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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial

Promising vision

Stepped up anti-gay mobilization by the right wing is being effectively countered by firmer commitment and broadening our base of support

by Kerry Lobel

As I travel the country I am both heartened and impressed with the level of energy and expertise of the activists I meet. At the same time, I am aware that we face an increasingly organized and insidious opposition. We are witnessing an unprecedented wave of organized and orchestrated intolerance, perpetrated by leaders of the right and targeting our communities.

Recently, three major movements have signaled a heating up of anti-gay rhetoric and mobilization against the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans communities, signaling a step up in the "culture wars." The actions and words coming out of these groups are cause for real concern.

Just last month, the Southern Baptist Convention took the unusual and extreme step—in the name of preserving family values—of asking its members to participate in a national boycott of one of the world's most family-oriented corporations. They ask for the full-scale rejection of Tigger and Mickey because of Walt Disney Co.'s "gay friendly" policies, including domestic partner benefits and Ellen's coming out. They cite Disney's active participation in America's moral decline. The Rev. Tom Elliff, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, referred to gay men and lesbians as "moral trash."

All summer, Promise Keepers will be mobilizing for its massive gathering of 1 million Christian men at the foot of the steps of the U.S. Capitol this October. Although they claim to be a movement of Christian men living their lives by biblical values, in fact their leadership is closely linked to right wing organizations. Founder Bill McCartney has gained national notoriety for his anti-gay rhetoric, declaring that "homosexuality is an abomination of Almighty God," and that gay people are "curable." Promise Keepers' literature reads, "homosexu-

ality violates God's creative design for a husband and a wife and is a sin." McCartney made his plans clear when he said, "Many of you feel like you have been in a war for a long time, yet the fiercest fighting is just ahead. God has brought us here to prepare us. Let's proceed. It's wartime!"

Finally, just a few weeks ago, a conference of right-wing political activists and academics came together in Washington, D.C., at Georgetown University to demonize the gay and lesbian community in the name of science and scholarship. The benign-sounding conference "Homosexuality and American Public Life" included a who's who of right-wing homophobes, including Robert Knight of the Family Research Council, who argues that "there is a strong undercurrent of pedophilia in the homosexual subculture." Ex-gay Anthony Falzarano claims that the gay community "has been working for the last 30 years like an army of termites, secretly eating away the floorboards of moral integrity in this country."

Where is the silver lining? Our response to these acts has been heartening. In rejecting the boycott, many are voicing support for Disney and its policies, including President Clinton. Coalitions are coming together in cities and towns across the country to expose the true agenda of the Promise Keepers. And a broad range of scholars, students and organizations are coming forward to challenge the bigotry of pseudoscience.

The more we organize our supporters, the more marginalized the right wing becomes. We must be clear about our vision. Our country must move into the future guided on the principles of freedom and equality.

Kerry Lobel is the executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

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