Collective Statement

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

The Gay Movement

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

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

The Gay Press

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

Parts of the gay press have been concerned solely with serving a gay market. Such periodicals as *Him* or *Line* have the Up act as a vehicle for the exchange of goods and services in that market, devoting a large amount of space to contact ads.

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

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

The Collective

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

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

Where We Stand

The women's movement was the first, historically, to pose the need to confront sexism. Sexism is the discrimination against people on the grounds of their gender or sexual orientation; it is the stereotype expectation of what women and men should be or do. The anti-sexist struggle was a major part of the early gay liberation movement. This developed out of the contradictions of a society which proclaimed the 'sexual revolution' but limited sexual freedom to the young, the pretty, the heterosexual. The early Gay Liberation Front proclaimed that sexism and the resulting oppression of women and gays was so endemic
to society that it could only be obliterated by a transforma-
tion of society. But this was a statement more on the level
of moral exhortation than of scientific analysis. As a group
we feel the need for a materialist analysis of sexual
oppression and hope that this journal will contribute to
that end.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Way Forward

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

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

As revolutionary gays we realize that a socialist revolu-
tion can only be made by the working class. It has great
strength but is held in check by a reformist leadership, and
fragmented by regional and craft differences. Areas such as
women’s and gay oppression have been largely ignored in
the labour movement. We therefore support gay caucuses
in the Trade Unions and rank and file movements. But it
is only in the context of building a revolutionary move-
ment committed to fighting against both sexism and capital-
ism that there is any real hope of achieving gay liberation.

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

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

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

Editorial Note

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

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

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

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

Members of the Gay Left collective are:

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

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A socialist involved in the gay movement has to look two ways: to the movement itself, which is fragmented, generally civil rights oriented, and often apolitical (C.H.E. 'personal' matter, irrelevant to the wider class struggle. The gay socialist, therefore, has a complex task: on the one hand, to attempt to convince the socialist groups of the relevance and significance of the struggle for gay liberation; and, on the other, to convince the gay movement of the struggle for sexual freedom with the working class for socialism.

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

Where Marxism differs from other socialist theories is in its conviction that capitalist society has produced social movements which must struggle against capitalism in order to achieve economic, social and personal justice. Socialism, therefore, becomes not a blueprint for the millennium but a necessary product of the struggle of the working class and oppressed peoples to throw off their shackles. The last few years or so have shown that many of the original aims of gay liberation can be achieved this side of socialism, through the conscious intervention of gay people themselves, pushing at the slackening bar of, nineteenth century bourgeois morality. But there is still no evidence that the root of gay oppression, the sharp gender expectations enshrined in the family, will be tackled by a class struggle which is manifestly distinct as political, in the clear sense that personalities, and sexual personalities, are moulded by social forces; secondly, that the struggle for personal liberation can only be successful by a common involvement of all oppressed peoples. The trouble with these statements was that they remained on the level of moral exhortations rather than becoming analytical tools which needed development; and as the movement lost its original utopian clarity, they were reduced to pious platitudes.

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irrelevance to the modern women's movement. (6) Nevertheless, as a result of this emphasis, questions of sex were relegated to the arena of 'personal freedom' where they have remained to this day.

**Homosexual Rights**

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

The last couple of decades of the nineteenth century saw a tightening up on the restrictions against homosexuality in many leading capitalist countries, and particularly in Germany and Britain. The notorious Paragraph 175 of the German penal code, and the 1885 Labouchere amendment in England had the function of controlling male homosexual behaviour and of more sharply defining the acceptable heterosexual male role: as W. T. Stead said in the wake of the Oscar Wilde trial 'the male is sacrosanct ; the female is fair game'. (7) The result on the part of liberal reformers, and increasingly on the part of some homosexuals themselves, was a campaign to change the law and public opinion. This had two overlapping aspects: the political campaign to support change in the penal codes; and a theoretical attempt to conceptualise homosexuality. In both respects, Germans were in the vanguard, with Magnus Hirschfeld as the dominant figure; the German gay movement found a more muted response in England, with individuals such as Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis as the most prominent publicists.

