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Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Decriminalisation of Homosexuality

GLEN Publish extracts from Dáil and Seanad Debates on 1993 Bill.

Monday 24th June 2013 marks the 20th anniversary of the passage through the Dáil of the Bill which decriminalised homosexuality on the basis of equality. The Bill, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) 1993 Bill, was proposed by the then Minister for Justice, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, on behalf of the Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition Government.

“The passage of the Bill in June 1993 was a watershed in the lives of gay and lesbian people in Ireland. No longer were Irish people to be treated as criminals, just because of who they were” said **GLEN Chair Kieran Rose** who also was GLEN Co-Chair in 1993. GLEN was a leading campaigner for the reform since its foundation in 1988.

“The passage of the Bill was one of the most important steps in the liberation of gay people in Ireland. It led to new generations of lesbian and gay people able to live their lives more openly.” continued Rose.

The Dáil and Seanad debates in 1993 are regarded as one of **the pivotal moments of a transition to a more modern and progressive Ireland**. To mark the 20th anniversary of the passage of the Bill, GLEN has published extracts from the Dáil and Seanad debates, which include:

“What we are concerned with fundamentally in this Bill is a necessary development of human rights” **Máire Geoghegan-Quinn TD, Minister for Justice**

“What could be more important for us, as legislators, than to create a climate and a space in which two people who have chosen each other can express and share their love?” **Mervyn Taylor TD, Minister for Equality and Law Reform**

“Young people will no longer have to grow up in the shadow of the taint of criminality which has blighted the vulnerable youth of so many of our citizens with terror and shame” **Senator David Norris**

Gay law reform was the building block for the extensive legislative reforms which followed. **“Without the decriminalisation legislation and, most crucially, an equal age of consent, subsequent campaigns for legislative reform for lesbian and gay people would have taken much longer and been extraordinarily difficult.”** said **Suzy Byrne**, also a GLEN co-chair in 1993.

Following gay law reform a series of other reforms were implemented including powerful equality legislation; refugee protections; domestic violence protections; funding for health and social services targeting lesbian and gay people was secured; and comprehensive civil partnership legislation was introduced in 2010.

“We have come a very long way since the State regarded gay people as criminals. Ireland has changed. Ireland has become more accepting of diversity and more outward looking. **Life for lesbian and gay people has radically transformed. More and more are living their lives more openly; in their families, their workplaces and their communities all across Ireland**” said Rose.

“**We still have a way to go to ensure full and equal citizenship for lesbian and gay people.** There is still an unacceptable level of violence and harassment; young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people face very difficult times in school; the promised parenting legislation, approved by an overwhelming majority at the Constitutional convention recently, is urgently needed; marriage and full Constitutional protection must be secured; gender recognition legislation is long overdue” said Rose.

The 1993 Dublin Pride March was held the day after the Bill passed. Journalist Mary Holland in a column in the Irish Times said “One would need a heart of stone not to have been moved by the great waves of happiness that surged through the centre of Dublin last Saturday afternoon as Irish gays and lesbians took to the streets”. As Chris Robson, also a GLEN co-chair in 1993, who died earlier this year, commented “The following Saturday, when the Dublin Pride march featured the chant ‘**What did we want? Equality! When did we get it? Yesterday!**’ was a sunny, exhilarating, glorious day”.

Coincidentally, this year’s Dublin LGBT Pride Parade is on Saturday next, June 29th.

Ends

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Editors Notes

1. Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 1993

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 1993 removed the Victorian laws of 1861 and 1885 which criminalised sexual behaviour between men.

Senator David Norris had taken a constitutional case against the laws in Ireland which had failed at the Supreme Court in 1983. He then appealed to the European Court of Human Rights, where his lead counsel was Mary Robinson. They won the case there in 1988 and Ireland was found to be in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. Five years

later, following a strong campaign by GLEN, the ICCL, the Trade Union movement and others, the Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition Government agreed to bring forward a Bill. That Bill removed the existing laws, and established an equal age of consent for gay and straight people.

2. *Dáil and Seanad Speeches from Debates in 1993*

GLEN have published extracts from the Dáil and Seanad debates on the Bill, with introductions by the GLEN co-chairs in 1993 – Kieran Rose, Suzy Byrne and Christopher Robson.

The publication is available [here](#):

[http://www.glen.ie/attachments/Decriminalisation_1993 -
_GLEN Extract of Dail and Seanad Debates.PDF](http://www.glen.ie/attachments/Decriminalisation_1993_-_GLEN_Extract_of_Dail_and_Seanad_Debates.PDF)

3. *RTE's Morning Ireland covered the Dáil debate.*

See below for the report, which includes contributions from the Dáil speeches from a range of politicians.

<http://www.rte.ie/archives/2013/0621/457935-20-years-since-decriminalisation-of-homosexuality/#.UcbJ1Zj-4G1.gmail>

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