

**Socialism & the
Struggle for the
Rights of Lesbians
& Gay Men**

**Resolution of the Democratic
Socialist Party**

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Contents

Preface by Pat Brewer	4
Preamble	7
The Origins & Development of Homosexual Oppression	9
Origins of homosexual oppression	9
The development of homosexuality	12
Personal life after the bourgeois revolutions	14
Women & sexuality	17
The character of gay & lesbian oppression	19
Development of the Struggle for Lesbian & Gay Rights	23
The early movement	23
Homosexuality & the socialist movement	25
The Bolshevik Revolution	26
The Stalinist betrayal	29
The impact of Stalinism on Third World revolutions	32
Rise of the modern movement in the West	34
Impact of the movements	37
Political & Ideological Trends Within the Movements	44
Identity politics	44
Lifestylism	46
Ranking sexual preference	47
Separatism	48
Post-structuralism	51
Queer politics	52
Political independence & autonomy	54
The Democratic Socialist Party & the Struggle for Lesbian & Gay Rights	57
References	62

Preface

By Pat Brewer

Socialism and the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians and Gay Men is a resolution adopted by the 16th National Conference of the Democratic Socialist Party, held in January 1995. It is the latest of several resolutions to be adopted by the DSP since its founding conference in 1972 analysing the nature of the oppression of lesbians and gay men and the importance of the struggle for the democratic rights of gay men and lesbians as part of the ongoing fight to achieve a socially just, democratic and ecologically sound future for us all. The DSP and its associated youth organisation, Resistance, came into existence out of the same struggles that led to the new rise of struggles by lesbians and gay men in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The DSP has always given unconditional support to the struggle for the democratic rights of gay men and lesbians. This support has been integral to the building of the party over the past 25 years.

The resolution contained in this booklet marks a further clarification of the DSP's analysis of the nature of the oppression of lesbians and gay men and its relation to the need of the capitalists to maintain the family system, as well as the evolution of the gay and lesbian movements over the last two decades.

There are several points that should be noted about this resolution. Firstly, it is not a document on sexuality. The DSP doesn't take a position on sexuality generally, nor on any specific type of sexual relations or activities — except those involving coercion and violence, and paedophilia. The DSP doesn't advocate that people adopt any particular sexual orientation. We don't take a position on sexuality because we just don't know enough about the nature of sexuality. As well, there are problems with the term itself. It is used in several ways. Sexuality is more than sexual orientation. It often refers to the notion of self and human psychology. Now that may be a distortion because of the time and period psychology as a science began to develop and the

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relation of this to sexual theorising. But more fundamentally it is because the notions of sexuality and every individual's psychology are shaped by the institutions of a class society where all social interactions are moulded by private ownership of productive resources, class exploitation, and individual competitiveness.

This also has a reflection in the language used in the resolution. Because of the spread of biological determinist theories of the difference between men and women, the social sciences have used the term "sex" to refer to biological differences of genitalia, reproductive functions, etc., and the term "gender" to refer to the social categories of masculinity and femininity. This has often led to a polarity between biological determinism and social determinism. We believe there is a dialectical relationship between biology and the social formation of the individual's psychology which we have expressed using sex/gender to encompass our disagreement with both determinisms.

Secondly, this is a document about the development of the gay and lesbian movements in advanced capitalist countries and, in a limited way, the Soviet Union and other socialist states. It does not deal in depth with the situation in the Third World. Homosexual behaviour is apparently universal in human societies historically but the forms of homosexuality and which of these are considered socially acceptable have varied enormously between societies, as well as within societies. Because of these cultural differences, as colonialism and imperialism impacted around the world, laying their economic and political distortions on each particular society and its cultural heritage, they also imposed the conceptions of sexuality and racism that were dominant in the developed capitalist countries upon colonised communities. So while the resolution makes reference to this process it is still beyond its scope to cover the diverse ways this has impacted in individual societies within the Third World. Nor is it necessary at this time to aid the work of the DSP in the struggle for gay and lesbian rights.

Thirdly, the resolution contains considerable descriptive material. Given the lack of general information about the history of gay and lesbian experience we thought it would be useful to include whatever was possible from a variety of sources. This has meant drawing from a diversity of experiences: for example, from the US experience of the way the family developed under capitalism (the shift from being a unit of production to a unit of consumption, and the impact this had on personal life); from the German experience of the early gay and lesbian rights movement; and much of the material of the lesbian movement and feminist history comes from British sources. So the illustrative material is varied of necessity simply because the information available is limited. We have tried to include as much Australian material as possible.

6 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

We would like to note in particular the useful historical work of John D’Emileo, Garry Wotherspoon, Liz Ross, Craig Johnston and in particular we thank Peter Drucker and the International Institute of Research and Education in Amsterdam for permission to draw extensively on historical material that he and the LIRE have researched.

Many of the sources we have drawn from do not have a Marxist analysis and perspective. We felt it useful to present the descriptive material within a Marxist framework.

In addition, much of the history has been written by gay men’and really doesn’t deal with lesbian history. This is a bias we have tried to correct in our presentation of the descriptive material, drawing the lesbian material from feminist historical research (where, again, many of the researchers do not apply a Marxist analysis and perspective).

In fact, the difficulty we had in acquiring the illustrative material reflects the further problem that for the most part we’re dealing with two movements — the movement of gay men and a separate movement of lesbians. While there have been periods where these movements have worked together, criticisms that the gay men’s movement has failed to take on board the impact and effects of sexism, and the theoretical dominance of lesbian separatism in the lesbian movement have meant two separate organisation processes and this is reflected throughout the document by the use of the plural, movements.

The basic outlook of the resolution is clear. The struggle against the oppression of lesbians and gay men is part of the struggle between the capitalist rulers and the working class. Homosexuality represents a contradiction to one aspect of the ideology used to buttress the family system — an institution indispensable to the maintenance of class society. It contradicts a central aspect of the repressive bourgeois morality which stigmatises all sexual activity outside the framework of sexual relations between married heterosexual couples. The struggle to strengthen the democratic rights of gay men and lesbians is part of the struggle to strengthen the rights of all the oppressed and it has the potential to strengthen the forces fighting to build a society free of all forms of exploitation and oppression. The resolution asserts that unless the lesbian and gay movements orient toward building alliances with other sections of the oppressed to overturn the social foundations of bourgeois morality, the gains made by the gay and lesbian movements will be constantly under attack and full civil and human rights for gay men and lesbians will not be won. ■

Preamble

In June 1969 police raided a popular gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, in New York's Greenwich Village. This triggered four nights of street fighting between police and hundreds of demonstrators, angered and rebelling against state harassment and persecution of homosexuals. Within months of the Stonewall riots, gay and lesbian rights groups sprang up in major centres around the United States and in other advanced capitalist countries, including Australia. Stonewall both marked and came to symbolise the rise of the modern movement for the rights of lesbians and gay men.

The new wave of struggles by lesbians and gay men grew out of the radicalisation of young people in the late 1960s, an aspect of which was a rejection of the repressive sexual morality of capitalist society. Under the impact of movements against racial discrimination and against the oppression of women, radicalising young people began to reject any discrimination against people for their sexual orientation. Inspired by others fighting for their democratic rights, young gay men and lesbians began to publicly challenge laws and practices that penalised and stigmatised homosexual activity. The gay and lesbian movements have struggled to repeal laws that criminalised their sexual choices. They have challenged the harassment by the state, the medical profession, the police, the judiciary and the church in order to overturn systematic discrimination in employment, in welfare services, in education, and the negative images and prejudices imposed upon them.

The struggle for the rights of lesbians and gay men has advanced since the 1960s. Real steps forward have been taken to win acceptance of the right of gay men and lesbians to determine their own sexual life and affirm their dignity as human beings without being subjected to legal penalties. But these gains are constantly under attack by the right-wing forces in society.

The Democratic Socialist Party has always given unconditional support to the struggle for the democratic rights of lesbians and gay men. This struggle, is part of the class struggle between the capitalist rulers and the working class. Any extension of democratic and human rights strengthens the working class as a whole in that struggle.

8 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

Furthermore, the source of oppression of gay men and lesbians is the need of the capitalists to maintain the family system. The struggle by lesbians and gay men to end their oppression therefore has the potential to strengthen the forces fighting to overthrow capitalist rule and build a society free of all forms of exploitation and oppression. ■

The Origins & Development of Homosexual Oppression

Homosexual behaviour seems to be universal in human society, across boundaries of time and culture. According to anthropological studies, some form of homosexual behaviour (male and/or female) has been considered socially acceptable in most societies at different times. But which forms of homosexual activity exist and which are considered acceptable vary enormously from one society to the next, as well as within any one society, and are a product of the unique histories of different socio-economic formations.

Origins of homosexual oppression

While direct evidence no longer exists, the origins of repression of homosexual activity is clearly connected with the rise of the family and of class society, which brought about the subjugation of women. This linkage is quite understandable given the interrelatedness of reproduction and sexuality for women.

In comparison with other species, the range and variety of human sexual expression is enormous. This does not deny the fact that human sexuality, like animal sexuality, is intertwined with physical reproduction. Biological sexuality is a precondition for the range of social patterns which mold the variety of forms human sexuality can take.

Similarly, sexual difference is a biological reality, but oppression and discrimination have not always been attached to such a difference. The origin of such oppression is economic and social. Women's child-bearing function has always been the same but their social roles have changed — their social status has not always been that of a degraded domestic servant, subject to man's control and command. Marxists have traced the beginning of women's inferior place in society to the emergence of class society. Prior to this development material production was organised communally and its results shared equally. Different labour tasks were carried out by the various sub-groupings based on age, gender, etc. within the larger social group, but there was

10 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

no exploitation or oppression of one sub-group by another. Both sexes participated in social production, helping to produce the sustenance and survival of all. The social status of men and women reflected the indispensable roles each played in this productive process for the survival of the group as a whole. But this sexual division of labour was not accompanied by any institutionalised social inequality between men and women.

While the exact process by which the transition to class society took place is a continuing subject of research and discussion, the fundamental line along which inequality and the shift in women's status began to emerge lies in the changing productivity of human labour based on agriculture and domestication of animals. New divisions of labour, craftsmanship, commerce led to the private appropriation of an increasing and permanent economic surplus and the development of the possibility for some humans to prosper from the exploitation of the labour of others. In these specific socio-economic conditions, as the exploitation of human beings became possible for a privileged few, women, because of their biological role in producing the next generation, became valuable property. Like slaves and cattle they were a source of wealth. They alone could produce new human beings whose labour power could be exploited. Thus the purchase of women, along with all rights to their future offspring, arose as one of the economic and social institutions of the new order based on private property. Women's primary social role was increasingly defined as domestic servant and child-bearer.

The oppression of women was institutionalised through the family system. Women ceased to have an independent place in social production. Their productive role was determined by the family to which they belonged, by the man to whom they were subordinate.

Along with the private accumulation of wealth, the family unit developed as the institution by which responsibility for the unproductive members of society — especially the young — was transferred from society as a whole to an identifiable individual or small group of individuals.

In the new society, women were transformed into little more than breeding animals whose function was to provide male heirs to receive accumulated wealth. This function required that women be sexually exclusive, so that men could be certain they were passing on their property to their own, and not some other man's, children. Within the arising family, women essentially became the property of their husbands or fathers, who controlled their entire relationship to society.

At first glance, it might appear that a society which regulates women's heterosexual behaviour in order to ensure parentage of children would not necessarily go on to proscribe homosexual behaviour. The institutionalisation of some forms of homosexual

behaviour in some earlier societies and its toleration or approbation — at least within some social layers — in ancient Greece lend weight to this view. However, few if any societies justify social institutions solely in terms of their real function. Except in periods of revolutionary crisis, most social institutions are maintained not by brute force of the ruling class but by ideological means. The institution becomes seen as “natural”, “god-given”, “necessary” to ward off some natural or supernatural evil, etc. It is only a small step from regulating sexual behaviour in order to ensure the legitimacy of children to asserting that procreation is the sole permissible reason for having sexual relations. Indeed, this assertion has remained a keystone of the ideological justification for women’s oppression up to the present day.

The persecution of homosexual behaviour arose as a by-product of the oppression of women, as a result of the need to portray the family as “natural” and inevitable. Of course, the precise connection between the oppression of women and the persecution of homosexuality has varied between different societies and at different times, as well as with the importance of the family, its economic function, and the presence or lack of a political/ideological challenge to it. Moreover, the ideological justification for persecution of homosexuality is capable of developing further according to its own logic.

Class society distorts all human relationships by transforming, social interaction into relationships between property owners. This applies not only to human cooperation in production, but to the entire social superstructure as well. A neighbour is no longer someone near, a member of the community, but the owner of adjacent land. Children become primarily heirs and property. Women are reduced to the status of breeding machines and domestic slaves. By generalising commodity production, capitalism transforms all human relations into commodity relations. As a result capitalism stripped away the hypocritical religious halo that surrounded family relations under feudalism. Marriage was revealed to be primarily a property relationship and only secondarily, if at all, a loving and affectionate relationship.

But capitalism transformed the family in many other ways as well. The functions of the family unit have contracted. It has become less and less a unit of small-scale production — agricultural, craft, commercial, or domestic (weaving, sewing, baking, etc.), although it remains the basic unit through which consumption and the reproduction of labour-power are organised. Each adult member of the family sells his or her labour-power individually in the labour market. This created many contradictory effects. The basic economic bond that previously held together the family of the exploited and oppressed — the fact that they had to work together cooperatively in order to survive — began to dissolve. As women were drawn into the

12 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

labour market they began to achieve some degree of economic independence. This economic independence began to undermine their domestic subjugation and their inferior civil and legal situation.

But there is a contradiction between the increasing integration of women in the labour market and the survival of the family. Greater economic independence and more equality undermines the family institution. Yet the family system is an indispensable pillar of class rule, in the past as today under capitalism.

