



Photo: James Gemmill

An Indomitable Spirit: The Eight Hundred of CUPE 391

by A. Galanopoulos et al.

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“The most important asset of any library goes home at night –
the library staff. “ – Dr. Timothy Healy, NYPL

These are the ramblings, musings, and personal observations of one member of approximately 800 unionized library staff workers of Local 391 of The Canadian Union of Public Employees, CUPE. The catalyst, an unprecedented 88-day long labour dispute, or strike for those who appreciate uncomplicated language, involving CUPE 391 and its employer, The City of Vancouver.¹

Those expecting a dissection of sorts of the events leading up to, during and post strike will be somewhat disappointed. Although what follows will contain a few of these details, in the form of appended documents (Appendix #1, #2), the genesis of this article is rooted in the need to recognize and document the extraordinary creativeness, persistence, compassion and solidarity of those 800 library staff workers of the Vancouver Public Library. This is a **tribute** to a library staff who showed the library community, the public and the politicians how ingenuity and fearless convictions synthesize to create a paradigm, one worthy of emulation by other library systems that find themselves in similar circumstances. The members of CUPE 391, as a collective, are an apotheosis of positive labour actions.

For those unfamiliar with the physical landscape and organizations mentioned above, the snippets of information that follow, lackluster as they may be, are necessary components to understanding the terrain of this labour dispute. Appendix #1 contains a chronology of the events in these places among these players.

The Physical Geography

“Vancouver is the largest city in the province of British Columbia. It’s surrounded by water on three sides and is nestled alongside the Coast Mountain Range. Vancouver is home to spectacular natural scenery and a bustling metropolitan core, and boasts one of the mildest climates in Canada. The Greater Vancouver region is home to more than two million people in 21 municipalities, making it the third largest metropolitan area in Canada.”²

The Political Geography and Participants (some more willing than others)

- Canadian Union of Public Employees, CUPE 391
- The Vancouver Public Library, VPL
- The Vancouver Public Library Board
- The City of Vancouver and The Greater Vancouver Regional District, GVRD (now Metro Vancouver)

The Canadian Union of Public Employees, CUPE

CUPE pronounced “que pee” is Canada’s largest union. It is comprised of 550, 000 members, 2,500 locals and 70 offices across the country. “With more than half a million members across Canada, CUPE represents workers in health care, education, municipalities, libraries, universities, social services, public utilities, transportation, emergency services and airlines. CUPE members are service-providers, white-collar workers, technicians, labourers, skilled trades people and professionals. More than half of CUPE members are women. About one-third are part-time workers.”³

CUPE Local 391, History⁴

CUPE 391 had its humble beginnings in 1931 when a group of library employees formed the Vancouver Public Library Staff Association. It went through a number of metamorphoses and other labour group affiliations emerging as a member of Canada’s largest union on September 23, 1963.

CUPE 391, Today

CUPE local 391 represents close to 800 employees of The Vancouver Public Library, as well as 10 employees of Gibsons and District Public Library. We are comprised of librarians, library technicians, information assistants, library assistants, book binders⁵, delivery staff, maintenance workers, graphic designers, supervisors, marketing and communications coordinators, corporate service clerks, and duplicating machine operators.

Local 391 members are compassionate advocates, thoughtful negotiators, active in our local community, and engaged in the broader community.⁶

The Vancouver Public Library, VPL (1869-)

The third largest library system in Canada, the Vancouver Public Library is comprised of a Central library and 20 branch locations; total size of its collections is 2.7 million items with 1.3 million of that housed at the downtown Central library.

The library's primary funding source, and one might argue also its employer, is the City of Vancouver. VPL also receives Provincial funding and project grants including one that facilitates its role as a Provincial Reference Resource. In terms of municipal funding, however, VPL received 4% of the total \$848 million dollar operating budget.⁷

The Vancouver Public Library Board

The VPL Board is one of, "75 locally appointed library boards, accountable under the Library Act, [to] manage and control the public libraries" of British Columbia, BC.⁸

Individuals of the library board are appointed by City Council with a requirement that one member be from the current municipal council. The VPL Library Board, with its maximum allowable number - 13, has historically included two additional government representatives, one from the Vancouver School Board and another from the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation.

For the purposes of this article, the following statements from the *Library Act* need to be highlighted. Note: item 9(d) is not reflective of the current negotiating hierarchy involving CUPE 391 and its employer.

General powers and duties of the **library board** (excerpt):

The library board

- (a) may make rules for managing its business and for regulating the use of its facilities and services by the public,
- (c) must appoint a chief librarian
- (d) may hire and dismiss employees, enter into collective agreements with employees and set the terms of their employment, including fixing their remuneration and duties.⁹

The City of Vancouver and the Greater Vancouver Regional District, GVRD

The Mayor and ten councillors ponder, debate and direct the City's business. In addition, The City of Vancouver looks to the Greater Vancouver Regional District, GVRD (now Metro Vancouver), a separate level of government, for assistance and services that affect all of the 21 member communities of which the City of Vancouver is the most populous. These services include: hospital planning, parks, water supply, solid waste, sewage disposal and labour relations.¹⁰

So who sits at the bargaining table if it's not the VPL Library Board?

The CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee was comprised of the Union President, Alex Youngberg (Alexandra) and five other members. Representing the interests of the Employer were individuals from Vancouver Public Library Management, City of Vancouver, and members from the Labour Relations Bureau of the Greater Vancouver Regional District, GVRD.

As the above descriptions have already alluded to, the involvement of so many political entities makes for a challenging and often progress-impeding process. The GVRD has been the labour intermediary since the mid 1970s. Simplifying this process, for example, the removal of the GVRD (now Metro Vancouver) as the City's collective bargaining intermediary, has been a choice some municipalities have opted to pursue as in the case of the City of Richmond.

Free from the Bureau: Key to settlement in Richmond, says Mayor Brodie

"City of Richmond Mayor Brodie is crediting the fact his city opted out of the GVRD Labour Relations Bureau as part of the reason they were able to reach a deal with civic workers as opposed to facing the kind of job actions seen in Vancouver and North Vancouver."

See: <http://www.fairnessforcivicworkers.ca/news>

97% of the CUPE 391 Membership Voted to Strike¹¹

The members of CUPE 391 voted overwhelmingly to go on strike for the following issues:

- Pay equity (see Appendix #2 for CUPE 391 report)
- Improved benefits for members and their families
- Rights for Part-Time and Auxiliary workers
- Better job security and technological change protection¹²

The fight for pay equity, or comparable worth, or equal pay for work of equal or however one wants to describe this was clearly the dominate issue for the Union and the most problematic if not enigmatic for the employer.

It is interesting to note that while the strike was in progress at the Vancouver Public Library, discussions on the topic of pay equity were initiated at both the British Columbia Library Association, BCLA and the Canadian Library Association, CLA. The 2007 President of BCLA, Deb Thomas, presented her personal views on this in the September/October issue of the *BCLA Reporter*. Her thoughts are summarized by this excerpt:

“Fundamentally, this issue is about fairness. Everyone - regardless of gender – should receive fair compensation for the work that they do. That this remains an issue for some of the largest public libraries in British Columbia highlights the fact that this province lags behind other provinces such as Ontario where pay equity legislation in the late 1990s increased the salaries of library workers by, in some cases, up to 24%.”¹³

In a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, CBC radio interview, the City Librarian of the Vancouver Public Library responded to a question on pay equity in this way.

Interviewer: But what do you make of the union’s position regarding pay equity and gender discrimination which they’ve been resolute about for the last 12 weeks?

