

KIERAN ROSE AND TRICIA TREACEY

This motion calls for civil and human rights for a minority that represents about 5% to 10% of the population; that is the lesbians and gay men of Ireland.

Under the present laws gay men can be sent to jail for up to life terms for consenting sexual relationships. The European Court has declared that these two laws contravene the European Convention on Human Rights. These laws degrade our democratic society because a society where a minority no matter how small can be jailed for no other reason than prejudice - cannot call itself free. This motion calls for the repeal of these two laws.

Besides the threat of imprisonment - gay people experience the same range of discrimination, stigmatisation and prejudice as other minorities. Living as a gay person in Ireland is in many ways like being black in Alabama. This discrimination is expressed in terms of the educational system, the so-called caring professions, media stereotyping, access to housing etc. A more recent development is that gay men have been subjected to what seems like an organised and widespread campaign of Garda harassment.

But employment is the most critical area where discrimination and prejudice effect gay people. In many cases gay people do not get jobs, are fired or lose promotion solely because they are gay. The right to work and to a fair deal at work are basic workers rights which everyone is entitled to whether black or white, male or female, gay or heterosexual.

The Employment Equality Act and the Unfair Dismissals Act specify certain types of discrimination as unlawful - this motion calls for these and other Acts to be amended so that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation will be unlawful.

It would be wrong to consider gay rights in isolation from the rights of other minorities. 25% of our population are denied the right to a basic standard of living and are classified as living in poverty. There are about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a million people on this island who are denied the right to work. Women, by no means a numerical minority, are kept in a subservient role by our male dominated society. I could go on listing those groups which are excluded from full participation in our community - travellers, the disabled, unmarried mothers, those who we decide to incarcerate in mental institutions etc. All these groups share one thing in common - they do not have the wealth, the power or the privileged status to ensure that their legitimate interests are protected.

On the other hand there are elites which can hold the community to ransom. 5% of the pop

of the population owns more than 70% of the wealth of this country - this unequalled power has allowed that elite to have the Wealth Tax abolished and to place the burden of taxation on us the PAYE workers. When it comes to deciding how to share out the wealth of this country - all of us here are a minority in power terms.

The achievement of a just and equitable society where the rights of every citizen are respected has been the guiding principle of the Trade Union Movement. Solidarity among workers is the basis of our strength and of the considerable social progress that has been achieved since the Movement was founded.

I trust that this meeting will support the rights of its fellow workers who are gay by giving its overwhelming support to this motion