

**AUSTRALIA**

Melbourne's fourth gay and lesbian pride parade attracted 40,000 people to Fitzroy Street in the St. Kilda neighborhood Feb. 1.

The 2-kilometer procession, sponsored by the mayor and city of Port Phillip, a government entity that encompasses several Melbourne neighborhoods, featured 85 contingents.

As is often the case in the United States, the loudest applause went to Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, and to Dykes on Bikes.

**BRITAIN**

Openly gay British actor Sir Ian McKellen was nominated for an Oscar Feb. 9 in the best actor category for *Gods and Monsters*. The movie tells the story of horror film director James Whale, who was gay.

Responding to the news, McKellen told Sky Television: "There is a shift certainly in American society as there is in British society toward an acceptance of gay people as being perfectly ordinary. The film industry is at last beginning to catch up with that and reflect it."

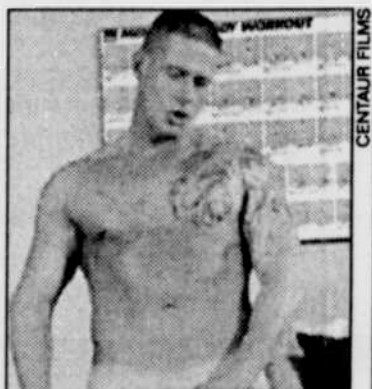
However, he added: "When we were trying to get a distributor to sell this movie...there were still some producers—some very big producers whose names I won't mention—who said they wouldn't market that because it was about gays. It is ridiculous. There is one gay character in the movie but it is about love and friendship and companionship. The reaction I get by snail mail and e-mail is, 'Thank you for a movie that made me laugh and cry at the same time.'"

The chairman of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee was outed Jan. 30 when British Customs agents found prohibited gay erotica and marijuana joints in his luggage as he returned from visiting his porn-star boyfriend in Amsterdam.

Conservative Euro MP Tom Spencer, who represents Surrey, was fined \$908 on the spot and released. He was later suspended by Tory leaders and announced he would not seek reelection.

Spencer, 50, has been married for 19 years and has three children. He told reporters his wife knows he is gay and that they have an open relationship.

"I am gay and I have always been gay," he said. "My wife and I discussed this before we were married.... I have always been liberal on social issues of this kind, and part of the way we have lived our lives is occasionally I would go away for a weekend."



Cole Tucker

The biggest surprise of the affair, however, is that Spencer's boyfriend is U.S. gay porn star Cole Tucker, 45, of whom Spencer says: "I have to admit I'm in love with him.... I feel very upset I've dragged him into this.... Cole and I had a lovely weekend together and the videos he gave me were a present. It's ironic that is how this all developed."

Tucker, who lives in Boston, told reporters: "Tom Spencer is a very fine man. There is nothing seedy about our relationship."

**BULGARIA**

Several dozen gay men and lesbians published an ad in the Feb. 1 issue of the daily newspaper *24 Tchassa* demanding legalization of same-sex marriage.

"A state cannot call itself democratic if people like us are marginalized, insulted and forced to segregation," the ad argues.

The signatories claim they have support from closeted members of the government.

**CANADA**

Customs officials in Sarnia, Ontario, have confiscated a shipment of the U.S. book *Best Gay Erotica 1999* and informed the intended recipient, Publishers Group West Canada, that the books will be destroyed.

*Best Lesbian Erotica 1999* was also seized but was released.

PGWC spokeswoman Sara MacLachlan noted that 400 copies of the men's book had arrived unscathed just three weeks earlier.



"This book is so widely available in Canada it's hard to imagine why Canada Customs would seize it," commented Toshiya Kuwabara of Toronto's Glad Day Book Shop.

Canadian activists have battled with customs officials for more than a decade over importation of U.S. erotica.

In 1996, in a case brought by the Vancouver store Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium, the Supreme Court of British Columbia found that customs officials had discriminated against gay people—in violation of the equality and freedom-of-expression provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—by routinely singling out gay porn for confiscation.

**COSTA RICA**

The Roman Catholic archbishop of San José did not violate a law that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation when he denounced a planned gay and lesbian pride festival last August, a court ruled Feb. 6.

The lesbian and gay group Pink Triangle had sued Archbishop Roman Arrieta for saying officials should block the event. Arrieta could have been sentenced to 60 days in jail.

**FRANCE**

Tens of thousands of people marched through central Paris Jan. 31 in protest against a partnership bill that grants unmarried couples—same-sex and opposite-sex, romantic or not—spousal rights in areas such as inheritance, housing, taxation, workplace benefits, social security and social-welfare programs.

