

## The Straight Stuff

*Things are rotten in the Big Apple; Maggie's anti-gay campaign; Babies: to boom or not to boom?; and bigots and activists in Willamette Week.*

B Y W C M c R A E

### Bess Myerson, Fag Hag fatale

It is not well in Gotham. Corruption in New York politics is as common as rain in Portland, but recently New York Mayor Ed Koch's administration has been up over its waders in malfeasance. The **Bess Myerson jobs-for-divorce scandal** was already a heady high calorie confection for the media. But the top blew off when columnist Jimmy Breslin, in an editorial in the *New York Daily News*, linked the Myerson affair with **the homosexuality of a top Koch aide and close Koch friend, Herb Rickman**.

Myerson had campaigned as Koch's steady date and Girl Friday during Koch's first successful mayoral race. In return, Myerson received the title of Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the city. However, when her real-life boyfriend (a Mafioso-type presently in prison) wanted concessions in his divorce settlement, Myerson gave a job to the presiding judge's daughter in return for a favorable divorce ruling. When Myerson's swap went public in the press, Koch was isolated — not just politically but also as a *soi-disant* straight man: where had all the girlfriends gone?

Breslin's column all but drove the final spike: he accused aide Rickman (who had also "dated" Myerson) of covering up Myerson's dealings so she in turn would not reveal him as gay. From here to Ed Koch is only a matter of connecting the dots.

*New York* magazine described the Breslin editorial as "the most outrageous piece of political writing in recent memory, and perhaps the first time in history that a daily newspaper had revealed a public figure's homosexuality against his will."

Clearly, no one at *New York* has heard of the *Oregonian* or Gordon Shadburne.

### What I did for effect

Was I the only one who found it tacky when, on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition," **the announcement of choreographer Michael Bennett's death from AIDS** was accompanied by the song "What I did for love"?

### See Maggie run

British media, never known for its restraint, aided **Maggie Thatcher's successful gay-baiting campaign** in last June's British election. The lesson was not lost on Republicans, according to columnist David Broder, who reported that top GOP operatives swarmed around Thatcher's campaign, hoping that "if Thatcher wins . . . the Republicans will gain important clues on how to win here."

Lesson number one for the vacationing Republicans was Maggie's successful politicization of AIDS and gay rights — and manipulation of British press — to isolate the opposition Labour Party. In a billboard campaign, the Conservatives under Thatcher ridiculed Labour's belief that

homosexuality be addressed positively in sex education classrooms. "Is this Labour's idea of a comprehensive education?" read the billboard, which pictured a book cover with the title "Young, Gay and Proud." The British press made gays and lesbians the object of ridicule and scorn: one tabloid printed photos of Elton John supposedly in *gay flagrante delicto*; another revealed that Queen's Freddy Mercury had lost lovers to AIDS, and that Mercury feared he could develop AIDS: "I would have thought he's got a jolly good chance," reported one columnist, "serves him right, too"; "Poofers Paradise" concluded another headline. Conservatives succeeded in linking Labour's pro-gay stance with the spread of AIDS: a spokesman for Labour candidate Neil Kinnock said "the gay and lesbian issue" was costing them votes.

Thatcher succeeded in creating such a firestorm of publicity that CBS's *60 Minutes* devoted a segment to the uproar.

It is important to note that the Conservatives are not officially anti-gay. They merely know how to make political hay. However, the American Republican party is anti-gay. Once GOP campaigners realize the vote-getting potential of AIDS/gay smears, the current croquet game between AIDS hawks and doves (testing vs. education) in the Reagan cabinet will end.

Can the Democrats be far behind?

Reagan has won his elections by conjuring up visions of a home and hearth always beset with an external threat — high taxes, unions, communists. How handy for a successor that AIDS, and by inference, homosexuality, is here to provide a timely "malaise" for the next election.

### Tolerance — nay, acceptance — in the weeklies

The best part of *Willamette Week's* story "The New Crusade Against Gays" was the photos: the "slender" Keeston Lowery in front of City Hall; Joe Lutz, the Ken Doll of the Far Right, posturing before a nylon flag; Drew Davis over-exposed in his search for exposure.

Jim Redden's accompanying article adequately revealed the contrast between being "out" as a gay activist, and being "out" as a bigot. His analysis of the issues, however, was tentative, even querulous. Portland, writes Redden, "has long had a reputation for tolerating — even accepting — homosexuals." No! Even accepting? This is understatement in the garb of journalistic discretion — event solicitude.

### Bork defects

Depending on how you read the press, we are either experiencing a **new baby boom**, or our culture is dangerously close to a state of child depletion: as goes the ozone, so goes children. On the one hand, trend-setting Yuppies are supposed to be amassing children with the same sense of calculation that leads them to invest in wine futures and European cars.

Designer children are in. *Oregonian* Assistant Editor David Sarasohn, in a recent editorial, finds that three new magazines — *Child*, *Children*, and *Parenting* — have sprung up to meet the needs of upscale parenting. "Children can even be useful fashion and career accessories," notes Sarasohn.

However, not everyone has blissed out with lullabies on their Walkmans. On alternative days, the press has wrung its hands over reports on **the lack of free white babies in the world**. According to Ben Wattenberg in his book *The Birth Dearth*, birth rates in Western nations have declined to such a degree over the past 200 years that the societies of the West — our birth rights — are in danger of expiring under the coming tide of the great unwashed of the Third World, who do not have the worries of art investment to prevent them from procreating. The halls of media talk shows have echoed to Wattenberg's query: "Could a Third World culture become dominant? Will we worship cows?"

In discussions like this, gay people never get their fair share of credit for the drop in the birth rate. Contraception, abortion, and working women get all the honors.

It is clear that the Reagan administration is as worried about the white baby birth dearth as Wattenberg: **the nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court** is just what the Procreationists ordered. To ensure there are more babies, Bork has publicly stated he would rule to deny women access to legal abortions, and has stated that the Constitution does not guarantee citizens free access to contraception; to make sure that a gay lifestyle will not tempt young breeders from the straight and narrow paths of destiny, Bork has ruled that no one has a constitutional right to engage in gay sexual activity; to ensure that non-white children don't threaten the rights of endangered white children, Bork has written that poll taxes against racial minorities should be legal, and that whites may bar access to public facilities to blacks.

To ensure that this Edenic world of smug white babies doesn't prevail, *write the Oregon Senate delegation and oppose Bork's nomination*: Senator Robert Packwood, Rm. 385, Federal Bldg., 1220 SW Third, Portland, OR 97204; Senator Mark Hatfield, Rm. 114 Pioneer Courthouse, 555 SW Yamhill, Portland, OR 97204.

Birth Dearth, Bork Dork, it all sounds like white male supremacy to me.

### The Times they are a changin'

The *New York Times* has finally agreed to use **the words "gay and lesbian" in news stories** instead of "homosexual." This new leniency extends only to adjectival uses of the words. ". . . We will write 'gay author' but not 'a gay' or similarly 'gay men' or 'homosexuals' but not 'gays'," reads a *Times* internal memo.



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