

# VIEWPOINTS

## NYPIRG: Political and Moral?

By Gideon Isaac

Now that SUNY is trying to find out what the New York Public Interest Group (NYPIRG) does with student funds, it is appropriate to ask what NYPIRG is. Is NYPIRG a collection of independent consumer organizations, representing most students, or is it more centralized and ideological than NYPIRG students care to admit?

According to NYPIRG students who I questioned here, each PIRG is independent and student run. The non-student staff may be experts like a lawyer or a cancer expert, or a lobbying expert. They are hired by the students, and work for lower pay than they could get outside.

NYPIRG students point out that the lobbying and legal experience they get is an education, often saying it is the best experience of their college career.

What does NYPIRG lobby for? They avoid moral or political issues, according to student member Jim Lioda. They lobby against nuclear power and spread literature. They also have a major thrust against limitations on what a consumer can get from a company that has produced a faulty product.

Some specific projects they work on

are:

- A return bottle bill which they try to force on reluctant store owners on Long Island.

- The truth in testing bill which forced the SATs and MCATs to make their test public.

- They boast of decriminalizing marijuana, of killing the bank interest rates bill, and the voting time reduction bill.

In 1980, they issued 60 legislative memoranda, and testified over 12 times in front of legislative committees.

The idea of our own student lobby, offsetting the special interests and passing bills for "the needs of all three million Long Islanders," as NYPIRG Director Donald Ross puts it, is at first attractive.

The problem is that the issues NYPIRG addresses, by their nature, have to be moral and political. This means that what NYPIRG does with the more than \$2 million it gets from students across the country (the money is pooled at PIRG centers and then redistributed) is based on the moral and political beliefs of students at each PIRG, and on the beliefs of the student and staff at the redistribution centers.

Now it is true that PIRGs are often

voted on by student referendum and that the majority of students may feel that the extra funds PIRG gets are needed for PIRG's activities. Last year, Stony Brook students voted that \$1.50 of each student's funds should go to NYPIRG. It may even be true that most students agree with NYPIRG's issues. Still, it is arrogant of NYPIRG to decide that it knows the good of the people better than the people themselves.

For instance, they decided that return bottles are the greater good for Long Islanders despite the objections of many Long Island storeowners and consumers who find disposable bottles more convenient. They remove ceilings on how much you can sue a business for which it turn sends insurance up for that business and the cost is passed on — to you.

They decide that marijuana is safe, but many scientists and social workers think otherwise.

Again, their absolute stand against nuclear power must have political, economic and international effects (such as increasing the importance of military control of the Persian Gulf).

The more one reads of PIRG's activities, the more it seems that they feel any burden can be placed on businessmen

or companies in the interests of the people. For example, the PIRG organizing manual says we should increase taxes on business to fund health and environmental projects. It notes that "the profitability of a commercial building, and even a large industrial property can be heavily influenced by the level of the property taxes on it."

Donald Ross has said: NYPIRG is "this ultimate in student power." The question is: power for what? The Students Manual for Public Interest Organizing (by Donald Ross and Ralph Nader) says for just missions."

Because the staff of PIRGs are not tied to any corporation, and can devote their full time to improving society, does not make their judgement of social issues necessarily impartial.

If student funds are enlisted in their efforts, then students should be informed on their applications. The statement on PIRG might go something like this: We are deducting \$1.50 of your money to support our chapter of the consumer activist organization PIRG. If you want to know more about it before the deduction or do not want to fund it, check here.

## Does Bisexuality Exist?

By William Ruiz

Does bisexuality exist? Many people both gay and straight think not. These people think that the bisexual is, in reality, a closet gay who is not willing to admit his or her basic homosexuality.

In some cases, this is true. An example is the person who has led a heterosexual lifestyle for a long time. Say this person wants to shift to the gay scene. Naturally, he or she can not change their lifestyle overnight.

So in this case, bisexuality is used as a bridge of transition to go from hetero to homosexuality. The time crossing the bridge can take weeks, months or years depending on the individual. This bridge (and many gay people don't like hearing this) is also a two way bridge. The homosexual who is also in sexual transition will use bisexuality as a bridge to a more heterosexual lifestyle.

