

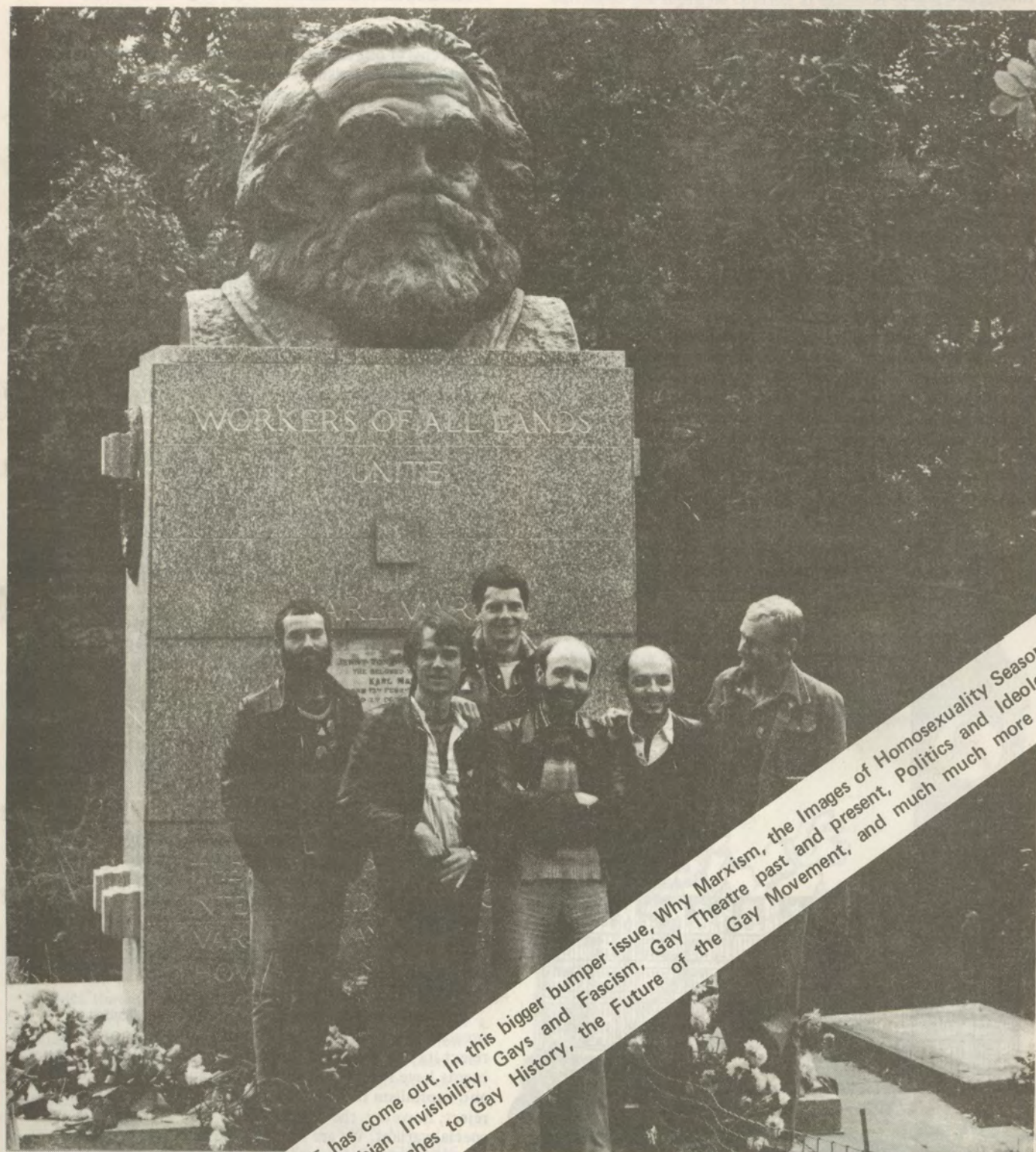
# GAY LEFT

A Socialist Journal Produced By Gay People

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GAY LEFT has come out. In this bigger bumper issue, Why Marxism, the Images of Homosexuality Season at the NFT, Lesbian Invisibility, Gays and Fascism, Gay Theatre past and present, Politics and Ideology, Approaches to Gay History, the Future of the Gay Movement, and much much more



# Why Marxism?

by the Gay Left Collective

Two years ago, in our first collective statement, we put forward our aim:

"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."

We hope that the issues of the journal we have produced and our participation as socialists and gays in political activities have furthered both our own development and the aims we put forward. But we are engaged in an ongoing theory and practice, and have always rejected the notion of having a finished or completed position. We have learnt, and are learning, from our continuing practice and theoretical debate. While on the one hand we reject the idea that a "theoretical practice" is a sufficient basis for our political activity, we also reject the notion that activity must always have a higher priority than theoretical discussion. A solely "activist" position ignores the insights for practice which can be gained from these theoretical debates. In restating in this article our belief in the necessity of a Marxist politics, we both sum up the changes we have undergone and outline some of the areas which still need clarification in the debate on gay liberation and socialism.

## AGAINST REFORMISM

Why do we think a Marxist analysis is necessary? Since the early 1970s there has been a widespread movement towards Marxism amongst feminists, gay liberationists and others who participated in the post-1968 would-be revolutionary euphoria. Many individuals joined established socialist groupings. Others have contributed to the creation of a socialist current in the women's movement and the gay movement. This move towards Marxism implied a rejection of the spontaneist and counter-cultural stress of the early sexual liberation movements and a search for a politics that could more effectively link our particular concerns with

wider political struggles against class exploitation, patriarchy and racism. Marxism offered a politics, a theory and practice, a history of class struggle and struggle against oppression with which we could identify. What does this mean practically?

Firstly, as Marxists, we reject reformism — the belief that all we socialists and gays desire can be attained within the confines of existing society. This does not mean that reforms are impossible within capitalism. If we believed that, we could make no sense at all of changes that have taken place. Neither does it mean that we should not struggle for further reforms, such as abolishing an absurd age of consent, and for the protection of lesbians and gay men against the police and the courts. The struggle for reforms can, indeed, have a vital mobilising effect, both in drawing in hitherto unpoliticised layers and in developing within us self-confidence and awareness. What a rejection of reformism *does* mean is recognising clearly what can and what cannot be attained within a patriarchal-capitalist society. An awareness of the endemic nature of sexism and patriarchy in our society will inevitably lead one to a rejection of reformism.

The changes of the past decade have revolutionised the possibilities of leading an openly gay life. But it is, as David Fernbach once put it, "Liberation, Capitalist-style". The major thrust of the development of attitudes within capitalism has been the acceptance of homosexuality but only within the confines of a patriarchal and familial framework. There has been a sustained, if unconscious, effort at containment, testifying to the overwhelming strength of exclusive heterosexual norms which express the imbalance in the social/sexual relations between men and women; an imbalance which simultaneously contributes to the orderly maintenance of capitalism.

There has been an extensive overlap between the values of the gay sub-culture and the heterosexist culture (in clothes, consumerist values, disco culture etc). At the same time our separateness as people is confirmed by continuing and increasing state harassment; by media attacks on other minority sexual preferences such as paedophilia; by the differential treatment of lesbians and gay men, with the former still treated as a subject largely for male titillation, while for men in certain circumstances it is tolerable, even modish. Our aspirations as socialists must be to change more than this. We must oppose exclusive heterosexual, male-dominated norms, enshrined in the family, backed by Church and State.

Secondly, Marxism involves an identification with a revolutionary tradition of struggle against capitalism. This implies a recognition that there are objective barriers within capitalism to the full development of the forces of production and the release of new social energies. The development of a socialist society will provide the economic and social conditions for the full equality of the sexes, the necessary condition for the final downfall of patriarchy and sexual oppression. As a revolutionary politics Marxism provides a framework for an analysis of the ways in which the exploited and oppressed can struggle against capitalism and its attendant oppressions. The pre-condition for economic and social change then is the winning of political power from the dominant classes; the employment of this new power to begin the destruction of old attitudes and ideas; the creation of new forms and relationships. The working class, rooted as it is in the major centres of production, has to be the material basis for this revolutionary struggle.

But, thirdly, our acceptance of Marxism does not preclude a critique of the Marxist tradition in order to reject its deformations. In particular the anti-sexist movements have revealed new areas of struggle against patriarchy and capitalism to which Marxism has to respond. We reject, however, the concept of a "Gay Marxism" as a special variant. We are anxious, on the contrary, to identify certain *absences* in the Marxist tradition as it has developed and to attempt to remedy them.



## ABSENCES

Marxism is a tradition of revolutionary political struggle by the working class for socialism. As a corpus of theory it embodies the tradition of struggle, the lessons of success and failures; and as a theoretical expression of that tradition is a guide to present and future action. It is in this context that Marxism is also a theory of history, an analysis of the workings of a capitalist economy, a science of society. As a science of revolutionary politics, it has to learn all the time from its testing in experience. But as a wider science of society it is still greatly underdeveloped, not only in crucial areas such as ideology and the state, but also in specific areas such as psychology and sexuality. A Marxist method, we believe, can contribute to an understanding of these areas. Hitherto it has been left to bourgeois ideologies (biologisms, eugenics etc.) to fill the gaps in Marxist theories. The whole area of sexuality is an example of such an absence. This does not mean that socialists generally have not been concerned with questions of sex and gender roles. But there has not, we argue, been a properly *Marxist* understanding of sexual oppression, nor can we claim at this stage to have one ourselves. The interactions of patriarchal structures and capitalist social relations are so complex that we are only at the beginning of understanding them. Such an understanding, we suggest, lies in grasping the relationship between the economy, ideology and culture, and the insights supplied by recent developments in the study of sexuality.

This approach implies and demands a rejection of economism, a deformation to which Marxism has been particularly prone. Because Marxism is a *materialist* theory of society it has been too easy to understand this in purely economic terms. As a result, in some Marxist texts, the economic has often appeared as a piece of clockwork, inexorably and inevitably striking the death of one mode of production and the appearance of the new, with scarcely the appearance of human agency. Socialism is seen as the inevitable product of a capitalism which must perish by its own inherent contradictions. This makes for passivity and reformism.

Even when activism is stressed it can still suffer from economism; for if the stress is placed entirely on the economic as the motor of historical change, then struggle can be conceived entirely in economic terms. Workers' struggle is not limited to a fight for better wages and work conditions. A worker's position is also a result of a structure of social relations which are initially inculcated through the family and reinforced through bourgeois ideology. Thus gender roles as defined in the family are central to the male/female dichotomy of work relations. Economism ignores this whole dynamic and suggests that social relations will be naturally transformed in a post-revolutionary situation. The experiences of 'socialist' regimes throughout the world suggest this is unlikely to happen. Thus state ownership of the means of production has been achieved, though without workers' democracy, whilst the ideology of the family and the social relations which stem from that ideology remain and these are similar to those in Western capitalist countries.

This sort of approach leads to the neglect of ideological, cultural and above all *political* struggle. Even Lenin, who in practice (and polemically) rejected economism, never entirely abandoned it in his theoretical asides, and Trotskyism, which in many ways has attempted to keep alive the tradition of activist revolutionary socialism through many dark decades, has as its theoretical basis another form of economism in its "concept of the Epoch" — the idea that we live in an age of "capitalist crisis, war and revolution", so that the only question confronting the working class is that of a correct revolutionary leadership. The consequences of this brand of Trotskyism has been major sectarian battles among rival Trotskyist groups as to who constitutes this leadership.

At its heart is a too narrow interpretation of the "economic base", and a subordination of a full scientific understanding to what is essentially a topographical

metaphor — "the base/superstructure". In recent years the revival of Marxism as a creative guide to political action and social analysis has led to a recovery of the insights of those earlier Marxists who rejected economism — especially Antonio Gramsci. A creative debate has developed within Marxism, concentrating on the different levels — the economic, the ideological and the political — and their complex articulation within the mode of production. The major insight which is relevant here is that the ideological is itself a material factor in society, not, as long tradition suggested, a simple reflection of the "base". Ideas are not a product of simple illusion or false consciousness but as acted on can become real material forces in helping to shape social practices. Societies are not pieces of clockwork but are multilayered formations in which the *economic* is mediated through complex *social* relations, *ideological* forms and *political* practices. The basic reality is of class conflicts taking many different forms — from struggle on the shop floor through constant ideological and cultural battles to the supreme conflict at the level of state power.

In Britain, over the past few years, (and this is the product of a complex political situation) a major development has been in the effort of Marxists to understand the forms through which bourgeois hegemony has been maintained, and in particular the role of ideology. We define as hegemony those forms of ruling class supremacy, leadership and influence which are outside the formal repressive structures of state power, eg education, cultural, political and social ideas.

This is relevant to the struggles of feminists and for gay liberation because it is at the ideological level that most of our oppression as gays is expressed, and not on the economic level. This is more true for gay men than lesbians. The oppression of women has a dominant economic expression as the theorisation of the role of domestic labour under capitalism has attempted to grasp. But there is also an increasing awareness that the questions of gender and sexuality cannot be simply derived from capitalism. Hence the recent debate on patriarchy and the articulation between capitalism and patriarchy.

One avenue, much pursued of late, has been that of psychoanalysis, conceived of as the "science of the unconscious". Despite a high degree of obscurity, the reassessment of Freud, especially through the work of Jacques Lacan and the debate stimulated by Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* have as their common aim the attempt to grasp how we become social beings, as "men" and "women". As it has been put, this work:

"Opens the way to a re-evaluation of psychoanalysis as a theory which can provide scientific knowledge of the way in which patriarchal ideology is maintained through the formation of psychological "masculinity" and "femininity". Such knowledge is obviously a pre-



condition of any successful cultural and political struggle against patriarchy — the point being not merely to understand the unconscious but to change it."

(Randall Albury, *Two Readings of Freud*, Working Papers in Sex Science and Culture 1, Sydney, Australia)

There are problems in this route. Psychoanalysis has the advantage of taking us beyond the purely descriptive and classificatory, which has been the chief contribution of the dominant tradition in recent English discussions of sex, symbolic interactionism (as in the work of J.H. Gagnon and W. Simon, *Sexual Conduct*, and in K. Plummer's *Sexual Stigma*) which influenced us in our last editorial, *Love, Sex and Maleness*. But the pursuit of the truth of psychoanalysis can lead to a sort of despair of political action or any wider social or collective activity, and to an indulgence in theorisation for its own sake.

Psychoanalysis and the debates on ideology provide a theoretical basis for the continuing struggles of women and gays against patriarchy. For if the capitalist social formation is a combination of levels, there are similarly different levels of practice and struggle, though they must not be artificially separated. As gays our specific struggle is ideological, though as socialists we fully participate in the necessary economic and political struggles against capitalism.

## THE FAMILY

In previous issues of *Gay Left* the heart of gay oppression has been located in the family and we have attempted to explain why this should be so. In retrospect we probably overstressed the purely economic aspects of the family and mechanically assimilated homosexual oppression to it. But the stress on the family must still be central for it is here that in each generation the boy-child and girl-child enter into the rules of social life. Here also is where the dominance of reproductive sexuality is maintained. In our culture these rules closely relate gender-identity to a particular form of sexual expression. Male homosexuality has until recently been interpreted in terms of having "undesirable" social characteristics such as effeminacy, or in terms of a pervasive disease — sickness model.

Lesbianism, scarcely defined at all, has suffered from the general ideological stress which has equated female sexuality as secondary, responsive and maternal. The ways in which male and female children enter the social, with all its attendant expectations, are not yet clear, though psychoanalytic theory may be able to help our under-

standing. The usefulness of such an understanding is that it transcends essentially *social* and historical divisions of sexuality into heterosexual (good) and homosexual (bad), and strategically links the struggle against homosexual oppression in our culture with the struggle *against* patriarchy and *for* women's liberation. The fight for gay liberation is thus an aspect of a wider struggle against male domination.

But having recognised that, and the need to work closely with an autonomous women's movement, there are specific areas where homosexual self-activity on the largest possible scale is vital.

(A) in the defence of gay rights, especially when, as at the moment, they are threatened with erosion by court and police pressure, and by public prejudice in this period of economic decline.

(B) in struggling for further gay reforms — for the rights of lesbians and male homosexual parents; against the age of consent; for extension of civil rights to all homosexuals etc.

(C) in the development of a theoretical and practical awareness of our situation.

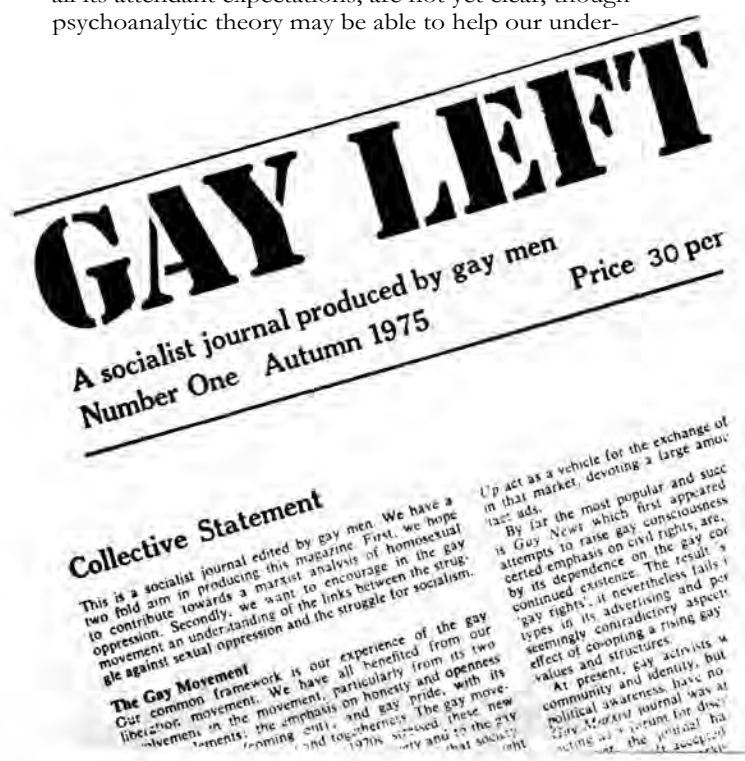
(D) for lesbians and gay men, independent struggle for the development of our own non-oppressive community, leading to the articulation of a positive identity; including, in this, discussions of central areas such as the nature of relationships, sexuality and role playing.

The gay movement is wider than any specific organisation. Indeed we can argue that the movement as such can have no single organisational form; gay liberation is the self-defined activity of gay people fighting to gain control of their own lives and destinies. This struggle has to go on under capitalism *and* socialism. The struggle for sexual self-determination will not cease because a society calls itself socialist as the gruesome experiences of homosexuals in many of the self-described socialist countries of the world today testify. The transition to socialism will not obviate the need for an autonomous gay movement or feminist movement; they will in fact be more essential, for in the struggle to determine the form of a new society, the activity of oppressed groups and identities will be decisive. But the essential precondition is our self-organisation now.

## AUTONOMY AND PARTY

In the struggle against patriarchy and capitalism, a vital task of gay socialists must be in the ideological and cultural spheres. This includes exposing the oppressive nature of bourgeois familial forms, questioning the dominance of heterosexual norms, exploring forms of relating which can go beyond compulsive coupledom, developing a critique of the various forms of patriarchy and sexism, and striving for a theory and practice now which can begin to challenge bourgeois hegemony. The socialist current in the gay movement has an important role to play in this work.

This poses acutely the relationship between the gay movement, the wider revolutionary movement and a possible unified revolutionary socialist party. We believe an autonomous gay movement (as an autonomous women's movement) to be essential, and reject any effort to subordinate the movement to any one political sect. Political militants of various left tendencies will and should contribute their ideas to the gay movement, but it is foolishly self defeating to offer a purely organisational answer to gay socialists seeking political leadership — "the answer, comrades, is to join the party". A major weakness of the British left is its sectarian fragmentation; for any one political sect to arrogate to itself leadership as *the* revolutionary party is an extension not an abandonment of sectarianism. While supporting the existing work of comrades in left organisations we believe that as a long term aim, the realignment of revolutionary forces is essential as the only basis for the building of socialism.





But what does this concretely mean? Sheila Rowbotham in a recent issue of *Red Rag* (No 12) questioned the whole Leninist tradition for its hostility to a broader socialism, and wondered whether a party form which demands democratic centralism and elitism can incorporate the sort of changes that the women's and gay movements have illuminated. J Ross on the other hand, in a recent *Socialist Woman* (No 6/2) has made a radical distinction between *political* leadership, which has to be organised through a Leninist party, and *social movements*, guided where appropriate by the insights provided by Marxism as a revolutionary science, which have to organise autonomously, in a complex dialogue with the political organisation

and with other social movements. The two points are not necessarily exclusive. The forces making for socialism in the West are wider than any single political form at present could embrace and, as we said above, any attempt to incorporate all such forces into one party form will be self-defeating.

The distinction between party and movement is one issue; the other is the form of the party: is a Leninist organisational form necessarily the correct one? Is a vanguard party necessary in advanced bourgeois democratic societies? Is the Bolshevik model of the "seizure of power" the one we should work on here? There are other questions that might be asked but it is clear from the disarray on the left that the answers are not preordained.

But the separation we have suggested between party and movements implies the need for some sort of revolutionary working class party to the building of which we want to contribute: *revolutionary* because it is only a break with capitalism and reformism which can remove the blocks to a socialist advance; *working class* because it is only the proletariat ("traditional" and new) which can provide the material base, in its collectivist strengths and traditions, for a socialist society; *party* because it is only a political formation of the working class and other revolutionary forces that can finally organise against the political strength of capitalism centralised in the state. Social movements such as the gay movement can contribute through ideological struggle to the undermining of bourgeois hegemony; but the struggle for power, in the last instance has to be on the *political* level. Nevertheless the nature of the political formation has still to be determined through actual political practice.

The struggle for socialism will be a long and arduous one; but it is only in that struggle that a meaningful end to restrictive definitions of sexuality will come in this process the very concepts of "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality" will be challenged. It is foolish for anyone to claim full knowledge of the processes and changes that this will involve. What we continue to need is both theoretical clarification and the constant testing of theories in practice.

## Gay News Defence Committee

The National Gay News Defence Committee was set up in October and is made up of representatives from lesbian and women's groups, gay liberation groups, gays in the trade unions and CHE groups from all over the UK. Its purpose is to:

- 1) Quash the convictions and sentence of *Gay News* and its editor.
- 2) Repeal the Blasphemy Law.
- 3) Stop the backlash.

For further information contact the National Gay News Defence Committee, 147 Mayall Road, London SE24. Tel: 01-274-0843.

OUTCOME	A magazine of sexual politics
OUTCOME	produced by lesbians and gay men.
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**Women Awake, the Experience of Consciousness Raising (C.R.)** is the story of a c.r. group in South London over a period of about a year. Sue Bruley recalls what led her to join the group, how it was formed and the way in which it evolved. Through the experience of the Clapham group she attempts to evaluate the contribution of c.r. to the women's movement as a whole.

The first print, which came out last year, has now sold out. *Women Awake* has been of enormous value to women new to the women's movement and has helped many c.r. groups to establish themselves.

It has now been reprinted. The price is still only 25p (plus postage). Bulk rates available.

Order from: Sue Bruley, 38d, Clapham Road, London, SW9.

# Here We Stand

We're Here: Conversations with Lesbian Women  
by Angela Stewart-Park and Jules Cassidy

(Quartet £1.95)

Reviewed by Sue Cartledge

"This book is not trying to prove anything about lesbians, it's just to say 'We're Here'." So the authors introduce this book of interviews with twelve lesbian women. *We're Here*: the message is addressed to a world in which lesbians are still hidden; from their parents, fellow workers, and even each other. The well known folk-myth of our escape from repressive legislation because Queen Victoria refused to believe such a thing could exist is echoed by the stories of gay women themselves in the book:

"What would happen to the family, what would happen to me and people finding out about this awful thing? But I didn't know what awful thing I was because, apart from her who I adored, and she did adore me, I hadn't met any other lesbians that I knew about or saw. So it was this terrible myth, ignorance, social conditioning."

So an isolated lesbian (and in the nature of things most lesbians start out isolated) suffers from the absence of any image from which to forge an identity.

Where lesbianism has struggled into print, it had been in one of three main ways. First, as part of a male sexual fantasy when the 'lesbian' element is merely there to add a frisson of novelty to a jaded but always overriding heterosexuality. This genre, product of the self-delusion of overgrown kids who refuse to believe nobody wants to play with them, has nothing to do with the realities of lesbianism. Secondly there are the 'scientific' or 'scholarly' analyses, which discuss lesbianism as a sexual or psychological deviation, and whose main concern is to probe the causes of this departure from the 'normal'. Even a sympathetic analysis, such as Charlotte Wolff's *Love Between Women*, talks in terms of case-histories, and has chapters called *A Theory Of Lesbianism* and *The Characteristic Lesbian*. In contrast the authors of *We're Here* explicitly disavow any intention to "say anything about lesbians in general. All that one can accurately say about lesbians in general is that they exist".

Thirdly there are the polemical writings, mostly American, appearing as smudgy pamphlets and subsequently in heavy gay liberation anthologies. While undeniably right on politically, these broadsides usually preach only to the converted, and seldom reach the closet lesbians, confused and fearful adolescents, and indifferent or hostile heterosexuals. Moreover, polemics can overawe with their confidence or intellectual skill. They can increase the isolation of a lesbian who would feel that such an assured and glitteringly militant world could only exist on another planet. And it is this woman that the authors say they are trying to reach:

"Both of us are nearly thirty, both of us wasted a lot of years as isolated lesbians trying unsuccessfully to be straight. If the women's movement had been as strong then, we could have found a lot about ourselves and had the support of other women. If there had been a single book that showed us other lesbians and talked about them and us and about our sexuality, it would have made us feel less alone, less lonely."