By the 20th century, the exploitation of women in the workforce at lower rates of pay than men and the extra profits thereby had to be weighed against the ability of women to carry out the basic unpaid domestic labour of childrearing, care of the sick, the elderly. The capitalist state began to buttress the family by providing some social services and subsidising some of the economic and social functions it used to fulfil. Yet there are still many tasks in the home carried out by working-class women — cooking, cleaning, washing, etc. — which play a specific role under capitalism. This unpaid household work by women is necessary to the reproduction of labour-power sold by the members of each working-class family to the capitalists. Commodification of the tasks now performed within the family unit would inevitably result in a large reduction in profits. Official estimates in 1990 assessed the labour-time involved in this work as equivalent to around 60% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product.

The needs of capital to “free” labour from all means of producing and sustaining life in ways other than the sale of each individual's labour-power in the market, had fundamental and contradictory consequences to social, religious, economic and personal life under capitalism.

The drive of capitalism to privately appropriate greater and greater profits from large-scale social production, reinforced the pressure on the family by locating civil and legal rights in the “free” individual. This pressure led to the growth of struggles to achieve democratic rights as well as greater social and economic equality. It also led to a greater importance of ideological control to contain the dynamic of this contradiction. Part of that ideology used to shore up the family led to the systematic persecution of homosexual activity.

The development of homosexuality

While homosexual activity has existed in a great diversity of social forms in many human societies, a category of people called “homosexuals” has existed in almost none of them. The word “homosexual” was only coined in the 1860s in German, emerging in English in 1892. The creation of a specific person known as “the homosexual” is a product of modern Western societies and is contradictory to traditional social

practices and values even in strongly homoerotic societies. The first lesbian/gay identities grew up through a long process in Europe and North America that took at least 600 years, beginning in European societies that were still feudal. Only in the last hundred years of this 600-year process — long after capitalism was firmly established in the Netherlands, Britain, France and North America — have gay/lesbian identities emerged in their distinctively modern form. Sexuality in European feudal societies was centred on the sexual submission of wives to husbands in marriage, which was seen as one among many divinely ordained, hierarchical, personal relationships that made up the social order. With the generalisation of commodity production and exchange in the later centuries of European feudalism, however, hierarchies based on personal fealty were undermined. Among the feudal nobility in regions of France and Italy where commodity relations were most highly developed, the concept of “courtly” love arose. The poets who celebrated courtly love more or less consciously described it as an emotion independent of or even in contradiction to the compulsory, religiously and socially sanctioned institution of marriage. Love, according to these bearers of the new ideology, was often or usually adulterous.

Romantic love was portrayed at first as part of the aristocratic world of leisure, literacy and “honour”, which had nothing to do with “commoners”. But it found echoes in other parts of feudal societies.

In Christian monasteries and nunneries, where homosexuality had always been an obvious possibility, some began to idealise friendships between themselves in terms that were erotic as well as religious. Shifts in sexual patterns among the nobility and clergy were also echoed, though in very different ways, in the new cities that grew up. Some people in these cities escaped from the categories of lord and serf or even from the guild categories of master, journeyman and apprentice. In the cities too it became possible to imagine and engage in sexual relations based partly on desire rather than on established socio-sexual hierarchies.

At the bottom and in the margins of feudal societies, a few men and women in the cities became more or less detached from the kinship structures that went together with the feudal social order. Because of the oppression of women throughout the history of class society, the possibilities of living independently of the dominant social structures, particularly those of the family, were always much easier for men. In early feudal cities the objective possibility arose for male homosexuality to be not just an occasional “sin” or recreation indulged by men otherwise firmly locked into family and social structures. Covert communities of men living homosexual lives are known to have existed in northern Italy as early as the 14th century, in France as early as the 15th century, and in England as early as the 17th century. But even where they existed such

14 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

communities involved a tiny minority of the population. The vast majority of men who engaged in homosexual behaviour would not have been part of them. For women constrained within family and feudal relations, there appears no parallel at all in this period.

It wasn't until after the bourgeois revolutions in Europe and North America during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries that conditions for a male homosexual and lesbian identity began to emerge. Two changes were of particular relevance — changing family structures and gender roles in the developing capitalist nations, and industrialisation, which multiplied the size of cities, and thus the size of populations detached from traditional family structures, particularly rural structures based on family-based agricultural production.

Personal life after the bourgeois revolutions

The rise of capitalism brought about a major change in the form of family life. The late 16th century Dutch revolution, the mid-17th century English revolution and the late 18th century French and American revolutions dissolved the feudal relations that had been the basis of European economies, cultures and sexual expression. Beginning with fringe groups like the Quakers who were originally part of the English revolution's far left wing, people questioned husbands' previously unquestionable authority and began promoting reciprocity and affection as essential to marriage and sex. The idea of love based on desire and free choice, which under feudalism was largely limited to the nobility and associated with adultery, was adapted under capitalism to become the ideal of bourgeois marriage.

With the rise of industrial capitalism beginning in the late 18th century in England, spreading across Europe and North America in the 19th century, the family began to decline as a production unit. Village or small town life had been structured around a household economy, composed of family units that were basically self-sufficient, independent and patriarchal. Men, women and children farmed land under the control, lease or ownership of the male head of the household. Although there was a division of labour between men and women, the family was an interdependent unit of production. The survival of each member depended on the cooperation of all. The home was a workplace where the female members of the family processed raw farm products into food for daily consumption, where they made clothing, soap, candles, etc., from the farming activities which involved all members of the family. As wage labour spread, this system of household production declined. Men and women were drawn out of the largely self-sufficient household economy. The family was no longer an independent unit of production. But while it was no longer independent, family

members were still dependent on one another.

Because capitalism had not expanded into taking over the production of consumer goods, women still performed necessary productive tasks in the home. While many families no longer produced grain, for example, wives still baked bread from the flour bought with wages, or purchased yarn or cloth to make clothing for their families. The transition away from the household family-based economy to a fully developed wage-labour economy continued into the 20th century. For example as late as 1920, 50% of the United States population lived in communities of fewer than 2500 people. The vast majority of black Americans in the early 20th century lived outside the waged-labour system, as sharecroppers and tenant farmers whose production rested on the family. Even in the towns and small cities women continued to grow and process food, make clothing and engage in other kinds of domestic production.

But as the shift away from a unit of production took place, the family took on more significance as an affective unit — a place where emotional support, satisfaction and happiness was supposed to take place. By the beginning of the 20th century among the members of the propertied classes of the industrialised capitalist countries; the ruling ideology described the family as the means through which men and women formed satisfying, mutually enhancing relationships and created an environment that nurtured children. The family thus became the setting for “personal life” sharply distinguished and disconnected from the public world of work. Notions of love, desire and free choice, having first trickled down from the nobility and been adapted by the bourgeoisie, slowly became the basis of middle-class and working-class family life.

This shift in the ruling ideology regarding the family paralleled a shift in the character of social reproduction. There are two aspects to social reproduction — the maintenance of daily life for the family unit, and the reproduction of the human species. While mass consumerism changed the way the tasks of maintaining daily life were done, through the expansion of domestic appliances, mass-produced food and clothing, etc., major aspects of generational replacement changed as well. The meaning of heterosexual relations began to change.

While the family was the basic production unit of society, men and women needed the labour of children and the birth rate was high. Just as among the rural population in the Third World today producing offspring was as necessary as producing the basic food crop of grain, potatoes, etc. Sex was harnessed to procreation and procreation to marriage. People didn't talk about sexuality; they spoke of marriage. And they condemned all sexual expression outside the marriage bond, not differentiating sharply between sodomy, lewdness and heterosexual fornication.

But as wage labour spread and production became socialised, it became possible

16 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

to separate sexuality from procreation. People began to freely choose their spouses rather than marrying those chosen for them by their parents. Sexual choices broadened. Sexuality was now seen as a means of establishing intimacy, promoting happiness, and experiencing pleasure. In this context it became possible for some men and women to organise a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex. It began to make possible the formation of urban-based communities of lesbians and gay men.

This was very different from the previous experience of homosexual behaviour. The social space for a separate homosexual lifestyle could not exist where survival was structured around production in the family. For example, in the USA homosexual activity was well-documented in legal records — sodomy in men, lewdness among women. There were even laws to prohibit unmarried adults from living outside family units. So it was only when individuals began to make their living through wage labour, instead of as members of an interdependent family unit, that it became possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal lifestyle. In Australia, while there were similar developments over time, the form of European invasion and settlement as a series of penal colonies led to a repressive official attitude toward homosexual behaviour within the early British settlements. Even before the “first fleet” set sail from England, Governor Arthur Phillip made it clear to the transported convicts that two acts would merit death — murder and sodomy. This extreme hostility to homosexual activity was later imposed on the Aboriginal population which did not view homosexual practices as crimes or “sins”.

But the colonial officials faced persistent problems dealing with homosexual activity. The gender imbalance of a greater number of men to women, extreme in convict transportation, continued with settler immigration. The four capital crimes most frequent in early penal settlement in Tasmania were rape, carnal knowledge of girls under 10, homosexuality and bestiality. Gender segregation within penal colonies and jails, coupled with the isolation of frontier settlement and the later gold rushes, created a milieu in which homosexual acts were frequent among men. It has been suggested that it is this persistent shortage of women which established the sublimated male homosexual relationship of “mateship”, particularly rural working men’s mateship, which has been a basis of the cultural imagery of Australia, despite the urban reality of life for the overwhelming majority of Australians.

By the end of the 19th century in Australia as in other developed capitalist countries, groups of men and women existed in cities who recognised their erotic interest in their own sex and sought a social life and identity based around this difference from the majority. In bohemian artistic and cultural areas, gay and lesbian lifestyles began to

emerge. In this period particularly after the social disruption of World War I, gay men and lesbians began to invent ways of meeting each other and sustaining a group life. Already in the early 20th century large cities contained male homosexual bars. Gay men mapped out cruising areas, annual drag balls were held in cities in the US like Washington and St Louis for example, which brought together large numbers of black gay men. Public bathhouses and YMCAs became gathering spots for gay men as well. Lesbians formed literary societies and private social clubs. Some working class women “passed” as men to obtain better-paying jobs that allowed them to live with other women. Higher educational women’s colleges, women’s professional associations and clubs were supported by a web of lesbian friends. By the 1920s and ’30s in large US cities lesbian bars began to emerge. As this separate lifestyle began to emerge from the late 19th century on, the newly defined homosexual identity was classified as criminal. For example, in England in the 1880s a series of laws regulating sexuality were passed after much agitation concerning the coercive nature of prostitution by the strand of feminism known as the “social purity feminists”. Prostitutes were depicted as women who fell victim to men directly through sexual activity, but also through kidnapping, sexual imprisonment, physical coercion and seduction — what became to be called “white slavery”. The Criminal Law Amendment Act 1883 was passed which raised the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16 years age, gave police greater summary jurisdiction over poor working-class women and children, made “indecent acts” between consenting male adults a crime and laid the basis for censorship laws. Lesbian activity was explicitly excluded from the Act as something unthinkable according to Queen Victoria. These laws reflected the dominant view of women’s sexuality at this time and the subordinate role of women in society. The Australian settler-colonies followed the lead of the British law, punishing the crime of buggery with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Women & sexuality

Women began to win some freedom in their personal lives in the advanced capitalist countries by the late 19th century, although it wasn’t until the early 20th century that “respectable” women could be seen in public without men. The ideology of women’s sexuality itself was transformed in this period. The mid-19th century view of sexuality was based on instinct theory. Men were driven by an insatiable sexual urge which women virtually lacked. Women’s dominant instinct was motherhood. Through the social evolutionary theorising of Freud and Herbert Spencer based on social Darwinist principles, this was transformed into the notion that women’s asexuality acted as a civilising force to curb the “beast in man”. Untrammelled sexuality was seen as a

18 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

heritage from the animal past of the human species to be transcended by civilisation. But prostitutes, lower-class women and women of non-white races were of a lower order of civilisation, closer to the sexual promiscuity of primitive times. This provided an outlet for men's natural sexuality which couldn't be fulfilled in marriage by the virtuous but asexual wife. It also provided the basis of the double standard — unchasteness in men was thus excusable and understandable but both unforgivable and unnatural in women.

But if women were seen as morally superior to men sexually, they were in every other way inferior, more primitive, less evolved and more fundamentally defined by biology. Women were held captive and unable to escape from the total domination of their reproductive system. Women's behaviour, whether "normal" or pathological, lay in the functioning of their reproductive organs. This was reflected in 19th century medical practice where manifestations of sexual desire and of most other "pathologies" were dealt with by treatment and possible removal of the offending "causative" organ — hence oviotomy, hysterectomy, clitoridectomy — and later applied to men who "acted like women" with castration, either physical or chemical.

Freud's theorising broke through some of the crudest aspects of biological determinism and instinct theorising. He outlined a psychosexual personality development through fixed stages of development, locating sexuality as well as other determinate instinctual drives as normal and present from birth in all people regardless of sex. He challenged the belief in the innocence and purity of childhood and the "deviance" of masturbation, advocating that sexual experimentation and interest were valid, although limited, parts of the development of the heterosexual norm. Women's sexuality became normal rather than pathological.

But even the first wave of the feminist movement of this period constrained sexuality within the ideology of the family, marriage and motherhood. Reproduction and sexuality blended into one, with sexuality subordinated to romantic love. The social purity feminists advocated voluntary motherhood through the birth control method of abstinence, rejecting artificial contraceptive measures as a means whereby men could indulge their lust inside or outside marriage through prostitution. Lust was condemned, to be replaced by love, but only the "pure" love for the purpose of "carrying on the (white) race". For single women they advocated chastity or asexuality as both sexual and political choices. Their major campaigns were against prostitution — "white slavery", seeing prostitutes as victims exploited by the lust of men. These were interspersed with temperance campaigns loaded with the imagery of bestial, violent, uncontrolled male lust.

