

THE POLITICS OF HOMOSEXUALITY**DON MILLIGAN**

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About this pamphlet

The outlook of this pamphlet was largely the product of discussion in the meetings of Lancaster Gay Liberation Front during 1972. The publication of the pamphlet also formed part of the battle to persuade the International Socialists [subsequently the Socialist Workers Party] to support the struggle for gay liberation. However, the tone of the pamphlet and many of its underlying assumptions provide an accurate impression of the viewpoint and experiences that fuelled much of the radical gay movement at the time.

Although developments since the early 1990s have amply demonstrated the wrong-headedness of its analysis this text continues to have historical interest because it was the opening shot in the struggle successfully waged by numerous individuals and groups during the 1970s and early '80s to get socialist, trade union, and other labour movement organizations to take the oppression of gay people seriously.

Don Milligan
Manchester 2007

Introduction

In 1969 the New York police raided a gay bar, the Stonewall on Christopher Street. It was an ordinary affair until the customers started to resist. They drove the police from the bar onto the pavement and into the road. This was the first time that homosexuals had fought back directly on such a scale. Police reinforcements arrived and the riot that followed led to the formation of the Christopher Street Gay Liberation Front.

The emergence of the gay liberation movement in the United States led to the development of gay liberation groups in a number of countries, including Britain. By building up an understanding of why hostility to homosexuals is inevitable in a capitalist society, gay liberation groups have shown clearly the political significance of homosexuality. The existence of this movement in Britain marks a new awareness that law reform societies like the Campaign for Homosexual Equality cannot really challenge gay oppression.

In the routine resistance of workers against the employers and the struggle of socialists against capitalism we often lose sight of the aims – we can't see the trees for the wood. Because people do more than work in factories and pay rent rises we need to gain a fuller knowledge of the different ways that capitalism disfigures all human relationships. By doing this we will get a better picture of the kind of society we want to build for ourselves.

The movements for women's liberation and gay liberation are important because they make us more aware of the ways in which we are drenched in myths and prejudices that support the way things are – enabling capitalism to continue.

Undermining the family

Opposition to homosexuality is founded upon the belief that procreation is the fundamental objective of sexual activity. The production of children is not seen as incidental to human sexual activities but as central to them. Consequently, heterosexual fucking is thought of as vital to any sexual relationship. Homosexuality is condemned as unnatural simply because it cannot produce children. Therefore homosexual relationships are an affront to capitalist society – they do not support the family, and necessarily take place outside it. They are formed simply because people derive pleasure from

them. Gay sex is unmistakably sex for its own sake and tends to upset the moral apple cart.

Even when homosexuals do 'marry' each other they unwittingly turn marriage into a charade. Gay marriages performed by the Metropolitan Community Church in the USA are a grisly parody of heterosexual ceremonies. Far from making homosexuality acceptable, they demonstrate the absurdity of marriage and challenge the assumptions that the institution rests upon.

The homosexual relationship breeds no such natural corrective (children), no compulsion to be outward looking, and to enter, as in a family, into new and ever-growing relationships [sic]. It is, in more ways than the obvious one, sterile.¹

Homosexuality cannot be drawn into the net formed by marriage to encompass love and sex in monogamous unions. Marriage is primarily a means of legitimizing and rearing children. The family consisting of the man in charge, a subordinate women, and their children on who they imprint themselves, has no place for homosexuality. The family denies the sexuality of children, represses that of adolescents and reduces fidelity to an expression of property rights.

Sexual repression starts in the family. Because parents are conditioned and trapped, they tend to ensnare 'their' children in the prevailing masculine and feminine stereotypes – into relationships of domination and subordination. By attempting to govern and control the entire development of the individual, parents 'bring up' their children in their own image. In carrying out this task families fulfil a basic function for capitalist society – that of soaking each new generation in the values of bourgeois society and male supremacy.

Homosexuality breaks the rules, it is seditious and unnatural because it runs counter to the family and the fundamental values of capitalist society.

