

AN OPEN LETTER TO BCNU MEMBERS

June 2009



Dear BCNU member:

Re: BCNU's plans to sign up members
of other health care unions

For decades, members of BCNU and other health care unions have worked side-by-side with a shared commitment to team work.

Whether it's on the nursing unit, in the community, in joint health and safety and violence prevention committees, or by standing together in our commitment to achieve fair wages and working conditions, we have stood in solidarity with each other and in our commitment to patients.

We can also take a lot of pride in our combined efforts to mobilize community action through our work in the BC Health Coalition, and campaigns to stop the cutbacks and privatization in health care.

Although we have had our differences at times, we have never lost sight of our collective goals. Our mutual dedication to provide the best care possible under challenging conditions and defend public medicare for the benefit of all has always taken priority.

Despite a long history of working together as sister unions, the BCNU leadership has launched a full-scale campaign to move members of our unions, starting with those in the Facilities and Community Health subsectors, into the BCNU.

The BCNU leadership is targeting LPNs right now, but they have also been clear that they've got a wide range of unionized health care workers in their sights including including care aides, unit clerks, ambulance paramedics and even doctors.

As you know, we work in a high pressure environment where health care workers must rely on each other to deliver quality care as a cohesive nursing unit.

These latest actions by BCNU directly undermine collaborative nursing practice, professionalism and team work. They create unnecessary disruption, divisiveness and uncertainty among colleagues.

We would urge you not to participate in this campaign to sign up members of other unions as BCNU associate members.

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In terms of the broader labour movement, there are significant consequences to BCNU's attempts to raid other unions' members.

Raiding – which occurs when one union tries to take members away from another union – undermines solidarity, weakens the labour movement and drains resources.

Instead of wasting money and time fighting each other, we could be using our resources in working together to protect public health care and improve seniors' care.

On February 17, HEU and BCGEU filed raiding charges under Article 4, Section 5 of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) constitution against BCNU through their national unions (CUPE and NUPGE).

On May 14, CLC president Ken Georgetti wrote Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions president Linda Silas stating:

“It became clear with the publication of advertisements in British Columbian newspapers on May 13, 2009, and from statements at the meeting by the BCNU representative [held May 13], that the BCNU was preparing to undertake actions that would be in violation of Article 4, Section 5 of the CLC Constitution.”

“I am, therefore, directing that the CFNU/BCNU cease all actions in which it is interfering in and seeking to disrupt the established bargaining relationships of other affiliates.”

Despite this direction from the CLC president, BCNU has continued and in fact escalated its actions. If the BCNU continues to fail to comply with the CLC's directive to cease these actions, BCNU representatives may be barred from participating in CLC, B.C. Federation of Labour and local labour council activities. The BCNU could eventually face expulsion from these labour bodies.

That's a price that the leadership of BCNU appears to be willing to pay in order to pursue their plans to boost BCNU's non-RN membership.

But in our view, such an outcome would be a loss for both the labour movement and for committed union activists in the BCNU.

If you believe we should be working in the spirit of unity, we encourage you to contact your leadership to voice your concerns.

In Solidarity,

HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION
BC GOVERNMENT AND SERVICE EMPLOYEES' UNION
UNITED FOOD AND COMMERCIAL WORKERS UNION LOCAL 1518
CUPE BRITISH COLUMBIA
INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS LOCAL 882

P.S. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Please pass it on to other BCNU members who may be interested.