

Toronto strike deal not quite done

Fate of tentative deal with CUPE Local 416, representing the city's 6,000 outside workers, still in limbo as city and union meet to iron out 'outstanding issues'; official details released

BRODIE FENLON and JENNIFER LEWINGTON

Toronto — Globe and Mail
Update Last updated on
Wednesday, Jul. 29, 2009
12:57PM EDT

Toronto's municipal indoor workers have finally learned the official details of a tentative settlement as they gathered by the hundreds today at a downtown hotel for a ratification vote.

As first reported by The Globe and Mail, the deal allows full-time unionized workers to keep the controversial sick day benefit program if they so choose and continue to accrue credits until they leave the city, at which time they can cash out up to six months of sick pay depending on length of service.

However, employees can opt for an immediate cash payout at a discounted rate and move into a new short-term disability program, which provides for six-months of coverage but no carry-over provisions. New employees will be automatically enrolled in the new plan.

The deal includes wage increases of 6 per cent over three years: 1.75 per cent in 2009, 2 per cent in 2010 and 2.25 per cent in 2011.

[Read the tentative settlement](#)

[Download this file \(.pdf\)](#)

The city's decision to grandfather the controversial sick-day benefit mirrors what has happened in York Region, Mississauga and Hamilton, but it has still drawn fire from critics who claim Mayor David Miller caved to the unions.

“There is absolutely no justification for increasing wages or leaving those benefits intact,” said Satinder Chera, Ontario director of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. “The mayor's going to have a lot to answer for,” he said.

Yet even one of Mr. Miller's toughest council critics, former Etobicoke mayor Doug Holyday, concedes that taking the benefit away from current employees would have been next to impossible.

“The sick-plan settlement is not as good as we had hoped for, but it's still doing the right thing,” he said. “To turn around and get nothing would have been worse.”

The contract will likely be a tough pill to swallow for Toronto's non-unionized workers, who face a pay freeze this year and were not given the option to continue to accrue sick pay credits when they switched to a similar short-term



disability program last year.

Meanwhile, the fate of a tentative deal with CUPE Local 416, representing the city's 6,000 outside workers, was still in limbo this morning as the City of Toronto and union representatives met to iron out some “outstanding issues” that stand in the way of ending the 38-day civic workers strike.

In a statement, Local president Mark Ferguson said there are “still final pieces to put into place,” adding he hopes to resolve the unspecified issues at this morning's meeting. City spokesman Kevin Sack confirmed the meeting but declined to specify the topics under discussion.

Outside workers had expected to vote today as well, but the timing now depends on the outcome of talks between Mr. Ferguson and city officials.

If union members approve the proposed deal, city council was expected to vote on it Friday.

Mr. Miller said in a statement released late last night that workers were welcome to return to work as soon as they ratify the deal – before council approval.

Details of the city's plans for a return to normal operations are expected at a briefing this afternoon.

The summary of the offer provided to members of Local 79 at the Sheraton Centre hotel says workers must decide by Nov. 18 what to do with their sick pay. Those who choose a payout will get the windfall next February. Workers will also get Family Day added to their collective agreements as a designated holiday.

The deal gives workers minor increases to hourly premiums for working nights and weekends, as well as wage protection for 35 months if an employee is redeployed to a lower rated position.