

# Everyone Reads with Public Libraries

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## CUPE in Canada's Libraries

CUPE is the union of choice for library workers. Our union represents almost 17,000 library workers across Canada. CUPE library members work in a variety of workplaces from public libraries to school, university and hospital libraries. The majority of members, more than 9,900, work in the public library system. An additional 6,800-plus members work in 17 other sectors of the economy, which include the K to 12, post-secondary, municipal, and hospital sectors. The library sector is predominantly female accounting for 85 per cent of the library workforce and this is reflected in CUPE's library membership.

### Earnings

The average annual incomes of CUPE library workers either exceed or are on par with the national average for all library workers in Canada. However, the average earnings of *public* library workers are greater than the average earnings of library workers in other economic sectors. In recent years, negotiated wages have been increasing beyond three per cent per year.

CUPE wage data reveal that librarians earn \$14.00 an hour; library and archive assistants and technicians earn \$10.00 an hour; and library clerks earn \$9.00 an hour. This places library workers among the lowest paid public sector workers in the country.

Low wages and gender wage discrimination persist in Canada's library sector. Statistics Canada data reveal the average salaries of male librarians increased 4.09 per cent between 2000 to 2005, more than double the percentage increase of female librarian salaries (1.95 per cent). Ongoing wage discrimination points to the need for all governments to properly fund pay equity so there is no discrepancy in the wages of women and men doing the same work.

### Government Expenditures & Underfunding

Local governments funnel more money into libraries than the federal and provincial governments combined. In 2003, municipal government library expenditures amounted to \$1.5 billion. For the fiscal year 2003/04, provincial government spending on national, public, school, university and college libraries approximated \$856 million. For the same period, federal government spending on all libraries was even less at \$43.2 million, approximately five per cent of provincial government spending.

There has also been drastic erosion in federal expenditures on *public libraries*. For the period 1998 to 2004, federal spending on public libraries declined by a whopping 89 per cent to \$1.1 million. By comparison, 2003/04 expenditures on public libraries by the provincial governments amounted to \$148.4 million, or 188 per cent more than federal government spending.

### **Contracting Out & Privatization**

Government underfunding of public services opens the door to contracting out and privatization of library services. Given the drop in federal spending on public libraries it is not surprising that contracting out of library services has gained a foothold. Some public libraries have contracted out such services as ordering, processing, cataloguing material, and technology, while other libraries are considering it. Still other libraries are considering contracting out library acquisitions.

CUPE's experience with contracting out and privatization shows that quality public services suffer at the hands of private contractors. In order to maximize profits and reduce operating costs, private contractors cut corners, layoff or hire fewer staff, and exert a downward pressure on wages and benefits which results in staff recruitment and retention challenges. Public dollars should not be funneled to private companies as profit to provide an inferior level of service to the public. Unlike private contractors, public library services work in the public interest and focus on providing quality services, not on maximizing profits.

### **Change is needed**

CUPE does not shy away from tackling the tough issues that impact members. We've launched successful campaigns to stop the contracting out and privatization of library services in communities across the country and have lobbied governments for increased funding so we can continue to provide quality, public services. And we have made significant gains on the pay equity front in British Columbia and in Ontario where one settlement, worth \$20 million, will see members' paycheques increase between 15 cents and \$4.22 per hour.