



GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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May 2010

LEO IGWE COMES TO LONDON

GALHA'S initiative to bring Leo Igwe to London to take part in an International Day Against Homophobia event has proved successful. He will be a guest of honour at our May meeting – see the Events section.



A Nigerian, Leo is a brave campaigner for humanist and secularist values in Africa. He is Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Humanist Movement, head of the Centre for Inquiry in Nigeria and IHEU representative.

Leo and his family have been subjected to police harassment and they have been arrested several times, most recently in January of this year, when his support for a rape victim led to a trumped up charge of murder being brought against him by a corrupt police enquiry.

At the time, GALHA's press release quoted secretary David Christmas: 'Leo Igwe's arrest ... looks to be part of a wave of politically and religiously motivated persecution mixed up with corruption that is

sweeping across Africa, aiming to intimidate and silence anyone who does not conform to the narrowest and most intolerant interpretations of religion, especially those of Christianity and Islam.

'Targets obviously include humanists, who argue for reason and fact-based values, and also gay people, along with those fighting for democracy and against corruption.

'While the situation is different in Nigeria, Uganda, Malawi and Zimbabwe, it is the internationally organised force of religious bigotry that is oppressing the general population in each of them, and trying to use gay people as a convenient scapegoat for wider social problems.'

Leo also takes on witchcraft in his human

rights campaigning and tries to mobilise international condemnation. It is a very potent and dangerous force in Africa and there are many victims, particularly women and children. There is even state-sponsored witch hunting. Leo has written: 'Witch-hunting is evidence of worsening social tension, division, oppression, and exploitation in Africa. Those who are executed as witches are the poor or the uneducated from the villages or shanty areas of the cities. Victims of witch-hunting are the voiceless, defenceless, helpless and hapless members of the population.'

The May meeting promises to be one of the most important GALHA has held for a long time.



GALHA members Derek Lennard and Malcolm Barnes supported a demo to protest the jailing of a Malawian same-sex couple, Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga.

STOP PRESS

The British Humanist Association is arranging a fund-raising lunch in honour of Leo Igwe to be held on the evening of Saturday 15th May. When details are clear they will be posted on www.galha.org

GALHA and the General Election

This issue should reach members before polling day and so the following questions are suggested for those inclined to tackle their candidates on a range of Humanist/LGBT rights issues. It is well to remember that a candidate's views may not reflect their party's official policy.

On the Family

- Do you believe that any new entitlements or responsibilities accorded to married couples (e.g. married tax allowances) should be extended to Civil Partners?
- Do you support full same-sex marriage?
- Do you believe that any new entitlements or responsibilities accorded to married couples (e.g. married tax allowances) should be extended to Civil Partners?
- Do you believe that the Government should look at ways of enabling and encouraging more LGBT people to assume the responsibilities of parenthood?

On Education

- Do you support the replacement of faith-based schools by ones which do not privilege any particular belief system?
- Do you agree that, so long as faith-based schools remain, they should not be allowed to discriminate between children based on the children's religion or that of their parents?
- Do you believe that all schools should be required to have a comprehensive anti-bullying policy, which explicitly includes measures to combat homophobic bullying?
- Do you believe that education on sex and relationships should include advice about same-sex relationships?

On Equality

- Do you believe that religious organisations should be able to dismiss or discriminate against employees or candidates on grounds of sexual orientation or religious affiliation, even for positions which are not directly related to promoting that religion (e.g. youth workers or clerical staff)?

On The Constitution

- Do you favour disestablishment of the Church of England?
- Do you agree that it is wrong for any religious group to be entitled to privileged representation, as currently with the Anglican bishops in the House of Lords?

On the EU and Foreign Affairs

- Do you believe that promoting and protecting LGBT rights in other countries should be an explicit part of the UK's foreign policy?
- Do you believe that Britain should use its influence in international bodies (The EU, The Commonwealth, The UN etc.) to promote and protect LGBT rights?
- Do you believe that Britain should offer asylum to all those who can show that they are at risk of persecution based on their sexuality?

