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# GAY LEFT

A socialist journal produced by gay men

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## Collective Statement

This is a socialist journal edited by gay men. We have a two fold aim in producing this magazine. First, we hope to contribute towards a marxist analysis of homosexual oppression. Secondly, we want to encourage in the gay movement an understanding of the links between the struggle against sexual oppression and the struggle for socialism.

### The Gay Movement

Our common framework is our experience of the gay liberation movement. We have all benefited from our involvement in the movement, particularly from its two unifying elements: the emphasis on honesty and openness in our gayness (coming out); and gay pride, with its combination of solidarity and togetherness. The gay movement that arose in the early 1970s stressed these new values in opposition both to straight society and to the gay subculture that had arisen in the interstices of that society, and which was, in effect, a ghetto defined by straight values. 'Out of the closets and into the streets' had a real meaning in challenging gay people's acceptance of heterosexual society's definition of them. But once these new insights were absorbed the movement lost its coherence.

The counter-culture emphasis which dominated the early movement stressed personal change as the key to social change and the elimination of sexism. The emphasis was on awareness groups, consciousness-raising groups, political drag, communes and dropping out. But the power structures of society were left completely untouched, and the lives of the majority of gay people were left completely unchanged by the sweet smells of incense, inspiration and home-baked bread. There was no realistic recognition of the ways in which sexuality is moulded to serve the needs of society. And, as a result, the G.L.M. was characterized by extreme fragmentation and/or reformist policies. It is pointless lamenting the sense of purpose of the early days, even to try to recreate it. Nostalgia is the enemy of progress. Radical gay analysis must start with the movement as it is, and for this reason we start with the most public manifestation of the gay movement ; its press.

### The Gay Press

The popular gay press, which includes magazines, periodicals and newspapers, has proliferated in the last five years. Some understanding of the purpose of this press will go some way to explaining why we feel the need for a new journal. The gay press is largely related to, and dependent on, the expansion of the gay, and largely male, subculture. This subculture itself has two functions ; it acts primarily, and with most value, as a focus of identity for gay people who can within it begin to achieve a community ; but, secondly, it creates this community within the confines of capitalist values. Its success depends upon exploiting existing stereotype sexual attitudes and seeks to institutionalize the gay subculture without making any attempt to challenge either the basic family unit or the sexual roles necessary for its survival.

Parts of the gay press have been concerned solely with serving a gay market. Such periodicals as *Him* or *Line*

*Up* act as a vehicle for the exchange of goods and services in that market, devoting a large amount of space to contact ads.

By far the most popular and successful gay newspaper is *Gay News* which first appeared three years ago. Its attempts to raise gay consciousness through a fairly concerted emphasis on civil rights, are, however, circumscribed by its dependence on the gay commercial market for its continued existence. The result is that while championing 'gay rights', it nevertheless fails to challenge sexist stereotypes in its advertising and personal contact ads. These seemingly contradictory aspects of *Gay News* have the effect of co-opting a rising gay consciousness into capitalist values and structures.

At present, gay activists who need the subculture for community and identity, but reject its values and lack of political awareness, have no press focus. From 1972-4, the *Gay Marxist* journal was an attempt to meet this need by acting as a forum for discussion of radical gay arguments. However, the journal had no clear editorial policy or political base. It accepted articles, not only from marxists but also from anti-marxists and reactionaries, and it finally failed through lack of purpose and direction. Our journal is seeking to meet the needs of radical gays by providing a forum for discussion. We plan to work within a clearly expressed collective policy which will be reflected in the articles selected to be published.

### The Collective

As a group of gay men we believe it necessary to work out a marxist theory of sexuality. As gays, we have each been forced into examining why heterosexual society abuses, reviles and persecutes us. Each of us has come to realize that this oppression is linked with the role of the family and the subjection of women. These in turn are, we believe, related to the capitalist system of production. By working together, developing our understanding of capitalism and sharing our experiences of intolerance, we will attempt to draw the links between the family, the oppression of women and gay people, and the class structure of society.

The present collective, which has for some time been meeting regularly, decide for the time being at least, that we could best explore our sexist attitudes most truthfully, in an all-male group.

### Where We Stand

The women's movement was the first, historically, to pose the need to confront sexism. Sexism is the discrimination against people on the grounds of their gender or sexual orientation ; it is the stereotype expectation of what women and men should be or do. The anti-sexist struggle was a major part of the early gay liberation movement. This developed out of the contradictions of a society which proclaimed the 'sexual revolution' but limited sexual freedom to the young, the pretty, the heterosexual. The early Gay Liberation Front proclaimed that sexism and the resulting oppression of women and gays was so endemic

to society that it could only be obliterated by a transformation of society. But this was a statement more on the level of moral exhortation than of scientific analysis. As a group we feel the need for a materialist analysis of sexual oppression and hope that this journal will contribute to that end.

It seems clear to us that sexism is generated and perpetuated in the family unit. In capitalist society the family has a two-fold function: economic and ideological.

Firstly, the sharp polarization of male/female roles in the family, with the male role dominant in production, the female subordinate in the home or secondary labour market, serves the economic needs of capitalism. The system of domestic production, centred in the home, and integrating all members of the family into it, was replaced during the early part of the nineteenth century by the growth of factory production which tore the worker from the home.

The then existing role differentiation between men and women sharpened during this early factory period as male workers became the dominant wage earners and women, being responsible for child-care in the home, and earning only half the equivalent male wage when working, were forced into the roles of housewife, mother and secondary labourer. Because the factory system made families entirely dependent on wages, the work done by women in the home, which didn't earn a wage, tended to be seen as valueless. Similarly, the fact that women earned less as workers, tended to reinforce their subservient economic and social position relative to men.

The needs of the factory system were met by this subservient position of women because they provided a pool of cheap labour that could be drawn on when needed, e.g., during periods of economic expansion and easily discarded when employment shrank. The production of domestic work, i.e. the raising and care of workers, was ensured without being a drain on the profits of the workplace.

The present ideological framework of male and female roles can therefore be seen as a manifestation of the particular sexual division of labour which arose as a consequence of the growing dominance of industrial capital.

Secondly, the family has an ideological role, both in perpetuating the class position of its members (the female's class position is always defined by that of her husband) and in defining the subordination of the woman, economically, socially and emotionally, to the man. It claims as natural what has been socially created and moulds the emotions to serve the sexually created gender expectations. In the process it rejects homosexuals, transvestites, transsexuals: people who do not conform to the social expectations that are needed to perpetuate the capitalist economy. Whatever the ideological forms it takes (the religious one of 'sin', the medical one of 'sickness') ultimately gay oppression is a result of the demands made on the family by a capitalist society.

### The Way Forward

Sexual oppression cannot be destroyed under the capitalist system, though no doubt local victories may well be won. It is essential, therefore, for us as gay people, to begin to link our oppression to the wider system of exploitation and oppression that capitalism operates. But at the same time, the question of sexuality must be confronted by the self-defined revolutionary left and by the labour movement generally. Many of them still fail to see sexism as having a materialist basis; or they believe that sexual orientation is biological and immutable instead of being a result of social conditioning. Some revolutionary groups argue that sexism will disappear after the revolution, accepting its presence now but failing to understand how it forces gays and women to conform to sexist roles and consequently prevents us from rejecting the values connected with those roles which are intrinsic to capitalism.

Part of our task in relation to the revolutionary left is to expand the discussion of sexuality which occurred pre-1914 in the works of Engels, Kollontai and Zetkin. This task has been taken up and developed in the women's movement which is the main force posing the relationship between sexism and capitalism.

As revolutionary gays we realize that a socialist revolution can only be made by the working class. It has great strength but is held in check by a reformist leadership, and

fragmented by regional and craft differences. Areas such as women's and gay oppression have been largely ignored in the labour movement. We therefore support gay caucuses in the Trade Unions and rank and file movements. But it is only in the context of building a revolutionary movement committed to fighting against both sexism and capitalism that there is any real hope of achieving gay liberation.

We do not approach the revolutionary left with a ready made analysis, nor do we expect to be presented with one. By developing marxist theory and practice in the ways we have suggested we can strengthen and enrich the revolutionary tradition. We would agree with Juliet Mitchell when she wrote in *Women's Estate* that:

The oppressed consciousness of all groups contributes to the nature of socialist ideology—if any oppressed awareness is missing from its formation that is its loss.

We intend this journal to contribute to the development of a broader socialist analysis.

### Editorial Note

In the first issue of *Gay Left* members of the collective have contributed nearly all the articles. We have attempted to explore sexual politics from a revolutionary point of view and hope that in future we will receive a response on the part of the gay community and particularly from those members who are socialists.

In one way we feel that this issue has not completely fulfilled our aims. There are no articles on lesbianism or female sexuality. We realize that the oppression of gay people is intrinsically bound together with the oppression of women, but this first issue inevitably relates to our own experiences as gay men.

In future issues we would like women, either as individuals or in collectives, to contribute their own articles to the magazine. Only by these sorts of exchanges can we all work for an understanding of our position as gay men and women who are socialists.

We ask for articles, reviews, letters, notes of meetings, relevant press cuttings, etc. from all gay socialists, men or women. The only proviso, which we as a collective have hammered out, is that we will not publish any main articles which directly subvert the editorial policies. That is to say, we will not publish articles which are anti-Marxist, anti-socialist, anti-feminist or anti-gay.

*Members of the Gay Left collective are:*

Keith Birch, Gregg Blachford, Bob Cant, Emmanuel Cooper, Ross Irwin, R. Kincaid, Angus Suttie, Jeffrey Weeks, Nigel Young.

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# Where Engels Feared to Tread

By Jeffrey Weeks

A socialist involved in the gay movement has to look two ways: to the movement itself, which is fragmented, generally civil rights oriented, and often apolitical (C.H.E. is 'the biggest club in Europe'); and to the labour and socialist movements, which have, over the past fifty years or so, almost completely ignored sexual matters. On the reformist wing of the labour movement the struggle for sexual freedom has been seen as a matter of 'individual conscience'; amongst the revolutionary groups, where the issue has been raised at all, it is generally seen as a 'personal' matter, irrelevant to the wider class struggle. The gay socialist, therefore, has a complex task: on the one hand, to attempt to convince the socialist groups of the relevance and significance of the struggle for gay liberation; and, on the other, to convince the gay movement of the necessity of combining the struggle for sexual freedom with the struggle of the working class for socialism.

The gay liberation movement of the early 1970s made two theoretical gains which are worth re-emphasizing: first, the recognition that 'personal' issues are political, in the clear sense that personalities, and sexual personalities, are moulded by social forces; secondly, that the struggle for personal liberation can only be successful by a common involvement of 'all oppressed peoples'. The trouble with these statements was that they remained on the level of moral exhortations rather than becoming analytical tools which needed development; and as the movement lost its original utopian clarity, they were reduced to pious platitudes.

Where Marxism differs from other socialist theories is in its conviction that capitalist society has produced social movements which *must* struggle against capitalism in order to achieve economic, social and personal justice. Socialism, therefore, becomes not a blueprint for the millennium but a necessary product of the struggle of the working class and oppressed peoples to throw off their shackles. The last few years or so have shown that many of the original aims of gay liberation can be achieved this side of socialism, through the conscious intervention of gay people themselves, pushing at the slackening bar of, nineteenth century bourgeois morality. But there is still no evidence that the root of gay oppression, the sharp gender expectations enshrined in the family, will be tackled by a late capitalist society manifestly disintegrating. It is this awareness that justifies gay socialists campaigning to draw gays, women and men, into the struggle against capitalism. But this having been said, the revolutionary socialist grouplets, with one or two tokenistic exceptions, have hitherto shown remarkably little interest in taking up the issue. This is not a failure of 'real' socialists to take up a 'peripheral' matter. It is a result of a total inability of revolutionary groups to break out of a long economic tradition. It represents, above all, a theoretical failure to grasp that a ruling class perpetuates itself not only through the economic and ideological forms of exploitation and oppression, but also through the character structures, the emotional formations, of its members. Certain issues, particularly male/female sexual relations and characteristics, are implicitly seen as beyond time and history, not subject to historical processes and social transformation. This misconception is rooted in the development of Marxist theory, but at the same time it is the Marxist awareness of historical processes which provides the key to broaden the theory. This historical narrowness is particularly obvious in the case of homosexuality. To remedy it we must begin to cut a pathway through tangled woods ... where Engels feared to tread.

