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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

NEWS RELEASE

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Government must honour building cleaners' rights under the Employment Act

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As the request for proposals for cleaning services in government buildings closes today, SGEU urges the Ministry of Central Services to ensure that the rights of the workers whose jobs are being tendered are respected.

Under Section 6-18 of the Employment Act, when a contractor takes over a business or part of a business, it must honour any existing union contracts.

“It would be best for everyone – the workers, the public, Saskatchewan taxpayers – if cleaning services remained in government,” says SGEU President Bob Bymo. “But if the ministry moves ahead with its plan to contract out the jobs of hundreds of building cleaners, we want a commitment from them that they will act in good faith and respect the collective agreement that these workers have signed.”

On January 12, the Ministry of Central Services requested proposals from private contractors to take over the cleaning services in numerous government buildings across the province. The request for proposals closes today.

These job cuts will affect 251 workers in 17 communities.

“Government doesn’t get to exempt itself from abiding by Saskatchewan labour law,” says Bymo. “It must honour the rights of its employees, and the intent of article 6-18, just like any other employer disposing of services.”

Article 3 (b) of section 6-18 of the Saskatchewan Employment Act reads, “if any collective agreement affecting any employees affected by the disposal was in force at the time of the disposal, the terms of that collective agreement are deemed to apply to the person acquiring the business or part of the business to the same extent as if the collective agreement had been signed by that person.”

“Building cleaners bargained a contract that gives them fair wages and benefits, access to grievance procedures in case of unfair treatment, and other rights, and we will not allow those rights to be unfairly taken away,” says Bymoer. “This government thinks it can cut its way out of the financial mess that it created, but in the long run, these cuts are going to be costly.”

The Sask. Party government mismanaged this province when it hired a corporation in France to build 60 km of road around Regina for a whopping \$2 billion. It squandered \$33 million on LEAN, \$47 million on smart metres, and spent hundreds of millions of dollars on consultants, when ministry employees could have done the same job for much less. Government added three new MLA positions at a combined cost of roughly \$700,000 per year. And between 2009 and 2016, Wall’s Executive Council – where his senior political staff work – received a 74 per cent payroll increase.

“Building cleaners are the lowest-paid workers in government, and they’re being forced to pay for the Sask. Party government’s mismanagement,” says Bymoer. “Meanwhile, Wall has no intention of giving up some of his own salary – which is partly subsidized by big corporations and Alberta oil.”

Wall is the last premier in Canada to accept a salary top-up, of \$37,000, which is paid out of donations to the Sask. Party. That’s about the same as what a full-time government building cleaner makes in one year.

“We warned government about its wasteful spending decisions,” adds Bymoer. “Now, instead of listening to us, they’re trying to dig their way out of their mess at the expense of public employees’ jobs and rights.”

SGEU will continue to urge government to cancel the privatization of cleaning services, and has launched an online petition at <http://keepthecleaners.ca>.

“In the meantime, we want to caution that if government moves ahead with privatization, we’re prepared to hold it accountable to the law, in order to ensure workers’ rights are protected,” says Bymoer.

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