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- Marty Jan 2014

The U.S. RADICALIZATION, FROM AFAR

by George Breitman, Lower Manhattan Branch

May 22, 1975

In the year 1975, after the fall of Saigon, is it too much to expect leaders of the Fourth International in Europe to show some understanding of the radicalization in the U.S.? After all, this radicalization began over a decade ago and has had major effects on world as well as U.S. politics.

The answer to my question seems to be Yes if we go by the article "World Capitalist Leadership in Disarray" by Pierre Frank, dated April 30, 1975, in *Inprecor*, May 8, 1975.

Discussing repercussions of the rout in Southeast Asia on the development of the class struggle in the U.S., Frank says, "It is difficult to conceive of a repetition of the phenomena of the 1960s: the eruption of various movements (the antiwar movement, the Black movement, the women's movement) which did not deeply penetrate the working class and eventually declined, the country falling back into political apathy."

In addition to its being difficult for Frank to conceive of a repetition of "the phenomena of the 1960s" (the radicalization), it is difficult for him to conceive correctly of the phenomena themselves. According to him, the antiwar movement did not deeply penetrate the working class and the country fell back into political apathy.

But earlier in the same article, Frank says, "Technically and militarily, Washington is no less ready to intensify its military intervention in this region [Southeast Asia] than it was in 1961 or 1965. In fact, it is even more ready to do so. But what has changed in the meantime is that

formidable opposition to any new massive military adventure abroad has arisen among the American masses. So long as the bourgeoisie is unable to alter this situation in the United States, the price it would have to pay for such an operation would be a political and social crisis of catastrophic proportions in its own country."

So we are presented with a rather curious situation. On the one hand the antiwar movement did not deeply penetrate the working class and on the other a formidable antiwar opposition has arisen among the American masses. Could there be a cause-and-effect relation between the antiwar movement and the mass antiwar opposition? It's not even hinted at in Frank's article. Maybe, in the way he conceives things, the formidable opposition arose despite the antiwar movement?

But that's not stranger than his attempts to evaluate the political climate in the U.S. On the one hand the country has fallen back into political apathy and on the other the capitalists are faced by an antiwar opposition so formidable that they would be confronted by a catastrophic political and social crisis if they tried to resume military intervention in Southeast Asia. Could it be that "apathy" is not the right word to describe such a state of affairs?

Ignorance about the American radicalization and its manifold, far-reaching effects at home and abroad, usually expressed in condescending and disdainful terms borrowed from ultralefts and workerists, always was unworthy of a Fourth Internationalist. Now, after U.S. defeats in Southeast Asia, surely it is time to abide by the maxim that it is wise to think before you write.

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- Marty Jan 2014

CONCERNING THE DRAFT RESOLUTION ON GAY LIBERATION

by Steve Beren, Upper West Side Branch, New York
Local and Sandy Knoll, Detroit Branch

May 26, 1975

The group of comrades supporting the general line of the Draft Resolution on Gay Liberation are seeking a reversal of the orientation adopted by the 1973 SWP convention to the gay liberation movement.

Briefly stated, our objectives are as follows:

(1) For an understanding of the real meaning of gay pride, particularly a correct appreciation of the way the slogans of gay pride are seen by the masses of gay people.

(2) For a rejection of the characterization of the gay movement as peripheral to the class struggle, with the debate on this taking place within the context of agreement that the gay liberation movement is less important than the women's movement.

(3) For increased propaganda and activity in the gay liberation movement.

(4) We plan to emphasize a calm, reasoned and loyal discussion over the question of voting on resolutions, although we will call for a vote within the caucus supporting the NC Draft Political Resolution.

(5) We urge the branches to have separate discussions on this question. We propose that the convention have a

separate discussion and vote on the Draft Resolution on Gay Liberation.

At the recent NC plenum, no steps were made to reverse the party's position. It is proposed that the party continue as if the test of events had proved the line of the memorandum correct.

In this context, the discussion must continue and the differences brought out so that the error can be corrected. However, while the task of developing a more correct analysis of the approach to the gay liberation movement will be aided by continuing the discussion and education, such differences cannot be resolved simply by a vote.

While there will be a vote, the differences must ultimately be solved in a broader political context—through practice, discussion, and experience.

Toward this end, we urge the entire membership to study, debate, and decide on all the documents on each side.

And, in accordance with the tradition of our movement, we urge all those who agree with us to take an open stand, informing the leadership and ranks of their position.

DRAFT RESOLUTION ON GAY LIBERATION

by Steve Beren, Upper West Side Branch, New York
Local and Sandy Knoll, Detroit Branch

May 26, 1975

A. Political Approach to Gay Pride

Among gay people a mood has developed to reject self-hatred and to affirm their humanity. This has been reflected in the slogan "gay is good" and in the concept of gay pride.

Gay pride reflects the same confidence and group solidarity that feminism represents for women or that Black nationalism represents for Blacks. Gay pride is a powerful force behind the gay liberation movement.

The view that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality is as false as the "biological inferiority" of women or the "racial inferiority" of non-whites. It is the ideological pretext for justifying and continuing the violence and oppression against gays. From this myth flow the stereotypes and reactionary ideas about homosexuals and homosexuality, prejudiced ideas that are used to justify the specific forms of oppression gays face.

The Socialist Workers party rejects all forms of prejudice against gay people.

Because of the irrational and emotional attitudes about homosexuality, and because sexuality is such a touchy personal issue, people tend to react subjectively. We should always keep the prejudices of the masses in mind, but we should not make any concessions to this backwardness. It is essential for Marxists to refute the anti-homosexual mythology of class society most importantly as a directly political question because of the concrete social effects of anti-gay prejudice.

It is in the interests of heterosexual workers to support the gay liberation movement. Prejudice against gays among straight workers is an obstacle to working-class unity and thus the class struggle.

Gay oppression, including physical attacks on gays by police and others, is a material oppression against *all* the oppressed and exploited, particularly the working class. The scapegoat role played by gays aids capitalism in beating the rest of the masses into submission and subservience.

The violent repression of homosexuality and the deep

and widespread anti-gay prejudices of this society are conservatizing and demobilizing factors in the overall class struggle. This is one of the reasons the gay liberation movement has more than a "peripheral" role to play in the coming American revolution.

The workers must be won to support and defend the gay liberation movement, just as they must be won to defend women in their fight for liberation or the right of Black people to self-determination. Most of our opponents fail to come to grips with this issue, capitulating to the backward prejudices of those straight workers opposed to gay liberation. While the reformists and sectarians label gay liberation a "minor issue," "exotic," "narrow," "peripheral," etc., the Socialist Workers party should be in the forefront of winning heterosexual workers to supporting the just demands of gays.

Some on the left, especially the Stalinists, advance the view that socialist society will maintain and "revolutionize" the traditional heterosexual roles by "divesting" them of their oppressive character. But despite the Stalinists, who label homosexuality a "fascist perversion" or a "product of a decaying capitalism," the view that homosexuality will cease to exist once heterosexual relationships are "revolutionized" has no basis in fact. It is the repression, frustration, and inhibition of homosexuality, not homosexuality itself, that is characteristic of capitalism. The Stalinists are merely covering for the oppression of gays in the workers states.

Against such theories, we put forward a simple fact: homosexuality is equal to heterosexuality. We solidarize with the slogan "gay is just as good as straight," and the briefer popularization, "gay is good."

Many heterosexuals believe that gay pride is the same thing as advocacy of homosexuality and an attempt to convert heterosexuals—a sort of sexism in reverse. But the gay liberation movement, with its slogans of "gay is good!" and "out of the closets and into the streets" is not aimed at oppressing heterosexuals but at mobilizing and inspiring gays. Far from advocacy of homosexuality, the fact that "gay is good," "gay is just as good as straight," and similar slogans are gaining popularity signifies something very progressive: that more and more, little by little—cautiously and timidly—gay people are beginning to consider the idea that maybe, just maybe, they are equal in every way to heterosexuals. It is the way the masses of gays see these slogans, and not the interpretations of a tiny handful of counter-culturalists, that is decisive.

In a socialist society, there would be no oppression of homosexuals and no repression of homosexuality. In such a society, human beings will simply express their natural sexual inclinations, whatever they may be.

Of course, this is not true under capitalism. Most people today prefer either homosexuality or heterosexuality, think one or the other is better for them. One preference "is just as good as" the other.

In their introduction to *Twenty Questions About Homosexuality: A Political Primer*, the Gay Activists Alliance of New York states:

"It is important for our heterosexual brothers and sisters to understand that most of the questions they ask themselves offend and oppress us, for they are not asked of other groups (in) our society, and they have little to do with our lives since they are based entirely on misinformation and myth. But these myths have often been used as

excuses for the denial of our Constitutional and human rights. So—despite the fact that our lives need no justification—we are compelled to provide answers.

"One major source is our own experience. We know that we are neither criminal, immoral nor sick. But we have also used the bulk of the most recent literature on homosexuality; objective information which proves our point. . . ."

