

D.C. police sensitivity training falls short

Efforts by the District of Columbia Police Department to develop a sensitivity training program for officers has been ridiculed by community leaders as "poorly conceived, inadequate and insulting." The \$50,000 training program was supposed to improve relations between officers and underrepresented people. Minority groups unanimously chose to boycott the program, citing a complete lack of representation and availability. "We were outraged," said Marshall Wong, of the Afro-Asian Relations Council. "We had been told time and again that there would be opportunity for meaningful community input."

Although Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly had promised a "high-profile" program as part of her "multicultural initiative," members of the mayor's cabinet representing minority groups were not consulted or even advised about the program planning. The company hired to do the training was given a week to prepare it and not informed about plans for target group participation until after the contract was issued. Officers from underrepresented groups were expected to speak on discrimination issues, but there are no openly gay officers in the D.C. Police Department. "They were asking us to accomplish something in 15 minutes that's impossible to do," said Tracey Conaty, co-chair of Gay Men and Lesbians Opposing Violence. The training program has continued without community participation.

Sentiment for Hawaiian sovereignty growing

A movement is growing among the indigenous Kanaka Maoli people of Hawaii to seek some form of sovereignty, or at least recognition, as the 100th anniversary of the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii by U.S. Marines approaches. The Native Hawaiian people are the only indigenous group not recognized by the federal government. "We are talking about recognition that an illegal action took place, and the idea that native Hawaiians have a right to self-determination," said Gov. John D. Waihee III, who is the first governor of Hawaii who is a Hawaiian.

"We are talking about issues we dared not discuss 10 years ago," Waihee said. Over 40 groups have formed to champion the rights of Native Hawaiians. Kalahui Hawaii, or Hawaiian Nation, has 12,000 members and seeks federal recognition similar to that accorded to mainland Native American tribes. The movement is a source of concern for many Hawaiian residents, most of whom trace their ancestry to the U.S. mainland or Asia. Some groups have called for some divestiture of lands, or even outright independence, although most support less extreme goals.

Scouts still resist education

Two Washington, D.C., men joined the ever-growing number of former scouts who have filed discrimination suits against the Boy Scouts of America for being forced out of the organization because they are gay. Roland Pool, 31, and Michael Geller, 30, both Eagle Scouts and members of the Order of the Arrow, scouting's highest rank, had continued active involvement in the organization until their sexual orientation became known and their memberships subsequently canceled. The American Civil Liberties Union and a local law firm are representing the men in their joint suit, based on the D.C. Human Rights Law, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

In San Diego, Police Chief Bob Burgreen announced the end of the 30-year agreement

between his department and the BSA because the local chapter refused to allow a gay officer to remain as an adviser in the department's Explorer Scout program. "It breaks my heart to do this," Burgreen said. "However, this department cannot continue to affiliate with an organization that discriminates against a group of people."

Not a military dictatorship

In a precedent-setting move, a federal judge ordered the Navy to reinstate sailor Keith Meinhold, who had been discharged after he acknowledged that he was gay on national television. When Navy officials at first balked at the order, Judge Terry J. Hatter Jr. demanded that they comply, and the Navy backed down. "This is not a military dictatorship," Hatter said. "It is not the former Soviet Socialist Republic. Here the rule of law applies to the military." Meinhold was reinstated to his former position the day after Veterans Day.

Meinhold's lawyer, John Maguire, said, "I think it will have broad ramifications on policy because the Navy has alleged up till now that the presence of gays is disruptive of good order, morale and discipline." Many gay-rights activists praised Hatter's ruling but expressed anxiety about the legal disposition of the case, which could be overturned on appeal by the conservative Supreme Court. President-elect Clinton's promised executive order overturning the military's ban on homosexual service members could be impeded by such a turn of events.

