



## Cracks in union resolve as strike nears Week 4

TheStar.com - GTA



STEVE RUSSELL/TORONTO STAR

Pickets and non-union staff stick to their own sides at the waste transfer station on Commissioners St., July 11, 2009. One car is allowed through every 15 minutes.

520 workers decide to cross picket lines as others refuse to endorse 'stupid' dump site wait times

July 12, 2009

Nick Aveling  
STAFF REPORTER

Cracks are beginning to appear in the solidarity of striking civic workers, even as the union insists "a fairly big gap" in bargaining positions is keeping the two sides apart.

As Toronto enters Day 21 of a strike that has stopped garbage collection, curbed municipal services and shut down scores of daycare centres, more than 520 striking city employees have decided to cross their own picket lines and go back to work, city officials say.

And some pickets are refusing to enforce the union's mandatory wait times for residents lining up to drop off garbage at temporary sites, calling the delays "stupid."

The union is letting one vehicle drop off garbage every 15 minutes, which means waits can stretch to hours if there are many cars in line. But some pickets are allowing residents through every five minutes – and, in an increasing number of cases, not even that long.

Despite the growing discord among the ranks, union officials are quick to point out that most members are sticking to the plan.

"I wouldn't say there's increasingly low morale at all," said CUPE spokeswoman Pat Daley. "Our picket

lines are strong, we have members showing up to picket duty, and the vast majority of people are staying out and standing behind the negotiating committee."

Still, pickets at the Commissioners St. transfer station allowed people to drop off garbage every five minutes yesterday; they wore placards warning of 15-minute waits.

Some 24,000 inside workers and 6,200 outside workers walked off the job June 22.

Exactly which workers – inside or outside, full-time or part-time – have crossed the lines is unclear. Also unclear is how many of their requests to return to work have been granted. A city spokesperson declined to comment, and Daley said the union does not keep track.

Meanwhile, Daley said CUPE is still waiting to hear from the city after tabling a counter-offer late Friday. The city had offered a four-year, 7-per-cent wage hike along with a partial sick-bank payout to current employees who would then be moved to a new short-term disability plan.

"There's still a fairly big gap," she said.

City spokesman Rob Andrusevich declined to comment.

A growing sense of impatience was not limited to the picket lines yesterday.

Boris Steipe, 49, staged a one-man protest, lugging a bag of garbage from a temporary dump at Christie Pits to the Commissioners St. transfer station, a 10-kilometre trudge that lasted more than three hours. The bag, increasingly pungent as the day wore on, weighed close to 8 kilograms.

"Fellow citizens have approached me and asked whether we couldn't just pitch in and organize a private contractor to at least get the hazard out (of the park)," said Steipe, a biochemistry professor at the University of Toronto.

"CUPE told me they couldn't allow it, that they would picket that. The city told me they are not discussing this possibility because they are not, as they said, `dealing in hypotheticals.'"

Earlier last week, neighbouring residents fought successfully to close the Christie Pits dump. But the garbage remains.

Steipe said he was worried about environmental damage at temporary dump sites such as Christie Pits and Moss Park.

Yesterday's downpour did nothing to improve the situation, he said.

"The water will spread, carrying with it whatever has leached out of the bag and some of the toxins that have been sprayed on the bags," he said. "The toxins that they're using ... are reasonably safe for humans, but they are environmental hazards. If they get into the ground water, they're quite toxic to fish and aquatic life."