



Newsletter

Hundreds rally at VGH in support of Sodexho workers

About 500 supporters rallied today at Vancouver General Hospital to express their solidarity with 1,100 Sodexho workers - members of the HEU - who are fighting to achieve a fair first contract with the Paris-based corporation.

The front-line staff - who provide dietary, cleaning and other support services at nearly 30 hospitals and care facilities - heard powerful messages of support from several speakers who praised the workers for their courage and condemned Sodexho for its refusal to pay a living wage.

"We miss you and we want you back," Health Sciences Association President Cindy Stewart told the striking workers. "HSA workers know full well the value of your work. And it's about time Sodexho recognized your contribution to health care."

That message was echoed by Len Rose of the BC Nurses Union, who pledged solidarity and underlined the importance of good nutrition, cleanliness and safety in providing quality medical care. "We're in this to support you," he said. "As nurses we know how integral you are to the health care team."

BC Government Employees Union President George Heyman, whose union represents more than a dozen Sodexho employees at Vancouver's George Pearson facility, condemned "profit-hungry" corporations like Sodexho and emphasized the importance of "sticking together, being strong together, and bargaining together" to regain lost ground.

And Karen Whitfield of the Telecommunication Workers Union, who pledged support from locked-out Telus workers, thanked HEU members for "the solidarity you have given us in our struggle."

"We're facing similar challenges," she said, "from employers who want to devalue workers and drive down wages - all at a horrible cost to British Columbians and Canadians."

But perhaps the most powerful moment in the noon-hour event came when more than twenty Sodexho workers - most of whom have never taken job action before - assembled on stage with HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy and HEU president Fred Muzin to face their crowd of supporters.

Calling the \$10.15 an hour wage paid to Sodexho workers "a disgrace to the province and the country," Darcy praised the HEU local at Vancouver General Hospital for initiating the event and refusing to allow government's privatization agenda to divide them from their sisters and brothers in Sodexho.

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Representatives from the BC Federation of Labour, the BC Teachers Federation, the BC Health Coalition and the Vancouver and District Labour Council also turned out with messages of encouragement and solidarity.

First contract bargaining began for this group of Sodexo workers on March 11 and covers food service staff at Vancouver Coastal Health Authority facilities, cleaning staff at MSA, Eagle Ridge and Mission Memorial hospitals in the Fraser Health Authority and a range of support services at German-Canadian, Foyer Maillard and Rosewood care homes in the Lower Mainland and Central Care in Victoria.

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