

Public trashes strikers

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STAFF REPORTER

This is all the union's fault. Scrap the sick-bank system. End the strike.

The feeling among GTA residents is clear, according to an Angus Reid poll conducted for the *Toronto Star*. More than three in four, 76 per cent, oppose the strike. More than two-thirds, 71 per cent, think CUPE should drop demands for an agreement that allows workers to bank 18 sick days a year. And an overwhelming 81 per cent favour provincial back-to-work legislation.

Toronto is on Day 3 of a strike by 30,000 city workers.

"Our interpretation is that, given the current economic situation, sympathy is lower for negotiation demands like the banking of sick days – considered to be a perk – when people are losing their jobs right now," said Jodi Shanoff, a spokeswoman for Angus Reid.

Stuart Green, spokesman for Mayor David Miller, agreed the sick-bank system is an issue, but added, "I really don't think it's as simple as a lot of people presume."

Still, he said, he wasn't surprised by the findings.

"Nobody likes strikes. They're bad for everybody. Workers who should be at work and want to be at work aren't," he said. "People want all of their city services delivered ... and we all want the city to be running and functioning."

CUPE spokeswoman Pat Daley said last night: "I think we knew when we went out the public wouldn't be particularly happy. Nobody wants a strike, particularly our members. We didn't feel we had any choice. We have to stand up for the rights we have in our collective agreement."

At a news conference yesterday, Miller wouldn't comment on what's happening at the bargaining table, or on issues being negotiated. Instead, he condemned the illegal dumping of garbage in public areas.

"As mayor I'm disappointed that some would be so thoughtless as to use our beautiful parks and green spaces in this way," he said. "This is just the second day of the strike, which is why it's important to take a stand now and put those who are illegally dumping on notice that we will not tolerate this kind of activity."

The city will, by week's end, announce 19 temporary drop-off locations for garbage. Meantime, people who witness illegal dumping are encouraged to call 416-338-0338 and leave details about where the dumping occurred, including licence plate numbers.

Councillor Karen Stintz (Ward 16, Eglinton-Lawrence) said Miller took the wrong tone by criticizing frustrated citizens.

"They're trying to do the right thing. And I would have expected the mayor to send a strong message to the union



RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

A bylaw enforcement officer is seen June 23, 2009, poised to fine those who become impatient and dump their trash by the side of the road rather than wait to dump their trash at the Bermondsey transfer station.

that we need to end the impasse," she said. "Instead, he took the opportunity to tell residents that their behaviour is intolerable. I just think it's not recognizing the level of frustration that's out there."

Outside the Bermondsey transfer station, an exasperated Roslyn Bruce carried a single garbage bag. Picketers were allowing only one person in to deposit garbage every 15 minutes.

"Even if they're on strike, you should be able to go in a nice line and put your garbage there. Why do you have to stand here?" she said.

Meanwhile, those not willing to wait have already made a mess of parks across the city.

"It's pretty bad," said Laura McDonough, a teaching assistant at St. Patrick Catholic Secondary School. Soft drink cups, pizza boxes, plastic bottles and garbage bags were strewn about Ashbridge's Bay Park, where her students celebrated the end of the school year.

The *Star's* Angus Reid online survey targeted 600 randomly selected adults living in the GTA. The poll conducted yesterday and Monday was considered accurate within four percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Other findings:

53 per cent of all GTA respondents blame CUPE for the strike; 21 per cent blame the city.

Ten per cent of respondents expect the strike to last less than a week, 37 per cent are predicting one to two weeks. Another 30 per cent expect it to last up to a month.

Garbage collection (84 per cent), parks and recreation (48 per cent) and libraries (39 per cent) are the main services missed. (The last figure suggests the strike might be almost as confusing as it is frustrating. Only 5 out of 99 public library branches are closed – those using community centres or city space.)

"That personal affectation number is going to grow as this strike lingers," said Shanoff. "As people get even more frustrated, we expect to see those numbers climb."

With files from John Spears, Paul Moloney, Vanessa Lu, Donovan Vincent and Daniel Dale