

# Prioritizing People

Three years ago, North American street newspapers in America agreed that forming a united network would help us exchange information, protect ourselves against such things as the anti-First Amendment legislation in Cleveland to license the vendors of street papers, and encourage the growth of new street papers. Most of us consider our papers to be tools in the struggle for social justice and an end to homelessness. United, we can be stronger.

The North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA) was founded in 1996 in Chicago, at a conference attended by delegates from about 40 papers in the United States and Canada. In 1997, most of the same papers — and a few new ones — met in Seattle and worked out details of organization. Last month, we all met again in Montreal, Canada. I have come away with the feeling that now we are getting down to work.

Thanks to our friends at A Territory Resource and the Kongsgaard-Goldman Foundation, four of us from *Real Change* went to Montreal: Tim Harris, Director; Madeline Lewis, an active member of the Homeless Speaker's Bureau; © Dr. Wes Browning; and myself, Anitra "Many Affiliations" Freeman. Between Madeline, Wes, and myself we represented the Real Change Homeless Empowerment Project and a bit more.

*Journal L'itinéraire*, the streetpaper of Montreal, began as a cafe for the poor and homeless. The paper itself grew out of a desire to increase the sense of community among the people using the cafe. The vendors' desk, where the papers are distributed, is still in the cafe itself, while the production offices are around the corner. The cafe has now added four computers, three of which are hooked up to the Internet, and rent for \$1 an hour. *Journal L'itinéraire* has an excellent site at <http://itineraire.educ.infnit.net/>.

This year's controversy was *The Big Issue*, the major street-newspaper of Europe, beginning a paper in Los Angeles, California. *The Big Issue LA* was expected to submit an application for membership in NASNA at this year's conference, but TBI Publisher John Bird instead announced that *The Big Issue LA* is delaying its application for one year to allow the American streetpapers to get to know them better before making a decision. His speech, going on to describe his own background and the early history of his paper, gave the current members of NASNA a much more accurate picture of himself and *The Big Issue*.

A new Executive Committee has been elected, with a wide diversity in membership — including Roberto Menendez, a native of El Salvador now residing in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Tim Harris is again the NASNA President. The membership gave the Executive Council a list of the concerns they would like to see worked on this year, including protection for existing papers; development help for new papers; standards of journalistic ethics.

Most of us felt that NASNA is really starting to move. Madeline described her reason for being hopeful as the greater sense of cohesion in the membership this year. We are actually starting to think of ourselves as "NASNA."

Nobody goes into street-paper activism because they have a meek, quiet personality with no opinions of their own. We will always be a loud crowd in discussing *anything*. But I noticed that by the third day people were picking up on what they had in common and coming up with ideas that helped everybody.

To Wes, the most hopeful sign was the diversity and inclusiveness of the movement. "You can't be a small select group and have a *movement*," Wes said. Over this past year, the Executive Committee worked out a definition for a "streetpaper" that does not dictate to each paper how it runs its own business, and at Montreal it was adopted. Now we have a movement.

The diversity on the Executive Committee was one of the signs of hope for me. But what most encouraged me was that the workshops and the informal talks between members pretty much cut past the abstracts and the conflicts and got down to concrete projects.

Lots more papers have homeless writing workshops this year. Several have poetry readings, or have published chapbooks. Others are very interested in doing the same things. Several of the women editors, including myself, agreed to continue to network with each other about writing workshops and about women's issues.

One of the newly elected members of the Executive Committee, Anthony Oliver, Director of Chicago's *StreetWise*, is outspoken about considering the vendor the core of the streetpaper. "Papers should be vendor-driven, not content-driven," says Anthony. Although I think good content also helps the vendors, I do believe that *people* are the priority — and that giving more people more joyful things to do is a great thing to look forward to. ☐

—Anitra Freeman



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: LINDA LARSON, *SPARE CHANGE*, BOSTON; CHUCK CURRIE, *THESE HOMELESS TIMES*, PORTLAND; ERIC CIMON, *JOURNAL ITINERAIRE*, MONTREAL; STACIE CLARY (SECRETARY), *HOMEWARD*, SACRAMENTO; ROBERTO MENENDEZ, *STREET FEAT*, HALIFAX; TIMOTHY HARRIS (PRESIDENT), *REAL CHANGE*, SEATTLE; SHARON THORP, *STREET BEAT*, PITTSBURGH; MICHAEL STOOPS (TREASURER), NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS; ANGELO ANDERSON, *GRAPEVINE*, CLEVELAND; DONALD WHITEHEAD (VICE-PRESIDENT), *STREET VIBES*, CINCINNATI; NOT SHOWN: ANTHONY OLIVER, *STREETWISE*, CHICAGO. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOURNAL L'ITINERAIRE.