. On February 2, JP Morgan downgraded Safeway shares to a sell.

On February 11, just before the *Guardian* went to press, the UFCW workers and the companies met before a federal mediator.

## >>notebook>>



### Georgetti is pushing hard for a two-prong PR campaign

## Time to get labour's house in order

**W**atch for Canadian Labour Congress president Ken Georgetti to launch a major advertising initiative in the coming months to improve the profile and political clout of organized labour across the country.

Speaking recently with labour journalists in Ottawa, Canada's top labour leader promised big changes. "The CLC needs to undertake an image-building campaign for itself, and as an impetus to sell union membership to workers," Georgetti argued. The reason labour has a bad image, he says, is because of the anti-union bias of Canada's corporate controlled media. And on the political front, Georgetti bemoans that working folk have too little power when it comes to shaping the agendas of government. "People spend one-third of their lives working, but not one work-place issue figures prominently in election outcomes."

So Georgetti is pushing hard for a two-prong PR campaign. Feel-good ads highlighting organized labour's efforts

to improve the lives of working Canadians and their communities. And then harder-edged spots on specific issues to gain support and force politicians to take notice.

Recent changes in federal laws covering donations to political parties will free up about \$1 million annually for the CLC to invest in a long-range campaign. However, if Georgetti's plan is to succeed, he'll have to ensure that organized labour does in fact have a positive image to sell.

And on this count, he faces some challenges. Like union leaders here in B.C. who sign sweetheart deals with multinational corporations to help the Liberals privatize health care. Or labour officials allegedly leading mob attacks on other workers and roughing up television reporters.

If the CLC president wants to change how people view unions, then he's going to have to take action to get labour's house in order before he hits the airwaves.

STEPHEN HOWARD • HEU'S FORMER COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

# The Occupation's war on Iraqi workers

**B**aghdad, Iraq – The disaster that is the occupation of Iraq is much more than the suicide bombings and guerrilla ambushes of U.S. troops which play nightly across television screens. The violence of grinding poverty, exacerbated by economic sanctions after the first Gulf War, has been deepened by the latest invasion.

Every day, the economic policies of the occupying authorities create more hunger among Iraq's working people, transforming them into a pool of low-wage, semi-employed labour, desperate for jobs at almost any price.

While the effects of American policy on daily life go largely unseen in the U.S. media, anyone walking the streets of Baghdad cannot miss them.

Children sleep on the sidewalks. Buildings that once housed many of the city's four million residents, or the infrastructure that makes life in a modern city possible, remain burned-out ruins months after the occupation started. Rubble fills the broad boulevards, which were once the pride of a wealthy country, and the air has become gritty and brown as thousands of vehicles kick the resulting dust into the air.

In the meantime, U.S. contractors get rich from the billions of taxpayer dollars supposedly appropriated for reconstruction.

Iraq's national wealth – factories, refineries, mines, docks, and other industrial facilities – are being readied for sale to foreign companies by the occupation's bureaucracy, to whom

democracy and the unrestrained free market are the same thing.

But Iraqi workers, while facing bleak conditions, are not accepting their fate, at least as defined by corporate planners. They are organizing and making plans of their own.

**Iraqi workers, while facing bleak conditions, are not accepting their fate**

Iraqi workers need a raise – desperately. For six months, they've been paid at an emergency level dictated by the U.S. occupation authority, known as the Coalition Provisional Authority, or CPA. Most workers get \$60 a month, a small percentage \$120, and a tiny minority of administrators and managers \$180. Those without jobs, estimated at 70 per cent of the workforce, or about eight million people, have even less.

One worker at the General State Leather Industry Factory, the largest shoe factory in the Middle East, says she supports six people in her family



DAVID BACON PHOTO

with the emergency payment. With unemployment still at catastrophic levels, every working Iraqi is supporting many other people at home. As she explains her situation, she's surrounded by four other seamstresses, each wearing a hejab and worn tan tunic over their clothes.

"The prices of food and clothing are going up rapidly, and the salary is very low. We work hard, and I've been here 10 years. I have to have a raise," she pleads.

