With the fifth anniversary of the unofficial founding of the Edmonton chapter of the Progressive Librarians Guild coming in spring of 2015, now is perhaps an auspicious occasion to reflect on our brief but eventful history with the goal of learning from our experiences and sharing these experiences with the wider PLG. Please bear in mind that I do so from my own subjective experiences as a charter member, rather than this being an official undertaking by the chapter as a whole.

From the onset, the Edmonton PLG was a different breed of PLG chapter, one made almost entirely of people working in the information field. We did not arise from a university or a library program and never had an official connection to any such institute of higher learning. No students were involved in the formation of the chapter and this, coupled with a wide membership including librarians, library technicians, and archivists, made our group unique among PLG chapters. Furthermore, we are a Canadian chapter, and at the time of our foundation, the only PLG chapter in the country (the Halifax PLG was the first chapter to form in Canada in 2008, but that group was defunct by 2010).

The impetus to form the Edmonton PLG came from a lunch meeting that I had with Amanda Bird of the Edmonton Public Library and Toni Samek of the University of Alberta’s School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS). Toni had heard that I had been involved in the formation of the Halifax PLG and wanted to know about that experience, and so Amanda introduced and joined us for a lunch that ultimately led to a commitment to form an Edmonton chapter of the PLG.

Over the summer of 2010, further conversations with colleagues led to the recruitment of two more interested individuals, Raymond Frogner (then...
of the University of Alberta Archives) and Rene Georgopalis (then of the St. Albert Musée Heritage). The five of us proceeded to plan our inaugural event, a panel discussion on a host of topics related to social justice and the information profession. The event, dubbed Social Justice in the Stacks, was held at SLIS in November 2010 and was designed to both engage the wider information community in social justice topics and to attract more members. The event, promoted through word of mouth and through various professional listservs in the Edmonton area, was well-attended. The interest generated from that event led to a large spike in our membership and in December 2010, we held our first official meeting. These meetings have been held on a monthly basis ever since.

Laying a Foundation

The importance of infrastructure was greatly emphasized from that first meeting in late 2010. My experiences with the Halifax PLG taught me that a basic structure to the chapter and to its meetings would be essential in creating a lasting organization. Furthermore, the Halifax experience showed that while the enthusiasm and fresh perspectives of students is invaluable, the Edmonton chapter would not survive if it relied entirely on students. The Halifax chapter was composed entirely of students and faced a substantial turnover every two years. In addition, that chapter maintained a very informal approach and did not have any defined positions or keep minutes of its meetings. Once the charter members of the Halifax PLG graduated, the loose structure of the organization did not survive beyond two years.

With this in mind, the Edmonton PLG elected a secretary, treasurer, and communications officer at its first meeting. The secretary was responsible for ensuring that agendas were made for monthly meetings, keeping minutes, maintaining the chapter’s records, and dealing with correspondence. The treasurer was responsible for the chapter’s bank account and for ensuring that dues were sent to the central PLG. Finally, the communications officer was responsible for maintaining the chapter’s email account and online presence, including our website and social media accounts.

The most important facet of these officer positions is that they are directly accountable to the chapter membership and hold absolutely no executive power whatsoever. Through quorum, the chapter democratically makes all decisions in our monthly general meetings; the officers merely ensure that the business of the chapter is attended.

A second plank in our foundation was the creation of chapter bylaws, a document designed to ensure the survival of the group beyond the participation of its founding members (see Appendix A). There was some discussion on the necessity of such a document, but my experience in Halifax was a good
argument in favour of taking the time to draft and maintain bylaws. At the beginning, the bylaws were all self-explanatory and we were sure to add a clause that would allow for easy amendments. The bylaws have subsequently been amended several times as new situations arose that could not have been foreseen from the onset.

A third foundational decision was to keep minutes at every meeting, both general and committee meetings, and to adopt a loose interpretation of Robert’s Rules so as to prevent meandering, directionless meetings. The imposition of Robert’s Rules was perhaps the biggest subject of debate in those early months but quickly became the standard by which our meetings are run.

