

EDITORIAL

Crackdown on gays violates human rights

Last Thursday night in Toronto, 150 policemen armed with crowbars and sledgehammers stormed a number of bathhouses patronized by homosexuals and, shouting obscenities, smashed down cubicle doors, broke windows, and ripped pictures from the walls. During the raid, in which almost 300 people were arrested, one of the policemen was heard to say 'Too bad these showers aren't connected up to gas.' Charges were laid against the owners for running a 'common bawdy house', and in an unusual action, the patrons were charged, although it is not the practice of the Toronto police to do so when heterosexual bawdy houses are raided.

The police action was six months in the planning. Perhaps spurred on by the

denied custody of their children, made the object of RCMP special files, simply for being gay. John Damien, the object of a long legal struggle, has been fighting for years to get a job back that he lost for the same reason. These and other cases, in light of last week's raids, make it clear that the Ontario government is out to 'get' the gays. The effects of police raids on bathhouses, newspapers, and private lives range far beyond the problems created in the personal and public lives of the victims. When people know they are liable to Gestapo treatment, censorship and humiliation in the courts, many of them will be less likely to come out and fight for their rights as Canadian citizens and taxpayers.

Police raids show need for specific protection of sexual minorities

recent defeat in municipal elections of progressive mayor John Sewell and gay candidate George Hislop, both of whom had supported prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the city, the police moved in to stop what is clearly legal, i.e., the conduct of consenting adults in private. It is also debatable whether the term 'bawdy house' should be applied to an establishment where no money is exchanged between partners. The police doubtless term their actions a 'clean up' or 'a demonstration of law and order.' Other phrases spring to our minds: 'flagrant violation of human rights', 'suppression of minorities', 'Nazi tactics'.

That such a raid happened here in smug old Canada should come as no real surprise to anyone who has followed the systematic harassment of gays over the past few years, particularly in Ontario. Most notable is the Body Politic case, in which the respected gay newspaper has been dragged through over two years of expensive court cases, even after winning its initial obscenity trial. In an unusual action the government appealed the 'not guilty' verdict, and the paper continues to suffer under the financial burden of defending itself. The strategy of the Attorney General of Ontario seems to be to put such a financial strain on the paper as to prevent its further publishing. Gays are thrown out of the armed forces,

Unavoidably, one must speculate whether Conservative Premier William Davis, who has just called a provincial election, is involved in the raids, which he must know about. Perhaps the conventional wisdom of P.C. organizers is that political hay is to be made out of harassing a minority unpopular with large numbers of voters. If so, it can only be hoped that such ignominious plans backfire. What the *Globe and Mail* has called 'an ugly action' has been rejected even by the fundamentalist Rev. Campbell, leader of Renaissance International, an anti-gay group, as 'distasteful.' Apparently the hysteria whipped up by this right-wing group is too much even for its own members.

The raids raise some fundamental questions about the nature of Canadian society. One of the lessons of sociology is surely that, given the chance, the majority will suppress dissident minorities. When there is also a premeditated campaign of oppression, the results can be twofold. Reactive violence (in Toronto there was an impromptu demonstration of 1,500 angry people who marched on police headquarters) will result in further confrontations and even more repression, or society will take steps to ensure that all citizens have equal rights under the law, and not insist that some are more equal than others. We suggest that Canada follow the second course.



NEWS ITEM: IN A CRACKDOWN ON HOMOSEXUALS 150 TORONTO POLICEMEN CONDUCTED RAIDS RESULTING IN OVER 300 ARRESTS

Unfortunately Canada has dragged its feet on human rights. According to a 1977 Gallup poll a majority of Canadians support the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, but only Quebec has seen fit to do so. This week's raids must be illustration, enough of the need for **specific** protection of sexual minorities. As long as the law is sufficiently vague on minority rights, the forces of reaction (and one must use such dramatic phrases when sledgehammers and crowbars are unnecessarily used) will exploit minorities. In the 60's it was deemed necessary in the U.S. to enact legislation specifically for the protection of black civil rights, and at present the debate for Equal Rights for Women continues for a similar reason.

Ironically, or perhaps quite deliberately, the raids in Toronto followed almost directly on the heels of the defeat of NDP MP Svend Robinson's amendment to the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedom, which would have prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the Canadian Constitution. The Ontario police clearly feel justified in their version of Kristallnacht, but Canadians interested in human rights can only react with disgust. If the Ontario government thinks that bashing a minority over the head is going to make it go away, it knows nothing. Worse, it has learned nothing.

the Dalhousie Gazette

The Dalhousie Gazette, Canada's oldest college newspaper, is the weekly publication of the Dalhousie Student union members, and is a founding member of Canadian University Press.

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The deadline for articles and letters-to-the-editor is noon on Monday. No unsigned material will be accepted, but anonymity may be granted on request. Letters should not exceed 500 words and must be typed on a 64-character line and double spaced. Local Advertising is handled by DAL-ADS — the advertising department of Dalhousie Student Union: Tel. 424-6532. Ad copy must be submitted by the Friday preceding publication.

Our office is located on the third floor of the Dalhousie Student Union Building. Our mailing address is the Dalhousie Gazette, Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S. You can reach us by telephone at (902) 424-2507.

The subscription rate is \$10. per year (26 issues) and our ISSN number is 0011-5819.

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