



GALHA NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GAY & LESBIAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

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Proud in Birmingham

GALHA opened its 2011 Pride season with a much-frequented stall. There was interest in the Association's new brochure and in the general Humanist material on offer. Paul Allen, our man-at-Pride, and his helpers fielded many questions on Humanism, sometimes from those of a religious persuasion. Some were practical. One elderly woman chuckled: 'I'm 76. Do you do funerals?' 'No,' we replied, 'but we can direct you to those that do. Do you have a date in mind?'

All was very good-humoured, though the stall had to deal with a very blustery wind which would send grit and our material flying, to mingle with that of the 'I've never kissed a Tory' Labour Party stall across the way. Visitors to the stall included Natalie Drew of Gay Family Web, which was featured in our last issue.

There was welcome feedback on GALHA's wall on Facebook. Vez Kirkpatrick wrote:

"You guys had a great stall at Birmingham Pride, hence I have now signed up

:-) Keep up the good work."

Further appearances this season are planned for: London – 2nd July, Brighton – 13th August, Manchester – 27th August and Cardiff – 3rd September. Help on the stall from GALHA members or supporters is very welcome. Those interested should contact the Secretary.



Editor's Notes

Pride in Birmingham – Shame in Moscow

The many outrageous and hilarious costumes apart, there was a normality in the atmosphere at Birmingham Pride that is a cause for celebration. The event seemed as popular with the straight community as with the gay; in fact are such terms even appropriate any more in this context? Certainly, there are miles to travel to achieve equality in some key areas, notably the playground, the football stadium and the church, and outbreaks of vicious and violent homophobia warn us from complacency. Nevertheless, there has been enormous progress. In 1987 a Black Country councillor could publicly opine that gays deserved to be gassed! GALHA was involved in the protest, if I recall correctly. But now, gone are the lines of sour-faced police and hostile cat-calls from the public. The police parade with us and everybody joins in the fun. The problem now may be commercial exploitation and profiteering.

Meanwhile on the same day, Moscow was shamed by its treatment of LGBT people. A number of brave activists, including Peter Tatchell and Louis-Georges Tin, president of the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) and speaker at our London meeting in June, faced police and neo-Nazi violence as they attempted to defy the repeated ban on a Pride march. Homosexuality was decriminalised in Russia in 1993, but much of Moscow's gay scene is still underground because homophobic prejudice is rife. A recent poll reported 84 per cent of Russians believed homosexuality was immoral and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church have consistently described it as a disease. This year's ban comes despite a ruling in October by the European Court of Human Rights in favour of Russian homosexuals. The court ruled that the Moscow authorities had violated the European Convention on Human Rights by forbidding the rallies in 2006, 2007, and 2008. Amnesty International has roundly condemned the ban. Nicola Duckworth,

Director of Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia Programme, said: 'Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Russia still face widespread discrimination. Moscow should be leading the fight for LGBT rights – not holding it back.'

That was putting it mildly. A week before, the authorities had permitted an anti-Pride rally to go ahead, allowing the combined forces of the Russian Orthodox Church, the ultra-nationalist movement Narodny Sobor, the Eurasian Youth Union and social movement Family, Love and Fatherland to mobilize. Very effectively as it turned out. Far-right groups attacked as soon as activists raised their rainbow flags and posters. Peter Tatchell wrote: 'We witnessed a high level of fraternisation and collusion between neo-Nazis and the Moscow police ... our suspicion is that many of the neo-Nazis were actually plainclothes police officers'.

The authorities in St Petersburg have proved rather more enlightened. They allowed an LGBT event called the Rainbow Flash Mob and with a heavy police presence protected participants from attack by extremists. Rainbow flags and posters asserted 'Homosexuality Is Not an Illness' and 'Different Love, Equal Rights' and 300 balloons were released into the sky to mark IDAHO. However, at the same time the Russian Imperial Movement held its own authorized event. They urged their supporters to 'demonstrate civic consciousness and counter the profaners of the city of St. Peter.' On their website they wrote: 'Death to paedophiles, sodomites and molesters!'

Familiar stuff from homophobes everywhere, and particularly in those seven countries that still put gay, lesbian and bisexual people to death for same-sex activity: Iran, Mauritania, Saudi-Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Nigeria (death penalty applies to 12 Northern provinces with Sharia law) – soon to be followed by Uganda?

Malcolm Trahearn

GALHA condemns Church homophobia and calls for the removal of bishops from Parliament

In a press release GALHA has condemned the recommendation by the Church of England's legal advisors that it is not open to those appointing a bishop or a suffragan Bishop to propose someone who is in a sexually active same sex relationship. Adam Knowles GALHA President commented: 'Humanists accept that religious organisations should be broadly entitled to choose leaders who adhere to their rules, even where we believe those rules to be bizarre, anachronistic or immoral – and the Church of England's attempts to ban gay Bishops is all three. It attempts to deny gay people in that position the right to a loving relationship fully lived out.'

