

QUELLING THE VOTE?

BENT'S GAY PRE-ELECTION SOAP BOX

As the next general election looms, *Bent's* own dream ticket Adrian Gillan dusts down our by now infamous pink soapbox to put the main parties through their gay hustings. So: which one merits *your* precious queer vote?



LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

www.delga.libdems.org
Cllr Richard Porter, Chair DELGA (Liberal Democrats for Lesbian & Gay Action), local councillor in the London Borough of Southwark and Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate for Camberwell and Peckham in the forthcoming general election

Our LGB strengths...

The Liberal Democrats have been the only party who have provided effective opposition to Labour over the past eight years. On gay adoption, repeal of Section 28, transgender issues and civil partnership rights, the Lib Dems have been unanimous in their support for a change in the law. The parliamentary party and regionally elected representatives around the country have been at the forefront of campaigns to ensure the police are more responsive to the needs of the LGBT community, and that reports of homophobic hate crime are taken seriously. Our party leader, Charles Kennedy MP frequently refers to the struggle for gay equality in his speeches and the party manifesto for the coming general election will outline the progress we still need to make to ensure an equal society for all. Key issues for the coming election will be

focused around the themes of freedom, fairness and trust and will include proposals for an Equality Act, which will outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation. Contrary to popular belief, it is still perfectly legal to discriminate against a gay person in the provision of services, something this legislation would outlaw.

Our rivals' LGB weaknesses...

Labour

Whilst one can acknowledge progress has been made over the past eight years, we have been badly let down by Labour. Let us not forget that the repeal of Section 28 took nearly six years, and outlawing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the workplace only came on to the statute books thanks to the European Union. And if you work for a religious organisation, the government negotiated an exemption to the legislation so you can still be sacked because you are gay. More recently, it has been a struggle to get the government to accept that the Civil Partnerships Bill should include provision for full pension rights, and the government still has a long way to go in addressing the problem of homophobic bullying in schools.

Greens

Based on our electoral system, a vote for the Green Party at the general election is a wasted vote.

Conservatives

Michael Howard was part of the cabinet that introduced Section 28, resisted equalisation of the age of consent, denied gay people basic human rights for eighteen years, introduced the poll tax and now wants us to vote for him. A large proportion of Tory MP's recently voted against repeal of Section 28, civil partnership rights and gay adoption.



LABOUR

www.lclgr.org
Katie Hanson, Co-Chair, Labour Campaign for Lesbian & Gay Rights

Our LGB strengths...

Labour's record in office speaks for itself. Since 1997, the Government has:

- Equalised the age of consent for gay men
- Repealed Section 28, which outlawed the "promotion" of homosexuality in schools
- Changed immigration law to allow non-European Union citizens to live in the UK with their partners
- Amended the asylum instructions to allow claims for asylum to be made by those who fear persecution for being lesbian or gay
- Lifted the ban on lesbians and gay men serving in the armed forces
- Changed the law to allow same-sex couples to adopt children
- Brought in the Civil Partnerships Bill, giving same-sex couples access to all the same rights and responsibilities as heterosexual married couples
- Implemented regulations that give protection from discrimination in employment to lesbians and gay men
- Equalised sexual offences law, removing "crimes" such as gross indecency that had no heterosexual equivalent
- Amended the Criminal Injuries Compensation

scheme so that same-sex partners are eligible for compensation

Members of LCLGR have been involved in campaigning on these issues since the Campaign was founded in 1983. There is still more work to do, but there is also a great deal to be proud of.

LCLGR is calling on all lesbians, gay men and bisexuals to vote Labour at the next election.

Our rivals' LGB weaknesses...

A return to a **Conservative** government would be a disaster for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. At the last General Election, the Tories made it clear in their manifesto that they still supported Section 28.

The **Liberal Democrats** offer some good policies on paper but that is where they will stay—only Labour can deliver equality. And in many parts of Britain, the only thing that voting LibDem can do is to let the Tories in. If you go to bed with Charles Kennedy, you could wake up with Michael Howard.

The **Greens** have let themselves down by taking to promoting the rather bizarre views of one of their newest members, Peter Tatchell, who appears to have been living in a parallel universe for the last seven years. According to Mr Tatchell, the Government has been spending its time trying to block lesbian and gay equality. We say that the only thing that was better under a Tory government were OutRage! campaigns!

READ THEIR RESPONSES TO EACH OTHER IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF BENT (APRIL) !!!AND WRITE IN TO TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!!!

