

Post-strike windfall?

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Evidently following the example set by strike-bound Windsor, Mayor David Miller has declared that Toronto, too, might compensate residents for services lost due to a walkout. "We can't look at that in detail until the strike is over and we assess everything," Miller told reporters yesterday. "But the basic answer is, yes, that will be considered."

But both Torontonians and Windsor residents would be ill-advised to bank on a post-settlement windfall, at least just yet.

Faced with a city workers' walkout that has already lasted 11 weeks, Windsor politicians are on record considering a strike-related refund for municipal taxpayers. That city estimates it has saved \$300,000 a day in wages as a result of the strike, and net gains are to be tabulated with an eye to giving some money back.

Even Windsor officials, however, note that all strike-related costs aren't yet known, so it is impossible to say how much money the city will net from not paying the wages of those on the picket lines.

Any public expectation of post-strike payouts is premature before a full accounting of how much money is saved – or lost – through a labour dispute. There may be nothing to share except red ink.

Toronto's last municipal walkout, lasting 16 days, resulted in a net *cost* to taxpayers of \$3.3 million, even though the city saved millions in unpaid wages. Those savings were more than offset by strike-related costs and by lost revenue from unpaid licences and other user fees.

Furthermore, even if there are net savings this time, there might be good arguments for spending the money on cash-starved services rather than rebating it to taxpayers.