

Kelly McParland: Toronto, the workers' paradise where nothing works

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[Full Comment](#), [Kelly McParland](#)



Toronto at the moment is a shining example of a major city operating along leftwing principles. Nothing works.

It's a workers' paradise, paradise in this case being a place where you no longer have to do your job. The services that two million people have paid for [aren't being delivered](#), because two city unions can't get what they want and are on strike. The interests of the majority are subverted to the demands of a small, privileged minority. It's the Family Compact in reverse. The unions, ultra-conservative in their left-wing zeal, resist change at all costs. They want a world that remains forever unchanging, if change requires acceptance of fewer personal privileges. The state, according to the striking city workers, is them. The rest of us are supplicants.

Toronto has ceased functioning. The daycares aren't open. The community centres are closed. The pools don't operate. City-run camps are shut. Parks aren't maintained.

Families that counted on services to help amuse the kids over the summer are out of luck. Working families -- the sort the left is supposed to care about, more than hard-hearted right-wingers -- are on their own, forced to juggle jobs, in a recession, with unexpected and unnecessary childcare complications. Small businesses, the kind that fuel the economy and employ the sort of people unions champion, are suffering. The normally left-friendly Toronto Star [reported on Sam Sinnthurai](#), a restaurant owner who spent \$7,000 adding an outdoor patio for customers, but now can't open it because he can't get fire and safety approvals from the city. (Why you'd need a fire or safety inspection for a concrete slab surrounded by a metal fence is another issue). "I'm a hardworking man and we're losing business," he complains.

Do the city unions care? Nope. Because unions, despite their rhetoric, care only about themselves, public sector unions in particular. Private sector labour groups have had to concede the reality of the recession, contributing to the survival of their jobs. Air Canada, Chrysler, GM -- even Globe and Mail employees agreed to concessions Thursday to avoid a strike. But the city can't go bankrupt, and the strikers jobs are safe whatever the case, so there's no such pressure on Toronto workers. All the pressure is on the politicians,

and in Mayor David Miller Toronto's unions have an unusually vulnerable opponent.

As Peter Kuitenbrouwer [reports in his ongoing coverage of the conflict](#), the mayor views himself as a friend of organized labour and has conceded time and again to the unions, even at the expense of the city where his first allegiance should lie. He's protected them from contracting out. He's pushed for higher wages. He de-privatized trash service and gave the unions total control, and now the trash is piling higher thanks to union intransigence in those same neighbourhoods. City councillors can't even meet for their regular jaw-jaw sessions since there's no one to provide "support services" (i.e. turning on the lights and microphones) so they've drifted off to other summer pastimes, leaving Mr. Miller to mope around wondering why his friends in the union are treating him this way.

Memo to Mr. Miller: It's because they're not really your friends, Mr. Mayor. Unions will play friendly as long as you always give them what they want. But submission has to be total. No questions, no arguments. Because they don't really care about anyone but themselves.

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Photo: Toronto Mayor David Miller at a press conference prior to walkout by city workers in June. (Peter J. Thompson/National Post)