Question 20 in GAA's pamphlet asks: "Is it better, in this society, to be heterosexual?" And GAA replies:

"Is it better to be white? Or gentile? or descended from the settlers on the Mayflower? These are questions that should never be asked seriously by anyone who believes in our constitutional principles. But they are asked nonetheless, and members of our oppressed ethnic minorities once wondered whether it wouldn't be better to 'pass' if possible, or at least try as hard as they could to fit into the prescribed patterns. Now these minorities have come to understand that the only answer is to be exactly what you are and proud of it—that avoidance of insanity does not consist in conformity but in protest against injustice.

"Homosexuals too now realize that our first duty toward ourselves is to accept nothing less than the same rights and dignities accorded others. We are no longer willing to accept the tyranny of the majority and we see the efforts to describe us as 'criminal' or 'immoral' or 'sick' for what these efforts always have been, *political* maneuvers aimed at stripping us of our personal values, at constricting the human personality and at substituting conformity for social diversity. We are serving notice that we'll tolerate no more brainwashing or brutalization. . . ." (their emphasis).

"Gay is Good" is a political slogan of equality and democracy. It is a slogan expressing the present developing consciousness of gays, reacting against present oppression. It is neither an analysis of sexuality in primitive society nor a prediction of sexuality in the socialist future.

It reflects the striving of gay people to have homosexuality accepted, regarded, and treated equally with heterosexuality. In short, it reflects gay pride and the weakening of bourgeois sexual morality.

B. The Importance of the Gay Liberation Movement

Gays suffer a real oppression, rooted in capitalist society. Gay liberation cannot be achieved short of the socialist revolution.

Although some of the demands raised by the gay liberation movement can be met under capitalism, the ultimate goals of gay liberation *cannot* be won under capitalism except in the most partial, incomplete, and distorted form. Each partial victory will give added impetus to the movement. And through struggling to *completely* end gay oppression, many will see that their demands can be totally met only through a socialist revolution.

The gay struggle raises demands of a democratic character. As Marxists, we do not believe democratic demands are less revolutionary, less important, or less proletarian than transitional demands. When the fight for

democratic demands utilizes proletarian methods of struggle, it can be an important weapon in the class struggle. The gay liberation movement, a democratic struggle, raises demands and poses problems whose solutions go beyond the reform of capitalism, pointing to some of the needs of humanity that can only be solved through a socialist revolution.

This is not to equate the gay liberation movement with the struggle against imperialist war, or against inflation and unemployment, or for self-determination of oppressed nations, or for the emancipation of women. The point is merely that the demands of the gay liberation movement are not narrow in scope, nor is the issue of gay liberation peripheral to the class struggle.

The gay liberation movement confronts and helps break down traditional sexual morality, one rather important aspect of bourgeois ideology in that it helps preserve the nuclear family relationships in class society and provides the emotional and ideological glue helping hold the nuclear family together.

The enforcement of a heterosexual norm is probably one of the most important aspects of this sexual repression.

Sexual repression and oppression are among the keys to the maintenance of capitalist rule. By suppressing, repressing, and distorting sexuality—a key component of the human personality—the ruling class maintains a firm grip on the psychology of the masses. This aids capitalism in beating the masses into submission and subservience, and aids in the enforcement of all other capitalist norms—whether political, social, economic, moral, or cultural. The repression of human sexuality is vitally important to the maintenance of the authoritarian social order.

It is in the family that sex-typing and rigid sex roles are first learned, and with them the proper attitude of submissiveness to parental and paternal authority. In this way children are broken and trained to accept the repressive social structure.

The family prevents the free expression of sexuality, and in particular it attempts to suppress homosexuality, because homosexuality by definition is in conflict with the heterosexual norm.

It appears that the beginning of the repression of homosexuality can be traced to the origin of the nuclear family and the rise of class society. In order for the nuclear family to have been created and develop, the introduction of a compulsory sex morality in the early stages of class society, and its enforcement throughout thousands of years of class rule, were both necessary. Over these thousands of years, the effect has been to mold and distort the human character to suit the needs of the class rulers. Herein lies the explanation of the roots of gay oppression.

This sexual repression is a material oppression against all the victims of capitalism, because it destroys and robs much human potential and ability, and channels remaining energy in the interests of the capitalists.

Not only the family, but all the institutions of capitalism (the church, medicine, psychology, education, government, business, media, the police, etc.) are geared to seeing that people stick to these rigid roles and definitions. But homosexual behavior does not conform to the heterosexual norm.

Precisely because it challenges the reactionary and stifling norms and institutions of class society, the struggle for gay liberation is important, not only for human sexual liberation, but for human liberation in every sphere of life.

The oppression gays suffer is not *primarily* economic, although gays do face economic discrimination, particularly job discrimination. Gays are not oppressed because of their role in the family, but—since the family enforces the heterosexual norm—they are oppressed because they do not fit into their intended social roles. What is involved is not so much the oppression of gay people as a behavioral minority but the attempted suppression of homosexual behavior.

Gays are not oppressed as part of the reserve army of labor as are Blacks and women. Gays do not face the national oppression of Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans, nor do they have as great an urban concentration and proletarian composition as these sectors. While the women's movement challenges the economic and social role of the family, the gay movement poses *primarily* an ideological challenge.

But gays do face economic oppression, physical brutality, and social discrimination, leading the gay movement to confront a wide range of institutions—police, schools, medicine, psychology, religion, government, media, business.

The scope of the gay movement is less than others, but it is not "narrow."

The issue of gay liberation is less important than war, inflation, unemployment, racism, or the oppression of women, but it is not a peripheral issue.

The gay liberation movement is a democratic struggle, but it is not limited to the struggle for democratic rights of the "sector" of the population defined as "homosexual." It is also at the same time a struggle to liberate all humanity from the heterosexual norm imposed by capitalism.

Actually the very concept of "homosexual" as a distinct variety of human being is a myth deliberately fostered by capitalist society to uphold the heterosexual norm. The gay liberation struggle is objectively a struggle for a society in which there will no longer be "homosexuals" and "heterosexuals" but simply human beings expressing their natural sexual inclinations. This struggle is for a society that will ensure and protect the free development and expression of sexuality.

The counter-cultural wing of the gay movement believes that homosexuality, because it involves sexual relations that fall outside the family system, leads to liberation from that system. This is wrong on two counts.

First, homosexuality does not lead to liberation from the family system. The fact that homosexuality involves sexual relations that fall outside the family only points out why the family and other institutions seek to repress homosexuality.

Second, liberation can only be achieved when, in the process of the construction of socialism, society as a whole takes on the social and economic functions of the family, and the heterosexual norm "withers away" along with the family itself.

Although the gay movement does challenge bourgeois ideology and sexual morality, it cannot by itself "destroy" the heterosexual norm. Only in the aftermath of a successful struggle for power by the working class will the abolition of sexual repression begin to become a reality.

While the abolition of capitalism is a pre-condition for gay liberation, the oppression of gays in Cuba and the Stalinist countries demonstrates that it is no guarantee. There will be a need for a gay liberation movement after the revolution. The struggle against post-capitalist oppression of gays will be part of the effort to construct a socialist society.

(The oppression of gays by the workers states is also a strong refutation of the reformist argument that gay liberation can be won *even short of the abolition of capitalism.*)

While the counter-culturalists deny that gay liberation is bound up with and dependent upon the struggle of the workers for state power, on the reverse side of the coin are the workerists, who ignore or oppose gay liberation, and who believe that the gay struggle is of little importance to the overall struggle.

Both the counter-culturalists and the workerists fail to see the gay movement as an important and significant ally of the working class.

It was the development of the current radicalization that led to the birth of gay pride, paved the way for an independent gay liberation movement, and enabled the gay struggle to increase its relative importance.

In the 1950's and early 1960's, there were just as many homosexuals as there are now, and the oppression they faced was just as real and unjustified. Groups like Mattachine and Daughters of Bilitis lobbied for law reform without success. The homosexual rights movement was isolated, saddled with a reformist perspective, and was *really* peripheral to American politics. In their introduction to *The Gay Crusaders*, Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker wrote of this period:

"Through the fifties and sixties, the movement had been the work of a dedicated few dozen people across the country. There had been pickets and legal challenges, but basically the movement was small in numbers and expanding slowly."

But all this was to change dramatically. Under the impact of the new radicalization, and particularly influenced by Black nationalism and feminism, there developed a qualitative change in the consciousness of gays: the development of gay pride. This political awakening was explosively demonstrated in the 1969 Stonewall uprising, which Tobin and Wicker describe as "the birth of gay pride on a mass scale."

After Stonewall, there was a qualitative change in the level of organization and the scope of struggle of the gay movement. It was the birth of this new, independent, radical, and militant gay liberation movement that enabled the issue of gay oppression to be lifted from the "periphery" of the class struggle and instead by placed "at the center of its advance." The Stonewall rebellion not only unleashed the pent-up anger of gay people, but also rapidly galvanized this sentiment into a movement, and unexpectedly increased the potential to mobilize people in support of freedom for homosexuals.

