

October 2015

OCTOBER IS CANADIAN LIBRARY MONTH

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

October is Canadian Library Month, a time to reflect on the important role libraries play in the lives of all Canadians. Our libraries are much more than just a space to house books and reference material. They are important community and cultural hubs that play a vital role in promoting important democratic values such as freedom, justice, and participation in political life.

Libraries also promote life-long learning. Many libraries provide educational programs on such diverse topics as computer technology, health and wellness, languages, and parenting and prenatal classes. Your local library welcomes all members of the community: newcomers to Canada, job seekers, adult learners, young mothers and their children, and people on the margins of society.

Our libraries are one of our most important cultural institutions. More than 60 per cent of Canadians, or 21 million people, have a library card. The vast majority of Canadians, 97 per cent, have access to a library. And every month, more than 200,000 Canadians visit their local library to get help finding a job.

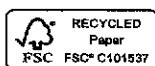
It is clear that libraries play an important role in the lives of all Canadians. And yet in recent years, our libraries have come increasingly under attack by governments and employers. CUPE library workers have had to fight austerity budgets and cuts to staffing to maintain quality services.

Also jeopardizing quality library services is the trend toward precarious work. Nearly 45 per cent of CUPE library workers work part-time, and that number rises to over 70 per cent for CUPE library clerks. Precarious workers represent a cheaper labour pool for employers because they are paid less than full-time workers, work fewer hours, and are provided few, if any, employment benefits. Refer to the attached fact sheet to learn more about how precarious work threatens quality library services.

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Privatization also threatens quality library services. Up until very recently the most common examples of privatization in the library sector were the contracting out of bibliographical services such as ordering, processing, cataloguing material, and technology. Now, the Ottawa Public Library Board is considering a public-private partnership (P3) for the development of the new Ottawa Public Library. Visit www.ourlibrarymatters.ca to learn how CUPE members are fighting back against this privatization scheme.

Library workers also have health and safety concerns. Libraries are safe places for people who are homeless, battling addiction, and suffering from mental illness. Library workers are sometimes required to work with vulnerable people but are not provided training in conflict resolution. Library workers may experience violence and harassment when situations escalate and are particularly at risk when working alone.

During the month of October, CUPE calls on members and locals to stand in solidarity with library workers as we take on these challenges in our workplaces. And we urge you to visit your local library and check out the events planned for Canadian Library Month.

In solidarity,



PAUL MOIST
National President



CHARLES FLEURY
National Secretary-Treasurer

CUPE FACTS

Precarious Work Threatens Library Workers' Security and Service Quality

October 2015

Every day CUPE's 22,000 library workers provide quality services to Canadians across the country. But the quality of services provided is being undermined by the increasingly precarious nature of work. Quality services can be maintained and enhanced by a stable, full-time, trained library workforce that is fairly compensated.

Precarious employment in the form of part-time, temporary, casual, relief or contract work represents a cheaper supply of labour for cash-strapped library boards. Precarious workers are paid a lower wage than full-time workers, work fewer hours and are provided few, if any, employment benefits. Most precarious workers are excluded from or must meet high standards to be eligible for workplace pension plans.

Precarity is extremely common in the library sector. Nearly 45 per cent of CUPE library workers are part-time, while that number is over 70 per cent for CUPE library clerks. Library workers are least likely to be paid for sick days and many must work several years before securing a full-time job.

According to the 2014 CUPE Membership Survey, you are more likely to be a precarious worker if you are a young woman (34 years of age or younger), have a physical or mental health injury, are racialized, speak a language other than French or English at home, or be a non-citizen. The survey also reveals that precarious workers earn less than \$40 thousand annually.

Findings from other research show that precarious workers are often unaware of their work schedules, report low job satisfaction and have limited career prospects. Employers rarely provide training to precarious workers. In fact, oftentimes precarious workers pay for their own training.

The rise of precarity in the library sector jeopardizes the provision of quality services. It is challenging to recruit new hires and retain existing library staff when the compensation is poor and the work is insecure. The lack of full-time work opportunities make it difficult to attract young workers into the field.

Moreover, many precarious workers are forced to hold down several jobs to make ends meet. Consequently, through no fault of their own, they are often unable to make the same commitment to a single employer as a full-time worker. Split shifts and a lack of guaranteed hours make coordinating with other jobs and achieving a healthy work-life balance difficult. Precarious employment leads to high stress levels, health problems and affects household well-being.

The loss of skills and de-professionalization is yet another negative fallout of precarity. We have witnessed a trend in the library sector whereby the job responsibilities of higher paid classifications are downloaded to lower paid classifications. In one instance, two librarian manager positions were eliminated due to budget cuts and some of the responsibilities were downloaded to lower classifications in the bargaining unit with no increase in salary.

So, what can we do as union activists to combat precarity in our workplaces and increase the job security of library workers? We can:

- Bargain collective agreement language to convert part-time, casual, contract and relief positions to full-time positions;
- Bargain improved benefits for part-time and other precarious library workers;
- Start a conversation with your library board about precarity and lobby for a reduction in precarious employment;
- Start a conversation with your municipal government about precarity as local governments are often the main funders of libraries;
- Lobby municipal, and other levels of government where applicable, for increased funding to recruit and retain full-time, qualified library workers;
- Lobby your library board to increase funding for staff training;
- Work with community partners such as the United Way so they know that CUPE supports and participates in the *Good Jobs for All Campaign*
<http://goodjobsforall.ca/about/>;
- Get involved with your local library associations and school libraries to inform them about precarity and how it negatively impacts library workers and quality services; Refer to this fact sheet when developing arguments to present to library boards and governments during bargaining and lobbying.

It is important more than ever to tackle precarity in our workplaces because we know that involvement in our union increases with job security. The more members we have actively engaged in our union the more successful we will be at the bargaining table and in countering attacks on labour from corporations and governments.

Please visit www.CUPE.ca for more information on precarity. And join us for a discussion on precarious work in libraries at the Library Sector Meeting at the CUPE National Convention scheduled for November 1st starting at 10:00am.

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