

"Who Speaks for Libraries and Librarians?"

Panel presentation at "Contested Terrain: Shaping the Future of Academic Librarianship." Canadian Association of University Teachers: Librarians Conference. Ottawa. October 2012.

I'd first like to thank my co-panelist Lisa Sloniwoski for having thought of me when she and Erin Patterson and Paul Jones were organizing this panel. One of the reasons I was approached concerns my recent experience with CLA, which I'll detail a little bit later. For now I'll just say that although this panel broadly speaking addresses leadership in our library associations, I'd like to focus today on CLA and its potential for effective advocacy on behalf of the library community. When I say library community," I am putting the emphasis on the word community and I intend it in the broadest sense to include:

1. all information workers - managers, non-managers, librarians, archivists and other staff;
2. all those invested in the products of libraries and library labour, including:
 - research communities - all levels within and outside formal institutions;
 - the government and its law-makers
 - citizens of Canada, whose democracy we have as a central focus in our jobs.
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In my opinion, CLA's major weakness is that it has failed to mobilize even its core member community around the value of libraries and the roles libraries play in a democratic society. CLA has an extensive network of members at the ready; members who are willing to engage in true advocacy and who have, especially lately, been frustrated by the lack of coordination or implementation of advocacy at CLA. It's not only CLA members who are poised for action - since it considers itself the spoke-body of all library workers in Canada, one could hypothesize that CLA might coordinate a massive pan-library movement that could include labour issues, our national information infrastructure, freedom of expression and so on. And let me reiterate - I think CLA actually has this potential. Many of its members feel that way as well, which I know from having read opinion pieces regarding CLA on various blogs, from having recently interviewed members and former members, and from having been copied on emails to CLA regarding its leadership with respect to important issues, such as the budget cuts to LAC. One of the reasons I think CLA has this capacity is because I know that it has has this past. Let me explain.

Earlier this year, I began a research project using archival material at LAC for the purpose of uncovering the labour organizing of academic librarians in Canada. I knew that CAUT had deposited many records relating to the subject (and thank goodness they were deposited long ago, and not subject to the current embargo on new acquisitions of private donor records.) During my investigation, I was shocked to see how prominent a role CLA played in advocating for academic librarian rights in the workplace. I, like many of you I suspect, have only known CLA in its current form- an organization whose Executive Council is thick with senior library management, has a reputation for being conservative and cowardly, for being slow to react to urgent matters, for not supporting library workers, for being too expensive to join and irrelevant to many.

But getting back to my research ... there I was in the reading room of the LAC and discovering for the first time through historical documents, just how active and activist CLA used to be. This study almost turned into a side project simply because there were so many records and they were so surprising that I

felt a responsibility to tell the story. In the end I decided not to, but I am glad to have the opportunity to mention some of my findings to you today. And just a note - although these records pertain specifically to academic librarians, since that was the focus of my research, I also furthered my study by reading the book *The Morton Years* by Elizabeth Hulse which is overflowing with tales of CLA's early activism, including at least two separate cases where the association intervened in wrongful dismissal cases against librarians, and one other case where CLA publicly opposed a job description advertised in its own publication because it considered the functions of the job problematic. One could conclude that CLA felt it a core part of its mandate to support library workers - even though - to refer to a contemporary argument for not doing so - it is quite possible that the librarians involved were managed by other CLA members and that the institutions they worked for might have also been members. CLA took up the fight because back then, its leadership understood what it was to protect the profession, which naturally includes protecting those practicing the profession.

Also, just a side note but one that is important for the context of my talk today - one of CLA's earliest mandates and some might even say the reason it was formed - was to create a national library of Canada. CLA lobbied heavily and consistently until it achieved that goal. It's a very different road from the one that CLA is on today.

So, among my findings....in the late 1950's, CLA ran several articles reporting on the standards and salaries of Canadian academic librarians - not academic libraries please note, but academic *librarians*. The author of the articles (who was probably Elizabeth Morton, CLA's first Executive Director) notes that staff working under the head librarian did not have equivalent rank to other academic positions in the university, hinting at what later would be a strong CLA stand regarding the status of academic librarians. CLA also officially released a statement that it "fears the gap between library staff salaries and teaching staff salaries is having a discouraging effect on the recruitment of academic librarians."^[1] CLA pursued this line of argument and in 1959, recommended a ranking classification scheme based on the usual four ranks of university teachers. It went even further to recommend actual salaries for these ranks which were in line with faculty salaries. This is the earliest document I found relating to salary parity, an issue that we've discussed before at this very conference and one which continues to be an item of discussion for academic librarians to this day.

