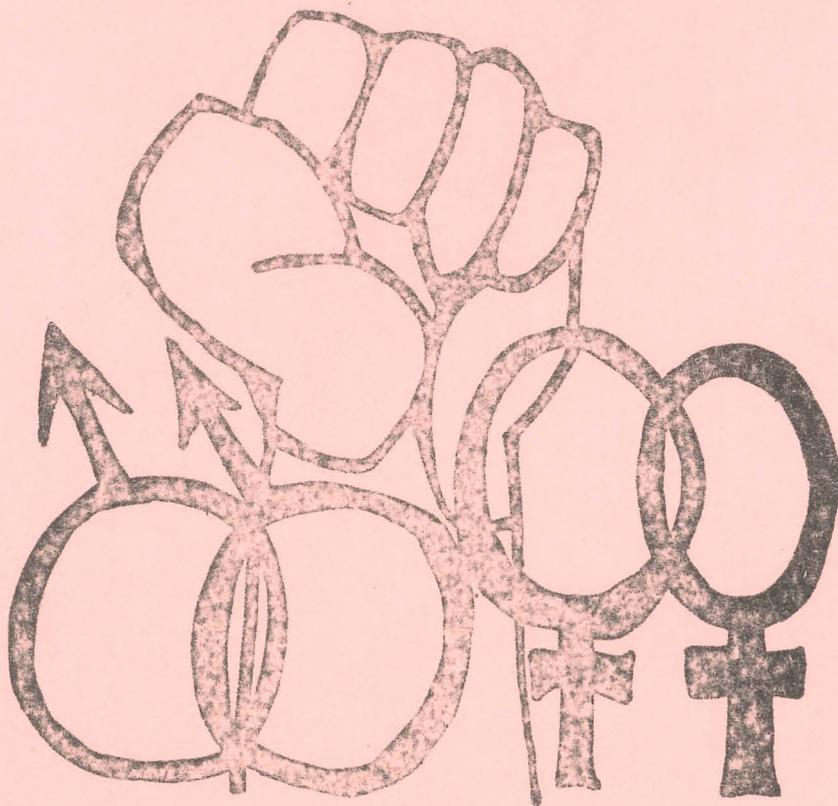


4th National Homosexual Conference
August 25 - 27, 1978

Papers Presented by

the **Socialist Workers Party**

and the **Socialist Youth Alliance**



THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT AND HOMOSEXUALS: THE RECORD

You are in a political discussion with some other homosexuals. You have just said that you think that examples of discrimination against us should be seen as part of a greater oppression--you say it's part of the capitalist system.

Inevitably you are intercepted:-

"It's no use going into a boring rave about capitalism, socialism has got gay people nowhere. Look at where they have revolutions--Russia, China, Cuba. They are really sexually repressive places. The gay communities are much worse off over there. We've got to keep what little freedoms we have now under this system."

Most lesbians and homosexual men know something about the severe oppression of gay people in the post-capitalist societies. All of them know that the labour movement today does not fight for our liberation. This is the major factor in making them suspicious of socialists, and hostile to the strategies that can bring us to an understanding of our oppression and how to overcome it.

Here we'd like to outline the real history of the socialist movement, in its relation to the struggles of homosexuals, and reveal the proud record of working class defence of gay rights. We'd also like to analyse what went wrong after the Russian revolution, why the workers' states are so repressive, and why major sections of the world labour movement turned against homosexuals.

A few years ago two New York socialists, David Thorstad and John Lauritsen, published a valuable study revealing the history of the early homosexual rights movement, beginning in the 1860s.

They pointed out that the Stonewall rebellion in June 1969 in New York, which is seen as the birth of the modern movement for gay liberation, was in fact the hundredth anniversary of the long struggle for gay rights.

For any group of oppressed, regaining a knowledge of their history is important. It brings courage, a sense of identity, a heritage of proud struggle. It's all the more important for lesbians and homosexual men, whose oppression is marked more than any other by enforced silence, ignorance and isolation. Discovering that homosexuals before us fought against their persecution is a real victory for our movement.

Also there are lessons to be learned from the history of the early movement. We can understand our present situation and weigh up possible strategies to embark on much better if we can relate back to what happened in the movement before us.

Marx and Engels

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were the founders of modern, scientific socialism. Their ideas drew on the most advanced ideas of the time -- English political economy, German materialist philosophy, and French socialism. From these they forged an understanding of how capitalism operates, and how the workers and oppressed will eventually triumph over it, opening the way for the unfettered blossoming of human potential.

But they aren't infallible gods. Their failure to correctly perceive of homosexuals as an oppressed group to be supported is unfortunate and regrettable. On the other hand, any such understanding would be

surprising, given the infancy of knowledge about sexuality in their time.

In his work "Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State", Engels failed to take his historical materialist analysis far enough, and assuming the naturalness of heterosexuality, denounced the ancient Greeks for the "degradation of boy-love." The private correspondence of Marx and Engels indicates that they read some of the literature on homosexuality that the gay movement put out in the 1860s. They ridiculed it. Also they abused J.B. von Schweitzer, a leader of the German working class movement because of his "faggotry" (warmbruderliche), while the leadership of the German labour movement (particularly Ferdinand Lasalle) was prepared to defend him.

These sad errors, however, must be realistically seen in relation to the greatness of their overall contribution to the struggle against all oppression, and the invaluable influence their ideas have on our search to locate the roots of our oppression as homosexual men and women, and the solution to it. Their legacy to future generations of struggle was the Marxist method, not their personal shortcomings.

The early homosexual movement

A large movement for homosexual rights developed in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century. This movement had extensive links with the socialist movement. Lassalle, Bebel and Bernstein, leaders of the workers movement in Germany were early and prominent defenders of homosexuals at a time when such a stand was seen as outrageous and the gay movement had few friends.

