

GAY LEFT

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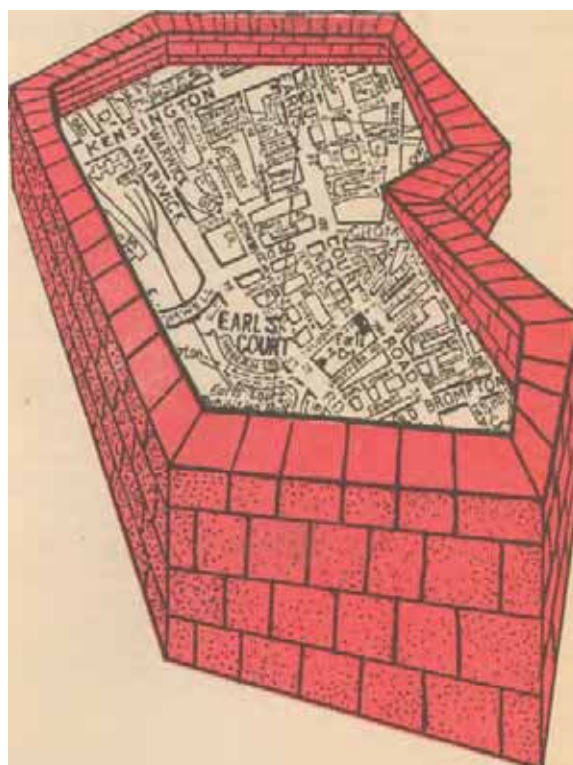
Within These Walls... by Gay Left Collective

The Gay World Today

The early gay liberation movement saw a sustained attack on what we liked to call the 'gay ghetto'. This was seen both as a state of mind (closeted, narrow, fashion conscious, objectifying) and as a geographical place (the 'meat-markets' and 'rip-off joints' of Earls Court and Chelsea). Gay liberation offered a creative alternative: community instead of alienation, comradeship instead of isolation, love instead of competition, the struggle against sexism and ageism instead of enslavement to commercialism and the latest fashion. But early gay liberation had only a limited direct impact on the gay world; its promise of personal liberation now seemed vapid when compared with the depth of external prejudice, the persistence of internal barriers, the strength of our ingrained (and often sexist) emotional structures, and the need to earn our daily bread. Moreover, on an external level the gay ghetto was not resistant to change. The closeted atmosphere of gay bars dissolved into gold dust as the proprietors realised that they could allow gays to dance together without the (legal) heavens falling in. The Gay Sweatshop play 'Mr. X' has a moving scene where the hero is introduced to the gay ghetto, and presented with a list of 'don'ts': don't give your true name, don't kiss in public, don't touch your partner when you're dancing ... It is effective because, still, for most of the audience it was their experience. But to a generation reaching the gay world now, it must seem like the faint echo of a bad dream. The gay commercial scene has proved elastic to a fault. If gay liberation could set up a 'people's disco', so could Tricky Dicky. If gay liberation could publish gay magazines, so could Don Busby; bigger and glossier, if rather less liberated. Gay liberation prized open the crack, but gay commercial interests rushed to pour in.

The result is that increasingly the gay world is moulded and defined explicitly by the values of capitalism. As a group of gay men we need what the gay world can offer. Friendships, love, sexual contact do not drop out of empty skies, or confront us daily on the bus into work. They have to be sought in a world still largely hostile or alien, if in a more subtle way than previously, to free gay sexuality and honest and open gay relationships. This is not, of course, to deny that the gay movement has achieved a better community than existed before. On the one hand we do have more open dances and discos, better lighted pubs and clubs, more accessible cruising areas (how did we manage without *Gay News* and the *Spartacus Gay Guide*?). And on the other we now have genuine, and growing, gay community services, which help the isolated and promote genuine self help and growth of confidence and personal stability. That's our achievement.

But despite what many say (usually the better off and glamorous, or the politically naive) the golden age has not yet started, nor are further improvements under capitalism inevitable. In the first place, of course, the benefits of recent changes are unevenly spread, both geographically and socially. Capitalism, by its anarchic and unplanned nature,



is incapable of resolving any social question evenly and smoothly. Secondly, and this is more difficult to grasp, the changes have occurred often at the expense of any genuine release from the pressures of a competitive, commercialised and sexist scene. We have been offered an improved situation only if we surrender to it completely. The gay subculture is riven with clashes and illusions. The women tend to be split off from the men, butch men from fem, leather queens from drag queens, and so on. Many of these attitudes are themselves reflections of heterosexual values; others of the pervasive cash nexus.

In this gay world it is all too easy for people to lose their individualities, sex becomes the aim of life; individuals become things.

What we want to do in this article is look at some aspects of the present male gay world, its history and most common forms, the impact of the gay movement on it, and then tentatively look at the way forward. We come up with no startling suggestions. Mao Tse Tung once said, "to investigate a problem is to solve it". This is certainly the first step; the rest is up to us — and you.

The Subculture

What we have seen in recent years is essentially a massive

growth of a homosexual subculture. A subculture represents an attempt to provide a group solution to particular problems within the confines of a given society. In our case a homosexual subculture attempts to resolve certain of the problems that a hostile environment dictates for homosexuals. Although homosexuality exists in all societies, it is only in certain types of culture that it becomes structured into a distinctive subculture. And it is so structured when no generally acceptable social outlet is allowed for it. The subculture thus acts both to provide social intercourse for the stigmatised; and to segregate the 'deviants' from the population at large. This dual character seems to have been common from the first appearance of a male gay subculture in England in the early 18th century. A writer speaks of the Mollies club in 1709 which had parties and regular gatherings, and another writer in 1729 mentions 'Walks and Apartments', picking-up areas, mainly around the Covent Garden area of London (ironically, or perhaps not, this is where the G.L.F. started 250 years later!). These clubs and meeting places are associated with a culture we would now regard as transvestite and 'effeminate', suggesting it was this initially, together with the traditional taboos against sodomy (remember the 'buggers clubs' of post Wolfenden debates?) which generated most hostility. By the mid 19th century the subculture becomes a much more defined and recognisable entity. Its development is associated with increasing hostility to gay sex in society at large and a heightened homosexual identity, which, in turn, is largely a product of the redefinition of social roles within the family and society that is characteristic of the 19th century triumph of industrial capitalism. Urbanisation in particular allowed the development of relatively anonymous meeting places, and made possible a rapid move between the 'normal' and 'deviant' cultures. A young man of the upper classes might move from schoolboy sex in his public school to casual sex with guardsmen (a notorious source of rent); to familiarity with well known cruising areas in London; to cross-class liaisons with the working class (sometimes rent, sometimes not), all without sacrificing his well-connected marriage and social prospects: unless of course he was caught.

The working class was often seen by middle class romantics as a reservoir of healthy young love, untrammelled by bourgeois values. A whole tradition of gay radicals from Whitman, through J.A. Symonds and Edward Carpenter to E.M. Forster and beyond dreamt of healthy bodies and rough minds. The reality of working class gay life was perhaps less romantic. There is some evidence that as the nuclear family model spread through the class, the pressure on working class male gays sharply intensified. Young working class boys pop up in the notorious scandals (e.g. the messenger boys in the Cleveland St. scandal of 1888, the rent in the Wilde case); and harsher legal penalties that followed the 1885 Labouchere amendment ground particularly on the male working class homosexual. These tendencies recur constantly in the 20th century development of the subculture, up to its apotheosis in the swinging sixties and seventies. One or two generalisations can be made.

- 1 The subculture is overwhelmingly male. There are very few signs of lesbian clubs before the 1960s, none of female cruising areas. Individual lesbians there were, and small lesbian coteries, but no structured 'underground'.
- 2 It is a part-time subculture. Few live in it all the time; its nature is defined by the gay's ability to switch from it to straight society almost invisibly. The cottage (public lavatory) was thus more than the most common form of the culture; it was its symbol. It is significant that as we male gays became more visible in the 70s, so the authorities find urgent reasons to close down conveniences.
- 3 It is largely urban; cottage networks exist in almost all medium sized towns; but it is the large urban centres that have most clearly defined, complex subcultures.
- 4 It is a *sexual* subculture organised essentially around sexual contacts.

Sex In The Mind

The fragmentation of life into separate parts and particularly the separation of sex from 'life' is not a product of homosexual characteristics — whatever they may be — but a typical example of the way in which capitalism distorts and fragments relationships. People are encouraged to define themselves in terms of particular qualities rather than as whole personalities. When one quality is particularly prized the lack of that quality becomes an obsession. Black

people feel intensely the fact that they are not white, women feel intensely the fact that they are not men, gay people feel intensely the fact that they are not heterosexual. People react in many different ways to the lack of these prized attributes — by despair, by pretending they are irrelevant, by defiance, by assertion of the qualities which are not regarded as acceptable — and eventually hopefully by organising themselves.

Gay people until recently have felt their lives are divided into the 'normal' part and the sexual part. Traditionally, the sexual part has been hidden, secret. Gays, when they have not repressed their sexuality altogether, have generally sought one of these two solutions:-

- 1 Since sexuality in our society has been so closely bound up with supposedly stable, emotional relationships leading to marriage and family life, some gays have aped that and tried to find a suitable partner for a pseudo-marriage. This often turns into an endless search for an ideal person who does not exist — and even if he did exist, would be unlikely to be recognised in the shadows of a cottage. Disappointment is the norm and is followed by an even more frenzied search for this ideal partner;
- 2 Some gays realise the futility of such a search and, apparently casting aside their emotional needs, exalt their sexuality into a prime position. They have accepted society's definition of them in sexual terms and glorify that aspect of themselves which is socially repugnant. Since there can be no link between this feature of their lives and the rest of their lives they must give it some coherence by perpetually repeating the whole process. The need to pick up is no longer simply sexual but has become a major feature of their whole emotional being. It both strengthens by virtue of its frequency and weakens by virtue of the fact that it reminds one constantly of one's position outside the norms of bourgeois society.

In both cases the result is a compulsive search which in fact only accentuates the fragmentation which society imposes. This does not mean we share the views of those bourgeois moralists (doctors, psychiatrists, judges) who attack homosexuals for their 'promiscuity'. There is nothing 'immoral' in freely choosing and changing partners for mutually satisfying sex. One of the greatest assets of being homosexual is that we can more easily free ourselves from moralistic labelling of sexual behaviour, and we can begin to explore our sexuality in a way untrammelled by stereotyped norms. But the point is that often 'promiscuity' is not an act of liberating sexuality but of tying it to unrealistic expectations and wants. We have to break away from a 'compulsiveness' which is imprisoning, without surrendering to rigid bourgeois norms. This is one of the deep ambivalences of cottaging.

Cottaging

A recent piece on sexism in the CHE newsletter tartly warned its male readers that cottaging was NOT an act of liberation. Of course it is not. And yet it has a basic directness which often puts to shame the more salubrious parts of the gay scene. It is basically about sex, and in its various forms, its own intricate codes and uses, it reveals a lot about gay oppression.

Almost certainly most gay men and quite a lot of others use cottages (public lavatories) for making sexual contacts. For many gays cottages are the first introduction to homosexual expression. This is especially so for young people whose alternative outlets are few, e.g. in small towns. Outside the cities and large towns, lavatories are often the only places where gay encounters can be made. There is a whole unwritten history of gay men's initiation to sex in public places (perhaps this adds another dimension to W.H. Auden's phrase about "private faces in public places") and it will not do to moralistically condemn. Many people use cottages because they have no choice in the matter as there is no other available sexual outlet. Others find it difficult to function in the more public gay scene. This is dictated in large part by the sexism of the gay world, with its premium on youth and good looks and money. The more direct sexuality of the cottage sometimes (not always) transcends age. For others, again, cottaging offers an alternative for open avowal of their homosexuality — you can have regular sex with members of the same sex for years, and never openly admit to yourself your sexual orientation. Here casual sex of this sort merges into that described by Laud Humphreys in *Tearoom Trade* — speedy, anonymous sex, perhaps between married men, who then return to the

comfort of their wives and families.

But cottaging offers not only the possibility of casual sex in 'public places', but an opportunity to pick up a wide range of partners, taken back to one of the partner's nearby flat or bedsitter, for quick mutual satisfaction. Cottaging thus offers the possibility of sexual contact without emotional commitment; perhaps for variety within a stable relationship. On the other hand, out of such casual beginnings many close friendships have developed. Cottaging is thus a highly ambiguous activity, and for this reason it often has a strong fantasy element. Many men get tremendous excitement out of the repetition of the activity and its varied associations. In a society which has so harshly oppressed gay sexuality, gays cannot simply condemn all this. It is a central part of our experience. In the beginning of the modern gay liberation movement, the use of cottages was bitterly attacked by militant gays; now it is sniffed at by respectable elements. But until society deems fit to allow the open expression of our sexual needs cottaging or its equivalents (cruising open spaces, etc.) is likely to survive. It represents above all the ineradicability of gay sexuality, a sexuality which our society either prefers to pretend doesn't exist, or strives to channel into respectable avenues.

Clubs and Pubs

Clubs, pubs, etc., are less ambiguous as meeting places. They conform more closely to the heterosexual norm of sexual contact. They demand, probably, a more urgent need to identify oneself as gay, though this is often not the case. Their atmosphere, of course, is healthier, cleaner and cheerier than toilets (but not always!). Chances of police harassment are less. There is a better chance of meeting on a social level, of establishing friendships and emotional commitments. People meet socially and not always for sexual reasons. Nevertheless, because more identifiable, clubs and pubs are often, in a paradoxical way, more contained and more open to social moulding. There is, for instance, the stress on looking 'good' — according to that place's particular sexual stereotype, e.g. young and dolly or butch and tough. Competition for your man is rife. Of course this is again part of the continuum with heterosexual maleness. But that, surely, is the point. Many of the clubs and pubs offer useful services. Others are highly exploitative. They feel in a position to be able to ask what they want and get away with it. Pubs and clubs often charge exorbitant prices for shabby services and premises and provide little in return. This is why other countries seem like El Dorados in comparison with Britain. Some gay facilities in USA, Canada, Holland actually seem to want your custom.

Nevertheless, conditions have improved and are likely to go on improving. What we need to pinpoint are the dangers as well as the advantages of this happening.

The dichotomy seems then to be between casual sex, where nothing is defined or determined and a rigidly defined scene, where everything is more or less open, but no one is fully satisfied. Neither is finally adequate, for all the time they work within the narrow confines allowed by our society.

The Subculture Contained

The walls around the subculture/ghetto are invisible; they are, nevertheless, effective in containing us. Three aspects can be identified. Firstly, the state, with the main agency being the officers of law enforcement. Second is the public whose attitudes are moulded by social, legal, medical and religious concepts. Third are gays themselves, who internalise the values and prejudices of the oppressor.

The state has partially withdrawn from the regulation of sexual behaviour over the past decade and has granted a free space for gay men, over 21, in England and Wales, in private, to express their desires. But the bourgeois state still practises active discrimination. Many state jobs are closed to known homosexuals — for example, the diplomatic service, branches of the civil service, the armed forces, etc. Except for sex acts which take place between two consenting adults over 21 in private, much other male homosexual behaviour is classified as criminal. Many popular gay meeting places are heavily patrolled by the police — a constant reminder that toleration is strictly limited.

Above all, as the major agents of law enforcement, it is the job of the police to seek out gay 'crimes'. It is, of course, blatantly untrue that police behaviour is not

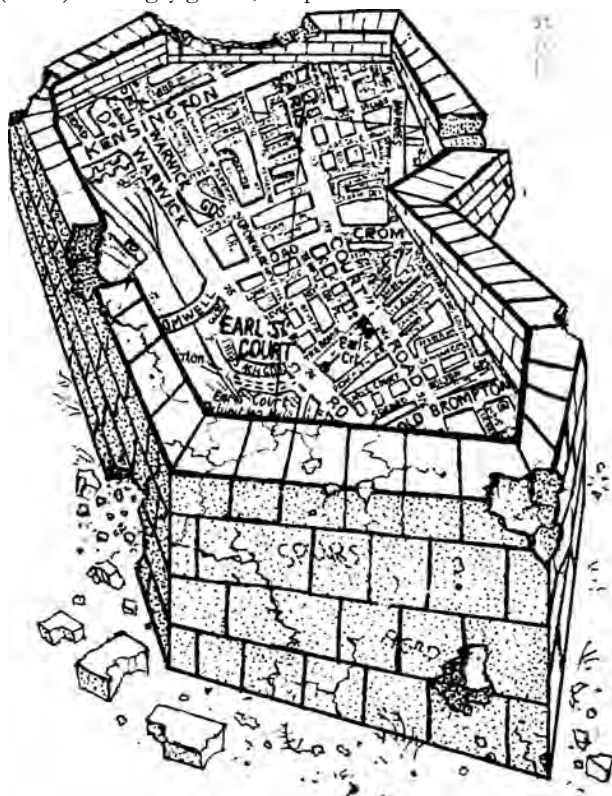
discriminatory. For example, entrapment methods are used to entice gays to commit offences so that they may then be smartly arrested by the 'innocent' policeman. An equally common example is the patrolling of gay meeting places on the pretext that in law the blocking of public footpaths is illegal. Though footpaths outside gay pubs are kept clear, it is rare to see footpaths outside straight pubs, churches, chapels or cinemas, etc., so patrolled and cleared. Policemen, in these 'liberal' days make a tremendous public relations effort to convince the gay community that they are not against us. They are only against *public* indecency, they say. They don't care what you do in private. But beware of the police when they come bearing gifts. The reality of oppression is here around us; in Brighton today, where 15 arrests a week are made to guard *public* decency; in your town tomorrow.

