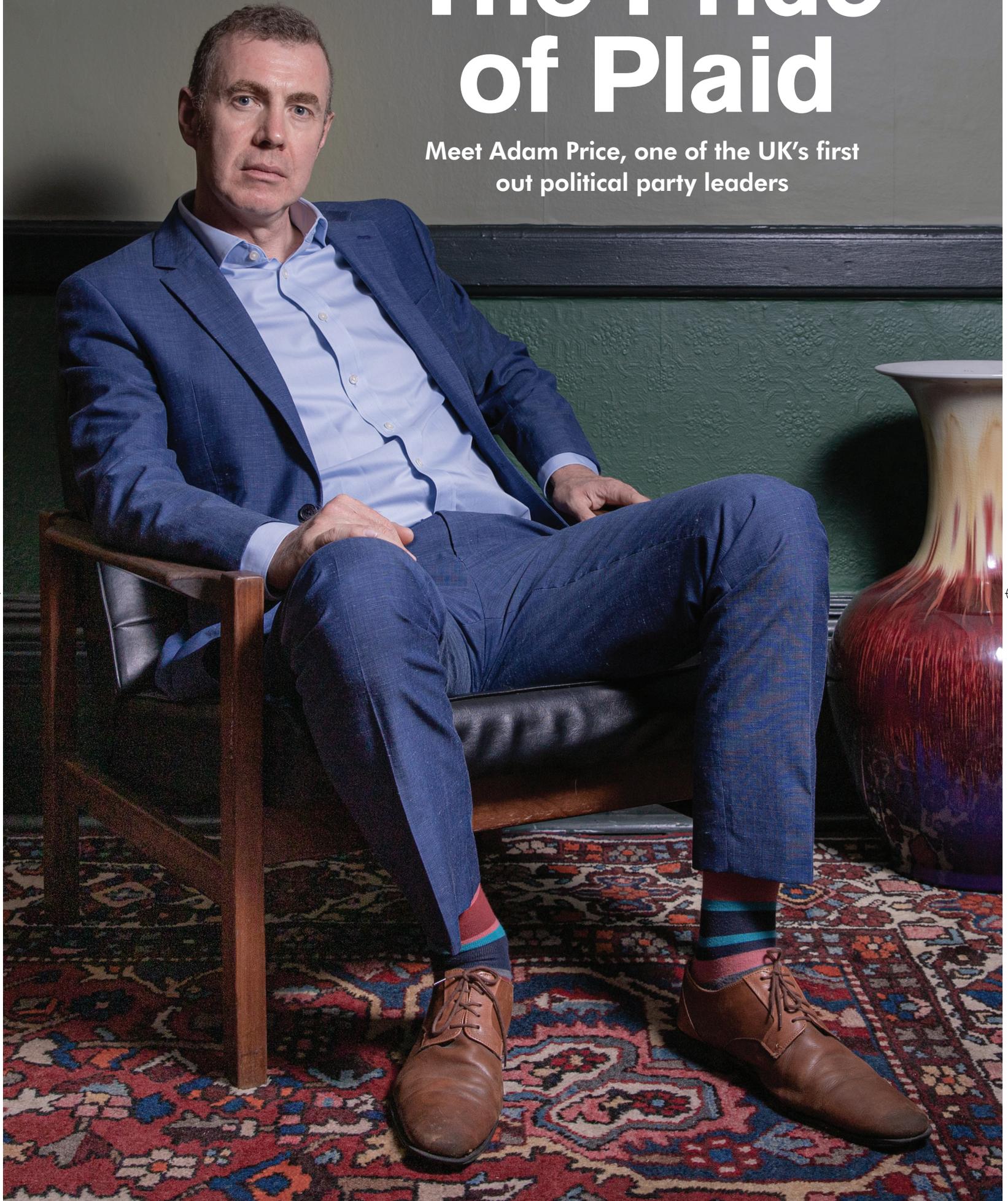
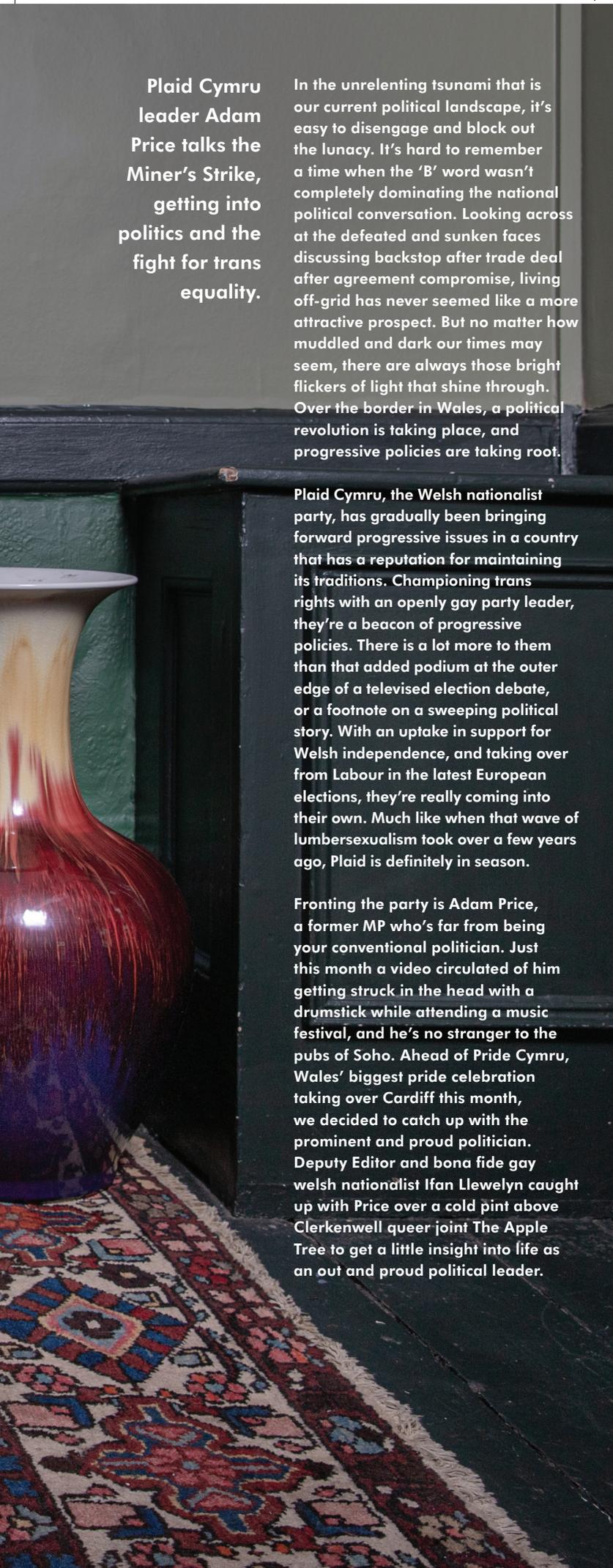


