



## Marching for love, marching for hate

sermon for UU 30 Dec 2018

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### Intro

I had a rather difficult experience two weeks ago (14 December), when I received an invitation to join a protest in favour of having non-racist immigration. The protest was to be outside Jacinda's Mt Albert Electorate office. I was invited because other unitarians are also on their mailing list. And I support non-racist immigration, so I went along to the Unite Office a few minutes walk from Jacinda's office where we were to assemble and start marching.

My concern was triggered even before I got there, because it said we were going to make a **counter**-protest against against "the racist mob". It didn't name this mob, but I worked out it was the National Front, a right-wing group who had a week earlier protested against the government's interest in signing a United Nations Pact on Immigration.

From the National Front website I found they **were** racist. Their site had a cartoon of ugly aggressive Africans wanting to come here and undo our way of life.

I was also concerned that the organisers of the counter protest called themselves Love Aotearoa, Hate racism... That seemed uncomfortably close to hating racists. I wanted to be marching for love of refugees, not for hatred of the National Front.

Also the counter-protestors didn't want the National Front to know we were coming; in case our numbers were too low, and we wouldn't be able to confront them very effectively.

And another reason for not going, they said was that the media was less likely to cover the event if there was no opposition, so we didn't want to give them oxygen.

I was concerned during the preparation meeting to find that the leader didn't believe in democracy, and that they wanted us to wear yellow vests, because the National Front were going to wear yellow vests, copying a French trade union that was also protesting against higher petrol prices. I don't oppose higher petrol prices: I actually supported petrol prices a month ago, in a sermon about climate change.

But I did support them on immigration: so I thought I would go along. It was a well-timed protest, because foreign minister Winston Peters was heading for a conference in Africa the following week, to find out about this UN Pact. We would encourage him if we made a display of support for non-racist immigration.

*There were a couple of posters in the room saying this is a season for joy not hate ... and I said I'd be very happy to carry one of those.*

But as the time for marching approached, only 15 of us had turned up, and they were concerned we'd be outnumbered. I said I had once been in a demo with only 15, outside the high court. It was very successful and we got huge publicity for our court case.

But 15 was not enough for these organisers. So instead they decided to pose for a group photo outside their union office. I said surely Jacinda's office is the place to get photographed.

And this was the last straw for me. So I wished them well but didn't stand up for the photo. And Kay Parish, from this congregation felt something similar. She took the photo, but didn't want to be in it.

There was only one news agency which covered the National Front protest, and the reporter didn't say how many protesters were there, but from their photo it looked like about 15 people - same as us.

We would not have been disgraced, if we had gone there. We would have shown a message of love, matching the message of hate. And I believe most viewers would have supported us.

**But we were stopped by our organisers hatred of the national front. It seemed to outweigh their love of refugees.**

And that's why I picked this topic: marching for love, marching for hate ... I had come to march for love, and we ended up with no march at all.

And Mr Peters did attend the United Nations meeting, and the government did join the Pact. But it got very little media coverage, thanks to us.

I hope I haven't blackened my name with the love Aotearoa-Hate racism group... They may have other protests I would support.

## Second protest - the Auckland Pride parade

A second, even sadder case hit Auckland over the Pride parade - This has traditionally not been so much a protest as a celebration of our gender-diverse culture, and a number of us have supported it .... I think it was about my fifth time. I think there were four churches that supported it: the others were Pitt St Methodists, the Ponsonby Baptists, and the Anglican All Saints church in Ponsonby. Four gay friendly churches, all in and around Ponsonby road.

But again, love and hatred got tangled up. Most of you will be aware of what happened, but I'd like to summarise it for those who missed this debate .... and are wondering whether to support the Pride Parade next year. I am torn three ways on this issue. And I'd like to invite you to comment.

The first I knew there was something wrong was late November when the organisers had said any gay or gender diverse police who took part would not be allowed to do it

in uniform. I recalled it was only a couple of years earlier that the the police had started attending in uniform, and it was widely welcomed.

## Pro uniforms

Some gay people were very upset with that decision.

In particular: One of the **former** Pride organisers, Graham Gresham, who had founded the Pride Parade, said its future was now in jeopardy: that was in November 21. He said one of the highlights of the parade for him was two years ago when the police were allowed to join the parade in uniform. I did some homework on him, because he seemed to be a good representative of that side of the story.

I looked up his Facebook page and it was full of this issue. Particularly strong criticism of the ban on uniforms was made by **Levi Joule**, who wrote the feature editorial in the Gay Express website, entitled **How extremists hijacked the Auckland Pride board, railroaded a community and demolished our parade.**

Joule said the hijacking was done by a group called People Against Prisons Aotearoa, who tried to block the parade in 2015. Their goal was for the Pride event to be a **protest** where grievances must be given priority. Their other goals include the abolition of the police force, and the abolition of prisons.

