

SECRETARY-TREASURER'S HANDBOOK

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook was developed to give newly elected Secretary-Treasurers an outline of their duties, an idea of where they can turn for advice and a list of relevant Education Department Courses. The handbook also describes how an effective Secretary-Treasurer contributes to the development of a strong local union.

I - Role of a Local Union Executive

The union executive (President, Vice-President, Recording Secretary and Secretary-Treasurer) is responsible for the leadership and administration of the local. The "job" of all union leaders is to advance the interests of the members. The best run locals are not those with the lowest dues rate, the most money in the bank, or the best filing system. Well run unions solve workplace problems, advance the interests of the members and solve their workplace problems.

Unions represent their members by negotiating collective agreements and by lobbying governments to improve laws that affect the membership. Unions also represent their members by seeing that employers do not violate their collective agreements or laws (health and safety, human rights, etc.) that affect the members.

Unions must force employers to do things that they would not otherwise do. Our employers want to have a free hand to provide public services as cheaply as possible. Union members must work together to force employers to pay more than the bare minimum, to provide safe working conditions, to provide us with job security, etc. Even at a time of cutbacks, wage freezes and contracting-out, unionized workers do better than those with no protection.

The difference between members of an effective union and unorganized workers, or members of a passive local, is the difference between bargaining and begging. The difference between bargaining and begging is the power to effect change. Unionized workers who act together and support one another have more power than individual workers who can't even complain about working conditions, harassment by supervisors, racism, or being passed over for promotions for fear of being labelled a trouble-maker. Unorganized workers and members of weak locals can only hope that their employer will find other ways of saving money besides cutting their wages or laying them off. In short, members of strong locals have a lot more say about what happens to them compared to workers with weak or nonexistent unions.

Unions are not insurance policies where you pay your dues and expect someone to solve your problems for you. Unions are self-help organizations where the members work together in order to solve common problems. It is the job of the executive to coordinate these activities and to see that the members have adequate information, advice and funds to effectively deal with workplace problems and concerns.

II - Role of the Secretary-Treasurer

The Secretary-Treasurer is responsible for the local's money. This means that he or she is responsible for seeing that the amount of dues income is sufficient to carry out activities needed to advance the members' interests. They are also responsible for seeing that spending priorities reflect the local's goals and that money is spent in accordance with the wishes of the membership. For these reasons, the position of the Secretary-Treasurer must be bonded at all times.

Secretary-Treasurers must also keep the members informed about the financial health of the local and about how their money has been spent. Unless the members have confidence that their money is being spent according to their wishes, interest and support for the local will dwindle.

Without adequate funding, locals cannot carry out the activities needed to represent the members. It is better to have an active local with lots of membership involvement and activity with a small surplus in the bank than a passive local with little involvement but with a large surplus in the bank.

III - Duties of the Secretary-Treasurer

Income and Deposits

- Maintain records of the size of the bargaining unit and the regular monthly wages paid to the bargaining unit.
- Receive and deposit all initiation fees, dues and assessments.
- Write receipts for all cash received.
- Record all income transactions in the local's CUPE ledger book.

Expenses

- Make all disbursements by cheque.
- Receive a receipt or expense voucher for all disbursements.
- Ensure that all cheques are signed by two signing officers, that all cheque stubs are completed, and that cheques are pre-numbered.
- Record all transactions.
- Prepare per capita tax forms.
- Receive membership approval for all non-routine expenditures.

Financial Records

- Record all transactions in the CUPE ledger.
- Present a monthly written Financial Report to the membership and to each executive meeting.
- Complete a monthly bank reconciliation.
- Complete a Statement of Income & Expenses Form every six months.
- Maintain a receipt book for all cash transactions; record all payments on cheque stubs & keep copies of all vouchers received from members.
- Keep a copy of all minutes of Executive and Membership meetings where financial payments were authorized.
- Maintain membership records & sign membership cards.
- File all expense vouchers, invoices, receipts.

Financial Advisor

- Prepare cost estimates of contemplated new expenditures.
- Develop a budget for projected income and expenditures.
- Calculate a dues rate needed to provide income to cover projected expenditures.
- Advise executive and membership on the costs of proposed activities.

IV - Tips For Secretary-Treasurers

Bookkeeping

- CUPE has a complete set of books, (Ledger, Monthly (Treasurer's Report) and Bank Reconciliation Forms) available. These forms are specifically designed for local unions and should be used by all locals except those large locals with a computerized bookkeeping system.
- CUPE has also produced a complete manual on how to do all of the duties of the Secretary-Treasurer and Trustee. The manual is called "The Financial Officers Handbook". Both the handbook and the bookkeeping forms are available from your CUPE Representative.
- CUPE has also developed a course specifically for Secretary-Treasurers. The "Financial Officers Course" is useful for all newly elected Secretary-Treasurers even if they already possess the knowledge to complete the bookkeeping forms.

Reports

- Distribute a copy of the monthly Treasurers Report to the membership.
- Make a short verbal report on the financial health of the local, noting major expenditures, and the bank balance at the beginning and the end of the month. Be prepared to answer questions on all expenditures.

Budgets

- Treasurers should prepare a yearly budget. The discussion about the budget should centre on what the local will need to do to be more effective. These plans for new activities should then be costed along with estimates of the costs of ongoing activities. The resulting budget should be presented to the membership for approval. The budgeting process gives the executive an opportunity to assess the work they have been doing and start to plan for the future rather than react to events and crisis.

Dues

- The Secretary-Treasurer should see that there is enough income so the local has the resources to represent the members. If income is insufficient to cover the costs of planned union activities, the Secretary-Treasurer must prepare a report to the membership explaining in detail that a dues increase is necessary and what any new money raised will be spent on.

V - Skills and Knowledge Required to be an Effective Secretary-Treasurer

- CUPE's Constitution
- Local Bylaws
- Bookkeeping skills
- CUPE financial procedures
- Ability to make verbal and written reports to the membership

VI - Sources of Advice and Assistance

- Former Secretary-Treasurers
- Treasurers in other unions (meet them at the CUPE District Council or the Labour Council)
- Experienced members of your executive
- Your CUPE Representative
- CUPE Accounting Department
- CUPE Education Department Courses
- Per Capita Tax payment hot line 1-800-363-CUPE (2873)

Note: Use this number for any questions about bookkeeping.

VII - Relevant Education Department Courses

- *"Introduction To CUPE"*
A short course for newly selected executive and committee members introducing them to CUPE and to effective union administration.
- *"Our Union"*
A more detailed course on the roles of members of a union executive and committees and on the skills needed to be effective.
- *"Financial Officers Course"*
This course is specifically written for Secretary-Treasurers and Trustees of CUPE locals. All newly elected Financial Officers should take this course even if they already have a knowledge of bookkeeping. The course covers all aspects of the duties of the Secretary-Treasurer.
- *"Face to Face Communication"*
A course in how to communicate effectively. Useful for anyone who would like to have more effective listening and communication skills.

Contact your CUPE Education Representative for more information on these courses as well as other courses offered by the CUPE Education Department or by your Federation of Labour.