

BY LYNN McNICOL

When the November second elections returned a determinedly homophobic and warmongering president to the White House and a number of states passed laws banning gay marriage, queers and our allies were outraged. The next day, a lesbian couple in Burlington created the Queer Liberation Army in answer to the militaristic and heterosexual backlash. Organizer 'General Insurrection' (a.k.a. Laurie Essig) and her partner were "overwhelmed" by the election results, she said, and decided to do something about it.

Having been involved in groups such as the Lesbian Avengers, Act Up and Queer Nation, the general and her partner decided that formation of a Queer Liberation Army would be a reasonable response to the elections. They were soon joined by others who were equally distraught. Two months and a handful of actions later, the QLA has quickly caught on. The upstart group has found followers as near and far as Montpelier, Chicago, Virginia, and Seattle. "We want it to spread like a virus," quipped General Insurrection.

The street theater group is taking on not only the right-wing Republicans in power, but also Democrats and mainstream LGBTQQ organizations perceived as failing to address the needs of all queers. While the QLA plans to build alliances with other movements for social justice, for now it remains a small, varied group of queer folk.

On a recent gray Sunday afternoon, a half dozen or so of the troops gathered in the uncharacteristic quiet of 135 Pearl, a historically gay bar in Burlington that currently defines its clientele as "a safe palce for everyone." Attending the meeting were students, a professor, workers in queer service organizations and others — representing a range of ages, gender identities and races. It was a somber meeting until *Out in the Mountains* Editor Euan Bear walked in to take a photo.

Suddenly the group sprang to life, donning bright pink T-shirts with "Queer Lib Army" printed on them and hamming it up for the camera. Then they all chose their stage names for the day. 'Private Parts,' who also attended the meeting, opted out of the photo.

The QLA aims to use mass media, nonviolent direct action, and "the speaking of truth and the use of humor in a bleak world" to achieve its aims. The group demands full human rights for queers of all persuasions, including an end to harmful labeling of transgender men and women by the psychiatric profession. That demand refers to diagnostic terms such as "gender dysphoria" used to identify the urge of men and women who seek help to change their assigned gender.



The Queer Liberation Army Fights With Humor

"The U.S. Army wants you for their unjust war in Iraq, but why be cannon fodder when you can join the Queer Liberation Army and fight for peace, justice, truth & pleasure?" from the Manifesto of the Queer Liberation Army

While at least one member of the group is "civil-unioned," the QLA opposes using gay marriage as the primary issue to free queers from discrimination. Rather, it demands that rights and privileges "be detached from marital status and that family relationships be defined by the people in them, not the state." Members of the group argue that marriage is a privilege for wealthy, white, straight people and we don't need to be like them to be acceptable. Also, to define marriage as a principal right for gays "leaves out lots of people," Gen. Insurrection noted.

As one of its first acts, the Queer Liberation Army joined a mid-December peace rally in downtown Burlington. One QLA member offered a rousing speech to the

crowd, and the group led the entire parade down the street. The QLA also appeared on member Peggy Luhrs' local cable TV show (*The Feminist Media Review*), and prepared for a "recruitment" event held in Montpelier last month.

Other plans include a pamphlet to be written by the Propaganda Committee, possible actions for Valentine's Day, and queer-leader practice. The group also supported "Not One Damn Dime Day" — a total boycott of any purchases on January 20th, Inauguration Day — to oppose the war in Iraq and business as usual.

While the Queer Liberation Army uses (or misuses) military titles and parodies political doubletalk to its humorous advantage,

the group's message is ultimately one of optimism and peace. Said the QLA's Minister of Truth in a telephone interview, "Every day we're alive and hopeful is a revolution." ▼

The Queer Liberation Army is actively recruiting new members. They meet at 4:00 every Sunday afternoon at 135 Pearl in Burlington. Check out their website at www.queerlibarmy.org, or send them an email at queerlibarmy@aol.com.

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