The controversial measure has passed the National Assembly and is pending in the Senate. It consumed 70 hours of Assembly floor time as conservatives tried many approaches to derail it.

The protesters marched from Napoleon's tomb on the Left Bank to near the Eiffel Tower. Prominent right-wing politicians and Catholic groups mingled with teen-agers dancing to rap and techno music.

The demonstrators claimed the bill subverts (their definition of) family values. But Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement said the Socialist government will not be deterred from its plans.

"The individual has rights and homosexuals also have the right to a certain stability," he said.

**NEW ZEALAND**

The ninth annual gay and lesbian Hero Parade attracted a record 200,000 revelers and 58 floats to Auckland Feb. 13.

Prime Minister Jenny Shipley opened the festivities with a speech urging a celebration of diversity.



"The gay community is very important. If we could all celebrate our sexuality with as much confidence as the gay community we would be a much healthier community," she said.

Corporate sponsors included Durex, Qantas, Pepsi and Lion Breweries.

A Hamilton lesbian must pay child support to her former lover with whom she raised children the partner conceived via artificial insemination, the nation's high court ruled Feb. 10.

The judges said the gender-neutral wording of the Child Support Act can extend to same-sex relationships.

Andrew Davie, the lawyer for the woman who lost the case, says, "She has some difficulty understanding how she was unable to adopt and unable to marry but has now been made a stepparent."

The birth mother told reporters: "No man can [shirk responsibility] so why should she?"

The women, who were not named, were a couple for more than 10 years.

**NORWAY**

The state's Lutheran church faces a possible split after the bishop of Hamar in the southeast of the country reinstated a lesbian priest who had been barred from the pulpit after she married her girlfriend under the nation's same-sex partnership law.

Siri Sunde was suspended in 1997 because church rules prohibit ordination for persons in same-sex partnerships. But Sunde's bishop, Rosemarie Koehn, believes the ban is wrong and sent Sunde back to work.

"With the same justification the church has used to change its view in other cases, it must change its view about homosexuality," Koehn said. "There is not a theological basis for excluding clergy for entering a partnership."

Sunde called Koehn's decision "a victory for Christ."

Norway's registered-partnership law grants every right of matrimony except access to adoption, artificial insemination and church weddings.

**SOUTH AFRICA**

On Feb. 12, the Cape High Court ordered the government to equalize immigration law for same-sex couples.

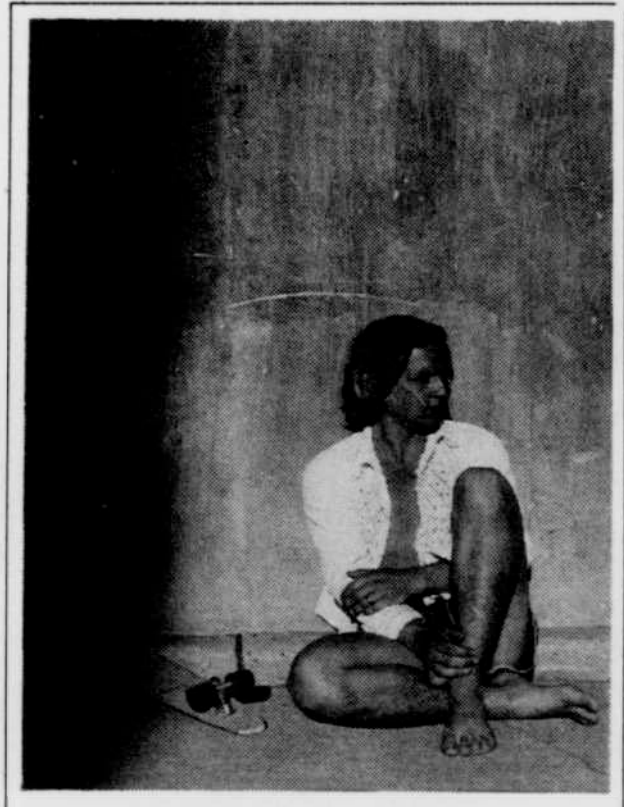
The judges said the Aliens Control Act violates the nation's post-apartheid constitution, which bans discrimination based on sexual orientation.

"The constitution seeks to promote a society in which diversity of identity is respected and protected," wrote Judge Dennis Davis. "The act prefers certain forms of life partnership over others.... This cannot be justified."

The ruling resulted from a case filed against the Department of Home Affairs by the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Equality and several gay men and lesbians whose foreign partners had not been allowed to immigrate as spouses.

■ Compiled by REX WOCKNER

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