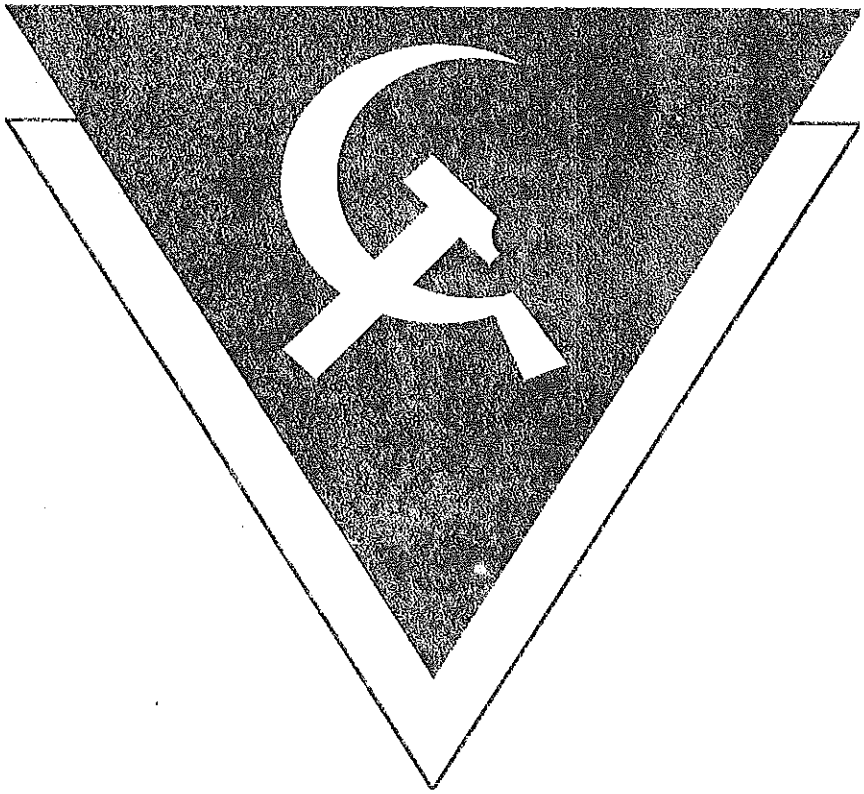
Lesbian and gay liberation

A COMMUNIST STRATEGY



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A WORKERS POWER PAMPHLET

Lesbian and gay liberation

A COMMUNIST STRATEGY

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Acknowledgements

Since the late 1960s the rebirth of the women's and lesbian and gay movements has given rise to a renewed interest in sexual politics. A number of writers within these movements, and within the various left groups, made valuable contributions on this question, particularly in unearthing the long lost works of progressive sexologists, socialists and sexual reform campaigners. In writing this pamphlet we consulted many sources but we would like to acknowledge a specific debt to several books. Chapters one and two in particular owe a debt to the following works:

Vern L Bullough *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (University of Chicago Press)

Jeffrey Weeks *Sexuality and its Discontents* (Routledge and Kegan Paul)

Alan Bray *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (Gay Men's Press)

Gay Left Collective *Gay Left*

John Lauritsen and David Thorstad *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement* (Times Change Press)

Eduard Bernstein *On Homosexuality* (reprints by Athol Books)

All of these books provided much valuable information but we take full responsibility for the political analysis in this pamphlet.

Editor's note

In this pamphlet we have used terminology relevant to the historical periods under consideration. Thus, in dealing with the period prior to Stonewall we have tended to use the terms homosexual and homosexuality with reference to both men and women, since these were the commonly accepted terms at the time. For the recent period we use our own preferred term; 'lesbians and gay men'.

Introduction

At the time of re-printing this pamphlet Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill, which outlaws the 'promotion of homosexuality', is about to become law.

In recent months Labour council after Labour council have slung out their dented shields and hoisted the white flag.

In these circumstances the strategy that has been adopted, by Harringey and others, to 'fight' Clause 28 is one of capitulation. The ALA initiated method of attempting to win, through court action, a narrowly defined definition of 'promotion' is to concede defeat before the fight is begun. To rely on Tory judges to rule favourably is utopian. We know from case after case of lesbian mothers having their children taken from them that the courts are not on our side.

We must support individual councillors like Linda Bellos who state they will defy Clause 28 and we must campaign for all Labour councillors to do the same, but we must remain absolutely clear that the record of these reformists is one of sell out after sell out.

The entire history of 'left' Labour councils taking up the cudgels on behalf of the oppressed has been strewn with problems. In essence it has been a history of 'gesture politics', with little or no real resources being provided. For most of the councils concerned it has been a cynical attempt to provide 'left cover' for cuts and more cuts.

In a situation where jobs and services are being cut in other council departments it is not conducive to breaking down anti-gay prejudice. This does not mean calling for cuts here first but opposing all cuts and calling for growth budgets to meet the needs of all sections of the community. In doing so we will be capable of winning 'straight' trade unionists to a defence of lesbian and gay rights and to a policy of 'non-compliance' with Clause 28. It is an urgent necessity to begin now to lay the basis for a massive campaign of defiance of Clause 28 by the front line unions in local government and education. We must win as many unions as possible, nationally and locally, to a definite commitment to non-compliance and defence of any individuals victimised as a result of operating this policy, up to and including strike action.

However the main obstacle to overcome if we are to do this is the isolation of the lesbian and gay communities from the organised labour movement. If we are to win workers to take action in defence of our rights we must see, and convince them that Clause 28 is part of a class wide offensive by the Tories. This is not the view of many in the leadership of 'Stop The Clause'. Even some on the 'revolutionary' left have attempted to stop the campaign from turning to the labour movement and arguing for defiance. A leading supporter of the International Socialist Group, Jamie Gough, attended a national 'Stop the Clause' meeting and moved the deletion of non-compliance from it's policy statement.

The campaign is doomed to failure unless it breaks out of it's self imposed isolation. Pick up any leaflet produced nationally by the 'Stop The Clause Campaign' and you would be forgiven for thinking that the battery of anti-union laws, the racist immigration laws and the attacks on workers generally that we've witnessed over the past few years hadn't happened. The publicity for the 9 January demo read: *'Today its lesbian and gays, tomorrow—black and minority ethnic people? Trades unionists? Women?'*. The fact is of course the Clause represents not the beginning of an attack on workers' rights but a driving home of the attack that was launched by the Tories in 1979.

It is only actions like the threatened strike by Bradford teachers in defence of a colleague sacked for admitting he was gay and groups like 'Trades Unionists Against Clause 28' that show a glimmer of hope in defeating Clause 28.

As we said in the introduction to the first issue of this pamphlet:

'There is a danger that, faced with the bosses onslaught, lesbians and gay men will seek personal or separatist solutions to their plight and turn away from the labour movement. The labour movement itself will come under pressure from the self-seeking bureaucrats at the top to ditch the progressive policies on lesbian and gay rights that have been adopted by both the TUC and the Labour Party.'

Unfortunately, more and more, these predictions are coming true. And yet it is ever more urgent to overcome these weaknesses. To do so we need a Marxist understanding of lesbian and gay oppression and an action programme to fight it. We need to have a balance sheet of the strengths and weaknesses of the Marxist tradition on the lesbian and gay question and we need to be armed against the false strategies for liberation that mushroomed in the 1970s under the influence of feminism and economism. This pamphlet aims to meet these needs. It is a revolutionary communist strategy for lesbian and gay liberation.

Workers Power April 1988

The origins and nature of lesbian and gay oppression

Lesbians and gay men are subjected to a brutal oppression in capitalist society. Despite some countries having legalised homosexual acts between consenting 'adults' in private, oppression, discrimination and legal harassment continue to exist on a massive scale. So much so that millions feel obliged to conceal their sexuality or to repress it. The submerged misery of these millions is incalculable. Against all who voluntarily or involuntarily reveal their sexuality, a massive barrage of repression is unleashed. Lesbians and gay men face not only abuse and derision but physical assault which can end in murder. At work lesbians and gay men face the constant threat of dismissal and victimization and, if unemployed, discrimination. In addition there is the routine harassment by the police on the streets, in the gay clubs, through entrapment and so on. Lesbian mothers are systematically denied the custody of their children. The 'popular press' keeps up a constant campaign of vilification — an incitment to 'queer bashing' and a constant stoking of the fires of homophobia. Why is there this monstrous campaign of repression which unites such unlikely bedfellows as the Pope, Ian Paisley and the Ayatollah Khomeini? Homosexual acts have long been condemned by certain religions — most notably Christianity — but the systematic oppression of homosexuals as a distinct category of people separated off from 'normal' society especially in Western Europe and North America began only some two hundred years ago. That is, it is a feature of *capitalist* society.

The justification for this oppression is that homosexuality is not merely abnormal but also, and more importantly, 'unnatural'. While the levels of toleration that capitalist society is prepared to grant homosexuals have fluctuated, acceptance of homosexuality, and therefore the recognition of it as a perfectly natural phenomena, has never existed. Yet the sexual behaviour deemed 'natural' by capitalist society — heterosexual activity with great emphasis on penetrative intercourse as 'real' sex — is only one aspect of human sexuality. What makes it so suited to being described as the only natural form of sex is its reproductive function. Now this is extremely important for the survival of the species and has always been so. The idea, perpetrated by many radical feminists, that penetrative heterosexual intercourse is inherently oppressive to women ignores a fundamental biological fact of human life. However, acceptance of the importance of reproductive sex is only half the story. Because one thing is natural it does not follow that everything else is unnatural. Moreover, the very word *natural*, brings with it a whole number of problems of definition. Human beings have never taken nature as a *fait accompli*, but have always sought to either utilise or transform nature. Our species has, by social means, repeatedly developed and transformed its own 'nature'.

To understand the development of lesbian and gay oppression it is necessary to dispense with capitalism's categories of natural and unnatural in matters of sexuality. They are arbitrary in the extreme.

Capitalism has existed for several hundred years. In the thousands of years preceding capitalism's rise to world dominance there were many different views of what was natural and unnatural in sexual relations. Different societies and even different strata within a particular society conformed to moral codes that were peculiar to themselves. What was perfectly natural and even sanctified for the pre-Columbian natives of South America seemed unnatural and abominable to the Christian conquistadores. The wide diversity of moral codes in sexual matters throughout history is eloquent testimony to the uselessness of the term *natural* as any sort of guide. Attitudes to-

wards sexual behaviour and moral codes that relate to it repeatedly change as a particular society itself changes. Moral codes for regulating sexuality are determined by the needs of the class that rules in a particular society. These codes are always in conformity with the social needs of the dominant class. The condemnation of homosexuality as unnatural and the systematic oppression of homosexuals that this led to, arose from the social needs of capitalist society and its ruling class, the bourgeoisie. Nature was called upon by the bourgeoisie to validate an oppressive code of sexual conduct. A cursory glance at history demonstrates that with its sexual morality, as with all of the other aspects of capitalist society that are deemed eternal and natural, nature had nothing whatsoever to do with it. The present bourgeois attitude to homosexuality is not eternal and history repeatedly shows this to be the case.

ANCIENT GREECE

In Ancient Greece homosexual activity was not regarded as unnatural at all. Sexual love between men was glorified by poets, philosophers, sculptors and painters. Although there are recorded examples of lesbianism as well — the term itself being derived from Lesbos, the name of the island where Sappho, a poetess who celebrated the love between women, lived — there is no evidence to suggest that it was accorded any social approval. Amongst males, homosexuality was not merely tolerated, it was encouraged. After his failure to rescue Eurydice from the underworld the mythical songster Orpheus turned to the love of young males. His songs openly celebrated this love. Plato and Aristotle, highly regarded by bourgeois scholars, both extolled the virtue of male homosexuality. Attempts by Christian scholars to suggest that such love was a non-physical, idealised love (hence 'Platonic'), do not square with the mass of written and archeological evidence depicting in great detail, and with obvious approval, the physical aspects of male homosexuality. Even before the much publicised acceptance of homosexuality in Greece, earlier examples of the social approval of homosexuality exist. In ancient Mesopotamia the earliest legal codes dealt with many aspects of sexual morality but there were no provisions for the punishment of homosexuality. Indeed amongst the caste of priests in early Mesopotamia homosexual practice was commonplace, public and accepted.

However, nobody should imagine that Ancient Greece was a haven of sexual freedom. It was a strongly patriarchal class society — based on slavery. Whilst many of the free males of Athens, Sparta and Thebes conducted same-sex emotional and sexual relationships women suffered terrible oppression. The citizen's wife was largely confined to her household and severely punished for any sexual relations beyond those with her husband necessary for producing children. The family was already an instrument of oppression. Other women were restricted to prostitution. The slaves, the great majority of the producers, had no rights either political or sexual.

EMBARASSING FACT

The main point however, is that this society not only functioned, it also produced some of the finest products of the human spirit, giving birth to the earliest forms of democracy, to classics of tragic and comic drama, to philosophy, sculpture, architecture, mathematics and so on. And all this happened in a period when intra-male sexuality was not repressed but encouraged. This society was in no sense decadent — that is falling apart as a result of sexual customs. This embarrassing fact is usually passed over in silence by bourgeois historians and moralists. Classical Greece was unusual in the explicit honour and role accorded to male same-sex love. It was closely related to the educative and military training aspects of the Greek City-State, resting on the exploitation of slaves and the subordination of women. The 'ideal' relationship was between an older, mature man and a younger adolescent (pederasty, which literally means 'love of boys'). This was supposed to aid the education, moral as well as practical, of the young and to bind together the male citizens as a military force. This pattern has existed as well in other warrior societies throughout history.

LEGAL PUNISHMENT

However, if this pattern was unusually highly developed in Ancient Greece, if same sex love was only tolerated in other societies, nowhere was it treated as it has been for modern times with fear and loathing, let alone subjected to systematic legal punishment. Also, in Greece heterosexuality and homosexuality were not counterposed. Men were not thought of as being either homosexual or heterosexual. Sex between men and women was principally for the purposes of reproduction, while sex between men was a source of pleasure. There was, however, no question of invoking nature to grant approval or disapproval for either. Instances of homosexuality and heterosexuality amongst the gods and goddesses were, after all, legion.

The rise of Christianity, in the late classical world and during the establishment of feudal Christendom, brought about a significant change in attitudes towards homosexuality in Western Europe. However, homosexuality was lumped together with other sexual sins deserving of spe-

cial treatment by the zealots of the early Christian church. Practitioners of homosexuality, along with fornicators, those guilty of bestiality, adulterers and more besides were the targets of Christianity according to Saint Paul.

PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES

Paul, as part of his plan to unify and centralise the Christian church, stamped on the very early sexually free attitudes of Christ's followers and advocated an ideal of celibacy that had profound consequences for Europe for centuries to follow. For Pauline Christianity lust and debauchery were major sins, punishable by god and the law, and homosexuality tended to be regarded as a particularly abominable extension of these sins. Once again it is clear that the target of god's wrath was a man guilty of a homosexual practice, rather than a man guilty of being a homosexual. To counter the sins of the flesh Paul preached celibacy as *the* highest good for all. He wrote to the Corinthians:

'It is good for a man not to touch a woman . . . For I would that all men were even as myself.'

OPPRESSIVE NORMS

He did concede in the same letter that this ideal might be beyond many and that the best way to avoid 'burning' would be to marry. But marriage was very much second best. Reinforcing the oppressive norms of the family, visible from the earliest days of class society, Paul taught that within marriage women had to occupy a position of total subservience to their men:

'Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, not to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.'

Whereas paganism had witnessed many cults in which sexuality was an integral element of doctrine and indeed worship (fertility rites), Christianity — at least as systematised by the third century Roman State Church — excluded it. The blessed trinity, the holy family and the virgin birth of Christ by Mary all excluded sex. Moreover, the church was run by an all male, priesthood.

For early Christianity sex itself was an expression of sin, of the fall and of the devil. The sexual impulse was, according to Saint Augustine, so powerful that it destroyed the capacity for reasoned thought. Therein lay its danger. It was an earthly pleasure that could divert the faithful away from the pursuit of heavenly delights. And women were the temptresses, the true daughters of Eve. Thus in the earliest teachings homosexuality was not seen as a major threat. But the hostility towards sex in general that was typical of Christianity meant that it would inevitably become a target for persecution.

Ironically warnings against homosexuality became necessary for those closed communities — monks and nuns — who had chosen to live celibate lives. Saint Basil was obliged to warn young monks to:

'. . . fly from intimate association with comrades of your own age and run away from them as from fire.'

Saint Augustine found it necessary to utter a similar caution for nuns:

'The love between you, however, ought not to be earthly but spiritual, for the things which shameless women do even to other women . . . are to be avoided.'

BRAZEN HYPOCRISY

As the church developed, during the middle ages, into a major power, running the affairs of its own vast feudal estates and heavily influencing the affairs of all the kingdoms of Christendom its attitude towards sexuality hardened. By 1215 absolute celibacy was imposed on all clergy. Its willingness to condemn to the stake those guilty of lust or those guilty of sodomy — usually along with a variety of other crimes — increased considerably. But this hardening up on morality was accompanied by an increase in brazen hypocrisy. Fornication by the holy fathers of the lowest order and the highest was commonplace. And in the monastic communities the sins that Basil and Augustine had warned against were practiced, often without reproof, so long as discretion was maintained. In other words a stringent code of sexual morality — transgression of which meant death or dismemberment — was a weapon of social coercion used to terrorise and control the peasant masses. It is no accident that the various heretics burnt by the church were often in political rebellion against the papacy, and equally no accident that their charge sheets contained along with the sin of heresy the sins of lust and sodomy.

In the later middle ages the sins of sodomy or buggery do appear to have been more widely punished than previously. It was at this time that the medieval church furnished the world with the concept of a sin against nature. Homosexual activity was listed as such a sin by the leading Catholic theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas. But it was in the same category of heinous crimes as masturbation, bestiality and . . . having heterosexual intercourse in anything other than the missionary position! In cases brought before the law, however, homosexual activity tended to be regarded as on a par with adultery. Prosecutions of sodomites were normally 'sex cases' in which the accused would stand charged of a host of other supposed sex crimes. The idea of the sin against nature became more important in the sense of identifying an

actual breed of 'unnatural' sinner/criminal as feudalism gave way to capitalism. Capitalism appropriated late feudalism's idea of a natural order of everything on Earth ordained by god, and used it to sanctify its own particluar methods of exploitation and oppression. In turn this led to a further qualitative development of western society's attitudes to homosexuality. This process of change is at its clearest in the case of the earliest major capitalist power, Britain.

CIVIL WAR

The civil war that erupted in Britain in 1642 was a class struggle for political power between the forces representing the remnants of feudalism and those who championed the cause of capitalism, the bourgeoisie and a new social order. In the economic and political spheres capitalism did triumph over the old feudal aristocratic order (though not without the aristocracy winning important compromises that enabled it to survive as a powerful factor in Britain). By the end of the seventeenth century the changes in society were being reflected in changes in philosophy and morality. The 'natural order' of late feudalism was preserved but was proved to be in accord with the precepts of reason and empirical fact. One element of the natural order of things was the newly emerging bourgeois family. It was counterposed to the libertinism of aristocratic sexual relations, and all manifestations of sexuality that did not accord with this emerging norm were held to be deviations from nature and from reason. There were very clear implications in this development for society's view of homosexuality.

As social relations began to be moulded by the needs of an economy geared towards production for exchange, the market and money, an intensification of the sexual division of labour took place. There was a growing physical separation of the 'home' from the place of work. The old feudal household as a unit of production itself was being broken up. As one historian of the period, Sheila Rowbotham, observed:

'Although many women still continued to work alongside their husbands their role in family production came increasingly to be regarded as supplementary. By the eighteenth century women in the growing strata of "middling people" were already being reared for the leisure and sensibility we associate with the Victorian middle class.' (Hidden from History

Changes in the organisation of work not only affected the legal and social position of women but also the dominant ideas in society about the distinct roles of women and men.

The empirical philosophy of John Locke, writing in the 1690s, gained in popularity in Britain. He taught that private property was the most basic 'natural right' for men. The bourgeois man should be 'free' to accummulate capital through his own hard work and through the use of his workers' labour. In particular he needed to be free of the cares of the home, the organisation of domestic life, the rearing of children and so on. This affected the way in which the bourgeoisie viewed marriage. It modified the institution to suit its own purposes. In feudal times the peasant husband would have sought a wife suited not merely to producing children and keeping house but also to helping in the field.

The aristocracy generally married for purposes of property and to continue the family line, but a mistress, not a wife, was often the object of the Lord's affections. Arranged marriages were the norm and customs such as the land-owning Lord's right to sleep with a serf's chosen bride on the first night of her marriage prevailed into late feudal times throughout much of Europe.

BOURGEOIS IDEALS

The rising bourgeoisie, on the other hand, celebrated the ideal of the individual love match. Marriage should be the result of a man's love for a woman — an idea embodied in the principal novels of the eighteenth century in Britain. The bourgeois family was private and domestic. It was not a basic unit of production, but a social structure which freed the male in the family to accumulate capital and to establish his influence in society and politics. Affection was supposed to be the cement that held the new family structure together. As the Bolshevik Alexander Kollontai noted:

'In practice, of course, the bourgeoisie itself, in the name of convenience, continually sinned against this moral teaching, but the recognition of love as the pillar of marriage had a profound class basis.'

The relevance of this for the way in which homosexuality was treated was that any sexual relationships outside of the heterosexual love marriage were increasingly viewed as a threat to the bourgeois family itself. Homosexuality in particular became an offence not simply against nature in the physical sense as had been the case in feudal times, but also against the natural, that is *bourgeois*, family. Homosexuality ceased to be simply the action of those overtaken by lust and therefore prepared to 'do anything' as the feudal moralists had taught. Rather, as an activity in direct contravention of the bonds of the love marriage, it came to be viewed as the activity of a distinct minority who were choosing to commit crimes against the natural order of the world.

In the period of the transition from feudalism to capitalism there occurred a series of moral panics and large scale persecutions aimed at 'devil wor-

shippers' and witches. An integral part of the charges against the victims — men and women — was 'unnatural vice'. Women suspected of being unnatural in their affections were tortured or burned at the stake. The crime of unnatural affection (often levelled at women who simply lived alone in the village) was, however, rarely the only reason for such witch hunts. Bad harvests would sometimes provide a pretext. On other occasions natural disasters would suffice as an excuse. In the early eighteenth century however, persecution aimed at male homosexuals because they were homosexuals, part of the new category of people being created, began on an unprecedented scale.

COLLECTIVE TRIALS

Initially it took the form of raids which resulted in the arrest and prosecution of groups of men frequenting London's 'Molly Houses'. In place of trials of individual deviants — the old norm for cases of sodomy — whole groups of men were prosecuted in collective trials in 1699, 1707 and 1726. Convictions resulted in the death penalty. And in the trials it became clear that those men were viewed as sinners who freely and knowingly chose to sin. Homosexuality was beginning to be seen as the activity peculiar to a group of people — homosexuals. The eighteenth century only saw the beginning of this process. It was taken to a new stage of development as capitalism matured and as the norm of the bourgeois family permeated the whole of society in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Active persecution in the eighteenth century also provoked a reaction from those persecuted. There is evidence of organised resistance up to and including the use of violence against the raiders, by the users of the 'Molly Houses' in 1726. Of course nothing like a homosexual movement developed, but a growing sense of identity amongst those targetted for attack was evident. The development of a sub-culture through conventions of dress and behaviour helped fuel this sense of identity. The very creation of a distinct identity was, however, a result of the choice, in matters of sexual behaviour, that capitalism was now posing to all individuals.

'THIRD SEX'

The male homosexual of the eighteenth century had to conform to established morality or become a Molly. Indeed the Mollies were the prototype of what many nineteenth century sexologists and homosexual rights' campaigners alike called the 'third sex' — women trapped inside men's bodies. This view, though false, enabled male homosexuals to develop an alternative culture and escape from the moral strictures of bourgeois society. The culture, which could loosely be described as 'camp' was extremely important for the Mollies. In his *Secret History of the London Clubs* of 1709 Edward Ward gives a clear picture of the Molly subculture which set the tone for homosexual culture for years to follow. He wrote of the Mollies:

'They adopt all the small vanities natural to the feminine sex to such an extent that they try to speak, walk, chatter, shriek and scold as women do, aping them as well in other aspects.'

Of course the idea of 'aping' women confuses homosexuality and the super-imposed gender roles that capitalism has developed concomitant with its sexual division of labour. But it was this strict demarcation of gender roles that the Mollies were responding to. Men were men and women were women. This was not simply a biological fact for capitalist society. It had implications for sexuality and behaviour. Since the Mollies did not feel as though they were men in the heterosexual sense that society had decreed the norm, they adopted the mannerisms and dress fashionable amongst women at the time. The truth is that while there is a clear biological distinction between men and women, this does not determine either sexuality — sexual preferences and orientation — or most aspects of social behaviour.

Much of the behaviour associated with a particular gender is socially, rather than biologically constructed. For example the fact that women are child bearers is a feature of biology, of gender. However the tasks of child rearing, which in all class societies have been classified as women's work, are not determined by biology, by gender at all.

There is nothing in biology that makes women better cooks or cleaners than men. Nothing at all. Yet these tasks are commonly thought of as 'women's work'. In fact they are the product of a sexual division of labour which arose in the course of humanity's social development. Moreover, to justify this division of labour over the centuries differing class societies have constructed a culture in which feminine and masculine characteristics in terms of emotions and social behaviour, are totally counterposed.

DESTRUCTIVE DIVIDE

This counter-position stems from socially constructed gender roles not, to any significant degree, from biology. It fragments the human personality. It prevents men and women from assimilating the best elements of both of the rigidly separated categories — masculine and feminine — and thereby transcending what is an extremely destructive divide. In a nutshell then, gender roles

are primarily products of our society not of our sexuality.

Despite all this, however, and despite the element of misogynistic ridicule that undoubtedly exists within the camp tradition pioneered by the Mollies, the male homosexuals of the eighteenth century were attempting to defend their sexuality against its stigmatisation at the hands of capitalism and its moral guardians.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century and with the development of industry the bourgeoisie consolidated itself in Britain as the ruling class. At the same time it brought into being the industrial working class and eventually the conditions necessary for the revolutionary transformation of capitalism itself — large scale industry. Farming developed on a capitalist basis, while the Enclosure Acts, 1760-1830, eliminated the peasantry as a serious social force within Britain. The thousands who were driven off the land migrated to the towns and became free labourers — proletarians. Capitalism was creating its own class enemy despite itself.

Initially the bourgeoisie did not seek to impose its 'ideal' family on the newly emergent working class. On the contrary the requirements of capital accumulation in the early nineteenth century led it to ruthlessly break up proletarian families. Child labour, the horrific exploitation of women workers and the exacting toll of long hours at the factory for men all undermined the reproduction of a stable family life for the masses. However, as the working class grew and began to organise as a class and as capitalism's needs for the reproduction of labour power became greater, the ruling class' ideas about the family were obliged to become the ruling ideas for the whole of society. Pressure from the working class for the protection of family life (a progressive struggle) and the bourgeoisie's need to use the family as a means of regenerating and reproducing labour power led to the spread of the bourgeois family as the bedrock social unit in society.

The process was accelerated towards the end of the nineteenth century. Capitalism in Britain had developed into its imperialist stage. This was accompanied by significant changes in the composition of the working class. A relatively better off layer of skilled male workers came to politically dominate the organisations of the working class. This was the social basis for the development of reformism. The 'aristocracy of labour' was 'bought off' by the fruits of imperialism's super profits.

BOURGEOIS FAMILY

It was in this period particularly, that the bourgeois family was sold to, and adopted by, the mass of the working class. It was at one with the general response of skilled workers to the trade crises (women out first) and to their trade union demands (the male 'family wage' and the exclusion of women from productive labour especially in the skilled trades).

If the status of the bourgeois was partly measured by the 'leisure' of his wife and daughters in the eighteenth century, by the end of the nineteenth century a similar attutude prevailed amongst the upper layer of the working class. And it served as a powerful transmission belt for this bourgeois ideology to the rest of the class. The effect on attitudes towards homosexuality was that the working class became infected by the bourgeoisie's hostility to 'unnatural acts'.

The systematisation of oppression was reflected in legal developments.

Homosexuals were the most clearly identifiable deviants from the bourgeoisie's natural order. They were set apart from society — with even well meaning sexologists helping the process with their theories of men trapped in women's bodies and vice versa — as a target for repression. All that was missing — given the difficulties of using Henry VIII's sodomy laws — were modern legal codes for dealing with them. A Liberal MP, Henry Labouchere, furnished the necessary clauses with his law on indecency, in 1885. It stipulated:

'Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male pereson of, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.'

Thousands of gay men have suffered at the hands of the gross indecency laws ever since. Pressure for their introduction had come originally from well meaning reformers to combat the 'white slave' trade in children for sexual purposes. The guardians of bourgeois morality saw to it, as they have so often since, that this pressure by the reformers was used to their own advantage. In a climate of moral panic, they so shaped the law that male homosexuals became the principal victims, along with prostitutes, of the moral panic.