Theoretically, an aim was to prove that homosexuality was not a sin, nor properly a sickness, and therefore ought not to be a crime. It was seen, in Havelock Ellis's word, as an anomaly, based on biological variation, while Hirschfeld (and Carpenter) preferred to see homosexuals as forming an 'intermediate sex'. The important point to note is that except on the fringes of the movement no attempt was made to question existing definitions of gender roles. On the contrary, the existence of homosexuals was not used to challenge gender concepts but to confirm them. The political consequence of this was to place the debate on the level of civil rights for a sexual minority who could not help being what they were.

This in turn demanded an orientation to law reform, and gaining maximum support for pressure to be brought on the appropriate legislating bodies. Oscar Wilde had written: 'Nothing but the repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act would do any good. That is the essential. It is not so much public opinion as public officials that need education'. (8)

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

Hirschfeld himself was a supporter of the (then) Marxist Social Democratic Party and his earliest political support had come from this quarter. Edward Bernstein, before his revisionist heresies, contributed an important analysis of the material sexual hypocrisy in the wake of the Wilde trial; and August Bebel, a founder of the S.D.P., gave his support in the Reichstag to law reform. (9) He seems to have found Hirschfeld's campaign too apolitical, in fact, and urged him to go further in mobilising support in the early 1900s. By 1912 Hirschfeld's Scientific-Humanitarian Committee came out for a more consistently political commitment. They issued an advertisement just before the 1912 election as follows: 'Third Sex : Consider This! In the Reichstag, on May 31, 1905, members of the Centre, the Conservatives, and the Economic Alliance spoke against you ... but for you the orators of the Left! Agitate and vote accordingly!' This is posed as a tactical rather than a strategic alliance, but it reflected a real balance of opinion. The S.D.P.ers had given consistent support to repeal of Para 175 in the Reichstag from 1897 onwards; and, after the split in the international workers' movement following the Russian Revolution, the revolutionary tradition as embodied in the Communist Party continued to do so, at least till 1930. In May 1928, in reply to a questionnaire, it stated: 'The CP has taken a stand for the repeal of Para 175 at every available opportunity.' However, despite this left wing support, Para 175 was not repealed, and the campaign to change the law was eventually swamped in the descent into fascism after 1930. Seen as a secondary issue, it was never given priority in a period of economic turmoil.

As in Germany, it was generally the liberals and socialists who favoured reform of the law in Britain, but no large scale campaign to change the 1885 Act was to emerge until the period of the Workers' 1950s. And although Edward Carpenter, perhaps the most persistent propagandist of the gay cause at the beginning of the century, was deeply respected in the labour movement, his views on homosexuality were treated with indifference.

A dialogue he had with Robert Blatchford, editor of the socialist paper The Clarion, in the early 1890s illustrates the problem. Blatchford defended Carpenter, and urged readers to study his works on women. But when Carpenter wrote to Blatchford in 1893 suggesting that he write on sexual matters, the latter replied: 'I am radical but ... the whole subject is nasty to me.'

And in a further letter he wrote: 'Now, you speak of writing things about sexual matters, and say that these are subjects which socialists must face. Perhaps you are right ; but I cannot quite see with you.' To justify this he put forward arguments which still enjoy currency:

1. That reform of sexual relations would follow industrial and economic change.
2. If this is so, then anything which inhibited economic change would also hinder sexual change. And as sex reform was unpopular, it would be best not to raise it at present.
3. 'I think that the accomplishment of the industrial change will need all our energies and will consume all the years we are likely to live.' As a result, sex reform will, 'not concern us personally, but can only concern the next generation.' (10) Blatchford's mechanistic position was not unjustified, and went with an unholy worship of the family and the British imperial mission; it rehearsed all the common prejudices still heard on the revolutionary left. Carpenter's views on sex, convinced as he was of the moral superiority of the intermediate sex, bears of a cosmic consciousness; hardly fitted comfortably into British socialism. A more typical position was that put forward by the Marxist philosopher, Belfort Bax, who questioned whether, 'morality has anything at all to do with sexual act, committed by the mutual consent of two adult individuals, which is productive of no offspring, and which on the whole concerns the welfare of nobody but the parties themselves.

