

Exploring Edmonton's Library and Archival Labour Activism and Visions of a National Library Workers' Organization

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Abstract

This article examines the history and relationship between organizing library workers and creating spaces for critical conversations in Edmonton since 2010. The reflective piece begins with a short history of the Edmonton Chapter of the Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) and underscores the group's successes in advocacy and organizing local symposia (Cannon, 2015; MacDonald, 2013). Despite early successes, PLG Edmonton disaffiliated from the broader PLG organization in 2016, and its successor organization, the Information Workers Collective (IWC) also failed. The demise of PLG Edmonton and the IWC notwithstanding, these efforts facilitated the creation of the local Politics of Libraries (PoL) Conference. The goals of PoL are twofold — to serve as a space for critical conversations too often excluded from workplaces and classrooms and to facilitate the development of a national library workers organization. Over time and due to pandemic health restrictions, PoL has evolved into an online speaker series. While this change in format broadened the reach of the event, attracting attendees and speakers from around North America, PoL has not yet achieved its goal of developing a national library workers' organization.

The article concludes with two foci. First, reflecting on the nature of Edmonton PLG and PoL, it underscores the seemingly unidirectional nature of the relationship between organizations and conferences/discussion spaces — organizations can much more easily create spaces for critical conversations than can conversation fora be converted into larger organizations. Secondly, the piece examines the thread connecting PLG Edmonton, the IWC, and PoL for a yet elusive national library workers organization (Oliphant and McNally, 2014).

Keywords Progressive Librarians Guild; Politics of Libraries; collective action

Étude du militantisme syndical des bibliothécaires et archivistes d'Edmonton et de la vision d'une organisation nationale du personnel des bibliothèques

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Résumé

Cet article examine l'histoire et la relation entre l'organisation du personnel des bibliothèques et la création d'espaces de conversations fondamentales à Edmonton depuis 2010. Le document de réflexion commence par un bref historique du chapitre d'Edmonton de la Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) et souligne les succès du groupe en matière de défense des droits et d'organisation de symposiums locaux (Cannon, 2015; MacDonald, 2013). Malgré ses premiers succès, le chapitre d'Edmonton de la PLG s'est désaffilié de l'organisation plus large de la PLG en 2016, et l'organisation qui lui a succédé, l'Information Workers Collective (IWC), a également échoué. Malgré la disparition du chapitre d'Edmonton de la PLG et de l'IWC, ces efforts ont facilité la création de la conférence locale Politics of Libraries (PoL). Les objectifs de PoL sont doubles : servir d'espace pour des conversations fondamentales trop souvent exclues des lieux de travail et des salles de classe et faciliter le développement d'une organisation nationale du personnel des bibliothèques. Au fil du temps et en raison des restrictions sanitaires liées à la pandémie, la conférence PoL s'est transformée en une série de conférences en ligne. Bien que ce changement de format ait élargi la portée de l'événement, attirant des participants et des conférenciers de toute l'Amérique du Nord, PoL n'a pas encore atteint son objectif de développer une organisation nationale du personnel des bibliothèques.

L'article se conclut sur deux points. Premièrement, en réfléchissant à la nature de la PLG et de la conférence PoL d'Edmonton, il souligne la nature apparemment unidirectionnelle de la relation entre les organisations et les conférences/espaces de discussion — les organisations peuvent beaucoup plus facilement créer des espaces pour des conversations fondamentales que les forums de conversation qui ne peuvent être convertis en organisations plus importantes. Deuxièmement, l'article examine le fil qui relie le chapitre d'Edmonton de la PLG, l'IWC et la conférence PoL pour une organisation nationale du personnel des bibliothèques encore insaisissable (Oliphant et McNally, 2014).

