

## Settling in for the long haul

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Municipal workers in Windsor are striking because management wants new hires to work without the retirement benefits current workers enjoy. This is a worthy strike. Workers must resist any attempt to create two classes in their ranks. All workers doing the same work should have the same wages and benefits.

Toronto workers are striking to defend payment for banked sick days upon retirement (Premier Won't Force End To Municipal Strike - June 25). This is not a worthy cause. To demand payment for unused sick days is to admit that one cannot be trusted to use them honestly. Good health should be its own reward.

Now that we've had a few days of vituperation masquerading as reasoned comment aimed at Toronto municipal employees, let's look at some of the issues in context.

*Argument:* The strike is a horrible inconvenience. So it is, but consider the alternatives. We could do it European-style, with labour-relations chaos, where strikes can arise in any sector at any time and without warning. Instead, we have a labour-relations regime that balances workers' right to bargain with checks and controls on labour conflict. Strikes, when a contract expires and negotiations break down, are a legitimate part of a conflict-resolution system. In exchange, we are spared wildcat strikes, and possible civil disorder.

*Argument:* Workers' benefits are too rich and they should give stuff up because of the recession.

I haven't noticed many bankers, lawyers, dentists or newspaper columnists voluntarily giving up economic advantages.

Are sick-leave gratuities too rich? Perhaps, but unless the critics know the tradeoffs that resulted in this particular benefit, the criticism is simply spitefulness. Nor should we forget that the strike is not just about sick leave. Other issues include security and wages.

My advice? Take a valium, lower the volume, and let the parties get on with negotiating an agreement.

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I find it hard to swallow the signs at Toronto transfer stations held by picketing public employees that say "We work for you Toronto." That's right - they do. And we can't afford to pay those bankable sick days any more. Contrary to what Christie Blatchford may have you think (Three Days In, Our Survival Skills At Their Limit - June 25), most of us are crushing cans, flattening cardboard, composting in our backyards and settling in for the long haul.