On Health

- What measures do you favour to reduce the incidence of HIV and other infectious diseases?

Editor's Notes

OUT OF AFRICA: GALHA is proud of its success in bringing to London the distinguished Nigerian Humanist, Leo Igwe and we are indebted to the tireless efforts of Derek Lennard in this regard, noting his generosity and that of his partner, Malcolm Barnes. Leo is a brave campaigner for LGBT rights in a context that requires the sort of courage and self-sacrifice that few of us could muster. In many African countries, homophobia has reached dangerous levels and is being promoted and exploited by populist politicians. We are accustomed to expect nothing less from the likes of Robert Mugabe, who once said that gays were 'worse than pigs and dogs', but it's sad to read of the otherwise admirable Morgan Tsvangirai needing to say: 'Women make up 52% of the population... There are more women than men, so why should men be proposing to men?' Homosexuality is held to be an import from a decadent West, despite strong evidence of former tolerance being subverted by Christian evangelism and criminalisation during the colonial era. It is good news, however, that that other African champion of equality, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, is joining international protest. He knows all about the colonial legacy. My favourite Tutu pearl is: 'When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said "Let us pray." We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.'

PROTEST THE POPE: Since we reported in the March issue of GALHA's support of the coalition campaigning against

Ratzinger's state visit, more and more damaging evidence of child abuse and clerical cover up has emerged, notably in Germany, the Pope's homeland. GALHA member Keith Porteous Wood, Executive Director of the National Secular Society, speaking in Geneva at the United Nations Human Rights Council asked: 'How much more evidence of children's suffering at the hands of the Church will the UN and the international community tolerate before fulfilling their responsibility to those children to hold the Vatican to account?' Indeed, and calls for the Pope's resignation are becoming more common. The Vatican's defiant response at Easter was to characterise criticism as chiacchiericcio, sometimes translated as 'petty gossip'. Then the Pope's No. 2, Cardinal Bertone, on a visit to Chile suggested that gay sexuality was to blame for the church's child abuse scandals. All this will certainly energise our protest.

ELECTION 2010: Almost immediately the Conservatives have scored two own goals. Chris Grayling, Shadow Home Secretary, was recorded voicing his sympathy for B and B owners turning away gay and lesbian couples, forgetting the illegality of such behaviour. And David Cameron was stumbling, inarticulate and confused on LGBT issues in an interview recorded for the Gay Times website. GALHA is of course non-partisan, and we publish in this issue a number of questions members might consider asking all candidates.

Malcolm Trahearn



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".

SPECIAL APPEAL

GALHA is leading the move to bring the distinguished humanist activist Leo Igwe to the UK to speak at the IDAHO event in May (See GALHA Public Events). Leo holds a Nordic Rainbow Award for his support of LGBT rights in Nigeria. Members wishing to make a donation to help cover flights and visa fees can do so via Paypal on the GALHA website or by sending a cheque, made out to GALHA and endorsed on the back 'Igwe Appeal', to GALHA Treasurer, Mike Rickwood, at 1 Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD.



FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

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

FRIDAY 14TH MAY, 7.30PM.

SPECIAL INTERNATIONAL MEETING-HOMOPHOBIA IN AFRICA.

Two brave African campaigners confronting homophobia in Africa address this landmark meeting:

Leo Igwe, in London especially to take part in activities to mark the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO). A distinguished Humanist, Leo has suffered constant harassment, physical attacks, and several periods of imprisonment in Nigeria for his staunch defence of LGBT Rights. He is the founder and executive secretary of the Nigerian Humanist Movement. Leo will be receiving the Nordic Rainbow Humanist Award at the other IDAHO event on 16th May.

Reverend Rowland Jide Macaulay, founding Pastor of the House of Rainbow Metropolitan Community Church, Lagos, Nigeria. He has won several awards including 2007 Black LGBT Award as "Man of the Year" for his work in helping LGBT people of faith.

