

BULLETIN

Saluting members' courage

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by RICK LAMPSHIRE

When the Liberals were elected in a landslide victory on May 17, we all knew that British Columbia was in for a new era.

This new era was going to make British Columbia a better place for all British Columbians, Gordon Campbell told voters.

Well, in the first 90 days, Premier Campbell and his government haven't done much for anyone but their friends: while they introduced tax cuts for the most affluent, they've introduced a process to attack the most vulnerable who depend on Pharmacare for their better health.

While they agreed to an arbitration mechanism for doctors to settle a dispute on wages, they slammed the door on collective bargaining and imposed a fundamentally unfair contract on health science professionals.

As an organization, we knew from the outset the odds were against us in the recent round of contract negotiations. We started our bargaining with an NDP government telling us there was less money at the table for health science professionals than nurses. With that knowledge, we embarked on bargaining with a clear mandate from you, the members, to do whatever it took to get the best possible contract for HSA.

With the election of a Liberal government and clear signs that health care would not be the priority that was promised in the election campaign, the union and its members became even more determined to pull out all the stops for a fair agreement. And the government pulled out all the stops, too.

The HEABC never went to the table to negotiate. They went there to stall for an end to the NDP government and the introduction of a new era — an era in which it could dispense with collective bargaining, and submit its position to the government for enforcement.

That's exactly what happened. It is unprecedented. And as a first move by a government that calls itself open and accountable, it bodes badly for the future of labour relations in BC under the Liberal government and it bodes even worse for the future of our health care system. Health Services Minister Colin Hansen said the cooling-off legislation was going to be bad for morale in the health care system — what does he think an imposed contract that values some health care professionals over others is going to do for the people who deliver the services to the patients? I know that as professionals, health care providers will continue to do their utmost to care for British Columbians right across the province. But I also know that with the expertise, experience and talent HSA members have, you will have to make personal decisions about what your future looks like — wherever and in whatever career choices you make.

I have been privileged to spend the last five years with HSA, but I now have my own personal decision to make. I have decided to accept an exciting opportunity with the Air Canada Airline Pilots Union where I know that the experience and opportunities I have had at HSA will stand me in good stead.

I have given everything I have to this organization, and this union has given me more than I could ever reciprocate. The combination of a strong Board of Directors and staff has made my time here a personally rewarding one.

I want to especially express my admiration for your President, Cindy Stewart, and the leadership she has taken both in the union and in the broader labour movement. I have been a labour practitioner for 25 years across the country, and have witnessed the full range of leadership. Cindy is a rare leader who has never forgotten where she comes from. She takes her direction from you, but doesn't shy away from making the tough decisions that have helped this union grow. She can do that because she devotes an incredible amount of personal time and energy to knowing what's important to you and what's right for the organization.

I leave HSA with mixed feelings, but know that I will be watching as this union continues to flourish and rises to the challenge of the new era in British Columbia.

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