

11/15/79

To all OCIC Forces,

As you will recall, on Sunday, October 14th, nearly 100,000 lesbians, gay men and supporters marched in Washington DC to call for an end to the legal oppression of homosexuals. Piggybacking on this demonstration, about 60 lesbian and gay male socialists met the evening of the demonstration to consider how to relate to one another and how, as a group, to relate to the ongoing gay liberation movement.

The group acknowledged the danger of the present situation in which lesbians and gays are under increasing attack from the New Right. Organizations such as the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress and Christian Voice are attempting to whip up anti-gay hysteria in a manner reminiscent of the Nazis in the '20's and '30's. Gays are scapegoated as the cause of the breakdown of the family. Gays are portrayed as threats to children and as threats to the socialization of "real" men and women. The pro- "traditional values" campaign -- anti-gay, anti-ERA, anti-abortion -- is part of the New Right's attempt to alay the ideological foundations of fascism.

Faced with these attacks, the gay liberation movement as a whole finds itself in an ideologically and politically weak position to mount an effective defense. The dominant forces of the movement at present are linked to gay religious organizations, or are narrowly reformist, making of the gay liberation movement a single-issue campaign. The social base for this right-wing leadership is a relatively small group of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois white males for who gay oppression is the only oppression they experience. For the vast majority of gay people, however, gay oppression is only one of the oppressions they suffer. Most gays are working class. Many are national minority. That half of the gay population which is lesbian has often been far in front of gay men in their struggle, because of the prior identification as women.

Today, more people in the gay movement are beginning to understand the capitalist roots of anti-gay prejudice, and the links between the ir struggle and the struggles against racism and sexism, and the struggle of the proletariat as a whole. They are just beginning to emerge as a conscious force, able to challenge the domination of the bourgeois leadership of the gay movement.

The evening prior to the demonstration, members of five OCIC member organizations (Atlanta Organizing Committee, SUB, PWOC, PSO, and BWA) both gay and straight, met to consider how they might best participate in the meeting of socialists scheduled for the next day, and how to raise the issue within the OC.

We concluded that it is no longer adequate for the OCIC forces to continue to ignore the gay question or give it such a low priority in their work. If the New Right is given an unchallenged lead for five years in whipping up anti-gay hysteria, not only will the democratic rights of a large minority of the US be further eroded, but the party-building forces will have conceded to the Right an important ideological foothold with direct links to the issue of sexism. The participants in our meeting were convinced that a way must be found for OCIC forces to coordinate and increase their efforts on behalf of the democratic rights of lesbians and gay men.

A special focus of any OCIC investigation of the gay question must be the relationship between gay rights and the Black liberation movement. The impact of capitalism on the Black family, resulting in different roles and a different division of labor for men and women than in the white working class, has resulted in different attitudes toward gays. The historic problem of sexism in the Black Liberation Movement, which is normally associated with extreme homophobia (most clearly illustrated in the Nation of Islam) exists alongside a supportive attitude, based on identification with being a discriminated group, on the part of many Blacks. Within the gay liberation movement, the visibility of white male petty-bourgeois leadership, and the failure to take up the struggle against racism have exacerbated tensions. Perhaps the clearest example is the frequent use of white gay men as "shock troops" in areas scheduled for recycling. (Being able to double up incomes and being usually without children, gay men can frequently afford recycled housing and ignore the neighborhood around them). Subjectivism in the gay movement, also most pronounced among white men, whereby gay activists deny the material differences between gay oppression and racism must also be dealt with.

To begin this process, our group is circulating the questionnaire below to all OCIC forces. We are proposing that cadre from our organizations, both gay and straight, begin a common study leading to a better strategic understanding of the gay question in relation to party-building. A tentative outline of that study is attached, and some of us are doing bibliographic work now to help flesh it out.

For this study to happen, organizations must agree that the gay question deserves more attention and release some portion of some cadres' time to undertake the study. The response you send to the questionnaire will help us determine if our organizations agree and what our next steps will be.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Does your organization support the democratic rights of gays and lesbians?
2. If your organization does not have a line on the gay question, could it subscribe to the perspective put forward in the Organizer, October 1979 (and reprinted in the Guardian, Left Press Column, Nov. 14, 1979)?
3. What role, if any does your organization or members of it play in local or national gay organizations?
4. Do you know if there are gay or lesbian members of your organization? What has been your practice on their being open in various situations? Can you put them in touch with us?
5. What is your response to having one or more members of your organization participating in the proposed study?
6. Do you have any bibliographical material to contribute to such a study?
7. If you do not agree that work on the gay question should be undertaken now, under what material conditions should the OCIC forces begin such work?

Responses should be sent to Peter Doyle
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forthe
for the OCIC Oct. 14th ad hoc group,

Peter Doyle
Peter Doyle

First Draft - Proposal for Study of Gay Liberation and Party-Building

I. History of the Gay Liberation Movement

- A. Early Movement -- Germany, Britain, US (1865-1940)
- B. Modern US Movement Part 1 (1950-1969)
 - 1. Organizational Development
 - 2. Political Development (Special focus on Mattachine, DOB)
- C. Modern US Movement Part 2 (1969 -)
 - 1. Stonewall and the Gay Liberation Front
 - 2. Present Day Gay Liberation Movement -- Organization and Politics of the major trends -- NGTF, CLGR, Church Groups, local forms, March on Washington.
 - a. National Minority Participation
 - b. Sexism and separate women's organizations
 - on Class composition of leadership

II. Political Analysis of the Question of Gay Liberation

- A. Objective conditions of lesbians and gay men
 - 1. Prevalent forms and levels of discrimination (discuss men and women separately)
 - 2. Review legal status of gays -- anti-gay laws and gay rights measures
 - 3. The "Gay Ghetto"
- B. Capitalism and Homosexuality
 - 1. What is the utility of homophobia to Capitalism?
 - 2. What concessions can capitalism make to GL without a serious threat to its hegemony (ideological) over the working class?
- C. Political errors in GLM - what is their basis and how can we fight them?
 - 1. Racism
 - 2. Sexism
 - 3. Reformism
 - 4. Anti-Communism
 - 5. Feminism
 - 6. Subjectivism
 - 7. Ultra-democracy

III. Party-Building and the Gay Liberation Movement

- A. Is Gay Liberation a Revolutionary Task? (Does the elimination of homophobia require the overthrow of capitalism?)
- B. Gay liberation and Democratic Struggles
 - 1. Relationship, theoretically and practically, between GL and the struggle against sexism.
 - 2. Gay Liberation and the Struggle against racism
 - a. Attitudes of Black Community and Black Liberation Movement towards lesbians and gays
 - b. Developing contacts with Black lesbians and gay men.
 - 3. Gay Liberation and the Working Class Movement
 - a. The experience of Gay Liberationists in the TU movement.
 - b. Raising the question within the rank and file movement.
 - c. Involving gay and lesbian workers in the rank and file mvmt.
- C. Gay Liberation and the new family
- D. Gay Liberation and the US Left
 - 1. Historical survey -- CPUSA, New Left (SDS), SWP
 - 2. Modern anti-revisionist movement -- sectarianism homophobia, and the alienation of progressive lesbians and gays.
- E. The International Communist Movement and the Gay Question
 - 1. Historical positions -- German Social Democracy, the Bolsheviks, Stalin.
 - 2. Present day positions -- USSR, PRC, Cuba; ~~USSR, PRC, Cuba~~ GDR; new socialist countries and liberation movements.
 - 3. Developing a principled public criticism (esp. re Cuba)