

Open letter to Bobby Edwards

Editor's Note: The following open letter was submitted by Jim Hood, past chairman of the Eugene Gay People's Alliance. Bobby Edwards is chairman of the Eugene Human Rights Commission.

Dear Bobby:

I am taking this opportunity to respond publicly to your most recent statements (in the Jan. 12 Emerald) about the Gay People's Alliance and our matter currently before the Eugene Human Rights Commission, because it looks now as if the only way we're ever going to have a dialogue on this is through the press. Although GPA has asked repeatedly, over and over, that Commission members bring us their questions, reservations, or objections regarding our request for changing the City Code—I mean, this would seem both fair and proper if the Commission were dealing with us in good faith—we continue to hear nothing directly from Commission members, but at the same time to read in your public remarks new objections and newly-recognized "underlying issues."

Hypothetical complaint

The latest such issue you raise relates to a hypothetical complaint of job discrimination. I quote: "Suppose, for example, that an employer has no place on an application form for an indication of sexual orientation. If someone is denied the job and comes back to the commission alleging that he was denied the job because of his sexual orientation, we won't have the resources to find out if the complaint is valid or not."

I don't know just how limited HRC investigatory resources are, but since the complaint you describe is obviously preposterous, it doesn't seem to me that a Warren Commission-scale investigation would be required to throw the case out.

To suggest that a gay person would charge discrimination in a situation where the employer clearly had no way of knowing the person was gay is comparable to suggesting that a Black person would be likely to charge discrimination in a situation where he submitted an application by mail and gave no indication of his race, but still was denied employment.

I really can't agree that these are cases of sufficient legal intricacy to require handling by the courts and the district attorney's office.

Eager to respond

But this is only "one of those underlying issues," according to the Emerald story. Perhaps the others are not so readily answerable. We are eager to respond to them, but so far we are hampered by not knowing what they are. I think you will agree that it would be unfair and unjust for the Commission to reach a decision on our request without exploring these questions fully. I realize that Commission members are busy people, but after all, this matter has been before the HRC for nearly six months. (I think I may pertinently add, in this connection, that of the four HRC Subcommittee members who have met with us over the past six months and explored the ramifications of our request in face-to-face dialogue, three have progressed from positions of either opposition or neutrality to become our most ardent and outspoken supporters on the Commission.)

We will continue to respond in the press, if necessary, as we become aware of Commission questions through that medium; but we are at a loss as to why this seems to be the HRC's only method of communication.

The fact is, I'm afraid I have become rather skeptical as to how much of what we put into print is actually read or assimilated by Commission members. You yourself, Mr. Chairman, admitted to me—on the same evening you said you had decided not to support our request to change the City Code—that you had not even bothered to finish reading the GPA Fact Sheet on Homosexuality.

You are quoted in the Dec. 20 Eugene Register-Guard as feeling that homosexuality is not "a natural thing," that it is "an abnormal practice." These questions are dealt with at some length in the Fact Sheet, along with such other basic matters as legality, morality, labeling and stereotyping, the "sickness" theory, and the generalized oppression and specific discrimination that gay people suffer.

Assumed burden of proof

In our Dec. 18 letter to you and the Commission, we challenged anyone to prove that there is anything wrong with being gay, to prove "that homosexuality is inherently pathological or that it represents any inherent organic or psychological defect." Since we have assumed the burden of proof and produced evidence to the contrary—and our challenge has been met with only silence—it seems to me again unfair for you to take your doubts and reservations to the press instead of to us.

I want to respond, finally, to your objections in both the Register-Guard article and in last Friday's Emerald to our use of analogies and comparisons between the oppression of Blacks and the Black movement, and the oppression of gay people and the Gay Liberation Movement. In the Emerald you are quoted as saying you felt "insulted by the . . . use of parallels between the Black experience and the Gay Liberation Movement," and that you feel "they have been exploiting Blacks to further their own goals."

Since this amounts virtually to a charge of racism, I want to answer you in some detail. To begin with, I do not regard the comparisons and analogies we have used as being "parallels," the term you use in both articles. Parallels, as I understand them, are extended comparisons or analogies, down-the-line and point-by-point. Nothing could be more obvious than that the discrimination experienced by a person because of his skin color, and the psychological oppression experienced by another person who must spend his life pretending to be something he is not—in order to avoid discrimination—are not parallel.

Since the whole thrust of our presentation before the Human Rights Commission has been that the oppression of gay people is unique, probably unlike anything in the knowledge or experience of most Commission members, and therefore something they would need to be informed about at length, I am baffled by your repeated assertion that we have used "parallels." We have, I will admit, tried to relate gay oppression—the unknown—to the Black experience when comparisons or analogies have seemed applicable and natural, precisely because to any sensitive and informed person the Black experience in our society is almost synonymous with discrimination and oppression. The comparison in the third paragraph of this letter is an example. But this is a far cry from trying to parallel Gay and Black.

