



# Off The Shelf

*Newsletter of Vancouver and Gibsons Public Library Workers*

## Why Management Acts the Way It Does... (...and why CUPE 391 does too)

*D'Arcy Stainton  
President, CUPE Local 391*

It's been almost a year since I took on the role of President of our Local. It's been challenging, to say the least. Perhaps one of the biggest hurdles that consumes the most of my time is educating individuals on the role of a union. Many view our union as merely some sort of insurance policy...an antagonistic body whose job it is to oppose Management, to be called upon when a worker's rights have been infringed.

The public view of unions is little better. We are often referred to as a "special interest group," and because our wages are paid out of the public purse, we are often viewed by taxpayers as being in opposition to the greater public good.

So, we find ourselves stuck in this strange dichotomy. By nature we are supposed to be stubbornly opposed to management, advancing only our own special interests. Management, in turn, is expected to expend its energies trying to eke out more work for less. Several of our members, frustrated by what seems to be a childish opposition, turn their backs on us, saying that Unions have outlived their relevance in today's labour world.

I say that we need to work to transcend this dichotomy. The first step is to understand what motivates each side. Then, we must look at what constrains the participants, and to what audiences they are speaking.

Workers crave stability. **Change holds no inherent rewards for us, as it means increased work, increased risk, and higher stress.** Stability is the trade-off we seek for not taking our individual skills and talents to the open market. By choosing a public sector, unionized place of work, we are banking on long-term job security and stable wages. Sure, we might earn more for similar work in the private sector, but for most of us at VPL that prospect is loaded with a little too much risk (we might, after all, earn less, or nothing at all!). This is *not* a losing attitude. Stability allows us space to develop lives that are rich in many facets – friends, family, the arts, sport.

*See **Management** on next page...*



Rest in Peace Constance Devine

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### ...*Management*

Stability at work helps create a gentler, better society – it is the low-risk, blue-chip stock that won't make you an overnight millionaire, but will let you retire at sixty-five.

Managers seek change. Managers, to a certain extent, are risk-takers, who have bet their careers on climbing a ladder out of the realm of protection offered by unionized work environments (although it can be argued that there are degrees of risk, and climbing the management ladder in the public sector is a little less dangerous than attempting it in the private sector). People drawn to management are banking on a higher reward/risk ratio, and are willing to sacrifice significant time and effort to reap greater financial and professional benefits.

How does a manager demonstrate management skills? By putting their “stamp” on the organization they are leading. A manager who seeks to be recognized knows better than to simply keep the wheels turning. This is why a new manager is always an inherent threat to stability...he or she is driven to find new ways of doing things, regardless of how well things have worked in the past.

VPL is *not* a complicated organization. Managerially, it is quite flat – there are relatively few excluded staff who oversee the operation. The bulk of our work is circulating material for the public. I think it is fair to say that the majority of our patrons would be quite pleased with a few bare-bones services: free internet; DVD's; lots of best-sellers. However, the public is not at the top of the list when it comes to whom managers are interested in impressing. That would be the Library Board and our funding bodies, the City and the Provincial Government. These agencies are impressed with new, cutting edge initiatives, that may only serve a small percentage of our patrons, but garner recognition for our organization.

This is why I contend that our members are presently overworked, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. Brian Campbell's replacement will mark the fifth new member of the Library Management Team in the past few years. His replacement will bring forward new initiatives, and each will be a departure from the day-to-day operations currently in place. Each will involve a change in the way that some or all staff do their jobs.

How else can we explain the enormous investment in Single Service Point implementation? Or the current huge expenditure in time and effort in the Area Services Plan? These initiatives are *not* being driven by public demand (our public has been consistently very satisfied with our traditional library services). This is not to say that these plans are entirely without merit: however, the changes involved for staff are sweeping and being implemented at an alarmingly brisk pace. The rationale being given is that there will be increased efficiencies in the future and improved service. Again, I query the motivations – where are the cost/benefits analyses to justify giant shifts in how we do our work? I agree with management that there are probably many overlapping and/or outdated practices in VPL – there are in *any* large organization – but the hidden costs of sweeping changes that attempt to address these issues in one fell swoop are immense and seen in high rates of stress, absenteeism, and RSI. Managers, in effect, mortgage the well-being of present staff in an attempt to buy savings in the

