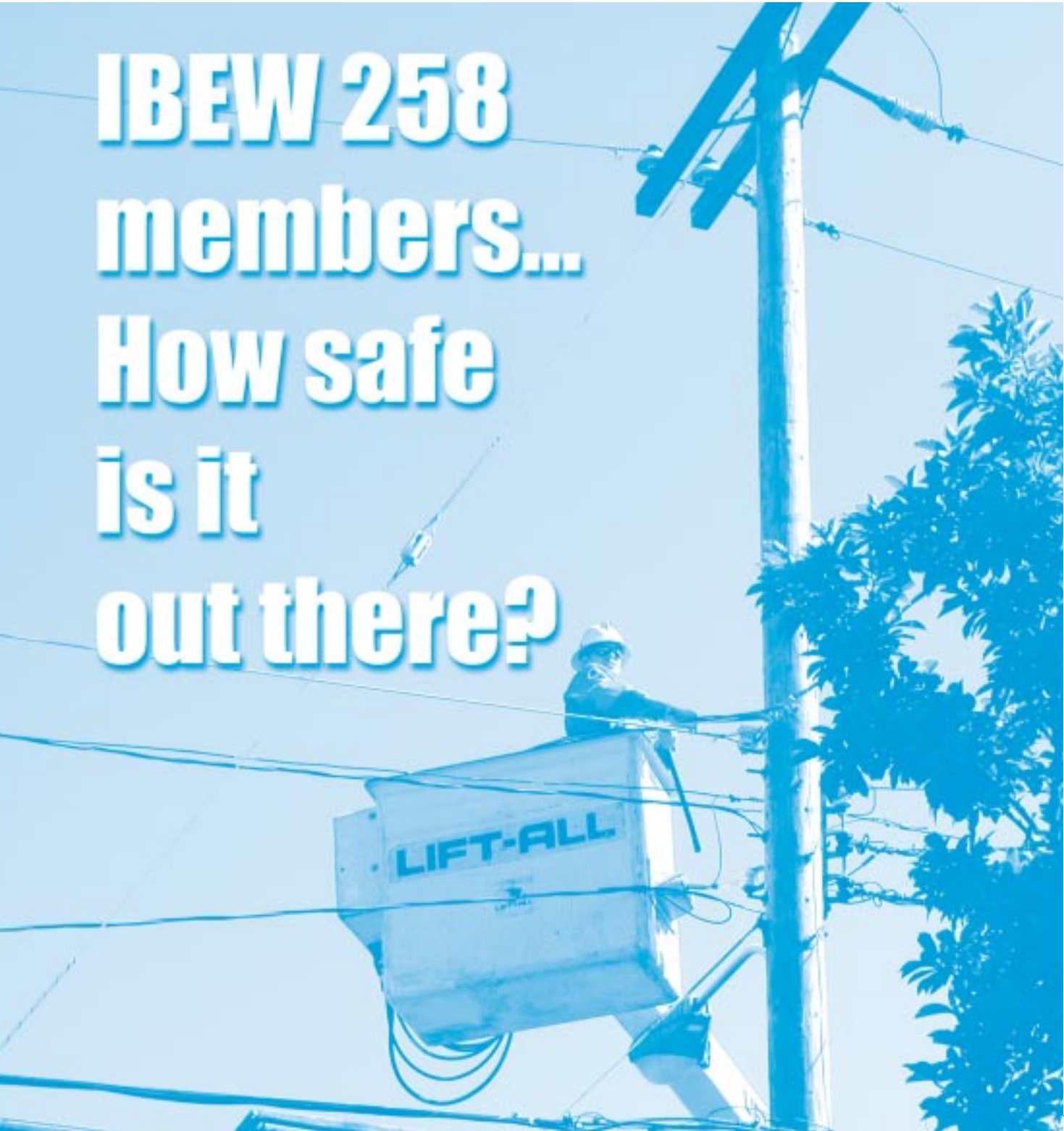


# HOTLINE



Local 258 I.B.E.W.  
FALL 2003

**IBEW 258  
members...  
How safe  
is it  
out there?**



# Business Manager, Doug McKay



We've lived with this Liberal government for two years and have watched them sell off the assets of the Province. The Liberals are selling our heritage.

The Legislature recently passed new laws deregulating critical safety standards for the construction of new schools, hospitals, industrial complexes and residences.

Under the new legislation, the BC Safety Standards Act and the BC Safety Authority Act, semi-skilled workers and helpers are approved to make, assemble

and install safety devices under the watch of a journey-level worker. For example, an individual with no prior experience or qualifications can now install a boiler in a school or hospital. In the past this work could only be done by a journey-level worker.

In addition, the new Industry Training Authority Act for apprenticeships is designed to facilitate task training over the "full scope of trade" training. These made-in BC certificates will not be recognized outside BC and fall short of the Canadian Red Seal certification, the official standard across North America.

The government rationalizes these changes by saying the industry will police itself regarding compliance with codes and standards. That self-policing will be monitored through a process called "results-based risk assessment". Unfortunately this means wait until an accident happens and figure out what went wrong after-the-fact.

Those who work at Hydro know too well that this Government is committed to de-regulation no matter the cost. Bills 10 and 39 have been passed into law, over-riding collective agree-

ment rights and leaving the Union with little option but to take BC Hydro on in the Courts and at the BC Labour Relations Board.

Some may wonder why this government is so committed to stripping away safety standards and writing legislation that guts collective agreements. Is it pay-back for campaign donations from big business and non-union contractors? Could it be an ideological drive to privatize and deregulate as many government functions as possible letting market forces alone dictate every aspect of our lives?

I suspect it is likely both, and in the wake of the devastation caused by the Liberals, we must become ever more vigilant as consumers and educate ourselves on the cost of the products we buy. "Buyer Beware" takes on a whole new meaning in this Liberal era. ☒

## HOTLINE

Published by Local 258 IBEW

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### DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO WANTS THE HOTLINE?

If you know of someone who is not receiving the "HOTLINE" newsletter and would like to be on the mailing list, please contact the union office at the address above.

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# The Fight Against Privatization of Hydro Continues

On July 28, 2003, BCTV reported on a BC Hydro internal document that they had received, outlining a project to set up a small business generation operation, with options to take management of seven generating stations out of the hands of BC Hydro. BC Citizens for Public Power held a press conference on July 29, 2003 to respond to the document, expressing our outrage at the government's apparent "about face" on the issue of privatization. Business Manager Doug McKay issued a press release, calling the government on their broken promise to keep BC Hydro intact, as we watch them dismantle our public electric utility piece by piece.

Following release of the document, Energy Minister Richard Neufeld claimed ignorance of the project, and clearly stated that control of the seven dams in question would not be taken away from BC Hydro. Since the issue hit the news, BC Hydro's Generation line of business has indicated that the



*Brother Doug McKay discusses implications of BC Hydro's privatization plans with Rudy Lawrence (far right) from the Council of Senior Citizens Organizations. Also in the photo are Business Rep Jim Greenwell, ABM and Dan Payne, ABM (far left).*

plan has been shelved, and no further action respecting change in management of dams is being contemplated. This is a small victory in the face of all of the "de-construction" of our public

electric utility, and we must continue to battle to protect the property of the rate payers from the "hurry up and sell it" attitude of our provincial government.



## BC Citizens for Public Power Update

by John Young, Executive Director BCCPP



*BC Citizens for Public Power Executive Director John Young.*

Even though summer is well under way, our work to save BC Hydro and protect our public power system continues!

Throughout the summer we are proceeding with legal steps in the Class Action Lawsuit that more than 52,000 British Columbians have supported, intervening with the BC Utilities Commission in hearings to set your electricity rates, filing a Canadian Charter of Rights lawsuit in response to the BC government's attempts to put itself above the law in privatizing BC Hydro and organizing community action, including public events featuring former BC premiers Dave Barrett and Bill Vander Zalm.

### Class Action Lawsuit

While the pace of the justice system is slower than most of us would like, we



*IBEW 258 President Michelle Laurie speaks at BCCPP press conference. She is seated at the table with OPEIU President Jerri New.*

are making progress on this very important front.

On June 27, we had our first meet-  
*(cont'd on next page)*

## BC Citizens for Public Power Update

(cont'd from previous page)

ing with a trial management judge in BC Supreme Court. We will meet again with the Judge and the defendants' legal team (BC Hydro and the BC Government) in late July. These meetings are the first steps in a process that will lead to a certification hearing this coming fall.

The certification hearing will likely last one week and, at the end of it, a Supreme Court Judge will decide whether or not to certify our class action lawsuit against the BC Liberal Government's efforts to privatize and break up BC Hydro.

We have a very strong case and an excellent legal team so we think our chances for winning the certification hearing are good, although we are breaking new ground. If we do win, we will go on to a full trial in Supreme Court in what will be the largest class action lawsuit in Canadian history, with all BC Hydro customers as plaintiffs.

