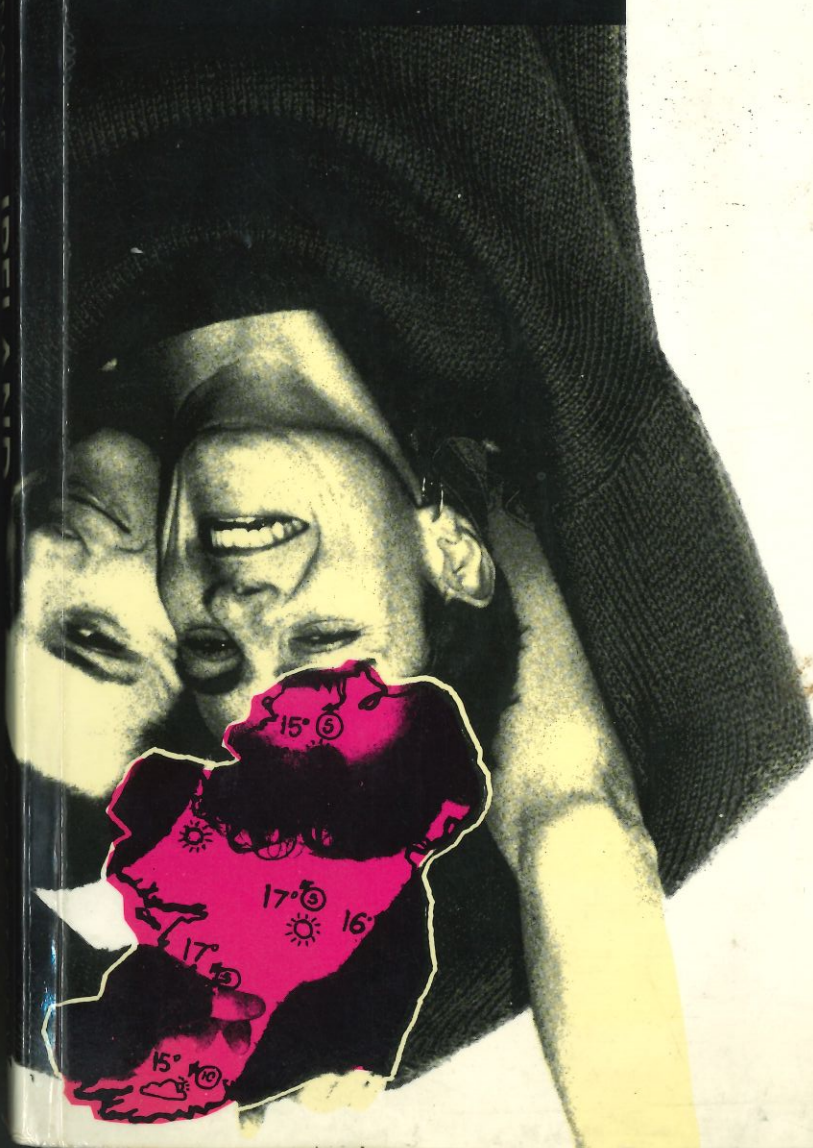


ALTERNATIVE IRELAND

DIRECTORY



WOMENS MOVEMENT

PEACE

CO-OPERATIVES

LESBIAN AND GAY

COUNSELLING AND

PSYCHOTHERAPY

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

ANIMAL LIBERATION

COMMUNITIES

EDUCATION

FOOD

GAEILGE

TRAVELLERS

MEDIA

FILM AND VIDEO

SOCIAL WELFARE

EMPLOYMENT

TRAVEL GUIDE



ALTERNATIVE IRELAND DIRECTORY

A DIRECTORY FOR NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Fourth edition, completely revised and enlarged.

LISTINGS * RESOURCE GUIDES * TRAVEL GUIDE

The **Alternative Ireland Directory** is a sourcebook for new social movements in Ireland. It is an essential tool for anyone who wants to find out what's happening under the surface in Ireland today.

The Directory is designed to be a practical handbook for anyone interested in these new movements — whether you're travelling in Ireland, actively involved in some of the movements covered or just want to find out more about them.

