

## Workers dancing in the streets!



THE DEVIL HOLDING COURT WHILE THE DANCERS DANCE

**SOME YEARS AGO**, I remember standing on Manchester's Canal Street in the midst of the city's gay quarter and being astonished by the marvellous creativity on display. My eye was particularly taken by two glorious lads. They were shouting "Make way, Bats coming through, Bats coming through!". This was entirely appropriate because they were both splendidly kitted out as megabats, striding along through the crowd on stilts. It was then that I noticed that they were not some innocent piece of street art but an advert for *Bacardi*.

I was startled, but undismayed. As the years have gone on Pride parades have been alive with corporate sponsorship and advertising. Everyone from Price Waterhouse Coopers to HSBC have become enthusiastic supporters of gay rights. This striking turn of events has also been accompanied by the participation of The Scouts, the Police, and even, on

occasions, the RAF, avowed Roman Catholics, liberal Jews, and audacious Muslims.

These developments have dismayed many of my generation who remember the embattled days of gay liberation fifty years ago. Now, it seems that moves to rededicate Pride to *politics* and *struggle* have assumed a wider resonance among much younger people, particularly those engaged in the plethora of lgbtq+ organisations. They want to up-the-ante on issues like trans rights, and battle tirelessly in defence of rights already won, just in case they are withdrawn, by some dastardly government.

This is a curious development given that more or less all the demands of the gay movement were met throughout Britain and Northern Ireland by January 2020, and substantially many years before with moves like legislation to set the sexual age of consent for homosexual boys at 16 – the same age as heterosexuals – in 2001, and a raft of subsequent changes that have dismantled the legal framework for the oppression of homosexuals in its entirety. With the exception of outstanding battles around the quashing of historic convictions, and the continued legality of conversion therapy, we have won everything we could have wished for.

This is the foundation upon which Pride parades have joined the regular calendar of events in cities, towns, and even villages, throughout the country. They have not merely announced our legal emancipation, but have contributed to the much trickier battle for acceptance of homosexuality in wider society. Pride now amplifies the need for broader forms of cultural acceptance. Large numbers of straight people have been drawn into the celebrations; mums and dads bring along their kids to join in the fun, decked out in rainbows, the kids waving Pride flags.

What's more there's dancing in the streets. This is a remarkable development for British workers, after all most of us are not Brazilians, and downtown Manchester is not exactly Ayia Napa, or even Notting Hill. So, the exuberance which lesbians and gay lads

bring to our wet and often chilly climate can only be welcomed. Yet, there is a problem, weekend tickets for Manchester's "gay village" – essentially three streets of gay bars, hotels, and a small park – cost £32. True, £2.50 of this sum is for charities, but the rest presumably goes on security, policing, public safety, and insurances.

Now here's a demand we could all get behind – why don't the city council, the hoteliers, the banks and other commercial outfits, foot the bill in its entirety? Why don't they put their money where their mouth is to make sure that those who cannot afford £32 are able to dance in the streets. That's a demand that all those busy people in the LGBTQ+ organisations could support without difficulty.

Evidently, Stonewall, LGBT Foundation, and many others, could focus their attention upon Pride funding, the freedom of teenagers and school children from bullying and discrimination, and the international struggle to end the oppression, violence, and murder of lesbians and gay men in a large number of jurisdictions throughout the world; this would include paying full attention to the needs of homosexual refugees and asylum seekers here in Britain as they strive for security and a safe haven. There is much to be done.

Yet it is curious the extent to which the full legal emancipation of gay men and lesbians has been overwhelmed by issues concerning transsexuality. Many lobby groups and organizations have shifted their focus to trans rights and have rejected any critical discussion of the issues involved. Now, it is a moot point if thinking and feeling that one is not of the gender to which one's physical biology might indicate, is enough to transform one from man to woman or woman to man. And, without entering into this dangerous territory, it is not immediately apparent to me what the issue has to do with gays and lesbians.

It is right that people should be able to dress how they like, and assume any 'identity' they like, they should be able to determine their own pronouns and

to insist that others use their favoured form of address.

All this goes without saying.

But these issues have little or nothing to do with sexual orientation – whether or not people are attracted to members of their own sex. This is because homosexuality is defined as a sexual preference for persons who share our own biology, male or female.

The broad cultural impulse behind the demand for trans rights is entirely progressive. The idea of inclusion and an end to discrimination are wholly positive. This cultural trend toward an acceptance of all regardless of condition is welcomed by the broad mass of people at Pride events and beyond – I am certain that the great majority of *Out* homosexuals believe that nobody should be left behind. Nobody should be discarded.

In emulating Irish Republican leader, James Connolly – “No nation can itself be free while others are held in chains” – the LGBTQ+ milieu is surely right. None of us can really be free while transsexuals are traduced and disrespected. However, this does not mean that issues related to transsexuality are the same or even similar to those of sexual orientation, or that they can be dealt with in the same way.

Gay and lesbian organisations and lobbies cannot simply shift focus from sexual orientation to gender fluidity or gender dysphoria without causing maximum confusion and without damage to the real outstanding problems affecting homosexuals internationally, securing the safety of asylum seekers and refugees, and the welfare of vulnerable kids in schools and colleges.

It is understandable that winning more or less all of our demands has caused considerable dislocation in LGBTQ+ circles, but the response should not result in an attempt to blend multiplying gender identities, *queer*, *plus*, *fluidity*, into an alphabet soup. These discussions of gender have little or nothing to do with homosexuality which has, as it always has had, a focus on biological sex, and fancying members of our

own sex. Of course, these boundaries are not set in stone, and many of us have strayed across different predilections and related identities at different times and in different stages of our lives, but let's be clear homosexuality and transsexuality are distinct and separate issues and cannot be rolled into a portmanteau term, now called *gender*, without doing violence to the meaning, value, and reality of homosexuality.

That being said, it is evident that the relationship of lgbtq+ organisations, and their current preoccupations and shibboleths, are rather distant from the wider homosexual population. This is made abundantly clear at Pride events when the upbeat celebratory atmosphere pays little or no attention to the worthy aims and prohibitions of gay and trans politicians. The mass of homosexual working people give absent-minded support to all lgbtq+ bodies without interesting themselves in policy or the small print. They draw their solidarity as homosexuals in a loose and capacious manner, and are not detained to any degree by the concerns of activists.

This should always be remembered by those claiming to speak on behalf of 'the gay community' – a problematic entity if ever there was one.

So, let's be clear the two problems – first, the commercial sponsorship which challenges the prejudices, and cherished commitments of the gay liberation generation; second, the dislocation and lack of focus of today's campaigners and activists, caused by having won virtually all our demands relating to homosexuality, need to be boldly confronted.

Pride remains 'political' even if an explicitly political slogan or issue is never raised. It is political because it celebrates our vivacious and varied civil society; it makes it clear that we're never going back into the closet; we're never again going to back down in the face of violence and prejudice. This is the point of Pride, dressing up, slapped to the eyeballs, prancing about, camping it up, gay men gorgeous in white t-shirts and black shorts, glamorous lesbians, gym

bunnies with boastful six-packs, bulky bears, anxious young lads not sure how they fit in, alongside old geezers who've forgotten where their put their get-up-and-go, amidst those tottering along on ridiculous heels, sporting even more ludicrous wigs: the cross-dressers bugging up all the categories with their grand hauteur and garish confidence.

We really need not worry.

Pride will always remain political.

