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Queer Families? Reconciling Theory and Practice

Queer Families Conference, November 14th, 2016, Université de Montréal

By Marianne Chbat, member of the LGBT Family Coalition

Using my own personal experiences as a starting point, I was asked to explain the reasons why I'm interested in aligning a queer worldview with being a parent. In just a few words, I'm a 33-year-old cisgendered (non trans) woman, a mother since one year, and of Lebanese-Egyptian origin. I also self-identify as Queer. (At times, though, I won't necessarily use this word to describe my sexuality. That depends on the context. If I'm in a context where the word queer means absolutely nothing to those I'm speaking with, I won't say I'm Queer because nobody will understand me. My goal is to be visible and real, especially since I've become a mom. I don't want my child to have the impression that our family configuration doesn't exist or that there is no name for our family or for the sexuality of her parents. So in some contexts I am lesbian, because this term is generally understood to designate two women who share their private and personal life together. If I have the space to talk about being queer, I'll do it, but I don't take for granted that everyone knows what this means).

I'm in a relationship with another woman since 7 years now. I met my partner in an academic context at the Université de Montréal, where we were both starting our master's degrees in sociology with Sirma Bilge as our supervisor. We were both very much interested in questions about sexuality, gender and ethnicity. We had no idea what academic paths our lives would take. In fact in working with our thesis supervisor, in meeting new people with political and identity politics that were beyond anything we had encountered before, and in reading new feminist and queer authors, we slowly changed our own identity discourses. We came together and felt more and more that queer identity politics matched more closely with who we are, rather than simply identifying as lesbians.

At this point, I approached Marie-Ève with the idea of having a child. That was in 2014. This idea to 'normalize' myself bothered Marie-Ève and even scared her a bit. Marie-Eve has always been more logical and rational than I. She was right. Perhaps my desire to have a kid was partially motivated by my wanting to be like everyone else. But it wasn't at the bottom of my idea. What I really wanted was to share with her the experience of being a parent. To accompany a human being on this planet, for a time. And to grow with this person...

Our project went from dream to reality very quickly. Marie-Ève gave birth in August 2015 to a highly energetic baby who changed our life and obliged us once again to rethink our queerness. Before becoming parents, for me, the politics and theories of queerness implied a deconstruction of normalizing categories. For me, it meant taking apart our representations of what it means to be woman, man, gay, lesbian, black, Arab, etc. It meant to accept that there are thousands and thousands of ways of being. That identities are infinitely complex and that there is a social and political imperative to destabilize these norms, by living in opposition to and outside of them.

I have to admit though that even though I wanted to politically deconstruct my identity as a woman and to question normative categories, I have never felt as much oppression as I have since becoming a mother. In fact, since becoming a parent, the expectations that are articulated and demanded of mothers have taken on a whole other dimension for me. I never realized to what point the whole notion of family is intrinsically linked to heterosexism and capitalism. And what was even more twisted and difficult for me was to be confronted with the fact that I was putting pressure on myself to conform to these expectations, despite the fact that I wanted to undo these norms and that my daily work as a student is to advocate against gender norms that include, evidently, norms about the family and motherhood. This year, in becoming a parent, and particularly in becoming a mother, I have tried to learn how to unlearn all the baggage that has been handed down to me, while eliminating as much as possible all the guilt that is part and parcel of being a parent. I have learned and continue to learn to put limits around my work, and around my studies, so I can find quality time with my child. Having a child has forced me to confront the deeply capitalist system that I live and participate in, and have invested myself in.

So I have realized after this first year of articulating my parenting, my couple, my work, my studies, and my social life, that while the necessity to deconstruct categories is still an urgent preoccupation, it has to be negotiated with a certain distance. In fact this institution of motherhood, overlaid with cisgendered, hetero-patriarchal and capitalist norms, which I launched myself into this year, has obliged me to reflect carefully about what it means to be a woman in this world. What it means to be a woman, a mother, ethnic and in a couple with another woman. Throughout this reflection, and at certain tension points it's become much clearer to me that to deconstruct these

categories does not necessarily imply living above them, erasing them, or acting like they don't exist. The objective of bringing these categories under the spotlight is essential in order to challenge these norms and to underline the challenges and oppressions of being identified as being part of one or a number of these minority identities.

Despite these reflections, sometimes I feel like an imposter with respect to queer politics. Having a complex because I am not performing queer in its purist version. Having a number of privileges (of class, of citizenship, of having a non-handicapped body, etc.) and performing my gender in a way that conforms to feminine expectations, I realize that the oppressions that I am living are much different and maybe less frequent in my daily life than a trans woman or a woman who does not perform her gender according to cultural expectations, to name but a few examples.

At the same time, isn't it a bit contrary to think that a queer position could be judging me because of this when in fact the whole point is to intrinsically question categorisation in order to let people be free to articulate their own identities? I think I've found a kind of resolution in understanding and living queerness for its anti-oppressive dimension. Speaking to our child about racism, sexism, ableism, transphobia. Bringing these different realities and forms of oppression to light. Not denying these realities and above all finding ways to advocate against these forms of oppression in my work, through discussions and exchanges with family and friends (who frequently have no idea about what the notion queer even means), are things I have done and wish to continue to do on a daily basis, in order to live my life in coherence with my many identities and queer political affiliations.

