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## **Toronto on strike: A strengthening city, a weakening union**

Posted: July 08, 2009, 5:11 PM by Rob Roberts

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



KUITENBROUWER



PETER KUITENBROUWER

City Hall and 30,000 striking city workers are playing a high-stakes game of chicken. Who is going to crack first?

So far, 18 days in to the strike, Mayor David Miller seems to be in a relatively good

position, with most councillors, on the left and the right, appearing to support his “fair contract that the city can afford” stance.

The strikers, meanwhile, are getting by on \$200 a week strike pay, that is, \$10 an hour for a maximum of 20 hours a week in picket line duty. Today, the resolve among a few of the strikers guarding the Café on the Square entrance to City Hall appeared to be wavering a bit.

“I got my strike paycheque in the mail yesterday,” said Raymond Lee, a parks worker at Toronto Island who has a seasonal job, May to October, and therefore is not entitled to any sick pay, even when he is working. “I have to pay my rent.” He did not seem too sure how he was going to do that.

The striker next to him, a 27-year-old man who just started in the city planning office, added that, “There is definitely a pressure from the workers to go back to work, because nobody wants to be on strike.” He also has less sympathy for the main union position in the strike, which is to protect the 18 sick days a year, which workers can bank and cash out for a maximum six-month windfall when they retire. “I’m a new hire and I don’t get the 18 sick days with pay,” he said.

He questioned the other union talking points -- that they want what the other unions got, and that they won’t back down. (“No give-backs,” say the pickets’ sandwich boards.)

“Bargaining for the other unions was done before the recession, and we are bargaining in a recession, so we’re in a bad position,” the young planner said. “I’m with a compromise. If we need to cut small pieces from our budget to make the city work, I’m in favour of that. We need give and take.”

Councillor Adam Vaughan (Trinity-Spadina), a strong supporter of the mayor, said people in his ward are not about to crack under union pressure and give the workers what they want.

Mr. Vaughan, who has moved his own office into the Centre for Social Innovation, on Spadina Avenue in Chinatown, during the strike, said the Chinatown and Queen West Business Improvement Areas are stepping into the breach.

“They’re increasing the frequency of their own cleanups,” he said. “We hope to recompensate them after the strike.” Park users are similarly picking up trash they find, he added.

“My residents aren’t going to surrender their parks to labour unions or city hall,” he said. “And management does a pretty good job of picking up the garbage overnight.

“We haven’t missed a beat,” he added. “You could probably throw yourself under a bus if you want. We decided to go out into the ward and find the work and do the work.”

Still, Mr. Vaughan noted the real victims are 52,000 kids whose city camps and swimming lessons are cancelled, and many more whose parks are weedy and, in some cases, are now garbage dumps.

Mr. Vaughan was speaking at the John Street Roundhouse, where Leon’s opened a gorgeous new store in the locomotive sheds that it has lovingly restored, providing a great backdrop for Mayor David Miller’s “keep calm and carry on” resolve. A 10-piece brass band played “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad.” The sun shone. Vintage steam and diesel locomotives flanked the crowd of hundreds, including women wore wide-brimmed straw hats.

The mayor, who wore a grey summer suit, waxed sentimental about two train sets his grandfather gave him for Christmas, back in England.

“In 1965 at Christmas he brought me a little toy clockwork railway... then in 1966 at Christmas he bought me an electric one,” the mayor recalled with a smile. “So I feel like a piece of my own heritage has been restored. Congratulations. This is Toronto working at its absolute best.”

These are the kind of pictures that Mr. Miller needs right now.

(Photo: Peter J. Thompson/National Post)



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by AmyHco

Chicken never ends well; both parties usually end up with severe lacerations.

Jul 08 2009

7:46 PM

Toronto -- a word once synonymous with clean, may soon be viewed as a germ infested organism which repels tourists and prospective residents.

Many people will be short when it comes time to pay the bills.

I disagree with your comment regarding the suffering of our children. Many privately funded camps have recruited extra staff to deal with the demand.

We are Torontonians. We are the worlds most diverse population. It's times like these where we come together and earn our title as one of the best cities to live in.

A local business has stepped up to the plate and put together [garbagehelp.com](http://www.garbagehelp.com). They helped me find professionals who could take my garbage, and best of all, they donated all the profits. Even strikers who are having trouble paying their bills can sign up to help clean the city while negotiations are underway.

[garbagehelp.com](http://www.garbagehelp.com) is a great example of how a large and diverse city comes together like a small town.

by ontarioboy

Amy - "...most diverse population..." why do people from Toronto always say that over and over? why do you always need to bring multicult into everything, ethnic diversity has nothing to do with a labour strike

Jul 09 2009

9:18 AM

by Chevy69

It's about time we stopped capitulating to the demands of the unions. They're absolutely ridiculous; who do they think will pay for the huge demands? Do they think they're going to make all kinds of overtime once the strike is over to clean up the city?

Jul 09 2009

9:33 AM

by Blue-man

In 22 days, on Aug. 1st, the Caribana Parade is slated to float through TO's downtown.

