

Homophobia as Party Politics: The Construction of the 'Homosexual Deviant' in Joh Bjelke-Petersen's Queensland

Shirleene Robinson

Introduction

In 1987, years of frustration with Queensland's sexually repressive culture compelled a homosexual man named Cliff Williams to write to the national gay magazine *OutRage*. Williams outlined a number of the difficulties he faced being gay in Queensland and ended his letter with the exclamation, 'To hell with homophobic Queensland!'¹ This exclamation captures many of the tensions in Queensland in the 1970s and 1980s. While these decades were a time of immense political change for gay and lesbian Australians, Queensland's political culture was particularly resistant to the gay and lesbian rights movement.

The Australian gay and lesbian liberation movement emerged as a political force in the 1970s and 1980s during an era when Queensland was governed by the extreme right-wing premier Johannes 'Joh' Bjelke-Petersen, and a climate of censorship and repression prevailed. This article explores the ways in which Bjelke-Petersen and his Country Party/National Party government defined homosexuality as morally deviant in order to gain electoral advantage, thereby incorporating the politics of homophobia into governance. First, the Bjelke-Petersen government made efforts to prevent homosexual teachers from being employed and homosexual students from forming support groups. Second, it used the HIV/AIDS epidemic to demonise homosexual individuals. Third, it attempted to introduce anti-homosexual licensing laws and to criminalise lesbianism. Finally, the 1986 Sturgess Inquiry into Sexual Offences Involving Children and Related Matters also contributed to public anti-gay sentiment. Paedophilia was consistently linked to homosexuality throughout this era.

As Adrian Cherney suggests, the most effective means of gauging homophobia in society is to undertake qualitative research that best discovers social experience.² Accordingly, this article first analyses anti-homosexual rhetoric expressed by political figures. As Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller argue, 'an analysis of political

discourse helps us to elucidate not only the systems of thought through which authorities have posed and specified the problems for government, but also the system of action through which they have sought to give effect to government'.³

This article considers the ways in which anti-homosexual rhetoric impacted upon Queensland's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (GLBTIQ) community. Information about the response from this community is largely drawn from the gay media and focuses on language, signs and meanings.⁴

The terms 'homosexual' and 'homophobia' are both comparatively modern linguistic creations. As Gary Simes has explained, the language used to describe homosexual acts and developing homosexual identities has changed considerably over the past 150 years.⁵ The term 'homosexual' was coined in 1869 by Karl-Maria Kertbeny, and was subsequently popularised by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his *Psychopathia Sexualis*.⁶ Broadly speaking, though, the idea of a fixed homosexual identity appears to be a twentieth century concept. During the period under consideration in this article, a mainstream homosexual subculture in Queensland was still emerging and many gay men described themselves as 'camp' rather than homosexual or gay. However, by 1971 the term 'homosexual' had gained sufficient currency amongst Brisbane's gay and lesbian population to be used in a survey of this community undertaken by the Humanist Society.⁷ Furthermore, politicians and the media were also beginning to use the term 'homosexual' to describe same sex-attracted individuals. As a result, the term 'homosexual' is used throughout this article.

The term 'homophobia' was first used in an academic sense by the American psychologist George Weinberg in his 1972 book *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*.⁸ It is often used to describe all forms of negative behaviours towards members of the GLBTIQ community, but more precisely should be supplemented by the use of the term 'heterosexism', which more specifically describes the structural forms of compulsory heterosexuality that impact on the lives of GLTBIQ individuals.⁹ Over the past 30 years, though, the term 'homophobia' has been adopted and used both by members of the GLBTIQ community and by wider society to describe prejudices that impact upon individuals as a result of their attraction to the same sex.¹⁰ This article follows this broader approach, using the term 'political homophobia' to describe the manifestations and manipulations of anti-homosexual prejudices in the political sphere.¹¹

The 1970s and 1980s were decades of progressive social reform in most parts of Australia. In 1972, South Australia became the first state to decriminalise some homosexual acts. By 1989, every Australian state and territory except Queensland and Tasmania had decriminalised male-to-male sexual activity. While the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s forced governments in the southern states to forge closer relationships with the GLBTIQ community, Queensland's National Party government steadfastly refused to consult with this community. Instead, Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen forged close links with fundamentalist religious groups and used homophobic policies and rhetoric as a political strategy. It is thus not surprising that many gay and lesbian individuals viewed Queensland as Australia's most homophobic state during this era.

Gay and lesbian activists in Queensland historically have contended with a number of difficulties unique to this state. First, Queensland's governing structure – with a single chamber and an electoral system that over-represented the rural sections of the population – meant that it was difficult for reforms to be debated in Parliament. Second, the anti-democratic nature of the Bjelke-Peterson government meant that protest marches and other public demonstrations – activities that had successfully drawn attention to homosexual rights in other states – were not permitted. Third, reforms were particularly difficult to achieve because, unlike the southern states, Queensland had no homosexual press and the periodicals that provided a voice for gay people in southern states were banned from public sale.¹² These difficulties were compounded by the active use of homophobia as a political tool by conservative Bjelke-Petersen ministers. Clive Moore points out that while Queensland's gay and lesbian culture is 'quintessentially Australian', the 'gerrymandered, rural/reactionary rule of the National/Liberal and National Party government' during the Bjelke-Petersen era meant that mainstream Queensland was slower to embrace homosexual reform than other states.¹³

