

# International VIEWPOINT

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# Oregon voters defeat anti-gay/lesbian initiative

**ON THE SAME DAY** as the United States presidential election, voters in the state of Oregon defeated Measure 9, known as the "Abnormal Behaviours Initiative" which was an attempt to amend the state constitution to declare that homosexuality is "abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse".

## GARY BILLS

**T**HE ballot measure attempted to lump homosexuality with other "behaviours" that should be discouraged such as pedophilia, sadism and masochism. Civil protection of homosexuals from discrimination was maligned by Measure 9 supporters as "special rights" for gays and lesbians and the measure would have barred the use of state funds and facilities from being used to "promote, encourage, or facilitate homosexuality".

The real impact of the measure would have been to allow discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation — in employment, housing, medical care and benefits (including coverage won in union contracts) — the elimination of AIDS hotlines and information services and the banning of books from schools and public libraries that did not advocate "traditional family values".

### Conservatism in rural areas

The measure was defeated by a margin of 57% to 43% but a breakdown of the vote indicates the conservatism that exists outside the urban centres. Around the Portland area, the initiative was rejected by a margin of almost three to one; in the rural counties, the measure got a majority vote.

The major sponsor of the measure was a group calling itself the Oregon Citizen's Alliance (OCA), local representatives of Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition and other rightwing fundamentalist Christian groups such as Operation Rescue, Eagle Forum, and Coalition of Women for Traditional Values.

This group is an incipient fascist group, probing, by electoral, non-electoral and legislative means, for a political base for

the most reactionary agenda. It was the major organizer of support for the Gulf War, through its "Home-front Coalition" and "Defenders of Liberty Parade". It is in the forefront of attacks on women's right to abortion. It has run candidates for state offices on an extreme reactionary programme against both Democratic and Republican candidates.

### Christian totalitarian agenda

The OCA sought through this initiative to attract and mobilize the most bigoted and reactionary forces within the petty bourgeoisie and working class in classic fascist form. They themselves have a "Christian" totalitarian agenda that they seek to force on the population while they accuse gays and lesbians of trying to implement a secret agenda of their own.

The big bourgeoisie and its media did not support this initiative but a victory for the OCA would have given it more political leverage of the type it believes it already has in the Republican Party as demonstrated at that party's convention this year. Lon Mabon, the OCA's head commented on how encouraged he felt by the Republican convention, saying that it felt just like an Oregon Citizens Alliance convention.

However, after the elections, Oregon Republican Party officials began talking about splitting the party to avoid its takeover by OCA forces. It is clear that many bourgeois and liberal elements in the Republican Party do not agree that the OCA's is the best way to advance their agenda at the present time.

The bigotry that the OCA and other similar rightwing groups encourage has resulted in an anti-gay ordinance in Springfield, Oregon and a large increase in hate crimes directed at minorities, women, and gays

and lesbians. The worst of these was the firebombing of a home in Salem, Oregon by racist skinheads which resulted in the death of a black lesbian and a gay man. Nationally, attacks on gays and lesbians now rank as the number one hate crime.

In Colorado, where an anti-gay ballot measure was passed, there has been a significant increase in violent attacks on gays and lesbians. One man, accused of being gay, was killed in a store while his pregnant wife waited in the car.

The backers of Measure 9 made a special target of teachers and children. They pushed heavily the notion that homosexuality is something taught and glorified by teachers — especially gay teachers, who, according to OCA lies, are prone to pedophilia. This line of attack had a measure of success in frightening some parents.

After the defeat of Measure 9, the OCA has stated that it will use this fear to "fine-tune" its next attack on the rights of gays and lesbians. Another initiative is planned in two years.

This initiative polarized Oregon's population. Forces both pro and con are reacting to the deepening crisis of capitalism. Measure 9 campaigned heavily in rural counties where the timber industry is in deep slump. They sought to blame homosexuals for the pressures working class families are feeling — from taxes, joblessness, crime, low pay and benefits and a deteriorating school system.

It is encouraging to note that, as the debate developed, the discussion became less and less about homosexuality and more about those pushing the initiative and what they hoped to gain from its victory.

The heightened political tension around this battle, which was not limited to Oregon, has mobilized many for the battles yet to come.

### Union opposition to reactionary measure

Opposition to Measure 9 came initially from the public employees union who, in 1988, fought an OCA ballot measure which nullified anti-discrimination laws protecting public employees. They, along with forces in the Democratic Party, helped found the No on 9 coalition.

This coalition had a clearly reformist perspective. They analyzed the issues in cultural, legal and religious terms rather than attempting to expose those beneficiaries of the existing social system who hope to gain from attacking gays and lesbians. Campaign strategy was formulated by public relations firms and lobbying groups.

Many gay activists and supporters would have preferred a strategy that answered the lies spread about homosexuality by Measure 9 supporters and many campaigned on this basis. ★