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A REVIEW AND A COMMENT

by David Thorstad, Upper West Side Branch,
New York Local

Sexuality and Homosexuality: A New View by Arno Karlen. W.W. Norton & Co. New York, 1971. 666 pages. \$15.

"Of the two hundred million people in the United States, some ten million are or will become exclusive or predominant homosexuals—more than there are Jews or Latin Americans," states author Karlen. "People with at least a few years' significant homosexual experience may number more than twenty-five million—more than blacks. Yet there is no 'problem' minority of which sociology has learned so little."

One of the reasons so little is known about homosexuals are and how they live and what they have contributed to human history is that homosexual behavior has not generally been considered a worthy subject for investigation. Even in the recent past, for example, when Kinsey's Institute for Sex Research decided to undertake a study of homosexuality (still to be published), it was turned down by two dozen foundations. Even where homosexuality has been the object of scientific investigation, the investigators have rarely been able to divest themselves of their proheterosexual bias. And Western scientists studying homosexuality in other, more primitive, cultures, Karlen points out, have done so through glasses fogged by the Judeo-Christian tradition to which they belong.

As a result, no work trying to make sense out of what is known and claimed about homosexuality from history, literature, and science has ever been done.

This book claims to do so. In the first sentence, Karlen calls it "an act of presumption." And indeed it is. For after dispensing with modesty in the first sentence, he dashes into the hazardous and foggy fray of his subject with his sword flailing, and in the process cuts down homosexuality more than he does myths about it. His "new view" is not so much new as it is a more sophisticated presentation of the old tendency to deprecate homosexuality. If, in the process, some light is shed on homosexual behavior throughout history and throughout the world, it is in spite of Karlen's heterosexual bias, which keeps getting in his way.

Bias is not his only shortcoming. He is also a vulgar empiricist. Thus, for instance, in his first chapter he dismisses the theory that early matriarchal societies were replaced by patriarchal societies with a mere flick of the hand: Life is too "confusing, disorderly and exciting" for the theory of the matriarchy put forward by Bachofen, Engels and Briffault to be of any use, concludes Karlen, who remains undisturbed by his own inability to offer an alternative explanation.

But theory admittedly may not be the empiricist's strong point. Surely Karlen could be expected to fare better on the more solid ground of facts. Alas, here too his bias distorts the picture.

This is most crude in his chapter on homosexuality

in ancient Greece. Karlen's thesis is that "in ancient Greece homosexuality was considered a deviation; it was given positive value only by a minority of homosexuals, bisexuals and apologists. Neither did its presence in Greece have any relationship to social, artistic or political health." This is a novel thesis because it flies in the face not only of claims by authorities on the subject (such as Hans Licht, whose *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* Karlen himself describes in his exhaustive, annotated bibliography as "the most complete scholarly compendium on the subject," but then dismisses as "unfortunately, written with a pervasive prohomosexual bias"), but even some of the facts Karlen himself presents. Most astonishing, however, is the fact that Karlen states his thesis without ever seriously attempting to prove it.

The entire chapter reveals poor judgment—despite the occasional positive observation, such as his rejection of the notion that there is a causal relationship between homosexuality and the downgrading of women ("homosexuality flourished more in the ancient world as woman's position improved and her freedom increased"). Item: "Probably the best source of ancient Greek attitudes toward homosexuality is Aristophanes." Actually, a writer of satirical comedies can hardly be considered the "best source" in an objective search for attitudes. Moreover, not only was Aristophanes the only poet to constantly ridicule pederasty, but he was writing in Athenian society (which had not institutionalized homosexuality to the extent that the Dorian society of Sparta had) at a time when public life was dominated by sophists, gossips, and libertines. But Karlen does not want nuances and historical complexities to slow his rush toward unsubstantiated, sweeping generalizations.

His conclusion about the poet Sappho is simply ridiculous. He correctly points out that only about 5 percent of her writing remains, thanks to the book-burning crusades of Christian zealots (around 380 A.D. the Bishop of Constantinople ordered her books burned "wherever they were found," and Pope Gregory VII had many of the remaining works burned in 1072). Yet while much of what remains is homosexual in content, it contains no *explicit* descriptions of the homosexual sex act. And so Karlen concludes: "That she was a practicing homosexual is quite likely, but not certain." In other words, since Sappho wrote merely good poetry, and not explicit pornography, there is reason to doubt she was gay! All this would no doubt be funny if it weren't typical of Karlen's reluctance to grant anything positive about homosexuals and their history.

At the end of several chapters in this book are interviews with homosexuals and scientists from various disciplines. These interviews are generally far more interesting than what Karlen has to say. They are intended, he explains, to "illuminate what may otherwise seem like fanciful theories or speculations." And sometimes they do, as for instance those accompanying his informative chapters

on transvestism and transexuality, the relationship between hormones, genes, instinctual programming and imprinting, environment and sexual behavior.

The interview following the chapter on Greece, however, is an example of Karlen's reprehensible journalistic travelogue approach. To apparently "illuminate" his unsubstantiated theory about ancient Greece, he interviews an atypical male homosexual couple in present-day Chicago (that's Chicago, USA—not Chicago, Greece)! However interesting their remarks may be, they shed little light on the love of Sappho for Cleis, Socrates for Alcibiades, or Achilles for Patroclus.

The pervading assumption running through *Sexuality and Homosexuality* is that the least reliable source of information on homosexuality is the homosexual or "pro-homosexual" person. To have an objective opinion about homosexuality, you have to be heterosexual. This line of thinking no longer holds water where Blacks and women are concerned, but it is still the rule regarding homosexuals. This book is a contemptible effort to shore up such thinking.

* * *

The preceding review was submitted to *The Militant* last February. It was considered for publication during the Gay Pride Week issue at the end of June and rejected.

Sexuality and Homosexuality—whose dust jacket describes it as "the definitive explanation of human sexuality, normal and abnormal"—is a very lengthy, detailed, and on the surface learned treatment of a subject that is of interest both to the gay liberation movement and to the antihomosexual ideologues of capitalist society. The thrust of the book is to reinforce the efforts of the latter at the expense of the former. This no doubt would help explain the rave review it received from the *New York Times*'s Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in October of last year, a month after it came out. It might also have more than an incidental relation to the fact that it has quickly qualified for the promotional efforts of the Book-of-the-Month Club. Author Karlen has become another "authority" on homosexuality and now graces platforms on the speakers' circuit.

The book has also been reviewed in the gay press, and is bound—in spite of its high price—to join the list of books with which a certain familiarity can be assumed among gay activists.

The decision of *The Militant* not to run the review puzzled me because I felt it met standards of length, quality, relevance, and timeliness; these standards were not unfamiliar to me since I had helped edit the "In Review" page for more than a year.

The reasons the review was rejected, I was told, were essentially two: It was "too erudite," and it "went beyond" where the SWP is at in terms of how it can or ought to relate to gay liberation. It was suggested that the review might more appropriately be submitted to a gay publication.

I disagree with both of these reasons. If I thought nothing more than a personal disagreement was involved, of course, I would not raise it in the framework of a political discussion. But more than that appears to be involved. The incident raises certain questions about the relationship between our press and the gay liberation

struggle that I would like to see cleared up by this discussion. It is in a spirit of candor and out of a genuine desire to clarify this that I have submitted this item.

The objection that the review is "too erudite" is doubtless the lesser—though at the same time the more concrete—of the two arguments. It appeared to be prompted essentially by two brief references with which persons who had not read the book might be unfamiliar—pederasty and Aristophanes. On pederasty: I see no reason why readers who do not know what pederasty is (for the most part, these would probably be straight readers) should object to looking the word up in a dictionary. This is preferable, in my opinion, to, say, adding a parenthetical explanation about this practice that played such an important role in the sexual life of ancient Greece; such an explanation would be absurd and condescending in the context of such a review. To suggest that a reference to pederasty might perhaps be out of place in a discussion of ancient Greece in a review of a book on homosexuality would seem to me to imply one of two beliefs: either that straight readers would take offense at the assumption that they should know something about a practice they may go through life neither doing nor knowing anyone who did; or that such a reference is irrelevant and somehow out of place in a socialist paper—specifically sexual references belonging more properly in the gay press. I don't think either one of these arguments would be warranted.

