

# Section 28

and the revival of  
Gay, Lesbian and  
Queer Politics  
in Britain

edited by

Virginia Preston

**ICBH Witness Seminar Programme**



**Section 28 and the Revival of  
Lesbian, Gay and Queer Politics in Britain**

**ICBH Witness Seminar Programme  
Programme Director: Dr Michael D. Kandiah**

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Section 28  
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Chaired by Jeffrey Weeks  
Paper by Adam Lent and Merl Storr  
Seminar edited by Virginia Preston

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ADYINKA ODUBENA and KEIR THORPE

## Citation Guidance

References to this and other witness seminars should take the following form:

**Witness name, in 'Witness Seminar Title', seminar held [date of seminar], (Institute of Contemporary British History, [date of publication], [full internet address of seminar]), page number of reference [use the number given in the header at the top of the page referenced].**

For example, referring to Peter Tatchell's comments on his reactions to the proposed amendments to Section 28 which were defeated:

**Peter Tatchell, in 'Section 28 and the Revival of Gay, Lesbian and Queer Politics in Britain', seminar held 24 November 1999 (Institute of Contemporary British History, 2002, <http://www.icbh.ac.uk/witness/section28/>), p.32.**

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# Section 28 and the Revival of Gay, Lesbian and Queer Politics in Britain

Adam Lent and Merl Storr

The aim of this seminar is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and origins of the rapid resurgence in gay, lesbian and queer political activism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This paper provides a brief historical background to the debate and raises some of the questions which the seminar may wish to consider.

The opposition to Section 28 was led by the Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action and by Stop the Section. After the intense activity organised in response to the Section had died down, three extremely high profile groups began wider campaigning: the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power was launched in January 1989; The Stonewall Group was founded five months later; and within a further year the first meeting of OutRage! had been held.

It is often asserted that the reason for this renaissance was Section 28 itself. Its sheer vindictiveness both in concept and wording, not to mention doubt about its legal credentials, challenged an increasingly apolitical attitude – especially amongst gay men if not lesbians – and provided the impetus for the politicisation of a whole range of other issues taken-up by the groups mentioned above. But the seminar may want to consider a range of deeper factors that could also have been at work:

## *Reaction against identity politics*

By the late 1980s there was a growing reaction against the type of forthright identity politics which had encouraged fragmentation within social movements along race, gender, sexuality and disability lines in the early 1980s. Groups like Women Against Fundamentalism were rebuilding some burnt bridges. Was this change a key feature in allowing gay men and lesbians to unite against the Government's plans after many years of division and hostility?

## *Thatcherism and Victorian Values*

Section 28 can be seen as just the most concrete example of the Conservative Government's Victorian Values. The chronology below gives a hint of some of the other manifestations of the approach. Had gays and lesbians been provoked long before Section 28 but been unable to act? Was Section 28 a provocation too far?

## *HIV/AIDS*

Since the early 1980s the gay community had had to endure not just the grief and pain caused by the spread of the new disease but also the intensified prejudice and bigotry exhibited in its wake by the media and public figures. Government inaction and incompetence in its medical and educational response worsened this situation. Did HIV/AIDS create a legacy of anger and frustration that erupted in the late 1980s? Did the fact that the gay community had to fall back on its own resources to educate and support in response to HIV/AIDS create the political structures and confidence needed for forthright campaigning after Section 28?

## *Growing opposition to Thatcherism*

Dissatisfaction with the Thatcherite Government was intense by the late 1980s/early 1990s. A deep recession and poor policy decisions were creating major grass roots, direct action opposition on the poll tax, green issues and disability. Did the resurgence of gay, lesbian and queer politics

owe as much to this changing political mood as events specific to the gay and lesbian communities?

The seminar may also want to consider the impact the different campaigning groups had by answering the following questions. Why did the action against Section 28 fail? Why did OutRage! and Stonewall prove more viable than OLGA, Stop the Section and ACT-UP? Why did such differing styles of politics in the form of OutRage! and Stonewall appear at the same time? Did they complement or negate one another?

## Chronology

- 1985 JAN The London Lesbian and Gay Centre opens with Greater London Council funding. The Centre is immediately beset by a fierce dispute over whether certain constituencies such as bisexuals and SM groups and practitioners should be allowed to use the Centre.
- FEB The Government announces that Health Authorities are to have 'reserve powers' to detain 'highly infectious' AIDS patients.
- JUL An EGM of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre finally accepts the right of SM groups and practitioners to use the Centre. Bisexual groups remain excluded although individual bisexuals are permitted to use the centre.
- OCT Labour Party Annual Conference approves motion committing the Party to full legal equality for gay men and lesbians.
- NOV The Conservative Party Chairman, Norman Tebbit, attacks the 'valueless values of the permissive society' in The Disraeli Memorial Lecture.
- 1986 APR Metropolitan Councils, including the GLC, abolished.
- Norman Tebbit attacks the 'poisoned legacy of the Permissive Society'.
- JUN The Government introduces an amendment to its Education Bill making local authorities ensure that sex education gives due emphasis to 'moral considerations' and 'the values of family life'.
- SEP The press gives extensive coverage to the claim that schools in the London Borough of Haringey are using a children's book about a girl living with her gay father and his partner. The book is called 'Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin'. The Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker, calls for the book to be banned. The Parents Rights Group holds a public burning of the book outside a Catholic Primary School
- OCT Labour Party Conference achieves the two-thirds majority needed to have a commitment to lesbian and gay rights included in the Party manifesto.
- DEC Conservative MPs attack the gay and lesbian policies of Labour London boroughs in a debate on local government.
- 1987 JAN The press gives extensive coverage to the news that a Reverend Rushworth-Smith is beginning a hunger strike in opposition to Haringey council's education and Positive Images policies.
- FEB Lord Halsbury's bill preventing local authorities 'promoting homosexuality' is passed in the House of Lords.
- MAR A 'Smash the Backlash' march is held in Haringey to 'defend lesbian and gay rights'. Organised by local groups, it attracts over 2,000 people.

- MAY The debate on Lord Halsbury's bill is suspended in the House of Commons due to an inquorate chamber.
- The Campaign for Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights holds a conference designed to draw up a draft bill. The conference collapses into factional disputes but a minimal set of demands is agreed.
- JUN The Conservative Party wins its third consecutive election. Chris Smith is re-elected with an increased majority.
- OCT Margaret Thatcher attacks Positive Images policies of left-wing local authorities at the Conservative Party Conference stating: 'children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay'.
- DEC David Wilshire introduces an amendment in The House of Commons to The Local Government Bill which would make it illegal for local authorities to 'a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality and b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.' The amendment is known as Clause 28 and is accepted without a vote.
- The offices of *Capital Gay* – London's free gay newspaper – suffer an arson attack.
- 1988 JAN 10,000 people join a march through London in protest at Clause 28 organised by the Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action.
- A candlelight procession in London for the rights of people with HIV/AIDS attracts 12,000.
- FEB Lesbians Against the Clause demonstrate at Piccadilly Circus. Attended by approximately 70 women, this is a specifically lesbian-feminist event which is not supported by Stop the Clause or OLGA.
- Eight lesbians abseil into the chamber of the House of Lords from the public gallery during the debate on Clause 28.
- 20,000 March against Clause 28 in Manchester.
- Ian McKellen comes out during a radio discussion on Clause 28.
- Clause 28 is passed in the House of Lords.
- MAR A group of lesbians invade the BBC newsroom during transmission and chain themselves to the newsreaders in protest at Clause 28.
- A demonstration against Clause 28 becomes the largest gay and lesbian march in Britain.
- Clause 28 is passed in the House of Commons and becomes Section 28 of the Local Government Act.
- MAY Section 28 comes into force.

- JUN The Pride Festival is transformed into a protest against Section 28 and attracts 30,000.
- OCT The Labour Party and the Social and Liberal Democrats Conferences both commit themselves to scrapping Section 28.
- The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, defends Section 28 and makes homophobic comments in a television interview.
- 1989 JAN Aids Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP) is launched.
- MAY Stonewall Group is launched.
- OCT The Campaign for Access to Donor Insemination is launched in response to Government attempts to limit lesbian access through the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. The bill is ultimately passed stating that the child's 'need ... for a father' must be taken into account when access to donor insemination is being considered.
- 1990 FEB Mrs Thatcher describes proposals to reduce the gay age of consent as 'wholly unacceptable'.
- APR Gay actor Michael Boothe is killed in a homophobic assault.
- MAY OutRage! is founded as a direct response to Michael Boothe's murder. Stonewall launches its draft Homosexuality Equality Bill.
- JUN OutRage! holds its first demonstration at the public toilets in Hyde Park against police persecution and prosecution of gay men.
- SEP OutRage! holds a mass 'Kiss-in' at Piccadilly Circus. The event wins extensive media coverage.
- The Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative is launched – it brings together OutRage!, Stonewall, Switchboard, the Gay London Policing Group and the Gay Business Association to discuss policing issues and present a united voice in negotiations with the Metropolitan Police.
- DEC In the Operation Spanner case, 16 men are convicted of assault and other charges for engaging in consensual SM sex. Sentences range from £2,000 fines to four years imprisonment.
- Clause 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill proposes tougher sentences for the gay consensual offences of soliciting and importuning, indecency between men, and procuring.
- The Department of Health proposes guidelines for the Children Act including Paragraph 16 which would prevent gay men and lesbians from fostering children.

*References*

The above chronology was compiled using the following sources in which further details of Section 28 and the revival of gay, lesbian and queer politics can be found:

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J. Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, revised edition (London: Quartet Books, 1990).



# Witness Seminar

## Section 28 and the Revival of Gay, Lesbian and Queer Politics in Britain

edited by  
Virginia Preston

**Transcript of the witness seminar held 24 November 1999, 5pm, in the England Room,  
Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, London.**

### **JEFFREY WEEKS**

London Gay Switchboard, founded  
1974.

Named after the 1969 Stonewall riots  
in New York, precipitated by anger at  
police harassment in America's gay  
community, Stonewall Lobby Group  
was founded in London in 1989 to work  
towards the advancement of the civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural  
rights of lesbians and gay men.

OutRage! is a UK direct action group  
formed in May 1990 to campaign  
against homophobia.

[I've not] participated in a witness seminar before, and I don't think anyone else has, so we'll see how it goes but it's an opportunity for dialogue, as I understand it. We're not experts here telling our version we're to present our view, our witness, and ask for contributions from the audience and have a dialogue around that. Let me introduce the panel, then I'll take the privilege of the chair to say a few words before they speak. On my far right, which isn't an accurate description, is Lisa Power who is well known as a long-time activist and writer, and has been particularly active over the years in Lesbian and Gay Switchboard,\* or was, and was one of the original founders of Stonewall\* and I believe you also attended the first meetings of OutRage!.\* Is that right?

