

**AUSTRALIA**

The federal police extended workplace benefits to employees' same-sex partners in March.

The decision followed a request from the partner of Alan Scott, a liaison officer stationed in Italy.

The Australian Council for Lesbian and Gay Rights greeted the news with a demand that the military immediately follow suit.

"While the military takes into account the relationships of heterosexual service personnel who are periodically relocated great distances from their former posting, it doesn't give a damn about homosexual service personnel in similar circumstances," says ACLGR's Rodney Croome. "This is unfair to the soldiers involved because they may have to choose between their relationship and their career. It is also bad for the military because it has an adverse effect on both morale and the retention of highly trained personnel."



Rodney Croome

**DENMARK**

Former Danish health minister and current European Parliament candidate Torben Lund, 49, married his boyfriend, sociology student Claus Lautrup, 28, at Copenhagen City Hall March 13.

Lund, a leader of the Social Democratic Party and the nation's first openly gay cabinet-level official, is considered a shoo-in for the Euro Parliament seat.

"A politician does not need courage to admit his homosexuality," Lund told Agence France-Presse. "The important thing is to be natural, to behave like others, to love like other people, not to fear prejudice and rumors—and to show overtly that one is homosexual, because it is not an illness."

He added: "I am happy to live in an open-minded, free and tolerant country like Denmark, where homosexuals do not have to keep a low profile and where gay marriage does not create a sensation."

Lund was twice married to women and has two daughters aged 23 and 14. But meeting Lautrup put an end to his heterosexual ways.

"One shouldn't hesitate to listen to the voice of the heart," he said. "You only live once."

Denmark was the first country in the world to legalize marriage-like same-sex partnerships, in October 1989. Registered same-sex couples have all the rights of opposite-sex spouses except access to adoption, church weddings and artificial-conception procedures.

There have been 4,338 same-sex marriages in Denmark during the past 11 years, according to AFP. In the earlier years, gay men were more likely to take advantage of the partnership law, but recently more lesbians than gay men have gotten married.

Hanne Moeller, spokeswoman for Denmark's National Association for Gays and Lesbians, speculates: "Women in the beginning were a bit skeptical of registered partnerships. They did not want to be too much like heterosexuals.... But now we have a new generation of lesbians who find it natural to have a family and to raise kids."



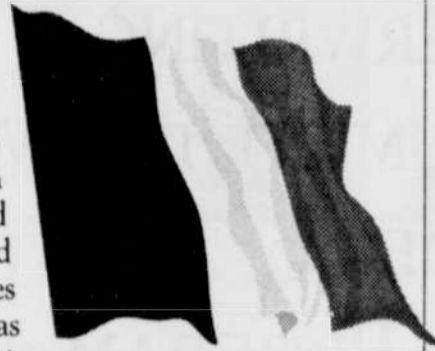
Torben Lund

**FRANCE**

On March 18, the French Senate rejected a measure passed by the National Assembly in December that granted unmarried couples—same-sex and opposite-sex, romantic or not—many of the rights and benefits of matrimony. The vote was 216-99.

The senators approved an alternate proposal by a vote of 192-117 that recognizes only male-female cohabiting couples.

The measure that passed the Assembly 316-249 on Dec. 9 would have granted same-sex couples rights in areas such as inheritance, housing, taxation, workplace benefits, social security and social-welfare programs.



**SWEDEN**

Several hundred protesters threw rocks and tomatoes at Swedish photographer Elisabeth Ohlson March 14 when she stepped outside the city museum in Norrköping, 75 miles southwest of Stockholm.

The museum is showing her *Ecce Homo* exhibit, which depicts Jesus and the apostles in drag and as leathermen, and shows a nude Jesus being baptized.

"I went out to document [with my camera] what was going on," Ohlson says. "It was when they discovered it was me that the tumult began. I didn't think they would recognize me."

Ohlson fled back inside. Local reports did not mention any injuries.

Most of the protesters reportedly are members of a Syrian Orthodox church.

The exhibit has provoked protests in several cities where it has been displayed.

Jon Voss, editor of the Stockholm gay newspaper *QX*, explains: "Two pictures have caused most protests from the religious right: *The Last Supper* scene, where [Jesus] is sitting in high heels with 12 drag queens and transvestites. And one scene where he is baptized nude, showing his dick. This has caused uproar and a lot of laughs because the model in the picture has a big dick. The bishop of Uppsala...said the dick was erect, which the model, who works here at *QX*, denies."



From *Ecce Homo*

**UKRAINE**

The queer organization Our World Gay and Lesbian Center is apparently being denied government registration.

The group's application for government registration has been referred to the national Ministry of Justice for further review after local officials declined "to give a conclusion about the legality of the existence of citizens with anomalous sexual orientation."

