

Ep 6 - TPL and Transphobia with Alicia Elliott - Transcript

KN: Karen Ng

AJ: Allison Jones

AE: Alicia Elliott ([@WordsAndGuitar](#))

KN: Welcome to the Organizing Ideas Podcast. I'm Karen.

AJ: And I'm Allison. We are two new librarians and your hosts for this podcast.

KN: Together, we're taking a closer look at the relationships between organizing information and community organizing. We are recording today on the unceded and ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples.

AJ: Today we're speaking with Alicia Elliott about Toronto Public Library's recent room booking to Meghan Murphy.

<chime>

Hey folks, this is Allison. I'm adding a little more context here before we jump into our interview with Alicia to tell you a little more about the situation at Toronto Public Library for anyone listening who hasn't been following this. So, Toronto Public Library's rented a room to Meghan Murphy for the event "Gender Identity: What Does It Mean for Society, the Law, and Women?" on October 29th, 2019. Earlier this year, Vancouver Public Library allowed Murphy to book their space for an event on a very similar topic. Vancouver Pride Society, in their decision to deny VPL's participation this year in the Vancouver Pride Parade, described the event as follows:

"During this event, five speakers asserted that trans women are not women and should not be treated as women. VPS asserts that the conduct reflected both at this event, and in past public comments by these speakers, are discriminatory in a way that violates the British Columbia Human Rights Code."

Murphy has repeatedly called trans women men and opposed Bill C-16, which added gender identity and expression as protected grounds under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Megan Jones tweeted a photo of the poster for Murphy's event at TPL on October 11, and was really the person who alerted many others to this situation. The response from the trans community and allies in Toronto and elsewhere has been swift and it has been very strong.

<chime>

This is a situation that hits close to home for us in a number of ways. We both live in Vancouver, were involved in responding to [VPL's similar room booking](#) to Murphy earlier this year, and we both work at public libraries in the lower mainland and are interested in helping prevent similar bookings in future. I'm also nonbinary and I'm really concerned about the ways transphobia manifests in libraries more generally.

KN: Alicia Elliott is a Tuscarora writer from Six Nations of the Grand River. She won a National Magazine Award in 2017, and was chosen by Tanya Talaga to receive the RBC Taylor Emerging Writer Award in 2018. Her debut book of essays, *A Mind Spread Out On the Ground*, was published in March 2019. We're grateful that Alicia is in town and able to speak with us about this today.

AJ: We will say that we did end up having to record the interview over the phone, so the sound quality has that crackly element. You're going to feel like you were right there with us on speakerphone. Um, hope you enjoy the conversation and stay tuned for later in the episode when we also have some statements and responses from trans people about how Toronto Public Library's room booking has affected them.

<introductory music>

<phone rings>

AE: Hello?

AJ: Hi, Alicia?

AE: Yes, it's Alicia, hi, how are you?

AJ: Alicia, sorry, this was going to be one of our first questions.

<laughter>

AE: That's totally okay.

AJ: Thank you so much for chatting with us, making the time.

AE: Yeah, no problem.

AJ: We're really glad to get the chance to speak with you.

KN: Mhm.

AE: Oh, thank you so much for inviting me on, this is awesome.

KN: Yeah, it's exciting.

KN: You are one of the three initial signatories on a [petition](#) called "Stop Hate Speech from Being Spread at the Toronto Public Library." It has over 5,000 signatures. What prompted you to start this petition?

