



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWSLETTER

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## Campaign for living wages takes centre stage at bargaining conference

More than 100 HEU members employed by Aramark, Sodexo and Compass gathered in Burnaby for an historic bargaining conference on Thursday morning, March 27.

It was the first time workers employed by the three corporations had come together to discuss common issues and create a united action plan to support bargaining later this year.

HEU president Fred Muzin welcomed delegates congratulating them for standing firm despite attempts by government, health authorities and the three multinational corporations to devalue their work, drive down their wages and set them apart from the rest of the health care team.

“Now we have to overcome the economic injustice,” he said, “that’s what the living wage campaign is all about.”

Secretary-business manager Judy Darcy thanked members for their courage and determination in joining HEU and pledged the full support of the union in their fight for a living wage and safe working conditions.

“No worker should have to make a choice between their job and their health,” she said. “Every worker has the right to health and safety as well as dignity and respect on the job.”

Darcy said there’s a direct connection between low wages and health. And she pointed to heavy workloads, chronic staffing shortages, a lack of basic supplies and inadequate training as serious hazards that put workers and patients at risk.

She recognized that every day members are working through their lunches and their breaks to get the job done. “You go that extra mile at great personal expense.”

Darcy also shared the results of a poll of British Columbians that showed widespread support for living wages for hospital workers.

Throughout the rest of the morning participants broke into small groups based on their employer and their region to discuss issues and develop bargaining demands.

Members reconvened in a large group to share their work. Many got up to the mikes and talked about the importance and power of working together to support each other and fight for a fair contract.

The overarching message to employers, health authorities, and government is that they deserve a living wage and safe working conditions.



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Later in the day members heard how the living wage campaign has mobilized broader community including more than 6,000 on a petition demanding family-supporting incomes.

Wearing campaign t-shirts that proclaimed “work should lift you out of poverty, not keep you there” delegates marched through the neighbourhood carrying placards with slogans written in several different language and handing out leaflets to passers-by.

The second day of the conference will hear presentations from a community and labour panel about the importance of the living wage campaign for workers, their families and their communities. Members will also elect their bargaining committee and complete plans for moving the campaign forward.

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