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# CIVIC AFFAIRS

**Providing Municipal Services —  
Methods, Costs and Trade-Offs**



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Better Government Through Research

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## CIVIC AFFAIRS IN BRIEF

In this CIVIC AFFAIRS we examine recent developments of increased contracting of municipal services to the private sector. Traditionally, services have been provided by municipal departments except where economies of scale dictated otherwise. In that case, regional government or some other government level has assumed responsibility. Contracting out has been used primarily to avoid outlay for expensive capital equipment or where expertise is not available within the municipality.

Recently, the practice of contracting to the private sector for services normally provided by municipal forces has increased in the belief that services can be provided more efficiently by the private contractor. The cause of seeking this alternative has been the fiscal squeeze in which most municipalities find themselves. Consequently, they are attempting to achieve cutbacks in spending and to show cost savings.

Although there are a number of ways services can be provided, the main focus of the study is on contracting versus in-house production. On the surface, contracting appears to be less expensive. However, our research shows that this is not necessarily the case. Furthermore, trade-offs occur in the decision to adopt an alternate method of service delivery.

The philosophy of council plays an important role in choosing between in-house production and the private sector. The Councils of the cities of North York and Toronto demonstrate this.

The Bureau believes that a number of factors and not only the cost must be taken into consideration by municipal decision-makers when faced with the question of whether or not to contract out. These criteria are reflected in our recommendations.

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## I INTRODUCTION

The traditional and major role of municipal governments has been to provide public services. Public demands have called for increased and improved services for which the municipalities have drawn on the property tax as their main source of independently generated revenue. This source is finite, however, making provision of public services more difficult. In fact, a wide variety of public service industries provide services. No longer do we have only "the government" supplying the public with services.

Public goods and services moreover are distinct from private goods which makes it more difficult to deliver them. Services may be provided without satisfactory knowledge about demand or user preference and their use pattern is difficult to regulate. For example, the more people there are enjoying the facilities of a park, the less desirable it becomes to the individual and more parks must be provided to restore the enjoyment of use. The users of a service often lose sight of the monetary value of that service since they pay for it indirectly. This results in such problems as over-use, under-use and even abuse, through negligence or vandalism of public facilities or property. Factors of this nature make the previously simple task of providing services no longer simple.

When financial constraints are added to the inherent problems of supplying public goods and services, municipal governments are caught in a dilemma. They are faced with meeting increased needs yet keeping property taxes at acceptable levels. With only limited relief through provincial monies, municipalities are seeking new ways of cutting service costs.

Municipalities are reviewing their own productivity and are trying to improve their service delivery. Some are entering into agreements with other municipalities or other levels of government to provide services. This would be particularly true of those areas where metropolitan, regional or county governments have assumed responsibility for certain services over a wider geographic area.

Another option being used is contracting out to the private sector. In this case the municipality articulates the demand and the private sector provides the service through a contractual agreement with the municipality. It is this last option which is the focus of this report.

## II THE PROVISION OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Municipalities contract for a wide variety of services. These can be divided into areas of special expertise and of labour intensive work. The former encompasses management consulting, planning and legal work. Contracting is entered into when expertise is not available within the municipal corporation's staff or when demands for special projects or studies exceed the existing staff's capacity. Labour intensive work is usually found in the public works department or in maintenance. We will be concerned with contracting of this latter type of work.

### City Department vs. Contracted Services

In 1980 the Bureau of Municipal Research undertook a survey to determine which services are most frequently contracted out by Canadian municipalities, and secondly, whether municipalities intended to expand the practice. We contacted 84 cities and received replies from 47 - a response rate of close to 56%. Responding cities ranged in size from 35,000 to 500,000 in population. 87% contract out, ranging from minor components of municipal services to making it a rule to consider contracting when budget decisions are made.

The Bureau's survey showed that refuse collection, street construction and maintenance, and snow removal are the services most frequently contracted to the private sector. 55% contracted out refuse collection and/or disposal, 46.8% contracted street construction and maintenance, and 29.8% did so for snow removal. Street construction is an area demanding heavy investment in machinery and for this reason is often contracted out. Other services contracted out, in decreasing order of frequency are: utility construction; street lighting; public health and welfare functions; street cleaning; equipment maintenance; park maintenance; public protection; parking meter collection; animal control; and landfill maintenance. Six municipalities or 14.6% of respondents did not contract out any services.

A recent survey of 96 Canadian municipalities with populations of 20,000 or higher conducted by Canadian Union of Public Employees on the practice of contracting for refuse collection, determined that 46 municipalities or 47.9%

of all respondents used private contractors for this public service.<sup>1</sup>

A 1973 International City Managers' Association Survey in the United States found that 61% of responding municipalities had formal or informal agreements for providing services by other governmental units or private firms and that a wide range of services was provided by contracting.<sup>2</sup>

These statistics indicate that the majority of municipalities in Canada and the U.S. contract out. They also identify labour intensive work in the areas of refuse collection, street construction and maintenance and snow removal which are the top three services to be contracted in Canada.

