

## No easy options for ending strike

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As a strike by 30,000 Toronto municipal workers grinds to the end of its fifth week, calls are mounting for drastic action to end this stubborn walkout. Some urge confronting the unions by hiring private contractors to clear away garbage stored in temporary dumps. Others want Queen's Park to intervene and legislate an end to the strike.

Neither option is advisable, at least for now. Mayor David Miller and his officials are wise to stay the course, providing what services they can with management staff, until all reasonable hope for a negotiated settlement has been exhausted.

A "hardball" approach risks triggering picket line violence that would hurt people on either side of labour's divide. Toronto's reputation would suffer far more from images of broken heads and pitched brawls than from the temporary nuisance of having garbage piled in city parks or litter on the streets. There is no good reason to pursue this inflammatory option.

As for provincial back-to-work legislation, it could abruptly end the strike and leave it up to an arbitrator to impose a contract. But Miller is correct in noting that past arbitrated settlements have tended to be relatively generous to labour – awarding annual pay increases in the range of 3 per cent. Toronto, quite simply, can't afford that. There is also a well-founded concern that an arbitrator would likely retain contract language that allows city workers to cash in their unused sick days. Curtailing that benefit is a key – and reasonable – goal of the city in this labour dispute.

The provincial Legislature does have the power to skip arbitration and simply impose a contract. But such a heavy-handed step would risk embittering labour relations in the province for years to come.

Toronto officials are trying their best to maintain municipal services and have, in recent days, expanded their output to include issuing building permits, processing rebates for cancelled daycare and summer camps, and scheduling a special meeting of city council for Aug. 5 to deal with essential business. "The city is functioning reasonably well," Miller told reporters on Friday.

More could be done, including having councillors set an example of restraint by rolling back the 2.42 per cent pay hike they rashly allowed themselves this year. But this is no time for dramatic measures like hiring strikebreakers to barge through picket lines. The ideal solution to this dispute remains a negotiated settlement, accepted by both sides acting in good faith.

That's how a bitter walkout ended last week in Windsor. The city's striking municipal workers reached a tentative agreement after 100 days on the picket line. The deal was unanimously endorsed by Windsor city council and then ratified by workers Friday.

Torontonians are understandably frustrated. But having now gone well over a month without a regular paycheque, striking workers are also feeling the pinch. The best relief to that mutual and increasing distress lies at the bargaining table – not through escalating picket line confrontation or by appealing to the green-carpeted corridors of Queen's Park.