## Engels et al

The starting point for our exploration must lie in the works of Marx and Engels, and Engel's *Origin of the Family* is the *locus classicus* for the search. This work begins with the absolutely essential precondition for a Marxist analysis, the assumption that the sexual division of labour, between men and women, and the historical supremacy of men over women, has a material base, is

rooted in the mode of production. He then makes a second assumption: that the relationship he sees in the bourgeois family, with the male's supremacy based on his economic position in a commodity producing economy, and his desire to ensure uncontested inheritance of his property, can be pushed back to the origins of class society. The overthrow of mother right and the growth of a social surplus controlled by men coincided with the 'world historic defeat of the female sex'. Whatever the historical validity of this, a logical deduction follows from it: that only on the basis of women's full re-introduction into social labour on equal terms with men will their liberation be achieved.

'The predominance of the man in marriage,' Engels wrote, 'is simply a consequence of his economic predominance and will vanish with it automatically.' (1) 'Automatically': behind this simple word are a number of assumptions which have persisted throughout Marxist tradition.

1. Firstly, there is a clear assumption of the 'natural', biological basis of social roles. The sexual division of labour between men and women—with the women primarily responsible for child care—is not questioned. It only assumes oppressive qualities, we must understand from Engels, with the development of private property, and he seems to believe that under socialism the family will embody a traditional division of labour, even though many of the family's previous functions will be socialised. 2. Secondly, as a corollary of this, there is an inevitable bias towards heterosexuality. Marx and Engels inherited from the utopian socialists a classically romantic belief in the all-embracing nature of true love between men and women:

'our sex love has a degree of intensity and duration which make both lovers feel that non possession and separation are a great, if not the greatest calamity; to possess one another they risk high stakes, even life itself'.(2)

This sex love has been distorted by commodity production, but will flourish on a higher plane under socialism so that 'monogamy, instead of collapsing, (will) at last become a reality'.(3)

Homosexuality is consequently abhorred, its expressions seen as 'gross, unnatural vices'. Its manifestations are seen as symptoms of the failure of sex love and the degradation of women, so that, for example, in ancient Greece:

'this degradation of women was avenged on the men and degraded them also, till they fell into the abominable practice of sodomy and degraded alike their gods and themselves with the myth of Ganymede'.(4)

It would have been extraordinary in the early 1880s if Engels had thought otherwise. It reveals, however, a failure to explore the social and historical determinants of sexual and emotional behaviour which underlines another key assumption.

3. Engels seems to believe that sexual oppression can be directly deduced from economic exploitation, and without which it would disappear. As a result his outline of the family is bare and external, bones without flesh. He assumes that the 'personal' is natural and given, and that once the constraints of a society dominated by the pursuit of profit are removed private life would spontaneously adjust itself to a higher stage of civilisation. There is no concept, that is, of the need for conscious struggle to transform inter-personal relations as part of the transformations necessary for the construction of a socialist society.

Within the socialist movements of the Second International (1889 to c1914) Engels work was treated not as the starting point but as the last word. The key to women's emancipation was seen as entry into the work force, so that the women's struggle was related directly to the class struggle. Women's domestic labour was left unanalysed, as was the nature of 'personal' life, and particularly female sexuality. In his conversations with Clara Zetkin Lenin lashes her for allowing German women's groups to spend evenings discussing 'sex and marriage problems': 'I could not believe my ears when I heard that.(5) It is worth adding that even in 1975, when a British Trotskyist group seeks to raise the women's issue, it quotes this very sentence as if it were the height of wisdom, ignoring the specific context and its general

irrelevance to the modern women's movement. (6)

Nevertheless, as a result of this emphasis, questions of sex were relegated to the arena of 'personal freedom' where they have remained to this day.

### Homosexual Rights

However, although never integrated into Marxist theory, demands for homosexual law reform were taken up by a number of socialists in the period c1890 to 1930—in Germany, Britain and the USSR. We must be clear about the basis on which this was done.

The last couple of decades of the nineteenth century saw a tightening up on the restrictions against homosexuality in many leading capitalist countries, and particularly in Germany and Britain. The notorious Paragraph 175 of the German penal code, and the 1885 Labouchere amendment in England had the function of controlling male homosexual behaviour and of more sharply defining the acceptable heterosexual male role: as W. T. Stead said in the wake of the Oscar Wilde trial 'the male is sacrosanct ; the female is fair game'.(7) The result on the part of liberal reformers, and increasingly on the part of some homosexuals themselves, was a campaign to change the law and public opinion. This had two overlapping aspects: the political campaign to support change in the penal codes ; and a theoretical attempt to conceptualise homosexuality. In both respects, Germans were in the vanguard, with Magnus Hirschfeld as the dominant figure ; the German gay movement found a more muted response in England, with individuals such as Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis as the most prominent publicists. Theoretically the aim was to prove that homosexuality was not a sin, nor properly a sickness, and therefore ought not to be a crime. It was seen, in Havelock Ellis's word, as an anomaly, based on biological variation, while Hirschfeld (and Carpenter) preferred to see homosexuals as forming an 'intermediate sex'. The important point to note is that except on the fringes of the movement no attempt was made to question existing definitions of gender roles. On the contrary, the existence of homosexuals was not used to challenge gender concepts but to confirm them. The political consequence of this was to place the debate on the level of civil rights for a sexual minority who could not help being what they were. This in turn demanded an orientation to law reform, and gaining maximum support for pressure to be brought on the appropriate legislating bodies. Oscar Wilde had written:

'Nothing but the repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act would do any good. That is the essential. It is not so much public opinion as public officials that need education'.(8)

This sort of approach led to a consistent attempt to present an ultra-respectable image for gay people. Hirschfeld admitted that he had played down pederasty for fear of delaying law reform, and both he and Ellis in Britain created in their studies a clear image of the upright and moral character of their male homosexual subjects. A consequence, of course was to a large extent the ignoring of lesbianism, which was not subject to legal penalties, although the subject did become a matter of public controversy later (e.g. during *The Well of Loneliness* case in Britain). Further, because of the emphasis on law reform efforts had to be made to maximise cross class support, and hence a real reluctance to commit the campaign to a clear political position.

Hirschfeld himself was a supporter of the (then) Marxist Social Democratic Party and his earliest political support had come from this quarter. Edward Bernstein, before his revisionist heresies, contributed an important analysis of the material base of bourgeois sexual hypocrisy in the wake of the Wilde trial ; and August Bebel, a founder of the S.D.P., gave his support in the Reichstag to law reform.(9) He seems to have found Hirschfeld's campaign too apolitical, in fact, and urged him to go further in mobilising support in the early 1900s. By 1912 Hirschfeld's Scientific-Humanitarian Committee came out for a more consistently political commitment. They issued an advertisement just before the 1912 election as follows:

'Third Sex : Consider This! In the Reichstag, on May 31, 1905, members of the Centre, the Conservatives, and the Economic Alliance spoke *against* you .. but *for* you the orators of the Left! Agitate and vote accordingly!'

This is posed as a tactical rather than a strategic alliance, but it reflected a real balance of opinion. The S.D.P.ers had given consistent support to repeal of Para 175 in the Reichstag from 1897 onwards, and after the split in the international workers' movement following the Russian Revolution, the revolutionary tradition as embodied in the Communist Party continued to do so, at least till 1930. In May 1928, in reply to a questionnaire, it stated:

'the CP has taken a stand for the repeal of Para 175 at every available opportunity.'

However, despite this left wing support, Para 175 was not repealed, and the campaign to change the law was eventually swamped in the descent into fascism after 1930. Seen as a secondary issue, it was never given priority in a period of economic turmoil.

As in Germany, it was generally the liberals and socialists who favoured reform of the law in Britain, but no large scale campaign to change the 1885 Act was to emerge until the post Wolfenden period in the 1950s. And although Edward Carpenter, perhaps the most persistent propagandist of the gay cause at the beginning of the century, was deeply respected in the labour movement, his views on homosexuality were treated with indifference. A dialogue he had with Robert Blatchford, editor of the socialist paper *The Clarion*, in the early 1890s illustrates the problem. Blatchford defended Carpenter, and urged readers to study his works on women. But when Carpenter wrote to Blatchford in late 1893 suggesting that he write on sexual matters, the latter replied:

'I am radical but ... the whole subject is nasty to me.' And in a further letter he wrote:

'Now, you speak of writing things about sexual matters, and say that these are subjects which socialists must face.'

Perhaps you are right ; but I cannot quite see with you.' To justify this he put forward arguments which still enjoy currency :

1. That reform of sexual relations would follow industrial and economic change.
2. If this is so, then anything which inhibited economic change would also hinder sexual change. And as sex reform was unpopular, it would be best not to raise it at present.
3. 'I think that the accomplishment of the industrial change will need all our energies and will consume all the years we are likely to live.' As a result, sex reform will, 'not concern us personally, but can only concern the next generation.'(10)

Blatchford's mechanistic position was not untypical, and went with an unholy worship of the family and the British imperial mission ; it rehearses all the common prejudices still heard on the revolutionary left. Carpenter's views on sex, convinced as he was of the moral superiority of the intermediate sex, bearers of a 'cosmic consciousness', hardly fitted comfortably into British socialism. A more typical position was that put forward by the Marxist philosopher, Belfort Bax, who questioned whether, 'morality has anything at all to do with a sexual act, committed by the mutual consent of two adult individuals, which is productive of no offspring, and which on the whole concerns the welfare of nobody but the parties themselves.'

This is the classically liberal argument for toleration, and it has been the most typical 'progressive' view on the left.(11)

This was pre-eminently the case in Bolshevik Russia. Penal restrictions on homosexual acts were removed in 1918 along with the legalisation of abortion and contraception, the liberalisation of divorce etc. These have been seen by Wilhelm Reich as the harbingers of sexual revolution brought in on the wings of the social.(12) But in actuality it must be doubted whether these legal gains ever amounted to more than a formal acceptance of the most advanced bourgeois theories, given the enormous social backwardness of the Soviet population. Little was done to positively encourage social acceptance of homosexuality, and although throughout the 1920s Soviet laws were regarded as models for the rest of Europe, no theoretical advances were made. The impact of the reforms was probably not deeply rooted by the time the reactionary Stalinist juggernaut overtook them in the 1930s.

To sum up these strands of evidence, it is clear that the gay question was raised in the ranks of the left, particularly in Germany, and formal support to legal

equality was often given in varying degrees. But the issue was never seen as a vital one because it was never posed as a challenge to orthodox views of gender roles.

### Reaction

The question was always seen as one of individual civil rights, and the civil rights argument is the one that is most consistently being taken up again in the modern socialist tendencies as they find it necessary to respond to the gay liberation movement. But the view that has dominated Marxist orthodoxy since the 1930s is that of homosexuality as a bourgeois deviation and decadence. There are two overlapping sources for this. The first is the Stalinist counter revolution in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, which subordinated all aspects of personal freedom to the priorities of production as determined by a parasitic bureaucracy. The strengthening of the family was seen as a necessary part of this, and with it went the revocation of most of the legal gains of the early revolutionary period. In March 1934 homosexuality again became a criminal offence in the U.S.S.R.(13) It was specifically defined as a product of 'decadence in the bourgeois sector of society' and a 'fascist perversion'. The apparent rampant homosexuality of the upper echelons of the Nazi party was used as one element in justification. In fact, Hirschfeld's books had already been burnt in Nazi Germany, and almost simultaneously with Stalin's clamp down the Roehm purge (the 'night of the long knives') inaugurated a new wave of terror against German gays. The fascist counter-revolution of the 1930's took homosexuals as one of its categories of scapegoats. But because of the central role of Stalinism in the world communist movement there was no challenge to this sexual counter-revolution in the various C.P.'s. A belief in homosexuality as a bourgeois decadence survives in many of the Stalinist Parties to this day.

