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Richard Dunphy

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Sexual identities, national identities: the politics of gay law reform in the Republic of Ireland

RICHARD DUNPHY
University of Dundee

In June 1993, the Irish parliament finally decided to comply with the 1988 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights[1] — which found Ireland's legal prohibition of male homosexual acts to be in breach of Article 8 of the Convention on Human Rights — and approved a Government-sponsored measure which stated that 'any rule of law by virtue of which buggery between persons is an offence is hereby abolished'.[2] The age of consent was in effect equalized at seventeen years. A long campaign for legal reform began in the mid-1970s when a leading gay activist, David Norris — later elected to the Irish senate[3] for the University constituency of Trinity College Dublin — first launched his legal challenge to the republic's anti-gay laws. This campaign seemed to end in victory, at least as far as decriminalization of male homosexual acts and the age of consent issue was concerned.

This move by the Irish Government — by now a coalition between the nationalist and Catholic-oriented Fianna Fáil and a Labour Party never known for its progressive or secular zeal[4] — surprised many observers. The Republic had undergone many sweeping changes in the preceding 30 years, notably urbanization, partial industrialization, land clearance, entrance into the European Community and increasing cultural penetration; it had also experienced the apparent decline of traditionalist nationalist discourses which had given way to discourses which emphasized technocratic competence and the pursuit of economic growth. There has also been movement towards partial secularization — relaxation of censorship since the 1960s, declining attendance at weekly mass,[5] and acrimonious debates around the issues of abortion and divorce in the 1980s. There is no doubt that the emergence of a women's movement in the 1970s, and the increasing political weight of an educated urban middle class, especially in greater Dublin, were important factors contributing to this partial secularization.

However, until the 1980s, the lesbian and gay community had been almost invisible, and lesbian and gay political activism had been confined to a small if courageous handful of people. One writer, whilst acknowledging the foundations laid by this courageous handful during the 1970s, has argued that it was really only during the 1980s that the social and cultural changes the Republic was experiencing finally allowed a significant (if still small) lesbian and gay community to publicly emerge.[6] Moreover, the defeat of the reforming forces in the abortion referendum in 1983 and the divorce referendum in 1986 had seemed to indicate that a successful backlash against social change was being mounted by Catholic-inspired conservative forces. Institutionalized

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homophobia was strong, above all within the Church, the judiciary and the media. Both the High Court and the Supreme Court had rejected David Norris's case that the prohibition on sexual acts between consenting adults violated the Irish Constitution, invoking the alleged incompatibility of homosexuality with the 'Christian values' enshrined in the Constitution. The state broadcasting corporation, RTE, had earned a reputation for over-zealous self-censorship of any discussion of lesbian and gay issues.

The political elite had shown mainly apathy or indifference, and sometimes derision or hostility, towards demands for homosexual law reform. True, a significant gain had been made in 1990 when the then Government included in the country's new Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act the category of 'sexual orientation' alongside race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality or membership of the travelling community. However, no case had ever been taken under this law to protect lesbians and gay men, although several lesbian and gay groups had submitted published materials to the Director of Public Prosecutions.[7] In the aftermath of the European Court of Human Rights ruling, Government ministers had promised reform, without committing themselves to an equal age of consent, but failed to deliver.[8] A conservative political climate and a lack of public support for the change were cited as reasons for the delay. Emily O'Reilly has suggested another reason: fear of the powerful covert influence exercised by right-wing Catholic lay societies.[9] In April 1993, a new Justice Minister had set out three options in a memorandum to cabinet colleagues — copying the 1967 British legislation, introducing an age of consent for gay men of eighteen years, and the equality option. The language used in her memorandum had alarmed members of the lesbian and gay community, containing as it did prejudicial references to the 'genuine problems' which heterosexuals would face in accepting equality and to 'bizarre manifestations' such as homosexual marriages.[10] It seemed to indicate that the Government was going to opt for the most limited reform on offer. In the event, it seems likely that the memorandum reflected, not so much the Minister's own prejudices, as an attempt to reassure doubting colleagues.

Irish lesbian and gay activists therefore reacted with joy, certainly, but also with something bordering on incredulity when, in June 1993, the Government turned down a British-style 'compromise' with a higher age of consent for gay men than for heterosexuals or, in practice, lesbians, and instead opted for equality. Unlike Britain, moreover, the Irish legislation contained no special privacy laws. Justice Minister Máire Geoghegan-Quinn told the Dáil that anything less would demonstrate a 'genuine lack of understanding of human nature'.[11]

This article focuses upon the campaigning tactics and discourses adopted by lesbian and gay campaigners within the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) which was set up in 1988 to coordinate the campaign for legal reform. Although by no means the only activist group,[12] GLEN took the lead role in campaigning for law reform from 1988 onwards. This paper argues that its tactics and discourses helped to maximize the prospects for a successful if still incomplete programme of legal reform, by facilitating movement on the part of a political elite which had by now good reasons of its own to introduce some of the desired reforms. In this sense, GLEN played a pivotal role in ensuring that social and political change which had contributed to a climate more

objectively favourable to law reform than ever before actually translated into a *subjective* disposition on the part of the political elite to move on the issue, after innumerable delays. However, this paper also argues that those same tactics and discourses, though highly effective, were on occasion problematic, and may have unwittingly helped to reinforce traditionalist ideological themes around the key concepts of family, nationality and social unity.

As claimed above, the Irish political elite had, by the early 1990s, reasons of its own for displaying a greater willingness to take demands for gay law reform more seriously. Although the Government had stalled on the 1988 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, it was clear that action would have to be taken sooner or later. True, the European ruling required the Irish Government to amend its laws 'only to the extent that they criminalize homosexual acts in private between consenting adults',[13] and therefore did not impose any obligation to introduce an equal age of consent. Nevertheless, the argument could be made within the ruling political circles that it was sensible to go for an equal age of consent and remove the issue from the political agenda rather than risk it dragging on again and again — in the event of an unequal age of consent being introduced. Moreover, depending on the audience to be addressed, the political elite could either seek to blame 'Europe' for the measure if grass roots party activists, conservative voters, or the Catholic bishops got restless — and cite the alleged threat to Ireland's membership of the Council of Europe; or take the credit for an act of 'generosity' which went beyond the minimum required by the European Court ruling.