AE: Well, I have a lot of trans friends and family members that I was really concerned about and, uh, well Catherine and Carrienne and I all have that, so, you know, we had seen what had happened in the Vancouver Public Library. And I personally know, anyways, that I was disappointed in the ways that cis members of the literary community and other communities didn't, I feel like, mobilize as much behind trans people who were saying that this is very damaging to us. You know, there were people who did stuff and it was awesome, but I just was, like, I feel like we need to really, from the get-go, show our solidarity and support and also kind of try to shoulder that burden for the trans people that we know and love. Because, you know, they shouldn't have to do this work all of the time. They have to do that in their everyday lives, so, um, you know, we, kind of, were like, what can we do to put pressure on the library, and we all knew that, you know, me and Carrienne had just done an event at the library, and Catherine was about to have her book launch there, so you know, we know that there's a lot of events that happened in collaboration with the literary community. And so we thought, at least if we make a statement about this maybe other people will join in so that we can both, um, try to put pressure on the library to follow their own policies and also, um, you know, show the trans community that they're not alone in this. And people are willing to stand beside them and fight alongside them. So that was kind of the birth of it I guess.

AJ: Yeah, thank you. It's, like, it's really, um, <pause>. I feel emotional listening to you talk about that because it's really lovely to have people act in solidarity in that way. And I'm curious if, uh, you know, like there are, people often assume, and there often are, strong relationships between literary communities and libraries and I'm curious if you could talk about, like, why you chose that community specifically as the group that you wanted to take action with and, um, how you see that relationship.

AE: Well, I know that, um, for myself, I love the Toronto Public Library in general. Like, I used to live in Toronto and that was a space where I always. I feel like every writer, kind of, when you're in a space with a lot of books there's just this kind of warm feeling, but also, you know, it's a place where, you know, I did not have a printer, and stuff like that. I didn't have, when I didn't have a computer and whatnot and I needed to do things, that was where I would go. And, you know, libraries have made themselves available to not just writers, but you know, members of

different marginalized communities, a lot of, like, street-involved people and whatnot. And I think a lot of the time, libraries have kind of been on the, like, the forefront of kind of pushing for, you know, supporting those different communities. Even I remember my public library in Brantford was one of the first places to have, you know, sharps disposals in the bathrooms. And you know, that was, I thought, super important. And, so, you know, all of these, librarians, I just feel so strongly about, and the way that they support community is amazing. And, you know, literary events and stuff like that, it helps, it is a mutual kind of relationship between writers and the literary community and the library. That's, those are our people. They champion our books, and, you know, make space for us and create community. And so, you know, I thought that, you know, we, or I thought, in communication with Catherine and Carriane, we were like, we love this library and we wanted this to come from a place of love, too. Because we love the library and we love our trans friends and family and so, you know, um, to not just, to make sure that we say we, we're doing this because we think that, you know, the person who is making these decisions is making the wrong decision. And doing something that could very well, you know, hurt the Toronto Public Library's relationship-building with trans community and with writers. Because also, you know, a lot of people think, you know, you're not trans so you, what does this matter to you, but I mean, it affects all of us. Trans people are humans. If we allow trans people's rights to be squashed, then, you know, that means that everyone's rights are up for debate. And I just don't see any way that we should have anything other than a baseline- Human rights are for everyone! And the fact that we're allowing, or not all of us I guess, but the fact that the library, the City Librarian is right now saying "We need to allow this discussion to take place in the library," to me that just, it just boggles my mind.

<laughter>

AE: Because so many librarians do so much outreach work and have done so much to create, you know, safe community spaces and to have the City Librarian trying to undermine that work is to me, it just makes me furious!

KN: Yeah, it's definitely very heartbreaking and I find that when you love something that much, I think constructive criticism, I think challenging the library to do better, like, it comes from a place of love. I don't think people would really put forth this much effort if they didn't love what the library stands for. Um, so I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit more about the kind of response that you've received from Toronto Public Library?