This is the classically liberal argument for toleration, and it has been the most typical 'progressive' view on the left. (11) This was pre-eminently the case in Bolshevik Russia. Penal restrictions on homosexual acts were removed in 1918 along with the legalisation of abortion and contraception, the liberation of divorced persons. These have been seen by Wilhelm Reich as the harbingers of sexual revolution brought in on the wings of the social. (12) But in actuality it must be doubted whether these legal gains ever amounted to more than a formal acceptance of the most advanced bourgeois theories, given the enormous social backwardness of the Soviet population. The legal position was done to positively encourage social acceptance of homosexuality, and although throughout the 1920s Soviet laws were regarded as models for the rest of Europe, no theoretical advances were made. The impact of the reforms was probably not as deep rooted by the time the reactionary Stalinist juggernaut overtook them in the 1930s.

To sum up these strands of evidence, it is clear that the gay question was raised in the ranks of the left, particularly in Germany, and formal support to legal
equality was often given in varying degrees. But the issue was never seen as a vital one because it was never posed as a challenge to orthodox views of gender roles.

**Reaction**

The question was always seen as one of individual civil rights, and the civil rights argument is the one that is most consistently being taken up again in the modern socialist tendencies as they find it necessary to respond to the gay liberation movement. But the view that has dominated Marxist orthodoxy since the 1930s is that of homosexuality as a bourgeois deviation and decadence. There are two overlapping sources for this. The first is the Stalinist counter-revolution in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, which subordinated all aspects of personal freedom to the priorities of production as determined by a parasitic bureaucracy. The strengthening of the family was seen as a necessary part of this, and with it went the revocation of most of the legal gains of the early revolutionary period. In March 1934 homosexuality again became a criminal offence in the U.S.S.R. (13) It was specifically defined as a product of ‘decadence in the bourgeois sector of society’ and a ‘fascist perversion’.

The apparent rampant homosexuality of the upper echelons of the Nazi party was used as one element in justification. In fact, Hirschfeld’s books had already been burnt in Nazi Germany, and almost simultaneously with Stalin’s clamp down the Roehm purge (the ‘night of the long knives’) inaugurated a new wave of terror against German gays. The fascist counter-revolution of the 1930’s took homosexuals as one of its categories of scapegoats. But because of the central role of Stalinism in the world communist movement there was no challenge to this sexual counter-revolution in the various C.P.’s. A belief in homosexuality as a bourgeois decadence survives in many of the Stalinist Parties to this day.

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

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

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

**Whither?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Notes and references**

1. F. Engels, quoted in Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life* (A Canadian Dimension Pamphlet) P 70. This is a very useful study of the question. A slightly different version of the translation of this quote can be found in Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Aristotle Books 1977) P 80. I have generally used this edition for quotations.


4. Ibid P 128.


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


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

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


12. See W. Reich, *The Sexual Revolution*. P 141. See also Zaretsky, op cit p 76.


Gays and the Trade Union Movement

By Bob Cant

The idea of gay work in the Trade Unions seems to many people absurd and irrelevant. Traditionally, most gays in this society have accepted the division of life into private and public, home and work, and they have been only too keen to conceal their homosexuality from the people they work with. When the gay movement was at its height there was a strong spontaneous element in it which tended to be opposed to work but which, more importantly, saw the Trade Unions as part of the anti-gay mafia which included the family, the education system, the media, the bosses, the police and so on. Now it is somewhat different in that many more gays are no longer prepared to hide their homosexuality and the economic situation does not really allow for the existence of a free-wheeling-peace-and-love-let’s-all-make-love-in-the-streets-mass-gay-movement. As I see it, most gays who have been influenced by the movement are working in jobs which they do not wish to lose; their social life is likely to be more open and fulfilling than it would have been several years ago but they still feel a great deal of unease and/or oppression at work about how far it is possible to express their homosexuality.

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

Many people see trade unions simply as bodies which negotiate wages with employers. But this is, of course, a very narrow view of trade unionism. The only unions who took any action were from one paper mill and one textile works, whereas the others tend to relate much more closely to their job activity. Increasingly, the union comes to be identified with the negotiators—i.e. usually full-time appointed officials—and the worker adopts an apathetic, passive attitude to his membership. Revolutionary socialists argue that the union is much more than this, that the membership of the union must be actively involved in decision making, that officials must be regularly elected and recallable by the members and that the union should protect the workers in all aspects of their lives. In the early decades of this century British Trade Unionists did, on occasions, act to protect their members and their communities in such a way. The fact that unions have now declined to the extent where they are seen as bodies for the negotiation of wages for mostly white, mostly male, mostly hetero-white workers is just one of the effects of social democracy on our society. The only people to benefit from this are the capitalist class.

