

GAY LEFT

A Socialist Journal Produced By Gay People
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Carrying on ...

This issue completes our first year of publication. For us on the Collective it has been an exciting and a learning year. We feel we have laid down a ground pattern on which, hopefully, much can develop. We have tested the water, and found an audience for a left wing gay journal of discussion. Much, of course, remains to be done, and there are grey areas which still need to be explored. We have to constantly define and re-define our relationship with the gay movement, with women, and with the left. They are not static relationships but fluid, and developing. Several articles in this issue take some of the essential discussions a few steps further. Sue Bruley has raised important questions which we have talked about at great length in the Collective and have replied to individually. Bob Cant's article on International Socialists raises a multitude of issues in our continuing problematical relationship with the Left. These themes are also reflected in other articles in this issue.

What we have to reject is the notion that *Gay Left* can attain a sort of Platonic perfection, laying down in its wisdom the road ahead for gay people. We have been variously seen as the leadership in embryo of a new gay left movement, as would-be-philosopher-queens, as elitists, as armchair gays. We see ourselves rather more truthfully as a small group of committed socialist gays who have established this journal as a forum for discussion in the gay movement. We are an open journal, willing to publish articles and contributions which relate our own central concern: the relationship between gay liberation and socialism. We do not consider it our duty to publish material which does not touch on those themes; there are other gay papers, and space is scarce. But neither do we expect total agreement from our readers with all our views which, like others, are constantly developing and changing. Constructive criticism is welcome and will gain a response. We do feel though that those who criticise could do so most helpfully by directing it to us and by offering contributions to the journal. We hope to be able in future to discuss in detail all articles with contributors before they are published.

Since the journal started there have been early signs of changes in the attitudes of the socialist left to the gay issue.

The *Communist Party* now has a special commission preparing a report, and the *International Socialists* have formally adopted a policy of support for gay rights. Both these moves have been on the level of support for 'gay rights' rather than any deeper questioning of sexism, but they are small steps forward. Even the ultra sectarian *Workers' Revolutionary Party's* paper, *Newsline*, sent a reporter to this year's C.H.E. conference, and the *Workers Socialist League* published a good letter on the Gay Workers' Conference. The latter would have been even more useful as an article but given the history of the left's treatment of gay liberation it is all too easy to believe that a vast amount of editorial heart searching went on before even this modest contribution was finally published.

As we go to press the resignation of the Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, is expected as he moves on to greener fields in Europe. We cannot lament his departure. His is a record of right-wing labourite policies for the past two decades; a real enemy of the working class and the Labour Movement. But many gays will lament his going. In a world where few support us, his record of supporting gay civil rights and sex reform is reasonable. He was Home Secretary when both the Homosexual Law Reform and the Abortion Act were pushed through and earlier he supported reform of the censorship laws. That we are now aware of his going, and of the self-publicising activities of the pseudo radical Young Liberals is in itself a mark of the appalling record of the socialist left on these issues. As the left now jump on the libertarian bandwagon, it is worth them remembering that it is their duty not to catch up with the liberals (who, as someone once said, see both sides of the question and act accordingly) but to go *beyond* their positions towards a socialist critique of the bourgeois norms and bourgeois reforms. The left in Britain is in crisis and, with the failure of revolutionary socialism, the threat of fascism looms ever more threateningly. Fascism is triumphant invariably *because* of the failure of the left. But in reconstructing itself the left must not ignore the major issues raised by the sexual liberation movements over the past six years or so. Socialism and sexual liberation are complementary, and it is towards the juncture of the two that *Gay Left* will continue to work in its second year.*



Divided We Fail

by Nigel Young

The dawn of gay consciousness and the development of the women's movement has made many of us realize how intricately sexism is in our personal lives and our work situations. As gay men we have become aware of what are sexist attitudes and roles, and in our political work we have attempted to raise the issue of sexism as central to any revolutionary struggle. In this work, however, we are confronted by a theory and practice which divides the struggle against capitalism from the battle against sexism. The former is obviously a priority, but sexism is regarded as a deviation from the main struggle, a battle to be won after the revolution. The highly impersonal structures in which we carry out our political work militates against our raising either the political or personal implications of sexism.

These two spheres are at the heart of the problem. We need to analyse the oppressive nature of sexism as defined in our personal relationships and secondly the relationship of this type of sexism to exploitative/competitive work situations. We have the unenviable task of fusing together two agents of oppression: the controlling and defining nature of heterosexual norms and values being highlighted in the gay liberation movement whilst conditions at work are of central importance to unions.

This division was highlighted for me when I raised the gay issue around the case of John Warburton (see *Gay Left* No.1) in my own union. The left in my union branch — a highly politicized one — were able to see the case as one of obvious victimization but were unable to relate their analysis to a broader discussion of gayness in which they might have explored the relationship between the personal oppression of a gay teacher and the ensuing political implications. What arose was a situation in which I was constantly being asked to reaffirm the general nature of oppression in society and from this commitment gay oppression could be added to the list. This I feel is a dangerous divide and one which people who are gay and Marxists working in unions will find it difficult to avoid. The danger lies in the complete undervaluing of the role of sexism in society as an oppressive force.

This situation applies equally to the women's issue as raised by the straight left. It seems perfectly acceptable to discuss the oppression of women in terms of maternity leave, bad pay and conditions at work or lack of nursery facilities. Or take up specific cases of the victimization of women workers, but at the same time ignore the analysis of personal relationships which the women's movement has put forward as a prime agent in their oppression.

For gay men who are Marxists it is unavoidable that the division between what is considered a personal situation as opposed to a political one will arise both in their work in unions and in their contact with the revolutionary left. It is a tradition of the unions to raise political issues which highlight exploitation as occurring solely at the point of production. In these terms it is far easier to exemplify which class is most oppressed. Consequently what has always been considered to be the most valuable work has been organisation in and around factories. This attitude has spread through unions regardless of the work situation, so we are constantly fighting cases of wages, conditions at work and victimization of workers. These issues are central but as we know through the dissemination of literature from the women's movement, an improvement in our material position bears little relationship to the personal relationships we have and the ways in which those relationships can be oppressive.

Also, for gay men the division is wider as we have no specific body of literature which analyses the way men oppress each other and women. The nature of male oppression has been clearly highlighted by the women's movement. We therefore have no way inside or outside the traditional political structure within which we can operate to analyse the nature of personal oppression. However we are able to draw upon the

analysis developed in the women's movement and it is from it that gay men can begin to look at some of the dynamics of our personal relationships. At the same time we can relate those dynamics to the work situation where it is not enough just to 'come out' by telling everyone 'I'm gay,' we must also question the whole notion of 'masculine' and 'feminine' work role situations. Put in another way sexism isn't something which oppresses us only in terms of our personal relationships, but it also enables society to define work roles which are equally oppressive.

Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* states that one's gender is 'a status category with political implications'. She then defines the components of one's sex as being role, status and temperament. Status is the political component, role the sociological component and temperament the psychological component. As an extension of this argument I want to analyse the ways in which gay men fit into these structures. I also wish to look at the way these categories have been central to my own relationships.

Status and Role

Politically the status of women in 19th century England was always defined in a subservient, secondary manner to men. This position was built upon a whole history of patriarchy which denied the vote to women and gave married women no legal rights to property or their children. Women were also almost totally excluded from educational institutions and were the subject of much protective, paternal legislation which took them out of the factories and mines and into the home. Many developments of the role of women as we know them today came with the rise of the industrial revolution and the development of the nuclear family. The status of women, therefore, became firmly linked to their two roles as a cheap pool of secondary labour, and in terms of their role, as housewives and mothers. The work of the latter role was considered non productive labour. Women are supposed to do more boring, repetitive work than men and are usually paid less for it; they are also often the servants of men in industry having jobs such as secretaries, cleaners and tea makers. Behind all this is the assumption that this is 'feminine' work. And men who do work in what are considered 'feminine' jobs are thought of as odd or eccentric or, horror of horrors, even gay! The history of women and work reads like an equation: woman = housewife + mother + cheap labour + feminine = slave.

The political implications of this situation are enormous especially in terms of role definition in work. So many jobs are specified as being masculine or feminine; women being typists or teaching young children, men being builders or engineers. To change this type of sexist stereotyping would demand those involved in traditional areas of political work to question deeply what it is about masculinity and femininity which requires men and women to do jobs considered acceptable, what is oppressive about these roles, and what our own attitudes as men would be to doing what was considered 'feminine' work.

Women who try to change their position in society in terms of their work role often do so in traditional women's work. Thus they may become head teachers more easily or run secretarial agencies or start play groups, but would find severe opposition in trying to break through the male preserves of building workers, railway drivers or mechanics. The picture becomes more complicated when one considers the barrage of propaganda which states that being a mother and housewife are the pinnacles of all women's achievement; these are the 'natural' preserves of women's role and status in a capitalist society.

Temperament

As the 'natural' role of women is so closely tied to their being seen as secondary and inferior to men, it is no accident that their temperament as defined by men is also seen as weaker and inferior to men. Women are considered weak, emotional, sensitive, conformist, jealous. In turn these have been deemed 'feminine' qualities and therefore men should have none of these attributes. Since Freud raised the hoary spectre of 'penis envy' no woman can tread the ground of male preserve without

being accused of wanting to have a penis or wanting to be a man. Although there has been a re-examination of what Freud had to say concerning women (see Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*) no-one can deny the way which his theories have had a monumental importance in maintaining an image of women which totally represses their sexuality unless it is prescribed 'feminine' behaviour.

Kate Millett's categories apply to the experiences of many gay men though this must not be confused with the male radical feminist position of the early 70s which said that men have only to wear drag in public to know what it is like to be a woman. The whole socializing processes for men and women are so different that it is impossible for men to swap those experiences simply by trying to look like women, but whom the public perceive as men. It is futile to pretend that men can know by being radical feminist what it is like to be an oppressed woman.

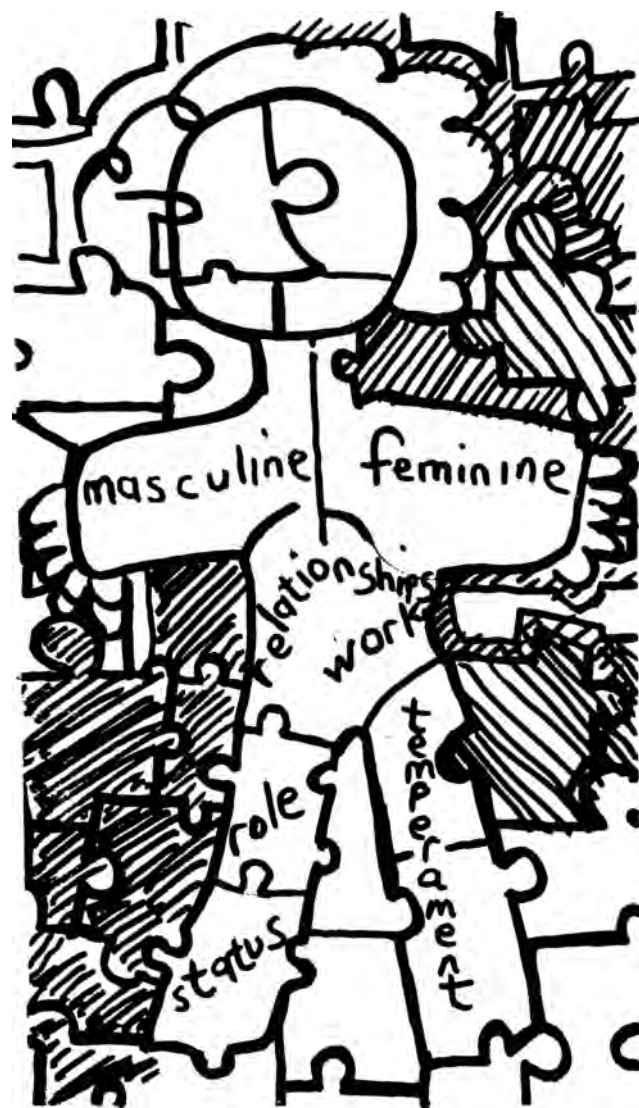
The position of gay men in society, like that of women, is considered a very dismal second to that of straight men. In a recent legal case a high court judge reminded us that the 1967 Act did not entitle gays to think their lifestyle was an acceptable alternative to heterosexuality. In legal terms the range of gay behaviour which we are allowed to indulge in would almost require us to be hermits. Also, as gays, we find it hard to express the full range of our gayness in our work through fears of losing our jobs, or being ostracized by our fellow workers. In addition we do not create nuclear families and we therefore pose a threat to the conventional socialization patterns.

If we have an awareness of our gayness and reject heterosexual norms and values we will not relate to women as the dominant partners in a relationship. Neither will we expect women to be our domestic slaves or child rearers. In relation to children we would not socialize them in the 'normal' patterns of masculine and feminine behaviour and the associated roles. We therefore pose an added threat in terms of our non-willingness to participate in the oppressive machine which feeds future generations into capitalist society.

Our position in society is much more acceptable to that society if we do not challenge its norms and values for example by accepting the role of being straight, by covering up our gayness, by marrying. Or if we pass for straight by trying to look more butch than Mr Universe. It is in an oppositional way but precisely in this sphere that the position of gay men relates closest to that of women. In order to change their status in society women move away from the 'natural' preserve of motherhood and domesticity and towards masculine roles, whilst gay men change their status by moving into the 'normal' sphere of masculine heterosexual roles and also by the adoption of heterosexual norms and values.

Thus — to gain acceptance we are forced into adopting the same position of women: adopting roles which are considered masculine. The supposed temperament of gays has almost been as closely defined as the temperament of women — 'feminine' qualities plus weak wrists, lips, mincing walks, high voices, etc. Many straight gays put down gays who manifest these 'feminine' qualities as making them appear to be like women. Thus if we wish to change our temperament for the 'better' we must behave as though we were straight. In the gay world there is something slightly superior about being butch, aggressive, manly. The one is dominant the other submissive and weak, just as straight men are supposed to dominate and women are supposed to submit.

However, women are caught in a double bind situation here, because though it is acceptable to change one's roles and status in work terms by becoming a worker as well as a mother and housewife, it is unacceptable to change one's temperament. Women, we are told, succeed in a man's world because of their feminine qualities. To adopt a masculine pose invites accusations of being too aggressive, of being like a lesbian. Gay men must assert what is considered natural for men in order to cover their gayness and lesbians must be feminine women to cover theirs. Heterosexuals always find it confusing if gay women and men fit straight women and men's stereotypes temperamentally. What they never understand is the confusion for us in terms of our sexuality, and the contradictions we have to go through in conforming to heterosexual norms concerning our temperaments.



The Status of my Relationships

My own relationships have been characterized by the inherent contradictions which have confronted me concerning my gayness, my femininity, or in the past my desire to pass for straight. There was also an uneasiness created by my social experience of gayness with other gays and my political feelings. Although I felt oppressed by my experiences in the gay world, regardless of the fact that I could operate quite easily in that world, I could never relate that oppression to my political feelings that capitalism exploited and oppressed people. I saw my gay oppression as a feeling of personal inadequacy. These ideas spread into my relationships through a nagging feeling that there was something missing. Somewhere in the distance would be the perfect situation, in the present I always put down my relationships and consequently ran away from them. I had a constant thought that somehow my relationships were second best. This always struck me vividly when I saw heterosexual couples walking in the street. Fantasy played an important role here as I was always more envious of beautiful men and women walking together for they appeared to be able to express their emotions openly. I assumed that what was missing in my own relationships, an inability to commit my emotions to anyone, was paramount in theirs. I felt unable to tell anyone I loved them and found it impossible to deal with anyone who expressed a positive emotional commitment to me. With heterosexual couples I automatically assumed that theirs was a life of bliss, a constant assertion of their feelings for each other which they were able to accept.

When I was 23, I met a man who I decided to live with. This was the 'real' thing and before we found a flat I was desperately excited by the idea of being in love. Of course the only way to express that feeling known to me then was to live with someone. However the fantasy did not last long and after a month of hating living together, of never wanting to be in the flat, never wanting to see the person, never wanting to

accept him for what he was, I could not get out quickly enough. Yet not for one moment did I question the validity of wanting a monogamous relationship and neither did I see that what was stifling and role playing for straights was exactly what I was copying in my relationships. The end was just seen as another personal failure.

My Role

At this time I very much played the role of being weak, passive and coquettish. I always felt unequal to my friends whom I considered my intellectual superiors, I was treated as the bright butterfly which is turned to for amusement, but hardly taken seriously. I played the game excellently of being a pretty young thing and consequently met people who treated me as a pretty ornament. This type of role playing in which I assumed a stereotyped feminine attitude completely distorted my relationships and my notion of gayness. There was no sense of equality and the experience of liberation which can come through an understanding of role playing was also lacking. What I had socially learnt I took for being natural and consequently felt a bitterness about my own stereotype femininity. I therefore always had to reject my relationships and felt an increasing sadness as each one ended and another took the familiar path.