### Charter Challenge

We recently joined with the Office and Professional Employees' International Union Local 378, one of two unions representing BC Hydro workers, in launching a Charter Challenge under Canada's Constitution to the BC Liberal Government's Bills 10 and 39.

These bills are unprecedented as they seek to put Gordon Campbell's government above the law and beyond the scrutiny of the BC Utilities Commission.

In fact, in Bill 39 the BC Liberal Government used the remarkable phrase "despite the common law" in its Bill 39 (pushed through the Legislative Assembly on the last day of the spring session). A simple translation of "despite the common law" is that the government wants to do whatever it pleases without any concern for the existing body of common law: this surely constitutes one of the most arrogant and extraordinary moments in Canadian political and legislative history.

Bill 10 is the Bill the government forced through the legislature in February in order to privatize one third of BC Hydro in its secret deal with



*"The creation of BC Transmission Corporation is the first step in privatizing what is arguably the biggest core asset of BC Hydro - our transmission lines. The IBEW is fundamentally opposed..." Doug McKay, IBEW Business Manager.*

Bermuda-based consulting firm Accenture (formerly Andersen Consulting – the one-time consulting arm of Enron auditors Arthur Andersen).

Bill 39 also created the BC Transmission Corporation under the Company Act – splitting one third of BC Hydro off from the formerly fully integrated utility. Once it is up and running, BC Transmission Corporation represents the first big step down a road that will lead to US/multinational control of our transmission system and US market rates for electricity.

The Charter Challenge should go to trial this fall or early this winter and, if we win, the government will be forced to suspend the implementation of Bills 10 and 39 and allow the BC Utilities Commission to hold full hearings into why the government is forcing these radical and misguided changes. As part of the Charter Challenge, we will gain public access to the secret documents the government and Accenture have kept hidden since they hatched their scheme to break up and privatize BC Hydro. These documents should make for very interesting reading!

### Other Important News

#### A Premier Event

On June 6 in Vancouver, we hosted a truly historic event featuring former BC Premiers Dave Barrett and Bill Vander Zalm. Joining them on stage were current political leaders MLA Joy MacPhail (NDP), Chris Delaney (BC Unity Party) and Adriane Carr (BC Green Party). All five leaders spoke passionately in opposition to the BC Liberal government's misguided efforts to break up and privatize BC Hydro. They all agreed that it is one of the most important issues facing British Columbians. The evening was truly inspirational and helped to shine a very bright light on this critical issue.

This coming fall, we will be holding additional Premier Events in locations outside the Lower Mainland.

#### BC Utilities Commission

BCCPP is an intervener in an Inquiry into a Heritage Contract for BC Hydro. The Inquiry held hearings at the end of July and the beginning of August in Vancouver. These hearings and the recommendation the Utilities Commission makes to the government will have a significant impact on electricity rates for years to come.

We have presented a very strong submission to the Inquiry (you can see it in the Research section of our web site – [www.citizensforpublicpower.ca](http://www.citizensforpublicpower.ca)) and will play a key role holding BC Hydro accountable to prevent major electricity rate increases that would subsidize private power companies.

#### Local Community Action

Throughout the coming fall and winter, we will be targeting a number of communities across the province for events and action to raise the profile of this critical issue. We will challenge MLAs and Ministers to debates. We will hold community forums and we will work with community groups to demand public meetings with MLAs to get them to explain why they think the privatization and break up BC Hydro is a good idea.

As always, thank you for your interest and your support. ☑

## Senior Assistant Business Manager, Jim Greenwell



I have recently been appointed as a Union Representative to a Steering Committee for a sector review of the Canadian electrical industry, funded by Human Resources and Development Canada (HRDC). Our focus will be specifically the Canadian electrical utility industry.

The Committee includes representatives from labour, education and industry from across the country. This broad-spectrum initiative will add value to the efforts of utility companies trying to acquire the necessary skilled workers, and ensure that Canadian utilities remain a safe and viable source

of employment for working people. All utilities are experiencing skill shortages and will value information that will assist them in their recruitment, training and retention activities.

The Committee will focus on four main themes over the one-year study.

- recruitment;
- retention;
- education, training and development; and
- non-traditional sources of workers.

An in-depth study of these themes will provide valuable information for the utility industry as the upcoming retirement of a significant portion of

the workforce is creating an ever-shrinking labour pool, that is moving towards a critical shortage.

For my part, I will point out the importance of high levels of standardized training and the continued development of apprenticeship programs, identifying the importance of the Red Seal program, which allows for the mobility and consistency of training across the country.

If you have any thoughts regarding these topics please contact me, your input would be very much appreciated. ☎

## United Way/HYDRECS campaign set to begin



Labour's involvement has always been a foundation of United Way and this past year saw continued outstanding support from Union members. Sisters and brothers supported a broad range of issues including children and families, assisting people living in poverty, assisting seniors and supporting people with disabilities.

Union members understand the need for United Way and despite a tough economy, Labour support of United

Way and the community has continued to grow. Over 80 local Union offices displayed their generosity, rallied together and exceeded all expectations, increasing their United Way contribution by \$30,000 in 2003! In 2004, the goal is to raise \$1 million new dollars for United Way to invest in programs and services in our communities.

For those IBEW 258 members who work at Hydro, watch for HYDRECS Campaign canvassers making presentations throughout the province from September to November 2003.

Brother John Mellis, the HYDRECS Fund's vice-chair, and Power Line Technician in Abbotsford states "I became involved with the HYDRECS Committee initially as a means to give back to the community, as my daughter Amanda, who has special needs, has received great support through programs at her school. But now, I can list a hundred good reasons for supporting charities in our communities, and I am certain all of you have your own personal reasons as well. IBEW members are known for their extreme generosity to many wonderful charities, so I encourage you to review the charities featured during HYDRECS' 2004 Campaign. Thank you for your support!"



HYDRECS Special Projects: Crisis Intervention & Suicide Prevention Centre of BC; Pacific Assistance Dogs Society (PADS); Dawson Creek & District Hospital Foundation, to purchase a Bone Densitometer; Greater Victoria Hospitals Foundation to purchase a Digital Mammography Unit; Canadian Red Cross Society, BC Southern Interior Region for Medical Equipment Loan Service.

Local United Ways provide a valuable link to services in the community. Please contact the United Way in your region.

**Campbell River and District United Way** (250) 287-3213

**Castlegar District United Way** (250) 365-7331

**Comox Valley United Way** (250) 338-1151

**United Way of Cranbrook** (250) 426-8833

**Cowichan United Way** (250) 748-1312

**United Way of The Fraser Valley** (604) 852-1234

**Boundary Communities United Way** (250) 442-8431

**United Way of Kamloops & Region** (250) 372-9933

**United Way of the Central & South Okanagan/Similkameen** (250) 860-2356

**Kimberley and District United Way** (250) 427-3250

**United Way of the Lower Mainland** (604) 294-8929

**United Way of Nanaimo and District** (250) 729-7400

**Nelson and District United Way** (250) 352-1978

**Powell River and District United Way** (604) 485-2791

**Prince George United Way** (250) 561-1040

**United Way of Trail** (250) 364-0999

**United Way of North Okanagan Columbia Shuswap** (250) 549-1346

**United Way of Greater Victoria** (250) 385-6708

# We Got Mail!



Dear IBEW,  
Thank you so much for your thoughtfulness in sending a fruit platter. Also thank you to Leon Arishenkoff for his phone call and best wishes.  
Bill Ruks



Dear Brothers and Sisters, IBEW Local Union 258,  
Thank you for attending my retirement lunch on May 31, 2003.

Also, thank you for all the gifts you have given to me, such as the beautiful retirement plaque and pin also the key holder, IBEW tee shirt. Last but not the least is the 25 year IBEW pin. I will treasure them.

I want you to know that I am totally honoured. Even though I am not noted for attending monthly meeting, my heart is with the union and all it stands for.  
Thank you brothers and sisters,  
Charles Csuka



Dear IBEW,  
Just a note to thank you very much for your generous donation to the BC Hydro – IBEW Open Golf Tournament held at Moberly Lake Golf & Country Club. A great time was had by all.  
From all the participants we thank you,  
Gerald Pope



Dear 258 members, Officers and Doug McKay,  
Your thoughtfulness means so very much and thank you very, very much for those terrific presents.  
Sincerely yours  
Armin Decaron



Dear Jim,  
I would like to thank the IBEW Local 258 for their assistance during our time of need. My family and I are grateful for all your help. We delivered a healthy baby girl of 9 pounds 2 ounces on March 5th.  
Thanks again!  
Yours sincerely  
Brother Paul Kramer

Dear Doug McKay,

Thank you for the card and sharing our sorrow.

Chuck McWhirter passed away July 1, 2003. He loved his 47 years working as a Lineman. The family wishes to thank the staff at IBEW 258 who showed him so much respect. Also the contractors whom Chuck worked for and all his co-workers in the industry.

