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Ad policy. No sexually exploitative advertising will be accepted. Compensation for errors in, or cancellation of, advertising will be made with credit toward future advertising.

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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial

I can't hear you

*Queer activist voices in Portland are being silenced—
have we let homophobia and the mainstream get us down?*

by Diana Courvant

As a queer woman in Portland, I have been involved in many direct actions. But when I joined the Lesbian Avengers a few years ago, I seem to have gotten in on the tail end of a glorious streak. At one point the Avengers were working on so many actions simultaneously that it was impossible for one woman to be involved in them all. Lately, actions have been scarce, and the number of people going to meetings has been small. A co-worker who was kicked out of an apartment after her mother outed her to the manager thought that the Avengers were only in Corvallis. Friends from the Corvallis Avengers have complained more than once that they can't seem to get hold of the Portland Avengers through their hot line.

The Avengers aren't the only activists who seem to be slowing down. Margaret O'Hartigan, who never seemed to shy away from a good fight before, has recently taken the position that she would prefer that the Oregon Legislature remain ignorant of the state of civil rights protections for transsexuals lest it decide to remove the few protections transsexuals do have (which cover only on-the-job discrimination, not housing or public accommodations). ACT UP is planning a national 10th anniversary action in New York City, but seems to be silent here. The only Portland direct action that I have heard of recently was the protest of *Willamette Week's* biphobic personal ads policies by Portland Bisexual Alliance and LABIA.

The state Legislature is considering legislation to invalidate queer marriages at the same time it is considering workplace

protections for sexual orientation. *The Oregonian* continues to report male-male sexual abuse as front-page news, but buries male-female abuse in the Metro pages. Queers are still being harassed and stalked in Northeast Portland and elsewhere.

There is no shortage of topics to be angry about, but our community seems to have lost its ability to voice anger. Is this an illusion? Are we simply giving our own activism less press or public acknowledgment? Are we simply tired after years of fighting the Oregon Citizen's Alliance? Or is mainstream society now treating queers so well that we'd rather take what we get than rock the boat?

More and more often, I hear our public figures speaking of political reality as a reason to silence ourselves. Are protease inhibitors, the death of the OCA and same-sex marriage in Hawaii enough? Have we decided that it is counter-productive to ask for what we deserve: full equality, an end to harassment, and media free of heterosexism? Will our allies refuse to work with us if we let the world know that we want more than Newt Gingrich or Brady Adams are willing to give?

Portland's queer community will always grow and change. These days it's more Cascade AIDS Project, less ACT UP; more Lesbian Community Project, less Lesbian Avengers. Is this what we want? Is it time for direct action's street death? Now is the time to ask the question. LCP's loss of executive director LaVerne Lewis and Phoenix Rising's funding crunch mean that Portland may find its institutional voice quieted at the same time that its activist voice is growing hoarse.

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