

City workers are our neighbours and friends

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These are the glory days for the union bashers in our midst; there is nothing like the smell of rotting garbage and the sight of padlocks on the doors of the daycare centres to heighten the anti-labour frenzy.

Let's try to relax.

The people on strike are our neighbours. They are not stupid and they are not evil. They are us.

And if a strike is a brutal tool, it is always a weapon of last resort, and a sign that negotiations have been flawed.

A bargaining table has two sides, kids.

It is also useful to remember that you and I are the employers here. The people we hire to pick up our trash and tie the shoelaces of our toddlers are valuable members of this community. We need them more than ever now, if times are so tough.

Take a deep breath and consider this:

We are trying to claw back their benefits. Regardless of what you think of those benefits, we clearly have not offered anything of equal value in return. Had we made a graceful and elegant offer, there would be no strike.

We are also offering them a smaller wage increase than we gave the cops and firefighters and some other workers. Why should the men and women now on strike bear the brunt?

They, too, have bills and mortgages and kids in school, and no one is offering them a break on their credit-card interest just because times are tough.

The notion that we can offer them a lesser wage increase than the one we gave the cops is not just vaguely unethical, it is inflammatory.

Alas, it seems some people think that when times are tough, we have a duty to stand on the necks of the weakest.

But if this recession is so severe, perhaps we should now be trying to get the cops and firefighters to open up their agreements so we can snatch a little money back from them.

I am frankly not happy about the growing pile of orange peels in my compost bins, but it is my duty to figure out how to cope.

I am also certain that the guys who normally haul my trash away are not happy that they had to walk off the job to make a point.

Here, it is useful to remember that strikers also have kids in daycare, just as they also have mounds of coffee grounds and piles of old newspapers building up at home. At least, I hope they are still buying papers.

But that's another story.

Back to the bigger picture for a moment: Some people think that the City of Toronto should not have unionized workers. Other people, even more regressive, think that city workers should not have the right to strike. Still others – and these are the real troglodytes – think that because times seem to be tough, all city workers simply ought to tug their forelocks and be thankful that they have jobs.

Those people are the real enemy. They confuse apple peels with orange peels. If it weren't for unions, we'd all be making two bits an hour.

Having said that, I do have a bit of cautionary advice for striking workers: keep a civil tongue, and watch your language when you Twitter.

Oh, and when we do manage to haul our trash to one of those miserably far-flung dumping stations, make it easy for us, maybe even give us a hand. Because we are your neighbours.

You want us on your side.

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