The movement had its beginnings in the 1860's when a new penal code for Prussia was proposed which penalised male homosexual activity. In 1871 this new penal code was adopted by the Reichstag, the German parliament, for all of the newly unified Germany.

A Hungarian doctor, Berkert, wrote an open letter to the legislators in 1869 calling upon them to reject the new law. In his writings he tried to defiantly present a rational understanding of homosexuality (he is credited with having invented the term), and defend the more enlightened Napoleonic law code.

The leading personality of the movement in the nineteenth century was Karl Ulrichs, who fought courageously, sometimes alone, against the extension of anti-homosexual laws in Germany.

His writings, from 1862 onwards, push the idea that homosexual women and men are a third sex. Although today this sounds ridiculous, understanding of human sexuality at the time was minimal, and he helped clarify the development of a homosexual identity. Winning a separate identity, and a concept of what we are, were major breakthroughs for the early movement, and for the study of psychology as a whole.

When Oscar Wilde went to trial in 1895, this defence internationally showed who stood on the side of homosexuals. Emma Goldman, the anarchist, in the USA, and George Bernard Shaw, the Fabian socialist in Britain, were virtually alone in their countries in opposing Wilde's persecution.

Wilde was a socialist of sorts. He himself had stuck his neck out, alone among England's literary figures, in opposing the execution of Chicago's Haymarket martyrs in 1887.

His book, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism", while not Marxist, was influential in American radical circles, and sold hundreds of thousands of copies in Central and Eastern Europe. His beleaguered defence "of the love that dare not speak its name" is one of the great tragedies of our heritage. Wilde's prosecution signalled a really major defeat for the gay communities in England. Only a generation before the death penalty for sodomy had been lapsed. Now repression gain intensified.

England had no organised movement comparable to Germany although outstanding homosexual pioneers like the socialist leader Edmund Carpenter campaigned for freedom for gays and wrote books shedding light on "uranians" (a word the early movement used for third sex or intersex people, ie homosexuals).

The best defence of Wilde was mounted in Germany. Eduard Bernstein, leader of the German Social Democratic Party, the party of the German workers, wrote a series of articles in Die Neue Zeit in May 1895. He argued that all morality is a historical phenomenon, and that homosexuality could not be termed "unnatural". He argued against notions that homosexuality accompanied the decay of civilisations such as the Greek and Roman, and even warned against accepting what Krafft-Ebbing and other psychologists were putting forward, for they could not condemn homosexuality as a disease without stepping into the shoes of the moralizers. Bernsteins defence stands out as one of the high points of socialist support for homosexual liberation, and indeed as one of the gay movements most remarkable documents. It is the basis of the historical materialist Marxist analysis that Engles didn't do.

In 1897, two years after Ulrichs death, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee was formed to agitate against paragraph 175 (the anti-homosexual law in Germany), to enlighten public understanding of homosexuality and to interest homosexuals themselves in the struggle for their rights.

It included a significant number of lesbians, although the group was overwhelmingly male. In 1904 Anna Ruhling appealed to the womens movement to support lesbians. She said that a significant number of uranian women had made valuable contributions to the womens movement but that the women's movement had not in turn defended lesbians.

The Scientific Humanitarian Committee embarked on a long term petitioning campaign seeking the names of prominent people to build opposition to the law.

On January 13, 1898, August Bebel, an esteemed leader of the German Social-Democracy, and the author of "Women and Socialism" was the first parliamentarian to take the floor in support of the petition campaign. Uproar followed in which the parties of the right heckled him and were countered with shouts of "hear, hear!" from the SPD delegates.

In all, 6000 public figures signed the petition including Herman Hesse, George Grosz, Krafft-Ebbing, Karl Kautsky, Albert Einstein, Kathe Kollwitz, Heinrich Mann, Stefan Zweig, R M Rilke, Thomas Mann and Martin Buber. Zola and Tolstoy also signed.

The gay movement thereafter came to call for votes for the SPD in elections.

Agitation kept up, growing consistently until in October 1907,

a meeting of 2000 was held in Berlin for example. The strength was undermined by a series of scandal trials, discrediting famous gays, and causing public hysteria.

In 1911 the large German women's movement answered the call of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee and the Social Democratic Party and swung into action, defeating the proposed extension of the law to cover lesbians, with mass meetings and rallies. The movement was broader than the SHC. There were many other groups and many other leaders, most notably Kurt Hiller and Benedict Friedlander. The movement also spread to countries bordering Germany.

Magnus Hirschfeld had been undisputably the leader of the SHC and the movement as a whole. He was a member of the SPD. The least secretary of the SHC, Richard Linsert, was a Communist and later a left oppositionist against Stalinism. In the revolution of November 1918, the SHC "took a most active part". Hirschfeld addressed a meeting of 4000 in Berlin on November 10: "In addition to a true peoples state with a genuinely democratic structure, we want a social republic. Socialism means: solidarity, community, mutuality, further development of society into a unified body of people. Each for all and all for each! And yet a third thing we want: The community of peoples struggling against racism and national chauvinism, removal of limitations on economic and personal communication between peoples, the right of peoples to self determination regarding their relationship to a state and their form of government. We want peoples courts and a world parliament."

In the wake of the overturn of the old order in Germany, it seemed that all the movements aspirations would be realised. The workers parties: the Social Democrats and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) maintained their support. (This support ended only in the 1930s under the pressure of fascism and stalinism.)

The movement set up the impressive and pathbreaking Institute for Sexual Science and not only demanded repeal of the law but amnesty for all homosexuals in prison. It rejoiced in the new freedom of the press. In 1921 Berlin held the first congress of the World League for Sexual Reform.

