

An Interview with Peter Tatchell

By [Jack Chadwick](#)

Tuesday 24 June 2014



Photo credit: [Pete Birkinshaw](#)

At the invitation of the York Union and Derwent College, LGBT movement activist and human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell visited the university to give a talk on “What’s left after same-sex marriage? The unfinished battle for LGBT equality.”

You have shared the view that the movement (LGBT) has in many ways become less radical and more conservative in its approach: less critical of society and its norms?

We’ve made great advances towards LGBT equality, having secured the repeal of all major anti-gay laws. However, in the process the LGBT community has largely lost sight of the radical liberation ideals of the early pioneers in the 1970s. They opposed homophobic and transphobic discrimination, but also had a vision of a cultural revolution which would change the values, laws and institutions of society for the benefit of everyone – including straight people. In the days of the Gay Liberation Front, we never wanted equality within the status quo. Our aim was to change society, to transform it, to eradicate all forms of injustice. The equality agenda, important though it is, remains quite limiting – it implicitly accepts society as it is and merely wants equality for LGBT people within the status quo.

How would you see this status quo as limiting for straight people?

I think that in many respects, straight people are disadvantaged and denied full opportunities by the current legal and social set-up. For example, same-sex marriage and civil partnerships are essentially the same – they are a one-size-fits-all system that does not take into account the needs of all couples. A truly radical approach to relationship recognition would create a new system which allowed couples to pick and mix from a menu of rights and responsibilities to create their own tailor-made partnership agreement. Another issue that requires more than mere equality is sex and relationship education in schools; it’s inadequate for straight kids as well as LGBT ones. So we need to think beyond equality to an agenda of, what I call, equality-plus.

And would you connect this to feminist criticisms of society, especially the idea that the gender roles that are problematic for LGBT people are also generally problematic for women?

The campaign against homophobia and transphobia is in many ways another aspect of the struggle against sexism and patriarchy. Both the women's and queer liberation movements challenge straight male patriarchy – they question traditional gender roles and norms around sexuality. Although the struggles against sexism and homophobia are different, in certain respects they have a lot of common ground.

What are your thoughts on the controversy in the LGBT movement around Stonewall, and in particular the criticism that it is too close to its sponsors – the allegation that its campaigns often too closely resemble adverts for big businesses?

Stonewall's diversity programme is a good way of getting companies to adopt more LGBT friendly policies; the downside is it's often just tickboxing. So for example, Deutsche Bank was no. 24 on the Stonewall list even though it had dozens of cases against it alleging homophobic, misogynistic, and racist discrimination, likewise, more recently Newham College has figured very highly on the list despite the fact that they failed to act against a homophobic lecturer who made an astonishing homophobic outburst until there was massive media publicity. Just because a company has good LGBT rights policies doesn't mean it should be immune from criticism if it uses zero-hours contracts, underpays its staff, or exploits tax-avoidance schemes. It's great that companies are more LGBT-friendly, but some of these companies are guilty of not paying their fair share of tax. We shouldn't give them a free pass just because they have positive policies for LGBT people.

While you became initially well-known as a left-wing Labour activist, since then you've been more famous for LGBT campaigning. But could you talk through your idea that a structural transformation of the economy, a move towards 'economic democracy', is needed?

Well I've been championing human rights and social justice for nearly fifty years. When I stood for Labour in Bermondsey in 1983, and when I stood for the Green Party in Oxford East in 2009, I was campaigning on a whole range of social justice issues. In the wake of the financial crisis of the last few years, it has been highlighted that we need a fundamental rethink of the way in which the economy has been run. In particular, the lack of economic democracy – Britain is essentially an economic dictatorship, a handful of very rich and powerful people, mostly managers, directors, and major shareholders control all the levers of power. They make all the key decisions, the vast majority of people who work in private and public institutions have no say – they're excluded, they're disenfranchised. We need to move to a new system where the economy is in closer alignment with the political system, where there is one-person-one-vote.



29 comments

Maria B

24 Jun '14 at 10:38 pm

Peter Tatchell has written in support of paedophilia and hebephilia, and believes children can make an informed choice to sexual consent:

"The positive nature of some child-adult sexual relationships is not confined to non-Western cultures. Several of my friends – gay and straight, male and female – had sex with adults from the ages of nine to 13. None feel they were abused. All say it was their conscious choice and gave them great joy.

