

A Gay Socialist Journal

# GAY LEFT

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## PERSONAL POLITICS



# Editorial

When we started putting together this issue of *Gay Left* no-one knew that on May 3rd, this country would elect the most right-wing Prime Minister, together with an equally reactionary set of ministers, since the war. The issues and tasks confronting us were never easy under Labour but there did seem a chance, through resistance and organisation, of defending attacks made on the Women's Movement, the Gay Movement and civil liberties generally.

The availability of abortion came under attack through a number of private member's Bills. There was pressure from the police lobby and others to give the police extra powers and to restrict the rights of those under suspicion or arrest (the review group on criminal procedure is soon to report). The Prevention of Terrorism Act seriously attacked civil liberties with the freedom it gave the police to deal with 'the Irish question'. The Special Patrol Group made its presence felt at gay meeting places as well as harassing the black community, pickets and anti-fascist demonstrations. Moral bigots such as James Anderton, head of Manchester Police, and Mary Whitehouse have tried to restrict public expressions of homosexuality.

Meanwhile, Parliament could sell out on extending the limited legality of male homosexuality to Scotland and Northern Ireland with the same equanimity as they continue to deny the Irish the right to self-determination. We had the spectacle of the Labour Government selling out the rights of Northern Irish gays at the European Court of Human Rights for the tacit support of reactionary bigots like Paisley in Parliament. A Bill introduced into the House of Lords to reduce the age of consent for male homosexuals to 18 was treated with contempt and derision, whilst Mary Whitehouse seemed to gain more of the ear of Merlyn Rees, the Home Secretary, than we ever did.

As well as this we saw the Labour Government destroy itself through taking up economic policies which attacked the living standards of its own supporters and running an economy where the dole queues grew longer while prices on the stock exchange rose higher.

In response to the general ideological shift to the Right, with the Tory talk of law and order, the need for a return to the old moral values and the importance of the family, sections of the Labour Party, and Callaghan in particular, took up these themes in a number of speeches, thus operating on terrain defined by the Right. In this climate a dangerous situation develops in which traditional values about family life and the correct roles that one should play would make all our lives and work more difficult.

This is not of course to suggest that the Gay Movement and the gay sub-culture is about to be swept away. In fact, the sub-culture and the commercial facilities were and are booming. This and the failure of the Gay Movement to make any significant links with the wider gay scene, except perhaps through the Gay News Defence campaign, means that there is little collective awareness of the threats presented by these wider social forces. Often aspects of oppression and reaction are experienced solely as individual disasters — an arrest, the loss of custody, the loss of a job — while the closure of a nursery or club are still isolated and isolating events. A central need is for the Gay Movement to build a collective awareness of these issues and to provide greater support and resistance.

## International Experience

This is not just a British experience. In Canada, the gay paper *Body Politic*, has been harassed by the police for some time and this last year withstood a serious prosecution. The election there has also seen the victory of the Conservative Party. In the USA we have recently witnessed attacks on the civil rights of homosexuals in a number of States even though the Briggs initiative in California was defeated. It is symbolic that on the 10th anniversary of

Stonewall we have reports of thousands of gays rioting in San Francisco in response to the jury verdict on the murder of the liberal Mayor and a prominent gay rights campaigner.

## The Tory Future

What can we expect from the Tories? In a simple phrase — the same but worse. Hopes for any reforms have been dashed. The first action of the new Government in giving massive pay increases to the police and the army illustrates the stress on law and order and the strong state.

There will obviously be major cutbacks in many public sector areas which will have an important impact on women, both in the loss of employment in these areas and in that the support provided by these services will largely become again the tasks of women in the family. The new economic and moral climate will also affect those areas where support is given to groups providing help and advice and those trying to create 'alternative' institutions and attitudes, ranging from law centres and community support projects to workers co-ops, while work around racial and sexual equality will inevitably suffer.

The other obvious area of attack is the Trade Union movement, which, however reformist its leadership may be, presents the only resistance to the worst excesses of Thatcherism. The proposed limiting of the right to picket may have wide repercussions while the stress on 'scroungers' builds on ignorance and social division.

Of direct relevance to gay people is the appointment to the highest legal positions in the Government of three men with long histories of moral bigotry, especially regarding homosexuality. In this climate, local police forces may begin to broaden their attacks on the gay community like the recent experiences in Manchester and Brighton.

## Our Response

At this time gay socialists need to get together and ask ourselves what our tactics should be, and how we can support each other. There is of course always the question of political differences but it appears to us that most gay socialists are not in parties and we should therefore resist sectarianism. It is a luxury which at this period in our history we cannot afford.

There are however two areas which need re-emphasising strongly at this time. One is the importance of autonomous movements and two is the continuing exploration of the personal as a vital area of politics for all socialists. The explosive growth of these areas occurred at a time of relative economic prosperity and in a liberal social climate, but they remain just as crucial in the present political conjuncture. We need to argue vehemently against those who produce a shopping list of political activities in which questions relating to sexuality and personal politics come very low. No doubt even more people now than in the past will argue that it is a bourgeois indulgence to fight in these areas while living standards are under attack, when unemployment is rising and when the power of the State is being



increased to deal with stropky workers and the Left. But our concerns are no less important under a Thatcher Government, indeed they become more urgent. It is not only the economic position of women and most gays which will decline under the present Government but the quality of all of our lives will be under attack. The family will be elevated as the panacea for all our moral ills. The media will sustain distorting images which reinforce alienation and sexism. Without autonomous movements and without a continuing exploration of personal politics -- the way we relate to each other, the alternatives to traditional political structures, the way we feel -- any alternatives to fighting solely around economic questions will fade away. We will be in danger of yet again seeing the struggle for socialism as being something outside of our lives.

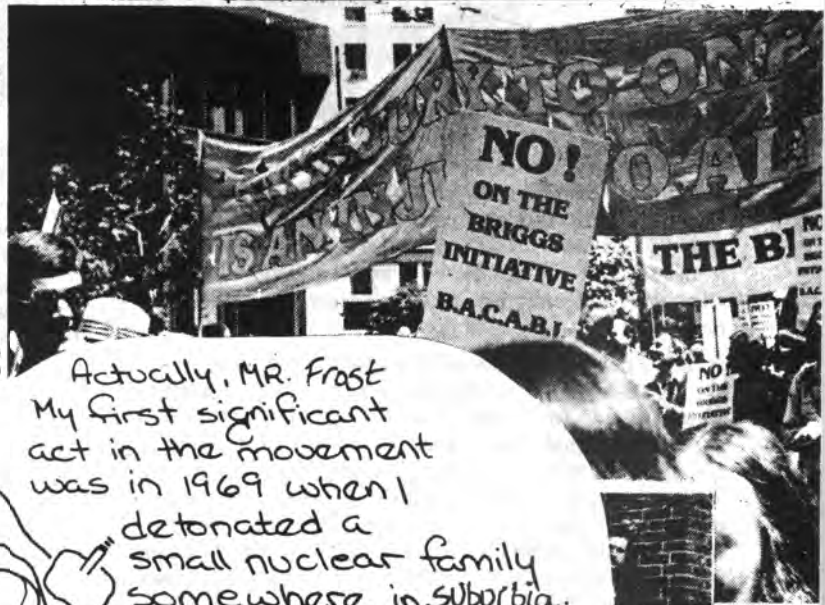
The fight for socialism has to be carried forward on all fronts and in all aspects of our lives. Unity and growth in our struggles can only come about through a recognition of the specific forms of oppression that individuals and groups face and by confronting these in the socialist movement itself. Only in this way will more people be prepared and able to collectively resist the threats posed by the policies of the Tory Government and be drawn into and build the struggle for socialism.



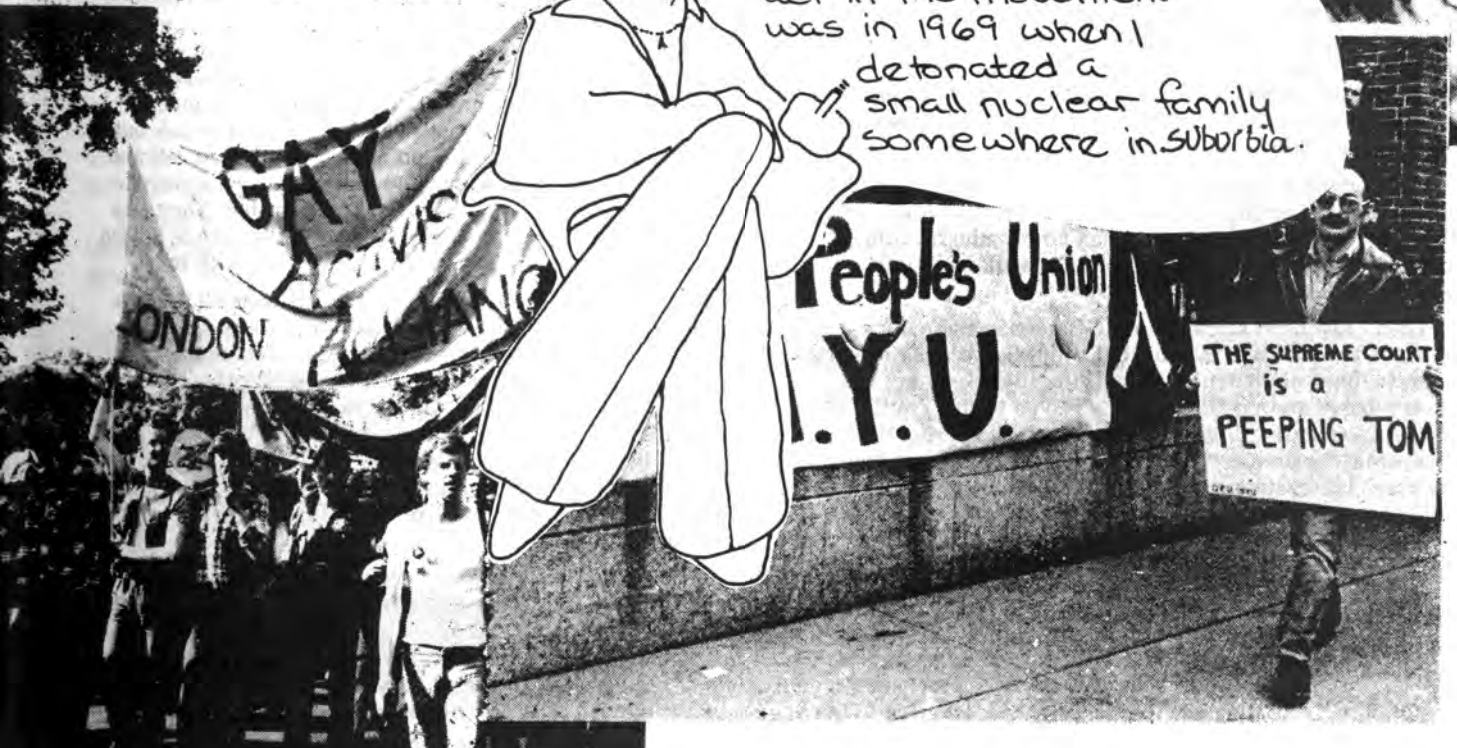
Marchers surge past police headquarters in Montreal



Sidney police prevent gays from entering the courts.



Actually, MR. Frost  
My first significant  
act in the movement  
was in 1969 when I  
detonated a  
small nuclear family  
somewhere in suburbia.



# Personal Politics~Ten Years On

The Personal is Political ... that principle, despite its problems, remains the enduring legacy of the Women's and Gay Movements.

We discovered that what we were doing in our 'private' lives was not isolated from the wider structures of society: we also discovered that the goals and aims of broad political action were not separable from their impact on our own lives and concerns. The traditional models of the privatised individual and the 'selfless' militant both proved inadequate as ways of understanding and acting to change the oppression of advanced capitalism.

That redescription of what constitutes politics needs re-emphasising in a political situation very different from the early days of GLF. It would be too easy to forget, to fall back into an increasingly strident Left orthodoxy which would make Women and Gays mere auxiliary troops in some romanticised attack on state power, or to try and escape into the dreamworld of 'individual solutions' The dialectic has to be maintained, between the personal and political, between the struggle for new ways of relating to each other now and the building of organisations that could effectively challenge and change the whole oppressive order. The beginnings of socialism can't wait till after the revolution; they have to happen now in our own immediate personal and political practice.

The following accounts by the members of the collective try and show how that dialectic has operated in our own lives, and the changes that have resulted in how we see ourselves and how we see our politics.



Ten years ago I was still at school, feeling isolated and persecuted for being 'queer' which the other kids seemed to be able to identify though I could not understand why. I knew I was gay but never had thoughts of meeting other gay people, it just seemed impossible. I did not feel bad about being gay although I felt unhappy at the rejection and insults that I received.

I had developed a socialist attitude, partly perhaps through a rejection of the people and society around me which seemed to oppress other groups and me for no apparent rational reason. I also felt very distant from my family with their mixture of rural and working class conservatism. I could not speak with them or anyone else about the things that I really felt. I became more withdrawn and depressed and could cope with school less and less. I just thought of getting away so that I did not have to have contact with anyone.

I left school at 18 and much to my own surprise and that of my family, I arranged a job and moved to London in early 1971. For about three months I had no meaningful contact with anyone, living in a hostel, going to work and loosely working with the Young Socialists.

Then I saw news stories about GLF and somehow I managed to arrive at a meeting in Covent Garden one evening - a new life exploded into being! Within the week my whole life was based around GLF. I started to go to the Youth Group, I joined the Commune Group and there were the large weekly main meetings with hundreds of lesbians and gay men. The excitement and optimism are hard to convey. I still felt nervous and withdrawn as a person and yet I threw myself into everything I could with a confidence my gay identity gave me. The second week I met Kim. It was the first gay sexual experience for both of us, though we both pretended to be terribly calm and experienced.

The people and activities of GLF became my whole life. I remember going back to the Socialist group to proclaim my gayness and the parting was mutually wished. I started to live



with Kim and then we moved into a gay commune together. There were marches, gay-days, sit-ins against pubs that discriminated against us, guerrilla activities against newspapers which abused us. We joined the demonstrations of the Unions, those against British troops in Ireland and others to show our support and to make our own stand, though we were often put to the rear of the marches and occasionally abused.

GLF seemed to bring together all my political ideals and a new lifestyle based around my sexual identity. It was a period of euphoria whatever problems might be going on in my relationships, in the commune or at work, which became incompatible with the rest of my life and so I left the job. I believed strongly in the politics that we put forward in GLF about relationships, sexism, the integration of personal and political actions and the critique of an oppressive capitalist system. It did not seem at odds with my socialist beliefs but extended them. However, the political groups of the left and the reformist and male dominated unions seemed in ways to be part of the enemy or at least not to be trusted. Their lack of understanding and dismissal of sexual politics made it hard to become involved closely in day to day work with them.

Not everything though was perfection. I was still insecure about myself and collapsed into bouts of jealousy and tried to force monogamy on our relationship. The commune was often stormy and problems were avoided rather than gone through honestly. GLF had warring factions laying down the paths we should follow from drag, drugs to detonators. Despite this I felt free and the world was going to change. It oppressed women and gays and we protested and confronted it vigorously but it did not seem to impinge on my own life very much.

After a couple of years GLF slowly disintegrated, the commune split and it was necessary to reassess one's position and the world outside. It had not gone through the revolution. Things were easier, at least in London, one had lots of friends and gay groups to work with and from this one could move back into other areas of activity. I worked



for a year and ran into very few difficulties about being very openly gay. I then went to college and helped to start a gay-soc and worked with the revolutionary socialist groups whose positions on sexual politics were opening up. In some ways my coming out through GLF and being so involved in its life-style and politics has made it difficult for me to relate to the commercial gay scene and it has taken some time to come to terms with this reality. However, the experience of GLF and the groups that now make up the gay movement are still the focus for my self identity and gives me the personal and political confidence to carry on my involvement with the Trade Union and socialist movements.

Keith Birch

For most of the first 18 years of my life, my experience was of trying, 'despite my handicap' to fit in and be accepted. My handicap was of not being tough, not one of the gang, but someone who was a 'softie', an outsider - not interested in games or girls or smoking, but talking, working, and other boys/men. I found my acceptability, at least to adults, by being clever.

Being clever, I went to University which opened up new horizons, for here I mixed with other young men, and a few women, who were also finding their feet and making a fresh start after leaving home. Together we tried various aspects of the counter-culture, drugs, Divine Light and Rock Music. But somehow homosexuality was still somewhere outside. The love for one another that we fostered in our drunken stoned moments stopped at the point at which I even tried to get into bed with any of my friends. I wasn't rejected, I was patronised.

It wasn't until I left college and started work as a residential social worker in Southampton that I consciously sought contact with other gay men. My first faltering steps at making contact were bedevilled with my fears of mutating into the stereotypical queers I had been taught to hate. I persevered for lack of any better alternative and had my first sexual experience with a man at the 1974 Malvern CHE conference, when I was 25. The next year, at the Sheffield CHE Conference, I first came across terms like 'sexism' and I began to be aware that being gay was a political issue, not just a personal one. I learned that there were structures imposed on us as individuals which conditioned the way we behaved. I first appreciated what it was to act in an oppressive way.

Prior to my contact with gay politics I had been very much of an a-political person — a Liberal if anything. I had always dismissed parliamentary politics as the manoeuvrings of individuals and groups eager to retain or gain positions of power. But this new sort of political thinking was different. It tried to draw links between people's different experiences, and didn't start from pre-ordained ideas but from our own situation as gay people. I found it difficult to identify this sexual politics with the politics I was familiar with. No-one was leading us; no-one was laying down a party line.

As time went on I became involved in setting up a union branch in the charity where I was working. There were struggles — we even went on strike and occupied the head

office. I started to draw links between my oppression as a gay man and the strength and inspiration gained by organising with other gay people, with the confidence and increased political awareness we gained fighting as workers against a paternalistic oppressive management. It was during this time that I started making some tentative links between sexual politics and socialism, though in both cases what I understood was often fairly skimpy.

It was as a result of joining *Gay Left* that I first came to read some Marxist theory and appreciate the structural analyses that were possible of work, and of sexuality. What I liked was a politics which didn't intend to provide 'right answers' but supplied tools for discovering what the most useful questions were. In addition it gave a framework for doing something I had never been able to do successfully, and that was to struggle against oppression, rather than to give in to it.

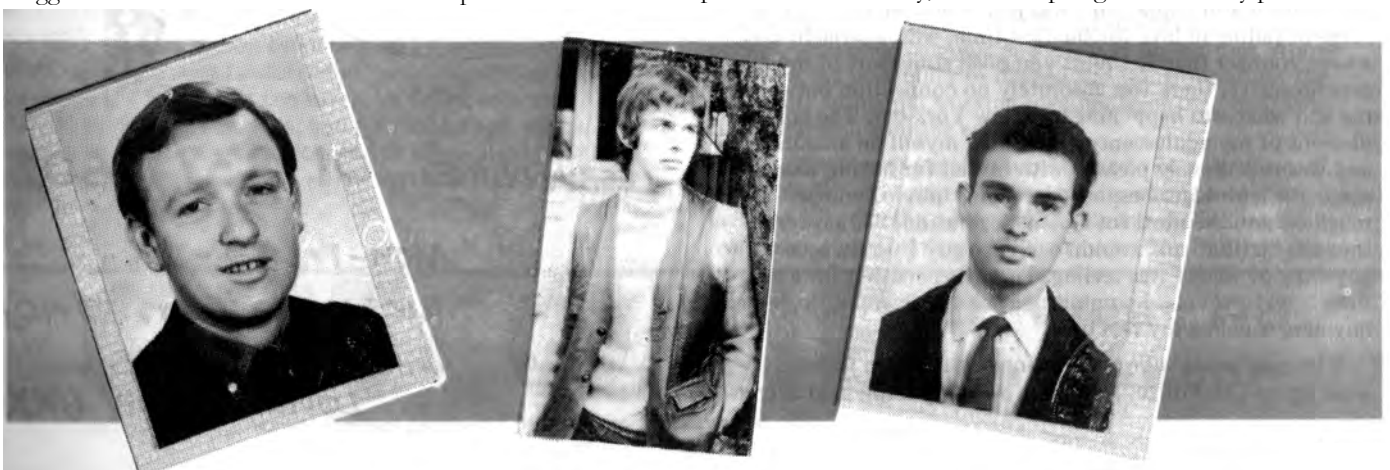
Derek Cohen

Ten years ago life seemed rosy. I had a lover, a small, if damp basement flat in Notting Hill Gate, work I liked and two circles of personal friends — one gay, one straight. I enjoyed exploring liberal ideas, supporting the Labour Party, marching for peace in Vietnam, and experimenting with dope. Neat, ordered, separate compartments which appeared to fit together.

Yet sometimes the pieces did not quite fit. When any gay topic came up in conversation with non-gay friends — all of whom I assumed knew I was gay but never mentioned it (me colluding in a conspiracy of silence) I blushed deep; my face reddened, my heart leapt and panic rose. I could hardly speak let alone imply that I was gay.

This awareness grew more acute when GLF started meetings in Powis Church Hall just round the corner from where I lived. My 'straight' gay friends looked faintly amused and asked 'liberation from what?' then changed the subject, but I was drawn like a reluctant magnet. I went to the door, but it was only after several attempts that I felt able to go inside to discover a room packed full of men. Some did strips to obscure poetry, some milled about, but at the centre there was much lively, sometimes angry discussion. A general smell of dope pervaded the air of rebellion and anger. It was too much for me. I felt remote and distant, yet disturbed. Life so neat and ordered seemed to be threatened.

A friend sent me 'Psychiatry and the Homosexual' which I judged critically - overstated I thought with some faked facts. Its real message about gay oppression never got a look in. I was as possessive and jealous in my love life as ever, yet the contradiction between the ideal I had in my head i.e. a loving totally satisfying physical and intellectual monogamous relationship seemed in total contradiction to what happened and about which I felt unable to speak. The split between reality and desire loomed even wider. After living together for a year with my lover, our relationship broke in a huge crest of silent, unspoken recrimination leaving me deeply hurt and shaken. I withdrew, as I now see it, to try a complete reassessment of my life. No more romantic, assumed relationships. no more lies about monogamy and pretensions at fidelity; no more apeing an ideal. Gay politics



and openly gay friends seemed to offer at least a framework in which to understand what was going on.

A cautious tentative relationship was struck up with a man who was a socialist and interested in gay liberation and I joined CHE. Again I felt panic at going to an open gay meeting but I persevered. Relationships, loves, even occasionally politics were discussed, if not deeply at least with a basis of shared interests. I met people who did not seem afraid to say they were gay and were willing to talk about it.

Slowly gay liberation was beginning to mean something. I came out to a few friends to little response and no bad reactions. We organised (a very badly attended) public meeting. Activism seems a positive contribution but somehow needed a political framework. I eyed the ad in *Gay News* for the Marxist Reading Group but thought it would be too heavy for me. Anyway, doubts about the treatment of homosexuals in communist countries seemed to augur badly for any marxist answer and overshadowed any meaningful discussion.

'With Downcast Gays' was sold in the CHE group and every word seemed to speak directly to our experience. Gay oppression, self-oppression, feelings of guilt about being gay, internalizing the attitudes of society about myself, and even hating my gayness seemed to echo every half thought, mostly repressed idea. Society seemed suddenly not to be the immutable natural force I had assumed, but perhaps could be changed, and I could help. By good fortune I was invited to the tail end of the series of meetings of the Gay Marxist Reading Group and for the first time in my life 'things came together'.

Here politics, sexuality, work, study and discussion seemed all part of a whole, which could be looked at and analysed. I could hardly sleep for the excitement and wondered if it was all too good to be true. The group continued, and then reformed itself to become the Gay Left Collective. We instituted a formal reading programme of marxist texts, and set about producing a Gay Left journal.

Links were set up with the women's movement and friendships with feminists brought new awareness. It would be easy to suggest that the political and personal path was smooth or always the same — they were not. Personalities still clashed, particularly in the early days before we held regular discussions about our relationships in the group, and I still had to confront my feelings of gay guilt and objectified sexual experiences. At times the euphoria of the intimacy of the shared experiences in the collective and the personal discussions is almost too much, while at the other extreme — heavy discussions of 'discourse' theory or the writings of the latest French philosophers quickly redress the balance. The struggle has to go on and attempts to give up through exhaustion and frustration have to be resisted. All of us in the group are involved in other areas — unions, gay politics, writing and so on, yet for me, Gay Left is high up on my list of priorities. The search for alternative relationships with seemingly endless discussion is a challenge and cannot be ignored. The personal and political cannot be separated and all change is for the better but there is still a long way to go. Emmanuel Cooper

When Stonewall happened I was just seventeen and on the verge of falling in love for the first time, with a straight boy, a year younger than I. Unless you posit some sort of mystic synchronicity, there was absolutely no connection between me and what was happening in a New York bar. The contradictions of my adolescence: I declared myself an anarchist, and was ridiculously pleased with myself for having won a place at Cambridge; I espoused a philosophy of youth rebellion and the need for violent revolution, "all power to the imagination" and couldn't tell the guy I was in love with anything of what I was feeling. That rift persisted for a long time — an intellectual commitment to a radical politic, which nowhere touched my real life.