In part this had been made possible by the world outreach the movement had made. Hirschfelds international speaking tours had taken him as far as China. But even as the victory of the movement was in sight, fascism, the ultimate weapon of threatened capitalism, was advancing.

By the time of its ultimate triumph over the tragically misled workers parties in Germany, it had already harrassed the gay movement and forced retreats. The tide had turned and homosexuals were attacked from all sides and forced back into the closet. From the early twenties on, gangs of right wingers had broken up meetings of the movement. Hirschfeld himself suffered a fractured skull in Munich in 1921 at the hands of anti-semitic thugs. The gay movement was one of the first victims of the rage the Nazis unleashed once in power.

The Institute was ransacked and destroyed on May 6, 1933. Hirschfeld fled to France and died soon after. The German movement died with the quarter million homosexual women and men who were sent to the gas chambers wearing their pink triangles.

The gains of the 1917 Russian Revolution and their betrayal

The German movement had an influence on the Russian intelligentsia.. Around the turn of the century authors began examining sexuality in their works. Less than positive were Pushkin, Gogol and Tolstoy. But some poets, novelists and artists rejoiced in homoeroticism.

After the 1905 revolution many personalities in Russia, including leading politicians, argued for gay rights. These aspirations for sexual freedom were met in the wake of the great October revolution. Massive social revolutions bring with them questioning of previously unchallenged ideas, and the flowering of social freedoms.

After the French revolution, women, blacks and homosexuals had come before the revolutionary assembly and demanded equality. In 1791 laws prohibiting homosexuality were repealed. Through Napoleons conquests this reform spread across Western Europe.

Two months after the Soviets took power in Russia, in December 1917, the Tsarist law codes were repealed, thereby decriminalising homosexual activity.

In the early years of the revolution, despite the disorder, pivity and war, a new life was being born. There were radical experiments in the arts and in education. With the laws against gays, repressive laws on divorce, abortion, illegitimacy and prostitution had gone. The Bolsheviks strick at the oppression of women ensuring their legal rights (even by force in the more backward areas) and attempting to socialise family functions and bring women into the workplace with equal status.

Prominent homosexuals held high public positions, like Eisenstein, the film maker and Chicherin the diplomat. Homoerotic literature, like Kuzmins poetry was published. The first edition of the Soviet Encyclopedia based its entry on homosexuality on the ideas of Hirschfeld and Freud, the most positive understanding existing at the time.

The dominant feeling was that it was a principle that the state had no business interfering in sexual matters and that "it was necessary to break down the walls which separate homosexuals from the rest of society".

Dr. Grigory Batkis, Director of the Moscow Institute for Sexual Hygiene, led the official Soviet intervention in the congresses of the World League for Sexual Freedom. There and in his book, "The Sexual Revolution in Russia", he explained the new attitude towards gays in Russia, and agitated against the anti-homosexual laws in the capitalist countries.

Yet even in the twenties a bureaucracy was growing that would turn away from advancing revolution and would reverse many of the gains of October. Russia was backward and isolated. Real socialism couldn't be built out of socialism. Gradually the new rulers consolidated their domination over the working people, exhausted by the turbulence of the previous years, deprived by war of their best fighters, and demoralised by the failure of the expected European socialist revolution.

Although production was no longer exploitative, as under capitalism, the bureaucrats appropriated to themselves goods that couldn't be produced in amounts large enough to be distributed to all. To maintain their position they abandoned the world revolution in favor of compromises with imperialism (hence "peaceful coexistence"). To maintain their position, they trod on any flickers of workers democracy.

This process is seen in the conflict between the supporters of Stalin and the supporters of Trotsky. Stalin's victory for the rising bureaucracy meant untold suffering for the people of the USSR and the most damaging betrayal of socialism since the European workers parties voted in favor of the 1914-18 war.

In Stalinist Russia in the 1930's the official attitude to the family was reversed. Facilities to take the burden of household work were no longer a priority. Repressive laws prohibiting divorce and abortion were reintroduced. Medals were given out to encourage motherhood. Women received the "Mother hero in of the Soviet Union Award" for having 15 children, and supposedly thereby helping to boost human resources for the war effort.

This bolstering of the family should be seen in the context of all the conservative and anti-democratic policies that Stalin's reign introduced. The authoritarianism of the nuclear family structure must also be seen as beneficial for the stability of the bureaucracy's rule.

With this overturn of the revolutionary policies of the Bolsheviks, came the historic turn against homosexuals in the workers states and in the workers movement around the world.

In January 1934, roundups of homosexuals began in Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa and other cities. In March a new law, recommending 8 years hard labour for homosexuality (itself) was introduced. The Soviet press and the Communist Parties around the world denounced homosexuality as degeneracy caused by decadent capitalism. Homosexuality was, at the same time, "the fascist perversion" to the Stalinists, and "sexual Bolshevism" to the Nazis.

To this day the political parties of the workers movement that adhere to the USSR or China mount versions of that myth. To this day the regimes in the USSR, Albania, China, Vietnam, Korea, etc. enforce silence about homosexuals in those countries, denying publicly that they exist now. Prosecution of people for homosexuality continues, however, as shown by the imprisonment in recent years of Soviet film maker Sergei Paradjanov.

In Eastern Europe the situation is better. In most cases there are no laws and gay sub-cultures and bar scenes are allowed to exist. East Germany repealed the law that the early movement had fought against in revulsion at how the Nazis had used it. West Germany had kept the law until recently. Also, in East Germany it is reported that Dr. Rudolf Klimmer and friends have kept up the work of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. There is also a gay liberation group in Poland.

The countries of Eastern Europe, despite the restrictions on democratic rights are comparable in their treatment of homosexuals.