While it may be impossible to condone paedophilia, it is time society acknowledged the truth that not all sex involving children is unwanted, abusive and harmful."

Peter Tatchell, Guardian letter dated 26th June 1997.

There is also his contribution to a book, "Betrayal of Youth" (1986), written by former vice chairman of PIE (Paedophile Information Exchange), which reiterates these lines. The book – in which at least two of its authors have since been prosecuted for child sexual abuse images – propagates the notion that age of consent should be abolished. This of course forgets that children cannot consent to sexual activity as they lack the emotional and psychological maturity to do so.

Tatchell has suppressed mention of these previous writings for a paedophile advocate journal and of his Guardian letter suggesting that nine year olds can happily and joyfully consent to sexual activity with adults, but they can be found online.

Interestingly, his current campaign is to lower age of sexual consent to 14. His argument here is that it is wrong that a 14 and 15 year old, for example, should be prosecuted for sexual activity. However, this rests on the falsity that adolescents of that age are prosecuted and placed onto sex offenders lists if they engage in sexual activity. This is untrue. Allowances are made for sexual activity within similar age groups for under sixteens. Allowances are not made for adults engaging in sexual activity with children – let's use the correct word – under the age of consent (16). What Tatchell promotes is acceptance of sexual congress between children age 14 and adults, without risk of presecution for the adult party.

I am astonished York University invited this man.

 Report

James

26 Jun '14 at 10:42 am

Peter Tatchell has never advocated adults having sex with children. He does not support this. He says adults should NOT have sex with children. He has never advocated the abolition of ages of consent. He has said that if young people of similar ages have sex below the age of 16 they should not be prosecuted, providing they both consent and there is no coercion, manipulation or exploitation. Treating these young people as criminals is wrong. They need counselling, not prosecution. Read here: <http://bit.ly/opVrXm>

 Report

Anonymous

26 Jun '14 at 6:08 pm

"While it may be impossible to condone paedophilia, it is time society acknowledged the truth that not all sex involving children is unwanted, abusive and harmful."

 Report

Maria B

26 Jun '14 at 11:20 pm

This is a disingenuous reply that does not address anything in my original comment. I'll discuss it below, but firstly: Tatchell facilitates the language of child abuse and child abuse scenarios. Has he retracted or explained these comments?:

"The positive nature of some child-adult sexual relationships is not confined to non-Western cultures. Several of my friends – gay and straight, male and female – had sex with adults from the ages of nine to 13. None feel they were abused. All say it was their conscious choice and gave them great joy.

While it may be impossible to condone paedophilia, it is time society acknowledged the truth that not all sex involving children is unwanted, abusive and harmful."

Peter Tatchell, Guardian letter dated 26th June 1997. Similar comments are made in his work for the vice chairperson of PIE (Paedophile Information Exchange).

On the only thing you reply to:

I pre-empted your comment on the lower age of consent issue by explaining that Tatchell is putting it on a false platform. Allowances are already made for adolescents in those scenarios on a case by case basis – in any event, such a scenario going to court is quite rare, and usually only in events where one of the parties involved was under 13:

Baroness Hale, 2003, on the Child Sex Offences Act:

“Both prosecutors and sentencers will have to make careful judgments about who should be prosecuted and what punishment, if any, is appropriate. In many cases, there will be no reason to take any official action at all. In others, protective action by the children’s services, whether in respect of the perpetrator or the victim or both, may be more appropriate.”

A proposed change in law of consent would mean that adults could have sex with children of 14 without legal consequence – a disaster for a legal system that already has difficulties offering protection to children of 16 and under.

Again, I ask, has Tatchell ever explained his criteria for the ‘positive’ child-adult sex relations (which was fashionably called ‘intergenerational sex’ in his days of writing for PIE)? Does he still think that in any scenario, an adult having sex with a nine year old child is not ‘unwanted, abusive and harmful’ but a matter of ‘joy’? His own words hang him. This self defensiveness over lowering the age of consent is more a distraction from the fact he openly facilitated (if you don’t want to use the word ‘advocated’) a vocabulary of paedophilia. How can you support him?