Another worker at an oil refinery just outside Baghdad, complaining anonymously for fear that he would lose his job, told me he'd spent 10 years fighting in the Iran-Iraq war, only to return home to his six children with nothing. "I still have no house or

place to live," he said bitterly, "and the current emergency wage is totally incapable of supporting us."

In September and October 2003, the refinery saw three work stoppages, in which workers demanded a regular salary at a level higher than the emergency payments. Leather factory workers even stormed out of their plant, and marched to the Labor Ministry, complaining about their manager and the wages. Similar protests have been happening at workplaces throughout the country.

DAVID BACON

LABOUR JOURNALIST/PHOTOGRAPHER

• *This is an excerpt from a longer essay, originally published in The Progressive. Go to <www.progressive.org>.*

## Hospital housekeepers get recognition and respect

**Calgary – After voting to join the Canadian Union of Public Employees in December 2002, housekeepers at the Peter Lougheed Centre, Rockyview General Hospital and Colonel Belcher Hospital have a first contract that gives them a 35-per-cent wage increase along with many benefit improvements.**

**Over 200 housekeepers, employees of Sodexo MS Canada Ltd., turned out to vote 96 per cent in favour of the two-year contract.**

The majority are new Canadians who speak English as a second language. More than half were working full-time hours but had been categorized by the employer as part-time. The new contract means that all employees working full-time hours will be recognized as full-time workers, making them eligible to receive health benefits and sick leave.

And overtime will now be paid to all employees who work more than the prescribed number of full-time

hours in a day. Previously employees only received overtime after 44 hours per week and many were required to give up shifts because of extra hours worked.

"Everyone is thrilled with this contract. These workers joined CUPE to improve their wages and working conditions," said Jim Arthurs, president of CUPE Local 182. "Finally these workers will be recognized for the valuable work they perform in our health care system."

## >>voices>>



**A rule requiring 25 exemptions is a feeble rule**

## Take the welfare time limit off the books

**On February 6**, at the last minute, the B.C. government introduced a new 25th exemption to the two-year time limit on welfare. Brought in by the Liberals in April 2002, the time limit rule restricts "employable" recipients to two years of support during any five-year period. Single recipients can be cut off entirely after 24 months, and families with children can have their inadequate cheques further reduced.

Now, with the new exemption, the time limit will not apply to those who follow their employment plans and continue to seek work. According to government only 339 people will be impacted, instead of the thousands who would have been if this exemption had not been hurried into place.

Clearly, government retreated from the time limit in the face of mounting pressure from community groups, churches, unions, city councils, social policy experts, and individual British Columbians. The new exemption is a back-handed admission that time limits don't work. But it's

not enough. Government must now repeal the legislation.

B.C. is the only province in Canada to put an arbitrary time limit on welfare. This is a serious break with Canadian social policy of the last 50 years, which is based on an understanding that we should provide everyone with protections against "universal risks to income" (sickness, disability, old age, job loss) that can make any of us unable to provide for ourselves and our families.

Social assistance is the very bottom of the social safety net, available only to those in the most extreme need. Cutting off that assistance, or reducing it to levels that risk food and shelter, disregards the humanity of those who are poor. It's a bad policy, whether it affects thousands or 339 or one.

A rule requiring 25 exemptions is a feeble rule. And a rule which, to save the government's face, requires an exemption that guts the rule itself, needs to be scrapped. The welfare time limit should be off the books.

**SHELAGH DAY** • DIRECTOR, POVERTY & HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT



## How to become an LPN in B.C.

If you are a health care worker who wants to upgrade your skills or if you are thinking about a future in nursing, check out our new handbook on how to become a Licensed Practical Nurse in B.C.

The handbook has information about different post-secondary training programs and skills upgrading options, tuition and course costs, financial aid, the licensing process, the College of LPNs, and English proficiency tests.

It is also useful for foreign trained nurses in Canada who are looking to complete credentialing requirements, or non-practicing practical nurses who want to re-enter the profession.

Produced by HEU in collaboration with the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of B.C., the handbook is available on our website, or by contacting Provincial Office.

HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt says the handbook highlights the successful advocacy work undertaken by the union to increase the utilization of LPNs.