International gays seek asylum in United States

Increasing numbers of foreign gays and lesbians have been using grounds of persecution in their native countries to request asylum in the United States, thus circumventing the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service discriminatory policies against gays and lesbians. Although the ban on allowing gays and lesbians to enter the country was officially lifted in 1990, the new tactic challenges continuing homophobia by immigration authorities. "Can someone who has an inclination to do something that a majority doesn't think is right be defined as part of a social group? I think that would be debatable," said immigration service spokesman Rich Kenney, exemplifying the current agency mindset.

Some of the cases involve citizens from countries with whom the United States has friendly relations, like Hong Kong, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Russia, causing some embarrassment for the government. According to U.S. immigration law, asylum seekers must prove that they are members of a persecuted "social group" and that their fears of returning home are "well founded." Julie Dorf, executive director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission in San Francisco, noted, "Gays and lesbians are migrating to the relative safety of the United States to escape prison, torture and death squads in other countries. This strategy can enable us to establish legally that such persecution violates our fundamental human rights."

In one case, a bisexual man from Hong Kong said that, although Hong Kong recently softened its sodomy law, the reabsorption of the port by China in 1997 could mark the beginning of another period of persecution since Chinese authorities are known to subject gay men to electroshock, beatings, and "re-education" camps. In another case, a gay man from Guatemala has requested asylum in Seattle, noting that six of his friends in Guatemala were killed because they were gay, and he was imprisoned and tortured on several occasions. In recent years, immigration authorities in other countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, Australia and Canada, have been granting asylum to gays and lesbians.

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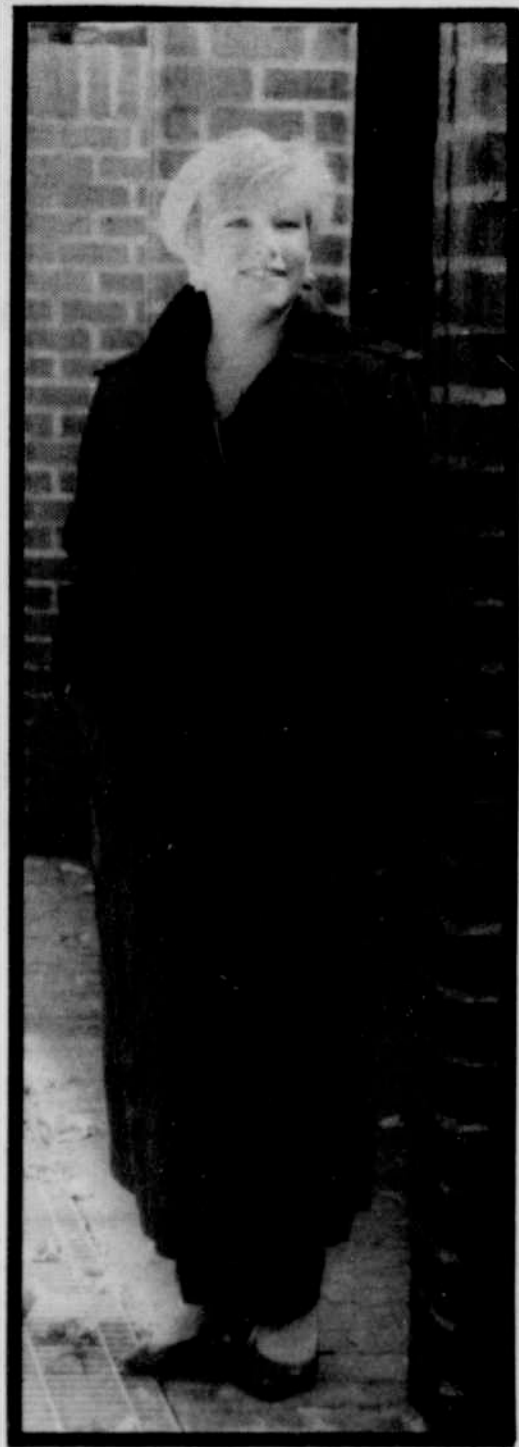
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