In fact, my queer posture is deeply rooted in intersectional feminism. For myself and for my partner as well (I'm letting myself speak of her a bit, because of course I am not living the concept of parenting and family alone as a single parent, but living this reality at her side and reflecting together every day), our vision of queer parenting is intertwined with looking at the issues and systems of oppression. I can't talk about sexism without speaking about racism or without speaking about ableism. I can't talk about being queer without positioning myself and taking into consideration the different spaces I occupy as sometimes someone who is marginalized and oppressed and at other times someone who is in a dominant and privileged position. For me being queer and an intersectional feminist goes together because that allows me not only to question identity categories but also to look at the conditions in which these identities are constructed and how these identities exist in larger overlapping systems.

I think that there needs to be some popular education in order for queer identity politics and intersectionality to be considered real and pertinent. I'm speaking today to people that understand me and who inform and nourish my politics, my life, and my identity. And I am profoundly grateful and hopeful because of that. But at the same time I'm conscious that when I leave this room and return to my everyday life, in the daycare of my daughter, in the grocery store, at the street corner or even in the corridors of this university, this conversation that we're having might not be so well understood. Sometimes I have the impression that I am living in a bubble with my friends. Like when we are speaking about what queer means and how the boundaries of what it means to be a man or a woman are porous and elastic. But in reality society we're not there yet. In a world where Donald Trump is elected as president of the United States, or closer to home that it is still destabilizing for first year bachelor's students to speak about feminism and the fact that gender and sexuality are socially constructed, I realise that there is still much ahead before we can talk about queer identities and politics to everyone and to feel understood and respected in having such a stance.

So to the question of whether I am performing queer well and if this stance, both theoretically and materially can be allied to the concept of family, I think we must also ask ourselves the question about how we should speak about being queer in places outside of our usual circles. Asking our parents to not only speak about the beauty of their granddaughter, but encouraging her in her other non-gendered qualities; participating in school committees not only to visibilize homoparental families, but also to propose non binary categories on school forms and promote communications that include, racialized people or handicapped people who were historically and are still excluded from spheres of power - these are a concrete ways for me to queer my family. Family and queer are possible. Absolutely. For me it is the structures of capitalism, heterosexism, racism and capacitism that are incompatible with the notion of family. But queer politics are necessary to question our systems and the foundations of the institution of family that are entwined in traditional representations of gender race, sexuality and work.

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News Briefs

Quebec News

December 8, 2016 – The *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* presented its 2016 Rights and Freedoms Award to Annie Pullen Sansfaçon and her daughter Olie Pullen in recognition of their work on behalf of the rights of trans children.

Ms. Pullen Sansfaçon, a professor at the School of Social Work of the Université de Montréal and founder of Gender Creative Kids Canada, has advocated in favour of the rights of trans children for several years. With her daughter Olie, she took part in the National Assembly public consultations on a bill designed to change the Civil Code to allow, among other things, trans children to change the mention of their sex in the Québec civil status register.

The moving testimony of her daughter helped increase understanding of the difficulties facing these children when their identity papers do not correspond to their gender. Following their testimony, the Civil Code was changed in June 2016 and the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms now includes gender identity and expression as a prohibited ground of discrimination.

December 15, 2016 - Montreal will play host next summer to an international conference on sexual diversity. The conference will be part of the city's pride week and its organizers hope to sensitize people as to the importance of international solidarity with the LGBT community — it will focus on countries with large francophone populations.

The provincial government is spending \$300,000 to support the event, according to International Relations Minister Christine St-Pierre.

January 25, 2017– The *Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec (SAAQ)* of Saint-Hyacinthe has prohibited its employees from using *Monsieur* and *Madame* following the complaint of a transgender woman.

Last June a trans woman visited the SAAQ to renew her driver's permit. During the taking of the photo, the employee angered the woman (who's masculine name was still in the SAAQ's dossier) by addressing her as 'Monsieur'.

She complained to the SAAQ, who later apologized. This was the first complaint of this nature ever made to the SAAQ. To avoid further problems the SAAQ now asks all employees to not use the words 'Monsieur' and 'Madame' to respect the rights of their trans clients.

February 9, 2017 - Citizens of the Sainte-Marie-Saint-Jacques provincial riding have started a petition and have demonstrated to stop their district from being eliminated before the next election. The petition has already gained 8,000 signatures opposed to the electoral redistribution.

A group of those living in the central Montreal riding, represented by Québec solidaire MNA Manon Massé, is asking the *Commission de la représentation électorale* to change its decision to remove the riding from the electoral map. The redistribution will create the new ridings of Ville-Marie and Westmount—Notre-Dame-de-Grâce — replacing the Westmount-Saint-Louis riding.

The electoral map is revised every second election to take into account variations in population. The electoral map was last changed in 2011 and was in place for the 2012 and 2014 provincial elections.

The current riding has a high density of LGBT people and would be diluted if the boundaries are changed.

