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world briefs

AUSTRALIA

Following a nine-year campaign by activists, the state of Tasmania has finally legalized gay sex, wiping out the nation's last sodomy ban.

In an unrecorded voice vote May 1, the island's Legislative Council repealed Criminal Code sections 122 and 123, which outlawed consenting sexual intercourse "against the order of nature" and "indecent practice between male persons."



The punishment was up to 25 years in prison. The lower chamber of parliament, the House of Assembly, passed the repeal measure March 27.

Pro-repeal forces in the 19-member upper chamber fought off proposed amendments that would have banned "promotion" or "encouragement" of homosexuality and would have set the age-of-consent for gay sex higher than 17, which is the legal age for straight sex. They also dislodged a preamble that would have blamed homosexuals for AIDS.

"This marks the end of a 25-year campaign for gay law reform across the country," said Rodney Croome, spokesman for the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group, which waged the long battle to legalize homosexuality. "What we have got today is an uncompromised and unqualified victory for justice and equality for gay and lesbian people in this state, for all Tasmanians and all Australians."

TGLRG plans to move forward with a campaign for an anti-discrimination law.
(Feona Studdert contributed to this report.)

BRITAIN

Three openly gay candidates were elected to Britain's House of Commons on May 1 in Labor's landslide over the Conservatives.

MP Chris Smith was re-elected in central London's Islington South and Finsbury with 62.5 percent of the vote. Prime Minister Tony Blair



quickly appointed him secretary for national heritage, a post that oversees the arts, broadcasting, sports, tourism and the lottery.

That makes Smith Britain's first openly gay Cabinet member.

"I think that the fact that someone who is openly gay can be appointed to the Cabinet and can go into Buckingham Palace to kiss hands with the Queen as I did yesterday, without the slightest tremor of significance really being attached to it by the great majority of the press, shows that we have come a very considerable way in gaining acceptance from the British people," Smith said. "Being open, being honest about your sexuality actually wins you support, it doesn't deny it to you."

In Exeter, in England's West Country, BBC radio journalist Ben Bradshaw trounced opponent Dr. Adrian Roger, president of the Conservative Family Institute. Roger had called homosexuality "a sterile, disease-ridden occupation" and urged voters not to "let the pink flag fly over Exeter."

In Enfield Southgate (far northeastern Lon-

don suburbs), Fabian Society Secretary Stephen Twigg, 30, upset former Secretary of Defense Michael Portillo. The Fabian Society is an old-style Labor Party think tank.

Twigg had not expected to win. "It wasn't remotely a possibility for me," he said. "I was standing in a seat where we had a Cabinet minister with a majority of 15-and-a-half thousand. As far as I was concerned I was putting myself forward for the experience, standing in the area that I was born and brought up in. It was a great possibility just to get some experience, and it was only during the campaign that I realized that there was a real possibility that we could win it."

"This is a very exciting period in our history, and I anticipate major legislative reforms—not only around gay and lesbian rights, but also significant reforms to the constitution and the democratic process itself."

Labor actively courted the sexual minority vote with promises to lower the age-of-consent for male-male sex to equal that for lesbians and heterosexuals, ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, repeal Clause 28 (which prohibits local governments from promoting homosexuality), lift the military gay ban, and treat same-sex couples equally under immigration law.

"This whole country seems transformed by the election results," said activist and former International Lesbian and Gay Association Co-Secretary General Lisa Power. "People are going round grinning, all the cab drivers claim to be Labor supporters, there's a real air of optimism. Everybody loves the new government and can't understand why we put up with the Tories for so long. Chris has been made heritage secretary—a homo in charge of the arts, yet."

(David Cook, John Hein, David Smith and Philip Reay-Smith contributed to this report.)

CANADA

Following months of campaigning and screaming by gay and AIDS activists, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien has announced renewed funding of the National AIDS Strategy.

"We have decided that the National AIDS Strategy will be carried on at the same level for years to come," Chrétien said in Vancouver in May.

Funding for the programs was set to expire next year. The delay in re-allocating the money was a huge source of contention at the 1996 International Conference on AIDS in Vancouver, which Chrétien refused to attend—breaking a tradition set by heads of state of other nations where the conference has been held.

British Columbia's Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils voted 165-158 on April 28 to ban from schools all material related to homosexuality.

"When homosexuality is taught [in schools] it becomes an advocacy for homosexuals and thus teaches that homosexuality is acceptable as a healthy lifestyle," the group's nonbinding resolution states.

The Ministry of Education does not have to



heed the association's wishes.

The vote was likely related to a March 19 vote by the British Columbia Teachers Federation to fund an anti-homophobia and anti-heterosexism program.

BCTF members will use their dues to provide staff, office space and resources to develop work-

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