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**Editorials**

**Could it happen here?**

Those who have seen Stephen Spielberg's latest movie, *Schindler's List*, say that it is a powerful emotional experience. The film—an account of a German industrialist who saves the lives of more than a thousand Polish Jews during the Holocaust—is shot almost entirely in grainy black-and-white, giving it the feel of a documentary and lending authenticity to the atrocities it recounts. From the nightmarish brutality of the purging of Krakow's Jewish ghetto to the nonchalant murder of concentration camp prisoners by their commandant, each horrifyingly real scene is as impossible to watch as it is to ignore. The film is as close to a vision of hell as we are ever likely to see.

Among the many comments made by those who have seen *Schindler's List*, the one heard most often is, "How? How could this have happened?" Surely everyone who has seen the movie has studied the Holocaust in school, yet witnessing the graphic details of this horror adds a dimension to this event that forces the viewer to consider the human element of the story. It's easy—even comfortable—to see the Holocaust in two dimensions: The Germans are The Bad Guys, the Jews are the Victims, and the Allies are the Heroes. Without faces, the statistics are simply numbers, and the question of "How" becomes irrelevant.

It is the gruesome details of the slaughter—the screams of men, women, and children as an army of stormtroopers rush at them from all sides, the sound of an officer's voice as he casually instructs a guard to shoot a prisoner of talking back, the muffled agony of trainloads of thirsty, frightened prisoners on their way to Auschwitz, the deafening silence of a mountain of dead bodies—that we find so difficult to comprehend. How, we ask, could people descended from a culture that has produced the likes of Bach, Mozart, and Brahms become so cruel, so sadistic, and so full of hate that they consciously construct gigantic murder mills all over Europe? How could one person possibly treat another as if he were less than a bacterium? How could this have happened? Beneath these questions is the one we're almost too terrified to ask: Could it happen again? Could it happen here?

As horrible as the Holocaust was, the greater horror is that it *could* have happened—that an entire nation of thinking, rational people *allowed* it to happen.

The story of the Holocaust begins more than a decade before *Schindler's List* does. Germany in the early 1930s was suffering terrible economic hardships and its people were being seduced by the rhetoric of the National Socialist Party—the Nazis—whose extremely nationalistic views promised clean, simple solutions to the country's manifold and complex problems. Hitler, as head of the Nazis, said that Germany's problems were caused by Jews, Communists, Social Democrats and other "undesireables," and, though he failed to explain precisely how this was so, most Germans began to agree with them and they were elected to political office in large numbers.

The rest of the story—the building of concentration camps, the round-up of Jews throughout Europe and eventually their wholesale slaughter—can be rolled off by most any seventh-grader. What the average seventh-grader couldn't tell you is that Hitler's purging began with the swift and systematic destruction—including execution by the tens and even hundreds of thousands—of Germany's gay culture. In fact, the photograph of a huge pile of burning books that is so closely associated with the beginning of the Nazi reign of terror is actually a picture of the burning of the contents of Berlin's Institute for Sexual Science, an internationally known library of gay and lesbian literature. The photograph was taken in May of 1933—two years before Germany's anti-Jewish laws were passed.

Spielberg ought not to be slighted for omitting reference in *Schindler's List* to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. At the same time, however, we who see the movie ought to know the whole truth about the Holocaust so that when we hear the likes of Pat Buchanan and Pat Robertson and Dan Quayle and Fred Phelps and Joe Chambers and Lou Sheldon and Phyllis Schlafly and anyone else who blames gays and lesbians for whatever problems confront America, we can hear—faintly but clearly—the echoes from half a century ago.

**Speaking For Myself**

A Personal Opinion

**Are we next, Rico?**

by Mel Dahl

The United States Supreme Court recently ruled that the Racketeering Influenced Corrupt Organizations Act, more commonly known as RICO, may be used against Operation Rescue. I should be thrilled, but I'm not.

A bit of background: RICO was designed to shut down sham businesses which operate as a front for organized crime, and has been quite successful. It provides harsh civil and criminal penalties for organizations and organizational leadership found to engage in illegal activity. It allows the seizure of assets and the jailing for long periods of time of persons found to be engaging in illegal activities.

