Sorry for delay. Replies below.
Jeff

From: vistrana@ulb.ac.be
 To: jeffreydudgeon@hotmail.com
 Date: Tue, 10 Feb 2015 20:12:28 +0100
 Subject: Université Libre de Bruxelles - Help for a work

 Dear Mr. Dudgeon,

 I am really enchanted you took on your time to give an answer to my previous mail. I would like to thank you for this and also tell you what honor it is to talk to you personally for our work. Even if the informations you gave me are already very interesting, I would you be really grateful if you could take some time to take a look at a few questions I am sending to you. Here they are :

 1) What happened before you went to the European Court of Human Rights ? Before how many jurisdictions have you appeared and what was the issue?

We went straight to Strasbourg having exhausted our domestic remedies which in the UK, without a constitution and at that time the Human Rights Act, only required evidence of failed attempts to reform the law. This was through campaigning in parliament both locally in Belfast, at Stormont, before it was prorogued in late 1974 for what turned out to be 30 years, and at Westminster. All attempts failed. The Labour Government meantime started a meandering process of law reform which was shelved in 1978, and ditched by Margaret Thatcher’s new government a year later after sensing the local opposition. The NIO Minister, Hugh Rossi, when making that decision wrote in a note on the papers, “Leave it to Strasbourg to find against us.”

This is a danger - Strasbourg becomes the easy option for nation states instead of reforming locally. (This may no longer be so in the case of the UK – rather the opposite, because of silly decisions like that on prisoner voting. The concept that the European Convention is a living instrument can go too far or too fast.)

 2) How did you feel in your country before the trial ? Did you feel hostility from people or was the reject of homosexuals people just an application of the law ?

Hostility was a problem but not as great as we expected from people at work or in the street. My house was attacked on about five occasions with windows broken and one person living there was hospitalised after a breeze block was thrown through the window. I still live at that same address but remain constantly cautious and afraid of it starting again, from a different set of (new) teenagers.

 3) Did the case had any influence on your reputation and your political career ?

I was actually unemployed at the time of the judgment (1981) and before the law reform (1982) I got a junior job in the civil service and prospered, eventually, through promotion. My reputation was enhanced except that I became and remain a bit typecast. But gays achieving in any field will remain typecast for decades to come.

 4) Before the case were you passive or more activist compared to problems encountered by homosexuals in the country ?

Don’t understand.

 5) Have you felt a difference in behavior concerning yourself ? Did people act differently with you?

Gay people are always cautious about how people react to them if they know their sexual orientation. This may be different for younger people now.

 6) And in the public opinion ? Was the public opinion different after the trial faced with the homosexuality ?

Public opinion slowly turned in our favour. Law change did have an effect, as did the fact that we were seen in public for the first time ever. The Coming Out process, of which this was part, has had the most impact and matters have now accelerated where gays are found in myriads of public positions. The religious opposition is now feeling the heat instead of us.

 7) What was your feeling after you victory at the European Court of Human Rights ? Did you feel relieved or do you think such an opinion should have been natural ?

We felt we had won a significant victory and one that was justified and right. We came from that new generation that fought to change things and would not accept self-oppression.

 8) How did you feel by attacking your own country ?

No problem there. I was a young left-wing radical influenced by the American civil rights movement, British liberalism and the Labour Party. In Northern Ireland permanently riven by an ethnic dispute, not dissimilar to that in Belgium, we were at that time in the middle of a war. We had no political allies, only enemies, except in England. In the 1970s you were nobody if you did not attack your own country. Patriotism did not mean very much, especially to us in Belfast as we had two brands to choose from and tended to reject both.

 I permiss myself to send you these but would also totally understand if you think some of them are too personal or even if you can't take time for me.

 Thank you by advance,
 Looking forward to hearing from you soon,
 Yours sincerely,

 Virginie Stranart

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