Public attitudes are equally ambiguous, as the recent **Gay News** survey of public opinion suggested. Stereotypes of homosexual behaviour (seen as a largely male activity, associated with effeminacy and mental derangement) are deeply imbedded in the public mind. At best we can expect a patronising toleration. Generally the public reads in the press and sees in plays and films the stereotyped ideas that gays are unhappy paedophiles with suicidal tendencies, and few people have any opportunity or even interest in seeing that this is rubbish and that gays can have a fulfilling and enjoyable life-style — such evidence directly challenges the basic belief in the rightness of the family situation.

With such defining and limiting attitudes from the law and the public in general, it is little wonder that most gays feel that they can only function in a gay ghetto; this concept has been adopted by many gays to the point where the ghetto is seen as: a natural and right part of society. Not only, however, do many gays operate only as gays inside the ghetto, but also, after suffering years of oppression and prejudice, they subconsciously adopt these attitudes and loathe themselves for being gay. Such gays often see the ghettos as being sad and boring places, yet cannot operate outside them — hating themselves and yet unable to see, let alone identify, the cause of their oppression.

Dancing the Gay Lib Blues

Gay Liberation sought to challenge these attitudes, but as its sun fades in the West, we can begin to see them in a more objective perspective. The movement, which arose in the early 1970s, drew many of its original members from people who were dissatisfied with the gay sub-culture in a variety of ways — those who knew the gay scene who were sick of it, followers of the counter-culture, radicals and student activists. Although there were many twists and turns in the attitude of the Gay Liberation Movement (GLM) to the gay ghetto, the predominant attitude was



that of the counter-culture — the ghetto was a part of straight society and must, therefore, be fought. We held people who were part of it as being responsible for their own oppression. Cottages, pubs and clubs were put down as manifestations of self-oppression; casual sex was alright as long as it wasn't anonymous; the need for relationships was recognised but monogamy was condemned. The whole thing was based almost entirely on feelings and any wider analysis of the reasons for the existence of the ghetto was lacking. This lack of analysis was inevitably accompanied by a lack of strategy. Leafletting and demos took place outside gay pubs (e.g. Gay Pride Week demo through Earl's Court with shouts of "Come Out" to the gay patrons) and an atmosphere of confrontation was generated. But, there was no strategy for alternative social and sexual outlets for the majority of gays.

For a time the GLM did offer an alternative to the ghetto for some with meetings, group activities, discos and dances all enveloped in an atmosphere of openness and togetherness. This began to develop into a new ghetto due to the gulf between us and those who we classed as the 'straight' gays. This was compounded when the split occurred between the women and the men in the movement. The gay women worked with the women's movement while the gay men became more isolated into the new ghetto.

After this, much of the serious questioning of gender roles disappeared. Such discussions became less honest and more ritualistic. The male gay movement, instead of challenging and confronting sexism, became increasingly defensive. The right to be openly gay was seen only as a great gain which must not be lost; less and less was it seen as a first small step in a new era of sexual politics. The gay movement, particularly through offshoot organizations like Icebreakers, acted as an important support group for people coming out. But because it had abandoned wider political objectives it now tended to glorify what already existed. The slogan "Glad to be Gay" now became much more like "Whatever is Gay is Good". Coming out no longer involved rejection of the ghetto but rather an open assertion of one's membership of it.

The need for a double life was being destroyed. It was now much more possible to be open about one's homosexuality. The appearance of a gay community newspaper helped strengthen this trend. The news items about anyone and anything gay, the interviews with rich and famous gays, the lists of gay clubs and pubs, the contact ads all helped confirm the view that one was not just an isolated individual. One was now part of a community, but one which remained conservative and largely impenetrable. We could join local gay groups or gaysocs, if we were students, where we could openly meet our 'own kind'. The ghetto, in fact, had come out. Without the ghetto all the new publications and groups were meaningless. They were simply new cosmetics for the tired old faces of the ghetto.

The experience of the women has been different inasmuch as their ghetto was smaller and weaker. But it seems clear that they have become much more integrated into the women's movement and have developed politically much more than the men from the GLM. The lack of a strong political men's movement is, no doubt, one reason for the re-emergence of ghetto values in the male gay movement. The pattern, nationally, has been one of radical groups being replaced by more conservative social groups with close links to the ghetto. This experience does have many variations, however, and some places, e.g. Birmingham, Bradford, have established longer lasting, more radical gay groups with a wider base in the community which have attempted to do more than just play sexual bingo. Gay centres have been established in many cities. Although these have tried to establish an alternative to the gay commercial scene, they have appalling financial problems. This was made clear most recently when the South London Gay Centre was refused a Community Aid Grant by the London Borough of Lambeth.

The emergence of a few nationally known gay leaders and the continued submergence of the vast majority of gays brings to mind the experience of the first British Labour Government in 1924. As Ramsay MacDonald said of it: "This extraordinary phenomenon of a Labour Government that has met kings and rulers of the earth, that has conducted itself with distinction and with dignity; this Labour Government that has met ambassadors, that has faced the rulers of Europe in terms of equality; this Labour

Government that has sent representatives forth and its representatives have been held as statesmen ..."

There are now powerful and busy leaders from the gay ghetto just as there were powerful and busy leaders from the working class in 1924. But neither group made any basic challenge at the structure or values of society. The leaders have been accepted by society but the base from which they arose remains unaltered except in the smallest ways.

Cracking the Walls

Elizabeth Wilson recently remarked that we must not suppose "that by some well-meant effort of will we can here and now transcend our society and miraculously have new and unalienated forms of sexual love relationships". (*Red Rag* No.10, p.9). The failure of many gay communes illustrates very clearly the great difficulties of escaping from capitalist values and of creating viable alternatives. Gay community services in part try to offer non-commercial services but even they cannot fully avoid the pervasive sexist and commercialised values around them. Without being despairingly deterministic then, we have to record our belief that genuinely full, non-sexist, equal relationships can only be rare within capitalist society (for a comment on this see the review of *Fox*). They will all the time be subject to the pull and push of capitalist values.

But this does not mean we can do nothing. Moreover, some of the steps forward in breaking down existing value structures have to take account of the existing state of the gay world. Despite its expansion of late, gay women and men are still open to oppression and exploitation within the ghetto, and this is accentuated by the continuing split for most between the gay scene and work and home. A discussion in the gay movement of this split and of the continuing relevance of 'coming out' in combatting it would be a necessary starting point. It could lead on to a continuing discussion of the nature and relevance of the gay scene which would pinpoint the areas of exploitation which would have to be fought, and underline the areas of warmth which have to be encouraged. What is necessary is that gays should begin to strive for *control over their own lives*. This means campaigning around a series of issues which can unite the gay world. First, the demand for the removal of all police harassment at gay establishments and meeting places. A slogan arising from this demand could be "no crimes without victims". Secondly, we could express our consumer-strength by *not* taking bad facilities, high prices, hostile atmospheres, just because we are gay. Thirdly, we must demand the right to freedom of access to facilities, regardless of the way we dress or look. Fourthly, and most important, we must create and support as far as we can, alternatives to the commercial scene. The most important gain of the gay movement over the past two or three years has been the development of support groups such as gay teachers, gay social workers, gay trade union groups, lesbian groups, and the gay community centres, such as those in South London and Bradford. These support groups provide a milieu in which gays can explore the roots of their oppression in direct relationship to their immediate social or work situations, and at the same time enable women and men to develop awareness and confidence in their own abilities. These growth points are the platforms from which to launch a concerted attack on the values and assumptions of a heterosexual society.

But these are only partial steps. As socialists we believe that the only way to eliminate sexism is by breaking the economic and social conditions for its existence in capitalist society. This means, above all, continuing our dialogue with the socialist and labour movements. It means us taking seriously the need to struggle against capitalism and sexism. It means them beginning to recognise, what was commonplace to the pioneering revolutionary socialists, that socialism is not merely the transfer of economic power. That must be only the first step in a constant struggle to transform all relationships. The socialist movement must recapture again the buried tradition of seeing socialism as a whole way of life.

We regard it as vital that this dialogue be continued: through discussion and study groups, through gay trade union groups, through gay fractions in the organisations of the left. We need all the time to develop a better understanding of the links between sexual oppression and the exploitation of people as workers. A start has been made in this direction with the Gay Workers Conference held in

Leeds in February 1976. Out of this conference, and similar moves, should flow an awareness of the need not only to confront 'straight society', but also the economic structures

which underpin it. Only in this struggle will the true alternatives to manipulative sexuality and endemic sexism emerge.*

2

DESCRIPTION SIGNALEMENT

Bearer Titulaire		Wife Femme
Profession	STUDENT	
Place and date of birth	TEAKING	
Lieu et date de naissance	26-11-46	
Country of Residence	SCOTLAND	
Pays de Résidence		
Height	5 ft. 10 in.	
Taille		
Colour of eyes	GREEN	
Couleur des yeux		
Colour of hair	BROWN	
Couleur des cheveux		
Special peculiarities	1	
Signes particuliers		
CHILDREN ENFANTS		
Name Nom	Date of birth Date de naissance	Sex Sexe
<p>Usual signature of bearer Signature du titulaire: <i>Angus Suttie</i></p> <p>Usual signature of wife Signature de sa femme:</p>		

(S.11846)

3

Bearer Titulaire

Wife Femme
<div style="text-align: center;">(PHOTO)</div>

From Latent To Blatant

A personal account by Angus Suttie

In the beginning there was me, my mother, father, two brothers and two sisters. I was much the youngest and when I was one year old my father gave up being a ploughman to set up his own dairy business. We moved to a little, tight, narrow, puritan Scottish town, set on a little hill in a valley surrounded by bigger hills. This was 1947.

The whole family except me and my elder sister who was eight years older, was involved in helping to start up and run the business; it must have been especially hard for my mother. She not only did housework, cooking four meals a day for seven people, washing up, laundry, cleaning, shopping, tending the numerous pets, looking after me, etc., but she did a day's work, seven days a week, unpaid in the dairy. This is fact is what most of her life, as long as I have been alive and before that, has been made up of — two jobs, one in the home and one outside. I spent most of my time on my own until I started school. I have little or no memories of my father until I was eleven when I worked on a milk van with him, but even then I never got to know him. So my father is a complete unknown to me, a mystery, a stranger; a figure who was spoken about and whom I could see and touch, but someone that I had no real contact with. As my mother spent most of her time working, I therefore wasn't actually very close to her, but

she was my main source of emotional comfort and it was she who had the job of bringing me up.

There wasn't an age at which I didn't prefer playing with dolls or dressing up to playing football or playing with toy cars and tractors. Gifts of toy guns were left unused. This was punished by ridicule and being called jessie and cissy and so I would only do these things in secret. Instead I took to reading a lot which was more acceptable but still not as good as playing with other boys. As often as not though I would play with the girls. "Why aren't you outside?" I was often asked and attempts by my brothers, who were back from National Service in the army, to toughen me up by mock fighting and rough games would end with me in tears and them in laughter.

The attempts to mould me to what was expected of a boy growing to be a man were as persistent at school as at home and games in particular became something which I dreaded. Football was compulsory and for boys such as me who were not good at it, we were made to feel not only that we were personally worthless but aberrant and morally wanting. "You're a waster" I was told once when I had 'forgotten' to bring my football boots — "and I hope you're not returning next year." The effort made to form me as a male made me realise that certain gestures were

okay if they were done by a man and others were not. So I consciously watched myself and if I caught myself sitting with my legs together I would spread them apart; also crossing my legs at the thighs was more un-male than stretching them out before me and crossing them at the ankle; it was also more male when yawning to stretch back and with one's arms bent and sticking out at the side to push one's chest forward; when bending down it was male to bend from the waist, and so on. I became gesture conscious and practised different ways of walking and chose one where I swayed slightly from side to side.

Growing up was painful and I sometimes felt like a jam-pot cover that was being stretched to fit over a jam-pot that was too big. I often thought of running away or doing myself an injury just so that my family would accept me as I was and not keep trying to change me. I never came up to what was expected of me and what was expected was that I should be playing football, scraping my knees, rough, tough and hard enough to fight back. Instead I cried a lot which I shouldn't have done and took my frustrations out on the cat. I got on best with the younger of my two sisters. She would bully me, but she didn't mind me dressing up and while I played with her toys she played with mine. So she was the one in the family to whom I felt closest and apart from my mother, she had most influence on my earliest years.

It is strange that I who didn't fit the masculine/boy role that was ascribed to 'me, I who was closer to my mother than anyone else, should turn against her, but I did. And I can remember the exact moment when it happened, it was that sudden. I was coming home from school and was jumping on another boy's back to make him carry me, when I saw my mother across the street watching me. She said hello but a feeling of annoyance, anger and resentment that she was watching me filled my head and I ran as fast as I could up the street. I was about eight at the time and before then we had had what I expect was a usual mother/son relationship, but after that I would judge her and she failed. I was jealous of time she spent away from me but felt stifled and smothered if she bothered too much about what I was doing. I would be annoyed if she asked too many questions and resented her intrusion into my life. I was angry and humiliated if she hit me and I wouldn't sit on her knee or let her cuddle me. This episode which marked a change in my relationship with my mother made a great impression on me and years later I would wake up having dreamt about it.

Writing this has made me realise that though I have come through to what I feel is a better relationship with my mother than ever, the attitudes of my two brothers towards her and towards women in general appear to be based on hatred and critical judgement. Their treatment of women implies that women are to be used for serving them with comforts and sex and that they are inferior, by far, to men. This is particularly true of the elder of my two brothers and is summed up by something he said. When I told him that I am gay, he was disgusted and when I added that there would be gay men working in London Transport (he works for the buses) he strongly denied that there were any male homosexuals in L.T. I carried on to say that there would also be lesbians working in L.T. to which he replied "Oh, I ken that. All the bloody women are lesbians." These same attitudes of women's inequality had been in our parents' relationship. My mother served the family for years in the home and when the marriage, which has the home as its centre, broke up, it was my mother who, as the keeper of the home, bore the blame. One evening after there had been a row and my father had gone to the pub, my mother had broken down and cried "I've failed, I've failed, I've failed, I've failed" over and over again.

So anyway, there I was at ten years old, a spoilt (as I was often told) introverted boy with an inferiority complex and a stutter, who got on with the younger of his two sisters but who got on better with the dog, when something called sex entered my life. In my family there wasn't much emotional or physical warmth or tenderness. No one called anyone names of endearment and we didn't kiss each other or touch one another in a loving way. And the culture around us of course was like this. In this emotional/physical desert, sex was something dirty and to be ashamed of. For a woman (married of course) the physical visibility of her pregnancy was an embarrassment and she would have jokes made about her because everyone could see what she had been up to.

So when the scoutmaster took me aside to go over the scout laws with me and put his hand up my shorts, it was no wonder that I felt alarm and guilt. I also felt pleasure and excitement and told the other scouts that the scoutmaster had a cock like a huge sausage. Their reaction seemed to be one of titillation as well as that it was wrong. One or two of them called me poof, but I hadn't a clue what it meant. I at this time hadn't reached puberty yet and all that was involved was tickling and stroking one another's genitals, but on every occasion I felt dirty and guilty, so much so that I left the scouts and joined another troop. I had received enjoyment from the contact but I felt no attraction from the scoutmaster and I would think longingly of some of the other scouts with whom I would have much preferred a mutually pleasing sexual relationship.

Where I am from, all moral issues were dealt with as a cleaver deals with meat and to have sex outside marriage was scandalous. For example in a shop where I worked, a boy and a girl were sacked after they were discovered having sex in the stockroom. And to be gay or paedophile was to be a pariah and delight would be taken in making one aware of one's outcastness. Living near me was an elderly, single man who was rumoured to fancy little boys — whether he did or not, I don't know — but pre-teenage boys would throw stones at his door and chant "Pete the snecker, Pete the snecker". The scoutmaster as long as I was in the town didn't have his paedophile activities brought to light, and if he had, as he was married with two daughters and had quite a high position in the council administration, it would have meant social ruin. His feelings of guilt though were shown by the fact that when we went over the scout laws together, he always left out the law which says 'A scout is clean in thought, mind and deed'. This of course had increased my guilt feelings that we were doing something 'dirty'.