The extent of contracting in California is documented in a survey directed at City managers for which responses from 84 cities were received. City governments accounted for only half of the provision of services in these cities, the other half being provided by other measures. Among these, private contractors and county governments ranked of equal importance. 20% of all cities were classified as contracting cities, in that more than 10% of their total budget was contracted out.<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. survey also investigated the effects on performance. California city managers felt that city departments performed efficiently in zoning, planning, parks, building and safety and law enforcement services. These functions are all related to local control. Residential garbage collection was felt to be most efficiently performed by franchise arrangement or private contract. Four other services that City departments did not provide efficiently were: street cleaning; traffic signal maintenance; animal control; and fire protection. However, the city department was rated as most responsive to citizens and the best means of assuring municipal control over quality. The predominant factor in contracting out such labour intensive services as garbage collection and snow removal are labour costs. Employee costs are not significantly different between large scale and small scale

<sup>1</sup>"Unions fight use of private firms for municipal work", The Globe and Mail, July 15, 1980, p.3.

<sup>2</sup>E.S. Savas, Ed., Alternatives for Delivering Public Services, Diebold Institute for Public Policy Studies Inc., Westview Press, Boulder, Colo., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

producers, but differ markedly between the private and public sectors.<sup>1</sup> Government employees are protected by more legislation and regulations concerning hiring, firing, work rules and wages. The important finding of this survey is that city departments can be differentiated in terms of performance.<sup>2</sup>

#### Diverse Municipal Perspectives

The Bureau's survey indicated that 63.8% of responding municipalities had investigated providing various services by alternate means in the recent past. 40.4% are actively considering going ahead. We interviewed politicians and administrators in Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto and North York for details.

Ottawa contracts out all private residential refuse collection, janitorial services for city buildings and security services. Snow removal is partially contracted, as well as a substantial quantity of minor work in areas such as painting, landscaping, building maintenance and mechanics' jobs. The decision to do so for work up to \$25,000 rests with the Purchasing Department which calls all tenders, in conjunction with the department in which the job originates. Questions as to whether work above that amount is contracted are decided by Council. Experience has taught some lessons. Specifically, the necessity for municipal supervision was realized and for contracts assuring some measure of control of work standards by stipulating adequate remuneration to private sector employees.

North York's major contracts are refuse collection from apartment buildings larger than 30 units in three quarters of the City's area, janitorial services in city buildings, security services, snow ploughing (in 1980 without contract but by pricing only), road salting, plus a variety of work accounting for approximately 39% of the total Public Works Department expenditures for 1979.<sup>3</sup> To cut its own labour costs, the practice of hiring

<sup>1</sup> Sidney Sonenblum, et al, How Cities Provide Services, Ballinger Publishing Co., Cambridge, Mass. (1977), pp. 21 and 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Calculated from 1979 Public Works Department Expenditures, City of North York.

casual labour for short periods up to six months has evolved. This saves on wages and benefits. North York is committed to a policy of contracting out if the job can be done in the private sector. Board of Control is authorized to accept the lowest tender which Council can overrule only by a two-thirds majority. Generally, contracts call for the application of wage rates set by the Metropolitan Toronto Fair Wage Officer after being approved by the Board of Control and Council of North York. Work for various departments contracted for less than \$10,000 proceeds by informal tender which draws on a pool of contractors known to the City and does not involve a Board of Control or Council decision. The decision is based on price, service and quality and is struck by the Department of Purchasing and Inventory Control and the individual City department and buyer involved.<sup>1</sup>

The City of Kingston, on the other hand, has made the decision to limit the practice of contracting out. At the same time it remains acutely concerned with costs. Save for extremely minor work, Kingston is operating its municipal services under complete restrictions of contracting. An agreement with CUPE came about in negotiations some seven or eight years ago between the Union and the Clerk Controller, Treasurer, Personnel Officer and Department heads representing the City. Aldermen at that time felt that they lacked expertise to decide on matters concerning municipal employees. It is now perceived that this situation limits the City's options and flexibility in terms of cost savings, although Kingston has not come under any pressure for high taxes.<sup>2</sup> However, Kingston has directed its attention to management practices and the efficiency of its own operations. For example, \$100,000 has been saved each year for the past four years in refuse collection expenses. Operations were made more efficient with the use of modern equipment, streamlined procedure and employee incentives in the form of time completion. These measures cut the number of staff by one-third (through attrition) and overall increased productivity has resulted. Other examples are a cost-sharing arrangement between Kingston and three neighbouring rural townships and the local Chamber of Commerce. An Area Economic Development Commission has been formed which means that Kingston has

<sup>1</sup> "Integrating Municipal and Contractor Work Forces", Address by B. Ruddy to the American Public Works Association (Ontario Chapter) Convention, 1977.

<sup>2</sup> According to a 1979 and 1980 survey of 34 Ontario municipalities conducted by Royal Trust Co., Kingston's taxes ranked among the five lowest in both years.

not replaced its own retired Industrial Commissioner. As of January 1981 Kingston will have an annual performance review system in place for all city departments.