 Report

Adam Zarwan

26 Jun '14 at 7:54 pm

Concerning Tatchell’s past opinions, he is always shady about concealing what he’s done and said. Important to add that outside the UK he is not regarded as some kind of human rights hero: he’s seen by LGBT activists elsewhere as a dangerous egotist who doesn’t consult with others and only concerned about his own publicity. See this “warning” about Tatchell from African LGBTI activists, <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2007/increase310107.html>

 Report

Adam Zarwan

26 Jun '14 at 8:06 pm

By the way, is “James” James Howarth who works for Peter Tatchell’s “Foundation”? Is Tatchell sending his employees out to check on what is said about him in the comments field? Don’t they have some kind of human rights work to do?

 Report

Adam Zarwan

5 Jul '14 at 2:39 pm

And about Peter Tatchell’s harassment of other activists, and his attempt to censor criticism of him, check out <http://paper-bird.net/2014/03/13/white-savior-cat-on-the-rescue-industry/> and <http://www.alanalentin.net/2009/11/02/racism-and-the-censorship-of-gay-imperialism/>
The man is opposed to free speech and does not belong in an academic setting.

[Report](#)

Zayed Salloum

8 Jul '14 at 2:31 pm

Is this the same adam Zarwan who was issued with a cease and desist order to stop stalking Peter Tatchell and other famous gay public figures about five years ago?

[Report](#)

Adam Zarwan

8 Jul '14 at 5:50 pm

I've never been issued with a cease-and-desist order by anybody, and I've never stalked anybody. Do you also work for Tatchell? That's a weird-ass fantasy.

[Report](#)

Adam Zarwan

8 Jul '14 at 7:01 pm

Marie B says: "Does he still think that in any scenario, an adult having sex with a nine year old child is not 'unwanted, abusive and harmful' but a matter of 'joy'? "

But I thought you muslims worshipped a middle aged man, mohammed, who married a 6 year old, Aisha, but who didn't touch her, in the biblical sense, until she was 9. Did she experience joy?

[Report](#)

Maria B

9 Jul '14 at 12:55 pm

That is a comment that seems out of character and off topic for the previous poster. Unfortunately the Nouse comment system has no verification process on it. It sounds like a madcap comment cooked up by one of Tatchell's supporters or a troll.

I am not here to justify or explain religious teachings or history, although I will say that the above comment is deliberately provocative and misinformed. A discussion on it would derail this conversation - which has still no input from Tatchell or his supporters on how he has facilitated the language of child sexual abuse by suggesting it is a subjective rather than objective wrong. Has he ever accounted for the Guardian letter - or why he facilitated and articulated a vocabulary of child sexual abuse? The juxtaposition of this with the promotion of Tatchell as a human rights campaigner is jarring, to say the least.

[Report](#)

Maria B

9 Jul '14 at 10:56 pm

This is a troll comment. What does this have to do with the Guardian letter? Also, I am not a Muslim.

[Report](#)

Adam Zarwan

9 Jul '14 at 2:08 pm

It was not me (Adam Zarwan). It was one of Tatchell's supporters posting Islamophobic racism under my name. These people are weird.

[Report](#)

Maria R

Peter B

9 Jul '14 at 3:19 pm

Surely it's hardly 'islamophobic' to point out what muslims praise in their prophet, namely what a wonderful and compassionate man he was not to touch Aisha until she was 9, rather than falling upon her and ravishing her delicate flesh at age 6.

Muslim holy texts mention that he liked to have her put her tongue in his mouth to cool him down.

How is this misinformed? Shall I list the requisite links that clearly point out the sexual nature of Mohammed's sex with this 9 year old?

[Report](#)

Aisha

9 Jul '14 at 3:40 pm

Hmmm, it is baffling isn't it how Maria B bashes Peter Tatchell, possibly justifiably, for his 'facilitating the language of child abuse and child abuse scenarios' (whatever the fuck that means! Translation please) but at the same time has a hissy fit and throws accusations of racism around when someone points out how the prophet mohammed, according to muslim hadiths (holy texts) fucked a 9 year old child.

This is grotesque hypocrisy on her maria B's part. Either criticise the prophet Mo or stop criticising Tatchell for advocating a lower age of consent.

