

City's pettiness is what really stinks

Jun 25, 2009 04:30 AM

[Comments on this story](#) (11)

[Vinay Menon](#)

When I arrived at the Bermondsey Transfer Station yesterday morning, I was prepared for the worst.

I expected to see a mountain of trash as high as K2. I expected to smell a stench so putrid, it would invade my nostrils and forever haunt my dreams. I expected to hear catcalls as I chaperoned my double-bagged garbage past a mob of jostling picketers.

But there was none of that.

Instead, I pulled up to what looked like the most boring tailgate party in history.

Some of the striking workers were perched on lawn chairs, under a canopy of leafy branches. Others stood in a perforated cluster near the blockaded entrance, wobbling in the heat with downcast expressions.

On a sloping hill overseeing the non-action, police officers on bicycles watched with an interest usually reserved for toddlers at the opera.

On the sidewalk, beyond orange-and-black construction barrels, one bearded fellow roamed with a cigarette dangling from his lips and an alphanumeric "Honk 4 Support" placard draped across his torso.

As I waited, and waited, three big rigs rumbled past and did just that. There was also honking of the unsupportive kind.

One motorist slowed down and spasmodically cranked out staccato beeps while thrusting his left hand into the muggy air.

As his vehicle snaked toward Eglinton, his middle finger pumped up and down like a turbocharged piston.

Another driver screamed: "You're lucky you have jobs! Get back to work!"

As I continued to wait, and wait, a young man approached my car and crouched near the passenger window. He offered a kind heads-up:

"Hey, buddy, just to let you know, there's a bylaw guy here and he may give you a ticket if you're idling."

"Thanks for the warning," I said, killing the engine.

An idling ticket? Heavens, what a great way to defuse a potential powder keg. What charges might come next? Jaywalking? Loitering? Trespassing? A ticket because our garbage isn't wearing a seat belt?

Note to the Bylaw Guy: We're only idling because our access to one of the designated transfer stations is impeded. We're only idling because, at this moment in time, we are confused citizens who are transporting garbage under a sweltering sky with minimal direction and no sense of protocol.

Disgusted, I gulped coffee from my thermos and glanced into the treetops, half expecting to see David Miller with a notepad and a pair of binoculars.

A few minutes later, a man leaned into my window.

"Sorry for the inconvenience," he said. "When it's your turn, we're asking that you leave your garbage beside that black barrel."

I nodded and monitored the car in front of me. Eventually, it was waved toward the makeshift unloading zone. Two people jumped out and removed trash from the trunk so gingerly, it was as if the bags were filled with priceless artifacts. Then they walked through the pickets like paparazzi-averse celebrities on a red carpet nobody could see. They sped away.

I waited. And waited some more as a wristwatch was checked and, finally, someone yelled, "Okay, go ahead."

Less than a minute later, I was driving along Bermondsey, still fuming about the possible idling ticket, of all things.

But, honestly, what a perfect encapsulation of this maddening situation: Instead of solving the underlying problem, the city is treating citizens with passive-aggressive scorn, proactive mistrust and a pettiness that is breathtaking.

I guess it's easier to blame the victim. Or create villains when no heroes are forthcoming.

Still, what the hell did we do?

Think I'll make myself a "Honk 4 Support" sign and go stand outside Miller's house this evening. The silence should be deafening.

vmemon@thestar.ca