While the gay and lesbian history of Queensland is still an emerging field of research, some texts provide valuable context for this study. Clive Moore's important book, *Sunshine and Rainbows: The Development of Gay and Lesbian Culture in Queensland*, considers the emergence of a gay and lesbian community in Queensland in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁴ This book does not focus extensively on political homophobia, however. Moore has also written a number of other pieces that explore aspects of male homosexuality in Queensland's past.¹⁵ Yorick Smaal has also written some valuable material relating to the early formation of a male homosexual subculture in Queensland.¹⁶ An interest in restoring Queensland's non-heterosexual histories also saw the publication of a special edition of *Queensland Review*, edited by Belinda Mackay and Yorick Smaal, in 2007.¹⁷ This special issue was devoted entirely to the state's queer past. Works exploring the history of Australia's gay and liberation movement also help place Queensland's gay and lesbian movement into a national context.¹⁸

The broader context of the Joh Bjelke-Petersen era has attracted the attention of a considerable number of historians and commentators.¹⁹ Much of this attention has focused on Bjelke-Petersen's longevity and the corruption that surrounded his government.²⁰ Understandings of protest against Bjelke-Petersen, along with youth subcultures during this era, were enhanced with the publication of *Radical Brisbane*, edited by Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier. However, the use of homophobia as a political tool by the Bjelke-Petersen government has not yet been explored.

Joh Bjelke-Petersen

Joh Bjelke-Petersen's long reign as Queensland's Premier began in 1968 and ended in 1987, with the Fitzgerald Inquiry into police corruption. He governed the state as leader of the Country Party (which became the National Party in 1975) in Coalition with the Liberal Party until 1983, and is particularly remembered for

his rigid control of all areas of government policy and his anti-democratic stance on public protest.²¹

Bjelke-Petersen was brought up in a deeply religious atmosphere as his father was a Lutheran pastor. During his time in office, he assiduously cultivated links with fundamentalist Christians who supported his social agenda. In particular, he was highly receptive to the agenda of Rona Joyner, who formed two groups, the Society To Outlaw Pornography (STOP) and the Committee Against Regressive Education (CARE), which were particularly regressive about sexual matters.²²

Due to the lobbying of Joyner, in 1978 a primary school social studies course, *Man: A Course of Study*, was suddenly banned from all Queensland schools. It was soon joined by the secondary course, *Social Education Materials Project*, along with works of literature that included *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.²³ As Ross Fitzgerald has observed, censorship reflected 'the nature of Queensland society – its moral traditionalism, and the identification of a populist political elite with Christian fundamentalism and other "conservative ideologies"'.²⁴

Despite Bjelke-Petersen's best attempts to stifle debate, there remained a strong protest culture in Queensland in the late 1960s and 1970s. Much of this protest culture had emerged from The University of Queensland during the Vietnam War. In 1975, student activists and radicals established 4ZZZ, an alternative community radio station that became a powerful voice of dissent.²⁵

The Emergence of a Gay and Lesbian Movement

The gay and lesbian movement in Queensland also provided a voice of dissent during the Bjelke-Petersen era. Craig Johnston and Robert Johnston have argued that the years from 1969 to 1978 saw the first phase of the gay movement in Australia – an era that was marked by organised resistance to official views against homosexuality.²⁶ One of the most important early organisations from this first stage was certainly the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP). Johnston and Johnston argue that the second phase of the gay movement in Australia dates from 1978 – the year of the first Mardi Gras in Sydney. They maintain that this second phase saw the formation of distinct gay communities.²⁷

The Queensland gay and lesbian movement was strongly influenced by developments in the southern states but had to contend with the particular brand of social conservatism and control espoused by the Bjelke-Petersen government. A branch of CAMP Inc was founded in Brisbane in 1971. As Clive Moore points out, the activists involved in CAMP Inc 'went very carefully about establishing [the organisation] in Queensland's homophobic environment'.²⁸ Certainly there was reason to exercise caution. The Justice Minister, Dr Delemothe, had recently conflated paedophilia with homosexuality when he declared that 'the greater the number of homosexuals, the greater the threat to innocent boys'.²⁹ Given this attitude, the leaders of CAMP wrote to the Justice Minister Dr Delemothe and to the Police Commissioner Ray Whitrod to inquire about any legal restrictions that might impact on the formation of CAMP in Queensland.³⁰ They were informed that

there were no official objections to the formation of the organisation, providing that members did not engage in illegal behaviour.³¹

In 1976, Ray Whitrod resigned as Police Commissioner after Joh Bjelke-Petersen appointed Terry Lewis as Assistant Commissioner. Whitrod had held the position since 1971 and his resignation was directly attributable to his belief that the police force was increasingly corrupt under Bjelke-Petersen. The change in policing attitudes after Whitrod's departure was felt immediately by the gay community. In 1978, one writer to the *Gay Solidarity Newsletter* asserted that they 'had observed how police and public antagonism to homosexuals had escalated in the last two years'.³² Another writer pointed out that two Brisbane men were due to face court on gross indecency charges, which carried a maximum penalty of three years' jail. The writer noted that these charges

marked the end of a long truce between the police force and the homosexual community, a truce which existed throughout the years of Commissioner Ray Whitrod as the Queensland Police Chief. In recent months, the conservative Catholic hierarchy of the force, headed by Commissioner Terry Lewis and the CIB Chief Superintendent Tony Murphy, has turned its law enforcing eye on the moral well-being of the state.³³

The police harassment of homosexual individuals took two main forms. First, women within the police force who were suspected of being lesbians were transferred or forced to break up domestic liaisons.³⁴ Second, Licensing Squad detectives increased their raids on saunas popular with gay men and acted as *agents provocateurs* towards gay men in beats. The first attack on a sauna occurred in October of 1977, when fourteen Licensing Squad detectives raided a gay sauna club, which was not publicly named in gay periodicals of the time, tramping through the premises, 'verbally abusing men in the coffee and reading rooms' and closing the club, despite failing to find any drugs or pornography.³⁵ The owners of the club attributed the raid to a 'state election due only a few weeks later and Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen running on his usual law and order campaign'.³⁶ The owners reopened the club in 1978. They were, however, raided only two days after this reopening.³⁷ Several men were arrested and, not surprisingly, attendance rates at the club drastically decreased.³⁸

While many heterosexual Queenslanders may not have been aware of the scale of covert harassment being experienced by members of the gay and lesbian community through police actions, the second half of the 1970s saw political homophobia become much more overt to mainstream Queenslanders. This growth in political homophobia was largely due to the increased visibility of the gay and lesbian liberation movement and the actions of fundamentalist Christians who opposed this movement.

