



THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PRIVATIZATION AND WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

Notes for the National Contracting-Out and Privatization Coordinating Committee from the Persons With Disabilities National Working Group

June 27th, 2005

1. EFFECTS OF PRIVATIZATION ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT IN THE FIRST PLACE

- Persons with disabilities are more likely to be hired by public sector employers such as governments, municipalities, school boards, and other public institutions, for a variety of reasons. One reason is that certain public employers, such as the federal government, have employment equity programs, which specifically seek to include persons with disabilities in their employment.
- Persons with disabilities will often have additional personal financial expenses associated with their disabilities, and are likely to be paid higher wages if they work in the public sector. One of the reasons for this is that public sector employees are more likely to be unionized, which invariably means higher wages than they would receive in the private sector.
- We know intuitively that workers in the public sector are more likely to obtain the accommodations and support they require to succeed at their jobs. A variety of reasons for this include the following:
 - Firstly, public sector employees are more likely to be unionized and to be more aware of their rights, as well as having the assistance of the Union to help enforce those rights through a grievance procedure or filing of a Human Rights complaint.
 - Secondly, if the public employers are under an employment equity program, the accommodation of persons with disabilities is a built-in part of the program.

- Thirdly, employers offering public services are not driven by financial costs only, so are more likely to take a long-term view and make an initial investment in the training and support of workers with disabilities.
- The concern, therefore, when a decision is made to contract out a portion, or all, of a public service, is that workers with disabilities, who are generally already under-represented in the workforce, will lose employment either directly or indirectly if the employer perceives them or their accommodation needs as a financial liability. The profit motive of private enterprise makes it more difficult for those employers to take the long-range view of investing in workers with disabilities.

2. THE EFFECTS OF PRIVATIZATION ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES OBTAINING SERVICES

- When the work of agencies and organizations providing services to Persons with Disabilities are Contracted-Out, persons with disabilities may become concerned that level of services may decrease or that the cost of services may increase.

3. EFFECTS OF PRIVATIZATION ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN ENFORCING THEIR RIGHTS

When a decision is made to contract-out a service or portion of work provided by a large public employer, a new smaller employer may not recognize the Union that formerly represented those workers. The benefits of unionization in terms of fighting for the rights of its members, is true for all workers, but particularly important for workers with disabilities who may feel isolated in the worksite, and may not have the resources to take on the employer alone. The empowering of our members with disabilities makes it essential that they not be put in the vulnerable position of having no representative to advocate on their behalf.