The next years were an emotional maelstrom for me: I went up to Cambridge, lost touch with my home and friends,

became embourgeoise, acquiring status, culture, the appropriate dreams and even the speech of an alien class, all these transformations adding to the dislocation that I felt because I was gay, and prone to fall madly and extendedly in love with very beautiful and extremely fucked up straight men ... erotic passion finding its legitimacy in the role of mentor/martyr. The confusion was compounded by a fairly constant drug and alcohol diet, in an atmosphere of aristo decadence, a sort of haute-bourgeois appropriation of the counter culture. But that milieu provided a space to come out as gay, or at least bisexual, just so long as you didn't take it too seriously, could be amusing and entertaining about it. So I posed, all the while feeling utterly at sea. I also came across GLF for the first time, but even though it appealed intellectually it was too much at odds with the environment I depended on for some sort of validation and sustenance, and the conflict between the two quite often fused me out. I'd go to a CR meeting with people from the GLF and then nip back to the college for drinks and dope, and also to hang out with a man who was trendily bi (gave me the first GLF badge I wore in fact) but who was, as my pattern masochistically dictated, monstrously screwed up and who didn't give a shit about me. I teetered on the edge of that contradiction for the rest of my time in Cambridge, and came close to, as the jargon has it, freaking completely, especially as my consumption of acid increased. It's always struck me as ironic that I tripped before I had sex.

At the end of that time, I went, *faute de mieux*, to the States to study for a Ph.D., and went back into the closet, and closed the door firmly for two years. In retrospect that seems completely insane, but the extreme disorientation I felt in Cambridge, in America, the seeming impossibility of getting any sort of relationship that I wanted with a man, made me give up ... a sort of inner suicide. The nadir of that experience was nine months in virtually perpetual anxiety, occasionally blossoming in literal terror at being on my own, walking down a street, taking tubes ... Getting out of that was due to the ministrations of a very sympathetic therapist who had the nous to recognise that it was the repression of my homosexuality and not my being gay that was at the root of my 'breakdown', and due too to growing close to another straight man who though he didn't respond sexually at least valued me and the friendship we had. That process of healing had its consequence in my moving to London in '76, coming out again only this time with a little more vigour, and with a growing political awareness. The analyses of gay liberation and later of marxism, or at least sophisticated versions thereof, actually made sense of the chaos I'd been through in a way that the particular strand of GLF thinking that I'd encountered in '73 had not. Over the next year or so there was a slow resolution of the contradictions that I'd first realised when I was seventeen, even if new problems and conflicts flowered.



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I'm committed, then, to gay liberation, to feminism and to socialism not at all primarily from an intellectual development, or from logical conviction, though the eminent sense and rationality of gay socialism seems obvious to me now, but rather from a deep and enduring sense of having been personally fucked over in this society — as gay, by the ten years repression of my own capacity for pleasure out of guilt and fear, and as working class in that I was well and truly mauled as I was being yanked away from my background to the promise of a Cambridge education and a middle class career. The sense of singular personal hurt, and the still lingering scars of a proneness to depression, to irrational resentments of friends and comrades and often intense feelings of isolation and alienation, coupled with an understanding that all of that was no mere caprice but was systematically related to the warping of others' lives because of their race, sex or class: that remains the wellspring of my own loathing and opposition to capitalist patriarchy, and the vision of a society where that hurt could not have happened maintains me in struggles that often seem as meaningless as the society that makes them necessary.

Philip Derbyshire

In the autumn of 1970 I had recently graduated from the University of Sussex as an Art Historian, and had just commenced a one-year teacher training course, having turned down an M.A. place in London in order to stay in Brighton with my boyfriend. Although I didn't know the actual phrase, I had 'come out' to my family and friends some three years previously. I was 21. I knew the gay scenes in London and Amsterdam. I was extremely sociable, extremely gregarious, and extremely articulate. I had six years involvement in socialist and pacifist politics behind me. I probably thought I was the bee's knees. And GLF scared me half to death.

This is hard to explain. I'm well aware of how Gay Liberation changed some people's entire lives overnight. I can only say that at the time it didn't change mine. I've said I was gregarious: certainly my address book was full of names. Yet these remained little more than names. For I was completely involved in a relationship in which I was totally dependent on one other person for emotional and physical security, for love as I then understood it. I'm not for one moment saying this was a good thing. Clearly it was not. But in this context GLF inevitably seemed terribly threatening. It showed me things about myself which I wasn't ready or able to face. All that tremendous feeling of togetherness only served to make me feel more isolated still. I knew in some dim way that this was what I wanted, but I also knew, or thought I knew, that this was simply not for me.

I can see in retrospect that my ambiguous responses to GLF were objectively structured in my childhood — growing up gay on a big council estate with highly neurotic parents, and being sent away to private boarding schools. Leaving school my carefully cultivated facade of urbane literate egotism continued to hide a real terror of even the most ordinary social situations. And like the mask in Onibaba, I found it was one I could not easily remove. At consciousness-raising groups, at Gay Days, in the founding of a local GLF, I found myself mouthing gay slogans and exuding Gay Pride without much conviction, still paralysed inside with nameless secret fears. I don't suppose I was unique in this.

I liked the bars: I didn't like beards. I liked the clubs: I didn't like the ethos of enforced collectivism and organized spontaneity. I have spent the Seventies trying to work through these contradictions, and now look back with an odd mixture of regret and relief. Regret for what might have been, and relief that what was is over. Thanks to GLF I can now take that mask off, sometimes ...

Simon Watney



My involvement with GLF changed my life. In Autumn 1970 I had just started working at the London School of Economics, having escaped with all the speed I could muster from a disastrous period as a school teacher. I had a small, but protective circle of 'queer' friends. I knew a lot of the cottages and some of the bars. Some of my best friends knew ...

My politics were socialist, but unfocussed. Disillusion with Labour and Wilsonism had not propelled me towards the revolutionary or libertarian left. Somehow May '68 did not speak to me or my concerns. I watched it all on television. And at the height of the *evenements* I succumbed to glandular fever. That seemed to summarise my prostration when confronted by great events. My politics and my sexuality were in different compartments, and my friendships were neatly demarcated. He was a friend, he was a lover: never the two should meet.

And yet by the autumn of 1970 I was, I can now see, ready for change. I was drawn to the counter culture, but terrified of it. I was intellectually interested in the ideas of the new, new left, but uninvolved in it. I was anxious for new types of relationships but unable to break out of my pseudo incest taboo. I was ready to climb, but fearful of falling. And LSE suddenly, unexpectedly, offered me the opportunities. Hardly had I started when a new burst of student militancy shook the School, drawing me into the 'new politics'. I became involved in my trade union just as the Labour movement was gearing itself for the biggest industrial confrontations for a generation. And above all I was at the LSE when the Gay Liberation Front started there.

It crept up on me almost unnoticed and then flooded over me. An article in the student paper awakened me to the birth of GLF. I went along to the first meeting I could, in early November, not sure what to expect. It was Wednesday night. I timidly went into basement room. And suddenly there were all those people, all those GAY people. Here was the counter culture, and the flavour of alternative life styles wafted through the room. Here was the revolutionary left, and the rhetoric of confrontation and liberation sparked from person to person. Here was the gay subculture, *openly* meeting, *passionately* speaking, *collectively* transforming itself. Here, for the first time, I immediately and permanently saw the possibilities of integrating my life: of making a politics of my person, of making personal and relevant my politics. Above all, I saw the possibility of change and transformation: the possibility of people working together to change their lives. It was a revolutionising experience.

But of course the reality turned out to be a little more mundane. What I eventually had to face was the contradictions between the new possibilities and the old, resistant realities. I mouthed the compulsory rejection of compulsive

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monogamy, while I entered an intense, long lasting and immensely valuable one to one relationship. I firmly rejected the tyranny of bourgeois morality only to flirt, half in love with easeful death, with the demands of libertarianism. I threw away my grey suits and swished in my not inexpensive kaftans beads and beard. But the greatest contradiction, underpinning all the others, was that between the hopes inspired by GLF and the grim realities of the 1970s. The last flame from the cultural energy of the 60s was being quenched by the downpour of the 70s. We believed that all the possibilities and aspirations of the movement were going to be realised overnight. Revolution was around the corner, and with it all our frustrations and oppressions would dissolve like strawmen in the wind. Alas!

And yet, beyond the rhetoric, the browning copies of old handouts, the dated flavour of liberation dialectics, is the hope and the possibility, the memory and the inspiration. We all know now that the struggle is a long and hard one. But the struggle goes on because of those millenarian, wildly optimistic and utopian, but inspiring early days. Despite everything, GLF transformed the possibilities of being gay in our society. And it showed that given the will, the energy and the collective endeavour nothing is entirely impossible.

Jeffrey Weeks

In 1969 I was a closeted, gay socialist at the London School of Economics immersed in long hours of discussion around an obscure point in Kantian philosophy whilst not comprehending that the student strikes, sit-ins and take overs, which had sped over the waters from Berkeley, California were demands by students for control over part of our own lives. The gay movement was a year or two away so the politics of control over my own life was even less well understood, indeed not yet even thought about. What I can remember about myself then was a deep sense of fragmentation and a longing to meet other gay men who at least voted Labour even if they thought politics an abstract irrelevance to their own lives and a subject best avoided. But I never did. My experience of my gayness was essentially about having sex whilst relationships — those beautiful, life-long, endlessly satisfying love affairs were something which I assumed everyone else had. So if there weren't any satisfying relationships there was intellectual superiority and analytical reasoning to fall back upon; a beautiful protective device which enabled me to assume a knowledge of my own fractured life but which gave me nothing to piece it together with.

Academic study and its associated levels of abstraction were generally beyond my comprehension and far more hours were spent looking longingly at men across the library rooms than divining the inner meanings and the great importance of the philosophical difference between "I raise my arm" as opposed to "my arm was raised". Kant dominated LSE in more ways than one! More often than not a socialist analysis or a marxist interpretation of anything was treated on the same level as a disease, a passing phase or an act of open defiance against the natural order of things. In these circumstances my socialism stood still; student politics seemed so remote and complex compared with my previous experience as a stropky young socialist in a local Labour Party constituency.

At the same time I was surrounded by aggressively heterosexual women and men holding hands, kissing, dancing, laughing together, getting engaged and some even getting married. I felt so alone, I so much wanted to be like them. And to think we were all considered so rebellious, so radical! It would be wrong though to paint a totally dismal picture — I wasn't a mere tool of patriarchal and capitalist oppression, there were lots of good days and I had a couple of very close non gay friends. But without support and without an understanding of my own life, I couldn't tell anyone I was gay. After all what would I have said? "I have sex with men, long to fall in love like heterosexuals and when I'm in a relationship can't get out of it quickly enough". But despite this it still seems extraordinary and sad to me that in four years at LSE, I never met another gay student I could speak to, and when I left there at the age of 23 I had outside one close gay

friend — a kind, supportive, perceptive man who I ran away from.

What was left? Well my socialism was still unblighted. It seemed to me and still does, impossible to support a system which glories in the success of the rich, whilst all around us lies the anarchistic anachronisms and destructive oppression/exploitation of patriarchal capitalism. So given this as a very brief, sketchy backcloth to ten years ago perhaps it was inevitable that I should be drawn to gay liberation and its emphasis on understanding and controlling our lives, openness, honesty, and developing relationships which were not just sexual. It was also very important for me as a trade union activist that gay liberation enabled me to develop a socialist practice which went beyond the struggles for better wages and working conditions and stated loudly and boldly that what had always been considered private and personal was public and political. Thus I was supported by the movement and able to come out at work, and in my trade union and raise our concerns about sexual politics which never crossed my mind in 1969.

It may sound trite and corny but it's true to say that my life was transformed by gay liberation; its collective consciousness, a sense of belonging to a group, has made me stronger and richer whilst it has also enabled me to make some sense out of 10 years ago; it wasn't necessary to see 1969 as some sort of mental aberration or the way things are if you're "queer" — I could even look back to that period and smile at some of the more desperate moments.

So at this point in time, I'm beginning to think about the disparate parts of my life; work, sex, friendship, love, politics. Ten years ago, this would have been impossible. My socialism was something outside of me. Today, though, it's a question of trying to find some sort of balance. Everything seems more urgent with a Thatcherite government bristling to go on the attack. You feel a little guilty if you're not being a right on 100% political activist, but then even activists need some sort of personal life. It's not possible to keep bashing oneself because the revolution hasn't come or doesn't look likely next week. Then there's the problem, for me, of trying to live a personal life that somehow relates to one's politics — a real problem as there are no easy answers to living under capitalism and as a friend put it recently, we have to try hard not to be "sexually and socially capitalistic" — more understanding, more supportive, more caring — less exploitative. But at least as a gay socialist I feel there's a framework in which we can start to tackle these things.

I suppose deep down — well not very deep — I'm an idealist and a romantic, so I want to end by waving a political flag for the future and say that I feel that only by piecing together our gayness and our socialism and combining it with collective action can we defend and advance the gains of the gay and women's movements. I can't say capitalism will crumble tomorrow, next week or in a year because of our action, but I know that without it "Socialism and the New Life" will remain a mere slogan.

Nigel Young





# Gays at Work :Student Unions

by Kate Ingrey

Looking back I suppose I entered the privileged world of higher education via the back door.

I flew the coup before my 15th birthday, to share the grotty glories of living, existing in Dalston, while being exploited (on my sisters insurance cards) by a firm of accountants in Holborn, as an underpaid 'Girl Friday'.

My independence established, (walking to and from work twice a week due to lack of funds) I returned home, temporarily.

I found a better job as a printer in a college, which through youth and/or ignorance I held for three years. There I was 16 years old tied to a stinking offset litho machine, while all around me were taking day trips to Brighton as and when they felt like it. I wasn't exactly overpaid for it either. When I left I was earning £17 a week, the *man* who took over from me started on £42. This brought me to the 'wonderful world of work', namely, temping. This is probably the worst way to earn a living. The agency earns twice as much as you, so the employer is inclined to expect their money's worth. I sometimes thought that the jobs I was sent on were specially created by the firm to give their other employees someone to snip at; they can always replace you if you retaliate.

I'd always done a lot of drawing and an escape was needed. One day in spring 1975 I turned up half an hour late for an interview at a foundation Art School (who have a good record for waving 'O' and 'A' level requirements), and was accepted. Prospects certainly seemed brighter.

A foundation year is spent thus:

1st Term: Making marks. The mark made by spitting on a piece of paper is very exciting if viewed while standing on your head over a 60ft drop.

2nd Term: Building a portfolio. i.e. making spit on bits of paper look like works of art by spending vast amounts of money on cardboard frames. Your portfolio completed the rest of the term is spent applying for places on degree courses.

3rd Term: When you finally get accepted somewhere, anywhere, you can relax and do what you want to do which is far more fun.

This is how I managed to get a toe-hold in a large London poly.

Most of my sexual relationships were of the one night stand variety, all with the opposite sex. On the whole, if they lasted beyond this brief liaison I'd discover that the strong nasty exterior, (something I was very attracted to) only hid a dishonest desire to make me feel guilty for not being the ideal, giving creature I was on the first night.

Being one of those people who cheerfully (if unknowingly) take responsibility for everyone and everything around them, this was a desperate position to be in. In the first place I'd feel it was my fault for starting the encounter. In the second, due to the crumbling exterior, the person would no longer be in the slightest bit desirable. Experience taught me it was generally easier to move house or change jobs than to try and sort out the mess. Of course there were times when the shoe was on the other foot, but it doesn't seem the same somehow when it's you phoning up in tears at midnight.

## Degree of Independence?

Anyway I was at college on a degree course, involved in an on/off relationship of a couple of years standing with a man called Andrew, who is now one of my best friends. At the time things weren't so good between us, but we hung on to the investment. Especially as we'd both lost a lot of 'friends' in the process of setting it up.

Andrew first read me the SCUM manifesto in 1974, he was well up on feminist theory, but if you are female it

doesn't take long to catch up, overtake, and castrate (in a manner of speaking).

Through some quirk of circumstance I found myself standing for election as student union publications editor on a NOISS platform at the end of my second year. I'd put in a lot of time helping the previous year's editor, and I think it was due to this, and the sexist vote, that I managed to pip the then president at the post.

I'd been spending a lot of time involved in various political activities, and had hung around on the fringes of SWP, but had never joined, which was probably a good thing since I don't think I could have handled the discipline of the party system and investigated myself at the same time.

With hindsight I'm fairly sure that the college cell underestimated both my intelligence and my individualism. I think they thought they had a 'pretty puppet' in the Publications Editor elect.

I'd been to a few Gay Soc. discos, not because I wanted to initiate a lesbian experiment, but because at the time I was much into discos, drinking and having a good time. The fact that I didn't/don't find political lesbians and Gays particularly predatory was an added bonus. I was mystified that a lot of people at college shyed away from such events for fear of being labelled 'queer'. Still that was, and is, very much their problem not mine.

I met the woman I now live with at our college 'Women's Day', but didn't get to know her until sometime later when we managed to get ourselves, invited back to a mutual friend's place for lunch. It later transpires that this friend was in the market for a bit of sexual experimentation herself. (A feeling very prevalent at that time within this particular women's group. 'Glad to be gay' was getting a lot of air time). However she never did manage to work out whether she wanted to sleep with Kay or myself or both.

Kay was involved in a relationship with a woman and two kids, I was living with Andrew. So our friendship didn't become a sexual relationship until a couple of months later when both of these relationships had fallen apart. I think our mutual friends/acquaintances were convinced it wouldn't last. They willed or hoped it wouldn't, however, it has.

The consensus is that having a lesbian affair is an OK thing to do over the summer, but that one can't afford to have a radical lesbian feminist running the college magazine during the year.

## Editorial Freedom?

College papers tend to deduce a lot of their adolescent humour from thinly veiled sexism, I wasn't prepared to produce those goods. What were the poor swines going to laugh at now. They certainly don't know how to laugh at themselves.

Nowadays most students aren't interested in their union as such and many resent having to pay for something they don't see the use of. Mass student militancy is a thing of the past. Nearly all the gains made by student unions for their members were made in the late 60's and early 70's. The present officials just caretake a dying idea. Thus the reality is one of mismanaged funds, forgotten meetings and stardom for the few at the expense of services.

As the union becomes more intangible the membership becomes more reactionary, voting into office anyone who promises to keep a low profile and avoid confrontation.

Editors have found it hard to get student contributions for the college paper. During my term of office this has been further hindered by other union officers 'forgetting' to produce such things as President's reports etc. It means they don't have to account for what they've been doing on behalf



of the membership, generally not a lot. Without news it becomes increasingly hard to produce a newspaper.

The membership looks to social events and to the magazine to provide evidence that their fee is doing something for them. Unfortunately, both these services have had their budget cut. But they do have a paid editor, researcher, writer, designer, typist, paste-up etc. However, they don't see it quite like that.

Kay and myself have spent many a fraught day writing the news pages, the letters page and so on. Sometimes I know the issue so well that I don't even bother to look at it when it comes back from the printers. I do try to print every student contribution although that often means severe editing, i.e. racism and sexism. If I disagree with a letter I disagree in print, but this hasn't, as I hoped, stimulated more discussion. Still, they have stopped coming in addressed 'Dear Sir', except from the Federation of Conservative Students who must be thicker skinned than most.

### Must Spend My Time . . .

Racial politics rate high on the average political student's 'must spend my time fighting for' chart, basically because most students are white and middle class. With all the frenzy in the world for the issue of the moment, these people are still able to return to their comfortable abodes without any risk of racial abuse. Sexual politics are something else entirely, everyone is affected. Too much investigation in this field has the drawback of changing the lives of 'right on' politicians.

Our poly recently went into occupation against the imposition of quotas on overseas students, instead of the usual minimal support from students, the occupation was packed with 100-150 students sleeping in. Not only were students participating, they were of varying nationalities, Malaysian, Iranian, etc. and were providing very positive insights into the whole area of neo-colonialism. I first felt something was wrong when the General meeting asked for a 'Chairman' for the occupation committee. Piecemeal protest from surrounding 'feminists'. Things went from bad to worse. Beyond the usual sexual free-for-all that inevitably accompanies occupations, women were doing the cooking, women doing the washing up, women being molested, and everyone happily getting drunk to the strains of 'Brown Sugar'. The Rolling Stones are very much the heritage of

people around my age, but no matter how many parties I've previously spent listening to this crap, my political advance does mean that I now see that this particular song is racist and sexist in the first degree.

I approached one of the 'stars' of the occupation, (a woman whose energy has launched a hundred badly attended 'How dare you presume I'm heterosexual' discussions.) and asked her what she thought about it. After being informed that I was over-sensitive and intolerant I slunk back to the table I was sharing with my lover. People were sitting on the floor, on each other, but the two chairs at our table were empty. Which just goes to show that taking your politics seriously can badly damage your image.

It's only since I've been a lesbian that I have really seen the way in which all women are oppressed. I've stopped playing the game and don't try and hide the fact. Instead of being able to brush aside the shit that is constantly forced on women, I feel raped by it, and react to it. A lot of feminist women at college see this reaction as a condemnation of the way they let things pass for a life of acceptance. It isn't intentional, but people always see things the way they want to, which gives everyone a nice cop-out.

My alienation/exclusion hasn't been particularly obvious, it's slightly self induced, (I don't feel it's up to me to prove to folk how harmless I am despite my 'perversion'), but mostly it's just that the way I live my life questions those around me, asks for answers to their exclusive sexuality, their imminent return to the state of the nuclear family.

I'm glad that during my year of office I haven't had to ask for direct and public support from the liberals and temporary left, because when it comes to the crunch I don't think that support is as forthcoming as we try and make ourselves believe. □

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## SISTERS, NEVER LET A DOCTOR PUT YOU DOWN AGAIN!

Our Bodies, Ourselves, a Health Book by and for women.

Boston Women's Health Book Collective.

British edition by Angela Phillips and Jill Rakusen. Penguin, 1978. £3.50.

*Reviewed by Sue Bruley*

One of the most important aspects of the women's liberation movement has been the desire to overcome ignorance about our own bodies. Women have sought to retrieve from 'the professionals' an understanding of their own physiology. A necessary part of this process must be the availability of low priced literature which can be easily assimilated by women with no background in medical terminology. The Penguin edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is the English version of the original Boston Women's Health Book Collective, which was first published in 1971.

*Our Bodies, Ourselves* was an instant success and has been widely acclaimed, and deservedly so as it is a truly impressive manual of women's health care. But the book's originality lies in the fact that it is far more than a mere 'body manual'. Women's bodies are never treated in the detached and mechanical manner of the medical profession. The element of consciousness is always present. This integrated perspective successfully embraces detailed information on complex medical problems such as Pelvic Inflammatory Disease and Endometriosis along with a whole range of material concerning lifestyles and personal relationships.

Ordinarily one would cringe at the sight of a section on Lesbianism in a manual on women's health care, expecting the topic to be dealt with in pathological terms. Fortunately a complete break with this kind of approach has been made. The section on 'Lesbian Perspectives' presents a straightforward and honest (ie non-idealised) description of lesbian sexuality and life styles, including lesbian mothers. The use of three personal accounts in this chapter blends in well with the overall concept of the book.



# Pat Arrowsmith -Pacifist

The following interview with Pat Arrowsmith was arranged because of her experience over the past 20 years and more in progressive causes. We were interested both in these involvements in themselves and how the emergence of the women's and gay movements may have affected her political perspectives. This is an edited version of the interview with Pat conducted by Keith Birch, Jacky Plaster, Marie Walsh and Nigel Young.

*GL: In this election you stood as a Socialist Unity candidate in Jim Callaghan's constituency, campaigning particularly on the Troops Out issue. How successful do you feel this kind of intervention is?*

PA: When the major political parties keep such a silence on the British War in Ireland it is a way of getting some publicity, and to confront people with the issue. We held public meetings around Troops Out and I got to speak to groups that would not normally consider Ireland. At one meeting a young man who was about to join the army changed his mind on being confronted with the realities of the war he would have to fight in. One is also made aware of the coercive power of the State. During the campaign I was arrested twice by the police — merely because of speaking in public on the Irish question.

*GL: How did you come to stand as a Parliamentary candidate and why do you feel the Irish question to be of such importance?*

PA: I stood as a candidate in 1970. I was approached by some people from the Communist Party who wanted someone who would attract wider support. I stood exclusively on the Vietnam war issue but my agent was Irish and a Republican and I became aware that this was Britain's first responsibility. It was not good enough just to take up causes in far away places such as Vietnam and Chile. Right here England was involved in a war situation in Ireland and as a pacifist this became of primary concern.

*GL: There seems to be little general awareness of the issues at stake in Ireland and the Left and Troops Out Movement have made little impact as yet. What sort of reaction did you get?*

PA: The majority of public opinion polls show that people do want Troops Out. Largely this is not from a socialist perspective of giving the Irish people the right to self-determination. Rather it is the expression of a feeling of 'let them kill each other', a repugnance for the bombings and killings and there is no end in sight. In a broad sense this state of public opinion can be attached to the perspectives of Troops Out if the issues can be explained properly and mass pressure put on the Government to move from this impasse.

