

SPECTRUM

Positively Pink

Politics of paranoia - Part III

OPINION/ A fringe activity, treating and "curing" homosexuals entered the mainstream in 1948.

by Adrian Park

"People are more easily moved by fear than they are by love." Richard Milhous Nixon.

Senator Joseph McCarthy was censured by the US Senate in the spring of 1954; thereafter his star rapidly declined. He died in 1957 a spent political force, but his legacy lingered on for another three decades, taking the form of a Manichaeism that became a part of the fabric of political life in the US, UK, and to a lesser extent, Canada. This Manichaeism took the form of a general suspicion of any advocate of human rights initiatives - and in the case of gay-rights advocates equated them with the darkest of motivations. In the demonology of the Right-wing, the "Homintern" were bedfellows to the Comintern.

Until the late 19th century same-sex activity fell squarely within the moral domain governed by the institutional churches, and was seen as just another sin (albeit a particularly heinous one) that anyone could commit. Early psychologist and sociologists changed the terms of reference dramatically - homosexual-

ity became an illness, replete with new name, symptoms, and eventually treatments and "cures". Until the hey-day of psycho-analysis in the 1950s, this remained a fringe interest.

In the hysterical atmosphere of the post-WWII Red Scare the Kinsey "Report on the sexual behaviour of the human male" of 1948, created a sensation. The popular press took Kinsey's statistics whichever way they saw fit to boost sales (even the serious press rarely take the care over scientific statistics that they lavish over financial data). Kinsey estimated that 4% of US adult males were exclusively homosexual - having only ever been aroused by other males and never by women. A further 8% were largely homosexual, and in total 36-38% of adult males had experienced some sort of homosexual arousal or activity to the point of orgasm (this predominantly during adolescence). All Kinsey's caveats were ignored, and headlines declared that his study had found that between 10 and 30% of US males were homosexual. By the time McCarthy had whipped the Red Scare to fever pitch, equating treachery with perversion, it was common knowledge that not only were "Reds

under the bed", but they were fighting for space with a legion of "queers!" How could God-fearing, decent folk sleep at night for the racket?

A fringe activity, treating and "curing" homosexuals entered the mainstream. The English speaking world was in the grip of an epidemic of homosexuality. Psychiatry (especially psycho-analysis) led the effort, but clinical psychiatry and neuro surgery brought up the substantial rear. Even the most ardent psychoanalysts had to admit that "cure-rates" were infinitesimally small, and relapse the norm. A vast array of clinical and surgical techniques were developed to supplement the couch; running the gamut from electrical and chemical aversion therapy, through chemical castration and induced insulin shock, to radical brain surgery. The clinical model of the neurotic, if not psychotic homosexual became self-fulfilling, and anyone sane when entering such a treatment regime stood a high chance of not being entirely sane when they came out the other end.

Initially ignored by the mainstream, Evelyn Hooker's pioneer-

ing work with well-adjusted homosexuals, systematically demolished the premises on which the clinical model was based. Her methodological strengths (even Kinsey had relied heavily on data from prisons and other custodial institutions), and numerous follow-up studies during the following years eventually convinced a new generation of psychiatrist and psychologist to revise their approach. "Adjustment" to one's sexual orientation became the desirable goal of treatment, and in 1972 the American Psychiatric Association finally decided that homosexuality should not be regarded as an illness.

Out of the realm of medicine, homosexuality was once again the preserve of the churches. This development coincided with the first muscle-flexing exercises of the forces that would eventually become the New Right and Moral Majority.

The Right-wing backlash to 1960's liberalism had several false starts. Edward Heath's Conservative government in Britain fell apart in economic anarchy after a mere 3 years, and though Richard Nixon lasted longer, he too eventually succumbed in the byzantine morass of Watergate. Joe Whose brief flirtation with the reigns of state was Canada's only experience of this abortive right-wing revival. The lesson the New Right learned from these debacles was that they had to appeal to more than people's economic insecurities. In 1977 and 1978 a faded beauty queen and an alliance of religious mis-fits showed the way. Anita Bryant's crusade to "Save Our Children", eventually disintegrated, but she had demonstrated that there was political mileage in homophobia.

Able assisted by the bumbling gerontocracy in the Kremlin, the New Right had little difficulty reviving Cold War antagonisms. In Britain Margaret Thatcher rode to power on the triple plank of Red Scare, racism and homophobia. Ronald Reagan entered the White House 18 months later cheered on by a new brand of religious fanaticism in which the same three ingredients figured large. Thatcher's initial homophobia was largely used as a weapon against a left-wing in disarray. The direct assault on gays and lesbians had to wait until 1987 and 1989, when a succession of acts were passed making it illegal to "promote" positive images of homosexuals or homosexuality in schools or any local government funded institution, severely curtailing custody and adoption rights for lesbian mothers and gay fathers, and radically redefining public nuisance and indecency legislation with new draconian penalties (harsher in some cases than for rape).

