



Full Gay Marriage and Civil Partnership Equality a Step Nearer

In the teeth of opposition from some religious groups, the Coalition Government have announced that they are to consult over how marriage laws in England and Wales can be further reformed. Perhaps the objective of the Equal Love campaign, as reported in the January issue, is on the way to being realised and gay and lesbian couples could soon win the right to marry, and straight couples be given the right to form civil partnerships.

Furthermore, the Home Office has announced it is lifting the ban on civil partnership ceremonies being held in religious places of worship, but churches will not be forced to extend the facility to couples. Whereas the move will be welcomed by some denominations like the Quakers, it will be anathema to sections of the Church of England - and of course to the Vatican. They worry about litigation taking away their right to discriminate.

The removal of the ban was agreed on a free vote in both houses of parliament in a late amendment to Labour's Equality Act 2010, but needed action from the Coalition to implement it.

Footnote: An unhappy Archbishop of Durham, John Sentamu declared 'You mustn't have rights that trump other rights,' voicing what has become a mantra for many religious people. Increasingly they cite analogy with discriminating B & B owners who claim freedom of conscience. What we



Peter Tatchell and OutRage!'s Equal Love campaign is backing couples like Rev Sharon Ferguson of the Metropolitan Community Church and her partner Franka who wish to see gay marriage legalised. The campaign also backs straight couples who seek civil partnerships. Photo: Chris Houston

Veteran LGBT activist Peter Tatchell is quoted as saying the proposals were 'a significant advance for gay and religious freedom. The old restrictions forced religious bodies to discriminate against same-sex couples, even when they didn't want to.' However, he described the government's failure to open up marriage for LGBT people as 'spineless'.

do in our own home / church is our affair, they say. That's our right. Well, increasingly it looks like dodgy ground. If freedom of conscience leads in the direction of discrimination, then, yes, it must be 'trumped'. Why should intolerance be tolerated? Ed.

Editor's Notes

All the Lovers

I recently learned the meaning of 'flash mob', a phenomenon no doubt familiar to younger readers. Wikipedia comes up with: 'a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual and pointless act for a brief time, then disperse', like the 5000 who converged on a location in New York to hold a pillow fight. The gatherings are fuelled by social networking sites and have mainly been harmless fun. Inspired by the craze, Kylie Minogue's pop video, 'All the Lovers', features a mob of scantily clad, writhing couples, kissing passionately and eventually forming a vast pyramid in the middle of LA. Interestingly many of the couples are same-sex. The video ends with Kylie releasing a dove of peace from the top of the pyramid. One couldn't wish for a better and more inclusive, Humanist image of sexuality. No wrinkles to be seen though, but I'm not complaining.

The video and the song have had great success - in the West. One reviewer described it as 'grown up but carefree, bombastic yet delicate, sober in spirit and drunk on love.' Kylie herself said: 'What I'm so thrilled about is the energy that comes through and that oneness. [...] It is a perfect and genuine expression of how I feel about sexuality and sensuality. I totally believe love should be for love's sake.'

However, television stations in several Asian nations where cultural and religious conservatism prevails, like Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, have censored the video, reacting to the explicit acceptance of same-sex love. Change in the region is coming slowly, but from India there are



encouraging reports that a new fashion-conscious gay magazine called 'Fun' is flying off the shelves. The magazine's editor has said: 'When I came out in 2006, my family publicly disinherited me. Now I see parents taking part in gay pride marches.'

In Nepal, there is even greater cause for optimism. After a Supreme Court judgment in 2007, the government has developed liberal policies towards sexual minorities and is aiming to attract around 200,000 LGBTI tourists this year. Agencies are offering same-sex marriages and adventure holidays in the spectacular national parks. There has been a very encouraging response. Kylie's utopia being realised perhaps.

We're a long way from that in parts of London, where there are reports that homophobic incidents have soared by 28 per cent. Writing in a recent issue of 'Attitude' Johann Hari draws attention to the often violent homophobia of many young Muslims. Posters have been put up declaring East London a 'gay-free zone'. Hari writes powerfully of the need to challenge homophobia, particularly in education. Intolerance must not be respected and change there must be if we are all to live in harmony. In this issue we report the exciting news that Hari is to be our guest at the annual lunch.