The Pride of Plaid

Meet Adam Price, one of the UK's first out political party leaders





Plaid Cymru leader Adam Price talks the Miner's Strike, getting into politics and the fight for trans equality.

In the unrelenting tsunami that is our current political landscape, it's easy to disengage and block out the lunacy. It's hard to remember a time when the 'B' word wasn't completely dominating the national political conversation. Looking across at the defeated and sunken faces discussing backstop after trade deal after agreement compromise, living off-grid has never seemed like a more attractive prospect. But no matter how muddled and dark our times may seem, there are always those bright flickers of light that shine through. Over the border in Wales, a political revolution is taking place, and progressive policies are taking root.

Plaid Cymru, the Welsh nationalist party, has gradually been bringing forward progressive issues in a country that has a reputation for maintaining its traditions. Championing trans rights with an openly gay party leader, they're a beacon of progressive policies. There is a lot more to them than that added podium at the outer edge of a televised election debate, or a footnote on a sweeping political story. With an uptake in support for Welsh independence, and taking over from Labour in the latest European elections, they're really coming into their own. Much like when that wave of lumbersexualism took over a few years ago, Plaid is definitely in season.

Fronting the party is Adam Price, a former MP who's far from being your conventional politician. Just this month a video circulated of him getting struck in the head with a drumstick while attending a music festival, and he's no stranger to the pubs of Soho. Ahead of Pride Cymru, Wales' biggest pride celebration taking over Cardiff this month, we decided to catch up with the prominent and proud politician. Deputy Editor and bona fide gay Welsh nationalist Ifan Llewelyn caught up with Price over a cold pint above Clerkenwell queer joint The Apple Tree to get a little insight into life as an out and proud political leader.

You were born in a mining community in the late '60s, what do you remember about those early few years?

