

stonewall news report

Newsletter of the Stonewall Group

Spring '93

AGE OF CONSENT CAMPAIGN One love, One law

Yes there was some cause for hope. In June last year Sir John Wheeler was Chair of the House of Commons *Home Affairs Select Committee*. A select committee of enquiry on the age of consent, paving the way for legislation seemed likely. But, unexpectedly, Sir John was replaced as Chair and the issue fell off the agenda.

That's what's happened. What are the lessons? Decriminalising gay sex must not be a marginal issue which can fall off the political agenda. We must ensure that it becomes a mainstream social reform, with widespread public support. Consider how far Britain is out of step with the rest of Europe. An age of consent of 21 is anachronistic *and* discriminatory. Criminalisation is a major barrier to safe sex education at a time when research

findings are confirming the rise of HIV infection amongst young gay men.

The case is unanswerable, but it needs to be made. Stonewall is preparing a number of new initiatives. We have commissioned a major analysis of all scientific research material dealing with age of consent issues. This hasn't been thoroughly done since Wolfenden (1954). We are planning to take a case to the European Court, presented by an 18 year old gay man who will argue that having reached the age of majority, he cannot be considered a youth in need of protection.

We firmly believe that decriminalisation is a necessary first step in our struggle for full legal equality. If you are interested and want to help please contact us.

HOUSING BILL - rights of succession

First, the good news. The Labour Party front bench supported an amendment to housing legislation currently before Parliament which would have given lesbians and gay men the right to succeed to council tenancies on the death of the tenant. The amendment arose from a survey of Local Authorities that **Stonewall** conducted. Of 131 authorities replying, over 80% supported or didn't oppose the amendment.

On the day the government didn't oppose the principle of the amendment, but voted

against it and even rejected the need for a code of guidance. Tony Baldry MP, Junior Minister for the Environment argued there was no case for reform as Local Authorities would grant joint tenancies to any same sex couple that contacted them. This will be news to many embarrassed Directors of Housing who do not grant joint tenancies to unmarried heterosexual couples, let alone lesbian or gay couples. **Stonewall** has presented further evidence to the government and will press for the reintroduction of the amendment at a later stage of the Bill.

Armistead Maupin - live!

With the arrival of Armistead Maupin's latest blockbuster, *Maybe the Moon*, Stonewall is pleased to announce a very special benefit evening of readings. The much loved author of the *Tales of the City* series will be appearing for **one night only** at the Haymarket Theatre, on Sunday 7 March starting at 7.30pm.

Armistead will be reading from *Maybe the Moon* and talking about his other work. He will be available to answer your questions. A few special surprise guests will set the Californian tone by

paying musical homage to the home of Barbary Lane.

You can meet Armistead Maupin at a champagne reception following the performance - special reception tickets are available at £50 each and are strictly limited. Other tickets are available for £5 (gallery), £15 (upper circle) and £25 (stalls and circle). Please join us for what will be a delightful evening celebrating one of the world's favorite and best known gay writers. **Bookings: 071 930 8800.**

The Law Society:

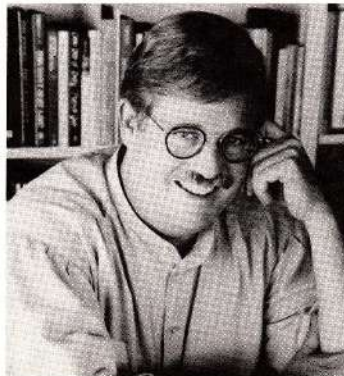


We serve law and justice?

In October the Law Society published a consultation paper proposing new anti-discrimination policies, codes and rules covering sex, race and disability - but not sexual orientation. Somewhere along the line it had been dropped. Following our media work, the response from lesbian and gay solicitors has been loud and strong. Over 50 women and men attended a meeting at the **Stonewall** offices. The Law Society has been overwhelmed with personal submissions, and **Stonewall** has forwarded its report on the experiences of lesbian and gay lawyers.

At a recent meeting of the Law Society, Mark Hinchliffe, the president of the Bradford L.S. spoke for many when he said that the Clause's omission "*felt like a stab in the back to gay members of my Society*" and that it had inflicted "*significant damage to the reputation of the profession.*"

A Law Society representative admitted the committee has erred in omitting the clause. Whatever the Law Society decides, **Stonewall** will be calling a follow up meeting for lesbian & gay solicitors and barristers to discuss further steps to combat this discrimination.



Workplace discrimination survey

Stonewall is carrying out the largest ever survey on discrimination in the workplace against lesbians and gay men. Over 1,500 people have already responded to our questionnaire, circulated through various mailing lists.

Initial results suggest that harassment in the workplace is extremely widespread, and most lesbians and gay men do not feel able to be out at work.

The questionnaires are being processed by student volunteer Linda Blake who is working for Stonewall for a year on a college placement.

The results of the survey will provide dramatic evidence of the need for employers to tackle the problems of discrimination and harassment. Further details in the next newsletter.

