

Late-night television host Tamara Tonite, whose legal name is Rob Paterson, plans to fight for transgender rights, euthanasia and lesbian access to fertility clinics, among other causes. "Every person on this earth deserves to be treated no better and certainly no less than any other person," she told *The Australian*.

About 35,000 people and 80 organizations joined in Melbourne's Midsumma Pride March on Jan. 21. The parade went down Fitzroy Street in the St. Kilda area.

The biggest cheers went to the People Living with AIDS contingent and to the gay police employees group. State Health Minister John Thwaites was also a crowd-pleaser, local media reported.



If Tamara Tonite is elected as premier, will she rename the state "Drag Queensland"?

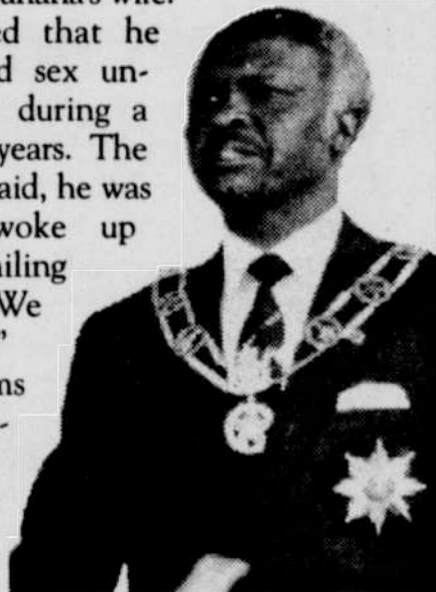
ZIMBABWE

Former Zimbabwean President Canaan Banana was released from Chikurubi Maximum Security Prison on Jan. 29 after serving eight months for sexually assaulting and sodomizing male members of his staff. Among those he intimidated into having sex were his bodyguard, cook and gardener.

Banana was president from 1980 to 1987. The incidents came to light starting in 1995, when former Banana aide Jefta Dube shot to death a fellow policeman who had taunted him by calling him "Banana's wife."

Dube testified that he and Banana had sex uncountable times during a period of three years. The first time, Dube said, he was drugged and woke up naked with a smiling Banana saying, "We helped ourselves."

Other victims described a scenario in which Banana would ask them to play cards, offer them a drink, put on



Canaan Banana music, insist on teaching them to dance, then kiss and fondle them while dancing.

CHINA

The city of Chengdu, capital of the Chinese province of Sichuan, has passed a law banning HIV-positive people from getting married or working as surgeons or kindergarten teachers. It will take effect in May.

The law also requires police to force-test prostitutes, drug users and members of other so-called high-risk groups within five days of an arrest. It further requires separate jail cells for HIV-positive inmates and mandates testing for any resident who has been out of the country for more than a year.

The legislation has been denounced by the *Chengdu Workers Daily* newspaper and the United Nations' AIDS program. Chengdu has 38 officially registered HIV-positive citizens.

SWEDEN

The Swedish Parliament's Committee on Homosexuality and Children recommended Jan. 31 that registered same-sex couples be permitted to adopt children, including kids from foreign countries.

The panel also said lesbian couples should have access to state-funded artificial insemination technology. Sweden has a registered partnership law that already grants gay and lesbian couples every other right of marriage.

The recommendations are supported by the Social Democrats, Centre Party, People's Party,

Greens and Left Party but are opposed by the minority Christian Democrats. The right-wing Moderaterna Party supports all the changes except for international adoption.

The committee's recommendations were presented to the minister of justice. Several months of debate will take place, then the government will introduce legislation in parliament, which should cast a vote on the matter early next year.

THE NETHERLANDS

Roman Catholic priests in the Netherlands are surprisingly pro-gay, a survey by *De Gay Krant* has found. The magazine mailed a questionnaire to 783 parishes and got a response from 339 of them.

A total of 42 percent of the responses were anonymous. Only one priest said gays are not welcome in his church.

A total of 95 percent said sexually active gays are welcome to take communion—a violation of church teaching. A total of 56 percent said they would bless a homosexual union in their church, and 83 percent said they would do so in private.

Catholic teaching maintains sexually active gays are living in "mortal sin." The soul of an individual who dies without confessing and being absolved of a mortal sin is condemned to hell, the church teaches.

During life, anyone who has committed a mortal sin and has not been absolved of it is barred from receiving communion. Receiving communion while living in mortal sin is itself an additional mortal sin.

The church's anti-gay doctrines are based on its beliefs that sexual acts are permissible only between opposite-sex spouses and that those acts must be open to the possibility of pregnancy. As such, birth control, oral sex and masturbation are also mortal sins.

CYPRUS

Two men who claimed they had sex with Cypriot Orthodox Bishop Athanasios of Limassol were jailed for three months Jan. 25 for committing defamation.

Costas Savva, 30, and Manolis Ilia, 34, admitted they had lied in exchange for money from Athanasios' enemies, who allegedly wanted to prevent him from becoming the church's next leader. Athanasios endured months of allegations until a Major Holy Synod—only the second ever to convene in Cyprus—cleared him of the accusations in November. 

Compiled by REX WOCKNER, who has reported for the gay press since 1985. He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Drake University and started his career as a radio reporter.

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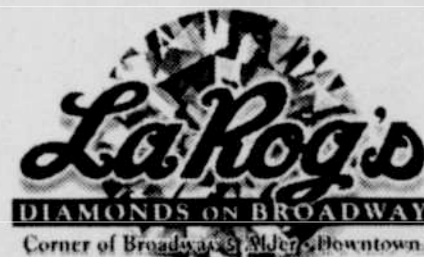
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