

THUNDER

Gay

Winter '87



Equality: Michael Sobota, left, and David Belrose, right, members of the Gays of Thunder Bay's Education Committee, address the debate surrounding an amendment to the Ontario Human Rights Code that would stop discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Winning Our Rights

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~AIDS FORUM~

PUBLIC FORUM ON AIDS



The public education forum hosted by the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay provoked a great deal of dialogue on the subject at a forum at the Waverly Resource Library on November 13.

The keynote speaker, Joan Anderson of the AIDS Committee of Toronto addressed the audience of nearly a hundred people during two sessions and described the work of ATC in helping persons with AIDS, educating the community and dealing with the myths surrounding the issue.

Lorna Holbrook of McKellar Hospital described the anguish she and fellow nurses experienced when dealing with an AIDS patient who died in 1985. They were scared she admitted and that the fear "of the unknown showed a real lack of knowledge about the disease". As a result, the discussions by Holbrook's staff indicated that persons with AIDS who are hospitalized in the future would be better treated.

Dr. Fred Ball, director of the local Ontario public health laboratory ensured health workers that it isn't as dangerous to handle the blood sample of someone infected with the AIDS virus as it is the sample of someone with hepatitis.

Michael Sobota and David Belrose outlined the efforts of ACT-B in Thunder Bay while Marg McGeever of the Health Unit spoke about the efforts of the unit in dealing with sexually transmitted diseases.

As a result of the support for the forum which was co-sponsored by Thunder Bay & District Health Co-Alition and the Thunder Bay Public Library through a grant from Health & Welfare Canada, the urgency for further public education was brought up.

The AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay (ACT-B) is considering the hosting of a forum for teenagers and parents as well as a possible workshop on safe sex practices for gay men.

BILL 7 ENSHRINES RIGHTS FOR GAYS

On Tuesday, December 16 Bill 7, protecting gays from discrimination, was passed by a voice vote in the Ontario Legislature in Toronto. The vote followed weeks of noisy, passionate and oftentimes bigotted debate on the floor of the house but had been endorsed two weeks before in a 64-45 vote. Spectators in the gallery who had been remarkably cool during the debate stood up and cheered following the vote.

The purpose of Bill 7 is to conform with the federal Charter of Rights and includes amendments to 70 Ontario laws. Originally left out in the original bill, NDP MPP Evelyn Gigantes proposed the amendment to include protections for homosexuals.

In his introduction of the bill, Attorney General Ian Scott emphasized that the bill would extend protection to gays: "simply... a matter of human rights."

NDP leader Bob Rae told the legislature near the end of the debate that sexuality is "really nobody's business." "Homosexuals have families too," he said countering charges that the bill would erode family values. He paid tribute to Ms. Gigantes for her "courage and directness" in introducing the amendment.

Of forty-five Tories only four voted in favour. Larry Grossman who backed the bill but showed a lack of leadership by allowing his party members a free vote said that the bill was "ill-timed, ill-explained, ill-managed". However he did emphasize that he had heard much "fear-mongering, fierce beyond the point of belief," during the debate and that (U.S. - style) Fallwellism "is not

welcome here".

In closing the debate Liberal Premier David Peterson asked, "would you give your child one of the speeches you heard in this house this past while" if discovering your child were gay? He was speaking to some of the MPP's who had claimed that passage of the bill would legalize pedophilia, or that it would decrease the birth rate as has happened in Quebec since the passage of similar legislation nine years before. "Part of the misinformation (regarding homosexuality) came out of this house," Peterson said.

Four of 45 Conservatives present voted in favour. Four Liberals of the 43 present voted against the amendment. Three of the 24 New Democratic Party MPP's did not show up for the vote; the 21 others voted in favour. Of the 125 members, 109 voted while 16 abstained.

Local MPP Jim Foulds who had told gay persons in 1981 that he could not support a gay lifestyle did vote in favour while Tory MPP Hickey Hennessey voted against the amendment. According to staff persons at the NDP constituency office there were many calls condemning the NDP for being the party to support gay rights as wholeheartedly as they did.

Gay activists in Thunder Bay have been urging passage of such an amendment to the Human Rights Code for several years.



R E C O R D

THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL, Thursday, November 27, 1986 3

Gay rights

Commentary: local media editorials against Bill 7 were appalling!

