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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

NEWS RELEASE

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SGEU files Unfair Labour Practice against government for threatening rollbacks, breaching rights of government cleaners

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SGEU is mounting a legal challenge in response to government threats to roll back wages of public service workers, force unpaid days off, and undermine existing pension and health benefits, arguing that this approach undermines the union's right to bargain on behalf of its members.

"This government is not only expecting public sector workers to pay the price for its own financial waste and mismanagement, it's doing it in a way that breaches their right to bargain collectively in good faith with their employer," says SGEU President Bob Bymoan.

Premier Brad Wall and Finance Minister Kevin Doherty have repeatedly made statements in the media about their intention to attack the wages and working conditions of public employees as a means of cutting costs and reducing the deficit.

To defend members' rights, SGEU has filed an Unfair Labour Practice application with the Labour Relations Board, arguing that the government is subverting the bargaining process by, among other things, laying out its financial mandate through a public relations campaign instead of at the bargaining table.

"Our members should not be hearing about wage cuts, job losses, rollbacks, and unpaid days off through the media. They have a union to represent them, and the government is acting in bad faith by communicating directly with them, instead of bargaining with the union they have chosen to represent them," adds Bymoan.

The Unfair Labour Practice application also argues the government has not acted in good faith by attempting to bargain directly with janitorial cleaning staff in the Ministry of Central Services. When government announced it was planning to contract out the cleaning work, it asked the janitorial staff to re-apply for their jobs by proposing a new private contract for services.

"Not only is government guilty of attacking some of the most vulnerable, lowest paid members of the public service, but it has breached the rights of those workers by putting them into the position of having to bargain with government as individuals instead of as members of their union," Bymoan

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adds. "It's heartless, unfair, and, we believe, a breach of the province's employment laws."

Attempting to unilaterally dictate the terms of an agreement, as the government is currently doing in its public statements about rolling back wages and benefits, is a breach of the bargaining process, says Bymoén.

"Collective bargaining is founded on the principle of being open to alternatives, to being willing to hear proposals from the other side, but this government is essentially saying 'take it or leave it'. The public service workers of this province deserve better."

"Public employees are on the frontlines protecting and preserving our province. Whether it's social workers caring for vulnerable kids, corrections and young offenders workers keeping communities safe, highways workers clearing roads, or firefighters safeguarding northern families, public servants work hard every day to keep Saskatchewan strong. They deserve to be treated fairly, and to have their basic rights respected by their employer," he adds.

"We are prepared to do whatever we can to defend our members against this unprecedented attack on public service workers and their collective bargaining rights," adds Bymoén.

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