Because of these decisions, the Edmonton PLG has run smoothly for nearly five years now, holding general, monthly meetings and keeping a record of our past decisions and discussions in order to hold each other accountable and to ensure that decisions made by the membership are acted upon in due course. If there is one bit of advice that we could offer other PLG chapters, either existing or potential, it would be to impose organizational structures such as these.

**Building Momentum**

Having established our organizational structure, we began planning events and actively engaging with the wider community. Our first event, in February 2011, was related to Freedom to Read Week and consisted of creating “censored” versions of paperbacks by wrapping the covers with white paper with a warning to not read the “censored” book. These covered books were then distributed at random sites around the city with information about the PLG Edmonton inserted inside. This project was intended to get the word out about both our chapter and Banned Books Week.

We also reached out to other groups across Canada in order to strengthen ties of solidarity and build a network of information workers. The chapter actively supported and reached out to colleagues who found themselves under attack at their jobs at McMaster University, Toronto Public Libraries, and the University of Western Ontario. We stood in solidarity with these workers by drafting statements of support and distributing said statements through listservs and email. These solidarity statements were well-received by the affected colleagues as well as colleagues from across the country and helped raise the profile of the PLG in Canada.

In addition to building networks with information workers across the country, we also reached out to leftist organizations and movements in Edmonton in order to create a tighter bond between our focus on information work and wider issues affecting our community. This led to a working relationship with the Edmonton branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) as well as highly visible participation in Edmonton’s annual May Day march, for
which we made a PLG banner that never fails to attract attention from fellow marchers. Our relationship with the Edmonton IWW led to an organizer training workshop put on in 2012 by the IWW specifically for PLG members, most of whom work in white-collar information settings such as libraries and archives. The Edmonton PLG has emphasized the need to organize in the workplace and therefore has made an effort to educate its members in the tactics and strategies of grassroots, workplace organizing as expounded by the IWW.

Another highlight in 2012 was the remarkable organizing that evolved in response to the federal government’s cuts to Library and Archives Canada, including the dissolution of the National Archival Development Program, which funded archives work across the country and was an immensely successful project. The Edmonton PLG spearheaded protests against these cuts that culminated with the Archivists’ On to Ottawa Trek. The Trek was composed of simultaneous protests in Edmonton, London (mounted by the PLG chapter at Western University), and Ottawa, where over 100 archivists and allies marched and held a funeral for archives funding at the steps of Library and Archives Canada. The Edmonton protest had approximately 30 attendees who gave Edmonton residents the unlikely and bizarre sight of angry archivists marching and chanting through the streets of downtown Edmonton and outside of the federal building.

Another point of emphasis in our early years was the importance of a wide spectrum of membership across professional divisions. While we are a leftist organization and do not seek to become an umbrella for all manner of information workers, including those who do not actively agree with our principles, we do strive to make our organization welcoming for all those information workers and students whose beliefs align with ours. With that in mind, we have made
active and continual attempts to recruit not just information workers who hold graduate degrees, but also students and information workers from technical services and related fields.

To give a fair assessment, our attempts to create a PLG chapter of all manner of information workers and students have had mixed results. The chapter’s membership in 2011 and 2012 was definitely a cross-section of the information field, with active participation from librarians, archivists, technicians, and students. Since that time, many students have come and gone as they graduate, which is to be expected, but we have also lost the participation of all of the technicians who used to be involved. This is decidedly a failure of our stated goal, and as of writing, we have had no success in reversing this trend. We still endeavour to include a wide variety of information workers, however, and visit both SLIS and the library technician program at MacEwan University annually to introduce those students to the PLG and what we are about.