Strangely it was not the advent of the Gay Liberation Front which began to make me reappraise my attitude towards the status of my relationships or the roles and temperament which I expressed within them, but my involvement with C.H.E. Here I felt I met the grassroots of gay people, a much wider range than one saw in the gay clubs and pubs, some of whom sought something in addition to sexual gratification. Confronted by isolation and oppression far greater than mine, I began to understand this was not a self-imposed individual phenomenon, but a socially created situation which had its roots in capitalist society. At the same time I was beginning to have a relationship with someone with whom I felt a sense of equality. I no longer seemed to be indulging myself in the old roles, nor denigrating the relationship as being second best. For the first time I was involved in a creative, expanding relationship. It helped that we had similar political views and a feeling that sexism represses gay people and makes them try to ape heterosexual norms and values.

We tried to develop a relationship based upon no specified roles and at last I found myself not playing any particular part, and I was certainly not demeaning myself or the relationship. I was accepting all the facets of the relationship for what

I perceived them to be. It was this rejection of heterosexual norms and values — norms and values which had been so central to all my previous relationships which enabled me to continue this relationship. There have of course been many contradictions in the relationship. For instance the development of friends on an emotional and physical level outside the relationship. How does one do this without being competitive or exploitative? Another problem arises in the creeping institutionalization of roles over a period of time which can so easily be internalized and at the same time resented. There is also pressure from outside to react to situations as a couple. One has a relationship and suddenly you lose your identity, your individuality, you become the royal 'we'.

There are no simple answers or ideal solutions to these problems, however an understanding of the ways in which our emotions and attitudes are structured certainly helps to counteract the years of heterosexual conditioning we have all encountered within the nuclear family.

When I joined the present Gay Left collective, I had therefore a certain sense of personal awareness. In the months the group met before we ever thought of producing a journal, I learnt to link this personal discovery with a Marxist analysis of homosexual oppression which firmly centred that oppression in the heart of capitalist society: it also made me realize that any socialist revolution must include in its analysis a thorough understanding of how sexism is endemic to capitalist society.

This brings me back to the starting point of this article where I stated that merely tacking on to a revolutionary programme aspects of sexual oppression was a dangerous principle and one which we as gays and Marxists must not accept. Revolutionary theory must relate material exploitation and oppression to the oppressive nature of relationships encountered by women and gays. We must explore what it is about role, status and temperament which defines sexuality not purely as something which represses us in terms of our personal relationships, but is also used as a method of reinforcing what is considered masculine and feminine work. If we do not commit ourselves as gay men who are also Marxists to this struggle, sexism will always be seen as secondary to the economic analysis of exploitation. The consequences of this position will be that after a revolution we will continue to find ourselves struggling against oppressive relationships and equally oppressive work roles. The combination of these forces can only reinforce the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity which are the fodder for sexism.*

gay women read

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Women in Gay Left

An Open Letter to the Collective from Sue Bruley

Whilst supporting the general aims of *Gay Left*, I am concerned about your policy towards women joining the collective. This letter is an attempt to persuade you to adopt a more positive feminist approach.

When the first issue of GL appeared I thought, frankly, that your opening line was appalling: "This is a socialist journal edited by gay men." The announcement came as if you considered your masculinity as something to be proud of. Whilst selling GL to feminist friends I noticed that they also regarded your heading and the opening line to be offensive. It certainly did not encourage them to contribute to GL.

In the second issue, despite the change of heading, the same misguided attitude was continued. You pretend to examine 'The Gay World Today', but then it is made clear that as far as you are concerned, gay men *are* the gay world. "What we want to do in this article is look at some aspects of the present male gay world ..." And then at the end of the article you have the cheek to say that we must begin, "campaigning around a series of issues which can unite the gay world." How can we? We are not even in it!

I know that you will say in reply that as men you could only write about your experiences in the male part of the gay world. But by equating the 'male gay world' with the 'gay world' you are denying the very existence of a lesbian subculture. To have written about *both* parts of the gay world would have been a much more complex task and one which is beyond the scope of the present collective. You have attempted to resolve the problem by taking a short cut, but in print it appears as an overtly sexist gesture.

One attempt to justify your position appears in the collective statement of the first issue when you say, "The present collective, which has for some time been meeting regularly, decided for the time being at least, that we could best explore our sexist attitudes most truthfully, in an all male group." What you are saying is that the collective acts as a consciousness raising group and that this would be inhibited if women were in it. I accept that men do not get many opportunities to do CR, but this should not be a barrier to women who are sympathetic with your objectives participating in the editing and distributing of GL. Surely these two functions can, to some extent, be separated?

GL has set itself up as a theoretical journal with extremely comprehensive objectives. "By working together, developing our understanding of capitalism and sharing our experiences of intolerance, we will attempt to draw the links between the family, the oppression of women and gay people, and the class structure of society." The fact that you apparently believe that this can be achieved in an all male group seems to me to be rather sexist. Inevitably, the experiences that the collective will rest on for its theoretical statements will be one sided and partial. As a feminist I am bound to argue that it is arrogant and patronising for a group of men to think that they can write about the oppression of women in any meaningful sense. There is not much point in making pious pronouncements about sexism if, in your own situation and everyday practise, you cope with the problem by trying your hardest to eliminate women from the scene.

You under-estimate GL's potential as a socialist journal for the *whole* of the gay movement because it dismisses female participation out of hand. I know that you want women to contribute articles, but as I said earlier, your format and composition does not encourage this. In addition, it is patronising to decide, *a priori*, that women would not be interested. Why can't they decide that for themselves?

It has been said that GE is a 'closed group' and that 'membership is by invitation only'. But I notice that two new names appear in the list of members in the second issue. Clearly, your doors are open to *some* men but firmly closed to *all* women. I accept that you have the right to determine your membership, but I do *not* accept that sex should be a valid criteria in making this decision.

Obviously, there are difficulties. The presence of one or two 'token' women is the greatest danger. But these problems must be faced and do not, in themselves, constitute an argument against excluding women from the collective.

I agree with you that a socialist, anti-sexist, gay journal is urgently needed, but I also feel that if GL is to live up to this promise its editorial opinion must not only be aware of, but *contain within it and reflect*, a knowledge of women's oppression and of female sexual experience.*

Six Members of the Collective reply to Sue Bruley's Letter

Sue Bruley's letter raises important issues, though not necessarily the ones she so forcibly articulates. But before tackling the central question, I think we ought to put some of her comments in a proper context. For instance, the by-line on the first issue was *not* a declaration of male pride; it was a statement of fact. It cannot be classed with the by-line of another recent gay journal, *After Lunch*, which declared itself to be for 'Men who like other men'. *That* is a declaration of separation; ours was an honest statement of the situation as it was. We decided to state this so that there could be no possibility of assuming that what we said was anything more than what we as a small group of people believe about the gay world, and about socialism. The journal was an intervention by a small all-male group into current debates in the gay movement; no more, and no less. Similarly with our collective article in GL No.2, we made some general statements about the gay world, gave examples, as we explicitly said, from the male gay subculture, then concluded with some general statements about tentative steps forward. Neither justifies the tenor that Sue chooses to see in them.

Sue Bruley describes in her new pamphlet, *Women Awake* (advertised elsewhere in this issue), how she felt the need to work in an all women's group after years of activity in mixed groups. This was a valid decision, and we in no way criticise her for it. But we had this experience very much in mind when forming the *Gay Left* collective from a group that had met for some time. Either as an all-male group, we invited women to join, which for many feminists like Sue would smart of tokenism; *or* we abandoned our own idea of preparing a journal, and merely invited all and sundry to join (which on previous experience would still have been a predominantly male group): *or* we continued as an all-male editorial collective for the moment declaring openly that that was what we were and working out the consequences of that.

The first option was out as far as we were concerned. The second option was not seriously considered, because one of the experiences that conditioned the working of *Gay Left* was the dismal memory of some of us of being connected with the earlier *Gay Marxist*. That was a shifting eclectic group of people, of heterogeneous views, some scarcely liberal, let alone Marxist. Each issue of the journal was produced by a different group, with the result that there was no continuity of policy, standards, production or distribution. We determined to do something different and hopefully better. That left the third option outlined above. It had the added advantage that in the early stages it would provide the context where we could examine from our own experiences the specific area of male gay sexuality (and I think '*Within These Walls...*' GL No.2 was a useful start, flowing as it did from intensive discussion of our experiences in the male subculture).

We decided on a closed collective. This would enable us to work together with reasonable stability over a long period. It would give continuity of policy, argument, outlook and administration. It did not mean that we were not prepared to accept new members, but they would only be accepted on the basis of broad agreement. That as such did not, and does

not as far as I am concerned, exclude women. The fact is however that no woman has approached us to join, though many women have expressed solidarity with our work. I think it is still right to maintain a closed, relatively small collective. The only valid alternative would be to dissolve ourselves and the magazine and call for a new group to start a new journal along different lines. We are not prepared to do that. Continuing as we are, however, does not mean excluding women as such. It means giving priority to our own internal cohesion and development, with or without women members. I think each applicant should be considered on her or his merits.

The issue is an important one, which is why several members of the collective have given separate replies. There is no anti-female bias in the journal as Sue Bruley knows well from personal contact, and the policy line is strongly pro-feminist. The question at issue is how best we can each contribute to the goals we all share. The debate which Sue Bruley's letter initiates will, we hope, clarify the road ahead. J.W.

The issues raised by Sue Bruley are certainly very important — the apparent exclusion of women from an all-male group which alleges to be concerned with the question of sexuality. Some of her criticisms, e.g. the attack on the opening line of *GL* No.1, seem to me to be frankly trivial. But the key question of the all-male nature of the group is by no means trivial and cannot be answered simply by saying that there are not many women interested in joining the collective.

The fact remains in our society that our sexuality is developed in accordance with the needs of the dominant class in that society. The women's movement has spent some time exploring the ways in which female sexuality is oppressed and controlled in this society and to what end. To do this many of them seem to have spent some time in all-female groups. Sue does not deny the value of such groups. What she seems to forget is that male sexuality — although not in the same way — is also oppressed and controlled by the dominant class forces in our society. If one is Marxist one does not believe that men are the oppressive agency in society, although we certainly have more privileges than women. What we have to do *now*, as men, is to examine our own sexuality, how it is developed, what is oppressive about its current social form, what is positive about that social form. Perhaps one real criticism that can be made of *GL* is that we have not yet begun to do that seriously enough. This it seems to me can only be done in an all-male group at present. This does not mean that all-male groups can be justified indefinitely but they do seem to have an important function now.

B.C.

I consider there to be positive aspects to an all men's group. Most important we can begin to explore our sexuality in a way which has been open to women already in closed women's groups. Through sharing our experiences as gay men who relate to a subculture which largely excludes women we can begin to understand what our sexist attitudes are.

However as a future position — when we have a thorough understanding of sexism — I see no reason why the group should not include women, if they wish to join.

As an all men's group I feel we are able to talk about the situation of lesbians or the 'gay world' as long as our statements relate to situations which exist as opposed to those we feel might exist.

N.Y.

Gay Left is a collective which came about as a men only group, and has since taken in new male members. We have to consider whether to make a positive decision to recruit women and therefore fundamentally change the collective or whether we continue as we are. As a collective *Gay Left* produces its journal and acts as a support and consciousness raising group for its members. *Gay Left* journal represents only the collective's views and those of individual contributors. It does not attempt to represent the views of the whole of gay left people though it wants to publish their articles.

The different experiences of gay men and women may not always help one to analyse the other and may in fact impede the analysis made by a men only or a women only group. *Gay*

Left claims it wants to explore sexual politics and this we started to do in the collective articles in No.1 and No.2 — and this I see as one of our main purposes. If this is best done by a group of all men then we continue as we are: if a collective of men and women would add breadth then we must expand accordingly.

E.C.

We have stated that the collective is attempting to work out a marxist analysis of our sexuality and sexism and that we can best do this at present in an all male group. If the group can progress in this aim I agree in rejecting Sue's proposals at this stage. Most of the group feel that we would be held back from fully exploring our sexuality in a mixed group, as women have found in the past. At our readers' meetings this has been agreed with and encouraged by most women as being a very important and urgent need within the movement.

I do not think that we could operate as two groups, one a GL collective and the other a male CR. However, we should have more readers meetings in order to have discussions about the magazine's development and also encourage more contributions to the magazine and discuss them with the people concerned.

This situation should not be static and if it is not productive the present structure of the collective would have to change. K.B.

Sue Bruley has raised a most important issue. There is no getting away from the fact that so far *Gay Left* has been written mainly by gay men (the important exception is that of Sue Bruley herself). To an extent this has been accidental — the group that had the idea and got it going in the first place all happened to be men. There is no reason why it should necessarily continue that way and I would welcome an extension of the representation of gay women's views in the magazine.

Our aim is to produce a magazine written by *gay people* and representing as wide a section of the committed gay left as possible. But I am not sure that the numbers game — i.e. to expand the collective to contain an equal number of women — is the best way to achieve this. It seems somehow to reinforce rather than get away from the idea of 'difference'. R.K.



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Gladrag is the GLF, Birmingham, magazine, price 10p.

A Grim Tale

The I.S. Gay Group 1972-75

by Bob Cant

One of the major problems facing all gay revolutionaries is the relationship between sexual politics and working class politics. This journal is just one of many attempts made over the last few years to fuse these two traditions. In 1972 after the heyday of the Gay Liberation Front many of us who had been active in G.L.F. joined revolutionary groups such as the International Socialists or the International Marxist Group in the belief that we could open a debate around the question of sexuality in them. I joined I.S. in 1973 hoping that I could do this and left earlier this year (1976) no longer believing this was possible.

When I joined I.S. what most impressed me about them was their approach to the real organisation of the working class. They were not interested simply in winning elections to parliament and trade union posts. They saw that the level at which workers were really mobilized, after all these years of social democracy, was on the shop floor. In that situation the real leaders of the working class were not the union bureaucrats but the shop stewards and convenors. This must, therefore, be the starting point for any movement of the working class towards revolutionary socialism. No other body could emancipate the working class — whether it was the Labour Party or the Red Army. The emancipation of the working class was the task of that class itself. It was a clear, honest approach to class politics which seemed to me to epitomize all that was best in the tradition of Marxism.

I.S. did not have as good a position on the gay question as the I.M.G. appeared to, but they were the only group that put a correct Marxist emphasis on the role of the working class and therefore, they seemed to be the only group in which it was worth raising the gay question. The traditions of the group seemed questioning and undogmatic and I was hopeful that these traditions of open, lively debate would be applied to the question of sexuality.

Homosexuality had first been raised in the group in 1957, following the publication of the Wolfenden Report, in an article in *Socialist Review* in December 1957. In this article C. Dallas adopted a fairly patronising position towards homosexuality which saw homosexuality itself rather than homosexual oppression as a symptom of a class society. She argued: "it is only when there is complete equality between the sexes in all respects, beginning with economic equality and extending throughout all aspects of life; when psychological development will be more balanced through freedom from the struggle for existence we fight today, and people more tolerant; when submission for gain is unnecessary because the poisoning effect of the money cancer is absent, that homosexuality would disappear naturally. If nature then produced an abnormality which it might do in a small number of cases, medical treatment would take good care of it." Such a position is of course, totally un-Marxist but nonetheless it was one held by many Marxists prior to the rise of women's and gay movements in the late 60s. What became clear to me when I joined I.S. however was that it was a position still held by many of my worthy comrades.

The Question Raised

The gay question was next raised in 1972 by Don Milligan, a long-time member of I.S., then a student in Lancaster. He submitted a review of the London G.L.F. manifesto to *Socialist Worker*, I.S.'s weekly newspaper, in February 1972. Months passed and only after he circulated copies of his correspondence with *Socialist Worker* was the article published in *Socialist Worker* No.271, 13th May 1972. He concluded the article by saying,

"The labour movement must be won over to support of the G.L.F.'s basic demand - for total acceptance of homosexuality in women and men as a good and natural way of loving."

But perhaps the most important thing about the article was that it was written in the first person. Could there be a queer in I.S.? Would the workers be scared off? They did not appear to be scared off but the party hacks certainly were.

At the 1973 Annual Conference in March, Milligan proposed a motion on the gay question. It was opposed by the Executive Committee. They assured the conference that they were opposed to all homosexual oppression but they could not accept the Lancaster motion — something to do with the ancient Greeks being homosexual. And so bedazzled by this argument about a society 3000 years ago, the Conference agreed to entrust the matter to the E.C. I had just recently joined I.S. and this seemed to me to be a reasonable way of handling the question.

