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# **UK: Labour MP Luke Pollard was sent despicable homophobic abuse on Valentine's Day**

Labour and Co-operative MP Luke Pollard was sent despicable homophobic abuse on Valentine's Day simply for sharing a photograph of himself with his boyfriend, Sydney. Here, for PinkNews, the MP for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport reveals how all the homophobic haters managed to achieve was remind him that Valentine's Day is, first and foremost, about love.

Day this year would be different for my boyfriend and I. It wasn't just a mix up at the florist with the flowers, or coping with love in lockdown: we were piled on by homophobic trolls for doing what couples across the country were doing and sending a short tweet celebrating our relationship.

"Happy Valentine's Day to my lovely boyfriend" is a simple message. It shouldn't be controversial. Not in 2021, but yet, it seems that not everyone has got the love is love message. And certainly some people mistook a day about love to be about hate instead. The attacks came steady and fast.

My boyfriend is beautiful and kind, and what we have together is very special. He has supported me as I've faced the rapids of public life, helping with elections , offering sage advice, always there with a hug and a glass of wine, a joke and a smile. He is my rock – and I don't mind people knowing I love him.

I'm Plymouth's first out MP; the first to wear my sexuality publicly, not as a source of shame to be hidden, but as a stamp of pride.

The trolls chose to attack me because I'm out and proud. They attacked me because I'm in the public eye and because me and Sydney don't look like a traditional nuclear family. That's a good thing. Family is everything to me, and every family looks different to the next: all you need are people who love each other no matter what, who share common bonds and who face their struggles together.

It's a convenient fib we tell ourselves that in the 21st century homophobia has been defeated. It hasn't. It's all too real.

When my office in Plymouth was vandalised last year with homophobic graffiti, Sydney was there for me. The age-old slur that gay men are child abusers is a common one, one that my team and I washed off the front of my office not once but twice. And the few years between me and Sydney offered the trolls and haters a first line of attack yesterday. Sydney's Chinese heritage added another.

It is easy to throw hate at hate. It is a natural reaction, but I prefer to calm the waters. I offered a cup of tea and a conversation to the person who vandalised my office. I wanted to speak to them to hear why they were so angry and so full of hate that slurs and vandalism was the only option for them. They are yet to take me up on my offer.

But to the haters on my Valentine's Day tweet, the love and affection Sydney and I have is a threat to them. Our love is good and I hope it lasts many more years. You must be in a dark place when sending homophobic and racist abuse is your pastime. Social networks are too slow to act on abuse but I am encouraged by how many people who saw those tweets and took the time to report them. Now it's over to Twitter to act.

Being an MP is a ridiculous job. The hours are all over the place and the pressures are intense. Having someone to stand alongside you on that journey, just as you stand alongside them through life, makes it a hundred times easier.

When I was growing up we didn't have out politicians like we do today. The LGBT+ role models across society aren't as present as they are today. The papers used to spit hate from their front pages. Laws had been drafted to marginalise and attack people like me. Progress isn't inevitable. It happens when people make it a priority, when we decide that enough is enough, and things should be different. That political change took generations, and the battles of those pioneers makes the abuse on one tweet look rather insignificant.

There is a lot of attention on the haters – it's how they thrive. But let's spend time looking at the messages of hope, of love, of support. Those people who shared their personal stories of their partners. The weird and wonderful range of relationships that make Britain so diverse. I hope that amid the commercialism of Valentine's Day – the bouquets (correctly delivered or not) the focus on my tweet expressing my love for my boyfriend can be a small and simple reminder of that eternal truth: love is love. And we're all better for it.

I hope that those who tweeted hate will one day have as much love as I feel today with my partner. It's a happier place than I fear many of the trolls find themselves in, and for that they have my sympathy. I haven't lost a wink of sleep thinking about their hate. I would encourage others not to either when they're attacked, because this happens to LGBT+ couples every single day of the year.

Homophobia and racism are on the rise, and we need to make a stand against it. The best way to do that is to not shy from the light, to be loud and proud of who we are and who we love

because love always triumphs over hate.

Luke Pollard is the Labour and Co-operative member of parliament for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport. He serves in Keir Starmer's shadow cabinet as shadow environment secretary.

*Photo credits: Twitter/Luke Pollard*

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