Gibraltar - rocking a hard place



Gibraltar, the last British dependency in Europe where gay sex remains illegal, is in the process of changing the law to make consenting gay sex legal. Stonewall can take much credit for this. We have been lobbying for reform since last summer. A news item in *The Observer* about our campaign led to media coverage on the Rock itself and a public debate on the need for reform. We lobbied members of the Gibraltar government at each of the British party conferences. We were helped by the Foreign Office, which put official pressure on Gibraltar to change the law.

We were surprised by the proposed age of consent of 18. In both Jersey and The Isle of Man, the reluctant reformers went for the bare minimum of change, setting consent at 21 in line with mainland inequality. However the new age is still unequal, as the heterosexual age of consent in Gibraltar is 16.

We hope the reform will give lesbians and gay men in Gibraltar the space to come out and start working for further change, both legal and social.

From the Director's Desk

Coming to Stonewall has, for me, been a revelation. Of course, I knew about some achievements - The Isle of Man, Paragraph 16. What I hadn't appreciated was the range of work and activity quietly gathering force, helping to build the case for change.



I hope this newsletter will help to share that information and describe the range of issues on which Stonewall is working. Some campaigns have already made headlines. Other projects, like the discrimination survey, have a much longer timescale to yield results.

Whatever the issue, dialogue is important. It is part of the process of building accountability, and ensuring that our voice is strong and self-confident, reflecting our common experience and aspirations. Finding this authentic voice is the key to change. The American lesbian and gay

community has been successful because they have forged from their many individual experiences one voice, to borrow from Clinton's inauguration speech. It doesn't mean they all agree all of the time, or all work in the same

way. In America the most confrontational politics happen alongside the most sober lobbying. But there is that self-confidence, that shared agenda.

I have seen how our movement has grown in the last twenty years. I firmly believe our shared agenda for lesbian and gay rights is now realisable and that Stonewall will be central in achieving this. I would like to thank all our generous friends, volunteers and supporters. This support - in time, in money, in advice and assistance has been the other Stonewall revelation. I hope this newsletter will reinforce your commitment and show what we can achieve together.

Angela Mason

Armed forces - our right to serve

"Western society no longer sees homosexuality as a legitimate ground for discrimination. America and Britain are among the last Western nations still believing the condition alone bars service in the forces. Both should think again."

Headline from Capital Gay, Gay Times? No, it's *The Times* leader of 26/11/92. With the election of President Clinton the US is now thinking again. Clinton has called for an immediate end to the harassment and discharge of lesbian and gay service people and is pledged to sign an executive order lifting the ban. There will of course be opposition, but his commitment is clear.

Change in the US parallels similar moves in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The Federal Court of Canada has ruled that the military's ban on lesbians and gays violated the Charter of Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Canada's Bill of Rights. The Australian government lifted their ban in November 1992 and the Ministry of Defence in New

Zealand also proposes dropping their ban.

Two years ago Stonewall gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Armed Forces, calling for decriminalisation and an end to the ban. The Committee conceded that homosexuality should not be a criminal offence, but on the crucial question of ending the ban they concluded:

"We are not persuaded that the time has yet come to require the Armed Forces to accept homosexuals or homosexual activity."

In the same week that Clinton demonstrated his commitment to ending the ban in America, Stonewall received a call from a lesbian soldier. Her "crime" was a suspected liaison with another officer. She had been isolated, all her personal belongings had been searched and she had been asked to name names. By the time Clinton signs an executive order in the US she will probably have been discharged from the British army.

Pension rights

Pension law is under review in the wake of the Maxwell pensions affair. **Stonewall** took this opportunity to point out the discrimination in pension schemes which provide a widow's or widower's pension to a surviving spouse but not to a surviving partner of the same sex, although everyone pays the same contributions. This inequality applies in all public sector superannuation schemes and most occupational pension schemes, although not to portable personal schemes.

Our submission to the Pensions Law Review Committee argues that widow's and dependent's pensions should be replaced by a partner's pension, the partner being nominated by the pension plan holder. Unmarried heterosexual couples would also benefit from this reform.

We have run articles in *The Independent*, *The Guardian* and the lesbian and gay press highlighting the problems, but our workplace discrimination survey (page 2) suggests that very few people even realise they are losing out.

Our next step will be to try and build support for these reforms in the run-up to the reform of pension law. We would like to hear from anyone who has lost out on a dependent's pension or has not been able to nominate their partner. We would also like to hear from anyone whose employer *does* allow them to nominate same sex partners, because we need examples of good practice.

Report on lesbian and gay rights in Europe

Stonewall has been coordinating the publication of a report commissioned by Vasso Papandreou, the former European Social Affairs Commissioner, on lesbians and gay men in EC countries and how EC law could affect them.

The report, *Homosexuality: a Community Issue?* is the most authoritative study to date. It will be published in early April. It will be launched in Brussels by **Stonewall**, ILGA and the European Human Rights Foundation, followed by launches in a number of EC capitals, including London.