*GL: In the campaign you stood openly as a lesbian and in support of the Women's and Gay Movements. Do you see any connections between this stand and the Irish question and what effect did it have on your campaign?*

PA: I see no connection between my being a lesbian and my involvement in Troops Out. They are separate issues both personally and in regards to Ireland. Gays in both parts of Ireland are in a bad position, it may be worse in the Free State than in the North. My public stance as a lesbian, though, did give me the opportunity to speak to audiences of gay men and lesbians who listened to me on Ireland when they may not have otherwise done so. At public meetings in the streets people would be shouting and joking about whether I was a lesbian. But when it was baldly announced that I was it usually just silenced them.

*GL: What is the background to your political beliefs and involvements? You became well known with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament but how did you arrive at that position?*

PA: My first political activity was at University and in the early 1950s with the Crusade for World Government. I was particularly concerned with the horrors of the bomb and the possibility of the destruction of all human life. I was a pacifist and became deeply committed to campaign against all wars and killing. I came to London in 1950 and was available to organise the first CND march to Aldermaston and from that time my involvement in the pacifist and CND movements became complete.

*GL: When did you recognise yourself as a lesbian and what was your involvement in the lesbian subculture during the 50s and 60s?*

PA: I first recognised my feelings for other women at boarding school but when I went to Cambridge University I fell in love with two men though the relationships were more on an emotional level rather than sexual. I felt rather blocked about my feelings at this time in the early 1950s. I then went into social work and fell in love with a woman who was one of my supervisors. There was an atmosphere of liberal tolerance but also the pressure that one needed help to be cured. I wrote to an analyst explaining my feelings and I received a letter back saying that she would help if I felt out of accord with myself, but if not, it was not a matter to be 'cured'. I did not contact her again.

Later I was working in Chester where I met a woman and fell in love and this was my first sexual relationship. The situation and relationship were very difficult and I left my job before being sacked and was almost run out of town. However I did not feel guilty by then, though she found it very difficult.

*GL: Did you know any other lesbians, just circles of friends or clubs?*

PA: No. This was the middle of the 50s and one felt very isolated. When I came down to London and started working for CND and other progressive movements I started to meet and have relationships with other lesbians. People ask when did I first 'come out', but it never seemed an issue in the environment I was working in. If one was living with another woman it was just accepted that that was the situation and nothing more was said; it was just taken for granted. I even discovered it could have its advantageous side when I went into Holloway on my prison sentences. Relationships were very much on the Butch/Femme stereotype. I remember on one sentence a group of women were discussing sexual relationships and one woman said very matter of factly, that she was bisexual, and I was very impressed by her honesty.

At that time, because of my very public involvement with CND, I felt that if I came out as a lesbian it might be used against CND, and looking back at the public attitudes of the time, I think that was right. I met Wendy in the early 60s who was also involved in the movements and we lived together for 14 years.

*GL: How did you see this relationship and what contact did you have with the lesbian scene and the Women's movement from the late 60s?*

PA: Wendy and I were fairly monogamous and we lived in a quasi-childless marriage. I occasionally had other relationships which caused difficulties and for which I felt guilty. It depends on the individuals and the way that they come together. It is natural for people to want to live together whether they are heterosexual or homosexual.

Wendy and I lived together on the basis of monogamy and so I was dishonest to her when I had other relationships and that is why I say I felt guilty with just cause.

We only went to the clubs such as the Gateways very occasionally because of the way our relationship worked. I went to a few of the early GLF meetings, probably in 1971 or so. I remember at one of them a woman announced herself as being 'butch' and the other women were very moralistic and put her down. One almost felt out of place for having short hair.

*GL: What about the Women's movement and the issues it raised. Did you not feel oppressed in the organisations that you were involved with in the 60s, the kinds of experiences that many women in the left had?*

PA: I did not really have those sort of experience. My involvement was in pacifist and progressive movements rather than Marxist groups. I was rather a late comer to the concepts of the Women's movement. My first contact with any such ideas was at the War Resisters Conference in 1970, when some Americans complained about sexist language and the use of words like 'Chairman'. I remember feeling rather scornful. It was only later that I began to realise that words do not merely reflect attitudes but help to define them as well. I have made a great point of this since in all the organisations that I am involved with such as CND and Amnesty International.



**FREESPEECH** for Thatcher and Callaghan — but not for those who dared to mention troops out of Ireland. Pat Arrowsmith, standing in Cardiff South-east, was arrested twice at street meetings during her campaign.

She is due to appear in court on 21 May to answer four charges. Among those demanding that these charges be dropped and supporting Pat's right to free speech are the Plaid Cymru and Communist party candidates who stood in Cardiff SE.

*GL: Why have you not been particularly involved in the Women's or Lesbian movements? You said before that you became concerned about Ireland because it was nearer home. Surely the oppression of women and gays is 'close to home'?*

PA: I have been involved in many aspects of the movement — on demonstrations, in union groups, to wearing badges. I do feel part of the general movement. However my primary concern is directed against killing — the bomb, wars, Ireland. In a sense I am not 'proud' of being gay. I just am. The notion of pride is just to compensate. I do not see being a lesbian as a political issue. It's not political, it's erotic. It's about love. What is political is the oppression that we suffer because of it and the resistance that we offer. If you are oppressed you fight back, you picket pubs, you caucus in your union. I am rather mistrustful of aspects of the Women's Movement where being lesbian is trendy, taken up as a political stance. The idea of 'any woman can' is nonsense.

What I have found important personally from the Women's Movement has been the opening up of sexual roles, that we do not have to be restricted to narrow stereotypes of butch and femme. I always felt uncomfortable in trying to fit into this kind of role and it did not fit my relationship with

Wendy. So it came as a relief to see that such roles did not matter.

*GL: You seem to see your lesbianism very much on an individualist basis, the making of statements if it seems relevant etc. But surely it is movements that make these interventions possible, that make the statements political and give them strength. I'm a lesbian and live on an estate in Hackney. Living there can be very difficult, people can make life hell. (Marie)*

PA: I suppose I've been lucky as a lesbian. I've never been attacked and I've spent most of my time with people in progressive groups so my lesbianism has never been a great issue. Also my public name has probably given me some safety, especially with the police and in prison with regard to being a lesbian.

*GL: In what terms would you describe your political beliefs and activities?*

PA: I would regard myself as a pacifist and socialist though not a Marxist. I am against privilege and for the public ownership of the means of production but as a pacifist I am against violent revolution in Marxist terms. I do not believe the end justifies the means. This does not mean that pacifism entails just sitting back and making useless protests. It means organising mass movements, campaigns of mass civil disobedience and non-violent resistance. People ask what would one have done in Germany against the Nazis. This is difficult, but one hopes that if a mass movement had been built early enough to oppose racism things would not have happened the way they did. That is why the Anti-Nazi League in the last year has been so important here against the National Front. I also think it is possible to talk to people individually and confront their prejudices. People on an individual level are susceptible to change. I believe in active pacifism. □

## A Response

by Jacky Plaster

Pat Arrowsmith believes that many, if not most, people can be convinced by rational argument and that any use of violence to effect social change is morally unacceptable under any circumstances. If this were true, it would mean that communist, feminist, black and gay liberation movements could achieve their objectives by peaceful means alone. It would also mean that the use of violence would necessarily make the ends worthless.

For instance, we would have to say that the Chinese Communist in achieving their objectives by means including violence, have inevitably rendered meaningless and suspect, the subsequent lives of millions of Chinese women and men, simply because of bloodshed involved in their revolutionary struggle.

Is this position true or tenable?

Granted our aims are desirable, what use is a 'moral' position that refuses the necessary means to achieve them? If it is true that, in many situations at least, civil disobedience and rational persuasion are insufficient, then we have to consider the consequences for the masses of oppressed people of what amounts to tilting at windmills. It might well be greater oppression.

In Britain today, we have capitalist oppression clothed in the ideology of human rights. Space has both been provided by the oppressor and created and used by the oppressed, within which peaceful methods of change have operated with some success. The Welfare State is an outcome of struggle, and even though it operates partly to facilitate capitalism, it is also a substantial gain of working class solidarity. But it may not always be so easy. The new Tory government intends to strengthen the repressive apparatus of the state in order to enforce its policies, which will mean a severe lowering of the standard of living of the mass of people and the destruction of the Welfare State. The erosion of civil liberties (increasingly paid only lip service to by capitalist rhetoric) forces us to reexamine our political practice.



'Morality', our notion of human welfare, always has to be put into context. Without specific and careful analyses of the situations facing us, we are left in an unexamined and ahistorical moral posturing. The probable consequence of such posturing is the pursuit of policies which are inappropriate and harmful to others. We cannot simply respond reactively in our political practice. Adjusting our practice to the anticipated consequences of our proposed actions is quite distinct from an amoral pragmatism; it is a sensitive recognition that the same action, productive in one context, may well be counter productive and harmful in another. (For example: coming out is not self-evidently good in all situations — what would be the result of coming out as gay in our children's infant school tomorrow?)

If our practice damages others, and we fail to reflect on it, then it is dubious whether we are morally intentioned: we must get the facts right, understand what we are doing and adjust our strategies.

Why should it be that physical violence leading to injury and death is an a priori and unacceptable violation of a self evident moral code, valid always and everywhere, and civil disobedience and rational discourse are self evidently morally correct?

There is no pre-given justification for such a position. Both means and ends have to be subjected to criticism in terms of their consequences in specific situations. We must cease to operate with an untheorised moral code.

Further, decisions as to what means one employs are never taken unilaterally, without taking account of the intentions of our enemies and their power to enforce their codes against us. Their is no single mode of rational discourse by whose rules we all abide. Our enemies' 'rationality', however coherent, is predicated on values totally opposed to ours. Not all people wish to negotiate rationally, and there is no necessary connection between 'rationality' and morality; a systematic world-view does not entail a concern for human welfare. The contradiction between us and our enemies is antagonistic, not resolvable by peaceful methods.

"In capitalist society contradiction find expression in acute antagonisms and conflicts, in sharp class struggle: they

cannot be resolved by the capitalist system itself, only by socialist revolution" (p443, 'On the correct handling of contradictions amongst the people' Mao Tse-tung)

What chance would the Chinese Communists have had before 1949 had they followed a pacifist policy? Civil disobedience and rational discourse, have a place, but a necessarily limited one.

Taking away human life should not be done lightly or arbitrarily. But the fact that human life is valued implies that it has the potentiality for high quality. The quality of life has to be fought for as hard as life itself.

These considerations determine how we judge the violence of the Provisional IRA or the violence of the British troops in Ireland. It cannot be violence per se that we attend to, but the meanings that violence is endowed with. We have to look at specific oppressions eg in Ireland that of British imperialism, the church, capital and patriarchy, which specific violences address. How those oppressions interact, what their strengths and weaknesses are how they might respond to specific pressures, all these considerations determine which actions are appropriate.

Many questions need to be asked. Why did the movements in Thirties Germany, communist, gay, feminist so tragically fail to draw sufficient support to resist Nazi power? This question pinpoints where the rational persuasion that Pat Arrowsmith advocates is crucial: the whole area of ideological struggle. Political action by the few, unsupported by the understanding and desire for change of the mass of people, is merely adventurist. Communists must use the democratic methods of persuasion and education, and should on no account resort to commandism or coercion. We have to overcome the internal divisions in the working class — man against woman, white against black, heterosexual against gay. If we cannot end our oppression of each other, if fascist, racist and sexist ideology cannot be overcome by a desire for change and willingness to act by the mass of people then the realisation of a high quality of life is nothing but a dream.

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# Paedophilia ~A Response

by Tom O'Carroll

In my preliminary reply to the Gay Left editorial on paedophilia, I promised a full response, and listed four points which would be its essence. All of these points are *implied* in what follows, but I do not propose to re-iterate them, since -- and I hope I will be forgiven -- I have decided it might be better to tackle the article in a slightly different way, taking *puberty* as a point of departure:

People think of puberty in the way the history books talk about the River Rhine: it is a "natural frontier". Just as the state boundaries of France and Germany might shift back and forth with the fortunes of war, so might ages of consent go up and down by governmental decree; but both phenomena have been thought to bear some loose relationship to important "natural" facts.

Puberty as a "natural frontier" is a concept which has bedevilled the discussion of paedophilia, in the Gay Left deliberations as much as elsewhere. The reason for this is clear enough: it provides a seductively neat, clear mental landmark for the mind to take bearings by — only to point our thinking in a completely inappropriate direction.

At one time, puberty was thought of as *the* great sexual awakening, preceded by childhood innocence. People don't make that mistake these days, least of all GL. As every schoolchild knows (except those crippled by socially induced shame), children are capable of orgasm from infancy onwards,' an ability which is not lost in the Freudian so-called

"latency period". Puberty, *and the years immediately preceding it*,<sup>2</sup> are indeed distinguished in our society by an increase in sexual behaviour, especially in boys, but as a period of awakening it is vastly overrated. Thanks to the cultural repression of their sexuality, girls are in fact more likely to experience orgasm for the first time during, or following, an *adult* sexual relationship' than at puberty.<sup>3</sup>

The myth that children become sexual at puberty has been largely dispelled. Yet a myth closely, indeed inseparably, bound up with this false notion persists, and has evidently played an important part in GL's thinking. I refer to the view that puberty marks a stage at which children cease to be children: that this is the stage at which they become transformed into beings who are somehow able to give an at least quasi-adult consideration to sex — to both its physical and emotional implications.

GL put it thus: "An age of consent, in theory at least, would seem to be meaningful only in the context of an entry into social and sexual maturity, which in turn suggests a relationship to puberty. The problem is that puberty is a process rather than a particular age, occurring roughly between the ages of 11 and 14, though individuals differ greatly in their physical and emotional development at this time. Together with the sexual development of the body it implies a growing awareness of the social world, particularly through greater contact with peers and older children as

sources of education and experience."

There is an important confusion of ideas here. In the first place, puberty is not a process, as is suggested: it means "being functionally capable of procreation" (Concise Oxford Dictionary), neither more nor less. This capability is one with which boys and girls find themselves more or less overnight, although development of the secondary sexual characteristics associated with it (the growth of pubic hair and so on) takes longer, and the period of acquisition is known as "pubescence". It is worth noting the precocious puberty has been known to occur as early as age 5 or 6, in children who show no sign of greater intellectual or emotional maturity than their coevals. (4)

What GL are getting at in their description of "a growing awareness of the social world" and so on, is not puberty at all, but adolescence, which fits the bill by definition: "ADOLESCENT: (Person) growing up, between childhood and manhood, or womanhood" (C.O.D.)

This distinction is not merely a pedantic one. For whereas the word "puberty" has the clear quality of a "natural frontier" about it, with direct reference to physiological changes in the body, the definition of "adolescence" is irritatingly vague. It begs all the important questions about what characterises childhood, as opposed to adulthood. In answering such questions it might be useful to make reference to a young person's demonstrable ability to cope with certain intellectual and moral concepts, à la Piaget, but the crude rule of thumb which settles for vaguely associating puberty with maturity simply fails to stand up to inspection: social workers and others are all too familiar with girls of 18 or 19 years of age (well past puberty) who do not have anything like the maturity needed to cope with having their own baby, and some of them never will have. Others show an impressively "adult" capacity to handle responsibility many years in advance of puberty, especially when the culture in which they are raised expects it of them. "Puberty rites" traditionally delineate an important event insofar as, in primitive societies, a young person's capacity to *reproduce* was of social and economic significance.

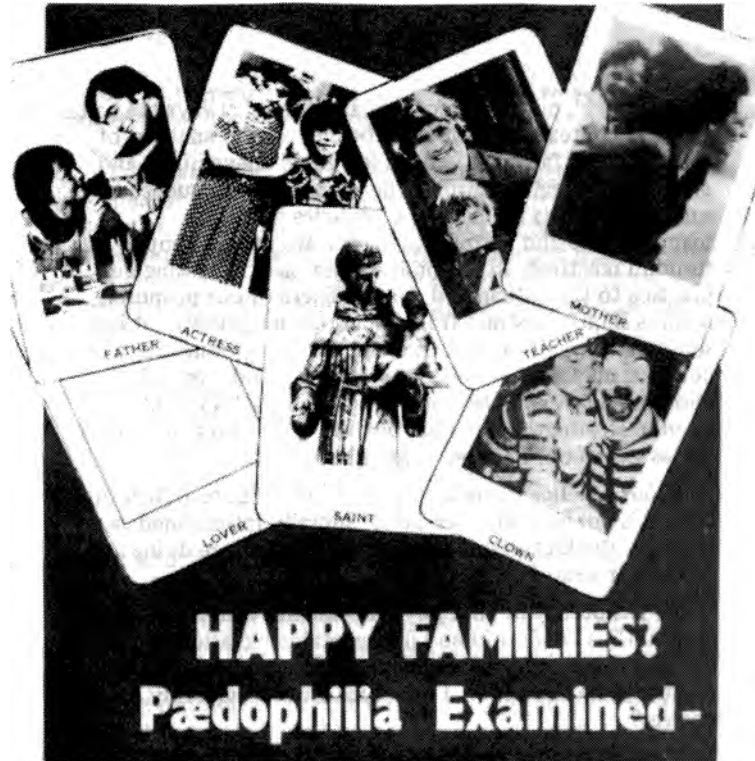
But it is not necessary for arguments relating to paedophilia to become bogged down in the question of "What is maturity", and in ages or stages associated with maturity. The belief that the question is irrelevant clearly marks the dividing line between those who embrace a real change in sexual attitudes and those who do not; between those who look upon sexual feelings positively, as a natural good, and those who can only regard it as an area of special danger and difficulty. In this respect, the issue becomes almost entirely separable from paedophilia as such: it is a much broader one, the resolution of which will profoundly affect every growing child and ultimately the entire quality of society.

## Maturity

Let's try and dispose of the "maturity" red-herring once and for all by a close examination of exactly *why* GL appears to feel it is important. GL isolates two sets of issues:

1. More or less practical matters. GL mentions early pre-pregnancy and VD, though neither is a problem of paedophilia as such: a girl can become pregnant, or catch VD, from a boyfriend of her own age. But, as GL says, this still leaves the question "as to whether children have the emotional resources to deal with paedophile relationships and the emotional crises that can happen".
2. "Consent", which involves "issues of disparity of experience, needs, desires, physical potentialities, emotional resources, sense of responsibility, awareness of the consequences of one's actions, and above all power between adults and children."

Now it makes no sense at all to analyse the above propositions bit by bit, in a myopic, detailed way. To do so would be to miss the wood for the trees -- the "answers" would all be distorted by the obsessions and preconceptions of our own, very particular, society. We need always to look outward, to be aware of the insights we can derive from history and anthropology, and to look forward, to have a conception of the quality of human society we want to build and the imagination to see what may be possible. These



are fundamental, and one would think perhaps too obvious points to labour with the readers of a radical journal, but they are the ones which are often neglected or lost sight of in the paedophilia debate, such as it has been. People have become all too hungup on the here and now; they have become ensnared by the doubts and anxieties which have for the most part attended their own sexual upbringing — and which, by becoming radical gays, they had thought to have cast off, but which in reality still niggle away at some point of subconsciousness.

Let's start by reminding ourselves that "paedophilia" is far from universally stigmatised, or even recognised as a condition needing categorisation. By the pastoral Lepcha people of Sikkim, sexual acts between adults and quite young children, including full coitus with girls of eight or nine, are looked upon indulgently. (5) In some societies, paedophilic acts have a special and institutionalised significance: such as the Aranda aborigines of central Australia, where "paederasty is a recognised custom ... Commonly a man, who is fully initiated but not yet married, takes a boy ten or twelve years old, who lives with him as his wife for several years, until the older man marries." (6) In a very great many cultures it is considered acceptable for adults — usually parents or relations, but not always — to masturbate children.

It may be debatable how far the customs of small and "primitive" peoples have any relevance to economically advanced, sophisticated societies like our own. But what we can be sure of is that our society, thanks partly to the multiple distortions of the personal life that have been engendered by the very factors that have made us "advanced" — the spirit of intense competition and will to dominance and exploitation — is riven with sexual strife, exploitation, neurosis and perversion (and here I use the word in the Stollerian (7) sense, to mean a sex life, like that of many rapists, in which positive hostility towards the sex object plays a major part).

Insofar as economic factors underpin what Reich called "the psychic massacre" (8) of our people (he could just as easily have been describing this country as his own), only

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politico-economic solutions, based on a *libertarian* left approach, offer any hope. But political change does not exist in a vacuum: people are not going to cast off their neuroses, their guilt, their male chauvinism or their female subordination, in response to some alien revolutionary clarion call. Such change is evolutionary, and the evolution that matters is in the minds of little babes in arms and of growing children: only if they grow up feeling good about sex and unprejudiced about gender are they at all likely to reach adulthood psychically intact.

## Without Shame

So far, I daresay, I'm on common ground with GL readers. Why then go over it? Because I feel we need reminding that most people in our culture reach their so-called maturity, whether at puberty or some other time, in a state of total mental muddle about sex. Adolescent boys (if they are "straight") find a massive conflict between their guilt feelings about sex on the one hand and the expectation that they should behave in a "manly", sexually go-getting way on the other -- a crisis which sometimes resolves itself disastrously by a projection of their guilt onto "bad girls" who can be degraded and humiliated at will. Girls, for their part, frequently eschew "dirty" thoughts about sex, in favour of an idealised world of romance, and the absurd search for a "Mr Right", to whom they seek domestic enslavement.

Having said this, it is possible to return to the issues of "maturity", as isolated by GL, with a fresh eye. Let's look again at the question "as to whether children have the emotional resources to deal with paedophile relationships and the emotional crises that can happen". Bearing in mind the points made above, it is possible to see that the question is totally misconceived: people only need great "emotional resources" to cope with "emotional crises" if their upbringing has taken them into adolescence saddled with the sort of monumental sexual hangups that are likely to give



rise to crises. Adolescence is not *necessarily* a time of emotional crisis: witness the idyllic adolescence of the Muria, as described in Elwin's classic study.(9) Children, by contrast — and the younger they are the more this applies — are better equipped to sexually relate to adults with a spontaneous, unproblematic sense of pleasure in our culture, precisely because they are *not* mature: because they are less likely to have been damaged by society's prevailing anti-sexual mores.

Dr Alayne Yates, a psychiatrist who is also the mother of six children, put this point well in her recent revolutionary book, *Sex Without Shame*(10), when she assessed the impact of incest between father and daughter: "The young child who doesn't know that, incest is immoral is both flattered and fascinated. It feels good and gets better with practice ... The girls I have evaluated who were young, uncoerced and initially pleased with the relationship remained emotionally unscathed, even after protracted incest ... Guilt is a relatively late occurrence, often not appearing until early adolescence. When these girls move out into the school and the community, they swiftly form gratifying liaisons with more appropriate males ... " Incest which *starts* in adolescence, however, is much more likely to be accompanied by intense guilt, depression, suicidal tendencies, bitterness and frigidity.

Now, it will be pointed out that children who enter a sexual relationship in the innocence described by Dr Yates i.e. being innocent of sexual shame and guilt, could be in for a rude awakening when a relationship is discovered. This is perfectly true. Guilt, if not taught by parents, tends to be

impressed soon enough by other authority figures. Take the case of Virginia, aged seven, as described by Bender and Blau:

"It was discovered she was making frequent visits to the janitor of the apartment house for sex relations. The relationship included cunnilingualism (sic), mutual masturbation, and fellatio. During this period her aunt also said that she observed her in sex play with a dog."

In hospital she was treated for this strange malady known as sexuality: "at first she discussed her sex experiences freely and shamelessly but" — after being taught shame, one gathers — "she later became more reticent and evasive".(11)

This leaves us with a question. Should we protect children from sex (to avoid the consequences of the guilt and social retribution arising from it) or, alternatively, should we prioritise the diminution of guilt? Knowing the hideous consequences of guilt and the harmlessness of sex, it doesn't seem a particularly difficult question to me.

## Problems

But some will contest my assertion of the "harmlessness" to children of sex per se. Direct physical sources of harm include pregnancy and VD, as already noted. One might ask how far are adolescents in our society mature enough to cope with these problems in a way which children are not? By and large, adolescence is entered into with very little sexual knowledge or experience. Indeed, pregnancy only becomes a problem in the postpubertal years, not beforehand. What we need to work towards is a society in which children arrive at adolescence with plenty of sexual experience: it can only be helpful to a girl newly capable of becoming pregnant if she is not easily "swept off her feet" by the first youth or man who comes along.

The "harmlessness" of sex also depends on what we are talking about when we speak of "sex" itself. Obviously, it would not be harmless for an adult to have anal intercourse or coitus with a toddler, whether or not the infant showed an initial willingness to let the adult attempt intromission. In these circumstances, the argument that the child "doesn't know what he/she is doing" has something to it: there can be no valid consent to a potentially *dangerous* act in the absence of a full understanding of what the act entails.

It is important to understand that although this issue appears to play a prominent part in the minds of those who are appalled by paedophilia, it is really an illusory problem, arising — significantly, in view of all that GL had to say about a conflict in the "meaning" of sex, as between the child's and the adult's understanding of it — from a confusion as to the "meaning" of sex for the *paedophile*. In the older psychiatric texts, paedophiles used to be described as "infantosexual"(12), meaning that as well as being deviant in the preferred sex object, their sexual aim was deviant too, being characterised by an "infantile" preoccupation with foreplay — with gently masturbatory and oral or caressing techniques, rather than with an urge to penetration. It is a pity in a sense that this deviancy of aim is less remarked upon now.

