

GAYS AND LESBIANS AGAINST THE RIGHT EVERYWHERE (GLARE)

"WE WANT OUR RIGHTS AND WE DON'T CARE HOW , WE WANT OUR LIBERATION NOW!"

GLARE Brief to the Standing Committee on Resource Development hearings on the Human Rights Code.

September 16th, 1981

To be a lesbian or gay man in Ontario is not always a pretty story. While our love for members of the same sex brings us much joy, the social institutions and pressures which constantly deny our very existence can bring us much pain and despair.

When we look for housing we face discrimination or arbitrary evictions when we find it. In our jobs we face the ever-present possibility of being fired simply because of our sexual orientation . John Damien, Barbara Thornborrow, Lyn Macdonald (London, 1978), Charles Lafrenie (Collingwood, 1979), Jim Davies (Windsor, 1979), and Brian Burch (Kingston, 1980), were all fired from their places of employment and the list could go on and on. At work we must bear the brunt of anti-gay and anti-lesbian remarks, often hiding who we really are from our fellow workers. To be lesbian or gay in our society is to often live our lives in the closet forced to constantly deny who we are because of hostile social pressure.

Many anti-gay laws remain on the books. Recently we have witnessed the use by the police of the bawdy house laws (sanctioned by government ministers) to terrorize the gay community in Toronto. The largest mass arrests since the War Measures Act in 1970 have taken place in our city. The police, with apparent government backing seem determined to brand our love for each other as a criminal act. Many of us are being dragged through the courts in costly legal battles which are draining the resources of our community. When lesbians and gay men are attacked by queerbashers (which seems to be a more and more frequent occurrence ) we rarely get any help from the police. Presumably they are too busy entrapping gay men on various 'offences', harassing us on the streets, or planning their next raid on our community.

The police campaign against us, and the emergence of right wing anti-lesbian, anti-gay groups has given a green light to gangs of queerbashers who roam our neighborhoods viciously attacking us. Last June 20th the 'boys in blue' attacked lesbian and gay demonstrators and not the queerbashers who were attacking the crowd. Lesbians on the streets face harassment from straight men, and the Rape Crisis Centre has reported an increase in assaults and rapes against women who are attacked because they are seen to be lesbians.

Lesbians even more than gay men face a daily denial of their lives as women loving women. As well lesbians face all the forms of discrimination that all women face. In a situation where men continue to earn far more than women it is often very difficult for women to survive independently of a male income. This lack of economic independence hampers many lesbians ability to come out publically, to affirm their pride as lesbians and to live their lives openly as lesbians. Heterosexual assumptions pervade all government legislation (for example in housing, welfare or family policy) buttressing heterosexuality as the only 'proper' role for women.

The media generally carries only negative images of us. The school



system generally ignores the problems of lesbian and gay students who are grappling with their emerging sexual identities, and assumes that all students must be straight. Lesbian and gay students face severe alienation, ostracism, and violence.

The list of injustices we face in our daily lives could go on and on. We refer you to the excellent Coalition for Gay Rights In Ontario (CGRO) brief for further details.

It is in this context that we demand implementation of the recommendation of the "Life Together" report which proposed the addition of sexual orientation protection to the Human Rights Code. This amendment would not eliminate all the injustices we face overnight, but would be a beginning by clearly stating that lesbians and gay men are legitimate minority groups which should not be discriminated against. We could use such a position to defend ourselves from the many abuses we face in the present setup. For example we could use such a change to demand that the police start to treat us as a legitimate group and not as a class of criminals (see the Right to Privacy Committee brief). The Metro Police Association is opposed to the inclusion of sexual orientation protection precisely because they don't want us to have the same rights as other people. Paul Walter president of the Police Association stated that:

The majority of the members of the Metro Toronto Police Association have grave concerns about recognizing homosexuals as a legitimate minority group with status under human rights legislation.

(Globe and Mail, August 30th, 1981)

In the context of a police campaign against our rights it is imperative that sexual orientation protection be added to the human rights code.

It is also essential that the sexual orientation clause cover all lesbians and gay men, including those who are on the front lines of extreme right wing attack like teachers and child-care workers. Lesbians and gay men have just as much right to work in these occupations as straight people. The myths that gays are 'child molesters' has been proven to be false in all research (see the attached GLARE "Lesbian/Gay Information Sheet") on this question. Open lesbian and gay teachers in the school system would aid in providing valuable support for lesbian and gay students. Heterosexuality is assumed to be a compulsory social norm and it is important that there be open lesbians and gay men to present an alternative for those who need one.