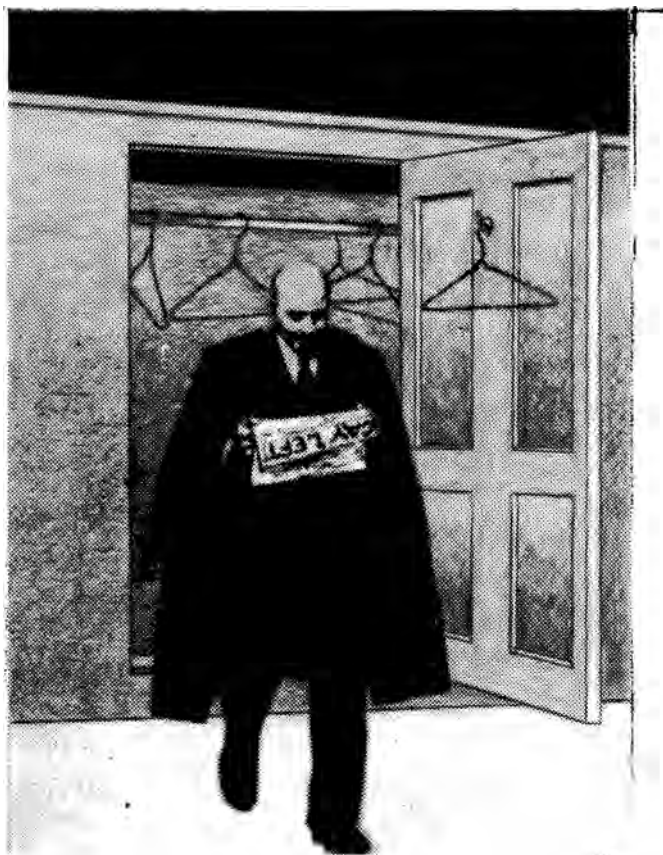
Months passed however and the E.C. never seemed to find the time to deal with the gay question. So in June of that year a number of gay comrades met in Lancaster to decide what to do. For two weeks an advertisement appeared in S.W. for this meeting of the I.S. Gay Discussion Group. But then, lo and behold, the National Secretary of the day decided it was unconstitutional for us to advertise. In future, we had to advertise on the Classified page as the Socialist Gay Group — thereby giving the impression that we had nothing to do with I.S. Strangely enough, this constitutional rule did not seem to apply to the I.S. History Group, the I.S. Science Group and even the I.S. Brass Band.

Enter the Middle Class

There were over a dozen comrades, both women and men, at the meeting from a wide variety of branches scattered all over the country, some of whom felt unable to come out in their branches. But it was a happy, constructive weekend and we came away from it full of great hopes. Undeterred by the indifference shown by I.S., we laboriously and democratically produced a document which we submitted to the Internal Bulletin for publication, in the autumn of 1973. This document attempted to *begin* to discuss gay oppression in a Marxist framework. It also raised a number of demands concerned with discrimination, police harassment, custody of children, medical treatment, sex education and age of consent. It was a very modest beginning to a debate on sexual politics. We waited and waited for it to appear — or even for an acknowledgement — but still we waited. Meanwhile Don Milligan had moved to Bradford where he began to set up a G.L.F. group. The I.S. branch committee there instructed him not to. It was difficult for us in London to know what was really going on but it became clear that there were some people in I.S. who wanted to stamp out gay work altogether. This should have come as no surprise to us, given I.S.'s then current position on women which totally ignored questions relating to the family, housework and sexuality and was only concerned with women at work. Nonetheless, we were surprised at the underhand repressive way in which these people did act. The E.C., having ignored our document on gay work, eventually drew up a hasty, ill-informed statement on the gay question. This document stated I.S.'s opposition to gay oppression but made not even an attempt to analyse the politics of sexuality. It fell into the old Stalinist trap of assuming that all gays are middle-class, and, therefore, a bit perverted. It was based on prejudice and gossip and, although it made an attack on G.L.F. — for its political mish-mash of ideas - it did not mention the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, presumably because it had never heard of it. It included statements such as "Socialists who make 'gay work' the main arena of their political activity tend quickly to exclude any other considerations and elevate the interests of the G.L.F. above that of the political organisation of which they are nominal members." What abusive rubbish.

This statement was presented to the October meeting of the National Committee; one amendment was made; there was no further discussion and the Document was approved. It instructed I.S. members to withdraw from work in G.L.F. So much for the open informed debate I had expected in I.S.

We were not consulted about this although we had submitted a document to the Internal Bulletin. We actually heard



about the decision at a meeting of the Women's Sub-Committee. Siri Lowe and Sue Bruley, who were both members of the I.S. Gay Group, had been asked by the convenor of the sub-committee to write an article on lesbianism for the I.S. women's paper, *Women's Voice*. The three of us went with copies of the article to the October meeting. It was, of course, rejected -- too middle-class, although the writers were a printworker and a student from a working-class family. This was always to be a favourite line - attacking whatever disagreed with the hack line as being middle-class. The kind of article they would have been prepared to accept would have been about a victimized lesbian shop steward. The kind of courage and support needed for a lesbian to become a shop steward, let alone join a trade union, was not an issue that interested these tough cadres.

Siri Lowe then arranged for some of us to meet the F.C. on October 19 for them to clarify their position. It may seem facetious to some, but I can still recall the feeling of walking into that meeting and thinking I had walked into a Hollywood set of a film about the Russian Revolution. A hunch of hard-faced men dressed in black, sitting round a table pretending to be Bolsheviks while a woman took notes in shorthand. Or perhaps I had entered a time-warped and found myself in 1917. I did not feel as if I was in London in 1973. We got nowhere at this meeting - one comrade accused us of wanting gay branches and fractions, an absurd idea (given that gays, as gays, have no social power) but one which was much used to discredit us. Another spoke of homosexuality as a 'cancerous growth'.

The Queers Fight Back

So we organised our comrades throughout the country and seven local branches submitted motions to the N.C. opposing the document. At the December meeting of the N.C. there was no change in their position. However, Tony Cliff said that it was alright for us to be in G.L.F. as long as it was not regarded as political activity. Presumably, sex with someone of the same sex was fine as long as you did not talk politics. For a revolutionary, particularly one of Cliff's experience, to talk as though one area of your life could be separated from politics is a nonsense - and a dangerous, conservative nonsense: it that.

It may surprise many people that we continued to work in

I.S. Some, however, such as Milligan, did drop out, increasingly disillusioned with the Leninist concept of the party. Its insistence on party discipline and concepts of leadership seemed as oppressive as many of the things we were fighting against. Those of us who did stay in were greatly encouraged by the response of rank and file members. Although the leadership was not listening to us, we seemed to be making an impact in other places. We spoke at meetings at a number of I.S. branches and student groups and, generally, we had a very good response. People did want to know about sexual politics and they did try to grapple with its difficulties. It was also encouraging to receive so many replies to our Socialist Gay Group advert. They came from all over the country, mostly from very isolated people and at one time amounted to as many as three a week. Most of all this was a very important period politically - what with the miners' strike, the three day week and the collapse of the Heath Government. I became branch secretary for a few weeks at this time. I was surprised that another comrade had not been elected but I was told by the district organizer that his name had not been put forward because he did not have a girl-friend at the time and was feeling rather unhappy. When I remarked on the fact that I was not exactly in a stable emotional position myself, the organizer seemed to find this strange and changed the topic.

The Gay Group's next plan was to widen the issue and hold a conference on sexism in Birmingham in March 1974. The aim of this conference was to raise the questions connected with socialism and the struggle for sexual liberation. We saw it as our contribution to the process of political education going on within I.S. Steve Smith who was organizing this was instructed by the National Secretary to cancel it. He did, however, suggest that the idea of such a conference could be put to the Women's Sub-Committee or the Publications and Training Committee. The W.S.C. was unwilling to sponsor a national conference of this type. The convenor said she thought regional conferences on such topics were more useful than national ones which "tend to attract mainly middle-class audiences and not the people who are actually building the branches". Why she imagined that an activist group like I.S. tolerated lazy, middle-class members, I am not sure. She went on to suggest that we raise the issue at branches - not realizing, or ignoring, how difficult that was when we were not allowed to advertise.

But the reply of the Publications and Training Committee was particularly interesting. It said that "I.S. does not take a position on what you describe as 'sexism', and also contrary to your opinion we have not found the issue to cause any concern amongst the working class members of I.S." The ramifications of these statements are enormous but, of course, they were in the same mould as Cliff's remarks about gay sex. Sexuality was not a political issue to them. Their politics seemed to be economics and militancy, full stop. We were furious at their mindless bigotry but we knew, without any doubt, that they were wrong. Their mistake was a hangover from the Stalinist past which in time would be corrected.

Collapse

The next plan was to get official recognition for the subterranean I.S. Gay Group. Such an officially recognized group, we felt, would provide some solidarity for the gay comrades, most of whom remained very isolated. It would be a starting point for discussion on gay politics in I.S. in the way that the West Indian Group was for West Indian politics in I.S. It was not to be a ghetto and it is in this aspect of a starting point that its importance lay. After all, sexual politics should be of concern to all I.S. members. The July 1974 meeting of the National Committee was faced with five resolutions from branches calling for the setting up of such a group. True to form, it rejected them. At this point, our strength began to diminish. Morale was low. One comrade in East Anglia resigned because of the treatment he had received after he made a pass at another male comrade at a party. I.S. branches are not renowned for concerning themselves with the way women are treated at their parties. Many comrades disappeared at this time - either not replying to letters or leaving the organization or deciding not to make an issue of their sexuality.

Steve Smith and I decided to write something for the Internal Bulletin but because our morale was low it was never completed. In retrospect, this was a great error because there were many branches which had heard nothing of our dispute at all. The whole dispute had been conducted much too much on the leadership's terms and on the leadership's territory. By publishing an article in the Internal Bulletin we would have opened things out much more and perhaps conducted the debate on a political level, and got rid of the smears and whispers which had characterized the whole thing. A great deal of the responsibility for this is mine. I wrote an article for *Socialist Worker* in July 1974 and allowed myself to become obsessed with its publication. Little wonder that I was obsessed since five months elapsed before it was published. Over these five months I phoned S.W. on average three times a week. In the end an article appeared by Laurie Flynn and myself on the legal oppression of gays. This was fine so far as it went but because it dealt with the law it totally ignored lesbianism, and thereby the much deeper questions about the historical oppression of all sexuality. Despite my insistence, the word 'gay' was not used once in the entire article. The fact that that article was not part of a series dealing with questions of sexuality is an indication of I.S.'s civil rights approach to this question. In my despair, however, I welcomed a civil rights approach rather than the heavy-handed techniques of distortion and silence to which I had become accustomed.

Two motions on the gay question were submitted to the 1974 Annual Conference by Lancaster and Tottenham branches --- but these were defeated without any discussion. The one motion* to the 1975 Conference was likewise defeated without any discussion. When we were selecting delegates in the North London district for the 1975 Conference a comrade asked if these delegates would be prepared to speak to the motion on sexuality. They refused.

For much of 1975 I believed I was the only gay person prepared to raise questions of sexual politics. Three things really kept me in the organization - the first that I.S. seemed the only group capable of organizing the British working class on revolutionary lines; the changing position of I.S. on abortion; and my belief that the organization was still democratic enough to enable a real debate to take place sometime in the future. But the personal strain was terrific - I was often moody, irritable and ill. I left when I lost faith in the organization's ability to function democratically.

Conclusions

Looking back I feel that our greatest mistake was not to involve the whole membership of I.S. more. We should have made use of the Internal Bulletin more than we ever did. That way, the membership throughout the country would have known what was going on and the leadership would have found it more difficult to isolate us as they did. But more significantly, I feel we made a great mistake in concentrating on the gay question as such rather than sexuality as a whole. Our strategy made it more difficult for people who were in the process of coming out since people were identified as either gay or not gay. It made it easier for people to opt out arguing that it was up to gays themselves. It also made it easier for a limited civil rights approach to be adopted.

What we ought to have done was raise the question of everyone's gender role. Sexual oppression is not something of concern only to gays. Everyone is conditioned to follow a particular role. But these roles are created by historical circumstances and need very serious consideration by Marxists. The approach taken recently by the London Gay Workers' Group in drawing up a Sexual Rights Charter for debate in the labour movement is probably the correct one. I understand that a new Gay Group has formed since I left I.S. and has successfully put forward demands to the 1976 Annual Conference. I wish them luck but I will be very surprised if the organization has changed so much that it will support any real gay work.

There are things which I.S. can be criticized for. The most basic one was their denial of our right to meet. They would of course assert that they had never done this and that would be formally correct. But in real terms they made no allow-

ance for the fact that most gay comrades were isolated and could only meet each other through the agency of S.W. I honestly believe they thought we could spot each other on sight or by some secret sign. That they were not prepared to consider the importance of gay comrades meeting together is not surprising given the developments in their politics in the early 1970s. In correctly putting the central emphasis of their activity on the working class they often saw workers only as workers and ignored other aspects of their lives. This is why they ignored the oppression of women and the role of domestic labour and only struggled around their exploitation as workers; it is also why for so long they failed to treat seriously the racist oppression of black workers. Reality for them seemed to have become contained on the shop-floor. The ideological divisions within the working class were treated as though they were so trivial as to be irrelevant. The refusal to allow us to set up a gay group created difficulties of a kind that did not exist for women and blacks - because no-one could tell if a person was gay or not some gay comrades hid their sexuality and added to their own oppression, courtesy of I.S. They never recognised any of the problems that a gay person might have in coming out at work, with his family or in a political organization. They never recognized any of the problems that this isolation might create in terms of relating to people and becoming a socialist.

My second criticism of I.S. is for their failure to acknowledge the validity of sexual politics. Some people claimed that Engels' *Origin of the Family* said all that needed to be said. Apart from the fact that it treated homosexuality as a perversion, it had been written before most developments in scientific birth control. Women now had, for the first time, the possibility of a real choice about whether they became pregnant, about when they became mothers, about whom they related to. Although the State has denied this choice to so many women, the possibilities now facing women can totally transform all their expectations. The spin-off on men has been enormous and many men, for the first time, are faced with a whole series of problems about relationships, housework and childcare that never existed while women were dependent on them. Women of the Russian Revolution such as Alexandra Kollantai could not begin to contemplate the possibilities that face women, today. These technological changes are given real political importance because of the existence of a women's movement. One would have thought that all this might have been worthy of some consideration by I.S.

The whole concept of a private life has become very important in these hundred years since Engels wrote. This concept has played an important part in the development of a whole number of industries --- house-building, women's magazines, films, cosmetics, household goods and so on. But it seemed that these links between ideology and developments in the bourgeois economy were not that important as far as I.S. was concerned. 'Come the revolution, it'll be alright on the night' sums up the level of I.S.'s approach to sexual politics. The strength of the National Abortion Campaign made I.S. alter this position somewhat in 1975. Suddenly, Cliff was talking about a woman's right to control her own body being analogous with the workers' right to control the means of production. This was, beyond doubt, a great leap forward but it was not accompanied by any wider questioning of sexual politics. However, had it come earlier some of us would still perhaps be in I.S. By the time it came the weariness and isolation was too far advanced.

The third criticism of I.S. is the one that has made me most bitter - and that is the way our political arguments were distorted. We were accused of being concerned only with homosexuality -- but if that had been true why would we have bothered to join a revolutionary working class organization? We demanded a gay group and the rumour went out that we wanted branches and a fraction. We mentioned housework and were said to support the reactionary 'Wages for Housework' campaign. I could not have believed that such ignorance, bigotry, prejudice and cowardice were possible in a revolutionary organization.

I feel very sad to have to write these things about I.S.

because despite all this they are still the only group in this country that is even beginning to organize the working class on revolutionary lines. They revived the Marxist tradition in this country at a time when Marxism seemed to be either Stalinist manoeuvring or sectarian Trotskyist splitting. And these factors are, of course, what make their treatment of sexual politics so tragic. Were they a bunch of nut-cases or Stalinist ogres it would matter less. The fact that they embody much of the best of the working class tradition in this country does not make one hopeful.

The dilemma I was faced with in 1972 still remains. How does one raise sexual politics *and* take part in the organization of the working class along revolutionary lines? To my

knowledge, all the groups that I would regard as revolutionary have, at best, only taken up a civil rights approach to sexuality. Membership of these groups for any gay person - particularly one without a gay support group - becomes very oppressive and warps all of one's political behaviour. On the other hand, leaving these groups has enormous dangers. One can develop one's sexual politics but the possibilities of becoming isolated from the mainstream of left politics are great. Where do we go from here, comrades?*

*** This motion was passed, overwhelmingly, by North London District.**

Was Marx Anti-Gay?

by Randal Kincaid

Almost the very first words written in the first issue of *Gay Left* was the statement that one of the aims of the collective was to contribute towards 'a marxist analysis of homosexual oppression'. This stand and the commitment to an analysis of gay oppression and its relationship to other forms of oppression and exploitation has drawn comments and criticisms. Some of these should be aired. In this way we can work towards a further definition of our position — at least as it appears to me.