Following hard on the heels of this report will be a major discussion, in the European Parliament, on the equal treatment of lesbians and gay men in the EC. A report is being prepared for the European Parliamentary Committee for Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs which will look at the legal and social position of lesbians and gay men, including new developments in lifestyle and relationships, discriminatory legislation on the age of consent and freedom of movement in the Community.

The first debates in the European Parliament will be in the spring, with a full debate in Strasbourg in the early summer. We'll keep you posted.

NEWS IN BRIEF

ADOPTION LAW REVIEW

In October 1992, a Departmental Working Party published a review of adoption law recommending no change in the law to prevent lesbians and gays from adopting. However a different message is coming from Tim Yeo, the Junior Minister responsible for the review. Using the exact wording of the notorious Paragraph 16, he said: "...equal rights and gay rights have no place in adoption law" and is now considering further legislation or guidelines to make sure local authorities get the message. **Stonewall** has presented a submission to the Adoption Law Review arguing against this restriction and for recognition of lesbian and gay parents.

IMMIGRATION RIGHTS

We receive many requests for help from couples who have problems with immigration because one partner does not have the right to stay in the UK. Heterosexuals in a similar position can solve the problem immediately by marrying. Same sex couples don't have this option.

We are currently following the fortunes of three couples who are going through official channels, applying to the Home Office for permission to remain here on the basis of their relationship. We want to focus on these injustices in the coming months. If you are in this situation please contact us. All replies will, of course, be treated as confidential.



CORPORATE SURVEY

Planning has begun on our next major survey, targeting private sector employers to discover how many are committed to equal opportunities for lesbians and gay men.

We will be asking whether they include us in their equal opportunities policies and whether they recognise same-sex partners in their pension schemes, compassionate leave arrangements etc.

Raising awareness of these issues is a major aim; we want to get the idea across that equal opportunities are good business practice, benefitting the employer as well as employees.

We will use the results to produce a good practice guide for employers, using examples of good practice from top employers to help make our point.

If you work for a private sector employer who has a good policy on lesbian and gay employees - please get in touch! We need all the examples of good practice we can find.

Publications list

Our newsletter is designed to keep you informed of the range of issues we work on. It can only tell you so much.

If you want more details of any of our campaigns we can send you briefings. They are free to Friends of Stonewall (although an SAE or a donation to cover costs are always appreciated).

The following is a list of current briefings and papers:

- * Armed forces briefing
- * Age of consent briefing
- * Sex education briefing
- * Partnership briefing
- * Housing Bill briefing
- * Submission to Adoption Law Review
- * Submission to the Law Society
- * Submission to Pension Law Review
- * Information on volunteering for Stonewall
- * Information on the Stonewall Postal Action Network
- * Information on our affiliation scheme

See below for our address.

Stonewall goes live!

STOP PRESS: Stonewall now has a regular weekly slot on **GAY**, London's only lesbian and gay radio programme. **GAY** goes out every weekday from 1am to 3am on 558 MW. Every Tuesday you can hear someone from Stonewall talk about current issues. Anyone in London or home counties area can tune in.

Why I support Stonewall

"What we millions of gay people need most is an authoritative, mature, realistic, patient and calm organisation lobbying on our behalf. Given the depth of entrenchment in attitudes towards gay life and sensibilities, it takes more courage to be tranquil in our attempts to find equality in law, in the workplace, in public attitudes, than it does to be hysterical, huckstering and shocking.



This is not to say Stonewall is without passion - of course it is passionate. It is passionate about justice, equality and reform. But it is no use railing at imagined enemies: some cold-eyed skinhead on the one hand or blustering apoplectic Colonel from the Shires on the other. You cannot blow down a stone wall with anger, you have to master its structure and then dismantle it brick by brick. Which is not to say Stonewall isn't in a hurry for change, we all are. The gathering of support and spreading of information amongst politicians and the powerful is working. Stonewall needs and deserves your trust and support. It has mine."

Stephen Fry

Just £5 a month can make all the difference...

At **Stonewall** we recognise our work is long term, that it will take vigilance and patience to fight homophobia and achieve our basic human rights.

We intend being around for many years to come, offering a secure, professional and rational response to attacks on our rights.

No group can plan for the future without being able to rely on regular income. We are hoping our friends across the UK will recognise this and support us by committing at least £5 a month to the fight for our rights.

If you recognise the value of our work and want to help us to continue, please make a donation to our campaign work by standing order.

Please help secure our future so we can get on with the job of securing yours.

Please return to: Stonewall, 2 Greycoat Place, London SW1P 1SB.

STANDING ORDER FORM

To the Manager: _____
(PLEASE USE BLOCK LETTERS AND PRINT CLEARLY)

_____ Bank plc

Address of Bank: _____

_____ Code: _____

Bank Sort Code

--	--	--	--	--	--

Please pay the Stonewall Group Ltd. (Account No. 10854126, sort code 60-40-04, NatWest Bank High Holborn London WC1V 7PS) the sum of _____ pounds monthly/annually (delete as appropriate) starting from _____ (date of first payment) until further notice. Please debit my account no. _____ (account number).

Signed _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Postcode _____