Canada News

November 29 - Same-sex parents in Ontario and others who use assisted reproduction to conceive no longer have to adopt their own children. The *All Families Are Equal Act* ensures that couples who use sperm donors or a surrogate are legally recognized as parents.

It passed the Ontario legislature unanimously, though nearly half of the Progressive Conservative caucus was absent for the vote.

Social conservatives fought against the bill, upset that the term "parent" is used instead of "mother and father."

The bill also enables trans parents to modify their children's birth certificates when they list the parent with a gendered parental title that is not accurate. Trans parents can now use Father, Parent or Mother to more accurately reflect their gender.

The bill also recognizes multi-parent families, allowing a child to have up to four legally recognized parents.

December 1 - The Canadian federal government says it will attempt to reverse one of the world's toughest legal systems for people with HIV/AIDS, a move advocates say would be a major change in how Canada deals with the virus. "Just as treatment has progressed, the criminal justice system must adapt to better reflect the current scientific evidence on the realities of this disease," Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould said in a December 1, 2016 statement for World AIDS Day.

The government is considering creating prosecutorial guidelines, which could ask judges to consider less severe sentences for people charged in HIV non-disclosure cases, based on the real risk of transmission and the accused's intention in the case. That would be a major change for a legal system that has given harsh sentences to people living with HIV who have exposed others to the virus — regardless of their intent or whether the disease was actually transmitted.

HIV/AIDS organizations say more than 170 people in Canada have been charged with criminal offences for failing to disclose their HIV status, with some facing murder charges. In October, the executive director of the HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic of Ontario said he's heard other countries ridicule Canadian courts at global conferences.

December 9 - After mounting criticism over a policy that bans gay men from donating blood, Canadian Blood Services (CBS) might scrap all its blanket restrictions and replace them with personalized risk assessments.

"Just an incremental shortening of the policy doesn't deal with the principal assertion of unfairness and discrimination," Graham Sher, the CEO of Canadian Blood Services, told the House of Commons health committee on Dec 8, 2016. He said Canada should consider "a completely different approach . . . a policy that does not discriminate on the basis of gender and sexual orientation."

On June 20, Health Canada lowered its restrictions on blood donations from men who have sex with men (MSM), from a five-year deferral period to 12 months. That restriction applies to gay and bisexual men as well as some trans people.

At the committee, CBS' chief medical officer suggested the deferral period could be replaced with "gender-blind or sexual orientation-blind screening approaches."

"Such an approach might include asking all donors whether they have had a new sexual partner, or more than one sexual partner, in a given timeframe," Dana Devine said.

CBS facilitates all blood donations outside Quebec, where Héma-Québec plays a similar role; both follow almost-matching protocols.

December 12 - A former Canadian Forces member who says a series of aggressive investigations into her sexual orientation hounded her out of the military in the late 1980s is leading a class action lawsuit against Ottawa. Alida Satalic's lawsuit, spans the years 1969 to 1995 and applies to anyone who served in Atlantic Canada. Lawyer John McKiggan says in the statement of claim, which has not been proven in court, that between the 1950s and 1990s the Canadian government engaged in a campaign to identify, harass and purge lesbians and gays from the Armed Forces.

It names Satalic as the representative plaintiff in the class action, saying the lesbian former postal clerk was mistreated and harassed while she was serving her country.

The lawsuit is claiming \$100 million for the federal government's breach of duty of care, fiduciary duty and violation of charter rights, plus a further \$50 million in punitive damages.

December 13 - Two of Canada's northern territories, Nunavut and Yukon, are moving towards passing comprehensive trans-rights legislation. In Nunavut, Bill 31, which would add "gender identity" and "gender expression" to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination under the territory's Human Rights Act, has already cleared two readings through the non-partisan, consensus-based territorial assembly. It is expected to pass its third and final reading during the winter session, in March 2017. In Yukon, the incoming Liberal Party government that was elected on November 7, has pledged to conduct a review of all of the territory's "legislation, policy and practice . . . to ensure the Yukon Government meets rules and social standards for LGBTQ non-discrimination."

Newly-appointed Justice Minister Tracy McPhee says the review will include amending the Human Rights Act to include trans people, and amending the Vital Statistics Act to allow trans people to change their legal gender without undergoing surgery.

If the Yukon and Nunavut bills are passed, New Brunswick will be the only place in Canada where trans people are not explicitly protected by anti-discrimination law — in that province, they must rely on the category of "sex" to be interpreted to include them. Explicit protections were passed in British Columbia and Quebec in 2016.

December 16 - Canada's federal prison system could soon scrap a longstanding policy of housing trans and intersex offenders based on their genitalia while effectively barring them from gender-confirming surgeries. Since at least 1999, Correctional Service Canada (CSC) has sorted trans inmates who haven't transitioned based on their genitalia.

CSC's current "gender dysphoria" policy allows for hormone therapy. However, it restricts gender-confirmation surgery to those who have spent "12 continuous months in an identity-congruent gender role," while only counting months prior to their incarceration.

