

Toronto on strike: Garbage day (finally) comes to Weston Road

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National Post*

Garbage day came to Weston Road yesterday after local businesses, supported by their city councillor, hired a private disposal company to pick up trash.

Smiling residents hauled a month's worth of waste out of their houses and lined it up along the curb on Weston from Wilson Avenue to Finch Avenue. A pall of month-old, rancid food hanging in the air — and trailing down the road behind the company's green garbage truck — could not dampen the celebratory mood.



“Thank God! God has visited us today,” said Huynh Kai, who lives in a house just north of Sheppard Avenue on Weston and put out his garbage after hearing of the collection.

The collection day was a sign of the changing mood in the city. The councillor behind it, Giorgio Mammoliti (Ward 7 York West), is a member of the Mayor's executive committee. He has supported the Mayor's policy of keeping garbage collection in the hands of unionized city workers. But yesterday he said his frustration led him to team up with the local Business Improvement Area and hire what are essentially strike-breakers, to troll the street in a truck and pick up the neighbourhood's trash. CUPE members briefly picketed the truck yesterday.

Mr. Mammoliti, a former president of CUPE Local 767, representing public housing workers, said that union was not allowed to strike. He wants the province to also strip garbage collectors of their right to strike.

“I believe in the process, I believe in negotiating, I believe in all that. But I also believe they should be an essential service and I'd like the province to make them an essential service,” he said. “I don't want to represent the City of Toronto and have to go through another strike.”

Mr. Mammoliti said he wasn't trying to pick a fight with the union, but called for the city's striking workers to return to work.

“I think they should come back to work. Keep talking with the city over the summer,” he said. “And if they still feel they need to be on strike, do it in September or October when it's less of a headache for people.”

The councillor, who lent a hand picking up garbage for an hour, said he thinks a city strike presents health and safety concerns for residents.

“People are supposed to stay with rats and mice and maggots?” he said. “The union is advocating health and safety within its members — it's hypocritical.”

The councillor also said he agreed with the Mayor's approach. "I think the Mayor is holding firm and there are many of us who want him to hold firm."

Sandra Farina, executive director of the Emery Village BIA, said she hired TorCan Waste Management yesterday to clean up the area's major street until the strike is over. Local businesses fund 50% of the BIA budget. The other half comes from city coffers. Community response, she said, has been overwhelmingly positive.

"All of these people have been honking their horns and coming up to say thanks," she said.

Ms. Farina wouldn't say how much the private workers are costing the association, and said any decision on continuing the service depends on how long the strike lasts. She estimated the company was costing her group about \$100 per hour. "Part of it is being donated by the company," she said.

Alan Cliffe, a garbage collector with TorCan working the route yesterday, said he was making \$17 an hour, his usual rate. As of October, 2008, Toronto "driver-loader, solid waste" employees earned \$25.11 an hour.

After filling one truck with garbage from the east side of Weston, Mr. Cliffe said he dumped the trash at BFI's private dump in Concord, Ont., before returning to clean up the west side of the street.

As Mr. Cliffe tossed reeking garbage, some sitting outside since last month, neighbourhood residents approached and asked him if he would take their garbage as well. He agreed.

Mr. Mammoliti said his office and the BIA weren't encouraging residents on other streets to drop off trash on Weston, saying the initiative was primarily to help the area's businesses.

But that didn't stop Anna Martinez and her friend Laura Burrows from dropping off some trash they've amassed at their homes nearby.

"To me, it's not fair what he's doing," Ms. Burrows said of Mr. Mammoliti's support for the BIA and not for residents who live off of Weston Road. "It might start a war ... All I know is I pay taxes and I expect service."

And although Mr. Mammoliti doesn't live in the ward, he said he is also using private collection to get rid of his waste. "I actually got rid of it with a private guy. That was before today," he said. "I'm not going to fool around."

Private garbage collector Alan Cliffe plugs his nose at the terrible stench of month-old garbage as he and associate John Zelazny, right, pick up trash along Weston Road for the Emery Villiage Business Improvement Association. Photo by J.P. Moczulski for National Post