

SPECTRUM

Positively Pink

Mob rule or liberal democracy - a clear choice

OPINION/ A minority is no less worthy of human rights because it is unpopular.

by Adrian Park

It's an old saw that we get the politicians we deserve - apathy is the death knell of democracy. In that light the events here on 26 October, and south of the border on 2 November were very gratifying. Large numbers of electors turned out and voted; in the US reversing the trend of a generation. So much for the good news, the bad being that we had to go through the farce of 26 October in the first place. An old teacher of mine used to say "ask a silly question, expect a silly answer." The question was inane, and the answer - well, your guess is as good as mine! This illustrates the weakness of referenda in principle. At least Canada only indulges in such mockeries of democracy rarely - in certain US states the festivities occur biennially. On 2 November nearly 100 propositions went to referendum votes in more than 10 states and many more municipalities. Among them Oregon, Colorado, Portland (Maine) and Tampa Bay (Florida) had propositions on the ballot concerning gay and lesbian rights legislation. All the propositions sought to reverse or forbid anti-discrimination legislation, with the more radical anti-discrimination legislation, with the more radical Oregon "Measure 9" demanding a state constitution amendment declaring homosexuality to be "perverse, un-natural and abominable" and forbidding the employment of gays and lesbians in the teaching, health-care and child-care professions. The Oregon and Portland propositions failed, in Colorado and Tampa Bay they passed. Oregon particularly, saw a carefully crafted and well-financed coalition of fundamentalists produce a campaign of murder, intimidation, fear and hate - their defeat is a major cause for celebration.

These referendum propositions were formulated and promoted by the Citizen's coalition, supported by Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition. Content to be part of the conservative coalition that brought Regan to power, since 1988 these organizations have struck out on their own, putting together impressive grass-roots movements. We witnessed their final attempt to hijack the Republican Party in the Houston hate-fest last June. However, no-one should assume we've heard the last of them, or that their activities are restricted by the border. Too much is at stake here - including the future of liberal democracy.

This lunatic fringe is a multi-headed monster, its faces ranging from eye-rolling, mouth-frothing televangelical mob-orators seeking the death penalty for "adulterers, abortionists and unrepentant sodomites" in a return to "Biblical justice", to the ostensibly less rabid, certainly less hysterical "Focus on the Family" and certain elements of the Reform Party. Paralysis of leadership and general dis-

content with the political establishment have provided the opportunity. Economic and social malaise, as ever, create a climate were scapegoating has a ready audience.

What unites these rag-tag remnants of the New Right, now that their traditional political allies have demonstrated their ideological and moral bankruptcy, is the rhetoric and propaganda. The demands for regular referenda are paramount - with minority and gay and lesbian rights legislation usually cited as evidence that traditional representative democracy has "lost touch" with voters - with whom these new populists claim to be in perfect tune.

From the late 18th Century on, the proponents of liberal democracy have considered the fate of the individual against the interests of the state, and the fate of minorities within the state. The fashion for constitutions being the result. The archetype, the democracy of classical Athens, had no constitution, the vote of the electors was law - and the death sentence on Socrates being a well known act of this state. Crucially, liberal and constitutional democracy functions under the rule of law - Constitutions protect minorities from the whims of the majority, especially a majority moved by fear, insecurity, hatred and ignorance. A lynching is no less wrong because a majority approve - a minority is no less worthy of human rights because it is unpopular. Referenda in this context subvert constitutional democracy: for the CA and its allies in Oregon and Colorado, and the regular referenda enthusiasts in this country, that is precisely the intention. Having failed to win power, or to hold on to it, by traditional means, these fringe parties of the Right seek to change the system.

One of the hopeful signs in the US was that in Oregon the mask of the OCA (Oregon Citizen's Alliance) and the CC was seen through. The mainstream churches all realized that these "Christian" organizations were no more "Christian" than the old German Democratic Republic was "democratic", and all roundly condemned the proposition.

While modern civilization undoubtedly has its problems, a return to the legal notions of Neolithic goat-herds, and a scriptural interpretation that has justified torture, slavery, the burnings of witches and heretics, and genocide warfare is not the solution. Curiously, a recurring lie in the CC and CA rhetoric was the old notion that acceptance or tolerance of homosexuality heralds the decline of empires - Rome being the preferred example. In fact in the Roman Empire at its height, roughly from Julius Caesar to Caracalla, all the emperors excepting perhaps Augustus and Claudius either tolerated homosexuality, or were gay or bisexual themselves. As Gibbons pointed out 200 years ago, the precipitate decline of Rome occurred only after the Empire became Christian. That Christianity should have proved incompatible with a power-

structure based on gross inequality, utter contempt for the value of women and children, and slavery should really be a matter of Christian pride. Certainly many of Christianity's subsequent problems stem from the way it integrated itself into that dying power-structure after Constantine.

What the future of liberal democracy needs is leadership dedicated to constitutional principles like equality before the law, and a law applied without favour - referenda on the other hand represent an abdication of political respon-

sibility. Pat Buchanan and Pat Robertson were right when they claimed a war was in progress. The choices have rarely been more clear - the Right has declared war not on liberal values, but on civilization itself. As the German president recently reminded the world, Weimar's liberal democracy did not fail because there were too many National Socialists, it failed because there were too few committed democrats.