Our values in Western civilization are founded upon the sanctity of the family, the right of property, and the worthwhileness of 'getting ahead'. The family can be established only through heterosexual intercourse, and this gives women a high value. Property acquisition and worldly success are viewed as distinctly masculine aims. The individual who is outwardly masculine but appears to fall into the feminine class by reason. . . of

his preference for other men denies these values of our civilization. In denying them he belittles those goals which carry weight and much emotional colouring in our society and thereby earns the hostility of those to whom these values are of great importance.²

Masculinity versus Femininity

Homosexual relationships generally parody those of heterosexuals with ‘butch’ and ‘fem’, active and passive. But implicit in homosexuality there is a challenge to this division between men and women, and consequently, to male supremacy. The handing out of male or female characteristics among homosexuals is of course not related to the genitals of the individual but rather to one’s personality, mannerisms and sexual preferences. This fact alone makes homosexuality subversive. Most homosexual relationships deny the genital basis of our individual characteristics, our roles and our status in society: women can be ‘butch’ and men can be ‘queens’ – women can be male and men can be female. Gay relationships imply that the adoption of male and female roles is arbitrary, and that the supremacy of men is founded upon myth and not biology.

It is remarkable that so much effort and so many taboos and prohibitions are thought to be necessary to enforce the sexual norms of our society. The differences between masculine and feminine forms of behaviour are dinned into us all from the earliest age to ensure that we are capable of ‘doing what comes naturally’. It is of course not enough to assume that because people have female genitals they will be feminine. An intense process of teaching and learning is necessary to ensure that somebody with penis and testicles will be appropriately masculine. In fact women and men have the same intellectual capacities and the same emotional abilities. Our sexual roles are imposed upon us by society, because of our genitals but not by them.

The capacity to menstruate, bear children and breast-feed must affect the psychology of an individual. However, the recognition of physical and psychological differences between men and women cannot justify the acceptance of the social concepts of masculine and femininity. The biological differences between the sexes historically resulted in a special division of labour

between men and women, and in the social subordination of women to men.

The concepts of masculinity and femininity that have arisen out of this relationship of domination and subordination are used today to defend the continuation of male supremacy.

For example, girls and women tend to score higher on the verbal tests and nearly always do better than boys and men on the coding test which calls for short-term memory, speed deftness, males on the other hand, invariably achieve higher scores on arithmetic and on block-design, the visuo-spatial test.³

Such observations lead this psychologist to argue that girls:

are particularly skilful and deft with their hands, which may be one reason that women often are, and enjoy being, seamstresses and needlewomen. . . This dexterity results in women generally being extremely competent typists too, and it is a competence that men find difficult to match.⁴

‘Science’ is wheeled in to justify the inferior status of women and impose ideas of femininity that inevitably subordinate women to men.

The ideas and expression of femininity and masculinity are completely interwoven with the relationship of subordination and domination. In our society feminine characteristics are considered to be definitely inferior to male ones. Muddle-headedness, frivolity, gossiping, giggling and emotional frailty are all female qualities. While men are concerned with abstract ideas, are strong, capable and responsible for the management of industry, the family and the nation:

the male is physically stronger but less resilient, he is more independent, adventurous and aggressive, he is more ambitious and competitive, he has greater spatial numerical and mechanical ability, he is more likely to construe the world in terms of objects, ideas and theories.⁵

The attribution of particular roles and forms of behaviour to individuals simply because they have male or female genitals is largely arbitrary. It has little to do with muscles and nothing to

do with the intellectual abilities or emotional make-up of either sex. Yet the division between masculinity and femininity remains a basic feature of human sexual relations. This tyranny, the tyranny of gender, is so intense that people who identify completely with the other sex become members of the opposite sex psychologically – they become transsexual. It becomes imperative for some transsexuals to undergo surgery and other treatment in order for them to bring their physiology into line with the way they think of themselves and want to be thought of in our society.