However, the facts, so far as they are available, back up the early clinical impressions. Gebhard et al, in their standard work on male sex offenders(13), found that noncoital sexual activity, mostly manual manipulation of the genitals, accounted for no less than 94% of offences against girls under 12. In offences against boys under 12, an even higher figure, 97%, did not involve anal intercourse, most of the activity being manual-genital (45%) and oral-genital (38%). Gebhard listed separately those offences in which there had been aggression against girls. This was a smaller, but very different group. In these cases, where a degree of violence or intimidation had been used, coitus was attempted in 23% of cases and actually achieved in a further 23%. Interestingly, there were so few examples of aggression against young boys that Gebhard did not feel justified in separating them out as a category. It should also be pointed out that Gebhard's data related to convicted offenders only, so that the cases involved may have been biased towards including a disproportionate number of unsatisfactory ones, in which the child was the



complainant. In cases which do not reach the courts, the proportion of non-penetrative activity may be even higher.

What we are talking about as the activity of most paedophiles, then is touching and licking — the kind of sexual pleasuring that children do among themselves (given a chance) and which is accepted as legitimate for parents in many cultures to do with their children. I have slowly come to believe that PIE's proposals for abolishing the age of consent(14) (these proposals were formulated in 1975) do not take sufficient account of this fact, and I believe a great deal of legitimate concern could be obviated if the issues of full penetrative sex on the one hand and "sex play" on the other could be distinguished and considered separately. For my own part — PIE has yet to deliberate formally on this — I feel it may be both theoretically and practically acceptable to endorse a minimum age for penetrative sex, while allowing other forms of consensual sex at any age.



## Consent

It is not necessary here to discuss specific legal proposals any further. Instead, I want to consider the legitimacy of "consent" to non-penetrative i.e. physically harmless sex, in the light of what GL had to say about sexual "meanings" and issues of relative power and equality between adults and children. Perhaps the most crucial "meaning" of sex to adults is that in our culture it is charged with a tremendous amount of importance: the decision to "consent" or not "consent" is assumed to have enormous consequences and ramifications — a point which has some validity in the context of an unwanted pregnancy or a forcible or damaging penetration, but which extends far beyond this meaning.

The decision to "consent" has overtones in our culture of accepting a commitment, or at least something which is going to very radically and permanently affect one's future life. At one time in "respectable" society the commitment would only have occurred within marriage — a lifelong pair-bond which undoubtedly requires a mature appreciation by both partners of what they are letting themselves in for (a maturity which is often absent among adults even at the highest levels of intelligence and sophistication, and which really presupposes an impossible degree of prescience). Even now, entering a sexual relationship implies for many young people a commitment, if not to marriage, then at least to engagement, or to "going steady". If one accepts the ability to make mature commitments as a necessary basis for consent to sex, then children (plus most adolescents and many adults) have to be ruled out, just as these categories of person cannot enter into financial contracts such as hire-purchase deals, unless their credit rating (reflecting their known maturity in handling money) is good.

But why should the ability to honour commitments be an issue in sexual consent? Why should consent involve, as GL puts it, "a sense of responsibility", or "an awareness of the consequences of one's actions"? If there is no commitment, and no dire consequences, these qualities are quite redundant, and only play a part in our thinking thanks to those vestiges of our anti-sexual culture than continue to lurk at the back of our minds. To children, particularly younger children, sex may mean simply a kind of play, a "game" that makes you feel good, just as hopscotch, or riding on a swing, can be fun in other ways — and they are perfectly able to accept or reject it on this level. They may have some idea from a very early age that sex is "naughty", and this may influence their decision, either by putting them off, or by positively attracting them to the lure of the forbidden. Either way, they have no need to conceptualize sex as other than a "game" in order to play it.

This is not to deny that there is more to sex than just a game, or that children need to grow towards an appreciation of that fact. But let's not forget that even infants — especially infants — experience and know the link between physical intimacy and "emotional" feelings: their earliest notions of parental *love* for children are built around cuddles and caresses. To be *loved*, as opposed to merely *played with*, by a paedophile, need be neither an alien nor alarming phenomenon to the child.

Paedophiles, for their part, often enter the spirit of "playing games" in their relationships with children, just as parents do. This does not mean that they cannot be capable of, and willing to, assume a role involving responsibility — involving an inward commitment, or wish, to care for and cherish a child. In this sense, there may indeed be a disparity of meaning to the relationship, as between what the paedophile feels and what the child feels, just as the parent-child relationship means different things to each party within it. But we do not insist because of this that a child must become grown up before he can "consent" to being nurtured by his parents.

## Disparities

It has been suggested that among the disparities of meaning, of intentionality, between paedophile and child, there are two elements to the adult's "prioritisation" of certain areas of the body and secondly his "fetishism" for a particular age group. Either of these objections could be the subject of a full-length article in itself. But suffice it to say that the first is based on a rather dated, Freudian, conception of the child's psycho-sexual development towards genital gratification, when in fact children of *any* age may be strongly disposed towards specifically genital acts, while the second is based on the idea that paedophiles concern themselves solely with a sexual "symbol", rather than with a whole person, and that this apparently diminished response would appear to impoverish the quality (and/or duration) of the relationship. *A priori*, this may appear to be the case, but this view overlooks the fact that the sexual response of *all* people is reducible to fairly basic symbols (see Colin Wilson's existentialist exposition of this in *Origins of the Sexual Impulse*)(15) and the limitations of the paedophilic response are simply more visible than others. It does not mean that paedophiles are any less able to relate to their sexual partners as *people* — which may mean, and often does mean, continuing a warm social relationship with the young sexual partner well into his/her adulthood.(16)

## Power and Equality

The key issues, however, are those of power and equality, and in this respect the parallels between the paedophilic relationship and the parental one are all important. In the parental setting, disparities of experience and power between adults and their children are taken for granted; it is assumed that these disparities will be used for the benefit of the child rather than to exploit him. Usually, this is the case, but no GL reader needs to be reminded of the failings of the nuclear family and the pathological domination and suffocation — or sheer physical abuse — of many children by their parents. The answer is not to abandon nurturance as such — children

positively *need* to be nurtured by an unequal person (there would be no point in a mother breastfeeding a "baby" as big and strong and independent as herself) - but to think in terms of supporting alternative, less introverted family structures, in which power is spread more broadly, and also to support a notion of children's *rights*, to counterbalance the possibility of arbitrary and exploitative imposition of a parent's will (or the will of any other adult, in a sexual or non-sexual context).

In the case of paedophiles, as opposed to parents, it is assumed -- totally without justification - that any disparities in experience and power will be exercised malevolently, whereas many paedophiles are patently well-disposed, as loving teachers, residential house parents, or simply "friends" to their children, who bring a degree of heart and dedication to their involvement which far exceeds that given by people for whom kids are just another job. Of course, it is not difficult to "prove" the paedophile's malevolence so long as any sexuality between children and adults is defined as bad.

There will be those who find it hard to understand how a *further* unequal relationship can be justified, in addition to that between parent and child. Such an objection is misplaced for a number of reasons, but principally because inequality is at its most powerfully malignant in situations (usually within the family) in which the child has no choice, when the adult in question is able to dictate absolutely the conduct of all aspects of the child's life - what the child will eat, when he/she will go to bed and get up, the type of religious indoctrination to be received, what company the child will keep etc. The paedophile is rarely in such a position of "monopoly control" (a position which is *always* undesirable, irrespective of sex). On the contrary, he is far more likely to represent an *alternative* to the strictures and narrow horizons of the parental home, a broadening of the child's view of the world, a new option, which can be taken or left just as (freer) children *choose* friends among their peers. This element of *choice* has to be at the core of any programme for the development of children's rights; without it, the word "rights" is empty and meaningless.

This is a theme on which it is tempting to write endlessly. But I believe it would be useful to leave the last word to a recent internal discussion document prepared by the Gay Commission of the International Marxist Group(17), which emphasised the need for broadening the base of the child's social experience in the way I have suggested:

"... we should see the involvement of children in the social life of the wider society and the development of relationships with adults as entirely positive ... the involvement of children in adult society will mean that, while children cannot have the same experience as adults, they need not be *systematically deprived* of an understanding of adults, as at present. This means that relationships of adults

to children, including sexual ones, can be on a much more equal basis ... A widening of the scope of relations between adults and children will *inevitably* mean an increase in the incidence of paedophile relationships. We thus see the raising of the taboo on paedophile relationships as being an *integral part* of the liberation of children and of women. Paedophile relationships are not only allowable, they are to a large degree inevitable in a socialist society."

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# Childhood Sexuality & Paedophilia

by Jamie Gough

The editorial on paedophilia in *Gay Left* was a welcome opening up of the discussion in the left press of a previously taboo subject. However, it does not seem to me overall, to provide a good framework for the discussion. In this article, I will try to sketch an alternative.

## 1. The oppression of children as a revolutionary question.

I think that the starting point for the discussion should be a historical materialist analysis of the *social* oppression of children, and of its contradictions; and the perspective that this opens up for the liberation of children.

In the peasant and early petit bourgeois family the child was put to work at the earliest possible age in order to contribute to the collective or private production that the family was engaged in, but work was carried out under the discipline and violence of the father. In the development of industrial capitalism in England, children were increasingly used in factory production, gradually coming under the direct discipline of the capitalist. From the mid-nineteenth century, however, the gradual rise in the real wage, the exhaustion of the reserve army in the countryside, together with a certain pressure from (adult male) working class organisation, meant the removal of children from the workforce. In the latter part of the century, the slackening rate of accumulation produced a parallel decrease in the involvement of women in industrial wage labour. This allowed the re-appearance of the form of the petit bourgeois family out of the decay into which it had fallen during a hundred years of frenzied accumulation. Backed up by an extension of schooling, this structure could meet the need of capital for a more skilled, disciplined and healthier labour force. Thus the creation of the new role for children, the creation of modern 'childhood', coincided with a qualitative intensification of the definition of women as wives and mothers.

By the late nineteenth century the productivity of labour was such that it was technically perfectly possible for the family to begin to wither away, for housework and child care to become a social task, and for the subordination of children to their parents to become obsolete. Only capitalist social relations, with their tendency to privatise responsibility, to atomise the working class, and to keep down the cost of reproducing labour power, prevented this occurring. From now on, *there was the latent possibility of children's liberation*, which could therefore become a political question.

The moral of this is that the oppression of children is not the result of some abstract power of adults over children deriving from their difference in age, strength or social experience, but is a limited historical phenomenon. Moreover, it is now rooted in capitalist social relations. The liberation of children is thus inseparable from the achievement of socialism.

Unfortunately, this is an aspect of the construction of socialism that has received little discussion to date. But some outlines are fairly clear. Children would not be tied, whether legally or socially, to their biological parents, and parents would no longer have the responsibility for the economic maintenance and social care of their children. Rather, this would be the responsibility of the whole community. This does not mean that children would be in nurseries 24 hours a day (as some feminist and socialist writing sometimes tends to imply). Children could be integrated into communal households where they could develop stable relationships with a variety of adults, and where they could choose which adults they wanted to be with. This would lay the basis for attempting to progressively overcome the separation of children and youth from the major social, economic and political institutions of 'adult society'. Thus, schooling would no longer be the confinement of children in the artificial

world of abstract learning, safely away from the world that this learning is supposed to reflect. The struggle for the liberation of children would thus involve not only the moment of separation, of the autonomy of children, but also the moment of integration, of superceding the divide between adult and childhood social institutions.

The removal of the authority of adults over children, and of the special emotional relationships that children are compelled to have with their parents, together with the possibilities for greater autonomy and privacy for children, would allow enormously increased scope for children's sexuality. This is very obviously the case for sexual relations between children. The general changes already outlined imply also a completely different framework for sexual relations between children and adults. Firstly, the involvement of children in adult society will mean that, while children cannot have the same experience as adults, they need not be systematically deprived of an understanding of adults, as at present. Relations between adults and children, including sexual ones, could then be on a much more equal basis. Secondly, within the households or communities of which they are a part, children will have a much greater ability to shape their relationships with the adults than they presently have within the nuclear family.

A third important change will result from the increasing role of men in looking after children in nurseries and 'at home'. Because of the specific role of women in the care of children, women are allowed and, within certain bounds, encouraged to have relationships with children, particularly their own, which are very physical and sexual. (The limits of this would seem to be that where women have relationships with young people that are sexual in adult terms, they are regarded not so much as corrupters of youth but as neurotic.) It is for this reason, as well as the general denial of women's sexuality, that women are very seldom considered as paedophiles or capable of having paedophile relationships. An increasing responsibility of men for child care will mean increasingly physical relationships between men and children and thus a putting into question of the distinction between men and women in this respect. It will also mean that the sexuality of women itself will no longer be denied by the very process of its compulsive focusing onto children.

The intertwined process of children's and women's liberation would therefore inevitably mean a widening of sexual relationships between adults and children. This would, in fact, seem to undermine the existence of paedophiles as a separate group of people. And this change would be inseparable from changes in the sexual identities of (adult) women and men.

## 2. Puberty

In the context of sexual relations, the definition of 'child' is usually now taken (at least among liberals and leftists) as being those before puberty. What marks out puberty, in the first place, is the ability to participate in reproductive sex. While this is a biological given, the importance attached to puberty is *socially* constructed. The possibility of creating and rearing children, and the social relations within which this takes place, remain the core of the family structure and the central sexual-political question. The 'problem' of puberty, presenting itself as the difference of pre- and post-pubertal sexuality, is in fact a political, not a natural one. This point is missed in the editorial. It describes puberty as "the entry into social and sexual maturity . . . Together with the sexual development of the body, it implies a growing awareness of the social world . . ." This definition slides blandly from biology to the social. On this basis, a natural gulf between child and adult sexuality is constructed, one



that in itself makes paedophile relationships "invalid": "The criteria exist for recognising the validity of relationships when there is some approximation of meaning ... We are inclined to believe that this does not usually happen before puberty." This is a central argument of the editorial, but the criterion of "validity" (oppressiveness?) seems to me arbitrary and in fact absurd. It is certainly the case that a sexual relationship between an adult and a child will have a different, socially defined meaning within the life of each. As we have already seen, this meaning is likely to be very different under socialism; but it will still be there. But there is also a systematically different meaning in, for example, sexual relations between adult men and women, and in non-sexual relations between adults and children. Are these, too, "invalid"?

A more substantial problem is that of the degree of understanding of the meaning of the relationship for the other. We have already seen how society mystifies paedophile relations for both adults and children. The understanding in each case will vary enormously, depending on the individuals. But this is in any case not a firm foundation on which to legislate, either literally or morally.

### 3. Consent

The real problem is not one of puberty, or of meanings, but of power to coerce. Here again, the editorial takes a rather naturalistic view: " 'Consent' has different meanings for children and adults." In the sense that children express consent in different ways, and have different social opportunities to consent, this is true. For instance, in some situations children will be afraid to express disapproval of what adults do; in others they will express disapproval directly where an adult would be embarrassed to do so, or be unable to conceal their feelings. But what appears to be meant is that our (adult) conception of consenting simply does not apply to children.

I think that this is simply the conventional view, which is at the centre of the oppression of children, that children do not and cannot know their own minds. The point here is not at all to understate the social power of adults to manipulate children. But precisely because that power is social, it has cracks in it. Only the most oppressed children are really unable to show to adults their consent for or against things that they do with those adults, whether sexual or not. Children can, and even now do, seek out and find things that correspond partially to their needs. There are sexual relationships between adults and children to which the children manifestly consent, for instance where they go to great lengths to continue the relationship, or where they have actually initiated it. In concrete instances, the question of consent cannot be judged *a priori*. All forms of social power contain contradictions; if they did not, there would not only be no possibility of revolution, there would be no possibility of even thinking of one's own oppression.

### 4. The state and the law

But what of the use by adults, this side of socialism, of their power to coerce children? Does this not require an age of consent in the law at least until that time?

First, it is necessary to point out how little the law does to protect children from harassment. For instance, by far the most common form of sexual coercion of children is of a girl by her father. But the girl is effectively prevented even from going to the police not only by the fear of and moral blackmail from the father, but because the result would simply be for her to be taken into care, that is, imprisoned.

In fact, the law not only does not protect, it exacerbates the problem. There is, of course, a whole battery of legislation that effectively makes children and young people the prisoner and possession of their parents. But the law of the age of consent plays a particularly important role within this. First it implies that children do not have any 'real' sexuality (and conversely, that only reproductive sexuality is 'the real thing').

But children's sexuality is not simply non-existent — it is also dangerous! The law implies that children are not really

capable of consenting in an area where their strongest feelings are involved, and by extension, in all areas which are of greatest importance to the child itself. Secondly, the 1885 legislation was seen at the time as being a way of emphasising the importance of male protection to women: girls would be protected from men, especially at work, up to the age of 16, when they would require the 'protection' of a husband. This moral still has force today. Thirdly, the law prevents people under the age of consent from obtaining contraception and abortion, since they could only want these things for illegal acts. Fourthly, the law mystifies sex to children. 'Sex education', even at its best, does not, and cannot at the moment, tell children anything about their own sexuality. What it tells them about adult sexuality is totally abstract, since if this were portrayed concretely it would imply a real exposure of children to it, a sort of paedophilia-in-thought. All this actually makes it much harder to a child to discuss a sexual relationship with an adult that it may have or have had, because it is dealing with something which has been rendered mysterious and which seems to be a cause for shame. This, of course, increases the possibility of exploitation. Finally, the actual application of the law terrorises children. The police use all the powers at their command to extort 'confessions'; and the court proceedings teach the children that they have been involved in something dirty, whether or not that was their estimation at the time.

The law, and the court cases that the press goes to such lengths to dramatise, are thus a very important part of the way in which children's continued subordination is ensured. It is therefore nonsensical to argue on the one hand for measures to liberate children, and on the other to support their continued 'protection' by the law of the age of consent. What is necessary at the level of the law is a prohibition of assault of demonstrable coercion.

We should be clear, however, what the limitations of such a change in the law would be if not accompanied by the wider social process of the liberation of children discussed earlier. Only a complete change in the social position of children can effectively prevent their sexual coercion by adults. The solution of the editorial here is hopelessly inadequate and liberal: it proposes "providing the maximum social means of *protecting* the child. In this situation the responsibility of paedophiles would have a major part to play" (my emphasis).

Moreover, under the present form of the state, it is guaranteed that in the actual *application* of the law nothing would change. In cases where the child has consented, the police, judiciary, and in many cases the parents would do everything to ensure that the 'child molester' was convicted. The state apparatus would still be dominated by a class that had an interest in the perpetuation of children's oppression. The editorial, however, argues that an age of consent of 14 might "be enforced outside of criminal law (?) in special children's courts which would deal with all sorts of children's rights outside the bureaucratic disaster of present legal interventions in this area." The problem, though, is not bureaucracy but the class nature of the state. Once again, the question of child sexuality points to the need for a socialist revolution.

This is not at all to say, though, that a campaign against the age of consent law is not important. A campaign led by young people themselves would be a very sharp way of challenging the whole reactionary ideology that surrounds child sexuality. It is never too soon to start to do this!

### 5. Conclusion

I have argued that it is vital to see this issue in its class context, to see its place in the contradictory structures of society as a whole and its relation to the power of the ruling class. Seen in this way, it is evident that the questions of child sexuality and paedophilia cannot be solved except by a massive social and political struggle. This is in the first place the struggle of young people themselves, whose rebellion has made child sexuality a political issue.

The oppression of children and young people, and in a secondary way that of paedophiles, is a cruel oppression, and the struggle against it cannot be 'managed' or postponed. □

# In Defence of Disco

by Richard Dyer

All my life I've liked the wrong music. I never liked Elvis and rock 'n' roll; I always preferred Rosemary Clooney. And since I became a socialist, I've often felt virtually terrorised by the prestige of rock and folk on the left. How could I admit to two Petula Clark L.P.s in the face of miners' songs from the North East and the Rolling Stones? I recovered my nerve partially when I came to see show biz type music as a key part of gay culture, which, whatever its limitations, was a culture to defend. And I thought I'd really made it when turned on to Tamla Motown, sweet soul sounds, disco. Chartbusters already, and I like them! Yet the prestige of folk and rock, and now punk and (rather patronisingly, I think) reggae, still holds sway. It's not just that people whose politics I broadly share don't *like* disco, they manage to imply that it is politically beyond the pale to like it. It's against this attitude that I want to defend disco (which otherwise, of course, hardly needs any defence).

I'm going to talk mainly about disco *music*, but there are two preliminary points I'd like to make. The first is that disco is more than just a form of music, although certainly the music is at the heart of it. Disco is also kinds of dancing, club, fashion, film etc.; -- in a word, a certain *sensibility*, manifest in music, clubs etc., historically and culturally specific, economically, technologically, ideologically and aesthetically determined -- and worth thinking about. Secondly, as a sensibility in music it seems to me to encompass more than what we would perhaps strictly call disco music, to include a lot of soul, Tamla and even the later work of mainstream and jazz artistes like Peggy Lee and Johnny Mathis.

My defense is in two parts. First, a discussion of the arguments against disco in terms of its being 'capitalist' music. Second, an attempt to think through the -- ambivalently, ambiguously, contradictorily -- positive qualities of disco.

## Disco and Capital

Much of the hostility to disco stems from the equation of it with capitalism. Both in how it is produced and in what it expresses, disco is held to be irredeemably capitalistic.

Now it is unambiguously the case that disco is produced by capitalist industry, and since capitalism is an irrational and inhuman mode of production, the disco industry is as bad as all the rest. Of course. However, this argument has assumptions behind it that are more problematic. These are of two kinds. One assumption concerns *music as a mode of production*, and has to do with the belief that it is possible in a capitalist society to produce things (e.g. music, e.g. rock and folk) that are outside of the capitalist mode of production. Yet quite apart from the general point that such a position seeks to elevate activity outside of existing structures rather than struggles against them, the two kinds of music most often set against disco as a mode of production are not really convincing.

One is folk music -- in this country, people might point to Gaelic songs and industrial ballads -- the kind of music often used, or reworked, in left fringe theatre. These, it is argued, are not, like disco (and pop music in general), produced for the people but by them. They are 'authentic' people's music. So they are -- or rather, were. The problem is that we don't live in a society of small technologically simple, communities such as produce such art. Preserving such music at best gives us a historical perspective on peasant and working class struggle, at worst leads to a nostalgia for a simple, harmonious community existence that never even existed. More bluntly, songs in Gaelic or dealing with nineteenth century factory conditions, beautiful as they are, don't mean much to most English speaking people today.



Village People

The other kind of music most often posed against disco and 'pop' at the level of how it is produced is rock (including Dylan-type folk and everything from early rock 'n' roll to progressive concept albums). The argument here is that rock is easily produced by non-professionals -- all that is needed are a few instruments and somewhere to play -- whereas disco music requires the whole panoply of recording studio technology, which makes it impossible for non-professionals (the kid in the streets) to produce. The factual accuracy of this observation needs supplementing with some other observations. Quite apart from the very rapid but then bemoaned by some purists -- move of rock into elaborate recording studios, even when it is simply, producible by non-professionals, the fact is that rock is still quite expensive, and remained in practice largely the preserve of middle-class who could afford electric guitars, music lessons etc. (You have only to look at the biographies of those now professional rock musicians who started out in a simple non-professional way the preponderance of public school and university educated young men in the field is rivalled only by their preponderance in the Labour Party cabinet.) More importantly, this kind of music production is wrongly thought of as being generated from the grass roots (except perhaps at certain key historical moments) -- non-professional music making, in rock as elsewhere, bases itself, inevitably, on professional music. Any notion that rock emanates from 'the people' is soon confounded by the recognition that what 'the people' are doing is trying to be as much like professionals as possible.

The second kind of argument based on the fact that disco is produced by capitalism concerns *music as an ideological expression*. Here it is assumed that capitalism as a mode of production necessarily and simply produces 'capitalist' ideology. The theory of the relation between the mode of production and the ideologies of a particular society is too complicated and unresolved to be gone into here, but we can begin by remembering that capitalism is about profit. In the language of classical economics, capitalism produces commodities, and its interest in commodities is their exchange-value (how much profit they can realise) rather than their use-value (their social or human worth). This becomes particularly problematic for capitalism when dealing with an expressive commodity -- such as disco -- since a



## The Characteristics of Disco

Let me turn now to what I consider to be the three important characteristics of disco — eroticism, romanticism, and materialism. I'm going to talk about them in terms of what it seems to me they mean within the context of gay culture. These three characteristics are not in themselves good or bad (any more than disco music as a whole is), and they need specifying more precisely. What is interesting is how they take us to qualities that are not only key ambiguities within gay male culture, but have also traditionally proved stumbling blocks to socialists.

### *Eroticism*

It can be argued that all popular music is erotic. What we need to define is the specific way of thinking and feeling erotically in disco. I'd like to call it 'whole body' eroticism, and to define it by comparing it with the eroticism of the two kinds of music to which disco is closest — popular song (i.e., the Gershwin, Cole Porter, Burt Bacharach type of song) and rock.

Popular song's eroticism is 'disembodied': it succeeds in expressing a sense of the erotic which yet denies eroticism's physicality. This can be shown by the nature of tunes in popular songs and the way they are handled.

