



NSGEU THE 20-20 STAND

Spring 2014

PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR LABOUR MOVEMENT



Joan speaks at the National Day of Mourning, Province House.

Labour relations in Nova Scotia have been completely transformed by a single piece of legislation, which was introduced and pushed through the legislature by a Liberal majority government in a matter of days.

Bill 37, the Essential Health and Community Services Act, will force all workers providing health and community services to negotiate a level of essential services before they even begin to negotiate a collective agreement.

While it is true that essential services legislation exists in many other parts of the country, Bill 37 is by far the worst type of this legislation in Canada, and will most certainly undermine the collective bargaining efforts of more than 35,000 workers in our province.

Many members who work in the civil service or education sectors may think this legislation won't affect them, but this couldn't be further from the truth.

Our civil service workers have never had the right to strike in this province, a fact which we understand is quite frustrating to many. However, these members still benefited from their brothers' and sisters' right to strike, as health care locals, such as Local 97 and 42, have often led the way at the bargaining table and used the threat of strike as leverage to help set fair, strong wage patterns, which were then carried over to all subsequent bargaining tables.

Now, with a diminished right to strike in the health care and community services sectors, all bargaining committees are sure to have a tougher time during their next round of negotiations.

And that's exactly what this government wanted.

The Liberals first tested the waters with this type of legislation in March, when they refused to agree to wage parity for 1,600 home support workers and, instead, brought in a similar type of essential services legislation to order them back to work.

They may have introduced essential services legislation under the guise of keeping Nova Scotians safe, but in reality, their central goal is to interfere in the collective bargaining process and balance their budget on the backs of workers.

Had safety been their primary concern in either of these cases, this government would have listened to the significant concerns brought forward by frontline workers, rather than move to silence them with legislation.

But this fight is far from over.

The NSGEU is leading the way on this issue, filing a constitutional challenge to ensure workers' bargaining rights in this province are restored. We will be holding meetings and a special convention has been called for the first time in our union's history, so we can talk about what this legislation is really about, and how it will affect workers in this province. We need each and every one of you to get involved: to talk to your coworkers, neighbours and family members, and make sure this government comes to recognize that the path to labour peace is through negotiation, not legislation!

This union will face this challenge as it has with so many before: head-on, with courage and conviction, and we will emerge from this battle stronger than ever. That's a promise.

In solidarity,

Joan Jessome

Joan Jessome

President, NSGEU

THE STAND

is a publication of the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union
255 John Savage Ave.
Dartmouth, NS, B3B 0J3

Contributors

Joan Jessome
Holly Fraughton
Shannon MacIntyre
Deedee Slye
Ian Johnson
Susan Coldwell
Paul Cormier

Contact NSGEU

902-424-4063
1-877-556-7438
inquiry@nsgeu.ca

Executive Officers

President
Joan Jessome
902-471-4566
1st Vice President
Jason MacLean
902-549-1888
2nd Vice President
Kelly Murphy
902-830-1499
3rd Vice President
Dustin Rioux
902-499-5102
Secretary-Treasurer
Darren McPhee
902-449-7778

The NSGEU is affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress, the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, and the National Union of Public and General Employees.
www.alltogethernow.nupge.ca



**together
FAIRNESS
WORKS**

The Union Stand is proudly produced by NSGEU with the help of members of the Unifor Union of Canada in Local 165.

NSGEU



Supporters rally at the Local 97 nurses strike in early April.

FEATURES

- 4 **BILL 30** Home support workers fight back.
By Deedee Slye
- 6 **LEGISLATION LETDOWN** Labour fights back against anti-worker legislation. *By Holly Fraughton*
- 9 **STAFF HEROISM** Quick thinking results in life saving rescue.
By Deedee Slye
- 10 **INSIDE VIEW** Bill 37 untold stories.
By Rick Wiseman
- 11 **Q&A** Local 97's fight for safe staffing ratios.
By Jen Smith
- 12 **AROUND THE UNION** Pictures from the local 97 strike.
- 14 **LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE** Mental health forum.
- 15 **MEMBER STORY SUBMISSION** View from the top.
By Debbie Chipman

2014 FAMILY PICNIC!

Saturday, July 12th, 12-4pm

Oakfield Provincial Park, 366 Oakfield Park Road, Grand Lake

Rain date: Saturday, July 19th Please **RSVP** by Thursday, July 10th by calling NSGEU at 424-4063 or 1-877-556-7438 or emailing inquiry@nsgeu.ca

CONNECT WITH US!

We want to hear from our members. If you have thoughts on this issue of The Stand, or ongoing union issues, send us your feedback! You can email us at inquiry@nsgeu.ca or connect with us:



facebook.com/NSGEU



@NSGEU @PrezJoan

MEMBER TWEETS

NUPGE (@NUPGE)

Congrats @NSGEU 1st union to join project promoting National Standard on Psych Health & Safety in the Workplace nupge.org/first

Carrie Campbell (@CarrieCampbell_)

Excited that @corinnegilroy and I were just elected to represent Local 81 at @NSGEU's upcoming Special Convention. #nspoli

@ManningsChair

When Manning MacDonald missed work for a month @StephenMcNeil didn't call him into his office. He defended him. #nspoli @NSGEU #betrayed

Tony Tracy (@Tony_Tracy)

Had a great time at #NSGEU Day today — celebrating the birthday of @NSGEU, Nova Scotia's largest union. A proud history. #NSpoli #canlab #1u

Operation Maple (@OperationMaple)

All across #Canada small towns are being threatened. @sgeu and @NSGEU are fighting back!

