Bill Clinton's America: Arms Merchant to the World
By Lora Lumpe

At a Capitol Hill press conference in November 1992, a reporter asked President-Elect Clinton what he would do to "stop the sale of arms from this country around the world." Clinton responded: "I expect to review our arms sales policy and to take it up with the other major sellers of the world as part of a long-term effort to reduce the proliferation of weapons of destruction in the hands of people who might use them in very destructive ways."

Two years, several wars and more than $50 billion of U.S. arms sales later, the White House released the results of its review of conventional weapons export policy. Advocates of both arms control and arms exports had worked to influence the content of the 6-page document, released on February 17, 1995. The arms industry won. "It's the most positive statement on defense trade that has been enunciated by any administration," gushed Joel Johnson, one of the weapons industry's chief lobbyists.

Arms controllers' hopes for U.S. leadership to restrict the trade were based on faith rather than reason. During the two years of the policy review, the Clinton team continued--and in many ways accelerated--the Cold War pro-export practices of the Reagan/Bush administrations. In fiscal years 1993 and 1994, the executive branch (and Congress) signed-off on a staggering $100 billion of government and industry-negotiated arms deals. Moreover, the administration actively assisted industry by subsidizing marketing activities, lobbying foreign officials to "buy American," and financing several billions of dollars of sales.

The "new" guidelines call for business as usual: "the United States continues to view transfers of conventional arms as a legitimate instrument of U.S. foreign policy--deserving U.S. government support when they enable us to help friends and allies deter aggression, promote regional stability, and increase interoperability of U.S. forces and allied forces." Instead of restraint, the policy emphasizes openness in exports. Instead of limiting sales and technology on a regional basis, it promotes "responsible" exports: the U.S. will export only to those countries which it favors and discourage exports by others to those it disfavors. Instead of de-commercializing weapons exports, the government will now explicitly consider the impact on the arms industry in deciding whether to approve a sale. Finally, export decisions will continue to be made on a case-by-case basis, meaning export of anything to anyone is possible.

Market Trends
There are several annual sources of information on the international arms trade. Each report measures something slightly different. These varying data can be confusing; however, all sources seem to agree on two points. First, they show the arms market is shrinking, due almost entirely to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of subsidized arms transfers from the former Soviet republics. However, this claim is based on the accuracy of past U.S. government estimates of Soviet arms transfers during the Cold War. If those estimates were exaggerated for political or other reasons--as were estimates of Soviet military expenditure--then comparisons of today's market with that of, say 1987, are shaky. Moreover, arms sellers have an interest in suggesting that the market is in decline: it implies that the problem of the international arms trade is taking care of itself.

The second point of agreement--this one indisputable--is that since 1990 the United States has overwhelmingly dominated the market. Proponents of sales often claim that the increase in market share is not due to an increase in U.S. sales but simply to a shrinking "pie." This is not true. U.S. dominance is attributable, in roughly equal parts, to bullish American marketing during and since the Iraq war and to Russia's near
withdrawal from the market. Since 1990, U.S. sales activity—through both the government-negotiated Foreign Military Sales program and through industry-negotiated sales licensed by the State Department—has spiked (see box).

China sold less than $300 million worth of arms in 1993—less than two percent of the market. After peak sales of $5.8 billion in 1987, it fell from the third-ranked seller in 1990 to sixth place in 1993. China was also the third largest arms importer in 1993, buying $1.3 billion of weapons.

At $2.6 billion in sales, the four largest European suppliers (France, Britain, Germany and Italy) together accounted for 13% of all sales made to the Third World in 1993. This is down from $7.5 billion--29% of the market—in 1992.

UN Register of Conventional Arms

- On September 1, 1994, the United Nations released its second annual Register of Conventional Arms, containing data on seven categories of arms imports and exports during 1993. The Register was established in 1991, in response to the Iraq war, to help identify "excessive arms build-ups." Eighty-one UN members submitted information for the 1994 report.

