

SPECTRUM

IN THE PINK

"THE MORAL IMPERATIVE OF COMING OUT"

By JAMES GILL

A friend of mine who is an activist for lesbian and gay rights told me of one news tip which he received for his radio show. Among other things it revealed the identity of a gay M.P. who was in the closet. He (my friend) and I began discussing the responsibility of gay men and lesbians in public life.

I asserted, and still do, that coming out of the closet was a personal choice and no community interest is strong enough to override that. My friend's arguments did raise a number of questions in my mind, though.

Almost everyone knows of Svend Robinson, the openly gay M.P. from British Columbia (not the M.P. referred to above). Similarly, everyone should be aware of the fact that there are about thirty other lesbian and gay M.P.'s still in the closet (probably fewer lesbians because women are underrepresented in Parliament). I know of a few of these M.P.'s. The principal question is whether they are shirking any duty to the gay and lesbian community.

These M.P.'s, by staying in the closet, create a presumption of heterosexuality. They do nothing to stop it, and in some cases cultivate it. There have been cases of lesbian and gay members of legislative assemblies arguing against bills to afford equal rights to gay men and lesbians. Clearly this latter action, and probably the former, are examples of a betrayal of the lesbian and gay community. It is one thing to decide not to come out of the closet. It is quite another to argue against equal rights for your brothers and sisters.

It is important for the gay and lesbian community to cultivate appropriate role models. It must be shown that you can be openly lesbian or gay and still be successful in any field. Gay and lesbian youth face a multitude of problems above and beyond the stresses that typically accompany adolescence. It fills me with hope to think of how much easier that can be with people like Svend Robinson to show that there is no need to be afraid of a homosexual orientation.

So what responsibility do lesbians and gay men in positions of community leadership have to the gay and lesbian community? The ongoing struggle for equal rights for women and for racial minorities is made somewhat easier by the fact that the community leaders from these groups are visible. We do not have that advantage, and regrettably so. If we all turned purple tomorrow there would be a lot of purple people out there. Once we are out of the closet, we have nothing to lose by fighting for our rights.

For lesbians and gay men in politics, the decision of whether or not to come out of the closet is based primarily upon political factors: possible damage to re-election hopes or to the party. There is also the risk of being branded a "one-issue" person. This issue was certainly the toughest for me. I am prominent in the gay and lesbian movement, but I am not a "gay student leader", rather, I am a student leader who happens to be gay.

There is another question, however, brought to mind by the Barney Frank affair in Washington. By becoming a public figure, does the lesbian or gay activist have to become a social paragon in all things? Certainly the Frank affair has caused problems, but do these outweigh the benefits of having an openly gay public figure? In one respect we can take heart, for the gay and lesbian community is 'represented' at all levels of society (we have much closer to our fair share of M.P.'s than do women of visible minorities) but at the same time it is not true representation because it is hidden.

We must, in the lesbian and gay community, provide the support and activism that is necessary to allow public figures to come out of the closet. I still maintain that it is their own choice, but at least we can make it as easy a decision as possible.

Next GALA Meeting: Tuesday, October 24 at 8:00 pm in room 26.

SEX AND THE SINGLE PAMPHLET

Luis Cardoso

Although AIDS is the single, most important issue facing today's students, it is a tragedy that the debate has become bogged down in the issue of what constitutes offensive language. The St. Thomas University students' council has taken it upon themselves to decide that the pamphlet on AIDS presented to U.N.B. students during registration contains language that is offensive. In an editorial from the St. Thomas student newspaper THE AQUINIAN (Sept. 20, 1989), the pamphlet was described as both "garbage," and "a joke."

The decision not to distribute the pamphlet in question was made by the St. Thomas University students' union. No pressure was put upon the students' union by the administration. This makes the decision all the more bizarre. It would seem that the students' council at S.T.U. is out of touch with their own students. Unfortunately, it is those students that will suffer for the council's decision.

The explanation for the decision is that the pamphlet uses "street," or "gutter" language; students should know enough to recognize the medical terminology for the sexual practices described graphically throughout the pamphlet. Such an explanation ignores the statistics that show illiteracy among university students is a pressing concern. Apart from those students who are illiterate, there are a large number who have never learned the medical terminology for the sexual practices they recognize by their "street" names, for in fact, they have known them as such since primary school.