By rejecting in practice the idea that the core of human sexuality is the sexual subordination of women to men, homosexuality poses a real threat to the sexual ‘balance of forces’. This is particularly true of homosexual women. Women are the passive, and sometimes co-operative, objects of men’s sexuality. For the male supremacist women who define their sexuality independently of men are almost a conceptual impossibility. Hence Queen Victoria’s ignorance, the absence of biblical prohibition, and the usual words of encouragement to lesbians: ‘a good fuck’ll put you right, love’. Women who are masculine by reason of their independence or their mannerisms and personality are feared and resented because they question the biological basis of the social roles and status awarded to either sex. Similarly, men whose behaviour, either socially or sexually, is considered female are savagely ridiculed and oppressed because they break the ‘natural’ rules. They threaten the status and position of all men by indicating that masculinity is not natural at all, but is instead strictly learned and rigidly enforced. Homosexuals and transsexuals by asserting the primacy of personality and sexual identification over that of social assumptions about biology question the basis of the sexual categories – masculine and feminine.

Oppression and Repression

Sensuality and physical contact between people of the same sex is acceptable only on specifically ‘emotional’ occasions – like scoring a goal. Such prohibitions don’t apply equally but the advantage women have rests on the belief that they cannot have a sexuality which doesn’t depend on a man. At any rate women are still restricted:

Girls should be discouraged from walking around the College arm in arm.⁶

Lesbianism is more a matter of ‘don’t mention it and it’ll go away’, while arse tapping and mock sexual advances among men are a regular part of life on building sites, in factories, offices and schools.

Even the clothes that people wear are rigidly prescribed according to sexual roles. Transvestites are victimized with an extraordinary fanaticism, coupled with a widespread fascination for drag ‘artistes’.

THE FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT
 THAT EVERYONE’S
 FLOCKING TO SEE!
 ‘BIG, BOLD & BEAUTIFUL’ ‘CAN YOU TAKE THE
 FAMILY? – CERTAINLY!
 There are only a few naughty jokes, and no doubt the kids
 will explain them to you on the way home’
 For adults he is a wit,
 for children very gentle’.
 DANNY LA RUE
 – QUEEN OF HEARTS

That sexual roles can be swapped is common knowledge, but it is only acceptable when institutionalized in pantomime or drag. When firmly defined roles are confused in real life by transvestites or homosexuals the repression is swift and violent.

With a fear reminiscent of the Inquisition people assert their ‘normalcy’; rendering themselves unable to touch or embrace each other, or express friendship fully. Such taboos restrict and mutilate the personal relationships of all people irrespective of sexual preferences. Lacerating jibes are the inevitable penalty for failing to stick to the behaviour ‘appropriate’ to one’s sex. Humour whips most people into line; defining what is possible; limiting self-expression and oppressing everybody. Ridicule of gay people is the means by which heterosexuals repress themselves.

However, ridicule is only one aspect of this oppression. Discrimination in jobs and housing is widespread. Generally homosexuals experience little difficulty in finding work in every kind of occupation – but this is usually dependent upon secrecy. Most homosexual people lead a ‘double-life’ exemplified by the small ad:

Attractive woman, early twenties, wanted to share social outings and be seen about with gay businessman (30). All expenses paid no obligations.⁷

The police have openly admitted keeping secret dossiers on school teachers whose private lives they think to be ‘corrupt’⁸ and some resourceful employers use a device which tests a person’s reactions to visual material shown on a screen. D. C. Southward of AIM Biosciences replied to an enquiry concerning the ‘pupillometer’ as follows:

I am sorry to reacted so violently to the list of applications suggested for the pupillometer. [One of them given as detection of homosexuality.] There is no suggestion that employers should discriminate against homosexuals but merely that its presence should be measured along with as many other characteristics as possible – IQ, nAch, colour vision, etc. Judgement on the basis of one characteristic alone I would agree is almost invariably misguided.

I am quite certain that in certain fields – interior design, male dancers etc you could positively correlate homosexuality with success.

