



**JOHN
CARTWRIGHT**
Guest Columnist

Outsourcing shafts workers

Recently our neighbours south of the border celebrated Martin Luther King Day. The renowned civil rights leader was assassinated in 1968 in Memphis, where he had gone to support striking sanitation workers.

In Los Angeles this year, two of those workers were honoured for being part of that history that combined civil rights with the efforts to raise standards of workers.

Here at home, on the other hand, the news about our sanitation workers is all about the drive to outsource their jobs. The battle cry from Bay Street and the Mayor's Office calls for a full-scale outsourcing of all kinds of work at the city of Toronto, whether it is solid waste collection or police station cleaners.

After all, if money can be saved, why not?

That has been the guiding rule for powerful CEOs when they look at their own operations. Lots of them have out-

sourced — sometimes overseas, sometimes to contractors here at home.

Is there a cost to any of this? Sure, if you are one of the people whose job is being taken away, then it becomes very personal.

For someone like Mary, who came to Canada

twenty years ago and graduated from community college as a professional cook, it has a bitter taste. She worked in the cafeteria in a local hospital, earning \$18.60 an hour to cook meals for hospital visitors.

Minimum wage

When the CEO decided to save money by outsourcing her job, he couldn't just fire her. The union contract didn't allow that, so she was moved to another job delivering food to the rooms. Her pay was cut by a dollar an hour, and the contractor that took over the kitchen hired a replacement — a new immigrant — at just over minimum wage.

Of course, nobody stays long when they are being so poorly paid, so the turnover was constant. The job changed from one that paid a living wage, down to one that

paid poverty wages. But the CEO got a bonus for "achieving efficiencies."

In the private sector most of the outsourcing sends jobs out of the country. Enbridge wiped out 300 call centre employees and sent their jobs to the Philippines. Bell Canada, of course, moved most of their customer assistance work to India. That's also where Bombardier sent some of the technical work that used to be done here in Toronto.

Those good jobs are no longer available for the next generation of Canadians, but hey, that's efficiency.

We have all heard about medical data being sent half-way across the world to be processed, and bank records

sent to the States where your personal information is now subject to the U.S. Patriot Act. How about the auto parts company that closed up its plant and outsourced to Mexico?

It's pretty clear that outsourcing has shafted a lot of hard-working

Canadians out of their jobs.

So next time someone talks about what a wonderful idea it is to outsource city work, think about the cleaners at Union Station. The company there exploited undocumented workers, misclassifying them as "independent contractors" and paying less than minimum wage.

When the Fair Wage office exposed the violations, nobody could find the victims to give them the money they were owed. Instead, the next batch of people desperate enough to work for poverty wages will be found for the task.

It's the basic nature of outsourcing. And while it shafts working people, it makes a lot of money for the people at the top.

— Cartwright is president of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council

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