The second source is closely intertwined with the first and stems from a particular interpretation of the psycho-analytical tradition. This sets up a norm of heterosexual 'genital sexuality' as the height of sexual relations, and homosexuality is seen as a falling from this. The work of Wilhelm Reich is the locus for much of this attitude. Juliet Mitchell has shown the way in which his values were a reaction against the decadence of pre-Nazi Berlin :

With chronic unemployment the mass of the people had little left to sell but their bodies. It is against this bourgeois decadence and working class wretchedness that the moral tone of Reich's sexual theories must be set his predilection for hetero and healthy sexuality, his wish for men to be men and women, women.'(14)

Reich was clearly trapped within gender stereotypes, but his view of heterosexual fucking as the height of sexual health recurred again in the early counter culture of the 1960s, which, at first at least, was extremely hostile to gay sexuality. In the case of Reich it came from an inability to historicise the question of sexuality, which, following nineteenth century convention he saw as a fixed quantity of energy. However, in his attempt—not the last by any means—to synthesise the works of Marx and Freud he had little guidance in the classical Marxist texts.

### Whither?

In the coming period of economic turmoil and class conflict it is quite possible that Marxist tendencies will again fail to respond to the questions of so called 'personal politics' with the seriousness they demand. David Thorstad's experiences in the American Socialist Workers' Party (S.W.P.) has shown clearly the limits of even an apparently 'sympathetic' Trotskyist group. Its policy, he wrote :

'reduced the gay liberation struggle to a struggle for gay rights ; it refused to see it as a struggle against the exclusive heterosexual norm of capitalist society, as a struggle for a society in which the suppressed homosexual potential of everybody could be liberated.' (15)

Compared with the refusal of various British socialist tendencies to contemplate even a gay rights position, this might seem an advance. But a Marxist analysis of sexuality cannot stand still on outmoded positions, which have been superseded by the self activity of gay people themselves. However understandable the narrowness of Trotskyist groups in particular when seen in the historic context of capitalist and Stalinist terror, they have a duty

now to realise the potential fullness of Marxist theory.

As Thorstad's article suggests, a Marxist analysis must begin with an awareness of the function of the bourgeois family in defining rigid gender roles, and in delimiting the expression of sexuality. The women's movement and the gay movement have made considerable theoretical strides in exploring these areas, but the understanding of sexuality as such, and its social determinants, is as yet in its infancy. However, as a document in the S.W.P. controversy made very clear :

'The ultimate impact and appeal of the gay liberation movement can only be understood on the basis of the fact that it involves a struggle not merely for the rights of a presently constituted minority who are defined as gay, but for an end to the built in need of capitalist society to suppress homosexual behaviour in all of its members.'

It is in such an analysis that we can begin to see the inter-connection between the 'personal' and the 'political'. And their merger into a common revolutionary practice is a task for the immediate, not the post revolutionary future.

### Notes and references

1 F. Engels, quoted in Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life* (A Canadian Dimension Pamphlet) P 70. This is a very useful study of the question. A slightly different version of the translation of this quote can be found in Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* edited by Eleanor Burke Leacock (Lawrence and Wishart) P 145. I have generally used this edition for quotations.

2 Engels, *Origins*, P 140.

3 Engels, *op cit*.

4 *Ibid* P 128.

5 Lenin, *On the Emancipation of Women* (Progress Publishers, Moscow) P 101.

6 See *Socialist Press* No. 7 (published by the Workers' Socialist League) May 1, 1975 P 5.

I understand that this quote has also been bandied about in debates in the International Marxist Group.

7 Quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Other Love* (Mayflower Books 1970) P 169.

8 *Ibid*.

9 The sources for the following information are: John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement* (Times Change Press, 1974) ; and the articles by Jim Steakly in *Body Politic* Nos 9, 10, 11, on the early German gay movement.

10 The source of this information is the Edward Carpenter Collection in Sheffield City Library ; see particularly the letter from Blatchford to Carpenter dated 11 Jan 1894.

11 Belfort Bax, *Ethics of Socialism*, P 126.

12 See W. Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*.

13 *Ibid*. See also Zaretsky, *op cit* P 76.

14 Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Allen Lane 1974), P 141.

15 David Thorstad, 'Gays vs SWP', *Gay Liberator* No 42.

# Gays and the Trade Union Movement

By Bob Cant

The idea of gay work in the Trade Unions seems to many people absurd and irrelevant. Traditionally, most gays in this society have accepted the division of life into private and public, home and work, and they have been only too keen to conceal their homosexuality from the people they work with. When the gay movement was at its height there was a strong spontaneist element in it which tended to be opposed to work but which, more importantly, saw the Trade Unions as part of the anti-gay mafia which included the family, the education system, the media, the bosses, the police and so on.

Now the situation is somewhat different in that many more gays are no longer prepared to hide their homosexuality and the economic situation does not really allow for the existence of a free-wheeling-peace-and-love-let's-all-make-love-in-the-streets-mass-gay-movement. As I see it, most gays who have been influenced by the movement are working in jobs which they do not wish to lose; their social life is likely to be more open and fulfilling than it would have been several years ago but they still feel a great deal of unease and/or oppression at work about how far it is possible to express their homosexuality.

It is as an expression of this unease/oppression that groups of gay workers have been formed in the past two years. Many of these have been among workers whose job actually makes their sexuality an issue such as teachers, social workers, journalists. But there have been other attempts to form gay groups among workers whose sexuality would not seem to be so immediately important to their job—such as printworkers. It is interesting that those gays whose jobs have a strong ideological role tend to have formed themselves into groups outside their unions whereas the others tend to relate much more closely to their union. No doubt, this is a reflection on the lower level of union consciousness which exists among the more middle-class, white-collar workers. But it also raises questions about the nature of trade unionism.

Many people see trade unions simply as bodies which negotiate wages with employers. But this is, of course, a very narrow interpretation and also one which suits the employers. Increasingly, the union comes to be identified with the negotiators—i.e. usually full-time appointed officials—and the worker adopts an apathetic, passive attitude to his membership. Revolutionary socialists argue that the union is much more than this, that the membership of the union must be actively involved in decision making, that officials must be regularly elected and recallable by the members and that the union should protect the workers in all aspects of their lives.

In the early decades of this century British Trade Unionists did, on occasions, act to protect their members and their communities in such a way. The fact that unions have now declined to the extent where they are seen as bodies for the negotiation of wages for mostly white, mostly male, heterosexual workers is just one of the effects of social democracy on our society. The only people to benefit from this are the capitalist class.

## Nature of Trade Unionism

Let us take the issue of rents, for example. Revolutionary socialists would argue that this is an issue which is basic to the living standards of the working class whereas most Trade Union officials would now argue that it was outside their realm of interest. But in Glasgow in 1915 the rent-strike there was won only with the vital support of the trade unions. Many men were away fighting in the First World War and the resistance to the enormous rent increases was organized by women led by Mrs. Barbour. They seemed to be winning when the landlords struck on a device whereby they could have the increases deducted from wages. At this point, the workers from the factories and shipyards came out on strike. The landlords' scheme crumbled and the Government was forced to introduce a Rent Restriction Act.

Compare this with the attitude of the Trade Unions to the rent strike in 1972/3 by the tenants of Tower Hill, Kirkby. When two of the leading strikers were imprisoned the only unions who took any action were from one paper factory. The rent strike was defeated through the failure of local Trade Unions to understand their wider role as protectors of the working class. They ignored the fact that unions as the most powerful form of working class organization have a responsibility to protect less powerful sections of the same class.

In recent years, however, there have been signs of change in this attitude among rank and file trade unionists. In July of last year 1,000 miners from Swansea came out on strike in support of the nurses' pay claim for they saw, quite clearly, that failure to increase nurses' wages would lead to mass resignations and a further deterioration in standards in the National Health Service.

## Women and Blacks

The two groups of workers, however, whose situation is nearest that of gays are women and blacks. Ten years ago if anyone had suggested that they should get any special protection from the unions they would have been laughed at. 'Women only work for pin money,' and, 'Blacks don't belong here—so they don't deserve as much as the rest of us,' are the best of the comments that might have been made at the time. Basically, both groups were expected to put up with less money, more tedious and menial work because of who they were outside their place of work. Now the situation has changed. Women and blacks are tired of waiting for action from hostile Trade Union officials and have begun to take action themselves.

Women workers have long been thought of as not proper workers. The fact that they became pregnant and were expected to do housework put them in a weak position—they were not able to attend union meetings in the evening, they were usually on the lower grades, they were laid off first, maternity leave was seen as a privilege, the demand for creches was a joke. Since the strike of women textile workers at Leeds in 1969 there have been more and more examples of militant action by women. Most of these recently have been over the implementation of the Equal Pay Act. Many women began to realize that employers planned to make use of job evaluation schemes to create a category of badly-paid jobs which would leave them as badly off as ever.

The ten week strike in 1974 by the women at Salford Electrical Instruments in Heywood, Lancs. showed how well women were prepared to fight. S.E.I. is part of the massive G.E.C. combine—and if other G.E.C. workers, and especially the male workers at S.E.I., had come out in their support there is no doubt they would have been victorious. As it was, Trade Union officials persuaded them to accept a confused settlement which did little to improve their position.

In this atmosphere of increasing militancy, the fact that many union branches and Trades Councils have adopted the Working Women's Charter (which includes abortion on demand, maternity leave as a right and free nurseries) hopefully points to further action by all trade unionists to win these demands for women.

Black workers have met the same kind of hostile inertia from Trade Union officials. Two examples of this are the strike at Imperial Typewriters, Leicester and the Sikh turbans dispute among Leeds busmen. In both cases, the Trade Union officials gave little help and did nothing to prevent a great flare-up of racism among white workers. Indeed, at Imperials, where the blacks had been prevented from electing their own shop stewards, the strikers felt they were being opposed by a united front of management and Trade Union officials. The fact that the unions have been allowed to run down in this way so that white workers do not see blacks as their fellow workers is tragic. The only solution is an active union with full participation by all members.

So, we can see from the struggles of blacks and women that the way ahead in Trade Unions is not an easy one.

1. Their problems can probably be summarized as follows: —1 Hostility from Trade Union officials;
2. Hostility or apathy from many male workers (in the case of women) and white workers (in the case of blacks);
3. Exploitation of these confused feelings by the management to keep their work force divided;

#### 4. Lack of self-confidence.

Anyone who raises the gay issue in a Trade Union can expect to meet all these problems and, at least, two others:

a Accusations of perversion—either jeers every time you speak or more vicious slanders behind your back.

b Suggestion that one's gayness is not an issue at work. Women and blacks are paid less because they are women and blacks, but that is not true of gays. Gays can be found in all grades of work.

The most important lesson that women and blacks have learned from their recent struggles is about the nature of trade unionism. If unions remain as they are, controlled by a handful of overpaid, appointed bureaucrats—then they will get nowhere. The workers will remain divided among themselves and they will continue to be additionally oppressed. Only where the union is its membership will these divisions end—all decisions must be democratic, negotiators must be elected, recallable and paid the same as the average member. Only such a union will fight for its membership—and that will include its gay membership.

