

Television

Pressure Groups Are Increasingly Putting The Heat on TV

By JOHN J. O'CONNOR

THIS Tuesday evening, courtesy of a "Marcus Welby, M.D." episode called "The Outrage," the most significant scenario concerning a prime-time program will have already been played off camera. The name of the power game can be called "Powerful Networks Versus Increasingly Powerful Pressure Groups."

In this case, the network is ABC. The pressure groups are organizations representing the causes of homosexuals, most prominently the National Gay Task Force. It all began several months ago when David Victor, creator of the "Welby" series, approached ABC executives with a proposal for an episode involving child molestation. Mr. Victor was armed with what the network refers to as "significant" statistics on the problem compiled by the Los Angeles police department. He was told to commission a "proper" script.

The script, written by Eugene Price, was sent to the National Gay Task Force for advisory "input." Task Force leaders exploded. They refused to suggest "positive" changes and flatly declared that the program should never see the light of a TV tube.

In the script, a 14-year-old boy has been raped by his science teacher while on a field trip. The focus of the story is kept on how the incident affects both the boy and his family. ABC insists the program involves not homosexuality but pedophilia in the form of an erotic desire for children. The Task Force maintains that, no matter the intentions, a story using the rape of one male by another can't help but have a "chilling effect" on pending legislation in several cities and states that "would protect gays from discrimination in employment and housing."

The group also questions the accuracy of the program's basic details. A 14-year-old, they say, would fall outside the range of the typical pedophile, who is likely to prefer children under the age of 10. And, they add, key statistics, including those gathered by the Kinsey Institute, indicate that incidents of sexual child molestation are almost exclusively heterosexual.

Despite the protests of homosexual organizations, ABC proceeded with the project, but not without incorporating careful script changes. Several, though not all, references to violations of "manhood" were eliminated. And it is specifically stated that the case "has nothing to do with homosexuality," that the guy has a "severe mental and emotional problem," and that the typical pedophile is "often married and middle-aged."

Homosexual organizations, however, show little inclination for compromise on the issue. Instead of maintaining negotiations with the network, they have gone to affiliate stations, the



The National Gay Task Force is putting pressure on ABC's affiliate stations not to broadcast Tuesday night's episode of "Marcus Welby, M.D." The episode, called "The Outrage," stars Sean Kelly, above, as a boy who is molested by a teacher. Marla Adams plays the boy's mother. The Gay Task Force fears the episode will set back pending legislation affecting homosexual rights. ABC, on the other hand, insists the show has nothing to do with homosexuals.

direct source of network power, in a campaign to have the stations refuse to carry the program. At deadline for this article, at least two major stations, in Philadelphia and Boston, had expressed agreement with the pressure groups. Another station won't carry the episode

because it simply objects to the subject matter. It couldn't be less concerned with homosexual rights. And ABC indicated there could be further station defections.

Irresistible force would appear to have met immovable object, but the

issue is complex, and the cast of characters cannot be neatly assigned to black hats and white hats. Both sides are treading on genuinely sensitive issues.

For its part, ABC made a mistake in attempting to force this subject, with



Organizations such as the Gay Activists Alliance have helped reduce the number of offensive TV stereotypes. All well and good, says a critic, but 'such demands can become counterproductive.'

its obvious potential for controversy, into the rigid format of "Marcus Welby, M.D." The script and the production are dreadful. If the network was determined to pursue the subject, it had the responsibility to provide the care and attention that generally can be offered only in a special production, much as was done with the portrait of a juvenile detention home on NBC's "Born Innocent."

Suppose, though, that a network did devise a serious and effective production dealing with sexual child molestation, a problem that does exist. And suppose the central incident did involve two males. "Almost exclusively heterosexual" does not mean "never homosexual." At what point does the understandable anxiety of homosexual groups become censorship or prior restraint?

That is the key issue underlying the role of all pressure groups: the Catholics objecting to the abortion episodes of "Maude," the Jews objecting to any production of "The Merchant of Venice," the Poles objecting to "QBVII," and so on to weekly infinity.