Please be assured that whether you are homosexual or not is a subject of monumental indifference to me – I just want to sell the pupillometers.⁹

If a person makes no effort to conceal his homosexuality then jobs are difficult to find and often impossible to keep. Houses and flats too often depend upon secrecy. Two years ago a forty year-old kitchen worker was evicted by Stoke-on-Trent Corporation from the council house where he had lived all his life – because it was alleged he was homosexual. Councillor Jim Westwood, chairman of Stoke’s housing committee, was quoted as saying that the man had been evicted because his house was dirty and because he was homosexual. And the housing manager said ‘We couldn’t prove homosexuality, but it was strongly suspected.’¹⁰

When ‘it’ is confessed families often assure their ‘bent’ offspring that they can be straightened out. GPs, psychiatrists, and electrodes are all brought to bear in the struggle for normalcy. All the family and social pressures conspire to bully a person into accepting that they are sick and will benefit from treatment. Isolated homosexuals not surprisingly hope for a

‘cure’. They opt for interviews with professional men who will confirm how queer that they really are. They volunteer for aversion therapy and co-operative subjects administer electric shocks to themselves; watching their hands twitch as erotic pictures of the ‘wrong’ sex are displayed:

I was taken to a small, darkened room in a secluded area of the hospital. In the room there was a desk with the photographs and pictures lying on the top. They had been pasted onto pieces of card so that it would be easier for me to handle and look at them. Next to them was an electrical device with a pair of electrodes connected up to it. At the side of the table was a chair and a pair of screens. . . .

He explained that it would be better if I could nod or signal in some way to him as soon as I got even the slightest feelings at all from the picture in front of me, then he could electrocute me at the first point of sexual vibes. So I got strapped up and then it began. He handed me a picture and as soon as I got any vibes from it I signalled to him and he pulled the switch. I felt a terrible burning sensation at the back of my wrist and my fingers began to twitch violently. I couldn’t stop my face from grimacing and sweat drenched my whole body instantly. . . .

After two more shocks I told him to stop. I couldn’t stand the burning sensation and seeing my fingers in such a distorted position. But what really got me was the waiting in between shocks.¹¹

The repression of homosexuals is a social necessity for a society committed to male supremacy and the family. Gay oppression is pervasive: haunting the lives of all homosexuals and destroying everybody’s potential.

Social Scenes and Gay Ghettos

One of the results of gay oppression is the ‘gay scene’. The scene is a ghetto of a special type; composed simply of bars and clubs it concerns only people’s social and sexual lives. The freedom that gay people have to conceal their homosexuality enables many of us to escape occupational and residential discrimination, and this in turn

limits the functions of the ghetto to purely social and sexual ones.

There are some jobs where gay people can 'come out' with minimal risk to their employment. Artists and 'creative people' are permitted certain eccentricities, and it may be that homosexual people are attracted to some occupations because they afford greater freedom. Homosexual women might also find life easier in the uniformed services but it is probably true to say that as many gay women are teachers, typists and bus conductors as are members of the army. And caution hides many gay men behind the overalls of factory workers and the lounge suits of bank clerks.

Minorities, like the black population in Britain, are strengthened by their almost totally working class composition. This is not true of gay people. Gay people, drawn from all classes, races and both sexes have only their sexual propensities and their oppression in common. The heterogeneous nature of the gay minority gives homosexuals little real power in society. We can exert no economic sanctions against those who attack us, and we cannot effectively protect ourselves by geographical concentration.

This weakness has led gay people, both in and out of the gay scene, to absorb and accept the values of male supremacy that inevitably oppress us. Male homosexuality has often involved the rejection and denigration of women. If men are considered superior to women then clearly men can have much more stimulating relationships with each other. The idea that love relationships between men are finer and more worthwhile than relationships between women and men is an ancient belief that flows logically from the view that women are inferior. These ideas are unfortunately still alive and well on the gay scene. Women are generally excluded, or at least discouraged from using gay bars and clubs used by men. Publications, clubs, bars, and homosexual social, cultural and political organizations are almost exclusively for men:

As a new member of CHE [Campaign for Homosexual Equality], and having received my first bulletin, I find it most disturbing to read that there is a campaign to try and get more women into what appears to be male groups. Personally I think this is an unhealthy move in the wrong direction, and could in the end do more harm than good. . . .

