

## In Defence of Public Services

# Keep Calgary's Parks Public



Calgary, April 29, 2011

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) has launched a campaign to Keep Calgary's Parks Public in the face of a decision by city managers to privatize some parks maintenance, irrigation and the South Cemeteries services.

CUPE Local 37, representing the City of Calgary's outside workers points out: "Parks are an important part of what makes Calgary a great place to live. Residents know they can rely on Calgary's dedicated and knowledgeable civic workers to provide quality services."

"Members of CUPE Local 37 have looked after cemeteries, irrigation work, cleaning the litter and garbage in the parks for over 90 years and we want that to continue." Their work also includes mowing, cultivating, seeding and fertilizing, pest control and snow removal.

Local 37 organized a rally and "Picnic in the Park" at Prince's Island Park on April 29, during the Alberta Federation of Labour convention. At the rally, Galley noted that CUPE Local 37 members work "for their neighbours, families and friends" unlike private operators who do the work for a profit. "Contracting out of parks, irrigation, and the South Cemeteries affects not only the citizens who use them, but also the students that would have benefited from working as a seasonal worker in these areas," said Galley. "These students will not have the opportunity to work this summer for the City."

CUPE National President Paul Moist stated: "Public services make Calgary a better place and we don't accept the contracting out of any public work." He pointed out that university students graduate with \$30-40,000 of debt and should get "fair wage for a fair days work" and need access to city jobs.

CUPE Local 37 points out that the City of Calgary already has first-hand knowledge of how privatization affects services. They contracted out maintenance of the South Cemeteries and street cleaning in one district to compare private services. Under a private contractor, the cemetery went to weed. Both services are now in public hands.

A huge banner was made and used as a blanket at the picnic and Local 37 members and delegates to the AFL convention signed the blanket/banner. Lunch was provided for everyone and Local 37 distributed a leaflet outlining their concerns and asking people to contact the mayor and their alderman.

Galley told *TML* that "Calgary has awarded a contract to a private company to maintain parks in four districts in Calgary. However, when the successful contractor took another look, they told the city that they would only be able to maintain two districts. So, two of the parks districts, the south cemeteries, and irrigation of the parks are going to be done by contractors.



This says reams about how ridiculous and absurd are the claims that this is a move to be more "efficient" and "cost-effective." The contractor submitted a bid in response to a Request for Proposals (RFP), yet no sooner than he is successful, he says he cannot do all the work.

What's more, no one in the city administration will take responsibility for the decision to contract out parks and cemeteries maintenance work. Galley told *TML* that when he visited Mayor Naheed

Nenshi with CUPE President Paul Moist, Nenshi said he was not aware of the RFP on parks and he would look into the matter. It was the same with the aldermen. Neither the Mayor nor the aldermen have even replied to the local. Yet the general manager of the Parks Departments says she is following the direction coming from City Council. The collective representing city outside workers is defending the jobs and existing wages and benefits of public sector workers and defending the quality of public services. They deserve to be listened to and responded to when they raise matters of such importance to the citizens of Calgary.

According to the city manager in an interview with the *Calgary Herald*, this is not about cost-cutting *per se*. "It's making sure taxpayers are getting the best bang for the buck." The manager is right about one thing. Privatization is not about "saving money" but about transferring wealth to private contractors at the expense of the workers who perform the services and the public who need and deserve well-maintained public spaces.

Privatization is about destruction and wrecking of public services. Right across Canada the monopolies are pushing public-private partnerships (P3s) and privatization of public services to further their own profits and narrow interests. The "cost savings" they claim will follow would come from a radical restructuring of labour relations in cities across the country, pushing down wages and benefits and eliminating pensions. The Harper government has refused to provide the funding which Canada's cities need. The election of a Harper majority signals that the anti-worker, anti-social offensive is being stepped up, making it even more important to fight each and every attack on public services and the workers who provide them.

As Galley told *TML*, "It's a slippery slope. If they start with parks who knows what the next work taken will be. Also there is the trickle down effect affecting people like the maintenance workers who maintain the parks equipment, so there will be full-time employees as well as the seasonal workers out of work."

Local 37 is continuing its campaign to Keep Calgary's Parks Public. It is currently running Keep Parks Public ads on Calgary radio stations and in Calgary newspapers. Their campaign to Keep Calgary's Parks Public deserves everyone's support!