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Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

June 27, 2017

Government to fire hundreds of cleaners from living-wage jobs this week

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In less than a week, the family-supporting jobs of 230 government cleaners will be terminated when the Sask Party government hands over cleaning services to private companies, which are expected to pay workers significantly lower wages.

“Government cleaners are being stripped of their living wages and the dignity those wages bring,” says SGEU President Bob Bymoan. “We’re already hearing that private companies will be drastically cutting wages for these jobs. It’s downright cruel of government to fire these cleaners, and then give them little choice but to reapply for their jobs at far lower pay.”

“Many of these workers are under tremendous stress, worrying about how they’re going to pay their bills, keep their homes, and provide for their families.”

In January, the Ministry of Central Services requested proposals from private contractors to take over cleaning services in government buildings across the province. Government has now awarded these contracts to 12 private companies.

Based on previous job postings from some of the selected companies, cleaners can expect wages in the range of \$12 to \$13.50 per hour – lower than the starting hourly wage of \$16.30 that government cleaners in Saskatchewan are currently paid.

“It’s no surprise that these contractors are going to pay their workers less,” says Bymoan. “Whether it’s privatizing public services or doling out tax breaks to the corporate elite, the Sask Party government continues to make Saskatchewan’s most vulnerable people pay the price for its mismanagement and waste.”

Government has been eager to highlight that some of the cleaning contracts were awarded to businesses run by former government cleaners, but Bymoan says this privatization is still more of an attack on workers than an opportunity.

“We are glad to see our members making the best of this situation, and we wish them every success,” says Bymoer. “But the fact remains that the livelihoods of hundreds of cleaners were sacrificed for the sake of this privatization. Offering a fraction of the contracts to a few former workers does not undo the serious harm done to the majority of workers’ lives and families.”

Bymoer adds that privatizing cleaning services will cost the province more in the long run.

“Cleaners are some of the lowest-paid government workers, and now they will be making poverty-line wages,” says Bymoer. “Cutting living-wage jobs isn’t good for Saskatchewan families or the economy. It does not spur growth. It is likely to result in government having to spend more to support low-wage workers through our social safety net.”

More than 1,200 people have signed a petition calling on government to stop the contracting out of cleaning services.

“Saskatchewan people have rallied, they’ve signed petitions, they’ve contacted their MLAs, but this government refuses to turn its cuts around,” says Bymoer. “It’s time for Premier Wall and the Sask Party government to take responsibility for mismanaging the province’s finances, and put forward fair solutions.”

Bymoer says government could be more fiscally responsible by canceling the corporate tax cut, reviewing millions of dollars’ worth of contracts with private consultants, ditching costly megaprojects, keeping revenue-generating public assets in public hands, cutting the number of MLAs, and reversing the 74% payroll increase that Wall gave his Executive Council between 2009 and 2016.

“It was Premier Wall and his government who blew the surplus and put us deeper into debt – not cleaners making a living wage,” says Bymoer. “They especially shouldn’t be made to pay while big corporations are given huge tax breaks.”

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