Free Speech for the Stupid

May 30, 2008 By Paul Dalton

As an activist and person with AIDS, I am vexed by the folks I call ?denialists.? These are people who believe- for various and disparate reasons- that HIV is not the cause of AIDS. They vex me because 1) they run in some of my circles, 2) they are dead wrong and 3) I want very badly to shut them up.

HIV denialism comes in a few flavors. There are the folks who see conspiracies lurking behind every bush. There are the bigots like Duesberg, who literally hate folks with HIV/AIDS and bend over backwards to pin our disease on our apparently aberrant behaviors- like having sex and getting high.

And then there are the instinctively oppositional folks, the molecular level rebels. These are the folks that run in my activist and, to an extent punk rock circles. A few years back, while attending an Anarchist conference in Toronto, some of them held a denialist workshop. It was disgustingly well received, in spite of my persistent debunking.

These are folks- like me- who seek to overthrow nothing less than the whole world. We stand in opposition to the powers that be, pretty much no matter who they are. Most of the time that puts us on the right track. Examples of enlightened governance are few and far between. Sometimes it turns in to knee jerk oppositionalism- poorly thought out, reactive anti-establishment thinking.

Now, I will put my anti-establishment credentials up against almost any one. As much of a revolutionary that I might be, I am also a skeptic. I am deeply mistrustful of dogma and group-think. These kind of denialists see themselves as challenging mainstream medical dogma, but aren?t. They are engaging in a mishmash of pseudoscience and conspiracy theory that is frankly unseemly for people who purport to fight on the side of the downtrodden.

I am generally opposed to shutting down people?s ability to express themselves. But just as I protested the notorious Holocaust denier David Irving?s speech at UC Berkeley years ago, I protest these folks. Recently Duesberg and his press lackey Celia Farber were given awards as ?whistleblowers.? What a crock! They are no more whistleblowers than the folks on school boards around the country who are trying to have creationism taught as science- but to much worse effect.

Sometimes denial dies harder than denialists. Here in San Francisco a gaggle of denialists took over ACT UP SF, and turned it into a denialist group. Most of their leadership is now dead of AIDS. Worse still is the impact this has on people with HIV, who fall prey to the all-too-attractive message that HIV is harmless.

One of the worst cases of this involves the well known denialist Christine Maggiore, who wrote ?What if Everything You Knew About AIDS Was Wrong?.? Her daughter, Eliza Jane was never tested or received care for HIV. She died of AIDS. She was 3.

Denial=Death.
Fight for the Truth.
Fight AIDS.

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