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CUPE's 22,600 library workers provide frontline services to Canadians across the country. Approximately 12,768 of CUPE's library workers are in 119 stand-alone public library locals, while the rest belong to locals with members in municipalities, universities, colleges and school boards.

CUPE represents the majority of all unionized library workers in Canada.

The primary job classifications are librarian, library clerk, library archive technician and page. Most library workers are women (85 per cent); racialized workers account for about 12 per cent of CUPE library members.

LIBRARIES AS COMMUNITY HUBS

A library is a central community hub. Meeting rooms are used by community groups, library staff host education programs and clubs, and the publicly accessible computer terminals are highly popular. Canada's public libraries log 100 million visits and lend 2.1 million books every year. Nearly two-thirds of Canadians have a library card.

The library is the only public institution that provides free access to the Internet through over 8,500 computers that are accessed over 18 million times a year. Libraries provide services for seniors, employment supports, language and reading groups, and citizenship test preparation.

FUNDING

Libraries are funded by all three levels of government – federal, provincial and municipal. Municipalities are the largest funders, spending more than the federal and provincial governments combined. The federal government provides funding exclusively to national libraries, while the provinces and territories fund public, school, university and college libraries.

Federal library funding has been inconsistent and dramatically reduced over the past several years. The federal government has significantly reduced the library workforce and closed several federal departmental libraries. These closures meant the end of interlibrary loans from those collections, threats to irreplaceable documentation and the loss of skilled researchers.

Provincial and municipal library budgets face serious threats. In 2019, the Ontario provincial government slashed by 50 per cent the budgets of the Ontario North Library Service, represented by CUPE 4705, and its counterpart, the Ontario South Library Service, represented by CUPE 3604. The funding cuts resulted in layoffs, reduced access to reading materials, interrupted the interlibrary loan system, and negatively impacted many remote, rural, and Indigenous communities.

In 2018, budget cuts to the library network in Longueuil, Quebec resulted in staffing cuts and a move by the employer to not replace staff on leave. The workers are represented by CUPE 306.

In 2017, CUPE organized the largest days of action in recent Saskatchewan history to respond to funding cuts announced in the provincial budget. CUPE mobilized up to 7,000 people in "read-ins" in over 70 communities under the banner, *Save SK Libraries*. Hundreds of CUPE members and other community members wrote letters, phoned and visited members of the legislature, got thousands of petitions signed, and made sure that every newspaper and call-in radio station was flooded with calls to keep the libraries open. Bowing to the pressure, the Saskatchewan government announced it would completely restore the \$4.8 million in funding cuts to the province's libraries.

In 2016, the Newfoundland and Labrador government announced plans to close 54 libraries to save less than \$1 million. The closures would have seen almost 60 women in rural communities lose their jobs. CUPE 2329, the local representing the province's library workers, fought back. The campaign forced the government to reverse the closures.

Toronto has also seen serious threats to its library funding. The city tried to cut library funding by 10 per cent. Members of CUPE 4948 fought back with a campaign that reduced the scope of the cuts and even brought about a budget increase.

Issues

HEALTH AND SAFETY: COVID-19

Libraries in communities across the country have reopened, many with limited services, after several months of closures due to COVID-19. But we can expect public health restrictions to remain in place for many more months. Physical distancing measures, frequent hand washing, and mask-wearing are now the norm, coupled with an increased demand for digital services including e-books, online orders and reservations, and online programs. Entries and exits have been designated as one-way to control the flow of foot traffic.

Some Libraries are allowing the public to return materials while other libraries have suspended returns for the time being. Libraries that are allowing returns are now placing materials in quarantine.

Staff at many libraries are now tasked with cleaning and disinfecting book covers, DVD's countertops, computer terminals, and door handles. Library workers should receive employer-training on cleaning and disinfection products used in the workplace, the proper use of cleansers and disinfectants, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), the disposal of cleaning and disinfecting products and materials, and all precautionary measures.

HEALTH AND SAFETY: WORKPLACE HAZARDS AND VIOLENCE

Workplace health and safety is an ongoing concern. A CUPE BC survey of over 500 library workers found that library workers witness, and in many cases are responsible for dealing with, verbal threats, intoxicated patrons, drug use, theft and the viewing of explicit material online. Over 65 per cent of respondents reported exposure to biohazards like feces, urine, used needles and bed bugs.

Public libraries are a safe haven for people who are homeless or battling addictions or mental health challenges. Library workers interact with marginalized and vulnerable populations daily and are often called upon to perform duties more commonly associated with social work – but with little or no training in skills such as conflict resolution. Sometimes situations escalate, and workers are subjected to physical or verbal violence and harassment. For more information on workplace violence see CUPE's new fact sheet, *Violence in our libraries and what to do about it*.

Library workers are at risk of back injuries and repetitive strain injuries from lifting heavy books, boxes and bags. Libraries are often housed in old or under-maintained buildings. Indoor air quality and ventilation issues are common, including mold, asbestos and off-gassing from decomposing film and microfilm.

HEALTH AND SAFETY: THE OPIOID CRISIS

Should library workers be expected to administer Naloxone when someone is thought to have overdosed? That is the question many library workers and administrators have been grappling with in recent years. Naloxone, also known as Narcan, is a potentially life-saving medication that blocks the effects of opioids. Many public libraries, mostly in larger urban centers, have become the new front lines for the opioid crisis. Some libraries have introduced voluntary Naloxone training for its workers, whereas others have equipped security guards with Naloxone.

Employers should provide training on the safe administration of Naloxone but workers' participation should be voluntary. Employers should also provide supports to workers who have experienced and/or witnessed traumatic workplace events.