Stephen Bates, who has studied the rise of the religious right in modern America, argues that there the modernism of the 1960s spurred a subsequent growth of right-wing evangelicals. Increases in the divorce rate, along with the rise of secular humanism and the development of various liberation movements, saw

fundamentalist Christians engage with a political system they had long mistrusted.³⁹ The gay and lesbian movement was particularly threatening to the world-view of fundamentalists.⁴⁰

As Graham Willett points out, tensions in Australia were similar. The radical reformist policies of the Whitlam federal government, which was in power from 1972 until 1975, exacerbated many of the fears held by Australian fundamentalists.⁴¹ While organisations such as the Festival of Light, which was directed by Fred Nile from 1974 onwards in New South Wales, gained a public profile, religious fundamentalists were able to influence government policy towards homosexuality most strongly in Queensland.

University Support Groups and the Employment of Gay Teachers

One of the first issues to bring political homophobia to the forefront in Queensland revolved around support groups for homosexual university students. Later attacks focused on the employment of gay teachers. The Bjelke-Petersen government was quick to support protests against both issues.

In March 1975, students at the Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education formed the Kelvin Grove Homosexual and Lesbian Group. A young education student, Greg Weir, acted as public spokesperson for the group. Very soon after its formation, the group attracted the ire of three conservative groups, the Society to Outlaw Pornography (STOP), the Committee Against Regressive Education (CARE) and the Parents of Tertiary Students (POTS).⁴² The first two of these groups at least were driven primarily by Rona Joyner, a private citizen who wielded enormous influence in conservative political circles.

STOP and CARE lobbied the Kelvin Grove College of Education to ban the Homosexual and Lesbian Group but their efforts were unsuccessful as the council of the College agreed the group could continue. Greg Weir appeared on the ABC television program *Today Tonight* in support of the Homosexual and Lesbian Group and also was involved in a small public demonstration supporting the need for such a group in the centre of Brisbane.⁴³

STOP, CARE and POTS, according to *AXIS*, the Teachers' Union newsletter, 'predictably [had] credibility and willing ears in the Queensland Parliament of Joh Bjelke-Petersen'.⁴⁴ This considered, developments involving the Homosexual and Lesbian Group's main spokesperson were not surprising. In 1977, Greg Weir had completed his Diploma of Teaching. Under the system of the time, students who had studied education at these institutions were bonded to the Department of Education for the same number of years for which they had received training or they were required to pay back the money the government had spent on them. In January 1977, however, Weir received a letter from the Director General of Education stating:

With reference to your letter of 14 January 1977, I wish to inform you that there is no position available to you in this Department at present. You are absolved from any commitment to this Department as a result of monies paid to you during the tenure of your scholarship allowance.⁴⁵

Weir's exclusion from the teaching profession was based on lobbying by STOP, CARE and POTS and the support that these fundamentalists received from the Bjelke-Petersen government. Brian Lindsay, the Liberal Member for Everton, made a point of requesting assurance from the Education Minister that 'young men and women with such unfortunate and unnatural personal lifestyles are never admitted to the profession'.⁴⁶

Weir challenged the government decision, travelling around Queensland and Australia to draw attention to this discrimination. He gained the support of a number of trade unions and funding from the Australian Union of Students. However, by November 1983 Weir was in poor health and settled out of court with the Queensland government. This meant that, technically, the Queensland government had not lost the case. One year later, in 1984, the Education Minister Lyn Powell – who would later be described by the gay magazine *OutRage* as 'a lunatic fundamentalist' – asserted that teachers in state schools who publicly identified as gay would be fired from their positions immediately.⁴⁷

The 10th National Conference of Lesbians and Homosexual Men, 1984

Homosexual issues received greater attention in 1984, when the 10th National Conference of Lesbians and Homosexual Men was held at The University of Queensland. Interestingly, activists made the decision to hold this conference in Queensland because the Queensland Education Minister would not allow teachers to attend conferences in the southern states.

Reaction against this conference from Bjelke-Petersen's government was swift and preceded the conference itself. In 1983, National and Liberal Members of Parliament condemned it. *The Age* newspaper in Victoria viewed these attacks with cynicism, writing that 'fears of an invasion of southern homosexuals' appeared to have healed divisions between the recently estranged Liberal and National Parties. Lyn Powell made a number of remarks against the conference, and 'for a while it looked as if the National Party had cornered the entire anti-homosexual ground. But the Liberal Party was quick to catch up [and] sent its new deputy Mr Angus Innes into the fray'.⁴⁸ Innes declared that the conference was 'clearly part of a world-wide movement' to impose homosexual 'views on others'.⁴⁹

In 1984, as the conference approached, conservative political protests against it increased. One MP, Earle Bailey, the Member for Toowong, made a speech declaring that the conference posed a threat to social order. He asserted that one program, titled 'The practicality of running a campaign and building the leadership of the oppressed, or you can do it too; straight white men don't have a monopoly', was 'of great concern to the members of this Parliament, because it could be full of CAMP Club men and women in a fairly early stage'.⁵⁰

