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Views: Queer Delusions

Many queers woke up on November 3 feeling like they had been stabbed in the gut. As pundits rushed to submit their analyses of the latest Democratic party crash and burn, the media frenzy began to resemble a morbid competition to see who could pour more salt in queer people's wounds. Without Ralph Nader to scapegoat for this election cycle's thumping at the polls, it became clear that pushy queers — who had the audacity to seek equal marriage rights — would be the new Naderites, publicly reviled by Democrats for their candidate's loss. Sure, a strong majority of queers marched in lockstep behind the Kerrycrats, but how could they be so selfish as to don those tuxes and bridal gowns and dance around like a bunch of fairies on the steps of San Francisco's city hall? Couldn't they see they were ruining it for the Dems? We deserve your votes, they say, and you should be grateful for the crumbs we might just throw you.

Here's our 'friend' Senator Dianne Feinstein's (D) post-election analysis of the struggle for gay marriage in her home state of California: "It gives [conservatives] a position to rally around. The whole issue has been too much, too fast, too soon." In typical self-loathing queer mode, Representative Barney Frank (D) of Massachusetts opined about the gay marriage movement, "I think it hurt.... I wasn't willing to pay a price for a lot of hoopla that didn't accomplish anything."

Too much, too fast? Hell no. This is not the moment for apologies, nor to let this scapegoating demoralize us. Here's the news that those playing the queer blame game won't emphasize when telling you to sit down and shut up. CNN exit polls showed that while only 25 percent of voters expressed support for gay marriage, a further 35 percent supported civil unions. Now we here in Vermont know well that civil unions fall far short of full equality, but 60 percent of people expressed support for extending more rights to queers. One certainly doesn't find this in the mainstream discourse, as commentators remind us repeatedly that voters cited "moral values" as their top concern (chosen from a list by a whopping

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20 percent of people, while a measly 80 percent identified things like the economy, Iraq, the 'war on terror,' and education as their main priorities).

It's a delusion to think that had a Democrat been elected president, the trajectory of queer rights would have been much altered. Remember Bill "don't ask, don't tell" Clinton and the Defense of Marriage Act? But Kerry voted against DOMA, right? Newsflash from Kansas, Dorothy: someone

While hanging out with them was slightly preferable to being mocked by the football team, most of us eventually realize that this isn't a productive way to live. As adults, however, we still flock to the lesser bully come poll time.

As queers discuss how to proceed now, here are a few things I hope we keep in mind. First, it's a waste of energy to campaign for candidates who won't support our issues in hopes that they will change their minds once elected. Politicians almost always give us less than they promise, not more. Second, victories rarely come without strong social movements. This is not the time to play dead, but to organize to protect our recent gains and to push for more. Otherwise, our position will be even further eroded. Third, now more than ever, queer activists need to align themselves with other struggles for social and economic justice.

While marriage equality can be one goal of many, we should

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who repeatedly says, "This is a matter for the states" (isn't this what apologists for slavery used to say?) is not your friend. And while Republicans will continue pushing a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, Kerry was never going to work too hard to oppose it, and certainly wouldn't have fought for federally recognized civil unions.

It seems to me that many queers' lemming-like march behind the Democrats is symptomatic of how queer people have been conditioned since birth to accept the lesser bully as their friend. As young, closeted queers, many of us quickly learned to accept any situation that didn't involve getting pounded into the locker room floor. I knew that many of my high school friends harbored homophobic views, but as long as I stayed closeted and kept quiet, they didn't call me 'fag,' and I thought that was good enough.

also remember that if we had a universal health care system, marital status wouldn't matter when allocating the right to be healed. We wouldn't have to worry about winning access to our deceased partners' social security benefits if we had a system that adequately supported all elderly people. And we mustn't forget that the culture of war feeds the cult of masculinity that seeks to oppress queers, control women's bodies, and generally punish the weak. There's zero evidence that our rights will be extended through unwavering support of either major party — it's time to think hard about the alternatives. ▼

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