



Discussion Bulletin

Published by

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

14 Charles Lane, New York, N. Y. 10014

Vol. 30, No. 1
June, 1972

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MOTION APPROVED BY SWP NATIONAL
COMMITTEE PLENUM

The following motion was approved by the National Committee at its plenum, May 14, 1972.

(a) To open immediately following the plenum an internal party literary discussion, for a three-month period, of the gay liberation movement and the party's orien-

tation to it, leading to a decision by the subsequent plenum of the National Committee;

(b) To authorize the incoming Political Committee to allow a limited extension of the discussion period if practical circumstances require.

CONCERNING THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT
AND THE PARTY'S ORIENTATION TO IT

by Barry Sheppard

The purpose of this article is to help initiate the internal party literary discussion of the gay liberation movement and the party's orientation to it. The first part contains some comments on the oppression of gay people. The second part is an outline of the development of the gay liberation movement, as far as I know it. The third section presents my opinion on what the party's orientation to this movement should be at the present time.

* * *

Various gay liberation and homosexual rights organizations have described the kind of oppression that homosexuals face in the United States. (See David Thorstad's article in the April 16, 1971, issue of *The Militant*.) One aspect of this oppression is the existence of reactionary and archaic laws against homosexual acts. While these laws cannot be enforced on a large scale in the population as a whole, they are used to selectively victimize gay people. The existence of these laws also sets the stage for the police and others to victimize gays in other ways, from entrapment to blackmail.

Known homosexuals face discrimination in employment. There are many employers who will not employ known or suspected gay people. Known gay people also face housing discrimination. In addition to these and other overt forms of discrimination, gay people also are subjected to a special psychological oppression, resulting from the deep social prejudice against them.

Why does this oppression of gay people exist? Gays are not a class, with a special relation to the means of production, nor an oppressed nationality, nor do they

play a special role in the family or any other social structure. There is not a precise analogy, therefore, between the oppression of gays and the oppression of workers, oppressed nationalities or women. For example, the roots of the oppression of women lie in the development of the family structure in the rise of class society, which assigns a subordinate role to women within that structure and within society. Discrimination against women in other spheres is a result and extension of the subordinate role of women within the family structure. Prejudice against women is part of the ideological and moral justifications of the subordinate role of women in society, just as anti-Black prejudice and racism are part of the ideological and moral justifications of the oppression of Blacks as a nationality.

The prejudice against gay people, however, is not a direct result of a subordinate social role played by gay people—gay people play no special social role. This prejudice is directed against people whose sole distinction is that they engage in or have a preference for certain kinds of sexual acts. It is rooted in and flows from the traditional sexual morality, which disapproves of those acts and the people who engage in them. This traditional sexual morality itself is a product of the nuclear family system; it consists of guidelines of sexual conduct which help preserve the nuclear family relationships in class society.

Leaving aside all discussion about why homosexual impulses exist, or why a section of the population prefers homosexuality, which need not concern us in trying to understand the nature of the oppression of gay people, the prejudice against homosexual acts and gay people is

a by-product of the traditional sexual morality, which is the emotional and ideological glue helping hold the nuclear family together.

The discrimination against gay people, in turn, is a result of this prejudice, prejudice that is ultimately derived from that social structure known as the family— itself a product of class society.

The prejudice against gay people is inculcated—hand in hand with the compulsive sexual morality of the family system—by parents, religion, the schools, the law, quack psychiatry. This prejudice is manifested not only in the more obvious and even violent ways, as in the cases of physical attacks upon gay people by cops and others. It also results in a range of psychological oppression—from difficulties in finding a fulfilling personal life, to feelings of shame and guilt on the part of gay people. There is a fear of exposure and an attempt to hide their identity on the part of most gay people. This is a fear of not only what could be done against them by their employers or by the courts or police, but it is also a fear of social ostracism.

The struggle against the oppression of gay people is basically a democratic struggle. The motion on the gay liberation movement probe adopted by the 1971 SWP convention included the following point: "To reaffirm the party's position, stated in the Political Committee motion of May 25, 1971, of unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights, including full civil and human rights, and against all the forms of discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism." This summation of the party's position on the oppression of homosexuals is essentially correct in my opinion, and should be maintained.

* * *

There have been two discernible phases in the rise of the gay liberation movement. In the 1950s, two organizations developed and were most prominent, the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society, which attempted to educate people about the issue of the discrimination against homosexuals. They engaged in activities such as speaking before various groups and lobbying to change some of the discriminatory laws.

A new phase began in the later 1960s, and developed rapidly especially during the fall of 1969 and the spring of 1970, with the rise of what has been called the gay liberation movement. The gay liberation movement is an aspect of the current radicalization and developed out of it. It has tended to make a much more radical critique of society than the previously existing homosexual rights organizations did, although the development of the gay liberation movement has had an impact on both the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society and has partially transformed these organizations in certain areas.

There are a number of factors which prepared the way for the development of the gay liberation movement.

First, there have been changes in the prevailing attitudes on homosexuality in society as a whole, together with changes in prevailing views on sexuality in general. While the prejudices remain, and they are deep, a more tolerant attitude towards homosexuals has developed. At bottom, this reflects a loosening of the hold of compulsory sexual morality that has accompanied

the growing crisis of the nuclear family.

These changes towards more tolerant attitudes concerning homosexuals have been evident in the cultural and information media in various ways, in the fact that there have been changes in the laws (in one state) and certain governmental administrative directives against aspects of the discrimination against gay people, and even in statements by some bourgeois candidates. There have been a greater number of legal challenges to aspects of discrimination against gay people. This shift in attitudes has provided an atmosphere in which such a movement could develop.

The development of more tolerant attitudes towards homosexuals has been most pronounced among radicalized young people. One aspect of the youth radicalization has been a widespread and growing questioning of repressive sexual morality. This critical attitude towards traditional morality undermines the ideological basis of the prejudice against gay people.