My father was a coal miner and the Miner's Strike looms large over my personal and political history. It's when I first got active in politics. I remember coming down to London for the first time during the strike, in the summer. It was a trying time because my family only had my child benefits to survive on. It was also an awe-inspiring time as a fourteen-year-old, getting to spend three weeks in London, being bought my first pint by people who thought I was a coal miner because I was so tall. My mother got very involved and we went all around the country speaking as part of women support groups, so it broadened my horizon and probably the one experience that formed by life in politics.

So being an activist from a young age ingrained something in you.

Yes, and it was also the first time I met people were out as LGBT. We've all seen the film now (*Pride*). They came to my home town, the Gays and Lesbians Support the Miners, and that was an incredible experience for me because at that point I already knew I was gay, but had separated in my mind the familiar story of my working class Welsh community verses my sexuality. Gays and lesbians were welcomed to the working men's club in the heart of our community – looking back, that sewed the seeds of confidence in my mind that I could bring those aspects of my personality together.

Fun fact, our photographer was actually an extra in *Pride*! So when it came time to up sticks, you headed for Cardiff. Was that a liberating experience?

It was a mixed picture for me. I made a decision to stay in Wales even though I could've come to London. In terms of my political involvement, that was a good idea because I because I threw myself into it in Wales. It was a torrid time in the late '80s, and I was probably one of the last people to get a student grant. I stayed in the closet throughout my entire time as a student, though I did tell a few people in the LGB society, but I was reticent to take it further because home was only an hour away. There wasn't that classic blank canvas for re-invention. You come out when you're ready, and I finally did it a week or so after graduation and that was a time I thought "Well, this is my life now. I have to make a decision." As it happens, one of my best friends from school came out to me at the same time I came out to him. He actually asked me, "I don't want to go to a gay club alone, would you mind coming with me?" and obviously I was deeply enthusiastic about going. Those early days I spent a lot of time walking up and down past a gay bar before getting the courage to walk in. Heart racing. It took courage to make those first steps. The next time it was me badgering him to go again.

It was around that time that people took to the streets of Cardiff to protest the passing of Section 28, right?

Yes, that's right. It was probably the first major march by the community there, mirroring the marches in London, Manchester and elsewhere. I was on the march, despite being closeted, though it was one of the first baby steps in the coming out process for me. There was some degree of bewilderment in that experience, it was a very different time and we were being so publicly espousing LGBT rights. Those were the days that gay clubs in Cardiff would be behind a dark hidden door, so to have people march through the streets in defence of gay rights was a fantastic thing. I was proud to be there.

Was it that same courage that had you perusing that first seat in Parliament?

I first stood for parliament in 1992 as the youngest candidate in that election across the UK, and I got 3.7% or something which was an achievement. Nine years later the opportunity came for me to stand in Westminster in my home seat covering Carmarthen and East Dinefwr and it was one of only nine seats that Labour lost in that election. In that time I was out as far as I was concerned, to my family and my friends, but not everyone knew and a couple of days before the election I was interviewed by a journalist who was going to out me. I hadn't actually hidden it but if he did that two days before, it would that imply that I was being duplicitous or dishonest. That was a testing time and as it happens the paper decided not to run that outing story, but as soon as I got elected that I didn't ever want to be in that position again. I'm proud of who I am so I arranged an interview with a friendly journalist at BBC Wales just wanting to get the information out there.



Sitting on those green benches for the first time, you've seen it on television so many times and suddenly you're there."

In winning that seat, you move from the comfort of South Wales to the wild west of Westminster. How was that transition?

When you first arrive in the House of Commons, you have to pinch yourself. Sitting on those green benches for the first time, you've seen it on television so many times and suddenly you're there. I decided very quickly that I wasn't going to be cowed by it. I thought, "Right, I'm going to be the best I can be as much of a thorn in the side of the establishment as I can be." Within a year we had a big political story involving donations to the Labour Party, then about a year in I tried to impeach the Prime Minister for the first time in a hundred and fifty years. Aim high! "Doesn't lack ambition" was always on my report card at school. Make as much of a nuisance of yourself as you can, for the best possible reasons.

We often hear rumours of public figures hiding their sexuality to advance their careers. Was that something in the air at that time?

Totally. Politics was not the most receptive environment for folk to be open about their sexuality. To give one example of how things might have changed, when I was first elected in 2001, shortly afterwards there were a few more people who had arrived who were out, or came out. There were around eleven of us in the early 2000's. I was once phoned up by the Daily Mirror actually, because they'd spotted me at Prowler on a Sunday. They'd been tipped off, and they were going to run the story. I told a very disappointed journalist that I was out already, and I was there with my boyfriend. Now I believe the number of out gay and bi MPs is in the mid-forties. It changed because people started coming out, and people see it's okay.