A Letter From California

Craig Hanson, writing to us from California, approved of our analysis of the gay ghetto in *Gay Left* No.2, but he also saw an inherent incompatibility in being both marxist and gay. In this article I am going to take up his major points and explore some of the issues he has raised.

In recent years, the letter suggests, there has been a certain disillusionment among segments of American radical gays with the idea of marxism being the only ideological framework in which a person can develop a coherent opposition to the present form of capitalism. The experiences of American gays in Cuba and information on the situation of gays in other 'communist' countries have contributed to this but the letter goes on to suggest that there is an anti-gay element that is fundamental not only to traditional 'communism' but to marxism itself. The letter concludes with the tentative suggestion that anarchism may provide a less constricting theoretical framework for gay activists.

Points of Agreement

First of all it should be said that there are points of agreement between us and areas of mutual concern. For instance, we both agree that as gays we wish integration with the larger society, but not on terms that would diminish our identity and freedom as gays. I particularly liked one part of the passage Craig Hanson quoted from David Darby's article: "Until straight men become aware of their own homoerotic selves (the repression of which produced their present mangled personalities) then gay liberation will be at most a matter of pleading for tolerance in a straight defined framework." (1) So neither of us are interested in a special pleading for gays as a particular minority group but for a wider understanding of the nature of sexuality itself that encourages a development of homosexual as well as heterosexual feelings. Where we differ is in our approach towards understanding our identity as gays and in the nature of the political choices that are open to us.

'Communist' Governments

Much of Craig Hanson's letter was taken up in describing the situation of gays in Cuba, China, Russia and other 'communist' countries. Some of this information was new to me, but *Gay Left* has already given space to instances of gay oppression in Cuba (*Gay Left* No. 1), and in Russia (***Gay Left* No.2**). In this issue, there is 'A Grim Tale', which highlights the problems of gay activists within International Socialists. As socialists and gays we are aware of the attitudes towards us of many people who call themselves marxists. But do these sexist attitudes, which are directed towards women as well as towards gays, have anything to do with marxism? It seems more likely that it has more to do with the colonial past of some of these

countries and identifying homosexuality as an aspect of 'decadent' capitalism. But the idea of decadence is an example of the kind of value-laden, non-materialistic term that Marx was at pains to exclude from his writing, and such attitudes tend to reflect the chauvinism of emerging nations and a need to establish an identity that is different and 'better' than that ascribed to them by former dominant powers.

Although there is no suggestion (at least by Marx) that there are rigidly defined stages along the road to a 'higher form of society', situations such as Cuba, China or Russia cannot be given as text-book examples of the sort of development that Marx had in mind. For one thing, these societies have not really experienced the capitalist phase which Marx associated with a necessary development of productive capacity and a movement away from traditional customs and beliefs. In *Capital*, Marx points to the revolutionary aspects of Modern Industry, contrasting it with the conservatism of previous social formations, that not only affects the social conditions of production but also people's minds:

"The capitalist ... forces the human race to produce for production's sake: he thus forces the development of productive powers of society and creates those material conditions which alone can form the real basis of a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle." (2)

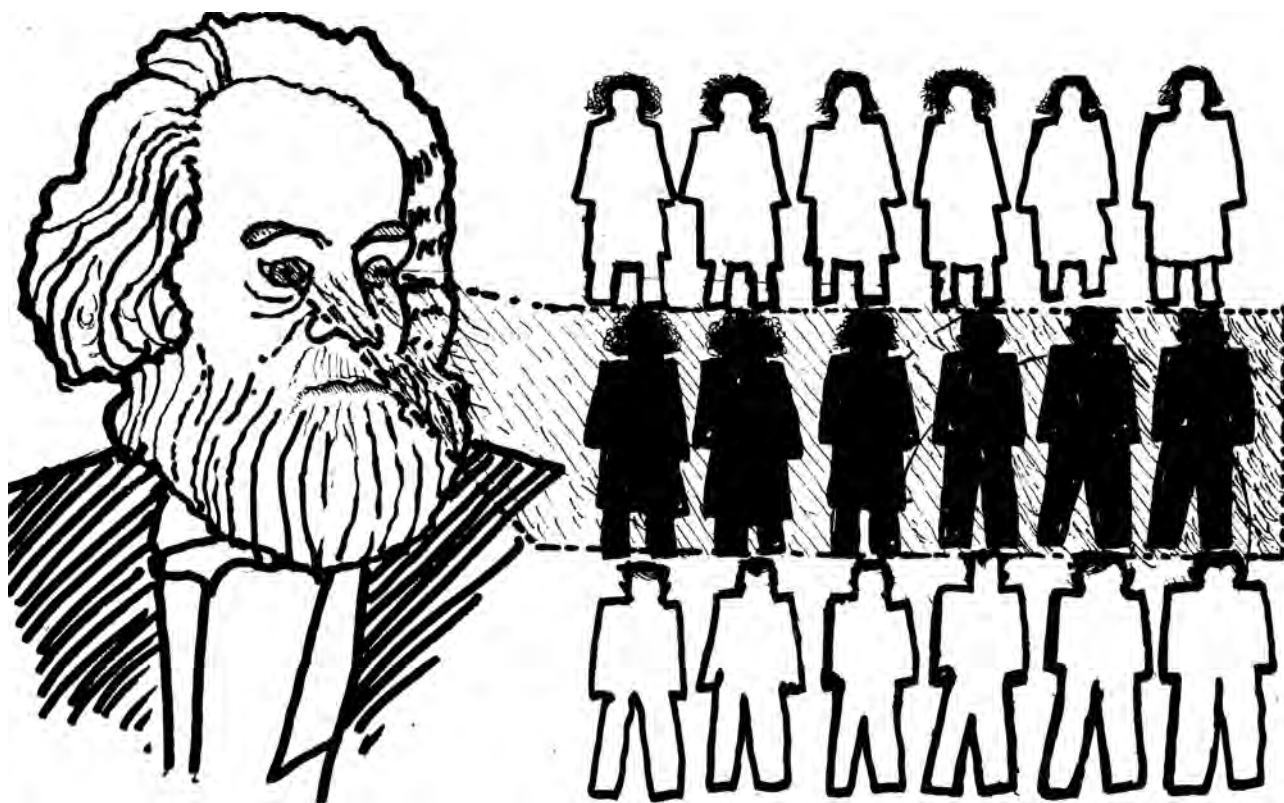
It would be completely consistent with a marxist analysis to predict that more 'liberal' attitudes towards homosexuality would be more likely to exist in advanced capitalist societies than in countries where, despite a 'communist' revolution, they were closer to a pre-industrial mode of production.

The Marxist Ethic?

"Because a gay consciousness is inherently incompatible with the anti-sex puritanism of either capitalist Christianity or Communist Marxism, there can be no Christian Gays, and there are no Marxist Gays. There are only confused homosexuals who *think* they are Christian or Marxist."

Craig Hanson in this passage seems to be suggesting that Marxists have the same approach to Marx's writing as Jehovah's Witnesses or other fundamentalist groups have towards the Bible. In Marx there is no statement of principles. There are basic assumptions but I am unaware of any statement about how people should or should not behave in any of Marx's important works. To deduce 'an anti-sex puritanism' from the fact that Marx does not mention sex is, I think, wrong. He does not mention sex because it is outside the limits he has drawn. In fact, the conceptual vocabulary to enable rational discussion of sex did not exist in Marx's time. Sex and gender inevitably went together and it is only relatively recently that it has been possible, conceptually, to separate the two. Marx does, however, link changes in social relations with structural changes in society and thus provides a framework for understanding the changing nature of sexual relations.

Like some other observers of nineteenth century industrial England Marx was filled with a sense of moral outrage at the social conditions of the great mass of working people. His



particular approach to understanding this situation was an attempt to analyse the basic tendencies in capitalism. He viewed conventional ethics with considerable distrust as he felt that these values tended to reflect the interests of the dominant class. Marx's sense of justice revolves around the individual's rights over his own labour power. Capitalism, as he defines it, begins when the great mass of people are obliged to sell their labour power on the market as a commodity. It is in this situation as it develops that Marx uses value terms such as 'exploitation' and 'appropriation'. Far from setting up a universal ethic, Marx establishes a frame of reference within which it is possible to examine sets of ethical assumptions.

Before Marx there was no non-metaphysical account as to how and why societies or groups in societies developed particular social values. Marx extended the possibility of a materialist explanation to include areas which beforehand could only be explained in metaphysical or moral terms: This is not to say that Marx's account is *necessarily* true, but it has a logical consistency and can, to some extent, be tested and refined. It can also be set alongside other accounts in such a way that rational judgements can be made regarding relative merits.

Scientism

"A final aspect of Marxism which I feel is counter to our needs as gay people is their fascination with being scientific. Marxism developed at a time in which there was still the hope that science would provide some sort of definitive framework. This has given rise to what seems to me a tragic aspect of Marxism - their pseudo-objectivity. The myth has been that somehow by proper analysis of society one could objectively determine the proper course of action. This course would be objectively valid by being scientifically determined and would be ordained by history."

Craig Hanson is quoting again from David Darby's article. It is, in my opinion, a valid criticism that could be applied to many (perhaps most) marxist writers. It is, however, incorrect if applied to Marx himself in his mature writings. The aim of *Capital* is not "to determine a proper course of action". It is an exercise in analysis and synthesis that people have found useful in enabling them to make decisions about courses of action.

The point is taken, however. A sort of dogma has been created by 'marxists' and 'anti-marxists' and this has often little to do with what Marx actually wrote. Marx is either used as an Aunt Sally or a battering ram and consequently the wrong climate is created for the serious study that his work requires. I would urge those interested enough to read *Capital* (Vol. 1) which is regarded as the synthesis of everything he

wrote. There will be both 'marxists' and 'non-marxists' who will approach this work with false preconceptions. To dispel only two of these: revolution is never mentioned in a political sense and the word 'communism' is never used. Was Marx Anti-Gay?

Marx was a product of his own environment which was one that reinforced 'traditional' elements in personal relations. Craig Hanson suggests he would have considered homosexuality as unnatural. This may be true. Marx lived at a particular point in time and belonged to a particular society, but he predicted vast changes in the nature of social relations. A particularly important concept for attempting to analyse the changing nature of sexuality is that of Modern Industry.⁽³⁾ In Marxist terminology Modern Industry was introduced and developed under Capitalism but extends beyond it. Unlike pre-capitalist modes of production where production tended to reflect traditional, conservative forms, Modern Industry, as Marx saw it in 1860, tended to be rational and revolutionary as survival in such a system demanded continual change as competition threw up more rational forms of production. Such changes reflect changes in social relations and hence changes in social roles.

A change in social roles implies a movement away from traditional sexual roles. There is evidence to suggest (see 'Where Engels Fears To Tread', *Gay Left* No.1) that this was what was occurring towards the end of the nineteenth century in industrialized European countries. Although the Victorians were unequalled in their assertions of the value of traditional family relations, this in itself might suggest that people were beginning to be aware that these traditional forms of social and sexual relations were for the first time being threatened. This anxiety over homosexuality and prostitution that was such a feature of this time, was articulated in legislation: an attempt, no doubt, to shore up the flood gates.

A marxist analysis of sexuality provides a way out of a situation where values are 'given' and any change in values is looked upon as 'moral decline' or values being 'eroded'. The world is changing. What was important before is not necessarily important now. It is perhaps time to attempt to understand the nature of sexuality and sexual roles and to consider new ways of relating that are more in keeping with our present world.*

1. David Darby. Article, joint issue 'Fag Rag and Gay Sunshine', Summer, 1974.

2. Capital Vol.I. ed. Lawrence & Wishart, p.555.

3. The concept of Modern Industry and the possible consequences for the family and relations between the sexes see *ibid.* pp. 454-460.

All Worked Up

by Gregg Blachford

In the first two issues of *Gay Left*, we discussed different aspects of the Gay Workers' Movement. This article looks at the events that have occurred and the issues that have surfaced since our last issue.

The basis on which the Gay Workers' Movement has acted is on an agreement that any struggle of gay people for an end to oppression and discrimination must, in the present economic climate especially, seek a base for action within the organised labour movement. Discussion must be initiated in and between the gay and labour movements on how best this can be done.

Many Gay Workers' Collectives have been set up since the first National Conference in May 1975. The collective in Leeds committed itself to produce a newsletter to keep us informed of the activities of others and to assist the organisation of another Gay Workers' Conference. By the end of that summer, a nine page newsletter had been produced which included news on the CHE Conference that had been held in Sheffield, the Conspiracy Laws, the tentative Gay Workers' Charter and information on the next Gay Workers' Conference to be held in Leeds in February 1976. The organisation of the conference was taken on by the Leeds group with the responsibility for the newsletter being shifted to another Gay Workers' Collective in Nottingham.

The Nottingham group produced a second newsletter towards the end of the year. It included useful articles on some of the practical problems of bringing up the gay question in one's trade union branch. The events that had occurred in London were documented along with a list of issues, besides gay ones, around which gay workers could organise: Working Women's Charter, unemployment, abortion, sex discrimination, equal pay, conspiracy laws, etc.

The Second National Conference

The conference began with a bang on Friday, 13th February, 1976 at a reception at the Wellesley Hotel in Leeds. The Bradford GLF group put on a play called "All Worked Up" about some of the problems that gay people face at work. Well, the hotel manager got all worked up himself and called the police, allegedly because the room was overcrowded. They came, the play was stopped and everyone was asked to leave. A confrontation had occurred within an hour of the conference opening! Everyone, though, sat tight and eventually the police and manager retreated and the play continued. This created a very good feeling of togetherness which, to a large extent, was to last through most of the conference.

The next morning, people began wandering into Leeds Polytechnic to begin the discussions. Registration and accommodation seemed much more organised than last May's conference. Workshops began on the following areas: Lesbians and Work, Gays in the Trade Unions, and Cuts in Social Expenditure. I went to the latter one which had few people and no leader which resulted in no conversation for a while. The main question to arise here was whether we should fight the massive cuts in public expenditure as gay people on our own or as workers in the larger anti-cuts campaigns already in existence? Those who had fought as gays had been criticised by the straight left for bringing sexual politics into an area where it did not belong. Also, gays have been verbally and physically abused at larger Trade Union demonstrations, such as the North West T.U.C. lobby of Parliament in November 1975.

There was a feeling that you had to "prove" yourself as a good union member before the branch would tolerate you as gay or allow you to bring up gay issues. But it was stressed that gays must operate as such in unions as well as working in autonomous gay groups. We must remember, though, the many gay people who do not belong to any trade union or have lost their union membership because of unemployment. These people are less likely to be protected from the full effects of the cuts.

THEY FOUND IT EASIER
TO SACK ME BECAUSE I'M GAY.
I SHOULD HAVE JOINED THE UNION,
I SUPPOSE. I'LL GO TO THE GAY CENTRE
TONIGHT AND THEY MIGHT HAVE SOME
SUGGESTIONS. ANYWAY, I CAN'T AFFORD TO
GO TO LOUISE'S ON THE DOLE.



The workshops continued after lunch with most of the men in the session on "Gay Workers and the Gay Scene" and the women continuing their morning workshop on the specific problems of lesbians in the work situation. It began by looking at whether lesbians were in a better situation at work *vis a vis* other women because they were more independent and less economically tied to men or whether things were worse for lesbians because they tended to feel isolated from the other women who were in different social situations than themselves. Women on estates and in factories tended to be physically, mentally and emotionally close but there is a definite line over

which one must not cross or the label of "lesbian" is attached to one's behaviour. Most women cannot afford to or do not want to have this label pinned to them so "come-out" or "upfront" lesbians are isolated and "closet" lesbians continue to repress their feelings.

Because of the lack of any chairperson, this workshop discussion began to wander and eventually came to be dominated by the Power of Women (POW) Collective whose entire theme is a reformist campaign to get wages for housework paid for by the state. The workshop gradually disintegrated as tea-break time arrived.

