

Here's why you need patience

In this occasional feature, the National Post tells you everything you need to know about a complicated issue. Today: Katie Hewitt walks us through the process for cleaning up the city when a strike by 30,000 Toronto workers comes to an end, on Friday at the earliest.

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Q Why is garbage still piling up every-where? Haven't the city and the workers reached a deal?

A Well, kind of. On Monday morning, the Toronto Civic Employees Union (CUPE) Local 416 reached a tentative settlement with the City of Toronto, followed that afternoon with a settlement from Local 79. Bargaining is off the table for now as Mayor David Miller and CUPE representatives have claimed satisfaction with the terms of the agreement, which won't be made public until both parties have reached ratification.

Q How do they ratify the deal?

A Union workers are preparing to vote today on the proposed settlement, which was arranged by the collective bargaining committee. The contract will be approved if the general membership votes "yes." The City Council must vote. Councillors need 24 hours notice for a meeting, so if notice is given Thursday, voting will take place Friday to implement the contract.

Q How will the unions, made up of thousands of workers, conduct their votes?

A Information sessions will be held for union workers throughout the duration of voting day today. Written copies of the entire contract will be made available, as well as point-form notes for the sake of simplicity. Verbal presentations will also be made at set times throughout the day. Voting will operate on a secret-ballot system and will be based on a simple majority, or 50% plus one vote.

Q How will City Council conduct its vote?

A Ratification from the city requires a majority vote from council members present. If all councillors are in attendance, acceptance of the contract requires at least 23 votes in favour. A tie is counted as a loss, and the contract will not be instated.

Q Why is the resumption of service taking so long?

A In 2002, the day after legislation, all union members reported for work, and some arrived early to begin street cleanup, a massive undertaking that saw a small cavalcade of garbage trucks dispatched to the city's main streets. As the workers returned to their jobs, the city and the workers met with a mediator and arbitrator, who settled unresolved issues.

This time we must wait for voting, before anything can happen. Even so, Mayor Miller has said that the cleanup could begin as early as this weekend, pending ratification; a 24-hour turnaround is still possible.

Q What are the city's priorities once the strike ends?

A Garbage will be the priority: City staff will remove litter from temporary dump sites in parks and clean the streets of debris. Mayor Miller said he hopes Toronto residents will enjoy curbside garbage collection next week for the first time in six weeks. "That's certainly our goal. In fact I'd like it picked up from my house," Mr. Miller said. "My garage is a quite interesting place to be at the moment."

Q What if I want to go swimming?

A Other services, like public pools, community centres and daycares will take a little longer. Equipment requires maintenance, pools require cleaning, and daycares must order food, Mayor Miller said.

Q Will workers receive overtime pay for the cleanup? MoMonday is a holiday

A Yes. Some council members, including Case Ootes and Doug Holyday, have expressed concern about the cost of overtime wages incurred by the city. Unionized city employees could receive the standard time and a half, or double time in some circumstances, if they continued to work through to the upcoming holiday Monday.