

COPE

June/July 2004

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news from local 378

Canadian Office & Professional Employees' Union Local 378

We're a 100% Canadian union

—Paula Stromberg

The maple leaf flag flew a little more proudly for union members at this year's Canada Day. Our union is now 100% Canadian.

The 33,000 member independent Canadian union, Canadian Office and Professional Employees' Union (COPE), was created June 20, 2004 when the Canadian National Committee of the Office & Professional Employees' International Union (OPEIU) unanimously voted to separate from the US-based union and declare Canadian autonomy.

The process to attain Canadian autonomy was straightforward, as outlined in the OPEIU constitution, but emotions nevertheless ran high. On June 20, 2004, our union's Canadian National Committee, on behalf of Canadian members of the OPEIU, served notice on the International Executive Board, International President Michael Goodwin and International Secretary-Treasurer



Nancy Wohlforth that Canadians were invoking Canadian autonomy under Article 14 of the International Constitution.

With speed and commitment

that was truly inspiring, 24,410 members in Canada (74%) provided their authorization for autonomy in just a one-month period.

Canadian President Jerri New (formerly Canadian Director), the new Canadian Secretary-Treasurer Serge Cadieux from local 57 in Quebec and the Canadian Executive Board received standing ovations from the assembled Canadians at a meeting in Bal Harbour Florida in June.

New remains as President of local 378 and Cadieux as Quebec SEPB (Syndicat des employees et employes professionnels et de bureau – Quebec) Director.

"We had overwhelming support from Canadian members during the one month campaign," New said.

"More than 74% of our members in Canada signed autonomy authorization forms and we made the historic decision to form a national union."

Our new name is Canadian
Continued on page 3

Feature Story



ICBC programmer analyst Ralph Hurtig who has Multiple Sclerosis says it was vital to have the union as an advocate when dealing with his devastating diagnosis. COPE, formerly known as OPEIU, helped him apply for Long Term Disability benefits. See story on pages 8-9.

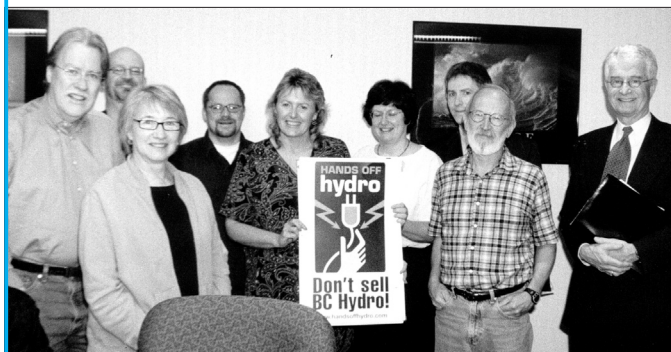


COPE 378 members (left to right) Helen Baker from ICBC Underwriting, Gary Chiu and Shirley Seary from ICBC's Insurance Division, and Elaine Fraser from ISD attended a union meeting in June on Canadian autonomy at Lonsdale Quay in North Vancouver. See story on pages 3, 4, 5.

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BC court says protection from arbitrary legislation lies in the ballot box



BC Citizens For Public Power class action lawsuit hearings will be underway this fall. Left to right at a CFPP planning meeting are Jim Sinclair, Bill Tieleman, Marjorie Cohen, Mark Veerkamp, Jerri New, Eleanor O'Donnell, lawyer Jamie Baugh, Murray Dobbin and lawyer Leo McGrady.

Earlier this spring the BC Supreme Court ruled against Canadian Office and Professional Employees' Union (COPE) local 378's constitutional challenge under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of BC Hydro's deal with Accenture. The court ruled that the government has the right to introduce legislation and the Courts do not have the power to intervene.

The BC Supreme Court has also denied local 378's attempt to have the provincial government's order in council approving the contract declared invalid.

COPE had been hoping to force BC Liberals to hold a public hearing into the move that turned a third of the province's power resources to a foreign corporation, Accenture. COPE also tried to have the Supreme Court order the disclosure of Accenture documents through the BC Utilities Commission (BCUC).

In her decision, Honourable Madam Justice Neilson said, "Protection from the passage of arbitrary legislation lies in the ballot box." COPE President Jerri New commented that union members are learning the importance of

politics the hard way as BC Liberals continue to pass legislation that hurts many British Columbians.

