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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Library workers give mixed reviews to CEO's vision of TBPL's future

A recent statement by the recently named CEO for Thunder Bay Public Library (TBPL) has left the city's library workers reconciling their own experience with the optimistic view offered by the CEO.

In his quote on July 19, 2022 Dr. Richard Togman spoke affectionately about libraries being "sacred places" and TBPL in particular as a "respected and beloved institution" – sentiments echoed by library workers. However, their own experiences are grounded in a reality very different from Dr. Togman's rosy predictions about the future of libraries in Thunder Bay. "When a library doesn't have enough staff, it reduces services for everyone. So library workers can't forget that Dr. Togman was on the management team that laid off most of the library workforce when COVID hit," said library worker Margaret Demillo. Demillo is also president of Local 3120 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which represents the bulk of workers at Thunder Bay Public Library. She continued: "Twenty of those layoffs turned out to be permanent and now the library struggles with staff shortages. I'm sure those laid-off workers, along with the rest of us, would like to hear how that action matches up with a strategy to grow the library.

"When the pandemic happened, TBPL had a contract with its workers that allowed for services to continue in a quarantine situation with workers to keep working. But TBPL refused to acknowledge those provisions, and we still feel the effects today." Demillo also took exception to Dr. Togman's comment about Thunder Bay residents being ready to "emerge from COVID and rebuild as a community of growth and opportunity with top tier public spaces." "We are interested in how Dr. Togman will lead staff in a COVID environment, since public health data indicate that the pandemic is far from over," noted Demillo. "Library workers also will be part of the strategy to offer high quality public services to Thunder Bay residents, but it must be done in conjunction with developing safe spaces for staff and the public."

"We hope he is true to his word about the library being a sacred space. Past Board actions regarding library funding are questionable. For example, in January 2020 Togman said "We should maintain and increase pressure and work with the union to turn the protest into a rally to support TBPL and get as many people as possible from across the community to turn out", urging library workers to advocate to protect the TBPL budget. Weeks later, the Board, which included Dr. Togman, disciplined union members for protesting cuts to the budget, falsely accusing them of wildcat strike action.

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