### **LISA POWER**

Yes

### **WEEKS**

Next to her is Rebecca Flemming who was a key figure in London's Stop the Section in the late 1980s and is an ancient historian. Lisa is

London Bisexual Women's Group, a social and support group, set up in 1984.

The Women's Film, Television and Video Network (WFTVN) was set up in 1981 to provide information and support for women working or seeking work in film, television and video. WFTVN aimed to change the representation of women by the visual media and make those media more responsive to the realities of women's experience. It closed in Mar 1989.

*Spare Rib* first appeared in June 1972. Run by an editorial collective, it aimed to explore the ideas of the emerging women's liberation movement. Sue O'Sullivan's records for 1971-87 are in the Fawcett Library archives at London Guildhall University, see <http://www.lgu.ac.uk/fawcett/archives/>

Sheba Feminist Press was a not-for-profit workers' co-operative founded in 1980 to publish women writers, particularly those who had not been to Oxford or Cambridge, and who weren't necessarily white or heterosexual or middle-class, and who didn't speak with the polished vowels of Bloomsbury ('About Sheba Feminist Press', <http://www.cpsr.org/cpsr/gender/sheba>). Archive at the Women's Library, see <http://www.lgu.ac.uk/fawcett/main.htm>

*Feminist Review*, published by Palgrave from 2002, was founded in 1979, and is produced by an editorial collective based in London and publishes articles on debates in and around feminism.

Feminists Against Censorship was formed in 1989 by a group of long-time feminist academics and campaigners who wished to fight censorship from a feminist perspective.

Sir Peregrine Worsthorne, journalist, editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* 1986-9.

'Resistance to the Poll Tax', ICBH witness seminar held 1 April 2000.

a mediaeval historian, so we have some historical training here. I actually am a modern historian and sociologist. Next to me is Sue George who has been an activist over the years in bisexual politics and at the time of Section 28 was active in the London Bisexual Women's Group\* and was working for the Women's Film, Television and Video Network,\* and on the far left is Sue O'Sullivan who has been an activist and writer in the women's movement and the lesbian and gay movement since the 1960s. She was on the *Spare Rib* collective\* and survived its most difficult moments, and was a key figure in the Sheba Press\* collective and *Feminist Review*\* and she has been active in Feminists Against Censorship.\*

Lisa pointed out earlier on that in fact all of us are historians in one way or another and I think we've all contributed to an attempt to understand contemporary history whatever our backgrounds. I just want to say a few thoughts of my own which are by no means definitive but I hope are of some use in setting the framework for the discussion.

It seems to me that looking back Clause 28 is one of the key examples of what Peregrine Worsthorne\* called the 'bourgeois triumphalism' of the Thatcher government after 1987. It was one of those key symbolic events which mark our history as lesbian or gays, but it was also I think quite symbolic of other things going on. It was a moment of triumphalism in terms of the Thatcher regime which also had the seeds of its own decay – one thinks for instance of the poll tax which was the classic product of this late Thatcherite period and which I gather is going to be the subject of the next witness seminar in the spring\* – but of course it had a particular impact on those of us who identify as lesbian or gay. And in a strange sort of way I think, because the whole history of sexuality to my mind is dotted with symbolic events which are often more important than some of the material effects of changes in the law. Symbolic events can have major effects. We know that Clause 28 has never directly been used since 1988 but its effects in all sorts of ways have permeated the community.

There seem to me two ways of looking at it. There's first of all the local events which led to Clause 28 itself, and the prime issue there for the Tories who led the campaign was the activities of local authorities against which Clause 28 was directly attacking. And of course that was both something about what was happening in the

lesbian and gay community in terms of equal opportunities committees, lesbian and gay committees, attempts to, in quotation marks, 'promote homosexuality' in various local authorities, but it was also of course part of an ongoing crisis in local government, and I think that interaction between what was specific to the lesbian and gay experience and of broader significance go back and forth all the time the events surrounding Clause 28. It was also I think an act of supreme opportunism by the Thatcher government itself, because it in effect caught the Labour opposition on the hop. Labour government extremely embarrassed by what was going on in local government, it had been defeated in 1987, and that overlap, the sweep of that, was still very much there. So there were specific local circumstances I think which led to Clause 28, but of course there are wider issues affecting lesbian and gay world and I would pick on two which I think are important and they're interrelated.

The first official Department of Health report on AIDS was produced in 1983 when three people had died. From 1982 to Sept 1999 in the UK there were 39,444 recorded cases of HIV infection, 16,605 AIDS cases and 13,258 AIDS deaths (National AIDS Trust figures).

One is the impact of HIV throughout the 1980s.\* HIV and AIDS crisis dramatised the uncertainty and attitudes towards homosexuality, brought out all sorts of homophobic responses, but also of course produced an amazing response from the community itself. And that's linked to another thing. The key phrase to my mind in Clause 28 has always been the one about pretended family relationships, and in a sense what I think Clause 28 was in a large part about was saying 'thus far and no further'. There was a degree to which a consensus developed politically that the, what is happened in 1967 in terms of changes in decriminalisation of male homosexuality, it had all sorts of effects and Clause 28 was like a sign post saying thus far and no further. A certain decree of toleration in private but no over-sweep into the rest of the life, rest of life. But of course pretended families is about the legitimisation of lesbian and gay relationships not simply about decriminalisation. It takes the agenda much further. And to my mind there's a link between HIV and pretended families in that both are about the lesbian and gay experience being more than simply about sex. It's about caring relationships. HIV produced a caring response, pretended families are about care, various forms of care and that notion of lesbian and gays being more than sexual beings who can be tidied away in a corner, but instead are infiltrating the nature of family life, of personal life, I think was part of the hidden currents behind Clause 28. It's part, therefore the response produced by Clause 28 I think, is part

of a much longer shift in attitudes to the sexuality, personal life and so on which is more than simply expressed in all those changes in the law in 1967 and failed attempts to change the law afterwards and up to this day in fact. It is actually about the full legitimisation of lesbian and gay life choices, and as I say it was an attempt to draw a line against that.

But of course like all such attempts it was a disastrous failure. Because the affects of most attempts to change the law on sexuality almost inevitably produce counter-productive effects, make a different world, and we're going to see the same again with the equalisation of the age of consent when it happens in the next few. The attempt to protect people between 16 and 18 which is one way of trying to get the law through the Lords much more easily is actually going to have all sorts of unintended consequences which we can't predict. And I think Clause 28 had massive unintended consequences for the Thatcher government. It, in a sense in an attempt to stop the flow of progress, it actually made that progress possible. Because it dramatised the situation of lesbian and gays it created a huge response from the community itself, it put new things on the agenda, and it I think it's a key, probably the key, symbolic event in the history of sexuality of the last 30 years because it actually forced people to draw lines and to say on which side they were and in doing that it actually made a new politics of lesbian and gay life possible.

Those are my thoughts, others will contribute theirs, let me just say two more general things. This is an attempt to explore these issues from all our different experiences and contribute to our understanding of Clause 28 so I hope we'll all be able to sort of engage in discussion in a sort of comradely spirit, and in an exploratory spirit, and if I could just urge people not to re-fight old battles but try to understand the context in which those battles took place, and avoid sectarianism, but as far as possible give honest testimony and I am sure you will all do that OK.

[Peter Tatchell arrives]

**WEEKS**

Peter, you're not a shrinking violet, come and join us. [pause] Peter Tatchell is well known as a leading gay activist over many years and has been in the press recently for some recent activism. Lisa.

**POWER**

*The Pink Paper*, weekly free newspaper, founded in 1987.

OLGA, Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Activists.

OK. Very briefly when Section 28 happened I was working on the *Pink Paper*.<sup>\*</sup> I wasn't actually very involved with OLGA<sup>\*</sup> which is what you've got me down as I was only involved with OLGA in the sense that my girlfriend was involved with OLGA and so I was involved with OLGA. But I was actually working on the *Pink Paper*, one of the founding group who put it together and Section 28 or Clause 14, as it was at the time, happened within the first four or five weeks of the *Pink Paper* being set up and we couldn't believe that this was all going on so fast after the new paper had been set up. And I remember we were very lost, we had to really speculate about what this legislation would mean, and in fact what we initially went with, which gives you an idea of the gay press then being not that much different than the gay press now, was we thought one of the biggest effects was that it might close down gay bars. So we certainly thought that was the way to get people's attention so that was what we put on the front page.

We really had no idea when it first came off of what it was or what it would do. We hadn't seen any anti-gay legislation, we hadn't seen any legislative debate around gay issues for at least two decades. Everything had been around social activism. And it happened also in mid-December and it caught everyone amidst. And an indication of the state of the lesbian and gay movement at that point is that we all went 'Oh my God how are we going to mobilise? The students have already all gone home'. We didn't quite know what to do if all the students had gone home, because most of the movement went through those kinds of channels at the time. I remember it was my birthday party and somebody got up and gave a briefing about Section 28 it was the most bizarre birthday party ever. Suddenly we had to get the word out about this thing. We shoved it out in papers, we tried to get people to know what was happening, and there were a couple of meetings at Camden Town Hall, as I recall, and there were various proposals. And course OLGA wanted to have its own march and Stop the Section wanted to have its own

march and some people wanted to have an early march and some people wanted to have a late march, so we had all the usual inter-sectarian rows, and everybody was right and everybody was wrong as far as I'm concerned because we shouldn't have been sectarian but at the same time everybody had good arguments.

Gay Business Association, established 1984.

But there was a march decided on for January the 9th and even if we didn't get most of the students out, the Gay Business Association\* went around all the main discos putting up posters and I'd never seen this happen in the gay entertainment area before. They put up posters that said 'Get off your arses and march', and we actually brought the disco bunnies out, and they were very instrumental in the riot outside Downing Street, because they'd never been on a demo before and they thought that if you rioted you meant it, so you'd have a proper riot not just stand there and shout at the police for a bit.

So that was superb and for me a lot of what happened around Section 28 was that they didn't know what they'd woken up. They'd brought the gay social scene which would never go into politics, and the gay political scene which pretended it never went into the social scene, together for the first time in many years and people were coming out on marches who'd never marched, people were talking to each other who'd never talked to each other before.

See chronology, p.14, Feb 1988.

And the other thing it meant to me was the rise of lesbian activism within the mixed lesbian and gay movement. I'd come out in a time when lesbians didn't mix very much with gay men. There were a few token lesbians we always used to say there were about five of us and they'd rotate two or three different ones of us in the gay newspaper each week to show that they knew there were some lesbians alive, but actually most lesbians were in separatist things and actually Section 28 brought lesbians very firmly back in and I think it's no surprise that there are a number of lesbians on this panel, more so than men. I remember a lot of lesbians suddenly getting involved at that time. Not just the abseilers\* although they were the most obvious, the most visible manifestation of that. And I remember a lot of my gay male friends saying 'oh we've got to do something too, we can't leave all the fun to the women'.