The political trajectory of this period highlighted the dangers of sexuality and

women's responsibility to protect decent women from the dangers of venereal disease, which at that time was without cure. These were interspersed with the eugenic arguments about improving the human "stock" based on evolutionary theorising, and the rigid duality of chastity before marriage or "purity" after, condemning those who had sex outside these rigid guidelines to ruination which led ultimately to prostitution. This period laid the basis for many of the sex and vice codes still in operation today in Western societies. It wasn't until the early 20th century that another strand of feminism, the "new morality" feminists, rejected the hypocrisy of indissoluble marriage and the "old morality" dualism of purity or prostitute. Instead, they argued for women's sexual pleasure and agency but confined these to the expression of "love", which they defined as mutual orgasm through penetration. This "love" took place in free unions — monogamous relations that could be freely entered and freely left. They argued too for the separation of sex from reproduction, advocating the use of artificial mechanical methods of birth control. But they were just as prescriptive of sexual choices outside this limited framework as the social purity feminists had been.

Although the experience of World War 11 broke down many of the traditional barriers for women — in jobs, education, etc. — the restrictions on women's sexuality persisted into the '60s when the second wave of the feminist movement emerged.

Modern feminism broke out in a similar time frame with the breakdown of the sexual rigidity of marriage — the "sexual revolution" of the '60s. The second feminist wave coincided with major advances in birth control technology. Abortion techniques, antibiotic drugs and the development of the contraceptive pill allowed on a mass scale for the first time sexuality to be separated out from the confines of procreative activity within marriage.

But because capitalism drew more men than women out of the home and into the paid labour force, the potential for men to lead lives independent of the heterosexual family unit has been greater. And given that the public space in cities is "male space", it isn't surprising that gay male life has been significantly more public than lesbian life.

The character of gay & lesbian oppression

The possibility for an autonomous personal life emerged as capitalism itself developed. Affection, personal relations and sexuality choice allowed the development of an identity and way of life based on sexual preference. As this process began to coalesce, the medical profession with rudimentary forms of scientific application began to lay the basis for the psychological/psychiatric study of individual personality types. They "discovered" the homosexual, as a new exotic deviant personality. This reconceptualised homosexuality as a condition that inheres in a personality rather than as a criminal,

20 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

sinful act. In reality, this was less a sign of scientific progress than an ideological response to a changing social reality to devalue the way some women and men began to restructure their lifestyles.

During the first half of the 20th century the institutions and networks that constituted the subculture of gay men and lesbians slowly grew, stabilised and differentiated. This process occurred in an oppressive context. Those who engaged in such activity were severely punished if they were caught. Homosexual expression was devalued in any form.

Just as under feudalism sexual non-conformity was seen as a threat to the established social order and the religious ideas that justified that order, under capitalism sexual non-conformity has been seen as a threat to the stability of “family life” and the continued oppression of women. Independent women, particularly lesbians, and gay men became scapegoats. The repression against gay men and lesbians ranged from ignoring their existence to physical extermination in concentration camps. Lesbians and gay men were subjected to servitude in forced labour camps, denial of their civil rights, assassination by death squads, censorship, imprisonment, castration, clitoridectomy, forced internment in psychiatric institutions, the barring of parents from raising their children, state hangings, dismissals from jobs and the military, shock therapy, family rejection, forced registration with the state, government-sanctioned torture, prison rape, threats of eternal damnation from religious leaders, evictions from houses of worship, and random street violence.

But while there have been many different manifestations of oppression of lesbians and gay men, homosexuality has not been a basis of systematic super-exploitation within the work force. Lesbians and gay men do not play a special role in the system of capitalist exploitation of wage labour. While employers in a variety of jobs and professions discriminate against open lesbians and gay men, homosexuals as a group are not subject to the last-hired-first-fired, high-unemployment-low-pay pattern of work imposed on women, young people and racially oppressed sections of the work force. The oppression of homosexuality is not a comparable source of direct profits. Lesbians and gay men are persecuted not for direct economic gain but as part of the defence of the repressive sexual morality which justifies the oppression of women through the family.

Thus the forms of oppression of lesbians and gay men are more constant in the sense that they do not vary directly as a result of capitalist economic interests. Changes in general attitude toward lesbians and gay men are due to political factors and have been associated with the rise of working-class radicalism and the efforts of gay men and lesbians themselves. Most particularly the beginnings of the lesbian and gay

movements have been linked to the rise of the women's liberation movement: from the 1890s to the 1930s to the first wave of feminism, and since the 1-960s to the second wave of feminism.

The struggle of gay men and lesbians is against discrimination and penalisation on the basis of their sexual orientation. It has been and is a struggle for their democratic rights. Thus, it is not surprising that the struggle for homosexual rights has made its greatest progress at times when other oppressed groups have also been in motion, and has declined in periods of reaction and ebb in the mass movement.

But lesbians are not just discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation; they are also oppressed as women. Under capitalism the oppression of lesbians takes on special features related to women's economic position. The family is an economic unit. This means that women who choose to live together are forced into an economic as well as a personal relationship. With the lower wage rates for women, the choice of a lesbian lifestyle is almost automatically also the choice of a lower standard of living. This is reinforced by such things as discriminatory credit practices, which make it difficult or sometimes impossible for women lacking a male guarantor to obtain housing loans, for example. For a lesbian who has children, the difficulties are further multiplied on the economic, social and legal levels. The hardships of raising children in a situation where both partners in a relationship must work are compounded by bigotry, the myth that every child "needs" a male guardian for proper psychological development, and even the threat that the state may remove children from the mother's custody.

Because their oppression as lesbians interacts with their oppression as women, the psychological impact of their oppression has an added dimension which is not felt by gay men. For males in modern capitalist society, the ruling ideology decrees that social standing and hence one's sense of personal identity are achieved primarily through one's work. For women, by contrast, status and personal fulfillment are supposed to come first of all through a relationship with a man and the raising of his children. Many lesbians radicalised in opposition to their oppression as women first and felt the discrimination they suffered because of their sexual orientation was only one element of the material restrictions women face in trying to determine the course of their lives. Thus many lesbians were in the forefront of the feminist movement from the very beginning. They have been part of every political current within the women's liberation movement, from lesbian separatists to revolutionary Marxists, and they have helped to make the entire movement more conscious of the specific ways in which lesbians are oppressed.

And because of the lesbian movement's insistence on the right of women to live

22 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

independently of men, they often become the special target of reactionary attacks. From hate propaganda to violent physical assaults, the attacks on lesbians and on the lesbian movement are really aimed against the feminist movement as a whole.

In a similar way the fight against discrimination against gay men and lesbians can intersect with other struggles against the exploitation of waged labour or against discrimination based on race, ethnicity or age. So the struggle for the democratic rights of lesbians and gay men can intersect with the struggles of other oppressed groups against capitalism to create a society free of the distortions, constraints and limitations of class society. ■

Development of the Struggle for Lesbian & Gay Rights

It is not widely realised, but the gay and lesbian movements did not begin with the New York Stonewall riots of 1969, but a century earlier. The movement first arose as a response to a proposed new penal code in Prussia which included a clause outlawing male homosexual activity. This code was adopted by the Reichstag in 1871 for the newly unified German state.

The early movement

In 1869, a Hungarian doctor named Benkert wrote an open letter to the Prussian legislators, calling on them to reject the anti-homosexual Paragraph 175. Benkert correctly pointed out the connection between social reform generally and legal equality for homosexuals. The Napoleonic Code, for example, had placed homosexuality and heterosexuality on the same legal basis, and subsequently three German states had made homosexual acts legal.

The most influential figure of the movement in this period was Karl Ulrichs, who in 1864 wrote characterising homosexuals as a third sex which he named Uranians. This term, widely used for decades both on the continent and in England, embodied the notion that homosexuals were either a woman's mind in a man's body, or vice versa for women. Mistaken though this notion was, both gays and straight supporters saw in it justification for their argument against persecuting people whose sexual orientation could be considered as inborn, "natural", and as unchangeable as that of the heterosexual male and female.

The first and most influential homosexual rights organisation was the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, founded in Germany in 1897. The committee's goals were the repeal of Paragraph 175, the enlightening of the public about the nature of homosexuality, and the involvement of homosexuals in the struggle for their rights. In line with these goals, it published a scientific yearbook on homosexuality as well as a

24 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

wide variety of propaganda material. One of the central focuses of its political activity was a petition for the repeal of Paragraph 175 which was signed by prominent people not only in Germany but throughout Europe. The committee lasted for 35 years until it was suppressed by the Nazis in 1933.

Although Paragraph 1,75 outlawed only male homosexuality, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee consciously sought to involve lesbians in its activities. Lesbians generally concentrated their efforts in the women's liberation movement. In a speech to a Scientific Humanitarian Committee meeting in 1904, lesbian feminist Anna Ruhling commented:

When we consider all the gains that homosexual women have for decades achieved for the women's movement, it can only be regarded as astounding that the big and influential organisations of this movement have up to now not raised one finger to secure for their not insignificant number of Uranian members their just rights as far as the state and society are concerned, that they have done nothing — and I mean not a thing — to protect so many of their best- known and most devoted pioneers from ridicule and scorn as they enlightened the broader public about the true nature of Uranianism.

In 1910, a new draft penal code proposed to extend the outlawing of male homosexuality to include lesbians. This threat produced an increased co- operation between the homosexual and women's movements. This particular penal code was not adopted, and a new draft introduced in 1919 no longer referred to lesbians, although it still provided five years' imprisonment for homosexual acts between males.

In the reactionary atmosphere of the First World War, the homosexual rights movement could make little headway. The committee itself was politically independent and its primary task during the war was to keep the homosexual rights struggle alive so that it could blossom again once the hostilities had ceased and the struggle for the rights of homosexuals could be raised anew.

The movement welcomed the German revolution of November 1918 as providing the conditions in which full homosexual equality could be won. But Social Democratic betrayal and the mistakes of the young Communist Party resulted in the revolutionary opportunities of 1918-23 being lost, and restabilised German capitalism soon demonstrated that bourgeois society is incapable of providing a "life of human dignity" for anyone, let alone for homosexuals. While the Scientific Humanitarian Committee expanded its work and influence (it had 25 branches throughout Germany in 1922) and re- established the international contacts that had been broken off by the war, the homosexual rights movement was one of the first targets of the fascist reaction. As early as October 1920, a meeting in Munich was physically attacked, and in 1921

Magnus Hirschfeld, the committee's founder, had his skull fractured by anti-Semites. In February 1923, Nazi youth opened fire on a lecture which Hirschfeld was addressing in Vienna, wounding a large number of the audience.

One of the factors contributing to the decline of the movement was the attempt by the Social Democrats and the Stalinised Communist Party to gay-bait the Nazis. The writer Kurt Tucholsky attacked the left for this self-defeating approach in the following terms:

For some time, the radical left-wing press has been running accusations, jokes, and cutting remarks about Captain Rohm, a functionary of the Hitler movement. Rohm is, as is known, homosexual... I consider these attacks against this man to be rather indecent. Apparently, any means, fair or foul, can be used against Hitler and his people. Yet anyone who so mercilessly deals with others in this fashion is entitled to no consideration whatsoever — Let him have it! ... Above all, one should not go searching out one's adversaries in their beds.

The only thing that might be permissible is the following: To point to those remarks by the Nazis in which they deal with the "eastern vices" of the post-war period as if homosexuality, lesbian love, and such things had been invented by the Russians and then infiltrated into the noble, unspoiled, pure German people. If a Nazi says this kind of thing, then — and only then — is it permissible to say: You have homosexuals in your own movement who admit their proclivities, who are indeed proud of them — so shut up!

Homosexuality & the socialist movement

In attempting to gay-bait the Nazis, the Social Democrats and Stalinists turned their backs on a long tradition of socialist support for the rights of lesbians and gay men.

When Oscar Wilde was put on trial in a witch-hunt atmosphere in 1895, virtually no one in England came to his defence. But Wilde was defended in Germany by *Die Neue Zeit*, published by the Social Democratic Party which was the largest socialist party in Europe. In a two-part article, Eduard Bernstein attacked the hypocrisy of bourgeois sexual morality and argued that it was the responsibility of the socialist movement to provide rational and scientific leadership on sexual questions.

Bernstein emphasised the historical view that "moral attitudes are historical phenomena", and pointed out that "previously the Romans, the Greeks, the Egyptians and various Asiatic peoples cultivated homosexual gratification... we must be satisfied with the statement that same-sex intercourse is so old and so widespread that there is no stage of human culture we could say with certainty was free from this phenomenon".

From this historical standpoint, Bernstein also attacked the psychiatric theories

26 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

which treated homosexuality as an illness:

... it is a certainty that [homosexuality] is by no means always a sign of a depraved disposition, decrepitude, bestial pleasure-seeking and the like. Anyone who comes out with such epithets takes the standpoint of the most reactionary penal laws.

The Scientific Humanitarian Committee also won early support from prominent Social Democrats, among them August Bebel, who signed the committee's petition and urged other Reichstag deputies to do the same. In a January 13, 1898 speech to the Reichstag, Bebel ridiculed the government's law- and-order approach to homosexuals:

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 committed within the confines of Berlin alone.

In May 1905, the Reichstag divided on party lines in a debate on homosexual rights, with the Social Democrats supporting the petition and the capitalist parties opposing it.

In a 1907 speech, Bebel recalled how shocked some Reichstag members had been by his estimate in 1898 of the large number of homosexuals. If that estimate had been wrong, Bebel now said, it was because it underestimated rather than exaggerated, the number of gays. He concluded:

... gentlemen, you have no idea how many respectable, honourable, and brave men, even in high and the highest positions, are driven to suicide each year after year, one from shame, another from fear of the blackmailer.