Second, the new Fianna Fáil-Labour coalition government, which replaced the more right-wing Fianna Fáil-Progressive Democrats coalition in December 1992, was anxious to don the mantle of a reforming administration. The new Government's programme had placed great emphasis on social and political reforms, and had even created for the first time a Ministry for Equality and Law Reform.[14] Lesbian and gay activists sought to exploit the Government's own anxiety to appear reforming, with the lesbian writer Mary Dorcey arguing that 'it would be difficult, indeed cynical, for a Government with a Minister for Equality to introduce legislation that promotes inequality'.[15] Gay law reform was a 'liberal' measure which, crucially, did not require a constitutional amendment and therefore — unlike abortion or divorce — could be introduced without recourse to a referendum. That would have involved politicians actually having to defend the proposal before a potentially hostile electorate, and risking defeat. Managed properly, there was a good chance of success in parliament. In the event, the issue was 'managed' so well that deputies were spared the embarrassment of even having to vote on the matter. Gay law reform would be a tangible 'liberal' reform to which the Government parties could point when wooing the urban, middle class, liberal vote. The power of that vote had been shown in November 1990 when a liberal, feminist lawyer, Mary Robinson, had been elected President of Ireland. She had, incidentally, been David Norris's lawyer throughout his appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

Third, Fianna Fáil, in particular, was anxious for electoral reasons to repair its relations with these social strata. The party's campaigns against abortion and divorce in the 1980s, its support for the losing side in the referenda on abortion which were again held in November 1992, and its perception as a

traditionalist, Catholic force, has placed great strain upon its ability to maintain its cross-class electoral block. Within the party itself, socially liberal elements, including the new Justice Minister Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, were genuinely well-disposed to the equality measure. Although gay law reform was arguably not an issue for the great majority of Fianna Fáil members or supporters, it was also a measure which, by 1993, implied little cost for the party. Resistance to it, on the other hand, left Fianna Fáil open to the charge of exercising a 'reactionary' influence within cabinet and might allow its Labour Party coalition partners to pose as the socially liberal carriers of the Mary Robinson banner.

Fourth, public opinion had been focused on the implications of the 1983 vote on abortion by the tragic case of a fourteen year old rape victim whom the Irish courts had sought to prevent from going to England to have an abortion; referenda in November 1992 had dealt Catholic fundamentalist and right-wing forces — and the Fianna Fáil leadership[16] — a blow by upholding the right to travel abroad to have an abortion, and to receive information on abortion. In this climate, clericalist forces were placed on the defensive and the pragmatic instincts of many politicians may have led them to conclude that they had more to gain than to lose by appearing 'generous' on the questions of decriminalization and the age of consent. The uncertain posture of the Catholic hierarchy — which, for the most part, did remarkably little to campaign against the measure — may also have reflected the fact that their attention was, as one well-informed activist has claimed, elsewhere: focused on the sexuality of women and the question of abortion.[17]

Finally, the new Government enjoyed a very large majority in parliament, and could count upon substantial (at least passive) support for the law reform measure, not least because a number of deputies on both sides of the house were either uninterested or found the subject too distasteful or embarrassing to turn it into a major bone of contention.

The tactics and discourses adopted by campaigners helped persuade the political elite to take action. First, from the early 1980s, campaigners had concentrated on 'winning friends and influencing people', first by building upon alliances made during the abortion referendum of 1983, later by working within the trade unions and by associating the legal reform campaign with other 'social justice' causes, such as the struggle to secure rights for members of the travelling community. Second, the revolutionary rhetoric of the early days of gay liberation politics had, by the late 1980s, well and truly given way to a coherent reformist agenda which GLEN pursued. The goal was, through legal and political reform, to carve out a new relationship between the Irish state and lesbians and gay men.

GLEN sought to achieve its 'long march through the institutions' by careful campaigning, lobbying and persuasion couched in language which did not so much confront head-on the key ideologies of nationalism and family values as side-step them or even take aspects of them on board. In short, gay law reform was often presented in GLEN's discourses as affirming rather than challenging the centrality of the family in Irish life and the flattering self-images of the Irish 'nation' offered by nationalism. One could argue that this is an astute subversion of dominant discourses, using them to actually legitimize a multiplicity of national and sexual identities and family forms. Or one could argue that it is

a dangerous evasion of much of the reactionary nature of Irish nationalism and of the repressive nature of the family as the central institution in Irish life. At any rate, a fairly conservative and overwhelmingly Catholic political elite were addressed in a language which they understood, which appealed to rather than undermined their values, and which even, for the most part, flattered them. The result was a highly successful 'insertion' of GLEN's agenda into the political mainstream, with significant practical results to date[18], but also with questions remaining as to how radical the challenge to dominant ideologies has been.

National and sexual identities: the campaign for law reform

The Republic of Ireland is a small country, and a remarkably homogeneous one in terms of ethnic and religious composition. Not only does the ideology of the family occupy an absolutely central role in Irish life, but there has been a strong tendency to think of the (southern) Irish people in family terms: Ireland as family writ large. The notion of the 'Irish' as a family is quite pervasive, and if anything has been reinforced by persistent large-scale emigration which has both served to rid/deprive the country of its rebellious/dissenting 'black sheep' and has led to the sentimentalization of its 'exiled sons and daughters'. The strong sense of place and of community and intimate social relations — compared with a much larger and more economically developed country such as the United Kingdom, for example — have complex and contradictory effects.

On the one hand, Irish society can be stifling, smothering and fundamentally hostile to notions of diversity and individuality — as the many lesbians and gay men who have emigrated over the years, not just for economic reasons but also to protect their sanity, can testify. On the other hand, the strong sense of 'inclusion' — often regardless of whether one wishes to be 'included' or not — means that errant members of the national family, including those with 'strange' sexual habits, may be tolerated as harmless eccentrics or even celebrated as colourful additions to the family — provided they don't challenge the dominant values of the society head-on. (The example of how the President of Ireland publicly accorded the respects due to a widow to Hilton Edwards at the funeral of his lover, the famous actor Micheál MacLiammóir, in 1978 is well known.)

On the one hand, the society is formally an overwhelmingly Catholic one in which the electorate has been reluctant — until the abortion-related referenda in November 1992 and the narrow pro-divorce vote in November 1995 — to offer any public defiance to the teachings of the Catholic hierarchy. On the other hand, many people circumvent Catholic teachings on issues of sexuality — for example, contraception — in their everyday lives. The capacity to live happily with contradictions, rather than seek a resolution of them, is perhaps characteristic of Irish society and goes deeper than mere charges of 'double standards' or 'hypocrisy'. What a former Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, once described as 'an Irish solution to an Irish problem' (he was referring to his Government's limited relaxation of the laws banning contraception) essentially involves the recourse to pragmatic stop-gap measures which postpone any

painful confrontation with social or cultural contradictions which might explode the central myths of societal homogeneity and family unity.

