



Eoin Collins

A Tribute to a LGBT Political Activist

by Kieran Rose

February 2026

For Eoin Collins (1963 - 2022)

Key strategist of same-sex
marriage in Ireland

**Cover photo of Eoin Collins with Eoin's sister
Deirdre, John Brady, Declan Buckley, Bill Foley
and Kieran Rose at Dublin Pride, 1993**

*Photo by Christopher Robson courtesy of
National Library of Ireland*

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Eoin Collins at GLEN meeting when Unfair
Dismissals Act Resource Document launched, 1992
*Photo by Christopher Robson, courtesy of
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**“We were always building,
not knocking.”**

- Eoin Collins

Contents

We Were Always Building Not Knocking, a summary of Eoin Collins' work and impact	9
Being Irish and Gay, Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland 1995	33
Double Disadvantage: Poverty and the Lesbian and Gay Community, Poverty Today Issue 26 December 1994	34
Lifting the Lid, Poverty Today Issue 30 December 1995	35
Gay Saunas, 1998	36
Vatican and Homosexuality, 1999	37
Eoin in Conversation with Una Mullally, 2014	38
Gay Politics and the Minister for Justice, Irish Times letter 2005	46
Civil Marriage for Gay People, Hot Press 2005	46
Reviewing Progress on Equality for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People, Equality News 2006	48
High Ambition: Benchmarking Ourselves Against the Best, conference speech 2006	52
Proposed Civil Partnership Is a Great Achievement, Irish Times June 2008	59
Creating a Climate Where Everyone Enjoys Equality, Irish Times June 2009	61
International Competitiveness and the New Economy, Progressive Economy 2009	63
Strategies for Success	65
Equality in Ireland 20 20 Vision, conference speech 2010	67
Response to Criticisms of GLEN's Strategy on Civil Partnership and Civil Marriage, 2015	70
When Prejudice Can Kill, letter to the New York Times	76
Key Strategist of Same Sex Marriage in Ireland, Irish Times obituary	77
Eoin's Favourite Things	79
Further Reading	81
Tribute by Sandra Irwin Gowran	83
Tribute by Anne Colley Chair of Working Group on Domestic Partnership	Back



GLEN banner with Suzy Byrne, John Brady and Eoin Collins.
Photo by Christopher Robson courtesy of National Library of Ireland



Eoin and Kieran Rose in Belfast, 1991
Photo: Louise O'Meara

We Were Always Building Not Knocking, a summary of Eoin Collins' work and impact

by Kieran Rose

Eoin Collins was a powerhouse for the incredible progress LGBT people have made in Ireland over the past three decades. Eoin's pivotal and continuous role since the late 1980s, as an activist, strategist, researcher and writer, has not been sufficiently recognized.

Eoin passed away all too young in 2022 after a short illness. Eoin's husband Josep Adalla had passed away three months earlier after a heart attack.

Eoin was a key activist in GLEN since 1990 and the story and success of GLEN is the story of Eoin and his achievements. The 'Remarkable Journey' in just purely legal terms, from criminalization to gay law reform on the basis of equality, Equality legislation, marriage-like Civil Partnership, and then full and equal Constitutional status with the success in the Yes Equality Referendum, and significant legal progress for Transgender people.

Alongside this transformational legal progress was a transformation in the social status of LGBT people in Ireland from one of huge bigotry and marginalisation to where there was a mass political campaign in every County in Ireland in the successful marriage referendum, and a gay man could be elected Taoiseach without controversy, which GLEN set out as a goal in 2006.

Eoin was a key person who decades ago set out this ambitious agenda for radical change in Ireland and then used all his great intellectual and persuasive skills to make this fundamental change a reality.

Eoin Collins was a great friend, funny, lovable, generous, loved life, erudite, had wide cultural interests (see 'Eoin's Favourite Things'), great intellectual curiosity, and a great fondness for Ireland which strongly influenced his politics.

This article is intended to give a brief introduction to the political work of Eoin, to give a flavour of the wealth of material that is on Eoin's website www.eoin-collins.ie. The three other booklets are also relevant, 'GLEN Phase Two', 'How the Irish Marriage Equality Referendum Was Nearly Lost in 2015', and 'Trade Unions and Progress for LGBT People'

The transcripts of the three interviews with Eoin by George Gavrilis for Atlantic Philanthropies oral history project, Michael Barron, and Una Mulally for her 2014 book 'In the Name of Love', give a real sense in Eoin's own words of his political and intellectual seriousness, his passionate commitment to social justice, and the need to make significant progress in the shortest time possible (see www.eoin-collins.ie for full transcripts)

Eoin had a great interest in, and love of Dublin and Eoin's first project he did with Nexus Research Cooperative was 'Why Are We Waiting? Dublin Transport for All' (1991) on the need for far more investment in public transport in Dublin on social justice and environmental grounds and to stop prioritising private transport including the very destructive road widening schemes. The report was praised by then Minister Mary Harney as the best report she had read on transport issues in Dublin. It is as relevant today as it was in 1991.

The project was overseen by the Community Workers Cooperative with funding from the Combat Poverty Agency and Niall Crowley (later to be CEO of the Equality Authority and key advocate for LGBT equality) wrote the preface. It was the first report Eoin and myself worked on together, I had written the project proposal for the Community Workers Coop.

This was also the beginning of a hugely important working relationship between Nexus and GLEN that continued for the next fifteen years or so with Eoin as the link person. At the time GLEN had little or no money, no office, not even a filing cabinet, so Nexus supplying free office facilities so that we could for example issue press

releases was crucial as the gay law reform campaign intensified. Nexus also supported the Women's Coalition, Condom Sense and the Campaign against Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act.

Eoin describes Nexus as 'a very left-wing research cooperative' that strongly supported GLEN and other progressive campaigns. 'A bunch of guys there, Seán O'Siochrú and Brian Dillon and a few others were really really supportive of everything we did, and used every bit of surplus that Nexus had in terms of office space or other resources to support what we were doing' (Gavrilis p17).

Around the same time GLEN was liaising with the Combat Poverty Agency to get funding to do research on the links between discrimination and disadvantage in the case of lesbians and gay men and Eoin wrote the various iterations of the funding proposal. There was significant resistance in the Combat Poverty Agency to funding the research so it took a while to persuade the Agency, the research and policy report 'Poverty, Lesbians and Gay Men, The Economic and Social Effects of Discrimination' was finally published in 1995 and launched by the Minister for Social Welfare Proinsias de Rossa at a high profile event in the National Concert Hall.

In his interview with Michael Barron, Eoin speaks very interestingly about the role of the Poverty study in parallel to decriminalisation as 'looking at building recognition of gay and lesbian identity' (pp 2 to 5).

"We didn't just want a study on discrimination, we really wanted a study which profiled the identity of gay people and the study itself was very lifecycle focused. It went right through the period when you were young, your experience with family, your experience in school, your experience in the workplace, your experience in the neighbourhood you're living in. So, it was looking at all those dimensions of life and really tried to show what this is, what a gay person experiences throughout their lives. These are all the hoops they have to jump through and they can fall at any of those hurdles ..'

In the interview Eoin speaks strongly about the resistance in the mainstream community development sector to taking on board the findings and recommendations of the study, and says that undervaluing of lesbian and gay lives and identities was a form of homophobia, as Eoin put it:

'But if you define it more broadly as actually not

recognizing a gay person's life as legitimate it was homophobic' (Barron p11).

Speaking to George Gavrilis about the Poverty report Eoin said:

'And there was a huge resistance at the time from right across every state agency and within the whole community development sector which had really grown throughout the 1990s in response to poverty. We used to go to community development events and people used to think, well, what's this got to do with us? We're dealing with hardcore poverty. There was a sense on some parts of the "left" in Ireland that gay issues were somehow marginal, like legalising pot or something .. Sort of slightly inconsequential; just a lifestyle issue; not really impacting on lots of people, not a big deal.

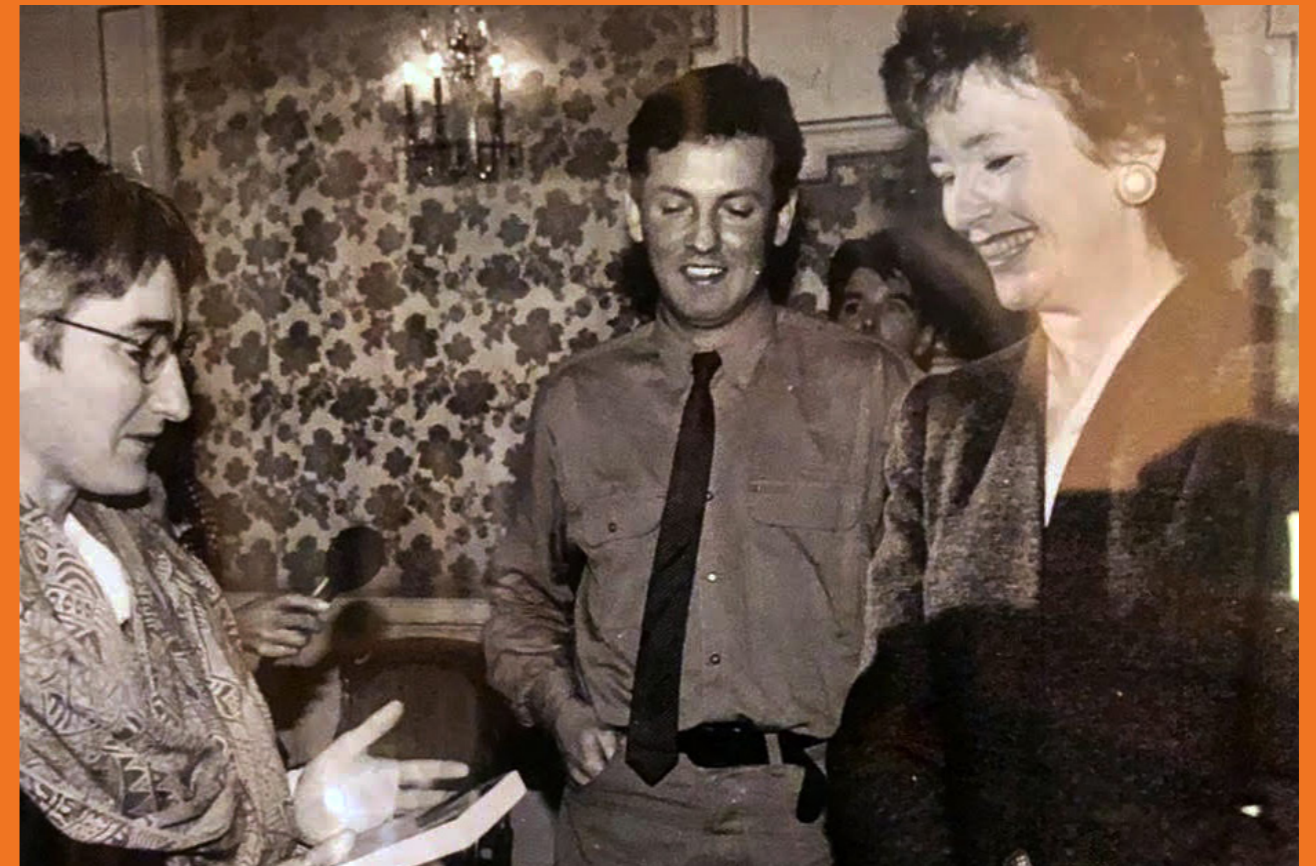
And there was a whole swathe of the community development sector that was connected to the Catholic Church in some way. I think this idea they had that we were trivialising poverty in some way was really just masking a deep prejudice they weren't acknowledging.

Of course, on the "right" you had just huge resistance to it, to any positive recognition of gay people at all. At least here we knew what we were dealing with. And in this environment it was very hard to get the kind of community development funding that was really necessary to support people ..' (Gavrilis p6)

Eoin speaks very movingly about the revelatory nature of the research, 'I remember someone telling me quite emphatically that,

"Well, I've never been discriminated against." But he then mentioned he had never bought a house, saying, "Oh, I couldn't buy a house. I'd have to answer a question about my HIV status'. And suddenly you thought, well, there you go'. (George Gavrilis p5).

Eoin did the great bulk of this innovative research work and subsidised the project with many weeks of unpaid work to ensure that the project was high quality. It was a crucial resource for the lesbian and gay community in making funding proposals etc. for the following decade and more. It was ground-breaking in terms of Ireland, and also internationally as there was no similar research done in other countries. This was the first of many GLEN and Nexus reports where Eoin was a central creator.



Eoin and Ide O'Carroll at the launch of Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland with President Mary Robinson at Áras an Uachtaráin, 1996.



Eoin with Kieran Rose at GLEN report-back meeting, 1992. Photo by Chrisphter Robson.



Below: President Mary Robinson and Eoin Collins at launch of HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community in 1996



Above: President Mary Robinson launch of HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community 1996 in Aras an Uachtarán. Including Christopher Robson, Eoin Collins, Arthur Leahy, Deborah Ballard and Joan Byrne.



Eoin with Kieran and Bill Foley, Pride 1996
Photo by: Christopher Robson Photographic Collection
courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

'Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland, Towards the Twenty-first Century' edited by Eoin and Ide O'Carroll was launched by President Mary Robinson in Áras an Uachtarán in 1996. It is a major cultural production unsurpassed to this day I think, including twenty two articles on a wide range of issues including politics, HIV/AIDS, emigration, the arts, by leading cultural figures such as Mary Dorsey, Emma Donoghue and Eibhear Walsh.

Eoin wrote a lovely short introduction about growing up, being Irish and gay and the difficulties in the 1980s in integrating the two identities, and being an emigrant in London. How his reading about the Bloomsbury group, Berlin 'decadence', Stonewall and Gay Liberation influenced him and led him to think as a young person:

'To be gay was to be urban, intellectual and sophisticated. With all these notions in mind, I went to London to recreate myself in the image of those I had read so much about. However, the GLC had recently been abolished, Clause 28 was about to be introduced .. it was a depressing time to be in Britain: the Welfare State, the trade unions and local democracy were all under attack. In this environment, and faced with the attitudes of some gay men who felt moved to commiserate with me on the backwardness of Ireland, I reacted with anger ..'

Eoin speaks extensively about being gay and being of Ireland in his conversation with George Gavrilis:

'If I was going to be happy I was going to have to reconcile being Irish, being from that background in Lucan, with being gay. But the problem was I had such a strong sense of Ireland being just sort of irredeemably reactionary and bad. So when I came back to live in Dublin, I was determined to kind of rediscover something more positive about my Irish identity. I think I found that in GLEN. (p15)

'So it opened up all of that [Irish] history to me, in a way, and it made me much more at ease about being gay, and gave me huge confidence about being gay. And I think that for me, it's back to those perspectives about hiding - I think sometimes we didn't realise the damage that was done around being hidden, of hiding, of being in the closet.

And this is a total aside now, but I've just been staggered, I've just been reading - I don't know if you

know the J.P. Morgan Library around the corner? .. Belle da Costa Greene was his librarian, who claimed to be of Portuguese descent, but actually was African American. And her father was Richard T. Greene, who was an academic, who'd done his PhD, as it turned out, on the Irish Famine. But Belle da Costa Greene passed as white for years. And a lot of the book is just about some of what that did to her. And as a gay person, it just suddenly struck me as that's exactly what we did, you know? We passed, and you were constantly afraid of exposure. And so that's a long digression back to being back in Ireland, a feeling that one had to embrace everything about yourself in order to be powerful, to do anything about changing things for other people.' (p16)

There was a strong sense of failure in Ireland especially in the 1980s, as Eoin puts it 'everyone in my class in Trinity in '86 emigrated, mainly to London':

'The Irish economy was in such free fall it was just a disaster. There was nothing. I mean, the Careers and Appointments Office was referred to as the Sneers and Disappointments Office [laughter]. And that gives you a sense ... just that there were so little opportunities around. And so, people went with a real sense of a feeling that we were just a failure, our country was just a fiasco. We just were sort of incapable of actually creating conditions that were conducive to living' (p19).

Eoin speaks about how important it was that GLEN saw itself as a part of the broad Left and progressive movement in Ireland:

'That definitely permeated all of GLEN, that strong sense that we were part of a broader political movement rather than a kind of lifestyle issue or something. And I think that was crucial. And not just part of a broader movement, but a broader Irish movement, as well, which I think was very important, that we weren't only part of an international gay movement - I don't mean that disparagingly in any way - but that we were very much part of a strong Irish movement around progress' (p20)

There is an interview in the Visions book with Mary Dorsey the poet and activist from the early 1970s, and Eoin highlights it in his conversation with George Gavrilis:

'It's so evocative. She's asked, well, what was her memory of the 70s, the early 70s? And she said - and it's my memory as well - just grey, and priests and nuns



All photos from 2003 at Kieran Rose's 50th birthday party

Left, Brian Sheehan and Eoin

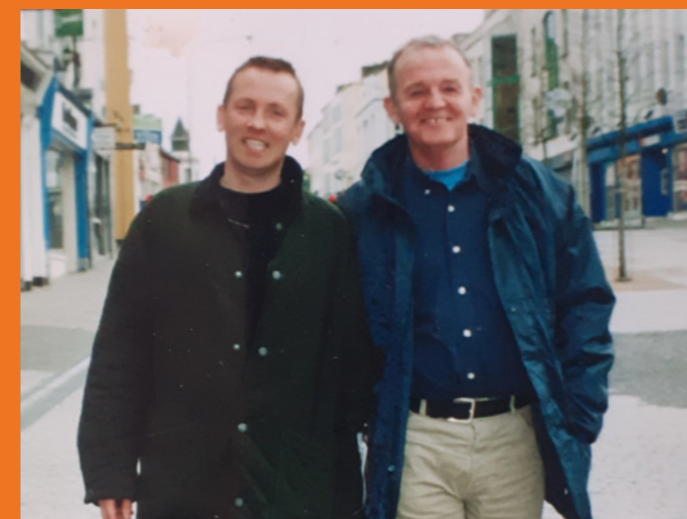


Above and left, Pride 1996, Pride 1997, Christopher Robson Collection, courtesy of National Library of Ireland

Eoin and Paul Kearns



Sally Shovelin, Eoin and Kieran Rose



Eoin in Waterford for an LGBT community development project, 1999, with Arthur Leahy. Photos Kieran Rose.



everywhere [laughs]. That is definitely a memory I think a lot of us have, of that kind of greyness. And the cities, because Ireland was very poor in the early 1970s and Dublin was falling apart. It's hard to explain. Sometimes people used to come to Dublin and think, God, I didn't realise you're still recovering from the war. And it wasn't - it was just so badly maintained, and buildings had been left fall. It was a very bad period. (p13)

Christopher Robson, (he and Eoin were great friends), often spoke of writing about the campaigns he was involved in, sadly Christopher passed away before he got to write the full story, but he at least got to write an article on the GLEN campaign for the 'Visions' book (see www.kieranrose.ie).

HIV/AIDS was still a crisis for gay men in the 1990s, but there was no national focus on the HIV prevention needs of gay men, and no gay men's advocacy group on HIV/AIDS in Ireland since Gay Health Action closed in 1990 because the Department of Health refused to fund its educational work on the basis that homosexuality was criminalised. GLEN decided after gay law reform, that it was vital that there was a renewed focus on HIV prevention for gay men and so it proposed to the Minister for Health Brendan Howlin that GLEN be funded to prepare such a national HIV prevention strategy for gay men.

We met the political advisers to the Minister including Anne Byrne and the funding for the strategic study ensued, much to the annoyance of Department officials who said so to me later.

Eoin played a key role in the development of 'HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community' the GLEN and Nexus report of 1996 which took a very broad view of health promotion and opened the door to ongoing funding by the Department of Health and the Eastern Health Board for gay community initiatives. In the Preface to the report which Eoin co-wrote we said:

'It is now a commonplace in gay communities throughout the world that new initiatives are galvanised by a realisation that people simply cannot accept yet another funeral of a loved friend, dead several decades before his time.'

The report was launched by President Mary Robinson in Áras an Uachtarán and separately by the Labour Minister

of State in the Department of Health Brian O'Shea. Now the report is a very important historical resource for the HIV/AIDS issues and the impoverished state of gay community facilities at the time.

The Strategy report resulted in Department of Health funding for a Project Director to facilitate the implementation of the Strategy and GLEN set up a new organisation Gay HIV Strategies (GHS) to facilitate this work. GHS was an advocacy and development project, it didn't deliver services except as part of a pilot project, and it had no programme budget so it had to work in partnership with other agencies.

Gay HIV Strategies was set up at a meeting in Eoin's apartment overlooking the Quays in Dublin, Eoin is quite funny about how long the meeting went on saying to George Gavrilis in the oral history interview for Atlantic Philanthropies,

'I always remember Chris Robson saying at that meeting, "God, we've been here so long I've seen the rubbish go up the Liffey and back down all the time we have been talking"' (p9).

Nexus generously offered to host this role in their offices in Fumbally Court Dublin 8 and provide administrative services, otherwise the initiative would not have succeeded. I took a career break from Dublin County Council to take on the role of Project Director. Nexus continued to provide office facilities for the subsequent Project Directors of Gay HIV Strategies until c2005 when with Atlantic Philanthropies funding, GLEN was able to rent the entire Nexus offices at Fumbally Court where Taoiseach Bertie Ahern launched the GLEN Strategic Plan in 2006.

The Report and the Department of Health funding also opened the door to another major breakthrough, significant funding from the Eastern Health Board, for the very first time, for a wide range of gay community initiatives that would support HIV prevention, including the Gay Sauna Pilot Project, and support for Outyouth a gay youth project. Pat McLoughlin, a senior manager in the Eastern Health Board (EHB) was a key champion, one of the very few we had at the time in any sector.

Eoin was involved in all these EHB funded projects and co-wrote the preface to the Sauna report which set out the very important role of gay Saunas as safe places for gay men internationally and historically. The Sauna project



Eoin (center) outside Leinster House in 1992 highlighting Government delay on gay law reform.