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Charts by Zale Marrelli

In a report issued last July, the Congressional Research Service estimated that Third World countries purchased $20.4 billion of arms in 1993. (The report's definition of "Third World," excludes Turkey, Greece, East European countries and all former Soviet republics.)

According to the report, while U.S. Foreign Military Sales agreements increased only slightly from 1992 to 1993, U.S. market share rose from 56% to 73% of all Third World agreements. The CRS report actually understates the magnitude of U.S. sales, since it excludes arms sales negotiated directly by industry but licensed by the government. In 1993 the U.S. sold weapons to over 140 countries. The Project on Demilitarization and Democracy calculated that 90 percent of the U.S. sales went to countries that were either not democracies or that were human rights abusers. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were the leading U.S. customers in terms of dollar volume.

Meanwhile, non-U.S. suppliers—often cited in the American press as irresponsible merchants of death—made marginal sales by comparison (see box below). Russia's sales fell from $11.8 billion in 1990 to $1.8 billion in 1993. Iran, Syria and the United Arab Emirates were Russia's largest customers.

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Gay and Lesbian youth are by definition an at-risk population. A 1989 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services study on youth suicide found that gay youth account for 30% of all completed teen suicides, and that approximately 50% of gay youth attempt suicide at least once. In addition, studies show that 25% of gay and lesbian youth have serious substance abuse problems, 40% of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth have run away from home at least once, and 45% of gay males and 20% of lesbians experience verbal or physical assault in high school. Twenty-eight percent of these youth are forced to drop out of school because of harassment resulting from their sexual orientation.

While most gay and lesbian people have undoubtedly been affected by AIDS-related death or illness, very few gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers know someone their own age with HIV or AIDS. Based on our experience, we have found that lesbian and gay teenagers think that only older gay men can get AIDS, and that others their own age are somehow immune to the disease, therefore leaving them at high risk for HIV infection.

In the Spring of 1993, Maria Mezzatesta (Associate Director, LIGALY, Inc.) and I had the option of writing a thesis or doing a Masters Project our last semester of Social Work school at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. We chose to do a project recognizing a tremendous need for education and support about and for gay youth on Long Island. We created a Lesbian and Gay Speaker's Bureau going into schools in our community to start the education process. With some success we were able to enter several school districts, and discovered what we already knew -- that gay and lesbian youth were crying out for a safe place.

To fill an unmet need Maria and I, along with several youth, created Long Island Gay and Lesbian Youth, Inc. (LIGALY) in September 1993. At the time LIGALY was created, there were no services geared towards this population and young people with HIV/AIDS and all disabilities; advocacy services for Long Island teenagers and college students who feel they have been treated unfairly or discriminated against for being gay; short-term individual, group and family counseling and crisis intervention services administered by a staff of New York State Certified Social Workers; HIV/AIDS services, which are incorporated into every component of service including support groups, counseling, and prevention and risk reduction education; the Speakers' Bureau which provides educational workshops and training for students and professionals in Long Island's high schools, junior high schools, colleges and universities, and agencies and organizations on a wide range of topics including Growing Up Gay, Homophobia, Suicide, Substance Abuse and HIV/AIDS.

At present, LIGALY provides a variety of services including: 14 ongoing peer and professionally-run support groups across Long Island, designed to meet the diverse needs of the community by being specialized for teenagers, young adults, young women, and young people with HIV/AIDS and all disabilities; advocacy services for Long Island teenagers and college students who feel they have been treated unfairly or discriminated against for being gay; short-term individual, group and family counseling and crisis intervention services administered by a staff of New York State Certified Social Workers; HIV/AIDS services, which are incorporated into every component of service including support groups, counseling, and prevention and risk reduction education; the Speakers' Bureau which provides educational workshops and training for students and professionals in Long Island's high schools, junior high schools, colleges and universities, and agencies and organizations on a wide range of topics including Growing Up Gay, Homophobia, Suicide, Substance Abuse and HIV/AIDS.

