



February 2, 2005
Presentation by Alex Grimaldi
President, CUPE 30
To: Edmonton City Council
Re: Fair wage policy

Thank you for the chance to speak to the issue of a fair wage policy for the City of Edmonton. This is an issue of some importance to CUPE and I think it should be of importance to city councillors.

A fair wage policy is, in our opinions, the establishment of a series of conditions that contractors must meet before the City will do business with them. Those conditions might include; agreed upon wage rates, working conditions, and employment equity policies or practices.

Adopting a fair wage policy ensures that all businesses with which the City contracts, follow the same labour principles as the City of Edmonton itself follows.

The City and its unions will always quibble over contracting out of work. The city, like many employers, wants flexibility to hire contractors if the skills for a specific job are not available in house. Unions, and CUPE is no exception, want to make sure their employer's demand for 'flexibility' is not code for looking for employees who work for less than the wages set out in our contracts.

The reality is that the City will always rely upon contractors for some portion of its operations. The first benefit of a fair wage policy is that it lessens the conflict caused when work goes out of house. With a fair wage policy in place, employees are assured that if the city has chosen to contract, it is not to undercut their wages, but for other reasons. With that assurance, contracting out of work loses its toxic effect on the morale of the workforce.

The City of Edmonton, rightly sees itself as a fair and responsible employer. It pays staff family-supporting-wages, does not discriminate in hiring or other employment practices, and offers good opportunities to advance.

But when the City contracts with companies that discriminate, or pay sub-standard wages, it loses that "moral high ground". Doing business with a company that pollutes our air and rivers is the same as polluting ourselves. We need to consider this in the way we conduct our contracting policies.

A fair wage policy allows you as councillors to make Edmonton and even better place to live. It's commendable that the city doesn't discriminate. However, that policy is limited to the confines of city employees. A fair wage policy allows the city to have a positive influence beyond city hall. If other employers adopt better employment practices, it is the people of Edmonton, working for those companies, that benefit.

For example, the Mayor has expressed unease at the low hiring rate of aboriginals in the city. But tackling the unemployment rate of first nations people, and the barriers that exist to their advancement, will not be solved by the City government alone. The City must do more than just set an example. A fair wage policy could encourage more hiring and training among our aboriginal population by contractors. Such a policy would encourage native employment across our city.

CUPE 30 supports adopting a fair wage policy. Fair wages ensure work is performed to the highest possible standard thereby ensuring that City services are the best that we can offer to the people of Edmonton. The City has responsibility for the working conditions encountered by contractors' employees. A fair wage policy ensures that all employees doing work for the City are treated equitably and can earn a decent living wage.