

# “Library Workers Will Not Be Shushed”

## 2012 Union Review

The following review of union activity in libraries is taken from entries posted on the Union Library Workers blog (<http://unionlibraryworkers.blogspot.ca>), a project of the Progressive Librarians Guild. Braden Cannon maintained the blog from January - December 2012. Sarah Barriage began contributing to the blog in October 2012.

In its annual union membership survey, the U.S. Department of Labor (2013) reported that individuals working in education, training, and library occupations had the highest unionization rate among occupational groups in 2012, with 39.2% of individuals in these categories belonging to unions. This was down from 40.5% in 2011. The 2012 overall union membership rate of 11.3% was also down from 11.8% in 2011.

A number of works on libraries and unions were published in 2012. These include, but are certainly not limited to:

- A post on PLG London blog entitled “The Canadian Library Association’s Failure to Advocate for Librarians and Libraries” (Lockhart, 2012)
- Privatizing Libraries, an ALA Special Report (Jerrard, Bolt, & Strege, 2012)
- An article in The Atlantic on library privatization (Erickson, 2012)

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■ Sarah Barriage joined PLG’s coordinating committee in 2012. She recently worked as a public services librarian at the Augustana Campus Library, University of Alberta, and will be entering the doctoral program in the School of Communication & Information at Rutgers University in September 2013.

■ **KEYWORDS:** Librarians’ unions; Labor unions – Canada; Labor unions – Egypt; Labor unions – England; Labor unions – South Africa; Labor unions – Spain; Labor unions – USA; Labor unions and similar labor organizations; “Privatizing Libraries” (ALA report); AFSCME: Canadian Union of Public Employees; Bibliographies.

- “Collective Bargaining is a Human Right: Union Review for 2011” in *Progressive Librarian* (McCook, 2012)

Union and library-related events were held on a number of occasions, including a library workers’ conference hosted by the Canadian Union of Public Employees in March 2012 (see <http://ow.ly/na0Y1>) and “All of Us or None: Social Justice Posters of the San Francisco Bay Area”, an exhibit of special collections material at the Oakland Museum of California that ran from March - August 2012 (see <http://ow.ly/na0ZI>).

## January 2012

- The Toronto Public Library Workers Union engaged in a number of activities in their fight for a new contract, having been without one since the end of 2011. These activities included polling Toronto residents on the use of surplus municipal funds (Peat, 2012b), enlisting the support of prominent authors to sway the opinions of city administration (Peat, 2012a), filing for conciliation in their negotiations with the city (Peat, 2012c), and working with other Toronto public sector unions to present a united front against city administrations (Alcoba, 2012).
- The United Auto Workers shut down their own research library and its unionized staff (represented by OPEIU) were either re-assigned or laid-off.
- The union representing workers at Chicago Public Library, AFSCME Council 31, filed a grievance against Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s unilateral decision to close public library branches on Mondays (Blake, 2012). The decision to reduce library hours followed the laying-off of 176 library workers. Chicago librarians hosted “People’s Library Hours” at several branches in protest (McClelland, 2012). It was later announced 65 of the laid-off library workers would be hired back in order to keep the library’s branches open on Mondays (Byrne, 2012).
- Service Employees International Union Local 721, which represents library workers in the California city of Simi Valley, filed a lawsuit against the city administration over the latter’s plans to withdraw from the Ventura County library system (McGrath, 2012). The lawsuit claimed that the withdrawal is a legislative act that cannot be made unilaterally. It was reported that the lawsuit was specifically launched to prevent the city from issuing a request for proposals to outsource library services (Goldberg, n.d.).
- Workers at the Attleboro Library in Massachusetts agreed to a contract with the city government.
- Over 200,000 librarians, archivists, and information workers unionized in Egypt (Mourad, 2012). The development was built on the efforts of

information workers from all manner of libraries and archives as well as students in the field.

- Union workers at the Manchester, Connecticut library system ratified a new collective agreement with city administration (Leavenworth, 2012). The workers are members of AFSCME Local 991.
- Fresno County Library in California actively recruited volunteer scabs to run the library in the event of a strike by county workers (Torres, 2012). It was also reported that librarians in the Fresno County Library system were actually scabbing their own strike, with the help of the volunteer scabs (Ritchie, 2012).
- Harvard University Library announced a decision to “involuntarily” downsize its staff, to the shock and concern of the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (Weinstock & Worland, 2012). Complaining that their union leadership was not doing enough to fight proposed library cuts, members of the union began mobilizing without the assistance or support of union leadership (Dou, Jain, & Weinstock, 2012).

