



Time to Take Out the Trash:

**How Toronto City-Workers Can Win
in the Fight Against Ford**

The Greater Toronto Workers' Assembly

According to certain superstitions, the Mayan calendar predicts the end of the world in 2012. While 2012 will certainly be chaotic, one need not look to the stars: there are much more earthly battles ahead. Forget about December 21st, 2012, the end of the Mayan calendar. The date to keep an eye on is December 31st, 2011, the end of city contracts. Our longest winter begins January 1st.

The upcoming battle between Toronto city workers and Rob Ford is one of the most important labour struggles in all of Canada. It will set the precedent nationally. If we lose here, resistance everywhere will be more difficult. If we win here, we can begin to build a mass movement against austerity and union-busting. Ford and his powerful allies are preparing for class war. We must ensure that they are not the only class fighting.

What is Ford's strategy? Here's what's at stake...

Much rides on the so-called ‘Jobs For Life’ provision. Tweedle-Dum (Doug Ford) has said that Tweedle-Dumber (Rob Ford), “intends to target ‘jobs for life’ whenever possible.” What is Jobs For Life? To hear the *Toronto Sun* tell it, it permits municipal workers such insulation that they no longer need to worry about doing their jobs well (Levy, Nov. 8, 2011). Bullshit. Jobs For Life asserts that those with 10 years cannot be laid-off as a result of contracting out or privatization—they are guaranteed another job in the municipality. This is simple job security. It doesn’t protect someone from being moved, changing what work they do, or being fired for inadequate work. The Dum-Dum brothers don’t like it because it hinders their ability to cut services or contract-out work and break a union that has demonstrated time and again that it is willing to stand up for its rights.

Ford has already revealed what he intends to do with city-services with the partial privatization of trash collection. In August, Green for Life Environmental will begin hauling trash from Yonge Street to the Humber River. See that folks? Not *Jobs For Life...Green For Life!* Ford is also targeting redeployment provisions, layoff and recall notices, and rules affecting temporary and permanent work. Basically, this is a 10% rollback of employee benefits. Furthermore, it’s becoming increasingly obvious that during the likely winter work stoppage, Ford intends to use scab labour to break the union. There is no room for worker security in Rob Ford’s Toronto. No Jobs For Life, but you can work ‘till your dead! Gravy anyone?

Again, Ford’s unofficial mouthpiece *The Sun* asserts: “It’s like [CUPE 416 President Mark Ferguson] and his union buddies are still locked in the 1950s” (Levy, Nov. 8, 2011). The 1950s? We should be so lucky. The austerity measures being implemented around the globe—of which Ford is just one part—are bringing us back to the 1920s. The stakes couldn’t be higher. Ford intends to break unions. No amount of reasonable argument will suffice. *He cannot be persuaded.* Only direct actions can stop Ford.

Labour leaders are starting to recognize this. Ontario Federation of Labour president Sid Ryan recently asked an audience of delegates, ‘Are you prepared to come down to City Hall and get your arms around it and start that conversation[?] [...] Ryan went on to say, “Nothing has ever been accomplished without a little civil disobedience” (Van Alphen, *Toronto Star*, Nov. 21, 2011). True, but nothing great has ever been accomplished without a lot of civil disobedience. Did going down to City Hall cut it when a portion of 416 was privatized? No. Will it cut it when city workers are locked out? No.

We must prepare a better strategy. The most likely outcome is an enforced stoppage of work by the city known as a ‘lockout’...it’s like a strike we didn’t choose. Our strategy must have two basic elements: (1) changing our message, and (2) direct actions. Let’s look at each in turn.

First, we must frame our message in a way that wins the public to our side by connecting this battle with the broader austerity measures being implemented everywhere. We must convince other workers that their struggle is our struggle. Traditionally, CUPE has kept bargaining and services separate. We need to merge them. The main bargaining demand must be about services. Here’s our message:

We don’t want to strike. Our single demand: keep services public.

Not only will this go a long way in winning public support, but keeping these jobs in the public sector is the best way to ensure our job security anyway.

