

Peter Tatchell – [Biography](#)

[40 years of human rights campaigning 1967-2007](#)

Peter Tatchell has been campaigning for human rights, democracy and global justice since 1967.

He is a member of the queer human rights group OutRage!, and the left-wing of the Green Party.

Peter is the Green Party parliamentary candidate for Oxford East, and the Green Party's spokesperson on human rights.

A summary of his motives, morality and methods is here:

<http://www.petertatchell.net/biography/motives.htm>

Peter's key political inspirations are Mahatma Gandhi, Sylvia Pankurst, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. He has adapted many of their methods to the contemporary struggle for human rights – and invented a few of his own.

Born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1952, he began campaigning for human rights in 1967, aged 15. His first campaign was against the death penalty, followed by campaigns in support of Aboriginal rights and in opposition to conscription and the Australian and US war against the people of Vietnam.

In 1969, on realising that he was gay, the struggle for queer freedom became an increasing focus of his activism.

After moving to London in 1971, he became a leading activist in the Gay Liberation Front (GLF); organising sit-ins at pubs that refused to serve “poofs”, and protests against police harassment and the medical classification of homosexuality as an illness.

He famously disrupted Prof Hans Eysenck's 1972 lecture which advocated electric shock aversion therapy to “cure” homosexuality.

The following year, in East Berlin, he was arrested and interrogated by the secret police - the Stasi - after staging the first ever gay rights protest in a communist country.

Throughout much of the 1970s, and beyond, he was active in anti-imperialist solidarity campaigns, supporting the national liberation struggles of the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea, Oman, Palestine, Western Sahara, East Timor and West Papua.

He also campaigned against the dictatorships in Franco's Spain, Caetano's Portugal, the Colonel's Greece, Marcos's Philippines, Suharto's Indonesia, Pinochet's Chile, Somoza's Nicaragua, Saddam's Iraq, the Shah's and Khomeini's Iran, and Brezhnev's Soviet Union and its satellite regimes in Eastern Europe and the Baltics.

Peter stood as the Labour candidate in the 1983 Bermondsey by-election, but was defeated in the most violent and homophobic election in modern British history.

In the mid-1980s, he and others risked arrest on charges of sedition and incitement to mutiny by publicly urging British military personnel to refuse to obey orders to train, prepare and use illegal nuclear weapons.

In early 1987, Tatchell launched the world's first organisation dedicated to defending the human rights of people with HIV, the UK AIDS Vigil Organisation. In 1988, the UKAVO persuaded the World Health Minister's Summit on AIDS to issue a declaration opposing government repression and discrimination against people with HIV.

An anti-apartheid activist since his teens in the late 1960s, his lobbying of the ANC in 1987 contributed to it renouncing homophobia and making its first public commitment to lesbian and gay human rights. Later, together with others, he helped persuade the ANC to include a ban on anti-gay discrimination in the post-apartheid constitution.

In the late 1980s, Peter co-organised the Green and Socialist Conferences, which brought together reds and greens and sought to forge a new political alliance for social justice and ecological sustainability. Even then, he was warning of the dangers of climate change, resource depletion and species extinction.

After playing a prominent role in the London chapter of the AIDS activist group ACT UP, in 1990 he and 30 other people founded the radical queer human rights direct action movement OutRage!.

Most notoriously, in 1994 Peter Tatchell and OutRage! outed 10 Church of England Bishops and called on them to "tell the truth" about their sexuality - accusing them of hypocrisy and homophobia for publicly supporting anti-gay policies, while privately having homosexual affairs. This led to him being denounced in parliament and the press as a "homosexual terrorist" and "public enemy number one".

In the same year, he and five other members of OutRage! picketed an Islamist mass rally at Wembley Arena, organised by the fundamentalist group, Hizb-ut Tahrir. They were protesting against the group's unlawful public exhortations to kill gay people, unchaste women and Muslims who turn away from their faith. Despite the Islamists openly threatening to murder him, the police arrested Tatchell.

Two years later, in 1996, he launched his "Consent at 14" campaign, which urged a reduction in the age of consent to 14 for both gay and straight sex; arguing that consent at 16 was a form of child abuse because it criminalised the sexually-active half the teenage population who have sex before the age of 16. He suggested that the best way to protect young people from sexual infection and abuse is earlier, more frank sex education, to empower them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to make wise, responsible sexual choices and to report unwanted sexual advances.

Peter and his OutRage! comrades interrupted the Archbishop of Canterbury's 1998 Easter Sermon in Canterbury Cathedral; condemning Dr Carey's advocacy of discrimination against lesbians and gay men. He was arrested and convicted under the Ecclesiastical Courts Jurisdiction Act 1860 (formerly part of the Brawling Act 1551).