These observations on the social and cultural context are important to an appreciation of the dynamics of GLEN's campaigning tactics and discourses. Two other points are worth noting at this stage. Firstly, access to members of the political elite is often easier and on more intimate (often first name) terms than in a larger polity, such as the UK. This is true not just for the economically powerful interest groups, but even for a group such as GLEN. Secondly, the numbers actively and directly involved in the lesbian and gay campaign for law reform are really very small indeed. GLEN never involved more than fifteen to twenty activists from 1988 onwards, and by late 1995 this number had declined to five.[19] GLEN did, of course, 'report back' to the wider lesbian and gay community at open meetings which were held at roughly six-monthly intervals from 1988 onwards. This means that GLEN tended to operate as a high-profile and fairly close-knit group. Some of the most high-profile spokespersons for GLEN were of nationalist or republican sympathies, in particular, Kieran Rose, who emerged as an articulate and influential strategist, appearing on television and radio, meeting with members of the political elite, and authoring the only comprehensive 'inside' account of the campaign yet to be published. They helped disseminate a nationalist discourse which attributed 'Irish' values of 'tolerance' and respect for diversity to the legacy of 'the anti-colonial struggle',[20] whilst portraying homophobia as a residue of British colonialism — in short, not really 'Irish'. Whilst not all members of GLEN — let alone all lesbian and gay activists in the wider community — necessarily shared the enthusiasm for nationalist myth-making, there has been little public dissent from within this close-knit group from what has become a dominant ideological message. This is particularly because, from a pragmatic point of view, it seemed to be working in terms of facilitating progress with legal reform.

The strategy of building alliances and influencing key pressure groups had achieved considerable success a year before the launch of GLEN, when the Irish Congress of Trade Unions launched a radical policy document supporting lesbian and gay rights in the workplace. The ICTU also called for the repeal of anti-gay laws.[21] This initiative was followed in 1988 by a report from the Irish Council for Civil Liberties which

> set out in detail how the constitutional principles of equality, sexual privacy, intimate association and self-expression should be interpreted so as to guarantee the equal rights of lesbians and gay men. It argued strongly for equality in the criminal law and set out a model anti-discrimination Bill.[22]

A key strategic decision behind the launch of GLEN which was to pay dividends was taken at the outset. As Ireland's repressive anti-gay laws were rarely enforced by the 1980s, and accordingly there might be said to be *de facto* law reform already, it was decided not to campaign for early law reform, but instead to concentrate on building up a consensus in favour of the equality option as the only option.[23] In 1990 the Law Reform Commission, established by the Government, reported in favour of this. The Law Reform Commission further recommended that sex with those under the age of fifteen should be criminalized under a new offence of 'child sexual abuse'. For those aged fifteen

to sixteen, it was recommended that existing laws should be replaced with the following:

> sex would still be an offence for the older party if involving a 'person in authority' (e.g. parent, older relative, or someone responsible for the young person's welfare, education or supervision);
>
> anal intercourse (defined in gender-neutral terms) would be an offence at this age where the younger partner was the 'passive' partner;
>
> vaginal intercourse would not be an offence unless involving a 'person in authority' or someone five years older than the girl concerned.

From the beginning, GLEN was a largely male organization and by the end of 1995, just one of its five remaining core activists was female. This naturally raises the question of whether the law reform agenda was dominated by male issues, to the detriment of lesbian concerns. Certainly, not all lesbian activists chose to work with gay men in joint campaigns around the age of consent issue, and not all gay men were free from sexist prejudices. For example, not all gay male activists realized that the struggle for the legalization of divorce was not just a 'heterosexual' issue but had major implications for lesbian mothers seeking custody of their children. On the other hand, GLEN activists did campaign for a 'yes' vote in the divorce referendum as well as contributing financially to the 'yes' campaign. Some lesbian activists saw the campaign for decriminalization of male sexual relations and an equal age of consent as essentially a men's issue, although many other lesbians lent their support to the campaign. Moreover, it quickly became apparent that GLEN's agenda went beyond the issue of the age of consent to embrace issues such as the promised Equal Status Act, protection from discrimination at work, and partnership rights — all of which certainly affected lesbians as much as gay men.[24]

By the early 1990s, GLEN was succeeding in getting lesbian and gay issues discussed on television and radio as never before — starting with a television debate in 1989 — and were producing effective commentary in some daily newspapers, notably the *Irish Times*. The decision to construct the struggle for lesbian and gay rights as part of a wider struggle on behalf of all socially and economically marginalized groups was also important. It ensured that, instead of isolation, common cause was made with progressive forces campaigning for the rights of members of the travelling community, and the rights of people with disabilities, for example. Crucially, in Ireland, these forces often included progressive priests and nuns. The decision to link the struggle for legal reform with work on the question of poverty and social exclusion — at the height of the age of consent campaign GLEN was involved in a project sponsored by the Combat Poverty Agency on this theme — was also to prove important. The struggle to break through the barriers of isolation received a notable boost in December 1992 when President Mary Robinson invited 35 representatives of lesbian and gay groups to the presidential official residence for a reception in their honour.

Lobbying of politicians was stepped up throughout this period. GLEN had an input into the framing of a Labour Party Equal Status Bill in 1990 (which has not yet become law) and into proposals for reform of the law on rape and indecent assault introduced by Workers' Party (later Democratic Left) deputy,

Pat McCartan in 1990. Contact was also continuous with Progressive Democrat, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil politicians.[25]

By 1992, GLEN had enrolled the support of the National Youth Council of Ireland, the Council for the Status of Women, the Democratic Left, the Labour Party, Young Fine Gael, organizations representing travellers and people with disabilities and the main Protestant denomination, the Church of Ireland.

