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Unions in Public and Academic Libraries

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Unions in Public and Academic Libraries

Complete Abstract:

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Kathleen de la Peña McCook

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See for updates:

Barriage, Sarah. “Library Workers Will Not Be Shushed”: 2012 Union Review. *Progressive Librarian* 41 (Fall 2013): 86-97.

McCook, Kathleen de la Peña. “Collective Bargaining is a Human Right” *Progressive Librarian* 38-39 (Spring 2012): 69-90.

McCook, Kathleen de la Peña. “There is Power in a Union, 2009-2010.” *Progressive Librarian* 34/35 (Fall/Winter 2010): 76-87.

McCook, Kathleen de la Peña. “There is Power in a Union, 2008-2009.” *Progressive Librarian* 32 (Winter 2009): 55-67.

McCook, Kathleen de la Peña. “Workplace Speech in Libraries,” *Progressive Librarian* 31 (Summer 2008): 6-16.

McCook, Kathleen de la Peña. “There is Power in a Union, 2007.” *Progressive Librarian* 30 (Winter 2007/2008): 70-78.

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Unions contribute to a stable, productive workforce—where workers have a say in improving their jobs. Librarians in public, academic and school libraries have organized in unions for better wages, working conditions and benefits. In 2006 taken as a whole, U.S. union library workers earned almost 21% more than their non-union counterparts. (1) A stratified sample of 3,418 public and academic libraries found the union advantage extends across all library sizes and types. Union membership varied by region from

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Public Libraries

The first public library unions were affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL): New York Public Library and the Library of Congress formed in 1917 ; Boston Public Library and the District of Columbia Public Library formed in 1918 and the Philadelphia Free Library formed in 1919 (2). Bernard Berelson has examined the historical context of these first public library unions and their dissolution. All but the Library of Congress union disbanded by 1929 due to the overwhelming strength of the opposition or poor leadership. (3) Of special note is the debate that took place about the status of women as articulated by union organizer/suffragist Maud Malone of the New York Public Library Employees Union. (4)

In his overview of unionism written for *Library Trends*, *Employee Organization and Collective Bargaining in Libraries*, (1976) Herbert Biblo characterized the years 1934-1949 as the second wave of public library unionism. (5) The passage of the National Labor Relations Act, (also known as the Wagner Act) in 1935 and the creation of the National Labor Relations Board to regulate collective bargaining fostered organizing. The Cleveland Public Library Employees Union was organized as part of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME, AFL) in 1937, but became part of the State, County and Municipal Workers of American (SCMWA, CIO) later that year.

Joyce M. Latham has tracked the State County and Municipal Workers of America, a white-collar CIO union, and in particular the development of the Chicago Public Library's Local 88 (1937) – one of “several unions which emerged as a response to the failure of middle class structures in the face of the economic challenges of the Depression.” Latham's work is especially recommended as a thorough and extensive analysis of the origins of public librarians' engagement in challenges to dominant social and cultural constructs during the period of the late 1930s-1940s. (6) Other public library unions founded during this period include Milwaukee, Grand Rapids, Detroit, Minneapolis, Atlanta, Newark, Boston, and Wayne County. Biblo notes that these unions came and went with Atlanta and Grand Rapids never re-emerging after their initial organization.

During the 1950s no new public library unions emerged, but in the 1960s a new wave of unionization began with locals formed in Philadelphia , Milwaukee, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Brooklyn, Buffalo and Erie, Washington, D.C., Enoch Pratt, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, New York, Queens, Santa

Monica, Youngstown, Oshkosh, Berkeley, Bloomfield, NJ, Enfield CT, Morris County, NJ, Newark, NJ, Oakland and San Francisco. Additionally, John F. Kennedy's Executive Order of January 17, 1962 on Employee-management cooperation in the Federal service set the tone for increased labor organizing in governments. This activity was documented by Melvin S. Goldstein in his 1968 report on collective bargaining efforts on behalf of professional librarians in the United States which included digests of collective bargaining agreements currently then in force as well as the status of negotiations. (7)

At the 1975 watershed conference, "Collective Bargaining in Libraries," Don Wasserman of AFSCME, presented the context for increased bargaining activity in the public sector and noted that bargaining entered more readily into "mission of the agency," than had blue-collar workers. (8) In his 1975 monograph, *Unionization: The Viewpoint of Librarians*, Theodore Guyton accounted for the emergence of library labor unions, their goals, and their patterns of growth. His study provides a solid overview of unionization grounded in labor history and theory and includes a survey of librarians' attitudes toward unionization. (9)

The high-water mark of library union literature came in 1981 with the publication of *Librarians and Labor Relations* which assessed economics, politics, and history in light of new laws, court decisions, and changing personnel trends. The volume examined librarian management relations and placed library worker unionizing in the large context of labor. (10) Doreen Lilore, a former president of a public library local and staff member at AFSCME, wrote an exceptional study of the state of public library unions in 1984 with attention to negotiating the labor agreement, contract administration, analysis of grievance procedures and a content analysis of public library labor agreements. Her review of the external interaction between the local and management is a major contribution to the history of public library unionism (11) and built on the earlier analysis by Joseph Vignone. (12).

