

# Atlantic Gay Conference

by Glenn Walton

**"Building a Community Spirit: Atlantic Gay and Lesbian Conference, November 9-11."** This harmless looking notice appeared recently on noticeboards throughout the province. Many were ripped down (including at Dal) by upset (and presumably heterosexual) individuals. Some of these self-appointed offenders of freedom of expression felt moved to scribble retaliatory messages to the conference. One of them read "Christ has condemned and destroyed your kind. Read your Bible, scum of the Earth, molesters of innocent children—agents of Satan, cursed by God and damned forever." Clyde Richardson of the **Gay Alliance for Equality** opened last weekend's conference by letting this notice sail through the air and onto the floor, where it belonged. Religion? Well, the Gae has plenty of that, and lots more. Consider:

The GAE, a non-profit organization operating out of

headquarters at the Turret on Barrington St. at present counts a 1,000 plus membership and provides a wide variety of services to local gays: regular religious and political meetings, a civil rights committee, films, dinners, a phone line (429-4294) and yes, a disco, recently outfitted with a new light show that had its spectacular debut during the final act of Sunday's conference-closing Cabaret. The place, if the feeling generated at the three day conference is any indication, is thriving.

It wasn't easy in the beginning. The organization's founding in 1972 was plagued by financial, organizational and legal difficulties, and the GAE was 'on ice' for a year until Robin Metcalfe and a few others revived it in 1975. It has grown because it fills a real need for gays in the city and throughout the Atlantic provinces to meet and develop a sense of belonging to a community, a sense often denied them by a hostile 'straight'

world. If the problems from outside weren't enough, there was dissention in the ranks. "We spent 3 hours debating on what colors the tiles in the men's washroom should be," Richardson related. Well, it's the only home they've got.

All is not rosy for Halifax gays, despite the GAE's success. There is talk about moving from its present location because of lease problems, and there is occasional harassment from the community. Recently there was a bomb threat on the Turret, and crank calls are regular fare on the Gayline. A recent fire in the stairwell may have been the work of arsonists: at the time of the blaze there were over 100 people at the club, who trooped down the fire-escape onto the street, while the fire was doused. Exhibiting a dauntless nonchalance in the face of what, after all, may very well have been a mini-holocaust, the gays were back on the dance-floor in half an hour, boogying to Dolly Parton's disco hit

**Burning.**

More serious are the periodic attacks on gays at the nearby cruising area, the Triangle, which have resulted in near deaths in the past. As the police aren't cooperative, there is reluctant talk about organizing a rescue squad. "We've got members who aren't to be fooled with" a spokesman says, "and those queer bashers aren't going to savor the sight of a gang of irate faggots and dykes descending on them. Usually, though, whenever a few of us do get together, they just run away."

All of this seemed far away at the weekend conference. Its theme '**Developing a Community Spirit**' was interpreted as a challenge to help other groups get started up in the Maritimes. Fredericton, New Brunswick was well represented by several enthusiastic organizers, and plans to establish an organization there are well under way. "The conference has been very valuable to us" one of them

said, and **FLAGS** (Fredericton Lesbians and Gays) appears ready to go. "We need more women" he admitted, "otherwise we'll have to drop the 'L.'" Some of the New Brunswickers got a taste of the volunteer work that the GAE depends upon, serving gamely as waiters during the tumultuous show on Sunday evening. "It's been a great conference!" was their verdict.

Films and workshops, book and craft sales rounded out the official part of the conference. On Sunday morning 2 representatives from the GAE, including one former viceperson, laid a wreath at the Remembrance Day ceremonies, in honour of all the gay service people who died in Canada's wars. In many ways it was a fitting gesture, exhibiting the gay community's integration into society. What it lacks is recognition of that status, and the Halifax Herald ignored the gesture in its reporting.

## Women's Rights Brief presented to MPHEC

by Pam Berman

The need to alleviate the financial barriers that mature women face in trying to obtain post-secondary educational opportunities, was stressed in a brief presented to the Study Committee on Financial Aid to Maritime Students. In the brief, representatives of the Canadian Committee on Learning Opportunities for Women (CLOW) emphasized the necessity for improved funding of education for women financially unable to attend university.

The CLOW is a national organization that has as its main objective the extension of studies and training opportunities for women who are financially disadvantaged.

June Eaton, an Education Resources Assistant, working at Mount St. Vincent, presented the brief and said three main points were covered in the presentation to the Study Committee.

The first main recommendation was to extend the loan program to cover part-time students. Several groups

were making this suggestion but the CLOW was the only organization making the suggestion on behalf of women.

"Most returning mature part-time students are women", Ms Eaton said.

Family and job responsibilities usually force adults to continue their education on a part-time basis so loans in this area are very important. Also, a survey done by the CLOW indicates that women are reluctant to use family income for their education.

The second point concerned married women and the inclusion of their spouse's income when their loan applications are being considered. Legally neither spouse has access to each other's money and in some cases the availability of family funds is non-existent depending on the attitudes concerning the furthering of education. Many women also feel uneasy about using the family income for their own education, making the regulation of basing need on

the income of both spouses unfair.

The Study Committee found problems with this idea saying higher income families might have an advantage over more disadvantaged homes. It was then suggested that to clarify married situations these cases should go before the same review board that single students use when the parent either refuses or is unable to support their education.

Eaton also said the criteria eligibility should be reorganized in order to allow the border line applicants to get a just chance at advancing their education.

The other major concern of the CLOW was the retraining of women presently in the welfare system who may have the ability and desire to go beyond the low income jobs that the Manpower courses leave them in. Mechanisms are required to detect these abilities and encourage possible candidates for university. Currently there does not exist such a structure to test or screen people for possible advancement.

Statistics show that one in five women in the labour force

are single, widowed, divorced or separated and that 45.3 percent of all female headed families are earning less than \$5000. This low average income necessitates financial aid for any woman who wants to continue her education and establish a better life for herself and her family.

If women are ever to break out of the low income brackets that most are trapped in, financial assistance is needed not just for tuition and materials but for day care expenses and the loss in income suffered when they return to classes full-time or even part-time in some instances.

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