We will all miss him.

In loving memory

Susan McWhirter

Children: Karen & Steve, spouses and grandchildren



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On behalf of the members, officers and staff of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 2278, the Teaching Assistants Union at the University of British Columbia, we would like to thank you for your kind and generous donation to our strike fund. We were striking for fairness and justice against a contemptuous and arrogant employer: an employer who simultaneously offered us a 10% pay increase and a 16% pay cut due to tuition increases which are a condition of employment; an employer who also proposed eliminating all existing health care coverage; an employer that would not grant maternity benefits; an employer that would not agree to our members receiving more than 12 hours of paid sick leave.

Your contribution to our defense fund provided us with the financial capability to fight a hostile employer but your contribution also taught us an important lesson. Financial solidarity was crucial in our struggle but political solidarity was critical in our collective understanding that we were not alone in that struggle. Messages of support from all over North America were overwhelming in a rather simple lesson: we have an obligation and need to support one another.

We will be resolute in our support of others fighting for the most basic of rights: justice and respect.

In solidarity

Adrienne Smith

president

CUPE Local 2278

**10th Annual  
IBEW - BC Hydro  
Golf Tournament**

**Fund Raiser for the  
Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada**

**Golden Eagle Golf Club  
21770 Ladner Road  
Pitt Meadows, BC  
September 15, 2003**

**1 pm  
North Course  
Shotgun Start**

**ENTRY FEE: \$67  
STEAK DINNER  
PRIZES FOR ALL**

**Team Play Competition  
Long Drive  
Hole-n-One  
K.P.**



**Early birds  
get the Eagle!!  
Register by August 31 and  
you will be entered in a draw for  
golf for four at Golden Eagle!**

**For more information  
please contact...  
Dan Payne: 604-816-8999  
or 604-520-3305  
Gord Selcer: 604-469-8809**

**Please call Dan or Gord  
if you would like to reserve  
a golf cart.**

**Make cheque payable to"  
IBEW Golf Tournament  
OCS: IBEW Local 258 or  
Mail: IBEW Local 258  
7535 - 6th Street  
Burnaby, BC V3N 3M2**

# UNIT REPORTS

## Unit 5

by Mark Davison, Unit Chair

Time for another article for the Hotline and another plea for people to get more involved. For those members who have moved and have not up-dated their addresses at the hall, please do so. An incorrect address means you cannot receive voting information, important mail outs, or get timely get well greetings if you are sick or injured.

We are under attack from many sources: government, apathy, bitterness and just plain bad attitudes. To improve our future we need to act like a brotherhood and care about our brothers and sisters. The rumour mill always has 20/20 vision on what we have done wrong, but the only way to fix things is to be forward-thinking about what to do next. It will take an effort from all the sectors of this union to keep Local 258 vital and strong.



Recently, I learned about a topic that should be of interest to many members, husbands of members or male family or friends. I had a talk with brother George Clark who, after attending a Lifestyles program on colon cancer, recognized some symptoms, got checked and found out he had prostate cancer. He could not say enough positive things about the course he attended and he credits it with saving his life. I asked the course instructor, Michelle Steenssens to prepare a short article on the subject. ☘

### Are you at risk?

Cancer is a disease in which abnormal cells in some organ or tissue go out control, growing and increasing in number.

At the Men's Health Issues Workshop, provided as part of the Health Education program delivered by Safety and Health Promotion Services (Lifestyle), the focus was on two cancers in particular, prostate cancer and colon cancer.

Although prostate cancer is the most common cancer among Canadian men and the second most fatal after lung cancer, it remains one of the most ignored diseases in Canada. About 12,000 men will be diagnosed this year and about 4,000 will die from this disease. But this does not have to be the case — early detection can help, and new therapies can effectively treat and often cure the disease.

It is important to become aware! If you are over the age of 45, it is highly recommended you have a regular physical exam as prostate cancer usually develops without any obvious symptoms and can be difficult to identify.

Every year over 16,000 Canadians develop cancer of the colon and rectum or, as it is commonly called, colorectal cancer. Unlike most other common cancers which tend to occur more often in either men or women, colorectal cancer tends to occur with approximately equal frequency in both sexes.

For those who have access to the BC Hydro Lifestyle Programs, these workshops are available to you and can be presented in about one hour. For other members, consult your family physician about your risk factors. There are a variety of treatments and a wealth of information out there. Don't be caught unaware!

## Unit 6

by Robert Abernethy, Unit Chair



There are three announcements for this report:

### 1. MEETING

**LOCATION CHANGE:** from the Old Age Pensioners Hall in Abbotsford, to the Royal Canadian Legion at 12101-224 St in Maple Ridge, at 7:00pm September 10th.

2. **ONE EXTRA MEETING** at Chilliwack on December 17th at the Best Western Rainbow Country Inn — 43971 Industrial Way.

3. A reminder that we are having the IBEW 258 Social on Sunday September 21st. Come out and have a hamburger or two and tell some tall tales to friends you haven't seen in awhile. We're praying for a sunny fall day as we'll be there rain or shine. See the notice on page 17 in this issue for details and directions. ☘



# 258 Members to benefit from Legal Representation



*In May, 2003, Rebecca Murdock joined Local 258 as staff lawyer on a half-time contract basis. After obtaining her law degree from Osgoode Hall Law School in 1993 (MA 1990; BA 1988), Rebecca initially practiced as an associate with a Toronto Law Firm specializing in trade union representation. Rebecca came west in 1997 due to her spouse's employment at UBC, and worked as staff counsel to the BC Labour Relations Board and later as in-house counsel to a large private sector trade union. Rebecca lives in East Vancouver with her spouse Peter, daughter Amber and border collie Cairo.*

Local 258 has filed a Charter challenge at the BC Labour Relations Board disputing the transfer of BC Hydro employees to BC Transmission Corporation on August 1st.

In cases where a business is sold or transferred, the Board normally requires the old employer to give affected employees the option of severance, or bumping rights under their

collective agreement. Alternately, employees can consent to a transfer to the new employer taking their seniority with them.

The situation at BCTC is unique because the legislation effecting the transfer expressly denies employees the option of severance or bumping rights. The Board must follow that legislation except where a Charter violation is established.

Local 258 says BCTC employees have had their "freedom of association" and "right to life, liberty and security of the person" violated by the Transmission Corporation Act (Bill 39), and the employee transfer provisions ought to be struck down. Employees ought to be given the opportunity to choose from the range of options provided for in their collective agreement. This is the first case of its kind heard by the BC Labour Relations Board.

Local 258 is also in the process of applying to be an Intervenor in an action filed by the OPEIU in the BC Supreme Court. That action attacks Bills 10, 29 and 39 - legislation affecting various aspects of BC Hydro, particularly the creation of Accenture. Although Bill 39 is only a small aspect of the court case, Local 258 supports OPEIU's general request for an order compelling the government to engage in public hearings before the operations of BC Hydro are divided. Again, this is test case litigation in the Province.

Local 258 has also provided financial support to the BC Citizens for Public Power and their class action against the Province and BC Hydro. That law suit was filed in September 2002 but has not yet been heard. To read the Statement of Claim, visit [www.citizensforpublicpower.ca](http://www.citizensforpublicpower.ca).

## Canada cited for repressing unions

### CLC/CALM

Anti-union repression is on the rise around the world and Canada is no exception. So says a report released by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which represents over 158 million workers in 150 countries including Canada.

According to the report, in 2002, 30,000 trade union activists around the world were fired for exercising basic worker rights. Some 20,000 were harassed, more than 2,500 were detained, 89 were imprisoned and 213 were murdered-206 in Latin America alone.

The report also notes how Canadian provinces are increasingly passing legislation that deprives large numbers of working people of their rights.

"This isn't the first time Canada has been embarrassed by the actions of rogue provincial governments. It should come as no coincidence that the provincial governments most

cited for the growing violation of worker rights are those controlled by parties that champion the current distorted free-market model of globalization," says Ken Georgetti, CLC president.

In recent years, provinces controlled by right-wing governments have passed laws that deliberately deny labour rights to agricultural workers, strip workers of the right to strike, and guarantee workers a right to information about how to leave a union, but not information about how to join a union. At the same time, these governments have moved to increase the number of hours employers can force people to work, watered down health and safety rules, and lowered the employment age for children.



# Electrical Industry Training Institute



by Phil Davis, EITI Training Manager

In reflecting on the 11 months that I have been here at EITI, two main trends seem to stand out. On the one hand, many of the larger issues in the trades training environment remain the same. On the other hand, when we shift our focus to the more immediate surroundings, everything is quite different.

Where things remain the same is that there is still a great deal of uncertainty in the whole world of trades training. The government has finally assembled its new board for the Industry Training Authority. We hope that over the next year we will have clearer direction as to the role of this new authority, and how it will impact our training. We also hope that we will in some way be able to impact the new Training Authority.