However, after the 1980s the literature and reporting of public library unionism declined. Public sector unions came under much duress after the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike in 1981 and the Reagan testing of the strength of the labor movement (13). The American Library Association focused on issues of pay equity and comparable worth during the 1980s and 1990s, but did not provide a forum for ongoing discussion of labor issues or unions within the association.

Public library workers' unionization issues are very situational and different greatly from library to library. Much depends on the larger context of unionization in a government jurisdiction. If there is an overall organizing unit of government employees—AFSCME or SEIU-- then library workers often organize as locals of larger units. While one library might divide workers between librarians and clerical and support workers, another might combine them into one local. Weber's 1992 article on support staff unions in Ohio demonstrates the need for unions to reflect local and state situations. For example at the time of his article the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library had two unions. Office, clerical and maintenance employees were represented by the Communication Workers of American and the librarian local under the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association. (14)

In 2002 the journal, *Public Libraries* published a forum on unions, edited by Hampton (Skip) Auld and spurred by the support of some ALA members for striking Marriott hotel workers during the Association's 2001 conference. (15) Ann Sparanese, a public library shop steward and her local's delegate to the County Labor Council, expressed her opinion: "I do think the union helps ensure fairness and respect on the job and is a powerful shield for all employees against a management that would like

to act against an employee without doing the necessary homework.” (16)

The longest strike in the history of public librarianship—89 days-- by the 800 members of CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) 391 of the Vancouver Public Library in summer 2007 was documented in an extensive essay by Anita Galanopoulos. The CUPE 391 strike was for pay equity, improved benefits, rights for part-time and auxiliary workers and better job security/technological change protection. The “Bargaining & Strike Chronology” included in her essay provides a detailed look at the blueprint of a strike (17).

See appendix I. for a list of public library unions in the U.S. and Canada. [available in the *Encyclopedia of library and information sciences* (3rd ed.) New York: Taylor and Francis].

Academic Unions

Academic librarians, unlike public librarians, almost never organize as a local within a larger union. Herbert Biblo noted that the Librarian Shop, Howard University, Local 10 UFWA,CIO seems to have been the first collective bargaining agreement to cover an academic library staff in the United States (1945). (18) However, since the beginning of formal collective bargaining involving college faculty academic librarians have participated in faculty bargaining units based on a community of interest.

The three unions that account for the majority of unionized academic librarians are the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA). Those wishing a foundational study of the growth of the AFT and the NEA should refer to Blackboard Unions (19).

The literature of academic library unionism is scant. Weatherford’s 1976 Council on Library Resources study, *Collective Bargaining and the Academic Librarian*, places library bargaining in the context of the national organizations as he summarized the commingled history of academic librarians and classroom faculty. He also underscored the role of faculty status for librarians vis-à-vis the librarians’ participation in the bargaining unit. (20). In the literature of academic librarianship continued concern over faculty status has seemed to override discussion of collective bargaining. (21)

At the national level the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) intertwines issues of faculty status and collective bargaining. The policy regarding collective bargaining current as of 2008 is that “academic librarians shall be included on the same basis as their faculty colleagues in units for collective bargaining. Such units shall be guided by the standards and guidelines of ACRL pertaining to faculty and academic status.” (22)

The most comprehensive source for unionization information about higher education is *The Directory of Faculty Contracts and Bargaining Agents in Institutions of Higher Education* a compilation of every collective bargaining relationship covering faculty in the U.S. As of January 2006, over 375,000 faculties had union representation in the U.S. organized into 575 separate bargaining units and distributed across 491 institutions or systems of higher education with 1,125 campuses. (23)

A state of the art of support staff unionization in 1986 and a literature review: Unions for Academic

Library Support Staff examined unionization at 176 academic libraries. (24) There is no single list of support staff unions in academic libraries. Collective bargaining generally encompasses multiple job classifications on a campus such as AFSCME or SEIU.

The literature of academic librarianship has few discussions of faculty unionism. However, one recent essay, "Librarians as Key Players in Faculty Unions," that describes the role of library faculty at Eastern Washington University provides insight into the articulation of faculty status for librarians and collective bargaining. The essay demonstrates the collegiality developed through teaching and library faculty working toward common goals. (25) More articles that provide a functional analysis of the role of unionism in faculty worklife would contribute to better understanding of the importance of unions to academic librarians..