GALA Upcoming Events

Friday, Nov. 27 - 7 PM - Women's focus evening. Visiting speak-

ers talking about the "W.O.M.Y.N.'s Group" and on women's health issues, in particular prevention and detection of cervical and breast cancer. Followed by the feature film "Oranges are not the only fruit" (of particular interest to Lesbian women). Everyone welcome, including "off-campus" persons.

Friday, Dec. 4 - 7 PM - Drop In Centre. Usual location. Further activities to be announced. For additional information and locations or events call 457-2156. Monday and Thursday 6 PM - 9 PM.

The Wimmin's Room

Real men don't drink coolers

OBSERVING/ On to table two. A little more calculation here, less testosterone.

by Patti Post-Smyth

I am a patron of the Social Club. Well, let me qualify that and say I do feminist research at the Social Club, usually on Friday afternoons and on Tuesday evenings, otherwise known as "free pool night." In my four years of membership I feel I am now ready to present my critique of your establishment as well as my own personal theory of the macho game of pool as it is practised in the backroom. Let me begin at the door. When I arrive I am greeted by a large male, colloquially known as the "bouncer." I, of course, know them all by name but to spare any further strain on their brains I will not mention them personally. I flash my membership card. Often they insist on stamping indelible ink on my hand so my kids will know for sure that Mom went to the Social Club and not the library as she has stated. There is no entrance without this tattoo.

Okay, I allow the personal invasion of my body. I would just like to have a drink now please. "Oh, no, not yet, M'am." First you must divest yourself of any property you may be carrying real or personal for a charge of fifty cents. Sweetly saying I have only paid twenty-five cents for my adorable little pink raincoat at a yard sale does not go over well. (How do I tell them the truth, that I have not taken the time to get the wrinkles out of my NO MEANS NO t-shirt and besides I have spaghetti stains on the front, right where guys eyes look when they talk to you!) I fear this plea for leniency will go unheard as have most of my similar appeals in the past. Okay, I'll give up the coat and keep my arms folded.

"Now, your bookbag, please." No, not my bookbag. Everything I own practically is in that bag. I try to think fast but by this time two enforcers are bearing down on me. "You can't go in with a bookbag." "Where am I supposed to keep my large wallet stuffed with kids pic-

tures and bank machine receipts, my cigarettes, my tampons!" "Sorry, lady." Well, I think to myself. I could put my wallet in my pocket. This skirt doesn't have one...I'll have to unfold my arms and show my unkempt appearance. I try to roll my cigarettes up in my shirt sleeve like a truck driver but I have acquired neither the skill for doing so nor the bicep to keep them from falling out. Well, that takes care of both hands. The wallet and cigarettes. I've never left the club with any money anyway. The remaining problem, and the most perplexing; where do I put my tampons? I could write "It's a Girl" on the wrapper with a marker and stick it in my shirt pocket, if I had one, and pretend it's a new kind of cigar. If I had two I could attach them to my earrings. Why didn't I bring a Kotex pad and I could have stuck it in my bra, if I'd have worn one. All I want is a cooler. Just one. If I bring a plastic bag can I put these things in there? No, that would constitute a bag.

Tell me, please, am I entering some foreign country where I must leave my possessions at the border? And then it strikes me. Yes, that is exactly it. I am about to enter the Testosterone Zone. A place where you can buy condoms but not tampons. A place where real men drink beer not coolers. Where Happy Hour is only on beer and hard stuff, never wine and cooler! It's becoming clearer now. This is a place where somebody may steal my bookbag or my pink rubber coat or they think I might smuggle out a cardboard Pepsi cup or a straw or smuggle in my own brew. They don't know that women come with baggage and men come with only their egos. Are they called "bouncers" because they have rubber heads?

So I relent. I hand over my bookbag (which is really my purse) and about which the bouncer has no idea that a woman's purse is just as much a part of her as her arm. I don't mention the "personal item" and hope that I don't bleed on the chairs. So,

duly stamped and stripped, without leaving a tip for this service, I run to the bar. My "usual" is handed to me with a smile and a courteous remark from the woman behind the bar to whom I gladly give a portion of my laundry quarters for knowing what I drink without me having to ask, and also out of sympathy for working this long in a place with such macho rules.

Now, only slightly recovered, I survey the room for friendly faces. Friday afternoon, a few regulars, some business students working on an ethics project in the corner, a professor reading the Bruns. Might as well trip on into the pool room. Straight ahead, table one, the shark table. Only the most serious power players here.. It has room to move around and the broken Pepsi light doesn't attach itself to your cue after a hot shot. Apprentice players study their moves. To my right table two. These guys are serious but are more forthcoming with the praise for their opponent. Then there is table three. For guys who play just for the hell of it and the "odd" woman, usually observing. There are quarters lined up on the cushion, as long as a pool cue. Guess I won't play today. By the time it gets to be my turn the daycare will have been closed for an hour. Watch and sip. Guess I should come on ladies night if I want to see some women. Do they have a "gentlemen's" night? Would anyone show up afraid of being called a "wimp" if they did?

The way the players at table one are slamming their balls around no one would dare call them wimpy. After all, are they not doing their best to get all those balls in the small, warm, dark openings of a soft felt table with a long, hard phallic symbol? Okay, the guys at table one are frustrated sexually.

On to table two. A little more calculation here, less testosterone. More thought being employed here. Military tactics. They are manipulating

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