The tragedy is that, with AIDS, one has no second chance. First year students without the benefit of the first class education that S.T.U. obviously provides, as council president Irma Ferlatte can be so confident in her estimation of her fellow students' intelligence, could be in serious jeopardy without a frank, honest guide to the danger of AIDS. Obviously, the students' council at St. Thomas University is prepared to make this decision, and to assume the deadly serious responsibility it entails. One cannot help but ask, however, if certain individuals have let their own sexual mores interfere with a decision that should not be clouded by the issue of sexual morality.

One can only hope that the attitude expressed by the students' union at St. Thomas University does not set a precedent among universities. Meanwhile, the controversial pamphlet is still available at U.N.B. for students at St. Thomas University who may not have as firm a grasp of medical terminology as Ms. Ferlatte to peruse. The short walk down the hill may save lives.

A further development in this controversial issue: it seems that the Federal Centre for AIDS of Health and Welfare Canada, the very institution that funded the pamphlet, is threatening to withdraw funding because the pamphlet printed by the Students' Union of Nova Scotia and the student associations of the Atlantic Provinces was not the same pamphlet shown them when they made the decision to provide the funding.

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LEGAL EASE

POLICING POWERS ON CAMPUS

There are various organizations involved in maintaining peace and order on the University of New Brunswick campus. The most prominent of these are the Campus Police (CP's), UNB Security, and the Fredericton City Police. Within the residence system, the proctors and dons of the individual houses have limited power with regard to maintaining order and enforcing house rules.

Because the campus is considered to be private property, the University, under the University of New Brunswick Act has the responsibility of maintaining order on campus. In order to do this, the Board of Governors of the university has enacted the Student Disciplinary Code, as well as various other regulations, including liquor regulation.

STUDENT DISCIPLINARY CODE

The Student Disciplinary Code was enacted to provide students with a means of self-discipline. It states that "it is not meant as a replacement to the laws governing the community as a whole, but as an alternative whereby the University recognizes the special environment it creates and chooses to discipline students in that context." The Code outlines various offences and punishments for them. For the most part, the Code is administered by the Campus Police. If you are brought up in a charge under the Student Disciplinary Committee, which is composed entirely of students.

CAMPUS POLICE/UNB SECURITY

The Campus Police are very familiar sights on our campus. They are usually the first campus enforcement organization with which students deal. They are responsible for enforcing the provisions of the Student Disciplinary Code, the various liquor regulations, and generally for maintaining order and ensuring proper student conduct at campus events. Campus Police members have the authority to report students who commit a breach of the Disciplinary Code.

UNB Security is given authority to enforce the University rules for traffic control and fire prevention. Like the Campus Police, they are responsible for the protection of people and property on the campus.

If Campus Police or UNB Security catch someone committing a serious offence, they may arrest that person. This type of arrest is known as a Citizen's Arrest in the Criminal Code. The Criminal Code allows an ordinary citizen to arrest another without a warrant if he or she finds that person actually committing an offence or has reason to believe that the person has just committed an offence and is escaping.

Basically, the Campus Police and UNB Security handle most problems that arise on campus. Many offences are dealt with internally and the City Police are rarely called in unless the offence committed is a very serious one.

FREDERICTON CITY POLICE/R.C.M.P.

It is the popular belief of many students that the Fredericton City Police of R.C.M.P. are not allowed on the campus as it is considered to be private property. This is false. If a crime has been committed, the police have every right to enter the campus. For the most part, the police will not interfere with the Campus Police and UNB Security in maintaining order on campus. They will, however, respond to a call from one of these organizations to help administer the law, if necessary. It is therefore usually at the discretion of the University to decide whether or not to call in the police.

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Continued from page 3. particularly conservative religious types or those whom she describes as having been "brainwashed into believing that a fetus' rights outweigh those of the mother."

Looking into the future, Catherine likes to believe anti-abortionists will see the light. But until they do, she and others who support women's right to choice will have to contend with being called murderers as they make the long, expensive trip to Montreal or Toronto for quick and efficient abortions.

She believes that when the

anti-abortion lobby steps away from its "morbid rhetoric" and starts thinking about the reality of a single mother's life, it will become more sympathetic towards women who choose to have the procedure.

"We're not monsters, we're just ordinary women. We're your sisters, your daughters, your mothers and friends. When I had to make my decision, I had to face being called a murderer. Where the anti-abortionists when the two year old is crying for a bottle or when the diapers have to be changed? Where are they I ask?"

* Catherine is a pseudonym



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