## Beyond Isolation

The chosen method of breaking down this loneliness is interviews with twelve different lesbians, illustrated by excellent photographs which manage to convey the women's personalities without making them into freaks, stars or sex-objects. It is a simple approach. The authors 'meet' the women and allow them largely to speak for

themselves. They do not analyse them; they are not conducting research into lesbianism. They ask questions, but the questions are fairly diffuse, encouraging rather than guiding the conversation. This diffuseness allows the subjects covered to range from vegetarianism and astrology to prison life and the medical establishment (though of course certain major themes emerge; of these more later). Given the social invisibility of lesbians, and the dearth of books where we speak for ourselves, this simple approach is justified. The reader also 'meets' twelve different open lesbians which as things are is about eleven more than most people can expect to meet in the course of their lives. This in itself makes the book a useful political statement.

But as a political document *We're Here* goes further than this. Both in the choice of women interviewed, and in the questions asked, the authors belie their own rather disingenuous statement of intention "to show some ordinary lesbians to the world in an open and honest way." Of the twelve women interviewed no less than ten are involved in CHE or the women's movement or both; and another (Pat Arrowsmith) is a seasoned pacifist campaigner. Large parts of most of the interviews cover themes such as coming out, views on feminism, and the politics of personal relationships. This feminist and gay political slant raises the book above the level of those lousy *Gay News* "Living Together" features which take us from the washing up to the wire-haired terrier via who pours the cornflakes, and leave us with a resounding message that gays are just like everybody else only more so.

Other than their tendency to some political involvement, the women interviewed vary quite widely. They range in age from 21 to 50, in occupation from a nurse and a clerk to an ex-actress and an ex-company director. Five have been married, while three have had no sexual relationships with men. Four of them have children, while Pat Arrowsmith, who has none, explains why: "They break things, they pee all over the place. They are like great lumps of sour





anthropomorphic ice-cream." Some of them have lived with one lover for years; others have a succession of short affairs. This no doubt deliberately broad selection should help to dispel the myth that lesbians are flat-footed, flat-chested, man-hating butches, or fluffy but devious femmes who hang out in the seedier parts of the world's capitals but never in your own office, factory, street or even family.

Through the work of the women's movement and the gay movement the world is changing a little for lesbians. This book charts the shift from Jackie Forster, now 50, who thought she was the only lesbian in the world, to Debee Moskowitz, now 21, who was listening to feminist radio in New York at 15 and was ready to 'come out' a year before she did. But for most of these women the initial reaction to their own lesbianism was bewilderment and repression; "I thought, don't be so bloody silly, you can't fancy another woman, it's ridiculous." "I'd had affairs with four women before that, but each time I hadn't really thought about it in terms of being a lesbian — I just thought it was a kind of freak experience."

As well as their own bewilderment, lesbians who come out usually have to deal with the hostility of family and friends: "As far as my in-laws are concerned, I'm dead and buried, and a lot of my friends." Veronica Pickles, who became a cause celebre when she was sacked from her midwifery course for being gay, describes how even other lesbians she had worked with hastened to dissociate themselves from her: "And the gay women there spent the whole time saying 'It's not the Veronica Pickles we know. You mustn't jump to conclusions, it might not be that poor girl. I mean she was such a nice girl, I'm sure it couldn't be her.' " Repression and discrimination, direct and indirect, flourishes. Pauline Heap describes her fight for custody of her children — her husband would rather see them in care. Veronica Pickles is sure that her open lesbianism will block any career advancement.

#### Love, Sex and the Women's Movement

In *Love Between Women* Charlotte Wolff argues that 'homosexual' is a misnomer for lesbians: "It is not homosexuality but homoemotionality which is the centre and the very essence of women's love for each other." One danger of this statement is its implication that sex is less important for women than for men; a traditional belief that feminists and many lesbians reject. Sexuality is central to most lesbian relationships; and most lesbians find making love with another woman exciting and satisfying — more so than sleeping with men. Indeed, according to a review of the findings of sex surveys, published in a recent issue of *Lesbian Tide*, on a crude orgasm count lesbians have a lot more fun than heterosexual women, which isn't surprising in view of the physical and psychic differences between men and women. As one of the women in *We're Here* puts it: "You understand each other more. It's much more on the same wavelength." But there is an element of truth in Charlotte Wolff's statement. Sexuality for lesbians — perhaps more so than for gay men — is expressed in an emotional context, in the context of loving another woman. And for lesbians it is often precisely this emotion, rather than the physical acts, which makes sleeping with another woman so different from sleeping with a man. Jackie Forster describes the feeling of bareness when this context is missing: "I've had sex for its own sake, and it was just like having it with a man and so isolated at the end of it because there was no emotional thing taking over."

Of course alienated sex exists among lesbians. In the book Luchia Fitzgerald describes her five years on the straight gay scene. "It was one after another. Living with someone, shacking up for a short time, then breaking up ... I was as miserable as fuck." But where the women in *We're Here* talk about their relationships with other women, brief as well as long-lasting, unhappy as well as happy, the strongest impression is of love for another woman, as a woman: "the whole thing of being with women and loving them is that I'll be friends with them first and the friendship will be really the most important thing and making love will be an extension of that."



The women's and gay liberation movements have given love for other women a wider context than that of the individual romance. The ideology — and at times reality — of loving women as friends and sisters enriches lesbianism: "it wasn't until last year when I found my gay identity that I thoroughly knew that I loved women and not just one woman." Sisterhood can break down the barriers even between mother and daughter: "Since she came to the Women's Centre we talked and talked and different things and me and my mother are like sisters now. That's the only thing I wanted in my life for me and her, you know, to be the best of friends." Many lesbians, including some in this book, have come out after joining the women's movement, while others embrace feminism as a natural extension of their commitment to other women: "Do you think lesbianism and feminism are always compatible? You know, necessarily so intertwined? — They are intertwined for me. I mean, I can't separate my politics from my emotional feelings and my — even my physical attractions."

Lesbians who are feminists (and of course many are not) are fortunate in that the women's movement can give their love for other women a political meaning. It can take us out of the ghetto, enable us to turn our oppression back on the oppressors, and make the connections between hostility to lesbians, the denial of women's sexuality, and our relegation to 'secondary' roles as wife, mother and sex-object. There are many strong feminist statements in *We're Here* from Veronica Pickles' views on male doctors: "Pigs, butchers, sods, bastards, that's what I think", to Monica Sjoos' description of her reaction to the outcry about her painting *God Giving Birth*: "I would have liked to stand up in court and first of all ask whether the image of a woman giving birth to a child is an obscenity, and secondly, what do they think about all those degrading images of women they see all around them — to me that is an obscenity."

#### Roles

Staple gay liberation themes, such as the importance of coming out, and criticism of stereotyped roles, recur in many of these interviews. Interestingly, the one 'non-political' woman in the book experiences this as clearly as the militants: "I'm beginning to believe there's no such... .. that there shouldn't be a thing of butch and femme like and all the rest of it. Of course a few years ago I would have classed .... I always liked to go as the butch. Now I just feel ordinary." Other women criticise role-playing from a feminist standpoint: "If women are going to ape all the worst characteristics in men and simply become male chauvinistic pigs themselves in their butchness, then that's wrong. If one isn't going to accept it in a man then one surely isn't going to accept it in a woman." For anyone who wonders why lesbians tend to work with other feminists rather than in mixed gay groups, that which divides us from many gay men is expressed as well as that which unites us: "It's so male dominated I feel overwhelmed — I tried to talk about women's rights and got shouted down by the men." Even with gay men who are too polite, sympathetic or politically aware to shout women down, many lesbians simply feel a lack of identification which Jackie Forster expresses: "I just found I was having to put the brakes on in the male gay movement and

I wasn't having to put the brakes on with the straight women and I just knew my identity was with women."

#### Lesbianism and Socialism

No doubt by now some Gay Left readers are glancing at their watches and wondering when socialism and capitalism are going to get a mention. Mandy Merck, in her review in *Time Out* accurately described the political line of the book: "the authors have quite reasonably chosen many interviews which take positions they themselves support; broadly a libertarian lesbian feminism which asserts personal change and the creation of an alternative feminist culture as urgent political tasks for women." While those of us who are trying to make links between feminism, lesbianism and socialism might wish to see more explicit 'left-wing' analyses in the book, it is fair to say that the politics expressed in *We're Here* reflect the politics of most lesbian feminists at present. And this politics, though many of us criticise its gaps and none of us think it has 'arrived at a final solution', has evolved from some years of experience:

"When I came into one of these left-wing groups, my experience had been of marriage for eight years, two kids and feeling completely oppressed, my mother dying in poverty, and I said, 'What are you talking about? How does that relate to either mine or my mother's experience? Nothing, nothing at all.' So I thought there was a huge lie there somewhere. This is why I was never willing after that to work in a mixed group again."

The message of this book is far stronger than the simple *We're Here*. Its overwhelming message is the enormous importance of the women's movement to lesbians — as to all women; not only in our political statements but in the fabric of our lives. Luchia Fitzgerald:

"I'll tell you something now. I literally had a hump through oppression — What, a humped back? -- Yeah, I was gone right down like that, if you know what I mean, and the longer I was in the Women's Movement, the more it seemed to straighten itself up. That's the gospel truth that, that's really true."

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# A Breathtaking Sweep

Femininity As Alienation

by Ann Foreman

(Pluto Press £2.40)

*Reviewed by Keith Birch*

In this book Ann Foreman goes through a very wide ranging look at the different concerns of the Women's Movement and the various causes of women's oppression. She begins by looking at traditional Marxism and Psychoanalysis and the attempts to combine them. This leads to a discussion of women's changing social role with the rise of capitalism and it centres on the concepts of alienation and reification brought about through generalised commodity production and the corresponding changes in familial relationships. She links Marx's concept of alienation to that of De Beauvoir and Sartre within the existentialist tradition, and goes on to describe how it is not just a feature of the production process but is central to women's relationships within the family and the roles of femininity and passivity. The book rounds off with a critical overview of the domestic labour debate, an outline of the relationship of the Trade Unions and Labour Party to women at work and in the family and finally a discussion of the possible way forward for an autonomous women's movement in the struggle for socialism.

This breathtaking sweep through so many issues is well written and drawn together but all this crammed into 150 pages means that some issues are merely skimmed or dismissed in a page.

Ann Foreman's view of Psychoanalysis is largely negative and she sees little of value in the attempts at fusion with Marxism. Her critiques of Reich and Marcuse concentrate on the difficulties of their syntheses caused by their basis on the libido theory. The criticism of Juliet Mitchell's book follows from her own concept of the unconscious and her analysis of Freud's theory as one which is in opposition to revolutionary social change. This section is summed up with the statement that "to synthesise marxism and psychoanalysis was an impossible task". In the case of Freud himself Ms. Foreman dismisses any theoretical implications that psychoanalysis may have for feminism and marxism in her concentration on aspects of his work which stress the biologism and ideological limitations that it contains. The only significance given to Freud's work is the emphasis it brought to sexuality.

Ms. Foreman's main concern is with the concepts of alienation and reification in Marx's work and how this relates not just to the sphere of commodity production under capitalism but also to the relationship between

women and men in the family. The alienation felt at work meant that the importance of the personal/familial aspects in the lives of male workers — their sexual and emotional relationships with their wives — became even greater. This attempt at individual fulfilment and self-confirmation by men involved the use of women as objects and women's experience of this was one of alienation tied to dependence and the growing stress on femininity and passivity — "While alienation reduces the man to an instrument of labour within industry it reduces the woman to an instrument for his sexual pleasure within the family".

The use by Sartre and De Beauvoir of the concept of alienation in interpersonal relations is considered in this context and Ms. Foreman, while seeing this as a positive step forward, criticises Sartre for the way in which he applies the term ahistorically and De Beauvoir for her description of women as having been always 'the Other' in regard to men's attainment of self-confirmation. She identifies this alienation specifically to the rise of capitalism and the separation of family and production.

Although this thesis is interesting and partially true, I feel that it offers an inadequate and idealistic analysis of this complex question. Her idealism seems much influenced by the work of Lukacs, particularly in her use of the concept of reification — the way in which social relations appear as relations between things, facts, outside human control. On this she bases a theory of ideology which she opposes to traditional marxist ones of reflection of economic relationships or false consciousness. Rather, ideology is a result of reification within capitalism which structurally excludes a level of reality from thought or is real experience only partially understood. Tied to this, the unconscious becomes merely the repression of a level of reality from thought through reification.

As with Lukacs, the move towards socialism comes with the working class and women gaining the conscious realisation of self-alienation. This is because "capitalism reveals, without being able to resolve, people's potential for realising themselves in sexuality as well as productive activity" and socialism will bring "the final supersession of alienation and reification enabling human beings to become for the first time the conscious authors of the social process" accompanied by "the replacement of genital heterosexuality by polymorphous sexuality".

While disagreeing with these propositions and her conceptions of ideology and the unconscious, Ms. Foreman's book is an interesting intervention in the current debate.



# Beyond Privilege

The Limits of Masculinity

by Andrew Tolson

(Tavistock Publications, Hardback £5.50

Paperback £1.95)

*Reviewed by Tom Woodhouse*

*The Limits of Masculinity* comes out of four years involvement in a Birmingham Men Against Sexism group. Andrew Tolson speaks from his experience as a heterosexual man from within a group of heterosexual men. It is important to note the author's heterosexuality because many of the problems discussed (Sexual Relations Between Men and Women, Fatherhood and Childcare within that context) relate specifically to the problems of being male and heterosexual. The problem of masculinism is equally important, however, to both gay and straight men because there is a large area of shared experience/conditioning and we should not assume that as homosexual men we are any less sexist or any less a threat to women: we are all as men the agents of Patriarchy.

The major part of Tolson's account is based on showing that masculinism is strongly linked to the means of production and to the workers' position within that system:

"In Western industrialised societies, definitions of masculinity are bound up with definitions of work ... the qualities needed by the successful worker are closely linked to those of the successful man."

He identifies three types of masculinism, that of the working class male, that of the middle class male and that of the "progressive" middle class male. Although I see that it is important, especially for Marxists, to be able to view many problems from the point of view of class, I do not see that it is particularly useful or relevant when discussing masculinism. Aspects of masculine expression may vary with class, i.e. there is an observable variation between certain aspects of working class and middle class male chauvinism, but those variations are minimal and to concentrate on them is to some extent to confuse the issue. From reading Tolson's book it is very easy to think that he is saying that masculinism is a product of class rather than that class is a product of hierarchy, which is the inevitable outcome of a power-based patriarchal system.

When discussing the working class male Tolson becomes a little confused as a result of his class analysis of masculinism. There is some conflict between the view of the working class male as an oppressor because he is a man and as oppressed because he is a proletarian. This leads Tolson to say with reference to car workers:

"In this situation a seemingly anachronistic working class masculinity continues to have a vital political role. Because it provides a basis for collective solidarity the culture of the work group acts as an important form of resistance ..." and "In this context working class male chauvinism is part of an elaborate symbolic world; and in the age of mass production is a vital cultural defence."

I do not see the relevance of defending working class masculinism as a response to bourgeois exploitation, when both bourgeois exploitation and working class chauvinism are variants of a masculinism based on the oppression of women, something that Tolson never actually comes to grips with.

Tolson's emphasis on the relationship between work and masculinism continues in his discussion of the middle class male. The rise of the meritocracy and its subsequent crisis of confidence in the 60s and 70s is linked to the middle class crisis of masculinism and its reformist solutions such as the "open marriage" and "marriage as a mutual contract". He seems to see the middle class male as very much under attack and in many ways losing ground from the onslaught against Patriarchy.

"Both classes of men have inherited the patriarchal culture of the past and both experience the erosion of patriarchal privilege by capitalist expansion ... Today's teacher lives out directly, in the classroom, the ideological contradictions of a decaying imperialist, class ridden society."

I disagree that Patriarchy is being eroded except in the sense that the individual capitalist-patriarchs are being replaced by the bureau-patriarchs of modern capitalism; hand in hand Patriarchy and capitalism are neither decaying nor being eroded as much as we would wish they were. The links between masculinism and work begin to break down when Tolson introduces his third category, "the progressive middle class male", a loosely defined group which presumably includes Men Against Sexism. No explanation of the group is put forward in terms of differing work experience: "the 'class fraction' includes *some* teachers, social workers, journalists and creative artists."

Without doubt there are men who are beginning to explore their masculinism and are attempting radical alternatives to traditional monogamous heterosexual or, for that matter, homosexual relationships, but I feel that within the logic of Tolson's theory of masculinism based as it is on class/work, they ought not really to exist.

While I agree that a man's position within the male hierarchy, as symbolised by his job or, in the case of the middle class male, his profession, is important when we try to look at the ways in which we as men oppress each other and women, this is only one aspect of masculinism, albeit an important one. Masculinity ultimately derives from our power as men over women's bodies and over the means of reproduction. Homosexual men are not denied the ever present possibility of dominating women's bodies and in many ways symbolically work out dominant/submissive, male/female heterosexual parallels in relationships with men. Tolson fails to analyse men's physical power over women and women's bodies. It is this initial division of the means of reproduction into a power relationship which we as men should try to understand and analyse: only through an understanding of that power can we hope to develop an overall understanding of Patriarchy, Sexism and Hierarchy.

In conclusion Tolson relates in some detail his experience in an all male heterosexual C.R. group. This is by far the most interesting section of the book and although it is less detailed it rivals Sue Bruley's account of a women's C.R. group. He sees C.R. as a limited (limited by masculinity) but extremely useful tool for the creation of an awareness of one's own masculinism and as a means to combining the personal with the political.

As to the political, Tolson believes that men should become supporters of the Women's Movement:

"As men as agents of a patriarchal culture, we remained the dominant gender. In a certain sense, we were imperialists in a rebellion of slaves — concerned defensively about the threat of our privilege ... Men can, I think within a limited sphere, develop a supportive role which does not 'incorporate' feminist and gay initiatives. It is important that men should continue to participate in childcare and nursery education where their very presence challenges sex-role expectations."

I partly agree with this point of view in that it appears to be very difficult for men together to do much more than reinforce our own masculinity, but we should not lay the burden of leadership or guidance at the feet of women for that is a misunderstanding of feminism. It is too early in the struggle for men together to cease looking for ways to combat masculinism within ourselves. I would recommend this book as a much needed contribution to the theory of masculinism, but one to be read critically.

# Politics and Ideology

by Keith Birch

## An Introduction to Althusser, Mitchell and Lacan

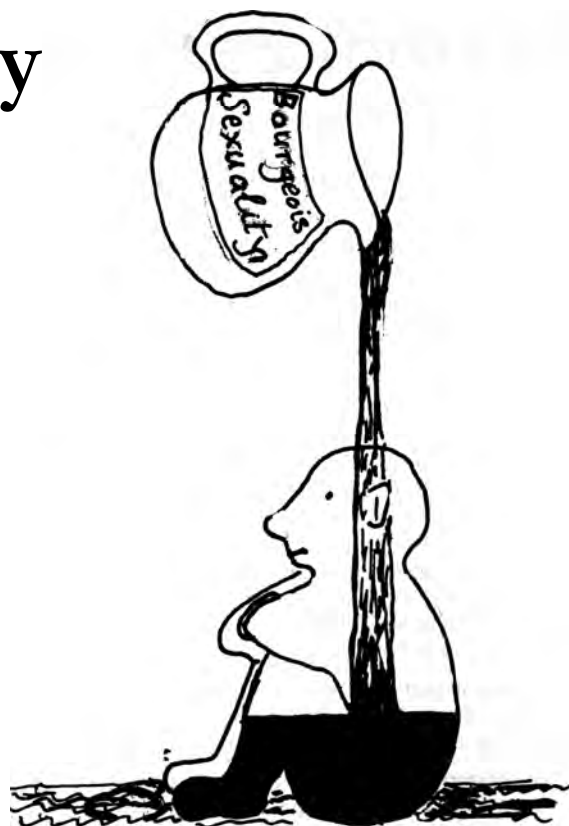
Over the past few years there has been little theoretical discussion within the Gay Movement, partly as a result of the fragmentation and stagnation that occurred and the main preoccupation of the socialist current to the traditional Left groups. On a practical political level some advances have been made in Britain within the major parties of the Left. Gay groups in the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party have been formed and both parties have, like the International Marxist Group, issued statements in support of gay civil rights as well as making noises about the struggle against sexism, although discussion and action throughout the membership on these issues has been limited.

The theoretical impasse that has come about in the G.M. in this country leads to major problems that we are now confronted by and which fundamentally affect our practice. Added to this, the dominance of an economic perspective on the revolutionary left — despite broader theoretical analyses in some cases — tends to limit the issues raised by the Women's Movement and G.M. to ones of reformism and civil rights. For instance, the campaign around the defence of abortion rights suddenly became important to some of the left groups, but while defending abortion as a fundamental right of women, the wider issue of sexuality is not confronted and propaganda and action is often reduced to solely economic questions, and thus abortion rights will be automatically attained under socialism. Likewise, the issues raised by the G.M. can be treated as civil rights for yet another minority group which can be integrated now into the Party by issuing statements in support of gay rights and, come the revolution, by legal changes.

Support and integration in this partial way results from the inadequacy of our theory, activity and demands. Within both the W.M. and Marxism important advances have been made concerning ideology and sexuality, the areas of specific relevance to the G.M. in any analysis we wish to make of our oppression under capitalism. The G.M. should be open to and involved in these discussions so that the socialist movement must face up to the question of sexuality and so that we may have the means of fighting our oppression more effectively. We still live with the concepts borrowed from the W.M. of the early 70s and though they gave us valuable insights into how gay oppression is related to the exploitation and oppression of women and non-reproductive sexuality in general, it fails to account for and make links with the way in which capitalist society reproduces itself as a totality, not only labour power but also its relations of production and ideological forms, and how the subordination of women fits into this structure.

### An Economistic View of Gay Oppression

In our first collective editorial we stated the need for a materialist analysis of gay oppression. We centred sexual oppression on the role of the family under capitalism and the subjection of women within it, pointing out both the economic and ideological aspects of this. On the economic aspect, we discussed the role of women in the domestic sphere, labour and reproduction, and their use as a cheap source of labour in the economy, thus reinforcing their economic subservience. The ideological role of the family was concerned with reproduction and the socialisation of children, especially into their sex roles. We did not place gay oppression concretely within this framework but by extension saw that it was the general result of sexism and the need to control sexuality. The implication being that homosexuality threatened the family as the most obvious form of sexuality for pleasure outside the straight-jacket of reproduction and thus social and legal prohibitions were imposed on it.



Our account tended to reduce gay oppression to an almost immediate response to the economic needs of capitalism. At the same time the central debate amongst socialist-feminists and the left concerned domestic labour and women's role in the labour force under capitalism. The argument ranged over different interpretations of Marxist economic categories of productive and unproductive labour and whether domestic labour contributed to the creation of surplus value and the relationship between women's two roles, in the family and in the industrial labour force. However, the attempt to fit an analysis of women's subordination solely within an economic framework in the traditional manner of socialist economics fails to take account of the ideological and cultural aspects of oppression that result from a patriarchal form of society or to recognise other areas of struggle that are necessarily outside of the immediate economic sphere. Work in the W.M. is now concerned with both the political economy of women, entailing consideration of women's specific exploitation under capitalism and the role of the family and reproduction, and an analysis of its complex relationship with patriarchy and ideology.

An analysis of gay oppression cannot simply be fitted into a discussion of economic categories. It cannot be fixed within an account of economic exploitation beyond the links to the oppression and control of female sexuality within production and reproduction. Gay oppression is now largely located in the sphere of ideology and its role in the general reproduction of the relations of production and the patriarchal social formation. What we need is a theory of sexuality, not specifically of gayness, and to see the way in which sexuality is socially constructed. Gays as a social minority may be able to gain some liberal reforms within capitalism and the containment of homosexuals as a minority group poses little threat to the present social order. It is the wider questions of sexuality and sexism that pose a threat by confronting the basis of current social relationships.

### The Role of Ideology

The role of ideology has been a much neglected area within the Marxist tradition but this state of affairs has been changing. This is the result of several factors; the lack of any revolutionary breakthrough during the last decade of economic crisis, the influence of the Cultural Revolution in China and the spread of the work of Gramsci and Althusser.

The ideas of Gramsci, as interpreted by the Euro-Communists, and their concern with the struggle for socialist hegemony by building 'broad democratic alliances' around the working class has given greater stress to the role of ideology and culture in the way bourgeois domination is continued. Also central to the new thinking about ideology has been the work of Althusser and his critique of previous Marxist conceptions in this area.

At the same time, discussion in the Women's Movement was facing similar problems. The economic analysis, though of course basic to an understanding of women's oppression, was not enough by itself. The knowledge gained by the W.M. about women's subordination under patriarchy showed that one's socialisation could not be overcome just through an awareness of one's situation and the removal of a 'false consciousness'. It was clear that formulations of ideology which pose it as 'false consciousness' or as simply the reflection of one's position within economic relations were inadequate to explain the needs and desires that are concrete forces in people's lives. They cannot be swept away simply by consciousness raising groups however valuable they may be at some levels. Within the G.M. the vision of our self-oppression is very strong and exhortations for everyone to come out and throw off this oppression through efforts of self-will are, besides being idealist, lacking an understanding of the real forces which lead to our oppression and the much deeper foundation of the socialisation process. The tendency is to see the individual as an already constituted rational being who is filled with the accepted social attitudes and knowledge through socialisation and so can be changed on being confronted with 'the truth' of her/his situation and the reality of their social relations. However, the forces which mould our character structures and our existence as sexed beings within the social formation are much more strongly embedded in us and in the ideological and economic relations in which we live.