Since Stonewall, along with the growth of gay pride there has been a shift in the attitudes of society. The trend

has been towards support for gay rights and away from hatred and prejudice. The gains that the gay liberation movement has made would have been impossible if millions did not already support the rights of gays.

The large homosexual population, the mass actions of the gay liberation movement, the increasing support for gay rights, the growth of gay pride—these are among the factors leading to the conclusion that the gay liberation movement *will* mobilize masses of gay people to fight for their rights.

The interrelationship between gay liberation and the struggle of the workers for state power was clearly demonstrated in the 1974 upsurge in Portugal.

The workers' upsurge unearthed a rainbow of political tendencies and gave birth to all kinds of new struggles.

There was a gay liberation contingent in the 1974 May Day demonstration in Oporto.

Later that month, the Movement for Revolutionary Homosexual Action arose, claiming 1,000 members and distributing a statement in Lisbon solidarizing with the workers movement and demanding repeal of the anti-gay section of the criminal code. Statements in support of gay liberation appeared in the major daily papers.

The Portuguese gay movement, of course, surfaced after decades of repression and reaction. And it took a generalized upsurge of the working class to awaken the gay section of the population.

In this sense, the American gay movement has developed much further. *Prior* to a mass upsurge of the workers, tens of thousands have already been mobilized by the gay movement. The American gay movement has contributed in its own way to the developing radicalism of the workers. In the past six years, the movement has *qualitatively advanced* from the peripheral position it occupied in the 1950's and early 1960's.

So far the gay movement has been predominantly students and other young people. Particularly as a generalized radicalization of the American workers, including gays, develops, there's every reason to expect the gay liberation movement to make further significant advances.

C. Tactical Orientation to the Gay Liberation Movement, 1975-76

Before going into proposals on the party's work in the gay movement, let's review the highlights of gay liberation activities in the past two years, beginning with the 1973 Gay Pride Week activities.

*The June 1973 Gay Pride Week activities were considerably larger than the 1972 actions: 15,000 turned out in New York, 2,000 in San Francisco, 1,500 in Philadelphia, 1,200 in Chicago, 500 in Boston, 200 in Dallas, 200 in Detroit, 150 in Atlanta, and 130 in Minneapolis.

*Jul. 1: Memorial meetings were held in several cities following an arson fire at a New Orleans gay bar, which killed 32 people. The largest meetings were: 500 in San Francisco, 400 in Los Angeles, 250 in New Orleans, 125 in New York, and 120 in San Diego.

*Aug. 9: 300 demonstrate in New York against police brutality.

*Aug. 26: 100 women, led by Lesbian Feminist Liberation, demonstrated at New York's Museum of Natural History, calling for an end to racist and sexist terminology.

gy, increased hiring of women recognition of the contributions of women, recognition of the contributions of lesbians in particular.

*Sep. 26: 150 demonstrated in Boston at the State Capitol in support of gay rights legislation.

*Oct. 23: 300 people protested at the Denver City Council at hearings on revisions in the legal code that would be harsher on gays.

*Nov. 12: 150 people protest at Denver City Council hearings on legal code revisions.

*Nov. 19: 150 people protest, again at the Denver City Council hearings.

*Nov. 23-24: 300 attend conference of Gay Academic Union in New York.

*Nov. 30 weekend: 400 Black women attended the Eastern Regional Conference of Black Feminism, sponsored by NBFO. One of the two largest workshops was on "The Triple Oppression of the Black Lesbian."

*Dec. 9: 100 demonstrate in Castro Valley area of San Francisco in support of petition opposing discrimination against gay prisoners. The petition called for an end to involuntary segregation of inmates, equal access to recreation and job training, the right to receive gay literature and form gay organizations, and an end to denying parole on the grounds of homosexuality. 15,000 signatures had been gathered throughout the state in support of the demands.

*Jan. 21, 1974: 250 marched on the L.A. police headquarters, protesting vice squad operations.

*Feb. 22: 300 people protest at Hollywood division of LAPD.

*Mar. 4: 100 at Ann Arbor, Mich. City Council protest the city's failure to enforce its own human rights ordinance.

*Mar. 14: 200 in New York at CBS studios protest antigay programming policies.

*March or April: *Amsterdam News*, major Black newspaper in New York, endorses Intro 2 in editorial.

*Apr. 18: 150 in support of Intro 2 at New York hearings.

*Apr. 20: 350 at Gay Rights Action Coalition Rally for passage of Intro 2.

*April or May: 100 to 150 at UCLA Gay Awareness Rally.

*May 4: 1,000 demonstrate in New York in support of Intro 2.

*May 4-7: 300 at University of Michigan, in conference on "Gays and Mental Health Oppression," held simultaneously with the national APA convention.

*May 7: Boulder, Colo. referendum on gay liberation defeated, 13,107-7,438. The law would have banned all forms of employment discrimination against gays, except for services hired within one's home. During two hotly debated public hearings, opponents charged it would make Boulder into a "sexual deviate mecca" to be known as "Lesbian-Homoville." The issue, according to one local paper, became "the hottest, most divisive in the history of the community." This was the first case of a gay rights law being presented directly to the voters in the midst of a controversial public debate. About half of all registered voters participated. Following the vote, the mayor (a Black), and one city council member became targets of a recall movement, based largely on their support for the gay rights bill.

*May 11: 250 to 300 attend Minnesota Conference on Gay Rights.

*May 23: 150 to 175 protestors at New York City Council meeting where Intro 2 was finally defeated.

*Jun. 11: American Nurses Association convention in San Francisco. Gay Nurses Alliance schedule workshop in room with capacity of 200, but 600 show up. An extra session had to be held.

*1974 Gay Pride Week activities: 20,000 in New York, 5,000 in Los Angeles, 4,000 in Chicago, several thousand in San Francisco, 1,000 in Boston, 1,000 in Berkeley, 400 at Stanford University, 200 in Detroit, and 200 at Texas Gay Conference in Fort Worth.

*July: NEA meeting of 9,700 in Chicago. After 30 minutes of debate on a resolution opposing discrimination against gays, the resolution passed 65 percent to 35 percent.

*July 12: American Library Association meeting in New York City, 400 attend gay caucus, 225 hear talk by Mike McConnell. ALA governing council, reversing staff's position, calls for investigation of the refusal of the University of Minnesota in 1970 to hire McConnell.

*Aug. 4: 100 attend first meeting of Comunidad de Orgullo Gay, Puerto Rican gay liberation organization formed in the wake of steps towards a stricter anti-gay penal code in Puerto Rico. 300 people attend succeeding meetings. 5,000 copies of the first edition of the organization's monthly newspaper, *Pa' fuera*, are distributed in the first week of September.

*Sep. 2: Over 100 in Detroit protest firing of Brian McNaught, gay columnist fired by the *Michigan Catholic*.

*Oct. 5: 75 to 100 demonstrate in San Diego against wave of police arrests.

*Nov. 29-30: 600 people attend Gay Academic Union conference in New York.

*Dec. 2-8: Gay Pride Week in Eugene, Ore. Largest event, 175 heard talk on state of gay movement by Morris Kight.

*Dec. 14: Gay contingent in March on Boston for school desegregation.

*Dec. 18-22: 500 attend International Gay Rights Congress in Edinburgh, Scotland. Major subjects of discussion: the struggle of gays for legal rights, the oppression of lesbians, the relationship between the gay liberation movement and the trade union movement, and the defense of gay victims of the Chilean junta.

*Jan. 24-26, 1975: 350 people from Canada and the United States attend Lesbian Conference in Montreal.

*Early March: 200 supporters of gay rights legislation at Ithaca, New York, City Council discussion.

*Mid-March: New England Gay Conference in Provincetown, Mass., attended by over 600 people.

*Apr. 11-13: 500 people attend the Midwest Gay Pride Conference, held at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

*May 3-4: 150 people participate in workshops on various aspects of gay liberation, at Amherst, Mass.

*May 17: Gay contingent in March on Boston for school desegregation.

(This list will be updated later during the pre-convention discussion.)

What should our approach to the gay liberation movement be? As with any movement, we should use the approach and basic concepts outlined and developed in the transitional program, and try to reach out to the move-

ment at its present level. In a collaborative manner, recognizing that the gay liberation movement has its own dynamic, we should contribute to and try to develop the struggle. We should help lead it to a higher level.

It is not possible to do this however, by simply participating in the movement with a correct line, although that is necessary. Favorable objective conditions are the prerequisite. While we can *sometimes* help the objective conditions develop in a favorable direction, we cannot create these conditions.

We are always seeking ways to intervene in all aspects of the class struggle, at whatever level it is at, and project the correct line to move the struggle forward. Which struggles open up for us at a given time, what their scope and duration will be, is determined by the overall objective situation, and not our desires.