Opposition to gay law reform was forthcoming from a number of right-wing Catholic lay groups such as the Knights of Columbanus — a powerful and influential male middle-class organization which includes businessmen, professionals and civil servants in its ranks — and Family Solidarity which published a 1990 manifesto entitled *The Homosexual Challenge*. The primary tactic adopted by this group was to argue that the legalization of homosexuality under any circumstances would imperil the psychosexual development of young people. Emily O'Reilly has documented the scare tactics, attempts at electoral and political blackmail against TDs (parliamentary deputies) and forms of manipulation characteristic of such groups.[26] According to Rose,[27] a great deal of GLEN's time and energy went into countering the propaganda of these groups. However, GLEN avoided adopting an anti-clerical stance; indeed, its work on poverty issues meant that a common terrain was established with the influential 'social justice' wing of the Irish Catholic Church.

It is of course true that the introduction of gay law reform in June 1993 preceded the recent spate of child abuse allegations against priests and, more recently, nuns — all of which have considerably undermined the moral standing of the Catholic Church in Ireland. However, even by the early 1990s, the power of right-wing Catholic groups, and the political clout of the hierarchy (which are not, incidentally, to be confused) were in decline. The Law Reform Commission, for example, had been free from clerical influence. The referendum campaign launched by some right-wing Catholic groups against ratification of the Maastricht Treaty — on the grounds that 'Europe' would seek to 'impose' abortion and other alleged evils on the God-fearing Irish people — alienated the great majority of the political elite who were solidly in favour of European integration, and exposed the right-wing Catholic fundamentalists to the charge of constituting a lunatic fringe. Finally, as noted above, the outcome of the November 1992 referenda on abortion information and the right of women to travel abroad further marginalized the ultra-clerical lobby. Although the Catholic primate of Ireland, Cardinal Cathal Daly, had reiterated the Church's opposition to reform in 1991, the Church's energies were focused elsewhere from November 1992 through to June 1993 and a surprisingly muted response characterized the Hierarchy's position during this. GLEN, for its part, studiously avoided head-on confrontation with the Catholic Church. Indeed, the organization wrote to all Catholic bishops asking not for support, but for neutrality, on the grounds that 'even if actions are considered sinful, why demand that they be defined as criminal?'.[28] According to Robson, the Catholic bishops took up this point and quoted it in a statement issued a few days before the Bill was finally published. (In actual fact, the bishops had months earlier issued a pastoral on the subject of contraception which made the same distinction between 'sin' and the criminal law.) GLEN even received some letters from bishops thanking it for its 'helpful' briefing documents.[29] The decision by right-wing groups such as Family Solidarity to oppose any decrim-

inalization at all, to the very end, rather than advocate a more restricted reform was perhaps a tactical blunder which further isolated the fundamentalist Catholic forces.

With the accession to office of the new Fianna Fáil-Labour Government in December 1992, lobbying intensified. The strategy was to praise politicians for measures introduced so far — the inclusion of 'sexual orientation' in the 1990 Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act, for example, and the April 1993 move on employment rights — in order to flatter their desire to see themselves as champions of human rights, fairness and reason, and push them to move on an equal age of consent. A major success was the decision in February 1993 of the youth wing of Fianna Fáil to declare in favour of equality, citing the 'Fianna Fáil Party progressive legislative achievements in this field of human rights'.[30] This was significant as the organization had earlier been criticized for issuing a document on AIDS which made particular mention of the needs of prisoners, haemophiliacs, women, and drug users, but managed to avoid mention of gay men altogether.[31] Thus, a party which had precious few progressive legislative achievements in this field to its credit was encouraged to flatter itself into believing that it was a natural proponent of sexual equality all along.

Nationalist themes were to figure fairly prominently. Under the subtitle, 'An Irish solution', an article by GLEN's co-chairperson in April 1993[32] declared: 'Our current laws on homosexuality derive entirely from Britain ... the 1861/1885 British Statutes have created an Irish problem: the one certain thing that is not needed is a British solution ... by following the recommendations of an Irish Law Reform Commission [an equal age of consent] will provide a true Irish solution'. Rose had earlier put the argument more forcefully, arguing that as Ireland 'prepares to rid itself finally of one of the malign leftovers of British colonialism ... the stereotypes of a "reactionary priest-ridden" Ireland and an "enlightened" Britain will not survive the shock'.[33] He continued:

> The anti-colonial struggle for national, civil and religious liberties provides us with values of respect for 'fairness'. It is also possible that the repressive control of all sexuality here has led to a certain feeling of solidarity between heterosexuals and homosexuals.

The second part of this passage is clearly an example of rather wishful thinking. The first sentence ignores the fact that the 'anti-colonial struggle' produced a southern Irish state every bit as sectarian, discriminatory and exclusive of minorities as its northern, Protestant counterpart.

The construction of gay men — since the immediate issue was about the age of consent, it did not involve lesbians as much — as 'sons' and 'brothers' was to prove important. In other words, part of the discourse adopted by GLEN emphasized the identity of gay men as members of a 'family' (and, by extension, as members of 'Ireland as family writ large') rather than as individual citizens or members of their own, chosen (i.e. non-biological) families. At a meeting with the Minister for Justice on 1 April 1993, GLEN included in its delegation a representative of Parents Enquiry, a group for the parents of lesbians and gay men. The meeting was constructed by GLEN activist Chris Robson as follows: 'Two Irish mothers decided the issue between them: "You

simply can't make criminals of young gay men. An unequal age of consent would be a huge injustice on our sons".'[34]

There is no doubting the force and power of the message. In February, the Justice Minister had been quoted as telling a Fianna Fáil youth conference that an age of consent of seventeen was not an option as 'single sex schools and parents would have concerns about this'.[35] By May, she was declaring on Irish state radio that after her meeting with the parents of gay men she was convinced that nothing short of equality would suffice. She recalled their initial shock at learning that their sons were gay, and continued:

> After all that very painful and traumatic process, they suddenly realised that this was a fact that they had to deal with. They couldn't just turn off the taps of love that they had given a 17/18 year old child for all of those years and say 'just because you now tell me you're gay I'm not going to love you any more or I don't want you any more'.[36]

The sub-text of this powerful and genuinely moving interview was clear: just as parents, moved by love and compassion, eventually accepted the 'painful' reality of their child's sexuality, so 'Ireland as family' would and should show similar compassion toward its children in general who were gay. (The reality, of course, as one lesbian writer pointed out, was that it is still extremely difficult — above all given absence of a metropolitan culture in Ireland — for Irish lesbians and gay men to 'come out' to their families: many postpone the matter until they emigrate; and that Irish parents who showed such acceptance and understanding towards their lesbian and gay children are still 'pearls among the manure'.[37])

Four themes, then, were repeated continuously, and formed the basis for the persuasive campaign waged by GLEN:

—that the Irish were a 'naturally' tolerant and fair people and that the acceptance of gay law reform was entirely compatible with a nationalist agenda: indeed, that homophobia was a legacy of the British empire. The slogan 'proud to be Irish and proud to be gay' was adopted. In itself, this is a perfectly laudable sentiment, of course; the point is that it was given a nationalist construction;

—that Ireland should look not to Britain, but beyond Britain to its new European partners — and especially to what a GLEN briefing memorandum referred to as 'other Catholic European countries'[38] — for guidance;

—that the Government and the political elite, apart from a few fundamentalist cranks, were committed to equality, social progress and justice, and that gay law reform would be an affirmation of that commitment;

—that lesbians and gay men were members of families, that discrimination was an affront to their families as well as themselves, and that equality would strengthen the family, not weaken it.

