

AIDS activists call for firing of Schabbas

TORONTO—On the evening of February 12 here, over 800 outraged protesters demonstrated and marched in the streets to demand the removal from office of Ontario's Chief Minister of Health, Doctor Richard Schabbas. Activists marched to the offices of Ontario Health Minister Elinor Caplan to demand that she fire Schabbas after he made a threatening proposal to quarantine HIV-positive people and People Living With AIDS.

SCHABAS THREATENS QUARANTINE

In an interview the week before, Schabbas stated that People Living With AIDS and HIV-positive people who engage in any sort of sexual activity should be forcibly confined. He also declared that, in the particular case of HIV-positive and People Living With AIDS, no distinctions should be made between sex involving the use of condoms and other safer sexual practices, and unsafe sexual practice, stating his opinion that the risk involved in sex using condoms is "too high." He has stated his desire to empower local "public health" authorities to detain People Living With AIDS who "ignore orders not to place other at risk for infection (sic)." A ministry spokesperson admitted that, according to Schabbas' proposal, a person could be held against her/his will for the rest of their life.

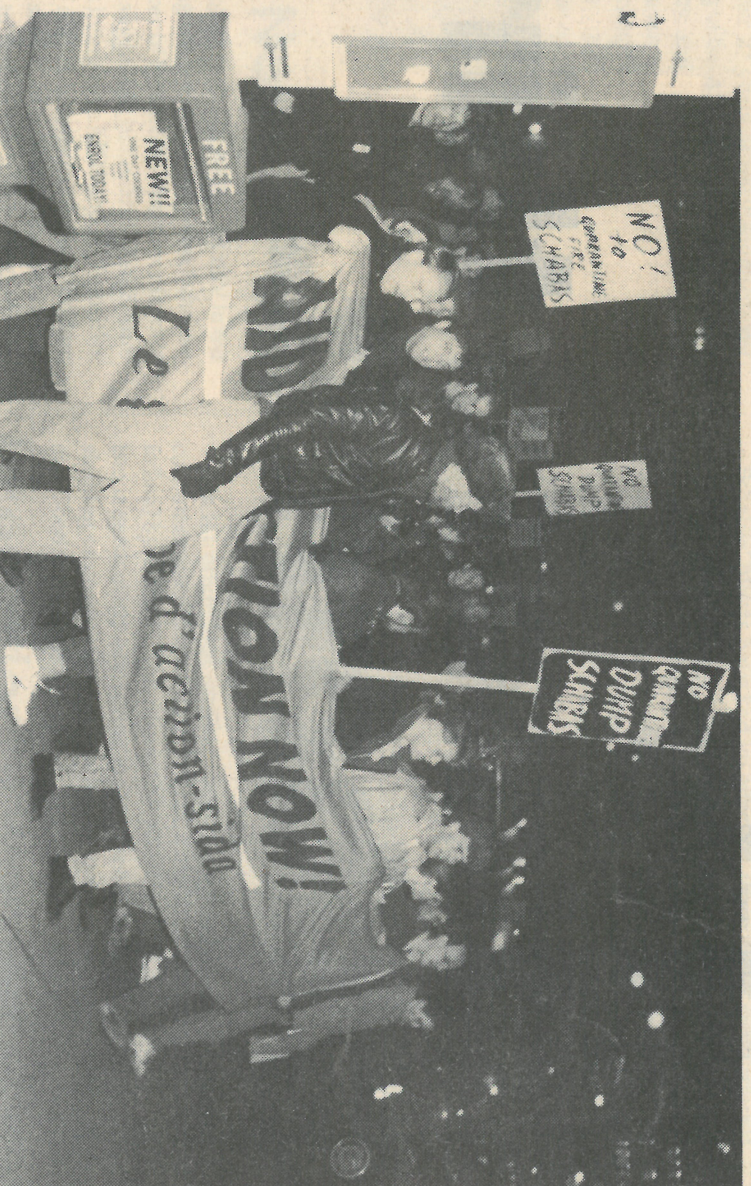
PUBLIC HEALTH MENACE

In an emergency protest organized in two days by AIDS AC-

TION NOW!, and supported by the AIDS Committee of Toronto, the Toronto PWA Foundation, and the Casey House Hospice, a large and angry group of women and men from lesbian, gay, and progressive communities gathered at the 519 Church Street Community Centre for a spirited rally before talking to the streets.

Mary Louise Adams, a member of the steering committee of AIDS ACTION NOW!, read from a prepared letter to Elinor Caplan, stating "By ignoring evidence and expertise on HIV transmission, negating public education on safer sex and spreading alarm among people at risk for HIV, (Schabbas) has become a public health menace." She voiced the frustration of all present, declaring her anger that "the energies which we all have to devote to fighting AIDS (on many levels) now need to be diverted" to combat the immediate threat posed by Schabbas' menacing proposition. Activists responded with loud shouts of "Fire Schabbas Now!" and "Quarantine Schabbas!" Many people present signed petitions to Elinor Caplan demanding Schabbas' dismissal, or wrote their own sentiments on Schabbas in personalized letters, all of which were delivered to Caplan's office the following day.