The reference to Aristophanes, while it assumes a certain level of culture perhaps, does not necessitate any knowledge of his work for the reader to get the point. He is identified as a satirist and the point is made that whatever other things one may learn from a satirist, an objective appreciation of the mores of a particular epoch is not necessarily one of them. I think most readers would understand this.

Sexuality and Homosexuality, while its approach is essentially a journalistic and popularizing one, nevertheless contains a great deal of "learned" information on a subject pervaded more with ignorance than intelligence or understanding. The fact that this is presented with a definite antihomosexual bias and a considerable dose of dishonesty will be welcomed by those who subscribe to the prevailing notions of the inferiority of homosexuality; it will go unnoticed by readers unfamiliar with any of the intelligent literature on the subject.

To expose this book properly and the way it deserves to be exposed would require more space than *The Militant* is at this time prepared to grant. It was in an effort to cope with this limitation that I decided that rather than superficially skip through 666 pages, it would be more meaningful to readers who had not read the book if I were concrete and dealt at some length with one typical and significant chapter. Even in view of the space limitations, I believe that this approach provides the reader with an honest idea of the kind of proheterosexual prejudice that this society requires and acclaims in its "authorities" on homosexuality.

The argument that the review somehow "went beyond" what can properly be said on the subject of gay liberation in the pages of *The Militant* (even in a review, which, it might be added, is not a "line" article) is an argument of a more serious nature, in my opinion. It was, unfortunately, an argument advanced more, it seems, on the

basis of a general "feeling" than on well thought-out criteria. I think that, where possible, clear-cut guidelines should be laid down, and if indeed such guidelines already exist, I think they should be stated candidly. The problem, in other words, is, just what *is* the line beyond which articles and reviews in our press cannot go? Indeed, just where *is* the SWP "at" in terms of relating to gay liberation through its press? Frankly, I now find myself somewhat uneasy in attempting to answer these questions because of the prevailing ambiguities, because of the apparent unanimity when it comes to deciding that a line has definitely been crossed, and the no less apparent lack of a clearly articulated definition of what that line is.

Perhaps some comrades feel that it is out of line for the SWP or its press to take a position, so to speak, on whether or not homosexuality is good. Perhaps they feel that this review "went beyond" where the SWP is at because it implicitly assumes that homosexuality is good; indeed, it does not pretend to stand aloof of this question but stands foursquare, without being obtrusive or browbeating, on the notion that gay is good. If comrades feel that where the SWP is at in its public position is a sort of neutral zone on the question of homosexuality—neither good nor bad, the product of causes so complex, and an issue perhaps so divisive, that it is undesirable to take a position on the normality of homosexual impulses—then it would be a positive contribution to this discussion for such a belief to be stated forthrightly. In my opinion, such a position would be both politically and scientifically unsound.

It would appear to me, in fact, that it is precisely this underlying assumption of the review that homosexuality is good, and the fact that it does not even occur to the reviewer to suspend judgment on the question, that the comrades regarded with some discomfort. This is certainly the impression that the somewhat vague notion

of "going beyond" conveys. If so, such an approach would reveal a rather serious misunderstanding of the proper relationship between the revolutionary party and the gay liberation struggle. In my opinion, it is unrealistic to think that the SWP can come to terms with gay liberation without a position recognizing that homosexuality is both normal and good. This does not mean advocating homosexuality. It does mean rejecting any of the sexist notions that homosexuality is a deviation, an abnormality, or a sickness. There are no doubt comrades who still believe that homosexuality is a sickness and something not quite normal. This would not be surprising since this is also the prevailing view of the sexist society in which we have all been brought up. But the existence of such notions cannot be allowed to obstruct the presentation of a proper, positive attitude toward homosexuality in our press.

This has already been done—in my article "Homosexuality: Fact versus Myth" in the July 2, 1971, issue of *The Militant*, for example, which advances, with appropriate scientific backing, the argument that homosexuality is a normal expression of human sexual capacities inherent in the human animal. While this article was no more a "line" article than the review of Karlen's book, it certainly suggested that the party took a forthright position behind the concept that gay is good. I am quite aware of the fact that some comrades found this notion—as well as the article—disturbing; they felt it "went beyond" where the SWP is "at." But does this mean that articles reflecting such an approach are now no longer considered appropriate for publication in our press? If so, our ability to discuss homosexuality and gay liberation in our press would be subjected to an incorrect, unscientific, and unjustifiable limitation.

Candid answers to these questions can, in my opinion, only serve to help clarify this discussion.

July 14, 1972

FOR NATIONAL PARTY INTERVENTION IN THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT

by Steve Beren, Chicago Branch

In Barry Sheppard's article on the party's orientation to the gay liberation movement, he concludes that "it would be a mistake to carry out a national party intervention in the gay liberation movement at the present time." The purpose of this article is to explain why, in my opinion, it would be a mistake *not* to carry out such an intervention.

What Is Our Approach?

We start from the fact that gays suffer a real oppression in this society. We understand that gay liberation cannot be achieved short of the socialist revolution.

Although some of the demands raised by the gay liberation movement can be met under capitalism (at least partially), the goals of gay liberation *cannot* be won under capitalism or embraced by the capitalist parties. Through struggling to completely end gay oppression, many will see that their demands can only be totally met through a socialist revolution.

The creation of a revolutionary workers state is the necessary precondition for the winning of sexual liberation and the creation of a free sexual environment for all humanity. Creation of such an environment, which would allow for the free development of human sexual potential, is a key task in the creation of a socialist society.

The abolition of capitalism is a precondition for winning gay liberation, but this in no way means that the fight for gay liberation should be postponed until after the revolution. Nor will anti-gay prejudice and oppression suddenly disappear the day after the revolution. The socialist revolution will eliminate the material basis for gay oppression, but it will take time to eradicate attitudes and patterns of behavior with such deep historical roots.

Just as gay liberation is impossible without socialism, the socialist revolution will not be complete until the last vestiges of anti-gay prejudice and oppression are wiped out. Until this prejudice and oppression is ended, there will exist an independent gay liberation movement. The intervention of the Socialist Workers Party will be decisive in leading this movement to victory.

What should our approach to the gay liberation movement be? As with any movement, we should use the approach and basic concepts outlined and developed in the transitional program, and try to reach out to the movement at its present level. In a collaborative manner, recognizing that the gay liberation movement has its own independent dynamic, we should contribute to and try to develop the struggle. We should help lead it to a higher level.

The emergence and growth of the gay liberation movement presents the revolutionary party with a challenge, with responsibilities and with opportunities. The gay liberation movement has lifted the dignity and hopes of gay people. The Socialist Workers Party should decide to actively work to end the oppression of gays, and most

importantly, to lead the way to full liberation. We are the only organization that can put forward a revolutionary program for the gay liberation movement.

Our job is to begin getting involved in the gay liberation movement, to learn from and begin thinking about the movement. As the movement evolves and as our participation and knowledge deepen, we will be in a much better position to know what strategies and demands to push within the movement, what coalitions and formations we should intervene in, etc.

The gay liberation movement is not yet a mass movement like the antiwar or Black liberation movements (i. e., demonstrations in the hundreds of thousands, widespread mass antiwar sentiment or nationalist consciousness). But there is both the need and the potential for the development of a mass, independent gay liberation movement. The SWP can and should contribute to the process of formulating a program and organizing actions that will lead towards the development of such a movement.