The workerists attempt to overleap the current objective situation, seeking shortcuts to the masses. Such attempts to leap over the objective situation lead to abstention from the real living class struggle as it develops.

Our general approach to the emergence and growth of the gay movement should be to see it as presenting the revolutionary party with a challenge, with responsibilities, and with opportunities. It offers us the chance to recruit, win greater influence in the radical movement, and advance the interests of gays.

The SWP should aspire to be in the forefront of the gay movement, vigorously intervening with our ideas and revolutionary program. There is no contradiction between building the gay liberation movement and building the revolutionary party. Intervention in the gay liberation movement is a *method* of party-building, not an obstacle to it.

In projecting what our immediate tasks should be, we must have an open-minded and flexible attitude toward intervention.

First of all, where we have the forces, we should intervene in building actions around specific issues (gay rights legislation, campus recognition, defense cases, etc.) where there are real openings and where the actions have potential to have an impact (i.e., with a political focus, or drawing large numbers, etc.). In such circumstances, comrades could attend meetings and work with existing groups or coalitions.

Second, in projecting this allocation of cadre and resources, the party should not at this time take the initiative in launching a national campaign around any particular issue or issues. Nor should we take central organizational responsibility for the gay movement, as we have in the antiwar, abortion rights, and school desegregation movements. A large-scale colonization of the gay movement would be inappropriate. A more modest intervention is called for.

Third, we should intervene with fractions at local and national conferences, advocating a mass action perspective and the raising of demands that can appeal to masses of gay people, such as: full rights for gays, repeal of anti-gay laws, end job discrimination, end police brutality, etc. We should particularly become involved in plans for the 1976 Gay Pride Week activities.

Fourth, we should consider the feasibility of initiatives

toward gay contingents in demonstrations supporting school desegregation in Boston. The struggle in Boston has the potential to spur on other movements, such as the gay liberation movement, that are concerned with civil rights.

Fifth, we should step up the use of our press, publications, forums, and election campaigns to build the gay movement. Our articles and speeches should discuss and explain our position on gay liberation, the oppression of lesbians, the nature and roots of gay oppression, the history of the gay liberation movement, the meaning of gay pride, the oppression of gays in Cuba and the Stalinist countries, the need for an independent mass movement, the relationship of gay liberation to the rest of the radicalization, etc. Such propaganda work requires a Marxist analysis of the gay liberation movement. *The Militant* should carry analytical and educational as well as news articles. The news articles in *The Militant* should begin to reflect the *full* scope of activities of the movement. Through our press, we should build activities of the movement and involve ourselves in its debates. Pathfinder Press should publish at least two pamphlets, one on the oppression of lesbians, and one on gay liberation in general. We should have one speaker representing the party's views on gay liberation available.

Sixth, we should begin thinking out our relationship to the First International Lesbian Congress to be held in August 1975 in Norway, and the Second International Gay Rights Congress to be held in Easter 1976 in Puerto Rico.

Our job is to get involved in the gay liberation movement, to learn from and begin thinking about the movement.

The carrying out of these tasks will lay the basis for further participation in the gay liberation movement.

There is both the need and the potential for the development of a mass, independent gay liberation movement. The SWP can and should contribute to the process of formulating a program and organizing actions that will lead towards the development of such a movement.

This is a task that cannot be done overnight, and it certainly cannot be done by waiting for it to happen. But it is a task that must be done, and it cannot be done with our abstention.

The SWP has been discussing the gay liberation movement for over four years. What the SWP needs, and what this discussion should eventually produce is a clear, uncompromising and enthusiastic statement, one which can be a stepping stone for solving the tactical, strategical, and theoretical questions posed by gay liberation, and which sets us on the road towards assuming the leadership of the movement.

The decision not to intervene nationally in the gay liberation movement, recommended by Barry Sheppard in the 1972 literary discussion and then codified by the April 19, 1973 N.C. memorandum on gay liberation, was a step in the wrong direction.

National party intervention in the gay liberation movement is long overdue. The gay liberation movement is six years old. Let us begin.

IN REPLY TO BARRY SHEPPARD ON GAY LIBERATION

by Steve Beren, Upper West Side Branch, New York
Local

May 26, 1975

The purpose of this article is to explain why the *Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement* (Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 7) approved in 1973 is incorrect, and to argue for the analysis and orientation provided in the *Draft Resolution on Gay Liberation*.

This article will discuss arguments raised in the main pro-memorandum article, *Major Flaws in the Thorstad-Green Resolution "For an Intervention Into the Gay Liberation Movement"* by Barry Sheppard (Vol. 31, No. 34, p. 8), focusing on: (1) the political approach the party should take towards the development of gay pride, (2) the relative importance of the gay liberation movement, and (3) the party's tactical orientation to the movement at the present time.

"Taking a Position on Homosexuality"

Point 2 of the memorandum concludes:

"The party should take no position on the nature or value of homosexuality, nor try to determine what is 'good' or 'bad' about heterosexuality or homosexuality, and not advocate any specific sexual orientation." (p. 8)

The memorandum argues that the party should adopt "political positions that guide its work" and "not take positions on a whole range of scientific, artistic, cultural, and other questions." (p. 7)

This is correct, but in this case what is involved is *not* the party taking a scientific or cultural stand in the sense of a full-blown theory on sexuality, but the party taking a *political* stand: agreement with the concept that gay is just as good as straight.

In his article, Barry Sheppard makes it clear that he considers solidarity with the slogan "gay is good" and affirming the equality of homosexuality with heterosexuality to be a scientific or cultural rather than a political question:

"Comrades Thorstad, Green, Beren, et. al. put great emphasis on this question [the nature or value of homosexuality], calling it the 'central thrust' of [the] gay liberation movement. . . .

"For the party to adopt a position on the question of the value of homosexuality vis-a-vis heterosexuality would be a diversion from our purpose, as the memorandum explains. . . .

["These] comrades . . . are in reality proposing that the party begin to become something other than a political organization. They would have us become a proponent of 'gayness is good'—which falls outside of our political purpose." (p. 10)

The party can be hurt, not only by taking positions on non-political questions, but also if it takes the *wrong political position* in evaluating gay pride.

It is not so much a question of *whether or not* homosexuality is equal to heterosexuality, but rather one of what political approach to take towards the growing

realization among gays that homosexuality is equal with heterosexuality.

This growing realization has led many to a rejection of self-hatred and an affirmation of their humanity. This has been reflected in the slogan "gay is good" and in the concept of "gay pride."

The memorandum, by incorrectly posing the question as a non-political one, fails to adopt a correct analysis of gay pride and its role in spurring forward the gay liberation movement. In the name of "not taking a position on a scientific question" the memorandum actually takes an incorrect *political* position: a refusal to support the slogan "gay is good."

Instead of the approach of the memorandum, the party must understand "gay is good" for what it is: a political slogan of equality and democracy.

Political Position Inadequate

The memorandum's refusal to acknowledge that homosexuality is not inferior to heterosexuality casts a shadow over its formal position of support to the democratic rights of gays.

"Assertions have been made . . . that the NC memorandum's political position gives only lip service to the struggle of gay people for their full rights," Sheppard writes. He then goes on to state that "the memorandum is crystal clear in its political position," citing its "unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights." (p. 8)

But this is only one side of the memorandum's political position. Another is our political approach to gay pride and anti-gay prejudice. And *this* is where the memorandum's political position becomes inadequate and incorrect.

Sheppard writes:

"The memorandum rejects all forms of prejudice against gay people. It supports their struggle for the eradication of every aspect of the oppression they suffer, and rejects 'theories' about gay people *or about homosexuality* that are used to justify the oppression of gay people." (p. 9, my emphasis)

If the memorandum "rejects 'theories' about . . . homosexuality," isn't it "taking a stand on homosexuality"?

If the memorandum "rejects 'theories' about . . . homosexuality that are used to justify the oppression of gay people," doesn't this imply rejection of the theory that homosexuality is inferior to heterosexuality?

Replying in the negative, Sheppard writes:

"But while we reject such theories, we do so on the ground that they are used to oppress gay people. We do not attempt, as a party, to put any other theory about homosexuality in the place of such theories." (p. 9)

So the memorandum "rejects 'theories' about . . . homosexuality that are used to justify the oppression of

gay people" not because such theories are incorrect and ignorant prejudice, but because "they are used to oppress gay people." But there is a difference between opposition to anti-gay theories and the rejection of the manner in which they are used. Since even a correct theory can be misapplied and abused, the party must make clear that we reject these theories *because they are incorrect* as well as because they are used to oppress gay people. Since the memorandum fails to do this, it leaves open the implication that the theory that homosexuality is inferior to heterosexuality may be correct.

Since Sheppard goes on to state his opposition to the party taking the position that homosexuality is equal to heterosexuality, the statement in the memorandum that "we reject with contempt all forms of bourgeois prejudice against gay people" presumably uses the phrase "reject with contempt" broadly enough to include both those who agree and disagree with the prejudiced, bourgeois theory that homosexuality is inferior to heterosexuality.