The discussion around ideology is of great importance to the G.M. and should not be dismissed as idle talk amongst left theoreticians. First of all it entails a critique of the way the socialist movement has operated, and still largely does so, similar to some of the criticisms that the W.M. and G.M. have made of it. That is to say, against the left's reduction of all analysis and struggle to the economic and the concentration of activity at the point of production to the detriment of any other area of life. Secondly, the recognition of ideology as an area with a relative autonomy from the economic opens up the possibility of it being an area for struggle by the left as well as by the W.M., challenging and exploiting the contradictions that arise there. Thirdly, it concerns the way in which the individual enters and exists in social relations, the way in which we become sexed subjects — the subject being the term used to describe the individual in its social relations as opposed to the bourgeois notion of the individual as the centre of purposive action. This includes how we learn our femininity and masculinity and how we carry the ideology necessary for the reproduction of social relations under capitalism.

These new conceptions that are being advanced and the wider scope of activity that they envisage may help to move us on from the 'personal is political' debate that we have with the left.

An important aspect of this analysis of the role of ideology is the renewed concern with Psychoanalysis and the formation of the unconscious as the way in which a human being enters the social order and takes her/his determined position there.

The rest of this article is concerned with giving a brief outline of some of the work being done in this area; Althusser on ideology, Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* and finally a discussion of work in progress by marxist-feminists developing from this.

Althusser

The part of Althusser's work with which I am concerned is his conception of ideology and the Ideological State

Apparatuses essay. His starting point is a critique of the economic determinism of the socialist movement and its view of the social formation as that of an economic base on which is built a superstructure of the political and ideological levels. Traditionally, from this starting point, socialists had merely reduced the ideological level to a reflection of economic relationships. As a consequence, all analysis was focused on understanding the economy and activity was limited to the economic struggles of the working class. This can be seen in the reformism of the Second International and their belief in the inevitable transition to socialism because of the internal contradictions of capitalism and in the idea that revolutionary change to a socialist economic base and relations of production would automatically bring similar change in all other social relations, ideas and culture after an unspecified length of time.

This position is challenged by Althusser who describes the social formation as being made up of three levels — the economic, political and ideological, in which both the political and ideological have a relative autonomy from the economic which does, however, remain determinant in the last instant. In different modes of production any of the levels may be dominant in the social formation, their position being determined by the economic. All of the levels exert influence on one another so that instead of the economic simply determining ideology it is, in its turn, acted upon and changed by the other levels. Althusser describes ideology as having a material force, the ideas and values that people live by lead them to take certain actions which have a material effect on the other levels of society. Thus ideology is not a simple reflection and does not have an immediate correlation to the economic. It has a relative autonomy and may have contradictions both within itself and towards the other levels. The importance of this redefinition of the social formation is that capitalism survives on the ideological level as well as the economic and these formulations may help us to gain a better understanding of capitalist relations.

In his Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) essay, Althusser suggests that the analysis of the ideological level should be taken from the point of view of the reproduction of the conditions of production, in particular the existing relations of production. He identifies two aspects which maintain the reproduction of the relations of production, the repressive State Apparatuses, such as the police, army and courts, which function largely through force, and the ISAs, such as the family, education, culture and religion, which function in the main through ideology, though they may be backed up by force. Under capitalism the most important of the ISAs are the education system and the family. Althusser stresses the role of education which takes us all and teaches us skills and values and develops the division of labour in order for us to take our places in society. At the same time it reinforces the sexual roles which we have been given. However, much of this is only a secondary stage of socialisation which reinforces what has already been formed within the milieu of the family. The school 'teaches 'know-how' in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its practice'. The family is more important in that it constructs people as agents of production and reproduction and instills the forms of domination and subordination. It is in the family that the oppression of women and gays is initiated and it is also within familial relationships that the genesis of the individual as a sexed subject within ideology takes place. Althusser says "Ideology constitutes concrete individuals as subjects" and it is in the family where the individual exists as an always-already constituted subject, taking up a specific position and becoming a sexed subject, taking on the aspects of femininity and masculinity that this society demands.

Central to Althusser's theory of ideology is the work of Lacan in the field of psychoanalysis. This is true both for his formulation of ideology as not being false consciousness but as representing "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of-existence" and in his



notion of the process in which ideology constructs individuals as subjects. There are difficulties in both of these formulations. The use of the term imaginary comes from Lacan and his theory of the pre-Oedipal or "Mirror" stage of the infant and it relates to the misrecognition of reality, though Althusser stresses that it is not false, and through the subject acting on this misrecognition it has material consequences. The complex relationship between ideology and the concept of the subject is expressed by Althusser in that ideology only exists in and for subjects but at the same time it constitutes them. The circularity of this argument is apparent and presents difficulties by making the social formation a closed system. A similar problem arises in his conception of the ISAs which he sees as unified by the ideology of the ruling class so that the trade unions, for example, are part of this totality. This view tends to dismiss the actual and possible gains made through class struggle in many areas.

#### Juliet Mitchell's Psychoanalysis and Feminism

Juliet Mitchell's book takes up the relationship of psychoanalysis to the modern feminist movement. It shares with Althusser a use of Lacan's reading of Freud. Mitchell says that the rejection of psychoanalysis by the W.M. is mistaken and results from a misunderstanding of its possible use; a result of the way it has been used by bourgeois psychology as a tool for defining and enforcing normality. Likewise, in the G.M., discussion on Freud has centred on whether psychoanalysis is an enemy, classing gays as sick and proposing cures and slotting us back into society as 'healthy individuals', reinforcing the idea of individual failings rather than the outcome of problems which are social in origin. The arguments in defence usually stress the breakthrough that Freud made in the theory of sexuality — polymorphous perversity, childhood sexuality, the wide spectrum of possible sexual object choices. They also refer to the various statements that he made of the best liberal kind — "homosexuality is not a sickness, only a social disadvantage", "homosexuals should have full civil rights". However, for those who have not rejected psychoanalysis as an obstacle to sexual liberation there has been a tendency to dismiss Freud's work in favour of Reich, Laing and varied techniques of group therapy. As Mitchell describes it, whatever importance they may have had for the W.M. and G.M. — the stress on sexuality, and relations in the family — their work is not of the same value as Freud's.



What Mitchell proposes is the status of psychoanalysis as a science, one which can be made use of "not as a prescription for a patriarchal society but as an analysis of one". It is not only important for our understanding of patriarchy but also of ideology, the construction of the subject, femininity and masculinity and sexuality.

Psychoanalysis is the science of the unconscious and it is at the level of the unconscious that we acquire the character structures which reproduce the social and sexual relations necessary for the reproduction of the present social formation. Mitchell, following Lacan, distinguishes the scientific concepts which form the basis of Freud's work from the cultural and theoretical limitations in which he operated and its degeneration into the present practice of bourgeois psychology. This involves a re-reading of the theories to free them from their biologism and the terminology in which Freud had to think them.

#### The Oedipus Complex

From the basis laid down in Lacan's interpretation, psychoanalysis can help to reveal the way in which human beings enter the social order and take on their sexed identity and their respective roles in the patriarchal order. This entry is achieved for both sexes through the Oedipus Complex which is also central to the taking on of femininity and masculinity and the choice of sexual object. As described by Freud, the Oedipus Complex for the boy involves competition with the father for the love of the mother and a wish for his death. However, the fear of castration, which is made real by the sight of a 'lack' in girls of a penis, and the desire to preserve his penis, the centre of his pleasure, means that he gives up the claim on his mother and instead identifies with his father and the future power of this role with the reward of a wife of his own. The Oedipus Complex is smashed.

For girls the process is much more diffuse and Freud only considered it independently late on in his work. It involves both the attainment of femininity and passivity, through recognition of 'castration', and the transference of the love object from the mother to the father. The recognition of the 'lack' of a penis precedes the Oedipus Complex and leads to a rejection of the mother for not giving her one and eventually to the transfer of love to the father, through the equation of a penis with a baby, which the father can give to the girl. The sense of castration leads to the giving up of clitoral sexuality and the entry into a period of passivity before the erotogenic zone transfers to the vagina.

In the work of Freud, the anatomical differences between the sexes largely contributed to their respective social roles and characteristics. This, and the denigration of women ("lack of penis", "castrated", "less developed super-ego"), has led to the wholesale rejection of psychoanalysis. But it is this very subordination of women and their sexuality through the structuring of the unconscious within the patriarchal order that it can help to explain.

Lacan's reading of Freud makes use of those concepts which relate closely to those of the science of structural linguistics rather than the elements of instinctual theory which are present, so that he says "the unconscious is structured like a language". One enters the social order, the Symbolic, through one's entry into the order of language. Entry into the social order occurs through the Oedipus Complex which Lacan, in keeping with Freud, sees as universal and ahistorical phenomenon. Here the relationship of the child to the mother is broken by a third party, the Father. Mitchell equates this with the move from the closed relationship of nature, the mother and child, to that of culture where the child takes up its social position. For Lacan, the Phallus is the universal signifier, the emblem of the Father and of social order, which ensures through the acquisition of language, the entry of the child into society and its appropriate sexual identity. The Phallus is the signifier of power and it is this symbolic 'lack' that is forged on the unconscious through the Oedipus Complex in the attainment of femininity which contributes to the maintenance of the subordination of women.

## Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis has described homosexuality as a fixation of object choice at a certain stage of development. In the work of Freud are identified several different factors which lead to a predominant choice of sexual object of the same sex. These include, for men, the identification with the mother and passive attitude towards the father, fear or regard for the father resulting in the avoidance of rivalry, and the denigration or fear of women. For women Freud attributed it to a masculinity complex and the refusal to recognise 'castration' although he felt bisexuality was much more widespread amongst women because of their first love object being of the same sex.

What the reinterpretation of the Oedipus Complex by Lacan as the means of entry into the social order implies, in relation to homosexuality, is still an open question. Some have posed women's entry as being a negative one in their relation to the Phallic signifier and their position of social subordination but in what way can it be related to homosexuality? Deleuze has described it in terms of a refusal, reminiscent of Marcuse's view of homosexuality in the 1960s. We have as yet to see if any useful knowledge can be gained in this respect.

## Problems of Mitchell's Approach

Although Juliet Mitchell's book is an important opening up of this area there are major criticisms that must be made of it. A central fault is the way in which she poses psychoanalysis as a distinct science with a completely independent field of study to historical materialism. She describes Marxism as having to deal with the economic and class struggle while psychoanalysis is concerned with the analysis of ideology and sexuality under patriarchy. This false and dangerous distinction leads to her proposing that it is the working class that is the bearer of the fight against capitalism and the W.M. in the separate cultural struggle against patriarchy and ideology. This is the very dichotomy that marxist-feminists are trying to overcome rather than the proposal for the way forward.

The other main fault is the way in which she tries to integrate the theories of Levi-Strauss to explain the cause of patriarchy and to show the universality and ahistorical nature of the Oedipus Complex. This notion equates the exchange of women between men or kin groups with the inauguration of 'culture' from 'nature'. This exchange is necessary because of the basic need for communication and reciprocity. It is the start of social intercourse and binds society together, breaking out of the closed, incestuous nature of the kin groups. The fact that it is women who are exchanged as signs between men is thus attributed to a necessary, though unexplained, move from 'nature' to 'culture'. Thus, all societies have been patriarchal and have an incest taboo to ensure this exchange. Mitchell gives us this idealist theory instead of attempting to make a materialist analysis of women's role in production and reproduction in the kin groups which may explain their subordination and exchange between men.

## Work in Progress

The problems raised by the relationship of patriarchy and ideology to capitalism are very complex and much of the present work involves a critique and clarification of the insights gained from the work of Althusser, Lacan and Mitchell. It opens up the possibility of making a materialist account of the functioning of ideology and the construction of the sexed subject within social relations as opposed to the notion of some pure essence being at the heart of each individual which is capable of being set free under socialism.

Some of the most interesting work has appeared in the journal *Working Papers in Sex Science and Culture*. One of the central issues raised here has been the relationship between psychoanalysis and historical materialism. In an article by Jane Bullen, it says "psychoanalysis cannot explain the relation patriarchy has with social and economic forms, nor can it analyse the social conditions in which it arose. Psychoanalysis as a science explains what goes on in

# Psychoanalysis and Feminism

Juliet Mitchell



the unconscious of male and female children to produce 'masculinity' and 'femininity' as we know them".

However, the articles by Mia Campioni et al stress the need to ground psychoanalysis within historical materialism for the study of ideology and the unconscious in relation to the mode of production. Campioni says that psychoanalysis cannot be autonomous, the unconscious can only be thought as an effect of the social in its historical context and she "attempts to place Freud's theory of the origin and function of the Oedipus Complex within the marxist theory of ideology in order to find the connection between sexuality and the class struggle."

Within this project there is the beginning of a materialist analysis of the relation of kinship structures and the family to the mode of production. An important aspect of their work is a critique of the phallogentric and ideological bias of the theories of Freud and Lacan. Factors central to their theories such as the Oedipus Complex and the Phallus as signifier of social order are taken as neutral whereas they should be seen as ideological constructs of patriarchy. This bias within Lacan's reformulation of Freud poses difficulties for the way in which his theories can be used.

Similar concerns are raised in the Papers on Patriarchy from the conference that was held in London in 1976 while in another short paper Mary McIntosh questions the way in which the W.M. and G.M. have seen sexuality and talked about its oppression as if there was a true essence. She shows the complexity of the problems in thinking about sexuality, given that it is not an innate characteristic but a culture specific phenomenon which raises the issue of the social context and structuring of sexual behaviour in our society.

## A Way Forward?

It is as yet unclear what this work may provide. It shows a move away from much of the simple economism of the left and the need for ideological struggle and transformation as being central to the socialist movement. Of course, the

economic demands of capitalism are central to the oppression of women but it is through ideological practice within the family that women and gays experience much of the oppression of their social relations. As an essay in the *Papers on Patriarchy* says "Any analysis of how the family functions to enforce the divisions between relations of production and relations of reproduction has to take account of the specific ideological function of the family". It must be recognised that sexuality exists within the context of human culture and is not a pre-given essence or instinct.

The recent debates in the socialist and women's movements which stress the material reality of the ideas that people live by in society points to the need to challenge and remove them as obstacles to change. The ideological struggle is important in loosening the hold of capitalist values and relationships in the process of building oppositional forces and it will be just as necessary in the transition to socialism. There will be a continued need for autonomous women's, black and gay movements to confront racism and sexism and fight against all aspects of oppression.

There are however dangers which must be faced in this renewed emphasis on ideology. We should not follow Mitchell's split of the economic and ideological struggles to the working class and W.M. respectively. There are problems in the attempt to bring an analysis of the individual within the framework of Marxism. Previous attempts at combining psychoanalysis with Marxism to meet this need have largely failed and there are many difficulties to be faced in any appropriation of Lacan's work.

These areas of theoretical work may help to validate the current practices of the W.M. and G.M. within the socialist movement and in time give insights into how the struggle against patriarchy may be carried out more effectively. However, in the struggle against bourgeois and patriarchal hegemony at all levels of our society, we should not ignore the true nature of State power which lies behind it and the determining role of the economic. These will have to be confronted before any transition to a socialist society is possible.

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# Another Patriarchal Irrelevance....

The Homosexual Matrix

by C.A. Tripp

(Quartet Books £5.95)

Reviewed by Phil Derbyshire

Gays have long been the objects of bourgeois social science, and it is not surprising that Tripp's book, so firmly grounded in that tradition, should turn out to be another monumental inconsequence. It is to be hoped that the works of the French Marxists Deleuze and Foucault will soon be available in English, so that we can dispense with reading historically naive accounts of sexuality, and begin to supersede the tradition that so mechanically produces them.

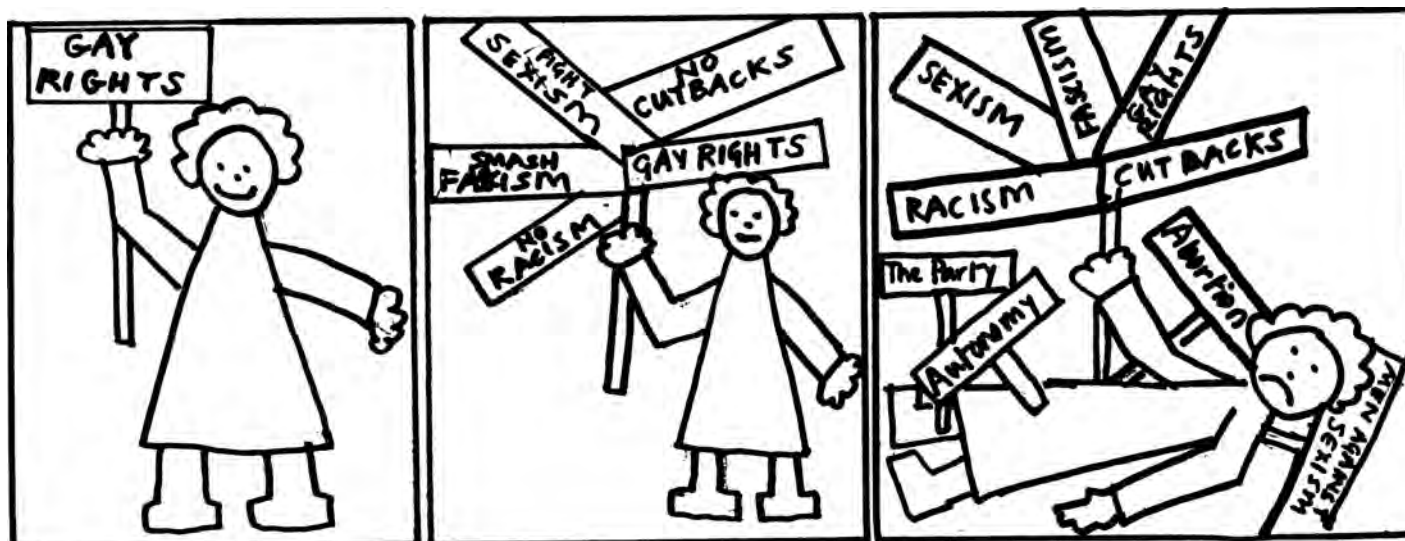
*The Homosexual Matrix* is a liberal tour through the domain of homosexuality. Its author is a well intentioned patriarch, offended by the taboos on homosexuality, but unable to see the structures of sexism that support those taboos: indeed he is incapable from his individualistic psychology to even conceive of the possibilities of such structures. Homosexuality is for him a unitary and trans-historical category, ie it is the same 'thing' for men and women and has existed in the same way throughout history. That he is conceptualising homosexuality through the ideological forms of advanced capitalism cannot occur to him, yet significantly most of the examples he uses to illustrate his various discussions are drawn from contemporary American gay male culture, with occasional bracketed addenda for lesbians. To that extent he is remorselessly sexist and whilst he nods at the possibility of non-phallic sexuality amongst lesbians, he fails to use this as a clue for the re-interpretation of male sexuality, but rather sees male and female sexuality as biological givens, whose differences are founded in 'neurological substrates'.

His devotion to biologism is apparent in the chapter on 'Inversion', where he legitimates gayness by reference to rats and dogs; occasional taking up of the 'opposite sex's' behaviour is legitimate, indeed a measure of sexual capacity, because lower mammals do it. Yet simultaneously he accepts gender roles and the active/passive division between men and women as absolute! But then again the account of protozoan reproduction as a valid model of sex (p.115) shows a quaint distortion of thought.

The oppression of gay men and lesbians is explained by the usual liberal clichés of prejudice, ignorance and the residuum of the Judaeo-Christian heritage; hence his politic is the familiar demand for education, and the slow acceptance of homosexuals who are "just like everyone else" within capitalism. The alternative accounts of Feminism and Marxism are not mentioned; the Women's and Gay movements are only obliquely and snidely mentioned and dismissed. "The Politics of Homosexuality" for Tripp are the activities of faggots in the CIA and American Federal politics!

I suppose that one can thank this slightly anachronistic Enlightenment rationalist for not producing another attack on homosexuality, but the mass of ill-sorted and untheorised data in this book can only provide material for the ongoing project of developing a Marxist theory of sexuality: the book itself does nothing to help that project. It is a humorous irrelevance and at £5.95 very dear.





# Crossroads - which way now?

by Nigel Young

"I'm a lesbian, a socialist and an alien. If I were to come out in my union branch at school as a lesbian, the Head-mistress would love it — I'd get the sack. On my own I don't feel I should risk the work I can do as a woman and a socialist."

"If I were to come out in my union branch as a gay man, I feel I'd be jeopardising the struggle of my party against cuts, unemployment and racism."

These are just two of the many personal comments I have heard over the last year from lesbians and gay men who work in their unions as socialists but feel unable to raise the issue of gay rights as part of their struggle as committed socialists. Some people may raise their eyes in horror at such "closet" gays, but this misunderstands the real issue of the continuing oppression which lesbians and gay men face in their battles against sexism in their union work.

As far as gay rights are concerned we are still too often confronted by the simplistic historical legacy of the gay liberation movement. This saw the struggle against sexism as an end in itself and saw the battleground defined as come-out gays smashing the barriers of sexism through their demands for gay rights. Perhaps in the 1960s we may have been forgiven for such optimism and naivety. But a decade later the battle against sexism is nowhere near over and in some places the battle hasn't even begun. At the same time we are confronted with high unemployment, falling standards of living and a backlash against the permissive society of the "swinging sixties", factors which make our cries for gay rights seem like an even smaller voice in the hurricane.

## Gay Rights' Struggles — The Problems

Problems inherent in gay rights' struggles have been submerged by the energy and commitment we have placed in coming out in our unions. In practice few people have raised the gay issue in their unions and those of us who have often did so in response to victimised gay workers rather than as an issue we have the right to raise at all times.

The practical problems in this area are common. First, most of us working in our unions have had to struggle against isolation. One or two caucuses exist, but most of us have to carry out our gay battles in isolation. There comes a point when you can not bear being the token gay assuaging the consciences of other branch members too many times a year. Secondly as there are small numbers of open lesbians and gay men scattered throughout many unions the problem of organising effectively across unions is almost impossible.

A final problem in this area relates to the programme we wish to put forward. In the gay workers' movement we started out with a Gay Rights Charter which ended up as a huge list of individual campaigns, many of which were unrelated to the needs of lesbians. A proposal for a sexual rights charter was never discussed. I think the "movement" already sensed it had neither the direction nor power to raise the issue of sexual rights in our unions. Today we are left with a frustrating vacuum where those of us who are outside of political groups wonder what direction to take in the battles against sexism, racism, fascism and economic chaos.

## Is There A Gay Politics?

The difficulties confronting us in our political work reflect the problem of identifying what a gay politics is. In certain areas there is still an obvious need for what we might consider conventional gay work such as counselling and befriending services, consciousness raising groups and social groups. However if we wish to extend our practice towards a wider political framework, we must examine present political activity and reassess the role and value of a gay politics in relation to that activity.

Political struggles have occurred in which lesbians and gay men have taken and continue to take a positive role and, at the same time, make important statements about gays and politics. Several examples spring to mind. The Trico strike of women over equal pay in 1976 involved the women at Trico mounting 24 hour pickets for many months. Groups of lesbians and gay men went to the pickets several times and though there was some reticence shown by the Trico workers, it must have been the first time for most of them to be confronted by open gays, who showed their solidarity over many weeks by helping out on the picket lines.

Lesbians and gay men have also been in much evidence at the Grunwick strike this year, which not only gives us a feeling of mutual solidarity but also shows other workers our presence. As the Gay Liberation Movement has always asserted "coming out" is a life time process which can be done in many ways.

Finally at the battle of Lewisham this August against the fascist National Front, large numbers of lesbians and gay men were in the forefront of the struggle which forced the fascists to scuttle along the pavements rather than marching down the roads with their disgusting banners.

The unifying factor in all of these actions is that large numbers of us have been able to show our solidarity with oppressed and exploited people by our group presence. This seems to me a more positive way of raising gay and non-gay consciousness at present than placing an intolerably heavy burden on isolated gays to "come out" in their unions when they have no group support.

## Ideological Work

The second area in which we need to reassess our position relates to work on the ideological level. Gay community centres, gay caucuses in unions, and gay groups generally have an important role to play. They challenge bourgeois norms and values about the way we live together and the types of relationships we develop in the wider community. At the same time such organisations bring to the fore extremely important organisational criticisms of bourgeois structures and in so doing encourage much wider rank and file involvement in the development of these groups. These developments need to go on side by side with our traditional political activity. Otherwise we will find ourselves in the dangerous position of having a lop-sided elitist movement addressing all of its actions towards other radical gays and committed socialists.

Work on the ideological level is also important because it represents socialism as a qualitatively different experience to capitalism whilst at the same time it enables us to view our activities in these areas as legitimate fields for revolutionary struggle. We are no longer being solely confronted by the message that the only "good revolutionary" is for example, a dock workers' shop steward — and male at that. Thus the success of any revolutionary practice begins to be seen in the perspective of gaining support through challenging *all* the bourgeois capitalist dominated structures; in the ideological and political as well as the economic spheres.