City Librarian: It’s a hugely complex issue. We do not believe that there is systemic gender discrimination at the Vancouver Public Library. Men and women are not paid differently for doing the same work. We believe that when library positions are compared with positions at City Hall, when you take the whole range of factors that have to go into determining what a job is valued at – and that includes qualifications, working conditions, consequences of your actions on the job, the responsibilities you hold – when all of those are taken into account, we don’t believe that there are serious discrepancies. We do acknowledge, and certainly Foley [appointed mediator] acknowledges in his recommendations, that now some positions of the library probably need market adjustments, that

positions are underpaid relative to some other work environments. But this is not *gender* discrimination per se.¹⁴

Joel Bakan, a **professor of law** at the University of British Columbia, an internationally recognized legal scholar, author of *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power*, and co-creator of the film, *The Corporation*, ---and strike line visitor offered his thoughts on pay equity for this article. It is reprinted here with his permission.

“One of the real shames in the way the recent city strikes were dealt with was the presumption in the media that somehow libraries were not as important to the public as garbage collection, or the issuance or construction permits. In a way this exactly reflected the main grievance of the library workers, namely that their work was being undervalued on gendered grounds – that because library work is traditionally viewed as women’s work, it is somehow less important, worth less, when compared to traditionally male jobs. The principle of pay equity, which the librarians were fighting for, is crucial because it challenges the embedded gender stereotyping that so profoundly distorts the way we attach value to work.”

How to conduct a strike, 391 style

“Chaos in the world brings uneasiness, but it also allows the opportunity for creativity and growth.” ---Tom Barrett

A three-month, full-time strike, unprecedented in local library history has had monumental impacts on the economic and emotional health of the Vancouver Public Library staff. What follows are some of the ways CUPE 391 chose to deal with this reality – with creativity, integrity, and resilience.

Since it would be impossible to highlight all that we did during those 88 days and at all locations -- instead, what follows are vignettes of our proud accomplishments. Apologies to anyone who might feel excluded! A US library school professor has suggested that a book might be a more appropriate vehicle.

On July 26, 2007 (some consider this to be July 23) approximately 800 library workers of the Vancouver Public Library withdrew their services and went on strike. For the first time in their 77-year history the CUPE 391 members, library staff found themselves relegated to the various library exteriors with their varying amenities, shade and warmth. Some of us are now very familiar with every uneven brick on the plaza of the Central library; and are more attuned to weather conditions, present and impending. We have an enhanced awareness of and respect for the power of nature and the power of a unified work force.

So how does one organize a strike? Is there a manual? Are all strikes conducted in a similar fashion? Is there a strike standard one should adhere to? How does one bring order to what is essentially an emerging society with its diverse needs and components (government & economics, food, shelter, entertainment, etc.). In terms of organizational skills, of course there is no other professional group that can even come close to matching those of library workers. This genetic predisposition, of sorts, served us well.

Other than the existing CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee and the Union Executive, comprised of ten members, there was no other structure to deal with the realities of the strike. It became quickly apparent that a Job Action Committee was required, not only to handle the day to day strategies and events, but to act as a communication and motivational force during this economically and emotionally-taxing time. Some of the events organized by the Job Action Committee will be mentioned later.

Crew Talks

Picketing staff were invited to attend on-site talks throughout the day, their length of course depended on the type of news to be delivered, the weather and appetite of those attending. A question & answer time was always encouraged. At the Central Library, the Crew Talks usually took place on the North Plaza, a Roman amphitheatre styled space that looks onto one of Vancouver's most well-known streets, Robson. The talks, delivered by the various members of the Job Action Committee usually without mechanical assistance (i.e. megaphones), and in direct competition with the downtown traffic and blasts of car horns registering their support, informed the staff about such things as: bargaining updates, strike pay, rallies at City Hall, media blackouts, picket behaviour protocols (flip your sign when walking near businesses), etc. These informal chats, thanks to the talents of Peter Degroot, D'Arcy Stainton, Randy Gatley, and Alexis Greenwood were integral to sustaining the energy of the 800 throughout this very lengthy three-month strike.

Picket Captains

These individuals, too many to mention here, were on-site roving information purveyors who fielded questions on topics ranging from picket line protocol to strike pay information to when the next delivery of coffee/tea would occur. Brian Peaslee, a regular Picket Captain, with his quick wit and union experience was an invaluable presence; a credit to his role and rank.

CUPE 391 Bargaining Blog

This award-winning blog is packed to its digital extremities with information on all things -- labour. There you'll find links to photos, videos, bargaining resources and a diary highlighting our setbacks and triumphs. The blog was an invaluable communication tool and will remain as a record of our historic struggle.

See:

Bargaining Blog

<http://www.cupe391.ca/blog2/>

Bargaining Resources Page

<http://cupe391.ca/action/bargaining.shtml>

Ministry of Propaganda, CUPE 391 Counterspin Committee, Media Clarifications

The media's failure to provide diverse viewpoints and unbiased information was painfully apparent during the strike. Media democracy took on more personal meaning. We witnessed - in frustration - the inaccuracies that filled the pages of our local newspapers. To bring balance to this problem, a group of like-minded picketers agreed to scour the pages of all the local media, paper and digital, and bring attention to our side of the story through written contributions that were published on the blog. The office of the Media Clarifications Committee, it went through various names changes, was often the concrete ground outside the Central Library. Some of us remembered our elementary school days and the fine art of sitting with your legs crossed. All was not 'primitive' however, one member brought along a laptop to the "Battle Room" and reports were written -- on site, on strike. The efforts of the group's labours can be viewed on the CUPE 391 blog at: <http://www.cupe391.ca/blog3/> under *Setting the Record Straight: Media Clarifications*.

A Day in the Life of a Library Picketer

Unlike other Union locals, CUPE 391 did not assign picket times. Library staff were afforded the flexibility to set their own hours of picketing. However, in order to qualify for the maximum amount of strike pay, 20 hours of picket duty were required to earn \$250. per week in strike pay. These hours could be completed in more than one location. In fact, union members were encouraged to divide their time across many Vancouver Public Library branches. Some chose to picket in the mornings, others preferred the afternoons, some chose to complete the 20 hours over 3-4 days while others stretched the time over the week.

Tracking the comings and goings of the 800 was no easy feat but a registration table at each picket location, appropriately staffed, and with all the necessities of an outdoor office (picket signs, cell phones, writing instruments of every

description, forms, tents, etc.) made for easy accounting. And then there was the coffee, tea, water, and goody table that was stocked by the Union, picketers, other supportive labour organizations, and the kindness of our library patrons.

After the initial novelty of this new-found occupation wore off, the first week or so when people would gather, picket, talk and do little else, library staff settled into routines and diversions of their own making. Chatting with your colleagues can only go so far before boredom settles in. To combat the monotony and still fulfill their picketing obligations library staff started to occupy their time by: playing various board games, doing crossword puzzles while simultaneously walking the perimeter of the building, reading - of course, playing instruments to entertain their colleague (guitars, accordion, trumpet, violin), walking their dogs, playing toss football, sketching, and knitting.

Good Food, Good Company

There were pancake breakfasts, chili days, and the gastronomic highlight of the week, the Friday barbecues. As anyone who has organized a family barbecue knows, creating an outdoor kitchen is no small feat and even more challenging when your family numbers in the hundreds. The CUPE culinary experts served the regular North American fare of hot dogs and hamburgers as well as many ethnic dishes. One Friday featured Indian cuisine. Many library staff brought items to share which were gratefully accepted and greatly enjoyed.

Our hospitality also extended to the many homeless individuals who congregate around the Central library. They were invited to share lunch with us but for those who were hesitant to approach our outdoor restaurant, library staff made deliveries. Smiles priceless!

