
“The Union Can’t Sit Idly By”

2013 Union Review

By Sarah Barriage

The following is a review of union activity in the information sector throughout 2013. The items in this review are taken from posts on the Union Library Workers blog (<http://unionlibraryworkers.blogspot.ca>), which is a project of the Progressive Librarians Guild. Sarah Barriage maintained the blog throughout 2013, with Joanna Kerr serving as an occasional contributor.

Reports & Publications

In 2013, the United States and Canada both issued reports on unionization rates in their respective countries. In its annual union membership survey, the U.S. Department of Labor (2014) reported that the overall union membership in 2013 remained the same as that of 2012, with 11.3% of the workforce belonging to unions. While the highest occupational group unionization rate was among individuals working in education, training, and library occupations, the 2013 rate of 35.3% for this occupational group reflects a decrease from both the 2012 rate of 39.2% and the 2011 rate of 40.5%. An analysis of long-term unionization trends across Canada also reflected a decrease in unionization rates in the information, culture, and recreation industry, with rates dropping from 27.6% in 1999 to 25% in 2012 (Galarneau & Sohn, 2013).

Other publications related to union activity in the information sector issued in 2013 include:

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■ KEYWORDS: Bibliographies; Labor unions – Canada; Labor unions – India; Labor unions – South Africa; Labor unions – Trinidad & Tobago; Labor unions – United Kingdom; Labor unions – USA; Labor unions and similar labor organizations.

- “A Manifesto for Culture” issued by Public and Commercial Services Union (n.d.)
- A calendar of labor history events and exhibitions in New York and neighboring states issued by the New York Labor History Association (n.d.)
- “The Public Library Service Under Attack: How Cuts are Putting Individuals and Communities at Risk and Damaging Local Businesses and Economies”, a report issued by UNISON (Davies, 2013)
- The first report by Canada’s National Library Workers Committee, presented to the Canadian Union of Public Employees National Convention (“National Library Workers Committee report”, 2013)
- An online collection of librarians’ collective agreements at universities and colleges across Canada created by the University of Western Ontario Student Chapter of the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL: UWO Student Chapter, n.d.)
- ““Library workers will not be shushed”: 2012 union review” published in Issue 41 of *Progressive Librarian* (Barriage, 2013)

Awards

In early 2013, the Toronto Public Library Workers’ Union (CUPE 4948) was awarded the Ontario Library Association’s Media and Communications award for their “Our Public Library” campaign, which was launched in response to proposed budget cuts and suggestions that the library system be privatized (“Toronto Public Library Workers’ Union campaign garners OLA Media and Communication Award”, 2013).

The Labor Archives of Washington was the 2013 recipient of ALA’s Reference and User Services Association’s John Sessions Memorial Award “for its steady stream of exhibits, outreach efforts to the community and the impressive LibGuides site and digital collections portal site” (“John Sessions Memorial Award”, n.d.).

Events

A number of exhibits, both physical and digital, were launched in 2013 related to historical union activity. Such exhibits included:

- “Labor and New Deal Art Print Exhibit” hosted by the Cleveland Public Library in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of The Little Steel Strike (“Labor and new deal art print exhibit opening January 19th”, 2013)
- An exhibit on the 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike titled “Bread and Roses Strike of 1912: Two Months in Lawrence, Massachusetts, that Changed

Labor History”, showcased by The Digital Public Library of America (“Bread and Roses Strike of 1912”, n.d.)

- A collection of political and union activist posters from a number of countries were on display at John Curtis Free Library in Hanover, MA (Burridge, 2013).
- Two online historical collections, the “Dan Long Union Library Poster Collection” and the “Therese O’Connell Poster Collection”, launched by the Victoria University of Wellington Library (“Historical poster collection goes online”, 2013).

Union activity was also a focus of two events at the 2013 ALA Annual Conference. Larry Spivack, President of the Illinois Labor History Society, and Shawn Nicholson, Assistant Director at the Michigan State University Library, spoke on preserving labor history. Jessica Storrs and Paul Almeida presented “Union 101 for Librarians and Library Workers”.

Union Activity

January 2013

- The union representing library staff and other support workers in schools across Ontario, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), reached a tentative deal with the provincial government (Bradshaw, 2012).
- Members of CUPE 5047, the union representing library support specialists and other support staff at the Halifax (Nova Scotia) Regional School Board, held a strike (“Halifax school board facing possible labour trouble”, 2013).
- British Columbia’s labour relations board ruled that Simon Fraser University had been bargaining in bad faith with CUPE 3338, the union representing library assistants and other support staff at the university (Sandborn, 2013).
- The St. FX Association of University Teachers at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia went on strike (“St. Francis Xavier University faculty on strike”, 2013). The union represents librarians, archivists, and other faculty.