Gay Oppression

Gays are not a class, oppressed nationality, or sex. We are not fighting for national self-determination. But gay oppression is just as real as national oppression or the oppression of women. An oppressed nationality is not a class, nor does an oppressed nationality play a special role within the family structure. Women are not a class, nor are they fighting for national self-determination. But the oppression of Blacks as Blacks, Chicanos as Chicanos, and women as women, are all forms of class oppression.

The oppression of gays as gays is every bit as real and is every bit as much a form of class oppression. True, unlike Blacks, Chicanos, and women, gays are not oppressed as part of the reserve army of labor. But then, Blacks, Chicanos, and women are not oppressed because they engage in or have a preference for homosexual acts.

In any case, gay people have the same need as Blacks, Chicanos, and women for the development of our own movement and the building of our own independent power. The fact that many gays are also workers, women, Blacks, Chicanos, etc., only adds fuel to the explosive power of this movement.

An independent gay liberation movement is needed to mobilize masses of gay people in an unrelenting struggle for liberation. It is the job of the SWP and YSA to be part of the vanguard of this movement. We must be in the forefront of this movement, vigorously intervening with our ideas and revolutionary program. The SWP and YSA should work to build both the gay liberation and socialist movements. We should see these tasks as separate, yet interrelated—and certainly not contradictory. It is by helping to build a gay liberation movement that can win victories that we will be able to attract and recruit the best gay activists to the revolutionary move-

ment.

What the SWP needs, and what this discussion should produce, is a clear, uncompromising and enthusiastic statement, one which can be a stepping stone for our solving the tactical, strategical, and theoretical questions posed by gay liberation, and which sets us on the road towards assuming the leadership of the movement.

A decision not to intervene nationally, as recommended by Barry Sheppard, would be a step in the wrong direction.

The Role of Sexual Repression

The struggle against the oppression of gay people, a democratic struggle, can also be called truly socialistic in its implications.

As David Thorstad pointed out in last year's preconvention discussion:

For, while it is true that the acquisition of our civil liberties—the right to be who we are—is an important aspect of the struggle for gay liberation, it is not the most fundamental one.

The essential thrust of gay liberation is not merely to win from straight society the right to express our sexual orientation without being ridiculed, beat up and murdered, without losing our jobs and friends, and without hiding. No. It also involves a struggle for sexual liberation: It ultimately aims at liberating the sexuality of everyone from the restrictions and puritanism of American capitalist society.

These sexual norms, from which both gays and straights have to be freed, are heterosexual.

According to Kinsey and other authorities on sexuality, every human being is born with a general sexual capacity which includes both the heterosexual and the homosexual. In other words, the capacity for homosexual behavior exists *in nature* and is as much a part of the basic *human* sexual capacity as heterosexual behavior. (This, incidentally, is the meaning of the slogan "2, 4, 6, 8—Gay is Just as Good as Straight.") It is society—not any inborn characteristic—that subsequently determines the predominance of heterosexuality or homosexuality in an individual. The fact that homosexual behavior is absent from the lives of most Americans does not prove the superiority of heterosexuality but merely demonstrates the success with which society has instilled its own warped sexual norms in people.

In our society, unlike most other human societies, the only acceptable sexual norm is one of exclusive heterosexuality. Our society condemns all homosexual behavior in all ages and in either sex. The fact that this norm has nothing whatever to do with real human sexual potential, but even represents a distortion of that potential, does not prevent it from being enforced in ways that inflict great suffering on individual human beings and immeasurable loss to society through wasted human potential. And the fact that this norm is violated by millions of Americans merely emphasizes the degree to which it is out of tune with the reality of human sexuality.

One of the strongest implements society uses to mould the growing child into the acceptable social forms and to keep people there as adults is the coercion to behave like a member of one's own sex (to be a *real*

man, to be *really* feminine). Anyone who deviates from these norms is quickly labeled "queer."

These sex stereotypes and definitions not only have nothing to do with real human potential; they are also reflections of the social needs of the dominant, heterosexual, capitalist society, and they change as those needs change. With the rise of entrepreneurial capitalism, for instance, the rugged individual was the ideal—at least the male ideal. Today there are no more entrepreneurs to speak of and the rugged individual image is no longer useful. In today's consumer society, it is not people with initiative who are needed, but rather people who lack it, people who follow orders—whether it is buying detergent or killing the enemy in Vietnam or hating homosexuals. In a technologically advanced, complex stage of imperialism, the male ideal is the astronaut, the mechanized, unthinking robot.

These images change for women too. During the second world war, when the capitalists needed to tap the reserve army of labor to which women belong, the image projected for women was not that of today's happy housewife, content with the socially useless and unrewarding labor of a home-centered life. No woman today who refuses to play dumb and pretend that she likes being denied the opportunity to develop as a free human being, independent of a man, will for long escape the accusation that she too is "queer."

These sex stereotypes are used not only to sell the products of a consumer society. They are used to keep people in line. If you spend all your energy trying to conform to this society's warped and rigid definitions of a "real man" and a "real woman"—and both straights and closeted gays spend enormous amounts of energy doing precisely that—then you will have none left for the struggle to overthrow the society that imposes those definitions on you.

Many straights can be appealed to to support gay liberation precisely because it will help break down these rigid sex definitions. You don't have to be gay to understand that gay liberation will also help free you from the compulsion to prove your masculinity or to be truly "feminine." And so, in the process of achieving their freedom to be gay, gay people will be helping to liberate straights too.

But this liberation will go deeper than the shedding of role playing and sex stereotyping. It ultimately involves sexual liberation in general: freedom to develop and express one's sexual orientation without social constraints; freedom to relate to persons of the same or opposite sex as human beings, not as objects or tools; freeing of the capacity for homosexual love which the heterosexual norm in our society is designed to root out. . . .

If the gay liberation movement was later than some others in coming on the scene, its impact is still far from having been felt. When the full impact of gay liberation is felt, when the antihomosexual influence of our social institutions has been dispelled and their structure transformed, when the sex-typing that herds people into mutually exclusive categories of "real men" and "real women," heterosexual and homosexual, normal and abnormal is overcome, it won't be so easy to find people claiming that the struggle for gay liberation has played a "peripheral" role. . . .

"To the extent that the free development and expression of sexuality is an important factor in the lives of all human beings, and to the degree that the elimination of sex typing will be necessary to achieve this, gay liberation has a role to play in the liberation of everyone, whether gay or straight. For without liberation from the restrictions on sexuality imposed by class society, it is impossible to talk about the liberation of humanity. (*Answers to Some Questions on Gay Liberation*, by David Thorstad, SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 29, No. 12, pages 4-5. See also *Aspects of the Gay Liberation Movement*, by John Lauritsen, subsection entitled "A Marxist Approach to Gay Liberation: Sex Roles, Conformity, Historical Materialism, Etc.," SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 30, No. 1, page 9.)

Sexual repression and oppression are among the keys to the maintenance of capitalist rule.

Sexuality is a key component of the human personality. By suppressing, repressing, and distorting sexuality, the ruling class maintains a firm grip on the psychology of the masses. This aids capitalism in beating the masses into submission and subservience, and aids in the enforcement of all other capitalist norms—whether political, social, economic, moral, or cultural.

As Barry Sheppard points out, the traditional sexual morality "consists of guidelines of sexual conduct which help preserve the nuclear family relationships in class society," it "is the emotional and ideological glue helping hold the nuclear family together." (pages 3-4)

But sexual repression and the oppression of homosexuals are not only necessary for the *preservation* of the family. As with women, it appears that the beginning of the oppression of gay people can be traced to the origin of the nuclear family and the rise of class society. In order for the nuclear family *to have been created and develop*, the introduction of a compulsory sex morality in the early stages of class society, and its enforcement throughout thousands of years of class rule, were both necessary. Over these thousands of years, the effect has been to mold and distort the human character to suit the needs of the class rulers.

