

Flagship

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The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union LGBT Members ... www.fbu.org.uk

Summer 2007



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Editorial

Are we safe



Pat Carberry
NLGC
Chair

It has been a challenging year for the National Gay and Lesbian Committee. We have witnessed many changes in terms of improved legislation for the protection of our members and have also played our part in making sure that legislation is passed by campaigning and lobbying politicians in a position to secure the necessary changes.

It's not all been highs. We have also had our fair share of lows. Despite having secured legislation for the protection of the equal rights of members of

the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) community, it is quite clear that we have a long way to go to winning the hearts and minds when it comes to attitudes within some areas of society. It is clear that the dinosaurs (large prehistoric animal with tiny brain) are far from being extinct and still have the potential to inflict serious damage. So we cannot afford to drop our guard or what has been gained

It is quite clear that we have a long way to go to winning the hearts and minds when it comes to attitudes within some areas of society

could soon be eroded.

As in previous years we have endeavoured to attend and support as many pride events as possible, including Brighton, Cardiff, Glasgow and London Europride. These events are a rare opportunity for the fire service to get the fire safety message out to the gay community and the service must make the most of this opportunity. Full marks go to the Welsh brigades who displayed an outstanding commitment to what is one of the smaller Pride events. London Europride was hugely successful. There was the largest attendance of our members at any of the Pride Events, bolstered on

the march by General Secretary Matt Wrack and Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark.

Pride Scotia in Glasgow turned out to be possibly one of the most contro-

versial following the refusal of a fire crew from Cowcadden to attend and distribute fire safety leaflets at the event.

from dinosaurs?



A media circus ensued with the story being reported not only nationally but also internationally. Meanwhile, nine firefighters were disciplined for failing to carry out a lawful order, the outcome of which resulted in the issuing of final warnings and a demotion of a watch manager who was subsequently reinstated at his previous rank on appeal. The incident did include elements of homophobia.

as anti-gay and defenders of moral judgement and religious belief, and on the other, as bigoted homophobic firefighters. Neither view is true. Strathclyde Fire and Rescue received 3,500 complaints on the issue and the FBU also received its fair share of complaints for defending the members involved. We are now almost a year on and it's time to move forward. What we must ensure is that a similar instance does not reoccur as the legislation concerning the provision of goods and services

which took effect at the end of April (see article of new law by Stewart Brown, Page 6) and any such action would receive a more severe punishment.

What I believe we shall see in the not so distant future is a campaign by organised religious groups who will claim that the new legislation will result in their

But it would be unfair and not a true reflection of the events to say this was the only reason why the decision was made not to attend the event. Lessons have been learnt on the need for better communication about attendance at public events.

The political fallout from the events in Glasgow has been far reaching. Support for the firefighters' position came from various corners ranging from tabloid newspapers reporting things that had not actually occurred, religious groups claiming the crew had been ordered to do things that they had not and of course the BNP had their campaign running to defend those accused. The facts around the events have been lost in the ensuing circus. Individuals were heralded, on the one hand,

persecution, as in their minds all they are doing is exercising their religious beliefs. We of course support the rights of individuals to hold those beliefs. However, when those beliefs result in direct actions to the detriment of members of the LGBT Community such that it is tantamount to discrimination or harassment then this cannot be tolerated. Should this occur, then those indulging in such behaviour will quite likely find themselves in the courts and this will not be a case of persecution but prosecution.

By the time you read Flagship, FBU Annual Conference will have taken place. This year there were two resolutions to conference calling for certain voting rights to be stripped

from minority sections. The validity of these resolutions will have been debated and decided by our Annual Conference.

Yet, on so many other issues individuals or possibly organised groups have been waging a misinformation campaign using websites and sending anonymous literature to branches.

Such propaganda should be ignored and treated with the contempt it deserves. We all support free speech but this is not. If people have valid points to make on a subject then instead of being the cowards they are they should put their name to those comments.

