

SPECTRUM

The Black Triangle

Gay issues and narrow mindedness

STUDENT UNION/ *It is amazing just how far they will go to keep gays and lesbians from getting equal treatment.*

by Tristis Bhaird

I wanted to continue talking about books and films this week, but there have been some developments on this campus that cause me to shudder. I watched with interest the situation GALA finds itself embroiled in grow more and more insane.

My first encounter with the SU exec's narrow-mindedness on gay issues came this summer when I attempted to get some funds to start a gay & lesbian resource file. Half of my budget was for music, since I had no lesbian music for Dos Lesbos, and CHSR informed me that special interest music was supposed to be purchased through the representative clubs of the union (this was what they had been told by the SU finance committee when they tried to expand their minority music library.)

The finance committee decided in my case that there was no such thing as lesbian music. I argued myself blue, and in fact nearly gave myself an ulcer trying to prove that there was such a thing, before I realized a few basic truths. The first is that they have no business at all deciding whether lesbian music exists, so I did not need to convince them. The second truth is that they were not going to fund any more than they did. In their little world gays and lesbians don't rate dog doo. Regardless of the statistical fact that somewhere around 10% of their union is paying gay dollars into the coffers, these people are unrepresented, and forced into silence and therefore don't have the clout to gain the privilege of "rights"

One of the nifty little tools that I found out the union had then was to have sexual orientation groups included with political and religious in a bi-law that said they didn't have to fund us at all. I asked them what commonalities could possibly connect sexual orientation with religion and politics, but we weren't getting along too well at that point so I never did get a decent answer. As we went into the school year I was busy trying to keep student radio alive at UNB/St. Thomas and had no energy left to pursue the ridiculousness of the bi-law.

Now, alas, the bi-law thing is back in business. The unfortunate part is that the challenge to it is coming from the political groups. We are still lumped in with them and are being drug along. Everybody is battling over whether to strike the bi-law, or not recognize the groups. Just lovely. I still want to know why we're in there at all. Why doesn't the SU fight over the other two and take us out? Apparently their lawyer told them there is nothing

wrong with what they're doing. I myself would question the advice, and the manner in which it was sought. The question sent to the legal rep should not have been along the lines of "can we defend ourselves in a lawsuit?", but "What are our legal responsibilities" and "where is the line between discrimination of a minority and protection of the union from ideologic, or political usurpation?"

According to an active GALA friend of mine, it is really us who are the most dangerous from the executive's viewpoint. He tells me that all kinds of other groups and cultural organizations may lose their recognition because of this fight and he is amazed at "just how far the SU will go to keep gays and lesbians from getting equal treatment."

The foolishness of this new stand the SU executive is taking is as scary as it is funny. Sure, why don't they cut off all the clubs and

societies that aren't inclusive? They would save you a bundle, and all the international students can shut up and put up. After all they don't have much in the way of representation. They can lose this privilege called "rights". Any club that isn't comfortable for a good ol' boy from this fair country to sit back, kick his heels up and listen to rock & roll at all the events just ain't worth the bother. Listening to chinese music at the New Years festival is uncomfortable... We never heard that kind of music before... this food ain't, chinese like we know chinese... get rid of all this stuff! ... Africa night has all that fast music, and bright colours... hey it's almost like a disco, we don't like disco. Get rid of it!

This is what it's going to come down to. The SU exec says that GALA isn't inclusive because it is open to gay and gay positive people, but someone, who is uncomfortable with homosexuality would not feel welcome in the group. They

ignore the fact that if someone is claustrophobic they will not be comfortable in the scuba diving club.

Well fine, if they want to be idiotic about it, they can stand behind their bizarre words. I say that all club constitutions should be examined, and if they do not already state that homosexuals (among all the other minorities) are welcome in their membership and will achieve equal status (in other words a fag could be president of the Engineering Society), then those clubs be forced to amend their bi-laws to make it so. As well, since there are so many groups a homosexual might find intimidating to join, all clubs must publicly state on the Student Union clubs and societies page of this paper that they are open to gays and lesbians and will provide a harassment free atmosphere for them (even the flaming ones who might be most uncomfortable, you understand). Starting in the fall all clubs must actively recruit gays and lesbians, people of colour, interna-

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tional students whose culture includes non-western style-christian religions etc. and must provide a minimum number of events that these people would be comfortable attending as well as the straight-white folk stuff.