At 15 I felt the pressure to ask girls out but didn't have the courage or sufficient desire, so when a girl asked me out my problem was solved and we went to see a film. The fact that she had asked me out and made it easy for me to get over the initial step of dating her, made me try to cling to her as a safe entry to social conformity. However she soon gave me up and this was the end of attempts at heterosexual courtship. I did make forays into dance halls frequented by heterosexuals but stayed pretty much aloof and tried smoking to keep me interested. From then on I had to do a balancing act with girls. I tried to keep girls as friends without actually telling them I wasn't interested in courtship or petting; but as soon as any girl made demands that the relationship should be on a more regular basis, I ran scared and avoided her from then on. On only two occasions have I ended up in bed with a girl, and both times I was able to avoid fucking with them. The first time by pretending I was too tired and sleepy and the second time by saying that I didn't want to take her virginity as she was too nice a girl and I thought too highly of her. My attraction to the same sex however took a positive turn when I had my knee rubbed continuously for half an hour in a cinema by an older man. It was electrifying and startling too. I soon discovered that in the next large town men could be met in toilets or cinemas who enjoyed touching and wanking off male youths and so from spending most of my free time at the swimming baths I became a film freak. Previously masturbation had been my sole release; with my total lack of sex education and ignorance I had often been scared that this would lead to impotence. This seeking for contacts in cinemas and toilets, the only places I knew where to meet other homosexuals was new and exciting at first, but later became very unsatisfactory. However it was my only outlet (and sporadically at that) until I was 21 (I am now 29), when, living in Ayrshire at the time, I entered my first gay bar.

It was nerve wracking. I had heard about this bar which was in Glasgow in an anti-gay joke and it took me a week of standing in the street, every evening where the bar was, for me to build up the courage to go in. I was so nervous and guilty about being gay, and going into this gay bar seemed to be a public declaration of my gayness, so that when I had gone there once it became easier to go there again. It was here that I met a guy with whom I had my first really pleasant homosexual experience; we had sex in a bed instead of a toilet. But I had been expecting more from a gay bar. After all here we were, homosexual men who were hated and despised, ridiculed and denied a decent existence, who came to meet one another in this bar, but

instead of a relaxed friendly atmosphere, I found it cold and chilling. The atmosphere and attitudes of the world outside were brought into the pub and unless one was in a group or coterie of gay friends, the situation could lead to desperation and a feeling of just as great isolation as outside.

Soon afterwards I left Scotland for London and the bright lights of Earls Court. I became an habitue of the Coleherne and learned to function adeptly in this gay bar in the rituals of picking up and being picked up — of making contact with the eyes and then carrying out a duologue to find out whether we fancied each other: then perhaps a tentative question such as "It's crowded in here tonight, isn't it?" or "Can I buy a drink?" Or else further communication with the eyes to discover whose place we could go back to. I went there for two years and mostly found it quite depressing. However it was my lifeline to my gayness and I needed it and so tried to adapt to its conventions as easily as I could. I would equate my enjoyment of the evening with whether I managed to pick up anyone but most probably if I did, I wouldn't see him again as I only saw people once and that usually was it finished. I would look out for someone who would suit me as a permanent lover — a kind of ideal, but of course as I only saw people once I didn't give that a chance. It was a vicious treadmill.

I was not heterosexual, I was a homosexual, and a homosexual is defined by society as someone who has sex with people of the same sex. So I had sex with gay men but my emotional relationships were always with heterosexual men. My emotions were split off from my physical needs. Society told me that I was a queer and a queen and bent and a poof and a fairy and a faggot and I was despicable and so I thought everyone like me was also despicable. So I despised them as I despised myself. It was each gay for, as in my case, himself. I didn't fit in with heterosexuals but the homosexual subculture was ridden with their — the heterosexuals — view of what we were. And so we gays were split and fragmented and it was very difficult to break this pattern and achieve any lasting friendship with other gay people.

I failed completely to make gay friends because of my loneliness and frustrations at being gay. I remember I once said to someone that if there was a pill which would make me heterosexual I would take it. Because I hated living in a bedsitter, and hated the dull, repetitious work I was doing; because there seemed to be no way out of all this, I attempted suicide. I firstly took care to destroy the copies of a gay magazine I owned called *Jeremy* in case my family should find out that I was gay. The jobs I had had were mostly unskilled labouring jobs and in them it had become obvious that I was not the same as the other men. I didn't have their toughness in speech and gesture, I didn't drink pints of beer or bet on horses or follow football; I wasn't interested in cars and I didn't speak about women as bits, chicks, that, cunt, pussy, piece, talent, etc. In fact I didn't actually talk about women a great deal. And of course my 'difference' was sometimes hinted at or spoken about. One man had his three-year-old son run after me to call me queer. Mostly though I was left on my own. I got on much better with women in the jobs I had, especially older women. The younger women I always felt were a threat as they might see themselves as potential girlfriends.

Then a short while after my suicide attempt, while I was crossing the road from The Coleherne to go into The Boltons I was handed a leaflet about a group which had just started called the Gay Liberation Front (G.L.F.). So I went to a meeting. At this time I had been in London for two years and it is an odd reflection that during this period I had never heard of the Albany Trust or the Committee for Homosexual Equality (as it was then called). G.L.F. challenged and questioned the images and names that heterosexuals had heaped on us — challenged and questioned the male/female stereotype roles that led to such rigid definitions and polarisations of sexual tendencies. G.L.F. questioned the whole male power structure of capitalist society and challenged the gays in the subculture to come out. A feeling of gay pride and gay solidarity was developed. We shouted that gay is good, and that

two four six eight
gay is just as good as straight
three five seven nine
lesbians are mighty fine.

We were encouraged to come out and tell our family and people at work that we were gay and that it was great. Discos and dances were set up as alternatives to the subculture. It was a revolution in my life from being secretive, afraid and guilty to being proud and glad to be gay. Coming out at work proved to be less of a trauma than I had thought it would be. Now that I'm a full-time student still have a feeling of being separate from the other students because of my gayness, but however, if the other students do oppress me they will do it knowing that there's a 'poof' around who's going to answer back. As for my family, my gayness is an embarrassment and it is a subject which is not mentioned. They won't acknowledge my gayness in any other way than that they never now ask if I'm going steady with a girl or when I'm going to get married. The only concession is that they ask how Jeff (my boyfriend) is doing.

And that's it. I've managed to come through the oppression surrounding us gays, though not unscathed. I've come through the tight, all-embracing hug of the ideology of the family, school and the social pressure at work, in the media and elsewhere, and through the failed chase for something better in the gay subculture. And I've come through it to a tenuous hold on to a society which is still basically anti-gay. But I know that I am lucky and fortunate that I was in a large city and came in contact with G.L.F. and people who helped me. Few of the conditions which I came up against have changed much or at all. Thousands of gay people live in other parts of these islands still oppressed, repressed and depressed by the prevailing culture; in the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland - and Scotland, where homosexuality is yet illegal, in Wales and England where our rights are minimal. Everywhere the male ethic is dominant. Gays all over the country live lives completely untouched by G.L.F. or the 'sexual revolution' as it is called. And while some gays fight for further rights, it is necessary too to fight for a basic feeling of gay pride for our sisters and brothers everywhere. Only with a feeling of gay pride and solidarity can we go on to challenge sexual stereotyping and the male-dominated culture which oppress us.

Review

The Early Homosexual Rights Movement

By John Lauritsen and David Thorstad

Times Change Press, New York, 1974. 91 pages, price £1.00.

This is a very useful book, the first produced in the gay movement which attempts to outline the general trends of past struggles for homosexual rights. In an earlier form it was written as an internal educational document in the American Socialist Workers Party. Its central involvement is thus with the connections between socialism and the gay movement. Its detail can still provide valuable ammunition in the present struggles of gay socialists.

The book's first concern is to suggest the continuity of the present gay liberation struggles with those of the past. The section on 'The Early Homosexual Rights Movement',

from 1864 to 1935 is effective in tracing many of the forgotten campaigns, particularly those waged in Germany by the pioneering student of homosexuality, Magnus Hirschfeld (himself known as Auntie Magnesia in the German gay world) and his followers. The work of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the struggle against the notorious anti-homosexual Paragraph 175 of the German penal code, the rivalries with the cultural emphasis of the 'Community of the Special', the eventual establishment of the Institute for Sexual Science, and the World Congresses for Sex Reform are fascinating stories. They particularly throw into relief the more muted (if nevertheless still traceable) campaigns in Britain and the USA.

There is a danger, though, of overstressing the elements of continuity between the past movements and the present.

In the first place it ignores the specific forms of oppression that gave rise to both the early campaigns and the particular shapes they adopted. The history of the early homosexual rights movement would make more sense if located in the threefold development of new legal controls on sexuality (not just homosexuality); new ideological forms adopted as the 'medical model' of homosexuality; and the growth of a relatively complex and recognisably 'modern' type of subculture.

This threefold development can be traced not only in Germany but in Britain and the USA and forms the essential framework for understanding the gay rights campaigns. Secondly, it is wrong, I think, to under-emphasise what was new in the Gay Liberation Movement that burst on us in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This obviously grew out of past campaigns in various ways, but for those who took part in the early movement it was a qualitative leap: almost it seemed at the time from 'the realms of necessity to the realms of freedom'. This latter view was, as it turned out, an illusion, but the 'leap' was significant enough, and it is still working out its consequences within the gay community.

The differences between the implications of the two movements can be detected in the section of the book describing 'Scientific and Theoretical Issues'. What most of the early theorists attempted to do was find a role for homosexuality *within* existing concepts of gender roles and sexual differentiation. This can be understood clearly enough when placed in the context of the practical and 'scientific' concerns of the early twentieth century but it is obviously sharply different from our own preoccupations with gender roles and the family. And this precisely underlines the advance, both in theory and practice, that has taken place. The early movement's chief concerns were to establish the existence of homosexuality, the identity and role of homosexuals (Inverts', 'Uranians', 'the Intermediate Sex', or whatever) and the removal of penal sanctions from it. The central involvement (though not always the day to

day concern) of the present movement is with the causes of oppression, the pervasiveness of sexism, and the meanings of the *movement* against them. The differences can be summed up in the comparison between 'campaign', the key word of the early struggles, and 'movement', the key word of the present phase.

What is significant about the early campaigns is the close connection with the political left. This says a great deal about the quality of these early campaigners and about the left at that time. It was still the bearer, to put it bluntly, of a concept of socialism which saw it as a whole way of life, not just a series of economic arrangements. The social revolution was seen by many of the socialists who supported homosexual rights as a transformation, not only of the political but of the personal too. This is an emphasis that has been almost entirely lost in socialist movements. This book should thus have a salutary effect on those non-gay socialists who read it. But what the section on 'Socialism and the early Gay Movement' also underlines is the ways in which ideological and pseudo-scientific definitions of sexuality and gender roles vitiated the apparent liberalism of even the most sympathetic of socialists, such as the early Bolsheviks, and paved the way for the rapid back-tracking from the 1930s, onwards (for more on this see my *Where Engels feared to tread* in issue No 1). Gay socialists could do worse than ponder on the lessons and implications of this section.

The book ends with notes on a number of pioneers, including Edward Carpenter, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Magnus Hirschfeld and Walt Whitman. These are sketchy, but often illuminating. The book, as might be expected, only begins to scrape the surface. But the soil it reveals is very fertile. Some interesting crops might yet grow from it.*

Jeffrey Weeks

The book can be obtained from most Left bookshops in Britain. In London, Compendium, Colletts, Housemans and Rising Free bookshops stock it.

Gays In Films

by Richard Dyer

Since the gay movement began we have insisted on the centrality of the media (understood in its widest sense) as a carrier, reinforcer or shaper of our oppression. Sometimes we have gone overboard in blaming the mass media — they are only one of the instruments of oppression. More important, we have tended to condemn images of gayness in the name of aesthetic concepts and values that are highly problematic. We've tended to demand that gay characters and themes be represented according to certain ideas and ideals about what art is, without seeing that such ideas and ideals are *straight* ones, not neutral or transparent but imbued with a sexual ideology that has anti-gayness as one of its cornerstones. I want in this article to look at some of these notions as they apply to films, to argue that what appear to be 'given' aesthetic principles are, in however ambiguous a way, also principles of heterosexual hegemony.

1 "Gayness should express itself on film"

Many critics, especially in gay publications, are concerned with how gayness expresses itself on film. I am thinking particularly of Jack Babuscio's articles in *Gay News* (and let me make it clear right now that what follows is not an 'attack'; Jack's articles raise central issues in the most widely available non-pornographic forum there is for gays in this country, and his articles have helped me enormously in trying to think these issues). Running through all of these articles is the notion of the 'gay sensibility', which he defines as 'a creative energy reflecting a consciousness *different* from the mainstream, a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression; in fact, a perception of the world which is coloured, shaped, directed and defined by the fact of one's homosexuality.' (GN 82; p.15). Many of his articles are concerned with the way this sensibility 'surfaces' in films — for example, his pieces on John Schlesinger (GN 74) and James Dean (GN 79).

There is already a problem here with the notion of a gay sensibility. Jack tends to write as if the very fact of being oppressed, and of being able to pass because one's stigma need not show, automatically produces the gay sensibility. I am certainly happy to acknowledge the fact of the gay sensibility, but it has to be understood as something that has been and is produced and practised in history and culture — it is the specific way we (or rather, a relatively 'out' minority) have found of coping with and resisting our oppression and our peculiar situation as 'invisible' stigmatised people. Oppression does not just 'produce' a sub-cultural sensibility; it merely provides the conditions in relation to which oppressed people create their own sub-culture and attendant sensibility.

A second problem is that it is in fact rather hard for an individual sensibility to surface in a film. This is partly because of the sheer numbers of people who work on a film, in an often fragmented and long-drawn-out organisation of production; even the director has limited room for manoeuvre.⁽¹⁾ But it is more importantly because any artist in any medium whatsoever is working with a tradition, a set of conventions, that are imbued with meanings that she or he cannot change, and indeed of which she or he is most likely not aware. Even if films did have individual authors (as most 'underground' films do⁽²⁾), it would still not alter the problem. The author may have any qualities you like; but the cinematic language has connotations and conventions that escape the author. Take a film like *The Detective*, which sets out to be sympathetic, puts a major star (Frank Sinatra) as a defender of gays and details some of the forms our oppression (and self-oppression) takes, but cannot all the same help but reproduce the dominant image of gays — the actual conventions of the film are more powerful than the intentions of scriptwriter and star. Thus the star's unassailable heterosexuality and centrality to the action enforce a narrative function of gay passivity, requiring a

straight to act for us; the bleak view of sexual relations in American thrillers like this means that gayness is seen as part of a web of sexual sickness, equated especially with the hero's wife's nymphomania (i.e. she fancies men other than him!); the gay scene can only legitimately be shown at points in the plot relating to crime (why else would Sinatra be interested?), and so enforces the link between gayness, deviancy and crime; and the actual visualisation of the gay scene can find no way round the impression of the grotesque (— the milieu is sketched in by cutting from bizarre face to bizarre face, accompanied by snatches of dialogue lifted out of context, as the protagonist supposedly looks round and takes in the gay environment; this is a convention of representing the gay scene — compare similar scenes in *The Killing of Sister George*, *New Face in Hell*, *The Naked Civil Servant*, etc.).

Nor is this problem confined to commercial cinema. (Indeed, as Claire Johnson has pointed out(3), the very obviousness of the conventions in commercial cinema may mean that it is easier to manipulate in progressive ways than the hidden conventions of 'art cinema'). Thus in contemporary French cinema there is really little to choose between the lesbian in *Emmanuelle*, an obvious exploitation film, and those in *Les Biches*, directed by critically acclaimed Claude Chabrol, and the feminist film *La Fiancée du Pirate* (— except that she is actually rather nicer in *Emmanuelle*). This is because in every case the film is made within a straight framework, women seen only in relation to men, and the lesbianism is there as a facet of the het world-view. In the case of the first two, the attraction of lesbianism is evoked the better to assert the superiority of hetness; in the case of *La Fiancée du Pirate*, the lesbian seems to represent a 'sick' way of being an independent woman over against the heroine's independence via prostitution (which both allows her to revenge herself on men and gives her enough money to leave the village). In no case is lesbianism expressing *itself*.