Stress

People handled the stresses of the 'striking lifestyle' in very different ways, exercise was one of those methods.

"Tai Chi began on the picket line as a result of discussions between union members including some from the Wellness Committee. It was a way for us to deal with the uncertainties, the ups and downs, and serve as a form of stress reduction. One of our members with some experience in the practice led the Yang Style Tai Chi sessions. Almost none of those who took part had ever done Tai Chi so instruction focused on simple description with emphasis on the health benefits of the forms.

We did not progress beyond the first few movements in the sequences as that seemed to be best for the time, place and audience. The slow movements, with concentration on breathing and balance seemed to be tailor made for a strike

situation. Many staff were curious about the practice and the sessions attracted as many as two dozen people from time to time. Generally, they were done 2 or 3 times a week in mid-morning, usually after the “Grandeur on Georgia” portion of the day which was the title given to the activity of standing on the corners of Georgia and Homer street, waving our picket signs at traffic and passers by. Because the movements were done outside the library plaza we had to be limited by the weather – but we were only rained out on a couple of occasions.”

--member of the Wellness Committee

Hardship Committee

The stresses that a strike exerts on its participants extends beyond the physical and emotional aspects. Although library workers have, historically, engaged in what has been called ‘voluntary philanthropy,’ losing a quarter of one’s annual salary during this strike was economically devastating for some families. To help offset this significant wage loss, the Hardship Committee was formed to administer grants and no-interest loans. Donations poured in from other union locals, organizations in Canada and the United States, and the citizens of Vancouver’s surrounding municipalities. The generosity offered to CUPE 391 was phenomenal and hugely appreciated!

Striker’s Brain

When broken down into the physical components of picketing, you don a sign and walk the perimeter of your worksite hoping to draw the attention of those who might make a difference – the public, politicians, etc. Picketing, in its basic form, is not an unpleasant task -- in good weather. However, what is not immediately apparent is the mental toll that leading a ‘striking lifestyle’ entails. This phenomenon, which may have already been identified in literature on the topic, is characterized by an almost 24/7 preoccupation with the task at hand, one that inflicts a mental and physical paralysis. Many CUPE 391 members noted that although, logically, they had more free time – were at the worksites 20 versus 35 hours a week – they didn’t see a noticeable difference in what they accomplished during off-picket hours. It was as though we couldn’t move ahead until the strike was over. Even mundane, otherwise ordinary jobs such as laundry often remained untouched – for another day when spirits and energies might be higher.

Knitting in Solidarity

A park-style bench located on the Homer Street side of the Central Library became a knitters destination. Why? Knitters seek out other knitters, they congregate. A sign soon appeared, propped up against this bench, it read,

“Knitting in Solidarity.” The Knit Picketers, as they called themselves quickly realized that they could contribute their skills to producing hats for families in need. Additionally, as the strike proceeded, they recognized that they could earn some desperately needed funds for the Hardship Committee by selling their multi-coloured creations to other staff. Free knitting lessons were also available.

The Videographers

We are artists, dancers, musicians, writers, poets, actors, environmentalists, athletes (including a Sports Hall of Fame inductee), and videographers. CUPE 391 is a unique assembling of individuals of diverse skills and whose talents became more prominent during the strike as people realized that they could add another dimension to the activities on the line. Whether for cathartic, entertainment, creative or political statement purposes – this didn’t seem to matter.

James Gemmill, Holly Hendrigan, David Philip, and D’Arcy Stainton are our strike videographers,. They documented, in their very differing styles, events and aspects of the strike. Their videos are available for all to enjoy off the CUPE 391 Bargaining Blog site at: <http://www.cupe391.ca/blog2/>

Artistic statements from our videographers:

I created my strike films with the general public in mind as the target audience rather than the local’s membership. In the knowledge that in this day and age unionized workers are often portrayed in an unfair fashion by the mass media, my overriding goal was to put a human face to VPL’s workforce, and to be as positive as possible in the message, which I felt was strong and our best marketing tool. I also avoided humour, knowing that other 391 video-makers were employing it and not wanting all the films to blur together. Black and white was used in the hopes that my final film would contain a slow fade-in of colour, to signify a “return to normalcy”. Alas, this film was never made.

-James Gemmill

We didn’t set out making our videos with any particular themes in mind. We just wanted to “entertain the troops.” Both of our mindsets tend toward the satiric, and a labour strike is an inherently absurd situation, highlighted in this case by the inane denial of a pay equity issue. We also wanted to simply look at daily life on the picket line and give that a few twists. So with our unstructured ideas we shot heaps of footage and then shaped it at the editing stage. It was fun!

-David Philip and Sloan Garrett

My films are all about keeping the bar low. I choose antiquated genres like the newsreel format because I have really poor equipment (my footage is shot using the MPEG video clip feature on my son's digital still camera). This way, I can use titles and dubbing to make up for what would undoubtedly be horrific sound. The poor video quality plays up the intended format, too. I edit everything using Windows Movie Maker on my old PC, and keep filming time to 15 minutes (everything is done in one take) and editing time to under two hours.

By keeping my standards simple, making one of these movies is not onerous, and it fits into my busy life as a parent.

-- D'Arcy Stainton

Flying Pickets, Bike Strike Brigade

When CUPE 391 went on strike in late July, the Union Executive quickly realized that we could not set up pickets at each of the 21 branches, for a variety of reasons: many branches lacked shade from the sun or shelter from the rain, or were located on busy, noisy streets far from washroom and coffee facilities. The Union then suggested that a group of people drive to certain unpicketed branches and wave signs around for a half-hour or so, and then move on to another branch. These hours would be counted as a "Flying Picket" shift. When the flying picket concept was explained to a large group gathered at the Central library, three hardcore bicycle commuters looked at each other and said, "Why drive? Why not bike?" After a quick consultation with the Union Executive, where everybody agreed to cross their fingers and acknowledge that no liability insurance was available, the Flying Bicycle Pickets were born.

Also known as the Bike Strike Brigade, we were very easily organized. It was a joint and democratic effort, but Beth Davies took the lead. She gathered phone numbers and e-mail addresses of known commuters, drew posters, and contributed to the strike blog. A children's librarian provided crafty materials and we decorated our bikes with balloons, ribbons, and union slogans. Somebody else created Bike Brigade banners we safety-pinned to our T-shirts (and, later, rain jackets!) five to fifteen of us would gather at a certain branch, and figure out a route that would take us to several different branches over the 4-hour picket shift. We went as fast as the slowest rider, and avoided hills whenever possible. One day, somebody suggested an Epic Ride: visit every branch over an 8-hour shift, ending at a nearby pub. To everyone's delight and surprise, about 50 bicycle riders showed up. Somebody strapped a cassette player to his rack and we relived the heyday of the mixed tape. It was a glorious sunny day, the first of

many long, 50-odd kilometer Wednesday rides. We expanded our rides to visit picket sites of other striking city workers, such as community centres, the animal shelter, the transfer station and works yard, swimming pools, and archives.

Everybody loved the Bike Brigade. The bike picketers enjoyed the freedom and the exercise, quickly finding out that participating in the Brigade was the easiest way to fight strike-induced depression. The stationary picketers appreciated the arrival of the cyclists, thanking us for breaking the monotony of their shift. We received standing ovations for just showing up! Branches fueled us well with coffee and donuts, as well as the occasional feast of chili, salmon, and souvlaki. Cars did not seem to mind being temporarily delayed by our motley parade of bell-ringing library workers. Many riders gained strength, skills, and confidence, and claimed that the bike brigade had a lasting impact on their future transportation choices.