Popular song's tunes are rounded off, closed, self-contained. They achieve this by adopting a strict musical structure (AABA) in which the opening melodic phrases are returned to and, most importantly, the tonic note of the whole song is also the last note of the tune. (The tonic note is the note that forms the basis for the key in which the song is written; it is therefore the harmonic 'anchor' of the tune and closing on it gives precisely a feeling of 'anchoring', coming to a settled stop.) Thus although popular songs often depart — especially in the middle section (B) — from their melodic and harmonic beginnings, they also always return to them. This gives them — even at their most passionate, say, Porter's 'Night and Day' — a sense of security and containment. The tune is not allowed to invade the whole of one's body. Compare the typical disco tune, which is often little more than an endlessly repeated phrase which drives beyond itself, is not 'closed off'. Even when disco music uses a popular song standard, it often turns it into a simple phrase. Gloria Gaynor's version of Porter's 'I've got you under my skin', for instance, is in large part a chanted repetition of 'I've got you'.

Popular song's lyrics place its tunes within a conceptualisation of love and passion as emanating from 'inside', the heart or the soul. Thus the yearning cadences of popular song express an erotic yearning of the inner person, not the body. Once again, disco refuses this. Not only are the lyrics often more directly physical and the delivery more raunchy (e.g. Grace Jones' 'I need a man'), but, most importantly, disco is insistently rhythmic in a way that popular song is not.

major problem for capitalism is that there is no necessary or guaranteed connection between exchange-value and use-value in other words, capitalism as productive relations can just as well make a profit from something that is ideologically opposed to bourgeois society as something that supports it. As long as a commodity makes a profit, what does it matter? (I should like to acknowledge my debt to Terry Lovell for explaining this aspect of capitalist cultural production to me.) Indeed, it is because of this dangerous, anarchic tendency of capitalism that ideological institutions — the church, the state, education, the family etc. — are necessary. It is their job to make sure that what capitalism produces is in capitalism's longer term interests. However, since they often don't know that that is their job, they don't always perform it. Cultural production within capitalist society is then founded on two profound contradictions — the first, between production for profit and production for use; the second, within those institutions whose job it is to regulate the first contradiction. What all this boils down to, in terms of disco, is that the fact that disco is produced by capitalism does not mean that it is automatically, necessarily, simply supportive of capitalism. Capitalism constructs the disco experience, but it does not necessarily know what it is doing, apart from making money.

I am not now about to launch into a defence of disco music as some great subversive art form. What the arguments above lead me to is, first, a basic point of departure in the recognition that cultural production under capitalism is necessarily contradictory, and, secondly, that it may well be the case that capitalist cultural products are most likely to be contradictory at just those points — such as disco — where they are most commercial and professional, where the urge to profit is at its strongest. Thirdly, this mode of cultural production has produced a commodity, disco, that has been taken up by gays in ways that may well not have been intended by its producers. The anarchy of capitalism throws up commodities that an oppressed group can take up and use to cobble together its own culture. In this respect, disco is very much like another profoundly ambiguous aspect of male gay culture, camp. It is a 'contrary' use of what the dominant culture provides, it is important in forming a gay identity, and it has subversive potential as well as reactionary implications.



Donna Summer



Rhythm, in Western music, is traditionally felt as being more physical than other musical elements such as melody, harmony and instrumentation. This is why Western music is traditionally so dull rhythmically — nothing expresses our Puritan heritage more vividly. It is to other cultures that we have had to turn — and above all to Afro-American culture — to learn about rhythm. The history of popular song since the late nineteenth century is largely the history of the white incorporation (or ripping off) of black music — ragtime, the Charleston, the tango, swing, rock 'n' roll, rock. Now what is interesting about this incorporation/ripping-off is what it meant and means. Typically, black music was thought of by the white culture as being both more primitive and more 'authentically' erotic. Infusions of black music were always seen as (and often condemned as) sexual and physical. The use of insistent black rhythms in disco music, recognisable by the closeness of the style to soul and reinforced by such characteristic features of black music as the repeated chanted phrase and the use of various African percussion instruments, means that it inescapably signifies (in this white context) physicality.

However, rock is as influenced by black music as disco is. This then leads me to the second area of comparison between disco's eroticism and rock's. The difference between them lies in what each 'hears' in black music. Rock's eroticism is thrusting, grinding — it is not whole body, but phallic. Hence it takes from black music the insistent beat and makes it even more driving; rock's repeated phrases trap you in their relentless push, rather than releasing you in an open-ended succession of repetitions as disco does. Most revealing perhaps in rock's instrumentation. Black music has more percussion instruments than white, but it knows how to use them to create all sorts of effect — light, soft, lively, as well as heavy, hard and grinding. Rock, however, only hears the latter and develops the percussive qualities of essentially non-percussive instruments to increase this, hence the twanging electric guitar and the nasal vocal delivery. One can see how, when rock 'n' roll first came in, this must have been a tremendous liberation from popular song's disembodied eroticism — here was a really physical music, and not just mealy mouthedly physical, but quite clear what it was about — cock. But rock confines sexuality to cock (and this is why, no matter how progressive the lyrics and even when performed by women, rock remains indelibly phallic-centric music). Disco music, on the other hand, hears the physicality in black music and its range. It achieves this by a number of features including — the sheer amount going on rhythmically in even quite simply disco music (for rhythmic clarity with complexity, listen to the full length version of the Temptations' 'Papa was a Rolling Stone'); the willingness to play with rhythm, delaying it, jumping it, countering it rather than simply driving on and on (examples — Patti Labelle, Isaac Hayes); the range of percussion instruments used and with different affects (e.g. the spiky violins in Quincy Jones/Herbie Hancock's 'Tell Me a Bedtime Story'; the gentle pulsations of George Benson). This never stops being erotic, but it restores eroticism to the whole of the body, and for both sexes, not just confining it to the penis. It leads to the expressive, sinuous movement of disco dancing, not just that mixture of awkwardness and thrust so dismally characteristic of dancing to rock.

Gay men do not intrinsically have any prerogative over whole body eroticism. We are often even more cock-oriented than non-gays of either sex, and it depresses me that such phallic forms of disco as Village People should be so gay identified. Nonetheless, partly because many of us have traditionally not thought of ourselves as being 'real men' and partly because gay ghetto culture is also a space where alternative definitions, including of sexuality can be developed, it seems to me that the importance of disco in scene culture indicates an openness to a sexuality that is not defined in terms of cock. Although one cannot easily move from musical values to personal ones, or from personal ones to politically effective ones, it is at any rate suggestive that gay culture should promote a form of music that denies the centrality of the phallus while at the same time refusing the non-physicality which such a denial has hitherto implied.

## Romanticism

Not all disco music is romantic. The lyrics of many disco hits are either straightforwardly sexual — not to say sexist — or else broadly social (e.g. Detroit Spinners' 'Ghetto Child', Stevie Wonder's 'Living in the City'), and the hard drive of Village People or Labelle is positively anti-romantic. Yet there is nonetheless a strong strain of romanticism in disco. This can be seen in the lyrics, which often differ little from popular song standards, and indeed often are standards (e.g. 'What a Difference a Day Made' — Esther Phillips, 'la Vie en Rose' — Grace Jones). More impressively, it is the instrumentation and arrangements of disco music that are so romantic.

The use of massed violins takes us straight back, via Hollywood, to Tchaikovsky, to surging, outpouring emotions. A brilliant example is Gloria Gaynor's 'I've got you under my skin', where in the middle section the violins take a hint from one of Porter's melodic phrases and develop it away from his tune in an ecstatic, soaring movement. This 'escape' from the confines of popular song into ecstasy is very characteristic of disco music, and nowhere more consistently than in such Diana Ross classics as 'Reach Out' and 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough'. This latter, with its lyrics total surrender to love, its heavenly choir and sweeping violins, is perhaps one of the most extravagant reaches of disco's romanticism. But Ross is also a key figure in the gay appropriation of disco.

What Ross' record do — and I'm thinking basically of her work up to *Greatest Hits* volume 1 and the *Touch Me in the Morning* album — is express the intensity of fleeting emotional contacts. They are all-out expressions of adoration which yet have built in to them the recognition of the (inevitably) temporary quality of the experience. This can be a straightforward lament for having been let down by a man, but more often it is both a celebration of a relationship and the almost willing recognition of its passing and the exquisite pain of its passing — 'Remember me/As a sunny day/That you once had/Along the way', 'If I've got to be strong/Don't you know I need to have tonight when you're gone/When



Grace Jones

you go I'll lie here/And think about/the last time that you/ 'Touch me in the morning'. This last number, with Ross' 'unreally' sweet, porcelain fragile voice and the string backing, concentrates that sense of celebrating the intensity of the passing relationship that haunts so much of her work. No wonder Ross is (was?) so important in gay male scene culture, for she both reflects what that culture takes to be an inevitable reality (that relationships don't last) and at the same time celebrates it, validates it.

Not all disco music works in this vein, yet in both some of the more sweetly melancholy orchestrations (even of lively numbers, like 'You Should Be Dancing' in *Saturday Night Fever*) and some of the lyrics and general tone (e.g. Donna Summer's *Four Seasons of Love* album), there is a carry over of this emotional timbre. At a minimum, the, disco's romanticism provides an embodiment and validation of an aspect of gay culture.

But romanticism is a particularly paradoxical quality of art to come to terms with. Its passion and intensity embody or create an experience that negates the dreariness of the mundane and everyday. It gives us a glimpse of what it means to live at the height of our emotional and experiential capacities — not dragged down by the banality of organised routine life. Given that everyday banality, work, domesticity, ordinary sexism and racism, are rooted in the structures of class and gender of this society, the flight from that banality can be seen as — is — a flight from capitalism and patriarchy themselves as lived experiences.

What makes this more complicated is the actual situation within which disco occurs. Disco is part of the wider to-and-fro between work and leisure, alienation and escape, boredom and enjoyment that we are so accustomed to (and which *Saturday Night Fever* plugs into so effectively). Now this to-and-fro is partly the mechanism by which we keep going, at work, at home — the respite of leisure gives us the energy for work, and anyway we are still largely brought up to think of leisure as a 'reward' for work. The circle locks us into it. But what happens in that space of leisure can be profoundly significant — it is there that we may learn about an alternative to work and to society as it is. Romanticism is one of the major modes of leisure in which this sense of an alternative is kept alive. Romanticism asserts that the limits of work and domesticity are not the limits of experience.

I don't say that the passion and intensity of romanticism is a political ideal we could strive for — I doubt that it is humanly possible to live permanently at that pitch. What I do believe is that the movement between banality and something 'other' than banality is an essential dialectic of society, a constant keeping open of a gap between what is and what could or should be. Herbert Marcuse in the currently unfashionable *One-Dimensional Man* argues that our society tries to close that gap, to assert that what is all that there could be, is what should be. For all its commercialism and containment within the work:leisure to-and-fro, I think disco romanticism is one of the things that can keep the gap open, that can allow the *experience of contradiction* to continue. Since I also believe that political struggle is rooted in experience (though utterly doomed if left at it), I find this dimension of disco potentially positive. (A further romantic/utopian aspect of disco is realised in the non-commercial discos organised by gay and women's groups. Here a moment of community can be achieved, often in circle dances or simply in the sense of knowing people as people, not anonymous bodies. Fashion is less important, and sociability correspondingly more so. This can be achieved in smaller clubs, perhaps especially outside the centre of London, which, when not just grotty monuments to self-oppression, can function as supportive expressions of something like a gay community.)

### Materialism

Disco is characteristic of advanced capitalist societies simply in terms of the scale of money squandered on it. It is a riot of consumerism, dazzling in its technology (echo chambers, double and more tracking, electric instruments), overwhelming in its scale (banks of violins, massed choirs, the limitless range of percussion instruments), lavishly gaudy

in the mirrors and tat of discotheques, the glitter and denim flash of its costumes. Its tacky sumptuousness is well evoked in *Thank God It's Friday*. Gone are the restraint of popular song, the sparseness of rock and reggae, the simplicity of folk. How can a socialist, or someone trying to be a feminist, defend it?

In certain respects, it is doubtless not defensible. Yet socialism and feminism are both forms of materialism — why is disco, a celebration of materiality if ever there was one, not therefore the appropriate art form of materialist politics?

Partly, obviously, because materialism in politics is not to be confused with mere matter. Materialism seeks to understand how things are in terms of how they have been produced and constructed in history, and how they can be better produced and constructed. This certainly does not mean immersing oneself in the material world — indeed, it includes deliberately stepping back from the material world to see what makes it the way it is and how to change it. Yes, but, materialism is also based on the profound conviction that politics is about the material world, and indeed that human life and the material world are all there is, no God, no magic forces. One of the dangers of materialist politics is that it is in constant danger of spiritualising itself, partly because of the historical legacy of the religious forms that brought materialism in existence, partly because materialists have to work so hard not to take matter at face value that they often end up not treating it as matter at all. Disco's celebration of materiality is only a celebration of the world we are necessarily and always immersed in; — and disco's materiality, in technological modernity, is resolutely historical and cultural — it can never be, as most art claims for itself, an 'emanation' outside of history and of human production.

Disco's combination of romanticism and materialism effectively tell us — let's us experience — that we live in a world of materiality, that we can enjoy materiality but that the experience of materiality is not necessarily what the everyday world assures us it is. Its eroticism allows us to rediscover our bodies as part of this experience of materiality and the possibility of change.

If this sounds over the top, let one thing be clear — disco can't change the world, make the revolution. No art can do that, and it is pointless expecting it to. But partly by opening up experience, partly by changing definitions, art, disco, can be used. To which one might risk adding the refrain — If it feels good, *use* it.



Peter Straker



# Living With Indecency

by Bob Cant

I entered the cottage at about 3.25am. I stood next to a man who was already there. There was neither physical contact nor eye contact between us. I may well have been fantasising but I was so drunk that I cannot remember if I was. Two or three minutes later three policemen entered from both ends of the toilet. We were charged with gross indecency. Eleven months later, after a four day trial in a Crown Court, the judge instructed the jury to acquit us on the grounds that the police evidence was 'unsafe and unsatisfactory'. The following is an account of some of the things I experienced and learned in that eleven month period.

My immediate responses were very contradictory. As soon as the police came into the cottage I went along with them quietly and obediently, almost like a lamb. It would have been stupid to try to escape but I never even thought of it. I made no sound of protest. I knew perfectly well what was happening and showed neither surprise nor anger. The police evidence later said that I looked 'sheepish' and that was certainly how I felt. I was in complete awe of the forces of the state.

But within two minutes, by the time I was in the police van, I was determined to plead not guilty. I had no idea of what that would entail but I wasn't giving in. As a trade unionist activist, I'm fairly used to standing up to authority and that trade union consciousness made me determined to fight. In the police station I made it clear that I would defend my innocence. I tried, as I was legally entitled to do, to stop them taking my fingerprints. I only agreed when they made it clear they would keep me inside until a court gave them permission to take them. When I realised they were searching me for what they called 'traces of homosexuality' I told them I was gay because I felt I would have to argue that my sexuality was irrelevant to their case. I asked a police officer to stop using the word 'queer' in my presence.

## Fear and Isolation

These contradictions continued throughout the whole period before the trial. On the one hand I was prepared to conform with certain demands made on me by society because I did not want its disapproval; on the other hand, I was going to fight every inch of the way over the case itself, and for my job, if convicted. That tension, between my need for acceptance and my sense of militancy, nearly tore me apart.

One of the most predominant feelings I had was one of fear. I was terrified to go out, at first. I wouldn't, of course, go near a public toilet. I wouldn't even stay on the same side of the street as a policeman. I also found it difficult in supermarkets because I felt that I looked so guilty that store detectives would be bound to watch me. I met no-one else who had fought and won such a case and that simply intensified the feeling that my whole view of the world was becoming incomprehensible to everyone else. I felt more and more isolated and in danger of losing contact with everyone around me. My sense of panic increased along with the isolation and a lot of the time I felt I was clutching at fog. One morning at 4 or 5 o'clock after drinking a bottle of whisky, smashing some crockery, playing Billie Holliday to the whole street and screaming hysterically I was eventually able to tell the friend who was with me that I was terrified of being alone. It seems banal to say that, but as the world I knew slipped away from me I thought I would never be able to return to it. I saw myself as always alone and rejected.

It was to compensate for this fear of being alone that made me adhere to most of my old routines (eg work) in a very rigid way. I found their familiarity very comforting. It also helped me to tell people about my arrest and I talked over the whole thing again and again with anyone who would listen. But my other great fear was not helped by talking for I could not express it even to myself. In the event of being found guilty, the case would probably be reported in the local paper. Because I'm a teacher the local paper near my college might well have published the story. And if my trial took place in a thin week for news, it might even be reported in the national press. (The *Daily Mirror* recently published the name and address of a head teacher convicted on a similar charge.) How would I deal with being known as a man who allegedly went cottaging? How would I deal with remarks on the street in the working-class community where I live? How would I face students, many of whom are unsure of their own sexuality but nonetheless very conventional? How would I face my colleagues at work and in the trade union movement? If I hadn't come out already it is just inconceivable as to how I might have dealt with it. Even so, I was absolutely terrified of a situation where my alleged sexual behaviour and fantasies would be a subject of public discussion.



## Face to Face with Myself

All this forced me to reconsider the way I saw my own gayness. Since I came out, I had always been very public in my gayness. I had come out to all my old friends and I had come out to the people I worked with. I had campaigned on the gay question in the International Socialists and in my union. All but the first of the gay groups I had been involved in had had a very public function — campaigning, writing and so on. But by the time I came out I was 26, at work and had been passing as heterosexual for many years. I had always had to argue for acceptance and had seldom felt myself to be in a position where I could assert my gay identity as I wanted for I always had to think of the consequences. However brave I may have been I had been able to ignore certain aspects of gay liberation; there was no sense in which my heterosexually-learned patterns of behaviour had been challenged on a day to day basis.

Much of this related to the way I had chosen to live with other people. In the six years since I came out I had chosen to live in households whose occupants included two children, eleven heterosexual adults and three gay adults. It was only a month before my arrest that I had begun to live with a lesbian and a gay man. The straight people I lived with could not have been more supportive of my attempts to establish a gay identity; but they would not challenge me in the way other gay people might have done. The result was that, unchallenged, I had retained many of my old heterosexual assumptions about the way that one person might relate to another. A bit of me was still monogamous enough to believe that some day a knight in shining armour would come and do wonderful things for me. And until that time there were certain 'dark and shameful secrets' that I would keep hidden — even from myself. Only *he* would help me explore them; only *he* would absolve that guilt for me. The adolescent fears and fantasies about homosexuality which I had had in the 50s were unexplored and unexpressed. Given this sudden smashing of my confidence, I found myself face to face with this hideous mess.

The way I had previously failed to acknowledge these fantasies made it even more difficult for me to deal with the fact that they were becoming public knowledge. For twenty years I had harboured fantasies about seeing/touching a moving cock such as would be possible in a cottage. (The motion is what is important; the static nature of pornography leaves me completely cold.) For twenty years I had refused to accept the fact that the first place where I had realised that I could see such cocks was a public toilet. Consequently, I had refused to accept that going into a cottage would be a search for a repetition of that first voyeuristic, sexual experience. Seeing and fantasising about what I might see were the important things and that was why I had never had sex with a man in a cottage. But in the process of coming to terms with these un-exotic fantasies I nearly destroyed myself. My anxiety and paranoia became hyper-anxiety and hyper-paranoia. I was in the grip of an incomprehensible fury. Some of the time these emotions were released through contact with the two men I was/am closest to. I suppose I can feel pleased about the fact that I never felt violent towards them; there certainly wasn't much else to feel pleased about. But under this duress I slowly began to realise that no-one could help me explore my fears and fantasies unless I *really* began to explore them myself. I realised that I had to be the knight in shining armour myself.

Another important part of the self-knowledge I gained in this period was about my sense of security. It depended on things like having the *Guardian* delivered, going to the pub every day, going to the cinema, eating out, buying books, going on holidays abroad. It was a security which was based on things external to me — things which resulted from the fact that (unlike most of the world's population) I had a pleasant, well-paid job and a comfortable standard of living. As I reflected on the possibility of losing the case, losing my job, undergoing a massive drop in my standard of living, I panicked. There were other things to keep me going, but I was no longer sure of what they were.

## Solidarity

I had to do something to relieve these tensions and so I took up swimming and dancing. There's nothing to say about the swimming except that I enjoyed it. But the dancing was important for a number of reasons. It became a ritualised way in which I could express the violence I felt about my situation. But it also opened up to me a whole new world — the world of the gay ghetto. I had come out into the gay movement and had never been part of or dependent on the ghetto. I had really only used it when I wanted to pick up

someone. My expectations in that area had been confined purely to casual sex — since most of the men I had been involved with on any other level I had met through the gay movement. But now through going to a gay club and dancing a lot (often on my own), I discovered features of the gay ghetto previously unknown to me. The group of people I got to know through dancing were warm and supportive and yet unquestioning. The few glimpses I had of their often alien political views did not prevent me from recognising their warmth and responding in a similar vein. I discovered that the ghetto/commercial scene was more than just a creation of the breweries and other entrepreneurs. For some, it was the gay community. It was the only place where they could begin to be themselves. Outside its doors the world was cold and oppressive. I do not in fact hold with this analysis but for the first time I identified and understood what I had disparagingly seen as a closeted existence. The rest of the world was unbearable, but for these few hours on a Friday or Saturday night the world was ours. We were all in the same boat. At such points I could have become a gay separatist. The way I had tried to persuade others of the reasonableness of my life-style now seemed an irrelevant gesture. The only thing that mattered then was to build a way of living that was acceptable to me along with people whose situation was similar to my own.

This was not, of course, the only form of solidarity which I experienced. The people I lived with and one other man friend were remarkable in their patience and love. On some occasions when I became really unbearable they told me so and their criticism helped me to feel that I was still human. The fact that I had responsibilities to others enabled me to perceive of myself as more than just an object of pity. There was, too, a strong clearly articulated sense of support from the people I worked with, and when I couldn't cope they coped for me. I also got a great deal of support from the gay group in my union. A group of both women and men, they allowed me to ramble on about some of my fears at their meetings. That in its turn made me feel secure enough in that group to participate in their other discussions and activities. The presence of women in the group was probably important inasmuch as their feminist politics may have made it more acceptable that I should talk about my fears without threatening the function of the group.

The other gay group to which I belonged was *Gay Left* and they responded rather differently. Apart from a six month break prior to my arrest, I had been in this group for nearly three years, since its foundation. It had been successful in what it had set out to do and it had enabled me to be more creative than I have ever felt elsewhere. But, it seemed to me, in my absence a definite political shift had taken place and my activist style of politics had become rather less acceptable in the group than once it had been. The very success of the group had also made us more complacent. The survival of the group had become an end in itself, more important than the attempt to confront difficult areas of our personal politics. There had been internal personal problems within the group which had been neglected because they were too awkward. I had felt unhappy about it but had done nothing positive about it. I had given a kind of token support to the idea that we should all share tasks but I still continued to be one of the thinkers and someone else typed out my thoughts. Given my failure and that of the group to resist certain roles and situations it was not surprising that the group found me very difficult to deal with at this period. Everyone was very concerned about me, and individually

some were very supportive. But as a group they acted as if I had no problem at all. This, I think, taught me one very important lesson about the gay men's movement. However much we have come out, gay men of our generation remain conditioned men. Our involvement with the gay movement does not enable us to escape our socialisation, and the notion that we should be brave, strong etc. I was exhausted with trying to be all that and really wanted to cry in a group situation where I didn't have to put all my fears on to one person. But that was not permitted to me. I was, however, permitted to feel bad about my undoubtedly strong sense of guilt. Such a feeling was not right on and could not, therefore, be expressed in that group. All this certainly helped me to see how easy it is for gay men to fall into new forms of complacency. We must all take part in a constant process of resistance to such patterns of male behaviour if gay liberation is to mean anything.

### The Trial

After the torment of waiting the trial itself was almost a relief when it came. I had a barrister who appreciated the importance of sexual politics and we had prepared the case carefully over the previous months. I had contacted Gay Switchboard as soon as the police released me, five or six hours after my arrest. They had been very helpful and had put me in touch with a solicitor that very morning. After speaking to him I realised that I should opt for a Crown Court trial. I decided to make notes of every detail of what I had been doing on the night of my arrest and also of the police's treatment of me. I found these very useful in refreshing my memory before I went into the witness box. Despite all my preparations, I still felt that my role was a highly contradictory one. A part of my case depended on the fact that I was a nice, articulate, middle-class, white man with a well-paid job. My witnesses were also nice articulate middle-class white people; as indeed were the group of people who came to court with me every day to give me moral support. People like us are far more likely to be believed by judges than many other members of the community. My gayness, instead of coming over positively, might in fact appear to be a blemish on an otherwise impeccable character. If I did want to be positive about my gayness perhaps I should be prepared to say that I thought cottaging was all right. Perhaps I should say that, in my opinion, cottaging charges were one way in which the gay community was oppressed in Britain today. There would be little point in winning the case if it was by suggesting that my form of gayness was socially more acceptable than that of men who do go cottaging. For many men, and this is particularly true of married men, and men in working class communities, it is their only gay outlet. It is also the case that many men go cottaging simply because they enjoy it. How could I possibly express disapproval of that?