The most celebrated homosexual victim of the moral reaction that followed the Labouchere Amendment was Oscar Wilde, the author. His case is rightly famous not simply because of his individual reputation, but because it revealed, in the starkest possible terms, that capitalism's cure for those 'suffering' from homosexuality was two years hard labour. In society's view homosexuals were not merely sick men, they were criminals. Wilde himself had faced gay baiting from his college days. At Oxford his forthright 'decadence' prompted the yahoos at his college to try and wreck his room (though Wilde's 'effeminacy' was no obstacle to him kicking these thugs down the stairs!).

POLICE EVIDENCE

Following a well publicised affair with Lord Alfred Douglas, son of the Marquis of Queensberry, evidence that Wilde had committed acts of gross indecency with other males was amassed by the police and Wilde was convicted in 1895. The male homosexual community panicked and many fled to what they saw as a haven, Paris, where tolerance was greater as a result of the legacy of the Napoleonic Code in French law. More importantly the law had wagged its finger at all homosexuals by jailing Wilde — his fate awaited all of them. Their sexuality became a cause of ceaseless fear, fear of being found guilty of a 'crime' which caused nobody any harm at all, to which the 'victim' had consented, and which was conducted privately. The pioneer sexologist, Havelock Ellis, pointed to the deep rooted unfairness which underlay the laws that were used against Wilde and many more after him:

The act which brought each of us into the world is not indecent; it would become so if carried on in public. If two male persons, who have reached years of discretion, consent together to perform some act of sexual intimacy in private, no indecency has been committed. If one of the consenting parties subsequently proclaims the act, indecency may doubtless be created, as may happen also in the case of normal sexual intercourse, but it seems contrary to good policy that such proclamation should convert the act into a penal offence."

We need not agree with Ellis' views on public morality, to be able to appreciate the way in which he highlighted the discriminatory character of the law on gross indecency.

IMPERIAL LAW

Other imperialist countries followed a broadly similar pattern. In Germany Paragraph 175, rendering male homosexuality illegal, was passed into Imperial law in 1871. In the USA, despite variations between states, laws against homosexuality were brought into force in the nineteenth century.

What of lesbianism? In the nineteenth century there was not an equivalent legal crusade against it. This was not due to any enlightened attitude, however. Nineteenth century attitudes to women, 'respectable women' that is, were based on a total denial of the existence of female sexuality. Gradually this was modified by the view that nice women wanted sex, but purely for procreative purposes. The sexologist, August Forrel, typified this outlook when he wrote:

"The most profound and most natural irradiation of the sexual appetite in women is maternal love."

Indeed, this outlook influenced early feminists who campaigned around the theme of the protection of motherhood. Their view of sexual intercourse as procreative fulfilment led them to castigate lesbians for engaging in non-reproductive sex. Even Marie Stopes, who fought to enlighten women on many sexual matters, developed quack theories about the centrality of semen to sexual activity to justify a hostility to lesbianism. She wrote:

"The bedrock objection to lesbianism is surely that women can only play with each other and cannot . . . . have a natural union or supply each other with the seminal or prostatic secretions, which they ought to have and crave for unconsciously."

Thus the denial of female sexuality led the nineteenth century moral guardians to ignore it in the hope that it would go away. Then, when a sexual dimension to women was granted, it was quickly and rigidly subordinated to the tasks of breeding future generations. However, when lesbianism patently refused to go away, the state showed that it was prepared to strengthen the law. In 1921 a Criminal Law Amendment Bill was passed by 143 to 53 votes in the House of Commons. It read:

"Any act of gross indecency between female persons shall be a misdemeanor and punishable in the same manner as any such act committed by male persons under section eleven of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885."

The House of Lords, he it said, prevented the law reaching the statute book not out of friendship towards lesbians but because the old fossils were still convinced most women did not know anything about lesbianism and to pass a law about it would bring it to their attention unnecessarily. However, the bourgeoisie were prepared to use other laws — like indecent assault — against lesbians and had no hesitation, in 1928, of finding Radclyffe Hall's *Well Of Loneliness* guilty of obscenity and suppressing it.

SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

The bourgeoisie of the late nineteenth century called on science to help them justify their treatment of homosexuals. They did not, however, always get the answers they wanted. The contribution of the early sexologists and psychologists was extremely contradictory. Virtually all the leading experts in these fields — Kraft Ebbing, Magnus Hirschfeld, Freud, Havelock Ellis — favoured the reform of the anti-homosexual laws. They were, by and large, convinced that homosexuality should be the object of scientific investigation, not criminal prosecution. To this extent, therefore, they found themselves very often in conflict with capitalist morality.

However, their theories for explaining homo-

sexuality often reinforced bourgeois society's view of it as either an abnormality or an illness. Thus Kraft Ebbing's path-breaking *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) billed itself as a medical study of the 'abnormal'. Freud, similarly regarded homosexuality as a disorder or perversion. But he rightly opposed the idea that homosexuality stemmed from a woman being trapped inside a man's body or vice versa. He believed that homosexuality was a confusion of choice in terms of sexual preference, not a confusion of gender identity. Polemicising against the 'third sex' thesis he wrote:

'The literature of homosexuality usually fails to distinguish clearly enough between the question of the choice of object on the one hand and of the sexual characteristics of the subject on the other . . . A man in whose character feminine attributes obviously predominate . . . may nevertheless be heterosexual. The same is true of women.'

This was a very important insight.

THROWBACK

However, Freud was a bourgeois liberal not a Marxist. He did believe that the homosexual's preference for same-sex love was a throwback to the days before civilization, when bisexuality was the norm. As such it was a problem, if not an illness; a disorder, if not a crime. He wrote:

'Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage; but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of the sexual development.'

In other words the 'sexual function' is not dictated by norms laid down by society but by an independent, 'sexual development' which goes on in each individual. Psychological factors can check that development and thereby cause homosexuality, because the proper endpoint of that development for Freud was, and should always be, heterosexuality. Freud did not challenge capitalism's normative approach to sexual orientation.

The ideas of the early sexologists and psychologsts were ignored by capitalism's law makers and moral guardians. Until the 1920s and 1930s that is. By then a more pliable breed of scientists than the great pioneers, were installed in the key medical establishments throughout the imperialist countries.

The views of the pioneers that homosexuality was an abnormality were seized upon, and their pleas for tolerance and understanding were ignored. Even those who sought to harmonise psychology and Marxism, like Reich, classified homosexuality as a deviation from 'normal', genital based sexual activity. Tragically Freudian psychoanalysis was instrumental in getting homosexuality listed with the World Health Organisation as a recognised illness. Science and morality were brought into harmony.

By the beginning of the twentieth century most of imperialist Europe and North America had legally sanctioned the oppression of homosexuals — male and in a different way, female. It took over sixty years for any generalised shift in attitude and law reform to take place. But the years of tolerance that followed the 1960's, were not only of limited duration, they were of limited use. For lesbians and gay men oppression merely changed into a different gear. Now even the reforms of the 'permissive' sixties are under attack as gay men are blamed for the AIDS virus, and turned into modern day lepers and as lesbians are sacked from their jobs, denied their children and all too frequently, beaten up on the streets.

Capitalism has given lesbian and gay oppression a legal, political and in many respects, a social form. It has made it more wide-ranging and thoroughgoing than ever before, but it has also sparked resistance. That resistance needs to be transformed into a struggle, not only against oppression but also against the capitalist society that nurtures and sustains that oppression.

Marxism and the lesbian and gay question

The development of capitalism in Britain and Western Europe was accompanied, as we have seen, by an emerging morality that categorised homosexuals as deviants. Homosexuality was no longer merely an instance of individual depravity. It was a way of life for a whole number of people, especially men, and had to be treated as a threat to society. The development of the systematic social and political oppression of homosexuals did lead to the development of organised resistance. In a number of European countries movements and campaigns for homosexual rights emerged.

The very term homosexuality was coined by a Hungarian, Doctor Benkert, in the 1860s. Benkert — himself a homosexual — wrote an open letter to the German government in 1869 protesting against the proposed introduction of Paragraph 175 into the imperial legal code. This Paragraph rendered all homosexual acts committed by males punishable offences, carrying heavy prison sentences. Moreover, the introduction of the Paragraph was especially worrying for male homosexuals since it was common knowledge that the German police had built up extensive files on the sexual habits of numerous individuals. Benkert's letter was significant in bringing opposition to Paragraph 175 into the open. In that sense it laid down a marker for future movements against the paragraph when it became law throughout Germany in 1871.

In Britain homosexual acts between males had been punishable by death until 1861. But the change in law in that year, to make such activities merely liable to prison sentences was designed to increase not decrease persecution. Trials for sexual offences were more likely to result in convictions if the death penalty was not the outcome. The law on gross indecency between males, introduced in 1885, consolidated anti-homosexual legislation in Britain. Despite the lack of legal provision for the prosecution of lesbians in most capitalist countries, oppression manifested itself in a variety of other ways.

The political basis of the early homosexual rights campaigns in Britain, and more particularly in Germany, was bourgeois democratic. That is to say that, the campaigns were aimed at changing specific anti-homosexual aspects of existing law. In 1810 Napoleon introduced his legal code throughout much of Europe. This code regarded matters of sexuality, where consent was given, as entirely private. The code was not a reflection of Napoleon's own reputed homosexual inclinations, as bourgeois historians have argued. Rather it was a real gain of the French Revolution of 1789 which had inscribed on its banner the democratic rights of man, including privacy in all matters concerning sexual preference and behaviour.

However, the ideal of bourgeois democratic equality — between men and women, between races and between homosexuals and heterosexuals — popular for the purposes of summoning the plebian masses to struggle against feudalism, soon came into conflict with the realities and necessities of a world dominated by capitalist exploitation and the remorseless quest for ever greater profits. As industry in Europe developed, the effective exploitation of wage labour by the capitalists eventually necessitated the imposition of the bourgeois nuclear family structure on the entire proletariat. In turn this family structure militated against bourgeois democratic rights for women and homosexuals (male and female). In many European countries and in North America this development led to the stigmatisation and criminalisation of all aspects of sexuality that deviated from capitalism's heterosexual family norm. Homosexuality, which as we have seen was already classed amongst the chief crimes against nature, was inevitably a major target. Thus Paragraph 175 stipulated:

'Unnatural coupling undertaken between persons of the male sex and between people and animals is

punishable by imprisonment. Civil rights can also be withdrawn.'

Paragraph 175 and the Oscar Wilde trial in Britain, which stressed the unnaturalness of his crime, set the terms of reference for the early reform campaigns. Humanists, liberals and socialists of various hues conducted agitation against capitalism's institutionalised oppression of homosexuals. They reasserted a fundamental tenet of bourgeois democracy; namely that the state has no business interfering with personal matters so long as they do not harm anyone. Defence of the Uranians (a term coined by the homosexual rights campaigner, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and adopted by lesbians and gay men at the time as their common title) centred on combatting the legal discrimination they faced.

In Germany a long running campaign had as its central focus the demand for the repeal of Paragraph 175. This defence of democracy was completely correct, and, for its time, highly progressive. However, the link between the oppression of homosexuals and the development of the family under capitalism was not understood by the early movement of Uranians or by the pioneers of Marxism. Indeed Engels, who laid the foundations of the Marxist analysis of the family, did not see the connection between the structure of the family under capitalism, together with the ideology associated with that structure, and the oppression of homosexuality. Worse, his idealised view of heterosexual love (a view influenced by nineteenth century romanticism) led him to condemn homosexuality as an outrage against the dignity of man:

'. . . but this degradation of the women [Engels is referring to prostitution in ancient Greece — WP] *was avenged on the men and degraded them also till they fell into the abominable practice of sodomy and degraded alike their gods with the myth of Ganymede.'*

Engels developed this attitude in isolation from any existing homosexual rights movements and for once allowed a mixture of romanticism and Victorian morality to cloud his normally rigorously materialist judgement.

Despite Engels' individual viewpoint and regardless of the individual viewpoints of the leaders of the socialist movement, it was that movement that took up the defence of homosexuals and the fight for their democratic rights as citizens. The leader of the Universal German Workingmen's Association, Ferdinand Lassalle, defended J B von Schweitzer, who was hounded out of the legal profession because he was known to be a homosexual. Lassalle welcomed von Schweitzer as a leader of the Association. His grounds for doing so showed that early socialists understood the democratic principle at stake even if they did not understand the question of sexual politics. Lassalle declared:

'In the long run, sexual activity is a matter of taste and ought to be left up to each person, so long as he doesn't encroach upon someone else's interests. Though I wouldn't give my daughter in marriage to such a man.'

Not that Schweitzer had expressed any desire to marry Lassalle's daughter!

From the 1860's on the working class and socialist movement in Germany did not allow its primitive views on the nature of homosexuality to obstruct its firm commitment to the democratic defence of homosexuals. Marxist and non-Marxist socialists became, from very early on, the most consistent fighters for homosexual rights, proving once again that only the working class remained faithful to the democratic ideals that the bourgeois revolution had espoused but that the hypocritical, penny pinching bourgeoisie had long since consigned to the dustbin of history. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the strongest party of the Second International, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), won the acclaim of Uranians everywhere by daring to challenge Paragraph 175 on the floor of the imperial Reichstag. Bebel, the great socialist leader, took the floor in 1898 to ridicule the idea that homosexuals were a tiny handful of perverts. He asserted, against this view, and to the horror of the bourgeois deputies all around him on the benches of the Reichstag, that there were homosexuals everywhere:

'The number of these persons is so great and reaches so deeply into all social circles, from the lowest to the highest, that if the police dutifully did what they were supposed to, the Prussian state would immediately be obliged to build two new penitentiaries just to handle the number of violations against Paragraph 175 within the confines of Berlin alone.'

Bebel's defence of homosexuals was grounded in the SPD's fundamental commitment to the democratic aspects of the socialist minimum programme — the state should keep its snout out of people's personal affairs. But while the party's position on democratic rights was unambiguous, its attitude to homosexuality was more confused. The basic position, which was way in advance of Engels' attitude, was developed by Eduard Bernstein (later a leading revisionist within the party!) in a series of articles in *Die Neue Zeit* in 1895. The occasion for these articles was the Wilde trial in Britain. Bernstein effectively and savagely attacked the bourgeoisie for its mean and hypocritical treatment of Oscar Wilde. They had praised his literary work up to the point that he was found guilty of gross indecency. Then they banished

Wilde from the ranks of polite society. Bernstein noted:

'Everything changed for him, and the directors of the theatres that had acquired his pieces — of what is injured morality not capable? — removed not his pieces, but his name, from the posters.'

This example of bourgeois hypocrisy prompted Bernstein to attempt to develop an understanding of homosexuality, *'deriving from scientific experience'*.