Malcolm Trahearn



Kylie's mob... read Editor's Notes to see what all naked revelry is about....

Christian Guesthouse Couple to Appeal

Most LGBT Humanist readers- and indeed many of the faithful - will have applauded the Bristol County Court judgment handed down in January against the Christian hoteliers, Peter and Hazelmary Bull, who turned away a gay couple. It seemed that equality legislation had triumphed and that the law was clear on the equal provision of goods and services. Crucially, religious conviction was no excuse for discriminatory practice. Judge Rutherford said: 'Whatever may have been the position in past centuries it is no longer the case that our laws must, or should automatically reflect the Judaeo-Christian position.'

However, the couple and their backers, the Christian Institute, are to appeal. The case is an interesting one as the couple ran a policy of denying a double bed to unmarried couples, both straight and gay. They had previously been in trouble for turning away heterosexual couples.

In this case, the gay couple concerned, Martyn Hall and Steven Preddy, had entered into a Civil Partnership, so the issue is likely to be how far marriage and civil partnerships are equivalent. Although the law says that civil partners are to be treated as married ones, they cannot be described as 'married', mainly because of conservative religious opposition to gay marriage. A challenge to the judgment will have to be on the basis that marriage and civil partnership are not equivalent, an issue the judge must have thought needed clarifying in allowing an appeal.

However, should an appeal succeed on these grounds it will greatly strengthen the case for same-sex marriage as the only means of securing full equality before the law. The position of many (especially Conservatives like David Cameron) is after all that Civil Partnerships are effectively marriage, and that there is no pressing need to offer formal same-sex marriage. A pro Bull judgement would run a coach and horses through that assumption. It would certainly be ironic if a Christian campaign against equal status to Civil Partnerships were to lead to full gay marriage!

In deciding to go to appeal it is to be

hoped that the Bulls and the Christian Institute have reflected on the words of Ben Summerskill chief executive of equality campaign group Stonewall about the case they lost: 'Religious freedom shouldn't be used as a cloak for prejudice. For the estimated £30,000 that this court case cost Mr and Mrs Bull and their supporters, Oxfam or Save the Children could have vaccinated 100,000 people against meningitis in sub-Saharan Africa. That

'Whatever may have been the position in past centuries it is no longer the case that our laws must, or should automatically reflect the Judaeo-Christian position.'

would have been a more Christian way to spend their money.'

The Bulls' claim of even-handedness may also be questioned. Attracted by the 'quality of service and happy atmosphere' promised on the hotel's website, one of the National Secular Society's Council members, Dr Ray Newton, said he stayed at this hotel in a double room with an unmarried partner, registered under different names, but they were not challenged.

Footnotes:

Another Christian B&B owner is now being taken to court, again backed by the Christian Institute. Michael Black, and Liberal Democrat councillor John Morgan, are claiming that they were discriminated against after being turned away from a B&B in Cookham, Berkshire on 19 March 2010. They have launched legal proceedings against Susanne Wilkinson, the Christian owner of the B&B.

Readers will recall that Chris Grayling, Minister of State at the Department for Work and Pensions, damaged his career while in opposition for supporting B&B discrimination.

 **Join GALHA's Facebook Group**
Do you have a Facebook account? If so, you may be pleased to know that GALHA now has its own virtual community online. Login to Facebook at www.facebook.com and search for "GALHA".



Matt Cook On Gays and Family Life

Roy Heaps describes a recent successful GALHA Public Meeting

At a packed meeting in Conway Hall, Dr Matt Cook, senior lecturer in history and gender studies, gave a wide ranging account - with witty illustrations - of the domestic and family lives of gay men across the 20th Century.

He began with secret homosexual relationships and encounters in the Edwardian period, with same sex relationships often veiled from the public eye by an apparently conventional marriage. Up to the beginning of the Second World War, a significant proportion of the populace was employed in domestic service, and one particular reported affair was of two men serving in different households, whose relationship continued for nine years, despite their having nowhere private to get together. They met weekly in a park, until police prosecution brought their relationship to an end.