To a great extent the dilemma did not arise in court because of the highly specific nature of the questioning. There was no general discussion at all. I only had to talk about what had happened on that particular Saturday morning. I said what was required in my most authoritative teacher's voice. My shirts were pressed; I wore my tie; the henna had grown out of my hair; my appearance and bearing certainly did not go against me.

The one factor which, undoubtedly, won the case for me, however, was the evidence of an expert medical witness. The police had alleged that when they arrested me my penis was erect and remained so for some minutes (despite the fact that I was looking 'sheepish'). They also said that I was not circumcised. In fact, if I had had an erection it would have been impossible for them to tell whether or not I was circumcised. Because I was out at work, I was able to discuss the evidence there. A friend on the union branch committee suggested that I should get a medical witness to discredit that evidence. With his assistance, I found a consultant with experience in medical jurisprudence who was prepared to testify to this in court. But it was also necessary for him to have a photograph of my erection to show the jury. They were rather more embarrassed then I was by this badly-coloured instamatic representation of a penis trying to remain erect. The picture would have aroused no interest in a

porn magazine but it led to the judge dismissing the police case against me as 'unsafe and unsatisfactory'. The prosecuting counsel, however, argued for a further hour that my co-defendant could still be guilty. It is a strange idea of justice that one person could be innocent of mutual masturbation and the other guilty. Finally we were both acquitted.

### Reconstructing My Life

In a sense, I was sorry not to hear the jury's verdict, although the judge's decision totally discredited the police case. But after four days in the same court room I felt we had all developed a kind of siege mentality. After all that time in the windowless court room, in the same pub at lunchtime, in the queue for the same gents toilet, perhaps some kind of silent sympathy had been born. But perhaps I'm just kidding myself.

A socialist feminist friend who attended part of the trial expressed some feelings I shared in a poem.

There'd been hundreds who'd heard Tom say  
"glad to be gay, glad I'm that way"  
many who'd not known of the pain  
of one gay on trial that day.

"Gross indecency, right hand or left  
Stroking the hm hm of the other"  
Legal inaccuracy, blatant prejudice —  
The cops were to blame for the bother.

Acquitted - - but after a week  
Of the court's indecent exposure  
either undermining male sexuality  
or riling raped women's exposure.

"The penis" brought out on show  
as another 'object' in evidence  
Never seen in this light before  
Sensed now by a feminist with lenience.

And as we go out of the court  
He says sadly, as one been accused,  
"the others would have lost their wives,  
their jobs or been badly abused."

And indeed had I lost the case, I could well have lost my job as well. I would certainly have been suspended from teaching until such time as I could appear before a special meeting of the governing body of my college. My union would have argued for me to keep my job but it would have been virtually another trial. Even if I had kept my job I would then have had to face all the comments of less sympathetic colleagues and students.

But now it was over. I had expected a fantastic sense of elation but that only lasted an hour or two. It was really all very anti-climactic. Then I had to try to get back to some kind of ordinary life. But while I live in the same house, read the same papers, work in the same job (I got promoted after the acquittal) and am politically active in the same circles there could be no return anywhere. Long after the main cause of the anger and anxiety had gone, the anger and anxiety remained. There was also a long struggle to regain control of my own language and expression; I seemed to imagine that there was a court of law in judgement on everything I said and thought. Gradually I began to feel more together. I also appreciate much more any real struggles — however small they seem. And so I have more respect for my own small struggles. Yet again, the message seems to be — the personal is the political. It can't be bad to re-learn that.



# Lost Freedoms

by Tom Woodhouse

This article was written partly in response to Jeffrey Dudgeon's piece, *The Phoney War in Ireland* (Gay Left 7). I will not attempt to criticise what was said there, that has been done already by Margo Gorman in *Outcome No 8*.

The central core of his argument stands in shreds after Jim Callaghan attempted to exchange gay law reform for Ulster Unionist votes. Jeffrey Dudgeon may think Ireland provincial, British Prime Ministers certainly need no lessons in being cosmopolitan.

I have not tried to postulate any solutions to the 'Irish Question', just some ideas and different ways of looking at the relationships between nationalism, sexism and imperialism in Ireland. This article is partly about why I am an Irish nationalist. It is also an attempt to clarify some points about the history of Ireland which are rarely discussed and little understood.

It is difficult to decide whether homophobia in Ireland is greater than in other parts of Britain. In both the 'north' and the 'south' anti-homosexual laws remain on the statute books and attempts to reform the law through pressure from the European Courts have so far failed. In Northern Ireland law reform is unlikely to come from within as evidenced by Ian Paisley's 'Save Ulster From Sodomy' campaign and the recorded opinions of the Northern Ireland politicians. The forces of repression in the 'south' have as yet to show their teeth though the strongest upholder of state morality, the Roman church, is hardly likely to take the side of law reform. In many ways although they might vehemently oppose law reform heterosexuals north or south need fear little from the change, if law reform comes through outside pressure. The strength of their ideology can remain intact, their claim that freedom under the law for gay men is an imposition by liberal democratic Europe rather than the desire of the ordinary Irish person will assure the myth that homosexuality is a foreign disease.

From my own experience in Ireland (outside the major cities), homosexuality does not exist in the minds of the people though homosexual acts exist in practice. In the west of Ireland people have refused to recognise my homosexuality when I have been alone but will recognise a homosexual relationship when I have been with another gay man. It must be similar to the situation in England before homosexuality became a concept during the 19th century (Weeks).

This has advantages and disadvantages. Queer bashing although not unknown is relatively uncommon compared to England and rare outside the main centres, but on the other hand, because of the situation, the jump from the homosexual act to recognising one's homosexuality seems an even greater leap for the Irish man. There are no shortage of homosexual acts in Ireland, just a shortage of homosexuals. For a further discussion of a parallel situation see 'Spotlight on Greece', *Gay Left No 7*.

Use of the anti-homosexual laws is rare (defined as sex between men over 21). For the frequency of prosecutions in Northern Ireland see Northern Ireland Office statement on gay law reform May 1979. However, organised homosexuals who see themselves as intrinsically homosexual are persecuted by the police for their homosexuality rather than their homosexual acts, as in the case of Cara-Friend and NIGRA (see Dudgeon, *Gay Left No 7*). Homosexual oppression in Ireland has little need of the law because oppression centres around the actual existence of homosexuality as a possibility. This can be seen for example in the pronouncements of the Vatican on homosexuality which centre around the sexual act, a man may be tempted to have sex with another man but so long as he avoids the 'act' then he does not sin. It is an attempt to deny that homosexuality has an existence outside the sexual act, an existence more threatening than two men making love together. (I chose this

example as a type of thinking rather than a reference to the primacy of Catholicism in Ireland.)

This situation is a direct result of British Imperialist manipulation of Irish culture. Until the 17th century Celtic Irish society enjoyed a sexual freedom surpassing any other group in Europe. A freedom deliberately destroyed by the English through the plantations of Elizabeth and James and finally by Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell who, after slaughtering a large percentage of the population, including every living thing in Kilkenny, excluded the native Irish from more than half the island ('to hell or Connaught'). What was significant about the English colonisation of Ireland, though not unusual, was the concentration on the destruction of a culture rather than the simple destruction of native political power. Irish celtic society was based on common rather than individual ownership of land and gave freedom to women unheard of in those Celtic countries which had been in contact with the fiercely anti-matriarchal Roman Empire. It is the position of women which must be used as a barometer, as it is the most recorded and about which information is most easily accessible, of the sexual freedom in pre-colonial Ireland (realistically before the 17th century).

There is evidence that male homosexuality was not proscribed, for example, in the *Tain*, the great epic poem of early Celtic Ireland, we can read of Cu Chulainn and his lover Fergus who are forced to fight because of tribal loyalty, the love song of Cu Chulainn to the dead Fergus is a masterpiece of homoerotica. But it was the destruction of women's equality and its replacement by rigid sex role stereotypes that led more than anything to the repression of homosexuality, through the demand that 'man' only exists as the dominator of 'woman'.

To summarise briefly, Irish women's equality under the law ceased with the statutes of Kilkenny enacted in 1366 which forbade the use of the Irish language, Brehon law, Irish surnames, costume, Irish riding, poetry, music, and epic, though the English did not have the political power to enforce these acts until the 17th century. Under Brehon law (which, surprisingly, survived longest in Ulster) women had the right of independent property ownership, divorce and remarriage and could be practitioners of the arts and sciences if they chose to do so.



'If a couple chose to part all they had to do was stand back to back on the hill of Tailteann near Tara and walk away from each other. Trial marriages were very common ... Grainne O'Malley — 'for forty years the stay of all rebellions in the west' as the English called her — divorced her second husband by calling out "I dismiss you" from the walls of her castle. Later they re-married on her terms. Grainne commanded war-galleys in Clew Bay' (Trehwala).

There was no such thing as an illegitimate child, a mother had simply to 'name' the child and, if a son, would inherit a part of the father's property. Marriage was one of the keys to Irish women's independence, based as it was on a complex series of property relationships which did not automatically involve property transfer from women to men.

'Down to the end of the old order in 1603, what could be called Celtic secular marriage remained the norm in Ireland ... Christian matrimony was no more than the rare exception.' (Nicholls)

The Catholic church was not a key mover in the change of women's position. This can be directly linked to the final conquest of Ireland by Cromwell.

Ironically some critics of Irish society equate the pre-eminence of the Catholic church with the puritanical segregation of the sexes and the stereotyping into rigid sex roles. To view the relationship this way is not only simplistic but also ignores the fact that Catholicism in Ireland had proceeded along very un-Romish lines, as did sex role stereotyping until the final conquest by Cromwell which accelerated the land ownership transfer begun with the earlier Ulster plantations.

'The puritanism afflicting women's status amongst Protestants and Catholics in Ireland was not and is not a consequence of Catholicism, but rather the infusion into secular life of the archaic domestic code imposed by the Cromwellian invasion. It was further imposed by the non-conformist sects, which have been the dominant force in shaping the mores and morals of the majority of the Northern Ireland working-class of all denominations, and it was fused into the indigenous institutions.' (Fields).

In fact it was the outlawing of Catholicism which led to the romanisation of the Catholic church in Ireland. From the 17th century until the foundation of the Maynooth seminary in the 1820s priests were trained in Europe, mainly Douai in France, and introduced into Irish Catholicism Roman celibacy, forbiddance of divorce, Augustinian misogyny and fear of homosexuality. Augustine talked of 'the beastliness of women' and 'for men to suffer women's desires is not according to but contrary to nature'.

However when Irish educated in Europe towards the end of the 18th century began to bring back republican ideas, the college of Maynooth was founded using aristocratic French priests to again try to control any liberationist ideas that religion might spread.

The manipulation of religion was not the only way in which the English attacked the culture. The Gaelic language was destroyed because it did not encompass capitalistic concepts of property ownership and did not support sex role stereotyping, for example, the word chairman does not exist, the Gaelic equivalent carhadirleach means 'occupant of the chair', none of the overtones of sexism and power of the English word. Misogyny, institutionalised by the English, continues to be a driving force behind the Irish male.

'The imagery of Eire as the Mother further alienates and fascinates the Ulster Protestant. His religion and society are so strongly male oriented no equivalent symbolism can be readily available without incorporating the fear-evoking symbolism of the Church of Rome. 'Thus as a female, 'She' (Eire) has the potential to possess a man and somehow influence him away from his masculine objectives.' (Fields)

'Older country people in Ulster have a superstitious dread of the power of Catholic women to influence their sons away from their religion and swallow up the family's future in catholic assimilation. Also, it is perhaps significant that Ulster Protestants have always been willing to give their daughters

distinctively Irish names, but have on the whole been hesitant to give Irish names to their sons ... The unconscious symbolic 'logic' underlying this custom is possibly as follows: Ireland is female and you can ratify your possession of her by naming women in her honour, but if you name your sons in this way she will thereby in some way possess them.' (Rankin)

'This kind of fear of femaleness translates into or possibly derives from an attitude that God in creating desire for women in men has been guilty of a lack of taste. For the Catholic the church is male dominated, if not male oriented, and family life tends likewise. Ignorance of facts about sex and the guilt emanating from engaging in it have conspired to produce a strained relationship even between those spouses who enjoy each other. In both segments of the population it is expected that males will prefer the company of other males and have a right.' (Fields)

Thus we have a society with an institutionalised misogyny but which also expects, through fear of women, men to spend most of their time together primarily through work and the pub, the main form of leisure for the mass of the working-class. Masculinity is equated with the sexual domination of women and homosexuality, though always close to the surface, feared as a failure of masculinity, 'being like a woman'.

For Irish feminists and gays the choices are difficult. Obviously there is scope in terms of law reform and general agitation towards equality. But the central issue of Irish politics is the relationship with nationalism and or republicanism. Republicanism, the major nationalist outlet is a blend of nostalgia for old Ireland, frustration of the oppressed Northern Catholic working-class and an uncertain socialism; though in the case of the official republican movement, an uncertain marxism.

That nostalgia for old Ireland is not a nostalgia for the Brehon laws or sexual equality but more for an artificial golden age epitomised by the poetry of Pearse or Yeats. An Ireland of suffering virgins rather than Grainne O'Malley and her war-galleys. But nationalism could be a liberationist force if redefined in terms of regaining lost freedoms, sexual and political, and one of our struggles should be to rewrite our history in those terms.

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## LAMPPIAO

In Mid-September 1978 members of the editorial collective of the Brazilian Gay Liberation Magazine *Lampiao* were subpoenaed and questioned by the police on the direct instructions of the Minister of Justice Falcão. It transpired that all eleven members of the collective were to be charged with 'making propaganda for homosexuality' and 'acting against public morality and good mores', violations of the Brazilian Press Law.

So far, *Lampiao* has not been seized, but the editorial collective has been subject to fairly continuous harassment by the Brazilian police, and legal action for the above violations is still pending.

Letters of condemnation of this action have already been sent to the Brazilian Minister of Justice, but the campaign should not stop now. *Lampiao* needs support, either in terms of messages of good will, letters to the Minister of Justice, or demonstrations organised outside Brazilian embassies.

*Gay Left* hopes to publish an article on the *Lampiao* case in issue 9.



# The Regime of Sex

A History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction  
Michel Foucault. Allen Lane. £5.95.

Reviewed by Philip Derbyshire

Acclaimed when it first appeared in French in 1976, Foucault's first volume in a projected six-volume history of sexuality, seems certain to become one of the most widely discussed texts to emerge from the theoretical eruption in Paris. It is possible to disagree with Foucault's ideas, even more to object to the allusive and often opaque style that embellishes them: it is impossible to ignore them. Foucault's history is the most radical attempt to rethink our understanding of sexuality, and more generally of power and knowledge, since the rebirth of sexual politics. Whether it succeeds in that rethinking cannot be decided on the basis of this slim volume, and even in failure, Foucault's work is likely to be infinitely suggestive of new lines of thought and research.

The History comes at the end of a whole series of investigations into the institutions, discourses and practices of what Foucault has come to call 'disciplinary society' and is linked to those inquiries in method and objective. The very compression and density of this volume is less deliberate obscurantism than assumption of knowledge of previous texts, especially *Discipline and Punish*. The latter sections of the History depend for a full reading on knowing how Foucault has come to see Power as productive of subjects, which are no longer the natural, given individual egos of bourgeois thought, but are, rather constructed and have their only existence in discourse; Foucault too has previously theorised the extension of individualising and disciplinary techniques from the mental hospital, the prison, the school and military academy to the whole of society. And it is in this theory of power that Foucault is at his most radical and most sketchy.

Around this theory of power Foucault constructs an account of the history of the body very different from that current on the Left. Sexuality is seen as an apparatus of power deployed along lines of penetration into the bodies of individuals and the social body in order to regulate and administer the whole of life. 'Sex was a means of access to the life of the body and the life of the species.' He rejects the idea that sexuality has been repressed for the last three centuries, with an increasing liberalisation since Freud, and that that repression is coeval and coextensive with capitalism. Rather, he suggests, there has been a discursive explosion around sex, and sex has come increasingly to be seen as the secret of our existence, a jewel in the silent darkness of ourselves that is being constantly incited to speak and to speak THE truth about our being and our lives. Contemporary with that explosion and immanent in it has been the creation of sexualities and sexual types: there is no 'natural' or essential sexuality, rather sexuality is produced, sex itself is an effect of the operation of power ... an imaginary unity of all the possible pleasures, sensations, affects behaviours of the body. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is in fact a history of the way sexuality has been constructed, the way an ideology of sex has come into being, the technologies that effect this genesis and the purposes and intentions they serve.

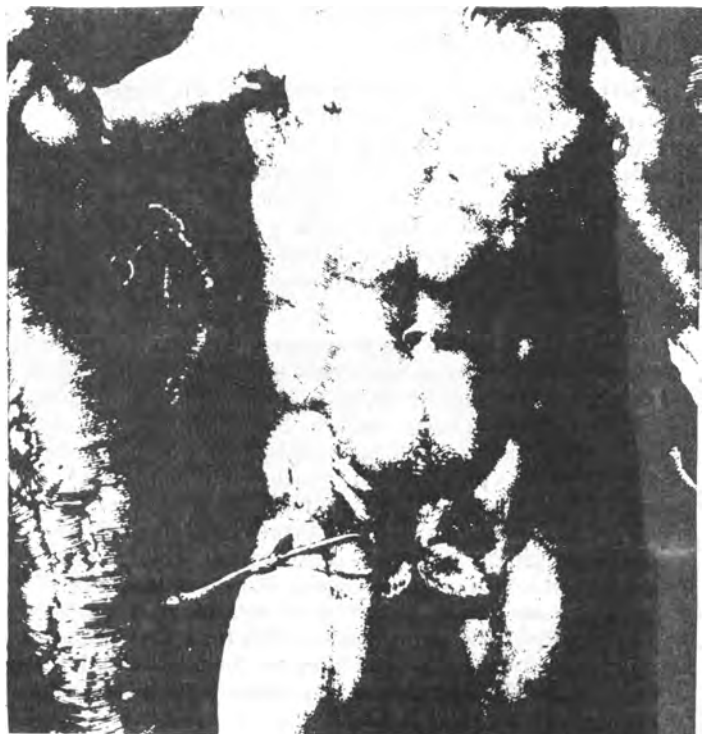
That history begins in the seventeenth century, with the transition from a society based on alliance and kinship, to one based on sexuality. In the former, blood and ancestry are the major thematic concerns within the family and marriage is the target for intervention by the law and the church; in the latter, marriage fades into a discreet silence and the formerly indiscriminated and peripheral sexual activities become the major focus of scrutiny, codification and regulation. Prior to this time, the illicit was a set of behaviours, from rape to sodomy to bestiality, which were potentially options for everyone. Increasingly from this time, the illicit was transformed into the sexually aberrant: abnormal sexual behaviours were seen as the acts of particular sorts of people. The Law which drew a line between per-

missible and impermissible was replaced by the Norm which distributed, defined and actively produced. Sodomy could be committed by anyone. Homosexuality was an essential property of individuals, was inescapable and was present in every aspect of the individual's life. The sodomite was a backslider; the homosexual is a species.

Foucault's account of how this transition was achieved is fascinating and irritatingly incomplete. Techniques, he claims, that had begun to develop in the fourteenth century, especially that of concession, were adapted and encroached into the main body of society. Truth through self interrogation, where the speaking subject coincided with the subject spoken of, became increasingly the way of gaining access to and producing the individual. This religious confession gradually became confessional science, was medicalised: the speaking subject was interrogated and observed; a generalised sexual causality was posited and aetiologies were hidden even from themselves and hence constant and varying avowal were *de rigueur*, in the hearing of interpreter who could decipher the coded meaning of what was said. Again and again sex was at the heart of things but recalcitrant in its truth telling, demanding the utmost attention and coercion to make it speak.

Parallel with this development was the shift in the legal regulation of sexual practice. Acts 'against nature' became the manifestations of criminality and treated as such. Foucault sees the genesis of the prison with the construction of 'criminality' and the growth of a science of sexuality (unique to the West) with the implantation of perversions as parallel but interlocking trends. There is no *a priori* connection, no global strategy by the ruling class, rather specific technologies with particular goals and aims, and power-knowledges with specific strategies gradually pervade the body politic and articulate each on the other to maintain a society where power insinuates itself into every aspect of life.

Four major strategies can be seen in this particular extension of power in the nineteenth century: the hystericising of women's bodies; the pedagogisation of the child's sex; the socialisation of procreative conduct; and the psychiatrisation of perverse pleasures. Each strategy creates an object of knowledge ... the hysterical woman, whose body is suffused with sex, the masturbating child, the malthusian couple and the perverse adult, each of which becomes a target of intervention, the object of manipulation by technologies and their practitioners. The classic example is the homosexual: named in 1869, criminalised in England in 1885, given an aetiology by Kraft Ebbing, Ellis and Freud and made the target of corrective technology every since ... psychotherapy, shock treatment, chemotherapy etc.



All this Foucault situates in the rise of the bourgeoisie and the transformation from a regime which used death, especially spectacular death, as mark and manifestation of its rule to a regime where death became the limit of power which now extended its order over the whole of life: population was counted and recorded, its growth encouraged or retarded: the body and its health became a concern especially as the life and vigour of future generations depended on it: an expansionist bourgeoisie became obsessed with sex as a distinguishing mark and affirmation of itself. The sexual family was in origin the bourgeois family: the nervous woman was the leisured woman, the masturbating child is the public school pupil, the perverse adult is the degenerate youth whose sexual conduct endangers the future rule of the class, who is unfit for the manly tasks that face him. It was only later that this family was extended to the proletariat: as a means of subjugation and regulation, but in that extension a new principle of differentiation enters, where the degree of repression undergone becomes the mark of the Chosen. It is here Foucault claims that is the origin of the discourse of sexual repression, and he casts doubt on the possibilities of such a discourse ever escaping its implication in the apparatus of sexuality: whether Freudian or Reichian psychoanalysis is merely the displacement and realignment of that apparatus.

In the end Foucault returns to power and the resistances that exist against it: power comes from everywhere, is sustained everywhere. But there is always resistance, and that power-resistance couple is immanent in the discourses of sexuality themselves. The discourses of essential sexuality have been used by the sexual politics movement to counter power itself; the homosexual has become gay. But now sex itself has to be attacked and the ideology that makes it the crucial aspect of our being. It is no longer a question of the liberation of sexuality but rather a struggle for the body and its pleasures.

Such a provocative, novel and encompassing account leaves many questions unanswered which nag after the sheer

exuberance and vitality of the text have lost their entrancing quality. Power remains tendentiously analysed; it is not something that can be seized, it cannot be understood on the model of law and prohibition. It does not exercise its rule by denial and negation 'in political theory the king's head has not been severed'. It is not unitary, it flowed from everywhere; it comes from the base and not from a single source, in the state or wherever. But quite what it is Foucault delicately refrains from saying and how the "great dominations" maintain themselves is obscure, as is the way that we can combat them and power itself. There is no justification for Leninism in Foucault, but no coherent alternative political practice either.

Foucault delineates some of the technologies of power and regulation, but does not ask why particular individuals fall into one definition or another; why do some people define as homosexual and others not? The effectivities of the technologies are not discussed.

And if power is thinly analysed, the nature of the 'body' stands in complete obscurity. Why should bodies stand in privileged exception to the operation of power, a sort of last term in a series of constructions. Foucault gives no answer. Sexuality and subjectification/subjectation: it is all of a piece, despite Foucault's assurance that there is resistance ... but that might be a pious manichean hope in the face of what is pictured as a Power of infinite resource, sophistication and subtlety. How much does Foucault's disenchantment with the millenarian optimism of May '68 dictate a vision of pessimistic complexity: the abandonment of the myth of Revolution suborn him to a piecemeal and fragmented politics?

Perhaps the next volumes of the History may allay those criticisms: whatever one's judgement the History is a work that demands reading and rereading; like Nietzsche whose work explicitly informs Foucault, the despair that Foucault senses is faced with courage, and the task of rethinking old forms of thought is accomplished with bravura. □

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## Picking up the Pieces *Review by Jeffrey Weeks*

Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the making of socialism.

By Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, and Hilary Wainwright.

(Newcastle Socialist Centre and Islington Community Press. £1.25)

The left in Britain is in crisis. Confronted by the biggest upsurge of industrial militancy for five years in early 1979 the Labour movement, from ultra right to far left, was paralysed. Confronted by a vital General Election we allowed the most right wing Tory leadership since the 1930s to seize the ideological initiative and to achieve the sort of political consensus that might well take us into the 1990s. And the response of the left has been confusion, division, a revival of sectarianism, or despair.

This short book faces our dilemmas and begins the arduous task of self examination and self criticism. It consists of three essays: an Introduction by Hilary Wainwright, a long essay on the Women's Movement by Sheila Rowbotham, and an account of local political activism by Lynne Segal. There is no attempt at a programmatic conclusion (indeed that would be totally alien to the aim of the book) nor even total political agreement. Sheila Rowbotham's essay, for instance, polemicalises against existing left organisations, while Lynne Segal has just joined one (Big Flame). But the concerns of all three writers are similar: to attempt to rethink what it means to be a socialist, how to work as socialists for a new form of society, and how socialism will integrate the insights and aims generated by the women's, gay, ethnic and cultural movements of the past decade.

