

LAYOFFS COME TO TORONTO



In Toronto the layoffs are a coming and the union for the city workers has, as expected, begun to object. Some of you may remember our earlier coverage of the budgetary issues in Toronto, and their failed voluntary layoff plans that began earlier this year in an attempt to avoid having to do exactly this. The city had hoped that this program would allow them to shed 700 positions, but they were only successful in losing 230 employees in this way. The problem, besides people's general hesitation to give up a good job, was the fact that many of the positions simply could not be eliminated voluntarily due to regulations governing which services the city must provide. Now, with the layoffs coming down the pike the cities largest union is putting in its two cents. They are claiming that the layoffs will be in bad faith. City Manager Joe Pennachetti, the same man who came up with the less than successful voluntary layoffs plan in the first place, has confirmed that the city will need to shed jobs in order to stay fiscally sound. This philosophy is in line with the campaign promises of the Mayor of Toronto, who frequently mentioned cutting the costs of the cities 53,000 employees as a way to make Toronto leaner during his last campaign. The workers labor contract expires at the end of the year, leaving room for layoffs, or some serious re-negotiations to keep everyone in their jobs, the same way that the workers of New York did earlier in this year. Though for now the city seems to be relying on a strategy that focuses on lay offs and leaving vacancies open. Joseph Pennachetti had this to say to local reporters, "There will be layoffs. We have a plan that you will see at the end of the month on that. It's a combination of vacancies and layoffs. I can't get more specific than that." The city is expected to release its proposed budget for 2012 by November 28th. At that time there will be more details about how many people, and which positions may be let go. Clearly it will not be the people who were rejected by the voluntary layoff program. As it turns out the program actually had about 1,140 applicants. According to Mr. Pennachetti many of the applications had to be rejected because more than 1/3 of the applicants were in either a legislated or a cost-shared program where jobs cannot be cut. The unions response to the idea of layoffs were not favorable. While the new contract is under negotiation, there are already rumors of lockouts or service interruptions. The city and the Local 79 (a union that represents about 22,00 of the city's workers) have been having problems with the negotiations. The issues have now escalated. The city has already written to the Ontario Labour Relations Board. The city also has made a request to the Ontario Ministry of Labour asking that a conciliator be appointed to help resolve the issues and smooth over negotiations.

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