

Flagship



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

Spring 2009



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campaign for
paid time off for
equality reps**

**Fire Minister
calls time on
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Not all the people who appear in pictures in this publication are LGBT

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Time to take stock

In 2008 we saw some positive steps towards greater understanding of the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) fire service employees and communities. You can read about some of these in this edition of *Flagship*.

However, events that have unfolded early this year are deeply worrying. I refer to two highly significant decisions involving legal challenges on the balance between respecting religious belief while fulfilling the need to engage with all elements of the communities we serve.

There is the case of four firefighters in San Diego who, following one mistrial in a claim for compensation for sexual harassment they alleged they had faced as a result of being ordered to participate in a Pride Parade, successfully sued the city fire department at the second trial.

Much closer to home was the decision by Strathclyde Fire Service to settle outside of an employment tribunal in a claim being made by a Christian firefighter. He asserted that his rights to religious belief had not been respected because he was disciplined for refusing to attend a community fire safety event at Pride Scotia in 2006. When, in January this year the tabloid press broke this story, what emerged was that compensation and an apology had been given by the fire authority to the claimant.

Because of the way the tabloid press and certain columnists have reported these two events, both the decision in the US and UK will influence what, based on their religious beliefs, people believe they can and cannot object to doing.

The decision in Strathclyde, in particular, has far wider ramifications than just for our LGBT members and their community. For it also opens up the issue of sectarianism. Should a Roman Catholic, for example, be ordered to attend a Church of England event, can they now refuse? Can a Christian member now refuse to attend a Muslim community fire safety event? And so the argument could go on. In places like Northern Ireland, it is important to recall, our members did their jobs for over three decades while maintaining neutrality in what, at times, must have been the most difficult imaginable circumstances. And for this unwavering professionalism, they deserve the greatest of respect.

As a result of the media coverage of these cases, many in the service shall be left with the belief that there are times when they have the right to choose who is entitled to the services we provide.

We as a Union can send out publications educating our members as to what we should be doing and fire and rescue services can issue orders and dispense discipline to ensure these orders are adhered to. But when it becomes more convenient to settle such cases rather than uphold the principle of inclusiveness, then we risk undermining the esteem and respect our organisations command in the communities we serve.

We need to take stock of the need for mutual respect and to ensure we maintain professionalism at all times and in all circumstances, engaging with all communities without exception. In the face of assertions in the tabloid press about the erosion of "Christian values for the sake of political correctness", the question has to be asked: who is refusing to engage with who?

Pat Carberry, Secretary, National Gay and Lesbian Committee





Gordon Brown greets Pat Carberry at the reception

FBU celebrates at 10 Downing St

LGBT HISTORY MONTH

National Gay and Lesbian Committee Secretary Pat Carberry has been busy this year participating in events for LGBT History Month. Pat attended a reception at No. 10 Downing Street, Thursday 5 March, where Prime Minister Gordon Brown hosted a reception for over 200 people from the LGBT community and who work in the LGBT sector, including representatives from campaigning groups like Stonewall, LGBT charities, celebs like Amy Lane, Rhona Cameron, John Amaechi and Andy Bell, media personalities like Scott Mills, as well as trade union colleagues Maria Exall from CWU and Peter Purton from the TUC and Sarah Messenger from the National Fire Service Employers side of the National Joint Council. Secretary of State for Equalities Harriet Harman also played host.

Gordon Brown highlighted 11 acts of parliament brought in by Labour to benefit LGBT workers and communities but conceded that there was still plenty to be done to achieve LGBT equality.

Michael Cashman, MEP also spoke about how the LGBT community must never forget that those who wish to halt the campaign for full equality are still out there and reminded the attendees that we must never take our eye off the ball.

On a lighter note, Amy Lane and her partner – who were civil partnered the following day – threw their hen do at the reception. Gordon Brown highlighted the fact that this was the first time a lesbian couple have had their hen night in 10 Downing Street!