Also in the photo: Proinsias de Rossa TD, Emmet Stagg TD, Eric Byrne TD, Roger Garland TD, Kieran Rose and Suzy Byrne.

Photo Christopher Robson Photography Collection courtesy of National Library of Ireland



GLEN staff from left, Brian Sheehan, Eoin Collins, Davin Roche, Marie Hamilton, Odhrán Allen, Sandra Irwin Gowran, and Ciaran McKinney in Fumbally Court, Dublin 8, 2007. Photo by Tommy Clancy.



Eoin with Kieran and Aengus O'Snodaigh TD at GLEN report launch, 2007. Photo by Tommy Clancy.



Civil Partnership Act, GLEN and friends after Seanad passed the Bill, 2010. Photo by Karl Hayden



GLEN at Dublin Pride, Eoin with Sandra Irwin-Gowran and Bill Hughes, 2010. Photo by GLEN.



GLEN board and staff with Minister Dermot Ahern signing commencement notices of the Act, 2010. Photo by Tommy Clancey.

was very radical for its time just five years after gay law reform, and according to Eoin it saved lives.

The Waterford Area Partnership and Waterford Regional Youth Services were the only agencies to tackle lesbian and gay issues in a serious way, and engage in a community development project with Gay HIV Strategies and Nexus Research in the late 1990s. Eoin and myself worked on the community empowerment project together, it was a very very difficult process given the levels of prejudice, discrimination and marginalisation gay people experienced in Waterford at the time and the lack of State support. The reality of many people's lives was grim. Eoin and myself joked that we would be better giving everyone a one way ticket out of Waterford and campaigning instead for Civil Marriage so that young LGBT people growing up would at least know they had a positive future ahead of them.

One of the main learnings from the Waterford project that Eoin and myself took was that there was a negative cycle of underdevelopment in place; prejudice and discrimination meant that there were no paid workers to do advocacy work, so our voice was not heard when decisions on policy or funding were being made, and so the discrimination and marginalisation was not challenged, and the negative cycle went on (see Waterford project report on www.eoin-collins.ie).

The need to break the negative cycle of underdevelopment was one of the key recommendations of the NESF report of 2003. The Waterford learning also fed into the sense of urgency and ambition for radical change in the immediate term in GLEN's later Strategic Plan 'Building Sustainable Change' when GLEN had major and unprecedented funding from Atlantic Philanthropies to deliver fundamental and sustainable change. We saw the Atlantic funding as a golden 'once-off' opportunity, as a 'booster rocket' to lift us out of the negative cycle. To emphasize this sense of urgency we (rashly) said the objective of GLEN was to put itself out of business as soon as possible.

The activities of GLEN can be divided into three phases: Phase One is from its foundation in 1988 to 1993 when an equality-based gay law reform and inclusion of sexual orientation in the Unfair Dismissals Act was achieved; Phase Two from about 1994 to 2004; and Phase Three from 2005 with major Atlantic Philanthropies funding. Eoin was a crucial and continuous GLEN activist over all

these years, indeed for the latter part of the 1990s GLEN was just Eoin, Christopher Robson, myself and Arthur Leahy in Cork.

The later 1990s and early 2000s saw fundamental progress for LGBT people with the enactment of Equality legislation and the setting up of the Equality Authority, key objectives of GLEN and the Campaign for Equality which GLEN set up in 1991. As Eoin says:

'there were lots of exciting things happening ... it was a very exciting time ..' (Gavrilis p7).

In other ways it was a lean period for LGBT progress, LGBT groups did not receive the State funding or representation on public bodies that other communities received. LGBT students in schools were ignored. Eithne Fitzgerald, a Labour Minister of State refused point-blank to give the LGBT community any representation on the NESF. There was a major setback in 2004 when the Civil Registration Bill was amended when it was going through the Dail so as to define marriage as between a man and a woman, later to be used as a key reason by the Judge in the High Court to reject the Zappone Gilligan Constitutional case.

However, despite all the obstacles and lack of support, Eoin was incredibly productive during this period in doing a series of ground-breaking project reports on a wide range of LGBT issues including education, mental health, Transsexual health, international best practice, professional training for youth workers (as well as the Visions book and reports on Poverty, HIV Prevention etc outlined above). These reports by Eoin were not academic studies but were designed to achieve change, a form of action-research, for example the Mental Health report of 2004 resulted in immediate Health Board funding for a part-time strategy worker. In the Transsexual report Eoin said, 'once I met the Trans people I was determined to do the best piece of research possible' (Gavrilis, p12).

As Eoin put it:

'we all took the work very seriously. All the focus of our type of research and policy work has always been on getting something done. I think academics have a greater freedom to, you know, interrogate the blah blah blah and all of this, and it's great - and has its role. But we had a very strong, urgent role to actually deliver for people' (Barron p14)

GLEN/GHS strongly took the line that State and other mainstream agencies must deliver appropriate, accessible and effective services to LGBT people, and while LGBT-specific community services had an important role, the primary responsibility was on the State to deliver proper services to LGBT people. That is what those reports Eoin wrote were about, showing how in a particular context such as Education or Mental Health or Youth services etc, what the particular LGBT issues were, and what the mainstream service could do to deliver a LGBT-friendly and supportive service.

These reports by Eoin laid the essential foundations for the rapid and transformational change GLEN was able to make with Atlantic funding.

The research that Eoin did in the 1990s and early 2000s was almost always the only research available on LGBT issues in Ireland and provided the essential evidence for the Equality Authority and NESF working groups on LGBT issues. Eoin was on both working groups and contributed with his usual persuasiveness and intellectual heft.

As part of the NESF process, various Government Departments and agencies were invited in to discuss what they were doing on LGBT issues and Eoin is very interesting on how dismissive many of them were of the process and LGBT issues:

'at the time, all these departments came in and just said, "Well, what's this got to do with us?" Again, it was considered, I think, trivial. It was just trivial to people. So you would have the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment .. and we'd be talking about, "Well, the issue of employment discrimination, is that an issue for you as a department of employment?" They never thought of it. It doesn't exist, or it's just something they thought was irrelevant to their operations' (Gavrilis p8).

In many ways, GLEN in Phase Three was an implementation of the recommendations of previous reports by Eoin, and the Equality Authority and NESF reports.

Schools were one of the key areas for progress identified by Eoin and GLEN/Gay HIV Strategies, as Eoin put it:

'it was very, very hard to get [the Department of] Education to acknowledge that there was any problem at

all in schools, or that they had any role, even, in creating environments where bullying wasn't an issue. And through the Combat Poverty research, and through our own personal experiences, we knew that education was really where it was at - that schools were so toxic for gay people at such a vulnerable time in our lives. And then, we met up with Atlantic ...' (Gavrilis p9).

Around 1999 a secretive group Tara Consultants (later to become Atlantic Philanthropies) approached Eoin and myself and said they would like to fund GLEN. They said that they did not accept unsolicited funding from groups but identified groups they would like to fund and approached them: a tribute to the reputation of GLEN. We met in the Nexus offices, and as Eoin put it:

'And they came in and met us. And they said they wanted to give us money. And we, I think we thought they were the Moonies or something, and they were saying how much did we need? And we thought, oh my God, this is - it was unprecedented, really. So I think what happened was we just said, "Okay, let's start off with something very immediate". And what we did is we got money then for us to do a study on education, called "Education: Lesbians and Gay Men" .. it was published in 2000' (Gavrilis p10).

In later years senior Atlantic Philanthropies people like Colin McCrea often expressed their amusement that we thought that Tara Consultants were like the Moonies cult because they were so secretive.

Eoin recalls the 'hostility' Sheila Terry got when she launched the limited Fine Gael policy on civil partnership in 2004:

'My god. A lot of journalists, and it was such a limited measure that the hostility being that this was an attack on marriage blah blah blah, it's hard to believe that level of vitriol against a very minimal step forward' (Mullally p1).

Eoin and Josep were interviewed by RTE TV news about the Fine Gael 2004 civil partnership policy.

Eoin describes how it was 'fantastic' to be able to work full time as paid Director of Policy Change for GLEN with Atlantic funding and implement all the lessons he learnt over the previous twenty or more years (Gavrilis p1-21).

Following a series of meetings in 2005 between the Minister for Justice and Equality Michael McDowell and GLEN where GLEN made the case for Civil Marriage and other initiatives to deliver progress for LGBT people, in February 2006 the Minister established 'The Working Group on Domestic Partnership' chaired by Anne Colley. Eoin was the GLEN and only LGBT representative on the Working Group, the group met 22 times over 9 months. Eoin had a huge sense of responsibility to get the group to go beyond its remit of Domestic Partnership. Eoin was very successful in persuading the Colley Group of mostly senior Civil Servants to recommend Civil Marriage and if Civil Marriage was Constitutionally vulnerable, full Civil Partnership.

This was the breakthrough that led to all the subsequent progress such as the Labour Party Civil Unions Bill, the marriage-like Civil Partnership Act of 2010, and the success of the Civil Marriage Constitutional Referendum in 2015. Anne Colley and Eilis Barry the Equality Authority representative on the Group paid fulsome tribute to the pivotal role of Eoin on the group (see tribute section of www.eoin-collins.ie):

'I will always remember him as someone very special, honest, quietly spoken but steely determined to keep the focus on the principle of equality, and a gentle persuader, a great colleague'
Anne Colley

Persuading the Colley Group to go way beyond its remit and recommend Civil Marriage is Eoin's single greatest achievement of many. Eoin speaks of the great sense of responsibility he felt:

'The sheer sense of responsibility of getting a result that would first of all, not set things back, but obviously, hugely, that would really, really have framed things for the future. I put a lot of energy into it. And one of those was the responsibility - there was no other lesbian or gay group represented. But the way I had approached it was with just a strong sense of what we wanted, which was to say marriage is what we wanted. And that's what I went for, to make sure that - and I think at the time - it's hard to explain, but there were criticisms from the left and the right around our pursuit of marriage ... marriage was just sort of a patriarchal institution, why would we want to be part of it .. (Gavrilis p29)

Eoin managed to clarify and simplify what were seen then

as complex issues, and convinced the Group to consider three types of relationships and their legal recognition; opposite sex relationships, same sex relationships, and non-conjugal relationships. As Eoin said in his interview with George Gavrilis (p33),

'Dividing those three things was absolutely important - I think if I had a contribution, that was it, because it cut through so much. It was a great strategic way of cutting out all the noise around marriage.'

The rights of children was another important area of Eoin's work on Colley:

'I prepared a paper for the group working with Linc in Cork, Angela O'Connell, a paper on children of same-sex parents, so what we were trying to do there was get some kind of provision for children into it. We succeeded actually in getting a commitment to adoption, joint adoption. Marriage then got in as the equality option.' (Mulally p3).

Not surprisingly this huge sense of responsibility to deliver radical progress for LGBT people and to overcome all the obstacles took its toll on Eoin, in response to a question from George Gavrilis 'Was that difficult?', Eoin replied,

'It was difficult. And I don't mind saying this: I developed insomnia at that stage that I have never, ever cured' (P28).

2006 was a hectic year for Eoin, he also gave a keynote address, 'High Ambitions: Benchmarking Ourselves Against the Best' on Civil Marriage and other issues at the major conference on legal recognition of same-sex relationships in May, organised by the Department of Justice and Equality, GLEN, and the Equality Authority.

Speaking of the great progress Ireland had made in recent decades and the reluctance of some commentators to accept the reality of this progress, Eoin asked was this reluctance due to:

'The psychological overhang of failure in the past; the sense that we were incapable or undeserving of success'

Eoin goes on to say that now people in Ireland talk 'of ambition and getting to the next level rather than



Eoin, Minister Dermot Ahern TD and Josep Adalla at signing of commencement notices for Civil Partnership Act December 2010. Photo: Karl Hayden



Eoin getting up to give his talk at the 2006 conference on the legal status of same sex couples Michael McDowell TD Minister for Justice and Equality, and Niall Crowley CEO of the Equality Authority, at a conference organised by the Working Group on Domestic Partnership, GLEN, and the Equality Authority. Photo: Derek Speirs

reverting to past decline'. Eoin refers to the great progress made for lesbians and gay men, a gay law reform based on equality, Equality legislation that put us to the forefront internationally, and Ireland ensuring that sexual orientation was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam. Eoin goes on to say:

'This progress has hugely raised the expectations of gay people for their lives. There is a whole new generation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people who expect to be able to live and work in Ireland, where being gay is no barrier to advancement. They expect to be able to meet others, to have fun, to fall in love and, if they choose, to settle down and get married to the person they love and establish a family. Indeed many lesbians and gay men already take on the duties of care to partners and children, despite the lack of legal protection or recognition'.

The speech of the Minister for Justice Michael McDowell opening the conference was disrupted by right-wing protesters: 'All these guys from the Ancient Order of Hibernians all were throwing copies of the Constitution up at us. So it was kind of scary that bit!'. (Mullally p2 and Irish Independent 27.5.2006).

'The real thing we were trying to do in Colley and through that Conference was to get marriage on the agenda' (Mullally p2).

Eoin was centrally involved in developing the GLEN Strategic Plan 'Building Sustainable Change' which set out its ambitious intent with significant Atlantic Philanthropies funding as follows:

'The goal of the programme is not about managing our marginalisation, but abolishing it, and therefore making GLEN redundant in the shortest time possible. The Building Sustainable Change programme is ambitious for Ireland and ambitious for our communities. It aims towards a society where being gay is unremarkable; where people can aspire to be openly gay as Taoiseach, CEO, teacher, nurse, construction worker or any occupation they choose. It works towards a society where a young gay or lesbian person can come to terms with their sexuality, confident of support from their family, friends, school and society at large. It seeks to ensure that LGB people can form their own relationships and families and have these recognized on an equal basis with others'.

Eoin was centrally involved in getting An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern to launch the GLEN Strategic Plan in the GLEN offices in Fumbally Court in June 2006 when An Taoiseach gave a detailed and powerful speech with strong Governmental commitments to progress for LGBT people including:

'Our sexual orientation is not an incidental attribute. It is an essential part of who and what we are. Sexual orientation cannot, and must not be the basis for a second-class citizenship. Our laws have changed, and will continue to change, to reflect this principle' Taoiseach Bertie Ahern TD, 2006

This was an international first, the first time that any Prime Minister gave a speech to a lesbian and gay advocacy group. Civil Servants later told us that this speech opened the possibility of progress across Government. As Eoin put it:

'I remember on the Colley Group, the statement that Bertie Ahern made when he opened the GLEN office, that lesbian and gay people were equal. That was hugely helpful to them in the civil service, it gave them a kind of permission' (Barron p15).

The Taoiseach's visit and speech is an example of GLEN ambitions for radical and early change, a 'big bang' approach, putting LGBT people at the heart of Irish society. There was wide media coverage.

In November 2006 the Colley Group report was published and proposed just two options for recognition of same-sex couples: marriage and full Civil Partnership. The Group highlighted access to Civil Marriage as the option that would:

'achieve equality of status with opposite sex couples and such recognition that would underpin a wider equality for lesbian and gay people'

Also in 2006 Eoin and GLEN met Brendan Howlin who said that the Labour Party believed that Civil Marriage would be contrary to the Constitution but that they had a marriage-like Civil Unions Bill based on the Colley Group report, and asked for our support. We got the sense that if we did not support the Labour Bill they might not proceed with it, in any case we readily gave our support as it was a fundamental step forward. In December 2006

the Zappone and Gilligan case lost in the High Court.

'The Labour Party was amazing. I would recommend you read some of the speeches in 2007 by Pat Rabbite, the then leader, Michael D Higgins who's now President - such powerful speeches. Pat Rabbite talked about the Martin Luther King one, "the fierce urgency of now", the idea that we just need to get something comprehensive through' (Gavrilis p37).

The Explanatory Memorandum to the Labour Party Civil Unions Bill notes that it accords with the analysis of the Colley Group report, and Pat Rabbite constantly referred to the Colley Group report in his speech to the Dail.

Pat Rabbite said that the Civil Unions Bill: 'Is about equality. It would offer same-sex couples the greatest measure of equality possible under the Constitution. It would offer same-sex couples access to a status relationship similar to marriage in every practical way'

Eoin noted that: 'interestingly at that time there was no division in the lesbian and gay community at that point as the galleries were packed' (Mulally p4).

The other proposal GLEN put to Minister McDowell at the meetings in 2005 was that GLEN be funded for a liaison person to work with Department of Justice and Equality officials across all Government Departments to implement the recommendations of the 2003 NESF report. The liaison role was itself a NESF recommendation, GLEN got 100,000 euro per annum for three years, and Eoin as Director of Policy Change for GLEN took on the paid liaison role (see George Gavrilis pp64 to 67).

One of Eoin's other major personal achievements was convincing Minister Brian Lenihan, who he knew personally from Lucan, not to await a decision of the appeal to the Supreme Court in the Zappone/Gilligan case before preparing Civil Partnership legislation as was set out in the Programme for Government, but to proceed immediately to drafting the Civil Partnership legislation. Minister Brian Lenihan gave this commitment to immediate drafting of the Civil Partnership Bill in his speech at the launch of the GLEN Annual Report in 2007. As Eoin said to George Gavrilis, 'And that was terrific for us'. (Gavrilis pp39 to 41).

The Civil Partnership Heads of Bill were published in

June 2008 and Eoin wrote an opinion piece in the Irish Times on the 26th June:

'While set out in the dry language of statutes, this Bill is about relationships of love, mutual care and commitment and extending out legal recognition and supports to those who are in these relationships'.

'Bertie Ahern as Taoiseach spoke eloquently of the critical psychological milestones in the development of a more confident, open and dynamic Ireland. This Bill is another critical psychological milestone.'

There was strident opposition to the Civil Partnership legislation from the Catholic Church and the lay Right because the proposed legislation was too close to Civil Marriage. There were serious attempts in Fianna Fáil to derail the legislation, and there was opposition in Fine Gael.

Meanwhile Marriage Equality, Katherine Zappone, David Norris and the LGBT group Noise were carrying on a campaign to stop Civil Partnership because it was not Civil Marriage.

However, we believed that there were huge numbers of LGBT people and groups throughout Ireland who were supporters of Civil Partnership because of its immediate benefits whose voices were not being heard and whose interests we had a duty to advocate for.

Given the vocal opposition from two different sides, there was a danger that the Government would decide 'we are in a no win situation here' and quietly drop the Civil Partnership Bill, especially given the overwhelming pressures on the Government, at a time of 'national crisis', as Eoin put it:

'There was huge anger at the Government about the economy, which was now in freefall, and about the budget announced earlier which was one of the most drastic in Irish history' (Gavrilis p55).

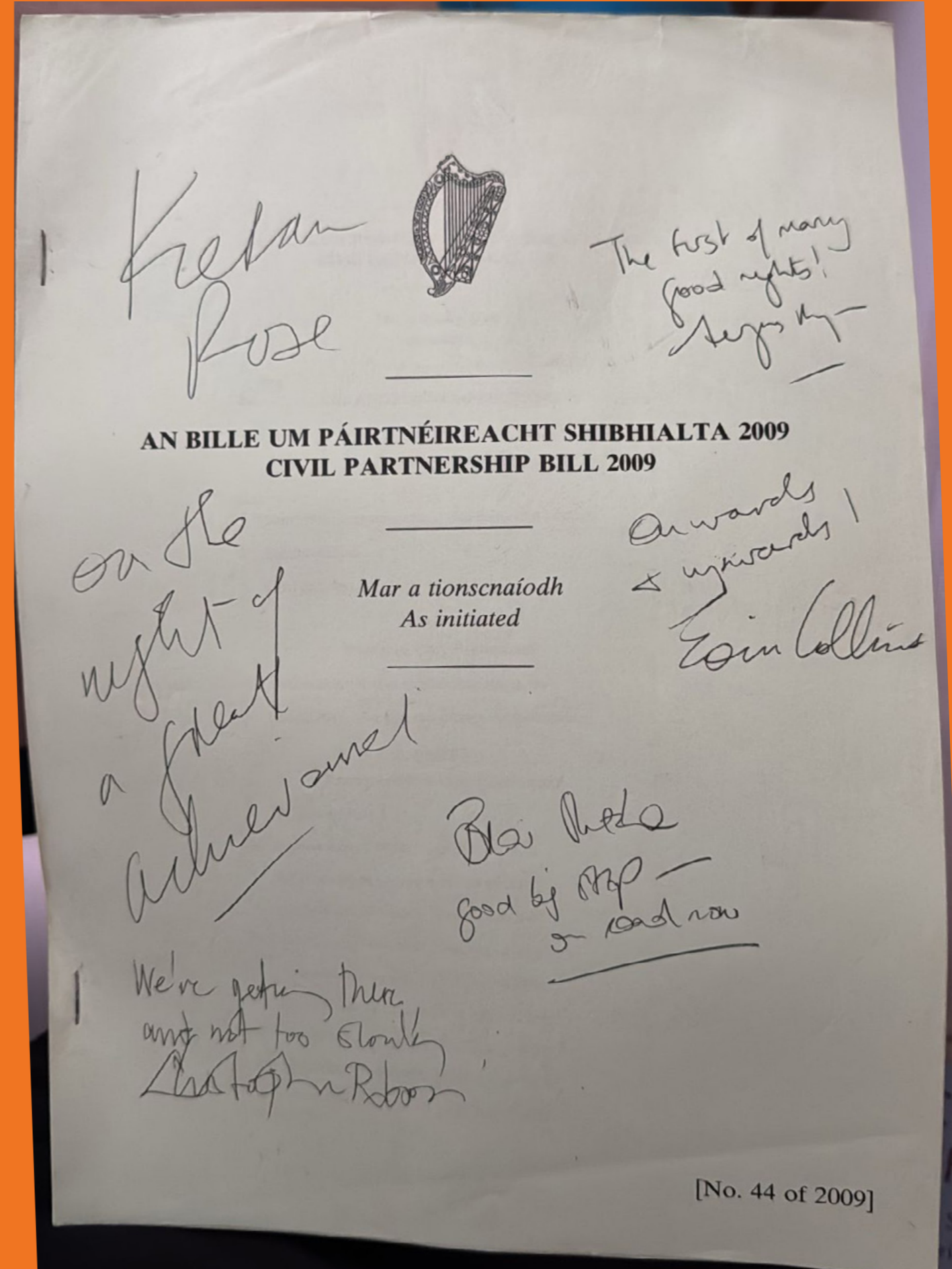
Dermot Ahern Minister for Justice and Equality was due to launch the GLEN Annual Report in the Royal College of Physicians on Kildare Street in October 2008 but there was a huge demonstration by pensioners outside the Dail so Sean Alyward Secretary General of the Department had to give the Minister's speech instead, where he reaffirmed the Minister's commitment to an equality-based Civil



Eoin with Brian Lenihan TD Minister for Justice and Equality and Anne Colley former chair of the Working Group on Domestic Partnership at the 2007 launch of the GLEN Annual Report, where the Minister announced plans to introduce Civil Partnership legislation without waiting for the Zappone Gilligan appeal.