AE: Yeah, so it's kind of twofold because, you know, on the one hand the City Librarian is the one who is in charge of making this decision at the end of the day, and she, her name is Vickery

Bowles. She has made it very clear that she doesn't want to reconsider her decision. And I'll talk a little bit more about that in a second, but on the other hand you have the Toronto Librarians Union who came forward and said "We do not agree with this decision at all." Which, you know, I had suspected when this came out, when I talk about the Toronto Public Library and stuff like that, it's not about the librarians who have to follow this decision that someone above them has made. I don't believe that most of the librarians believe that decision or stand behind that decision. And I know that the union has proved as much in the statement that they've released. So, you know, it disappoints me that one person is, you know, is in a position where she can undermine this work and undermine the people who have to stand behind her decision and kind of, like, say "Well, she represents the Toronto Public Library, so this is, I guess the Library decision, even though none of us agree with it." It just, um, you know, it's almost kind of, um, like a dictatorship kind of situation, if you'll excuse the comparison, but, you know, it's definitely not something where all the librarians were asked whether they agree with this or not. So in any case, to kind of speak a little more directly to Vickery Bowles' response to this situation, um, I find it very curious that, you know, a couple years ago, I'm not sure if you're aware but there was a bit of a controversy because the [Toronto Public Library had rented out a room for, um, a memorial services for a lawyer who represented neo-Nazis](#) in a lot of their cases and criminal proceedings and things like that. And, um, it was rented out by neo-Nazis for the purpose of having a memorial for this person. And at the time there was a lot of public outcry about it and Vickery Bowles responded by changing the rental policy so that it wasn't just that, so that you could not refuse to rent a room to someone based on who they were or things they had done, you had to do it based on what the purpose of the event was. And so, she changed that policy in 2018 to say it's about the purpose of the event. So the event has to be discriminating against, or promoting discrimination, or contempt, or hate against a protected group. Which includes those who have different gender expressions and gender identities. And so that was the policy she changed so that neo-Nazis could rent out the library for, you know, their purposes. And, you know, now it's interesting because when she released her response to this, now she's saying that, in direct contravention of the changes she made, now it's no longer about the event itself, now she's saying that because Meghan Murphy has not had any criminal convictions of hate speech. So it's about her past now, it's not about the purpose of the event. That, you know, she should be allowed to say whatever she wants, not only say whatever she wants, but say whatever she wants in the library. That's the thing that frustrates me the most about all of this. So many people are saying it's about free speech, free speech. No one is arguing that. Yes, obviously these arguments are dangerous, these arguments are, I would argue hate speech. It is very difficult to get that charged under the criminal code and, like, human rights code and everything like that, but, you know, at the end of the day what we're asking is for the library to

follow their own policies and, you know, we're trying to point out the fact that just because you can say whatever you want does not mean that you deserve a platform where ever you want. Those are not the same things. And the fact that, you know, a lot of people who are trying to take rights away from others are trying to take away those things is very intellectually disingenuous. And I hate that people are buying into it, you know. Being able to say whatever you want and not get arrested for it is not the same as deserving a platform where ever you want and forcing people to listen to it regardless of whether what you're saying is dehumanizing people and asking for their human rights to be stripped away.

AJ: Yeah.

AE: So, it's, um, a very frustrating situation.

AJ: Yeah, well, and when this happened at VPL I know that there were a lot of people pointing to [Toronto's policy](#) with those recent updates that you mentioned and saying, "Well, you know, VPL if you're going to be revisiting your policy," which they've done, "You could look to that as an example." And, you know, I remember some librarian friends saying, well, you know, "Policy isn't the problem, it's the people who are in charge." People would say to me, you know, "I don't think that if Vancouver had Toronto's policy they'd say no to this event." And so it's very interesting to see it play out in real time, of, like, well, now we actually know that with their policy Toronto will also not say no to this event, and, you know, as you say it's like, that, um, decision by the City Librarian about what she values and stands for and what she's going to have her institution do. Um, I'm curious, like, on the flip side of that, like, us in Vancouver thinking we could learn from Toronto, obviously not

<laughter>

AJ: Your letter, you and Carrienne and Catherine say "We stand with our friends in Vancouver who strongly opposed VPL's hosting Murphy at an event in January 2019." And I'm curious, you talked about this a bit in the introduction, but if there's anything more you might want to say about what you have learned from the event at the Vancouver Public Library or the responses to similar events that happened at UBC and [SFU](#), um, and like what this solidarity or learning looks like on the, on this broader scale? Now that this is happening so often, unfortunately <laughs>

AE: <laughs> Um, well, I know that I remember seeing, there's an amazing writer who is trans named jaye simpson, and they were doing a lot of mobilizing around this when this happened. Trying to talk to writers and things like that, and, um, in communication with another trans writer named Kai Cheng Thom. Where they were trying to figure out how best to react to this situation.

