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## Toronto on strike: The city's unsung civic heroes

Posted: July 14, 2009, 10:44 PM by Barry Hertz

[Politics](#), [Kuitenbrouwer](#), [Mayor David Miller](#), [Toronto on strike](#)



KUITENBROUWER



PETER KUITENBROUWER

Yvonne de Wit, the manager at Toronto Public Health who designed the city's A La Cart program for multi-ethnic street food, has been working nights at the Seaton House men's hostel, cleaning feces and breaking up fights.

Uli Watkiss, the city clerk, is working in the mail room in the basement of City Hall. "I'm fine," she said. "A lot better than some of the other people."

And at the city's water filtration plants, management staff have stayed in the locked facilities day and night since the strike began, with other staff bringing them in food.

These are the unsung heroes of the city workers' strike, now in its fourth week — the 4,000 "non-union and management staff" trying to keep some of the city functioning. The city has forbidden them from talking to the media, so none spoke for the record for this article.

Many said they are working seven days a week, 12 hours a day. They are earning barge-loads of overtime pay, but are not seeing their families, and many summer vacations are now up in the air.

"Everybody's burnt out," said one corporate security staffer who said she has worked 12-hour days with just one day off over two weeks, and was denied permission to attend a family funeral.

"Everybody's exhausted."

The city knows these workers' value as it attempts to hold firm against asking the province to legislate the strikers back to work. Last week Mayor David Miller sent an email to all of them to thank them.

“I want you all to know that I appreciate your work and am very proud of how you have responded during this challenging time,” Mr. Miller wrote.

“Whether you are working at a transfer station, helping keep our facilities clean and running smoothly, working in a temporary garbage drop-off site, water treatment or supply plant, parks facility, courts or in a social service program — you have worked as a team with impressive results.”

Among other redeployed managers, Scott Barrett, a senior co-ordinator at Heritage Toronto, is answering the phones at the Access Toronto call centre in North York. Steve Johnston, the spokesman for Transportation Services, is collecting bags of garbage at Moss Park.

In some places, the strike has become quite a make-work project. At the Bermondsey Transfer Station, a spot accepting the public’s garbage, I counted four police officers, two guys videotaping the picket line, two Bylaw Enforcement officers, six management staff, plus about 50 pickets.

Everyone seemed serene (except the public waiting in a long line of cars to drop off trash). One manager was cleaning off a gas grill to cook up lunch for his colleagues.

A manager in Municipal Licensing — watching to prevent illegal dumping — said she is working seven days a week, but it is not all bad.

“We expected to be sitting behind a desk, so this is kind of a nice change,” she said, standing in the sun. Still, she added, “We’re not allowed to take vacation.” I asked her how long she could hold out. “We’re OK,” she replied. “We’re strong.”



At City Hall, the city has assigned dozens of managers to “picket monitor” duty. They wear blue windbreakers that read “Toronto” and sit by the picket lines. One of them, a woman who works in human resources at Metro Hall, said, “It’s stressful for all of us.” Another, a man, said, “It’s boring. It’s sad.”

Meanwhile, the city has redeployed its lawyers to process traffic tickets, because the regular prosecutors are on strike. On the third floor of Old City Hall yesterday, an agent — who represents people charged with traffic offences — pointed to a silver lining to the strike: the inexperienced prosecutors mean fines are lighter right now. And a lawyer confirmed this: “We’ve been given a little briefing on what [kind of a deal with an accused] is permitted, but it all falls apart when the JP [justice of the peace] lowers his glasses and says, ‘Mr. Prosecutor, isn’t there something that we can do here?’”

Outside the Seaton House men’s shelter, Marie King, who works there, was picketing outside. She is worried the management staff replacing her could fall ill. “How are they going to recognize HIV, TB, hep C or swine flu?” she asked.

A manager confirmed he has new respect for those who have walked out. “It’s pretty hard, man,” he said. “We’re not used to this kind of stuff. It’s a real eye-opener.”

*Photo: Jim Smith, right, and Rob Decleir, both management staff with the TTC, help unload trash at a temporary dump site near Leslie Street and Eglinton Avenue last week. Credit: Tyler Anderson/National Post*

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by robertbj So that's who those cheerful and helpful people who took my garbage were!

Jul 15 2009  
8:31 AM

Thanks!

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by SueWe They non-unionized non-management staff get paid overtime.

Jul 15 2009

9:17 AM And the management staff get 'time off' in lieu of overtime. They can get up to 3 weeks off, in addition to their usual vacation, if they essentially work 2-2 1/2 hours of overtime every week for a year. Do the math.

And how many of these managers were part of the Union and walking the picket line just a few years back and holding taxpayers to ransom.

I don't trust any civil servant who has been a civil servant working for the same organization their entire careers.

Sorry but Unionized, Non-unionized they are virtually all the same.

I don't feel sorry for any of them.

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by amc15 Let's not forget that along with the ridiculous overtime they're collecting, that these  
Jul 15 2009 supervisors and managers are receiving a BONUS to do the work of union employees. For  
9:39 AM one division, I've heard it is around \$540. BONUS!?!

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by Advokat AMC: "Ridiculous overtime"?!? Did you even READ the article?!? Why WOULDN'T  
Jul 15 2009 you pay someone overtime for working 7 days a week, 12 hours per day?!?

4:39 PM

Than again, maybe you think that management is having a really easy time doing the jobs of all the striking workers... which begs the question, "What the hell do we need all those unionized workers for?"

Lemme guess: You are a striking CUPE worker and you are mad that your boss is doing the job of you and a dozen of your lazy parasitic colleagues (and getting well paid for it), while you sit at home with your anger, empty bank account and delusions of importance. Close?

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by shann73 Just wondering is Marie King is available to train us all in how to recognize HIV and Hep  
Jul 15 2009 C...i have been working and Managing in this sector for a long time, and I didn't even  
9:00 PM know you could tell "recognize" HIV and Hep C.....it goes against all that TPH and  
research and general has taught us. Her comments set the clocks back 20 yrs for those  
living with HIV AIDS and Hep C...it just goes to show how lucky her clients are that she is  
not at work right now!! Marie, I suggest some serious training.....