Bailey was particularly affronted by a session that was to discuss paedophilia. The inclusion of this session had been debated strongly by gay and lesbian activists, who were aware that conservative forces might use the session to discredit the gay and lesbian rights movement. Indeed, this is what Bailey did. He declared that 'there is a side to this exercise that is enormously disturbing. What they are trying to do in many ways is to legitimise sex with children'.⁵¹ The strategy of

linking homosexuality with paedophilia has been observed more broadly in other parts of Australia. The historian Steven Angelides has argued that the ‘figure of the “innocent” heteronormative child was mobilised by a range of social groups in Australia during this time in order to serve as a bulwark against the liberalisation of sex education pedagogies and an advancing gay rights movement’.⁵²

Efforts to link paedophilia and homosexuality appear to have been extreme in Queensland. The Queensland Minister for Welfare Services, Geoff Muntz, seized the opportunity to link the two when he tabled a statement to the Queensland Parliament, declaring that ‘the vile practice of paedophilia reflects the degenerate standard of the entire homosexual subculture’.⁵³ Muntz also declared that ‘homosexuals do not reproduce, they recruit, and they usually recruit children and young people, not middle-aged men and mothers with children’.⁵⁴

The Minister for Education, Lyn Powell, successfully pressured The University of Queensland’s Senate into withdrawing permission for the session on paedophilia to run. Muntz, determined not to be outdone, continued to maintain that the conference was ‘a condemnation of the Federal Labor Government, that they have promoted the acceptance of homosexual behaviour and their deviant behaviour in our community’.⁵⁵ W.H. Glasson, the Minister for Lands, Forestry and Police, also entered the debate, telling Parliament that ‘police will keep a close watch on the Tenth National Conference of Lesbians and Homosexual Men to be held at the Queensland University this weekend’.⁵⁶

Response to HIV/AIDS

Political homophobia and an alliance between conservative politicians and fundamentalist religious groups had been established before the arrival of HIV/AIDS in Australia. However, the arrival of the disease significantly exacerbated the homophobic rhetoric of members of the Bjelke-Petersen government. One writer has noted that ‘the onset of AIDS [was] something of a godsend to the moral puritans who determine public policy on sexual activity in Queensland’.⁵⁷

The Queensland government’s response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic has justifiably received much condemnation. Historians, however, have recognised the efforts made by members of the GLBTIQ community to inform their community of the implications of the illness and ways in which safe sex could be practised.⁵⁸ In 1983, the first meeting was held by Queensland activists; during the following year, homophobia motivated by the disease was given enormous publicity.

In July 1984, the media reported that 30 recipients had received blood contaminated with the HIV virus. This number was modified the next day to 26. The reporting of this was not handled with any degree of sensitivity. Fears of an epidemic increased significantly in November when the Minister for Health, Brian Austin, announced that three babies had died after receiving transfusions of blood contaminated with HIV/AIDS. The blood had been donated by a 27-year-old homosexual Brisbane man. The *Courier-Mail* and *Daily Sun* both devoted their front page to comments from the father of one of the dead babies, who not only referred to homosexuality as ‘this degenerate trend’ but also urged the donor of the contaminated blood to commit suicide.⁵⁹

In August 1984, when concern over contaminated blood was mounting, Bjelke-Petersen described homosexual people as ‘insulting evil animals who should go back to New South Wales and Victoria where they came from in the first place’.⁶⁰ Bjelke-Petersen also took the opportunity to declare that the New South Wales Labor Premier, Neville Wran, ‘should hang his head in shame for legalising homosexuality in New South Wales’.⁶¹

The arrival of this contagious and potentially deadly disease in Queensland caused considerable public fear. The legislative response of the Bjelke-Petersen government appears to have been highly reactionary. It quickly introduced amendments to the *Transplantation and Anatomy Act*, allowing for a \$10,000 penalty or two years’ imprisonment for those who knowingly gave false information in respect of body tissue used for transplant or transfusion.⁶² The introduction of this legislation helped to convey the impression that homosexual blood donors might knowingly have donated infected blood.

When introducing the amendments, Austin continued with the rhetoric that had been adopted by Bjelke-Petersen, associating the Labor Party with homosexuality and HIV/AIDS with both. Austin stated that the children who had died as a result of receiving contaminated blood ‘appear to be the innocent victims of the permissive society Australia is becoming. It distresses the Queensland government to see how some other states and Canberra support legalised homosexuality.’⁶³

As the HIV/AIDS crisis continued, the Bjelke-Petersen government steadfastly refused to open discussions with the activists involved in promoting safe-sex campaigns. Bjelke-Petersen also refused to allow condom machines to be installed in public facilities and did not allow for non-judgemental discussions of safe sex or indeed any sexual education in Queensland schools. While other states set up testing and treatment facilities and funded AIDS Action Councils, the Queensland state government refused to fund such facilities.⁶⁴

The Bjelke-Petersen government did overcome its reluctance to mention sex in schools by consenting to mention HIV/AIDS in high school classes. The way it was mentioned, however, was inflammatory and homophobic. Brian Austin declared: ‘Young adults should be told that AIDS is a result of abnormal behaviour. There was quite a lot of pressure on them to accept abnormal behaviour until AIDS came along.’⁶⁵ In terms of informing Queensland children about how to avoid the disease through safer sexual activity, though, the government was negligent.