## Lesbians and Gay Men

The relationships between lesbians and gay men, even when we define ourselves as socialists too, have often been an explosive issue. In the early G.L.M. lesbians and gay men found it increasingly difficult to work together and the need of the lesbians for a women-defined situation took them out of the G.L.M. and into the women's movement. Today, though, even if some areas of our personal lives remain separate our common areas of struggle as socialists draw us together. There is a pressing need to begin to share experiences of our oppression in relation to dominant ideological areas, in relation to our work situations, and finally in relation to our practice as rank and file unionists. Out of these discussions it may even be possible for lesbians and gay men to start to tread gingerly into the explosive arena of discussions around sexual practice and personal relationships.

Lesbians will continue to organise autonomously, but I feel it is important that there be a working relationship in limited areas as a means to unifying and strengthening the gay movement in its struggle against sexism and for socialism. However, to call at the present time for large scale joint conferences and campaigns in the hope that a basis will be laid for lesbians and gay men to work together seems out of touch with current needs or possibilities. By the end of all past conferences it became apparent that lesbians would continue to work in the women's movement. In reality we have never been able to define areas of activity, on a large scale and in the long term, which were relevant to all of us. Consequently these events have tended to separate us — the opposite of their intention.

Lesbians and gay men can work together in a practical way. For instance both groups have been involved in Trico, Grunwick and at Lewisham. In the latter case many gay men took their lead from the women's group which was well stewarded, highly disciplined and sang the best songs throughout the march and demonstration. Through these joint activities we are more likely to be able to explore common areas of concern whilst at the same time developing contacts between the two groups. It is imperative, therefore, that gay men should participate in particular struggles of the trade union movement against racism as well as carrying out their day to day union work.

## Parties and Movements

The way in which we carry out our political activity leads to all sorts of agonising questions about whether we can best work in an autonomous group or whether we should join a political party. Party activists often say that it is up

to us to change the party by working in it. A heavy task — build a new revolutionary party and smash capitalism at the same time. This attitude tends to deny the role and importance of autonomous movements.

It needs to be stated quite categorically that such movements have a vital role to play in extending any revolutionary struggle. They reach many groups of people in an explicitly political milieu who for quite valid reasons are unwilling to join a particular party. Simply put, the role of an autonomous movement is to organise independently around issues affecting that group. What has been vital in the development of the gay movement is that it has been able to explore the *personal* in a framework which does not exist within a formal party. It has been able to draw into its movement sections of society who are oppressed yet are unable to explore that oppression in a party. This does not mean that the gay movement is not political or is not struggling for revolutionary change. Out of the movement have sprung activists, theoreticians and some who have moved into parties. At the same time the gay movement has often provided support for many of us to become actively involved in wider political work. What the gay movement has been able to do, therefore, is raise the consciousness and political awareness of its own members. At the same time it has taken issues outside to the public and the revolutionary left which were never raised before the growth of autonomous movements.

This growth has called into question many of the sacred cows of left parties' practice and dogma. This is especially true concerning vital questions relating to the organisation and programme of left groups. A small section on the left has just begun to debate the shortcomings of democratic centralism and in what ways Leninist theory and practice has to be related to present day needs.

These discussions are not only important to those of us outside of parties, but must form the basis of an on-going critical examination by those already in left groups. Principles of Leninist organisation cannot be taken as immutable. The complex relationship between those outside the parties, the rank and file of any party, and the leadership of that party cannot be ignored. A discussion around these difficult areas would help to suggest to those of us on the outside that both sides of the democratic-centralism equation were in balance. At present there is a grave suspicion that we have a little too much centralism without the corresponding democracy.

The relationship which the gay movement can have with the left is also determined by the movement's ability to respond to the left's organisation around areas of struggle in which the movement can be supportive. It would be naive, for instance, to pretend that the gay movement could have organised the mass struggles at Grunwick or Lewisham. We did, however, help to shape these events by our presence, for instance, on organisational committees at Lewisham, whilst the events of the particular day were determined by the interplay of all the non-aligned groups with those in parties. Members of parties should accept, therefore, that the presence of large numbers of non-aligned groups is just as important as aligned ones. Both groups can gain from the solidarity expressed on such occasions.

Sometimes one feels, though, that an open gay presence is not always seen as particularly useful when it comes to converting workers to socialism. But the purpose of activity is not solely an issue of smashing capitalism; it is equally related to the development of consciousness and the breaking down of myth and prejudice. All comrades on the left have an absolute political duty to break down oppression wherever it exists.

## The Individual and Political Practice

Whatever the nature of our political work, whether it be within a party or in an autonomous movement, we have to translate our theory and practice at our workplace and in the community. It is in this milieu, away from the glass-houses of campaigns and conferences, that lesbians and gay men can work individually and politically. On an individual

basis we can relate our experiences of oppression to others, whilst at the same time it is possible to talk about the links between the personal and the political. This is one very important way of drawing people into a political process who would otherwise find conventional political meetings alienating. As a part of the same process we can begin to show that the struggle to control our own lives, whether it be at home, at work, or with friends, is an intensely political process which will help us to look at the way bourgeois norms and values can be instrumental in the way we live our lives.

The value of this type of activity is that it enables thousands of people to be reached who are not involved in conventional political struggle. At the same time it enables us to break down much of the mythical propaganda about "lefties" who are often solely presented and perceived as terrorists, students or middle class academics removed from the realities of everyday living.

This type of politics is important because it gains vital support for socialist ideas which is the first step towards involving people in the struggle for socialism.

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# How Time's Gone By

A Review of Gay Theatre  
by Derek Cohen

In March 1975 a series of plays opened lunchtime at the Almost Free Theatre in London's West End under the general heading of *Homosexual Acts*. These plays dealt in some way or other with homosexuality and the company that performed them was called Gay Sweatshop — fore-runner of the present day Gay Sweatshop companies. In September this year the men's group of the present Gay Sweatshop unveiled its latest production — *As Time Goes By*. The two reviews below show that gay theatre has come a long way. It is no longer enough to have plays which just show the daily lives of lesbians and gay men — TV soap operas can do as much. It is not even enough to include an appreciation of our oppression. Gay theatre now seeks to remind us of our history; we are encouraged to recognise the patterns in our lives to see that unless we act together to change its direction, history will surely repeat itself. Gay theatre has become a conscious political medium.

## *Homosexual Acts*

The plays from the 1975 lunchtime season, together with a longer evening production, have been reproduced in a book called *Homosexual Acts* after the series. There are five plays in the book — *One Person, Fred and Harold*, and *The Haunted Host* all by Robert Patrick, *Thinking Straight* by Lawrence Collinson and *Ships* by Alan Wakeman.

When I saw the lunchtime plays two years ago I felt a rush of enthusiasm for them — here were theatrical events that related in some way to something that was part of me — my homosexuality. It was gladdening to be able to take friends to these plays and show them that not all theatre was about heterosexuality, but that gay people too also had a place on the stage (or floor as the Almost Free Theatre stage tends to be). Reading through those same plays now in a block I find myself viewing them differently, not just across time, but from each other as well. By reading them together the biases and inferences, the less obvious messages that the plays and the characters in them convey, became more apparent.

Gay women and men are, on the whole, isolated and invisible. This means that images of gay people in the media are that much more valuable to the public and to ourselves as guidelines; theatre companies presenting 'gay theatre' and those writing for such a theatre have a special responsibility not incumbent upon more traditional theatre. In presenting a number of plays under the banner of *Homosexual Acts* the audience will consciously be expecting to see realistic images of gay people. Because of the way the Almost Free Theatre presented the plays it would seem fair to assume that gay people, or at least those connected with the company, approved of the images being presented. I am not here denying the difficulty there has always been of finding good gay material for the theatre or of getting that material produced. But in agreeing to put on the plays reprinted in the book there was a collusion with their images.

For me the best play in the book is *Thinking Straight* by Lawrence Collinson. It concerns a playwright, Lawrence, who is rewriting an autobiographical play in its original gay setting as opposed to the heterosexual love affair he felt obliged to couch it in ten years previously in order to get it shown on television. On the stage he is confronted with two examples of himself — the female character who took his part in the heterosexual version and the man who he was in the actual situation. During the play the author is confronted over and over again by his male self about the way he fitted gay relationships into heterosexual moulds. He is challenged about how, despite the transformation from a heterosexual relationship into a supposedly more honest gay one he is using the same clichés about romantic love, despair, disillusionment, sacrifice, jealousy and fidelity. He is reminded by The Man that "... a gay man or woman has to consider his or her sexuality in far wider terms than straights think about theirs." He is confronted about his own double standards — that on the one hand he claimed not to "go to bed with anyone unless I really love him" but was content also to have a series of "brief encounters" on the side. Lawrence didn't even believe, himself, in the values he presented in his play. This play





well illustrates the dangers of applying heterosexual norms about relationships and sex to gay relationships: one cannot simply turn a he into a she or vice versa and have a gay as opposed to a straight play. As *The Man* says "... we don't have to commit adultery; we don't have to be promiscuous. All these are hetero concepts based on the nuclear family tradition. We can have one lover or we can have ten or we can have a thousand ...".

It is a pity that Robert Patrick didn't see or read *Thinking Straight* before writing his plays. It is a pity that the theatre company did not apply the principles of *Thinking Straight* to their own productions.

*One Person* concerns the social life and relationships of a man, his difficulties in relating other than from behind a thick veneer of joviality and outrageous humour. In essence he is a very lonely man who takes the opportunity during the play to reminisce about his relationship with someone supposedly in the audience. *Fred and Harold* concerns two men trying to relate to each other sexually and emotionally. The play lasts ten minutes and we are presented with a brief slice of their lives — no past — no future — perpetually trying to get close but at the same time keeping themselves apart. *The Haunted Host* — a much longer play than the rest concerns, like the other two, the difficulty a gay man has in relating to another man. In this play a rather manic playwright tries various ploys to entrance and yet at the same time repel a new friend who is the split image of his previous and now dead lover who still haunts him.

That any of the plays by Robert Patrick was in this season seems to be because the characters in them are gay. Yet all of them expect us to accept the characters just as they are, normal hung up men having difficulties getting on with other people who happen to be men. There is nothing else in them that marks them out as being gay, and this is, I think, because they are essentially plays about heterosexual relationships. Seen in this way the feelings and ideas, the ways of relating all become immediately much more understandable. The jealousy and possessiveness, the preoccupation with relating to one other person in a monolithic relationship are easy to understand in the life history of heterosexuals, yet they are presented in these plays as something normal and to be accepted without question in the lives of gay men. Yet there is no need for us to relate in this way. As I have said one does not get a gay plot merely by changing the sex of one or more of the characters. Having Juliet fall in love with another woman does not make *Romeo and Juliet* a lesbian play; turning Ophelia into a man doesn't make *Hamlet* a play about gay men. These examples should make the point clear. To present gays as being no different except for what we do in bed is not only irresponsible but totally inaccurate. Where in these three plays is the oppression — self and external — that affects all gay men? Nowhere does he show why these characters seek the sort of relationships they do — modelled on heterosexual norms. As I have said I think the reason is that primarily these plays are about heterosexuals who are *passing as gay*. The reasons are beyond me.

*Ships*, the remaining play in the book, is a series of three linked scenarios about "... chance encounters with strangers ... every such chance encounter could still be the start of a marvellous adventure". In this play self-oppression, repression, isolation are presented. Though limited, that this play does at least acknowledge these forces in our lives makes it much closer to 'gay theatre' as it should be.

For the first time in 1975 theatre audiences in London were given the chance to see some plays self-identified as about homosexuality. The selection they got is something we should be ashamed of. They lack any depth, not about people, but about homosexuality. They ignored lesbians, contributing further to their invisibility. Largely, they showed gay men failing to relate easily to each other. That these men failed is certainly due to their trying to do so on the basis of heterosexual norms. Yet the audience is not helped, apart from in *Thinking Straight*, to question these norms and can easily come to the conclusion that it is

because the men are gay that they fail, that tragedy is the logical outcome of being outside the norm, and that if only they were better at relating like heterosexuals they could be happy. In order to be useful gay theatre must question, it must show what is different about being gay; it must show our difficulties and our joys in a context — the context of a heterosexually dominated society with heterosexual norms about relationships. Where these norms and pressures go unchallenged, maybe not even acknowledged, gay plays like these become a series of heterosexual acts.

### *As Time Goes By*

*As Time Goes By*, the latest Gay Sweatshop production is an excellent play. Not only does it have a tight script enacted with flair and inspiration but it also succeeds in presenting some essential points about the political situation of gay men, both in relation to each other, and to 'straight politics'.

The first section of the play centres around a male brothel in 1896, the year after the Oscar Wilde trials. We watch the tensions mount between the brothel keeper and his 'boys' as they strain under the pressure firstly of their aristocratic customers and secondly the Law. The aristocrats too have to react to the increasing repression of homosexual activity and the only characters who seem unscathed are Edward Carpenter, sexual reformer and Utopian Socialist, and his lover who lead an idyllic life in the country. When the repression starts biting the brothel inhabitants receive the full weight of the Law's retribution while the rich customers have their wealth and power to support their escape to less oppressive parts abroad, beyond the Law's reach. In the face of oppression the gay men divide along class lines fighting each other. Meanwhile, outside the hurly burly of the city, Carpenter and lover read about the events from afar, but are unaffected and so can kiss and cuddle in the fields, tell the local cleric to mind his own business and generally avoid the consequences of their homosexuality by isolating themselves.

Thirty five years later we see a different group of gay men earning their daily bread in Berlin. The men are more filled out as characters, two drag artists, a club owner and Hans a communist from Bavaria who comes to Berlin to



SHARON SMULLEN

Professor Hirschfeld, German researcher into homosexuality, hears news reports of his work.

find the bright lights and sets up home with one of the drag queens. Their show business lives take place against a backdrop of ever nearing fascism in Germany and the return of laws governing sexuality in the USSR. While presenting his analysis of the rise of fascism (unemployment, inflation) and the importance of the fascists own men (the storm-troopers) taking to the streets, Hans has to admit that socialist practice does not seem to have the answer either. The others put their faith in the number of homosexual men among the fascists, believing that as long as the homosexual Roehm had control they would be safe. When he is shot the repression increases and they all need to flee.

As in the earlier period wealth threatens to divide the men, the moneyed club owner vs the poorer staff. Meanwhile Magnus Hirschfield, theoretician, founder of the Institute for Sexual Science, and a direct influence on these men is out of the country and we see him and his lover in Paris reading about Roehm's death and the rising campaign against homosexuals (see photo). Safe in Paris he fails to grasp that his Institute and all his records have been looted and burnt. Those records include some on Lenny, one of the drag stars, and we leave the period as the Nazis roam the streets looking for him. Theory and practice are countries apart.

The third period is set in a gay bar on Christopher Street in New York in 1969. We are shown how diverse the gay men are, each soliloquising (in one case silently) about his own experiences, for no-one is listening. Many stereotypes are represented — the drag queen, the leather man, the college socialite, the liberal businessman. Yet in the face of harassment these men do not become split, they transcend their differences and achieve cohesion in action, changing themselves in the process.

What is most beautiful about this play is the very many parallels it draws. Sometimes these arise because past events are described that are ever present to us now — the unemployment, inflation and it becoming 'almost respectable' to beat up Jews in the streets in the 1930's tallies

closely with our present economic position and the attacks on gays in the streets and courts. Sometimes the parallels are internal to the play — in the late 1920's fascists used to wear identifying badges under their lapels — guess where the New York policeman wears his. Often the parallels are with issues as vital to gay socialists now as then. The way that gays were split along economic/class lines bears strong resemblance to the situation that many gay socialists find themselves in today. We could learn a lot from the discussions in the play about the abuses of scientific methods and the danger of using scientific evidence to support political theory. If they identify Jews by the shapes of their foreheads and noses might they yet try to identify gay men by how broad our hips are?

This play succeeds because it presents a historical account of gay oppression which we can extrapolate to our present day situation. The parallels are there with the events and relationships of 1896 and the 1930's. We certainly need more of the spirit that emerged in 1969 in New York. But this is not enough. More than being shown how gay people can be split in the face of oppression we need an analysis of why gay women and men have been oppressed since the middle ages at least. We see gay men questioning other people's explanations of their condition — illness, third sex or whatever. It is commendable to start the chronology of gay history in 1869 when Benkert coined the term 'homosexual'. But we never see any of the characters, whatever their status, questioning this definitional constraint. Maybe it never happened and would be unhistorical to include it in the play.

Despite these shortcomings *As Time Goes By* presents more about gay politics than practically any other gay cultural event to date. It is entertaining. It is informative. It is stimulating. It works. *As Time Goes By* will be touring around the country for much of 1977 at least. Go and see it.

*Homosexual Acts* is published by Inter-Action Imprint price £1.20

## N.O.O.L.

The National Organisation Of Lesbians

250 women crammed into a hall in Nottingham on Nov 5 for the first conference of the National Organisation Of Lesbians. We decided almost unanimously to use 'lesbians' instead of 'gay women' in the title because 'lesbian' is used to frighten and repress any woman who steps out of line, and for us not to use it would be a collusion in this repression and in our own invisibility.

In the first session our two aims became very clear: the need to break down the isolation of women approaching lesbianism, but also to go out and smash the negative image of lesbians, through political action such as pressure groups, public education etc. These two aims may appear separate, but they 'are closely interlinked — until we publicise and take action against the very real discrimination against lesbians eg. in child custody cases, in sackings and a forced 'closet' existence at work, in the lack of information on homosexuality in sex education etc etc, isolated women will continue to be forced to hide their lesbianism, sometimes even to themselves. During the conference we were reminded of what we are up against: the London bus's windows were broken, a brick landed on one woman's neck, women wearing lesbian badges were insulted in a pub and told they were not 'real women' and a crowd of kids and youths hung round the doors all evening, pestering the women going in and out. The only way we can say 'Yes I'm a lesbian and proud of it' is to join together and support each other in taking action against this and all the other types of oppression.

We decided that NOOL will be an autonomous organisation and not affiliate to any other body. We agreed that we do not want a hierarchical organisation but after much discussion decided to have another conference at the end of February in York to deal particularly with the issue of structure. Until then we are concentrating on local organisation: a telephone contact list is being drawn up and existing switchboards asked to have women only services at certain times (any woman interested, contact the newsletter committee). A telephone tree for quick mobilisation on national issues is being set up. A newsletter with reports on this conference, a contact list, and material for the York conference will come out in January. Anyone interested in working on the following pressure groups, contact the newsletter committee: lesbian custody cases, sex education in schools, lesbians in the armed forces, aversion therapy and discouragement of lesbianism in psychiatry, discrimination at work.

Two treasurers have been appointed (we have £200 so far) and until the next conference all donations etc should be sent to the National Organisation Of Lesbians, c/o Maureen Colquhoun, the House of Commons, London SW1.

The February conference organisers need help — NOOL conference, c/o York Women's Centre, 32A Parliament Street, York, Yorks.

Newsletter committee (deadline: Jan 7th) c/o Su Allen, 38 The Chase, Clapham SW4.

Helen Bishop

Notes on the National Film Theatre Season of Gay films, July 1977 by Paul Hallam and Ronald L. Peck.

Despite attempts by the Festival of Light to stop the gay season at the National Film Theatre, and the consequent low profile the season got within the NFT itself (no display or stills, just a stark list of titles), the season afforded gays in London their first real opportunity to confront images of themselves in films ranging from 1924 to the present. The films were from a number of different countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Britain, Italy, Canada, the United States and Hong Kong – and represented different areas of film activity, from commercial mainstream cinema (thriller, melodrama, social realist drama, comedy, horror, kung fu, 'soft' pornography) through to documentary, independent and avant-garde cinema.

There were inevitable disappointments and gaps all the same: the distributors of *A Very Natural Thing* refusing to allow the NFT a single screening; the inclusion of some easily accessible films – *Satyricon*, *A Bigger Splash* – at the expense of less available ones, like *Saturday Night At The Baths*; the exclusion of Warhol (*The Couch*, *My Hustler* and *Flesh* being particularly relevant to the season); the exclusion of any 'hard' pornography (a BFI ruling), despite the proliferation of gay porno cinemas, and the well-known existence of gay porno 'classics' like *Boys In The Sand*, *Pink Flamingos* and *Pink Narcissus*; the exclusion of any current avant-garde work (for that one had to go to Bristol, where Super-8 work was shown in the context of a lively and provocative discussion); and perhaps the cultural range was not as large as one might have hoped, being almost exclusively North-west European and American. But it was a pioneering season that introduced a lot of scarcely-known films and reintroduced others that were out of circulation.

It is important to see the season in the context of recent developments in the cinema generally. We have moved on from the time when gay characters were simply absent from the screen to a time when they are almost obligatory. *Mean Streets*, *Carwash* and *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* all have their token gay characters. And in *Dog Day Afternoon* and *The Ritz*, they are central to the action. And this does not include independent films like *Sebastiane*, which was sold almost exclusively on its claim to be the first truly gay film. But "more" clearly doesn't mean "better". The representations of homosexuality in *The Ritz* and *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* are as objectionable as any in the cinema. Like one of the more recent films shown in the NFT season, *An Investigation of Murder*, the gay world is invaded for easy laughs. In the case of *Investigation* . . . being in addition lumped alongside uncomplicated pictures of drug addiction, prostitution and violent crime – part of the seamy underside of the city, seen from a very sure, and straight, point-of-view, usually that of the star character (Walter Matthau) or his sidekick (Bruce Dern), located firmly in the norm (however broken or shattered) of suburban family life.

It is an understanding of this perspective – that of the norm – that perhaps supplies the best introduction to the films shown in the season. In varying degrees, a consensus notion of what is usually understood by "normality" is present, even if present-through-being-absent; in all of the films, sometimes re-enforced, sometimes questioned, and sometimes rejected for a new notion of normality.

In relation to the films discussed in this article, we have asked two fundamental questions:

1. What is the presumed notion of normality in the film?
2. How is homosexuality shown in relationship to it?

We have centred the discussion on five films from the season – *The Third Sex*, *The Loudest Whisper*, *Victim*, *Sunday Bloody Sunday* and *Some Of My Best Friends Are*. – all of them arguably negative films about homosexuality, ending as they do in a miraculous conversion to heterosexuality, suicide, reaffirmed marriage, loss, and bolted doors between lovers, but which seem to us to be important stepping stones in *complicating* popular notions of what

# IMAGES OF HOM IMAGES OF HOM

homosexuality is. All of the films shown in the NFT season need writing about, but these five seemed to us to be the most exceptional in respect of the above questions, whilst at the same time reflecting, in their chronology, the progressive attitude to homosexuality in the West.

## The Third Sex

Produced in Germany in 1957, *The Third Sex* (formerly entitled *Different From You And I*) is ostensibly about a late adolescent boy's 'rescue' from homosexuality and 'conversion' to heterosexuality.

The film's frame of reference is the courtroom; which opens and closes the film. There, the boy's mother is on trial for her role in exploiting a servant girl in her effort to 'normalise' her son. Given the terms in which the film apparently presents homosexuality, as dark, corrupting and introverted, and the actual celebration of the boy's moment of conversion, it puts the film peculiarly out of joint that it is the boy's mother, and not, for example, Dr. Winkler, the homosexual 'corrupter of youth', who is, from the very beginning of the film, on trial. The mother is not on trial for *wanting* to change her son (that much the court understands) but for the means she chose to do it. Nevertheless, it throws the film against itself, for the mother, as part of the family, is otherwise to be seen as embodying values that the film sets against homosexuality.

Once the narrative proper begins (the story of the boy as told by the mother), the heterosexual and the homosexual



# MOSEXUALITY MOSEXUALITY

worlds are increasingly clearly circumscribed, the homosexual world being seen as a threat and a danger 'out there'. The central setting of the film is the family living-room, dominated by the image of the father, who is often shown sitting at his desk. A successful businessman, he dresses with conventional respectability (a dreary suit linking him with the business world at large) and speaks and moves with an uncompromising stiffness. The image of Marlon Brando's Major Penderton, in *Reflections In A Golden Eye*, whose homosexual feelings are disguised by the clipped military manner that serves as the norm in the stricter circumference of a military base, is only an extension of the image of the father. The mother, by contrast, is presented as the archetypal complement: softer, kinder, more relaxed, more loving, connected with the 'outside' world only through her husband, the home-maker, the refresher, the ultimate attractive decoration. In these two and the 'balance' between them, the stable values of family and business life are embodied.

From the start, the son is shown to be 'divorced' from the family, repudiating the authority of the father and preferring art to business. He spends all of his free time with a friend, who stimulates this preference for art with readings from a novel that he is writing, with literary discussion, and with listenings to recordings of 'musique concrete' ... The relationship is presented as lively, physical, inquisitive and creative, but is referred to by the parents as something unnatural and wrong. The friend is seen as a bad influence and the son ordered not to see him, even on one occasion being locked in his room.

A shot from a sequence later in the film places the friend against the night sky, outside a garden gate, intercut with his point-of-view of a brightly lit scene of boys and girls dancing together under the approving eye of one of the girls' fathers. Interestingly, whilst the main character is shown to be capable of normalisation later in the film, the friend is shown to be unredeemable and one can't help feeling that a small scene in which it is disclosed that he has been brought up by his mother alone, and that his father was a dancer, is meant to explain that. The terms of the relationship are to be understood then as that of the innocent waylaid by the corrupted, of the 'realistic' business world temporarily subjugated by the fantastic world of art.