Cuba

The Cuban revolution was an outstanding victory for human progress. It raised a small, beleaguered nation from deepest poverty to well-being. The Cuban revolution made, and continues to make, an enormous contribution to the global struggle against imperialism.

While not ruled by a bureaucracy, hardened and thoroughly counter-revolutionary, like in the USSR, real workers democracy doesn't exist in Cuba. One indicator of this is the Cuban government's attitude to lesbians and male homosexuals.

In 1965, UMAP (Military Units to Increase Production) were set up. Homosexual men and women were to be isolated into these units, somewhat like concentration camps.

In 1971 the resolution of the First National Congress on Education and Culture (published in Gramma, the official organ of the Cuban Communist Party, on May 9, 1971) condemned homosexuality as a "social pathology". "It is not to be tolerated for notorious homosexuals to have influence in the formation of our youth." "Relocation" and "severe penalties" were recommended for individual cases of "deterioration". Purges of teachers, cultural workers, athletes and government functionaries began.

What was behind this, in a country that had gone further than any other in attempting to socialise the functions of the family and free women from relegation to inferior roles?

Intersecting with the pressure of the traditional Stalinist belief that homosexuality is a product of decadent capitalism, was a heritage of southern European machismo, Catholicism and frontier masculinity. (Part of the appeal of the "heroic guerrilla fighter" is his vision of the individual fighting for survival in the wilds). Significant too is the memory of pre-revolution Cuba. Like Puerto Rico today, astronomically high unemployment presented no alternative to thousands of men and women other than selling their bodies to yankee businessmen tourists. It's an unpleasant image of homosexuality that is hard to erase.

Determinant, though, in the continuation of Cuba's persecution of gays, is the lack of opportunity for homosexuals to raise the issue through organs of workers democracy.

The modern gay movement and the left

Stalinism and fascism had virtually destroyed the gay movement across the world. Tiny, timid groups survived in some countries. Before the rebirth of the militant in 1969, a number of groups had evolved in America: Daughters of Bilitis, One Inc and Mattachine Society and the Society for Individual Rights.

The founder of the Mattachine Society, Henry May tells how he had to abandon his long standing membership of the American Communist Party, in order to begin gay movement work. To this day the CP in the United States regularly purges members suspected of homosexuality, however, many of the original members of Mattachine were leftists. The group had evolved from "Batchelors for Wallace" a closetted support group for a progressive candidate in the 1948 election.

McCarthyism, the anti-communist witchhunt which plagued the USA in the fifties, hit out at homosexuals first, scapegoating them as much as Reds. There were many homosexual scandals and panics (like the famous one in Boise, Idaho) and this period of extreme persecution kept the closet doors firmly closed, and delineated homosexual oppression for a generation.

The left, in this situation, wanted to distance itself from homosexuals, incorrectly hoping to avoid at least a part of the general persecution.

In the late sixties, with the new generation having thrown off the stultifying ideas of the previous years, new movements arose: the counterculture, the New Left, the black civil rights movement and most importantly womens liberation.

These influences, the inspiration of those struggles and the mood created by new liberationist ideas enabled the development of a

of radical homosexual movements in the big gay communities in New York and San Francisco.

In June, 1969, the new movement was born, when the Greenwich Village people rioted, resisting a cop attack on the Stonewall a gay bar.

The early gay groups considered themselves revolutionary. The name Gay Liberation Front was in solidarity with the National Liberation Front bravely fighting imperialism in Vietnam. They saw themselves as a major part of a movement which would soon overturn all oppression, and usher in a new world of freedom.

These ideas died early, and as the youth radicalisation that fed them slowed, the gay movement still growing fast, often became involved in quiet lobbying of liberal politicians for reforms. The women, by and large, were forced to form autonomous lesbian groups because of the failure of gay movement men to confront their sexism.

Now, hopefully a new era of the gay movement has commenced. Signalled by the militant mass action that was the united response of hundreds of thousands of American lesbians and homosexual men to the threat posed by the campaign figureheaded by Anita Bryant.

Significantly this comes at a time when the radicalisation is coming to be based much more in the industrial working class than in student youth, and when capitalism has entered a long term severe international recession. It comes at a time when the ruling class has to reverse the gains made by women and oppressed minorities in the last period, and will increasingly attack basic human rights.

The Socialist Workers Party believes we have every reason to look to a broader, more militant, working class gay movement world wide in the coming years.

The responses of the left parties to the modern gay movement have been varied. Many of the activists in political gay movement groups are associated with socialist organisations or are leftward looking.

Many left organisations stand within the tradition of Stalinism. Uncritically echoing the policies of Moscow or Peking, they are totally hostile to homosexuals and to the gay movement. (In Australia, the Socialist Party, and the Communist Party Marxist/Leninist).

The Communist Party of Australia, like the British Communist Party, is a small party that has tried to throw off the worst aspects of its Stalinist past. Pressured by a large Labor Party, relatively large forces to the left of them and a large active gay movement, it took up homosexual rights demands. We believe that the CPA's commitment as a party, to gay liberation is uneven. Its long years of faithful service to the counter-revolutionary bureaucrats in Moscow cannot be washed clean, and they cannot be reformed into an effective revolutionary organisation.

Other organisations outside the tradition of Stalinism reflect the Stalinist conception that homosexuals are not working class. They have not overcome the idea that the class struggle is only to be waged from the factory floor (by macho, white males, presumably) and don't relate to struggles waged by Blacks as Blacks, against their oppression, by women as women against their oppression, etc. (In Australia the Socialist Labour League and the Spartacist League).

Our party, as part of the Fourth International, stands in the tradition of Trotskyist opposition to the bureaucratisation of the Soviet Union and of the Communist Parties. Only we could analyse the long detour that Stalinism made away from the support socialists gave to homosexual liberation.