RISE OF PRECARIOUS WORK

The 2017 CUPE National Library Workers' Survey on Precarious Employment found that a large percentage of library workers are precariously employed. Precarious work may be part-time, temporary, casual or contract work. These non-permanent positions offer fewer full-time hours of work and fewer, if any, employment benefits like access to extended health insurance benefits and pension plans.

The survey results revealed that 53 per cent of CUPE library workers are either precariously employed or are vulnerable to precarious employment. Library workers who are precariously employed tend to work less than full-time hours, earn less than \$40,000 annually, have more than one job, and work as library clerks, or assistants.

Many part-time workers hold down several jobs to make ends meet and are unable to achieve a work-life balance.

PRIVATIZATION AND RESTRUCTURING

Privatization affects libraries in various ways. A common threat is contracting out of bibliographical services such as ordering, processing, cataloguing material and technology.

The move to self-service checkout and book returns is also common, leading to fewer staff positions and a decrease in the valued frontline service culture. Private contractors tend to cut corners, lay off or hire fewer staff, and try to cut wages and benefits.

Public-private partnerships (P3s) are a recent threat. In 2015, the City of Ottawa considered a P3 for the development of the Ottawa Public Library's new main branch. A successful campaign by CUPE 503

forced the City to abandon its P3 proposal in favour of a plan to house the new public Library and Library and Archives Canada in a new development near the city centre. Ottawa's new public library is scheduled to open to the public in 2024.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE: STAFFLESS LIBRARIES, SELF-SERVICE CHECK-OUT AND RFID

Staffless libraries are now a fixture of Canada's largest public library system. It was first conceived as a pilot project, but two branches of the Toronto Public Library are now permanent, staffless libraries. A staffless library is just that – a library with no on-site staff during extended hours. They mean fewer jobs, fewer programs for the public, reduced access for vulnerable communities, and increased risks to public safety. Staffless libraries have also been implemented in Hamilton and Calgary.

Self-service check-out is another cost cutting tool that has resulted in numerous staff layoffs. A 2014 staff report to the Toronto Public Library Board revealed that 81 full-time jobs had been lost as a direct result of self-service check-out technology.

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) is a threat to library workers' job security because it allows patrons to check materials in and out of the library without staff assistance. RFID is an electronic chip that replaces traditional barcodes. It is used to identify and track books, DVDs, CDs and other library materials. Initially praised as a tool to help staff, RFID is increasingly used by management to cut positions.

USE OF VOLUNTEERS

Library workers are concerned about the use of unpaid volunteers. Employers use volunteers to cut labour costs and to avoid creating new, paying jobs. Women workers are most affected since volunteers typically donate their time in female-dominated sectors including libraries. But volunteers themselves are not the problem; rather, it's how employers

choose to use volunteer labour that can contribute to a negative labour relations climate. For more information see CUPE's new fact sheet, *Use of Volunteers in CUPE's Library Sector*.

SERVICES FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Public library services are poor or completely lacking in small, rural, and remote Indigenous communities. Many communities have no access to properly funded public libraries, especially those on reserves or in remote regions. There's a lack of materials produced and published in Indigenous languages which contributes to an overall lack of resources. Advocacy groups have called on governments to provide more funding.

Bargaining

Most library locals bargain directly with their employers. In some areas, lead local or limited coordinated bargaining is part of an overall bargaining strategy. Negotiated annual wage increases continue to be small in the library sector, at two per cent or less.

Library locals across the country have made noticeable gains in the past two years. CUPE 4948, Toronto Public Library Workers' Union, negotiated ground-breaking language on human rights. The new, five-year deal provides two weeks of paid leave for trans-affirming care and another two weeks of paid leave for domestic violence or sexual assault leave.

Locals have bargained improvements in several other areas including pay equity, precarity, health and safety, harassment and violence, seniority, sick leave for casual workers, extending benefits to same-sex partners, improvements for probationary workers, and increases to guaranteed hours.

Employers also sought concessions at the bargaining table related to wages and sick leave. Workers in

public library boards are less likely to be paid for sick days when compared to other workers. In at least one instance, an employer wanted to replace paid staff with unpaid student volunteers.

On a more positive note, CUPE municipal and library workers in British Columbia have teamed up to bolster their strength at the bargaining table. The South Coast Municipal and Library Campaign brings together 24 municipal and library locals representing 22,000 members. The campaign elements include community outreach, coordinated bargaining, internal organizing, and local leadership training. The campaign launched in 2018.

Pensions

New pension information for CUPE members working in public libraries shows that about 92 per cent of these members can participate in a registered pension plan. Defined benefit plans are the most common type of pension and are typically provided through the City or Municipal Pension Plan.

Most part-time and casual workers are excluded from workplace pension plans or are required to meet high standards to be eligible. This hits workers at smaller library boards, mostly staffed by part-time workers, especially hard.

Allies

CUPE has engaged with allies in creative ways to promote and protect libraries. In Newfoundland and Labrador, CUPE participated in a pilot project on early literacy facilitation with the government and community partners. CUPE 2329 members facilitated the 12-session program.

In Toronto, CUPE 4948 does a tremendous amount of community outreach. In past years, the local has participated in *Word on the Street*, a national book and literacy fair, to connect with the 250,000 attendees about its campaign against budget cuts. Also popular is the local's ice cream truck with all proceeds going to the 2020 United Way Campaign on behalf of all Toronto Public Library Workers.

CUPE members and staff participate in a variety of annual library conferences across the country, including the B.C. Library Association, Ontario Library Association, Atlantic Provinces Library Association and the Canadian Federation of Library Associations, to name a few.