

BURNING ISSUES

gays and sexism on the left

At a recent convention of the New American Movement, a developing alliance of American left-wing tendencies, a major furor erupted over the presence of an information and recruiting table of the October League, a Marxist-Leninist organization. The issue was the October League's exclusion of gays from their membership, and an attempt to evict them from the convention floor was defeated by a narrow vote.

This incident was the latest example of an ongoing debate on the left over the decision by certain groups to exclude gays. The October League and the Revolutionary Union are two examples of this sexist tendency in our local community.

The staff of the Great Speckled Bird, which includes several gays, has decided to contribute to the debate over sexism on the left. The article featured below is adapted from "Toward a Scientific Analysis of the Gay Question," written by the Los Angeles Research Group, a group of gay communist women. The original article appeared in the "Radical Forum" section of The Guardian. The article strongly criticizes the left groups which now exclude gays, and the Bird staff agrees with its direction.

In view of The Bird's disagreement with anti-gay tendencies on the left, the staff has also decided to change advertising policy:

Free Advertising: The Bird regularly grants three column inches of free advertising space to left and movement organizations on request. From now on, this service will not be granted to any movement organization which excludes gays. In general, if there is any doubt as to an organization's policy toward gays, we will request a written statement of non-exclusionary intentions.

Paid Advertising: We still will accept paid advertising from left organizations which exclude gay people. However, we will accompany any such ad with notice of the sexist nature of the organization.

We hope our printing of the article below, and our new advertising policies, will clarify where we stand on gay participation in left organizations. We also hope our actions will help spur a constructive debate on a subject that has not been given a well thought-out treatment, with the result that some organizations are pursuing policies which will increase anti-gay prejudice among the American people, who are already saturated with anti-gay propaganda through the straight media.

The anti-gay theory as adopted by leftist groups runs roughly as follows: homosexuality is a response to decaying imperialism and to male chauvinism. It is decadent, the product of a dying bourgeois society. It proposes an individual solution to a social problem, does not lead to political struggle and is escapist. It has no material basis since gays cannot produce children. Let's break it down:

(1) A main premise is that gayness is a response to a decaying society. Though it is true that advanced capitalism intensifies alienation, it does not follow that alienation is the source of sexual relations, either heterosexual or homosexual. Homosexuality existed and was socially accepted in societies prior to capitalism (for example, in primitive communal societies such as the Iroquois and the Mojaves). Homosexuality in pre-capi-



talist societies clearly was not a response to decaying imperialism, which had not yet historically occurred.

(2) The major thrust of the anti-gay theory is that gayness is a manifestation of bourgeois ideology. To answer this, it should be pointed out that bourgeois ideology is dominant under capitalism, permeates the lives of even working people, and guides most gay and heterosexual relationships. It is one's world outlook, not one's sexuality, that determines one's class stand; it is the consciousness that is brought to the relationship that determines the ideology manifested in the relationship.

(3) The anti-gay argument alleges that gayness is an escape from male chauvinist attitudes and male supremacist society, that gays have a irresponsible social attitude in their most personal relationships. But we struggle against the ideology of male chauvinism in all aspects of our lives—at work, in school, in political organizations, among friends. Individual love relationships are not the source of male chauvinism; relationships reflect the reality of capitalist culture. No individual relationship under capitalism is per se a relationship in which people struggle against male supremacy. The impetus to do so must also be present.

Gayness is not an escape from male chauvinism and supremacy;

bourgeois ideology cannot be escaped by changing who you sleep with. Gays must confront male supremacy wherever they are. Male chauvinist thinking encourages anti-gay prejudices and divides and confuses people. Gay women are told that all they need is a good man; gay men are told that they are not "real" men. Heterosexuals are taught to ridicule their sisters and brothers on the basis of acquired sex role models.

(4) The anti-gay line goes on to say that gayness is an unwillingness to relate to the opposite sex. This must flow from the bourgeois notion that heterosexuality is "natural" and that gayness is "unnatural." This is incorrect. Marxist-Leninists know that there is no such thing as abstract human nature. Instead of unwillingness, gayness is often the willingness and ability to relate to the same sex.

While it is true that some gay women choose not to relate to men and express strong anti-male feelings, there are many gay women who do not. It is one-sided to focus only on gay women who voice anti-male sentiments and to ignore the countless heterosexual women who express equally strong anti-male feelings. Likewise, the actions of many heterosexual and gay men exhibit anti-female attitudes. None of this is surprising given the dominant ideologies

of male chauvinism and male supremacy, which have kept men and women divided.