The Working Women's Charter

By 4 p.m., when someone finally dared to call everyone together, all 75 of us reconvened and started a discussion around possible amendments to the Working Women's Charter which has been in existence for two years and has been adopted by 12 unions at their national conferences and by 33 trades councils throughout Britain. It is a charter of rights for women with demands relating to both work and home. It has provided the basis for a campaign around women's social and economic situations within trade unions, tenants' associations, etc. But it includes no provision for sexual orientation. The conference agreed that it should send amendments forward to the Working Women's Conference to be held in April 1976 at Coventry. The POW Collective again began to turn the discussion to the "Wages for Housework" campaign and argued that the W.W.C. does *not* say anything for those women who work at home without a wage. Therefore they suggested that we should put to the W.W.C. Conference that the title of the charter should be changed to "The Women Wage-Workers Charter". This motion was defeated. Their domination of the discussion was pointed out by several angry women who felt that they were using this conference for their own ends instead of concentrating on the issue of sexuality at work which was the theme of the conference. In the end, several women went off to word amendments to the charter for discussion at a later point in the day.

The Gay Workers' Charter

The question arose as to what had happened to the Gay Workers' Charter (GWC) and were we to discuss it? The Nottingham Collective answered that they had decided, in organising this conference, that we were not strong enough as a movement to even begin to take this charter to our branches. We would find ourselves isolated and depressed perhaps leading to a lowering of morale. What they suggested should happen was that our energies should be directed into taking specifically gay issues to our unions which were relevant to our own particular work situations. Examples would include getting support in branches of teaching unions for a gay teacher who was sacked or warned because he or she had discussed homosexuality in the classroom or, more generally, for any gay worker who had been sacked because of his/her openness regarding his/her homosexuality. These arguments were accepted without debate (a result of exhaustion?) and the Gay Workers' Charter was shelved until an unspecified time in the future.

The final event of the day was the acceptance of the amendments to the Working Women's Charter proposed by some of the women. They felt that a separate "sexual freedom for all women" clause was too general and would be too different from the other more concrete demands in the Charter. Therefore, they suggested amendments to the existing clauses which are italicized below:

Point 2: Equal opportunity of entry into occupations, in promotion *and defence of jobs*, regardless of sex, marital status or *sexual orientation or hours worked*.

Point 3: Equal education and training, *regardless of sex, marital status or sexual orientation*. Compulsory day release for *all and the opportunity for all women for further training*.

Point 5: The removal of all legal and bureaucratic impediments to equality, *regardless of sex, marital status or sexual orientation*, e.g. with regard to tenancies, mortgages, pension schemes, taxation, passports, *custody and care of children*, social security payments, hire purchase agreements.

At the Working Women's Charter Conference held in Coventry on 10th/11th April 1976, these proposals were drafted into a revised charter which is to go to the unions that have accepted it for further amendments and suggestions. Then at a future Conference, the democratically revised Charter will be adopted as a whole for further action.

The evening saw us at the Guildford Hotel watching the General Will Company present their "I Don't Like Apples" play about the multitude of problems faced by a married woman who decides to leave her husband and "go it alone". This was followed by a crowded disco which everyone had looked forward to and seemed to enjoy. We were so different from what we were like during the day. Many of us tend to split our behaviour into "serious, heavy conference-type actions" and "fun, frivolous and camp actions" at the disco. But, then again, we are very well rehearsed at this as most of us still live split lives to one degree or another every day. As one person commented, perhaps the importance of discos at conferences reflects the social isolation of gays.

Sunday

The Sunday session was set to start at 10 a.m. but by 11.30 there were only 30 people — a perennial problem at two-day gay conferences. We eventually began by breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the document prepared by the Nottingham Gay Workers' Collective on the perspectives and proposals for the campaign which we would later discuss together in the large group. Some of the questions raised were: What are the significant differences between middle class and working class gays and is it possible to get more working class gays involved in this campaign?

Should we confine ourselves to developing the consciousness of a small group of gays or should we concentrate our efforts on involving many "straight" gays at a more basic level which might involve a dilution of the struggle?

Can gay groups in unions become too personal, not concentrating on organisation and action?

Should we be campaigning within revolutionary socialist groups to get them to make political statements about sexuality and act on them?

The plenary session after lunch was attended by about 55 people which steadily declined as the afternoon crept on. In fact, some members of the Bradford and Leeds G.L.F. groups walked out during this session without commenting on their reasons for doing so.

It has been suggested that the omnipresence of the I.M.G. (International Marxist Group) put some people off because they were suspected of opportunism using the emerging Gay Workers' Movement to their own advantage. Whether this is true or not is difficult to say but what it does illustrate is the differing orientations of the different groups and collectives within the G.W.M. For example, Brixton and Bradford seem to have a local, anarchist-type approach compared to the more national orientation of the Nottingham group. Perhaps these differences may cause splits in the future as the movement develops.

The Gay Workers' Handbook

It was felt that the most realistic and worthwhile way forward at this time for the Gay Workers' Movement was if we could produce a Gay Workers' Handbook that could be used by gay people to help them raise gay issues at their place of work. The afternoon was spent organising the production of the handbook. The items that needed to be included were discussed and individuals and groups volunteered to write a section. Then we would all come together again on April 4th in London to discuss further details.

That ended the second British Gay Workers' Conference. In my view, it was superior to the first conference in that the organisation was of a higher standard (food, agenda, entertainment, accommodation, etc.), there was a more unified idea as to what direction the movement should take and finally, concrete things emerged from the conference, that is, the proposed amendments to the Working Women's Charter and definite plans for the production of a Gay Workers' Handbook.

Hopefully, the spirit of this conference would not die

immediately at its end and that people actually would go back and write the pieces that they offered to do. For the most part, as it turned out, people did fulfil their obligations. The meeting on April 4th at the South London Gay Community Centre was well attended (about 35 people) and we spent most of the time discussing the articles that had been submitted.

But, first, it was necessary to further clarify exactly at whom this handbook is aimed. It was decided that the best target would be gays at work who would, in most cases, be unpoliticised and who would feel that they wanted to come out at work but did not know how to go about it. As little jargon as possible must be used and there should be no presumption about the amount of previous knowledge that the readers have about the present gay political scene.

One of the issues that arose concerned the personal experiences of gay people at work. One person's experience (a public school Londoner) raised a lot of controversy as the writer was not at all aware of the political implications of his homosexuality and he did not see his gayness at work as at all problematic. Were we looking only for certain types of experiences that fitted into our analysis? Were we only going to take manual workers' experiences as valid? Is there a 'typical' experience? General agreement was reached on the idea that we must not edit any contributions we get or take out the sections that some of us may not agree with. They must be accepted or rejected as a whole. Many more offers came to write about coming out at work and variety, it was felt, was necessary in this section of the handbook so as many readers as possible could find some experience with which to identify.

Birmingham G.L.F. organised the latest meeting to discuss the organisation of the handbook held on the weekend of _

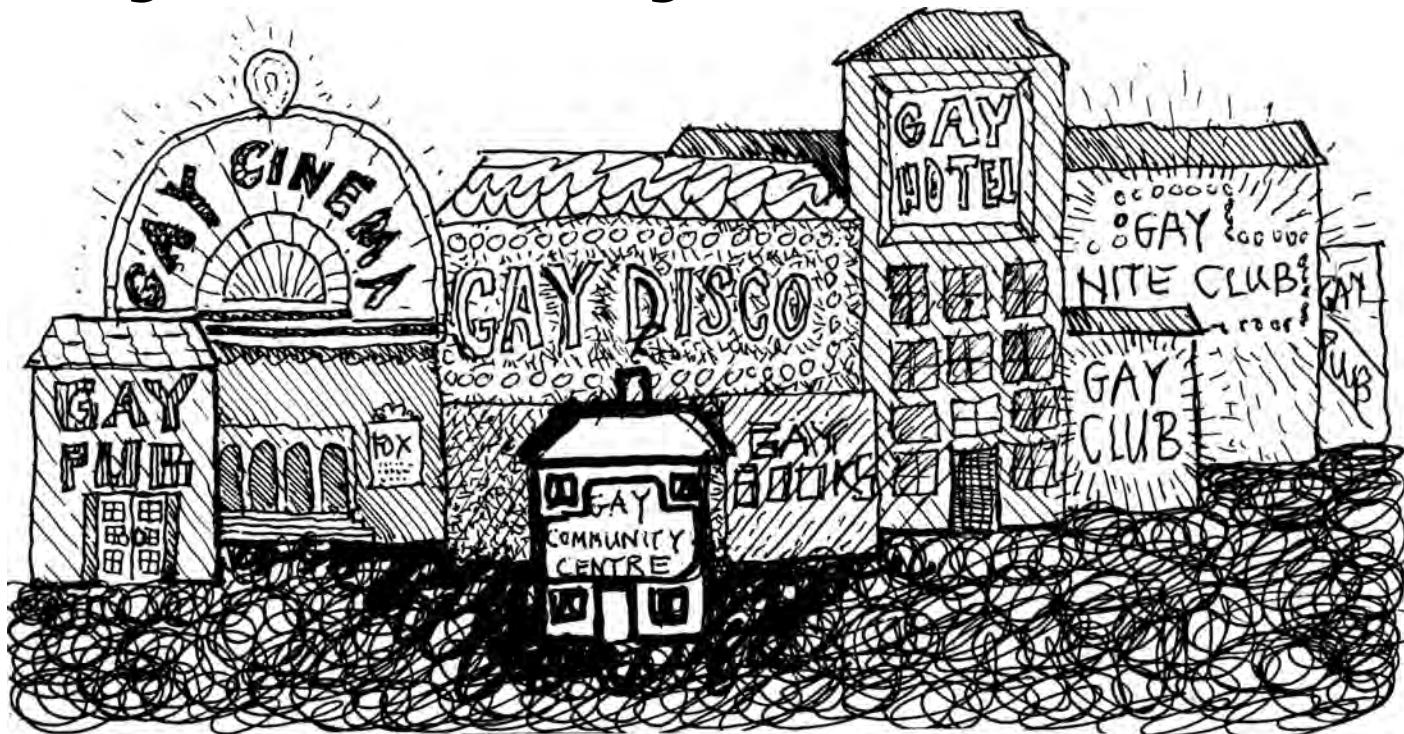
5th/6th June 1976. Numbers were way down -- only seven attended from outside Birmingham but more articles were discussed as well as methods of production. Nottingham Gay Workers' Collective has taken on the responsibility for the editing and production of the handbook with assistance from others on working weekends in Nottingham in July. Hopefully by *Gay Left* No.4 we will be able to report that the handbook has been completed.

Problems

At all of these meetings there has been a feeling of togetherness despite the disagreements and it seems as if something is actually going to be published. The Gay Workers' Movement seems to progress fastest when there is something around which to organise. But we must not become over-confident. We are small in numbers with little evidence of growth, isolated at work and often at home as well. We lack much widespread support. In fact, often other gays are totally against us and we are ignored by most of the revolutionary left. But despite this, it is vital for us to develop a situation where it is possible for more and more gays to come out at their place of work. This process is an important factor in generating self-respect and ending the lies, hypocrisy and deceptions that most gay people have to live. It also has the function of challenging traditional gender roles by bringing others to question the sexist nature of society. At least they will be compelled to realise that an alternative lifestyle is both possible and acceptable. Perhaps they will even be challenged into thinking about their own sexuality.

Gay Left can play a role as a documentor of the on-going events that occur in the Gay Workers' Movement. We will watch and record what goes on as well as individually continuing to work within the movement.*

Gay Community Centres



Beyond the fence is the sky
Beyond the role is the individual
Beyond isolation is community

Slowly, Gay Community Centres are being started by gay people seeking to form non-commercial meeting places where gay women and men can feel completely free to express themselves through dress, discussions or discos and generally enjoy the company of each other. Most are established in houses scheduled for demolition and redevelopment and are set up with the most meagre financial resources and not without protests from some local inhabitants. Centres usually organize regular weekly meetings and are open regular hours.

The addresses of UK centres are given below. We apologise for any centres not included and would like to hear from them.

London

Current details from Gay Switchboard: 01-837 7324.

North London (Finsbury Park) Gay Centre for women and men. London N4. (check address). Wed. evening meeting. Tues. GLF open eves. and weekend.

West London Gay Centre, "The Point" at the corner of Tavistock Crescent and Portobello Road.

South London Gay Community Centre, 78 Railton Road, Brixton SE24. Tel: 01-274 7921.

East London Gay Centre, 19 Redmans Road, El. Tel: 01-790 2454.

Edinburgh
S.M.G., 15 Broadley Terrace, Edinburgh

Most centres are for women and men, often local women's centres have gay women's meetings. Check Switchboards or Women's Workshop, 38 Earlam Street, London W1. Tel: 01-836 6081 for details.

Centres in other towns and cities are hopefully being set up.

Phone Switchboards for details:

Bristol: 0272-712621 (8-10.30pm)

Manchester: 061-273 3725 (7-9.30pm)

Brighton: 0273 27878 (8-10pm)

West Midland: 021-449 8312 (7-10pm)

Oxford 0865-45301 (7-9 p.m.)

Glasgow: 041-204 1292 (7- 9pm)

Dublin: 0001-764240 (Thurs—Fri 7.30-9.30pm, Sat 3-6pm)

Gays and Class

Notes on Gays and Class, by Richard Dyer

One of the good things about the film 'Fox' is that it has made people talk about the question of gays and class. But is the film's basic point -- that gay subculture is a mirror of straight culture, simply reproducing its class divisions and exploitation -- really true? I would like to suggest -- and it really can only be suggestion, because we simply do not know enough in hard facts about the lives of most gay people -- that (i) the class cultures are to a certain extent reproduced in gay subcultures; (ii) *but* the larger part of the gay culture is male bourgeois; (iii) *but* that it is male and bourgeois in a far from simple way. Let me take each of these points in turn.

(i) 'The gay scene in Birmingham, where I live, can be broken down in social class terms. The four pubs and two clubs can be divided into the posh and the common, the smart and the rough. The small towns of industrial Lancashire (e.g. Blackburn, Preston, Bolton, Wigan) where there is a small bourgeoisie, have distinctively working class gay pubs, as have parts of South London and the East End. Equally, there are gay clubs in London and Manchester almost as exclusive as the gentlemen's clubs of Pall Mall.

How far does this pattern, and its extremes, extend over the country as a whole? I cannot say for sure, but my guess is -- not very far. It seems to me that whilst there are different class emphases from pub to pub, club to club, the distinctions are far more blurred than has so far been suggested. The actual class position of the clientele of a particular place may not tally with the vague class tone of that club -- you get for instance the middle class gay 'slumming' in 'rough' pubs, and the working class gay escaping the 'masculinity' of his class background amidst the chi-chi of a club.

The ritualised forms of promiscuity -- cottaging, baths, trolling -- are of interest here, for they seem to be further 'outside' of class, participated in fairly equally by all classes (and races). By reducing all interchange to the sexual, promiscuity strips them of class connotations. If class does operate here, it does so not in terms of differentiation of locale (though there are opera-trolling and expensive Turkish baths ...), but in terms of the sexual fantasies people from one class (or race) have about people from the other.

(ii) There is then some class differentiation within gay culture -- yet I feel the tone that dominates is male and middle class. Of course, gay *activity* is no less widespread in one class than any other (as far as I can make out) -- but the way it is socially-culturally *patterned* seems to show a greater influence of male, middle class norms. (Especially where, as in the majority of cases, there is only one pub.)

This becomes more evident if one goes beyond pubs and clubs to include the gay movement (C.H.E., G.L.F., etc.) and gay publications (*Gay News*, *Sappho*, *Playguy* ...). It is interesting to note how right from the start gay magazines aiming at providing more than just porn (*Timm*, *Spartacus*, *Jeremy*) all just took it for granted that the readership would be interested in high fashion, the Arts, cookery and foreign travel. Now obviously there are reasons in addition to class why these magazines (and their successors) should have assumed that these were the things to sandwich between the pix -- fashion and cookery are 'feminine' and so fit many gay men's sense of themselves as 'feminine'; the arts are supposedly traditionally tolerant to gayness and besides provide (especially ballet and

films) voyeur's bonuses; foreign travel represented a chance to escape prying eyes in the pursuit of love and sex. Yet despite that, fashion, art, cookery (as hobby rather than necessity) and foreign travel (until recently) are indelibly middle class interests. I can't really demonstrate it, but I also feel that the way they were written about, the particular taste that governs the dress and decor concerns, is also essentially middle class. (One way of putting that is to say that gay men have more 'taste' -- providing you remember that 'taste' is not an absolute, but rather a set of criteria largely established by the class that dominates a society.)

I do not think all this is because the straight middle class is more 'liberal' or 'tolerant' than the working class. Endless discussions with gay people about their backgrounds suggests that acceptance and tolerance are equally to be found (or not) in both working class and middle class contexts. The explanation has more to do with the fact that gay culture has hitherto always developed in the relatively anonymous setting of city or town centres, away from gay people's immediate neighbourhood and family, away from the group activities of one's peers. Yet neighbourhood and group affiliations are far more typical of working class culture than the individuated, mobile, adaptive life styles of the middle class. This means that it was easier for middle class men to establish a gay culture in their own image, into which working class men would make an at times very awkward and difficult entry.