There were two of us Welsh MPs who were gay, the other being from the Rhondda. Wales is often seen as a small scene socially conservative area, and yet there we were. To my face, it was never an issue. Locally, I never experienced direct politically motivated homophobia. Of course, coming back to it now with social media, we have a rising wave of bigotry. People might have been saying things behind my back, but now if anyone makes a prejudicial comment then you see it. It does exist, but for me coming up as an out politician was a positive experience.

Then after two terms in office, you decide to step down.

Yes, which surprised a lot of people. I had a relatively healthy majority when I got re-elected. If you're a politician with a seat in Westminster with a safe majority is like getting a golden ticket for a lot of people. I never saw it like that. I don't like the idea of a political career. It's important to re-charge your batteries.

After almost 10 years I needed to re-energise and get some fresh ideas by going back to university, and what better university to go to than the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard. It was an astonishing crop of people. Taking some time out mid-career before I was back in the fray. A lot of people go into politics, whatever their political aspirations are, and you slowly see that light fading. People can lose the mission that got them into politics in the first place.

And you came back, all guns blazing with your eyes on that Plaid Cymru Party Leader role.

That wasn't the plan, and I think for me politics shouldn't be about personal ambition. Sometimes you have to step up to that plate and you're called to act, and if not now, when? If not us, then who? I realised that I needed to stand for the leadership in order to take the party in the direction that we needed. We have a one-party rule in Wales, which isn't a very pretty picture in terms of the high hopes that were there 20 years ago which haven't been delivered in full. There is so much good the Welsh Government has done, but there's so much more that we could be doing. That's what keeps me in Plaid, that's what gets me up in the morning.

There seems to be a renewed vigour for independence, especially among young Welsh people.

Wales is increasingly inde-curious, to use a phrase inspired by the LGBTQ community. The general mood seems to be "I'd never thought I'd say this, but I'm beginning to support Welsh independence", which is almost like a coming out. We're catching up with Scotland, and there's a growing self-confidence in pure political terms. We just had the biggest march for independence in recent history down in Cardiff. Another detention that's drawing support for Welsh independence, Scottish independence and Irish unity is that people who wouldn't not describe themselves as nationalists, but are looking at British politics, seeing the Boris Johnson and Michael Farrage shambles that is Brexit and Westminster and thinking surely it doesn't have to be this.

Also in contrast to Westminster, we've seen Wales becoming increasingly supportive on Trans issues.

It's brilliant. We've had the new guidance on gender-neutral school uniforms. I think Wales is among the first countries in the world to do so. It's so important that we move away from traditional binary ideas of gender and provide young people with the proper space and support for them to choose who they want to be, rather than have that choice made for them.

Wales' first Gender Identity Clinic is due to open next month. Why do you think it's important to have those services, if not locally, but in your home country?

It's probably one of the things I'm most proud of since being elected into Welsh parliament. I drafted the last manifesto for the last election, and was pretty insistent that we had a commitment in there for a Gender Identity Clinic in Wales. It's entirely unacceptable that as a modern, inclusive nation, we were forcing people to travel to another country in order to access basic services in terms of gender identity. We still need to make sure the comprehensive service is available as soon as possible, but the new clinic is a huge step in the right direction. It was secured because we insisted on it through a budget agreement. It was actually Plaid Cymru, in making it a priority in our budget agreement, that made it happen. Politics is party driven by declaration, but declarations need to be followed through. It's late, but it's still a massive step forward.

As a politician who is LGBTQ, do you feel a responsibility to advocate and bring forward our issues?

I think so. An important issue is visibility, that's why I was keen early on to be open about who I am. I've become the role model I was lacking growing up. It is incumbent upon us who are LGBT in politics to be true to our community, and to fight all forms of injustices everywhere. I feel strongly in the principle of intersectionality. Being LGBT has to ground you in an opposition to all forms of injustice and discrimination. We as a community can't be free if we don't also tackle racism and sexism. If Westminster is dragging its feet on the reform of the Gender Recognition Act, I would like to see us have that devolved to Wales so we could move forward more quickly, so we could then have the power to be an equal society as far as the Trans community's concerned.

GENDER RECOGNITION ACT

Shon Faye

TALKS US THROUGH THE GRA CONSULTATION AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR TRANS PEOPLE!



