

SPECTRUM

"Let's do it quietly"

James Gill assesses N.B.'s gay and lesbian liberation movement

No meaningful progress in the area of human rights is ever achieved unless the oppressed define how they will fight the oppressor. Assessed in this light, the lesbian and gay liberation movement in New Brunswick is found wanting. The New Brunswick Coalition for Human Rights Reform has abdicated its responsibility to set the agenda on gay and lesbian rights reform by submitting to a government who told them, "Let's do it quietly." If the human rights code is amended as the result of a quiet lobby, it will be virtually useless.

Human rights legislation is not a panacea, for it only addresses a selected few symptoms of the problem of heterosexism. If we are to attach societal disregard, we have to challenge people's attitudes. We have made some progress - it used to be the lesbian or gay man who had to

ask to have a letter published with the name withheld. Now my name appears in block caps, while the bigot who pens such myopic drivel as "If God had meant homosexuality to be normal he would have made Adam and Steve" has to hide behind the anonymous signature. I do not have to fight cowards, I have my hands full picking on people my own size, for we still have much further to go.

Let us learn a few valuable lessons from the choice movement. Rather than get an injunction against protestors outside his clinics (and using the forces of women's oppressors) Dr. Morgentaler asks women to mobilize and outnumber the protestors. Chantal Daigle's case is remembered not for its legal significance, but rather for the political activism which is initiated. So when the courts and the governments are

making decisions about how we can live our lives, where are the fags and dykes?

There are many ways to keep control of a political agenda. Unfortunately in New Brunswick, the movement is dominated by a strategy which is doomed from the start.

The principal gay and lesbian rights reform group hides behind an innocuous sounding name which does not even connote the issue of sexual orientation. This reflects a refusal on the movement's part to come out (literally) and fight. The Coalition was not going to file a complaint with the Atlantic Press Council regarding Tom Crowther's editorials about the quarantining of people with AIDS, and the disgusting references to homosexuality within it until they were forced into it by individuals who threatened to stop funding the Coalition. Meanwhile, on

campus, GALA (which at least calls itself like it is) has not uttered a sound concerning Mr. Crowther's continued membership on the Board of Governors. We must make it clear to the government that the appointment of a homophobe to UNB's Board is no more welcome than the appointment of a racist, a sexist, or any other type of bigot.

It is only by living openly, and on our own terms that we will ever achieve any liberation. Until then all we are is a bunch of whining people who are just fighting for the right to be treated the way we always have. If anyone seriously believes that a sexual orientation amendment to the Human Rights Code can be achieved without a public outcry from the redneck bigots of the province (and let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that they are an inarticulate lot

-- they seem to have a fairly successful political party on the roll) then I have news to relate. And if anyone seriously believes that human rights legislation is going to make any difference, then I suggest that they take a look around eastern Ontario. Things are no different there because no one has had the courage to fight for change.

Until liberation is earned, all that can be expected are handouts, tokenism, and patronizing attitudes.

James Gill, guest columnist this week, is an alumni of UNB who now practises in Vancouver. He is the author of the "In the pink" columns which were published by The Brunswickan last year.

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