The contrasting attitudes of the working-class and bourgeois parties was perhaps encapsulated by an advertisement that appeared in several newspapers shortly before the 1912 German elections:

“REICHSTAG ELECTIONS! 3rd sex! Consider this! In the Reichstag on May 31, 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 Bolshevik Revolution

The direction that the German socialists had set was followed by the Russian Bolsheviks after they took power in 1917. Within two months of taking power, the Bolsheviks began the process of abolishing all laws against homosexual acts. Homosexuality was completely decriminalised in the new Soviet criminal code in 1922, and treated no differently than heterosexuality in the clauses dealing with minors or assault.

These reforms were an integral part of the Bolsheviks' social legislation designed

to wipe out the medieval and even earlier oppressions perpetuated by capitalism for its own purposes. “It was necessary, it was said”, Wilhelm Reich wrote, “to take down the walls which separated the homosexuals from the rest of society.”

In a 1923 pamphlet, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia*, Dr Grigory Batkis, director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene, outlined the thinking behind the Soviet government’s social legislation:

The social legislation of the Russian communist revolution does not intend to be a product of pure theoretical knowledge, but rather represents the outcome of experience. After the successful revolution, after the triumph of practice over theory, people first strove for new, firm regulations along economic lines. Along with this were created models governing family life and forms of sexual relations responding to the needs and natural demands of the people...

In the first period of the war, women won economic independence both in the factory and in the country — but the October Revolution first cut the Gordian knot, and instead of mere reform, it completely revolutionised the laws. The revolution let nothing remain of the old despotic and infinitely unscientific laws; it did not tread the path of reformist bourgeois legislation which, with juristic subtlety, still hangs on to the concept of property in the sexual sphere, and ultimately demands that the double standard hold sway over sexual life...

The relationship of Soviet law to the sexual sphere is based on the principle that the demands of the vast majority of the people correspond to and are in harmony with the findings of contemporary science...

It declares the absolute non-interference of the state and society into sexual matters, so long as nobody is injured, and no one’s interests are encroached upon.

About homosexuality, specifically, Batkis wrote:

Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offences against public morality — Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called “natural” intercourse. All forms of sexual intercourse are private matters. Only when there is use of force or duress, as in general when there’s an injury or encroachment upon the rights of another person, is there a question of criminal prosecution.

Literary works with lesbian and gay themes were published throughout the 1920s, including works with powerful and explicit homoeroticism that would have been banned in any other country. For example, the poet Mikhail Kuzmin, the first important Russian writer to make homosexual love a central theme of his work, published *Zanaveshannye Kartinki*, a collection of erotic verse illustrated with homoerotic drawings, in 1920. He continued publishing until 1929, well after the Stalinist bureaucracy

had consolidated its hold on political power.

As late as 1930, the work of Magnus Hirschfeld provided a large part of the basis for the entry on homosexuality in the first edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia. This edition said that “in the advanced capitalist countries, the struggle for the abolition of these hypocritical [anti-homosexual] laws is at present far from over. In Germany, for example, Magnus Hirschfeld is leading an especially fierce and not unsuccessful struggle to abolish the law against homosexuality. Soviet law does not recognise ‘crime’ against morality... “. Soviet delegations attended the first four congresses of the World League for Sexual Reform, in which the German Scientific Humanitarian Committee also played an important role, in 1921, 1928, 1929 and 1930. At its height the League claimed over 130,000 affiliated members.

The new Soviet Republic faced enormous social and economic problems. Programs for sexual equality and women’s liberation were implemented to the extent possible given the economic and social backwardness of the Soviet Union and the poverty, social dislocation and devastation caused by almost a decade of war and civil war. There was a conscious attempt to begin combating the reactionary feudal social norms and religious attitudes in a predominantly peasant country. Those who made their living by waged labour — the working class — were the minority based in a few large cities, and women were a relatively small percentage within this minority.

Despite this, on coming to power, the Soviet government passed a series of laws giving women legal equality with men for the first time. Marriage and divorce became simple processes of civil registration at the request of either partner. The concept of illegitimacy was abolished and access to abortion was made free and legal. The repressive and restrictive functions of the family were to be stripped away so that this institution which was the basis of oppression of women would “wither away” over time and interpersonal relations would take place in a free consensual framework. In this situation free sexual relations formed the basis for the new interpersonal relations and sexuality became a private matter. There were different views of the idea of free union or free love and no one view dominated, but the social and legal barriers to sexual expression were reduced and removed. As would be expected under these conditions backward attitudes to sexuality and to women existed not only in the society at large, but were reflected within the ruling Bolshevik Party at all levels.

And while sexuality shifted into the realm of individual choice, the relationship between sexuality and procreation remained an issue for society. In line with the prevailing views across Europe and the US, the decision to bear a child was not personal but social, and society’s reproductive needs took primacy over an individual woman’s desires. Motherhood was viewed as a social responsibility. The relation between

society and the mother were reciprocal in terms of her duty in childbirth and the state's provision of welfare and support. In this framework, while the Bolsheviks legalised abortion in the early 1920s, they did so for health reasons, given the huge numbers of backyard abortions with the consequent high rates of death and injury to women. But this wasn't seen as part of women's reproductive rights.

The Stalinist betrayal

Establishing and maintaining working-class political power in a backward and predominantly peasant-based economy through the vicissitudes of a civil war, foreign intervention and economic blockade exacted a huge toll on the most conscious activists and revolutionary fighters in Soviet Russia. The decimation of this layer and the crushing of the postwar revolutionary upsurges in Western Europe in countries like Germany where industrialisation was much more developed and the working class much larger and stronger, weakened and demoralised the Soviet working class, and laid the basis for usurpation of political power in the first workers' state by a bureaucratic caste, headed by Stalin, in the 1920s.

A privileged social layer that appropriated for itself many of the benefits of the new economic order grew rapidly in the fertile soil of Russia's poverty and social backwardness. To protect and extend its consumption privileges, the bureaucracy reversed the policies of the Bolsheviks in virtually every sphere, from government based on soviet democracy, to control by the workers over social and economic planning, to the right of oppressed nationalities to self-determination, to a revolutionary internationalist foreign policy. Restoring the reactionary framework of the family and bourgeois sexual morality was basic to this process of reversal.

By 1940 the political counter-revolution carried out by the Stalinist bureaucracy had physically annihilated almost the entire surviving Bolshevik leadership and established a totalitarian regime that kept hundreds of thousands in prison camps, and ruthlessly crushed every murmur of opposition.

As the exile Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky argued, the family cannot be abolished, it has to be replaced. Only a socialist society, which has developed the productive forces to the point where it is possible to perform socially the functions now handled by the family, will be able to do away with the family. The Soviet Union was materially unable to replace the family.

But this fact in no way justifies the counter-revolution in sexual and family matters carried out by the Stalinists. A revolutionary leadership would have explained frankly that Soviet society lacked the material wealth to replace the family immediately, but that this remained the ultimate goal. Although it remained necessary for functions like

30 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

the caring for the young, washing and cooking to remain within individual households, this would be regarded as a necessary evil, not a virtue, and to the extent possible these functions would be performed socially through such things as childcare centres at factories. Until it became possible to perform all such functions socially, a revolutionary leadership would have consciously sought to undermine the mythology of the family and the sexist prejudices associated with it, encouraging an equal division of labour within the family, etc.

The Stalinist bureaucracy, however, had both economic and political reasons for restoring the family system — and with it the oppression of homosexuality. Rapid industrialisation in the early 1930s under the first and second five-year plan brought women into the work force in massive numbers but reinforced family dependence by virtually halving all wages. Forced collectivisation in the countryside led to huge population shifts, social dislocation, destitution and urbanisation. While additional community eating places and child care centres were set up, these couldn't keep pace with demand. Neither could the social infrastructure. Increased poverty brought about a breakdown in social order, especially among the young. Instead of deciding to increase services and support by the state, the Stalinist bureaucracy pushed for increased law and order policies, fortified the repressive forces of the state and reverted to strengthening the family within that framework.

Already in 1928, the changing situation became evident at an International Congress of the World League for Sexual Reform, when the Soviet delegate referred to homosexuality as a potential “social peril” and abortion as an “evil”, even though homosexuality and abortion were both still legal in the Soviet Union. The following year the Soviet delegate to the congress did not mention homosexuality and he concluded his presentation, “Demand for Abortion in Soviet Russia”, with the words: “We are deeply convinced that the best foundation of society necessitates the consciousness of motherhood.”

An article in the 1929 Great Medical Encyclopedia, reprinted in abridged form in 1930 in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, while still calling for repeal of laws against homosexuality, asserted its “wrongness”. The fifth congress of the World League for Sexual Reform, originally meant to take place in Moscow in 1931 on the theme of “Marxism and the Question of Sex”, was cancelled by the Soviet government and had to be moved to Prague.

Foreign Stalinist parties took a little longer to follow Moscow's lead. In 1931, the German Communist Party agreed to the organisation of the German Association for Proletarian Sexual Politics, which was based on the ideas of Wilhelm Reich, then a party member. In the following year, however, the party repudiated Reich and ordered

his works be removed from its bookshops.

In January 1934 in several Soviet cities there were mass arrests of gay men who were sentenced to prison or exile in Siberia. In March all the Soviet republics were required to adopt a statute punishing homosexual acts with imprisonment. The Soviet press denounced homosexuality as the “degeneracy of the fascist bourgeoisie”.

As already noted, this anti-homosexual campaign was part of a general reactionary offensive by the bureaucracy. In 1936, legal abortion was abolished. A Pravda editorial discussed this move in the following reactionary terms:

The elite of our country, the best of the Soviet youth, are as a rule also excellent family men who dearly love their children. And vice versa: the man who does not take marriage seriously, and abandons his children to the whims of fate, is usually also a bad worker and a poor member of society.

Fatherhood and motherhood have long been virtues in this country...

At the end of 1935 and beginning of 1936 the French homosexual writer, Andre Gide, visited the Soviet Union and was profoundly disappointed by what he saw. Pierre Harbart, who accompanied Gide, wrote in his diary that he was:

... so sick of virtue that I could throw up. I learned that boys no longer kiss girls without first having gone before the mayor; that, homosexuals are mending their ways by reading Marx in concentration camps; that taxis must be lit up at night so as not to harbour sin; that the bedsheets of Red Army soldiers are inspected in order to shame those who masturbate; that children have no need for sex education because they never think about dirty things like that; that the fee for divorce is about to be raised, thereby putting it out of the reach of the poor; that it is unhealthy for people to enjoy themselves sexually without reproducing. This has all been proven by science, and everybody bows down in awe before its decrees.

Although some of Stalin's repressive laws (such as his ban on abortion) were repealed or softened after his death, the ban on homosexuality remained in effect and gay men and lesbians were persecuted through the rest of the Soviet Union's existence. Even in the 1970s leading cultural figures like filmmaker Sergei Paradzhanov were sentenced to five years imprisonment for “deviant behavior”. And while lesbians weren't penalised by law, those who came out publicly were forcibly detained in psychiatric hospitals. In the “glasnost” period after 1987 the beginnings of a public discussion was starting to be raised, questioning the “deviance” of homosexuality but as of 1990 the criminal law remained stipulating prison terms of five to eight years. The Stalinist bureaucracy's attitude towards the family and homosexuality flowed through to all the Communist parties worldwide, even to the German party which had been the pace setter on this issue for the whole Marxist movement. So as the new revolutions took place after

32 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

World War II and new socialist states in Eastern Europe were established under Stalinist leaderships, the prevailing Soviet view of sexuality, the family and women's liberation were taken as Marxist.

These positions were not mechanically reproduced in these countries where Stalinist regimes came to power. Important differences existed, reflecting historical, cultural, economic and social variations from one country to another, even one region to another. However, despite differences in degree on the question of women's liberation policies, on the issue of free sexuality there was much greater consistency of repression and the view of homosexuality as deviant.

While in the German Democratic Republic paragraph 175 of the Penal Code outlawing homosexuality was repealed in 1967, homosexuality still was regarded as an unfortunate affliction. In 1961 gay and lesbian relations were legalised in Czechoslovakia but homosexuality was still regarded as an abnormal sexual practice. Paragraph 199 of the Hungarian Penal Code still refers to "illicit sexual practices" despite anti-gay and anti-lesbian proscriptions being repealed in 1961. Homeros Lambda, the Hungarian association for homosexual rights, was the first lesbian and gay organisation to be legalised under a Stalinist regime in Eastern Europe. During the 1980s and '90s gay and lesbian activity increased in East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland with gay and lesbian bars and coffee shops and some open positive discussion of homosexuality in the mass media. Yet in the post-Stalinist period following 1989, the future for gay and lesbian rights is not necessarily set to improve. With the reunification of Germany, former East German gay men were disadvantaged. Whereas in the GDR, the age of consent was unified across the board at 14, today sexual activity is legal for heterosexuals and lesbians at 14, but for gay men from 18 only. In Poland under the influence of the Catholic church, sexual freedom and women's control over their fertility have deteriorated sharply with the outlawing of abortion and major forms of contraception as well as the prohibiting of sex education in secondary schools.

The impact of Stalinism on Third World revolutions

In the Third World, colonialism meant that many men and women were forced into prostitution by economic necessity. Exploitation and foreign domination set a framework that preserved elements of pre-capitalist relations, distorting social and economic development. This made it easier for the revolutionary movements to accept the Stalinist reaction on sexuality which defined homosexuality as a product of capitalist decadence. The Chinese revolution brought a regime to power in 1949 that has been unremittently anti-lesbian and anti-gay. While sexual "licence" in the pre-revolutionary imperialist enclave of Shanghai may have influenced the leadership's attitude, a

puritanism was linked to the regime, particularly in its drive for industrialisation. The Chinese Stalinist regime implicitly acknowledged that its repression of homosexuality was directed against pre-capitalist Chinese traditions rather than “Western corruption” when it condemned female “sisterhoods” in Guangzhou as “feudal remnants” despite a rich homosexual history in China. The Chinese government today classifies homosexuality as one of the “Western social diseases”.