Jenny Wellwood (@Jazzyjwell)

Good on you nurses for passionately showing up to fight for something you believe in. Voices were heard, despite outcome. #nspoli @NSGEU

HOME SUPPORT WORKERS FIGHT BACK

By Deedee Slye

It's Thursday, February 27th, the evening before the strike is set to begin for members of Local 34 who work at Northwood Home support. There is an emergency meeting at the new NSGEU office (and there have never been more people packed into the conference room). Home support workers are standing at the back of the room. Every seat is taken. President Joan Jessome stands at the front of the room and rallies the members explaining the nature of the essential services legislation she has just been told the Liberal government will be tabling in the morning to stop the impending strike. She had just seen a copy of the wording and language of Bill 30.

"I've been a member of this union for 24 years, been on the executive of the union for 19 of them, and been the President for 15; and I have never seen language like this and I have never gone through a round of bargaining like we just went through," says Jessome.

The members are visibly upset and confused by this legislative interference by the McNeil government. Many come to the microphone to speak about how they will not be silenced and tell others that they will make sure McNeil is held accountable. Picket captains wearing bright red shirts are meeting and making final plans. They all have their lists and their lines. Lori Smith, NSGEU's Organizing Officer, has run through the drills with them. They are ready for the morning and for the strike to begin. In the hall and behind the scenes, NSGEU home support members and supporters in Locals 19, 246, and 42, among others, are being marshalled to speak at Law Amendments which will start as soon as Bill 30 passes first reading. The union has been spreading the word to other health care workers and supporters. The list of presenters is growing steadily.

Everyone knows the Liberals have a majority and will be able to pass their essential services legislation. But we are

not going to make it easy for them. There is a slim hope that if we can line up enough speakers, and if the NDP refuse to sit on the weekend, we may be able to keep the pressure up and force the government to negotiate. That hope is a long shot.

"We'll have our say at Law Amendments," says Joan on the night before the strike (to a CBC reporter). "But we have a long memory."

On Friday morning, home support workers converge on the NSGEU office in Burnside. The strike begins at 8 a.m. By 7:30 a.m., the parking lots are full. Members of Local 34 who have been to last night's meeting have their t-shirts on. Others pick up a t-shirt and picket signs, find their picket captain, and wait for the buses. That morning, members of Local 34 take to the streets in what may be their last full

legal strike. There is no real idea how long they may be out. Could be hours; could be days; until the legislation passes. They fill the buses and are dropped off outside the legislature where they march in the freezing cold to the beat of a small drumming band and their own creative percussion instruments. The striking members of Local 34 have noise makers and pots, and they are being led by members of the NSGEU Provincial Executive, Jason MacLean, Kelly Murphy, and Dustin Rioux. President Jessome is being interviewed almost constantly by reporters until she makes her way into the legislature to sit with members in the gallery to watch the debate on the Bill.

The morning begins with promising signs. Members watch as MLAs including Frank Corbett, Maureen MacDonald, and Lenore Zann speak against it at length. Mid-afternoon, Bill 30 is moved to the red room to be considered by the Law Amendments Committee.

The Law Amendments process is the place where members of the public can comment on the merits of a bill that has passed first reading in the house. Any citizen can request to speak to the committee by calling and having their name put on the list. Home support members and

their supporters fill the red room and, beginning with President Jessome, they outline how Bill 30 takes away workers' rights and why it is wrong to interfere with free collective bargaining (President Jessome's presentation can be seen online at nsgeu.ca). One by one, home support members address the committee, sharing stories about the important work they do. They explain to the committee why it is so important they receive the same pay for the same work whether they work in a hospital setting or a home. They explain how in many ways, working in a home is more difficult: You never know your working conditions until you walk through the door.

It comes as a shock to hear that NDP agree with the Tories and the Liberals to sit on Saturday, ensuring the bill will be passed by the end of the weekend. When President Jessome learns this, she immediately leaves to confirm what has just happened. The NDP's decision means that all the pressure is off the government and they will have the legislation passed by Saturday. In a state of disbelief, anger, and protest, President Jessome marches back into the red room to tell everyone what has happened and that there is no point in being here any longer. All the members in the room follow her out. It is a heartbreaking moment for everyone involved.

But the fight does not stop here. We are challenging Bill 30 in the courts and will continue to put political pressure on those 33 Liberal members who took the rights away first from home support workers. We will not forget.

The Minister of Health & Wellness, Leo Glavine, is on record saying that the future of health care is not bricks and mortar, but community and home support. We will not let the government take advantage of home support workers, primarily women, in order to deliver health care more cheaply. Our members deserve respect and will continue to fight for it wherever and whenever possible. Recently in Ontario, home support workers won the same wages as those who work in acute care facilities. We will continue to fight for fairness. ■



“We’ll have our say at Law Amendments,” says Joan on the night before the strike (to a CBC reporter). “But we have a long memory.”



LABOUR FIGHTS BACK AGAINST ANTI-WORKER LEGISLATION

By Holly Fraughton

The anger and frustration was palpable as workers took to the streets in early April, protesting legislation that would forever change the Labour landscape in Nova Scotia.

Clad in pink t-shirts and wielding picket signs and noisemakers, the Registered Nurses of NSGEU's Local 97 led the charge, and other healthcare workers from NSGEU and other unions - Unifor, NSNU, CUPE and more – weren't far behind as they marched towards the legislature.

The nurses found themselves at the forefront of this battle with a Liberal majority government because they were in the midst of trying to reach an agreement with an employer who refused to participate in the collective bargaining process, choosing instead to fall back on a government that was all-too-willing to interfere and take away workers' strongest bargaining tool: their right to strike.