In this perspective, Jack Babuscio's article on James Dean is instructive. He argues that Dean's gayness informs his three screen roles, giving them 'depth', 'warmth' and 'sensitivity'. Thus *Giant* for instance allowed him to express 'the inability of adolescents to relate to the sexual roles played out by parents'. Now in terms of how a particular screen image happened to come about, the role of Dean's gay sensibility in modifying and shaping it may well have been crucial, and it is polemically important to say so. But at the same time one has to see that, as an expression of gayness, it is deformed. There is never the slightest suggestion in any of his roles that Dean is gay; Plato's 'crush' on him in *Rebel Without a Cause* is by no flicker of recognition reciprocated by him, and there is no other such attachment in the other two films. At one level of course, Dean, quite possibly through his gayness, did help launch a way of being human and male without being particularly 'masculine' (cf. also Montgomery Clift and Anthony Perkins) — and that is a contribution to the struggle against the sex roles. But this struggle could only be showed at the expense of the character's gayness — he had to be seen as emphatically heterosexual. Moreover the narrative frameworks of the films implicitly reinforce the heterosexual, sex-role norms. The point about Dean's roles as *roles* (rather than the qualities his *performance* suggests, which may well be in contradiction with the roles), is that he is, in *East of Eden* and *Rebel Without a Cause*, the son of, in the first case, a strong mother, and, in the second, a weak father. The stress on the 'extraordinary' quality of these parents (Jo Van Fleet in *Eden* always photographed in shadow and with dramatic 'expressionist' techniques of lighting and camera angle; Jim Backus played for laughs and pathos in *Rebel*) implies the properness of the ordinary parental roles of 'weak' mothers and 'strong' fathers. Dean of course had a following, and it was undoubtedly linked to the kind of non-butch image of being a man that he incarnated; an image that gay men have been in a particularly good position to imagine and define — I don't want to deny his contribution nor its gay roots. But this contribution is, inevitably, at the expense of gayness, and it is moreover in an artistic form where his roles' function in the narrative, and the construction of other characters through performance and filming, contradict the implications of his image. People may have taken away an image of gentle sensitive ways of being a man, but they may also have taken away a sense of neuroticism born of inadequately performed sex roles. Films, and most art, are usually as contradictory and open to alternative interpretations as



The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant

this; and as long as it is a question of inserting gayness into films as they are, any full, undeformed expression of the gay sensibility will tend within any film to offer a weak counterpoint to the reinforcement of heterosexual and sex-role norms.

2 "Gays as ordinary human beings"

A very common stance of straight critics, and alas many within the gay movement (for we so easily take over straight notions without realising how inapplicable they are to our situation), is that films should show that gay people are just ordinary human beings. In this line of thought, highest praise is granted to those films where it is apparently 'incidental' that the characters and milieu are gay.

Now it may be true that we are still at the stage where we need to assert, to others and to ourselves, that we are part of the human race. But such assumptions assume that there is no real difference between being gay and being straight. Yet, from a materialist standpoint, gayness is different physically, emotionally and socially from hetness. It is physically different not in the sense of involving different genetic factors (the equivalent sexist argument for the facist arguments of behavioural psychology) but in the sense of being a different physical activity — two women in bed together is not the same as a man and a woman together or two men. It is different emotionally because it involves two people who have received broadly the same socialisation (being both of the same gender) and have thus formed their personalities in relation to the same pressures and experiences. It is socially different because it is oppressed — oppression enters into straight relationships of course, partly through the legacy of puritanism in its various forms and partly through the oppression within straight relationships of women by men. But the heterosexual impulse is not of itself condemned (except in extreme instances) and a space is allowed for it in marriage. We, on the other hand, have nearly always been condemned even for having gay desires, and no real social legitimacy (in a wider sense than mere lack of legal constraints) has ever been allowed us. I don't wish to imply that we are different in every way from hets — in terms of aspects of our lives not directly involving relationships, we are, clearly, the same as hets. Our bodily functions, how we do our work, our intellectual and creative abilities, all these are in no way different from straights ... except in so far as they involve

relationships. The trouble is of course that they do — so much of life is relationships and even where no physical sexual expression is given to them the sexual reality of our lives necessarily informs them.

What this boils down to in terms of films is that if you are representing sexual and emotional relationships on screen, it does make a difference whether they are gay or straight. One will not do as a metaphor for the other, neither will either do as general metaphors for human sexuality and relationships. In assessing, for instance, the kind of power struggles and games portrayed in *The Killing of Sister George*, *Staircase*, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, *The Boys in the Band*, one has to decide whether these are the power games going on in gay relationships (formed and practised in a situation of oppression) or whether these are the power games going on in straight relationships (formed and practised in a situation where men oppress women) transposed to ostensibly gay characters in order to give the verdict of 'sick' and 'neurotic' to heterosexual hang-ups by ascribing them to homosexual people. The films mentioned seem to me to be so lacking in any sense of the reality of oppression (the social situation of gayness) and of gay sexuality (the physical activity of gayness) as to make the second interpretation the more likely.

A further reason for accepting this interpretation is that it is a characteristic of some, a minority, gay relationships, to imitate straight 'marriages'. Thus superficially, seen from the outside, gay relationships can be reduced to the forms of conflict of straight ones, whilst at the same time implying that it is the 'tragic' impossibility of gays actually being married straights that accounts for the conflicts. In this way, such domestic dramas of 'gay' life are doubly reassuring for the straight audience — they allow it to view problems of heterosexuality (which psychologically they no doubt need to) without being shown these problems as by showing how tragically impossible they are for gays. All this is confirmed by the way straight critics, presented with a similar drama involving het people, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, promptly turned round and asserted, despite Albee's assurances to the contrary, that it was really a disguised homosexual play!

3 Realism

Lingering behind much of the criticism of the representation of gays in films is the feeling that it is not real, it does not show gay people as they really are.

Realism is one of the trickiest terms in the whole critical vocabulary — yet it is endlessly evoked, often with recourse to synonyms like 'convincing', 'true-to-life', 'plausible' and so on. What this means is that we require films to present us with settings, people, events that as closely as possible resemble day-to-day life, granted a little artistic licence. We tend not to recognise how conventional realism is, although one only has to look at the realism of earlier periods (British 30s documentary, Italian neo-realism, 'Method' acting) to see both how stylised all realisms actually are and how each realist style carries all sorts of cultural, historical connotations with it.

However the problem with realism is not so much our blindness to the conventionality of the realism of our own times, but the fact that realism is really only capable of capturing the surface of life — it cannot 'capture' what is going on inside people's heads nor can it capture the social forces that determine the surface of life.

In fact it is very hard for 'realism' to do anything but reproduce dominant ideology. That is — in everyday life objects and appearances have, first, an objective status in the bio-physical world, and second, a range of potential significances for us individually, although dominant in that range is what our culture has taught us to associate with them. But once objects and appearances are filmed they can only mean to us what they mean in the film. They are signs whose only bio-physical status is celluloid. It then becomes exceedingly difficult for them to mean anything but what they predominantly mean in culture. Thus to show gay people 'realistically' on the screen means to show them in the conventions of the prevailing cinematic realism; which in turn means to reproduce the ideas and assumptions about how gays really are which prevail in society. Whatever its intentions (and the intentions of realist film-makers are seldom anything but generous), a 'realist' film about gays is unlikely to challenge the assumptions of most of the audience about what gays are

like — for whilst we as gays may read the everyday surface represented (perhaps quite accurately) according to our sub-cultural understandings, the rest of the audience is perfectly free to read it according to its dominant cultural understandings.

Realism can, within its conventions, show the look of gay life, but it cannot show what it feels and what it means to gay people, nor can it show the social pressures that act on gay people and so produce the look of gay life. This I think is neatly shown up by the film *Victim*, which is a mixture of liberal realism and crime thriller. The notion of oppression comes across in the film certainly, but only because of the nonrealist elements — that is, that it is a major star (Dirk Bogarde, then a pin-up) who is got at for being gay and that the thriller narrative clearly assigns villainy to the blackmailers not the gays (— remembering that this is the sort of thriller in which there is no moral ambiguity about who the goodies and the baddies are). On the other hand, the depiction of gay life is, in the conventions of the time, realistic enough — but the conventions of the time are such that real can only mean the kind of 'sickness' view of homosexuality that the film's title's emphasis would suggest. Thus whilst it does not reproduce the 'evil' connotation of gayness, it does reproduce the 'sickness' connotation that the Wolfenden report was to reveal as the dominant bourgeois view of us.

4 Stereotypes

No term is more frequent in gay criticism of the cinema than 'stereotype'. Certainly we are right to be angry about the succession of pathetic, ridiculous and grotesque figures that are supposed to be us up there on the screen.

We may define stereotype as a method of one-dimensional characterisation — that is, constructing a total character by the very mention of one dimension of her or his characteristics. Thus to know that a character is lesbian is immediately to know that she is aggressive, frustrated, loud-mouthed, big-boned and perverse. All art, indeed all our thoughts about the world, uses typecasting but when we label someone a 'grocer' or a 'doctor', we usually assume that that does not tell us all we need to know about him (and we usually assume it is a man). Whereas it is assumed by stereotypes such as the dumb blonde, the happy nigger, the bull dyke and the camp queen that we know all we need to.

Thus far we can agree that stereotyping is a Bad Thing. However behind this notion of stereotypes there lingers another notion which may be equally undesirable — this is the idea of the "rounded" character, the type of character-construction practised by nineteenth century novelists and advocated by theorists such as E.M. Forster. This is *not* the 'natural' way of 'depicting people' in art, but a particular artistic method for constructing protagonists in a particular narrative tradition. It is a method that has inscribed in it certain of the dominant values of Western society — above all, individualism, the belief that an individual is above all important in and for himself, rather than a belief in the importance of the individual for her or

The Killing of Sister George





his class, community or sisters and brothers. This cardinal precept of bourgeois ideology as against feudal or socialist ideology is built right into the notion of the 'rounded character', who may well feel some pulls of allegiance to groups with whom she or he identifies, but who is ultimately seen as distinct and separate from the group, and in many cases, antagonistic to it. Rounded characterisation is then far from ideal when you need (as we do) expressions of solidarity, common cause, class consciousness, fraternity and sorority.

What we need is not the replacement of stereotypes by rounded gay characters (though it would I think be wrong to underestimate the *temporarily* progressive impact of films which do use rounded characterisation for gay characters; this breaks the rules — it is a surprise to find Peter Finch in *Sunday Bloody Sunday* treated with the same trappings of 'roundness' as Glenda Jackson), but rather the development of positively valued gay types. That is representation of gay people which, on the one hand, unlike stereotypes proper, does not function to deny individual differences from the broad category to which the character belongs. But it, on the other hand, does not, unlike rounded characters, function to diminish the sense of a character's belonging and acting in solidarity with her or his social group.

What the positions just discussed seem to lack is any concept of the operation of ideology in art. Films are treated as transparent, neutral, a mere medium, and the distorted representation of gayness as a correctable, regrettable fault. As long as the mesh between artistic form and dominant ideology is ignored, no radical critique of gays in films can be accomplished.

Where gayness occurs in films it does so as *part of* dominant ideology. It is not there to express itself, but rather to express something about sexuality in general *as understood by hets*. Gayness is used to define the parameters of normality, to suggest the thrill and/or terror of

decadence, to embody neurotic sexuality, or to perform various artistic—ideological functions that in the end assert the superiority of heterosexuality. We are wrong to assume that anti-gayness in films is a mere aberration on the part of straight society — how homosexuality is thought and felt by hets is part and parcel of the way the culture teaches them (and us) to think and feel about their heterosexuality. Anti-gayness is not a discrete ideological system, but part of the overall sexual ideology of our culture.

This ideology is complicated. There are many inflections of the het norms, and much of the analysis of images of gayness has to take this into account. Two examples — gayness in the American thriller tradition called 'film noir' (e.g. *The Maltese Falcon*, *In a Lonely Place*, *Gilda*, and also arguable later cases such as *Gunn* and *New Face in Hell*), where gayness is part of a web of sexual fear and anxiety (especially in the form of sexually potent women who endanger the hero); *Victim* is one example of a whole series of British films treating sexual-social issues (such as prostitution, child-molesting, adultery) as 'problems' and 'sickness'. How the gayness is represented derives from the particular inflection of the ideology of the time.

Moreover, and here we can take hope, ideology is contradictory, ambiguous, full of gaps and fissures. Straight culture is attracted as well as repelled by gayness, and films do show the differing pressures of these responses. Gay culture, although itself formed and deformed in the shadow of straight culture, does contain oppositional elements within it — gayness always at the very least raises the spectre of alternatives to the family, the sex-roles, male dominance. Thus to take an example of an extremely conventional, bourgeois, 'well-made' film, *Summer Wishes, Winter Dreams*, a film in which the very briefly shown gay characters are presented as performing ballet grotesques. Not on the face of it a positive assertion of gayness. Yet the film centres on the rifts and cruelties of a heterosexual relationship, and, at the end of the picture, the gay relationship, although not shown, is evoked as a positive, happy-making one (— the fact that it is off screen suggests how hard it is to find *images* to evoke this). Moreover, the central character's dilemma is structured in the film (as the title indicates) in terms of dreams (the nightmare of the ballet-gay) and wishes (sentimental reconciliation of son within the family unit). Her anguish is shown to stem not from realities themselves but from how she thinks realities. There is thus an undertow to the film which does begin to raise questions and intuitions about the whole edifice of marriage, sexual relationships and so on. It is to such undertows that we should look, for they are the most likely sources of a cinema which undermines heterosexual artistic hegemony from within and may in the process create a form of artistic language which comprehends all of human sexuality and relationships.*

Notes

1 See Ed Buscombe: 'Ideas of authorship' in *Screen*, Vol 14, No 3 pp. 75-85

2 *Gays have been particularly influential in the development of underground cinema; e.g. the work of Kenneth Anger, Constance Beeson, Jack Smigh, Gregory Markopoulos.*

3 See Claire Johnson: *Notes on Women's Cinema*, S.E.F. T., 1973.

A Commune Experience

By Keith Birch

The commune movement was an important aspect of the alternative society in the early 1970s. Even though the number of people who actually set up communes together may have been quite small, the interest in the movement and its underlying ideology was widespread, especially amongst the young and middle class idealists.

The relevance of this movement to gay people now may seem very slight, but in many ways it did question the structure and functions of the family in modern society as the women's movement and revolutionary gay people do today. There were attempts to put into practice many of the propositions for alternative living structures and relationships. From analysing the practical failure of the movement in general and from personal experience of living in a commune, some of the contradictory aspects and the incompleteness of the movement's ideological foundations

become apparent.

I was amongst a group of gay people who were all members of the Gay Liberation Movement in 1971 who wanted to form a commune. The attraction of living together in this way for gays had several specific causes. Gay people are excluded from the family unit or feel alienated from it in many cases. The socially prescribed roles of mother, father, etc., are not possible or are forced onto us and so the nuclear family cannot fulfill our needs. Therefore, the prospect of a loving extended 'family' is particularly appealing. A communal situation had the chance of serving the emotional needs of people who are made to feel isolated by this society, as many gays are. This feeling was probably true for most of the commune.

A communal situation encourages the questioning of the roles that are allotted to us by this society. Ours was, of

course, a rather unique group, in that we were all gay men at the start though later on some women did become members. Also, there were no children in the commune. This meant that many problems were not confronted by us.

One of the central concepts of the commune movement, with which we agreed, was the stress put upon personal change as being a key factor for wider social changes in the future; if the whole of society would not change, we were going to build an alternative society, side by side with it. The writings of Cooper and Laing were widely read and approved of. There was much criticism of family life and the bad effects it had on the individual. Great faith was put on alternative group structures to produce a better emotional environment. There was little thought given to the economic and social background which forces people into their present circumstances. Economic problems were only considered in relation to the financial stability of the commune. If individuals could solve their personal problems and learn to relate fully with other people, sometime in the future, society would become a loving utopia.

Our group had been meeting together for some time to discuss our ideas and to get to know one another. We all came from very different backgrounds, both in class and nationality. About the only things we had in common were being gay and wanting to live in a commune. The first major problem was to get somewhere for us all to live but suddenly there was an opportunity for those who wished to move into a flat and so about seven of us actually took it up. The first few months were a period of great change and excitement for us. It was a matter of confronting the problem of a group of almost total strangers living together in a very small space. The decision to have a communal bedroom was forced on us for reasons of space as well as ideology. New people came along who were interested in joining and after the first six months we moved to another flat with some change in membership and a growth in numbers to about 12. The number of members was to remain fairly constant until the end, although some people moved on while others joined us.

Some of the first disagreements had occurred because of a feeling of domination that some of us felt from those who seemed to speak most and take the decisions. This initial problem was resolved when the majority of us moved, leaving the others behind. It was the first failure that we had to admit from our original theorising. Our often repeated belief had been that it was possible for any people to live together and through the continual interaction, confrontation and mutual change in character, conflicts would resolve themselves. However, this was not the case on this occasion and later ones.