Organize & Assemble

Since 2011, our biggest undertaking has been an annual symposium, Organize & Assemble. We decided that we wanted an event that would allow for an open exchange of ideas, theories, and practical advice related to social justice movements and the information field. We wanted such an event to be fundamentally different from professional conferences in that the stated goal was not only to provide a forum for leftist discussion but also to build a wider movement, hence the name of the event, which refers to the professional activities that we are engaged in as well as the organization of an information workers’ movement.

The first Organize & Assemble was held in October 2011 and featured presenters speaking on a host of topics. It did not have a theme, as we wanted to encourage as much participation as possible. The result was a success; we had a strong lineup of presenters and attracted attendees from across the province and even from British Columbia and Saskatchewan. For a more in-depth discussion of these proceedings, please refer to Stephen MacDonald’s Conference Proceedings: Organize & Assemble – the First Symposium of the Edmonton Branch of the PLG in Progressive Librarian 36/37, 2011.

The second Organize & Assemble followed in October 2012. Likewise, it did not have a specific theme but saw presentations on such topics as digital labour and innovation rhetoric in the library field (please see Stephen MacDonald’s Organize and Assemble II: Progressive Librarians’ Guild Edmonton’s Symposium in Progressive Librarian 41, 2013). The 2013 edition of Organize & Assemble was the first to have a theme, which was precarious labour in the information sector. This symposium featured a presentation from Gil McGowan of the Alberta Federation of Labour, who spoke on the challenges
facing the labour movement due to the Temporary Foreign Workers program. Other presenters talked about providing library services to Temporary Foreign Workers as well as efforts to unionize at academic libraries.

*Organize and Assemble IV* took place this past October and focused on the commodification of information. The issue of *Progressive Librarian* at hand is devoted entirely to those proceedings so you can see for yourself the strength and relevance of the program.

Since 2011, organizing the annual symposium has been the major, on-going project of the Edmonton PLG and an entire article could be devoted to these experiences. For now, we want to provide a brief overview of the development of *Organize & Assemble* and refrain from further analysis until a later date.

**Hitting a Wall**

Like all chapters of the PLG, the Edmonton chapter is composed of volunteers and there is a limit to the time and energy that volunteers can give. We are proud of what we have accomplished, but there have been some hiccups along the way. Some projects started with lofty goals and have yet to reach fruition due to the same impediments with which all volunteer organizations struggle.

First among our on-going but as-yet-unfulfilled projects is the Alberta Radical Research Collective (ARRC). ARRC was designed to facilitate the preservation of records related to radical leftist organizations in Alberta in a cooperative model that would allow creator organizations to maintain their own archives while simultaneously making them accessible for research into leftist movements in the province (see Appendix B for further details).

Our second on-going but as-yet-unfulfilled project is the *Rise with the Ranks Workshop* (RWR), designed to be a weekend-long workshop devoted to creating an egalitarian information workers’ movement through grassroots organizing (see Appendix C). RWR was initially scheduled for summer of 2013 but was postponed indefinitely. The current plan is to launch RWR in the first half of 2015. As with *Organize & Assemble*, an entire article could be written about our attempts to mount RWR, but for now, we want to use it to illustrate the fact that volunteer-run organizations such as ours can only achieve so much in due course.

**Membership Principles**

During the course of our nearly five-year history, there has been only one major issue that has generated a significant amount of internal debate: the creation of membership principles specific to the Edmonton chapter of the PLG.
The issue arose, ironically, from the success of our organization. After several well-attended events and Organize & Assemble symposia, we received an influx of new members who did not actively involve themselves in the organization but were able to read our minutes on the internal listserv. Some of these new members were in positions of authority, which was an issue for students who would soon be entering the workforce and were concerned that their political activities might be used against them by potential employers who had access to PLG minutes. The concern was serious enough that it became a topic of great discussion at several of our general meetings.

Eventually, it was decided that we needed some form of membership principles that would protect our members from possible repercussions from inactive members misusing information from PLG minutes. A committee was struck to compose draft principles, which were brought back to the chapter. After months of sometimes intense debate, new membership principles were adopted in March of 2014 and the chapter bylaws were amended to reflect the change (see article VIII of the bylaws in Appendix A).