Within the context of their own special and inevitably narrow interests, many of these groups present arguments that cannot and should not be ignored. The National Gay Task Force is no exception. In a letter to ABC in January, 1973 (this is not the group's first run-in with "Marcus Welby"), the Task Force explained: "Our point is that gay people in our society are where blacks were not so many years ago,

just emerging from media invisibility. Greater caution is needed at present to avoid giving offense."

Homosexual groups have undoubtedly won a measure of "greater caution" from broadcasting. Offensive "fag and dyke" jokes have been reduced. Mincing stereotypes are examined more closely and are beginning to be supplanted with touches of more authenticity ("That Certain Summer").

The greater caution is a direct result of pressure on broadcasters, and the pressure has to continue. But, given the "committed" nature of a pressure group, the demands can become unreasonable or even counterproductive.

Eventually, the pressure begins to generate polarization. For one executive at ABC, the demands have become political, exacerbated by the defeat of a "gay rights" bill in New York City. "No," is his message to homosexual organizations, "you may not use me to get your legislation passed." In his contacts with these organizations on specific projects, he is looking for advice rather than censorship, appraisal rather than prior restraint.

The balance is undeniably delicate. But in attempting to replace the old and frequently abusive stereotypes of homosexuals with only "positive" non-abusive stereotypes—even if only until the "prejudice balance" is redressed—the homosexual groups are veering toward an unreality of their own. That unreality is as objectionable as any other.



CAROLYN INNIS, Morris Kight speak at Texas Gay Conference

Gay libbers meet here

By JACK HANDEY

The battle for Gay Liberation won't be over until "gay" is no longer an issue.

So declared Morris Kight, the "Dean of the Gay Liberation Movement," during a press conference Saturday.

Kight and other national, regional and local gay leaders are attending the three-day Texas Gay Conference II in San Antonio.

Although "enormous victories" have been achieved by the Gay Liberation Movement,

said Kight, "The battle won't be over until gay is a non-issue."

He said the biggest victory to date for the movement has been to dispel from the minds of most gay people the notion their homosexuality is something to hide or be ashamed of.

Organizer

Liberation Front and helped organize the first Gay Pride Parade in Los Angeles.

He is now director of the Los Angeles Gay Community Center.

Also attending the conference is Carolyn Innis, a founder of the Gay Nurses' Alliance, the largest of the gay professional associations. "Our society is not comfortable with sexuality, period," she said, adding with any deviation, "You've got a whole lot of turmoil and fright and trouble." Gene Leggett, a self-avowed homosexual who recently lost his bid to be reinstated as a Methodist minister, is coordinator of the conference. The conference, sponsored by the Texas Gay Task Force, ends Sunday. It was scheduled to coincide with the beginning of National Gay Pride Week, the last week in June.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY to INTEGRITY

integrity/houston
po box 1604
houston, texas

77022

A super HAPPY NEW YEAR each of you the very best collectively.

On December 6th, 1974, of medical students at professor said it was era. Our ER speakers and the first of the year produce a booklet for

On January 2nd, Integrity, expresses

On Thursday before it was a grand affair The table should have imaginable dish on the

The Sexuality and L brochures and has under the region. Integrity We hope to gain most o

I/H is currently ne a showing of "A Very N have talked to Interst the Tercar chain to ob March. If all goes as those of "underwriting (debtors prison). We and Austin and would l the film.

We are looking forv Dallas. I will be hap have them ready. If t coordinators or deleg

Has ANYONE seen an zine, or whatnot (tea from as far away as Re been legit, but we hav desired. Several inq "swingers" publication

are featuring weekly WE haven't. We have of any other than thr "Dial A Stud." Let u

As I have a "Bitch blunt, competitive, d you don't get busy w beautiful people at D

MEETS EACH

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Ban Bias

The pastor of a church the gay community asked ban discrimination again in housing and city empl

The Rev. R. M. Falls Community Church 2023 Waugh Drive, will include a course-ly of police training. Falls said clergymen