Over 100 youth from Long Island Gay and Lesbian Youth, Inc. (LIGALY) march in the 1995 Long Island Pride Parade. LIGALY's contingent was the largest ever to march in the five year history of the parade.
classes, college student leaders, resident assistants, first year student orientation, and fraternities and sororities; *a Fun and Esteem Project which is a five-week group, offered several times a year, focussing on building self-esteem through group exercises and games, and dealing with issues of coming out, safer sex, negotiating safer sex, HIV/AIDS and STD’s and relationships; *Gay and Lesbian Activities (GALA), which plans social and recreational events for all of LIGALY’s program participants; *Gay AIDS Project (GAP)- LI, which provides case management, counseling, community outreach, social activities, and preventive and risk- reduction education; and finally, *outreach to people with disabilities, providing support groups, counseling and education to the deaf/hearing impaired, blind/visually impaired, learning disabled, mentally retarded, and physically challenged.

"It felt really good to do something that would possibly prevent someone from going through what I went through."
Adam Kaplan, age 20

LIGALY recently opened up the first ever community center on Long Island for gay youth, also creating for the first time a home for the Long Island Gay and Lesbian community. The center will headquarter LIGALY’s operations and will provide an after-school drop-in center, counseling and support services, social activities, college and career nights, and a helpline.

One of the unique aspects of LIGALY is that we go directly into the community to deliver our services. Since transportation on Long Island is inadequate and inconvenient, we have made it possible for thousands of youth to receive service within close proximity to their homes. Instead of just one office, we have 31, spread out across Nassau and Suffolk County, from the South Shore to the North Shore. These 31 "offices" include our Community Center, 14 support groups and 16 College Campus locations.

In addition, LIGALY, Inc. is seen by many as an expert in the field of working with gay youth. LIGALY is often featured on Long Island public television, in NEWSDAY, and was a participating agency/presenter in the 1994 Statewide AIDS Conference, sponsored by the New York State Department of Health. Staff from LIGALY have also been featured as presenters at the Long Island Conference on Chemical Dependency, the New York State Department of Parks and Recreation Annual Conference, Nassau and Suffolk County Teen Health Conferences, the Western Suffolk Counselors Association Conference, and others. The agency conducted its own conference in June on "Youth in Crisis - Working with Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth" for over 100 Long Island youth service workers, including school and agency personnel.

Department of Parks and Recreation Annual Conference, Nassau and Suffolk County Teen Health Conferences, the Western Suffolk Counselors Association Conference, and others. The agency conducted its own conference in June on "Youth in Crisis - Working with Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Youth" for over 100 Long Island youth service workers, including school and agency personnel.

In LIGALY’s two-year existence, the agency has served over 450 people in support groups (400 are currently active). It has made over twenty advocacy interventions in high schools and counseled 175 clients. The Speakers’ Bureau has presented over 220 educational workshops reaching over 15,000 people. Our possibilities are limitless. The future holds many bright and exciting challenges, and together, as a community, we will move forward proudly creating a better world for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

David Kilmnick is the Executive Director of LIGALY, INC. LIGALY’s address is: 32 West Main St., Bay Shore, NY 11706. They received an $800 RESIST grant in March, 1995 to help them purchase a printer/fax/copier machine for outreach, publicity and to develop educational materials.

"The People at LIGALY saved my life. And I’m eternally grateful."
Mo Wilson, age 16

"Alone I felt vulnerable, afraid of everything. With the people in the group I found the courage to admit to myself that I was gay and then to others. Through the years, not only have I found friendship and love, I have also found myself."
Chris Leto, age 25
The report demonstrated the U.S. dominance in the arms market in terms of actual equipment deliveries. In 1993 the U.S. delivered nearly 2,400 tanks, 832 armored combat vehicles, nearly 300 artillery pieces and 100 aircraft, 75 attack helicopters, and 2,900 missiles and missile launchers. The U.S. exported ten times as many tanks as the second largest overall exporter, Germany. Russia delivered 120 tanks, 350 armored vehicles, 14 artillery pieces, 33 combat aircraft, one submarine and no missiles.