We had no idea what we were doing with Section 28 though. We hadn't seen it coming. We reacted as best we could to it but within the parameters that we had at the time, and I well remember the

Gay Business Association turning up at one of the planning meetings and some people literally hissing them because they dared to talk to the police. And there was a lot of criticism of the arts lobby for talking to government, and it was simply not done. We were in a position where all we could do was get out and march. We wouldn't negotiate with the Tory government, and for me that was the lesson that came out of Section 28 in the long run which led to the founding of things like the Stonewall group, by a coalition of people who'd never been politicised before Section 28, and other people like me who'd been political for a long time and saw that the tactics we were using got us nowhere with Section 28, glorious though they were and mobilise our community though they did, they actually didn't affect the legislation. And I came to realise that we needed to affect the legislation as well as mobilise the community. So I think Section 28 really is the founding of a whole turning point in the modern lesbian and gay movement in this country. And it happened at the same time as a whole load of other things which I hope other people on the panel will bring up around arguments around sexual politics as well as arguments around party politics.

Section 28 was the first time I ever met someone who was an openly gay Conservative. And I'd been out for 15 years before then, I must've known them, they just kept their mouths shut. It changed an awful lot of things in our political framework in the community and I'd love to hear what other people think happened afterwards because there are people on this panel I haven't seen since, and it's been fascinating to see them again.

**WEEKS**

Rebecca

**REBECCA FLEMMING**

Well, I should confess at the outset that I was one of those students who may or may not have gone home at the crucial moment. I'd just come down to London as a student having definitely fore-sworn politics. I'd done too much politics previously and my studying had suffered and now I was starting again and no politics,

David Wilshire, Conservative MP for Spelthorne since 1987. See chronology, Dec 1987.

just serious study of Sanskrit and Urdu, I think that's what it was at the time. However that was proved to be a rapidly untenable position really as David Wilshire's\* amendment came out in December. And I was kind of almost immediately dragged into the campaign, and then, sort of, in January when after the Stop the Clause, Stop the Section campaign itself had been sort of set up, as a, trying to unify, bring together all the different people who were involved, active, against Stop the Section and very specifically directed around that particular issue. When it became clear that really one of the things that we desperately needed was some, was a kind of office, and some people to be in the office and I was in a position where it was less bad for me to drop out of my course than it was for people to drop out of their work or whatever.

ULU Building, Malet Street, London WC1, also home to NUS London.

That's what I did and I basically became a kind of full time, I don't know, Stop The Clause organiser. There was a small office, although we later graduated to the board room in the University of London Union.\* Again, looking at that sort of student support from the University of London Union and NUS London. And we had a very small office to start off with a telephone and a typewriter, and you have to imagine, remember this is all in the days before these things could be organised with the touch of a computer button, there was a lot of typewriting that went on, and a lot of very keen people. And which was the really important thing, that we were able to, I mean I sort of tried vaguely to kind of co-ordinate some of the administrative side, but it was quite an easy task in the sense that we weren't lacking volunteers. There were an enormous number of people as Lisa says who hadn't been involved in political activity but who just kind of turned up and presented themselves to help and who, and that was sort of the way on which we worked.

And I mean thinking back on it now I spent interminable hours in meetings in a way that I really cannot now fathom exactly how I survived going through that many meetings, but I suppose when I think about it, I mean I did. There was all sorts of Stop the Section meetings. There were the kind of large trying to co-ordinate the whole thing, we had lots and lots of little sub groups to try, and a trade union sub group, and local government, all sorts of different groups trying to deal with particular issues, different areas of activity, so you could basically go to a meeting every single night of the



week with considerable ease, and then there was also a lot of people who wanted speakers from the campaign and so on, and I. We sort of tried to do that as best we could but I don't actually remember being ground down by the prospect of all these meetings which was quite amazing, but I think part of the reason for that is it was clear that things were happening.

I mean the meetings I sit in now are much more about the social glue which sort of keeps institutions together and that you can't have a academic department unless you have a certain number of meetings. Kind of every term whatever and that's just it, you're not sure exactly what the meeting is for but if you didn't have them you wouldn't be an academic department, for example. Whereas these were meetings that although they may have been somewhat chaotic at times clearly had things to do, tasks were allocated, people did them, people came back and said what they'd done.

There was an enormous amount of imperfection in the system, but the kind of activity, level of activity and commitment was manifest and kind of kept things going. And I think when I sort of think about why it was first of all that I. It's possible that I was quite easily tempted away from the study of eastern south-east Asian languages back into politics and that I was just waiting to fall as it were and certainly it was easier for me to commit myself full time than it was for a number of other peoples, but it wasn't a kind of an entirely negligible decision to make and when I think about why I did make it. I mean I have to say that I took the whole Section, the Clause, David Wilshire's thing, the Section 28, I took it very personally. I saw these people saying these things and I thought they're talking about me and I'm just not in a position not to do something about it. That's me they're talking about and that's it. And it was, they were talking about me in a particular kind of way that was very important, and Jeffrey has raised this whole issue about pretend family relations but also the issue of promotion. They were sort of doing it in a certain kind of way that went to the heart of the matter if you like, which is that none of these issues are real if you accept that as lesbians and gay men we are equally valid members of society. If you don't think, if you don't think there is anything to be corrupted into, there's any problem with any of that thing then all of this just falls to one side. And those people are just in a very systematic fashion saying that you're just a second class citizen, a

second class kind of person, and I did feel it kind of very personally, and I happen to know that all those people who were waiters or whatever in smart restaurants, and who turned up to, who had never done anything before in their lives who turned up, it was because the same thing. They thought it was them personally that was being talked about.

And I should say, I have to say now that in the sense that, I have to confess I probably, I'm not sure what would happen if the same thing happened again. Partly because, sort of I don't know what you want to call it, experience or something insulates you to some degree against some of these things and after a while you just can't take it all personally, otherwise you'd be up and kind of chasing around madly all the time trying to fight the things that are kind of wrong. But the other thing which is more positive, I mean I think that's me becoming kind of conservative or whatever, but I mean the other thing is this things people have talked about previously which is the sense in which although we may have lost the battle there was a kind of step forward, clear step forward made in terms of winning the war.

And that is that now, if you kind of think back to those times immediately after the Section when people were sort of saying what they should do with homosexuals was put them all, put us all in the gas chamber and so on. That kind of public level of rhetoric has just kind of gone. That's, we're not in, we're by no means in a nice happy kind of society, and some of the kind of things the Labour Party talks about, for example, the government talks about in terms of family is kind of awful in many ways, but that the sort of aggressiveness of that rhetoric has sort of dwindled in various senses and that is also one of the issues I think that we need to think about.

And I want to quickly say – how much have I done of my five minutes? – two more general points. One is that I that I think – or three actually, very quick – one is the thing about Thatcherism and why did we sort of fail to stop the Section and that's because in some senses Thatcher knew what a lot of other people seem to have forgotten ever since which is that you don't admit your mistakes. If you've got a policy you see it through that's it you just do it. Whereas the Labour party was falling over itself admitting mistakes before it had even made and it's now got to the point where it won't even say anything on the kind of basis that it might make a

mistake. So there, I don't think there was ever the real serious possibility that the legislation itself wouldn't see the statute book, but the thing that really matters is what happened all around that, and one of the things that happened around that and not just symbolic I think, although there clearly are a whole range of issues, but there was a whole set of people who kind of came out, who became involved in various forms of activity, even if they may now be gone back into being not so active and so on. And that I think has had its effects in various ways.

The second thing is that I think about is that the, one of the things in the briefing paper is the issue of kind of durability, why didn't Stop The Clause continue and I have to say that the idea was never that it would. The idea was that Stop the Clause was something that was formed for a specific reason to try and bring together as many people as possible to try and combat Clause/Section 28 and the notion that was that after it had done its task that we hoped that a kind of added level of political activity, political thinking, political discussion might well kind of encourage the formation of other groups, and the continuing activity, but it wasn't going to be within that particular kind of form. And in many ways it was actually quite important that the diversity of the lesbian and gay community in all sorts of senses sort of reasserted itself, in terms of the way that, or asserted itself again in a sense in the sorts of ways groups, political activity, and so on would be formed from then on. And I think that that's sort of one of the things that we have to think about.

And the other point is that I do think we need to concentrate quite clearly on the way that local government was involved in all of this, not just that local government was a target but all those things that you think about. I mean Lisa said that all these meetings in Camden Town Hall. I mean I think I visited every single Labour town hall, I can't remember how many times over the course of that, because there were councillors who were sympathetic, there were Lesbian and Gay Units in those days who devoted all their time and energy to the Stop the Section campaign. I mean it's a kind of, in this day when local democracy is not only dead but completely and utterly buried, it's quite hard to imagine but I think that's one of, a important area of the discussion.

**WEEKS**

Thanks Rebecca, Peter would like to go later to get his breath, so Sue George.

**SUE GEORGE**

OK, right, I was expecting Peter to go next. Well, I come from a very sort of different perspective to the previous two speakers, in that I wasn't directly very involved in the Clause 28 Campaign. At that time, around the late eighties I was working at the Women's Film Television and Video Network, and it's very interesting that one of the last things Rebecca was talking about was about local government. We had been funded by local government, and previous to that the GLC, and so my main remembrance of that time was essentially fighting for my job. Very quickly money was taken away from radical groups, it was like the whole roll back of every kind of positive progressive political movement in the face of Thatcherism. It was all kind of very intense and panicky and we thought 'help help. You know, if we don't have a big campaign now then all the things that we've been working for over the past few years will just go', and that in fact is what happened.

The British Film Institute is a charity set up in 1983 to encourage the development of the arts of film, television and the moving image.

And I remember in 1987 the British Film Institute\* who were also funding us gave a big conference talking about the new reality and what I remember for the whole of this time was a new reality, a right wing reality. Whereas in the past there had been a very kind of hopeful feeling that the future would be different, the future would be more progressive, here were all sorts of things saying no, the future is going to be more market-driven. You have to look at value for money, we have to look at the reality of giving people what they want and that means lower taxes which aren't going to fund things like you're doing any more. So as part of that, to me Clause 28 was part of the whole swing to the right which is mentioned thoroughly in this briefing paper.

And the other thing that I remember was, at that time my main identity was as a feminist, and feminism seemed to be falling to pieces at that time. That there was a lot of – and I expect that Sue, Sue O'Sullivan, will be talking about this, about the lesbian community and what was happening around at this time, which was to do with representations of lesbians. And everyone was at each other's throats, it seemed to me, and it was not a very pleasant time to try

and be politically active. When one group of women would be saying one thing, another group of women would be saying another thing, and it was very difficult to know where to put your personal allegiance.

As well at that time I was involved in the London Bisexual Women's Group which had started in 1984. And it was a support and social group essentially, coming out of a kind of consciousness-raising tradition, and we I don't think explicitly were involved in any kind of political activity. I don't know about the mixed bisexual group but around that time it seemed to me that most bisexuals weren't out in the way that they are today, that in the mid to late eighties many lesbian and gay groups explicitly banned bisexuals, and even those that didn't specifically ban bisexuals were quite hostile. For instance at WFTVN, my workplace, we had an equal opportunities monitoring form which asked about your sexuality, and one woman had put bisexual. And one lesbian read this over my shoulder, and when she saw bisexual she said, 'Yuk!'. Quite literally 'Yuk!'. And so that I don't think was really a context when one felt terribly happy about coming out.

