

THERE IS POWER IN A UNION — 2009–2010

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*It looks like class war to me, and I, for one, will not surrender
without firing back.*

—Ann Sparanese, union librarian in Englewood, New Jersey

Economic recession took a heavy toll on the library workforce in 2009-2010. Lay-offs, cuts in hours and benefits and full out BIBLIOPOCALYPSE in Buffalo and Erie County were just some of the challenges faced by union library workers. Library workers also stood in solidarity with union hotel workers throughout this time supporting boycotts and drafting resolutions in support of collective bargaining (Stephens, 2010).

The percentage of libraries that report that all librarians and other professional staff are covered by collective bargaining agreements increased from 21 percent in 2005 to 25.1 percent in 2010. The percentage of libraries reporting that all support staff are covered decreased from 17 percent in 2005 to 14.4 percent in 2010 (Sager, 2010).

In 2009-2010 only a few items on library unions were indexed in *Library Literature & Information Science*. Major articles that were indexed: Applegate's "Who Benefits? Unionization and Academic Libraries and Librarians" (2009); Westlund's, "Libraries and Unions: Not Such an Odd Couple." (2009); and the *Progressive Librarian's* union summary series (McCook, 2009). The 2010 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences* included the article "Unions in Academic and Public Libraries" (McCook).

Unions at large had considerably more press. Noteworthy is a new labor history, *There Is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America* by Philip Dray (2010) which demonstrates the need for unions as the fight for economic democracy continues. Analyses of the need for unions to return to their historical roots as a social movement by Julius Getman (2010) in *Restoring the Power of Unions* and Paul Le Blanc (2010) in "Radical Labor Subculture" propose strategies to rebuild the labor movement.

The PLG Project, *Union Librarian*, a blog of library union news, is the basis for the 2009-2010 union highlights in this review.

January 2009

§ The first legislation signed in the Obama administration was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which allows more leeway for women and others seeking justice over pay discrimination. George Miller, chair of the U.S. Congress Committee on Education and Labor stated: “With President Obama’s signature today, we ensure that women and other workers who are discriminated against while on the job have the ability to receive a fair remedy. Ongoing pay discrimination is an attack on all working Americans and must be stamped out. The Congress and the President restored the law today and ensured that discriminatory paychecks are not immune from challenge.”

February 2009

§ Jean Dickson, activist union librarian, who has been grievance officer, vice president and president of the Buffalo Center Chapter of United University Professions, the union representing UB faculty and professional staff was profiled in *UB Reporter* (Wesolowski, 2009).

March 2009

§ The U.S. Department of Labor’s Wirtz Labor Library is the recipient of the 2009 John Sessions Memorial Award, an honor presented by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) and named for John Sessions, former American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) co-chair of the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. Wirtz Labor Library was selected for its efforts in supporting the history and contribution of the labor movement in the United States. In addition to maintaining unique and historically significant collections, including rare international material, the library particularly impressed the committee with its recent efforts to make its collection more accessible to a broader audience through digitization and to increase visibility of the library through the Wirtz Labor Library Lecture Series.



§ Toronto Librarians Split from CUPE Local 416 to form own unit. After a nasty battle, the city’s 2,400 librarians voted overwhelmingly to leave the city’s powerful outdoor workers’ union. With about 50 per cent voter turnout, more than three times as many librarians voted to split away from Local 416 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees - which also

represents garbage collectors and parks workers – as voted to stay. Library unit chair Rob Rolfe said “the time had come” for his members to form their own unit.

§ Ann Sparanese essay on the Employee Free Choice Act appears in *Library Worklife*.

§ Eileen Muller, AFSCME Local 1482 President, profiled on the blog, AFL-CIO NOW. The president of AFSCME Local 1482/Brooklyn Library Guild attributes a great deal of her personal and professional growth to union membership. Eileen Muller’s story, and those of other women who have benefited from union membership, are recounted by James Parks on the AFL-CIO NOW Blog; visit the March 8 posting.



