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by Marty Davis

The Great Divide

A sad commentary on our community's inability to reasonably express differing viewpoints

And then, all hell broke loose. The *Just Out* Web site, e-mail, the phones, all have been frenetic with activity following this publication's Jan. 21 call for the resignation of Portland's beleaguered mayor, Sam Adams. Reaction was immediate, hostile and seemingly non-ending. In the blink of an eye a "Boycott *Just Out*" page popped up on Facebook. Calls to advertisers threatening loss of business came soon thereafter. Blog posts everywhere showed a level of rage and betrayal never seen before in this community.

I could easily post hundreds of examples of furious messages sent by angered readers. The following one does a fine job of summing up the sentiment of out-for-blood *Just Out* critics.

Screw Marty Davis and her stupid newsrag!

As far as I am concerned, she and her staff are all persona non grata [sic] in queer circles from now on. She should be expelled from the GBLTIQ community for her zealous and instant betrayal of the mayor.

She is a traitor to our cause.

Suffice it to say, more than a few folks were not pleased with the decision to call Adams into accountability. On a positive note, and no doubt a surprise to many, a nearly equal amount of readers showed support and agreement with the decision. And you know what? These opinions matter, too.

The initial outrage was focused in three areas. First, how dare *Just Out* express an opinion. Secondly, why was it necessary to do it so quickly? And finally, and clearly, "*Just Out* does not speak for the entire community, does not speak for me, so shut the fuck up." Many were furious that *Just Out* had expressed an editorial opinion.

Demanding that a paper not express opinion is rather like telling a restaurant not to serve food. Expressing opinion is what papers do. Opinion appears throughout. It's in book and film reviews. It's in restaurant write-ups. Opinion shouts from the unique voice of our columnists. Opinion can be as mild as suggesting which events we recommend you attend or as brash as calling for the resignation of an elected official. Newspapers exist to publish fact and opinion. Sometimes you'll agree. Sometimes you won't. If *Just Out* had issued no opinion, a different opinion or the very one we did, there would still be some who disagree.

In the case of the Adams issue, the anti-*Just Out* crowd, though fervent, hostile and undeniably frequently rude, was matched by an equal number of people who wrote in support of the position taken by *Just Out*. And even if there'd been no call for resignation, everyone would have arrived at their same thoughts and feelings on their own accord, in their own time.

We could have filled the pages of this issue with nothing but letters and comments from readers, both for and against us. Had we the space to do so, I think many of you would be aghast at the horrific way members of this community reacted toward this paper, and toward each other. When not attacking *Just Out*, readers turned on anyone and everyone else who dared express an opposing opinion. Reaction hasn't been pretty, and it hasn't been healthy. If you're not already a visitor to JustOut.com, you can find all the

posts and comments posted there, where they will remain in Web perpetuity. You will find there a sad and eye-opening commentary on our community's inability to reasonably and rationally express differing viewpoints.

Secondly, why was the call for resignation issued so quickly? Why not wait for all the information to be presented? There are two reasons for this. One, for the issue at hand, all the facts needed to be known were present. There was no confusion, and there was no lack of clarity. Also, there was no need to wait to determine which way the prevailing wind of popularity might blow. Indeed, it would have been more comfortable to wait and take a safer direction. It's always easy to float along with the tide of popular opinion. It's also wrong. Journalism is not a popularity contest.

As noted above, the third bone of contention consisted of frustration and rage concerning the impression that *Just Out* would be viewed as speaking for the entire gay and lesbian community. *Just Out* does not speak for the community, nor do we speak at the community. We do however, speak to you. You can listen, or you can choose not to. You can agree, or you cannot. Ample opportunity is provided for the expression of dissenting opinion.

Why does *Just Out* then often claim to be the voice of the community? Because we represent the collective voice. *Just Out* is the venue for your letters, your opinions, your comments and your events. We tell your stories; therefore, we are the voice of the community.

Outrage from the call for Adams' resignation was accompanied by demands and pleas. "Apologize and retract the call for resignation" was heard over and over.

An apology will not be forthcoming. There is nothing to apologize for. Calling the mayor into accountability was a necessary and appropriate step to take. The same action would have been taken were it Sam Adams or any other local mayor, commissioner, senator or politician who found themselves in a similar situation. Straight, gay, black, white, man, woman, old or young—it doesn't matter. We view the circumstances, not the

sexual orientation. Isn't that what we demand of the rest of the world? Treat us for who we are, not for our sexual identity?

In the past two weeks, the saga of Sam Adams has been played out in papers, televisions, radios and blogs across the nation. There is, at this moment, simply nothing left to say on the topic of the mayor and his actions. Disagreement continues to ferment. I wake up in the night shouting, "It's not about the sex!" No one listens. The community is divided into combative camps.

As we go forward with this debate, I do need to make it clear that I am establishing boundaries and guidelines for engaging in civilized conflict with this publication. Threats of harm to myself, my staff or our facility will simply not be tolerated. Understand that vandalism, theft and destruction of property is neither acceptable nor legal. Those who remove or destroy this publication, then boast about it on Facebook, will be held liable for their actions. Being supportive of Adams is one thing; gross misbehavior is another.

We are left now with a divide to bridge. I don't know who can or will step up to help with this process. I do know who should.

Sam Adams was our hero, our icon, our great gay hope. Our community's personal investment in him clearly exceeded his ability to meet our expectations. *Just Out* did not topple Sam Adams from his pillar of popularity and position. Sam Adams did that himself. 

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