

MESSAGE TO CITY HALL –
ONLY A FAIR CONTRACT WILL SETTLE THE STRIKE
Thursday, July 2, 2009

The strike by City of Toronto employees is truly regrettable, and truly avoidable. When CUPE locals 79 and 416 entered collective bargaining early this year, nobody could imagine that their members would be walking picket lines by summer.

Negotiations have dragged on for months with no progress. The primary stumbling block has been the concessions the City has been trying to extract from the union contracts. The City of Toronto and Mayor David Miller has seriously underestimated worker's resolve to defend their collective agreement rights. Both locals received one of the strongest strike mandates ever. Members have been signing up for picket duty in record numbers.

While the media has been trying to whip up a frenzy over the strike, the public has not yet adopted such an anti-union stance. While people generally recognize that there are future financial issues the City will face, the attempt to set up CUPE 416 and 79 members for concessions compared to other groups of municipal employees does not sit well. In fact, across Ontario CUPE has negotiated dozens of municipal agreements in the last year without major concessions – except in Windsor where that Mayor's approach has led to a bitter three month strike.

The May 7th Stewards Assembly framed labour's approach through this crisis – workers didn't cause this crisis, and we should not be the ones paying for it. And while in some situations workers have had the bankruptcy gun held to their heads in order to force concessions, there is no reason for this approach to be accepted by those who provide services to the public every day.

The larger context of this dispute is the failure of the current model of globalization that was shaped by deregulation, privatization, and unrestricted trade deals. Across the world, business interests have been attempting to use the financial crisis to enforce further structural adjustment. It is no accident that the City's fiscal crisis, created by the Harris amalgamation and downloading, has not been resolved by Queen's Park Liberals.

In the face of the never-ending budget crunch, conservative councilors continue to demand contracting out, wage freezes and privatization. Newly elected Conservative leader Tim Hudak has waded in demanding back to work legislation, while others are urging Miller to hang tough against his own employees.

As the strike drags on, there is a real danger of a backlash being exploited by the right-wing and corporate interests in this city. Comparisons are being drawn to the 1995 election when Mike Harris swept into power and launched a relentless attack on all workers. Mayor Miller and the progressive Councillors who enjoyed labour's support would do well to understand the political minefield that is being sown every day that the strike continues.

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The fact is the strike will not be settled until a fair contract is put on the table by the City's negotiators. The entire labour movement in Toronto will support our sisters and brothers in CUPE until this becomes a reality.

The executive board recommends:

1. Labour Council call on all affiliates and activists to support CUPE Local 79 and 416 picket lines and strike actions across Toronto
2. All affiliates and union members immediately contact the Mayor and City Councillors to demand the strike be resolved with a fair contract
3. All union leaders and activists engage in media outreach through letters to the editors, talk shows, and new media
4. All affiliates undertake to educate their own members as to the issues involved in this dispute