

Support waning for city strikers: poll

Jonathan Fowlie

Vancouver Sun

Thursday, August 30, 2007

Public support for Vancouver's striking municipal workers has declined since the first union local walked off the job six weeks ago, a new poll suggests.

Released to The Vancouver Sun today by the Innovative Research Group, the poll was conducted over five weeks and tracks how opinions have been changing during the dispute.

The survey indicates that while the striking Canadian Union of Public Employees locals enjoyed stronger public support than the city at the outset of the strike, people now feel the city is being more "fair and reasonable" than the unions.

"The union has lost support for its position over the time we surveyed," said Mike McDonald, a senior research associate with the Innovative Research Group.

The poll was conducted July 25 to Aug. 29. The firm polled between 225 and 299 people each week over the Internet. The highest margin of error over that time was within 6.5 percentage points.

McDonald said his group, which did polling for the NPA during the 2005 civic election, but has also done work for CUPE in Ontario, conducted the poll as part of its ongoing tracking of public opinions.

He said the pollsters measured public support by asking if people think either side is being "fair and reasonable." It then arrived at a final indicator of overall support for each side by subtracting the percentage of negative responses from positive ones.

In the first week of the poll -- July 25 to Aug. 1 -- 31 per cent of people felt the unions were being fair and reasonable, while 41 per cent said they were not.

Those responses combined to create an overall score of minus 10.

During the same week, the city scored an overall rating of minus 23, with 26 per cent saying the city was being fair and reasonable, and 49 per cent saying it was not.

In the weeks since, opinion of the city's position has fluctuated, but overall people have come to see the city as being more reasonable than the unions. In the most recent measure - for the week ending on Wednesday - the city got an overall score of minus 19, four points above where it was when the polling began.



CREDIT: Bill Keay/Vancouver Sun

The city's striking civic workers stage a big march through mid-morning traffic this week from Science World to city hall.

By contrast, the unions' score dropped to minus 30 in the past week, 20 points down from where they began.

This last week of the survey happened as CUPE Local 15 turned down two offers put forward by the city so they could issue a counter-offer of their own.

As of today, the city was still considering that offer and had not issued a formal response.

In an interview today, CUPE BC's secretary-treasurer said that despite the poll, he's been amazed with the support the three striking unions have enjoyed throughout the dispute.

But Mark Hancock said he understands why people might be frustrated.

"Strikes just aren't popular," said Hancock, adding this one is particularly challenging because the issues are too complex to describe in concise media friendly sound bites.

Mayor Sam Sullivan responded to the results today by saying he is not driven by polls, and that the results are not going to change how he approaches the dispute.

"I don't let my actions be directed by polls," he said in an interview. "I am committed to protecting the taxpayers and looking after all of the citizens of this city."

Sullivan went on to condemn an early morning protest today during which two people wearing hoodies dumped garbage in front of NPA Coun. Kim Capri's Grandview-Woodlands duplex.

In an interview, Capri said she awoke at about 5:30 a.m. to see the two people unloading trash into her yard.

"It's really unfair," she said. "These types of personalized attacks are inexcusable."

Capri said she yelled at the two, causing them to run away. She said the Anti-Poverty Committee later took responsibility for the incident.

The committee also took credit for a similar action on Aug. 24 at the Yaletown condo complex where Sullivan lives.

jfowlie@png.canwest.com

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.