

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP) Column 434WH

As has been mentioned, the intrinsic nature of homophobia—whether in the real world or the unreal world—is bullying. It is a bully that does not show its face, and is often ignorant of the reality and the impact of that type of discourse. Plenty of people engage in this type of discourse, which is based on a falsehood, evidenced by hate, which allows them a veneer of respectability; there are those of us who believe we see it even in this place on a regular basis.

Therefore, why should the digital age be less full of hate than the previous age? Since the dawn of time, the LGBT community has faced unfounded and pernicious discrimination. As an openly gay man, I am very much aware of it; I was born into a world in which homosexuality was illegal. I hope the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) will forgive me if I mention that the legal systems of the United Kingdom meant that, in Scotland, homosexuality was not decriminalised until 1980—when I was nine years old—and that in Northern Ireland, it was not decriminalised until 1982.

Notions of who we should be, and the dictation of what we are meant to conform to, are so often what underlines hate. The transfer of hate from the real world to the unreal world should come as no surprise. This debate is taking place on 1 July, so we have come to the end of Pride celebrations in June specifically—I know a Pride march is coming up in London at the end of the week. That should remind us, especially those of us in the LGBT community, about the real nature of Pride, which is activism and solidarity. We must now seek to transfer that traditional method of activism and solidarity to the unreal world, where we really need to challenge these things.

This is a situation in which neither politics, religion nor society is free. As I mentioned during a debate on the Floor of the House last week, I am especially grateful that the Bishops' Conference of Scotland has signed up to the Time for Inclusive Education campaign. It has stated that no child in state-funded Catholic schools in Scotland should leave school having been bullied because they are gay, whether in the real world or—as I have said—the unreal world. I use the terminology “unreal world” because online is not real; the words are real, and the hate is real, but it is a world that is controlled in a very different way.

We need to be clear that online homophobia crosses over to the political sphere—a place in which it has always found fertile ground, whether on the far right or the extreme far left. Earlier, we heard mention of the LGBTQ community in Russia, which suffers more from the onslaught of online hate transferring into physical hate. We also heard about Chechnya, and we can only imagine the trauma caused to the LGBT community there. However, let us not assume that social or liberal democracy is free from homophobia; how many political debates in this place have been infused by it, across both the right and the left? No political party, including my own, can claim a clear conscience about the history of homophobia. As of today, I am sure I will start to get a hell of a lot more of it; I actually do not get that much, but I believe that is about to change. I have actually told my team who deal with online communications for my office to expect it, because it is something they have never really had to deal with.

Docherty-Hughes, M. (2019). Online Homophobia Petition. Available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-07-01/debates/FE62A216-74F7-4499-952C-A1555802953D/OnlineHomophobia>