§ The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress (AFC) reports the death of Archie Green March 22, 2009. Dr. Green, North America’s most prominent scholar of labor-related folklore, has been an essential guiding force in the history of AFC. It was largely through his efforts that the Center was created. From 1969 to 1976, Green put his academic career on hold to live in Washington, D.C. and lobby Congress for the passage of the American Folklife Preservation Act. Green earned a Master of Library Science degree from the University of Illinois in 1960, and a Ph.D. in folklore from the University of Pennsylvania in 1968 (Archie Green).

April 2009

§ *Agitate! Educate! Organize!* Lincoln Cushing and Timothy W. Drescher (ILR Press, 2009). Lavish full-color reproductions of more than 250 of the best posters that have emerged from the American labor movement ensure that readers will want to return again and again to this visually fascinating treasury of little-known images from the American past. Some of the posters were issued by government programs and campaigns; some were devised by unions as recruiting tools or strike announcements; others were generated by grassroots organizations focused on a particular issue or group of workers – all reveal much about the diverse experiences of working people in the United States. [L. Cushing is a PLG member].



May 2009

§ Librarians in Rocky Hill, CT members of Sub-local 39 of UE Local 222/CILU, have a new four-year contract that locks in their health insurance percentages through June 30, 2012 and increases wages by 15.4 percent. In the old contract they had annual maximum dollar caps on the annual premium contributions members had to pay, as did the other public employee unions in Rocky Hill. The committee was prepared to fight as long as necessary to maintain those caps, and not to be the first union to eliminate them. (“Librarians Lock Up,” 2009).

§ King County library unions merge to form second-largest local in Council 2. Several years ago Local 1652-LM, King County Library Maintenance, had about 15 members who were the only union workers in the library system. The local has now merged with Local 1857, the King County library workers, and the resulting local is 970 members strong. The rapid growth in the local has its origin in 2002. It was then that 550 members of the library voted to join Council 2. At the time they became local 1857 and eventually bargained their first contract. Then, last year, 400 library pages voted to join Council 2. Now the 550 members of local 1857 have merged with the pages as well as the original maintenance workers to become one big local 1857, putting it second only to the City of Spokane local, which has 1,100 members. “Our eventual goal is to negotiate one contract for all of these library workers,” says Council 2 Director of Organizing Bill Keenan. “That is one of the benefits of merging them into one unit.” In addition to the newly merged local, Council 2 represents the 83 supervisors, Local 1857-s, of the King County Library System. They recently joined Council 2 and now have a contract as well. (King County Library Unions Merge 2009).

June 2009

§ Jack Henning, a spellbinding orator and forceful presence who was an icon of organized labor in California and beyond, died in June 2009. He was 93. The son of a charter member of the plumbers union, Henning rose to become the longtime head of the California Labor Federation before his retirement in 1996. As the state’s top labor advocate for more than a quarter-century, Henning gained legendary status as a fierce defender of workers and an avid foe of the perils of “capital” left unchecked. (McDonnell, 2009).

July 2009

§ There were two major union programs at the American Library Association annual conference, “There is a Union Difference.” Lydia Morrow-Ruetten, Nina Manning, Carol Thomas, William A. Thompson. ALA-APA Programs for the People, July 11. The program highlighted the difference in union and non-union support staff salaries found by the Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO, using ALA-APA data.

The program also included a discussion of other salary-related topics such as the Employee Free Choice Act. The program featured speakers from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

§ Michael Torres, Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, AFSCME Local 3395, was honored as the winner of the Sirsi-Dynix – ALA-APA Award for Promoting Salaries at the networking breakfast, July 12, an opportunity to network with colleagues who are interested in unions.