Mots-clés Progressive Librarians Guild; Politics of Libraries; action collective

Introduction

At the core of labour advocacy and activism lies organizing — building power through such traditional strategies as unionizing, collective bargaining, and striking, and by using these as leverage to radically transform the work that we do for the better. However, organizing library and archival workers either across various kinds of information work or over geographic distances has often proven difficult. For example, even the creation of the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL) was not without controversy (CAPAL Steering Committee, 2013), and it is an organization for only one type of librarian.¹ For organizing to be successful, workers need spaces to engage and converse with each other, and to build off that engagement and take action. This article examines the history and relationship between organizing library workers and creating spaces for critical conversations among them as these have played out in Edmonton since 2010. This history is punctuated by the activity of three groups: the Edmonton chapter of the Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG), the short-lived Information Workers Collective (IWC), and the extant Politics of Libraries (PoL) conference/speaker's series.

In exploring and critically reflecting on the work of Edmonton PLG, IWC, and PoL, issues of academic freedom, vocational awe, reliance on unpaid volunteer labour, structural divisions between archivists, librarians and other library workers, and a lack of capital all emerge as impediments to organizing and solidarity. These reflections are important for others committed to organizing library workers across Canada and beyond. Although we have included critiques throughout this paper, none of these are meant to criticize the contributors to the PLG, the IWC, or the PoL. Instead, we believe that critique of the existing systems in which we work is necessary in order to free ourselves from them. To that end, we are reflecting on the PLG, the IWC, and the PoL through the lens of critique as care — we offer critiques of our limitations in order to transgress them (Mandieta, 2011; Popowich, 2018a).

This paper provides history of the rise and fall of the Edmonton PLG, before discussing the failed IWC, followed by the emergence of PoL. Next, we provide our reflections on the PLG and the PoL, and what the future of our organizing may entail. We conclude with reflections on the challenges of attempting to use a volunteer-led speaker series/conference as a catalyst for organizing a national library workers' organization.

¹ For a further and elaborate treatment of issues related to organizing academic labour in Canada see *In Solidarity: Academic Librarian Labour Activism and Union Participation in Canada* (Dekker & Kanduik, 2014).

The Rise and Fall of PLG Edmonton

Edmonton has a rich history of organized labour. From the Edmonton and District Labour Council, which was founded in 1906 (EDLC, n.d.), to being home to the Alberta Federation of Labour, which is made up of more than 25 unions representing 175,000 workers across both the public and private sectors (AFL, n.d.), organized labour has remained an important facet of the provincial capital. Additionally, the area is home to a vibrant library and archival community. The large Edmonton Public Library (EPL) system is complemented by a series of smaller public library systems in the surrounding communities. With six post-secondary institutions there is also a diversity of academic librarians. The Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), City of Edmonton Archives and other local institutions, as well as the Archives Society of Alberta provide a strong complement of archivists. Finally, the Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) program at the School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) at University of Alberta and MacEwan University's Library and Information Technology program ensure a regular flow of new information workers into the community.

The PLG originated in New York in 1990 with the main goal of disputing, "the claim for the library as a neutral, non-political organization that serves best when preserving the status quo, and attempt[ing] to renew the library as an agent for progressive social change" (Progressive Librarians' Guild, 1990). In 2010, Braden Cannon from the PAA, Amanda Bird from EPL and Toni Samek from SLIS founded an Edmonton chapter of the PLG (Cannon, 2015). The PLG Edmonton was distinct from many of the other PLG chapters across North America. Unlike other chapters, which are primarily composed of LIS students and operate largely as campus-based groups, the Edmonton chapter had less participation from students and significantly greater participation from LIS professionals (Cannon, 2015).

The unique constitution of membership in PLG Edmonton explains the chapter's early successes, which included both an annual symposium entitled "Organize and Assemble"² dedicated to critical discussion of LIS issues and a series of advocacy endeavours. Cannon (2015) provides a detailed history of PLG Edmonton's first five years, but notable activities include advocacy around Library and Archives Canada's cancellation of the National Archival Development Program and its *Code of Conduct*, as well as the annual "Organize and Assemble" symposium, the fourth of which was published as a special issue of the *Progressive Librarian* journal (volume 43) (Carruthers, Panjvani, McNally & Christiansen, 2014). However, even Cannon (2015) highlights some of the underlying challenges: first, the work was entirely

² For a review of the first and second symposiums, see MacDonald (2011) and McDonald (2013).

driven by volunteers. Second, the young organization had gone through one important change over the five-year period: the introduction of membership principles (for a full reproduction of the membership principles, see Cannon, 2015). The membership principles, though reflective of the organization's goals and ideological orientation, were alienating to anyone in a management position and resulted in some early members leaving the organization.