So the bisexual movement to me, so far as I can remember, wasn't particularly active in anything against Clause 28 although obviously many individuals, and indeed I, went on demonstrations and stuff. That was about the end of it. I mean what I think that many of us felt at the time was that Section 28 was obviously, as the other panellists have said, very important, but we weren't at all clear about what it meant in practice. And in hindsight I think why we felt so frightened was because it was its conjunction with the AIDS epidemic. As far as I can remember it was around then when many many men were starting to die, and the hostility of Section 28 combined with that just seemed to be so utterly cruel and homophobic in its intention, that I think we all felt very frightened about what actually it was going to mean in the long term. And when I was thinking about this, I was thinking well why hasn't it been repealed yet, I mean there's so far as I can remember there's been discussion about repealing it for ages and ages, and looking in the briefing paper the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats say they've been committed to repealing it ever since it was passed, but it still hasn't been passed and you know, why is that?

**SUE O'SULLIVAN**

OK, I didn't get terribly involved in the organised aspect of fighting against Clause 28 and tonight I am interested that there are other people who felt that too. I was trying to think - why not? I think it's because of the history, the kind of politics that I was involved in from the late 60s up through the 80s and even now to a certain extent. These were feminist radical politics and then later lesbian politics. We were never anything less than ambivalent about parliamentary politics and quite frankly I never understood British parliamentary politics. Then I thought, oh fuck, I don't even understand the American system and I was born there. It wasn't something that drew me in, so there was a personal aspect, perhaps a defect. But I wasn't alone because there were many people in the particular times of the 70s and 80s, who left behind, or didn't join in the kind of politics which focused on the legal aspects of parliamentary mysteries, etc. etc. We were involved in a much more community-based grassroots organising. We belonged to small local groups and these were the starting points. It wasn't that we didn't have an international or national perspective on the things that were happening. It was just how we organised.

I was working at Sheba Feminist Press at the time of Clause 28, and I belonged to Feminists Against Censorship and I was also part of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre.\* I see that there are other people in this room who were there at that time. I was specifically involved in the Lesbian Lounge\* group or collective who organised the lesbian events and put the lesbian agenda forward at the LLGC. And we were also the ones who were most involved in the extremely bitter fighting that went on at there about whether SM groups should be allowed to use the centre – and even whether other sorts of groups should be able to use it. I can't remember whether we specifically discussed bisexual groups in the Lesbian Lounge, I don't know.

At Sheba we had published a book called *The Playbook for Kids About Sex*.\* It had been on our stock-list a long time. Leading up to the 87 election we got a phone call from somebody who it turned out worked for the Conservative government, or he was a sort of a gofer for the Conservatives, and he wanted to order a large number of *The Playbook*. We thought about it for a while and then we decided, well why not? I mean they obviously had the book, why not sell them more. So a large car drove up outside our grungy

The London Lesbian and Gay Centre was founded in 1985 and supported by the Greater London Council. Now closed.

The Lesbian Lounge was part of the London Lesbian and Gay Centre.

Joani Blank, *The Playbook for Kids About Sex*, illus. Marcia Quackenbush, Sheba Feminist Press, 1982.

office in Bradbury Street in Dalston, the street of many co-ops, and this guy got out very stony faced, in an overcoat - he almost looked like a gangster. Anyway he came in, he took away over a hundred copies and left us with a large amount of money. And we wrote a letter to Mrs. Thatcher and thanked her very much for supporting [laughter] our publishing venture and for giving us as much free publicity as she did. Because in fact the books were distributed to MPs for a discussion about what horrible things would happen to children if books that supported lesbianism and homosexuality were distributed. In fact I think it was one of the books that ended up on that infamous Conservative election billboard which listed a number of book titles saying 'This is what they have in store for you' sort of thing.

I remember going on the Haringey march, the Backlash one mentioned,\* but you know at Sheba we had ambivalent feelings about the whole positive images thing. On the one hand we could see the need and we would talk about the politics of this need and understand it. On the other hand at Sheba we just happened to be on an edge, a more itchy discussion about the restrictions that positive images put in place for publishing. We were talking about different things – especially sexuality – that were perhaps a bit more shady or less clear than positive images allowed. We wondered about the lesbian and gay units or women's units that placed such an insistence and gave such strong backing for the positive images. But we definitely supported that march. I also went to the January big march\* and to the Candlelight march\* that were all mentioned in the briefing.

I don't know if anybody else has read the columns that Ivan Massow\* writes. He wrote one about a month or two ago in which he was talking off the cuff saying, 'oh you know its really great that lesbians are finally finding a voice, you know they never had a voice before, isn't it super that they're getting a voice', and I thought to myself what does he know? After all, as he admitted, lesbians were very involved in the whole campaign against Section/Clause 28. I also was working on the *Pink Paper* around that time and we would discuss how activist lesbians were in the campaign. We felt the main cause of this was the women's movement. The history of the women's movement still fed into something that younger and older women could get some sustenance from. There was the history of

Mar 1987 'Smash the Backlash' march in Haringey, attracted over 2,000 people. See chronology.

Jan 1988, march in protest at Clause 28 organised by the Organisation for Lesbian and Gay Action. See chronology

Candlelight procession in London, Jan 1988 for the rights of people with HIV/ AIDS. See chronology.

Ivan Massow, British businessman and political activist, Steven Norris's Conservative running mate in the 1999 London mayoral elections. He left the Conservative Party for Labour in 2000 because of Tory opposition to the repeal of Section 28 and attitudes to asylum seekers.

activism, there was Greenham Common, there were all sorts of girls in punky anarchisty squats in Brixton and in Stoke Newington – all these fabulous things. I think there was a sense from some of the men I knew that was like, ‘God, these girls are really something’. So even though I wasn’t involved in it I was pleased to see the younger women getting involved in a rather more activist way. After Section 28, I don’t seem to have given it as great importance in my own thoughts at the time. Maybe I was so involved in other areas of lesbian and gay politics that I didn’t feel as frightened about it as other people are saying. Everything seemed to be switching to the right so it was just part of a general move that way. I was wondering whether the whole thing about pretended families has had an effect that perhaps we weren’t aware of at the time, or maybe I wasn’t, maybe other people were. Around that time it seemed as if lesbians – particularly lesbian mothers, or those women who were supporting, or wanting to support lesbian mothers’ right to have children – were muting some of the more alternative ways of looking at lesbian motherhood or lesbian families if you like. Some of the more radical or critical feminist positions on the normal family, the accepted family, were muted because you had to say, well, we’re not a pretended family, we’re a real family. The discussion wasn’t all one way or the other, but there was a slight problem.

I’ll just say one other thing. Section 28 did have input into the questions about ‘born that way’ and ‘choice’ as well. Just a little personal story. Long after Section 28, I was at a secondary school fair in Stoke Newington which perhaps has the largest concentration of lesbian mothers and children of lesbians than any other place in London or England. A friend of mine helps the librarian to organise a bookstall and so I went to support the fair and buy some books. There’s a very diverse community of children in the school and the books reflected this. There were a lot of really interesting looking books for teenagers and young people on black history, on local history of Jewish people, on various other areas that would represent the children and the experiences they’d have. But there wasn’t one on lesbians or gays or homosexuality in general or anything. So I said to my friend, I’m perfectly happy to buy one of the books here, but I mean really why isn’t there a book on homosexuality or lesbianism in a school where I know there are plenty of the



children of lesbian mothers? And she said, well the librarian says we can't because of Clause 28 – it's too dangerous and we can't. Of course the irony was the librarian was a lesbian. Clause 28 has never been used but that story is just an illustration of its negative influence – only three years ago.

[tape change]

## **PETER TATCHELL**

In 1983 Bermondsey had been a safe Labour seat but, after a by-election campaign in which Tatchell's sexuality became a major issue with the press and other candidates, it was lost to Liberal Party candidate Simon Hughes who gained a 10,000 majority and remains the sitting Liberal Democrat MP.

...four years after I stood as the Labour candidate in the Bermondsey by-election.\* Most commentators seem to agree that that was probably the most violent and homophobic election in Britain this century. The experience of that campaign brought home to me, even before Section 28, the scale of social homophobia that was still very strong in our culture and that's why, after that defeat, I resolved to try and turn it into something positive by devoting my energies to campaign for lesbian and gay human rights.

I did lots of different things between 1983 and 1987 but in early 1987, again before the Clause was on the horizon, I got together a small group of people to set up the first movement in Britain to campaign for the civil rights of people with HIV and AIDS. There had been up until that time a huge backlash against the gay community, whereby we were stigmatised and blamed for the epidemic. There were all kinds of draconian proposals floating around to deny people with the virus basic civil rights. It was a very menacing, threatening situation. So with a few other people we set up the United Kingdom AIDS Vigil Organisation, which was the first movement in this country to campaign for the human rights of people with HIV and AIDS. And we planned to organise a major conference and a big candlelight march, in London, in late January,\* on the eve of the World Health Ministers Summit on AIDS. World Health Ministers were coming from all over the world for a crisis meeting to decide a common plan to tackle this new global threat. And we felt that it was very important there was an organisation and a series of events to highlight issues of civil liberties and human rights which were hitherto being ignored.

The January 1988 conference called for a spirit of social tolerance and a greater exchange of information on HIV/AIDS. The first World AIDS Day was held on 1 Dec that year.

So of course when Section 28 came along in December [1987], we suddenly found ourselves in a conflict situation. Because the World Health Ministers Summit on AIDS was fixed for January 25th all our events were already in place; we were mobilising people to support this particular event and suddenly now we were faced with a double whammy, with Section 28 on our hands. So for me personally it was a very difficult choice, on the one hand I wanted to throw myself into the Section 28 campaign, but on the other hand I also knew that HIV and AIDS was also important and that we'd set a series of events in train and they really had to really be followed through. So initially I wasn't so much involved in the campaign against Section 28 because I was putting all the energy with others into making a success of the Human Rights Conference at Central Hall Westminster and the pickets and various other events we organised to coincide with the World Health Ministers Summit.

It's hard to know what the right choice would have been but I think we did the right thing. And perhaps one indication of that is the fact that as a result of that fairly small-scale effort, because so many lesbian and gay people were really taken up by the campaign against Section 28 there were very few of us working on this it made things very difficult, people's energies were all into the Stop the Section campaign, but nevertheless we did manage to have an impact on that conference and got the World Health Ministers Summit on AIDS to make the first global declaration against discrimination with respect to people with HIV and AIDS. And that to some extent marked the turning point in governmental responses. Up until that time there'd been this huge gut reaction knee-jerk response which was to, in many countries, to lock up people with HIV and AIDS, ban people with HIV and AIDS entering countries, and all other kinds of unofficial action like vigilante attacks on hospices and places that were caring for people with HIV and AIDS. So that was a very important significant thing but I must say that once that was over myself and those that were involved in the United Kingdom AIDS Vigil Organisation threw ourselves very much into working with those people who'd got the campaigning against Section 28 underway.

