

Neither side of Toronto strike spared citizens' wrath

Online respondents less likely to vote for David Miller by 58 per cent margin

Jill Colvin

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Nearly 60 per cent of Torontonians surveyed this week say they are less likely to vote for David Miller now than before the six-week municipal workers' strike began, a new poll has found.

The results are evidence of the beating the mayor's reputation has taken, even as he managed to win a narrower-than-expected city council vote Friday to ratify the new contract with the city's unionized employees after a day of bitter debate.

While Mr. Miller won this vote, 58 per cent of residents said they are less likely to support him in next year's mayoral election as a result of the 39-day strike.

The Globe and Mail/CTV poll shows his sliding popularity is driven by the perception that the city gave away too much to the unions, especially in allowing current employees to continue accumulating 18 sick days a year, which nearly 80 per cent oppose.

Globe and Mail/CTV poll on the municipal strike

"The mayor's appeal has taken a significant hit," said Tim Woolstencroft, managing partner of The Strategic Counsel, which conducted the online poll. Just 23 per cent of respondents approved of Mr. Miller's performance during the strike and only 18 per cent approved of city council's. More than half say their opinions of both have worsened.

"Sixty-one per cent say the mayor capitulated to the unions when they really wanted the mayor and this city to hold tough and not give in," Mr. Woolstencroft said. Only 9 per cent of respondents – fewer than one in 10 – said union negotiators made more concessions than the city.

The survey of 750 Toronto residents was conducted Wednesday and Thursday, after the details of the city's tentative agreement with CUPE Local 79 were made public. The Local 416 deal mirrored the Local 79 deal. Members of Local 79, representing inside workers, ratified their agreement Wednesday, while members of Local 416, representing outside workers, voted Thursday.

City council ratified the deals by a vote of 21-17 after a day-long debate Friday.

The new contracts protect a controversial perk that allows current full-time employees to keep accumulating 18 sick days a year, then exchange them for as much as six months' pay when they retire. Only 22 per cent of those surveyed approve of the practice.

Looking back at the last six weeks of rotting garbage, picket lines and cancelled services, most Torontonians feel residents coped well.

But respondents believe even more strongly than before the deal that union workers should not have gone on strike during a recession.

They are also not quick to forgive. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed now believe that garbage services should be privatized to prevent future strikes – an 8-per-cent jump from the number who supported the idea before the agreement.

"I think that reflects the frustration with what's gone on the past week," Mr. Woolstencroft said.

And while residents give the mayor and city council a low score, city workers fared even worse.

Nearly 70 per cent of respondents said their opinions of city workers and municipal unions have soured. Just 10 per cent approve of the municipal unions' performance.

But municipal workers, Mr. Woolstencroft notes, don't have to face re-election.

“The mayor and city council need to be concerned,” he warned.