§ Springfield, IL. “Metaphorically, the 10 layoffs are equivalent to taking a meat cleaver and amputating an arm or a leg of the library’s workforce, crippling our ability to provide basic service to the public,” said Bob Moore, an employee at Lincoln Library for 22 years. “Services will definitely suffer dramatically,” said Moore, who is not one of the 10 employees facing layoff. Union representatives told Springfield IL aldermen and the mayor that 10 workers scheduled to be laid off at Lincoln Library are “not fat hiding in the budget.” The city has told nine union employees and one non-union library worker that their last day at the library will be Aug. 6. The council took several budget votes this week that saved the jobs of 67 police officers and firefighters who also had received layoff notices, but not those of the library employees. (Poole).

§ Westlund, Jennie. 2009. “Libraries and Unions: Not Such an Odd Couple.” *Alki* 25 (July): 10-11.

August 2009

§ The nation’s largest teachers union sharply attacked President Obama’s most significant school improvement initiative saying that it puts too much emphasis on a “narrow agenda” centered on charter schools and echoes the Bush administration’s “top-down approach” to reform. The National Education Association’s criticism of Obama’s \$4.35 billion “Race to the Top” initiative charged that “Race to the Top” contradicted administration pledges to give states more flexibility in how they improve schools. (NEA Slams Obama’s School Reform Plan).

§ NY Library Association Affiliates with New York State United Teachers. “We feel partnering with NYSUT will increase our ability to advocate for the interests of our members, protect against potential cuts, and further our legislative agenda,” said Josh Cohen, NYLA President. The state Library Association has entered an agreement with the much larger and hugely more influential New York State United Teachers union in which NYSUT will lobby on its behalf (NYLA Affiliates with NYSUT).

September 2009

§ Toledo-Lucas County Public Library to Cut 10% of Work Force. Between 30 and 35 workers — up to 10 percent of the work force in the Toledo-

Lucas County Public Library system — will be jobless next month, library officials announced September 2, 2009. Association of Public Library Employees. UAW Local 5242 – Region 2B. [Communication Workers of America Local 4319, which represents circulation clerks, custodians, maintenance workers, and book processors.] “Members should know that the economy is tough right now and everybody is suffering,” said Harry Johnston, a representative from Communications Workers of America. His union represents clerks and custodians. “We’re working very hard with the governor’s office to get funding and restore those positions,” he said of the pending layoffs (Tharp).

October 2009

§ Progressive Librarians Guild opposes the actions of the Hyatt Company. “Be it hereby resolved that the Progressive Librarians Guild opposes the actions of the Hyatt Company in its mass firing of housekeepers in Boston and Cambridge. We also oppose the actions of the Hyatt Company in having regular employees train temporary employees to cover for regular employees’ vacations, then use those newly trained temporary employees to permanently replace the regular employees. We urge all librarians to avoid using Hyatt facilities during the 2010 Midwinter Meeting of the American Library Association.” Approved by the Progressive Librarians Guild-Coordinating Committee, October 14, 2009.

§ Toni Samek, Professor, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta was Keynote Speaker: “Academic Freedom and the Responsibility of Librarianship” at the Canadian Association of University Teachers. Librarians Conference. Negotiating for Parity: Closing the Librarian/Faculty Gap. [October 23-25, 2009]. (Canadian Association of University Teachers. 2009).

§ Applegate, Rachel. “Who Benefits? Unionization and Academic Libraries and Librarians.” *The Library Quarterly* 79 (October): 443-63.

November 2009

§ “What is Distinctive about the Library of Congress In Both its Collections and its Means of Access to Them, And The Reasons LC Needs to Maintain Classified Shelving of Books Onsite, And A Way to Deal Effectively with the Problem of “Books on the Floor” – November 6, 2009. Thomas Mann. Prepared for AFSCME 2910, The Library of Congress Professional Guild representing over 1,600 professional employees (Mann)

§ Rockford Library Union Cuts Finalized. With a Rockford library board vote and a signature, a lengthy debate between the library union and administration comes to an end. “We have an agreement with our bargaining unit,” says Library Executive Director Novak. Library Union President Karla Janssen, “I think it was the best decision that we could make given the circumstances.” It’s a one-year deal with some key changes that save

the library close to 600-thousand dollars. It freezes 2010 wages, eliminates overtime for working Sundays and allows the library not to fill vacancies when employees decide to leave. But administrators are still planning to lay off between 14 and 16 union workers (Barr, 2009).

