

**WORLD**news

ty and equal protection under the law and impedes AIDS prevention work.

"Private, consensual adult sexual relation falls within the intimate associations protected from the state intrusions under Article 21 [of the constitution], the exercise of which lies at the core of individual autonomy and are key to development of one's personality," Naz said. "There exists no compelling state interest to justify the curtailment of such an important element in the fundamental right to life and liberty."

"The social effects [of the statute] drive gay men underground, with a devastating impact upon the AIDS prevention effort," the group added. "Once underground, they become extremely vulnerable to AIDS because it becomes difficult for them to negotiate safe sexual behaviors. It also becomes difficult to identify and target this population for AIDS prevention efforts through education and medical services."

Section 377 punishes "carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal" with up to life in prison.

**CANADA**

The province of Quebec will set up a civil unions procedure granting gay couples every right of marriage except access to adoption, the government said Dec. 7.

The plan will be submitted to the Quebec National Assembly, where it is expected to pass. "We're aiming to erase the discrimination that exists in our laws and guarantee that same-sex couples have the same rights as others," provincial Justice Minister Paul Begin said.



Paul Begin

A recent poll found 76.5 percent of Quebecers support letting gays formalize their relationships. But some activists are not pleased with the proposal.

"This is not true equality," Rene Leboeuf told the *Toronto Star*. "The day that we have access to marriage and divorce like other people, that will be a true legal status."

Leboeuf and his partner, Michael Hendricks, have sued Quebec for the right to marry under the ordinary marriage laws. The case is ongoing.

Irene Demczuk of the Coalition for the Recognition of Same-Sex Couples of Quebec told the Canadian Press wire service: "If we don't get parenting rights, we will be back in courts. Parental recognition is not a minor thing."

Royal Canadian Mounted Police recruits are asked whether they are gay, the *Ottawa Citizen* revealed Dec. 3.

"This is a question that is black and white in the security interview," Staff Sgt. Normand Nadeau admitted. "It's there. It is common knowledge to everybody that has gone through the interview. This is a departmental policy."

"Our members have to deal with top-secret files on a regular basis and are made aware of privileged information," Nadeau told the newspaper. "We want to make sure there is no compromise [because of blackmail]."

Legal experts told the *Citizen* the question violates the Canadian Human Rights Act, which prohibits such inquiries during job interviews. It also might contravene the privacy and freedom-of-expression guarantees of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, lawyers said.

"Certainly an individual's sexual orientation should not be of any import to an employer one way or another," said Catherine Barratt, Canadian Human Rights Commission spokeswoman.

Canada might be trying to pull a fast one on gay couples, and they have responded with a pair of class-action lawsuits seeking \$400 million in back pensions.

When the nation extended pension benefits to surviving gay partners last year, officials declared only gays whose partners died after Jan. 1, 1998, would be eligible. The lawsuits—one covering all areas but British Columbia, which has somewhat different laws, and one covering British Columbia—claim the retroactive date should be April 17, 1985, the day equality guarantees were enshrined in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"The Jan. 1, 1998, cutoff date was imposed on same-sex couples on a purely arbitrary basis and without any legal justification," lawyer Douglas Elliott told a news conference. "All Canadians rely on the Canadian Pension Plan. Gays retire, too."

Co-counsel Patricia LeFebour added: "Working gays and lesbians have paid into the plan all their lives. The government does not discriminate when it collects the money; it only discriminates in paying the benefit."

Lead plaintiff George Hislop told reporters: "It seems the government wants to give itself immunity for past discrimination. Our government has effectively confiscated our pensions."

**SWEDEN**

Sweden's government presented a bill to Parliament on Nov. 28 to criminalize agitation against homosexuals. "This is to be effected by extending the penal provision for agitation against a national or ethnic group to include threats or expressions of contempt alluding to sexual orientation," the Ministry of Justice said.

Serious agitation—such as "hate speech alluding to homosexuals"—would bring a six-month to four-year jail term. The laws should take effect between July 1, 2002, and Jan. 1, 2003, the government said.

**THAILAND**

Hundreds of HIV-positive people demonstrated Nov. 30 at Government House in Bangkok, demanding the Public Health Ministry provide anti-HIV drugs under the universal health care plan.

Health Minister Sudarat Keyuraphan responded with a promise to provide anti-retroviral treatment to 10,000 HIV-positive people next year and to 150,000 by 2006. Generic versions of common anti-HIV medications will be produced cheaply by the Government Pharmaceutical Organization.

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, the Thai Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS and the Thai NGO Coalition on AIDS are continuing their push for prompt treatment of all Thai AIDS sufferers by writing to the prime minister and the health minister. About 1 million of Thailand's 60 million residents are believed to be HIV-positive. **J**



Sudarat Keyuraphan

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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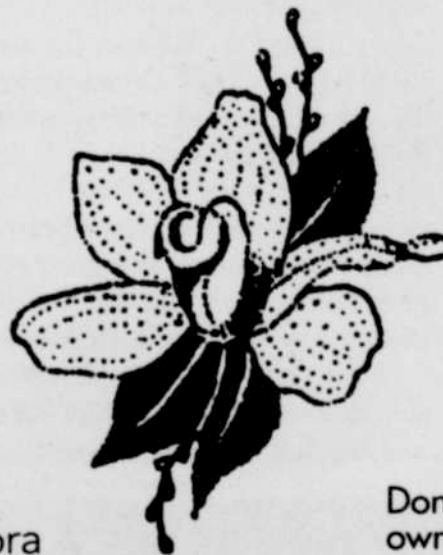
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