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# CAMPAIGN FOR THE RIGHTS OF LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

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## NOTES

**NUMBERS** Homosexuals form at least 10% of all studied populations [Kinsey Institute, and others]. This amounts to more than 200,000 Irish men and women, and means that everybody knows gay people: they are friends, colleagues, close relatives. Of the 200,000 perhaps 10,000 have "come out"; that is, have accepted themselves and have told others. The rest have told no one, and many deny their own identity even to themselves.

**LEGAL STATUS** All sexual activity between men is illegal: a crime with no victim. Penalties range from one year to life imprisonment. [1861 and 1885 Statutes, currently before the Supreme Court on a question of constitutionality]. The present laws are not often used, but form the threatening background against which violence, discrimination and prejudice flourish. [Sexual acts between women are not illegal, though lesbians, of course, share all other discriminations].

**VIOLENCE** "Queer-bashing" gangs know very well that their victims are outside the law. So indeed do the Gardai, who ignore the gangs and keep no record of their activities. People are beaten every day, frequently put in hospital, and often killed. The recent well-publicised death was one of many. Attacks occur everywhere, not just in one or two parks.

**POLICE ATTITUDES** Not only do the police ignore attacks, they often harass gay people themselves. Gays are arrested, questioned, interrogated. During the 1982 investigation of the Charles Self murder, it was the gay community itself that came under investigation. More than 1500 individual dossiers were prepared: parents and employers of gay people were informed.

**LEGAL CUSTODY** In disputed cases over custody of children, the mother is almost always given custody. The most obvious exception is when the mother is known to be lesbian. Children can and have been taken away from mothers solely on this ground, even when there is no one else to care for them. Lesbian mothers have lost even visiting rights, and gay fathers too have had these rights denied them.

**SOCIAL PREJUDICE** Many gay men are less afraid of lonely dangerous parks than of living openly as homosexuals. Many lesbians endure great loneliness, or pointless unhappy marriages rather than "come out". People fear the prejudice and ignorance of friends, families, colleagues. This prejudice is everywhere. In education, gay-people are ignored, or mentioned briefly with contempt. The media sneer at ludicrous stereotypes, or wildly over-dramatise ordinary events. Churches stigmatise. Everyone who derides or belittles gaymen or lesbians shares the responsibility for the fear that dominates so many lives.

**EMPLOYMENT** Nowhere are gays more afraid to "come out" than at work. They are aware of their illegal status; they are aware that others have lost jobs, or failed to get them, or remain in the lowest grade. If trouble does occur, their colleagues must stand by them; their Unions must support them. It is impossible to give accurate figures of jobs lost: so few will speak out. But the true figure is in the hundreds, at very least.

**DESTRUCTION OF LIVES** It is bad enough that lives should be lived out behind a curtain of fear and self-oppression, but the guilt and the repression of identity (particularly among the "silent" 190,000) can lead to further appalling problems. Gay people have very high rates of alcoholism, psychiatric admissions, and suicides. It is important to realise that these are the effects of fear and self-loathing caused by society's prejudice. They are not the effects of simply being gay.



## DRAFT RESOLUTION:

"Because of the severe repression against lesbians and gay men in Ireland; the widespread discrimination against them, the justified fears of dismissal from work, the status of gay men as criminals before the law, we demand that the Dail and the Seanad act on the following:

1. The repeal of all laws which criminalise people specifically because of their homosexual activity.
2. Enactment of laws, or changes to current laws, to ensure equal treatment for all, irrespective of sexual preference.
3. An amendment to the Employment Equality Act to ensure that people can neither be refused employment, nor dismissed from it, on account of their sexual preference.

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c/o

HIRSCHFELD CENTRE  
10 FOWNES ST., DUBLIN 2.

Issued jointly by:

National Gay Federation  
Dublin Gay Collective  
Liberation for Irish Lesbians  
Cork Gay Collective  
Derry Gay Rights Association

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