

## Let's 'get back to normal'

Mayor says progress at the bargaining table means 'now is the time to end strike'

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The first sign of movement in acrimonious contract talks between the city and two striking unions has prompted Mayor David Miller to ask the workers to take down the pickets and return to work.

"I want to say to the unions and the people they represent -- Enough is enough," Miller said at the city's daily briefing at Metro Hall yesterday, as striking workers chanted outside.

"There's been progress at the bargaining table this week and now is the time to end this strike. Allow children in Toronto to use their public services and allow us to get back to normal."

Miller said the whole city has been inconvenienced but it's kids in particular -- including 2,800 children in strikebound daycares -- who've been affected the most.

"There are many children in this city who don't have alternatives to publicly run recreational programs, or access to city run pools for example," Miller said.

"They're being severely hurt by this strike."

"It's something that works for everyone. That would be our preference."

Not long after the mayor finished the briefing, Mark Ferguson, president of CUPE Local 416, and Anne Dembinski, president of Local 79, issued a joint statement.

"Mayor Miller said today what our bargaining committees have been trying to get through to him and his negotiators for months now -enough is enough," the statement said. "Instead of hearing us, the city of Toronto forced 24,000 people out on strike.

"We believe a settlement and an end to this strike can be reached quickly if the city withdraws its concession demands and shows respect for its employees with equal treatment. Enough is enough, Mayor Miller? Tell it to your negotiators!"

Earlier in the day, union spokesman Pat Daley also said the union prefers the province stay out of the dispute and not pass legislation ordering an end to the strike.

"We've been working since January to try and get negotiated settlements and that's still our preferred route to go. We think when you have a negotiated settlement you have better long-term relationships in the work place," Daley said.

Miller agreed, saying the city will not ask the province to order the workers back onto the job.

The city has been adamant throughout the talks its financial position has been wrecked by the recession, with taxes down and welfare payments up, and it can't afford a hefty wage increase and such perks as banked sick time, paid out at retirement.

The two unions, representing about 24,000 workers, have said the city is using the recession to strip away hard-won benefits and deny workers a raise they deserve.

A deal is possible with goodwill and hard work, Miller said, adding taxpayers may see some form of rebate for services they paid for and couldn't use once the strike is settled.

Some non-monetary issues have now been settled, the mayor said.

"We will consider it but we don't know what it will look like," Miller said. "When you pay for a program that's not provided, you expect some kind of consideration. We can't look at that in detail until the strike's over and we've assessed everything."

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