Under the impact of movements such as the Black liberation struggle and the women's liberation movement, radicalizing young people have begun to reject any discrimination against people for their physical or sexual characteristics. For many in this generation, opposition to the traditional repressive sexual morality and to discrimination based upon sexual characteristics is becoming the norm. This trend among the youth was reinforced by the rise of the women's liberation movement.

The women's movement itself is concerned with sexual oppression, as women are oppressed as a sex. The literature of the women's movement has analyzed and exposed the objectification of sex and the debilitating and reactionary character of traditional sexual morality, and the distortion of sexuality in capitalist society. The Marxist theory of the origin, structure and role of the family as the basis of the oppression of women has become much more widely accepted. In this context, many in the women's movement have begun to see the prejudice towards homosexuals as another facet of sexist oppression.

The women's movement not only helped pave the way for the rise of the gay liberation movement on the plane of ideas, it had to confront the question of the discrimination against homosexuals directly in the form of lesbian-baiting. The women's movement has been lesbian-baited from two sides. First, there are lesbians in the women's movement, including in leadership positions, and the movement has been baited because of this. Secondly, there is the related charge that any woman who fights for her rights is stepping out of her "place," is rejecting her "femininity," and must be a lesbian. The women's movement has by and large rejected lesbian-baiting as an attempt to divide and weaken the movement. This debate, and working with lesbians in women's groups, helped many women overcome prejudices against lesbians, and to see that this prejudice is, in part, another aspect of the oppression of all women, since it includes not only a prejudice against women engaging in sexual relations with other women but also a prejudice about what a woman's personality is supposed to be.

While these developments in the radicalization lay the ground for the rise of the gay liberation movement, this movement itself has in turn brought a higher level of understanding and consciousness of the oppression of gay people among radicalizing youth, and wider layers.

The gay liberation movement has been manifest in a number of different ways, from the coming out of hidden homosexuals (some of them prominent people), to articles in the bourgeois press, to the proliferation of gay newspapers, to the organized gay liberation movement.

In 1969 and 1970, gay liberation organizations appeared in major cities and on campuses across the country. The "coming out" of organized gay liberation groups reflects a growing mood, especially among young homosexuals, to reject self-hatred and to affirm their humanity, as well as a desire to fight discrimination. There were a number of actions and demonstrations—the largest have been the Christopher Street demonstrations in 1970 and 1971.

From what we can tell from the probe of the gay liberation movement that was conducted by the party and YSA, and by what has happened since the party convention, there has been an evolution of the organized gay liberation movement. A sector of the movement developed in an ultraleft and inward-turned direction. This sector has become part of the broader ultraleft and commune-oriented youth current. In some areas, this process has resulted in the virtual disappearance of any viable organized expression of the gay movement.

This process was accompanied by splits, where there was a reaction against this ultraleftism, and where there were people who wanted to keep a movement going that would continue to fight for the rights of gay people. Thus in some areas and campuses, more stable formations have survived. The Gay Activists Alliance in New York is probably the most stable of these organizations nationally. On many campuses, some viable gay groups have continued to function. Many of these, however, seem to be, at present, concerned primarily with providing various social services and outlets for gays, although we could expect that they could be mobilized around specific struggles, should they develop. The present political orientation of these groups appears to be primarily towards the elections. One of their activities has been to confront candidates, demanding that they take positions in favor of the rights of gay people.

It's a very uneven picture throughout the country. In some places, gay liberation organizations continue to function on one level or another, while in others they are virtually nonexistent. There is no national organizational framework of gay liberation organizations. From what we know at present, it is unlikely that there will be such a national organizational framework in the near future. It also appears unlikely, given the present orientation of most gay liberation groups, that there will be

any national focus of action by gay liberation groups in the period immediately ahead.

The gay liberation movement at present encompasses a small fraction of homosexual people. It remains to be seen how extensively gay people will be mobilized to struggle for their rights, exactly what forms this struggle will take, and the tempo of the struggle.

* * *

The question of what our orientation towards this movement should be at the present time has to be considered in the light of the concrete situation of this movement, and in relation to other fields of work and tasks facing the party.

In view of the present state of the organized gay liberation movement on a national scale, it is my opinion that it would be a mistake to attempt to carry out a national party intervention in the gay liberation movement at the present time. There is no national gay liberation organization which could be a focus of our intervention. There is no national action coalition around specific issues of gay oppression which we could support and help build. Any attempt by us to start from scratch and try to build such an organization or coalition would be a very difficult enterprise—in my opinion, one which would inevitably fail in the given conditions where we do not see much motion toward such formations. We cannot attempt to substitute our own small forces, in any movement, for broader forces we might like to see organized, but which are not at the present time.

Since the party convention, there have been a number of struggles around the issue of gay rights that have occurred on a local level. For example, there was a demonstration in Minneapolis last fall, reported in *The Militant*, protesting the firing of a gay person from his job at the university. This year, again, it looks as though there will be Christopher Street actions in some cities.

The tactical question of how to relate to such local developments and local gay liberation organizations will vary from branch to branch and at different times, and should be decided by the branches in light of the general overall political priorities of the party, and the resources of the branches.

Finally, given the interest in the elections on the part of most of the gay liberation movement, the position taken by the SWP election campaign on gay rights should help us reach the best of the gay activists, win them to support of our campaign, and recruit them to our full program.

June 1, 1972

ASPECTS OF THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT
by John Lauritsen, Upper West Side Branch, New York Local

From Bolshevism To Stalinism

Within months of taking power after the 1917 revolution, the Bolshevik government, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, ended all legal discrimination based upon homosexuality. The old czarist homosexuality paragraph which penalized homosexual acts with long-term imprisonment was simply scrapped. This reform was consistent with making divorce easy, providing for free abortion, communal laundries and dining halls, and other revolutionary actions.

An article on homosexuality in the great Soviet Encyclopedia was based upon the two people considered to be the leading scientific authorities on the subject: Magnus Hirschfeld and Sigmund Freud. The article maintained that homosexuality represented a scientific question and that homosexuals should not be punished. It was emphasized that the walls separating homosexuals from the rest of society should be taken down.

