
TUC/SERTUC public meeting
23 September 2015

Whose Pride is it?

A short report of the TUC/SERTUC public meeting held at Congress House on 23 September 2015

Fifty people participated in a constructive and wide-ranging discussion on the direction and future of Pride in London at the public meeting organised by the TUC, SERTUC (southern and eastern region TUC), GLATUC and LGSM at Congress House in London on 23 September 2015.

Points made by the speakers

Chairing the meeting, Peter Purton (TUC LGBT policy officer) stressed the long history of support by the trade unions for Pride and the key role of unions in the still unfinished battle for LGBT liberation nationally and internationally. The meeting had been organised because of concern at some aspects of the otherwise very successful and enjoyable 2015 Pride in London, in particular that commercial sponsors had become dominant on the parade at the expense of those who had led the fight for equality.

Maria Exall, chair of the TUC LGBT Committee, explained that the TUC saw this as an issue of accountability to the LGBT communities and while recognising that sponsorship was essential to keeping Pride free, was concerned at the excessive corporate role in Pride. With mayoral elections looming it was time to press for greater GLA support. Trade unions were the true voice of LGBT people at work and dealt with the issues; corporate staff networks could not do this.

Nicola Field from LGSM spoke of the impact of the film "Pride" on younger LGBT people and the role of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners in regenerating a political movement around Pride. She proposed that trade unions and those excluded from the community should lead Pride and urged LGBT support for initiatives to welcome refugees.

Peter Tatchell reminded everyone that the first Pride in 1972 had been both a party and a protest and although there had been enormous achievements since then, there remained many issues to tackle (education, hate crime, trans rights, exclusion of bisexuals etc). There had been good things about Pride 2015 and sponsors were welcome providing they were not dominant and signed up to ethical practices.

Phyll Opoku-Gyimah praised the unions for helping ensure that UK Black Pride could flourish. It existed because of the racism and exclusion faced by black LGBT people. She stressed the vital importance of understanding intersectionality. UK BP was about the challenge of tackling racism and being inclusive at the same time, including at Pride where Pride London had been supportive.

David Sharkey from SERTUC LGBT network stressed the key role of trade unions in the fight for equality and echoed the point about the mayoral election. Inclusion needed to cover economic status as well – some Prides were pricing poorer people out. Pride should not be a party but a celebration, which was different: the right messages were delivered from the platform in Trafalgar Square, but most people in the parade will not have heard them because they could not get in.

Open discussion

The chair of the Pride Community Advisory Board drew attention to the role of the CAB in representing views of the community to the Pride board but pointed out that there were a lot of vacancies awaiting people to fill them.

Other speakers drew attention to the problem arising from the UKIP presence at Pride and the way in which the Board had handled this. Phyll pointed out the unacceptability of organisations that were racist and bigoted.

Speakers drew attention also to the barriers facing disabled LGBT people at many Pride events.

Others highlighted the problems caused by the success of Pride in mobilising so many participants and the need to consider other locations for the event after the parade.

A number reinforced the message about the key role of unions and some proposed a potential role for unions to act as a focal point for a broader political section, but others saw practical problems with this.

At the end of the meeting, the chair of Pride, Michael Salter, welcomed the constructive discussion, and stressed that the board was asking the CAB to consider policy on exclusions and ethics. He raised the possibility of using Pride to facilitate an “oral history” of the LGBT movement but wondered how this could be achieved. Stressing the point about the need for funding, he asked how Pride could be politicised.

The chair thanked everyone for a constructive discussion and closed the meeting, inviting participants to join a mailing list so that the issues could be progressed.

Next steps

The organisers of the meeting, the SERTUC LGBT network and the TUC LGBT committee, will be discussing the next steps for trade unions in taking forward this discussion. Everyone is reminded of the vacancies on the Community Advisory Board (reached via the Pride in London website) and to keep an eye open for the next Pride in London public meeting.