The City of Toronto has demonstrated yet another approach. Its decision-making criteria are generally predicated on what is best service for dollar, coupled with non-monetary considerations. These include such characteristics as goals, nature of output, source of revenue, nature and structure of the workforce and type of technology used. A council decision in 1974 reflected consideration of non-monetary values. Refuse collection by private contract in one part of the City was terminated in favour of city employees performing the service. A cost differential of 4.9% after one year of operation by the City was considered palatable in favour of an improved service.<sup>1</sup> Save for some minor maintenance of equipment, work is contracted out generally only in the Works Department in connection with street construction and maintenance. The policy governing recommendations by the Commissioner of Public Works for carrying out work by private contractor is based on four factors:

- (1) that the work is of a seasonal or occasional nature;
- (2) that it is varied in type, fluctuates in quantity and is paid for in whole or in part by other agencies;
- (3) that the construction equipment required to carry out the work is high in capital and maintenance cost;
- (4) that there is a well organized, productive, skilled and competitive industry available to carry out the work.<sup>2</sup>

A breakdown of public works expenditures and type of work performed by contract and city forces for 1979 showed 60.44% to have been carried out by full-time city employees, and 39.56% by contract.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Report to the Committee on Public Works, from R.M. Bremner, Commissioner of Public Works, April 3, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Report to the City of Toronto Executive Committee from R.M. Bremner, April 2, 1980. This report was issued in response to a request initiated by Alderman D. Heap, directed to the Mayor and Members of the Executive, February 13, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.3.

In interviews, the advantage of flexibility was mentioned. A municipality is able to "shop around" for what is best work for tax dollars in the absence of constraints prohibiting contracting out. At the same time the element of comparison and competition between private and public sectors was considered to make for a positive situation. It was also suggested that contracting need not be confined to the worker level alone, but might extend to the managerial sphere and that top administrative personnel be hired on a contract basis; in the same vein, one alderman felt that planning should be done on a contract basis to achieve distance from political considerations and influence and to save costs.

As an employer, the City of Toronto is perceived as sympathetic to its employees which carries positive spin-off effects in terms of morale and quality of working life considerations. Decisions regarding contracting involve fiscal as well as other considerations. When contracting, it is considered important to encourage employers to pay fair wages which is stipulated in contracts.

These four cities illustrate the diversity with which contracting is handled by municipalities and what the experience with contracting has been. Kingston demonstrates that a municipality can achieve savings by examining its own operations. Ottawa shows the need for proper municipal supervision and control of work standards. North York demonstrates the philosophy of contracting whenever possible, and Toronto serves as an example where other considerations besides costs come into play.

III COST EFFICIENCY OF CONTRACTING - TWO CASE STUDIES

It frequently is the decision of municipal councils to contract out services because it appears to be cheaper. Decisions are based on tender quotations. However, research in the U.S. found that more extensive contracting, which occurs in Los Angeles County, California, does not result in L.A. County cities having different levels of expenditure than other cities in California.<sup>1</sup>

Two case studies are presented here. They focus on municipal vs. contractor collected garbage, a service that is frequently contracted out, as was reflected in the Bureau's survey. Also, data is readily available and the examples include the experience of an American and a Canadian city.

Minneapolis

The study of garbage collection undertaken in Minneapolis analyzes a situation in which public and private producers of a public service were placed in a competitive situation. The experiment was conducted between 1971 and 1975. Refuse collection was divided between the city and a consortium of 50 small private firms that formed a single corporation for purposes of administration. The private firm collected from about 60% of the total area. The city carefully monitored performance of each service provider.<sup>2</sup> Economic performance was measured in terms of cost per ton and cost per household. Output was measured in tons of refuse collected per truck per shift.

The results, shown in Table I (see p. 9), indicate economic performance to be more efficient when performed by contract. However, the gap between municipal and contract collection costs narrows considerably over the 5-year period. When cost of monitoring the contractor is included at 3% of annual cost per household, municipal collection proves to be less expensive by year four.

Performance of municipal workers measured in terms of tons of refuse collected per shift increased steadily, whereas private crew performance

<sup>1</sup>S. Sonenblum et al, How Cities Provide Services, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Contractors compliance with contract stipulations was also monitored and the cost of administration to the City of Minneapolis was calculated at 3% of total contract cost.

TABLE I

Performance of Municipal Versus Contract Collection of Residential Refuse in the City of Minneapolis

Year	Cost Per Ton <sup>1</sup>		Annual Cost Per Household		Tons per Shift	
	City	Corp.	City	Corp.	City	Corp.
			Difference City/Corp.	Difference City/Corp.		
1971	\$32.08	\$28.91 <sup>2</sup>	+11.0%	\$30.60 <sup>2</sup>	5.74	6.11
1972	32.52	32.36	+ 0.5%	32.04	5.95	5.96
1973	33.75	32.75	+ 3.1%	33.12	5.95	5.96
1974	36.38	35.96	+ 1.2%	34.80	7.12	6.20
1975	37.97	37.44	+ 1.4%	38.23	7.35	6.69

<sup>1</sup>Not including the city's cost of monitoring the contractor.