Outside Queensland, other conservative politicians followed Bjelke-Petersen’s methods of linking HIV/AIDS and homosexuality with the Labor Party for political gain. It was clear that there was going to be a federal election before the end of 1984 and Bjelke-Petersen’s rhetoric was repeated on the federal scale. The leader of the federal National Party, Ian Sinclair, blamed ‘the socialists in Canberra’ for the spread of HIV/AIDS, maintaining that ‘without the promotion of homosexuality as a norm by Labor’ he was ‘quite confident’ that the deaths of the ‘three poor babies’ would not have occurred.⁶⁶

The HIV/AIDS epidemic unfortunately inspired homophobia across Australia. It appears that this homophobia was at its worst in Queensland, where government ministers openly demonised homosexual individuals and used this fear to increase

popular support. In 1987, Cliff Williams wrote of Queensland: 'With the advent of AIDS, homophobia [took] on a new and more sinister form. Gay men have been brutalized in city-street bashings and demoralized in the tabloid media.'⁶⁷

OutRage magazine strongly believed that the Bjelke-Petersen government very deliberately used the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the fear this caused for electoral purposes. In 1991, the magazine recalled: 'The National Party equated homosexuality with AIDS and turned them both into an election issue. This was the peak of AIDS hysteria throughout Australia but it was worst in Queensland.'⁶⁸

The Sturgess Report of 1985

The Sturgess Report was commissioned in this climate, in 1984 when HIV/AIDS hysteria was at its peak. In many ways it fed off the homophobia that was being used politically at this time. The report emerged from allegations that three men, including a prominent radio announcer and a police officer who appeared regularly on children's television, had engaged in sexual offences with young boys. The Queensland press alleged that these allegations were part of a broader paedophilia ring that operated from illegal brothels in the state.⁶⁹ Des Sturgess was appointed Director of Public Prosecutions and was asked to investigate the matter.

Sturgess reiterated much of the rhetoric that had been espoused by the Bjelke-Petersen government and fundamentalist groups when he declared that 'there is a modern phenomena linking homosexuality, drugs, and the corruption of children'.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Sturgess declared:

While it is a myth to say that all homosexuals are paedophiles, I believe it to be a fact that male homosexuals are more attracted to youth than heterosexuals and will remain so for much of their lives. Also, I am satisfied children can be made homosexuals as the result of homosexual experiences.⁷¹

While other states were decriminalising homosexuality, Sturgess only recommended the reduction of terms of punishment. In his final report, released in 1985, Sturgess suggested that instead of the existing sentence of fourteen years' jail, offenders should be charged with a misdemeanour and a maximum of three years' jail. Quentin Dempster, writing in the *Sunday Mail*, criticised Sturgess for not advocating the decriminalisation of homosexuality. He wrote that 'this continuing homophobia in Queensland does not encourage homosexuals to come forward to assist the health authorities in combating AIDS, for example. In fact, it drives them back in the closet.'⁷²

A close examination of public statements made by Sturgess would indicate that he was never likely to support homosexual law reform. In 1985, when the Gay Mardi Gras in Sydney was attracting increasing numbers of spectators, he asserted that: 'It is not an expression of freedom, it's an expression of sexual hedonism. It was a most unfortunate example for children entering puberty or who have just entered puberty.'⁷³ This statement again reveals beliefs Sturgess held about links between homosexuality and the corruption of youth.

Ultimately, though, it is doubtful whether the Sturgess Report achieved any significant benefits for child victims of sexual exploitation. Perhaps the most perceptive comments about the Sturgess Report came from criminologist Paul Wilson, who asserted that ‘for years in Queensland, we didn’t find child abuse when it was there and now we are danger of finding it when it is not there’.⁷⁴ Later, Bjelke-Petersen and his Police Commissioner Terry Lewis both admitted that they had never read the Sturgess Report.⁷⁵ In retrospect, it appears that the calling of this inquiry was predominantly intended to draw attention away from allegations that the Bjelke-Petersen government knew of corruption in the police force or of the existence of illegal brothels.

Liquor Licensing Law Amendments

In 1986, in the lead-up to the state election, gay and lesbian individuals were once again targeted by the Bjelke-Petersen government. This remains the most obvious use of homophobia as an electoral strategy in Australia in this era. The Bjelke-Petersen government, with support from its Liberal Coalition partner, introduced legislation that aimed to prevent homosexual men and women from frequenting bars. When introducing the legislation, the government once again conflated and confused paedophilia with homosexuality. In November 1985, the Liberal Justice spokesperson, Angus Innes, declared: ‘Queensland should give a national lead in combating this modern scourge of promiscuous homosexuality and its associated disease AIDS by specifically forbidding the maintenance of places of regular congregation of homosexual people in licensed premises.’⁷⁶

As attention was drawn to Queensland’s gay bars, the Licensing Commission chairman, Mr M.R. Stubbins, told the *Sunday Mail* that a recent court case had described activities at a gay bar. He noted that: ‘Boys danced with boys, girls danced with girls, boys kissed boys. My own reaction to that is yuk, but community standards are changing unfortunately.’⁷⁷ Neville Harper, member of the National Party and the Queensland Attorney General and Justice Minister, told Parliament that ‘the amendment as drafted will allow action to be taken to ensure that these sexual perverts, these deviants, these gay bars, will not be allowed to prosper, will not be allowed to continue’.⁷⁸

There was considerable public protest against the proposed laws. Matt Foley, who would later become the Labor Party Attorney-General for Queensland, described their drafting as ‘a return to the dark ages of prejudice and ignorance’ because of ‘a scurrilous linkage between child molesters and other members of the gay community’.⁷⁹ As has been discussed, the use of this refrain was a common theme in political discourse by Bjelke-Petersen’s ministers.