The strength of Bernstein's analysis was its debunking of the idea that homosexuality was unnatural, as charged by capitalist morality. Using the method of historical materialism, he explained the way in which moral and sexual views were the product of definite historical and social circumstances. Bourgeois sexual morality was far from being the eternal and natural law that capitalism's hired moral hacks claimed. In fact it was a recent development and at that time was far from being universal. Precisely because attitudes to matters of sexuality are historically conditioned the yardstick of what was 'natural' was invalid. Bernstein argued that the prevailing morality constituted the 'normal' and that therefore deviations from it were abnormal rather than unnatural. Nature and norm were different things and most norms were, in any case, unnatural. As Bernstein explained:

'For what is not unnatural? Our entire cultural existence, our mode of life from morning to night is a constant offence against nature, against the original preconditions of our existence. If it was only a question of what was natural, then the worst sexual excess would be no more objectionable than, say, writing a letter — for conducting social intercourse through the medium of the written word is far further removed from nature than any way as yet known of satisfying the sexual urge.'

By rejecting the idea that same-sex love was in any way unnatural, and by showing that such a type of love had existed in many different societies at many different times, Bernstein made a *revolutionary* contribution to the development of a Marxist theory of sexual politics.

The weak side of Bernstein's analysis was the way its grasp of the causes of homosexuality. He tended to accept capitalism's categories insofar as he believed that homosexuals did constitute a distinct category of people by virtue of the fact that they suffered from an illness. In other words their sexuality was not and could not be the product of free choice. As an illness homosexuality had to be understood, tolerated and sympathised with. He wrote that cases of homosexuality *'must not be judged morally but pathologically'*. This view became widespread amongst the socialist movement and persisted for many years in its ranks.

Herzen, also writing in *Die Neue Zeit*, refined this view and ascribed the causes of the 'illness' to a confusion of genes at the earliest, bisexual phase of the embryo. This produced the person who had a woman's mind trapped in a man's body. This concept was embraced by wide sections of the homosexual community and extended to explain lesbianism — the man's mind trapped in a woman's body. The key, therefore, to understanding the illness of homosexuality was science. Sexuality, it was believed, was determined scientifically. Herzen argued:

'In my estimation it [why people are homosexual or not — WP] *is to be found in embryology in conjunction with phylogeneticism and anthropology.'*

This scientific determinism was, by and large, accepted by the Uranian movement. The major homosexual rights movement, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (an international organisation, but based and at its strongest in Germany) and its leading theorists conducted a great deal of research to scientifically prove the 'third sex' theory. The committee's journal was actually called the *Yearbook for Intermediate Sexual Types*. All of this reflected the major boom in 'scientificism' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

This approach was much more indebted to Social Darwinism, associated with writers such as Herbert Spencer, than Marxism. Consequently, its materialism was corrupted by an overly evolutionist and biologist stance. The result was the development of quack theories of homosexuality. Physical, biological, genetical and biochemical factors often took precedence over social and psychological considerations. The influence of this 'scientificism' was widespread in the Uranian and socialist movements (though one gay organisation, the Community of the Special, rejected scientific determinism only to replace it with mysticism). Pioneer sexologists and homosexual rights campaigners like Magnus Hirschfeld and Kraft Ebbing, fully endorsed this approach.

While many valid insights were gained as a result of the work of the early sexologists, the Marxist movement made a major, if entirely understandable, mistake by accepting the 'third sex' theory as an explanation of homosexuality. This theory fails to understand that gender roles, as opposed to gender itself, are for the most part socially, not scientifically moulded and that a rigid division between homosexuals and heterosexuals entails the cramping of human sexual potential that is a necessary feature of capitalism's version of family life. None of this is to deny that biological distinctions between the genders exist and do determine certain differences. But there is no

scientific proof, to date at least, that gender dictates a heterosexual norm for all people or that it dictates all manifestations of behaviour that have become associated with a particular gender through the centuries.

Despite this theoretical weakness the impact of Marxism's essentially principled, democratic stand on the homosexual question brought support for the SPD from many Uranians and propagated inside the working class a high level of tolerance, if not support, for homosexuals. In Berlin Magnus Hirschfeld circulated a questionnaire on sexuality which included questions on homosexuality amongst 3,000 students and 5,721 metal workers. Not one worker objected to answering the questionnaire. A gaggle of students, on the other hand, brought Hirschfeld to court and had him successfully prosecuted for circulating an 'insulting' questionnaire. Throughout the trial the workers' movement defended Hirschfeld and the SPD's paper, *Vorwaerts*, carried regular articles on the case.

The Uranian movement did not fail to recognise who its allies were. The bourgeois parties in the Reichstag had only words of hate for homosexuals. The SPD, at the very least, spoke of humanitarian tolerance. In 1912, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee intervened in the elections accordingly. It published an advert which declared:
'Third Sex: Consider this! In the Reichstag on 31 May, 1905, members of the Centre, the Conservatives and the Economic Alliance spoke against you . . . but for you the orators of the Left. Agitate and vote accordingly.'

The support for the left actually went further than just voting. In the German revolution of 1918 gay men and lesbians (who had been involved in the German women's movement before the war and who had campaigned to get that movement to take up their cause) organised and fought to destroy the rule of the Kaiser and of the aristocratic Junker class. The homosexual presence under the banner of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, was visible in rallies, demonstrations and street fighting. At a mass meeting at the height of the revolution Hirschfeld called on an audience of almost 4,000 to struggle not merely for a democratic republic but also for a 'social republic'.

The Committee's petition on Paragraph 175 was actually presented to parliament in 1922, but by then the democratic counter-revolution led by the right wing leaders of the SPD meant that the reactionary law was never repealed. However, a greater degree of tolerance was won and Hirschfeld was able to found the Institute for Sexual Science, housing it in the palace of a German prince removed from both his oversized house and his lofty social station in the course of the revolution. The Institute, like Hirschfeld himself, became a target of attack for the growing Nazi movement and was eventually smashed up and closed by Hitler's stormtroopers.

Outside of Germany, too, socialists were in the front ranks of those responding to the Uranians' call for a campaign for democratic rights for homosexuals. In Britain the utopian socialist, Edward Carpenter, campaigned for homosexual rights and linked them with the need for socialism. After the Wilde trial and the witch hunt atmosphere it engendered, Carpenter had great difficulty getting his work published. Only the press of the working class movement would publish his writings on sexuality. The Manchester Labour Press published his book *Towards Democracy*, which dealt with homosexuality as well as a range of other topics. The socialist Belfort Bax (a man who believed that males were the oppressed sex!) was prepared to take a stand on the rights of homosexuals to behave in private as they wished. He argued that morality had nothing to do with:
'. . . a sexual act, committed by the mutual consent of two adult individuals, which is productive of no offspring, and which on the whole concerns the welfare of nobody but the parties themselves.'
Of course while adhering to this position many socialists, like Blatchford, the editor of *The Clarion*, still found 'the whole subject nasty'. But that put them on the side of those who were ignorant of sexual politics rather than on the side of moral reaction.

In the USA the anarchist movement and anarchist figures like Emma Goldmann (who had met lesbians while she was in prison) took up the cudgels in defence of homosexuals, particularly in the many states that had reactionary laws on the question.

The work of Bebel, Bernstein and the SPD (in particular in the Reichstag debates on Paragraph 175 in 1898 and 1905) enlightened the socialist movement internationally to the democratic questions at stake in the defence of homosexuals. Additionally it brought many Uranians to recognise the need to identify their struggle for rights with socialism and internationalism (the Community of the Special adapted Marx's old slogan to read *'Uranians of the World Unite'*). The parties of the working class had been the only ones to respond positively to the pressure for reform carried out by the pioneer homosexual rights movement.

The most tangible gain achieved in the struggle for homosexual rights in this period was a result of the victory of the working class under the banner of revolutionary Marxism (Bolshevism) in Russia in October 1917. In December 1917 the Bolshevik government abolished all the Czarist laws that forbade or restricted homosexual activity. This

was an enormous gain and proof positive that revolutionary socialism is the key to destroying capitalism's reactionary moral laws, as well as its other repressive laws. The world's first workers' state provided the only form of government prepared to enforce on behalf of homosexuals the old democratic principle that the state should not interfere in private matters. Doctor Grigorii Batkis, the director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygene, codified Bolshevism's approach in a 1923 pamphlet, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia*. It stated:

'Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offenses against public morality — Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called 'natural' intercourse. All forms of sexual intercourse are private matters.'

The open expression of homosexuality was tolerated to a far greater degree in post-revolutionary Russia than in the capitalist countries.

However, the revolution did not get much beyond the SPD's already established theoretical understanding of homosexuality. The view that it was a form of bodily/genetic disorder rather than a crime, and should therefore be tolerated not punished, remained prevalent amongst Russia's leading sexologists. The Bolshevik revolution had created the preconditions — working class power — for the achievement of lesbian and gay liberation. The possibility for further theoretical and practical advances existed. But this possibility was not realised. The enormous democratic gain of 1917 was not built upon for one simple reason — a political counter-revolution was carried through by the bureaucratic caste that had emerged in the war-torn, desperately poor and backward Soviet Union. Numerous gains made by the working class and the oppressed through the revolution were stolen from them by the bureaucracy, headed by Stalin, which had usurped political power.

Under the leadership of Stalin in the late 1920s the Soviet Union became a degenerated workers' state. That is, the potential for the transition to socialism on the basis of the post-capitalist property relations, was blocked. An ever present danger of economic collapse, thanks to the blinkered and self serving policies of the bureaucracy, meant that the country was in an a fairly constant state of crisis. Part of this process was a reactionary shift of position by the workers' state on the question of homosexual rights.

After leading the field in the defence of homosexual rights at various international medical congresses throughout the 1920s, towards the end of the decade Soviet doctors, including Batkis, were instructed to drop all mention of homosexuality. Their bureaucratic masters drew a veil over the subject and kept it in the closet until the problem of AIDS in the 1980s obliged Gorbachev to admit the existence of homosexuality in the Soviet Union. The democratic gain of 1917 was obliterated in 1934 when, after the personal intervention of Stalin, laws making homosexuality punishable by imprisonment were re-introduced.

Underlying this renewed attack was not, as many modern lesbian and gay activists have asserted, a historic incompatibility between socialism and lesbian and gay liberation. To credit Stalin in the 1930s as socialist in the revolutionary sense of that word, shows a profound lack of understanding about the nature of socialism. The attack actually represented a retreat from socialism as a result of the bureaucratic counter-revolution. The revolutionary perspective of removing the oppressive aspects of family life through the socialisation of domestic tasks, child rearing and so on, was abandoned by the Stalinist apparatus. This was no tactical and temporary retreat dictated by the appalling poverty of the young workers' republic and its inability to be able to afford to socialise domestic labour.

On the contrary it was a conscious strategy directed at resurrecting as a noble ideal the bourgeois model of family life, which every Soviet man and woman should follow. The woman was expected to carry out domestic tasks as well as working in a Soviet factory. This revival of the bourgeois family by Stalinism was designed to to assist the bureaucratic caste develop Soviet industry and agriculture in a manner that served its own narrow interests and bolstered its own privileges. Just as capitalism, in its defence of the family, is obliged to oppose all threats to the heterosexual, nuclear norm so Stalinism was obliged to do the same. To justify this the bureaucracy propagated the theory that homosexuality was a bourgeois deviation, typical of degenerate capitalism in general and fascism in particular. The pro-Stalinist author Maxim Gorkii summed up the official Soviet attitude in the 1930s and showed the distance that separated the degenerated workers' state and the Bolshevik government of 1917 when he wrote:

'In the fascist countries, homosexuality, which ruins the youth, flourishes without punishment; in every country where the proletariat has audaciously achieved social power homosexuality has been declared a social crime and is heavily punished.'

Needless to say Gorkii's supposed paradise for homosexuals, Nazi Germany, showed its real colours by pinning pink triangles on homosexuals, rounding them up and sending them to face starvation and death in the concentration camps.

It is no exaggeration to say that the combined

counter-revolutionary victories of Stalinism and fascism eradicated the gains that had been made by the homosexual rights and socialist movement in the preceding forty years. The homosexual rights movement, as an organised force, was destroyed. Worse, within the socialist movement itself the climate of reaction led to very reactionary views on the lesbian and gay question taking root.

In May 1928 the German Communists Party (KPD), the most advanced party in the Comintern on matters of sexual politics, was able to answer a questionnaire on homosexual rights to the effect that it had *'taken a stand for the repeal of Paragraph 175 at every available opportunity'*. Less than five years later it had reversed its position. Immediately prior to Hitler's rise to power the KPD consciously adopted a policy of gay-baiting the Nazis on the basis of the bourgeois deviation theory of homosexuality. The existence of some well known gay men in the ranks of the Nazis prompted the Stalinist KPD to equate Nazis with homosexuality and describe homosexuality itself as a filthy and corrupt perversion. Tragically this viewpoint, which should have been consigned to the dustbin, had a long standing impact on nearly all wings of the socialist movement.

In this climate of reaction the tiny forces representing the continuity of revolutionary communism — the Trotskyists — were unable to develop a Marxist theory of sexual politics. Their achievements in keeping alive the principles and practice of Marxism were monumental. But, given the terrible pressures they were under and the objective tasks posed by the moves towards world war, it is not surprising that sexual politics did not constitute an immediate priority for the Fourth International. Unfortunately, however, the Trotskyists did fail to make a clear statement on the democratic principle of privacy in matters of sexuality that was posed by the homosexual question. The whole question appears to have been dropped from consideration altogether.

After the war and Trotsky's death the Fourth International degenerated into a centrist organisation. Unable to comprehend the survival and expansion of Stalinism all wings of the movement ended up capitulating to it in one way or another. By 1951 the political programme of Trotskyism had been liquidated by the Fourth International's leaders; Pablo, Mandel, Healy and Cannon. Not surprisingly this degeneration hampered the further development of a revolutionary perspective on homosexuality. The SWP(US) for example was, in the late 1950s, prepared to engage in an elaborate and diversionary debate on the use of cosmetics by women, but unable to bring itself to say anything on the question of homosexual rights.

Some of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International were even guilty of emulating the KPD's gay baiting. During the Socialist Labour League's fight with Gaitskell in the British Labour Party in the early 1960s, the League's journal, *Labour Review*, attacked the Labour leader for appointing the right winger, George Brinham, as a youth officer in charge of the Young Socialists. The right wing appointed him, fumed *Labour Review* in its Winter 1962/63 edition, despite *'his addiction to homosexuality'*. The 'Trotskyists' were outraged that *'such a man'* had been allowed near young people. The right wing, as agents of the bourgeoisie, hinted the Healyites, were guilty, like Oscar Wilde before them, of corrupting the youth. This backward and reactionary view of homosexuality persisted in the Healyite group until 1985 when Healy himself was expelled for sexual 'abuses' of women comrades. After his expulsion numerous horror stories of Healy's persecution of lesbians and gay men inside his organisation came to light. Some other groups followed Healy's example. A Greek organisation that had once been part of Healy's International Committee, published a document in 1980 on homosexuality and referred to it as a *'foul smelling subject'*.