This sexual repression is a material oppression against all humanity, because it destroys and robs much human potential and ability, and channels remaining energy in the interests of the capitalists.

Just as this traditional sexual morality helps to preserve the family, the family helps to enforce the traditional sexual morality. While each reinforces and thrives upon the other, they are not one and the same thing. Each plays its own independent, although related, role in making capitalism run smoother.

In Oberlin in 1970, Mary-Alice Waters said:

The deepening contradictions in the family system between the ideal and the reality have produced what is commonly referred to by the sociologists and commentators as the crisis in the family and the sexual revolution.

The ruling class is rightfully concerned about this process. They understand better than many political tendencies that claim to be Marxist *how crucial the family system is for the maintenance of class rule*. It is the fundamental mechanism by which children are broken

and trained to accept the repressive and hierarchial social structure. The family is the prototype of society in this respect. It's like the old Confucian saying that the relationship between ruler and subjects is parallel to that between father and children.

The repression of human sexuality from infancy on and its acute repression during adolescence (which has led Reich to so accurately describe the period of adolescence as the "sexual misery of adolescence" is enforced totally by the family institution and education. *It is vitally important to the maintenance of the authoritarian social order*. When these mechanisms of perpetrating class rule are undermined, as in the United States today, the family crisis and sexual revolution can only bring increasing problems to the ruling class and greater optimism for revolutionaries." (*Towards an American Socialist Revolution*, pages 75-76, my emphasis)

The struggle for gay liberation is important, not only for human sexual liberation, but for human liberation in every sphere of life, precisely because it challenges the reactionary and stifling norms and institutions of class society. The thrust of the movement is clear: end all legal and extra-legal oppression against homosexuals; grant full human rights to homosexuals; end the physical and psychological violence directed against us. Capitalism cannot grant us total liberation. Our total liberation will require the destruction of the institutions that oppress us: the family, the church, the police, bourgeois science, bourgeois education, bourgeois psychology, etc.

Just consider the effects complete sexual liberation is going to have on humanity. It will mean an end to traditional roles, and the creation of a new way of life where each person can decide for herself or himself how to spend their lives. Of course, there is no blueprint for what sexuality will be like under socialism. All we know is that socialism will permit the free development and expression of sexuality. Certainly, sexuality in a free society will bear little resemblance to sexuality under capitalism. But the full implications of sexual liberation are impossible for those of us living under capitalism to completely comprehend.

Is Gay Good?

One gay liberationist, in an article printed in the *Guardian*, wrote that "gay liberation provides a vision for a post-revolutionary society."

This view was opposed by Irwin Silber in the January 16, 1971, *Guardian*. Silber first stated that he agreed that the left should support gay liberation. "However," he wrote, "whether 'gay liberation provides a vision for a post-revolutionary society,' . . . is another question again. Clearly the end of class society and the elimination of property/object relationships between human beings will provide the basis for a new moral code and vastly changed cultural patterns. *Conceivably*, . . . the traditional relationship between social necessity and heterosexual behavioral patterns will go through significant changes. . . . *Much more likely* . . . is that socialist society will make it possible to divest traditional male roles of their exploitative content and traditional female roles of their

dependent status—enabling the new man and the new woman to fulfill themselves in a mutually supportive fashion. . . ." (my emphasis)

This view, that socialist society will maintain the traditional heterosexual roles "divested" of their oppressive character, is a close cousin to the Stalinist view of the "revolutionary family." There is no reason to believe that it is likely that homosexuality will cease to exist once heterosexual relationships are "revolutionized." Silber is merely covering for the oppression of homosexuals in the Stalinist countries and Cuba.

Of course, *all* sexuality is distorted under capitalism. But the idea that homosexuality is a distorted expression of sexual behavior that occurs when heterosexuality is not allowed to develop freely has no basis in scientific fact. Homosexuality is no more a distorted aspect of sexual behavior than is heterosexuality. Despite the Stalinists, who label homosexuality a "fascist perversion" or a "product of decaying capitalism," it is the repression, frustration, and inhibition of homosexuality, *not* homosexuality itself, that is characteristic of capitalism.

The view that exclusive heterosexuality is the norm and homosexuality is unnatural is as false as the "biological inferiority" of women or the "racial inferiority" of non-whites. It is the ideological pretext for justifying and continuing the violence and oppression against gays.

From this myth flow the stereotypes and reactionary ideas about homosexuals and homosexuality: that we are sick degenerates, that we are child-molesters and morals-corrupters, that we are criminals and sinners, that we hate members of the opposite sex, that we really want to be members of the opposite sex, that we are perverted and therefore less than human beings, that we are a threat to society, etc.

These prejudiced ideas are used to justify the specific forms of oppression gays face: police and civilian violence, imprisonment, blackmail, discrimination in jobs and housing, subjection to electric shock treatment and other "cures," condemnation by all the institutions of society (church, medicine and psychology, education, government, media), invasion of privacy, social ostracism, etc.

Everyone, gay or straight, is affected by the prejudice and oppression against homosexuals. And as John Lauritsen points out, "no one is completely free from the possibility of being attacked as queer."

Queer-baiting in the McCarthy period, the antiwar movement (linking pacifism and draft resistance to cowardice and homosexuality), or the feminist movement (linking any independence in women to lesbianism), are examples in the political arena of how anti-gay prejudice and oppression are threats to everyone. These examples also serve to point out the role of sexual repression in enforcing political norms and needs of class society.

In his article, Barry Sheppard notes "a growing mood, especially among young homosexuals, to reject self-hatred and to affirm their humanity. . . ." (page 5) This is reflected in the slogan "Gay is Good" and in the concept of "gay pride."

One of the major tasks before the gay liberation movement is to educate against and break down society's anti-gay stereotypes and prejudices. The question, "Is gay good?" is an important issue between the gay liberation movement and the heterosexual-dominated society as a whole, and it is an important issue for the self-pride and

self-confidence of individual gay men and women.

As in our books, pamphlets, and articles on the myth of the inferiority of women, it is the responsibility of Marxists to get out the *truth*. Because of the irrational and emotional attitudes about homosexuality, and because sexuality is such a touchy personal issue, people tend to react subjectively. We should always keep the prejudices of the masses in mind, but we should not make any theoretical or scientific concessions to this backwardness. It is essential for Marxists to refute the anti-homosexual mythology of class society. The scientific questions concerning homosexuality cannot be ignored by the revolutionary party. The fact—and *it is a fact*—that human beings have a basic potential for both heterosexual and homosexual behavior must be recognized. Recognition of this fact will aid us in understanding the roots of gay oppression, the role of sexual repression, and the importance of the gay liberation movement.

The Potential of the Gay Liberation Movement

Barry Sheppard writes, "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." (page 5.)

It is true that the gay liberation movement is composed of a small number of people. But the gay liberation movement is going to get bigger. Is it likely that the gay liberation movement will stop growing? remain the same size? get smaller? or even—disappear? Such a view would be correct only if we were to divorce the gay liberation movement from its political and social context—the deepest radicalization in American history. If we were to sever its ties to the rest of the radicalization, we could dismiss its potential for growth.

Last year, Comrades Bob Bresnahan and Bernie Senter wrote:

The [gay liberation] movement is new. It is moving in the direction of mass political action. In fact, several mass street demonstrations in the tens of thousands already mark its brief history. The movement is undergoing significant geographical expansion. The development of the movement was stimulated by the previous radicalization and particularly by the emergence of the women's liberation movement. The strength of the radicalization is conducive to its further growth. In short, there is every reason to believe that the gay liberation movement will continue to grow and continue to press its struggle for liberation from sexual oppression. (*The Position of the Proletarian Orientation Tendency on the Gay Liberation Movement*, by Bob Bresnahan and Bernie Senter, SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 29, No. 26, page 26)

The potential social force of a movement depends in great part on whether the movement pursues a course of reaching out and involving people in mass action. What is the record of the gay liberation movement on this score? On June 27, 1971, Christopher Street Liberation Day, demonstrations around the concept of gay pride, calling upon people to come out and join the struggle for liberation, occurred in several cities. The largest action was in New York, where up to 20,000 people participated in a march and rally from Sheridan Square to Central Park. This march was the culmination of a week of forums,

workshops, dances, and smaller demonstrations. The action was widely covered by the media, which called the action twice as large as the 1970 march, testimony to the rapid growth of the movement.