On Monday night, while the Local 97 bargaining committee and employer were still at the table trying to reach an agreement with the help of a mediator, the Liberals tabled Bill 37, the Essential Health and Community Services Act. This piece of legislation will force all workers providing health and community services to negotiate a level of essential services before they even begin to negotiate a collective agreement. It is likely to require 85 to 90 per cent of affected workers to stay on the job during a strike, thus rendering a strike completely ineffective. And since an effective strike will be taken out of our bargaining toolbox, employers will be in a position to claw back existing benefits. To tip the scales even further against workers, Bill 37 includes a "poison pill": a form of arbitration that favours the province and employer, and includes the Province's "ability to pay" as criteria this arbitrator must consider.

Labour lawyer Ray Larkin calls Bill 37 "the most radical and far reaching change to our labour legislation in Nova Scotia since the 1972 Trade Union Act."

In his presentation to the Law Amendments Committee, Larkin pointed out that while past governments – led by Gerald Regan, John Buchanan and John Savage – all engaged in temporary interference in collective bargaining, not one of them removed the freedom of workers to exercise a fundamental right on a permanent basis.

But Stephen McNeil has done just that with Bill 37. "What this Bill is doing is permanently removing a fundamental right. Whatever you would say about how many people are essential, I think it is very clear, everybody is going to agree, Capital Health, for example, with regard to these nurses, will make the claim that 85 per cent of them will be essential. So that 85 per cent ... are being told by this legislation, permanently, your right to strike is gone," Larkin explained.

"So the fact you take away the right to strike for a large portion of the bargaining unit, means they are not going to have a say in their terms of employment. They are losing a fundamental freedom and the Bill should not be proceeded with."

WORKERS REFUSE TO BE SILENCED

Larkin was just one of almost 200 Nova Scotians who signed up to speak out against Bill 37 during a marathon session at Law Amendments. The presentations were limited to just five minutes and began on Tuesday afternoon, stretching on through the night and wrapping up at around 4:30 a.m. on Wednesday.

Trish MacDonald, an RN who works in an IMCU unit at the hospital, also addressed the committee, speaking passionately about a horrific shift she endured at the hospital just the night before, which saw her lose one patient, and have to shock another patient's heart while he was still conscious.

"He gets to feel everything and he screams, and the two people in the other beds ... can hear everything that's going on," MacDonald explained.

"...Would you like that to be you? Your wife? Father? That man stayed in that bed, could not be intubated (and) endured his heart shocked five times while he was awake. Now, you tell me what kind of health care system we have, and you ask me if I deserve a safe patient ratio on my floor."

Diane Wilson, a nurse who works in the burns and plastic surgery unit, also spoke out about her very real concerns surrounding the level of care she is able to offer patients, due to understaffing in her area:

"Plastic surgery is not the glamorous sensationalized media that people think it is. Plastic surgery is facial reconstruction after motor vehicle accidents, it is digit reattachments, which involve checking on those patients every 15 minutes for 12 hours. It is breast re-implants after being removed because of cancer. Being a burn nurse, means caring for critically ill patients in continuous, excruciating pain. It means doing wound



Local 97 nurses rally outside Province House.

“
They are losing a
fundamental freedom
and the Bill should not
be proceeded with.”



Local 97 nurses listen to speakers outside Province House.

care for hours at a time when that patient is screaming at you and begging you to stop and you have to keep going because it is the lesser of two evils. I had an 18-year-old girl look into my eyes and beg me to let her die. Can you imagine the emotional fortitude that we have to have to do this job? Now imagine being in all of these situations and not having the staff to do this properly. On my floor, being short-staffed means if we're lucky, there's three nurses to run the whole floor – four if it's a really, really good day. I have lost count of the shifts that I have gone for twelve hours without peeing, without eating, without having a drink. It means I don't get my charting done until the next shift comes on because technically I'm not there anymore, and I can actually sit down and get it done. I have lost count of the times that I have had to leave and go to the bathroom and cry for a few minutes, regain my composure and come back. I have lost count of the sleepless nights and the amount of time I spend crying at home because my patients are in jeopardy ... it is my ethical obligation as a registered nurse to advocate for the rights of my patients, and I will be damned if I let Bill 37 take that away. It is not only going to take away the rights of over 33,000 healthcare professionals in Nova Scotia, it is going to take away the rights and the voice of every single patient that we serve: that is the vast majority of Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia is my home, and nursing is my calling, but I cannot work and live under this kind of oppression. Don't make me leave my home, and don't take away the only thing I've ever cared about and that I've ever been good at; I am begging you to listen to your frontline workers, because we have your best interests at heart, no matter how you treat us."

Sadly, the government chose to ignore these workers' pleas. But thanks to the tireless efforts of the healthcare workers and their supporters, the passage of Bill 37 was successfully delayed until Friday morning. This meant that Local 97 nurses would get their day to protest – legally.

THE STAGE WAS SET

The Liberals had flexed their muscles just a few weeks prior, when they brought similar legislation against 1,600 home support workers who were trying to achieve wage parity with workers doing the same job in an acute care setting.

Providing home support isn't easy: the Workers Compensation Board recently named personal and nursing care homes as the most violent workplaces in Nova Scotia. Home support workers provide the same care with a similar client group, but work alone, without the support of colleagues or supervisors. They have no long term disability or dental coverage, drive great distances in their own vehicles to reach their clients, and make up to \$2.16 less per hour than their counterparts.

The NSGEU was calling on the employers and government to give these workers wage parity. When it became clear they weren't willing to do so, President Joan Jessome wrote to Premier McNeil to propose arbitration on the wage parity issue and avert a strike. McNeil refused, and instead, introduced Bill 30 (the Essential Home Support Services Act).

At that point, workers started to realize that this government wasn't interested in fairness, or in our fundamental rights.

