

BULLETIN

## Liberals went too far

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**ith less than a year** left in the Liberal government's mandate, we have come through a very turbulent period in labour relations in British Columbia.

It started three years ago when the government legislated health science professionals back to work and then imposed a contract on HSA members. It continued with legislation that arbitrarily changed health care contracts.

When a mediator recently concluded there was no hope for a negotiated settlement with HEABC, HEU served strike notice, and picket lines went up April 25 on the heels of HSA's annual convention.

I want to thank each and every one of you who, on incredibly short notice, supported HEU on the picket lines. It was a huge task for our job action coordinators around the province many of whom were in Burnaby for our convention to ensure essential services and job action schedules were put in place.

Your strong support was critical to the success of the HEU job action in the days leading up to the government's introduction of Bill 37.

Even when the legislation ended the strike and you returned to your regular scheduled shifts, your continuing support of your colleagues was well appreciated by HEU.

The details of Bill 37 have been well chronicled. After years of battling with HEU, the government showed just how mean-spirited it was.

After trying to convince British Columbians that your co-workers providing support services are overpaid, it was clear British Columbians didn't agree with how far the government was prepared to go and they were particularly aghast at government's decision to legislate a retroactive 15 per cent wage rollback.

Much to government's surprise, they were on their own. The reaction to Bill 37 was swift. British Columbians were shocked and angry. The key to their eventual softening of the legislation was the broad public support shown for HEU in their protest against the government.

As an officer of the BC Federation of Labour I was involved in the weekend negotiations that led to the province backing off the legislation and finding an agreement that mitigated the most outrageous aspects of the legislation.

That weekend, a courageous and difficult decision was made by the executive of the HEU and the officers of the BC Federation of Labour. The work done that weekend:

- eliminated any retroactive wage rollbacks
- forced the government to back down from their plans to privatize an estimated additional 8,000 full-time jobs, capping any contracting out at 400 this year, and 200 next year
- secured \$25 million in severance that will be left to the bargaining association to distribute
- ensured there would be no recriminations from employers against health care employees or unions involved in job action

With less than a year left in their mandate, the Liberal government got a clear message. The electorate, up to this point, have seemingly been prepared to cut the government some slack with the constant imposition into the collective bargaining process. But this time, they went too far, they got a little too greedy and their arrogance was a little too blatant. The backlash cut a wide swath across public opinion and the government had no choice but to listen.

With a federal election underway and less than a year to the next provincial election, the events of the past month underscore the importance of ensuring those that represent us, understand the issues that are important to us.

As delegates to the HSA convention confirmed, the next twelve months hold great potential □ and no one can speak about the issues important to you □ better than you.

I□m looking forward to working with HSA members across the province to ensure issues important to you are raised at every level of government. □

*Cindy Stewart is president of the Health Sciences Association of BC.*

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