Specifically, HEU's efforts have helped win a significant increase in the number of LPN training seats in conventional post-secondary nursing programs and in special access and skills upgrading courses.

In 1999, the union negotiated with the provincial government for a special \$10 million

fund to increase the utilization of LPNs and to expand training opportunities for those who wanted to embark on a nursing career.

## Coalition launches lawn sign campaign

Health care workers on Vancouver Island who are part of the Communities Solidarity Coalition are promoting a province-wide lawn sign campaign to draw attention to the Campbell government's devastating cutbacks in health care and social support programs.

The campaign slogan "Health Care for All, Poverty for None: Oppose the B.C. Liberal's Agenda" is printed on a bright blue background and is available for a nominal

cost from HEU's Provincial and regional offices.

## NDP leader meets with executive

In a recent meeting with HEU's Provincial Executive, NDP leader Carole James described a number of measures a New Democrat government would move on to alleviate the damage of Campbell's devastating record in health care.

They include repealing the Liberal's contract-breaking legislation Bill 29, putting all

privatization contracts under the microscope, and restoring balance to the labour code.

James said she knows that HEU members have been hit harder than anyone else in the labour movement by the Liberal agenda, and that wherever she goes in B.C. she's hearing about the impact of the Liberals' health care cuts.

"If the Liberals get another term, I'm afraid there will be nothing left in B.C.," she says.

"My job is to give people a reason to vote for the NDP."

Although "people are feeling really angry" about the provincial government, she said they're also excited "because they see a real

## BALANCING IT ALL

PATTY GIBSON

**LOUELLA VINCENT** loves working with people with disabilities. On and off the job, she's committed to making sure everyone she supports gets a chance.

# SHE TAKES TIME TO CARE

**C**OMMUNITY SOCIAL Services worker Louella Vincent is someone whose passion for people fills every part of her daily life – on and off the job. For more than 15 years she's worked in a variety of group homes and day programs, supporting people with disabilities to live with dignity, choice, and respect.

But Vincent's support for the people she cares for in a working environment isn't over at the end of her shift. That's because she and her husband John also care for people with disabilities in their own home through the province's adult foster care program.

Providing individual foster care was not something Vincent had planned to do. But when one of the women she supported kept expressing her unhappiness at living in a group home environment, the ministry finally asked Vincent to consider taking her home. That was 12 years ago. And she's still living there.

"You wouldn't believe the changes in her," says Vincent. "They're huge. Every day she gets out of bed happy and gives you a big hug. She laughs and loves to sing – things that never would have happened before."

Over the years she has also provided adult foster care to "several gentleman" on a more temporary basis.

Talking with Vincent, it's clear that she loves work-

ing with people with disabilities and that she brings a great deal of skill and understanding to her work. "I listen to them. I believe in them. I earn their trust. And I never, ever make promises I cannot keep."

"People come with varying needs," she explains. "My job is to figure out what those needs are and try to meet them."

Vincent says it can be more challenging trying to support someone when they cannot speak, "but when you've worked with a person long enough you can figure out what they're trying to say. People don't always need words to be understood. If you just pay close attention to the non-verbal clues they give you, you can figure it out."

As to what motivates Vincent's work with people with disabilities she says, "Everyone deserves a chance ... and the people I work with are so very honest. They accept people for who they are, not what they are."

In addition to her full-time work and foster care, Vincent has also raised two children and now has two young grandchildren.

But it doesn't stop there. Vincent is a dedicated union activist, a member of the Lion's Club, a financial director for a small non-profit society and she sits on a variety of committees and boards in Surrey.

Currently, she is a hardworking member of the Community Social Services negotiating team, which had just negotiated a tentative contract at press time.

**People come with varying needs. My job is to figure out what those needs are and try to meet them.**



PATTY GIBSON PHOTO

**Louella Vincent says she's motivated by a burning desire to help others feel happy and valued. In this, she brings a wealth of skills and understanding to her work.**

So why does Vincent open her home to people with disabilities when all her competing responsibilities leave her little time to spare?

