

Cuts will 'undermine' Library and Archives Canada

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (which represents 66,000 teachers, librarians, researchers and academic staff at 124 universities and colleges across Canada) is fighting governmental cuts to services and jobs in Library and Archives Canada. On April 30, Library and Archives Canada (LAC) sent notices that 215 jobs will go. The cuts include:

- The elimination of 21 of the 61 archivists and archival assistants who deal with non-governmental records.
- The reduction of digitisation and circulation staff by 50%.
- Reduction of staff dealing with preservation and conservation of documents.
- The closure of the interlibrary loans unit.

The National Archival Development Programme (NADP) which supports programming for provincial, regional and university archives across Canada is to be ended. This will also put an end to the gateway database "Archives Canada", which provided access to otherwise little known small and local archival holdings across the country. The Canadian Council of Archives office in Ottawa will be closed and as a result many summer work projects already planned across the country have been cancelled. For updated information visit: www.savelac.ca

LAC will also be abandoning its commitment to acquire and maintain a comprehensive collection of Canada's documentary past. Officials are considering no longer obtaining two copies of all material published in Canada. As well, senior management now says LAC's principal role will be limited to the collection and preservation of federal government records, instead of housing a comprehensive collection of artistic, cultural and historical materials; the fundamental richness of a country's heritage.

In a letter to the Minister for Canadian Heritage and official languages, Darin Barney of McGill University said, "cuts of this nature are a serious threat to the integrity of Canada's democratic culture." The action, he said, would "make much of the scholarship done by our members impossible to accomplish and undermines the mandate of the libraries and Archives of Canada."

Public access has already been greatly reduced at LAC, along with previous cuts to many specialist archival positions. With these new cuts in staff and services, access to Canada's heritage will be difficult if not impossible. The implications are dramatic for film makers, professional researchers and academics alike.

The Visual Researchers' Society of Canada (VRSC), headed by FOCAL board member Elizabeth Klinck, will be particularly affected by these cuts. At the best of times, access to footage and stills at Library and Archives Canada is a long and cumbersome procedure. Despite the incredibly rich collection, visual researchers are already discouraged when trying to obtain material. VRSC members now worry they will have no choice but to avoid LAC altogether. These cutbacks are gouging deeply into the preservation of Canada's historical and cultural heritage. Along with serious cuts to the national public broadcaster, CBC and the National Film Board of Canada this year, Canada's visual heritage will continue to suffer with these news cuts at LAC. What will this heritage be for future generations, 50 or 100 years from now? Klinck worries that we will see great gaps in the visual history of this country. The Canadian collective memory is being lost.