Citizens for Public Power class action lawsuit hearings will be underway later this year. In the meantime, BC Hydro has applied for a rate increase at the BCUC. "Both Citizens for Public Power and COPE have registered as intervenors to ensure we get documents about the increase," explained New.

At Terasen Gas, new legislation (Bill 85) removes the requirement that company headquarters remain in the province and lifts the limit on foreign ownership of shares. "After unsatisfactory meetings with Terasen Gas CEO John Reid, we're quite concerned about COPE members' jobs remaining in BC."

Problems with veiled raiding of COPE members by IBEW local 213 are still not resolved at Terasen Gas. IBEW applied to the Labour Relations Board for consolidation of all bargaining units at Terasen.

"We advised IBEW that we plan to continue to have two bargaining units that have been in place since 1972."

COPE 378 Executive Board

President

Jerri New

Secretary-Treasurer

Lori Mayhew

Vice-President – ICBC

Karen Rockwell

Vice-President – BC Hydro

Doug Hill

Vice-President – Combined Units

Andy Ross

BC Hydro

Bonnie Merriman

Vic Rempel

Danny White

ICBC

Audrey Barnes

David Black

Kimberley Ganner

Joyce Galuska

Marilyn Bridges

Combined Units

Marj Owen

Nancy Dowdall

Margaret Sykes

BC Gas

Bruce Farmer

COPE news from local 378

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Canadian autonomy achieved



Standing on the court house steps in downtown Vancouver, Bruce Laughton, lawyer for COPE 378, and Rick Edgar, lawyer for COPE local 15, review their legal victory with COPE President Jerri New, and COPE board member Karen Rockwell and Vice-President Doug Hill. OPEIU International failed in its attempt to get a BC court injunction preventing our union from consulting members about Canadian autonomy.

COPE *Continued from page 1* —by Paula Stromberg

Office and Professional Employees' Union (COPE). The union will still be known as SEPB in Quebec. COPE continues to be affiliated to local labour councils, provincial federations of labour and the Canadian Labour Congress.

New reassured union members, "Autonomy will not affect any of our collective agreements with our employers or members' dues."

The first Canadian convention will be held in November 2004 where a new COPE constitution and structure will be formalized.

Until November, COPE/SEPB will operate under the interim Constitution as adopted by the Canadian National Committee (now Canadian

Executive Board). The provisions were adapted from the International Constitution as they applied to Canada to ensure consistency and stability during the transition.

"Our members decided that it's time for Canadians to control our own union, in our own country," New said.

"Despite regrettable attempts by the International union's executive to stop us from exercising our right under the constitution to become autonomous, we have succeeded with the strong support of our members."

COPE Secretary-Treasurer Serge Cadieux added, "The creation of COPE means the \$3 million formerly paid to OPEIU in the United States will stay in Canada, for Canadian members."

COPE local 378, formerly OPEIU

local 378, represents about 11,000 members in British Columbia, including workers at ICBC, BC Hydro, Terasen, Accenture, Hastings Racecourse, TransLink and other employers. Employers elsewhere in Canada include the Mouvement Desjardins, Laurentian Bank of Canada and Gaz Metropolitain in

Quebec; Saskatchewan's SGI Insurance; in Ontario: Ticketmaster, the Ombudsman, the Community Care Access Centre; and credit unions, trade union offices and other public and private sector employers across Canada.

COPE has 33,000 members nationally. 🍁

**Canadian Office and Professional
Employees' Union (COPE)
gained support of 74% of members
for Canadian autonomy
in just one month**

Court battle

COPE fights US International OPEIU legal action in Florida District Court aimed at stopping Canadian members from forming separate union

—by Paula Stromberg

COPE officials are going to court in Florida to fend off its former US parent union's attempt to stop Canadian members from separating by filing legal action in Southern District of Florida Court and breaking up union meetings to serve writs against the Canadian executive.

Canadian Office and Professional Employees' Union (COPE) was formed June 20, 2004, after 74% of the Canadian members of the Office & Professional Employees' International Union (OPEIU) signed forms authorizing Canadian autonomy, a right contained in the OPEIU constitution. It has been recognized by the Canadian Labour Congress.

