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## **A tale of two pickets**

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This is a tale of two pickets at two Toronto transfer stations, near to each other on the map, yet miles apart in how they treated residents and the media yesterday.

As the story goes, it was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

First the worst: Scarborough transfer station near Markham Road and Nugget Avenue. As a resident, you couldn't help but feel under siege. A manager acting as a bylaw officer barked at people who parked on the wrong side of the street and threatened others with fines for illegal dumping. Strikers seemed to relish delivering the news to hapless residents with bags in tow that they faced a wait of at least an hour, which turned out to be several hours for those at the back of the line. "You can try Bermondsey [transfer station], but good luck," said a female striker to a new arrival in the queue. "The wait there is even longer. You might as well just go home."

After a 15 minute wait, the picketers would allow one person past the blockade. The resident would have to carry his garbage down a road to a gate, where he was delayed for another 15 minutes before he could dump his trash. Only when he returned was the next person in line allowed in. It was a long, drawn-out affair for those who stuck it out under the blazing sun.

Hoping to confirm the protocol, I asked to speak to the picket captain. A polite young striker, one of the few at Scarborough, offered to fetch him.

Meanwhile, a district captain did speak to me. I asked him to explain the protocol and wait times.

"I don't know," he said. "You can get a bag of garbage and get in line if you want to find out." He eventually walked off.

The polite striker returned to tell me the picket captain wasn't going to talk to me. "I'm sorry," she said, a little sheepishly, the way you do when you're forced to apologize for the behaviour of a relative.

What a difference a few kilometres can make.

At Victoria Park transfer station near Finch Avenue and Highway 404, there was only one person in line. He said he had waited for 45 minutes. But when his time came, picketers wearing work gloves carried his bags in for him (I don't know if was for my benefit or not, but either way, the strikers were far more civil).

So was district captain Ed, who engaged me in conversation, explained the union's side of the dispute, and apologized in advance to the odd resident who pulled up to the picket line in their car. "We're not asking for anything. We just want to keep what we've got," he said of the union's bargaining demands.

(An interesting aside: Ed, who didn't give his last name, said he believes members would be amenable to scrapping the controversial sick leave benefit program as long as they were allowed to grandfather in whatever days they had accumulated to date, similar to what happened last year to the city's non-union workers.)

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to guess which transfer station had fewer complaints. I heard grumbling from the residents waiting at Victoria Park; I heard real anger from those in line at Scarborough.