

Good Afternoon Friends, Comrades, LGBT people or, in short, Conference.

In the trade union tradition I grew up in, this is how we used to address each other. I believe we need this kind of solidarity and openness with each other as much today as we did then. I apologise for not being able to address you in French. Although once upon a time I used to speak better French than English, living almost 29 years in England saw to it that my spoken French died! We are unfortunately fast becoming a world which is communicating in one language. I often find myself speaking a language which is not my native tongue with many of you who also do not have this language as your first language in the parts of the world in which English is not a native tongue either! I say "unfortunately" because I believe this makes our world culturally poorer and understanding each other more difficult at a time when world needs more understanding of our differing points of view not less.

I was going to start with our history but recent events whilst we have been here in Montreal made it necessary for me to deviate from my prepared text. Yesterday, at the plenary session of the conference we witnessed some hypocrisy that in my opinion risks jeopardising the political credibility of this entire event. We adopted, quite rightly so, a call asking the Canadian Government to provide visas to those brothers and sisters from Cameroon to attend to this conference. However when some of us wanted to adopt a motion in support of those LGBT people from Lebanon who cannot be here with us because of the war being waged by the Israeli government with the full support and protection of Bush government against the sovereign state of Lebanon. Apparently this is not to be. Why not?

It cannot possibly be that for us to have a gay man from Cameroon here in Montreal with us is more important than to have a lesbian from Lebanon here in Montreal, can it? Yesterday we saw an excellent video explaining the situation on the ground in Lebanon. Apparently this was enough. We cannot call for an "immediate ceasefire in Lebanon", we cannot call for the "Israeli Army to stop killing civilians", and we cannot say "we support the call of Mrs. Cynthia Hess van Kruegener for a full investigation through the UN into her husband's killing during the attack on the UN peace-keeping post by the Israeli army". We cannot say "we support the Lebanese LGBT organisation Helem's call for the boycott of this year's World Pride in Israel", and declare that "we believe there will not be peace in the Middle East and in the World without sorting out the problems of Palestine. The world is being hypocritical and is taking clear sides in support of the state of Israel at the expense of the Moslem World". Why can't we say these things? Is it because we are silly queers who cannot have such opinions about such high international matters? Or is it because we are intimidated with the "sophisticated" (!) Bush view, which says the World is divided into two camps: "Us and Them". In other words if you do not support Bush's view of the world then you are one of Them!

What does it mean to be one of Them? Let's not beat about the bush. According to these "sophisticated" international strategists in the USA it means you are supporting terrorists. Hence we cannot say anything against Israeli aggression; hence we cannot say anything against the flagrant disregard for International Law by the US government and we can say nothing against the US government's lack of respect for the UN.

Let me give you one local example of what these silly Bush policies are doing. At the moment in my country Turkey there is a growing pressure on the government to undertake military operations against the PKK in northern Iraq. The PKK is accepted as a terrorist organisation by USA. Increasing and influential voices are publicly asking, "Why can't we do in northern Iraq what Israel does in Lebanon?" Luckily enough there are saner voices speaking against it too. I wrote publicly in my newspaper column about how stupid and undesirable this would be. Do you know what reassurances were publicly given to the Turkish Government by Bush and Ms. Rice? "Don't worry. We'll sort out the Kurds. The US and Turkish governments working together with the Iraqi Government!"

Finally on this subject I want to say the following: Please for a moment consider why this event is infinitely more successful than the Gay Games which have just closed in the USA? Is it only because the Scientific Committee and the local organisers are better than their American counterparts? Is it because we had more money? Is it because Montreal is more beautiful than Boston? Why were there, as I understand, only just over 200 foreign participants at the Gay Games as opposed to many much more foreign guests here? Is it because the Canadian government give visas more easily than the US government?

No, it is because we, the participants and athletes felt that Canada in general, and Quebec in particular, especially Montreal, is a place where human rights are respected, where peace is desired, and tolerance and understanding is practised. Hence, sport can be a vehicle for peace, understanding and social change. So whatever the leaders of the plenary yesterday did or did not do, I want to declare from here; we want peace in Middle East and in the World. At the moment the biggest obstacles in the way of peace in Lebanon are the Israeli Army, with American weapons, and the Israeli Government, with the support of the US government.

Please however watch out. This morning I read on the front page of the "The Globe and Mail" that the "U.S. is planning to fingerprint Canadian workers". You are on your way to join us; "the Others".

May I now return to my original speech and start with our history because one who does not know his/her history cannot look healthily to the future. As I go along I will put in front of you my thoughts about future.

The idea to have an international Trade Union (TU) LGBT Conference was baked up at the *International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) Conferences'* workshops almost a decade and a half ago. PSI, which many of your unions are affiliated to, made its declaration in 1993 in Helsinki on lesbian and gay rights. I had a hand in writing it but it now seems a little out-of-date, however as one of the earliest historical documents we have in the international TU lgbt movement, it is important.