In the nineteen fifties smaller family units gained ascendancy - a development later unflatteringly called the nuclear family. Gay men living together were derided in the press as pretending to be legitimate couples, decorating their rooms extravagantly in a pathetic attempt to simulate the domesticity of husband and wife households. The playwright John Osborne (of 'Look Back in Anger' fame) was among those who excoriated such same-sex shams of respectability. Nevertheless more sympathetic views eventually prevailed, resulting in homosexual law reform in 1967.

The authorities hoped that gay men would show their gratitude by being very discrete about their private lives and not allow their presence to become a nuisance to respectable people.

In the early 1970s the Gay Liberation Front sought freedom from social discrimination for lesbians and gay men. One of its long-term aims was a restructuring of society, away from small family units in favour of people living together in communes. These larger domestic groups were seen as a route to more varied and open kinds of sexual relationships than were possible through traditional marriage. Since then, however, communes of the type envisaged by GLF have not become widespread.

Progress has been made in some ways, notably the introduction of Civil Partnerships for same sex couples. Campaigns are in progress to introduce same-sex marriage, perhaps along with extending Civil Partnerships to heterosexual couples. With children increasingly being brought up by same sex couples, changes in the shape of gay families look set to continue in the future.

During a particularly risqué part of Dr Cook's presentation, Conway Hall was plunged into darkness. Suggestions that this electrical failure was pre-arranged for dramatic effect are strongly denied.

Dr Cook's talk was GALHA's contribution to marking February as Gay History Month - lgbthistorymonth.org.uk

School's anti-homophobia programme provokes fury

The enlightened programme developed in a Stoke Newington school and praised in our January issue has caused some Conservative MPs and their supporters in the right-wing press to froth and fume with indignation.

The Training Council and Development Agency for Schools has funded a £35,000-initiative that will develop lesson plans in a range of subjects. Schools will be offered the plans but will be under no obligation to use them.

The new plans, which are optional and suitable at both primary and secondary levels, include LGBT themes in Maths, Science, Geography and Languages, the intention being to raise visibility and promote acceptance. Sue Sanders from Schools Out said: 'We are attempting to remind teachers that LGBT people are part of the population and you can include them in most of your lessons when you are thinking inclusively.'

However, some Conservative MPs have rubbished the programme. Craig Whittaker, a member of the Education Select Committee declared: 'This is nonsense. We have enough problems in our country, where we are too far down the national comparative league tables in these core subjects.' For his colleague Richard Drax it was all about gays trying to impose 'questionable sexual standards' on kids. Referring to the cost of the programme, John O'Connell, from the TaxPayers' Alliance, opined: 'Parents will wonder if this is the right use of funds and time in

those subjects, particularly when we keep hearing how tight budgets are.' The Daily Mail's star columnist Melanie Phillips joined in, claiming 'This is but the latest attempt to brainwash children with propaganda under the camouflage of education. It is an abuse of childhood.'

In his blog on the subject, Johann Hari referred to the 2006 detailed study by the Schools' Health Education Unit, which found that in Britain, 70 percent of gay children get bullied, 41 percent get beaten up, and 17 percent get told at some point in their childhood that they are going to be killed. He went on to give a moving example:

'Jonathan Reynolds was a 15-year old boy from Bridgend in South Wales who was accused - accurately or not, we'll never know - of being gay. He was yelled at for being a "faggot" and a "poof". So one day, he sat a GCSE exam - later graded as an A - and went to the train tracks near his school and lay on them. He texted his sister: "Tell everyone that this is for anybody who eva said anything bad about me, see I do have feelings too. Blame the people who were horrible and unjust to me, see I do have feeling too. Blame the people who were horrible and unjust to me. This is because of them, I am human just like them. None of you blame yourself, mum, dad, Sam and the rest of the family. This is not because of you." And then the train killed him.'

Recommended reading for Whittaker, Drax, O'Connell, Phillips et al.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All meetings will now be held with disabled access on the ground floor of Conway Hall.

'Equal Rights' - are we there yet?

A talk by Peter Tatchell.