A rare program at a national conference sponsored by the American Library Association-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) at the ALA Conference in New Orleans on June 25, 2006 addressed the role of unions in academic libraries. John Buschman, one of the presenters summarized: "unionized library faculty have both rights and responsibilities to the library and its services as a whole, and their sponsoring institution. If the status is meaningful beyond a mere title, then librarians must take the responsibilities and the power they have seriously and utilize them judiciously, and this means going well beyond pleasing "the boss." (26)

See appendix 2. For a list of academic library unions in the U.S. and Canada see *Encyclopedia of library and information sciences* (3rd ed.) New York: Taylor and Francis (2010)

Unions and the American Library Association

The lack of American Library Association focus on unions has been noted by many researchers. After a short-lived Library Union Round Table that existed from 1938 until the 1950s there was no formal entity in the national association that addressed union concern. The ALA's Office for Library Personnel Resources did develop and distribute a packet on Unionization and Collective Bargaining in 1982 as part of that Office's overall commitment to library personnel issues. (27) A search of the ALA's archives turns up very little information about library unions and collective bargaining.

The election of Maurice J. Freedman as president of the American Library Association in 2001 saw a new focus on library worklife. Freedman established a Special Presidential Task Force on Better Salaries & Pay Equity. As part of this initiative the Task Force published the "Advocating for Better Salaries and Pay Equity Toolkit" coordinated by Margaret Myers, retired director of ALA's Office for Library Personnel Resources that included contact information for and links to unions, FAQs on unions in libraries, and a sample neutrality agreement. (28) This work led to the formation of the Library Advisory Committee of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and a Library Workers Caucus. The union working group also connected with Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which reported on the relative pay and benefits of union and nonunion library workers. (29)

With the ALA climate for considering library worklife issues changing in the twenty-first century the ALA Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) was established in June 2001 as a companion organization to

the American Library Association. The ALA-APA is a nonprofit organization for the purpose of promoting “the mutual professional interests of librarians and other library workers.” It enables certification of individuals in specializations beyond the initial professional degree and also has the charge of advocacy for the “mutual professional interests of librarians and other library workers.”

The union subcommittee of ALA-APA is charged 1) to investigate the extent of the presence and role of unions among library workers; 2) to report findings to the ALA-APA Standing Committee on the Salaries and Status of Library Workers; 3) to work towards the initiation of a relationship and dialogue among ALA, ALA/APA, and national unions representing library workers, in order to improve their salaries, working conditions and status; 4) to encourage ongoing research and publishing on unionization in libraries.; 5) to develop union support and advocacy materials for the Better Salaries Task Force Tool Kit; and 6) to be the permanent interest group within ALA/APA that would serve as a resource for both active and developing unions of library workers. (30)

Unions Today

There is no single source that lists all unions in which librarians participate. This author compiled a list of public and academic unions with links to websites as appendices to this article in the *Encyclopedia of library and information sciences* (3rd ed.) New York: Taylor and Francis (2010)

These lists were put together by numerous searches state by state and may be incomplete, but they are the single most complete source of union information at this writing. Readers should be aware that there is some fluidity to unions across the U.S. and Canada and some data may have changed since this article was submitted. Library workers belong to a variety of unions including, but not limited to the American Association of University Professors, the American Federation of Teachers, AFSCME, National Association of Government Employees, Service Employees International Union, United Autoworkers, United Service and Allied Workers of RI, United Public Employees of California (UPEC), United Service and Allied Workers of RI.

Unions and Human Rights

In 2008 the world celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). During the drafting of the Declaration there had been tension between the World Federation of Trade and the International Labor Organization about the inclusion of union rights. Mrs. Roosevelt “explained that the United States delegation considered that the right to form and join trade unions was an essential element of freedom.” (31). Unionization as a human right was included in the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights as Article 23.

Article 23.

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
- (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
- (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Sixty years later unions continue to be viewed as fundamental to democracy. Elaine Bernard wrote in

2008: "Unions are the premier institution of a free, democratic society, promoting democracy in the workplace, as well as economic and social justice, and equality. They have this role because they are instruments of transformation of members and of society at large. In this wonderful transformation rests the real power of unions." (32).

The democratic victories in the 2008 general U.S. elections had enthusiastic support from unions. Unions to which the majority of librarians belong (AFSCME, AFT, NEA, SEIU) contributed funds and volunteers to get out the vote. It remains to be seen as the Democratic Party holds power in the federal government if the climate for unionization provides an opportunity for unionization to grow in the public and educational sectors.

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