For LGBT-related political news and discussion: www.thegayvote.co.uk

CONSERVATIVE



CONSERVATIVES

www.gayconservatives.com
 Charles Hendry, Shadow Minister for Young People, Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party and Conservative MP for Wealden

Our LGB strengths and a challenge to our rivals...

Late last year, Parliament passed one of the most important pieces of legislation for the LGB community—the Civil Partnerships Bill. Nothing shows more clearly how politics has changed than the fact that more members of the Conservative Shadow Cabinet voted for it than did members of the, much larger, Labour Cabinet.

This was just one more step along a road of change, which I know many have felt has taken too long. Last year, I was the first MP ever to hold an event at Westminster to look at the issues facing LGB young people—focussing on crime, health and the voluntary sector. In another summit this year, we've once again focussed on how we make our communities safer for LGB young people.

We've done this because we are appalled at the threats LGB people face each and every day—threats of abuse in the street, bullying at

school—that too often go unrecognised and unreported. Violent crime has almost doubled under Labour and many of those crimes are against gay men. It's also shocking that young gay men are more likely to try to commit suicide than any other section of the community—bullies in schools find it all too easy to get away with their evil taunting.

That's why we want to take more action to make our streets safer, by putting 40,000 more police on the beat. It may indeed involve changing attitudes and reporting systems, but we will not see homophobic abuse tackled effectively until people genuinely feel they can report an attack and know it will be acted upon immediately and sympathetically. We will also act to stamp out homophobic bullying, especially in schools.

I recognise that, in the past, many have been put off voting Conservative because of issues like Section 28, but today's Conservative Party has a clear commitment to equality, both in the people we employ and the candidates we select. I'm proud the Conservative Party is now selecting openly gay candidates in key marginal seats for the coming election; many I am sure will become outstanding MPs. And I'm proud Michael Howard has stated so clearly that a person's sexuality is irrelevant to their ability to be a good MP.

We now need to go a step further and take sexuality out of politics—to reach a stage where a person votes for the Party which reflects their views on health, the economy, tax and whatever else is important to them, and where issues of sexuality become a thing of the past.

Green Party



GREENS

www.greenparty.org.uk
 Nigel Tart, LGBT Spokesperson, Green Party

Our LGB strengths...

The Greens are a party of action.

Our Green MEPs are campaigning for EU-wide recognition of same sex partnerships; lobbying for the European Commission to outlaw the religious exemption from employment protection; calling for protection against discrimination in good & services; and calling for a Europe-wide survey of best practice in policing LGBT communities, with a view to developing a Charter for Gay-friendly Policing.

Our councillors are calling on Local Education Authorities to issue all education workers with clear guidance on their responsibilities to provide a safe, inclusive learning environment, to challenge all forms of prejudice and bullying, and to support LGBT staff and students in coming out.

Darren Johnson was the first out gay "leader" of a national political party. He instigated the London partnership register in his very first speech. Peter Tatchell (now a Green Party member) proposed the setting up of a Lesbian and Gay Museum in London. Following Darren Johnson's championing of this project, the other parties soon joined the bandwagon. In

Brighton, Councillor Simon Williams has been at the forefront of the campaign against "murder music". Lord Tim Beaumont is a former chair of the Albany Trust, the first LGBT lobby group. A former LibDem, he joined the Greens in 1999.

Our rivals' LGB weaknesses...

New Labour's record is one of broken promises and dragged heels. They only lowered the age of consent because a 16 year-old had already started taking John Major's government to the European Court of Human Rights. Despite a 1997 election pledge, Section 28 was only repealed in 2003—after a backbencher's bill. They fought tooth and nail in Europe to keep the ban on lesbians and gays in the military. Employment protection resulted from a European Union directive, and New Labour bowed to right wing Christians and made churches and such exempt. The sexual offences' reforms were marred by a new homophobic law against clogging. It is still legal for insurance companies, hotels and the like to refuse to serve us. The proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights is set to overlook LGB rights in favour of religious groups.

The **Tories** are responsible for nearly every homophobic law ever passed. They can wheel out the odd progressive for a "gay safari" to Brighton, but no one is taken in. Old Tory values still hold sway, in the form of "Section Twenty-Eight" and their recent attack on LGBT History Month.

While the **LibDems** are generally more LGBT-friendly than the others, they couldn't match the Greens' call for marriage equality; indeed, they even put up resistance to the Liverpool partnership register.