Nature of Trade Unionism

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

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

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

Women and Blacks

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The most important lesson that women and blacks have learned from their recent struggles is about the nature of trade unionism. Women and blacks are paid less because they are women and blacks, but that is not true of gays. Gays can be found in all grades of work.

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We expect to meet all these problems and, at least, two others:

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

1. We must build union gay groups to provide confidence and solidarity to gays and to encourage others to come out.

2. We must support the reconstruction of a strong active Trade Union movement which will defend all its members wherever and whenever they are attacked.

Acknowledgments to—Socialist Worker, Gay News, Red Rag, Case Con (Gay Issue).
Gays in Cuba
By Keith Birch

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

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

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

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

The first hard news of systematic persecution of gay people came in 1965 when the U.M.A.P. camps (Military Units for the Aid of Production) were set up. These were ostensibly places for young men who were not suitable for the army because of their ‘moral outlook’ or lack of commitment to the revolution. In practice they were little better than concentration camps (a description which Castro himself used after visiting one in late 1966) occupied by anti-revolutionaries, thieves and a very large number of homosexuals who were forced to ‘clean crime’ alone. In 1966 several prominent artists, writers and actors were told to report to these camps and this brought official protest from the Cuban Writers’ and Artists’ Union and the results were the so-called ‘socialist democratization’ decree from the Congress of Education and Culture. Gay people were said to be sick and homosexuality was an unnatural hangover of bourgeois society, which is the usual communist line, and it would disappear with the achievement of socialism.

Until that time, homosexuals should be kept out of positions of influence over young people, in education and the arts particularly, so as not to infect them. Before this there had been purges of the more openly gay teachers, students, soldiers and so on but it was now carried out with more vigour for a time. Individual gay people, women and men, workers and soldiers were publicly exposed, denounced and usually dismissed to be sent away for re-education. The last few years have seen rather less activity against homosexuals although there have been no official statements of a change in policy. The immediate future does not hold much hope of any radical change, but the situation is still open to influences, both internal and external, so there should not be complete despair.

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

We now come to the overtly economic and political causes for gay oppression. The struggle for power of the Cuban Communist Party and others who hoped to model Cuba along the lines laid down by the Soviet Union, against those like Castro who wanted a Cuban road to socialism fitted to its needs and not falling into the mistakes of Soviet society. Since the revolution this struggle has been played out against a background of great economic difficulties due to the U.S. blockade. The resulting dependence on massive aid from the Soviet Union has influenced the power of the different factions and thus the social policies that have been implemented. In the early 1960s the old Communist Party members tried to gain control of the leadership. They were largely responsible for the setting up of the U.M.A.P. camps which they used as a base to attack libertarians and to try to stamp out all intellectuals and the young citing homosexuality as a reason. However, they lost out in this bid for power and were themselves purged from the leadership and in 1968 Escalante, their leader, and others were tried. Also, with the failure of the Cuban economy in the late 1960s to reach the targets hoped for, especially in sugar production, Cuba became more and more dependent on Soviet support and followed its line much more closely, the decree from the Congress of Education and Culture(3) in 1971 being a symptom of this. The economic situation and fear of aggression from the United States meant the need for the people to be unified and to work together for the continuance of the revolution and the mass response to the leadership was the end of any questioning of the leadership was allowed. As an official statement said, the people must ‘struggle against all forms of deviation amongst the young’(4) This included influences of American culture such as drugs and pop music, an awakening Black Power movement which was quickly
The Case of John Warburton