This year's actions were somewhat smaller: 7,000 in New York; 6,000 in Philadelphia; 2,000 in San Francisco; 1,000 in Chicago; 1,000 in Los Angeles; 500 in Detroit; 100 in Atlanta.

The size of this year's actions reflects the effect of the elections on the gay liberation movement. Many people have worked to elect gay delegates, support the McGovern campaign, organize activities for the Democratic and Republican conventions, etc.

Nevertheless, this year's gay pride demonstrations were much larger than the abortion rights demonstrations in May, even though the gay liberation movement is smaller than the women's liberation movement. This demonstrates the tremendous desire within the gay liberation movement to maintain unity around the annual gay pride mass actions. This unity covers almost every organization and grouping in the movement, including those involved in two-party electoral politics. This differs from the women's movement, where the largest and most influential organizations counterpose work within the Democratic Party to the building of an independent movement.

Many liberal politicians, seeing the independent gay liberation movement as a threat to the status quo, are now making token statements in a conscious attempt to direct the power and activism of the movement away from independent struggle and into the Democratic and Republican parties.

Undoubtedly, as the movement grows, the fight to maintain an independent movement will become increasingly important. The Democrats and Republicans will step up their attempts to derail the movement, and there will be tremendous pressure on the gay liberation movement to get off the streets. Our intervention—the intervention of a conscious revolutionary vanguard—will be very important in this regard.

The initiating slogan of the gay liberation movement was "Out of the Closet and Into the Streets!" The gay liberation movement has proven capable of mobilizing thousands of people in concrete actions against their oppression. This will give us a head start, and will make our job as mass action advocates within the gay liberation movement easier.

Wide Support For Homosexual Rights

Gay liberation has become an important issue in the 1972 elections. Capitalist presidential candidates McGovern, Humphrey, Lindsay, Chisholm, McCloskey, and McCarthy have been forced to voice varying degrees of support of issues of gay liberation. Many state and city legislatures have considered gay rights bills. Even the nationally televised Democratic Party convention heard debate on a minority plank on gay rights. Although the McGovern majority defeated the proposal by voice vote, the issues of gay liberation were brought to millions of people who either watched the debate on TV or read about it in the papers.

All this would not be happening if millions of Americans did not already support democratic rights for gays. For years groups like Mattachine and DOB lobbied for reform of discriminatory laws, with little success. It's only now that there is a fighting gay liberation movement that

some gains are being made.

Take the case of the struggle in support of Intro 475, a gay civil rights bill considered by the New York City Council in January. Mayor Lindsay, in the midst of his presidential campaign, did not speak out or otherwise lift a finger on behalf of the bill. As a result, he became a prime target of demonstrations led by the Gay Activists Alliance. Gays picketed Lindsay when he spoke, staged a sit-in at Lindsay headquarters, and publicized Lindsay's inaction throughout the city.

After Intro 475 was defeated, Lindsay received much of the blame for its defeat. Eventually, Lindsay wrote a long letter to GAA, and issued an executive order opposing discrimination against gays in city employment. He did things not out of fear of the few hundred members of GAA, but out of fear of losing favor with hundreds of thousands of gay New Yorkers who had supported Intro 475.

Gay liberation is a powerful political force, and Mayor Lindsay tasted some of its clout.

The support for homosexual rights, the growth of gay pride among the gay population, and the more tolerant attitude towards gays, all reflect the crisis of the family and the sexual revolution.

The attitudes of society are beginning to change. The trend is toward support for gay rights and away from hatred and prejudice. The large homosexual population, the mass actions of the gay liberation movement, the increasing support for gay rights, the growth of gay pride—these are among the objective factors leading to the conclusion that the gay liberation movement *will* mobilize masses of gay people to fight for our rights.

The sexual revolution and the radicalization as a whole have paved the way for the independent self-organization of homosexuals in struggle against the government, and will enable the gay liberation movement to play an important role in the coming American revolution.

The State of the Movement

As groups like the Gay Liberation Front in New York grew ultraleft, they also became smaller, more isolated, and less relevant. They came to represent only a small fraction of the movement. In most cities, they have been replaced by organizations similar to or patterned after the Gay Activists Alliance in New York. GAA-type organizations exist in most cities where we have branches. Additionally, united-front coalition organizations, like the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee in New York or Christopher Street West in California, exist in many cities, often side by side with GAA-type organizations.

Gay Pride Week activities, in addition to marches, also include workshops, forums, social activities, and local or national conferences. For example, 260 persons attended a Gay Pride Week conference May 19-21 at Ohio State University. The conference was organized by the Ohio Gay Pride Committee, Columbus Gay Activists Alliance, and Radicalesbians. National gay liberation conferences have also been held: last March in Austin, last November in Madison, and this February in Chicago. Another national conference is scheduled for Labor Day in Minneapolis.

There are hundreds of campus gay liberation groups. The national YSJP teams this spring found gay liberation groups on almost every campus they visited. Campus struggles have taken place around campus recognition

and the right to use campus facilities. Even the attempt of gays to have an equal social life with straights on campus becomes a political struggle in and of itself.

The following quote, excerpted from the introduction to *The Gay Crusaders* by Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker, describes the rise and development of the gay liberation movement:

Thousands of homosexual men and women have marched in the streets of America since the first homosexual uprising in 1969, forcefully demanding a myriad of social and legal reforms. These people who until recently were considered a subject for smirking amusement, who hid their sexual preferences, who endured harsh legal and extra-legal penalties without murmur, have suddenly come forward in large numbers to challenge and change the society which for thousands of years has condemned them to social ostracism, public ridicule, imprisonment, and at times even to torturous death.

The concept of an organized homosexual movement is not a new one, though early groups bear scant resemblance to those of the present. Early in this century, some homosexual groups were formed in the United States and abroad, but the information we have about them is limited and fragmentary. In parts of Europe, especially in Germany, the homosexual movement made some headway, but disappeared with Hitler's rise to power. Homosexuals under the Nazi regime were sent to concentration camps along with Jews and political dissenters.

In the United States around 1950, homosexuals, still living under the fear created by the homosexual-hunting of the repressive McCarthy era, began to organize secretly, holding their meetings with shades drawn and with lookouts posted to watch for the police. The organizers got braver, and soon the first American homosexual magazine, called *One*, was being published and mailed out of Los Angeles. When a postal ban, triggered partly by a lesbian story in one issue, was slapped on the magazine, the publishing group fought the ban all the way through the courts and won in 1958 in the U. S. Supreme Court. This landmark decision secured the right for all homosexual organizations to use the mails.

Throughout the decade, homosexual groups opened offices, established ties with professionals in law, religion, and the behavioral sciences, issued magazines, newsletters, pamphlets, and brochures, and—most important—provided help and reassurance for thousands of homosexuals grateful for the existence of groups of their own people to turn to.

Increased self-confidence grew into assertiveness, and by the mid-sixties homosexuals were not merely waiting for the courts to decide cases in their favor but were initiating suits to press the courts for guarantees of broad-scale employment and other rights. Today's movement is busy waging an impressive array of legal battles to get full equality for homosexuals in all matters touched by law. . . .

A word about terminology. Up to 1969, this movement was generally called the homosexual or homophile movement, and these terms are still frequently used. After a dramatic event in 1969, younger activists began calling it the gay or gay liberation movement. "Gay," which had long been an in-group synonym for homo-

sexual, seemed a natural rechristening, and overnight the shift in names caught on.