Turkey and Greece--which have had very tense relations of late--were the leading importers, with most of their equipment coming from the U.S. or other NATO nations.

Buyers Call the Shots

Surplus arms production here and abroad has created a buyers' market, allowing customers to receive sweeter deals. First and foremost, buyers are extracting a better price and financing packages from sellers, dramatically reducing the macro-economic benefits to selling countries.

A second demand is for the technology to produce weapons. Increasingly, manufacturers are granting licenses to recipient countries to produce subcomponents, components, or entire weapons systems. A prime example is the $5.2 billion Korean Fighter Program deal of 1991. In order to make the sale, U.S. industry was willing not only to send manufacturing jobs overseas but also to risk the creation of new competition in the near term. The security risk of helping to establish new weapons industries abroad takes a back seat to pressures to make the sale now.

Buyers are also demanding higher tech weaponry. In the past few years top-of-the-line systems previously off limits (such as American F-15E "Strike Eagle" and Russian Tu-22M "Backfire" bombers, modern European diesel submarines and supersonic, sea-skimming anti-ship missiles) have been placed on the auction block. This, too, is not without obvious risk to the sellers. Military and intelligence officials repeatedly pointed to the increasing availability and sophistication of conventional arms as a prime threat to U.S. security. The Director of Naval Intelligence, Rear Admiral Edward Shaefer, testified last summer that "the overall technical threat and lethality of arms...being exported have never been higher." CIA Director James Woolsey testified on January 10, 1995, that advanced conventional weapons "have the potential to significantly alter military balances, and disrupt U.S. military operations and cause significant U.S. casualties."

A mix of dangerous security strategies, outmoded diplomatic rationales, and false economic calculations conspires to convince U.S. policymakers that massive levels of arms exports make sense today. Added to the mix is industry's desire for high profits and organized labor's desire to maintain high-paying jobs.

"Rationales" for Arms Sales

Arms exports continue to be used, as during the Cold War, for both stated and unstated strategic reasons. Recipient nations are said to need U.S. arms in order to take responsibility for their own defense. In reality, the U.S. uses exports and joint military exercises to gain access to overseas bases and to establish the infrastructure and interoperability necessary for U.S. intervention.

Interoperability is a hallmark of the doctrine of "coalition warfare," which the U.S. built up during the Cold War to contain communism. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the U.S. has intensified and expanded military ties around the world. According to Pentagon planning documents, instead of arming allies against the Soviet bloc, U.S.-led coalitions are now arming against "regional instability" and "uncertainty."

Further, according to the new arms transfer policy, U.S. arms exports will promote regional stability. The policy statement does not specify exactly how weapons will do this, but presumably it refers to either: a) the creation of a balance of power; or b) the build-up of deterrent capabilities of U.S. allies. However, weapons are more likely to undermine peace and security than to maintain them. Moreover, the geopolitical landscape is so volatile that predicting regime stability and the steadfastness of alliances is impossible. Former U.S. allies--and recipients of U.S. weapons and military training--in Panama, Iraq, Somalia and Haiti became foes.

A third strategic rationale cited in support of arms exports is the need to maintain weapons production lines in case of a future war. The recent spate of mergers and acquisitions in the U.S. arms industry has not reduced output significantly. Production lines for many of America's front-line weapons--e.g., F-15 bombers, F-16 fighters, Apache attack helicopters, and M-1A2 tanks--remain open now only for sales abroad. In other cases, the government is approving new production lines solely for export.

