



LGBT History Month 2018

Section 28: Abseiling Lesbians & Jenny Living with Eric and Martin Notes

(1) *Jenny lives with Eric and Martin* by Susanne Bösche, London: Gay Men's Press. 1983.

This is an original copy of the children's book *Jenny lives with Eric and Martin*, published as a teaching resource to educate children about homosexuality. Using simple text and black and white photographs, it tells the story of Jenny from Denmark who lives with her father Martin and his lover Eric. Identified by the *The Sun* newspaper as a 'vile book in schools' its publication created hysteria in the press which instigated and defined the introduction of Section 28.

(2) *The Milkman's On His Way* by David Rees, London: Gay Men's Press. 1982.

Thatcher's Government were concerned with left-wing 'Loony Left' councils indoctrinating children with homosexual promotional propaganda. One text of concern was teacher David Rees' (1936-93) book *The Milkman's On His Way* aimed at young adult readers and available in public libraries. Its homoerotic cover and explicit sexual references were criticised for 'glorifying' gay sex and promoting homosexuality as an attractive and 'better' choice. The book fuelled further debate which led to Section 28.

(3) *AIDS Don't Die of Ignorance*, London: HMSO. Leaflet. 1986.

The Thatcher Government's *AIDS Don't Die of Ignorance* campaign was launched prior to Section 28. This leaflet was distributed to every house in Britain and featured in the *AIDS Monolith* public information film (directed Nicolas Roeg). The media heightened fear surrounding the illness and promoted widespread homophobia with gay men seen as 'plague carriers'. The tabloid press featured cartoons and news stories focusing on gay men's 'deviant' behaviour causing the spread of the disease. As such, Section 28 came out of a climate of prejudice, fear and hostility and saw many teachers in schools concerned about what they could and could not teach around gay issues as part of the curriculum. This lack of guidance, coupled with poor policy and the threat of prosecution saw incidents of homophobic bullying increase in schools.

In a 2017 interview for *Gay Times*, actor and comedian Matt Lucas also commented "*I regard Margaret Thatcher and the people who created and endorsed Clause 28 as murderers. They prevented young men from learning how not to contract AIDS and die*".



(4) Demonstrations and Protests Lesbian Demo at The House Of Lords. Daily Mail Mac Pugh/Rexscanpics photograph. 1988.

This photograph was taken of the ‘Lesbian Avengers’ shortly before they abseiled from the public gallery in the House of Lords into the main chamber on 2 February 1988 protesting at the passing of Section 28. No footage exists of the protest attack itself and was recorded in House of Lords Hansard transcript as merely an ‘interruption’.

The BBC’s *Six O’Clock News* was also disrupted live on air by three lesbian protestors who broke into the newsroom at BBC Television Centre (23 May 1988). At the beginning of the broadcast newsreaders Sue Lawley and Nicholas Witchell attempted to carry on despite the women chaining themselves to the cameras and news desk shouting ‘Stop Section 28’.



(5) Section 28 Badges

A selection of anti-Section 28 campaign badges worn by members of the LGBT community. Badge wearing was encouraged not only to assert the wearer's homosexuality, but also to raise awareness and visibility of LGBT issues. In support of the gay community a Trades Unionists 'Defy Section 28' badge was also sold, continuing the tradition of the work achieved by the *Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM)* 1984-85 movement during the UK Miners' Strike (as depicted in the 2014 film *Pride*).

(6) *Two of Us* by Leslie Stewart. London: Arlington Books. 1989.

The BBC Schools' drama series *Scene* commissioned Leslie Stewart's television play 'Two of Us' as a resource for Secondary Schools. Produced and directed by Roger Tonge, it saw a 'love story giving tender and realistic portrayal of ordinary lives'. The aim of the drama was to reassure "*young gay people that they are not alone and (perhaps more importantly in today's climate) to promote tolerance of homosexuality in the heterosexual majority*". It was about Matthew (Jason Rush) having an intense relationship with his friend Phil (Lee Whitlock). Once completed it was pulled from transmission in the BBC-2 schools' Daytime On Two slot due to concerns arounds its 'promotion' of homosexuality. It was broadcast on 25 March 1988 in an edited format as a *Scene Play Special* at 11.30pm on BBC-2. *The Sun* at the time reported "*it is wildly irresponsible for the BBC to screen the play. It will be irresponsible for any teacher to show it to his pupils... They should ensure that any videos stay where they belong. Locked away in the closet*". The novelisation of the play was published a year later.