The same rhetoric used to justify these legislative atrocities in Britain has surfaced in the US and Canada. Documents published in

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recent months by the Oregon Citizens' Alliance (a front organization for fundamentalists) in the US, and by "Parent's Concern" and the "Family Association" here in Canada, practically quote verbatim from advocates of the British legislation (the Conservative Family Association) - even retaining the British spelling! All harp on about three myths - lies actually - 1. that gay men and lesbians actively recruit, and that people only become lesbian or gay because of recruitment or seduction, or the "promotion" of gay and lesbian "lifestyles", 2. a gay/lesbian conspiracy is out to subvert the institutions of state, church and society, with "the family" as prime target, and 3. "secular humanism" is an anti-religion determined to erase all traces of Christianity from western civilization - tolerance for homosexuality is all of one seamless web with promoting "Darwinism", feminism and social welfare in this nefarious purpose.

The absurdity of these myths should be self-evident. That the "Homintern" is a force at all is a fantasy concocted by folk who have forgotten to take their lithium, and have no concept of the reality of gay and lesbian political organizations. The reality being that, AIDS-related organizations largely excepted, organizing a coffee-morning without months of ferocious in-fighting would be cause for wild celebration - a lavender coup d'etat is about as unlikely an event as you'll get. As for the plot against "the family" and Christian values, a political movement that has elevated greed to the status of virtue if not civic duty, allied with a fundamentalism that has turned hate into a sacrament needs no help on this score from the Homintern. The only frightening aspect of all this is that anyone takes the politics of paranoia seriously to being with.

G.A.L.A. Upcoming Events

Friday 20th November - Drop-In Centre. 7 pm onwards "Bring a Dessert Night."

Friday 27th November

- Women's Focus Evening - including a brief presentation on the community - womens organization, the "W.O.M.Y.N.'s" group.

- A visiting speaker, Marge Rioux, talking about prevention and detection of breast cancer and cervical cancer.

-feature film (of womens interest in particular) "Oranges are not the only fruit" No witty comments please!

For locations of events call the Gayline (operated Monday and Thursday, 6 - 9 pm) on 457-2156.

Metanoia

Professors as spiritual guides

EDUCATION/ To be complete, it ought to impinge on the whole person.

by John Valk

When I ask students why they attend university the response I invariably receive is "So I can get a job." Students select subject areas, minor programs and electives to place them in the most favourable position to get that job. In all of this, high grades are important, if not essential.

This should surprise no one. Merely learning for learning's sake is not very realistic in an economically depressed era. The contemplation of lofty ideological principles or values may indeed be attractive, but unless there is some guarantee that it will result in a paying job, it is not likely to be pursued. And, who can fault students for taking such a position?

Have we not, however, swung to an extreme? We ought to be alarmed when we hear comments such as: "it is not important what one studies, but the grade one receives". Has the greatest challenge today become merely one of absorbing only that which is necessary to acquire a (high) grade? Has university education become a narrowed endeavour?

To be complete, education ought to impinge on the whole person. Learning is more than job training, and teaching more than presenting facts, more than sharing the latest research results? Education is a matter of helping students become better people in order that they are

better able to perform at their jobs, and perhaps even create new and more meaningful ones. A university should not only produce knowledgeable students, but also discerning ones; those who know the difference between right and wrong, between self-interest and self-giving, between justice and injustice, between the easier route and the better route?

The person who plays the most crucial role in the learning process is the professor. The root word of professor is "to profess". To profess means, at minimum, to state where one is coming from, one's point of view, one's meaning and purpose in life, one's view of the importance of his/her subject matter in the greater scheme of things. What a professor "professes", both in word and deed, may be of great interest to a student searching for guidance. Whether a professor regards students as crucial to the learning environment, or a nuisance to personal endeavours, will be of even greater interest.

The professor is in the unique position of presenting more than facts and information. The professor can generate in the student a love for learning, open up new worlds of ideas and possibilities, stimulate the imagination to realize greater potential. One can also close down, stifle or limit a student's growth. In effect, the professor is in a unique position of trust and influence. He or she can help the student make sense out of life, to assist in the search for mean-

ing as well as truth and knowledge.

That search is also spiritual. It goes far beyond what we have traditionally (and perhaps naively) understood as spiritual or religious. Too often we assume a separation between the spiritual and the rest of life, with the former as optional, perhaps within an institutional framework.

Students are in search of meaning when they enter university. That search of late is all too often concentrated narrowly on jobs and salaries. But the search for meaning also includes wrestling with who we are as human beings: beings who are more than mere consumers; beings who have need for community, for meaningful relationships free from emotional or sexual oppression, for work that is more than utilitarian. Students today are desperate for the assurance that what they hope to do will make a meaningful difference, that it will contribute positively to make our society (and global village) more free, just and joyful, for ourselves and for others.

There are students who emerge from higher education quite cynical. Perhaps the trust has long ago been broken. But there are also students who have been mentioned by professors who encourage, challenge and stimulate the imagination, who assist students in

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