

Canadian Blood Services Unions Meet in Ottawa

Unions from across Canada, with a common employer, Canadian Blood Services, met in Ottawa October 26th to 28th. NUPGE staff and affiliates attended from Ontario, Manitoba, Newfoundland, Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and British Columbia. CUPE Locals and Staff participated from CUPE National, New Brunswick, Alberta and B.C. (HEU) and NSUPE representatives from Nova Scotia and PEI

“This is the 2nd National meeting of CBS Unions” said Sean Allen, President of OPSEU Local 477. “We were quick to acknowledge the importance of continuing to meet, share valuable information and develop common strategies to deal with bargaining, employer policies and union/employer relationships.”

Some of the key discussions centered around the current bargaining climate and challenging negotiations with CBS; grievances and arbitrations; staff shortages and workload issues; CBS re-structuring and the impact on donors and the future of the blood supply.

Challenges at the bargaining table were a common theme. While Calgary (CUPE Local 1846) achieved a collective agreement after 11 bargaining dates, many Locals across the country reported lengthy delays in bargaining, employer proposals for significant concessions and a reluctance by the employer to address substantive issues. CBS lab technologists in Ontario are heading to the conciliation table with an 84% strike mandate after 13 days of bargaining. Many of the Union’s tabled bargaining demands sought to address recruitment and retention issues such as increasing the guaranteed hours of work for part-time employees, improvements to premiums, benefits and wages, and protection against job loss resulting from contracting out and the use of volunteers.

CBS re-organization and the Optimization Project have resulted in layoffs across Canada. The next big hit will be taken by OPSEU with notice of a loss of 50 fte’s with the opening of the big box blood super centre in Ontario. Working smarter with fewer staff, standardized operating procedures and standardized job descriptions were discussed as key elements of this project.

“We fear that the Optimization Project will severely impact donor flow and donor hours. We anticipate more layoffs and are quite concerned about the safety of the blood supply,” said Kim Storebo, President of CUPE Local 1846 in Calgary.

Dawn Adamson, Coordinator of Member Services for HSABC elaborated on the impact of the Optimization Project to B.C. lab technologists. “We see CBS maximizing the scope of work performed within each job description to justify staff shortages and this is a big issue for us.”

Delegates carried on the theme of their 2005 meeting related to the safety of the blood supply in Canada. When CBS took over the operation of the blood supply for all Canadians, their mandate was safety above all else. It is important for Canadians to reflect on why our blood products and services should never be compared to a cost-cutting driven corporate organization whose goals are to save money. Contracting out and threats of privatization sparked a lively debate on the continued safety of the blood supply. Strategies were discussed over whether or not to go public over safety and security issues concerning the collection and handling of blood, the structure of clinics and the short-staffing. “We don’t want to scare the donors away because we need them, but CBS has to be held accountable and right now nobody is challenging them to be accountable,” said Ron Stockton, Business Agent for NSUPE. Delegates formed a sub-committee to gather information on safety breaches and to develop a proposal to address these issues.

Recognizing the need to continue working together through joint communication and discussions, CUPE Locals in New Brunswick and NSUPE delegates from PEI and Nova Scotia volunteered to jointly host the next gathering of CBS Unions which will be planned for the Spring of 2010 in the Maritimes.

Activists return to their respective Locals with a renewed energy and action plans to remind the Employer – it’s in them to give!

NSUPE, October 29, 2008