



Out at Work Conference

16th – 18th March 2011

Wellington Town Hall

HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE



The CTU Out at Work Council made the decision to hold their biennial conference in conjunction with the Human Rights Conference being held in Wellington from 16th to 18th March. There were six conference streams at the conference:

Work/Mahi

Learning/Te Akoako

Wellbeing (Mind and Body)/Te orange hinengaro me te tinana

Our stories from the Past/O tatou korero o mua; he taonga

Law and our Rights/Te ture me to tatoa mana

Spirit/Te taha wairua o te ora

To enable us to run our conference as part of the Human Rights Conference, the Council took responsibility for arranging the 'Work/Mahi' stream and our delegates were to attend this stream whenever possible.

Everyone came together for the plenary sessions held each morning. The theme for the Human Rights Conference was:

Strength in Diversity: Connect, Collaborate, Inspire

PLENARY SESSIONS

Wednesday 16th

The opening plenary session was titled: *Intersectionality – The Whole of Us* and was chaired by Kevin Hague, Green MP. Three speakers talked about where they had come from and how they had got to be here. Elizabeth Kerekere spoke first and was enthralling. She talked about her journey of discovery about takatapu within her family and within Maori

oral history and her decision to bring them forward into the light. Next Fuimaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann talked about the place of the fa'afafini within Samoan culture pre and post-Christianity of the late 19th Century. Finally Marilyn Waring talked about her journey and that of gay/lesbians in NZ from her entry into politics until now. Her final words were that until we had the right to marry we would always be second class citizens. No-one would consider excluding people from marriage based on their religion, or their ethnicity, so why should they do it solely based on a person's sexuality or gender. This challenge set the scene for the whole conference.

Thursday 17th

Our Rights Across the Asia Pacific Region – A snapshot was chaired by David Huebner, Ambassador of the United States of America to New Zealand and Samoa. This session was one of the more thought provoking sessions and one that sparked the most debate.

The first speaker was Wurundjeri elder Annette Xiberras, whose traditional lands cover the area now known as Melbourne. Annette talked about her role as protecting aboriginal cultural heritage and the discrimination she faced being the only woman involved in this field and being a lesbian.



She weaved the story beautifully even though it was disturbing. The only sour note of the conference was the way the Chair ended this speaker's session. He forgot to give her a time warning and then interrupted her to tell her time was up. The audience let him know how unhappy they were with his treatment of this speaker and he offered her more time as the end of the plenary but the magic of her storytelling had already been broken.

The next speaker was Roger Stanley from Samoa and he built on the session from Wednesday morning. He discussed the developing fight for fa'afafini rights in the Pacific, giving an interesting history of this 'third sex' throughout Polynesian history. There was no discussion, however, on the rights for same sex relationships within this presentation or the one earlier and this was something that seemed to be a theme throughout the conference when looking at the rights for people in the Pacific – the focus was solely on those who saw themselves as the 'third sex' and thus quite separate and different from those labelled as gay or lesbian. This is an area where more work has to be done.

The final speaker was Geentanjali Misra from India and she gave a very thought-provoking and uplifting speech on the fight for gay/lesbian rights in India. She talked about the successful campaign to remove the section of Indian law that criminalised same sex intimacy and it was fascinating to see the strong parallels between their campaign and many of our organising campaigns within the union movement.

Friday 18th March

The morning plenary session was chaired by Maryan Street, Labour MP and had the theme *Movement Building for Change*. Sunil Pant from Nepal was the first speaker and he opened his session with graphic pictures showing the progression of the gay/lesbian movement in Nepal. I believe there should have been a warning as it showed people who had been raped, beaten and murdered, and it was quite shocking to begin the morning so violently. By the end of his session there was a feeling of hope that change was occurring but the images remained with you for a long time afterwards. However, the photo of Sunil on top of an elephant as part of the Nepalese pride march was one all of us enjoyed.



The second speaker was another person from the Pacific who wanted to challenge the conference to change its language because those who were fa'afafini or similar from the other Pacific Island nations did not see themselves within the letters LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered or Intersex). They did not believe they were born in the wrong body (transgendered) nor were they born with no clear sex (intersex – was hermaphrodite) and if we truly wanted to be inclusive then we need to include them fully, including in any abbreviations we chose to use.

Grace Poore from Malaysia was the last speaker and she talked about her role as the Regional Programme Coordinator for Asia and the Pacific Islands at the International Gay and Lesbian

Human Rights Commission. She acknowledged that her main focus to date had been on the Asia region but that this was about to change. She talked very enthusiastically about importance of the role of the Human Rights Commission to help facilitate change within countries.