(5) Gayness is further attacked as being an individual solution to a social problem, as outside the mainstream of society, and as not involving people in struggle. But since when do sexual relationships engage people in struggle? The anti-gay line makes sexuality rather than class relations, primary. The basis for social change is class struggle, not sexual relationships.

On what basis do these "dialectical materialists" say that gays, in general, see their relationships as sources of personal salvation in ways different from heterosexuals? Of course, some gays do—and some heterosexuals do. But no communist, gay or heterosexual, sees personal relationships as the solution to society's problems. To look only at aspects of the gay liberation movement which do, incorrectly, pose gayness as the solution to the contradictions of society and to assume that all gay people share that analysis, is to deny the role of conscious leadership and to ignore the very progressive elements of the gay movement.

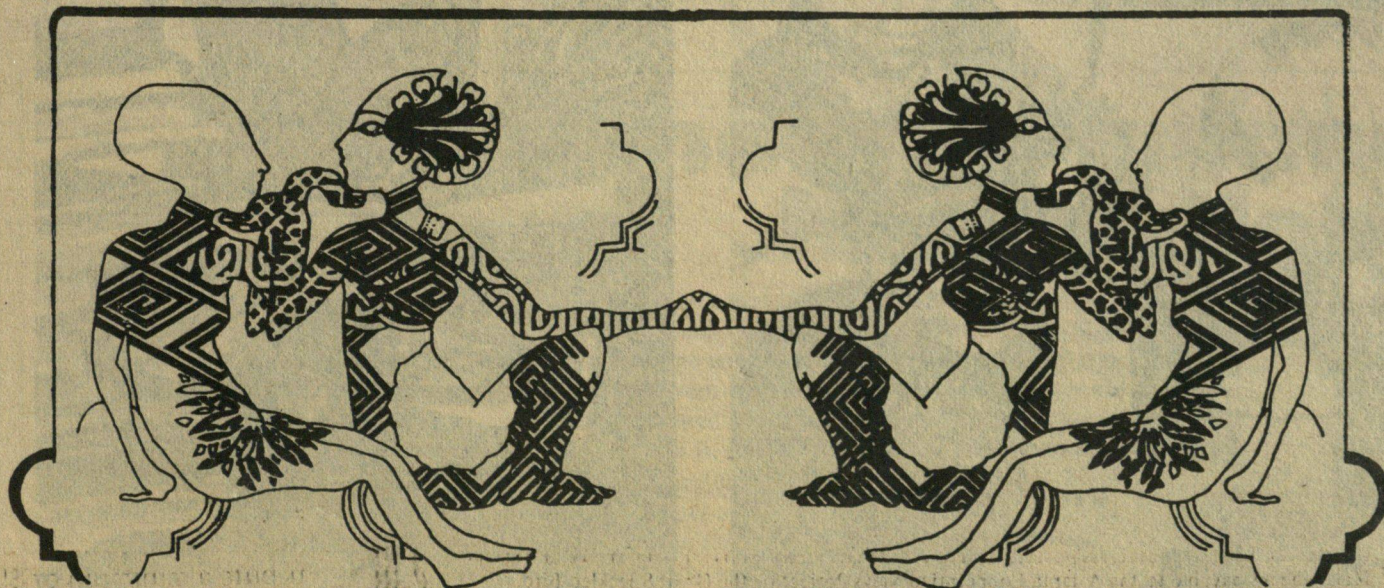
To argue that gayness is an individual choice because gays are outside the mainstream of society, and consequently that gayness is not progressive, is likewise erroneous. Gays are not on the periphery of society. Most gays, like most people, are workers; they are next to you at work, in the school and in the community.

(6) Next, the anti-gay line says that there is no material basis for gay relationships because they do not produce children. By this logic, all sex which is not procreative has no material basis and is a manifestation of bourgeois ideology; similarly, abortion and contraception would not be supported, and couples should not engage in sex unless they want children. As communists of course we see that the procreation and perpetuation of the working class is necessary.

But we believe that especially in this historical period, a distinction can and should be made between sexuality and reproduction. In the past, when infant mortality was great, the birth rate was decreasing, life spans were shorter, and larger populations were an economic necessity, things were different.

For the future, we understand the meaning of social responsibility under a worker's state to be different from the

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graphic by wendy cadden/women a journal of liberation

Busing.

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But the Atlanta Board of Education was still holding back, balking at so called "forced" busing for desegregation. In reality, busing had long helped maintain segregation. Fulton County for many years bussed their black students to an Atlanta high school, and as late as 1965, Cobb County sent their black students to Marietta schools.

