



KEVIN HAGUE – GREENS MP

Speech to Out@Work Kamp

(Unable to attend due to sitting in urgency at Parliament)

What do you see as the major issues facing queer people in NZ and internationally in the coming years?

It's worth remembering that in many countries around the world queer people lack even the most basic human rights, including the right to life. I well remember attending the conference of the International Lesbian and Gay Association alongside some representatives from Mexico. The attendees from Mexico who had attended the previous conference had been killed by death squads on their return home. If I engaged in homosexual behaviour in Iran it would still be punishable by having a stone wall collapsed on top of me. And the list goes on. One of our responsibilities in a relatively progressive country is to find ways of reaching out to support queer people in these countries and to support calls for change. The Amnesty International model demonstrates that action by ordinary people and NGOs in the West can be an effective lever for change.

Then there's a critically important international issue that particularly has affected men who have sex with men in the West, including New Zealand - the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Probably quite a number of people have heard me speak about the epidemic previously, so no need to go into all of the detail. There is a fundamental problem in that human attention spans are simply too short to take account of the long lifecycle of an HIV pandemic, which has the same shape as an influenza epidemic, but over a very much greater period of time. While most New Zealanders (and most Westerners) and particularly most gay and bisexual men assume that the threat and severity of the HIV pandemic has receded, the reality is that we are still in the foothills of the epidemic, going up. This gap between decreasing perception of risk and increasing actual risk is a huge problem, because it will further accelerate the epidemic.

Turning this around and maintaining focus in the long term will be huge challenges for our communities.

What do you believe the priority work for the queer movement should be?

Again, some people will previously have heard me talk about this. If we look around the world at who has been most affected by the HIV pandemic, a stark pattern emerges of correlation of HIV infection with political, social and economic marginalisation. If we apply the same thought experiment to almost any health problem in New Zealand, this same pattern emerges. For our communities the take-out message is this: our ongoing marginalisation predisposes our communities to poorer health status (including HIV, mental health issues, suicide, alcohol and drug problems etc). This same experience of social marginalisation limits our opportunities and achievement in many other aspects of our lives - education, for example.

Reality is that although we have made huge progress over the past 25 years, for a young person realising for the first time that they are different the world still probably looks much the same as it did for me coming out in the 1970s: it's likely there's been some increased visibility of gay or lesbian people, but the message is still we are fringe; they will have been brought up with an expectation of heterosexuality; they almost certainly know nobody they know to be lesbian or gay. Their school most likely doesn't allow Rainbow Youth, doesn't have a support group, and they are probably surrounded by people with hostile anti-gay attitudes and the ubiquitous equation of gay = useless. Still pretty isolating, isn't it?

I think that our top priority as a community is to make the world safer for these young people through visibility, support, and confronting prejudice and popular culture.

I know there are other legislative issues (full legal equality in marriage and adoption law, gay provocation defence etc) but to me these are much lower priorities.

What have been your experiences as a queer politician?

Well they've all been pretty good so far - I'm a firm believer that bullies are weak and respond to low self-esteem. I'm proud of who I am, what I've achieved and what my Party stands for - so they stay well away.

Anything else you want to talk about?

Just to remind delegates that the Green party has the best policies and best voting record of any party in Parliament on queer issues - which are matters of policy, rather than conscience, for us.