

Outdoor workers union threatens to leave talks

Sets Sunday midnight deadline

JOSH WINGROVE AND JENNIFER LEWINGTON

From Saturday's Globe and Mail Last updated on Saturday, Jul. 25, 2009 04:18AM EDT

One of two unions representing striking City of Toronto workers will walk away from the bargaining table at midnight tomorrow if it hasn't reached a deal with the city, its president said yesterday.

"I am a patient man, but I am close to the end of my rope," said Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 416 president Mark Ferguson, representing outside workers.

"A few minutes ago I told the city negotiators that time is running out. We must have a settlement by midnight Sunday, or we are finished."

Asked what he meant by "we are finished," Mr. Ferguson said his union would stop negotiating and stay on strike until the city presents a deal the union finds fair.

The announcement was also the first sign of a split between Mr. Ferguson's members and their fellow striking indoor workers, represented by CUPE Local 79, which said it has no plans to follow suit if Local 416 walks away from bargaining.

"We haven't set a deadline, but we would obviously love to get a deal this weekend," spokesman Robert Lamoureux said. "Local 79 is taking it one day at a time."

Toronto Mayor David Miller responded an hour after Mr. Ferguson's announcement.

"I have stated repeatedly over the past several weeks that the unions needed to bring a sense of urgency to the bargaining table and get on with reaching an agreement," the mayor said in a statement.

"I am pleased that Local 416 will now bring that sense of urgency to the table. The city has been and remains fully prepared to bargain 24 hours a day to reach an agreement that is fair to our workers and affordable to Torontonians."

Mr. Ferguson accused the city of failing to work toward a solution, and called on city negotiators to be given "a mandate to settle" rather than "a mandate to bargain."

He said union officials would be at the table around the clock, and rejected the idea of the appointment of an arbitrator to reach a deal.

"No, I don't see that [an arbitrator] as being a viable option. The best collective agreements are agreements that are directly negotiated between the parties."

The 24,000 striking workers walked out on June 22.

The typically soft-spoken Mr. Ferguson said that "enough is enough" and sought to characterize the frustrating strike as the result of the city's unwillingness to negotiate.

"We wanted to conclude negotiations last March, but the city refused to budge from its concessionary demands," he said.

"There has been a lack of urgency in the negotiations from the city's perspective, and we're saying enough is enough."

New garbage drop-off sites

Two new garbage drop-off sites will open today, on day 34 of Toronto's civic workers' strike.

The parking lot of Amesbury Arena at 155 Culford Road and the tennis courts at Otter Creek Centre, at 140

Cheritan Ave., will be open 7 a.m.-7 p.m. daily, officials said yesterday.

Sites at Caledonia Park and North Toronto Memorial Arena, at capacity, were set to close last night. But they still will be monitored for security, with regular inspections by the city's medical officer of health.

In total, there are 24 temporary garbage drop-off sites.

Meanwhile, on Thursday and yesterday, the city filed requests with the Superior Court of Ontario for injunctions against pickets who have blocked access for city officials and the public at Bluffer's Park in Scarborough and at a city welfare office in North Etobicoke. *Jennifer Lewington*