
“A Seat at the Table”

2015 Union Review

By Sarah Barriage

The Union Library Workers blog (<http://unionlibraryworkers.blogspot.ca/>) is a project of the Progressive Librarians Guild established in 2002. The blog serves to document union activity in libraries, archives, and the information sector. The following is a review of this activity as documented on the blog in 2015.

Reports and Publications

- John Hyslop, President of Queens Library Guild, AFSCME Local 1321, authored a post on the Union Library Workers blog in response to the New York City Comptroller’s report on corruption within the library’s administration. His post can be read in full at <http://unionlibraryworkers.blogspot.ca/2015/07/corruption-at-queens-library-statement.html>
- UNISON Scotland issued *Read It and Weep: Scotland’s Library Staff Speak Out*, a report of the results of a survey of library workers across the country.
- “Showing Solidarity: 2014 Union Review” by Sarah Barriage was published in issue 43 of *Progressive Librarian*.

Awards

- In January, PLG Member Lincoln Cushing was honored with the Western Workers Labor Arts Award during the Western Workers Labor Heritage

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Festival in California. Cushing has published several books related to labor and social justice.

- The Calcasieu Parish Library System was awarded the 2015 John Sessions Memorial Award for its part in developing the Southwest Louisiana WORKFORCE Resource Guide.

Events & Conferences

- The AFL-CIO/ALA Labor Committee organized a labor history bus tour at the ALA Annual Meeting in San Francisco, CA in June.

Strikes & Protests

- Library workers at Queen’s University in Kingston, ON joined other support staff in an information picket in January, bringing attention to their ongoing negotiations with the university administration.
- University of Northern British Columbia Faculty Association voted in favor of strike action in January (Hyslop, 2015). In March, classes were cancelled as the workers went on strike for two weeks, ending only when the university administration moved to suspend job action (“2015 UNBC Faculty Association strike”, n.d.).



Photo courtesy of UNBC Faculty Association

- Public sector trade unions across Northern Ireland took part in strike action in March, closing schools, libraries, and museums (“Northern Ireland public sector strike: Impact on services”, 2015).
- Workers at Lucknow University in India went on strike in March (“Students in dilemma as LU strike continues”, 2015).
- Library workers and other staff at Southern Cross University in Australia, members of the National Tertiary Education Union, went on strike in March

in response to stalled negotiations with university administration (Sloane, 2015).

- Workers in Bromley Council in England engaged in a series of one-day strikes in April in protest of council plans to reduce funding for library and other public services (Linney, 2015a, 2015b). The workers are members of Unite.
- In April, workers at Capilano University in British Columbia went on strike (“Capilano University cancels all classes due to faculty strike”, 2015).
- South East Cornerstone Public School Division library workers and other support staff, members of SEIU, went on strike in Saskatchewan in April (Park, 2015). A tentative deal was reached in May after three weeks of strike action (Schick, 2015).
- Workers in Barnet Council in England engaged in strike action throughout the year in protest of plans to outsource library and other services (Caven, 2015; Speck, 2015). The workers, members of UNISON, typically took part in co-ordinated one-day strikes. Additionally, the union created music videos about the outsourcing plans that are viewable on their YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCH0-ICGzIoZZN18cc-jmCHQ>).
- In May, library and other city workers staged a protest at a Santa Cruz City Council meeting (York, 2015). The workers, members of SEIU Local 521, were protesting what they described as poverty wages, and were arrested after refusing to end their demonstration.
- Workers at the National Library of Australia and other public service workers represented by the Community and Public Sector Union engaged in mass strike action in June in protest of pay cuts (Thomson, 2015).
- In July, workers at Yarra Plenty Regional Library in Victoria, Australia, members of Australian Services Union, engaged in three days of work bans until an agreement was reached with the library administration on their new contract (Armitage, 2015).
- Clerical and technical staff at the University of Illinois, represented by AFSCME Local 3700 and AFSCME Local 698, hand-delivered postcards to the university’s president in protest of stalled contract negotiations (Wurth, 2015).
- Support staff at London Metropolitan University went on strike after three union members were given compulsory redundancy notices, including the branch secretary of UNISON (Robinson, n.d.).
- Workers at the National Gallery in London staged one-day walkouts throughout the year in protest of the planned privatization of sections of the museum’s services (Hatfield, 2015). The workers are represented by Public and Commercial Services Union.
- Workers at the National War Museum and the National Museum of Scotland,

members of Public and Commercial Services Union, went on strike in August in protest of the removal of weekend allowances for workers hired after 2010 (Weisblum, 2015).