February 2013

- Staff at Harvard Library voiced their concerns arising from the restructuring of library services in a number of ways, including passing out flyers, sending letters to administration, and participating in rallies and pickets (Cersonsky, 2013).

- Simi Valley (CA) City Council voted to privatize Simi Valley Public Library, making it the third library to become privatized after leaving Ventura County Library System (Harris, 2013).
- As the strike by faculty at St. Francis Xavier University ended (“St. FX students back to class after three-week strike”, 2013), the union representing library and other support staff at the university, the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union, rejected a contract offer from the university administration (“Support workers at St. Francis Xavier University reject contract offer”, 2013).
- While all female tenure-track and tenured faculty at the University of British Columbia were given a pay increase in order to address gender-based pay inequity at that institution, a review of librarians’ salaries found no such pay inequity and librarians were thus not included in the pay increase (Bigam, 2013).

March 2013

- On March 6, bylines in the Toronto Star newspaper appeared only as “Star Staff” in a display of solidarity with staff who had been targeted for layoffs, including Toronto Star librarians (Cross, 2013). Staff at the newspaper are represented by the Southern Ontario News Media Guild (CEP Local 87-M).
- Staff at Richmond Public Library in British Columbia ratified a new four-year collective agreement (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2013b). The staff are members of CUPE 3966.
- Members of CUPE 391, the union representing library staff at Vancouver Public Library, Sechelt Public Library, and Gibsons and District Public Library, ratified a new four-year collective agreement (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2013a).
- Members of New York’s biggest public employee union, District Council 37, rallied outside New York City Hall to demand a solution to ongoing funding uncertainty (Katinas, 2013).
- Staff at New Westminster Public Library in British Columbia voted in favour of joining CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2013c).
- Staff at Saugus Public Library in Massachusetts reached an agreement with the town of Saugus regarding the details of their new contract (Gaffney, 2013).
- The South African Municipal Workers Union called on local governments to ensure adequate funding for libraries as a means of providing free access to information and the empowerment of citizens in a statement promoting National Library Week (“Municipal workers welcome library week 2013”, 2013).

- 250,000 members of the Public and Commercial Services Union in the UK went on strike in protest of changes to wages, pensions, and working conditions (“PCS union stage Budget day strike”, 2013). The strike affected numerous public services, including museums, libraries, galleries, government departments, tax offices, job centres, and border patrols.

April 2013

- Staff at Saskatoon Public Library (Saskatchewan), members of CUPE 2669, held a read-in at City Hall in order to bring attention to their on-going contract negotiations (“Saskatoon library workers stage hushed City Hall protest”, 2013).
- Members of Service Employees International Union Local 888 Southbridge Town/Library Employees in Massachusetts voted unanimously earlier this month to decertify (Lee, 2013).
- Over 80 current and former Windsor Public Library employees shared in a \$1 million pay equity settlement (Schmidt, 2013). The payments are retroactive to 2005. Windsor Public Library employees are members of CUPE 2067.

May 2013

- Protestors at a May Day demonstration at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, spoke out against austerity measures that could include closure of the university’s education library and other cuts to library services (“Police arrest 447 anti-capitalist demonstrators in Old Montreal”, 2013)
- Leaders of the Communication Workers Association Local 1031 issued a letter of no confidence in the library board at Bloomfield Public Library in New Jersey, citing mismanagement of library funds and safety issues (Frankel, 2013).
- The union representing library workers at Bridgewater Public Library in Massachusetts reached an agreement with the town on a new three-year contract (Hyman, 2013).
- An agreement was reached on a collective agreement for workers at Saskatoon Public Library that covered the period from 2010 to March 2013. Workers received retroactive pay increases.
- Library workers in Fort Madison, Iowa signed a new one-year contract with the city (Parrott, 2013).
- The only professional librarian working at St. Paul University in Waterloo, Ontario was fired in response to a need to reduce its operating budget (Roll, 2013). The librarian was a member of the Executive of the Professors Association of St. Paul University.

- Library workers in Rockford, IL signed a new collective agreement that runs until 2015 (“3% pay raise for Rockford Library workers”, 2013).
- Members of the Public and Services Commercial Union protested outside of the Liverpool Museum and employees at museums across the United Kingdom staged walk-outs as part of a weekend of action in response to cuts to arts and culture (Vaughan, 2013).

June 2013

- Library services in Harrow, UK were outsourced to a private company, raising concerns about service provision and contract transfers (Thain, 2013).
- The National Union of Journalists expressed opposition to announced plans by the UK newspaper publisher Trinity Mirror to close all regional newspaper archives, potentially making eleven positions redundant (Linford, 2013).
- Moreno Valley City Council in Moreno Valley, CA approved a five-year contract with Library Systems & Services LLC to run Moreno Valley Public Library, which resulted in all of the library’s employees being laid off and given the opportunity to interview for their positions after the takeover is complete (Hurt, 2013a).