Another example from a decade later was that, at the request of CLA, CAUT performed a survey of librarians in Canadian universities to uncover the status of librarians at each institution for the purposes of determining: a) whether or not academic librarians had faculty or academic status and b) whether or not librarians should be members of CAUT. CLA was thus one of the original catalysts for the academic librarian status discussions that would preoccupy the profession for decades to come. CAUT finished the job by issuing policy statements on the subject years later, but these discussions may not have taken place or may not have taken place at that point in time had CLA not pushed CAUT in that direction. In fact what the records show was that CLA often took the lead on academic librarian issues and then passed them on to CAUT which would formulate recommendations for actions. But CLA was the starting point, especially in the years before librarians were officially members of CAUT.

The close working relationship between CLA and CAUT continued on into the 1970's. To my surprise, I found documentation regarding a collective bargaining workshop organized by The Canadian

Association of College and University Libraries or CACUL which until last year, was an interest group of CLA. The workshop was held at CLA's annual general meeting in Edmonton that year. The workshop was called "Writing, Negotiating and Administering a Contract," and the author of the document expected at least 100 people from the CLA delegation to attend this all day session.^[2] In fact, throughout the 1970's there is evidence of a CAUT-CACUL committee which made recommendations on salaries, librarian-faculty equity, academic status, library privileges for retired faculty and librarian members and even held discussions regarding a national association of librarians. Although the documents do not explicitly indicate this, I have guessed that the CAUT-CACUL group was likely the basis for the incorporation of the CAUT Librarians committee in CAUT in 1975. It's impressive how closely CLA worked with CAUT to achieve tangible improvements to the conditions of academic librarians in Canada and that CLA has a legacy in the CAUT Librarians Committee. So in a way, we're all here because of CLA's advocacy work. How many people in this room would have raise their hands if I'd asked "Do you believe that we are all here in this room, at a CAUT Librarians conference talking about the future of the profession specifically from a labour angle, because of CLA?" I suspect not many.

A collective bargaining "how to" presentation at the annual CLA meeting... It's almost unthinkable for many of us because we've never known this CLA from the archives. We've never seen CLA fight for anything other than a few choice issues, and certainly we've never seen it stand up for working conditions of academic librarians or any type of librarian or library workers. In fact, what we've seen and what some of us have experienced, is quite the opposite - the stifling of freedom of expression, the rejection or deliberate ignorance of member input including resolutions passed at its own annual meetings, the refusal of CLA to take any politically delicate or controversial stand in the face of threats to librarians and library workers, its complicity in the undoing of our national library and archives and so on.

Just to come back to my experience last spring for a moment. Those of you who are subscribed to the CAUT librarians list-serv may recall message after message about the budget cuts LAC, staff cuts, the whittling away or discontinuation of services. It seemed to me at the time (though in retrospect I think I was quite naive and not all experienced at dealing with CLA) it seemed to me that because CLA had been such a force in advocating for the National Library of Canada and that it had fought for librarians in the past, that CLA would step up to the plate and once again fight for the national library and its workers. Through my study of the history I had awakened to the potential that CLA has for good - after all it was CLA's extensive and unrelenting advocacy that resulted in a Canadian national library to begin with!^[3] So I did what seemed logical at the time - I called CLA and asked it to support a Day of Action at its conference where the target would be Daniel Caron, head of LAC, and the keynote speaker. On the phone, I mentioned CLA's former work on behalf of the National Library and noted that the association had recently sent a letter to Minister James Moore regarding its dismay at the situation there. I requested that information about the Day of Action be emailed to all conference delegates to make them aware of the cuts, to better prepare them for the keynote by circulating information regarding what was happening at LAC so that they could confront Daniel Caron with confidence. After all, CLA was preparing for a major advocacy activity - its Day on the Hill which was both an advocacy boot camp and meetings with MPs to talk library issues. Of course I didn't know at the time that participants were discouraged from mentioning the cuts to the LAC to MPs, something I found out after interviewing one

of the participants. My request for support was denied. No discussion. And to my knowledge, the it was never shared with the Executive Council or members; it was a unilateral decision made on the spot. It seemed to me at the time and still does, that the conference was a golden opportunity to mobilize - all delegates together, facing the same threat. A group of well-informed people might have challenged Daniel Caron and his policies quite effectively just as the archivists at the Association of Canadian Archivists did a month or so later at their meeting in the Yukon. Or when they organized the On to Ottawa Trek. Or when they had the funeral for the LAC. Instead, Daniel Caron was in no significant way confronted over the cuts and from what I heard later, the audience was marginalized by CLA itself, whose President insisted on mediating feedback by monopolizing the microphone, and stripping questions and comments of any semblance of challenge.