#### ...and Gays?

So what demands do we raise in our unions and how do we go about it? The National Union of Journalists (N.U.J.) seems to have gone further than any other union in that its annual conference at Swansea this year passed a motion against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. In view of the fact that most of the country's newspapers are written by members of the N.U.J. this should augur well for press treatment of stories concerning homosexuals. Perhaps. The Gay Rights Media Group points out that the T.U.C. circular no. 100 which is concerned with equal opportunity in employment and discrimination, mentions sex, marital status, creed, colour, race and ethnic origin, but, not sexual orientation. It would clearly be in the interests of gay trade unionists to campaign for the inclusion of sexual orientation in this circular—as well as being very educative for their fellow trade unionists.

However, even if it were included it doesn't mean the end of problems for the gay trade unionists. In the S.O.G.A.T. (Society of Graphical and Allied Trades) Journal for September 1974, John McPhail of Glasgow wrote of the need to support homosexual law reform in Scotland where all male homosexual activity is still criminal. He went on to say, 'To my mind, the union has an obligation for the welfare of its members not just in their working lives but also in the social sphere. The problems of the homosexual may not be your problems but that does not mean they are unimportant. One of your workmates may be homosexual ; if so, he or she will need your understanding—not hostility.' A gay printworker is unlikely to be paid less than other workers because he is gay but he is entitled not to expect attacks from his fellow workers. An active union would make sure such attacks did not happen—because it would realize the dangers of dividing one worker from another and it would understand the tragedy of worker oppressing worker.

Such hostility does exist as any gay worker knows but this hostility was, for once, expressed in print in *Public Service*, the N.A.L.G.O. (National and Local Government Officers Association) Journal following a letter which gave details of a self-help homosexual group in N.A.L.G.O. One member felt that reading the letter was like being impertuned a public lavatory ; another seemed to think that homosexuals should not be admitted to N.A.L.G.O. ; and another said sodomy was indirectly responsible for bombing of property, hi-jacking, murder, and various other evils, right down to empty churches. If this is the response that comes to the setting-up of a union gay group, there can surely be little doubt of the atmosphere in which most gay people have to work. Most of us don't expect to be faced with the above kind of hostility but we all know the hypocrisy and the condescending smiles and the demoralizing effect they have.

Raising the matter openly in the context of a union is really the only way to deal with this prejudice at work—but this can only be done if we have a support group which understands the meaning of the phrase, 'Glad To Be Gay'. If you have come out then this is the most important thing to do for other gays in your union. Set up a gay group which will act as a focus for them and enable them to withstand the hostility and hypocrisy of other trade unionists and draw on the support of those who accept gayness.

The other problem about a 'sexual orientation' agreement is that it is not specific enough. It is quite easy for an employer to say that he will not discriminate against anyone who is gay but in practice to do just that. The cases of John Warburton and Veronica Pickles are good examples of that. John Warburton was taunted by his pupils about being queer so he spoke to them about it and answered their questions. He was then banned from teaching in Inner London Education Authority schools although the leader of I.L.E.A., Ashley Bramall, had said he would not discriminate against gay teachers. Likewise, Veronica Pickles, a Buckinghamshire midwife, found herself withdrawn from an assisted training scheme for health visitors. Bucks Area Health Authority denied this was because of her homosexuality but because of the publicity which her gay activity had involved her in. Both authorities were quite adamant in their denials of anti-gay discrimination but both also seemed to expect their gay employees to keep absolutely silent about their sexual orientation and even lie about it. So, clearly, any clause which opposes discrimination must be very specific. Once again, this depends very much on an active union which is concerned about the real interests of its members and not just in passing token resolutions.

#### Conclusion

The idea of a Gay Workers' Charter—along the lines of the Working Women's Charter—has been raised recently. This would provide a focus of specific demands around which we could organize. This is clearly an excellent plan although I will be accused of being too cautious when I say that it seems to me too early to do this.

At the moment, the crucial task is the organization of gay groups within the unions such as those in N.A.L.G.O. and N.U.P.E. Only with this kind of support can most gays hope to come out and win support for our demands—support for victimized gays, a real end to discrimination at work, support for gay workers harassed by landlords and the police. Each group should draw up specific demands as they relate to their situation and the kind of problems that are likely to arise. This will be particularly important in the so-called caring professions where people are expected to support and propagate the ideology of the ruling class.

The proposal by Alan Clarke of C.H.E. for a union of professional homosexuals which would then affiliate to the T.U.C. and raise gay demands is a nonsense. Not only is it a ghetto approach to politics but it is also the kind of manoeuvre that eases the passing of token resolutions. It is only by sheer hard slog in our own unions that we can achieve anything meaningful. For it is only with a strong base of support in an active trade union movement that we will move anywhere. Of course it is only in that situation that the whole working class can move anywhere. Our interests are one.

We must not, however, expect everyone to understand it immediately. Few non-gay trade unionists bothered to turn up at a lobby in support of the gay teacher, John Warburton. Presumably they failed to see that the case of a victimized gay worker is just as significant as the case of any other victimized worker. If he is re-instated, it is a victory for all workers ; if he is not, it is a victory for the bosses. We have a hard task ahead of us to educate the Trade Union movement but it is only by being part of it that we can do so.

Gay workers will meet all the hostility and prejudice—and more—that has faced militant women and blacks over the past few years. There is no point in kidding ourselves that it will be an easy fight—but there are no easy alternatives. Our task at the moment is twofold:-

1. We must build union gay groups to provide confidence and solidarity to gays and to encourage others to come out ;
2. We must support the reconstruction of a strong active Trade Union movement which will defend all its members wherever and whenever they are attacked.

Acknowledgments to—*Socialist Worker, Gay News, Red Rag, Case Con (Gay Issue).*

# Gays in Cuba

By Keith Birch

Gay people who support the cause of revolutionary socialism are often confronted by other gays with the fact that in all the countries that have achieved some form of socialist system, homosexuals are still discriminated against or even quite harshly persecuted. On the contrary, I want to stress that socialism does offer a possible solution to the sexism inherent in our present capitalist society as well as involving an economic revolution. This is made clear by the situation in Russia after the 1917 revolution. Abortion and contraception were legalized and made available to the masses. Anti-homosexual laws were removed. The role of the family in a socialist society was questioned. Both women and gays gained important advances in these first few years but the growth of the Stalinist bureaucracy brought all this to a close and in 1934 punitive laws were introduced against homosexuality, shortly followed by measures against abortion and a renewed stress on the family unit as the basis of society.

In order to see why the existing socialist(1) countries have treated gay people so badly, let us take a closer look at one of the more recent revolutions, that of Cuba, where there has been rather more publicity about the position of gay people in society. The Cuban revolution in 1959 was not just a victory of socialist forces over the exploitation and repression of the Batista regime but was also a strongly nationalist reaction to the long period of domination by the United States. The aim was to build a new society based on socialist principles, not in the image of the Soviet Union, but instead taking regard of Cuba's individual situation and history. The ideal was the creation of the 'New Socialist Man', free from the contamination of capitalism and monetary incentives, a model for other countries to follow.

What then has happened to the gay people of Cuba since that time? All that the majority of people know are the stories about work camps for male homosexuals that made a few headlines in the late 1960s and little else. The two main questions that concern us, therefore, are how gay people have actually been treated in the sixteen years of the revolution and what were the main causes of this state of affairs.

First of all, an outline of the oppression of gays from the sketchy information available to us. No actual laws against homosexuality were enacted by the new Government under Castro and no official statements were made at that time. However, unofficially gays were treated as being sick or criminal but were not thought a major problem as we would soon disappear with the dawn of the new society. One of the first acts after the revolution was the clean up of the cities. This meant the closing down of the brothels and clubs and the removal of the prostitutes and homosexuals from the streets, especially in Havana, which was little more than a playground for American tourists and a centre for all kinds of crime.

The first hard news of systematic persecution of gay people came in 1965 when the U.M.A.P. camps (Military Units for the Aid of Production) were set up. These were ostensibly places for young men who were not suitable for the army because of their 'moral outlook' or lack of commitment to the revolution. In practice they were little better than concentration camps (a description which Castro himself used after visiting one in late 1966) occupied by anti-revolutionaries, thieves and a very large number of homosexuals who were there for that 'crime' alone. In 1966 several prominent artists, writers and actors were told to report to these camps and this brought official protest from the Cuban Writers' and Artists' Union and the round-up was called off on Castro's orders. The U.M.A.P. camps were the cause of a very rare event, an international outcry at the treatment of homosexuals, although it only really gathered force when gay intellectuals started to be persecuted, and then the protest largely came from other artists and intellectuals. However, at the end of 1966 these camps were officially closed but work camps in various forms continued, as shown by a quote from a Minister, Risquet, in 1971 when he said that 'loafers needing re-education should not be sent to institutions for thieves and homosexuals'(2). The general attitude was first

expressed in 1971 at the First National Congress on Education and Culture. Gay people were said to be sick and homosexuality was an unnatural hangover of bourgeois society, which is the usual communist line, and it would disappear with the achievement of socialism. Until that time, homosexuals should be kept out of positions of influence over young people, in education and the arts particularly, so as not to infect them. Before this there had been purges of the more openly gay teachers, students, soldiers and so on but it was now carried out with more vigour for a time. Individual gay people, women and men, workers and soldiers were publicly exposed, denounced and usually dismissed to be sent away for re-education. The last few years have seen rather less activity against homosexuals, although there have been no official statements of a change in policy. The immediate future does not hold much hope of any radical change, but the situation is still open to influences, both internal and external, so there should not be complete despair.

Now we come to the causes of the oppression of gays in a society which was trying for such a radical break with the past. Firstly, there was the over reaction to the previous situation in Cuba which suffered from sexual exploitation, as well as economic, by the United States. Havana was almost one large brothel, both for women and men. Gay people were associated with this old society and its regime in the minds of many people and with the need to sell one's body in order to stay alive. The Revolutionary Government thus took a very puritanical line in sexual matters and gays suffered from this 'clean-up'. Secondly, the sexual culture in Cuba is that of *machismo*, the cult of male virility, a latin kind of male chauvinism. This entails living up to a kind of ultra masculine ideal, male friendship being prized, but also a high degree of sexual competition regarding women. In this atmosphere women had a very inferior status and their virginity on marriage and faithfulness afterwards was demanded. Homosexuals in this society were even more despised than in our own. The revolution has failed to challenge this area of life to any great extent. A large amount has been done towards gaining economic equality for women. Education and many jobs are open to both sexes and reforms affecting the family, like easier divorce and widespread birth control facilities, have been implemented. However, the function of the family as the basic unit of society and the male dominance have not been questioned as yet very deeply.

We now come to the more overtly economic and political causes for gay oppression. The struggle for power of the Cuban Communist Party and others who hoped to model Cuba along the lines laid down by the Soviet Union, against those like Castro who wanted a Cuban road to socialism fitted to its needs and not falling into the mistakes of Soviet society. Since the revolution this struggle has been played out against a background of great economic difficulties due to the U.S. blockade. The resulting dependence on massive aid from the Soviet Union has influenced the power of the different factions and thus the social policies that have been implemented. In the early 1960s the old Communist Party members tried to gain control of the leadership. They were largely responsible for the setting up of the U.M.A.P. camps which they used as a base to attack libertarian tendencies amongst the intellectuals and the young citing homosexuality as a reason. However, they lost out in this bid for power and were themselves purged from the leadership and in 1968 Escalante, their leader, and others were put on trial. Also, with the failure of the Cuban economy in the late 1960s to reach the targets hoped for, especially in sugar production, Cuba became more and more dependent on Soviet support and followed its line much more closely, the decree from the Congress of Education and Culture(3) in 1971 being a symptom of this.

The economic situation and fear of aggression from the United States meant the need for the people to be unified and to work together for the continuance of the revolution and thus no opposition and very little questioning of the leadership was allowed. As an official statement said, the people must 'struggle against all forms of deviation amongst the young'(4) This included influences of American culture such as drugs and pop music, an awakening Black Power movement which was quickly



suppressed and the 'counter revolutionary sentiment of homosexuality'. Gay people in particular became scapegoats, a group already despised, who could be made an example of in this period of establishing unity and social control.