Lakehead Living, with characteristic understanding of the complex issues involved, titled their editorial "Bill is bad". It's content repeated the falsehoods and misinformation contained in an earlier article by Mickey Hennessy. (Lakehead Living provides Hennessy as well as other local Federal, Provincial and municipal politicians free platforms to promote themselves and their ideas). Hennessy, denying gays are discriminated against, said "Homosexuals may work where they wish and cannot be fired for their sexual preference". This was simply a lie. Gay men and women have been fired from their jobs for decades in Ontario. We have factual cases of this happening in Thunder Bay. The Lakehead Living editorial seized Hennessy's distortion that Bill 7 would give homosexuals "special rights and enshrine their lifestyle and behaviour." It does nothing of the kind. It grants the same rights against discrimination in areas of employment, housing and services that were already shared by other Ontarians. These are not special rights. The editorial didn't explain what "special rights" they were talking about. It is merely a useful phrase allowing them to adopt a mantle of righteous indignation against guys. As to the issue of enshrining a gay lifestyle, the Ontario Human Rights Code did not - and does not now after the passage of Bill 7 - enshrine anyone's lifestyle or behaviour. Behaviour that breaks the law is subject to the conditions and punishments of the criminal code of Canada. Bill 7 does not alter that fact.

Lakehead Living went on to invoke the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, restating their position that "homosexual behaviour is against Christian morality." This had nothing whatever to do with Bill 7. Ontarians live in and share a pluralistic society. Hindus, Moslems, Jews, Buddhists, Sikhs and atheists cannot be discriminated against because their lifestyle may be (and more than likely is) in conflict

Ontario Attorney General Ian Scott says proposed changes to the province's human rights code that protect homosexuals from discrimination will not disrupt the values of Ontario society. He's right. But society itself is in for a big shock.

Public opinion polls consistently show the values of a sizable majority of people include disapproval of the homosexual lifestyle. While discrimination in any form is to be discouraged, strongly-held majority opinion cannot be discounted.

Scott says extending protection to homosexuals is simply a matter of human rights. But while minorities must be respected and accommodated in a civilized society, majorities have rights, too.

The majority of people in Ontario find the gay lifestyle unnatural, even repugnant. Bill 7 ignores the majority view insofar as public hiring is concerned, prohibiting discrimination in hiring on the basis of sexual preference by all but volunteer or-

ganizations.

"This law will not permit or require pedophiles to be hired by day-care centres," Scott said. "It will not permit or require child molesters to be hired in schools."

Added Port Arthur MPP Jim Foulds, whose New Democratic Party had the sexual orientation amendment added to Bill 7, "... Big Brothers (or) Boy Scouts will still be able to discriminate in any way they like against any volunteer."

Those exceptions alone are an indication of the need for protection of public morals and sensibilities. That there are exceptions at all shows proponents of the amendment are not entirely convinced of its worth. They admit a gay lifestyle is worthy of public opposition.

If so, then why inflict it on heterosexual Ontarians other than children?

Certainly in many cases, forcing private companies and agencies of government to exclude homosexuality from hiring practices, and

landlords from denying accommodation to homosexuals, will not create problems. Many gay men and women prefer to keep their sexual preferences entirely to themselves. But others flaunt it causing annoyance and even disgust among the heterosexual community - the majority.

This legislation will force the majority to put up with the presence of homosexual workmates and neighbors with the attendant possibility of unwanted advances. If children be protected against this, why not men and women who disapprove of, or even abhor, the more liberal elements of the gay community?

On the street, men and women with traditional values can simply walk away from unwelcome association with homosexuals. But in the workplace, and in the hallways, laundry rooms, parking garages and saunas and swimming pools of apartment buildings and condominiums, they will be forced

to put up with it. Friction, and probably violence, will surely follow.

By "coming out of the closet," the gay community has forced the rest of society to recognize its scope. And Ontarians have not unduly objected to that presence, whether it be gay rights organizations, telephone hot lines, film festivals or public demonstrations. But Bill 7 forces most Ontarians to work and live alongside homosexuals, no matter the extent to which they wish to display or promote their lifestyle.

It might well go some way to forcing recognition of homosexuals and their right to live in this society. But it will never force public acceptance of what most see as deviant behavior, legitimate though it may be in a medical sense.

Bill 7 ignores the unwritten rule of a free society which now almost universally allows anyone to do what they want, within reason and the law, as long as it doesn't intrude on others' lives.

with Christian morality. To suggest gays can be discriminated against because we threaten Christian morality may be grounds for religious discrimination in reverse.

The Chronicle-Journal, in a lengthy two column editorial, attempted a loftier tone but repeated much of the same misinformation and distortions. Emboldened with their own righteousness, they came to the crux of the issue by saying Bill 7 would force workers and neighbors "to put up with ...unwelcome association with homosexuals". This is absolutely correct. In areas of employment, housing and public services, discrimination would not be allowed. And then the Chronicle Journal added: "Friction, and probably violence, will surely follow." Gee, folks, you better not pass this bill or violence will surely follow. (emphasis added). What an inflammatory remark! And no justification either in fact or logic was offered in support of that statement. The truth is something altogether different: Quebec has had in place similar legislation for almost a decade. Friction and violence have not "surely followed". As well, many municipal governments in Ontario have had similar bans against discrimination passed by their local by-laws for areas under their jurisdiction. The result has been largely that people get along with each other. It is shameful and a disgrace that responsible journalists repeat this lie.