This points up a rather serious problem in the party's coming to grips with the gay liberation movement: Some comrades just do not yet recognize the fact that gay is just as good as straight. Sheppard errs when he suggests that the party not take a position refuting these comrades.

As Harry Ring pointed out in 1972:

"(W)e need an educational discussion that would equip every comrade to rebut the kind of utterly false argumentation found in Comrade Nat Weinstein's contribution in Bulletin No. 4, July 1972. Frankly, I believe that when a serious comrade can simply dismiss the reality of gay oppression with the quibbling assertion that it is merely 'psychological oppression,' we have evidence of the fact that antihomosexual prejudice runs so very deep in this society that it even manifests itself within society's most conscious vanguard. . . .

"In political argumentation, it has been observed, there is often a 'good' reason and a real one. I don't think the arguments advanced against a positive orientation toward the gay movement are even very 'good' ones. And I don't feel I would be going too far afield in speculating that the real reason for such opposition is fear that identification with the gay movement and significant recruitment of gays would impair our image among workers—straight ones, that is.

"The problem is not totally illusory even if the fear is exaggerated. But I think the only way we can hope to deal effectively with the problem of antigay prejudice among workers and others is by first divesting ourselves of that same prejudice." (*A Civil Liberties Approach to Gay Liberation Is Insufficient*, Vol. 30, No. 9; p. 7)

When those supporters of the memorandum who *do not agree* that gay is just as good as straight say they "reject with contempt all forms of bourgeois prejudice against gay people," is it really any wonder why this is considered lip service?

Gay People Are Equal (In All Other Respects)

Sheppard writes that the "line of the memorandum implies rejection of any notion of the 'inferiority' of gay people. But this does not entail taking any position on the question of homosexuality itself. The difference can perhaps be seen in the two possible interpretations of the 'gay is good' slogan." (p.9)

Sheppard indicates that the statement "gay people are just as good as heterosexual people" is "in line with the memorandum." Now, this may appear to be just another way of stating "gay is just as good as straight."

But Sheppard goes on to make it clear that the memorandum opposes taking the position that "gayness or homosexuality is just as good as heterosexuality." So for Sheppard, "gay people are just as good as straight people" is not another way of stating but is *counterposed* to "gay is just as good as straight."

Since, all other things being equal, gays and straights differ only in sexual orientation, "gay people are just as good as straight people" is normally understood to imply that "gay is just as good as straight," and vice versa.

By counterposing the two statements, Sheppard places "gay people are just as good as straight people" into an unusual context which completely transforms its meaning. Instead of meaning "*in the area of sexual orientation, gay people are just as good as straight people,*" Sheppard would have it mean "gay people, *leaving aside their homosexuality, are just as good as straight people, leaving aside their heterosexuality.*"

Since, in the view of anti-gay society, it is precisely in the area of sexual preference that the inequality lies, Sheppard's formula is hardly an adequate refutation. Why bother to assert that "gay people are just as good as straight people" if the statement is not intended to apply to the area of sexual orientation?

"Gay people are just as good as straight people" and "gay is just as good as straight" are not "two [mutually exclusive] possible interpretations of the 'gay is good' slogan," as Sheppard claims, but rather complementary and overlapping ideas.

By counterposing the two, Sheppard not only rejects the slogan "gay is just as good as straight" but also renders meaningless the statement that "gay people are just as good as straight people."

The statement that "gay people are just as good as straight people," to have any meaning, *must* apply to the area of sexual orientation.

Are We Going to Imply That Gay People Are Wrong in Their Personal Preference?

It must be recognized that for one individual to prefer homosexuality or to think that homosexuality is better for her or him "is just as good as" another individual preferring heterosexuality or thinking that heterosexuality is better for her or him. It must be understood that the preference of homosexuality "is just as good as" the preference of heterosexuality.

"Gay is just as good as straight" says that both preferences are equal. To refrain from supporting this slogan, to refrain from recognizing that homosexuality is not inferior to heterosexuality, implies that the preferences may not be equal—that one may be superior and the other inferior—and that *some* people may therefore be *wrong* in their personal preference. Given today's prevailing anti-gay prejudices, the theory that homosexuality is inferior to heterosexuality *would go completely unchallenged.*

This is "in line with the memorandum," but it falls far short of the correct approach outlined by Harry Ring in 1972:

"Comrade Sheppard is, in my opinion, unrealistic in contending that trying to understand the nature of gay oppression we can put aside 'all discussion about why homosexual impulses exist, or why a section of the population prefers homosexuality.'

"It would be utopian and counterproductive to demand that the party acquire a full, rounded grasp of a profoundly complex subject about which there is only an extremely limited body of valid scientific information. I do not think we must answer all the basic questions involved as a precondition for a positive approach.

"But there are certain essentials which I am convinced cannot be avoided if we are to intervene effectively in the gay movement.

"I don't think that politically conscious gay activists will be particularly impressed by a political position which is limited to support of their civil liberties.

"Rather, I believe, we must have a position of support for gay rights within the context of clearly rejecting the nonmaterialist notion that homosexuality is an illness—an illness induced by class society which will be cured by socialism.

"There are many individuals and groups that regard homosexuality as an illness but oppose oppression of gay people in much the same sense that they oppose the oppressive conditions that prevail in mental hospitals as well as the virulent prejudice against the mentally ill.

"But the gay liberation movement is predicated on a concept far more basic than the demand for civil liberties. The very essence—and profound significance—of the development of the movement is precisely a rejection of the notion that homosexuality is an illness. Some contend that gay is better, but all are agreed that gay is good. They have emerged from the closet to fight for their liberation because they have finally come to recognize that the terrible oppression they suffer is as unjustified as it is unjust. They have taken a position that every political tendency will be compelled to relate to, one way or the other." (*A Civil Liberties Approach to Gay Liberation is Insufficient*, Vol. 30, No. 9, p. 6)

Is the Gay Movement "Peripheral"?

The memorandum states, "In our long-term strategic priorities, the gay liberation movement is much more peripheral to the central issues of the class struggle than either the women's movement or the movements of the oppressed nationalities." (p. 9)

This proved to be a controversial formulation, particularly since the 1973 Draft Political Resolution, in rejecting "workerist" shortcuts to the masses, defined "workerism" as "the rejection of the various social movements that have developed in the course of the radicalization, discounting them as peripheral or as obstacles to the proletarian revolution or workers struggles." (Vol. 31, No. 13, p. 15)

In his article supporting the memorandum, Sheppard attempts to explain this apparent contradiction:

"We should first clear up a misunderstanding that resulted from the memorandum's use of the word peripheral. . . . We have polemicized with [those] who dismiss the struggles that have arisen in the course of the radicalization as 'peripheral' to the class struggle. We deny this, and see these movements, including the gay liberation move-

ment, as part of the class struggle against the myriad forms of class oppression. But at the same time, movements on different questions against different aspects of the oppression spawned by capitalist society do not all have the same weight in the class struggle. Nor do the issues different movements raise have the same importance in the class struggle." (p. 10)

While recognizing gay liberation "as part of the class struggle," Sheppard is not retracting the view that it is a *peripheral* part of the class struggle. The fact that different movements do not have the "same weight" or the "same importance" still does not justify labeling the gay liberation movement as "peripheral." Sheppard is *not* polemicizing with those who dismiss the gay struggle as peripheral, but with those who reject that characterization. Sheppard himself does not reject the characterization, but is merely "clarifying" it in order to soften its blow.

But two other leading comrades who support the memorandum are more blunt:

Nat Weinstein states:

". . . while this issue comes under the general heading of the struggle for democracy, . . . it is extremely limited in potential for attracting large masses. . . . gay liberation cannot play any significant role in the American revolution. . . ." *A Contribution to the Discussion on Gay Liberation*, Vol. 30, No. 4, p. 9)

". . . disproportionate emphasis on gay liberation based on the false notion that this issue is in some way decisive to the success of the revolution—or even an important contributor—[would] prove to be a diversion in our approach to oppressed nationalities, workers and women. Undue emphasis on minor issues can give an organization like ours an exotic image, erecting barriers that cannot be justified by subsequent historical development." (p. 11)

And Fred Feldman writes that "large-scale implantation of our cadres into social movements like the gay movement, progressive movements which are peripheral to the main course of the American revolution, would be . . . a diversion. It would harm our party and not build it." (*The Thorstad-Green Counterresolution: A Political Step in the Wrong Direction*, Vol. 31, No. 33, p. 47).

While it is important to evaluate the social weight of the gay liberation movement, and while its social weight is clearly *less* than that of the women's movement or the movements of the major oppressed nationalities, the question is: is the gay liberation movement so much less important as to warrant the label "peripheral"—or is it important enough to require us to reject that characterization?

Potential to Mobilize a Large Sector of the Population

The memorandum states: "The gay liberation movement directly relates to a relatively narrow sector of the population." (p.9) However, gay people constitute a *large* sector of the population. The Kinsey report suggests a figure of 20 to 25 million Americans.