Now I think to put it in its context Section 28 was just one of a quintet of queer-bashing political assaults on our community. There was the Conservative Government's family values crusade.

Mrs. Thatcher launched her great new crusade in the early mid 80s which was to resurrect and defend traditional family values backed up by a second wave which was to exalt and idealise traditional Victorian morality.

Then there was the AIDS backlash, the stigmatisation of the gay community, the over-blaming of our community for the epidemic, the horrendous consequences, the farcical consequences. The horrendous ones were people with HIV and AIDS being attacked in the street and having their homes firebombed; the farcical responses were people with HIV up on minor shoplifting charges being forced to go to court wearing protective bodysuits and visors so as not to infect the judge and jury, and people being refused service in bars and clubs because they were gay, and there was a fear that if they drank from a glass the glass might become infected and the whole local population would die the next day from HIV and AIDS.

Then there was also the record rise in arrests of gay men, a huge police crackdown, partly inspired by Mrs. Thatcher's family values crusade and her exaltation of Victorian morality and partly by the backlash surrounding HIV and AIDS. The numbers of gay men being arrested in the late 80s for consenting gay behaviour reached a record high in 1989. The highest level ever this century, higher than in 1964, 65, 66, 67, before the decriminalisation of male homosexuality, so-called, higher even than in 1954, 55 at the height of the Mcarthyste-style witch hunts which led to the trials of Montagu and Wildeblood.\*

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, who had previously been charged in Oct 1953 with offences allegedly involving two boy scouts, was arrested on 9 Jan 1954 on new charges of improper behaviour with two airmen. He was tried in Mar 1954 along with his cousin Michael Pitt-Rivers and the *Daily Mail* diplomatic correspondent Peter Wildeblood, who were all imprisoned for inciting the two RAF men to commit indecent acts. The case was followed by calls for law reform, supported by a report from the Church of England's Moral Welfare Council, which recommended an equal age of consent.

And then to top it all off number five was the wave of queer-bashing murders, this horrendous scale of killings of gay men that was going virtually unreported in the mainstream media and which the police were doing virtually nothing about. They were more interested in arresting us for consenting gay behaviour in the back rooms of clubs or on Hampstead Heath in the middle of the night than in protecting us against violent assault and even murder. Of all the dozens of people we recorded who had been killed where there was pretty clear evidence the motive was queer-bashing hatred nearly half of all those murders were unsolved and the police showed absolutely no interest whatsoever in seriously attacking those crimes.

So Section 28 was the last straw in that context of a series of attacks

on our community and it led I think to two basic responses. One group of people responded by saying well we've got to work within the system to change the law, to influence parliament you know whether we like it or not the parliamentary system is there, we have to lobby MPs and government ministers to get change, and that of course, that response of course, led to the formation of Stonewall and its traditional style lobbying campaign. The other reaction was a sense of both fury with establishment politics and disillusionment with the party system.

I think many of us felt totally and utterly betrayed by democracy. We'd put our faith in the democratic system, we'd put our trust in politicians to be able to listen to reason and to show compassion, yet they voted, when we had all those votes on Section 28 right down the line time and time again in favour of discrimination and by very substantial majorities. And it wasn't just Section 28; there were three really important amendments that were put up which any reasonable person would have voted for, but which were also voted down. One was to allow schools to acknowledge in sex education lessons that lesbian and gay people existed, to allow that we, to acknowledge that we exist, that could not be tolerated by a Conservative-dominated parliament it was voted down including by our dear friend Mr Portillo.\* So much for his caring compassionate Conservatism. Then there was another amendment which said that local authorities would be allowed to take steps to combat discrimination and promote understanding and tolerance. That too was voted down, and there was a third amendment which would have allowed teachers in schools to provide advice and counselling to lesbian and gay pupils who were vulnerable and in need, and that too was defeated by a massive majority.

So that's the context which I think led quite rightly to a huge sense of disillusionment with orthodox politics and a feeling that we had to do a different style of campaigning, by all means let's have the orthodox lobbying, let's write to MPs, let's all lobby ministers, but in addition many of us felt we had to do much more. And inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and the struggles for Indian independence, the suffragettes and the US black civil rights movements, OutRage! was formed to challenge homophobes face to face, to force them to account for their homophobia and to try through direct action to put lesbian and gay issues on the mainstream political agenda, in

Michael Portillo, MP for Enfield South from 1984-1997, re-elected to Parliament for Kensington & Chelsea in Nov 1999. Voted against equalising the age of consent for homosexuals and heterosexuals in 1994. In a *Times* interview published on 9 Sept 1999 he said he had 'homosexual experiences as a young person'.

order to promote awareness encourage debates and change attitudes.

And I think that there is still, all these years later, still that debate to be had, to what extent do we need direct action versus lobbying? Can the two complement each other? My own view is we need both. Just as the suffragettes found that while they wrote letters to MPs and lobbied ministers they got nowhere, once they started taking direct action it put the struggle for women's votes on the mainstream political agenda. It forced governments and MPs to take the issue seriously and that then opened the doors for more calm reasoned patient campaigners to take the case to the heart of parliament and government.

## **WEEKS**

Thanks very much Peter. Well I think you've heard a variety of different perspectives which says something about contemporary history. We all have a particular view of events. Let's now open it up to the floor, ask questions or make statements, bear witness in your own ways, and then towards the end we'll come back to the panel for any final comments that they may have. So the floor is yours.

## **JULIAN HOWS**

I just wanted to put a further bit of context on something some people have touched on, with relation to AIDS or HIV providing some of the, some of things that caused people to be sort of pissed off, that when Section 28 came along, the Clause came along, that they were prepared to vocalise. And it was going to be a very personal thing if you think about it. 83 was when we first found out about this disease and when the first conference that was organised by the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard in this country aroused passion with AIDS and HIV. By 85, we'd had the 86, we'd had the Iceberg campaigns,\* and all the stigma and discrimination that Peter was talking about but what we actually had is that we also had created in some ways, a lot had been forced upon the gay male community, was actually we'd ended up being a community which was forced to care. It was forced to care because our friends, our lovers, our col-

The Iceberg campaign was a Government advertising campaign of around 1982 intended to alert the public to the dangers of HIV/AIDS.

leagues, our families, were dying.

So to a certain extent I would say that the politics was still going on because we were actually forming on a very individual basis those caring communities which were actually caring for our friends which were actually looking at countering all those forms of discrimination that were actually happening. Like not being able to be fed in a hospital by staff, by being discriminated against by having stones thrown through our windows etc. So there was a certain amount of community vocalisation that was going on but quite rightly Peter says that when things like Section 28 came along, actually it was the straw that broke the camel's back to some extent, so those people who were non-political what did actually politicise them was actually the fact that they had been forced to care for each other once again which hadn't happened since the early gay liberation front of the early 70s. And I think, so that's trying to put it into a very big context, and I think at the same time as that and just to finish off, I mean say for me sitting as someone living with HIV and actually looking at Clause 28 I actually, and quite a lot of us, saw it as a bad piece of legislation from the start, actually a spiteful piece of legislation probably, an unenforceable piece of legislation that was just trying to create a climate of fear, and that's actually what made us angry. That's actually what made us do something about it, and to a certain extent it was a displacement around five or six years of having our virus and our disease ignored that actually made the eruption for people who had not previously been politicised.

## WEEKS

Thanks Julian – please could people introduce themselves when they speak.

## ALLAN HORSFALL

A Home Office committee chaired by John Wolfenden (1906-1985), set up in 1954 "to consider ... the law and practice relating to homosexual offences and the treatment of persons convicted of such offences by the courts" as well as prostitution offences. The Wolfenden committee met from 15 Sept 1954 for three years and published the *Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and*

As somebody who came upon Section 28 at a much more advanced age than any members of the panel I think rather differently. From the time of Wolfenden\* and the reform I began to see that every advance of gay rights was accompanied by a reaction from the right which determined to carry on its war against homosexuals by other means and they've always done that all the way along after Wolfenden. Wolfenden was a faulty document, it was further weakened in the legislation, but we thought that by patient campaigning it could be improved and the weakness could be

*Prostitution* on 3 Sept 1957. Of the 13 members of the Committee who had served for the full three years, 12 recommended that homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence. An age of consent of 21 was suggested. In 1967 this was made law.

20,000 people marched against Clause 28 in Manchester on 20 Feb 1988.

i.e. the House of Commons. Dame Jill Knight was in fact an MP at the time, for Birmingham Edgbaston (1966-97) as was David Wilshire (see note p.24). See e.g. Hansard, House of Commons, 9 Mar 1988, column 421. Jill Knight was made a life peer (Baroness Knight of Collingtree) in 1997.

removed. And we saw a gradual improvement, in 1980 a bill extending the reform to Scotland, in 1982 an Order in Council extending it to Northern Ireland, and we thought that by pressing things forward it would advance. Peter's talked about the leap in arrests in the 1980s, but you also recorded Peter that immediately after the 1967 reform arrests didn't go down they went up.

And so we went on until the advent of HIV which very properly drained away energies into AIDS care and generally demoralised the people and made us think that progress would be even slower than it had been up till then. It may not be possible for some time but it we'd always seen it as a matter of the slow march of progress halted, and then Section 28 came along and it suddenly became the slow march of progress reversed, and this is what infuriated people. I did my little bit up in a room in the rafters of Manchester Town Hall where we feverishly addressed envelopes, everything at the last minute, hoping to get something together and very fearful that the Tories would find out that here we were, in the Town Hall, using council facilities unbeknown to them contrary to the thing that they were promoting, that we were fighting against. But I was astonished by the reaction when we produced more than 20,000 people in Albert Square for that tremendous demonstration.\* Personally I agree with everything that's been said about the Thatcher administration in terms of seeking to restore Victorian values and the damage that that did, but I never saw, but I never saw Section 28 as being engineered by the Thatcher government. I saw it and it was reported at the time that it was a bit of horse trading, that Wilshire was only Dame Jill Knight's representative in a lower place\* and Dame Jill Knight's late husband was an optician, and it was at a time when the Tory government was proposing to bring in charges for eye testing. And she was perhaps the only Tory peer, maybe the only Tory who was intent on opposing that and she was lobbying against it and it was reported that this was a bit of horse trading that we'll give you your Clause 28 if you lay off our opticians' charges. Maybe, I mean the government doesn't like to have these things forced on it, maybe they would have resisted it had the Labour party not remained quiet until the last minute, which it did. Maybe if the Labour party had opposed it from the beginning, Thatcher might have said Jill Knight and David Wilshire, you can't have it. We don't know. But the other thing I regret, one doesn't want to

see anyone prosecuted, but I do rather regret that nobody in local government has ever been prepared to force the hand of the Crown Prosecution Service to bring an action because I think a good barrister in court would have made mincemeat of it. I mean you can't promote homosexuality, homosexuality isn't a course of action it's a state of being, and it can neither be promoted or discouraged and I think that the law which we know to be badly drafted and a bit of nonsense could be made widely apparent as a bit of nonsense, and had it been knocked down in court a few times maybe we should have had repeal before now. I don't know, just maybe.