Proponents claim that arms sales allow suppliers to gain and maintain "influence" with recipients. Sellers in the past applied conditions--at least in theory--to weapons purchases. In today's market, however, the buyer is more likely to influence the seller than vice versa. Besides this dubious diplomatic rationale, the U.S. government continues to rely on arms transfers as a one-size-fits-all fix for almost any foreign policy situation. Need to "reward" allies for participating in Desert Storm, peacekeeping in Somalia, or enforcing the no-fly-zone in Iraq? Send weapons. Need to seal a peace agreement? Send weapons, and forgive past military debt as well.

Economic "Rationales"

After the Iraq war, it looked briefly as if the international arms trade was going to be held accountable for enabling, if not fomenting, Iraq's aggression. But the arms export lobby in the United States quickly and effectively headed off the backlash by emphasizing the "jobs" factor. However, while production of most major weapons systems is spread strategically across nearly every state and most Congressional districts, relatively few workers are employed through arms production for export. A 1992 Congressional Budget Office report estimated that sizable reductions in U.S. arms exports to the Middle East, America's largest market, would affect less than one-tenth of one percent of the total work force.

But everyone pays a higher Defense Department (DOD) bill because of these exports. Weapons proliferation, instability and warfare in the developing world are used to justify this year's $250 billion Pentagon request (this excludes $40 billion of other military spending). The development and production of next-generation U.S. weapons are justified now on the basis of weapons being acquired by Third World nations, including those which the United States has sold. Lockheed's lobbying campaign for the F-22
Clinton's America

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fighter is based on the proliferation of very capable fighters, such as the F-15E, F-16C/D and the F/A-18.

Moreover, arms manufacturers receive vast government subsidies. Taxpayers underwrite the research and development of weapons and employ a Pentagon sales force of several thousand people here and abroad. The DOD spends public money to market U.S. weapons at overseas arms bazaars and nearly $5 billion of public money is given away each year to allow allies to pay for U.S. weapons purchases.

In Belarus, Ukraine, Russia and China the Clinton administration has aggressively promoted and assisted the conversion of arms industries to peaceful pursuits. While visiting Beijing in October, Secretary of Defense William Perry said that it was in U.S. interests to "help these countries resist pressure to make weapons even beyond their needs." However, the administration apparently does not consider this advice valid for the U.S. The Clinton administration's conventional arms transfer policy doesn't refer to conversion and downsizing the U.S. arms industry.

Clinton's failure

Over 30 wars are raging around the world today, almost all of them being fought with imported weapons. Given its market dominance, it isn't surprising that U.S. weaponry is finding its way into combat in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Kashmir, and Somalia to name a few.

Lacking the courage to take on weapons corporations and the Pentagon, and the vision to devise new security paradigms, the Clinton administration has failed to seize the opportunity afforded by the end of the Cold War. Rather than seeking to reduce reliance on force—and building up reliance on the rule of law—the White House has ensured not only much more warfare to come but also killing and destruction at much greater levels.

The long-awaited official policy makes plain that any change in U.S. arms export policy must come from the bottom up. No progress will be made on the issue of limiting the global arms trade without significant grassroots pressure.

What You Can Do

* Educate others in your community about the U.S. role in spreading weapons around the globe. Much information—most of it free— is available from the sources listed below. Obtain and share the information. Speak out and write on these issues.

* Oppose the use of federal taxes to underwrite weapons exports and military training. Let your elected officials know that they should cut arms export subsidies.

* Ask organizations and professional associations with which you are affiliated to join the national Code of Conduct campaign. This coalition of over 200 national and local organizations works to pass more responsible U.S. arms export policies (see below). To become a co-sponsor, or for more information, contact Scott Nathan at Peace Action Education Fund, (202) 862-9740 ext. 3041.


