

City in talks

35 days in, union ultimatum takes bargaining to the wire

Jul 27, 2009 04:30 AM

[Be the first to comment on this article...](#)

Jason Miller
Donovan Vincent
Staff Reporters

Negotiations to end a 35-day strike by Toronto's municipal workers went down to the wire last night.

As midnight approached, negotiators for the city and locals 79 and 416 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees continued to talk in a last-ditch effort to reach agreement.

Spurring them on was an ultimatum issued Friday by Local 416 president Mark Ferguson, who said he would walk away from the talks if agreement wasn't reached by midnight last night.

About the only promising sign came earlier in the evening when some members of Local 79, representing the city's inside workers, said they received calls from their union heads alerting them to a potential settlement before the midnight deadline.

As the deadline neared, union spokesperson Pat Daley said the talks have now reached the most critical moment, as both sides attempt to iron out a solution for the "tougher issues."

Both sides, she said, are making a serious effort, talking back and forth to reach what she called a "serious deadline."

Daley noted that both local 79 and 416 were working together in the search for a solution that has left Toronto with mountains of garbage piled in residential neighbourhoods and caused cancellation of a large number of city services and summer programs for holidaying schoolchildren.

"There are different tactics being used but they are still coordinating back and forth," Daley said about the negotiations between both unions and the city, speaking just two hours before the deadline.

Daley said it was a positive move on Ferguson's part to set the midnight deadline, which adds urgency and focus to the talks, but suggested she "wouldn't count on it" spurring an early settlement.

Local 416 represents 6,200 outside workers, including garbage collectors, while Local 79 represents some 24,000 mostly inside city workers.

Local 79 made a comprehensive offer to the city late Wednesday to settle the strike, but there's been no movement since.

CUPE national spokesperson Robert Lamoureux, speaking on Friday, said he believed it was "possible to reach a settlement this weekend."

Lamoureux's optimistic tone was a stark contrast to the deadline issued by Ferguson, and a significant shift in



ADRIEN VECZAN/TORONTO STAR

A striker directs traffic July 26, 2009 at Bermondsey Transfer Station where management operates dump for locals.

tone from 416.

Earlier in the strike it seemed 416 was close to a settlement with the city, and 79 was holding out.

Local 79 president Ann Dembinski had voiced frustration with the city's contract offer, saying thousands of part-timers in her union wouldn't be covered by the city's proposed sick leave plan.

She also accused the mayor and the city of adopting a negotiating position that was hostile to women because many of her members are female.

Her union represents 24,000 mostly inside workers, including public health nurses.

But then came Friday's ultimatum from Ferguson.

While Ferguson threatened to walk away, Local 79 took a more conciliatory stance, promising to continue talks.

City councillor Frances Nunziata predicted Friday that Ferguson's stance would upset his striking members, and she urged that before Local 416 walked away from bargaining it should bring the city's latest offer to its membership for a vote.

"A lot of the members I've talked to say they want to go back to work ... I think that since the city made its offer (public) there are a lot of employees who are quite happy with it and want to go back," Nunziata said in an interview Friday.