



WEDDING RECEPTION

On Tuesday 5th February MPs voted in favour of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill by 400 to 175, a majority of 225.

Several Galha LGBT Humanist members were in Committee Room 9 at the Houses of Parliament with Peter Tatchell when the result was announced.

Galha Chair Adam Knowles said:

"This is great news, though the number voting against is significant. It's a great

concern that here in 2013 there remain 175 elected members of Parliament that disagree with equality for LGBT people, including a majority of MPs that voted from the Conservative party.

David Cameron has our full support in his determination to push this through, albeit with some of the important amendments brought up during the debate, particularly the inclusion of Humanist celebrants being able to conduct ceremonies like their religious counterparts"

Peter Tatchell, coordinator of the Equal Love campaign, said:

"This is a resounding, historic victory for love and equality. It has brought joy and hope to tens of thousands of same-sex couples who love each other and who want to get married.

We are on the cusp of ending the last major legal discrimination against gay people. This vote for equal marriage is the culmination of the struggle for homosexual equality that I and others began in the 1960s. We are nearly there.

The next major battle on the bill will be in the House of Lords, where the outcome is far from certain. The opponents of equal marriage are determined to make a last ditch stand in defence of marriage discrimination. They want to keep lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as second class, unequal citizens. Our love will triumph over their prejudice"

Readers are encouraged to write to their MPs and share their views, a process made extremely swift at the Coalition for Equal Marriage website:

<http://www.c4em.org.uk>



Conor and James, founders of the Coalition for Equal Marriage, with Galha News editor Richard Unwin



Galha News columnist Adrian Tippetts with veteran campaigner, and Galha supporter, Peter Tatchell



Galha Chair Adam Knowles

INTERVIEW: Mary Porter

Galha News recently caught up with the Galha Committee's new member and BHA liaison, Mary Porter...

Hello Mary. You are a trustee of the BHA. What does that mean, and what does it involve?

The bottom line is that the Board of Trustees is responsible for ensuring that the organisation uses its money to meet the purposes for which it has been given. This means Trustees must ensure that we have a clear strategy for achieving our aims and that we monitor how effective we are in carrying this out. Trustees are all volunteers contributing our various individual skills and enthusiasm in undertaking these responsibilities.

How did you come to be involved with Galha?

I have an interest in governance as a process, but equally important I thought I would enjoy supporting the committee.

How do you see Galha developing over



the coming years, and how will Galha's new status as part of the BHA affect that?

I see Galha as an organisation enjoying the phenomenal commitment and energy of its committee. Once all the new systems have been set up around the integration with BHA, I think Galha will benefit from the BHA paid staff (plus volunteers) who are working full time specifically on campaigning, marketing, publicity, communications, finance etc - who can support Galha's work programme. Already a very successful organisation, I imagine Galha will become even better known as a national organisation with more activities outside London, and with more members from the wider LGBT community.

What's your standard reply if someone asks you what Humanism means?

As a humanist I believe that I have only one life and that if I live on after my death it will only be through the work I have done and in the memories of those I have influenced in some way. As I have just the one life and I can't look forward to another to make reparation for this one, I must make the most of my life for my own sake as well as for others. In making decisions about how to live my life - although I may be helped by wiser folk - in the end I must rely on my own intuition, understanding, observations and experience, and my sense of responsibility for myself and towards others and the world in which we live.

What do you see as the most important LGBT Humanist issues that we need to tackle?

I think gay marriage is a key issue as it is bringing the issue of LGBT rights to public attention. I have a long standing concern about sex education. Having started work in the sexual health field over 30 years ago, I remain concerned about the lack of positive education in schools about sexuality and relationships in general and, in particular, about LGBT issues. As well as challenging the proliferation of faith based schools with their negative

and damaging messages to young people, I think we must challenge their rights to discrimination in employment - e.g. the recently published Catholic schools handbook which makes it clear that Catholic schools have the right to exclude any teacher who is in a "non chaste" relationship that is outside Catholic teaching.