By Nigel Young

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

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

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

Within twenty-four hours John Warburton was brought before the Authority (his employer) and asked to sign a piece of paper demanding that he never discuss homosexuality in the classroom again unless within a structured sex education programme, and with the full permission of the head teacher. He felt unable to sign this additional contract which no other teacher had been asked to sign. Consequently he was banned from taking any employment with the ILEA.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, most people in the Gay Teachers' Group seemed disinterested, not to say hostile towards the union. What has the union ever done for us? was the cry from the floor. There was a gulf in understanding the politics involved between socialists and liberals within the group, and the relationship of these politics to the stand of the Left on issues of sexuality.
Within straight Left groups or trade unions there has never been much ground for discussions on sexuality. Thus the anti-union and anti-left cries seemed appropriate to the callers. But this attitude ignores the development of the women's movement, and its critique of sexuality from a Marxist standpoint. It also ignores the attempts by gay trade unionists to raise similar issues in their unions: trade unionists in the past have rarely discussed the issue. Their sexist attitudes are unrelated to their socialism or to being a member of a trade union. For the socialists in the Gay Teachers' Group it was a perfect opportunity to take the issue of a victimized worker who in this case was also gay to the unions. The majority of the Gay Teachers' Group seemed unable to see these issues, and firmly stuck to letters, phone calls, and petitions.

John Warburton had already highlighted the politics of homosexuality when he went on the gay rights demonstration. Were we in the Gay Teachers' Group only concerned with more and more demonstrations, and not rockinig the sexual apple cart? Let's keep the rosy normal apples on top, and the rotten gay ones underneath seemed to be the attitude of some gay teachers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Coming Out Politically

By R. Kincaid

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

For gays to act politically in their own interests they must have some concept of their own position in the community and how their situation relates to the production of resources needed, or seen to be needed, by that community. This will help towards an understanding of their own oppressed situation. It is only then that an overall policy of action can be formulated. Gays must not be taken in by the idea that choosing a political allegiance is a matter of selecting the party with the right set of principles in the same way as one might choose a new pair of trousers. The main political parties in this country represent different coalitions of interests and do not acknowledge the existence of gays except in a negative and repressive way. It is to be a different sort of political platform that gay people should turn to one that recognizes that different groups or classes have interests that may be conflicting; one that recognizes the
The effectiveness of GLF arose from the stark contrast that it presented against the old style. It attempted to develop its own conventions and let its structure grow in an atmosphere that was dominated mainly by a self-oppressive and, except for the one central fact of being gay, tended to be ultra-conformist. GLF was the antithesis of this sort of gay scene and provided the opportunity for a different kind of public identity and an acknowledgement of a gay life-style. Let us consider the possibilities for political action that it generated.

In our present position it is worth looking at the influence of the Gay Liberation Movement, the first manifestation of a public gay movement, in opening up possibilities for gays, particularly young gays, to develop a new consciousness of gay interests as a group. Within which the individual is given greater freedom to act in a public way, the meaning of which is closely affected by the nature of the other. A movement involving a public assertion of existence, of values, the nature of one's life, and its effects on the other, is part of the process of personal intellectual growth, the part of everyone at these meetings to heighten their sensitivity towards the feelings of the others present was demanded. It was also intellectually stimulating and exciting. One was aware that a new culture was forming and being recognized. New words and phrases came into use—'super-gay’, ‘ego-trip’, ‘putting people down’—though at the time they sounded flip, they contained ideas that generated much thought and had philosophical implications that extend outside the gay world.

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

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

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

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

In many ways, the fairly radical Executive Council of CHE seems to care more from the membership it represents. E.C. members, all of whom work hard and voluntarily for CHE, have openly come out as gays and put forward a positive position of a gay life style quite independent of traditional heterosexual relationships. CHE organizes conferences, such as the one at Sheffield this year, where, for example, a unique civic reception gives open and official recognition of the delegates’ homosexuality. Yet despite this lead, few gays seem encouraged to follow.

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

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

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

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

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

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**Report**

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

After months of hopeful anticipation, I heard a rumour that the Gay Workers’ Conference was actually going to take place. For details, I checked with Gay News and Gay Switchboard asking them if they could verify this information. No, they hadn’t heard a word. That was the first sign that things were going to be rather disorganized at this Conference. I mean, really, if two of the most important avenues of gay communication don’t know about it, then who will? As it turned out, a small, very unrepresentative sample turned up; mostly from the local area, mostly from white-collar trade unions, and, mostly men.
Arriving on Friday night, we met others who assumed, as we did, that International Marxist Group (I.M.G.) members had organised this meeting. It had already been labelled by Red Weekly as 'the most important gay conference this year'. This feeling was further reinforced when we saw the supposed organizer of the conference and well-known member of the I.M.G. sitting in caucus in the corner of a pub with other I.M.G.'ers. This was the grouping that was to become so familiar to many of us by the end of the conference.

