

Pink pound will not bring liberation

By Janine Booth

PETER TATCHELL and Edwina Currie have exchanged a bizarre but revealing correspondence recently. Currie was asked by a newspaper which living person she most despises. "Peter Tatchell" she replied, going into a rant about how he damages the cause of equality by being too radical and confrontational. Tatchell's response was to write to Currie asking her to stop attacking him and begging unity in the common cause of gay equality. According to the gay press, Currie replied with a handwritten note telling Tatchell to "piss off".

Currie — self-proclaimed champion of gay equality, and hero of many Stonewall types — picks as her hate figure not a homophobe, but a gay activist whose strategy she disagrees with. She is pre-occupied with ensuring that her support for an equal age of consent does not associate her with people who are prepared to be active and noisy in demanding equality. Her excuse for supporting the notorious homophobic law Section 28 was that its opponents were not polite enough. Not for Edwina Currie the fluffy notion of us all pursuing a common cause.

She is not on our side — Tatchell should have told her to piss off. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are not all one big happy family with a common interest. What we share is attraction to people of the same sex, in a society which is hostile to same-sex attraction. Our interests otherwise are more decisively determined by class, which puts the majority of lesbian, gay and bisexual people not shoulder-to-shoulder with Edwina Currie or gay Tory MP Michael Brown, but on opposing sides.

To illustrate this, I recall a gay Tory I used to know, and the arguments that used to break out in the bar. "How can you be a Tory if you are gay?" people would ask, rightfully indignant at his membership of a party that has attacked our rights so persistently. "Simple" he would reply, "I'm rich. I've gained so much from the Tories because I'm rich that I can put up with a bit of homophobia. It doesn't affect me that much anyway."

Embracing Tories in the struggle for equality involves disregarding other issues. It inescapably implies that those other issues — hospital closures, attacks on education, mass unemployment, deepening poverty and inequality, racism and deportations — do not matter. It is saying that the oppression and misery inflicted by the Tory Government on millions of people is unimportant. That lesbian,

Oh, piss off.
Edwina Currie
24/4/35.

gay and bisexual equality is the only — or at least the most important — issue. And if lesbian, gay and bisexual activists act as though other issues are not important, then why should people affected by those issues give any support to the fight against homophobia?

The lesbian/gay/bisexual movement is failing to learn the lesson of solidarity. The labour movement must take a share of the blame for the collapse of many activists into single-issue campaigning (Peter Tatchell being a good example). Many gay activists have no faith in a labour movement that has consistently failed them. But it remains the case that lesbian, gay and bisexual people will not win liberation by ourselves. We need the support of millions of people, and we need the labour movement to champion our equality. That means fighting alongside other sections of society under attack, not alienating them by inviting into our movement the people who are attacking them.

The Tories who pretend to support us are the darlings of gay capitalists. The Gay Business Association showered Edwina Currie with awards after last year's age of consent campaign. Some gay people believe that pink capital and our 'spending power' can create new openings for equality.

The blossoming of a gay commercial scene has undoubtedly made life easier for a lot of people. However, it is not so helpful if you live outside a major city, if you can not afford to go out, or if you can not tell your family where you are going. The scene does not exist primarily to help people come out and be confident about their sexuality - it exists so that club owners can make a profit by charging exorbitant door prices and £2.50 for a can of lukewarm Fosters.

Banking on the power of the pink pound, and trying to achieve advances by hobnobbing with Tory MPs, both have a similar effect. They push to the forefront of our 'movement' a certain type of homosexual — the smart, respectable, inoffensive, besuited, successful gay man. John Major had tea and a chinwag with knighted actor Ian McKellen a few years

ago. I very much doubt that he would have got his tea set out to welcome a leather dyke or a drag queen. Edwina 'some of my best friends are gay' Currie surrounds herself with well-spoken, well-presented gay men.

Those who think that putting our 'respectable' face forward gives us a greater chance of success are mistaken. Despite Ian McKellen's knighthood, suit, politeness and artistic credentials, *the Sun* still raged against him last week as an "awful militant homosexual" (!), decrying his presence at the VE Day celebration.

There needs to be a reconciliation between the labour movement and the lesbian/gay/bisexual movement, barely on speaking terms at the moment. This is a two-way process. The labour movement must support equality — a three-line whip for an equal age of consent; a public commitment to equal rights in all areas; active participation in struggles against homophobia; trade union action against discrimination in the workplace. Lesbian, gay and bisexual activists should

break out of the single-issue straitjacket, and reject class collaboration and frolicking with Tories. ■



Pride has become increasingly concerned with the gay commercial scene. This is not primarily about helping people come out and be confident about their sexuality.

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