Another thing that remains the same is that our relationship as a trades training provider to BC Hydro continues to evolve. We have received new opportunities to provide training for IBEW members working BCH, while in other areas our training has been reduced. I would anticipate this relationship to be in active evolution over the next years, as BC

Hydro continues to make changes.

On the other hand, many things are different. I will outline for you a few of the new initiatives that we will be beginning or continuing over the next year.

In May we completed our first ever



*Congratulations to the first Power Line Technician Pre-Apprenticeship Program graduates*

Power Line Technician Pre-Apprenticeship Program, run in cooperation with Kwantlen University College. We had 15 graduates from the program with 10 hired for the BCH summer hire program. Reports on their work have been very favourable. We also have indications that three of our graduates have been hired by various Line Contracting companies.

During June of this year we made contact with the IBEW training center in the United States. They were impressed with the level of training that we do at our school, and indicated that they would like to visit our facility in the fall of this year to see if there are programs that we could help them develop.

We are beginning to make inroads with our training to some of the public institutions around the province. We have a pilot project to run our Industrial Safety Program at the Justice Institute in the fall. We are also in the process of getting one of our High Voltage courses in the calendar of the College of New Caledonia in Prince George.

Another area of potential new training opportunities is in Electrical Safety. We have initiated discussions with WCB on working with them to develop a course to help those who are digging recognize possible electrical hazards. This is obviously an area where we can offer a history of solid safety programs to the general public.

We are making progress in our discussions with industry and the other IBEW Locals in BC to begin training for the inside electrical industry. The largest numbers of apprentices in the province are in the electrical trade, and if we can secure this type of training, it would greatly increase our volume, and thus our stability. Included in this would be a revision of our current electrical programs to make them suitable for industrial settings; this will allow us to offer more relevant training for sites such as saw mills and pulp mills around the province.

This leaves us with a great deal of work to get done and, as with everyone, a minimum of time in which to do it. We look forward to your continued input and support over the next year. ☑

## Congratulations to the North Stars!



*IBEW Local 258 was happy to sponsor Melissa Hirschfeld, daughter of member Bob Hirschfeld, in her AAA girls hockey squad run to the provincial championships in the spring. Melissa is seen in this photo standing at the left end of the back row.*

# Update on IBEW 258 Unit Structure

by Michelle Laurie  
President, Local 258

In response to the article about our Unit structure in the last edition of the Hotline, four people provided responses. Two were e-mails briefly stating that they supported changing the structure to create more units and ensure the members have an effective voice. One was a telephone call from a member who felt that change would be negative, and that it would further remove the membership from the officers of the Local. The fourth was a detailed letter outlining the history of the unit structure and its formation, with the perspective that this is not a good time to change, given the current difficulties already facing the labour movement in general.

Although I had hoped for more response from the members, the feedback did point out some clarification that is needed. First of all, the structure that we have established can continue, if we understand and accept the limita-

tions. Each of us is attached to one of the six units named in our bylaws. While each unit is named as a city, the boundaries are defined regionally. Still,

each unit can

only have one

union

meeting

per month to deal

with regular union

business, so that

“official meeting”

must be designated.

At present, we are

accepting that

the charter

city meet-

ings are

the “offi-

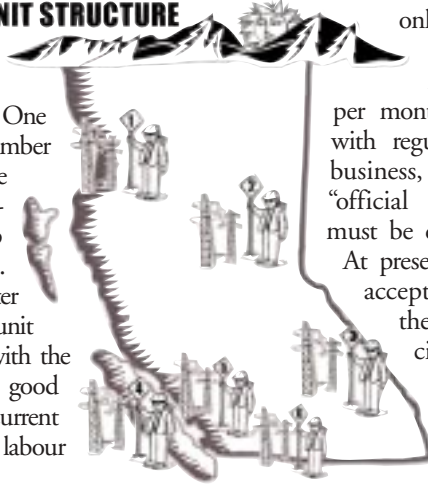
cial

meet-

ings” for each unit.

All other meetings are considered “information sessions”, and no official business can occur at them. When the bylaw amendment vote was held in June, we adhered to our bylaws, and

## IBEW 258 UNIT STRUCTURE



## IBEW members support fundraising



*This summer IBEW 258 member Frank Lenk (right) and his crew participated in the Silly Boat Race, a fundraiser for the Child Development Centre in Nanaimo. Looks like they had a great time while supporting this worthwhile cause.*



# How safe is it out there?

Many members of our union go to work every day hoping to get a fair wage for a fair day's pay, and it isn't until one of our union brothers or sisters suffers a tragic workplace accident that we are reminded of the many safety hazards we are exposed to on a daily basis.

From working on our roads and highways as a flag person to working in the sky on high voltage power lines, safety is our number one priority. There is no question of the importance of safety procedures in our every day working lives. But despite all our best intentions and using all safety precautions, workplace accidents do occur, sometimes with tragic consequences.

According to statistics from the Workers Compensation Board, in British Columbia alone, approximately 90 workers suffer electrical injuries every year. These injuries range from shock to severe burns. On average, three BC workers a year die from accidents involving electrical contact. Injuries and fatalities occur from accidents involving low voltages (750 V and below) as well as high voltages, usually from contact with high-voltage power lines.

If you have a personal story about safety, or if there is a safety issue you would like to see more information about in the Hotline, please contact the editor at Hotline, IBEW 258, 7535 Sixth Street, Burnaby, BC, V3N 3M2.

## From your Business Manager, Doug McKay

We started this year with several serious accidents, including the fatal injury to Brother Norm Cockerill in an electrical contact incident in the GM Shrum switchyard; an electrical contact incident at Wahleach Generating Station; flash burns to a Power Line Technician; and a motor vehicle accident to a traffic control person. It's time to step back and take

a good look at our work methods. We must be always be vigilant regarding safety, and particularly so when the government is turning its back on safety concerns.

We send our condolences to the Cockerill family and wish our other injured members a swift recovery. Live safe, live well, work Union.

## A personal survival story

by Bob Abernethy, Unit 6 Business Rep

As many of you already know, I had an electrical contact accident on June 18th of this year at the Wahleach power station. At this time I would personally and publicly like to thank Mauno Vahasalo and Andy Bucknell for taking me out of the situation as quickly as they did, putting themselves at risk in so doing. Many thanks to Leo Parberry, our first aid attendant, who was right on me and kept my act together until the ambulance arrived. I'm also so very grateful to all those other people who did what needed doing at Wahleach. Thank you to those who sent me get well cards, baskets of goodies, and even a good bottle of vodka. I like to also thank those people who visited me in the hospital and at my home and also for the many phone calls. When you're lying in a hospital bed or at home feeling like yesterdays newspaper, kind of crumpled and bent, blowing around aimlessly, it's more than nice to get a call from someone or a visit saying, "I remember you, how are you doing?"

*(cont'd on next page)*



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## A personal survival story

*(cont'd from previous page)*

I got half lucky in that I only made contact with a single phase to ground on a delta type configuration in the range of around 7000 volts. I don't remember a thing except that split second of helplessness before you head down the road to eternity. This is the fourth time in my life I've knocked on death's door or the grim reaper took a swing at me and missed. I grew up around logging, sawmills and cattle and all the associated equipment that goes with it. If there was ever an unpredictable situation going to happen, these three industries can provide the opportunity. At a very young age I learned to respect machinery and how to handle it and to watch what was happening around me, on the bigger picture, because if I didn't - I saw the end results first hand more than once and even with that I've had more near misses than I care to remember. My Dad said when you die you're assigned to guard over a living descendent and watch for them, to keep them out of harm's way. I believe that to be true for I've been moved out of harm's way in the last second of certain death or that voice (Irish, as hard as nails, impatient, bad tempered) comes to me, telling me when to hold it, when to fold it, and when to run!

My first experience at knowing I had a guardian looking after me was when I was nine years old and a three foot diameter fir tree, one hundred fifty feet long, chased me down the mountain. I could not get away from the thing. It had eyes and followed me. In the last second before I was to be run over, something grabbed me by the collar (the voice said "get down here") and threw me in a hole in the brush and rocks as that tree went right over me burying me in bark and branches! I was a bit beat up but OK.

Ten years later, during a falling contract in the Prince George area during a winter with lots of snow, I felled a

tree. It was going down in an eleven o'clock position and I was moving in a two o'clock direction (getting paid by the tree, so we're moving, not waiting around to watch it completely fall). As the tree finished falling, it struck with the force of ten Babe Ruths a small, dead sapling buried under the snow. The small tree came out of the snow and made a home run out of me. As I'm flying through the air, the voice came to me saying, "You'll be OK, I took some of the blow for you." That's the last thing I remember. I woke up in the snow laying face up. I opened my eyes after awhile, saw only white, so it took some time to realize that this wasn't heaven - it was just snow covering my face. There wasn't a mark in the snow for forty feet from where I got hit to where I landed. Being young and strong, I just went to town, got my chest taped up, and a couple of days later I was back on the contract. It only hurt when I breathed for couple of weeks.