Finally, I was greatly disturbed when reports recently reached me of an official of our Union making comments that "I will crush the minority sections". I cannot confirm that these comments were actually made and would like to think that they were not. If they have then those responsible will recognise their words. Such comments are not the language of a trade unionist. However it had a familiar ring and I recollected such dialect from my days as a history student. It was indeed more in keeping with the speeches made in 1930s fascist Italy by Benito Mussolini.

Using the term fascist may seem a bit strong but it may be of some interest to note that the term fascist comes from the Italian word fascist meaning union or league. It comes

from the Latin word fasces which was an axe with a handle constructed from a bundle of rods. This symbolised strength through unity as a single rod is easily broken while the bundle is very

difficult to break. The term fascism or fascist was adopted by Benito Mussolini along with the symbol of the axe with the bundled rods handle.

It's time to stop beating one another up and realise that we need to unite. The idea the union is about what is best for the majority is not a trade union value. Our union is about what is best for all of us.

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THE LONG ROAD TO EQUALITY

New legislation on goods and services will have huge implications for the fire and rescue service and all its employees, says Stewart Brown

You will all no doubt have seen the reports on TV and in the papers recently on the outcome of the debate around new legislation on the provisions of goods and services as far as it affects lesbians, gay men and bi-sexual people (LGB). The Government confirmed that there were to be no exemptions for religious adoption agencies – although Catholic agencies were given 21 months to adjust. After a long battle, the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 came into force from April 30.

These regulations were originally due to come into force in autumn 2006, (alongside part 2 of the Equality Act,) but were delayed in order for government officials to give proper consideration to the extremely high level of responses received. Northern Ireland has a separate equality law framework from the rest of the UK, as prescribed by the Equality Act 2006. The Northern Ireland regulations, commencing 1 January 2007, were developed by the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and include protection from harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation outside the workplace.

Everyone in the FBU and the wider trade union movement who worked for the new legislation deserve thanks and credit for their tremendous efforts. This is a great victory.

Even a few years ago, it would have been unthinkable that a position favoured both by the prime minister and the Secretary of State responsible for LGB rights would have been overturned by the resistance of other cabinet ministers.

We all played an important part

The campaign in Parliament itself was clearly crucial, but we all played an important part both in making direct representations, and in mobilising and stiffening the resistance among MPs. The principle of equality was the foundation of this campaign and the argument was won.

In bringing forward regulations to outlaw discrimination in the provision of goods and services on grounds of sexual orientation (and, in due course, gender identity) the Government will be putting in place one of the

final pieces in the legal jigsaw, by which people who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual (and, later this year, transgender) will benefit from the same protection as any other citizen against unfair discrimination.

The FBU has long campaigned for such a development. Lesbians, gay men, bisexual and trans people have always paid the same taxes abided by the same laws, and made as great a contribution to our society as anyone else. But until now, they have not been treated as equals. Now is the time to bring that disgraceful situation to an overdue end. Any and every service for the public must be provided without discrimination.

And the fire and rescue service (FRS) is no exception. Providers of goods or services – including, for example, fire authorities in their fire safety activities – will need to ensure that they are not treating anyone unfairly on grounds of sexual orientation, such as turning customers away, providing goods or services of inferior quality, in a less favourable manner or on less favourable terms than would normally be the case, including for example being hostile or less courteous.

A campaign of information, awareness training and understanding of this new legislation, must be taking place across all 58 fire authorities now, otherwise it will be members

ACTION POINTS

- ◆ Make sure you are aware of current legislation and ask your employer to supply you with information on it and what training you will be receiving
- ◆ A campaign of information, awareness training and understanding of this new legislation, must be taking place across all 58 fire authorities now



Gay Pride march in London

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

of the FBU who will suffer at the hands of the employers, as they continue to mismanage the current legislative framework for all strands of equality in the FRS. Make sure you are aware of current legislation and ask your employer to supply you with information on it and what training you will be receiving.