Nor was it only the International Committee that had a bad record on the lesbian and gay question. The USFI of Ernest Mandel, despite making various adaptations to feminism in the 1970s and not condemning homosexuality in a Healyite fashion, has refrained from ever publishing a major document on the lesbian and gay question that the British section had submitted to a world congress. Its silence has never been explained. The USFI's supporters in the USA, the SWP, showed their fear of the lesbian and gay question in 1970, when they authorised the banning of known gays from membership of their Young Socialists' Alliance *'for security reasons'*. And in 1973 a call for an intervention into the US gay movement was defeated at the SWP's conference on the grounds that it would give the party an *'exotic image'*.

By and large, however, the revival of a lesbian and gay movement in the 1970s did lead to a modest improvement in the positions of the major left groups throughout the world, on matters of sexual politics. Reactionary excesses of the Healyite type were the exceptions rather than the rule. But the period 1933-34 up until the end of the 1960s can justifiably be described as the dark ages as far as Marxism and the question of homosexuality is concerned. The homosexual rights movement was smashed, Marxists were at best indifferent, at worst reactionary, and lesbians and gay men were driven underground or into the the closet and individual isolation.

Capitalism's long boom after the Second World

War brought prosperity, relative class peace and stability in the imperialist heartlands. One result of this was that welfare services expanded and lessened the strain on the family in terms of looking after children or elderly and sick relatives. More women were drawn into the labour force. This economic development was accompanied by a relative liberalisation in the field of morality.

The limits of the liberalisation were very definite. A sexuality that contradicted the essential structures and norms of the heterosexual family could be tolerated but never accepted. Persecution was lessened but not entirely removed. However, the different social climate of the late 1950s and 1960s led, eventually, to the redevelopment of various homosexual rights movements in the imperialist countries. Socialists were obliged to take a position on homosexuality, since in some countries the capitalist state itself was discussing proposals for reform of the law. In Britain, in 1957, the Wolfenden Commission of Enquiry into homosexuality and prostitution, published a report recommending that the legal persecution of male homosexuals, providing they were over twenty one and conducted their sexual activities consensually and in private, should cease. The report's proposals did not become law until 1967.

Typical of the left's response to Wolfenden was an article by C Dallas in *Socialist Review*, the journal of the group that later became the British SWP. She wrote that the tolerance recommended by Wolfenden would be the best help for *'the poor, the misfits, the abnormal'*. Prison would only weaken and emotionally damage the hapless and effete gays:

'Besides its complete futility as a cure, prison life is so degrading for a man who might be highly strung and very sensitive, that it might cause permanent mental damage.'

The old idea of the woman's mind trapped in a man's body is stongly hinted at by Dallas. She concluded that only socialism could cure the world of homosexuality, thereby accepting completely the idea that it was an illness, a disorder of some sort:

'If nature then [after socialism — WP] *produced an abnormality, which it might do in a small number of cases, medical treatment would take good care of it.'*

On the one hand Dallas' attitude, like Healy's to date and that of Ted Grant and his Militant Tendency for a long time, revealed that the Marxist position on the lesbian and gay question had been buried beneath mountains of ignorance and obscurantism. On the other hand the belief of Dallas and the others that homosexuality was an illness of some sort that required toleration and medical help, did reflect an inherited weakness of the Marxist position on homosexuality from the days of the SPD. It took the development of a lesbian and gay movement itself to challenge the 'sickness' theory in the ranks of the left and, in the 1970s, to stimulate a reconsideration of the homosexual question.

By the latter part of the 1970s centrist Trotskyism had swung from its previous flawed or reactionary theories on homosexuality to a capitulation to the prevalent ideas amongst the lesbian and gay movements. Many of the left groups in Western Europe and North America tried to recruit lesbians and gay men by adapting to the autonomous movements instead of trying to combat their, usually, petit-bourgeois and utopian ideas. To have combatted these ideas the left would have needed a distinct Marxist theory of sexual politics and their relationship to the class struggle. It failed to develop such a theory and, like the autonomous movements themselves, was incapable of charting a road to lesbian and gay liberation. The result of this failure was the fragmentation of the various lesbian and gay movements to the extent that once again they have ceased to exist as meaningful, organised campaigns. The major forces claiming to be Trotskyist have re-established the tradition of defending lesbian and gay rights but they have been unable to connect this defence with an overall programme for working class power and lesbian and gay liberation.

In this context, and in the context of growing moral reaction in Western Europe and North America, the task for revolutionary Trotskyists in relation to the lesbian and gay question is to provide a communist perspective for liberation. Marxism furnishes us with the means for doing this. The Marxist tradition is richer than many lesbian and gay activists care to admit. It is incomplete in some respects and flawed in others. However, historical materialism is the only basis upon which a theoretical understanding of sexual politics and the oppression of homosexuality can be constructed. Only revolutionary Marxism provides an action programme which combines the struggle for democratic rights and the struggle for real sexual liberation with the class struggle for socialism. ▼

False strategies for liberation

The rebirth of a radical lesbian and gay movement can be dated to the summer of 1969. A routine police raid on a gay bar in New York led to the Stonewall riots. Inspired by the huge street demonstrations by the mass campaign in the USA against the Vietnam war, by the street battles by students in France and Germany and sick of the incessant police harassment they suffered, gays fought back with a vengeance. For three days and nights gay men battled with the cops. Their action set rolling a whole new movement. Prior to Stonewall the campaigning for homosexual rights was low key. Organisations were dedicated primarily to lobbying people in high places and were dominated by bourgeois liberals seeking limited reforms that would help make their lives easier. Typical of such groups was the Homosexual Reform Society in Britain, set up in 1958 and geared more or less exclusively to getting the then Tory government to implement the Wolfenden proposals. The Society was strictly non-political, and confined its activities to persuading potentially sympathetic MPs to the need for law reform. This class collaborationist approach was also followed by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), which originated out of the North West Committee of the Society.

To many activists back in the late 1960s and early 1970s CHE offered little or nothing. It was particularly dire on the question of lesbianism. The sheer energy and militancy of the Stonewall riots and the 'liberation' movement they inspired, were far more appealing to the younger lesbians and gays undergoing a general radicalisation. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was created, first in the US and then in Britain as the radical alternative to CHE.

As against CHE's discreet pleas for toleration the GLF advocated and practiced an unapologetic pride in gayness. Gay liberation was viewed as first and foremost liberation from self-oppression, from life in the closet. The GLF's proposed means for achieving liberation was for more and more gays to 'come out'. If this occurred on a sufficiently mass scale homophobia would be challenged and overcome. This strategy stressed the courage of the individual — helped by groups of course — but it placed no special stress or reliance on the labour movement and the working class. This approach led the GLF in the USA and Britain automatically towards a separatist position. From feminism it took over a radical critique of the family. But this critique was largely limited to the restrictions that the family placed on homosexuality. The various GLF manifestos did not explain why the family was the root of lesbian and gay oppression, what its role and function was in society and consequently how to overcome or transform it. The GLF's tactics were, as a result, individualistic and separatist. The use of drag by gay men, for example, certainly challenged bourgeois society's stipulations concerning gender based dress codes but did nothing to change bourgeois society itself. Radical drag could never have mass appeal as a means of struggle, based as it was on self-expression and individualistic activity. Worse, it alienated many lesbians in the GLF who saw woman-deprecating mimicry at work amongst at least sections of the drag activists. The importance of drag within the GLF revealed a fundamental weakness in its strategy. The individualistic methods of struggle it proposed were a reflection of its largely petit bourgeois social composition. And that radical petit bourgeois individualism led to dress, along with a host of other things that constituted a particular life-style, becoming more important than collective struggle.

Gradually the campaigning gave way to the creation of a cultural scene — a life-style that lesbians and gays could live, within capitalist society. Of course individuals developing their own lives, personal, sexual,and social in a way that recognised and celebrated their gayness was a necessary and totally legitimate thing to do. But it was not and could not be a strategy for eliminating the root causes of oppression. The rapid growth of gay culture — even of a 'gay capitalism' to cater for it — whilst it made life better for many gay men and, to a lesser extent, for lesbians, in San Francisco, New York, London and Amsterdam — did not achieve

the breakthrough of overcoming capitalist society's homophobia. Indeed as the liberal 1960s and 1970s gave way to the reactionary 1980s — the decade of Jerry Falwell, Ronald Reagan et al — it became plain, even before the tragedy of AIDS, that a moral counter-offensive was being launched. AIDS added a moral panic to a developing moral reaction. The life-style 'solution' — available at its peak only to those who could afford it and who lived in the larger cities — has been proved to be a very precarious buffer between the individual and his or her oppression.

Capitalism can and does intrud into the life-styles of lesbians by denying custody of their children, and gay men are imprisoned for cottaging under the gross indecency laws. Life-stylism, as the response that eventually dominated within the GLF, led to its collapse as a fighting movement. It had made important gains for lesbians and gay men. The GLF, along with the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) and to some extent inspired by it, placed the question of sexual politics back onto the political agenda. But like the WLM, its failure to develop a collective response, a class response to oppression, turned it in on itself and caused fragmentation to the extent whereby a lesbian and gay movement, in any meaningful sense of the word, ceased to exist. The movement was replaced by numerous, and sometimes competing, pressure groups. Acrimonious clashes arose from the fact that individualism paved the way for subjectivism. The self became the centre of everything and triumphed over what had been the uniting features of the movement — the common fight against oppression. Different people chose different life-styles, waged disputes as to which were the best and parted company. The key institutions of oppression ceased to be central targets and were left intact.

One group to emerge out of the GLF and also from sections of the left, was the Gay Left Collective. It published *Gay Left*, the first issue of which came out in the Autumn of 1975. The Collective's members had been profoundly influenced by the class battles that had raged in Britain in the early 1970s. These battles had shown the real power and potential of the working class. The 1974 miners's strike, for example, had led to the Tory government being forced to call an election which they lost. *Gay Left* was, initially, a positive response to these developments. The journal attacked life-stylism as an introspective retreat from the terrain of struggle and as a failure to register the significance of the class struggle for lesbian and gay liberation. The first issue scathingly criticised the gay movement's life-stylism thus:

'But the power structures of society were left completely untouched, and the lives of the majority of gay people were left completely unchanged by the sweet smells of incense, inspiration and home-baked bread.'

Rejecting an individual road to liberation, the Collective unambiguously declared:

'Sexual oppression cannot be destroyed under capitalism.'

This development out of the gay movement was extremely significant. It reflected the failure of both the lesbian and gay movement and the established groups on the British left to offer lesbian and gay socialists (though the Collective was initially all male) a perspective of struggle. None of the left groups had provided a class answer to the lesbian and gay question. So a small group of gay men who regarded themselves as Marxists set out to try and do just that. Many of the contributions to the journal, particularly in its first year of existence were very valuable. At a theoretical level they endeavoured to develop a class based theory of sexual politics. At a practical level *Gay Left* promoted the building of gay groups in particular workplaces and unions, unifying such groups in a Gay Workers' Movement. However, a definite trend away from class politics began to emerge, growing stronger as the left itself fragmented in the early years of the Labour government. As the 1970s wore on the politics of feminism began to exercise a greater influence over *Gay Left* than the politics of Marxism. The absence of an authentic and influential Trotskyist organisation which took sexual politics seriously helped this process along. The emphasis of the journal began to shift away from collective struggles and more and more to purely personal struggles. The slogan *'the personal is political'* came to mean that the personal, the way you felt and behaved, was more important than politics in the sense of taking collective social action. Even sexual politics started to be defined in purely subjectivist terms. *Gay Left* began to replace rather than supplement, the method of Marxism with the methods of psychoanalysis as the key means to understanding oppression. The turn away from Marxism was signalled in an article in the fifth issue of the journal entitled 'Why Marx?'. This article argued that Lenin and Trotsky were, despite everything they wrote against it, guilty of economism. Economism is a tendency to regard economic or trade union struggles as self-sufficient, as the class struggle *par excellence*, and therefore tends to denigrate political struggles or any issues originating outside of the workplace. Economism believes in tailing economic struggles, not in leading them and linking them with other struggles. Lenin and Trotsky were opponents of this tendency not practitioners of it. In the Althusserian and feminist jargon popular in the 1970s, however, economism came to stand for the class interests of the proletariat, which were compared unfavour-

with 'ideological struggles' waged by intellectuals on behalf of the oppressed. Indeed for many feminists the working class (white, male and heterosexual by definition) was enemy number one. *Gay Left* took on board this false definition of economism which denigrated the class struggle at the workplace. Instead of seeking to integrate the fight for lesbian and gay liberation with the struggles of workers for better wages and conditions, for trade union rights, for jobs, the Collective started to counterpose a concern for 'personal politics' to the class struggle. Without at first realising it *Gay Left* was helping petit bourgeois individualism to make a comeback. Sexual oppression was removed altogether from the field of class struggle and taken upstairs to the 'ideological level'. This meant that the fight for lesbian and gay liberation and the class struggle were increasingly seen as totally distinct spheres of practice. Marxism was suitable for class struggle but psychology was the key to understanding oppression:

'Psychoanalysis and the debates on ideology [debates largely amongst Stalinists of the Eurocommunist stripe — WP] *provide a theoretical basis for the continuing struggles of women and gays against patriarchy . . . As gays our specific oppression is ideological, though as socialists we fully participate in the necessary economic and political struggles against capitalism.'*

The old critique of the GLF and the fragments coming out of it to recognise the specific nature of the family within capitalism and its importance to the capitalist economic order was dropped. Instead the Collective criticised itself in its first year because it had *'probably overstressed the purely economic aspects of the family'*. And, the Leninist party was abandoned in favour of the organisationally and autonomous movement:

'. . . gay liberation is the self-defined activity of gay people fighting to gain control of their own lives and destinies . . . We believe an autonomous gay movement (and an autonomous women's movement) to be essential, and reject any effort to subordinate the movement to any one political sect.'

So, liberation was self-defined by gay people as a whole, no matter what their class, their politics or their beliefs. *Gay Left* had come full circle. By the fifth issue its principal contributors were lighting their own incense sticks and baking their own wholemeal bread.

