**NIGRA 30th ANNIVERSARY OF FREEDOM/EMANCIPATION**

**CELEBRATORY DINNER**

**FRIDAY 26 OCTOBER 2012**

**Jeff Dudgeon speech**

**The Commons vote on Northern Ireland law reform was on 25 October 1982**

Sad that President PA MagLochlainn cannot be with us tonight – his head has been ‘above the parapet more often and longer than anyone else’.

**Apologies, messages of support and regrets:**

Senator David Norris, Ronnie James, Billy Crothers, Stephen Birkett, Brendan O’Connell, Jennifer Bell, Gerry McGrillen, John Barr, Sean McDaid, John Miskelly, Ciaran Moynagh (MM Solicitors, Holywood).

Absent and departed friends: Tom McManus, James Ford Smith, Graham Carter

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

Guests – pick out a few old (Brian, Doug, Bailey, Mervyn, Sean) and some from the new generation (Andrew, John O’D, Conrad, Andy T}. The middle generation (Barry, Rob, Vince) are now being squeezed at either end.

Thank the speakers and the restaurant.

30 years since we were set free by vote and the RUC raids in 1976.

Last May, a royal personage pinned a medal to my chest in Buckingham Palace - my MBE for services to the LGBT community in NI. She said, ambiguously, ‘you have come a long way,’ and I assuming she knew I was from Belfast mumbled in agreement saying something about having been a radical activist who had now become a respected elder in Belfast – by state and community, if not by church. I remain a radical, if also increasingly incrementalist.

When we fought for gay law reform - for decriminalisation, a campaign that started with the birth of NIGRA in 1974/5 we had a long uphill struggle. Ranged against us was the state, the police, the judiciary, local government and ALL the political parties, be it in the form of active opposition, silence or sabotage.

Also the ‘Save Ulster from Sodomy’ Campaign led by the current First Minister and his predecessor.

Yes our political and legal antagonists prospered mightily as did Lord Brian Kerr [LCJ] and Sir Nicolas Bratza [ECHR President].

And more conservative elements in the gay community were frightened of our campaigns - and the inevitable fallout - such as Ernie and Jim [later of the Chariot Rooms] perhaps the last of our people to go to jail in the mid-1960s. With good reason as the RUC launched their unexpected round-up in 1976 largely sensing – and justifiably – a criminal conspiracy in the two gay organisations NIGRA & Cara Friend.

Oddly we had support - from journalists [Mary Holland Fionnuala O’Connor, BBC Spotlight programme 1976], the DHSSPS [Cara-Friend grant from 1975], Labour Party figures, lawyers like Kevin Boyle and Francis Keenan, and, I think, the plain people of Ulster.

My Strasbourg briefs were Paul Crane and Terry Munyard and Lord Gifford [1967 voter/current Jamaica case].

You know my themes and how to address current issues:

* Inability of Stormont to reform – nothing new there
* Reliance on ECHR and judicial review.
* Church of Ireland and gays.
* Adoption ban – NIHRC judicial review result.
* Blood ban.
* Religious premises ban for civil partnerships - achievable.
* Gay marriage – not for a long time. Lords
* Need for gay candidates to be selected e.g. the Alliance Party

The Court hearing was in April 1981 before a full panel of judges and in October judgement was given in my favour. The Court held that the UK was in breach of Article 8, by 15 votes to 4 (Ireland, Turkey, Cyprus and Portugal).

The judgement stated the “restriction imposed on Mr. Dudgeon under Northern Ireland law, by reason of its breadth and absolute character, is, quite apart from the severity of the possible penalties provided for, disproportionate to the aims sought to be achieved.”

But by 14 votes to 5 they held that it was not necessary also to examine the case under Article 14 (taken in conjunction with Article 8) i.e. discrimination The Court ruled that “once it has been held that the restriction on the applicant’s right to respect for his private sexual life give rise to a breach of Article 8 by reason of its breadth and absolute character, there is no useful legal purpose to be served in determining whether he has in addition suffered discrimination as compared with other persons.”