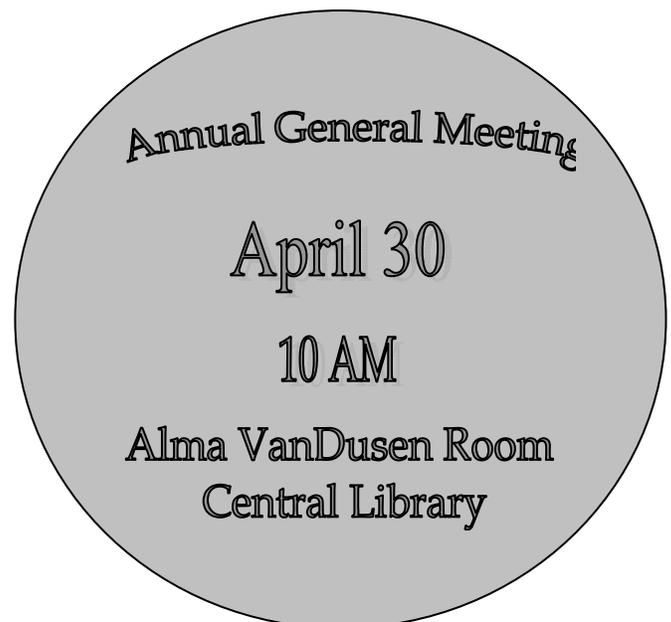
future. A short-term workload increase is justified by a predicted long-term workload reduction.

Workers are feeling the stressful effects of this fast-paced change. Management, in its quest to implement innovative, recognition-gaining improvements, expresses frustration to the resistance that (naturally) comes from workers whose primary interest is stability and personal well-being. Hence the birth of the present dichotomy that characterizes managers as driving for greater productivity with little thought of the consequences for staff, and workers as change-resistant dinosaurs wed to outdated ideas and practices.

How do we rise above this dichotomy? It's tricky. As workers, we need to recognize that change will always be imposed, regardless of how much we resist, or how unmerited or illogical we may think the change is. It is wise to focus our energies on helping to direct the change so that it has the least impact on our security, by identifying the issues that are core concerns, and doing our best to work with the ones that aren't true threats to our security. It is also wise to carefully monitor our own well-being, and to look for ways to make our day-to-day work lives happier and less stressful.

Management needs to work in a more cohesive fashion to ensure that change is implemented in a rational, incremental fashion, and that it is assessed at a cost/benefits level. At present, it appears that each member of LMT is pushing agendas forward that reflect individual interests, and the subsequent multiple, simultaneous changes are impacting staff with workload issues and huge additional stresses.

See *Management* on next page...



### ...*Management*

The union's recent morale and workload surveys are an attempt to communicate with our funding bodies the impact of present practices – to force our managers to acknowledge that each initiative or change that is introduced has a direct effect on our workers' daily lives. A few of our members have complained to me that commenting on managerial vision and planning is not really the role of a union. To the contrary, I would say that it represents the crux of the labour/management split. ***If we cannot acknowledge and address the impact of management direction on our work lives, then we are forever left dealing with the fallout after the fact– an endless treadmill of grievances, illnesses, and depressed and demoralized workers that drain our union's resources.***

So...what can we expect in the way of changes over the next five years or so at VPL? I would love to hear your thoughts, and arrange to publish them (anonymously, of course) on the web site or in the next issue of *Off the Shelf*. E-mail them to: [predictions@cupe391.ca](mailto:predictions@cupe391.ca).

***Here are ten of my thoughts and guesses, in no particular order, based on observations I have made:***

1. *At least two more members of LMT leaving their positions (either to retire, or to seek new opportunities), resulting in new strategic directions for the Library.*
2. *After the broad establishment of floating collections, centralized ordering and weeding.*
3. *The creation of a provincial virtual reference project administered at VPL and staffed with contract workers (along the lines of the Canadian Health Network project).*
4. *The final breakdown of Translogic that triggers a search for a replacement technology to move materials around Central.*
5. *More pressure for space at Central to house offices for special projects and jointly-funded initiatives.*
6. *New positions created for the new Mount Pleasant, Kensington and Riley Park libraries, with a subsequent increase to the annual operating budget.*
7. *Widespread labour unrest after the Olympics, when contracts expire and the City faces funding shortfalls as a result of hosting the games.*
8. *Further centralization of on-call staffing.*
9. *Increased uniformity in the way services are delivered system-wide (watch for the implementation of new standards of service for a two-tiered branch system).*
10. *More pressure on closed divisions to cut costs, and all work units to do more with less to free up funding to avoid cuts to hours or materials budgets.*

Again...it behooves us to look ahead so that we can be prepared for the changes we know are coming, and to take steps to deal with them in a positive manner through the tools we have available: our collective agreement, and a unified union membership working together to improve our lot at VPL.