The central (and longest) essay by Sheila Rowbotham illustrates the dilemma most acutely, but also projects the possibilities. At the heart of the essay is a two-way movement: of reflection on the almost laughable inadequacies of our Leninist sects, bound to rigid Bolshevik models, eye-strained through perusal of holy texts, and bureaucratically authoritarian in their 'support' of workers' self activity and autonomous movements; and of recognition of the really important gains in terms of self help and self organisation that we have learnt from the women's and other autonomous groupings. The form of the essay is part of the message: acute personal experiences are interwoven with polemics against IS/SWP and other left sects and with general reflections on the possibilities of socialism. The point constantly reaffirmed is that socialism is not just about the laws of capitalist accumulation or of surrender to the ineluctable processes of history, but is also about personal feelings and inter-personal relations.

The whole point about autonomous movements is that they begin with our personal, often idiosyncratic experiences of oppression. They cannot stay there, if the oppressions are to be ended, but without that reaching out to the personal there is no hope or possibility of any general social advance. Thatcherism stretches out to the greed, envy and hatred that capitalist society generates in individuals. Socialism must reach out to the hope and possibility of a better life. - This book, by stressing this constantly, and by underlining the vital need to make socialism a struggle for a new life, raises our eyes from the gutter. It does not provide answers. But it makes that vital start by generating many of the right questions. □

# Edward and George

THE DEAR LOVE OF COMRADES

*Reviewed by Sarah Maguire*

The play was enchanting: the performances were good, the set beautifully designed and the songs and music were wonderful. It was well directed and the script was engaging and entertaining. I enjoyed 'Dear Love of Comrades' very much, and I would certainly recommend seeing it. As a piece of gay theatre it is excellent, and possibly the best work that the men of Gay Sweatshop have performed, for which the company deserves warm congratulation. However, I feel both unable and unqualified to criticise the play's theatrical merits in depth, and therefore I intend to comment on the interpretation of the politics of Edward Carpenter as represented in the play.

A play about Edward Carpenter should have relevance to the gay movement, and to gay socialists in particular. Carpenter was a prominent figure in socialist politics during the political struggle of the 1890s, and he was a gay man who tried to explore the connections between his politics and his personal life.

The play concentrated very heavily on Carpenter's personal life, and the dominant theme was the sexual and emotional relationships between Edward, George Merrill (whom he lived with for thirty years) and his personal friends formed by his involvement with the Sheffield Labour Movement, George Adams and George Hukin. The struggles that they encountered in their personal lives were represented as being very similar to those faced by feminists and gay people today. Obviously the strife and anguish involved in trying to have non-monogamous relationships is not a prerogative of the 1970s, but I felt that the emphasis was placed on these particular tensions and that the peculiar difficulties which must have faced Carpenter and his contemporaries were not fully explored.

The stresses inherent in having relatively open gay relationships at that time, both psychological and legal, must have been overwhelming. And not only was Carpenter having sexual relationships with other men, but he was relating to working class men. Carpenter felt unable to form emotionally satisfying relationships with men of his own class: upper class men could not show any affection for each other because of their position and role. He was drawn to working class men by the warmth and support they were able to give to each other. Although he did form sexual relationships with working class men, Carpenter was still an upper class intellectual, something he felt unhappy about. This point was touched on quite clearly in a scene when he is at the opera in London seeing his publisher, Fisher-Unwin, who is objecting to printing material on homosexuality in Carpenter's book due to current scandals surrounding Oscar Wilde. Carpenter makes it quite clear that he loathes being at the opera and that he dislikes having to spend time with members of his class in order to get his book published. He is in a position of privilege that he obviously feels contradictions about: he can disappear off to India to study philosophy and religion when he wishes, leaving George Adams and George Hukin to manage the farm at Milthorpe, an event they seemed to resent.

I felt that the contradictions of class, which ultimately Carpenter was unable to transcend, were not fully explored in the relationships portrayed between Edward and the Georges. Nor did the politics behind those non-monogamous sexual relationships come over. Non-monogamy was obviously the 'right' way to relate, but the reasons for this choice were not explained. At points I felt as though I was watching a group of my gay male friends discussing their relationships — except that they were wearing funny clothes and kept bursting into song.

I found the complete absence of women very striking and an accurate reflection of Carpenter's emotional and political interests. Although he did have some women friends these

were generally middle class feminists. His contact with these women undoubtedly affected his analysis of sexual politics, but, as women, they were unable to make a large impact on him emotionally, and consequently radically to influence his politics. Carpenter was obviously far more aware of the oppression of women than the vast majority of upper-middle class men of his time, but this awareness was fundamentally limited by his preoccupations which were largely decided by both his sex and his sexual orientation. These preoccupations, and their effect on Carpenter's politics, were clearly demonstrated by the 'invisibility' of women.

The 1890s were a time of enormous political change that affected the succeeding decades. Splits began to develop in the Labour Movement between the anarchists and the socialists and the Independent Labour Party emerged with the aim of furthering the interests of the working class through election to government. Given Carpenter's involvement with socialism these issues needed to be explored. There were only passing references to the industrial disputes and class conflict in the play as though they were very distant from the life as portrayed at Milthorpe. The farm was very isolated — it had to be given what Carpenter was trying to do — but all the inhabitants were also actively involved in the 'outside world'.

The arrival of Frank Simpson, a member of the ILP, was treated as an intrusion, which, under the paritular circumstances of his arrival, it was. But the people at Milthorpe must have often welcomed such visits as an opportunity for political discussion.

An attempt was made to deal with Carpenter's politics in a scene depicting a picnic which Fred Charles, an anarchist, attends. The political differences between Carpenter and Charles are not adequately dealt with, and this lack of analysis affects the relevance of the following scenes. At that time serious splits were developing in the Sheffield Socialist Club between the anarchists and the socialists. The anarchist faction was advocating direct, and violent, confrontation, which Carpenter, and other socialists, disagreed with. The anarchist group was infiltrated by a police spy and Charles and others were arrested and imprisoned for planning to manufacture bombs. Carpenter became heavily involved in the trial and tried to help Charles. Because, in the play, the political differences between the two men is not explained, the significance of Carpenter's support for Charles is missed: it is seen as personal, rather than as an alliance with someone he fundamentally disagrees with politically, against the Right.

Presenting a play about Edward Carpenter is obviously fraught with difficulties. I enjoyed the play very much, but I felt that it did not adequately explain Carpenter's politics. I thought that the play would have been quite confusing to anyone who did not know anything about Carpenter as his actions were isolated from their political roots, losing significance. Because Carpenter was a person who tried to connect his politics with his personal life he is someone who is relevant to gay people, feminists and socialists today, as the recent interest in his life and work has testified. Although an enjoyable and interesting play, I am not sure that it manages to reflect Carpenter's political and personal life accurately or adequately. I do think that it should be seen, and I would hope that it would stimulate the audience to discover more about Edward Carpenter, opening out the debate in the gay movement between our personal lives and the politics behind our actions.



# Teachers Out

*In the last issue of Gay Left we printed a review by Margaret Jackson of the Gay Teachers' Group's pamphlet Open and Positive. The following two letters have resulted.*

From John Warburton

I would like to make some comments on Margaret Jackson's review of 'Open and Positive', in *Gay Left* No. 7, not because the review is essentially critical and dismissive, that is a reviewer's prerogative — but because I feel the basis of the criticism is, in terms of the advancement of the gay movement, counter productive.

First, I must question the opinion that there is a lack of 'a deeper political analysis' behind 'Open and Positive', Jackson's main criticism. Rather than expect every gay artefact to spell out such an analysis, it might be better to judge such artefacts on whether or not they contradict that analysis. From the little information Jackson gives of her analysis, 'Open and Positive' does not seem to contradict it. If Jackson pursues her argument with all elements of the movement's culture, her perception of gayness must be bleak indeed.

'Open and Positive' is essentially a fully documented account of the correspondence between myself and the ILEA, NUT and others involved in my dismissal from teaching, and a careful reading of these letters should reveal that my arguments are purposefully restricted to the line of debate adopted by my adversaries. I do not accept that any 'deeper political analysis' in my letters would have achieved greater success in terms of my reinstatement (the purpose for their being written), and on reflection I certainly doubt if so much of the Authority's and Union's attitudes would have been exposed, if from the start I had argued my case in terms of homosexual oppression having its 'roots in a social structure which ... (is) ... organised around the principles of private property and male supremacy' and sexism being 'a deeply pervasive ideology which is both produced by and helps to legitimate and reproduce patriarchal and capitalist relations'.

The contributions from the three other teachers involved in 'Open and Positive', have a four-fold importance. Firstly, they supply further factual information about my case; secondly, they introduce new perspectives to the arguments, where they exist, used against me by ILEA and NUT, still using the terms of reference laid down by these bodies; thirdly, they make it clear that the phenomenon of gay teachers coming out at school does not start and finish with John Warburton; and fourthly, they are public statements that those teachers are as open, or more so about their gayness in school than I was, and thus they defy ILEA to deal with them in the same way it dealt with me. Considering that none of them nor, to my knowledge, none of the 2,000 teachers who signed the petitions supporting my case and demanding the right to discuss homosexuality in the classroom, have been dismissed, I feel that Jackson's statement: 'It is a reminder to all gay teachers, if one were needed, that our gayness will only be tolerated as long as we do not talk about it to our pupils' shows more than a little paranoia.

Jackson claims that because there is 'no attempt at a deeper political analysis of the issues ... the strategies proposed, such as more gay teachers coming out, building up union support at grass roots level, and demanding a place for homosexuality in the curriculum, have a naively optimistic ring'. Yet despite her 'deeper political analysis' (which I presume goes deeper than the clichés quoted above) she offers no more useful strategy, much in the same way that officials from ILEA insisted I handled the classroom situations in the wrong way but provided no alternative tactics.

The call for more gay teachers to come out is hardly naive when in fact it is happening, without those teachers losing

their jobs. The fight against my dismissal, although not able to achieve my reinstatement, for reasons explained in the booklet, has made it much less likely that ILEA will repeat its actions. It is even conceivable that the Authority's officials have mellowed their attitudes towards openly gay teachers after their exposure to movement ideas. For far too long gay teachers have been granted special closet licences by the gay community, when in fact, as educators, there is even more reason for them to come out than most, if for no other reason than to provide alternatives to the tired queer stereotypes each new generation grows up with.

Jackson's suggestion that building up grass roots union support is naively optimistic must, coming from a socialist, be more of a statement of arrogance, or fear, than anything more profound. Is it because ordinary trade unionists, perhaps without Jackson's 'deeper political' insights, just would not understand, or is it because she fears the possible reactions towards her that arguing her case as a gay person might produce. Perhaps she should check out Westminster and Hackney NUT Associations as examples of what can be achieved by openly gay teachers, and imagine how much more could be achieved if those teachers had more gay support. It may be a slow process but it is essential that the process continues. The trade union movement is far too important to be dismissed so glibly.

Jackson's criticism of my parents' attitude as expressed in their letter to the Headmistress of St Marylebone CE School shows no sensitivity. As she finds it 'particularly disturbing' that the letter was included at all, yet 'understands John's reasons for including it', am I to presume that she thinks my naivety has led to another political faux-pas? The letter was included primarily because it is relevant to the full documentation of the case and as I stated in 'Open and Positive', 'perhaps more than anything else it nullifies any argument that has been put to me that I should not be as open about my sexual orientation as the majority is about theirs'.

Jackson's specific criticisms of the letter are the sentences: 'We were told in 1972 by our two GPs that one in ten of the population is born with this feature and it is not something that they elect by choice. This has been confirmed to us by another medical practitioner of great experience', together with the 'lack of comment on the pathological model of homosexuality it so clearly expresses'. Personally, I am forever grateful to those GPs for reassuring my parents that for me, being gay is completely natural, especially when I consider what they could have been told. As with many working class people of their age group, at times of crisis they rely heavily on doctor's advice, and finding out that their son is queer was, for them, one hell of a crisis. (The use of 'queer' here is metaphorical and is not an indication of my political standpoint.)





For me, 'being born gay' is convenient shorthand for all the possible theories of why I am gay. Being born heterosexual or bisexual is similarly convenient shorthand. I am not interested in causes of sexual orientations. What I am concerned about is that all non-exploitative sexual-emotional relationships should be equally validated by society. Whilst believing that that should be an integral part of socialism, I also believe that if the majority of socialists are to accept that view, gay people must be seen to be proud of their orientation. Thus I am convinced that, in most cases, the "primary political action for any gay socialist is to come out as much as possible in all areas of their life.

With regard to my parents, my openness has caused them to move an incredible distance since 1972 in terms of understanding homosexuality and gay oppression. If my parents believed my gayness to be pathological, as Jackson suggests, they would hardly be as supportive in my right to be openly gay as they are. Neither would have written to the Headmistress as they did; nor would they have been so successful in enlightening the community in which they live about gayness. I can't help but feel Jackson suffers from some form of dogmatic blindness which has led her to equate 'born with this feature' and 'GPs' with 'pathological model'. When she goes on to say she finds 'the lack of comment ... (on this "pathological model") ... extremely alarming ... (and) ... bound to reinforce the prevailing view that homosexuality is a congenital disease or abnormality, and thus effectively depoliticise the whole issue', blindness turns once again to paranoia. Moreover, when she has previously criticised 'Open and Positive' for lacking 'deeper political analysis' and labelled the strategies it proposes as naive and optimistic, to say my parents' letter "effectively depoliticises the whole issue" strikes me as being just silly.

Finally, Jackson states that 'socialists and feminists will I am afraid, find nothing to bite on in this booklet. Ultimately it treats gayness as a legal-moral issue, rather than a political-economic one and therefore amounts to little more than a plea for tolerance.' To say that the book offers nothing to socialists and feminists assumes all socialists and feminists have the political understanding of homosexuality that Jackson herself has. That itself is naive and optimistic.

In practical terms, what is 'legal-moral' as opposed to 'political-economic' about three gay teachers who, having understood how one of their colleagues has been kicked out of teaching for refusing to promise not to discuss homosexuality with pupils, have stated clearly that they have done, and will continue to do what the latter teacher did, and furthermore will likewise refuse to give an undertaking to discontinue to do so if asked. Furthermore, is Jackson really denying the importance of countering gay oppression unless it has a clear 'political-economic' basis? Presumably Jackson would dismiss as unimportant the struggles, for example, to keep *Gay News* and *Body Politic* circulating, to repeal the anti-gay laws in Northern Ireland and the fight to keep California's gay teachers employed, because of their 'legal-moral' bases. Theorising by itself can sometimes take you so far ahead of present reality, that you can become isolated from the wider gay community, blind to the battles that are being fought and callous towards the individuals who take the brunt of homophobia.

I am led to the conclusion that Jackson's excuse for not coming out (ie its being politically naive) and the use of her 'deeper political analysis' as a shield behind which she hides are far worse than the ploy used by some more reactionary gay teachers who claim they prefer the double-life of respectability during the day and naughtiness at night. Both tacitly allow society's perverted ideas about homosexuality to be adopted by a new generation. But Jackson's also brings socialism into disrepute.

John L. Warburton, London SW15.

From Margaret Jackson

Thank you for sending me a copy of John Warburton's comments on my review of 'Open and Positive' and for giving me the opportunity to reply. I've found it difficult to formulate a reply, as he and I seem to be arguing from rather

different political perspectives, but perhaps the following attempts at clarification may prove helpful.

1) I cannot agree that the review is 'essentially critical and dismissive'. It is certainly critical but also appreciative and therefore not, in my view, dismissive.

2) I am at a loss to understand how John is unable to infer that I think his letters to ILEA, NUT etc, should have contained a deeper political analysis. I was referring specifically to the lack of such an analysis in the contributors' commentaries and afterword which, in my view, weakens though does not dismiss the importance of the book as a contribution to the theory and practice of the struggle against sexual oppression.

3) I certainly do not underestimate the political importance of John's and similar struggles, or dismiss strategies such as coming out, building union support, exerting pressure for curriculum change etc. Indeed it is my own involvement in such activities which has made me aware that, although the strategies proposed by the contributors to the book are not in themselves misconceived, they are not only much more difficult and complex than they are made to appear but are in themselves not enough. For instance, in my experience it is much easier (though not easy) to win trade union support to gay rights than it is to get the male-dominated trade unions to question and change their own sexist assumptions and practices, without which neither women's nor gays' oppression can be overcome.

4) My criticism of the inclusion of the letter from John's parents without editorial comment on the view of homosexuality it contains was certainly not intended as a putdown of the letter itself nor of his parents' achievement in coming to terms with their own personal crisis and changing their attitudes towards homosexuality and gay oppression. My criticism relates to my belief that one has a responsibility to ensure that readers are not left with the impression that it is a *fact* that 'one in ten of the population is born with this "feature" '. Such a view of homosexuality confines it within a deviance perspective, even if the deviance is not necessarily viewed as pathological. I am reminded of Jeffrey Weeks' comments on Havelock Ellis, one of the early crusaders against the oppression of homosexuals:

'Ellis' approach is still the most common among liberals in attempting to understand homosexuality. By collating all the available data, the aim is to show that it is not a product of particular national vices or periods of social decay, but a common and recurrent part of human sexuality. This was an important element in liberating ideas of homosexuality. But in Ellis' case (and in that of most of his successors) it stopped there. No attempt was made to explore why forms of homosexuality were accepted in some cultures and abhorred in others, and the only hints he gave as to why homosexuals were oppressed in contemporary society were vague references to the survival of religious taboos. Ellis' approach is basically descriptive: the material roots of sexual oppression are left unexplored.' (*Coming Out*, p.62). As Weeks points out, Ellis' approach set the tone for liberal attitudes to homosexuality for generations to come. I would argue that contemporary liberalism, while tolerating homosexuality still views it as essentially deviant, and that to do so is not only to misunderstand it but to defuse it politically.

This brings me to what I see as the heart of the matter. John's statement 'I am no longer interested in the causes of sexual orientation', his reference to gay pride, and his conviction that 'the primary political action for any gay socialist is to come out as much as possible in all areas of their life' suggest to me that he and I may be operating with very different conceptions of socialism. While I would not deny that coming out is a political act, I do not see it as the primary political action for gay socialists. I do not know what sort of action I would regard as *primary* (it would be arrogant to think that I did), but I do believe that a sine qua non of fighting sexual oppression and sexism is to expose and challenge their material bases. As a lesbian, and a socialist, I do not want my 'deviance' to be tolerated or accepted as something to be proud of (in what sense is anyone's sexuality something to be proud of?). One of the problems of the gay

movement has been its liberalism, ie its tendency to limit its activities to demanding certain 'rights', without challenging the social relations that underpin the withholding or granting of those rights in the first place. In relation to homosexuality I want to argue that a central task for socialists is to challenge sexual identities and categories, and to open up the whole area of sexuality as a problem within the wider issues of

social relations, the aim being ultimately to transform those relations. If 'coming out' is seen as a part of that task then indeed it can be a valuable contribution to the struggle: the danger of liberalism is that in stopping far short of such aims, it may in fact impede them.

Margaret Jackson, London SE3.

## HOMOSEXUALITIES

by Alan P. Bell & Martin Weinberg

Mitchell Beasley £7.95 hardback

*Reviewed by Emmanuel Cooper*

Sex, its practice, function and frequency has become, above all other topics, a popular post-war obsession, and symptom and fact of the liberal mind and the permissive society. In the last 20 years Freud's revelations about the importance of the sex drive have become much more well known, with such concepts as 'blocked' projection and 'sublimation' becoming a part of everyday language, helping to fuel the fire that sexual excess was a feature of our society.

On the heels of Freud's theories about sexual behaviour came the American sexologist Alfred Kinsey, who set out to painstakingly find out and measure much of what Freud and his followers hinted at. The famous two-volume Kinsey Reports — one on men (1948) and one on women (1953) researched in as scientific a manner as Kinsey and team could devise the sexual activities of its many 'subjects'. His findings which were often sensational in the Press, revolutionised many popular ideas about sex and love.

Perhaps the Report's most famous — or infamous — discovery was the number of people, in particular men (over 70%) who had had homosexual experiences in their lives, though only a small number became exclusively homosexual. These startling findings prompted Kinsey to research the subject thoroughly, but he died before the project started. The Institute of Sex Research he founded continued with the idea and the latest Kinsey Report aptly and cleverly titled 'Homosexualities' is the result. It will shock few people. The authors sensibly point out that just as there are many different sorts of heterosexual behaviour, the same is true for homosexual behaviour which does not fit into easily stereotyped patterns. Equally it would be as inappropriate to think that one book on homosexuality would be the definitive work, as only one book on heterosexuality.

The research team set out in true Kinsey tradition to carry out their task in as conscientious a manner as possible; interviews were carefully graded and elaborate systems of cross checking were devised to ensure accuracy and impartiality. Lengthy face-to-face interviews with approximately 1,500 people were conducted with 'subjects' drawn from 'every walk of life'. Though quite how men in a steam bath could or would provide useful information when approached by an earnest interviewer is hard to imagine.

The study examines in detail the extent of sexual experience, including sexual partnerships, sexual techniques and sexual problems; acceptance of homosexuality and social adjustment; and religion, politics, friendship and marriage among homosexual men and women.

All the information, complete with statistical tables, analyses and comment, makes a solid tome, which says little new but, importantly and scientifically confirms much of what we knew already. For example, most homosexual men in satisfactory relationships are as happy as or happier than the control group of heterosexual men in similar situations. Equally, they confirm that gay clubs and pubs are primarily social meeting places and not merely the 'meat market' they are often put down to be.

There are criticisms to be made: the sample of women is far too small to warrant the book's subtitle (A Study of Diversity Among Men & Women), and its chosen geographical district, the Bay area of San Francisco is a well known area for gay liberation, and would compare favourably with

other areas. Also, most of the research is 9 years old, which covers a period in which there has been an enormous and liberalising switch in attitudes towards homosexuality.

But perhaps the biggest criticism is that the study compounds the theory that homosexuality can be studied as an identifiable and separate group with a unifying identity when, in fact, the first Kinsey Report with its theory of sexual continuum, pointed to the exact opposite. All the interviews were with self-identifying homosexuals when there are many expressions of homosexuality throughout the whole spectrum of sexuality. Yet there is much useful information here and much clearing away of myths and it contributes towards a general and necessary review of the way we see sexuality and sexual behaviour. □



## CRITICAL THEORY OF THE FAMILY

by Mark Poster

Pluto Press, £3.95

*Reviewed by Keith Birch*

In this book Poster challenges the simple determinant relationship that some Marxists have posited between economic relations and the form of the family. His aim is to give a theoretical basis for studying the family in order to understand its role in constructing those needs which make radical consciousness difficult and because in itself the family is a source of oppressive relationships. To this end he critically explores the theories of Freud, Reich, Lacan and others and the ways they construct the relationships between the individual, the family and society.

What Poster argues for is a greater stress on the psychological forms that are constructed by familial and social relationships in specific historical and class settings. Family relationships construct and reproduce differing forms of domination, particularly those of sex and age, in the context of wider power relations.

Poster outlines some aspects for a critical theory of the family from which empirical studies can enlarge our understanding. He limits his project to the synchronic level of family structure rather than studying its historical development and he rejects the functionalist account of the family — reproduction, socialisation etc. — which has dominated most Marxist and sociological approaches, as well as that of the early Gay Movement. The family is a region where the psychic structure and emotional patterns are primarily formed. Poster argues that a revised Freudian psychoanalysis provides the foundation for understanding psycho-sexual development in given family structures and he goes on to construct and analyse different models on this basis.

This book is an interesting critique of a variety of theories of the family which have influenced our approach in the Gay Movement until recently and shows ways in which a more complex appreciation may develop.

# Past Present

With Downcast Gays

by David Hutter and Andrew Hodges

Published by Pink Triangle Press, 65p.

Psychiatry and the Homosexual

Published by Gay Liberation, 25p.

The Politics of Homosexuality

by Don Milligan

Published by Edinburgh SHRG, 25p.

Reviewed by Nigel Young

Apart from the fact that these three pamphlets speak volumes of truths — sometimes overstated, sometimes hard and crude and sometimes just plain wrong, they are a timely reminder of the anger, energy, directness and urgency of the gay movement in its early days. We have not moved mountains since then or made our theory and practice perfect, but we have become aware of more of the dilemmas and contradictions about oppression and self oppression, the development of and our relationship to, the sub-culture, and the untidy relationship between gay liberation and socialism. It is because we now have a more developed consciousness in all of these areas that on re-reading these pamphlets I felt acutely aware of their shortcomings.

*With Downcast Gays* clearly documents the widespread and overwhelming social basis of our oppression and rightly states that self oppression which stems from the former is an equal enemy. However in their anger about oppression the authors appear unsympathetic about the ways it affects our behaviour and unconcerned about the very real material constraints which stop people coming out. Coming out is seen as an act of revolution in itself, a path to eternal liberation, instead of being seen as a vital and difficult process in relation to other factors. The authors talk of coming out "being opposed to a life time's conditioning ... but coming out is essential". This is obviously true, but it begs the question of how and with what support. Later in the pamphlet we are told, "It is pointless to limit coming out to those who will understand; only by public, indiscriminate, indiscreet self disclosure can this shame be denied." Thus in the process of castigating one moral framework the authors erect an equally oppressive one. The arguments are not about how to support every act of coming out, but about a moral imperative which few people then or now could deal with. Perhaps the underlying flaw in the pamphlet is expressed in the final sentence, "External oppression we can only fight against: self oppression we can root out and destroy", because it suggests a polarity between external factors and the self. Certainly we need to be aware of self oppression, but it is not, as the authors suggest, a self imposed factor to be exorcised by our individual efforts. Damnation for being in the closet doesn't help us, collective support does.