The Directory Contains:

- comprehensive up-to-date listings.
- a critical overview of each movement written by a key participant.
- resource guides to employment, the media and other institutions.

and THE ALTERNATIVE IRELAND TRAVEL GUIDE

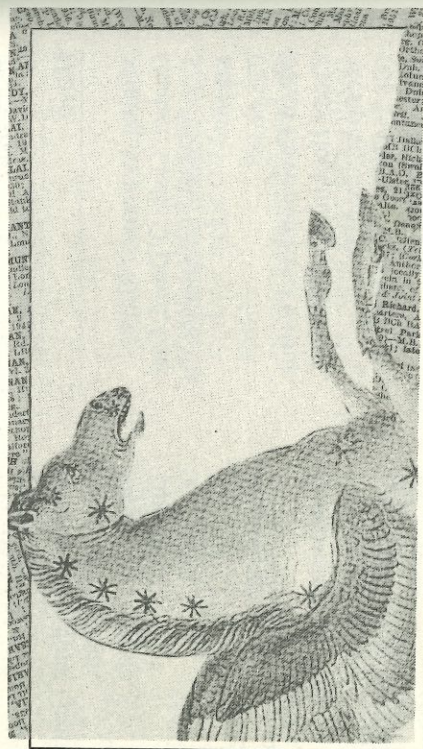
AID is published in Cork by the Quay Co-Op, a workers co-operative.
AID is printed in Ireland on environment-friendly paper.

Price £4.95.

ISBN 0 9512456 1 9

Viewpoint by - Kieran Rose

Kieran Rose is co-chairperson of GLEN. He works in town planning and is involved in environmental issues and politics. He is an active member of the Local Government and Public Services Union which is currently conducting a survey of lesbian and gay rights of work internationally.



Lesbian and Gay

viewpoint

The Lesbian and Gay community in the Republic is now in a period of great challenge and opportunity. On October 26th 1988 the European Court of Human Rights decided that our anti-gay laws contravened the European Convention on Human Rights. The decision was generally welcomed here but the Government has still not introduced legislation to amend or abolish the Victorian laws.

The demands of the lesbian and gay communities in the area of law reform are clear and simple: we want no distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality in the criminal law; we want a single age of consent (the crucial issue here is the right of young people, including young lesbians and gay men, to sexual autonomy); we also demand anti-discrimination legislation to cover sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, gender and disability. To co-ordinate the campaign we have set up the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) which incorporates all lesbian/gay groups and activists.

Organising ourselves

There has been a lesbian/gay movement in Ireland since the early 1970s. The initial organisations attempted diverse tasks: social, political, befriending and (most onerous of all) managing premises. The Hirschfeld Centre in Dublin was one of the first lesbian/gay centres anywhere and is now slowly re-opening after fire damage. In the early 80s the various lesbian and gay 'collectives' gave radical leadership, ideologically and practically, with demonstrations, pickets and campaigns. Since the mid-80s service-orientated groups (such as Gay Switchboard Dublin) and loose networks (e.g. of Trade Unionists) have been the dominant forms for activism.

Since the mid-1980's the AIDS crisis has absorbed ever increasing energy. Gay Health Action (founded in 1985) provided the first organised

response to AIDS in Ireland. The universities, particularly the constituent colleges of the National University of Ireland, have been the scene of protracted struggles for the recognition of lesbian/gay societies. 'Reach' - a Christian based group - has proved very popular in recent years. All through the 80s David Norris (latterly Senator) pursued his ultimately successful, constitutional action through the High and Supreme courts and finally at Strasbourg.

The two largest cities - Dublin and Belfast are the main centres for lesbian and gay services. Indeed one of the insidious effects of Partition is that it has divided our efforts so that two separate and identical cases had to be taken at the European Court. As Ursula Barry has put it "Partition is the central fact of life in this country. It cannot be ignored, it cannot be avoided. No part of the social movement, including the Women's Movement, has been able (despite many attempts) to break free from the effects of partition" (Feminism in Ireland).

Cork is the next largest centre and many initiatives have stemmed from there including the First National Gay Conference 1981, which articulated the demands of the community for many years to come. The Quay Co-Op - a workers co-op, bookshop, cafe, resource centre - has been a vital support to the lesbian/gay community since 1982 and is a model for other towns. The debilitating effects of high unemployment and emigration are particularly telling in smaller communities - such as Cork. The main tasks in the future are to reach out to isolated lesbians and gay men and to intensify our lobbying/educational work; both tasks need some form of national co-ordination and fundraising.