The homosexual milieu is most fully expressed in a setting clearly dramatised as the classical opposition to the boy's family home: Dr. Winkler's home. It is dark and expressionistically lit where the family home is dully and evenly bright. There are the curves of nude male statuary and abstract painting as against the linearity of the desk and the rows of encyclopaedic volumes (in which the father and mother pore over the definition of "the third sex"). Dr. Winkler is the alternative father, an artist who dresses casually and moves gracefully, who is surrounded by beautiful things and beautiful people. His home is a night-time gathering place, with erotic entertainments (art having the strongest link in the film with Eros) ... semi-nude youths wrestling on the dimly-lit living-room carpet, accompanied by music (compare the opening sequence from *Sebastiane*, which uses similar imagery to describe decadence).

We are aware that homosexuality is 'other' from the start, when the homosexual friend is attacked at school, and throughout the film the house of Dr. Winkler is understood as shut away from view, 'underground', *self-created* and operating under different norms. There is an important part in the film where the boy's father, in the company of a friend, leaves his house and the world he is sure of to seek out the world he believes his son to inhabit. It is a journey through opinions and alternative points of view that started with the seeking out of the authority of the encyclopaedia. A psychiatrist is consulted, the mother of the homosexual boy questioned and a cabaret with a drag artist visited, the last-mentioned making the father particularly edgy and uncomfortable. He ends up at Dr. Winkler's, where he is refused admission. But later in the film, when Dr. Winkler is out in the streets, he is stopped by the police.

The actual conversion of the son carries no conviction whatsoever ... the sight of the servant girl's naked body and the reassuring strains of a classical piece of music driving him to the point of *taking* the woman in the 'masculine' manner (pinning her to the garden lawn outside the house), which she, in the classical 'feminine' manner, resists-then-embraces, thereby discovering the joys of the heterosexual relation (celebrated by a soaring musical theme far-away from the musique concrete of Dr. Winkler's), and thereafter rejecting his friend's company and Dr. Winkler's house. He becomes the model of his father and the servant girl the model of his mother, taking possession of the house for the brief time that both parents are away (part of the mother's strategy).

Since the episode of the son's conversion is so weak and unconvincing, even as 'plot', one is left with the structural opposition of the heterosexual and homosexual worlds. There can be no doubt at all of the film's intended meaning: the dissolution of Dr. Winkler's evenings and the son's healthy restoration to the family fold are triumphantly related. But the dullness and stiffness of the family in no way compensates for the excitement and eroticism of the gayworld; and the hindsight with which one views the film today only exaggerates further the 'seriousness' of the one and the 'playfulness' of the other. It looks rather like the biblical epics of the fifties and sixties, where the oppositions are similarly caricatured and resolved. The images and the associations of homosexuality (particularly with art) are sufficiently strong in the film, even today, for the film





to have an ambiguous effect. And it is an effect that is strengthened further, as indicated earlier, by a narrative structure that has the mother on trial for manipulating the situation with the servant girl, thus throwing the authority of the heterosexual norm itself into doubt.

#### The Loudest Whisper

*The Loudest Whisper* was made four years later (1961) in Hollywood with two star actresses, Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine, playing two teachers who run a small rural school for girls. Based on Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*, it dramatises the effect of a maliciously circulated rumour — "the loudest whisper" — that the two teachers are enjoying a lesbian relationship. Unlike *The Third Sex*, there is no structural opposition between heterosexual and homosexual worlds, indeed the implicit tragedy of the drama (though it is one that the film itself seems to impose) is that there is no alternative to the heterosexual world; there is no place for the homosexual to go.

In the opening scenes of the film, the 'normality' of the world is all-pervasive. It is Open Day at the school and parents and children alike enjoy the freedom of the school and the gardens, where refreshments are served by the young teachers in the sunlight. It's a mood of gaiety and expansiveness, confirmed even by the accounts, which balance for the first day since the school opened. As the film develops, the images become tighter, darker and colder, never recovering the easy spontaneity of the opening.

Even at the beginning of the film, though, there are clues that the equilibrium is precarious. The two teachers, Karen and Martha, are involved in very different relationships: Karen is engaged to be married to a young (and curiously dull) doctor, connecting her to possibilities outside the school; Martha is 'stuck' with her Aunt Lily, the temporary guest who never departs, pulling her *into* the school further. It is a row between Martha and Aunt Lily, overheard by the monstrous child-agent of the film, that starts the rumour. Martha's apparent jealousy of Karen's relationship with Joe is called "unnatural" and strange. The same child, Mary, later catches sight of Karen and Martha embracing. Seeking revenge out of all proportion for a justly given punishment, Mary tells her grandmother that the two teachers are lesbians. The grandmother removes her at once from the school, and very quickly all of the other parents have done the same, leaving the school empty. The delivery boy refers slyly to the relationship when he drops in the groceries. Cars begin to pull up in the road at the front of the school, and fingers to point, making it impossible for the two teachers even to take a walk in the gardens. Even Karen's fiancé expresses doubt as to whether the two women are homosexual or not.

For most of the film, the drama hinges on the apparent injustice of the rumour. The audience is encouraged to think of the rumour itself as vicious and untrue, referring to something so hideous it is even unspeakable. The actual scene of Mary whispering the rumour to her grandmother is dramatised in a way that strongly endorses this impression, the audience hearing none of the words but catching their effect on the close-up contortions of the grandmother's face. In that close-up, the film produces its strongest image of the conventional response to the idea of lesbianism. As the effects of the rumour escalate, the desire is to see the child repudiated and the effects undone, the equilibrium of the opening scenes restored. To that end, Karen and Martha seek to clear their names.

It is easy to take away the impression that Mary is the villain of the piece. Certainly she is presented from the start as the monstrous child, exceptional in her self-centredness, and a terrifying bully. But the extent of the damage done by the rumour is only possible because of the general consensus of opinion in the film that such behaviour between women is strange, wrong and "unnatural". For the child, the authorisation of this point-of-view is to be found in the adult world. It is Aunt Lily who harangues Martha's behaviour as unnatural and it is the action of the girl's grandmother, in removing her from the school, that compounds the sense that it must be very awful behaviour



*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*

indeed. The fact that every child, without exception, is removed by its parents, stresses the community consensus on this. Even Martha and Karen share this viewpoint, wanting more than anything else to clear their names, to *prove* that they are not really lesbians at all. In their isolation, they both learn however *what it would be like if they were lesbians*. It is a common indirect approach to 'problem' areas in the Hollywood cinema. In *Gentleman's Agreement* Gregory Peck learns what it's like to be a Jew, without being a Jew. In *Pinky* Jeanne Craine, as a half-caste, learns what it's like to be both black and white, without being either. *The Loudest Whisper*, for most of its length, guarantees the audience the security of knowing that these two teachers are not really lesbians. Whatever prejudices the audience brings in with it will be exploited further by most of the film, confirmed in the manner in which everybody within the film wants to disassociate themselves from lesbianism.

Once the rumour has been exposed as untrue, the grandmother, *the* pillar of the community, humbles herself and apologises to the teachers, promising compensation and restoration. But the drama is not, after all, resolved. The isolation of Karen and Martha has had its effect, in its completeness bringing them much closer together than, say, Karen and Joe were ever together (the earlier romantic interlude between them seeming very lightweight by the end of the film).

The last section of the film is unexpected and challenges the audience at the very point when the plot seems to have worked itself out. Left alone in the school building after the grandmother has made her apologies and left, Martha 'admits' that she *does* have homosexual feelings for Karen after all. It's as if she had never allowed herself to explore that possibility until this moment, either not knowing about these feelings at all or, knowing about them, but not being able to express them. There's no reproach from Karen, only warmth and friendliness. She suggests they take a walk, something they have not been able to do. She talks of her and Martha and Joe all going away together and starting afresh in another place. Even within the film, it's seen to be a naive solution. Having 'come out', Martha can hardly 'go back'. She hangs herself. The film presents this as inevitable action, having offered no way out for her other than continued self-oppression.

But at the same time the film implicitly condemns the community that excludes any kind of self-realisation for the homosexual. It makes the film finally very confusing. For although Martha is represented 'sympathetically' and Karen's marvellous gesture at the funeral of passing everybody by, including Joe, out of love and respect for Martha, is emotionally very strong indeed, Martha's case remains an isolated one, a sad, sorry tale that could not have ended otherwise. She was a victim of a quirk of nature.

In the end, for all the shock of the discovery of Martha's body, it is the strength of the relationship between the two women that one remembers. It is the one decent, open, honest and deeply loving relationship in the whole film. Karen's walk past the mourners, her head high, ennobles it further, and sets it apart from the community.

Victim

*Victim* begins where *Loudest Whisper* ends, with the suicide of a gay character. Released the same year as William Wyler's film (1961), it goes much further than that film in its acknowledgment and considerable understanding of the existence of a homosexual milieu, even if it lacks the other's passion and intensity.

*Victim* is basically a thriller with social realist pretensions. It starts by following a construction worker mysteriously on the run, moving from one location to another, seeking help from different men, including a car salesman, an antiquarian bookseller and an eminent barrister whom he intermittently calls. Each man rejects him and he ends up alone in a roadside cafe, trying to dispose of the contents of a parcel by flushing them down the toilet. He is caught by the police and the papers he was trying to destroy are pieced together again and turn out to be part of a dossier of paper cuttings on the barrister, Melville Farr. Farr is summoned to the police station where he is told that the construction worker hanged himself in his cell. We learn that the dead boy was homosexual and that Farr was friendly with him, giving him lifts to and from his place of work (their respective working environments having earlier been juxtaposed, suggesting the social distance between them).

The shock of the boy's death, the knowledge that he was being blackmailed for being homosexual (he was trying to leave the country at the start of the film) and a renewed appeal to Farr by the boy's best friend, who calls on Farr in his chambers and urges him to do something about the blackmailing, initiates the main action of the film, which has Farr taking on the role of private investigator and trying to break the blackmailing ring by seeking out some of the "victims" and offering himself as one. Farr is the hero, the individual with guts acting for the cowering oppressed homosexuals, risking home and "brilliant" career (a promotion is expected any day), in order to see justice done.

If the film is much-criticised today for its dubious realism, for marrying the social problem movie to the thriller and for the compromise of its conclusions, its importance for homosexuals, especially in the pre-Wolfenden days, should not be underestimated. It remains, still, in many respects, a brave film to have made and perhaps the only record we have on film of how dark and repressed the situation of most gays was before 1967.

Most importantly, the film presented the hero as homosexual. Farr is not presented as the straight barrister taking up the wrongs of the suffering homosexual; Farr is homosexual, even if he is married and acknowledges his homosexual feelings as belonging more to his past than to his present. Farr is played by Dirk Bogarde, who, in 1961, was already at the peak of his popular career as a matinee idol, but, contradictorily, has the reputation, amongst gays, of being a gay actor who has not publicly come out, and therefore a homosexual who is not homosexual. Two years after *Victim* he made *The Servant* for Joseph Losey and thereafter became the actor-as-artist, only intermittently returning to his matinee roles. The period 1961/63 is therefore the pivotal one in Bogarde's career and *Victim* rather than *The Servant* is arguably the turning point. Certainly, he risked losing his popular audience by playing a homosexual, and his image has been sufficiently ambiguous since then to gain him a gay following. Whether he is gay or not, Bogarde has come as near as the popular cinema has ever come to providing gays with a star-identification, which, when the star-identification system is so manifestly heterosexual, is important. Gays have almost always been excluded from simple star-identification, their idols always being somehow ambiguous or confused ... James Dean, Montgomery Clift, David Bowie, Elton John, David Cassidy

and Dirk Bogarde. Are they gay or are they straight?

Within *Victim*, Bogarde as Farr is located as a family man, and, as in *The Third Sex*, the family home becomes the film's central image of stability and equilibrium. But it is a family without children, which the film implies is an absence (see the scene with the wife working with young children in a school), an adequate enough symbol for an arrested marriage. At the start of the film the wife knows nothing of her husband's relationship with the construction worker and the calls the boy makes both to Farr's home and his office are ignored, shut out. When he is later detained at the police station and told of the boy's suicide, it becomes clear that this stifled aspect of his life is going to have to express itself in his home. His wife becomes suspicious and when they row, Farr 'confesses' all. The disgust of the wife never really leaves the film and a good part of the last third of the film is taken up with her dilemma, as the 'wretched' wife of a homosexual. When they close together again at the end of the film, we are meant to assume, plainly, that both will do their duty and stand by the other in the struggles to come, in which Farr warns his name will be dragged through the mire. The death of the construction worker is a dark shadow hanging over their past and there is no guarantee that Farr will not get similarly involved again. But there is a sense in which Farr is 'out' of it. Although he has the public struggle in the courts to go through, he will be fighting the case not simply as one of the victims but as a married man. The marriage has somehow come 'through' it all, proving the strength through adversity.

The homosexual milieu is to be understood as very much outside the home ... centrally located in a gay pub (The Salisbury). But gays are seen in their places of work also, in a bookshop, a car showroom, a hairdressing salon, a building site, and Lincoln's Inn, and in their homes. There should be nothing remarkable in that, but it is very rarely indeed in a film that any attempt is made to indicate, even sketchily, the 'full life' of the homosexual.

*Boys In The Band*, for example, throws away all of the 'background' information on its principal characters in the credits sequence, removing them from their working lives so that they are free to act out their angst in the vacuum of a studio apartment for the rest of the movie. *Victim* gives a good sense of gays actually rooted in complex lives outside the gay pub, involved in relationships and activities that in no way connect with the essential narrative of the film. In fact, the film impresses the notion of separate, largely unconnected lives, in which the gay pub plays no major part. Nevertheless, the gay men in the film do know each other, and the film does not enter into the ways and means by which these people met. Farr says that he met the construction worker when he was driving; the boy was thumbing a lift (the opening sequence of *L'Homme de Desir*). Perhaps Farr was cruising furtively, or maybe he really met him in The Salisbury, or another pub, or a



'A Bigger Splash'

cottage. The film does not explore these links, but merely asserts that they exist ... somehow a construction worker and a leading barrister knew each other as homosexuals and met each other, whilst at the same time the barrister was unaware that certain of his colleagues were homosexuals.

For all the 'ordinariness' of the gayworld of the film, which is what the scenes from working and social life assert, it is still shown as exploitative (the toughest blackmailer is himself associated with gay iconography), violent, vagabond, inferior, unhappy, secretive and unconscious of itself as a uniting factor. Even if we are to assume that changes in the law would eliminate the nastier aspects of it, there is nothing desirable about it, nothing to suggest that gay relationships might be as valid as heterosexual ones. In *Victim*, the gay world is marginal and unthreatening, *irrelevant* to the world of the family and the heterosexual relationship, but it is to be tolerated humanely and sympathetically. The marriage of Farr and his wife will last as long as further homosexual liaisons do not complicate it. Farr does not stand on his homosexual feelings at the end of the film, but he does, briefly, earlier, when he describes the feelings he had for the construction worker to his wife. "I *wanted* him!" he shouts. It is the film's most effective moment and comes through with such conviction that the reconciliation of husband and wife at the end seems completely false.

As if to clarify the lines of argument within the narrative of the film, there are scenes throughout between the two police officers conducting their own investigation of the blackmailing ring. It is in these scenes where the intentions of the film are least disguised: the older (and wiser?) officer arguing that the laws against homosexuality must be changed, that the old laws are charters for blackmail; the younger (the one most afraid of the homosexual inside him?) arguing against degeneracy, wondering where it will all end if homosexuality is sanctioned. There is no doubt that the film as a whole is to be taken as illustrating the older officer's argument, the younger officer's fears being sent up ludicrously (but frighteningly) in the shrill outburst ("Blasphemy!") of the woman blackmailer arrested at the end of the film, sufficiently close to the initial response of Farr's wife to be considered the 'normal' view.



#### Sunday Bloody Sunday

Ten years after *Victim*, in 1971, *Sunday Bloody Sunday* brought the 'civil rights' attitude to homosexuality to its logical conclusion, apparently equating the heterosexual and the homosexual relationship by exploring one man's relationship with a man and with a woman. In the earlier films, however subverted, there had always been a defined notion of normality, one that moved from intolerance to tolerance of homosexuality. In *Sunday Bloody Sunday* that distinction has all but gone and it is not possible to locate, with any assurance, where, if in any one place, that notion of normality is. It is most assertive in the scenes of celebration following the Bar-Mitzva, where the Peter Finch character, Daniel, is almost overwhelmed by his huge family. But then that family is specifically Jewish, and traditional Jewish, and is very different from the liberal Hodson family, whose tolerance is the most often-referred

to joke of the whole film. But both families are seen from the vantage point of a different kind of relationship: that of Alex (Glenda Jackson) and Bob (Murray Head) and of Bob and Daniel. These are the 'mature' relationships of the film and the drama is not in justifying them or in juxtaposing them against the images of family life, but in exploring what 'sexual liberation' can actually mean to adults involved in relationships, problems of jealousy and possessiveness.



As played by Glenda Jackson and Peter Finch, these are not young lovers but middle-aged people who have chosen not to marry and settle down into family life; only Bob is still very young and only he seems capable of shifting easily between relationships, and of being alone. The film does not explore Bob very far. It never enters into his point-of-view or shows him in scenes apart from Alex or Daniel, who are the real subjects of the film. The film is about their dilemma: going along with the 'sexual revolution' and 'making do' but suffering as a result, wanting, each of them, Bob around all of the time, but not able to admit that freely, frightened of expressing that and thereby losing the little that they have, and therefore compromising what they want on the basis that half a relationship is better than none. There are no big, passionate scenes ... everything is buried, becoming a struggle within the heart and mind.

There is no attempt to suggest that the relationship between Bob and Daniel is any more complicated than that between Bob and Alex. The general sense of the film is that these are equally valid relationships, neither of them better or worse than the other, and that all of these people are 'equal'. Only once does the film seriously suggest that beneath the surface there is real difference, and that very briefly, when Daniel by chance runs into an old pick-up in Earls Court. The film largely achieves its balance by cross-cutting 'matching' sequences in the lives of Alex and Daniel. One sequence has Alex having a fling with a man she is helping in her work. It is a small satisfactory experience. The 'matching' sequence in Daniel's life is entirely unsatisfactory, the confrontation with the pick-up in the street being violent and unsought. It is as if Daniel wants to forget not just that particular relationship, but what the man suggests of another way of life. Unlike Bob, who is an artist, this man is altogether from another sphere of life, rougher, and drunken. The disruptive effect he has on Daniel is compounded by the scene linked with it in which Daniel visits the all-night chemist in Piccadilly Circus, populated with 'grotesques', and has his status as a doctor questioned by the counter assistant. When he returns to the car, where he had left the man, the man is no longer there.

In providing only this episode as a clue that there is a gayworld in which people from different social groups can run into one another, the film does avoid really confronting what it is to be gay, just as it also avoids exploring Daniel's Jewish family life very far, the pressures upon him to conform, to play the heterosexual man. Of course, these avoidances can be said to be the very avoidances of the Daniel character himself, in which case the limitation of the film is the limitation of the character. Daniel inhabits a very small stratum of society, of which the picture of the

Hodson family is indicative if not typical. Within the Hodson household pretty well anything goes: the children take dope, the parents go away at weekends without their children, the children are sophisticated in matters of sex, and there is a black academic staying in the house. In this all-tolerating environment, it is not difficult to absorb both Alex and her lover and Daniel, the homosexual.

The general effect of the film is to suggest that homosexuality is ordinary and can be easily normalised. The scene at Earls Court is the film's only real concession to the view that it is normalised only within a certain class of society. It would be an easier film for most gays to relate to if the parameters of Daniel's life had been explored more fully. One cannot help coming away from the film with the feeling, 'Well, of course, *he is a private doctor . . . he is comfortably off*. No wonder *he* doesn't have many problems ..."

#### Some Of My Best Friends Are ...

If *Sunday Bloody Sunday* concludes one line of approach to homosexuality, that which plays down, avoids, or even denies any real difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality, *Some Of My Best Friends Are . . .* (1971) concludes the separatist line, ignoring possibilities of integration and normalisation in the 'real' world and instead asserting the possibilities of an alternative world, self-created, with an alternative notion of normality. They are two distinct lines that find their expression in the gay movement itself and other films in the gay season fall into one or the other: *A Bigger Splash* confirms *Sunday Bloody Sunday*; Fellini's *Satyricon*, Kenneth Anger's work, Genet's *Chant d'Amour* and the documentary *The Queen* reject conventional reality and the dramatic dynamic of opposing and contrasting the 'real' and the 'fantastic'.

*Some Of My Best Friends Are . . .* is set in a gay bar in New York on Christmas Eve. What makes it particularly interesting is that the film-makers do seem conscious of the fact that the barworld it describes is one not absolutely self-created, but one from time to time taken over in a situation of real repression. There are very brief scenes at the beginning and end of the film that show, in the opening and closing of the bar, that straight interests control it. And the bar's importance in the lives of the people it describes is stressed; as one character says, "Where else can a fairy go?"

It is this locating of itself that contextualises the indulgent proceedings of the evening. And even if the bulk of the film overthrows conventional normality with the normality of the barworld, 'reality' occasionally intrudes, as in the scene where a mother comes to reclaim her son. The scene is played for laughs (in a send-up of 'realistic' melodrama) and the mother is sent packing, leaving the barworld unripped.

The bar functions as a warm refuge from the cold 'outside' for the gays who have nowhere else to go. All human life is there. Apart from two friendly woman cloakroom attendants (one of whom thinks of the place as her home) and a straight black piano player (who has been 'normalised' within the bar), there is the middle-aged married man, the Swiss-French skier, the Rechy-styled hustler, the older man taking his 'nephew' to Europe, the transvestite, the camp waiters, the naval officer, the actor, the priest, the fag hag and the young innocent who has never been to a gay place before ... The film-makers have crammed in as many contradictions and types as possible. There is no central character in the film, no hero ... Rather than identification, there is involvement in a mosaic of different situations, all of them caricatured to the point of absurdity, and therefore not to be taken too seriously, and yet not to be taken *not* seriously.

What is very funny (and much of it is hilariously so) is also tragic, or has its serious side. There is much fun at the expense of the transvestite, for example (not particularly so, for every 'type' is a target). The film enters into 'her' romantic fantasies in which 'she' sees herself in the style of a Cyd Charisse musical. But the reality has her being groped

by a very different kind of man. Later she is savagely beaten up, which is played both for laughs (the excessive make-up) and seriously (no-one intervenes), and is rounded off with the archetypal comic situation where she is on her hands and knees looking for a contact lens.

What most seriously weakens the film is that it seems to accept and indulge in its relationship to the outside world. The characters are mostly making the best of a bad time, laughing at each other, fooling around, play-acting in histrionic Hollywood fashion, indulging fantasies, holding together in the teeth of Christmas, all of which one is able to enjoy and to understand, but it is possible only by shutting out the external reality. When the mother storms in and demands her son, there is a solidarity that makes it possible to deal with her not on her terms but on theirs. But this does not extend beyond the bar and no-one seems to want it to. There is a resignation about the characters that makes them weak.

In the end the film does not *sufficiently* locate the bar. The film breaks down into a series of comic situations and one-liners that are introverted. The gayworld *ceases* to be, as it was even in *The Third Sex*, in any way provocative, threatening or undermining. It is 'only' a tolerated, exploited pocket in the cellar of an office block, inward-looking and largely unrelated to a wider sexual-political world. A film by gays for gays ... the epic home-movie.

#### The questions remain

There is no doubt at all that the NFT's gay season should make us angry. Hardly any of the images of homosexuality were unequivocally affirmative, liberating or ... angry, though many of them were strong, exciting and passionate and, as we have tried to suggest, more complex than they might at first appear.

A season like this leaves one with two further questions:

1. If these are the *only* widely available images of homosexuality, what must be their effect on homosexuals? Although many film-makers are breaking away, even destroying traditional narrative techniques (see particularly the work of Ron Moule, Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey), they are doing so, in the area of gay cinema, before the popular cinema has provided any satisfactory narrative cinema relating to gay people. Narrative identification, for example, is being rejected by the avant-garde (perhaps always has been to some extent) at a point in time when gays can claim they still have not had it.

An initial period of identification is important to a repressed group that has *never* had adequate self-images. Gays have tended to identify with images of themselves that others have produced to suit their own purposes (rather as John Berger argues that women have), images generally weak, pathetic, comic, at best ambiguous, which have been addressed to presumed heterosexual audiences. One reason that gays still have poor images of themselves is that the screen mirrors throw back these distortions and confusions.

2. What is their effect on heterosexuals? For all their opposition to the season, the Festival of Light would surely have found their opinions largely confirmed in the films shown ... unhappiness, suicides, violence, healthy rebirth, separateness ...

Most disappointingly, there was almost nothing that challenged the heterosexual world view openly. At the same time, family life, marriage and the 'realistic' workaday world has rarely seemed so dull and predictable set against some of the passionate and fabulous images of the gay-world, never more exotically embodied than in Delphine Seyrig's lesbian vampire, in *Daughters of Darkness*.





# Gays and Fascism

by Bob Cant

Fascism is a vicious and destructive form of government which has menaced Europe and, to a lesser extent, other parts of the world over the last 60 years. It became important after the Russian Revolution when the European ruling class was struggling to resist the spread of Communism. Its importance lay in the fact that it was apparently an all-class movement. It was, in fact, simply a new means of making the working class of Europe accept the continuing domination of the capitalist class by a mixture of force and propaganda. It portrayed all other organisations as contrary to the national interest and, with the aid of its own mass movement, smashed them.

Fascism appeared, however, to have been destroyed as a significant political force in Europe by the Allied victory in the Second World War. There were fascist governments in Spain and Portugal but they were more intent on survival than expansion. Handfuls of people in this country celebrated Hitler's birthday every year but they were seen as irrelevant anachronisms.

