



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

BACKGROUND

Compass looks to hire foreign workers; low wage strategy in health care rooted in BC Liberals' Bill 29 privatization policy

January 2002 – B.C. Liberal government passes *Bill 29*, removing contracting-out protections from the HEU provincial collective agreement covering hospitals and long-term care homes.

February 2004 – Compass Group is awarded a five-year contract by the Vancouver Island Health Authority to clean hospitals and extended care facilities from Victoria to Nanaimo – and to provide patient meals in the Capital region.

The health authority then uses the provisions of *Bill 29* to issue more than 1,000 lay-off notices to food services workers and cleaning staff.

December 2005 – The Labour Relations Board certifies the Hospital Employees' Union as the bargaining agent for 700 Compass Group employees. At the time of certification, most workers earn \$10.51 an hour, with few benefits.

December 2006 – Stan Lanyon is appointed as mediator-arbitrator under a section of the Labour Code intended to facilitate first contract agreements.

February 23, 2007 – B.C. economic development minister Colin Hansen joins federal human resources minister Monte Solberg in Vancouver for the announcement of the expansion of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). The changes extend the amount of time a foreign worker can remain in Canada from 12 months to 24 months.

Critics say the TFWP redesign does not include any provisions for monitoring, compliance or enforcement mechanisms to ensure that employers respect the rights of guest workers. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) reports numerous complaints by the United Food and Commercial Workers, INTERCEDE and other organizations about the abuse of workers' rights under the program <http://canadianlabour.ca/index.php/Salimah_Valiani/1117>.

March 27, 2007 – Lanyon awards a first collective agreement, which establishes hourly wages of \$12 an hour for most workers – rising to \$13.05 by the expiry of the contract in September 2008. In its submission to Lanyon, Compass Group makes no mention of its overseas recruitment plans.

June 8, 2007 – The Supreme Court of Canada strikes down key sections of *Bill 29* as a violation of the freedom of association provision in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Court gives the B.C. government one year to consult with the affected unions and bring their legislation in line with the Charter.

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September 11, 2007 – The Canadian Labour Congress calls for an official federal investigation into allegations that workers in the TFWP have been subject to exploitative recruitment fees, withholding of pay, and other violations of Canadian labour laws and standards.

September to October 2007 – Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) expected to approve Compass application.

December 2007 – Temporary foreign workers expected to begin work at local hospitals.

October 11, 2007