The publication of *Progressive Librarian* volume 43, which was undertaken entirely by PLG Edmonton members, also underscored another point of tension within the PLG Edmonton chapter: an increasingly strained relationship with PLG's central Coordinating Committee, which is based in the United States. The Edmonton PLG chapter noted numerous problems with the Coordinating Committee in a 2016 blog post. According to that post, these included: a lack of democratic and financial accountability on the part of the Coordinating Committee; restructuring of membership dues from \$20 USD, of which the local chapter could retain 50%, to \$25 USD, of which the local chapter could retain nothing; and problems with distribution of the *Progressive Librarian* journal, including the rejection of Edmonton PLG's offer to manage and host the journal as a fully online open access publication (PLG Edmonton, 2016a). The Edmonton PLG also underscored that such criticisms were not new (Litwin, 2008), and that differences were related to issues of governance, not ideology. By the summer of 2016, the tension between PLG Edmonton and the Coordinating Committee boiled over, with the Edmonton chapter voting to dissolve on June 28, 2016 (PLG Edmonton, 2016b). While both groups expressed commitments to solidarity between the now separated entities, the PLG Coordinating Committee and the newly dissolved Edmonton PLG also engaged in a degree of finger pointing as to who was to blame for communication and governance challenges (PLG Edmonton, 2016a; PLG Coordinating Committee, 2016).

Interlude: IWC and Shout for Libraries!

The dissolution of PLG, however, was not the death knell for the group. Members of the dissolved PLG chapter set to work creating a new organization entitled The Information Workers Collective. The IWC worked quickly to establish a new set of guiding principles. These principles were crafted by the same members who had spearheaded the PLG Edmonton's break with the central PLG. The principles were developed through an email discussion involving several former PLG members in late August 2016 as the IWC began to take shape. The initial starting point for the principles was a ten-point program drawing a degree of inspiration from Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale's ten-point program for the Black Panther Party. The initial ten points were:

1. Full time permanent employment
2. Equal remuneration for equal work
3. Unity for information workers in all areas
4. Recognition of the emotional, affective and intellectual nature of information work
5. Resistance to the oppression and domination of capitalist social relations
6. Rejection of the commodification of information
7. Awareness of the interconnection between social relations and technology, as well as the realization that technology is neither neutral nor deterministic
8. No discrimination against information workers regardless of worker characteristic, work type or any other factor
9. End to hierarchical workplaces
10. Solidarity with workers of all kinds

However, discussion participants found the points overly ambitious (especially point 9), and the ten points were subsequently revised into seven guiding principles by Braden Cannon, discussed and adopted as the guiding principles for the IWC at its inaugural meeting on August 30, 2016.³ The seven principles are:

Solidarity: Building networks of support, mutual aid, and resistance across the information professions while recognizing that our professions are a small part of a wider workers' movement;

Education: Using our positions to enhance access to and understanding of information in the community and encouraging our colleagues to question notions of neutrality, privilege, and hierarchy;

Organizing: Recognizing the importance of a well-organized workforce and community to effect change and actively engaging in campaigns, events, and networks that will build a strong, self-sufficient movement;

De-colonization: Acknowledging the historical legacy of the colonization of Indigenous peoples and working to counter the power imbalances that resulted from colonialism;

Equality: Challenging systemic structures that create power imbalances based on race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, or class;

³ Some final editing of the principles did occur via email on September 1, 2016.