A recent article in the Guardian newspaper stated that "the rule book has changed, and now we have the icing on the cake". Well, yes the rule book has changed and we do indeed have that icing on the cake allowing us the full protection in the workplace, through the Employment Equality (SO) Regs 2003, and in day to day life, through the goods and services regs, that we should expect, like any other tax paying citizen in the UK.

Questions to be asked

But has society really changed its attitude towards the LGB community? And has the workplace really got any better with all the new legislation? These are questions that need to be asked debated and answered some how, and by someone.

That someone could be you, in your fire stations, in your emergency control rooms, and the other workplaces, as you and I strive to make the lives of the under-represented in society and the FRS a better place to work and live.

VOICES FOR PREJUDICE

This legislation was passed and will be brought into the statute book, but up until only January, there was fear spreading through our ranks that the conservatives, the church and right wing elements of society would be able to muster a fight and gain enough support to defeat the government in both the House of Commons and the Lords on this issue.

Ever since the announcement of the proposed regulations, there have been powerful voices raised in opposition. Since the publication of the Northern Ireland regulations, the pressure has been stepped up, including a challenge to them in the Courts by Judicial Review.

A Prayer to annul the new laws in Northern Ireland was also sought through an early day motion supported by Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson. It was also given support by mainland conservatives, including Norman Tebbit and Baroness O'Cathian, who were both major players in the introduction of Section 28, which banned the promotion of homosexuality in schools. Democratic Unionist Party Peer, Lord Morrow, tabled a motion to scrap laws banning discrimination against LGB people for the provision of goods and services. The law came into force in Northern Ireland on 1 January after a two month consultation period.

Lord Morrow's call to annul the regulations was defeated by 199 votes to 68.

There was a campaign of letter writing, lobbying and sermons as well as full-page advertisements in newspapers in the UK, designed to pressure the Government off its chosen path.

The arguments used in this campaign were a crude mixture of scaremongering (including some misrepresentation of what the regulations actually say) and bigotry (aimed at undermining what they do really say). Their objective hinged on the call for anyone with religious objections to homosexuality to be exempted from the law, so that they can continue legally to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation, where for other citizens such discrimination is illegal.



Norman Tebbit: backed opposition

ANDREW PARSONS/PA PHOTOS

VOICES FOR EQUALITY

The Government has an excellent record in tackling discrimination, legislating to improve the rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Since 1997, the Government has repealed Section 28, passed legislation to permit adoption by same sex couples, created new civil partnerships, and been uncompromising in its work to tackle homophobic bullying. It also created the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regs 2003, which was the framework from which the goods and services legislation was based.

During the passage of the Equality Act (which contains in Part 2 provisions prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion or belief in the provision of goods, facilities and services, education and public functions) there was significant pressure to provide similar protection on the grounds of sexual orientation.

To this end, the Government introduced regulations in April at the same time as the provisions on religion and belief are commenced. Protections against discrimination in these fields are already in place in relation to disability, gender and race.

The Fire Brigades Union, and the TUC, along with other affiliates have been at the forefront of the work undertaken to bring about this legislation.



TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber: at the forefront

JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

DO THE REGULATIONS PREVENT BELIEVERS MAINTAINING THEIR RELIGIOUS VIEWS?

Opponents claim the regulations are a challenge to religious freedom. It is right and proper that every citizen has the right to their religious belief (or absence of religious belief), and the right to live their own life according to what they understand to be the precepts of their religion. At the same time, it is necessary that every citizen be required to comply with the law of the land, even if that law conflicts with their perception of what they believe their religion requires. The advocates of sweeping exemptions for religious organisations from having to comply with this law want to be able to discriminate in the services they provide, because they start with the prejudice that lesbians, gay men and bisexuals should not be treated the same as everyone else. The proposed regulations will not prevent anyone from continuing to hold that prejudice and to live their own life according to their beliefs. Nor will anyone be prevented from stating that view. But what the law must prevent is anyone being able to claim that their religious views give them licence to treat a whole section of the community with less favour than they would anyone else.



