



## LAW

BY ARTHUR S. HAYES

### Singles' Rights Activists Target Corporations

**T**HE SINGLES' rights movement has gained acceptance from voters and legislators, but it has made little headway with business.

Singles' rights advocates say that many of the nation's 50 million unmarried people are treated unfairly by the insurance, airline and financial service industries, as well as by employers. They argue that singles pay more for some services than married people and often aren't entitled to the same benefits.

In the late 1980s many cities recognized heterosexual and homosexual domestic partnerships. Seattle and other cities even extended spousal benefits to the unmarried companions of municipal employees. California allows non-traditional families and couples to register as unincorporated non-profit associations, a move that could lead to greater legal recognition of those relationships.

But for the most part, the business world has resisted the demands of the singles movement.

Management lawyers say corporations feel little compulsion to extend benefits to companions of their employees because the law doesn't require them to.

"I don't see the private sector moving to replicate these early developments in these municipalities," says Paul Shultz, a lawyer with Towers Perrin, a benefits consulting firm.

But Thomas F. Coleman, a singles' rights lawyer in Los Angeles, predicts that in 15 years the movement will have an impact on corporate America. "People are filing lawsuits—threatening to file lawsuits," he says.

One of them is the surviving lesbian partner of a deceased American Telephone & Telegraph employee. She filed suit in federal court in New York last August, charging the company with discrimination because it denied her the death benefits it ordinarily pays a husband. An AT&T spokesman says that until the law recognizes such partners, the company has no obligation to extend its benefits to them.