But that will likely change soon. CSC spokesperson Lori Halfper says the policy "is currently being reviewed after recent consultations," including the clause that jail time doesn't count towards the 12 months. "The revised guideline should be finalized and published this winter," Halfper writes.

The news comes amid an investigation by the Canadian Human Rights Commission. In December 2015, the West Coast Prison Justice Society filed a human-rights complaint alleging the policy was leading to rapes of transgender inmates. The commission previously referred a similar case to its tribunal, which ruled in 2001 that the policy was discriminatory.

December 18 - A colourful new campaign aims to encourage LGBTQ athletes to stay in the game by encouraging hockey players to decorate their sticks with the six colours of the Pride flag. "Pride Tape is a

badge of support to LGBT youth to say you're welcome in our sporting communities." said Kris Wells, director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta, the group spearheading the campaign. "This is a way to signal that you're an ally without having to actually say anything."

Wells says far too many young people are forced to quit athletics, due to discrimination. "Hockey in particular can be a hyper-masculinized environment, and any form of difference can be seen as a weakness," said Wells.

A crowdfunding campaign to raise \$54,000 to produce and distribute 10,000 rolls of the tape was launched. Once manufactured, it will be distributed for free to local minor hockey teams across Canada and beyond, with tape also available for sale to the public.

January 19 - Danielle Bottineau says she's disheartened by Pride Toronto's decision to limit police involvement in its events. Bottineau, a Toronto Police Service constable and a member of the city's LGBT community, has participated in Pride for the past seven years as a uniformed officer and an LGBT liaison on the force. "I've been on a rollercoaster of emotions," said Bottineau. "I'm saddened by it for sure. I'm disheartened by it."

The decision to ban police in uniform effectively from Pride Toronto events comes after the organization's annual general meeting. The item was not on the agenda, but was added at the last minute after requests from the crowd. The request was on a list of demands that Black Lives Matter Toronto issued to the organization this past summer during the Pride parade.

January 27 - In what transgender rights activists are calling a "landmark" development, the Canadian government has settled a human rights case that could pave the way for gender markers to be scrubbed from passports, birth certificates and other identity documents. Ottawa is also undertaking a government-wide review to assess how it collects and uses sex and gender information — a move that advocates for transgender rights are hailing as a major victory in the fight to remove "male" and "female" markers from identity documents.

"To my knowledge, this would be like a world first, for a government to proceed to review all of its gendering practices," said Barbara Findlay, a lawyer and member of the Gender-Free ID Coalition, an advocacy group calling for gender-neutral identity documents. (Findlay spells her name with lower-case letters.)

"It's a seismic shift in the way that we understand what gender means and how we should be using it."

The announcement caps a five-year battle launched by Findlay's client, 32-year-old Torontonian Christin Milloy, who was repeatedly denied in her attempts to update the gender information associated with her social insurance number. In January 2012, the transgender activist and web developer filed a human rights complaint against Employment and Social Development Canada (then known as Human Resources and Skills Development Canada), which oversees the SIN register.

In the settlement, ESDC acknowledged that personally identifiable sex and gender information can be collected from Canadians only if there are "legitimate purposes" for doing so. It remains unclear how "legitimate purposes" will be defined, but Milloy believes the acknowledgement is "revolutionary."

"Now the onus is on government to prove why they need the data," she said.

"We are encouraged by this change, and we hope that all governments in Canada are inspired to remove gender markers ("male or female") on documents wherever possible, and make any remaining markers more gender inclusive," Marie-Claude Landry, chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, said in a written statement.

"You wouldn't be entitled to ask somebody's race, sexual orientation or religion — and gender is exactly the same," findlay said.

In British Columbia, a human rights complaint is asking for gender information to be removed from birth certificates. In Saskatchewan, a lawsuit is seeking to remove gender markers from everything from government ID to school applications. And at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, a complaint launched by Toronto artist and activist Rory Vandrish is asking for gender markers to be scrubbed from Canadian passports.

February 6 - The You Can Play project, started five years ago to create a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ people in sports, has 30 new recruits working to help further the cause — one player from every team in the National Hockey League. The players have all volunteered to be an LGBTQ ambassador, something You Can Play co-founder Patrick Burke called "a really exciting moment for the NHL."

"It's the first time that any professional league has had one designated player on each team who will be the LGBTQ ambassador," Burke said on CBC Radio's *Metro Morning*. "The player will be responsible for being the go-to person on his team when it comes to LGBTQ events or media questions or issues."

Among the players who have stepped up to fill the ambassador role is Andrew Shaw of the Montreal Canadiens, who was suspended last year for using a gay slur while playing for the Chicago Blackhawks. "He wanted this responsibility, and I think it's a real tribute to the growth he's made in a short period of time," said Burke.

February 8 - The Liberal government is restoring and modernizing a program that gives financial support to those mounting expensive legal battles to clarify and protect their language and equality rights in court. The reworked court challenges program is also expanding to include other sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including religion and freedom of expression, democratic participation and the right to life, liberty and security of the person.

It is also expanding its scope to include parts of the Official Languages Act, including communications and services to the public, proceedings of Parliament, language of work within federal jurisdiction and the promotion of both English and French.