The next morning, after sleeping on the floor with ten beautiful men but, of course, no one touching each other, we arrived at the delightful Leeds Polytechnic. There, we arrived at the delightful Leeds Polytechnic. There were conference this year'. This feeling was further reinforced by evidence of the I.M.G. presence?

After lowering ourselves into our seats, we listened to Martin O'Leary give a half hour talk on 'The Law and Beyond'. It was a clear and concise account of the importance of law reform for gays. He included a discussion of the false ways out of our oppressed situation such as 'the law is in the process of change' and the need for some sort of Gay Workers' Charter along the lines of the Legal Action Group. He ended with the words 'it is understandable why we have to be liberal, but it was not just to be a piece of paper to be passed at next year's conference' and came across a Red Weekly vendor. More evidence of the I.M.G. presence?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Newsflash!

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

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

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

**The Politics of Homosexuality**

*Don Milligan 20p Pluto Press*

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

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

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

The emergence, out of the political Pandora's Box of 1968, of the Gay Liberation Movement has altered the whole terms of the discussion. A movement of homosexuals of an entirely new kind was born in collective struggle (literally in a fist fight with New York cops attempting to make arrests in a New York homosexual bar). They asked not for integration and tolerance but for itself. In the meantime socialist homosexuals are entitled to expect the active support of their heterosexual comrades. Socialists who are weak on this question will therefore sets out to demonstrate the social significance of homosexual oppression.
Before we can start to analyse gayness historically we must be clear as to our approach. Much of current gay historiography (or more appropriately, hagiography) whether intentionally or not, falls within a third sex tradition. This was the dominant tendency in the early German and British gay movements at the beginning of the century and assumes that gay people form a separate, usually biologically determined group, constant throughout history and ill-tolerated by the Christian tradition. This was the dominant tendency in the early German and British gay movements at the beginning of the century and assumes that gay people form a separate, usually biologically determined group, constant throughout history and ill-tolerated by the Christian tradition. This was the dominant tendency in the early German and British gay movements at the beginning of the century and assumes that gay people form a separate, usually biologically determined group, constant throughout history and ill-tolerated by the Christian tradition.

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

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

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

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

The vilest men in Britain. Who are they? Murderers,
Guttersnips — Guttersnips — Gut

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

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

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

Highest response came from David and Mary Willes, a pram-pushing couple with two pre-school kids. "I'd smack him in the mouth," said Dave cheerfully when presented with the prospect of a gay teacher explaining his sex life to the young. He didn't think much of Reds or anti-Reds. "I'd teach Your daughter? Would you let a limp-wristed lad teaching?"

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

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

Jeffrey Weeks

**Book Review**

**Forward Steps**

*Homosexual Oppression and Liberation by Dennis Altman*

Allen Lane 1974 First Published 1971

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

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

He has little time for the traditional left, which has either dismissed the gay movement, oppressed it or tried to politicize it by infiltration. Altman goes on to resist attempts to identify gay liberation with the left. 'Political movements, all of them attract people who are insecure, confused, sexually uncertain'. This is a fairly damning dismissal and one which suggests that it is a convenient rationale for his own apolitical feelings. If Altman is dismissive of the gay movement, oppressed it or tried to politicize it by infiltration, why doesn't he offer any way of achieving 'human liberation'.

Altman offers clearer and more positive aims in other fields—"the need to break down sexual types, for example. Also, Altman does not accept the liberal view of merely achieving the oppression of people in general, hence the insistence by the traditional left that all will be cured by the revolution. With our present state of liberation and our basic mistrust of the bureaucracy the established left seem to want to set up, we must ourselves examine the total structure of society in order to understand our position, and, as gays, work to ensure that the revolution achieves the aims of sexual and human liberation."

Altman's book is a lucid and convincing account of our first steps, but in 1975 we want the next steps to be given equally serious thought.

Emmanuel Cooper

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