The Code of Conduct would prohibit arms exports to any government that does not meet the criteria set out in the law unless the President exempts a country and Congress passes a law affirming that exemption. The four criteria a country must meet to be eligible for U.S. weapons are:

* democratic government
* respect for human rights of citizens
* non-aggression (against other states)
* full participation in the U.N. Register of Conventional Arms

The Code's criteria are all primary foreign policy tenets given lip service by past and present U.S. administrations. Nevertheless, 90% of the record $14.8 billion in U.S. arms sales to the Third World in 1993 went to states which didn't meet the Code's criteria. While it wouldn't end all objectionable arms sales, the code would raise the level of scrutiny and force a debate on arms exports to those governments.

For More Information

British-American Security Information Council (BASIC)—1900 L Street, NW, Suite 401-2, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 785-1266, e-mail: basicusa@igc.apc.org Focuses on multilateral arms export control initiatives.

Center for Defense Information—1500 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, (800) CDI-3334 or (202) 862-0700, e-mail: cd@igc.apc.org CDI has a conventional arms transfer project which produces the Defense Monitor and episodes of "America's Defense Monitor," a public television program on arms production/export issues.


The Federation of American Scientists Arms Sales Monitoring Project (307 Massachusetts Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20002, (202) 546-3300, e-mail: lumpe@igc.apc.org Publishes the Arms Sales Monitor, which reports on U.S. government policies on arms exports and weapons proliferation.


Peace Action Education Fund—1819 H Street, NW, Suite 660; Washington, DC 20006, (202) 862-9740 ext. 3041 Peace Action Education Fund coordinates the Grassroots Network Against the Arms Trade and assists citizens in lobbying and bringing local attention to arms production and trade issues.

Project on Demilitarization and Democracy—1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 300; Washington, DC 20009, (202) 319-7191 PDD publishes occasional reports on the impact of military spending and arms transfers on countries in the developing world.

William Hartung, World Policy Institute—65 Fifth Avenue, Suite 413; New York, NY 10003, (212) 229-5808 In 1994, Hartung published And Weapons for All (HarperCollins), an excellent critique of U.S. arms export policies and practices. He will soon publish a study of the use of U.S. weapons in wars around the world.

Lora Lumpe is Director of the Arms Sales Monitoring Project of the Federation of American Scientists in Washington, DC. The following piece is reprinted with permission from the May-June 1995 issue of the Nonviolent Activist, the magazine of the War Resisters League. The bi-monthly publication is available for $15/year to individuals and $25/year to institutions from War Resisters League, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012
Where Have All the Homophobes Gone?:
State Politics in the Gingrich Era

By John D'Emilio

The Republican Party's Contract with America—and its younger sibling, the Contract with the American Family—have dominated political reporting for most of the year. Because both have chosen to sidestep head-on discussion of homosexuality, gay issues have slipped from the national media's radar screen. For many gay men, lesbians and bisexuals this must come as a welcome relief, a moment of respite in a hard political season. Who, after all, could enjoy being the target of the kind of rhetoric generated in the last few years—at the Republican convention in Houston, in the Senate hearings on the military's exclusion policies, or in the fight over the NEA?

The lull, however, is more apparent than real. Congress is not the only body that legislates. In the fifty states, there was no Contract with America to discipline local right-wing political leaders, but in many of them there is an infrastructure of gay organizations eager to move forward their quest for respect and equality. The result is that state capitals rather than Congress have become the battleground upon which the issue of equal rights for gays is being fought.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute recently released a study of state legislation. Because the survey is the first of its kind, it is impossible to determine whether the action level is greater or less than in recent years. But what can be said with certainty is that legislative debates about the place of gay, lesbian and bisexual citizens in society are extensive. At least 97 gay-related measures moved forward in 33 states. In 30 states, anti-gay measures received serious consideration, while 18 states advanced non-discrimination bills of one sort or another.

The news, both good and bad, can tell us much about the political strength of the gay community and of its most outspoken opponents.

