

HOW I BECAME A BORN-AGAIN OPPRESSOR

Hello. I would like to introduce myself to you. My name is Merciful Blasphemy (my friends call me Mercy... my enemies, well, they don't call me). I am a little known, yet powerful worker within the Department of Human Services. I want to take a few moments of your time to share with you the story of my career. You see, I am a Born-Again Oppressor.

In my youth, I fought valiantly for the equal rights of all people, especially the poor, the powerless, the outcasts, and those victimized by the horror of domestic violence, rape, incest, and our American Legal System. I was young. I was foolish. Why, I hadn't yet cancelled my subscriptions to East-West Journal, Ms. Magazine, and Mother Jones. I believed my little hands could help reform the world. I thought that a new moral consciousness was somehow stronger than corporate power. Ha! How far we allow our youth to stray from the American Way. We are blessed with a governmental system that provides a momentary glimpse at the so-called idea of freedom before correcting such delusions and guiding us back on line. It really is sad how many working adults still believe such visions.

But such immature and blasphemous thinking has been cast from my small but humble brain. I see brilliance in the ways of simple oppression. A few individuals lead; the rest of us follow. Easy. As long as I remember to never complain and to co-opt my personal values, I really have no problems. I can be happy. If I cooperate, I may someday be assigned to a leadership role. But for now, I don't have to worry. That's what the leaders do. I don't have to think for myself. That's what the government does. It's like being a contented child. As long as I block the memories of my personal childhood horrors, I am comforted by my surroundings. I no longer struggle with my ideals. I don't wrestle with political correctness. I buy grapes anytime I want to. And I never feel overwhelmed nor burned-out by the all-encompassing spirit of radical thought. I have been renewed by the energy of institutional power.

This change was no easy task. I was a stubborn and rebellious young adult. I fought, long and hard against this mental takeover. I used to speak out in unison with my brother and sister coworkers as we confronted management standards on poor working conditions, unsafe workplaces, affirmative action rights, equal rights for alternative lifestyles, and accessibility rights for differently-abled clients. I was well versed. I believed that language held power, and I knew the lingo. I was determined that every individual be given a voice and that every voice be heard. I helped define issues of "empowerment." I drafted policy on Client Rights. I talked about covert violence as well as overt injustices. I demanded that, as an office, we confront each other on our own racist, sexist, classist and homophobic statements, beliefs, and values. Together, office workers hung posters. We attended rallies. We marched in pride parades. We wore politically correct buttons and tee-shirts. We were proud of our defiance. We were making a difference.

The success of our frequent Unity Breaks and public demonstrations brought about community recognition. Because I was outspoken, I was viewed as the office spokesperson. The more notoriety I received, the more anxious my coworkers became. I began to hear whispered questions between restroom stalls. Could we be going too far? Are we rocking the boat a little too much? Could we lose our jobs? Our office unity began to break apart as coworkers feared the loss of their personal income more than the fear of management privilege or management retribution. After all, it was management who had hired each of us in the first place. Management eagerly picked up on the inner-office fears, and further divided the staff by manipulating the weakest individuals into opposing positions against the strongest workers. Coworkers spent their time fighting each other rather than against management rule. And they stopped speaking to me. Ahh, the brilliance of

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oppression. It was a taste of true political savvy. And I, in my youth, still believed that we could bridge our disagreements, rekindle our common goals, and renew our pledge to provide equal and just social services. I was prepared for a positive confrontation between opposing powers that would instigate the eventual overthrow of the old, patriarchal ways. I believed that, finally, justice would avenge political violence. I was dedicated to hardcore, radical persistence. The times were rapidly a'changin'. I was radiant.

But no longer. I have been struck dumb by the truth of political oppression.

In an instant, I grew wise to the ways of power and privilege. Why should I continue fighting someone else's battles when I could simply turn my back on certain issues and they disappeared? Why work so hard on issues that were not my personal issues? After all, I wasn't differently-abled, so why should I care if the office was not accessible? I wasn't poor, so why should I work afterhours when poor people didn't work at all? Why try to adapt my schedule to the need of clients? If they need my services, they will make a point to find me when I am available? Why use my time creatively? It only added hours to my day, compounded my paperwork and was not a part of my job description. Why devote every weekend and several evenings each week to planning political actions when I could be home in bed watching "Designing Women" and "thirty something?" Why be extra-sensitive to the quality of clients' lives when they probably wanted that way of life to begin with? Why be sensitive at all? It wasn't in my job description. All that was expected was that I do my job on regular work time, comply with office standards and maintain an adequate job performance? Was that asking too much?

Yes, I am a Born-Again Oppressor. I no longer desire the view from the mountaintop. I'm sitting on top of as much of a mountain as I'll ever have. Why complain about that? It's a nice enough view from here. It's such a relief! No more speakouts and pride marches. No more rallies. No more posting notices. No more consciousness-raising sessions. In fact, no more confrontations because I no longer have any complaints. Social oppression has always been here. I just needed to learn to accept it. I needed to grow up. I know, now, that those people who remain dissatisfied are simply unwilling to grow up and accept life as it is.

Since my transformation I have more personal time and more interest in socializing. I've played bridge with many important people in my community. I'm starting a morning jogging program with some others. Why, I've even joined a weight-loss club with the city's most

eloquent leaders. In fact, since I converted and threw away my old, overly radical ways, my office coworkers have started speaking with me again. We have regular staff lunches with management, and it's just the greatest plan. I realize, now, how important it is to invest in office maintenance, and is well worth the loss of direct client time. We need a break from our oh-so-difficult jobs so that we are more in-tuned with each other. We share recipes and discuss holiday plans. We have learned that entertainment is the apex of inner-office support. After all, the office that eats together, keeps together.

I'm so glad that I have seen the light, and I want you to see the light as well. Speaking out against oppression is so divisive. I carried around so much anger when I was working against oppression. Anger is just another way of keeping hate alive, and we simply cannot love one another if we remain angry at each other. I've learned to love myself. I now put myself first. When someone comes into the office filled with pain and misery, I simply love them for who they are. If they can't change, then I accept them as they are. I take the time to reach out to them with all my heart and encourage them to "just say no" to what is wrong in their lives. I teach them to understand their place in the world. I show them how happy I am. I'm happy for who they are. My job is much easier now, and much more fulfilling. It is a privilege to work together in oppression. If more of us joined together fight against radical insight, then I know that social services would prove an unlimited success. After all, when you're the oppressor, you also control the statistics.

Merciful Blasphemy is currently upgrading her credentials so she will be better equipped to enforce her power over those poor unfortunate souls who rely on social services. She lives on the North Coast and dwells within a local bureaucracy.



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