There are more gays in the United States than there are Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, college students, or trade-unionists. And the number of Blacks and gays are about the same. Thus Sheppard is wrong, when in speaking of "those who are gay," he states, "While this is not an insignificant section of the population, it is not . . . as

massive as the . . . oppressed nationalities." (p. 10)

Sheppard states "that the gay liberation movement does in some way affect every person." (p. 10) This is somewhat of an understatement. Because of the fierce efforts to completely suppress homosexuality in all people, the damaging effects of gay oppression are felt on a far wider scale than merely among those who consider themselves—or are considered—gay.

Thus, the memorandum underestimates the number of people directly affected by the gay liberation movement.

According to Barry Sheppard, regardless of the number of gay people, "it remains to be seen how extensively the mass of gay people will be mobilized by the gay liberation movement, although we can expect that the movement will grow and have the support of most gays." (p. 10)

The memorandum states that the gay movement "does not have the potential mass of either the women's movement or the movements of the major oppressed nationalities." (p. 9)

Fred Feldman writes, "There is no concrete evidence to date that the gay movement has the capacity to bring any significant section of the workers into struggle against the system, although it is quite likely that the working class as a whole (gay and straight) will become convinced of the correctness of the civil liberties demands of the movement." (p. 48)

Nat Weinstein writes, "There are no driving forces that can impel in a mass effort a significant portion of the claimed tens of millions of gays out of the 'closet' and into their full struggle for their rights." (p. 11)

However, particularly since Feldman and Sheppard both believe that most gays (i.e., at least ten million people) will come to support the gay movement, it seems unreasonable to doubt that this support will be translated into greatly increased direct participation.

Such doubts about the potential mass of the gay liberation movement are based on the assumption that because of the deep prejudice against homosexuality, all but a few gays will remain in the closet. This view is incorrect because it does not take into account the present and future effects of the development of gay pride consciousness.

Is it likely that the gay liberation movement will stop growing? remain the same size? get smaller? or even—disappear? Such conclusions could be drawn only by divorcing the gay liberation movement from its political and social context—the deepest radicalization in American history.

The strength of the radicalization is conducive to the movement's further growth. The concept of gay pride will spread, further motivating and impelling millions of gay people.

The annual Gay Pride demonstrations in New York on three occasions have been in the range of 15 to 20 thousand people (1971, 1973, and 1974). Many other demonstrations involving 1,000 people or more have taken place in New York and other cities. Thousands marched in gay contingents organized during the antiwar movement, and these were often among the largest and most visible contingents. Twelve hundred women attended a conference of the lesbian movement held in California in 1973.

Five hundred people attended the first International Gay Rights Congress in Scotland in December, 1974.

These mass actions and conferences have been the product of a movement which is predominantly students and other young people.

Gay workers will be no less affected by the radicalization than gay students. If gays have already marched 20,000 strong in New York, when there is a mass radicalization of the workers, won't there be truly massive actions? Won't the power of the gay movement be multiplied, particularly in the area of job discrimination?

The memorandum underestimates the potential size of the gay movement.

Potential mass, of course, is not the same thing as social weight. But at least in terms of sheer numbers, the gay movement probably has the potential to appeal to and mobilize more people than either the Chicano or Puerto Rican movement. At the same time, and despite this, the national oppression, urban concentration, class composition, and superexploitation of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans gives these struggles greater social weight than the gay liberation movement.

The Scope of the Issues and Demands Raised By the Gay Struggle

According to the memorandum:

"The issue [the gay liberation movement] raises is essentially limited to the struggle for democratic rights of this sector. . . . The movements of the major oppressed nationalities in the United States—both because their national-democratic demands cannot be met except through the proletarian revolution, and because of their overwhelmingly proletarian composition—raise almost from the beginning demands of the working class as a whole. The women's movement, also, because of the role of the family as a pillar of class society and the character of the economic exploitation of women, raises class demands. The gay liberation movement is much narrower in the scope of its demands." (p. 9)

Sheppard stresses the "class composition and urban concentration" of Blacks, and states, "Even if we differ on the number of gays in the population, or on how many of them will become mobilized, the scope of the movement must be characterized as considerably more narrow than the women's movement and the movements of the major oppressed nationalities." (p. 10)

First of all, as is clear from this article and from part B of the *Draft Resolution on Gay Liberation*, there is some agreement on the difference between the scope of the gay liberation movement and the scope of the other movements mentioned. But the statement that the demands of Blacks and women cannot be won under capitalism points out a similarity, not a difference, between the demands of these movements and the demands raised by the gay movement.

Additionally, the demands of the gay struggle are "working class demands" in the sense that they are bound up with the struggle for workers power and are in the interests of the proletariat. While the demands of the gay movement are bourgeois democratic demands, the same is true of the demand for the right of self-determination of oppressed nations or the demand for equal rights for

women.

Because gays face economic discrimination and oppression on the job, the issues of inflation and unemployment will be of particular interest to radicalizing gay workers. Demands such as a reduced workweek with no cut in pay, cost of living escalator clauses, preferential hiring, etc. will be raised by gays for their own reasons and out of their own experience—i.e., they will raise these demands not only as workers but as gay workers facing a unique form of economic oppression.

Finally, as the resolution points out, the gay movement raises issues that confront a wide range of institutions in capitalist society. And it helps expose the hypocritical character of American “democracy.”

The scope of the gay movement is neither narrow nor peripheral, even if it is less than that of other movements. It is correct to say that, *relatively speaking*, its scope is “considerably more narrow” or “much narrower” only if this goes hand-in-hand with an understanding that the labels “narrow” and “peripheral” must be rejected.

What Is Our Method?

The memorandum underestimates the number of people directly affected by the gay liberation movement. It also underestimates the potential of the gay struggle to mobilize these people. Finally it minimizes the scope of issues raised by the movement. Taken together, these errors lead to the exaggerated conclusion that the gay liberation movement is “peripheral” to the class struggle.

This incorrect conclusion leans in the direction of the workerist attitude to the movements of the current radicalization warned against in the 1973 Draft Political Resolution.

Our method is not to dismiss a movement as “peripheral,” thus preventing an objective assessment of the actual opportunities for intervention. I agree with the method and approach Harry Ring suggested during the last pre-convention discussion period:

“We should reject the view that the gay liberation struggle is ‘peripheral’ to the central issues of the class struggle.

“I do not believe that the gay liberation struggle has the same social weight and potential in relation to the coming American revolution as that of the national minorities, of women, or even of the youth movement. But to assess the role of a particular movement or social strata as lesser than others is quite different from characterizing it as peripheral. I think it is apparent that the gay liberation movement is already a significant component of the radicalization and I am convinced its potential will further increase. . . .

“I believe we should seek to intervene in the gay liberation movement, and do so with our political conceptions of how the movement can be built and how its aims can be best advanced.

“We should do this within the framework of our political priorities. But these priorities should not be permitted to become a rationalization for those who oppose or have serious reservations about intervening in the gay movement.” (*Statement on Gay Liberation Discussion*, Vol. 31, No. 31, p. 35)

Differing Evaluations of the State of the Gay Movement

In his article, Sheppard opposed the idea that the Socialist Workers Party should intervene in the gay liberation movement, *regardless* of the actual opportunities and objective situation:

“Let us take one other argument which is implied in the Thorstad-Green resolution. That is the argument that, well, maybe the movement is presently facing some problems. But if the SWP decided to vigorously intervene on a national scale in it, that would provide the necessary leadership to transform it.” (p. 11)

The comrades supporting the *Draft Resolution on Gay Liberation* are also opposed to attempts to leap over the objective situation, since such attempts lead only to isolation from the masses and abstention from the real struggle. Where we differ, however, is in our assessment of the objective situation.

Comrade Sheppard writes:

“(T)he paucity of struggles described in the Thorstad-Green resolution itself, and what has been reported about concrete struggles in last year’s literary discussion on the movement, and what has been said by supporters of the Thorstad-Green resolution in this discussion, indicate that the memorandum’s view of the movement is more realistic and sober. The fact is that there are not many struggles, and what struggles have occurred have been on a local basis. Where they do occur, the memorandum says that the branches should support them. We are not going to miss out on any real struggles that do occur.” (p. 11)

Since Sheppard states that “support” includes intervention and participation as well as propaganda, and since the memorandum states that our “support to this movement will be mainly in our propaganda” (p. 9), it might be useful to see how closely our propaganda work has reflected the actual state of the gay movement.

As far as I have been able to determine from the 1973 index to *The Militant*, of the 23 items mentioned in part C of the resolution as occurring between June and December of 1973, only 3 were reported in *The Militant*. Of the 38 items listed as occurring in 1974 or 1975, only about 5 or 6 were subjects of *Militant* articles. (Since there is not yet a 1974 index, I am relying here on my own memory.)

