

## Which Side Are You On? Same Sex Unions in New Haven (Jan 2002?)

Imagine a room full of people carrying homemade signs protesting what they see as injustice.

They are carried by people who work hard and are barely able to support their families. Increasing rents in New Haven leave them with one paycheck away from homelessness. Their kids are subjected to New Haven's most under performing schools. Not able to afford the \$6,000 a year required to own a car, they rely on an inferior public transportation system. A lot of them work at the lowest wage earning jobs at Yale and are among those who will look forward, if Yale has it's way, to pensions of less than \$500 a month when they have to retire and little hope of advancement in their jobs.

On the other side of the room a smaller group, largely white, college educated and self-satisfied, observes the spectacle with thinly veiled distaste. Among their numbers is a Yale Vice President who routinely offers apologies for why Yale can't afford to pay its workers decent wages and pensions and why the paltry contribution Yale makes to city coffers is actually generous. Also supporting them are some of the city's most reactionary aldermen, those who opposed taking action against union busting at YNH hospital, were nowhere to be seen in the social contract actions, were dubious on the Iraq war resolution, and even spoke in favor of the cross sound cable.

So which side are you on?

I know what side I would usually be on. But alas, this time doing the right thing meant aligning with the wrong side.

Because what came before us last Monday was the rights of those who live with partners of the same sex to live in dignity. The fundamentalist churches in Fair Haven, the Hill, Newhallville have decided that the bible gives them the right, indeed, the obligation, to deny the civil rights of folks based on how they behave in their bedrooms and their congregations are drawn from the city's poorest neighborhoods and those who need the most help.

One of the inspiring things about the labor actions at Yale was seeing dining hall workers and art gallery curators, and lab technicians and janitors, grad students and food service workers, even a few assistant professors all joined together on the streets and on the picket lines. Could we some day get beyond the bizarre divisions of "identity" which have kept us fighting ourselves for the small crumbs which are left for us after the Enrons, the Ken Lays, the Rick Levins and the Yale, have made off with the whole loaf? A few months back, you might have had reason to be optimistic.

Last Monday was a depressing example of one of the many barriers which stand in our way.

The city didn't need to be reminded of yet another thing which divides us, and prevents us from seeing that the fight is not between black and white, anglo and latino, gay and straight, but between the people and the powerful.

It was a victory for those whose interests are served by keeping us divided.

It was a loss for everyone else.