In solidarity,  
D'Arcy Stainton  
President, CUPE Local 391



Janis McKenzie

### Constance's memorial

Monday, February 27  
at Central



Luba, Jaspal, Sammi and Mumtaz

## Introduction to Integral Theory and Practice

By Arthur Gillard  
(Library Assistant II-Circulation)

For several years I've been impressed and inspired by the work of Ken Wilber and have found his Integral theory useful in all areas of my life - particularly in weaving the disparate threads of my life into a coherent whole, in figuring out where I need to do more work and how to go about it, and in determining how my life fits into the transitions and transformations, the challenges and crises, the chaos and opportunities the world is undergoing in this difficult phase of our individual and collective evolution.

Recently I attended an enjoyable and stimulating conference in Seattle called "Integral Weekend Experiential Training" prior to which we were given an excellent introduction/overview entitled **Introduction to Integral Theory and Practice.** It is a very accessible introduction, which I offer to anyone who is curious about this subject. I'll quote the first section so you will get an idea of what it is all about:

### Overview

During the last 30 years, we have witnessed a historical first: all of the world's cultures are now available to us. In the past, if you were born, say, a Chinese, you likely spent your entire life in one culture, often in one province, sometimes in one house, living and loving and dying on one small plot of land. But today, not only are people geographically mobile, we can study, and have studied, virtually every known culture on the planet. In the global village, all cultures are exposed to each other.

Knowledge itself is now global. This means that, also for the first time, the sum total of human knowledge is available to us - the knowledge, experience, wisdom and reflection of all major human civilizations - premodern, modern and postmodern - are open to study by anyone.

What if we took literally everything that all the various cultures have to tell us about human potential - about spiritual growth, psychological growth, social growth - and put it on the table? What if we attempted to find the critically essential keys to human growth, based on the sum total of human knowledge now open to us? What if we attempted, based on extensive cross-cultural study, to use all of the world's great traditions to create a composite map, a comprehensive map, an all-inclusive or *integral* map that included the best elements from all of them?

Sound complicated, complex, daunting? In a sense, it is. But in another sense, the results turn out to be surprisingly simple and elegant. Over the last several decades, there has indeed been an extensive search for a comprehensive map of human potentials. This map uses all the known systems and models of human growth - from the ancient shamans and sages to today's breakthroughs in cognitive science - and distills their major components into 5 simple factors, factors that are the essential elements or keys to unlocking and facilitating human evolution.

Welcome to the Integral Model.

Anyone who would like a copy of the complete PDF file, please email me at [hugh\\_manatee@telus.net](mailto:hugh_manatee@telus.net)

Thanks to Lily Gee of Kitsilano Branch for photo

## Photo caption contest!

Do you or your worksite think you have the best caption for this photo?

If so, send your caption to me ([lornemac@vpl.ca](mailto:lornemac@vpl.ca)) and a select panel of appropriately jaded judges of your peers will select the winner, and you may find yourself relaxing by the pool adjacent to the pristine beach where stands the fabulous and majestic Hotel d' Celebre, in an all-inclusive expenses paid trip to sunny Belize for 7 days and 7 nights (pending approval of the cupe 391 Executive). Or at least you will gain fame and accolades from your co-workers when your name is published in the next issue of this exclusive publication.



Another day at the office!  
Workload issues! What workload issues?  
**(Your new and improved caption here)**

# News

# Environmental Awareness Committee

By Keith Edwards

## Reduce, Reuse and Recycle (not just a 90's catch phrase)

As you know, the library does recycle printed materials such as newspaper and other paper products, along with a limited supply of toners. Many books are re-directed for possible re-sale at our book sales. A separate 'scrap' section might be worth trying at a book sale for those reading materials that are dated or for some other reason slated for the garbage. Some of those materials are good just for the art or pictures and can be used for collage or craft projects.

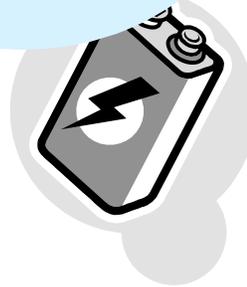
One sided pages of papers can be sent to bindery for p-slips, just take out the paper clips (try saving the paper clips for reuse!) and staples prior for cutting down to size. It helps the staff if they can be stacked in same size piles. Remember that this same paper would be good for practice printing or non-official copies.