<sup>2</sup>Large initial decline due to change from separated to combined collection.

Source: E. S. Savas, "An Empirical Study of Competition in Municipal Service Delivery" in Public Management Forum, Nov./Dec. 1977, p. 721.



remained relatively static. It must be kept in mind, however, that city crews consisted of 3 workers whereas corporation trucks had only one man crews. A substantial increase in city crew productivity is indicated by the fact that the city initially used 34 3-man crews which were reduced to 27 3-man crews by 1975 and the number of households served increased by 51% over the five year period. No change in technology took place over the period, but the city provided an incentive system in 1974 whereby workers could leave the job after completing their routes. This in turn prompted a redesign of routes. The union representing the municipal workers agreed to both these productivity improvements. Despite these changes, the city crews still had much spare time available. A plan for 1976 therefore called for increasing the city department's share of the work to 50% of households in the City of Minneapolis from the previous 39.5% in 1974. Overall productivity analysis of the municipal crews between 1971 and 1975 indicates that direct labour hours per household per year have declined by 35% and tons collected per man-hour have increased by 37%. Projected improvements when city crews will be fully utilized are for a reduction of 45% and an increase of 68% for the aforementioned productivity indicators and for an increase of 82% of the number of households serviced.<sup>1</sup>

The private sector agency having been made conscious of work performance of the city crews added more services at no extra cost, such as free pick up of bulky objects, and agreed to a 4% price reduction in 1975. Comparative performance data are issued annually by the City of Minneapolis and have created competitive tensions between the private and public operations.

The conclusions drawn by the study attribute increased productivity and cost effective service delivery for the citizens of Minneapolis to the competitive climate which was deliberately created. However, no claim to universal applicability of this approach is made. A single entrenched system of one kind or another in other cities would be more difficult to restructure. Prior to reorganization a system of split responsibility for refuse collection existed in Minneapolis which was divided by type of refuse collected. Thereafter, private and public sectors took on equal tasks and performance could be compared. Judicious monitoring and reporting played the key role in assessing performance under competitive conditions.

<sup>1</sup> E. S. Savas, "An Empirical Study of Competition in Municipal Service Delivery" Public Management Forum, Nov./Dec. 1977, p. 718.

### North York

Our second example is taken from the City of North York.<sup>1</sup> In 1973 North York's Council was faced with the question of whether or not to purchase special vehicles and to add to its employees in order to carry out collection of refuse from apartment buildings consisting of more than 30 units. These apartments were using special compactors and required specific equipment for collection.

Tenders went out for bids by private firms and prices quoted by half a dozen firms ranged from a low of \$0.84 per apartment suite per month to a high of \$2.15. On the basis of the lowest bid the estimated cost came to \$554,400 for the year. If the Borough provided the service it was estimated that 10 vehicles, 16 workmen and one foreman at a cost of \$546,820 would be required. The two estimates were considered roughly equivalent and the Commissioner recommended division of the Borough into four parts. Each contained a similar number of apartment units. Three areas were to be serviced by two different contractors at the lowest bid; the fourth by the Borough in order to establish comparisons and to establish "competence and financial capability of a contractor to carry out the work."<sup>2</sup>

The contract covered a period of five years beginning in 1974, and provided for annual adjustment of the original unit price. According to the formula in the contract, the following cost escalations resulted:

1st year	- \$0.84	per month per apt. unit
2nd year	- \$0.93967	" " " " "
3rd year	- \$1.04238	" " " " "
4th year	- \$1.12478	" " " " "
5th year	- \$1.20647	" " " " "

A review in 1976 indicated a 10.93% increase in the three year period between 1974-1976. The contractors were approached by the Borough for a possible reduction of 1976 prices. They were indeed willing to accept no increase for 1976 providing that a new 5 year contract would be entered into, at a base rate of \$0.93967 per apartment unit per month, subject to the same terms and

<sup>1</sup> Until 1978 the City of North York was known as the Borough of North York.

<sup>2</sup> Report to the Works Committee, Borough of North York, from B. Ruddy, P. Eng. Commissioner of Public Works, June 21, 1973.

conditions as the original contract.<sup>1</sup> Council decided to let the original contract run the full term and subsequent costs are shown in Table II (see p.13). Compared with Borough costs per apartment unit (Area 4), the cost for private provision averages out at \$1.03066 per unit per month over the 5 year period and at \$1.00690 for Borough provided service.

A cost comparison to determine savings had the other three areas been served by Borough forces was also made. This exercise reflected a potential saving of \$136,082 over the period (see Table III, p.14).<sup>2</sup>

One member of Board of Control questioned how Borough costs were calculated, and if these were indeed comparable with calculations for contracted services.

Cost for private collection did not include administration by the Borough but was simply the lowest bid plus yearly escalations. The calculations of refuse collection by the Borough allowed for office overhead, a calculation of foreman's time at 25% of annual payroll cost, and vehicle costs which included depreciation. A recalculation of Borough work by Controller Greene based on the advice of a senior budget analyst of Metropolitan Toronto showed that the per unit cost would have averaged \$.8269 and had the Borough undertaken services in all areas, a saving of at least \$581,373 would have resulted over contractor costs in the 5-year period.<sup>3</sup> Additional savings would have resulted from better organization of routes and economies of scale.