Public Service: Recognizing that libraries and archives are essential public services necessary to a thriving democracy and resisting efforts to de-fund, privatize, outsource or otherwise undermine these public services and their role in advancing and safeguarding the public interest

Collectivism: Resisting capitalist hegemony and the dominance of capitalist-social relations, and reflexively understanding the role of power in all social relations (IWC, 2016)

The IWC also set up an agenda for a series of meetings through late 2016 that would establish the new organization. Although the new organization appeared ready to continue the work of PLG Edmonton, its existence was short-lived. An initial meeting was held in September of 2016, but the organization quickly came undone as the small core group saw some members leave the Edmonton community for new professional opportunities, and others reducing their levels of contribution due to changing life circumstances. While the email announcing the creation of the IWC had noted that the organization would host its inaugural Annual General Meeting in December of 2016 (IWC, 2016), the organization had dissolved before that meeting transpired; the IWC met for the last time in October 2016.

The collapse of the IWC created a void in the critical archival and library community in Edmonton. Yet the connections formed within PLG provided the potential for new work. All that was needed was a catalyst. Fortuitously, just such a catalyst came in a series of two interactions over the winter of 2016-2017. The fourth episode in the first season of *Shout for Libraries!*, a campus radio show from the University of Alberta put on by students of the MLIS program, focused on "Politics in the Libraries." The featured guests were Sam Popowich (University of Alberta Libraries) and Michael McNally (SLIS) (Shout for Libraries!, 2016). Hosted by Céline Gareau-Brennan, the conversation between Popowich and McNally, who already knew each other, ultimately resulted in an engaging podcast on the subject. Later, in early 2017 Popowich and McNally had an unplanned encounter at an Edmonton bus stop, and their conversation sparked the idea for a broader one-day conference on the politics of libraries.

The First PoL

Planning for the first PoL conference took place from May 2017 to April 2018. Popowich and McNally recruited SLIS students via an email which read:

The conference will address topics including precarity, neoliberalism and other, yet to be determined, issues facing the field. The conference will be one day (Apr 23, 24 or 25 (with the exact date to be determined)) and will include a mix of papers, round table discussions/panels and other means by which both presenters and attendees can delve into the subject matter. The timing is also connected to the 50th anniversary of the spring 1968 protests, which took place in many countries and reached a boiling point in May 1968, specifically in France.

If you are interested in helping plan the one day event, we would be happy to have you aboard. Sam and I both wish to ensure the day is engaging, critical and broadly relevant. (M. McNally, personal communication, June 5, 2017)

As noted in the email, the conference intentionally coincided with the 50th anniversary of the global 1968 social protests, and the goal of the conference was to provide a space for critical discussions on the politics of libraries that are often censored in workplaces and left out of classrooms. With roughly 40 attendees and nine presentations on topics ranging from neoliberalism to collective agreements and publishing practices in LIS,⁴ the conference appeared in many ways to reproduce the critical and collegial forum that was PLG's Organize and Assemble symposia.

Shortly after the gathering, Popowich (2018b) noted the moderate success of the event. Speakers from across Canada and one international presenter attended. Though there were some gaps, such as Indigenous-focused content, and little in the way of concrete proposals for change, the discussions generated sufficient enthusiasm among the organizers to host a second event. PoL II followed in August of 2019, this time with a theme of labour in libraries to recognize the centennial anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike in 1919. With nine presentations, a panel of students and recent MLIS graduates discussing precarious employment, and a slightly larger audience, momentum for a one-day, in-person, critical discussion forum in Edmonton was re-established.

Planning for a third in-person PoL in 2020 was stymied by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, PoL evolved from a full-day, in-person conference format in 2018 and 2019 to a multi-week, virtual speaker series format with the intent of continuing to provide a space for critical discussions on the politics of libraries.

⁴ For a list of speakers/topics for any of the PoL conferences/speakers' series, see: PoL (n.d).