Our party, and our sister parties overseas, have responded best to the modern gay movement, integrating gay demands into our program and placing a high priority on work in the campaigns the gay movement has run. For us gay liberation is in no way peripheral to the class struggle.

We support the independent self-organisation of lesbians and homosexual men to combat oppression. A strong movement that puts the needs of gays first, is an added strength for the revolutionary movement. This was shown in Germany in 1918. It is also a guarantee that homosexual oppression will not be neglected by the workers movement, before or after socialist revolution. The history of the USSR indicates this. The presence of a homosexual movement would have pushed acceptance of lesbians and homosexual men further in the early revolutionary years, and would have waged a determined fight against the bureaucracy's return to persecution of gays.

We see, in the history of the early German gay movement confirmation that it is not enough to just fight gay oppression, but it is necessary to defeat capitalism as a whole. Just when the German gay movement saw victory in sight, and was sure that society had become more enlightened, capitalism turned its laws and its Nazi shock troops loose on homosexuals.

The massacre of homosexuals by the fascists in the thirties, and again in 1973 in Chile, are to us further confirmation that the alternatives facing world civilization are socialism or barbarism. While capitalism continues to exist, it will threaten not only attacks on democratic rights, but also ultimately famine, war, fascism, and the endangering of human survival on this planet. All for the sake of profit.

We believe that the crimes committed against lesbians and male homosexuals in the name of socialism are, in fact, crimes against socialism. Socialism means the liberation of all the oppressed.

For us the natural link between the socialist and the gay movements is borne out in our theory, in the history of the early movement, and in our present daily political practice.

We know that the revolutionary movement and the gay liberation movement will go forward together and that the socialist revolution in the west will guarantee homosexual freedom. Its leadership will be in full support of the gay liberation movement. The political revolution which will institute workers' democracy in the post-capitalist countries will restore to lesbians and homosexual men the human rights and dignity that socialism promises to all the downtrodden, exploited and persecuted peoples of the world.

DEMANDS FOR THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT

(1) Repeal of all anti-homosexual laws, including:

- *repeal of all laws prohibiting homosexual acts as such;
- *repeal of all laws regarding soliciting and inciting;
- *repeal of all laws of indecent assault, indecent behaviour, indecent acts, and offensive behaviour;
- *repeal of all regulations prohibiting homosexual behaviour in institutions such as schools, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, "welfare" homes, prisons or the armed forces;
- *release of all homosexuals from prisons and psychiatric institutions;
- *just compensation for all those who have suffered under these laws;
- *destruction of all files on homosexuals.

(2) For a Charter of Rights for Lesbians and Homosexual Men, banning

discrimination in:

- *employment, including teaching;
- *education;
- *housing, immigration, and other areas;
- *For the right of homosexual parents to retain custody of their own children, and for the right of homosexuals to adopt children;
- *For legal, economic, and social recognition of homosexuals relationships on the same basis as heterosexual relationships;
- *For rational sex education in schools, teaching that human sexuality can be expressed in both homosexual and heterosexual forms and that the only harmful sexual relationships are those based on coercion;
- *For the rewriting of homosexuals into history and literature courses;
- *For the banning of the barbaric practices of aversion therapy, chemical castration, and brain surgery designed to eradicate homosexual behaviour.

(3) End Police Harassment of Homosexuals.

(4) Organise counter-mobilisations, and a campaign against right-wing attacks.

(5) Within the Gay Community:

- * For facilities for lesbians and homosexual men to meet free from harassment, discrimination, and exploitive prices;
- * For fire safety and proper ventilation in gay bars;
- * No discrimination against women and Blacks in gay bars;
- * Free distribution of political literature in gay meeting places.

Winning these demands would be a great step forward for lesbians and homosexual men. Not because we would have won full liberation, but because in securing and maintaining these rights we would have assembled a human force capable of contributing in its turn to the final revolutionary overthrow of this system of oppression. The success of these campaigns would, of course, mean the daily lives of lesbians and male homosexuals would be that much more bearable.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE LESBIAN AND MALE HOMOSEXUAL MOVEMENTS

The lesbian and male homosexual movements face an important choice on the weekend of August 25-27, with the holding of the Fourth National Homosexual Conference in Sydney. The conference will deal chiefly with the discrimination that homosexuals face in the workforce, but will also decide the general direction of the movements for the coming twelve months.

The recent upsurge in activity of the gay movement in this country, particularly in Sydney, indicates the potential of the movement.

The reaction of lesbian and male homosexual activists to the brutal police attack on the June 24 Mardi Gras in Sydney was large -- 2000 attended a demonstration in Sydney, 600 in Melbourne, and smaller numbers in Adelaide and Brisbane. The size of the demonstrations has certainly exceeded anything seen before in this country and points to the involvement of large numbers of previously uninvolved gays.

The actions here occurred in the context of right-wing attacks on the rights of lesbians and male homosexuals in countries around the world, where gays had apparently gained greater acceptance in the last 9 years. The most important of these attacks was the defeat of the Miami anti-discrimination legislation on June, 7, 1977, following an hysterical anti-homosexual slander campaign led by Anita Bryant who was assisted by such groups as the Ku Klux Klan.

In Britain, Mary Whitehouse and the Festival of Light successfully prosecuted the paper Gay News for "blasphemy". A similar attack occurred on Body Politic in Canada.

Here, in Australia, the Festival of Light (FOL) and other reactionary groups have attempted to whip up a similar campaign. FOL is touring Mary Whitehouse around the country in September this year. Two of the major themes of the tour relate to homosexuals -- "blasphemy" (ie censorship) and the "protection of children."

What is quite apparent is an international offensive designed to force us back into our closets, and to destroy any gains that have been made during the 1970s.