What was the dramatic event? Through the fifties and sixties, the movement had been the work of a dedicated few dozen people across the country. There had been pickets and legal challenges, but basically the movement was small in numbers and expanding slowly. Then, in June 1969, New York police raided the Stonewall Inn, a bar on Greenwich Village's Christopher Street that was popular with male homosexuals. The bar's clientele took umbrage, and for the first time in history homosexuals fought back. The police were stunned. In the full-scale riot sparked by the routine raid, homosexuals were injured and so were police. Word spread of the spontaneous rebellion, and immediately the movement acquired a grass-roots appeal and began to burgeon. Many new activists consider the Stonewall uprising the birth of the gay liberation movement. Certainly it was the birth of gay pride on a mass scale.

Since then, the social and legal struggle by gay women and men in America has escalated. Those at the forefront of this challenge to laws and customs have begun organizing this country's estimated ten to fifteen million adult homosexuals (depending on how you interpret the Kinsey figures; some put the figure as high as 20 million). In 1965, organizers could muster fewer than 50 homosexuals for a picket line. On the last Sunday of June in 1970 and again in 1971, thousands of gay people marched in New York, Los Angeles, and other cities, joyously commemorating the 1969 rebellion at the Stonewall bar as Christopher Street Liberation Day.

And now, in 1972, there are over 300 gay organizations in the nation, many of them on college campuses. Their members regularly confront politicians, lobby in state capitals and city halls, challenge psychiatrists, debate theologians, and appear on radio and television to champion their cause. . . .

Many of today's gay liberationists go far beyond concern with the obvious grievances: federal denial of civil service jobs and security clearances; laws against unorthodox sexual activity between any two consenting adults; harassment by police. They call for a total re-examination of society's suffocating arbitrary sex roles, for a total reshaping of a social system that fosters anti-homosexual attitudes. A well-known bit of gay graffiti illustrates the pointed social criticisms gay people are raising: "The army gave me a medal for killing a man, and a dishonorable discharge for loving one." Like women's liberation, gay liberation is raising fundamental questions about our society and its values, questions that far transcend legal inequities. . . ." (pages 7-10)

Gay Liberation and Party Building

Our general approach to the gay liberation movement should be to see it as presenting us with both opportunities and responsibilities. It offers us the chance to recruit, win greater influence in the radical movement, and advance the interests of homosexuals.

There is no contradiction between building the gay liberation movement and carrying out the work of building the Socialist Workers Party. National party intervention in the gay liberation movement would aid party building.

Last year, in a reply to the Proletarian Orientation Tendency, George Novack wrote:

An organized movement of homosexuals engaged in mass mobilizations against their victimization is unprecedented in the social struggle of the modern world.

All these movements [Black nationalist, student, antiwar, women's liberation, and gay liberation—SB] have had an impact and stirred emulation in other parts of the globe. They testify to the fact that the erstwhile stronghold of world reaction is also becoming something else. It is a laboratory for new experiences and experiments in radical action emanating from a deep-going revulsion against a decadent monopoly capitalism.

The sectarians have not yet caught on to this. They are blind to the significance of such innovation because they do not conform to previous patterns or their preconceptions and prescriptions. However, it is precisely their genuine novelty, their departure from the norms, that give importance to these out-of-the-ordinary occurrences. Marxists are—or should be—especially attentive to what is new, different and progressive in all spheres of anticapitalist activity.

Sectarians, on the other hand, discount or dismiss novelties with the handy disdainful epithet of "petty-bourgeois," thus disclosing their own narrow mentality. They minimize and disparage the sectors already engaged in struggle, and especially student activism, on the ground that the workers are not concerned or interested. . . .

They have not comprehended the nature and depth of the social crisis of U. S. capitalism expressed in the radicalization to date. This idea is the heart of the N. C. political resolution. The upheaval is affecting all elements of the social structure up to the ruling heights, as the rift over the Pentagon papers attests. Above all, the crisis has awakened and is arousing hitherto unheard-from layers of the oppressed from the homosexuals to the prisoners. It is giving voice to the voiceless, courage to the timid, pushing forward the backward, and inspiring them to emulate and even vie with one another in struggle for their rights and satisfaction of their grievances.

The resolution notes how the students and Chicanos learned from the Blacks, and how La Raza Unida is setting an example of independent political organization for the Afro-Americans. The insurgent women have taken their cues for their actions from the precedents set by the Blacks, students, and antiwar forces. This chain reaction spreading from one sector of the oppressed to another is far from finished. The tenor of the resolution is that only the first initiatives have been taken and much more is to come.

It is necessary to understand, as the sectarians do not, that the initiatives and innovations of the various components of the radicalization to date are not purely peripheral. Each one of these independent movements have their own contribution to make to the multiform revolutionary cause and constitute integral parts of the process of strengthening the anticapitalist forces and building the revolutionary vanguard. Our participation in them is not a diversion or distraction from the central objective but ways and means of obtaining it more expeditiously. (*Schematism or Marxism? What is At Issue in the Debate Over Our Political Line*, by George Novack, SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 29, No. 14, pages 6-7)

The Socialist Workers Party can play a decisive role in the gay liberation movement. In projecting what our immediate tasks should be, the most important things will be to immerse ourselves in and learn from the movement, and to have the most open-minded and flexible attitude toward intervention.

First of all, every branch and local should assign comrades to gay liberation work. In most areas, joint fractions should be set up. Regular reports on the gay liberation movement should be given to executive committee, branch, and local meetings. Regular reports should also be sent to the party and YSA national offices. The national offices should assign forces to provide national organizational and political direction for the intervention and to coordinate our overall work in gay liberation. It should become the norm in our movement for national fraction meetings to take place, and for resolutions and reports on gay liberation given, at national gatherings of the SWP and YSA.

Secondly, comrades should be assigned to attend meetings, participate in, and work with existing groups, especially groups on campus. Whether to join or participate in a particular group is a decision to be made by the branches and locals, but we should intervene in GAA-type organizations and Gay Pride Week coalitions where they exist and are open to us. Where we have the forces, and where there are real openings, we should join in and help initiate actions around specific issues (such as Intro 475, the McConnell case, campus struggles, police brutality, etc.)

Third, we should intervene with fractions at local and national conferences (such as the one scheduled for Labor Day weekend in Minneapolis). We should advocate a year-round program of activity on the national and local level—demonstrations, conferences, forums, defense cases, etc., with more frequent dates of national focus, in addition to Christopher Street Liberation Day. We should advocate the raising of demands that can appeal to masses of gay people, such as full rights for gays, repeal of anti-gay laws, end job discrimination, end police brutality, etc. But which demand or demands will become most important is not yet clear and we should be flexible in this regard.

Fourth, we should step up our work in building gay contingents for antiwar demonstrations. The gay liberation movement offers tremendous possibilities for antiwar organizing; there already exists enormous antiwar sentiment among gay people in this country. We should also step up our work in building lesbian contingents in the abortion rights demonstrations.

Fifth, we should carry out an aggressive propaganda campaign through our press, forums, and election campaigns. Our articles and speeches should discuss and explain our position on gay liberation, the nature and roots of gay oppression, the history of the gay liberation movement, the oppression of gays in Cuba and the Stalinist countries, the need for an independent mass movement, etc. We should use our press to build the activities of the gay liberation movement and to involve ourselves in its debates. We should answer red-baiting attacks from within the gay liberation movement and attacks on the gay liberation movement by our left-wing opponents. Leading comrades should be sent on national speaking tours, representing the party and YSA and speaking on these issues. Pathfinder Press should begin publishing a series of books

and pamphlets about the gay liberation movement.