- Librarians, teachers, and support staff represented by the Seattle Education Association went on strike in September, closing schools across the city for six days before reaching an agreement with administration (Chappell, 2015).



Seattle Education Association on strike - Photo courtesy of Elaine Harger



Elaine Harger (right) and a colleague, an ELL teacher
Photo courtesy of Elaine Harger

- Unite Community held a campaign to protest plans to lay off 88 staff and close two libraries in Kirklees, England. Unfortunately the reductions went ahead as planned, and also included the elimination of mobile library services (Lavigueur, 2015).
- Teachers and support staff in Ontario schools engaged in a work-to-rule campaign in October, refusing to carry out some of their duties as their unions engaged in contract negotiations (Mangione, 2015). The two unions, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, reached agreements with administration in early November (Csanady, 2015).
- Solano County workers in California engaged in a one-day strike amid ongoing contract negotiations, resulting in library closures (Shams, 2015).
- Thirty-seven thousand members of Front Commun went on strike across the province of Quebec, including workers at the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec ("Quebec public sector strikes", 2015).
- The Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria and Confederation of Labour Podkrepa, unions representing workers at libraries, museums, and galleries in Bulgaria, held a 'Day of Discontent' in November in response to decreased funding and low wages (Leviev-Sawyer, 2015).

New Contracts

Workers in libraries across the United States and Canada ratified new contracts throughout 2015. These include workers at:

- Erie County Public Library in Erie County, PA (represented in AFSCME Local 2666)
- Attleboro Public Library in Attleboro, MA
- Lincoln Township Public Library in Stevensville, MI (represented by AFSCME Council 25)
- Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ (represented by AAUP-AFT)
- Medicine Hat Public Library in Medicine Hat, AB (represented by CUPE 46)
- Massena Public Library in Massena, NY (represented by Teamsters Local 687)
- Los Angeles Unified School District
- Museum of Modern Art in New York, NY (represented by UAW Local 2110)
- Powell River Public Library in Powell River, BC (represented by CUPE Local 798)
- Lowell Public Schools in Lowell, MA (represented by SEIU Local 888)

- Oakland Public Library in Oakland, CA (represented by SEIU Local 1021)
- Onondaga County Library in Onondaga County, NY (represented by Civil Service Employees Association)
- Belleville Public Library in Belleville, ON (represented by CUPE Local 907)
- Mineola Memorial Library in Mineola, NY (represented by Library Employees Unit of the United Public Service Employees Union)
- Morris Public Library in Morris, CT (represented by AFSCME Local 1303-105)
- McMaster University in Hamilton, ON (represented by McMaster University Academic Librarians' Association)
- Ledding Library in Milwaukie, OR (represented by AFSCME City of Milwaukie Local 350-5)
- University of Western Ontario in London, ON (represented by University of Western Ontario Faculty Association – Librarians and Archivists)
- County of Los Angeles Public Library in Los Angeles County, CA (represented by SEIU Local 721)
- University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, IL (represented by AFSCME Local 3700)
- Waterloo Public Library in Waterloo, IA (represented by Communication Workers of America)
- Peterborough Public Library in Peterborough, ON (represented by CUPE Local 1833)

Additionally, workers at several libraries chose to unionize, including:

- Clerical, technical, and paraprofessional staff, including library workers, at Northern Illinois University. The workers filed a petition with the state's labor board seeking to unionize with AFSCME. Laura Harris, an employee in the College of Education, stated: "We're dedicated, hardworking employees, and with our union, we'll have a seat at the table when decisions are being made." ("More NIU employees joining AFSCME", 2015)
- Workers at Westhampton Free Library in Westhampton, NY, who voted to unionize with New York State United Teachers union (Campbell, 2015)
- Workers at Sandwich Public Library in Sandwich, MA, who joined the American Federation of Teachers (Brennan, 2015)

Miscellaneous

- Doncaster Council in Doncaster, UK joined with the unions UNISON,

Unite, and GMB in pledging to pay all council workers a living wage (“Pay joy for 600 Doncaster council staff”, 2015).

- The union representing library workers at Morris Public Library in Morris, Connecticut (AFSCME Local 1303-105) filed a grievance in February against the library’s board of directors after the board voted to eliminate the position of library director (McKenna, 2015).
- The Ontario Pay Equity Commission ordered Ottawa Public Library to increase wages and make pay equity adjustments retroactive to 2005 for its workers, represented by CUPE 503 (Ottawa-Carleton Public Employees’ Union, 2015). The Commission determined that library staff were being paid less than other city workers.
- Kitimat Public Library in Kitimat, BC was briefly closed in April after library workers refused to cross the picket lines of striking municipal workers, represented by Unifor (Orr, 2015).

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