And so, I remember reading, you know, just this morning I read [jaye simpson's response to everything that was happening at the Toronto Public Library](#), and they gave a lot of insight into kind of what the fallout of that looked like in Vancouver. And, um, I know that the [Vancouver Pride disinvited the Vancouver Public Library from participating in events](#). And I think that that's, I, to me that makes so much sense. If the Vancouver Public Library was not going to be, you know, standing in solidarity with trans folks, then why would they allow them to, you know, then use the Vancouver Pride parade as, like, a, you know, some sort of shield against the transphobic event that they allowed to happen within their facilities? So, um, that to me was an important thing. And we're seeing now Toronto Pride just released [a statement](#) talking about how they will disinvite, is the implication, the Toronto Public Library from pride events if they allow this to move forward as well. So you may be able to take from that. But also, um, you know, jaye just talked about how seeing the arguments and stuff like that that were made in that Meghan Murphy event that happened at the Vancouver Public Library, um, how that affect them personally. And, you know, um, seeing, you know, people that I care about having to, knowing that trans folks in general in their everyday lives have to deal with countless microaggressions and also outright aggressions, just moving through the world. So the one place where they felt that, you know, a lot of trans folks feel that they feel safe is at the library. To know that that is not true, that, you know, this sense of safety is, you know, illusory and that people who are higher up, who are not even the ones who are actually even on the ground supporting trans folks and other marginalized communities. That people who are high up can make these decisions that affect these relationships so deeply and hurt trans communities so viscerally, you know, I feel like that, to me, is shameful. I don't understand why, you know, um, why the people who are higher up are allowed to make these decisions who the librarians, who are on the ground, who have worked so hard to create safe spaces for LGBT and Two Spirit folks, now they have to deal with the fallout of that. Of a decision they did not make and, you know, have to basically apologize for that. For something they haven't done. It's awful. So I think just seeing the fallout of that, and knowing that's something that will happen in Toronto, um, if this event moves forward, that's really disheartening. But, you know, I will say that I'm so impressed with the way that people have been mobilizing around this, and the amount of writers who have, um, stepped forward and said, you know, I'm relocating my event from the Toronto Public Library if this moves forward I'm going to be cancelling, or, you know, just standing in solidarity. I think that that's necessary because, you know, people don't necessarily think that trans folks have support. And they're such a small percentage of the population that, you know, that people can do whatever they want to them. And so, you know, it's important for people who are cis to stand

up and stand beside our trans friends and family and, you know. And even if you don't know any trans folks but you just have, you know, basic decency.

<laughter>

AE: You know, to stand beside and say that this is not acceptable. You know, no one should have to see their human rights be debated in a public institution. And, you know, I just don't think that that's something that we need to allow. And even when, you know, when we look at the policies, even the Toronto Public Library has a policy which says that that shouldn't be allowed, and yet, you know, Vickery Bowles is saying, "I looked at the, her views are not discriminatory." When she's directly asked, "Is this not a discriminatory belief?" To turn around and say, "Well, I'm not going to talk about that." You know, like, I think it's important that we do ask ourselves what the views are of the people who are making these decisions. Because they, um, you know, these are the people who stand for these institutions. I think it's important to know. Does Vickery Bowles support the trans community or does she not? Does she believe in these, you know, the things that Meghan Murphy is saying? Or does she not? I think those things are very important for the public to know so that they, so that we can determine how safe it is to be in places where someone who doesn't think that, you know, members of our community are human or deserve to be safe in public spaces, um, so we can make a determination on whether we want to support those institutions.