Second, we must employ direct action. Framing the message is not enough: we also have to get this message to the public. Our message will be ignored by the mainstream media unless we force them to cover it. During the 2009 strike, against the wishes of 416 workers, management decided to dump garbage in Christie Pits. Nevertheless, the media blamed 416 workers. Union local leaders have said publicly that one tactic for 416 is the voluntary shovelling of driveways. While this kind of public relations may forge useful one-on-one relationships, this alone will not shift public opinion and will not put pressure on Ford. Furthermore, there is no reason to expect the media to cover it. We need something more dramatic. We need something Ford can't ignore.

Because so much of the 2009 strike was focused on garbage pick-up, garbage workers will be closely scrutinized in the coming months. Possible ideas for direct actions might include the following:

- We could dump garbage in the wealthiest neighbourhoods. Let the 1% deal with the stench of their toxic influence.
- We could park dozens of garbage trucks in front of the KPMG office building. This will connect the attack on city workers to Ford's attacks on the city as a whole.
- We could organize car cavalcades to surround and halt scab garbage trucks. This will publicize Ford's union-busting.
- We could take inspiration from Occupy Toronto and occupy the yards. This will connect the struggle of city workers to the vitality expressed by the global Occupation Movement, while also providing an opportunity for teach-ins and the coordination of further actions.
- We could pick up garbage from local charities that, because of municipal budget cuts, will be paying garbage collection fees for the first time.

These suggestions are meant to inspire creative strategizing. Although garbage workers are a highly publicized group, the majority of city workers are in CUPE 79. The point is that workers know their workplaces better than anyone. Workers know what will be the most disruptive.

And that's exactly what we need: disruption. The most important aspect of these disruptions is how we connect our struggles with the public. Every time they try to create public-private partnerships, we must already have in place *public-public* partnerships, that is, genuine political partnerships between public sector workers and the public we provide services for. This is a long term project and it needs to begin now.

Nevertheless, CUPE locals 416 and 79 cannot win this struggle on their own. Ford is too determined, his backers too powerful, the stakes too high. We can't just tell Canadian workers that our fight is their fight. We must demonstrate that Ford is not only up against 416 and 79, but CUPE as a whole. It is only this kind of leadership from CUPE that can bring the rest of the labour movement into this struggle. Occupy Toronto pointed us in the right direction. We must occupy this city. CUPE National should publicly set up a war office to Toronto now to coordinate the working class as a whole against Ford's war on workers.

Rallies, marches, educationals, and campaigns, while necessary, are not enough. We need direct action. Particular sections of CUPE could embark on rolling days of action that minimize damage to the public while putting pressure on Ford. We could engineer a slowdown in one sector and remove services for half a day in another sector. On another day, we could hold a sick-in at one sector and a teach-in with clients in another sector. This could coalesce into city-wide days of action.

Only workers—union and non-union, public and private sector—acting as a class, can stop Ford.

But even this isn't enough. If we are actually going to turn Ford's battle against city workers into a battle against the entire labour movement, we must acknowledge the divisions that stifle collective action. The forced eviction of Occupy Toronto is illustrative.

This was a lost opportunity for 416 workers and Occupy Toronto alike. As a 416 worker dismantled her tent, an occupant told him that she too is a CUPE worker and that she supports him in his struggle. The 416 worker replied, 'I don't care about your support. A real CUPE worker wouldn't be staying in a park. You obviously chose the wrong profession.' This troubling interaction reflects divisions in the labour movement as a whole, divisions that are all too common. Meanwhile, other workers protesting the eviction yelled 'Shame!' at the 416 workers.

But where were these and many other working people, unionized and non-unionized, when a portion of garbage collection was being privatized? Or when Local 416 and 79 workers were forced on strike by a Miller administration attacking their hard-fought gains? Or when postal workers were legislated back to work?

The point is that we are all to blame. The labour movement is divided in many ways. Only by acknowledging and transforming these divisions can we generate the collective response necessary to stop Ford. We as workers need to change our collective understanding of what we have in common. Bargaining as usual is over. When our contracts end, we not only confront the employer, but also the various levels of the state. We cannot fight these battles one local at a time. First, it's a fight of the union as a whole. Second, we must extend this fight to the labour movement as a whole. Third, this must be seen as a fight of the entire working class, including those providing services and those receiving them, the organized and unorganized, those who are employed, and those who wish they were given a chance to use their labour.

CUPE, the largest union in the country, is at the center of this battle. Where is our plan? What is our strategy?



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