



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

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Hospital housekeepers, dietary workers in VIHA, PHSA return strong strike vote

UK-based hospital contractor, Compass Group, refuses to negotiate on issues critical to clean, safe hospitals – says HEU.

Approximately 1100 hospital housekeepers and dietary workers, employed in the Provincial Health Services and Vancouver Island Health authorities, strongly rejected Compass' final offer in votes held throughout the past week.

In VIHA, the vote was 93 per cent in favour of job action in PHSA the vote was 99 per cent.

UK-based Compass Group walked away from bargaining in late January, after demanding concessions and refusing to negotiate on any of the union's proposals related to workload, training, supplies and staffing levels – issues that are essential for clean and safe hospitals.

“Our goal is to achieve a negotiated settlement that not only provides the working conditions for quality services, but also provides living wages that allow workers to support their families with dignity and respect,” said HEU secretary-business manager, Judy Darcy.

Essential service levels are currently being negotiated through the Labour Relations Board and no decision has been made about when strike action might begin.

The union is hopeful that a strong strike mandate from workers will bring Compass back to the table and will encourage government to take responsibility for the crisis in contracted out health care services.

Some of the proposals that Compass rejected are, improved training requirements and health and safety systems to reduce injury rates, a new ‘floater position’ to ensure manageable workloads and improved services, and the regularization of casuals to encourage recruitment and retention.

HEU recently conducted a survey of contractor-employed housekeepers and dietary workers in 5 sites and found that 30 to 40 per cent take on two or more jobs to make ends meet, while others endure the kind of stress that comes from choosing between food and heat or from being unable to afford basics for their kids like school field trips and sports equipment.

“These contractors receive hundreds of millions in public dollars,” said Darcy, “in tough economic times, government must ensure these resources support healthy communities and local economies.”

In their final offer, Compass also demanded concessions that include withholding \$75 per worker as a deposit for uniforms, keys and swipe cards, requiring workers to pay for proof of illness documents, and reducing sick leave benefits to an earned half-day per month, up to 6 days per year.

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