

Toronto on strike: Exhaustive, all-night talks seal the deal

Posted: July 27, 2009, 9:51 PM by Barry Hertz

[Toronto on strike](#)



Mayor David Miller (right) speaks to city's chief negotiator, Bruce Anderson, during a press conference held at city hall to confirm that the city of Toronto has reached deals with CUPE Local 79 and Local 416 on July 27, 2009. Photo by Aaron Lynett for National Post

By Allison Hanes, National Post

Little sleep and a lot of takeout food were ingredients in a whirlwind weekend bargaining session that finally broke the impasse between the City of Toronto and its two striking unions after 37 days.

It all started late on Friday at the Delta East on Kennedy Road in Scarborough. Mark Ferguson, the president of Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 416, representing 6,000 outdoor workers, convened the press to speak about the city's earlier announcement that it would seek to renegotiate its essential services agreement on ambulance service. Instead, he dropped a bombshell.

"I am a patient man but I am close to the end of my rope," Mr. Ferguson said sitting alone at a long, empty banquet table. "A few minutes ago I told the city negotiators that time is running out. We must have settlement by midnight on Sunday or we are finished. "We will not be at the table after 12 o'clock Sunday night."

Mr. Ferguson's ultimatum came as civic workers in Windsor voted to accept a new contract after a 101-day strike — news that gave a new sense of possibility to the talks.

Union members and media congregated at the Scarborough hotel in anticipation of the Sunday deadline.

At midnight, Pat Daley, a CUPE spokeswoman, appeared instead of Mr. Ferguson. She said intense talks had been extended one hour.

But 1 a.m. came and went, with no Mr. Ferguson. Ms. Daley reappeared briefly to say, "It could be a while."

Anxious Local 416 members took smoke breaks and grumbled: "A deadline is a deadline."

At about 2 a.m., CUPE staffers arrived at the hotel with a large order of takeout food — a harbinger of a long night ahead.

At 7 a.m., a haggard-looking Mr. Ferguson issued one last ultimatum: Local 416 would give the city just half an hour to finish the deal or this time, he would walk.

“At this point in time a settlement is entirely in the hands of the city,” he said.

Another 1½ hours ticked by before Mr. Ferguson returned, this time in the company of his negotiating team. He smiled and said Local 416 had reached “the basis of a deal.”

But in a show of solidarity, he said his members would not ratify unless “sister” Local 79, representing inside workers, reached an agreement across town.

Focus then shifted to the Sheraton on Queen Street where Ann Dembinski, president of the union for inside workers, was holed up with her team.

Robert Lamoureux, a CUPE spokesman, said the deal between outdoor workers and the city had definitely given a bounce to bargaining downtown.

By 2:30 p.m., the finishing touches were being put on a deal when both Mayor David Miller and Local 79 announced dueling press conferences. Neither would back down so they took place simultaneously.

Looking grey and exhausted, Bruce Anderson, executive director of human resources for the city and its chief negotiator, described an around-the-clock, face-to-face bargaining session with Local 416 over the weekend that had sealed the deal.

Standing at his side the Mayor added: “I think you can tell Mr. Anderson was definitely at the table 24 hours.”