THERE IS POWER IN A UNION:  
Union Activism 2006 Timeline  
compiled by Kathleen de la Peña McCook

Unionism is the action for workers that dare not speak its name in much of the literature of librarianship. The library press does not cover union activity on a regular basis. In the early 1990s Elaine Harger and Mark Rosenzweig did a column for Library Journal called “Talking Union,” but since that column ended there has not been ongoing reporting.

The ALA Allied Professional Association (ALA/APA) was established by the American Library Association in 2001 for two purposes:

- Certification of individuals in specializations beyond the initial professional degree (see www.ala-apas.org/certification/certification.html).
- Direct support of comparable worth and pay equity initiatives, and other activities designed to improve the salaries and status of librarians and other library workers (see www.ala-apas.org/salaries/salaries.html).

Union activity falls under the catchall phrase “other activities” but is not highlighted or supported as such by the ALA-APA. The organizational home of unionism in the ALA-APA is under a subcommittee of the Standing Committee on the Salaries and Status of Library Workers. This is very low visibility and organizational commitment for a profession in which approximately 30% of all workers are unionized.

Union activities of library workers are highlighted in this timeline to provide a record of the Progressive Librarians Guild and our solidarity with unions.

February 2006

◮ Cheshire (CT) public library staff form a union under AFSCME.

◮ AFSCME Local 1526 of the Boston Public Library won the second annual SirsiDynix-ALA-APA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Promoting Salaries and Status for Library Workers.

By selecting Boston Public Library’s AFSCME Local 1526, nominated by Diane Fay, we honor a segment of our profession without a big voice, “said jury chair Peter McDonald. “The union did an outstanding job in their last contract negotiations to win upgrades for all 76 library support staff in the 26 of the 27 branches of the city public
library system. With support of administration, and in good
faith negotiations with the city, Local 1526 was able to
win a 10% salary increase over the next four years through
exemplary effort, dogged perseverance, and impeccable
arguments of how important library support staff are to the
libraries they serve.

March 2006

John N. Berry III, Editor-in-Chief, Library Journal, and a lifelong
advocate of libraries and the people who staff them spoke to the
Interest Group for Libraries and Unions (IGLU) of the Washington
Library Association. He addressed ways for making library
workplaces worthy of the professional values they represent. He
discussed examples of workplace rights violations and the negative
impact these violations can have on staff at all levels of the library.

Joan Cassidy, librarian, New York State United Teachers, Latham
(NY), is the 2006 recipient of the John Sessions Memorial Award
presented by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA),
a division of the American Library Association (ALA).

Joan Cassidy has done a fabulous job of librarianship in
creating the Albert Shanker ‘Where We Stand’ database,” said Dan Golodner, award committee chair. “She did the
research, legwork, training, and was the liaison between
Cornell University (Ithaca) and the New York State United
Teachers in which one of the most outstanding research
tools for labor and education historians was created.

April 2006

With libraries facing daunting budgetary challenges, President
Gerald W. McEntee of the American Federation of State, County
and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) commemorated National
Library Workers Day by thanking the librarians, library workers,
technicians and support staff who have dedicated their lives to the
goal of keeping America reading.

June 2006

Seattle Public Library employees of AFSCME Local 2083 pass
resolution calling for President Bush’s immediate removal or
resignation from office.

“Ignored Too Long: the Benefits of Managing a Library with a
Union” John Buschman, Steve LaBash, Dorothy Warner. Panel
at the American Library Association Conference, New Orleans.
The panel examined library management fundamentals that union
environments encourage or require to counter a longstanding undertone of avoidance and resentment concerning the subject. This panel – eagerly embraced by APA - was one step toward changing thinking on a topic discussed behind closed doors to strip away myths and misconceptions of managing in a unionized environment.

American Library Association endorses Employee Free Choice Act.

38.5%! That is the result of the 2005 Survey of Librarian Salaries question about library employees covered by collective bargaining reported in the ALA-APA Newsletter, Library Worklife.

July 2006

Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library employees pushing for a union suggested their own cuts of about $1.2 million by trimming the costs of hiring temporary workers and consulting and legal services.

“Library employees want a voice in their future,” said David Warrick, executive director of the local chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union.

“Theyir efforts have been disrespected by this board. Now we are at the point where we don’t ask, we demand notice and recognition.” Michael Torres, a library employee organizer, said confrontation was the next step because the board has not recognized a request to meet for several months.

The Progressive Librarians Guild passed a resolution in support of the Indianapolis-Marion County Librarians as published in the summer 2006 issue of Progressive Librarian.

August 2006

Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library Board OKs Union Vote the Indianapolis Star reports: The Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library Board agreed to recognize an employee union if enough eligible workers vote for it.

National Education Association’s Library, Information Literacy, and Technology (LIT) caucus promotes Information Literacy through the use of both books and technology. Many are school library media teachers. The caucus meets each summer during the NEA Annual Meeting and Representative Assembly (RA).
More than 100 Illinois State University union employees marched by the campus administration building—contesting continued salary negotiations, and decrying ISU’s proposed raise schedule... “We’ve been working without a contract since June 30, and we’re working on last year’s wages,” said Karen Dunton, president of Local 3236 American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

American Federation of Government Employees National Council of EPA Locals #238’s (AFGE Council 238 or the Union) Demand to Bargain over the closing and major reorganization of the EPA Headquarters and Regional libraries. We demand this right pursuant to Article 45, Supplemental Agreements and Other Negotiations During the Life and Term of this Agreement and Designated Representatives of the Parties of the Master Collective Bargaining Agreement between the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the AFGE.

Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild-CWA members planned a second rally Wednesday, October 25 to continue pressing for a contract with Catholic News Service. The employer’s demand that it be able to unilaterally terminate the pension is the key sticking issue. WBNG represents more than 3,000 workers in the metropolitan area and is a local of the Communications Workers of America. The Guild represents 20 employees at Catholic News Service, including reporters, editors, photographers, librarians and clerical workers.

A state arbitrator has imposed a three-year wage settlement that will give 79 Monroe County [NY] court workers raises through 2008, totaling 11 percent. The Monroe County commissioners formally ratified the settlement Wednesday with Teamsters Local 229. The bargaining unit includes law librarians.