The demand for sexual orientation protection is widely supported by religious, political, civil liberties, community and cultural groups. Many organizations of working people strongly support the inclusion of sexual orientation including the Metro Labour Council, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Canadian Union of Public Employees-Ontario Division, the Ontario Federation of Labour, and the Canadian Labour Congress. Many union locals have negotiated sexual orientation protection as part of their contracts.

If this commission and this government don't support sexual orientation protection (which with the Tory majority is virtually assured), they are objectively lining up with the most extreme right wing groups in the province. You will be feeding into and perpetuating the hate campaign against lesbians and gay men, feminists and other minority



groups. You will be hearing tomorrow from Stew Newton and his organization "Positive Parents", which has been responsible for spewing hate literature against lesbians, gay men, and supportive politicians all over our city. Next week you will be hearing from Ron Marr of the so-called "Pro-Family Coalition" and "Canadians for Family and Freedom", two other right wing groups. In July these groups, and the right wing of the Metro Tory party got together to form a new right coalition. They were addressed by Howard Phillips, national director of the US Conservative Caucus and one of the leading lights of the "Moral Majority" organization in the USA (see the Toronto Star, July 19th, 1981). These groups are dedicated to a reactionary social programme, and are against women's rights, gay rights, minorities, democracy and freedom. Lets remember that at a Toronto Board of Education meeting September 15th 1980 one of these alleged "Christians" told a young gay man :

IF YOU WERE MY SON I'D HAVE DROWNED YOU AT BIRTH

If the government and the Tory party refuse to move on this issue, the next time a young lesbian or gay man out of despair or isolation takes their own life, or when the police eventually beat one of us to death, or gun one of us down (as they have done with blacks like Albert Johnson) -- the blood will be on your hands as well, and we will hold you accountable.

GLARE is not just concerned with the issue of sexual orientation. Lesbians and gay men are interested in a just society for everyone. We support the changes that would begin to redress the injustices that the physically disabled have been forced to face, and the *women* measures that would begin to combat the sexual harassment that *1*face at work. We would urge that the discrimination against single mothers through exclusion from adult only accomadation be ended. We feel that the Human Rights Commission needs to be able to respond not only to individual complaints, but must also be able to initiate the redress of institution wide forms of discrimination such as exists in rental accomadation and in employment agencies. The problem of the backlog of cases because of underfunding and understaffing must be delt with.

In the longer term the human rights commission must be transformed from a bureaucratic government appointed and controlled apparatus into a body where there is more input and control from the different minority communities who actually suffer discrimination, and from organizations like the women's liberation movement, and the trade unions. The Human Rights Commission must become a body that is useful to us in the context of our daily battles against discrimination and prejudice.

Equality doesn't just exist in the abstract or in a human rights code. It has to exist in the conditions of our everyday life. The addition of sex and race to the code have not eliminated sexism or racism from our society. Similarly the addition of sexual orientation will not eliminate heterosexism (the socially enforced norm that says heterosexuality is the only 'natural' and 'healthy' way of life). Legal, social and economic changes must also take place as well to create the conditions for equality between blacks and whites, women and men, and straight people and lesbians and gay men.



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Sexual orientation protection is essential but we also need other changes such as the following:

- We need the repeal of all anti-gay laws, including the bawdy house laws which are presently being used to justify mass arrests. The police campaign against our community must be ended. An independent inquiry into the bath raids must be launched. There should be freedom for all non-coercive, consensual sexuality.
- The government should support other lifestyles than just the traditional heterosexual family unit in it's welfare, housing and other policies. The government must move towards economic independence for women, so lesbians will be able to come out and express their pride in being lesbians more freely. This will require support for equal pay for work of equal value, and affirmative action for women and minorities.
- Educational campaigns with the input of the lesbian and gay movements must be launched against bigotry and heterosexism in the schools and through the mass media.

Given the Tory domination of Queen's Park it will be extremely unlikely that we will get badly needed changes in the areas of sexual orientation, police reform, or policies combatting sexism and racism by playing by the rules of the system.

We will continue to organize for our rights, and to forge alliances with others disadvantaged in the present setup. We will see you at the next rally on your doorsteps.



GLARE is a group of lesbians and gay men dedicated to fighting the anti-lesbian and anti-gay attacks of the Right through educational work and cultural activities to affirm the pride of our communities. We oppose the sexism and racism of the Right, particularly the recent arrival of the Ku Klux Klan — which combines a heavy dose of anti-gay bigotry with its racism. For further information contact GLARE at Box 793, Station Q, Toronto, Ontario M4T 2N7.