The well-defined procedure was not without some drama however. OPEIU International union representatives accompanied by court pro-

cess servers arrived at the Florida hotel where COPE members were meeting and attempted to serve writs on the union, bursting into a COPE membership meeting without permission or notice. The OPEIU legal action seeks a court order that the Canadian union's separation from the US union be declared null and void and seeks damages against the individual executive members of COPE.

If it weren't so outlandish, it would be funny. "We're amazed by the actions of the US union in trying to stop Canadians from exercising their democratic right to separate and form a Canadian union," said COPE president Jerri New.

"For OPEIU to ask a Florida Court to tell Canadian workers in Canada that they cannot form their own Canadian union is beneath contempt and illustrates why our mem-



Proud to be Canadian. "The enthusiasm and high level of union members' participation in the autonomy campaign has been very moving. Let's keep the momentum," said new COPE President Jerri New amidst cards, flowers and congratulatory phone calls from well-wishers throughout the labour movement.

bers have strongly decided to separate from OPEIU.

"Canadian workers in our union will never be told by an American union president what we can or cannot do in our own country. These heavy-handed tactics are a disgrace to OPEIU and no doubt an embarrassment to the American labour movement."

COPE Secretary-Treasurer Serge Cadieux added that for Quebec

union members it is unbelievable that an American union would show such disrespect for democracy.

New pointed out that OPEIU International already tried and failed to block the Canadian autonomy move in British Columbia Supreme Court earlier in June 2004 and that COPE will retain legal counsel in Florida to fight the OPEIU action here.

"We are confident that an Ameri-

Continued on page 5



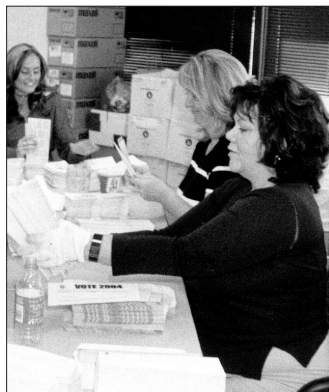
"O Canada." In the final hours after all the Canadian union authorization forms were returned and the tallies were being done, volunteers in the union office sang the national anthem. More than 300 volunteers from throughout our union visited worksites, phoned union members and encouraged them to fill in their forms supporting a move to Canadian autonomy. Members in local 378 voted 78% for Canadian autonomy compared to a national 74% result. "We were organized," said Union Representative Ardell Brophy and Senior Union Representative Dave McPherson who worked non-stop on the autonomy drive.



In the COPE union office, administrative staff (left to right) Linda Allan, Michelle Amery and Carol McLuskie send out information to members about the drive for Canadian autonomy.



Karen McRae from the COPE administration component works on the membership campaign.



Sandi Malhame was among COPE 378 office staff members stuffing thousands of envelopes.



We can almost smell the maple leaves. COPE office staff Yudon Garie and Elaine Stephens smile in the face of victory.

From page 4

Court battle

can judge will see what a Canadian judge earlier decided – that the OPEIU's case against Canadian autonomy has no merit," New said. "All the OPEIU legal action in Florida will mean is an enormous waste of workers' hard-earned dues, money

that should be spent for the benefit of union members and in organizing workers."

New, who is also president of BC-based COPE local 378, said that COPE has filed a statement of defense and counter-suit against OPEIU. "These are necessary legal steps although we'd would prefer to get on with the process of building the new Canadian union." 🍁

New 33,000 member COPE created through decision of Canadian OPEIU members to separate from US International union

The union which represents employees at ICBC, Saskatchewan Government Insurance and some other insurance industry employers has separated from its U.S.-based international body. Locals of what was the Office & Professional Employees' International Union here [in Canada] are now in the Canadian Office and Professional Employees' Union. National and local 378 President Jerri New said existing collective agreements continue. Dues and ... benefits will remain the same. — *Thompson's World Insurance News*

Buzz Hargrove from the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) telephoned on Canada Day to congratulate Jerri New and COPE members on the formation of our new national union.

"Many Canadian and interna-

tional labour leaders have extended their support throughout this campaign," said COPE President Jerri New.

"We have been part of a historic process. Members are so proud. Let's keep the momentum."



COPE office staff members Donna Morris and Shelley Lockhart work on the Canadian autonomy campaign.



Doug Hill, COPE Vice-President for BC and Yukon region, and Karen Rockwell, COPE Executive Board member from BC and Yukon, listen to French translation through headsets at a Canadian union executive meeting.