These anachronistic Hitler-lovers are now, however, among the leadership of the fascist groups in this country. They run candidates in many local and parliamentary elections and their demonstrations provoke street-fighting not seen on mainland Britain since the 1930s. They are the most frightening political force in the country today because of the threat they represent to all collective life, including both the labour movement and the organisation of all oppressed groups. In this article I will attempt to explain the nature of fascism — both in the past and today — and to argue a case for gay involvement in anti-fascist struggle.

## Fascism in Italy

A fascist regime was first set up in Italy in 1922 and then in Germany in 1933. In Britain the British Union of Fascists was led by Oswald Mosley, an admirer of both Mussolini and Hitler. The countries which had fascist regimes or strong fascist movements had all undergone economic turmoil, had been governed by divided and confused governments and been faced by the presence of a strong, but nonetheless divided, left.

The Italian economy had not recovered from the effects of the First World War, and there was a consistent series of strikes and factory occupations in 1919-20. Representatives of the major trade unions and the Socialist Party met during the occupations of 1920 but they decided by 591,245 votes to 409,569 not to stimulate the development of the situation into a revolution. By restricting the occupations to an industrial dispute, the left lost much of its initiative. The whole country was confused and the working class was effectively leaderless. Mussolini proposed a nationalist solution which won the support of the Southern landowners, some of the Northern industrialists, the peasantry, the King and, eventually, the Church. His solution was to concentrate all political and economic power in the hands of the Fascist party. All other independent political parties and trade unions were abolished and anyone who resisted the Fascist plan, such as the Communist leader, Antonio Gramsci, was imprisoned. Many other anti-fascists were killed.

At first, the upper classes had been rather shocked by the thug tactics of Mussolini's fascist gangs but as they realised that the traditional bourgeois democratic governments of Italy could not control the workers, whereas the fascist gangs could, they increasingly took an interest. For the important thing was that although Mussolini's fascists were not of the bourgeoisie they were able to make certain sections of the workers act on behalf of the bourgeoisie.

The mass nature of the fascist movement distinguished it from other right-wing parties and enabled it to succeed where they had failed.

Nationalist ideology was one of Mussolini's important weapons. He argued that Italy had been betrayed by her wartime allies; that Italian territory at Trieste, occupied by an independent Italian force, had ceased to be Italian only through the cowardice of the Italian government; that the Italian left were Russian-backed foreign agents; that there was a need for a restoration of law and order and, later, for the values of the Church. All these things were possible, he said, under the total authority of a fascist regime. The rallies at which he screamed and shouted his ideas were to be an important vehicle for his accession to power and, later, his continued hold on it. He reached at deep-seated fears of confused and unorganised sections of the Italian people and inspired an irrational devotion to his cause.

## The Rise of the Nazis

The victory of German fascism over ten years later is better known but it shares many of the same features of the Italian experience. The economy was in total chaos — six million unemployed, a bankrupt lower middle class, withdrawal of American investment. The government was weak and increasingly resorted to rule by decree since democratic agreement was impossible. The left was divided between the more constitutionalist Social Democrats and the then ultra-left Communist Party which branded the Social Democrats as social fascists. As the situation worsened the Nazis won more and more support for their fascist solution from the peasantry, the lower middle classes, the Prussian junkers (landowners), sections of the military and a few industrialists such as the steel boss, Thyssen. The methods of thuggery were similar to those of the Italian fascists. The S.A. roamed the streets beating up their opponents, particularly Communists. Many unemployed workers, no longer under the influence of a trade union, joined the S.A. which, after all, provided them with clothes as well as a sense of purpose. This created an atmosphere of fear which spread through the whole population.

The ideological weapon was used even more extensively by Hitler than it had been by Mussolini. The concept of blood became for the Nazis a mystical and unifying force. It was not enough to preach a nationalist doctrine which denounced the treatment of Germany at the Versailles peace settlement, the menace of Bolshevism and the international Jewish conspiracy. Hitler extended nationalist ideas even further and said that German nationals could

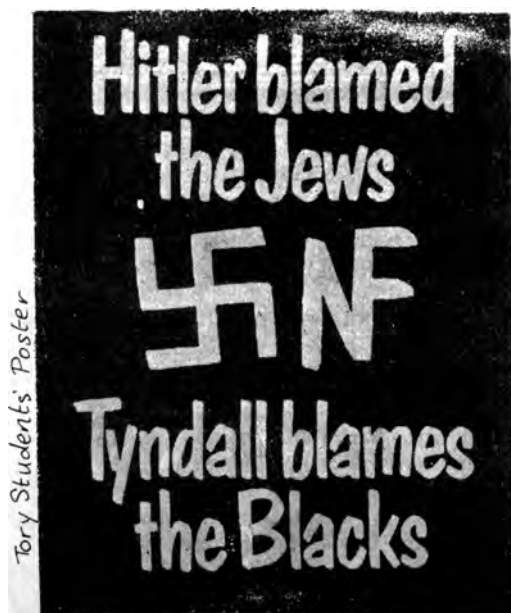


only be of the Aryan blood. All who endangered the purity of the blood — whether they were Jews or homosexuals or gypsies or physically handicapped — must be exterminated. The superiority of the Aryan blood was to be made manifest in the German nation under Hitler and its continuation guaranteed through the family.

The family was an essential social unit in the Nazi vision. The Aryan woman's major task in life was to marry an Aryan husband and produce as many children as possible. She was to be a machine for reproduction and also the installation of Nazi ideas into her young children. Obviously any open assertion of homosexuality could represent a danger to this programme. For that would suggest that sexuality might have other purposes than procreation and that was tantamount to treason. It was largely for these reasons that tens of thousands of homosexuals were sent to concentration camps and forced to wear pink triangles to identify themselves. The number of homosexuals who died in these circumstances will never be known.

The Nazi solution to Germany's problems was barbaric in a way that few thought possible in an allegedly civilised European country. Once they had taken power they dispensed with the parliamentary process and Hitler ruled by decree. All other political parties and unions were abolished and the leaders who did not escape into exile were sent to concentration camps. Cultural life ground to a halt and all forms of art (films, literature, painting) became vehicles for the expression of Nazi propaganda. Jews were debarred from holding certain jobs and from inter-marriage with Aryans; their homes, shops and synagogues were attacked and destroyed; they were moved into ghettos and then into death camps. Six million died. Hitler did provide full employment but only in the construction of a war machine which was to be a factor leading to the Second World War.

But most frightening of all is the fact that this regime came to power not only through terror but partly by the consent of the German people. Its emotive attacks on monopoly capital combined with its conservatively-reassuring nationalism struck a chord with many confused and impoverished Germans. Its message was rooted in irrationality and succeeded in offering both change and stability. But this miracle could only be achieved by faith — faith in Hitler and faith in the Nazi Party. Through this mystical process of sacrifice and suffering the Superman qualities of the German race would emerge and restore it to its former greatness. It was only shortly before he came to power that the German business community began to appreciate the value of Nazi mystical anti-capitalism in defending themselves against the concrete anti-capitalism of the left. Their sacrifice was to concede control over the form of their products. Their control vanished into the hands of the Nazi State but their profits remained.



## The National Front

Britain today is hardly on the verge of such a collapse but it is certainly ripe for the propaganda of fascist groups. Inflation is still high, unemployment has soared over 1½ millions and the government is weak. (Although the Tories may well be returned with a large majority at the next election Thatcher's attitudes to, particularly, trade unions, immigration and the social democratic under-pinnings of our society make it unlikely that she will be able to govern any more effectively than Callaghan.)

The fascist group which is manipulating the situation best is the National Front. It was formed as recently as 1967 by an amalgamation of small right-wing and racist groups. The fact that they were able to run so many candidates in local and parliamentary elections suggests that they receive financial backing from some section of big business, in addition to their members' subscriptions. The actual activists in the NF do not appear to be many but they have enjoyed some electoral success recently and in several places have pushed the Liberals into fourth place. Their major successes have been in the inner cities suffering the effects of long term neglect of housing, education and social services and also of the departure of industry for the suburbs. Most of these voters have been Labour supporters in the past but they have become increasingly disillusioned with the failure of their own allegedly working class party to improve their lot. These factors along with the cultural crisis of multi-racial living have been well exploited by the NF. There are also voters who have traditionally right-wing views and are both strongly racist and anti-union who might be expected to be in sympathy with the NF, but for the time being such people, more middle class and based in smaller towns and suburbs, keep faith with the Tories. But it might only require something like a Tory failure to end *all* immigration or to destroy the closed shop to push them on to the fascist road.

The NF concentrates for the moment, however, on the working class discontent with the decline of the inner cities. They have depicted the immigrant and indigenous black communities there as responsible for all the social ills of these areas and have begun, very effectively, to separate white worker from black worker. They now feel so confident about this line that during the Ladywood by-election in August 1977 one of their widely used posters read 'The National Front is a racist front'.

This anti-black propaganda also inspires attacks on individual blacks, black shops, houses, places of worship and other meeting points. The spread of such racism has assisted the movement of both major political parties to the right in their attitudes to immigration and both now accept the idea that a limited number of immigrants is A Good Thing. This atmosphere of fear combined with low wages and sub-standard homes makes life increasingly unbearable for most immigrants.

The links between the NF and these brutal attacks are, of course, difficult to prove and some liberals argue that such occurrences are just unfortunate. But if anyone doubts that the NF is fascist one has only to look at some of the statements they made before they became involved with electoral politics and hence with the creation of a respectable image. In 1962, Martin Webster, now the National Organiser of the NF wrote in the *National Socialist Magazine* an article entitled *Why I am a Nazi* which included the following statement.

'After visiting the HQ of the National Socialist Movement I became convinced of the correctness of the Nazi ideology ... Not a day goes past without some act of stupidity by the Jews and their allies coming to light ... acts of foolishness brought on by the chill North wind flaunting the swastika banner in the sky ... In every White land in the world Nazi movements have been formed and we join with them in the historic Nazi battle cry. Victory Hail! Sieg Heil!'

Or one can look at the programme of the Greater Britain movement founded in 1964 by John Tyndall, now

Chairman of the NF.

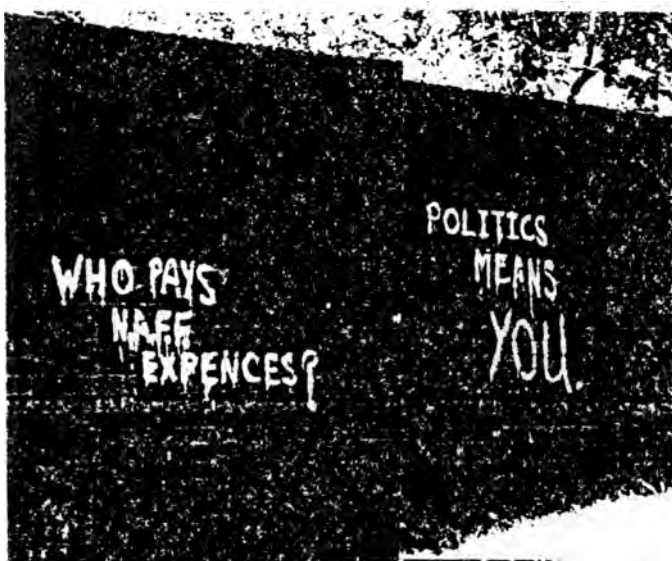
'For the protection of British blood, racial laws will be enacted forbidding marriage between Britons and non-Aryans. Medical measures will be taken to prevent procreation on the part of all those who have hereditary defects, either racial, mental or physical. A pure, strong, healthy British race will be regarded as the principal guarantee of Britain's future.'

A statement hardly designed to inspire confidence in gay activists!

Perhaps both these men would publicly repudiate such statements now. But if one looks at the policies of the NF one is hard put to find anything concrete but race hatred. Their public presence is only too reminiscent of that of Hitler's SA; a report in the *Hornsey Journal* about their demonstration in Lewisham in August 1977 reads as follows.

'I saw the protective umbrella of police marching next to NF members who were carrying pick-axe handles with nails driven through one end; another was swinging a bicycle chain over his head.'

The media, however, has generally kept quiet about this and the NF are having some success in presenting themselves as victims of unprovoked left-wing violence.



#### Supportive Factors in Britain

Although the NF is the best known fascist group there are others who assist the move to the right in the public consciousness. The National Association for Freedom, Mary Whitehouse and Enoch Powell all deny that they are fascists — and quite correctly in my opinion. But their politics give an added respectability to the politics of hatred so crucial to a fascist upsurge.

NAFF is currently concentrating on weakening the power of trade unions to take any form of action. They are best known for their support of George Ward, the Grunwick boss, against the year-long strike by his employees and also for their legal intervention when the Union of Post Office Workers planned a temporary blacking of mail to South Africa. Their success in both cases has increased the confidence of employers who feel inclined to oppose trade union demands and thereby endanger all forms of workplace organisation.

Mary Whitehouse's recent successful prosecution of *Gay News* on a blasphemy charge represents a major attack on the organised gay community. The conviction of *Gay News* and its editor no doubt gave a certain respectability to expressions of anti-gay feelings and in the weeks after the trial there was an increase in queer-bashing in London and one man was actually battered to death as he left a gay club. Similarly, in the summer of 1976, the speeches of Enoch Powell on race and immigration were followed by vicious attacks on black people and several murders took place.

The importance of the activities of NAFF, Mary Whitehouse and Enoch Powell is not lessened because they all deny they are fascists. For their activities encourage the feelings against trade unions, against gays and against blacks that feed the growth of fascism.

Many gays feel angry about the prosecution of *Gay News* but would deny any links between that and the rise of a fascist movement in Britain. Such a view ignores the overall situation in Britain. The government is weak and the economy in chaos. Traditional capitalist solutions are being used which are aggravating existing social problems such as unemployment, lack of decent housing, an inadequate health service and so on. When these solutions fail as seems almost certain they must, other solutions, not traditionally considered in Britain, must be used. They will either be to the left or to the right; the status quo will be unable to continue. A fascist takeover is unlikely in the short-term but some authoritarian government, with a measure of NF support, but preserving a democratic facade along Gaullist lines, is far from impossible.

#### Sexual Politics and Anti-Fascist Activity

It should be clear to gays that only a socialist solution is acceptable. The economism of the left and its consequent lack of interest in gay politics has inspired little confidence among gays. Despite the formal adoption of support for gay politics among many revolutionary groups their practice often remains different. The chanting of the slogan 'Tyndall is a poofter' by so-called revolutionaries outside an NF meeting during the Becksfield local by-election (October 1977) is by no means an isolated case. The left, despite this, remains open to persuasion and the existence of a gay movement has had an effect on the consciousness and practice of some parts of the left. Such persuasion is an impossibility with fascists. Opposed as they are to all forms of independent organisation they would doubtless close all gay centres, clubs and meeting places, and disband gay groups of every kind. The very best we could hope for would be survival in the closet. A far more likely fate for those who asserted the values of a gay life-style would be similar to that of the German homosexuals in the death camps of Hitler.

It may be argued that many homosexual men are drawn towards fascist organisations, and that should guarantee some kind of homosexual freedom. But such a nonsensical argument fails to recognise the elements of masculine role-playing in this particular phenomenon. The public aggressive nature of fascism both relies on and fosters authoritarian male behaviour. Emotions and sex are not publicly seen — they are designated to the area of the home. The public world is a man's world and the self-hatred of such homosexual fascists can be apparently overcome through the common bonds of the uniform and the mass rally. Women play no part in this public world. Their role as housekeeper and child-breeder ensures their dependence on and subordination to men. There can be no gender confusion in this system. The male brotherhood of the fascist movement can enable some homosexual men to ignore questions such as their own sexuality and their relations to women. They can believe that they have become 'real men'. But such a desperate strategy of physical survival is far from any concept of gay liberation.

In a situation where fascism is considered as a possible form of government any gay who wishes to reconsider gender roles, to explore new non-oppressive life styles or even to live as a couple with someone of the same sex must associate with the left. Change must come and only a victory of the left can provide the possibility of moving towards gay liberation.

Such an association with the left is not easy in view of not only their indifference or hostility to gay activism but also their own lack of unity. The Communist Party, the Socialist Workers' Party, the International Marxist Group, Big Flame and some of the Marxist-Leninist groups are committed to the struggle against fascism but none of them can honestly be said to be *the* socialist vanguard. It must

also be said that some constituency Labour Parties have participated in anti-fascist campaigns. Gays will, doubtless, join these groups and operate within them but many more will probably join nothing.

Such gays can probably learn a great deal from that section of the Women's Movement which has formed a group called *Women Against Racism and Fascism*, and mobilised very impressively for several anti-NF demonstrations. Feminists who picketed at Grunwick have written in *Spare Rib* 61 of the sense of solidarity and discipline they found among male trade unionists on the picket line. While sexism did not totally vanish, the fact that they were involved in a common struggle together opened up whole new possibilities. An organised gay anti-fascist contingent would doubtless have similar experiences.

I am not arguing for the formation of a gay group that concentrates on street fighting to the exclusion of all else. Street activity is only one part of the anti-fascist struggle. But the consciousness of that part of the gay community that responds to the cultural focus of the Tom Robinson Band and Gay Sweatshop needs a more coherent form. This is particularly true of gay men. Attempts must be made to form a gay anti-fascist movement (as opposed to a committee) that will concern itself with the formulation of a longer term strategy against fascism.

This will involve us not only in arguing for the inclusion of gay liberation on a socialist programme but also in the questions that concern the traditional left. We have a great deal to learn from the campaigns for better housing, better social services, better education and a decent living wage as well as the campaign for workers' control over the workplace. These are after all the problems which draw many disillusioned working class people towards fascism. A real socialist alternative that proposed honest solutions to them could go a long way towards diminishing the fascist appeal. It is a framework in which we can begin to present the politics of personal life in a constructive way.

### Control of the Streets

The wider anti-fascist movement, however, is not in agreement about how to oppose the NF in the short term. The Communist Party, sections of the Labour Party and the progressive wings of the churches are in favour of peaceful counter-demonstrations against the NF and also of Government bans on NF marches. Such proposals are misleading for they ignore the importance of control of the streets to fascists. Fascist regimes, on the whole, have come to power neither by straightforward seizure of power, nor by an electoral victory. In both Italy and Germany the violence they engendered on the streets created an atmosphere which enabled the fascist leaders to intimidate the Constitutional Heads of State into handing power over to them. It goes without saying, therefore, that they must not be allowed such control of the streets here.

The argument that such control of the streets can be avoided by Government bans on fascist marches is also incorrect. Such bans may be a victory in the short-term for the local labour movement but, in the longer term, they contribute to an increasing level of authoritarianism. The

police are given more legalised power to use force and a Gaullist solution becomes a greater possibility.

The call for bans also ignores the social climate in which fascism grows. For demonstrators and counter-demonstrators do not go on to the streets because they cannot think of anything better to do on Saturday afternoon. They do so because they are profoundly discontented with certain factors in their lives and socialists must address themselves directly to this discontent. To call on the government to impose a ban is an abdication from the struggle which will be inevitable in the process of bringing about socialism.

It can also be pointed out that in some areas such as Bradford and Leeds where there has been anti-fascist activity support for the NF fell in electoral terms (*Guardian*, August 20th 1977). This cannot, of course, be guaranteed but it is useful counter to the liberal argument that ignoring them will make them go away.

The position of the revolutionary left that fascists must be prevented from marching in the streets is, therefore, the correct one. The confidence which the working class, the blacks, the women and the gays (they are not as separate as this formulation suggests) gain from organising effectively against the fascists is an important element in pushing them forward to organise for a socialist transformation of society. Through each struggle we learn the value of effective action.

The way that the fascists and the anti-fascists operate on the streets is an indication of their different politics. The fascists march with weapons ready to attack their opponents if the opportunity arises – and they march not in a united way but as individuals bewitched by the sound of a drum or the sight of a banner. They remain separate from each other, united only by their dependence on and obedience to their leader. The left, on the other hand, links arms and learns and re-learns by that gesture the meaning of their collective strength. We gays, who wish to have some control over our lives, must link arms with our comrades in the working class movement, the black movement and the women's movement to drive the Nazis off the streets and clear the way for a society where gay love will be a socialist necessity.

Sources referred to for the writing of this article include:

*Socialist Worker*, *Spare Rib*, *Morning Star*, *York Feminist News*, *Guardian*, *Hornsey Journal*.

*The National Front* – Martin Walker (Fontana)

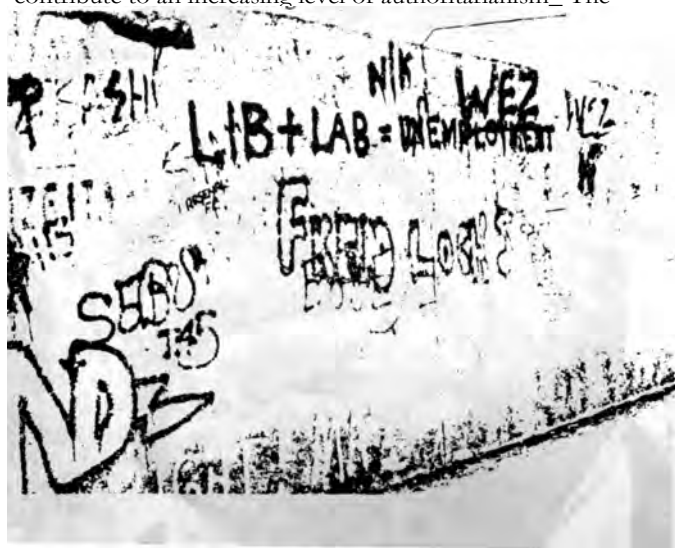
*The Mass Psychology of Fascism* – Wilhelm Reich (Penguin)

*Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front* – Leon Trotsky

*The Occupation of the Factories* – Paolo Spriano (Pluto)

*Women in Nazi Germany* – Jill Stephenson (Croom Helm)

For another analysis see David Edgar's article – 'Racism, Fascism and the Politics of the National Front' in *Race and Class*, 9/2 Autumn 1977.





# Various Routes

## Approaches to Gay History

by Jeffrey Weeks

### Works Reviewed:

A.L. Rowse, *Homosexuals in History: A Study of Ambivalence in Society, Literature and the Arts*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1977. £7.95.

Christopher Isherwood, *Christopher and His Kind 1929-1939*. Eyre Methuen, London 1977. £4.95.

Jonathan Fryer, *Isherwood: A Biography of Christopher Isherwood*. New English Library. London 1977. £7.50.

Tom Driberg, *Ruling Passions*. Jonathan Cape, London 1977. £5.95.

Arno Press Collection, *Homosexuality: Lesbians and Gay Men in Society, History and Literature*. General Editor — Jonathan Katz, New York 1975.

Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History*. Thomas Crowell, New York 1976.

1977 has been the year of the gay book in Britain. Partly this is the result of an increasing social acceptability, on a certain level, of homosexuality; partly too, deriving from this, there is a new awareness by publishers of a gay market to be tapped, an awareness already a topic of discussion in the American publishing trade press.

It would be heartening to think that this publishing (and preceding writing) activity was a direct result of the political impact of the gay liberation movement, but this is not unequivocally so. The gay movement has undoubtedly been the stimulus and pre-condition for the present developments but few of the books which have so far appeared have been a direct product of activity in and identification with gay liberation. Only three or four books (as opposed to journalism and pamphlets) published in Britain over the past half decade have come out of any direct involvement with the gay movement. I can think of Ken Plummer's *Sexual Stigma*, Jeremy Seabrook's *A Lasting Relationship*, Jack Babuscio's *We Speak for Ourselves* and *We're Here* by Angela Stewart-Park and Jules Cassidy. Homosexuality has become a topic to be reviewed in the book pages of the Sunday newspapers, but the majority of the books on the subject are still very much within a liberal conservative problematic.

This is especially true with regard to the historical treatment of homosexuality, and the works under review illustrate a number of the problems. If you believe, as I do, that attitudes to homosexuality are culturally specific, that very few societies have had the clear cut division between "heterosexual" and "homosexual" that our Western society has; that the emergence of a homosexual consciousness and identity is a comparatively recent historical phenomenon; and that attitudes to homosexuality can only be understood within the framework of wider discourses on sexuality, with their specific conditions of origin and development, then it becomes very difficult to accept (a) the traditional approach which sees homosexual history as essentially a magnificent (or tawdry depending on your position) parade of great kings and queens; or (b) the emergent gay liberation approach which searches for a "gay history" and identity back to the roots of time. One is in fact the mirror image of the other. While the first sees homosexuality as the manifestation of an inner, *essential* self, product of an individual quirk, the other sees gays as being a discrete group like a racial minority, with a long, if hidden, history of its own. Both can produce a great deal of fascinating detail and the second has the valuable function of suggesting a continuity in "our" history, but I believe both to be in the last resort ahistorical approaches, for they ignore the very processes of historical change which have produced modern notions of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

### Kings and Queens

A.L. Rowse's book is a classic example of the traditional approach, and a classic example, too, of his own style of history writing. It is essentially a series of pen portraits of famous male homosexuals, their lives, achievements, and loves. Apart from a brief chapter on the "Mediaeval Prelude", the period covered is the Renaissance to roughly post World War II, and all the expected names are here, from Michaelangelo and Leonardo to Marlowe (but definitely *not* Shakespeare), James I and VI, Bacon, Frederick the Great, "Some Russians" and "Eminent Victorians", Ludwig of Bavaria, and Ernst Rohm, through Lytton Strachey and co. to Cocteau and Mishima. Little effort is made to discuss the different cultural conditions within which their homosexual behaviour was expressed, nor to explicate how they saw themselves, surely a crucial question. And the emphasis is entirely on "achievers": not just queens of history but *great* queens. Running through the book is Rowse's usual display of snobism. Thus:

"Salai was not loyal to Leonardo — as again we often notice with inferior humans in relation to those so much above them."