Christians protest at a Gay Pride march in London

PHILIP WOLMUTH/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



HIGHLY RECOM

A London member gives her impressions of the LGBT National School



Fantastic building: Wortley Hall near Sheffield, venue for the school

Although I have been a firefighter in London for four years, this was to be my first time at the joint FBU/Aslef LGBT National School. I had heard good things about previous schools, but while I was excited I was also a little apprehensive as to what the weekend would entail and what would be expected of us.

On arrival to the fantastic building that is Wortley Hall, I was greeted by FBU and ASLEF members. The formal introductory session held after lunch gave an overview of people's roles within their respective unions and an outline of the weekend's activities.

Interesting insight

A representative from the Coalition against Racism provided an interesting insight into the work that they carry out and the struggles that people may face because of their sexuality as well as race.

Chris Kelly from Voiceworks was highly entertaining and captivated his audience with anecdotes and group work – very enjoyable!

The evening's entertainment was an eye opener to say the least ... with X-Factor eat your heart out, as members of the school got up to sing their hearts out on the karaoke (or should I say scaryoke?!), much to the amusement of the locals.

Saturday started with an informative presentation from members of the Albert Kennedy Trust (The only charity dedicated to finding accommodation for homeless young LGBT people). I found this highly emotive and many of the facts and figures about young LGBT people were shocking. The representatives were very good and I would definitely consider supporting this trust at some stage in the future. A session on news and updates on current Union Campaigns then followed.

After lunch a powerful video was shown and a speech was given by Darren Goddard



HOWARD DAVIES/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



LONDON LGBT SCHOOL

Region 10 (London) FBU and the Greater London Authority (GLA) held the first regional LGBT school at City Hall in London on 31 January.

With a host of guest speakers, the day proved to be both great fun and educational too. The day's objective was to inform and educate LGBT members on a huge variety of issues/decisions that both directly and indirectly affect our lives and on ways we can influence these decisions.

Rob Downey and Neil Young from the Greater London Authority, Pat Carberry and Ruth Winters from the FBU, Jane Richardson from the Gay Police Association, Stephen Frost from Stonewall, and senior managers Roy Bishop, Ron Dobson and Pat Oakley from London Fire Brigade all provided sessions throughout the day.

The sessions were both informative and fun and included a wide range of topics such as Stonewall Workplace Equality Index (well done London for coming 28th out of 200 and thus being the most Gay-friendly brigade in the country).

There then followed a session on the LGBT timeline (great session from Mr Carberry on the LGBT law/rights/issues/policies over the last 50 years).

The day finished with a session titled Magic Wand, which focused on how we could tackle equality issues in the workplace. London EC member Mick Shaw closed the school.

A huge thank you to those who gave up their valuable time to either present at the event or attend.

The feedback I received was 100% positive and hopefully this event will be the first of many to come. It was definitely worth all the hassle and I not only learnt huge amounts, but was able to network with some new friends too!

Norman Perry
NLGC Representative, Region 10
Host of the school

MENDED

from the Gay Police Association. The video charted the work that the group had done over the years and are continuing to be involved in.

A closed session then followed where members could discuss their experiences of being LGBT at home, work and socially and many people found this to be very useful.

The evening's social trip into Sheffield was rather amusing as people strutted around on the dance floor and generally had a good time and got to know each other.

Feedback all positive

Sunday morning loomed all too soon for those who had stayed up late (you know who you are!). After a talk from a member of the Department of Trade and Industry, feedback was given on the school, all of it positive. The school then closed, with provisions already being made for the next one in 2007.

My initial apprehensions about the school soon disappeared and I had a very interesting

and enjoyable weekend. Everyone was friendly, welcoming and sensitive to individual's experiences and issues.

Confidentiality was a top priority and LGBT members who are not out at work should take comfort in this if they are considering attending the school for the first time. Committee members were always on hand to answer any questions or deal with any problems. I would definitely recommend this school to LGBT members. Apart from networking opportunities, LGBT issues could be discussed in a safe environment and the different speakers that attended provided a valuable insight into the different work that is carried out by various LGBT/Union organisations. I am already looking forward to the school next year.