If we could have any famous Humanist, dead or alive, as a speaker at a Galha event, who would you pick?

Not famous in her lifetime, not an eminent philosopher or scientist, although she was an anthropologist, not even an eminent humanist, although humanist in her beliefs, I would love to hear from Ann Dunham. In brief, this white American became pregnant by, and married, a black African at a time when mixed race marriages were illegal in half of the USA. Abandoned by her husband who had a wife back in Kenya, she raised her son as a single parent. A community activist in Indonesia, she is described as idealistic and pragmatic and acting on her humanist beliefs. Her approach was said to be to change the world one village at a time. Her son, Barack Obama, learned the need for people to have hope, meaning and purpose at his mother's knee.

THE FINAL FURLONG TO EQUALITY... but don't hold your horses: write to members of the House of Lords, says ADRIAN TIPPETTS



The successful passage of the Same Sex Marriage Bill in the House of Commons on Tuesday, 5th February 2013 was a milestone

in LGBT emancipation. It looks like the last vestige of homophobic discrimination in English law is heading towards history's dustbin.

Although the majority of Tory MPs did not support the bill, the 225 margin in the House of Commons is convincing. The victory was won by appeals to reason and humanity during the House of Commons debate, which exposed the double standards of the anti-marriage lobby. East Ham MP Stephen Timms' argument that marriage was about the ability to procreate infuriated fellow Labour MP Lyn Brown, who's wedding last year Timms attended. Was her marriage, she interjected, inferior because she was likely too old to have children? Another MP reminded him that he was also offending parents of adopted children, who were after all not biologically related. When the most personal matters are politicised in this way, any debate can put friendships at stake. Sir Roger Gale, who has voted against every piece of LGBT rights legislation in the last 20 years, rose to his feet to defend the sanctity of marriage and, presumably, his third.

The debate highlighted how the anti-equality opponents lost their case as soon as gay people could come out comfortably. The debate clinchers came from MPs such as Mike Freer, Chris Bryant and Stephen Gilbert who gave passionate personal testimonies about the harm caused by a society in which LGBT people are set apart and

made to feel different and inferior. And those testimonies appeal to the good nature of our straight allies to show solidarity. To those who argued that equal marriage brings no extra rights, who better than the black Christian MP for Tottenham, to remind the House that separate is not equal? Thanks are due to all of Labour's Muslim MPs too, for voting in favour.

The whole battle for civil marriage, and to allow gay affirming churches to hold ceremonies for gay couples if they wish to, was not merely a fight over the use of a word. The argument centered on the integrity of LGBT people and how we value each other. Marriage has been made off-limits to gay people precisely because it is seen as a 'gold standard' relationship, elevating heterosexuality and thus straight people as 'ideal'. Heterosexuality is not an ideal: our sexual orientation is part of our nature, and cannot be aspired to.

I sense more than a slight hint of hypocrisy from those arguing against equal marriage because 'it isn't a priority'. The very people making this argument have spent a fortune on media and mass-mailing campaigns, briefings and conferences to get this very message across. It is clearly a priority for these lobbyists to maintain the second-class status of LGBT people in society and will not give up the fight.

In the coming weeks, a committee of 19 MPs will thrash out details of the Bill. In May, the Bill will then be debated and voted on by the House of Lords. At both stages it will face hostile politicians looking to either scupper the bill or introduce a host of loopholes.

Rebels may seek to guarantee exemptions for state employees who oppose gay marriage because of their religious beliefs. They may lobby for the rights of teachers to avoid reference to same-sex marriages in sex and relationship education. Here

the government must insist that children are given facts and not dogma in class. Every child should know that he or she can fall in love, and that the joy, affection and commitment that comes with it is equally worthy and authentic, regardless of who you love.