THE BATTLE IS JUST BEGINNING

The NSGEU has already filed notice that it will challenge Bill 30 in court, and plans to do the same for Bill 37, both on the grounds that the legislation violates the Charter of Rights, as it takes away workers freedom of association and expression. Our success will be largely dependent on the success of a similar legal challenge underway in Saskatchewan.

"The Supreme Court has recognized that workers have a right to free expression exhibited in picketing and going on strike and a government has to have legitimate reasons for limiting those freedoms and this bill will have to stand that test," Larkin said.

In the meantime, the union will continue to help nurses advocate on their patients’ behalf, and give them an avenue to speak out on safety concerns. Nurses now have an NSGEU safety hotline they can call or email their concerns to, so union reps can follow up and track the staffing and safety issues that are so prevalent within Capital Health.

Prior to the last election, Premier McNeil stated “My position on the right to strike has been clear. Our party supports the right to strike and will continue to do so.” Clearly, the Liberals have changed their position on this issue quite drastically.

The NSGEU intends on making sure people remember this betrayal. While the next election may seem a long way off, we have 3½ years to remind people of how this government has treated workers.

SO,WHAT ARE “ESSENTIAL SERVICES,”ANYWAYS?

It’s a great question, and a highly subjective one as well!

If you asked any employer or the government, chances are they would say that almost 100 per cent of services are “essential.” Otherwise, they wouldn’t exist, right?

Wrong.

The services our members deliver are very important and valuable. But only a small portion of them should be considered “essential,” because only a small portion of them provide services in life-or-death areas, such as in Intensive Care Units or certain types of operating rooms in a hospital setting.

The way “essential” is interpreted by the Labour Board will determine how many workers retain the right to strike in the event that bargaining fails. That percentage of workers will then determine what strength that Local will have at the bargaining table.

Our goal is to keep the percentage of workers designated as “essential” as low as possible, to ensure workers retain their leverage at the bargaining table, and their bargaining committees can use this to get the best possible collective agreement. ■



“ That percentage of workers will then determine what strength that Local will have at the bargaining table. ”



QUICK THINKING RESULTS IN LIFE SAVING RESCUE

By Deedee Slye

On Saturday, January 12, NSGEU’s Executive Director, Keiren Tompkins was involved in the dramatic rescue of a 21-year-old man who fell through the ice at Uisge Ban Falls in Baddeck, Cape Breton. Since then, Keiren’s feat of heroism has been captured and communicated on CTV, CBC Radio, YouTube, Facebook, and various newspapers including the Cape Breton Post.

Keiren had been out snowshoeing with friends on the trail leading to the waterfalls. At the end of the trail in view of the falls, they stopped for a break. A group of three young men passed them on their way up. A few minutes later, Keiren and his friend Steve Ross parted from the group and went to join the young men at the falls to take some close-up photographs. They were accompanied by Vince Forrestall who had joined their group just minutes earlier.

As Keiren and Steve were climbing up the solid ice toward the main waterfalls, the three young men were starting to descend the steep frozen ice and snow. It appeared as though the main area of open water was on the left-hand side of the falls and one of the three young men, Julien Rouleau, started to carefully come down the right side. Unbeknownst to all, they were standing on a layer of ice and snow which was covering a very rapid and deep part of the brook flowing from the falls. As he descended the hill, Julien lost his footing and slid down the ice, cracking through the fairly thin layer of snow and ice and disappearing completely.

Tompkins and Ross ran to the end of the ice, about 80 feet away, to see if the young man would surface there, but to no avail. Tompkins quickly decided they must attempt to locate Julien through the open hole he plunged through, if there was any hope of finding him. Keiren lay flat on the ice, hanging his head into the hole, while Steve held his lower legs to prevent him from going through.



Under the ice, there was a circulating pool of water and at first Keiren saw no sign of Julien at all. But after about 30 seconds, he saw a hand come out of the water and was able to extend his ski pole to make contact with him. Keiren and Steve were able to secure both of Julien’s arms and helped by Vince and Julien’s friends, Tyler Murphy and Cody Delaney, the men were able to pull Julien from the frigid water.

Keiren was still thinking on his feet when he moved everyone immediately away from the area after the rescue, as they were still standing on top of the waterfall and pool. The snow and ice could have given way from under all of them at any time.

They were able to change Julien into some warm and dry clothing and footwear before walking back to their vehicles, which were about 30 minutes away. They all then went to Ross’s cottage in Baddeck to find warmth and share drink and

some laughter and jubilation as they counted their blessings.

This is not the first time Keiren has saved someone’s life. In 1990, our NSGEU Newsletter reported Keiren, who was not yet on staff at the NSGEU but was on the Board of Directors and a long-time activist, took “heroic action to save the life of a scuba diver who got into trouble late in September.”

It seems that Keiren has been in the right place at the right time. As well, he was lucky and wise enough to have acted quickly in both of these rescues.

We are very proud of our Executive Director, and humble hero. Way to go, Keiren. ■

BILL 37 UNTOLD STORIES

By Rick Wiseman

The first week of April in 2014 was a week that many of us will remember in this province as a dark time for the labour movement. As we were in the midst of preparing for job action with our 2,300 nurses, Premier Stephen McNeil and his Liberal government blindsided workers with a piece of legislation that tramples our rights and ignores the history on which this province was built.

March 31st, Bill 37 was tabled. Moments later my cell phone rang to inform me. I – like many others that evening – headed off to the legislature. This was the first all-nighter that we had, listening to discussion on this bill through the night, while a 7 a.m. illegal job action was nearing with each passing moment. When the morning arrived, our President, Joan Jessome, stood in front of the media to address the events of that day.

Local 97's illegal strike started that morning in what was quite possibly the worst weather we had in an awful winter, but spirits were strong and our voices were heard. Hundreds of concerned citizens lined up to speak at law amendments to have their concerns heard by those who could actually make a difference. Unfortunately, those words fell mostly upon deaf ears.