While the initial format change was due to the ongoing global pandemic, the organizing committee for PoL IV in 2022 and PoL V in 2023 opted to continue with the online format for the expanded reach it provided. Each year, conference organizers select a new theme, with themes being Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Intersectionality in LIS (PoL III); Vocational Awe (PoL IV); Intellectual Freedom and Democracy (PoL V); and Solidarity in GLAM Institutions (PoL VI). The 2021 speaker series ran with five talks that spring. PoL IV grew to six talks. PoL V and VI's themes attracted far fewer submissions, resulting in just four talks in the springs of 2023 and 2024. While the first three PoLs eschewed having a keynote speaker, a decision made in part to reflect that no voice should be elevated above others, PoL IV, which focused on vocational awe, had Fobazi Ettarh as the keynote, given her foundational work on the topic (Ettarh, 2018). Ettarh's keynote (2022) reflected a high point for PoL with 269 people registering for the talk and over 100 people attending. Reflecting both Popowich's critical work in the area of intellectual freedom and his important contributions to founding PoL, Popowich was approached and agreed to give the keynote for PoL V (Popowich, 2023). Building off the IWC's guiding principles, the sixth speaker series once again eschewed having a keynote speaker, as the organizers felt that placing one voice above all others ran counter to its theme of solidarity, and the series ran with four talks over April and May 2024.

The shift in format from an in-person conference to an online event created opportunity for important changes such as increased access to the series through a collection in the University of Alberta's digital repository (University of Alberta: ERA, n.d.). While only one set of slides from PoL II was deposited in the collection (and nothing from the first PoL), video recordings from ten talks from PoL III to V populate the collection. Since the creation of this collection, the videos from PoL III and IV have been viewed more than 100 times, with the most popular talk being Blechinger's analysis of QAnon's appropriation of information literacy in online chat groups. That video has been viewed over 325 times as of 2021 (Blechinger, 2021). The move to an online format also broke down geographic barriers to being involved in the organizing committee. Although the majority of PoL conferences have remained Edmonton-based, contributors based in Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia have also been involved in the past three years.

While the small organizing committee for PoL (ranging from six to nine members) has primarily focused on the conference/speaker series, there have been discussions about PoL expanding beyond the series. In July of 2021 the idea of broadening PoL into an organization was discussed at a meeting of the speaker series organizers, however, nothing came to fruition. In May of 2023 the discussion was reprised with ideas ranging from developing a book to transforming into an

advocacy organization. Yet, at the time of this writing, no substantive action has been taken in any of these directions.

Reflecting on PLG and PoL

For over a decade, critical archivists, librarians, information workers and students in the Edmonton area (and a few from further afield) have contributed to creating a critical forum for discussion of contemporary issues in the field of LIS. However, broader contributions to the field — such as collective organizing, activism against the neoliberal status quo, advocating for ourselves and our labour in interdisciplinary spheres, and using our collective power to leverage more control over the way we work — remain elusive. Both Edmonton PLG and PoL have seen interest wax and wane. PLG was able to undertake advocacy work, run the annual symposium, and make contributions to scholarship (both in articles about the activity of the PLG chapter, and *Progressive Librarian* volume 43). Despite these achievements, breaking away from the larger PLG group did not enable the IWC to succeed. It can also be argued that PoL reached its own high point with PoL IV in 2022. The 2023 and 2024 speaker series witnessed both a decline in the number of presentations and in the number of registrations. PoL IV had 307 total registrants across all six talks with the two most popular sessions having 269 registrants and the least popular session garnering 206 registrations. In contrast, PoL V had only 163 registrations for four talks, with the most popular session having 122 registrations and the least popular session getting just 97 registrants. PoL VI had four talks as well, though its most popular session garnered only 94 registrations at the time of this writing. Although part of the decline in interest in PoL V and VI may stem from a tiring of online sessions three years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the decline in both submissions and registrations may also suggest fatigue with PoL in general or disinterest in the themes.

Contrasting Edmonton PLG with PoL, it might be argued that the former achieved far more than the latter. PoL has yet to take on any action beyond its conference and speaker series. This difference can be explained in part by the distinctive make-up of each group: Edmonton PLG was largely comprised of professionals, many of whom had full-time, stable employment. Conversely, students or precariously employed recent graduates have overwhelmingly contributed to PoL. PoL has been smaller and more fluid with fewer stable contributors. Only two of the original nine organizers have stayed involved for all six iterations. While PoL currently has eight organizers, many volunteers have been involved for two or three iterations of the conference/series before moving on. The transitory nature of PoL is understandable — students and recent graduates often readjust their