"No matter how conscientious a government is when it proposes legislation, or how thoroughly a government studies a piece of legislation before it becomes law, there may still be unforeseen impacts on guaranteed rights," federal Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould said Tuesday in Ottawa.

The program was established in 1978 and has played an instrumental role in many major constitutional challenges, including the fight for same-sex marriage, before it was abolished by the previous Conservative government shortly after coming to power.

LGBT Marriage News

November 30 - The 43-year-old Prime Minister of **Luxembourg** officially marries his partner, Gauthier Destenay, a few months after the Luxembourg parliament lifted the gay marriage ban.

By doing so, the Prime Minister becomes the second EU leader to marry a same-sex partner after Johanna Sigurdardottir, Iceland's Prime Minister, who married her partner in 2010.

The Christian People's party banned same-sex marriage in 2007. In 2013, however, 83 percent of Luxembourgers were favourable to changing the law and lifting the ban on same-sex marriage.

December 12 - Thousands of people from **Taiwan** gather on the streets for a final push to legalize same-sex marriage. Organizers estimate around 200,000 to 250,000 people attended the rally in front of the presidential palace on Ketagalan Boulevard in Taipei.

One of its most prominent supporters is none other than Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen. Over the weekend, she said, "All comrades have the right to marriage."

Same-sex marriage in Taiwan faces tough resistance, especially from conservative Christian groups who says that passing the new bill will harm traditional family values. Those who are opposing same-sex marriage have also held their large-scale protests in the past few weeks.

David Tseng, spokesperson of The Alliance of Taiwan religious Groups for the Protection of Family, said that the protests against legalizing same-sex marriage had an estimate of 200,000 participants as well.

December 14 - Across the **world**, one billion people can now benefit from marriage equality, meaning they live in a place where same-sex marriage has been legalised, the World Economic Forum shares on social media , as it highlights breakthroughs reached in 2016.

The milestone was first noted by Tony Pitman, an Australian LGBT activist, who conducted an analysis on marriage equality. Calling it a historic shift on a truly global scale, he noted the landmark number of one billion was reached in July 2016, when nine Mexican states and Mexico City followed the lead of other Latin American nations Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay to legalise same-sex marriage.

The first country to allow same-sex marriage was The Netherlands in 2001. However, a seismic shift came when the ruling by the United States Supreme Court in 2015 guaranteed same-sex marriage throughout the whole country, bringing marriage equality to over 320 million people. Brazil offers over 200 million people this right, followed by France with 67 million.

The Netherlands and Spain tie for most gay-friendly country in the world, according to a 2015 Gallup Poll. Of those asked the question 'Is the city/area where you live a good place to live for gay and lesbian people?' 87% of people in both nations responded 'yes'.

The WEF reporting on Pitman's work cautioned, however, that although one billion people now have marriage equality, this only represents around 14% of the world's population.

Same-sex relationships are still illegal in more than 70 countries.

January 9 - Caster Semenya, the Olympic star who was at the centre of a gender dispute, marries her girlfriend in a stunning ceremony. The 800m gold medalist, of **South Africa**, ties the knot with her long-term partner, Violet Raseboya. Taking to social media, Semenya posts pictures of herself and her bride at the Chez Charlene wed ding venue in Pretoria. She writes that the pair enjoyed a "perfect day".

The intersex athlete - who was previously subjected to gender testing to prove she was female - has a condition known as hyperandrogenism. This naturally increases her levels of testosterone.

In 2015, the Court of Arbitration for Sport overturned the International Association of Athletics Federations's rule to force athletes with naturally high levels of testosterone to take hormone-suppressing drugs.

January 17 - With 68 votes to 11, the **Mexican** parliament finally approves the right for civil unions between couples in the LGBT community.

Although in Mexico equal matrimony rights already existed in some states like Campeche, Coahuila, Quintana Roo, Jalisco, Nayarit, Chihuahua, Sonora and Mexico City, the proposal launched by Peña Nieto last year in order to legalise homosexual matrimony in all Mexico was rejected by various political parties.

February 1 - Norway's Lutheran Church votes in favour of new ceremonial language that will allow its pastors to conduct same-sex marriages, bringing it into line with several other mainstream Protestant denominations abroad. Last April the annual conference of the Church - to which nearly three quarters of Norwegians said in 2015 they belonged - backed the principle of same-sex marriages, but did not agree on a wording. The new decision involves modifying the marriage text to make it gender-neutral, removing the words "bride" and "groom".

February 2 - Estonia legally recognises the marriage of a gay couple for the first time. On appeal, a court in the country's capital Tallinn recognises the marriage of a same-sex couple, in a hopeful sign that full marriage equality may not be too far off.

A court in the district of Harju refused to enter the marriage between the men, who wed in Sweden, into the civil register. But on appeal, the court ruled in favour of entering the men's marriage into the register. LGBT activists and legal experts have said they hope that the ruling will set a precedent paving the way for same-sex marriage to become legal in the Baltic State.