The brightest spot was Rhode Island, which became the ninth state to enact a statewide civil rights measure banning discrimination based on sexual orientation. The clearest pattern of gay-friendly activity was the tendency, expressed in fifteen states, to include sexual orientation among a list of categories needing protection against discrimination. They tended to cluster around two broad areas of policy-making legislation: health care and hate crimes. In Massachusetts, for instance, several bills which prohibit discrimination in the delivery of various kinds of health services made it through committee.

For close observers of gay politics, these results should provide some measure of comfort. The AIDS crisis has propelled activists out of their community and into the center of the health-care field. Their work, and that of the women's and lesbian health care movements, is reaping dividends. In the same way, activists since the early 1980s have fought vigorously to call attention to anti-gay hate violence. At the state and national level, they have worked closely in coalitions with other targeted groups to have hate crimes recognized as a form of violence needing special remedies.

Meanwhile, the national climate of divisiveness and intolerance is playing itself out in state politics. Even in states like New York, California and Massachusetts, where the gay community is well organized and has long been visible, anti-gay measures were able to receive a hearing. In other states, right-wing Republicans had an easier time transforming their agenda into policy. In Arizona, where the Radical Right has a working majority of the state Republican party's governing body, the governor signed into law a measure prohibiting school districts from implementing any course of study that "promotes" a homosexual lifestyle or portrays homosexuality as a "positive alternative life-style." And Utah became the first state to impose an explicit ban on recognizing same-gender marriages that may be performed in other states.

As these last examples suggest, the right wing is choosing its targets shrewdly. From a proposal in Oregon that would effectively prohibit doctors from performing alternative insemination on unmarried women—including lesbians—to a bill in Vermont that would ban adoption by unmarried couples and second-parent adoption, the Far Right is attempting to construct a barbed-wire fence of law and public policy. Its purpose: to keep lesbians, gay men and bisexuals out of the territory marked "children and family."

The strategy speaks both to the history of gay oppression and to the contemporary state of lesbian and gay concerns. In the past, medical, legal, and religious discourse defined homosexuals in opposition to the heterosexual nuclear family. Inflammatory stereotypes defined queers, whether male or female, as predators seeking to invade the sanctum of the home and to steal the young.

For previous generations, the price of adopting a gay, lesbian or bisexual identity has often been to live outside the family. When a gay political agenda took shape after Stonewall, basic goals such as sodomy law repeal, civil rights protections, and the removal of the stigma of mental illness took precedence. But now, the gay community across the country is reclaiming family. Lesbians are choosing to have children, gay men are seeking to become foster parents, both men and women are insisting that their intimate partnerships be recognized by law. Lesbian, gay and bisexual parents want their children—and their children's peers—to be taught tolerance in school, while the parents and advocates of gay youth are insisting that the schools respond to the needs of their sexual minority students. In almost every area of public policy that impinges on family and youth, gay voices are being heard.

These voices are new, and not yet well organized. And so the Radical Right has rushed into the void, playing upon the emotional flashpoints that run through American culture, and fomenting fear. It is not hard to do. With the crisis of family and community that Americans are living through, gay men, lesbians and bisexuals are easier, simpler targets than a changing labor market with wage structures that compromise family stability, or school systems without the resources to educate.

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This year’s legislative record suggests that battles over family are likely to remain frontline conflicts. It also suggests that the gay community needs to apply to the arena of family the lessons it has learned in its fight for health care and against hate-motivated violence—patient, deliberate, and sustained organization; broad-based education of sympathetic allies; and the careful articulation of an agenda rooted in the real needs of its members.

Author and historian John D’Emilio is director of the Policy Institute at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington, DC.

Letters to the Editor

We receive many letters throughout the year about our grants to gay and lesbian and bisexual groups. Some people don’t think they are a priority for RESIST to fund, others’ don’t see why they need our money. Still other RESIST supporters who are pro-gay/lesbian don’t exactly know how to improve things in their groups. Here are two letters we received, and our responses.