The strike ended in late October, but the Bike Brigade lives on. The experience created lasting friendships and a renewed joy of bike riding. It's more difficult to organize rides now--we're back to our busy lives and work schedules, and it's dark and cold out. But we vow to keep riding together, and come early spring, the bike paths and pubs of Vancouver will (occasionally) again be alive with a lively peloton of library workers on wheels.

– Holly Hendrigan



photo: James Gemmill

Holly Hendrigan (left) and the Bike Strike Brigade

A/V resources:

Photos by Anita Chan: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ellafunnt/sets/72157601364029495/>

Photos by James Gemmill:
<http://flickr.com/photos/jamesandannie/sets/72157601067630540/>

Flying Bicycle Brigade by James Gemmill:
<http://jamesandannie.cyberflunk.com/portfolio/video17.html>

Tour de VPL by Holly Hendrigan <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkUPgRV6Pao>

Acknowledgement of the Acknowledgment Committee

The moral and economic support extended to CUPE 391 was impressive, hugely appreciated and inspiring. Notes of encouragement and statements (via blogs, in-person, etc.) validating our fight for fairness arrived from all over North America, within and without the library community.

The need to recognize the many kindnesses extended to us gave rise to the Acknowledgement Committee, a group of three, with many helpers, who hand-crafted and mailed in excess of 200 unique thank you cards.

Librarian Retires on the Line

The strike was a first for CUPE 391, as was celebrating a retirement while on strike. The occurrence of this happening might not be indeed unique but rare in any case. Who better to relay the emotions of the day than the long-time CUPE 391 member himself, Ron Dutton.

“My last day of work was bitterly cold, with the threat of rain. I arrived with 10 dozen donuts (sugar, fat and chocolate being excellent insulators) to find no more than 15 chilly staffers manning the picket line. By noon the donuts were gone--the line was THROBBING--and had grown to well over 200 merry souls. Staff I had not seen in 25 years made the long trek downtown, including people with whom I had once performed puppet shows as a junior children's librarian in branches that no longer exist. The sun broke through its cloud cover, masses of food and a portable barbeque appeared out of nowhere, and the party was on!



photo: James Gemmill

Alexandra Youngberg and Ron Dutton at his retirement party on the line.

There were heartfelt speeches, gifts (including, appropriately, a bottle of Anarchist beer), some tears and many hugs. Young people whom I had never met lined up to shake my hand. I spoke briefly (atypically), reminding staff of the farewell address of a long gone Chief Librarian. In her retirement speech, Miss Tufts had astounded everyone present by saying that, in her experience, the very best staffers were those who took the most active roles in their union, that a strong union was essential to the good operation of a library. Not a message we are likely to hear again soon.

You know, you work hard all your life, try to treat your coworkers with fairness and respect, set your standards high and push the envelope whenever possible. But you never really know what, if any, impact you have had on the service or on the people is with those whom you work. That day I had the extraordinary experience of hearing the generous and genuine feelings of my colleagues. The staff at VPL made my last day the most unforgettable of my career, and I am deeply grateful to them all.” – Ron Dutton, VPL Librarian for 32 years.

CUPE 391 Picket Line Visitors

Writers, poets, and political personalities were invited by various CUPE members to the picket line to lend their support. And some came post-strike. Todd Wong, through his network in the literary community, was able to organize what he has entitled, “The Library Square Author Series.”¹⁵ A partial list appears below. Sincere thanks to everyone who showed their support; apologies to those that may have been overlooked.

Joel Bakan – law professor, author, film co-producer (see his pay equity statement above)

Fred Bass - preventive medicine physician, former City of Vancouver Councillor

Libby Davies – community activist, advocate, Member of Parliament for Vancouver East.

Chuck Davis, “Mr. Vancouver” – broadcaster, award-winning author, historian, newspaper columnist

Mitch Freedman (post-strike visitor) – librarian, pay equity advocate, former President of the American Library Association, ALA, creator of *The Better Salaries/Pay Equity Task Force*.

"It was an honor and a pleasure to speak with and meet CUPE 391 members and other library worker militants in the Vancouver area. I thought that the commitment exemplified by the Vancouver Public Library staff (CUPE 391) striking for 88 days for equitable pay was extraordinary.

Putting their livelihood on the line for principle as did the CUPE 391 members was unprecedented in my experience and knowledge--the possible exception being Joan Goddard and her colleagues at the San Jose Public Library and the other San Jose City departments.

"I always will remember the CUPE 391 members because they showed that there were still people--library workers, indeed!--who put their livelihood on the line for 3 months as part of their commitment to and their fight for fair pay."

Daniel Gawthrop – author of the *Rice Queen Diaries*, CUPE Communications staff member

Terry Glavin – author, journalist, editor, adjunct professor in the creative writing department, The University of British Columbia

Hiromi Goto – award-winning author, poet, currently 2007's Vancouver Public Library's *Writer-in-Residence* programme recipient.

Naomi Klein - award-winning journalist, syndicated columnist and author of the *New York Times* and international bestseller, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*.

"I want to congratulate you on your tenacity, and your courage, and your insistence on your right to work under fair conditions, under equitable conditions, you deserve this."

Her visit is captured on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QWSj8Ha55o>

Jack Layton – leader of the New Democratic Party, NDP, former university professor, a small business owner, and author

Stan Persky - writer, media commentator and philosophy instructor.

George McWhirter - City of Vancouver's inaugural Poet Laureate, Professor Emeritus of the University of British Columbia's Creative Writing programme.

Raging Grannies - caring older women who endeavor to raise awareness of issues relating to peace, the environment, & social justice through satirical songs and skits.

Tom Sandborn - Vancouver based writer, organizer and consultant, currently serves on the board of directors for the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association

Ann Seidle (post strike visitor) – Librarian, film producer of *The Hollywood Librarian*

Fiona Tinwei Lam – poet, a Scottish-born Chinese Canadian who grew up in Vancouver, winner of one of the 2003 City of Vancouver Book Prizes.

Rita Wong – author of *Monkeypuzzle*, activist, and archivist

Ellen Woodsworth - community organizer working for social justice, economic equality, former City of Vancouver Councillor.

CUPE 391 Strike Events (no particular order)

Two rallies at City Hall

Read In Solidarity

Benefit concert for our Hardship Fund, Sept. 15/07

Labour Day picnic

Picketing Puppet Productions' - ***Click, Clack, Strike!***

Haiku writing event – see example.

Word on the Strike

Black & White Day

Film screening of *The Hollywood Librarian*, with an introduction and special visit from Ann Seidle, librarian and film producer

Details of these events can be found on the CUPE 391 Bargaining Blog:
<http://www.cupe391.ca/blog2/>

Moving Forward

“Time is always moving. The important thing is to learn from the past and then look forward to the future.” – Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama

The scope of this article has precluded any attempts to offer a thorough accounting of the events of this historic library strike or an economic or political analysis. The intention of the article was to offer glimpses, emotions, and an appreciation of what a collective of determined individuals can accomplish in terms undefined by any monetary measurement. We will take forward the lessons learned during those 88 days --- remembering though to look back at this time of frustration, exhaustion, tears, creativity, resilience, laughter and camaraderie. **We are the 800 of CUPE 391.**

Closing Comments from President Youngberg

“It is inevitable that some defeat will enter even the most victorious life. The human spirit is never finished when it is defeated...it is finished when it surrenders.”

---- Ben Stein

Why, after being on strike for twelve weeks did we settle for less than we deserved? This is CUPE Local 391's first strike in seventy-seven years. Library workers love and thrive on public service. Everything about our job appeals to us. We are life-long learners, sharing information and facilitating, with a deep-rooted belief that our public is worthy of the highest possible standards of service and that there should be access for all.

