TUC LGBT Equality Newsletter

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Editorial

With the election looming, every newspaper is speculating about the size of a Tory majority. For LGBT people, although we frequently have things to complain about, if we stand back and put the last dozen years in perspective, no one can deny that the advances we have secured – both in the law, and in popular attitudes – have been historic, and unprecedented. We have a lot to defend: but not by becoming defensive. On the contrary, the best way to nail down the gains is to keep on pressing forward on all fronts. In this newsletter we report on current and planned activities designed to do just that. But they cannot work without the participation of trade union activists in every union and every part of the country.

Memories of summers past…

Photo: Laurie Smith (CWU)

Ladele case victory a milestone

On 14 December 2009, the Court of Appeal threw out Lillian Ladele's attempt to claim that her religious objection to our equality allowed her to be exempt from the law of the land. The decision puts an end to efforts to justify discrimination against us that is not permitted on any other ground. This is not an argument against the right of people to hold, and practice, whatever religious belief they wish: but it is a clear warning that holding such beliefs does not

give anyone the right to discriminate against people on grounds of sexual orientation (or gender identity) in employment, or the delivery of services.

However…

Cutting Edge and the Equality Bill

There is still confusion in the real world about how far existing law allows organisations with a religious ethos to practice discrimination on grounds of religion, or where they think it would not be appropriate to employ someone LGBT because of the views of their followers. You may have thought this had been resolved by the ruling of the High Court in the joint trade union challenge to the exemptions in the Employment Equality (sexual orientation) regulations 2003, where the judge stated that such exemptions should only apply to ministers of religion, but sadly there is plenty of evidence that faith organisations are finding ways around this, for example by imposing life-style requirements.

Now, six years after a complaint was lodged by the National Secular Society, the European Commission has taken action against the UK government for (among other things) allowing exemptions that go beyond the scope of the European Directive they were meant to be transposing into UK law.

In the Equality Bill, entering its Committee stage in the House of Lords in January 2010, the government *has* tightened the wording – at last – to reflect the 2004 judgment. But the Bill leaves intact some of the exemptions permitted for faith schools (for example) that have been used to discriminate against LGBT people in all kinds of jobs.

The groups that organised the two successful faith, transphobia, homophobia and human rights conference in 2007 and 2009, including the TUC, have formed a body called the Cutting Edge Consortium. They are pressing for amendments to remove these sections. If you know a friendly member of the House of Lords, do get in touch with them and point them to this issue!

You can contact the Consortium at cuttingedgeconsortium1@googlemail.com.

Unfortunately, the powerful lobby of faith organisations that wishes to preserve or extend its exemptions will themselves press for amendments - but theirs will worsen the present position.

They may also challenge important advances for LGB people like the extension of the equality duty to cover sexual orientation. It will be vital to strengthen government resolve to keep these parts of the bill intact.

Ultimately, if the bill were to fall because it runs out of time – a serious risk - it would be a major setback for us, even with its remaining imperfections.

Elsewhere, in education..

.. more progress is being made. The joint union campaign coordinated by the TUC has established positive working relations with government to encourage the necessary steps if the continuing scourge of trans- and homophobia in the education system is to be defeated. A trade union delegation met two key bodies – the Training and Development Agency (covering the training of teachers) and the National College (covering heads). Both bodies – for the first time – were invited to grasp what they must do to help eliminate the prejudice, both have started work on the issue, and it has been agreed that we will back to follow this up in the spring.

Meanwhile, all the unions in education have agreed that the TUC should host a special conference for education workers (across the sector and covering both teaching and non-teaching staff) and union negotiators to share good practice and encourage a higher profile for unions in dealing with the issue. Provisionally pencilled in for early summer 2010, this event could be a big step forward.

Tackling football (but not only football..) homophobes…

Where do we meet the most consistent (and currently not really challenged) prejudice? Alongside school playgrounds, try a football stadium, or a group of boys kicking a ball around in the park. No wonder there isn't a single "out" professional footballer.