Earlier in the day, Pat attended a Communities and Local Government event called “Living Books”, which was organised in conjunction with World Book Day. Says Pat: “I was a living book – someone who will talk on a one-to-one basis about a specific subject. A brief description of the individual and the subject is on a notice board and civil servants and politicians can book a session with the living book.

“My title was ‘Gay Firefighter’, and the subject was: ‘The struggle to bring understanding of sexuality to the fire service against a backdrop of resistance from the tabloid press.’”

Throughout the day Pat was borrowed by seven different people – each for between 25 to 40 minutes – including the Fire Minister Sadiq Khan (below). Adds Pat: “The discussion was informal but quite enjoyable.”



CAMPAIGN NEWS

National Secretary attends funeral of former member

RESPECT

It was with great sadness that the FBU National Gay and Lesbian Committee received the news of the death of a former member and watch manager from an English Fire and Rescue Service.

At the invitation of the family of the member's family, Pat Carberry, NGLC Secretary attended the funeral.

It is understood that the member was in the process of appealing to an employment tribunal in a case alleging discrimination and

harassment relating to his sexual orientation.

He died six days prior to the date set for the commencement of proceedings for the tribunal.

At present a request has been made for an adjournment of the tribunal whilst a decision is made as to if and how the tribunal may continue.

At the NGLC meeting on 13 February, committee members stood for a minute's silence out of respect for the member and all in the service who may be suffering directly as a result of their sexual orientation.

TUC steps up its campaign over Edwards appointment

EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The TUC is stepping up pressure on the Government to remove Joel Edwards as a commissioner for the newly formed Equality and Human Rights Commission. It has written again to equality minister Harriet Harman MP seeking a meeting to discuss this and in particular to consider whether the criteria for appointments to this body that led to Mr Edwards' appointment need to be reviewed.

Joel Edwards' views on LGBT people and relationships have never been concealed, but were repeated each time the Evangelical Alliance – he has now resigned from the leadership – submitted its views to consultations on changes in the law.

He believes that being LGBT is no more than a lifestyle choice, that same sex relationships are sinful, that civil partnerships do not deserve to be treated the same as marriage and that people cannot change their gender (he therefore does not recognise rights for trans people in their new gender).

Delegates from trade unions across the UK carried a motion – selected by the TUC LGBT Conference – to TUC Congress



Joel Edwards: Believes being LGBT is a 'lifestyle choice'

2008 calling for the removal of Joel Edwards from his position as a commissioner.

→ Write to both the Minister for Equality, Harriet Harman MP, at the Government Equalities Office, Ashdown House, 123 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6DE; and Trevor Phillips, Chair, Equality & Human Rights Commission, Arndale House, Arndale Centre, Manchester M4 3EQ, pointing out the anomaly between the EHRC's role as promoter of equality for all groups within its remit and the appointment of a commissioner whose public statements have demonstrated time and again that he does not support equality for LGBT people.



Pete Wilcox represents LGBT FBU members in the North East but gets no paid time off to do it

Paid time off a win-win for all

EQUALITY REPS

The National Gay and Lesbian Committee is strongly backing the TUC's campaign for statutory paid time off for equality reps as a win-win for employers, unions and FBU members.

Part of the proposals in the Single Equality Bill currently going through parliament is the role of union equality reps. The Government acknowledges that equality reps will be key to the success in progressing equality in the workplace, but current proposals do not provide for statutory paid time off similar to that offered to health and safety and union learning reps.

Pete Wilcox, G&L rep for the North East and a member of the TUC LGBT Committee, points out that there is still time to apply pressure on the Government to include a statutory recognition for equality reps and that such a move would bring benefits to all.

"We have always struggled with some employers to gain reasonable facility time. In the present economic climate this will only compound that situation.

"Statutory paid time off for equality reps would assist reps for LGBT, women and black and ethnic minority members when applying for facility time to carry out their duties. It would also help bring on board reps that do not identify with any particular strand but have a willingness to progress equality issues in the workplace.