The Gender Recognition Act is due a much-needed makeover. Talk to any trans person and they'll tell you. We chatted to writer and trans activist Shon Faye about exactly why it's such a headache, and what needs to change.

So Shon, what do you currently have to do to get your gender recognised legally?

In the application process, there are two streams; one if you're married and the other if you're single. If I were going through it as a single person, I would have to have a psychiatric report by a psychiatrist diagnosing me with gender dysphoria, which is still classified as a psychiatric disorder, and a long medical report from the psychiatrist to obtain that. The

psychiatrist asks you a bunch of questions about your life, your history... I've had psychiatric assessments in my treatment and I found it very invasive. You have to submit that report, then there's another report that another doctor has to give

(which can be your GP) where they have to account for what hormones you're on, what you're planning to do towards medical transition, there's a question they have to fill in that's what are your intentions as far as surgeries, which ones have you had, if you haven't had any surgery, why?

That's the medical evidence, but you also have to prove that you've been living as your required gender for two years at the time you apply. That's a complex thing to prove, because there are only certain ways which you can prove that. Pay slips for one, which requires a job and having your name and title showing that you're living as your correct gender. Also possibly your passport or driving license has to be sent off if you've changed those over, and also if you've changed your name. Obviously all of those documents cost money to change. The psychiatric reports, changing your documents and having a job, they're all quite financially exclusive. They rule a lot of people out. Those are all hidden costs. Then you send off that pack of evidence to a panel of three people, who you never meet, and they then decide on the evidence whether you're who you say you are. There's no form of appeal against that. It's a drawn out process, and it's hard to navigate. You have to be living two years, presenting full time as your acquired gender, but you also have to get psychiatrist reports, and to see a gender clinician, the waiting time on the NHS can be up to two years in some cases.

“Politics is getting very polarised and minorities are getting targeted, and trans people tend to be one of them”

What happened back in July when they opened up this public consultation on the issue?

Well, last year the Government announced that it intended to consult on this, and that's when the media storm kicked off. So they dragged it on and didn't actually follow through on their promise until July of this year. Finally the consultation was published. It was a weird one. It's an online document where they speak to you and members of the public, particularly trans people, for their opinion on what should change about the law. That could be people who want to see the law change for trans people, but also transphobic people who don't want to change the law at all.

We're seeing quite a rise in transphobic sentiments in the mainstream media, why do you think that is?

Well, it's because trans people have come into a new era of visibility. We've always existed but we have had more media attention over the last few years. That causes a backlash. There are people who have never liked us and feel threatened by trans people and by what our existence means on a fundamental level. There's also the unpleasant strain of the media as a very narrow group of people. There aren't many trans people working in the media, and definitely not in editorial roles. Politics is getting very polarised and minorities are getting targeted, and trans people tend to be one of them.

You're guest Editor of Vice next week! Tell us about what you've commissioned.

They're doing a campaign called Recognise Me, and they trying to get

people who aren't usually engaged in this issue to respond to the government consultation, and talk to them about why it's important that trans people can self-determine their gender. Trans people are often spoken over. It's hard to get people to talk about anything other than debating our existence, we usually have to appear with a transphobe on TV. We commissioned an intersex trans woman to talk about that kind of crossover, someone who's intersex and trans and how legal gender affects her. It's just trans people in their own words really.

Head over to Vice.com to check out all the commissioned work for Recognise Me. To respond to the consultation on the Gender Recognition Act, head over to Stonewall.org.uk to fill out their streamlined response form. The consultation closes at 11pm, 19th of October.

LET'S TALK

MENTAL HEALTH!



It goes without saying that our mental health is important. Especially in these social media-swamped, anxiety-infused times.

We're getting better at talking about our feelings in general, and chatting to each other is great, but sometimes it's also good to seek the help of a professional!

Juan Michael is one of those professionals. He offers counseling specifically for LGBTQ+ people. We had a chat with him to find out more.

Tell us a bit about yourself and what you do.

Hi, I'm Juan Michael. I'm a Counsellor and I offer a safe and confidential counselling space in London. I identify on the LGBTQI+ spectrum and have a mixed heritage background; these qualities inform the sensitivity and empathy you can expect from me towards the intersections of your culture, race, disability, gender, sexuality or relationship diversity.

Why is it important to talk about our mental health?

Whilst mental health is important to talk about, attention might also be given to your feelings and how you experience them in the body; alongside intuitions and your deeper heart and soul longings.

Do you think gay people struggle with their mental health?