These attacks are not occurring in a vacuum. They are part of the reaction of the ruling class in the west to the international recession and to the gains made in the previous period by workers, and such diverse groups as women, national minorities and homosexuals.

More and more the ruling class must attack the standard of living of workers and drive women out of the workforce and back into the home, in order to maintain its level of profits. To do this the role of the family and its rigid sex-roles must be re-emphasised. In this situation, it is important that the ideological position of the family be strengthened.

Modern capitalist society, which assigns economic and social roles on the basis of sex and which pretends that this stereotyping is the result of some natural law, cannot permit any type of sexual behaviour which contradicts the myth that "biology is destiny". Male homosexuals, particularly those of us who are "effeminate", are an affront to the morality of a society in which female means inferior. And lesbians defy the myth that the greatest aspiration of a woman is to marry and bear children.

There is little room for the rights of lesbians and male homosexuals -- let alone an active lesbian and homosexual rights movement -- in this situation. However, a strong gay movement, particularly in the United States, stands in the way of this goal. In addition, acceptance of homosexuality has increased considerably in the past 9 years, to the extent that the majority of Australians, and the situation is similar elsewhere, support the full legal equality of homosexual women and men with heterosexuals. In this situation the attacks of the FOL and other extreme-right groups, perform an important ideological function.

The response of the gay movement in turn must be as large as possible -- seeking out allies to fight against these attacks. The National Homosexual Conference must look clearly toward its goals of planning the extension of gay rights and defending those that the movement has already achieved.

The homosexual conference should look toward forming the basis of a number of campaigns for homosexual rights.

Repeal of all anti-homosexual laws

The homosexual movement should demand the repeal of all laws limiting homosexual behaviour. The only sexual activities which should be prohibited are those, whether heterosexual or homosexual, in which someone is coerced.

In some parts of the country, eg South Australia and the ACT, sodomy between consenting adults (ie persons over 18) has been eliminated as a criminal offence. There have also been a number of attempts at reform of this particular law in other states. However, reform has been at best piecemeal and quite unsatisfactory.

Most prosecutions of female and male homosexuals occur under other legislation such as soliciting, inciting, indecent assault, and indecent acts.

In a report on homosexual "crime" by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics, only 5 of the 215 convictions for homosexual offences in NSW in 1975 were between consenting adults in private. The report said that 89 of the 162 adults could not have been charged if they had been heterosexuals doing the same thing. This still understates the way the laws are used to persecute us.

22% of the cases involved acts without consent of one of the people involved. However, it should be noted that many of these cases did not involve any actual sex, and that there is tremendous pressure on homosexuals faces with prosecution to deny consent.

Most "offences" occurred in places that are not legally private - these frequently involved cops picking up men in drag, women or men being affectionate with friends of the same sex, young men trying to sell themselves, or obvious homosexuals just hanging around.

One third of convictions involved cops spying on homosexuals behind closed doors in public toilets. Most of these convicted were working class. Particularly hard hit were young workers, the unemployed, and transvestites - showing the ways these laws are used to persecute working class homosexuals.

Most importantly the laws give excuses for individual cops to prey on gays. Most "arrests" go unrecorded. It is quite clear that the only course for the homosexual movement is to fight for the repeal of all these laws and replace them with a law covering coercion.

Along with this, regulations covering homosexuals in the armed forces, prisons, schools, mental hospitals and "welfare" homes should be repealed. All those in prison or psychiatric hospitals should be released and compensation paid to them and others who have suffered from this persecution. All records of these "offences" should be destroyed.

Legislation should be introduced banning the use of aversion therapy, chemical castration, and brain surgery designed to eradicate homosexual behaviour.

Anti-discrimination legislation

At this stage, there is no legislation in Australia covering discrimination against homosexuals. In NSW the FoL and other reactionary religious groups forced the state government to drop the clause relating to homosexuality from the Anti-Discrimination Act.

Homosexuals are to be found in every walk of life - as workers, unemployed, capitalists, married and unmarried, and women in the home. However since most people are not capitalists, it is safe to assume that the overwhelming majority of homosexual men and women are workers.

Lesbians and male homosexuals frequently face discrimination in employment. This is to be the main area of concern for the homosexual conference.

In particular, teachers are often faced with the sack or non-employment because of their sexuality. A number of glaring examples stand out. In NSW, Penny Short lost her teachers scholarship because she was a lesbian, and Mike Clohesy was sacked for appearing publicly as a homosexual.

In Queensland, Greg Weir was refused a teaching position even though he had fulfilled the conditions of his teaching bond. He was later refused teaching work in NSW and South Australia. There are certainly many other unpublicised examples of teachers sacked for their homosexuality.

After the Weir case, the Qld. Minister of Education gave instructions to education authorities to fail homosexuals, who, like Weir, would not be employed by the education department. This was the most blatant example of victimisation of gay teachers.

Discrimination also occurs in the education process. Homosexuality is not discussed in schools. It should be treated as a valid form of sexuality along with heterosexuality, in a rational sex education course.

In the public service, many gays have to keep their sexuality secret for fear of losing promotion. There are countless other examples of workers who have been sacked for their homosexuality or else they have had to live double lives to avoid discrimination and victimisation.

In Newcastle, in 1977, hundreds of homosexuals were questioned by the cops - many at their workplaces. A number were sacked on the spot.

Homosexual relationships do not receive legal, social or economic recognition as do heterosexual relationships. All these should be placed on an equal footing. The gay movement in an anti-discrimination campaign should press these issues.

Lesbians and male homosexuals are seldom allowed to keep their children in case of divorce - and never allowed to adopt children. Equality should be fought for in this area.