## February 2012

- Unite, the union representing library workers in Greenwich, England, threatened legal action after a conflict of interest was declared by Councillor John Fahy, temporarily halting plans to privatize the library system (Chandler, 2012). Fahy’s company had been given control of libraries in the area.
- Unison protested cuts to the local archives in St. Helens, England, saying that the cuts would threaten the archival holdings currently housed in the public library (“St Helens council denies archives claim”, 2012).
- Students and workers at Harvard University joined together to protest the university administration’s moves to down-size its library staff (Weinstock, 2012). The march included members of Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers, the Student Labor Action Movement, and faculty. Harvard Library management later announced it would form three joint councils with the union to better plan and implement the proposed re-organization of the library system (Schwartz, 2012).
- Library workers and several thousand other public employees represented by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance threatened to strike after having their wages frozen for a third consecutive year (“Union threatens strike after pay frozen for third year in a row”, 2012). The pay freeze affects up to 15,000 workers.
- The Toronto Public Library Workers Union called for a “no board” report, a recognition by the Ontario Ministry of Labour that the negotiations have stalled (Church, 2012).

- The State Department of Labor Relations certified the library union at Concord Free Public Library (Hooper, 2012). Workers at Concord Free Public Library are now officially represented by AFSCME Council 93.
- A rally was held in solidarity with workers at the National Library of Spain, members of CNT-AIT Madrid (“February 4 - day of solidarity - conflict with the National Library of Spain”, 2012). Workers there have been campaigning against budget cuts and outsourcing since 2010.

### **March 2012**

- Workers at Toronto Public Library went on strike for 11 days before reaching an agreement with the city’s administration that awarded raises to all employees and gave job security to those who have earned 11 or more years of seniority (Dale & Jackson, 2012). As part of strike action, the union hosted a read-in rally and a knit-in rally to raise public awareness (“Toronto library workers to hold ‘read-in rally’”, 2012; Peat, 2012d).
- AFSCME Local 2760 and Gary Public Library in Indiana came to an agreement on the laying off of 14 library workers and a library budget cut of about \$500,000. The president of AFSCME Local 2760 had earlier claimed that proposed cuts to their library system amounted to “union-busting”, with several union members being demoted to part-time positions and thus becoming ineligible to carry a union card (Dolan, 2012).
- The National Federation of Women’s Institutes partnered with Unison, the largest union in the UK, in a campaign entitled “Speak Up for Libraries” to help save public libraries from proposed funding cuts (“Speaking up for libraries”, 2012).
- Librarians in Winsford, England, staged a one-day walkout as part of ongoing industrial action against town council’s moves to alter their collective agreement (“Union action to close Winsford library”, 2012).
- Unionized workers at the Monona Library in Wisconsin launched a lawsuit against the board accusing them of “wrongly using the state’s controversial new collective bargaining law to invalidate a signed contract” (Verburg, 2012).
- Unionized workers at the Rockford Public Library in Illinois delivered a vote of no confidence in their executive director, Frank Novak (Curry & Green, 2012).

### **April 2012**

- Workers at the Regina Public Library in Saskatchewan voted for a strike mandate. The workers are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and passed the vote with an 82% majority.

- It was announced that 41 public school librarians with the Chignecto-Central regional school board in Nova Scotia would be laid-off as of June 30. The move is the result of budget cuts but came as a surprise to the workers and the union, the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union.
- Workers at 16 branches of the Okanagan Regional Library in British Columbia voted in favour of a strike with a 96% majority (Rolke, 2012).
- In honor of Library Workers Day on April 10, AFSCME launched an online campaign to draw attention to recent attacks on public libraries across the country by proponents of austerity measures (Sorrell, 2012). Stating that “library workers will not be shushed,” AFSCME Local 1215 (Chicago) president Carl Sorrell drew attention to the importance of an active, organized work force and ties with community members in defending library services.
- Library workers in Greenwich, England went on a four-day strike in opposition to city council’s decision to privatize the library system (Page, 2012). The library workers are members of Unite.
- Library workers in the Canton County, Ohio library system, members of SEIU 1199, ratified a new contract (“Stark District Library employees get raises this year”, 2012).

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## May 2012

- Workers in the Okanagan Public Library system held an informational picket at the opening of a new library branch in Vernon, BC to inform the public about the situation facing CUPE members who were trying to negotiate a new contract with the library system (“Workers picket at opening of new Vernon library”, 2012). Workers later began a series of escalating job action (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2012a; “Job action strikes Okanagan Regional Library branches again”, 2012).
- Library workers represented by AFSCME in West Haven, Connecticut have finalized their first contract with the West Haven Public Library (Misur, 2012).
- Regina Public Library workers represented by CUPE staged a one-day walkout, temporarily closing several branches of the library system. The workers had not had a new collective agreement in over two years and had been without wage increases since 2009.

