



ANTHONY RUSSO

PETITION OF PREJUDICE

BY MICHAEL McCUSKER

"The debate about whether sexual orientation should be included in Oregon's civil rights laws is ultimately a debate about what principles society should be founded upon. It is a struggle to define the social contract that citizens make with one another to live under one government."

—KATRIN BRIDGET SNOW

Homophobia like alcoholism is a disease, a psychotic obsession to enforce a mythical moral and sexual purity through ostracism, oppression and violence to the point of murder and genocide.

Gay men and lesbians, however they might be called in succeeding eras or separate cultures, are as historical a part of humanity as heterosexuality. Humanity is probably of a bisexual inclination, able to find its pleasure with either or both sexes. Many early cultures were not disturbed by the sexual preferences of their citizens so long as each generation replicated itself in adequate populations to continue the tribe or society. Other early societies developed traditions of severe sexual conditioning, however, which spread pervasively more by sword and fire than by reason or logic. Sexual tolerance in most areas of the world was supplanted by rigid definitions of acceptable sexual practices which were exclusively heterosexual.

Religion is of course a doctrinaire force in matters of sexual subversion, the oppressive arbiter of public morality, rabidly averse to homosexuality. Christianity in medieval times burned homosexuals by the hundreds of thousands, buried at the bottom of stakes among the faggots of wood that would ignite heretics and women accused of witchcraft, which is the origin of the term *faggot* to describe gay men. Homosexuals have long been forced to leave shadow lives, and much to the contrary of popular fear, it is they who are preyed upon, who have for centuries been open game for anyone to ostracize or harm. Coming out of the closet most likely meant dropping into a casket. While heterosexual debauch has generally been tolerated among successful armies and in aristocratic practices of incest and rape of peasant girls, homosexuality has been shunned and homosexuals hunted, tortured and executed.

Gay bashing is old; AIDS is new. While thousands of young men died of the epidemic, ecclesiastical homophobes declared their deaths as punishment for offending God with their unnatural acts. The death toll has been staggering; these lines from a poem by George Meredith provide a collective epitaph:

*And we go
and we drop like the fruits of the tree
even we
even so*

The extreme prejudice of a conservative government felt little concern for AIDS until homosexuals started falling like the *fruits*. The government's apathy during the Reagan/Bush years could be likened to genocide in a different form than gas chambers in death camps. The attitude was to let the gays die; and the medical profession, though it has since reacted heroically in its fight against AIDS, initially balked and disgraced its Hippocratic Oath. Children with AIDS were dismissed from schools and neighbors pressed their families to leave town.

A part of the reluctance to marshal Red Cross type epidemic relief during the 1980s was not only a demonstration of prevalent public revulsion for homosexuality but also a barely concealed gloating that the immense strides made by Gay Liberation in the previous decade were literally being wiped out by the death toll among its strongest adherents. AIDS at first promised to be a sort of final solution to the rise of gay influence in the United States; only when white heterosexuals from the 'burbs began to contract AIDS did the government belatedly creak into action.

Though AIDS has taken a staggering toll among the male gay community (which is in the aggregate as promiscuous among its members as other men are with women) and less among lesbians, it has failed as a final solution to eradicate their determination to be as free and equal citizens as their

tormentors. So ancient methods of exclusion and repression are once more revived to inculcate fear and revulsion in both gays and straights to intensify their mutual antipathy and to ultimately pacify the public to the process of eliminating homosexuals both legally and extralegally. A Portland white supremacist who represented an organization he described as "the moderate force of fascism," told a newspaper a few years ago that homosexuals "will either be corrected" by "Skinnerism behavior modification" or "it's the bullet."

The Oregon Citizens Alliance is attempting once again to disenfranchise gay men and lesbians in Oregon, strip them of all rights as citizens and as human beings entitled to the most basic protections of democracy. The process chosen by OCA, in alliance with the so-called 'Christian Coalition', is again the initiative petition which gives the public the opportunity to oust crooked politicians or change bad laws but which can also be an instrument to discriminate against troublesome or disaffected minorities. This time the attempt is to eliminate any support or positive mention of "sexual minorities" in public schools. Titled 'The Student Protection Act', this initiative calls for banning "public school instruction encouraging, promoting and sanctioning homosexual/bisexual behaviors," as well as makes the contradictory assertion that teaching about "sexual orientation" is divisive to society.

In the Past the OCA sponsored statewide initiatives that attempted to amend the Oregon Constitution to declare homosexuality "abnormal and unnatural" and required state and local governments to not "promote, condone, encourage or facilitate abnormal behavior."

OCA spokespersons deny they are setting up gays for extralegal persecution, yet claim homosexuality defiles the eyes of God and threatens children who are, they say, exposed to perversion as long as gays dwell openly in society (they claim their petition is for "child protection"). They say homosexuals should not be given special privileges or be protected by laws.

The OCA has dropped some of the earlier controversial provisions from its original ballot measure of 1992 that lumped

bestiality, sado/masochism, pedophilia and incest with homosexuality, which Damon Edwards, cofounder of the Clatsop County AIDS Coalition, wrote in an article that appeared in the August 1991 NCTE (*Stop the Witch Hunt*), "cunningly lumped homosexuality in the middle of all these activities."