There is no doubting the effectiveness of these discourses in achieving the goal of mobilizing the political elite. Indeed, many of the measured, intelligent and compassionate speeches which were made in the course of the Dáil debate, which began on 23 June 1993, reflected the arguments put forward by GLEN, and several deputies paid tribute to the quality of argument and lobbying which had influenced their judgement. In particular, the family message was

explicitly taken up by Justice Minister Geoghegan-Quinn when she dismissed the idea that parents of gay children could possibly want their children imprisoned in later life for expressing their sexuality.[39]

Conclusion

This article has focused on the role played by GLEN in persuading a political elite, not previously known either for its socially reforming zeal in general or for its support for the rights of sexual minorities in particular, to finally introduce legislation more progressive than many had dreamed possible. There is no doubt that there had previously been a minority of Irish parliamentary deputies — socialists and liberals — who were supportive of lesbian and gay law reform out of genuine convictions rooted in a sense of justice, reason or moral conviction. What is interesting, is how that minority was transformed into a majority; and how opposition was so marginalized that the Fine Gael party backed down, in a rather shame-faced fashion, from its attempt to amend the legislation to raise the age of consent for gay men to eighteen, leaving the one right-wing TD who called for a vote on the issue without a seconder for his proposal. As a result, the Bill passed without a vote in the Dáil. This article has argued that the tactics and discourses of GLEN were pivotal in securing this achievement. It has also argued that this involved constructing the issues, and addressing the political elite, in terms which, not only did not challenge dominant value systems, but may have unwittingly reinforced, in some senses, myths of nationality and family. This is not to disparage in any way the remarkable achievements of lesbian and gay campaigners in Ireland. But rather to offer a supportive but critical reinterpretation of GLEN's work. Indeed, one should acknowledge that GLEN's August 1995 submission to the Constitution Review Group[40] established by the Government did recognize the necessity to address issues of gender relations within families and within society, and the need to give Constitutional recognition to 'the diversity of personal relationships which now exist in this country'. This yielded a measure of success when the CRG Report, published in May 1996, recommended recognition of 'families not based on marriage', as well as the inclusion of a constitutional clause stating that 'no person be unfairly discriminated against directly, or indirectly, on any ground such as sex, race, age, disability, or sexual orientation'.[41]

GLEN has worked hard to earn a reputation as a moderate, responsible pressure group, producing good quality arguments, engaging in persuasion rather than hectoring, and resting its case on reason rather than emotion. Taking the view that the door of the political establishment would soon open, if only it quietly and confidently keep knocking, GLEN eschewed the politics of dramatic gestures ('there was no point in abseiling into the Dáil'[42]). Analogies with the UK are dangerous, given the differences in the political and cultural contexts. Suffice it to say that the dichotomy between 'direct action' and 'parliamentary lobbying' which has tended to emerge and become intensified by acrimonious exchanges between Stonewall and OutRage! in the UK has not yet materialized in Ireland. Commenting on the tactic of 'outing' in the UK,[43] GLEN's joint chair and only prominent lesbian activist, Suzy Byrne, accused OutRage! of creating 'huge divisions' in the UK lesbian and gay movement, and dismissed 'outing' as inappropriate to the Irish situation. Her

comments are worth quoting at some length. 'The campaign for the recent changes was not a noisy one', she wrote:

> Quietly activists made contacts with other minorities, trade unions and sympathetic politicians, to bring about change. There were no drag queens chaining themselves to the gates of Leinster House. Lesbians and gay men were presented as ordinary members of Irish society who didn't have two heads, and who deserved to be treated like everyone else. The boat wasn't rocked and the laws began to change ...
>
> Gay groups do not see any benefits in naming gay TDs or urging homosexual bishops to leave the closet. Why challenge the status quo when legislation is slowly changing, by adopting an 'in yer face' campaign which would only increase homophobia and resentment?
>
> As long as Ireland continues its long trek to becoming a pluralist society and more people come out for themselves, the closets in the Dáil can rest assured that they will not be opened by any organisation, and the current libel laws will also prevent the press from doing so.

This article followed a much-reported case of a Government Minister who was detained by the police in the company of a young gay man in a well-known gay cruising area in Dublin's Phoenix Park. Not only did he retain his cabinet post after 'regretting' the incident and affirming his love for his family, but the political elite also rallied around him, attacking the police for allegedly leaking the incident to the press. Lesbian and gay organizations such as GLEN offered no challenge to the 'family values first' sub-text of that affair.

There is no doubt that GLEN's reformist strategy has paid dividends, and my case is not that pseudo-revolutionary posturing or ethically-debatable tactics such as 'outing' are desirable *per se*; rather that questions must arise as to whether a 'don't rock the boat' approach really has done anything to call into question the dominant national and sexual ideologies in Ireland, or whether some of GLEN's discourses have encouraged a tendency towards self-delusion about the complexity of the challenges ahead.