The gay and lesbian community responded to the proposed amendments in a very organised manner. Following a meeting in Canberra of the National Gay Lobby Group, the Queensland group took the issue to the Human Rights Commission. Greg Weir once again found himself receiving considerable media attention when he acted as a spokesperson on this issue for the Queensland Gay Rights Committee. A hotline was also established, which members of the gay and lesbian community who felt they were being harassed as a result of the proposed

laws could telephone for support. Solicitors visited bars to inform customers of the impact of the proposed legislation, and public meetings were held, while the minister himself refused to hold meetings with activists.⁸⁰

The proposed laws did result in homophobic publicans voicing their concerns. Bernard Power, the owner of the Jolly Swagman Tavern at Stafford, told a crowd that included Bjelke-Petersen: 'if people were being obviously gay or causing a disturbance', they would probably not be allowed into his tavern.⁸¹

Gary Somerville, a member of the 4ZZZ Gay Waves Radio Collective, declared that the legislation's real danger was that it was officially giving police a licence to harass gays and he had heard of a few people who had been 'kicked out of straight bars'. He also knew of two women who had been prevented from walking into a Fortitude Valley straight bar.⁸² Ironically, such draconian laws unified much of the state's GLBTIQ population. In February 1986, *OutRage* magazine noted that attempts to ban gay bars had actually 'increased gay bar patronage'. Activist Toya de Wilde declared that 'it has brought the community closer together'.⁸³

Ultimately, the liquor laws did not pass for two main reasons. First, with an election imminent, tensions between the National Party and its coalition partner, the Liberal Party, were evident. Internal divisions between the conservative Coalition meant that the National Party opted to vote with the Labor Party against the legislation.⁸⁴ Second, publicans refused to support the ruling. The National Party was probably mindful of this pressure when it opted to drop the legislation. Certainly, publicans had waged a considerable battle against proposed law changes. The President of the Queensland Hotels Association, Dick McGuire, informed the media that he had advised 1,000 publicans around the state to ignore the law. McGuire maintained that the proposed legislation was unworkable, with publicans being unable to 'spot the deviant in a crowded hotel'.⁸⁵

The legislation had also attracted derision from the media. The *Sunday Mail* made the point that publicans could not be expected to identify homosexual people when prominent politicians such as Sir Llew Edwards were unable to do so. Edwards had recently appointed 103-year-old Monte Punshon, who '[made] no bones about the fact that she is homosexual' as Expo '88's first official ambassador. Punshon herself denounced the legislation as 'ridiculous, perfectly ridiculous and silly. I think they're backwards and biased.' The *Sunday Mail* concluded that it was 'a good thing' Punshon lived in Melbourne, 'where they view such things in a more enlightened way than do Mr Harper and his colleagues'.⁸⁶

In November 1986, Bjelke-Petersen won his seventh electoral victory. This victory prompted many gay and lesbian Queenslanders to move interstate. In 1991, in its first edition, the gay and lesbian newspaper *Queensland Pride* reflected on this issue when it declared:

Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen has been very successful in pinning the 'child molester' tag onto gay men, and the intellectuals and the media are to blame for not setting the records straight. But we have to remember that not only did gay men leave this state in droves, intellectuals and good journalists did likewise.⁸⁷

The use of homophobia as a political strategy was clearly well-entrenched by the mid-1980s, and the 1986 liquor laws proposals show that Bjelke-Petersen openly used this rhetoric when an election was looming.

Criminalisation of Lesbianism

While previous anti-homosexual sentiment had focused predominantly on gay men, in 1987 the Bjelke-Petersen government turned its attention to lesbian women. In this year, the Justice Minister Paul Clauson put a series of proposed amendments on sexual offences before Cabinet. *OutRage* noted that ‘apparently off his own bat he decided to add on a proposal that lesbian acts be made illegal, a move which he described as a “rationalization” given that male homosexual acts were already illegal’.⁸⁸ Under the changes, the charge of gross indecency under which homosexual acts between men were illegal would be extended to cover lesbianism.⁸⁹ This was the first proposed law of its kind in Australia.

The Human Rights Commission state director Quentin Bryce (who would later become Australia’s first female Governor-General) declared that it was ‘a very strange move to start creating crimes out of things that were never considered illegal’. The President of the Queensland AIDS Council Bill Rutkin declared: ‘The government does not and cannot enforce the laws against homosexuals that are in place now – it’s just another legislative form of victimisation of homosexuals.’⁹⁰

Ultimately, Cabinet did not act on Clauson’s proposed legislation. Clauson told the *Courier-Mail* that ‘it was decided that it would be ineffective’ to change the laws.⁹¹ There is no question that the policing of such laws would have been close to impossible. It was almost certainly this, rather than any other motive, that saw the proposal abandoned. It is curious, though, that as other states were decriminalising homosexual activity, Queensland was investigating methods of criminalising this behaviour.

Conclusion

In other parts of Australia, the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s served to inspire closer relationships between state governments and the gay and lesbian community. In Queensland, activists had little hope of achieving reform or improved relations with the state government. The Bjelke-Petersen government demonstrated a continued willingness to scapegoat homosexual Queenslanders for electoral currency. In other states with two Houses of Parliament, it may have been possible to have pressed for reform, even with an anti-democratic government. With Queensland’s single House, this was not possible.

Furthermore, the street marches that helped to draw attention to the gay and lesbian movement in New South Wales were not permitted in Queensland. The gay press, which did much to publicise homosexual law reform in the southern states, was also banned. This considered, achieving homosexual law reform under the Bjelke-Peterson National Party government was very difficult. The only possible means of achieving gay law reform was to pressure the opposition Labor Party

to adopt the cause, and this is exactly what Queensland activists successfully managed to achieve.⁹²

The Bjelke-Petersen era ended with Joh Bjelke-Petersen resigning in 1987, after the ABC TV program *Four Corners* exposed the endemic corruption of the Queensland government and police force.⁹³ While the program was responsible for the Bjelke-Petersen era ending, other internal power struggles also assisted in the toppling of Bjelke-Petersen as Premier. The Fitzgerald Inquiry provided further evidence of widescale corruption.⁹⁴ Mike Ahern and Russell Cooper both served stints as leader of the National Party and Queensland Premier until an election in 1989 ended 32 years of conservative rule.⁹⁵