Can we do anything about this? Yes! After a really successful fringe meeting on sporting trans- and homophobia at TUC Congress in September 2009, LGBT sports campaigners came together with TUC affiliate the Professional Footballers Association and the TUC in December 2009 to plan a united campaign to help make the Football Association's worthy policies have a real impact. The new alliance hopes to meet up with the FA in the New Year to give some impetus to the many possible ways of challenging the current culture.

This is a campaign that TU regional and local forums and networks can get involved with, by making links with groups like Pride Sport, or the Gay Football Supporters Network, or the Justin Campaign, to work with clubs locally. And although the national campaign will focus on football, the same approach can be used with every sport. The more progress can be made in any sport, the more we can read good practice across to the others.

February 19, 2010: the Justin Campaign, named after gay footballer Justin Fashanu who was driven to suicide, is holding an event with Brighton & Hove Football Club, with the support of many other organisations. Find out more at their excellent website, www.thejustincampaign.com.

History Month 2010

Another reason for taking up the sports campaign is that LGBT History Month has decided to focus on this issue in the two-year run up to the Olympics in 2012. Schools Out! and LGBT HM have recognised the links withtheir own campaigns, so are also part of the new sports alliance.

February 2010 is the next opportunity to raise the profile of trade union LGBT history – and link it to the future. The TUC nationally is working with the Government Equalities Office to stage an event that will look to the way that progress in the workplace can feed into changing popular attitudes for the better.

More and more unions are organising something for History Month: please let the TUC know what you are doing so we can spread the word.

Lest we forget: HMD

Immediately before LGBT History Month, on 27 January (every year – the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945) takes place Holocaust Memorial Day. In 2009, for the first time, the TUC became actively involved and members of the TUC LGBT Committee took part in the national commemoration event held in Coventry. HMD recalls the holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis, and it remembers not only the Jewish communities that Hitler's regime attempted to annihilate, but also all the other victims of their hate: including LGBT people and trade unionists. HMD events seek not only to look back, but also to look forward, to encourage a world where such horrors can never recur. In 2010, the focus is on "the legacy of hope", and the decreasing number of holocaust survivors will feature centre stage, with the purpose of delivering the same message.

HMD events take place all over the country, and anyone can get involved: the HMD Trust provides materials and advice, check their website at www.hmd.org.uk for ideas and information about local events. And do get involved.

The rise of the BNP in Britain and the far right across parts of Europe ought to be justification enough for highlighting the lessons of the past.

International news:

Doing anything for IDAHO?

As the next report confirms, being LGBT in many places in our world continues to be unsafe, even downright dangerous. For several years, UK unions have supported actions to highlight this on 17 May, the International Day Against Homophobia. It's never too soon to start planning some public activity to make people aware.

Heading backwards (Uganda)…

News from Africa confirms that without a doubt, to set against the gigantic progress in recognition of our right to equality in Europe, it is possible for catastrophic reverses to take place elsewhere.

Many will have heard that, following meetings with representatives of extremely homophobic US evangelical groups, local supporters introduced a bill into the Ugandan parliament that is a charter for taking LGBT people in that country back beyond the dark ages. At the most extreme, men who have sex with men may face execution. Even people who fail to report homosexual activity between others face imprisonment.

Unfortunately, the widespread outrage expressed across the world at these steps seems only to have reinforced the determination of Uganda's politicians to enact the bill. The TUC acted as soon as the bill was announced to contact the Uganda trade unions, and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. The latter assured us that they were using whatever diplomatic means they had to protest. The UN itself – which leads vitally important AIDS relief programmes in Uganda – has made clear its horror at the measure. However, external pressure (especially that from former imperial powers) is all too easily counterproductive.

There have already been protests at the Uganda embassy in London: look out for announcements of further such activities, and lend your support.

… and changing direction (Poland)!

In contrast, there is positive news from Eastern Europe. The major Polish trade union federation, the SPZZ, has appointed its first officer responsible for LGBT issues. UK unions had been working with Polish counterparts for a little time, and Unison in particular played a key part in making this (hopefully) epoch-making development possible.