Friday 18th March 2011, 7:30pm at Conway Hall

This event is organised by GALHA with the official support of Outrage and the Peter Tatchell Foundation. Some of the couples involved in this campaign are expected to be present. We hope to confirm soon that a guest speaker who is a legal expert on gay marriage/partnership law in Europe will also be present.



Film: 'Boys in the Band' followed by discussion.

Friday 08th April 2011, 7:30am at Conway Hall

The 1970's film, 'The Boys in the Band' directed by William Friedkin was the first American motion picture to revolve around gay characters, and is regarded as a milestone in gay cinema. After we have seen this film, we will discuss to what extent gay life and the nature of homophobia have changed over the last 40 years.

Watch for events information on Meetup.com. Stephen Green of Christian Voice does. For 'Pink Therapy' in January he posted: 'Stephen Green would like to be there to proclaim that Jesus Christ saves and heals and liberates those who seek to be delivered from homosexual desires.' He wasn't spotted among the 70 people attending. Ed

Johann Hari to be Guest of Honour at 2011 GALHA Lunch

Johann Hari is an award-winning journalist who writes twice-weekly for the Independent, one of Britain's leading newspapers, and the Huffington Post. He also writes for the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, Le Monde, Le Monde Diplomatique, The New Republic, El Mundo, The Guardian, The Melbourne Age, the Sydney Morning Herald, South Africa's Star, The Irish Times, Attitude and a wide



Johann Hari speaking at Protest the Pope 2010
Photo: Lewishamdreamer

range of other international newspapers and magazines. The date and venue for the lunch is to be confirmed.



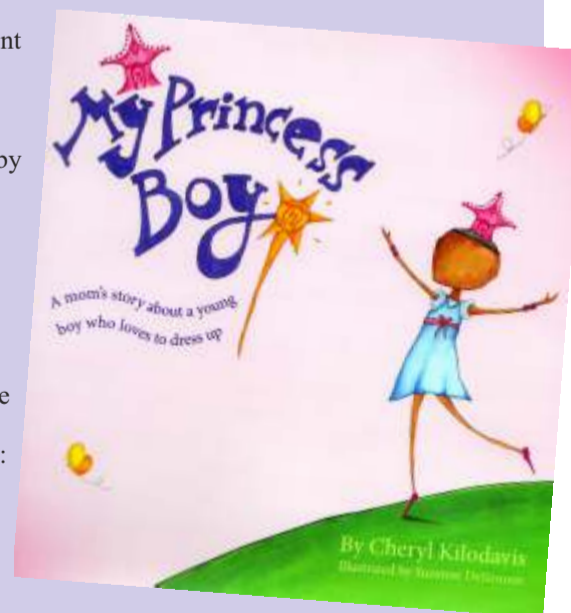
At work, your faithless servants...

Members of the 2010-11 GALHA committee. From left to right: Derek Lennard, Events and Campaigns Co-ordinator; Malcolm Trahearn, Editor of GALHA NEWS; Henry Lawson, Press Officer; Adam Knowles, Chair; Mike Rickwood, Secretary; Malcolm Barnes, Treasurer. Absent: Sue Robson.

My Princess Boy

In the wake of the It Gets Better movement mentioned in our last issue, an unusual children's book has appeared from America and caused a minor sensation. Entitled 'My Princess Boy', it is written by Cheryl Kilodavis, a mother who at first had difficulty coming to terms with her young son Dyson's insistence on sometimes dressing as a girl, in pink tutu with sparkly accessories. She feared bullying at school and general disapproval, especially from other parents, and tried unsuccessfully to create in the boy an enthusiasm for boyish things. Speaking on national TV she said: 'I had deep cultural and religious perceptions of how my sons as males should look and behave.'

Finally, her older son shocked her into acceptance when he said one day: 'Mom, why can't you let him be happy?' She realised that she had to begin 'a journey in self-awareness and re-evaluation of stereotypes and perceptions of what I thought I believed'. So she decided to write a book for children which celebrated difference. Describing her book, she said, 'It stands for hope and it



stands for acceptance. Sooner or later I hope the world will embrace the uniqueness that is really within our lives.'

When his mother reminded her son that girls, not boys were princesses, he declared: 'I'm a princess boy' - and provided the book's title.