

NAM, OL, & GAY LIBERATION

New American Movement (NAM) is a nationwide socialist organization of about thirty chapters. Founded in 1972 largely by people radicalized in the anti-war movement, NAM has attempted to combine the New Left heritage of nondogmatic politics with a Marxist perspective of building a grass-roots, working-class movement for socialism. NAM politics have emphasized the importance of feminist contributions to the Left, including the political significance of "personal" life, the importance of an autonomous women's movement, and support for gay liberation and an autonomous gay liberation movement.

At the recent NAM convention, some members of the NAM gay caucus objected to the presence of an October League (OL) literature table among several other outside left groups there selling literature. The OL is a China-oriented Marxist-Leninist group whose position on homosexuality is that it is a "decadent" phenomena of class society and that gay people will be "re-educated" after a revolution.

The NAM convention committee then closed down the OL literature table, and the issue went to the convention floor for discussion. We in Austin NAM are strongly opposed to OL's "line" on gays, but we were disturbed for a number of reasons at the tactic of opposing that line by closing down the OL's lit table. We helped draft a resolution that condemned OL's position on gays, but called for re-instatement of the table. The resolution passed in a close vote. In what follows we'd like to explain why we took this position.

We're angry at the Guardian's account, which is basically confusing and often misleading, and we're very concerned about the kinds of rumors we hear flying around--specifically, that we support the OL's position that homosexuality is a symptom of the decadence of capitalism and that gay people ought to be "re-educated" after a revolution.

Comrades, we would be crazy to agree with such an analysis. At a mental health institution where some of us work, two of the first three people fired in an anti-union offensive were gay. The UT administration spent three years trying to keep gay people from organizing on campus. One of our members in Lexington served time on a contempt charge in the grand jury offensive against gay people. One of our most valued members lost his job when his employer got an anonymous phone call denouncing him as a gay socialist. We look at who attacks gay people: bosses, university administrations, cops, grand juries, the Lower Nineteenth Street Merchants Association, and frat rats. We would need to have our heads examined if we stood with these people on any issue. At the convention, we characterized the OL's position as reactionary and anti-human; we stand by that analysis.

Particularly striking is the way in which anticommunism continues to flourish in NAM. The most glaring example of this came in a move to eject an October League (OL) literature table from the convention. Members of NAM's Gay Caucus urged the convention arrangements committee to rescind its agreement permitting the OL to set up a literature table (paid for, as were tables by the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and others) because of what they charged was OL's support of "genocide" against homosexuals.

The arrangements committee acceded to the request and notified OL that it would have to leave the convention. When news of the action spread throughout the meeting, however, a huge controversy broke out. Finally, members of the Austin (Tex.) NAM chapter introduced a resolution on the floor of the convention to overturn the decision to expel the OL. After a passionate debate, the resolution was passed by a fairly narrow vote (228-175) and the OL set up its literature table once again.

sketch by Kathy Kollwitz
in memoriam German fighters
against Nazi Germany



GAY LIBERATION IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

SOCIALIST REVOLUTION IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT GAY LIBERATION

But what do we do about it? Nam has a strong commitment to democracy and we feel that its very important to use open and equal methods of resolving conflicts within the left. We would be very happy if, in the whole world, all socialists understood the need to fight the oppression of gay people. But this is not the case. China makes the dubious claim that there are no homosexuals among its seven hundred million people; Cuba "re-educates" its gay population. Inside the US, we are the only nationwide socialist organization, with the exception of some trot groups, that supports the formation of an autonomous gay movement and criticizes the anti-gay policies of the socialist countries. We feel some responsibility for correcting this situation and we think it would be very difficult to do so if we had no contact with organizations like the OL. If we excluded them, we would have no opportunity to struggle with them. We are interested in exposing the OL's line, confronting them about it, and changing their thinking; we are not interested in repressing them. The resolution we introduced makes this clear:

Many people have said that, if somebody had come to the convention with sexist or racist literature, we would have excluded them. There's some point to this argument--we would not have permitted Right-to-Life or the Ku Klux Klan to appear at our convention. But we don't feel that the argument holds in this case. The OL was not participating in the NAM convention. They had paid a fee, along with the Socialist Workers' Party and some other left groups to sell their literature in a specified room away from convention proceedings. When informally confronted about their line, they defended it, and they were

confronted about it so often that they did very little else all weekend.

Further, we ask people to consider the state of the Left in this country. It's almost a truism that the left is divided, ridden with sectarianism, and intensely competitive. The attitude that any group that you disagree with is an agent of the bourgeoisie, or a collection of counter-revolutionaries, or a danger to the workingclass, is largely responsible for this state of affairs. NAM has suffered a lot from this kind of sectarianism, of which Silber's article is a fair example, and we don't want to act in a sectarian or divisive way ourselves.

We think that it is important not to be one-sided in our evaluation of a group. The OL does some valuable work in trade unions and around racism. We think they are mistaken on very many questions, and we have lots of disagreements with them. But they are not our enemies, and we will not treat them as we would the Klan or Right-to-Life or any group of flat-out reactionaries.

We do not see this action as an attack on the gay movement or as a retreat from our position of support for that movement. We hope that people who have disagreements with our position will talk with us, make their criticisms openly and that this incident not become a breeding ground for rumors and gossip.

Austin NAM