Sixth, we should have internal educationals on the history of the movement, the nature and roots of gay oppression, the relationship of gay liberation to the rest of the radicalization, theories of sexual revolution, etc. We must increase the general level of understanding and knowledge of the gay liberation movement within the party, so that we can increase the number of comrades who feel comfortable with the political and theoretical problems of the movement. Straight comrades should be encouraged to learn about the movement by attending meetings, reading the press and literature of the gay liberation movement, selling our press to gay activists and other recruitment work, etc.

The carrying out of these tasks will lay the basis for our further participation in the gay liberation movement. And we can be sure that especially after the election period the conditions will exist for unprecedented growth of the gay liberation movement.

Barry Sheppard writes that since there is not now a national action coalition in the gay liberation movement, our only alternative, if we decided to intervene, would be to start from scratch, substitute ourselves for the masses, etc. But this *not* our only alternative.

Before the formation of WONAAC in July 1971, there was no national action coalition in the women's liberation movement. Does this mean we were wrong to have a national intervention in the women's liberation movement throughout 1970 and the spring of 1971? Indeed, where would the women's liberation movement and the abortion rights struggle be today if we had not intervened on the grounds that there was not yet a national action coalition. Even today, WONAAC is rather small.

What we did in the women's liberation movement, and

what we should now begin to do in the gay liberation movement, was to participate in the movement with the aim of gradually winning over and gathering up the forces necessary for the launching of a national mass action coalition. This is a task that cannot be done overnight, it certainly cannot be done by waiting for it to happen. But it is a task that must be done, and it cannot be done with our abstention.

The political resolution adopted by last year's convention says that the revolution will ". . . open the road to the destruction of capitalist exploitation, alienation, oppression, racism, and sexism, and the construction of socialism—the first truly human social order." The revolution ". . . will incorporate the democratic and transitional demands that flow from the various independent movements that have arisen in the course of the social struggle as well as those that will arise as the radicalization deepens. It will give an enormous impetus to the further development of these movements until their demands are met in full in the course of the construction of socialism."

Only "the first truly human social order" will give total freedom to gay people. The stake of homosexuals throughout the world therefore lies in the success of world revolution. The gay liberation movement will be a permanent feature of the international radicalization. It will be a part of the revolution. It will play a key role in destroying sexist ideology. The gay liberation movement will exist until the last vestiges of prejudice and oppression are wiped out. Clearly, the gay liberation movement is a revolutionary movement. The SWP should welcome the opportunity to intervene in and eventually lead this movement to victory. *National party intervention in the gay liberation movement is long overdue.*

July 19, 1972

BASIC QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE ANSWERED

by John Lauritsen, Upper West Side Branch,
New York Local

Without Revolutionary Theory There Can Be No Revolutionary Movement

Answers to certain basic questions are central to developing a theory of gay liberation. Such questions must be answered—and answered scientifically—as: Is there a natural superiority of heterosexual behavior over homosexual? Will homosexual behavior increase or decrease in a free society?

In addition, though more subjective, we must ask: Will homosexual love occupy an honored place in a free and truly human culture? Will homosexuality be considered a desirable characteristic for the sons and daughters of a socialist future?

Is gay good?

Our answers to these questions will determine whether our involvement in gay liberation will merely consist of a civil libertarian fight for the democratic rights of misfits, or whether it will involve a more profound struggle for human reason, with revolutionary implications.

In my opinion we cannot expect to recruit gay activists or deserve the respect of gay comrades on a position of "toleration." Enough evidence is available for Marxists to reach conclusions on the above questions, and we must have the intellectual courage to do so.

* * *

I feel Comrade Barry Sheppard is mistaken when he writes, "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.* . . ." (emphasis added)*

I believe these and similar questions do concern us, and they concern us because, as Lenin put it, ". . . *the role of a vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory.*" (*What Is To Be Done*—emphasis in original)

Also relevant is Lenin's conviction, expressed by quoting the "profoundly true and important words of Karl Kautsky": "*Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge.*" (*op. cit.*—emphasis added)

There is less room for impressionism, "gut feelings," or any other type of subjectivism in the present discussion on gay liberation than in any which has taken place in the socialist movement—precisely because no other area of discussion is so laden with deep-seated fear and prejudice. The disgraceful exclusionary policy of the 1960s is witness to the latter.

* I will grant, however, that Sheppard's brief and rather general contribution would have been much longer and more cumbersome if he had attempted to deal with every germane issue; and he may have intended to leave the development of these questions to the literary discussion itself, which would be entirely understandable.

Homosexual Acts Represent Natural, Completely Human Forms of Behavior

My own position can be stated succinctly. I feel that homosexual acts represent natural, completely human forms of behavior. I further believe that there is no natural superiority of heterosexual over homosexual behavior. Or phrased another way, the human animal is gay (of course I include the so-called "bi-sexuals" in the gay category, since the great majority of those who are homosexually oriented are also heterosexually oriented).

I presented evidence for these positions in my first bulletin. Other comrades have presented further evidence. I shall not repeat the arguments here.

If Comrades Feel Homosexuality Is Unnatural . . .

Some comrades (and most Americans) would not agree with these positions. If anyone feels a quite different analysis of human sexuality is correct, I strongly urge him or her to write it down and submit it to this discussion. Open debate is the precondition for theoretical unity, and hence, for a strong intervention into the living class struggle.

I feel constrained to qualify this somewhat. Contributions should be serious, and a certain degree of knowledge is essential for a reasoned analysis of sexuality. The intelligent literature on sexuality is limited, and most sex literature is the foulest idealist garbage.

At a bare minimum, two books must be read in order to have any understanding of homosexuality. They are: *Homosexual Behavior Among Males* by Wainwright Churchill, and *Patterns of Sexual Behavior* by C. S. Ford and F. A. Beach. Both are available in paperback, and I see no reason why every branch bookstore should not carry them. I don't agree with everything in these two books, but I do feel that no intelligent discussion is possible without having studied them. Three or four evenings of reading is not too much to ask of those who would contribute to the discussion.

There is much other literature—some essential for a comprehensive analysis, most of it foolishness. I am confident that the theorists of the revolutionary party can deal with the ideas of such charlatans and nincompoops as the medical "authorities," Doctors Reuben, Bergler, Bieber, and Socarides, or such lay fools as Norman Mailer, Arno Karlen, or Joseph Epstein. A Marxist movement must be capable of rebutting bourgeois psychiatrists and moralists as well as bourgeois economists, sociologists, historians, etc. If we can't do this, then we have no business intervening in the gay liberation movement. Or any other movement. Indeed, we ought to dissolve.

A Special Plea To The Leadership

It seems to me that a prerequisite for party democracy is knowing how our leaders stand on basic questions, knowing the reasons behind a course of action or non-action.

A certain holding-back with regard to involvement in gay liberation has been evident in the past year, partially owing, I believe, to the lack of a generally accepted Trotskyist analysis, the development of which is the purpose

of the present discussion. However, one might also surmise that the opposition of part of our leadership has prevented a more positive involvement. Whether the latter is true or not, we have no way of knowing.

I therefore strongly urge any leaders who take exception to the views I have presented to state their own positions and submit them to this discussion.

An Examination Of Terms

Let us examine the proposition: *homosexual acts represent natural, completely human forms of behavior*. First, the emphasis is on "acts" rather than "preference," "orientation," etc. This avoids trying to get inside people's heads and dealing with dubious psychological constructs, as well as the inevitable tendency to oppose a homosexual to a heterosexual orientation (read Churchill!). One should not counterpose a fondness for oranges to a fondness for apples. Of course, psychology and consciousness do exist, and there is a time and place to study them, but a clear materialist analysis is more concerned with practice.

Second, the word, "natural." This is used in its general, everyday sense. To be sure, one could argue that no phenomenon occurring in nature should be considered "unnatural," but this veers off into obscurantism. The point is that homosexual behavior can be expected to occur in the social human animal; that it is not the product of mistakes, aberrations, or peculiar life-experiences; and that it is a basic component of the human animal, both social and pre-social.