Despite these apparent differences between costs, North York Board of Control in 1979 again recommended and Council subsequently approved private garbage collection for three-quarters of the City's apartment buildings. The same cost escalation clause remained in the contract. Markham Disposal, Division of Miller Paving Ltd., submitted the lowest bid for the entire contractor area. The City's own forces continue to service the same remaining quarter.

<sup>1</sup> Report to the Works Committee, Borough of North York, from the Commissioner of Public Works, July 9, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Report to Mayor and Members of Council, from the Commissioner of Public Works, Feb. 5, 1979, "Summary of Apartment Garbage Collection Costs 1974-1978 Inclusive".

<sup>3</sup> Memo to all Members of Council from Controller Barbara Greene, City of North York, February 19, 1979.

TABLE II

North York  
Summary of Apartment Garbage Collection Costs - 1974 - 1978 inclusive

Year	AREA 1 (Private Contractor)				AREA 2 (Private Contractor)				AREA 3 (Private Contractor)				AREA 4 (Borough)				
	Average		Total		Average		Total		Average		Total		Average		Total		
	No. units	Cost**	No. units	Cost	No. units	Cost	No. units	Cost	No. units	Cost**	No. units	Cost	No. units	Cost	No. units	Cost	
	per	\$	\$	per	\$	per	\$	per	\$	per	\$	per	\$	per	\$	per	\$
*1974	6,504	0.84	100,481	11,962	0.84	77,595	9,238	0.84	90,005	7,645	1.11730	134,196	10,274	1.08847	139,310	12,632	0.91902
1975	8,356	0.93967	163,992	14,543	0.93967	130,941	11,612	0.93967	172,992	14,547	1.20647	238,008	16,629	1.20647	152,570	13,839	0.91872
1976	10,968	1.04238	219,470	17,829	1.04238	177,040	14,392	1.04238	139,310	12,632	0.91902	139,310	12,632	0.91902	139,310	12,632	0.91902
1977	11,549	1.12478	248,532	18,641	1.12478	210,928	15,808	1.12478	152,570	13,839	0.91872	152,570	13,839	0.91872	152,570	13,839	0.91872
1978	11,756	1.20647	273,892	19,323	1.20647	238,008	16,629	1.20647	172,992	14,547	1.20647	172,992	14,547	1.20647	172,992	14,547	1.20647

\*10 months only

\*\*Unit cost price based on contract year (March-February) and not on calendar year

Source: Borough of North York, Report to Mayor and Members of Council Re: Apartment Garbage Collection, from Brian Ruddy, P.Eng., and R.H. Davie, Dept. of Public Works, February 5, 1979.

TABLE III  
 North York  
 Cost Comparison of Private vs. Public Service Delivery of Refuse Collection

	Total Units, Areas 1, 2, & 3	Total		Equivalent Borough		Difference
		Contract Cost	Cost	Unit Cost	Borough Cost	
1974	27, 704	\$232,706	\$1,11730	\$309,537	\$+ 76,831	
1975	34, 502	389,156	1.08847	450,748	+ 61,592	
1976	43, 189	533,066	0.91902	476,298	- 56,768	
1977	45, 998	613,751	0.91872	507,111	- 106,640	
1978	47, 708	678,435	0.99099	567,338	- 111,097	
		\$2,447,114		\$2,311,032	\$- 136,082	

Source: Borough of North York, Report to Mayor and Members of Council Re: Apartment Garbage Collection, from Brian Ruddy, P.Eng., and R.H. Davie, Dept. of Public Works, February 5, 1979.

The lowest average bid for all three areas in North York was \$.7852 per unit per month, considerably lower than the lowest bid of \$.84 made five years earlier. Other average bids were recorded at \$0.988, \$0.94 and \$0.938.<sup>1</sup> Markham's staff is not unionized and trucks consist of one-man crews. According to opinions of unionized firms involved in the bidding, such underbidding may mean poorer service. Lower quotes and smaller returns can only be absorbed because of Markham's diversification in other areas of business.

In contrast to the Minneapolis experiment the element of competition in North York is now severely reduced. Also, no effort was made by North York to monitor efficiency of its own forces or of the contractor. No accurate comparison can therefore be made between contractor and city costs. It is not known for example how many vehicles and crews are necessary to perform the Borough's portion of the work efficiently. Forecasts for the entire Borough cannot accurately reflect estimates at the most cost efficient level. The accuracy of calculating savings will depend on how well performance in both the private and public sectors can be assessed. Work may appear to be more efficiently performed by the private contractor. However, all costs to the municipality are seldom included. Contracting therefore will appear as an attractive alternative to administrators and politicians who see it as a way of assuring efficiency of operations, or who are reluctant to expose municipal inefficiencies.

