

WASHINGTON TIMES

4 November 1985

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Plagued by AIDS paranoia

The news that in the opinion of a major Soviet publication the U.S. government had produced the AIDS epidemic via a program of germ warfare induced that special comfort one feels in the fulfillment of any natural cycle: as in thunder after lightning, night after day; the reassurance, in short, of a predictable rhythm in the universe.

Still, it was not necessary to go so far abroad as the Soviet Union for such a theory. Especially since, just last week, we learned the results of a poll conducted by one of the nation's most influential homosexual news weeklies: a poll which told us that a substantial percentage of respondents hold roughly the same view.

According to the *New York Native*, 37 percent of the respondents — a sizable chunk — think that AIDS is a disease created by an arm of the federal government.

A slightly smaller number (32 percent) believe they understand how the government has gone about effecting the grand plan to annihilate homosexuals — namely, by "the use of some substance the government put into drugs" that are used by homosexual men, and drug-abusers, by the by.

In fact, 45 percent of those polled disagree. Still, to think that this government would *not* set about deliberately to kill a selected body of its citizens was, the paper's editor later said, "extremely naive."

Such naivete could not be charged, of course, to that 37 percent to whom the true cause of the AIDS epidemic now stood revealed.

For, as one respondent noted, he had himself long suspected some conspiracy. Otherwise why, "after a great stretch of homosexual history" should the "death-dealing disease come, as it were, out of nowhere?"

Now "nowhere" is not the most precise way to describe the particular great stretch of homosexual history that emerged out of the 1970s: the era of liberation whose sexual freedom in its various forms has become known to the world as a prime generator of the AIDS plague.

A college professor offered the prediction that if he lived a normal lifespan, he would "see the CIA (who else?) unmasked as the perpetrator of AIDS.

One correspondent, let it be noted, was sufficiently open-minded to think that the germ warfare responsible for AIDS might have been waged either by "our government" or the Soviets.

(None of the respondents and certainly nothing in the poll-report provided an answer to the mystery of why in the face of such a plot the government had chosen to exempt lesbians, who, as far as we know, aren't touched by AIDS?)

What, then, are we to make of this phenomenon — of a study of a population which has, as we have heard these many years, learned pride, dignity, and self-esteem, thanks to its liberation movement? It's in good part a population which, if this poll is to be believed, holds views of reality that at the least can be said to merit psychiatric attention.

Postulating a whole world — one's own government, indeed — so preoccupied with its hatred as to engineer a plot to murder homosexuals: this is liberation?

No, this is pathology — as not a few of the enraged respondents among the 45 percent taking issue with the conspiracy view recognized.

One pointed out that the questions bordered on "hysterical paranoia." Another put the point more directly, admonishing the editors to "stop being so ridiculous."

Ridiculous, indeed, but telling as well — chiefly about the promotion of paranoia and its uses, one of the essentials of such liberation movements. It tells us, as well, of the means by which even the AIDS plague was pressed into service in

the interest of advancing the movement.

It is worth remembering, in these last weeks' struggles over the bathhouses, the enormous war which journalists — homosexual journalists — had to wage in San Francisco

before being able to overcome the opposition of activists militantly opposed to any disclosures of the AIDS danger. For disclosure, they argued, threatened to abridge the political advancement of gay rights.

The bathhouse controversy is

now, to be sure, famous in its own right for the extraordinary degree of cowardice it has yielded, mainly in politicians who continue to incant that the bathhouses should not be closed because they are places where education against AIDS will best take root.

Or as New York Rep. William Green put it: the epidemic would actually worsen without the educational opportunities lost to us by closing the bathhouses.

Who, hearing such stuff, can fail to be struck afresh by the extremes of absurdity which issues of this politically delicate kind can induce in the forces of enlightenment?

Does there remain a patch on the globe where this information is lacking? Or any child over 6 who cannot by now list the rules of "safe sex," as we have come to know and love them?

Homosexuals should go to the bathhouses for the preservation of health — a notion in its departure from reality on a par with the view that the government of the United States deliberately contrived to spread the plague of AIDS among homosexuals.

To both of these notions the response of the letter writer to the *New York Native* applies:

Don't be ridiculous.

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