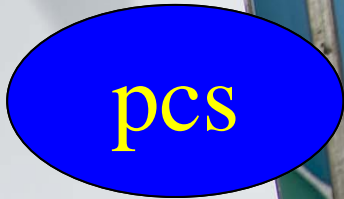


 proud



Public and
Commercial
Services Union

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**November
2008**

THE VOICE
OF LESBIAN
GAY, BISEXUAL
AND TRANSGENDER
MEMBERS

The voice of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans PCS members



Jeff Grist PCS Proud Chair

Hello again

By the time you read this, summer has been and gone (not that we noticed it!) and Pride season has come to an end. 2008 has seen PCS Proud present at more Pride events than ever before despite the weather, what a resilient group we are.

By the time you read this we will have held the PCS LGBT Seminar on 14-16 November in Leeds. I am sure that the event will have been informative and entertaining to all who attend. Much of my time since my last column has been taken up on the Seminar, as well as routine Proud stuff.

Coming up soon, the Proud review is now underway and will be completed in time for our AGM, which will be held in London on the Friday 27th March 2008 – details will be sent to all Proud members in the new year. We will soon be considering producing draft motions for next years Branch and Group AGMs. These too will be made available to all Proud members for action, as you consider appropriate. A little further ahead you will have seen Wash's request for 'history' articles in the last magazine. Please send your contributions, however small, as we want to publish our History for LGBT History month 2009.

And finally, some advance warning for the faint hearted, the PCS Proud calendar will be back for 2010. The 2008 edition stock sold out, providing substantial donations to Jflag and Iraqi LGBT. We are still in the planning stages for 2010, but I am sure that it will be another fabulous publicity and fund raising opportunity.

Bye for now, if I haven't seen you at the Seminar, I look forward to doing so at the AGM.

Jeff



Editors Reports, Martine McGarry & Geoff Webb

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Dear all

Welcome to Novembers edition of your PCS Proud magazine and thank you to everyone who has contributed.

I hope you have had a great summer and are looking to get more involved with their Union during the autumn months.

There are lots of things going on, so as well as reading on, remember to check out the Equality & Proud website for updates.

Hopefully I will have met a few more people during our LGBT seminar in November in Leeds...remember to keep those articles flooding in.

Take care

Martine McGarry

Proud Co-Editor

Welcome to Winter!

I am looking forward to a lively and thought provoking 2009 for the Proud magazine.

In addition to Martine's request I would like to ask you (with the permission of all parties involved of course) e-mail photographs of events that you might be involved in. Proud members are involved in some of the liveliest and diverse aspects of union work and it would be nice for our visual content to reflect that. Please send photos in separately from any articles.

I was also going to ask that you write more letters to us but the subject religion will, on past experience resolve that problem.

Geoff Webb

Proud Co-Editor

Fancy yourself as a designer? Proud is holding a competition to design a T-shirt dealing with the not always helpful effect of religion on LGBT discrimination. Entries to the usual address. Prize, the first shirt off the presses!



Iraq, out of the Gathering Darkness. Craig Young

DNA magazine's Middle Eastern correspondent Clive Simmons has penned a horrifying account of what LGBT Muslims have to endure in the Middle East and South West Asia. This time, he focuses his attention on the deteriorating situation in Iraq. In past coverage of this area, I've suggested that Moqtadr al-Sadr's Mahdi Army paramilitary was one of the greatest threats to LGBT safety in Iraq, whose malign influence has led to 'disappearances,' mutilations, torture and summary execution of LGBT Iraqis. However, Simmons suggests another pivotal figure in contemporary post-Saddam Iraq has as much influence within contemporary Iraq as Iranian-born Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Despite his strong Iranian ties, the United States has tried to build links with the prominent Shia Muslim religious leader, even if he did seek sanctuary in that neighbouring country when Saddam launched his massive purges and assassinations against independent Shia religious leadership in the eighties and nineties.