Twenty years passed. I was commercial fishing with a friend, off the north end of Vancouver Island (what a way to spend a holiday). We had been fishing most of the day since dawn. It was rough and stormy and getting rougher. We pulled up the gear in the afternoon and started heading for shelter. Something was not right, the ship was handling sluggishly and I went down to the engine room where I found water six inches deep. I screamed up to my friend to get a fix on our position and let the other boats know we may be in trouble. While he was on the radio, I was desperately looking for the leak. Then the voice told me to get out of there, we were going down. Before I could get to the other end of the engine room, I was up to my waist in water. When I made it to the top of the stairs I could see a wall of green water coming over the back end of the ship. I was running for the wheel house, the last exit out. The wave hit the back of the cabin and blew in the door. Tons of water went down the stairs to the engine room. If I had been a few seconds slower, that wave would have

knocked me down the stairs with it to certain death. So I half swam, half scrambled out the door of the wheel house to the bow of the ship. The next wave blew all the glass out of the wheel house. My friend and I now waited for our fate. Will some one find us in time and rescue us, or do we get the watery grave? The rescue itself is another story.

With all of the incidents and near misses I've survived, this accident is a totally different kind of hurt. It badgers the mind. Physically I have the same strength, but head space wise I'm not so sure. Out of curiosity, I chaired the Unit Meeting in July just to see how it would go. I felt like there were two people inside of me, one had a grip on the situation, the other one wanted out of there. As I'm sitting there conducting the meeting, my heart is going two hundred miles an hour, my palms are sweating and I'm feeling somewhat light headed. I found out afterwards that I had an attack of post traumatic stress syndrome. I thought that stuff was all bull shit. At one time I could handle six or eight problems on the go. At the time of this writing, if I got more than couple things on the go I start getting frustrated. Even writing this is not easy.

This kind of reminds me when I was a kid and got bucked off the horse. Dad put me right back on, with much protest from me. It was the best thing that he did for me. If he hadn't forced me back on, I probably wouldn't have ridden a horse again (I hurt badly from that fall). I'm thinking maybe I should have done that here and gone back to work a couple of weeks after I got hurt, sweated out the bullets and got back in the saddle.

So to every one of you out there, ASSUME NOTHING. If there's a slight change in plans, STOP and RETHINK IT.

It's been a privilege to have been here today to write this article.

Be careful out there. It's dangerous.



# The Role of Unions in BC Politics: What It Has Been and What It Should Be

by Kendra Holt

Throughout British Columbia's history, the labour movement has been constantly evolving to meet the challenges of our ever-changing economy and society. Similarly, union involvement in BC politics has also varied greatly throughout the 20th century, coinciding closely with the ups and downs of the labour movement in BC and throughout Canada. From the early industrial and craft union movements at the start of the century to the Solidarity Strike of 1983, labour organizations have left their mark on BC's political landscape. The outcome of the 2001 provincial election has changed the face of politics in BC and unions must adapt to new roles in order to maintain their presence in BC politics.

## The Role of Unions in BC Politics: What It Has Been

In the years leading up to World War I, several independent labour parties, which were closely associated with craft unions, entered the political arena. While the labour parties were not a serious threat to established parties in provincial politics, they were successful in gaining some ground in civic politics. The first glimpse of the labour movement's potential to influence BC politics occurred during the Coal Miners Strikes on Vancouver Island when in 1898 the mining community of Nanaimo elected Ralph Smith as their MLA based on his liberal/labour platform. Between 1877 and 1912, coal mine workers on Vancouver Island as well as other communities throughout BC, organized strikes to protest dangerous working conditions; however, with the onset of the depression in 1913 and the coming war the coal miners were unsuccessful in their initial bargaining attempts.

During the inter-war years, workers generally experienced low wages and unsteady work. While strike action occurred throughout this period, the advancement of the labour movement was limited by poor employment opportunities. The onset of World War II renewed the Canadian economy and provided increased employment opportunities. Union membership grew rapidly during the war years with workers seeking membership in well-established international unions. When in 1946 the federal government implemented mandatory union dues for all workers whom benefited from a union-negotiated contract, unions were provided with a level of financial security they had not previously experienced. The increased finances of unions allowed them to hire permanent staff and develop stronger collective bargaining skills.

While it would take another 11 years before the repercussions were felt, the direction of BC politics changed drastically in 1961 when the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CFC) and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) combined to create a new political party with a strong social agenda, the New Democratic Party

(NDP). In September of 1972 the NDP was elected into office. The NDP government was receptive to the labour movement and several improvements to collective bargaining rights were made. However, the conservative economic climate of the late 1970's and 1980's brought a drastic change to the face of BC politics and the role of unions. In December of 1975, Bill Bennett and his Social Credit party won the BC provincial election. In the years that followed, the role of unions in the political arena once again shifted to that of a vocal adversary of right-wing policy decisions and legislative maneuvers.

In 1982, BC Premier Bill Bennett implemented economic cuts to education funding and the establishment of a wage control program for public sector salaries. In response to these actions, the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) joined forces with students, local communities, school trustees and parent groups to vocalize opposition to the cutbacks. The dispute escalated the following year when the provincial government introduced a legislative package unprecedented in BC political history.

*Congratulations to the 2003 winner of the Tom Firkin Scholarship Essay, Kendra Holt. Kendra is the daughter of long time IBEW 258 member Alan Holt, and graduated from the University of Victoria with a Bachelor of Science degree. We are happy to publish her winning essay, "The Role of Unions on BC Politics: What It Has Been and What It Should Be" in this issue of Hotline. Kendra is beginning graduate studies towards obtaining a Masters Degree in Resource and Environmental Management from Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, BC.*

*Photo of Kendra Holt*



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The package included 26 bills aimed at downsizing the government and called for the layoff of 1600 public service workers. Of particular concern to all public service workers, including teachers, was Bill 3, which allowed employers to layoff employees without a cause. Teaching professionals were especially vulnerable because there were no provisions for seniority or severance in their agreements.

Unions and community groups throughout BC were quick to respond to the new legislation. Within a few weeks the British Columbia Federation of Labour (BCFL) called a meeting of all BC unions to organize a united labour front to oppose the legislative package. Community groups representing human rights, women's rights, anti-poverty, tenant's rights, students, seniors, and the environment worked alongside unions in a Solidarity Coalition. Over the next four months approximately 100,000 workers were involved in strike actions across BC, including members of the BC Government Employees' Union (BCGEU) and the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF). A protest at the Social Credit Party convention in Vancouver attracted 60,000 people. With international attention being drawn on BC labour rights violations and threats of a general strike on the horizon, Premier Bill Bennett sat down with leaders of Operation Solidarity in November of 1983 to resolve the job action. The end result was the Kelowna Accord, in which the BCGEU got a collective agreement. The BCTF continued to campaign for full collective bargaining rights and in 1987 was successful.

While the outcome of the Solidarity Strike movement was controversial in that not all of the demands of the Solidarity Coalition were addressed in the Kelowna Accord and the legislation was not reversed, the momentum gained for union solidarity during this period demonstrated the strength labour organizations within BC. Following the Solidarity Strike, the unions of BC used their public notoriety and resources to influence BC electoral politics. They were successful,

and in 1991 the NDP was once again elected into office. While unions continued to fight for labour standards throughout the 1990's, the BC government did not hinder collective bargaining processes during this time.

### **The Changing Direction of BC Politics**

In 2001, BC experienced a major political overhaul. The NDP government, which had been fraught with public criticism of a fiscal mismanagement, lost badly at the election polls. For the first time in BC's history, the Liberal Party, led by Gordon Campbell, was elected into office with a sweeping majority. Downsizing the public workforce and privatization of BC's crown corporations were placed firmly on the public agenda. With a goal to cut provincial spending by 25% in three years, 12,000 public sector jobs have been put on the line. To date, there have been over 3,300 positions made redundant by the Liberal government's Workforce Adjustment Program.

Since Campbell's government took power, unions have been excluded from decision-making processes affecting their members, while mass numbers of unionized public service workers have been laid-off. Existing health care employee contracts, which had been bargained with the NDP government, were made void and Bill 18 was passed through legislation, making teaching an essential service. Moves to privatize crown corporations have included the sale of all government run liquor stores, the privatization of large portions of BC Hydro, and the transfer of the BC Ferry Service to a private corporation. Unions have been vocal in their opposition to these actions, arguing that transfer to the private sector will threaten the economic, social, and environmental functions of crown corporations. Employment opportunities within BC will be reduced due to outsourcing of work to commercial firms located outside BC, and workers wages, benefits, and safety will be at risk in the more commercial, profit-orientated market.

Under these conditions, the power of public sector unions is at risk of being diminished while labour conditions deteriorate.