Assorted elastics are in Shipping and assorted used envelopes can be asked from Supplies.

*Did you know...*

**The EAC collects the following items, that VPL does not, to reuse or recycle:**

- batteries (household)
- micro-fiche films,
- plastic cd and video cases (broken)
- plastic spools from cash register receipts,
- plastic wrappings (around newspaper or documents),
- styrofoam blocks (from new computers)
- tattletape,



In central, the blue bins that are in the divisions encourage staff to not throw away their recyclable and refundable plastics, tins and glass containers.

Please take note of the plastic containers that don't have a number inside of a triangle, as these are not considered good for the collection nor are products with the # 6.

As consumers we can all make decisions about what we buy, and try to purchase products that are recyclable according to the current acceptable standards of your municipal areas. May the buyer beware and let our buying powers speak!

Any non-refundables go to the city recycling blue box containers, while refundables are cashed in and put towards environmentally sound practices and promotions for staff. Watch for Bike Month activities in June and others throughout the year.

The Environmental Awareness Committee (EAC) would like to thank library staff members for your collective efforts in reducing waste, and recycling and reusing items. Special thanks to Alex Campbell, Maureen Uldall-Ekman, Lily Gee, Lily Wong, Mark Keop and Sue Moore.

*If you have any questions about who, what, when, where, and why, email EAC or contact EAC's chairperson, Keith Edwards on Level 6.*

# Bargaining 101

From Sunday January 22 through to Friday January 27 I once again had the opportunity to attend the Canadian Labour Congress winter school held each year at the Harrison Hot Springs resort. This year I took the Basic Collective Bargaining course and it proved to be an interesting and informative program.

I arrived at Harrison wondering what to expect over the coming week. To me bargaining had always seemed a mysterious and complicated process whereby negotiators got together to try to hammer out an agreement that both sides could agree to; A daunting prospect at the best of times. What I discovered altered my perceptions of what the bargaining process entailed.

During the week we discussed a whole host of topics that gave all who attended a good grounding in the bargaining process. We discussed the definition of collective bargaining, and the factors both internal and external that can affect it. We talked about some of the legal issues that influence bargaining such as the B.C. Labour Code and the Employment Standards Act.

We discussed how bargaining committees are formed, how they are run, and some of factors that make up a good bargaining committee.

We spent a fair amount of time discussing communication during bargaining and its importance in the entire process. To this end we looked at examples of a variety of bargaining surveys which are used to identify the issues that the membership would like addressed in the current round of bargaining. We talked about various ways of information sharing with the membership that included, amongst other things, updates at general meetings, in the union newsletter, and face to face contact. All these provide ways for the bargaining committee to communicate to the membership about how the negotiations are going, any contentious issues that have come to light, and to gain support for what has been achieved so far.

We talked about formulating our bargaining demands and some of the information sources that can be used when doing this. These included things like annual reports, legislative and government policies, old contracts, outstanding grievances, and the bargaining survey.

Once we had discussed some of the basics we got down to discussing some bargaining dynamics. These were things that ranged from where to hold the negotiations, how much detail to use when presenting your demands, what if any are the limits to the length of the negotiating sessions, the rules of caucusing, and even down to where each member of the committee will sit at the bargaining table.

After all of this we finally got down to some actual bargaining. The class was split into four groups, two of which represented union bargaining committees, and two of which represented management bargaining committees. One was private sector, a plastics company, and the other public sector, a library. Once we got our assignments we went through the entire bargaining process from setting up our committee, formulating our demands, meeting with the other side and eventually coming up with an agreement that both sides could agree to. This was an interesting exercise that highlighted the give and take that is a part of the bargaining process. It also served to demonstrate the dynamics present in a bargaining committee, and gave us all valuable insights into the need for clear communication and the importance of each committee member understanding both the

important issues and the overall goals of the committee. An excellent end to a great week.

See *Bargaining* on next page...



*All in all I learned a lot about bargaining and it no longer seems so mysterious and daunting to me. My hope is that I will be able to use the knowledge that I gained to help our local in the next round of bargaining, and with your support I am positive that we will get the best deal we possibly can.*

**Bargaining...**

**On a side note:**

Every year at the Harrison Winter School there is a singing contest and each class is expected to come up with a song that speaks to what their course is all about. The following is the song that my bargaining class performed and is sung to the tune of the Rolling Stones

**“You can’t always get what you want”**

We sat down at the bargaining table  
To get what we thought we were able  
We asked for an increase in wages  
The employers they laughed in our faces

They said, you can’t always get what you want  
You can’t always get what you want  
You can’t always get what you want  
But we’ll try real hard, with our union card,  
we’ll get what we need

We went back and talked to our members  
And told of our employers abuse  
We said we are strong in our numbers  
And with a strike vote we can’t lose

We cried, we will always get what we want  
We will always get what we want  
We will always get what we want  
We are strong and proud and we’ll shout out loud  
We’ll get what we need – whoo hoo!