Although the United States considers him a peacemaker and reliable ally, al-Sistani is condemned by exiled LGBT Iraqis, who were targeted in one of his fatwa's (religious

Question: What is the view on a man embracing another man with lust, and go about kissing one another with sexual desire? What if they go even further and enter the domain of deviant sexual behaviour?

Answer: All of this is *harām* even if there might be difference in the degree of prohibition
Al-Sistani's Website 'Code of Practice for Muslims in the West'

declaration and instruction to the Muslim faithful) shortly after the US-led occupation began in 2004. Ayatollah al-Sistani seems to be pursuing a deliberate programme of 'social cleansing' through his brutal "Badr Corps", another Shia Islamic paramilitary militia, centred in Najaf. What is even more damning for the US-led occupation forces is that they're either looking the other way, or express vitriolic homophobic abuse when challenged about their apparent toleration of such human rights abuses. Admittedly, it's a complicated picture. According to Simmons article, Saddam Hussein's Mukhbharat (secret police) regularly recruited young gay Iraqi males to serve as spies against foreign gay businessmen or Iraqi business leaders abroad. However, they were also tortured if

they did a bad job of it, or refused to comply. Once Saddam was ousted in 2003, things rapidly deteriorated, given that Iraq had no real experience of a pluralistic and secularised diverse civil society with multiple interest groups and political perspectives before that point. To be honest, al-Sistani's Badr Corps don't only target lesbians and gay men, and after overseas pressure, the Ayatollah's website has removed the anti-gay fatwa statement,** although an anti-lesbian declaration still exists. Indeed, as



Simmons details, two Iraqi lesbians, Amal and Zahra, were shot dead and decapitated as a result of their courageous concealment of six gay men, and a child that they had rescued from paedophile sex work. Amal and Zahra were only two members of Iraq's underground LGBT network of safe houses, which exists across Iraq, and tries to smuggle out LGBT Iraqis to Syria, Turkey and the European Union. In the latter, they can at least claim

sanctuary as asylum seekers from their ordeal. There are other horror stories- in Iraq, regular access to AZT is impossible, and one PLWA safe house occupant can only rely on intermittent supplies from Syria, subject to \$400 bribes paid across the border. One would think that Allah the Merciful and Compassionate would weep at this ordeal for someone who is already dealing with a life-threatening medical condition. Simmons has other horrifying stories to recount. Jobory, another respondent, was tortured and gang-raped by Moqtadr al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia, who have now been integrated into Iraq's new Interior Ministry security forces and police. In 2006, the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) harshly condemned the existence of Shia (and Sunni) domestic terrorism against Iraqi LGBT's. Al-Sadr has established Shia religious kangaroo courts in which young and zealous Shia clerics sentence apprehended LGBT Iraqis to whipping and eventual execution. Altogether, expatriate LGBT Iraqi human rights supporters estimate that at least 425 LGBT Iraqis have perished in the last five years.

**but see panel above.

Recommended Reading: Clive Simmons: "The New Dark Age"
DNA 101 (June 2008): 96-100.



'Faith God and Sexuality, my journey' Jay Bedford, Black Members Joint Rep

I have spent many years since I was young looking for God and trying to understand who God really is. Is he the God of the Old Testament or is Jesus the manifestation of what God would be like in human form? If that is true then there is big difference between the two.

A God that designed a world that is so intricate and detailed all coming together from flowers, trees, land, and water to animals and know all the laws of nature and science must a God of great wisdom and knowledge.

How can this God be the kind of God described in the Old Testament? One that is demanding, cruel, petty, jealous, and unfair as whose temper and manner is worse than most of the cruelest people who have lived and died.

There are many things in the Bible that do not make sense and are clearly not correct. Since the age of 17 I have been searching for the answers and have been to many churches, read many books on subjects from angels to natural law and watched many documentaries that talked to historians and experts in different fields.

“Is he the God of the Old Testament or is Jesus the manifestation of what God would be like in human form?”