### **The Role of Unions in BC Politics: What it should be in our current political climate**

Despite the current challenges experienced by unions in BC politics today, unions still have an important role to play in setting the social agenda of the province. Unions must continue to vocally challenge political agendas and decisions that adversely affect BC's workforce. By making the public aware of infringements on workers' rights, and demanding bilateral decision making processes and public inquiries into closed-door deals, the labour movement has remained a prominent entity in BC's current political climate. In the two years since Gordon Campbell was elected into office his approval rating has dropped from 70% to 43%.

Unions must continue to work with affiliates in collective bargaining in order to ensure fair settlements at the bargaining table, as well as, continue to campaign for workplace health and safety protections. Similarly, unions must continue to defend public services and crown corporations from massive program and budget cuts, deregulation, privatization, and the contracting out of work. Unions have the potential to use their influence to increase economic pressure on the BC government. By implementing boycotts and job action, unions can slow down and reverse policy decisions.

Unions also have an active role to play in putting an end the current softwood lumber dispute in BC. Labour groups have combined forces with environmental organizations to wage a lawsuit against the BC Liberal government over its approval of increased raw log exports, which is in violation of the forest practices code. Coastal communities have been hit hard by mill closures in the past two years and the increased export of raw logs represents the export of jobs from BC.

BC labour groups can also play an

important role in BC politics by bringing BC labour issues to the international community. Recently, BC unions representing nurses, hospital workers, health care professionals, teachers, college educators, government employees, and various social service workers waged a complaint to the International Labour Organization (ILO), a United Nations body which acts to uphold labour standards. Upon investigation, the ILO found the BC government's implementation of six legislative bills to be in violation of the United Nations Freedom of Association Act. It concluded that the government had violated labour rights by refusing to negotiate contracts with their employees' unions and unjustly using the legislature to enforce their will. In addition, the ILO recommended a repeal of Bill 18, the controversial bill that made teaching an essential service. This is not the first time the ILO has become involved in BC politics. In the 1980's the ILO found the Social Credit government to be in violation of international labour standards by denying collective bargaining rights to teachers and implementing wage control programs. Subsequently, the Social credit government ended wage controls and, in 1987, granted teachers bargaining rights.

### Conclusions

Throughout BC's history, unions have had a dynamic relationship with politics. From the Coal Miners' Strike at the turn of the century to current legal battles over Forest Practice Code violations and unjust legislation, unions have demonstrated their ability to weather change and influence politics. In our present political climate of an unstable economy, unemployment, and decreased job security, unions must continue to welcome change while ensuring that hard won concessions are not lost. Unions have a vital role to play in BC politics as advocates for workers' rights during the current economic restructuring. In addition to turning the attention of BC's voting public towards labour issues, unions

can also continue to influence politics by drawing an international audience.

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Western Canada Wilderness Committee; Environmental and labour groups sue government for approving massive exports of raw logs

## Ten reasons you know you live in Gordon Campbell's heartland

### CUPE BC/CALM

1. The local elementary school is closing and being converted to a retail liquor outlet.
2. When you send your kids to school on Monday mornings, you pack their lunch and a suitcase. The nearest school is so far away that they can only come home on weekends.
3. You are an avid collector of Bermudian stamps, since your monthly electric statement comes from there.
4. You are taking your vacation at home this year because you can't get out. The government closed the ferry and the railway, and the highway is falling apart.
5. Now that the ferry doesn't run anymore the kids are learning how to swim.
6. Martinis have become the drink of choice at the local pub, since they come with a "get out of jail free" card.
7. Your town council is considering asking Bangladesh for foreign aid.
8. Hospital emergency wards have begun to sell popcorn because their line-ups are longer than line-ups at Cineplex.
9. No one has seen the local MLA for so long that they can't remember who it is - and the MLA likes it that way.
10. A Hollywood location scout is visiting your community. He's looking for a ghost town.



Mark this on your calendar!

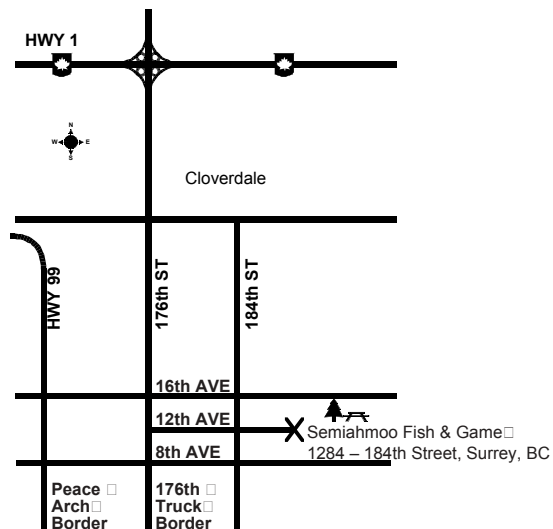
# IBEW Local 258 Family Social

Hosted by Units 5 & 6

Sunday, September 21, 2003, 11 am - 5 pm  
at Semiahmoo Fish & Game Club,  
1284 - 184th St., Surrey, BC

Everyone is welcome to join the festivities!

- Free Food & Beverages:  
Hamburgers, Hot Dogs,  
Snacks & Pop
- Bucket Rides
- Tug of War
- Sack Races
- Face Painting
- Nature Walk



Look for complete details and directions posted on your IBEW bulletin board, or check the IBEW website:



[www.IBEWloc258.com](http://www.IBEWloc258.com)



# Congratulations



*Congratulations to Charlie Csuka on his retirement. He is shown above being awarded a long term service plaque from Assistant Business Manager Dan Payne (right).*



*Fifty years service certificate was awarded to Donald Grady by Unit 3 Chair Leon Arishenkoff.*



*Welcome to the fifty years as a union member club Brother Victor Stutsky.*



*Alex Mazur receives his fifty year union membership certificate.*



*Business Manager Doug McKay congratulates Skip Marsh on receipt of his retirement plaque.*



*Unit 3 Chair Leon Arishenkoff congratulates Charles Claydon on receipt of his fifty year service certificate.*

# IBEW members!



*Congratulations to Garth Jorde on his receipt of his long term service pin from Unit 3 Chair Leon Arishenkoff.*



*A 35 year service pin was awarded to Brother Ross (Stretch) Downey by Unit 5 Chair, Mark Davison.*



*It's a family affair! IBEW 258 member Al Cooley (left) just retired from Hydro and he is shown here with his retired father, Percy Cooley, on receipt of his fifty-five year service certificate.*

## From the archives



Do you recognize the two IBEW members in the above photo? They are shown in this photo receiving their Journeyman Certificates from J.S. Grutschnig, former supervisor at Whatshan Generating Station. Here's a hint to help you out: this photo originally appeared in the December 1968 issue of Hotline. Send your answers to "Hotline - From the Archives" and the winning answer will receive an IBEW t-shirt. The winner will be chosen on October 6 and announced in the next issue of Hotline. In case of a tie there will be a draw.



# IBEW International President Edwin D. Hill on Largest Power Failure in U.S. History

Last week's power failure for 50 million Americans may well have stemmed from an overworked transmission system, a severe reduction of the work force and deferred equipment maintenance — all developments that followed deregulation.

Deregulation promised benefits from competitive markets, but it also brought uncertainty, which froze investment in new construction. In the 10 years since utility deregulation was first introduced, power companies have built or updated very few new transmission lines. Today demand continues to climb, but transmission investment in 2000 was less than half of what it was in 1975. In general, training programs for workers have been reduced or suspended indefinitely. The work force has been reduced by one third in the past 10 years, with an obvious impact on maintenance.

In fact, deferred maintenance has

become the hallmark of deregulation. In order to maximize profitability, maintenance schedules in many utilities have been extended from six months to two or three years, greatly adding to system risk. Because electricity is often generated hundreds of miles from its user, the system is increasingly interconnected. When one or two elements of such a highly integrated system break down, the result is cascading blackouts like the one that occurred last week.

Deregulation provides incentives to a utility company to sell electricity across state and national boundaries, but it is transmitted on a grid initially designed to deliver only to its local customers. What happened last week is bound to happen again, given the growing demand for electricity.

