

The impact of cuts on the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) communities

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Part of the current homophobic discourse is to portray LGBT people as economically stronger than the "general population". We've heard about the so called "pink pound" and the expression "double income, no kids" which present us in the mainstream media and advertisement industry as a new target market of the consumerist society.

These representations tend to feed the conspiracy theories that describe the "gay lobby" as imposing the "values of a minority" to the defenceless silent majority who continues to raise "hard working families". Some people continue to think that homosexuality should not be the concern of the working class which has better priorities to defend like opposing the government cuts. They don't realise that we are actually as much if not more concerned by the cuts.

If some gay men are indeed very powerful and influential, the majority of LGBTQ people are in fact less advantaged economically. It is true that white middle class gay men are often the leaders of the gay movement and indeed more visible because they have more power which allows them being visible. The "pink pound" in a capitalist society allows them buying better acceptance.

However, what about those who are not middle class? Do you think that homosexuality is stranger of the working class? Ask yourself why trade unions are still dominated by straight men. Why is it still so difficult for many to come out among their comrades? The reality is that we do exist but LGBTQ issues are still considered as less serious, less important, a secondary struggle which divert the focus from what really matters. This way of thinking is actually the best way to divide the working class when we should be all united.

It erases our existence and therefore our oppression and our struggles. Moreover, homophobia does not operate in the same way according to your class, gender, race, etc. Homophobia may be less a problem when you are a Minister and have a body guard, but it can be very violent when you are working on the streets as a sex worker and that people see you as an easy target that doesn't deserve police protection. Lesbians as women don't benefit the same economic power that gay men when Trans' people are often excluded from the labour market. Also the HIV epidemic has had a tremendous impact for many gay men in terms of economic disempowerment.

Many people remain silent in their workplace about their identity because they know that in a difficult economic period they may be the first ones to be made redundant. They know that the cuts in their sector will target them more than others. They will have to continue playing the discreet ones, sometimes lying, and listening to all the family stories of their colleagues acquiescing in silent. They will give some money to help a widow colleague with the funerals of the loved husband she lost while nobody said a word when his husband and half his friends died of aids few years earlier.

The cuts will affect the LGBTQ communities more because we are never a priority. The "real families" will always come first, even when we have children too. They will have to save the most important and we know that we're not. Many LGBT charity organisations are already losing their funding like Galop an organisation helping victims of hate crimes; LGBT youth services which many have already closed, or

Broken Rainbow that helps people suffering domestic violence within a same sex couple.

The cuts imposed on students and the rise of tuition fees will obviously have a greater impact on those students who are not supported economically by their family and among them many LGBTQ students are more likely to be in that situation.

Many HIV services and health organisations are also at risk, with a greater lack of means to support people living with HIV and with fewer consultations available for STD's testing and less prevention campaigns in a critical period when young gay men are currently very vulnerable to HIV infections.

There will be even less funding to investigate hate crimes when they are already underfunded. Yet, the difficult economic period is conducive to higher level of homophobic and transphobic attacks because people are looking for scapegoats for their own problems. The lack of staff in public transports or the cuts in public lighting will also reduce the safety of those who need it the most.

Most schools don't educate pupils about feminism or LGBT issues despite an obligation to mention them at least for LGBT history month in their programs. If schools have less funding, many teachers will consider that they must focus on the "fundamentals" without wasting time for less important items of the programme. Nonetheless, education is the best way to fight hate crimes committed often by very young people and to reduce the problems of school bullying or the high levels of LGBTQ teenagers' suicide.

Many LGBTQ people are in need of protection such as asylum seekers. Most of them are denied their rights and deported back to countries where they face persecutions and death. LGBTQ asylum seekers who are only seen as an additional cost will struggle even more to be recognised by the Home office as deserving protection.

The list is long and I probably forget other issues but what is clear is that we will suffer a lot from the cuts. In that struggle, we will need more than ever the support of the Labour movement because the gay movement has for the moment nothing to say about the cuts. However, more and more LGBTQ activists refuse the commercialisation of their pride and sociability places and the de-politicisation of their identities. Some like me use the term "Queer" politically not only to reclaim the insult but to question the normalisation of the gay identity and in particular regarding the issues of class and race.

We are more and more who prefer to invest our energy in the Labour movement because the oppression we suffer is not only about homophobia and that the homophobia we suffer is different to those of white middle class men. New forms of activism such as UK Black Pride, Hackney Pride, Queer mutinies, or the work of LGBTQ trade unionists try to include and analyse the intersection of class, race, sexuality and gender in their struggles. Left Front Art is one of these organisations and we have affiliated to LRC because we want these issues to be part of the progressive Labour agenda.