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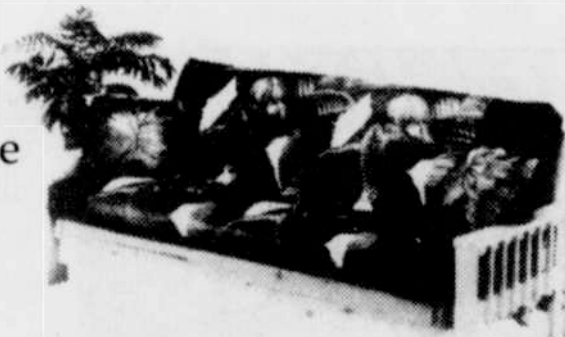


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Persecution

Our country is being perverted by the abuse of the right to vote and of the initiative process

by Lee Lynch

Once is harassment. Twice is meanness. Three times is stupidity. The fourth time is persecution and nothing less.

Oregon's third anti-gay and -lesbian ballot measure has been defeated, and by margins so similar to our victory in 1992 that it's obvious the concerted attacks of the Oregon Citizen's Alliance on a group of fellow Oregonians is a waste of time, energy and money.

Renée LaChance, publisher and editor of *Just Out*, wrote in her Nov. 4, 1994, editorial, "Colorado lost the fight to keep discrimination out of its constitution. Now, two years later, its Amendment 2 has been ruled unconstitutional in every court except the U.S. Supreme Court, which is expected to decline to hear the case. Meaning Colorado is better off two years after losing than we are, two years after winning. Go figure."

While we've won the last two attacks on the rights of gay men and lesbians, the OCA already has two more initiatives submitted for the 1996 ballot. Still, our newest victory is not entirely empty. This morning I thanked a straight job colleague who has done what chicken-livered me couldn't manage to do—canvass for the cause. Another non-gay friend who became a U.S. citizen just weeks ago has been canvassing, appalled to watch this nation of immigrants undermine its own democracy. And then there's the friend who is undergoing chemotherapy out of town. He came all the way home to cast his vote. These people of conviction and courage are my heroes.

In order to keep treading water, we spent at least four times what the forces of evil reported spending. Renée LaChance: "The OCA and the right wing's true agenda is to bankrupt the sexual minority communities—financially and emotionally—until we can't fight any more."

A whole generation of queer kids is growing up under this pall. How is it affecting them? Certainly giant billboards warning voters to protect their children against us won't make one less kid queer, though they may well drive more queer kids to suicide or into doomed attempts at heterosexuality.

Lisa Keen reported in the Nov. 28, 1994, *Washington Blade*, "OCA's most recent ad has a young high school student named 'Joe' recounting an experience in which he said one of his teachers 'told us that we should have a least two homosexual experiences to know if we were gay.'"

"In reality," said Julie Davis, head of the No on 13 campaign which is opposing Measure 13, "what the teacher said was that two homosexual experiences shouldn't make you believe you're gay."

It is exactly this sort of twisting of words that enables the OCA to seduce voters. Once the OCA has lied, even unshakable proofs won't erase the impression left on those already fooled. Prejudice is thirsty stuff and drinks up more of the same whenever it can. The lesbian and gay community

personifies a defensive posture. We have usually been outcast, and it's beginning to feel like no matter what we do, we can't win.

These initiatives should not appear on the ballots of any country that purports to hold human rights sacred. In any country in which church and state are separate. In any country with as much access to good information and truth as we in the United States could have.

But do any of those characteristics still describe "America"? The takeover by radical-right moral vigilantes is happening before our very eyes. A Newt Gingrich as speaker of the house. A president browbeaten by a religious movement. Political offices purchased with the power of money not used to advertise truth, but to fool as many of the people as much of the time as the liars can manage. Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition whined on National Public Radio that the Democrats demonized radical-right voters, purloining the very word "demonizing" that we have



been using to describe what is being done to lesbians and gay men. We are not perverts, but our country is being perverted by this abuse of the right to vote and of the initiative system.

"Can't we sue?" asked a friend. We are being slandered; our livelihoods are in jeopardy. We are being denied the pursuit of happiness, and we are being forced to defend basic rights.

Reforms are needed to end discriminatory, fiscally impossible, and unenforceable measures. Initiatives are being used as a diversionary tactic. With the money we spent fighting this one—and the one in Idaho—we could have helped to put more progressives into political office.

The outraged new citizen, my canvassing colleague, the by-then-hale-and-hearty cancer survivor will be cornerstones of our 21st century coalitions. Courage, conviction and coalitions are exactly what it will take to stop the current cruel and unjust use of democracy. These everyday heroes see that discriminatory campaigns are no different from Christians burning witches. From the KGB sending gay men to Siberia. From Eastern fundamentalists flinging gay men off cliffs as punishment. The effects may not be as visible. The raids may be on our consciousness rather than our bars. The enemy may don sheep's clothing. Nevertheless, the fourth time is persecution—nothing less—and we will stop the persecution.