Doctor Phillip Berger, a local physician and a member of the HIV Physicians Primary Care Group, described the proposal as tantamount to "imprisoning people for life without trial." He stated that any move towards quarantine could have lethal effects, by dissuading people who have engaged in unsafe sex and unsafe IV-drug



Danny Ogilvie

Whose life threatened? Activists demand that "public health menace" Schabbas be fired.

use from seeking HIV testing and treatment. Doctor Alan Li, a member of the Gay Asians AIDS Project of Toronto, addressed the crowd to decry what he sees as an attempt to remove people's sexualities from our own control, and to place them in the control of "a racist and homophobic bureaucracy." "His proposal goes against all fundamental rights to choice and privacy," Li said. He added that we should all recognize that this province's obstructive policies around anonymous HIV antibody testing, combined with Schabbas' recent proposal, "could work together to make a disclosed test result lead to possible 'imprison-

ment."

The rally ended with a concise and spirited speech by Michael Smith, an activist living with AIDS. Smith noted that as a person at the top of the provincial hierarchy of medical officialdom, Schabbas was not in touch with grassroots communities of People Living With AIDS. He challenged Schabbas' social status as a medical "expert" on AIDS. He stated "We are the real experts on AIDS, right here in this room." Smith encapsulated the sentiments of the crowd by warning that "when the first person with AIDS in Toronto is killed by a bigot inspired by Schabbas' misinformation, we'll be after him (Schabbas)."

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Lesbian and gay protestors steal the show from Art Toronto's "Equality Day" flops



MAVerick

lesbian and gay issues. After this, the character of Eggleton's event shifted. From the proposed community event, it was transformed into an elitist invitation-only reception at City Hall, with the lesbian and gay content removed.

Lesbians and gays in this city responded with a demonstration to remind Eggleton of the need to proclaim Pride Day, and to express our sentiments about his farcical "Equality Day." On that cold, winter day, about 100 people showed up for a fun-filled rally, after which many of us attempted to infiltrate the "official" event.

The rally, MC'd by Harold Desmarais, featured several speakers, including Kyle Rae, who recently took a complaint to the Ontario Human Rights Commission over Eggleton's inaction on Pride Day. City Counsellor Jack Layton, a long-time ally of this city's lesbian and gay communities, and Ron Johnson, of the Lesbian and Gay Pride Day Committee. The crowd participated in a loud sing-a-long with the "Faggottes", who performed a great tune called "Art Thinks we're

Equal" to the music of "I Fall to Pieces" by the immortal Patsy Cline, as well another clever anti-Art song to the tune of a famous operatic piece.

After the demonstration, a group of 40 to 50 of us decided to crash "Equality Day." We reached a small lobby between the inner and outer doors of the entrance to City Hall, at which point we were denied entry to the building by security guards. More and more people crowded into the small lobby, but guards would not budge. Finally, after negotiations inside, Jack Layton and the people inside, we were allowed in.

The official event itself was rather uneventful, full of "respectable looking people" who stared at the homosexuals, until they slowly crawled out of our way. At this point we chose to feast upon the finger foods which Eggleton had supplied to his special guests.

When the Mayor himself arrived, several people attempted to engage in constructive discussions with him regarding his offensive position on Equality Day. He responded to the first question by

mumbling that "sexual orientation should be a private matter," and chose to ignore further questions by several insistent lesbians and gays. He veered over towards an admittance-restricted area, and then departed into the neither regions of City Hall, to a shout of "Equality 365 days a year, not just one, Art!" by one of the protestors.

The fight to proclaim Pride Day continues. The Mayor has again stated his refusal to proclaim our day again this year.

It is clear that Eggleton has little support from progressive people in this city. One month after "Equality Day", at the celebration of Nelson Mandela's release outside the office of the ANC on Danforth, we all cheered at the news of the official proclamation of Nelson Mandela Day, but the introduction of the Mayor himself was greeted with a chorus of boos which drowned out any applause he had received. Could it be that people are were disgusted by the ironies and inconsistencies of this man's facade?

Shawn Symms

Equality is a myth in the city of Toronto

TORONTO—"Our day, NOT Art's day, Pride Day, NOT 'Equality Day!'" On January 15, we let Art know what we think of his conception of equality.

As reported in the January issue of Rites ("Mayor Capitulates on Equality Day" by Anne Vespyr), Toronto Mayor Art Eggleton has declared January 15 as "Equality Day"—a pathetic attempt to stave

the growing anger in lesbian, gay, and progressive communities in this city for his consistent refusal to officially proclaim Lesbian and Gay Pride Day in this city. As a response to Eggleton's continued mistreatment of our communities, a broad coalition of community groups decided to reject his proposition of an "equality day," an annual event, the first of which would have somehow dealt with