'What is totally unacceptable is that an organisation that flagrantly practises discrimination of this kind should enjoy a special privileged place in the National Legislature. It is in any case indefensible that the British Parliament should be the only one in the world – apart from that of Iran – which reserves places in the National Legislature for religious figures. It is adding insult to injury that these are appointed in a way

specifically designed to exclude gay men, as well as – currently – all women.'

'This issue has a practical impact on the laws under which we all live. In the past Anglican Bishops have frequently figured amongst those voting to try to block equality for LGBT people.'

'We call upon the British Government and Parliament to work to remove Bishops from the proposed reformed upper house. Religious figures are perfectly entitled to seek membership of the British upper house, but they should go through the same process as everyone else, whether this involves election or appointment. That process must be seen to be transparent and non-discriminatory.'

'In the long term the Church of England should be disestablished – a vital step in making Britain a secular society in which people of all beliefs enjoy equal rights and protection under the law.'
This news release was put up on the Campaign for Secular Europe's Facebook page and had a positive response elsewhere on Facebook too.

An important message to all members

For the past couple of years GALHA has pursued charitable status, as mandated by AGMs. This was mainly to gain the resulting financial advantages, while accepting that there would need to be certain changes to our activities. We recently received a response from the Charity Commission that our application had been declined, mainly for reasons related to what is judged our political campaigning. After much discussion and having taken expert advice, we have decided that we shall not appeal, although we have undertaken further correspondence on the Commission's reasoning. As promised in last year's annual report and discussed at the most

recent AGM, the Committee is now taking a fresh look at GALHA's constitutional form. Our task is to ensure the best way to realise the organisation's strategic objectives – balancing effectiveness, efficiency and risk. There is agreement that the status quo as an unincorporated association is not fit for the future, but we also intend to make a more radical proposal in the form of a motion to this year's AGM (Saturday October 1st at Conway Hall, London), of which the wording will be issued in advance. This is vitally important for GALHA's future so I hope you'll get involved.

Adam Knowles, Chair (July 2011)



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".

African Confusion

Probably as a result of international outrage, the infamous Ugandan Anti-homosexuality Bill had still not been voted on at the end of the parliamentary session in May. However, the bill, which is technically still at the committee stage, could be carried forward into the next session of parliament.

Homosexual acts are already illegal in Uganda, but if the bill as originally introduced by its author, David Bahati MP, becomes law, the penalty for those convicted would be increased to life in prison.

Those who have sex with disabled people or minors or who are 'repeat offenders' would face the death penalty. Anyone failing to report to the authorities a person they knew to be homosexual would also be liable to prosecution. The 'promotion of homosexuality' would be criminalised.

Reliable information as to the present position is hard to come by.

One source has claimed that Bahati himself has said that the death penalty was removed from the bill in the committee report. He also said that the provision criminalising 'attempted homosexuality' had been removed, and that the penalties for same-sex intimacy had been reduced.

What is still clear is that anti-gay legislation has the full support of the Anglican Church in Uganda, keen to 'ensure that homosexual practice or the promotion of homosexual relations is not adopted as a human right'. It is also clear how much power the church has in a very conservative society. There have been no further public statements since a statement in February 2010 offering strong support for the bill.

If Uganda appears to be on course to become a kind of African Iran, Kenya, its neighbour, seems heading in the opposite

direction. Also a conservative society which criminalises homosexual activity, it has recently adopted a new constitution, which a legal expert has argued protects gay rights and even gay marriage.

Further, its new chief justice is a Muslim, who wears a stud in his left ear, and his deputy is a woman.

Both advocate gay rights and enjoy 80 per cent of popular support. Needless to say the appointments were opposed by Protestant church leaders on the basis of their "Christian values and beliefs".



Painting by Ugandan artist Brian Kezaala Nkoyooyo

Gay conversion case victory

Patrick Strudwick, who spoke from the floor at GALHA's January meeting on 'Pink Therapy', has been vindicated in his complaint against psychotherapist Lesley Pilkington (60) who tried to 'pray away the gay' with him. A journalist and gay rights campaigner, Patrick had visited her - with a Dictaphone taped to his stomach - claiming that he wanted to be straight. In a landmark ruling, Pilkington was found guilty of 'treating' a patient for his homosexuality. A much-delayed hearing of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) - the largest professional body for therapists - concluded that the treatment she gave constituted 'professional malpractice'. The sanctions imposed on her could lead to her being struck off. The result was also a defeat for the Christian Legal Centre, who fought the case.

During the therapy session she insisted against denial that he had allowed himself to be sexually abused during childhood and proceeded to pray: 'Father, we give you permission to bring to the surface some of the things that have happened over the years.' She gave him how-to-be-heterosexual tips such as taking up rugby, abstaining from masturbation and distancing himself from gay friends.