Take the thorny question of the 'family'. We have already commented on the tendency to construct gay men and lesbians as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters — i.e. in terms of their membership of a biologically-defined, nuclear family — and to ascribe rights to them on this basis. Such a construction does nothing to challenge the centrality of the traditional family in Irish life, or to deconstruct an institution which many feminists and others see as fundamentally patriarchal and repressive. Speaking at a 'We are Family' conference organized by the Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre at University College Dublin to mark Lesbian and Gay Pride Week, 1994, Rose argued that legal recognition of 'homosexual marriages' should not be a priority for lesbian and gay campaigners because (a) this was not a feasible demand 'in the short to medium term', and (b) the lesbian and gay community should not campaign for 'special' legislation such as that introduced in Denmark and Norway, but seek reforms which would benefit all those, gay or straight, in 'non-marriage relationships'. Such a position falls short of the sort of critical analysis of marriage and the family which several feminist speakers at the same conference called for.[44] Again, although some real gains were the

outcome of GLEN's campaigning strategy — such as the inclusion of protection of people in same-sex relationships under the Domestic Violence Act 1996 — the rhetoric which welcomed these moves and pressed for other, as yet unrealized, measures, such as the reform of the tax laws to treat same-sex couples on the same basis as heterosexual couples, was one which emphasized that 'the concept of the family is of great importance to the lesbian and gay community' and that 'a narrow definition of family ... has been used to stymie progress for gay people as well as children and women in general which in turn undermines actually existing families'.[45] What I am suggesting here is that the unresolved tension between a genuine desire to advance the recognition of a plurality of types of relationships and ways of living, and a reluctance to articulate a radical critique of the institutions of marriage and the family in Ireland, risks undermining the thrust of GLEN's challenge to familial ideology.

Further, the blend of Catholicism and socialism which seems typical of the politico-cultural formation of many GLEN activists (regardless of their current religious beliefs) does not predispose them towards a challenge to the hegemony of the family through an assertion of individual rights. Indeed, one of the striking political and perhaps generational differences between the legal campaign waged by Senator David Norris and the campaigning work of GLEN is precisely the absence of the classical liberal arguments which had featured so strongly in Senator Norris's campaign — about rights of privacy, rights of the individual, limiting the role of the state, etc. — in GLEN propaganda. In the latter, the emphasis is very much upon law reform as a path to inclusion within 'family' and 'nation' through an appeal to fairness and compassion, characteristics which are ascribed to the 'nation as family'.

Vague talk of how 'communities' might offer an alternative societal building-block to biological families do not as yet really inform the construction of lesbian and gay identities in GLEN's propaganda, and in any case the term 'community' has tended to be monopolized in the Irish context by Catholic intellectuals, inspired by notions of empowerment through subsidiarity.[46] This, in itself, is not sufficient reason of course to dismiss talk of 'community' out of hand. However, one must also bear in mind that the Irish experience shows that 'communities' in this sense can also be hot-beds of prejudice against 'outsiders', such as travellers, women who have had abortions, or single mothers.[47] In the Irish context, the concept has a pedigree which is markedly less subversive of the ideologies of family, nationalism and Catholicism than might be otherwise imagined. There is little evidence yet of how the concept might be employed by lesbian and gay campaigners to challenge the hegemony of family values.

The myths of the Irish people as a fundamentally tolerant and fair-minded people, and of homophobia as a colonial implant, are dangerous and misleading. Of course, tolerance and decency are characteristic of most Irish people — as they are of people everywhere. There is nothing especially Irish or post-colonial about such attributes. Quite apart from the ahistorical and essentialist aspects of such claims, such myths may underestimate the extent of prejudice, intolerance and latent violence towards lesbians and gay men within Irish society. They may also serve to mask the existence of profound contradictions within society and exaggerate the extent to which social change can be achieved without conflict, resistance and perhaps regression. Ireland is still a

society in which patriarchy and homophobia are powerful forces, in which diversity is still profoundly distrusted, and in which the visibility of gay men and lesbians is still widely resented.[48] Since decriminalization was achieved in June 1993, attacks upon gay men and lesbians who are open about their sexuality, and institutionalized resistance to further change, have not abated: according to some reports in the monthly *Gay Community News*, they may have actually increased.[49] If public opinion is to be changed, it needs to be confronted and challenged. The rather flattering self-image of the Irish which emerges, conveniently ignores the extent to which Irish national identities are increasingly problematic as we approach the twenty-first century. As a tactic, GLEN myth-making certainly has its uses, as shown by the degree of success achieved to date. However, the danger of seeking inclusion through worship at the shrine of national self-indulgence is that one might actually weaken the challenge to traditional discourses at a time when Irish nationalist ideologies, central to which have been Catholicism and family, are in profound crisis.

Ireland, moreover, is still a profoundly *in*egalitarian society, in which the notion that concern for social justice and fairness has distinguished our political elite is likely to raise a cynical smile. Flattery of the political elite, and of Irish society in general, must give way to analysis of the contradictions and short-comings which characterize Ireland's search for a new definition of itself. This analysis cannot exclude a class dimension. It may well be that the Dublin professional middle classes are more relaxed about lesbian and gay law reform. Or that members of a political elite who might be said to reflect a 'culture of contentment' stretching from centre-right to centre-left[50] are prepared to concede reforms in which, for the most part, they have little personal investment (provided they can be reasonably sure that an electoral penalty will not be exacted).[51] But this does not reflect an Ireland at ease with itself or its sexualities — a myth concomitant with the myth of a classless society.[52] Despite its highly laudable work on issues of poverty — the 1995 report, *Poverty, Lesbians and Gay Men: the Economic and Social Effects of Discrimination*, was perhaps unique in international terms — and its awareness of the centrality of the struggle for economic independence for lesbians and gay men, some of GLEN's more contentious discourses curiously reflect an absence of any class analysis of Irish society.

Irish politicians in general have a well-deserved reputation for pragmatism and opportunism, and for avoidance of painful issues. The danger is that, having satisfied themselves that they 'did their bit' in June 1993, members of the political elite may now be content to take lesbian and gay issues off the agenda, as they sought to take the abortion issue off the agenda with the token reforms of November 1992.[53] In the field of sex education, for example, an expert advisory group which was established by the (Labour Party) Minister for Education in April 1994 to report on the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality in Irish schools, issued a report in 1995 which limited its references to 'individual roles in the family' and 'valuing self and others', without ever mentioning homosexuality.[54] Given, moreover, that each individual school board of management will undertake the formula for implementing such a programme, and that these are frequently dominated by the Catholic Church, it seems likely that lesbians and gay men will continue to be condemned to invisibility. In the armed forces, although homosexuality is no longer illegal,

sexual acts can still be criminalized by the Defense Act of 1956. In June 1994, the army staff association, PDFORRA, protested at the harassment of gay soldiers by the military police who were imposing fines for sex which was both off duty and in private.[55] The association called on the Minister for Defense to introduce a code of conduct (a matter on which he had established a military board of review). Although the Report of the Constitution Review Group (mentioned above) in May 1996 was encouraging, several of the Catholic-inspired provisions of the present Constitution of Ireland have been invoked by the courts in partnerships rights or custody cases, and a tenacious struggle to carry the spirit of the Report into the draft of any proposed new constitution will be needed.