With the city growing blacker and the suburbs becoming a white donut, a new concept became part of the desegregation struggle: metropolitan relief.

THE METRO SUIT

"When our children entered the Buckhead schools, many were up to three years behind in reading level and other skills. Tutoring and special help brought them up. Statistics show they have kept up with their classes, and did not lower the school average at all."

This was the experience of the children from Father Ford's Emmaus House project. These black parents felt that white schools were providing an improved education for their kids. But Atlanta was becoming re-segregated. The parents went to ACLU of Georgia asking them to seek a metropolitan desegregation plan. But, neither the NAACP nor the Board of Education were interested in a metro plan. In June, 1972, at the request of 26 black parents, the Georgia ACLU filed its own suit seeking metro wide integration.

The ACLU's Metro case requests cooperation of all nine metro area school systems with a minimum of change in present administrative structures, leaving intact the present local boards of education. Those boards would contribute members to a metro board based on a per capita student attendance.

"The fear parents have," noted attorney Bethune, "is that if this suit wins, kids will be bussed from Marietta down to lower Clayton County. This isn't the idea at all." Adjoining neighborhoods across city/county lines will make busing in relatively small areas the general rule under the metro plan.

In addition, the suit advocates creative planning, such as using the "magnet" approach, to build for success. The "magnet" school plan proposes the creation of special interest centers, particularly for secondary education, which would supposedly draw students into their realm of interest, compensating for distance with superior programming.

A plan somewhat similar to this paired North Fulton and Northside High Schools, in a plan which Northside students could go to North Fulton for vocational training. According to June Cofer, however, this program failed miserably because no Northside students wanted vocational training.

By the end of 1972, eleven years after the first nine black students officially "desegregated" Atlanta schools, one black community was running a volunteer bus to put black children in white schools, but 106 out of 153 schools were "totally or virtually segregated, and the school population is close to 80% black and 20% white."

Two years later, Bill McKinney, black state representative, stated "Six years ago when the system was 30% black, I was for busing because I felt it was necessary for quality education. Now it is 80% black and we have to go out and find some white folks to integrate with, I'm not so sure."

The ACLU Metro suit, on the other hand, stands by the statement of Kenneth Clark, black psychologist:

"Segregated schools cannot be equal in a racist society—and segregated schools are not necessary except in a racist society. Racially segregated schools damage white children as well as black children."

—sally gabb

Part 2—1972 to present—next week

-gays

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definition under capitalism. In a society run by workers, the needs of one are the needs of all. The care and upbringing of children is a social obligation in which every citizen takes part. Biological parenthood is not as important as it is under capitalism, since children are no longer seen as the property of their parents.

(7) The final argument is that gays are not materially oppressed under capitalism since the capitalist class does not reap great profits from denying democratic rights to gays.

The material oppression of gays is linked to the monogamous family and the capitalist exploitation of sex roles. As communists, we must deal with the contradictory role of the monogamous family. On the one hand, the monogamous family is the primary source of enjoyment and strength for most people in this society. On the other hand, the monogamous family has been used in the bourgeois societies to perpetuate the division of labor between men and women which has been a bar to unity of the working class.

The complex system of sex roles that has developed along with and complementary to the monogamous family has added to and encouraged the oppression of gays. Male chauvinist thinking says clearly that men and women have different roles in society. Men take part in social production and women take part in domestic work, isolated and in the

home. Gays do not automatically fit into this neat categorization.

Gays are oppressed in many ways, from the denial of democratic rights (housing, jobs, education) to police repression and brutality in their communities; from imprisonment, castration, lobotomizing, to the use of aversive conditioning (chemicals, electric shock). Many "open" gays are forced to work in the lowest paying jobs for bosses who use this stigma as a lever for increased exploitation. Gay parents are denied custody of their children.

Parts of the new communist movement have abandoned their revolutionary duty to arouse the people, by not exposing these concrete examples of reactionary bourgeois ideology and by not explaining how these instances of oppression serve to weaken and divide the working class. The proponents of the anti-gay line have also failed to support any of their assertions with concrete historical or material facts.

The communist role is not to abandon any possible ally, but to show that socialist revolution under the leadership of the working class is the means to the liberation of all oppressed people.

Just as men, women, heterosexuals and oppressed national minorities cross all class lines, so do gays. Gays are neither inherently revolutionary nor inherently reactionary. Gay people, particularly gay workers, are capable of enthusiastically grasping socialist ideas and of being disciplined fighters. To make enemies of potential allies is to abandon the working class and its interests.

(This article was adapted from a longer paper which is available for 75 cents from LARG, P.O. Box 1362, Cudahy, Calif 90201.)

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