Homosexuals also face discrimination in housing, immigration, and in other areas. The only way to end this is a full-scale public campaign using such methods as a charter of anti-discrimination legislation in all the above areas. To this end the homosexual conference should lay plans for a

national campaign using such methods as a charter of homosexual rights in the trade union movement, similar to the Working Women's Charter Campaign. A similar campaign is at present being waged by gay groups in Britain.

In California, the homosexual movement has had a good deal of success in mobilising support from the trade union movement in fighting the Briggs Initiative aimed at banning homosexuals and the supporters of gay rights from any employment in schools.

Other possible actions that the homosexual conference should consider on this front could include a mass petition campaign to educate the public about homosexual discrimination and the setting up of a research body to collect evidence of the discrimination.

However, the main method for gaining equality should be mass public protests aimed at getting the largest possible number of homosexuals and our supporters active in support of the campaign.

End police harassment

The most overt oppression of lesbians and male homosexuals comes from the cops - the weapon the state uses against the working class and all the oppressed. The conference should project a campaign against the sort of police brutality and harassment that occurs in the lives of many homosexuals in all parts of the country.

The most visible example in recent days was the cop attack on a peaceful march in Sydney on June 24. The cops saw an opportunity to try and teach gays a lesson and force us back into our closet. They arrested 50 people, bashing them and many others as well. They followed this up by illegally closing the courts on June 26, for the first time in over 100 years. This is only the tip of the iceberg compared to individual attacks on homosexual women and men that occur daily.

This oppression must be exposed - any cops who engage in "puffer or dyke bashing" should be prosecuted.

Attacks of the Festival of Light & Other extreme-right groups

The most vocal anti-homosexual group in Australia is the Festival of Light. However, they are not alone in engaging in anti-homosexual propaganda. In Britain, there are close links between the fascist National Front and the FoL. In the USA, the Ku Klux Klan supports Bryants campaign.

It should be noted that homosexuals have been among the first people attacked by right-wing and fascist dictatorships. Homosexuals were among the first victims of the Nazis in Germany, and were, along with communists, the main targets of the McCarthy witch-hunts of the 1950's in the US. This was because they were vulnerable targets for the right's reactionary campaigns.

In Australia, such groups as the National Front and the Australian National Alliance are as yet very small, but as the economic crisis worsens we can expect them to grow. Already they have launched attacks on women, gays and migrants.

The homosexual conference should consider how best to counter the filth peddled by the likes of Fred Nile. This should not involve physical confrontations with them or trying to prevent them speaking. This would only make martyrs of them and would divert attention from the real issue -- their attacks on the democratic rights of homosexuals. They can easily be defeated in argument. We have nothing to gain but a lot to lose by preventing them being heard, whether it be physical force or by preventing their arrival here.

Even if they were prevented from speaking this would be a Pyrric victory. Almost certainly the same limitations would be placed on ourselves.

What is needed is a strategy of counter-mobilisation of the gay movement of the gay movement, the womens movement and the trade unions to show the FoL that they are a minority, with very little support. Our aim should be to mobilise as many people as possible in a massive repudiation of their lies, to demoralise them, and to drive them back into the sewers where they came from.

Gay Bars.

Over the past few years, homosexuals and lesbians have gained a number of victories. This has occurred particularly in the social sphere. There are now gay bars in most cities where lesbians and male homosexuals can go without fear of being bashed. There is now a national gay newspaper, Campaign, with a high circulation.

However these are very limited, if still significant, gains. They have allowed a much larger degree of social activity for homosexuals, and assisted the development of a greater consciousness of our oppression.

However these changes have occurred within the framework of capitalism. Thus many of the bars are firetraps, charge exploitive prices, discriminate against women and blacks, and ban the distribution of political literature.

The gay movement should seek to organise the customers and workers of these bars, to force the owners to lift the bans, to introduce fire safety and to cut their prices. If they say that these are not possible then they should be nationalised under worker-customer control. This is a concrete area for co-operation with the trade union movement, but it will require a longterm propoganda campaign on the issue.

All of the above individual campaigns are of course merely part of a broader campaign to end the oppression and exploitation of lesbians and male homosexuals. The ultimate goal can be reached only through the widest possible support.

At present acceptance of homosexuals seems to have increased immeasurably from the situation 10 years ago. However, these gains can be easily lost. The gay community cannot sit back and thank the politicians and society for the few small changes that have occurred. In particular, the homosexual conference must look to political solutions to the problems that we homosexuals face.

In defending our rights a variety of tactics can be adopted. The way that has been used most often in the past is putting faith in such liberal reformers as Neville Wran.

Various Australian groups, such as CAMP in NSW, and Society Five in Melbourne, have relied on lobbying such liberals for reform of the laws.

These politicians come back and say: "Just play things quiet and I'll see what I can do for you, next year. At the moment I have this conservative Upper House (or backbench), but next year things will be different."

Of course, next year never comes, because all the time they are under vocal right-wing pressure from such groups as the FoL and the police force.

An example occurred in NSW in 1977. Just after Neville Wran told CAMP that he would see what he could do for homosexuals, he sent greetings to a Festival of Blight rally in Sydney.

The most glaring failure of this lobbying technique happened in Miami last year. The council had passed a gay right ordinance after lobbying by

gay groups. The right-wing, led by Anita Bryant, had repeal of the ordinance placed on the ballot in the middle of the year. The leaders of the gay movement in Florida accepted the advice of the liberal capitalist politicians in playing things quietly. Instead of mobilising gays throughout the city, the gay groups 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 gays from handing out leaflets.

The result was a minimal turnout in areas of gay supporters, and strong voting in conservative areas. Most of the movement in the US has learnt its lesson from this defeat, and similar defeats in Wichita, St. Paul, and Oregon. The homosexual conference must reject this approach for the Australian movement.

