

97% strike vote means Vancouver Public Library could also be closed

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Vancouver Mayor Sullivan holds key to avert possible escalating strikes by civic workers throughout Lower Mainland, says CUPE

VANCOUVER – Today's record 97 percent vote in favour of strike action by Vancouver's library workers, represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) 391, means that residents can now add library services at Vancouver Public Library to the extensive list of city services that could be lost in the coming days if Vancouver's 5,500 city workers are forced to strike. These services also include garbage collection, parks and recreation programs, building inspection, building permit issuance and city hall services.

"We are dismayed," says Ed Dickson, CUPE 391 Bargaining Committee Chair. "There is no justification for the shameful demands the employer is making – demands to establish lower wages, demands to cut our benefits and access to sick leave. Vancouver's library workers deserve a fair contract."

Dickson shares the same concerns as Vancouver's inside and outside workers about the incredible stubbornness and unwillingness of the employer's bargainers to negotiate.

"Not a single library workers' issue has been addressed in the days of talks that took place," says Dickson. The library workers are seeking to address pay equity concerns, fair treatment of part time and auxiliary staff, benefit improvements and protection against contracting out.

CUPE says responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of Mayor Sam Sullivan to seek a political solution to avert a massive civic strike in Vancouver that could escalate to the entire Lower Mainland and affect everything from Olympic construction to tourism. Civic workers in Vancouver, whose contracts expired six months ago, face some of the most regressive take-away demands, like the demand to freeze the wages of Vancouver's 150 building service workers until after the Olympics.

"Mayor Sullivan holds the key," says Paul Faoro, President of CUPE 15, which represents Vancouver's inside workers. "All Mayor Sullivan needs to do to avert a strike is to instruct bargainers to stop demanding to take away worker rights, wages and benefits and negotiate fair contracts with the public employees that make Vancouver work." Faoro is particularly disappointed that Mayor Sullivan has denied union requests to meet to help find a political solution to the intensifying dispute.

Last week, Vancouver's outside workers, including garbage workers who receive trash from across the GVRD at the Vancouver Landfill, voted 96 percent in favour of strike action.

"During hard economic times, city workers have sacrificed and taken zeros, but now it is time to honour that sacrifice with fair contracts that improve workers lives – not contracts that make it even more difficult for workers to take care of their families and make ends meet," says CUPE BC

President Barry O'Neill. "Without fairness, there will be no labour peace in the Lower Mainland this summer."

CUPE 391 represents the 790 employees of Vancouver Public Library. They are the seventh group of workers in the Lower Mainland to register exceptionally high strike votes. Currently three quarters of the region's 12,000 civic workers are in strike ready position including civic workers in Burnaby, North Vancouver District, North Vancouver Recreation Commission, Delta, and Vancouver. They all bargain with representatives of the GVRD Labour Relations Department hired by their elected municipal politicians.

The public is urged to prevent a disruption in civic services by contacting their Mayor and Council via e-mail at www.fairnessforcivicworkers.ca

As part of their campaign for fairness, civic workers throughout the region can be seen wearing their respective official civic flags to work to show the pride they have in the services they provide. To see these flags, please visit the campaign website.

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