Yeah, we will always get what we want  
We will always get what we want  
We will always get what we want  
We are strong and proud and we’ll shout out loud  
We’ll get what we need – whoo hoo!

In solidarity  
Mark Whittam, Vice President-CUPE 391  
LA V (Carnegie)

**Statement on Harassment**

*Union solidarity is based on the principle that union members are equal and deserve mutual respect at all levels. Any behaviour that creates conflict prevents us from working together to strengthen our union.*

*As unionists, mutual respect, cooperation and understanding are our goals. We should neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.*

*Harassment means using real or perceived power to abuse or humiliate. Harassment should not be treated as a joke. The uneasiness and discomfort it creates are not feelings that help us grow as a union. Harassment focuses on the things that make us different instead of the things that bring us together like shared concerns about our families, decent wages, safe working conditions, fairness at work, and justice in society.*

*We believe that CUPE's policies and practices should reflect our commitment to equality. We urge members and staff to participate fully in CUPE activities mindful that all sisters and brothers deserve dignity, equality and respect.*

**CUPE National.**



Thanks to everyone who contributed to this issue of *Off the Shelf*. Submissions to future issues of Off The Shelf may be sent to Lorne at [lornemac@vpl.ca](mailto:lornemac@vpl.ca).

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# A Bad Day at the Bibliotheque

Excerpt from

by Laura Houle

*Gibsons and District Public Library*

"Don't you phone and let us know when we have books overdue?"  
The voice on the other end of the line sounds familiar, but I can't quite place him.

"Yes, we usually phone..." I'm about to explain the library's overdue notification procedure, but he cuts me off.

"Well, I wasn't phoned. Now, my book is overdue and the system won't let me renew it."

"Well, tell me your name and I'll look up your record."

"Rankin,... George Rankin."

Ah, yes, George Rankin. He doesn't like paying overdue fines. Many people don't care about a fine. They smile as they hand over a five dollar bill, "Here, keep the change. It's going to a good cause."

George Rankin isn't one of these people. If you tell him he has a fine, he takes it as a personal insult.

"Tell me how much the fine is?" he demands.

"Well, there's the one book that's still out, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Being a Cheapskate*. The fine on that one is estimated at \$4.75. Then there's two others that were each returned two days late..."

"What! I returned them on time! Which ones are they?" he snaps.

"One is called, *Financial Planning for Dummies*, the other is, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*."

"I returned them on time. What's the fine on those?"

"It's fifty cents each. The total fine would be \$5.75." I keep my voice calm.

"Don't you phone and let us know when we have books overdue?"

"Yes, we phone after two weeks..."

"Well, I wasn't phoned." he cuts me off. "Why don't you e-mail people? I thought you were supposed to do that with the new system?"

"Yes, well,..." I am tempted at this point to launch into my own diatribe about how the new system allows people like George to renew his books online, and how if he would just look at the friggin' date due card in the pocket at the front of the book then he'd know when his book was due, and ultimately, it's his responsibility to keep track of his damn books... but... I bite my tongue, take a deep breath, and say, "we're still setting up the e-mail system. Since we didn't have anyone's e-mail address to begin with, we had to collect them from individual members as they came in, and this has taken some time."

"Well, I wasn't phoned. How much is that fine?"

"It's \$5.75. But the one book is still out, so the fines keep accumulating until it's returned."

"Well, can you renew it for me?"

"Yes, I'll try to... hold on." George Rankin already knows that he can't renew a book when his fines are over \$5.00. He must have tried to renew it before calling, and the system wouldn't allow it. I am going to override the system fines block because I know that George lives on Keats Island, so it's not an easy trip for him to get to the Library. But when I try to renew the book, the system blocks me three times. First, it blocks me because George has already renewed his book twice. This makes me suspicious. Has he lost it? Then it blocks me because of his fine. And then it blocks me again, the last straw. "I'm sorry, George, but someone else has requested *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Being a Cheapskate*, I can't renew it for you."

"Well, what am I supposed to do?"

