

13 March 2024

Re: Union leaders urge Edmonton City Council to forestall UCP intervention in looming strike

Dear Mayor and Council:

We, the leaders of Alberta's largest public sector unions and worker associations, are writing today to urge you to consider the possibility that you are, wittingly or unwittingly, being used by the provincial UCP government to "road test" a back-to-work strategy on City of Edmonton employees that will then be turned against the other 250,000 Alberta public sector workers whose collective agreements expire this year.

What will this strategy look like? Our sources tell us that the provincial government is planning to declare that a strike by CSU52 members constitutes an emergency because it will involve more than 1,000 people working for the Edmonton Police Service (EPS). Under existing legislation, these employees are not classified as essential workers and they have the legal right to strike. But the UCP government plans to declare that their absence from work will threaten public safety.

Our sources go on to say that the UCP government will then send the dispute to a so-called Public Emergency Tribunal (PET), which will impose a binding settlement on the workers without negotiation. This contract will be imposed on all CSU52 members, not just those forced back to work by the emergency order.

Have you ever wondered why your management-side bargaining team – led by City Manager Andre Corbould – has failed to secure a deal in 18 months? We submit that there is no agreement because Corbould didn't want one. Instead, we think he wanted to reach an impasse and a strike – which would then provide his friends in the UCP government with the pretext that they need to swoop in, order the strikers back to work and use a PET to impose a settlement.

We know all of you value the people who work for the City of Edmonton. We know you think they deserve a raise, especially in these inflationary times. We also know that many of you would describe yourselves as worker-friendly and progressive. And, we know that you have, in good faith, been convinced that you should stay out of negotiations. Some of you might even think that a brief strike might break the log jam and result in a settlement.

What we think you may NOT have considered is that the provincial government would step in and use its power to impose a contract and strip City of Edmonton employees of their right to strike. Also, we think you may have NOT considered some of the consequences. The City of Edmonton is already suffering from low morale and an increasing inability to attract workers because its wages are lagging so far behind the private sector. What impact do you

think a back-to-work order and an imposed, below-inflation contract will have on morale or on your ability to attract and retain employees? Needless to say, it won't be positive.

For those of you who consider yourselves progressive and labour-friendly, we have two messages. First, if you agree with us that this dispute should NOT be put into the hands of the provincial government, please do something about it! Instruct Corbould and his team to get back to the bargaining table. The cost of living has gone up by nearly 15% over the past three years. Offering less than half of that to your employees is not fair or acceptable. Second, we encourage you, as the city's elected leaders, to intervene on behalf of your employees. An imposed agreement will not be good for them – and, ultimately, it won't be good for the city.

In conclusion, we'd just like to say that it's not too late to avert a strike. A deal can still be struck. But only if you step up to the plate, take charge and commit to cleaning up the mess created by your City Manager. He may be a UCP co-conspirator, but you don't have to be one, as well. You have the power to stop the UCP government from stepping in. You have the power to short circuit their plan to use draconian legislation. Only you have that power. We urge you to use it. We look forward to seeing your next steps and stand ready to assist in any way we can.

Sincerely,

Undersigned leaders

Gil McGowan, Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL)

Jason Schilling, Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA)

Steve Bradshaw, Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU 569)

Guy Smith, Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE)

Rory Gill, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE Alberta)

Mike Parker, Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)

Quinn Benders, Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA)

Heather Smith, United Nurses of Alberta (UNA)