By all means have female homosexuals in CHE, and they should have the same right to equality as the men: to hold office, and send delegates to conference, but they should have their own groups and stick to them.¹²

These values of the ghetto are the values of capitalist society both politically and culturally. This is facilitated by the commercial control of clubs and bars. The existence of gay bars is completely dependent on the whim of publicans and breweries. Gay clubs are generally very expensive. Their piss-elegance proclaims the bourgeois aspirations of the scene, while their existence often depends upon bribing the police. It is true that gay bars are ‘meat-racks’ – like any Mecca dance hall. The gay ghetto mirrors the relationships common to heterosexual people. The result is a parody of heterosexual relationships; intensifying romantic myths and oppressive realities. The search for a lifetime companion or Mr Right is a long and desperate business. Single-minded promiscuity co-exists with an emotional commitment to monogamy.

Despite its inadequacies the gay scene exists because many homosexuals need it. The size and character of the ghetto is determined by forces that gay people have virtually no control over. Political attitudes on the scene are permeated by the belief that homosexuals really are sick, and that we shouldn’t push our luck – gay people should avoid trouble at all costs and appeal simply for tolerance.

Homosexual Equality and Capitalism

Like all oppressed people, overawed by the influence and power of those that persecute them, homosexuals resist by evasion, avoiding open conflict with the norms of heterosexual society. Homosexual women and most gay men cope with their situation by joining in with the anti-gay humour and sentiments of their workmates and families, in practice accepting that they are ‘queer’. While some gay men strike back with camp jokes and irony, anticipating ridicule by laughing at themselves and flouting the mannerisms expected of them.

This response is patronized and absorbed by capitalist society, enabling the homosexuality of prominent showbiz personalities to become an open secret. Camp humour presents forms of behaviour that differ from those usually associated with masculinity as absurd. In this way it supports male supremacy.

The camp comedian defines what is 'normal' and what is 'queer' reinforcing his own oppression by ridicule of non-masculine behaviour. Such humour is based upon acceptance of the view that homosexuals are 'queer'.

This tradition of acceptance and evasion has resulted in the belief that gay people simply need to be freed from legal restrictions and all would be well. Law reform is widely held to be a panacea on the gay scene and is the major objective of most gay political organizations. Law reform is clearly important but to make it the central aim of the movement implies that gay people are principally oppressed by laws. This is not so. Gay women are not restricted by any laws and the oppression of gay men does not come from legislation.

For example, black people are restricted by immigration controls and deportation orders just as gay men are restricted by the Sexual Offences Act, but immigration controls are clearly not the source of racialism in Britain. Black people generally have worse jobs and housing, fewer educational opportunities and a higher level of unemployment than the white population. None of this is the result of legislation. The inferior position of black people is the result of prejudices which operates formally and informally without the force of law. Legal restrictions against gay men might well be swept away by an 'enlightened' parliament, but gay oppression will remain intact.

Homosexual equality is not possible under capitalism. Gay relationships run against the grain of family life and outrage male supremacists, both agents of the sexual repression that permeates capitalist society. Permissiveness, abortion scandals and a soaring divorce rate scarcely shake the male dominated family. Sex is compulsively related to the production of children their care and their introduction into the norms of our society.

The family is not economically necessary for capitalism but it is vital as a mechanism of social control. The despair of the right at the decay of parental authority underlines this very clearly. The myths centred around romantic love, motherhood and life-long monogamy are promoted by those that support the way things are. Although redundant, socially and economically, the family is preserved, like a sickly glaze cherry, as an ideological prop for the present system.