After assuming office in 1990, the Goss Labor government decriminalised male-to-male sexual intercourse for those aged over sixteen years. Male-to-male sexual intercourse for those aged under eighteen years technically remains illegal.⁹⁶ While the legislation had severe limitations, it still represented a significant milestone. When this legislation passed, Greg Weir reflected on the difficult struggle that Queensland activists had faced to achieve this reform. He stated:

There have been many times during the last year when I have put my head in my hands and, with a feeling of exhaustion, thought that reform would never come. It has been hard. But no reform in any state save South Australia has been easily achieved. Even there it took the still unsolved murder of a gay to bring reform. Queensland was maybe harder in that we had years of a government that regularly used gays as whipping post in the belief that it got votes.⁹⁷

In 1991, *OutRage* maintained:

The growth of Brisbane's gay community has been stunted by the Bjelke-Petersen years. There are a few gay bars, as there have always been, though new venues are now opening and a new community newspaper, *Queensland Pride*, is about to issue its third two-monthly edition. There have been gay rights marches and a month-long Gay Pride celebration is planned.⁹⁸

Such visible indicators of Queensland's GLBTIQ culture would have been unthinkable in the Bjelke-Petersen era.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the gay and lesbian liberation movement made considerable gains in Australia. In Queensland, though, this movement was considerably stymied by the Bjelke-Petersen government, which adopted the politics of homophobia for electoral gain. This government forged a close and continual alliance with fundamentalist forces and repeatedly defined homosexuality as a form of deviance. The fear of paedophilia and the threat of HIV/AIDS were both repeatedly used to demonise the state's GLBTIQ population. Furthermore, Queensland was the only Australian state to debate both the criminalisation of lesbianism and the introduction of laws excluding homosexual individuals from drinking in public bars. Consequently, the Bjelke-Petersen government appears to have been the most homophobic of all Australian governments of the era.

Notes

- ¹ *OutRage* 46 (1987): 5.
- ² *OutRage* 46 (1987): 5.
- ³ Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, 'Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government', *British Journal of Sociology* 43(2) (1992): 177.
- ⁴ For more on this methodology, see Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998).
- ⁵ Gary Simes, 'The Language of Homosexuality in Australia', in Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon (eds), *Gay Perspectives: Essays in Australian Gay Culture* (Sydney: Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, 1992), pp. 31–57.
- ⁶ Shirleene Robinson, 'Homophobia: Towards an Australian History', in Shirleene Robinson (ed.), *Homophobia: An Australian History* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2008), p. 3.
- ⁷ Clive Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows: The Development of Gay and Lesbian Culture in Queensland* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), p. 142.
- ⁸ Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, p. 142.
- ⁹ Daniel Wickberg, 'Homophobia: On the Cultural History of an Idea', *Critical Inquiries* 27(1) (2000): 43.
- ¹⁰ Robinson, 'Homophobia': 3.
- ¹¹ Adrian Cherney, 'Understanding and Documenting Anti-Homosexual Prejudice', *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 10(2) (1998): 125.
- ¹² Shirleene Robinson, 'Queensland's Queer Press', *Queensland Review* 14(2) (2007): 59–78.
- ¹³ Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, p. 213.
- ¹⁴ Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, pp. 142–89.
- ¹⁵ Clive Moore and Brian Jamison, 'Making the Modern Australian Homosexual Male: Queensland's Criminal Justice System and Homosexual Offences, 1860–1954', *Crime, History and Societies* 11(1) (2007): 27–54; Clive Moore, 'The Frontier Makes Strange Bedfellows: Masculinity, Mateship and Homosexuality in Colonial Queensland', in Garry Wotherspoon (ed.), *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives III: Essays in Australian Culture* (Sydney: Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, with the Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research, 1996), pp. 17–44; Clive Moore, 'That Abominable Crime: First Steps Towards a Social History of Male Homosexuals in Colonial Queensland, 1859–1900', in Robert Aldrich (ed.), *Gay Perspectives II: More Essays in Australian Gay Culture* (Sydney: Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, with the Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research, 1994), pp. 115–48.
- ¹⁶ Yorick Smaal, 'More than Mates? Masculinity, Homosexuality and the Formation of an Embryonic Subculture in Queensland, 1890–1914', MPhil thesis, University of Queensland, 2004.
- ¹⁷ Belinda Mackay and Yorick Smaal (eds), 'Queer Queensland', special issue of *Queensland Review* 14(2) (2007).
- ¹⁸ See particularly Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000) and Robert Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer: Remaking the Australian Homosexual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).
- ¹⁹ See particularly Rae Wear, *Johannes Bjelke-Peterson: The Lord's Premier* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002); Hugh Lunn, *Joh: The Life and Political Adventures of Johannes Bjelke-Petersen* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978) and Deane Wells, *The Deep North* (Melbourne: Outback Press, 1979).
- ²⁰ Evan Whitton, *The Hillbilly Dictator: Australia's Police State* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1989).
- ²¹ Raymond Evans, *A History of Queensland* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 222.
- ²² 'Rona Joyner's Death List', *Semper* 48(3) (1978): 7–8.
- ²³ Ross Fitzgerald, 'Censorship in Queensland, 1954–83', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 30(3) (1984): 358.