In many Third World countries the colonial and imperialist impact imposed rigid heterosexuality on the variety of indigenous sexual practices. But at the same time they dramatically increased the role of prostitution. In every continent, certain Third World cities have become centres of both heterosexual and homosexual tourism. Pre-revolutionary Havana, for example, was a city largely devoted to tourism, catering to the “vices” of Americans with prostitutes for all sexual preferences.

The Cuban revolution’s leaders, faced with the US imperialist heritage of vice, crime, gambling, exploitation and prostitution adopted a conservative role with regard to sexuality. During the early 1960s this was reinforced through the total US blockade on Cuba which led to an enormous dependence of Cuba on the bureaucratised socialist states of Eastern Europe and the USSR for trade. This also raised the profile of the Stalinist Popular Socialist Party which helped to fuel anti-homosexual prejudice.

After a certain point in the ’60s the Cuba leadership’s attacks on homosexuality had its own ideological momentum. Even gays and lesbians who had fought for the revolution found themselves facing repression and isolation. The height of the regime’s persecution came when gays were rounded up into UMAP (Military Units to Aid Production) camps in 1965. Though these camps were closed in 1967, other anti-homosexual measures followed in the ’70s: gay men and lesbians were purged from teaching, from delegations abroad, from the foreign ministry, from the medical profession. Membership of the Communist Party was officially barred for lesbians and gay men. Since 1986 a conscious process of change has been undertaken with educational work on homosexuality to address social attitudes and prejudice concerning sexuality. There has been a social relaxation of these views such that lesbians and gays face no barriers in other areas of economic and social life, yet the question of open identification of sexual orientation is somewhat constrained. There is a saying among Cuban lesbians and gay men of “Se dice nada, se hace todo” (“Say nothing, do everything”) which expresses this constrained attitude, although there isn’t homosexual repression in Cuba today. Recently major figures such as Fidel Castro and Vilma Espin, head of the Cuban Women’s Federation, have publicly taken up the need to challenge prejudices that see homosexuality as degenerate or at best unfortunate.

The second wave of feminism and the sexual revolution in the advanced capitalist

34 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

world had its greatest impact in Nicaragua with the Sandinista revolution in 1979 which began to revive the traditions of the early Bolsheviks. Pre-revolutionary Nicaragua was typical of Latin American patterns of homosexuality in many ways. On the one hand, there were some traditions of local homosexuality within certain constraints, for example in the traditional annual parade of men in drag as part of the national folklore. On the other hand, US sex tourism had impacted on a small scale with gay prostitution. So, in the first few years, the FSLN government showed some hesitancy on the open identification by lesbians and gay FSLN militants and an avoidance of a public discussion of homosexuality.

This hesitancy shifted as the government increasingly began to adopt measures to increase women's equality and independence. The US-backed contra war against the FSLN government and the increasing importance of international solidarity all helped to contribute to greater confidence on questions of sexual freedom. This, in turn, generated more confidence with the emergence of a fledgling lesbian/gay movement. For example, in 1988 lesbians and gay men organised an AIDS collective with support from the ministry of health.

While this movement continued to grow in confidence despite the defeat of the Sandinista government in 1990, the new pro-US government of President Violetta Chamorro came to power promising that her government would return women to the home under the old patria potestad — the right of the husband to “control” his wife and family. In 1992 one of the most repressive anti-homosexual laws in Latin America was adopted by the Chamorro government, trying to roll back the sexual gains of the Sandinista government.

But the impact of the return of sexual liberation to the agenda of progressive movements is evidenced with the election of the Government of National Unity in South Africa under the leadership of the African National Congress. One of the pieces of legislation was the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

Rise of the modern movement in the West

Between them, Stalinism and fascism destroyed the gay and lesbian movements for a generation. Hundreds of thousands of gay men and lesbians were arrested, incarcerated and executed. Only in the last few decades have lesbian and gay historians begun to document this record of mass murder. To give just one bizarre example, the Nazi persecution of homosexuality was colluded with by the Allied powers after the war. They decided to continue the imprisonment of the homosexuals they found in the concentration camps, and hence silence their testimony, because the Allies considered their incarceration by the Nazis justifiable. This action was symbolic of the period of

hostility and persecution that opened up in the West, particularly in the USA, from the immediate post-World War II period up until the 1960s. Only small, cautious groups survived in a few countries politically campaigning for gay and lesbian rights. But this period was also marked by a spreading of social and cultural activities and locations to cater to the growing expression of homoerotic preferences.

The most extreme persecution of lesbians and gay men in the post-World War II period took place in the USA. By the beginning of the 1950s a campaign of harassment, surveillance, entrapment and violation of civil liberties was launched by the government. Along with the demonology of left-wing and communist activists, the moral dangers of “sexual perversion” was the second major thrust of this intense period of political crackdown usually associated with the name of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

To understand the crackdown on homosexuality in the 1950s one must look at what preceded it economically, socially and politically. Taken together the Great Depression and World War II seriously disrupted family life, traditional gender relations and patterns of sexual relations. The prolonged economic dislocations of the 1930s led to a significant drop in both marriage and birth rates. The inability of young adults to find stable employment and achieve financial independence from parents led to postponement of marriage. Discrimination against married women in the work force encouraged young single women to remain unwed.

Wartime brought the return of prosperity and full employment, and an early rush into marriage and childbearing. But the disruptions of war were much more significant. Social dislocation, greater family stress led to more marriage breakdown. Married women entered the work force in unprecedented numbers across industry, and not only in the low-paid jobs traditionally available to them but also in traditionally male jobs with much better rates of pay.

The war as well opened up the possibility for greater sexual freedom which impacted on the social expression of homosexuality. The war separated millions of young men and women from their families, from the rural small towns and cities and thus away from the norms of family and heterosexual marriage. For those who were already gay or lesbian the war provided the opportunity to meet people like themselves, and led to a whole subculture developing in the bigger cities across the USA.

From the 1920s to the 1950s the place of sexuality was changing in American life. It was influenced by the spread of psychological theories of sexuality like Freud, and advice highlighting the importance of erotic pleasure in successful marriage. Young people began to enjoy a greater autonomy in sexual matters through the availability of cars and innovations in mass culture like the cinema, which allowed them to date without the chaperonage of adults. More widely available contraceptives helped to

36 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

sustain the shift to a sexuality that was non- procreative and increasingly not limited to marriage.

The 1948 publication of the Kinsey study of male sexual behaviour demonstrated clearly the shift that had taken place. Most men were found to have been sexually active by age 15. Premarital and extramarital sex was typical rather than exceptional. Virtually all men had violated the law at least once in pursuit of orgasm. Over one third of his sample had had at least one adult homosexual experience, homoerotic activity predominated for at least a three- year period in one out of eight cases, and 4% of US men were exclusively homosexual.

Reaction against this moral climate combined with the political conservatism against the left and communist movement to set the framework for the McCarthy period. Labour militancy declined as Communists and other leftists were expelled from union positions. The expression of dissent in the fields of education and cultural activity was severely curtailed as blacklisting became the norm. Fears of subversion, security and treason dominated the political agenda. Women were driven out of many areas of paid work and forced back into the home both by an intense ideological campaign extolling the virtues of motherhood and femininity and by the bosses' right to sack women without fear of union reaction or anti-discrimination legislation. A scaremongering campaign concerning the threat to women and children from the danger of sexual psychopaths led to a plethora of law and order responses.

It is in this context that the persecution of lesbians and gay men as “sexual perverts”, as a “threat to children and the security of the nation”, took place. An executive order banned homosexuals from all federal jobs which led to large- scale dismissals. The military intensified its purges of gay men and lesbians. The Post Office tampered with their mail, the FBI initiated widespread surveillance of homosexual meeting places and activities, and the police forces stepped up their harassment. Security checks, methods of entrapment, rigorous standards in licensing many professions, all aided by unfettered circulation of unsubstantiated records of surveillance by the FBI.

An ideological barrage of psycho- social theories of sexual and social deviance and abnormality justified the campaign of harassment and suppression, legitimising practices of brutal psychiatric treatment to “cure” homosexuals of their deviance and to justify their incarceration in institutions. Aversion therapy, chemical castration and even brain surgery were used to eradicate homosexual behaviour. And as state and medical violence was legitimated, so was public and personal violence against gay men and lesbians. This campaign against homosexuality was part of the effort to reconstruct patterns of sexuality, gender relations and personal life in a society shaken by recession and war. The labeling of sexual deviants helped to define the norm of the nuclear

family and reinforced traditional male and female roles. There was a congruence between the suppression of political dissent and the suppression of sexual difference.

In this context gay and lesbian groups like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis formed to raise the issue of their rights. The Mattachine Society, formed in 1951 in Los Angeles, reflected the double oppression of secrecy for being homosexual and secrecy for being members of the Communist Party which banned homosexuals from membership. The society's membership grew quickly as it initially led public campaigns on issues of civil liberties and police entrapment of gay men. Their initial success was undercut by the growing pressure of McCarthyism which led to internal disputes about whether political action or social links were to be the basis of organisation. By 1954 the majority rejected political action but the basis had been laid for future struggles.

McCarthyism marshalled the resources of the state and the media against the more extensive social and cultural meeting places and activities, but in the longer term the political and moral onslaught helped weld the lesbian and gay men's subcultures together. It helped shape a collective consciousness of oppression and discrimination, which spread slowly until the political radicalisation of the 1960s impacted. By the end of the '60s a resurgent feminism and a militant gay and lesbian movement opened up a new era of sexual politics. The new wave of struggles by lesbians and gay men was part of the more generalised radicalisation, particularly of young people, which rejected the stultifying conformism, repressive sexual morality and rabid anti-communism of the McCarthyite period.

Impact of the movements

The June 1969 Stonewall riot announced the birth of the modern gay and lesbian movements. These movements were and are distinct from the gay and lesbian social lifestyle-based "communities". The movements are bound together not only by a shared oppression but by a shared commitment to do something to combat it.

The political tasks of these movements were to drive back the erosions of civil liberties and take up the fight for equality and human rights for lesbians and gay men. A major early stage of this process was consciousness raising to combat the negative labels of deviancy and unnaturalness within the gay and lesbian communities as well as in the broader social context. Accompanying this was the need to build political confidence that was often termed "coming out" — overcoming the fear of social and material reprisals if one's sexual preference became known.

As in the USA, during Cold War repression of the 1950s in Australia the capitalist state and media targeted gay men as well as political dissent. For example, in 1955

amendments to the NSW Crimes Act made acts of indecency with a male and procuring and soliciting a male into criminal offences. Police harassment and entrapment of gay men stepped up. There were raids on gay bars and private parties as well as a purge at Puckapunyal army camp. In 1958 the NSW government set up a special committee to examine the causes and treatment of homosexuality, while the police commissioner, C. J. Delaney, publicly warned that homosexuality was Australia's "greatest menace".

During the 1950s and '60s the popular press continued to sensationalise homosexual issues but during the 1960s a more enlightened discussion began to emerge. By May 1967 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of NSW called for the decriminalisation of male homosexual acts between consenting adults, indicating that the hostile climate was beginning to wane. So the Stonewall riot fed into an existing political dynamic.

In late July 1969 the ACT Law Reform Society was established. This was a civil liberties group which aimed to amend the statute regulating male homosexual behaviour. Gay men and lesbians began to organise from that time onwards.

In Melbourne the Daughters of Bilitis/Australasian Lesbian Movement formed and in September 1970 the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP) began in Sydney. Within a few years CAMP became a national organisation and published Camp Inc, the first political publication for homosexuals. Homosexual men at this time identified themselves as "camp" in Australia, but the American term "gay" was adopted soon after as a symbol of affirmation and pride.

Gay Liberation groups associated with the "new left" and the youth counterculture sprang up in many cities after 1971. These affirmed homosexuality as part of the normal continuum of human sexual expression and took on the reactionary views of the state and police as well as those of the medical and psychiatric professions.

The lesbian movement developed out of struggles within the women's liberation and gay movements over the issue of lesbian liberation not just acceptance. A major struggle took place early within the women's movement about its failure to take up and champion the rights of lesbians as part of the overall struggle for women's liberation. This criticism surfaced initially at the third national women's liberation conference in Canberra in January 1973 concerning structures and attitudes which discriminated against lesbians within the movement.

During this period lesbian political activists moved uneasily between the women's movement and the gay liberation movement, not really organised systematically as lesbians. In August 1975 the first national gay conference was held in Melbourne and the issues of sexism in general and sexism of gay men were aired. By the end of 1975 lesbian separatist groups were meeting in Melbourne. At that time there were no

separate lesbian publications but finally gay liberation publications began to cover lesbian issues. A lesbian conference was held in Melbourne in February 1976 and in March a lesbian newsletter appeared. Lesbian services, for example a lesbian mothers' group, began to spring up as well as separate consciousness raising and political groups. This coincided with major debates in the feminist movement concerning separatism and sexuality, and about the nature of women's oppression and how to combat it — particularly between the socialist and radical feminists.

While sections of the left had been active in founding and leading both the women's movement and the homosexual movement, the first socialism and homosexuality conference was not held until July 1977 in Sydney.

After the fourth national homosexual conference in 1978 the Melbourne Lesbian Action Group was formed. The group attracted many women, met weekly, published a newsletter and initiated an active lesbian radio group broadcasting on 3CR.

As movements of liberalisation of sexual morality, the gay and lesbian rights movements and the feminist movement had to battle anti-pornography and censorship laws just to get their views heard.

Gay and lesbian publications in particular were subject to obscenity prosecution like English morals campaigner, Mary Whitehouse's successful prosecution of Gay News or police raids on the newspaper Body Politic in Canada.

The first major unified homosexual rights campaign took place around the 1977 tour of Mary Whitehouse organised by the Festival of Light (FOL). This campaign was successful in exposing FOL's reactionary agenda and the tour was a flop, both politically and financially.