"I guess it's because I come from a family of six children," she says. "We always brought home our friends, so I learned it was natural to share your home, and invite people into it. It just feels right. It isn't awkward or unusual or any of the things people might imagine."

But it is a lot to juggle, she admits, saying she couldn't do it all without her husband's "150 per cent support."

"I guess I just have this burning thing to make sure everyone else can feel happy, valued, and like where they are. That's what's most important to me."

Vincent also believes strongly in community and is always willing to "get involved." She extends that philosophy to her union activism.

"I wasn't always happy with what was going on, but I'm not one to stand on the sidelines complaining. You have to get in there and make things happen."

alternative to the Campbell Liberals out there.”

wearing that protested the employer's plans to contract out 23 housekeeping, laundry and dietary workers. That action resulted in an individual grievance against the employer. At a hearing early in the new year, LRB arbitrator John Sanderson found that wearing the

sticker was “a reasonable expression” of the grievor's views about the effects of contracting out at her facility; and upheld Article 4.02 of HEU's master agreement prohibiting “interference with an employee's activity or membership in the union.”

### North Shore councils oppose contracting out

North Vancouver's city council and district council have both agreed to take up the concerns of seniors, health care workers, and North Shore residents who are opposed to the provincial government's cutbacks and contracting-out agenda in health care.

Long-time Lions Gate Hospital employee Cathy Pinsent told the two councils that privatization means less continuity of care, increased risks to patient safety, longer waitlists, and a low-paid, transient, workforce that will not be able to maintain quality care.

To date, contracting out in North Shore facilities has

cost 500 skilled and experienced health care workers their livelihoods.

Both councils will communicate their opposition to the mass firings and the privatization of health care services to the provincial government and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority.

### Member publishes book

With the support of a peer-tutoring program at Children and Women's Hospital, HEU member Johnny Lac recently wrote and published *Under the Vietnam Flag* – an account of his early life in Vietnam and his eventual escape to Canada in the spring of 1979.

“My tutor would routinely

ask me to talk about my experiences, to help me improve my English,” writes Lac. “Thus I came up with the idea of writing this story.”

The book was published by Trafford on-demand publishing service.

### HEU budget

HEU's Provincial Executive has approved a \$25 million operating budget for 2004 that reflects a decline in revenue from the loss of members who've been fired as a result of the Campbell government's ruthless agenda of cuts, closures and privatization.

Revenues are projected to be \$24.7 million, while expenditures on an array of

*continued on page 14*

## Contracting

**OUT**  
It's a crying shame!

### Stick 'em up!

A recent Labour Relations Board ruling confirms members' rights to wear stickers protesting contracting-out in their workplaces.

Last fall three HEU members at Holyrood Manor – a for-profit seniors' care facility in Maple Ridge – were told to remove stickers they were

# factfile

Federal voting preferences for HEU members have shifted dramatically. Here's what the Mustel Group's polling numbers show:

December 2000 (361 total decided):  
NDP – 30%, Liberal – 39%

December 2003 (351 total decided):  
NDP – 53%, Liberals – 19%

### PAUL MARTIN'S COMMITMENT TO MEDICARE?

One of the prime minister's key election campaign organizers, Bruce Young, has lobbied the B.C. government on behalf of private clinics. Young, recruited from public relations giant Hill and Knowlton, represented the Coalition for Health Care Options – a group of about a dozen private surgical and diagnostic clinics that includes the False Creek Surgical Centre – and MDS Metro Labs.

Former Reform/Canadian Alliance MP Dr. Keith Martin, a longtime supporter of for-profit privatized health care, responded to Paul Martin's ascension to the Liberal party leadership by quitting his own party to seek a Liberal nomination.

Dr. Les Vertesi, who has published a book comparing Canadian Medicare with communism, has been appointed as the B.C. government's representative on the new Health Council of Canada created as a result of the Romanow Commission. Vertesi is Premier Gordon Campbell's brother-in-law.

## SPEAKER'S CORNER

JACK LAYTON

Politics in Canada is changing but Paul Martin and Gordon Campbell don't seem to see the writing on the wall.

