

scribing the degradation of the chain link by link, from plankton to fisherman to poet. Nor am I a political scientist, who could make the point by mapping the erosion of the rights of the individual in the present epoch of transnational government and multinational corporate interests. I am just a 20-a-day smoker who vowed to Neptune he would not litter in the lagoon, and I'm making the integralist point as best I can.

One sunny day there came *acqua alta*, for the first time that year and my very first in Venice. It is easy to describe what this is like to another Russian, because it's exactly like the first snowfall, when the known landscape of yesterday is converted overnight into the surgical cotton warehouse of a Martian field hospital, while the banal, leafless tree branch outside your window that had been looking almost utilitarian since September suddenly takes on the irrational contours of a beautiful and profligate thought. The children are out in the street, horsing around in the newsworthiness of it all, knee-deep, as if, literally, there was no tomorrow, while the parents are uncharacteristically indulgent, as if their own childhood, along with everything that's ever gone right in their lives, has been restored to them in that blessed instant.

To a person who knows nothing and wants to know nothing of the transport of the elements, somebody who would insist that a more urbane and forthright description be supplied to him, I can say that *acqua alta* works exactly like the bathtubs of Claridge's, that great flagship of pre-war, afternoon-tea-perfect hydro-pneumatic engineering in London, whose porcelain vastness the water fills through the plugholes from below, rather than the taps from above, with the expensive consequence that, after the initial gurgle of welcome, it is utterly noiseless. Here in Venice the streets, which are rarely wider than a Claridge's bathtub, fill up through small plughole-shaped grates cut into paving stone with just the same plush noiselessness and the same efficient quickness born of the eagerness to please, to provide Old World value for money, to compete with the Hilton and win. The water rises, changing the aspect of the city and providing the resident with the excuse to buy special rubber boots that anyone but a sexual deviant would agree look like medieval armor, stays a few hours, and eventually recedes, leaving the cobblestones clean as a shop window and the occasional ground-floor

shopkeeper cursing the day he turned down the offer to move to Mestre.

And my cigarette butts? They got washed away and ended up somewhere out in the lagoon, in an unwitting yet direct violation of my pact with Neptune. The ground of Venice and the islands, it turned out, is not as indifferent and impersonal as I and all the other transient *foresti* might have supposed, but is the solid shell of the liquid sea and part of its mystery. So, too, with the chain of well-being, whose healthiest sections—the ones least likely to snap right in front of me, the ones most certain to last me until absolute disillusionment settles in—I devote myself to seeking out and recording. Only rarely does the chain show itself to be stronger than one has assumed, and as ever it is only nature that is capable of pleasant surprises and of teaching the cynical pupil a cynical lesson.

*Andrei Navrozov is Chronicles' European correspondent.*

## Letter From England

by Derek Turner

### New Gaybour



In 1988, the Conservative government passed the Local Government Act. The most controversial part of the Act was Section 28. Subsection 1 stated:

A local authority should not (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality or (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

Subsection 2 was slightly more conciliatory in tone, saying that "Nothing in Subsection 1 shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease."

Section 28 was the culmination of a long campaign carried out by pro-family campaigners who had become increasingly concerned about the promotion of homosexuality in schools; even very

young children were being exposed to didactic tracts like the infamous *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*. It was one of the best things the Conservatives did in an 18-year incumbency remembered now more for its missed opportunities than for its achievements. Predictably, there was outrage from the usual suspects, but even some moderate homosexuals supported Section 28; they at least could tell the difference between "not promoting" and savagely repressing homosexuality. But a pledge to repeal Section 28 appeared in Labour's 1997 general election manifesto; this clause alone shows how far Labour's governing elite has moved from the party's traditional supporters. Few asked how this fit in with Labour's oft-stated desire to bolster family life and Tony Blair's highly public visits to churches.

The issue ran through the whole election campaign. Labour fielded several openly homosexual candidates who were elected; some of them are presently ministers. Since the election, there have been more revelations of zoophyte affiliations in Labour ranks, most famously Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson and Ron Davies, then Welsh Secretary, who had a bizarre escapade while cruising for black boys on Clapham Common, during which he was robbed by a man whom he had followed into a council estate.

These individuals are amongst those agitating for the repeal of Section 28, saying that it leads to "homophobic" bullying in schools, although the government admits that it has only "anecdotal evidence" that this is a problem. (An interesting aside on the homosexual debate is how the customary roles of right and left are reversed, with leftists believing all of a sudden that homosexuals are born rather than made, while rightists believe that homosexuals are made rather than born.)

There are still enough traditionalist Labour or cross-bench peers—like Lord Longford, who thinks of "homosexuality" as "sinful, sinful, sinful"—for Millbank to be approaching the issue warily. There are also some heavyweight campaigners on the right side, such as Chris Woodhead, chief inspector of schools, and the redoubtable Tory Baroness Young, who arranged for a display in the House of Lords showing the kind of agit-prop likely to be forced on children as young as six if Section 28 is repealed. Senior churchmen (like Scotland's Roman Catholic leader, Cardinal Winning),

rather surprisingly, came out in support of Section 28, as did the chief rabbi. Even more surprisingly, a millionaire Scottish businessman has put up money and promised to hold “poll tax-style” street demonstrations. The first result of these efforts was seen on February 7, when a packed House of Lords, which voted on the legislation before the Commons, threw the bill out by a substantial majority, 210 to 165. Even government vaporings about how Section 28 would be replaced with sex education which stressed the importance of marriage and family life did not convince many Labour peers.

This result is, however, only a reprieve, as the government has promised that “Section 28 will go,” and Labour’s enormous Commons majority will ensure its passage in the lower House whenever it is introduced there. Like all good “liberals,” Tony Blair will try again and again until he gets the “right” result. But if the peers stand firm when the legislation is introduced in the Lords next time, then the government may have to drop the clause or risk losing a whole legislative package. And then it may be too late to try again before the next election.

Even if Section 28 does get repealed,

Labour should be wary of electoral repercussions. Interviewed recently in the *Sunday Telegraph*, a typical Labour voter in Sedgefield, Blair’s constituency, has finally noticed that “If you’re white, working-class and heterosexual they don’t care about you.”

*Derek Turner is the editor of Right NOW!, published in London.*

## Letter From Inner Israel

by Jacob Neusner

### Rabbis, But No Torah



When the religion of Judaism speaks in its contemporary modulations—whether Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, or integrationist-Orthodoxy—we should hear many voices. But instead we hear one: the voice of left-liberal politics.

With the exception of self-segregated Orthodoxy, most (though, happily, not all) rabbis preach a secular doctrine of left-wing orthodoxy. That is puzzling, because the Torah—Scripture (the “Old Testament”) and the Mishnah, Talmuds, and Midrash that record the oral revelation of Sinai—presents a remarkably conservative vision of the social order. “Judaism” favors gay rights—except in the Torah. “Judaism” favors “a woman’s right to choose,” even at the very end of term—except in the law of the Torah, which deems the fetus to have a soul at a specific point in the pregnancy. “Judaism” opposes the death penalty—except in the Torah. Compose a list of liberal shibboleths, and I will cite, chapter and verse, rabbinical sermons and the resolutions of their associations that identify them as “Judaism.” And that is not to mention secular Jews and their organizations.

What explains the gap between the teachings of the Torah and the position of its contemporary masters, the rabbinic of today? The failure of the rabbinical schools to set forth a coherent intellectual structure and system resting on Torah learning has produced a generation of rabbis with little or no Torah to

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