The anti-equality lobbyists are hoping a persecution narrative will help sink the Bill. They have spread unsubstantiated fears - lapped up unquestioningly by the media, again - about churches being forced to marry gay people against their will. In fact the very first page of the Bill makes it clear that *any duty of a member of the [Church of England] clergy to solemnize marriages (and any corresponding right of persons to have their marriages solemnized by the clergy) is not extended by this act to same sex couples*. All churches are protected by the precedence of common law over statute law. Moreover, Article 9 of the European Convention prevents any religious organisation from being compelled to conduct same sex wedding ceremonies according to religious rites, if that is against their doctrine.

The House of Lords is full of an older generation of former MPs from all parties who are hostile to LGBT equality. Among those opposing it will be former ministers from the Thatcher era responsible for the hated Section 28 laws. The 178 'cross-bench' Members, politically unaffiliated and appointed to bring specific knowledge to debate, will be crucial in determining the outcome of the Lords' vote. **Be sure to write to them about why this Bill matters to you. See: <http://www.crossbenchpeers.org.uk/external-1.html>**

If the Bill that secured overwhelming Commons support doesn't pass, the vote is likely to bring the integrity of the House of Lords, and the concept of unelected,

un-removable, unrepresentative peers under scrutiny. What makes 26 bishops, sitting in the House because of their position, any better moral leaders than, say, 26 window cleaners? Why is someone more qualified to determine legislation on a host of matters till the day they drop, just because they had a cushy number at British Airways decades ago? Those questions may grow louder, if the Parliament Act is needed to assist passing of this Bill.

And removing this last piece of discrimination is urgent: for while public acceptance of LGBT people has risen by a large degree, there is a hardcore of visceral homophobic hatred to combat, as the abusive letters in MP mailbags have shown recently. According to studies, **one person in six under the age of 25** thinks that same-sex relations are always wrong. Nearly five thousand cases of homophobic hate crimes are reported annually, yet a Stonewall survey found that three in four LGBT people did not report crime to the police.

The law should help us break these prejudices down, not shore them up.



UPCOMING EVENTS...

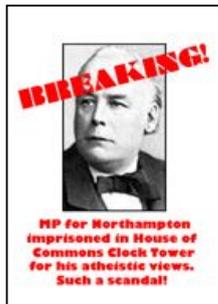
February Social

Friday 22nd February, 7.00pm at the Sommers Town Coffee House Bistro Pub - 60 Chalton Street London, Greater London NW1 1HS

An informal evening of drinks and chat. The venue serves both a main menu and a bar menu until 10pm. Look out for the committee members wearing Galha badges.

The Fruits of Philosophy - A new play from Fire And Brimstone Productions

Friday 15th March, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall. Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh - the most famous free thinkers - are put on trial for publishing a pamphlet aimed at poor people and advocating contraception.



Transphobia Event

Friday 12th April, 7.30pm in the Brockway Room, Conway Hall. A panel discussion on causes of transphobia and how to combat it. Speakers to be announced.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Happy new year! 2013 has begun with a bang for LGBT equality. The Same Sex Marriage Bill being passed through the House of Commons is a momentous achievement. See our lead feature, and Adrian Tippett's column above, for more on this landmark success, and why we shouldn't be complacent just quite yet.

And Galha itself has been full steam ahead. Behind the scenes the committee have been busy consolidating our new position as a part of the British Humanist Association and devising a fresh action-plan that'll make the most of the additional resources now available to us. Expect a detailed report soon.

There's been no slacking on the events front either. Already this year we've had a talk on queer Humanism by award-winning author Jonathan Kemp, a screening of Call Me Kuchu - a recent documentary on Uganda's struggle for equality, AND a third live musical

performance with the boys from the Vinyl Closet. And plenty more to come...

Another project that I was recently involved with may be of interest:

For his 2012 tour, 'Position Vacant, Apply Within', Julian Clary wanted to try something different -- a serious song about places around the world where it isn't cool to be gay.

Due to popular demand the song has been made into a music video, and is available to view on YouTube: Search for 'Cool to be Queer'.



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