

Primary Source Assignment

October 22, 1977: Montreal Police Raids of Truxx Bar and Le Mystique



The selected image is the cover page of the October 24, 1977, edition of the *Journal de Montréal*. The featured photograph is of a Montreal Police officer pinning a man down against the trunk of a car to arrest him during the resulting protests following the raids of the Truxx Bar and Le Mystique that took place two days prior on October 22, 1977. The relevant text translates to “The homos and the police”; “4 pages of exclusive photos” and “It’s war”. The Truxx Bar and Le Mystique were two gay bars located at 1428 and 1424 Stanley Street in the heart of Montreal’s gay district. Truxx Bar closed its doors in 1978, whereas Le Mystique closed in 2009 holding the title as the oldest gay bar in Montreal at the time¹.

The Toronto bathhouse raids of 1981 are often dubbed the Canadian equivalent of the Stonewall riots of 1969 in New York City, both of which pioneered a movement and paved the way for LGBT rights and a more inclusive society. However, an often-

overlooked event occurred in Montreal four years prior to the Toronto raids which succeeded in igniting an immediate call to action.

From February 1975 to June 1976, a campaign surged, fueled by the notion that then-Mayor Jean Drapeau sought to project a more conservative image and “clean-up” the city of Montreal ahead of the 1976 Summer Olympic Games². It prompted Montreal Police to engage in nearly constant surveillance, harassment and raids of bathhouses and gay and lesbian bars in Montreal’s Stanley Street gay village³.

In response, francophone and anglophone activists from several Montreal LGBT groups banded together along with gay men, lesbians and areas of the feminist movement to form an organization called the *Comité homosexuel antirépression* or CHAR (Gay Coalition against Repression)⁴. On June 19, 1976, the organization rallied more than 300 gay men, lesbians and their supporters to protest the violence

¹ <https://xtramagazine.com/culture/montreals-oldest-gay-bar-to-close-its-doors-30989>

² <https://interligne.co/bar-le-truxx/#>

³ <https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/resistance>

⁴ <https://www.queerevents.ca/queer-history/resistance>

against the community. It created a precedent as one of the most significant demonstrations to date and set the tone for the monumental protest to come.

In the early morning hours of October 22, 1977, nearly 50 police officers forcefully entered Truax Bar and Le Mystique in a militant-style raid armed with machine guns and donning bullet-proof vests⁵. A total of 146 men were arrested by what would later be dubbed the morality squad, subsequently detained for 8-15 hours in over-crowded cells without bail or access to legal representation and forced to undergo compulsory testing for venereal diseases⁶. This was the largest mass arrest in Canada since the *War Measures Act* was invoked by former Prime Minister Trudeau during the October Crisis of 1970.

The police actions immediately incited and propelled the LGBT community and its supporters to consider and take on a political stance. The next morning, 2,000 people arrived at the corner of St-Catherine West and Stanley Streets to protest the raids, defend gay rights and denounce police brutality⁷. The police on-site attempted to break down barricades by driving their motorcycles into the crowds and clubbing protesters. In response, protesters hurled beer bottles⁸.

Despite the widespread public outrage, the authorities charged all men with being found in a bawdy house (a brothel), and eight charges of gross indecency and two of possession of illicit drugs were also laid⁹. Amongst the arrested were 15 teachers, two lawyers, and a school principal¹⁰. Without any existing protection to LGBT persons under the law at the time, the arrests of the men and risk of their identities being disclosed publicly presented significant threats to their jobs, employability, their marriages, their families, and their lives.

LGBT activists lobbied to the Parti Québécois for the law to be changed and they listened¹¹. The government adopted Bill 88 and the Quebec Human Rights Charter was amended to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation within the province – all this no more than two months following the raids¹². On December 15, 1977, Quebec became the first Canadian province and the largest jurisdiction in North America to ever establish such legislative protection¹³. However, it took another five years before the charges against most of the 146 men were dropped¹⁴.

Despite the relatively lesser yet ongoing tensions between the police and the LGBT community, the province of Quebec has continued to position itself at the helm of gay rights for its communities. Twenty-five years after the raids, Quebec became the first jurisdiction in North America to allow the civil union of same-sex couples¹⁵. Nevertheless, the Québécois LGBT community continues to advocate for additional measures to ensure the protection of trans, intersex, and non-binary persons, who still remain some of the most vulnerable members of the population today.

⁵ <https://interligne.co/bar-le-truax/#>

⁶ <https://interligne.co/bar-le-truax/#>

⁷ <https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2019/10/20/cest-arrive--la-semaine-du-20-octobre>

⁸ <https://interligne.co/bar-le-truax/#>

⁹ <https://lgic.ca/event/n77.282>

¹⁰ <https://lgic.ca/event/n77.282>

¹¹ <https://thewalrus.ca/raiding-history/>

¹² <https://interligne.co/bar-le-truax/#>

¹³ <https://thewalrus.ca/raiding-history/>

¹⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/the-montreal-gay-community-gets-organized>

¹⁵ <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1062535/40e-de-la-descente-policier-du-bar-truax-un-tournant-pour-les-droits-des-homosexuels>

Image source:

The cover of the Journal de Montréal featuring the event proved difficult to acquire as most Canadian archives centre on English-language media content of events that took place outside of Quebec and/or require a paid subscription. I was unyielding in wanting to tell this story, and finally found the [cover](#) in an article by Xtra Magazine, which the publication acquired from the *Archives Gaies du Québec* (Gay Archives of Quebec).