

Media: gross indecency

by Robin Metcalfe

In the past two weeks, eight men have been arrested in Halifax on the charge of "gross indecency" (Section 157 of the Criminal Code). The charges arise from police surveillance of the public washroom in Woolco at Scotia Square from February 15-18. Gross indecency refers to any sexual act between consenting adults which occurs in a "public" place, which involves more than two people, or which involves people who are not either married or at least 21 years of age. The charge, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, is usually laid against gay men.

Contrary to popular belief, wash-room sex is not practised by most gay men. It occurs most often in two connections; where there are no legitimate gathering places for gays (the situation in most Maritime centres) or when older gay men, usually married and well-established professionally, seek out quick, anonymous sex with other men. These men, fearing the oppression and discrimination that face open gays, have tried to bury their gayness under marriage and

career, only to find it resurfacing again and again. Afraid of public exposure, they avoid gay clubs and bars and choose what they believe to be the safety and anonymity of a public washroom. These are far from safe, however. Many are equipped with cameras or hidden peep-holes through which the police spy on the occupants and invade your privacy and mine. One brief grope in a toilet stall may result in a prison term, a criminal record, a ruined career, a shattered family and often suicide.

The case came to the attention of the Halifax media on Tuesday, February 28. Immediately, CJCH and CHNS radio stations broadcast the complete list of names of the accused, and CHNS released their street addresses. The Chronicle-Herald of March 1 published all names and addresses, despite protests by the Gay Alliance for Equality. The results? Perhaps anticipating publicity, one of the accused is in hospital from self-inflicted gun-shot wounds from an incident over the weekend. The others face probable loss of jobs, harassment and family disruption.

Although legally innocent until convicted, they have already been tried by the media. As usual, the commercial press displays no moral concern for the consequences of its actions.

Three years ago in Ottawa the police announced the breaking of a male prostitution ring and the arrest of 16 men. Over the protests of the gay movement and the pleas of those charged, the names and addresses were published. Although only eight were convicted (and they received suspended sentences), the lives of all sixteen were violently disrupted. One jumped thirteen floors to his death after the Ottawa Journal put his name and address on the front page. Nine lost their jobs. Eight had to seek psychiatric help. Several were beaten by the police, and all were seriously harassed.

A key factor in the Halifax case is that a P.E.I. deputy minister was among those arrested. His name was featured prominently in all news stories. As one media spokesperson said to me, "the others rode in on his coat-tails" into the media

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spotlight. A radio newscaster said privately that had the story been a heterosexual one, it would never have been carried.

Whatever one feels about wash-room sex, several points are clear. First, people who have not been convicted of a crime should not have their names splashed all over town when that is certain to result in serious disruption of their lives. Second, a little furtive sex in a washroom stall hardly merits a five-year prison term and public degradation. Even less does it merit the attention of the police while serious crimes like rape continue unabated. Thirdly, and most significantly, if gay people were not subject to continual harassment and discrimination, few would find it necessary to seek out sex in lavatories. The Woolco arrests are a graphic illustration of the constant fear of exposure in which many gays live. To all gays, it is a sign that the closet is not only a miserable place to live, it is also not safe. Our only protection lies in an organized movement to fight for our rights.

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other club that I am a member of in Halifax has allowed me all privileges whenever I am in the city.

Sincerely Ripped-Off,
Carolyn Naugler

Too noisy to study

To the Gazette:

I am writing to express my concern over the lack of quiet study space available in The Student Union Building. Hoping no offense to CKDU radio, the music piped throughout this building creates a party atmosphere making it impossible to concentrate on work or even make a quiet phone call. The Student Union Building is primarily

here for the needs of the student, cafeteria facilities, recreation, and office areas: It should also offer some quiet areas for study.

At present the alternative areas for study on campus are inadequate because of their regulations. The Library has strict rules prohibiting food or beverages; One has to break up a study period there to trek to The Student Union Building for a meal or coffee

Empty classrooms serve well as study areas (and I notice they are frequently used) but scheduled classes have to use them, too.

There should be a quiet lounge area where a student can eat lunch or drink coffee while studying. This would be especially valuable for students who live out of town and don't have a local refuge from all of

the noise.

Before the first floor lounge was renovated it offered a quiet reading room which was ideal. Recently, I was infuriated to find the only similar space left in the building, room 314, closed to the students. Are comfortable quiet areas becoming extinct?

—Mary Hamblin

People are very wasteful

To the Gazette:

In a day and age when homeowners are insulating, installing storm windows and caulking energy leaks in their homes, there appears to be a blatant disregard for energy conservations in many institutions.

To quote specific examples: many of the buildings of Dalhousie University are overheated most of the time; it is not uncommon to walk into the Macdonald Science Library or the Kellogg Library and find the temperature between 75° - 80° F and a number of windows wide open. Worse still, in response to the overheating some individuals in older buildings have been known to turn on air conditioners to cool the rooms! It seems here that the institutions of local thermostat controls would be in order. The glassed in "link" of the Tupper Building has a series of doors (some of which are used) all of which have no outer door and a gap of 0.5 - 1.2 inches where the breeze blows constantly. Churches such

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