I do not have all the answers now but I have a better understanding of spirituality and the purpose of us being here and explanations for a lot of questions asked. These are my answers but they do not need to be yours. Take what you want, disagree with what you want, but at the end of the day take your own journey. Many people in the gospels took their own journeys and wrote them down. The only problem is a lot of people do not question it and believe that their journeys are not relevant to them, here is an example.

Paul may have gone to India and found it a horrible place with sinful people and may have even disliked the people for their colour. He may say that you should not associate with these people. Is he right? Are these not his own points of views carrying his own prejudices?

Should you believe this and follow it as it said to be gospel? For many years different things written in the scriptures has been used to justify all kinds of killings, rapes, prejudice, discrimination, torture and mental cruelty. It has been used as justification for the killing of gays, Tran's people and others. It has been used to put people from minorities in jail and treat them like second-class people.

I ask you, could this book really been written by God? Is he really different men who believe that they are inspired by God who have written many of the books in the Bible?

“For many years different things written in the scriptures have been used to justify all kinds of killings, rapes, prejudice, discrimination, torture and mental cruelty.”

In order to understand more we need to look at the Bible in more details.

Let's start with the New Testament.

Who wrote the first book?

A lot of the Old Testament is stories that have been handed down from generation to generation until they were finally recorded over a thousand years later. These stories were collected by the people who wrote the Old Testament. These stories were translated by the clerics and monks and put down in writing, being finalised by two councils held at the city of Jamnia, one in AD 90 and the other in AD 118. As we know stories that get handed down are like Chinese whispers and are not always accurate to say the least. You also find that parts of the stories have been exaggerated and dramatised to make them more exciting.

We know from the Old Testament that the world was made in 7 days, but it was more like thousands of years and the earth has been through many different stages including the ice age. We also know there have been other creatures here before us like the dinosaurs and we also know about early man. This does not fit into the Old Testament and is not recorded in the Bible. Why is this? I would suggest that this is because the understanding and science etc was not that good at that time and the writers would not have known about all the things that happened before.

Genesis was written to make sense of how the world came about and how man also came about. There are references from many other sources that the Garden of Eden was Heaven in the spiritual world.

We cannot avoid questions about Adam and Eve and the first two sons. How is it possible not to conclude that their relationship was incestuous? It is not a question that I can answer.

Then there is the story of the flood. In reality it is clear that could never really happen. It would take over 20 years to travel all over the world and take every species of animal. How would they survive? How would you know how to look after them? How would they all get on?

Translations of Egyptians writings in the pyramids tell us that the flood did not cover the whole earth, that the Egyptians were alive at the time and that it did not affect them. In fact the flood only affected certain parts of the World and Noah only took the animals he needed to survive in the boat.

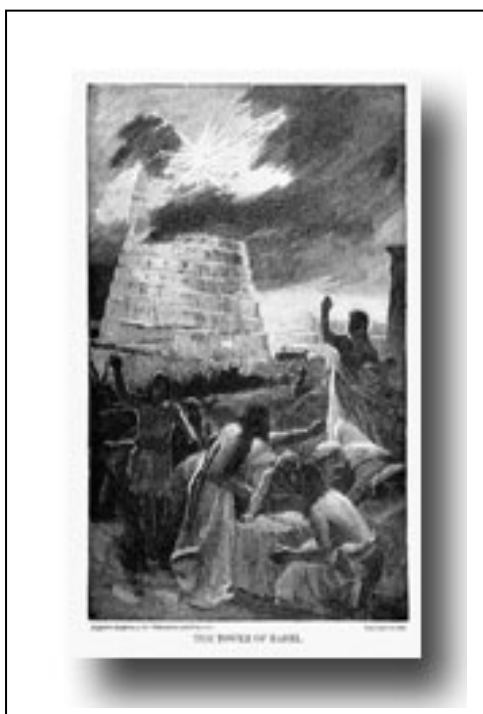


It is a wonderful thing to think that a rainbow is a sign that God would not flood the world again. When you learn about science or go to the famous waterfalls, you will see how the sun reacts when it shines through the water. It creates a rainbow. It is easy to see how this phenomenon has been embellished and dramatised through the Bible.