The Estonian Parliament back in 2014 narrowly passed legislation to legalise gay civil partnerships. The bill, which recognised civil partnerships of both straight and gay couples, passed with 40 votes to 38. 23 members were absent for the vote. The legislation took effect in 2016, and made Estonia the first former Soviet republic to allow civil partnerships for same-sex couples.

February 6 – Marine Le Pen, **French** presidential candidate, confirms in her campaign platform that if elected she would repeal marriage and adoption rights from same-sex couples.

International News

November 30 (The Guardian) U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has long insisted he is a "supporter" of LGBT rights and argued he is a "friend to the gays".

He once alleged that if Hillary Clinton won the White House, Islamist terrorists could enter the US who would "murder gays", while claiming that if he were elected he would "do everything in [his] power to protect our LGBTQ citizens".

Yet critics have pointed out his cabinet appointments so far – which include staunch conservatives who have fiercely opposed gay marriage – indicate otherwise.

Early in his career, vice President-elect Mike Pence advocated siphoning off government funding for HIV treatment and instead putting it towards gay "conversion therapy". More recently, he signed into law a controversial Religious Freedom Restoration Act, giving businesses the right to discriminate against gay people on the grounds of religion.

Meanwhile, the appointment of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General has sparked alarm in the LGBT community. Mr. Sessions has previously opposed lifting a ban on openly gay people serving in the military, voted in support of banning same-sex marriage and voted against a bill providing workplace discrimination protections for LGBT people. The senator – who will become responsible for law enforcement – has also opposed expanding the definition of hate crimes to include attacks on people because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, twice.

Appointing doctor-turned-politician Tom Price as Secretary of Health and Human Services has also prompted concern. Mr. Price – a longstanding critic of Obama's healthcare reform legislation – has also criticised the administration's guidelines allowing transgender students to use bathrooms that correspond with their gender identity, declaring them "absurd". The orthopaedic surgeon has previously co-sponsored a constitutional

amendment banning same-sex marriage. And when gay marriage eventually became legal, he said: "This is not only a sad day for marriage, but a further judicial destruction of our entire system of checks and balances."

Newly appointed Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has spent heavily in opposition to same-sex-marriage laws in several states. Ms. DeVos and her husband spearheaded a campaign to pass an anti-gay-marriage ballot referendum in the state in 2004, contributing more than \$200,000 dollars to the drive.

Trump's latest appointment of Transport Secretary, Elaine Chao, used to serve as George W Bush's Labour Secretary. In that position, Ms. Chao oversaw a Department of Labour which opposed LGBT anti-discrimination protections.

December 1 (Daily Mail) The first-ever **U.N.** independent expert selected to examine violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people has vowed to forge ahead with wide-ranging investigations despite formidable opposition to his appointment in a U.N. vote. "This mandate will cover every country under the sun and under the moon," Vitit Muntarbhorn said at a LGBT conference in Bangkok. "There can never be a political or legal vacuum in terms of protecting people."

December 2 (Pink News) The **Greek** Parliament has passed a bill that will expand the rights of same sex couples in Greece, as well as ensuring equality in the workplace regardless of sexual orientation, gender or religion.

The Greek press has reported that right-wing MP Constantinos Katsikis had railed against the Justice Ministry bill, saying that Independent Greeks would remain "faithful" to its "Christian and social beliefs as Greek patriots."

This comes after same-sex civil partnerships were legalised in December 2015 which was in response to the European Court of Human Rights condemning Greece for anti-gay discrimination.

Joint adoption for same-sex couples is still not legal, neither is same-sex marriage or IVF treatment for lesbian couples. But laws regarding the prohibition of hate speech and hate crime is now said to be some of the most rigid in Europe.

December 6 (Pink News) **Malta** has made history as the first European country to ban gay conversion therapy. The island nation passed the bill that will mean any medical professional found guilty of prescribing the so-called 'gay cure' therapy could be jailed. Politicians voted through the Affirmation of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression Bill, labelling gay cure therapy as "deceptive and harmful".

The new ban will see anyone found guilty fined up to \$5,000, or even sent behind bars for up to five years in the most serious cases. The new ruling will see Malta retain its position as one of the most progressive places in the world for LGBT rights.

December 20 (Pink News) A US-based pastor who cheerleads support for homophobic laws around the world is battling a 'crimes against humanity' lawsuit. Massachusetts hate preacher Scott Lively is one of the world's most notorious homophobes, and has been linked to anti-gay laws in a number of countries. Lively addressed an anti-gay conference in **Uganda** just before the country's homophobic law was drafted, where he urged a fresh crackdown on gay sex. He also cheered on anti-gay legislation in Russia. The pastor has extensive links to anti-LGBT movements across the world, particularly in developing countries. Human rights activists allege he is key to a wave of anti-LGBT laws and resistance to the repeal of sodomy laws around the world.

Lively is facing a crimes against humanity suit from Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), who allege he has acted in violation of international law, by seeking to promote the persecution of gay people. SMUG filed a brief with the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts in the case this month. SMUG is asking

the federal court to prohibit Lively from, among other things, preaching at Ugandan churches and lobbying or advocating against same-sex marriage in Uganda.”