## THE POWER OF INNOVATION

**H**EALTH WORKERS in B.C. have been hit hard by privatization, cutbacks and closures with thousands already losing their jobs. Life for them has been a huge challenge since Campbell broke his promise to respect health workers' contracts and then contracted out their jobs. But, make no mistake, Paul Martin's Liberal Party is very similar to Gordon Campbell's Liberal Party.

Across the country, Liberal governments' right-wing agendas are the same as failed conservative governments' agendas over the past 10 years. Paul Martin and Gordon Campbell don't seem to see the writing on the wall. They haven't seemed to notice the drawing power of new ideas and innovation. NDP governments in Manitoba and Saskatchewan have shown the way – on publicly-funded and administered homecare, for example – and the federal NDP is taking the lead on attacking the runaway costs of prescription drugs.

There's no question that in Canada the political landscape is changing. That's because Canadians almost universally want innovation and reinvestment in their public services. But not only isn't Paul Martin listening, he's moving in the opposite direction – appointing one senior MP to be responsible for P3 privatization and consistently ignoring Roy Romanow's solutions for public Medicare.

And Martin continues to buy into the failed rhetoric that public Medicare is unsustainable, taking

us down the path to more contracting-out, user fees and creeping privatization.

It's ironic the Liberals have money for corporate tax cuts or Star Wars missile defence, yet refuse to enact Medicare solutions that actually save money, such as homecare or lower drug prices. In government, they watched as surgery was privatized in B.C., as private, for-profit hospitals opened in Alberta and actually took a section out of the *Canada Health Act* to help Mike Harris privatize homecare services in Ontario.

We know from Romanow and what we see in the U.S. that public Medicare's cheaper and delivers better service. But it can get even better with new ideas like homecare, pharmacare and 24/7 community clinics.

With increased political will supporting the public will, we can get there. But, instead of planning for the aging baby boom generation, the Liberals use expensive hospital beds – even after a litany of promises to begin a homecare program.

And it's not about cost, because these programs will save us money. Too often governments blame Medicare's costs on the workers, while ignoring Medicare's fastest growing expense – drugs. Australia's drug prices are 30 per cent below the average because innovative bulk-buying keeps prices down.

The upcoming federal election is going to be about real choices and how new ideas can build a comprehensive Medicare system that values health care workers and helps Canadian families.



NDP LEADER JACK LAYTON

continued from page 13  
services and programs for members totals \$25.1 million, leaving a small deficit for the year.

"We have a tough challenge to deal with a significant revenue decline while minimizing the impacts on services for members," says union financial secretary Mary LaPlante.

"In the new budget, we've implemented a number of cost saving measures," she says. "But we've also ensured that we have the resources to continue to press for a fair contract settlement and to fight the Campbell government's vicious attack on our jobs and our health care system."

About \$700,000 in rev-

enue will be provided by CUPE National for fightback campaigns, as well as organizing and legal initiatives, LaPlante says.

She says the executive will continue to monitor the budget closely through the year. Further adjustments may be needed, she says.

## Paramedicals bargain

Talks for a new collective agreement covering 13,000 paramedical professionals kicked off January 13.

At the first meeting, the five-union Paramedical Professional Bargaining Association – of which HEU is a part – and health employers introduced general issues but not specific

proposals. PPBA representatives told the Health Employers Association of B.C. that they are fully committed to reaching a fair collective agreement that recognizes the needs of employers and workers.

HEABC was clear that cost savings to meet tight budgets is its top priority.

## HEU sounds alarm on P3 hospital costs

Two recent HEU-commissioned reviews of the proposed Abbotsford private hospital project raise serious concerns about substantial cost increases, accountability and who's looking out for the public interest as the Fraser Health Authority and

Partnerships BC push to close a public-private partnership (P3) deal by June 2004.

Respected forensic auditor Ron Parks noted in his review that the project has changed significantly and its costs ballooned since it was first tendered in January 2002. Despite the skyrocketing costs – the annual lease payment to the private consortium has escalated from \$20 million a year to \$39.7 million a year for 30 years – neither the Fraser Health Authority nor the government has done another cost comparison to see if the competitive process is working to ensure that taxpayers would be getting value for money.