*Psychiatry and the Homosexual* was written a year earlier and "deals with the treatment of homosexuality by mainstream psychiatry". The importance of the pamphlet is its strident questioning of all those areas of psychiatry which have defined us as an "abnormal statistic" or a "deviant neurotic" or "sick" or any other pejorative term. It throws them back at their originators and says plainly that being gay is not a problem or a sickness. However the pamphlet's total rejection of all mainstream psychiatry and psychiatrists throws the baby out with the bath water. And some of the bricks thrown at Freud would have been better directed at the malpractices of neo-Freudians. Yes some psychiatric practices and practitioners are horrific, these should obviously be fought against, and yes it is important to develop our own counselling and therapy groups. But some fears, phobias and repressions may be outside the scope of a self help group.

As well as this, some of our relationships to the world around us are more complex than the pamphlet suggests. Psychiatry, therefore, may help us to become more aware of these relationships in order that we can both understand and accept ourselves.

*The Politics of Homosexuality* looks at the content and relationship of gay liberation to socialism. Its political scope is broad and although the domestic labour debate has moved the discussion around the family away from a simple economic vision, Don Milligan's pamphlet does shift the debate around homosexuality away from crude conspiratorial-oppression theories. He is also aware of the need for gay socialists to build relationships with the gay community on the one hand and the trade union movement on the other. However his account of trade union homophobic heterosexism crumbling whilst gay socialists work evangelically and tirelessly at the point of production, one hopes, is a product of his membership then of the International Socialists (now the SWP), rather than a belief still held. For me, although the pamphlet has some limitations, Don Milligan articulated a whole series of concerns which are still relevant to us as gay socialists. He set down the starting points which enabled us to look more closely at the ideology surrounding the family, gender and camp and gave a focus for our theory as gay socialists in terms of action.

These three pamphlets cover the social, psychological and political ground which surrounds homosexuality. Their value then and today was to question the past definitions imposed on us by outsiders. By doing so they gave us the confidence and the tools to recreate our own social, psychological and political realities. Our task now is to move on, not away, from those early concerns and to create a body of theory and practice which is equally relevant to the late 70s and 80s. □



Gay Left badges — These are available, price 30p/75c including postage.

PSST —JOHN TYNDALL IS HETEROSEXUAL

Sexuality & Fascism

Big Flame 10p

Reviewed by Colm Clifford

*Big Flame's* pamphlet on fascism and sexuality briefly covers the areas of Women and Nazi Germany, Women and the National Front, and Men and Fascism. From my perspective as a gay male, both sections on women are interesting and informative. The section on Nazi Germany and Women talks about the position of women in the thirties under Hitler and some of the contradictions of a sacrosanct family in a Germany at war. "In 1939 3.5 million women took the decision to stay at home despite the labour shortage in the munitions factories." Women and the National Front gives a point by point run down of the National Front's attitude to women which, in combination with the first section shows a very obvious parallel.

The section on Men and Fascism is one I feel, as a gay man, a lot more relaxed discussing (thus it's getting the most space). Its analysis of gays and Nazi Germany is lacking in both perspective and facts. (If I feel that about an area I'm closest to I wonder how a feminist would feel about the other two sections.) The article points out the male prerogative of fascism along with the necessity of role playing. Men being strong, emotionless etc, while women are emotional, sympathetic, gentle. However the assumption of the unique link between homosexuality/maleness/fascism grates.

*"Not surprisingly, a fair number of the masculinest street fighters, including their leader, Rohm, took the philosophy of love between men seriously, and some were homosexuals. It needs to be said LOUDLY that the homosexuality of some Brownshirts was woman hating and different from today's gay liberation movement and from much of the gay movement in pre-Nazi Germany."*

Do we conclude from this that Rohm was the gay movement of the thirties in Germany? No mention of Hirschfeld and the Institute of Sexual Reform (which the Nazis looted and burned in May 1933) which by no means held a feminist politic. By implication J. Kimberley (the writer) sees male homosexuality in negative terms, is woman-hating as opposed to man-loving. Again:

*"It was because so much of the gay movement in Nazi Germany was woman hating that the Nazis could recruit."* Just how different was straight/gay misogyny in thirties Germany? Both left and right wing were anti-abortion and pro-family.

*"We are deeply convinced that the best foundations of society necessitates the consciousness of motherhood."* (Dr A. Gens, German Communist Party).

I disagree with Kimberley in his assumption that gay men's reasons for joining the National Front are any different from those of straight men, ie masculinity, which in this society is misogyny from a different viewpoint.

The article closes with a 'What is the situation today?' run down. It mentions the difficulties that women in the Anti-Nazi League face, and criticises the SWP suggestion that Women Against the Nazis should be dropped. (He neglects to mention the ANL fear of offending 'the masses', and thus refusing to give much publicity to Gays Against the Nazis, which is a pity as the parallel is relevant.)

Looking back over this review it seems I must have hated this article from the word go. Ironically my initial reaction was 'it seems ok'. Unfortunately it just doesn't stand up well on closer reading.

# Outlawed

## THE SEXUAL OUTLAW

John Rechy (W.H. Allen £5.00)

*Reviewed by David Thompson*

It is disturbing — if politically appropriate — that the wheel of history should have come full circle within the short space of 12 years. It is as if the privilege of being able to read *Last Exit to Brooklyn* in 1966 was a privilege *only*; as if every time we want to publish a work which aims to explore the realities, and not merely the hypotheses, of *our* sexuality, we will require the sanction of the moral protectors of society; as if we are doomed forever to bow and scrape to get a hearing! Yet, Rechy's blockbuster is now with us, in spite of a six month delay in publication through the benevolence of the Festival of Blight and the consequent caution of the publishers, who were forced to collect affidavits supporting publication before they could give the green light, although, by then, copies were available in paperback! We can only hope that when the next cycle rounds to a close — or well before then, by preference — the sanction of affidavits will not be necessary.

*The Sexual Outlaw* has two distinct — although clearly related — tracks: one centres around the story of Jim, and details his escapades during a three day period in the sexual underground. The other is a reasoned justification for gay existence and a fleeting look at a world which makes that justification necessary. Rechy's technique, of fusing a fictional — albeit earthy and recognisable — storyline with a polemic based on documentary coupled with personal statements (the whole expressed in crisp sentences), satisfies, not only because it provokes a clenched fist in defiance, but because it provokes more questions, like 'there is much in the gay world that demands critical exploration', and, 'complacency and indifference about our own are among the ugliest aspects of the gay world' abound, and require an in-depth analysis which the book was not written to give.

The story of Jim is the weaker of the two tracks. While we see Jim as part of the spectrum of life (as Jim lies on the beach, a hand moving towards his cock, a fisherman on the nearby rocks obviously throws his line), his persona is almost surreal, not so much an outlaw as at times a cruel egoist, and at others a desperate sexually-unfulfilled failure, yet always with an enormous phallus seeking worship. The other track, however, offsets the fiction, with its autobiographical base, breaking the repetition of Jim's experiences

and giving a clear perspective to the American gay myth (that myth which we, on the other side of the Atlantic, often falsely claim to be superior to our own). It would be ludicrous to endeavour to draw any global conclusions about a myth which encompasses so many styles. Rechy recognizes this:

"Gay must be allowed variations. It is gay fascism to decree that one *must* perform this sex act, and *must* allow that one, in order to be gay; it is gay fascism to deny *genuine* bisexuality, or to suspect all heterosexuals."

Yet it is not ludicrous to draw conclusions about those who prey on that gay world, like those who turn a blind eye when an elderly woman is raped because police are out arresting gays for holding hands in a gay bar! The emulation of that power game, witnessed in the gay world according to Rechy, by the S and M aspect, comes under his thundering hammer. While S and M may be a threat to gay freedom, so is any situation which aims to regiment people, as does 'the totalitarian imposition of the heterosexual norm', or which condones cruelty through contempt, like Rechy's jaded film director, firmly ensconced in his closet. The ugliness of the threats to our freedom need to be answered, not only with the outrage of suggesting that when gay people fuck and suck in the streets a revolutionary act is committed, but with celebration. Jim's hunt should not end at 'the tangled barbed wire', but should go beyond the vision of Dachau to that utopian world which *is* somewhere over the rainbow but becoming more visually tangible by the day. Then we will know, Mr. Rechy, whether a won revolution ends the life of the revolutionary. For now, however, thank you for your part — more please, and on with that revolution!





# Music to do the washing up to....

Tom Robinson Band — "TRB 2"

*Reviewed by Hans Klabbers*

Not the most imaginative of titles, and the same can unfortunately be said for most of the music on the record. The cover however is excellent. It provides a wealth of useful information with phone numbers of organisations such as Gay Switchboard, Lesbian Line and the National Women's Aid Federation who do not usually receive such wide efficient publicity. It also contains a list of good publications to read (eg. *Trouble With the Law*, the *Release Bust Book*, although "The Law and Sexuality" (Grassroots £1) and *Gay Left* are obvious omissions.)

The TRB sound has changed, become more mature, thicker somehow. Part of this must be due to an addition to the line up in the shape of Ian Parker, a fine keyboard player who provides interesting solos and a solid backing with Tom's bass and Preston Heyman who has replaced Dolphin Taylor on drums since the last album. The keyboards are more integrated, an important part of the overall sound unlike Mark Ambler on the first LP. Danny Kustow whose contributions on guitar are extremely extrovert at the best of times has not been allowed to dominate the TRB sound to the same extent as on stage and the previous record by Todd Rundgren taking time off from his involvement with the Patti Smith group to do an excellent production job on the album.

Tom's voice seems to be getting better with age, as demonstrated on *Blue Murder*, an emotional song with a haunting chorus which is the highlight of this selection. It's about the sometime boxing coach Liddle Towers who was beaten to death by the police after they arrested him for being drunk and disorderly outside a Newcastle pub. The coroner returned a verdict of 'justifiable homicide'. It is sung with sensitivity over a slow rhythm. The song ends with a menacing keyboard solo and a grinding guitar, with much confused shouting and arguing going on in the background:

" ... So if you figure on staying alive  
Button your lip and swallow your pride  
Don't make trouble when your hands are tied  
Liddle, he died ... "

Another highlight is "Sorry Mr. Harris". In the vein of "Winter of 79", it is a song about a man picked up by the army, who is interrogated and tortured. Tom Robinson's 'straight' voice is perfectly matched to the mock sincerity of the interrogator:

" I'm sorry but we simply don't believe you Mr. Harris  
We've seen you with these people several times  
We appreciate your pain but we need to know their names"  
It's effective and powerful stuff.

The other tracks on this record are mainly 'fun' singalong songs, some with memorable riffs and/or tunes ( *All Right/All Night/Hold Out*) and some without (*Black Angel/Crossing Over the Road*). It is a real disappointment not to find any songs about gays or being gay, unless you count "Let My People Be", which could be about anything, like any Village People cut you'd care to name. They're songs for a long hot summer (I hope he doesn't make any more predictions like that after the song of that name on TRB 1, and the disastrous summer that followed it). Everyone of these tracks are perfect for those American FM stations, songs for doing the washing up to. And that's good too. As Jill Posener said in a recent *Time Out* interview; " ... Politics has to be a totally intrinsic part of the popular music we're constantly flooded with .. .".

The new single on EMI records is a development of this idea. "Never Gonna Fall in Love (Again)", co-written with Elton John, is a gay disco song with a very strong and danceable tune. By the time you read this:

"I've got a brand new problem  
Pretty, and *he's* five foot ten

I don't want to fall in love again ..."

should be blasting out of every radio in the country, with the doo-wop chorus in the background singing "sexist, sexist ...". The flip is "Getting Tighter", an old Hot Peaches favourite, sung with just the right amount of nastiness. It is interesting and encouraging that, despite the compromises he's chosen to make, Tom Robinson is attempting to make political popular music, although it could be argued, a stronger emphasis on gay politics is needed.

There are other encouraging developments on the horizon. Tom is involved with the independent record-label Deviant Records, which he also backed financially and which recently released it's first single: "Stand Together"/"A Dyke's Gottado", the first by Noel Greig and the latter co-written with Jill Posener, who initiated the setting up of the label.

The single issued for Gay Pride Week, mentioned above, is another one, and I wonder how many more gay musicians are going to come out as a result of Tom Robinson's presence on the scene. I am not sure how Elton John's recent tour of the USSR, where gays are committed to mental hospitals and labour camps as a matter of course, fits into all this though.

It is very easy to criticise Tom as he is in a very vulnerable position, and the music press have done a typical build-em-up-knock-em-down job on him. Right now he needs support and encouragement. As many people hear what he says as Margaret Thatcher, and he is 'one of us' so listen to TRB 2, but remember that EMI do invest in arms in South Africa so borrow it from a friend. □



## LANGUAGE, SEXUALITY AND SUBVERSION

Working Papers Collection

Reviewed by Keith Birch.

This book is the first of a series by the Working Papers Collective. It is the result of an effort, as the editorial explains, to clarify the theoretical and political interventions that the group wish to make in the Australian political context. To this end they are going to publish collections of articles, pieces of research and reviews around more clearly defined areas of concern, mainly derived from French and Italian theoretical innovations such as the work of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari and Irigaray.

This issue looks at the discourses of psychoanalysis, political parties, specifically the Italian Communist Party, and other institutions and the way in which their practice reproduces power relationships and ensures their transmission.

In the section Power and Psychoanalysis, two important articles use Freud's analysis of Little Hans to show the way that psychoanalytic practice imposes its definitions and meanings on the behaviour of the small boy and helps to construct the very sexuality and relationships that it claims to discover. Deleuze and Guattari show how Freud's interpretation of Hans' behaviour, thoughts and fantasies conceals and excludes their real basis in the boy's experience and desire.

Gross and Campioni use the same work of Freud to show how his analysis is constructed within a bourgeois, patriarchal and heterosexual framework which imposes itself on the child in the course of analysis. Freud, with the parents, constructs Hans' individuality and sexuality within the dominant categories that Freud claimed psychoanalysis revealed. The theory of psychoanalysis is retained in their own work while rejecting Freud's claims to its universality and ahistorical nature. The article places the analysis in its historical and class setting while also pointing to the active role of the parents' unconscious.

An article by Meaghan Morris discusses some of the political developments in Italy up to 1977, focusing on the way in which elements to the left of or outside the Communist Party have been characterised, disqualified and attacked both by the State and by the PCI. Known as the 'excluded' or 'the Movement', these groups include elements of the young, the unemployed, the women's and gay movements and the far left. The challenge that they represent comes not only from their political organisation but also the disparate forms that their activity has taken.

The book also includes a number of translations of short articles by Eco, Deleuze and Guattari and Irigaray with the intention of bringing this theoretical work to a wider audience. □



### LETTER ON CAMP

Dear Gay Left

In Notes Against Camp (*Gay Left* No 7), Andrew Britton, for an hors d'oeuvre, bitterly attacks Gene, a character in 'Men', the play that Noel Greig and I wrote. Gene is an outrageously camp man and clearly not everybody's cup of tea. But, Andrew criticises Gene for saying "Socialism is about me", and in another place in the article complains that Gene asserts: "Men, like nature, abhor a vacuum".

By the same token Andrew would presumably attack Hamlet simply for saying "To be or not to be". Alternatively, he might haul Bette Lynch over the coals for chewing gum or having bottle-blond hair. But just as there's more to Bette Lynch than meets the eye, so Gene says a little more than Andrew has credited him with.

What Gene actually says about men is: "Men, like nature, abhor a vacuum. They have to fuck all the holes. Fill all the orifices. Plug all the gaps. Leave nothing to chance. Forewarned is forearmed." And about socialism he screams: "Socialism is about me, not about your neurosis. Socialism is the gift of the powerless. It's got nothing to do with powerful men."

Gene is a man who is powerless in the socialist and labour movement simply because he cannot and does not want to bury his identity to satisfy the prejudices of the manly men who, in his experience, are in sole charge of the Class Struggle. If it comes to the 'crunch' Gene would rather polish his nails than have to go all butch. And I can't blame him for that.

Gene, like camp gay men generally, is not expressing femininity by being camp. He is simply using irony to undermine the 'acceptable' stereotypes of masculinity on offer. Of course he is trapped within the confines of being a camp gay man, but this is because Gene has not discovered an androgynous role. Have you Andrew? Because I certainly haven't.

The play may be, and has been, legitimately criticised at many different levels, but to attack the work because it celebrates openly gay effeminacy at the expense of butchness is to completely miss the point. Because 'MEN' is, among other things, an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which those of us enmeshed in the masculine stereotype conspire in the oppression of our effeminate brothers. It is about the gender-trap, that labyrinth we all live in.

Don Milligan



## SEXUAL EXPERIENCE BETWEEN MEN AND BOYS

Parker Rossman. Temple Smith. £6.95.

*Reviewed by Philip Derbyshire*

Homosexuality seems to have lost its standing as absolute threat to the fabric of the family and society, at least if it remains confined within the ghetto and as a predeliction, however unfortunate, of adults. But the Demonology of the Right has found a new focus in the furore around paedophilia and the question of child sexuality. Whereas in 1962 the *Daily Mirror* could run sensationalist articles on 'How to Spot a Queer', it is members of PIE who now are mercilessly exposed in the Sunday tabloids, and the discourse of moral turpitude, irredeemable corruption and evil weaves around the figure of the paedophile.

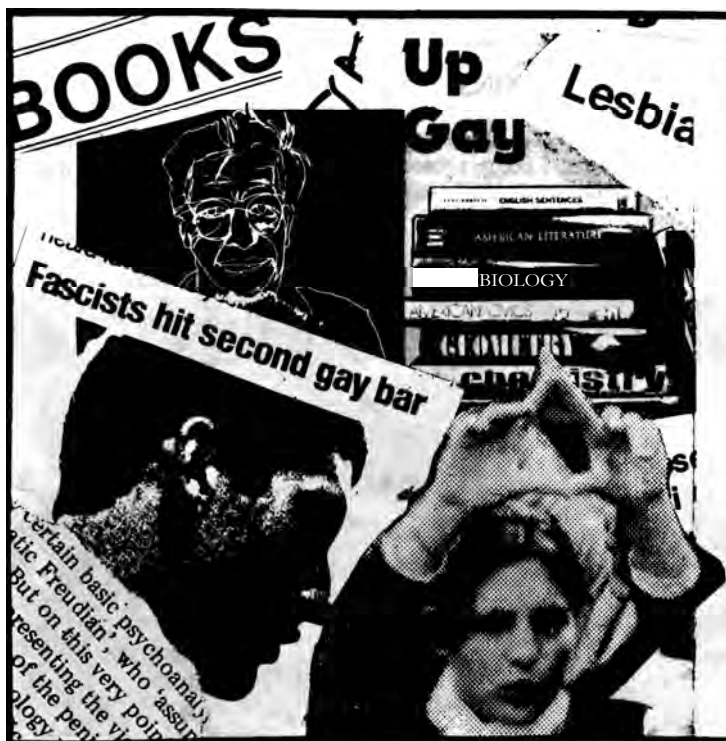
Unsurprisingly, in our society, where 'moral' issues are being fought out, science is rarely far away, and into the textual void around paedophilia, comes Parker Rossman's book, calling for objectivity and understanding where the Moral Rearmiers call for blood. But it is in this seemingly unbiased attitude that Rossman manages a more insidious exercise of power: he creates a new sexual delinquent, the paedophile, and then sets to work with typologies, taxonomies, discriminations, causal accounts ... in fact the whole arsenal of positive science, through which sexuality is analysed, regulated and controlled.

In the face of his own evidence, which remains enthralling and intrinsically fascinating, Rossman manages to hive off the paedophilic experience to the margins of sexuality. It becomes the prerogative of the paedophile/paederast despite the fact that few of the men interviewed only have sex with boys: there is no examination of the ways in which self-image and self-identity are acquired, nor how the rigid framework of 'natural' sexual categories restrict the possibilities of bodily pleasure.

Nor can Rossman get very far with more general reflections on sexuality and on the meaning of paedophilia when he ignores ab initio women and female sexuality. Far from being a simple delimiting of a domain of research, Rossman's exclusion of women from his account distorts in a sexist way the ways in which sexuality and sensuality are experienced between adults and children. He seems unable to think the connections between the affective intensity within the family and between mothers and children, and the existence of the paedophile as a category: parents and paedophiles have a more than contingent relationship in the present emotional economy of adult child relations.



Instead the paedophile remains a sexual outlaw, to be known, helped, saved from temptation proscribed, all as Rossman's erratic judgements dictate, but never a voice that might radically modulate the discourse that tyrannises our thinking on sexuality. And so the book, potentially so important, becomes merely an example of how not to write about sex, and with value only as inoculation against the plague of texts to come, as paedophilia and the sexuality of children and young people become central issues in the struggle for sexual liberation.



### GAY LEFT BOOK

The *Gay Left* collective is preparing for publication a book of essays discussing various aspects of the relationship between the struggles of gay people and the struggle for socialism. The vast majority of the score or so articles will be original publications, though a few of the outstanding contributions from past *Gay Lefts* will be republished, revised by the authors.

Themes include the relationship between capitalism and sexuality, the regulation of female sexuality, the role of the state and left political parties, personal accounts by lesbians and gay men of their coming out and of the subcultures, aspects of gay culture, the role of autonomous movements, and discussions of recent sexual political developments. Contributors include members of the *Gay Left* collective and many others who have participated in the women's and gay movements over the past ten years.

This book, written by lesbians and gay men, will be a major contribution to current discussions in the gay movement and on the left generally. Provisionally entitled--*Between Two Worlds: Radical attitudes towards homosexuality*, the book will be published in Spring 1980 by Allison and Busby Ltd, 6a Noel Street, London W1.



# What's Left

**Price Increase** — Despite raising the number of pages to 40 and incurring increased printing and typesetting costs we have managed to hold the price of *Gay Left* for a year and a half. Now inflation has overtaken us and we must raise the price of the journal. Both printing and typesetting costs have gone up a further 16% since the last issue, and postal rates are due to be increased within the next month. Subscription and mail order rates have gone up in line with these increases.

**York Community Books** — In the last issue we gave their address incorrectly. It is 73 Walmgate, York YO1 2TZ. They have an extensive list of gay books and pamphlets.

**Gay's The Word** — 66 Marchmont Street, London WC1 specialises in gay and feminist books, pamphlets and periodicals, including many imported items. Open 10-7pm, with late evening events on Thursdays. Close to Russell Square tube.

**Minerva Books**, a new mail-order firm stocking books for feminist and gay women, has been set up by Elizabeth Lambdon. To obtain further details of books available, please send a sae to Minerva Books, c/o 9 Moorfields, London EC2.

**Glib** is a new magazine produced in Birmingham by and for gay people, containing poetry, fiction, personal pieces and politics. Glib costs 30p. Further information from Allan Brayne, 137 Powke Lane, Rowley Regis, Warley, West Midlands.

**LE GAI PIED** is a new French monthly journal covering local and international affairs. The first two issues have also concentrated on recent developments in theoretical work on various aspects of homosexuality and gay politics. LE GAI PIED costs 5 fr. and an annual subscription is 50 fr. Available from EDITIONS DU TRIANGLE ROSE, B.P. 183, 75523 PARIS CEDEX 11.

## NORTHERN GAY

The Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA) is now producing a regular paper, *Northern Gay*, which aims to represent the views and cause of gay people in Northern Ireland to a broad public. The *Northern Gay* costs 10p and may be obtained from NIGRA, P.O. Box 44, Belfast.

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# Contents

Editorial .....	2
Personal Politics: Ten Years On .....	4
Gays at Work: Student Unions .....	9
Pat Arrowsmith -- Pacifist .....	11
Paedophilia -- A Response .....	13
Childhood Sexuality and Paedophilia .....	18
In Defence of Disco .....	20
Living With Indecency .....	24
Lost Freedoms .....	27
The Regime of Sex .....	29
Picking up the Pieces .....	30
Edward and George .....	31
Teachers Out .....	32
Reviews .....	34
Past Present .....	35
Outlawed .....	36
Music to do the washing up to .....	37
Reviews .....	38

## BACK ISSUES

### Gay Left No 3

Women in Gay Left, Gays and Class, IS Gay Group, Gay Workers' Movement and usual reviews etc.

### Gay Left No 5

Why Marxism, Images of Homosexuality in Film, Lesbian Invisibility, Gays and Fascism, Gay Theatre Past and Present, Politics & Ideology, Gay History, Future of the Gay Movement.

### Gay Left No 6

(Gays) In The Balance, The State Repression and Sexuality, Looking At Pornography, Working Class Lesbians, Gays at Work, Motherhood, Fighting Fascism.

### Gay Left No 7

Paedophilia Examined, Gay Art, Greece, Northern Ireland, Camp, Tom Robinson, Gay Sweatshop, Nighthawks, Chemical Castration, Reviews.

Please note that *Gay Left* numbers 1, 2 and 4 are no longer available.

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