

# BCGEU to take strike vote, could walk out April 1

**LABOUR** | The union says the government wants to contract out jobs

BY MIRO CERNETIG  
VANCOUVER SUN

VICTORIA — More than 25,000 of British Columbia's government workers will be taking a strike vote and could walk off the job as early as April 1, the president of the B.C. Government and Service Employees Union said Friday.

It's an unexpected move by the BCGEU with more than seven weeks still to go in continuing negotiations with the provincial government.

But union President George Heyman accused the government of still wanting to contract out jobs, highlighted he said by a recent advisory that the Liberal cabinet will exclude 700 BCGEU members from negotiations.

"We've been at the bargaining table now for four weeks, and I have to say with considerable sadness and concern that this government ... has not learned how to negotiate instead of legislate," Heyman said.

This may signal the BCGEU, and perhaps other public sector unions, will not reach deals by March 31. That would threaten the unions' access to the government's early-signing bonus of \$1 billion, an average of about \$3,300 for B.C.'s approximately 300,000 public-sector workers.

Finance Minister Carole Taylor said Friday that after March 31



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**GEORGE HEYMAN**  
BCGEU president



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**CAROLE TAYLOR**  
B.C. finance minister

the \$1 billion will instead go to paying down the provincial debt. That would reduce the government's four-year offer to settle all contracts to about \$5 billion.

But Heyman threw down the gauntlet.

"If the government hits that deadline and pulls that money off the table they run the risk of creating a strike where one might not otherwise have occurred," he said.

Taylor, who wants long-term labour deals in the run-up to the 2010 Olympics, remained firm.

"That's extra money that as of March 31st must go to paying down the debt if that money is not used," she said. "Mr. Heyman

knows that. The one thing that really worries me is we don't have much time.

"[The strike threat] was bit of a surprise to me," she added. "I don't think you ever solve difficult issues out in the press."

NDP leader Carole James said the BCGEU's decision to take a strike vote may indicate strife ahead.

It's no surprise, she said, that the BCGEU will seek a strike mandate if the government wants to exclude 700 workers from the union contract.

"What did government think would be their reaction?" she said.

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**BLACK EAGER FOR TRIAL**  
CHICAGO — Conrad Black, the former Hollinger International Inc. chairman and chief executive officer accused of looting his own company, said he's eager to have his trial begin. "I want to face the accusers and expose this case for the fraud it is," the Canadian-born Black told reporters after a hearing in federal court in Chicago Friday. Black's trial on racketeering, money laundering, wire fraud and obstruction of justice charges is set for March 5, 2007. He said he "probably" would like an earlier trial, without specifically saying when. His lawyers made no motion to change the date.

**DELTA CLAIM DROPPED**  
NEW YORK — Families of passengers who died on planes involved in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, agreed to drop claims against bankrupt Delta Air Lines Inc. and pursue the airline's insurance providers instead. Plaintiffs in more than 70 lawsuits against American Airlines Inc., United Airlines Inc., Delta, and other airlines filed the agreement Thursday night with the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in New York. The agreement means Delta won't be liable for any amounts awarded to the families of the victims of the Sept. 11 plane crashes by the district court. The plaintiffs are suing all airlines that flew out of the airports where the planes were hijacked because they allege the airlines collectively had responsibility for airport security.

**DE BEERS PROFIT SURGES**  
JOHANNESBURG — De Beers, which sells three-fifths of the world's diamonds, posted a 37 per cent increase in second-half profit and said sales climbed to a record as a shortage of gems led to higher prices. Net income for the six months to Dec. 31 rose to

## BUSINESS BRIEF



Former media baron Conrad Black arrives for a status hearing at Federal Court in Chicago Friday. He's charged with looting his own company.

\$215 million, from \$157 million a year earlier, according to a company statement Friday. Sales climbed 23 per cent to \$3.34 billion in the period and 15 per cent for the whole year. Full-year sales for 2006 won't grow by the same margin, it added. Prices for uncut diamonds have jumped by more

than a third since 2003 because of a dearth of gem discoveries. Growing jewelry use in China and India have also added to demand.

**VW TO CUT 20,000 JOBS**  
FRANKFURT — Volkswagen AG warned that as many as 20,000 jobs could be cut in the next three years under a restructuring plan announced Friday, as Europe's biggest automaker tries to trim costs at home and improve its tiny U.S. market share. The announcement came as the company reported a 2005 net profit of 1.1 billion euros (\$1.3 billion US), up 61 per cent from 697 million euros the year before. The result beat analyst expectations of 834 million euros. Volkswagen, which employs more than 340,000 people worldwide, also said it would look at "adjusting" factory capacity.

**POPCORN BOOSTS CINEPLEX**  
TORONTO — Booming sales of popcorn and soft drinks helped propel Cineplex Galaxy Income Fund to a 150 per cent revenue increase in the fourth quarter. Canada's biggest cinema chain also reported Friday a higher profit in its first full quarter since acquiring rival Famous Players in a \$500-million deal and cutting its workforce. Revenue in the October-December quarter was \$193.2 million, up from \$76.8 million in the final three months of 2004. Net income increased seven per cent to \$7.3 million. The income fund said it reviewed several concession offerings in November to align pricing between its Famous Players and Cineplex theatres, resulting in some price increases. The combined average concession revenue per patron was \$3.68, with a new record of \$3.45 for Cineplex Galaxy locations and \$3.89 for Famous Players.

## Cuban cigars still tops despite U.S. trade embargo

HAVANA — Cuba sold about 160 million of its world-famous cigars last year, in line with recent years' sales, a tobacco executive said Friday in announcing plans for this year's annual international cigar festival.

Sales numbers in recent years have averaged around 150 million cigars.

Manuel Garcia, vice-president of the island's cigar-marketing firm Habanos SA, told reporters that the world market for premium cigars is about 400 million, about half of which are sold in the United States. Cuba cannot legally export cigars or any other products to the United States under a 45-year-old American trade embargo against the island.

European countries are the largest market for Cuba's \$350 million US annual cigar business, especially Spain and France, followed by Germany.

The Festival del Habano will be held Feb. 27 through March 3.

*Canadian Press*

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### ANNOUNCEMENT



Jim Purewal, CA, CPA (Wash.)

Manning Elliott LLP is pleased to announce that Jim Purewal, CA, CPA (Wash.) has been admitted to Partnership in our Vancouver office effective January 1, 2006.

As a Partner in the firm's Assurance and Advisory Services Group, which serves over 100 public company clients, Jim's primary focus is on U.S. accounting and auditing standards including regulatory reporting to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. Jim specializes in the area of initial public offerings and related regulatory filings made by U.S. and Canadian public companies. Prior to joining the firm, Jim was an audit supervisor in the Seattle and Orange County offices of Ernst & Young LLP and worked as a financial reporting manager for a NASDAQ listed software company based in Irvine, California.

Jim became a licensed CPA in the State of Washington in 1998. He completed the Uniform CPA exam ranking in the top 1% out of approximately 57,000 candidates across the United States. Jim obtained his CA designation in 2002. Call Jim at 604. 714. 3679 or email him at [jim@manningelliott.com](mailto:jim@manningelliott.com).

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