And in his study, Lewis Auerbach, a former Ontario director in the federal Auditor General's office, questions who represents the public interest and what measures are in place to ensure private sector accountability.

The reports come close on the heels of the announcement that only one of the four short-listed consortia remains in the competitive process. Access Health Abbotsford stands alone in its bid for the private hospital after Vancouver Health Care Group and Fraser Valley Health Partnership withdrew in December and Healthcare Infrastructure Company of Canada dropped out early in February.

MARCH

APRIL

MAY

**MARCH 8**  
International Women's Day

**MARCH 20**  
The World Still Says No to War: Global Day of Action

**MARCH 21**  
Eradicate Racism Day

**APRIL 9, 12**  
Good Friday and Easter Monday. HEU offices closed

**APRIL 21 - 24**  
CUPE BC Convention – Hyatt in Vancouver

**APRIL 22**  
Earth Day

**APRIL 28**  
Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or Injured on the Job

**MAY 1**  
May Day – International Workers' Day

**MAY 24**  
Victoria Day – HEU offices closed

# Through their own eyes

**I**t was a photo contest with a twist. What it didn't do was give "outsiders" any further incentives to mine Vancouver's Downtown Eastside for potentially prize-winning pictures of the district's poverty and suffering. But what it did do was equip 110 of the neighborhood's residents with instamatic cameras so they could capture images of their community from their own unique points of view.

And it worked. As contest participants roamed the streets over a three-day period last fall – snapping pictures of friends, landmarks, pets, and just about anything else that caught their fancy – the community opened itself up to being caught on film by friendlier, more compassionate eyes.

Organized by the Pivot Legal Society, the photo contest handed out disposable black and white cameras on a first-come, first-served basis to Downtown Eastside residents who wanted a shot at winning one of several cash prizes. Participants were asked to document the neighbourhood by focusing on themes of compassion, joy, struggle, courage, faith and friendship.

Brownwyn Elko, who took the top prize of \$500 for her photo of a man hugging a small girl recalls, "It was a fluke really. I saw them and was almost bowled over by the heartfelt connection that was going on ... so I just snapped."

Elko says that before she moved into the neighbourhood, she was terrified at the thought of living in the Downtown Eastside. But circumstances made it the only affordable option she had.

"And then when I actually moved here and started interacting with people, and talking with the merchants, I became completely enchanted and I thought 'what a great community' it is. It's a community where people will give away their last cigarette, or share their last cup of coffee."

As to how the photo contest was received by the community at large she says, "It's created great waves. People are happy to see pictures that show the positive side of their neighbourhood ... pictures that show the heart and soul that's down here."

Of the 2,200 images that were produced, a jury chose 16 winning photographs. They are all included in a calendar that's being sold by residents and merchants for \$20. Residents are allowed to pocket \$10 for each calendar they sell.

In December 2003, the top 40 photos from the contest were put on display at the Gallery Gachet for a hugely successfully three-week run. Zola Novak, one of the majority of participants who didn't win a cash prize for her efforts, did achieve the dis-

inction of having one of her photos selected for the gallery exhibit. Entitled *Tommy Boy*, it's a photo of a cat who lives in a pawn shop just off Pigeon Park.

While Novak didn't win the prize she was hoping for, she did discover an interest in photography she never knew she had. Now she has an idea for a photo shoot she wants to do "of

all the animals that live in the pawn shops, furniture stores, and hotels down here."

Great idea, I tell her as I look around the gallery at so many powerful, passionate, images of people and places in the Downtown Eastside. And what a great project. I suspect she isn't the only one who discovered a hidden talent for photography.

• For more information or to purchase a calendar telephone 604-257-0366 or check out the Pivot Legal Society's website at [www.pivotlegal.org](http://www.pivotlegal.org)

## PHOTO PROJECT

**Downtown Eastside Portrait Calendar**  
Organized by the Pivot Legal Society

reviewed by **Patty Gibson**

AUDREY HILL PHOTO



**Audrey Hill's prize-winning photo is one of 16 winners featured in the Downtown Eastside portrait calendar.**



IRELAND



DAVIDSON



DEW



REARDON

## Armstrong activist ends 30-year career

After three decades working as a receptionist and transcriptionist, HEU member **Deanna Shearer** is retiring at the end of March. Known for her diligence and caring spirit among patients and co-workers alike, Shearer says she has faced every working day "as a new adventure."