As the week played out and it became clear that nurses would reach a legal strike position on Thursday morning, it was a safe assumption that Bill 37 would pass early Friday. Many of us once again made our way to the legislature to strike and once we arrived, nobody was leaving until it was over.

Sadly, the Bill passed as expected, with unanimous support from the majority Liberal government. The emotions in the room in that moment, as tens of thousands of workers in this province essentially watched their right to strike evaporate, were as real as any I have ever experienced.

Moments later we stood outside with arms locked, letting this government know that while they may have passed this Bill, this fight is far from over. One car every ten minutes was allowed to pass. After 24 hours, a second stretch of its kind that week, we still were not prepared to pass on an opportunity to force this government look us in the face while they were gutting our ability to improve working conditions for workers in this province. But the line easily parted for those MLAs that supported the workers of this province as much as they could over the week.

There are so many stories from this week that most will never have the chance to hear. Like the 47-year-old mother of three young children from the South Shore who had her cancer surgery cancelled,

despite NSGEU providing 100% staffing to that unit. It was with our help and her determination that CDHA agreed to not cancel her surgery. You won't hear about the patients in the hospitals during the strike with signs of support in their windows, or even coming out to the line to offer support to their nurse. And despite my best efforts, you won't hear about the Liberal MLA who couldn't bother to stay awake in his seat during debate on Bill 37, even with repeated elbows from his fellow MLA to wake him up. Shame!

Our union doesn't rest on its name; we don't rely on the work of yesterday to get us through today. We knew Bill 37 would pass, but wanted them to look our members in the face as they voted their rights away.



Rick Wiseman rallies local 97 nurses

I remind you it was only 48 hours prior to the bill being tabled that Stephen McNeil informed one of our nurses that he would respect the collective bargaining process. From President Jessome to the staff of our union to the activists that comprise our base, we were there.

The last story I want to share is from a university student who walked past the legislature at about 3 a.m. on Friday morning. He was walking home from a bar when he passed us on the street. I asked him how he was doing and quickly we got into a conversation about the events playing out in front of us. He is enrolled in Business and comes from a family of business owners. He didn't fully support unions and felt if you treated your staff right, you didn't need a union. Many of his beliefs didn't fall in line with what I – or others on that line that night

– would have agreed with. But nonetheless, we talked for the better part of an hour. And while he didn't fully agree, once he understood that the dozens of people singing, playing the drums, chanting and dancing in the streets, were all doing so with full knowledge that this Bill would pass anyways, he was wiping a tear from his eye. He couldn't believe that someone would care about something so much that they would go to such lengths, even in the face of such certainty; he continued to repeat how empowering that was.

I told him "welcome to NSGEU!" ■

Rick Wiseman is a member of Local 64, Colchester Residential Services Society

LOCAL 97'S FIGHT FOR SAFE STAFFING

Back in March, we spoke with two members of the local 97 bargaining committee; Susan Dobbin (SD) and Robert Chisholm (RD) Both Registered Nurses weighed in on the importance of nurse to patient ratios:

The Stand: What were the most important issues for Local 97 when you began this round of bargaining?

SD: Safe staffing, scheduling, vacation issues - these are all things that nurses had, in their surveys, identified as things that were issues for them. It's not about wages. It's not even remotely about wages. It's about having a safe workplace. It's about having safe staffing levels for our patients. And it's about work life balance. I think this round of bargaining is totally not about wages.

The Stand: What does unsafe staffing mean for nurses on a daily basis?

SD: ...We heard a lot of nurses talk and a lot of nurses' stories about their conditions at work, and some of the stories were actually unbelievable. A nurse would go to work and experience [the stress of unsafe staffing levels] and go home at the end of their day in tears.

We heard from a nurse who is alone overnight in a mental health unit with patients in crisis who are at risk of assaulting her or other patients. One nurse at the Veteran's told us about how she and a Licensed Practical Nurse are responsible for 25 patients, two of whom are dying, and if the nurse in the next unit calls in sick they take over another 25 as well.

The Stand: In August, Capital Health sent a directive to unit managers telling them not to replace the first nurse who calls in sick on a shift. What has that meant for nurses and their patients?

SD: For that one nurse to call in sick and not be replaced means that if she has six or eight

patients the rest of the nurses are picking up those patients. So that's not a good work environment.

Nurses can no longer take time with their patients to do the little things that make them more comfortable, make them feel a little better at a difficult time. But the real problem is the risk to patient safety. When you're running nonstop for 12 hours, when you are being asked to do more and



Susan Dobbin during the local 97 strike

more paperwork, but you're splitting your time at the bedside between six, ten, twelve patients, some of them really sick – that's when medication mistakes get made. That's when you simply aren't there to see the small changes when an infection starts or a patient takes a turn for the worse.

The Stand: Capital Health says there's already a process in place to address staffing concerns. It's similar to the process nurses elsewhere in the Province have. Why isn't that enough to ensure safe staffing?

RC: You're referring to the quality care report. That process has been in place for almost 15 years. Nurses for years have used those documents to try and address workload issues and work conditions and the outcomes have always been less than favourable. They've never resulted in an improvement in complement of the nurses on the floor. Oftentimes the blame is redirected back onto the nurse because [they are asked] what did they do to address the situation. It's not user-friendly, it's long, and it doesn't recognise that when nurses are working in those unsafe, high patient workload conditions they actually don't have the time to fill those documents out. We've never seen any positive results from having done that so right now we're quite frustrated with it. We're looking to change that.

The Stand: Why are you focusing on nurse-to-patient ratios as a solution?

RC: Minimum mandatory ratios would provide the right amount of staff, the right skill mix, that would enable us to provide the safe care that patients deserve. We believe it can still be flexible but it sets a baseline for what we think is safe.