"You'll have to bring it back as soon as you can." Isn't this obvious.

"That's great!" he hangs up.

Whew! I escape into the back office where I vent to Bernice.

"What is he? Six years old?" she responds. "Does he still need his mother to phone him up and remind him to bring his library books back on time?"

We share a laugh at George's expense. Then I go back out to the desk. The day is just starting....

**UPDATE**

# ON THE HACIENDA LUISITA STRIKE

**Tarlac, Philippines**

by Erie Maestro

In September 2005, CUPE 391 approved the motion to support the strike of the 5000 farm workers and 700 mill workers in Hacienda Luisita with a donation of Cdn \$750.00 to the United Luisita Workers' Union (ULWU) and the Azucarera De Tarlac Labor Union (CATLU). From the first day of the strike on November 6, 2004, the workers were harassed and attacked by the military, police and hired goons from the Cojuangco-Aquino landlord family. The strike caught local and international attention when the military and police fired on the workers on November 16, 2004. Seven strikers and supporters were killed from that assault, now known as the Hacienda Luisita massacre.

On December 8, 2005, the unions ULWU and CATLU signed their respective agreements with the family of Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino, the landowners of the vast sugarcane plantation. The strike in Hacienda Luisita was finally over. The strike, reputed to be the most controversial in the Philippine history, is a historic victory for the people of Hacienda Luisita. They battled not only with a very powerful politico-landlord family but one that was supported by the military and bureaucratic structures of the Philippine government.

The strike ended with the workers getting all their main demands, particularly the increase in the daily wage, benefits and the reinstatement of dismissed union officers and members. The victory of the strike was due to the courage and determination of the workers and their families to continue and maintain the picket line for more than a year in spite of the attacks, harassment and black propaganda against them.

Likewise, the consistent moral and logistical support of organizations and individuals, not only from within the Philippines, but also from the international community, like our local CUPE 391, helped tremendously to build a wide network of support for the striking workers. This support succeeded in propagating the legitimacy of the workers' struggle.

The killings against the workers have not stopped however. Names continue to be added to the list of martyrs. When I visited Hacienda Luisita as a member of the *International Solidarity Mission to the Philippines* last August 2005, the workers at the picket line held a vigil to honour those who died during the Hacienda Massacre and the three others who were murdered for supporting the strike -- City Councilor Abelardo Ladera, Rev. William Tadena, IFI and Peasant leader Marcing Beltran. On October 20, 2005, just before the end of the strike, armed men shot and killed Ricardo Ramos, the president of CATLU, in his own backyard. On March 17, 2006, Tirso Cruz, one of the Board of Directors of ULWU, was also shot dead by motorcycle-riding gun men in Hacienda Luisita. Their deaths heighten the fear that there could be more attacks and political killings against the militant leaders of the people in the hacienda. There are other similar assassinations against militant leaders and organizers around the country where the de facto martial rule under the current President Arroyo prevails.

Justice has proved to be elusive for the families of the Hacienda martyrs. No one has been arrested or punished for any of the killings. The Office of the Ombudsman even dismissed the case filed against the perpetrators of the Nov. 16 massacre. The President herself has not condemned the killings nor has she ordered her military to immediately pull out of Hacienda Luisita. It is public knowledge that nothing happens inside the hacienda without the consent or approval of the Cojuangco-Aquino politico-landlord clan and the Arroyo government.

The workers believe that the end of the strike is only one chapter in their struggle. They believe that this victory only advances their struggle for actual land distribution. And that justice will prevail



**Nov 16, 2004:** *Strikers running to escape the hail of bullets from the military. Seven strikers and supporters were killed from this massacre at the picket line.*



*Ricardo Ramos  
President of Central Azucarera de Tarlac  
Labor Union. Slain Oct 20, 2005*

Updates on new developments on what is happening in the Hacienda Luisita can be found at [www.kalayaancentre.net](http://www.kalayaancentre.net) or by e-mailing the BC Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines at [bcchrp@kalayaancentre.net](mailto:bcchrp@kalayaancentre.net).

# Report Back from The World Festival of Youth and Students

By **Krisztina Kun, LA I - Newspapers & Magazines**

Last August, I was fortunate enough to represent CUPE 391 at the 16<sup>th</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students in Caracas, Venezuela. The festival has been taking place since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War when youth and students stood up against fascism, and in recent years it has changed its focus to reflect the state of the world today, namely to denounce the US-led wars of aggression. As such, the slogan under which 20, 000 youth and students gathered from all over the world was: *Against Imperialism and for Peace*. Yes, 20, 000 youth from around the world gathered in Caracas, Venezuela for 8 days to meet each other, attend forums, workshops, and concerts, eat bad conference food and party till the morning in army barracks.