§ Toronto Public Library Workers Union (TPLWU) ratifies new collective agreement. CUPE 4948 has ratified their first collective agreement.

December 2009

§ Wisconsin-Labor History in Schools Bill Becomes Law. Gov. Doyle puts signature on the bill; calls for labor history to be state standard. Governor Jim Doyle made it official Thursday, Dec. 10: He signed into law AB 172, the Labor History in the Schools Bill, culminating 12 years of efforts by key legislators, workers, unions and others to pass legislation to assure the teaching of labor history and collective bargaining (Wisconsin Labor History).

January 2010

§ Progressive Librarians Guild. Midwinter, 2010. “Progressive Librarians Guild opposes the actions of the Hyatt Company.”



At left, SRRT members supporting Boycott at Midwinter.

§ The jobs of 12 Lorain (OH) Public Library system employees, and perhaps more, were saved yesterday when the library board unanimously approved concessions by unionized employees outlined in a memorandum of understanding (Library Board Approves).

February 2010

§ Elissa C. Cadillic, President AFSCME Council 93 Local 1526, representing approximately 270 library assistants, custodians, and clerical and maintenance workers in the Boston Public Library system defends workers against unfair editorial.

§ UAW Local 2282 Amalgamated / Moline Library Unit Agreement. The City of Moline and the Moline Library Board of Trustees have announced that a wage concession agreement for cost-saving measures has been reached with the UAW Local 2282 Amalgamated (Moline Union).

March 2010

§ Roosevelt University library receives John Sessions Memorial Award. The Murray-Green Library at Roosevelt University, Chicago, is the recipient of the 2010 John Sessions Memorial Award, an honor presented by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) and named for John Sessions, former American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) co-chair of the AFL-CIO/ALA Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. This annual award recognizes a library or library system that has made a significant effort to work with the labor community and has consequently brought recognition of the history and contribution of the labor movement to the development of the United States. Through its development of resources such as the "Oral History Project in Labor History," the Murray-Green Library has made an ongoing commitment to preserve and increase the public's accessibility to labor history. [Roosevelt University named its library after two men who began their working lives as coal miners before becoming rival presidents of the most powerful labor federations in America. William Green led the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Philip Murray headed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to the peak of their respective power. Both men died within weeks of each other in November 1952, three years before their organizations merged in 1955 to form the AFL-CIO.]

April 2010

§ Cincinnati and Hamilton County librarians Vote to Decertify Union (Oder).

May 2010

§ Library workers avoid layoffs in Hamden CT. — Library employees have ratified an agreement that includes furlough days, but eliminates the need to lay off any workers at the three libraries. Larry Dorman, spokesman for Council 4 of AFSCME said that a majority of the library system's 38 employees unanimously approved the agreement (DeMatteo).

June 2010

§ Labor Rights are Human Rights. Program at ALA Annual Conference. Washington, DC. Labor rights are at the heart of the struggle for human rights. The freedom to associate, to organize and to have equal opportunities in the workplace is under attack around the world. The program discussed labor rights, including the role of unions in promoting democracy and economic prosperity, and the attack on workers' rights as part of an international phenomenon. The importance of unions to the salary and status of women was a special focus of this program. Speakers: Bama Athreya, International Labor Rights Forum, Executive Director; Carol Rosenblatt, Coalition of Labor Union Women, Executive Director.

July 2010

§ Members of the union representing Queens Library workers have overwhelmingly rejected a plan to cut their benefits to save the jobs of 46 fellow employees facing layoffs in August. The Queens Library Guild voted 297 to 50 against a package of concessions proposed by the library administration. “Queens Library workers are willing to sacrifice to help their co-workers and friends keep their jobs with the caveat all concessions must be temporary and guarantee no layoffs for the fiscal year,” said John Hyslop, president of the Queens Library Guild, Local 1321. (Colangelo).

