

Commission passes equality ruling

by Beth Beattie

The reaction of the Halifax lesbian and gay community to last week's announcement by Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission to protect homosexuals from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was mixed.

Chris Aucoin, of the Gay and Lesbian Association of Nova Scotia (GALA), said "we are pleased but not satisfied."

In an unexpected move, the Commission unanimously passed a motion, effective immediately, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. In all places where the Human Rights

Act of Nova Scotia refers to sex as prohibited grounds for discrimination it will also mean sexual orientation.

There are limitations to the new interpretation of the act. It is not law, but a guideline by which the Commission will operate. "Interpretations can change at the discretion of the Commission, and until this interpretation is subjected to testing in the courts the lesbian and gay community will have no assurance of its legal strength, even as an interim measure" said Aucoin.

The lesbian and gay community is pleased with the proactive

position of the Commission, but there is a belief this one gesture does not sufficiently provide equal rights for lesbians and gays in Nova Scotia.

"Gays and lesbians will not be guaranteed human rights protection until that protection is explicitly included in the Human Rights Act of Nova Scotia" said Aucoin. Aucoin is optimistic that amendments to the Act will be brought forth during the next sitting of the provincial legislature. Attorney General Tom McInnis has tried unsuccessfully for two years to gain approval of the Tory Caucus to include sexual orientation in the Human Rights Act.

The new interpretation can be expected to directly affect Dalhousie, where it is estimated that 10-15 percent of the community is homosexual.

Julie Lewis, President of Gays and Lesbians at Dalhousie (GLAD), is encouraged but cautious of the Commission's move. Lewis warns the announcement

may result in increased homophobia in the community as the issue of homosexual rights is raised.

Lewis hopes there will be a positive reaction on campus, "Dalhousie is a centre for learning and higher education, and people are less likely to discriminate on the basis of irrelevant personal characteristics" she said.

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ber where you are" she said. "You may think you're in Nova Scotia, but you're in Micmac territory."

The second speaker, Dwight Dorey, Vice President of the Native Council of Nova Scotia, addressed issues of sovereignty for native people. "If sovereignty association can be negotiated, if it can be discussed and implemented for Quebec, it can bloody well be done for aboriginal people," he said.

The Committee in Solidarity with Native Peoples was created only four days before the protest by a small group of individuals who had organized two previous protests on Monday and Tuesday at the MacDonald Bridge. Toni Goree, a member of the Committee, said the group was organized because non-native Canadians wanted to express their support

for the Mohawks and other native groups.

"For the most part, before we took up an action we consulted with one or two native people" said Goree.

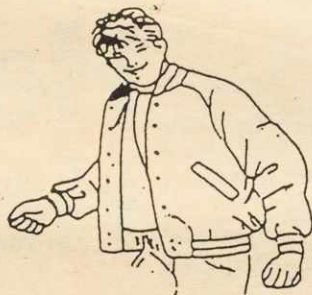
As for the turn out Goree was extremely pleased. "The march was very successful. The fact that 400 people would show up and march through the streets, I think, is a sign that they support the Mohawk people and their struggle."

Other speakers at the commons included Alexa McDonough, leader of the Nova Scotia New Democratic Party; Nakanakis, a Cree from Manitoba; Archbishop Hayes; Miguel Figueroa, Secretary of the Atlantic Committee of the Communist Party of Canada; and Mary Clancy, a federal Liberal Member of Parliament.

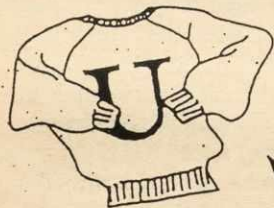
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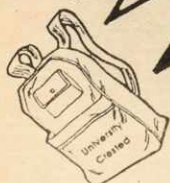
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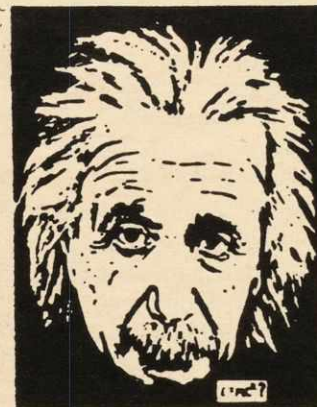
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