But let me back up a bit and tell you a little bit about Venezuela. For those who are not following the political history of this little country on the northern tip of South America, there has been quite a lot of action down there since the end of the 1980s and particularly since Hugo Chavez was

elected by the majority of the popular vote in 1998. Venezuela is rich in natural resources, especially oil. It has one of the largest oil reserves in the world, and up until the late 1990s, much of this wealth was in the hands of a select few, leaving the rest of the country, over 80 percent of Venezuelans, in poverty. Since Chavez has been in power, many reforms have taken place in favour of the people, not for the profit of a select few. The constitution has been re-written by a series of public consultations and referendums, petroleum has been nationalized and all the profits are being put into health-care, education, women's rights, land reform, indigenous rights, and much more. Particular attention is being paid to the rural poor and residents of *barrios*, the shantytowns on the outskirts of Caracas, where the government has set up state run stores called *Mercals* in which food is subsidized and less than half the price of normal grocery stores, and the land that was once considered squatted is now recognized as legitimately owned by the poor who live on it.

See Report on next page...



Caracas, Venezuela.

*Report...*

It is these human rights advancements that inspired me to go down to Venezuela and see for myself, especially when there is so much backlash in the media up here about Chavez, and how he's a dictator who doesn't have the support of the (rich) people.

The conference itself was an exuberant disorganized mess. I arrived by bus, having been traveling around the country for a few weeks already, and it took me almost an entire day to find out where I was supposed to register. They were expecting Canadians to arrive at the airport, which makes sense, but since I had gone against the grain, I was told my group had already been transported to the army barracks an hour outside of town in *Ciudad Miranda* and that I should go there to meet them. Go there how? Since an answer wasn't forthcoming, I resigned myself to staying at a backpacker's hostel in the bad part of town with my friend and travel companion. This proved most fortunate as the other Canadian delegates, when I met them the next day at the opening ceremonies, complained of cramped quarters, little food, and 3 hour long bus rides in and out of the city. The opening ceremonies were overwhelming, with 20,000 delegates from more countries than I thought possible. We lined up by country and paraded about the square for hours, there was dancing, and costumes, and frantic hand gestures as we tried to understand each other across language barriers. At the end of the ceremony Hugo Chavez welcomed us and spoke at length about the changes taking place in Venezuela, about the movement against US imperialism and the war in Iraq.

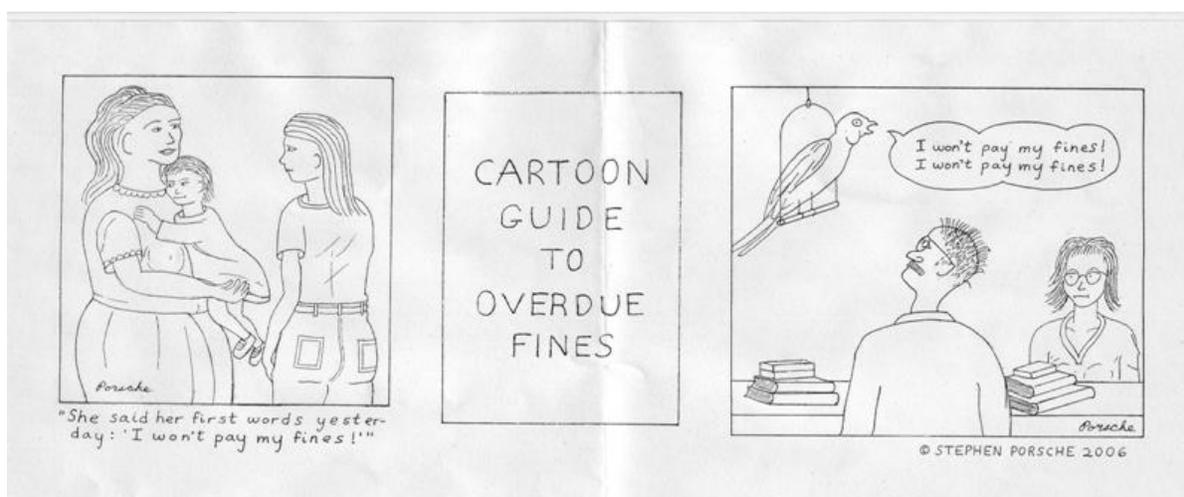
This first day was indicative of what was to come. The rest of the week was full of back to back sessions, panels, and workshops. There were usually 5 things going on at once all over Caracas, so planning your itinerary was an important part of the morning. But it never really mattered in the long run, as sessions would be moved and cancelled at will, there would be promises of translation and you'd show up, wait