Constant hard work for a weekly wage and two days off in seven, sometimes relieved by annual holidays, is the life most people lead. Sexuality is confined to a quick fuck a few times a week. The sexual life of workers is destroyed by shift work and by the ever-present pressures of routine labour. Spontaneity and

the development of full sexual and personal relationships is denied to most working people, because sexual life is subordinated to the physical demands of capitalism:

The psychological impact of shift working is probably more serious than the physical effects.

One of the most common spontaneous complaints about shift work is that it interferes with family life.

A study on German workers, for instance, showed that 74 per cent of married men and 45 per cent of single men who followed a shift schedule which included night work complained of disturbances in family life. The most frequently mentioned difficulties in husband and wife relationships concern the absence of the worker from home in the evening, sexual relations, and the difficulties encountered by the wife in carrying out her household duties.

Another area of family life that seems to be adversely affected by certain kinds of shift work is the father-child relationship. . . As one shift worker put it to me, “the only thing that has saved my marriage is an electric blanket.”¹³

The economy is organized in a way that involves workers making, servicing and administering things and organizations that they have no control over. ‘Ours not to reason why. Ours is but to do and die.’ This authoritarianism is basic to capitalist society which is operated by our rulers in their own interests.

Workers are asked to help ‘put the country on its feet’, to ‘get Britain moving’, to work with, and not against, ‘the National Interest’. People are cajoled, disciplined and compelled to work not for themselves but for employers who present their interests as identical to those of the ‘public’, to those of the workers. To make profits the employers have to compete. This in its turn necessitates the accumulation of capital to invest in new machines and equipment. People must be kept working to make this constant capital accumulation possible even though the worker has no influence over investment and gains nothing from the process.

In societies where the economy is completely nationalized under bureaucratic hierarchies like Russia or Cuba, homosexuals are also persecuted. The First National Congress on Education and Culture convened in Havana didn’t mince its words:

The social pathological character of homosexual deviations was recognised. It was resolved that all manifestations of homosexual deviations are to be firmly rejected and prevented from spreading It was resolved that it is not to be tolerated for notorious homosexuals to have influence in the formation of our youth on the basis of their 'artistic merits'. Consequently, a study is called for to determine how best to tackle the problems of the presence of homosexuals in the various institutions of our cultural sector. It was proposed that a study should be made to find a way of applying measures with a view to transferring to other organizations those who, as homosexuals, should not have any direct influence on our youth through artistic and cultural activities. It was resolved that those whose morals do not correspond to the prestige of our Revolution should be barred from any group of performers representing our country abroad. Finally, it was agreed to demand that severe penalties be applied to those who corrupt the morals of minors, depraved repeat offenders and irredeemable anti-social elements.¹⁴

These state-capitalist societies are dominated by the belief that life here and now must be subordinated to building up the national economy, for 'progress' and for the 'future'. Government praise and laws supporting the virtues of family life and the strict regulation of sexual life go hand in hand with the oppression of homosexuals.

Under capitalism a whole system of beliefs and values has grown up which justifies keeping our noses to the grindstone. Capitalist society is dominated by imperatives that run counter to the interests of most people. Sexual desires are bottled-up and organized to conform with ideas that support the belief that hard work is virtuous. The male dominated family plays a crucial role in maintaining this repression. In the words of the right wing Monday Club:

Humane tolerance of diversity and frailty should not obscure the recognition that the protection of the family is the essence of positive social morality.¹⁵

If homosexuality were fully accepted, many more people would have gay relationships. This would present a major threat to the family institution and the functional view of sex.

Socialism: Oppression or Liberation?