[Report](#)

Maria B

10 Jul '14 at 12:54 am

I have nothing to do with the other comments. A cursory look at the IP address log from the Nouse webpage editors or team would verify that. I suspect most, if not all, these tangential and rants are the product of the same person – posting under different names, including my own, and Adam Zarwan's. This sideline into the story of Aisha (unprovoked and unmentioned in the article, by any other comments, etc) – is an attempt to stir away attention from Tatchell's suggestion (in 1997) nine year olds can consent to adult-child sex in modern society.

I am pointing to Tatchell's Guardian letter. He isn't advocating a lower age of consent there. He is suggesting sexual relations with a nine year old, or a ten, eleven or twelve or thirteen year old can be a matter of 'joy' and fully consensual from the testimony of a few of his friends. This is a vocabulary that justifies paedophilic behaviour – from the part of the abusers. Children are utterly unable to consent to sexual activity. Suggesting that they 'might do' or 'find it joyful' enables abuse – it gets abusers a get-out clause in their minds, a salve that what they are doing isn't really that bad, or after all, tribes in Papua New Guinea did it, or people in 6th century societies might have done. These are facetious arguments that do not address our contemporary understandings of sexuality, childhood development and the uneven power an adult has over a child in these areas.

BTW, I am not a Muslim and I am not familiar with Islamic literature beyond where it intersects with my own research. I did not start this discussion I would not presume to make comment on it since I am not familiar with the literature, the religion or the line of argument. To me these comments read like the rants of trolls or Tatchell's lackeys – or even Tatchell himself, although I'm hoping he's not quite that mad.

I am however familiar with Peter Tatchell's Guardian letter. I've read that. Here's a link to the letter, if you missed it, and including his responses to critics in 1997, which I was previously unfamiliar with (I am not affiliated with the website – it was just the most cogent one I could find on a quick google search)

<http://spotlightonabuse.wordpress.com/2014/03/25/peter-tatchell-and-dares-to-speak/>

Henry Oracle

9 Jul '14 at 3:48 pm

Here is what the muslim holy texts say about mohammed and his 9 year old wife, Aisha. I sincerely hope now that both Adam Zarwen and Maria B will now seriously condemn the prophet Mo for his obvious sexual desire for pre-pubescent girls.

From the hadith of Bukhari, volume 5, #234

"Narrated Aisha: The prophet engaged me when I was a girl of six. We went to Medina and stayed at the home of Harith Kharzraj. Then I got ill and my hair fell down. Later on my hair grew (again) and my mother, Um Ruman, came to me while I was playing in a swing with some of my girl friends. She called me, and I went to her, not knowing what she wanted to do to me. She caught me by the hand and made me stand at the door of the house. I was breathless then, and when my breathing became all right, she took some water and rubbed my face and head with it. Then she took me into the house. There in the house I saw some Ansari women who said, "Best wishes and Allah's blessing and a good luck." Then she entrusted me to them and they prepared me (for the marriage). Unexpectedly Allah's messenger came to me in the forenoon and my mother handed me over to him, and at that time I was a girl of nine years of age."

Bukhari vol. 7, #65:

"Narrated Aisha that the prophet wrote the marriage contract with her when she was six years old and he consummated his marriage when she was nine years old. Hisham said: "I have been informed that Aisha remained with the prophet for nine years (i.e. till his death)."

From the hadith of Muslim, volume 2, #3309

Aisha reported: Allah's Messenger married me when I was six years old, and I was admitted to his house at the age of nine....

From the hadith of the Sunan of Abu Dawud, volume 2, #2116

"Aisha said, "The Apostle of Allah married me when I was seven years old." (The narrator Sulaiman said: "Or six years."). "He had intercourse with me when I was 9 years old."

From "The History of Tabari", volume 9, page 131

"Then the men and women got up and left. The Messenger of God consummated his marriage with me in my house when I was nine years old. Neither a camel nor a sheep was slaughtered on behalf of me"... (The Prophet) married her three years before the Emigration, when she was seven years old and consummated the marriage when she was nine years old, after he had emigrated to Medina in Shawwal. She was eighteen years old when he died.