In the end, what was being attacked and condemned by the local editorials was homosexuality itself. Intolerance, bigotry and hatred were openly being utilized to encourage fear and loathing of homosexuals on an unprecedented public scale.

This editorializing demanded a response and resulted in GTB's Education Committee holding the first public press conference, held in GTB's office, in history. All of the media sent representatives, and to their credit, our statements were reported fairly and accurately in the days following the event.

Bill is bad

Page 4, Lakehead Living, Wednesday, November 26, 1986

Congratulations and thanks to Fort William MPP Mickey Hennessy for taking a controversial stand on a very controversial issue -- the provincial government's proposed Bill 7.

Hennessy, who has said he will vote against the bill, has also said the Ontario Human Rights Code amendment would give special rights to homosexuals, over and above the rights of everybody else in the province.

The government had the right idea -- discrimination against homosexuals certainly exists in Ontario and

elsewhere -- but Premier David Peterson and his friends in the NDP who are supporting the bill are going about it all wrong.

The Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, as the MPP said, is also opposed to the amendment because it believes homosexual behaviour is against Christian morality. That may be true, but the real point here is the matter of minority special rights.

To grant special rights to any group, including homosexuals, is a bad idea. The government should admit it made a mistake and go back to the drawing board.

Video Fest?



There have been many films released with a "gay theme" and one of 1986's best has to be "My Beautiful Laundrette" by British filmmaker Stephen Frears. The film is an incisive look at what it's like to be poor and unemployed in Margaret Thatcher's London. The two central characters are gay and this is treated with a casual, almost indifferent approach, while at the same time candor and passion. It's not without its bumps and bigotry, but is nonetheless well worth seeing. "My Beautiful Laundrette" as well as many other commercial films with gay themes and/or content are available on video tape in Thunder Bay. Check your local video outlet. There is talk of selecting some of the best of these and organizing a "gay themed video festival" locally. Anyone interested?

EDUCATION

Since its inception in 1980 the Education Committee of Gays of Thunder Bay has been actively promoting the need for tolerance and for protections from discrimination in the Human Rights Code. During the debate on Bill 7 Michael Sobota and David Belrose held a press conference to support the bill's passage. Mickey Hennessy, Fort William MPP, had written in a November issue of Lakehead Living that gays are already protected. At the press conference which was attended by all media in Thunder Bay it was pointed out that Hennessy had lied on the floor of the house by claiming he had received no letters or calls of support for the amendment. In fact, David Belrose held up a copy of a letter thanking him for his own letter of support for the bill. Hennessy did say that he had received one anonymous letter but had been overwhelmed by the response against the bill's passage.

Roman Catholic Bishop O'Hara told a CIX interviewer after the bill's passage that there were no examples of discrimination against gays in Ontario. Shortly after, CIX interviewed Doug Broman who had lost a job in 1979 because he was a homosexual and had been printing Thunder Gay at the time.

Partners sought

GIB's Ad Hoc Committee looking into the permanent establishment of a Club/Lounge for members of the gay community has begun detailing its proposals. Looking for investors to contribute an amount of \$300 or more the committee hopes to establish a limited partnership with the partners coming under the control of the Limited Partnership Act of Ontario.

The committee points out that many gay men and lesbians leave the area because of a lack of gay options. The campaign they say is an effort to promote an "environment conducive to being gay in Thunder Bay".

Gays of Thunder Bay would be a general partner and individuals would be legally liable only to the amount of their contribution.

Committee members feel confident that the venture would turn a profit and that investors would in turn see a return on their monies.

Further information should be directed to Gays of Thunder Bay Ad Hoc Committee.

The committee has placed an advertisement in the January issue of the Body Politic soliciting investments.

FLAUNTING IT

by

Michael Sobota

THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS - Part I

This is the story of a kind and generous man who lived and worked in Thunder Bay as an openly gay person.

I first met Wayne Maxwell at a house party about four years ago in the East End. It was one of those hot summer gatherings that was slow to get started but quickens its pace by midnight and is throbbing with nearly wall to wall bodies by 1:00. This particular evening the house in question was so full, the gathering spilled out onto a large front porch, the steps and even the lawn around the sides of the building. On this porch I met someone who shared some smoke, a glass, a hug and wonderful conversation. He was introduced to me by a mutual woman friend, and from that meeting I have always liked and respected Wayne Maxwell.

