

THE S.A. LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL AND HOMOSEXUAL LAW REFORM

Members of the S.A. committee of C.A.M.P. have been having continual discussions and correspondence with important councillors, based on a policy of working towards improving the wording of Mr. Murray Hill's Bill; seeing is it can be passed into the Lower House as an Interim measure.

When the Mitchell Committee submission to the government is finally prepared, which may take some considerable time, it is likely that a much more modern reform will be suggested. Our belief is that this will be very likely to be passed into law.

Getting Mr. Hill's Bill amended and then sent to the Lower House is well worth fighting for and for this we need your continual support. the advantages of this effort are:

- 1: as a method of educating Parliamentarians by forcing them to read on the subject and make speeches.
- 2: as a valuable interim measure provided it is amended.
- 3: to make it easier for Parliamentarians to stomach the 'Mitchell Bill' if it is more liberal still.
- 4: as a possible ploy in forcing the government to do something about H.L.R. by amending the Hill Bill, using government draughtsmen etc.

Once again I must ask for your earnest help. If each member could write four or five more letters covering the ground listed below, much could be achieved;

- 1: Make your letters polite - not angry or rude.
- 2: You need not write as a homosexual, but only as a concerned citizen.
- 3: Write in your own words saying what I suggest roughly below, but we want it to appear as a perfectly natural, spontaneous series of letters from different unconnected persons. So change the wording without changing the meaning.

A. Write to Hon. C.M. Hill, Parliament House ADELAIDE.

Dear Sir,

- have been following the debate on your bill for homosexual law reform ... I see you are being opposed by a number of Members. I hope you will be successful finally. Perhaps the Bill could be rescued by allowing amendments at the Committee Stage so that the bill can attract support from Mr. DeGaris and perhaps from others who will only vote for the Bill if it is changed in some way. etc.

~~B. to 1. Hon. Mr. Story M.L.C.  
2. Hon. Mr. R. De Garis M.L.C.~~

- 1. Hon. Mr. Geddes M.L.C.
- 2. Hon. Mr. Russack M.L.C.
- 3. Hon. Mr. Gilfillan M.L.C.

Dear Sir,

I see from the newspapers that you are opposed to change in the law at present which makes homosexual acts between consenting adults in private a criminal offence with up to ten years jail and a flogging as punishment.

I had always thought that it was a liberal principle that individual liberty was more important than making a man's private behaviour in his own home a police responsibility.

OR

Surely Christianity has moved from the idea that the 17th Century Puritan of England had that attempted to retain harsh criminal penalties, and found so unsuccessful.

OR

Australian Christian leaders who have considered this question in detail are nearly all in favour of getting the police out of the area and

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Church into it. These include the Methodist Church General Synod, the Presbyterian General Assembly of N.S.W.; many Anglican Diocesan Synods and the Roman Catholic Cardinal Griffin Committee of the U.K.

C. to Hon. Mr. Potter, M.L.C.  
Hon. Dr. Springett M.L.C.

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your support for homosexual law reform. I hope you will be able to help support any amendments which might be needed in the Committee stage to help get the Bill through.

-the President, S.A. C.A.M.P.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE ADELAIDE CLERGY LETTER

Between May and July of this year the Religious and Moral Issues working group of the S.A. branch of C.A.M.P. sent out a statement with covering letter to all parish clergy of the Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Congregational churches in the Adelaide metropolitan area - a total of 370. By the middle of August more than 30 replies had been received, either by letter or reply sheet, nearly half of which were from Anglicans. Taken together they provide a useful index of contemporary Christian thinking on homosexuality in our society.

The most striking feature of the letter replies is their lack of unanimity, thus reflecting the current questioning and reevaluation of traditional sexual ethics inside as well as outside the Christian church.

