



TIMES ONLINE

Archive Classified Shopping Promotions Games Fast Times My Times

Search this site

Britain

June 30 2003

BRITAIN

- Honours
- Congestion charging
- London
- The euro
- Guide to Government

TIMES ONLINE

- Home
- Breaking news
- Britain**
- World
- Sport
- Business
- Your Money
- Comment
- Sports Book
- Travel
- Shopping
- Law
- Classifieds
- Games
- Crossword
- Motoring
- Property
- Student
- Sunday Times

NEWSPAPER

- Sunday
- Today
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday

QUICK CLICKS

- Appointments
- Arts
- Books
- Contact Us
- Creme
- Education
- Encounters
- Fast Times
- Film
- Finest
- First night
- Food and Drink
- From the Archive
- Good University Guide
- Health
- Online Specials
- Play
- Promotions
- Public Agenda
- Style Guide
- Subscription
- Supplements
- Talking Point

June 30, 2003

Gay couples welcome equal rights

BY RICHARD FORD, HOME CORRESPONDENT

HOMOSEXUAL partners will have the same rights as heterosexual married couples under government plans that will give same-sex relationships legal recognition for the first time.

The most far-reaching legal reform affecting gay rights for more than 30 years will give same-sex partners next-of-kin rights in hospital, allow them to benefit from a dead partner's pension and exempt them from inheritance tax on a partner's home.

But the consultation paper published today will be criticised for discriminating against unmarried heterosexual couples. Campaigners said the proposals should have been extended to provide legal recognition for all unmarried couples.

Evan Harris, Liberal Democrat equality spokesman, said that the decision to exclude opposite-sex couples from claiming the rights conferred by civil partnerships will be a bitter disappointment to hundreds of thousands of people.

Peter Tatchell, the gay rights activist, described the plans as "heterophobic" and "retrograde". He added: "It is divisive, heterophobic and discriminatory to exclude unmarried heterosexual couples.

"Cohabiting heterosexuals also lack legal recognition and protection. This is a grave injustice."

The consultation will not use the term "gay marriage" but the civil partnership proposal is as close to a marriage contract as possible. Gay couples would sign a register declaring that they want to form a civil partnership. They would then have recognition as next of kin for medical purposes and property rights.

The paper will also emphasise the responsibilities that go with the civil partnership including separation

ALSO IN THIS SECTION

ADVE

Colleagues turn on 'lacklustre' Kennedy

Gay couples welcome equal rights

Tory Iraq war rebels get their jobs back

This week in Westminster

Correction

News in Brief

BREAKING NEWS

Britain from PA

Plans for 'gay marriages' revealed

Trains 'will still be late by 2010'

Hunting supporters in Commons protest

Orangemen banned from flashpoint road

Soldier 'forgot' Bloody Sunday deaths

BT BROADBAND



Read the Times Online **guide** to getting the best out of

Broadband

TOOLS & SERVICES

Times Newspaper Edition

The paper in a page: today's Times and The Sunday Times in an easy-to-read format

Compare the odds

Before you place your bets, find the **best value** with our new odds comparison service. Plus, **Rob Wright's Racing Update**, and the latest betting news on the big sports events

TI

in

NEW



firm, E
Online
help y

Television and Radio
The Register
Times e-mail
Times 2
Times Services
Weekend

SPECIAL REPORTS

Investor's Centre
Best of Broadband

arrangements under which alimony may have to be paid.

Jacqui Smith, the equality minister, will, however, reject calls for gay couples to be subject to a qualifying period before they can register. She will point out that there is no such rule for straight couples.

In London more than 500 gay couples have signed a civil partnership register set up by Ken Livingstone, the Mayor, even though it is only a symbolic recognition.

Michael Cashman, 52, who as Colin Russell in *EastEnders* took part in the first gay kiss on British television, said that he would be among the first to register. He said that although he and his partner, Paul Cottingham, 39, had been together for 20 years, they enjoyed none of the rights married couples took for granted.

Mr Cashman, who is now a Labour MEP for the West Midlands, said he applauded the Government for "addressing this inequality". He hoped for speedy progress.

Ben Summerskill, chief executive of Stonewall, the gay rights campaign group, said: "We are delighted that a long overdue step is being taken by the Government."



Find a holiday

Search our database of flights, city breaks, holidays and late deals, today including 2 nights in Paris from only £105

Money Shop

Search and compare loans, credit cards, mortgages and other financial products and buy online

The Sunday Times

Enterprise Network
Case studies, information, advice, events and exclusive offers for middle market businesses online

Crossword Maestro

Get the expert software system for solving crosswords

JOB FINDER

Search for appointments in:

The Times

The Sunday Times

GO

busine

INVE



Read c
how to
stock i

Contact our advertising team for advertising and sponsorship in Times Online, The Times and The Sunday Times

Copyright 2003 Times Newspapers Ltd.

This service is provided on Times Newspapers' standard Terms and Conditions. Please read our Privacy Policy. To inquire about a licence to reproduce material from The Times, visit the Syndication website.