The ideology of the G.L.M. at the time against monogamous couples was carried into our beliefs concerning our living situation. At the start there were two couples, though not monogamous, but by the end of the two year period the number had increased. It could be said that we entered the group from isolated backgrounds and went through a living process which gave us the personal confidence (or need) to enter couple relationships. Some felt free enough to relate to several others in the commune sexually and most of us had sexual relationships with people outside the group and visitors. However, the underlying tensions that wider sexual expression amongst the commune members ourselves caused, became too great for it to happen frequently or for too long. The subject was not often discussed and a satisfactory understanding of our feelings was never worked out. There was a sense of guilt about being jealous, so instead of open confrontation, pressures were put on in more subtle ways. Sexual relationships with people outside the group somehow felt less threatening and were more open to discussion and so problems could find some resolution.

House meetings were held regularly at the start in which we would try to sort out all the general financial and material problems. There is a joke that people part over who does the washing-up. When 12 people live together that chore grows to amazing proportions and it caused many arguments when people did not make their contribution. Finance was always a problem. Communes, by their nature, stress the 'living' situation but those in cities, unless based on some sort of craft production or business, find it necessary for members to undertake wage labour outside. At first most of us had full-time jobs but these were gradually given up in favour of part-time occupations, cleaning or claiming Social Security in order to give us freedom and time to spend together. Projects for us all to

produce crafts within the commune were often considered and attempts were made but without success. Differences arose between those who wanted to move to the country so the commune could be self-supporting and others who wanted to remain in London where they felt work within the G.L.M. and greater social contact more important.

Another feature which affected the way in which the commune progressed was the fact that we were used by the G.L.F. office as a place for people, who were on holiday or in trouble, to stay. The result of this was that we were always overcrowded (at one point there were 20 people staying in a flat meant for six). We were confronted with many people's problems, emotional, legal and others, and had less time to sort out our own. There were occasional rip-offs. However, this continuous stream of people provided us with contacts with the outside. Some became members of the commune after spending a period of time to find out whether we were mutually suitable. Also it served an important role for sexual relationships.

Every member of the commune was expected to pay an equal share towards the rent bills and kitty for food. This was agreed after much discussion because the differences in employment and the level of each person's wages meant that for some it was easy while for others it could be a problem. However, it was felt that if everyone contributed, it would not lead to situations of dependence or ill-feeling and it would show commitment and responsibility towards the rest. Even so, it did not always work out like this.

For some of the time we did the cooking, shopping and cleaning by rota with the intention of us all being together at least for a main communal meal each day. The rota system did not last as its formality led to inconveniences and an oppressive feeling to conform, although at times things became so chaotic that it was returned to for short periods. We continued to have a communal bedroom until the last few months, although it seemed to surprise visitors, as did the fact that the bathroom had no door. It was recognized that people need to be alone at times and so a room was set aside for this purpose.

After almost two years the commune began to disintegrate. It is impossible to identify one particular cause; rather it was through various personal and political differences combined with feelings of frustration and emotional exhaustion.

Although I have rather dismissed the relevance of personal change through communal living as a way of changing our society, most of us feel that it was a very important experience and we discovered a great deal about ourselves, our feelings and hang-ups, etc. We had to confront things that in other circumstances could have been avoided and therefore not resolved. In many ways I believe that I was one of those who gained the most from living in the commune, particularly in being able to relate with others and in self-confidence.

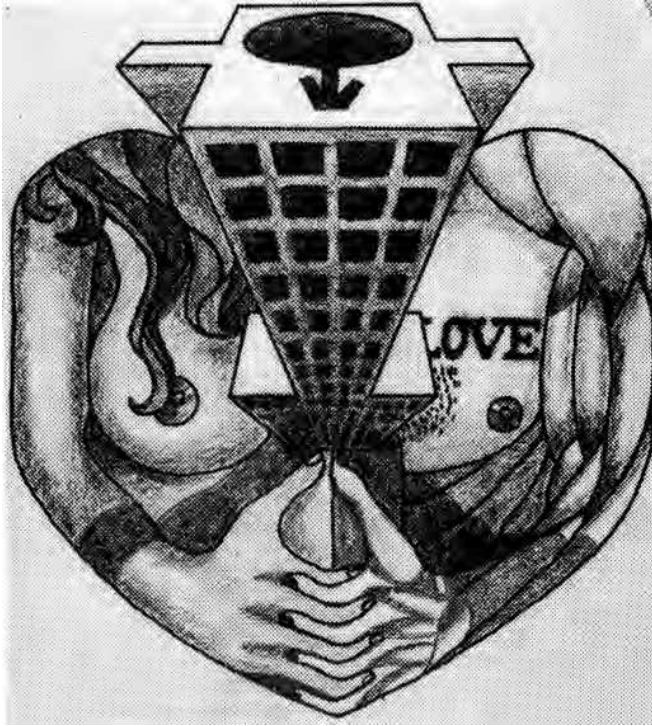
Research on other communes, backed up by personal observations, shows the failure in the vast majority of cases to bring about equal relationships between the sexes. What tended to happen was that the women communally did what has been labelled 'women's' work, bringing up the children, cooking, cleaning, etc. Some change did occur because the whole group would be centered on the home and greater value put upon domestic work and increased interaction of all members. I visited several communes in the country where the women looked after the children, cared for the animals and gardens, made things to sell and did the cooking and cleaning. The men seemed to just do a few of the heavier jobs, chop wood, drive and occasionally play with the children; the rest of the time they spent smoking dope. Many of the groups broke up in a fairly short time. Relationships between adults and children again focussed on the mother/child axis, though now with a group of women and children. The father may have been around more but the basic roles did not alter. There is nothing inherent in the structure of a commune to bring about changed relationships and except for a few politically aware groups, most returned to the old patterns without much thought.

Economically and socially the theories of the movement were utopian and backward looking, to an age of crafts and simplicity which was impossible to attain and could not offer a way out for the masses of people from our present society. However, it did point to the possibilities of different bases for relationships which could exist in a future socialist society, having destroyed the economic and ideological obstacles presented by the capitalist system.*

Eros And Civilisation

An Introduction to Marcuse's Essay on Freud

by Ronald L. Peck



Marcuse's 'Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud' is an analysis of sexual repression in present day technological societies. Although the emphasis is upon the repressive character of capitalist societies, it is clear that miracles are not expected of socialist societies before socialist ideas have been revised and enlarged to take into account psychoanalytical interpretations of history. In Marcuse's analysis, sexual and economic repression are understood as part of the same order of repression and the liberation of one sphere does not make any sense without the liberation of the other. His stress on the centrality of sexual liberation perhaps accounts for the marginal interest in his work expressed by orthodox Marxist theorists and for its being virtually ignored by active political groups of the Left. Though groups have taken up some of the concerns of the Women's Movement, and marched in solidarity in National Abortion Campaign rallies, the support has been for women as an oppressed social group. Sexual liberation as it is understood by Marcuse, one can't help feeling, would be rejected as libertine, individualistic, romantically hedonistic. The socio-economic/sexual divide seems as large now, as it ever was. Gays on the Left must be particularly aware of this. Marcuse's work is recommended because it does attempt to pull things together coherently, to construct a model of society in which sexual repression is contextualised. A number of gays, including Dennis Altman, have found *Eros and Civilisation* worth grappling with.

Marcuse is not at all concerned with homosexuality as such; there are only two brief references to homosexuality in the book, but both are very positive. He has coined a term which *includes* homosexuality: "polymorphous sexuality". What is meant by it is an expansive and receptive sexuality, freed from the notion of usefulness or "end". He refers several times to "pre-genital polymorphous sexuality", a condition obtaining, briefly, in the earliest stages of infancy, when sexuality is not localised or separated off as a genital function, when the erotic is larger and less distinct. As we 'grow up', we grow into a world of sharp differentiations in which sexuality is located in genital contact with the opposite sex. 'Normal' sexuality becomes procreative sexuality, narrowed spatially (genitally) and temporally (between periods of work), leaving most of the body free

to function as an instrument of labour. Against this, Marcuse asserts (quoting Freud) "the primary context of sexuality is the function of obtaining pleasure from zones of the body; this function is only *subsequently* brought into the service of that of reproduction." Polymorphous sexuality survives in maturity tabooed as perversions the greater their degree of deviation from procreative sexuality. The perversions posit a threat: "Against a society which employs sexuality as means for a useful end, the perversions uphold sexuality as an end in itself" Marcuse writes positively of the "perversions" because they reassert claims made and denied in early infancy; through their virility the 'norm' of sexuality as inherently procreative might be broken. If they are to redefine sexuality as polymorphous, 'the guilt associated with them has also to be broken, or, as Nietzsche said, *reversed*. Marcuse paraphrases Nietzsche: "mankind must come to associate the bad conscience not with the affirmation but with the denial of the life instincts, not with the rebellion but with the acceptance of the repressive ideals".

Polymorphous sexuality

As I understand Marcuse's notion of polymorphous sexuality, homosexuality is a part of it; what Marcuse believes is fundamental is a form of androgyny. Within this wide definition of sexual possibility, homosexual behaviour is an immediate and spontaneous and positive element. Separated off and tabooed in maturity, it is identified as perverse, and rejected, because unproductive. The perversions, like the arts, are marginal because, in presenting alternatives to the norm, they are of no use to the society that operates from the stability of unchanging norms. For Marcuse, they hint at the possibilities of what he calls the "Great Refusal". A norm of sexuality that is so defined, so limited, so *adapted* to the needs of a consumer society is a functioning part of that society, a support of it. By implication, homosexuality, as one of the perversions, challenges that norm. It harbours potential rebellion. By pushing homosexuals to the edge of society, a vantage point on that society is unwittingly given us. But most homosexuals take no advantage of their 'outsideness' to analyse the reasons for their oppression within the context of the society; they want nothing more than to reintegrate themselves into that society, which they believe is capable of reforming itself to include them. Marcuse himself came to recognise the apparently infinite capacity of society to absorb potential rebellion: he writes of it in his 'Political Preface' to the 1966 reprint of *Eros and Civilisation* (first published in 1955), in his *Critique of Pure Tolerance* (1967) and in *An Essay On Liberation* (1969). "It makes no sense to talk about liberation to free men . . .", and yet it is that notion of freedom that has to be exploded, articulated anew and strengthened against the whitewash of the catchphrase and the jingle.

But one cannot properly understand and appreciate the importance Marcuse gives sexual freedom outside his reconstruction and modification of Freud's model of the dynamics of civilisation. His starting point is a restatement of some of Freud's essential propositions. Civilisation depends upon the permanent repression of the instincts, which, if relaxed, would pull out the centre and dissolve civilisation into barbarism. Repression of the instincts operates under the reality principle, which, through the ego, mediates between the desires of the instincts (characterised collectively as the id and safeguarded by the pleasure principle) and the reality of the external world. Out of the long dependence of the infant on its parents develops the superego, which guides the ego to act in accord with established morality. The repression of the instincts is necessitated by universal scarcity, which will not be overcome even by the maturest level of civilisation. It is with Freud's notion of 'eternal' scarcity that Marcuse first takes issue. For Freud, it was part of the "terrible reality" of life. For Marcuse, it is part of an organised reality which can be altered through redistribution. In other words, scarcity exists in the present only because it is being perpetuated in the interests of the dominating class. When Freud proposes that the desires of the instincts must be modified in the face of a harsh reality, no distinction is made between a biological/phylogenetic reality and a historical reality. But it is that distinction that Marcuse argues is critical. Biological repression is accepted as an essential precondition of societal relations. Over and above that, at any particular historical moment, any given society is characterised by the degree of its "surplus repression"; it is this variable that

makes it possible to make comparisons between societies. Correspondingly, Marcuse also distinguishes between the reality principle as Freud used the term and the present historical form of it, the performance principle. Under the performance principle, all men's activities are measured and valued according to their degree of social usefulness.

Performance principle

In its present form as the performance principle, the reality principle has extended itself so far that the realm of the pleasure principle has become marginal and ineffective. Each man's "performance" commits him to between eight and twelve hours of largely alienated labour each working day. Upon his performance depends his standard of living. Production depends upon consumption, consumption on production, in a cycle maintained by the insatiability of the demand for consumer goods, transformed into objects of libido by advertising so saturating as to be unavoidable. Sexuality is 'useful' insofar as it guarantees the maintenance of what has become the 'system'; insofar as the body is reconditioned as an instrument of labour, a certain "permissiveness" is allowed. What is "socially useful" is confused with what is "good for society" which in turn is confused with what is "normal", and these become the descriptive terms of more and more areas of experience. Even the hours free from labour are evaluated in terms of the performance principle:

The individual is not to be left alone. For left to itself, and supported by a free intelligence aware of the potentialities of liberation from the reality of repression, the libidinal energy generated by the id would thrust against its ever more extraneous limitations to strive to engulf an ever larger field of existential relations, thereby exploding the reality ego and its repressive performances.

Marcuse's point is that the reality principle, as characterised in the present by the performance principle, is increasing its control over our lives at the very historical moment when it could be relaxed. The necessities of life are no longer scarce; technological development (which Marcuse does not celebrate but accepts as a fact) has created sufficient abundance to provide for everyone. But the "necessities" are no longer clear-cut. In an age of mass production and consumption, under capitalism particularly, everything is necessary, and desire for *everything* engineered. Satisfaction is always at the stage of catching up. If it could be generally recognised that the necessities of life which truly are necessary to life involve only a minimum of labour (and would involve even less if the alienation of labour were 'completed' by more extensive automation), then a correlation could be made with the actual time men and women spend working. The greater part of production is the generation of "waste" (Marcuse includes armaments), of unnecessary consumer goods which have been turned into objects of libido. It is the organised scarcity of *these* which maintains the apparatus of production. Within this coherence, labour time itself is one of the false necessities. In his contention that the working class itself is one of the central supports of this system, Marcuse has alienated himself from most activists in the labour movement. His insistence on the possibility of a civilisation based upon minimum necessities of labour is dismissed as utopian, and it is in the interests of the ruling class that it should continue to be so dismissed.

Archaic heritage

Through the symbolic parable of the archaic heritage and the myth of the primal father, Marcuse seeks to explain further the common defence of the performance principle in which opposing class interests act unitedly. This most rejected of Freud's ideas assumed the origin of civilisation to be marked by the rise to power of the father, whose monopoly of pleasure was 'justified' to the sons by his protection, security and love. "The father establishes domination in his own interest but in doing so he is justified by his age, by his biological function, and (most of all) by his success: he creates that 'order' without which the group would immediately dissolve." But the relation of the sons to the father is one of ambivalent love-hate, expressed in the wish to replace and to imitate the father. The father is killed only to be deified, introducing taboos and restraints that become the established morality and law. "The annihilation of his person threatens to annihilate lasting group life itself and to preserve the prehistoric and sub-historic destructive force of the pleasure principle. But

the sons want the same thing as the father: they want lasting satisfaction of their needs. They can obtain this objective only by repeating, in a new form, the order of domination which had controlled pleasure and thereby preserved the group. The father survives as the god ..." "The function of the father is gradually transferred from his individual person to his social position, to his image in the son (conscience), to God, to the various agencies and agents which teach the son to become a mature and restrained member of his society."

But there has been an important change in the "classic form" of the id-ego-superego dynamic as a result of the growth of paternal institutions. The reality principle used to be *tangibly* embodied in individuals – fathers, captains, chiefs – but "these personal father-images have gradually disappeared behind the institutions. With the rationalisation of the productive apparatus, with the multiplication of functions, all domination assumes the form of administration. The pain, frustration, impotence of the individual derive from a highly productive and efficiently functioning system in which he makes a better living than ever before. Responsibility for the organisation of his life lies with the whole, the 'system', the sum total of the institutions that determine, satisfy and control his needs. The aggressive impulse plunges into a void ..." Increasingly, administration and the law appear as the ultimate guarantors of liberty. Rebellion appears "as the crime against the whole of human society and therefore as beyond reward and beyond redemption", an omnipresent threat that the crime against the father dare not be repeated. As the 'system' enlarges its coherence, "the interactions between ego, superego, and id congeal into automatic reactions" and consciousness, "increasingly less burdened by autonomy, tends to be reduced to the task of regulating the coordination of the individual with the whole". The aggressive instincts are moved against those who do not belong to the whole; the foe is characterised as omnipresent, justifying the total mobilisation of society.

Pleasure principle

How shrunken, then, is the scope of the pleasure principle? Where are the desires of the instincts safeguarded? According to Marcuse, in phantasy. Andre Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* is quoted: "in its refusal to forget what *can be*, lies the critical function of phantasy". Which becomes also, for Marcuse, the critical function of art. At this point, one should break away from the delineation of Marcuse's model to return to the importance of the "perversions" within it, and its relation to the gay left.