But in 2018 the Pride board had a new board chair, Cissy Rock and many new members. I believe there were about 300 of them, so it was a very different board.

But the Gay Express article says, the new Board's real reason for wanting to ban police uniforms was that it would ignite a switch to a more radical kind of parade. I quote the Gay Express article: **"In 2018 they would find a Pride board with a freshly appointed chair, and members all too willing to help them obtain the match they needed to spark the fire that would destroy the kind of parade they all wanted gone."**

**The match was LGBT police marching in uniform.**

**Then, the article says, the (rainbow) community descended into civil war, major sponsors and community groups such as Rainbow Auckland began to withdraw their support for the parade.**

This all happened in just four weeks, starting November 9.

## Told parade gets ditched

1. So banning police in uniform was the first step.
2. Then next step was the police announced that **if their members could not march in uniform they would not march at all.**
3. The third step was when a number of other groups pulled out .... Rainbow New Zealand, Vodafone, the Ponsonby Business Association, Rainbow Youth, the ANZ Bank, BNZ and NZME – the group who own the Herald and other media.
4. Two members of the Pride Board also pulled out.

Now that summary of events is very contentions. It is the viewpoint of the **old** board, who had welcomed police in uniform a couple of years earlier.

## There were reasons for objecting to police uniforms

But the other other group of rainbow people had good reasons for objecting to police uniforms.

1. They said a number of transgender people in particular, were still being treated badly by the police and the uniform is a symbol of that fear. And the people opposing the uniforms said these trans people were one of the most oppressed groups, and others should take their side, not the side of the police.
2. One of the police department's diversity officers was Tracy Phillips, and she favoured police participation. But even she admitted that complaints from these transgender people needed to be addressed. That was a huge concession to the anti-uniform protest.
3. The Green Party said they would still take part. Their spokesperson Jan Logie said there are wonderful people in the police, working to eradicate transphobia and homophobia, but she said members of the gender diverse community still experience discrimination and violence from the police .... "bridging those realities requires a deep listening that is not easy."
4. I was quite impressed with Jan Logie's stand, and was inclined to accept that this was a good reason for uniforms to be banned. But I still had some several reservations -
5. The Act party said they had planned to enter a float, but won't now, unless there are changes.
6. I saw a news item about Jacinda Ardern being asked whether she would support the new kind of Pride parade, and she said she would wait to see how it developed (don't have her exact words). That also seemed a reasonable position to me ... and I might have taken it myself, except that would have meant dropping this sermon and inventing another one in just a day or two.

But my concerns became more definite when I checked another couple of issues. There were several things that smelt rather fishy.

## A fishy fundraising campaign

One was the givealittle fundraising plan, set up on November 23, just two weeks before a special meeting, where there was going to be a motion of no confidence in the new board.

The meeting was scheduled for December 6, at Pitt St Methodist church.

But the givealittle plan seemed to close the meeting's options.

The donation plan was to raise \$30,000. In a couple of weeks. They achieved that goal which is quite impressive. But it also smells a little, as if this was part of a manipulative plan. Because it covered two options. One option was if the present board was retained, and kept their no-uniform policy: then they would get the \$30,000.

But if they were kicked out, or if they dropped the no=uniform policy ... the \$30,000 would go to rainbow-friendly causes yet to be defined... but they would be defined by a survey of the donors.

This seemed like a huge bribe to the members of Pride NZ, to go with the no-uniform parade.

### On the other hand - big business bribing

On the other hand, you could argue that big business was trying to bribe the Pride organisers by donating many thousands of dollars for the traditional Pride parade, with the payoff that it was:

- hypocrisy - pretending to support Pride, because of the publicity they would get, or
- aiming to get profits out of gay spending, or
- manipulation, by withdrawing their sponsorships when the rainbow people didn't toe the line,.

All these were arguments used by the new pride organisers.

And all these strings were pulled in the givealittle campaign.

The title of the givealittle campaign suggests there is something wrong with business sponsorship, by its very title

### The feelings of the givealittle donors

The givealittle campaign was called

### Let's replace Pride's corporate funding with community putea

Let's replace Pride's corporate funding with community putea (putea means financing) So you could argue that the rainbow community had to raise funds, because the corporates had withdrawn their funding.

Which came first? the chicken or the egg? Did the new board calculate that banning uniforms would lead to the corporate sponsors pulling out? Or was the givealittle campaign necessary, because the corporations had done the dirty on them, pulling out their support.