The reason for *Gay Left's* demise was its inability to develop Marxism on the question of sexual politics and break decisively with feminism. For that matter it also failed to develop a revolutionary critique of the real economism on the British left, embodied in the practice of the International Socialists/ Socialist Workers Party (IS/SWP). Jeffrey Weeks, one of *Gay Left's* regular contributors, wrote in the first issue that the failure by socialists to tackle sexual oppression:

'. . . represents, above all, a theoretical failure to grasp that a ruling class perpetuates itself not only through the economic and ideological forms of exploitation and oppression, but also through the character structures, the emotional formations of its members'

This 'not only but also' approach is simply not a Marxist, materialist approach. The real question is what relationship do the 'character structures' and 'emotional formations' of individuals bear to the system of exploitation and class rule? For Marxists the mode of production is the decisive basis on which the family and consequently the general patterns of individual psychology rest. Therefore you cannot understand problems of individual psychology — the existence of which we do not at all deny — or the sexist and heterosexist consciousness of most men and women, without understanding that our society is capitalist. Only on the basis of this understanding can individual psychological problems be tackled and sexist/heterosexist consciousness fought. Any psychology, no matter how radical, that starts with the individual rather than with capitalist society and its social relations, including the family (and the sexist/heterosexist norms that prevail within it) will end up offering individualistic and utopian solutions to the problem. The bourgeois family which, by its very nature, oppresses women and homosexuals, can only be replaced when its roots in the capitalist mode of production are dug up. The only class that has the ability to do this is the working class. Therefore to counterpose as separate tasks the struggle for socialism and the fight to overcome character structures is totally false. The separatism it involves confirms and reinforces the sexism and heterosexism of the existing reformist labour movement. It hives off lesbians and gays into a utopian project of psychological self-liberation. Feminism had already gone down this path. *Gay Left* followed.

By the second half of the 1970s feminism had come a long way. The modern WLM was not, at the outset, all that sympathetic to lesbians. When lesbians in Britain left the GLF and turned to the women's movement they found not only an unwillingness to accept sexual orientation as an important question but also open hostility to lesbianism. In *Sisterhood is Powerful* one activist recalled:

'When a woman showed up at a feminist meeting and announced she was a lesbian, many women avoided her. Others told her to keep her mouth shut for fear of endangering the cause.'

However, the question of lesbianism refused to go away. In fact the opposite happened. The issue kept being raised. In 1978, at a women's conference in Birmingham, a split on the issue of lesbianism

between radical feminists and socialist feminists occurred. The split was a sign of the fragmentation that was wracking and destroying the WLM. In fact the origins of the split lay in an earlier period of feminist history. The radical feminists had argued at a national conference of the WLM in 1971 that men were the enemy — all men. In their position paper, 'Thoughts on Feminism', they argued that to achieve liberation women had to stop sleeping with men:

'. . . as long as the Sex Act remains the norm for sexual relations, we remain the habitual givers, pawns in the male power game. And we will continue to be dominated by men . . . As long as we have our closest emotional/sexual relationships with men, women's liberation can be no more than a lobby.'

Seeing the division in society as being primarily between genders opened the door to attacks on the male working class (no different to male bosses because of their shared anatomy) and left the radical feminists classifying the women of the ruling class as potential sisters in struggle. The whole reactionary theory was encapsulated by Leeds Revolutionary Women in 1979 who denounced the masses of women who are heterosexual:

'Every woman who lives with or fucks a man helps maintain the oppression of her sisters and hinders our struggle.'

Such a position not surprisingly split the WLM since it stigmatised its heterosexual members as scabs.

The radical feminist wing of the WLM held a definite appeal for many lesbians. The GLF — an alliance with gay men — had not really provided the answers. The WLM was, to some extent, wary of making lesbianism a major issue. Radical feminism seemed to be the only creed that took lesbianism seriously. Yet its logic was extreme separatism and bitter hostility to the 'male dominated' working class. It led to political lesbianism. Sexual orientation became determined by a strictly political consideration — men are the enemy. We believe that people should be free to choose their sexual orientation for whatever reason they like. But we do challenge the premise that political lesbians base their choice on, the premise that all men are the enemy. It is a premise that leads to disunity in the face of the class enemy in whose interests sexual oppression is perpetrated. It undermines the possibility of building unity between lesbians and gay men, let alone between them and the working class as a whole.

Radical feminism identified the system on which male power was based as Patriarchy not class society. This justified the theory that all men oppressed all women and were therefore the real enemy. It led to some horrendously reactionary ideas such as the control of the male population through eugenics to keep it at the 10% required for reproductive purposes, an idea seriously put forward at a US women's conference. Socialist feminism did not dare challenge the false theory of Patriarchy and male power head on.

As a result the socialist feminists found themselves, despite their formal split with the radicals, adapting some of the most 'radical' feminist ideas. They saw women's subjection to men as being based on ideological, psychological and sexual oppression and articulated as an initial answer to this consciousness raising. It soon became apparent that only a tiny number of women could be drawn into this process. Why were most women impervious to it? Not because the principal terrain of struggle lay elsewhere for the mass of women, said the socialist feminists — echoing their radical sisters — but because women were subjected to the terror of sexual violence. Sexual violence was the most important means of enforcing male power. This violence was defined as being an unbroken chain starting from verbal comments, through domestic violence and sexual harassment at work right up to rape. Such a definition fails to recognise that all acts of violence take place within particular contexts, and while all, including rape, are manifestations of the oppressive nature of human relations under capitalism, qualitative distinctions between sexist verbal comments, sexual harassment and rape clearly exist and have to be made. They cannot be understood as a simple continuum. Yet both radical and socialist feminism argued that male power was exercised through an interconnected sliding scale of violence. This was summed up in the slogan; *'pornography is the theory, rape the practice'*. Hence the campaigns sponsored by socialist feminism (amazingly, by the British SWP as well during the height of its feminist *Women's Voice* turn in the late 1970s) such as 'Reclaim the Night' and the anti-pornography campaigns. As the tactics and strategy of the women's movement became more and more anti-male and separatist, its base became narrower and as a movement, even as a socialist feminist movement, it had virtually ceased to exist by the early 1980s.

While socialist feminism and lesbian and gay activists influenced by it, avoided the worst excesses of man-hating they did embrace the theory that oppression stemmed from male power. Thus while Patriarchy and class society were related, they were at the same time distinct. To fight class society you needed — eventually — socialism. To fight Patriarchy you needed feminism — now. This outlook permeated the positions of one of the most important socialist contributions on lesbian and gay liberation in the 1980s, *Gay Liberation in the Eighties* by Jamie Gough and Mike Macnair

ough being a regular writer in the publications of e British section of the United Secretariat of the urth International — the USFI — until it split a w years ago). This book has influenced the Labour mpaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) d, in some respects, must take responsibility for aving that organisation floundering when the parratists and class collaborationist liberals re- ntly hijacked the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay ights Campaign. The book's central argument is hat male power results in an alienated sexuality for all, and that this is at the root of lesbian and gay oppression. In this analysis class society becomes a secondary factor. The authors write:

'The repression of lesbian sex and of men playing the "passive" role are, then, based on male power and the family system.'

And again:

'. . . sexuality is arranged around a system of male power.'

Systems of sexual order replace those of economic order as the bedrock determining causes of sexual oppression. Now, we do not deny that the ideology of male dominance has a profound influence on the way in which society, in its majority, views and treats homosexuality. It will take working class state power and years of education to lay the basis for eradicating this ideology. But neither the ideology of male dominance, nor even the limited benefits that many men do gain from the oppression of women, should be confused with economic and class relations that these things are based on. The ideology of male dominance is not a reflection of a reality called male power, but of the reality of class society in which sexual order is arranged to suit the needs of the ruling class.

Gough and Macnair's false analysis is no mere academic mistake. It leads to a class collaborationist practice and to support for the idea of an all class lesbian and gay movement. They argue:

'As with the women's liberation movement, socialists must support and help to develop the existing gay liberation movement. To wait until there exists a uniformly "socialist" or "communist" or "working class" gay movement is a recipe for doing nothing about gay liberation.'

That the authors put inverted commas around the terms relating to class and class politics, but do not when they talk about the gay liberation movement speaks volumes about their politics. The working class exists. Revolutionary communism is the only politics that fights consistently for the historic interests of that class and for all oppressed by capitalism. To downgrade them in the way Gough and Macnair do is to abandon the terrain of class politics. This is particularly true given that they counterpose to a working class perspective the existing gay liberation movement. Which gay liberation movement? There simply isn't one in Britain, or indeed in most countries. There are numerous disparate campaigns. There are class divisions between different wings of the lesbian and gay 'communities'. No matter, Gough and Macnair argue, this 'movement' is central, whereas class politics are peripheral. In fact, as the experience of those lesbians and gays who organised support for the striking miners and printers discovered, this 'movement' — or more accurately the lesbian and gay community in the larger cities — is split along class lines in any case. Sections supported the strikers, sections refused to. We say that it is necessary to take the split further. Capitalism, not male power, is the real obstacle to sexual liberation. The struggle for liberation cannot be separated from the class struggle for socialism. If it is, it will lead to the triumph of bourgeois and petit bourgeois elements whose perspective is limited to piecemeal legal reform within the framework of capitalism. This was demonstrated in real life by the hi-jacking of the Legislation Campaign at its May 1987 conference. It was seized from the Gough and Macnair influenced LCLGR by a motley alliance of anti-working class liberals and feminists, whose 'radicalism' was such that they saw fit to bait, in a completely reactionary manner, bisexuals, transsexuals, straight supporters of the campaign and left groups, all in the name of autonomy.

A major reason for the triumph of feminist and separatist ideas amongst lesbian and gay activists was the failure of the centrist left to provide an alternative. Indeed, hostility to even discussing the lesbian and gay question on the part of the British left groups, which were growing in size and influence in the early 1970s, drove many women and gay men towards separatism. Later adaptations to feminism — by the SWP, the USFI and others — merely served to bring the influence of separatist ideas into the labour movement. In the early 1980s this meant these ideas being carried into the left of the Labour Party.

The IS/SWP tradition in Britain reveals the real errors of economism on the question of sexual politics. Economism is not a serious involvement with the economic struggles of the working class but a refusal to raise transitional demands or political slogans within these struggles. It is not active involvement — indeed a central orienation to — work in the trade unions, but a refusal to raise anything but the narrowest 'trade union' issues in them. It is, in short, the tailing of the present consciousness of the mass of trade unionists in the belief that this consciousness will spontaneously develop into a socialist one if the struggles intensify sufficiently. The 'economist' therefore tends to exclude 'difficult' questions which seem to bear no relationship to the economic struggle. The IS group

took the question of racism very seriously — especially after the London dockers, a militant section of workers, marched in support of Enoch Powell. But the lesbian and gay question did not (apparently) threaten to split the workers in their economic struggle in the same way as racism did. Therefore IS relegated it to a footnote. Indeed when gay activists tried to raise it inside IS they got short shrift — being accused of splitting the working class over secondary questions.

The issue of homosexuality was taken up for the first time since Dallas' articles of the 1950s (see Chapter 2) in 1973. A gay activist, Don Milligan, submitted an article on the GLF to *Socialist Worker* and raised the lesbian and gay question at the group's national conference. The matter was referred to the incoming leadership who promptly ignored the whole question. In the years following, an IS Gay Group was set up but the leadership repeatedly obstructed its functioning. It was refused advertising space in the paper and any official status within the group. A conference on sexism, planned by the Gay Group in 1973 was cancelled as a result of pressure from the leadership. Typical of the attitude of the leadership was a response to the Gay Group's request for a conference from the 'Publications and Training Committee'. It stated:

'IS does not take a position on what you describe as "sexism", and also contrary to your opinion we have not found the issue to cause any concern amongst the working class members of IS.'

In other words it was not the business of IS members, supposed revolutionaries, to champion the cause of the oppressed inside the working class. This, alongside the IS/SWP attitude to the woman's question and to Ireland was symptomatic of its deep and consistent economism. Not surprisingly it led to many lesbians and gay men leaving, more accurately being driven out of, the organisation.

It was only after feminism's ideological impact on society began to make itself felt inside the unions and the Labour Party that the SWP, as IS had become, turned its attention to matters of sexual politics. It was prepared to adapt to feminism to catch a few recruits. In 1977 *Women's Voice* groups were set up. In 1979 the SWP published *The Word is Gay*. In both cases the politics of the existing autonomous movements were tailed, not challenged. Just as economism in the early 1970s led IS to tail the economic struggle of the workers in the hope of winning recruits, so in the later 1970s it tailed the struggles of the sexually oppressed, likewise in search of recruits rather than revolutionary answers and a revolutionary strategy. For good measure it ritualistically added the call for trade union action on matters of sexual politics but it did not attempt to construct a Marxist alternative to feminism. When the recruitment ceased and the danger of losing members to the movements increased, the SWP's turn to feminism was abruptly ended. *Women's Voice* groups were wound up and, during the Thatcher years, the 'downturn', as the SWP calls the present period, the organisation has confined itself to abstract propaganda on the lesbian and gay question. If the working class cannot fight on the economic front how can it be expected to take up other causes? Nothing, therefore, can be done until the dark clouds of the downturn fade away. Doubtlessly, if a renewed period of aggressive wage struggles materialised the SWP would revert to saying that the question of lesbian and gay rights was a side issue or a diversion.

Militant, the other major group on the British left claiming to be Marxist, has an even worse record. Only since 1983-84 has it allowed the LPYS, which it controls, to take a position on lesbian and gay rights. Whereas the SWP chopped and changed its position on the movements of the sexually oppressed, ignoring them one minute and tailing them the next, and the British section of the USFI (a tradition represented by Gough) consistently adapted to feminism, the Militant stood firm in the tradition of 1930s 'Marxism' — that is, Stalinism — on sexuality. For years it classified homosexuality as a 'bourgeois perversion'. Gay baiting inside the LPYS was encouraged and physical attacks on gay men took place at the LPYS summer camps in 1981 and 1982. Those who raised the question of homosexuality inside the LPYS were dismissed as 'middle class'. Not only was lesbian and gay rights, in their view, 'not a working class issue', it was not even acknowledged as a legitimate democratic issue.

Militant's attitude remained unchallenged until lesbians and gay men within its own ranks organised themselves unofficially. This, combined with pressure from the Labour left, which had begun to identify the lesbian and gay issue as one of its worthy causes, forced Ted Grant, the leader of Militant, to put his 1930s outlook into the closet. However, despite the change of position inside the LPYS and the visibility of lesbians and gays in Militant, the tendency's position today is a long way from Marxism. Just as its answer to the working class on most issues is 'socialism', plus a few reforms now, so for lesbians and gays all it offers is socialism in the millennia and the reduction, not the aboliton of, the age of consent.