History

As regards the pre-1970 history of 'homosexuality' amongst the Irish at home and abroad, there are numerous sources awaiting researchers with relevant questions. 30% of prisoners in Portlaoise Prison were imprisoned for homosexual offences according to a 1946 Labour Party pamphlet. The Post-Civil War Church-State dread of political and moral subversion is evident in a Government Committee of 1930 which reported that homosexuality was spreading with "malign vigour" due (partly) to the recent political upheavals. Court cases indicate that there was an organised sub-culture in Dublin at least by the late 19th century. The Brehon Laws regarded 'homosexuality' non-judgementally as one of the reasons for divorce. Early and medieval Irish poetry was frequently homoerotic.

From his researches James Barden refers us to a poem where a man laments his lost lover, translated by Oscar Bergin under the title "A Hot Friend Cooling". In the Americas, 'homosexuality' among the indigenous peoples was given as a pretext for their colonisation; one wonders about Edmund Spenser's 17th century coloniser's view of the Irish: "Their savage brutishness and loathsome filthiness which is not to be named".

Writers and revolutionaries

Writers and revolutionaries figure prominently in later history, including Oscar Wilde, Roger Casement, Somerville and Ross, Eva Gore-Booth, Forrest Reid and Brendan Behan. The famous couple Michael Mac Liammoir and Hilton Edwards dominated the theatre world and the former had an "open, celebratory attitude towards his gayness", according to Simon Callow. Kate O'Brien's last two novels predate the women's movement in the portrayal of the lesbian 'who knows no shame', to quote her biographer. Padraig Pearse's unconscious homosexuality is described by his biographer Ruth Dudley Edwards; she translates naive verses he wrote in Irish, for example:

"Little lad of the tricks...
Of the soft red mouth...
There is a fragrance in your kiss
That I have not found yet
In the kisses of women".

Today many of Ireland's leading media and cultural people are lesbian or gay but unfortunately almost none have 'come out' publicly or explicitly. Philip Chevron of The Pogues and Desmond Hogan the writer, are exceptions and both London-based, reminding us how much our emigrants have to contribute to those of us in Ireland. There are a number of young artists and film-makers who deal with lesbian/gay issues. 'Chaero' by Matt Hayes is an excellent short film. "Gay Community News" gives an indication of the cultural strength waiting to be tapped. A Gay Men's Chorus and a photographic study are being discussed. A west Belfast group have written and are staging a play on lesbian and gay rights. Mary Dorcey, lesbian feminist author, has received widespread coverage for her recent book of short stories.



Contradictions

The support for and the opposition to the Lesbian and Gay community

illuminates the tensions and contradictions in 26 county society. According to a fascinating recent study (*Understanding Contemporary Ireland*) "few societies have changed so rapidly and so radically as the Republic of Ireland since the 1960s". In 1961, one in every twenty married women was in the paid workforce, by 1987 this figure had shot to one in five. Economic growth, international (e.g. EEC) influences, the Women's Movement as well as the Irish history of struggle for democratic and religious liberties have provided the basis for progress. The pre-1960 agrarian economy's need for sexual repression (of heterosexuals at least) - uniquely few and late marriages, low birth rates outside marriage and lack of contraception - has changed fundamentally. The "objective secularisation" of modern Ireland is ironically illustrated in Maynooth College, bastion of episcopal influence, where the support of increasing numbers of lay students and staff led to the lesbian and gay society almost gaining official recognition in 1990.

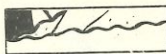
Support

Active support for the rights of lesbians and gay men is now widespread and includes the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the Union of Students in Ireland and the Council for the Status of Women. Support has also been expressed by the Employment Equality Agency the Law Reform Commission and various political parties and others. The widely welcomed Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act (1990), the Labour Party's Equal Status Bill (1990), the (for example) Civil Service Employment Equality Agreement (1988) all include lesbians and gay men.

In terms of media coverage there appears to be no market here for the lurid homophobia evident in the British media and politics. The draconian gay laws are not implemented and police harassment is infrequent - a case of law reform or "governing from below" to use a Sandinista phrase. Paradoxically, the North is characterised by entrapment convictions and severe RUC harassment despite their 1967-style law "reform".

Reaction

The heterosexual opposition is both traditional and modern and derives its great strength from the Catholic Church spear-headed by John Paul II's appointees as bishops. In an interview in January 1990, the Archbishop



of Dublin spoke movingly of his exclusively male friendships and then Ratzinger-like described homosexuality as a "disorder and an affliction". Lay Groups such as Family Solidarity, influenced by New Right British and U.S. groups, are active. Family Solidarity's recent pamphlet *"The Homosexual Challenge: Analysis and Response"* would see us as a "well organised pressure group, following its own distinctive ideology and demanding radical and far reaching changes in Irish law and public policy". The prejudicial decisions of the Courts, the National University, the National Youth Council, and others (not forgetting legislators) map for us the control exercised by the Catholic Church.

