

THE Quidnunc Crier



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FEWQ was incorporated in January of this year. Many of its forty initial members attended the inaugural Annual General Meeting in March. One writer came to the meeting to announce that he had no intention of joining FEWQ because the situation was beyond hope and nothing could be done. The consensus among the other writers in attendance was that English-language writers want a stronger voice within Quebec and want to feel less isolated: no one expected FEWQ to perform miracles, but a multitude of possibilities were clearly open to it. A four-person executive was elected, to be supported by an advisory board of senior writers within our community, many of whom are regional reps of national organizations.

In the months following the AGM, several articles in the press mentioned or discussed FEWQ. A number of writers stated publicly that they saw FEWQ as a turning inward, a circling of the wagons, or a ghettoization of English-language writers, and that they would not be part of such an organization. One commentator said that he couldn't decide from week to week if all the recent activity of the English-language writing scene was "The sign of a renaissance or one last fling before we all disappear like the dodo bird." He went on to say that "Sometimes I feel like cheerleading; sometimes I feel like sniping." FEWQ was not created by or for people who feel the situation is hopeless or that circling the wagons is the only remaining solution. Nor is it expected that every writer will join. However, many writers will benefit.

It is normal that a new organization take some time to establish its identity. This newsletter is a review of the first ten months of the organization. The events which have flowed from FEWQ's formation are the stuff that make it possible to believe in lucky stars: no moment in the past

twenty years could have been more propitious for the creation of an English-language writers' organization in Quebec.

The Quebec Drama Federation (QDF), L'Association des éditeurs anglophones du Québec (AEAQ), and The Quebec Society for the Promotion of English-Language Literature (QSPELL) have been lobbying and organizing since the mid-1980s. Members of those three groups were among those who were instrumental in creating FEWQ. Within days of its first AGM, FEWQ was invited to join the three older groups in a Task Force organized by the Ministry of Culture. Over the summer, more than a hundred writers were questioned and then consulted on the evolving brief which was presented to the Task Force in July. The response from the Ministry of Culture was prompt and decisive. FEWQ is now officially recognized as the group representing English-language writers in Quebec. FEWQ has been promised funding on a three-year basis to set up an office in collaboration with QSPELL and AEAQ -- an office that will be the long-desired focal point for the literary community.

FEWQ has also been recognized by the Ministries of Culture and Education as the appropriate group to work with UNEQ to expand the existing writers-in-schools programme -- which is open to published novelists, poets and playwrights -- into English-language schools with English-language writers.

Concurrently, FEWQ was invited to be one of the official participants in Celebration '93 and has thereby received an enormous amount of publicity. The activities of FEWQ have been reported in *The Gazette*, *Hour*, *The Mirror*, *The Globe and Mail*, *La Presse*, *Le Devoir* and *L'Actualité*. The result of all this press attention is that dozens of published and produced writers, who otherwise would have known nothing of FEWQ's existence, have contacted us and become members. As we enter our tenth month, membership has passed the 100 mark and continues to grow apace.

The rest of this newsletter is devoted to details of FEWQ's activities. Few of those who attended last March's AGM would have believed that so much would happen so quickly. There is still an enormous amount of work to be done, but we have successfully established an organization which will build upon these foundations.



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WRITERS IN SCHOOLS

The Ministry of Culture and the Department of Education have, for a number of years, funded a Writers-in-Schools programme which has been managed by l'Union des écrivaines et écrivains du Québec (UNEQ). The programme is open to primary and secondary schools throughout Quebec which can invite novelists, poets or playwrights to discuss their work with classes. One of the major attractions of the programme is that a copy of the writer's book is purchased for each student in the class (last year the programme bought between 8,000 and 9,000 books) and the students study the book for a month before meeting the writer. In addition, the copies of the book are donated to the school library.

After FEWQ's Task Force recommendations, the Ministry of Culture realized it was high time that the programme be expanded to include English-language writers and schools. The operating budget for the first year is targeted at 10% of the budget for the French-language programme.

FEWQ is hereby inviting applications from writers who are interested in participating in this programme. We will be collecting names from December '93 through to February '94. A selection of eligible writers will be made by a FEWQ committee early in March, and information on the selected writers will be circulated through the school system starting late March. The first writers will be going into schools in the fall of '94.