(7) *Out Proud & Fighting* by Noel Halifax. London: Socialist Workers Party. 1988.

Various political organisations produced booklets and pamphlets expressing concerns about Section 28 and what it would mean to gay people. This booklet by Noel Halifax for the Socialist Workers Party (February 1988) argues that it would “*encourage and make respectable ‘queer bashing’ and that homosexuality would be driven back into the ‘closet’*”.

(8) Ian McKellen and Michael Cashman marching in Manchester protesting about Section 28. 1988.

***Arts Lobby* Launch. 1988.**

Michael Cashman as Colin Russell. *EastEnders* promotional postcard. 1987.

Ian McKellen (b. 1939) collaborated with a group of people from the creative arts to form the *Arts Lobby* in protest against Section 28’s proposed removal of gay literature, films and arts from libraries and schools. Knighted in 1991 for services to the performing arts, McKellen ‘came out’ during a BBC Radio 3 interview in response to Section 28 and went on to become one of Britain’s most successful gay actors and prominent LGBT rights activists. Michael Cashman hit the headlines as the first gay character (Colin) in the BBC-1 soap opera *EastEnders* (1986-89, 2016) and went on to become MEP for West Midlands (1999-2014). In 2014 he was made a Life Peer, taking the title Baron Cashman of Limehouse. McKellen and Cashman made visible protest against Section 28 and went on to become the co-founders of the LGBT human rights charity *Stonewall* in 1988.

(9) *No Clause 28* by Boy George. London: Virgin Records Ltd. 7" record single. 1988.

Boy George, *The Smash Hits Collection* 1987. Smash Hits Magazine/Panini Publishing Ltd. Sticker. 1987.

Boy George (b. George O'Dowd, 1961) released the protest song *No Clause 28* in June 1988. It featured on his album *Tense Nervous Headache* and had the lyrics: "*No Clause 28/No Clause 28/Brother you're much too late/They talk about AIDS they call it a curse/But brothers we know it's gonna get worse*".

The record sleeve artwork by cover artist Jamie Reid depicts George as Enid Blyton's Noddy. The song was moderately successful in the UK and across Europe.

(10) *AARGH! [Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia]* edited by Alan Moore. Northampton: Mad Love. 1988.

This comic was produced by *Watchmen* writer Alan Moore (b. 1953), his wife and their mutual partner to raise funds in the fight against Section 28. This anthology contained comic art and stories about homophobia and gay contributions throughout history by Moore himself, Neil Gaiman, David Lloyd, Dave Gibbons, Frank Miller and Bryan Talbot. The comic raised nearly £20,000 for the gay charity to OLGA (Organisation of Lesbian and Gay Action).

(11) Repeal Section 28. Stonewall campaign postcard.

Campaigns against Section 28 continued into the 2000s, despite no prosecutions occurring because of Section 28. It was eventually repealed on 21 June 2000 in Scotland and on 18 November 2003 in the rest of the UK by section 122 of the Local Government Act 2003. Today it is viewed largely as an embarrassment by the Conservative Party who introduced it. In 2009 the Conservative Leader David Cameron publicly apologised saying: *“I am sorry for Section 28. We got it wrong. It was an emotional issue. I hope you can forgive us”*.

These items are from the collection of Stephen Griffiths, Course Leader, BA (Hons) Film, Television and Radio, School of Computing and Digital Technologies and Chair of the University’s LGBT+ Staff Network.

**The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Staff Network Group provides a confidential and supportive environment for all staff who identify as LGBT+, with the aim of promoting the University as a safe space for all. The University is a Stonewall Diversity Champion and the group promotes inclusivity and an awareness of wider diversity issues. For more information about this, please contact Stephen Griffiths:
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