

No, we're not calling in the army

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[Royson James](#)

Thirty-six hours into the municipal workers strike — 36 hours, not days — and Torontonians had already lost their minds in unnecessary panic.

Legislate them back to work! Take away the right to strike!! Privatize garbage collection!!!

My goodness. Get a hold on yourselves, people. If you can't do without these workers for two days then maybe they should be making three times the salaries they now pull down.

One day of strike and the mayor sounded shrill and desperate – threatening huge fines for illegal dumping of garbage.

By Day 3, talk radio was abuzz with outraged citizens, in full fume over having to wait an hour to dump waste at city transfer stations. Electronic news outlets feed the beast with provocative web polls. And newspaper websites stoke the fires.

Pace yourselves, people. Save some of the outrage for Week 4 of the strike. Windsor residents and businesses have now managed to cope through 10 weeks without garbage pickup. Are they made of sterner stuff? And what does that make us? Jellyfish?

If we're not careful, the rest of the province will think Torontonians soft. So, suck it up, Hogtown.

Windsor-area MPP Sandra Pupatello slipped up yesterday and called us "babies." She apologized soon after, but no need to apologize for the truth.

Most of the attention has been on garbage, for understandable reasons – the stench, the health concerns, the yuck factor, the unsightly mounds of waste, the prospect of bringing in the Pied Piper ...

But why are journalists asking about the health concerns of piling, rotting, stinking piles of trash on DAY ONE of the strike? The questions were posed on Monday, a day before the first person in Toronto would miss the first garbage pickup.

It won't be until tomorrow that all Toronto residents miss one trash pickup. Remember the old days when garbage pickup day fell on a public holiday and you had to store it until the following week? Dust off that protocol.

Understand that all the bleating and complaining achieves the opposite of what the aggrieved citizens seem to want – a crushing of the unions and their "outrageous" demands. (In point of fact, the unions are trying to hold on to gains, some secured by giving up other concessions. If the city wants an end to the banking of sick days, there must be some sweetener it can add to the mix of benefits that will make the pill easier for the union to swallow.)

Didn't we learn from Mel Lastman's calling in the army to clear a mountain of snow in 1999? Comics from Cornerbrook to Comox still get laughs just recalling the image.

Speaking of Mel, he's back in the news – roused from his retirement hibernation by the strike, something he endured three times in his 31 years as mayor in North York and Toronto.

Toronto should have sought a legal injunction to guarantee residents access to waste transfer stations, across picket lines. "Who the hell is going to wait four hours?" asked Mel. "You got kids in the back seats. It stinks. The city should have taken out an injunction right away. Instead, they're making asses of themselves by picking through garbage and handing out tickets (to people who dump the trash). They look like they are on the side of the unions."

Yesterday, the union rallied at Nathan Phillips Square, Sid Ryan delivering a rousing call to arms. The city continued to outline contingency plans. And Premier Dalton McGuinty promised to "hold our fire and allow both sides to do what needs doing."

Common sense, at last.

Royson James usually appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Email: rjames@thestar.ca