From the Encyclopedia of Islam, under "Aisha":

"Some time after the death of Khadija, Khawla suggested to Muhammad that he should marry either Aisha, the 6 year old daughter of his chief follower, or Sawda Zama, a widow of about 30, who had gone as a Muslim to Abyssinia and whose husband had died there. Muhammad is said to have asked her to arrange for him to marry both. It had already been agreed that Aisha should marry Djubayr Mutim, whose father, though still pagan, was friendly to the Muslims. By common consent, however, this agreement was set aside, and Muhammad was betrothed to Aisha... The marriage was not consummated until some months after the Hidjra, (in April 623, 624). Aisha went to live in an apartment in Muhammad's house, later the mosque of Median. She cannot have been more than ten years old at the time and took her toys to her new home."

SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE OF AISHA'S AGE

The above references are just a sample of the Islamic source material statements that Aisha was 9 when her marriage was consummated. Over and over again the great Islamic scholars state that Aisha was 9 when her marriage was consummated. No serious Muslim scholar doubts this. Generally it is only embarrassed Muslims living in the West who challenge her age.

 [Report](#)

Adam Zarwan

9 Jul '14 at 4:39 pm

It's amazing how, as a "human rights campaigner," Tatchell seems to find his most diehard support among these right-wing lunatics. What they feel about pedophilia (when it can't be blamed on Muslims) is anybody's guess, but I suspect they would forgive Peter Tatchell anything.

 [Report](#)

Maria B

9 Jul '14 at 10:45 pm

I am sure a brief look at the IP records can verify the comments by the other posters taking names 'Adam Zarwan' and 'Maria B' are not the original posters.

comments are no the original posters.

 [Report](#)

Maria B

9 Jul '14 at 10:54 pm

Excuse mistakes in above comment – typing on phone. I am surprised at how trolly and bonkers Tat:s supporters are. You realuse that IP addresses will be logged on the comment system? While Nouse has a rather open to misuse system where anyone can post with another's name, it will log IP addresses – individual to an area or house. That's why you can't upvote or downvote your own comments, I assume? Unless someone is in my basement pretending to be me and making mental comments on something that still.doesn't address the Guardian letter....

 [Report](#)

Mr Baffled

9 Jul '14 at 4:44 pm

Adam Zarwan, this is really nothing to do with Peter Tethell, but for me passing by and seeing your condemnations of him, it's the double standards you express that irk.

I understand from just a cursory examination of this disccusion that you are saying it is right wing lunacy to condemn religious immigrants for their pedophilia, but left wing to condemn peter t for saying the age of consent be reduced to age 14.

Is that correct?

 [Report](#)

Maria B

9 Jul '14 at 11:00 pm

No.

 [Report](#)

Maria B

9 Jul '14 at 11:04 pm

Adam Z - I wonder if all if these people pretending to be us and posting tangential diatribes could, in fact, be the same person....Hmmm....

[⚠ Report](#)

Adam Zarwan

10 Jul '14 at 9:10 am

I am also suspicious that that one person works in Peter Tatchell's office.

[⚠ Report](#)

Anonymous Islamists

10 Jul '14 at 9:42 am

How very, very intriguing to know the intimate connection between the professional fraud "Peter Tatchell Watch" and Adam Zarwan/Maria B.

Are they perhaps related and one and the same persons?

[⚠ Report](#)

Maria B

10 Jul '14 at 10:45 am

I'm neither affiliated with Tatchell Watch or Adam Zarwan - although the former has been an interesting read (thanks for pointing me to it) and the latter sounds a sane and good-humoured person. Again, I'm pretty sure the original comments from myself and Adam will show different IP addresses...

[⚠ Report](#)

Peter Tatchell Watch

10 Jul '14 at 9:46 am

Yes, it is odd how seconds after a comment is posted on this obscure york university web page it pops up on well known anonymous supporter of homophobic islamists 'peter tatchell watch'

Odd that.

Do you think there's some connection between the parties of islamists involved?

[⚠ Report](#)

Nouse editor

19 Jul '14 at 3:12 am

obscure m8?

[⚠ Report](#)

baffled bamboozled confused and confuddled

11 Jul '14 at 11:41 am

what in god's name is going on here

[⚠ Report](#)

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