It doesn't put patient's lives in jeopardy and it doesn't give the control specifically to the organization

who basically are under the gun of the government in trying to meet annual budget lines. That's how they're staffing now, all budget driven.

The Stand: What can NSGEU members – nurses and those who want to support them – do over the next few weeks of the bargaining process?

RC: It's important to send a message to the government that as a group of caregivers – respected caregivers – in the province that we are trying to improve care for patients.

We need the MLAs and the government to know that aligning themselves with this legislation is going to affect them in the polls in the next election. They need to understand what a force we can be, how much influence we have over our families, our neighbours. People know how hard we work and how we advocate for our patients and that we have the potential to change the political makeup, particularly in HRM. ■

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION!



Standing Strong in the Face of Essential Services Legislation

The McNeil government's interference in collective bargaining, and the passage of essential services legislation for 35,000 health care and community service workers, has changed the bargaining climate in the province. We are a strong union with a committed membership and the resources to make this work in the best interest of our members. We are moving forward as per the legislation, and have filed notice to negotiate essential services with Capital Health for Local 97. On May 1st, we filed for our other locals, who have contracts that expire at the end of October. We are determined to maintain the right to strike for as many members as possible.

No one stands alone!

NSGEU

LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE:

MENTAL HEALTH FORUM

NSGEU president Joan Jessome was recommended by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) as a panalist for the “Leadership in Workplace Mental Health Forum” held on Thursday, April 3, 2014. Unfortunately, the forum fell right in the middle of our fight with the McNeil Liberal government as we stood up for patient safety and nurse patient ratios for our Local 97 nurses and our opposition to their essential services legislation and President Jessome was not able to attend. She sent Paul Cormier, NSGEU Occupational Health and Safety Officer, and Susan Coldwell, Working Toward Bully-Free Workplaces Coordinator, to attend the event in her place.

Fellow panelists included Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne; George Cope, President and CEO of Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE); and Mike Schwartz, Senior Vice-President of Great West Life.

This event provided the opportunity to speak to chief executive officers and presidents from across Canada, many of whom are recognized as industry and business leaders in the area of workplace mental health, as well as provincial and territorial ministers of health and ministers with responsibility for mental health and addictions issues.

Paul Cormier presented on the importance of workplace mental health and the experience in the workplaces of our 32,000 members. Susan had prepared a poster which outlined information about our Bully-Free Program to share with other employers.

We are very pleased to announce that the NSGEU has been selected as the first union in Canada to participate in a three year case study research project in partnership with Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC). This case study research project is designed to follow the journey of 25 Canadian employers as they become industry leaders in workplace mental health as they work through the staged implementation of the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health & Safety in the Workplace (the Standard), the MHCC will provide observations and insights to each organization. By working through the implementation of the Standard at the NSGEU we will be able to offer information and instruction to other employers in the province as they do the same. Although the Standard is voluntary at the moment, we expect that it will become mandatory in the future. ■



Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, official photo of forum.



Paul Cormier and George Cope.



Bully-Free Workplaces Coordinator, Susan Coldwell, NSGEU President, Joan Jessome, Health & Safety Officer, Paul Cormier, Director of Negotiations & Servicing Robin MacLean, and NS-PSC Renewal Office Special Advisor Brian Gilbert. In Toronto, January 16th.

VIEW FROM THE TOP

By Debbie Chipman

Two thousand thirteen began like any other year with the creation of New Year's resolutions – lose weight, get fit, save more money and spend less. I also resolved to try to do more for others. Returning to work on January 7th, I hurt my wrists when a cabinet hit them at work. Diagnosed with neurofibromatosis, I found out I needed surgery to remove tumours on my spine. As a union member, I was placed in a new job and physiotherapy helped my wrist, but I still needed the surgery.

My scheduled surgery had a risk of paralysis. The eight hour operation occurred on April 30th and my recovery included spending 21 days in hospital. Part of this time was spent in the Nova Scotia Rehab Center. I was in a lot of pain, could not walk, roll over in my bed, feed myself or lift my arms as high as my shoulders. When I was able to walk, I initially used a walker. My first goal was to make it down the hall. I made it about three feet and had to sit down. Fortunately, I walked out of the Rehab Centre and am still recovering. I can walk and feel my toes and hands, which is a wonderful feeling. Others at the Rehab Centre are not so lucky. They are in wheelchairs, have had strokes or been diagnosed with MS, Lou Gehrig's and Parkinson's.

During my recovery, I kept photos from when I participated in Drop Zone 2010 in support of Easter Seals Nova Scotia. Those photos, along with prayers from family and friends, motivated me to work on a speedy recovery. I decided during my recovery that I wanted to do the rappel again and accomplish this physical challenge while supporting the work of Easter

Seals. On September 22nd I rappelled 330 feet down the MacDonald Bridge and the following day rappelled 18 stories down the 1801 Hollis Street building in Halifax. Both were challenging and there were times when I wanted to quit, but I reminded myself of how far I had come. With lots of determination, I did it!

Physically-able persons don't think about opening heavy doors or going up steps when necessary. I only needed a walker for a short time, but my eyes were opened to



how many places are not accessible. Seeing some of the challenges that persons with disabilities face, I know Easter Seals would be there to help them. Easter Seals Nova Scotia programs and services are directed to meet the needs of persons with disabilities in our communities: to help children, teens, and adults with disabilities to become more active, build independence and confidence, and gain access to equipment and information. Easter Seals also partners with therapists and staff of the Nova Scotia Rehabilitation Centre to assist patients with their needs.