There has been a general failure to democratize the revolution, for example, no workers' control but instead administrators appointed by the Government. The formation of Committees for the defence of the Revolution as a mass organization of the ordinary people in a democratic way has been valuable in the housing, education and health areas but they do not have power to make decisions of fundamental importance to the nation and are used as a rubber stamp for decisions already made higher up and as a means of social control at a local level. The Cuban situation shows some of the possible failings of a socialist revolution. It also shows the need for gay people to take part in the revolutionary process and to fight for their rights at every level of the struggle. Revolutionary socialists must realize from the previous failures the vital part sexism plays in the old order and unless combatted as part of the revolution, true socialism will not be achieved.

- Notes
- 1 Conventional usage.
  - 2 Quote from *Gramma*, official Government paper 3.9.71.
  - 3 The Declaration is reproduced in *Out of the Closets*.
  - 4 *Gramma* 9.5.71.

Further sources of information  
Social Control in Cuba *Martin Loney* from *Politics and Deviance*.  
*In the Fist of the Revolution* Jose Iglesias.  
*The Cuban Revolution and Gay Liberation* Allen Young from *Out of the Closets*  
Cuba Hugh. Thomas

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## The Case of John Warburton

By Nigel Young

This article analyses the way in which a group of gay teachers fought the banning from employment of a gay teacher in London. In our fight with the local education authority different people within the gay teachers' group took up different positions. The attitudes which arose depended both upon people's political beliefs and the degree to which we were able to openly discuss our own gayness and related issues of sexuality in our work place. I have attempted to show the confusion and inadequacy of the fight by highlighting these various factions. I hope that any further struggle by gays to defend a victimized gay worker will not make the same mistakes.

In November 1974 John Warburton, a gay teacher, went on a gay rights demonstration in Trafalgar Square. He was seen on the demonstration by one of his pupils. On his return to school the following week he was confronted by taunts of 'poof' and 'queer' from the girls.

Unable to teach constructively in this atmosphere, he stopped the lesson. He explained to the girls what being gay meant to him, and answered their questions. This situation arose several times over a period of six weeks, but it was only on the last occasion that the girls' form mistress heard of the discussion. Horrified by it she reported the incident to her head teacher who in turn reported it to the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).

Within twenty-four hours John Warburton was brought before the Authority (his employer) and asked to sign a piece of paper demanding that he never discuss homosexuality in the classroom again unless within a

structured sex education programme, and with the full permission of the head teacher. He felt unable to sign this additional contract which no other teacher had been asked to sign. Consequently he was banned from taking any employment with the ILEA.

The ILEA have always claimed that the banning of John Warburton was not gay discrimination. They have always stated that they are not concerned with the private lives of teachers, and that they employ many known homosexuals; even some who have been convicted of offences. However, when trying to discover why John was banned, it was difficult for the Authority to decide upon the central issue.

At first they insisted that he only had to sign the piece of paper. There was no explanation as to why only he should be asked to sign this additional contract. There was also an implication that John's discipline was suspect, although that was hard to substantiate. John only discussed homosexuality once with several classes, and a creative atmosphere was maintained. John was then accused of campaigning and crusading on behalf of gays. However, we all know that no one ever campaigns or crusades on behalf of heterosexual norms and values in school!

The ILEA eventually decided that the real crime was John not teaching the subject lesson through all the taunts about his gayness. The question is—was it an accident that the ILEA changed its attitude so often? For two reasons I would say definitely not.

First: by failing to state clearly what their objections were, they clouded the central issue. This is the right a gay teacher has to talk about his/her gayness, and the right to encourage children to critically examine heterosexual norms and values.

Secondly: by clouding this issue the ILEA have attempted to confuse the direction of the struggle involved, which is to obtain the reinstatement of John Warburton.

In January 1975 I went to a Gay Teachers' Group meeting convened especially to discuss the ways in which the fight could be carried on. There were two approaches to the problem. The first I shall call the liberal approach. This involved the writing of letters to the ILEA, telephoning, and getting together a petition.

The Authority must have hoped for this response. They could write devious, obscure letters in reply to individuals; they could happily listen to telephone conversations; they could smile politely at the petitioners, and gracefully acknowledge their views.

The ILEA assumption was correct. Although the petition was invaluable as a means of spreading information, and starting discussions on the issue, it ultimately lacked power. Our energies should have been directed to making sure our unions circulated a petition. In political terms it is they who have the necessary power to force the Authority to change its attitude.

However, to return to the Gay Teachers' Group, we were using the liberal processes for dissent and discussion, which doesn't affect the status quo. It is also true to say that when carrying on this liberal dialogue with the Authority, our aims were not made clear. We should have asserted the right of gay teachers to talk about their gayness, and discuss sexuality openly. If we had won on this demand, all the other ILEA charades would have fallen away, and John would have automatically been reinstated.

The second approach adopted by the Gay Teachers' Group was socialist in its attitude. A small group of us decided that although we would support the liberals in the group, the most important aspect of the struggle was to raise the issue with our unions. After all, here was a clear case of victimization, and we would expect our union to support a worker regardless of union officials' own views on homosexuality. We also saw it as an opportunity to raise issues which had never been discussed before at union meetings.

However, most people in the Gay Teachers' Group seemed disinterested, not to say hostile towards the union. 'What has the union ever done for us?' was the cry from the floor. There was a gulf in understanding the politics involved between socialists and liberals within the group, and the relationship of these politics to the stand of the Left on issues of sexuality.

Within straight Left groups or trade unions there has never been much ground for discussions on sexuality. Thus the anti-union and anti-left cries seemed appropriate to the callers. But this attitude ignores the development of the women's movement, and its critique of sexuality from a Marxist standpoint. It also ignores the attempts by gay trade unionists to raise similar issues in their unions; trade unionists in the past have rarely discussed the issue. Their sexist attitudes are unrelated to their socialism or to being a member of a trade union. For the socialists in the Gay Teachers' Group it was a perfect opportunity to take the issue of a victimized worker who in this case was also gay to the unions. The majority of the Gay Teachers' Group seemed unable to see these issues, and firmly stuck to letters, phone calls, and petitions.

John Warburton had already highlighted the politics of homosexuality when he went on the gay rights demonstration. Were we in the Gay Teachers' Group only concerned to get him reinstated without rocking the sexual apple cart? Let's keep the rosy normal apples on top, and the rotten gay ones underneath seemed to be the attitude of some gay teachers.

It was these same teachers who wanted to get John reinstated, but didn't want to discuss the issues of sexuality which arose from the case. Those of us in the unions wanted to broaden the discussion on sexuality and force other teachers in school to discuss the subject. Thus no longer would trade unionists and straight teachers be able to ignore our gayness. We could talk about ourselves as well as John. It was an ideal platform on which gay trade unionists could come out.

The draft motion which arose out of these conflicts was unfortunately unclear in its aim. In it we asked the ILEA to lift the ban on John Warburton and to give the right to teachers to discuss all controversial subjects when they arose. But this obscured our real purpose which was to enable gay teachers to discuss gay issues openly.

In retrospect, this was a weakness in our motion. It highlighted our confusion when trying to clarify the central issues involved. By framing the motion broadly we allowed people to talk about the issue of freedom of speech—a nebulous liberal concept instead of the issue with which we were directly concerned. Our aim should have been to direct the discussion solely to the issue of gay rights. The motion was further weakened because we in no way outlined a campaign of action which we wished the unions to adopt. We had framed a motion with no teeth.

The response of the rank and file union members to the motion was excellent. Generally it was passed with very little opposition. Subsequently the motion was sent to the executive of the National Union of Teachers.

As I have already stated, one might have expected our union Executive to have supported a victimized teacher regardless of its views on the subject of homosexuality. Their attitude towards the case of John Warburton was disgusting. They sent him a letter stating that no teacher, including one who is homosexual, had the right to 'instigate' a discussion on sex. They conveniently forgot that John did not 'instigate' the discussion, but that it was done so by his pupils. They also advised John to sign the piece of paper issued by the ILEA.

The last turn of the screw came when the Executive claimed that the position of the ILEA in relation to the discussion of sexual matters in the classroom was union policy. Not surprisingly no teacher I have spoken to in the union had ever heard this was the case. Union branches when also receiving this letter were appalled, and asked for a clarification of the so called 'policy'.

The response of the Executive of the union was one we should have expected. They are not likely to support teachers who become involved in issues which question the social fabric of society. The Executive is dominated by head teachers, and they see the prime role of the educational system to support existing norms and values. They wish to run schools where these values are exemplified and upheld.

The Executive represents very much the attitude of many trade unionists in matters involving sexuality. The family is still upheld as a positive social asset. Thus the union Executive was hardly likely to encourage a discussion of sexism and male chauvinism which dominates the working class.

The prime function of the Gay Teachers' Group should have been to encourage members to carry the issues to the union movement. This could have been done by analysing the relationship between John's case, the oppression of gays, and workers. Whatever a trade unionist's feelings on homosexuality, they would at least have to think about the oppression of gays, and the way it is tied to capitalism.

In schools gay teachers should have centred the discussion on issues of sexuality which arise out of being gay. By so doing we would have avoided the irrelevant issue of freedom of speech. If gay teachers chose the latter cause to fight on, we could go through the whole incident without making any personal statement about our own gayness.

The difficulty with the Gay Teachers' Group was that many of its members had not come out at school with other teachers. Some felt it wasn't necessary. In these circumstances it was hard to see how the Gay Teachers' Group could isolate the central issue, and bring about a discussion on sexuality in staff rooms and union branches where it is unlikely to have been discussed before.

I would like to end by saying that although we made many mistakes within the Gay Teachers' Group, many of us learnt a great deal about the local education authority and the union bureaucracy. For the first time a group of gays confronted the bureaucracies of our employer and union. We are still involved in the struggle to get John Warburton reinstated.

As we progress we are confronting many faceless bureaucrats, and a lot of teachers and trade unionists with issues of sexuality. Such confrontations can only help to destroy the oppression which gays have to suffer in most work situations.

I feel sure that in any future clash which a gay worker has with the ILEA, they will think very carefully before assuming they can ban or dismiss him/her in such a dictatorial manner. If they do not act justly there will be a great deal of anger and political opposition from increasingly politicized gay workers.

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## Coming Out Politically

By R. Kincaid

It could be said that until recently gay men and women had no politics which related directly to their sexuality. To take up any political cause—certainly if it required a public commitment—homosexual men and women had to present a front which ignored their own deep feelings and may even have misrepresented them. Although the Gay Liberation Movement has brought with it the possibility for homosexuals to be actively and totally involved politically in their own right, in reality for most gay people the situation has not changed. More and more gays are coming out, but are they coming out politically? It would seem that they are not. This is an attempt to understand why and to do this the possible nature of meaningful political action for gay people must be considered.

For gays to act politically in their own interests they must have some concept of their own position in the community and how their situation relates to the production of resources needed, or seen to be needed, by that community. This will help towards an understanding of their own oppressed situation. It is only then that an overall policy of action can be formulated. Gays must not be taken in by the idea that choosing a political allegiance is a matter of selecting the party with the 'right' set of principles in the same way as one might choose a new pair of trousers. The main political parties in this country represent different coalitions of interests and do not acknowledge the existence of gays except in a negative and repressive way. It is to be a different sort of political platform that gay people should turn—one that recognizes that different groups or classes have interests that may be conflicting; one that recognizes the

interests of gay people as a group.

There are two aspects of gay politics to be considered: the public and the personal. The former is concerned with a manifesto, with a political platform, with concerted public action; the latter is concerned with the sort of action that can be taken at an individual level that may throw into high relief the sort of value assumptions that are generally made about sex roles and, in particular, about the nature of homosexuality. These two facets of political action are interconnected. The nature of one closely affects the nature of the other. A movement involving a public assertion of existence, of values, the development of a public attitude, can provide a framework within which the individual is given greater freedom to make his own statement.

