

# Christian Group Banned From Running 'Gay Cure' Advertisements

A British judge upheld on Friday a decision to ban a Christian group from placing adverts on London buses that suggested people could be cured of homosexuality.

The group, Core Issues Trust, wanted to place adverts on the side of London's distinctive red double-decker buses that read: "Not gay! Ex-gay, post-gay and proud. Get over it!"

The proposed adverts were a response to a campaign by gay rights group Stonewall, which had run adverts on London buses that read: "Some people are gay. Get over it!"

In a 35-page ruling, High Court judge Beverley Lang dismissed Core Issues Trust's claim for a judicial review into the ban on the adverts imposed by Transport for London (TFL).

"(The advert) was not a contribution to a reasoned debate," she wrote, saying that the group's freedom of expression was counter-balanced by the risk of causing grave offence to gay people and increasing homophobic attacks.

Core Issues Trust said it would appeal, arguing the judgment was "likely to stifle open and free debate" about homosexuality and discriminate against "those who reject a 'gay' identity".

The group says it aims to help "people who voluntarily seek to change from a 'gay' lifestyle to a gender-affirming one".

Stonewall welcomed the judgment, saying the decision to ban what it described as "voodoo 'gay cure' adverts" was correct.

TFL, the public body in charge of the bus network, decided in

April 2012 to stop Core Issues Trust from running the adverts on the grounds that they went against its “commitment to a tolerant and inclusive London”.

## **Censorship**

The Christian group argued in court that the real reason for the ban was that London Mayor Boris Johnson disagreed with the view expressed and thought the adverts could hinder his re-election campaign. A mayoral election was due three weeks later.

Core Issues Trust based the accusation on a TFL press statement dated April 12, 2012, which said the mayor “was strongly of the view that this ad should not be run”.

Judge Lang dismissed the accusation that Johnson had abused his position as TFL chairman to advance his political interests. She said TFL had acted in its own interest to avoid causing offence, an objective shared but not imposed by Johnson.

Stonewall Chief Executive Ben Summerskill said Johnson had been right to express his objections to the proposed adverts.

“In a city where over half of gay young people face bullying at school, and where tens of thousands of gay people are subjected to hate crimes every year just because of the way they were born, it’s perfectly proper for a mayor to object to the use of such advertising in an iconic public setting,” he said.

However, Lang’s judgment contained some criticism of TFL, suggesting that it had not considered whether it was perhaps applying double standards by banning Core Issues Trust’s adverts after it had allowed Stonewall’s “Get over it!” campaign.

Christian groups supporting Core Issues Trust seized on that part of Lang’s judgment, which referred to the Stonewall

advertises as “controversial, sensitive and potentially offensive”.

“As soon as a Christian group responds to Stonewall’s provocation and dares to challenge the reigning political orthodoxy, the message is banned,” said Andrea Minichiello Williams, director of a group called the Christian Legal Centre.

“This case demonstrates the huge asymmetry and censorship that characterises public debate at the moment,” she said.

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*Editing by Pravin Char*

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