We have a great deal of research to do in finding out what discussions took place within the Bolshevik party, and exactly what reasons were given for the revolutionary and unprecedented abolition of the anti-homosexuality laws. We might speculate that the leading Bolsheviks perceived religious superstition as the source of anti-homosexual prejudice; evidence to this effect was available at that time, though it would be quite meager and subjective in comparison to the anthropological data banks available to us now. Almost certainly they realized that activity *which does nobody any harm* should not be punished. This is the "no crimes without victims" concept which has recently gained currency in the gay liberation and other movements.

According to Wilhelm Reich, both Lenin and Trotsky placed great importance upon the sexual revolution and the need to develop appropriate theory.

Lenin himself, in criticizing a book by Ruth Fischer, stressed the fact that the sexual revolution, like the sexual social process in general, was not at all understood from the standpoint of dialectic (sic) materialism, and that its mastery would require a tremendous experience. He thought that if anybody would comprehend this problem in its totality and real significance, he would do the greatest service to the revolution. . . . Trotsky also pointed out again and again how new and how little understood was the field of cultural and sexual revolution. (*The Sexual Revolution*, Noonday, N.Y., p. 180)

Unfortunately, circumstances did not permit the development of such theory. The early actions of the Bolsheviks, however, gave a powerful impetus to many different struggles, and radical mass-based sexual freedom groups arose during the 1920's and early 1930's, until they were squelched by fascism and stalinism.

As part of the Thermidorian reaction in the Soviet Union, there developed a mythology regarding homosexuality-

completely without foundation in the real world.

Stalinists began to talk of homosexuality as "the result of decadence in the bourgeois sector of society" and "the fascist perversion." Discrimination and "party purges" began to take place. In some cases, old Bolsheviks like Clara Zetkin intervened and achieved acquittal. But repression continued until in January, 1934 there were mass arrests of homosexuals in Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkov, and Odessa. In March, 1934, a law punishing homosexual acts with imprisonment up to eight years appeared.

For an eloquent polemic dealing with the tensions midway between Bolshevism and Stalinism, I suggest that comrades read "A 1928 Appeal for Homosexual Rights" by Kurt Hiller, appearing in the May, 1971 *International Socialist Review*. In this speech, delivered before the Second International Congress for Sexual Reform in Copenhagen, Hiller, an independent socialist and spokesperson for homosexual emancipation, takes on the "decadence" theories of French CP'er Henri Barbusse, who became one of the most subservient stalinist hacks.

The Communist Parties to this day continue to propagate the stalinist crap about homosexuality being "the product of alienation," "the fascist perversion," etc., *ad nauseam*. I shall give a few typical and recent examples of their libels. First, however, I wish to re-emphasize that there is *not a scrap of evidence for these myths*. The "fascist perversion" theme is particularly obscene, since gay people were put into concentration camps and murdered under fascism in Germany and Italy. In Italy today, the neo-fascist party propagandizes for anti-homosexual legislation. In America, the American Nazi Party counter-demonstrates at gay liberation actions.

Example I.

Carmen Ristorucci, in reviewing Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* for the CP theoretical journal, *Political Affairs*, January, 1971, writes:

Little differentiation is made between homosexuals who are a product of a decaying capitalism which confuses and corrupts the minds of people, and women, an exploited section . . .

Example II.

The cartoons of Bill Andrews for the *Daily World*.

A. (February 20, 1971)

Cartoon shows an effeminate J. Edgar Hoover and Nixon. Hoover is the evil queen after Snow White story — asks question of magic mirror ("who is fairest of us all?") — reflection of effeminate Nixon in mirror answers, "You are, of course, my dear!" Both are clearly portrayed as less than "real men," i.e. "faggots."

B. (May 29, 1971)

Hoover again, being embraced by male TV star, with hearts floating around. Hoover says, "Easy lad! People are looking!"

C. (October 15, 1970)

A charming allusion to the "fascist perversion."

The caption reads, "Sen. Fulbright (D-Ark) criticized the Nixon regime 'for thinking that it is in our interest to go to bed with the Papadopoulos.' (Fascist Greek junta)" Andrews draws a Nixon in flowered pajamas in a four poster double bed with a depraved looking Papadopoulos with pursed lips. Nixon, his arms around Papadopoulos, says "...But it was LUST at first sight!" On a small table is an alarm clock and a vase with flowers. Through a window can be seen the Acropolis. So that nobody will miss the point, a large swastika is shown on the foot-board of the bed.

Example III.

Jarvis Tyner in pamphlet, *Build the Youth Front*, 25c, publ. Y. W. L. L., sold at July, 1971, NPAC conference in NYC.

But Gay Liberation is essentially a diversion. And the bourgeoisie picks up on these things and goes to town. The N. Y. Times was talking about "gay ghettos." . . . There is male chauvinism (*sic*). There's no question about that, but I don't think "sexism" describes the thing, the phenomenon. We are opposed to the repression of homosexuals on the basis of their being homosexuals . . . But it is a psychological problem. It's based on the bourgeois concept of manhood. It's based on all kinds of pressures in the crisis and oppression and exploitation in society with people distorted and so on. But you really can't answer the Gay Liberation movement at this stage by walking up to them and saying "You're sick." They're not ready to accept this. And in every coalition, Gay Liberation has been brought in. . . . Then they had this united front with some sections of the Trotskyites and other trends. (p. 18)

Example IV.

The leading stalinist "intellectual," Prof. Herbert Aptheker, writing in his book, *The Urgency Of Marxist-Christian Dialogue*, Harper & Row, N. Y. 1970.

...a good working rule would appear to be that the exercise of sexuality is the privilege and pleasure of adults and is the business of two such adults and nobody else's. On the whole this would answer the question of so-called "perversions," though the attitude toward homosexuality remains rather intensely hostile in socialist countries.