This is not just something to cheer from afar. No! Because **Europride 2010** takes place in **Warsaw** (17 July), and SPZZ will host a cross-European trade union event in advance of the Pride parade itself, to promote practical help for dealing with discrimination in the workplace. UK unions should consider sending representatives to show our solidarity with our LGBT comrades in Poland. Watch out for further information.

Back home…

Pride 2010

Once again, the TUC is ready to lead a trade union consortium to sponsor Pride London on 3 July, immediately after the TUC LGBT Conference. Appeals for financial support have been sent to union General Secretaries. Even though everyone recognises times are hard, Pride actually offers a fantastic opportunity to promote the trade union message to vast numbers of people: there were *one million* people on the streets of London for Pride on 4 July 2009.

Getting that message across is partly a matter of having a high TU profile. That's why getting everyone to sport one of the TUC's splendid Pride t-shirts is a must. There is plenty of time to decide how many are needed by each union, and to order them (at just £9.99 each – with bulk discounts possible) from our suppliers (below).

Our fashion partners
www.philosophyfootball.com
(tel 020 8802 3499) are
offering the unique TUC Pride
T-shirt for just £9 .99 each,
with discounts for bulk.
Wear it with Pride!

News from Wales

Natasha Hirst, the Wales TUC Equality Officer, provides this report.

The second annual Wales TUC LGBT Conference was held on 30 November 2009 at the Unison Conference Centre, Cardiff. A diverse agenda included key note speaker Angela Gidden MBE, a highly acclaimed Welsh designer, talking about her career and how her sexuality has influenced the path her life has taken.

Other speakers included Peter Purton, providing an update on the Equality Bill, and Robert Goddard from Stonewall Cymru leading a workshop on engaging young members in trade unions and the LGBT campaign. Delegates also enjoyed a viewing of the short film Diana which follows the life of Mohit, an Indian pre-op transsexual and is the winner of multiple awards across the world.

Motions debates included topics such as alcohol misuse, homophobic bullying in schools, social exclusion of older LGBT people, the 2011 census, links with International LGBT trade unionists and reform to the Wales TUC equality committee procedures. Delegates finished conference with an active session looking at how to move the LGBT campaign forward in Wales.

SERTUC

The SERTUC LGBT network held a well-attended AGM in Congress House on 2 December 2009. The network looked back on a very active year of discussions and campaigning, with many guest speakers, participation to raise the LGBT equality message in other organisation's conferences, campaigning against the BNP, and a massively successful History Month event in February ("Pride in our Legacy II"). The AGM – which was addressed by TUC LGBT Committee chair Maria Exall - added a new face to the network's steering group with the election of Thierry Schaffauser (GMB) as secretary.

.. and the South West

Jeff Grist writes that Unions Out West have been involved in a regional survey of LGBT people, trying to establish demographics and an understanding of issues/concerns. The results are being published at a special launch event to be held in February for LGBT History Month.

Best stall prize 2009

Belatedly, congratulations to Unison on winning the prize for best stall at Pride London 2009. The GMB stall came a very creditable close second, representing a major improvement over 2008, when they were unplaced! (The decision was made by a jury of almost-sober and totally independent TUC staff working on the TUC's own stall).

Wearing the Trade Union message at Pride 2009

Photo: Laurie Smith (CWU)

Surveys, and publications news

Bisexual trade unionists

Unions have been circulated a survey for bisexual members. Concern was expressed at the 2009 Conference that the "b" in LGBT is all too often overlooked, so the survey is designed to identify what the issues are, and to report these to the TUC LGBT Committee for action.

The survey is available on-line on the TUC website, www.tuc.org.uk. Go to the LGBT page in the equality section and follow the instructions there.

Workplace guidance

Probably by summer 2010, the TUC will publish a revised and updated version of its guidance, **LGBT equality in the Workplace,** to take account of legal changes with the Equality Bill, and other improvements in workplace practices.

The Stonewall Index

Also in preparation is a briefing for unions on how to respond if the employer decides to become part of the Stonewall "top 100" index. Expected publication early in 2010.

Contacts

To check your regional TUC LGBT contact, visit the TUC website, www.tuc.org.uk, and go to the LGBT page in the Equality section.

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