There is the story of the tower of Babel, where a large group of people built a tower hoping they would reach God. God was not pleased and he gave them all different languages so they could not work together and build the tower.

If you think about it, this story is also over exaggerated. We have built skyscrapers and huge towers, but God is not in the sky or the clouds but rather in everything. Limited knowledge historically

made it likely that people did believe God was in the sky high above the clouds.



The Babel story explains how people spoke in different languages and nothing more. If you know anything about communication and words, it is more likely that people in different countries built up over the years a large vocabulary of their own words for different objects and verbs. This was agreed and used by the community, which then became their language. This would explain the different dialects and accents.

I could go into all parts of the Old Testament but it is not important. What is important is that we talk

about the gospels that have been used to justify murder, killings, rape, discrimination, hostility, bullying, blood shed and torture. As a person from a minority, I do need to speak to you about Leviticus and the Ten Commandments or rather 'commitments'. God gave the ten commitments, apparently unwillingly, as people needed some guidance.

I can believe these were 10 suggestions, as they make some sense, if not taken literally. I do not believe the rest of the rules were written by God, as it would have taken ages to write all that down on stone! The other rules are very anti sex, anti women, narrow minded, silly, and discriminating and favourer's men.

Do you think that God really wrote those? What about Joseph? What about Jesus and his early life? What about the day he rose from the dead? What about the real story of Mary's birth? Jesus and his family? His brothers and sisters? How the Catholic Church rose in power and money? How one man wrote most of the New Testament? What about the other gospels and what do they say? All will be revealed in the next instalments....

Jay

Do you have an opinion of the role of religion in society and, particularly in relation to LGBT issues? Please e-mail your letters to martinepcsproud@btinternet.com, geoff.i.webb@btinternet.com or write to the editors c/o the Equal Opportunities Department



Joel Edwards, an odd choice for the Job?

By Geoff Webb Proud co-editor

“Homoerotic practices are inconsistent with the Bible, sex belongs in marriage.”
(Source Pinknews.co.uk)



**'Equal rights' Commissioner,
Joel Gordon**

I don't put myself up as any kind of expert at making important appointments to bodies such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission and it's just as well, as I would have made the schoolboy error of assuming that statements such as that made above would potentially disqualify any candidate from even standing from such a post.

I would hold the view that there could be no more a place for Mr Edwards on a Commission who's self-stated

mission is to “reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society” than there would be for a person who thought that women were OK but their place was really in the home.

Fortunately, the Minister responsible for the appointment Harriet Harman, suffers no such scruples. Indeed she did not deem the subject worthy of a response when questioned on the appointment at the Labour Party Conference.

Perhaps she felt that she said it all when, on making the appointment, she commented on the appointment of Edwards and Maeve Sherlock OBE (Former Chief Executive of the Refugee Council), that the appointees; “bring a wealth of expertise, commitment and a strong track record in dealing with equality issues. They will be assets to the EHRC in its

important mission to champion equality and human rights for everybody."

Despite such firm assurances I wonder if the LGBT community are not seeing some much anticipated chickens come home to roost in the balance of the Commission's work. The fear was always that it would be 'soft' on LGBT equality and it may be that a body that contains a commissioner who's past comments include; "All evidence seems to suggest marriage between man and woman is crucial for family life, and the best context for children."

And

"We are saying God has proscribed marriage for man and a woman for practical, sociological, cultural reasons" is justifying our fears from the outset.

Indeed the TUC take this view and any union and its members who have similar misgivings are urged to write to both the Minister for Equality, Harriet Harman QC, MP:

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.