December 27 (LGBTQ Nation) The January 2017 issue of *National Geographic* is a special issue focusing on the “gender revolution” and features a 9-year old transgender girl who is believed to be the first trans person on the publication’s cover. “The best thing about being a girl is, now I don’t have to pretend to be a boy,” the cover quote reads.

The issue hit newsstands on Dec. 27, ahead of Nat Geo’s two-hour documentary *Gender Revolution*, co-produced and hosted by Katie Couric. It premieres Feb. 6.

A new study by the National Center for Transgender Equality shows that discrimination is still prevalent against the community, including against trans youth who often face abuse both at home and at school.

January 20 (IB Times) Minutes after Donald Trump was officially sworn in as **U.S.** president, the LGBT rights page was taken down from the White House and Departments of Labor websites. The site’s removal drew alarm from the millions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens who are concerned about losing some of the protection granted to them under the Obama administration.

Previously, whitehouse.gov/lgbt provided information about legislative LGBT progress over the past eight years. It also offered support programs for the LGBT community such as "It Gets Better Project," which aimed at inspiring LGBT youth who may be facing discrimination and contemplating suicide.

Now, the new page reads "Sign up for updates from President Donald J. Trump!" or "Sorry, the page you're looking for can't be found" next to the president's seal. All of the information about the LGBT community that could be found on the WhiteHouse.gov webpage during Obama’s presidency can now be accessed on ObamaWhiteHouse.gov.

January 27 (The Independant) A gay activist from New York has announced plans for a mass LGBT protest after being inspired by hundreds of thousands of women who marched in **Washington DC** on January 21. David Bruinooge from Brooklyn, NYC, posted plans on Facebook for a march in the capital on June 11, in response to fears within the LGBT community that President Donald Trump’s administration threatens equality rights.

Mr. Bruinooge, who works in television, told the *Washington Blade*: “I was watching the events [of the women’s march] unfold on TV and I was very proud and inspired by all the women, the strong women in our country who were kind of taking this to the street and getting their voices heard. And in the back of my mind as an openly gay man I thought the gay community should be doing something like this to follow up on the momentum.”

The last major LGBT protest in Washington was the National Equality March in 2009, where hundreds of thousands of participants called for full equality for LGBT people in all 50 states.

The march planned for June will coincide will Capital Pride, DC’s annual celebration of gay rights and culture, which consistently draws large crowds.

January 31 (CNN) Thousands of gay and bisexual men who were convicted of now-abolished sexual offenses in **Britain** have been posthumously pardoned under a new policing law, the Justice Ministry announced. The "Turing law" received royal assent, the last stage in a bill becoming law in the United Kingdom. It gives an automatic pardon to men who died before the law came into force, and makes it possible for living convicted gay men to seek pardons for offenses no longer on the statute book.

The law was named after World War II code-breaker and mathematician Alan Turing -subject of the 2014 film "The Imitation Game" - who killed himself in 1954 after he was subjected to chemical castration as punishment for homosexual activity.

In 2013, nearly 60 years later, he received a posthumous royal pardon from Queen Elizabeth II.

Sex between men over the age of 21 was decriminalized in England and Wales in 1967. However the law was not changed in Scotland until 1980 or in Northern Ireland until 1982.

In recent years gay people around the world have fought to be pardoned for same-sex crimes that have long since been abolished. Last year, Germany announced plans to compensate thousands of men who were convicted under an old law for their sexual preferences, Deutsche Welle reported. And in New Zealand, lawmakers introduced a petition in July seeking a formal apology and a pardon for those convicted of same-sex acts under laws abolished 30 years ago.

February 23 (AP) The Trump administration has just withdrawn Obama-era guidelines on how schools should accommodate transgender students.

Last year, while Barack Obama was president, the Education and Justice Departments issued the guidelines, saying among other things that transgender students should be called by their preferred names and pronouns, and have access to the restrooms, locker rooms, and other single-sex facilities that correspond with their gender identity. The guidelines are nonbinding, but the Obama administration had warned that schools not following them could be found in violation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits sex discrimination, and face a loss of federal funding. During Obama's presidency, the departments held that Title IX covers discrimination based on gender identity.

The revocation was likewise issued by the Education and Justice Departments. "This is an issue best solved at the state and local level," Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said in a statement.

Activists, however, warn that the move may embolden lawmakers to introduce legislation that is hostile to trans students, and say transgender equality should not be something that varies from state to state or locality to locality, but instead should be a matter of national policy.

News from the LGBT Family Coalition

UPCOMING MEETINGS

MARCH 2017

◆ **MONDAY, MARCH 6TH FROM 7 – 10 PM**

MONTREAL: SCREENING OF THE FILM "TRANSGENDER PARENTS"

THE LGBT Family Coalition and UQAM's Research Chair on Homophobia invite you to the screening of the film "Transgender Parents" (english with French subtitles). Rémy Huberdeau the film's director will be present after the screening to chat with the audience.