The decision to deny our community access to their libraries was a difficult one. Women's economic inequality is an issue that must concern all of us in society. We went out on that principle and came back in on the principle – that it was time to give our public back their space. Our strike has identified our human rights issue and has educated thousands of people across this continent. We built coalitions with other female-dominated sectors across the land. Our solidarity with each other and our movement to achieve pay equity is now secure in its foundation and is an indelible part of our spirit. The job actions that supported our strike were great examples of participatory practice in a grassroots movement.

We lost that round with the guys in suits with 6-figure incomes (see David Philip and Sloan Garrett's video, *Three Men in Suits*, at <http://cupe391.ca/blog2/>), but we are beginning to win the war against gender discrimination. The outcome of the mediation, with the fourteen pay grades being awarded to the top librarian and clerical classifications shows clearly that there is marked discrepancy between female dominated library workforce and the male-dominated City of Vancouver workforce. We will take our battle for equal pay for work of equal value to other venues, continuing to build coalition with other female-dominated, wage-depressed groups. The fight for justice, dignity and equality must continue and now has firm support from the community we serve and beyond.

---Alexandra Youngberg, President CUPE 391
Library Journal Movers and Shakers Award Nominee

FOOTNOTES

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Employer

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(12) CUPE 391, "How Did We Get Here? Chronology." 28 Nov. 2007.

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(14) Paul Whitney, Interview with Rick Cluff. "The Early Edition."

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Appendix #1

CUPE Chronology

Summer/Fall 2006 – CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee is appointed and begins preparations for upcoming negotiations.

Summer 2006 – The CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee surveys members on what issues and concerns they would like to see addressed in our next contract.

October 2006 – The CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee presents a list of proposed bargaining issues to the 391 Executive. The issues are amended and ratified by the executive and presented to 391 members at the November 22, 2006 General Meeting. CUPE 391's contract with our Employer is set to expire on December 31, 2006. It's time to bargain a new contract.

December 18, 2006 – Negotiations begin.

The CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee has its first meeting with the Employer and the GVRD to exchange proposals.

January-April 2007 – Negotiations continue.

CUPE 391 meet with the Employer on January 31, February 26 & April 11, with no progress. Municipal workers from CUPE 15 (Vancouver inside), 1004 (Vancouver outside,) 23 (Burnaby), 454 (Delta), and North Vancouver District (389) bargain with the GVRD and their respective employers and also make no meaningful progress.

April 26, 2007 – CUPE 15 receives 93.5% support for a strike. CUPE 391 has made no further progress in negotiations.

Wednesday, June 6, 2007 – CUPE 391's Bargaining Committee meets again with the Employer. The Employer continues to say no to all of 391's proposals. Talks come to a complete halt.

Thursday, June 7, 2007 – CUPE 391 applies for mediation at the Labour Relations Board in an effort to negotiate a fair collective agreement.

How did we get here?

June 13, 2007 – Fairness to Civic Workers Campaign is launched.

www.fairnessforcivicworkers.ca

June 24, 2007 – CUPE 391 members take strike vote.

There is a large membership turnout for the Strike Vote meeting. (A strike vote is a referendum that gives the Union the legal ability to take strike action, if necessary, in support of negotiating a collective agreement.) CUPE 391 members vote 97% in favour of strike action if the Employer continues to ignore our proposals.

July 3, 2007 – Mediation begins.

CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee meets with the mediator for the first time and presents an amended package to The Employer.

July 5, 2007 – CUPE staff release a report on Pay Equity (one of our four key issues) and its impact on libraries. Copies are distributed to worksites.

Bargaining Committee members Ed Dickson, and Laura Safarian join more than 50 CUPE members from around the Lower Mainland at the GVRD Labour Relations Bureau's monthly meeting. CUPE had previously made an application to be put on the speakers list, but were told that "labour relations" was not on the agenda. Despite being asked to leave, CUPE members stand their ground and reluctantly the GVRD allows CUPE BC President Barry O'Neill a chance to speak to the Labour Relations Bureau for no more than 10 minutes. During his short address, President O'Neill reminds the GVRD that no meaningful bargaining has actually occurred yet. There is extensive media coverage of this meeting.

July 11, 2007 – Back in mediation.

The CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee tables another amended list of proposals on several issues. The Employer responds to the Union, but so far none of CUPE 391 priority issues, like Pay Equity, Job Security, Rights for Part-Time and Auxiliary Employees, or benefits have been addressed.

July 20, 2007 – Mediation Unsuccessful, Strike Notice Issued.

After three days in mediation, the Employer continues to stall and refuses to discuss any of 391's key issues. With no other options available, at 4 p.m. the Bargaining Committee asks the Mediator to book out and serves 72-hour strike notice. However, the Committee also encourages and invites the Employer to continue talking over the weekend in hopes of coming to an agreement. Unfortunately, the Employer emphatically declines to continue negotiating and leaves the room.

July 25, 2007 – CUPE 391 makes a presentation to the VPL Board on Pay Equity and reissues invitation to bargain.

July 26, 2007 – CUPE 391 members go on strike for the first time in our local's 77-year history.

The Bargaining committee again reissues an invitation to the Employer to meet anytime and anywhere to bargain a fair agreement without concessions that addresses our local and key issues. Negotiations in the City of Richmond conclude and the collective agreement is ratified (formally approved)

August 1, 2007 – Negotiations Resume.

The Bargaining Committee tables an amended package of proposals that featured our local key issues. The Employer takes the package and says they will get back to us on August 9. They intend for us to wait over a week for their response knowing that we would be remain on strike.

CUPE 454 and Corporation of Delta ratified their agreement August 1.

August 2, 2007 – Burnaby contact is ratified. The Burnaby Library Board and Union will form a joint committee to look at all library classifications (except pages), comparing them to similar positions in the City of Burnaby, and then making use of the job evaluation plan being developed by Coquitlam and the GVRD

August 4, 2007 – North Vancouver District contracts are ratified.

Although they did not ask for a job evaluation plan, North Van librarians receive a 1 page grade wage adjustment.

August 5, 2007 – Vancouver CUPE locals (391, 1004, 15) agree to resume negotiations with the City. A media blackout is imposed, which lasts for 5 days.

August 7, 2007 – Surrey contract is ratified.

August 9, 2007 – Negotiations break off. Media black-out is lifted.

The Bargaining Committee, after being available for a total of over sixty-four hours, meets with the Employer for only three hours and five minutes. The Committee tries to be creative and flexible with our proposals, but the Employer will not seriously consider any of 391's local issues and continues to focus on Employer concessions.

August 15, 2007 – The Bargaining Committee meets again with the Employer. The Employer basically restates their last position and offers less than the regional wage settlement that has wage increases on January 1st of each year.

August 17, 2007 – The Bargaining Committee responds to the Employer with a counter proposal. We include the actual wage and term from the other regional settlements and job evaluation language from ratified Burnaby agreement.

August 24, 2007 – It's been 7 long days since CUPE 391 last spoke to the Employer.

August 29, 2007 – CUPE 391 participates in a rally at City Hall.

September 2007 – The Greater Vancouver Regional District, GVRD changes its name to Metro Vancouver.

September 2007 – Employer finally agrees to resume negotiations.

September 2, 2007 – The VPL Library Board meets for an in camera information meeting.

September 5, 2007 – Day 19 without a response from the Employer.

September 10, 2007 – A Talk about Talking.

Informal discussion about returning to the bargaining table takes place between all parties.

