

EDITORIAL

Lose the rhetoric,
and gain a movement

Street Roots communicates with people experiencing poverty every day, much like hundreds of organizations and institutions around Portland. Sometimes we get it right, and sometimes we don't. What we can't understand is why progressives continue to use the language we do when trying to create a social justice movement.

The far Left can't seem to accept that if it's going to frame goals using words such as "capitalism" and "socialism," they have already lost the masses and thwarted any progress in a social movement. Most people already have an image in their mind about what these

Is there any wonder that we see more and more poor people joining conservative and right wing causes?

words mean, and often they have nothing to do with the point a group or a coalition is trying to get across. The message is lost.

While progressives are busy making fun of the Tea Party and moderate

conservatives, those within the movement are busy communicating simple messages with populations that the Left has either completely ignored, or alienated for one reason or another.

At the other end of the spectrum, progressives and institutions that determine the course of social justice movements, and more importantly funding have adopted several key phrases such as "gender," "health" and/or "racial equity," or "social determinants."

Framing issues in the rhetoric of equity, and how social determinants impact poor and working people may feel at home in textbooks and academia, but it bears little relation to the boots on the ground; the common folk we are trying to organize. There's a disconnect happening between the individuals and institutions charged with supporting organizations working with people in poverty, and the people themselves. So is there any wonder that we see more and more poor people joining conservative and right wing causes?

There's a reason the Obama campaign used slogans like "Yes we can," and "Hope" during the last presidential election. These words translate across issues, and people have the ability to conjure up what those specific phrases mean in their own busy lives. In short, they can relate that "Yes we can" make a difference, and that yes, there is "hope" on the horizon.

Of course, SR believes in equity for people, from the poor to people of color to individuals identifying as gay or lesbian, transgender or queer. But as a movement, we all seem mired in semantics so far removed from our realities that we don't seem to know what exactly to ask for anymore.

It's clear that many progressives in elected office are moving from election to election without a clear sense of vision and values, while the Right is organizing within their party base relying on simple messaging and framing.

As long as we frame poverty issues with vacuous buzz words created by a disaffected class, we will continue to lose a base of working people that believe that organized labor, the Democrats and other progressives are only out for themselves.

The progressive movement has to set aside its own terminology and judgment of others, and what it believes is right before the masses of poor and working people. We're not organizing the poor. We're organizing for a movement of middle class values and what we believe the poor need, and it's killing us. What the poor need is to be a part of the conversation and allowed to air their message without the guise of political correctness. Let's stop running for election, and start walking side by side with the people who have something truly important to say.

STREET ROOTS' EDITORIAL BOARD

The views expressed in the editorials in Street Roots are the consensus of members of the editorial board and contributing volunteers.

Setting the bar a little higher each year

This edition of the newspaper, like every edition of Street Roots, is filled with in-depth news, commentaries and voices from people experiencing



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at streetroots@hotmail.com.

poverty in the Portland region.

The vendor program and the relationships built between readers and businesses with people experiencing homelessness throughout the

community is at the core of the organization. We often highlight the vendor program through our fundraising efforts because it is at the heart of the organization, and it's what resonates with people.

Saying that, the newspaper has become an increasing go-to for many people throughout the Portland area for original news and commentary. SR prides itself on being able to deliver a unique perspective concerning the community through it's in-depth reporting on a range of issues.

This year we have introduced a handful of partnerships through the newspaper to better serve the community. The Bicycle Transportation Alliance, the Portland Police Bureau, and newly introduced Western States Center (page 14) have regular columns in the newspaper. Along with these voices we have regular columnists on

prison reform, homeless and affordable housing policy, and people telling their own experience of living outside.

By offering a wide range of voices in the community we are better able to understand poverty and a myriad of issues that are interconnected, like law enforcement, transportation and immigrant and refugee communities.

It's easy to come to expect a certain quality of news and opinion without understanding the level of work put into the newspaper. For such a small group we have set a high bar. That's why we're asking you for your help this spring.

SR currently works with around 100 vendors gaining an income of their own in front of 50 businesses throughout Portland. We have around 60 volunteers who help us produce a newspaper that reaches 18,000 readers, and 60,000 Rose City Resource booklets that are distributed to more than 150 organizations and institutions. This is all done with a staff of three and a half people. We are, in a sense, a people-powered moving train. We are as grassroots as grassroots gets - giving Portland something special.

At the end of the day, it's people like you that make us successful. That's why this spring we are asking you to help SR stay strong and think about giving a one-time or recurring donation to the organization. We can't thank you enough. Keep coming back. You won't be disappointed.

LETTERS

Make your impact happen

Sam Al-Jondi is a vendor with Street Roots.

SAM AL-JONDI
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

It was 11 o'clock in the morning. I walked into the office to get more newspapers. I had to use the washroom, so I walked to the back where it is located. On my way there, I passed by Joanne's station. She is the managing editor. She tilted her head back, running her fingers through her hair; her cheeks blown out as big as a small balloon as she blew out a deep breath, all in frustration and a moment of uncertainty. I knew what was going on - she was searching for the right words to make the best picture she can, to serve the best dish. Joanne Zuhl goes through that gate quite often - always looking for the right words. To her and to all other's who work hard to keep us informed and aware, my deepest respect and appreciation.

I was standing in front of the public library one morning. As usual, I was selling the newspaper. A lady steps out, comes down the stairs and walks towards me saying, "I love this paper but I don't have a dollar." I reach into my plastic bag. I took one copy out and said, "Do you want one anyway?" She struck me as one who was sincere but had been bruised by life. She was as tender as a spring leaf.

"But that is a dollar for you, and you need it." She said.

"It is not about the dollar, it is about you, it is about me, it is about our community and our country," I replied.

She took the paper, took two steps back and said, "I love you." I looked into her eyes, and they were watery and I said, "I love you too." She turned around and walked away, I never saw her again.

If we all treated each other with courtesy, we will all be that much better off. I can't count how many times I've been up and down in my life. For immigration reasons or political ones, I can't hang onto what I accomplish in my life. Often times I run low on self-esteem. I was going through that when I managed to save a little money and

move into one of the cheap hotels.

Next day I went to get some linen. The lady at the desk gave me what I needed. When I thanked her, she tilted her head slightly to the right and with kind brown eyes said, "You're welcome." I was puzzled. Nobody is supposed to like me; I don't even like me.

I was heating up some food for dinner the following night when she came out of the office and started talking to me. Debby is a friend of all people. She makes people warm inside, liking themselves. What a gift to have. After our conversation I walked away thinking that maybe I still have

something. Maybe I can be somebody. All maybes, but good maybes.

It is people such as these along with places as Trinity Episcopal Cathedral on NW 19th Avenue

that make Portland a great city. People such as Father William Lupfer, who faces the needy without making them wait outside to show the world the good that he is doing. A man who cares about other's dignity while providing them with what they need.

People like the cook Heidi Rose who serves love with the food she cooks. They even pay for your glasses if you need them. Sid Mobeaty who handles that, is another gentle soul.

Organizations like Portland wiki (portlandwiki.org/PortlandWiki): It is a service that connects all the dots, to bring various organizations together to improve each other's ability to serve the community in more ways than before. To organize the community in ways where it can put proposals to the establishment so the latter can respond quickly and effectively.

It is about how one can serve one's community not how the community can serve you. So bring your ideas and proposals to the table and make your impact happen, and your voice heard. Whether you represent yourself or a corporation, make a difference and get in touch.

It is not about the dollar, it is about you, it is about me, it is about our community and our country.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Street Roots encourages readers to submit letters and columns for publication. Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mailed to streetrootsnews@gmail.com.