Eoin Collins and husband Josep Adalla



Civil Partnership Bill signed by Eoin Collins, Christopher Robson, Brian Sheehan, Kieran Rose, and Fergus Ryan on the night the Dáil passed the Bill.
Photo: Karl Hayden

Partnership.

Dropping the Bill would have left many hundreds of couples with no legal solutions to their urgent problems such as immigration, or health care, etc. So GLEN stepped up its advocacy for marriage-like Civil Partnership as a legal solution to urgent needs and a key stepping-stone to Civil Marriage, as Eoin said, 'We held our nerve' despite the vitriolic attacks (George Gavrilis p87).

We were used to attacks from the Right but we had never been subjected to a campaign of misrepresentation and vilification from some LGBT groups like Marriage Equality and Noise and individuals like David Norris and Niall Crowley. Eoin made the case to a leading figure of the 'Marriage or nothing' approach that Civil Partnership would deliver immediate solutions for example for couples who were at risk of being split up because of the lack of immigration rights. The leading figure replied that 'hard cases make bad law', this was the approach of the Catholic Church in opposing contraception, divorce, abortion and other human rights.

The 'marriage or nothing' stance was like a form of religious zealotry, as Eoin put it if you questioned that 'evangelical' (Gavrilis p58) approach:

'well you're not- it's sort of like born again. You're damned. You're not fully embracing marriage' (Gavrilis p76 and 77).

There was a manic level of hostility to Civil Partnership as Eoin recalls one person, a senior public servant, at a meeting on Civil Partnership with the Green Party leader John Gormley in Government buildings saying:

'tell me Minister what can we do to embarrass you sufficiently to get marriage into the programme for government'

If you questioned the efficacy of the Constitutional court case route to Marriage you were seen as Eoin put it as being 'sacrilegious' (Gavrilis p40). 'It became that it just was unacceptable to criticise it or even ask if it was going to win or not' (Mullally p7).

In conversation with Michael Barron puts these issues in a broader context:

'I suppose there are two separate things. People who

think they are so moral, by just focusing on high principle and will never compromise, but never compromising can actually mean totally compromising and not delivering at all for people.

So, you have to tell somebody, a young person or whoever, that you haven't delivered for them because of some higher principle. And they'll say, yeah, that's fine, but you know, when will my issue be dealt with? So I think that's where we are all engaged. It's the challenges of serious politics. Of serious social change, where people are really interested in and focused, on actually delivering. I think that's where true courage lies in a way, because people are lambasted.' (p17)

The full Civil Partnership Bill was published in June 2009 and Eoin wrote an opinion piece for the Irish Times on 29th June saying:

'Today there are 1,000s of lesbian and gay couples living in committed and loving relationships all over Ireland

Civil Partnership is a historic reform that will quickly deliver positive, concrete change in the lives of many people'

It was a very difficult time especially for Eoin and the other full time staff in GLEN: 'It was definitely very hard, personally, I found it hard to deal with.'

'I remember when the Bill was torn up at the famous Pride. That was the only time I felt actually threatened at a lesbian and gay event'

(Mullally p7)

Speaking with Una Mulally Eoin describes the work progressing Civil Partnership:

'It was just such a long incredibly intense campaign .. the night we were going into the Dail in 2009 with this woman screaming over at us, holding up her child saying "tell my child he's a second class citizen", and I remember that being dreadful, but anyway, there you go' (Mullally p10).

But when the Civil Partnership Bill was passed in 2010 Eoin had a great sense of achievement and joy that vulnerable couples now had immediate legal solutions, as Eoin put it in his interview with Una Mulally:

'... when the Act had got through, suddenly lots of things did start happening. Immigration for example brought out their regulations .. and then suddenly everyone who had these problems all started getting their visas which was to me incredibly moving.

I remember this Filipino woman who was a nurse in the Mater. She'd been in Ireland five years and her partner couldn't even visit her because they were afraid it would be considered immigration intent. She hadn't seen her partner for a few years, she couldn't afford to go back. And as a result, her partner could come over to Ireland. The two of them got a Civil Partnership, we were at it in Capel Street, and her partner could live and work in Ireland.' (Mullally p9).

Describing the wedding celebration on Capel Street Eoin said:

'And there was such incredible joy there' (Gavrilis p70)

There is a photo of a delighted Eoin holding a People of the Year Award in 2010 and the citation is:

'For its persuasiveness and ability to hold its nerve in the pursuit of its goals and for its relentless work in enabling Irish people to move closer to a society that respects all of its citizens equally, GLEN receives a People of the Year Award'

Around this time Eoin, who had a Masters in Economics, and myself were developing the GLEN national economic case for diversity and equality which was ground-breaking at the time. This made the case that principles of equality and diversity, as well as being essential in their own right, also had national economic benefits in terms of; supporting innovation, job creation and prosperity, attracting international investment, tourists and international students. This resulted in a joint 2011 GLEN and Dublin City Council project on these issues funded by the Equality Authority and the European Union. This economic case is very much an example of how Eoin saw GLEN and LGBT issues as central to the debate about the future of Irish society and its economy.

The economic case for diversity and equality laid the basis for the business sector support the Yes Equality referendum campaign launched by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny in April 2015 at an event in the Digital Hub Dublin 8 jointly organised by GLEN and Business for Yes (see

articles in Silicon Republic 16th April and 1st May 2015 www.siliconrepublic.com). Martin Shanahan CEO of the IDA also expressed support for a Yes vote saying it would improve Ireland's international image and attractiveness, using the case made by Eoin (see www.journal.ie 1st May 2015).

In 2011, Eoin moved to New York to be with his partner and later husband Josep Adalla. Eoin speaks very movingly about Josep in his interview with George Gavrilis. How in 2004 they were both interviewed on RTE TV News about the Fine Gael Civil Partnership policy document. How as a Filipino, Josep couldn't get immigration status in Ireland, couldn't work as a Nurse, was stopped at the border, detained at Cavan Garda station. In 2005 Josep got offered a job in the US and moved there. In 2008 when Eoin's father died Josep came back for the funeral, but 'he was stuck at Dublin Airport; they weren't going to let him through'. As Eoin says to George Gavrilis:

'Unfortunately Civil Partnership came in too late for us in a sense. If it had come in earlier, Josep would have gotten a job in Ireland. We might be living in Ireland instead of me living in New York. It would have been a very different situation. So it was very hard. Those kind of things matter an awful lot. For me again, the personal bit to it is that in 2008 when the Bill was published, my father had been diagnosed with lung cancer. The last meal ever I had with him outside was when he had arranged a dinner out to celebrate that. He was so thrilled that Josep then might come back from America. And then he died. (pp71 and 72).

Eoin was always struck by the great irony that he and Josep had far far fewer rights under New York State 'marriage' legislation (which did not include Federal rights), compared to the marriage-like rights they would have under Irish Civil Partnership law.

'I remember one woman who I had worked with, and got her American partner into Ireland to work and live with her. And when I was coming here, New York marriage had just been enacted - way before Federal recognition. And she said to me, "You know, it's great for you going over there. At least you have equality over there, not a dog's license here". And like I was, "New York marriage is a dog license. Doesn't cover any of the things that are critical to your life and which are in Irish Civil Partnership. It doesn't cover immigration, social security,

pensions. It doesn't cover Federal tax". It was lacking in so much' (Gavrilis p74).

In his conversation with Una Mulally, Eoin describes how Civil Partnership and the wedding celebrations throughout the country 'actually increased the momentum for marriage':

'I think as a result of all those Civil Partnerships across the country, I mean I had been at two of them, one must have had 800 people at it, older people and whatever. The impact of this it's like when you take just one couple who do this civil partnership, how many people have they invited to take their relationship seriously? Your work, your family, your friends, and in your neighbourhood. It's like all these little bombs going off all over the country. Happy bombs!' (Mullally, p10).

There was no let-up in the campaign against Civil Partnership, Marriage Equality published a report 'Missing Pieces' on what they saw as the many differences between marriage and Civil Partnership. Besides being mean-spirited to those celebrating their Civil Partnerships it was also misleading and strategically counterproductive, as Eoin put it:

'It was better to emphasise how close Civil Partnership is to marriage in order to get marriage than to emphasise the differences ... I think it was much better to say, which I think is true, is that the Oireachtas legislated for as close to equality as they could get under the Constitution, rather than to say that the Oireachtas deliberately legislated for inequality. I don't see the rationale for arguing the second one. Or I don't know how that would bring us closer to marriage (Mullally p10).

A senior figure in Marriage Equality later admitted that their report was just propaganda and happily they gave up on this approach during the Constitutional Referendum campaign.

In 2011 Eoin moved to the United States to be with his partner Josep Adalla, and they later settled in Manhattan New York. In 2016 they married when Federal marriage became possible in the US.

Eoin continued to be involved closely in GLEN as a consultant and advisor including coming to Dublin and preparing a Theory of Change Strategy for LGBT progress for discussion with the Department of Justice and

Equality. Eoin also drafted the GLEN submission to the Constitutional Convention on Marriage, 'The Remarkable Journey towards Equality and Civil Marriage for Lesbian and Gay People in Ireland'. Eoin was always available for wise advice.

Eoin was a key architect of the GLEN strategy for winning a Constitutional Referendum and this was later adopted by the wider Yes Equality campaign. On winning a majority of people, Eoin said:

'I suppose our one was never needlessly provoke, in a way. Our view was we engaged with what you might call the big, moveable middle. People who didn't understand maybe gay issues, but weren't hostile to them at all. And so that's the people we sought to win over, including through public representatives. We didn't really go and have big debates with the Right to be honest even though I must admit it was terribly tempting at times, because we just felt what we should do is really just concentrate on winning over the moveable middle (Mullally p8).

In his 2019 conversation with Michael Barron, Eoin reflected on all the changes that had taken place over his decades of political activism:

'A lot of gay people I know as well kept their head down, stayed in the closet and just continued to build a career. It never occurred to me to have a career. People forget that it was impossible to live in Ireland and to be out and live in main stream in the mainstream of society. You had to completely explode it in a way and that was exciting and we all did so much. I'm seeing people now in Ireland who are totally out of the closet and I remember them years ago and one is a High Court judge and it's great for them. But they didn't help when we needed it and they wouldn't be where they are now if they did' (Barron p18).

George Gavrilis asked Eoin about the impact of Atlantic Philanthropies funding and Eoin reflects on that and the drivers of history and progress:

'I think gay rights would have proceeded without Atlantic, clearly, but not as quickly. I think it has been hugely, hugely important ... one was staff ... and a kind of professionalism .. having the time to read - that was just enormous. That was invaluable. And Atlantic was great because they left us alone; they trusted us .. that

we did know what we were doing. And it was clear that we were making progress on our theory of change, as you like. It was clear that we were making progress. .. Have you read the Breda O'Brien article? ... How important are individuals in history? And are they important, or is it all some sort of system thing? Or is it, you know, things would have happened anyway, it's just the forces of history are for you? But I'm between that, and I think individuals do make a great kind of difference. And even the force of history can be behind you, but you're stuck. It can happen. You can have the wrong approach. You can get it wrong.' (Gavrilis p85-86)

In New York, Eoin was a Director of ActKnowledge based in CUNY and also a Director of the Center for the Theory of Change, reflecting his life-long interest in how to make radical change happen most effectively:

'And that's why I'm Director of the Center for Theory of Change here. I'm really interested in how you get change: what is your strategy, do you think that will work? What are the conditions necessary for you to get where you want to go? What are you doing, will it influence those conditions?' (Gavrilis p76).

In New York Eoin did reports on a wide range of issues internationally especially on the needs of children (see George Gavrilis pp82 and 83). In 2018 Eoin set up Collins Strategies and returned to his great interest in cities with a report on the Theory of Change and Urban Planning for the City of Philadelphia. Eoin was delighted to begin work on a number of projects with Rethink Ireland and Michael Barron (see Eoin's www.Linkedin.com).

In 2021 Eoin did an Assessment of the Historic Importance of 311 East Broadway for the Lower East Side Preservation Initiative www.lespiwww.lespi-Nyc.org. Eoin celebrated New York in his great photos of Manhattan on his Facebook.

Eoin's 'Favourite Things' (2021) is a wonderful celebration of Eoin's love of life and culture; painters, literature, music, food, films, cities, museums, and everything else, a result of discussions with friends in New York, see www.eoin-collins.ie

In 2022 the LGBT Restorative Justice Campaign was set up to advocate for Disregard legislation for all those who were arrested, prosecuted, convicted, imprisoned for consenting sexual relationships with another man, before

gay law reform in 1993, and for other reparations for the wider damage done by criminalization in Ireland. It is fitting that the iconic photograph of a delighted Eoin on the 1993 Dublin Pride Parade celebrating gay law reform, a campaign he was centrally involved in, is highlighted in the campaign material (www.lgbtdisregard.ie)

Speaking to Una Mulally in 2014, Eoin recalls all the momentous progress for LGBT people that he had been so pivotally involved in:

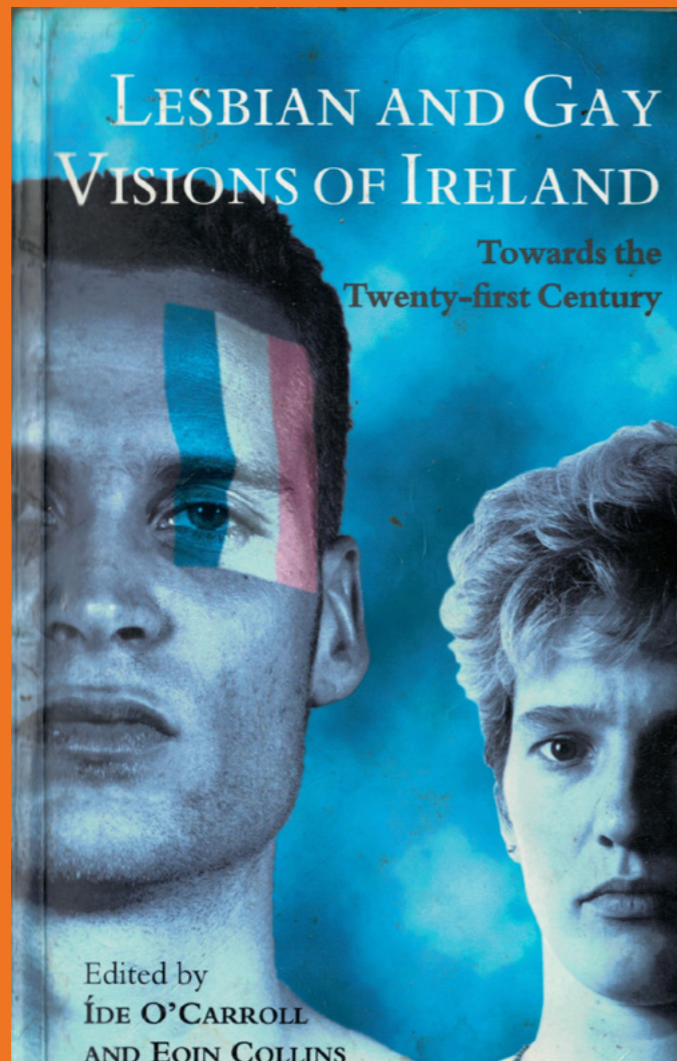
'I remember the Pride in 1992 and myself and Proinsias de Rossa, Kieran Rose were walking on it and I remember it seemed big at the time, and the one next year where we could all fit in literally into the courtyard of the Central Bank plaza. But we felt huge. And now seeing Pride where it's so ginormous. That's one thing I want to get across: it's amazing how quickly things have changed .. it's extraordinary' ... (Mullally p11).

George Gavrilis concludes his interview asking if we took Eoin and GLEN 'out of the picture, would Ireland have a Civil Partnership Bill in 2010? And Eoin responds:

'[laughs] I'm not sure. Who knows? Maybe not - I don't think so, because who else was advocating for it? [laughs] We were very strong, I think. We held our nerve. We didn't give in. But you know, I think progress would happen; I just don't think what [did go] through would have gone through. Yes, I don't think so.

Gavrilis: Well, that's a powerful end to the oral history, I think.

Collins: Thank you very much. [laughs]'



Cover of Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty-first Century, edited by Íde O'Carroll and Eoin Collins

Being Irish and Gay

From the introduction to Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty-first Century.

When I was growing up my first positive sense of what it might mean to be gay came from studying economics in school, when one of our more progressive teachers told us that John Maynard Keynes had had a relationship with a man. I almost hit the floor with excitement, and with assistance from the teacher, who was probably surprised by my sudden interest, began to read about Keynes and his association with The Bloomsbury Group. From this point on, my reference points for 'gayness' were to be British and American: Bloomsbury, Berlin decadence and, eventually, Stonewall and Gay Liberation. To be gay was to be urban, intellectual, and sophisticated.

With all these notions in mind, I went to London in 1987 to recreate myself in the image of those I had read so much about. However, the GLC had recently been abolished, Clause 28 was about to be introduced and most of the people I worked with talked of the escalating price of property and the profits to be made in buying shares in the recently privatised British Gas. It was a depressing time to be in Britain, the Welfare State, the trade unions and local democracy were all under attack. In this environment and faced with attitudes of some gay men who felt moved to commiserate with me on the backwardness of Ireland, I reacted with anger. I found myself defending the Catholic Church on the basis that it, unlike Margaret Thatcher, believed in 'society' and the concept of the common good. I took great offence at the notion that we were 'priest ridden' or almost physically reactionary and conservative. In argument, I pointed out that in the town I come from people identified strongly with the Catholic Church, but many remembered the times when Catholics could not obtain loans from the local bank and worked for low pay in the local mill without any possibility of advancement. That such people could simply be dismissed as unreconstructed bigots seemed inaccurate and unfair.

Some time after returning to Ireland I attended a debate at University College Dublin. My memory of the motion is impressionistic and went something like; 'Lesbians and gay men deserve equal rights in the new Ireland'. The first speaker was a rather crude and silly homophobe who presented a particularly nauseating

case against the motion. I was sitting in the audience, aching to express my anger and hurt. Then Kieran Rose moved to the podium and calmly dismissed the motion, refusing to debate about rights which he believed were inalienable and self evident. Instead, he talked about what the lesbian and gay community was doing in Ireland, the years of activism, the progress made in redressing prejudice, the strength of the community and its contribution to Irish society. His only concession to what the first speaker had said was that the views she had expressed would find little favour among the people of Ireland who, with a renewed confidence, were rediscovering and embracing more progressive parts of their political and cultural heritage.

I relate these experiences because they explain why I have found working on Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland so exciting. Many of the contributors, whether they know it or not, have had a profound impact on my life and have enabled me to reconcile my identity as Irish and gay in a way which makes me proud of both. It is my belief that the tremendous fondness for our community which comes through in all contributions has been key to the changes that have taken place for our community in Ireland. Long may the change continue!

- Eoin Collins

DOUBLE DISADVANTAGE

Poverty and the lesbian & gay community

EOIN COLLINS

Prejudice and discrimination against gays and lesbians and the need for action to counter it, has officially been recognised in government policy for almost six years now and legislation decriminalising homosexuality has been in place for almost 18 months. However, despite the considerable progress made in addressing the issue of discrimination at this level, the reality for many lesbians and gay men is very often one of fear of disclosure in a climate of prejudice and hostility. This has serious practical effects for individual lesbians and gay men, narrowing employment opportunities in the context of high unemployment and presenting particular problems for those lesbians and gay men who are already disadvantaged.

DISCRIMINATION EFFECTS

Prejudice leads to many stereotypes, one of these being the notion of gay people as an homogenous minority; affluent, organised and male. The reality is that the lesbian and gay community is diverse in terms of gender, socio-economic background, educational attainment, age, location and health status. For individual lesbians and gay men already suffering disadvantage in any or all of these areas, discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation can lead to forms of 'double disadvantage'. This issue has been explored by the recent Report of the Second Commission on the Status of Women in analysing the situation of women in poverty, women with disabilities, lesbian women and other categories of women facing particular problems. The Commission found that "women who are doubly disadvantaged need additional (their italics) measures directed

towards ending their marginalisation and bringing them closer to social equality".

VULNERABILITY TO DISADVANTAGE

Even those gay men and lesbians who otherwise have access to more resources and social and economic opportunities are still subject to the same processes of discrimination which makes them vulnerable to disadvantage. These processes can work through the entire lives of individual lesbians and gay men. For example, research has shown that many lesbians and gay men experience isolation, depression and confusion when their sexual identity is being formed, very often in an environment where disclosure of their emerging sexual orientation would expose them to isolation from their families and prejudice and discrimination within their schools. This continues throughout their life in employment and other areas relevant to their social and economic well-being such as access to accommodation, services and vital support networks.