Homosexual liberation is not possible under capitalism and it is not guaranteed under socialism. Socialists in Britain are confused and embarrassed by the issues raised by the gay movement. Homosexuality is thought of as a middle or upper class 'disorder'. Not something that a working class mum or a rugged proletarian might 'suffer' from. This, of course, is absolute nonsense. There are well over two million homosexuals in Britain and most of them are working class people. Alexandra Kollontai's views on sexuality after the Russian revolution make the point well:

To imagine that only members of the well-off sections of society are floundering and are in the throes of these problems would be to make a grave mistake. The waves of the sexual crisis are sweeping over the threshold of workers' homes, and creating situations of conflict that are as acute and heartfelt as the psychological sufferings of the 'refined bourgeois world'. The sexual crisis no longer interests only the 'propertied'. The problems of sex concern the largest section of society – they concern the working class in its daily life. It is therefore hard to understand why this vital and urgent subject is treated with such indifference. This indifference is unforgivable.¹⁶

This indifference has led to the repression of homosexuality inside socialist organizations of both the reformist and revolutionary type. Smug liberalism enables many socialists to oppose police harassment of homosexuals while making life impossible for gay people inside the organizations of the left. The fact is that homosexuals have very, very rarely 'come out' inside socialist organizations. Gay people work in the branches of political organizations, in the trade unions and in rank and file movements, yet never tell their 'comrades' that they are homosexual or live openly as gay people.

The reason for this is that gay people feel *and are* oppressed culturally and socially within the revolutionary movement. Liberal attitudes of tolerance and sympathy for the sexually 'deviant' crush the spirit of gay socialists and isolate us from

each other. The emergence of the gay movement independent of socialist organizations is of great importance for us because it breaks down the guilt and fear that results from isolation. By coming together we will be able firmly to reject the sympathy offered by our 'comrades' and demand solidarity with our struggle against gay oppression.

Because the gay population is dispersed throughout different occupations and places, the gay movement can make little practical contribution to the labour movement. We can't strike or organize tenants' associations, except perhaps on Earls Court Road! But the contribution we can make is nevertheless of vital importance in challenging the ideology of capitalist society. Capitalism does not simply depend on paratroopers and policemen – it depends on its ideas. A mass movement can be built on the wages issue alone but it will only be revolutionary if it rejects the basic ideas of capitalist society. Socialism is not simply about economics – it is not even mainly about economics. We are fighting for a whole life where people will not exploit and dominate each other – a society free from material oppression and sexual poverty.

Working class people suffer more from the disruption of their personal lives than any other section of the population. Reactionary and repressive attitudes about the status of women or the rights of homosexuals are a direct result of the sexual repression that the working class is exposed to. The popular hostility to homosexuality and women's liberation in the working class influences the labour and socialist movement very deeply.

However, the working class is the only social force capable of removing capitalism and building a society in which people control their own lives, determining the objectives and amount of work they will do. The position of the working class is central in the struggle to overthrow capitalism not because workers are the 'salt of the earth' or because working people are socially or culturally 'progressive'. The workers alone possess the social and economic strength to frustrate and overturn the present system and are compelled to seek collective solutions to problems.

The way forward for a clothing worker, car worker or gas worker is not to earn more than one's mates but precisely to gain equality of income – the slogan 'Parity not Charity' speaks for itself. Because it is obvious that modern production cannot be broken up and distributed to workers like land to peasants, working people are increasingly compelled to smash capitalism

and more than any other social group is constantly ware of the collective nature of economic life. This awareness is of fundamental importance for the development of alternatives to capitalism.

But workers' control of industry and the abolition of capitalism would create only the *possibility* of gay liberation. The abolition of gay oppression can only be brought about by breaking down sexism in the working class and by building up an understanding of the way male supremacy and the persecution of homosexuals represses everybody.

Gay Liberation – The Movement We Need

Life-style politics have featured prominently in the development of the movement for gay liberation with the setting up of a number of communes. Groups like the Radical Queens have opted for increasingly bold shock tactics, both as a means of propaganda and as a means of understanding more completely the ways in which men oppress women.

The development of communes is important because it involves people living together and exploring new forms of relationships: discovering ways of breaking down aggression and possessiveness in personal relationships. Communes have also formed a significant part of the squatting movement, directly challenging waste and exploitation in the housing industry.

However, these activities cannot be spread effectively while land and housing policy are controlled by landlords, local authorities and the state. Communes, free schools and other experiments in new ways of living are essential but they will not succeed by gradually replacing capitalist social and economic relations. Under capitalism life-style politics are necessarily exclusive, involving small groups of people and tiny minorities. Communes show us *what* is possible. But they do not *make* a new life possible for the majority – that can only be done by creating a whole new society.