My trade union, NALGO at the time had a strong lgbt group and NALGO was an internationalist union in the true sense of the word. So we attended regularly the only LGBT International Forums at the time, called ILGA Conferences. The union was committing unseen resources to LGBT work at the time. Not only had it had a full time paid officer to organise this work it was also sending delegations to international lgbt gatherings and sponsoring the big national pride march in London. I was this lucky person; the first "Lesbian and Gay Officer" in the world working full time for a trade union. There is still a delegation from NALGO here at this conference, although the union is now called UNISON, and my successor is here too although I believe she is now called the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Officer. Times change but thank God they sometimes change for the better!

Of course we needed to deserve our union's investment in us, so we began to organise workshops about trade unions and LGBT rights and soon found within ILGA other like-minded trade unionists. In 1994 at the Stonewall 25th anniversary gatherings in New York we had meetings organised by SEIU and AFCLCIO. (I remember doing a strip tease at this meeting! I was of course younger and much more attractive. The things we had to do for our unions!) The ones in ILGA were all European at the time, not because there was not LGBT work happening in unions in other parts of the world but because at the time ILGA was essentially a European organisation. There were members from AbvaKabo and ABOB of the Netherlands; a public sector union and teachers union respectively, and ÖTV from Germany, later called Verdi. We were all activists and trade unionists and serious about changing the World and our dream of an international lgbt conference was getting closer.

We needed a pretext to which we could attach our conference. The Amsterdam Gay Games of 1998 was approaching and we had at least two good and supportive trade unions in the Netherlands. The FNV confederation in the Netherlands and our two international bodies Public Services International (PSI) and Education International (EI) were also supportive. Hence, it was time to organise the first "Workers Out", although this conference was not called "Workers Out" but it was called the "Homosexuality, Trade Unions and Work Conference". I don't know whether it does in French but in English this title sounds a little awkward, but I understand it works perfectly well in Dutch. The idea was to bring together work place issues for lgbt both from the trades unions' and employers' perspectives. As you know, this idea is still alive here at Montreal, we have our third "Workers Out" conference and there is also a parallel "Out for Business" Conference. You see, a good idea does not die it just changes shape and name.

The Amsterdam Conference was a great success. It boosted our confidence. At long last we were able to step out of the workshops of ILGA. International trades union bodies were also excited because the support we had enjoyed for some time from the leaderships of these international secretariats was finally starting to be reflected at the grass roots. We have even elected a "contact group", a kind of an executive body from the Amsterdam conference. However without any resources the ability for this group to function soon diminished and again the handful of usual suspects were left.

Of course, many struggles for lgbt activists continued during the four years between the Amsterdam and Sydney Conferences but the Gay Games of Sydney 2002 were approaching and we didn't even have a local organising committee down under. One other benefit to come from this conference was a handbook for international lgbt unionists. I wrote the booklet for PSI & EI to publish and I am told it has been translated into 11 languages. It remains the only document about lgbt issues in the international trade union movement. It is out of date and needs to be revised, however there is an important connection between this handbook and the Canadian trade union movement. Many of the good practice examples which I have added at the end of this booklet came from Canadian trade unions. If you can get hold of a copy you might find things to make you proud of your union's history.

So I used my trade union contacts in Australia and with the support of my union and the approval of those activists who remained active from Amsterdam Conference, I went to Sydney to set up the first meeting of the organising committee for the second "Workers Out". Indeed it was Australian activists who coined this phrase "Workers Out" for the first time. The Sydney Conference was a great success too. There was however some disappointment expressed amongst some Australian activists about

the lack of support and continuity between Amsterdam and Sydney. I mention this now in order to make us think about the future. We have to understand that resources are a very important part of the work we are all so keen to do. Political will and commitment on their own are not enough. The Sydney conference also saw greater support and participation from the two international secretariats; both EI and PSI were well represented at the conference at both the activist and leadership levels. There was greater understanding amongst the leadership of these organisations that we, the activists, are expecting more from our international secretariats. Hence both of the secretariats stepped up their efforts.

2004 saw a joint conference in Porto Alegre, Brazil between EI and PSI on LGBT issues. This meeting showed the way forward for our international work and set up some kind of a structure. I say "some kind of a structure" because there are still unresolved issues especially, as I understand it, on financial matters and on how this structure will function in relation to the international secretariats. Nevertheless, the pool of activists we have is a great constituency with which to take our work forward. I must mention the name of two people in this context. Rebeca Sevilla and Fred Van Leeuwen. An ex- ILGA Secretary General herself, Rebeca now works for EI and her contribution to developing this set up has been most important. And Fred, who leads the EI, is the only openly gay international trade union leader I know of. With his fellow countryman Hans Engelberts, General Secretary of PSI, their support over the years for an LGBT voice in the trades unions has been exemplary.

I must also mention the PSI Congress here in Canada which also made an important contribution to the development of an international TULGBT movement. I will not even attempt to name names, but luckily enough most of them are here and they were responsible for putting together this wonderful gathering.

Trade Unionists are often modest people. We often do not appreciate ourselves enough. Looking around me today with the largest ever TULGBT gathering in the world, with so many new trade unionists here and with so much support from our non-LGBT colleagues I think we can congratulate ourselves.

Thank you listening me so patiently.

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