In upholding sexuality as an end in itself, the perversions demonstrate an active opposition to the rule of the performance principle. The opposition is represented in mythological archetypes whose images recur through the ages: Prometheus, the producer, as against Orpheus, the singer. Orpheus, according to classical mythology, introduced homosexuality to the people of Thrace, rejecting the "normal Eros" for a "fuller Eros". The age of the performance principle is the age of Prometheus; all evaluation is in terms of production; all else is marginal. I don't think that Marcuse is being fanciful when he writes of "productivity", "The very word came to smack of repression or its philistine glorification: it connotes the resentful defamation of rest, indulgence, receptivity – the triumph over the 'lower depths' of the mind and body . . ." It is not, therefore, the transfer of the productive apparatus from the control of the ruling class to the control of the working class – at least, not that alone – that Marcuse looks to for a revolutionary 'solution', but a turning away from the emphasis on production altogether. Through the liberation of men's time might be created 'mental space' necessary to reflect upon the necessity to work. The centrifugal forces of the performance principle, re-enforced from within and without, have to be loosened. Wherever possible, space must be created. In fighting for his homosexual rights, the oppressed gay is grinding against the norms that sustain the system and helping to wear them down. The gay who parades his sexuality and publically celebrates his enjoyment of it, who is able to reverse the feelings of guilt that society plays upon to limit that enjoyment, is doing much more than fighting the war of gay liberation; he is upholding the enjoyment of sexuality for its own sake. He provides a sharp focus. In itself it is not enough. It's a starting point only. Marcuse's analysis describes a world of toil being sold, and bought, as paradise

on earth; the reality principle masquerading as the pleasure principle. If gay liberationists are really to contribute to the Great Refusal, the struggle must be part of the fight to recover, and enlarge, the realm of the pleasure principle and to weaken the control of the reality principle.*

Eros and Civilisation by Herbert Marcuse. Available in the Abacus series published by Sphere Books Ltd. 1972.

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Sheffield Incident

by John Lindsay

The following incident happened at the Sheffield Conference of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, August 1975. This description and analysis of the event also points out some general tactical points.

On the Friday evening a large number of the delegates attended the reception given by the Lord Mayor of Sheffield. At the end of his opening remarks a woman took the microphone and said that the waitresses were being paid somewhat less than the waiters and appealed for a collection to augment their wages. The Mayor, apparently disturbed, left the reception at that point. Later in the evening at the entertainment provided by the City a folk group from the West Country was singing a collection of traditional country songs with banter in between. The songs tended to be of the "boy chases girl, boy catches girl, boy fucks girl" type, with the banter along the lines of "we four don't need groupies for we have a big round one who is good enough for all of us". After the first song there were a couple of cries of "sexist"; after the first verse of the second cries of "boy" when "girlfriend" was sung, at which the group laughed. At the end of the second some people walked out, during the third there was some intermittent heckling and by the end of the third quite a number of people had left although it was difficult to estimate propor-

tions. In the foyer a group of about 25, mainly women, decided that the performance should be stopped. We went back into the hall and started barracking, some went on to the stage and unplugged the microphone and a chaos situation lasted for about ten minutes. The group attempted to continue with their singing, being applauded vociferously by a large number of the people in the hall; attempts to explain the reason for the intervention were shouted down. The group left the stage to considerable applause and an interval was called. After the interval a "big-band" group played "hits of the past" to a diminishing audience until the concert and the bar closed.

In the foyer and at the bar discussion continued until the building closed. At the various venues of the conference debate waged, and in many ways the tone of the conference was set. Throughout the weekend the role of women in CHE and the importance of sexism came under analysis; from this came debate on the role of CHE in general and on its structure and administration. The implications of that one incident need to be analysed in detail both in terms of their immediate effect, in terms of their effects by the end of the weekend and in the longer term. The main areas in which they need to be considered, I suggest, are the consciousness of the people involved in initiating the demonstration, the consciousness of the rest of the delegates, the leadership of CHE and the press/general public who will gain information only at nth hand. The questions rising are whether the conflict nature of the intervention was politically wise, whether there might have been alternative methods of intervention, whether the show should have in itself been allowed to continue and whether we can learn any tactical lessons from the evening?

First of all the alternatives. These could have included one or two people going onto the stage, asking the group to stop, and then explaining their objections. Thereafter the group might or might not have continued singing the same type of songs, in which case another event would have occurred. No notice could have been taken, people walking out when they felt they could take no more. Again it cannot be determined what would have resulted. Both these were suggested as "correct" actions by those who said that the conflict intervention was "incorrect". Now for the event. I would suggest that it could not be allowed to continue for two reasons: firstly the content of the songs was insulting to the women for it presented them as sex objects whose existence was defined by the satisfaction of the requirements of men; secondly, the nature of the songs was insulting to all the gay people who had travelled to Sheffield to celebrate their homosexuality for it consisted of the socially dominant stereotype notions of human relations, reflecting the culture usually available from radio, television and newspapers, in many ways that culture at its worst. On the basis of this argument alone the intervention was "correct" for that performance had to be stopped. The spokespeople for CHE did not appear to fully grasp this however, for they suggested that the audience was not suitable rather than that the "institution" was not suitable. One said that it was fit for a men's pub but not a CHE conference and this was so quoted in a local newspaper. The point of the intervention however is that that sort of entertainment is not suitable anywhere. This however raises a very interesting question to which we will have to give a lot of consideration. If facets of culture are part of the ideological armoury of the dominant class then is it at times either "justifiable" or "necessary" to destroy that culture in order that the emerging class may be released from the self-oppression which that culture gives rise to?

Now for the analysis. In the immediate instance first. For the people who took part in initiating the demonstration it was an immediate and unanalysed reaction to an oppressive situation. That they were capable of acting together was a demonstration to themselves of their consciousness and collective power which I suspect gave them strength; their perception of the reaction gave them further anger and determination for the rest of the weekend. For them the incident set the tone of the weekend, defined the problem and indicated their methodology. (It must be pointed out that this group did not consist of all the women at conference, nor did it consist only of women.)

For the rest of the audience puzzlement was the first reaction for they were being entertained by the civic authority and did not understand the point of the rumpus. Their immediate reaction was annoyance that their entertainment was being disturbed and annoyance at the bad manners of a small group in interrupting the singers who

were "only celebrating their heterosexuality after all". The liberal idea of everybody allowed to do his own thing appears to be the main identifying feature of this group. Their applause seems to have arisen from a right of speech position rather than from positive support for the group. The antagonism towards the intervenors however was considerable.

The leadership of CHE appears to have been mainly concerned with the effect on the civic authorities and the press, apologising to the group for the disturbance, explaining to the Lord Mayor and the press although admitting at the same time that the entertainment had not been wisely chosen. It has been suggested that they had already had the opportunity to examine the material and had selected this particular group, and had already censored the 'sexist' element from their songs. However as it is difficult to determine the nature of even the individuals concerned in the leadership without a complicated analysis, I shall leave further comment on this group.

The press in Sheffield covered the event remarkably objectively — women reading the report could only have gained a positive idea, some of the local officials certainly gained some understanding but whether the incidents in themselves will have produced any change in individuals, in the civic authority or in the people cannot be determined. In the long run it is unlikely. As the Mayor pointed out we were being welcomed for our money not our gayness. (Those weren't quite his words but certainly his intent.)

Over the short term (i.e. the remainder of the weekend) the group involved became the centre for most of the criticism of the conference as a "male", "tory party type" event, of the structure of CHE, and generally feelings were polarised with the group distinctly as one pole. In the main they felt justified in their actions and used the event as a practical example of the position of women in CHE, the nature of sexism and the general organisation of both the conference and the CHE itself. The group acted on divided over the weekend into three: those who agreed with the intervention and who generally came to be identified with the intervenors; those who agreed about the nature of sexism but who disagreed with the method of the intervention, mainly taking the position that people should have left and allowed the songs in an almost empty hall; and those who were directly antagonistic towards the intervention and the thinking behind it. They saw CHE as a single undivided body providing a pleasant weekend and felt the intervention to be a threat "splitting CHE", not understanding what "this sexism business is all about" with an articulated misogyny as the other pole. The main advantage of the incident was that it gave a clear example of the sort of thing that needed to be talked about — discussion did not have to be theoretical but instead every debate could be grounded in this practical example and this came in many ways to dominate the weekend.

For the leadership it showed them that there was a minority which could not be baffled by supposedly democratic structuring of procedures, nor by defining areas of debate, although the militant group was generally outmanoeuvred during the rest of the conference when it came to plenary sessions. Until some idea can be gained however of the nature of the leadership as a group and of their individual and shared expectations no further analysis is possible.

For the press and the public it cannot be determined whether this increased interest or changed opinions. The National Front and the Ratepayers Association which had

threatened intervention did not appear. Possibly to some extent the stereotype of the limp-wristed handbag was counterposed but there is no available data. Long term events, particularly in the experience of the Sheffield group of CHE, might yield some evidence.

The major question is whether there is any advantage to be gained from involvement with CHE either for the left as left, or for gay liberation as a whole? The other questions are on the role of gay culture and on the tactical issue.

The first group gained the impression over the weekend that if there was a role for women in CHE it would emerge after a long struggle, some feeling that CHE was not worth the effort, others that there was little else. The second group in some cases threatened to leave or did leave, feeling that CHE was not what they wanted, the "biggest gay club in Britain" obviously intended as a cheaper Catacombs without the police. In some cases however a definite understanding of sexism developed and a new realisation of the position of women in society was given. Generally, however, there seems to have been a sense of disappointment that the euphoria of Malvern (1974) was not recaptured; some disappointed because no significant progress has been made in the consciousness of the bulk of the members, others because the weekend turned out to have something to do with politics. The bulk of the motions passed were general and unimplementable although their tenor was far to the left of the behaviour of the bulk of the members. £100 was voted for a conference to organise a gay rights movement in the trade unions for example; a bunch of militant unionists the delegates did not appear to be. Neither did they accept in principle that the trade union fight might be more important to gay liberation than the Houses of Parliament. It would appear therefore that there is some advantage to be gained from involvement although it is not clear what that advantage will be. Certainly much more work will have to be done in gaining an understanding of what gay liberation involves, what we can contribute to CHE and the general question of the relationship between our homosexuality and our involvement on the left.

Secondly it would appear that there remains a lot to be done in writing, composing and creating a gay culture for we cannot oppose a dominant superstructure with nothing, we cannot take gay pride in shouting down oppressive songs until we have something else to sing; we cannot fight Williams' limp wrist or Mary Renault's limp mind until we have something to put in their place. The beginnings are there in the Gay Sweatshop possibly, in Tom Robinson's songs and in some of the pamphlets but if they are then it is only the beginning and there is no indication that they will give our gayness the revolutionary perspective we require. Left-handed heterosexuals society will tolerate, left-minded gays will not be allowed to write, sing, act, paint, nor fight unless we prove ourselves strong enough.

Finally on the tactical issue I would suggest that from all points of the analysis the action was a right action and our praxis advanced by it. People were given a practical base for the debate; individuals gained a consciousness through corporate action; the dangerous enemy within the gay society was identified in those men who do not understand that being gay makes being *male* questionable; the limitations of our understanding of our political role were highlighted and our lack of sophistication in our analyses illuminated. The next time an event occurs we should be able to seize it, the next time an event does not occur we should be able to create it: the gay left can only benefit from action.*

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Ah,lesbianka!

Notes on a Russian Journey
by Sue Bruley

One measure of the degeneration of the Russian revolution is the Communist Party's complete reversal on the question of homosexuality. In 1917 it was abolished as a legal offence, but by 1934 it had become punishable by up to eight years in prison. The Bolsheviks renounced the right of the state to interfere in sexual matters. They abolished all laws with regard to sexual behaviour except in cases where consent was absent or injury had occurred. But under Stalinist dictatorship homosexuality came to be regarded as a threat to the moral fabric of society. Homosexuals were counter-revolutionaries, per se, because they challenged that great institution, the 'Soviet family'. The implication was even made that men who remained single could not possibly be good workers and were not, therefore doing their best to 'build communism'. (1)

When I visited the Soviet Union in August 1975 (2) I was determined to find out what changes had been made, both legally and in terms of social attitudes to homosexuality, since the dark days of Stalinist repression. Fortunately my task was made easier by the fact that another gay woman (Gully) was in the same party. She was as inquisitive as I and was quite willing to 'come out'. We decided to collaborate and find out as much as we could, even if it meant embarrassing the other members of the group by asking very direct questions to the Russians.

Moscow

On one of our evenings in Moscow a visit to the local 'Cultural and Pleasure Centre' was arranged so that we could meet some members of Kommsomol (Young Communists). This turned out to be a joint meeting with two other English speaking groups (one from NUS) of thirty each. One hundred and twenty of us sat in neat rows in the theatre part of the centre and were asked to pose questions to the five members of Kommsomol who sat facing us with very serious faces. In the S.U. it is a rare privilege to be allowed to meet foreigners and obviously only the most trustworthy of party hacks were permitted to reply to our questions. We quickly became accustomed to the dreary uniformity and predictability of their statements.

We were encouraged to ask questions of an informative nature rather than political questions. As a result our meetings with Kommsomol members were very dull, with people asking questions such as 'What is the price of a haircut in Moscow?' The Russians delighted in answering such mundane questions and made detailed and lengthy replies. I tried to inject some debate into the proceedings by asking for their views on such questions as: the relationship between the working class, the party and the state; internationalism etc., but the only response was one or two hack phrases such as, 'the people and the party live in harmony'.

After about 40 minutes of this Gilly and I decided that the time was right to attempt an intervention on the gay question. I asked for the microphone, stood up and announced that I was going to raise the subject of homosexuality. I stated that I was a homosexual and that the woman sitting next to me was too. An embarrassed silence suddenly fell on the hall. I took a deep breath and continued. I described the gay scene in the UK and the increasing tendency of homosexuals to refuse to hide their sexual orientation as if it were something to be ashamed of. I referred to the attitude of the leftgroups and told them that even the British C.P. now had it's gay caucus (gasps of horror from the Russians at this point). Finally I asked them to describe to me the probable life style of a homosexual in the S.U. and what the attitude of the authorities would be.

Even after I had finished speaking the audience continued to stare in my direction. The Russians too remained glazed and seemed to have an air of disbelief. Eventually one of them took the initiative and went to the microphone. He said that no one had ever asked a question of this sort and that they needed to talk amongst themselves before replying. After a few minutes one of them pushed another

forward, he squirmed in the other direction. It was obvious that none of them wanted to bear the responsibility of having to guess what the appropriate reply should be. Finally a young man in his early 20s took the microphone and said in my direction, 'It is a criminal offence.'

I stood up and asked him to explain in more detail and to state the usual length of prison sentences. He replied that two years was the normal term. They would say no more and asked the audience to continue the meeting by asking questions of a more 'general' nature about Soviet life.

After the Kommsomol meeting we approached one of our guides, Olga, in an attempt to obtain more information. She was quite responsive and promised to contact a 'friend of a friend' at the university (she was studying English at Moscow University), whom she thought to be a homosexual. But, as she said, she couldn't be absolutely sure as no one would ever admit to such a thing in public. In fact, we discovered, Moscow has a community of homosexuals who meet in an upstairs bar of a very well known cafe in Gorky St. (the main shopping area in Moscow). These gatherings were apparently tolerated by the police, probably because they do not attempt any sort of political activity — the USSR definitely has no equivalent of GLF. Gilly and I visited the Cafe Lira and, predictably, found the scene very closeted. The men at the bar were not in the least camp, although perhaps they were by Russian standards — we couldn't tell! We couldn't find any women there at all, but more about lesbians later.

Further discussions with Olga confirmed our suspicion that conviction on a charge of homosexuality did not merely result in a two year prison sentence. It was usual to ensure that the person concerned became as isolated as possible. If he had been working in a city, his permit (the USSR has an internal pass system) would be automatically withdrawn and he would only be offered another job in some far flung province, which could be up to 200 miles from the nearest town. Homosexuality meant certain disqualification from political office and even ordinary job promotion, except perhaps in the arts, where, as in the West, there is a much greater degree of tolerance.

Leningrad

In Leningrad another meeting with Kommsomol members was arranged. Our guide assured us that this time it would be a much more informal social gathering. We arrived at the Locomotive Club to find four large tables arranged in a square with beer, lemonade, cakes, sweets and fruit neatly arranged on white tablecloths. We sat interspersed between our Russian hosts, whom, the Chairman confidently informed us, were 'the cream of Soviet youth'.

After the endless speeches of welcome we were left to converse with our neighbouring Russians. Neither Gilly or I spoke Russian so we quickly commandeered the services of the group's interpreter and sat ourselves in front of three naive looking Soviet women (one of whom was a member of the Communist Party). Initially we talked about the position of women in the S.U. They clearly had the impression that full sexual equality was already a fact. They could understand the reasons for the women's movement in the West, but they thought such a thing was unnecessary in their own country. We asked them about the availability of contraception. Their reply, to our amazement, was that they did not know much about it as they weren't married, so they didn't have any reason to seek contraceptive facilities.