Conflicts

A subsequent nationwide opinion poll in February 1990 found that 30% favoured change in "the law governing homosexual relationships", 48% did not and 21% were in the category "no opinion/do not know." Interestingly the progressive vote in the 1983 Abortion amendment and the 1986 Divorce Referenda was 33% and 36% respectively. In the words of *'Understanding Contemporary Ireland'* this suggests that "if the foundations of conservative Ireland had been radically undermined, much of its moral and cultural structure persists." Indeed this campaign can be seen as the latest in a series of ideological/moral battles that included the 'Mother and Child scheme', control of schools and hospitals, women's rights, contraception and most recently AIDS education. The devastating defeats in many areas, particularly relating to women, reminds us of how partition has led to reactionary states north and south. In a positive sense it could be said that in Ireland heterosexuals perceive their sexuality to be repressed and so are more likely to support the rights of lesbians and gay men. The relationships between partition, repression, sexuality and the fracturing of the Irish psyche are worthy of a study in themselves.

Future

What of the future? The major issues for Ireland - unemployment, inequality, partition, the war in the north, emigration, the power of the church, sexism, sexuality, European integration - and how they are resolved, will all determine to a great extent the future of a lesbian/gay community. But the lesbian and gay communities themselves now have their own momentum and are effecting change in Irish society in terms of

a more self-confident approach towards sexuality and civil liberties. As with the Travellers' demand for recognition as an ethnic group, our demands are also contributing to an inclusive definition of what it is to be part of the Irish community.

This short article is a personal introduction from a 26-counties gay man's perspective. Those interested in further details and different viewpoints should read:

Equality Now, for lesbians and Gay Men, Irish Council for Civil Liberties. (1990). A tour de force and essential reading for anyone interested in social movements today.

Out for Ourselves: The lives of Irish Lesbians and Gay Men, Dublin Lesbian and Gay Men's Collectives (1986). A great book which strongly marks the demise of the Dublin Collectives available from 12, Chelmsford Ave., Ranelagh, Dublin 6. (£4.95)

Gay Community News: monthly, free and excellent newspaper. Published from the Hirschfeld Centre.

Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace, Guidelines for Negotiators, Available free from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions at 19, Raglan Road, Dublin 4. Tel: 01.680641.

Understanding Contemporary Ireland: State, Class and Development in the Republic of Ireland: R Breen et al., Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 1990, 248pp.

Feminism in Ireland, Special Issue of Womens Studies International Forum, Vol. 11, No. 4 1988, 427 pp +.



Listings

Lesbian and Gay

- National Organisations**
- Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA)**
P.O. Box 44,
Belfast BT1 1SH
084 66411
Meetings Thursdays at 8.30.
Membership organisation with broad campaigning aims.
Similar to NGF in the South.
National Gay Federation,
The Hirschfeld Centre,
10, Fownes St.,
Dublin 2.
01 710939
General purpose representative body with a wide membership.
Gay and Lesbian Equality Network,
c/o 10 Fownes St.,
Dublin 2.
01 710939.
Group founded in 1989 to campaign for law reform in wake of the verdict in the Norris case. It has defined a set of demands for law reform and is lobbying actively.
Parents' Enquiry,
Contact via Gay Switchboard
Dublin
A support group for the parents of lesbians and gays.
- Reach,**
PO Box 1790,
Dublin 6.
01 961834 (Thurs. 7.30 - 9 pm)
Gay christian discussion and support group. Meets monthly on Saturdays.
Northern Ireland Gay Christian Fellowship,
084 326117
Mon. Wed. and Fri. 7.30 pm - 10 pm, Sat 2 pm - 5 pm.
Metropolitan Community Church,
Contact Pastor Mike Foley
01 857403.
American-originated gay and lesbian friendly christian church.
Services in Dublin city centre
Sun. 7 pm. Group Meeting
Wed. 7.30 pm.
Gay Community News,
10, Fownes St.,
Dublin 2.
01 710939.
Free monthly newspaper for lesbian and gay communities.
Available mainly in Dublin but hoping for wider distribution.
Julian Fellowship
PO Box 1871,
Churchtown,
Dublin 14.