In our present position it is worth looking at the influence of the Gay Liberation Movement, the first manifestation of a public gay movement, in opening up possibilities for gays, particularly young gays, to develop a new concept of themselves. The most important development, historically, was the emergence of GLF in London in 1970. GLF introduced gay activism and a radical new approach to the situation of gay people. It is too easy to forget that before this event the public face of homosexuality was dominantly middle-class and self-oppressive and, except for the one central fact of being gay, tended to be ultra-conformist. GLF was the antithesis of this sort of gay scene and provided the opportunity for a different kind of public identity and an acknowledgement of a gay life-style. Let us consider the possibilities for political action that it generated.

The effectiveness of GLF arose from the stark contrast that it presented against the old style. It attempted to develop its own conventions and let its structure grow in answer to the needs of the moment rather than be borrowed from the straight world. It was understood that to adopt a conventional organization structure would risk influence from the all-pervasive values associated with straight organizations. If a chairman is appointed he or she will tend to look at the only available model of how 'chairmen' behave, that found in the straight world. Likewise, a 'committee' will tend to consider that 'appointment' carries the sort of 'rights' given to conventional committees. Other values creep in and eventually a complete set of straight values infiltrate the movement, including those values oppressive to gays.

Though the avoidance of creating an elite set of officers brought problems with it, the experience of having to explore new ways of relating and coming to agreement helped to develop a separate identity for those of us involved at the beginning of GLF and thus created the most dynamic aspect of the present movement. For those of us who took part in this initial phase, it was not possible to continue to hold conventional views about the need for an authority structure or about what was appropriate for public discussion. The constraints which most of the participants had previously felt about talking through their own deep feelings disappeared. The need on the part of everyone at these meetings to heighten their sensitivity towards the feelings of the others present was demanding. It was also intellectually stimulating and exciting. One was aware that a new culture was forming and being recognized. New words and phrases came into use: 'sexism', 'ego-trip', 'putting people down'—though at the time they sounded flip, they contained ideas that generated much thought and have philosophical implications that extend outside the gay world.

GLF in 1971 and 1972 had many of the features of a successful gay political movement. But the quality of the early movement was not sustained and it is worth considering now why it lost much of its initial promise. Size had something to do with it—it was not possible to keep up the particular feeling of unity and purpose that had been such an important part of the early meetings. There was, too, the 'super-gay' syndrome: a tendency on the part of some to prescribe narrow and arbitrary rules. Most would agree, however, that the greatest reverse suffered by GLF at this time was the departure of the women members from the central movement. The contrast of before and after this happening emphasizes the initial contribution made by the women. This event coincided with a shift towards parochialism where meetings held in different parts of London or different parts of the

country tended to reflect the personalities of the dominant gays involved rather than any overriding ethic. There were exceptions to this and many of these smaller groups have been successful in their own terms, but a general criticism of groups at this time was that the social aspects of coming together became more important than the political aspects of coming out. It is to another movement altogether, the women's movement, that we need to look for some indication of the lines along which a broader concept of the gay movement could develop.

The public revolt of women to their oppressed role has a longer history than that of gays. 'Women's Lib' has a clearly defined public image accepted, though grudgingly, by the media. There are also the 'stars'—those who are widely known and who are given the opportunity to put forward the women's Lib line and who do so frequently and uncompromisingly. There is more to be said about the women's movement. It is mentioned here mainly to emphasize the point that it is much further on the way to being a full-fledged political movement than the Gay Liberation Movement.

The GLM only receives general support from gays when it deals with specific issues such as police harassment or the lowering of the age limit. In evolving policy on wider and, perhaps, more important issues the movement is still in an embryonic phase and it may well be that individual gays are unable directly to take part in developing a political platform. It is in this situation that personal politics become important. A political action, whether it is taken by an individual in isolation or by a group, must have relevance outside the individual situation. Gay oppression can take many forms from simple 'putting down' to severe legal sanctions. In confronting such situations passively or actively a statement is made that has political relevance. A gay person should understand, however, that his own oppression relates to all situations of oppression, gay or otherwise. It is partly in realizing this that the individual becomes aware of his political identity and is able to become involved in the political action of a group.

It is difficult to make any general statement about the techniques and strategies of personal politics. An effective political statement can be made by the individual acting in such a way that assumptions and values in straight society are questioned. For example, transvestism may help to raise awareness of false assumptions made about sex roles and gender roles. The political effectiveness of actions such as those involving transvestism depends much on the timing and the way it is done. There are dangers here. Such actions create anxiety and embarrassment and, unless the setting is right, can be counter-productive.

There is also the danger of such actions becoming clichés or simply an excuse for ego-tripping, but, nevertheless, it is an effective way of making a political point, especially if it can be related to wider situations of oppression.

Understanding our relationship with the rest of society and being able to express this understanding within a group is part of the process of personal intellectual growth, the process of 'becoming'. We are all to an extent surrounded by an intellectual fog generated by other people, by past groups and their oppressive views of history. The nature of this fog is to cause us to have a view of reality determined, or at least affected, by what these other people want us to see. The process of 'becoming' involves us in dispersing this fog of false consciousness and being able to identify the 'substance' of the world we live in and distinguish it from reifications resulting from situations and events in the past. Gay men and women share a particular kind of oppression. If they can jointly learn new ways of relating in this process of self-liberation, their experience could benefit others outside their own world. But to get out of the prison created by other people's interpretations of reality we must begin to move forward collectively in a political way. In this context an analysis of our present roles in society and a conscious political strategy are both vitally important.

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# CHE in Close-up

By Emmanuel Cooper

Integration rather than rebellion is the message of CHE, and this reflects the liberal hope that homosexuals will come to merge imperceptibly into society as it exists now. Gay pairbonds and marriages, with in-laws welcoming both partners to dinner, is the suggested norm. It is a gloomy picture for gays who have developed a critical awareness of roles learnt in a family situation and who do not want to ape heterosexual stereotypes and the relationships which arise from them. In suggesting integration, CHE is offering no analysis of our position as gays in society, firmly buries its head in the sand and refuses to see that it is aiming to integrate us into the heart of our oppressors.

With a national membership of about 5,000, CHE would seem to be in a strong position to enact its plans for integration which follow two major methods—law reform by using parliamentary democracy and an education campaign which tries to ensure that sex education includes an unbiased account of what homosexuality is by providing study kits and gay speakers. That law reform and a fair educational hearing are essential is accepted by most gays, at whichever end of the political spectrum they sit, yet even on these issues few new members are recruited and support from grass roots members is minimal.

Here an analysis of the organization of CHE is useful. At national level, there is the Executive Council on which elected members sit for two years; the E.C. is responsible for the national 'image' of CHE and attempt to provide a list of recognized activist speakers who have come out publicly and are willing to address any meeting and work openly to further the aims of CHE.

On a regional level CHE consists of many small local groups, the majority of whose members want an active social life which pays only lip-service to its CHE allegiance. In fact, until recently, when a new method of paying subscriptions was introduced, members of CHE local groups did not have to be members of the national organization, and there were members who knew little of what CHE stood for.

In many ways, the fairly radical Executive Council of CHE seems divorced from the membership it represents. E.C. members, all of whom work hard and voluntarily

for CHE, have openly come out as gays and put forward a positive position of a gay life style quite independent of traditional heterosexual relationships. CHE organizes conferences like the one at Sheffield this year, where, for example, a unique civic reception gives open and official recognition of the delegates' homosexuality. Yet despite this lead, few gays seem encouraged to follow.

Why is it then that CHE gives the overwhelming impression that its members want to remain closed and closeted—safely wrapped-up and cared for in the arms of a parental E.C.? This point was emphasized in a recent recruitment drive in which CHE was advertized as the biggest gay club in the country. Basically it is because CHE accepts society as it is now, and its priorities for integration are, in order of importance, law reform, education campaign and 'coming out'.

'Coming out' is something to be admired and hoped for, but it attracts little importance maybe because it questions too violently the accepted norms of our society. Here a distinction must be drawn between individual and collective effort. The individual, by coming out, performs little that can be construed as a political act, however much courage it requires. On the other hand, coming out collectively, with its defiance of heterosexual values, could provide a concerted challenge to the structure of society—a structure in which the basic unit of socialization is a nuclear family which oppresses and excludes gays, and, unless changed, will continue to do so. Law reform, though long overdue, will not alter by one jot the feelings of most gays of inadequacy because they will always be outside the family unit structured to meet the needs of a capitalist society.

Local CHE groups also reflect the bureaucratic

organization of society. Three or four elected officers devise and run a mainly social programme for gays who want to meet outside the commercial scene. Some groups conduct limited campaigns—sending speakers to schools, addressing public meetings and so on, but support from within the group is often poor. Local groups achieve their highest success on a social level—large attendances are regularly reported for discos, boat trips, parties, coffee evenings, gay bingo and the like, events which build up a gay community in which some gays, for the first time, attend a group which is specifically for gays and in which they are accepted without question. However, the mere mention of the word campaign at one of these socials brings despairing looks to faces which have long ago decided not to rock the boat, either socially or politically. No one seeks to question why, in life outside of the gay community, he feels isolated and forced to conceal his own homosexuality behind a veneer of heterosexual pretence. They are unable to relate their oppression to the same system which oppresses the mass of people. With such an uncritical rank and file membership, there is little wonder that CHE advertizes itself as the biggest club in the country. 'Walk the corridors of power with CHE' ran one ad—it omitted to mention that to enter these corridors you had to take a vow of secrecy.

Not all CHE members feel that either secrecy or lack of a determination to develop a critical political analysis is right. Some local groups have attempted to work on a more libertarian basis by organizing themselves outside bureaucratic lines. They feel that the nomination of officers who run the group reflects too closely the employer-employee situations of a capitalist system, and have abandoned officers altogether, except for that of treasurer. They operate through a rotating chairperson and interest groups—Campaign, Social Newsletter and Care are typical. The structure is slow and clumsy to operate and works only on a local level, yet within it a greater number of members feel able to participate in the group's activities and at the same time develop the confidence necessary to reject heterosexual norms.

Of what value is CHE to radical gays? Should we ignore it, join it or fight against it as a piece of liberal whitewash? As our only national gay organization, it would be unrealistic of us to either ignore its existence or the need for reforms of the present punitive law and an honest and fair educational programme. We must therefore accept the value it has by giving it our support and working for its aims, while at the same time stressing the limitations of such reforms and argue at every opportunity that a fundamental change in society is necessary. CHE is made up of many lonely and oppressed people whose needs will only be met when they have fuller understanding of their present roles in our society.

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## Report

Gay Workers' Conference  
Leeds Polytechnic  
10 - 11 May 1975  
By Gregg Blachford

After months of hopeful anticipation, I heard a rumour that the Gay Workers' Conference was actually going to take place. For details, I checked with *Gay News* and Gay Switchboard asking them if they could verify this information. No, they hadn't heard a word. That was the first sign that things were going to be rather disorganized at this Conference. I mean, really, if two of the most important avenues of gay communication don't know about it, then who will? As it turned out, a small, very unrepresentative sample turned up; mostly from the local area, mostly from white-collar trade unions, and, mostly men.

Arriving on Friday night, we met others who assumed, as we did, that International Marxist Group (I.M.G.) members had organised this meeting. It had already been labelled by *Red Weekly* as 'the most important gay conference this year'. This feeling was further reinforced when we saw the supposed organizer of the conference and well-known member of the I.M.G. sitting in caucus in the corner of a pub with other I.M.G.'ers. This was the grouping that was to become so familiar to many of us by the end of the conference.

The next morning, after sleeping on the floor with ten beautiful men but, of course, no one touching each other, we arrived at the delightful Leeds Polytechnic. There were no signs anywhere to direct us to the meeting rooms. After much searching, we arrived at the steepest lecture hall imaginable (just right for intimate and meaningful discussion) and came across a *Red Weekly* vendor. More evidence of the I.M.G. presence?