There can be struggles with the wounds created by aspects of being and living on the LGBTQI+ spectrum. Beyond struggle, we might also celebrate the ways we triumph, flourish and are resilient.

What do you want people to take away from their sessions with you?

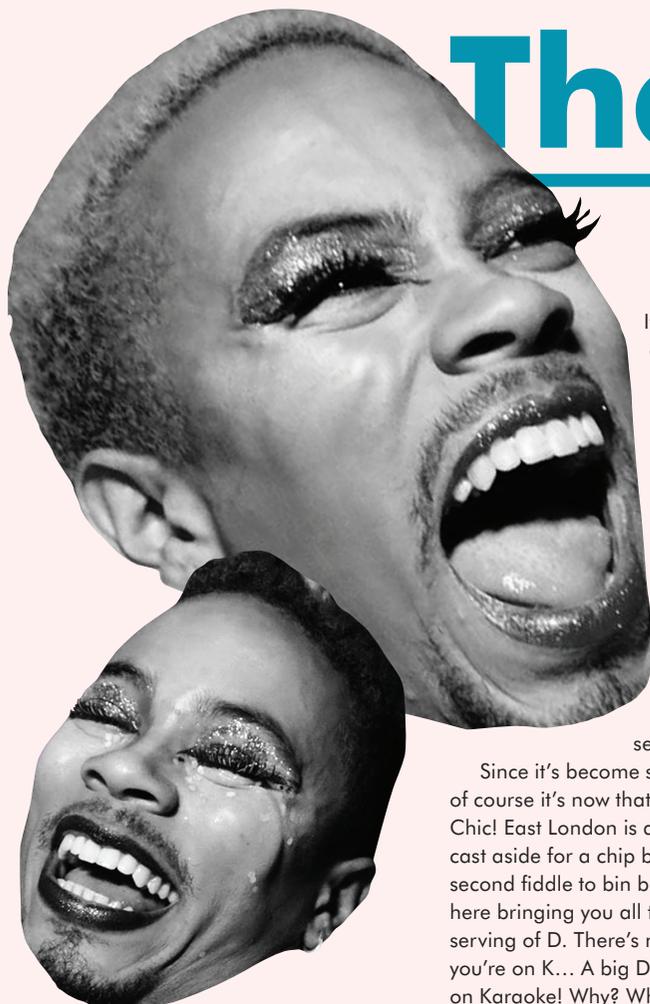
Often people want to take away something concrete: a sense of progress or a way to fix something - and that's understandable. Yet, the things you might take away could be more subtle and tender: a feeling of being deeply listened to; really seen and accepted - just as you are.

How can people get in touch with you?

You can visit my website at www.juanmichaelcounselling.com or reach out by email juanmichael@juanmichaelcounselling.com

The K Factor:

Official Launch



It's the ancient Japanese art of screaming Jager-induced tunes into a microphone. From the early 90s it has been a staple at little girls' birthday parties and awkward business functions. Its inventor picked up an Ig Nobel Peace prize in 2004 for finding 'a new way for people to tolerate each other'. Yes, really! Well, when Auntie Judith is heading for her fourth Celine Dion ballad, 'tolerate' seems to be too strong a word...

Since it's become so naff everywhere else, of course it's now that perfect brand of Dalston Chic! East London is a magic place where caviar is cast aside for a chip butty and sequin gowns play second fiddle to bin bags. The Karaoke Hole is here bringing you all the K you need, with a healthy serving of D. There's nothing like some big D when you're on K... A big Drag performer to heckle you on Karaoke! Why? What did you think we meant?

This weekend sees the premier of **The K Factor**, their weekly Karaoke competition with the chance to grabbing yourself some cold hard cash! Every Sunday night The Karaoke Hole will be whipping out £100 out of their pockets, slamming it on the table and having you EARN IT. But who decides who wins? Well, YOU of course you judgy bitch. We know you love to judge, so you may as well put it to good use. The official launch has super sexy Lipsync1000 winner of 2018 Rhys' Pieces hosting, so you better be ready to out perform this trophy grabbing qeen.

Every attendee will get the chance to show off their pipes, and channel their inner Mariah. Then a top 3 will be selected for a midnight sing-off to the death! Well, maybe not death, but to getting £100! So whether you're a closeted Carmen, or a Beyoncé beat into submission by a cold corporate uncaring world, come on down to The K Factor and let free your inner chanteuse.

The K Factor Official Launch is Sunday, September 16th from 8pm until they crown a winner!
The Karaoke Hole,
95 Kingsland High Street, E8 2PB.