Further information is available from Peter Purton
ppurton@tuc.org.uk
020 7467 1271

Readers will be well aware of this authors view on religion but that is not the point here. Equality and the freedom to express strongly held opinions must be observed in a strictly 'no detriment' context for Equality to be enjoyed by all. Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, put it very nicely when he commented: "Joel Edwards' definition of tolerance, rights and homophobia are very different to those of the body on which he serves. He seems to think religious freedom means the freedom to take rights away from other people. He must not be permitted to remain on this commission in a role that will allow him to compromise its aims. We would withdraw our objections if there was a sign of true repentance from Mr Edwards, an apology to gay people for his efforts to rob them of their rights and a request for forgiveness from those he has hurt with his activities. He also needs to promise that he will not engage in such campaigns again." (Source National Secular Society website)

The latter being an unlikely event, he should certainly not remain a Commissioner.



All Our Yesterdays, Today!

**Compiled by Geoff Webb,
Magazine Co-Editor**

Contributors Dave Plummer and Gareth Lee

An Israeli MP has blamed parliament's tolerance of gays for earthquakes that have rocked the Holy Land recently.

Shlomo Benizri, of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish Shas Party, said the tremors had been caused by lawmaking that gave "legitimacy to sodomy". Israel decriminalised homosexuality in 1988 and has since passed several laws recognising gay rights. Two earthquakes shook the region last week and a further four struck in November and December.

Mr Benizri called on lawmakers to stop "passing legislation on how to encourage homosexual activity in the state of Israel, which anyway brings about earthquakes". Israeli court rulings in recent years have granted inheritance rights to gay couples and recognised same-sex marriages performed abroad. Last week, Israel's attorney general ruled same-sex couples could adopt (Source 'BBC News')

The Advertising Standards Authority is investigating whether an advertisement placed by the Kirk Session of the Sandown Free Presbyterian Church in the Northern Ireland 'News Letter' newspaper on August 1st, the day before the Gay Pride Parade, breached advertising codes.

The advertisement, which described homosexuality as an abomination, defined homosexuals as perverts and called on religious followers to maintain a very public stance against the gay community despite recent violent homophobic attacks.

In the advertisement, the church lambastes the need for a parade, which celebrates a "profitable lifestyle". It condemns recent homophobic attacks, but said they may have been "provoked" by a section of the gay community's "desire to be known for a perverted form of sexuality" (Source 'Belfast Telegraph' 6 August 2008)



Poem's by

David Cunningham

PCS Proud

We're a small band of people
called PCS Proud,
We don't stamp our feet or
shout out loud.

We're here to promote those
who are LGBT,
We'll give you support what
which comes for free.
We'll work by your side to
show that we care,
It's what you deserve and
what is fair.

We'll help fight your cause,
however long it takes,
This will make life better, for
everyone's sakes.
Just give us a call or send an
email,
We'll sit and listen to your
experience or tale.
And then we'll help to put
things right,
And make all our futures so
clear and bright.

Written during LGBT in DWP
seminar, Leeds, Sept 08

Show Racism the Red Card

Show it the red card
That's what we all say,
As we all want racism
To just go away.

There's no place for it
In this day and age,
It's no longer popular
Nor is it the rage.

We cannot accept
Their point of view,
We've seen it before
And it's nothing new.

So this is why
It has to stop,
And we'll continue
Until we drop.

And so we'll continue
No matter how hard,
So we can show racism
The red card.



“Healthy Living for LGBT in DWP” 20-21 Sept ‘08, Leeds Martine McGarry Proud Co-editor

I had a cracking couple of days at the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) LGBT Group Members Seminar in Leeds in September and thought I would briefly tell you about it.

The two days were packed with information about LGBT issues and issues within DWP.

The event was hosted by Wash, Mel Sinclair & Chris Cuthbert and it ran very smoothly. That could be due to their ‘swan syndrome’ in that all looked calm on the surface but there was a heck of a lot of work going on behind the scenes, so it could look so smooth.