There is a possibility that I may be facing more surgery. However, I plan on being on the top of 1801 Hollis Street Building in 2014 and doing it again in support of this worthwhile cause. I would like to challenge my fellow union brothers and sisters to join me in supporting Easter Seals Nova Scotia and sign up for DropZone 2014. Take the challenge and help persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia. Log on to easterseals.ns.ca for more information. You can also find Easter Seals Nova Scotia on Twitter @eastersealsns or 'like' them on Facebook. ■

Debbie Chipman is a member of Local 8, Internal Services

SEEN PILOT PROJECT MOVING FORWARD

By Ian Johnson

Silver Economy Engagement Network (SEEN) should be a value added service to retiring and retired NSGEU members who would like to use their knowledge and skills to contribute to the health, economic and social well-being of their communities.

After a year of discussions and exploration of the concept, on September 11, 2013 NSGEU and Saint Mary's University Continuing Education signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding to begin the process of planning and delivering the Silver Economy Engagement Network (SEEN) to NSGEU members and retired members.

A joint working group of four representatives from the NSGEU and SEEN has been set up and we have held two meetings: on November 15 and on January 10. We have discussed moving ahead with possibly two or three initial projects which will work closely with our Regional Councils.

Once the details are clarified and approved by both parties, Saint Mary's Continuing Education will provide the services and materials for the projects. Where possible, other universities and other organizations will be invited to participate. For our part, NSGEU will provide information to the relevant members in a given area, identify possible venues for program delivery, and help to identify members who might be willing to serve as program facilitators.

Judging from the interest and enthusiasm already generated in the early stages of SEEN, it should be an exciting opportunity for interested members once the pilot projects are underway. Please watch for more details to come! ■

2013-2014 Sock it to Poverty Campaign Wrap Up!

The NSGEU Human Rights Committee says "Thank you!" for stepping up this winter and for making a difference in your communities through our annual "Sock it to Poverty" campaign this year. We collected over \$1,000 in cash and locals collected over 1,200 items- pairs of socks, mittens gloves; hats, scarves, jackets- which were donated to a variety of organizations in communities across the province.

For example members of Local 1 who work for Access Nova Scotia in Sydney, brought the mittens, socks and hats they collected to the Whitney Pier Youth Club (Boys and Girls Club) on December 21, 2013. ■



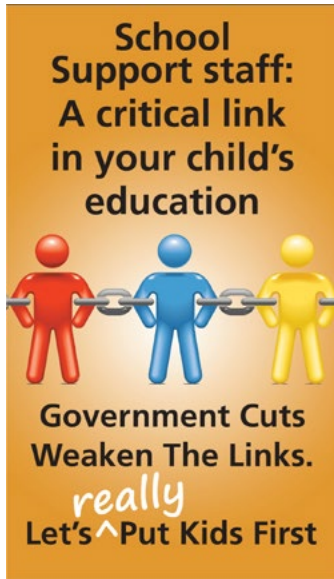
From newly formed Local 48 (Nova Scotia Pension Services Corporation) the response was overwhelming! The collected items were distributed to Adsum House (22 hats/scarves), Bryony House (39 sets of hats/scarves/socks), the Metro Turning Point (3 sets of hats and gloves), and Barry House (22 hats).



Support Staff need to be part of educational review process

Our members who provide valuable support services in the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board, South Shore Regional School Board, Tri-County Regional School Board, Halifax Regional School Board, Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, and Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial, should be included in educational reviews conducted by the Department of Education. Our members are the heart and soul of the school system providing administrative support and student support as librarians, IT staff, and educational assistants.

On February 19, the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development announced an Education Review Panel, headed by former Lieutenant Governor Myra Freeman, to review all aspects of public education and deliver a final report by October. On March 19, Ms. Freeman announced the Panel will be launching



an online survey in April, inviting written submissions by email or mail, gathering responses by Twitter, and creating a guide for discussion and input from youth, but not holding formal public hearings.

Unfortunately this government has failed to ensure support staff are recognized and represented in this process, especially on the partners' advisory group. President Jessome wrote to the Minister to make this request on February 20 and again on April 14. We will continue to push for the inclusion of support staff in this review. ■

Everything you need to know about being a union member

The NSGEU is committed to educating its members. We offer a New Activist course that provides answers to all the basic questions you might have about your union.

All members are eligible to participate in this education. The union pays the employer for your time, so that you receive your regular pay. All expenses, including meals, mileage and accommodation (if required) are also covered by the union.

If you have recently become an NSGEU member, or have been a member for years and think now might be the right time to get involved, then the New Activist course is for you. We hope that once you complete this training, you will have an interest in becoming active in your union, but you do not have to make that commitment.

You'll learn skills that will help you:

- understand your basic rights as a worker.

- have a good knowledge of NSGEU structure, resources and processes.
- understand the importance of unions to members and in society.
- understand the importance of Locals in our structure.
- understand basic labour history and the achievements of unions.
- gain some understanding of how collective bargaining and the grievance process work.
- have a better understanding of how collective agreements work and are enforced.
- better understand the diversity of the NSGEU membership and the value of this diversity to the union, along with the union's commitment to principles of equity and human rights.
- learn how to participate in union activities and goals, and learn how to encourage your Local colleagues to participate.

NSGEU Education Courses

New Activist

September 15 & 16, 2014
NSGEU Office, Sydney
[Cape Breton and Pictou/Antigonish/](#)
[Guysborough Region](#)

September 22 & 23, 2014
NSGEU Office, Yarmouth
[South Shore & Valley Region](#)

September 29 & 30, 2014
Best Western, Bridgewater
[South Shore Region](#)

November 13 & 14, 2014
NSGEU Office, Truro
[Cumberland/Colchester and Pictou/](#)
[Antigonish Region](#)

November 17 & 18, 2014
NSGEU Office, Dartmouth
[Metro A, B, & C Region](#)

Steward I

September 17 & 18, 2014
NSGEU Office, Truro
[Cumberland/Colchester and Pictou/](#)
[Antigonish Region](#)

October 6 & 7, 2014
Best Western, Liverpool
[South Shore & Valley Region](#)

November 19 & 20, 2014
NSGEU Office, Dartmouth
[Metro A, B, & C Region](#)

Eligibility: Stewards with no prior training.
Description: Introduction to roles and responsibilities of Steward. Introduction to grievance procedure and investigation.

