

# *Background*

## **Some Highlights of SEIU History in Canada**

**1943** First SEIU local in Canada was chartered; Local 244 in Vancouver represented office building custodians and window cleaners. The workers, most of them women, earned 35 cents per hour. Shortly after, Local 204 in Toronto was formed to represent a small group of elevator operators.

**1946** SEIU was the first union to organize hospital workers. The first hospital was the Toronto General Hospital. In Thunder Bay, a massive organizing drive resulted in certifications for all four area hospitals in less than eight months.

The legendary Elsie Hannon became President of her local at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, a post she would hold for the next 31 years.

In Montreal elevator operators were chartered as BSEIU Local 289.

**1948** SEIU successfully negotiated an eight-hour day contract.

**1950** Local 293's (now Local 333) Joe Thain from Saskatchewan and Ontario Local 210's Florence Crowder, delegates to the 1950 Convention in Seattle, halted proceedings until a Canadian flag was placed on the platform.

**1951** Locals 204 & 220 launched the union's first Ontario stewards training and collective bargaining courses in an old gristmill in Port Hope.

SEIU introduced the practice of Joint Collective Bargaining for regional hospitals.

**1959** Local 600 was chartered to represent Native Canadian hospital workers in the Pas, Manitoba.

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- 1963** A three month long strike was launched by Local 183 at Trenton Memorial Hospital. A collective agreement was signed in 1964. This strike set the wheels in motion for government imposed compulsory arbitration in the Ontario hospital sector (HLDAA) Hospital Labour Disputes Arbitration Act.
- 1966** U began to organize nursing home workers.
- 1972** International President Hardy launched a program to establish regional conferences in the U.S. and Canada.
- 1975** Isobel Gutoskie, business agent for Local 478, made history by having a copy of a collective agreement translated into Cree for the First Nations members of SEIU who worked in the Moose Factory Zone hospital.
- 1976** Medical staff at the Port Arthur Clinic in Thunder Bay walked off the job. The key issues for the 77 striking women were wages, a hospital benefit plan and union security. The strike captured national attention and turned out to be one of the longest and largest all-women strikes of its time.
- 1976** Canadian Locals gathered in Thunder Bay and passed a Constitutional Amendment bringing SEIU into full compliance with CLC guidelines, and elected Aime Gohier as Canadian vice-president.
- 1980** During a strike at Villa Mont-Royal in Montreal, members were injured when cars drove through the lines.
- 1983** SEIU challenged Ontario's Inflation Restraint Act, which brought wage restraints for workers. The Ontario Supreme Court ruled that the Charter of Rights freedom of association was violated and the right to organize, strike of bargain collectively had been breached.
- 1986** Local 800 was chartered in Montreal.

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**1988** U's Atlantic, Central and Western Canada Conference (ACWCC) Executive Board, local presidents and Quebec Local 800 struck a working group to strengthen the Canadian SEIU structure and set national programs within the SEIU International.

**2000** In February, delegates at the ACWCC Canadian Convention ratified an all-Canadian solution that proposed a new Canadian Constitution and a Canadian Council that includes Quebec.

In May, the presidents of SEIU Canada locals from coast to coast approved the new Canadian Constitution. It is a document that unites our members in Quebec and the other provinces as never before. It prepares the ground for a new unity, a new strength.

In April, delegates at the International SEIU Convention in Pittsburgh voted unanimously in favour of the Canadian self-determination resolution.

Sharleen Stewart is the first woman elected as the International Canadian Vice President.

**2001** In April the founding convention for the Canadian Council was held in Montreal, Quebec.

**2003** In June, as a result of an Ontario Superior Court of Justice Charter application filed by Local 204, the Ontario government was forced to pay out an additional \$414 million in Pay Equity Funding, forcing this provincial government to recognize that Pay Equity is a right and funding for it cannot be discretionary on the part of the government.

**2004** In March, the Founding Convention for SEIU Local 1.0n was held in Toronto

**2005** In February, the Executive Board of the Breweries, General and Professional Workers Union voted to merge with SEIU