**IDAHO - 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF DECRIMINALISATION**

**CITY HALL**

**17 MAY 2012**

Thanks to the organisers and Lord Mayor

This day last week, 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 mumbled something about having been a radical activist who had become a respected elder in Belfast – by state and community, if not church.

True but in some ways I remain a radical (of this more later) if also increasingly conservative and incrementalist.

It was not ever thus. 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. Waged against us was the state, the police, the judiciary, local government, 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 – 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 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 2 gay organisations NIGRA & Cara Friend

Oddly we had support - from journalists [MH/FO’C, 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.

Then a dinner with my Strasbourg briefs, Paul Crane and Terry Munyard, and Ulster exiles by no means all gay, at Lincoln’s Inn organised by Austen Morgan, a friend and supporter. Lord Gifford [1967/current Jamaica case] could not make it.

Many of the exiles have prospered - Brian Robinson (London LGBT film festival) Kate Hoey MP (NI age of consent reduction to 18), Richard Kennedy (former life, President of NIGRA) and his partner Louise Lunn, Tyler Dillard and Bilal Zahid (late of this parish and Alabama), my sister Vida, Maurice Leitch (author ‘The Liberty Lad’), Brian Garrett (NILP & SACHRIN), and earlier Lord Bew of Donegore at the House of Lords, friend and supporter who launched my book on Roger Casement ten years ago in the Linen Hall Library [sold out – double cover price now.]

You know my themes and how to address current issues

Inability of Stormont to reform – nothing new there

Reliance on ECHR, but no longer Westminster, and judicial review

Not in favour of Bill of Rights for NI – no politics through rights.

Church of Ireland and gays.

Adoption ban – NIHRC judicial review in train

Blood ban partial lifting

Religious premises ban for civil partnerships

Gay marriage

Need for gay candidates to be selected – only Alliance Party has three out councillors.

1982 VOTES AND SPEECHES analysis inc. Lord Blease supporting speech.

FUTURE HOPES