



Book Review

Review of *Organize Your Library! Developing the Collective Power of Library Workers*

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ABSTRACT

Review of *Organize your library! Developing the collective power of library workers*, by Angelo Moreno, Kelly McElroy, Meredith Kahn, and Emily Drabinski. ALA Neal Schuman, 2025. 136 pp. ISBN 979-8-89255-522-7.

KEYWORDS

Unions in libraries; union organization

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Organize your library: Developing the collective power of library workers is part of the *Critical Cultural Information Studies* book series. This series aims to “help advance the library field’s discussions and understanding of often difficult issues, such as structural racism, equity, sexuality, disability, oppression, privilege, power, intersectionality, and inclusion and belonging.

Organize your library: Developing the collective power of library workers is how-to book. It tells the stories of those who have started their own unions, negotiated contracts, and bargained for the common good of their communities.” The book is well organized, starting with an introductory definition of what unions are and why they might be needed. Chapter 2 describes how to start a union, depending on state law, followed by a chapter on the uniqueness of library workers and why unionizing can benefit them. Specific experiences from librarians and library workers in both public and academic libraries are explained, including how the decision was made to unionize and how the union benefited the workers within the given library.

The first of four authors, Angelo Moreno came to libraries after exploring other career paths and with a strong sense of justice in the workplace. He took a job at a public library in Michigan and became involved in unionizing the library, resulting in elevated pay for hourly and public-facing library workers. Emily Drabinski is an academic librarian at a university in Brooklyn with a rich history of unionization. Her salary increased significantly when she joined the faculty because of the influence of unions on salaries for library workers. Kelly McElroy is an academic librarian in Oregon, and her university has an American Association of University Professors chapter. Faculty at the university had a significant seat at the table when the administration proposed cuts during the COVID pandemic. Meredith Kahn is an academic librarian in Michigan. She believes that “the most effective strategy for building our collective power as the library workers—for the good of our profession, its institutions, and our patrons—is unionization.”

The greatest strength of the book is its readable style and easy-to-follow organization. Many examples of situations that led to workers organizing are given, including starting a chapter of an existing union, starting a union for library workers from scratch, and organizing with an existing local workers union outside of the library field. The authors also include descriptions of how unions help library workers who are already part of a union. There are chapters on conducting campaigns to unionize, negotiating contracts, and dealing with your boss in a unionized library environment. I found it encouraging that all four authors are familiar with unionized libraries, either having played a part in starting a union or having benefited from joining a library with an established union.

Being a professional librarian with very little knowledge of unions, I found the beginning chapters of the book fascinating. They explain the purpose of unions, how they can benefit workers, and how to start one. The chapter on negotiating contracts provides solid information on working with management or administration on union contracts. Many chapters include

action plans to help library workers take the next steps towards organizing. Chapters include additional readings for more information. Chapters on understanding the inner workings of union protocol are not as clear as earlier chapters that discuss the steps of unionizing. However, Chapter 4, “What Makes Library Workers Different?” was particularly relatable. Librarians can spend much of their professional lives explaining why we are slightly different than other workers in our pay grade or classification. As a university faculty librarian, I am very aware of the differences between teaching faculty and library faculty and spend time advocating for equal opportunities for library faculty. This chapter struck a chord with my own professional library experiences, and I understand the value of unionization in that context. Chapter 8, “Our Vision for the Future,” stresses that “library worker unions contribute to better library services for the community.” It stands to reason that librarians and other library workers who enjoy fair compensation and have agency in their libraries are more effective in their jobs. I think a librarian finding themselves in a unionized library would benefit greatly from the information included in these later chapters.

This book fills a much-needed niche for people who work in and lead libraries. As the notes on the book series state, the purpose of the *Critical Cultural Information Studies* series is to “help advance the library field’s discussions and understanding of often difficult issues.” Understanding how unions could impact the work life of people who work in libraries could broaden the opportunities offered to librarians and other library workers. With this book, people can educate themselves on the possibilities of making their work situation a better one.