Unfortunately, this “propaganda intervention” says less about the state of the gay movement than it says about the “realism and sobriety” of the memorandum’s assessment. There *have* been many struggles, even if they have occurred primarily on a local basis. We *have* missed some real opportunities for propaganda work, not to mention direct participation and intervention.

A compilation of the entries in the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature* and the index to *The New York Times* reveals that there has been a steady rise in the number of articles related to gay liberation, especially since 1971:

Years	Readers Guide to Periodical Literature	New York Times Index
1961-62	4	4
1963-64	14	25
1965-66	31	37
1967-68	29	52
1969-70	36	57
1971-72	47	116
1973-74	64	135

Since *The Militant* began covering the gay movement in 1971, its coverage has gone in the opposite direction:

Year	Readers <i>Guide</i>	New York <i>Times</i>	<i>The Militant</i> (all articles)	<i>The Militant</i> (excluding "In Brief")
1969	17	29	0	0
1970	19	28	0	0
1971	33	55	71	32
1972	14	61	37	12
1973	27	51	12	2
1974	37	84	***	***
1975	6*	8**	***	***

*—through April 10, 1975

**—through March 31, 1975

***—Index not available. 1974 coverage increased over 1973, but probably did not approach 1972 levels.

The Rule, Not The Exception

In his article, Comrade Sheppard pointed out that the memorandum, in using the word "support", "certainly does not preclude intervention or participation." (p. 9) Many comrades supported the memorandum solely on the grounds that it did not "preclude" intervention or participation.

For that matter, the Thorstad-Green resolution did not "preclude" that some branch or branches would not directly participate in the gay movement. However, what is important is the rule, not the exception. What is important is the general line of a document.

Since the memorandum was adopted, even our propaganda work, which was to have been our "main" support to the gay movement, has not reflected the actual level of activity.

In contrast to this, the *Draft Resolution on Gay Liberation* proposes that we increase both our propaganda work and direct participation to correspond to the real opportunities afforded us.

An Orientation to Political Struggles

Sheppard asks:

"Why, if the Thorstad-Green resolution itself cannot find many examples of real political struggles being carried out by the gay liberation movement at present, is there such a difference on evaluation of the present state of the movement?"

"I do not know the answer for certain, but would speculate that it is related to the two views of the gay liberation movement that are in the memorandum and the Thorstad-Green resolution. The memorandum, in discussing the political import of the gay liberation movement, is talking about its political aspects, real struggles against the laws, against victimization of gays, for the rights of gays, etc. It rejects the view presented by Comrades Thorstad and Green that the 'central thrust' or 'underlying thrust' of the gay liberation movement is proving that homosexuality is just as good as heterosexuality. To the extent that this is true, it indicates a turn away from politics by the gay liberation movement.

"This itself indicates how wrong the Thorstad-Green resolution is, taken as a guide to how we should intervene

in this movement where that is desirable or possible. The memorandum clearly orients us to supporting real, political struggles when and if they occur in the next period. The Thorstad-Green resolution would go in the direction of participating in the movement to 'prove' the statements about the value of homosexuality." (p. 11)

The "central thrust" of the gay liberation movement is not *proving* that homosexuality is just as good as heterosexuality. This was the approach of homosexual rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, which hoped to win tolerance and acceptance from straight society through reasoned argument and the presentation of scientific facts.

In contrast, the new gay liberation movement *proceeds on the assumption* that gay is as good as straight—with no debate about it. It consists of a *political struggle* to *achieve* equal treatment of homosexuality in this society.

When the gay movement demands an end to police brutality, it is not only fighting for the democratic rights of *gay people*, but is also fighting society's view of *homosexuality* as a crime.

When the gay movement confronts religious prejudice, it is not only fighting for the democratic rights of *gay people*, but is also fighting society's view of *homosexuality* as a sin.

When the gay movement confronts the psychiatric profession, it is not only fighting for the democratic rights of *gay people*, but is also fighting society's view of *homosexuality* as an illness.

When the gay movement confronts the educational system, it is not only fighting for the democratic rights of *gay people* who are students and teachers, but is also fighting for an objective view and scientific presentation of *homosexuality*.

The above-mentioned struggles must be based upon the idea that homosexuality is not a crime, illness, sin, or perversion, *any more than heterosexuality*. That is, these struggles must be based upon the idea that gay is just as good as straight.

The central thrust of the gay struggle is precisely the political struggle of gays to have homosexuality *accepted, regarded, and treated* equally with heterosexuality. The gay movement is battling prejudiced ideas about gay people *and* homosexuality, and is sharply challenging the institutionalization of the heterosexual norm in capitalist society.

Comrade Sheppard claims that "to the extent that this is true, it indicates a turn away from politics by the gay liberation movement." This statement only shows that the memorandum not only presents a wrong line for the party, but for the gay liberation movement itself.

Sheppard claims that the debate is between supporters of the memorandum, who want to orient to political struggles, and on the other hand, those comrades who want to have a cultural or scientific orientation, turning the party into "something other than a political organization."

Actually, the memorandum leads the party away from orienting to the real political struggle. In order to reverse this, it is necessary for the party to reject the memorandum and pass the *Draft Resolution on Gay Liberation*.

The Convention Will Decide

The party as a whole, represented by delegates at this

year's convention, will have the final say on this question.

Every branch and every individual comrade should carefully study the documents and follow the discussion closely. Comrades should participate vigorously in the oral and written discussion, recognizing that what they say will have a bearing on the outcome.

Those comrades who are convinced that the party

should reverse its position have a particular responsibility to the party as a whole. Yes, you must *intervene* in the discussion if the course is to be altered.

Hopefully, this article will serve to spark a vigorous and thoughtful discussion, leading to a more correct orientation to the gay liberation movement.

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- Marty Jan 2014

For the Formation of Labor Party Educational Leagues

by Joe Harris, Newark—at large

May 30, 1975

Over the past thirty years the SWP has been calling and working for the formation of a Labor Party. During the late thirties, with the rise of the CIO, in areas like Minnesota, New York, New Jersey, and others, Labor Party formations took place and our comrades worked within them, trying to steer them to a permanent break with the Democratic party. Unfortunately the labor skates, with the aid of the Stalinists, Socialist party, and liberals, and war-time prosperity, were able to derail this movement and turn it back into the Democratic party. The workers, not having become politically class conscious, were told they could attain their political objectives in a reformed Democratic party.

However, today's political scene makes possible for our slogan of "Building a Labor Party" to be moved forward with "seven league steps", to a closer reality and on a much wider scale than took place in the thirties. The denouement with Nixon, Ford, and McGovern is a fact, but whether this can be extended to include the Republican, Democratic and Wallace parties is a task for the SWP to fulfill.

The SWP approach with the slogan "Build A Labor Party" is proper but inadequate, at this time. What is necessary is action comparable to what was done in the Vietnam war. While calling it an imperialist war, the party appealed for the formation of antiwar committees to organize and arouse mass action. This must be done with our Labor Party slogan. We must initiate the formation of

Labor Party Educational Committees. These committees, by making available an organization to all who believe in a Labor Party formation, would draw thousands into action. Labor Party appeals and literature, issued by such committees and hopefully with the endorsement of progressive labor leaders and local unions, would receive much wider distribution and attention than what is given to SWP publications on the Labor Party issue.

Also these committees would be a much stronger threat to the liberals and labor skates who keep labor tied to the Democrats. The SWP is trying to cut this gordian knot, but the unaffiliated thousands who believe in a Labor Party, are on the sidelines because they do not belong to the SWP and do not have any organization through which to give battle.

That such committees could be formed by unions is possible, but unlikely at this time. The pressure from the labor skates against this is too great. Also the forces in the youth and student movements, which are now used by liberals for Democratic party work, could not be brought into activity for a Labor Party, if the movement were confined to the unions. What is necessary is to tap the forces inside and outside the unions, who believe in the formation of a Labor party; but who, today, have no organization to turn to and work with. The SWP, by initiating the formation of Labor Party Educational Leagues, will help move the class struggle a step closer to political class consciousness and socialism.

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- Marty Jan 2014

For a Further Clarification of the "Long Detour"

By Stephen Bloom, Brooklyn Branch, N.Y. Local,

May 30, 1975

The report by Gus Horowitz on Vietnam at the August, 1973 convention of the SWP (printed in IIDB, Volume X, Number 15) represents an important step toward the codification of our analysis of the social overturns of capitalist property relations which have taken place since the end of World War II.

One of the points of the presentation in this regard was that the creation of workers states in various parts of the world under the leadership of petty-bourgeois forces (such as the Stalinists) was part of a generalized detour of the revolutionary process, and that a total overview of this detour is necessary for an understanding of any of its component parts. It is the question of the character of this detour which I would like to take up at this time, since it seems to me that as presented by Comrade Horowitz and as repeated on other occasions, the analysis is incomplete.

