

# Bryant hits town, Gays hit streets

## Gay rights demonstrations biggest ever

By Paul Kellogg

It was cold outside People's Church Sunday night. Inside, in the warm, Anita Bryant of orange-juice fame was crooning out the virtues of the nuclear family to some 3,000 of the faithful. Outside, braving the cold, between five and six hundred supporters of gay rights staged a lively demonstration Bryant's against anti-gay views.

The demonstration, termed by one of the marshalls as the biggest ever in North York, attracted feminists, lesbians, gay men, a large contingent of Gay Youth some straight supporters of gay rights, and representatives of some small socialist groups.

Chanting "gay is just as good as straight" and "not the church and not the state, we must control our fate" the demonstrators formed a large picket line outside the church for two hours, as several dozen metro police and some curious residents of the Bayview-Sheppard area looked on. When the picketers periodically took up the chant "hey-hey, ho-ho, Anita Bryant must go", sections of the picketers combated the freezing cold by stomping out an impromptu jig.

The Sunday night demonstration followed a rally and march in downtown Toronto on Saturday night, attended at various times by between 900 and 1,000 plus.

Although called to coincide with Bryant's Toronto visit, the rally and demonstrations took up more issues than just Bryant's stand against gay rights. Among others, the actions demanded the immediate inclusion of sexual orientation in the Human Rights Code, child custody rights for lesbian mothers, full sexual rights for youth, and economic independence for women.

The demands of the coalition that called the actions reflected its make-up. Speakers at Saturday's rally represented groups such as Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), the Lesbian Organization of Toronto, Women's Counselling and Referral Service the Metropolitan Community Church, Wages Due Lesbians, the Gay Youth Group, and the Gay Alliance Towards Equality.

A highpoint of the rally (chaired by Pat Murphy from WAVAW) was a speech by a Lesbian mother who had just got custody of her child. To protect her anonymity, she appeared before the gathering with her head covered by a paper bag.

Another high point was the speaker from the Gay Youth Group, who pointed out that "Anita Bryant says she wants to save the children, but we are your children."

York student Gary Kinsman who was a marshal at the weekend's activities told *Excalibur* that the weekend was an unquestionable success for the gay movement. "They were the largest actions ever held in English Canada for lesbian and gay rights," he said.

"For the first time in the city, feminists, lesbian and gay men's groups were united in action against these attacks which are attacks on us all" he continued. According to Kinsman, the fact that lesbian organizations and WAVAW were some of the key builders of the actions, "will help to break down the male-stereotype of the gay movement that the media tries to portray."

A nasty sidenote to the weekend's activities was the physical harassment suffered by Kinsman and some of the other participants. On Saturday during the march up Yonge St. which followed the rally, Kinsman and a woman marshal were punched on three different occasions by a "bunch of young hooligans". The incidents, according to Kinsman, were within eyesight of the police, who refused to intervene.

On Sunday, Kinsman and York BOG member Harvey Pinder, late leaving the sight of the demonstration, were harassed, followed and Kinsman was punched by another group of "young hooligans". Kinsman again reported the incident to the police who were in the vicinity, but "they weren't very helpful" according to both Kinsman and Pinder.

Fortunately, said Kinsman, "those bigots couldn't punch very well."



A smiling Anita Bryant is whisked away from Peoples' Church under tight security last Sunday.

## Juice-peddler boosts old-fashioned family

By Paul Stuart

"The Anita Bryant Show" would have been a suitable way for North York's Peoples Church to bill last Sunday's evening service.

The anti-gay rights campaigner turned in a slickly produced piece of show-biz for the 3,000 who turned out. When this reporter succeeded in getting into the church, several dozen people who were crowded around the doors, were informed there wasn't any space inside.

Reporters and photographers stood to one side of the brightly lit stage, grinning and talking amongst themselves. A far better singer than her orange juice commercials indicate, Bryant gave the audience what they wanted: impressive performances of commercialized religious music and a tears-in-her-eyes account of how she almost bled to death when giving birth to twins.

This sort of thing is called "testimony" and is standard fare in fundamentalist churches. The aim is to create an emotional hot-house effect through confessions of guilt and tales of suffering. Bryant pulled this off extremely well and I couldn't help wondering if she might turn up on a *Mary Hartman* spin-off, should she tire of evangelism.

Resplendent in a long tartan skirt, Scots jacket and blouse, she was welcomed to town by North York Controller Bob Yuill who introduced her. Yuill said he was sure North York's Christians and Jews firmly supported Bryant's stand in favour of the family.