**WEEKS**

Thanks very much.

**JILL HUMPHREY**

I think, I'm not sure if this is a series of comments or questions, but I see the late eighties Thatcherism as a kind of very real if very negative recognition, this realism of this event in terms of, it's real in that it recognises that there is once again men in a potentially powerful group which is precisely why it is legislating against them and that results in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy where by nature they become a powerful group in mobilising against that pejorative kind of series of stereotypes. And I think that what that recognition does is give lesbians and gay men a chance to recognise the homophobia and then also a chance to mobilise against it, a chance to insert their own issues and identities into political discourse. Now I think that the problem at the moment is probably that under New Labour there is no longer that kind of recognition. There is perhaps a new kind of virtual recognition so that although there's the occasional thing about equalising the age of consent which is very very important but nevertheless when you actually get to mainstream Labour documents like *Supporting Families*,\* lesbian and gay men are not mentioned. This is a kind of document about really promoting the traditional nuclear family. It's really about promoting heterosexual marriages. I do mean marriages not just heterosexual partnerships and I think that there are real dangers in mistaking that virtual non-recognition as a more positive phenomenon than it really is because I don't think we are actually going to get out there march and mobilise against something like *Supporting Families* whereas arguably maybe we should do because maybe it's

*Supporting Families*, Home Office consultation document, 1998.



just as homophobic in its own sweet way but it's actually disguising it. And obviously what we do need to do is get to some sort of real and positive recognition, but I am not sure how far civil rights legislation as traditionally conceptualised is actually going to get us there. And I would like issues around the role of say bisexuals, transgender people, and other so called post modernist issues into the debate as well.

**WEEKS**

OK, one of the challenges I find of sitting in the chair is that I want to answer back to every point made and I'm going to resist that temptation.

**DEL LA GRACE  
VOLCANO**

My name's Del La Grace Volcano and I've been around London for about 14 years altogether so I've seen all of these changes. Community to me, lesbian and gay community, is a utopian concept rather than a lived reality because there is far too many people that are excluded from what we are talking about when we talk about a lesbian and gay community. If you look around the room I would say that it's a good 98 per cent white, probably middle class, lesbian and gay people and yet these community leaders that bandy about translife diversity are being -

**KEIR THORPE**

Some of us here aren't gay or lesbians.

**DEL LA GRACE  
VOLCANO**

Exactly, I don't come hoping that there would be something to do with queer politics, but we'll see, but this idea of diversity is something everybody likes to fling about but yet no one notices the homogenous nature of the people that they're surrounding themselves with, homogenous nature of people who come to meetings like this. What I'm hoping is the community is something that can be, become more of a reality and people that are lesbian and gay will notice others that are transgendered intersex people and that we will stop campaigning in this very narrow way for the rights of gay men to cruise or the age of consent or lesbian mothers, these single issue politics that have to do strictly with being lesbian or gay, and look at a more inclusive way of moving forward that include all different kinds of people and looking at these issues in terms of the human rights issues that are surrounding it. If lesbian and gays can get married then everybody you know, transgendered

people, and yet what I've found is that there has been an extreme reaction in the last few years against transgender and against anything that rocks the boat of lesbian and gay politics, that nice stable world that now that we've got Stonewall and we have the Equality Ball and we have gay MPs and everything seems to be really groovy. Well it isn't and yet we talk about it as if it is.

What I'm hoping is that there will be some room for a queer politics that doesn't actually focus on who you have sex with and will become more inclusive, people will be able to feel welcome. A lot of what I've found in groups like this is people say well we invited people that are black and Asian and disabled, we invited them but they didn't come, and nobody ever looks at the reason why those people do not feel included. We don't have a free press, there is no free lesbian and gay queer press, so how can anything like diversity ever really happen. If you pay the money man and you've got the money then you can buy the space, and you'll get the editorial and everybody in here knows that that happened, and yet I don't know if I have any space, any place in this community any more, because everyone seemed to be quite happy and complacent when we finally got lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender, it's like too much of a mouthful wasn't it, so let's forget about the transgender element, let's forget about the bisexual element, but let's have Dana International\* to headline at our party.

Dana International, Israeli singer, born Yaron Cohen, transsexual, won the 1998 Eurovision Song Contest.

## **WEEKS**

Thanks very much.

## **ADYINKA ODUBENA**

I think I ought to explain why I am here. I haven't been invited. I normally attend the seminar this seminar on twentieth century British History along with three other seminars at this institute. Now, I am not gay but I empathise tremendously with people who fight for rights. I'm a member of a minority of minorities, but I've never made an issue of it and I have never campaigned, perhaps because I've thought that campaigns can in certain respects be counterproductive. Now I am also a student of, how shall we say, not just a student, I did a doctoral thesis on diplomatic history and there is a gentleman here that I would like to advise. Now the cause of gay and lesbian people is an excellent, outstanding, it's a necessary fundamental one. Now if people then go on to violate the person or personality of ambassadors let alone the President of a country is

Peter Tatchell and three other members of OutRage! attempted to perform a citizen's arrest on Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe, when he was in London on 30 Oct 1999, on charges of torture under the 1984 UN Convention Against Torture. They were arrested themselves by London police.

the most stupid thing.\* I know it's *sub judice* and we're not going to discuss that but it is advice on the course. I call myself an African, not black, an African. The cause of Africans in Britain will not be served by antagonising, physically assaulting people for any reason whatsoever so I think I ought to make that quite clear. I'm not here for any purpose except to support the seminar that I always have attended which is this seminar.

## WEEKS

Thanks very much. Could we direct the comments back to Clause 28 directly and some of the effects because I think we're drifting slightly onto different territory although it's obviously related. Anyone else?

## CLARE HEMMING

I just was interested by what Sue mentioned in terms of the ambivalence around the terms in which the Clause got taken up in terms of 'well, we're not pretend families we're real families' and then reasserting that as a kind of, as a way of trying to get back into having rights by trying to be the same as ordinary families and putting that in the context of a Thatcherite move towards family values. My own experience was that when I was beginning university I became involved in campaigning around the Clause, living in York, and I can't remember exactly when it was actually but in my mind that and the campaign against the Alton Bill in relation to trying to limit the abortion rights for women, it was something I remember working on at the same kind of time. And they were very fused as a feminist for me in terms of both being seen as legislation that sought to limit women's independence, in a certain sense independent free sexual choices both in terms of, obviously in terms of sexuality, but also in terms of the ability to determine whether or not you had a child and at what point you did that. Which I think is interesting in relation to the family values push towards, which is not just heterosexual, but also in terms of for women's rights, puts women in a very particular position within that heterosexuality. It's not simply that we should be heterosexual but that women take up a particular place within that.

So I'm kind of interested in the different threads we're tracing here. On the one hand you have the kind of gay male thread and on the other hand you have a kind of feminist lesbian thread and it's interesting how they became fused in that moment around Clause 28.

**WEEKS**

Anyone want to follow on from that? Angela.

**ANGELA MASON**

The Local Government Bill was introduced in the House of Lords on 25 Nov 1999. It received Royal Assent on 28 Jul 2000 but only after two amendments including the removal of the repeal of Section 28.

On the grounds that what happens tomorrow will be history next week, can I just say what is going to happen tomorrow which is that as I understand it the Bill will actually be introduced.\* I'm afraid to say it's going to be introduced in the House of Lords and I'm delighted to find that I'm on tomorrow but it's all go the whole debate around the Bill and Section 28 is going to happen very very quickly indeed. Now obviously, we've obviously been thinking as I'm sure others have in this room as well, about how we are going to campaign to actually get it repealed this time. The good news is that the government haven't left it to a backbench amendment, it is there on the face of the Bill so the government will have to fight for the repeal of Section 28. The bad news is that even with a reformed House of Lords it's going to be very very hard I think to get Section, to get the Lords to pass the repeal of Section 28, and so the fight will immediately be focused on that given that it's been introduced in the Lords, so how we're going to deal with that? Well it is actually very difficult to lobby the Lords because they're completely and utterly unaccountable, so it's not even a matter of, we can write letters and so on but that is unlikely I think to be that effective.

Part of it will depend upon what sort of line the Conservative party take and that will be a real acid test on where the Conservative party stands on lesbian and gay issues, but I think more broadly what we have to do is we have to show that throughout the country in every community they are not satisfied and will not put up with being dictated to by the House of Lords. We have to show that the feelings throughout the country all the different sections of society is that homophobia is not welcome and lesbian and gay men and bisexuals and transsexuals are welcome, and to do that will really require a major national campaign.

And I think that we got, we did it around Section 28 as some of the panel speakers were saying at that time we had all sorts of political influences like the women's movement, so people were used to assorted political activism. That movement doesn't exist so strongly now so I think we're going to have to work very hard to create essentially action centres in every area of the country who can all try and get their local councils and other organisations to declare their community a Section 28-free zone or prejudice-free zone. But we

could build up that feeling around the country then we can isolate the Lords and the Lords will also be isolated in the media. So to win the repeal of Section 28 we do in fact have a very big job to do. I think the lesbian and gay community, the transsexual community, bisexual community do feel strongly about the issue. We've just done a series of meetings in I think six major towns and we were amazed we were getting 200-odd people coming out on a cold winter evening to come to a meeting and nowadays that's actually quite difficult to do. So I think people do feel quite strongly about it and the best message that Section 28 has seriously damaged people I think is getting through.

We have masses and masses of evidence about incidence of homophobic bullying and abuse in schools which is simply not being challenged. It's not even that they haven't got the books, they're not challenging the most homophobic behaviour in schools because they're frightened to, because they don't know whether it will fall foul or not of Section 28. So we've got a very strong case that we can put to other sections of the community that really what I want to say is we've got to do it and we've got to do it now.

## **WEEKS**

Thanks very much Angela could you just clarify what the status of the Bill would be if it's separate from the equal age of consent Bill?

## **MASON**

The Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill was introduced in the Commons on 28 Jan 2000. The second reading debate took place on 10 Feb 2000. It became law on 30 Nov 2000 equalising the age of consent to 16.

Yes, there are two Bills now in the Queen's Speech. Firstly they are going to reintroduce the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill\* which is the equalisation of the age of consent, and the government have already said that they will use the Parliament Act to make sure it goes through even the Lords. The Lords won't, they'll chuck it out again, but they will use the Parliament Act to make sure that it becomes law towards the end of the year. The repeal of Section 28 is in with the new Local Government bill.