An added dimension to both discrimination faced by gay people and the ensuing risk of disadvantage, has been the emergence of the AIDS crisis during the 1980's. American research suggests that poverty can be a contributing factor in premature mortality for those who are HIV positive. These issues are currently being addressed in a Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) project funded by the Department of Health which focuses on the importance of building up the self-esteem of gay people as part of effective HIV-prevention.

While many lesbians and gay men successfully avoid discrimination by choosing not to disclose their sexual orientation, strategies such as keeping one's sexuality a

secret may lead to significant social and psychological problems at a later stage. According to one review of research, psychological adjustment appears to be highest among men and women who are committed to their gay identity and do not attempt to hide their sexuality from others. As with other stigmatised minorities, gay men and lesbians probably maintain self-esteem most effectively when they identify with, and are integrated into, the larger gay community.

However, there are major obstacles in the way of such integration. While social services have been provided to meet the specific needs of lesbians and gay men over the past 20 years, those services have largely depended on the voluntary activity of individual lesbians and gay men. For example, lesbian and gay telephone helplines, the main source of information and advice for many of those in need, have never received direct funding from any state agency.

RESEARCH NEEDED

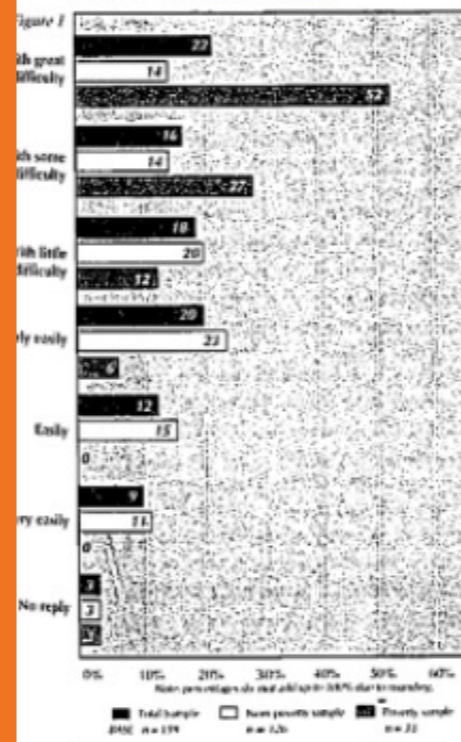
It is in this context that GLEN approached the Combat Poverty Agency to fund a study to examine the means by which discrimination increases the risk of poverty for lesbians and gay men and further disadvantage for those who are already poor. The study looks at how lesbians and gay men, individually and collectively, avoid, cope and resist discrimination. Funding was received in 1993 and the research carried out jointly by GLEN and Nexus Research. A report outlining the results of this research is now near completion. GLEN hope that the results of this research will provide an important basis for developing strategies to combat disadvantage in the lesbian and gay community ■

LIFTING THE LID ON DISCRIMINATION AND POVERTY

EOIN COLLINS

Almost a third of lesbians and gay men have been effectively homeless at some point in their lives according to a recent survey of one hundred and fifty nine gay people. More than a fifth avoid work for which they are qualified through fear of discrimination. Significant numbers experienced various problems at school due to being lesbian or gay. These are just some of the results which have emerged from a new report *Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men, the Economic and Social Effects of Discrimination*.

The research, undertaken by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and Nexus Research, aimed to examine the degree to which discrimination in areas crucial to social, economic and psychological well-being may have increased the risk of poverty for lesbians and gay men and further disadvantaged those who are already poor. These areas included family, education and training, employment/unemployment, services, health, emigration and also experiences of harassment and violence. The research also sought to profile the considerable efforts made by lesbians and gay men both individually and collectively, to counter such discrimination.



IDENTIFYING POVERTY

While the results of the survey cannot be presented as necessarily representative of the gay community (which remains substantially hidden as a result of prejudice and discrimination), they do offer insights into levels of discrimination, harassment and even violence suffered by those interviewed and provide a solid ground for the formation of policy relevant recommendations. Adapting the poverty definition and survey questions used by the Economic and Social Research Institute in its 1987 household survey, 21% of the sample population in the survey were identified as living in poverty.

Participants were also asked to assess how easily or difficult they found it to make ends meet. Over half (52%) of those living in poverty said that they made ends meet with great difficulty. In comparison, one in seven (14%) of those who were thought not to be living in poverty said they experienced the same problem (see Figure 1).

When asked about family and other support networks, two thirds of respondents said the gradual awareness of their sexual orientation had caused problems among family and friends. When asked about education and training the problems experienced included isolation, depression, poor self-esteem and harassment and bullying. As a result of these problems, thirteen respondents left school earlier than anticipated and eight people left college or training.

In relation to employment, many respondents experienced, or feared experiencing, discrimination and harassment in the workplace because of their sexual orientation. Forty per cent of those working had experienced some form of harassment in their current workplace, half of whom reported this was due to being lesbian or gay. Also, twenty one percent of respondents avoided work for which they were qualified and thirty nine percent said there were various categories of employers they would not work for, because of the fear of harassment and discrimination.

In the area of housing, forty percent believed they would experience discrimination if their sexual orientation was known. Not surprisingly, many respondents also showed signs of psychological distress, particularly those affected by poverty. Almost sixty per cent said they had emigrated at

some point in their lives, over half stating that their sexual orientation was a key factor in doing so.

HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

Perhaps, the most startling result from the survey is the impact of harassment and violence. Two fifths of respondents reported being threatened by violence because they were assumed to be lesbian or gay. A quarter of respondents had been kicked, punched or beaten while nine percent had been assaulted or wounded with a weapon. The significance of anti-gay violence and harassment was even greater for those in the survey identified as poor, ninety four percent of whom reported changing their behaviour as a result.

Despite the seriousness of these experiences of discrimination and prejudice, more positive results also emerge from the survey. For example, a majority of those who have 'come out' to family and friends found that doing so improved their lives. Also important is the strong role lesbians and gay men play in supporting one another. Two fifths said they had turned to lesbian and gay switchboards for information and advice. However, the provision of information and advice services to the gay community have depended largely on the voluntary contribution of individual lesbians and gay men: telephone help-lines for example, have never received direct funding from the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report makes a comprehensive series of recommendations to government and non-government organisations including:

- that in the context of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the government should establish a Task Force composed of government departmental representatives, the lesbian and gay community and others, to develop and oversee the implementation of programmes to combat discrimination and disadvantage identified in the study;
- that the government should introduce the promised Employment Equality Act Amendment Bill and the promised Equal Status Bill as a matter of urgency ■

Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men, is a new report published by the Combat Poverty Agency.

Gay Saunas

Gay saunas are an important and long-standing institution in the gay community. In his authoritative history, *Gay New York*, George Chauncey devotes a chapter to 'The Social World of the Baths'. Based on detailed research, documents how gay bathhouses had appeared in New York by the turn of the century and were some of the first exclusively gay commercial spaces in the city. Chauncey describes the social role of the baths as relatively safe places "where gay men could meet openly, discuss their lives, and build a circle of friends" (1994:224):

"For while the baths attracted men in the first instance because of the sexual possibilities they offered, and, indeed, fostered a distinctive sexual culture, they encouraged the cultivation of broader social ties as well." (1994:208)

The important role of saunas in gay life is often recognised in fiction. In his novel, *The Story of the Night*, set in Argentina in the 1960s, Colm Toibín describes how the hero discovers gay saunas and explores his sexuality. The important role of gay saunas is highlighted in the Department of Health and Children commissioned report *HIV Prevention Strategies and the Gay Community* (GLEN/Nexus, 1996). Writing recently in the *Irish Times*, Fr. Diarmuid Murchd wrote that:

'Gay clubs provide a discreet, informal, and tactile environment where men can connect with dimensions of life that are undernourished or suppressed in our patriarchal societies'

Repression features strongly in the history of gay venues and almost from the start the New York baths were targeted by the police and 'social purity' groups such as the Society for the Suppression of Vice. The police raids on the baths were often brutal and Chauncey describes one such raid in 1903 when an Irish pantryman was arrested and later sentenced to twenty years in the state penitentiary (1994:214-215). The repression of gay bathhouses is a recurrent theme. In 'The Regulation of Desire', Gary Kinsman details the raids on such venues in Toronto and other cities in Canada in the 1970's as well as

the defence campaigns by community groups and others (1987:206-9).

The onset of the HIV and AIDS health crisis resulted in health services, the gay community and the gay saunas working effectively in partnership in countries such as Australia, the Netherlands and elsewhere. However, in other countries such as the United States of America, the HIV/AIDS issue sharpened the debate and conflict over gay sexual venues and this more confrontational approach has tended to dominate the English language literature on the subject. In *AIDS and the New Puritanism* (1986), Denis Altman gives an overview of the early debates in the US on whether the baths should be closed, rigidly restricted or, alternatively, used as a venue for safer sex education. The latter point of view is persuasively put by the renowned historian Alan Bérubé in a number of court declarations including the statement that:

"bathhouses should be preserved as zones of safety, privacy and peer support as long as gay men are attacked for their sexuality"

For Altman, the debate over the baths is complex and raises medical, legal, political and ethical questions. It is our view that a coercive approach to gay saunas is unacceptable in terms of civil liberties and in particular the right to sexual autonomy, intimate association and self-expression compatible with a similar liberty for all others. This human rights perspective is at the heart of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties case for gay law reform and equality as set out in its 1990 report, *Equality. Now for Lesbians and Gay Men*. We have followed this approach in our submissions to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform's Discussion Paper on the law on sexual offences.

On a pragmatic basis, it seems clear that a HIV prevention strategy that builds a collaborative plan of action involving all actors (statutory, commercial and community), is more effective. Saunas respond to the self-defined needs of thousands of gay men. A health promotion programme must empathise with and accept the integrity of these self-defined needs and include

sauna customers in the planning process. An approach that discounts such needs or adopts a paternalistic or intrusive approach is unlikely to be effective. These and other values for a responsive HIV prevention strategy are set out in a discussion paper prepared by Gay HIV Strategies. In particular we would like to stress that programmes need to be 'gay positive' and 'sex positive'.

History shows that attempts to repress peoples consensual heterosexual or homosexual relationships usually founder and incur unacceptable social and personal costs. Ireland has a particularly lamentable record in this area in the past with a panoply of regulation including draconian censorship, banning of contraception, divorce and homosexuality and a punitive regime for unmarried mothers. Even the innocent pastime of dancing was subject to restrictive legislation and control by state and church. Ireland 1912-1985, *Politics and Society*, Joe Lee tellingly describes how "a morbid preoccupation with occasions of sin in dance halls would dominate pastoral pronouncements throughout the twenties and thirties" (1989:159).

From the Preface to 'Working in Partnership for HIV Prevention in Gay Saunas', *Gay HIV Strategies/GLEN, 1998*, co-written by Kieran Rose, Eoin Collins and Christopher Robson.

Vatican And Homosexuality, 14 August 1999

A letter from Eoin to The Irish Times.

I expect that many gay people in Ireland, like me, have been troubled by the recent debate in your newspaper on whether the expression of our desires and love constitutes "intrinsic moral evil". In trying to cope with this offensive onslaught, it is somewhat heartening to refer to the Combat Poverty Agency report, "Poverty: Lesbians and Gay Men" (1995), which found that lesbians and gay men who "came out" or, as Rev Peter Callaghan (August 10th) might put it, "chose a gay lifestyle", considerably improved their lives as a result. This occurred despite persistently high levels of anti gay discrimination which for many of us has meant isolation and bullying at school, loss of employment and experiences of violence and harassment on the street.

Even more heartening is the fact that many of these problems are now finally being addressed by the State. Existing and proposed equality legislation will, one hopes, combat prejudice and intolerance, the real "intrinsic moral evils" of our society.

Yours etc,

Eoin in Conversation with Una Mulally

Edited transcript of Una's interview with Eoin for her book 'In the Name of Love: The Movement for Marriage Equality in Ireland, An Oral History' 2014.

Thanks to Una for the transcript. See full transcript on www.eoin-collins.ie

Una: Can you tell me about the genesis of Colley Working Group on Domestic Partnerships?

Eoin: In 2005 GLEN was up and running with Atlantic Philanthropies funding and engaging and beginning the process around marriage. We had put in a submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution strongly saying that marriage was what we wanted. Then in 2005 an opportunity arose where Brian Sheehan who's now in GLEN, was head of the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and they invited Minister Michael McDowell to open it. There was a lot of controversy around that because of the referendum over citizenship.

There were a lot of issues going on but the committee stuck to their guns and invited him and he got a very warm reception when he got there. As a result, we found this out later from civil servants, he came away terribly pleased by his reception. Despite some of the things people say about him, he was supportive of gay rights. He was very supportive of decriminalisation, he was supportive. But he had a view and continued that view, I think it might have changed now, but he had a particular view at that time that gay people didn't want marriage and kept articulating that and re-articulating that.

Anyway, he was delighted with his reception at that event so GLEN met him then twice after that and we made the case to him each time that marriage was what people were seeking and it didn't really matter that if some people didn't want marriage, that wasn't the point.

So finally in December 2005 he said he would set up a group to look at it. The terms of reference were actually quite limited. The terms of reference were specifically something like 'looking at relationships outside of marriage'. It wasn't just same-sex relationships. So he set up the group. It was chaired by Anne Colley, former PD

politician. It had a lot of civil servants from the attorney general's office, from Revenue, from Dept of Social Protection. They had a few independent people; Eilis Barry, legal advisor to the Equality Authority, who is just a really wonderful person, really great and supportive and very strong on the committee.

There was also Finola Kennedy. Finola had, I suppose, a reputation for being quite close to the Catholic Church. She was somebody who some people had considered or was there to limit progress, but nothing could have been further than the case. She turned out to be just thoroughly decent and really thoughtful in the true meaning of the word. A really thoughtful, analytical, supportive person, she was really good. They were all the people that comprised the group.

I think our first meeting was in January or February, and we had 21 meetings. During that time, GLEN, the Equality Authority and the Working Group held a big international conference in 2006, Minister Michael McDowell launched it.

All these guys from the Ancient Order of Hibernians were throwing copies of the Constitution up at us. So it was kind of scary that bit!

We went for really top people. We got the former judge of the Canadian Supreme Court, Claire L'Heureux Dube, who gave a really strong powerful statement around marriage. Also we had a law lord, the top woman law lord in Britain, Baroness Hale, so really strong people. But the real thing we were trying to do in Colley and through that conference was get marriage on to the agenda.

I think the first thing that I did and wanted to make sure happened when I got into Colley was that we separated the relationships issues for heterosexual and homosexual couples. Our concern there was that we'd get another model for heterosexuals and then we would be tied into that very minimal model.

On the other side you had this sudden interest in two sisters, two brothers living together. That was from the right who wanted to stop any kind of conjugal status

being afforded to same-sex couples so they were bringing up the idea that there should be some model that recognised any form of domestic partnership arrangement. We really wanted to try and say these things have to be separated, otherwise we'll get something that suits absolutely no one.

We were successful in that and so we split up the relationships into three classes; opposite sex, same-sex and then non-conjugal relationships. That was really useful.

Once we split them up, our goal then was to get marriage as the equality option. It was an options paper we were charged with preparing. That's what the Minister wanted. So that was the first one. That took a long time. People did come around to it.

So we succeeded. What we got through Colley was that marriage was the equality option. They also looked at two elements of it, that it had a status element and it had the legal consequences and that the status element was really important as I think it would underpin a wider equality for lesbian and gay people.

The other thing I did was I prepared a paper for the group working with LINC in Cork, Angela O'Connell, a paper on children of same-sex parents, so what we were trying to do there was get some kind of provision for children into it. We succeeded actually in getting a commitment to adoption, joint adoption. Marriage then got in as the equality option.

One thing we couldn't shift and never shifted thereafter was the view that marriage would require Constitutional change. The Attorney General's office was pretty forthright on that. So rather than get a statement in the report that it was unconstitutional what we agreed and whittled down to was marriage was vulnerable to Constitutional challenge. So that's the statement that we managed to get in.

Then the only other option we put under the section on same sex couples was full Civil Partnership (CP) giving everything that marriage had except the Constitutional status. That was very important for us.

That's what we got through Colley. I think the conference helped. I think the Zappone-Gilligan case helped in terms of solidifying marriage as a goal. The Colley Report came

out at the end of 2006 and that became the basis for the reform thereafter.

So the next bit of reform based on Colley was the Labour Party Civil Unions (CU) Bill. They asked us in to talk about it. We said we wanted marriage. And they said 'no' they couldn't get marriage across, it would be unconstitutional, that was their advice, but they were taking Colley and they were at least going for full civil partnership, and they were calling it Civil Unions.

Interestingly the Labour Party published their CU proposal on the same day as the Zappone Gilligan case was defeated in the High Court

Looking over and over the Justice Elizabeth Dunne judgement, it was very hard to get that many positive things out of it. It didn't seem to be saying that the Oireachtas could legislate for marriage. It did seem to say that the Oireachtas could legislate for legal recognition for same-sex couples.

The Labour Party policy was really brilliant. Just to give you the context. What you then had was Michael McDowell suggesting there should be some kind of domestic partnership model, or contract model or something he called it which would have been very limited in scope, really really limited. What he was arguing for was that. And what you had was here's Labour then taking Colley and saying ok marriage is what we want, but the Oireachtas can legislate up to what marriage can provide.

So that's what CU was about. Interestingly at that time there was no division in the lesbian and gay community at that point because the Dáil galleries were packed. There was a real sense that getting the Labour Party policy over the line would have been huge progress. McDowell got a lot of hammering over that and there is an article by Fintan O'Toole at the time, and I think it harmed McDowell quite badly, that the PDs were supposed to be radical and now they're redundant. Because they're arguing for something so minimal and the Labour Party are arguing for this very strong measure, and it really was just marriage in everything but name. People really rallied around that, and really put the issue on the table.

Pat Rabbitte's speech was phenomenal. He went through McDowell. And I like McDowell! McDowell was, I just have

to backtrack a little on that, one of the issues that really came up for us was we were getting just so many people with immigration issues, Irish people with a partner from America or anywhere and they just were facing deportation, facing loads of problems. McDowell was so concerned when he heard that. And any people with problems he kept saying "just contact the Department and I'll make sure I'll help in any way I can." And he did. He sorted out a lot of the issues. So I think McDowell might have been intellectually arrogant at times, but he was I think on this issue, fundamentally decent around it and really did want to do things, but he just got into a fix around 'gay people don't want marriage.' So anyway,

Una: Just on that point, there is a funny irony that the two main ministers who actually pushed through or facilitated relationship rights are McDowell and Dermot Ahern, who you'd think would be two who would be least likely to do that?

Eoin: I don't know. Well certainly McDowell comes from a liberal tradition. Dermot wouldn't have as much, but McDowell definitely did. He has lots of gay friends I know and he's on this issue, and I know people have their differences with him, but we just found him so decent to deal with. I remember when he lost his seat and he had people shouting and screaming at him and I just thought it was vile. I disagreed with him on certain things but he was.

You would have somebody at your desk, and I'll just give you an example, these two women, one was Irish and one was from the States. The Irish woman had been in the States with her partner but overstayed her time in the States so she had to leave. Her partner had come back to Ireland and overstayed her time so she had to leave. So one couldn't go to America and then it was looking like the other wouldn't be able to be in Ireland. So this horrible feeling. It's like they say over here [US] in immigration equality, it's the one issue on same-sex recognition where a couple can end up in jail trying to stay together. McDowell took those cases very seriously. He was really very good and you know he said "send any of those over to me." And we did. And he sorted them. I think it's important to put that on the record.

But then fast forwarding to the Labour Party, the Labour Party was like a tour de force in terms of re-presenting the marriage argument through Civil Unions in the Dail and it's well worth reading the various speeches

from Rabbitte right through. They were just forensic, they were wonderful. Really ripped to shreds that there should be this one kind of single model for people in domestic partnerships, it really put the argument on the agenda. So we supported them in that and most lesbian and gay people supported it as well and everyone was very disappointed that the government then said they would defer consideration of the CU Bill, which meant it was gone. That was pretty cynical. So people were disappointed. That was 2007.

After that then what we started doing was as we continually do, meet up with parties, and whatever, keep putting the pressure on. In the election we published the positions of all political parties and that was right through from the most supportive which was the Green Party who were supportive of marriage, Fianna Fail civil partnership, right through to the worst actually which was the Progressive Democrats (PDs). They continued to hold this domestic partnership thing.

It's funny when you see Colm O'Gorman talking about civil marriage, because we've had debates on the radio about this, but that's the platform he stood on as a PD candidate in the 2007 election. So that was the worst model. It reminds me that we can all change our opinion as we move forward, and I think a lot of people have.

So we went into the 2007 election and I think what was great was we got to a point where every single party had a position, which was great. The good thing about the election was first and foremost was that the Greens were in power. We had a bit of leeway. And Fianna Fáil were back in but they had a position and Brian Lenihan was the new Minister for Justice. My mother would be very close to Brian Lenihan which was really good for me in terms of access because it was kind of like he would know the family very well. It could put a human face on the issue for him around what we were looking for. He would have known my partner and stuff. So that was really good.

Then they were negotiating the Programme for Government. That really was a high wire act because the Greens pushed and pushed and pushed to get something in. Even at that point in GLEN, we were still saying, we were hedging our bets, we were still not asking for Civil Partnership, we were just trying to keep the demand for marriage out there. Still saying what should be in the Programme for Government should be based on the Colley Report. Now the Colley Report was options, but

it was leaving it open. We actually gave a suggested wording, which is almost identical to the wording that went into the Programme for Government. In the end what went into the Programme for Government was a commitment to Civil Partnership taking account of Colley.

So that was it. Civil Partnership got in. We were disappointed in one sense that there wasn't still the kind of freedom maybe to move with marriage, but there it was and that's all the Greens could get. It was the last item in the Programme for Government. They really pushed it to the end, and they got it in at the end. I remember Arthur Leahy, a board member of GLEN, was in touch with Senator Dan Boyle all the time and he knew what was going on, and they really pushed it in. It's so funny if you see the original programme for government, the very last commitment is around this particular one.

