

## REGAINING THE INITIATIVE ACTION PROPOSAL

### BACKGROUND

Over the past year we have made significant advances in the struggle for equity in education for lesbian and gay students and the fight against homophobia and heterosexism at the Toronto Board. The "Sexual Orientation" Curriculum is out in the schools, a consultative committee has been set up, regular groups for lesbian and gay students and children of lesbian and gay parents are functioning. A network for lesbian and gay students, parents and employees (OGLE) has also been established. The "proselytization" clause has been struck from Board policy and sexual orientation has been added to the Board's general anti-bias policy.

As a direct result of these gains we are now experiencing a serious backlash. A new organization Citizens United for Responsible Education (CURE) has been formed. Taking its cue from the new strategy of right wing hate groups in the US and Canada, CURE has been careful to moderate its language. As a result of this new strategy it has been successful in producing an alliance of mostly the religious right as was demonstrated at last Feb 25 rally at the Board when around 300 people showed up. Although most of these people were out of district CURE has also instigated an effective phone-in campaign to trustees. Also taking their cue from the American right wing the group plans to use the issue of homosexuality to attack progressive trustees and replace them with others who will dismantle the range of equity issues promoted by the present board.

This moderate approach has not prevented the more activist elements of CURE from mounting a campaign of intimidation and even death threats against Tony who is our most vulnerable employee. The combination of CURE's official and unofficial strategies is beginning to be effective in wearing us down.

Not unexpectedly many of the trustees whose support has been wimpy at the best of times are now running scared. This pressure has been translated into the bureaucracy and is beginning to have effects on programme. Tony has been instructed to "destroy" copies of "So you think you might be lesbian" and "So you think you might be gay," two pamphlets aimed at lesbian and gay youth. The Equal Opportunity Office flyer on dealing with homophobic incidents is also being held up. There was a request from one of the associate directors to postpone the second "Challenging Homophobia" conference for secondary school students. Even without this request many of us have been so busy firefighting CURE initiatives that it seems unlikely that we would have had time to mount this effort. Finally the fact that the CURE rally was held on Board property was a clear violation of Board policy not to tolerate expressions of bias on the basis of sexual orientation. This policy is not being implemented

### GOALS

- 1\* Mobilize the lesbian and gay communities to put pressure on trustees to not back down and prepare to support vulnerable trustees in the upcoming election (December 1994)
- 2\* Mobilize specific sectors of the straight communities who are potentially supportive of our efforts -- education experts, parents, students, teachers, religious figures,