September 13, 2007 – **Bargaining resumes.**

September 14, 2007 – City of Vancouver, Vancouver Public Library and Metro Vancouver Labour Relations Bureau break off talks.

Mid September, 2007 – Brian Foley is appointed mediator for three CUPE locals

October 5, 2007 – CUPE's Bargaining Committee meets to review Brian Foley's (mediator) recommendations.

October 9, 2007 – 78.1% of CUPE's membership vote to reject the mediator's recommendations.

October 12, 2007 – CUPE's Bargaining Committee meet with library and City representative to present amendments to the mediator's recommendations.

October 14, 2007 – The CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee meet with representatives from VPL Management, Metro Vancouver (formerly the GVRD) and the City of Vancouver.

October 15, 2007 – Small group of CUPE's Bargaining Committee meet with representatives of VPL management and the GVRD.

October 16, 2007 – Media blackout in effect.

October 19, 2007 – 71.4 % of the membership say yes to the memorandum of agreement and a return to work.

October 20, 2007 – Vancouver Public Library Board meet and ratify the Memorandum of Agreement.

October 22, 2007 – CUPE 391 Vancouver Public Library workers return to work.

October 24, 2007 – Renowned pay equity advocate and former American Library Association (ALA) President Mitch Freedman appears at the Central Library, delivers a talk entitled, “Library Workers and Equitable Salaries.”

The Vancouver civic strike began on July 26th 2007. By early August 2007, five lower mainland CUPE locals had reached agreements with their employers. Despite this, it took until mid October, almost three months (88 days) for the City of Vancouver to reach an agreement that was not much different from the other settlements. Although controversial of course, the most frequently encountered explanation was that the City wanted to save money by prolonging the strike.

North Van District and Rec Commission strike expected to end

NORTH VANCOUVER - The pace of Lower Mainland settlements picked up even more today as CUPE 389's bargaining committee signed a tentative agreement with the District of North Vancouver and North Vancouver Recreation Commission. The 800 civic workers have been on strike since July 23rd, 2007. This agreement is the fifth CUPE municipal settlement in the past week and a half. [August 2, 2007 11:03 PM]

Time Spent on the Strike line by the Eight Hundred of CUPE 391

From and including: **Thursday, July 26, 2007**

To, but **not** including : **Monday, October 22, 2007**

It is **88 days** from the start date to the end date, but not including the end date

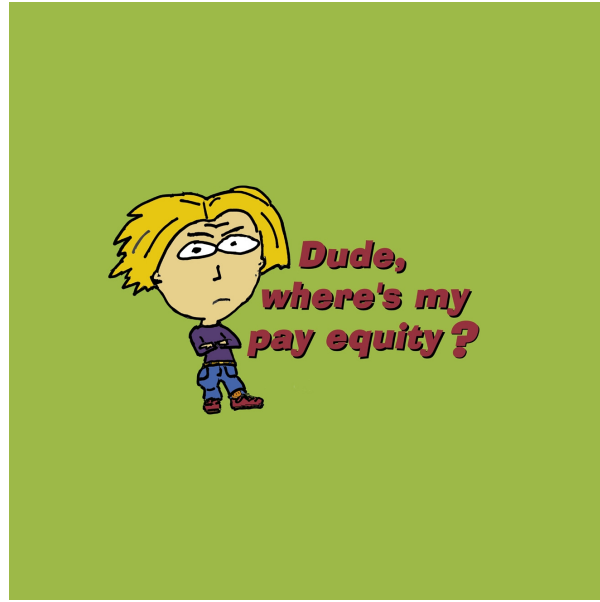
Or 2 months, 26 days excluding the end date

Alternative time units

88 days can be converted to one of these units:

- 7,603,200 seconds
- 126,720 minutes
- 2112 hours
- 12 weeks (rounded down)

Source: <http://www.timeanddate.com/date/duration.html>



art: Miranda Mallinson

Appendix #2

Pay Equity and Wage Adjustments – Presentation by CUPE Local 391 to Mediator Brian Foley October 1, 2007.

Presented by Laura Safarian and a CUPE National Representative

Preamble to Presentation -

My regular day job is as a public service librarian in the Art & History Division of the Main branch of the Vancouver Public Library. I have over 20 years of work experience in the field of information management, including 7 years at the Vancouver Public Library as a reference librarian.

Despite my work experience and 6 years of post-secondary education, I earn significantly less than almost all of my friends and family with similar education and work experience. For a long time I simply accepted this situation because I bought into the argument that as a public service librarian, I'd earn less.

Then I started to really look at what I actually do and I began to ask why public librarians are paid so much less than librarians in other sectors when the jobs are so similar? Is it because our society does not value public libraries and library workers or is it because our society does not value work that has traditionally been done by women?

What became evidently clear to me is that the problem revolves around the complexity of the pay equity issue and the mistaken belief that gender discrimination no longer exists in our society.

I think this belief stems from the reality that the women's movement made great strides in the 60s and 70s to achieve equality:

- We now have the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees us equality rights.
- We see all around us examples of individual women in non-traditional careers and positions of power.
- We know that women get paid the same as men when they do the same work.
- And in our daily lives, our society has progressed to the point where not many women expect doors to be held open for them, bus seats to be vacated for them or their drinks bought for them

I believe that all these "achievements" have convinced us that our society no longer tolerates gender discrimination. And therefore we live in denial that gender-based discrimination could possibly exist in our public libraries.

I am convinced that the world of municipally-funded public libraries is one of the last areas where the issue of gender discrimination has such an impact on the livelihood of the men and women working in them. I hope I can also convince you of this fact and impress upon you the need to finally address pay equity in this round of bargaining.

The bargaining committee would like to begin our discussion on this proposal by first introducing the landscape and history of the issue of pay equity, including how it relates to library workers. Then we'll turn our focus to the issue of pay equity at Vancouver Public Library, finishing with a review of how this proposal has evolved at the bargaining table over the course of current negotiations. Along the way, we will make reference to the supporting documents in front of you – sources that validate the information we are presenting to you on this issue today.

Introducing the issue and history of pay equity

In 1951, the International Labour Organization (including Canada) passed the Equal Remuneration Convention (No.100), which states in part:

"Each Member shall...ensure the application to all workers of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value."

In other words: Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value; Pay Equity; Comparable Worth. All phrases used in the discussion of the historic devaluation of work that has traditionally been, and remains, "women's work".

The first document we've provided you, an excerpt from the federal government's 2004 Pay Equity Task Force Report, discusses some of the various prejudices and stereotypes in the labour market that may create and maintain the wage

inequities that plague women's work – jobs such as secretaries, nurses and of course librarians.

Add these lingering stereotypes to an outdated job classification system that segregates work into occupational groups, preventing comparisons between work that is “male” and work that is “female”, and you have a system that perpetuates the historic devaluation of female dominated professions and workforces – specific to the case at hand, the devaluation of library work.

These historic inequities form a significant portion of the gender wage gap. Published in 2005, the fifth edition of the Statistics Canada publication titled “Women in Canada: a Gender Based Statistical Report” tells us that:

“Even when employed on a full-time, full-year basis the earnings of women remain well below those of their male counterparts. In 2003, women working full-time, full year had average earnings of \$36,500, or 71% what men employed full-time, full-year made that year.

As well, while there have been some year-to-year fluctuations, the gap between the earnings of women and men has not changed substantially in the past decade. Indeed, the current difference is actually slightly lower than the peak figure of 72% recorded in the mid-1990s. This is in contrast to the two previous decades when women's earnings as a percentage of those of men rose relatively quickly.”

Pay Equity attempts to correct this inequality.