But in 1978 NSW police stepped up arrest and harassment of lesbians and gay men at peaceful marches on June 24 and August 26. A broad defence campaign of lesbians, gay men, left wing parties and civil rights groups was successful in getting the charges dropped.

The anti-FOL campaign continued as the Campaign Against Repression (CAR) into 1979 up to the fifth national homosexual conference in Sydney when the decision was made to hold separate conferences for gay men and lesbians in future. CAR focused on the International Year of the Child which the right wing were using to try to raise their reactionary agenda.

Gay men and lesbians have taken up the fight against laws barring job access, and for privacy of information and freedom from government surveillance. Lesbians and gay men have struggled against discrimination, victimisation and sackings from public service jobs, the military, and particularly education where the right wing forces like FOL or the Right to Life (RTL), have organised against gay and lesbian teachers and

40 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

against any progressive content on sexuality and human behaviour in the curriculum. A collective from the Gay Teachers and Students Association published a pamphlet *Young, Gay and Proud in Victoria* in August 1978 and CAR actively supported its distribution to schools and bookshops, successfully countering a campaign by the right to have it banned in schools. In 1979 gay students had their first meeting as *Young Gays*.

In NSW right wing forces blocked the first anti-discrimination legislation in Australia from including a clause relating to homosexuality. After years of struggle in the 1980s this provision was finally included. And it's only since 1993 that the discriminatory bar to the military has been questioned.

The right wing has been most successful in blocking the development of educational curricula on sexuality and any broad program to change sexist and racist attitudes in education. The right has attempted to exclude open gay men and lesbians as teachers. This battle has raged throughout the 1970s and '80s, particularly in Queensland under Coalition or National Party governments. Greg Weir was refused a teaching position in Queensland even though he had fulfilled the conditions of his teaching bond. He was later refused work in NSW and South Australia. After the Weir case, the Queensland minister of education gave instructions to education authorities to fail students who were not going to be employed because of their sexual preference.

Decriminalisation of homosexuality and uniform age of consent laws have been basic demands as have the removal of the catch-all laws like the Summary Offences Act, used by police to target gay men in particular. The decriminalisation campaign was given impetus in the controversy surrounding the death of George Duncan in Adelaide in 1972.

South Australia became the first state to decriminalise male homosexual acts in 1972, followed by the federal parliament resolution in October 1973 that homosexual acts between consenting adults in private should not be subject to criminal law. Since then most states have followed this lead with Tasmania being the only state where homosexual acts are still a criminal offense.

In 1994 an attempt was made to override the Tasmanian legislation through a federal privacy law for sexual relations between consenting adults which has yet to be tested in the courts. This move by the federal Labor government was impelled by the historic judgment of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights that adult sexual preference is a basic human right and by an active campaign led by lesbian and gay rights groups in Tasmania.

Visibility and openness in all sectors across society has been a major thrust of the movements. Just as the women's movement impacted on the left in general, so too

has the homosexual rights movement, overturning the influence of Stalinism. Discrimination on the basis of sexual preference were taken up in the trade union movement, in the professions, in cultural activities, and in the capitalist parties. Within the ALP there has been an openly gay parliamentarian in NSW. But while today there is a more general acceptance that sexuality is a private matter between consenting adults — keeping politics out of the bedroom — within all the capitalist parties, there is traditional conservative condemnation and opposition to sexual freedom as well.

Some churches, like the Uniting Church, have ceased their condemnation of homosexuality as a sin, taking on a broader view of human sexuality. Others have loosened their attitude and public condemnation whilst still maintaining homosexual acts as a sin between God and the individual. But many fundamentalist churches and the latest edicts of the Catholic church have bitterly opposed any loosening of the tie between sexuality and reproduction. As part of their attempts to force women back into their “natural” role in the family under the paternal care of father and husband, there has been an overall attack on sexual freedom which particularly highlights homosexuality.

Visibility has had some marked successes. The gay and lesbian Mardi Gras starting in 1978 in the Kings Cross nightspot area, has become institutionalised as an international tourist event, screened for the first time on television in 1994.

The success of Mardi Gras mirrors the growth of a variety of social events and meeting places for gay men and lesbians, even to the degree that communities have developed in certain areas like Oxford Street and Newtown in Sydney. At the same time it is also symbolic of how capitalist rulers and aspiring capitalists within the gay and lesbian “community” have sought to profit from the public lesbian and gay events by commercialising and depoliticising them.

Part of the process of establishing centres of lesbian and gay social life has been the struggle against violence and harassment, both by the police and by the wider community as gay men and lesbians have become more visible. Police brutality and harassment declined as the struggle to decriminalise homosexual acts has been won.

There remain many areas where lesbians and gay men continue to suffer discrimination and exclusion. Homosexual relations do not receive the legal, social or economic recognition as heterosexual relationships. While some steps to “degender” some leave and welfare provisions such as carers’ leave are being advanced, rights to raise children or to have access to fertility programs are part of differential treatment. There continues to be discrimination in housing, immigration, and generally in education concerning human sexuality.

Perhaps the most successful campaign waged in Australia by gay men and lesbians

42 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

during the 1980s, which set a precedent around the world, was the campaign and education program around the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This epidemic has decimated and disproportionately killed some of the most politically experienced gay activists during the past 12 years, weakening the political movement for gay and lesbian rights. The campaign emphasised that HIV/AIDS is a disease that threatens everyone, rather than allowing it to be sidelined as a disease limited to gay men as has happened in other Western countries.

Public education campaigns on safe sex have accompanied support services to help those struck down by the virus. There have been campaigns to make treatments and drugs available through the public health system rather than benefiting only those who could afford to buy them. The whole campaign aimed to involve the broadest numbers of people. Many of the central activists were gay men and lesbians but the thrust of the campaign was to broaden out into the widest possible social involvement, to politically orient the campaign as a public health campaign for the society as a whole.

The movements today

Despite the success of the HIV/AIDS campaign, there has been a fragmentation and weakening of the gay and lesbian movements. This took place through the impact of separatism in the women's and gay liberation movements, and the coming together of the social milieu of lesbian and gay bars and subculture which have traditionally been secretive and self-absorbed — quite distinct from the political liberation movements that arose in the late 1960s and early '70s. This organisational fragmentation was part of the ideological confusion and demobilisation that began with the capitalist economic downturn from 1975 onwards and continued, stepping up sharply in the 1980s and '90s.

In Australia and around the world, real steps forward have been taken against sexual repression through the feminist and homosexual rights movements over the past 25 years. But these gains are under constant attack as has been seen in Britain and the United States under the conservative neoliberal policies and new moralism of the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. The international capitalist economic system has been subject to increasing economic instability and crisis since the mid-1970s. Governments, whether of conservative or social-democratic hue, have responded with similar packages of neo-liberal policies driving back the living standards and wages of working people. Increasing polarisation of wealth and cuts in social welfare and social services have been a basic feature of the restructuring of capitalist economies.

While social-democratic parties like the ALP have modified the economic brutality of their governments with some socially progressive stances on civil liberties, their political and economic strategy creates for many a climate of despair and helplessness as the trade unions, left parliamentarians, and, in some cases, traditional Communist parties have endorsed the basic thrust of neo-liberalist programs or have disappeared. This shift to the right and the political disorientation accompanying it, has been exacerbated by the collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union of bureaucratic “socialism”.

Since the 1974-75 world economic recession, the capitalist ruling class, driven by the laws of capitalism, has been on a long-term offensive to squeeze more profit out of working people. In order to achieve this the capitalist rulers must challenge every democratic right through which the working class can defend its interests: the right to strike, to picket, to have a union shop. And in order to restrict the ability of workers to resist this offensive, the employers make more general attacks on democratic rights, including freedom of assembly, speech and the press. This restriction on democratic rights is aimed at establishing an atmosphere of greater conformity and weakening the self-confidence of all oppressed and exploited persons. The anti-democratic assault must include attacks on personal freedoms that do not directly stand in the way of the employers satisfying their hunger for profits. Attacks on the democratic rights of gay men and lesbians fall into this category. The political struggle to advance and defend the democratic rights of lesbians and gay men is thus a reflection of the struggle between the capitalist rulers and the working class.

In order to undermine the ability of working people to mount any effective resistance to its austerity drive, the capitalist rulers have waged an ideological offensive against the idea that working people can defend their interests through independent collective organisation and action. As part of this offensive, the ruling class and its academic ideologists have promoted a variety of irrationalist, anti-materialist and anti-scientific philosophical and social theories. Through their adoption by left-liberal intellectuals these theories have become widely influential within labour, feminist and lesbian and gay rights movements. ■

Political & Ideological Trends Within the Movements

As the movement for lesbian and gay rights grew in the 1970s, so did the tensions between gay men and lesbians. In movements across the West this tension manifested itself quite early. Lesbians tended to organise themselves within the growing feminist movement. As this movement developed so did different theoretical strands within it and the advocacy of separatism and lifestyle politics became a major strand. Lesbians accused gay men of not coming to grips with sexism and with the misogynous attitudes prevalent within the gay community. This led in most cases to gay men and lesbians organising separately, in some cases engaging in no common action whatsoever.

The question of separate organisation by lesbians and gay men became mixed with the concept of separatism, i.e., with the idea prevalent among radical feminists that men as a group (the “patriarchy”) were the source of women’s oppression and therefore in order to win their liberation, women had to reject any collaboration with men in the fight for women’s liberation.

Organising separately became confused even more by equating the notion of political separateness with that of political independence. These concepts have been further obscured by the use of the terms “identity” and “community” in a variety of ways, including the advocacy of each of these separately, or in combination, as a political strategy. Many elements of these ideas have been taken on good faith by activists within the movement in an ad hoc manner, often mixed and confused in quite contradictory ways which obscure the overall coherence and political orientation of the whole ideological package being advocated. However, failure to distinguish between the various uses of these terms referring to personal preference, a social lifestyle and political strategies, impedes the struggle to attain the rights of lesbians and gay men.

Identity politics

When the identity of “homosexual” began to be used in the second half of the 19th

century, it emerged during an upsurge of pseudo-scientific theorising around social evolution — social Darwinism — tracing a hierarchical development of societies and races from man-as-animal to the “peak” of white Western civilisation. This was paralleled by psychological socio-biological explanations of the prevailing gender role differences as resulting from evolutionary needs based on sexual instincts. In this reactionary context homosexual identity emerged as a result of oppression — as an explanation of perversion developed into a view of an individual personality. Instead of people being engaged in homosexual activities, they became abnormal personalities — sexual acts shifted into definitions of the individual. These reactionary theories were part of the ideology fostered in the capitalist nations of Western Europe as they embarked on their major imperialist expansion, dividing up virtually all continents of the world into colonial empires from the 1870s up to World War I. The ideology sought to construct a nationalist sentiment among the working class and an identification with the imperial interests of their own capitalist class, as opposed to the growth of the socialist movement with its internationalism of the unity of all working people. It was in the late 19th century that the socialist movement also began to understand the class nature of the family, its social and economic functions in maintaining class society, and the distortions and repression this generates on human sexuality.

This period also saw the emergence of the possibility for gay men and lesbians to live an independent lifestyle outside the confines of the family system but within the persecutions and repression of capitalist society. Over time the notion of identity began to assume a positive aspect — a recognition of a common oppression suffered, a political rallying point. This came very much to the fore with the movements after Stonewall. Just as common political interest forged by racism led to the black rights movements and the recasting of identity of blacks (“black is beautiful”), so did the identity of gay men and lesbians become a positive political recognition of common oppression and the need to fight it. In this context the notion of “coming out” is a positive political act.

However, instead of this being seen as the first political step in the struggle for lesbian and gay rights, “coming out” and identifying as a gay or lesbian began to be posed as an end in itself politically. Asserting one’s sexuality as identity became defined as a radical progressive strategy. The logic of this view is that society can be changed through individual acts of defiance. Such a viewpoint fails to recognise that positive self-labeling does nothing to eradicate the material manifestations of the oppression of gay men and lesbians. It’s no more radical to be a lesbian or a gay man than it is to be a woman, or to be black, or a waged worker. Being oppressed isn’t a radical political act. Recognising that oppression and joining in common action with others to fight

such oppression is.

The act of “coming out” also assumed a more negative aspect when it began to be advocated as a political strategy for the gay and lesbian movements. This transforms an act of personal political confidence into a prescription to be imposed on all lesbians and gay men. Such a strategy fails to address the real situations many face where identifying openly leads to persecution. It also reinforces the confusion of personal action and “lifestyle politics” with political strategy.

“Coming out” was further extended by some to the politics of “outing” — identifying public figures as gay or lesbian where their sexual preference had been kept private. “Outing” is advocated as a negative sanction to fight off attacks on gay and lesbian rights or as a tactic to be used in the struggle for reform or in lobbying.

Lifestylism

Many gay men and lesbians who have “come out” have attached an additional meaning to the act of being openly confident about one’s sexual orientation. Instead of meaning deciding not to hide this aspect of one’s personal life from family, friends or co-workers, “coming out” means living in a certain part of town, having a certain arena of social activity, going to particular bars and restaurants or even having a particular kind of job. In this sense it means becoming a part of the gay and lesbian communities and assuming the lifestyle of these communities.

It is easy to understand the appeal of a community based on lifestyle to those whose sexual orientation has been marginalised and criminalised. Building a safe haven to escape the pressures of life under capitalism is very enticing and it seemed to merge into the ways that lesbians and gay men had organised their social life in the past. This type of subcultural grouping around social activities was part of the attempt of gay men and lesbians to carve out a social space for themselves during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

But to advocate community lifestyle as a political strategy leads to great confusion and is based on a misunderstanding of a slogan that arose in the early days of the second wave of the feminist movement — “the personal is political”. Originally this slogan referred to the notion that much of what was thought of as private or personal, and in that sense unique experiences, were in fact shaped by social — economic and political — forces and constituted systematic discrimination shared with others.

