

1. Being Gay is not a Problem.

In discussing gay people I mean those who want to relate sexually to members of their own sex (lesbians, homosexuals), and those who identify with the other sex, either by changing sex by means of surgery, etc (transsexuals), or by dressing in the clothes of the other sex (transvestists).

Homosexuality and trans-sexualism are almost universally defined in "respectable" society and in the medical profession as a "problem". Once such a definition is accepted, then the way is open for endless pseudo-scientific studies explaining its "origins" in terms of biology, chromosomes, early socialisation, and so on. The gay person is labelled as a "case" and investigated if possible, with a view to "curing" her/him. Such labelling in fact represents an attempt to isolate gay people as far as possible, and creates deep feelings of guilt in many. Even many so called revolutionaries accept this method of discussing gay people, only transferring the problems to capitalist society, which "distorts" people's sexual orientations, so that some people become fixated on members of the same sex. For such people, the socialist revolution will eliminate homosexuality along with prostitution.

For a revolutionary marxist, gay people do not present a problem in themselves. The problem lies in explaining why they are treated as they are and how they can change that situation. Since we do not accept that sex was instituted by the Divine (or Society) in order that children might be produced, or that women are only in their natural state when in a subordinate relationship to men, there is absolutely no reason why people shouldn't relate sexually to people of the same sex if they want to, any more than why they should not relate to people of the other sex if they want to. Such a position demystifies endless prejudices and "learned" tomes, and it is one of the positive gains of the Gay Liberation Movement to have forcefully presented this analysis. Far from "withering away", homosexuality will become much more common in a socialist society, as the mystifications and prejudices surrounding sexual relationships are removed. Indeed, this was the case in the early years of the Soviet Union, when penal legislation against homosexuals was abolished. Only as the Stalinist bureaucracy tightened its hold over the whole of social life did repression of homosexuals become once more the norm. (See the short account in W.Reich, The Sexual Revolution, Vision Press, 1972. Reich's general attitudes towards gay relationships were rather backward!)

2. Why then are Gay People Oppressed?

If homosexuality in itself is not a problem, why then are homosexuals universally oppressed in bourgeois society (the degree of oppression varies from time to time and in country to country, of course)? Why do many people among them militant workers who are anti-capitalist, feel an unease and confusion in regard to gay people (Pakistanis, women and "queers" are the stocks in trade of comedians in working mens clubs)?

No ruling group exists, for long by means of naked force alone. The continued existence of class rule depends on mystifying the population as to the true source of their oppression - the system of productive relations which extracts the wealth from those who produce and transfers it to those who own. On the one hand it is necessary to have institutions and symbols which are regarded as right and good by the oppressed, so that they may think the whole worth while. On the other, it is necessary to have groups of people who are identifiable in some way as different so that people's frustrations can if necessary be turned against them. The family is one such institution, gay people one such group.

Whether or not they see themselves as revolutionaries or even reformers, as by no means all do, gay people who actually practice their homosexuality threaten the ideology of the family. Since the family is, a crucial means for the reproduction of the labour force, and its ideological control involved the subordination of women, the struggles of gay people against the oppression and those of women against theirs are immediately linked. Through the family, new generations of workers are produced, ruling class

ideas are passed on, women are subordinated, isolated and divided from workers in the labour force. So control over the family is very important for the ruling class and its state. - By necessity, gay people must make a clear divorce between sexuality and reproduction

- By bourgeois legality they are forced to divide sexuality and marriage.  
 - By their very oppression their relationships tend to be fragile and transient, challenging the mythology of permanence sanctified in the marriage ceremony. Gay people around the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) have also consciously come to challenge and reject something of the dominance/subordination, activity/passivity, male/female ideas about behaviour appropriate to each sex, ideas which help greatly to maintain the subordination of women in capitalist society. In all these ways the uncontested public activity of gay people is a threat.

Gay people are also useful symbols of "moral decadence" in capitalism. All ills we feel can be attributed to permissiveness, moral laxity, Jews, Blacks, Gays, etc., and the persecution of the minority and in some cases their actual extermination (as in fascist Germany) can be a means of deflecting social tensions from their real source - the exploitative nature of the system itself.

The oppression of gay people is therefore both necessary and useful within the existing system, and for that reason it becomes clear that there is only one way for gay people to remove their oppression, and that is by linking up with all other oppressed groups, especially women and centrally the working class, whose exploitation underlies every other, in order to overthrow the system itself. Of all homosexuals, only those around GLF have begun to realise this basic fact. Other homosexuals have reacted either by retreat or attempts to reform.

