



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# BACKGROUND

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## Big 3 bargaining with Compass, Sodexo and Aramark

*Hospital housekeepers and food services workers negotiating for living wages, improved services and clean, safe hospitals*

The Hospital Employees' Union is currently negotiating for renewed collective agreements with multinational contractors Sodexo, Aramark and Compass (the Big 3).

In 2003 and 2004, the Provincial Health Services, Vancouver Coastal, Fraser and Vancouver Island health authorities signed commercial contracts with the Big 3 worth more than \$640 million.

Most hospital housekeepers and dietary workers employed by Compass, Sodexo and Aramark earn \$13.05 an hour with few benefits, no pension and between six and 10 sick days per year.

In 2008, Compass reported a 19 per cent increase in profits, up £662 million (\$1.2billion CDN) from 2007. Sodexo reported profits of 690 million euros (more than \$1 billion CDN), an increase of 15.3 per cent from 2007. Both companies reported steady revenue growth in the first quarter of 2009.

In the fall of 2008, WorkSafeBC issued 23 orders against Compass Group for health and safety violations in VIHA and PHSA hospitals that included:

- failure to provide written procedures on the use, storage and disposal of highly toxic cleaning agents;
- inadequate labeling of controlled products and outdated or missing material safety data sheets, and
- inadequate training related to safe work procedures.

A study by UBC researcher Dan Zuberi found that 30 to 50 per cent of hospital support services workers employed by the Big 3 reported taking on two or more jobs to make ends meet. This same study found that 70 per cent have difficulty paying their monthly bills.

Surveys conducted by HEU found that between 50 and 90 per cent of hospital support services workers employed by the Big 3 have come to work sick or injured when they can't afford a day off.

In 2008, Compass resorted to the Temporary Foreign Workers program to bring staff in to Victoria hospitals, when they were unable to recruit staff under current wage and working conditions.

A 2007 report from Vancouver Coastal Health noted that "high staff turnover among contracted-out cleaning staff is cited as the primary reason for poor cleaning performance."

In 2004, the U.K. government ended two-tier wages for contacted-out hospital support services to address the problem of high turnover and decreased cleaning standards.

In surveys conducted in 2008 at five hospitals in the Lower Mainland and the Victoria area, 45 to 60 per cent of housekeepers and food services workers reported working short-staffed almost every day.

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