Lifestyle politics inverts this to mean that this shared experience of oppression is personalised back into a community lifestyle choice. It advocates that one can achieve social liberation through adopting a particular lifestyle, and forming a tight-knit community with those who have made a similar choice. By implication it becomes a

political prescription about how to change society. Lifestyle politics advocates a model for others to emulate. It propagates the idea that lifestyle is a liberating or even radical political act in and of itself.

When communities of lesbians and gay men defined by sexual orientation and lifestyle become identified with political movements for the rights of gay men and lesbians, this leads to a number of problems. Firstly, it excludes the vast majority of lesbians and gay men within the working class who do not have the option of choosing their lifestyle or who do not want to adopt such a lifestyle for themselves.

Secondly, it is a utopian notion. Just as an island of socialism can't exist in the sea of capitalism, neither can a non-heterosexist haven exist in the midst of a heterosexist society. Attempts to create such a non-heterosexist haven in practice lead to making peace with the status quo, with the forces that profit from heterosexism. And this is exactly what happens within such communities. Some parts of "the community", like the owners of gay and lesbian bars, restaurants, theatres, bookshops, and real estate in the "community" part of town, profit from the oppression and isolation of lesbians and gay men and will defend the system on which their profits are based. Their idea of "gay and lesbian liberation" is creating a climate in which more and more lesbians and gay men will relate to the "scene" and patronise their businesses.

Thirdly, community as politics cannot take up the struggle for the rights of gay men and lesbians. By turning inward to create its own social life it does not take up the fight against discrimination in the wider society. It doesn't seek a political strategy to involve the widest layer of people to campaign in the struggle for full civil and human rights and to eradicate the basis of sexism on which such rights depend. Fourthly, a liberation-through-lifestyle political orientation disorients people as to what the struggle is all about. It can lead to the assumption that whatever "the community" is interested in, or a certain section of "the community" is interested in, is part of the political movement of gay men and lesbians. This has led to an interpretation that the major axis of the struggle for lesbian and gay liberation is an ideological struggle against homophobia and gender-based sex-roles rather than a political fight for the recognition of the democratic civil and human rights of lesbians and gay men and an end to discrimination based on sexual preference.

The axis of an ideological struggle against homophobia and gender-based sex roles rests on a variety of arguments which diverge in a number of ways.

Ranking sexual preference

Reactionary theories about the superiority of certain sexual preferences have classified aspects of sexuality as being natural/unnatural, or moral/immoral, or godly/ungodly,

or even closer to our animal past or more civilised. Since the persecution of gay men and lesbians is justified on this basis, it's not surprising that some aspect of the notion of ranking human sexual behaviour should penetrate the thinking of sections of the lesbian and gay movements. This has manifested itself in several of the arguments with those who advocate the axis of struggle as an ideological struggle against homophobia and heterosexism.

Some argue that homosexuality is a more progressive or a superior form of sexuality because it involves sexual relations which fall outside the family system, thus in some way subverting the oppressive functions of the family. But such a view mistakes the fundamental nature of the family which is primarily based on economic, not on sexual, relations. Sexual activities outside the family cannot replace the family system. They do not replace the economic benefits it provides to capitalism, free of charge, primarily through women's unpaid labour, for the reproduction of the next generation of workers, the care of the aged and sick, the care and maintenance of the present generation of workers.

The family system will wither away only as the social and economic functions it now performs are progressively taken on by society as a whole. Once these functions are removed then the very nature of the family itself will change drastically into some new form of social relations — free union based on sexual relations or bonds of emotion or friendship or shared interests.

Separatism

The second major confusion of ranking sexual preferences comes from the feminist movement. A section of "radical feminists" advocate separatism as political practice based on their analysis of the origins and nature of their oppression. The petty-bourgeois "radical feminist" theory of patriarchy identifies men — both individually and collectively — as the enemy. In this view women are subordinated because of men's manipulation of women's sexuality and their reproductive role, especially through the use of violence and rape. The primary oppression of women is then generalised to the creation, by men, of all other divisions and inequalities in human society. Such a view sees men as having a vested interest in women's oppression. This often leads to the assertion by some separatists that a "true feminist" is one who does not live with or have dealings with a man, advocating radical celibacy or lesbianism as a political practice.

Much of the theorising that underpins these positions comes back to some biological explanation. Superiority of gender or sexual preference is ultimately explained in terms of instinct, inborn drive, genetic trait, preset tendency, or some other similar

biologically fixed cause.

Obviously there is a biological basis to differences between the sexes, but the contribution of social and cultural forces in the shaping of human behaviour and gender differences is enormous. Biological explanations try to explain social behaviour which has varied enormously in the course of social evolution. If biology were destiny then there would be no social variation — all women at all times should have behaved in certain predictable fixed ways, so too should men. This clearly isn't the case.

Today there is another variant of biological causality being put forward. As scientific exploration and mapping of human genetic material is taking place, the human genome project, explanations of homosexuality have been advanced on the basis of the "gay gene."

Some within the gay and lesbian communities have welcomed this explanation since it seems to validate the naturalness of their sexuality and thus put an end to the attempts to modify, change or punish homosexual behaviour. But there is no guarantee that discrimination and medical intervention will cease if some genetic link is found. Much more likely is the development of genetic manipulation to "eradicate" such behaviour, if the lesbian and gay rights movement fails to deal with the social and economic bases of their oppression.

Biology based causality can't and doesn't explain the variety of social behaviours and norms that have been attached to the genders/sexes in different historical periods. Take the degree of change in capitalist society over the last one hundred years — whether in women's roles or in the expectations and norms of sexuality and erotic pleasure, or even the expectations and roles within that most stable class institution, the family.

The prescriptions of radical feminism have led into lifestyle politics as well as, at times, organising within the feminist issues around broader issues of common interest like rape, refugees, etc.

However, there is one major strand of radical feminism which rests on a similar biological determinist explanation of patriarchy but rejects the political struggle for civil or human rights as delusionary male culture. This current has been very influential among lesbian activists and is known as "cultural feminism". Their theorising rests on an inversion of the social Darwinist theories of the 19th century which projected the idea of the essential superiority of male over female. For cultural feminism, women are superior to men. This is based on women's unique and life giving, nurturing essence, while all that is male is evil and destructive. All social institutions and culture are patriarchal and reflect intrinsic male values which condition women. But some women can bring forward their inherent female consciousness to overcome male

50 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

culture based on male language and transcend the patriarchal dominance. But while some women can overcome their conditioning, no men can. They are biologically determined.

Cultural feminism has taken on many of the assumptions which have underpinned utopian projects of the past — that by an act of will and a policy of exclusion, new social relations will be forged, irrespective of economic and social realities. Their focus is on exclusiveness and the idealist view that change comes through restructuring language and intellectual culture. But those they exclude are most women and all men. Only those who agree with their view and their projects can take that necessary transformational leap into female culture.

This strand of feminism has played an enormously conservative role, linking with some of the most reactionary anti-liberation forces to attack sexual freedom and sexual openness. In a theory that equates male sexuality as power driven, genitally oriented and potentially lethal, male sexuality and violence are inextricably linked. Pornography is defined as the cause of rape and cultural feminists have advocated a form of censorship, or anti-discrimination law used as censorship, to remove the image of pornography. Such a view confuses the image with the act. Violent images are symptoms not causes of violence. These causes lie in the structure of economic and social relations of class society. Censorship just drives these images underground into the black market, not dealing with the social problems at all.

Moreover the question of pornography is even more problematic. Pornography and erotica lie on the same continuum. Part of the gains of the feminist and gay and lesbian movements has been to bring sexuality into the open, not hidden away as something to be ashamed of. Where such legislation has been set in place, for example in Canada, it has been used to declare lesbian and gay literature obscene.

Cultural feminism sees women's sexuality as diffuse, interpersonally oriented, seeking reciprocity, intimacy and commitment — more spiritual than sexual. Thus women are less affected by abstinence, seeking affection more than orgasm. Lesbianism becomes transformed into a radical female friendship which needs to be dissociated from contamination of male sexual relations, including male homosexuality. Cultural feminism's hostility to other minority sexual practices reflects the fear of the polluting effects of male sexuality. This takes the form of extreme hostility to male-to-female transsexuality, as well as to transvestites, gay men's sexuality, etc. Cultural feminists resurrect terms like sexual deviance and perversion to express this hostility and to exclude transsexuals from discussions of sexuality. They have gone so far as to invent a new terminology which excludes transgendered women, distinguishing "true women" as "women born women". This has led to prohibitions on entry into "true women's"

spaces. Similarly cultural feminism vigorously opposes any reproductive technology which it sees as impinging on women's basic creative life-giving function. Labelling science, especially reproductive science, as male and destructive, these women actively campaign against any form of reproductive technology. In this way they deny women the capacity to make their own choices about their own lives — reinforcing the old patriarchal view of women as incapable of making decisions, needing protection, etc.

The most conservative and politically destructive activity of cultural feminists is their campaign against choice and any fight for civil and human rights outside their own semantic transformational framework. They reject and denounce choice and rights and anyone who advocates the extension of choices and rights. This campaign becomes part of the reactionary backlash against feminism and the lesbian and gay rights movements.

Some of the logic of the arguments and action proposals of cultural feminism, particularly in the way they equate thought/image and act and their emphasis on censorship, has been taken up within the lesbian and gay movements. While much of the struggle has quite rightly taken up extending anti-discrimination legislation to include all acts of discrimination against lesbians and gay men,, sections of the gay and lesbian movements have successfully lobbied, or are in the process of campaigning, for anti-vilification legislation to stop verbal attacks.

This legislation is just another variant of censorship, albeit at present couched in progressive terms. In the longer term it will be used against the gay and lesbian movements as they campaign to change homophobic attitudes. Already there are those who argue in the logic of political correctness — that it is sexist or racist or homophobic to portray, reflect or expose socially backward attitudes in order to change them.

Censorship and obscenity laws were established in the first place to silence public discussion of sexuality and in particular to persecute and harass the growing homosexual rights movements of the late 19th century. What is of more use and of greater impact is the experience of the lesbian, gay and women's movements since the 1960s — to bring all these issues into the open and to campaign to positively change attitudes while fighting against acts of discrimination and oppressive social institutions and practices.

Post-structuralism

Ideological development within the gay and lesbian movements in the advanced capitalist countries has been influenced by the bourgeois ideological offensive through the promotion of idealist theories.

The latest wave of academic “death of Marxist” theories — post-modernism and post-structuralism — deny the very possibility of a general, scientific theory of society and social evolution, condemning such a theory as “essentialist”. Instead variations of pragmatism and “partial”, sectoral, or contextual theorising are held as the only possible options. These idealist, anti-historical, anti-scientific and politically reactionary conceptions have had a pervasive influence among left-leaning intellectuals in the imperialist countries. And they have impacted on the various social movements like the women’s and gay and lesbian rights movements. Post-structural accusations of essentialism are quite different from the essentialism of biological determinist causality of radical and cultural feminism. Post-structural accusations of essentialism refer to the denial that any general or universal explanation of social phenomena can be made. It is, in this sense, anti-scientific. Its advocates reject any notion of a shared oppression that forms the basis for common political struggle. Thus there is no general discrimination of gays or lesbians, instead each individual experiences their subjectivity in different ways at different times. So to use the general term of “feminism” or “lesbian or gay liberation” is invalid since everyone is different.

These views are aimed at the level of psychology and the experiences of the individual. Post-structural theories are based on the idealist perspective that language structures social reality, by which they mean the material world.

The major thrust of this type of theorising is reactionary. By denying any communality of oppression, these views deny the need for collective action to overcome that oppression. These theories become rationalisations for a politics of disempowerment and atomisation of the oppressed.

Queer politics

“Queer” politics emerged against this ideological background. Queer Nation, the first major organised expression of this politics, emerged in the USA in 1990 as a reaction to separatism.

Queer politics is based on the idea that anyone interested or involved in “unconventional” sexual activity, identity or even unconventional dress and appearance — bisexuals, transsexuals, those who cross-gender dress, anyone involved in sadomasochistic sexual practices, or those engaging in paedophilia — can claim to be part of this “queer movement” which challenged “straight” heterosexual behaviour.

Queer political theorists criticised gay and lesbian identity politics for being “tame” and not radical enough, open to co-option by “straight” society, for being proscriptive, exclusionist and for not really challenging gender stereotypes. They also attacked the gay ghettoised community as mimicry of “straight” consumerism promoting gay

capitalists. Advocates of queer politics argued against the gender role “assimilationism” of “straight” society and the proscriptiveness of the lesbian and gay identity politics as stifling choice, creativity and liberation.

Queer politics attracted some sections of the gay and lesbian communities and others who were trying to break from the politics of exclusion and separatism that had developed in the lesbian and gay movements in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Some bisexuals and transexuals who found it hard to find acceptance by the separatists in the communities sought to express their grievances through queer politics. Because of the combination of identity politics and separatism, bisexuals had been stigmatised by social prejudice within the gay and lesbian communities as well as in society as a whole.

Queer politics also attracted many young people seeking to express their opposition to sexual repression under late capitalism. The attractiveness of queer politics to layers new to political activity was based on its reliance on the politics of shock and outrage, and on its seductive argument that a movement of “anything goes” will liberate all sexuality.

However, queer politics does not offer an effective way forward for those seeking to end homophobia and the institutionalised oppression of gay men and lesbians under capitalism. In the end, queer politics has become the ultimate in identity politics — under a new name. It has advocated the adoption of a new, radical identity — the identity of “queer”, which claimed to be a more progressive identity than that of gay man or lesbian. Yet it remained inside the framework of identity politics with all its limitations.