So that got in. So then to some extent the jig was up around marriage in terms of the Programme for Government, but we still would keep going for it. It was very important that people would still talk about that marriage was what we wanted as much as we possibly could. But I suppose then the kind of divisions started opening up.

I remember a group of us including Marriage Equality and LGBT Noise went to meet with Minister John Gormley, Leader of the Green Party in government buildings. The Greens laid out their position and said they just simply couldn't get marriage. They had six TDs and that was it, that was all they could do, it just wasn't going to happen. But this was given that CP would be based on marriage; it was going to be a very significant step forward.

I remember one person at the meeting saying to John Gormley, this guy was a senior public servant, but he was saying, a gay guy, saying to John Gormley 'tell me Minister what can we do to embarrass you sufficiently to get marriage into the Programme for Government'.

So we said ok GLEN's job here is to get CP as close to marriage as we possibly can. I had two things in my head: the status and the legal consequences aspect. The status was really important, that we wanted at the very least to make sure marriage was the comparison, that it was marriage-identified. In terms of legal consequences, we wanted something quickly, because there were people in severe need.

Particularly the immigration one, it just kept growing and growing and became a huge issue for me because on one hand you're doing policy work, but on the other hand you have these people coming in who we'd never turn away. A constant stream of people coming in where one or other of the partners were facing either deportation or they'd have to leave.

I was at a meeting in Galway just after the election and Minister Brian Lenihan said there that they would wait for the outcome of the Zappone-Gilligan case to legislate for Civil Partnership. As we know that could mean kicking it into touch forever. And as it turned out, if we had waited for that we'd have nothing.

We were then asking Brian Lenihan to launch the GLEN annual report and were pushing him forward. One of the things we were saying to him was there's no point in waiting for the Zappone-Gilligan judgement.

So he launched our report and he said then that it was no longer his policy to await the outcome of the Zappone-Gilligan judgement (see Minister's speech on www.eoin-collins.ie). That to us was crucial. Then he said he would produce a Heads of Bill by the following year. We kept up the pressure.

We kept putting forward what was in Colley, Colley said the issue for same-sex couples is marriage and if not marriage because of constitutional issues then at least full CP. And we also wanted the provision in Colley of at least having joint adoption and the issue of children being addressed, children of same-sex couples. We were working on other areas of that. I was doing work with the Law Reform Commission.

He produced the heads of Bill in June 2008 and we thought it was good because it was very close to marriage. Dr Fergus Ryan who's on the Board of GLEN did an analysis of it and the big glaring exception was children which we really highlighted. But it was close to marriage. So we supported the heads of bill and again kept trying thereafter to push, to have the Bill then reflect as much equivalence to marriage as possible. That's when a lot of division came in.

I think it's a pity at the end of the day that the Labour Party Bill didn't get through because there was such support for it. It's a pity that people didn't see the benefit

of the achievement that CP actually was.

It was very hard to get people to argue about strategy or what was possible or what was feasible. I remember being down at a debate in Cork on it and I was saying I think we should go for CP, it's the best on offer, it's marriage identified, we're just not winning the argument around that there isn't a Constitutional issue with marriage. The argument against that, weren't arguments against that. There was just a reiteration of marriage is full equality.

I was thinking, I know that, I've been saying that for years! Ironically I was such a strong advocate for marriage early on, when some people were coming at me now who had been actually people who were saying it was patriarchal and blah blah blah. It was very hard to engage in a debate even with activists around well what should we do.

But I think the problem of the Zappone-Gilligan case was that it was very important, very useful at the start, but it began almost to hold up progress at the end. There was a sense that we should do nothing and accept nothing because that would go against what the case was about. It was very hard even to have a discussion on whether anyone believed that the case could actually win or not. There was a sense that it was almost disloyal to actually ask the question about what is the prognosis for this case? Will it win? Should we not accept progress because this case could actually win?

It was very hard to have a discussion about that case and it became that it just was unacceptable to criticise it or even ask if it was going to win or not. So that became an issue for me.

Una: What kind of personal impact did that division and the rhetoric that was going around have on you, not just on your work, but just in general being in that kind of space, which as you say was divisive.

Eoin: I think it was. I just felt it was so unfair that people seemed to have constructed an argument that there was a choice between marriage and civil partnership, and GLEN were going for CP because they didn't have faith in the argument that marriage was full equality. That was just simply untrue.

I heard that again and again: "if only GLEN would come

out for marriage." It was just so exasperating, because you had a sense that we are for marriage, but we are trying to ask questions about well, if we don't accept CP will we get marriage sooner? And our view was that CP was going to be not only delivering something for lesbian and gay people now, that it was substantial, it was marriage-based, but it would actually would increase the momentum for marriage. That's something that we believed. People just didn't listen to that argument. I suppose a lot of it as well was that our work was behind the scenes and it was hard to talk about, and there's communications issues around that and people can't see what you're doing all the time.

But it was definitely very hard, personally, I found to deal with. I remember when the Bill was torn up at the famous Pride. That was the only time where I felt actually threatened at a lesbian and gay event. I thought that was terribly sad. My sister and her kids were there and they left because they felt threatened.

Also I felt really sad for people with immigration problems who were so hard pressed. People who were literally crying over my desk and who knew this was going to deliver something for them. And then having people just tear up that in front of you and just wouldn't engage at all with the idea that there was an argument, a strong, positive argument for progress now.

So I think when it came to the Bill being published, just to get back to that, we met up with Dermot Ahern when he became Minister for Justice and again we had a whole new relationship to build. He wasn't terribly supportive at the start at all. We had our first meeting with him and it was very frosty. And we felt that the momentum for CP had gone with Lenihan. So that was difficult.

Also the economy was starting to collapse as well. But we worked at it and we did turn Dermot Ahern around, and he did become a strong advocate for it. So when the Bill was published in 2010, that took a lot of effort. He launched a report of ours and so when it came out, we were delighted because we felt this was a big step forward. It was the enumerating of as many legal consequences as close to marriage in that sense as we thought was possible. I think we could have got more, but it was great that it was very extensive.

I remember just on the day it was published, I remember one thing I was kind of horrified considering I had all

these people with immigration difficulties at my desk was that there was nothing about immigration in the Bill. Then I rang the senior official in Justice and he said 'well, you know, there's no legislative hooks in a way for this because there's so little family reunification in immigration law', so he said 'what we'll do is we'll put out a statement.' This was all done in such a hurry and a panic. He said 'we'll put out a statement'. So the Minister put out a statement saying that he would ensure that there was full equality between civil partners and married couples in immigration regulation. So we got that through. I was personally delighted about that because it meant so much to people.

Then we had the whole process of once the Bill then was introduced getting it into the Dáil and there's so many things, there's so many details here, my God! I could go on for hours and hours, but getting into the Dáil, meeting all the political parties. Tiernan Brady who joined GLEN was a Fianna Fáil member, through him we got to meet to address the Fianna Fáil party because remember, I don't know if you recall, Senator Jim Walsh had got a number of Senators and TDs to sign up to a Motion saying they would oppose CP. So we got to meet them. It was funny, David Quinn and Iona were in before us making their pitch. So we were talking to them on the way out. I just laugh at that now when I hear that Iona say they were supportive of civil partnership.

Una: Can you remember what you said to each other?

Eoin: We were just civil. I suppose our one was never needlessly provoke. Our view was we engaged with what you might call the big, moveable middle. People who didn't understand maybe gay issues, but weren't hostile to them at all. And so that's the people we sought to win over, including through their public representatives. We didn't really go and have big debates with the right to be honest even though I must admit it was terribly tempting at times, because we just felt what we should do is really just concentrate on winning over the moveable middle. So we just nodded at them going in and they nodded at us awkwardly. We went in and made our pitch. Then we met Dermot Ahern as well about it, but he was very strong, he just dismissed all the things that they were doing. We in a way had a battle with both the right and the left.

It was strange, because the night the Bill went into the Dáil, I think it was December 2009, there was a huge

protest that LGBT Noise had outside and there were people screaming at us going in. One woman I remember screaming saying that Civil Partnership partnership was worse than the Nuremberg Laws. And literally my God, David Norris was up on the platform saying it was child abuse. We were going in there and then on the other hand we had Senator Jim Walsh and Iona and other people tabling a whole series of amendments and that would have been exemptions for registrars, exemptions for religious institutions, would have meant hospitals and schools would have exempted themselves from the provisions of the CP Bill. This incredible ongoing attack.

One thing I thought was interesting, is that when Jim Walsh did try and get that Motion signed, that Noel Whelan wrote a very interesting article in the Irish Times saying that why did Jim Walsh only raise this issue now? And the reason was that he thought this thing would be delayed and delayed because that's the way you stop things happening in Ireland. So he never thought it would get to a point where it would actually be on the point of being implemented.

That's why we were so strong with Lenihan before about not waiting for any court case or whatever, which wasn't really germane to whether you can do this Act or not. To make sure that we weren't into the usual Irish one of delay, and nothing happens. So we went in that night to the introduction of the Bill into the Dáil. We were coming from pressure from both sides. It was extremely difficult personally to deal with. But there you go. That's what happened.

When the Bill was going through the Dáil we were there all the time, just battling away different amendments and really just constantly meeting up with TDs. On one day I think Tiernan and I met 70 TDs and senators walking from office to office. We worked with the ICCL as well doing information sessions in the Dail which were really good as well. We were pretty much entrenched there.

Then finally the Bill gets through to the Seanad. That was funny because again there were attacks from left and right if that's the appropriate use of the words. David Norris started his speech that day saying it was child abuse and appalling and he'd oppose it. Then by the afternoon he was describing civil partnership as the greatest progress in a generation or something. So he changed his mind in an afternoon.

Una: Do you think he did change his mind or do you think he was laying the argument out at the start always with the intention to go for it. That he wanted to put that more strident voice across to have it on the record, but then at the end of the day go I'm going to vote for this?

Eoin: Well it didn't sound like it at the time I have to say. He said he was going to vote against it in the morning. He certainly told us he was going to vote against it. So that's all I can really go on, is what he said to us. It didn't help us because we were under tremendous attack at this stage from people.

When the new government took power in 2011, our huge priority then was working to ensure that we could get the tax elements over the line and make sure it was implemented across State agencies in a way that made it as close to marriage as possible.

One thing for example, when the Bill was passed, we worked with the Revenue Commissioners, and we got actually really good traction with them, they ensured for example that the children of civil partnership could be in the top scale for inheritance tax. Again most of the tax elements then were very close to marriage.

When the Act had got through, suddenly lots of things started happening. The Immigration Service for example brought out their regulations and then suddenly everyone who had these problems all started getting their visas which was to me incredibly moving. I remember this Filipino woman who was a nurse in the Mater. She'd been in Ireland five years and her partner couldn't even visit her because they were afraid it would be considered immigration intent. She hadn't seen her partner for a few years, she couldn't afford to go back. And as a result, her partner could come over to Ireland. The two of them got a civil partnership, we were at it in Capel Street, and the partner could then live and work in Ireland.

I suppose if I think of anything that I've achieved, for me, it's that couple and other couples. I remember this Cuban guy and his boyfriend and they were in such bad straits and suddenly he got his immigration stamp for him. They were just fantastic, absolutely fantastic.

We worked with the registrar general then to make sure the services were accessible, and he had been on the Colley Group so I knew him very well. It was ironic

that despite all that was said about registrars wanting exemptions, none of them did. They loved doing Civil Partnerships.

All the people on the right who are saying that they did support civil partnership. I'd love to go back over their articles again. I know Breda O'Brien had a strong article talking about the religious exceptions and the necessity for them. So you know, they weren't supportive of Civil Partnership.

Our suggestions for the next Programme for Government was that all of the gaps in CP would be addressed particularly those in relation to children, which is what Minister Alan Shatter is doing now. Also that there should be a move towards marriage.

There's more than 1,500 couples now who have a Civil Partnership. One thing we had said at the time was that and I think it's really born itself out, it was better to emphasise how close civil partnership is to marriage in order to get marriage than to emphasise the differences.

It was important for us to say that when people were celebrating Civil Partnerships around the country, they didn't feel they were celebrating Civil Partnerships, they considered themselves celebrating marriages. So there was huge social recognition for marriage for gay people across the country. There was huge support for it.

I think it was much better to say, which I think is true, is that the Oireachtas legislated for as close to equality as they could get under the Constitution, rather than to say that the Oireachtas deliberately legislated for inequality. I don't see the rationale for arguing the second one. Or I don't know how that would bring us closer to marriage.

I have been at two Civil Partnerships, one of them must have had 800 people at it, older people and kids. The impact of this, when you take just one couple who have their Civil Partnership, how many people have they invited to take their relationship seriously? Their work colleagues, their family, their friends, and in their neighbourhood.

It's like all these little bombs going off all over the country. Happy bombs! So I feel it did help move the momentum for marriage.

Marriage Equality said that Civil Partnerships would set

the quest for marriage back, I don't think really that the facts would bear that out. I think it actually increased the momentum for marriage. Also while we're having this debate on marriage, we also have people with strong rights already, that people do have something that they can avail of and I think that's very, very important as well.

I do think when we go into the referendum that it should be back to engaging with the big moveable middle. We need to do that, and that can be a little more boring for people in a way.

For me there's different elements of a movement; there's the people on the streets, there's leaders, but there's also a need for the kind of slogger back room boys if you like, which maybe I feel I am. I'm glad I played the part.

Una: One abiding memory of all of that work and all of that time, what would that be?

Eoin: I remember being on the radio arguing with Colm Gormley from Amnesty International, and we were arguing about marriage and civil partnership. I remember the interviewer saying, 'So, are you just saying that you know Civil Partnership is a compromise in order to get you along the road to marriage in the end' and I said 'yeah'.

It did summarise for me what we had been doing. I think the most positive one was getting the immigration cases.

I can't describe how much that meant to me. When people came in. I just can't describe it. I find that very moving. And I think it's moving as well because I think their needs were terribly hidden. And you know, they weren't being addressed and they were so awful. Getting that through for them was wonderful. But there are so many aspects to it, Una, it was just such a long incredibly intense campaign.

One negative one was the night we were going into the Dail in 2009 with this woman screaming over at us, holding up her child saying 'tell my child he's a second class citizen', and I just remember that being dreadful, but anyway, there you go.

One thing I have to say is despite some bitterness, none of us ever really fell out at the end of the day. I think that's a nice thing. There's a sense that people get on and whatever. I think it's great. It's like the Maoist one, let a

thousand flowers bloom.

I remember the Pride in 1992 and myself and Prionsias De Rossa, Kieran Rose were walking on it and I remember it seemed big at the time, and the one next year where we could all fit in literally into the courtyard of the Central Bank plaza. But we felt huge. And now seeing Pride where it's just so ginormous. That's one thing I want to get across: it's just amazing how quickly things changed. Sometimes people don't realise things have shifted. It's extraordinary. And I think the quest for marriage has been a really important one in that shift.

Gay politics and the Minister for Justice, 27 July 2005

A letter from Eoin to The Irish Times.

Madam,
Your Editorial of July 25th, "Gay politics", rightly highlights the great strides that have been made in Ireland in giving lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people the rights they were denied for so long.

In campaigning for decriminalisation and for the equality legislation that includes sexual orientation as a protected ground, we were often warned of the great "backlash" that these simple equality measures would unleash. Such a backlash did not materialise, however, and a time when gay men could be imprisoned for consensual sex now seems inconceivable.

The spectre of the backlash has been raised again in relation to marriage and civil partnership, though one could equally emphasise the capacity of people in Ireland to accommodate change with fairness and generosity. Lack of provision for marriage or civil partnership, as your Editorial points out, is not just a symbolic gap but has very practical and negative implications for individual LGB people.

People have been forced out of their homes on the death of a partner. LGB couples, where one partner is from outside the European Economic Area, have been split apart or forced to live outside Ireland where their relationships can be secured without the threat of separation. The list goes on.

This is a time of great change in Irish society and our confidence to embrace such change should not be diminished by political failure in other countries. The fractious political debates of the US are less relevant to Ireland than our own solid achievements, and those of our EU partners, in promoting equality for LGB people.

Yours, etc,

Civil Marriage for Gay People, 25 August 2005

Article by Eoin in Hot Press Magazine.

Is civil marriage for gay people progressive or not? This is the interesting question raised by Eamonn McCann in his column in the last edition of Hot Press. As an organisation campaigning for opening out civil marriage to gay people, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) believes this is a radical and progressive demand. Developing strategies for radical change is not simple and the issues in this case go to the heart of progressive politics.

GLEN, as with other organisations seeking progressive change, has always had to respond to the most pressing concerns of our community. As people continue to be fired from their jobs because they are lesbian or gay, we have worked with the trade unions to protect ourselves and also worked to achieve anti-discrimination legislation in employment. As lesbian and gay people continue to be harassed, attacked and even killed because they are gay, we have worked with the Gardai to counter this. In advancing changes in employment protection there was no implied acceptance of the inequities of the labour market generally. In working with the Gardai, there was no implied acceptance of the limitations of the criminal justice system.

Other needs are now pressing, some increasingly so. Relationships forged between new lesbian and gay immigrants and Irish or EU nationals are unprotected and many face the immediate threat of separation. Whether a gay couple can be together or not can depend on the whim of an immigration official. Many lesbians who have helped raise a child are literally legal strangers to that child and can be separated from the child. A significant factor in these cases is that there is no legal recognition of gay relationships whatsoever. These are urgent issues that require an urgent legal response.

Opening civil marriage out to same sex couples is way of addressing these issues and there are practical

advantages to such an option. In the UK for example, although gay people still cannot get married, the new Civil Partnership Act for same sex couples does at least closely follow marriage law. A practical benefit of this is the relative legal simplicity involved. If a new partnership model covering a whole range of relationship types was created, with entirely new rules, this would have led to legal uncertainty and would be more difficult (and costly) for lawyers to advise.

It is also interesting that, in the UK, right wing opponents of the Civil Partnership Act in the House of Lords sought to wreck the legislation by tabling amendments to extend its provisions to others. For example, amendments were tabled to extend civil partnership to close relatives who have lived together for 12 years or more. The UK Lesbian and Gay Lawyers Association could find no information about any carer or family organisation that supported this amendment or any people who would be prepared to enter into it and who would have been helped by it.

Including same sex couples in civil marriage also has a powerful symbolic impact by giving equal status to same sex and opposite sex relationships. Right wing opponents recognise this and have strenuously opposed it. Eamon McCann refers to the lively celebrations of gay couples registering for marriage in Massachusetts, but there is a much larger political picture in the United States. A key element of this is the endorsement by President Bush of a constitutional amendment that would ban the enactment of gay marriage. Some people feel that civil marriage for gay people would strengthen the overall institution of marriage that they regard as an oppressive institution. However, the downside of this point of view, as noted by the writer and activist Sherry Wolf, is that it could make the case for inaction at exactly the same time that the Bush Administration is moving ahead with its right-wing assault.

GLEN recognises that there are differing opinions on this issue, including within our own communities. In Ireland, there is also the added complication of significant restrictions on divorce. We support civil marriage for gay people because we are an equality organisation and same sex civil marriage is an important reflection of equal treatment in law. But we work on other measures, such as equal education opportunities, to address the concerns of our communities and to promote equality more generally. The key issue is whether accessing marriage will hinder these efforts for greater equality.

As Sherry Wolf has noted, when the US Supreme Court struck down state bans on inter-racial marriage across the United States, it was greeted as a blow against racism. By overturning the ban on same sex marriage, are we not striking a blow against anti-gay prejudice and inequality?

Reviewing Progress on Equality for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People

Equality News was published by the Equality Authority, Spring 2006



**By Eoin Collins,
Director of Policy
Change, GLEN –
Gay and Lesbian
Equality Network**

Since the publication of the Equality Authority report *Implementing Equality for Lesbian, Gays and Bisexuals* in 2002 areas of progress can be identified in addressing some of the key inequalities identified. The Garda Síochána in particular have taken a number of important strategic steps to make the police service more responsive to the reality of anti-gay violence. However, progress in many other areas is less apparent. For example, despite the best efforts of individuals within the education sector, very limited systemic action has been taken to address the reality of bullying and harassment experienced by young lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people, or those perceived to be LGB, at school. Such bullying has been identified by BeLong To Youth Project (Ireland's only dedicated project for LGB and transgendered youth) as one of the most significant issues raised by young participants in their project and a risk factor for mental health problems and suicide for the most vulnerable young people.

The enactment of the Civil Partnership Act for same sex couples in Britain and Northern Ireland has also highlighted the lack of legal recognition given to lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) couples and families in Ireland. Although it falls short of full equality, as LGB people continue to be excluded from civil marriage, the Act does give LGB couples north of the border almost all of the rights and responsibilities of marriage, including joint adoption, parental responsibility and recognition of same sex partners in immigration law. These are hugely important issues for LGB families with children in Ireland and for the growing number of those in relationships with people from outside the EU. In the absence of legal recognition, LGB couples and families experience or face the threat of separation.

There has also been an international trend towards rejecting 'separate but equal' institutions such as civil partnership, and opening out civil marriage to all. Five countries have gone for full equality with civil marriage now accessible to same sex couples. These include the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada and most recently Spain and South Africa. Access to marriage has also been secured in the US State of Massachusetts. The Supreme Judicial Court of that State overturned the ban on same

sex civil marriage in 2003, treating it as a civil rights issue on a par with previous bans in the US on inter-racial marriage.

GLEN – Gay and Lesbian Equality Network has secured funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies that will support our five year strategy to address these and other inequalities. The strategy is an ambitious one, with high expectations about what can and should be achieved over the next few years to promote equality across a wide range of areas including legal recognition of relationships and families, education, employment, health, immigration, community development and security and safety.