It is important for us to maintain the strongest possible links with all gay people. Because, in order to challenge our oppression, we need to build wide understanding and support for homosexual liberation on the gay scene. Life-style politics help us to understand more fully the nature of our conditioning but most gay people simply cannot participate in these activities. The gay liberation movement must fight on the basic problems

facing most homosexual people and relate these to developing an understanding of the position of gay people in our society.

Because the oppression of homosexuality is tied up with the very fabric of capitalist society, gay liberation groups must also aim to spread our ideas throughout the labour and socialist movement. Shop stewards' committees have been known to prevent gay workers from being re-employed after serving prison sentences (an instance occurred at George Angus & Co Ltd [Fire Armour Division] in 1968).

We have to reverse this situation, because we cannot effectively fight against job discrimination without the support of the trade union rank and file. Gay people will not be able to 'come out' at work until we have established a clear understanding of what is involved in sexual repression. This can only be done by concerted propaganda: demonstrations, leaflets, meetings with shop stewards, apprentices, trades councils and rank and file workers' groups.

Because gay people are oppressed by male supremacy, the significance for us of the women's liberation movement can hardly be overestimated. Lesbians are oppressed because of their independence from men. Gay men are oppressed because they do not participate in the sexual subordination of women. Gay liberation and women's liberation are part of the same struggle and the liberation of gay people is inconceivable without the liberation of women. Gay people are a scattered minority while women make up over half the population and a third of the paid labour force.

By working in association with women's organizations that are fighting sexism, the gay liberation movement must direct its efforts towards the working class movement and socialist organizations around a set of basic demands including:

- 1. An end to all discrimination against homosexuals in jobs and housing.**
- 2. An end to aversion therapy and the treatment of homosexuality as a disease or sickness.**
- 3. Full recognition of the individual's right to change sex and the right to all necessary medical treatment free.**

4. **An end to exclusively heterosexual sex education in schools.**
5. **Abolition of all restrictions which prevent gay people from caring for their own children or adopting children.**
6. **Equal rights for homosexuals to display affection for each other in public places.**
7. **Abolition of all laws relating to the age of consent for boys and girls.**
8. **Abolition of all legal discrimination against homosexuals including police harassment and entrapment.**

Endnotes

- ¹ *L for Learner*, published by the Guide Association, quoted in *Ink*, No.25, 7 January 1972.
- ² Dr Fred Brown, a conservative American psychiatrist. Quoted in the *Manifesto*, London GLF 1971.
- ³ Corinne Hutt, *Males and Females*, Penguin 1972, p.88.
- ⁴ *Ibid* p.97
- ⁵ *Ibid* p.132
- ⁶ Principal's memo to staff on staff/student relations, Park Lane College of Further Education, Leeds, 1968.
- ⁷ *Time Out* classified advertisement.
- ⁸ *Gay News*, no. 9, 1972
- ⁹ Letter dated 1 March 1972 to convenor of counter-psychiatry group, Lancaster GLF, from AIM Biosciences, Cambridge.
- ¹⁰ *Sunday Times*, 12 December 1971.
- ¹¹ *Lancaster Free Press*, no. 7, December 1972.
- ¹² *CHE Bulletin*, October 1972, letters' page.
- ¹³ Tony Cliff, *Employers' Offensive*, Pluto Press, 1970, pp.70-71, quoting P. I. Mott, et. Al. *Shift Work, the Social, Psychological and Physical Consequences*, Ann Arbor, 1965.
- ¹⁴ Quoted in *Ecstasy*, no. 1, journal of the Gay Revolution Party, New York.
- ¹⁵ Executive Council statement, *Aims of the Monday Club*, March 1968.
- ¹⁶ Alexandra Kollontai, *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle*, 1919. Falling Wall Press, 1972, p. 3.