

International Colloquium on Union Renewal  
Friday, November 19, 2004, Montreal, PQ  
"Re-inventing Coordinated / Pattern Bargaining" – Presentation Outline

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During the mid to late 1980s, BCGEU began organizing Community Health and Community Social Services agencies throughout BC as service delivery shifted from the direct government service to the broader public sector through de-institutionalization and as community services like home care were expanded. Successively stronger collective agreements were achieved by negotiating a good agreement with a targeted employer in that sector, and effectively pushing the pattern on others. BCGEU's organizing tied into our bargaining objectives: targets were picked that fit our sectoral coordinated bargaining goals.

In 1996, the B.C. government legislated multi-union bargaining associations in the health sector; unions in this sector learned to work together effectively. By 1998, BCGEU and other unions in the social services sectors had voluntarily joined together and convinced the employers to come to the bargaining table as single representative groups. Employers recognized the advantage to this: rather than wait for pattern agreements to be forced at tables around the province, employers could exert voice with provincial consequence. Administrative efficiencies were also recognized from the perspective of the provincial government such that in 2003-4, sectoral coordinated bargaining was legislated in the Community Social Services sector.

The provincial government passed legislation to defeat successorship; within this framework the union signed concessions in some areas to achieve employment security through limits on contracting and /or effective successorship by another name. Also, the union negotiated roll-in clauses in existing individual agreements to bring them into the sectoral framework.

BCGEU's experience with sectoral coordinated bargaining has identified key factors to success. First, good, regular internal communication with members throughout the process is critical, particularly in developing objectives and understanding strategy. This ensures greater support for the agreement despite what can feel like a big distance between the worksite and the centralized bargaining table. Second, we developed coalitions with advocacy organizations who supported our goals of improving conditions for services in that sector, notably the Coalition of Childcare Advocates of BC. This advocacy organization has over time supported our goal of unionization in the sector. Third, the union can best integrate new certifications through the education and training of members in that cert. Fourth, it is important to work within federations of labour to ensure that unions do not pursue the same organizing targets, both within and across sectors. In BC, this goal has been facilitated by the BC Federation of Labour's "Organizing Institute." Finally, we are interested in exploring new forms of membership or connection with workers where in the short term, a certification and collective agreement is not achievable, but a small range of services – and involvement with labour movement and exposure to our ideals-can take place. This can lay the groundwork for more successful organizing in the future by building union awareness.