

BULLETIN

Continuing to fight for a fair contract

September 1, 2001

The Report: September / October 2001 vol.22 num.4

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It has been a very difficult six months for the union, and each and every one of our members.

In January, your bargaining committee set out to negotiate a collective agreement that included a substantial wage increase for all our members. That was the mandate: a wage increase that reflected your value to the system.

When I think about all the things we've done in the past six months, and all we have ahead of us I think of our 30th annual convention as a turning point for HSA.

At that convention we had a full understanding that we had a job to do. We had already seen three months of so-called bargaining. The employer was completely intransigent.

The NDP government was so preoccupied with avoiding extinction that it wasn't paying attention to the crisis in health care and the two sets of bargaining that were going on, and we were looking at the prospect of a landslide majority Liberal government that wanted to make its mark on labour.

There was nothing we could do to stop that lethal combination.

But we laid the groundwork and gave ourselves the tools to take steps to hurdle over the obstacles that were put in our way.

In this round of bargaining, the HEABC just looked at us, refused to negotiate and all but taunted us. "What are you going to do about it?" was their attitude.

You showed them you are not pushovers. You showed them you are serious about being valued members of the health care team and that you were prepared to take drastic steps to express your rejection of an unacceptable contract offer.

Our "illegal" strike on July 23 and 24 enraged the HEABC.

But I'm even more enraged that the employer and the government allowed the situation to get so bad that HSA members "respectful, respectable professionals who have always found a way to make things work" had to go on an illegal strike to be heard.

That's what has mobilized this union like we've never seen before. Imagine, five weeks of job action, two days of strike, one day province-wide and the day in defiance of legislation, followed by two days in defiance of legislation and a labour board ruling "culminating in a hearing before the Supreme Court of BC.

I can hardly believe it is me saying it when I outline these events. As people have said "it doesn't seem like

you, or HSA. And that in itself should be a message.

The manner in which we have been treated has galvanized the HSA membership like never before.

And our challenge now is to harness that force : that anger, that frustration that we feel so deep in our core. We need to acknowledge it, confront it and then use it to our advantage.

Premier Gordon Campbell and his government made a mistake when they legislated a contract on health science professionals. HEABC made a huge mistake thinking they could divide our union by offering better wage increases to some □ and leaving almost 50 per cent of our members behind.

It's up to us to expose the government's mistakes, expose their impact on our health care system, and reopen the contract any chance we get to get to some solutions.

And that is going to take diligence and vigilance by every member.

Your union needs to know what this contract means to you. If you decide to leave your job for another field, or another jurisdiction, let us know. If you're working unwanted overtime shifts just to keep your department open □ tell us. Without the information about the realities you face every day in your jobs, we don't have the tools to apply constant pressure on the government.

I know the tremendous pressure all our members experienced in the past six months, and I know the difficult personal decisions we all had to make in our attempt to achieve a fair collective agreement that values our contribution to the professional health care team.

This is the first chapter of a new era where we played the game valiantly against an opponent that was capable of changing the rules whenever we gained any advantage. It's a tough game to win.

Now's the time to prepare for the next chapter and build on our strength for the future.

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