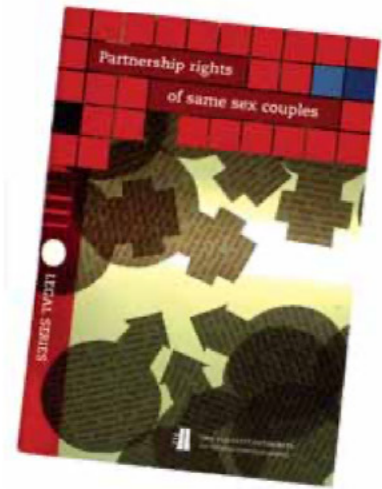
Significant changes have happened in Irish society that provide an important opportunity for promoting equality in these areas. Rapid growth in employment has raised the expectations of many LGB people, who now have the opportunity to access employment where they can be open about their sexuality and the opportunity to avoid or address discriminatory or unsafe work environments. This has been recognised by a growing number of companies, who have explicitly included sexual orientation in their equal opportunities policies so as to attract LGB workers. There has also been a much greater visibility of LGB people, with

prominent people in the media and show business 'coming out' with general public support or with benign public indifference.



*Implementing
Equality for
Lesbians, Gays
& Bisexuals*

These and other changes have increased confidence among LGB people and raised expectations of people's entitlements as full and equal citizens. LGB people, especially younger people who have come to adulthood with criminalisation part of a distant history, expect to be valued by their families and friends, expect to be valued in school free of bullying and harassment and expect to pursue any career option open to their heterosexual peers. LGB people expect to be safe on the streets or in the areas in which they socialise or live. Probably most importantly, they expect to have their relationships and families recognised and treated equally before the law.



Partnership Rights of Same Sex Couples

GLEN has a responsibility to deliver on and further raise these expectations by implementing an effective and feasible strategy for action based on the simple principle of equality. We want to foster a 'can do' culture where there is no sense of limited horizons, a quality that is already evident among many younger LGB people. With regard to legal recognition of relationships for example, GLEN has called on the Government not to limit its horizons to legislative change in the UK and to make Ireland the sixth country in the world to open civil marriage to LGB people. This step would be in line with the Taoiseach's stated ambitions for Ireland as outward looking, open and accommodating of change and diversity.

High Ambitions: Benchmarking Ourselves Against the Best

This speech was delivered by Eoin Collins, Director of Policy Change at GLEN, at The Legal Status of Cohabitants and Same Sex Couples conference held at the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland on Friday 26 May 2006. The conference was organised by the Working Group on Domestic Partnership, GLEN and the Equality Authority.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking Minister Mc Dowell for his opening address and the commitment he has brought to putting the issue of legal recognition of same sex couples on the political agenda.

The establishment of the Working Group on Domestic Partnership provides an important mechanism for examining the issues, but equally important is the commitment to speedy delivery of solutions. The issues we are discussing are not abstract; they are urgent and immediate to many thousands of people.

I want to begin by the discussing the background to the progress that has been made in Ireland. I then want to discuss some of the barriers to legislating for legal recognition and then some of the practical difficulties that arise in going for options that are not based on equality.

Progress

These are indeed exciting and hopeful times in Ireland.

I remember when I trained as an economist in the 1980s. The country was always a depressingly good case study on all the concepts and indicators that go with economic failure: stagflation, long-term unemployment, deficits and decline.

These times were additionally bad for lesbian and gay people: consensual sex between men was criminalised; there was no legal protection against discrimination; the crisis of HIV/AIDS had arrived; and a lot of lesbian and gay people kept their heads down, not least because of the risk of losing already scarce employment. Many more

emigrated to where they could live more secure and open lives.

That past truly is a different country. Now of course the challenge for economists has been to explain our success or explain why so many failed to predict it.

Change for lesbian and gay people has been equally rapid. By 1993, the Government had repealed the laws which criminalised sex between men, and did so on the basis of equality. This was followed by equality legislation, outlawing sexual orientation discrimination first in employment and then in the provision of goods and services.

All of this economic and social progress has hugely increased confidence and raised the expectations of Irish people. When the economy started to take off in the 1990s, there seemed a reluctance to believe it among some commentators and a deep conviction that it was not real or could not be sustained. It was often difficult to know whether this was genuine economic analysis or if it was the psychological overhang of failure in the past; the sense that we were incapable or undeserving of success. Now we talk of ambition and getting to the next level rather than reverting to past decline.

The same can be said of the progress for lesbian and gay people. There were those who said that we were simply complying with an agenda from Europe and that Irish people would be resistant to equality. In fact, much of the impetus for change has come from within Ireland itself. The Equality legislation put us to the forefront internationally in legal protections against sexual orientation discrimination. Ireland ensured that sexual orientation was included in Article 13, the antidiscrimination clause of the Treaty of Amsterdam.

This progress has hugely raised the expectations of gay people for their lives. There is a whole new generation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people who expect to be able to live and work in Ireland, where being gay is no barrier to advancement. They expect to be able to meet others, to

have fun, to fall in love and, if they choose, to settle down and get married to the person they love and establish a family. Indeed many lesbians and gay men already take on the duties of care to partners and children, despite the lack of legal protection or recognition.

Marriage and Legal Recognition.

We are today looking at issues arising for same sex couples and cohabitants more generally. But I want to focus on the particular inequality between same sex and opposite sex couples and families, which is exclusion from civil marriage.

Different issues, or possible barriers, have been raised in extending civil marriage to include same sex couples and families. I want to focus on three of these key issues in particular: the principle of equality; the wish for pragmatism; and the issue of whether lesbian and gay people want marriage or not.

With regard to principle, there is little disagreement that equality for same sex couples and their families means access to the rights and obligations of marriage. The right to marriage is well established in international law, in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and in the European Convention on Human Rights. Lesbian and gay men are either equal, with an equal right to marriage, or we are not equal.

The same issue of principle arose when the Government set about repealing the law in 1993 which criminalised sex between gay men. We now know that one of the options before the then Government, was to go for an unequal age of consent to mark a difference, namely that consensual sex between adult men was less acceptable. The Government rejected this option and went for equality and was pleased to have done so. It was a success that we all shared, some thing to be proud of. No political party has argued for inequality in principle, ever since.

As the Taoiseach has stated recently: "Sexual orientation cannot, and must not, be the basis of a second class citizenship. Our laws have changed, and will continue to change, to reflect this principle".

If it's not about principle, then the issue seems to be one of pragmatism.

There is of course nothing wrong with this and we very

much accept the Government's good faith in wishing to deliver quickly on what it sees as feasible options. GLEN too is interested in quick progress to address the pressing and immediate needs of lesbian and gay couples and families. GLEN has never been interested in moral victories that translate into little or no progress for people on the ground.

But it is important to analyse and discuss why civil marriage is not a feasible option. One argument is that it will be judged unconstitutional. But I have to say that lesbian and gay people are far less pessimistic about our Constitution and our Supreme Court than some. The case being taken by Katherine Zappone and Ann Louise Gilligan certainly reflects the confidence that many lesbian and gay people feel about their status as equal citizens under the Constitution. This society, and the position of lesbian and gay people within it, has been radically transformed since the last time that that sexual orientation was before the Supreme Court with the Norris judgement in 1983.

Perhaps the fear really is of wider opposition. There are of course groups and organisations that have a default position of opposing any progress for lesbian and gay people. Such opposition has not diverted successive Governments from legislating for equality however, and few, even among the opponents, now seek to unravel the gains. I have not for example, come across anyone campaigning to re-criminalise sex between gay men.

The third point concerns the argument that lesbian and gay people do not want civil marriage.

It seems reasonable to suppose that there are some lesbian and gay people who may not want to marry, just as there are some heterosexual people who may not want to marry. But there are many lesbian and gay people who do wish to take on the rights and obligations of marriage and who want the option to do so.

These issues have also been present in other countries. Experience from these countries (of which you will hear more today), does show some of the difficulties that arise, when the equality option is not followed. In particular:

One of the most difficult issues in not going for marriage and enacting some sort of alternative in response is that we are all put in the invidious position of having to debate and argue about the precise rights and



Eoin, Kate Irwin, Chair of the Equality Authority; Anne Colley, Chair of the Working Group on Domestic Partnership; and Michael McDowell TD, Minister for Justice and Equality, at the conference on the legal status of same sex couples organised by the Working Group on Domestic Partnership, GLEN and the Equality Authority. *Photo: Derek Speirs.*



Kieran Rose, Keith O'Malley, CEO of GLEN, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern TD and Eoin Collins at GLEN's offices in Fumbally Court, Dublin 8, during the launch of Building Sustainable Change in 2006. *Photo: Tommy Clancy.*



Department of the Taoiseach official and Eoin Collins finalising preparations ahead of the arrival of Taoiseach Bertie Ahern TD at GLEN's offices in Fumbally Court, Dublin 8, 2006. *Photo: Tommy Clancy.*



GLEN receives People of the Year Award 2010, Christopher Robson in the foreground, with Eoin and Niall McCutcheon of the Department of Justice and Equality in conversation. Eoin and Niall worked closely together on advancing LGBT issues across the public service, building on the recommendations of the 2003 NESF report



Eoin at Rehab People of the Year Awards, 2010.



Cathryn Mannion, Eoin Collins and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern TD at the launch of GLEN's strategic plan Building Sustainable Change at GLEN's offices in Fumbally Court, Dublin 8, 2006. In his speech, the Taoiseach made strong commitments to further progress for LGBT people. *Photo: Tommy Clancy.*



Eoin at the launch of the of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People: A Guide to Good Practice for Social Workers, GLEN and the Irish Association of Social Workers, 2011.



Behind the scenes at GLEN HQ, with Brian Sheehan and Eoin, c2010s.



Eoin on the night Dáil Éireann passed the Civil Partnership Bill. *Photo by Karl Hayden, 2010*

obligations to which lesbian and gay families are not entitled.

In the UK, legislators were faced with this task and in the end found little case for the exclusion of any rights and obligations when creating the new institution of civil partnership. Civil partnership is therefore almost entirely analogous to marriage except for the name. However this was a torturous process to go through: for example, legislators had to wade through nine acts and 70 sets of regulations of social security legislation alone, to take account of civil partnership.

The UK experience also shows the difficulties that arise when exclusion of same sex couples from marriage is addressed together with all relationships of domestic dependency, without being clear about the difference.

This can lead to legal frameworks that please or suit no one. For example, in the reading of the Civil Partnership Bill in the House of Lords, a number of conservative peers tabled an amendment, essentially a wrecking amendment, that would have extended civil partnership to two close relatives living in a situation of domestic dependence such as a mother and her daughter.

This was rejected - it being pointed out that this would have meant that the daughter, assuming she was heterosexual and met a man she wished to marry, would essentially have had to divorce her mother to do so. Such is the confusion when you seek equivalent frameworks for very different types of relationships.

Our experience in Ireland is that when issues are addressed on the basis of equality, it means that the issues are resolved and are not left to fester in the body politic. Politicians and the public alike are now proud of the political leadership that was shown with decriminalisation in 1993, an equality solution that moved the issue from the political agenda and which few would now seek to alter.

Change does bring challenges: - no one wishes however, to pressure people into change for its own sake, to advance abstract ideas just for the sake of it or to merely score political points. People may be surprised by same sex marriage, it may be unfamiliar to them, but lack of familiarity should not be immediately construed as hostility.

Ireland has demonstrated the great value of ambition

in economic and social policy. We have been ambitious before and we can be ambitious again.

Proposed Civil Partnership is a Great Achievement

This article by Eoin Collins, published in The Irish Times on 26 June 2008, outlines the significance of the Government's proposed Civil Partnership Bill. Collins sets out why the legislation represented a major breakthrough for lesbian and gay couples, situating it within the broader national dialogue on equality, legal recognition and the path toward full civil marriage.

GLEN, The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, strongly welcomes the proposals in the heads of a Civil Partnership Bill published yesterday by the Government. For the first time, lesbian and gay relationships will be recognised, supported and protected by the State.

While set out in the dry language of statutes, this Bill is about relationships of love, mutual care and commitment and extending out legal recognition and supports to those who are in these relationships.

This is a reform whose time has come. All political parties have played a role in getting us to this point and there is huge public support for change. The latest opinion poll conducted by Lansdowne Market Research in April showed that an overwhelming 84 per cent of people believed that same-sex couples should be allowed to marry or to form civil partnerships. The proposed civil partnership is a great achievement for Irish society and another sign of a confident and open Ireland. In somewhat gloomy times, this is good news, a confident initiative that should boost our spirits.

Thousands of lesbian and gay couples throughout Ireland will be delighted that they soon will have legal solutions to their urgent and real-life problems. Equally, their families, their friends and their colleagues will also be delighted at this new legal status.

The proposed civil partnership will extend many of the rights and responsibilities available through marriage to same-sex couples. It will lead to recognition and protection in a whole range of areas including succession, domestic protections and pensions. Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform Dermot Ahern has stated that civil partnership will provide for equal rights in taxation

and related issues.

The Equal Status and Employment Equality Acts will be amended to provide for protection for civil partners, representing a very significant extension of the equality legislation. Civil partnership will also provide for equal treatment with married couples in immigration legislation and regulations. This is a critical issue for many same-sex couples where one partner is from outside the EU.

A significant area of concern for Glen is the limited progress made in providing legal recognition for the growing number of same-sex couples, especially women, who are co-parenting children. Currently these couples lack any means of establishing a joint legal connection and responsibility for the child or children they are raising. We hope that our legislators will examine this issue over the coming months and develop practical proposals to address this key legal gap.

The proposals for comprehensive civil partnership follow a long period of national dialogue and debate on the issues involved. The issues have also been scrutinised by a range of bodies including the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution, the Law Reform Commission and, in particular, the Colley Working Group.

Glen was represented on the Colley Working Group and fully endorses its conclusions that access to civil marriage would achieve equality of status with opposite-sex couples and would underpin a wider equality for gay and lesbian people. Glen's goal is access to full equality through civil marriage and this Bill is a fundamental step towards that goal.

Glen also supported the emphasis of the Colley Group on the need for urgent progress for same-sex couples, which it believed could be delivered through full civil partnership, providing same-sex couples with rights and responsibilities equivalent to married couples. With the notable exception of recognition of same-sex couples and their children, the Government's civil partnership

proposals deliver on this option and provide an essential platform for future progress. We look forward to the early passage of the Bill.

Glen also strongly welcomes the proposals in the heads of the Bill for a redress scheme to offer certain protections to co-habiting couples who do not marry or avail of civil partnership, which will be provided to both opposite-sex and same-sex couples on an equal basis on the ending of a relationship or on the death of a partner.

Bertie Ahern as taoiseach spoke eloquently of the critical psychological milestones in the development of a more confident, open and dynamic Ireland. This Bill is another critical psychological milestone.

Anyone who was in the Dáil and Seanad for the debates in 1993 on decriminalisation will agree that the sense from our legislators was that they were celebrating a national achievement with delight. This Bill is a similarly powerful and historic law reform measure. In the 1993 debates, the minister for equality and law reform Mervyn Taylor stated: "What could be more important for us as legislators than to create a climate and space where two people who have chosen each other can express their love."

Creating a climate where everyone enjoys equality

This Irish Times article by Eoin Collins, published on 29 June 2009, examines the significance of the newly published Civil Partnership Bill. Collins outlines the practical impacts of the legislation for same-sex couples, its political and public support, and the remaining gaps still to be addressed, particularly for families with children.

The Civil Partnership Bill addresses many of the problems faced by gay people in long-term relationships, and should be welcomed.

TODAY THERE are thousands of lesbian and gay couples living in committed and loving relationships all over Ireland. Like in any other family, these relationships span many years, with couples looking after each other, caring for their children and their families, and actively contributing to all aspects of Irish society. Yet the law has rarely recognised these relationships.

The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (Glen) strongly welcomes the publication of the Civil Partnership Bill, which will for the first time provide recognition of and comprehensive protections for same-sex couples under Irish legislation.

This is a reform which has extensive political and public support. All political parties in their general election manifestos in 2007 committed to giving legal recognition and protections to same-sex couples, and the programme for government was committed to bringing forward civil partnership.

Opinion polls over the last number of years have consistently shown more than 80 per cent of the public have supported legal recognition for same-sex couples.

The Civil Partnership Bill follows extensive public discussion and analysis on the issues in the media, in both houses of the Oireachtas and by a range of policy bodies, including the Government Working Group on Domestic Partnership (the Colley Group), the Law Reform Commission and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution.

Some of the most striking aspects of the 2007 Dáil debate on civil unions for same-sex couples were the personal stories which politicians from all parties told about the importance of legal recognition for individual lesbian and gay people. The dominant theme of same-sex partnership ceremonies, noted one TD, was happiness, joy and celebration, not just for the couple but also for their family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues.

There were, however, other stories, such as that of a funeral which another TD attended in his own constituency, at which the long-term partner of the deceased was seated in the side aisle of the church, relegated to the status of a bystander.

The contrast of happiness and celebration with the serious difficulties that arise for couples due to lack of legal status and protection is familiar to most lesbian and gay people and their families. Grieving partners can find themselves unable to stay in their shared home if their partner dies suddenly, without having left a will.

Irish emigrants have been unable to return home with their same-sex partner because their relationship is not recognised in immigration law and regulations. Partners who have supported each other financially throughout their lives often have no means of passing on to their surviving partner the pension they have contributed to all their lives.

Lack of status, as noted in the Dáil debates, can have a particular impact at times of illness or death, as partners find themselves excluded from hospital visits or from the funeral of their partner.

Civil Partnership will address these and many other urgent and pressing issues which lesbian and gay couples now face. It will establish a legal status and standing for same-sex relationships and a comprehensive set of supports, protections and enforceable obligations on the part of civil partners that are comparable to those available to married couples.

express and share their love.”

A major area of concern for Glen, however, is the lack of progress made in providing legal recognition for the large number of same sex couples, especially women, who are co-parenting children. For example, dissolution of a civil partnership can be obtained without the legal requirement to make any specific provisions for the children being parented by the couple.

Nor will a child being parented by a same-sex couple – unlike a child being parented by an opposite-sex couple – be able to claim maintenance from a partner who is not their biological parent. This will seriously disadvantage children living in these situations, and we strongly urge the Government to address these gaps as the legislation is progressed.

Lesbian and gay people have a legitimate aspiration to civil marriage. This was acknowledged by the Government’s working group, the Colley Group, when it stated that civil marriage for same-sex couples would achieve equality of status with opposite-sex couples and underpin a wider equality for gay and lesbian people. This is Glen’s position.

The Colley Group also recognised the need for immediate progress to meet the urgent and pressing needs of same-sex couples, which could be delivered through full civil partnership. The Civil Partnership Bill and the associated Finance and Social Welfare Bills will address many of these urgent and pressing issues, with the very critical exception of legal recognition and protection for children and parents.

Civil Partnership is a historic reform that will quickly deliver positive, concrete change in the lives of many people. Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform Dermot Ahern, and the Government are to be congratulated on getting us to this point.

Anyone who was in the Dáil and Seanad for the debates in 1993 on gay law reform will agree that the sense from our legislators was that they were celebrating a national achievement with delight.

This Bill is a similarly powerful and historic law reform measure. To quote Mervyn Taylor, the minister for equality and law reform in 1993: “What could be more important for us as legislators than to create a climate and space where two people who have chosen each other can

International competitiveness and the New Economy - the role of equality and diversity

This piece by Eoin Collins, published on 12 June 2009 on Progressive Economy @ TASC, outlines how equality and diversity function not only as social values but as core components of Ireland’s economic infrastructure. Written as input into Dublin City Council’s economic strategy for the Dublin City Region, it argues that fostering inclusion is essential to competitiveness, innovation and the development of advanced economic sectors.

This paper on International Competitiveness and the New Economy: the Role of Diversity and Equality has been prepared by GLEN as an input into the Economic Strategy for the Dublin City Region being prepared by Dublin City Council. It argues that the importance of diversity and equality in growing the advanced economic sectors critical to Ireland’s economic future means that our equality infrastructure can be viewed as part of our economic infrastructure and a component of international competitiveness and economic renewal.

A theme consistently highlighted in a broad range of economic development and recovery strategies produced by Government and policy bodies, including the NES and the ESRI, is that Ireland has moved to a period where competitiveness will be based on the application of knowledge, creativity and a highly skilled, creative and adaptable workforce. To develop the advanced sectors, where skill has become a more central factor of production, a key challenge for policy makers across a whole range of sectors is how to nurture, attract and retain the skills on which these sectors depend.

Supporting diversity and equality, for example across the grounds of the equality legislation, is an important factor in meeting this challenge. Meeting the targets set by government for education at all levels, including lifelong learning, will be diminished if areas of education are considered appropriate for one age group or gender. Equally, creating the educational basis for critical and

creative thinking and developing the personal capacity and confidence for lifelong learning will be undermined if bullying or harassment on the basis of any diverse quality is tolerated and not addressed.

The economic significance of equality and diversity can be observed across other policy areas also. Many companies in the advanced sectors of the knowledge economy have strong diversity policies which are considered essential not only for recruitment and retention, but also for creating the conditions under which innovation can thrive. These policies will be undermined if the city or country in which firms locate is perceived or experienced by diverse workers as hostile or unsafe.

US economist Richard Florida has identified a broader impact of what he describes as tolerance of difference, namely that tolerance and acceptance of diversity is seen by companies and people as an indicator of an underlying culture and ecosystem that is conducive to creativity, a key quality driving new economic sectors. Florida states:

“Economic growth in the Creative Economy is driven by 3Ts: Technology, Talent and Tolerance. But technology and talent have been mainly seen as stocks that accumulate in regions or nations. In reality both technology and talent are flows. The ability to capture these flows requires understanding the third T, tolerance, the openness of a place to new ideas and new people. Places increase their ability to capture these flows by being open to the widest range of people across categories of ethnicity, race, national origin, age, social class and sexual orientation.”

Viewing equality and diversity in social justice terms and as key components of our economic infrastructure represents a shift in policy thinking that has occurred in other areas. As Professor Frances Ruane, Director of the ESRI, has noted in relation to education:

"The notion that human capital is our key economic factor is now being acknowledged widely. I was on some government committees in the mid 1990s and expenditure on education was still being seen at that time as social expenditure. It was only when the skills shortages came to light some years later that people began to link education to growth and that led to its economic importance being appreciated."