## July 2012

- Workers at Ottawa Public Library voted to go on strike after being without a collective agreement since December of 2011 (Reeveley, 2012).

- Ohio Association of Public School Employees Local 026 announced it was exploring strike options after the Guernsey County District Public Library provided notice of its intent to implement its final offer in the wake of an impasse in negotiations (Stillion, 2012).
- Library workers in Port Hope, Ontario organized with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (“Port Hope library workers join CUPE to enhance job security”, 2012).
- The labor dispute at Regina Public Library ended, with library workers organized with CUPE accepting a deal with management (“New deal for Regina Public Library staff”, 2012).
- Workers at the Saskatoon Public Library in Saskatchewan voted for a strike mandate. The workers are represented by CUPE and had been without a contract for over two years.

### **August 2012**

- A contract agreement was reached between workers of the Okanagan Public Library and management (Waters, 2012).
- Library workers at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa acted in solidarity with the Academic Staff Association at that university in their struggle against management. They are part of the Administration, Library and Technical Staff Association and participated in a two one-day strike with the National Education, Health and Allied Workers’ Union and Academic Staff Association. The three unions banded together and would not sign an agreement with management unless all three unions accepted.

### **September 2012**

- Academic librarians in the University of California system, who are represented by University Council - American Federation of Teachers, were being denied their salary increases in order to coerce their agreement to a contract extension and restructuring of retirement benefits (Wang, 2012). These salary increases are governed by merit reviews and many of the affected librarians had already passed the peer review process.
- Workers at the University of Victoria represented by CUPE, including library workers, served strike notice (“UVic workers serve strike notice”, 2012). The timing of the strike notice was set to coincide with the beginning of the fall semester and came after two years without a contract.
- The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), which includes many school librarians, held a massive eight-day strike that shut down the public school system in Chicago (Davey & Yaccino, 2012). The union was out for the first time in 25 years.

- Support workers, including library staff, with the Catholic School Board in Edmonton, Alberta went on strike. The workers are represented by the Communication, Energy, and Paperworkers Union of Canada.
- Library workers at the Saskatoon Public Library in Saskatchewan held an information picket, accusing library administration of hoarding funds and refusing to negotiate (Biber, 2012).
- Support staff at the University of Vermont, including library workers, voted to join a union but did not give a clear majority on which union to join (“UVM staffers vote for union representation”, 2012).

## **October 2012**

- Support workers with the Edmonton Catholic School Board, including library workers, overwhelmingly voted in favour of the latest offer from management. The vote brought an end to the three-week strike.
- Employees at two of the Okanagan Regional Library branches voted in favour of joining CUPE (Sthankiya, 2012). This decision followed months of job action and contract negotiations between CUPE 1123 and the Okanagan Regional Library board.

## **November 2012**

- Library workers in Maidenhead, England expressed concern over plans to extend library hours to Sunday and to use volunteers to staff the library (Batt, 2012). The workers are members of Unison and questioned whether or not those who work on Sundays will be paid over-time, as used to be the case for working on Saturdays.
- It was announced that nearly 300 jobs were being eliminated in Southampton, UK - including a number of positions in libraries (“279 jobs to go at council”, n.d.). Two unions, Unison and Unite, attempted to work with Southampton City Council in response to the announced budget cuts.
- Library workers at the Wethersfield Library in Connecticut had a new, three-year contract approved (Hoffman, 2012).
- A four-year contract was approved for library workers in Cheshire, CT (Ragali, 2012).

## **December 2012**

- Library workers at yet another branch of Okanagan Regional Library voted in favour of joining CUPE 1123 (Canadian Union of Public Employees,

2012b). The union now represents nearly 200 workers at 21 of the library's 29 branches.

- Elementary teachers across Ontario prepared to engage in job action in response to Bill 115, which has reduced sick days, introduced wage freezes, and restricted the ability of union members to strike (Gray, 2012). Bill 115 also impacts support staff at Ontario's schools, including library staff.
- The Dayton Metro Library Board of Trustees reopened negotiations with the Dayton Metro Library Staff Association after rejecting the recommendations of a neutral third-party fact finder (Smith, 2012).
- The union representing workers at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library in Vermont claimed that three employees have been shifted out of the union (Taube, 2012). The library contends that these employees were not shifted out of the union but were moved into new non-union, mid-level management positions. The union filed a complaint with an arbitrator and Vermont's Labor Relations Board.

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