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'We are making history'

DAVID SMITH reports on the London Lesbian and Gay Pride festival which this year attracted a record 38,000 people, confirming its status as the most successful event of its kind in Europe

Photographs by Nigel Hatton

"AT the risk of sounding ridiculous," said gay London councillor Bob Crossman giving what turned out to be the key-note speech at this year's festival, "our movement is guided by feelings of love."

"We are here today because of our belief in love and life unfettered... we are changing the world because of the way we are living in it... we will not be forgotten; every day of our lives we are making history."

And indeed on June 30th London Lesbian and Gay Pride made another little piece of history. 20,000 people were estimated to have taken part in the parade from the centre of the city, with banners coming from as many as two hundred different lesbian and gay organisations and interest groups.

In South London's Kennington Park the organising committee had the use of more space than in recent years. For the first time the festival of live music, disco, cabaret and market stalls went on until 11pm. And with Lambeth council suggesting that 38,000 passed through the park in the course of the afternoon and evening, the record attendance had once again been broken.

Bob Crossman is no stranger himself to breaking records and making history. As Mayor of Islington for four years, he was the first openly gay man elected to that office anywhere in the UK. He had been preceded on stage by Stephen Twigg, the first openly gay man elected President of the National Union of Students. Later in the day he was followed by the first openly gay man in television soap opera, Michael Cashman, now chairman of the directors of the Stonewall Group, who asked everyone to promise themselves that by the year 2000 we would have achieved full equality for lesbians and gay men in this country.

But politics aside, the day, as always, was about fun and togetherness. Old hacks who have been going to Pride for year after year might complain that they felt the atmosphere was "rather low-key this time around". But every year there are many thousands taking part for the first time who find

that being in a safe and unthreatening situation with so many other gay men and lesbians brings its own special buzz. And as an event which brings together people from far-flung communities in all corners of the country, and as a day for once a year reunions with old friends, London Lesbian and Gay Pride is irreplaceable.

The huge scope of the day's events are however bringing their own problems. With seven hours of main stage time to fill and a lack of big star names, entertainments organiser Jackie Stevens faced a line-up problem. But, as it happened,



Bob Crossman: 'we believe in love' Forum, page 24

the evening crowd were more than happy with Dutch singer Mathilde Santing, London pub circuit vocalist Paul Adams, drag star Lily Savage, American poet Storme Webber, country and western group Well Oiled Sisters and disco diva Jocelyn Brown. The cabaret tent, unfortunately too close to DJ Colin Peters' Bang disco tent, flourished with the cream of what its organiser Eric Presland hailed as "our living culture".

In the market area, the huge crowds showed their appreciation of access to the information, publications, T-shirts, gadgets and sundry goods on offer from almost 200 gay organisations. The crush brought the area to a standstill.

The whole event had cost the organising committee £60,000, and with money still owed to them and bills still to be paid, they can only say that they have a chance of just about breaking even. The crowds had not made the donations to collection buckets that had been hoped for, the average being a measly 28 pence per person. The problem of future finance needs urgent consideration by the whole lesbian and gay community, say committee members, who confess to be dangerously close to "burn-out".

The consolation can only be that they are, in Bob Crossman's words "making history". "You do not know how beautiful you look," Crossman told the festival crowds. "You are beautiful people. You're brilliant."



David Bunnett and Peter Tatchell (right) lay a wreath at the Cenotaph



Singer Mathilde Santing and students' president Stephen Twigg



Starring on the main stage: American disco diva Jocelyn Brown



Introduction to stardom: Lily Savage with friend

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