A respected union activist, Shearer has been a driving force in her local since 1986 as a shop steward, local executive member, convention delegate, and community networker. In the face of recent cutbacks and restructuring she has helped fend off job losses and where layoffs have occurred, has assisted displaced members facing to find support and new job opportunities within the facility.

## HEU members contribute to Citizens' Assembly

Three HEU members have been chosen through a random selection process to take part in B.C.'s high-profile Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

The 160-member Assembly is looking at ways to improve B.C.'s current electoral system by studying how individual votes cast in a provincial election actually translate into seats in the Legislature, and how our system compares to other voting systems around the world.

HEU members on the Assembly include **Neall Ireland**, a long-term care aide at Haro Park; **Edith Davidson**, a renal technical supervisor at St. Paul's Hospital; and **Donna Dew**, a care aide who is currently on long-term disability.

## Retired member working in South Africa

Last fall, Kelowna General Hospital lost care aide **Sheila Samuels** not only to retirement but to another calling.

In December Samuels returned to her native South Africa to work with the poor in remote areas of the country for five months.

Samuels had been collecting donations of clothes, toys, household items and more after returning from a trip to Africa in 2001, because – as she told the *Kelowna Daily Courier* –

"I am going to give ... to everybody and everyone. I just have a passion to help the people of South Africa."

## STAFF New communications director on board

After 13 years of dedicated service in HEU's communications department, **Stephen Howard**, who is best known for his strategic communications and investigative reporting skills has decided it's time to seek new adventures.

"It's been an honour and a privilege working with union members," says Howard who leaves his current position as director of communications and *Guardian* editor. He will be replaced by co-worker **Mike Old**, who joined the communications department in 1997.

## Reardon takes on new challenges

**Carol Reardon**, an able and diligent lawyer who has been part of HEU's legal team for the past three years, has taken a new position with the BC Nurses' Union.

Carol has worked on a number of projects during her tenure at HEU including the union's Bill 29 charter challenge, the regional dovetailing of seniority rights, and the legal requirement that health authorities conduct their board meetings in public.

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# GUARDIAN

"In humble dedication to all those who toil to live."

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DESIGN CONSULTATION

**Kris Klaasen,**

**Working Design**

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**UNION OFFICES**

**Provincial Office**

**Burnaby Site**  
5000 North Fraser Way  
Burnaby V5J 5M3  
(604) 438-5000  
E-MAIL [heu@heu.org](mailto:heu@heu.org)  
INTERNET [www.heu.org](http://www.heu.org)

**Regional offices**

**VANCOUVER ISLAND**

**Victoria Site**  
201-415 Gorge Road East  
Victoria V8T 2W1  
(250) 480-0533

**Comox Site**  
205-156 Manor Drive  
Comox V9M 1C7  
(250) 339-3698

**Nanaimo Site**  
601-495 Dunsmuir Road  
Nanaimo V9R 6B9  
(250) 754-5558

**OKANAGAN**  
100-160 Dougall Rd. S.  
Kelowna V1X 3J4  
(250) 765-8838

**KOOTENAY**  
745 Baker St.  
Nelson V1L 4J5  
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1197 Third Ave.  
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(250) 564-2102



## EQUITY PHONE LINE

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**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](http://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](http://www.pridepages.org)

**ALL CALLS ARE CONFIDENTIAL**

## Talk to us Toll-Free!

You can call any HEU office toll-free to deal with a problem or get information. It's fast, easy and free.

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1-800-663-5813

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1-800-437-9877

# Protect community social services for people in need.

**IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO**

Since 2001, the Campbell Liberals have cut over \$100 million from services to women, people with disabilities, children, and families in need.

Now, they want to cut another \$70 million on top of the over \$100 million already cut, threatening more services and jobs.

It's time the government stopped cutting community social services and brought back stability for workers, families and communities.



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