Ultraleftism

Another tactic supported by some groups, such as anarchists and the International Socialists, involves the use of what they call "militant tactics". These "militant" tactics range from such macho performances as challenging the cops to a physical confrontation, to the puerile "unplanned" flour bomb attack on Darlinghurst police station at the end of the JULY 15 gay rights march in Sydney.

To think that a successful takeover of a police station, even one as brutally oppressive as Darlinghurst, would halt cop harassment of homosexuals for even one hour shows an amazing lack of understanding of the class character of oppression in this society.

In fact, the motivations of the ultralefts is similar to those who advocate lobbying liberal politicians. Instead of relying on liberals to end oppression, they think that society can be physically scared into it.

The effects of these sort of tactics can be just as disastrous for our cause as that of the liberals. In a situation where the homosexual rights movement has gained more and more support, as our oppression becomes known to society, and when more and more homosexuals are willing to come out publicly for our rights, the ultralefts threaten the support that we have gained. They place the movement in the position of being viewed as a group of violent, flour-bomb throwing ratbags as well as physically endangering other participants in marches.

Further, the concept of militant demands or an ultraleft program that can be watered down at the bargaining table with the Wrens and Hamers of this world only serves to weaken the gay movement and stop it focussing on specific demands.

The homosexual conference must soundly reject the proposals of the ultralefts and the liberals. The perspective that the movement should lay down is the mobilisation of as many lesbians and male homosexuals as possible against our oppression.

The conference should look towards the hundreds of thousands of lesbians and male homosexuals who have never been in a gay rights demonstration. We must mobilise our sisters and brothers who in the past have looked on the gay liberation movement as a group of radicals who merely criticised the gains that had already been made and threatened their complacency.

The homosexual movement must also relate to the understanding the homosexual community has, at the present, of its oppression. In a sense we have been considerably helped by the appearance of such reactionaries as Bryant and Whitehouse. They have shown our community how flimsy and threatened the few gains that have been made really are.

In September, the Festival of Light will stage its first major anti-homosexual campaign in over a year. This will be the opportunity for the political movement for gay rights to mobilise homosexuals in this country on a large scale.

And it can be done. In San Francisco last June, over 250,000 people marched for homosexual rights and against the Briggs Initiative; 50,000 marched in New York at the same time. Last year, there were huge homosexual mobilisations in London, Barcelona and a score of other cities.

The only way to achieve gay rights is to force the politicians to introduce them. This can be done, not by pleading with them, or by physically threatening them, but by showing them that the community is demanding gay rights and that they will be in trouble if they don't introduce the legislation.

Of course the homosexual movement should seek out the support of other social movements. In particular, the women's liberation movement is clearly a natural ally. We are fighting exactly the same enemy - patriarchal capitalism. Also, we often have the same opponents. The Festival of Light is as vigorous in its attacks on the rights of women as it is in its attacks on homosexuals.

The other ally that the gay movement must gain the support of is the union movement. We must force the trade union leaders to take up our struggle. It is the organised working class which has the power to deal death-blows against out oppression.

The movement needs the establishment of a national co-ordinating structure at this conference - so that campaigns for the right to work and against the Festival of Light can be efficiently organised. We have to find ways to strengthen existing lesbian and male homosexual organisations.

While at all times looking for allies, we must keep the independence of the movement. That is, we should reassert our right to organise ourselves free from the control of non-homosexuals. This is important because it is only homosexuals who understand the oppression that we face. Having a movement where non-homosexuals participate in decision-making meetings leads away from the basic goal of organising the oppressed themselves against their oppression.

This does not of course preclude work within wider campaigns to defend our rights along with non-homosexual organisations or individuals or in united fronts against right-wing or cop attacks.

However, the biggest danger to the movement's independence comes from the threat of being bought off by liberal politicians who stand for nothing but selling us out.

Another danger is for the homosexual movement to get sidetracked into other campaigns not directly connected with homosexual oppression. This tactic, while possibly well motivated, simply leads the movement away from its key demands.

Any organisation coming out of the homosexual conference should be action oriented. Our task is to mobilise the homosexual communities and supporters behind our demands. We need as many people involved as possible, particularly in demonstrations and pickets for gay rights and against homophobes like Whitehouse.

National co-ordination of the various independent groups is necessary. Offices should be maintained in major cities to provide resources to activist gay groups.

A national monthly (or more frequent) newsletter would obviously be of great use. The movement must be as flexible as possible, unhampered by bureaucratic control.

General meetings of the homosexual movement, including all gay groups and individuals, should be held regularly to plan out co-ordinated strategy.

Within the movement and within gay groups, the right of lesbians to organise separately or as caucuses within groups should be recognised, as lesbians are oppressed both as women and homosexuals. The rights of women within the movement must be accepted.

This does not mean that the homosexual movement should decide that all members must be feminists (or pro-feminist) and socialists. The movement should not exclude new people on this basis. Through struggle against oppression, male activists will see the connection between their oppression and that of women and the working class in general.

Radical homosexuals can best show support for the women's movement by fighting our own battles hard. A victory against gay oppression is, in the long run, a victory for women, and for the working class - just as an injury to one is an injury to all.

The movement for the liberation of homosexuals, if it consistently fights for its demands, takes its place amongst the forces which will eventually side with the working class in overturning the whole system of inequality and misery.

The homosexual movement can look forward to great victories, both here and overseas. We are still only seeing the tip of the iceberg of our potential; gay liberation has already proven that it can mobilise people in their hundreds of thousands to end our oppression. It has shown that it can win the support of major allies in the women's movement and trade unions.

If this national homosexual conference lays down the perspective of a broadly based mass campaign, the movement can look forward to growth and success over the next year.