AJ: Yeah, and I think, like, even if she won't say it straight out, the more she does say the more obvious it becomes. I think [Gwen Benaway was talking about this on Twitter](#) as well, but it's really, what I felt when I read [her longer interview with CBC As It Happens](#), it's very

AE: Yes.

AJ: It's very obvious who she's listening to and what rhetoric she's picking up, and it's not trans people. She doesn't have to say, it's very obvious, more and more.

AE: Oh, I think so too.

KN: I think that, what's happening also kind of points towards how libraries right now don't, in upholding "free speech" as, you know, the thing to value in these decisions so far, kind of tells me that these libraries aren't really prioritizing people. Because Alicia you also mentioned at the beginning, just talking about how people have found really safe spaces, have found comfort in libraries. It seems like these events have just kind of forgotten that libraries are for people and people should come first. And that should also include human rights.

<laughter>

KN: Yeah, so your letter urges the library to cancel this event. Are there any other actions you'd like to see from the Toronto Public Library to address the harm they've caused and to prevent this type of situation in the future?

AE: Well I think that it, um, to me it would be really important for Toronto Public Library, and when I say that I don't just mean Vickery Bowles, I mean the Toronto Public Library board of directors, the people who are making these decisions and who are, you know, more responsible for the public image of the Toronto Public Library to make a statement on what they determine, um, to be acceptable within their institutions and what that means. Because clearly, as we can see, the policy that they've even put in place can be twisted and turned depending on who chooses to interpret it and how they choose to interpret. So I feel like the board itself should make it very clear how this looks, like what it looks like to, you know, to promote discrimination or to discriminate against a group of people. What that entails, and what their, how they would determine that. To have a standardized version, instead of just allowing it to be interpreted however, or not interpreted, to promote these sorts of things. So I think that would be good, but also I think that more than anything we need to turn to the trans community that has been impacted by this and ask what they need to see to feel like they are being listened to, and that their concerns are being taken seriously and that they are welcome and safe inside of libraries. So, you know, I don't know that that would look like, but I know that trans people know. So, you know, they're the ones who should, you know, really be being consulted on what they need for this to be, you know, for this to be fixed.

AJ: So, um, one last question I think before we wrap up, which is that you've spoken really supportively of library workers at Toronto and I know that their union did write that really awesome letter. Um, our audience is mostly librarians and archivists and I can say from my own experience working with them, many are lovely but there is, um, variation within the profession also

AE: Yes.

<laughter>

AJ: Let's say, diplomatically. Um, do you have anything else that you would like to say to this community about this event, what we need to be learning and doing differently? Any last message you'd like to leave people with?