On the night of December 21 or the early morning of December 22, 1985, Wayne Maxwell was murdered in his apartment. At the time, he was living alone. He was 35.

On the early morning of December 22, Tony Duncan was charged with Wayne's murder and taken into custody. He remained in jail for over a year until his trial for murder which occurred last January, 1987.

I attended the trial daily for more than a week. Duncan was tried by a jury of seven women and five men. After the conclusion of the trial the jury deliberated for 12 hours over two days before finding Duncan not guilty. Whoever killed Wayne Maxwell got away with it. For now.

This was the first murder trial I ever attended. I was surprised how sparsely it was attended. Members of Wayne's family were there every day. On some days there were clusters of young people in attendance; on others witnesses who had completed their testimony sat quietly listening. On most

days the courtroom was nearly empty. Present daily, though not always on time and not always for the full sessions, was a journalist covering the story for the Chronicle-Journal. He erred in what he reported in the paper and he consistently chose to report evidence in a provocative and cheap manner.

As presented during the trial, the crown did not have a solid case against Tony Duncan. There were wide gaps in the evidence, conclusions inferred rather than grounded in fact, opportunities for clarification passed over either by sloppiness, carelessness or design.

The case for the defense stretched common sense and rational belief. It didn't matter, in the end. The crown had bungled the prosecution.

At the heart of this murder, I believe, is the fact that Wayne was gay. And that he was a gentle, kind and generous man. Tony Duncan, and some of his acquaintances in Thunder Bay, didn't have any trouble referring to Wayne as a faggot.

I believe calling us faggots is like calling black people niggers. It is a word of incredible resonance: hatred, bigotry, fear, insecurity. It's use was not questioned or the psychology behind it explored during the trial.

In succeeding parts to this story I will discuss specific aspects of the trial, contradictions in sworn testimony and aspects of the evidence presented. I'll look at Crown prosecutor Alexandre Hardiejowski and Defense counsel Alfred Petrone and Celina Reitburger. I'll also analyze the role of the media in covering the case. I am also looking for more information, particularly the opportunity to talk with other people who knew Wayne and are concerned about what has happened. Please contact me. You are promised my complete confidentiality.

BACK to SCHOOL

Spreading the word in local classrooms

As we walked toward the entrance three boys leaning against a battered Datsun shouted, "faggots!" Everyone in the school had heard we were coming. That's not unusual we supposed: three faggots flaunting their homosexuality in front of a grade eleven class at Westgate High School most probably would be considered news.

This was our third visit to a classroom this school year - are we the chi-chi group of the season? Perhaps due to the publicity surrounding AIDS or maybe because of the noise generated by the Bill 7 debate, gays and lesbians are being invited to more schools than ever before. They are usually Man In Society type classes with students picking a "controversial" topic such as abortion, or hot ones like drug abuse and every now and then a student or group of students pick "homosexuality". Following researching and the preparation of a presentation, our real live gays get up and respond or just answer questions.

Michael Sobota and Doug Broman, two members of the Education Committee have attended all three and were accompanied by a lesbian, Shelli, to the latest class. Like the others, she was "higher than a kite" when the class was done.

"When did you know you were gay?" a young woman asks. We tell them that some of us always knew or didn't really come to terms with it until later in life.

"Don't you like women?" Of course we like women - we just prefer to become romantically involved with other men - or in Shelli's case, a woman.

Michael always starts our part of the presentation by saying that questions should be "in good taste". A few uncomfortable snickers and some shuffling from obviously

uncomfortable boys in the back takes place as they struggle with the sight of the openly gay people smiling down on them.

There are a lot of questions about AIDS and we try to put it into perspective: it's not a gay issue but rather a public health issue.

"What about your parents? Do they know? How did they react?" We tell them how each of our families have either reacted to the news or might still be ignorant of our orientations. "But don't you want kids?" Sure. Some of us do have kids and still others have resigned themselves to never having them and that there are those who are damn glad they'll not be forced to rear children. "Will children of gay parents become gay?" Not likely - statistics show that kids raised by gays are just as likely to become heterosexual as "normal" parents' children.

"Would you want your own children to be gay?" A pause. Well, no. Honestly speaking, who would want their children to go through the angst, the pressures and the bullhooey that gays and lesbians endure?

The teachers are grateful; the students who did the project are very thankful; some of the restless boys in the back have relaxed enough so that as we describe the coming out process, or the agony of dealing with religion or the hard times we had in school and other topics they have learned a valuable lesson. The lesson of tolerance; that we are just as normal as they.

Best of all, there might have been some young man or woman sitting there talking about the feelings they have. And as we close he or she senses they are not alone and that being gay is quite all right. We have planted a seed.