The membership principles are not an attempt to enforce ideological purity; rather, they exist to protect our members, ensure that we are all working toward the same ends, and to set a minimum level of commitment to one’s fellow workers and to the wider social justice movement. Specific mention was given to maintaining academic freedom for professors and students, so that students would not be penalized in class by professors who might be aware of students’ activities with the PLG, and to building a democratic workers’ movement so that employers would not be able to use knowledge of employees’ PLG activities against them in the workplace. Violations of these principles by PLG members would result in dismissal from the Edmonton chapter. So far, absolutely no controversy or dismissals have arisen as a result of the implementation of the membership principles, although at least one former PLG member quit the Edmonton chapter due to the principles being adopted.

Looking Ahead

Just shy of our fifth anniversary, the Edmonton PLG has much to be proud of and much to experience and achieve in years ahead. In 2015, we will see Organize & Assemble V, another May Day march, and hopefully the launch of the Rise with the Ranks Workshop. We will also continue work on the ARRC project and welcome any new initiatives that our members choose to mount.

Over the years, we have seen many members come and go, many involved members take a backseat, many inactive members get more involved, and an ongoing enthusiasm that drives our work forward. We believe that even if all of the members who were involved in 2010 and 2011 were to leave the organization now, the Edmonton PLG is in such a healthy state that it would
continue on the efforts of newer members and those who will join in the coming years. This is a great success and a testament to the tremendous effort spent over the years by dozens of Edmonton PLG members.

On behalf of the membership of the Edmonton PLG, we wish to express solidarity with the wider PLG and to invite you to the frozen north where you will find comrades in the Edmonton chapter.

Appendix A: Bylaws of the Edmonton Chapter of the PLG

I. Meetings

1. General meetings are to be held monthly.
2. Quorum for meetings is five members of the PLG.
3. Meetings will be run according to Robert’s Rules of Order with a rotating chair and recording secretary elected for each meeting.
4. Only members of the PLG may propose motions and vote at general meetings.
5. Motions will be carried by a straight majority.

II. Officers

1. There are three officer positions: Secretary, Treasurer and Communications.
2. Officers are elected annually in December of each year with the term to start in January.
3. Only members of the PLG may run for and be elected to an officer position.
4. Officers cannot serve more than two consecutive terms.
5. The duties of the Secretary are as follows: to prepare meeting agendas, to provide access to meeting minutes, to manage chapter records, and to act as the liaison with the main PLG.
6. The duties of the Treasurer are as follows: to manage the chapter’s bank account, to provide financial reports at each general meeting, to collect dues and arrange payment of national dues if necessary.
7. The duties of the Communications position are as follows: to manage the chapter’s email and web presence, to manage the chapter’s listserv, and to act as the main contact for public inquiries.
8. The secretary and treasurer will have signing authority over the bank account.
9. If any officer is seen to be negligent in their duties, they may be recalled by a notice of motion to recall at a general meeting followed by a vote
to recall at the following general meeting. Recalled officers can then be replaced as soon as possible.

**III. Bylaw Amendments**

1. Bylaws can be amended or added to as needed.
2. Bylaw amendments are to be announced through a notice of motion to amend bylaws at a general meeting followed by a vote to amend bylaws at the following general meeting.

**IV. Annual General Meeting**

1. The annual general meeting (AGM) will be held in December of each year.
2. Officers will be elected at the AGM, with nominations for positions to open at the November monthly meeting and to be closed by the chair of the AGM prior to the vote.
3. The vote will be by secret ballot, administered by two returning officers elected at the AGM.
4. After the vote, the ballots are to be destroyed by the returning officers.
5. Quorum for the AGM is five members of the PLG.
6. Officers are to present an annual report on chapter activities at the AGM.