Against my position on the naturalness of homosexual behavior are numerous theories. One is that the vagina and penis fit together so well that anything else is less than ideal, hence unnatural. A corollary of this argument would be that one's first response to another's sex appeal would be: "oh, what suitable genitalia!" "How pleasant it would be to link my genitalia with them!" This has never been my own response, and I feel it is not the response of most people. Since most gay people have experienced the penis-vagina coupling, and I admit it feels good, it would appear that other factors are more important in the selection of sexual partners. In addition, adherents of the ideal vagina-penis coupling must explain why so many heterosexual couples experiment with other combinations.

A second argument against "natural" is based upon the complementary psychologies of "real" men and women, with concomitant roles and expectations. Surely the feminist movement has dealt with this argument. The stereotyped definitions of "real" men and women change, and they serve the needs of the system, often quite blatantly. The argument is not one of materialists.

A third argument against "natural": propagation is the sole valid aim of sex. I refer comrades to the New Catholic Encyclopedia under "homosexuality," where this view is quite articulately presented by St. Thomas Aquinas. I shall not degrade this discussion to the level of rebutting the idiocies of the feudal religion.

A salient point with regard to naturalness is that homosexual acts are sinful according to the superstitions of patriarchal society. This was not always so. When any human activity is regarded as sinful and described in a clinical manner, it will seem unnatural. Think about such activities as playing chess, tennis, or poker. If these forms of pleasure were considered sinful (ponder the Methodists)

and described clinically (imagine a typical shrink describing the manipulation of these pieces of wood, pasteboard, etc.), then they would seem highly unnatural. And we might be hard put to argue that it was biologically natural to spend time and energy in such pursuits.

Humans are not only thinking and working animals. They are also *playing* animals, a thesis brilliantly developed by Johan Huizinga in his book, *Homo Ludens*.

Finally, the phrase, "completely human." By this I mean that gay sex and homosexual love are consistent with the very highest potentialities of humanity, that they will be honored components of the high culture that will develop under socialism.

Admittedly this proposition is subjective, but we have some evidence. Of the very greatest men and women, the highest representatives of humanity of which we have record, a very high proportion have been gay. In the field of literature alone, we can list: Aeschyles, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Pindar, Sappho, Socrates, Ovid, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Goethe, Hoelderlin, Michelangelo (yes, literature), Hans Christian Andersen, Proust, Gide, Virginia Woolf, Melville, Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Rimbaud, Verlain, Genet . . . and on and on. No doubt innumerable others hid their gayness so successfully, under the persecutions of class society, that we will never know about them. But try drawing up a list of great literary figures who were straight (exclusively heterosexual). It would be pretty second rate compared to the gays.

My point, which perhaps I have obscured, is simply that homosexuality will play a positive role in socialist culture.

Implications For Revolutionary Theory

If we accept the proposition that homosexuality is natural and desirable, then a different and much more profound analysis is required than if we were merely concerned with the rights of aberrants perhaps characteristic of only one phase of human development.

For three thousand years, no group of people has been more savagely persecuted than homosexuals. Yet, homosexual impulses have played a powerful motivating role in the lives of at least a substantial minority, and perhaps a majority of the population. How is it that harmless and loving acts were repressed so brutally and irrationally?

The Marxist method does not permit us to view this persecution as a mistake or an accident. Accidents don't keep repeating themselves for three thousand years. Neither does Marxism permit us to consider so profound a phenomenon as unrelated to the class struggle.

We have a lot of theoretical work to do. A lot of explaining.

For one thing, we must be able to show that the repression of homosexuality was part of the unified process comprising the institution of private property relationships, male supremacy, the family, and the state.

We must develop a historical-materialist analysis of the origins and perpetuation of anti-homosexual phobia.

Why is it that every swing to the right, be it Italian or German fascism, the advent of Stalinism, the fascist Greek junta (which started gay-hunting within days of taking power), or Nixon, is accompanied by a tendency to repress sexuality. Conversely, why is it that "with every great revolutionary movement the question of 'free love' comes in to the foreground" (Engels in "The Book of

Revelation").

We must be able to demonstrate how the threat of being labeled as "queer" acts in obstructing revolutionary consciousness and in keeping people in place.

In sum, we must be able to describe the role oppression of homosexuals plays in the class struggle.

These are the subjects for subsequent analyses.

July 24, 1972

A COMMENT ON COMRADE NAT WEINSTEIN'S CONTRIBUTION

by Lee Smith, Upper West Side Branch,
New York Local

Comrade Nat Weinstein's contribution squarely addresses what I understand is supposed to be the subject of the current literary discussion. That is, what should be the party's orientation to the gay liberation movement. Comrade Weinstein writes that we should continue our position 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.

Comrade Weinstein argues, however, that the party should not intervene in the gay movement, by which he means, he explains, "to send comrades into the gay organizations, take leadership responsibilities and to help build new groups."

I agree with both of these propositions, and, as I understand it, this is basically the position Comrade Barry Sheppard has taken in the initial article in this discussion.

But there is more to Comrade Weinstein's contribution than these two propositions. Related to his conviction that the gay movement by its nature is not going to develop into anything that calls for a party intervention is another, separate idea. While related, this idea is distinct, and it has to do with his being troubled, as a political, party-building person, by the confusion the whole gay liberation issue has engendered (or revealed) in the party. Comrade Weinstein expresses the wish that we will collectively rub our eyes, cleanly end "this chapter of the party's development," draw "all the correct lessons from this whole chapter," and in so doing, give a "new dimension to the understanding of the younger comrades in what a class approach to politics is all about."

I distinguish between this desire for cleaning up the confusion and Comrade Weinstein's evident belief that such a cleanup involves adopting his assessment of the gay movement's potential role in the class struggle. I do so because I disagree with the particular assessment he has made (while endorsing the basic approach he has tried to follow). But I wholeheartedly share his desire for the party to clean up the confusion that has made possible the kind of arguments he disputes in his article. If anyone believes Comrade Weinstein has constructed himself some straw men to duel with, that person only need consult the other articles in this discussion to see that comrades are really putting forward the sort of arguments he writes about. Some of them seem totally detached from any understanding of what the party is and what it seeks to become. Most imply at least some confusion

on the question.

A Basically Correct Approach

"Our politics begin," Comrade Weinstein writes, "with the fundamental premise that the workers are the class destined by history to lead the mass to the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a new society. Our fundamental task is to build the instrument that is capable of leading the class toward its accomplishment of this historic mission." This is pretty basic. It ought to go without saying that the literary discussion, like all of our other activity, proceeds on this foundation. This discussion is aimed toward our taking a decision respecting the allocation of our resources and energies vis-a-vis the gay liberation movement.

Comrade Weinstein is at pains to show that the very nature of homosexual oppression precludes the development of a mass fight against it. I believe he errs in his analysis of gay oppression. But whatever errors he makes, Comrade Weinstein proceeds with a basically correct approach—keeping his eye on what potential the gay movement has to advance the class struggle and build the party.

Although he advocates continuing the party's present course with regard to the gay movement, however, Comrade Weinstein neglects to point out the positive effect this course has had in building the party. By taking a correct position in defense of homosexual rights and making that position clear in our press, speeches, and campaign leaflets, the party has not only won new respect from the more conscious vanguard where we recruit today but from much wider layers where we will recruit tomorrow. We adopted this position not in a context where it marks us as kooks and dangerously isolates us, but quite to the contrary at a time when it puts us right at the cutting edge of changing public opinion.

It would be a mistake for us to do more than we are already doing in the absence of any development toward a campaign or formation in which we could productively intervene. But we should be clear that we have benefited from what we have already done.

Comrade Weinstein says he is convinced "events will quite speedily bring reality home." In regard to our present position, I believe they already have.

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