

In support of Resolution 217

Libraries- public libraries- are some of the last free public spaces available to all. They are open and accessible to any sector of the population, being for many people the only place to access necessary services and information. Federal and provincial governments have abdicated their social responsibility in providing for vulnerable populations, and have left municipalities to deal with the downloading of vital services. Public libraries have become the place, often the only place, to access social services, connect with the digital world, and simply find a safe space during a day that may have otherwise been spent on the street or alone in an SRO.

We have allowed the language of corporatization to creep into how we talk about funding public spaces and services. As a library worker, I know that language matters. The use of metrics and statistics has been adopted when measuring the value of social and cultural institutions. The numbers gathered are then hijacked by business majors and outside consultants who take and spin and use these for one purpose – cutting funding.

Public libraries are not void of humans and the building alone does not provide what vulnerable populations are seeking. It is the workers inside these buildings that help individuals: people struggling with online forms ask us to help them apply for disability, social or housing assistance. We are asked to find shelters for women and their children fleeing from violent situations. We help the elderly and the housebound connect with a world that is all too willing to leave them behind. And as you heard earlier during Resolution 216, library workers are often themselves in a position of vulnerability. This vulnerability is created not only from potential violence in the workplace, it also comes from the precarity of our jobs – in many cases these jobs are auxiliary, part-time, over multiple locations, and with insufficient training.

This resolution asks CUPE National to look at the language used to justify the erosion of our jobs and public services and create a campaign that will reframe the conversation. In many ways our work is measurable, and the impact we have on people's lives beyond the walls of the library is vast. We ask that CUPE National use their resources to promote public spaces that are fully-staffed with stable union jobs.