**Doug Ireland on Hitch**

The quotations from Antony Grey (who I got to know well and considered a friend) and those of Alan Horsfall reinforce my impression that Abse was not as gay-friendly nor adept as one might have supposed. However, I would be interested to read the views of others.

George Broadhead.

From: Jeff Dudgeon

Sent: Thursday, January 05, 2012 5:26 PM

To: Euro-Queer

Subject: [euro-queer] Leo Abse MP - hero and ...

I would argue you take reformers' assistance where you can knowing particularly if they are MPs they will only do what they were going to do. For that reason Leo Abse is a hero to me and interesting. Others' views are below.

Jeff Dudgeon MBE

PS I can't say I share Doug Ireland's opinion of Hollinghurst's books which have moments of interest but are generally overwritten and derivative with unpleasant and untypical characters not to mention a few other failings. I think also Johann Hari's star is no longer in the ascendant.

The late Antony Grey of the Homosexual Law Reform Society told me (and his excellent book Quest for Justice: Towards Homosexual Emancipation details the complexities) "...in the '60s Leo Abse was, of course, a positive pain in the arse and heartily disliked by most of my executive committee because he knew all the answers - right or wrong. This was because of his died-in-the-wool "barefoot Freudianism", which he had imbibed in his 'teens and which gave him his invincibly correct slant on life. It's very difficult - because in many ways he was the best person to pilot the Bill through the Commons: an extremely deft parliamentary tactician. But I shall maintain to my dying day that we could have got a better Bill if he and Arran had stood up to the Home Office bureaucrats.

Anyway, now that he's dead it frees me to be more candid in my memoirs, which I'm working on at the moment...The "privacy" bit got in because Lord Dilhorne successfully pushed a "wrecking" amendment through the Lords [supported by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Bob Boothby, damn them]. I immediately recognised that this would allow the police snooper back into the private consenting bedroom [or wherever], and pleaded with Lord Arran to overturn it [which I believe he could have secured a majority to do if he had persisted]. But he had this foolish notion of politics as "sport" - and cricket, not chess - and said "Oh no, they've won this one - we must let them have it". I was in despair, and would personally have rather packed the Bill in than allowed that to stand, as it drove a coach and horses through the "Wolfenden principle". But that's politics."

Allan Horsfall in contrast wrote in the Guardian:

"My gratitude to Leo Abse (Obituary, August 21) is not diminished by the fact that he disliked me. He regarded me not only as a meddler but - much worse - a gay meddler.

 In 1967 I wrote a letter, published simultaneously in the Spectator and Tribune, objecting to Abse's acquiescence to the exclusion of the merchant navy from the provisions of his sexual offences bill. He wrote to me to say he would be grateful if I would not go sounding off in the papers while he was piloting an important bill through the House.

 His great fear was that, if the pressure for reform was seen or supposed to be coming from gay men, then his chances of success would vanish. I have no means of knowing if this was true, but his attitude was indicative of the way in which working for gay law reform at that time was like trying to walk on eggshells.

 However mistaken he may have been, he was respected and listened to, with the consequence that the emergence of a powerful and influential gay movement was much slower than it would otherwise have been."

From: humanists@btinternet.com

To: euro-queer@groups.queernet.org

Date: Thu, 5 Jan 2012 13:37:24 +0000

Subject: Re: [euro-queer] my latest: "My Queer Friend Christopher Hitchens"

I am responding to Doug Ireland’s references to Leo Abse:

”In one section of the book, set in the early 1960s, there is a reference in chat at a dinner party to Leo Abse’s bill then pending in Parliament, without further explication. I would guess that there are no more than a handful of Americans who will know that Leo Abse, a real-life backbench left-wing Labour Party member of Parliament from Wales for three decades who died in 2008 at 91, deserves a very special place in the pantheon of heroes in the long struggle for gay human rights.

Doubting that even many British readers, even the gay ones, would get Hollinghurst’s reference to Leo Abse’s bill, I asked one of the brighter stars in the UK’s journalistic firmament today, Johann Hari, the openly gay columnist for the Independent, a fine upmarket daily, for his opinion.

You’re sadly right about Leo Abse, he’s virtually totally forgotten, Hari told me, and his books are out of print, alas. I doubt one in 1,000 gays here would know who he was.”

I confess that, when I read Hollinghurst’s obscure reference to Leo Abse’s bill, tears began rolling down my cheeks. But I was not weeping for the admirable old Abse a heterosexual who wrote several books sympathetic to homosexuality after leaving Parliament but for my very dear friend Christopher Hitchens, who had died just days before on December 15 after an excruciating, doomed battle against a galloping esophogeal cancer.

It was, after all, thanks to Hitch as all of us who loved him called him; he detested being called Chris that I knew who Leo Abse was and about his extraordinary contribution to homosexual emancipation.”

This is what Wikipedia has to say in connection with Abse’s support for gay law reform:

“Abse's views on homosexuality were strongly influenced by his knowledge of psychotherapy. He argued that an obsession with the question of punishment of homosexuals ‘has hitherto prompted us to avoid the real challenge of preventing little boys from growing up to be adult homosexuals. Surely, what we should be preoccupied with is the question of how we can, if it is possible, reduce the number of faulty males in the community’. Abse put his arguments in this way partly to ensure that those MPs who were inclined to vote for the Bill did not feel they were endangering their masculinity but mostly because he had a view that ‘those who do not procreate are deprived or stunted’ (the analysis of Antony Grey, who was leading the lobbying efforts of the Homosexual Law Reform Society and worked closely with him).

Posters to this list will no doubt correct me if am wrong, but as a 78-year-old gay man I recall that after the Law Reform Act of 1967, Abse expressed his dismay at some of the consequences, including the further demands of gay activists.

Of course Abse deserves great credit for the major part he played in getting the law reformed, but I don’t think he was as gay friendly as some may have supposed.

George Broadhead

If you want to see how sexy Christopher was when he was a student at Oxford, to both boys and girls, click on this link to my article:

http://www.gaycitynews.com/articles/2012/01/04/gay\_city\_news/arts/doc4f04a6fd9311c733058294.txt