Pay equity legislation across Canada

In recognition of the wage gap and the historic inequalities that exist between the earnings of men and women, governments across Canada have taken a variety of initiatives to address the problem.

At the federal level, applying to workers under the jurisdiction of federal labour law, Pay Equity initiatives are limited to a complaints-based process under the Canadian Human Rights Act. According to the Act, it is discriminatory to “establish or maintain differences in wages between male and female employees...who are performing work of equal value.” The Act also identifies that assessing the value of work, “the criterion to be applied is the composite of the skill, effort and responsibility required in the performance of the work and the conditions under which the work is performed.”

The Act identifies the standard by which the need for pay equity is assessed, and how pay equity is implemented – gender-neutral job evaluation that provides for the bias-free measurement of jobs based on the skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions required of the work.

When pay equity was finally established in the federal public service, librarians were one of the job classifications that benefited from the largest increases.

Of course, most workers in Canada are covered by provincial labour laws, and there is a hodge-podge of different legislative and policy initiatives across the provinces addressing pay equity. Several provinces have specific laws on pay equity which apply only to the provincial public sector, like Manitoba and PEI. Others, like British Columbia and Saskatchewan remain without any specific pay equity laws, although they have implemented pay equity in portions of the public service through policy frameworks.

Ontario and Quebec lead the way in Canada, with pro-active pay equity legislation covering most workplaces in the public and private sectors. Ontario's legislation is often declared to be among the most progressive in the western world.

Each of the jurisdictions with pay equity legislation or policies have required acceptable methodology by which to measure the relative or comparable worth of male- and female-dominated jobs. In all jurisdictions, the standard acceptable methodology has become the gender-neutral job evaluation plan.

Gains for library workers in Ontario, through proactive pay equity legislation

Ontario's Pay Equity Legislation was introduced in 1987, and applied to all public and private sector employers in workplaces of 10 or more employees. The Act, to quote Ontario's Pay Equity Commission:

“requires that jobs be evaluated and work mostly or traditionally done by women be compared to work mostly or traditionally done by men. If jobs are of **comparable value**, then female jobs must be paid at least the same as male jobs. Female jobs are those mostly or traditionally done by women such as librarian, childcare worker or secretary. Male jobs are those mostly or traditionally done by men such as truck driver, firefighter or shipper.”

Changes were made to the Act in 1993 to make it more effective for certain workplaces, such as libraries, where there were few or no male jobs within the place of employment. Before those amendments, some libraries were only allowed to make internal comparisons, although in others comparisons had been allowed to the municipal workforce.

The second document we've provided you is an excerpt from a 1994 article published in the Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science, which discusses in part the impact of pay equity on public libraries in Ontario prior to the 1993 amendments to the Act. It includes results of a survey of public libraries across Ontario on the subject.

Those results, in table 3, show that all levels of library workers, including Library Administrators, benefited greatly from the pay equity process. They show average increases, in medium and large library systems, of more than \$3 an hour for Librarians, almost \$3 an hour for Library Technicians, and around \$2 for Circulation Assistants.

There have been recent increases as well, as pay equity had to be re-established following the amalgamation of many municipal and regional governments in Ontario, providing for larger organizations and different male comparators for female jobs.

Of course, we don't all live in Ontario – nor would we want to. But we think this information serves to justify our claims that library workers are under valued and under paid at Vancouver Public Library and that we wouldn't be at this table discussing this today if Vancouver Public Library was subject to pay equity legislation.

Pay equity as an issue in the library community

The issue of pay equity in public libraries is gaining momentum locally, nationally and internationally.

Far from being an issue addressed only by library workers and their unions, professional associations are also weighing in on the importance of establishing pay equity for library workers. These associations represent public and other libraries, administrators, Library Board members, as well as librarians and other library workers.

We want to share with you a number of quotes from representatives of Library Associations:

From Mitch Freedman – past president of the American Library Association (excerpt from his email, dated Oct. 14, 2002, to the ALA Council and membership)

“I didn't sign onto this profession, nor did most of you, to subsidize libraries by accepting inequitable, and, in altogether too many situations, demeaning salaries. I will not let up in my efforts to promote better salaries and pay equity for all library workers in all kinds of libraries. I hope you won't either.”

The California Library Association has an active Fair Compensation Campaign titled: *Making the Case for Fair Pay*, which includes the following:

“Librarians and library workers are under-valued, and most people, whether members of the public, elected officials, faculty, corporate executives, or citizen board members, have little or no idea of the complexity of the work we do.

“Librarians and library workers are also unfairly compensated for the complexity of the work we do, especially in comparison with other service workers. There are several reasons for this: the vast majority of library workers are women, so we suffer from all the years of wage discrimination our gender has endured. The standard method (marketplace) used by human resources professionals for classifying and compensating service employees perpetuates low or unfair wage rates for library workers. And people with the power to make compensation decisions suffer from the lack of understanding of library work...”

The executive council of the Canadian Library Association has just endorsed a review of pay equity in libraries across Canada.

Closer to home, what follows is an excerpt from a column by the BC Library Association President Deb Thomas in the current edition of the BCLA magazine:

“Pay equity has been and remains a critical issue in recent labour negotiations between library workers and their employers in British Columbia. The newly formed Public Librarians Interest Group of BCLA has taken a strong stand in favour of addressing pay equity in those libraries where it has not yet been addressed and hopes to be able to bring a draft position statement on the issue to the Board in the coming months.

“Fundamentally, this issue is about fairness. Everyone - regardless of gender – should receive fair compensation for the work that they do. That this remains an issue for some of the largest public libraries in British Columbia highlights the fact that this province lags behind other provinces such as Ontario where pay equity legislation in the late 1990s increased the salaries of library workers by, in some cases, up to 24%.”

Library Pay Equity in BC

Also closer to home, CUPE’s recent report *Overdue: Pay Equity for Library Workers*, makes the following points about wages at public libraries in BC:

- Many entry-level positions in public libraries make as little as 64 to 82% of similar municipal labour jobs.
- Library assistants working in education – both K-12 and post-secondary, can earn up to 22% more than municipal library assistants.
- The highest wage librarian positions in seven lower mainland public libraries made about \$8 less per hour than librarians at two universities and \$10 less per hour than librarians at two colleges.

These differences reflect the fact that, while there is no pay equity legislation in BC, many women working in the provincial and provincially-funded public service

benefited greatly from a pay equity policy framework in place in BC during the 1990's. This framework provided pay equity money, from the province, to designated workplaces that had assessed the inequities in the wages they paid their employees and made adjustments to correct those inequities, using an approved methodology. In all cases, that methodology was a form of gender-neutral job evaluation.

Through this process, school boards, universities and colleges across the province made significant progress in correcting pay inequities – resulting in significant gains for library workers, as we've shown.

Unfortunately, this pay equity policy framework was never made available to, nor imposed on municipal or municipal-funded organizations – leaving workers at public libraries across the province falling behind their co-workers in other parts of the public service, with severely limited options to catch up.

In some cases, and we'll use the examples of Victoria and Port Moody Libraries, employers and unions have collectively entered into a joint, gender-neutral job evaluation process.

In Port Moody, where library and city workers are in the same bargaining unit, a single job evaluation plan was developed and applied across the bargaining unit. The implementation of the plan, which was finalized earlier this year, resulted in wages for the Public Services Assistant at the library increasing by \$4.27 an hour and the Children's Librarian rate increasing by \$2.63.

In Victoria, library workers are in a separate bargaining unit from municipal workers. Nevertheless, the employer agreed to work towards pay equity by using the same job evaluation plan to evaluate library jobs as had been used for the municipal workforce. The established goal was to pay library workers the same as municipal workers with jobs that were rated the same through pay equity.

