

Republican leader of US Senate calls homosexuality a “sin”

David Walsh
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Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi launched an ignorant and reactionary attack on gays June 15 while taping a cable television talk show. Asked by right-wing host Armstrong Williams if homosexuality was a sin, Lott replied: “Yeah, it is. In America right now there’s an element that want to make that alternative lifestyle acceptable. You still love that person and you should not try to mistreat them or treat them as outcasts. You should try to show them a way to deal with that problem, just like alcohol ... others have a sex addiction or are kleptomaniacs.”

Other Republican leaders expressed their support for Lott. House Majority Leader Dick Armey of Texas told reporters that the Bible considers homosexuality a sin and that, “My faith is very important to me.... I do not quarrel with the Bible on this subject.” Oklahoma Senator Don Nickles also told reporters he agreed with Lott.

The nomination of openly gay businessman and Democratic Party contributor James Hormel to the post of ambassador to Luxembourg has provided the occasion for Lott and congressional Republicans to vent their views. Earlier this month on CNN Lott expressed his opposition to Hormel’s appointment, claiming that the latter aggressively advocated a gay lifestyle. Lott, who as majority leader largely controls the Senate agenda, has refused to schedule a vote on Hormel’s confirmation.

Lott’s remarks are a flagrant attack on democratic rights, in violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of existing civil rights legislation. The sinister implication of his remarks is that homosexuals should be treated and cured of their “problem.” Nor does this type of appeal to religious backwardness, prejudice and fear fall into a political void. Naturally, when a racist killing such as the one in Jasper, Texas takes place, the

politicians piously deplore it. But Lott’s remarks can only worsen an atmosphere in which physical assaults on gays and blacks are already on the rise.

The Mississippi Senator’s comments follow the warning made by televangelist and 1988 candidate for the Republican presidential nomination Pat Robertson that Orlando, Florida might face God’s wrath in the form of natural disasters for hosting a gay pride weekend. After quoting the apostle Paul’s warning to the citizens of Rome about homosexuality, Robertson declared: “This is not a message of hate; this is a message of redemption. But if a condition like this will bring about the destruction of your nation; if it will bring about terrorist bombs; if it’ll bring about earthquakes, tornadoes, and possibly a meteor, it isn’t necessarily something we ought to open our arms to. And I would warn Orlando that you’re right in the way of some serious hurricanes, and I don’t think I’d be waving those [rainbow] flags in God’s face if I were you.”

Robertson and the Christian fundamentalist faction associated with him wield powerful influence in the Republican Party. These elements are making clear that they intend to conduct the 1998 and 2000 election campaigns on a very reactionary basis. The June 12 Iowa Republican gala gave a foretaste of the sort of issues they plan to raise in the next presidential race. Those attending the event included billionaire magazine publisher Steve Forbes, Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council, House Budget Committee Chairman John R. Kasich of Ohio, Marilyn Quayle, wife of the former vice president, former Reagan administration official Alan Keyes, Missouri Senator John D. Ashcroft, Clinton impeachment advocate Rep. Robert L. Barr Jr. of Georgia, former Tennessee governor Lamar Alexander, Montana Governor Mark

Racicot and Iran-contra conspirator Oliver North.

The speakers, many of whom have expressed interest in running for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000, spent the weekend denouncing the supposed moral degradation of America. Forbes, who ran for the 1996 nomination on the program of a flat tax, declared that the nation's biggest challenge "is a moral and spiritual crisis that threatens the very foundation of our free society." He proposed that opposition to abortion be made one of the party's central planks. Kasich attacked public education and Social Security. "The values of Americans should be imposed on Washington," declared Ashcroft. "America values families, it values the core institution of the family." Bauer asserted that American society was enjoying economic prosperity but suffered from a "virtue deficit."

There is an element of cynical political expediency in some of the right-wing demagoguery. Lott's gay-bashing in particular is politically calculated. The Mississippi Republican has not been known for harping on sexual issues until this year, according to Barney Frank, the gay Democratic congressman from Massachusetts. In fact, Lott publicly criticized the Air Force in 1997 for investigating the affairs of Lt. Kelly Flynn, driven out of the military for an alleged adulterous relationship.

According to press reports, Lott has been meeting regularly with leaders of the religious right such as James Dobson of the Colorado Springs, Colorado-based Focus on the Family media empire. Dobson has been talking to a host of congressional leaders in recent weeks, drumming up support for his "pro-family" program, which includes special tax preferences for married couples.

Taking shape in the comments of congressional Republicans are elements of an extreme right-wing campaign platform for the fall elections. After all, neither of the two big business parties has any proposal to make that would address the social crisis confronting millions. Entirely distant from the problems of working class and poor families, these wealthy politicians will attempt, in the name of patriotism, family values and God, to channel the deep resentment and alienation felt by broad layers of the population in a reactionary direction. This means more attacks on the poor, on immigrants and on gays, and on the democratic rights of the working class.



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