International competitiveness and the New Economy - the role of equality and diversity
2009

In Progressive Economy 2009, blog of left think-tank TASC
www.tasc.ie

For a longer version of this analysis, see 'Equality, Diversity and Economic Competitiveness' authored by Eoin. A joint GLEN and Dublin City Council project funded by the Equality Authority and the European Union, 2011.

This analysis was to play an important role in the Yes Equality campaign with the launch of Business for Yes by Taoiseach Enda Kenny at a GLEN event in the Digital Hub Dublin 8, 16th April 2015.

See 'Yes for marriage, yes for business, yes for Ireland'
www.siliconrepublic.com 16th April 2015

Martin Shanahan CEO of the IDA also called for a Yes vote in the Referendum in an interview with the Irish Times saying it would send out a positive message internationally.

'Marriage Referendum yes vote would be in Ireland's economic interest' www.siliconrepublic.com 1st May 2015 and www.journal.ie 1st May 2015

The trade union movement was strongly supportive of a Yes vote, as was IBEC.

Strategies for Success

'Field Dispatches: Winning Civil Partnership in Ireland – Q&A with the Gay & Lesbian Equality Network'

Atlantic Philanthropies interview with Eoin Collins and Kieran Rose, September 2010

In early July of this year, both houses of the Irish Parliament passed a landmark Civil Partnerships law, guaranteeing new rights to same-sex couples. The bill – "one of the most important pieces of civil rights legislation in 90 years" – was signed into law 18 July 2010. For the Gay & Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), the victory is the culmination of years of hard work. The Atlantic Philanthropies spoke with Kieran Rose, Chair, and Eoin Collins, Director of Policy Change in GLEN, and asked him what the victory means for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual (LGBT) community, and what lessons gay rights advocates around the world can take from it.

AP: What does the victory mean for the LGBT community in Ireland?

GLEN: Civil partnership is of major practical and symbolic value to LGB people. It extends most of the rights and obligations of civil marriage to same-sex couples. It provides for legal recognition in many areas not covered in state level marriage in the U.S. such as recognition on a par to married couples in immigration, social security and national taxation. Civil Partnership also involves the same public registration process as civil marriage.

Civil partnership has been enacted with the support of all political parties in the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament). Recognition of children/same-sex parenting is a major gap in the legislation, but there was agreement from all parties in the debates on civil partnership that this can be addressed through further change in family law.

AP: Does this law accomplish your goals fully, or does GLEN plan to advocate for marriage rights beyond civil partnerships?

GLEN: GLEN has always sought civil marriage and we have welcomed civil partnership, which is closely based on marriage, as a radical step toward that goal. The critical challenge to achieving marriage is the consensus that now exists across all political parties that opening out civil marriage to same-sex couples will require a referendum to change the Irish Constitution.

The legal case taken by Katherine Zappone and Ann Louise Gilligan to have their Canadian marriage recognised in Ireland did not succeed in the High Court, following a detailed judgement in 2006. An appeal has been lodged with the Supreme Court with the hearing hopefully to be held by the end of the year, although no specific date has been set as yet.

A critical immediate goal of GLEN is for legal recognition of same-sex families. Important policy opportunities for advancing such recognition now exist. At an institutional level, this includes the work of the Law Reform Commission on the legal aspects of family relationships. Considerable political support was also expressed in the debates on civil partnership by politicians across political parties for further progress to address gaps in legal recognition of children being parented by same-sex couples.

AP: Describe the campaign: how long has GLEN been working for civil partnerships and what role did it play in the victory?

GLEN: From 2005, GLEN based its campaign for marriage and equality-based family law reform on intensive engagement with Government, politicians across all parties, state agencies and the wider Irish public. Critical milestones included:

- The launch of GLEN's strategic plan by the Irish Prime Minister in 2006 where he set out the Government's commitment to equality and legislative reform.
- GLEN's engagement with three successive Ministers for Justice and politicians across all parties to put legal recognition on the political agenda. Every political party committed to legal recognition of same-sex couples in the 2007 general election, which gave a mandate for legislative change.
- Appointment of GLEN by the Government to its 'Colley' Working Group, which put forward just two equality-based options for legal reform. These were marriage, and if not marriage (due to Constitutional issues), then full civil partnership giving the same legal protections and recognition as marriage but without the Constitutional recognition given to marriage.
- Intensive and successful engagement with Minister for Justice, all politicians in the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) and the wider public to ensure that at

least full civil partnership based on marriage was enacted as opposed to earlier proposals (which continued to be supported by those opposed to change for same-sex couples) for a civil partnership model based on informal cohabitation with no conjugal status for same sex couples and limited protections.

AP: In 2006 GLEN adopted an aggressive, multi-faceted strategy "Building Sustainable Change," to win systemic long-term change in Ireland. How does this victory on civil partnership impact on the rest of its agenda and public perception of LGBT issues?

GLEN: In the debate on the Civil Partnership Bill in the Seanad, the Minister for Justice and Law Reform Dermot Ahern stated that "The level of support for the Bill shows that securing the civil rights of gay people is a mainstream goal and that ignorance and homophobia which gay people and their families – fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters – lived with in the past has no place in modern Ireland."

In placing progress for LGB people in the mainstream, civil partnership has contributed to major progress in other areas of GLEN's strategy for equality. This includes:

- Education: GLEN has worked with the Government Department of Education and Science on its first major policy dealing with sexual orientation at second level, a policy supported by all education partners, including Catholic school management bodies.
- Employment: There has been a significant demand from employers for support on workplace equality – which has included information on civil partnership that establishes a range of workplace provisions including equal treatment for married couples in taxation, pensions, immigration and workplace benefits.
- Health and Well-being: Major policy developments with health professionals and providers in making health services accessible and appropriate to the needs of LGBT people.

AP: What lessons can civil partnership and same-sex marriage advocates in other parts of the world take from this victory? What campaigning tactics and strategies were most effective?

GLEN:

- A Key Starting Point: GLEN was confident and optimistic that we could win the support of the vast

majority of Irish people.

- Engagement: Calm, consistent and professional engagement with Government, legislators and the wider public. (Having significant resources from The Atlantic Philanthropies and other sources was critical to the professionalism of GLEN events and publications)
- Listening: Focused on winning people over by listening to their concerns and responding to them respectfully but on a principled basis, yet still highlighted equality as our goal.
- Hearts and Minds: GLEN appealed to people's hearts, values and aspirations as well as their minds in building support.
- Political Strategy: Appealed to the best in the traditions of each political party and in wider Irish society. For example, opposition of 30 Fianna Fáil TD's and Senators to CP whittled down to three by appealing to the Republican and secular traditions of Fianna Fáil.
- Avoided "Cultural War": Did not present campaign for marriage as a cultural war with winners or losers but rather as progress in which everyone can take pride.

An overriding lesson for further progress is that how you win is as important as what you win. This is particularly important for laying the ground and motivation for further progress. Especially important in this respect was that:

- All political parties saw civil partnership as a major achievement in which all have played a role.
- Irish people have seen civil partnership as an achievement. This was evident to the very positive reaction of the public to GLEN winning a People of the Year Award, the nearest thing Ireland has to an honours system. Speaking at the televised awards ceremony, the Minister for Justice and Law Reform said "In the Civil Partnership Bill, I think they [GLEN] approached it really amazingly well in that they targeted everybody; they didn't just target the people who were on their side."
- Civil partnership was also achieved despite the opposition of the Catholic Church and lay religious organisations. However, the legislation was not presented as a defeat for anyone, but as an achievement for all of society and for Irish democracy.

Equality in Ireland – A 20 20 Vision Speech

This speech was delivered by Eoin Collins at the Equality in Ireland – A 20 20 Vision conference in Dublin Castle, held to mark a decade of equality legislation. Speaking in 2010, he outlined the impact of the newly enacted Civil Partnership legislation, the role of the Equality Authority, and the lessons learned from two decades of legal and social progress for lesbian and gay people in Ireland. The conference organised by the Equality Authority.

"Thank you very much for the invitation to speak here today and I just want to, before he rushes off, to congratulate the minister on the enactment of Civil Partnership legislation. It means a huge deal. It's a huge advance and will make an enormous difference to many, many people in the ordinary days of their lives. So, I just want to congratulate you for getting it through at this time. Thank you and I also want to particularly thank the Equality Authority for the invitation.

I think the Equality Authority has been hugely part of the campaign for legal recognition and has played a central role in getting us to this point. There's just three things I want to very briefly talk through. One is what's in Civil Partnership because it has broad implications, not just for same-sex couples but also for non-married cohabitants. The second thing is just to acknowledge and to go over just some of the role that the Equality Authority has played since the early 2000s in advancing change. And finally, some very brief lessons that may be useful for discussions over the next few days at this conference.

So, very quickly, the Civil Partnership, it's the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights of Cohabitants Act, was passed with the support of all parties, without a vote in the Dáil, as the minister said, and then after a nail biting debate in the Seanad, by 48 votes to 4. And it was nail biting because a series of amendments had been tabled to weaken it and to water down its effects. They were all rejected and it was very important that happened. The Civil Partnership and Certain Rights of Cohabitants Act has two separate schemes. And sometimes because the focus has been on same-sex couples, the two schemes get a bit mixed up. The first is a civil partnership, a registered scheme where when same-sex couples will register their relationships using the same procedures as

civil marriage. And from that registration, derive many of the same rights and legally enforced obligations of civil marriage. They cover a wide range of issues from taxation through to immigration to protection of shared home.

The second is the cohabitation scheme and this applies to opposite sex and same sex couples who do not marry or do not register their relationships. People who qualify to be a cohabitant after five years living together and two years if they have children. From that, this is a presumptive scheme, the economically dependent partner can apply to the court for a series of remedies. This could have huge implications, maybe on the gender ground. Very often it is women who are economically dependent because they are looking after children and this may provide much needed remedies.

There has also been a significant expansion of the Equality Legislation. There is now a new ground for civil status, which includes marital status but also makes it an offense to discriminate against civil partners whether in employment or the provisions of goods and services. Just because this session is about the Employment Equality Act, some sense of the impact of civil partnership you can see when we look at employment. Registered civil partners will be treated the same for pensions as married spouses. Under the Employment Equality Act, a new civil status will make it illegal to discriminate against civil partners in employment. And any work place benefits that are offered to a spouse must now also be offered to a civil partner.

Equally, the definition of member of the family in the Employment Equality Act has been extended. So, any benefit offered to the child of a spouse must also be offered to the child of a civil partner.

And, if income tax is going to be amended to again deliver equal treatment with married spouses, this means again people in vulnerable situations, that you can transfer your tax credits to the person who is earning less in the relationship and that will mean a lot for a lot of people. And the Immigration Bill will be amended to deliver equality with married couples but already the act being enacted has led to changes in de facto recognition in immigration regulations. And that has been a huge

thing because a huge amount of calls to GLEN over the past five years has been from couples where one party is from outside the EU and they are trying to stay and live here in Ireland on the base of their relationship. They now have some protection under this de facto recognition as a result of the Bill coming through.

I think one thing to acknowledge as well is that I met somebody from New York recently. He was over and he was quite astonished. A gay man looking legislatively at where Ireland was compared to New York. The sheer amount of progress that has happened here and as you can see right from '93, from unfair dismissals, right through to decriminalisation in '93, the refugee act '96, we have just had a very, very significant progress of our protections for lesbian and gay people that have propelled Ireland into one of the top countries in the world around protection for lesbian and gay people.

And the Civil Partnership Act is a huge, very serious step forward on that and in a way the other legislation was about that right not to be fired, not to be refused a service. This is the first bill that really looked at the right to something and it is the right of couples to have their relationships recognised, to have those relationships acknowledged by the State and by their communities.

As I said I think the Equality Authority has been a central player in a great deal of this progress. Going back to 2002, as Angela said, the Equality Authority was the first body to come out for civil marriage for same-sex couples and that was quite a long time ago. Since then, it has played a very central role. The previous CEO Neil Crowley and Eilish Barry, the legal officer at that time, played a significant role in participation on the Colley Group and then also leading a major international conference in 2006, which really defined the issues and really I think made a major contribution to clarifying the issues to the Irish public. From that Colley was able to make its proposals, as I said, which clarify the issues, clarify the issues that same-sex couples in particular were looking for marriage and what had been offered to same-sex couples is a very, very limited partnership model that would have been open to anyone. The Colley Group changed that and the Equality Authority played a significant in that.

But equally under Angela Kerins, the Authority has continued to play a very, very substantial role. The Authority came out in favour of the Civil Partnership

Bill when it was published but they didn't lose sight of the goal of marriage, which is the goal of GLEN, and equally made very, very strong statement, Angela Kerins did an op-ed piece in the Irish Times, very, very strong statements on the opt-outs that had been put forward by religious groups in the legislation, which would have hugely weakened its effects. That played a very, very strong in making sure that those opt-outs weren't taken. So, I really think that input needs to be acknowledged and equally the Authority has continued to acknowledge a key gap in the legislation which is lack of any recognition of children being parented by same-sex couples. The Authority, as we have, made a very substantial submission to the Law Reform Commission, which is examining these issues currently.

Just very quickly and lastly, just to look at some of the emerging lessons of the work that has taken place over the past two decades to advance all of this progress from our own experience and working with the Equality Authority and with the other equality infrastructure, including our work with the Department of Justice and lower form. The first one is building institutional support, that has been critical. As I said, the role of the Authority and the Colley Working Group have been central in framing the debate, in clarifying the issues around legal recognition. The second one, and more importantly even, has been building political consensus for change and I think we are very pleased that not only has the legislation been passed with the support of all parties but I think there's a real sense of ownership among all politicians and Oireachtas of the legislation, every party can see the role they've played. From the Labour Party, which had tabled its civil unions bill twice in 2007, to the Green Party, which has a policy of supporting marriage, and right through to Fine Gael, which was one of the first parties to propose civil partnership legislation. So, I think our Oireachtas and members of the Oireachtas needs to be congratulated. The quality of the debates was really superb and GLEN has published the Seanad and all debates on that basis. Because the quality of the input from all parties was very, very significant. And also what's evident from the debates is there seems to be an appetite for further progress. The issues and the gaps around children have been emphasised by politicians across all parties. We're hoping now that as a result of Law Reform Commission's proposal we can move legislatively on further progress.

And the support of the Authority has been and always

will be very welcome in that respect. The third point is that it is still possible to make progress at a time of huge economic crisis. I think that is a hopeful point around what has happened. Even despite the worst economic crisis of a generation, this progress has still been made. We hope, as the Minister has said, I thought it was an interesting point to say is that equality isn't some frippery, it's not some kind of luxury of the boom, it's actually intrinsic part of our capacity to recover as an economy. Economics and social development do go hand in hand. So, the equality infrastructure in that sense can be considered as part of our economic infrastructure. The two are very linked.

Another point from me has been the critical importance of delivering change in people's lives. Five year's ago, people rang me when I started this job in GLEN, they had immigration cases, a whole range of issues that affected them, and we had literally nothing to offer them. In some cases, people had to leave the country and their relationship ended or they had to both emigrate. In other cases, a business might have had to be sold because of the death of a partner and their livelihood gone as a result. For some people, it's too late. The partner has died and, even in some cases, they don't want anything but retrospective recognition. I think the need and urgency of this legislation has been very apparent from that. But I think we always need to keep a critical mind when we're framing the eventual goal of what we want to achieve. We also have to bear in mind the progress along that goal is extremely important for people in their lives.

The last thing is, just to finish on, I put it as unanimity in the goal and indifferences in strategy. Certainly there has been unanimity among lesbian and gay groups that marriage is a goal. Sometimes that hasn't all often been apparent because there have been very significant differences in strategy and I think we need to be able to look rationally, given we're talking over the next two days about the equality agenda. I think we need to be able to reflect on what strategies do work and rather than going back to rearticulate our goals, I think it is very useful to think well how do we achieve that, what are the lessons we learnt along the way, and how can we continue to move as fast to the goal as we possibly can. I will just finish on that and as I said I am delighted to be here today. I just want to again pay tribute to the Equality Authority for their significant work past and present on this issue. Thank you very much."

Response to Criticisms of GLEN's Strategy on Civil Partnership and Civil Marriage, 2015

Eoin Collins response to criticisms of GLEN's strategy for Civil Partnership and Civil Marriage.

I think the issue that has been hugely difficult for me is the view put about that GLEN had accepted civil partnership in preference to marriage due to a lack of interest in equality on our part or that we were arrogantly purveying some theory that it had to be civil partnership first.

The reality however, is that we held out for civil marriage as long as we could, but circumstances changed and we had to respond to that reality. In particular:

- We were asked by the Labour Party in 2006–2007 to support their civil unions bill, which was the same as marriage in everything but name. They said the legal advice they had was that marriage would not be constitutional.
- What were we to do? We couldn't say that their legal advice was wrong. The Zappone/Gilligan case had just failed. And McDowell was at this time saying he would bring in legal recognition that was not based on marriage, that lesbian and gay people did not want marriage. The Labour Party on the other hand was saying that it should be as close to marriage as possible – hence civil unions. So we supported it (as did most LGBT people at the time).
- Then the election happened and we pushed again for marriage – and when the Greens and Fianna Fáil negotiated the Programme for Government we pushed and pushed. But they could only get a commitment for civil partnership, but closely based on marriage.

From then on in, civil partnership was the only option being presented that had a realistic chance of being passed. We supported it for a range of reasons:

- There were a huge amount of people who needed the protections immediately. I remember one couple where one partner, a Cuban American, was facing deportation back to the US for not having a work

permit but his Irish partner could not accompany him there as he had been illegal there and would not be let back in. Or a couple where one partner was dying but could not pass on his pension to his partner who was also old but had no pension of his own.

- What were we to say to these people? We could not get any support for the proposition that civil marriage did not require constitutional change. The ICCL had this view, Fergus Ryan had this view and in any event, every single party, including the Greens had this view.
- And on the plus side, we believed that civil partnership, closely based on marriage as it was, would break the ideological back of the opposition to marriage. It is funny now to read people from Iona say they supported the civil partnership legislation when I actually debated them on the radio about it at the time. And their view was that because it was so closely based on marriage it would normalise it.

As it turned out, thousands of people have got civil partnerships across the country and many more have had the marriages they entered into abroad given legal effect at home. We are now having a referendum where every single political party is supporting a Yes vote. And if organisations such as Marriage Equality believed that a referendum was not required they should have argued this at the Constitutional Convention. They didn't and here we are.

In all of this I have to admit a personal dimension. Because of the difficulties in getting legal recognition in working in the Republic, Josep, my now husband, worked in Belfast from 2002–2005. Almost every week I had to take a call from Cavan Garda station telling me that they were holding him in the station and were putting him back on the bus to Belfast.

And when he came over from the US for my father's funeral in 2008 he was held in the airport and was only let through as my mother made a personal plea to Brian

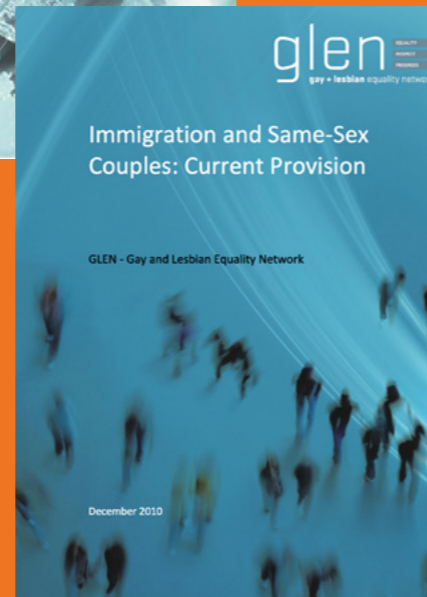
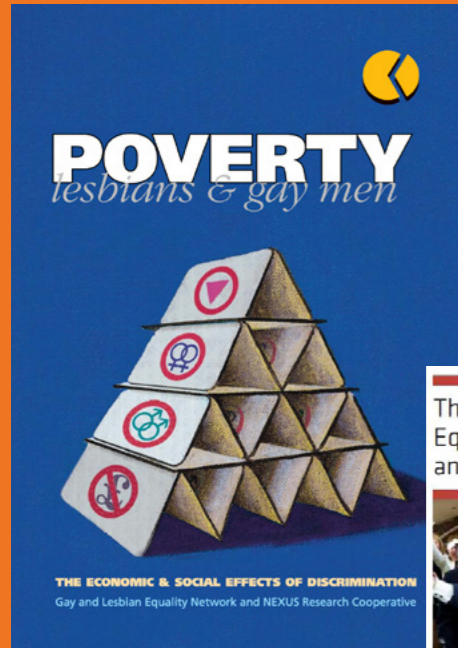
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The civil partnership legislation sorted this and many other problems out for people. On this point I find the most difficult points in the book those expressed by some of the proponents of marriage or nothing that GLEN was acting out of privilege and patriarchy. This was not true nor was it possible to engage anyone in a conversation about what strategy they would follow to pursue marriage if we rejected civil partnership.

