

Toronto on strike: Our parks grow thick with trash, and the union smiles

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[Kuitenbrouwer](#), [Toronto on strike](#)



Photo of growing piles of trash at Christie Pits this afternoon by Tyler Anderson, National Post

Several sanitation workers, members of Local 416 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, sat in canvas folding chairs in the shade today by the hockey rink in Christie Pits park, eating sunflower seeds from a big bag and tossing the hulls on the grass.

A steady stream of cars and minivans pulled up. Other City of Toronto workers (managers, who are not on strike) in neon green Customer Service t-shirts helpfully came forward and took up to three bags of garbage from each vehicle, and tossed it in the back of a white city pick-up truck. They then drove the few metres to the park's hockey rink, and threw the trash into a pile which, at 1 p.m., a worker named Jim estimated to contain about 100 tons of garbage.

I scratched my head. Given the long waits to which striking CUPE workers are subjecting the public at regular waste transfer stations, why are they letting this dump grow without comment?

The answer is simple, explained Jim, who is a manager in the Solid Waste division. The unionized workers want the garbage to pile up in our parks. They want it to stink to high heaven. They want the rodents and the seagulls to come. The more the trash festers, the more pressure the city will be under from the outraged residents of Christie Pits and other parks to cut a deal with the union, or ask for provincial back-to-work legislation.

Meanwhile, residents seemed to think nothing odd of bringing their trash to their local park.

"I feel sorry for the people who live in this area," said Leslie Adam, who lives three blocks away. His little white dog, Stellito, shared the back of his minivan with several bags of trash. "But what can I do? My mother-in-law has to use diapers 24 hours a day."

The city announced this afternoon it has closed the waste collection point at York Mills Arena, which is full, and plans to close the Christie Pits dump Sunday. "The closed sites will continue to be patrolled by both security and city staff and all health and environmental protection measures will continue to be implemented," said Geoff Rathbone, Toronto's general manager of solid waste.

The city is readying two new dumps at Centennial Arena on Ellesmere Road and Wilket Creek/Sunnyside Park at Leslie Street and Eglinton Avenue. I checked another makeshift dump yesterday, in a city parking lot on Lake Shore Boulevard W., west of the Sunnyside pool. Only a fraction of that vast fenced-off site is full.

At Christie Pits I asked Jim, the city solid waste manager, why the city doesn't just come in the night with loaders

and trucks, and take the trash somewhere a little more appropriate, like a transfer station or a landfill.

“Because of them,” explains Jim, pointing to the strikers nearby. “They’ll let it come in, but they won’t let it come out.”

Once again, the city is letting the workers dictate the terms of the strike. As the weather warms and the smell worsens, the city will be forced to take one of two routes: take on the strikers and haul away the trash, or go to Queen’s Park for a back to work law.

I am not holding my breath that Mr. Miller will get tough. But I am holding my nose.

Rather than haul away the trash as neighbours want, Dr. David McKeown, the city’s Medical Officer of Health, told reporters he planned to issue an order last night for Christie Pits, where an insect infestation has developed because residents have prevented spraying.

Residents, such as Azad Kalemkiarian, 14, who biked over today to look at the mess, are enraged by this dump.

“Every summer I come play here,” he said. “Play basketball” -- he pointed to the hoops in the hockey rink, below which spread the trash -- “and then go to the pool to cool off.” The pool, too, is locked.

“I think it’s disgusting,” he added. “This park of all parks. All my summers have kind of rotated around Christie Pits and this summer I haven’t even been once.”

The rows of garbage bags jamming the rink, oozing goo, ripped open by the claws of beasts, are a vile sight. But forget the visuals. As P.J. O’Rourke wrote once, upon visiting Haiti for Rolling Stone: “Believe nothing that you hear, half of what you see, and everything that you smell.”

The smell here is of sour death.