The meeting will also hear the latest news on what is going on to mark IDAHO in over 50 countries around the world. An optional donation of £5 is suggested.

SUNDAY 16th MAY, 7:00pm.

FILM: 'SUDDENLY LAST WINTER'. Includes discussion with film makers.

Marking the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) and as part of the Protest the Pope Campaign, we are delighted to announce that the makers of the film, Gustav Hofer and Luca Ragazzi will be present at this event and will talk about their experience of making this film.

The film is the story of Gustav and Luca, whose lives change when the Italian government presents a draft law that would give rights to unmarried and gay couples, prompting a wave of homophobia in Italy. The Vatican and conservatives fight against it, preaching that the legislation would undermine morality and the family. Together for over eight years, Luca and Gustav want to understand the different positions and undertake a journey into a country they did not know before and did not expect to find: their own.

With the Pope set to visit the UK on an official state visit in 2010, this moving and heart-warming documentary is a timely reminder of the negative effects that religious influence in politics can have on people's lives, and the homophobia and bigotry it helps spread.

FRIDAY 11TH JUNE, 7.30PM. - CULT STATUS?

Sarah Harvey, Research Officer of "Inform" talks about new Christian movements and cults and their attitudes to LGBT Rights.

FRIDAY JULY 9TH, 7.30PM. - THE BATTLE FOR DOVER SOUL.

A play by Fire and Brimstone Production based on the 2005 court challenge (Kitzmiller v Dover Area School Board), in the United States federal courts against a public school district that required the presentation of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution as an "explanation of the origin of life".

AUGUST-NO MEETING.

3rd - 5th SEPTEMBER - GALHA CONFERENCE WEEKEND and AGM

GALHA returns to Brighton after an interval of six years to the comfortable and well appointed Imperial Hotel. Weekend features include an entertainment by Brett Lock and Ted Brown, who will reprise their fascinating Vinyl Closet presentation. The AGM will take place at 10.30 am on the Sunday. See enclosed sheet or the website for further details and booking form.

FRIDAY 8TH OCTOBER, 7.30PM.

FREE THOUGHT AND CENSORSHIP. A TALK BY JULIAN BAGGINI, EDITOR OF THE PHILOSOPHERS' MAGAZINE.

November and December meetings to be confirmed.



Public Speaking Training

Our Plan (published in the January 2010 issue) identified a need for training in public speaking for those willing to talk on Humanism and gay rights and represent GALHA in schools, colleges and at Gay Pride stalls. Thus, in April eight members attended a very useful four-hour session led by Marilyn Mason, formerly education officer at the BHA.

OPINION

Be Out, Proud and Humanist across the Country

By Paul Allen

A view of our future from an 'ordinary' member: Paul Allen, Pride stall co-ordinator 2008-2010 and self-styled 'mature white fogey', writes a rallying cry for GALHA NEWS in advance of the current season, beginning with Birmingham Pride over the Spring Bank Holiday.

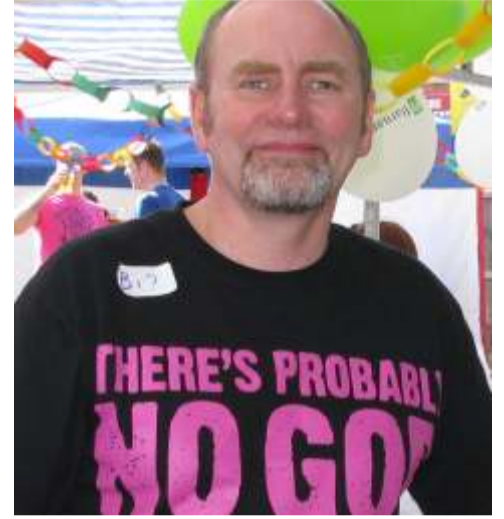
Is it really satisfactory for GALHA members to stay in the shadows of the Humanist closet and just pay their subscriptions rather than be visible and active in the organisation, allowing other people at the 'top' to speak in their name and lead only from their perspectives?