Finally, resistance to the inclusion of an unambiguous commitment to lesbian and gay equality in several long-promised pieces of legislation which were still awaiting implementation in early 1997 was a painful reminder of the obstacles still to be overcome. Two legislative bills in particular were singled out by lesbian and gay groups as important: the new Employment Equality Bill and the Equal Status Bill. If the new Employment Equality Bill were to become law it would undoubtedly mark a major step forward in outlawing discrimination in Irish society, tackling discrimination on grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, sexual orientation, disability, religious belief, race, and membership of the travelling community. The Bill defines sexual harassment in Irish law for the first time, establishes an Equality Agency to deal with complaints of discrimination, and allows for positive action to overcome discrimination against certain groups. However, GLEN activists, whilst strongly welcoming the Bill overall, found themselves battling on three fronts: against rather broadly defined 'sexual behaviour exclusions' which suggested 'that it will be lawful for an employer to discriminate against (or even dismiss) a worker where an employer might reasonably object to any form of that worker's sexual behaviour ... '; against religious exemptions which, given the wide control of the Catholic church over education, health and many social welfare agencies in Ireland, might mean that 'gay people could be legally excluded from the vast majority of such jobs';[56] and against the failure to allow for positive action on grounds of sexual orientation.[57]

As regards the Equal Status Bill, in the second half of 1995, business interests led by the Chambers of Commerce in Ireland and the Vintners Federation of Ireland were reported to be lobbying TDs to oppose those parts of the Bill that would prevent lesbians and gay men from being refused service in pubs, etc.[58] As this campaign grew in intensity, worries were expressed within the gay press in Ireland that the fight was being lost.[59] When the Bill was finally published in February 1997, lesbian activists expressed disappointment that it excluded consideration of partner recognition or child custody issues but nevertheless welcomed it as 'a very firm basis from which to challenge discrimination'.[60] Very soon, unease at the strength of resistance to change and uncertainty about GLEN's campaigning strategy to date saw some gay activists join forces with the British direct action group, OutRage!, to threaten to 'out' an allegedly gay Catholic bishop who was said to be amongst those fighting against any watering down of the religious exemption sections of the Employment Equality Bill.[61] As of June 1997, the Employment Equality Bill appeared to have fallen (see footnote 56) and the Equal Status Bill was

before the Supreme Court in its entirety, awaiting a judgement on its constitutionality.

The notion that tolerance and fairness are a legacy of the 'anti-colonial struggle' is too reductionist. The struggle for national independence and the process of constructing an Irish nation saw discourses of nationalism and Catholicism conflated. Within those discourses, sharply differentiated images of masculinity and femininity were drawn, and the ground was laid for strict public regulation of private morality and of sexuality. To contest these beliefs is to contest the validity of deep-rooted identities bequeathed by the 'anti-colonial struggle': to create a space in which the ideologies of family and nation can be challenged and the enduring myths of harmony and consensus exploded.

In short, despite the undoubted progress made, Ireland is very far from having properly faced up to, let alone resolved, the complex issues raised by the interplay of national and sexual identities at a time of unprecedented social and cultural change. It would be dangerous and foolish to underestimate the strength of resistance to change,[62] or the power which forces opposed to change are still capable of mustering. Myths are important forces, and can be powerful political weapons, as GLEN has demonstrated. But they are no substitute for painful and radical social and political analysis of the still dominant ideological forces — of family, Catholicism and nationalism — in Ireland: analysis of a type which goes beyond 'Irish solutions to Irish problems'.

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Notes

1. Under Irish law, there is no specific legislation governing sex between women, although the laws concerning sex with minors have been applied to lesbians in the past.
2. Kieran Rose, *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland*, Cork, 1994, p. 1.
3. Some members of the Senate are elected by university graduates. Senator Norris was first elected in the 1980s by graduates of the traditionally liberal Trinity College Dublin.
4. Successive Irish Governments, including those in which Labour participated, had, for example, shown indifference to the needs of gay men in the face of the AIDS crisis in Ireland. Rose (*Diverse Communities*) has commented on the hostility of the Department of Health in particular to addressing the gay community. Former AIDS activist Ger Philpott has recorded how a Labour Party Health Minister, credited with the first ever media campaign urging people to use condoms, had rejected the suggestion that anything should be done to target gay men as a specific group, even as late as Autumn 1993. Ger Philpott, *Deep End*, Dublin, 1995, pp. 229–31.
5. An Irish Times/MRBI poll in December 1996 reported weekly mass attendance of 66% of the population — still very high by comparison with most European countries, but a substantial decline from the 85% reported just a decade earlier, *Irish Times*, 16 December 1996.
6. William O'Connor, 'Prelude to a Vision: the Impact of AIDS on the Political Legitimacy and Political Mobilization of Gay Men in Ireland', in Ide O'Carroll and Eoin Collins (eds), *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland*, London, 1995, p. 184.
7. Suzy Byrne and Junior Larkin, *Coming Out*, Dublin, 1994, p. 49.