To be eligible:

- the writer must be a published novelist, poet, or playwright residing in Quebec

- the book(s) must be in print and available in appropriate quantities on seven days notice

- the writer should have experience with or aptitude in working with students (a preference for secondary or primary school may be indicated).

All interested writers should send biographical material and press clippings to FEWQ care of "Writers-In-Schools". For more information call 441-5178.

ANGLO TASK FORCE

In the Spring of 1993 FEWQ, along with QDF, AEAQ and QSPELL, was invited by Liza Frulla, the Minister of Culture, to take part in a Task Force on English-language culture.

Background:

In June of 1992, following the Arpin report and one of the most exhaustive parliamentary hearings in Quebec history, during which 264 briefs were presented, the old Ministry of Cultural Affairs unveiled a new Cultural Policy. The 150-page document forever altered government funding of the arts in Quebec. Three of the most far-reaching provisions were:

- the government declared culture to be as important to Quebec society as economic and social dimensions.

- the old Ministry of Cultural Affairs was abolished and a new, reduced, Ministry of Culture was created. Most of the artistic dossiers (not 'cultural industries') of the Ministry were transferred to the new Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ).

- the CALQ was to be made up of 12 artists, who would determine cultural policy for all programmes affecting 'arts and letters'. This is the first time in Quebec that artists have been

involved in cultural decision-making at such a high level.

In addition, the Cultural Policy recognized the historic contribution of "des Québécois d'expression anglaise" and made a clear commitment to on-going support of English-language creators and their institutions.

The Brief:

The brief presented by FEWQ in July (copies of the complete document are available) included the following recommendations:

- that English-language writers and related organizations have equality of access to all cultural funding programmes

- that English-language writers receive a proportional share of cultural funding,

- that English-language writers be represented on all juries, boards and in other consultative processes

- that there be an ombudsman designated to investigate perceived cases of unfair treatment

- that all jurors be competent to understand the language and cultural context of work under review

- that FEWQ be recognized as the official organization to represent English-language writers.

In October the Ministry informed us that FEWQ, AEAQ and QSPELL will be given a three-year grant to set up joint offices and create a focal point for the English-language literary community. Representatives of the three organizations are currently visiting spaces and planning how to best use this funding to develop our community.

by Peter McFarlane

The first time I heard of FEWQ was in the summer of 1992 when my friend Elias Letelier-Ruz invited me to a barbecue at my own house with half a dozen guests whom I had never met.

Among them were the poet, Sharon H. Nelson, and the poet/publisher, Endre Farkas. After dinner, Nelson and Farkas spoke of the need for an organization to bring together the lost tribe of English-language writers. Before the evening was out, Nelson handed me a twelve-page document which she and Farkas had recently put together, outlining the shape and mandate such an organization might take. Nelson even had a name for it, the somewhat unwieldy but nicely acronym-able Federation of English-language Writers of Quebec (FEWQ, FEW-Quebec, FEW-Q).

It wasn't until the next day, when I actually read Nelson's document, that I saw that FEWQ was not only a good idea, but a necessary instrument in getting our voices heard in Quebec City and Ottawa.

I worked with Nelson in late August putting together a rough draft of a

constitution. In early September, we met at her house with a dozen or so other writers (among them, Endre Farkas, Guy Rodgers, Linda Leith, Kenneth Radu, and Bruce Whiteman) who would form the nucleus of the Advisory Board and the first executive. That founding group was expanded later in the fall to include Quebec representatives from most of the national writers' organizations.

After some government difficulties over our name (they objected to the word "federation") FEWQ was officially registered in January 1993. A modest membership mailing was sent out soon after and the response was heartening. More than fifty writers signed up, and most of them showed up at last March's general meeting.

FEWQ is still less than a year old, but the new executive has already acquired recognition and some funding from the provincial government. With this newsletter and in subsequent meetings, I hope FEWQ will also fulfill another of its initial objectives: to provide a forum where Quebec's English-language writers can get together, get to know one another, exchange ideas and help one another in our common struggles.

Bill 51 creating le Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ) was passed in December 1992. All of the artistic programmes of the old Ministry of Cultural Affairs (with a total budget approximately \$42M) are currently being transferred to CALQ; 'cultural industries' will be handled separately. The full-time president of the CALQ board is Guy Morin, most recently executive director of Place des Arts. He is also executive director of the many fonctionnaires who will be employed by CALQ. The other 12 members of the CALQ board are artists selected by the Minister of Culture to represent dance, music, theatre, literature and the visual arts.