Pre-Retirement

June 21, 2014
Dal Agriculture Campus, Truro

October 4, 2014
Acadia University, Wolfville

November 15, 2014
NSGEU Office, Dartmouth

Eligibility: Usually within 1-2 years of retirement.
Description: Overview of pension politics in Nova Scotia. Presentation from CPP and your pension plan, i.e. NSAHO, PSSP, etc. Retirement benefits. Benefit information varies according to location and Local members.

NEW UNION STAFF



Shawn Fuller, Director of Negotiations and Servicing, Health Care

Shawn is no stranger to NSGEU having worked as an Employee Relations Officer in the health care sector for five years before taking a job with the government as Director of Communications and Senior Advisor to the Premier on labour relations. He was well liked by the membership as an ERO and we are glad to have him on staff as we face our current challenges with essential services legislation and the restructuring of the District Health Authorities.

Shannon MacIntyre, Communications Assistant

Shannon worked at Mount St. Vincent University for the last four years as a Multimedia Technician in the department of Distance Learning. She hit the ground running within her first days at NSGEU, shooting photos and video of the local 97 nurses strike. Most recently she has been busy laying out and designing this issue of The Stand.



Cindy Legault, Receptionist

Cindy worked for the Department of Health & Wellness in Adult Protection Services for seven years as a secretary before coming to the NSGEU. She'll be the first face you see when you arrive at the NSGEU office and will greet you with a friendly smile and make sure you get where you are going.

NSGEU a proud member of the Community Energy Coalition

NSGEU has joined a number of energy leaders and membership groups including Peak Experiences and The Nova Scotia Cooperatives Group to form the Community Energy Coalition of Nova Scotia.

This is a coalition of organizations with 360,000 members that will formally launch an initiative to work collaboratively to enact a shared vision for a secure and sustainable energy future for Nova Scotia. This would involve communities across Nova Scotia owning, generating and selling sustainable energy together for the benefit of all.

At the March meeting of the Board of Directors, the Board endorsed the membership in this organization and President Jessome was asked to be part of a panel presentation on April 16 at the Coalition launch at the 2014 Community Energy Conference.

President Jessome spoke about our partnership with Saint Mary's University in the development of the Silver Economy Engagement Network (SEEN) and how this network of knowledgeable and skilled volunteers from communities right across the province could also work to help sustain a healthy community energy coalition. You can find out more about the Coalition at: renewableenergyconference.ca

UNION THREADS

There's a whole range of colourful NSGEU clothing available at the union office at 255 John Savage Avenue. For more info, call Jackie Creemer at 424-4063 or toll free at 1-877-556-7438.



\$25.00



\$20.00



\$60.00



\$25.00



\$3.00



\$15.00

Our NSGEU tank tops and t-shirts would make a great addition to your summer wardrobe!

NSGEU DISCOUNT LIST

Present your NSGEU card to save money on a variety of items and services. For a complete list visit nsgeu.ca. Below you will find a selection of discounts available to you as an NSGEU member. For full list go to nsgeu.ca

ACCOMMODATION

The Westin Nova Scotia

1118 Hollis St, Halifax NS.
1-877-993-7846
reservations@westin.ns.ca

\$129 + taxes, for a tradition room, either two double beds or one queen. This includes: parking, internet, newspaper, fitness centre, pool, coffee, tea, and shuttle service to business district.

CLOTHING

Mark's Work Wearhouse

10% discount on regular retail price on such items as: footwear, coveralls, overalls, industrial outerwear, rain wear, casual wear, health wear clothing, work accessories. You must have an NSGEU membership card and Mark's discount card.

FLORIST

Gerry's Nursery

Centerville, Kings County
902-678-1255
10% discount

Pretty Posies

8877 Commercial St., New Minas
902-681-1166
10% discount

FRAMING/PRINTING

Atlantic Photo Supply

5505 Spring Garden Rd., Halifax
902-423-6724
atlanticphotosupply.com

10% discount on photo supplies (not includin cameras or other equipment). 25 free 4X6 photos when you sign up for online print service.

Frame Plus Art

6040 Almon St., Halifax
902-455-6792
frameplusart.ca
20% off framing and plaque mounting

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

MacDonell Pharmacy Ltd

1024 Grenville St. St. Peter's,
Richmond County
902-535-3196

Additional supplementary coverage of up to \$4 per prescription. You must present your NSGEU card and if applicable your employer drug card. In addition, a 10% discount on certain non-sale items will be offered on front-store purchases.

Special NSGEU CONVENTION June 2, 2014



For the first time in the history of the NSGEU, President Joan Jessome has used her constitutional right to call a special convention.

Convention will give the members an opportunity to have discussion about a number of pressing issues including: Bill 30, Bill 37 and the impact of essential service legislation; working under a majority Liberal government; and the restructuring of the health authorities.

NSGEU locals are holding meetings and electing delegates. Please attend your meeting and participate in this important process. This convention will set our direction as a whole union. We will face our challenges together.

In NSGEU, no one stands alone.



Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union
255 John Savage Avenue, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, B3B 0J3
902.424.4063 | 1.877.556.7438 | nsgeu.ca | inquiry@nsgeu.ca
Publication Mail Number 40010698