The majority view stayed the course and become an international standard; one followed by judgments against Ireland in the David Norris case and against Cyprus in the Alexander Modinos case. They were successful and speedier in the wake of the NI trail-blazing precedent.

Mine was the first successful gay case and thus ground breaking. It was only the thirty fifth case judged by the Court and the fifth violation found against the UK. There have since been ten thousand more cases judged at Strasbourg.

**COMMONS SPEECHES**

**No Northern Ireland MP voted in favour. Jim Kilfedder was present and seems to have abstained. Gerry Fitt, an antagonist, was absent. Ken Maginnis also an antagonist and Cecil Walker were absent.**

Mr Prior: The Government defended the Northern Ireland law before the European Court in the Dudgeon case and argued that the differences between the law in Northern Ireland and the law in England and Wales were justified.

Mr Soley (Labour): We should recognise the stand made by Mr. Dudgeon who went to the European Court of Human Rights. That man suffered a great deal of unreasonable persecution and allegations, and was subjected to a great many jokes about him and his behaviour. He and nine or ten others were threatened with prosecution, and were not told for at least 12 months whether that prosecution was going ahead. The prosecution was subsequently withdrawn.

Matthew Paris MP: Hon. Members luckier than I may find that personal conviction gives wings to their argument—the more powerfully they feel about an issue, the more powerfully they can speak. Unfortunately, that is not so in my case. I can happily argue the toss, but where I feel as deeply, strongly and personally as I do on this issue, argument altogether fails me. I support the measure with all my heart.

**Rev Martin Smyth (South Belfast): I should put it on the record that if the hon. Member for Hammersmith, North has heard of names being used against Mr. Dudgeon, I can only say that Mr. Dudgeon is a constituent of mine and at no time have I heard any names so used, but that may be because we move in different circles.**

NO VOTES

Ancram, Michael (Con)

Biggs-Davison, Sir John

Budgen, Nick

**Dunlop, John (Mid Ulster)**

**McCusker, Harold (Armagh)**

**Molyneaux, James (South Antrim) [gay]**

**Paisley, Rev Ian (North Antrim)**

**Powell, Rt Hon J.E. (S Down) [gay at university]**

**Smyth, Rev. W. M. (Belfast S)**

Taylor, Teddy (Southend E)

Winterton, Nicholas

**Tellers for the Noes:** **Mr. William Ross (Londonderry) and Mr. Peter Robinson (East Belfast).**

**but Lord Blease [NI peer] spoke in favour.**

Speakers tonight:

Former NIGRA life President Richard Kennedy who lived those times in the 1970s and Strasbourg times and Terry McFarlane (NIGRA housekeeping) but first:

But first one of Northern Ireland’s most effective church men:

Pat Buckley is a Catholic priest and bishop who was dismissed from his post by Cardinal Cahal Daly in 1986 for his outspoken views in the media about various issues including LBGT issues.

For the past 26 years he has operated an independent ministry from his Oratory in Larne from where he ministers to people who feel alienated from the mainstream churches/religions for whatever reason. He has been celebrating Lesbian and Gay unions throughout that time - long before they became legal either side of the Irish border. He has published a number of books including, in 2005, his own story of combining his homosexuality with his Christianity entitled: *A Sexual Life - A Spiritual Life*. He believes that LBGT people who wish to have a faith should create for themselves their own religious, theological and spiritual structures rather than beg the established churches and religions for acceptance.

Since 2007 he has been in a partnership with Eduardo, a Filipino, and they celebrated their Civil Partnership at Larne Registry Office in March 2010 in spite of a blaze of media attention.

**RICHARD then speaks**

**TERRY speaks**

**END**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Tomorrow Saturday, ‘Presbyterian Gay and Scottish’ Rev Blair Robertson, 3.45 Central Hall Rosemary Street.**

**This Sunday, 3pm Commemorative Service Sunday, Evensong, St George’s High Street.**

**NIPSA launch of gay rights policy, 14 November, City Hall, 12.30.**