The Meaning of the Long Detour

Horowitz presents the idea of the detour in the following way (page 24): "The Trotskyist movement had foreseen that the end of the war would bring about tremendous revolutionary upheavals. But for specific historical circumstances, this did not lead to the rapid growth and development of Leninist parties. . . . Instead there was a long historical detour. World Stalinism was temporarily strengthened. The revolutionary potential in the key advanced capitalist states was stifled under Stalinist leadership. The central thrust of the world revolution shifted to the colonial world; and in a few cases, successful revolutionary upheavals were headed up by petty-bourgeois leaderships. . . ."

"But these were exceptional circumstances, not the model for the major battles still to come. World events in past years have shown a tendency to shift back to the more classical pattern of socialist revolution first illustrated by the Russian Revolution. And for these developments the construction of mass Leninist parties is absolutely necessary."

This passage concentrates its focus upon the development of the colonial revolution in the late forties and fifties. The historical detour as seen here is predominantly a geographic one, concentrating on the underdeveloped world and the countryside, rather than on the classical form of insurrection involving the urban working classes. The shift in recent years back to the urban masses as the driving force in the revolutionary process is seen as signaling the end of the detour and the return of the world revolution to its normal course.

This idea that the detour is ending is repeated in the draft political resolution submitted by the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction to the last world congress of the Fourth

International. It is given rather extensive treatment in the section entitled *The World Revolution Resumes its Main Course*, under the subheadings: "The Long Detour," and "The Turn in the Pattern of Revolution and the New Upsurge of Workers Struggles." This section deals at length with events after World War II and the unusual conditions which set the stage for the social transformations in Eastern Europe and China; and the impact of the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban revolutions on the rest of the colonial world. It goes on to discuss how, beginning in the mid-sixties, the urban working class and the proletariat in the imperialist countries began to move to the fore once again.

The conclusion of the section is that the detour is coming to an end, and that the world revolution is resuming its main course: "Above all, the Fourth International calls attention to the turn in the pattern of the world revolution. Today, the urban masses, with their own forms of struggle and class organization, are moving to the center of the stage." (This passage is the conclusion of this section as it appeared in IIDB, Volume XI Number 2, page 9. The same paragraph appears on page 130 of *Dynamics of World Revolution Today*.)

While it is important to take note of and discuss this increasing importance of the urban working class in the world revolutionary process, this is only one aspect of the subject as it relates to the long detour. It seems to me that the fundamental character of the phenomenon is missed when discussed simply in this light, and that a serious miscalculation is made in marking the detour's end.

The most important fact about the deviation from the classical pattern of revolution by all of the social overturns since World War II is not geographic but political. This fact is touched upon but not developed in the section from Horowitz quoted above: "But for specific historical circumstances, [the revolutionary upheavals at the end of the war] did not lead to the rapid growth and development of Leninist parties." As a result, the Stalinists, and other petty-bourgeois forces, remained dominant in the world working class movement. They maintain their grip on revolutionary struggles throughout the world.

The main roadblock in the way of the classical revolutionary pattern, the main driving force of the historical detour, was the crisis of revolutionary leadership on a world scale. The crisis of leadership, the lack of mass Leninist parties to lead the revolution to success, guaranteed that the only revolutions which could possibly succeed for decades would do so with petty-bourgeois forces in the lead.

If the driving force behind the historical detour is the crisis of leadership, can we state that the detour is coming to an end without at the same time deciding that the crisis

of leadership has been resolved? No. Until Leninist parties are built on a mass scale, there will be no end to the long detour.

To be sure, the *relative* ease with which social transformations can be instituted in the colonial world, with their far weaker native bourgeoisies, meant that the shift of the revolutionary process away from the advanced capitalist countries after World War II significantly increased the likelihood of workers states being formed under the leadership of the Stalinists or other petty-bourgeois forces. In several unusual historical circumstances, faced with an imperialism which was weakened or taken off guard, several such transformations took place. But the shift of revolutionary activity to the underdeveloped countries was merely the vehicle which allowed the generalized historical detour to manifest itself, rather than its most important characteristic.

In fact, an explanation of the historical detour as a shift to the underdeveloped countryside does not explain its first actualizations, which were the social overturns in Yugoslavia and the rest of Eastern Europe. These can certainly not be dealt with in terms of a shift to the colonial world.

The relative roles of the colonial world and the advanced countries, the city and the countryside, in the revolutionary process will determine the forms which the detour takes, or even, perhaps, whether we will see any manifestations of it at all for a period of time. But the long detour will be with us until a mass revolutionary workers party is in a position to lead a struggle for power. Until then, every revolutionary upsurge will be headed by alien class forces.

I do not believe it is fruitful to speculate on whether or not some such upsurge might succeed in overthrowing bourgeois property relations. Before World War II we would not have believed that the Stalinists could have been in the leadership of successful transformations where they took place, or that the Cuban revolution could have succeeded as it did. Today, U.S. imperialism is seriously weakened by its experience in Vietnam, by Watergate, and by the world economic crisis. These were, no doubt, serious factors in the development of recent events in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, events which may result in workers states in one or more of those countries.

As we have seen from the other transformations which are part of the revolutionary detour, such a weakened imperialism is an important factor in the overall pattern of events. Certainly no other imperialist nation is in a position to take up the U.S. role as world cop. The lesson of the past thirty years must be that given the overripe conditions for revolution; given a world imperialism increasingly paralyzed by its internal contradictions; and given, further, the continued crisis of revolutionary leadership, aberrant social transformations are possible. These factors, which are the driving forces of the long historical detour, remain with us today.

The Importance of This Question for the International Discussion

The question of the character of the leaderships of the social overturns in Eastern Europe, China, Korea, Vietnam, and Cuba has come to the fore in the international discussion as a result of events during the Chinese cultural revolution and in Vietnam. A tendency developed which

resisted characterizing the Maoist leadership in China and the PRG-DRV heads as Stalinist. This resulted from a misunderstanding of what is meant by the idea of Stalinism being totally counterrevolutionary, and in turn presents serious theoretical difficulties. The treatment of this aspect of the problem in the Horowitz report is excellent.

However, there is another side to this question. The search for a shortcut to the difficult tasks of party building has led the comrades of the International Majority Tendency to take positions which would substitute a reliance upon the Stalinists in S.E. Asia for the need to construct a Leninist party. The SWP and the LTF have been completely correct in rejecting such a search for shortcuts, but I believe that the incomplete view of the historical detour discussed above may make an inadvertent, backhanded concession to that search.

In the last of the quoted paragraphs from the Horowitz report, he reaffirms the need for a Leninist party: "And for these developments the construction of mass Leninist parties is absolutely necessary." But this all-important conclusion is severely limited by the context in which it is presented in the document, for it flows directly from the idea that the world revolution has "shown a tendency to shift back to the more classical pattern of socialist revolution." This leaves one to conjecture as to what policy is "absolutely necessary" in the event that the world revolution should once again shift away from the classical pattern. And what was the correct approach in the colonial world for the past few decades?

There is no need to discuss the strategy of party-building in these terms. Of course, the SWP and the LTF have a clear position on the need for building Leninist parties in the underdeveloped countries as well as in the advanced ones. But by formulating the idea of the historical detour as it has been formulated, the door is left open for sidetracking the discussion around the secondary question of whether, in fact, the detour has come to an end.

Current events in S.E. Asia are a good example of this problem. The simple establishment of workers states, important as that would be, would not alter our analysis of the Vietnamese Communist Party or the need for a revolutionary party of the Vietnamese and Cambodian masses. It would not in any way confirm the IMT's analysis of the events in Indochina. Merely to discuss this question in terms of a shift away from these types of events on a world scale would beg the most important questions (especially if we consider the possibility that the victories in S.E. Asia may spur on similar "people's war" type strategies in other parts of the colonial world).

The fact that under unusual historic conditions social revolutions may take place without a mass Leninist party at the head does not in any way contradict the need to construct such a party. In fact, if we look at the results of almost fifty years of the crisis of revolutionary leadership, they clearly confirm the need for a revolutionary working class leadership. The few limited successes (and I would emphasize the word limited) are in fact a confirmation of the bankruptcy of relying on other than proletarian forces. Given the numerous opportunities, the small number of overturns which have taken place, and the deformed outcome of even these, seem merely as punctuation marks in the story of Stalinist and other misleadership and betrayal.

Just as the ability of a driver to occasionally reach a destination via a random search of streets does not contradict the value of consulting a roadmap; or the possibility that a blindfolded person with a pistol might once in a while hit the target, deny the value of sight; neither does the occasional stumbling to success of a revolutionary upsurge with a petty-bourgeois leadership mean that the building of mass revolutionary parties is not essential.

Conclusion

A clear understanding of the nature of the long

historical detour is essential to a unified, consistent analysis of the overturns of capitalist property relations in Eastern Europe, China, Korea, elsewhere in S.E. Asia and Cuba. It will also be crucial to an understanding of recent and future events in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (whether workers states emerge or not) which are bound to evoke stimulating international discussions.

The past few years have seen important progress in formulating and answering some of the most important questions raised by the revolutionary processes since the end of World War II. I hope that this contribution will aid this process of clarification.