### 3. The Way Gay People Respond to their Oppression.

#### a. Retreat.

Because they themselves often feel guilty, and accept the ideological definitions propagated about them, many gay people go to the medical profession seeking to be "cured". At the hands of the psychiatrists, etc. they will undergo many interrogations and or physical tortures, which may undermine their whole personalities or turn them into sexual zombies. A small number, for fear of discovery, commit suicide or mutilate themselves. But most enter the "Gay Ghetto". The Gay Ghetto is that very restricted area of social life which at the present time is allowed to gay people by the police. Certain pubs, certain clubs, certain public lavatories (cottages"), certain open spaces, are available to gay people. Even here they are not free from harassment, which is undertaken sporadically and indiscriminately with the purpose of keeping gay people insecure, restricted and out of the public eye.

#### b. Reform.

Since feelings of attraction to people of the same sex are to be found among those groups who in their general life situation benefit from existing society, numbers of people have hoped to gain a place for respectable homosexuals in respectable society. The Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) and the Beaumont Society for Transvestists are such groups. As with any other interest group, at certain periods some reforms can be won from capitalism. These reforms are never secure, never give the group an equal status, and never go far enough. The reform of the law in England in regard to homosexuals is a good example of the results of such actions (it does not apply in Scotland at all). While consenting males over 21 at the moment engage in homosexual relations in private, the Act is so hedged around with restrictions as to make the situation for gay people only marginally better, and indeed there have been more prosecutions since than before.

#### c. Revolt.

Both the retreatist and the reformist response of gay people involve the general acceptance of the ideology of capitalist society. The GLF and its counterparts in other countries (FHAR in France for instance), like the women's liberation movement, stem from and in turn contribute to the challenge to that ideology which has been developing in numerous ways among sections of youth, a challenge stimulated in the early 60s partly by the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam war movements, and in this country earlier by

the CND. GLF is a recent development. It only became significant in 1970-71, as young gay people, usually already radicalised in other ways, began to challenge the basic definition of themselves presented by all

"responsible" sources in our society, and thus came into open conflict with them. Gay people began to "come out" - be publicly identified as gay - with slogans "Proud to be Gay" and "Gay Is Good", etc. They refused to accept the restrictions demanded by the authorities and made ridiculous court proceedings taken against them. The Gay Liberation Manifesto published in late 1971, explicitly rejects the capitalist system and the institution of the family. Groups from the GLF have shown their solidarity with the working class by taking part in the trade union demos against the IRB and anti imperialist demos, as well as attacking some symbols of sexism such as the Miss World Contest, and contesting the reactionary forces around the Festival of Light.

#### 4. Some political problems in the Gay Liberation Movement.

While a more or less explicit rejection of capitalism is part of the understanding of almost every GLF member, the actual practice of the organization and movement is very diffuse and subject to immense diversionary pressures. Because "coming out" itself represents such a big emotional step for most people, a part of the movement has given support to those doing this an almost total priority, turning away from public activity. Others have felt the prime task is to link with reformist gay people in CHE. This gay "nationalism" can frequently turn to hostility against all out groups, and in reality represents a road back to the ghetto and reformism. For instance, Gay News has recently carried features about gay marriages in the United States without noticeable critical comment. Still others have become so involved with trying to create a new life style in communes and in personal relationships that it has become an end in itself, and thus utopian, for there are no solutions to problems of personal relationships in a capitalist system. Sometimes this search, can become a tyrannous new moral code as pressure is put on people to be bi-sexual, to have multiple relationships, or when "radical feminist men" criticize gay women for refusing to wear skirts, make up, etc.

As has sometimes happened in other oppressed groups, the distrust of authority among some members has spilled over into a refusal to organize meetings in any effective way, and some groups have become paralysed and so inactive. In London but not elsewhere in Britain, gay women and transvestists/trans-sexuals have felt it necessary to organize separately from gay men. It is very rare for the numbers of gay women in GLF groups to be equal to men. Part of the reason for this is that women's oppression leads them to be more hesitant about coming out, that gay women feel we can express our opposition to our oppression better in the women's liberation movement, and that gay men's attention is very strongly turned towards legal harassment which their sisters do not suffer quite so openly.

#### 5. Conclusions.

Thus it cannot be said that Gay Liberation represents a coherent political movement anymore than the Women's Liberation movement does. But this in no way makes its existence as an autonomous movement less significant. GLF has drawn attention to the need for better analysis of the family and sexuality; it thus challenges all received ideas about hetero-sexual relationships, as well as those about the relationship between hetero-sexuality and homo-sexuality. Secondly, GLF is exposing the reactionary nature of the psychiatric profession and the repressive legal system, sometimes in quite dramatic ways. Thirdly, the more politicized members are moving out to challenge bourgeois ideology within sections of the working class. If the Gay movement does not go forward, the situation will not remain static. In the current social crisis, the reactionary tendencies symbolised by the Festival of Light will move onto the offensive against gay people, and possibly begin to link up with the fascist/racist movements into a really dangerous diversionary threat. GLF and the Women's Liberation movement are very closely linked together in the struggle against capitalism which is the root of both our oppressions.

(A version of this note appeared in the Red Mole.)