If the SU doesn't go to these lengths, they cannot tell whether other groups are exclusive or not. By the way, the money-bags club needs to be a heck of a lot more inclusive, too. Active recruitment to help minorities past the barriers that we don't even know are there would get more reps from different perspectives on council, and the SU can stop making decisions for people who are not there to request respect for their rights.

Reverse discrimination - does it exist?

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only work when there is a recognition that the first priority is to create a level playing field. The cries of "reverse discrimination" and "I want the best person for the job" come from people who do not see the inequalities imbedded in society that give men the advantage even in situations that appear equal.

The second problem is more complex. It has to do with the construction of social knowledge and truth and the creators of that knowledge and truth. Feminist sociologist Dorethy Smith argues that because men have held the positions of power for the past several centuries and women have been effectively blocked from those positions - then it has been men who set the standards and the norms. A recent news story exemplifies the result of this.

The newly elected female premier on Prince Edward Island made a comment that illustrates how men have set the standards for society and how we mindlessly accept these standards. During her victory speech, Catherine Callbeck said she had made it in a "man's world" therefore she would not be giving women any special favors or consideration. This woman is supporting the illusion of equality. Because she has made it, all women can. This begs the question whether her success is the exception or the rule.

Obviously she is the exception. If there were true equality and every woman had the same opportunity as a man in politics, then 52 percent

of politicians would be women since we represent 52 percent of the population. The explanations for why 52 percent of politicians are not women involve theories about women's innate inferiority. I will bet that Ms. Callbeck does not consider herself inferior to a man or that women's "natural" place is in the home. Therefore the question remains, why aren't women equally represented in the public sphere? Feminist maintain that there are invisible structural barriers firmly in place that serve to keep women out. These barriers result from a history of male dominance and control of power. Feminists maintain that equality legislation is meant to remove those barriers - not to give women special treatment or advantages.

The second issue goes deeper than invisible barriers and a patriarchal structure that excludes women. What was this liberal leader saying about society and women's place in it when she was patting herself on the back for "making it in a man's world." She was unwittingly making a strong statement about the need for equality legislation precisely because it is a "man's world." What most people never think to question is why politics and the public sphere are still "a man's world." What does it mean to make it in a man's world? What is the cost to women? Being proud of "making it in a man's world" is a denigration of women, the validity of our lives and our reality. It is giving to men the power to set the rules and the standards by

which we live. Her statement, and the ideology that goes along with it, is insulting to women because it makes being a woman and viewing the world from a woman's point of view unacceptable. These women get to positions of power in a man's world because they sacrifice their womanhood to play the game by men's rules and on men's turf.

This new leader is simply a man in woman's clothing. Her ideals are patriarchal and socially constructed by the dominant group in society. This situation proves that women are not gaining equality with men; they are simply imitating men and, as a radical feminists, I find that depressing. I think the answer to equality in equal respect between men and women and a renegotiation of the standards and norms that men and women will embrace. There must be a balancing and equalizing of the standards and norms so that everyone starts off at the same point and truly has an equal chance of achieving whatever they chose to do.

For these reasons it is critical for society to support affirmative action programs and drop the ridiculous notion of "reverse discrimination." The people who refuse to admit that women are discriminated against are the same ones who represent this idea of "reverse discrimination." That line of thinking is illogical.

It is also important for UNB to restore the employment equity officer position to full-time. It VERY QUIETLY cut the job to half time after much public self-congratula-

tion about how progressive the university was for creating the position in the first place.

I also think it is time to question who really is the best person for the job. Is it the white male who got the job? Or were there hidden advantages, ideologies and stereotypes that weighted the odds in his favour? It makes me wonder, especially here at this university. UNB's record for hiring women professors is pathetic and the ratio for male to female professors is appalling. Are the new male professors that get hired here at UNB really the best people for the job? Were the 28 white male firefighters really the best people for the job or were the odds stacked in their favour? Not all those men could have been the best people for the job. Therefore, it is still men who are getting the special treatment, not women and minorities. Based on the liberal ideology that "the best person will get the job because everyone is equal" we are forced to the conclusion that any white man must be better.

Given the overall hiring record of this university and its mere lip service to affirmative action, I seriously question if women really get a fair shot at any positions. The upcoming hiring of a specialist in the sociology of family violence could act as an example of the university's commitment to equality, or lack thereof.