But are the above two cases all the possible cases of bisexuality? Are all bisexuals using bisexuality to arrive at one stop, be it a gay stop or a straight one? No, the above transitional cases are only one form of bisexuality. The other forms, and there are many, when closely examined in some cases yield a yes response to the initial question: Does bisexuality exist? Yes!

I cannot give all the forms of bisexuality here for I do not have the time or the space, but those interested can read *The Bisexual Option* by Fred Klein, pages 14-19.

Many people feel that in order to be bisexual one must be 50-50; in other words, one must like women and men equally. This myth or misconception comes no doubt from the concepts of hetero and homosexualities. In these sexualities 100-0 is the accepted lifestyle. Many bisexuals therefore try to live up to the mythical accepted 50-50 biequasexual lifestyle. I met a person who flatly stated that in order to be bisexual, one must sleep with a woman and a man simultaneously. The entire premise of the argument was the mythical 50-50 land.

A person can prefer one gender over the other be it a 60-40, 70-30, 80-20, etc., preference. What percentage one is doesn't matter as long as one is happy interacting with whomever one chooses to

interact with.

I stress the word chooses, for one can choose to act on his or her least preferred gender, provided there is an attraction. Social pressure to choose between gay or straight may rob an individual of that choice.

I, for example, am more homosexual in terms of sexual expression. Sometimes, however, it depends on who I meet. For example, if I meet a man and a woman at the same time, and the man is not my type, but the woman is my type, even though I am drawn more to men, I will go after the woman because she interests me and the man doesn't.

Basically I'm free to interact with men and/or women of my choice, socially and/or sexually, provided they also choose me.

Unlike many gay people who marry for the wrong reasons, i.e., covering up their sexual orientation, many bisexuals do marry and have families for the right reasons: they love their spouses and want a family life. The openly bisexual marriages can vary from an open marriage such as Barry and Alice: *Portrait of a Bisexual Marriage*, or a monogamous marriage such as Chuck and Merrill, a couple I know.

The only thing I can say to the gay community is that having gone through the experience and struggle to be yourselves, I and other bisexuals would have expected gays, of all people, to support us in our efforts to be ourselves. We get disappointed when the same comments that some of the straight community hurls at the gay and bisexual communities are hurled at us by the gays. Comments such as: "You are sick," "You are confused," "You are going through a stage," "You don't know what you want," "You can change," to name but a few. Oppressing and being oppressed is like fighting a two-front war; historically one always loses. This advice is good advice to all oppressed groups.

Anyway, I hope this viewpoint has opened the eyes of heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, autosexuals, asexuals, celibates, virgins (Did I leave out anyone?) alike into understanding a little bit about bisexuality.

(The writer is an undergraduate Spanish major.)

## The Suffering Of the Forgotten Prisoner

By Roger Borkum and Matteo Luccio

The Colombian government systematically engages in torture of political prisoners. A study on human rights in Colombia, excerpts of which appeared in the New York Times on April 17, cited 600 individual cases of torture (both psychological and physical), widespread denial of due process of law and incidents of murder of political prisoners.

Prepared by Amnesty International, the study, which calls for a limitation of military and police powers to conform with guarantees in the Colombian Constitution, was sent to the Colombian government and then released for publication.

More recent Amnesty International press releases have focused on: executions in Iran (August 28), a call for Israel to publicly inquire into complaints of ill-treatment of suspects in occupied territories (September 1), dramatic increases in political arrests and torture in Chile (September 8), an appeal to the United Nations for steps against the death penalty (September 15), and violations of international standards of fairness in recent South Korean dissident trials (September 17).

The sufferings of the forgotten prisoner must be heard. Often just the knowledge of being heard is sufficient to give hope to prisoners and their relatives and friends. Since 1961, Amnesty International has been giving such hope, working to raise public awareness and bring the pressure of public opinion to bear on governments which violate human rights.

Amnesty International has over 200,000 members and Campus Networks located on universities around the country. If you would like to know more about our organization on campus, please call or stop by our office: (246-6197) Room N302 in the Social and Behavioral Sciences building, or come to one of our meetings, in the office, at 7:30 PM on the second and fourth Thursdays of every month.

(The writers are members of the Amnesty International Campus Network.)

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