

Cooler temperatures, savvy Internet users deal CUPE weaker hand

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Daniel Dale

STAFF REPORTER

"Nobody understands what the hell is taking place with those guys. We've given them a super, super offer. I think they pissed away their summer, to be perfectly frank with you," Mayor Mel Lastman said at the beginning of the city workers' strike of 2002.

"These are difficult times for all of us, from the workers on the picket lines to the families with children in daycare," Mayor David Miller said at the beginning of the city workers' strike of 2009.

Lastman, characteristically, was shooting from the hip. Miller, characteristically, was speaking from a podium.

Many of the Canadian Union of Public Employees workers on strike today were among the thousands who walked off the job seven years ago. Some find themselves on the same picket lines. All find themselves on what may as well be a different planet, politically and technologically.

These differences appear, by and large, to have weakened the hand of the union by mitigating the disruptive impact of their disruption.

Even the sun has exhibited a Lastmanesque refusal to cooperate with CUPE. Garbage strikes are inconvenient because garbage stinks. Garbage stinks most when hot. During the 16-day 2002 strike, a *Star* reporter described "a despotic heat" that made "life in some places nearly intolerable." The average high then: 30.2 C. The average high during this strike, now in its 27th day: a tolerable 24.9 degrees.

"The mild weather certainly has alleviated some pressure," said Alan Hall, director of the labour studies program at the University of Windsor.

The temperate weather has reduced the demand for municipal pools, which the city was forced to reopen during the 2002 strike after a week of scorching heat.

We are also surviving more easily this time, albeit grumpily, because the city opened temporary dump sites after four days and not nine.

But yet another key difference is our comfort with Internet commerce – still a newfangled toy in 2002, eyed with wariness.

The wealthier among us who don't wish to wait in lines at waste transfer stations think little of hiring those entrepreneurial students posting \$5 PER BAG! on Craigslist to haul off our old sofas.

The web has also helped parents locate private daycares and private camps, giving them options, if not cheap solutions.

"The people who have money to do that kind of thing are also the ones who exercise a lot more control, a lot more influence, as far as the city is concerned," said Hall.

"To the extent people are able to find alternative ways of resolving the problem, even if it costs them some extra money, I think there's less of a motivator to really pressure councillors to get a resolution."

Another "motivator" is absent this time. As CUPE national representative Robert Lamoureux puts it with a laugh: "The Pope's not here."

Pope John Paul II's impending World Youth Day visit coming mattered in 2002.

Our leaders felt compelled to tidy up when it appeared untidiness would embarrass them in front of truly important people.

So it was Premier Ernie Eves who imposed back-to-work legislation – while in 2009 Dalton McGuinty has given no indication of any imminent intervention.