Others had also put in lot of hard work to pack in lots of information into a short space of time;

The event opened with the ‘ice breaker’....people always surprise & entertain given these opportunities.

Chris talked about men’s sexual health & PCS LGBT bullying & harassment survey. Steven & Dorian did a progressive reflection on a case study of ill health and attendance management, Dean talked about mental health issues, Mel talked about women’s & trans sexual health and Chris Cuthbert gave a talk about staff accessibility, security, harassment & bullying. Wash & Mel gave feedback about meetings with managers.

Davey even fired off a poem he wrote whilst at the event (see addition in this mag) – most amazing was that he wrote it in 5 minutes!

We had a guest speaker, Graham O’Hanlon (PCS campaigns section) who talked about campaign issues that DWP members are facing, and the Union Modernisation Fund (see call for Equality Reps below).

There was an opportunity to see some friendly familiar faces as well as some new bunnies to become acquainted with, which was fab.

Plus, there were lots of literature and other goodies to take away, distribute or read at leisure.

Look out for any other seminars or events you can get involved in and join in DWP activities and get more involved with YOUR union.

The seminar was excellent and the networking/socialising was 'entertaining' (or so I hear), so check out the Proud & Equality websites for regular events, courses and seminars throughout the Country.

Details of the Modernisation fund are below:

**To all Equality Reps –
Are you equal to the task?**

Potential equality reps are being sought as part of a two-year project funded through the Union Modernisation Fund.

The scheme is to develop a network of equality reps, mainly focused on the DWP Pensions group and our northwest region.

As well as looking at the roles currently undertaken by existing PCS equality reps, we are also keen to identify barriers facing those who might wish to undertake the role.

Latter stages of the project will involve developing training and resources for equality reps and securing support from employers to provide the necessary facilities and facility time for equality reps to operate effectively.

We are launching a series of surveys, and are particularly interested to hear from members who might be interested in taking on a greater role within equality areas.

In 2006, the Women and Work Commission recognised the case made by unions that properly resourced equality reps could improve performance on equality and diversity issues.

It recommended that the government should support trade unions financially to develop equality rep structures.

For more information contact our project worker, Graham O'Hanlon, on 0151 231 6120 or email graham@pcs.org.uk

What's On Guide

What's on	Where its on	When its on
December 08		
World AIDS Day events - Mozart's Requiem at St Martins in the Field with Diversity Chamber Choir and the London Gay Symphony Orchestra.	St Martin in the Fields Church, Trafalgar Square (near Charing Cross) London, WC2	01 Dec (fund raising event) 20 th Anniversary concert Starts 7.30pm
World Aids Day – Classical Concert	Bridgewater Hall Lower Mosley Street Manchester, M2 3WS	01 Dec, 8pm start (ticket prices vary)
Myles Antony Dream Boys (painting) Exhibition	Adonis Art 1b Coleherne Road, London SW10 9BS	03 – 31 Dec 11am-8pm (free event)
LGBT history and heritage - day of talks, Q&A & workshops, contributions from various organisations	London Metropolitan Archives 40 Northampton Road London EC1R 0HB	6 Dec Admission £10 / £7.50 book in advance- Booking: 020 7332 3851 or ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk
'Dancing Bear Academy of Music' - Birmingham Gay Symphony Orchestra	Look at: www.dancingbearacademy.co.uk for events and subscription details	Meets 1st & 3rd Sundays (3-6pm), and; 'Instant Opera Co' - the Midlands' LGBT opera group (meets 2nd & 4th Sundays).
London Gay Mans Chorus – Christmas Special	Cadogan Hall 5 Sloane Terrace London SW1X 4DQ	20 Dec, 3pm – 7.30pm, tickets £15-£35
March 09		
International Women's Day	Look out for events, UK wide	8 March
PROUD AGM	PCS Headquarters conf rooms 3 & 4, 160 Falcon Road Clapham, London SW11 2LN	27 March