Or in defending Proust's emphasis on an upper class milieu in his great novel:

"Such a society was measurably more sophisticated and subtle, more intelligent and aesthetically rewarding than any depiction of lower class life could possibly be, simple and confined, uncomplex and unintelligent as that is."

Arm in arm with snobbery is Rowse's usual vanity; not once but several times he stresses his (by no means universally agreed) "solution" to the problem of Shakespeare's sonnets, and seems at one point to compare himself with Newton and Voltaire (p.95). But of course Rowse is aware of his reputation — and plays to it. He quotes Cocteau: "Whatever the public blames you for, cultivate it; it is yourself." I think we can safely blame Rowse for this book.

### Love of the Commons Man

The memoirs of Isherwood and Tom Driberg are the raw materials for the future gay historian rather than works of history themselves. The writers were upper middle class men, with privileged access to all sectors of society, and their homosexual careers illustrate one of the most fascinating themes of the male homosexual subculture — the search for a fulfilling relationship with a young man of working class origins. For Isherwood, as he puts it, Berlin



meant boys; Driberg seems to have found young men to his taste in all times and places. It was essentially amongst middle class men that a recognisable modern male homosexual identity first began to emerge in the nineteenth century, and yet all of the leading advocates of homosexual love, from J.A. Symonds through Edward Carpenter and E.M. Forster almost to the present sought that love outside their own class. Partly this was a reaction against the stifling mores of their social milieu. Partly a sense of guilt about their sexual orientation (for the homosexual consciousness was deeply fissured by guilt and self oppression). Partly a semi-political desire to consciously smash the class barriers. The lives of both Isherwood and Driberg illustrate these themes. Isherwood was to find a way out of the contradictions by moving to California and eventual adherence to gay liberation. Driberg seems to have had a completely split life: his fellow MPs and journalists may have known of his homosexual life style; his constituents in Essex almost certainly did not. His post-humous memoirs are therefore much sadder than Isherwood's. You get a feeling, in the end, of a frustrated life despite Driberg's determined, if separate, pursuit of his twin passions: socialism and homosexuality.

The two themes are intertwined in Isherwood's life in the 1930s, beautifully retold in *Christopher and His Kind*. In the end Isherwood seems to have found an explicit commitment to socialism to have been incompatible with his homosexuality. He seems to be suggesting at the end of his book that this is fundamentally why he cast the dust of England off his feet in 1939 by emigrating to the USA. It was this 'betrayal', as seen by fellow socialists, that occasioned the one encounter between the different approaches of Isherwood and Driberg described in Jonathan Fryer's biography, *Isherwood*. Christopher wrote a chatty and indiscreet letter to Gerald Hamilton ("Mr Norris") in November 1939, just after the outbreak of War, debating on the attitudes of fellow expatriates and gossiping about his film making, his Yoga, and generally being frivolous. This found its way to Tom Driberg, who published it in his "William Hickey" column in the *Daily Express*. The result was to fuel the flames of those who readily saw Isherwood (and Auden) as traitors to socialism and their country in peril. Forty years later it is still difficult to pass judgement on this episode. Its roots, I believe, lie deep in the homosexual experience, and we are only at the beginning of understanding the deep complexities of the oppressed, but resistant, consciousness that developed. Apart from their readability and fascination the memoirs of Isherwood and Driberg are important documents for understanding this consciousness. Christopher Isherwood's book is, as one might expect, the more vivid and exciting. It is considerably more so than Jonathan Fryer's biography which is a useful summary of his subject's life, more detailed for earlier years than for later. But where Fryer covers the same ground as Isherwood himself in his two volumes of autobiography, *Lions and Shadows* and *Christopher and His Kind*, he adds little to Isherwood's words and the result is rather lustreless. It is a straightforward biography and in the end fails to illuminate contemporary attitudes to homosexuality.

#### New Histories

Jonathan Katz's work, a product of his commitment to the twin aims of gay liberation and socialism is much more significant and revealing. The *Arno Series on Homosexuality* which he has edited is basically a series of reprints, though there are one or two first publications. The material covered is vast in range and includes works by Natalie Clifford Barney, Romaine Brooks, Edward Carpenter, Donald Webster Cory, Havelock Ellis and J.A. Symonds, Benedict Friedlander, Earl Lind, Carl Heinrich Ulrich and many others; collections of documents from the various homosexual rights groupings from the nineteenth century, including *Documents of the Homosexual Rights Movement 1836-1927*, *A Homosexual Emancipation Miscellany c. 1835-1952*, *Lesbianism and Feminism in Germany 1895-1910*, and volumes of *The Ladder*, the journal of the

lesbian grouping, Daughters of Bilitis, the *Mattachine Review*, and material from the present gay movement. The collection also includes James D. Steakley's book, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany*, developed from articles which originally appeared in the Toronto gay liberation journal *Body Politic*. The work is a valuable descriptive account of the German movement from the 1860s to the "final solution" under the Nazis. It is full of fascinating detail and is indispensable as a source. As the author admits, the work shows a "literary bias" and has very little on lesbianism. But the latter point is at least explicable in terms of the constitution of the movement, which was male dominated. The book is about the movement, and there is little about the social and cultural conditions which gave rise both to a homosexual self-consciousness and a campaign for legal and social change. Much work still has to be done on this. But Steakley's book, like the whole Arno collection, begins to provide the vital raw materials and the preliminary research without which no proper understanding of social responses towards homosexuality are possible.



#### Raw Materials

Jonathan Katz's own magnificent book, *Gay American History* is both a concentrate of the wider collection and goes much further, in showing the vast complexity of attitudes and responses. It also shows the way towards a new approach towards homosexual history. Subtitled *Lesbians and Gay Men in the USA. A Documentary* the book is a collection of documents, with an Introduction, linking commentary, and full array of notes. It covers various themes from the sixteenth century to the present: *Trouble: 1566-1966*, basically accounts of homosexual life; *Treatment: 1884-1974*, dealing with the development of the "medical model"; *Passing Women: 1782-1920*, about female transvestism as a mode of gender revolt; *Native Americans/Gay Americans: 1528-1976*, about homosexuality amongst American Indians; *Resistance: 1859-1972*, detailing the various modes of personal revolt and public reform activity; and *Love: 1779-1932*. The range of documents reprinted is astonishing, and the notes to each section are extremely rich in further references, details and speculations. Although the work is a "Documentary" and not a finished work of narrative and analytical history, it goes further than any other work of homosexual history I know in detailing the infinitely complex process of definition and self-definition which has produced the modern homosexual identity. It will be indispensable for future workers in the field.

I want, however, to pick out two points which seem to me to pose fresh problems. The first concerns the title. It seems to me that to use a modern self-labelling term "gay" to define an everchanging concept over a period of four hundred years can suggest a constant homosexual essence which is just not there. Katz in fact recognises this very clearly. He makes the vital point that the "concept of homosexuality must be historicised", and hopes that the book will revolutionise the traditional concept of homosexuality.

"The problem of the historical researcher is thus to study and establish the character and meaning of each manifestation of same sex relations within a specific time and society ... All homosexuality is situational."

This is absolutely correct and is the measure of the break between this type of history and Rowse's. But to talk at the same time of *our* history as if we were a distinct fixed minority suggests a slightly contradictory attitude.

It poses a major theoretical problem on which the gay movement has had little to say. Ultimately, I believe, we can only understand changing attitudes to homosexuality within the context of wider discourses on sexuality, but the theoretical tools for doing this are still undeveloped.

A second problem arises from this: attitudes to lesbianism. Katz very commendably has attempted to give equal space to both male and female homosexuality, and although this is impossible in some sections, overall he succeeds. But this again suggests a problematic of a constant racial-sexual identity which Katz explicitly rejects theoretically. Lesbianism and male homosexuality in fact have quite different social histories, related to the social evolution of distinct gender identities, and there is a danger that this fundamental, if difficult, point will be obscured by discussing them as if they were part of the same experience.

In the long term, as I have suggested, the study of homosexuality in history poses questions of the dominant modes of sexuality at any particular period, and any self-contained search for *our* history will be self-defeating. But the recovery by gay historians of a buried experience is a vital transitional stage. Katz's work shows that the homosexual experience was much wider and richer than the characters of Rowse's work would suggest. It is important that work goes on in this way, because without it we can hardly understand the present, let alone grasp the future. The work of writers like James Steakley and Jonathan Katz is an essential starting point.

# The Gay News Trial

## ASPECTS AND IMPLICATIONS

by Simon Watney

The successful prosecution of *Gay News* and its editor Mr Denis Lemon in the Central Criminal Courts this July has been variously discussed and interpreted. I want to begin this article by examining the poem which lay at the heart of the trial, and to go on to consider some implications of the prosecution's case, which called upon the entire structure of bourgeois Christian morality, once Judge King-Hamilton had disallowed any defence on literary or theological grounds. We need to understand the complex unity of this structure if we are to fight back effectively in future. Our strategies will not be helped by analyses which focus simply on the person of Mrs. Mary Whitehouse, or which resort to vague notions of some mysterious unnamed conspiracy against gay people in this country.

"The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name" takes its title and significance from an anonymous poem, containing a celebrated reference to The Love that dare not speak its name, which was used to attack Oscar Wilde at the first of his trials in April 1895<sup>1</sup>. It is thus rooted in a specific history of gay literature and anti-gay legislation. At the same time "The Love That Dares to Speak Its Name" is a perfectly straightforward poem. A Roman Centurion is describing the dead Christ:

"As they took him from the Cross  
I, the Centurion, took him in my arms  
the tough, lean body  
of a man no longer young,  
beardless, breathless,  
but well hung."

Left alone with the corpse, the soldier takes off his clothes and, with more than a casual reference to Flaubert's Tale of St. Julian Hospitator<sup>2</sup> attempts to warm it back to life:

"For the last time  
I laid my lips around the tip  
of that great cock, the instrument  
of our salvation, our eternal joy."

The soldier knows that Christ had "had it off with other men" including Pontius Pilate, John the Baptist, Paul of Tarsus, "foxy" Judas and (needless to say?) all the other apostles:

"He loved all men, body, soul and spirit, even me."

After a rather coy moment of Fisher-King/Amfortas symbolism we realise that the centurion is explaining, pace Mr. Eliot<sup>3</sup>, how he fucked Christ's wounds, thereby receiving consolation both physical and spiritual.

There is a play upon the notion of "kingdom come", then, after a loosely sado-masochistic reference to

"... the passionate and blissful crucifixion  
same sex lovers suffer, patiently and gladly."

the narrator is left to wait for three days outside the tomb waiting for the resurrection and, dare one say, the second coming.

It is a rather silly poem. It is at times an amusing poem. It is from start to finish an extremely "literary" poem. In fact it stands within a long tradition of Uranian<sup>4</sup> poetry which turns divine imagery and language, not necessarily



Christian, to erotic ends, in order to "dignify" the theme of homosexual love by attaching it to suitably noble and "elevating" themes. As such it literalises with an admirable degree of frankness one habitually neglected aspect of devotional poetry, namely, the carnality of its imagery. Certainly it spells out this paradox in Christian ideology which contemporary Christians might prefer to ignore. It is necessary to stress the term ideology since the centrality of Christian morality to capitalist modes of production and consciousness is often overlooked. Religion did not end with Marx's words in *The Holy Family*<sup>5</sup>; and what is often comfortably described as modern bourgeois morality is heavily determined by Victorian theology/ideology, drained of any obligation to actual religious observance, but retaining the full force of its original metaphysical distinctions between body and soul, man and woman, etc. in a social vision of semi-miraculous "wealth", "enterprise" and a commodity paradise available to all, apparently, as the result of hard work and/or virtuous living. However much one juggles the books, homosexuality is incompatible with this ideology.

Mrs. Whitehouse and her Love for the Lord

It has been argued that in bringing her case against *Gay News* and its editor, Mrs. Whitehouse was in some way acting duplicitly or dishonestly, that she employed the blasphemy laws solely "to placate the liberal bourgeoisie and social democracy"<sup>6</sup>. Her real object, it has been repeatedly claimed, was to "get gays". There is however no reason to doubt her own words at the time that she was acting "out of my love for the Lord" and that she quite sincerely felt that she "could not live with herself" had she not pressed such charges. But ideology is not that simple. For to see the Honorary General Secretary of the National Viewers and Listeners Association as no more than a cynical manipulator of the law is to leave the very concept of law unchallenged, and also merely collapses the complex issues of homophobia and bourgeois ideology into facile conspiracy theory: above all it fails to consider the tortuous and torturing rationale of prejudice. Mrs. Whitehouse may well believe in a myth of docile masses whom it is her mission to protect, but the left cannot afford to. It is important therefore to neglect neither the individuals concerned, nor those to and for whom they elect themselves to speak. It is thus as unwise to over-emphasise the specific instrumentality of Mrs. Whitehouse herself — either in her demonstration-chant persona as

"La Shitehouse", or as the affable if "extremist" creature of the popular press — as it is to completely ignore her. She is in all probability a fairly representative English Conservative matron.

The blasphemy law has been used very rarely this century, which fact alone should remind us that there is no such thing as an archaic or obsolete act of legislation. All law is in somebody's interest. Since most statutes relating to "objectionable" material concerning religious subjects were repealed by the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1967, Mrs. Whitehouse turned quite naturally to the Common Law of Blasphemy and Blasphemous Libel (written blasphemy), which was developed during the seventeenth century to "protect" the Church of England against dissenters. As Common Law it is open and inclusive and need not work from precedent. It ironically serves as a reminder of the legal privilege enjoyed by the Anglican Church alongside its more immediately visible privilege in the related spheres of finance and education. It is also worth noting that directly after the announcement of the guilty verdict a number of other religious groups, including the Scientologists and the Islamic Community, began to campaign for an extension of this existing legal privilege to persecute in the name of defence for themselves.

Christian Morality and Middle-Class Ideology

At the trial, the Prosecuting Council, Mr. John Smyth, assembled his arguments within the supreme confidence of a set of shared assumptions on the part of the jury concerning the total depravity not just of the poem, but of homosexuality *per se*. His language was offensive and highly emotive: "This poem is not about love, it is about buggery". It is, of course, about both, but also a great many other things, as he himself proceeded unwittingly to reveal. It is, as I have shown, a poem which is in an important sense about literature and homosexual themes in the history of literature, and what matters is that Judge King-Hamilton disallowed any defence whatsoever on literary or theological grounds. Blasphemy, it was constantly argued, is a matter of common-sense, and common-sense, it quickly emerged, involves a more or less pathological hatred and fear of homosexuality. This hatred and fear was rationalised along the only too familiar lines that all gays are dangerous pederasts, and that *Gay News* is no more than a fortnightly clarion call to mass child molestation. The very existence of gay women was conveniently and necessarily overlooked.

The popular equation between homosexuality and pederasty which dominated the prosecution case has also been seen as another example of the cynical manipulation of the law. It is on the contrary, a perfectly reasonable product of the prevailing sexual ideology of our society. We should not therefore waste our time in complaining self-righteously that the poem was found to be blasphemous. That it most certainly is. We should instead seek to challenge the entire concept of legal blasphemy and, more to the point, take this opportunity to examine how, and on what grounds, the middle class attacks where it feels itself most threatened.

Mrs. Whitehouse and her allies undoubtedly conceive the world in dangerously simplified, if not actually fundamentalist terms<sup>7</sup>. But politics are not, as many Marxists would argue, simply "hidden within" the religious outlook. Such a view presupposes the existence of some essence, Politics, existing independently of its particular manifestations, a notion which is clearly idealist. Religion, like sexuality, is the very stuff and substance of politics. There is thus no question of blasphemy being no more than a strategy to disguise beliefs which are, in such an essentialist way, "political". Any useful analysis of the real power of ideology must at least attempt to explain how and why bourgeois thought requires this rigid category of politics in order to make the rest of life seem a-political.

In this context Christian morality remains central to middle-class ideology, "theoretically closed and politically supple and adaptable"<sup>8</sup>. Hence Smyth's emotive repetitions of the word "buggery" throughout his concluding speech, and his dogmatic appeals to "decent", "ordinary" people,





should come as no surprise to us. As he realistically informed the jury, it was up to them "to set the standard for the last quarter of the twentieth century, and perhaps beyond". This is precisely what the enforcement of law is all about — the standards and self-interest of the ruling class and its ideology. As Mrs. Whitehouse herself observed after the verdict, "a line has at last been drawn and a limit set". That limit is to be defined as the tolerance threshold of her bourgeois/Christian view of the world. In this limited sense then the trial may even have served some small purpose if it is seen to illustrate the unity of bourgeois thought and the ways in which it is able to work by associations and connotations across a wide range of issues and topics, including the authority of the Church, the "rights of the individual", the sanctity of the children, patriarchal values, and the wilful perversity of homosexuals. In this sense we can perhaps begin to appreciate the contingent set of beliefs and assumptions which connects the Festival of Light organisation, the National Association for Freedom, the Conservative Party and the National Front, as well as the staunchly bourgeois morality which led the picketers outside the Grunwick factory to abuse their gay colleagues.<sup>9</sup>

#### The Sexuality of Christ

*Gay News* was an interesting target for the right to select. *Gay Left* might be thought of as a more obvious object of attack according to some ultra-leftist theory. *Gay News* is, however, by far the more visible and accessible gay publication. In that sense, whatever one thinks of its editorial policies and explicit sexual politics, it is the most "out" example of gay pride in Britain. It is important to recognise *Gay News* in terms of its comparative availability. At the same time we must acknowledge the fact that it was the poem which was on trial, and that it would be entirely wrong to try to theoretically distinguish between the blatantly homophobic aspects of the trial and the concept of blasphemy from which they emerged. What so offended Mrs. Whitehouse was the slur, as she saw it, upon the sexual nature of Christ. Her recent actions against a Danish film-maker who had announced his intention to make a film in this country on the subject of a sexual relationship between Christ and Mary Magdalen, and the enormous press campaign which followed, illustrate her equal hostility to accusations of Christ's alleged heterosexuality.

The sexuality of Christ has constantly posed a problem for Christianity. His imagery has always been somewhat androgynous, strongly erotic, yet needing to be able to appeal to both sexes. This situation is still further complicated by Christian metaphysics, according to which He is both God — in the person of the Son, and Man — as mortal child of Mary and Joseph. In a recent article<sup>10</sup>, Michel Foucault has stressed once more the absolute centrality of sexuality in Christian culture, not simply as a negative force of proscription and repression, but as a positive element, in so far as its active mastering is necessary to personal salvation. Twentieth century theology, including Anglican theology, has tended with rare exceptions<sup>11</sup> to re-affirm the pre-Renaissance concept of the Church as "the mystical body of Christ" or "the Communion of Saints". In this context the eroticising of the figure of Christ involves the eroticising of all Christians. This is clearly not at all welcome, although it is scarcely new, since the entire cult of Marianology<sup>12</sup> was closely related to the simultaneous sanctification and eroticisation of women which took place in twelfth century Europe, resulting in the ideology of courtly love. We may thus appreciate the other side of the Whitehouse/Christian coin in recent attempts to "humanise" Christ and bring Him "up to date", as an entirely logical product of some aspects of the so-called sexual revolution. Predictably the Christ of *Jesus Christ Superstar* is as necessarily androgynous as the figure in Mrs. Whitehouse's mind as she knelt to pray, somewhat ostentatiously, during intervals in the proceedings at the Old Bailey.

It would in any case be extremely naive to imagine that the sexuality of Christ would ever be anything but controversial, and this has always been a delicate area for

Christians to negotiate. One has only to consider the crucial physicality of all the Christian sacraments, let alone such comparatively obscure doctrines as the Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine of Siena<sup>13</sup>. I do not wish to call into question the validity of the varieties of religious experience here, only to point to their often strong metaphoric relations to adult sexuality. Hence it is fascinating to see how the Prosecution Council deflected "charges" of homosexuality away from the person of Christ by the use of still more "common-sense" analogies. The jury was invited to imagine that the poem concerned somebody "universally loved and respected" in our society, "a member of the Royal Family" for instance...! If such a suggestion shocked or offended them, the jury had no choice, it was instructed, but to bring in a verdict of guilty. In it came.

#### Homosexuality and Paedophilia

Equally significant was Smyth's almost obsessive picture of *Gay News* as some kind of Paedophile Manifesto, this device being used, as in the case of the Unfortunate Royals, to deflect the specific issue of Christ's mortal sexual nature away to that of children and, by extension, to the whole issue of children's sexuality, sex education<sup>14</sup> and the sanctity of the family unit.

It is clear that the "de-sexualisation" of children is necessary in our society, both for the maintenance of those property relations enshrined within and communicated through the family, and the maintenance of our particular education systems. But a bizarre paradox occurs at this point, since that same refusal to acknowledge children as sexual beings is necessary in order to construct them within rigid cultural conventions as "boys" and "girls". Thus bourgeois ideology is ironically obliged to stress and exaggerate the extreme perimeter of childhood sexuality (homosexual molestation/rape/schoolgirl pregnancies) in order to avoid any confrontation with the central everyday issues of sexuality itself, and its basic function as the model for all those hierarchical and authoritarian relationships which the child must learn to take for granted if she or he is to grow into a Good Citizen.

But just as it is dangerously easy to see Mrs. Whitehouse as having single-handedly contrived the *Gay News* prosecution, so we run the risk of developing a supposedly "libertarian" theory of childhood sexuality, which only serves to reduce what we as adults might learn from children's relaxed and undifferentiating polymorphous experience of their bodies, in relation to one another and the world, to our own drearily limited categories of genital sexuality. It is not a question of our virtuously "allowing"

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children their own "latent" or "oppressed" sexuality, but of the very slight possibility that we might learn something from them. For, as the French theoretician Guy Hocquenghem has argued <sup>15</sup>, the "sexuality" which we would "allow" children is the very means by which we would still further guarantee their condemnation to the ideology (real power) of hierarchical and authoritarian relationships which so oppress us as "grown-ups".

In effect the childhood sexuality argument, which would project adult roles and values on to children, is not dissimilar to that of the Wages for Housework movement amongst some women. Both would ultimately tend, if realised, to institutionalise and reify those very sources of oppression which they believe they are attacking. It is not necessary for the Gay Movement simply to embrace the Paedophile lobby as comrades by virtue of a misleading analogy of comradeship in the face of adversity. In the opinion of this writer, their struggle is not ours, and the casual radicalism of such organisations as the Paedophile Information Exchange runs the grave risk of turning out to be as ruthlessly sentimental and patriarchal as that ideology which has left us with all those sailor-suited ten year olds scowling out from the family Daguerrotypes. At the same time, it must be emphasised that we do not, unlike Gay *News*, criticise P.I.E. because it damages our case.

#### Dirty Jokes and Bourgeois Ideology

What we learn then from the Gay *News* trial, and what can hardly be sufficiently stressed, is the organic and fluid unity of bourgeois ideology, over and above the inflexible categories according to which it organises its own consciousness of the world. This makes the trial an object lesson for the entire left. There can be no such thing as a single-issue case under bourgeois law, since all aspects of that ideology unite in order to attack any and every challenge to its imaginary authenticity. We should regard the trial as an example of the way in which all the levels of the capitalist state, institutional and ideological, converge and function together, to constitute bourgeois reality. That is the seminal strength of ideology, its taken-for-grantedness, its suppleness, its ability to leap across all the pedestrian categories of traditional Marxist analysis, arguing by subtle and not so subtle analogies and metaphors, so that an obscure professor's dirty joke can be used to launch a major attack upon all libertarian values, whilst still further reinforcing the closed mirror world of ideology itself.

#### NOTES

- 1 The poem in question, by Lord Alfred Douglas, was first published anonymously in a privately circulated literary review, *The Chameleon*, December 1894. It was in the context of this line, referred to by the Prosecution Council, that Wilde attacked the distinction between natural and unnatural love, a distinction central to bourgeois morality and still enshrined in crude sociological theories of deviance. "It is beautiful", said Wilde in his defence, "it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection ... The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it."
- 2 Flaubert's Tale was written in 1876. It tells the story of a handsome young aristocrat who kills both his parents as the result of a tragic misunderstanding. In remorse he becomes an outcast, eventually meeting a hideously deformed leper to whom he gives food and drink. Julian gives the leper his bed, but this is not enough: "My bones are like ice, come here beside me." Julian lies down beside the leper. "Take off your clothes so that I may feel the warmth of your body." Julian obeys. "Ah, I am dying! Come close and warm me! No, not with your hands, with your whole body!" Julian lies on top of him and kisses him. At which point the leper is transformed into the figure of Christ, who bears Julian up with him to Heaven.
- 3 In *From Ritual to Romance*, originally published in 1920, Jessie L. Weston explores the complex symbolism in European literature of the Fisher King whose wound can only be healed by the sword or spear which originally inflicted it. It is a major theme in Wagner's last great Christian opera, *Parsifal*, named after its beautiful young hero who heals the aged King Amfortas with a spear identified with that which pierced the side of Christ. It is also an important motif in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" of 1926.