**V. Special Meetings**

1. Any member with a second member may call a special meeting.
2. A call for a special meeting must be posted on the PLG Edmonton listserv and to the chapter blog.
3. Special meetings can be held no sooner than 24 hours after they have been called.
4. Quorum for special meetings is five members.
5. Minutes from special meetings must be posted on the PLG Edmonton listserv. If a meeting involves money, minutes from that meeting must be distributed to the list within 24 hours of the meeting.
6. Another regular or special meeting under quorum can reverse a decision.

**VI. Position Statements**

1. Any member may draft a position statement and send it to members using the PLG Edmonton listserv.
2. The statement may be approved by the internal mailing list.
3. The motion will be approved by 5 members.
4. The person who wrote the position statement will track votes on the position statement.
5. Votes should be posted to the internal list instead of being sent to the member who wrote the statement.

**VII. Membership payments to PLG Central Committee**

1. Members will renew their membership no later than the date of PLG Edmonton’s AGM.

**VIII. Membership Principles**

1. Membership in the Edmonton chapter of the PLG is contingent upon the upholding of the following principles:
   - Stand in solidarity with struggling workers and refuse to cross picket lines;
   - Uphold freedom of speech, thought, and expression in the workplace and classroom;
   - Strive for democratic workplaces and classrooms;
   - Uphold academic freedom in educational institutions for faculty and students;
   - Critically examine and oppose any power imbalances in the workplace; and
   - Not accept the notion of the neutrality of information workers and strongly oppose the commodification of information that turns the information commons into privatized commercial zones.
2. Membership shall commence upon the signing of the statement and submission to the said document to the chapter secretary.
3. If a member is found in contravention of these principles, membership in the Edmonton chapter will be revoked but remain in the central PLG. The affected member’s local dues will then be transferred to the central PLG.
4. If a member is accused of violating the principles, the accused member has the right to defend their actions at a general or special meeting, as defined by the bylaws and subject to the accused member’s availability within reason and prior to the next scheduled general meeting.
5. Membership status can only be revoked subject to a motion for expulsion from the Edmonton PLG, seconded and passed as per chapter bylaws.
IV. Membership Fee

The Edmonton Chapter of the PLG charges all members $20 for the membership year.

Appendix B: Alberta Radical Research Collective Mandate

The Alberta Radical Research Centre (ARRC) is a project of the Edmonton branch of the Progressive Librarians Guild (PLG) and is managed by Edmonton-area archivists, librarians, and related information professionals who seek to apply professional knowledge and research support to social justice movements in Alberta.

ARRC exists to document grassroots, community-led movements, organizations, or projects and the individuals involved therein that are based in or are related to Alberta and that actively work toward social, economic, or community justice. These movements, organizations, or projects can be related to labour, immigration, race, poverty, environment, community activism, or gender and sexuality, among others.

The documentation of these movements, organizations, or projects will consist of collecting original records and publications by and about these groups, as well as conducting supplementary research. Special consideration will be given to how these movements, organizations, or projects are managed with priority given to de-centralized, grassroots, co-operative, and democratic models. Priority will also be given to marginalized and under-represented communities where these communities intersect with the social justice focus of ARRC.

Appendix C: Rise with the Ranks Workshop Statement of Purpose

The Rise with the Ranks Workshop is predicated on the principle that library and information workers should not strive to rise from the ranks but rather rise with the ranks, to paraphrase Eugene Debs. We believe that cooperative, non-hierarchical methods of organization are essential to the social justice ideals embraced by our profession. Therefore, the purpose of the Rise with the Ranks Workshop is to:

- provide a counter to hierarchical, business models of management within the library and information industry;
• equip participants with the skills and tools needed to affect meaningful change within the industry and wider society;
• foster a specific worker identity among library and information workers;
• build a workers’ movement within the library and information industry based on collaboration and solidarity; and
• encourage the growth of self-management, egalitarianism, and worker empowerment within the library and information industry.