Unfortunately, the employer has refused to fund the wage adjustments, and library workers in Victoria have recently taken strike action to finally achieve them. The adjustments would see wages of Circulation Clerks rise by \$3.89, the wages of Public Service Librarians by \$3.31.

Recent gains at public libraries in the region

In British Columbia, where there is no legislation to establish pay equity, proposals to address historic wage inequities are becoming a hot issue at many bargaining tables. In many cases, Library Workers are leading the way. In the Metro Vancouver region, several other locals representing library workers have tabled proposals to address pay equity.

In Burnaby, CUPE 23 and their employers, both the City of Burnaby and Burnaby Public Library, negotiated a 2-step process to address wage inequities. The first step establishes a joint committee to compare Library jobs to jobs in the City,

using the existing job classification system. The employer has agreed to implementation costs of up to 5% of Library payroll for this project. The second step creates a joint committee to review the new JE [job evaluation] plan developed in the City of Coquitlam and consider its implementation in both the City and Library, with an additional 4% of payroll set aside for costs.

The North Vancouver City Library and CUPE 389 agreed to increase librarian wages by one pay grade.

The issue of pay equity at Vancouver Public Library

We conducted a survey of our membership in the summer of 2006, asking them about their priorities for the coming round of contract negotiations.

Our members made it clear that the issue of pay equity was second only to achieving the regional general wage increase. After nine weeks on strike, our members continue to tell us that the agreement we reach with the employer **must address, at least in part, the issue of pay equity and wage adjustments.**

We have looked for other ways to address the wage inequities. But our job classification system is an outdated method of whole job comparison that segregates work into occupational groups and doesn't allow for comparisons outside of those groups. In the present system, librarians can only be compared to librarians and clerical workers can only be compared to other clerical workers. And we are limited in our comparisons to our own workplace, meaning that while we can achieve a decent measure of internal equity, the present system does not allow us to make any advances on pay equity.

In the absence of a legislative or policy framework that will compel the employer to study the matter and correct any existing inequities - **in other words, without pay equity legislation** – it has become clear to us that the only avenue open to us to even begin to address this issue **IS** the bargaining table.

Indeed, the only significant progress we have ever been able to make on this matter has been in collective bargaining.

In 1981 we successfully negotiated a substantial increase for our lowest paid members – Library Assistant 1s. In 1992 we negotiated one pay grade increases to all classes at pay grades 9 through 11.

In the early nineties, the GVRD [Greater Vancouver Regional District] and municipal CUPE locals established a joint committee to work on the development and implementation of a new, point-weighted, job evaluation plan to replace the existing job classification system. After a couple of years of work, the parties abandoned the process. There are a number of rumored reasons for this, but they have never been clearly documented and are probably irrelevant. What **is** relevant is that both the employer and the union, in entering into the joint

committee, admitted and agreed that the existing classification system is outmoded, outdated and discriminatory.

We have seen the gains made by library workers in Ontario, and here in BC, in other library sectors, using gender-neutral job evaluation as a method to establish pay equity. And so our initial proposal on this matter called for the creation of joint committees to address job evaluation and pay equity.

The last document we've provided you is a chronology of the issue of pay equity and wage adjustments during the current round of bargaining. We hope you will review this document and observe that we have tried to adapt and adjust our proposals throughout this process, eager to find something that the employer would agree to that would still result in appropriate wage adjustments and start us on the road to the pay equity our members continue to tell us is so important to them.

You will see that, even though we recognize that a gender-neutral job evaluation process is the best way to achieve our members' goals, we have removed all reference to job evaluation in our final proposal.

We are now proposing a specific wage increase for librarians, similar to what was achieved in North Vancouver, and a committee to assess wage disparities in other classifications with concrete additional financial resources dedicated for use by the committee.

We have heard the employer's representative state, at the bargaining table, that there is no evidence of a pay equity, or wage inequity, problem at Vancouver Public Library or the City of Vancouver. Unfortunately, the employer has provided us with neither the data nor the methodology they used to make this determination. There has not been, to our knowledge, any "comparable worth" study to assess the existence of the problem.

We suppose it might be possible that the employer is right – although we kind of doubt it. We find it hard to believe that our members would still believe so strongly in this issue ten weeks into a strike if the employer's assertions are true. And the evidence of historic inequities, from jurisdictions and sectors that have begun to address them, is undeniable.

Still, if the employer is right and there is no problem, then there is no harm in creating the Joint Committee we are proposing, with a mandate to review and address the issue. And if the Joint Committee is able to establish that those wage inequities do in fact exist, then it's only prudent to establish a pool of money to address the issue.

Conclusion

In nearing a conclusion, I'd like to quote again from Roma Harris and the Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science,

"Of particular importance to all librarians, however is the reluctance in some municipalities to accept wage adjustments for library workers, for such reluctance suggests that women's work is still substantially undervalued and so too are the institutions in which women work. As the entangled nature of the public library's relationship with municipal governments becomes more and more obvious, this lack of respect for librarians and their work will remain a central obstacle in the public library's bid to attract sufficient funds to maintain a high level of service."

It has been very difficult for our members, and our bargaining committee, to understand the continued resistance from the employer. When the library community is making moves to address and correct longstanding inequities, in all jurisdictions and sectors, it seems inconceivable that our employer refuses to acknowledge the benefits to the organization of a gender-neutral job evaluation system and to at least start down the long road to pay equity. Our members have clearly told us that access to an objective, comprehensive and fair job evaluation system is important to them. If you were to approach our members on the picket line, they would tell you that.

We have been as flexible as we believe our members will accept on this matter – we have made significant moves towards the employer's position, with each change in our proposal a reduction in what we ultimately want to achieve. We believe it is unethical to continue to engage in a discriminatory practice on financial grounds. We believe that equal pay for work of equal value is the cost of doing business for the Library. Although employers will always argue that pay equity is too expensive, the financial argument is even harder to understand when this employer has recently saved millions of dollars in wages not paid during the strike and our pay equity proposals amount to only 1% of payroll per year.

In closing, our members have asked politely for some form of pay equity adjustments for years. We've tried lobbying the provincial government for pay equity legislation. We've tried to address it through wage adjustments and reclassification attempts. We've tried, in several previous rounds of bargaining, to get the employer to address this issue. All to little or no avail.

We've finally dropped the "polite" and have now been on strike for 10 weeks and counting. We are well aware that due to the length of the strike, our current members will not likely personally benefit from wage gains but we continue to stand out on the street on a matter of principle, for our sons and daughters, the library workers of the future. Equal pay for work of equal value.

We trust that you will seriously consider the information we have provided and hope that you can make a recommendation that begins to address pay equity for the library workers at Vancouver Public Library.

Thank- you

-Laura Safarian, Librarian

accompanied by a Representative of the CUPE National office in BC

Supporting Documents

1. Excerpts from: Pay Equity: a New Approach to a Fundamental Right, Pay Equity

Task Force Final Report, published by the Pay Equity Task Force under the authority of the Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of Canada, and the Minister of Labour, 2004.

2. Excerpts from: Public libraries and municipalities in Ontario: the impact of pay

equity, by Roma M. Harris, published in the Canadian Journal of Information and Library Sciences, vol.19, no. 2, July 1994.

3. Chronology of CUPE 391 Pay Equity Proposals

Available at:

http://www.cupe391.ca/action/bargaining_2007_documents/pay_equity_mediator_presentation.pdf

“The library is the temple of learning, and learning has liberated more people than all the wars in history.”

- Carl T. Rowan



photo: James Gemmill

pay equity

comparable worth

equal pay for work of equal value