

Toronto municipal union accepts Mayor Ford's layoff and privatization-promoting contract

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This past Sunday negotiators for 6,000 outside Toronto municipal workers accepted the “framework” for a concessions-laden contract that guts job security protections won over several decades of struggle.

The agreement came as representatives of right-wing Mayor Rob Ford's bargaining team—who had let it be known that they had plans to deploy scabs—were preparing to either lock out the outside workers or unilaterally impose a new contract. Months earlier union leaders had assured the city that they would not strike and de-coupled their contract dispute from the fight waged by Torontonians against the sweeping cuts to public and social services made in Ford's 2012 budget.

The leadership of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) was anxious to isolate and suppress any struggle—like the nine-week strike the city workers mounted in 2009 in the face of a media campaign that vilified them as “fat cats. So anxious that National President Paul Moist flew into Toronto on the weekend to press for a quick sell-out agreement, even if that agreement was in actuality only the broadest of “frameworks.”

Mark Ferguson, president of CUPE Local 416, confirmed that many of the concessions demanded by Ford have been accepted. “Throughout the process,” he said, “we have provided the city with many efficiencies and creative solutions to extremely difficult problems. There is no doubt that our members are making sacrifices. We are going to keep working to finalize a deal that gives the City flexibility and affordability

while still delivering great public services.”

As of this writing, the deal has yet to be released to the membership for a contract vote. Ferguson had initially stated that his team would need a day or two to “cross the t's and dot the i's” on the agreement. Later, however, a union spokesperson said that it could be several days more or even weeks before the membership would be presented with the contract details and a ratification vote organized.

Leaks to the press, however, indicate that the union leadership has surrendered to virtually every item on Ford's concessionary agenda. Most prominent is union acceptance of a massive re-writing of job security protections that had been the centrepiece of the city's demands.

For many years most permanent outside city workers had contractual provisions guaranteeing them re-deployment to a commensurate municipal job should their current positions become redundant. Such protections are common in municipal contracts across the province of Ontario and elsewhere in the country. The new framework agreement, however, will reportedly strip this protection from any Local 416 member with less than 15 years seniority at the municipal corporation. Estimates are that up to one-third of the outside labour force will now be vulnerable to layoff.

The deal will allow Ford to consolidate and then extend his program to privatize garbage pick-ups, street cleaning and park litter collection throughout Toronto. The job protection clauses had previously slowed his

administration's drive to privatize "anything not nailed down" in the city.

The Ford administration has already indicated that it views the concessions achieved with the outside workers as the general pattern for settlements with unions representing inside municipal workers and public library employees.

Ford has indicated that he plans to eliminate 7,000 permanent jobs from a city payroll that encompasses some 50,000 workers. He has already terminated 1,100 temporary employees via his recently passed 2012 operating budget that also saw tens of millions of dollars in cuts to social services.

Other leaked details of the proposed four-year deal include the replacement of wage rises with annual lump sum payments for the first three years and significant changes in managerial control over scheduling. Ambulance and other Emergency Medical respondents will see greater use of part-time workers. These workers will be stripped of the right-to-strike and henceforth their terms of employment will be determined through a system of binding arbitration.

The ruling elite have very consciously sought to administer a resounding defeat on the City of Toronto workers. With the city gearing up for a showdown with the outside workers, Canada's national newspaper and traditional mouthpiece of big business, the *Globe and Mail* published an editorial Saturday that emphasized the significance the ruling class has placed on imposing a major and demonstrable defeat on the outside workers.

"Governments across Canada," declared the *Globe*, "are anxiously watching the City of Toronto's [contract] negotiations ... as a test of the ability of all governments to restrain and reduce public sector spending." Further solidarizing itself with the Ford administration's concession demands and plans to slash city services and lay off workers, the *Globe* opined that municipal governments must have the right "to direct and deploy its employees as it sees fit."

The right-wing *National Post*, meanwhile, featured a column by Doug Holyday, the deputy mayor and point man for the city's contract negotiations, in its Saturday edition. The column denounced job security protections

as "untenable and out-of-step" with the organization of economic life.

The concessions deal accepted by CUPE Local 416 now sets the bar for negotiations with other municipal unions in Toronto and across Canada. As Holyday boasted in the wake of the settlement, "Municipalities will pay attention to what's happening here."

The betrayal of the CUPE leadership also sets the stage for the extension of the elite's concession demands into negotiations with unions representing provincial and federal workers. In Ontario, Liberal premier Dalton McGuinty is adamant that provincial workers must accept wage freezes, work-rule concessions, and layoffs as he prepares a draconian austerity budget. At the same time, federal Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper has threatened over the next several years to eliminate up to 50,000 civil service jobs, reduce pensions, and cut spending by 10 percent across-the-board in every government department.



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