After lowering ourselves into our seats, we listened to Martin O'Leary give a half hour talk on 'The Law and Beyond'. It was a clear and concise account of the importance of law reform for gays. He included a discussion of the false ways out of our oppressed situation such as those who believe that all we need to do is to get all gays to come out or all we have to do is subordinate our concerns to 'some other struggle'. He refuted both these points, quite correctly, as being the sole answer.

Britain's crises and growing instability mean that it cannot afford to be liberal anymore, he also explained. The worsening situation is indicated by examples such as Jill Knight, M.P. asking for the removal of homosexuals from the Social Services, the John Warburton case and the increased police harassment at Earl's Court. He said that this conference must discuss how to defend gays from these attacks and those to come and also how we can avoid the mistakes of the old British gay movements.

This well-put-together talk that had, though, few revelations, drew little response and discussion quickly came around to the inadequacy of this ugly lecture room (where we couldn't even see the people in the row in front of us) and to the inadequacy of the publicity which, generally speaking, only reached the radical gays. It was suggested that we move to a more pleasant room. This was agreed but we spent the next twenty minutes standing in hallways looking for guidance but getting none. It was suggested that we go for lunch while a room was sought. So, after only one hour, we were out on the street again. Enthusiasm was beginning to wane.

Fifty people reassembled in a much more suitable room after lunch to listen to Ellie Burns, Bradford A.U.E.W. Shop Steward, talk about her experiences in the W.R.A.F. several years ago and also the problems of coming out in the television factory where she now works. It made fascinating listening and I'm sure we wished we could have been as brave as she had been in our own work situations. The main problem seemed to be her isolation. Her trade union was beginning to tell her to stop going on about her gayness because they all accepted it and they couldn't see that anything more had to be done. As well as this, the local International Socialists' (I.S.) branch had not responded to the Bradford's G.L.F.'s offer of help.

This led to a most useful discussion of our own personal experiences with respect to how we dealt with our homosexuality at work and in our unions. This allowed us to see our individual problems in a much broader context.

Afterwards, we broke into three workshops that were to discuss the eternal problem, 'What is to be Done?' After reassembling, a problem of leadership arose because someone needed to bring together the various threads. In everyone's head was the fear of being called a 'bureaucrat' or 'on an ego trip' as used to happen in G.L.F. circa 1970. Finally, a Communist Party comrade from Edinburgh began to ask if it was generally agreed that there was a need for some sort of Gay Workers' Charter along the line of the Working Women's Charter. This was agreed, but it was not just to be a piece of paper to be passed at high-level Trade Union conferences. It must be used as a discussion document by ourselves at branch level. There, other homosexuals who hadn't come out, might feel much freer about being open about their homosexuality without fear of reprisals.

As to what the Charter would have to include, several suggestions were made. There must be a commitment on the part of employers and trade unions to end all discrimination against all gays with respect to hiring and promotion. At this point, a proposition was put forward that we could not support anyone's desire for promotion. But it was pointed out that however much we may object to people becoming bosses, not all promotions mean one becomes a member of the management.

Secondly, it must commit the Trade Union Movement to support homosexual law reform and to the removal of all laws discriminating against homosexuals. It was questioned whether this should lead to an elimination of all ages of consent legislation or not.

Workers should also be educated to help eliminate their sexist attitudes and anti-gay remarks and viewpoints.

We reached a dilemma over whether to include transsexuals and transvestites at the risk of lessening our chances of success. Do we preserve our respectability or be honest to our analysis? This was not resolved, but the latter was preferred by most. Perhaps 'sexual orientation and style of dress' would cover all possibilities.

That ended the day's work. The night brought a fabulous and friendly disco. A real feeling of unity was built up and expressed when we held each other and sang 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall'. A drunken 'het' took the violent side of these proud feelings when he started a fight which led to several gays being seriously hurt and having to go to hospital. This brought everyone right back down with a thump.

Sunday's session scheduled to start at 10 a.m. eventually began at 12.15 with about thirty people. We had to sit in the foyer on the floor and it was obvious that the scheduled speakers and workshops were just not going to come off. We were left on our own again to make some meaning out of all of us coming together from all over England and Scotland.

The main point to come out of this was that there must be another conference soon where much more preliminary work would have to be done. Representatives from as many trade unions as possible must be contacted as well as all gay groups in the country. It was felt that a newsletter would have to be set up to disseminate the information re the next conference which Leeds G.L.F. agreed to organize.

I sincerely hope that this newsletter and conference do come into being as I feel that the trade unions are vital in our battle to have a less split life—where we are 'ordinary' people during the day and homosexuals at home. It will also encourage more people to come out which, although it is definitely not the only answer to homosexual oppression, will go some way to changing the attitudes of the people whom we have to work with every day.

A link should also be established more directly with working class gays who, so far, have been under represented in gay groups mainly because of most groups' middle-class emphasis and bias.

Finally, as is stated in the collective statement, the question of sexuality must be confronted by the labour movement. I believe that this conference and others like it will lead to the fulfilment of this aim.

#### Newsflash!

The first newsletter has been published! Information regarding the conference, which is now going to be held in Leeds, is available from: Gay Information Centre, Gay Working Peoples Collective, 153a Woodhouse Lane, Leeds 2  
Tel 39071 X57

Those interested should also send financial contributions to that address as money is desperately needed.

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# Document

David Widgery writes:

The following review was written, on request, for the theoretical journal of the International Socialists' *International Socialism* in Autumn 1973.. It was rejected by Chris Harman, then editor, because 'he had not read the pamphlet' and supposedly was not in a position to tell me if I'd got the line wrong. He presumably never did because the review 'got lost', a euphemism I have experienced several times on socialist papers when the editor wants to reject something but has not the courage to say so. At the time the leadership of I.S. were conducting a political campaign against Don Milligan and the I.S. Gay Group which was by and large successful. For the record, one of the leading lights in that campaign was responsible for the classic line "I.S. does not have a line on what you call sexism and has not found it a phenomenon which exists in the working class."

I am glad of this chance to eventually publish the article: not because of any grand idea of the review's worth, but because of what the suppression of its fairly tentative contents reveals about the political context in which Don Milligan wrote his pamphlet.

## The Politics of Homosexuality' Don Milligan 20p Pluto Press

Homosexuality has been a taboo subject on the Left for 100 years. It's always been somebody else's problem ; something to do with bourgeois degenerates or Stalinist spies. Socialists who wanted to go to bed with lovers of their own sex have done so in great secrecy or simply become celibate and submerged their sexual longings in political activity. Although homosexual writers like Edward Carpenter, active in the Sheffield labour movement early this century, were very widely read in the movement (*Love's Coming of Age* went through twelve editions), their analysis could never advance beyond a desperate pleading for their form of love to be tolerated.

Radical homosexual writers who were drawn towards socialist ideas because of their own experience of the hypocrisy of capitalism were seldom welcomed. Oscar Wilde, openly prosecuted in an atmosphere of pre-Boer War patriotic hysteria was unmentioned by the socialist press of the day. Walt Whitman, the American left-wing poet, whose proletarian following in Yorkshire corresponded and sent money to their hero, was never able to openly link his homosexuality to his political feelings, although privately they were inseparable.

Of female homosexuals we know only sneers and silence. The Left has occasionally included homosexuals somewhere in its list of oppressed minorities but the perspective has been reformist and legislative. For example a warm-hearted article in *Socialist Review*, commenting on the Wolfenden Report which made homosexuality legal between consenting adults, still saw homosexuality as an evil and perverted form of love, a product of capitalist society which would be cleansed after-the-Revolution. In the meantime queers are supposed to keep their heads well down and wait for more tolerant laws to be passed from above. And although the Bolsheviks acted to legalize homosexuality, since 1934 in Russia and in most of the state-capitalist regimes, especially Cuba, homosexuals have been singled out for the most vigorous prosecution.

The emergence, out of the political Pandora's Box of 1968, of the Gay Liberation Movement has altered the whole terms of the discussion. A movement of homosexuals of an entirely new kind was born in collective struggle (literally in a fist fight with New York cops attempting to make arrests in a New York homosexual bar). They asked not for integration and tolerance but shouted defiance and challenged heterosexual society to examine the seamy side of its own 'normality'. A sexual minority, apparently contained in their own guilt-ridden ghettoised sub-society, suddenly in the late sixties began to organize politically and look for radical explanations

of their own situation. Seldom has Engel's remark that 'in the fore of every great revolution the question of free love is bound to arise' proved truer. The reaction of socialists has been embarrassed and uncertain. At one extreme the freak left by giving uncritical support to every whim of Gay Liberation (and they have been many) in fact took a liberal and also a rather patronizing attitude.

At the other extreme those socialists who denied that homosexuals were a 'genuine' minority, and suspect it's all a middle-class problem anyhow, ended up utilizing revolutionary phrases to cloak straightforward prejudice (at the World Youth Festival 1973, for example, socialist homosexuals were beaten up when they attempted to raise a G.L.F. banner). Milligan's pamphlet documents quite clearly how homosexuals are oppressed by law prejudice, the specific physical attacks made by psychiatrists and queer-bashers and, most importantly, the personal self-denial of a life of furtiveness and enforced secrecy. In reply to those who argue that this oppression has no relation to the class struggle he quotes the words of the Bolshevik Central Committee member Alexandra Kollontai who wrote in 1919 'the problems of sex concern the largest section of society—they concern the working class in its daily life.'

It is hard to understand why this vital and urgent subject is treated with such indifference. The indifference is unforgivable. Milligan argues that homosexuals are an affront to capitalism because they challenge the system's division of people into small competitive family units of obedient producers and consumers house-trained in obedience and rigid sex-roles. For, like the Women's Question, any adequate Marxist analysis of homosexuality is bound to deal with sexuality, child-rearing and psychology, topics not raised within the Marxist movement since the late 1920s. These questions are not being raised again in the working class movement by accident ; it is inevitable they will be asked once again in new guises as we transform our revolutionary socialism from the dogma of the few into the faith of the multitude. Indeed a modern revolutionary party unable to come to terms with feminism and the gay movement is storing up trouble for itself.

The struggle for a Marxist theory of homosexuality will continue and will only finally be made by working class homosexuals themselves. As Connolly says it is those who wear the chains who are most qualified to begin throwing them off. In the meantime socialist homosexuals are entitled to expect the active support of their heterosexual comrades. Socialists who are weak on this question will undoubtedly show themselves weak on other perhaps more important questions of principle. For it is not a question of moralism but one of class solidarity. For a male worker who sneers at queers, just like one who talks of niggers and slags, is finally only sneering at himself and his class.

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## Review

"Dangerous Deviants . . ."   
Who Screws Who? by Frank Pearce and Andy Roberts   
Funny Farm Publications 35p

This is an interesting and relevant pamphlet despite its journalistic title and demands close examination. It has been sown together—with stitches occasionally showing—from two previously published articles, one on the regulation of sexuality under capitalism, the other on the role of the media in creating images of homosexuals. Both together form an attempt to locate attitudes to homosexuality in the changing needs, economic and ideological, of British capitalism. This present pamphlet therefore sets out to demonstrate the social significance of homosexual oppression.

Before we can start to analyse gayness historically we must be clear as to our approach. Much of current gay historiography (or more appropriately, hagiography) whether intentionally or not, falls within a 'third sex' tradition. This was the dominant tendency in the early German and British gay movements at the beginning of the century and assumes that gay people form a separate, usually biologically determined group, constant throughout history and more or less ill-treated and oppressed. It is inadequate for two reasons: (a) it does nothing to challenge current social definitions of masculinity and femininity: rather it fully accepts them, and tries to fit homosexuals in between. (b) it leads to absurd chauvinistic conclusions—as if gay liberation was a national liberation struggle—and to reformist politics 'All we want is our rights.'

