

letters

TLN turns its back on diversity

To the Editor:

It's time to talk about the discrimination, harassment, and outright meanness that *The Lavender Network* editor Frank Aviles has suffered from TLN board and staff. At the March meeting, when people sought to address this, the board tried to shut out community comments entirely. When I informed them of their legal obligation to hear us, they reluctantly (and briefly) did, though some literally kept their backs turned.

Frank's been treated differently than past editors, all of whom were white. The harassment is daily; they intercept his business mail and open his personal letters; speak to him abusively; "re-edit" (that is, censor) the magazine after it's completed; continually redefine "editorial policy" in response to anything he writes or prints that they're uncomfortable with; and alternately ostracize and criticize him. When Frank attempts to address these problems, he is retaliated against.

Here's a sensitive, talented employee, doing a terrific job while making a salary much lower than most board members would ever consider for themselves. Plus, his vision for TLN has connected the diverse groups within the community. So, what does the TLN board do? They run him out of town.

When the straight world says to queers, "Why are you so angry; labels are divisive," we know they don't get it. Yet the board uses these exact words to attack Frank's work. What's wrong with this picture? Racism. It seems the folks on the board would rather their magazine not be "darkened" with opinions and pictures of people of color. That is their decision, which Frank can take or leave. But where does that leave us, the readers?

Frank, you have fans out here. We appreciate you, your insights, your gentleness, and your anger.

Yep, we love your anger too.

Rya Philips
Eugene

Editor's note: Frank Aviles has since fled to the relative peace of California. That Frank stayed on as long as he did is a testament to his deep commitment to implementing diversity where none existed, and the personal courage and strength that he had to do it. What Frank experienced was an institutionalized racism, reinforced by threats of violence. As a community that is composed of queers of every color, religion, national origin, able-bodiedness and language, we have an obligation to overcome our own prejudices. How can we continue to point a collective queer finger at homophobes, insisting that they get over their hatred and fear of us, while simultaneously running a gay Chicano out of the state for implementing diversity in *The Lavender Network*? Every one of us is responsible for the failure of TLN's board to adequately face its racism. It has certainly been no secret that members of the board were constantly in Frank's face about "under-representing" white, middle-class gays. This has been a painfully revealing example of how things "work out" when people don't involve themselves.

Every gay, lesbian or bisexual of anglo/Euro-pean descent has a responsibility to step in front of racist attacks directed at people of color. I will never forget the heat that *Just Out*'s publisher, Renée LaChance, took from the community as a result of hiring me as editor—and she's still hearing about it. We expect homophobes to just "get over it." Can we, as a community, just "get over" racism? The things that seem to stop us are

essentially the same as the things that stop straight people from truly becoming our allies: it's scary, it hurts, it's too hard, it's overwhelming; there is no racism/homophobia; if there were no queers/people of color it wouldn't be an issue; queers/people of color are addicted to being victimized; (and the all-time best), "I'm not racist/homophobic so I don't have to take any action about ending racism/homophobia."

We work hard to create heterosexual allies. One reason is that allies are essential to our struggle for equal rights. People of color need white allies, within and without the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities. None of us currently living created racism or homophobia, yet it will take every one of us to turn the tide on both these oppressions. I believe we can end racism within our community. We are essentially good people and we certainly have the kind of courage that it takes to fight for human dignity. TLN needs to hear from some white gay, lesbian and bisexual allies to people of color. Take that step. Get a feel for what we're asking our straight allies to do for us.

GWM

To the Editor:

Thank you for your even-tempered, healing answer to Kyle Martin's "fed up" rantings about "political correctness" (May 1). You see the sources of oppression in our society, and I feel lucky that you share that vision in the pages of *Just Out*.

Like Mr. Martin, I am white, gay, and male, but when it comes to political correctness games, I don't share Martin's passive acceptance of the rules as defined by conservatives. I prefer not to play at their table at all. The very idea of politically correct intimidation by the left is a lie. Even the expression "politically correct"—once used facetiously by progressives to gently ridicule each other's narrow thinking—has been stolen and used in the media as proof of a "conspiracy." I was fortunate to play a small part in advocating Stanford University's multicultural curriculum reform, one of the hottest "PC" debates of the late '80s. Since then I have read and heard countless lies about what happened there, chiefly from cultural warrior and former Secretary of Education, William Bennett. I have heard all about the imaginary conspiracies in which left-wing journalists and professors intimidate free thinkers and dissenters while pampering minorities, and I tire of the whole big whine.

Talk about bad sports! The patriarchy loses a few arguments about history and culture in a tiny corner of society and it has to shout that the whole game—its own game—is rigged!

Ethnic minorities and despised classes are in no position to rig the game. Not here for the last 501 years, nor elsewhere for thousands. All we "correct" folk want is for the truth to be taught in schools, for the suppressed books to be read, and (in our dreams) for the conquest to stop.

One more thing—on the issue of offending those whom Martin labels "our religious allies." As Christian as I may feel, I don't edit my opinions to avoid offending would-be church allies who "accept me but not my behavior." They are not allies of mine. And those who really do accept homosexuality will surely not be offended by your editorial candor in *Just Out*. I don't see a problem here. For some reason, Mr. Martin seems to think that to disagree is to take offense and censor. He underestimates us all.

Dave Ream
Corvallis

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