

## Union leaders differ on style but no sign bond coming unglued

The stakes of a prolonged strike, however, play out differently for the two locals as talks drag on

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As a strike by city workers hits day 27 on Saturday with no deal in sight, some noticeable differences in style have emerged between the two union leaders at the bargaining table.

Ann Dembinski, the president of Local 79 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, is vocal and aggressive in denouncing the city's offer to her 18,000 inside workers. She is the one who fires personal shots at Mayor David Miller, accused by conservative critics of being too close to labour.

Mark Ferguson, the freshman president of CUPE Local 416, representing about 6,000 outside workers, including garbage collectors, is more low-key in conveying his displeasure with the city's proposals.

That's in sharp contrast to his more flamboyant, fiery predecessor, Brian Cochrane, who, in the last strike in 2002, often overshadowed Ms. Dembinski.

Even with style differences, and hints of behind-the-scenes friction over strategy, there's no sign the unusual show of solidarity by the two locals before the strike is cracking.

"We have remained in close contact since and before the strike, and that co-ordination continues," Mr. Ferguson said Friday. "The co-ordination and collaboration between the two locals is strong."

Unlike in 2002, when there was little co-operation between the locals and the outside workers went out one week before the inside workers, Ms. Dembinski and Mr. Ferguson made a pact early on to work together.

Still, as the talks drag on, the stakes of a prolonged strike play out differently for the two locals.

Already, some predict calls to privatize garbage collection will be an issue in next year's election.

"If there is going to be contracting out ... it is Local 416 that is going to take it on the chops," said Councillor Adam Vaughan (Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina). "No one contracts out [the work of Local] 79" with white-collar and clerical members, he said.

To that end, city negotiators parse the words of the two leaders for any divergent views or hints of a deal.

Friday, Mr. Ferguson said in a statement that there was "nothing fair" about the city's offer released a week ago yesterday. But with some city demands off the table and a wage package sweetened to 7.2 per cent over four years, he also said the offer "gave us something to work with."

"And that is what we have been trying to do since last Friday," he said in the statement. "If that offer had been tabled before the strike deadline, we may not have had to strike."

A spokesman for CUPE 79 put it a little differently. "It's not something to work with in terms of what is there for us. It is more that [the offer] was the first time we saw some movement," said Robert Lamoureux. "For [Local] 79 it is more [that] the city needs to come much further."

For both locals, a contentious issue is the city's call to end a system of bankable sick days, potentially worth up to six months pay at retirement.

"We are discussing all the issues that may lead to a deal," Mr. Ferguson said, when asked about his local's proposals on sick days and wages.

But it's not clear that Ms. Dembinski has any interest in a city move to a cheaper, short-term disability plan.

She accused Mr. Miller of “playing games” that have slowed progress in the talks. Livid over the mayor's decision to go over the heads of the locals to lay out the city's offer in public on July 10, she said, “it appears to us that he is engaging in tactics that almost appear to be union busting.”