Jul 09 2009

9:34 AM

If the strike is still on, there isn't enough Febreze in North America to convert TO from a stinking cesspool to a Caribbean Paradise of hibiscus and coconut palm fragrances, as it should be.

So Mayor Miller, how much will this cost TO's hotels & restaurants or can we only expect your best Rhett Butler response?

As an ancestor of Mayor Thomas Langton Church (1915-21), I am personally offended by Miller's irresponsibility. He is operating in the best traditions of Roaring Twenties Chicago corruption, except Miller is supporting left-wing unionists with their noses in the public trough and their grubby hands in the cookie jar of taxpayer funds.

Pathetic.

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by Blue-man  
Jul 09 2009  
9:37 AM

Make that a descendant, not an ancestor, of Tommy Church.

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by ExRed  
Jul 09 2009  
9:46 AM

Come lets not be foolish and think that either the union or Miller gives a damn about the people. Miller is a socialist who is in bed with the same unions he is fighting. This makes Miller an abusive partner in this said relationship. Neither care about the city of Toronto. Both care about money...more couples fight over money than anything else. This is what we are watching happen now!

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by Tossed Salad  
Jul 09 2009  
10:40 AM

"Park users are similarly picking up trash they find, he added." Way to go councilor. These union idiots are now going to picket the parks and threaten little old ladies and children.

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by RogersJi  
Jul 09 2009  
10:55 AM

AmyHco wrote: "Even strikers who are having trouble paying their bills can sign up to help clean the city while negotiations are underway."

I think that these are called "scabs".

ExRed: I thought most couples' fights started over sex then moved over to money because it is tangible. So what is the equivalent for Miller and the Unions for sex?

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by Advokat  
Jul 09 2009  
11:41 AM

RogersJi: I think that the sex part is when the unions and the mayor collude on how to f\$#k the people of Toronto.

But your "scabs" statement bears comment. I assume that, by using the word "scabs", you are intending to insult those who would rather work and earn a paycheque, than join a strike that they don't believe in, led by a union in which they have no faith?

I applaud anyone who has the gumption to go back to work instead of mindlessly parroting union dogma. If I worked for the city and I thought that the deal proposed by the city was fair, why should I go on strike?!? Just to support my union leaders (who continue to receive a salary during the strike)?!?

Besides extortion against city residents, these lazy greedy CUPE thugs are also holding hostage all of those reluctant members who actually WANT to work, but are scared of union reprisals.

Stay strong, Toronto. In a war of attrition, the union will cave first. You can be sure of it.

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by Advokat  
Jul 09 2009  
11:48 AM

Something that should make EVERYONE re-think their assessment of the 'value' of unions:

A recent CFIB report based on 2006 Census findings shows government and public-sector employees are typically paid between 8% and 17% more than similarly employed individuals in the private sector. When other benefits are taken into account, the number rises to more than 30%.

“Expressed in dollar terms, public-sector employers have a combined wage and benefits bill that is \$19-billion higher than if they had kept costs to private sector norms,” the report says.

Sickening. Better-than-private-sector wages, combined with laughable benefits and job security. What a joke.

The government should privatize everything that can be privatized, and stop wasting our tax dollars.

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by Advokat  
Jul 09 2009  
11:50 AM

...and for the record, I DARE any union thug to try to stop me from picking up trash in the park where my children play.

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by Ryan\_  
Jul 09 2009  
11:58 AM

RogersJi, I have no idea what you're trying to say.

Anyway, the unions are going to lose this battle. Either Miller caves (because this union is way too entitled to concede a dime), or Miller contracts out.

I strongly don't expect Miller to contract out, so a new mayor eventually will take his place and then say GOODBYE to these overentitled unions.

Don't let the door hit you on the way out.

The time is now for these unions to grovel before the taxpayers, not fight them. I guarantee the unions will lose and the taxpayers will enjoy it.

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by Blue-man  
Jul 09 2009  
12:01 PM

@ ExRed;

Sad but true. We, the voters, listen to the high-minded rhetoric, espousal of supposedly held principles and promises of reform and ethical leadership by the same candidates over & over during every election.

And we buy it, hook, line & sinker, every time and end up with a bunch of disingenuous, selfish, self-serving politicians who feather their own nests and who are preoccupied with their own longevity.

Then we hesitate on kicking their butts come the next election, having been persuaded to give them the benefit of the doubt based on apologies and promises to do better.

Will we ever learn? Will Toronto citizens get the message this time & boot these

pathetic liars out & elect some functional, honest business-minded leaders onto the Toronto City Council?

If the voters don't "get it", they are doomed to continuing disappointment.

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by Southsider  
Jul 09 2009  
3:34 PM

One thing that perplexes me is that the unions have picked a fight with one of the most union-friendly mayors they could possibly hope for. This strike could very well cost Miller his job, and I think we can all agree that whoever replaces him will not be nearly as sympathetic to them as he is. Talk about biting the hand that feeds...