priorities and find themselves with less free time as they find more stable employment and as the general demands of their personal and professional lives change. Still, it provides further evidence of an organization less capable of labour organizing and advocacy work. Finally, Edmonton PLG was better organized. The PLG chapter had dues-paying members and an active bank account. Its meetings proceeded in a formal fashion, with established rules and notice-of-motion requirements. PoL's meetings are far less structured, with no terms of reference and sometimes no planned agenda. A significant amount of the planning has occurred via long email chains (a curious approach, given the organizers are information professionals and organization is usually what library workers do best). There is no structure for collecting dues or managing finances of any kind. Furthermore, PoL capitalizes on the fact that University of Alberta MLIS students are required to take on "voluntary" extra-curricular activities in order to meet the requirements of the LIS 600 capping exercise course (University of Alberta, 2023). Despite these limitations, PoL has continued, inspired in part by the hope that more serious organizing and advocacy can evolve from conference/speaker series.

In Conclusion: On Organizing

The belief that has in part animated PoL, which also underpinned part of Edmonton PLG's transformation into the IWC, is the idea of greater organization across workers in the archival, library and information sector. The crises faced by the field in the early 2010s, including the cancellation of the NADP and the LAC *Code of Conduct* demonstrated the inability of the now defunct Canadian Library Association to advocate effectively on behalf of workers (Oliphant & McNally, 2014). While several formal information workers' organizations exist in Canada, most notably CAUT's Librarian and Archivist Committee, the Association of Canadian Archivists, CAPAL, and CUPE's National Library Workers Committee — which issued its first report in 2013 when LAC was precipitating crises in the field (Barriage, 2013) — a truly national workers organization covering all kinds of archival and library workers remains elusive. What is clear is that while PoL (and its predecessor Edmonton PLG) may have been successful in organizing discussion fora, these have not led to more effective or cross-disciplinary labour organizing.

PoL's conference and speaker series style is still very much a pressure valve for library and information workers to promote their own work, network, and/or blow off steam rather than actively rejecting existing systems to bring about radical change. Drabinski (2019) underscores that "it is simply not enough, not ever and certainly not in this urgent moment, to develop a critique, and then head to the pub for a pint" (p. 56). However, this exactly how PoL I and II concluded the

conference, while the online speaker series doesn't even include the option for a collective drink afterwards. While we have been able to create fora for critiquing library status quo, we have never been able to organize those critiques into a tangible movement for change to that status quo. Furthermore, the conference and speaker series formats rarely reach an audience outside of the LIS community. Both Sloniowski (2016) and Almeida (2020) argue that academic librarians should facilitate resistance by engaging in critical interdisciplinary scholarship beyond traditional LIS journals. Fostering conversations, particularly ones focused on topics of dissent, civic engagement and critiques of neutrality, is also emphasized as a mode of critical engagement that connects struggles within libraries to broader issues in academia and can challenge unequal power dynamics (Sloniowski, 2016; Drabinski, 2019). PoL has largely eschewed a connection to the archival community, which Edmonton PLG embraced. In this way, it is perhaps naive to think that the PoL could rally library, archival and information workers to lead the charge against institutional dysfunction; to critique, call out, and call in the way we do our work; and to effect change. Ultimately, most workers cannot critique their employers if they want to feed, clothe and house themselves. Despite intellectual freedom being a supposed cornerstone of the field, the fact that only a minority have such freedom — specifically academic librarians and archivists who have the benefit of academic freedom stipulated by collective agreements — limits critical conversation (and in turn the ability to use such conversation for organizing). Although academic librarians in particular are well positioned to advance collective resistance, Popowich (2019) reminds us that immaterial librarian labour is enmeshed in the system that facilitates the commodification of labour and production of academic commodities, which in turn reinforces capitalist logic on the field. While LIS literature has some important case studies on labour organizing and unionization (for example, see Caffrey & Kimmitt, 2022; Dekker & Kandiuk (Eds.), 2014; McElroy, 2019), creating a broad-based national information workers organization is obstructed by the fact that public library workers, government archivists and librarians, and non-librarian staff in academic contexts — among others — lack the ability to speak openly without fear of retribution.

