

SAFER is organizing fishermen to put pressure on the Health Department and Fish and Game to do studies on commonly-eaten fish and post multi-lingual health warnings about the potential dangers of eating the fish. They are demanding that the signs be put up in Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese. SAFER points out that the anglers pay fishing license fees to the tune of \$6 million a year, and have a right to know about the dangers of eating what they catch.

Chin is out on the piers nearly every sunny day talking to the fishermen, getting them to send the relevant departments postcards making the demands, and to come to community meetings to air their grievances and find out about what they can do. "The long-term fight is to stop the dumping of toxic waste from city sewage and [high-tech] firms," he says, "but for now, we want people to know that we have rights."

—John Anner



*The Reverend David Ennis, a leader of San Francisco's religious right.*

## LOSING THE GRASS-ROOTS IN COLORADO

**O**n election night, November 1992, Coloradoans voted for a Democratic president for the first time in 50 years, elected a Native American as a U.S. Senator, and passed an amendment to their state constitution that bars gays and lesbians from applying for or receiving protection from discrimination or abuse of their civil rights based on their sexual orientation.

The amendment's sponsor, Colorado Springs-based Colorado for Family Values (CFV), used a grassroots campaign with a simple "no special rights for homosexuals" message originally developed by the Heritage Foundation. Through church meetings, door-to-door drops of anti-gay videos and one-on-one contact, CFV gar-

nered support for its initiative across the boundaries of race and class.

While the religious right is busy establishing Colorado Springs, Colorado as a national base from which to implement its reactionary legislative program, gay/lesbian groups and organizations of color are stuck in a swamp of political in-fighting. Many activists in both communities believe that the right is using so-called "homosexual special rights" as an organizing issue to push a larger agenda of intolerance, but activist gays and lesbians and people of color are having a hard time finding a common ground for unified action.

The opposition to the campaign for Amendment 2, led by

Equal Protection Colorado, conducted what Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Colorado director Sue Anderson calls "a traditional, slick, high-cost campaign" that primarily used telephone contact and advertising. She admits that the anti-Amendment 2 campaign lacked "community-based organizing that was more massive and widespread in its approach."

When the election was over, Amendment 2 lost by a narrow margin in major cities but took the rest of Colorado by storm. Colorado Springs alone accounted for half the state-wide margin of victory. "Basically," says Karen Terry, of the Colorado Lesbian and Gay People of Color Coalition, "people were in shock.

There was no plan" for how to deal with the amendment's passage.

Gay and lesbian groups such as the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund immediately filed suit to stop the amendment from taking effect and began calling for a boycott of Colorado. Practical results have been mixed for both these strategies, and if activists were hoping that the boycott would lead to greater participation and involvement by communities of color, they have so far been disappointed.

At a mid-December meeting of the Colorado Human Rights Coalition, tensions between gay and lesbian civil rights groups and organizations of color came out in the open. Member organizations of color complained that they had never received support in their campaigns, such as the fight against the English Only initiative, and said that they had been shut out of decision-making. They also

secret of their smoldering resentment over the failure of these organizations to join other civil rights struggles. For example, Latino groups recalled the resounding silence of gay and lesbian groups during the fight against Colorado's English Only initiative, passed in 1988. Meanwhile, the religious right is gathering its forces for more assaults on what it calls the "culture of tolerance."

Guy DeHerrera, of *La Gente Unida*, a Latino gay and lesbian organization, says that before the election "suggestions [to implement] an outreach component to go into our own communities" were ignored, and "meanwhile, CFV folks were out there. They'd not only say 'Vote yes on 2,' they'd say 'and these are the clear reasons why.'"

#### A Common Enemy

Many activists hope that the increasing strength and visibility

continued bad feelings between the major players.

For example, organizers of color refused to attend a recent organizer training/networking conference put on by Equality Colorado, the people who led the No on Amendment 2 campaign. Although Equality Colorado flew in a multi-racial team from Oregon to lead the conference, activists of color don't believe that Equality Colorado learned from the disastrous anti-Amendment 2 campaign experience.

#### No Satisfaction

While Equality Colorado is looking at a range of lackluster civil rights amendments as counterweights to Amendment 2, some organizations of color are deciding to go their own way and try to put together a grassroots response to the religious right agenda. Nobody is really satisfied with the proposed legislative solutions, and there is a strong sense that leadership and innovation are sadly lacking.

"Some [organizations of color] are considering developing their visions from within, becoming strong," says Suzanne Pharr, one of the visiting organizers from Oregon. *La Gente Unida*, for example, is planning an educational campaign in low-income Chicano communities that would focus on the political common ground between gays and people of color.

"I don't support any [of the amendments]. They are compromises," says DeHerrera. "People need to see this as the start of a new Civil Rights Movement. We need to fight and stand in solidarity," using the techniques of grassroots organizing. "It's too early to jump on just anything that's thrown our way."

Meanwhile, the boycott organizers are continuing their television advertising-oriented campaign, virtually ceding grassroots activity to the anti-gay forces.

— David Portillo

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Photo: Rick Gerhart

*A San Francisco stand-off between gays and religious right-wingers.*

suggested that gays and lesbian organizations had not made it clear to communities of color why it was in their political interests to support gay and lesbian civil rights. While some gay and lesbian organizations are privately critical of communities of color for not supporting the boycott of Colorado called by gay civil rights groups, activists of color make no

of the religious right will somehow shock the various communities into working together. "We've made mistakes, and racism has been involved, but now we have a common enemy," says one white Human Rights Coalition member. However, the hoped-for united front may die before it is born, poisoned by the lack of a clearly articulated political vision and