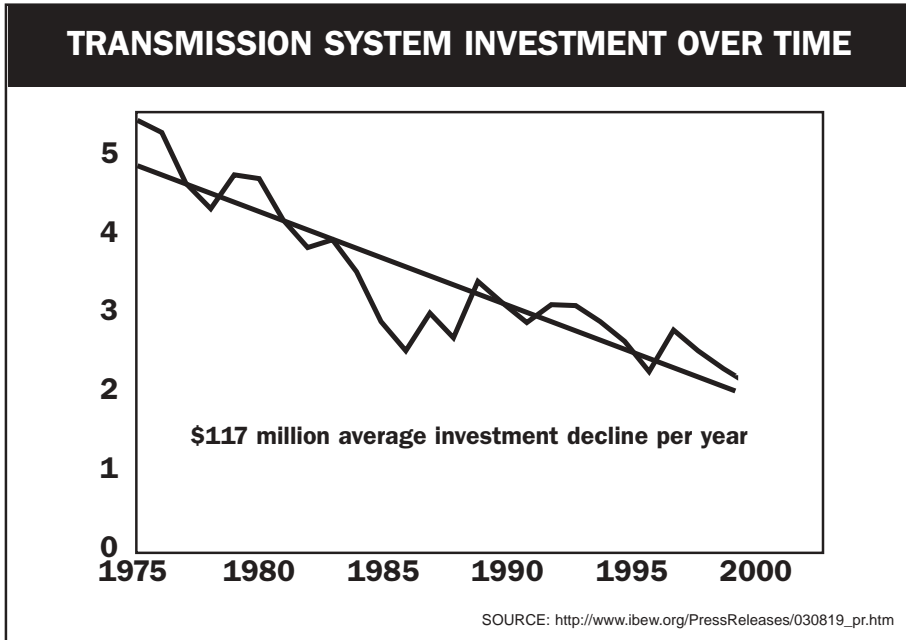
In recent years, deregulation has caused blackouts in the West and manipulation of power markets by the

likes of Enron and others. If we continue down this road, the fallout will become national. Power outages will become a way of life.

It is a cause of grave concern that utility deregulation has turned the once reliable, self-sustaining utility business into a marketplace where profit-taking trumps reliability. Consumers, businesses and industries are more at risk since electricity was redefined as a commodity rather than as a necessary service.

The IBEW urges policy makers to conduct an independent, engineering-based investigation into the blackout. Our modern electricity-dependent society should not be left to the mercies of today's deregulated utilities.

*The IBEW represents 220,000 utility workers in the United States and Canada.*



As this graph shows, investment in new transmission facilities in the United States has been declining steadily for 25 years.

## Dues Increase Notice from President Hill, IBEW

This is a reminder that there will be a \$1.00 increase in per capita tax to become effective January 1, 2004. This increase was approved by the delegates of the 36th IBEW International Convention, which was held in San Francisco, California, during the week of September 10 through 14, 2001. Accordingly, the following rates will apply for all per capita payments covering the period of January 2004, and thereafter:

- "A" Members - \$21.30 per month
- "BA" Members - \$10.00 per month

# Power Outage Traced to Dim Bulb in White House

by Greg Palast

Greg Palast is the author of the New York Times bestseller, "The Best Democracy Money Can Buy" (Penguin USA) and the worstseller, "Democracy and Regulation," a guide to electricity deregulation published by the United Nations (written with T. MacGregor and J. Oppenheim). Palast investigated Ni-Mo, LILCO and the First Energy predecessor companies for state governments of New York and Ohio.

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I can tell you all about the ne're-dowells that sent us back to the Dark Ages last week. I came up against these characters – First Energy and the Niagara Mohawk Power Company – some years back. You see, before I was a journalist, I worked for a living, as an investigator of corporate racketeers.

The power outage began in First Energy's Ohio operation. This company was the model for the film, "China Syndrome." Really. Then First Energy's Pennsylvania unit fumbled the power ball. These are the very same Homer Simpsons who melted Three Mile Island.

Next, Niagara-Mohawk blacked out and took down New York. Ni-Mo's claim to fame goes back to the 1980s. They built a nuclear plant, Nine Mile Point, a brutally costly piece of hot junk for which NiMo and its partner companies charged billions to New York State's electricity ratepayers.

To pull off this grand theft by kilowatt, the NiMo-led consortium fabricated cost and schedule reports, then performed a Harry Potter job on the account books. In 1988, I showed a jury a memo from an executive from one partner, Long Island Lighting, giving a lesson to a NiMo honcho on how to lie to government regulators. The jury ordered LILCO to pay \$4.3 billion and, ultimately, put them out of business.

I'm not surprised that the Three Stooges of the power industry knocked their heads together and blacked us out. What's surprising is that the US media is clueless about how we ended up with Larry, Moe and Curley in control of our nation's electronic lifeline.

Here's what happened. After LILCO was hammered by the law, after government regulators slammed Niagara Mohawk and dozens of other book-cooking, document-doctoring utility companies all over America with fines and penalties totaling in the tens of billions of dollars, the industry leaders got together to swear never to break the regulations again. Their plan was not to follow the rules, but to ELIMINATE the rules. They called it "deregulation." It was like a committee of bank robbers figuring out how to make safecracking legal.

But they dare not launch the scheme in the USA. Rather, in 1990, one devious little bunch of operators out of Texas, Houston Natural Gas, operating under the alias "Enron," talked an over-the-edge free-market fanatic, Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, into licensing the first completely deregulated power plant in the hemisphere.

And so began an economic disease called "regulatory reform" that spread faster than SARS. Notably, Enron rewarded Thatcher's Energy Minister, one Lord Wakeham, with a bushel of dollar bills for 'consulting' services and a seat on Enron's board of directors. The English experiment proved the viability of Enron's new industrial formula: that the enthusiasm of politicians for deregulation was in direct proportion to the payola provided by power companies.

The power elite first moved on England because they knew Americans wouldn't swallow the deregulation snake oil easily. The USA had gotten used to cheap power available at

the flick of a switch. This was the legacy of Franklin Roosevelt who, in 1933, caged the man he thought to be the last of the power pirates, Samuel Insull. Wall Street wheeler-dealer Insull created the Power Trust, and six decades before Ken Lay, faked account books and ripped off consumers. To frustrate Insull and his ilk, FR gave us the Federal Power Commission and the Public Utilities Holding Company Act which told electricity companies where to stand and salute. Detailed regulations limited charges to real expenditures plus a government-set profit. The laws banned power "trading" and required companies to keep the lights on under threat of arrest – no blackout blackmail to hike rates.

Of particular significance as I write here in the dark, regulators told utilities exactly how much they had to spend to insure the system stayed in repair and the lights stayed on. Bureaucrats crawled along the wire and, like me, crawled through the account books, to make sure the power execs spent customers' money on parts and labor. If they didn't, we'd whack 'em over the head with our thick rule books. Did we get in the way of these businessmen's entrepreneurial spirit? Damn right we did.

Most important, FDR banned political contributions from utility companies – no 'soft' money, no 'hard' money, no money PERIOD.

But then came George the First. In 1992, just prior to his departure from the White House, President Bush Senior gave the power industry one long deep-through-the-teeth kiss good-bye: federal deregulation of electricity. It was a legacy he wanted to leave for his son, the gratitude of power companies which ponied up \$16 million for the Republican campaign of 2000, seven times the sum they gave democrats.

*(cont'd on next page)*

## Power Outage Traced to Dim Bulb in White House

(cont'd from previous page)

But Poppy Bush's gift of deregulating of wholesale prices set by the feds only got the power pirates halfway to the plunder of Joe Ratepayer. For the big payday they needed deregulation at the state level. There were only two states, California and Texas, big enough and Republican enough to put the electricity market con into operation.

California fell first. The power companies spent \$39 million to defeat a 1998 referendum pushed by Ralph Nadar which would have blocked the de-reg scam. Another \$37 million was spent on lobbying and lubricating the campaign coffers of the state's politicians to write a lie into law: in the deregulation act's preamble, the Legislature promised that deregulation would reduce electricity bills by 20%. In fact, when in the first California city to go "lawless," San Diego, the 20% savings became a 300% jump in surcharges.

Enron circled California and licked its lips. As the number one contributor to the George Bush campaigns, it was confident about the future. With just a half dozen other companies it controlled at times 100% of the available power capacity needed to keep the Golden State lit. Their motto, "your money or your lights."

Enron and its comrades played the system like a broken ATM machine, yanking out the bills. For example, in the shamelessly fixe "auctions" for electricity held by the state, Enron bid, in one instance, to supply 500 megawatts of electricity over a 15 megawatt line. That's like pouring a gallon of gasoline into a thimble – the lines would burn up if they attempted it. Faced with blackout because of Enron's destructive bid, the state was willing to pay anything to keep the lights on.

And the state did. According to Dr. Anjali Sheffrin, economist with the California state Independent System

Operator which directs power deliveries, between May and November 2000, three power giants physically or "economically" withheld power from the state and concocted enough false bids to cost the California customers over \$6.2 billion in excess charges.

It took until December 20, 2000, with the lights going out on the Golden Gate, for President Bill Clinton, once a deregulation booster, to find his lost Democratic soul and impose price caps in California and ban Enron from the market.

But the light-bulb buccaneers didn't have to wait long to put their hooks back into the treasure chest. Within seventy-two hours of moving into the White House, while he was still sweeping out the inaugural champagne bottles, George Bush the Second reversed Clinton's executive order and put the power pirates back in business in California. Enron, Reliant (aka Houston Industries), TXU (aka Texas Utilities) and the others who had economically snipped California's wires knew they could count on Dubya, who as governor of the Lone Star state cut them the richest deregulation deal in America.

