

The International Scene

Mayhem in Montreal

The largest wave of lesbian and gay activism in Montreal since 1977 took place this July, as the community coalesced to protest police violence against lesbians and gay men.

Early in the morning of July 15th, police arrived at the scene of a private loft party attended by hundreds of lesbians and gay men. In dispersing the crowd, the police became violent, swinging clubs, hitting and punching, and shoving members of the crowd to the ground. Many of the police officers shouted anti-gay epithets while attacking the crowd, and several removed their badges to avoid identification.

The attack prompted a series of demonstrations that dominated much of the Montreal news over the next two weeks. The next evening a large non-violent demonstration blocked traffic in the middle of the gay "village" in Montreal's East End.

But the following day Montreal was shocked when a demonstration at Police Station 25 turned violent. Forty-eight protesters were arrested as police forcibly broke up the crowd. In front of TV cameras, the police beat demonstrators without

provocation. Many of the officers wore latex gloves and removed their badges before attacking the crowd. Several by-standers were also injured, and one protester was sent to the hospital after being kicked and hit in the groin repeatedly with a club. Several protesters reported both verbal and physical harassment while being held in police vans, and both male and female arrestees had their breasts and genitals fondled by police officers.

The outcry over these events forced the police to acknowledge the demonstrators' demands for an investigation of the police behaviour, lesbian and gay representation on the police/community relations commission, and educational efforts for the officers. Another peaceful demonstration produced assurances from the Chief of police and city government officials that these demands would be negotiated.

Finally, on July 29, a crowd of more than 2,000 staged a march and rally to protest the events and bring the community together. Demonstrations also took place in cities across Canada, and at Quebec government offices in London and New York.

The events marked "an end of the complacency that lesbian and gay Montrealers have lived with since 1977" (when police bar raids prompted street riots and the passage of civil rights legislation) said Ken Monteith, an activist who was among those harassed at the party and later beaten at Station 25. "The police riot woke up a lot of people who never thought about their own oppression before...and by all early signs, they aren't going to quietly forget it."

Editorial *(from page 2)*

we do exist. We need to do this so that education in this country doesn't exclude our experiences, so that young people see that there are a vast number of options and possibilities to being gay, lesbian or bisexual. This is why we need to fight censorship wherever it may occur, and especially within ourselves. Our experiences as human beings are as valid and important as those of anyone else. We need to remind ourselves of that fact, and act on it constantly as we define ourselves and, in so doing, redefine the society around us.




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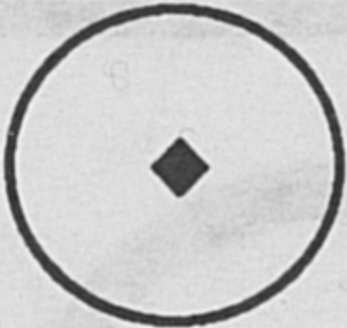


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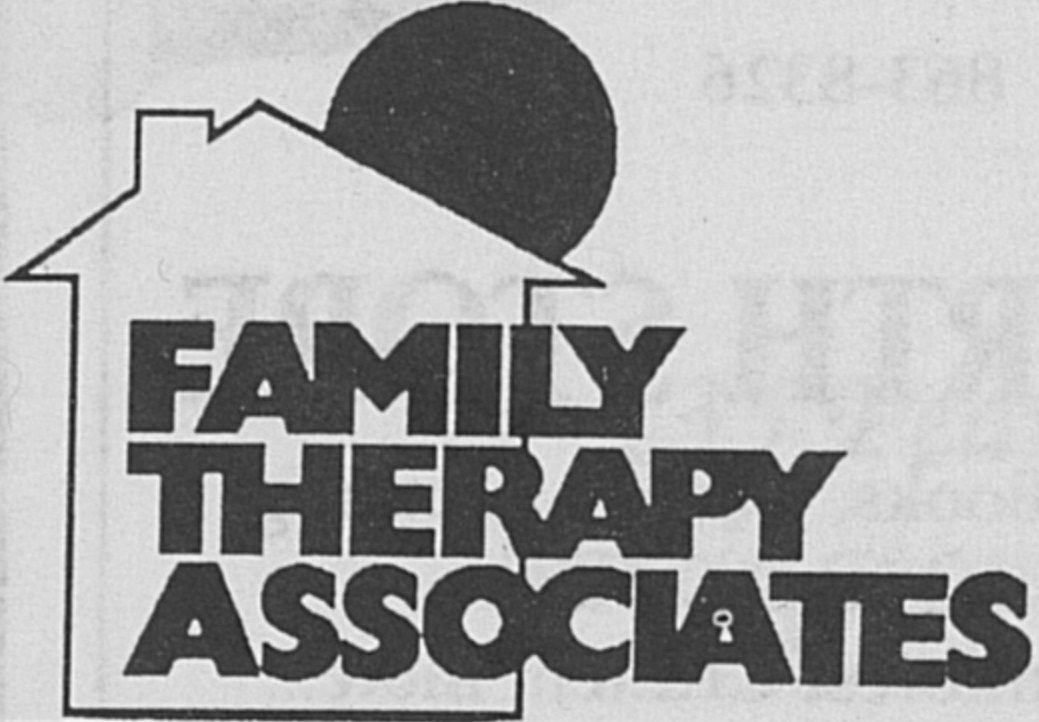
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