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Canadian couple Stephen Dunbar (left) and Rob Edge leave a Yukon courthouse July 14 after judges ruled in favor of same-sex marriage

CANADA

A trial court in the Yukon Territory ordered the government to give a gay couple a marriage license July 14. Territorial Premier Dennis Fentie accepted the ruling and said there would be no appeal.

Rob Edge and Stephen Dunbar married three days later. The court redefined marriage in the Yukon as the voluntary union for life of two people to the exclusion of all others and declared the old definition "unconstitutional."

"Hopefully someday nobody will question why same-sex couples want to marry—they'll know it's for the same reasons as everyone else," Edge said.

The court said it is "inconsistent" for the federal government not already to have legalized same-sex marriage in the Yukon given that it chose not to challenge court decisions that legalized same-sex marriage in the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec during the past 14 months and that it has announced plans to rewrite federal marriage law to include same-sex couples.

"The judge agreed that justice delayed is justice denied," said Martha McCarthy, who represented same-sex couples in the Ontario and Quebec marriage challenges. "He rejected the federal government's arguments that courts should stand idly by" while the Canadian Supreme Court answers some questions regarding same-sex marriage that the federal Parliament asked it to consider.

"This ruling sends a message that governments across the country must now accept the...right of same-sex couples to marry in a civil ceremony," said Laurie Arron, advocacy director for the national gay lobby group Egale. "It is simply unacceptable to maintain the fiction that capacity to marry, which is federal law, is different from one province or territory to the next. There is one law for the whole country, and that law includes same-sex couples. Governments who don't accept that are leaving themselves open to legal challenges and liability for costs."

The latest poll numbers show that 57 percent of Canadians approve of full same-sex marriage and that 38 percent oppose it.

Canada may be about to see its first same-sex divorce.

Two Toronto women, identified only as M.M. and J.H., got married June 18, 2003, eight days after Ontario legalized full marriage for gay couples. Now they have petitioned the Superior Court of Justice to end their union.

But there's a catch. Same-sex marriage was legalized by court orders in Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec and the Yukon Territory. But

the federal government has not yet opened up the institution in the rest of the country, though it has promised to do so, and that means the Divorce Act has not been modified to recognize married gay couples.

M.M.'s lawyer has asked the court to rewrite the Divorce Act to remove language that defines "spouse" as "either of a man or woman who are married to each other." The federal Justice Department responded that the act is, indeed, unconstitutional as written and should be struck down. Justice Ruth Mesbur will hear the case Sept. 13.

Canada has its first openly gay federal Cabinet minister. Prime Minister Paul Martin selected Member of Parliament Scott Brison of Nova Scotia as minister of public works and government services July 20.

Brison, 36, came out in December 2002 as he sought the federal Tory leadership post. He did not win that position and later jumped to the Liberal Party.



Scott Brison

COLOMBIA

Gay couples attended Mass at the Catholic cathedral July 4 in Bogotá wearing T-shirts denouncing Vatican homophobia. Fellow worshippers reportedly responded with surprise or hostility.

"Homophobia is not Christian," the shirts said. Gayness is "a fact of nature that no human can change," said one of the protesters, Gabriel Medina.

SPAIN

Spain's Roman Catholic Church urged its followers July 20 to fight Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's plan to legalize full same-sex marriage. According to *The Los Angeles Times*, Spain's leading bishops denounced gay marriage as an aberration of nature and an unprecedented affront to traditional values.

"Legal recognition of homosexual unions, and especially placing it on the same level with marriage, would constitute an error and an injustice with very negative consequences for the common good and the future of society," the bishops stated. Legislation legalizing gay marriage likely will be introduced in Parliament in September and enacted in January.

A poll released July 22 found that 70 percent of Spaniards support same-sex marriage. Only 11.6 percent of the 2,479 people questioned said they were quite or very opposed.

However, the poll also found that about 20 percent of Spaniards consider homosexuality unnatural and that 4 percent think it should be illegal. About one-third said it would be a serious problem if one of their kids was having gay sex.

The poll, conducted by the Center for Sociological Investigations, has a 2 percent error margin.

SOUTH AFRICA

South African gay groups filed an action July 8 in the Johannesburg High Court to overturn the common law definition of marriage, which allows only for opposite-sex unions.

The South African Constitution is one of only a few in the world that explicitly bans discrimination based on sexual orientation. While South African laws and court rulings are considered to be some of the most gay-friendly on the planet, it is generally acknowledged that societal attitudes toward homosexuality have not evolved at the same pace.

UNITED KINGDOM

Cruisy toilets along a highway in Wales were demolished by officials of the Welsh Assembly Government because of distress concerning men using them for "cottaging," as tea-room cruising is called in the United Kingdom.

The bathrooms were at a picnic site off the A449 highway between Newport and Usk in Monmouthshire, the icWales Web site reported July 9. Toilets that are structurally less-friendly to sexual hookups may be built in a few months, the report said.

AUSTRIA

The Austrian news magazine *Profil* has published photos of priests fondling and kissing seminarians at the St. Pölten seminary near Vienna. It also said some 40,000 porn pictures were found on computers on the premises.

The director of the seminary and his assistant quickly resigned. The Austrian Bishops Conference is investigating the allegations.

INTERNATIONAL

International statistics do not support the argument of U.S. conservatives that allowing same-sex marriage will undermine traditional marriage, a study has found.

Research by University of Massachusetts economist Lee Badgett, for the Council on Contemporary Families and the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, found that Scandinavia's marriage-like registered partnerships and the Netherlands' full same-sex marriages have had no measurable impact on opposite-sex marriage. There have been no increases in divorce, cohabitation or out-of-wedlock childbirth, and Denmark has seen an increase in the heterosexual marriage rate since the country instituted same-sex registered partnerships in 1989, the study said.

Badgett found that 77 percent of Norwegian couples with children and 75 percent of Dutch couples with children are married. The figure in the United States is 72 percent.

"The Scandinavian and Dutch experience suggests that there is little reason to worry that heterosexual people will flee marriage if gay and lesbian couples get the same rights," Badgett said July 13.

Gay Pride parades continued around the world in early July. About 3,000 people marched in heavy rain July 3 through the center of Dublin, Ireland. According to UTV: "Lorries [trucks] blasting out '80s electro-pop music accompanied the motley assortment of 6-foot drag queens, sailors, devils and angels lost in a sea of pink feather boas. Marchers dressed as giant walking sperm followed youth groups, AIDS awareness groups, a gay hiking club and a deaf gay group as they danced through the capital."

Between 700,000 and 1 million Spaniards turned out for Madrid's 26th Gay Pride parade July 3, organizers said. This year's slogan was "The Time Is Right," a reference to the new Socialist government's promise to legalize full same-sex marriage.

Some 50,000 people attended London's Pride celebration July 3. The parade, from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square, featured more than 30 floats and a dozen samba bands. A "Big Gay Out" concert followed in Finsbury Park.

"Not that long ago there were important political issues that people were angry about, like Section 28. Now we are hopefully going to see the Partnership Bill go through Parliament, so this is a celebration," said gay actor Sir Ian McKellen of *The Lord of the Rings* fame. "This parade helps say to people who haven't come out yet, 'There's nothing to be frightened of.'"

Section 28 was a 1988 law that banned local governments and schools from promoting homosexuality or "the acceptability of homo-