

Friday, June 6, 2008 - AM Edition

'Bear pit' session kicks off convention

Twelve candidates vying for office made their case to win support and answered questions from the audience at a well-attended election bear pit session last night.

Moderated by Larry Brown, secretary-treasurer of the National Union of Public and General Employees Union, rules for the forum gave each contestant three minutes to state their strengths and outline their platforms.

Candidates for the vice-president positions led off, and they fielded a variety of delegates' questions including:

- working conditions for community health workers;
- services provided by community social service workers;
- mentoring new activists and recruiting young workers; and
- international solidarity.

Candidates for secretary-treasurer followed, and faced questions about:

- increasing funding for cross component committees;
- role of secretary-treasurer within the union and outside it; and
- measures to speed up grievance processing.

The evening ended with the spotlight on the presidential candidates, with questions focussing on:

- how to tackle privatization and contracting out;
- how to think outside the box;
- bargaining strategy;
- community social services issues;
- lobbying government to rebuild skills training;
- a woman being the union's top leader;
- protecting members whose jobs have already been privatized;
- strengthening local OH&S committees; and
- protecting B.C.'s rivers.

Candidates running to replace George Heyman as president are: Byron Goerz, Colleen Jones, Doug Kinna, Sandi McLean and Darryl Walker.

Candidates contesting the position of secretary-treasurer: Brenda Brown and Judi Filion.

Candidates for vice president: Mike Clarke, Peter Dignard, Anthony Dodds, Stephen Lisik and Lorene Oikawa.

Key agenda items at today's opening session include the final keynote speech from retiring union president George Heyman, and an update on conditions in post-typhoon Burma.

Heyman, who is stepping down after nine years as leader of one of B.C.'s largest unions with 69,000 members, speaks at 11:15 a.m.

At 1:30 p.m. delegates will get an update on the situation in Burma. Maria Hla Tin, a Vancouver-based representative



DELEGATES attend a "bear pit" session where candidates responded to a wide range of questions.

of the Action Committee for a Free Burma, will speak about efforts to rebuild after the devastating typhoon, and the political struggle being waged against the repressive military regime that rules her country.

The plight of forest workers and resource communities will also be taken up. A representative of the United

Steelworkers will report on the crisis in B.C.'s forests at 3:30 p.m.

On Saturday, B.C. Federation of Labour President Jim Sinclair and provincial NDP leader Carole James will be on hand to speak to delegates. And the union's Spirit of Leadership Award will be presented to the West Coast Domestic

Workers and the Vancouver Committee for Domestic Workers and Caregivers' Rights at a special ceremony Saturday morning.

A special tribute to Heyman—who retires after 30 years as a union activist and leader—is set for Saturday afternoon. Elections take place on Sunday.

New delegates learn the ropes

Close to half of the more than 400 delegates expected to attend the 47th BCGEU Constitutional Convention will be new delegates.

Local 307 member Valerie Mill travelled from Vernon to be here. She's looking forward to her very first BCGEU convention. Following the new delegate



Valerie Mill

orientation forum, which covered rules of conduct and tips on speaking at the microphone, Mill is confident that she'll be able to overcome any nerves about public speaking "because if it's something I'm really passionate about, I can speak to it."

Mill, who became a member just a year and a half ago, has quickly become an active union member. She's already taken extensive steward training, violence in the workplace and leadership training, and become a shop steward. "I've read our contract cover-to-cover!" she notes. She also serves as the Local 307 young worker representative.

Now Mill will be voting on important resolutions that will establish the priorities for our union's activities in coming years. One of her main concerns is a resolution on preventing 'union-busting' that her local and other Component



Pobhinder Mann

3 (Community Social Services) locals have put forward. This resolution urges the union to continue to oppose BC government and Community Living BC efforts to move individuals-in-care out of group homes and into single non-union private homes.

Local 1203 chair Pobhinder Mann has attended a BCGEU policy convention before – but this will be his first constitutional convention.

He notes that his local has also put forward specific resolutions, including ones concerning child care.

Important information

Members are asked to **drop off** toiletries for women's shelters each day to the BCGEU Registration desk.

Green reminder: No paper cups on the convention floor, please.

The **Computer Centre** is in the Cowichan Room

Level 2. The hours are: Friday (8:00 am to 6:30 pm), Saturday (8:00 am to 6:30 pm and 8:00 pm to 9:00 pm), Sunday (8:00 am to 1:30 pm). The phone number is (604) 785-1936.

Convention phone number: (604) 681-6625. Fax: (604) 681-6635.