Regret offense

I regret, nevertheless, that you have felt so offended personally by the comparisons we have made as to suggest that we are "exploiting Blacks" to further our objectives. I regret also that you have vented this grievance to the press at every opportunity, but have not seen fit to bring it up with us in face-to-face dialogue. I would be interested to know, for example, whether you find Huey Newton's analogy between racism and the attitude of people who oppress gays—quoted in our Dec. 18 letter to you and the Commission—either invalid or insulting. Since I went to some length in that same letter to explain to you my own feelings as to the validity of our use of such analogies, and since both your statements to the press have been made subsequent to your receipt of our letter, I can only assume that you found my explanation unsatisfactory, in whole or in part.

Perhaps I should quote a portion of that explanation, since it is our only official written statement to the Commission on this matter. I wrote as follows:

You and Lewis Peters, in particular, seemed to resist and resent our use of such analogies, and to reject the idea that there is any basis for comparison. I think that what separates us here is a fundamental difference in perspective.

To you and Lewis, the Black movement, presumably, is an established and multifaceted fact: you perceive all its subtleties and complexities, its various historical roots, patterns of development, and future directions. As for the Gay movement—again, I am presuming—you have little information (the societal residue of scare stuff, myths, stereotypes, plus our propaganda) and less empathy. But to us—to gays with a developing political and social consciousness, the Black movement is a historical precedent.

This is true partly because it is in our interest to view it as such: we gained a sense of identity as an oppressed group largely because of the examples of the Black movement and the Women's movement, and it's only natural that we should also project our struggle to liberate ourselves and the society along similar lines.

Further, we have access to far more information to counter our own residual prejudices about Blacks and Women. This,

together with our first-hand experience of oppression, inevitably gives rise not only to analogies relating to oppression, political strategy, etc., but also to a greater degree of empathy (as I see it) for the Black and Women's movements than they have so far accorded the Gay movement. The analogies come more readily to us, then, partly because we have adequate information about both movements (or all three, including the Women's movement) on which to build analogies, and partly because many of the analogous patterns we see are really potential analogies—our projections, plans, and hopes.

The explanation seems to me comprehensive enough, and our motives honest and non-exploitive, so I still am at a loss as to what is improper about our using such analogies and comparisons as may occur to us. Can it be that your objection actually is to any association, whatever, with gays—even a semantic one, through figures of speech? I would hope not. But in the continuing absence of another explanation, the only alternative would seem to be that you have in fact read our statement and understood our position, and are nevertheless exploiting this issue yourself.

Jim Hood
Past Chairman
Eugene Gay People's Alliance

Letters

Hoax

It was at the ASUO Senate meeting of Dec. 7, 1972 that a vote was taken to confirm Cliff Zukin as Senate President—with Mike Bonner and a group of his supporters contesting this confirmation—the following is a list of those Senators who voted against his confirmation.

Mike Bonner 1359 Patterson
Bernice Hanson 1359 Patterson
Tom Bonner (Mike's brother)
Joan Baker 1255 Mill Apt. 22
Cathy Ralston 1255 Mill Apt. 22
Barbara Woodside 1255 Mill Apt. 22
Gloria Gonzalez 1255 Mill Apt. 8
Rosa Solano 1255 Mill Apt. 8
Keith Parrish 1230 Ferry Apt. 7
Ross Lienhart 1230 Ferry Apt. 7
Gret Itkin 90 East 24th Place
Gret Walther 90 East 24th Place
Larry Taylor 1410 High
Bryce Zabel Douglas-Walton
Dan "Buster" Heims 1000 Patterson
Room 306
Gary Ball 325 West 14th Apt. 1

It is profoundly evident, to any, and all, who will look at this list, and compare addresses, that the coalition which was backing Mike Bonner for the Senate Presidency is composed of his roommate, his brother (another brother lost in an attempt to get back into the senate), his close friends and their roommates, and four roommateless friends.

I wonder if the students know and realize just what a tremendous hoax Mike Bonner has perpetrated on them—my only hope is that the students will not allow themselves to be fooled all the time by this person. It is also quite apparent that with such close association existing between these senators that divergent views are not being represented in the senate, and the constituencies which they are supposed to represent are presently without true representation.

Roger Wyatt
Jr. History
345-4875

Protests article

We protest the recent article written by Josh Marquis entitled "Car Accident Kills Two." The information contained in the article implied that the accident was the result of initiation rituals of Sigma Chi fraternity. Since the accident is still under investigation it is unnecessary to throw bad light on the Greek system, by attempting to correlate the death with initiation.

Becky Schick
1987 University Street

Editor's Note: The information alluded to in the above letter is part of the official police investigative report of the Warne accident. The Emerald did not feel obliged to hide those facts in order to make the Greek system look "good" as Ms. Schick might hope. Further details in the investigation will be reported as they are released.

Drive-in classes

Since, at any given time between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m., approximately three-quarters of the student body on this campus is searching for a parking place, I have a modest suggestion: rather than build new parking spaces or expand the campus, the University should contract with local drive-in theatres to conduct drive-in classes during the daytime.

I don't think this suggestion is any more absurd than the alternatives presently available to students, which are 1) live within walking distance of campus and pay astronomical rents for abysmal housing, or 2) live far from campus, pay cheap rent, and dodge the meter maids.

Of course, this letter will probably get some flak from the eco-bicycle fringe, but I think anybody who pays \$90-plus for the pleasure of riding a bike through the Oregon monsoons and getting it ripped-off after two months is probably not college material anyway.

Gil Johnson