Of course participation in the development of this was even more difficult for gay women, who, brought up as 'women', had to negotiate the isolation of domesticity. It is interesting however to note that the only really working class gay pub that I know in Birmingham is a lesbian pub (it's in West Bromwich actually); and that the lesbian scene in general is far more working class in tone than the gay male scene. It is of course smaller, because most women still have to shake free the career of being a family-person, but where it does occur it does seem to be more 'working class', perhaps as a combination of (a) the fact that most lesbians have to be working people (that is, going out and doing paid work, not staying in and doing unpaid work); (b) the traditional collectivity of working class women's 'street culture', which establishes the possibility of cultural patterns of interaction more effectively than the double isolation (class and family) of middle class women; (c) *maybe* the identification of 'butchness' with working class style (and the converse identification of the middle class with effeminacy). This being the only available model of not being 'feminine' in the culture as a whole. (iii) Yet if gay culture is predominantly male and bourgeois, that does not mean that it is *simply* so. Aspects of gay culture can be seen as, implicitly, ambiguously, inflections of the dominant culture that may even run counter to it.

First, the fact that it *is* gay is already counter to the dominant culture, by which it is oppressed (-- *Fox* is notably short on the specificity of gay oppression). Second, gay culture does offer the experience of group identity (instead of magnificent individualism), something which the gay movement has been able sometimes to develop into powerful feelings of solidarity and collectivity. Third, camp, however much it can be used against us as stereotype, does also contain elements of send-up, exaggeration of straight roles, awareness of the artifice of social forms that pass for 'natural'

in the straight world. Four, many of the forms of gay relationships - the succession of brief affairs, cottaging, the relaxed sexual exchanges at conferences - run directly counter to the compulsive monogamy of straight society (though here again we have to be aware of the ambiguities -- promiscuity has always been kind of OK for men; 'permissiveness' is one of the biggest new markets of recent years for an ailing capitalism; the notion of 'responsibility' enshrined in monogamy has a lot to be said for it, but is not always transferred to shorter-term contacts).

It is the contradictoriness of our situation, especially when you try to think it in class terms, that makes it both very difficult to think about, and also encouraging. A contradiction always implies a looser, more open situation, a situation in which struggle is still possible. The success of the gay movement weakens the hold of bourgeois-patriarchal norms on the culture as a whole. At the same time there are enough features of the gay culture which could unite with the more positive features

Of working class culture. (A major problem in the latter is the importance of the family as a place to live [rather than as 'lineage'] ; and where I have met husband-and-wife role playing gay couples they have been working class and/or lesbian.) From the outside some such new creation seems to be part of the project of community centres developing not just as centres for gay people but as gay centres inextricably located in specific wider working class communities. The aim of a far closer involvement in the union movement - meaning both raising gay issues through the unions, but also raising gayness in the work place (as heterosexuality is endlessly) - is another such project. Another may be working against fascism in *genuinely* working class, multi-racial organisations. In all cases, sisterhood and brotherhood, camp, responsible promiscuity, have a role to play. That is a difficult practice - about it we need, as someone once said, pessimism of the intellect but -- and how - optimism of the will.*

Foxed

A Critique of 'Fox' by Andrew Britton

It was very illuminating - if disconcerting - to see Bob Cant's review of *Fox* appearing in the same issue of *Gay Left* (No.2) as Richard Dyer's admirable analysis of *Gays in Films*. On page ten, in discussing, amongst other works, *The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* - also by Fassbinder - Mr Dyer seems to me to have said very pointedly what also needs to be said about *Fox*: the film tries to suggest that gay relationships can be taken as a valid metaphor for the exploitativeness of bourgeois-capitalist society as a whole. I found the film offensive in the extreme; and since it is possible, apparently, for a popular audience - let alone a gay socialist - to read it as a "damning" indictment of the bourgeoisie, I feel it is important to raise one or two points in reply.

1. There is no mention in the article of the reception of the film in the bourgeois press. David Robinson's remarks in the *Times*, to the effect that the chronicle of exploitation is all the more convincing for being set in a "homosexual milieu", and that it represents an "honest" and "realistic" picture of gay relationships, are typical of what has been the general emphasis. This would seem to suggest both that a concern "With The Problem Of Homosexuality", as Mr Cant puts it, is rather more central to the film - and to its reception by the audience - than he tries to imply; and that its supposed subversion of bourgeois assumptions is rather less so.

2. The film's German title, *Faustrecht der Freiheit* (literally, *Fist-Right of Freedom*), carries connotations of 'the survival of the fittest', which, indeed, is the English title provided by Peter Cowie in his *International Film Guide for 1976*. Clearly, Social Darwinism has been crucial for capitalist ideology, and a film concerned with its ramifications within institutions and personal relationships might be interesting and valuable. What is objectionable in *Fox* is that the notion is introduced *not* as an ideological category, but as the inevitable order of the reality depicted. In other words, the ideology is reinforced. A Fate motif is introduced in the opening scenes in the fair-ground (consider the obtrusive emphasis on the deserted Big Wheel, revolving inexorably like the Wheel of Fortune), in the dialogue ("That's Fate!"), and in the device of the lottery, on which the plot turns. One can, perhaps, attribute part of the film's critical success to this carefully contrived impression of 'tragic' necessity. Insofar as *Fox* portrays 'the homosexual predicament', and reinforces deep-rooted preconceptions about it, it allows the spectator to sit back and think, "God! What awful lives they lead!" Insofar as it permits identification with the 'dumb loser', and enforces the generalisation that "That is how things are in this world", it encourages acquiescence in the movement of the narrative and, ultimately, in the *status quo*. The spectator can leave the cinema filled with an ennobling compassion for a despised and rather pathetic minority group, and a complacent conviction of his own, and everybody else's, helplessness. *Fox* is, in fact, the *least* ideologically subversive of films.



Mr Cant talks about Fox's "lack of choice", in a context which implies that there is a direct analogy between choice in immediate personal relationships and our lack of control "over the economic destiny of the countries" we live in. This is a fatuous equation; it is difficult to see how any individual movement towards self-determination, or any radical political action could begin, or even be conceived, if it were true. It is deeply significant that there is not the slightest mention of Gay Liberation in the film, not a glimpse of a character, gay or straight, who either wants or knows how to break out of the repressive environment. The only characters who are permitted any degree of distance from the central action either observe it in a spirit compounded of self-interest and resignation (Uncle Max, Eugen's father) or are provided with sterile, bitter tirades of disgust and self-disgust (Fox's sister). The film concludes that one is "inside the whale", in Orwell's phrase, and one can't do anything about it. The "lack of choice", the 'downhill-all-the way' structure, in which everything goes wrong with somewhat facile regularity, depends upon the deliberate choice of an ineffectual protagonist, whose defeat is inscribed from the start. *The Merchant of Four Seasons*, another Fassbinder film, works in the same way, and in both cases there

is an attempt to immerse the spectator in the process of disintegration.

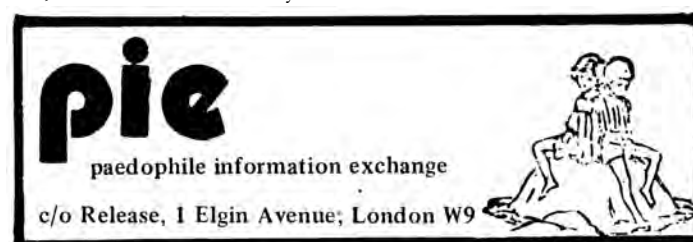
3. Bob Cant suggests that *Fox* is "about the corruptive nature of capitalism", and that the film is seriously concerned with the economic determination of human relationships. This formula seems to me objectionable on several counts. Unless one is willing to accept that 'filthy lucre' is a subversive concept, and that 'people with money tend to be unpleasant' is a significant judgement on "the pressures of capitalism", it is difficult to point to any coherent, *serious* awareness of the "economic structure of a society". Bourgeois audiences find no difficulty in accepting the proposition that "money corrupts all relationships", and the victimisation of the loser by rapacious hangers-on has become a staple narrative-structure precisely because it so emphatically *confirms* complacency, allowing us to feel outraged by a collection of vultures who are very definitely not *us*.

If the film were really concerned with the perversion of human relationships under capitalism as that is reflected in the lives of a particular group of people (in this case, homosexuals -- and if that *is not* the concern, then the use of gayness is superfluous) one would require (a) an exploration of what it means to be gay in a working class environment, and how this differs from what it means to be gay in an upper middle class environment. As it is, Fox-as-proletarian does not exist in the film beyond such qualities as bad table manners and the bourgeois myth that sees the proletarian hero as slightly (or, as here, exceptionally) stupid, gullibly generous, emotionally sincere (as opposed to the affectation and superficiality of the bourgeoisie -- consider Fugen's "We're not starry-eyed lovers anymore") and sexually potent, in a modern variation on the 'close-to-the-earth' syndrome. The class theme is, in fact, only trivially present, and the film's central conflict would remain if Fox were an aristocratic gay visitor from Mars. Mr Cant does seem aware of this at some level, since he can talk at one point about relationships being "more than just a matter of good individuals and bad individuals", and at another about the fable of "the innocent abroad in an evil world", without any acknowledgement that there might be some contradiction between the two. (b) An exploration of why and how the bourgeois gays depicted have come to acquiesce in the institutions of the society which oppresses them. As it is, there is no sense *whatever* in the film that gayness and bourgeois ideology are in any way incompatible. Indeed, as the action progresses, and the bourgeois gays whom Fox has met at the beginning appear one by one in positions of exploitative power, any distinction between victimisation by predatory homosexuals and victimisation by a predatory bourgeoisie becomes so blurred that we are left with, at least, the impression of an alliance for mutual benefit. It clearly needs to be said that although gay relationships may become exploitative under capitalism, as any relationships may, the attempt to elide the two is pernicious. (c) A sense of gay oppression. There is nothing in *Fox* to show that gayness is subject to ideological, social or legal constraints. Why no awareness of the economic and ideological factors which determine the existence of, say, the gay bar? Why no mention of the social stereotyping which associates gayness with interior decorating and sultry boutiques? Why is gayness taken as paradigmatic of "a world which is self-conscious and yet desperate not to face up to its own reality"? I quite agree with Mr Cant about the symbolism of boutique and antique-shop, but that symbolism has nothing essentially to do with gayness at all. Instead of exploring gay life-styles in terms of their various, complex determinants, Fassbinder presents them as a kind of existential metaphor, an image (deprived of any ideological context) of 'exploitativeness' which perpetuates every received idea about homosexuality -- its squalor, its ephemerality ("one affair after another"), its triviality, its decadence (the scene with the singer, an imitation-Dietrich backed by an enormous photograph of a naked musclemán), its inhumanity. Unlike Mr Cant, I feel that the inhabitants of the bar are consistently portrayed as callous, petty and malicious, and I found the use of the plump flower-seller's attempted seduction of Fox to arouse an automatic response of revulsion from the grotesque quite intolerable. Once all the

stereotypes and the finality of 'the predicament' have been affirmed, the spectator can be invited to feel pity. One can point to a comparable procedure in *The Tenderness of Wolves* (which Fassbinder produced), where, after all the fuss and bother about the activities of the murder reflecting the viciousness of capitalist society (a theme which, again, is not significantly *there* in the film, but which has earned it considerable praise -- including that of *Gay News*), we come back, through the use of Bach's "Have mercy, Lord, on me" for the opening and closing titles, to the real business of 'grief for sin' and the pitiable pervert. Fassbinder seems to me, in fact, the archetypal watered-down radical, whose extraordinary current popularity with bourgeois critics can be associated with the opportunity his films provide for becoming aware of, and condemning, some of the more obvious unpleasantnesses of the middle class without having too many basic assumptions disturbed in the process. The recurrent tone of rather frigid irony, shading at times into the misanthropic, is admirably suited to this purpose, as to the enrolment of the spectator in a stable position from which the inevitability of the action can be observed.

4. Many of the film's targets are reassuringly non-controversial, and curiously anachronistic. Elegant table manners, a familiarity with French cuisine, cultural philistinism and the "family tradition" of *Chateaufort de Pape* are easy, comfortable foes, from which we can dissociate ourselves without difficulty and to gauge the thinness of Fassbinder's conception, one has only to place these scenes beside, say, the Christmas scenes in *All That Heaven Allows* a film made in Hollywood in 1955 by Douglas Sirk, for whom Fassbinder is always declaring his admiration, but who is completely without Fassbinder's rather glib fatalism (consider, as an example of it, the way in which Fox and Fugen come across their Arab pick-up in "The Meeting-Place of the Dead"). In Sirk's film, the *insidiousness* of the oppression of bourgeois good manners is felt and conveyed with a subtlety and insight besides which the meal scenes in *Fox* seem dismally obvious and crude.

5. Bob Cant implies that there is no alternative to "gay chauvinism" on the one hand and the "fairly accurate picture of one part of the gay world" which he claims Fox to be on the other. One can readily agree that "the gay ghetto is not a pleasant place", that it is inadvisable to pretend that our lives are "heroic" (*do we pretend that?*) and that we, like everyone else, are subject to social and ideological determination in various ways, *some* of which are beyond our immediate control. This is *not* the same thing as saying that we should countenance a film such as *Fox*, whose unawareness of ideology is quite staggering, and which attempts, in a most simplistic and destructive way, to appropriate what it calls 'the gay world' as an all-purpose metaphor for a rotten civilisation. There seems to be a widely-held belief attributable, presumably, to fear of a charge of "gay chauvinism" - that we should commend and applaud every "exposure" of the "jungle-like atmosphere" (Mr Cant's fine phrase), which we, more than any other class of people, are thought to breathe. "Chauvinism" is now, of course, a loaded word, and probably, in the present context, an inappropriate one, if all that is meant is a degree of enthusiasm for Gay Liberation which various bourgeois/liberal observers feel to be 'excessive'. I think that "proper pride" is admirable, and sorely needed, especially at the present time. On the other hand, a clear, honest, coherent portrayal of the ways in which gay relationships are repressed, perverted, curtailed in bourgeois-capitalist society might be equally admirable. This is *not* what *Fox* is. Its version of homosexuality degrades us all, and should be roundly denounced.*



To have not or not to have

Sexual Offences. Evidence to the Criminal Law Committee. NCCL Report 1976, 20p
Review by Emmanuel Cooper

The myth of the 'permissive' society is one commonly put forward in direct contradiction to known facts - Antony Grey's description 'repressive society' is more accurate. The NCCL Report deals with the main areas where law limits sexual freedom or puts them into separate categories with moral overtones and emotive criteria - areas which very much outline society's attitudes to sex and sexual freedom. Main headings of the report are: age of consent, rape, homosexuality, homosexual and heterosexual offences, importuning, prostitution, incest, paedophilia, privacy and transvestites — all of which are examined in a straightforward, clear way which cuts through cant and prejudice and reveals the law for what it is — biased and moralistic.

The Report quickly gets to the main areas of disagreement and weakness in the present situation where 'sex crimes' are given a separate and emotionally charged category. It also points out offences against the *status quo* — of what is or is not allowed in terms of sexual relationships and illustrates the different extent of punishments meted out for 'acceptable' and unacceptable offences. For instance, a man molesting a girl will get a far less serious sentence than a man 'molesting' a boy.

The recommendations the Report puts forward can generally be accepted without reservation for they eliminate discrimination and attempt to diffuse some present moral attitudes. Moreover the recommendations could easily be incorporated within the present legal code.

The central point of the report -- the age at which young people can consent and how valid this criterion is for determining crime, is the nettle that is not grasped. This may be for practical reasons — that it would involve a discussion rather than merely legislative suggestions, but while the Report's reformist approach can be welcomed as a short term measure, it misses the opportunity to suggest that a radical rethink of our whole attitude to our sexuality is the only real solution.

Consent is very much a legal term with definitions that can do little to help, insisting as the law does that age is the main criterion for giving or withholding consent. While discussion concentrates on age it will always be tangential to the subject. The Report's suggestion that there should be different ages for different activities and 'partial' consent for some offences highlights the problems involved, for it accepts that criteria relating to consent based on age. Surely debate about consent must be allied to whether hurt or harm has been sustained, for any young person cannot, in any legal sense, consent, yet they can be willing to enjoy sexual activity. It must also be accepted that, in many cases, sexual interest does not start at puberty or pre-puberty, which is roughly the present age used by the law (for historical reasons) and the NCCL, but sexuality is an ongoing, developing state that does not necessarily involve anal, oral or vaginal contact. Expressions of sexuality are not confined to specific sorts of contact between people.

