

The Conservatives Harmless? Hardly.

By Lyla Miklos

Open Letter in Response to Andrew Dreschel Columns

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Andrew Dreschel's two most recent columns (I'm campaigning -- against prejudice in all forms – Jan 20/06 & Hamilton needs to elect at least one Tory MP – Jan 18/06) are very worrisome. The naivety Dreschel displays from his privileged, white, straight male stance is predictably, not surprising. Pretending that fundamentalist religions haven't influenced the direction of recent political trends and politics in North American society is beyond foolhardy. Anyone who believes that the powers of church and state should be kept separate should be very worried if Harper's Conservatives come to power.

Dreschel advocates for Hamiltonians to put some Conservative MPs into The House of Commons otherwise Hamilton will have no political clout in Ottawa since according to recent polls a Conservative victory seems likely. Dreschel also tries to convince us that Conservative candidate David Sweet's affiliation with the Promise Keepers is as harmless as Fred Flintstone's membership with the Water Buffalos.

I took a look at the official Promise Keepers (PKs) website at www.promisekeepers.org and their propaganda makes them come across as just a bunch of Christian men involved in some giant group hug to improve themselves and the world around them.

Some rudimentary "googling" on my computer proved otherwise.

The official website of NOW (National Organization for Women) at www.now.org has an entire section dedicated to the hypocrisy of the PK movement.

"The PK is modeling some unbelievable double-talk. Honor your wife, but be sure you're the head of the household. Seek racial "reconciliation" with hugs and tears among the biblically correct but ignore racial injustice when it comes to housing, education, jobs. Then march on Washington, but claim it is not a political action. Promise Keepers rally participants are urged to spend a pre-rally day providing service to rebuild communities. While we welcome the service, most of the people they help would not want to pay the high price PK is asking-- submission, racism and homophobia."

And it's not only women who have issues with the PK movement. Men Voice's Magazine's official website at www.menweb.org also has an entire section dedicated to examining the myths and truths about the PKs.

"The movement threatens democracy by blurring the distinction between church and state, and dividing the country along gender and religious lines. Beware of those who would shepherd us with their own agendas. The mechanisms are being built to facilitate control by few over the many. They may well be being put in place with the best of intentions. Never doubt that there are people out there who will be trying to use the structures to further their own ideologies. Even the threat of political action may be a viable tool given the ticket sales and numbers the organization is building. Have faith if you must that Promise Keepers will be kept free of people seeking political power, but don't close your eyes as you pray." – Keeping an eye on The Promise Keepers by Dick Gilkeson (www.menweb.org)

In *USA Today*, Stuart Wright, a sociologist at Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas, called the organization "an attempt to raise the authority and status of angry white men who find themselves declining in privilege and power. It is part of a movement of the religious right to reconstruct the 1950s." Jay Coakley, a sociologist at the University of Colorado, said in the same article that Promise Keepers "gives moral legitimacy to men who wish to regain power," and represents "the same white male Republican vote you saw in the last election." – What's wrong with the Promise Keepers? (*Midwest Today*, April/May, 2006)

I was appalled when Harper went after the visible and cultural minority vote by trying to insinuate that the Liberals and NDP were undermining their core values by supporting same-sex marriage. I was delighted when so many leaders from so many of these communities told Harper to stuff it and that they cherished the rights they worked so hard to achieve as minorities and that the idea of taking away rights from another minority was morally reprehensible. Hallelujah!

The current issue of XTRA! Magazine, Toronto's Gay & Lesbian Biweekly, has an editorial from its Publisher David Whalberg entitled Harper's Holy War. He concludes his editorial by saying the following: "*Harper seems to have rejected the core values of Canadian social harmony -- understanding, tolerance and mutual respect -- in favour of importing a hodgepodge of the world's more regressive religious prejudices. He preaches contempt for Western pluralism in the manner of an extreme Islamist, coaching the faithful to feel mocked and maligned by Canadian social permissiveness and decadence. Canada's gay communities have rarely known political leaders to be our champions. But I can't recall another leader who so*

actively tried to turn religious people against their gay fellow citizens. It's one thing for Stephen Harper, the nutty rightwing opposition leader, to conduct himself thus. But imagine Stephen Harper, freshly trimmed and beturtlenecked, as our prime minister: goading the faithful, exploiting misunderstandings, fomenting bigotry, shredding the social fabric. It's shameful, reprehensible and menacing."

Martin Luther King Jr. gave an address entitled "A Time to Break Silence". It was his definitive statement against the war in Vietnam. Sadly, his words have just as much if not more relevance today.

"I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered. . . . The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just . . . A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death. . . We must with positive action seek to remove [the] conditions of poverty, insecurity and injustice. . . If we do not act we shall surely be dragged down the long dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight." – Martin Luther King Jr. (New York City, 1967)

Bush and Harper's right wing social, moral and political agenda are not a giant group hug towards making the world a better place. Don't let Dreschel or anyone else try to fool you into thinking otherwise.