The experiences of both groups also underscore the problem of relying on voluntary labour. The situation is exacerbated in PoL, which derives a significant share of its labour power from students. Despite running a speaker series on the concept of vocational awe, PoL appears to use the same "set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in notions that libraries as institutions are inherently good" (Ettarh, 2018) in mobilizing its contributors. PoL invited both Ettarh and Popowich as keynote

speakers, but was unable to remunerate them in any way for their contributions, underscoring the reliance on exploiting voluntary labour. From a reductive and instrumentalist lens, PoL could be conceived as a way for LIS students to attain experience planning conferences, while speakers accrue professional credit through contributions to scholarship — both part of the system of the commodification of intellectual labour (Popowich, 2019). But the fundamental issue limiting groups such as Edmonton PLG and PoL from solidifying their organizations is the lack of capital. Although CUPE's National Library Workers Committee can draw on the organizational power of unionized labour, and CAUT can mobilize the service work of professional academic librarians and archivists, uniting and organizing the entire field of information workers appears highly challenging when efforts rely on voluntary labour. Organizing workers across Canadian libraries is inherently challenged by a multitude of factors including regionalism; institutional differences between public, academic, school and other libraries; differences in professional status; and the sheer number of workers involved.

A third challenge lies in uniting the archival and library communities. The former is represented by a national archivists' organization, which presents some challenges in considering how a national information workers organization could co-exist with the Association of Canadian Archivists. With respect to librarianship, fragmented professional control, which results from the American Library Association accrediting MLIS programs in Canada leaving Canadian LIS professionals with no formal control over the MLIS, presents a further complication (McNally, 2024). Although collective action is emphasized, several analysts have pointed to the weaknesses of library associations and the inherent tension faced by such associations trying to serve the interests of workers and employers (Oliphant & McNally, 2014; Dekker & Kandiuk, 2014; Phillipps, Eifler & Page, 2019; Zyvagintseva & Ribaric, 2023). The CLA and now the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) represent the interests of library employers, not library workers. This orientation was made evident by the CLA's weak response to the LAC *Code of Conduct* (Oliphant & McNally, 2014) and more recently by the CFLA's response to *Irreversible Damage* (CFLA, 2021) and the subsequent open letter to the CFLA critiquing its stance from a broad swath of Canadian librarians who felt the organization did not speak for them (Open Letter, 2021). Furthermore, calling for a national library workers' organization may unintentionally lead to further institutionalizing our already-institutionalized work (Drabinski, 2016; Seale, 2020). Without a serious discussion on what it means to be a 'library professional,' where professionalization privileges some and not others, the creation of a national

organization runs the risk of duplicating the institutional hierarchies we are critiquing (Drabinski, 2016).

Ultimately while the work of the PoL and the Edmonton PLG was, to some degree animated by a belief in what could be, the limitations inherent in those groups along with the structural problems of limited academic and intellectual freedom, reliance on voluntary labour, lack of capital, and the existing institutional dynamics within the Canadian library and archives sectors significantly hinders organizing. Nevertheless, we should not discount the work that both groups have done to bring attention to these issues. McElroy (2019) suggests that not all organizing work will be successful, but that iterative failures can be valuable if they contribute to eventual gains. Although they are still working with the master's tools (Lorde, 2018), they do, "emphasize shared points of struggle in solidarity, and not turning away from the work of troubling, unsettling, or problematizing the mythology of a field" (Pagowsky, 2022, p. 721). Discourse is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, and in that regard the work of PLG and PoL represents just one piece of a broader resistance to neoliberalism and advancement of library and information workers' collective interests. Finally, while the short-lived IWC failed to realize any major achievements, its principles can perhaps serve as a starting point for the arduous work of organizing information workers in Canada; we hope this paper can likewise further critical conversations toward organizing information workers. As Angela Davis once stated, "If we manage to convey those struggles in such a way that another generation comes and takes it up and moves it further... those who are on our shoulders have a much longer vision – they're able to see much further" (Davis, 2019, quoted by Bradbury). We hope that future library workers, archivists and information professionals will stand on our shoulders and achieve more than we ever could.

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