→ A more detailed report on the LGBT School is available in the Written report to FBU Conference 2007.



London LGBT
emergency services
network meeting

Norman Perry, NGLC Rep, Region 10, has been elected as one of two co-chairs of London Fire Brigade's LGBT Support Group, which is building strong relationships with the Met Police and London Ambulance Service and is sharing best practice ideas on how LGBT issues should be actioned within the emergency services. Helping to organise the FBU and fire brigades attendance at London Pride is also on the agenda of the group and this year's event looks set to be bigger than ever, with a combined Armed and Emergency service march. Says Norman: "In London we are lucky in that London Fire Brigade have great support mechanisms in place for our staff. Not only do we have the FBU but we also have support groups too. This position fits perfectly with my FBU role as London G&L rep, as alongside the other co-chair Divine Zake and other Support Group Committee members, we are working on many exciting projects in London."

NGLC chair Pat Carberry and NGLC EC member Stewart Brown joined 250 people from over 50 faith and secular organisations at a one-day conference held in London in February in agreeing a statement calling for a united response across faith and secular communities against homophobia, discrimination and prejudice and to promote human rights. The inaugural Faith, Homophobia and Human Rights Conference, which was organised in association with the TUC, and supported by CWU and AMICUS, called for "further progressive public policy that will deliver comprehensive and effective anti-discrimination legislation, including positive duties, on the basis of race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, and belief."

The conference included members of the world's six largest religions, as well as humanists, secularists, agnostics, and atheists, from a wide variety of political parties, trade unions, and community groups drawn from across the UK. The Conference Steering Group will be writing to a large number of faith and public bodies, including the newly formed Commission for Equality and Human Rights, to draw their attention to the wishes of the conference and inviting them to act on key recommendations.

Shocking stories about the oppression faced by LGBT people in Jamaica continue to reach us. Since the co-chair of J-Flag (Gareth, who spoke so movingly at the 2005 TUC LGBT Conference) was seriously beaten up in February, at least ten others have suffered the same treatment, while the police, far from protecting them as the law requires, have been adding to the persecution. Gareth himself has been subjected to continual harassment and has had to move house. During all this, J-Flag faces appalling financial difficulties. It has no money to pay for an office or meet staff costs. Gareth has renewed his appeal to British trade unions to raise funds for J-Flag. The TUC – which continues to press the issue with relevant contacts at Governmental level – can send donations on to J-Flag. The flow of contributions received during 2005/6 has dried up: now is the time to look again at helping out. Donations should be sent payable to the TUC via Peter Purton at Congress House. A substantial stock of J-Flag badges remain. If anyone wants to sell these to raise funds, please contact Stewart Brown gal01@fbu.org.uk.

Diary

- Leicester Pride** 23 June
- Pride Scotia** 23 June
- TUC LGBT Conference** 28-29 June
- Pride London** 30 June
- Oxford Pride** 14 July
- Lincolnshire Pride** 21-22 July
- Nottingham Pride** 28 July
- Hull and East Riding Pride** 28 July
- Belfast Pride** 4 August
- Brighton Pride** 4 August
- Leeds Pride** 5 August
- Gloucester Rainbow Pride** 11 August
- Manchester Pride** 25 August
- Cardiff Mardi Gras** 1 September
- Chelmsford Gay Day** 2 September
- Reading Pride** 8 September

FIRE SERVICE LGBT CONFERENCE

Bristol, 9-10 October

Sponsored by Avon FRS, FBU, CFA and the DCLG. For bookings email conference@avonfire.gov.uk or visit www.avonfire.gov.uk/avon/equalities

FBU G&L SCHOOL

19-21 October 2007

For an application form contact kevin.gutherson@hertscc.gov.uk or yanndubois785@hotmail.com

Want more information about the FBU's work on behalf of LGBT fire service employees? Have any questions? Get in touch – contact Stewart Brown at gal01@fbu.org.uk and/or visit our website: www.fbulgbt.org.uk/

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues**. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