Meanwhile, the deregulation bug made it to New York where Republican Governor George Pataki and his industry-picked utility commissioners ripped the lid off electric bills and relieved my old friends at Niagara Mohawk of the expensive obligation to properly fund the maintenance of the grid system. And the Pataki-Bush Axis of Weasels permitted something that must have former New York governor Roosevelt spinning in his wheelchair in Heaven: they allowed a foreign company, the notoriously incompetent National Grid of England, to buy up NiMo, get rid of 800 workers and pocket most of their wages - producing a bonus for NiMo stockholders approaching \$90 million. Is last week's black-out a surprise? Heck, no, not to us in the field who've watched Bush's buddies flick the switches across the globe. In Brazil, Houston Industries seized ownership of Rio de Janeiro's electric company.

The Texans (aided by their French partners) fired workers, raised prices, cut maintenance expenditures and, CLICK! the juice went out so often the locals now call it, "Rio Dark."

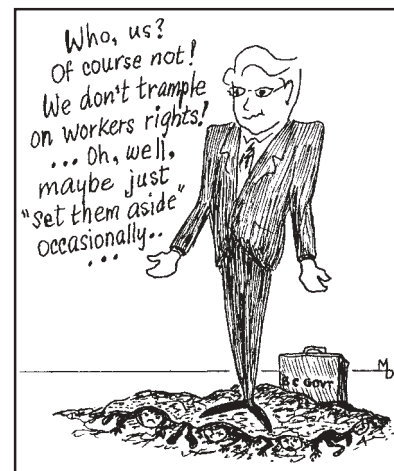
So too the free-market British buckaroos controlling Niagara Mohawk raised prices, slashed staff, cut maintenance and CLICK! – New York joins Brazil in the Dark Ages.

Californians have found the solution to the deregulation disaster: re-call he only governor in the nation with the cojones to stand up to the electricity price fixers. And unlike Arnold Schwarzenegger, Gov. Gray Davis stood alone against the bad guys without using a body double. Davis called Reliant Corp of Houston a pack of "pirates" – and now he'll walk the plank for daring to stand up to the Texas marauders.

So where's the President? Just before he landed on the deck of the Abe Lincoln, the White House was so concerned about our brave troops facing the foe that they used the cover of war for a new push in Congress for yet more electricity deregulation. This has a certain logic: there's no sense defeating Iraq if a hostile regime remains in California.

Sitting in the dark, as my laptop battery runs low, I suspected the truth about deregulation will never see the light – until we change the dim bulb in the White House.

See Greg Palast's award-winning reports for BBC Television and the Guardian papers of Britain at [www.GregPalast.com](http://www.GregPalast.com).



# Ruminations of a Retiree

by Ken McEwen  
Editor, **HOTLINE**



As I've reported previously, being a Journeyman Retiree brings heavy responsibilities. Not the least of which is the requirement to have an opinion on everything. Before retirement, one has an entitlement to an opinion. You've heard people say, "That's my opinion and I'm entitled to it." But, there is no requirement to have an opinion. You may or may not, as the mood strikes you. Not so with a Retiree. Retirees are **REQUIRED** to have an opinion. That's right from the first volume of the Retiree's Apprenticeship Manual. So, you see, retirement is not all lolling about. There is need for considerable rumination so that opinions can be formed.

Our current provincial and federal governments provide a lot of subject matter that demands rumination. At the provincial level there's stuff like the Coquihalla Highway, the Sea to Sky Highway, selling B.C. Hydro, selling B.C. Rail and various other privatization enterprises. Jointly, the provincial and federal governments have given us the 2010 Winter Olympics for rumination. Newspaper headlines advised us that we had "won" the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. Early rumination has led me to the view that is like saying we have "won" SARS or we have "won" Mad Cow Disease. Anyway, that's my opinion and I'm entitled to it. As a Retiree I can't declare disinterest. I am required to form an opinion.

In continuing Journeyman Retiree training and upgrading, Catherine Dear, Sesame and I wander about a fair amount in our camper. Wandering is about the only way I can describe our camper travels. We just go. Oh, when we leave home on the first day we sort of have a destination in mind for that night. Like Kamloops or Kelowna or

Hedley or somewhere relatively close like that. From there on it's kind of like wherever the spirit or the weather moves us. Sometimes we don't even get to that first destination. Retirement is not having any particular place to be at any particular time. Wandering does not negate the requirement to ruminate. At some point in the day while we're driving, Catherine Dear likes to have a quiet time. I think "quiet time" is another term for nap. It's during this "quiet time" that I can catch up on some ruminating.

Like, have you ever considered the batteries in those little button things that operate car doors? We got our other vehicle (not the camper) in June of 1994. The little button things still lock and unlock the car doors and make the horn go beep. That's nine years of locking and unlocking and beeping on the same battery. Imagine if that technology could be expanded to include other devices. Like, if something that small can have the power to perform thousands of operations over nine years, how come we're still playing around with inefficient internal combustion engines?

Or, another thing. Why is it that so many Retirees hold that early rising is a

virtue? When sitting around camp fires at Retiree gatherings, the subject of getting up time often arises. It usually starts innocently by someone saying, "See you in the morning." Somebody else then usually asks, "What time?" Then the discussion starts. One Retiree will say, "Oh, I always get up at six thirty." Another will say, "Six thirty? I'm always up at five fifteen." And so it goes, with each one claiming an earlier rising time, like you're a no-account lay-about if you stay in bed until eight o'clock. If the wood lasted to keep the fire burning long enough, I'm sure someone would claim to be out of bed before two a.m.

Speaking of camp fires, they are an important element of democracy and free speech. When Retirees gather around camp fires all kinds of subjects are discussed. Sometimes the government is even criticized. I wondered for a while if that's why the government stopped providing fire wood in the provincial campsites. You know, to limit free speech. But then I thought that perhaps rumination overload was leading to paranoia. Now it's my required and entitled opinion that the fire wood just went the way of hospitals and schools. Mind you, the Retirees I talk to would rather buy fire wood and leave the hospitals and schools alone. Perhaps the government will listen. Perhaps not.

There are many other things that I have ruminated on. Like TV commercials that show all those happy cheerful workers at Wal-Mart stores or those pharmacists that put bandages on customers knees at Shoppers Drug Mart. Have you ever met any of them? But, I'd better leave discussion of that until another time. So, that's it for this time. Please work and play safely this summer. Retirement is worth getting to. ☑

# From the Back Corner

Hey – where did summer go?? Seemed a little too quick for me. For many of our members though, it has been too dry for too long, and we all hope that the fire season is drawing to a close. On behalf of all the members, I want to extend a special thank you to each of you who put in an extra effort to restore power, shelter and services to those unfortunate folks whose homes have been damaged or lost in forest fires around the province – our brotherhood is defined and strengthened by our care for the welfare of our communities, be that in the workplace or at home.

Devastating effects have also been felt from the ongoing government actions around the province. Privatization of health care support continues throughout the province, and thousands of workers are being affected. BC Rail is up for sale, and Gordon Campbell has finally admitted that this is, in fact, privatization. Some of our schools won't be re-opening this fall, and class sizes will be larger in those that do. Some school boards are cozying up to corporations for donations to help them keep the classrooms functioning – this means aggressive, targeted advertising that can get to those young consumers when they are most vulnerable. Oh, this government is putting students first all right, first up on the auction block.

Well, there is no shortage of rallies to attend to protest what the Legislative masterminds are scheming at, and most of the time it seems no one is listening. This summer, though, we had a couple of successes. Collectively, the people of the province stopped the sale of the Coquihalla Highway through loud and steady protest. Oh, Gordo didn't like it, but the public will was overwhelming, and he just couldn't ignore it this time – not that he didn't try.



Rather than acknowledge that his plan was a mistake from the beginning, Mr. Campbell told us we just didn't understand. Personally, I think he may have that a little backwards...

We stopped them on another front, too – they were planning on sneaking a few dams out from under public management, and they got caught by the owners of those dams – the people of BC. They may think “core assets” is just a generalized concept, but we don't – we know that BC Hydro as a whole is a PUBLIC core asset, and we intend to continue fighting to keep it that way. If it hadn't been for citizens (including many of our members) speaking out against these secret plans, you can be sure those dams would be one of the items up for grabs in the amazing Liberal “BC Sell-Off”.

Some of our members have now had direct experience with the new Workers' Compensation Act, and the new appeal system, and can tell you that things on that front have not improved. Benefits have decreased and access to appeal is also decreased. This comes after a year when WCB stats

show that there was an increase in workplace fatalities. We are all under pressure to work harder and to keep the company's or the crew's safety record up. Still, please remember the most important thing is to go home whole, and to be able to retire in physical shape to enjoy it. Look after each other, take care of yourselves, and don't take chances. ☑



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