Although CLA did not support the Day of Action, colleagues and I decided nonetheless to go ahead with the protest. The core group consisted of library workers from various organizations, some retired, some working. Some emailed me to say they supported the Day of Action and wanted ribbons, but couldn't be seen at the conference. They had just been given notices that they would have to fight for their positions and they couldn't risk it. There were others who appeared at the event but whose names I never got. We made ribbons and leaflets to hand out and spoke with conference delegates on their way into the conference... until we were asked to leave. In total about 15 Day of Action volunteers were refused access to the CLA conference because CLA considered spreading information about the cuts to the LAC "inappropriate." We were bounced out of the conference area by official Conference Centre bouncers - I didn't even know conference bouncers existed until the CLA conference. And just in case you think that conference bouncers are a joke or smaller than the usual bouncers we encounter from time to time in private venues, I assure you that although they were polite, they were neither small nor a joke. We continued our inappropriateness just outside the conference centre until the very last delegate trickled in that morning, and I even attempted to hand Daniel Caron's handlers a ribbon and some leaflets. They declined.

The question I came away with after all was said and done was how representative was my experience and the experiences of the other volunteers who turned up despite short notice, left work, left the free vendor breakfasts, who risked being seen and found out by LAC management, who covertly handed out ribbons and information at the registration desk and welcome booth, who snuck into the conference room and placed SAVE LAC bookmarks on most of the seats --- how representative was our experience of CLA with respect to its lack of support of librarians, its restriction on freedom of speech and its insistence on status quo even in the face of major service and collection cuts at LAC? I felt that if my experience was typical, then clearly CLA was not even defending libraries, let alone librarians.

To answer my own question, I interviewed some former CLA members based in Ottawa (former members because they recently chose not to renew their memberships) and I've collected feedback from blogs and emails sent to me - and from my analysis of these, I have concluded that that my experience past spring was in fact quite typical of how CLA reacts whenever anyone attempt to push for more activism or advocacy. I've heard stories that range from moderate resistance, such as how CLA on the Hill Day participants were requested not to discuss cuts to the LAC with MPs, to true censorship. I interviewed a former member of CLA's Communications Advisory Group who, with another member, tried to implement a communications plan that would include challenges to libraries, librarians, access

to information and intellectual freedom. The plan was flatly rejected for straying from CLA's established and ultimately ineffective forms of advocacy. There have also been complaints from members of that same group regarding CLA's failure to adopt recommendations regarding positions on Intellectual Freedom. The group's mandate was promptly changed from being a Communications Advisory Group to being the body that identifies guest editors and themes for *Felicitermagazine*.

After my experience at the conference and publishing a piece on the librarians site of the University of Ottawa's faculty association^[4], several people commented on their own experiences with CLA. I'll read a small sample:

"LAC, the repository for our printed heritage is in the process of being destroyed and the CLA is censoring those trying to bring the issues to light.."

"[CLA] is delusional to think that by being quiet on this issue that the federal government will be kind to libraries in the future...What abysmal leadership in the midst of a war on knowledge."

"I was always appalled at the lack of action on the part of CLA when it came to freedom of expression. I joined ALA and found it to be a much more proactive. Cowardly is a polite term I would use to describe CLA's position on just about everything."

And my personal favourite:

"Somehow the CLA bosses have managed to sink to an even lower level than those of the LAC." From these and many other comments, I think it's safe to say that CLA is not on the right path, especially with respect to its core advocacy mandate. But the question for today is what is the right path? Is it more active provincial associations? Unions? Faculty associations? An all out general strike? I'd like to suggest that includes the community I referred to at the beginning of this talk: all library workers, research communities, and the citizens of Canada. I'd like for us to see natural connections between librarians and scientists when they hit the streets in a Death of Evidence march. I'd like for library workers to view access to information and intellectual freedom as the fundamental pieces in their advocacy work, and be able to articulate these to decision-makers, law-makers and society at large. One retired librarian from the Library of Parliament copied me on her message to CLA post-conference. She writes:
I had the opportunity to discuss cuts to Library and Archive Canada (LAC) with Hervé Déry, assistant deputy minister for LAC in charge of policy and collaboration. His opinion is that the library community is not concerned with the cuts to LAC. He said the archivists were upset by the changes to programs and services and had marched in the streets.

