

**RECORDING  
SECRETARY'S  
HANDBOOK**



# RECORDING SECRETARY

## INTRODUCTION

This handbook was developed to give newly elected Recording Secretaries an outline of their duties, an idea of where they can turn for advice and a list of relevant Education Department Courses. The handbook also describes how an effective Recording Secretary contributes to the development of a strong local union.

## I - Role of a Local Union Executive

The union executive (President, Vice-President, Recording Secretary and Secretary-Treasurer) is responsible for the leadership and administration of the local. The "job" of all union leaders is to advance the interests of the members. The best run locals are not those with the lowest dues rate, the most money in the bank, or the best filing system.

Unions represent their members by negotiating collective agreements and by lobbying governments to improve laws that affect the membership. Unions also represent their members by seeing that employers do not violate their collective agreements or laws (health and safety, human rights, etc.) that affect the members.

Unions must force employers to do things that they would not otherwise do. Our employers want to have a free hand to provide public services as cheaply as possible. Union members must work together to force employers to pay more than the bare minimum, to provide safe working conditions, to provide us with job security, etc. Even at a time of cutbacks, wage freezes and contracting out, unionized workers do better than those with no protection.

The difference between members of an effective union and unorganized workers, or members of a passive local, is the difference between bargaining and begging. The difference between bargaining and begging is the power to effect change. Unionized workers who act together and support one another have more power than individual workers who can't even complain about working conditions, harassment by supervisors, racism, or being passed over for promotions for fear of being labelled a troublemaker. Unorganized workers and members of weak locals can only hope that their employer will find other ways of saving money besides cutting their wages or laying

them off. In short, members of strong locals have a lot more say about what happens to them compared to workers with weak or nonexistent unions.

Unions are not insurance policies where you pay your dues and expect someone to solve your problems for you. Unions are self help organizations where the members work together in order to solve common problems. It is the job of the executive to coordinate these activities and to see that the members have adequate information, advice and funds to effectively deal with workplace problems and concerns.

## **II - Role of the Recording Secretary**

The Recording Secretary's job is vital in promoting the unions goals of militancy and solidarity.

Generally speaking the Recording Secretary is responsible for record keeping, and written communications.

It is the job of the Recording Secretary to keep the members informed about the problems facing them and the activities that the local is undertaking to deal with these problems. Keeping the members informed and involved is the key to building interest and involvement of members in union activities.

Keeping and maintaining records of decisions taken by the local and information such as letters to and from the employer and with other organizations are vital to the smooth and efficient running of the union.

## III - Duties of the Recording Secretary

### Record Keeping

- Take minutes at Executive & Membership Meetings.
- Maintain a policy log.
- Maintain the local's files.

### Internal Communication

- Prepare meeting notices & agendas for executive & membership meetings.
- Circulate minutes of executive & membership meetings.
- Receive, log and distribute all incoming mail.
- Develop & distribute a list of all correspondence received.
- Report on all important correspondence & lead discussion on business arising from correspondence at executive & membership meetings.
- Maintain union bulletin boards.
- Prepare bulletin board pamphlets promoting union activities & events.
- Edit the local's newsletter or assist newsletter committee.

### External Communication

- Receive all communication from outside the local.
- Respond to all correspondence.
- Compose letters to the employer, CUPE national & other labour organizations, the media, & individual members of the local.
- Forward proposed contract settlements & collective agreements to CUPE National.
- Order all office supplies & equipment.

*Note: Every Recording Secretary in a CUPE local does not perform all of the duties listed. In some locals, other members of the executive do some of the items listed above. To run an effective local, accurate records must be kept of decisions, written correspondence must be up to date and the members must be kept informed. It is less important who does each duty than that they all be carried out.*

## **IV - Tips for Recording Secretaries**

### **Taking Minutes**

- The purpose of Minutes is to record decisions. There is usually little need to take notes on the debate that lead to a decision.
- It is useful to note who will be responsible for carrying out each motion passed and when the task will be carried out.

### **Recording Secretary Reports to the Membership**

- To save time do not read each piece of correspondence but circulate a list of all correspondence and go over only those items that require a decision (such as a strike appeal) or the ones that are of interest to the members (such as details of an important contract settlement).

### **Meeting Notices and Agenda**

- Post Meeting Notices and Agenda on union bulletin boards at least a week before the date of the meeting.

### **Bulletin Board Pamphlets**

- Most members do not attend union meetings on a regular basis. To keep non-attending members informed, post one-page summaries of important contract settlements, grievance decisions and important union activities such as health and safety committee meetings, etc. on union bulletin boards.

### **Letter Writing**

- If you have trouble writing letters, start by listing the reasons you are writing the letter then list the points you want to make. Next, turn each point into one or two short sentences.

**Filing**

- Only file things that someone will need to refer to in the future and which will not be easily available somewhere else.
- Don't change an existing filing system unless people have trouble finding things.
- If you decide to change the system, consider filing things by subject by year. Some locals move the top file drawers down the cabinet at the end of each year and move the bottom drawer to the top after removing all but the most important files (meeting minutes, important grievances, contract settlements, invoices etc.) which are stored elsewhere.

**V - Skills and Knowledge Required to be an Effective Recording Secretary**

- Knowledge of how unions operate and what makes unions effective
- Ability to compose letters, bulletins, etc.
- Ability to take minutes at meetings
- Ability to organize files
- Ability to make verbal reports to the membership and the executive

**VI - Sources of Advice and Assistance**

- Former Recording Secretaries
- Recording Secretaries in other unions (meet them at the CUPE District Council or the Labour Council)
- Your CUPE Representative
- CUPE Education Department Courses

## VII - Relevant Education Department Courses

- *"Introduction To CUPE"*  
A short course for newly selected executive and committee members introducing them to CUPE and to effective union administration.
- *"Our Union"*  
A more detailed course on the roles of members of a union executive and committees and on the skills needed to be effective.
- *"Face to Face Communication"*  
A course in how to communicate effectively. Useful for anyone who would like to have more effective listening and communication skills.
- *"Public Speaking and Parliamentary Procedure"*  
Useful for anyone who is unfamiliar with meeting procedures or who feels uncomfortable speaking in front of groups.

Contact your CUPE Education Representative for more information on these courses as well as other courses offered by the CUPE Education Department or by your Federation of Labour.