

HOMOSEXUALITY & HUMAN RIGHTS

The Government's Human Rights Bill is directly derived from the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and indeed is an attempt to update and modernise that text. Either document can easily accomodate homosexual love.

If we were asked (not that we have been) what amendments we would wish to see incorporated in the UN Declaration, we would have to say first that we are already well satisfied with almost the entire text. Surely Article 29(2), for example, stating that "In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others ..." fits us like a glove, for if W.A. law proscribes homosexual coupling as a crime ... where is the victim? Why are we limited in our freedom, on what grounds, when we hurt no one? In this way, in Article after article, homosexuals really can feel well provided for by the Declaration.

If we wished to have homosexual Rights absolutely spelled out as such, which of course would be a good idea, then we could suggest that the words "sexual orientation" be inserted after the word "sex" in Article 2: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms

set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." It could be argued, however, that in fact we already are included, depending on how you define "without distinction of any kind", "sex" and/or "Other status".

There is only one great stumbling block, on closer examination, and not only for homosexuals but for everybody of more or less liberal bent, and that is Article 16, dealing with marriage and stating that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society"

At first glance one might think that substitution of the word "couple" might resolve the difficulty, but no, not really, for how, legally, can you define a "couple" (hetero or homo) so that everyone will agree as to what you mean? Your committee have attempted on various occasions to define specifically what we mean by a "homosexual couple" but have never come close to succeeding. "Two people in love" gets us nowhere, because the line defining love can never be drawn and also some couples remain couples after their passion is spent. Two people sharing living quarters ...? Obviously not,

since some of the most successful are precisely those who live separately. Two who are mutually faithful to one another? But many couples take extra-curricular activities in stride .. and yet remain couples. Two people who "feel" that they are "married" ...? But how often do couples part in the sincere belief that all is finished forevermore and yet find themselves in each other's arms an hour later? Or perhaps, two people who have undergone some form or another of semi-official and socially recognized ceremony? We would be most reluctant to think that Rev. Schoenmaker's brace of lesbians should be considered the only homosexual couple in all of Perth. And besides, a man and a woman can after all, form a couple and even found a family without necessarily having to be married. And so?

I personally conclude that it is the individual who is the basic unit of society, and that a couple or family forming what can only be a temporary group-unit is irrelevant, fundamentally, to what human rights are all about. I say "temporary" not so much because love does not always last, but because both partners are after all alive before they ever even meet and one usually continues to live after the other dies. And human Rights must prevail from the cradle to the grave for each one of us.

What is interesting is that the Government's Bill has taken precisely this step of eliminating the family as the group unit, leaving by implication the individual to be the basic unit, perhaps partly, to take homosexuals into account.

The Government has even proposed that a child has the right to his own religious opinions rather than be forced to follow the dictates of his family. Of course this enlightened step has brought down the wrath of the churches, which condemn the entire Bill of Rights

as evil and malicious on this one count and as a grave danger to public morality. Some danger!! What a risk, to have people think for themselves! In any event, the Government will now, no doubt, sell out to the insecure successors to Christ (who never condemned anyway) who feel that faith must come through external force rather than inner persuasion. Never mind ..

The winds of change really are blowing. The young people of today feel, rightly I think, that there is more honour in two people staying together because they want to stay together, rather than because they are obliged to by force of legalities or public ceremonies. And the organization of the United Nations as well as the Australian Government (can you believe it!!?) are finding words to define human rights in such terms that homosexuals are no more discriminated against than are heterosexuals. And if that isn't a revolution, my friends, what is ..?

Take note for example, that the Department of Labour has publicly confirmed that discrimination on grounds of homosexuality is one of the evils it's Committee Against Discrimination in Employment is combatting. Learn further that C.A.M.P. (W.A.) Inc., is actively proposing to the International Labour Organization in Geneva to include homosexuality in its Convention No. 111 on Discrimination and that we expect to propose soon to the United Nations that amendments to the Declaration of Human Rights include specifically, homosexuality. And then you do have to admit that, since our foundation two years ago, when scarcely anyone even dared to come out, progress really and truly is being made, in Human Rights .. in homosexual Rights.

Leslie Alexander::::::::::

N.B. The full text of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights is available from the United Nations Association of Australia, W.A. Division, 306 Murray St. Perth. 6000.