

Barbara Snelling from speaking at the Pride rally?" and "Who chose 'Queers and Friends Fight the Right' as the Pride Day slogan?" An enormous amount of frustration continues to exist regarding how these decisions were made and, more specifically, how to influence and manage these decision makers so that they can better represent the needs and concerns of the full community in the future.

Both decisions reflect an intolerance among these decision makers to people different from themselves -- in this case, Republicans. "We need to recognize that everyone is an individual -- stereotyping Republicans is just as bad as stereotyping lesbians and gay men." (anon.) "By saying that Snelling is not welcome is sort of saying that (g/l/b/t) Republicans are not welcome or that they should hide their Republicanism. It's important to build coalitions." (anon.)

"I can hear people saying that Republicans haven't been helpful, but there are a lot of them out there and we have to work with them. We had an opportunity to educate Barbara Snelling, so she could see more of us and get to know more of us ... It was a blown opportunity to develop a dialog with her. It's not as if we've accomplished everything we want to accomplish." (anon.)

And the aggressive aspect of the "Fight" slogan was seen as "inflammatory" and further "divisive" by respondents: "I really felt bad about 'Fight the Right.' That first word -- fight -- it stinks. I didn't want to be a part of this, but did so out of (a sense of) responsibility to the community. Getting hit does not give you the right to hit back; it only drops you down to that level. That's how I felt, that we dropped down to (their) level." (Travis Randall, Lyndonville)

"There were many reasons to take issue with that theme, which in and of itself proved antithetical to the entire notion of a unifying day in which we take pride in all gay/lesbian/bisexual expression. So instead of bringing us all together, it pushed us apart -- emotionally, intellectually, and, in the end, physically ... Unity needs to remain our paramount goal. Without it, our once-strong chorus of social protest will devolve into a cacophony of unintelligible individual shouts ... Our leaders -- our true leaders -- need to recognize and respect that multitude of voices. Obviously, there are varying levels of leadership involved here, but we must maintain our sights on the larger group picture, even when we're engaged in the smaller conflicts which beset our communities." (Hugh Coyle, Ripton)

#### Conflict

While Mary Hurlie, in her "Voices from the Mountains" piece in the September issue of this newspaper called for Susan Aranoff, Co-Liaison to the Legislature for the Vermont Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, to be held to a stricter accountability, Hurlie's message was likely dismissed by a community that has lost patience and interest in public displays of such vituperation. People believe that Ms. Hurlie's stated concerns mask a more personal conflict, one that they don't believe is appropriately resolved in a public forum.

The second major concern of the respondents is the seemingly unrelenting back-biting, blind-siding, and sniping to which many feel our leaders are subjected. While our leaders should be held accountable for their decisions and public statements, it seems important to these respondents that this be pursued in a respectful manner. "We are very quick to criticize and very slow to appreciate. That does not mean we should not be critical; just because someone put in a lot of time and energy does not mean we cannot be critical of mistakes. It just means we need to take the time to express appreciation with the same careful attention." (anon.)

"Terje (Anderson) said it best: 'We have to stop eating our young.' Our one common denominator is our shared sexuality; that leaves an enormous amount of room for divergence in virtually every other area of life. That divergence shows itself most clearly in our unwillingness to trust another person with 'leadership' or 'power.' We are too quick to criticize our leaders for stepping forward and making an effort, and too reluctant to acknowledge that someone else's approach may be appropriate and acceptable even if it is not our own preferred approach. I've seen firsthand the ferocity and meanness of such lack of trust and unwillingness to compromise and listen to the other person's perspective. It is ugly, draining, and totally destructive. Why would anyone want to enter into a 'leadership' role when being attacked by one's peers is a very real possibility?" (Susan Murray, Ferrisburg)

"Maybe because we've been marginalized all our lives, we're defensive even with each other about being unheard or squeezed out. It becomes a game of dueling oppressions and the forward movement we seek can't help but be stalled by that. It's my hope not that we bury our differences but that we also identify our common ground and remember that it is at least as important as that which divides us." (Chris Tebbetts, Burlington)

#### Sustenance

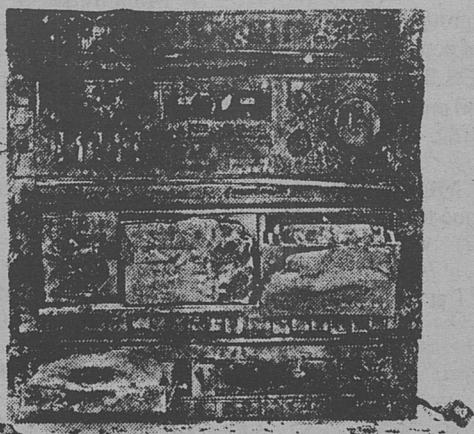
"As l/g/b/t people we live/organize within a paradox: we are far more than what we do with our genitals and with whom, yet we are discriminated against simply because of it. We are forced to organize in a cultural climate incapable of dealing with issues of sexuality in general, let alone with what is seen -- however mistakenly -- as 'unnatural.' We cannot nurture young men and women in the community -- the very people we need to be training and educating for future leadership roles -- for fear of being labeled child molesters. We are torn between seeking 'equal' rights that validate our being 'just like heterosexuals' and retaining our critical, outsider perspective that looks to create alternative ways of living/loving. Some leaders are willing to sacrifice the 'fringe' community (read: leather people, drag kings/queens, anti-monogamists, etc.) for the support of the mainstream, while others are willing to alienate resources and support from that very mainstream by their political tactics or philosophies (read: NAMBLA, ACT-UP, Radical Faeries, etc.)." (Dudley, Stratford)

"Although I am proud of being gay, it is not the high it was for me when I was young and coming out. This probably represents a good many of us and, when blended with a coming acceptance of our gayness by society in a larger way, we may be in danger of not paying attention to what needs to be done. It seems like a delicate balance of working for our rights while not becoming a whiny group." (anon.)

"As more people choose to be active members of our community, the more diverse our community grows. Diversity and growth mean new opinions, new ideas, and new opportunity." (Bob Bolyard, Burlington)

"What sustains me? The fact that this is a place where it feels like you can make a difference." (Chris Tebbetts, Burlington)

*In the next issue of Out in the Mountains, we will explore the solutions offered by the respondents to strengthen and improve the leadership within the l/g/b/t community. ▼*



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