



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWSLETTER

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Sodexo, Aramark and Compass workers rally for a return to the bargaining table

Members take their case for clean, safe hospitals, decent wages, and better working conditions to VCHA

HEU housekeepers and dietary workers employed by Sodexo, Compass and Aramark, and working in hospitals and care facilities throughout the Lower Mainland, gathered at Vancouver Hospital and marched to the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority's executive offices on April 9 to push their case for a fair collective agreement.

The HEU workers hope that the strong strike mandates they've returned during the last two weeks will convince B.C.'s health authorities and the provincial government to put pressure on their hospital contractors to get serious about bargaining new collective agreements.

The sun made an appearance for the late-afternoon rally that drew more than 250 workers and their supporters.

A number of community and faith leaders threw their support behind the workers, including Vancouver city councillor Geoff Meggs, NDP health critic Adrian Dix, First Call's Adrienne Montani, and Rev. Clarence Li of the Anglican Church.

Montani told the crowd that parents that don't make a living wage experience two kinds of poverty – not enough money to cover the basics and a lack of time.

“When parents don't make enough at their first job, they end up taking on a second, and sometimes even a third job. They try to lift their families out of money-poverty by working longer hours,” said Montani.

“Both money-poverty and time-poverty put children at risk for poor health, school failure, and other negative outcomes.”

There was a strong presence from the labour movement, including members of Local 40 who recently reached a settlement with Aramark at GM Place.

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Health Sciences Association president Reid Johnson spoke of the importance of supporting the entire health care team while B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair underscored the importance of the labour movement sticking together.

“When workers like you stand up to their employer in order to be treated fairly, we all win,” said Sinclair.

Many of the workers employed by hospital contractors also spoke about the challenge of working two or three jobs just to make ends meet – and of the lack of training and shortage of staff.

Over the last few weeks, many of those messages were written on bright fabric panels as part of a “clothesline” project that stood out among the many banners and flags at the rally.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy told the boisterous crowd that the goal of reaching a negotiated agreement is not only about improved working conditions and living wages.

“Our bargaining is about quality services as well,” she said. “Patients and residents recovering and living in VCHA hospitals and care homes deserve clean, safe facilities and nutritious, healing food.”

Currently, most Sodexo, Compass and Aramark workers earn \$13.05 an hour, have only six sick days per year, and no pension plan. And a survey of the housekeepers and dietary workers found that 30 to 40 per cent hold more than one job to make ends meet.

“These are profitable, global corporations who receive hundreds of millions in public dollars to keep our health facilities clean and patients properly nourished,” said Darcy.

“Sodexo, Compass and Aramark need to invest in their workforce, particularly in tough economic times, to ensure quality services – and it’s up to health authorities to ensure that they do.”

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