The creation of CALQ is an important step toward self-determination by artists in the area of cultural policy. The members of CALQ will review the nature of cultural funding in Quebec and all existing programmes. The actual transfer of programmes is slated to occur on the first day of the new fiscal year, April 1st, 1994.

Some of the promises of the Cultural Policy document have been fulfilled by the Minister in her appointment of two anglophones to the 13 member CALQ board: Guy Rodgers, president of FEWQ, and artist Melvin Charney. English-language artists have never before had this degree of representation in Quebec and it is a clear demonstration of the Minister's commitment to include us.

Other members of CALQ are: Godefroy Cardinal, Jean-Claude Germain, Marie Laberge, Ginette Laurin, Gilles Maheu, Jovette Marchessault, Monique Mercure, Elise Pare-Tousignant, Luc Plamondon and William Saint-Hilaire.

A number of members have approached the executive with the suggestion of workshops for members. We could organize workshops on a break-even basis whereby the workshop giver's fee would be recharged to the participants. This formula has worked successfully for years for the Quebec Drama Federation and Playwrights' Workshop Montreal. However, to make a workshop viable, at least eight writers need to take part. What the executive needs to know is what workshops are of interest to members. Some of the topics which have been suggested are: The ins and outs of getting published, Contracts, Agents.

We intend to offer the workshop(s) in our next newsletter. Please contact us as soon as possible with your suggestions for workshops and the people you would like to see give them.

FEWQ wishes to congratulate members T.F. Rigelhof (*Je t'aime Cowboy*), P.Scott Lawrence (*Missing Fred Astaire*), Eric Ormsby (*Coastlines*) and Ralph Gustafson (*Configurations at Midnight*) for being short-listed for the 1993 QSPELL awards. The winners, announced on November 26, were P. Scott Lawrence for fiction and Ralph Gustafson for poetry. Congratulations also go to Supporting Member Véhicule Press which published the winning books in both the fiction and non-fiction categories.

FEWQ EXECUTIVE

Guy Rodgers - President
Linda Leith - V.P. Projects
Susan Gabori - V.P. Operations
David Homel - V.P. Communications

ADVISORY BOARD

Sonja Skarstedt, Mariangela Vincenzi
- Co-chairs
Mark Abley (LCP)
Maya Byers (CBA)
Don Druick (PUC)
Endre Farkas (AEAQ)
Janet Kask (PWAC)
P. Scott Lawrence (TWUC)
Elias Letelier-Ruz
Peter McFarlane (past President)
Sharon H. Nelson
Bruce Whiteman

Now that we have 100 members, we need to start booking larger spaces for our events. More than 80 members and friends crowded into the upstairs space at the Lux Piano Bar on November 17th for our first ever "Joust for Words"

At the beginning of the evening, host Endre Farkas, dressed in medieval cape and cap, drew five numbers from his cap. The spectators holding those numbers were given masks and a set of score cards, numbered from one to ten, with which to judge the jousters. They were: Ruth Taylor, Anthony Berman, Carol Krenz, Mohamud Togane, Anne Dolores Careless, Faye Weber, Milly Charon, Katherine Frey, and Stanley Asher (who also provided musical interludes during the judges deliberations). The readings were nearly 50-50 fiction and poetry.

The judges were bold, awarding scores from four to ten, and in only a couple of cases drew noisy disapproval from the other spectators. At the end of the nine readings Carol Krenz and Stanley Asher were tied at 40 points each and competed in a joust-off. Stanley Asher came away from the evening with a handsome "Holy Grail" trophy.



The Federation of English-language Writers of Quebec (FEWQ) is a professional association recognized by the Quebec Ministry of Culture as the official representative of English-language writers resident in Québec. If you are an English-language writer living in Québec, FEWQ can serve you. Join us now

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Annual membership fee: \$22.26 (includes taxes)

Name: _____ Tel/fax: _____

Address: _____

Please enclose production and/or publication information about your work.

The first issue of the Quidnunc Crier was graciously produced on a shoestring budget by Mariangela Vincenzi.