For me, GALHA is now more democratic. We have a lively, dynamic, outward looking, media-savvy committee - and more women are joining the membership, and indeed the Committee too. This indicates to me a healthy organisation with purpose.

Active, creative and democratic organisations that diversify membership and appeal are the ones that thrive. I suggest GALHA doesn't want to become again a mature, white, male, London-dominated clique, as it could have been viewed in the past.

Prides are a great vehicle for promotion of Humanism to the LGBT communities across the UK. We have had great successes over the years with the stalls. The British Humanist Association support and the partnerships with local Humanist groups in Manchester and Brighton have been highlights for me.

Last year, in partnership with the BHA, we ran eight stalls across the country, including for the first time Black Pride.



Thousands of people saw the banners on the stall, hundreds took leaflets, many spoke to us and a good number joined either the BHA, GALHA or both.

It was very noticeable that so much interest was shown by women.

This year we will be running stalls at four Prides only: Birmingham, Brighton, London and Manchester.

There is a potential for regional development, particularly in the Manchester conurbation, with the possibility of a North West GALHA group. The big question is, Should we be helping to set up regional groups or linking into local groups across the country? To spread national appeal we have to be seen as a national group that operates outside of London.

To achieve our aims we need the active participation of all members.

Julia Wright & Sue Robson

GALHA welcomes two new Committee Members

Julia writes: *I grew up in North London and encountered religion at school - church services and choir attendance. Christmas's broke up the long winters and Passover meals were done "out of interest" a few times at home - but there was no religious significance. At 21 I went to Australia, where I worked for several years in a zoological park and graduated with a degree in Writing and Film from the University of Melbourne. I went on to work on the feature length documentary "Wild Tasmania." Natural history and conservation are still important to me. I have volunteered for small NGOs in East Africa and Sri Lanka and I am also member of MENSAs. I now live and work in London. LGBT rights are vitally important and I see Humanism as striving for equality. I believe that it is people that can really make the difference. I am very proud to have become a member of the GALHA committee.'*

Sue has recently retired from work as a Stop Smoking counsellor in the NHS, and before that she was an Occupational Psychologist in employment assessment. Brought up as 'C of E', she moved to the more reasonable and tolerant Unitarian Church in adulthood before eventually rejecting all superstitious belief and embracing Humanism. She lives in Southampton and enjoys the cinema, walking, playing Bridge and going on cruises. She also enjoys marches and demonstrations! She says: *'I hadn't heard of Humanism until a few years ago when I was introduced to my local group, where I discovered that I was a Humanist through and through without knowing it! Or, I should say had become a Humanist after a philosophical struggle through life. What impressed me most was that Humanists unequivocally supported*



equal human rights for LGBT people. No other organisation I had known was so clear about that. But I was sorry to find that no-one in my local group was "out gay". So I searched the internet hoping to find some kind of lesbian or gay humanist group, and, hey presto, found GALHA. Even though I lived too far away to join in all the meetings, belonging was well worthwhile. The newsletter was wonderfully informative. I could see that GALHA was doing wonderful work standing up for victims of homophobia and religious intolerance at home and abroad. I joined the on-line discussion group and I could make it at least to a couple of social events a year.

'I wished I'd found GALHA sooner and that's why I'm motivated to help GALHA grow now. There must be numerous potential new members "out there", male and female, of all ages and backgrounds who feel the same. There's so much for us to do right now, as this issue reports, standing up for our LGBT friends living in cruel oppressive theocratic regimes across the world, and supporting the 'Protest the Pope' campaign. I plan to actively support these efforts and work to increase membership. I look forward to my first annual GALHA conference and I hope to see some new members - and a few women - there this year!'