## **WEEKS**

The Parliament Act 1911 under most circumstances allows Bills to become law which have been passed in the Commons but not the Lords.

There's a problem with it being introduced in the Lords isn't there? If it fails this time they won't be able to use the Parliament Act\* in the next session because it was introduced in the Lords, isn't that right?

## **MASON**

That's right.

**WEEKS**

except the Clause can be reintroduced in the Commons.

**MASON**

Well what will happen I think is just the Lords will probably crack up. It matters very much whether there was a big majority against repealing the Clause, if it's a narrow majority that will, we will be in a much stronger position and then if they do throw it out then it will be reintroduced into the Commons and we will be in one of these situations where it bats back and forth to whoever thinks best.

**WEEKS**

Exciting times, does anyone want to follow on from Angela's comment or make any other comments? Alan again.

**HORSFALL**

Well, I'd just like to say that because it is going to be a clause of a Local Government Bill, the government, if there is a strong reaction against it in the House of Lords the government is going to be put in the same position again that it either has to back down on Section 28 or lose its Local Government Bill. And in addition to that if the Lords are adamant in resisting it the only way it seems to me that the government will be able to ultimately use the Parliament Act is to get rid of Section 28 through a single clause Bill and that would have been a better way to proceed. I mean I think that the government is just chancing its luck in hoping that the Lords will back down. Those are the difficulties that I see that it'll be the government that backs down.

**WEEKS**

OK, any further testimonies, comments, questions from the audience.

**MICHAEL KING**

I'm Michael King. I used to run the University of London Student's Union Gay Soc in the late 80s early 90s. I was also a teacher but studying as well, if you can believe that, so I was actually there when the kids were out and questions in biology classes. You couldn't really say very much but you let them do the talking that way and quite an interesting time. I ran this society to which Peter was invited, came along, Richard was invited as well, Angela, and they all came along and did your own talks, it was great stuff. We were really active in the early 90s because we had something to fight for, it's actually gone down hill since there's nothing happen-

Referring to the University of London Union in Malet Street.

ing new now. Apathy rules at the moment down the road\* but hopefully the local colleges have their own thing going. So basically it was a very busy time for me in those days, I did my little bit supporting the youngsters who came out of school because they couldn't talk about it at school, the teachers, we were there to help them. That was my bit to witness.

## WEEKS

Thanks very much, any final contributions? OK, well what I'm going to do is ask the panel just to make some final reflections, responses if they want to, Lisa.

## POWER

Human Rights Campaign, US lesbian and gay rights lobby group.

Yes I mean certainly a couple of things from what's come up. I think one thing, it's always fascinating to hear different people's versions of events and one thing we've completely ignored, partly because it wasn't direct on Section 28, is the influence that the American lesbian and gay, and other sexual freedom movements have had on the movement in this country. And I think one of the things about Section 28 was that it was actually all ours and our response to it was not predicated on things we had learnt from across the Atlantic, because I think it's only fair to remember that both Stonewall and OutRage! were actually directly modelled on American models of activism. Stonewall was modelled on a cross between the Human Rights Campaign Fund\* and the, I can't remember the name of the other one, but there was another big national American group, which did a lot of lobbying and things like that and we actually went over there and researched it.

## WEEKS

The Task Force

## POWER

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, US lobbying and education organisation founded in 1973.

Queer Nation: US gay and lesbian rights direct action organisation founded in 1990.

The Task Force yeah, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force,\* and OutRage!, the guys who actually thought up OutRage! in a front room I think in Camden, Edward King, Keith Alcorn, Simon Watney and people were very very blatant and clear at the time that they had founded it absolutely directly on the Queer Nation.\* They wanted a version of Queer Nation in the UK to do the kinds of

The Gay Liberation Front was started in New York after the 1969 Stonewall riots (see note, p.17). Aubrey Walter and Bob Mellors held the first UK GLF meeting at the LSE on 13 Oct 1970. A GLF march in Aug 1971 was the precursor of the first Pride in London in 1972.

Rt Hon Dr Jack Cunningham, Labour MP for Copeland, 1983 to present. In 1988 he was shadow spokesman on the environment.

activism that weren't happening, that had worked so well to bring Section, the whole Section 28 or Clause 14, as it started out, debate into the public eye. And many things in our movement along the years, including the Gay Liberation Front\* have been based upon American models but Section 28 wasn't. It was all our response and I think one of the things that would do us well to remember in the late 90s, in the modern politics that we have, is the way that people behaved then because there are some very interesting differences.

I just turned to Rebecca just now to check that my memory was correct and both of us were present at a meeting immediately after Section 28 was passed where a Labour shadow minister called Jack Cunningham swore blind to us that Labour would never repeal Section 28 and we were wasting our breath and that we should go away.\* Jack Cunningham I am very glad to say is completely behind the repeal of Section 28 and attended the Stonewall party at the Labour conference this year and is completely with us now. And he'll be with us until the next swing of public opinion, and we have a lot of fair weather friends like that and actually that's a lot of what Section 28 was about and it's a lot of what the fights we are going through now are about, that there are a vast number of people out there who are emotional, social, political opportunists, they will do what they think is socially acceptable in their heart of hearts they may think it's unfair to pick on gay people but they'll be pragmatic and if they think that the social ethos of the times is to pick on gay people they'll go along with that. And that's why we got all those other rises in social homophobia at the same time of Section 28 it was a mood of the country led by the media, led by some politicians, and people became very nasty.

What we have at the moment is a social ethos where it's not very cool to pick on lesbians and gay men publicly in the nicest circles but that's a very fragile thing I think Section 28 whatever happens over the next year or two with that should stand as a warning to us about how fast the public mood can turn nasty on us and how vigilant that we need to be and actually ...

[tape change]



**POWER**

... in which we did fight together were incredibly empowering, unfashionable word now, but empowering for the people who actually did those actions and they went on to get involved in a lot of other diverse things, and I'm glad to see so many of them here tonight.

**FLEMMING**

Just two things briefly I think. One is that in many senses people I think have, I can say this as an ancient historian, we're always saying, the thing is that we've got hindsight, and OK, 2000 years of hindsight may be kind of more hindsight than ten years or whatever, but I think in some senses that we are making some judgements already about the Section campaign which are kind of already anticipating, or are made on the basis of what we know happens afterwards, to do with what happens within activist groups and so on, and general political developments. I think we should possibly try and disentangle some of these things, because one of the things I want to point up on is in some ways, I mean Peter talked about the dichotomy between parliamentary and more establishment or anti-establishment, or outside extra-establishment activities. And in many senses, in some way, that is one of the things that has happened since. But in many senses actually one of the striking things about the Stop the Clause campaign is that, although there may well have been people within it who were very particularly attached to one strand and who wouldn't go to a meeting with Jack Cunningham if you, or at least not without a firearm of some description or whatever, but the kind of generality of the response that the people were willing to have and that people were often very willing to try a whole range of different sorts of activities and that we tried. Again I don't want to be getting rosy whatever the word is, rosy something about this, but that we were trying to find space within the campaign for, all those different kinds of approach to be able to be taken. And for people who dedicated their life to activity in the trade unions which is for example an area where an awful lot of advances were made into policies and so on, but they kind of got on and did it. People who were more interested in education and so on and there was a whole kind of range of different things being done and I don't think we necessarily want

to try and impose some of the divisions that have happened since on the campaign.

On the other hand I think there are some distinctions which have now become less important or prominent in various ways, and possibly divisions is not quite the right word, but different kind of issues and approaches and so on that were an important sum of the debates that did kind of wrack the Stop the Clause movement. That now people kind of think 'oh well you know I couldn't have really got excited about that now' and to some extent, I don't know what I think about this, but the issue that Sue was raising about the problem to do with pretended families and issues to do with promotion. Which is that clearly we were trying to maintain again in the Stop the Clause campaign a balance, keeping everybody on board, both those who would say absolutely you cannot promote homosexuality, it's just physically impossible to do that, and those who were saying of course you can, you should do it as often as possible, and the two kind of completely different approaches and which clearly might lead to different kind of arguments. Although it doesn't mean that you can't all march in the same march or whatever, and there were clearly both those positions put forward, and the whole issue about pretended families, some people were saying 'well actually we're not in the business of pretending to be a family and I mean that's just not what we're trying to do we've got a very different model of social living and that we're trying to advocate and that the family is an intrinsically hierarchical and oppressive institution' and so on.

And I think probably one of the failures, actually I don't think failure is quite the right word, but I don't think we had, we managed to keep most people on board most of the time but those issues which are important and which are continuing discussions changed in different ways, different sorts of importance. I mean we weren't able in some senses I think to generate a proper forum for debate in some of those ways. I don't think that that's necessarily what we were about, that we could have had endless meetings in which we generated the fundamental position on exactly what it is we think that which we were about action, but in a sense there was a space for discussion which was opened up and which didn't go very far, I don't think, in terms of the possibilities, although I'd be interested to know what other people think about that.

**TATCHELL**

In the 1960s the then Chinese premier Zhou-en-Lai was asked for his verdict on the French Revolution his response was, 'it's too early to say'. So at the risk of being a bit premature my verdict on Section 28 would be that it's, in a perverse way, the best thing that happened to our community, it energised us, motivated us, mobilised us, and inspired us to achieve things we'd never ever done before. When you think of Lesbian and Gay Pride prior to Section 28 you had 8 or 10,000 people, the summer afterwards you had 30,000 people. The whole movement was just captivated in a positive way, determined to survive, struggle, and carry on, which has spawned so many different, important, valuable achievements in the decade since. Someone raised the point about the arguments, the defensive kind of arguments, that we used during the campaign and I think in retrospect the argument that was often put, that we are just the same as straight people, was a very dangerous one because the assumption was that difference could not be tolerated and as Del La Grace Volcano made the point, we are a diverse community. Not all lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people are the same as straight people, or even the same as each other, and if you predicate your whole campaign on being the same 'we're just like you too' then anybody that doesn't conform to that traditional heterosexual lifestyle morality falls outside the protection and gains that are made.