The results achieved in Minneapolis are attributable not only to competitive supply, but also to efficient management. A rigorous system of monitoring and assessing productivity was established and conscientiously carried out. Productivity incentives were offered to workers and new routes mapped out and adopted when those in use were shown to be inefficient. The private sector, operating at greater levels of efficiency initially, was forced to follow suit when it became clear that municipal forces were catching up in productivity and therefore cost efficiency. The contractors provided additional service at no cost and reduced cost by cutting into profit. The Minneapolis experiment points out that municipal services are inefficient when they are poorly managed and that this condition can be rectified by introducing monitoring and assessment functions and subsequently altering the method of operation. Therefore, just how efficiently a municipal

<sup>1</sup>Extract from Board of Control Report No.1; dated December 13, 1978, Borough of North York.

service is operating will depend on how efficiently it is managed. By the same token, a municipality must be aware of output and cost of municipal services in order to be in a position to assess efficiency in the private market and it must be willing to assume costs connected with it.

An analysis of production efficiency in Swiss cities states that "it may appear to be advisable to switch from public to private production. This conclusion is, however, warranted only if private production is organized so as to guarantee the efficiency properties pertaining to the model of competitive supply."<sup>1</sup> Diversified large corporations who can outbid the small producer will eventually result in a situation of monopolistic conglomerates dominating the market and in control of price setting.

#### Quality of Service and Local Control

The Bureau chose quality of a service as an indicator to assess whether loss of control occurs when a municipal service is assumed by the private sector. No scientific survey was undertaken but we felt it would be interesting to determine if opinions expressed by City Managers in California could be borne out by opinions of municipal administrators here. Interviews were conducted in the cities of Ottawa, North York and Toronto. In addition we were able to draw on the results of a consumer sample survey conducted for the City of Toronto.

The City of Ottawa contracts to the private sector for many of its services or components of services. For example, garbage collection from private residences has been carried out by private contractors for as long as 15 years. Another major area of contracting is janitorial service for city buildings. The City switched from municipal to private provision of janitorial services when the City of Ottawa occupied its new city hall quarters. Municipal employees were absorbed by the private firms. Subsequently poor service became evident to city inspectors and a great many complaints by municipal employees were noted. City Council decided two years

<sup>1</sup> Werner W. Pammerehne and Bruno S. Fry, "Public Versus Private Production Efficiency in Switzerland: A Theoretical and Empirical Comparison" V. Ostrom and Frances Pennell Bish, Comparing Urban Service Delivery Systems, Sage Publications, Beverley Hills, California, 1977, p. 225.

ago to require the contractor to pay higher wage levels than the provincial minimum. The quality of service subsequently improved and complaints have been virtually eliminated. The City of Ottawa, however, maintains its own janitorial staff at community centres, field houses and for maintenance of indoor pools since these facilities require an increased amount of responsibility and stringent standards of cleanliness.

In North York difficulties with theft have been experienced with private contractors for office cleaning services. Security personnel is also contracted at minimum wages without benefits. High turnover of staff occurs in both areas indicating worker dissatisfaction. No incremental salary schedule is built into contracts to provide incentive for employees to stay and poor service is the result. Another comment was that there was no evidence of discrepancy in quality of service. The Commissioner of Public Works indicated that continuity in the performance of work is lost when tendering is extensive and that an attempt is made by the Department to obtain the same operators for the same areas to overcome the problem.

Perceptions in the City of Toronto generally were that service quality is better when work is performed by the City's own forces.<sup>1</sup>

The City of Toronto commissioned a quality of service survey in 1975 after residential garbage collection in one area of the city had been switched from contractor collection to the City's own forces. The same amount as previously paid to the contractor was budgeted to maintain the same level of service. A sample survey of household opinions showed that 77.3% of respondents felt that level of service had remained the same, 6.2% indicated that it had deteriorated, and 16.5% felt the service had improved. It was concluded that residents of the area were receiving improved service from the City.<sup>2</sup>

It appears from the foregoing that people generally felt that the quality of service is poorer when it is contracted out. This agrees with the perceptions of California City Managers who ranked a city department

<sup>1</sup> Memo to The Mayor and Members of the Executive of City Council Re: Contracting Out, From Alderman Dan Heap, Feb. 13, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Memo to Committee of Public Works, City of Toronto, from R. M. Bremner, Commissioner, Department of Public Works, April 3, 1975.

structure most effective for quality control and responsiveness to citizen demands. Evidence also arose that quality can be controlled by a contracting municipality with the use of specific contract stipulations such as fair wages and monitoring of performance. A municipality can therefore assure a continued measure of control by exercising these options. Its involvement does not end with the decision to contract and it must set conditions which will assure qualitative as well as cost efficient functioning of the private producer over the long run.