Against such distortions of Marxism one group on the international left which has tried to develop a serious programme for lesbian and gay liberation is the International Trotskyist Committee (ITC). The British section of this tendency, the Revolutionary Internationalist League (RIL) published an action programme for lesbians and gays. The ITC's

tion in the USA, the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) is distinguished for the importance it attaches to the struggles of lesbian and gay men. Many points made by the ITC on the realities of lesbian and gay oppression and its relationship to the way in which capitalism structures and uses the family unit, are valid. The ITC have also stated, formally at least, that their interventions into various lesbian and gay movements are aimed at winning them to a class position or splitting them on a class basis. However, there is a crucial aspect of their analysis of the 'specially oppressed' that undermines the ITC's claim to to be the real Marxists on this question. The RWL in particular have long argued that the 'specially oppressed' — blacks, women, lesbians and gay men — are the people who are most likely to be radicalised in an anti-capitalist direction. Without any explanation the RWL argue that the more oppressed you are the more radical you are likely to be. Thus, they write that women and gays *'can be some of the most militant class struggle fighters'*. This is true, but it does not flow automatically from the fact that they are oppressed. The question of class interest plays a vital part in determining whether they will be or not. Moreover, it is without a doubt the case that white, male, heterosexuals can be amongst the most militant class fighters. But RWL go on to stress that the 'specially oppressed are the vanguard of the socialist revolution. Thus:

'The RWL has a special commitment to winning militant lesbian/gay workers and intellectuals to the struggle for socialist revolution.'

Special, that is, in the sense of prioritising lesbian and gay work, and work amongst other sections of the oppressed, over all other work, in pursuit of a vanguard of the oppressed. Despite their professed class politics the RWL are drawn into blurring the class line amongst the oppressed. They emphasise the separateness of the specially oppressed and, by compiling lists of which section is more oppressed than another and therefore requiring extra special emphasis, they pass value judgements. The most oppressed become the most highly valued, the best potential vanguard fighters. And the danger of this is that it counterposes sections of the class to each other. It stresses special divisions over the need for class unity. It is a strategy that risks reproducing capitalism's own divisions amongst the working class. A working class lesbian is likely to have more in common with a working class heterosexual, than with a life-stylist middle class lesbian. Class interests will, eventually, triumph over the fact of common oppression. Of course in the USA it is true that one section of the specifically oppressed, the black working class, is very much a vanguard element in the class struggle. But to generalise from this experience and assert that this will be true for all of the oppressed groups is not only revisionism, it also flies in the face of reality in many countries.

The elevation of the revolutionary potential of the oppressed and the role as foremost vanguard fighters assigned to them by the RWL pushes the ITC as a whole towards an uncritical stance towards the autonomous organisations of the oppressed. For the RIL, for example, gay activism in and of itself — regardless of whether it is carried out under Trotskyist leadership — is the vital thing. They wrote of the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM):

'The fact that it has only been due to gay activists and not those from the left has been important.'

This misrepresentation of the facts (the organised left was the backbone of the LGSM campaign) was an attempt to justify the ITC's belief that the *'specially oppressed sectors are the most militant'* and that therefore *'intervention* [amongst lesbians and gay men — WP] *is an essential process in mobilising the vanguard'*.

This oppressed vanguard theory is carried into the RIL's *Action Programme for Lesbian and Gay Liberation*. The strategy outlined in this document is to *'seek genuine unity with all specially oppressed people in the struggle for liberation'*. The need for this struggle to be rooted, above all, in the organisations of the working class, with self-organisation only as a tactical means of furthering the objective of class unity, is ignored by the RIL/ITC. The *Action Programme* is not a Marxist programme for the whole working class on the lesbian and gay question. It is a charter for mobilising self-organised lesbians and gays for democratic and civil rights. For, although we are informed that *'our struggle is a struggle against the capitalist class and the state which serves it'*, the programme never makes concrete the link between the struggles of lesbians and gay men and the class struggle.

While we would agree with many of its demands they do not, unless they are actually linked with the struggle for revolutionary socialism, add up to liberation. Indeed at one point the programme leans towards the Gough/USFI view that the fulfilment of democratic reforms via a Labour government, actually equals liberation:

'We must demand that the Labour Party implement the demands for lesbian and gay liberation in this programme, for civil rights at work in the fields of housing, health care and education.'

Civil rights do not equal liberation. And what of the revolutionary workers' government, the smashing of the state, the socialisation of domestic labour? The programme makes no connection between the fight for these things, which the ITC claims to stand for, and the fight for lesbian and gay liberation.

As against the ITC's view we believe that an action programme that links the struggle for democratic rights and civil liberties, the struggle for sexual liberation and the struggle for socialism is needed. Around it lesbians and gay men must organise, on a class basis, with the clear objective of winning the working class as a whole to their cause. ▼

An action programme for lesbian and gay liberation

The systematic oppression of lesbians and gay men under capitalism is not accidental. Capitalism utilises the family as a social unit for the reproduction, physical maintenance and early education of labour power. As such, it portrays the family — a monogamous, heterosexual child producing and rearing unit — as both natural (it has 'always' existed) and as normal (anybody not conforming to this set up is 'abnormal'). To reinforce the family as an institution capitalism has developed a set of sexual and moral codes which are stultifying for all, but are specially oppressive for women, children, lesbians and gay men. The Christian church, an anti-sex bastion, plays an important role in perpetuating and legitimising this morality. From the Nineteenth Century on, medical science and psychology have reinforced this view defining any but heterosexual relations as perversions, sickness or abnormality. These 'scientists' do this despite the absence of any 'value free' evidence for their case. Sexual orientation becomes, not a matter of free and imformed choice, but a product of social conditioning. An exclusive heterosexuality is imposed on people from their earliest days. Expressions of homosexuality in people are consciously fought by moral teaching, social pressure and, ultimately, a battery of repressive laws enforced by the capitalist state.

The ideological requirements of capitalism for the defence of its family provide the justification for the oppression of lesbians and gay men. The isolated family household, despite being the only redoubt of personal security for working class people in capitalist society, is also the material basis for the oppression of lesbians and gay men, as well as women generally. As such, despite the fact that there are non-working class lesbians and gay men, the fight for lesbian and gay *liberation* is a class question. Only the political triumph of the working class over the capitalist class and the creation of an entirely new social and economic order — communism — can create the conditions whereby the family, as the basis for social oppression, can be transcended.

Thus, working class lesbians and gay men — or those who consciously and consistently identify with the struggle of the working class — have a material interest in fighting for real sexual liberation. Middle or upper class lesbians and gay men can and have been won to struggles for democratic rights, for formal equalities under capitalism, for public tolerance and so on. Indeed the existence of gay men in the highest echelons of capitalist society has led to periods of limited tolerance. However, bourgeois and middle class lesbians and gays can, despite their oppression, afford to cushion themselves from much of that oppression in a way that working class lesbians and gays cannot. Being oppressed does not automatically mean that lesbians and gays of the middle or bourgeois class are likely to be radical. Their stake in bourgeois society is often an overriding factor. Working class lesbians and gays may share aspects of oppression with such elements but they have a fundamental and irreconcilable class antagonism to them.

Therefore we are against any attempt to blur class differences within a lesbian and gay organisation/movement. We are for the clarification of such differences. Not in order to drive out people from these class backgrounds for this reason alone. But if bourgeois and middle class elements will not come over to the side of the working class then they thereby place themselves on the side of the class enemy. Furthermore we are against any tendencies to separatism. For this reason we oppose the call for an autonomous lesbian and gay movement, implying as it has come to do, autonomy from distinct politics, as well as from distinct parties.

Working class lesbians and gay men have a consistent, material interest in fighting the system that lays the basis for their oppression. Formal equality under the law means nothing to a

worker who does not have the material means to go through endless court cases fighting discrimination. Only the abolition of capitalism will create the material basis for the end of oppression, for a society in which sexual orientation becomes a matter for absolutely free choice. While we as communists fight for an end to all forms of discrimination and while we defend all those attacked because of their sexual orientation, we do so on the basis of recognising that the lesbian and gay question is not a separate question from the class struggle requiring a separate programme and party, but a class question requiring a working class, socialist answer and a revolutionary communist party. The fight against sexual oppression must be part of the overall struggle of the working class against all forms of exploitation and oppression.

THE NEW PERIOD OF CRISIS

The pattern of sexual reform and moral reaction in the major imperialist countries over the last thirty five years demonstrates clearly the relationship between lesbian and gay oppression and capitalism. The early 1950s witnessed an enormous expansion of capitalism — the post-war boom — which brought with it material reforms for the working class. In Britain the capitalists were able to afford to expand health, education and welfare services to an unprecedented degree. The demand for labour power in both industry and the expanding service sector meant that women were drawn into employment on a massive scale. The family remained crucial, but capitalism could afford to buttress it with expanded services rather than economic coercion and ideological terrorism.

These material reforms were the necessary preconditions for changes in sexual attitudes and actual legal reforms affecting the domain of 'public morality'. Capitalism could afford to be more relaxed about its own morality since economic crisis was not undermining its ability to pay for welfare services, nor tearing apart the fabric of family life. Indeed the need for women in the workforce led to an increased emphasis on the importance of 'happy' sexual relations as a means of cementing the family unit. The 1950s saw a definite shift in attitudes towards sex particularly towards women and sex.

It took a further decade of pressure — largely in the form of middle class lobbying campaigns — for this more relaxed morality to produce changes in the law with regards to homosexuality. Proposals for legal reform in Britain had been recommended by Wolfenden in 1957. They were not enacted until 1967. Sexual reform lagged well behind the economic conditions that made it possible. Nor would it have come without pressure from progressive circles (labour movement and liberal). The other side of this time lag, however, is that the intensification of moral reaction (recognising that limited legal and public tolerance did not eradicate moral reaction but merely temporarily offset it) in the imperialist countries came in the 1980s, almost a decade after the opening of the new period of economic crisis. The imperialist bourgeoisie's first, and still primary, targets were the economic gains workers had made during the boom years. Wages, jobs and services have all been under attack — mounting in severity by the year — since the early 1970s. The increased tempo of attacks on the public sector has necessitated a new ideological campaign aimed at glorifying the family. The hatred of the moral reactionaries for the 1960's is evidenced by Tebbit's fulminations against the permissive decade.

Inevitably lesbians and gay men have been pinpointed as a threat to the family. Early warnings in Britain of the systematic gay-baiting that was to follow, came when Mary Whitehouse successfully prosecuted *Gay News* for blasphemy and when the Callaghan Labour Government — as part of its attempt to portray Labour as the party of the family — carried out a vicious, hysterical witch-hunt of the Paedophile Information Exchange (PIE). To broaden the onslaught paedophilia and homosexuality were lumped together by the popular press and gay men were portrayed as would-be child molesters. The fact that PIE stood four-square for consensual relations only and against molestation and included heterosexuals and homosexuals in its ranks was characteristically ignored by the rabid press.

The arrival of AIDS in the 1980s in the USA and Europe was the cue for the present backlash against lesbians and gays. In the USA the Moral Majority is on the offensive. In Britain reactionary crusaders like Manchester Chief Constable James Anderton are beating the drums of anti-gay bigotry. In France the right-wing Chirac government has attempted to ban a popular and widely read gay magazine. And, as the economic situation shows no signs of improving, these attacks are likely to increase rather than go away. A Monitoring of AIDS Victims Bill is being mooted, and AIDS sufferers have been stopped and deported from several countries while travelling in Europe.

For lesbians and gay men, therefore, the task is to organise to fight moral reaction. The relationship of capitalism and its crisis to the level of lesbian and gay oppression reveals, above all else, that the working class is not merely the ally of lesbians and gay men, but the only force capable of waging a successful struggle against moral reaction and its insidious effects (increased physical attacks, legal harassment, discrimination at work etc). Lesbians and gay men must not organise a

fightback separately from the struggles of the working class and its organisations. The fightback must be organised within these organisations, winning support for the struggle against oppression. At the same time within the lesbian and gay communities' support must be organised for the economic and political struggles of the working class. Lesbians and gay men must stand in the front ranks of the labour movement as militant class fighters and. at the same time, win that movement to a militant, class fight for lesbian and gay liberation as part of a struggle for socialism.

That such a class perspective amongst lesbians and gay men can achieve tangible results has been shown by organisations such as Lesbian and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) during the Great Strike of the British miners in 1984-85 and, also in Britain, Lesbians and Gays Support the Printers during the 1986 News International strike. In both cases a class perspective of solidarity with workers in struggle brought together, and gave a sense of political purpose to, lesbian and gay activists. Not since the decline and fragmentation of the lesbian and gay movement in the 1970s had politics, class politics, been fought for so vigorously. The result was not only real solidarity with strikers but also support from workers for the struggles of lesbians and gay men, notably the progressive politics embraced by the NUM and the participation of miners and their families in the 1985 Pride March.

To build on such developments lesbians and gay men must organise within the labour movement — building union caucuses, united front campaigns,and when necessary and possible co-ordinating all these activities in a proletarian movement — around a programme for social and political equality and liberation. The programme we advance now is largely orientated to the British situation, but, we believe, it can be focused and adapted to other countries. It is a programme to rally lesbians and gay activists to the class struggle and to rally the working class to the cause of lesbian and gay liberation.

MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR LESBIAN AND GAY WORKERS TO ORGANISE OPENLY IN THE UNIONS

The trade unions are dominated by a bureaucratic caste — unaccountable and politically reformist. In general its reformism is of the most staid, reactionary sort. It accepts as eternal the bigotted attitudes of its members — themselves a product of capitalism's daily ideological crusade in schools newspapers, the media and through the church. It does nothing to counter this ideology. On the contrary its tendency is to oppose progressive policies on the lesbian and gay question. The defeat of this bureaucracy is something every conscious worker must be committed to. Only the defeat of the bureaucracy can clear the way to the transformation of the unions into revolutionary instruments for the struggle against exploitation and oppression.

- For the right of lesbians and gay men to caucus inside the unions to prepare for full participation in the union and to develop the confidence to be able to come out in the unions.

- For union sponsored education courses for officials, shop stewards and members on lesbian and gay oppression and how to fight it.

- For union meetings to be held in work time with no loss of pay — a burning necessity for lesbians or (less frequently) gay men with children and facing the resultant domestic pressures.

- For rank and file control of the unions: through regular mass meetings to decide on action; through making all officials subject to regular election, recallable between elections and paid the average wage of workers they represent; through union conferences made up of lay delegates elected by the branches.

- For the building of an anti-bureaucratic rank and file movement in the unions, committed from the outset to the fight against lesbian and gay oppression.

FIGHT UNEMPLOYMENT

Mass unemployment is a stark reminder of the bankrupcy of capitalism. Amidst a world of plenty, a world in which millions could be put to work producing goods desperately needed by the starving poor of the imperialised world, the dole queues in Britain, the USA, Germany and France continue to grow. Lesbians and gay men are affected as much as anybody, by the curse of unemployment. We also face the additional threat of being discriminated against and stopped from getting jobs if we have already come out, as well as being victimised and thrown on the dole for no other reason than that the employer has discovered our sexual preferences. What should be an entirely private matter becomes an excuse for vindictive sackings. Teachers, social workers and youth workers have been particularly affected by such discrimination, normally charged with being a danger to young people — a miserable piece of prejudice that bears no relationship to the statistical reality of child molestation or abuse (predominantly heterosexual in character). Fighting discrimination needs to be seen as part of the fight against unemployment.