AE: Uh, yeah, I just, I want them, like you said, to remember that this is about people at the end of the day. A lot of the people who are speaking out against these, against the petition that we're launching or who are saying that trans people and allies are trying to silence these conversations really should be thinking about what it means to host those conversations. What the effects are of, you know, on these communities that they are supposed to be creating a community space for. And what that means for them in their work. So, you know, I just think that these are, these are people at the end of the day. And those who are, you know, who are speaking out about, in support of Meghan Murphy, um, I don't really know how often a lot of those people are in libraries, to be very honest. Libraries are mostly used by people who are marginalized and, you know, people who are lower income and things like that, who, you know, they need safe places to be. And, you know, I think that we need to remember that. What responsibilities you have to those communities and whether you are willing to uphold that based on everyone's humanity. I think that, there was someone who I was talking to on Twitter, where I was, like, I tried to disengage finally, you know, we were going back and forth, and I said to them, "I hope that your human rights don't have to be debated." And it was a cis woman and she said, "My human rights are debated all the time." And, you know, to me that, for me to hear that and not say, how do you, as someone who knows the pain of having your human rights debated, who knows the anger of hearing someone tell you, you know, you shouldn't do this, or you shouldn't do that, or you, you know, you are your biology, whatever, how do you take that and say this is something that we should accept? Instead of what we want to forward. You know, of all the things that we have to debate, why do we have to debate people's humanity? You know, I feel like that should be something that's very clear across the board. You do not have to agree with someone to acknowledge that they are human. And I think that we should at the very least have that as the baseline for our conversations when we talk about legislation that is going, that allows people who have different gender identities and gender expressions to be protected under the human rights act under the criminal code. These are things that, you know, are baseline things. And to speak bluntly, you know, um, these protections have been in place in provinces for much longer than they've been in place federally, and I have not seen any evidence that has impacted cis women's rights. But I have seen evidence that people who align with TERFs and alt right and white supremacists are attempting to take away women's rights to choose, or other legal rights that, you know, impact us. So, you know, I just would like to really ask people to think really critically about the types of people who are taking up this rhetoric against trans people and who else they are willing to dehumanize and what else they are willing to push forward to take away rights from people and to, you know, and whether that's something they want to align themselves with. You know, think very critically about that. Think about the fact that white supremacists and neo-Nazis are working hand-in-hand with transphobic people

to limit the rights of trans people, and ask why they are doing that. What does that open the door for if we are willing to listen to arguments of whether trans people are people? That opens the door for asking whether any of us who are marginalized are, you know, human, and whether our rights should be stripped. We should not allow that. This is the very basic human decency. So please, just be decent. <laughs> It's not that hard, I swear.

AJ: Thank you.

KN: Thank you.

AE: Thank you.

KN: Yeah, we really appreciate this. For folks who want to learn more about your work or get in touch, um, how can they reach you?

AE: I'm on Twitter [@WordsAndGuitar](#). I do not actually play guitar that is very misleading. It's just a song title. I don't want to disappoint anyone where they're like, "Oh, can you play guitar?" No, I cannot. I listen to guitar but I cannot play it, so

<laughter>

AJ: Good to know. I have wondered that about your Twitter handle.

AE: <laughs> It happens a lot. I had someone invite me to a literary festival and they were like, "Oh, can you play guitar, we have some music" and I was like, "Absolutely not."

<laughter>

AE: Thank you so much for having me, it was lovely to speak to you.

AJ: Thank you.

<musical interlude>

AJ: The second half of this episode is focused on sharing different perspectives on this situation. We put out a request to trans folks to share with us recordings or written comments about their thoughts and feelings about the situation at Toronto Public Library, and we have 3 messages to share with you. There were also a number of folks who expressed interest in contributing but weren't able to do so in the end. So, we want to make sure people have the opportunity to hear from trans people directly about this event and the way that it's affecting them. And so we want to just point you to a few people on Twitter who you can check out who've been commenting extensively on this and providing a lot of really insightful commentary on the situation and the

ways that it affects people. So if you wanted to go have a look, a few of the people we'd recommend following or looking up are:

- Kai Cheng Thom [@Razorfemme](#)
- Gwen Benaway [@gwenbenaway](#)
- Megan Jones [@megjonesA](#)
- jaye simpson [@jayesimpson94](#)

There are many others who've been commenting and we encourage you to go have a look at Twitter and find these peoples' commentary.

We also expanded our request for statements to cis allies, especially library workers, and we received two statements from these folks, which we've included as well. If you're looking for more commentary by library workers on these events, please check out work by:

- Baharak Yousefi [@BaharakY](#)
- Allison Trumble [@atrumbled](#)
- Jane Schmidt [@janeschmidt](#)
- Sam Popowich [@redlibrarian](#)
- Shirley Lew [@shlew](#)
- Monique Woroniak [@mworoniak](#)
- Allana [@allanaaaaaaa](#)
- Desmond Wong [@desmondcwong](#)

There are many other trans folks and library workers who have been commenting on these things going on. These are just a few of the people who have been really helpful for us in thinking about the situation and we hope can help you get started in learning more if you'd like to do so when you've finished listening to this episode.