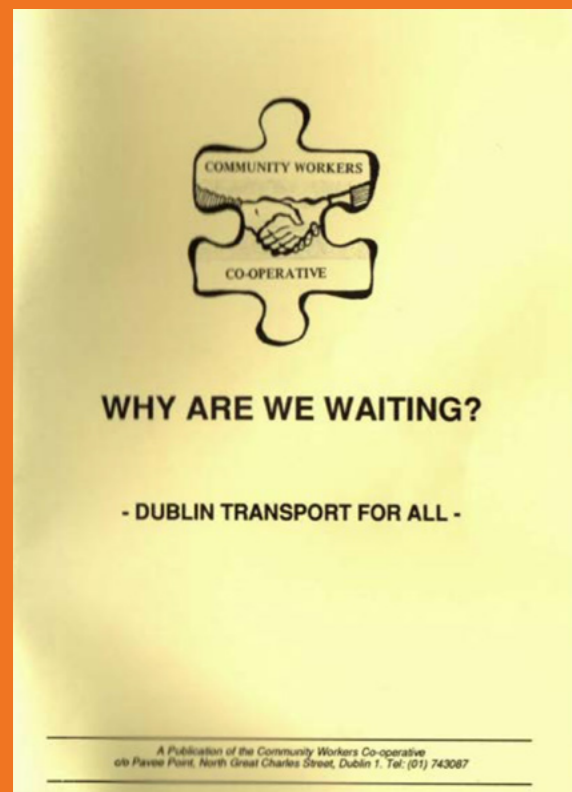
We now have a referendum. I hope it gets through so much. But if it doesn't, LGBT people and everyone else who supports equality in marriage can continue to advocate for marriage knowing that civil partnership and the recent family law bill means that they are protected on an equal basis in law.

Given all of this, it's hard to read what you say in the book about the civil partnership route to marriage being a theory that you don't buy. Getting civil partnership through was not a theory to us, it was based on political circumstances at a time of enormous stress and it has meant a huge deal to me and to other people.

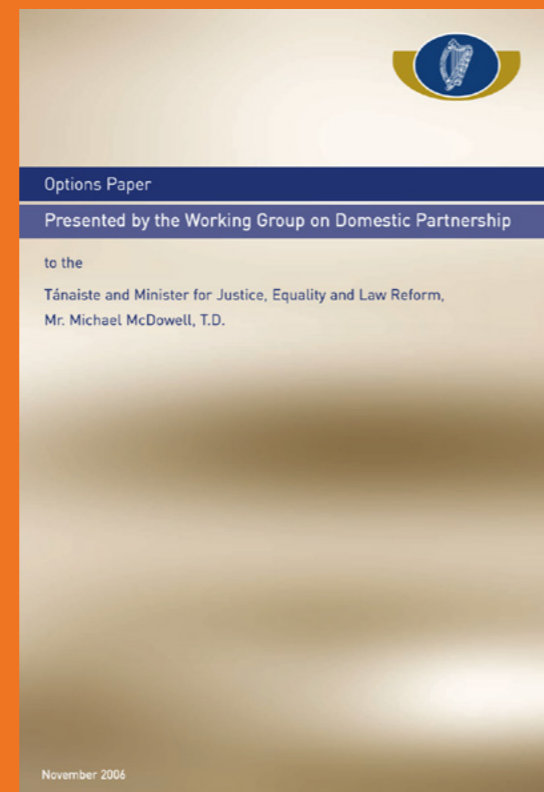
Some of the many reports authored by Eoin.



Eoin and his partner Josep at New York Pride



Why Are We Waiting, 1990, the first report Eoin produced for Nexus Research Cooperative



Eoin helped steer the Working Group toward recommending Civil Marriage and, where needed, full Civil Partnership. That shift laid the groundwork for the Civil Partnership Act and the 2015 Marriage Referendum.



Filipino LGBT group on 2004 Dublin Pride. Photo by Christopher Robson courtesy of National Library of Ireland



Seán Alyward, Secretary General of Department of Justice gives important speech on behalf of Minister in 2008 at launch of GLEN Annual report. With Kieran Rose, Sandra Irwin Gowran, Seán and Eoin, 2008.



Eoin with Catherine Cosgrave of Immigration Council of Ireland at launch of GLEN Immigration guide for same-sex couples 2011



Eoin and Bill Foley at Pride (at Dublin City Council Civic Offices), 2009

When Prejudice Can Kill

This letter was sent to the Editor of the New York Times on 15 April 2020, responding to the decision by Samaritan's Purse to exclude medical workers who would not declare opposition to same-sex marriage during the height of the COVID-19 crisis in New York City.

Dear Editor,

The writer Brendan Behan once said that the first thing on the agenda of an Irish committee was the split. It seems that the first thing on the agenda of an evangelical health provider, such as Samaritan's Purse, which has set up a 68-bed hospital in Central Park, is what workers and volunteers to turn away because they are unwilling to say they oppose same-sex marriage. This is pretty awful at the best of times but is particularly odious and dangerous at a time when New York City is the epicenter of a global pandemic and experiencing an unprecedented demand for health workers.

Each morning my husband, a nurse in the New York Presbyterian Hospital, sets off for work full of anxiety for his patients and worried that he might also bring home Covid-19 to me. He and his colleagues have been cheered by the huge sense of solidarity in this city, evidenced each evening by thousands of people applauding health workers from their apartments. That he, and the services of thousands and thousands of New York health workers would not be welcomed by Samaritan's Purse strikes a very discordant note in this climate of solidarity.

If ever there was an illustration of how prejudice can risk lives, this is it. What is Samaritan's Purse going to tell their patients affected by the virus? Sorry, we are short-staffed because not enough of New York's medical workers oppose same-sex marriage? It is time for evangelicals to be reasonable and, if they run a health service, to put their patients first.

Eoin Collins Obituary: Rights Activist and Key Strategist of Same-Sex Marriage in Ireland The Irish Times, 26 February 2022

Born: August 19th, 1963

Died: February 1st, 2022

Eoin Collins, a leading rights activist and one of the architects of same-sex marriage in Ireland, has died at the age of 58 after a short illness. He had an unshakeable commitment to social justice and was a leading proponent of community movements that tackled discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation.

His death comes three months after that of his husband Josep Adalla, who died of a heart attack on November 1st at their home in New York, shortly after Collins's illness was diagnosed. Devastated by the loss of Adalla, Collins travelled back to Dublin just before Christmas. He spent his last weeks with his mother and siblings at the family home in Lucan.

Collins grew up there as the middle child in a very loving family, which gave him a huge sense of security and confidence all his life. He often told the story with great pride of how, when he came out in the late-1980s to his mother Dolores, she threw a coming-out party to celebrate the news for friends and family in their home – even now not a common occurrence.

Kieran Rose, one of the founders of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (Glen) of which Collins was a central member, and a lifelong friend, said "Eoin was a key strategist in the remarkable journey of LGBT people from criminals to civil marriage; starting with decriminalisation in 1993, equality legislation in the late 1990s, civil partnership in 2010 and on to family recognition, marriage and constitutional equality in 2015."

Not only was Collins a committed, dedicated and humble activist, he also had enormous wit, warmth and candour.

Collins had been a director of Nexus research co-operative, one of the foremost facilitators of community development in Ireland, where his capacity for empathy and vision for change placed him at the heart of many human rights struggles. Brian Dillon, a fellow director of Nexus, said "Eoin's unique and formidable contribution was his innate unassuming commitment to equality – not just in the social or political sense, but in his everyday dealings with everyone with whom he worked."

Pivotal moment

Collins graduated from Trinity in economics and political science and, having worked briefly in UK, returned to UCD to complete a master's in economics in 1989, before joining Nexus.

He subsequently joined the staff of Glen as director of policy change with a vision to achieve an Ireland where being LGBT would be unremarkable and valued. In perhaps the most pivotal moment of his work in this role, Collins was appointed by then minister for justice Michael McDowell to the Colley Group, which was chaired by Ann Colley, in 2006.

Eilis Barry, director of Flac and a member of the group said, "Eoin was an unsung hero, a principal architect of extraordinary change that was to follow. The Colley Group was set up with narrow terms of reference that seemed designed to deter the group from examining marriage. It was a masterclass in advocacy and strategy to witness Eoin convince the group to conclude that only marriage would deliver full equality for same sex couples."

This subsequently became the government's position.

Political and legal consensus at the time was that same-

sex marriage would require a referendum, for which there was no political appetite. However, recognising the urgency of the need for protections for same-sex couples, Collins then drove the campaign for politically-achievable civil partnership which had all the rights and protections of marriage that were legally possible. Despite the gloomy predictions of commentators and most political parties at the time, comprehensive civil partnership legislation passed through the Oireachtas in 2010, along with the foundations for family recognition legislation. All of this paved the way for the success of the marriage referendum.

Federal marriage

Collins met Adalla, the love of his life, in Dublin 20 years ago. Adalla, a nurse originally from the Philippines, moved to New York and Collins joined him there in 2011. They married when federal marriage became possible in the US in 2016 which enabled him to become a dual citizen.

In New York, Collins continued his work on human rights and social change, working with ActKnowledge developing programmes and strategies with a wide variety of national and international organisations and becoming the first director of the Centre for Theory of Change.

Collins had a lifelong love of cities, especially Dublin and New York. His most recent work in the US on rebuilding community infrastructure in Philadelphia with Harvard linked that love of cities with his passion for good public policy that enables fairer, liveable cities.

Most recently he worked with the Equality Fund in Ireland, supporting minority and marginalised communities to organise strategically, and supported the establishment of the Rowan Trust for social justice.

Not only was Collins a committed, dedicated and humble activist, he also had enormous wit, warmth and candour. His huge love of life along with an ability never to be judgemental made him a terrific friend with abundant friendships sustained throughout his life.

Collins is survived by his mother Dolores, his siblings Imelda, Deirdre, Oonagh, Ciarán and Niall, his mother-in-law Virginia, Adalla's siblings Hazel and Dexter and a very wide circle of friends in Ireland and abroad.

Eoin's Favourite Things

This list grew during the Covid-19 pandemic from conversations and Zoom calls between Eoin and his friends Anne, Sheelin and Margaret. What began as a Desert Island Discs style challenge became an ongoing exchange of favourites: art, films, walks, food, books, cities and more. It is a portrait of Eoin's wit, curiosity and loves, captured in his own choices and words, and shared here so that his family and friends can recognise their own memories of him.

This list of (some of) Eoin's favourite things came about as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. Eoin loved to walk in Central Park and we (Anne, Sheelin and Margaret) loved to walk with him. He often quoted Desert Island Discs and, one day in late March 2020, set us all the challenge of compiling ours. Eoin's list (which you'll find at the end here) was characteristically brilliant, and original, and very detailed. When Margaret moved back to Ireland in April 2020 and had to quarantine for a fortnight, Eoin decided we four should zoom to keep her company and that we should have a quiz topic for our zoom. Over the next year and a half, until November 2021 and Eoin's own return to Ireland, followed many zooms and many topics (favourite pieces of art, cities, museums...). We decided to keep a record of our choices, initially in case one of us missed that evening, and later because we knew this was an exceptional time. We didn't know just how precious it would be to have this now. Our hope is that Eoin's family and friends enjoy reading this, and that it evokes your own special memories with him. Margaret Kelleher, Anne Doyle, Sheelin Wilson.

Irish art: Dorothy Cross, Shane Berkery, Louis Le Brocquy.

American Painters: Keith Haring, Jackson Pollock One Number 31 MOMA, Edward Hopper Room in Brooklyn, Andrew Wyeth Christina's World.

Favourite Museums: New Getty LA, Met NY especially Friday evenings, National Gallery London including Holbein's The Ambassadors.

Top Meals: Sushi Heaven with the Queens' gang, Chartier Paris, Fallon & Byrne winebar with small group of friends.

Favourite witty lines: PG Wodehouse "Aunt calling Aunt like mastodons bellowing across preieval swamps". All

About Eve: Birdie: There's a message from the bartender. Does Miss Channing know she ordered domestic gin by mistake? Margo: The only thing I ordered by mistake is the guests. They're domestic too and they don't care what they drink as long as it burns. Woody Allen Love and Death, Sonja: I never want to get married, I only want to get divorced. Addams Family: Morticia: My baby is ill and my husband is dying. Oh Mama what shall I do? Grandma: Well, you have a black dress.

Eoin's top cities: Florence, Leuven or Louvain, Lisbon, London. Least liked: Belfast, Limerick.

Most admired philosophers or thinkers: Bertrand Russell advice to future generations. Arthur Schopenhauer "Mostly it is loss which teaches us about the worth of things." Wittgenstein: "Death is not an event in life; we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present. Our life has no end in the way in which our visual field has no limits."

Advice to the young (and to our younger or older selves): Don't be so fearful all the time. Come out the moment it's feasible (otherwise you will regret the potential connections lost) and draw strength from your honesty rather than others' prejudice. Take your future life seriously, strike the balance between living for today and preparing for the future financially; don't sniff at money; you'll need it in your older life.

People we'd like to have met or have to dinner: Dorothy Parker, John Kenneth Galbraith, John Mortimer.

Eoin on beautiful people: Paule Baillargeon from I've Heard the Mermaids Singing, Alain Delon in The Yellow Rolls Royce, Jean Sorel in Day of the Jackal.

House Tips: Don't skimp if you can avoid it. Believe in your own taste.

Art choices: Ragnar Kjartansson at the Met, the circular video and song that made him feel like he was in Iceland. Wilhelm Hammershoi. David Hockney including his CA work and landscapes of Northern England.

Books politicians should read: Ozymandias by Shelley.
The Affluent Society by John K Galbraith.

Punishment for wrongdoers: Donald Trump to be sentenced to a five year Buddhist retreat on mindfulness and control of desire and forced to sing a song every hour on the hour. Cardinal Raymond Burke to be pinned to a float on Gay Pride in full regalia surrounded by go go boys dancing to It's Raining Men and I'm Coming Out. John Bolton missing the last helicopter out of Afghanistan as the Taliban arrive.

Best Eurovision moments: Severine, Vicky Leandros, Anne Marie David.

Irish foods Eoin loved: Christmas pudding, fresh white soda bread with strawberry jam and butter with a cup of tea, white batch bread or turnover with cheddar cheese, King's crisps.

Irish foods Eoin disliked: Food with lots of fish sauce, pig's blood stew, tripe, kidneys, banana sandwich.

Favourite walks: Central Park, South Wall Dublin.

Favourite podcasts: In Our Time especially philosophy Continental vs Analytic, Bowery Boys, Sean Carroll Mindscape Podcast, Jonathan Miller A Short History of Disbelief, The Atheism Tapes.

Favourite TV programmes: Brideshead Revisited, Sex and the City (but hated the movies), Queer as Folk UK.

Favourite films: All About Eve, Moonlight, Edie, Radio Days ("evokes New York to me more than anything else I know"), The King's Choice.

Favourite lines from books: Opening line of The Affluent Society. Emily Bronte Wuthering Heights description of the graves. James Joyce The Dead final paragraph. Virginia Woolf Mrs Dalloway opening London passage.

Desert Island Discs:

1. Man with the Child in His Eyes by Kate Bush.
2. Duet from The Pearlfishers by Bizet sung by Jussi Bjorling and Robert Merrill.
3. Last Time I Saw Richard by Joni Mitchell.
4. Gnossienne by Eric Satie.
5. Sandstorm by Darude.
6. Song to the Siren.

7. Hiroshima or Nagasaki sung by prisoners from H Block.
8. Ne andrò lontana from La Wally by Wilhemina Higgins Fernandez.

Book selection: A book to help navigate the stars at nighttime.

Luxury: A life supply of assorted drugs to help face sad or fearful times.

Further Reading

For further information on Eoin's work and achievements see:

www.eoin-collins.ie
www.kieranrose.ie
www.lgbtdisregard.ie

Many of following include quotes from Eoin:

Gay Pride Irish Times 27th June 2005

Welcomes condemnation by Bishops of bullying Irish Times 16th August 2005

Couple hopes to marry Irish Independent 21st December 2005

Gay rights group welcomes evidence of growing public tolerance Irish Examiner 21st February 2006 Eoin puts positive spin on the findings

Immigration rights Irish Examiner 9th May 2006

Government urged on homosexual bullying Irish Examiner 19th May 2006

Anti-gay protesters attack Minister Michael McDowell Irish Independent 27th May 2006

Activists demand legal rights for same-sex couples Irish Examiner 8th June 2007

Curbs on Partners Irish Independent 10th December 2007

Fianna Fáil opposition to Civil Partnership Bill Irish Independent 27th June 2008 - up to 30 Fianna Fáil TDs and Senators signed motion opposing Civil Partnership

Fianna Fáil support Civil Partnerships Bill Irish Times 2nd July 2008

Fianna Fáil Senator out of step with Party Irish Times 5th July 2008 article by Noel Whelan

Gays furious at Pope Irish Independent 24th December 2008

Fianna Fáil Party meets over opposition to Civil Partnership Bill Irish Times 3rd December 2009

Bishops weigh up Constitutional action on Civil Partnership Bill Irish Times 11th March 2010

Law on Civil Partnership enacted by Summer Irish Examiner 5th April 2010

Dublin Pride celebrations soured by anger over Civil Partnership Bill Irish Times 29th June 2010

We want full Civil Marriage rights Irish Examiner 3rd July 2010

Pink News 11th November 2010 quotes from Eoin on Immigration

Gays, Greens and Fianna Fáil Irish Times 8th December 2014 feature on Una Mullally's book



Screen shots of Eoin in Zoom conversations with Anne, Margaret and Sheelin

A Tribute to Eoin

I had the honour to work and share an office with Eoin when I joined GLEN in 2006, from him I learned so much. He was generous in sharing his experience and wisdom. He championed the value of evidence based research as a tool to bring positive change, he wrote meticulously, he thought and felt deeply. He was quirky and funny. He talked a lot! He was warm and giving and thoughtful. His work on equality had an enormous and lasting impact, his steadfast and diplomatic persuasion as part of the Government's Colley Group (2006) alone paved the way for access to marriage being opened to same-sex couples. He shared a vision that being LGBT would be unremarkable, that LGBT people could aspire to whatever they chose and were capable of doing. We're a long way towards that vision, thanks to Eoin. I will be forever grateful for the enormous contribution Eoin has made to my life.

- Sandra Irwin-Gowran



Trade Unions and Progress for LGBT People:
A Personal History
by Kieran Rose
May 2024



Gay and Lesbian Equality Network
Phase Two 1994 - 2005
A Personal History
by Kieran Rose
June 2024

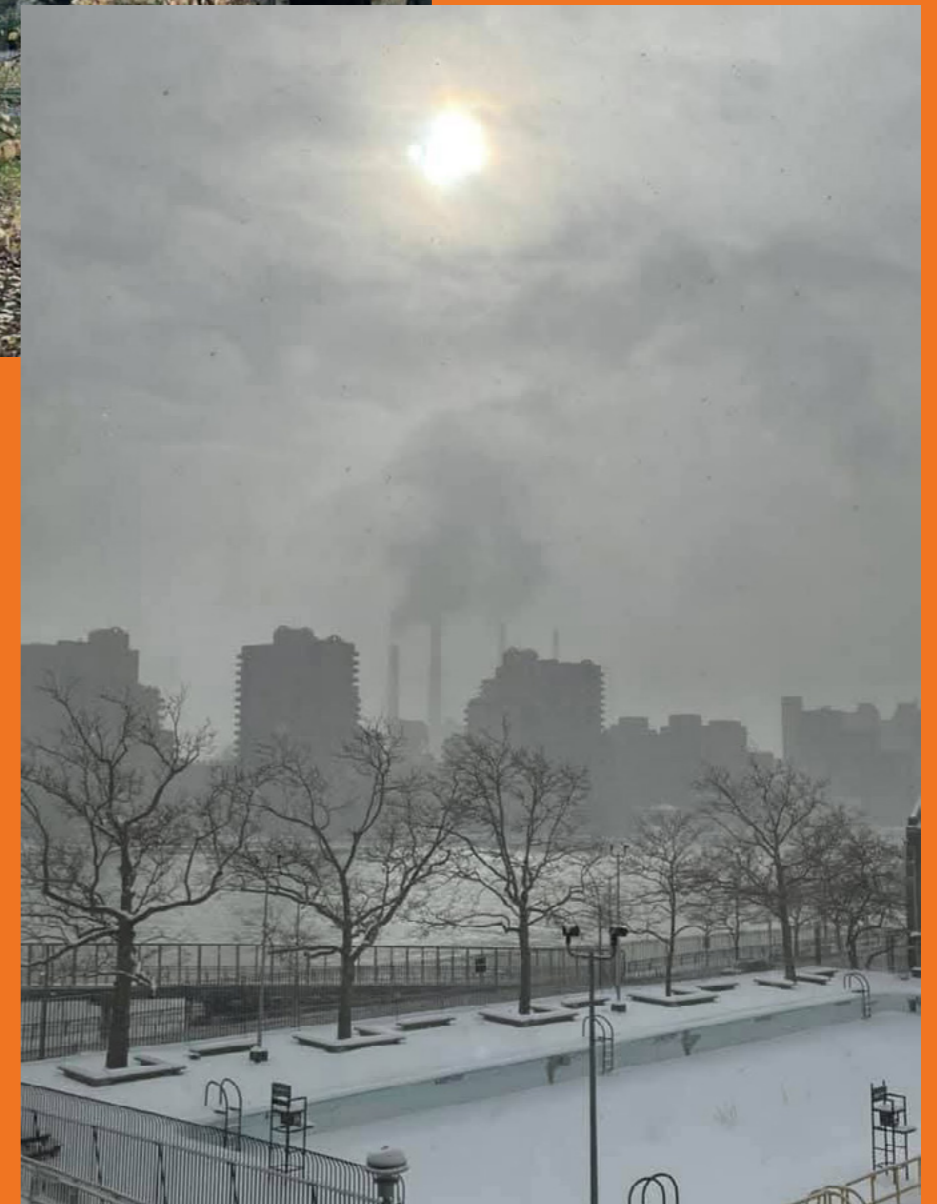
These publications document the wide range of Eoin's work and achievements



How the Irish Marriage Equality Referendum Was Nearly Lost in 2015
A Personal Perspective
by Kieran Rose
October 2025



Eoin moved to New York in 2011 to be with his partner Josep. He loved the city, especially Central Park. Top photo shows Central Park; bottom photo shows the view towards Roosevelt Island from their apartment in Manhattan. Photos: Eoin Collins



“I will always remember him as someone very special, honest, quiet spoken but steely, determined to keep the focus on the principle of equality, and a gentle persuader, a great colleague.”

- Anne Colley
Chair of the Working Group
on Domestic Partnership