

GAY LIBERATION ON HLR

In the last issue of the newsletter, Warwick argued the case against the support of homosexual law reform. In this present article, I am attempting a critique of his position, because I feel the issue is an important one for UL.

Many of Warwick's statements seem vaguely self-contradictory and logically inconsistent. Ignoring, for the moment, the obvious non sequitur that "an anti-social movement ... is consequently revolutionary", he maintains that support of law reform recognises the "right" of parliamentarians to grant us a licence to exist. "To demand that the law be changed is to ask to be legislated into existence." Yet I would have thought that the very existence of anti-homosexual legislation implied the recognition by the State of the existence of homosexual forms of behavior, and, ipso facto, the existence of homosexuals. It also seems to me that support for law reform might just as logically recognize that parliaments and the law have no place "in the bedrooms of the nation". Warwick himself seems in two minds about this; on the one hand, he opposes law reform in general, and on the other, hints that a program repealing existing laws would meet with his approval.

Homosexual law reform is an important issue, even if solely as a matter of principle. It prevents the State from interfering in matters of private morality, and hence is just as important as law reform in other areas, such as abortion, censorship and marihuana. But more importantly, basic law reform can be used as a wedge, as a starting point for more relevant legislative reforms. It may be easier to go from there on to such issues as job discrimination, and renting and buying of houses, etc., two issues on which positive steps have been taken by governments, in the Netherlands and New York City.

Perhaps the saddest aspect of his article is the underlying assumption throughout that all Gay Liberationists are political revolutionaries, and that this is somehow a necessary pre-condition for acceptance into Gay Lib. Nowhere is there any recognition of the pluralism not only in Sydney Gay Lib, but amongst all homosexuals in our society. He suggests that talk of radicalizing society is ridiculous anyway: "we can't even radicalize other homosexuals". True enough, and the university based membership attests to this fact. But I wonder whose fault this is? Can we afford to adopt this concept that gay lib members have all the answers, are a form of Lenin's vanguard of the proletariat? Isn't it a possibility that our failure to radicalise other homosexuals may lie with ourselves, our condescending 'you're not liberated' attitude to the conventional queens in the suburbs, to whom law reform might not so easily be dismissed as worthless and irrelevant? There are dangers in adopting a purist revolutionary line, of restricting ourselves to links with other leftist groups; (and while on this point, Warwick's ambivalence towards CAMP Inc should be noted). Can we be sure that when the revolution comes these New Left counter culture groups are going to continue to be our allies? It is worth remembering the effects on homosexuals of the revolution in Russia and Cuba, and also the strongly anti-homosexual stand adopted by much of the Black Power movement in the States. Can we be similarly sure that the suburban queens are of no use to us because they don't quite toe our revolutionary line? Gay Liberation is failing to accept the realities of the society in which we live if it fails to recognise that law reform means much to a large number of people. And to deny these people that,

for the sake of the 'revolution', seems yet another example of the subtle authoritarianism that ironically pervades much of the counter culture.

Perhaps we could draw an analogy from the theories of the de-schooling advocate, Ivan Illich. OK, maybe Illich is right, maybe we don't need schools to teach kids to read and write. But this ignores the fact that tomorrow millions of children will turn up for school, waiting to be taught to read and write, many of them from very poor homes for whom learning the three R's may be very important, simply as a matter of survival in a cruel, credential oriented society. There's not much that a poor black 14 year old can do in a large city if he cannot read and write enough to understand a street sign or read a phone book. Yet it is too often the rich college graduate who speaks three languages with native fluency at the price of 16 years of high cost, rigorous and sequential education, who is most determined that the poor kids should make clay vases, weave Indian head-bands, play with Polaroid cameras, and climb over geodesic domes. Perhaps it is also too often the university based gay liberationist, who has never had the experience of homosexual oppression western suburbs style, who has never lost his job or a roof over his head because of his homosexuality, who has never encountered the hostility and wrath of working class parents towards homosexuality, who, considering himself to be part of a liberated elite condescends to confide to his suburban gay brother that his self identity is dispensable.

It is well to keep in mind that even the New Left's guru Herbert Marcuse, realizes that an individual change in consciousness alone will not bring about a revolution; one has also to recognize the fact that there are groups of people in our society who possess enormous power, power which can be used to crush individuals should they so desire. By accepting a need for law reform, gaylib need not necessarily be following a reformist line; it may be simply recognizing the existence of power groups in the society. By pretending they are not there does not abnegate their existence.

Trevor Wilson

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