"Statutory paid time off has the potential to broaden equality work across our organisations.

"Addressing this issue would help fire and rescue services seeking to be seen as an employer of choice and striving to meet targets set in the Fire Service National Diversity and Equality Strategy 2008-2018.

"This would be a positive move that has the potential to benefit employers, unions, reps and, most importantly, the members we represent."

→ Write to your MP making the case for statutory paid time off for equality reps.

Fire minister: Homophobia not acceptable in the workplace

STONEWALL PROGRAMME

The Fire Minister Sadiq Khan (right) has urged all fire and rescue services to sign up to the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme. In a letter to every FRS in England, the minister encouraged chief fire officers to take action to tackle inequality and homophobia by joining the programme, which promotes understanding and provides good practice guidance around issues of sexual orientation in the workplace.

The Minister said: "If we are to attract and recruit the best people to the Fire and Rescue Service from the widest pool of talent, then all must know that they are welcome, that there is equality of opportunity and that they will be treated with dignity and respect. Their sexual orientation is an irrelevance."

Pointing to the survey of FRS staff commissioned by the Government and published last year showing that gay people still experience homophobia in the workplace, he said: "My message is clear – such attitudes are not acceptable in the 21st century. Bullying, harassment and discrimination have no place in the modern fire and rescue service; these behaviours will not be tolerated and I expect to see them eradicated."



DAVID MANSFIELD/REPORTAGE.CO.UK

Twenty English brigades have already joined the Stonewall programme. The minister said these FRSs had "made clear their commitment to positively promote issues of sexuality". But, he said "real cultural change" would come when all 46 services had signed up.

In addition to the FBU, Stonewall and CLG, the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers' Association are backing the programme.



Khan: Bullying, harassment and discrimination have no place in the modern fire and rescue service

In brief



◆ The National Gay and Lesbian Committee will be participating fully in Pride events once again this year with a focus on Brighton, London and Newcastle Pride. All members are encouraged to join in. For details of this year's Pride events see page 8.

◆ The Union is running two three-day courses designed to help FBU officials "improve their skills, update their knowledge and gain confidence when taking part in local consultations and negotiations and will be of assistance when dealing with employers' proposals and procedures for equality impact assessments." They will be held at Wortley Hall, Sheffield, on 8-10 July and in Glasgow on 22-24 July.

◆ Members of the TUC LGBT committee took part in the national commemoration event for Holocaust Memorial Day 2009, held in Coventry on 25 January. TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "Unions have always stood up to the kind of discrimination, prejudice and hatred that led to the Nazi Holocaust – I am proud that LGBT union members are taking part in this event." Among the millions of victims of the Nazis were many thousands of trade unionists and LGBT people.

◆ The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) and Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) condemned a seminar designed to attack lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Ugandans under the cloak of religion. The three-day seminar in Kampala, starting Thursday, March 5, featured an array of US speakers known for their efforts to dehumanise LGBT people and for their belief that homosexuality can be "cured." More: www.iglhrc.org

Learning, swapping notes, gaining inspiration



The Annual Gay and Lesbian School is now an essential appointment in the year for a growing number of LGBT FBU members. It's a fantastic opportunity for reps and lay members to learn, swap notes and gain the inspiration to go back into fire and rescue service workplaces to make a difference. And that opportunity was clearly seized by 50 students who attended the latest school at Wortley Hall, Sheffield during a long weekend in October 2008.

A range of excellent and engaging speakers and a programme covering hot topics such as developing networks and building leadership skills helped make what was our tenth school perhaps the most successful to date. As did the move to open it up to any LGBT staff from the fire and rescue service – on condition that they were members of a trade union. As in the previous four schools, we were pleased to hold the event jointly with ASLEF, the traindrivers union.

The school, held over the long weekend of 17-19 October, is an occasion both to examine how far we have got in terms of achieving equality for LGBT people in the fire service and what we can do to continue that progress. And as G&L Executive Council member Stewart Brown made clear in his opening of the school, despite all the challenges we have made great strides.