8. Fianna Fáil Justice Minister Ray Burke told the Irish Senate in December 1990 that he would bring forward legislation to 'decriminalise homosexual activities between consenting adults ... next year' *Irish Times*, 13 December 1990. He returned to his promise in October 1991 and February 1992. In April 1992 his successor, Pádraig Flynn, announced that the issue was not on his short-term agenda.
9. Emily O'Reilly, *Masterminds of the Right*, Dublin, 1992, p. 153.
10. Paul Cullen, 'Homosexual reform proposals are cautiously welcomed by campaigners', *Irish Times*, 24 April 1993.
11. Public Debates Dáil Éireann (hereafter PDDÉ), 23 June 1993, col. 2046.
12. Various small lesbian and gay groups grouped and regrouped throughout the 1970s and 1980s — often as emigration took its toll on activists — and were often divided by political orientation, personality, generation, and sometimes gender.
13. Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, quoted in *Irish Times*, 22 April 1993.
14. I am grateful to Ailbhe Smyth for pointing out that the creation of this Department was not altogether a progressive move: it 'serves to contain "marginal" issues within narrow parameters of legal discourse, and functions to downgrade focus on gender issues ... it also has virtually no independent resources' (correspondence with Ailbhe Smyth, 29 August 1996).
15. Quoted in *Irish Times*, 24 April 1993.
16. Brian Girvin, 'The referendums on abortion 1992', *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 8, 1993.
17. Interview with Ruth Riddick, Director of the Open Line Counselling Service at the Irish Family Planning Association, April 1995.
18. In addition to the age of consent issue, an amendment to the Employment Equality Act in April 1993 covered 'unfair dismissal' on grounds of sexual orientation; work codes in the public sector had outlawed discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or HIV/AIDS status in July 1988. Amongst the legal battles yet (as of April 1997) to be won, but where progress looks either promising or imminent, are the battle for equal partnership rights, and the struggle to influence a long-promised Equal Status Act to prevent discrimination in areas such as housing, social services and education, and a new Employment Equality Act — also promised for several years — to cover all forms of workplace discrimination.
19. Interview with Kieran Rose, joint chair of GLEN, August 1995.
20. Rose, *Diverse Communities*, p. 3.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
24. The work of specifically lesbian groups such as Lesbians Organising Together (LOT) — which was founded in late 1991/early 1992 and scored a major success in 1995 when their Dublin office, supported by Government funding, was opened by the Minister for Social Welfare, Proinsias de Rossa — lies beyond the scope of the present paper. Women working with GLEN also launched a sister-organization called the Lesbian Equality Network (LEN), which gained affiliation to the semi-official Council for the Status of Women and made submissions to Government departments on issues of specific concern to women.
25. *Gay Community News*, November 1991.
26. O'Reilly, *Masterminds of the Right*, p. 153.
27. Rose, *Diverse Communities*, p. 30.
28. Chris Robson, 'Anatomy of a Campaign', in O'Carroll and Collins (eds), *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland*, p. 57.
29. Rose, *Diverse Communities*, p. 57.
30. Ogra Fianna Fáil, 'Policy Discussion Document on the Decriminalisation of Homosexuality' (unpublished), February 1993.
31. *Gay Community News*, December 1991–January 1992.
32. Chris Robson, 'What we Really want from Máire Geoghegan-Quinn', *Gay Community News*, April 1993.
33. Kieran Rose, 'The Fear of Diversity: Gay and Lesbian Rights', *Irish Reporter*, No. 2, 1991.
34. Robson, *Anatomy of a Campaign*, p. 55.

35. *Gay Community News*, April 1993.
36. *Gay Community News*, June 1993.
37. Emma Bidwell, 'I am Gay', *Irish Reporter*, No. 15 (special issue on families), 1994.
38. GLEN, 'Briefing notes for Dáil and Seanad debates', undated (1993).
39. PDDÉ, 23 June 1993, col. 1973.
40. GLEN, 'Submission to the Constitution Review Group' (unpublished), 2 August 1995.
41. *Report of the Constitution Review Group*, Dublin, May 1996.
42. Interview with Kieran Rose, August 1995.
43. Suzy Byrne, 'No Way Out', *In Dublin*, August 1995. Another prominent GLEN activist, Chris Robson, published an attack on 'outing' and the tactics of OutRage! in the *Irish Times* on 4 March 1995.
44. For example, Ailbhe Smyth and Ger Moan (correspondence with Ailbhe Smyth, 29 August 1996).
45. From GLEN's submission to the Government Commission on the Family, entitled 'Different Families, Equal families', 11 April 1996.
46. Interviews with Kieran Rose and Eoin Collins, August 1995. See also Rose's speech at the 'We are Family conference in 1994 in which he singles out the idea of a 'Community Development Programme established in partnership between our community, the state and other agencies' in order to develop community facilities. This is precisely the type of programme which 'social Catholicism' has followed in Ireland.
47. Interview with Ailbhe Smyth, April 1995.
48. For example, Donna McAnallen, who was sacked on 26 April 1993 from her job as a lifeguard and fitness instructor after allegations that she had kissed another woman, and who subsequently lost her case for unfair dismissal, declared in March 1994 that 'people are getting complacent now that the law has changed'. She called for a national conference of lesbians and gay men to stimulate a grass roots fight against discrimination (*Gay Community News*, March 1994).
49. For example, two activists, Suzy Byrne and Junior Larkin, were violently assaulted in Dublin days after appearing on a television programme in October 1994. The attack led Byrne to remark, perhaps naively, 'the visibility given to lesbian and gay issues was meant to end prejudice, not increase it ... I thought we were living in a more civilised society' (*Gay Community News*, November 1994).
50. Interview with Ruth Riddick.
51. There is no doubt that the many generous sentiments expressed during the Dáil debate reflected a genuine sense of achievement on the part of deputies. To some extent, one can also read into the debate a desire on the part of the political elite to give itself a pat on the back for having actually stood its ground in the face of Church disapproval and adverse reaction in the opinion polls and carried through a liberal reform. Again, the fact that a referendum was not required is crucial.
52. The contention that 'as a society, we faced up to our fear of sexuality, especially a different sexuality, and said "yes, it's time to make our own decisions and on the basis of an optimistic view of human life and human nature"' (Kieran Rose, 'Moving Hearts and Changing Minds', *Irish Reporter*, No.14, 1994) is certainly a huge exaggeration. As argued above, it is highly debatable as to whether the reform would have gone through if society had been asked to decide the issue through a referendum.
53. Interview with Ruth Riddick.
54. Garreth O'Brien, 'Lessons in Love: the Reality', *Gay Community News*, April 1995.
55. *Gay Community News*, June 1994.
56. In May 1997, the Supreme Court rejected a legal challenge to these exemptions, but nevertheless struck the Bill down as unconstitutional because the provisions to protect people with disabilities from discrimination might interfere with the property rights of businesspeople! During the general election campaign of June 1997, the outgoing centre-left Rainbow coalition partners pledged themselves to a new referendum to secure a constitutional amendment to permit the Bill to go ahead. Given the Rainbow's defeat in that election by Fianna Fáil and its allies, it is unclear

(at the time of writing) as to whether the proposed legislation will now be allowed to lapse.

57. From GLEN's submission to the Minister for Equality and Law Reform, 22 August 1996.
58. *Gay Community News*, September 1995.
59. *Gay Community News*, December 1996/January 1997.
60. *Gay Community News*, March 1997.
61. Vicky Powell, 'Threat to out anti-gay Catholic bishop', *Gay Times*, March 1997.
62. A major social science survey in late 1996 reported that homophobia in Ireland was growing and that 25% of respondents would deny citizenship to gay people and 35% to people with AIDS (*Gay Community News*, December 1996/January 1997).