Pearce and Roberts start out with a more radical and useful assumption: that individuals are born with a fundamentally bisexual constitution, with a sexual expression which is moulded according to social influences and social needs. This implies firstly, that homosexuality is a natural part of everyone's sexual make up—and the wide range of anthropological and sociological evidence about different people's different sexual norms supports this ; and secondly, that different cultures endeavour to suppress this homosexual component, in differing degrees, to conform to the heterosexual norms that have been socially created. This implies the concept of social 'role'. The most commonly recognized roles are those of 'men' and 'women', and their sexual behaviour is expected to conform to their role expectations: the man active and aggressive, the female passive and responsive. Mary McIntosh in the late 1960s developed the concept of a 'homosexual role', present in some cultures and not in others. In our own culture the male homosexual role is clearly and sharply defined. It is a deviant role, despised and punished, and socially defined in order to bolster up the socially acceptable heterosexual roles. This is a valuable approach because it explicitly links changing attitudes to homosexual behaviour to changes in concepts of socially desirable heterosexual behaviour. In other words, homosexuals are oppressed in our society because they pose a threat to the socially sanctioned 'proper' male / female roles. Attitudes to male homosexuality can therefore be used as a 'manageable indicator' of attitudes to changing heterosexual roles ; and conversely, changing economic and social heterosexual roles can be used as an analytical tool to help explain new attitudes to homosexuality.

This is the approach Pearce and Roberts adopt, theoretically at least. They follow Mary McIntosh in seeing the emergence of a distinctive male homosexual role as a product of the early 18th century. It is not until the late 19th century, however, that it becomes widely recognized, both by Church and State and by homosexuals themselves. The 1885 Labouchere Amendment is a crucial landmark here, for for the first time, it makes all male homosexual acts illegal. And by sharpening the divide between acceptable and unacceptable male emotional and sexual behaviour it created an almost impassable barrier, to be crossed only at the risk of blackmail, notoriety and social ostracism.

The late 19th century sees a consistent attempt to socially suppress the homosexual component in the male's sexual make up ; the corollary of this is the emergence of the *concept* of the exclusive homosexual, which acts both as a protection for the heterosexual norm, and by a dialectical process, as a coherent identity for the homosexual. It is no accident, therefore, that the period which sees the harshest oppression of homosexuals sees also the beginnings of a gay rights movement.

Although Pearce and Roberts suggest these changes they are less clear in explaining them. They retreat, as many others have done, to a facile reliance on the Judao-Christian tradition's hostility to homosexuality. Unfortunately, an explanation which can explain everything, explains nothing. Christianity is an ideology which to a certain degree has a life of its own, supported as it is by highly organised structures and bureaucracies. But the success of the social purity Evangelical movement in the 1880s can only be explained by its relevance to the 1880s, as determined by the needs of the ruling class.

The pamphlet offers a series of impressionistic connections which do not fully explain this relevance.

The clue again lies in the 1885 Act. For the Act which outlawed male homosexual behaviour was tagged on to an apparently unconnected Act to raise the age of consent for girls to sixteen. This itself was a product of pressure from the social purity campaign. The connection between these two apparently unconnected enactments lies in their function: they both had the effect of controlling sexual relations outside the family, while strengthening them within the family. For the age of consent clause which was centrally related to control of prostitution, like the homosexual clause, was instrumental in closing the doors to socially acceptable sex outside the family.

This emphasis on the family must be seen in the context of sharpening definitions of male and female roles, itself linked to changes in the economy ; and to the need to socially integrate sections of the industrial working class into bourgeois society. This in turn must be set against a background of increased inter-imperialist competition, with the growing might of Germany and America ; and the consequent fear of imperial decline. It is surely significant that it was precisely in the last decades of the 19th century that the supposed link between homosexuality and the decline of great civilizations was made explicit by ideologists of the ruling class.

The family as a 'natural community' was seen as a haven from the conflicts of class society, as a natural microcosm of the national community. As Pearce and Roberts put it:

When the family becomes a universal interpretative image for the whole of society, homosexuality is repressed as dangerous because it questions the role categories.

The increased intervention of the bourgeois state throughout the 20th century in bolstering the family—through social security, family welfare provisions etc—has provided the material basis for the spontaneous reproduction of male and female roles. The state has been able, therefore, to partially withdraw from the direct regulation of sexual behaviour. But the repeal of the 1885 law relating to male homosexuality did not lead to the social sanctioning of male homosexual behaviour: it was merely a rationalization of the status quo, a recognition of the existence and sexual needs of a deviant minority : no more. Above all, of course, mere legal changes ignore the existence of female homosexuality.

This is the most glaring omission in the pamphlet. There is no proper discussion of the logical corollary of the 19th century worry about male sexuality : the down grading of female sexuality. Attempts to incorporate female homosexuals within the scope of the 1885 Act were dropped in the 1920s explicitly because this would give publicity to something best left unmentioned and unknown. Lesbianism is ignored because it poses a challenge to the social image of women as dependent and responsive to men. The late 19th century reassertion of the male role, protected by harsh laws from falling into homosexual ways, was accompanied by a sharper definition of the female role, hailed as the mother of Empire. Though the language and terminology may have changed, the images are still before us, in a society where a higher proportion of people get married than ever before. The greater sexual freedom of the 20th century is still defined in relation to the family unit, which, bursting at the seams, still works to present its stifling role models.

One of the ways these models are perpetuated is through the press, which by the 1930s had for the first time become a 'mass media'. The second part of the pamphlet is less speculative than the first and is a sober and valuable description of the ways in which the popular press creates and perpetuates stereotypes of 'deviant' behaviour ; 'Evil Man' ; 'The Sick Men of Hampstead Heath' ; 'Twilight Traitors' ; they are all headlines from popular Sunday newspapers of the liberal 60s. They should now be like garish nightmares, thankfully in the past. But of course the assumed moral outrage, the careful glossing over of facts, the distortion of tone, are still with us, witness the *Sunday People* of Spring Bank Holiday, 1975.

'The vilest men in Britain.' Who are they? Murderers,

rapists, property speculators? No! Homosexual paedophiles. The oppression of sexual minorities still sells newspapers and still acts as a guardian for the 'righteous'. A proper understanding of this pamphlet should help us to understand why: and suggest the relevant political conclusions to be drawn from that knowledge.  
Jeffrey Weeks

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## Book Review

### Forward Steps

Homosexual Oppression and Liberation by

Dennis Altman

Allen Lane 1974 First Published 1971

Dennis Altman set out to identify the many strands of the gay liberation movement and the success of his work can be judged by its widespread approval and acceptance since it was first published four years ago. To take such a loosely woven movement and link historical and contemporary threads with the work of gay writers and activists into a unified and readable account is no mean achievement. It says much for Altman's tenacity that he searched out and examined gay liberation in his native Australia, in the U.S.A. and in Britain.

It is also a book very much of its time, belonging firmly to the gay liberation movement. Having argued the case for gay liberation, Altman goes on to look at gay liberation and the left—toward human liberation. The argument that liberation from self-oppression must come before any real political understanding is one which many of us accept, as we do the argument that our ultimate aim is human liberation. What is curious, however, is that Altman gives no analysis of our present situation in society, nor does he offer any way of achieving 'human liberation'.

He has little time for the traditional left, which has either dismissed the gay movement, oppressed it or tried to politicize it by infiltration. Altman goes on to resist attempts to identify gay liberation with the left. 'Political movements, all of them attract people who are insecure, confused, sexually uncertain'. This is a fairly damning dismissal and one which suggests that it is a convenient rationale for his own apolitical feelings. If Altman is referring to traditional party politics in this quote then it may well be true, but it is a narrow view of politics which have in any case offered nothing to the oppressed gay.

Altman offers clearer and more positive aims in other fields—the need to break down sexual types, for example. Also, Altman does not accept the liberal view of merely integrating gays as equal members of society, but rather wants the full spectrum of sexual feelings to be recognized and so avoid the polarization of gays and heterosexuals. High and admirable ideals, but without any analysis of the economic (capitalism) and social (family) basis of our present society, they remain fairly romantic aims. The liberation of sexual feelings will come from a change in society, whose power and responsibility lies with the workers, who control the means of production.

What is required is someone with the broad sweep displayed by Altman to outline the methods by which the liberation of gays and all oppressed peoples may be achieved. Marxists have had little or nothing to say directly about the oppression of gays—they have only written about the oppression of people in general, hence the insistence by the traditional left that all will be cured by the revolution. With our present state of liberation and our basic mistrust of the bureaucracy the established left seem to want to set up, we must ourselves examine the total structure of society in order to understand our position, and, as gays, work to ensure that the revolution achieves the aims of sexual and human liberation. Altman's book is a lucid and convincing account of our first steps, but in 1975 we want the next steps to be given equally serious thought.

Emmanuel Cooper

## Guttersnips — Guttersnips — Gut

Readers are invited to contribute their own selections from the press.

### London Letter

Guardian '75

SOME OF our best friends in these liberated days are, doubtless, gay. But would you let a limp-wristed lad teach Your daughter? Would you indeed allow a gay to tell the kiddies the facts of life? Spurred on by the National Council of Civil Liberties, which reported this week that one-third of local authorities are "bigoted or confused" in their attitude to homosexual teachers, our Dawdle pollster—slower than Gallup—has been at it again, this time accosting working mums & others outside the Tesco supermarket in down town (and down market) Camden Town.

How would they feel about their friendly neighbourhood school hiring a gay? And the kids finding out about it? And teacher explaining his way of life to the little darlings? (It's a problem that has been disturbing the Inner London Education Authority of late where just such an issue arose.) And how about Communists or members of the National Front standing up at the blackboard to be counted?

Toughest response came from David and Mary Willes, a pram-pushing couple with two pre-school kids. "I'd smack him in the mouth," said Dave cheerfully when presented with the prospect of a gay teacher explaining his sex life to the young. He didn't think much of Reds or anti-Reds in the classroom either. "Children should be brought up with their own points of view—or their parents'," he added sternly.

Gladys Heath, a stocky, 50 year-old redhead, wasn't playing. Asked how many children she had, Gladys snapped back: "That's a personal question. Don't ask me anything like that. Anything polite, yes. But not that."

Undeterred, Dawdle turned to a 32-year-old ex-town planner with a six-month-old under her arm. She hadn't thought the thing through yet, but she did a lot of street surveys for pin money and was delighted to help out. No objection on the gay front. In fact, delighted if things were explained to teenagers. "They'll run into queers eventually anyway."

But she'd be mildly annoyed if political extremists got

AT WHAT point do you climb off the trendy liberal bus? When do you ring the bell and tell the conductor "Thus far and no further"? For me it came this week when I read Michael Parkin's decidedly cool piece on the Campaign for Homosexual Equality conference in Sheffield last weekend. Seems the gay delegates censured their own organising committee for not treating sufficiently seriously the problems of "paedophiles"—child molesters to you and me.

To make sure we hadn't got it all wrong London Letter collected the pamphlet successfully pushed round the gays' conference by Mr Keith Hlose and others from the Paedophile Information Exchange. Founded in October 1974 this worthy organisation looks after the interests of "those men and women who are sexually and otherwise attracted to young people below the age of 17."

To make the point still stronger their conference pamphlet carries a picture of a couple of jolly, innocent 10 year olds on the beach. It's hard to tell from the text just how sexual "relationships" with the kids really are. But a few discreet phrases give the clue.

We are talking, apparently about "mutually pleasurable" relationships and the recognition of children's "sexuality," "the removal from the statute books of the 'unjust laws which define mutual and loving relationships' as assaults." PIE exists, among other reasons, to look after members "in legal difficulties concerning sexual acts with consenting 'under age' partners."

In short we are talking about poor sad perverted adults who take pleasure in having it off with children too young to know what they are doing and why. People who need medical treatment rather than sneering persecution, no doubt. But, above all, people who need to be kept away from your kids and mine. And these are the people who gained the blessing of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. It's enough to give gays a bad name.

For good measure those

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