#### IV POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS AND TRADE-OFFS

##### The Public Service Unions

The most vocal opponents to contracting to the private sector have been the labour unions.<sup>1</sup> Canadian Union of Public Employees considers contracting out at all levels of government a long-standing, chronic problem which has increased in the past few years. It set up a National Task Force in 1979 to begin a program of action to protect and expand public sector employees. A second objective of the Task Force was to provide citizens with efficient citizen-oriented programs. CUPE has incorporated a number of clauses on contracting in agreements across the country, ranging from minor provisions to prohibitive statements. Complete restrictions on contracting, such as the agreements with the City of Kingston, are found in only about 100 cases protecting approximately 5% of the union's total membership. The next safeguard is to guarantee the jobs of all present union members of a municipality or some of its members, for example those with a certain length of service. A large percentage of members (approximately 80%) are covered under these provisions. Another clause which covers 17.6% of members is that a municipal employer may contract out, but will have to try to find alternate work for displaced employees. Further union provisions require consultation with or notification to unions prior to contracting out work; or requirements by the municipal employer for certain levels of pay and benefits to be provided by subcontractors.

The reasons for union opposition to contracting are numerous. They range from an obvious concern about a diminished membership, job security and mobility of its members, to quality of service and tensions between the municipality and its taxpayers. Among additional concerns that were mentioned are loss of control over hiring by the municipality and assuring qualified employees; hidden costs when considering only contract price; price fixing and increasing monopolization by certain service industries which means decreased competition and a compounding of problems concerning poor

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<sup>1</sup>For some recently voiced concerns see: "Unions fight use of private firms for municipal work", Globe and Mail, July 15, 1980; "Contracting out work is wasteful, corruptive, civil service unions say", Globe and Mail, August 12, 1980.

municipal management; decreased administrative control; an increase of the private consultant's influence over public institutions; poor treatment of employees in the private sector; and insecurity within the civil service. Furthermore it has been observed that tenders can easily be manipulated to assure contract awards going to specific companies.

Other considerations voiced by CUPE were a responsibility towards improving service to the public which it feels is not incompatible with the concern for the welfare of its members. CUPE feels that in the past it has concerned itself little with inefficiency or waste in the public sector but is now beginning to take a broader view of economics and the part of the public sector in it.<sup>1</sup>

CUPE is actively organizing around the issue of contracting out and a policy guideline in the form of a manual is scheduled for publication in the near future for national distribution. Individual campaigns for locals that are facing particular problems in cities such as Vancouver, Kitchener and Sydney will also be organized.

The position of the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto is that it is opposed to the contracting out of work traditionally performed by municipal employees. It also opposes contracting of jobs to non-union employers and is on record in support of fair wage policies being included in contracts to the private sector.

The question arises - what is value for money? Is it a contract awarded to the lowest bidder? Without knowledge of efficient performance and assurance of proper functioning of market competition, it is not possible to determine just how much should be paid to private contractors. Is it local control over responsiveness to citizens and levels of quality of service?

Politicians like to point to figures of comparative savings to enhance their public image. However, costs of administering tenders, paying the contractor and supervision and assessment of comparative efficiency are seldom calculated when contracting is the case.

<sup>1</sup> See also "Summary and Recommendations", in "Productivity and Quality of Working Life - Two Sides of the Same Coin", EMR TOPIC No.12, November 1979.

The responsibility rests with elected representatives as decision-makers to determine the criteria on which to base a decision and to formulate policy. Such criteria should weigh all the consequences of costs, efficiency and quality of service as well as factors which differentiate public goods and services from their private counterparts. For example who profits from tax dollars spent? Obviously the citizens at large. But additionally, a contractor is in the business to make a profit and governments as employers and providers of services have obligations such as employee morale and citizen confidence.

The perspective of labour unions injects human considerations into the decision-making process about contracting out. The concern is with the satisfaction of the individual municipal employee and overall morale within the municipal organization, fair wages to employees who perform work for the municipality in the private sector, and more recently, the image of municipal employees in the eyes of the taxpayer and meeting his concerns. Trade union demands require delicate balancing by politicians because strike action may reduce their re-election chances.

All these considerations relate to the characteristics of government operation and form an integral part of a holistic view of government. They encompass meeting human needs and satisfactions, public goals, the nature of the output, sources of revenues, nature and structure of the work force, type of technology employed, size of the operation, as well as maximizing input/output ratios.

#### Who Decides and How?

Whether a given service is provided in house or is contracted out, is a decision that is consciously determined by cities in California. The reason for the choice of a particular method is related to performance characteristics of the method as well as to performance preferences of cities. The selection of the method of providing a given service is therefore a critical municipal decision.

The question of who makes these decisions and the trade-offs involved in these decisions remains to be examined. Ostensibly, elected representatives make decisions affecting citizens. However, lines of decision making powers

are not always so neatly drawn. Administrators have considerable influence which is based on their expertise. They are often relied upon for information because of their experience and day-to-day involvement with the subject at hand, and can have considerable influence on Council decisions. Notwithstanding these considerations, let us look at the composition of Council of two municipalities whose philosophies differ on the question of contracting out.<sup>1</sup> (See Tables IV and V, pages 23 and 24)

Considering the number of Controllers and Council members of North York Council who came from a business background vis-a-vis those with professional associations and labour sympathies, it can easily be seen that a business philosophy would predominate.