Is it going to mean taking to the streets? I found examples of groups doing interesting work, but not necessarily marching. For example, BCLA's Library Month campaign this year encourages citizens to communicate with their MPs regarding the cuts to the LAC, the National Archival Development Program and federal libraries. The campaign ends with the words "Many voices, joined in a common cause, can make a difference. Join us this October and tell your MP these cuts affect everyone."^[5] This is the best example of a Library Month campaign that I've seen this year, but it's singular in more than one way. There are no links on the site to similar campaigns from other provinces or from other library associations.

South of the border, John Chrastka, a former director at ALA, is in the process of forming a Political Action Committee or PAC for libraries. EveryLibrary will educate the voting public about libraries, library budgets, library staffing and all related issues. It also assists libraries in formulating and articulating their

needs and mobilizing the public to vote for libraries, including information the public of the consequences of a negative vote such as the closure of public libraries or the worsening of school libraries.

Other library associations have developed political campaigns that are simpler than developing a PAC, but have been effective. The Save NYC Libraries campaign, for example, which was developed by Urban Librarians Unite (or ULU) based in New York City, had each member encourage 10 other people to call 311 and leave a scripted message for the city's budget officer regarding the closure of libraries. The campaign launched in mid-June and by August 30th, when the budget was announced, the city of New York announced no library closures and citizens were assured of 5 day a week service in all areas of the city.

I've already mentioned the archivists but they have also been a model. They coordinated quickly, efficiently and broadly. When I attended the funeral for NADP, the archivists had organized media, speeches from the heritage critics from both the Liberal Party Scott Simms, and the NDP, Andrew Cash, CAUT supported the event, and the icing on the cake was that much of it took place right on the front steps of the building. No one ever questioned whether or not Daniel Caron might be offended - in fact I think that was part of the plan.

With its vast network of members, CLA has all the capacity for an all out campaign regarding any issue that the library community write large deems important. But in both its actions and its words, CLA has fallen short of my expectations as well as others', and the time has come to move forward in a new way. I look forward to discussing the possibilities with you today.

Post script - When I rehearsed this talk for friends and family, I got many suggestions, including "make it less negative," and "make it less utopian," and "don't be so hard on CLA." I obediently followed these directions because I didn't want to alienate you - my audience, because I really believe that we need solidarity now. We're living in dangerous times, orchestrated by dangerous governments at all levels that would see our public spaces decrease, our middle class workers take cuts in salary and lose job security, forfeit our rights to bargain collectively or use labour action as a political and economic tool.

The Conservative Government's attack on the Library and Archives Canada is symbolic of what's gone so wrong. If you've never been there, I suggest you go. It's a great building - a public building - where every person who wants to can enter and access our public and cultural record. Of course, I'm not suggesting that there are no problems with the institution - its collections and staff embody our collective history, which includes racism, gender stereotyping, class hierarchy and so on. But as an institution that does what it does - collecting, preserving and diffusing our common culture and collective historical identity - it needs protection, and it needs us to stand up for it.

The National Archival Development Program also stood in opposition to our government's political and economic agenda. Of the five goals of the program, goal number three was to "Increase representation of Aboriginal peoples and under-represented ethno-cultural groups in Canada's archival heritage." Canadian projects including one at UBC to [revitalize and preserve indigenous languages](#) benefitted from NADP funding. But perhaps more importantly, UBC also created an infrastructure assist indigenous

communities in addressing their own archival holdings with the help of the NADP. And this is just one project- there are dozens of similar stories across Canada.

There is no way that these cuts are politically neutral. Both the LAC and the NADP are ideologically opposite to the policies that minimize our access to information and documentary heritage and reduce the ability of some of our most disadvantaged communities to capture and pass on their heritage.

With or without CLA, please fight these cuts.

^[1] CAUT Survey of Salaries in Canadian Universities (1959-1961), p. 4. M G28 I 208 vol. 64. Library and Archives Canada.

^[2] Ron D. Lowe to Tom Eadie, January 23, 1978. M G28 I208 Vol. 274. Library and Archives Canada.

^[3] See Hulse, Elizabeth. *The Morton Years: The Canadian Library Association, 1946-1971*. Toronto: Ex-Libris Association, 1995.

^[4] See "Librarians Silenced at CLA Conference," *Bibliothécaires de l'APUO / APUO Librarians*, June 1, 2012. <https://apuobibliolib.wordpress.com/2012/06/01/librarians-silenced-at-cla-conference/>

^[5] See "Express Yourself! Protest the Cuts to Library and Archives Canada and other Federal Libraries this October," British Columbia Library Association. <http://bit.ly/V6napj>