When we raised the subject of homosexuality, they couldn't understand what we were talking about. Becoming very frustrated at their blank faces, I asked the interpreter to repeat the question using the word 'lesbian' instead of 'homosexual'. 'Ah, lesbianka!' one of them said loudly. We explained that we were lesbians and that we wanted to know about lesbians in the USSR. They could not quite get over the fact that we were completely open about our homosexuality. They had never knowingly met a lesbian before (they had learnt the word from a Swedish novel that was on sale in the city) and were utterly intrigued by the fact that we did not see it as anything to be ashamed of. It is interesting to note that, unlike some members of the British group, they were not openly disgusted by our statement and seemed very happy to continue talking to us, although they did not have anything to say about lesbians because the whole subject was a complete mystery to them. They seemed very puzzled throughout and one said that she was not aware that sex between two women was

possible.

After an hour or so we were shown into another room and records were played so that we could dance. Our three Soviet sisters were keen to dance with us and showed no signs of physical unease. Again, this contrasts strongly with the behaviour of the other women in the British group who by this time had become almost paranoid about Gully and myself. We were amazed to learn from one of the sympathetic men in our group that the women had been sleeping with their clothes on and had come to an agreement to stay in pairs at all times. They were apparently under the impression that one of us would leap on them at the slightest opportunity!

The evening at the Locomotive Club was a very jovial occasion. Although obviously the 'Soviet youth' we had met had been a heavily scrutinized bunch, we still felt that we had got much closer to the opinions of ordinary Russians than we had in Moscow. As we were leaving we noticed that the women had begun clearing the tables whilst the men were just idly standing by.

Riga

Riga is the capital of Latvia, one of the three Baltic Republics. As our guides were not familiar with the region and the language (Latvian is similar to German) the group was 'handed over' to a woman, Anita, who taught English at the university. She was an extraordinary Anglophile, seizing every opportunity to meet English people and talk to them, as she had never been able to travel to the UK herself (foreign travel for all citizens of the USSR is an exceptionally rare privilege).

Anita's husband, Jarnis, who accompanied us on most of the official programme, was a lawyer. Gilly and myself jumped at the chance to find out more about the legal codes concerning homosexuality. He looked it up specially for us ... yes, the 1934 Act was still in use and homosexuals were regularly sentenced under it. In contrast to what we had been told in Moscow, he stated that the usual prison term was *five years* for adults and *eight years* if a male under 18 was involved (this is the legal definition of pederasty in the S.U.).

We asked why did the law ban male homosexuality and not mention female homosexuality? He could not understand our question at first. It seemed that for him the very term 'female homosexuality' was a contradiction. Finally, he came up with, 'The state thinks that women can't do as men do in bed, so there is no need for a law against it.'

As we talked to Anita and Jarnis it became clear that they were in full agreement with these disgusting prison sentences for homosexuals. They saw the state as having a right to

regulate sexual conduct because homosexuality *is*, 'an unnatural practise and must be stamped out' (Anita).

Conclusion

It is sad to report that in the country of the October Revolution homosexuals are persecuted even more viciously than they are in the west, but unfortunately this is the case.

The triumph of Stalinism enabled the state to consciously enter the personal sphere and rigidly transform it into what it regarded as the appropriate form. With this immensely powerful backing, the status of the family was elevated and motherhood redefined as a patriotic act. In the USSR an attack on the family is regarded as an indirect attack on the state.

Through complete control over economic resources, the government has ensured, in the crudest possible way, that any deviation from heterosexual monogamous marriage is not tolerated. *Single people are not even permitted to join the housing list.* Gay people are condemned to spend their lives in their parental home or to marry and attempt to mould themselves into heterosexuality, which contradicts all their feelings and desires.

For lesbians, the situation appears to be similar to that in western countries — oppression by invisibility. The rest of society merely refuse to acknowledge their existence. Sexuality is a male phenomena, therefore, women cannot by definition be sexual with each other. The complete denial of female sexuality is a tragedy not just for lesbians but for *all women* in the USSR. It is a strange kind of sexual equality if the sexual rights of women are not even thought to exist.

There is not enough space to analyse the reasons for the complete negation of all the sexual freedoms won during the revolutionary period. It does seem necessary, however, to point out that sexuality and the family are not autonomous strata in society. The form that they take is inextricably bound up with the structure of society as a whole. The promise of a new era of sexual freedom was lost with the retreat of the revolution. Today, visitors to the USSR can only witness the high price of that failure.*

Notes

1 For more details see J. Lauritsen & D. Thorstad *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement 1864-1935*, Times Change Press. 1974, pp 62-70.

2 We travelled with the 'Educational Interchange Council'. This is a government sponsored organisation which arranges visits to East European countries for young working people (i.e. no students). Three groups of thirty go to the USSR for two weeks every year.

The Gay Workers' Movement

by Bob Cant and Nigel Young

The Gay Workers' Movement (GWM) could not, at present, be described as a powerful mass movement. Most of us who belong to it have come under the influence of the Gay Liberation Movement (GLM) at some point in the last five years. Many of us have also been deeply involved in trade union work. We have often felt, however, that there has been a great split between the two — the fact that we have come out as gay is often seen as something separate from our struggle in the workplace. What the GWM must do is to fuse these two struggles, organize gays at their place of work and develop an analysis which is applicable to the position of gay workers. This article will discuss the present state of the movement, describe and analyse the beginnings that have been made towards the building of the movement and suggest strategies for building it further.

One of the phrases which came out of the early Gay Liberation Front was the "tyranny of structure". A feeling which summed up the dramatic content of most meetings where to call for a chairperson or some structure to a meeting was an invitation to be put down as a male chauvinist, an ego tripper or a power mad freak. However, out of the anarchy of those meetings arose a situation in which those who could voice their emotions most loudly dominated the vast majority of us who were unable to raise any issues we considered important. General meetings with 200 people at them became a private theatre show where

individuals harangued others over issues most of us were ignorant about. Few dared to ask what the meaning of such new concepts as radical feminism or sexism meant, for fear of being screamed at as "backward", "closet queen" or any other convenient put-down. But the structurelessness of the meetings became a tyranny for most of us and at the same time were used as emotional platforms by the few.

We have briefly raised the past because the Leeds Gay Workers Conference in May 1975 (see issue no.1 for a report) was like a flashback to the halcyon days of the early GLM, but this time without any willing participants. There was a general feeling of frustration at Leeds for all the reasons which the early GLM was put on a pedestal. The mood of the Leeds conference was such that we wanted speakers who had something to say on particular issues confronting gay workers at the time; we wanted people to chair meetings or take some initiative in small groups; we wanted to clarify major issues and go away with some sense of direction in which to place our energies before any future conference took place. Yet for most of the conference there was none of this, no one wanted to say, "This conference is a mess because it lacks direction, it lacks purpose." We were seemingly trapped by the structurelessness, which in the early GLM was so highly praised and which certainly did have some value in experimentation with meetings. It was not until the last two hours of the conference that someone

had the strength to risk appearing authoritarian and demanded we structured a meeting around plans for the year ahead. Out of the discussion which arose was a proposed long term debate for Leeds 1976. The main points we came away with were:

- i) a commitment to hold a better organized conference in Leeds in 1976.
- ii) a proposal to set up a newsletter committee which would act as a channel for people's ideas. At the same time the committee would be an information outlet through which we could be informed of news and views throughout the country.
- iii) we would use the draft gay workers charter as a discussion document rather than as a paper motion being passed willy nilly at union meetings, a somewhat optimistic thought anyway!

Back in London, one again felt frustration. Away from the excitement of the last two hours at Leeds, we were faced with the reality of no organization within which to discuss issues confronting Gay Workers. The GWM was virtually non-existent, and what did exist had no power. Experience in the Gay Teachers' Group of fighting the victimization of John Warburton (see issue No.1) taught us how difficult it was to fight the specific victimization of a worker who was also gay, let alone raising the hoary spectre of gay oppression which we saw as a symptom of the economic system which both exploited us as workers and oppressed our sexuality.

Out of the frustration which members of the Gay Teachers' Group felt, arose a meeting in London to clarify what the aims and direction of the GWM were.

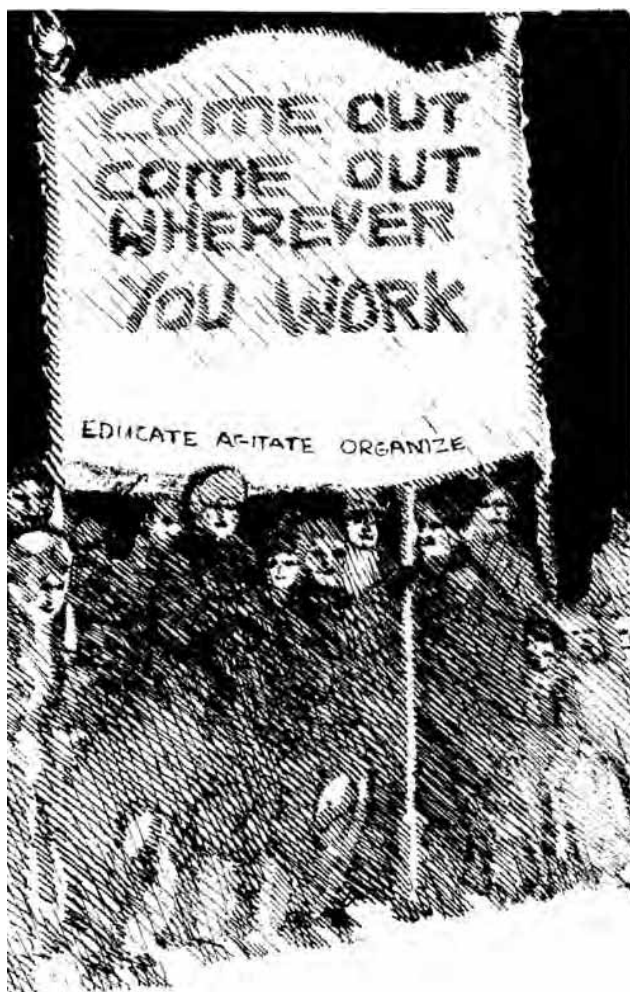
First London meeting

The first London meeting was held in October 1975. By 11 a.m., its advertised starting time, about 10 people were there, by mid-day the number was 30. At first, one was irritated by the impromptness of everyone. There seemed to be a lack of urgency on their part. But on reflection, the most likely reason for the general impromptness stems from most gay people's lack of experience of attending working meetings. After all, the early GLM flourished in a period when counter-culture philosophies prevailed; to expect people to be on time for anything was to be classed as "heavy", "into organizations" or "institutionalized". Certainly these experiments with structures helped many gays come to meetings and encouraged them to speak in small groups. The past, therefore, appeared in London as it had done in Leeds.

When the London meeting eventually started, we did the usual thing of sitting in a circle. Someone one day might explain what is so cohesive about sitting in large circles, especially when the majority, who turn up late, sit in an outer circle. Huddled together and taking turns to describe our union experiences, it soon became clear that there was no obvious role for gay trade unionists. Two points emerged strongly. First was that most of us operated in unions as individual gay members and secondly there was no contact between one union member and another across unions. One felt the level of activism was bound to be depressingly low in such circumstances.

One thing which did become clear from the morning session was that a large number of people were involved in struggles over the gay issue in their own union. Members of the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) and the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX) spoke of their attempts to get their unions to change their position on the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Circular 100 — and include "sexual orientation" as one of the grounds on which it was unacceptable to discriminate. Some groups had been concerned with getting recognition in their union for the gay group — this included the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO), the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT) and NUPE again. In some cases leading union officials had expressed some support for those groups but it seemed clear that they would not do so more openly until pressured by a number of their branches. The secret attempts by some members of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS) in collusion with full-time officials to set up a group unbeknown to most other gay members of the union seemed a sure recipe for confusion. The essence of any such group must be openness and this was quite distinctly missing. A motion on Gay

Rights submitted to the Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSA) Conference had not been discussed and a leading official of the union had said that the draft Sexual Offences Bill was not a trade union issue. Someone spoke of several instances in the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) where action had been taken or threatened in support of victimized gay workers. A Scottish member of the Society of Graphic and Allied Trades (SOGAT) had written in his union's journal of the discrimination facing all gay workers, even when they were not being victimized. Branches of both the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions (ATTI) had passed motions calling for the reinstatement of John Warburton. Although this had met with no positive response from the leadership of either of these unions and Warburton had not been reinstated, the debate over his case had, at least, raised the consciousness of some sections of these unions.



In the afternoon session — 60 people by now — we again sat in a circle and for about two hours people talked about their personal experiences as gays at work. We had no chair, we had no cohesion, no direction. Trade unionists we might have been, disciplined in our approach to the task ahead we never were. Eventually the meeting was saved from hopeless confusion by it deciding we needed a chairperson.

In response to the bureaucratic and reformist attitudes of some of those present, Martin O'Leary of the International Marxist Group made a major contribution to the meeting. He emphasized the importance of Gay trade unionists raising a series of demands centered on the questions of economic exploitation and sexual oppression over which we should not be prepared to compromise in order to gain "acceptance" in the trade union movement. The importance of the speech lay not so much in its denunciation of reformist tactics, but in its clarification of some of the knottier problems of gays in relation to the work place: what were the major issues? How did they relate to the present economic crisis? What should our demands be as gay workers? Were these demands incorporated clearly and effectively in the Gay Workers Charter? Within the speech lay the basis for a more directed, cohesive second meeting.

Lesbians

Another issue which arose in the afternoon session was the domination of the conference by men. This had arisen partly because the meeting had not been advertised in the lesbian movement and partly through the organization of the conference, which made no attempt to raise the issue of lesbian workers as central to any struggle against sexism. A decision was taken at the meeting to get in touch with the organizing committee of the Working Women's Charter. Although we realized that the conditions of lesbians at work were not covered specifically by the charter, it was the first time in post-war years that women had gathered together to organize and politicize around a set of demands worked out by them and specifically for women. We in the GWM could only learn from those experiences and hopefully utilize them in organization around a Gay Workers Charter.

Accordingly the second London meeting appeared to have a unification which the previous meetings so obviously lacked. Women spoke to us on the development of the Charter: the organization around it and some of the difficulties encountered with aspects of it. We were able to look at the Gay Workers Charter within a new framework and highlight some of its more obvious weaknesses.

With a refreshing rapidity the meeting centred around three issues. First, would the Gay Workers Conference benefit more from a Sexual Rights Charter instead of a Gay Workers Charter. It could be seen as more closely relating to gay women and men, or would this be taken as reformist in relationship to the demands of the Gay Workers Charter, a step away from the broader struggles of sexual oppression in relation to work in a capitalist society?

Secondly, had the GWM looked closely enough at the concept of sexism as it affects people in their families, with their friends, and at the workplace? Often sexism has been analysed as it affects us in the roles we play within our relationships, but rarely is it talked about in a way which unifies the separate elements of society which makes the total sum of our lives.

Thirdly, we felt that too often assumptions were made about working with the Trade Union Movement on the basis of very little knowledge. What is the function of the Trade Union Movement in relation to the struggle against sexism? What is the best means of raising the issue within our unions?

It became obvious that we would only be able to discuss all of these issues in a third meeting where three papers would be presented on sexism in its widest context, a sexual rights charter and the Trade Union Movement. One felt a quiet satisfaction that out of all the disorganization, and the chat which many had put down as "emotional", "apolitical" etc., we had arrived at a stage where a meeting would be held to specifically discuss three papers.

Combining the personal and the political

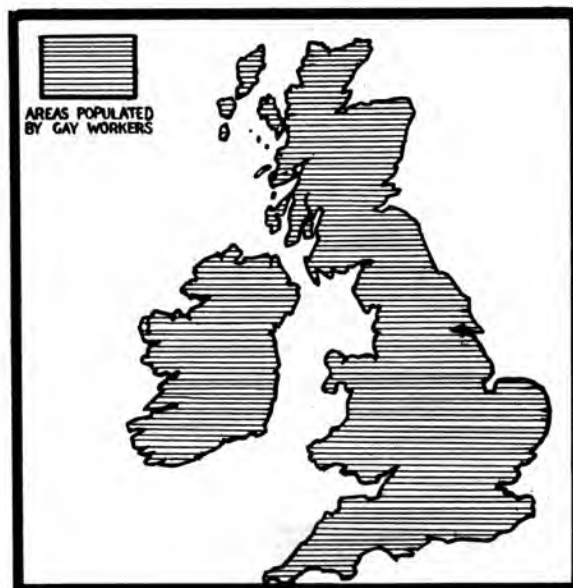
What is an essential part of the GWM is the ability of its meetings to encompass people's personal traits and still come out with a political framework. The GWM is young, it is not a hardened straight revolutionary group with well-defined economic issues to struggle over. The GWM is not even clear over its ideology yet and as Mary McIntosh commented at one meeting, the function of the gay movement (mostly male) will be to carry on an ideological debate, to draw gays into an area of thought which will move away from the idea that being gay is purely a sexual preference for one's own sex to a position where gay people will understand that what underpins their sexuality is the exploitative economic system under which at present we all must operate. The struggle against sexual oppression must therefore be centered firmly around the struggle against economic exploitation.