For the audience her appearance was clearly a big event and she could do no wrong. If she had come out and sliced oranges with a veg-o-matic they would have loved it. A man seated near me exclaimed "Hallelujah!" and "Praise the Lord!" after virtually every other word she said.

She made no mention of homosexuality. However after describing the difficult delivery of her twins she snuck in some social comment by saying she was glad she went through with it, "instead of aborting them."

When Bryant wasn't singing about being "an old fashioned wife with old fashioned kids in an old fashioned kitchen," she spoke to the audience and was inclined to ramble. When she remarked: "and I do drink a glass of Florida orange juice every day—that's not really a plug," there was no apparent connection between what she had said before, or the rest of her monologue.

She was talking a lot tougher in a January interview with *Penthouse* when she said:

"If the homosexual way of life is uplifted to the point where it is respectable and right and accepted as an alternate life-style, then it can happen for all types of people, even drunkards and prostitutes."

"If you're going to carry the human rights thing to its fullest potential, then someone who has sex with a beast can claim that he has human rights that are being denied."

It is this kind of stand which drew the crowds of believers and gay rights protester to Peoples Church on Sunday night. And it is this sort of position Controller Yuill was really supporting with his euphemistic reference to the family.

The demonstrators were on one side of the street, the Peoples Church on the other. But the rift in-between was far wider than the typically suburban stretch of Sheppard Avenue which separated them.

As I left the church, a middle-aged woman with a pro-Bryant placard said to me:

"I'd better not go in they'll think I'm queer, a homosexual. Did you hear about them picketing? O-o-h-h."

And she shuddered with hate.

## 5-faith service supports rights of gays

By Paul Stuart

While Anita Bryant put on her show in North York on Sunday, a very different kind of religious service was taking place downtown.

An interdenominational service in support of gay rights was held by the Metropolitan Community Church, which has a congregation made up of gay people. Among those present: Rabbi Mark Shapiro of Holy Blossom Temple; Bruce Mcleod, past Moderator of the United Church of Canada; a Roman Catholic priest; and an official representative of the Anglican church.

MCC's minister Brent Hawks characterized the service as an alternative to the Bryant visit to Peoples Church.

Contacted by phone at his office in Holly Blossom on Monday, Rabbi Shapiro was asked why he attended the service. He replied:

"I was there because as I understand it gay people have an aspiration to full human rights and I'm in agreement with that. And because I'm very much against the kind of interpretations Anita Bryant is making in regard to the Bible."

FROM T.O. T.O.L.A.

Rabbi Shapiro is part of a growing trend of theological opinion which supports gay rights. This is a trend which the MCC has been instrumental in developing in Christian churches. Founded in Los Angeles in 1969 by Rev. Troy Perry, the church has played an important role in overcoming stereotypes of gay people.

The church's attitude to religion is well represented in the title of Perry's autobiography *The Lord Is My Shepherd And He Knows I'm Gay*.

When I visited the MCC's Granby St. office on Friday night, I found Hawks in shirt sleeves, white collar firmly in place, working at his desk over a late supper. The church's offices did not give me the feeling of a headquarters for gay activism; the religious pictures and books rather conveyed an impression of people who are Christian first, gay second.

Hawks contends that the bible does not condemn homosexuality per se, but male prostitution and lust. Male prostitution sparked the following comment:

"If you go over to Grosvenor St. where the male prostitutes hang out, you'll find out that most of those guys aren't even gay. They just want the 20 bucks."

### NO COMMENT ON ARTICLE

He refused to comment on the controversial *Body Politic* article *Men Loving Boys Loving Men*, for fear of being quoted out of context and because the gay paper has criminal charges pending against it. He did say that he feels "the timing of the article was stupid," in view of the impending Emmanuel Jacques murder trial and anticipated moves to include sexual orientation in the Ontario human rights code.

Quebec has recently started on this inclusion, the first government in the world to do so.

Hawks sees the advent of the gay right rights movement as a phenomenon most churches weren't prepared for.

"I think the reason that most churches feel threatened is that now they have to get out and explain their beliefs. The law used to do it for them."

One of the more recent developments on Toronto's gay scene, is the formation of a religious group of gay Jewish men. Rabbi Shapiro says this group is called *Hamishtaca*, and has been meeting for at least a year.

The background literature Rev. Hawks provided me with contained a pamphlet entitled *Homosexuality: What The Bible Does...And Does Not Say*. It contained the following passage:

"Adults who expose themselves or attack little children are perversions and sexual orientation has absolutely nothing to do with it. There are perversions of a sexual nature, but *love* certainly is not one of them, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual love."



Pam Marino/Excalibur '78