- 4 Uranian poetry is the collective term applied to a wide body of homosexual literature in the nineteenth century which celebrated (in often highly comic terms) the love of men for boys. Its imagery is predominantly pagan or Christian. See Timothy d'Arch Smith: *Lore in Ernest*.
- 5 In his early works, *The Holy Family*, and the *Introduction towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx launches his most explicit attack on the unity between religion, the state, the family and civil society. It is in the latter work that Marx describes religion as "the opium of the people", an "illusory sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself."
- 6 I refer here to a recent International Marxist Group analysis of the Gay News trial.
- 7 At a public meeting in Hackney, London, this October, Mrs. Whitehouse referred her audience to a 1964 report put before the United States House of Representatives which, after no less than twelve years' research, discovered that among 40 Communist strategies designed to destroy Western Civilisation was the plan to "present homosexual degeneracy as normal and healthy". Do we need further warning against the dangers of conspiracy theories? Mrs. Whitehouse was heckled loudly throughout her speech. See *Gay News* 129.
- 8 Louis Althusser: "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New Left Books. London 1971.
- 9 At the mass picket of the Grunwick factory in North London in July 1977 a group identifying themselves as gay workers were abused and jostled by fellow picketers. The significance of specifically gay interventions is too large to discuss here.
- 10 Michel Foucault: "Power and Sex: An Interview". *Telos Magazine* No. 32, Summer 1977.
- 11 One such exception was the French writer Simone Weil. See her fourth letter to the Reverend J.M. Perrin, her "Spiritual Autobiography", included in *Waiting for God*, a selection of her writings published by Fontana paperbacks.
- 12 The term Marianology refers to a large body of legends and doctrines concerning the life and worship of the Virgin Mary in the later Middle Ages.
- 13 The Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine of Siena refers to a vision, later formalised into official doctrine, of St. Catherine's Mystical Marriage in Heaven with Christ, a complete spiritual parody of the earthly sacrament.
- 14 During the trial the English journalist Bernard Levin, called as a defence witness together with the novelist Margaret Drabble to testify as to the journalistic probity of *Gay News* as a "respectable" newspaper, was asked if he had read articles in various back issues, produced and named in quick succession by number. All the issues named featured articles concerning paedophile topics, which Levin defended as serious and important contributions to a much tabooed subject. He was eventually pinned down over a review of the Gay Sunshine sex manual, *Men Loving Men*, which Levin quite properly defended as a serious and necessary publication. Judge King-Hamilton however expressed considerable surprise that anyone in our society should need any advice or information concerning sexuality, homosexual or otherwise.
- 15 Guy Hocquenghem: *Le Desir Homosexuel*, Editions Universitaires, Paris, 1972. English translation forthcoming.

# A Unifying Experience

Coming Out

by Jeffrey Weeks

(Quartet Hardback £8.50, Paperback £3.95)

Reviewed by Ken Plummer

In trying to situate our own gay oppression historically, Weeks' articulate and well documented book serves as an invaluable — if incomplete — guide. Quite correctly, he refuses to impose contemporary understandings of 'the homosexual' upon the past, distinguishing between homosexual *behaviours* which may be more or less universal and homosexual *meanings* which are always shaped by wider socio-historical situations *and* men and women in real situations. Thus, his task (or one of them, for the book overflows with ideas) is to analyse the creation and emergence of the unique contemporary homosexual identity and subculture (male and female) as a product of *both* changes in the wider organisation of the family and gender roles under capitalism *and* the specific responses and counter responses to this of both homosexuals and 'moral crusaders'. The connections to the latter are well drawn; to the former, they remain glib.

Thus the book is at its best when it is teasing out the connections between oppressive definitions and homosexual responses from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Examining the ways in which homosexuality was turned into crime by parliamentarians and public scandals, sickness by the medical profession and moral horror by the puritan crusaders -- Weeks suggests not just their apparent negative impact on people experiencing homosexuality but also their positive face: severe oppression gave homosexuals a "sense of self ... (which was) ... an essential step in the evolution of a modern homosexual consciousness" (p.22). Covert, apologetic and guilt ridden as it was, a male homosexual identity began to evolve at the turn of the nineteenth century.

And so Weeks continues — documenting in detail and analysing carefully the hostilities and responses: the outrage delivered on Radclyffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness* helping in the emergence of a lesbian identity and the hostilities of legal persecution in the early fifties (Montagu, Wildeblood, etc) precipitating law reform groups. Slowly, the modern homosexual self of the liberated gay begins to unfold as his analysis turns to the momentous achievements of the Gay Liberation Front in the early 1970's. Here Weeks becomes a "participant historian" and those of us who were there in the early days of England's GLF will find it "exhilarating" to read, systematically, of those early meetings, the schisms and conflicts, and the final breakdown. No less interesting will be the final chapters where Weeks' analyses the contemporary gay world and its symbiotic relationship to liberal reformism and consumer capitalism — sprinkling his observations with polemical remarks on C.H.E., Gay News, the 'commercial scene' and the views of homosexuality held by contemporary "Left" groups.

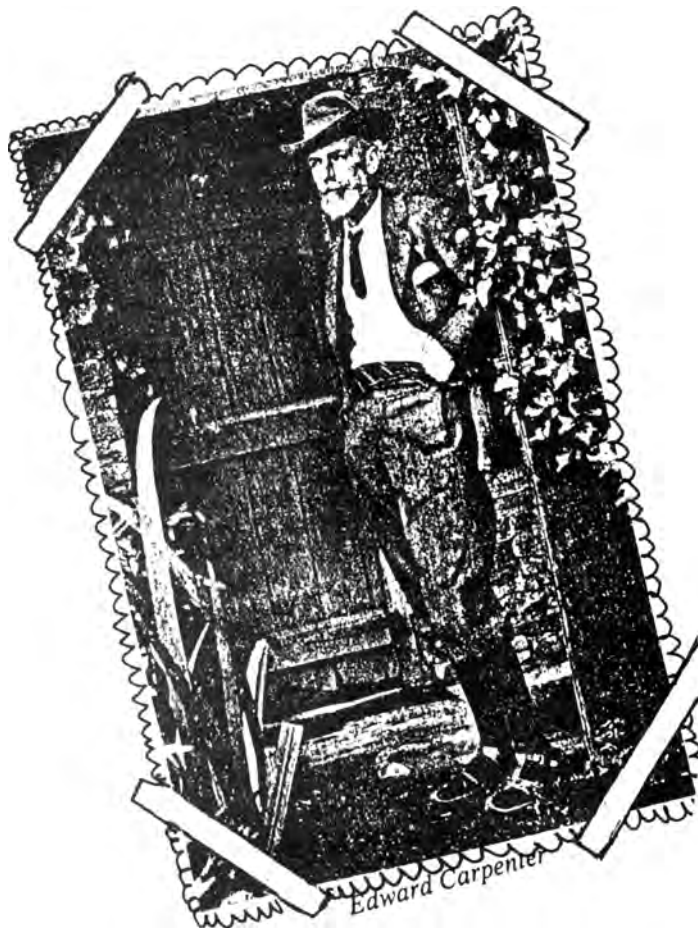
Whilst, however, there is much detail and analysis of the specific situational responses of homosexuals to their oppression, the connections which Weeks wishes to make to wider social changes are much more thinly drawn. The argument made is by now well trodden. Homosexual oppression increased in emergent capitalism because of the need for strengthening the family and the gender system — to harness both to the needs of productivity; it decreased in the 1970's (slightly) because of the ability of capitalism to 'commoditise' sexuality and for new homosexual markets to be created. Homosexuals — previously a threat to capitalism — were now partially co-opted. In Weeks' book, these connections form a massive backdrop for the analysis (and obviously for his prescriptions for a socialist future), but whilst they appear valid to me they are nowhere as

coherently analysed as the specific workings of reform groupings, which constitute the bulk of his study.

This book should be read by all "homosexuals" — so that they can grasp something of their recent history, their oppressors, their new identity and the gains that have been made. Yet absorbing as the book is, it could be claimed that Weeks — a Marxist historian — has given us a bourgeois history of Gay Elites. It is true that he acknowledges the "working classes" at many points — from the claim of Symonds that "masculine love ... abolishes class distinctions" through to the Gay Liberation Front participating in the "Right to Work" campaign. But his study is rarely concerned with the ways in which working class groups responded to oppression: it is persistently caught up in middle class/elite worlds. First, it is to Forster, Symonds, Carpenter, Radclyffe Hall and company we turn; then it is on to the world of the British Society for Study of Sex Psychology and the Homosexual Law Reform Society — ("overwhelmingly professional middle class", p.171): and finally it is 'the Liberationists' — whose members were drawn so rarely from the "working class", so frequently from the professions, students and the 'drop out' sons and daughters of the rich. The Gay World — like most worlds establishes its own hierarchies and in some ways this book is a documentation of the creation of a new Gay Elite who can afford to come out and a mass for whom the problems — or even possibilities — of 'coming out' were and are immense. As a "Marxist" analysis, the book would have been improved if it could have closely dissected the class variations in oppression and response. Is historical research now to repeat the follies of sociological research: the denial of working class homosexuality?

Nevertheless this is an important book and "*Coming Out*" is undeniably the best title for it. All the rhetoric, ideology, campaigning and organising that have occurred in recent years are little compared to the immensely difficult, often hazardous, personal political act of "coming out". It is this which constitutes the current stage in the construction of a modern homosexual identity — to experience homosexuality, to integrate it into one's *overall* life, to acknowledge it publicly and to feel no shame -- is a "new" way of being homosexual, and a way rendered possible only through the work of our forefathers and mothers in struggling persistently to change laws and stereotypes. Their road may have been long and heavy with bloody martyrdoms, and this book in one sense should document our historical gratitude to these people. But, of course, as Weeks persistently acknowledges the day is not over, the struggles are not resolved. He envisages now a period — perhaps till the end of the century — of a growing consolidation of gains in a piecemeal fashion; much of the latter part of his book documents the myriad of conflicting and competing groups that are emerging around focused issues.

What will hopefully hold these diverse groupings together is their 'coming out'. For it is this act which alone will ensure a place for the homosexual *experience* (not necessarily *homosexuals*) under the socialist sun. Interestingly, the new war that is beginning to be waged on homosexuality now is not about homosexuality *per se*: it is about 'coming out', and hence rendering homosexuality as a legitimate way of life and as 'role models' for the guilty hesitant. What both Anita Bryant and the National Festival of Light seek is to drive us "back in". They have, I believe, picked the right issues to drive us "back in" before we're properly out. Weeks' book is timely in reminding us of what could be lost if we should hesitate to keep our heads up high.



Edward Carpenter



Havelock Ellis, as a medical student

## Out of the Cess Pits

Socialism and the New Life  
by Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks  
(Pluto £1.80)

*Reviewed by Sarah Benton*

The world fragments us; mind from body, spirit from flesh, reason from emotion, self from other, private from public, personal from political, masculine from feminine. Each society has its own conflicts, its apparent antagonisms; each produces people so rawly aware of them that they spend their lives trying to resolve them. Some of those people become political; others end up social hermits trying to find some mystical welding of their mind and body, spirit and flesh, reason and emotion ...

Edward Carpenter (1844-1928) and Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) had in common a profound concern about the splits of their time, and a conviction that sexuality was a key to mending them. They also shared a vision of the whole person; in an integrated human society the fragmented human personality could be united, and the essentially harmonious human nature restored. For Carpenter, "the search is to restore this nature, to achieve a new unity between the inner self and the outer world which would allow a rebirth of the human spirit." For Ellis, it was to integrate the "divine vision of life and beauty" with science, and for individuals to create their own "unity of pattern, rhythm, feeling and intellect," as symbolised by dance.

Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks are equally involved with conflicts in our contemporary personal and public worlds. This shapes the questions they ask about the two men, while allowing us to see how different was the society of Carpenter and Ellis from our own. On occasions it might sound demoralisingly familiar — being concerned with sex, or artistic creativity or healthy food condemned you to the dustbin of history as far as marxist party and bourgeoisie were concerned. Yet this book will have failed if we imagine that these vigorous movements at the end of the century for sexual reform, for the creation of a labour movement, for welfare to be a state responsibility had not helped shape our own less repressive society

Edward Carpenter appears as the more political of the two sexual reformers; the conflicts he was concerned with were broader, more socially based than Ellis's. The ownership of property, the social and economic position of women, industrialism, unemployment, British imperialism were among the things he wrote about as well as the glories of love, comradeship, sex and open sandals. He was a political activist in the public world, avoiding the isolation and eccentricity that his social class and homosexuality might have produced by his involvement in the local socialist movement of Sheffield. If he gained notoriety there for the scandalous goings-on in his house (he lived with his male lover, the irrepressible, lusty bum-pinching George Merrill) he also earned himself a respect approaching reverence for his heart-felt advocacy of the 'new life'. Though his homosexuality was regarded by many comrades as going a bit too far, his long struggle to live his personal life politically seems to have added stature to his general political work.

By the 1880s, the Victorians had excised sexuality from normal human life and dropped it in a cess pit along with everything else nasty that threatened the survival of the British Empire. Having rolled a heavy stone on top, they could then creep out and pull it off every now and then to make sure this evil brew was still bubbling away down there. Hardly surprising then that someone like the American, Walt Whitman, whose poems pulled sex out of the mire and held it up as something glorious, celebratory, and part of love, friendship and the healthy human body, should have so shocked Victorian society, inspired Carpenter and influenced Ellis.

Fallen women, homosexuals and the criminal, insane, deformed, syphilitic, diseased members of Victorian society were all part of this cess pit. For if, by the end of the century, the Victorian establishment was less confident about its *laissez-faire* economy, its *laissez-faire* state, and its patriarchal family, it could not bring itself to see such people as casualties of such a system. They were, then, casualties of their own moral degeneracy. And it is this terror of degeneration that could engulf the whole British

Empire were the sources of contamination not firmly contained that sexual reformers had to fight.

The social and political life of the times is generally described with lucidity and perception in the book — especially the reality of day to day political work and relationships (Rowbotham) and the vitriolic attitudes towards homosexuality (Weeks). It is this terror of degeneration — which pushed left and right wing alike into the eugenics movement — which I would like to have seen analysed more precisely, along with its possible connection to the absence of a welfare state. The degenerates amongst us today have been 'immunised', hidden from sight by our welfare state and semi-detached houses. In the face of this, Carpenter both identified with society's outcasts — "our common humanity" could be identified "in the troubles and wandering eyes of the crazy and insane" and romanticised male friendship.

Rowbotham well describes the yearning for comradeship, for love between equal friends that inspired many socialists in the 1880s, and which continues as a powerful force in politics. Carpenter's feelings about that were also driven by a powerful male tradition that has hardly been explored: the notion of brotherhood, rising to a male love more exalted than anything women can attain. From David and Jonathan to Redford and Newman that love has been romantically mystified because it can't be honestly explored in societies committed to heterosexual marriage and the frailty of women.

Given the nineteenth century, bearing in mind how male love still comes under the grandiose title of 'the love that dares not speak its name', it is not surprising Carpenter wanted to name male love as splendid, tender, creative. Yes, he wanted to pull sexuality and homosexuality out of the cess pit and reintegrate it into the human personality; but his aim was also to reclaim masculinity from the deliberate and 'consistent brutality' that Victorianism had made it. He could not bear to be a brute.

In his compassion for women, his sincere commitment to women's independence, his conviction that the women's movement was one of the great liberating forces of his time, women, points out Rowbotham, remain slightly unreal objects, inhabiting a mysterious 'twilight women's world'. Lacking a theory to explain the gulf between maleness and femaleness, he ends up exalting what is most heroic in both. Unable to see how masculinity and femininity can be integrated in people, Carpenter ends up believing in an 'intermediate sex'. Carpenter was, of course, bound by the particular nature of the sexual culture he had to oppose and the limitations of the radical movements around him. Our own sexual liberation movements are immeasurably stronger because of the theories of sexism, of female sexuality, and because of the greater material freedom of women.

Though Carpenter was in contact with the main socialist and feminist organisations that were created, and which collapsed or merged in his time, his beliefs about the material conditions for liberation were closer to those of the Socialist League than anyone else. The conflicts of class, of the unequal ownership of property, the divisions between manual and 'brain' work could be resolved in a system of communal ownership and production. Rowbotham makes the very crucial point that the political divisions between organisations merged and overlapped at local level; marxists, feminists, anarchists, libertarians, radicals and nutcases talked to each other, and their ideas were not contained within their organisations — or lack of them. But in this description of Edward Carpenter we can see the shadowy roots of that public political gulf between Britain's marxist tradition and the concern with sexuality, relationships, morality and the way we live. Theoretically, the two were not integrated. Better organised, more consciously connected with material actuality, the marxist tradition appears to have been more robust — and contained by its cold-shouldering of the other tradition.

Ellis's explorations of sexuality and human nature are more narrowly drawn — but through that concentration he carried out the inestimable service of describing all the

curious things that people actually do in bed. Weeks points clearly to the political limitations of Ellis's analysis: yet the very accounting of actual sexual experience can be politically explosive, as the *Hite Report* has shown. And as I discovered as an eager 19 year old who, on an expectant rummage for dirty books in my father's hidden suitcase, came across a book by Ellis, read it, was amazed, stirred and reassured.

We learn less of Havelock Ellis's personal life than we do of Carpenter's, but the value and limitations of his researches in sexuality are most clearly explained. Faced with the same culture as Carpenter, Ellis drew on the new science to fight the idea that all sex outside the procreative marriage bed was corrupting. The new science sought material explanations for the development of humankind, and rejected the religious idea that God dropped us on this earth, wound us up, and sat back waiting for us to go wrong. Ellis had been tortured by the gulf between religion — which venerated art and love and spiritual things — and science which explained things but was cold and mechanical.

The resolution of this conflict lay in believing that the human being's essential nature was biologically determined, but this biology included the capacity for things spiritual. Liberation meant releasing the individual from those forces which denied the expression of beauty or wholeness.

It is this which, according to Weeks, is the central paradox of Ellis's work. His belief that human nature is basically shaped by biology, and that sexuality was an integral part of that, was in effect a counter to Victorian notions that a person could become depraved through moral weakness and especially through sex — or indeed that extra-procreational sex was itself a sign of depravity. But this also meant that a person's sexuality or personality remained bound by their bio-chemical make-up. The weapon he used to fight for a revolution in attitudes towards sex is the one we today, with the scientific triumphant, are left to fight.

Ellis was the first person to write sympathetically about homosexuality — and one of the first to use the word 'homosexuality'. His studies of homosexuals — and much of his work was descriptive rather than analytical — convinced him that we come in two varieties. The *natural* ones, called 'inverts', and *those who have been corrupted*, called 'perverts'. Weeks doesn't say what formula Ellis found for distinguishing the two.

His assertion that sexuality was an inherent part of our make-up, could in part be proven by what are known as 'cross-cultural studies'. That is, by offering Victorian society accounts of the sexual practices that could be observed inside and outside the bounds of the British Empire he could prove that people everywhere did do it, in one form or another, and live to tell the tale.

However because he did not make a distinction between the inherent potential for being sexual and the particular forms it took, he also regarded social customs connected with sex and procreation as being biologically inherent. For Ellis, 'courtship', or the sexual conquest of the female by the male was the foundation of sex and all sexual practices were a more or less exaggerated manifestation of courtship. This didn't, for him, make women less sexual than men — another blow to contemporary beliefs; but it did make women inherently modest and passive, and did mean that they all ought to procreate. Thus one more good man went to the arms of the eugenicists.

It is easier to grasp the weaknesses of Ellis's work, especially when you read about him from the position of today's sexual liberation movements, than it is to grasp just how much he helped haul sexuality out of the cess pit. He was certainly regarded by his friends and other sexual reform campaigners (many more politically involved than he) as having helped 'free sex from the smudginess connected with it from the beginning of Christianity'. His vision of sex as something which can be liberating and joyous is still not a part of our own politics, ridden as we are with notions of biological urges, compulsive sex and compulsive angst.



# What Is To Be Done

A Conference for Gay Socialists — July 2nd 1977

After the publication of *Gay Left* No. 4 the Collective thought that in the current political situation a one day conference could be held, organised jointly by various gay groups on the left, centred around discussing the positions of socialist gay women and men within the left. Gay groups are more or less established either officially or unofficially in the IMG, SWP, CP and in various unions and there seemed to be a need to talk about what being a gay socialist means both in an autonomous gay movement and within the framework of an established party.

All the various groups responded positively. A planning committee made up of representatives of IMG, SWP, CP, CHE, Lesbian Left and Gay Left met to organise the conference. They decided that it should take the form of a series of small workshops, each one led by a convenor. Four topics were chosen with a session in the morning repeated, with a different convenor, in the afternoon. A final plenary session was called to bring out areas of agreement and disagreement and to discuss future action.

Advertisements placed in *Gay News* and the left-wing press placed emphasis on attracting gay socialists and on a glorious summer's day almost 100 people responded to the call. Sue Cartledge and Jeffrey Weeks as joint chairpeople opened the day's events. Detailed papers were not prepared for the conference. Instead the planning committee had got ready substantial outlines of the sort of areas each workshop could cover, and these sheets were handed out.

Each of the eight workshops naturally covered much ground and different people gained and gave different things. The headings of the workshops — Fascism and Sexism, Gays and Class, Gays and Socialist Morality, and Politics of Sexuality including gay women and men — the personal and the political and the issues and campaigns, indicate the breadth of the discussion.

In the plenary session the extent of the discussion became evident. Generally most people expressed the need for this and similar conferences, feeling that only by meeting and talking over common areas could any 'position' for gays be worked out in their relationship to the left. Brief mention was made of the possibility of any organised 'gay socialist movement' but this was thought neither desirable nor useful at this stage.

On the value of future conferences there seemed to be three points of view expressed though these often overlapped. Political activists felt that only by joining and working within one of the established left parties could any meaningful revolutionary change occur; to this end they saw their gay work as only a small part of their political activity. "Gay conferences are useful recruiting centres" seemed to sum up their argument. Another view expressed the need for gays to work for a major regrouping of left wing parties around a central unified policy; they too tended to see the question of their political gayness as less important than this, though they were anxious to work out a theoretical position for gays.

A third view expressed a firm belief in an autonomous gay movement outside of the established political parties to continue trying to establish a theoretical position for gay socialists. Further discussion, they suggested, could be continued at a weekend residential conference. A venue out of London was suggested and volunteers from different parts of the country offered to serve on a planning committee. A further suggestion was that one of the gay groups of one of the parties could convene but not control such a conference, as they had access to administrative resources. As a workable alternative further one day London conferences were suggested, with written papers prepared and circulated beforehand. The theme put forward was "Gays and the State".

The women's voice was not heard much in the plenary session. The whole question of how women and men could

work together for conferences was not discussed. Numerically men outnumbered women and this imbalance was not helped by fewer women attending the afternoon session. No one suggested that joint conferences were not possible but this central question was not tackled on this occasion.

No specific dates have been fixed for the next conference but anyone, who is interested in either submitting papers or in planning arrangements in whatever capacity can contact: Gay Socialist Conference, 26 Dresden Road, London N19.

## What's Left

NEW GAY SOCIALIST GROUP

We are two gay men who have recently separately come to live in London and are surprised by the small number of discussion or study groups (especially for men) which are open to new people.

We think there is scope for a group to work on sexual politics, principally through reading and discussion, in particular the relationship between gays, feminism and the left.

If you are interested in getting involved in such a group or have any views on the idea then get in touch with either one of us, initially through gay switchboard: Tel. 01-837 7324.

Ken and Bob.

## Lesbian Line

Lesbian Line is a new phone service for women, operated entirely by a collective of women. We are London based, but have files on women's and particularly lesbian activities throughout the country. We offer information and someone to talk to, at present twice a week, on Mondays and Fridays from 2 to 10 p.m., but we shall soon expand. We also hold small socials for women who contact us.

We need up-to-date information on lesbian events, places, groups etc. particularly those out of London. If you can give us information on your town, please write to Lesbian Line, BCM 1514, London WC IV 6XX. If you'd like to join the collective ring us up — we need you! We'll share our experience with any woman who is interested; we'd like eventually to see a network of lesbian switchboards throughout the country.

LESBIAN LINE 01-794 2942



# Editorial Notes

Publication Dates: We hope from April 1978 to be coming out more regularly, three times a year. Contributions, especially short articles, are always welcome.

Letters: Owing to pressure on space we have had to hold back letters this time. But please keep sending them in.

Subscriptions: We are now opening a subscription department. Details will be found elsewhere in this issue. Donations will also be welcomed. *Gay Left* is a non-profit making journal completely financed through sales and gifts. Any contributions would therefore be appreciated.

Back Issues: Copies of issues 3 and 4 of *Gay Left* are still available, price 50p each inland, £1.00 overseas.

Next Issue: *Gay Left* 6 will include articles by Dennis Altman on "The State, Repression and Sexuality", Gregg Blachford on "Socialism and Sexual Morality", Derek Cohen on "Clienting — Individual Solutions to Collective Problems" and Randal Kincaid on "The Apoliticism of the Gay Press".

Correction: The "Gays and Work Symposium" held in Seattle last March, was organised by the Union of Sexual Minorities and *not* by the F.S.P. as we stated in *Gay Left* 4.

## THE COLLECTIVE

This issue was put together by Keith Birch, Gregg Blachford, Derek Cohen, Emmanuel Cooper, Jeffrey Weeks, Nigel Young.

# Subscriptions

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Make all cheques (Sterling or US or Canadian Dollars only) payable to Gay Left, 36a Craven Road, London W2, England.

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## BACK ISSUES

Gay Left No. 3

Women in Gay Left, Gays and Class, IS Gay Group, Gay Workers' Movement and much more.

Gay Left No. 4

Love, Sex and Maleness, Communists Comment, Lesbians and the law, Darwinism and sexuality, reviews etc.

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