Consent allied with age implies that the individual must have a full understanding of the situation and the ability and strength to decline as well as accept; therefore the question must be asked whether consent, in these terms, is a meaningful concept in a society where men dominate women and the whole of society dominates children to the extent that they have no legal rights at all. Under these circumstances does a child have the authority to consent or say 'no'? Children explore their own sexuality, in spite of forbidding adults, through play and fantasy situations, but how far can this be explored and developed with older partners? In relationships with older people it must be recognised that children have a sexuality to express and, if no physical damage has been

sustained, are unlikely to be hurt by any sexual encounter. However, if such cases are brought to the attention of disapproving adults or the law, then immeasurable damage can be done to the child — 'damaged goods', 'spoilt', 'used', etc. Where there is cause to suspect that force or pressure has been used then each case must be treated on an individual basis with informal enquiries. No legal 'consent' definition will be of much help. More useful, perhaps, is the concept of harm.

A very relevant example is incest which in our patriarchal society cannot be seen as an objective activity which can or cannot be consented to. With the full weight of society behind the father, how far does his daughter feel able to resist his sexual demands? With our present state of awareness and knowledge and inbuilt social taboos, these are extremely important questions. The Report's answer is to say that there should be no sex under ten, but this just will not do. Consent is a concept that cannot easily or readily be applied to the innocent and inexperienced of any age; fixing an arbitrary age of consent is to put emphasis where none should be and to suggest physical and emotional changes which just do not occur. Victims of sexual assault of any age should have full legal protection.

What we have to return to time and time again is an examination of contemporary attitudes to our sexuality and to the rights, or the lack of them, we give children and young people. At present the law upholds society's taboos and moral codes and punishes transgressors. Sex starts at sixteen (for most), at 21 for others. Until there is a gender revolution backed by a full awareness of the range of our sexuality, we will have to use the law as best we can. The NCCL Report is right in saying the law should not uphold moral codes and is clear in putting forward arguments and suggestions for reforms. The Report's recommendations are necessarily defined by the present laws surrounding sex. What is absent from the Report is any indication or analysis showing the ways those laws have shaped people's attitudes towards sex and their developing awareness of sexuality. Much of the rationale behind the laws relating to sexual behaviour are rooted in people's repression and their ignorance about developing sexuality and failure to see its fullest expression as something enjoyable rather than functional. Without this critique there seems little likelihood that demands for radical changes in the law will be implemented.*

WORKING HARD

Working Papers in Sex, Science and Culture, Vold,
No.1, Jan. 1976

Review by Jeffrey Weeks

Working Papers is a continuation of G.L.P.: *A Journal of Sexual Politics*, a magazine published during 1974 and 1975 in Sydney, Australia. G.L.P. in turn was a development of the earlier *Gay Liberation Press*, a magazine that grew out of the fragmentation of the early Australian gay liberation movement. In that trajectory we can learn a great deal about the development of homosexual politics over the past few years, and in particular we can see a growth from the simple pieties of the earlier days, to the problematical theoretical issues of the present.

G.L.P. was distinguished by a lively eclecticism. Its articles covered a wide, and often interesting range of subjects, from sodomy in the early settlements to Denis Altman's latest reflections on the modern movement. That eclecticism was, as the editors recognised, both its distinguishing element, and its bugbear. As a result, the editorial collective has made a turn towards Theory — and that Theory, as any reader of some modern French Marxist philosophers will recognise, has a capital T.



My feelings on reading the articles were mixed. The enterprise in itself is an essential one, and one in which *Gay Left* has every sympathy: to explore the ways in which sexual and cultural norms are internalised and perpetuated within a particular form of society (social formation). One of the outstanding unexplored problems in Marxist theory is precisely this one: of how the social relations of capitalist society are reproduced and perpetuated. It is appropriate therefore that the first issue of the journal should concern itself with one of the major modern texts in this field, Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. Mitchell's book is a courageous attempt to recover Freud from his detractors, particularly many feminists who see him as the arch male chauvinist and to discover the core of his scientific effort, and his relevance to a theory of female oppression in a capitalist and patriarchal society. In the process she describes how the biological determinism, which is often seen as the heart of Freudianism, is really a discardable husk. An interview with Mitchell in the *Working Papers* brings this out very well. As she says, Freud's "work is just permeated with the sort of ideologies of the

biological sciences from which he had to come. In that sense, I think, we have to read back that biological phraseology into the non-biological concepts which he was actually trying to develop."

But as Mitchell would be the first to admit, her book states the problem rather than satisfactorily resolves it, and there is still a gap where the real theoretical exploration of sexuality and particularly gay sexuality should be. *Working Papers* begins on this assumption. The articles in it range from a "Marxist Critique" of *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* to a study of "Patriarchy" and "A Theory of Reading."

In this latter are some rich examples of the defects of a certain approach: "The object of this text is to explore the idea of Reading. I use Reading instead of 'reading' in order to differentiate between reading as a theoretical activity and reading as a descriptive term of the type 'She is reading' and 'Bill is reading a newspaper'." The articles are, inevitably, of mixed quality; the best are those that advertise themselves as "tentative" rather than conclusive. An obsession with the 'Theory of theory can lead to a sort of paralysis of the mind and the will, which is why I welcome the political conclusions that appear at the end of the "Marxist Critique" of Mitchell's book. "Its significance is that it attempts to integrate Freudian theory into an understanding of women's oppression. Its danger is that it isolates the feminist struggle from the class struggle."

I think that this conclusion is misleading, given Mitchell's own declared ambition, but it at least keeps alive a concept of the union between theory and practice, which many of the other articles strive to lose. Nevertheless, the themes they adumbrate are central ones, and *Gay Left* hopes to explore them further in future issues. In the meantime, we can welcome the most recent metamorphosis of this journal, while regretting its occasional obscurity, and hope to engage in debate with it in the coming months.*

Working Papers in Sex, Science and Culture
Box 83 Wentworth Building, 174 City Road, Darlington 2008,
Australia.

Subscriptions \$6.00 for 4 issues (\$A7.50 overseas by surface mail); libraries and institutions \$15.00. Single copies from the publishers \$1.00 plus postage.

Copies can be obtained in London from Compendium Bookshop, Camden High Street, London NW1, price £1.00.

Capitalism, the Family and Personal Relationships by Eli Zaretsky, Pluto Press, £1.00

Review by Bob Cant

It is widely recognized that the women's movement has opened up whole areas of political debate long ignored by the traditional left. The debt that people, such as this collective, owe to the women's movement is enormous. That debt is also recognized by Zaretsky and indeed without their contribution, books such as this which attempt to fuse the politics of the personal with Marxism would not have been possible.

Zaretsky begins his discussion by referring to the issues raised by three feminists, in particular — Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone and Juliet Mitchell. Millett and Firestone are especially concerned with male supremacy and while they both see themselves as socialists, socialism is for them an economic matter. Firestone is probably best known for her exposition of a radical feminist theory which saw the family as the *primary* area of oppression within society. Followers of this have been involved in the setting up of many communes and feminist groups, often of a radical lesbian nature. Such has been their attitude to men that they have often become obsessed with personal solutions at the expense of any wider political movement.

It is with Mitchell that Zaretsky's sympathies are strongest and he draws attention to her statement: 'We should ask the feminist questions, but try to come up with some Marxist answers.' Developing her theories, he shows how historically the family had functions of production of food and shelter,

sexuality, reproduction — as well as the material production that has now been socialized in factories, etc. The effect of the split between socialized production and the other functions of the family has been to obscure the economic role of the family and so generate a number of further splits — between men and women, between public and personal.

These splits ensured that (pre-capitalist) male supremacy was absorbed into the capitalist system. Male supremacy existed not only in the family but was reinforced by its links with material production. The remaining functions of the family were assigned to the woman and since they did not directly produce surplus value were soon less highly regarded than the functions carried out by the man.

Increasingly, too, the area of the family has been seen as 'life'. People have seen this as something they have the right to control. A whole new subjectivity has arisen from the emergence of a proletarian family which allegedly can satisfy the need for 'happiness, love and individual freedom'. The tensions and the contradictions of this split-life have played a part in the development of bourgeois psychology which has usually failed to relate this personal inner world to the public outer world.

The traditional Left has not really grappled with this split. Zaretsky argues that both the Russian and Chinese revolutions have taken the Engels line that a new form of production would draw women into industry and thereby liberate them from their backward role in the family. The American C.P. (like so many other groups nearer home) has taken the line that such personal matters are petit-bourgeois and diversionary.

But Zaretsky finishes on a more optimistic note and sees the emergence of the new left, the women's movement and the black movement as signs that the old promises of the left are being challenged in a way that will result in a richer socialist movement which is not only concerned with overt wage labour. He takes his argument further and says, 'The potential point of contact between Marxism and psychoanalysis lies in a conception of the family and of personal life as concrete social institutions, integral to and shaped by the prevailing mode of production.' And it is clear that this is the area that anti-sexist revolutionaries must be looking to now. The women's movement has done a great deal to draw our attention to the nature of domestic labour and its function in the economy and ideology of a capitalist society. What we should

be doing now is working around the functions of the family described by Mitchell and Zaretsky as 'sexuality'. This question remains as problematic as ever. The part it plays in character formation, its relationship to other, more clearly understood roles --- these are all questions that come to mind. They are questions that Zaretsky doesn't begin to answer -- and in some cases hardly raises. He does, however, provide an excellent contemporary analysis of the family and personal relations as a starting point for debate. It is a debate in which gay men have a particularly important part to play along with the women's movement and the rest of the left in a way that has not always been true. Our analysis of our experience of the socialization of sexuality can only strengthen this attempt to fuse the personal and the political within a Marxist framework.*

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A PERMANENT DIVORCE

A Lasting Relationship: Homosexuals and Society
by Jeremy Seabrook, Allen Lane, 1976, £4.50
Review by Jeffrey Weeks

The title of Jeremy Seabrook's latest book, despite its calculated ambiguity, suggests clearly enough the themes. First, there is a suggestion of the inextricable involvement of homosexuals - often against their will - in and with their society (hence the sub-title). Second, and ironically, there is the hope, usually unfulfilled by the characters portrayed in this book (ostensibly a documentary, but half a novel-manque), of a 'lasting relationship', a permanent and supportive pair-bond that will follow the contours of the heterosexual relationships that many gays still prefer, or ape. What the book reveals, however, is the real divorce of most of the gay people described here, from their society. And unfortunately also it often suggests the divorce of the author from his subject matter. Many of the portraits are one-sided and caricatured, and one of the unfortunate victims has already written to *Gay News* stating that Jeremy Seabrook shall never cross his threshold again. Other characters in this work might rue the day they met Mr Seabrook.

Jeremy Seabrook's basic thesis is close enough to *Gay Left's* own concerns to make the book deserve a reading, but there are real differences between us. His argument, baldly stated, is that as soon as gay people (by which he means homosexual males -- women only make guest appearances in the book) become visible, they become exploitable. Indeed, he goes further than this; he argues that in their subcultural history, with its avid consumerism, obsession with immediate satisfaction and aping of aristocratic style, gay men are actual prototypes of consumerist man. 'Consumerism' is Mr Seabrook's enemy. The culture of poverty has become the culture of consumerism; the supportive working class home has become the anonymous housing estate; the web of communal values

has become the nexus of greed. This picture of capitalist society (ignoring class exploitation, the inextricable linking of production and consumption that Marx describes, the real contradictions of advanced capitalism) provides the theoretical framework of the book. The method of presentation is a bizarre mixture of impressionistic petit point portraiture, based on recorded interviews, and editorial comments made in rich socialogese. The form of the book is a series of short chapters, recording people from Bill Wexford, 62, to Raoul Schwartz, 30, to Mark Moynihan, 24; places - Amsterdam, Hampstead Heath; and events - a gay party, a meeting of a G.L. F. group, a west London disco; with a brief Postscript in which Jeremy Seabrook abandons his 'I am a Camera' (or in this case a tape recorder) approach and comes out as gay.

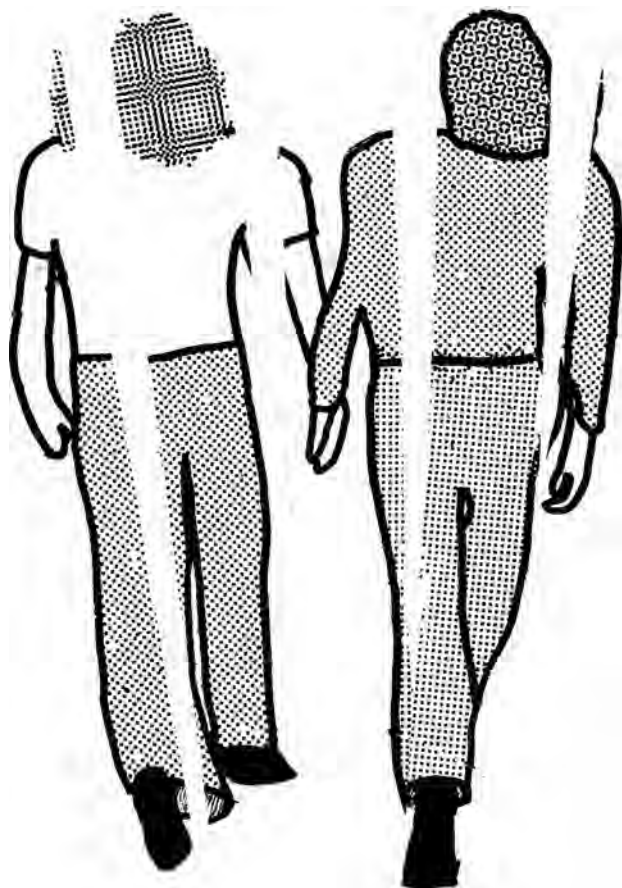
The trouble with the book is that it is selective, and selective in a way which underlines Seabrook's gloomy philosophy. Surely, one thinks, the gay world cannot be as unreservedly dreary as the book suggests. And of course we know that it is not. Mr Seabrook has interviewed diligently but has left out of his transcripts the hits that would round out a person or a situation. This comes out particularly in the section on 'An Evening in Windermere Avenue'. In this would-be elegant dinner party Brian, Alan, Simon and Roddy dine comfortably, bitch sweetly, reveal their fears, obsessions, weaknesses -- it seems like a scene from a novel in progress. It comes as a shock, therefore, to realise at the end that the author was there, listening to every word, and surely participating in it. Scarcely a word of his conversation comes through. And the omission of the thinking makes one doubt the whole. It makes us think: perhaps he has cut out everything else that he does not regard as relevant. And what is relevant? Well, all that supports his thesis: that the gay world is dreary, commercial, and above all infinitely absorbable.

Consumerism for Jeremy Seabrook is more than an economic relationship. It is a moral (or immoral) system, a miasma that envelopes and chokes the individual. There is

no way out: we struggle for our rights (in CHE, GLF or whatever) and immediately find that our successes turn to ashes; they are only the successes that consumerism allows us. We are all puppets of fate, passive before the never ending circularity of hopes lit, and hopes extinguished. The result is a panegyric of anguish and pain, an urn of burnt out aspirations and beliefs.

The common ground between Seabrook and *Gay Left* lies in our shared awareness of the fragility of our freedom in a capitalist society. But after that we part company. For Mr Seabrook seems to believe that nothing is worth struggling for, nothing worthwhile can be achieved; we win only to lose. This perfumed despair is the negation of political action. To counter this position, of course, is not to fall into the opposite trap of believing that all we have to do to change our situation is to will it (the evangelical 'upward gaze'). Political struggle can only begin with the situation as it is, and that means recognising the unevenness of the changes that have taken part — between classes, in geographical area — and the ambiguities of the gay movement, the subculture, etc. If we look at these we get neither unbounded hope nor spiralling despair. We get a sense of what has been achieved, a feeling of what still needs to be done, and of some of the ways in which we can begin to do them.

This book, despite its ambitions, provides no way forward.*



Women Awake, The Experience of Consciousness Raising
by Sue Bruley

This is a personalised account of one woman's disillusionment with the straight left, her decision to join a Consciousness Raising group and all that followed. It is the first detailed account of the workings of a British CR group. At the end there is an attempt to evaluate the contribution of CR on the women's liberation movement as a whole.

Price 25p (send 33p to cover p& p)
Orders to Sue Bruley, 38 Hillfield Ave., London N8. (After Nov '76, to 38d Clapham Rd, London SW8.)
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Come Clean.
'Saturday Night at the Baths'

Review by Bob Cant

The final credit of this film is one of 'special thanks to Professor Gregory Batcock just because'. And this final note of coyness is not untypical of a film which fails to come to grips with its subject.