This point was reinforced by Terry Richardson, founder of the FBU G&L section, who took us through the history of LGBT organisation in the Union and the struggles fought by LGBT members within the fire service before we gained recognition as an equality strand.

It was right from these beginnings that we began campaigning to get proper recognition and support for those suffering HIV-AIDS in the fire service. And so it was great to be at what was a truly spirited and "interactive" presentation by Andy Oaker of the National Disabled Fire Association, an organisation tackling this, and other disabilities.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in the fire service today is to get all fire and rescue services in England signed up to the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme, which promotes understanding and provides good practice guidance around issues of sexual orientation in the workplace.

With the fire minister swinging strongly behind this campaign (see page 4), the presentation by Ben Summerskill, chief executive of Stonewall, was very timely. Ben discussed network groups and their importance in providing support and contact with peers for employees, whether they are women, black and ethnic minorities or LGBT.

And in the following session, Ben's colleague Madeline Lasko from

This was the best school I can remember. The next is already being planned. Book early for the next one or face disappointment!

Stonewall gave us some invaluable advice about setting them up in the fire service.

For many students the most inspiring moments of the school were provided by Jona Olsson, chief of the Latir Volunteer Fire Department and an "out" lesbian. Jona is an incredible person with an incredible record in the New Mexico (USA) emergency services, in trade unions and the wider social movement, and the energy and skill with which she facilitated our four-hour closed session made for an emotional, intense and highly

PICTURES:
MARTIN JENKINSON





productive experience.

Despite progress on a great many issues affecting LGBT in the fire service, for many of us the decision of coming out at work is still sadly balanced against concerns about how this may hinder a career. This is one of the key reasons why the G&L committee has campaigned so long and hard to get people in leadership positions in the fire service to visibly promote LGBT equality. When you find a senior figure in the service who is both out and choosing to act as “ambassador” for all LGBT employees, you know you’ve found a real ally and role model.

For this reason the final session of the weekend, taken by London Fire Brigade ACO Peter Watkins, the highest ranking “out” fire officer (non-operational) in the UK, ensured we finished on a high. Peter shared with students ideas on how to develop leadership skills. And in this task, it can be safely said, there is probably no-one in the fire service better qualified.

LGBT school is more than anything else a place for networking,

sharing experiences and meeting new friends, and this school was no different. Once back in the workplace, the knowledge that we are not alone but have many colleagues who are facing similar challenges is a source of immense strength. And we are all stronger for having learned from each other lessons on how to overcome the difficulties we face.

This was the best school I can remember. The next is already being planned. Book early for the next one or face disappointment!

Kevin Gutherson G&L rep, Eastern England

→ Thanks Jona Olsson, now a good friend and strong ally and we hope to continue to strengthen our bond and work together more in the future. And thanks to all of our guest speakers, our tutor Julie Weekes and all of the staff at Wortley Hall who always do their utmost to ensure that we are well catered for and that the weekend goes off without hitch; and chair of our committee Yannick Dubois, who organises the school every year and does so diligently and without (much) complaint. All your work pays off and you are well appreciated!

WHAT SOME STUDENTS SAID:

‘I’ve found the school truly invaluable, both professionally and personally and the issues discussed during the sessions have really given me things to think about. Not only have I come away with a much better understanding of the culture of the fire service but also with the desire to do all I can to ensure LGBT staff in my own organisation are consulted on the issues that effect us and those in our communities we serve.’

‘One major effect of the school on me personally was a greater understanding of trade unions which I now realise affords me the opportunity to get more actively involved in LGBT and other issues. The networking provided me with contacts that will help greatly at work – and I made some great new friends too.’

‘Thank you very much for all your hard work. It was a fantastic event. I had a really great time and it was very informative. I would definitely like to come to the next one.’

LGBT OPPRESSION PAST AND PRESENT

The school always allocates time to provide students with an insight into, and a forum for debate of broader issues.

