

## ON HEALTH CARE

November, 2004

### **LIBERAL GOVERNMENT INSULTS HOSPITAL SUPPORT WORKERS ONTARIO HOSPITAL WORKERS FIGHT BACK!**

Ontario hospital support workers are still waiting for an apology from Ontario's Liberal government.

Hospital support workers provide vital services in hospitals. We reported for duty every day at the very centre of the SARS outbreak -- some will likely never return to work as a result.

So we were particularly offended when the Liberal Minister of Health and Long Term Care suggested hospital housekeeping staff are paid too much.

Hospital acquired infections are the fourth largest killer in Canada. Clean hospitals are the backbone of infection control. Hospital support workers keep our hospitals clean.

Britain experimented with compulsory contracting of hospital housekeeping services. Now the outbreak of infectious diseases in British hospitals and the filthy condition of British hospitals has become a major public policy issue. With headlines exposing the shortcomings of for-profit cleaning companies, Prime Minister Tony Blair has recognized that the standard of cleaning in hospitals has plainly affected the current outbreaks, telling the House of Commons:

“First, let us remember who forced the contracting-out of cleaning services in the national health service—the Tories. Who refused to put better investment in the health service? The Tories. Who came to this House and voted against every single penny of extra investment? The Tories.”

Closer to home, Quebec is now experiencing a major crisis with patients dying from a virulent new strain of C. Difficile. One Quebec hospital admitted that it had cut cleaning time for hospital toilets to 36 seconds! Earlier this month, the Montreal Gazette commented:

*“A number of factors are believed to be contributing to this outbreak. An easily corrected one is the lack of proper hygienic cleaning in Quebec hospitals. Budget cutbacks that date from the mid-1990s have resulted in hospitals where patients' toilets and sinks are too rarely disinfected or even cleaned.*

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*C. difficile is a bacterium spread by touching a surface or skin that is contaminated with fecal matter. In some Montreal hospitals housekeeping staff is stretched so thinly that a cleaner is given exactly 36 seconds to clean a toilet. This is completely unacceptable.”*

In British Columbia, after promising to respect hospital collective agreements before being elected, the Liberal government introduced and passed over the course of one weekend legislation that stripped hospital collective agreements.

The result? Seven thousand hospital support jobs were privatized, wages were cut almost in half, and workers ended up in poverty. Now the quality of hospital support services is falling fast.

We won't let the Liberal government do this to us here - we won't be reduced to poverty. And with labour and community support, we won't allow our hospitals to be turned into centres for infectious outbreaks.

On November 9<sup>th</sup>, thousands of hospital support workers set up information pickets in front of the hospitals: Our message - Our services are vital to Ontario hospitals.

There is no sign that the Ontario Liberals have learned anything yet, refusing to apologize and moving ahead with their plans to squeeze hospital budgets and slash health care support services. Thousands of layoff notices could come as early as the new year.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Services Employees International Union are planning more information pickets November 26<sup>th</sup>.

The Liberals have already broken their promise to stop public private partnership hospitals, pushing ahead with two projects started by the Tories. If they threaten collective agreements or keep on the privatization path, stay tuned for more militant labour action.

Ontario Council of Hospital Unions - Canadian Union of Public Employees  
Service Employees International Union Local 1.0n

**P L E A S E   P O S T**