

Statement on Marriage Equality Survey

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

2 October 2017

The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group supports a YES vote in the postal survey on marriage equality now in progress in Australia. We do this, not because we endorse the institution of marriage, but because the survey will have concrete results and we need to choose which results we favour.

Marriage is a reactionary social institution which exists so that men can ensure that their property will be inherited by children who are unquestionably their own offspring. Historically, it was also a means for negotiating alliances between families to advance their interests. The wishes and interests of women were of little account in the process. Marriage has thus been part of the subordination of women to men within class society. With the rise of capitalism, romantic love gradually superseded dynastic manoeuvring, allowing individuals relative freedom in choosing their partner. Such freedom is still subordinated, though, to the need to ensure paternity in the inheritance of property.

In recent decades, social prejudices against homosexual activity have been decaying, a consequence of widespread contraception, which has severed the previously iron link between sex and reproduction. This has opened the door for LGBTIQ people to gain wider acceptance in society and allowed their struggles for equality to achieve greater success. The struggles have been hard fought, because power concedes nothing without a demand, but the preconditions for success now exist in a way they didn't a century ago.

In 2004, the Coalition Government of John Howard saw the growing push for equality in society by LGBTIQ people and decided that something had to be done to stop it. Howard saw he would have trouble holding the line in the face of a piecemeal push against a series of petty material forms of discrimination, so he decided that he would draw a line in the sand over a major symbolic issue – marriage. After a brief media campaign, the Labor Party capitulated and voted with the Coalition to entrench compulsory heterosexuality in the Marriage Act. Howard had won another battle in his culture wars and had his position strengthened. What few anticipated, though, was how far and how fast public opinion would change.

Until Howard changed the Marriage Act, getting the legal right to marry had not been a priority of the LGBTIQ movement. For the most part, it saw marriage as a reactionary institution. There had only been a few stirrings of interest, provoked by developments in the United States. Howard had engaged in a pre-emptive strike, ensuring that marriage equality would not be achieved through the courts. His action turned the political situation around. The Marriage Act now stands

as a massive statement by the State that LGBTIQ people are not equal to straight people and their relationships are second class ones. The LGBTIQ movement got the message and realised that social equality wasn't going to be achieved without marriage equality. The forces of reaction have chosen their ground and we must wage our battle on that field, or not at all.

In itself, changing the Marriage Act to allow couples of the same sex to marry is a very minor reform. LGBTIQ people will have access to a reactionary institution which will be rendered irrelevant by a workers' revolution which abolishes property and thus inheritance. The significance of the campaign for marriage equality, though, is in the enemy we must defeat to achieve it. We are fighting organised religion, with the Catholic Church at its head. We are fighting some of the most powerful and justly hated figures on the political Right in Australia, including Tony Abbott, Cory Bernardi and Andrew Bolt. And we are fighting the Fascists, who have taken time out from spreading Islamophobia and anti-Semitism to demonstrate that this campaign is not about marriage, but about the legitimacy of homosexuality itself. If we win, we put these people to flight. If we lose, we will face a festival of reaction such as Australia hasn't seen since the 1950s.

The postal survey is a flawed process of direct democracy, something far inferior to an authentic plebiscite on a concrete proposal. We didn't choose this battlefield, but it's a battle we must win. Vote YES for liberty, equality and solidarity. Vote YES and prepare to take the struggle further.

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