In a reminder of how much LGBT people in the UK have achieved Shane Enright from Amnesty International briefed us on LGBT oppression across the globe. It was sobering stuff – even today people are tortured and in some countries put to death just because of their sexuality.

It was, of course, not so long ago that the brutality against LGBT people reached a scale of unimaginable proportions in the shape of the Holocaust. This was the subject of a film Peter Wilcox (North East FBU G&L rep) showed students. The group discussion that followed the film homed in on the far right of today and we were reminded of the need to challenge at every opportunity groups who preach and practice hate.

The school is also an occasion to promote some of the Union’s key campaigns. A timely intervention from Sue Offland and Kath Smith from the CSNC brought home to students just how serious the consequences of regional controls would be on the safety of the public and firefighters. And they urged us all to write to our MPs as part of the efforts to oppose them.





There was applause from spectators and from one of several duty crews from fire stations who turned out to show support for their colleagues participating in Stockholm Euro-pride

Euro-Pride Stockholm

It seems incredible that in liberal Sweden the fire service serving its largest city had no women or openly gay firefighters. But that was what we discovered when, early in 2008, we first met with Jan Wisen, the chief fire officer of Stockholm Fire Brigade and his head of communications Stefan Anering. The meeting was about starting to change this: what and how the fire service could contribute to Europe's biggest celebration of sexuality – Europride.

Discussions were very productive. Numerous emails later, chief Wisen and his communications officer were, at our invitation, in the UK to attend the London Pride celebrations. What our Swedish guests saw last July gave them a good idea of what to expect and just what impact a significant presence from the fire service in the Pride parade has on its staff, the

Stockholm Fire Brigade is now a place that LGBT staff can feel safe, comfortable and valued enough to stop hiding their sexuality

general public and spectators.

Two months later, it was the turn of the FBU G&L section to come, at the invitation of chief Wisen, to Stockholm.

This was to be the first time that Stockholm Fire Brigade would be taking part in any Pride march. It was even more significant as this year the Swedish capital hosted Euro-Pride, with an anticipated attendance in excess of 500,000.

Once in Stockholm, our five-strong delegation had discussions with senior fire service managers and trade union officials. Their overall feeling about the changes their new chief was bringing

was positive. They realised that the service was now going through a rapid transition period – and the benefits that having a diverse workforce would bring were immeasurable.

As a result of our presence and the service's decision to participate in the march, in the days immediately prior to the event a number of firefighters felt the courage to come out. At last Stockholm Fire Brigade was now a place that LGBT staff could feel safe, comfortable and valued enough to stop hiding their sexuality.

The day of the march was unforgettable – rain didn't dampen the high spirits in what turned out for us to be one of the longest Pride marches ever.

NGLC Secretary Pat Carberry and London G&L rep Norman Perry, interviewed live on national television and radio, spoke of the importance of the service's role in Euro-Pride, of our support for out Swedish colleagues and of showing people that being an LGBT firefighter or one from a minority background should not be an issue. And, they sent the message that people from all backgrounds, without exception, should seriously consider the fire service as a career.

To crown this fantastic day, Stockholm Fire Service won the most successful entry in the parade award for its large presence and the immense public support it attracted.

Stockholm Fire Service has realised that it is years behind other services with its equalities agenda and that it has to act fast and learn from the experiences of others. It shows every sign of doing so. The role we played in this – a role we have successfully played, together with many other colleagues in the FBU, in changing attitudes in the UK fire service – is a real achievement.

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More info: www.fbulgbt.org.uk

Diary

Oxford Pride	June 6
Euro Pride (Zurich)	June 6
Black Pride (London)	June 27
Swansea Pride	June 27
London Pride	July 4
Northern Pride (Newcastle)	July 18
Brighton Pride	August 1
Stoke Pride	August 8
Plymouth Pride	August 15
Doncaster Pride	August 15
Manchester Pride	August 29
Reading Pride	September 12
National G&L School	October 16-17
National FBU School	November 1-6

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0800 783 4778

Lines are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Have your membership number ready)