This is Peter's only conviction in 40 years of nearly 3,000 direct action and civil disobedience protests.

The following year, 1999, in central London, he and three OutRage! colleagues ambushed the motorcade of the President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, and made a citizen's arrest of the President on charges of torture and other human rights abuses.

In 2000, he stood unsuccessfully as an independent Green Left candidate for the London Assembly.

He attempted another citizen's arrest of President Mugabe in Brussels in March 2001, which resulted in him being beaten unconscious by Mugabe's bodyguards.

In 2002, Peter brought an unsuccessful legal action in the British courts for the arrest of the former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, on charges of war crimes in Vietnam and Cambodia.

The same year, he ambushed Mike Tyson outside his gym, just a few days before his world title fight against Lennox Lewis in Memphis, USA. Challenging Tyson over his homophobic slurs against Lewis, Tatchell persuaded Tyson to make a public statement insisting that he was not homophobic and to declare: "I oppose all discrimination against gay people."

In early March 2003, Tatchell forced Prime Minister Tony Blair's motorcade to halt in Piccadilly, in a protest against the impending war in Iraq. He ran out into the road and held up a placard opposing invasion and urging instead aid to the Iraqi people to help them topple Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. Blair's car screeched to a standstill just six inches from Tatchell's legs. Although arrested and detained in Vine Street police station, no charges were pressed.

He participated in the attempted Moscow Gay Pride marches in 2007, in solidarity with Russian lesbian and gay rights campaigners. Together with others, he was beaten up by neo-Nazis, ultra-nationalists and fundamentalist Christians; suffering some brain and eye damage. The police arrested him, while his attackers were allowed to go free.

Although great progress has been made in repealing anti-gay laws in the UK, he is still campaigning to complete the unfinished battle for queer equality: for an end to the ban on same-sex marriage, action against homophobic hate crimes and bullying in schools, and the enforcement of the laws against inciting homophobia violence.

He is also supporting queer activists in many of the more than 70 countries that still totally outlaw lesbian and gay relationships, and which punish same-sexers with maximum penalties including flogging, life imprisonment and execution. This solidarity work has included support for the queer movements in Nepal, Iraq, Nigeria, Iran, Russia and Zimbabwe.

Forty years after first beginning his human rights campaigns, Peter Tatchell continues to campaign for the independence of the Western Sahara, Palestine and West Papua. He supports the struggles for democracy and human rights in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Burma, Columbia, Somaliland, Baluchistan, Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

As well as opposing the war in Iraq and the on-going occupation, he has spoken out against US threats to attack Iran.

A high-profile campaigner in British politics for more than 25 years, he opposes ID cards, nuclear weapons and power, the privatisation of public services and the erosion of civil liberties by draconian anti-terror laws.

Believing that climate chaos is the biggest threat faced by humanity, he proposes a switch to renewable energy and, in particular, a coordinated international scientific endeavour to develop safe, clean, sustainable fuels to replace oil engines for cars and planes.

He supports a fairer proportional voting system, and an elected head of state and upper house; as well as a written constitution and a bill of rights. An opponent of animal-based medical research, on both scientific and humanitarian grounds, he urges major funding for an EU-wide effort to devise more reliable, effective and cruelty-free research technologies.

A radical anti-materialist and critic of the celebrity-obsessed consumer society, he advocates quality – not quantity – of life; questioning whether ever-increasing personal income and material wealth is the key to human happiness. A strong proponent of economic democracy, he believes in the redistribution of economic power and wealth, in order to make Britain a more economically democratic, participatory, inclusive, just and compassionate society.

For nearly 30 years, he has called for a single, comprehensive, all-inclusive Equal Rights Act to harmonise the uneven patchwork of equality legislation, to ensure equal treatment and non-discrimination for everyone.

Peter has proposed an internationally-binding UN Human Rights Convention enforceable through both national courts and the International Criminal Court; a permanent rapid-reaction UN peace-keeping force with authority to intervene to stop genocide and war crimes; and a global agreement to cut military spending by ten percent to fund the eradication of hunger, disease, illiteracy, unemployment and homelessness.

Peter Tatchell writes regular columns for The Guardian's Comment is Free website http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/peter_tatchell/ and hosts a weekly TV current affairs programme, Talking With Tatchell, on www.18doughtystreet.com

He is the author of six books, including Democratic Defence – A Non-Nuclear Alternative (Heretic Books/GMP) and We Don't Want To March Straight - Masculinity, Queers & The Military (Cassell).

For more information about his human rights campaigns: www.petertatchell.net and www.greenoxford.com/peter

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