### But is that what the community donors had in mind when they gave \$30,000

So I thought I'd check out what the new donors thought, when they gave \$30,000

Well having just run a community funding campaign myself, I recalled that many donors tell their reasons, when they make their donation, and you can read these reasons, just by looking through the donations on the givealittle site. I counted there were 600 donors, and about a hundred of them who wrote comments alongside their donations:

There was a pattern, several patterns:

### hatred of corporations, was one pattern.

One pattern was hatred of corporations. I quote a few of them

- These companies never cared about queer liberation: they just wanted the pink dollar. Let's never let them back in.

- Looking forward to a Pride that is less about advertising and more about community.
- You made the right decision. Now the police and sponsors who are pulling out are showing how shallow their support of takatapui and rainbow people really is. They will only support Pride if it enables them to rainbow-wash themselves. (rainbow is a takeoff of whitewash) They won't face up to what they have caused.
- I might join the Wellington Pride ... too if we can get rid of the corporate dick-heads who are only in it for performance purposes.
- Things are better with community rather than corporate support anyway.
- I'm donating to take Pride back to its roots and show that we never needed pink-washed companies to have a celebration/protest.
- full gay pride. Down with capitalism.

I thought those answers were mostly about hating corporate sponsors, more than caring about trans people being bullied.

### Concern for trans people

But there were a few donors who did speak of concern for people who are bullied by the police. Here are a few of them:

- What people forget is that the police uniform is a symbol of terror for some LGBTQA people.
- Congratulations to the board. Here's looking to a different Pride and starting to repair relations so everyone can be included.
- I always hated how pride was just corporate sponsors without addressing the ongoing issues.
- Pride is political.

### Hatred of the police

And there were just a couple of donors who just hate the police

- Pride in community, not corporates and pigs
- F the police. F the NZ Defence Force. F the capitalists who are holding the parade to ransom.

So the main driving force for this fundraising, was to oppose big business. Which is not a particularly gay issue. And the changes were not driven by gay people, but a group called People against Prisons Aotearoa, which originally supported transgender prisoners, but then moved on to support all prisoners,, and to oppose all police. They didn't just want no uniformed police in the march; they wanted New Zealand not to have police at all.

### Censorship

The new Pride board prides itself on being inclusive of trans people ... but it seems to be very intolerant of other sections of the rainbow community ... in particular gay police who want to wear their uniforms.

The givealittle donor page also gives a lot of information about who will be allowed to join the parade next year.

Every individual or organisation who wants to take part in the parade must pay a fee .... which varies according to who you are:

Category 1: a rainbow group or individual	\$200
Category 2: a charity, or government agency, student group etc	\$500
Category 3: a LGBTIQ business with up to 20 employees	\$750

category 4 a non- LGBTIQ business with up to 20 employees \$1500  
category 5: commercial enterprises \$5500 including \$500 towards a rainbow group entry.

And they must also submit details of their float, and any messages it may contain, and any movements they may do, and they can be thrown out if they depart from this.

Now I recognise their right of the Pride Parade organisers to censor the messages that the parade will allow. every protest needs to check who is on their side.

But it made me wonder, whether I would want to attend.

### Would I be allowed to attend?

would gay-friendly Anglicans, unitarians Methodists and Baptists be allowed to attend.

Would they let us wear Unitarian t-shirts?

Would I be allowed to wear this Peace t-shirt?

We never had that kind of restriction before.

I then tried to contact Betsy Marshall who is our leader with a responsibility for the Pride parade; she is on holiday too.

And I called All Saints church and their priest .... but they didn't return the call.

**My personal decision** would in the long run be based on what I was allowed to say and wear.

If I was told I could not identify as a Unitarian, I would not go. It's not just about the worth and dignity of trans people, it's also about the worth and dignity of the protestors.

Which puts me squarely in the shoes of the police who decided if they could not wear uniforms they would not go. I don't blame them.

But I remain to be convinced. If the churches are allowed to say where they stand, I might feel I should go.

**It's Pride Board's choice to change the rules - but we don't have to identify with their choice.**

### POSTSCRIPT

Right after I preached this sermon, I received a reply from the All Saints Anglican Church, to my query about whether they would be joining the Pride Parade in 2019. They replied they would not, because it was not inclusive enough for them.

So that puts an added question to Unitarians: we have in past years joined in the All Saints march. We now need to decide whether we want to organise a marching group of our own, or join on the coat-tails of someone else. I've now sent that extra information to Unitarians who have been involved in the march in past years, to see what they want to recommend for 2019.