for 3 hours as the presenters arrived, and find out that there would be no translation. Nothing ever started on time, and as we became accustomed to "Venezuelan Time" we joked about the irony that a gathering of activists and organizers was this disorganized. But there was so much beauty in the in between moments, that made up for all the waiting around. I met women who fought against the 2002 coup, (where Chavez was ousted for 2 days but then restated and elected back into office) they talked of the economic sanctions and told me about the famous rally where protestors were shot. I met doctors from Cuba who were working in the *barrios* and providing 24 hour medical care for free, (Venezuela is trading oil for doctors with Cuba as they have so much oil and not enough doctors, especially doctors willing to work and live with the poor). I was taken on a tour of Caracas by some locals I befriended, and shown the Art Gallery, and the University that is famous for its unusual architecture.

Within the conference, the highlight for me was the focus on Art and Revolution. There was an international panel on Hip Hop's role in Activism followed by a free open-air concert in Plaza Venezuela where big names such as Dead Prez, Immortal Technique and K'naan performed. There were many sessions and concerts with Cuban musicians, and I ended up befriending the Cuban hip hop group *Doble Filo* who were instrumental in starting an independent recording label, the first of its kind in Cuba.

It's always the in between moments that mean the most at conferences, the people you meet, the alliances forged, and this conference was no different. It was amazing to be a part of such a huge delegation of youth and students committed to social justice work, and to see first hand the revolution in Venezuela.

*Recordings of Hugo Chavez's speech and the Hip Hop forum can be found on [www.radio4all.net](http://www.radio4all.net) (Search Venezuela and Krisztina)*



# The Perks

By Peter DeGroot

Ah, the perks, - and I'm not referring to the wonderful organic free-trade coffee that is always on the go at Britannia. Instead, I'm thinking of all the neat little fun stuff that we have access to just because we're members of CUPE 391. The following are just some of the perks that you may or may not be aware of – and it is not a complete list! Each of the items is offered to you by our union, the library, the City or combinations thereof.

## **Scholarships**

CUPE 391 and VPL award 7 scholarships of \$500 annually for those continuing on in their library studies. There is also the Constance Devine Scholarship of \$1,000, which is awarded to a mature student who has demonstrated commitment to the union and the library. Scholarship details and application forms can be found on both the 391 webpage and on the HR webpage.

Our provincial union has a scholarship for children of CUPE BC members. Teens graduating from high school and continuing on at either college or university are eligible to apply. The application form for this scholarship comes out each spring.

## **Education**

The union, like the library, is a firm believer in the concept of life long learning. CUPE 391 will pay the registration costs and expenses for members to take courses put on by the union. Subjects range from retirement planning to public speaking to basic shop stewarding. Watch the union updates for the next round of courses being offered.

## **Conferences and Conventions**

Here's your chance to become involved in the larger labour movement. At the February 23 CUPE 391 general meeting, delegates were selected for the CUPE BC Convention here in Vancouver, and for the Workers' Out Conference in Montreal. Any member can put their name forward to be a delegate.

## **Fitness**

To use Fit Café at the Central branch, simply follow the registration steps found through the VPL Homepage. To use the bike storage room at Central, visit Security at Central to have your staff card activated.

## **Wellness**

A new committee at 391 and already making a mark. Yoga classes, lectures and suggested readings. Find out what the Wellness Committee is offering next by looking at the CUPE 391 homepage.

## **Self Funded Leave**

Six months or a year off work – and still getting a pay cheque every two weeks! Sounds too good to be true, but it is here and open to full time staff, and part-time staff eligible for benefits. Details on both the 391 and HR homepages.

## **Retirement Parties and Gifts**

When one leaves VPL, they are constitutionally entitled to a party and a gift. The 391 Constitution contains the specific information, and can be found on the union homepage.

## **No fines and unlimited holds**

How great is this!?! But remember not to abuse the privilege.

## **The best co-workers in the country**

For me, this is the best perk of them all.

*If you're wondering about other perks or entitlements, places to look include: the collective agreement, cupe391.ca, the CUPE 391 Constitution, the Pacific Blue Cross handbook, CityWire, the VPL homepage, the president's updates, and the list goes on.*