July 2013

- Library and other city workers in Oakland, CA participated in a one-day strike, closing the library and other city services, after being unable to reach an agreement with the city on their new contract (Artz, 2013).
- Workers at the public library and art gallery in Sarnia, ON went on strike for several days before an agreement was reached with the county (Dentiger, 2013). Glen Sonier, the representative for Communication, Energy, and Paperworkers Union Local 65, said that while the union did not initially intend on striking, “the union can’t sit idly by and let an employer dictate a collective agreement that’s not negotiated” (Simpson, 2013).
- Library staff, members of AFSCME 2289, and township supervisors in Warminster Township, PA came to an agreement on a new collective agreement.

August 2013

- Librarians and professors at the University of Ottawa voted in favour of strike action after negotiations between the union and faculty failed to progress satisfactorily. An agreement on a four-year collective agreement

was reached before strike action was taken (Feibel, 2013).

- After facing drastic budget cuts, the University of Alberta requested that unions representing staff and faculty at the university reopen their collective agreements. Neither union agreed to the request (Mertz, 2013).
- Library and other city workers in Hayward, CA went on a three day strike after failing to come to an agreement with the city on a new contract (“Hayward city employees strike over contract talks”, 2013).
- Unionized custodians at the Queens Borough Public Library were replaced with contract workers (Colangelo, 2013).
- A commissioner from Miami-Dade County, Florida, spoke out against paying full-time union representatives who have been excused from their normal employment responsibilities (Mazzei, 2013).
- An offer was made by Lincolnshire Co-operative to take over six libraries that had been slated for closure in Lincolnshire County, UK, a move that would result in job loss (Fish, 2013).

September 2013

- Library workers in Hamden, CT signed a new four-year collective agreement with the city that included wage increases and reduced sick days (Ramunni, 2013).
- Seventeen of the 23 Moreno Valley Public Library workers who were laid off when Library Systems & Services LLC took over were rehired with reduced benefits and wages (Hurt, 2013b).
- Layoffs and reduced hours of operation at Miami Dade Public Libraries were averted after county commissioners voted to dip in to the libraries’ reserve fund (McCorquodale, 2013).
- Members of the Tamil Nadu Public Libraries Employees Association in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu went on a one-day hunger strike, demanding increases in pay and benefits (“Librarians ask for better pay, perks”, 2013).
- Concordia University Union of Support Staff - Technical Sector and Concordia University Library Employees’ Union in Montreal, Quebec have reached an agreement with administration on their new contracts after three and a half years of negotiations (Brennan, 2013).
- A Pennsylvania teachers union filed a grievance against the Wyoming Valley West school board after the middle school librarian position was eliminated. A petition with over 800 signatures was presented to the school board asking for the position to be reinstated (Guydish, 2013).
- Library workers and other classified workers at Oregon state universities reached a tentative agreement with administration, averting strike action (“Union, university system agree on pact”, 2013).

October 2013

- The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) donated its labor archives, the George Meany Memorial Archives, to the Hornbake Library at the University of Maryland (Hall, 2013).
- A union drive was initiated at the University of Victoria, British Columbia (Kines, 2013). Faculty and librarians were given 90 days to sign union cards indicating their support for unionization.
- The union representing faculty and librarians at Westfield State University in Massachusetts voted no confidence in the university's president Evan Dobbelle in response to a spending controversy (Flynn, 2013).
- Librarians and library assistants at the Public Library of Youngstown in Ohio signed a new two and a half-year contract with the county that included wage increases and the elimination of step increases (Milliken, 2013).
- A new three-year agreement was reached between the University of Manitoba Faculty Association, which represents librarians and other faculty members at that institution, and the university administration, just before the strike deadline that had been set by the faculty association ("University of Manitoba strike averted at last minute", 2013).
- National Library and Information Systems workers protested unfulfilled pay increases at The National Library in Port-of-Spain, the capital city of Trinidad and Tobago (Surtees, 2013).
- Workers in the UK represented by Unite, Unison, and the University and College Union engaged in a one-day coordinated strike over an offered 1% pay raise ("UK university departments close as three unions join in strike over pay", 2013).

November 2013

- Library workers in South Gloucestershire, England took part in a one-day strike by members of Unison in response to proposed pay cuts for weekend shifts (McCormick, 2013).
- The National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland announced its plan for closure after a failed campus renovation project and declining support from the AFL-CIO, one of its primary backers (Rivard, 2013).

December 2013

- Workers at universities across the United Kingdom engaged in a second one-day strike on December 3, resulting in at least one university closure (Grove, 2013).

- Members of the Association of University of New Brunswick Teachers, the union representing academic staff and librarians at that institution, voted in favor of a strike as part of ongoing negotiations with university administration (Canadian Press, 2013). The administration and the union agreed to abstain from any lockouts or strike action during the university's exam period.

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