The closing plenary session was chaired by Rosslyn Noonan from the NZ Human Rights Commission. The first speaker was John Fisher from Switzerland, though John is originally from New Zealand and still saw himself as a Kiwi. He talked about the development of the Yogyakarta Principles which set out the premises for international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity and about his experience delivering these to the United Nations (we now have a copy of these in my office as New Zealand is a signatory to these principles).

The next speaker was Boris Dittrich from the Netherlands who spoke about how his government decided to become the major sponsor of the Human Rights Conference and the reasons why they sponsored people from throughout the region to attend. The final speaker was Joy Liddicoat from New Zealand who talked about the fight for GLBTI rights in New Zealand and how the Human Rights Commission works to ensure that these rights are upheld.

WORK/MAHI STREAM

There were seven sessions held within this stream and they were all very well attended, with people from outside New Zealand also joining in.

Transpeople and the Right to Work

Jack Byrne led this session around the issues facing transgendered people trying to gain employment, discrimination they face at work when they are transitioning from one gender to another, and the ongoing issues around working in the new gender. A young trans-man then spoke about his transition in the workplace and how he gained acceptance from both his workmates and the students he teaches.

Supporting People to be Out & Proud in the Workplace

I chaired this session and it was 4 different groups presenting. The PPTA started the session with an overview of the Safe Schools for Queers (SS4Q) programme and what it means for teachers and students at those schools who have implemented the programme. The next speakers were from the NZ Police and they talked about the progression of the police from 1980s until now where they have diversity liaison officers throughout the country. Jo Wrigley (right) from the NZ Nurses Organisation talked about setting up the Out@Work network in Waikato and what worked and what didn't. The final speaker was Rupene Amato (left) from the SFWU who had done some research about on union officials understanding of what Out@Work is and what it does.



Safe Workplaces for Queer Workers

This session had two groups – first was a Professor at Auckland University who did a presentation on harassment. Though the information was useful his presentation was not geared towards the union movement and they were not even mentioned in the people you should approach if you have a problem. The second group was the NZ Prostitutes Collective and talked about the changes in the law and how they have made workplaces safer for street workers but there is still a way to go. There were also sex workers from other countries where they are still fighting to get similar to those

existing in NZ. A very enlightening session, especially with the interaction between the NZ Police (who had stayed after their session) and the Prostitutes Collective.



Employment Rights and International Law Conventions

Laila Harre gave a very intensive session on employment rights and international law in the Asia/Pacific Region and ways that GLBTI activists should utilise different aspects to strengthen the rights of workers. Though very informative, there was a lot of information for people to take in and any future presentation should allow more time for interaction and questions.

HIV/AIDS and the Workplace

Eileen Brown from the CTU ran this session and gave an overview on the new international labour standard on HIV/AIDS in the world of work. Jason Myers then talked more specifically about the launch of a set of rights based guidelines for the NZ worker.

Using Campaigns to Achieve Our Rights

This was one of the most interesting workshops of the whole conference. It was run by Andrew Campbell and Lynley McIntyre and was a very interactive workshop that made as laugh but also make some serious campaigning commitments over the next 2 years. At the end of the workshop people came away with tasks to do to help achieve our rights. A strong theme throughout was the importance of changing the Government and keeping MMP and this is what many of the commitments made would be working towards.

Rights for Rainbow Workers in the Pacific

This was the last session of the Work/Mahi stream and one of the least attended. It was late afternoon on the second day. And that was a real shame because the speaker was inspirational and left us feeling very concerned for not only gay activists but unionists in Fiji under the current regime. It was this session that was most discussed the next day at our Council Meeting and resulted in a remit being passed unanimously by the Council to assist in any way we can without jeopardising those workers/activists.

COUNCIL MEETING (Friday Morning)

Friday morning saw us move away from the Conference after the morning plenary session and head to the NZEI meeting room to have an Out@Work council meeting. We did a debrief on the Conference and set some remits for the upcoming NZCTU biennial conference.

When then focussed on the representational structure of the Out@Work Council and talked about the need to encourage participation from those who attended the Conference. Though Unions elect just one person to be on the Council, it was stressed that observers were more than welcome. Discussion centred on how the use of video conferences had increased the ability for people to attend these meetings. It was agreed that we would continue using a mixture of videoconferencing and face-to-face meetings.

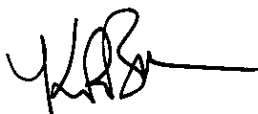


Nominations were then called for the positions of Co-Convenors and the following people were elected:

Jo Wrigley - NZNO
Karena Brown - EPMU

Thanks were given to the outgoing Co-Convenor Ian Gordon from the PSA for all the hard work he had done over the last 4 years.

The Conference closed at 4pm and delegates left feeling inspired, eager and willing to raise the profile of Out@Work amongst their unions and their workplaces.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KAB', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Karena Brown
Co-Covenor
NZCTU OUT@WORK