

## Body Politic challenged

The following letter was sent to the editors of *The Body Politic* with a copy sent to Rites.

For Ken Popert and Gerald Hannon (see houseboy ad debate, *The Body Politic* April 1985) it would appear that racism is just one opinion about race relations. Which is not surprising, since for some time now they and most of the collective have showed in their editorial practices that they believe that feminism is merely one opinion among many.

This laissez-faire approach conceals such important things as social power, oppression, and domination—and of course it makes sense that those who have power (in this case, editorial and political power to define the issues for gay people in Canada) would try to pretend that there is no power. The Tories do it all the time.

The advocates of abstract desire forget that they belong not to a colourless group but to the white race, which is the ruling race. In their undoubtedly sincere forgetfulness, they reduce racism—both in *TBP*'s pages and in the meetings described in the letters—to 'just your opinion, dears.'

Who will keep talking on those terms? Who wants to be automatically confined to the periphery of the newspaper and of the movement, while white men without any sense of how they hold and use power go about their "normal" business? Who wants to be forever defined as a hyphenated gay, and thus as someone whose loyalty to the gospel of gay liberation according to *TBP* is always suspect?

A few people from the hyphenated-gay communities might keep talking and writing: their opinions will undoubtedly be relegated to the letters page. But most of them will give up hope, and stop trying to make a difference.

Then the advocates of abstract desire, those who forget that all desires are rooted in certain power structures, will breathe a sigh of relief, having achieved hegemony over the definition of gay liberation. And they will forget what happened. A few months or years later, they'll sincerely ask one another: why can't we get more women to work with us? Why can't we get lesbians of colour and Gay Asians and all those people to come to our meetings and write for our paper?

The incessant talk about desire conceals a complacency about privilege. This complacency is not a mere "opinion": it reflects the vested interests of those who theorize about absolute desire. It is therefore an ideology, not a mere belief, an ideology designed to simultaneously reinforce certain forms of power and conceal how they operate.

Because the advocates of absolute desire are expressing not their opin-

ions but their vested interests, nobody should be so naive as to expect a clearing up of the "misunderstandings". *TBP* has a history of systematic abuse of gender and racial power, not only a history of misunderstandings. Those people in and around the newspaper who want to confront racism and sexism, have a long road ahead, and they will have to face up to the fact that the issue at hand is not "opinions" about racism but rather a very real power struggle. Who gets to write the agenda of the gay movement? Who gets to define who is at the centre of the community/movement and who is in the periphery? These questions have now—finally—been raised in a clearer form than ever before, and they will not be answered by means of a forum, a debate, or a series of letters. They will only be answered in the practices and power relations prevailing both within *TBP* itself and between *TBP* and the larger communities.

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