- For the right of lesbians and gay men to come out at work without fear of discrimination by the employers on the grounds of sexual orientation.

For full equality of opportunity for vacancies and promotion for lesbians and gay men in all spheres of employment, and for the necessary increase in public spending on investment resources to fulfil this demand.

▼ While discrimination by employers should be made illegal, the working class must recognise that, as with women and blacks, discrimination against lesbians and gay men, must be fought with direct action. Only this will stop the bosses exploiting loopholes in legislation. For strike action to defend lesbians and gay men sacked by the state or the bosses.

▼ For workers' control of hiring and firing to enforce an anti-discrimination, equality of opportunity policy. Workers' control over the bosses is imperative if they are not to abuse paper equal opportunity policies. For 24 hour state funded creche facilities to enable lesbian and gay parents to get to work.

▼ Fight unemployment by cutting the hours (with no loss of pay), sharing the work (under workers' control) and nationalising, under workers' control and with no compensation to the bosses, firms pleading bankruptcy or threatening closure or redundancy. For strikes and occupations to fight for these policies.

▼ For an unemployed workers' movement with full rights of representation within the labour movement. For the right of the unemployed to join the union of their choice at reduced subs-rates. For the championing of the fight against lesbian and gay oppression within such a movement.

THE ONSLAUGHT ON SERVICES HITS LESBIANS AND GAYS HARD

Capitalism can no longer afford the welfare services it provided to slightly ease the burden of domestic labour for women in the family during the boom when it needed women workers in large numbers. It is compelled to attack services and unload the burden of welfare provision back on to individual families. In the spheres of health, housing and education these attacks can have disastrous consequences for lesbians and gay men. they must be fought around politics that meet the needs of all workers. All too often the leaders of the labour movement settle for compromises that benefit only sections of the working class leaving others to suffer the consequences.

▼ End the discrimination against lesbians and gay men in housing. All too often lesbians and gay men are refused housing by the councils on the grounds that 'families' come first. There should be equal access to housing for all on the basis of a massive housebuilding programme financed by the state but under the control of the workers. The resources for this must be fought for if heterosexual working class families are not to be set into competition with lesbians and gay men.

▼ For council provision of decent temporary accomodation until permanent homes are ready. For working class tenants' groups with lesbian and gay representation to enforce this policy.

▼ For a massive expansion of the NHS to cope with the health requirements of all. This is literally a life and death question for many gay men faced with the danger of AIDS. Cash for research — not to line Saatchi and Saatchi's pockets. For free condoms and needles on demand.

▼ A London hospital has had to suspend dispensing Retrovir (a life prolonging drug for AIDS patients) because it cannot afford the drug companies' prices. Nationalisation of the drug companies under workers' control and with no compensation can end such scandals.

▼ No compulsory testing for AIDS. Repeal the Contagious Diseases Act.

▼ For an adequately funded sex education programme in all schools — to be decided by committees of classroom teachers, parents and pupils — to explain in a manner free from heterosexual bias, sexuality in general and homosexuality as one aspect of it. Children and youth must not be 'protected' by being fed the bigoted lies that are the stock-in-trade of the state and many headmasters/mistresses.

▼ Full support to councils who pursue 'positive image' policies with regards to homosexuality in the schools. Such politics, however, must be a step towards a national scientific, materialist based sex education course.

▼ All of the above policies require that lesbians and gay men take their place in the numerous battles against school or hospital closures, under the slogans — no cuts, expand the services to meet everybody's needs, for a massive programme of public works funded by the state but controlled by the workers.

DON'T FORGET WAGES

Like all workers lesbian and gay workers need a living wage. When workers struggle for better wages — or against attacks on jobs for that matter — lesbians and gays must join that fight and, on the lines of LGSM, take that fight out amongst the

...sian and gay 'community' seeking to rally those ...ressed for their sexuality to the cause of those ...ploited and oppressed by capital at work.

▼ For a national minimum wage linked to the ... of living and set at the level of the average ...ustrial wage.

▼ Against all wage restraint. For the protection ... wages against inflation by wage rises in line with rises in the cost of living as determined by committees of workers and their families.

▼ For real equal pay, for equal work for women. ...nd inequality of pay suffered by many lesbians.

POLITICAL AND LEGAL EQUALITY NOW

...n 1967 in Britain limited legal reform enabled a ...ay man to have sex with another gay man pro...ided both were over 21 and sex took place in total ...rivacy. This reform was a concession but it still ...eaves an enormous gap between the democratic ...ights of most people and those of gay men. Lesbi...ns remain unrecognised in British law but are no ...ss systematically discriminated against for that. ...ull legal and political equality under capitalism ...oes not equal liberation, but it must be fought for ...y the working class as an important element of ...he fight for liberation.

▼ Abolish the age of consent whereby a private ...atter — sex between consenting individuals — is ...bjected to the control of the capitalist state. At ...is moment the age of consent for heterosexuals is ...6 and for gay men 21. This leaves youth open to ...rious oppression. For young gay men under 21 ...e oppression is particularly severe. Every sexual ...t they engage in is a crime.

▼ For the right of lesbians and gay men to have ...stody of their children. No legal discrimination ...custody cases, on the grounds of sexual orienta...tion.

▼ Abolish all laws — gross indecency, soliciting, ...rages to public decency, insulting behaviour ...d all laws relating to prostitution — used to ...rsecute lesbians and gay men.

▼ Abolish the obscenity and Blasphemy laws ...hich can and have been repeatedly used against ...mosexual literature (*Gay News*, Gays The Word ...c.).

▼ Abolish the exceptions to Wolfenden — the ...my, navy, etc. All homosexuals should have full ...gal and political equality in society. No democrat ...n oppose the above reforms. They encapsulate ...e basic democratic position that a person's sex...al orientation and practice — providing it is ...nsensual — is entirely a private matter.

▼ End all police harassment of gay men via entrapment. All cases involving entrapment brought to court to be automatically dismissed. Disband all the special squads and units, like the IRU's, the vice squad and others, which can and have been used to raid gay bars and clubs.

AGAINST THE BOSSES' OFFENSIVE

Moral reaction is part and parcel of the bosses' overall offensive against the working class. The anti-union laws, the police picket-busting squads and the witch-hunts, are all elements of this offensive. So too are the gay-baiting articles that litter the national press, the increased incidence of 'queer-bashing', often organise by fascist groups like the BNP and NF, the physical attacks on health workers who look after AIDS patients, the vandalism to AIDS hospital units and the police raids on gay pubs and clubs. This offensive must be met with bold policies and direct action.

▼ For the right of lesbian and gay organisations to reply to the vicious gay-baiting articles churned out in the bosses' press. For print workers to fight for such a right and to stop the presses if it is not granted.

▼ For a democratically controlled labour movement daily paper committed to regular articles supporting the struggle for lesbian and gay rights and against oppression.

▼ For organised defence squads to defend lesbian and gay pubs, clubs and individuals against 'queerbashers' and police raids. For links with workers' defence guards — joint support, training etc. Full labour movement support for lesbian and gay defence squads.

▼ For workers' defence of AIDS related workers, establishments and patients. For state funded education courses on AIDS to explain the nature of the disease to healthworkers and school/college students.

▼ For the repeal of all anti-trade union laws.

AGAINST ALL DIVISIONS IN THE WORKING CLASS

Capitalism continuously strives to divide worker against worker. Sectionalism divides craft against craft and skilled against unskilled. Sexism divides men against women. Racism divides white against black. And heterosexism divides heterosexuals from lesbians and gay men. There is a constant pressure on all sections of the working class to seek separate solutions to what are, in fact, the common problems of exploitation and oppression. This pressure has given rise to various forms of separatism amongst sections of the working class —

craftism, feminism, black nationalism. While communists understand such pressures we do not concede one inch to them. We are integrationists, not separatists. We strive for maximum unity of the working class against the common enemy. To achieve this unity we fight against all those things capitalism uses to divide us.

▼ Against craftism — we fight for the linking up of industrial struggles, up to and including the use of the general strike against the bosses' offensive. We are for industrial unions to transcend craft and trade unions.

▼ Against sexism, we are for the full social and political equality of women as part of the fight for real women's liberation and socialism. We fight all instances of misogyny amongst gay men, and we combat the ideas of radical feminist separatism amongst lesbians.

▼ Against racism, we fight all immigration controls by the British state. We do not simply try to make them less racist or heterosexist in application. We support black self-defence against racist and police attack. We join the fight to drive organised racists from holding office in the unions. We are for physically smashing the fascists, not giving them a platform, driving them out of the unions. We don not gay bait fascists or right wing reactionaries such as Harvey Proctor but we do not excuse any lesbian or gay fascists from the treatment they will get from the defence squads of the labour movement.

▼ Against the poisonous fumes of nationalism we fight for a consistently internationalist policy. Disarm the imperialist bosses — always better their defeat in wars than their victory. Despite their persecution of lesbians and gay men we defend the USSR, Cuba and other degenerate workers' states against capitalist attack. We are for the workers — not the capitalists — overthrowing the bureaucracies that rule those states, thereby clearing the way to socialism and lesbian and gay liberation. We support the abolition of all anti-lesbian or gay laws in the degenerate(d) workers' states. We are against nationalist solutions to the economic crisis — like import controls — that line workers up with the bosses. Workers of the world unite — so too must lesbian and gay workers, for oppression is international and must be fought on an international plane.

▼ Imperialism's enslavement of the oppressed colonies and semi-colonies must be fought. National liberation movements should be supported. In Britain today this means fighting to get British troops out of Ireland and supporting the struggle of the republican fighters to achieve this aim. Lesbians and gay men have no interest in helping the British state maintain Loyalist rule in the six counties, a rule that means vicious oppression for lesbians and gays (remember Paisley's anti-sodomy campaign).

THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE QUESTION OF GOVERNMENT

The Labour Party has given the lesbian and gay issue mixed treatment in the last seven years. We know full well where Neil Kinnock stands — *"on the balls wing"* of the party, ready to denounce 'fairies' during the repulsive gay baiting campaign against Peter Thatchell in 1983. But despite this posturing by Kinnock the party has a formal commitment to support lesbian and gay rights. Moreover at a local level various left councils — spurred on by the old GLC — have set up lesbian and gay committees, launched equal opportunities programmes and have even tried to introduce 'positive images' of homosexuality in the schools. However, all too often these councils have — despite carrying the 'loony left' tag — either left policies at the level of being good intentions with no hard cash to back them up, or approached the whole question from a non-working class perspective. Indeed Livingstone consciously set the tone by cultivating lesbians and gays as one element of his 'rainbow coalition' (he was always quick to denounce *"the old, white, male working class"* — a thinly disguised attack on the working class as a whole).

The result of all of this is that policies on lesbian and gay rights have either been tokenistic or, as happened during the general election, jettisoned because they were and 'unpopular' cause (unpopular with the rabid bosses' press that is) and replaced it with a campaign proving Labour's commitment to the 'family'. The lesson is clear. Reformism cannot consistently fight the oppression of lesbians and gays, let alone advance a programme to overcome that oppression. However, we recognise that many lesbians and gays, like many workers in general, do not believe us. For this reason we say that we will join them in a vigorous fight to win the Labour Party to a policy of consistent support for lesbian and gay rights — demanding it takes up the policies we have outlined in this programme. We also fight to force Labour, should it ever get into office, to carry out these policies as part an overall programme of arming the working class, making the government accountable to the mobilised working class and its base organisations, and moving against the military, economic and political power of the bosses and their state. We do not believe Labour will carry out such a programme, but in the struggle to force it to we can and will win to that programme, millions of workers, the foremost fighters for lesbian and gay liberation amongst them.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY, WORKING CLASS POWER AND LESBIAN AND GAY LIBERATION

The struggle for lesbian and gay rights and liberation is, as we have stated throughout, a class struggle. To be defended and extended on any sort of lasting basis requires the overthrow of the bosses' state, its repressive apparatus, its laws and its bureaucracy. Only the working class, led by a consistently revolutionary communist party, can perform this task. Such a party must comprise the leading militants of the working class. It must be rooted in the workplaces and workers' organisations. It must be forged in the active struggles of the working class, winning leadership of them and directing them towards the conquest of political power. To do it the working class needs to build its own councils of delegates from the factories, the housing estates, the communities, and its own armed militia. Not only can these act as intruments for the overthrow of the capitalist state but also as the instruments of a new order — of working class state power.

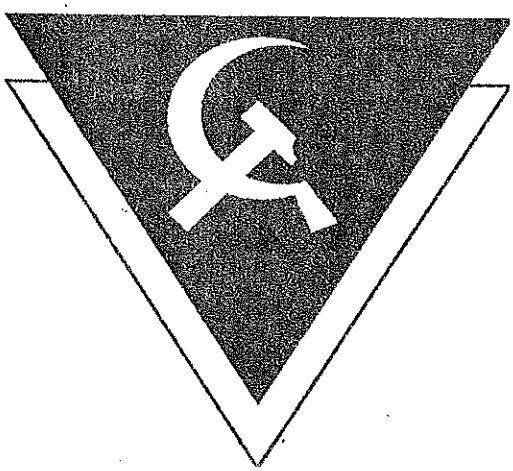
In what way will working class power benefit lesbians and gays? How will it liberate them? By liquidating the social and economic power of the capitalists, by expropriating their factories the workers' state could develop a centrally directed, but democratically controlled plan of production, coordinating the anarchy of competition and the blind drive for profit and replacing them with production to satisfy human need.

One part of this plan would be directed towards the provision of services that could socialise childrearing and housework. The domestic slavery of women within the family could be progressively eliminated through the provision of socialised childcare, washing, cooking and cleaning facilities. The specialised care of the old and care for the disabled could be taken on by state funded community services. All of these tasks now belong to the woman within the family. they explain the importance of the isolated family unit and its *normative heterosexual structure*, to capitalism. Socialise these tasks and you create a new foundation for human relationships to be built upon. Not merely is the material basis for ending women's oppression created but so too is the basis for a revolution in sexual attitudes.

Of course liberation will not come overnight. But, the gradual elimination of production for profit, the education of people away from the prejudices that have for so long blighted human relations, and from institutions like the church that have encouraged prejudice, and the ability of all to participate freely and equally in social, economic and political life, will progressively eradicate women's oppression, lesbian and gay oppression, indeed all forms of specific oppression.

We cannot predict what pattern sexual relationships will follow in a communist society. What we can say is that the removal of the oppressive norms so pivotal to the bourgeois family, will lay the basis for sexual relationships based on real freedom of choice. As such this will free lesbians and gay men from the torments and horrors of a coercive morality that obliges millions to deny or disguise their sexuality, and that has driven thousands to suicide or mental illness because of their sexuality. ▼

FORWARD TO COMMUNISM AND LESBIAN AND GAY LIBERATION



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