However, Congress, being its usual incompetent self, drafted the Act so sloppily that virtually any business which engages in activity which is illegal or unfair, or even looks like it may be illegal or unfair, can be swept up in the broad RICO net. At this point, most lawsuits against businesses include RICO claims almost as a matter of course. Entirely legitimate businesses, through accident or which deliberately ran afoul of one regulation or another, have been seized and their leaders jailed. In sum, what Congress intended to be used as a weapon against organized crime has become a monster.

The courts have held that much of what has been done in RICO's name is beyond what Congress intended, but it is not for the courts to re-write statutes. So, as long as Congress leaves the broad language in place, the courts will broadly interpret it.

Enter Operation Rescue. Let us be clear about one thing from the very beginning: Operation Rescue is one of the most obnoxious blights ever to curse the American landscape. It exists solely to harass women who are choosing to exercise what the courts have deemed a fundamental right — the right to

choose whether or not to be a parent.

For the past ten years, Operation Rescue has engaged in a systematic hate campaign of vicious harassment and unspeakable cruelty.

Some bright attorney for the abortion providers finally got the idea that, since Operation Rescue's *raison d'être* is to engage in illegal acts, it is a criminal enterprise within the meaning of RICO.

I will concede the argument has a certain plausibility to it. I will also concede that the antics of Operation Rescue have gotten entirely out of hand, and something has to be done about it. And, frankly, if Randall Terry and company spend the next 25 years in prison, I don't know if I would cry very hard. In sum, Operation Rescue is what attorneys refer to as an unsympathetic party.

The problem lies with what the attorneys refer to as the slippery slope; that it is much easier to start something than it is to stop it once it gets going.

What other organization do we know of that routinely engages in illegal activity for the purpose of trying to bring about social change? I'll give you a hint: It's acronym has five letters; the first three are ACT and the last two are UP.

That's right. I fully expect the next wave of RICO litigation to involve ACTUP. After all, the Operation Rescue argument is that it is an organization whose stated purpose is to engage in illegal activity, that it has a long pattern of engaging in illegal activity, and that it does so to harm the business and commerce of businesses providing a legitimate service. That analysis, of course, applies equally as well to ACTUP.

Now, even I know the difference between Operation Rescue and ACTUP, and I am not for a minute suggesting that a reasonable person would find the two comparable. The problem is that I'm not at all certain the

Continued on page 10

**Three strikes and he's out**

Mayor Richard Vinroot must be commended for his performance. After all, it's not every day that a homophobe can conceal his prejudices at a gay and lesbian candidates' forum well enough to leave the audience enthralled. But, Vinroot did just that.

At the June 1991 meeting of First Tuesday, Vinroot convinced a skeptical crowd that he was the mayor who would finally make homosexuals matter in the Queen City.

In a speech peppered with sound-bites like "I will listen and be fair," "[The gay community is] not mine to judge" and "I will respect you," candidate Vinroot wrangled himself a strong base of support from homosexual constituents.

Now, less than two years removed from that bravura bit of theatrics, Vinroot has denied us three times. It sounds like he is auditioning for another role these days.

The first betrayal occurred in November 1992 during the unsuccessful drive to have sexual orientation added to the city's list of protected classes. Following the city council's vote to deny the addition, Vinroot told his colleagues, "I think you made the right decision."

The second betrayal related to the March on Washington held in April 1993. Mayor Vinroot watched the event on television and the only enlightening comment he could think to make to the media was that he found it to be offensive due to the "language" and the "pub-

lic exposition of sex." Conceding that some marchers and rally participants probably did behave inappropriately, Vinroot still had an obligation to place those individuals in perspective in his comments, and he didn't bother. He was perfectly content to dismiss a civil rights demonstration by one million Americans based on the actions of a minority of its participants.

The final betrayal, the one which has cost him whatever shred of support he had left from the community, stems from the recent controversy over the starting time of the NC Pride March. Putting his opinion into the debate, Vinroot declared that he wished the March "wasn't happening at all."

The first reaction to these instances is to say "What gullible fools we all were." And while this is an accurate statement, it is much too defeatist. We should instead be empowering ourselves by organizing our retribution for these backstabbing.

It is widely held that Vinroot will seek Jesse Helms' seat in the U.S. Senate; we must diligently organize against this prospect. We have seen the type of representation gays and lesbians can count on from Vinroot, and we cannot allow him to take his prejudiced attitudes to Washington where he will have even more influence over our lives.

Besides, Mayor Vinroot has garnered our scorn the old fashioned way—he's earned it.

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