Commenting on the situation, an Our World spokesman says: "Gays and lesbians were singled out into a separate group of persons and doubts were cast on the legality of their existence and the possibility for them to establish public associations of citizens. It was evident discrimination of Ukrainian citizens on the ground of sexual orientation."

**UNITED KINGDOM**

Gay and lesbian activists in the United Kingdom are denouncing the Bank of Scotland over a new partnership with Pat Robertson, a United States-based television preacher and former presidential candidate.

The Scottish institution is launching a direct-banking subsidiary in the U.S. that will be 65 percent owned by the bank and 25 percent owned by Robertson.

Like the Bank of Scotland, it will have no branches, operating instead via mail, telephone and the Internet. Robertson is expected to promote the bank to members of the Christian Coalition and viewers of his *700 Club* television program.

"It seems amazing that such a respected institution would get into bed with someone like Pat Robertson, a man obsessed with knowing who everyone else is getting into bed with," says Kevin Ivers, spokesman for the U.S. group Log Cabin Republicans, which has taken the lead statewide in opposing the venture.

In a letter to angry customers, bank director of public relations Iain Fiddes explained: "To remain competitive and one of the UK's leading banks, Bank of Scotland must seek innovative ways of expanding its market. The arrangement with Dr. Robertson falls into this category. It is based strictly on business credentials and commercial logic like any other business development."

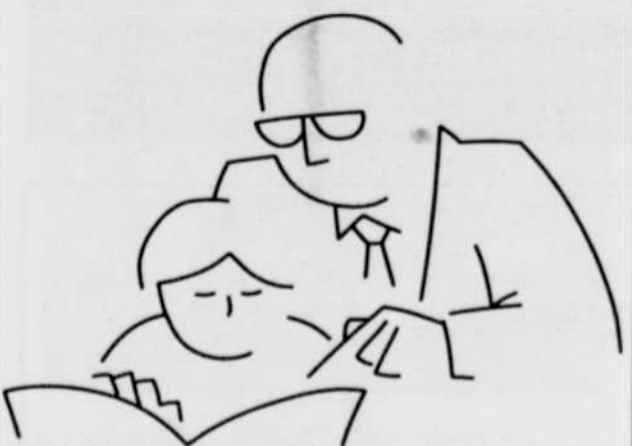
"Dr. Robertson is well known for his personal views, particularly on abortion and homosexuality," Fiddes acknowledged. "Those views, as with the personal views held by all the people with whom we do business, do not determine the basis of their business relationship with the bank."

A new British study has found that gay men who are more educated are less likely to be HIV-positive.

The survey questioned more than 4,000 men who attended pride festivals in London, Brighton, Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds in 1997.

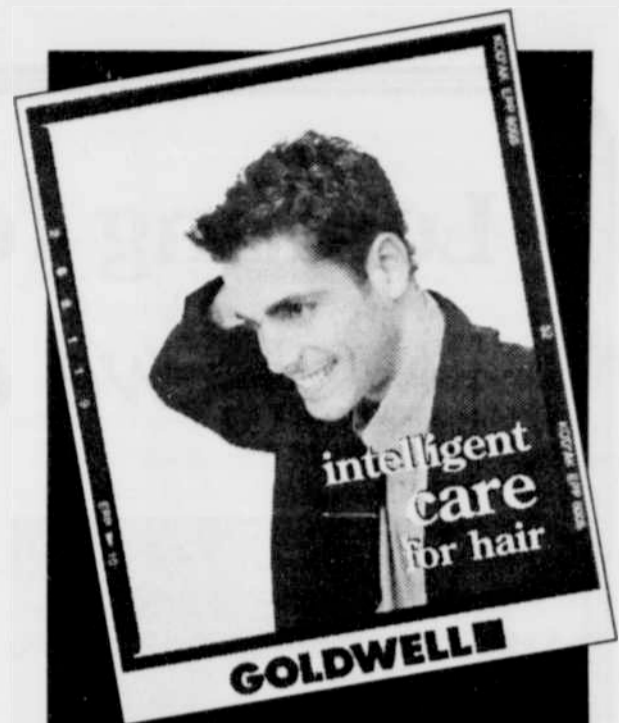
Among respondents who stayed in school through age 22, 7.6 percent were HIV-positive. Those who went to school through age 20 showed a 9.7 percent positivity rate. The rate reached 11 percent for those who finished schooling at age 18, 11.9 percent for those who finished at 16, and 19 percent for those who quit school before 16.

"I was gobsmacked when we got those results," said Ford Hickson of Sigma Research, which conducted the survey.



"Education gives you things," Hickson said in an interview with *Gay Times*. "And the more you have, the fewer needs you have. Education supplies you with choices. It increases your ability to pursue the choices that are available, it increases your competence in pursuing those choices, it increases the interpersonal and economic resources you can call on, and it eases your uptake of information."

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