

November 21, 1995

Elizabeth Birch, Executive Director
Human Rights Campaign
1101 14th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Elizabeth,

I've had this letter sitting in the back of my mind for quite a while now. Finding the time to sit down and write to you is not something I have been very successful with. But the mailings and press releases I have received over the last several months from the Human Rights Campaign (Fund) have prompted me to write. What I see happening is disturbing and dangerous, and is critical to nip in the bud. Elizabeth, I am writing out of a deep respect for the work you have done, and an appreciation for the position you now hold. I have faith in your ability, and ultimately, in your sense of what is just and right.

However, when the Human Rights Campaign (Fund) publishes information about the Right targeting lesbian and gay people without mentioning that bisexual people are also a targeted group, I have to wonder – what is going on? Many of the state initiatives are Colorado Amendment 2 clones, and also specifically include bisexual people. The Washington State initiatives not only target gay, lesbian and bisexual people, but transgender people, transsexuals and transvestites too. Our family is under attack. The Right recognizes all of us.

When I read the first two issues of the HRC(F) Quarterly from cover to cover I was shocked. The only mention of bisexual people in both booklets was within the language of Radical Right Congressman Robert Dornan's hate bill! He and his ilk see bisexuals as a threat to so called "family values." Bisexuals are another easy target to scapegoat and gain from financially. So except for California Congressman Dornan's reference, the language used in the HRC(F) Quarterly leads the reader to believe that lesbians and gay men are the only group that is reviled and in danger of losing basic civil rights. This is not only unacceptable and divisive, but poor strategic planning.

HRC accurately states "extremists are fighting and winning grassroots battles all across the nation." However, the exclusive lesbian and gay spin of the message feeds into the hands of those extremists who would like nothing better than to see us "queers" get distracted and fight among ourselves. The ongoing drama of deciding who is in and who is out of our gay civil rights and liberation movement is counterproductive and a dangerous waste of precious time. We both know how fast the Right is moving. We also know that to stave the tide we must work together; working together means communicating the whole truth.

Bisexual and transgender organizers and activists are involved in all aspects of fighting the forces of the Radical Right. Our basic civil rights are under attack. Bisexual and

transgender people are bashed, fired from our jobs, lose our homes and custody of our children, cannot adopt or be foster parents, are discharged from the military (The DOD explicitly defines bisexuality as a reason to be dishonorably discharged.), and bisexuals are scapegoated as carriers of HIV. This battle for basic human rights is our battle too. We will not be silent, or silenced.

The latest appeal sent to me proclaims that HRC works for “a day when lesbians and gay men are valued for who they are and not judged by whom they love.” A few sentences later this mailing ends with “we (HRC) need every gay man, lesbian, bisexual and every one of our non-gay supporters to join with us in this battle.” I was not only insulted but galled. HRC recognizes and includes bisexual people as gay when asking for financial support, but conspicuously ignores the fact bisexuals are also under fire. This pitch epitomizes the reason why I am writing. HRC’s message devalues bisexual people for who we are, judges us by who we love, and then asks us to identify with and support HRC’s work. I don’t get it. Where’s the accountability? What about the human rights of bisexual people?

With all due respect Elizabeth, I think the time has come for HRC to shake off whatever remains of the strict identity politics of the 80s, and join the broad based coalition politics of the 90s. How do we organize and educate effectively and efficiently if the information coming out of the Human Rights Campaign has such a misinformed, and therefore, divisive message? Who is responsible for making these strategic decisions? What is the thinking behind purposefully excluding bisexual and transgender people?

Whatever your long range plans and vision are, there has been a definite shift in the way HRC is spinning “bisexuality.” Several months ago, the subtitle – “the largest lesbian, gay and **bisexual** civil rights organization” (emphasis mine) appeared at the top of the press releases and in other materials that HRC(F) produced. What happened to the movement towards a more inclusive stance? Why was the direction changed? Is this part of your “overhauling HRC(F)’s ‘look and feel’” mentioned in the first HRCF Quarterly? As I said Elizabeth, I find this a disturbing and dangerous direction. Are we not all marked people in the eyes of the Radical Right? And, whether we like it or not, aren’t we in this together?

As far as I am concerned, the language in your materials and press releases concerning the anti-gay initiatives is an affront. The Radical Right understands and capitalizes on the fear and hatred of both bisexual and transgender people. Isn’t it important to educate and involve as many people as possible in challenging the Radical Right? Isn’t the simple truth a more powerful tool than not trusting people’s ability to deal with their bi- or transphobia? Is HRC afraid that gay men and lesbians will not donate money, get involved, and identify with the Human Rights Campaign if the organization takes a public stand to include the human rights of bisexual and transgender people? How can HRC send me a fundraising letter with an HRC(F) logo sticker that says “Liberty and Justice For All” when “all” doesn’t include me? What’s the deal?

I am closing this letter by quoting your recent “Open Letter” address to the Christian Coalition Conference where you called for a “New Ethic of Respect and Decency.” I respectfully request that you take your message to heart with regards to bisexual and transgender people, and your vision for the Human Rights Campaign.

“The time has come for us to speak to each other rather than past each other.”

“The first appeal ...please make integrity a watchword for the campaigns you launch. We all struggle to be people of integrity, especially when we campaign for funds. But the fact that we are tempted by money is no excuse. We need to commit ourselves to a higher moral ground.”

“(The) second appeal ...I ask that, as individuals, you talk to those of us who are gay and lesbian, rather than succumb to the temptation to either avoid us at all cost, as if we are not part of your community, or ...as if we are not worthy of quiet conversation. We are, all of us and those we represent, human beings. ...we can engage in an ethic of basic respect and decency.”

I look forward to talking with you, and working towards a solution.

Respectfully,

Lani Ka'ahumanu
BiNet USA, National Coordinator, Emeritus
20 Cumberland Street
San Francisco, CA 94110-1506
415-821-3534 email: aloha@slip.net

cc Don McCleary and Julia Fitzrandolph, Co-Chairs
Human Rights Campaign, Board of Directors
BiNet USA National Coordinators
The Washington Blade
San Francisco Bay Times