Such sexual conduct as well as the extraordinary emphasis upon sexuality in the West, and especially in the United States, (particularly in rather exotic and sadistic forms) is viewed by Marxists as a reflection of decadence. Manifestations of this in civilizations in decline—as in the Greek and Roman empires, or in those of Nazi Germany, and fascist Italy—serve to confirm this analysis, especially as far as dominant cultural and behavioral patterns are concerned. (p.99)

We observe Aptheker's use of the word, "analysis." Yet he presents no analysis. How could he?

Was the obedient professor just a little embarrassed at having to follow the decadence-fascist perversion line? Who can tell? The academes just rolls on.

Greece in its youth and its prime—decadent!

SUMMARY OF SCIENTIFIC OPINION

No other aspect of human existence has been regarded

with less rationality than sexual behavior. Until recently, homosexuality was regarded as a rare disease or a "crime against nature." In the Middle Ages, homosexuality was referred to as "*peccatum illud horribile, inter Christianos non nominandum*" (the sin so horrible that it may not be mentioned among Christians), and it is still regarded by many as something mysterious and uncanny—the "love that dare not speak its name." Most Americans would rather leap into a sea of flames than discuss their homosexual feelings.

Scientific studies, however, indicate that even in our own, brutally repressive society, homosexual acts are a commonly occurring form of activity found among all classes and all kinds of women and men.

Kinsey and his associates interviewed more than 8,000 American males and more than 7,000 American females in their studies: *Sexual Behavior In The Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior In The Human Female* (1953), using a study design of extreme sophistication. Here are a few of their findings:

Fifty percent of all males are conscious of erotic responses to other males.

Thirty-seven percent of the total male population (2 out of every 5 males) has had at least one homosexual experience to the point of orgasm between adolescence and old age.

Eighteen percent have at least as much homosexual as heterosexual experience for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55.

Ten percent are more or less exclusively homosexual for at least three years between these ages.

Four percent are exclusively homosexual throughout their lives after adolescence.

Ten percent of *married* males between the ages of 16 and 25 are involved in some homosexual activity.

Twenty-eight percent of the female population is conscious of erotic responses to other females.

Thirteen percent reach orgasm through homosexual contacts by their mid-forties.

Between two and six percent are more or less exclusively homosexual.

Kinsey and his associates find that their data require thinking in terms of a gradual *continuum* between those who exhibit exclusively heterosexual and those who exhibit exclusively homosexual behavior. They aptly sum up by saying:

The homosexual has been a significant part of human sexual activity ever since the dawn of history, primarily because it is an expression of capacities that are basic in the human animal.

The anthropologist, Frank Beach, and the psychologist, Clellan Ford, studied anthropological data on 190 human societies as well as the behavior of subhuman primates and lower mammals for their book, *Patterns Of Sexual Behavior* (Harper & Bros., 1951). They found that America, by condemning any and all forms of homosexual behavior, fell into an extreme minority position among human societies. Most human societies either encourage or tolerate some form of homosexual behavior. In addition, they found homosexual behavior, including genuine liaisons, to be quite frequent among infra-human primates (apes and monkeys) and among

all lower mammals. They concluded that:

Men and women who are totally lacking in any conscious homosexual leanings are as much a product of cultural conditioning as are the exclusive homosexuals who find heterosexual relations distasteful and unsatisfying. Both extremes represent movement away from the original, intermediate condition which includes the capacity for both forms of sexual expression. In a restrictive society such as our own a large proportion of the population learns not to respond to or even to recognize homosexual stimuli and may eventually become in fact unable to do so. At the same time a certain minority group, also through the process of learning, becomes highly if not exclusively sensitive to the erotic attractions of a like-sexed partner....human homosexuality is not basically a product of hormonal imbalance or "perverted heredity." It is the product of the fundamental mammalian heritage of general sexual responsiveness as modified under the impact of experience. (*op. cit.*, p. 263.)

Wainwright Churchill in his book, *Homosexual Behavior Among Males* (Hawthorne, N.Y., 1967) presents extensive evidence that anti-homosexual prejudice is peculiar to Judeo-Christendom, that is, to lands under the influence of Jewish and Christian superstitions. Such prejudice is not found in most of Asia and Africa, except as a result of European colonization or the penetration of Christian missionaries.

As materialists we are not inclined to think in terms of "eternal human nature," and we do not see sexual attitudes as having been handed down from an old man in the sky. Since evidence indicates that homosexual behavior is perfectly natural and commonly occurring, then it is anti-homosexual prejudice that has to be explained. This leads us to an examination of religious history.

OUR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

From the very beginning fear and hostility seem to characterize the Judeo-Christian attitude towards sex: original sin, the shamefulness of the naked body, etc.

Consider the cursing of Eve:

I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception
In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children
And thy desire shall be to thy husband
And he shall rule over thee.

Here we see the feminine role laid down as degradation and penitent submission to male authority.

What were the sins of our Mother Eve? Sexual pleasure and the pursuit of knowledge. And if one were to defend our woman ancestor, one would have to maintain that the human body and reason were good, in opposition to the entire Judeo-Christian tradition.

Homosexuality flourished among many ancient peoples: the Celts, Greeks, Scandinavians, Egyptians, Etruscans, Cretans, Carthaginians, and Sumerians, and throughout the "Cradle of Civilization," the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, the Nile Valley, and the Mediterranean Basin.

The ancient Hebrews, however, developed negative attitudes towards human sexuality. PRUDISHNESS came

to dominate the Jewish outlook. For example, the sculpture of the Greeks and other "heathen" peoples, portraying the nude human body, shocked the Hebrews, who called this "uncovering of nakedness."

The Hebrews considered themselves the "chosen people" of a jealous and vindictive god, morally superior to their neighbors. In setting themselves apart from other peoples, they developed a most stringent sexual code. Under mosaic law, 36 crimes were punishable by death; one half - 18 - involved sexual relationships of one kind or another.

For two men who made love to each other, the law stated:

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood *shall be* upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)

The prescribed method of execution was death by stoning, regarded as the most severe penalty. Adulterers, in contrast, were put to death by the more humane method of strangulation.

Not only would death by stoning be slow and painful, but there would be an additional psychological aspect. Every man, woman and child would take part in the execution, the hatred of the entire community directed against the non-conformist.

