

Against the Gay Ban

“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell: Is the Gay Ban Based on Military Necessity?” by Aaron Belkin, in *Parameters* (Summer 2003), U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Ave., Carlisle, Pa. 17013–5238.

Under the compromise “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy adopted a decade ago, U.S. military service is still off limits to known homosexuals. But four other nations have lifted their gay bans in recent years with no apparent impairment of military effectiveness. The United States should follow their example, suggests Belkin, a political scientist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and director of its Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military.

Australia and Canada in 1992, Israel in 1993, and Britain in 2000 eliminated their proscriptions, despite opposition from their armed forces and, in some cases, dire predictions about what would happen. Federal courts forced Canada’s hand, and the European Court of Human Rights, compelled Britain to act.

Researchers at Belkin’s center interviewed “every identifiable pro-gay and anti-gay expert on the policy change in each country including officers and enlisted personnel, ministry representatives, academics, veterans, politicians, and nongovernmental observers,” and also examined hundreds of documents and articles. They found that lifting the bans had little or no impact on the military services—“an absolute nonevent,” in the words of an Australian commodore. None of the 104 persons interviewed maintained that removal of the restrictions “undermined mil-

itary performance, readiness, or cohesion, led to increased difficulties in recruiting or retention, or increased the rate of HIV infection among the troops,” says Belkin.

Though more gay and lesbian soldiers revealed their sexual orientation after the bans were eliminated, most continued to avoid “outing” themselves. The Canadian military estimates that 3.5 percent of its personnel are gay or lesbian, but in 1998, six years after the ban was lifted, it received only 17 claims for medical and other benefits for homosexual partners. “Gay people have never screamed to be really, really out. They just want to be really safe from being fired,” said a lesbian Canadian soldier.

Many heterosexual soldiers object to homosexuality, Belkin notes, but there was no apparent increase in cases of sexual harassment or abuse after the bans were lifted. “In Israel, the 35 experts, soldiers, and officers we interviewed were able to recall only a handful of cases.”

Soldiers need not like one another to perform well, as many studies have shown, says Belkin. Of 194 combat soldiers in the formidable Israeli Defense Forces that he and a colleague surveyed, a fifth said they knew of a gay soldier in their unit. No study has found that any one of the 24 nations that now allow homosexuals to serve has suffered a decline in military performance as a result. The U.S. ban, Belkin concludes, is not needed for military effectiveness.

ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

African Prospects

“Low Investment Is Not the Constraint on African Development” by Shantayanan Devarajan, William R. Easterly, and Howard Pack, in *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (April 2003) University of Chicago, Judd Hall, 5835 S. Kimbark Ave., Ste. 318, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

Experts have long argued that the key to fixing Africa’s economic woes is to increase public and private investment. It’s true that during the period from 1960 to 1994, African countries invested just 9.6 percent of their gross do-

mestic product (GDP), significantly less than the 15.6 percent average among other developing countries worldwide. But the authors of this study—Devarajan with the World Bank, Easterly with New York University and the