Doubtless, many readers are already well aware of the story of the film — given the massive coverage it has received in some parts of the bourgeois press. A gay film must be news! A piano player from Montana, Michael, comes to New York with his girlfriend, Tracy, in search of work. He is employed at the Continental Baths, a famous gay meeting place — apparently frequented largely by beautiful young men who do not work. He is befriended by the manager of the baths, Scotti. As they become closer, Michael finds Scotti's interest in him more than he can handle. Despite a few setbacks, all ends well and the two get off together. Tracy is rather upset but the film ends with the two, apparently reconciled, going home together. And this ending is, of course, a terrible cop-out. Do Michael and Scotti continue to have an affair? Does Tracy leave Michael or does she smile bravely through it all? Does Scotti get screwed up by being 'the guy Michael *once* laid'? There are all kinds of possible developments which the film never considers. It may be valid to leave the subject in the air but these problems were never even considered by the film. It's amazingly bland approach so reminiscent of 'Love Story' and other sugary crap, leaves one wondering what the problem is. If a guy can change *within a week* from seeing homosexuality as 'abnormal' to being a practising bisexual then really there's not much to worry about.

The film has been said to be in praise of bisexuality but, if that is so, it fails to present its case very clearly. The two love scenes, both straight and gay, are filmed sympathetically — although only the gay one blacks out in the middle. But there is only one real discussion which begins to consider the nature of sexism and poses questions about the nature of normality. Something as complex as bisexuality — which terrifies so many people, which is seen by some as a cop-out — needs more subtle handling than it receives in this film.

What this film is really in praise of is one section of male gay life in Manhattan. Women only seem to appear in the film for tokenistic reasons — why any woman, gay or not, would want to go to the Continental Baths is a mystery. Tracy, the only woman with a major part in the film, is treated in much the same way as Sidney Poitier was in his earlier films in the 1950s — 'a bit different but really just like one of the boys'. The fact, too, that most of the men in the film seemed not to work or to work only very few hours may be an accurate reflection of the social reality of Manhattan gays — but is certainly far from the reality of most gays who are caught in a trap of a life divided between our work and our gayness.

There are some good scenes in this film — such as the football match between hets and gays and the marvellously decadent atmosphere of the Saturday night gig at the baths. And Don Scotti, in the role of Scotti, is superb. And, on the whole, I suppose one is glad that this film has been made at all. But the fact that such a bland little film can be seen as a breakthrough shows what a long way we still have to go.*

A Women's Liberation Magazine

spare Rib
30 PENCE MONTHLY

LETTERS

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

Letters are welcomed for publication and all letters received will be assumed to be for publication unless otherwise stated. The Collective reserves the right to shorten letters unless contributors state otherwise.

From: GLH - PQ. Groupe de liberation homosexuels
—tendance politique et quotidien. Paris.

We saw the first issue of *Gay Left* (Autumn 1975) and we were very pleased to see that we seem to have a lot of ideas in common, especially the key point of the centrality of the fight for sexual liberation to the general struggle of all oppressed peoples for their liberation from the exploitation and repression of the capitalist system. Thus, in a fairly brief although probably not very concise way, we herein reply trying to specify the areas of agreement we find in relation to your collective statement.

In the space of a small letter it's not possible to elaborate a historical account of the homosexual movements in France — we're now in the process of doing this since we believe that at this moment the junction of radical homosexuals and revolutionary Marxism is of essential importance and will provide the basis of the future mass revolutionary trend — but it is fairly true to say that the French, as always, were more highly politicised than their English counterparts who continually emphasised reformist law amendments which at best enabled the heightening of a certain sort of diffuse gay political consciousness, but which at worst deviated the debate along a totally false and misleading, and we believe ultimately irresponsible path towards the total recuperation and integration of the homosexual, thus not only by-passing but also conveniently camouflaging any profound political analysis, any consideration of the tactical and political advantages offered by a homosexual Marxist analysis.

As in England, French revolutionary groups have seldom been prepared to consider the sexual question in a significant, critical and political manner. Naturally, the revolutionary wing of the women's movement has galvanized this discussion, and so in a general way the women's struggle has achieved official recognition as a worthwhile element in the class struggle. In France, though to a much lesser extent than in England, homosexuals and women have often come together as natural allies in different struggles, but up to this time there has been no really clear formulation of this solidarity, it being frequently regarded as a phenomenon which automatically justifies itself — thus occasionally the demands of women have often grudgingly been viewed as partially valuable to homosexuals, by extension of the idea of those 'sexually not quite all there'. It is evident to us, however, that this nexus, often unconscious, is of vital importance in the elaboration of our political platform, and the time is now ripe for the correct theorization of a global Marxist analysis which roots itself in the dialectic of masculine-feminine opposition.

Integral to an analysis of this sort is the need for a social and psychological analysis of the internalization of the binary opposition upon which exploitation depends, and especially of the specific relationship, established by the women's movement, of power/phallocratism, which places the homosexual male in a fundamental contradiction if one follows the bourgeois psychoanalysts, even if only at a symbolic/phallematic level, in that the phallus is the focus of pleasure in a genital society. For if in our personal practice we perpetuate oppression, re-establishing in the bed the very roles which in theory we fight against, problems arise. But most essentially we start with a questioning of the fundamental theses. Thus, our name, "politique et quotidien" — the recognition that the personal is political.

We recruit only on the basis of anti-capitalist homosexuals, and will denounce those bourgeois homosexuals who are just as much the enemy as the bourgeoisie. We fight with women, with the workers against reformism wherever it is to be found, and as revolutionary homosexuals we will make public

appearances in support of free abortion, against unemployment, against fascism, etc.

Until now we've had brief mentions in the press of the extreme-left (far more widely read here than in England) and we are in contact with a dozen or so newspapers, and have contributed many articles to reviews, etc. Needless to say, certain of our members are in revolutionary organizations, but G.L.H. (P.Q.) is unaligned with any of the established groups, whilst we inevitably subscribe to the general politics of certain ones.

We hope that this letter heralds a long and fruitful relationship.

Bises Rouges et Fraternelles
Poncin, B.P. 631, 75160 Paris, Cedex 04.

GAYS AND THE LEFT

I was interested to discover (*Gay Left* No.1) that gay militants in Britain have the same difficulties relating to the left as we in Canada experience. All the left groupings here either ignore the 'gay question' or use it opportunistically: whenever they feel they have to make an impact within the gay movement.

For example, the Revolutionary Marxist Group (sister organisation of the I.M.G.) occasionally covers gay struggles in their press, but when they fielded candidates in the recent B.C. election they made no mention of the gay struggle whatsoever in their widely distributed election materials. When this was brought up at one of their public meetings by several gay activists, they justified it by saying it was forgotten. They also forgot to send a candidate to an all candidates' meeting sponsored by a gay group, although at least one left group was there as well as social democrats and liberals. This in the face of a major struggle against the major Vancouver paper which refuses to take an advertisement from the Gay Alliance Towards Equality (GATE). The R.M.G. will come and demonstrate with us, but when it comes to exposing the struggle of gay people to the workers at election time it is consistently forgotten. Is it an 'issue' the workers will not understand? Or are we an 'issue' too hot to handle? They don't say!

Brian Caines, Vancouver

INTELLIGENCE AND INSIGHT

Congratulations on both issues 1 and 2. It's good (and encouraging) to see a paper approaching the gay movement with intelligence and insight. How about future articles on Gay Teenagers and Gays in a Consumer Society?

John Gill, London, SE15

Gay Left Collective welcomes articles — long or short -- from all readers.

ORGANIZING IN TRADE UNIONS

I am writing for advice on how I should go about raising the question of gay rights with my own Trade Union. I belong to a relatively new organization which goes under the title of Association of Professional Scientists and Technologists (APST). I am a scientist by training but now work as a managing editor for a large group of science journals. The organisation I work for is a so-called Learned Society and since I've come out at work I've had no hassle on that score.

Unfortunately we have very few members within the organization but I see that as a relatively irrelevant matter since I do have the ear of one of the full time officials of the Union. What I want to avoid is letting things go off at half-cock; in other words, I'd value some advice as to how I go about setting the situation up for discussion.

Ed Smith, 48 Rosemont Road, Richmond, Surrey

Bob Cant and Nigel Young reply: *The gay TU groups which have been most successful seem initially to have got their membership through gay publications — and particularly Gay News — rather than through union publications. Perhaps a letter to Gay News might produce another gay scientist or two.*

Once you've got this nucleus of people, who've probably already come out to a certain extent if they read Gay News, then you can start raising the question in your union. One

approach is to write a collective letter just to make contact with other gay members. A number of signatures is obviously better than one. Another approach is to write an article about discrimination gays experience at work. A few examples of victimization make some people take it seriously, but I can hardly imagine a John Warburton type situation in your job. What is probably more important and harder is to write about the sexist and male chauvinist attitudes that we have to put up with.

I wish you luck with your full time official but it's much more important to win support from other rank and file members - by, say, passing anti-discrimination motions at meetings. Women's groups are often very helpful with this kind of activity. It is important to get open support from people who are not gay to prevent the development of a ghetto mentality and the feeling that "it's all their problem". It also of course makes it easier for people who are confused to raise the question of their sexuality.

GAY RESEARCH GROUP

The above group has been established to gather information on the availability of materials (magazines, books, press cuttings, posters, pamphlets, etc.) on all aspects of homosexuality. Such documentation will prove of immense value to a wide range of researchers in the field. In addition, we are also hoping to provide a pool of information about undergraduate, postgraduate and general research being developed in this field.

We would be very grateful if any readers possessing such information or material would contact us, at 13 Endsleigh Street, London WCI (c/o The British Sociological Association).

Gay Research Group

WORKING CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

Some questions about gay liberation organization keep jumping up in my life - over the last ten years I have been developing politically within the socialist movement and am now working with a M.L. (Marxist-Leninist) organization in preparation for forming and building a party. But as a gay I find many contradictions - such as in Cuba, China and Russia - concerning sexuality - and how do we build for the revolution.

Class being the primary contradiction, the need to build and strengthen working class consciousness is vital to build a proletarian revolution - so, is there any strategies, experiences, etc. of gay revolutionaries working in plants and factories doing workplace organizing and integrating the cultural/superstructure aspects of sexuality into their work that you know of?

The need to bring with us the cultural aspects into organizing is very important - but not primary - for we must keep politics in command - and that we will not recruit each and every person personally into the movement is reality, but that people will join the revolutionary forces because of politics - not to join a 'groovy-goodvibes community' - social unity is not strong enough to wage a revolutionary war alone but those aspects are also important but secondary.
L. Kelly, Minnesota

Nighthawks



In our last issue there was an announcement about the film Nighthawks which is about and by gay people. Finance had been expected from the British Film Institute but at their final meeting it was refused.

Ron Peck now writes:

The British Film Institute's Production Board Selection Panel never issued any collective statement as to why the application for a grant to make *Nighthawks* was ever turned down. No criteria for selection have ever been made public and therefore it is unuseful to say, simply, that the application failed to meet those criteria. Unofficially, it was suggested that the expense of the project (of *any* full-length project) would not help the application in a year when the Production Board was under pressure both from applications (there were rumoured to be 200) and when inflation meant that the annual grant from the government would have to be substantially increased just to keep up with rising costs. The original application was for £22,000, to make a 2-hour film in 16mm colour. Of course, the BFI is not the only body giving out money to independent film making, although it is *almost* the only one now that the Greater London Arts Association has had its film budget axed altogether this year. The problem is that the BFI is the only grant-giving body with sufficient funds to cover the cost of a full-length narrative film.

For those of us working on *Nighthawks*, there were very few options once the BFI had made its decision: one was to abandon the project altogether and try to work out a very small-scale project that could be done for about £1,000; another was to try to raise the money from donations from members of the "gay community"; the last was to try to set the film up as a commercial production.

The first option was never taken very seriously. Not because we had any contempt for the notion of a short film rather than a long one, but because the kind of time-and-space scale of *Nighthawks* required length - it had been conceived from the beginning as a film of episodes strung out over a period of five months.

The second option is still an option. An article appeared in **Gay News** briefly explaining the financial situation of the production. Some contributions were made and these were a great help. They were supplemented by contributions from friends and from gay men working in the arts who were interested in the project. In all, about £900 has been raised; And most of it has been spent on the material costs of the past five months, covering the costs of postage, telephone, sound and videotape, stills film stock, paper, photocopying, etc. It does not include wages: the four men working full-time on the production are all "unemployed" and surviving on social security payments.

It is just possible that a more concentrated drive to raise money through donation could raise another thousand pounds, but, set against the present budget for the film, £36,000, it could not even cover the cost of the filmstock. What it has

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covered — and does cover — is the running cost of production, of keeping the option of the project open. An immense amount of work has already been done on the script, which a dozen people have worked on. Most of the characters have been cast and locations been found.

The third option is the only realistic one left to realise the film as we want to realise it. We have done all of the "right" things: we have approached distributors and lined up possible distribution patterns in Britain, the USA and Australia; we have had the budget checked by producers and members of the film union (ACTT); and we have researched the success of past films with gay subject-matter. Of necessity, we have had to project a movie "product" with a "gay angle", for these are the only terms of negotiation in commercial film production. Fortunately, we can play the game with detachment, even amusement, since it is a question of representing the project a thousand different ways to a thousand potential backers, but at no point losing touch with the project as we have conceived it.

We are still fighting the financial battle, submitting an application now to the National Film Finance Corporation, whose interest is in profitability (the NFFC is part of the Board of Trade). We have already raised £4,000 of free facilities. But, without "stars" (the actors in the film are all gay men and women holding down 'ordinary' employments), it is not easy.

In the meantime, the various drafts of the script remain open texts for anyone interested in the project to drop into the studio and read and comment upon — and comments are taken seriously and discussed whenever the group goes through the script. We are still aiming to have the film ready for screening in April at the National Film Theatre's season of films representing homosexuality. If anyone can help us get there, contact us at —

Four Corner Films, 113 Roman Road, Bethnal Green, London E2. (01-981 4243).

LESBIAN LEFT

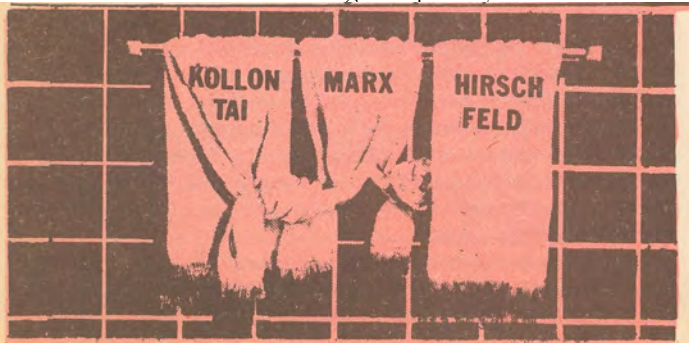
Lesbian Left is a newly formed grouping of lesbian feminists who are socialist in outlook. By means of collective discussion and action, we aim to examine and deepen socialist theory as it relates to us as women and lesbians. In examining, discussing and clarifying these questions we hope to counter the inadequacies of existing theory and so contribute to the ongoing debates and struggles, both by our personal presences and by theoretical contribution. Sexuality, lesbianism and personal life have traditionally been seen by the left as matters simply of personal concern at an individual level rather than integral to political struggle. We recognise that the revolutionary process for change must extend in all aspects of our lives, fusing the personal with the political. The group is hoping to produce a clearer and more comprehensive statement of our aims in the near future.

Any woman interested in finding out more about the group should contact us through the Women's Liberation Workshop in Earlham Street, WC1. Tel: 01-836 6081. At present we are meeting at 7.30pm every third Thursday at this address.

ICEBREAKERS ICEBREAKERS ICEBREAKERS

ICEBREAKERS needs more Icebreakers. •

If you are gay, think coming out is important, and want to help isolated gay people, write to us at BM/Gaylib, London WC1V 6XX. Women and teenagers especially needed.



LEFTovers

Contributions to Gay Left

Contributions, written or visual (cartoons, strips, etc.) are invited from readers. Articles can be any length and preferably should be typed with double spacing on one side of the paper. All contributions will be discussed by the Collective and contributors may be invited to come and discuss their ideas with us.

With help from Friends

Special thanks from *Gay Left* Collective to Ilric Shetland for help with illustrations and layout. Also to sellers of the journal. It would be very helpful if readers would be prepared to sell copies of *Gay Left* to friends, this would help with the difficult task of distribution. *Just write to Gay Left, 36a Craven Road, London W2, for details.*

Readers Meeting -- Tues. Nov 2 7 - 9 p.m.

Gay Left Collective have held two readers meetings which brought a large and enthusiastic response — at the second meeting over 40 readers attended, bringing much useful discussion and comment. The next readers meeting will be held at the London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2. Full details with Gay Switchboard, tel: 01-837 7324.

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GAY LEFT BACK NUMBER

No.1

Gays in the Trade Unions, in Cuba, at Conference.

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