

BULLETIN

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AS THIS ISSUE OF THE REPORT WAS GOING TO PRINT, HSA members who work in the community social services sector were preparing to vote on a tentative agreement reached after almost two years at the bargaining table.

The agreement, like every other provincial public sector agreement in BC in the past two years, was reached within the confines of the government-imposed "net-zero" mandate. That is, any improvements to terms and conditions in the agreement had to be achieved without affecting the bottom line. Simply put, if \$100 worth of benefit was put into the contract, there would have to be \$100 worth of savings from the contract.

The members of the Community Social Services bargaining committee were at the table for almost two years achieving a tentative collective agreement that they felt they could put to the members for ratification. It was the first time a tentative agreement had been reached in the sector without the assistance of a third party arbitrator or mediator, and the first time a sector bargaining committee recommended unanimous approval to the members.

Shackled to the very restrictive mandate, unions across the public sector have managed to squeeze out important improvements for members in the past two years. But, as the saying goes, you can't get blood from a stone. The coming round of bargaining promises to be a difficult one as the government is sure to plead poverty, and insist that public services including health care and education must continue to suffer from lack of consistent funding.

Combined with the defeat of the HST in the summer referendum and an international downturn in the economy, governments will count on the general public to buy the message that we all have to tighten our belts and ride the economy out.

But as HSA delegates to the April convention said in passing a resolution forwarded by the Board of Directors, a continuation of the "net-zero" mandate is completely unacceptable.

HSA will join with other unions representing public sector workers in developing a united front that demands the end of the "net-zero" mandate that eliminated any possibility for true, unrestricted free collective bargaining.

In September and October, in conjunction with the unions annual regional conferences, the union will hold one-day workshops for stewards and activists to consider a strategy for collective bargaining. Later in the year ... at the end of the November ... members of the HSPBA bargaining committee will be elected at the Bargaining Proposal Conference. Bargaining priorities for the other sectors with HSA members ... including community health, and community social services ... will also be developed this fall and winter. Registered psychiatric nurses, represented under the Nurses Bargaining Association, participated in setting priorities over the past few months.

I encourage all members to participate in upcoming local chapter meetings to set priorities for bargaining at

all the tables. Details will be posted on the union website at www.hsabc.org. 

Jeanne Meyers in acting as Executive Director of Labour Relations and Legal Services.

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