Edwards asked, "Do they (OCA) really think homosexuals belong in this group? Don't they realize there are straight people out there who partake in these activities every day? And don't they know the vast majority of gay people think these actions are just as disgusting?"

What the OCA won't tell you, Edwards wrote, "is that the vast majority of child molesters and rapists are heterosexual, not homosexual." The OCA, he said, seem to think that a heterosexual molester is somehow not as evil or perverted as a gay one. "Tell it to the thousands of little girls who are ravaged and raped by heterosexuals each year."

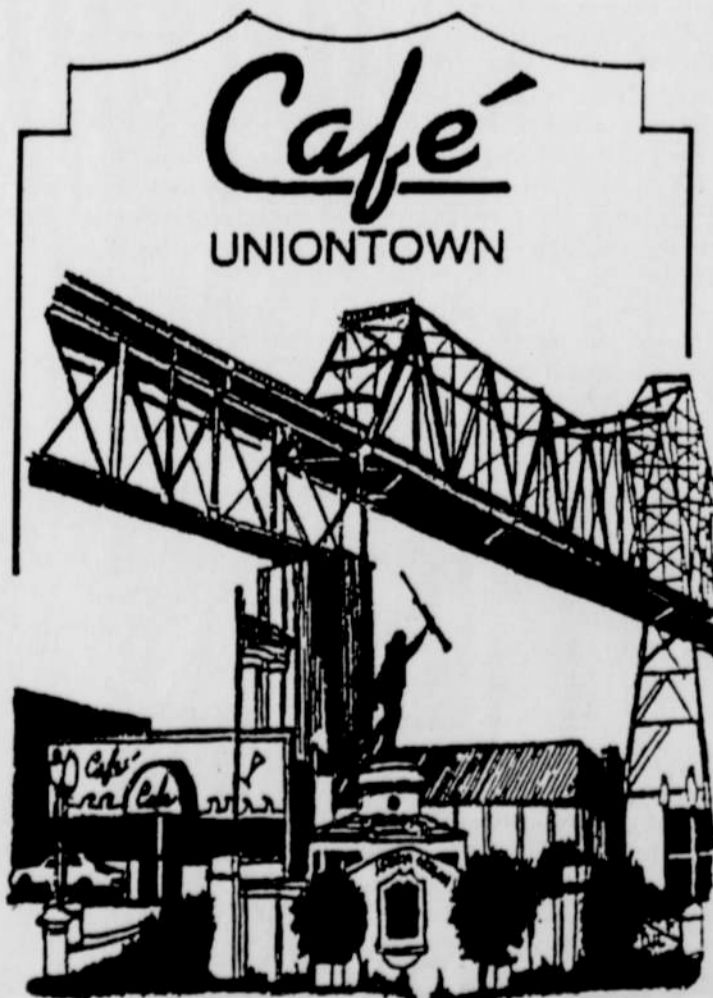
The Oregon Citizens Alliance was started in 1987 as a backlash against Governor Neil Goldschmidt's order that state workers who were gay should enjoy the same protection and rights of all citizens. OCA claimed gays were a special interest group being accorded privileges greater than the rest of the citizenry, and although the simple justice of the governor's position should have been evident, enough people accepted the patent absurdity and fear mongering of OCA to defeat Goldschmidt's reform. Within two months the OCA gathered nearly double the signatures needed to get their antigay initiative on the 1988 state ballot. The measure successfully rescinded the governor's executive order that banned discrimination based on sexual preference in public employment, but was struck down by the Oregon Supreme Court in 1993.

The OCA is immersed in ultraconservative issues besides its assaults on gays. In 1987 it opposed legislation for pre-kindergarten programs on the grounds that they were anti-family. OCA opposed parental leave which they claimed was anti-business and fought state divestment from South Africa.

Some other OCA activities included organizing the Homefront Coalition in support of the Persian Gulf War; involvement with rightwing women's groups that attempt to undermine the feminist movement; support of prayer in public schools; and the OCA rabidly attacks the reproductive rights movement. The OCA has mounted several local antigay campaigns in cities and counties in Oregon, though the state supreme court has ruled them unconstitutional and discriminatory.

In 1992 the OCA's infamous "Abnormal Behaviors Initiative" (then Measure 9) was defeated in Oregon, though a Colorado version passed and was subsequently ruled unconstitutional. The OCA publicly backed off from its bestiality stance in 1994 in hopes of attracting moderate bigots to its rank and file of radical homophobes who were not enough in number to swing the 1992 vote. Despite toning down the measure (13) it was decisively defeated. (OCA attempts to grassroots their prejudice at local levels were collectively known as "Son of 9.")

Despite its losses, court reversals and rejection by mainstream politicians, the OCA remains a dangerous spoiler not only to moderate Republicans and liberal Democrats but especially to gays and lesbians who have openly struggled for a generation to overcome prejudice and be allowed to at least live in peace.



218 WEST MARINE DRIVE
ASTORIA, OREGON 97103
(503) 325-8708

HOPE L. HARRIS

LICENSED
MASSAGE
THERAPIST

503/325-2523

