

CUPE 391

Meeting Tuesday November 1, 2005

Present: staff: C. Doerksen, L. Desaulniers, L. Elgbacka, E. Hare, L. Houle, L. Housden, P. Swadden, M. Young, S. Young. CUPE 391: D. Stainton. **Absent with apologies:** L. Carlson.

Chair D'Arcy Stainton called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Library Mainil Room.

- 1) Motion to accept agenda as presented. Carried.
- 2) Eileen Hare moved that the minutes of the September 26 meeting be accepted. Carried.
- 3) The events of the recent CUPE day of protest were discussed. D'Arcy began with some background to events, outlining recent BC provincial government legislation changes which declared teaching an "essential service" (contravening an internationally-accepted ILO ruling, to which Canada is a signatory). He continued with a description of Bill 12 (which imposed a back-to-work order on the teachers) as a further erosion of labour rights.

CUPE organized the October 21st job action as a challenge to this erosion.

Regarding the legalities of the Gibsons Library sublocal position during the October 21st situation:

CUPE executive does have the power to order its locals to stay away from work. Nevertheless, library locals have generally held votes in these cases. (Vancouver Public Library's CUPE local 391 voted 86% in favour of the action, and the employer was persuaded to close the library.) The Gibsons sublocal also voted, and our majority decision was to keep the Gibsons library open.

However, democratic votes in these situations are a departure from the norm, and CUPE national has said neither vote should have taken place.

In the library world, labour rhetoric is generally avoided, but in the crunch, union democracy does have limits, and CUPE is prepared to consolidate its authority and dictate the actions of its locals. In fact, the Gibsons sub-local has no legal autonomy. Even our collective agreement could be vetoed by CUPE national if it was deemed to undermine existing CUPE positions.

Everyone has the right to hold different opinions. But when a sublocal does act against the wishes of the larger union, there will be unavoidable consequences. In our case, CUPE local 801 set up a cross-picket in front of the Gibsons Library. D'Arcy noted that we did not cross that picket line and declared it is essential (as a bare minimum) for union members not to cross picket lines.

A few questions were asked.

Q: In what other ways might the Gibsons library be affected by upcoming union actions?

A: As an example, if Telus was called to fix a phone problem, a flying TWU picket could be sent to block the library.

Most foreseeable labour problems should occur toward the end of 2006, if they occur at all. Pressure may be applied against unions in the runup to the Olympics, starting with the construction phase.

Q: Our library's situation in the October 21st action was quite different from VPL, in that we're a small community with close personal ties to most of our patrons. And our employer did not close the library.

A: The situation actually wasn't that different. VPL has many small branches, some in staunchly pro-government areas, where staff later encountered a lot of resentment from some patrons for closing the branch. It's true, the employer took the heat off individual staff members by closing the branches itself, but the employer was only persuaded to close by the strong union vote.

Q: Would we have been breaking the law by honouring the CUPE action?

A: No.

Q: You cited past labour actions against apartheid in South Africa and the communist government in Poland as examples of when unjust laws must be defied. Isn't BC's current situation sort of "minor league" compared to this?

A: Yes, but the provincial government does seem bent on rolling back basic labour rights such as bargaining, for which lives have been given in this country (e.g., General Strike, Winnipeg 1919).

4) Laura thanked D'Arcy for clarifying the CUPE position, and for chairing the meeting. She then tabled draft copies of Gibsons Union job descriptions for Chair, Shop Steward and Recording secretary.

5) Motion to adjourn presented. Meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.