The Hebrews came to associate homosexual practices entirely with foreign customs, and they referred to "the way of the Canaanite-Chaldean-heathen-etc.," rather than naming the unnamable practices. Conceptions of idolatry evolved to the notion that homosexuality was actually unnatural. The Sodom and Gomorrah story was probably literally believed.

Then the slave religion, Christianity, came along. The Death Religion. The Christians carried forward the Jewish sexual code with new refinements.

By the 4th Century, Constantius had made homosexual acts a capital crime.

About 400 AD Theodosius The Great made Christianity the state religion of Rome, and from that time onwards, heretics were enemies of the state and traitors.

A milestone in the history of gay oppression came in 538 when Justinian The Great codified Roman law. This Christian emperor prescribed torture, mutilation, and castration. He once had the dying bodies of two bishops convicted of sodomy dragged through the streets in view of the assembled populace. Justinian's edict condemned sodomites to the sword "lest, as a result of these impious acts, whole cities should perish together with their inhabitants." The edict referred to "diabolical & unlawful lusts" and reasoned that "because of such crimes there are famines, earthquakes & pestilences," a reference to the Sodom and Gomorrah story. By March 15, 544, Justinian was claiming that homosexual acts endangered the state.

We might note in passing that the ruling classes do not generally feel themselves bound by the moral codes they pass down to the masses. Justinian was no paragon of virtue, and many stories are recorded of the affairs, both heterosexual and homosexual, of his wife, the Empress Theodora. She was once so excited by observing men being castrated that she was driven to public masturbation.

During the dark ages, homosexual offenders were punished by excommunication, denial of last rites, castration, torture, mutilation, death by burning, and burial in unsanctified ground. Some Christian fathers even felt it necessary to perform mutilation upon the *corpses* of the offenders. Sodomy, heresy, witchcraft, and treason became more or less equated (adumbrating the McCarthy period in America, where again homosexuality and treason were linked).

The word "faggot," now used as a pejorative for male homosexuals, originates in the practice of burning homosexual offenders at the stake. "Faggot" means a bundle of sticks tied together for burning. Such phrases as *fire and faggot* and *to fry a faggot* refer to burning heretics alive. Heretics who recanted were obliged to wear an embroidered figure of a faggot on their sleeve. Hence, we see the word generalized from a bundle of fuel sticks, to the method of execution, to major victims of the Inquisition, gay people.

According to Henry Kamen in *The Spanish Inquisition*:

Homosexuality in the Middle Ages was treated as the ultimate crime against morality, and the standard definitions of it refer to the "abominable" or the "unspeakable" crime. . . . The usual punishment was burning alive.

The Inquisition lasted until well into the 19th Century. Although the Roman Church deserves the greatest credit for the persecution of gay people, the Protestant denomination should not be overlooked.

Henry VIII of England murdered his wife, drove tens of thousands of people off their lands and then had 27,000 of them executed for "vagabondage." He established both the Church of England and the death penalty for the "detestable & abominable Vice of Buggery committed with mankind or beast." Henry VIII was a clever man. With a view to increasing the royal fortune, he was careful to specify (for those executed) "penalties of their goods, chattels, debts, lands, tenements, etc." Armed with this law, Henry VIII used the pretext of vice to destroy numerous monasteries and thus gain their lands. The death penalty for sodomy remained in effect in England until 1861.

In Amsterdam in 1750, 250 homosexual offenders were executed under the Calvinist tradition.

Under the Puritans, *The Capitall Lawes of New England* specified death for 15 offenses, including witchcraft, murder, insurrection, and homosexuality.

A Marxist Approach To Gay Liberation: Sex Roles, Conformity, Historical Materialism, Etc.

The Marxist approach to any new subject cannot diverge from the scientific approach. This is basic. The starting point is to acquire as much knowledge as possible in an objective way.

In the case of gay liberation, a specifically Marxist analysis begins from the perspective of homosexuality as being a basic component of the human animal. We also keep in mind the great malleability of human behavior, and the great variety of sex roles that have been adopted in one society or another.

Anti-homosexual prejudice is not merely the persistence of archaic religious beliefs, but rather these superstitions

as tailored to each prevailing system. As materialists, we are aware that sexual attitudes don't drop out of the sky, and we would expect them to be generally congruent with the interests of the people in power. Furthermore, we would expect sex-role stereotypes to change as the needs of the system change. And indeed they do.

David Thorstad's "Answers to Some Questions On Gay Liberation" (Discussion Bulletin Vol. 29, #12) provides a number of illustrations of how sex-role stereotypes can be viewed from a historical materialist standpoint. I will add only a few points, as the possible examples are countless.

Conformity and a fear of being different are central concepts. A paradox is in operation. On one level, there is a prohibition against non-conformity which is linked to homosexual activity, but may in fact have nothing to do with it. A woman who shows too much independence or a man who shows too much sensitivity may be branded as "queer," even though their orientation might be entirely heterosexual. There have also been cases where people refused to believe that a "masculine" man or "feminine" woman was really gay, even when he or she was exclusively homosexual.

The profound significance of the fear of being considered queer lies in the fact that *no one is completely free from the possibility of being attacked as queer.*

Whites are not directly threatened by racism, and men are not directly threatened by male supremacy. But everyone must put some effort into acting so that he or she will not be considered queer.

In the case of males, the required non-queer role-playing sometimes goes to ridiculous extremes. In order not to be queer, an American male must be rigid, tough, aggressive, emotionless, and humorless. He may never express affection to another male, except under the guise of obscenity, drunkenness, or horseplay. Brutality is a potential ingredient of the "non-queer" male, as well as an underlying contempt for women. The ideal non-queer male is an incomplete human being—a caricature who is incapable of forming a meaningful relation with either sex.

In order not to be "limp-wristed," the non-queer male will make himself "stiff-wristed," and go around like a zombie with rigor mortis—all just to prove he's not queer.

