

The Speech
Delivered by Charles C. Hill
Representing Toronto Gay Action
on Parliament Hill, Ottawa
August 28, 1971

On August 28, 1971, lesbians and gay men and their friends gathered on Parliament Hill in Ottawa to support the brief "We Demand." Prepared by the August 28th Gay Day Committee of Toronto Gay Action and backed by Canadian gay groups, the thirteen-page brief called for law reform and changes in public policy relating to homosexuals. The march was held on this day to commemorate the second anniversary of the passing of amendments to the Canadian Criminal Code (Bill C-150), which decriminalized "gross indecency" and "buggery" in private between two consenting adults twenty-one years of age or older. About 100 people marched on Parliament Hill for forty minutes, in pouring rain. Members of GATE sponsored a march at the Vancouver courthouse to show solidarity with the Ottawa marchers. These were the first large-scale public gay demonstrations held in Canada.



These texts are from the Toronto Gay Action papers, 1989-058/01, Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Toronto.

Presented by Ed Jackson, Donald W. McLeod, and the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives as a keepsake to the delegates of the conference "We Demand: History/Sex/Activism," Vancouver, August 26-28, 2011.

Designed and printed by Coach House Press, Toronto, in an edition of 250 copies.

Two years ago the Criminal Code Amendments came into effect. After months of debate, during which ignorant Members of Parliament amused themselves making anti-homosexual jokes and vaunting their religious and sexist bigotry, sexual acts between persons over 21 were made not illegal in private. This did nothing to ameliorate the situation of Canadian homosexuals. This merely brought the law into line with police practice.

In October of the same year, the Canadian homophile movement was revived with the formation of the University of Toronto Homophile Association. Beginning with eight people in one association, we're now thousands of men and women in many groups right across Canada and we're here today to assert our rights and make our demands. We're no longer willing to quietly give thanks for a few crumbs begrudgingly given us by our own government. We're here to demand full equality.

For thousands of years homosexuals have been the scapegoats of anti-homosexual societies. Throughout Canada's history our sisters and brothers have been thrown in jail, hounded into hospitals, forced to hide and pass for straight, conforming to other people's prejudices. Even today Canadian homosexuals are having their careers ruined, being kicked out of their churches, having their children taken away from them, and being assaulted in the streets of their own cities. What have we done to deserve all this violence and hate? LOVE. All we want to do is love persons of the same sex and live our lives as we decide for ourselves and for this we're taught in our schools to hate ourselves. We're labelled sinful, criminal, and sick, and fired from our jobs. No longer!

Today marks a turning point in our history. No longer are we going to petition others to give us our rights as gifts. We're here to demand them as equal citizens on our own terms.

Homosexual men and women in Canada are fed up with being the butt of other people's jokes.

We're fed up with the lack of basic respect due to all human beings.

We're fed up with having to hide to preserve our jobs.

We're fed up with having to hide to preserve our own freedom.

We're fed up with the genocide of gays fostered by psychiatrists using medieval tortures to destroy us.

We're fed up with being discriminated against in employment, housing, and the courts.

We're fed up with being arrested and harassed by police forces paid for by our own taxes.

In fact, we're fed up with paying the price of other people's hang-ups. No longer are we going to accept the lie foisted on us that there is a homosexual problem. There's no homosexual problem in Canada. There's a heterosexual problem. It is they that have made the laws to protect themselves from us. They're the ones who employ the RCMP to identify us, isolate us, and evict us from our jobs. They're the ones who control the schools that teach hatred of homosexuals. They're the ones who control the churches that label us sinners. They're the ones who control the courts that label us criminals. No longer!

We've come here today to assert our pride in ourselves. To say we're homosexual and proud of it. We're coming together and uniting to manifest our own power as Gays. Two million homosexual men and women in Canada are watching us. We're going to show them it can be done, that we can go anywhere we choose as homosexuals and as Canadian citizens with full civil rights.

Gay is proud and Gay is good.

Let's say it *wherever* we go.



WE DEMAND

1. The removal of the nebulous terms "gross indecency" and "indecent act" from the Criminal Code and their replacement by a specific listing of offences, and the equalization of penalties for all remaining homosexual and heterosexual acts; and defining "in private" in the Criminal Code to mean a "condition of privacy";
2. Removal of "gross indecency" and "buggery" as grounds for indictment as a "dangerous sexual offender" and for vagrancy;
3. A uniform age of consent for all female and male homosexual and heterosexual acts;
4. The Immigration Act be amended so as to omit all references to homosexuals and "homosexuality";
5. The right of equal employment and promotion at all government levels for homosexuals;
6. The Divorce Act be amended so as to omit all references to homosexual acts as grounds for divorce; moreover in divorce cases homosexuality, *per se*, should not preclude the equal right of child custody;
7. The right of homosexuals to serve in the Armed Forces, and therefore the removal of provisions for convicting service personnel of conduct and/or acts legal under the Criminal Code; further the rescinding of policy statements reflecting on the homosexual;
8. To know if it is a policy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to identify homosexuals within any area of government service and then question them concerning their sexuality and the sexuality of others; and if this is the policy we demand its immediate cessation and destruction of all records so obtained;
9. All legal rights for homosexuals which currently exist for heterosexuals;
10. All public officials and law enforcement agents to employ the full force of their office to bring about changes in the negative attitudes and *de facto* expressions of discrimination and prejudice against homosexuals.