City of Toronto Council (including members of the Executive Committee) presents a different picture. Backgrounds of members of Council are rather diverse and over 40% of Council is sympathetic to labour.

Municipal councils have frequently opted for contracting in the belief that it costs less and that municipal government should function more like a business. It appears, however, Council decisions on the issue of contracting out are in large part determined by the philosophy and sympathies of those making the decisions. North York contracted out garbage collection despite its apparent greater cost, and the City of Toronto based decisions not solely on cost, indicating a concern for a variety of considerations.

Certain trade-offs occur in relation to control over staff and quality of service. When contracting out is the decision, the municipality no longer has full charge over staff. This may erode morale within the municipal corporation and most certainly will bring union opposition. Quality of work may be jeopardized and citizen satisfaction lowered. Relinquishing certain control measures may be an acceptable trade-off in some instances if it means significant cost savings. However, priorities must be determined in each individual case, and only after all factors have been considered.

<sup>1</sup>Refers to Council members elected for the 1979/1980 municipal term.

TABLE IV

City of Toronto  
Professional/Business Background of 1979/1980 Council  
(including Executive Committee)

		Total #	%
Council members with present or past business affiliations:	F. Beavis ) W. Boytchuk ) T. Clifford ) J. Piccininni )	4	17.4%
Council members with present or past professional affiliation:	Professions (law, accounting, engineering, consulting, education, social work, religious, volunteer work) B. Adams ) G. Cressy ) A. Eggleton ) S. Fish ) M. Gee ) R. Gilbert ) D. Heap ) Y. Hope ) J. Howard ) A. Johnston ) T. O'Donohue ) A. Paton ) J. Rowlands ) T. Ruprecht ) J. Sewell ) P. Sheppard ) A. Sparrow ) T. Wardle ) D. White)	19	82.6%
TOTAL		23	100%
LABOUR AFFILIATION (10/23 or 43.5%)			

TABLE V

City of North York  
Professional/Business Background of 1979/1980 Council  
and Board of Control

			Total #	%
Council/Bd. of Control members with present or past business affiliations:	M. Berger	A. Heisey	)	
	E. Caplan	M. Lastman	)	
	I. Chapley	I. Paisley	)	12
	P. Clarke	M. Sergio	)	63.2%
	N. Gardner	E. Shiner	)	
	M. Gentile	R. Yuill	)	
Council/Bd. of Control members with present or past professional affiliation: (education, religious, legal aid, volunteer, or community work)	B. Burton		)	
	M. Foster		)	
	B. Greene		)	
	M. Labatte		)	7
	H. Moscoe		)	36.8%
	P. O'Neill		)	
	B. Sutherland		)	
<b>TOTAL</b>			19	100%
<b>LABOUR AFFILIATION (4/19 or 21.1%)</b>				

## V CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Contracting as an alternative to municipally provided services is used for a number of reasons. Smaller municipalities may contract to larger jurisdictions on a regional basis to achieve economies of scale and to avoid purchasing costly equipment. The private contractor may, in some instances, be able to furnish expertise that is not available within the municipality. Contracting as an alternative is frequently seen as providing flexibility at peak work periods and as a method of introducing competition into government bureaucracy, making it more efficient.

Recently, fiscal restraints have placed emphasis on cost savings. Contracting out has been seen as saving money when tender quotes have been considered the total cost. However, research shows that when all costs are taken into consideration, contracting to the private sector does not necessarily make it less expensive. North York's apartment garbage collection by private contract is an example. Public production under efficient management, however, can reduce costs. This has been shown in the case of Minneapolis. Kingston is striving in the same directions in the absence of private contracting.

When considering contracting out, it is important for municipalities to include factors such as responsiveness to citizens, responsibility to employees, a certain loss of control over the operation, as well as costs. Municipalities must also be able to gauge the efficiency of their own forces in order to compare efficiency with the private sector. The free market mechanism is rapidly lost in an era of increasing monopolization by certain service industries. Maintaining control mechanisms is important, since municipal responsibility does not end with contracting out.

Council policies in respect to contracting are governed by philosophical and political considerations. They may be based on a business philosophy and result in decisions favouring private enterprise. Or, they may encompass more complex aspects of productive activity which cannot be measured in monetary terms.



The Bureau recommends that municipalities:

- 1) examine the efficiency of their own management and monitor productivity of publicly produced services prior to decisions about contracting to the private sector;
- 2) maintain comparative evaluations with contractor produced work where the decision to contract out has been taken;
- 3) not consider tender quotations the single criterion on which to base cost decisions but to include quality considerations and such hidden costs as administering the tendering process, supervision of work and administration of the contract;
- 4) consider elements in addition to cost when its own forces are capable of performing at comparable efficiency. This includes service quality, local control and consumer satisfaction;
- 5) maintain control by including contract clauses affecting quality of work and quality of working life and supervise the execution of the contract and monitor efficiency;
- 6) assure themselves of competitive market conditions in areas where public production is unfeasible;
- 7) consider creating a competitive environment among public sector units or jurisdictions;
- 8) investigate cooperative buying and/or leasing within its own organization and in cooperation with other municipalities.

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