The fear of being thought queer is so intense in America as to be stronger than the fear of death itself for some. A recent article in the *Village Voice* (3/18/71) quotes a GI explaining how the army could induce young American males to comply even with unpopular commands—"I know guys in Nam who completely disagreed with the war but would volunteer for dangerous missions as soon as their manhood was questioned."

Gay liberation not only has its own validity as a centuries-overdue rebellion against real oppression. But in addition, gay liberation, by ending the crippling fear of homosexuality, should have a powerful liberating effect on everyone, and should spur all sectors of the oppressed and exploited to new combativeness for their own liberation.

Gay Liberation And The Revolutionary Party

We still have much to learn and much theoretical work to do. This task is uniquely one for the Trotskyist movement.

At this point, we see the great dynamic and potential

of the movement, its already international scope. We can see coalitions forming, such as the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee and similar groups, and a projected Washington conference this fall, which are consistent with our perspective of mass action. Already we know enough to begin to help build the gay liberation movement. Such principles as non-exclusion, mass action, focused or single-issue coalitions, *etc.* are applicable to gay liberation as to the antiwar or women's liberation movement.

We should continue to develop theory on the sexual revolution, completing the task that Lenin and Trotsky thought so important.

On campus, where we have a strong base, gay groups should prove of great importance as sources of new ideas and potential recruits to our movement.

As the gay liberation movement develops, collisions with the bourgeois social sciences, especially psychiatry, and with religion are inevitable, and the serious gay liber-

ationists should find themselves strongly inclined towards revolutionary Marxism.

Twenty thousand gay men and women joined the Christopher Street Liberation Day march in New York City on June 27, 1971. Many thousands more took part in similar marches and other related activities in Los Angeles, Chicago, Austin, San Francisco, Boston, and Houston.

Two years ago I was one of a few dozen gay radicals who were moved to struggle for *our own* liberation. We took to the streets, we linked our cause to other struggles, and we made other movements come to grips with gay liberation.

Now there are gay liberation groups in every major city in America, on hundreds of college campuses, and in many Canadian and European cities.

The time to move beyond the probe stage and to involve ourselves in gay liberation is now.

July 15, 1971

A Contribution to the Discussion
by Lee Smith, Upper West Side Branch, New York Local
June 5, 1972

Introduction

March 16, 1972

The following three items—a cover letter from two gay groups at Antioch, a statement by the Venceremos Brigade, and a reply to the Venceremos Brigade statement by the two Antioch gay groups—are self-explanatory. However, the reasons I have submitted them to the discussion may not be quite as readily apparent. I think they are relevant to a discussion of the party's orientation regarding the gay movement for two reasons:

1. The reply to the Venceremos Brigade by the two groups, both in its criticisms of the Cuban regime and in its defense of the revolution, shows the kind of serious and developed political thinking that is characteristic of the most advanced campus gay organizations. The conclusion I draw from this is that activists like these are people we should want in our party.

2. The discussion itself raises issues that the party is uniquely equipped to deal with, including the nature of gay oppression, the character of the Cuban state and regime, and how to defend a revolution. It is reasonable to assume that aggressive participation in such discussions—with our press, forums, *etc.*—can win some of the best gay activists to Trotskyism and recruit them to the YSA and SWP.

The conclusion I draw from this is that the orientation adopted by the party should be one that provides for the aggressive use of our press and other propaganda to intervene in discussions of the type represented by the following exchange.

Cover letter to gay groups:

Enclosed is the public statement by the Venceremos Brigade of their policy on the recruitment of gay people; and also a statement in response to it written by Yellow Springs Radicalesbians and Yellow Springs GLF. Knowing that other gay people have had contact with the V. B., we are interested in getting feedback on our statement; what dealings, if any, you have had with the Brigade; actions you have considered for dealing with the Brigade in the future; what you think of our statement.

We think it is important that criticism of the Brigade remain within the movement, so we are not sending these two statements to the Establishment, or even "hippie" press. Rather we are sending them to gay groups, gay newspapers, women's papers and some other movement groups and papers. We suggest that if people wish to make a public response they do so in one such paper. Less public responses can be sent to:

Yellow Springs Radicalesbians
c/o Women's Center
Antioch College
Yellow Springs, Ohio

or

Yellow Springs Gay Liberation Front
Gay Center

Antioch College
Yellow Springs, Ohio

* * *

VENCEREMOS BRIGADE PUBLIC POLICY ON RECRUITMENT OF GAY PEOPLE

Through many discussions in the past few months by the National Committee and the Regionals, we have formulated a policy concerning recruitment to the BV of gay North Americans. The BV is not pretending to analyze the potential or the validity of the gay liberation movement in the United States. (The potential or validity of any sector in the U. S. will be determined by the practice within the context of the struggle carried out inside the U. S. Our policy is based on practical considerations of the brigade in Cuba; Cuba's position toward homosexuality, the Political Objectives of the BV, our purpose in Cuba, thus our position toward Cuban policies, and the past practice of gay North Americans on the brigade.

The Cuban people, as a whole, do not accept homosexuality. There is no material base for the oppression of homosexuals in Cuba. They are not repressed in work camps or anything of the sort. But it should be clear that Cuba does not encourage homosexuality.

The First Congress of Education and Culture, a congress of three years of work and hundreds of thousands of participants, published a report of major importance in the creation of a Cuban culture, a culture which in the past has been robbed, denied, and infiltrated by U. S. imperialist domination.

Concerning homosexuality, this congress took the position that homosexuality is a social pathology which reflects left-over bourgeois decadence and has no place in the formation of the New Man which Cuba is building.

This position was formulated by the Cuban people for the Cuban people. It was not formulated for the U. S., or any other country. Cuba is for Cubans, and while progressive and revolutionary people are always welcome in Cuba, the Cuban culture is not created for them in particular.