October 17, 1994

Grant, from Chicago, wrote the following to us:

“Gays are not economically depressed. Why are they getting grant money?Polls indicate there are many more extreme right-wing gays than left-wing gays. Politics is more important than mere sexual orientation. The same thing can be said about women (gender differences) for that matter.”

November 23, 1994:

I wrote back:

Dear Grant,

While I was very glad that you sent RESIST a donation this past October, I was disturbed by the note you wrote on the back of your reply slip. Let me repeat it here, in case you have forgotten. “Gays are not economically depressed. Why are they getting grant money?”

It has taken me a long time to respond to your note, and I am sorry for the delay. Briefly, then, I want to say a few things. First, you seem to have fallen into the trap the right-wing has so successfully set up that gays are an economically advantaged group, that don’t need “special rights,” or our funds, for that matter. Some of their data, unfortunately, comes from the gay community itself. Gay male publications, hoping to attract rich advertisers, have tried to convince them that their market is economically advantaged. But that leaves out the bulk of gay men and lesbians who are by no means any more economically advantaged than most of us. If you think about the fact that women in general make far less than men, then think about a household of two women (a lesbian household). More than likely these women will be economically disadvantaged, especially if they are trying to raise children, which more and more lesbians are doing. And what if they are two women of color? How much money do you think they will have at their disposal for political organizing?

But perhaps that is all besides the point. I don’t agree with you that there are more right-wing gays than left-wing gays-- but that doesn’t matter either. We don’t fund right-wing gay groups. We fund left-wing gay activist groups.

The Right-wing, having lost around the abortion issue, has launched a major attack on gays and lesbians, as well as “welfare” and “crime.” We need to fund the groups that are organizing against these attacks and making broader coalitions with other oppressed groups.

That is what we do (here at RESIST). I’ve enclosed an interesting article Barbara Smith wrote over a year ago for the Nation, as well as a recent copy of Radical America. I call your attention to Suzanne Pharr’s article in R.A.:

For peace and justice, Nancy Wechsler

On July 5, 1995 we received this postcard, from Shana, addressed to the RESIST Staff:

I thought that Larry Goldsmith’s article, “Ask Tell.” brought up an important issue—diversity within a group, including sexual preference.

However, I was disappointed that he did not offer any suggestions about creating a more inclusive climate—how to begin? Where to go with it?

I can attest to the value of diversity within groups. Meeting and getting to know gays and lesbians who are “out” has gone a long way to help me undo some of the homophobia and heterosexism that I learned growing up in this society. And, in fact, I’ve met them through joining political groups/actions that did not focus directly on sexual preference.

I would welcome a discussion that addresses issues of privacy, vs. Visibility and practices that either encourage or discourage gays and lesbians from participating in political groups within the left. Thanks. Shana

September 26, 1995

RESIST’S Response:

Larry and I talked about Shana’s note, but we didn’t write our discussion down. In some ways Shana makes our point— you can meet gays and lesbians in any group, working around most peace and justice issues. We assume that virtually all such groups have gays and lesbians in them. The question is: Has your group made them comfortable enough to come out to you? We assume people talk before and after meetings about what they’ve done over the weekend, or possibly on vacation. Do you ever notice someone referring to their partner without using a pronoun? Start asking polite questions. “What does your partner do?” “Do you live together?” “Would they be interested in joining the group, or are they involved in other political work?” In other words, make social space a space comfortable for gays and lesbians. If you have a social event, make sure you use gender neutral terms to invite “significant others.”

More concretely, have a discussion of gay and lesbian liberation in your group. It may be an interesting discussion, and give some of your gay and lesbian members a chance to “come out” and speak for themselves about what the gay and lesbian movements have meant to them and how they are connected to other movements for social change.

For all the groups that tell us “we don’t ask” “we consider sexual preference a private matter,” “we don’t discriminate” all that really tells us is that the gays and lesbians in your organization have not felt comfortable enough to come out to you.

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