The mere assertion or celebration of a non-heterosexual identity does not challenge the material basis of the oppression of gays and lesbians. Lesbian and gay sexuality is systematically repressed under capitalism because it helps break down the ideology of the family by contradicting its repressive sexual morality. Hence, to end this oppression requires a political struggle for democratic rights. By trying to dissolve these sexual identities into a new queer identity based around a plethora of sexual choices, queer politics sidesteps the key task of building political movements around concrete political demands for full democratic and civil rights for lesbians and gay men.

Like previous forms of identity politics, queer politics remains trapped within the framework of post-structural individualism, promoting political action primarily on the individual level. Liberation amounts to acting out sexual roles which are said to challenge “straight” or heterosexist norms. Individualistic image, style and fashion replace politics. Thus, queer politics has recreated a lifestyle politics as prescriptive in its practice, although differently constructed, as the lifestyle politics of the lesbian and gay communities that queer politicians condemned. As has been seen in recent years, queer identity is eminently susceptible to co-option by capitalist consumer markets.

The politics of outrage, individual statement through fashion or the celebration of “anything goes” makes little room in the queer movement for those who are also subject to racial, gender and class oppression. It excludes those who cannot afford to be non-assimilationist if they want to hold on to a job, and those who cannot afford to keep up with the latest “subversive” fashions. Hence, despite its claim to want to build an inclusive movement, in practice Queer Nation in the USA has been predominantly white, middle class and male.

By dissolving lesbian and gay oppression into sexual repression in general, the queer movement obscures the specific political tasks involved in winning democratic rights for these oppressed groups. While a wide range of sexual and social behaviour is repressed under capitalism, not all repression has the same basis or is carried out in the same systematic way. Under capitalism discrimination against and oppression of gay men and lesbians is institutionalised. The general promotion of sexual choice does not address all the needs of lesbians and gay men in the legal, economic and social spheres. While there are specific democratic issues related to transexuals which should be addressed, this should not be at the expense of the specific needs of the struggle for gay and lesbian rights.

Queer politics also places obstacles in the struggle for women’s liberation. For example, some advocates of queer politics claim that any documentation that asks people to specify their sex (that is whether they are a biological male or female) is oppressive and therefore should be outlawed. But such a position would have reactionary consequences. How would affirmative action quotas for women in employment be monitored and enforced without records on the proportions of male and female workers being hired? How could affirmative action operate at all, if self identity and appearance were the only indicators of sex/gender?

The ideological focus of queer politics around deconstructing “straight” gender roles sanctifies some sexual practices which are reactionary and destructive. Paedophilia is a case in point. No matter how this practice is dressed up as “intergenerational sex”, any notion of choice and informed consent by children in sexual activities with adults is a sham.

Queer politics also lends itself to notions of a hierarchy of sexuality — those who are most developed sexually are those who identify as sexually fluid, neither heterosexual or homosexual.

Political independence and autonomy

One of the obstacles to a united political movement fighting for the democratic rights of gay men and lesbians is the division that frequently exists between lesbians and gay

men, a division based on the often sexist attitudes of gay men. As a result of this division, lesbians are usually organised separately — either in completely separate groups or as caucuses in an organisation which includes both gay men and lesbians. But such separate organisation is not a cause, but a result of division in the movement. Just as all gay men have the right to meet independently, lesbians have the right to organise separately to combat their double oppression as women and as homosexuals.

But the movements should strive for political unity, i.e., common action in support of a common goal. Unity on this basis requires recognition of the rights of all who participate, including the right to meet separately.

The political independence of such a movement should not be defined according to whom it excludes but rather by how it organises and by its objectives. That political independence means:

- That the movement is organised and led by gay men and lesbians, based on the understanding that self organisation by the oppressed empowers and forms the basis for social change.
- That it takes the fight for the rights of lesbians and gay men as its first priority, refusing to subordinate that fight to any other interests.
- That it is not subordinate to the needs of any political party since the movement must be open to all lesbians and gay men who want to fight against their oppression, irrespective of their political affiliations.
- That the movement is willing to carry through the fight by whatever means, and together with whatever forces prove necessary to achieve their goals.

This means that the movement will be politically heterogeneous with a variety of political currents active within it.

A negative example of what can happen when the movement relies, not on its own capacity to organise and mobilise, but on lobbying influential bourgeois politicians to defend or protect the rights and interests of lesbians and gay men, took place in the US in the late 1970s. The Miami council had passed a gay rights ordinance after lobbying by gay groups. The right wing immediately moved to repeal the ordinance, placing this repeal up for ballot on a referendum. The leaders of the gay and lesbian movement in Florida accepted the advice of the liberal politicians to play things quietly. Instead of mobilising lesbians and gay men throughout the city, they paid for respectable TV advertisements. They did not actively seek the support of the women's movement, blacks, Latinos, or the trade unions. They even prevented people from handing out leaflets against the repeal. The result was a minimal turnout in areas of gay support, strong voting in conservative areas and the repeal ballot won.

A similar tactical error is made by those who become impatient with the need to

56 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

organise the broadest support for the struggle for gay and lesbian rights. Instead small groups embark on “militant” stunts, provoking the police in peaceful demonstrations. While those who advocate such “militancy” may get an adrenalin high out of such stunts, mindless confrontation demobilises the support that has already been organised and undercuts the capacity to involve even broader layers. ■

The Democratic Socialist Party & the Struggle for Lesbian & Gay Rights

The Democratic Socialist Party stands for complete non-interference of the state and society in sexual matters, so long as nobody is injured or coerced. The DSP unconditionally supports the struggles of lesbians and gay men for full civil liberties and human rights. We believe that an understanding of the following points is essential to the success of that struggle:

1. The struggle against the oppression of gay men and lesbians is a struggle for democratic rights that contributes to breaking down the reactionary sexual morality that helps to preserve class society.
2. The source of the oppression of lesbians and gay men is the need of the capitalist ruling class to maintain the ideology that justifies and helps perpetuate the repression of sexuality, which in turn flows from capitalist society's need to maintain the family — the basic socioeconomic institution of class society.
3. The family system is indispensable to capitalist rule over and exploitation of the working class. The stability of the family system requires the economic dependence of women within the family. This in turn requires the repression of sexuality, forcing it into socially acceptable channels of male and female sexuality for reproductive purposes and approved socioeconomic roles.
4. The source of prejudice and discrimination against lesbians and gay men lies in the repression of sexuality, which in turn flows from class society's need to maintain the oppression of women. The oppression of lesbians and gay men is thus a by-

58 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

product of the oppression of women.

5. The struggle for women's liberation ultimately involves a challenge to the private economic burden borne by the individual family unit and points towards ending the economic dependence of women through the socialisation of the responsibilities now assumed by the individual family unit. The oppression of women is first and foremost an economic question. The family system which rests upon the oppression of women is above all an economic institution. It is not fundamentally a sexual arrangement nor is its primary role ideological.
6. The mobilisation of the masses of women is an essential feature of the struggle of the working class to overthrow capitalist rule and build a classless society. The destruction of the bourgeois state, the eradication of capitalist property, the transformation of the economic bases and priorities of society, the consolidation of a new state power based on the democratic organisation of the working class and its allies, and the continuing struggle to eliminate all forms of oppressive social relations inherited from class society — all these are necessary steps in the process of transformation to a new classless society.
7. Neither homosexuality itself nor the struggle against the oppression of gay men and lesbians directly poses a challenge to the role of the family as an economic institution based on the subjugation of women. Nor do they directly point to socialising the fundamental responsibilities of the family which will have to be achieved before the family can wither away. Unlike women, lesbians and gay men as a group do not play a special role in the system of capitalist exploitation of wage labour. While employment in a variety of jobs and professions may discriminate against open lesbians and gay men, homosexuals as a group are not subject to the last-hired-first-fired, high unemployment-low pay pattern of a superexploited section of the workforce like women, youth, or particular racial or ethnic groups. The struggle for the full democratic rights of gay men and lesbians contradicts the repressive sexual morality that the capitalists and their institutions use to bolster the family system.
8. Unlike the capitalists, the working class has no material interest in curtailing democratic rights or tolerating discrimination of any kind. To the contrary, any restriction of democratic rights and any discrimination hinders the working class by weakening its ability to employ its chief method of struggle against capitalists,

i.e., collective action in the workplaces and in the streets. The working class will be unable to move toward the abolition of capitalist rule without overcoming the divisions fostered within its ranks by capitalism. This can only be achieved by educating the working class through propaganda, agitation and experiences in struggle of the necessity to fight for the interest of all those oppressed by capitalist society. This requires the rejection of every prejudice used to divide workers among themselves or alienate the working class from their potential allies. It is through such common struggles that these prejudices and divisions break down most quickly. Winning the organised workers' movement to champion the democratic rights of lesbians and gay men is therefore part of the process of educating the working class to think socially and act politically. It is also part of the struggle to replace the present pro-capitalist leadership of the organised labour movement with a revolutionary socialist leadership.

9. Gay men and lesbians will only be able to win their liberation in alliance with the organised power of a workers' movement that sees itself as the champion of the rights of lesbians and gay men. These rights can be summarised as the demand for the complete legal, economic, and social equality of homosexuals. They include:
 - Repeal of anti-homosexual laws. These include the repeal of any law criminalising sex between consenting adults; making the age of consent for gay men the same as that for heterosexuals; repeal the Summary Offences laws which allow police to trap and harass gay men, sex workers and Aboriginal people; defending the rights of gay and lesbian refugees and couples from discriminatory immigration practices and removing HIV from health tests for visas.
 - Effective legislation outlawing discrimination against gay men and lesbians in employment, housing, child custody, adoption, donor insemination programs, etc.. Private schools, the health system and the insurance industry must be brought under the jurisdiction of anti-discrimination laws.
 - Increase health and welfare services. Specialist provision of health and welfare services to meet the needs of lesbians and gay men which include increased public resources to combat AIDS, and thorough consultation with the gay and lesbian communities on all legal and policy development aspects around HIV/ AIDS.
 - Repeal censorship laws including racial and homosexual vilification laws. Repressive forms of control of thought and of speech do nothing to advance the rights of lesbians and gay men whose oppression and discrimination has

60 Socialism & the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians & Gay Men

traditionally been based on muling and distorting issues of sexuality. Changes to attitudes are better addressed through positive educational programs and information.

- An end to the violence and street attacks on lesbians and gay men. While strengthening and making uniform legislation against hate crimes, the major thrust should be one of campaigning to change attitudes and fears which lead to scapegoating and violence against gay men and lesbians. Such a campaign should include the promotion of strong policies defending lesbian and gay members within trade unions, workers' organisations and communities; defending and extending gay and lesbian programs on national and community broadcasting; and funding for lesbian and gay community-based information and education programs.
- Sex education for young people and the broader community to stress the variety of non-cercive sexual relations that exist, without moral judgment or preference. This would include the integration of positive material on gay men and lesbians into relevant curriculums in all schools, colleges and universities, and the establishment of programs to combat anti-lesbian and anti-gay prejudice in schools.
- All sexual relations between women or between men should be treated in law in exactly the same way as sexual relations between men and women, and this should be reflected in law regarding marriage and de facto relationships. Sexual preference should be recognised as a matter of individual choice, a basic democratic right.

10. The DSP seeks to build a gay and lesbian rights movement whose tactics are based on the strategic understanding of the need to ally with the organised strength of the working class and oriented to winning support among the social forces that have the power to defeat those responsible for class exploitation and social oppression. Such a movement needs to involve all those willing to fight for the democratic rights of lesbians and gay men, relying on mobilising supporters of gays and lesbians rather than lobbying parliamentarians. Such a movement has to be politically independent of the capitalist ruling class, its parliaments and parliamentarians.

Our goal is to build the confidence of the masses to rely on their own united power, rather than delegate their struggle to others. For this reason, while organising to petition MPs or to get them to move private member's bills, etc., or to speak on platforms to publicise progressive ideas and champion struggles, these should be

seen as a means to build mass action campaigns. To rely on lobbying as a tactic subordinates the struggles of the oppressed to the needs of parties and government. It diverts resources from the organisation of mass action outside the confines of parliament — marches, rallies, public meetings, etc. Sections of the lesbian and gay movements have adopted a lobbying strategy towards the ALP, and while some legislative reforms have been gained by this process, it has also had the reciprocal effect of co-opting much of the political movement of gay men and lesbians. In this manner the struggle for gay and lesbian rights has been subordinated to the political needs of the ALP. As a consequence the movements themselves have been fragmented and weakened, and the cultural and lifestyle communities have become the public face of what were once active and very vocal political movements.

11. The political struggle for the democratic rights of lesbians and gay men is directed against the capitalist ruling class and objectively aids the struggle for socialism. While the victorious socialist revolution can immediately secure legal recognition of the full civil and human rights of lesbians and gay men, the fight to eradicate anti-homosexual prejudices inherited from capitalist society will need to continue during the transition period to socialism. The continuing independent organisation as lesbians and gay men will play an indispensable role in assuring the ability of the working class to carry this process to a successful conclusion.

Huge gains can be made within a short period of time in changing attitudes and turning back the ideological divisions fostered by class society as we have seen in Cuba in combating racist prejudice. Of course such gains do not mean that all prejudices are eliminated.

The far more difficult and longer term struggle facing a working peoples' government is to erode and replace the economic basis of the family, to create the conditions for the withering away of this basic institutional prop of class society.

12. Human sexuality and human psychology are distorted by class society, in which all social interactions are molded by property relations. We will not be able to remove the distorting factors until we have established a radically different kind of society, one based on human solidarity and free of class exploitation and social inequality. ■

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Socialism and the Struggle for the Rights of Lesbians and Gay Men is a resolution adopted by the 16th National Conference of the Democratic Socialist Party, held in January 1995. It is the latest of several resolutions to be adopted by the DSP, since its founding conference in 1972, analysing the nature of the oppression of lesbians and gay men and the importance of the struggle for the democratic rights of lesbians and gay men as part of the ongoing fight to achieve a socially just, democratic and ecologically sound future for us all.