As to the BV, the past activities of gay North Americans have generally been destructive. A list of specific activities would include "re-educating the Cubans" (assuming that the situation in Cuba must be the same as in the U. S.), outright attacks and denunciations of the Cuban revolution, imposing North American gay culture on the Cubans (for example, parading-in-drag in a Cuban town, acting in an overtly sexual manner at parties). Also, some gay North Americans have shown a greater interest in finding out about Cuban homosexuals than in finding out about the Cuban people and their revolution. This kind of activity has been a flagrant insult to Cuban culture. And it has demonstrated a lack of understanding of the position of Brigadistas in Cuba as guests of the Cuban revolution.

One of the objectives of the people's right to self-determination. [sic] to affirm the Cuban people's right to self-determination. While this does not mean that we deny the importance of dialogue, we are not in Cuba to carry out confrontations over disagreements. The BV involves activity within the Cuban setting. As guests of the Cuban Revolution, we must realize that internal questions con-

cerning Cuba's development can only be answered by the Cuban people: Answers cannot be imposed from the outside. Only the Cuban people have all of the essential elements to analyze and solve their problems correctly.

The attitudes and actions described above are particularly dangerous at this time because they join a cultural imperialist offensive against the Cuban Revolution and alienate North Americans from it.

There are gay North Americans who share the objectives of the BV. Our Policy is not meant to exclude them. However, given the gay North American position, the Cuban position on homosexuality, and the problems that have arisen from this situation, we will require of gay North Americans a clear understanding of revolutionary anti-imperialist priorities and total identification with the Political Objectives of the BV. It must be understood that going to Cuba means respecting Cuban culture.

* * *

STATEMENT TO THE MOVEMENT FROM GAY REVOLUTIONARIES IN YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO

[In February (1972), the National Venceremos Brigade issued a Statement concerning recruitment of gay people. After lengthy discussions, the following article was prepared in response by Yellow Springs, Ohio, Radicalesbians and Yellow Springs GLF. We hope this article will generate discussions and supportive actions by movement groups.]

In its latest statement the Brigade has manifested its ignorance of gay oppression. We think an understanding of gay oppression is essential before any policy about gay people can be discussed or formulated.

The Nature of Gay Oppression

Gay oppression reaches into every aspect of a gay person's life. If known, gay people are subject to being fired, to being unable to find housing, are subject to acts of violence by pigs and in fact by any straight person, and in many cases, to serving jail terms or involuntary commitment to mental institutions. We are subject to shock treatments and sometimes sterilization. Homosexuality is explicitly outlawed in most states, and homosexuals are persecuted under other, more general statutes as well.

On another level, we are socially ostracized and mocked, even by those who should be our allies. Just a few years ago, it was considered the height of humor and sufficient political condemnation to call a high-placed pig a faggot when speaking at antiwar rallies.

Nor is the U. S. unique. There is not a single capitalist country in which gay people are not oppressed. This oppression is added to the oppression that most gay people experience as members of a national minority, as women, or as workers.

It is no surprise that gay people are oppressed in capitalist society. Capitalism needs the nuclear family, and we don't fit in. Capitalism needs to keep women as a marginal segment of the workforce, to be held in reserve for periods of industrial expansion. And whether women work or not, their primary role is still considered to be in the home. To perpetuate this system, capitalism forces people into sex roles. Gay people do not fit into those roles.

Although a socialist revolution eliminates the economic necessity for a nuclear family and for keeping women on the periphery of society, it does not, simply through economic change, eliminate practices and attitudes that have arisen from capitalism. The anti-gay feelings held by the majority of the population freeze people into restrictive roles, and are an obstacle which a revolution must overcome in order to achieve the kind of society that will enable all people to live comfortably and love as they choose.

Most Gays Are Working Class

In capitalist society, gay people exist among all classes. A minority of gays are in the petty bourgeoisie. These gays can often find a comparatively comfortable life in the realm of culture, one that offers some degree of economic and social security, and can therefore be more open about being gay. Thus, the petty-bourgeois gay person becomes straight society's symbol of a gay person.

But in fact, the majority of gays are working class, as is the majority of the general population. These gays are often invisible to straight society, in fear of losing their jobs or even their lives. If given a chance, they will join readily in socialist reconstruction, seeing in it their only hope for an end to oppression.

Thus, conscious gay people can form a progressive force and join with other oppressed groups to overthrow capitalism. But as with other oppressed groups, it is hard for gay people, faced with greater day-to-day survival problems, to join and fight for liberation. Straight people in the movement must provide support for the gay person who wants to get involved in the revolutionary struggle.

History of Conflict with the Venceremos Brigade

Instead, sectors of the movement, especially the Venceremos Brigade, have shown continually oppressive attitudes towards gays. From the Elgin Cinema incident (in which Brigade members dealt with a scheduling conflict with GLF by calling them "faggots") to discriminatory recruiting policies carried on through unclarified rumors, to harassment of gay North American brigadistas both on the boat down and while in Cuba, they have shown a complete lack of comprehension of and support for gay people. Just recently, a gay woman in Texas, who had apparently satisfied Brigade criteria for an "anti-imperialist gay person" was removed from the Brigade in a final cut because she was gay, and told that in their opinion she was not strong enough to deal with the conflicts that might arise from her being gay. Instead of providing support, the Brigade has set a criterion of super-strength for gay people.

Now, after almost a year of rumor, the Brigade has issued a statement of their position on the recruitment of gays. The Brigade admits that the position was formulated through "many discussions in the past few months by the National Committee and the Regionals." In those past few months, gay liberation groups (including in Yellow Springs) have made many attempts to discuss Brigade policy and were met by official declarations and an unwillingness to include us in any decision-making process. Brigade policy will affect GLF and the entire North American movement and should have been made in consultation with gay North Americans, the rest of the North American movement and the Cubans.

Criticism, Not Denunciation

Movements of the oppressed can either be helped or hindered in their political development by those groups who consider themselves revolutionary. The anti-Communism of the Black liberation movement existing before the Panthers was due in large part to experiences with the Communist Party.

A movement isn't static—if it seems to be going in an unrevolutionary direction it should be helped by other sectors of the movement through constructive criticism while providing positive support.