So we're going to jump right in, now, to sharing the statements with you that we received. They're pretty emotional but we think they're powerful and important to hear.

<musical interlude>

[Niko Stratis](#): Hi, my name is Niko Stratis. I'm a trans person living in Toronto, originally from the Yukon. I'm one of the people that has been talking about this TPL Megan Murphy thing pretty frequently on Twitter. I spoke last night at the Toronto Public Library board meeting and am

leaving a message to talk about what it means to have the TPL giving space to someone like Meghan Murphy. This is a difficult thing.

The argument as you see online is around the concept of free speech. And while free speech does exist in this country it saddens me to see that an organization like the Toronto Public Library, a pillar of public life in our society and what is seen as an institute of higher learning, and has also long designated itself a safe space for all people, give not only the space to someone like Meghan Murphy, but also the legitimacy to someone like her. Allowing her space in the library to speak does a lot to legitimize her message. Her message being very harmful to trans people and nonbinary people. It works to dehumanize us, to delegitimize ourselves and our lives. She, you know, wants to limit access that we have to public spaces like washrooms and changerooms. It's not so much her message, I mean, her message is hateful and awful, but it's presented through, you know, she purports to be a journalist and presents herself as such. And she presents her message in a way that is very palpable and, you know, easy to follow. Like a cult. <laughs> And her followers eat it up. And they take it further. She is smart enough to keep herself at a distance from anything that might cause her, you know, any kind of legal, financial, or, you know, or work ramifications, but it's the way that she presents her message and the people that eat it up and what they do with it going forward that is equally as harmful to incite this sort of dehumanizing aggression towards trans people. It heightens the risk of violence towards us and our communities.

And, it's, you know, again, when it's presented by something like the TPL, it legitimizes her in a way that is scary. And people, like my parents for example, who look to libraries as institutes that present the greatest minds and speakers and thinkers of our generation, and when somebody like Meghan Murphy speaks at it they think that her views are worth listening to and it gives credence to what she has to say. And the fact that the TPL has made it pretty apparent that they're less interested in listening to trans people in this debate and more interested in listening to what people like Meghan Murphy and other TERFs have to say, it really tells us which side they're on. They have made public acknowledgements that they believe a lot of TERFs to be a marginalized group, or the group that is being silenced by us, trans rights activists. And I think that there's going to be a lot of negative ramifications from this. It is already a very stressful time.

As I record this it's the day after we spoke at the TPL board meeting, and I'm still a bit shaken up, that's why my words are a bit scattered and I often find myself unable to complete sentences or think properly because I'm still processing what I went through last night, which was sort of displaying my trauma for the TPL board to not really pay attention to. This is a difficult time in our lives and I urge people listening to listen and engage with trans people, protect trans people, support trans people, listen to us and provide us space to speak our minds and to highlight our voices and, um, that's it. That's all I can think of to say. Thank you so much.

<musical interlude>

KN: This next message is from someone who wishes to remain anonymous:

I am a closeted non-binary trans person, who has only very recently started to take some small steps to feel more comfortable being myself in the world. The actions of the Library have resulted in all my defense mechanisms and repression techniques to be activated in full force once again. It feels like my city doesn't even want me to exist. I don't feel strong enough to face this. It seems like every organization's nice-sounding policies are just fake virtue signalling. I am lucky to have a therapist to speak to this about, but I fear for other people like me who don't have access to help.

<musical interlude>

AJ: The next statement that I'm going to read is something that was emailed to us anonymously. It's a little bit longer, but it's pretty powerful so here we go:

I have seen how the public--both trans and cis--has reacted to the decision to allow transphobic speaker and author Meghan Murphy to host a talk at the Toronto Public Library. I have seen librarians react as well, mostly cis. I am a librarian who is transgender.