Despite our forbodings no hostile replies were received, probably because our severest critics, believing us to be perversely resistant to traditional arguments, thought it wasn't worth the effort. At the other extreme, we did receive a good number of assurances of full support, and indeed six clergymen (so far) have joined the Campaign. 'Your statement agrees very much with my own theology', wrote one minister, 'and I am chastized by its logic'. As might be expected, however, the majority of replies contained a mixture of agreement and criticism, with the latter tending to focus on the same points.

First, it was said that our interchangeable use of 'homosexual' and 'homosexual behaviour' was ambiguous and misleading. 'As I see it', wrote an Anglican rector, 'the Church does not condemn homosexuality as such any more than it condemns heterosexuality as such. What the Church has condemned (and still does) is illicit homosexual behaviour - specifically sodomy and lesbianism. The Church also condemns illicit heterosexual behaviour - specifically fornication and adultery.' The distinction is a valid one - but only in theory. In reply we would maintain that the church's traditional condemnation of homosexual behavi-

our (whatever its context) has in practice fostered a general condemnation of the homosexual condition in itself, whatever the theologians may say, as an inherently evil tendency. Homosexuals themselves - who should know - are certainly under no illusions; and those who for any reason have decided to remain celibate are just as reluctant as any other to allow the fact of their homosexuality to become known.

It was also objected that, whatever the church's part in contributing to the suspicion and hostility which surrounds homosexuality in most European thinking, its present-day pastoral attitude does not lack in compassion and understanding. We would tend to agree. Unfortunately - so great is the weight of accumulated social and religious pressures - most homosexual Christians have assumed, without themselves experiencing it, an attitude of condemnation and rejection from their priest or minister, and have therefore gone to great pains to conceal their sexual identity within the church context. Of those homosexuals who have remained in the church relatively few appear to have discussed their sexual 'problem' with a Christian counsellor. It would appear that a substantial proportion - though not a majority - of Adelaide clergy are prepared to suspend past judgements and hostile attitudes and to counsel homosexuals with sympathy, sensitivity and Christian charity.

Another point of disagreement was the implication of our statement that homosexuality and heterosexuality are equally valid sexual identities. A few deplored the suggestion. Homosexuality, claimed one Methodist minister, is a 'personality disorder' and a 'social deviation' which can be overcome to a large extent by a fundamental 'change in attitude' - though he also (illogically?) assured us of his wish that homosexuals should find acceptance within the wider community. Others, however, welcomed the idea. 'It seems to me,' said one (highly respected) Anglican priest, 'that homosexual relations should be as acceptable as heterosexual ones, but I am afraid there is probably much to be done before society's attitudes will change.'

Finally, some clergy felt we had ignored traditional Christian teaching on the need for self-discipline, thereby opening the door to unregulated license. Behind this objection seemingly lies the assumption that a homosexual

orientation consists essentially of a desire for physical sexual contact, which can and should be controlled just like any other socially undesirable predisposition - for example, alcoholism or the propensity to lose one's temper.

These two latter criticisms raise serious theological issues which deserve consideration at length.

The essential difference between homosexual and heterosexual people is a small one. The only difference between homosexual and heterosexual is the particular type of sexual drive: that whereas the heterosexual person is drawn to integrate himself (or herself) with somebody of the opposite sex, the homosexual person finds himself drawn to a relationship with someone of the same sex. Most homosexuals do not consider their sexual interests a symptom of sickness and accordingly do not wish to be 'cured'. As far as his own feelings go, the homosexual is entirely normal, and he sees no reason at all why he should not be accepted by his fellow men and women as such. He asks that he be allowed by society to love and to be loved in the way that is possible and natural for him.

Homosexual love in the context of a committed relationship can be and often is as good an expression of human sexuality as heterosexual love. Certainly it is not inferior. There is therefore no reason for the homosexual man or woman to feel ashamed of himself. On the contrary, there is every reason for him to accept himself, and there is every reason for society and the Christian church to accept him too. What is required of him is that, being a homosexual, he will be the best sort of homosexual possible.