Hello patients,

Dr Hartman here again with another foray into the matrix of psycho-sexual verities in the 90s. To begin this month I'd like to thank all the AIDS educators who've written to me in recent weeks.

My surgery has been a wash with piles of your tear-stained letters. It seems that my descriptions of the difficulties you face, as you try to spread the Condom Gospel to the heathen and hostile Australian public, have really uncovered a deep pool of unmet psychosexual need.

One particular letter has haunted me for days. It was written by an agitated educator who insisted that running AIDS workshops for punch drunk prison officers or sexually challenged CWA ladies is an absolute breeze, compared to a section of the community that has become her professional nightmare.

According to this lass, the most difficult training session to handle is a group of inexperienced nurses who consider themselves to be down-to-earth, open minded and tolerant. "Now that's when you've got real problems!" my educator wrote. "Sure," the nurses say, "homosexuality is okay. If men have anal sex, it's their own business."

But, according to my educator, what these nurses are really thinking is this: "Homosexuality and anal sex are okay - so long as I don't have to think about it, teach about it, or seriously discuss it in any way at all.

This is what is really going on in the minds of many liberal sounding professionals, and it translates into a difficult job when you've been asked to bring about 'attitudinal change', or so my AIDS educator correspondent claims.

But I don't want to end this series of consultations about the dilemmas of AIDS educators on such a dismal note. I want to leave you with a positive vision of a Golden Future. A future when an educator can go into a country men's prison for a workshop with a group of cynical and hostile prison officers and, at the end of a two-hour session, one officer will turn to the others and say, "Mates, there's something I have to tell you: I'm gay and I'm HIV positive, and we've been sharing everything in the tea room for three years."

And the officers will look at him and say, "That's okay. We understand. So long as we use condoms and stop sharing needles, everything should be all right. Thanks for sharing that with us." In this beautiful Vision for the Future, my AIDS educator patient will be sent into an outer suburban high school to work with a mixed group of 14 and 15 year olds from what is euphemistically referred to as 'disadvantaged backgrounds'. And after 55 minutes of 'enlightened action learning exercises designed to promote the open negotiation of power in a sexual context', the boys will suddenly turn to the girls and say, "Gee, I never really understood how girls felt before! I'll never call a girl a slut again. In fact, I'll admire girls who carry condoms and want me to use them as part of our gentle and loving foreplay."

And another boy will say, "I'd be delighted now if I discovered that my best friend is gay. And I wouldn't be frightened if I found out he fancied me. In fact, I'd be flattered, and I might even give it a go, with a condom and water-based lubricant, of course!" But patients, before I go, I'd just like to mention a fascinating little social occasion I attended recently. It was a party to mark the second anniversary of that quaint propaganda publishing venture, the Left Book Club. (I attended in my professional capacity as Psychosexual Therapist to the Left.)

The Club was also celebrating the publication of their fourth book, Technocratic Dreaming of Very Fast Trains and Japanese Designer Cities. What a catchy title! Soon every member of the Aussie working class will have just three books on their shelves - the street directory, the Bible and Technocratic Dreaming of Very Fast Trains and Japanese Designer Cities.

As I looked around the room that night, I was amazed to see just how many of my patients were there, most of them aging ex-commies from my New Left Party Clinic. Quite frankly, the group in the room that night gave the term Grey Power a whole new meaning.

And then it hit me, what Father Laurie Aarons is running there is not a Left Book Club at all, it's really one of the most innovative job creation schemes for retirees and pensioners that this country has ever seen! It's actually the Laurie Aarons Day Care Centre, a place where you can meet people, make friends and then, of course, try to sell books - an activity which gives you a sense of purpose every little minute of the day.

I understand there are people who work for the Left Book Club who never go anywhere without a bundle of books and leaflets tucked in their handbag or briefcase. One of these Club supporters recently got a parking ticket outside the Trades Hall in Sydney while she was dropping in to pick up another box of books. But she didn't get angry. She just sold the parking officer a copy of The Third Wave: Australia and Asian Capitalism. (By the way, when I refer to people who 'work' for the new Left Book Club, I should make it clear that, in the true spirit of the Left in this country, most of those 'workers' are unpaid.)

Actually, while we're on the subject of the Laurie Aarons Day Care Centre, I should point out that Father Laurie has now stepped down as director of the Left Book Club. His son Mark has accepted the job, after an election. And, of course, son Brian is pretty busy over in the New Left Party, and I understand Brother Eric is a bit of an activist as well. Let's face it, the Aarons clan has shown the Left in Australia that the word Dynasty means a whole lot more than just a television program.

See you in my clinics.

Send your problems to Dr Hartman's secretary, Julie McCrossin, care of ALR.