So I think that's a really crucial important thing, we've got to predicate our campaign on the right to be different, that being different is no terrible thing, that in fact it adds to the diversity, the complexity, the texture and generosity of our culture. I think that therefore we need to, on the one hand, yes lobby the orthodox institutions, but at the same time assert that right to be different and challenge them in ways which seek to transform our society for the benefit of everyone. I don't want to just conform to the straight status quo. I don't want to fit in with and assimilate to normative heterosexual morality lifestyles, values and institutions. I want to change society based on my needs and the needs of other queer people in order to create a society where there is space for everyone to be themselves, to be different, to have that diversity acknowledged and accepted. And a final point I'd make is that I'd sound a warning about the forthcoming campaign against Section 28. Too many people in our community seem to be under the delusion that getting rid of Sec-

tion 28 will solve things. It won't. Section 28 is important to get rid of, but largely because many teachers and others mistakenly think it applies to schools, which inhibits their provision of supportive, objective advice to pupils on lesbian and gay issues, and also just the sheer symbolism of what it represents. It's important to change, get rid of the Section, to end that symbolic designation of our community as second class and inferior. But I think unless we both insist that Section 28 is repealed, and that there is a new legal obligation on schools to talk about gay issues in an objective non-judgmental way, to include gay sex and safer sex within sex education lessons, and to provide counselling and support to vulnerable lesbian and gay pupils, unless that legal obligation is placed on schools, we'll find that many of the problems we complain about, and which we have blamed on Section 28 will continue. Because until schools have that responsibility, until teachers are required to deal with these issues in an honest up front way, in most schools it ain't going to happen. And of course that means not only getting a legal obligation on schools, but backing it up with proper training for teachers to be able to teach these issues in a way that is good, informative, confident, skilful, and knowledgeable, to empower young lesbian and gay kids. Again it's no use saying that schools have this legal obligation if we don't train teachers into how to teach these issues so many teachers don't feel confident.

And the final point is, we also need to bear in mind that by sticking with the limited agenda of an equal age of consent of 16, we're also creating a hostage to fortune with regard to dealing with lesbian and gay issues in schools because teachers are going to fear that if they give up-front explicit advice to young kids under 16 they might leave themselves open to prosecution for aiding and abetting unlawful sexual acts. Many of you will remember the case of the Birmingham teacher a few years ago who was arrested and prosecuted precisely on this point. Now, so long as we simply say that the age of consent is 16 and we don't acknowledge in campaign for the sexual human rights of those under 16 we are putting teachers in a situation where they feel legally uncertain about their right and entitlement to raise these issues with young kids under 16. That has to be remedied as well. I think the issues are much much more complex than simply repealing Section 28, important though that is.

**GEORGE**

Well I've been trying to sort out in my head what I think the legacy of Section 28 is, and I think that in my mind it's very confused with all the AIDS campaigning that was going on around that time. But specifically I think, as Peter said in his introduction, that Section 28 marked for many people a disillusionment with the parliamentary system. I suppose from my point of view, I came from the tradition where we never thought the parliamentary system was going to serve us and therefore it was in a sense no surprise when it was working against us. And I must say that nothing I've ever learnt in the next ten years has ever disabused me of that notion. The second thing is to do with pretended families, and I was reminded during this discussion how very significant that seemed at the time, and still seemed, and essentially that's still going on I think. At the time there was a great feeling that the moral majority in Britain was very significant, and also very loud, and they were talking about family values all the time, and it seems to me this obsession with family values still continues into the present day, and that in a sense we're all kind of caught up with it whether we like it or not.

A couple of weeks ago in *The Guardian* there was an article called 'Bi-try' about straight women who are so-called dabbling with lesbian sex.\* And the writer said in that that there are now two ways that you could, there was a way for gay men to be acceptably gay, which was to be settled down into to a very suburban domestic setting and never never look at another man, and there was one right way of being a lesbian, and that is to be someone that your boyfriend would like to shag, is how she put it. And it does seem to me that as other speakers have said, that there's been an homogenisation of the way lesbians and gay men are meant to be, which actually doesn't really help anybody, not even those people who are actually like that, it certainly doesn't help bisexuals for instance.

I would also like to reiterate what Peter was saying just a minute ago, which is that essentially we need more radical policies. I think that, just because now, as opposed to ten years ago, it's not very fashionable to be explicitly homophobic in any kind of liberal circles, still if you scrape under that there's a lot of subtle homophobia about any kind of sexuality which is not strictly heterosexual in actually a rather traditional kind of way. I think that that is actually quite fragile and that what we need is a more fundamental kind of revolutionary look at how we should change the world which will

\*'Gay for Today', Libby Brooks, *The Guardian*, 2 Nov 1999.

actually help people who are heterosexual as well, not just lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

## O'SULLIVAN

Well I just cottoned on to what the question was, the legacy, as it drew closer and closer to me so actually I'm not going to say very much. I suppose for myself the legacy was that it, in a minor way, made me more determined than ever individually never to go back, or go into the closet, and I'm sure sort of collectively, there was a sense 'no, I'm not going to let that happen, fuck them'. But there was also, I suppose in a positive sense, the thing that other people have said that HIV, AIDS and Section 28 put homosexuality, male homosexuality and lesbianism interestingly from Section 28, into the framework so that it was there. From what was meant to be a negative could be seen to have turned into its opposite, as other people have said. But I mean really what I think the legacy is that some of these questions are still unanswered for me, there was a question here about what allowed gay men and lesbians to unite against the government's plans? I sort of didn't think that, I couldn't understand how Women Against Fundamentalism\* indicated a switch in terms of identity politics, so that's a legacy for me that hasn't been answered here tonight. Are OutRage! and Stonewall, you know, appearing at the same time, lasting more than other groups, do they complement or negate one another? Well I'd still be interested in the legacy, I'd still be interested in hearing people talk about that too. So I have more questions than answers.

Women Against Fundamentalism was launched on 6 May 1989 with the aim of challenging the rise of fundamentalism in modern political movements which use religion as a basis for their attempt to win or consolidate power and extend social control. It became defunct in 1997 but has been revived as a website and email list: <http://www.gn.apc.org/waf/>

## WEEKS

Well, if I could just say a few words, not to sum up because I think that what this has revealed is there are so many different perspectives, so I'll just add my final perspective that come out of the discussion. First of all I think part of Clause 28 was about policing boundaries, and I think we are living in a time of unprecedented flux between boundaries, adults and children, heterosexuality, homosexuality, respectability and un-respectability. And in a sense Clause 28 is on a cusp of that, trying to define many of those areas, because it's concerned with children, it's concerned with family, it's concerned with heterosexuality, the boundary of homosexuality, and I think boundaries are very difficult to police, and one lesson we can draw from this is the failure of the policing of that bound-

ary. Although Clause 28 had many effects, as people have testified, I think the attempt to police the boundaries in the way intended by the promoters has failed.

The second point flows from that. I think people have talked about the social conservatism of Thatcherism, and the moral majority elements in it, but actually Thatcher in the end failed completely on the social authoritarian side, the moral authoritarian side, because actually at the end of 20 years of conservatism Britain was a more liberal society in relation to sexuality than it was at the beginning. Not as liberal as most of us here would want, there's a long way to go, we're in the middle of an unfinished revolution, but Thatcherism and all that reaction did not stop that social revolution, I think, which is going on.

The third thing that flows from that, that social revolution did not flow from above, it was not promoted by legislators, although legislation is important, it was a grassroots revolution. People are making their own lives, in circumstances that they may not have chosen, but are actually managing to do tremendous things, and I think that's a lesson of the Clause 28 episode. Final point is that Alan Horsfall said that you can't promote homosexuality, well I believe that you can promote homosexuality, and I think the whole battle over Clause 28 and its legacy is the degree to which we should promote it, and I think we've come a long way in that many people today are prepared to promote it, in a variety of ways. Not necessarily in explicit ways, but in the way we live our lives, and that promotion I think is vitally important.

This has also been enlightening for me in redefining community, or making me think what community is. And it seems to me community is in some ways about providing a focus for continuing dialogue, and continuing conversation, and one of the good things I've got from this evening is the possibility of having that civilised conversation between people with many differences, but also for these purposes having common cause.

So I'd like to thank everyone who made this seminar possible. Virginia Preston on behalf of the Institute of Contemporary British History which has been our host today. The organisers of the event Adam Lent, Merl Storr and Tim Jordan. The panel for contributing their testimony, and above all you for offering your testimony and bearing witness, thanks very much.





# Useful Links

Collected October 2001

General chronology of historical events from:

<http://equality-alliance.diversity.org.uk/Chronology.html>

Directory of women's groups based in London

<http://www.gn.apc.org/womeninlondon/>

The Hall-Carpenter Archives

<http://www.adpa.mdx.ac.uk/services/ilrs/hca/hca.htm>

The Knitting Circle – South Bank University Lesbian and Gay Staff Association.

Includes extensive pages on prominent gay men and lesbians, with biographies and press cuttings, and other resources.

<http://www.sbu.ac.uk/~stafflag/>

Particular information on Section 28 can be found at

<http://www.sbu.ac.uk/stafflag/gleanings28.html>

The Women's Library, previously the Fawcett Library

<http://www.lgu.ac.uk/fawcett/main.htm>

*Organisations referred to:*

Feminists Against Censorship (FAC)

<http://www.fiawol.demon.co.uk/FAC/>

Gay Business Association

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

Gay Monitor UK/Allan Horsfall

<http://www.ahfall.demon.co.uk/>

Human Rights Campaign, US organisation

<http://www.hrc.org/>

London Bisexual Women's Group

<http://bi.org/~LBiWomen/>

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard:

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

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, US organisation

<http://www.ngltf.org/>

National AIDS Trust (UK)

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

OutRage!:

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

Stonewall:

<http://www.stonewall.org.uk/home.asp>

Women Against Fundamentalism

<http://www.gn.apc.org/waf/>

*Other information*

The parliamentary debates around the passing of Section 28 are not currently available online.

Text of the Local Government Act 1988 – part including Section 28:

[http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/Ukpga\\_19880009\\_en\\_5.htm](http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/Ukpga_19880009_en_5.htm)

*Current party attitudes:*

Labour Government's position on Section 28:

<http://www.local-regions.detr.gov.uk/lgbill99/s28.htm>

Press release on Lords defeat of repeal, July 2000

<http://www.detr.gov.uk/press/0007/0500.htm>

Labour Party manifesto 2001:

'The repeal of Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act was grossly misrepresented as an attempt to use teaching to promote particular lifestyles. We will ensure that such teaching continues to be prohibited, based on the provisions of the Learning and Skills Act, while removing discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.'

(*Ambitions for Britain*, Labour Party manifesto 2001, p.33)

Liberal Democrat manifesto 2001:

The Liberal Democrats would 'Repeal Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. This gives legal sanction to discrimination, preventing schools taking effective measures against bullying and hampering responsible sex education.'

(*Freedom, Justice, Honesty*, Liberal Democrat manifesto 2001, section on Civil Liberties)

Conservative Party manifesto 2001:

'We will also retain Section 28 of the Local Government Act.'

(*Time for Common Sense*, Conservative Party manifesto 2001, p.45)

*Attempts to repeal Section 28:*

The Scottish Parliament voted to repeal Section 28 on 21 June 2000. The debate can be found in the Official Report for that date at:

[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/official\\_report/session-00/or070502.htm](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/official_report/session-00/or070502.htm)

The final Lords debate on the most recent repeal attempt in the Westminster Parliament is in House of Lords Hansard, 14 July 2000, cols 97-129. It is available online via the Contents page for that date; look for the Local Government Bill debate on Commons Amendment 377.

<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/ld199697/ldhansrd/pdvn/lds00/index/00724-x.htm>

