

TRANSADVOCATE

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# Love Ya! Mean It!

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## Article

“These vagabond shoes  
Are longing to stray  
And make a brand new start of it  
New York, New York!” -- New York, New York, Frank Sinatra  
  
You gotta love New York!

Seriously, these folks know how to speak out against what is wrong, organize and create a disturbance that’s worthy of the biggest city in the nation. I’m writing in response to the Gay City News.com report coming from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Banquet in the Big Apple. They organized not just street protests, but even support from their political friends to boycott the chi-chi event in solidarity with the trans community over HRC’s support for a non-inclusive ENDA bill pushed by Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA).

Yes, Sylvia Rivera and Bob Kohler would be duly proud of their community’s progeny.

Most of the article dealt with the notable absentees from the banquet, most especially the politicians (one of which was to present an award at the event). A few did offer the ENDA and HRC’s threats of keeping score of those voting against a gay-only ENDA in principle (due to its incomplete coverage).

One statement from Marriage Equality New York (MENY) about its award noted that “HRC’s stance on ENDA is clearly not in-line with our inclusive mission and disappoints those who believe we cannot leave anyone behind” and that the group “has ALWAYS been trans-inclusive and has always stood on the right side of this civil rights fight.”

In accepting their award at the HRC banquet, the group’s deputy executive director, Ron Zacchi, said, “MENY feels for our transgender brothers and sisters protesting outside, as we have often been the people protesting outside because incremental changes were accepted on our road to marriage equality.”

That’s a very powerful statement, and I applaud MENY for taking such a bold stance.

Then I got to thinking about who the statement was from. When you think about it, there’s not much of a limb they have to go out on with that beyond risk of possible funding from HRC. It would be pretty hard to push through any legislation for marriage equality for gays and lesbians without have it being inclusive of transgenders - or anyone else. On the inclusive part, I don’t know about their staff or board of directors but I wonder how many of them are transgender?

Conventional wisdom and demonstrated history have shown (most exemplary with the employment rights game) that those who've been closest to succeeding are the ones leading the charge. In HRC and other national organizations as well as state and local organizations, gays and lesbians have easily been the most successful at being hired, treated as equivalents in the workplace and even changing policy on this issue.

Consequently they have also been the sole leaders and the overwhelming majority of both staff and boards directing these organizations and their efforts. Understandably, it was logic I could see back in the late 90's when HRC's former Exec. Dir, Elizabeth Birch explained to me that they had made many inroads in the workplace and in congress. She also impressed upon me that she didn't want us jumping the gun before the education groundwork was laid and risking the benefits and gains their community had already made. Even with the most pressing need for jobs being on the T side of the GLBT amalgam, clearly they (read the G&L side) had to take lead in order to succeed.

Keep in mind that MENY is from New York State, which passed SONDA (Sexual Orientation Non Discrimination Act) in 2002. After the victory, then Exec. Dir, Matt Foreman of the victorious Empire State Pride Agenda (ESPA) made a promise that GENDA (Gender Expression Non Discrimination Act) for those who were left behind would be the top priority of the group. Soon after, Foreman departed for NGLTF's top spot, and the following year, marriage for gays and lesbians became the instantaneous top priority.

"I would not be just a nuffin'  
My head all full of stuffin'  
My heart all full of pain.  
I would dance and be merry,  
Life would be a ding-a-derry  
If I only had a brain." -- the Scarecrow, the Wizard of Oz

In fact, in 2002 gay and lesbian marriage wasn't even on anyone's radar screen. Truth be told, that came after one court decision in Massachusetts in favor of marriage.

Meanwhile, the trans community has enjoyed success at achieving marriage post-surgery as far back as 1964 in Illinois (pushed by Republican pols, no less!) Since then, court cases and state and local jurisdictions have cobbled together a series of unique views on full marriage for transsexuals, even in places as seemingly implausible as Kentucky (see Christie Lee Littleton). When that marriage was reversed in Texas' 5th district court, even that helped bolster marriage between two same-genital partners.

Yet even during the high profile Littleton case or even since the one victory in Massachusetts, I don't know that the trans community has ever been consulted, much less been a significant part, much, much less the lead role. There's no Shannon Minter, no Phyllis Frye, no Alyson Meiselman nor a Randi Barnabee in this latest movement. How about any other number of trans attorneys capable of working effectively at this? So much for the conventional wisdom a la Birch.

Sure, we don't say anything about this. Guess that means we don't notice, huh? We're too stereotypically shrill, petty and obnoxious to let anything like that slide, right? Just listen to Joe Solmonese: "I have to ask myself: When did we all become so impatient?"

Gotta admit, I'm a newbie at this compared to old Joe - I've only been at this rights game since 1996 - hell, only twelve years. And those who were pushing this before me only got started four years prior. Marriage has been around for four and a half long years. And after the initial 2003 summer victory, look how long it took before progress started moving on this? It took almost a full year to get to the attention of 2004 presidential candidate John Kerry ....

"Yeah, it's sad, believe me missy,  
When you're born to be a sissy,  
Without the vim and verve.  
But I could show my prowess,  
Be a lion not a mow-ess,  
If I only had the nerve." -- Cowardly Lion, the Wizard of Oz

Yes, I was being sardonic. It helps blunt the edge of the dual standards a little bit.

It's noted that in 2004 there were twelve states that turned out the "values vote" and enacted law to ensure no more "same-sex" marriage - even for transgenders in previously acceptable places like Kentucky or Michigan. Perhaps trans people should've been leading those fights, but that wasn't to be - not as things roll currently. Transgenders can't be valued team-players or employees, much less leaders. Look at our frequent calls for incrementalism. Sardonic again - sorry 'bout that. Who knows ... maybe we'd take our leadership cues from the likes of Barney Frank or HRC or even the Empire State Pride Agenda (ESPA) or Mass Equality? Yeah, that's gotta be scary ....

The thing is, it seems trans folk are supposed to accept our perpetual role in society as contentedly oblivious and good-naturedly unemployed naifs. Even if we do crane our necks at the car-crash obvious inequity, we're still expected to feign the ignorance and make it look real. Why? Silence Equals Death was a slogan that's proven an effectively battle cry for the gay and lesbian movement. So why is it expected that Silence Is Golden when it comes to transgenders noticing disparities, especially those within GLBT?

Oh yeah, I forgot ... ignorance.

Guess we're blissful. Too blissful to notice that the New York State org points fingers at HRC for not supporting fully inclusive legislation ... which HRC can then easily turn around and point their hoary finger right back, noting that they couldn't even pass a trans inclusive bill themselves!

Hell, that puts New York in the same category as broke-dick, holy-yokel, rednecked, peckerwood Texas whose legislature couldn't pass fully inclusive bill on a death bet. It's my own state, and I'll let you know that on humanitarian issues it's not one to emulate - where our state slogan is "Hang 'Em High" and gun-totin' violence is considered recreation.

It's not good company. But then again, I'm not noticing. Obliv ... ya know?

Who knows, maybe someday we'll actually get to work shoulder-to-shoulder as contemporaries? Sounds crazy, but this is the era of crazy happenings ....

"To win this vote (ENDA), we need to get the votes of people who beat Republican incumbents last year in districts that voted for George Bush, and we're going to yell at them because they only vote to

protect people from discrimination based on sexual orientation and are not yet ready to include transgender? These are people who are with us if a marriage amendment came up again, and they'll be with us on gays in the military." -- Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA)

"If any demonstrator ever lays down in front of my car, it'll be the last car he'll ever lay down in front of." -- former Alabama governor, George Wallace

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### **Suggested citation**

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