As a librarian, part of my professional ethics is to uphold the right to intellectual freedom and free speech. I take that responsibility very seriously. However, when we start caring about ideals (normally removed of context) more than actual people, we do ourselves and our patrons a disservice. There are some issues where there are *not* two sides. Libraries are not neutral, and they never have been. By allowing this person to speak and spread violent transphobic rhetoric, *the library is giving this side legitimacy*.

The Toronto Public Library has gone further than some libraries in that their policy for room use and hosted events gives them the freedom to reject or cancel events and requests which promote oppressive viewpoints. ***So by allowing this program, they are either breaking their own policy, or they are taking the position that they do not find the subject oppressive.***

Much has been said already about the message this sends to library patrons, especially transgender patrons. Toronto Pride has already sent a response to TPL. What about transgender employees? If my employer allowed this speaker, I would lose any sense of safety I have at work, and I would consider it and whoever made the decision (and whoever agreed with that decision) hostile. Transgender people already have higher job precarity than average. I recognize my privileged position in having a job for an institution with protections for transgender people. I do not know if there are transgender employees at the Toronto Public Library, but I can imagine how unsafe and scared they must feel, and I imagine transgender people will hesitate to work there in the future.

The Toronto Public Library is showing that its claims of allyship to the queer community are hollow and conditional. There is nothing to gain from allowing Meghan Murphy to speak, no positive outcome. There is no "marketplace of ideas" or discussion that will

happen. The only outcome is that the Toronto Public Library shows the trans community its true colors by signing off on transphobia.

Phew. Thank you for sharing that with us. It's a very powerful statement and we really appreciate that you took the time to put that together and send it in.

<musical interlude>

AJ: This statement is from Leanna Jantzi who is a librarian at Simon Fraser University. Leanna writes:

Our profession needs to critically engage in why the absolutist notion of intellectual freedom causes harm, facilitates hate, and is antithetical to values intellectual freedom exists to uphold, including the creation of space and safety for the voices and people who have been and continue to be marginalized. Moreover, we need to push back on this current application of intellectual freedom, which simply maintains the status quo and allows those in power to retain power.

I am grateful for the many intelligent, thoughtful, and passionate people who are leading this work. I hope more from our profession can join.

Thanks so much Leanna for sending that in.

<musical interlude>

[John Fink](#): Hey Organizing Ideas. This is John Fink. I'm an academic librarian in Toronto, or near Toronto, Ontario, not in Toronto, Ontario. I was present at the TPL board meeting where a lot of very, very, very brave and caring people spoke up objecting to the room rental by Meghan Murphy. And it was one of the most <pause> both most uplifting and sort of horrifying things that I've seen in a fairly long time. Uplifting because people who really, really care about the library and wanted to make a difference were there speaking, and horrifying because in the end it didn't really matter. Anyway, that's all. I'm glad you're doing a show about this because it's a really, really important issue and I look forward to hearing it. Okay, bye.

<musical interlude>

AJ: Thank you so much John, Leanna, Niko, and both of the anonymous contributors who sent us comments on this situation. We really appreciate you sharing with us how this event has affected you, how you're thinking, how you're feeling about this and we know it adds a lot to the episode and people are going to be really grateful to hear your insights.

Before we sign off, Karen and I would just like to express once more our solidarity with all the Toronto Public Library users, members of the literary community, the Toronto Public Library Workers' Union members, and transgender people in Toronto and beyond who are taking action on this. We love you, we appreciate you, we are here with you, and we hope that our listeners

who are tuning into this episode right now have learned a lot from your perspectives and will share this situation and what they've learned here with others. Thanks.

<musical interlude>

KN: We can be found on Twitter [@OrganizingPod](#) (organizing with a Z). Our email is organizingideaspod@gmail.com and our website is organizingideaspod.wordpress.com.

<outro music>

Transcribed by Allison Jones