Commenting, Strudwick said: 'I am an out, happily gay man. I asked her to make me straight. Her attempts to do so flout the advice of every major mental-health body in Britain.' He pointed out that despite all the horrors inflicted on gay people for decades - electro-convulsive and aversion therapy, chemical castration and religious brainwashing - nobody until the Pilkington case had ever been held to account

Very disturbingly, she also claimed that she had had referrals to 'treat' gay clients from the NHS GP surgery to which she is attached. As a result of the investigation, the British Medical Association passed a motion condemning conversion therapy and calling on the NHS to investigate instances where it



Patrick Strudwick

may have unwittingly paid for it.

Even if Pilkington is struck off, she could still practise, as the BACP is an independent body and no one has to be a member. There is still no state regulation, despite attempts by the last government to impose standardised codes of conduct upon psychotherapists and other health professionals. The Coalition has gone for a voluntary register.

In a parallel case also involving Strudwick, a psychiatrist he approached on Skype, Dr Miller of Belfast, told him that homosexuality 'represents a pathology' and advised him to have massages with male masseurs and to stand in front of the mirror naked, touching himself. He was to visualise a red light when aroused: 'I want you to move that red from your genitals up into your chest.' This from someone who claimed he himself had been 'cured'!

A complaint to the General Medical Council has so far fallen on deaf ears but many professional psychiatrists are outraged. A Dr Max Pemberton said: 'The GMC's decision is scandalous. Conversion therapy has been shown consistently to be dangerous and damaging. It is a disgrace that a qualified doctor is engaging in such practice, and an even greater disgrace that the GMC do not appear to feel that this warrants their attention.'

Meanwhile in Germany there are reports of homo-homeopathy. A Catholic doctors' association has caused outrage and laughter by claiming that it can cure the sexual orientation of gays and lesbians with sugar pills and 'religious counselling'. It would be difficult to make it up. Ed.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

'Heroes of Humanism' - A talk by Andrew Copson Friday 8th July 7.30 pm

Humanists make their ethical decisions based on reason and empathy after assessing the facts of the situation and the probable consequences of their actions themselves; they never think "what would Jesus do?" or what Muhammed do?". When it comes to understanding the universe, humanists rely on free enquiry and reason rather than blind trust in authority. But does this mean there are no figures that humanists can look to for inspiration or in admiration? "

I need a hero," said Bonnie Tyler. Andrew Copson suggests some suitable candidates for humanist heroes for this talk.

AUGUST

No meeting.

SEPTEMBER

To be announced.

Annual General Meeting

Saturday 1st October 2-6pm

Conway Hall. Red Lion Square. Holborn.

During the afternoon there will be a performance of Vinyl Closet 2, an entertainment by Ted Brown and Brett Lock

Annual Lunch

Saturday 12th November 12.30pm

(venue to be announced)

Guest of Honour Johann Hari, journalist

**A Demonstration
Against the Homophobic
Russian Authorities**

01 July · 18:00 - 20:00
Near Russian Embassy
Bayswater Road
London

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



Johann Hari speaking at Protest the Pope 2010 Photo: Lewishamdreamer

Attitude and a wide range of other international newspapers and magazines.

Louis-Georges Tin Speaks to GALHA's London meeting

Louis-Georges, founder and president of the International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO), distinguished French academic and thoroughly likeable man, addressed a crowded meeting in June. The meeting was GALHA's way of marking the 2011 Day.

The speaker was introduced by Campaigns and Events Organiser, Derek Lennard, who outlined the speaker's origins in Martinique and his academic career in France, where he achieved the most prestigious qualifications. He nevertheless encountered a homophobic 'glass ceiling', which initially sent him to the US, before he finally returned to a French university. He founded IDAHO in 2005. The organisation campaigns against homophobic persecution worldwide and stands up for LGBT rights. This year an estimated 50 million people have been involved in the campaign.

Louis-Georges described IDAHO's function as an umbrella organisation which serves to encourage local campaigns and initiatives and to fight for LGBT rights on the international stage, crucially at the UN, where oppressive regimes have seen their abuses given uncomfortable visibility. At the UN, he once famously treated delegates to a rendition of 'We Shall Overcome'. The occasion can be savoured on Youtube.

In his review of the international scene, he focused on Uganda and its



GALHA Chair, Adam Knowles welcomes Louis-Georges Tin

dreadful, pending 'anti-homosexuality' legislation. He highlighted the effectiveness of threats to withdraw development aid. But he saw change in Russia to be pivotal. Change there could lead to a general thaw in eastern Europe and in former USSR countries. There were generally encouraging signs, but not yet in Moscow. There was perhaps more to be gained by a march against homophobia, rather than the perceived confrontational Pride. Equally important was progress in China.

Questions from the floor were lively, with a possible lesson for Louis-Georges. It was pointed out that AIDS should not be used where HIV was meant, a distinction frequently blurred in French. Otherwise, the speaker's English presentation - without notes - was amazing. We were fortunate to be addressed by a man of great intellectual and moral stature, who was also a witty, engaging speaker.

Thanks are due to Derek Lennard for organising this event and to him and his partner, Malcolm Barnes, for providing hospitality.