The Brigade fails to do this. Instead, the Brigade has focused on certain past activities of some gay North Americans which they consider destructive, and have made it appear that these actions are representative of the entire Gay Liberation movement. It has not been the policy of the VB to issue categorical statements about any other groups within the Brigade (e.g., Chicanos, Blacks, Women), even though individual members of other groups have done things which might be considered destructive; we therefore believe that by issuing such a statement affecting all gay North Americans, the VB is being blatantly sexist and anti-gay.

As to the past activities of gay brigadistas, the allegation that they have "generally been destructive" compels us to remind the Brigade of the cane that was cut and the fruit that was picked by gay Brigadistas. In fact, these *constructive* activities are the only activities which we are certain of; we know that cane was cut, but we do not know all the facts behind the allegedly destructive activities of some gay Brigadistas, and the Brigade's statement only helps to confuse the issue by using loaded phrases like "parading-in-drag" and "overtly sexual manner."

Therefore, we cannot really discuss their charges but can merely suggest a list of criteria for future actions of all Brigadistas:

- 1) Criteria should be agreed upon by all members of the Brigade, including gay people (not imposed on gay people) before going down to Cuba.
- 2) Activities should not force anything on local people, or leave them to deal with situations which they had no part in creating.
- 3) Brigadistas should respect local customs as they would in any foreign country.
- 4) No North American should abuse their privileges as guests of the Cuban people.
- 5) Within these criteria, gay people should be under no more restrictions than straight people are.
- 6) Gay Brigadistas should be free to talk with other people about gay liberation.

The Brigade also says that "some gay North Americans have shown a greater interest in finding out about Cuban homosexuals than in finding out about the Cuban people and their revolution." We believe that gay Cubans are part of the Cuban revolution, and that it is as proper to have a special interest in the treatment of homosexuals as it is to be interested in health, or women, or national minorities. None of these interests can or should be exclusive of the broader context.

Solidarity with Cuba

Yellow Springs Radicals and Yellow Springs GLF have been and continue to be in firm support of Cuba's efforts in building socialism. We are united in our op-

position to any attempts by the U. S. ruling class, either by outright aggression (like bombing raids or invasions) or through subtler means of subversion, to destroy what the Cuban people have struggled so valiantly to build. We consider it a valuable experience for Gay North Americans to help in and learn from that struggle through participation in the Brigade.

It is because of this support that we take issue with the Brigade concerning their policy of "no-criticism" with respect to Cuba. Constructive criticism within the movement is essential so that all aspects of the movement can grow and develop in their understanding and actions. Criticism is particularly important within the North American movement, but it is also necessary between movements in different countries: Failure to criticize can easily lead to the kind of situation which U. S. communist organizations found themselves in in the decades after the Russian Revolution, when, because of a policy of uncritical support of the Russian Revolution, they found themselves appearing to favor all of the worst excesses of Stalin's regime.

We believe that the Cuban people are the only ones who can make decisions regarding their internal affairs. But in a situation where a socialist country is willfully oppressing a minority group in that country, it is the responsibility of all revolutionaries to try to influence them to change. Because of its special relationship to Cuba, the Brigade has a particular responsibility to do this.

Oppression of Gays in Cuba

But not only has the Brigade failed to take a critical attitude with respect to Cuba; it has tried to create a false impression of the Cuban situation by such statements as "there is no material base for the oppression of gays in Cuba." The statement from the First Congress on Education and Culture shows clearly that there is indeed material oppression of gays in Cuba. We need only quote from the statement: ". . . preventative and educational measures . . . are to be put into effect against existing focuses (of homosexuality), including control and relocation of isolated cases and degrees of deterioration. . . . it is not to be tolerated for notorious homosexuals to have influence in the formation of our youth; . . . those whose morals do not correspond to the prestige of our Revolution should be barred from any group of performers representing our country abroad; . . . it was agreed to demand severe penalties be applied to those who corrupt the morals of minors, depraved repeat offenders and irredeemable anti-social elements." We criticize the Cuban government for perpetuating the oppression of gay people, and we criticize the Brigade for attempting to cover up the facts.

Cuba has called homosexuality a "social pathology;" and the Brigade has interpreted Cuba's position to be that homosexuality reflects "left-over bourgeois decadence." But homosexuality has existed in the earliest human societies, from the Indians of pre-Colombian America, to the tribal societies in Africa, to feudal China and Europe, to the Arabic countries, to modern capitalist and socialist countries. The love of people for others of the same sex is not something that arose with capitalist decay, but rather something that, like heterosexuality, has existed in all cultures, taking on different forms in different cultures. In periods of decay, *all* human activities take on *some* decadent forms.

We believe that socialist societies should provide a climate in which people can learn to love each other regardless of sex-roles. Socialist societies that fight homosexuality are fighting a losing battle, because once they begin to abolish sex roles and render the family obsolete, they begin to set the pre-conditions for the emancipation of women and gay people.

Despite our disagreement with Cuba's policies toward gays, we would like to restate our support for the Cuban revolution.

Gay Demands to the Venceremos Brigade

In conclusion, we demand that the Venceremos Brigade work out a new policy on gay people in consultation with the gay liberation movement. This policy should include:

- 1) Active recruitment of gay people.
- 2) Applying the same political criteria to gays as is applied to all other people.
- 3) Working out behavioral standards applicable to all brigadistas along the suggested criteria.
- 4) Internal education on all oppressed groups in this country (gays, women, national minorities) so that brigadistas can be supportive of these groups.
- 5) A strong supportive attitude towards gay people that reflects an understanding that gay revolutionaries visiting Cuba are under extra pressures. (This support would include not sending people on the Brigade who are overtly anti-gay, any more than people who are racists or male-chauvinists.)
- 6) The Brigade should begin to educate themselves on the treatment of gays in Cuba.

Gay people have struggled and struggled with the Venceremos Brigade. We are tired of and disgusted by their sexism. We find the indifference of the rest of the movement to be extremely disappointing. They have treated this whole issue as *our* problem. It is time for the rest of the movement to show its support.

Yellow Springs Radicalesbians
Yellow Springs Gay Liberation Front