- 24 Fitzgerald, 'Censorship in Queensland': 348.
- 25 Alan D. Knight, 'Radical Media in the Deep North: The Origins of 4ZZZ-FM', *Queensland Review* 14(1) (2007): 95–105.
- 26 Craig Johnston and Robert Johnston, 'The Making of Homosexual Men', in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), *Staining the Wattle: A People's History of Australia Since 1788* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1988), p. 95.
- 27 Johnston and Johnston, 'The Making of Homosexual Men': 98.
- 28 Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, p. 165.
- 29 Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, pp. 165–66.
- 30 Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, pp. 165–66.
- 31 Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, p. 166.
- 32 *Gay Solidarity Newsletter* [Brisbane] (1978): 1.
- 33 *Gay Solidarity Newsletter* [Brisbane] (1978): 4.
- 34 *Gay Solidarity Newsletter* [Brisbane] (1978): 4.
- 35 *Gay Solidarity Newsletter* [Brisbane] (1978): 4.
- 36 *Gay Solidarity Newsletter* [Brisbane] (1978): 4.
- 37 *Gay Solidarity Newsletter* [Brisbane] (1978): 4.
- 38 *Gay Solidarity Newsletter* [Brisbane] (1978): 4.
- 39 Stephen Bates, *God's Own Country: Tales from the Bible Belt* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2007), pp. 238–66.
- 40 John Gallagher and Chris Bull, *Perfect Enemies: The Religious Right, the Gay Movement, and the Politics of the 1990s* (New York: Crown, 1996), p. 8.
- 41 Willett, *Living Out Loud*, p. 135.
- 42 *AXIS* (1976): 2.
- 43 *AXIS* (1976): 2.
- 44 *AXIS* (1976): 2.
- 45 Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, p. 172.
- 46 *AXIS* (1976): 2.
- 47 *AXIS* (1976): 175.
- 48 *Age* [Melbourne], 7 September 1983: 3.
- 49 *Age* [Melbourne], 7 September 1983: 3.
- 50 *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 28 August 1984: 272.
- 51 *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 30 August 1984: 356.
- 52 Steven Angelides, 'The Continuing Homosexual Offensive': Sex Education, Gay Rights and Homosexual Recruitment', in Shirleene Robinson (ed.), *Homophobia: An Australian History*, p. 172.
- 53 *The Australian*, 31 August 1984: 3.
- 54 *Courier-Mail* [Brisbane], 31 August 1984: 2.
- 55 *Courier-Mail* [Brisbane], 31 August 1984: 2.
- 56 *The Australian*, 31 August 1984: 3.
- 57 P. Thornton, 'Is the Old Right Now New? The State, the Family and Sexual Repression in Queensland', *Social Alternatives* 5 (1987): 8.
- 58 Paul Sendziuk, *Learning to Trust: Australian Responses to AIDS* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003), pp. 56–80.
- 59 *Daily Sun* [Brisbane], 3 December 1984: 1.
- 60 *Australian*, 31 August 1984: 3.
- 61 *Weekend Australian*, 17–18 November 1984: 1.
- 62 Sendziuk, *Learning to Trust*, pp. 56–80.
- 63 *Weekend Australian*, 17–18 November 1984: 1.

- ⁶⁴ *Weekend Australian*, 17–18 November 1984: 1. See Sendziuk, *Learning to Trust* for more on the response in other states.
- ⁶⁵ Peter North, ‘AIDS – Morality and Mortality: The Shaping of Preventative Strategies with Particular Reference to Queensland’, Master of Social Work thesis, University of Queensland, 1987, p. 111.
- ⁶⁶ *Weekend Australian*, 17–18 November 1984, p.1.
- ⁶⁷ Cliff Williams, ‘To Hell with Homophobic Queensland’, *OutRage* 46 (1987): 5.
- ⁶⁸ *OutRage*, May (1991): 19.
- ⁶⁹ *Sunday Sun*, 23 December 1984: 5.
- ⁷⁰ *Sunday Sun*, 23 December 1984: 5. See also Whitton, *The Hillbilly Dictator*, p. 110.
- ⁷¹ Des Sturgess, *Report of an Inquiry into Sexual Offences Involving Children and Related Matters* (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 1986), p. 10.
- ⁷² *Sunday Mail*, 23 February 1986: 11.
- ⁷³ *Sunday Sun*, 23 December 1984: 4.
- ⁷⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 September 1985: 11.
- ⁷⁵ *Daily Sun*, 21 September 1987: 31.
- ⁷⁶ *Sunday Mail*, 10 November 1985: 3.
- ⁷⁷ *Sunday Mail*, 10 November 1985: 3.
- ⁷⁸ *OutRage* 31 (1985): 4.
- ⁷⁹ *OutRage* 33 (1986): 8.
- ⁸⁰ Greg Weir, ‘Activity Heightens Over the Queensland *Liquor Act* on “Deviants” and “Sexual Perverts”’, Media Release, 5 December 1985, Greg Weir Collection, Vol. 14, MS1895, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.
- ⁸¹ *Daily Sun*, 4 December 1985: 1.
- ⁸² *Daily Sun*, 4 December 1985: 1.
- ⁸³ *Daily Sun*, 4 December 1985: 1.
- ⁸⁴ *Daily Sun*, 20 November 1985: 1.
- ⁸⁵ *Daily Sun*, 23 November 1985: 1.
- ⁸⁶ *Sunday Mail*, 10 November 1985: 13.
- ⁸⁷ *Queensland Pride* 1 (1991): 2.
- ⁸⁸ *OutRage* 52 (1987): 12.
- ⁸⁹ *The Australian*, 20 July 1987: 1.
- ⁹⁰ *Courier-Mail*, 20 July 1987: 1.
- ⁹¹ *Courier-Mail*, 21 July 1987: 3.
- ⁹² Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, pp. 183–89.
- ⁹³ Whitton, *The Hillbilly Dictator*, pp. 145–85.
- ⁹⁴ Phil Dickie, *The Road to Fitzgerald and Beyond* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989), pp. 17–18.
- ⁹⁵ Dickie, *The Road to Fitzgerald and Beyond*, pp. 17–18.
- ⁹⁶ Under section 208 of the Queensland Criminal Code, it is also still illegal for heterosexual couples to engage in anal intercourse.
- ⁹⁷ *Queensland Pride* 3 (1991): 2.
- ⁹⁸ *OutRage* May (1991): 18.