

## Where have all the politics gone?

by W.C. McRae

The goal of these interviews is to introduce gay Portland to those people who are, in one way or another, its leaders and friends, and to present the history of the movements that affect us now. And into the bargain, hope that if there is more awareness of ourselves as a community, then we might be interested in becoming involved in a movement, and with people, that have been made more familiar.

More interviews forthcoming in future issues of *Just Out*.

### Tia Plympton

Tia Plympton, presently vice president of the Portland chapter of the National Organization for Women, has been working with NOW for seven years, years that have seen many changes for women and for feminist social movements in this country. Many carry a perception of NOW from the past — a strident arch-feminism that seemed so radical and difficult ten years ago. That NOW today doesn't make the headlines and cause the astonishment that it did a decade ago doesn't mean it has softened or become more mainstream. Instead, according to Plympton, the mainstream, at least in feminist issues, has moved leftward.

In the Portland metro area, there are four chapters of NOW with about 400 members in the Portland chapter alone. The monthly meetings are a forum for speakers, programs,

or discussions of action. For NOW nationally — and for each chapter — there are four priorities: reproductive rights (rights to one's body); the passage of the ERA; the struggle against racism; and advocacy of gay and lesbian rights.

This last priority indicates, says Plympton, "that NOW has not moved into the mainstream" and that it has also internally healed the rift that threatened NOW in its earlier days when the lesbian left was seen by more conservative members as a highly visible, vocally dangerous faction of the women's movement. But gay and lesbian rights are "on the agenda." NOW is "amiably involved" with other women's groups, and NOW passed a resolution for all chapters to attend Gay Pride Day.

Even though Plympton gave testimony at the original hearings when the County Commission recently passed a gay rights ordinance, the entire situation was "very unfortunate." The radical right is very well organized, and even if a City gay and lesbian rights bill were proposed, passed, and won the inevitable referendum, Plympton wonders if it would be worth it. As symbolic legislation, a gay rights bill at the city or county level would be a very positive statement both for the gay and straight communities. But there are other concerns. A referendum, even if it upheld gay civil liberties, would aid the radical right in the community by enabling it to organize. Minorities respond strongest when the enemy is strongest, and that goes for the right as well as for the left. An "even more mobilized" right would probably be the inevitable outcome of any referendum.

Plympton also reminds that the costs — and not merely monetary — are very high:

there is a large price to pay in human costs. In terms of human resources, an electoral battle depletes people's energy to such a degree that those involved tend to burn out and disassociate themselves from the movement. And when "rights" become the sole issue of importance to a movement and to a community, then other, equally important issues are forgotten.

Plympton is one of many women active in Community Health Support Service (CHSS), and in Personal Active Listener (PAL), groups that have been formed in response to the AIDS epidemic. Plympton emphasizes that women are concerned about and involved with AIDS. As is becoming apparent, AIDS is not exclusively a gay problem, for one out of three new cases involves a straight person. And, ironically and tragically, AIDS, by becoming a public health crisis, might well break down the barriers between straights and gays. Remember, says Plympton, gays did not cause AIDS. It did surface among gay men but it could have surfaced anywhere, and once in the straight community, it will spread just as quickly. And in fact, Plympton speculates, a tragedy like AIDS could strengthen civil rights by exposing, in light of the human suffering involved, "the ludicrousness of the counter-movement." Perhaps something as horrible as AIDS could be the catalyst to codify informed opinion against ignorant, moralizing opportunists.

But what of more positive ways to organize the left? "Young women today just aren't political. We don't have enough social engineering skills to rally the youth." There is a small, though vocal, group of people on the far right who are able to be organized and mobilized by lies and scare tactics. But it remains a question of how to organize the center and left. One can't, for instance, use scare tactics: there is a large group of individualistic and educated people whom one can't reach or organize by lies and fear mon-


gering. It's easy to move the ignorant, but not so the educated.

One of the priorities of NOW is the promotion of gay and lesbian rights. But it is clear, when talking to Plympton that gay civil liberties cannot be the only issue, especially for women. Lesbians are not subjected to discrimination solely, or even primarily, because of their choice of sexual partners, but rather because they are female.

### Robert Smith

Even though he has lived in Portland since 1961, Robert Smith still thinks of himself as a "Hoosier" from Indiana. But since coming to Portland he has earned an impressive set of political credentials. Besides working at present as controller at the North/Northwest Community Mental Health Center, Smith is treasurer of the Democratic Central Committee in Multnomah County, and is vice-chairperson of the state Democratic Party. He is active in the Society of Friends, and is a member-at-large of the Friends Committee for National Legislation — its only openly gay member. He was treasurer of PTC for two years; in 1983 he was regional vice-chairperson of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus of the Democratic Party. Although he was not a delegate to the San Francisco convention last year, he was on the floor and participated in the gay and lesbian march during the convention.

Despite others' feelings to the contrary, he doesn't feel that the Democratic Party has reneged on gay issues. It is true that no openly gay delegates were elected to last year's convention, but that is as much due to the rallied determination of organized labor to have as many delegates as possible as to the alleged desire of Hart and Mondale to keep gays out. Also, the lack of high profile gays in the party is, at least in part, due to gays



*Renee Augrain, M.ed.*

COUNSELING FOR WOMEN AND FRIENDS OF WOMEN

777-6653  
1903 S.E. ANKENY  
PORTLAND, OR 97214

**THE NEIGHBORHOOD MASSAGE CLINIC** *Massage for women and men*

Valerie Lyon, M.S., L.M.T.  
*Neo-Reichian & Shiatsu*

Barbara J. Torelle, L.M.T.  
*Trager Psychophysical Integration<sub>SM</sub> & Massage*

For an appointment call: 234-6587

**MRCSS**

Mens Resource Center Counseling Service

**GAY THERAPISTS**

- Professional Counseling
- Low Fees — Sliding Scale
- Individuals, Couples, Groups
- Hypnotherapy
- Evening & Weekend

**235-3433**

**Problems . . . . . We Can Work It Out!**

**2nd ANNUAL**

**WOMEN IN THE WOODS**



at BREITENBUSH HOT SPRINGS  
August 9th, 10th & 11th, 1985

Three-day weekend retreat for lesbian women held at historic Breitenbush Hot Springs Resort, located adjacent to Mt. Jefferson (60 miles east of Salem, Oregon). Come and enjoy the natural setting, therapeutic hot springs, pools, steam sauna, hiking trails, rustic cabins, old mountain lodge, ovo-lactic vegetarian meals (included) and powerful energy of women together.

Time available for healing workshops, play, relaxation, music — your choice. Sliding fee scale from \$65 to \$125 (set your own fee). Register early, space limited. Send \$25 deposit (refundable until June 1) to PHOENIX RISING FOUNDATION, 408 SW 2nd, ROOM 407, PORTLAND, OR 97204. (503) 223-8299. Carpooling available from Portland or Salem.