Location: UQAM, PAVILLON J-A DESÈVE, ROOM DS-1950, 320 SAINTE-CATHERINE EST

PLEASE SEE THE ATTACHED FLIER FOR MORE DETAILS

◆ **SATURDAY, MARCH 18TH at 11:30 A.M.**

FAMILY ACTIVITY: L'ÉRABLIÈRE L'AKABANE (LANAUDIÈRE)

(For more information please see attached flier). **Reservations necessary.**

◆ **MONDAY, MARCH 20TH at 10:30 A.M. – 12 P.M.**

MONTREAL: GET-TOGETHER FOR YOUNG PARENTS

Discussion group for parents with young children (up to about 2 years old)

Discussion group for parents on the topic chosen by parents who are present

Espresso for the parents and snacks for all.

Location: L'espace café at the boutique La Culotte à l'Envers, 3162 Masson, Montréal, H1Y 1Y1

Please RSVP with Emilie ejouvin@hotmail.com or on the Facebook page of the Coalition

APRIL 2017

◆ SATURDAY APRIL 8

INTENSIVE DAY IN MONTREAL FOR FUTURE LGBT PARENTS (IN FRENCH)

Advanced registration is necessary: (514) 878-7600 or info@famillesLGBT.org

Please note: the number of places is limited (see attached flier for more details).

◆ THURSDAY APRIL 20 FROM 7 - 9 P.M.

MONTREAL: CONFERENCE ON FAMILIES WITH POLYAMOUROUS PARENTS

Where: UQAM

Details to come

◆ SUNDAY APRIL 30 AT 10 A.M.

FAMILY ACTIVITY: VISIT TO THE CHAGALL EXHIBIT AT MONTREAL'S FINE ARTS MUSEUM

Details to come

BULLETIN BOARD:

◆ **Le Centre des femmes du Verdun** offre l'écoute individuelle pour lesbiennes les mercredis de 9 h – 12 h et une série d'ateliers sur les relations lesbiennes saines. Pour plus d'information : 514-767-0384 ou site Web : www.centredefemmesdeverdun.org

◆ **Dorshei Emet B'nei Mitzvah Program:** Do you have children entering grade 6? We offer a meaningful program in which children discover the relevance of their Jewish heritage. Dorshei Emet is a welcoming Synagogue to individuals and families of all backgrounds, and to interfaith and LGBTQ families. **514-486-9400 (Alys Geiger)**, www.dorshei-emet, or drop in anytime to Saturday morning Shabbat services, 10h00 to 12h15, and stay for a light lunch and meet some of the members!

◆ **Le Centre des femmes de Rivière-des-Prairies! 514-648-1030** - Nous sommes ouvertes aux lesbiennes! Si vous avez besoin de plus d'informations vous pouvez consulter notre site web : www.cdfdrp.qc.ca ainsi que le site de notre regroupement : www.rcentres.qc.ca/propos.html

◆ **L'Écho des femmes de la Petite Patrie** est un centre de femmes qui offre des rencontres pour lesbiennes. Ces rencontres ont lieu les lundis soirs aux deux semaines de 19h00 à 21h30, et sont animées par une personne ressource. Ces rencontres, qui se veulent un lieu d'échange, de ressourcement et d'information, s'intéressent aux réalités et aux conditions de vie des lesbiennes. Les rencontres sont en français. Un service de halte-garderie est disponible avec réservation faite une semaine à l'avance. Le centre est situé au **6032 St-Hubert (métro Beaubien)**. **Téléphone (514)277-7445, télécopieur (514)277-1689**

MISCELLANEOUS

◆ **Traducteurs, rédacteurs, etc.:** Nous sommes à la recherche de bénévoles pour la traduction française de ce bulletin. Toute contribution (même à raison d'une page ou deux par mois) est la bienvenue. Si vous êtes disponible, veuillez nous contacter : info@famillesLGBT.org

◆ **Batshaw Youth and Family Centres** is encouraging English speaking and bilingual gay and lesbian couples, and singles, to consider becoming **foster parents**. There are babies, pre-schoolers and older children who are waiting for a foster home. For some the plan will be to help them return to their families. For other children, the plan will be to work toward **adoption**. What a remarkable feeling it is to know you have made a difference in the life of a child by providing a stable, safe and loving environment. For more information, please call, **Rena Rubin, Foster Care Recruiter, at 932-7161, local 416, or send an e-mail to rena_rubin@ssss.gouv.qc.ca**

♦ The **Open Book Library's** collection includes over 5500 books written by LGBT authors or by authors who write about our communities. Some of these books are for children and adolescents. We are very proud that approximately half of our collection is in French. Much more information as well as online consultation of the book collection is available at our Web site www.ccglm.org/en-b. We are located at **2075 Plessis** (CCGLM) in the Village. Come visit us! Open Wednesdays and Fridays from 1-8 p.m. (514) 528-8424.

The bulletin board is a free forum for members to communicate amongst each other. If you want to post an announcement in the next issue please send it to us at any time to info@famillesLGBT.org or by post to CF-LGBT, 3155, rue Hochelaga, bureau 201, Montreal, Quebec, H1W 1G4. If you have something to advertise, sell, rent or buy...anything where money must change hands, you can place an ad in the newsletter. Ads cost 20 cents per word.

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