September 2010

§ SRRT announces *Guide to Union Friendly Hotels* in an article in its September 2010 newsletter informing SRRT members about hotels and their current labor status in San Diego. The article encourages SRRT members to support unions and research hotels prior to making reservations for ALA conferences. (Stephens).



October 2010

§ Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library Reduces Hours 26%. (from 1,324 to 980 hours) effective October 3, and it has plans to eliminate 35 to 40 jobs before the end of the year. Michael Torres, the local chair of AFSCME Council 62, Local 3395, which has represented 320 out of 424 benefit-eligible staff since 2007, told *LJ* that morale at the library was low.

November 2010

§ “Our Profession’s Values....and Why They Matter” – Massachusetts Library Association and the Hyatt 100. Statement “As we advocate for libraries, it is often difficult to articulate and crystallize into manageable sound bytes all of the pertinent information that defines us and why we believe that library services and programs are essential to a strong democracy. It is even more challenging to find opportunities for public discourse regarding the values integral to our profession, and why they matter.” Jackie Rafferty, President, Massachusetts Library Association. [The MLA Executive Board determined that it was essential to take a stand for the Hyatt 100 by communicating our professional values to Hyatt management and requesting to be relinquished from our contractual obligations].

§ Buffalo & Erie County Library supporters have protested the county’s plans to cut \$4 million from the Buffalo & Erie County Library. “We’re here to make some noise!” rallied Timothy Galvin, president of the union that represents county librarians (Becker).

§ The Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library system has taken another hit laying off 37 employees. The layoffs are the latest in measures aimed at closing a \$4 million shortfall caused by declining property tax dollars. Last month, the library system slashed its hours, closing most branches an extra day each week....We all knew this was coming, but honestly, I think they could have handled this better,” said Michael Torres, AFSCME Local 3395 which represents roughly 315 of the library’s 793 employees. Torres said most averaged \$9-\$18 an hour (Milz).

§ “Check the ‘facts’ on Englewood workers.” Letter from Ann Sparanese, librarian at Englewood (NJ) Public Library. A few excerpts to NorthJersey.com:

- Some of Englewood’s wealthiest residents are on a campaign to out Christie Christie on our municipal budget. .. willing to distort the truth and scapegoat all city workers to win.
- As a librarian at the Englewood Public Library, I feel compelled to address the anti-public worker nonsense.
- At the library, there is only one person who makes a six-figure salary, and that is the director, who is, of course, non-union.
- Our “extremely generous” package includes evening and Saturday duty with no differential pay.
- At the library, we work hard to serve the public, in the most fundamental, salutary way with more business hours than any other department (except for police and fire of course.)
- It is mean-spirited for people who have multi-million dollar homes to target people who make 40, 50 and 60 thousand dollar salaries.
- Stop painting every city worker, every public worker, every union member with the same brush, as if we are the ones responsible for the economic downturn. We aren’t the greedy ones.
- There is a gale force wind against public workers in New Jersey...It looks like class war to me, and I, for one, will not surrender without firing back.

December 2010

§ Rising Number of Librarians Covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements. The percentage of libraries that report that all librarians and other professional staff are covered increased from 16.4 percent in 1997 to 21 percent in 2005, then to 25.1 percent in 2010. The percentage of libraries reporting that all support staff are covered decreased from 20.3 percent in 1997 to 17 percent in 2005 then to 14.4 percent in 2010 (Sager).

§ Continuing effort is being made to pass ALA Labor Resolutions. Drafts had been submitted prior to ALA Annual Conference 2010 by SRRT and the ALA/AFL-CIO Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups, and endorsed in principle by IFRT and IFC. They were not passed. These were being discussed on the ALA Council list the week of December 10, 2010 with plans to present them to the ALA Council meetings at

the 2011 Midwinter Conference. See ALA Council List archives for full discussion.

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