

Miller's way out?

Friday, July 24, 2009 06:39 PM

Adam Radwanski

To those of you stuck inside on a rainy days looking to amuse yourself with analysis of Canadian politics, apologies that blogging has been a little sparse this week. Aside from the usual excuses about a slow news period, I spent much of my week attempting to understand the relationship between Dalton McGuinty and David Miller.

It's not an easy thing to do. Miller's shop has clammed up during the summer of labour discontent, and the people closest to McGuinty are maddeningly difficult to throw off message. That said, [here's what I came up with](#) for our weekend paper.

A quick addendum might help to frame it in the context of the ([possibly never-ending](#)) city workers' strike.

If you're wondering why the provincial government is very unenthusiastic about legislating garbage collectors et al back to work, McGuinty's reluctance to bail Miller out during the next budget season - which I explain at considerable length in that piece - probably helps explain it.

Were the province to force arbitration, the arbitrator - as has been noted previously in this space and elsewhere - would probably force very few of the concessions that Miller wants from the union. So workers would likely return to their jobs with their sick-day plans more or less intact, and a reasonably generous pay raise.

That would be bad news for Miller, in the sense that his critics would accuse him of putting Torontonians through the unpleasantness of a long work stoppage without actually achieving much of anything. But it would also be good news for Miller, in the sense that it would give him an opening to blame the province.

Their province's hand-chosen guy, he could argue, had undone all his hard work to rein in the city's expenses. So how could McGuinty turn his back when the inevitable cash crunch hits?

Considering that the city will probably be well in the hole even if it *does* get a whole pile of union concessions, you could make the case that union-friendly arbitration would actually be the best-case scenario for Miller at this point. If that happens, it might put to the test just how much of a hard-ass McGuinty is prepared to be.