

Therapy and Politics: The New Alliance Party

by Euan Bear

There's a newspaper floating around Burlington these days, mostly found in laundromats. It is called *The National Alliance*, and it is radical. Not only is it rhetorically radical about class and economics in the style of left organizations of the late sixties and early seventies, it also puts out a line about a political party, The New Alliance Party (NAP). The NAP says in its literature that it is black-led, women-or-color-led, and pro-gay. I had never heard of them.

But then Howdy Russell called and asked if I would cover a panel discussion sponsored by NAP, because the party's gay and lesbian caucus national coordinator would be there. I am an old radical, a little burnt out, very disgusted with Democratic Party politics, and I was intrigued.

The gathering was billed as a panel discussion on *Women and the Rise of the Right* with reference to the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in Vermont. Admission cost \$4.

There were supposed to have been five speakers: Charlotte Dennett, a tireless worker for Vermont NOW during the ERA campaign and a published author who has researched the historical connections between economic crises and the repression of women's rights; Joy Livingston, a Burlington College administrator and an active member of the Burlington Women's Council; and state Representative Mique Glitman, a strong feminist who has supported gay and lesbian rights by introducing an anti-discrimination bill in the state legislature; and two speakers from the New Alliance Party (NAP) - Cathy Stewart, Boston organizer for the party and medical director of the party-allied Institute for Social Therapy and Research; and Mary Fridley, national coordinator of NAP's gay and lesbian caucus and New England regional coordinator for the NAP.

But two of the three Vermont speakers did not show up. Glitman was in a legislative hearing on the death penalty; Dennett bowed out because of a publishing deadline. Livingston arrived in plenty of time, and an immediate confrontation occurred at the door.

According to Livingston, she had discussed the admission charge with NAP's Burlington organizer, Richard Ronner, well before the date of the event, saying that she could not appear on the panel unless it was clear that people could pay whatever they wanted to or could afford without being confronted and made to identify themselves as low income at the door. She suggested that a donation box or can be placed on the table. Livingston said she thought the organizer had agreed.

When she arrived, a man sitting at the door was asking for \$4. A woman who had come in just before Livingston was asked for \$4. She said, "I can't afford that, I don't have any money." The door man said, "Well, that's what we're asking." There was a tense silence. "I guess I have to leave," said the woman. There was no mention of a sliding-scale admission.

Livingston restated her position and left when NAP's Cathy Stewart agreed to explain to the audience why she would not appear.

Meanwhile, I was interviewing Mary Fridley. Fridley came to the New Alliance Party by way of the women's movement. "I was a cultural worker in Oregon," she said, producing concerts. But as a working class lesbian, she felt politically unsatisfied with where the women's movement was going. It held little promise for poor and working-class white women, or for Latino and Black women. She came to New York after hearing of the Coalition of Grass Roots Women, and worked with the coalition before joining NAP.

Perhaps the most important thing she said is that NAP is the only independent political party (with about 30,000 members nationwide, mostly concentrated in New York City with a scattering of members in large, urban areas across the nation) that is committed to the Black and Latino grass-roots leadership of women, and that is pro-gay.

Their line on homosexuality is that it is not a sin, and not genetic, but a political statement protesting restrictive gender roles in a white-macho-male dominated society. By extension, the NAP believes that homosexuality is the free and conscious political choice of individuals to go against the mainstream.

In some circles, those are fightin' words. According to Fridley, *Gay Community News* has a policy of not covering the NAP's events in the Boston area. But when I called *GCN* for a comment, editor Stephany Poggi said there is no such policy.

Fridley also said that the Los Angeles National Gay Rights March Task Force had banned the NAP delegation from participating because of the party's advocacy of gayness as a political choice. Such a position, say critics of the NAP, opens gays and lesbians to further attacks from the right wing.

The NAP's response is that viewing homosexuality as genetically determined is the same as saying it is a genetic disease, giving the right wing a basis for quarantining gays.

The second most important thing she said is that those of us who were politically active agitators in the past, but are now burnt out (and, I mentally add, supporting liberal causes with occasional checks from backwoods hideyholes or downtown apartments), are burned out for a reason.

"There's nothing magical about the high level of burn out," Fridley said. "Radical energy had an impact in the seventies. The contributions of the gay movement were profound, but that energy was channeled into the Democratic Party. Deals were then made to purge the least desirables: transvestites, gays, lesbians, the poor, and people of color." Gays and Lesbians, Fridley said, have consistently been ripped off and sold out by the Democratic Party.

The next thing that caught my attention was that the New Alliance Party is sponsoring a petition drive, aiming to get a million signatures. The petition is directed to the Reverend Jesse Jackson, leader of the Rainbow Coalition of the Democratic Party, and asks him to support an independent Black candidate for President of the United States.

"Who?" I asked. "We don't have a particular candidate in mind," Fridley responded. "Whoever comes from the people" she said. "We want massive grass-roots participation, which will create an environment where leaders will arise." The NAP is organizing an independent People's Convention to establish a platform and choose candidates. The party is aiming to get on the ballot in all 50 states.

As for the NAP's political record, the party ran Dr. Lenora Fulani, director of Community Clinics of the Institute for Social Therapy and Research, and coordinator of the NAP's Women of Color Caucus, for the Governor of the New York state in 1986. She received 25,000 votes. Cathy Stewart ran for state representative from Boston-Cambridge area against liberal Democrat John McLaughlin. She lost.

The party aims to build coalitions, said Fridley, between groups that have traditionally been at odds with each other: Blacks and Gays, Blacks and Jews, Latinos and all three groups. "Some people say it can't be done. But given the state of things now, I don't know what else to do," she explained. "It's either build this party, do nothing, or rely on the same people who got us into this mess."

The NAP, she said, recognizes the progressive leadership which the Black community has given to the country. It is a multi-racial party which sees racism as the cutting-edge issue. The progressive movement, she continued, is doomed to failure unless it deals with racism.

A brief discussion of Vermont issues followed, including the recently introduced gay rights anti-discrimination bill and the betrayal of lesbians and gays by straight feminists during the ERA campaign. One man in the audience seemed intent on stirring up a heated debate over economic analysis. (I wondered if he was an old-style Marxist-Leninist, or perhaps an agent. The lessons learned in the sixties

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