The need for ideological debate is clear but this can only really begin in conjunction with the mobilization of more gay workers — particularly those who have not been involved in the GLM. But the very issue of mobilization is faced with three difficult problems — the isolation of the gay groups, the lack of much positive support from other trade unionists and the apparent lack of involvement by lesbians.

The isolation is exacerbated by the fact that most gay groups are not even allowed to advertise in their union's journals. Most existing groups seemed to have found their members by advertising in *Gay News*. And people who buy

Gay News are likely to have some kind of consciousness about their gayness already. The lesbian textile worker from Slaithwaite or the gay carworker from Linwood are less likely to buy *Gay News*. If they could see an ad for the gay group and an article about homosexuality in their own union's paper, it would be much easier for them to consider joining the group. The right to advertise must be one of the immediate aims of any union gay group.

Joining gay groups would also be easier if people could meet local contacts. If they could meet someone for a drink in a pub round the corner they would be much likelier to see their own gayness as something which was not alien or unnatural. There is a very strong need for local cross-union groupings of gay workers. So, for example, if a gay printworker were to become interested in the GWM, even if there were no other gay printworkers where he lived he could still be put into contact with other gay workers.



Reproduced from 'Craft'

None of this can really be done only by gay trade unionists. Some support must be won from other trade unionists. This may seem impossible but the problems faced by us, in this respect, are the same as those faced by anyone who tries to take politics into the union. It involves being concerned with issues related to aspects of one's life other than sexuality; nothing is more likely to antagonize people who are, after all, subject to much abuse for their union activity more than the feeling that the union is being used as a bandwagon for some separate cause. It involves explaining to people who have always separated their private lives from their lives at work why sexuality is an issue relevant to trade unions. It involves one constantly raising the question of sexual politics in conversation at work — e.g. when jokes are made about women, gays or older people, then one has to explain why you think it is important not to talk like that. It involves patient, hard slog combined with a spark of passion and the ability to choose the right moment. It requires qualities never known to survive in one isolated person — but only in someone who belongs to a group of like-minded people. The task of politicization is always hard but it often produces results when least expected. Imagine how we would all feel if everyone came out of a comprehensive school when one of their gay colleagues was victimized or if unloading came to a halt at London Docks because of a victimized gay worker. That is what we are working for and it will come if we work together and work hard.

The third problem is in many ways the most difficult — how does a group of gay men persuade lesbians to work with them. Many lesbians find gay men as oppressive as straight men. We, after all, have experienced years of male conditioning and if we are active in our unions we may even have strengthened our male characteristics — in the way we argue and so on. We may even find it easier to connect with straight women — their demands, e.g. nurseries, abortions, are much easier to organize around. But with lesbianism we find ourselves confronted much more directly with the deep-rooted nature of sexism in our society. Gay groups, therefore, that are set up must make

it their primary duty to welcome lesbians. Probably, the single most important thing that can be done at such meetings is for gay men to reflect on their style of talking and to curb the male chauvinist features. Men must also actually take over in a positive way the kind of tasks that often fall on women, e.g. minding the creche, baby-sitting for people who otherwise could not go to evening meetings. Links with Working Women's Charter groups are fine but, as men, we must work harder to integrate women into the GWM. If the movement is allowed to drift into being an all-male movement, then we might be better employed going to the pictures.

There are enormously difficult political tasks ahead, but the one thing which makes them possible to contemplate is the way in which we have begun to come together already.

For, despite the isolation and the lack of much support from other committed trade unionists, a movement has already begun to grow. And the success of any campaign, whether or not it be around a charter, will depend on the continuation of this coming together. We must form gay groups in our own unions and, locally, we must form cross-union groups of gay workers. In both cases, we must operate a positive discrimination in favour of lesbians. With this double network of solidarity, we can then hope to build a Gay Workers Movement. In the current economic situation we should not fool ourselves that it will be easy but, with the confidence that we gain from the GWM and its sub-groups, we can soon begin to take the question of sexuality into the heart of the labour movement.*

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FASSBINDER'S "FOX"

A review by Bob Cant

Fassbinder's *Fox* is a film about the corruptive nature of capitalism. The fact that the main characters are gay men does of course make it interesting for gay men but it is not primarily a film which attempts to Deal With The Problem Of Homosexuality.

The story is about a gay fairground worker, Fox, who wins a lottery and comes into contact with a group of rich fashionable gay men. He begins an affair with one of them, Eugen, whose father is the owner of a long established print works. Eugen and his family proceed to exploit Fox until all his money is finished and then they reject him. The last shot is of the dead Fox lying in a railway station with an empty *Valium* bottle beside him as two youths go through his clothes. The major theme of the film is the way in which money corrupts all relationships — Eugen exploits Fox's feelings for him because Fox's money can get him and his family out of their financial difficulties; Eugen also debases his relationship with Philip by rejecting him till his financial problems are solved; in the final scene too there is the mysterious conversation between Fox's previous lover and his antique dealer friend about some financial transaction — this is never fully explained but simply reinforces Fassbinder's point that in a bourgeois society all relationships have economic overtones. In many ways one has to see the film as a fable with Fox as the innocent abroad in an evil world in the tradition of Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Dostoyevsky's *Prince Mishkin*.

However to treat the film as though it were just a fable is to underestimate its complexity. There are many scenes in the film which acknowledge Fassbinder's debt to Hollywood — such as the scene by the french windows with the lace curtains (with all its implications of property and exclusion) and the conversations in the car (creating an atmosphere of growing intimacy between two characters). These scenes are significant not only in a cinematic sense but also in a sense that they indicate the dependence of post-war West Germany on USA. This can be further seen in the bar scene when Fox talks to the two GIs who are only interested in having drinks bought for them and fucks supplied for them. We are reminded that West Germany — like most of Western Europe — is a neo-colony of American imperialism. The lack of choice that Fox has in most of his relationships is as limited as the choice that most Western

Europeans have over the economic destiny of the countries they live in. Lest this be seen as crude European nationalism the point is further developed in the scenes in Morocco. Fox, the innocent, and Eugen, the symbol of a European bourgeoisie dying in the face of American domination, are only too ready to become the exploiters in relation to a man from a less developed country. Relationships are more than just a matter of good individuals and bad individuals — they are a clear reflection of the economic structure of a society and are no doubt intended here to be seen as an allegory of such.

Many gay people have seen this film as a put-down of gays. It is quite true that people who know nothing of gay life are unlikely to be attracted by the scenes of the gay ghetto as it is portrayed in the film. But then one must recognise that the gay ghetto is not a pleasant place and those who succeed in its jungle-like atmosphere are likely to be either young and beautiful or just plain rich. The rather nasty group of people who are Eugen's friends seem to me to be a fairly accurate picture of one part of the gay world, claustrophobic and bitchy. Philip's boutique (where there is no natural light and lots of mirrors) and the antique shop (encouraging buyers to imitate living in another age just as the ghetto encourages gays to imitate others' life styles) portray a world which is self conscious and yet desperate not to face up to its own reality. As gay people we have nothing to gain by pretending our lives are heroic and free from group imposed destructiveness.

Fassbinder does offer some little hope in the bar scenes where Fox meets his friends from the time before his lottery win. Their's too is an unreal world with the flower sellers, the drag and the woman consciously trying to look like Marlene Dietrich and singing of Shanghai (a city which no longer exists as it was in the song). But there is some comradeship — the people in that bar are not free from the pressures of capitalism but they do not forget the need to help each other and they are even prepared to help Fox when he moves away from them.

This is an excellent film — as damning as Bunuel or Chabrol with its comments on bourgeois society. But if anyone wants to see a gay chauvinist film which papers over the cracks then they should go elsewhere. This is a film that must be seen with a socialist perspective.*



Gay Left
c/o 36a Craven Rd
London W2
England

LETTERS

Dear Gay Left, Dear Gay Left, Dear Gay Left, Dear

The Struggle

Number one excellent, I thought. But, my God, you do have an uphill battle — a task not only of political, but of psychological education of highly recalcitrant potential supporters.

Colin McInnes, Hythe, Kent.

Comment on G.L. No 1

I've sold 20 copies of G.L.; mainly to heterosexual politicians in fact — at *Spare Rib* and Hackney Abortion Campaign. Some people have needed persuading; one woman saw the price and said 'But it costs the same as *Spare Rib* and that's a glossy magazine.' I explained about it being financed out of your own pockets. No one seemed to mind it being produced only by men — I've sold it about equally to men and women.

I thought it would have been useful to have carried a review of Don Milligan's pamphlet that placed the piece in a historical context; not so much of I.S. anti-gay politics but of the women's movement and its development of politics of the family and women's domestic labour. E.g. there's a bit where Don says the family doesn't have an economic role in capitalism, only an ideological one. That statement could be a bit misleading given current socialist feminist analysis.

Ann Scott, London N16.

Paedophile Politics

Paedophiles, as you briefly mentioned (in No 1), have begun to organise. Inevitably the organisation at present has no clear picture of itself or its objectives, and is not even sufficiently together for the establishment to seek to divide et imperat. Paedophile politics, such as they are, consist of wagon-hitching to the mainstream gay movement — a strategy which may embarrass paedophiles as much as it has already inconvenienced Peter Hain and some members of C.H.E.

It may well be that what inspires widespread feeling against child and adolescent lovers is not so much sexism as ageism. (Boy lovers are often guilty of sexism in my experience.) Certainly we cannot hope for our liberation, without actively supporting children's rights, both sexual and political. But is this fated to be vicarious struggle? Can an adult objectify sexual relationships with children if the child cannot objectify his/her own? And how does the male boy lover really make common cause with the male girl lover? (How in fact, can a fundamentally gay minority share the same assumptions as a fundamentally heterosexual one?) These are difficult questions to answer. Internal suppression and external oppression are more closely meshed for the boy lover, than for most other sexual minorities. Neither 'coming out' in the conventional sense, nor middle-of-the-road campaigning for acceptance, will liberate the paedophile. Indeed, I think current strategies for converting the compact majority are more dangerous than helpful. What is required is:

- 1) a very careful analysis of the role we paedophiles play in bulwarking repression (if all boy lovers in approved schools and private boarding schools were to strike, how many would be forced to close?)
- 2) a building of solidarity in struggle — which is woefully lacking at present (has any paedophile in this country really fought on behalf of an imprisoned fellow paedophile?) and
- 3) a revolutionary perspective on social change and

minority sexual rights. (Specifically, this would mean refusing to work for a mere lowering of the age of consent, or a mere handing-over of control of the young, from the courts to parents.)

May I invite anyone who is concerned in tackling these issues to contact me as soon as possible.

Roger Moody, 123 Dartmouth Park Hill, London N19.

Question and Comment

I have a question for you, which no doubt will be answered in future issues of *Gay Left*. Your statements suggest that you take a view of 'reform' struggles (civil rights laws, repeal of sodomy statutes, etc.) that I do not entirely share. I believe differences over what the gay movement's approach to struggle on these questions should be must be aired within the gay movement. There has been a very negative (mostly in the past) attitude on the part of ultra-leftists toward struggles for civil rights and law reform. On the other hand, many reformists speak of such aims and gains in this field as if it alone would bring about gay liberation and sexual freedom. Are these two views incompatible? Are they useful in terms of setting gay liberation strategy? I think struggle for reform is essential at this stage of the gay movement. And I think real gains can be (and have been — in the U.S. especially) made in this area — real improvements in the legal status of gays can be achieved, a better self-view among gays fostered, the hypocrisy of the capitalist system's 'justice' and 'freedom' exposed, and the vast public reached and touched in terms of our struggle. I consider 'leftists' (often police agents posing, I am convinced — I doubt that there is a really genuine ultra-leftist phenomenon in the gay movement at all) who belittle these 'reformist' struggles to be a real obstacle in the effort to bring Marxism to gay people, and a Marxist outlook to the left groups in the area of sexuality. Moreover, I think struggle for such reforms is revolutionary — or can be if it utilises mass means of struggle, remains independent of bourgeois class forces (politicians, etc.) and uses these struggles as a vehicle to

- 1) bring gay people into active struggle;
- 2) educate the public, and, yes, raise public consciousness, through leafletting, publishing of pamphlets, use of the mass media, street demonstrations, etc. There's nothing at all wrong with reforms, or struggling for them so long as they are used to mobilise and educate the masses of gay people. One other gain from civil rights reforms: gay people will find that their ability to use the (bourgeois) law against the bourgeoisie, and against their oppressor, has increased appreciably. They will be more likely to 'come out' openly than they will be without legal protections. And, convincing other gay people to come out is really the first step toward building a gay liberation movement with mass social impact. Don't forget: the first gay liberation movement achieved no lasting gains (unlike the women's movement, which at least, got the right to vote). Our movement today has already achieved much more in this area of reforms, and once achieved, it will be that much harder to revoke them. In addition, a struggle will be necessary to implement them — and that too will provide a concrete issue around which the gay movement, and its supporters from other sectors of society, will be able to mobilise and struggle.

David Thorstad, New York

The only gay socialist?

Congratulations on Issue No 1 of *Gay Left* — I have witnessed the embourgeoisement of *Gay News* over the years, and with it the decline of its ability to be taken seriously as a radical publication. Examples from the current issue are too numerous to catalogue; 'Gay Hero saves President Ford' screams the Page One *Daily Express*-type headline; its inside pages include a disgustingly sexist (I always find that when I leave people I have to destroy them) interview with the self-opinionated Disco Tex.

I can't be the only gay socialist in London who would really like to get together as often as possible with other gay socialists — is there anyway you could expand from the magazine to holding 'Gay Left Readers Meetings'? How about it?

Geoff Francis, London N16.

The collective reserves the right to shorten letters. All letters published in this issue have been abbreviated for reasons of space.

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Members of the Gay Left collective are:

Keith Birch, Gregg Blachford, Bob Cant, Derek Cohen, Emmanuel Cooper, Randal Kincaid, Ron Peck, Angus Suttie, Jeffrey Weeks, Nigel Young.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

This is our second issue of *Gay Left* and we plan to bring out the journal three or four times a year. Response to issue no 1 has been good with many helpful comments and suggestions as well as articles. We see *Gay Left* as a starting point for discussion and analysis of sexual politics within a Marxist framework. When reaction indicates this has begun, we feel part of our aim has been achieved.

In this issue we have increased the number of pages from 16 to 24 and aimed for a more visual presentation. Many readers thought the first issue looked too 'butch', or was too heavy to wade through without the pages being broken up by making it more visually exciting. We still welcome written or visual contributions. The journal and the gay socialist movement will grow stronger through this continuing debate concerning the purpose and function of sexism in a capitalist society. Only by a thorough understanding of the sexually and economically oppressive nature of capitalist society can the gay socialist movement work out strategies for destroying that structure. In order to critically examine some of the questions raised in issue no 1, we held a readers' meeting. As this proved a very successful venture, we are planning to hold another readers' meeting in April/May. Any comrades interested in attending it please write for details (with S.A.E.).

Criticism has been made of the cost of *Gay Left* — 30p. Alas, this is the lowest economic cost we can negotiate on a small print run (2,000 copies) and only the cost of typesetting and printing is covered in this price. Artwork, articles and distribution is done by the Gay Left collective and friends. Comrades who would like to sell a few copies of *Gay Left* have only to write to us at 36a Craven Road, London W2 for details.

We do not yet have the facilities for opening a subscription list. Readers who would like notification of the next issue can send us a stamped addressed envelope and this will be sent back to you when issue no 3 is ready — all being well in the summer.*

Gay Left c/o 36a Craven Road, London W2



Nighthawks

Between now and the end of May, Four Corner Films, a film-making collective, will be drawing into its final stages the shooting script for a narrative film about a gay teacher, *Nighthawks*.

The film will describe, amongst other things, a teacher's coming out at school, a process understood as political as much as it is personal. It will be largely made with gay people who will be playing themselves. A good deal of the content of the film will be arrived at through a process of discussion and through acting workshops with gays. Anyone wanting to take part in these should contact me at Four Corner Films, 113 Roman Road, Bethnal Green, London E2. Suggestions are also welcome, particularly with regard to locations. The film is scheduled to be shot through June and July in the London area. Further details available from the studio address.
Ronald L. Peck

Special thanks to Ilrich Shetland and Naurika Lenner

All letters will be assumed to be for publication unless otherwise stated.

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Gay Left No 1

Gays in the Trade Unions, in Cuba, at Conference, at politics and much more. Copies available: 30p, or 40p by post from 36A Craven Road, London W2.

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c Gay Left Collective 1976