

14 Charles Lane
New York, N. Y. 10014

July 9, 1971

HOUSTON

Tom Leonard

Dear Tom,

This is in response to a number of points raised in your letter of June 23 to me and in your letter of June 29 to Jack Barnes which has been referred to me.

You state that "there is unquestionably a gay tendency in the Party which has not formally accepted the responsibility of politically presenting their position to the Party and I believe they should be encouraged to do so prior to or at the Convention itself."

As I indicated to you when you raised the subject during my visit to Houston, it is not clear to me what you are referring to when you state that there is a gay tendency in the party. Certainly, as you state there is no tendency formed around any political documents which calls itself the "gay tendency." There are homosexual comrades in the party, but sexual preference is not a valid basis for the establishment of a tendency, which can be done on political grounds only, and it would be wrong to "encourage" gay comrades to form a tendency on that false basis.

Do you mean that there is an organized grouping of gay comrades who have a particular political view on gay liberation, who are not presenting their views to the party? What evidence do you have for such an opinion?

The present position of the party concerning the gay liberation movement is contained in the May 25, 1971 motion adopted by the Political Committee, which set forth the guidelines and purpose of the probe into the gay liberation movement. Discussion on this question is open in the party now as part of the pre-convention discussion. It is true that some comrades feel strongly on the question, and this has been reflected in some contributions to the pre-convention discussion bulletin. It is my opinion that whatever differences exist on this question cut across lines of sexual preference; it is also my opinion that most comrades do not yet have hard and fast views on gay liberation and are waiting for the results of the probe and further discussion.

The article by David Thorstad in the July 2 issue of The Militant reported the findings and views of Kinsey and other scientists on the extent of homosexuality in the United States, and its existence in other societies and periods of history. The purpose of this article was to provide an outline of what is known on this subject (and to indicate, as the article did, that "very few thorough and objective

studies of homosexuality have yet been done"). Other articles reported on activities planned by the gay liberation movement. These articles were within the guidelines laid down in the Political Committee motion, that "the probe will be conducted within the framework of the party's unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for civil and human rights against the discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism." They did not set "in motion at this time a process of party fractional intervention based on a defined strategic and tactical orientation in the gay liberation movement."

Party members spoke at some forums and conferences on gay liberation during Gay Pride Week, which was reported in The Militant. As far as I have been able to ascertain, such speakers kept within the guidelines of the probe, did not project a strategic or tactical orientation for the gay liberation movement nor a party fractional intervention based on such an orientation.

Thus I do not agree that the printing of these articles or the fact that party members spoke at forums on gay liberation mean that there is "a tendency in the Party that is carrying out an orientation toward gay liberation before it has been resolved internally."

Comradely,
s/Barry Sheppard
National Office

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14 Charles Lane
New York, N.Y. 10014
July 5, 1971

HOUSTON

Tom Leonard

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of June 29.

I've passed it on to Barry whom the Administrative Committee has asked to coordinate the gay liberation probe.

I have made copies of your letter for the Political Committee and will place your request to circulate it to the National Committee before them.

Comradely,
s/Jack Barnes
Organization Secretary

304 Avondale
Houston, Texas 77006
June 29, 1971

Jack Barnes
Socialist Workers Party
New York, N.Y. 10014

Dear Jack,

I would like the text of this letter to be presented at the next meeting of the Political Committee, and circulated to the National Committee as a whole.

In effect, I am withdrawing my support from the probe of the Gay Liberation movement.

I do so for two reasons: 1) when I originally supported the idea of the probe, I was aware, as were many comrades in the leadership, that the probe had indeed been in effect in the Party and the YSA, especially the YSA, for over a year.

I was hopeful that the probe would result in projecting a serious internal discussion in the Party which would enable us to work out a conscious line on this movement. I was also amicable to the idea of carrying over the discussion beyond the Convention since it is a question that most comrades haven't overly concerned themselves with.

The July 2 issue of the Militant, raises my second point of criticism, namely that the Militant in this issue, through the theoretical type articles it contains, plus a report of an SWP spokesperson speaking in behalf of the Gay movement, plus that in Boston the SWP Campaign Committee sponsored a "forum" on this question, leads me to believe that there is a tendency in the Party that is carrying out an orientation toward Gay Liberation before it has been resolved internally.

I object to the procedure whereby the Militant carries articles of this type, written mainly by Party comrades, which can be very divisive in our movement, without going through the procedure of working out the differences that exist on the question internally.

I think it especially wrong that this occur at a time when we are in the midst of a pre-Convention discussion which will determine our policy for the whole next period.

I have already written Barry, who is nationally assigned to cover the probe, that I felt this question should be resolved at the Convention. Specifically what is our political orientation toward this movement!

Comradely,
s/Tom Leonard

TL/d1

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304 Avondale
Houston, Texas 77006
June 23, 1971

Barry Sheppard
New York, N.Y.

Dear Barry,

I will continue to support the Gay Liberation probe until the Party Convention, at which time I feel that it is the responsibility of the Party to make an orientation toward this movement in the same way that the Political Resolution clearly states our orientation on all other questions.

I do not believe that the probe should assume an indefinite character, particularly since it has been going on in the youth movement for over a year, and, by the time of the Convention, I think we should have an estimate of how to proceed.

Further, as I stated at the time of your visit here, there is unquestionably a gay tendency in the Party which has not formally accepted the responsibility of politically presenting their position to the Party and I believe they should be encouraged to do so prior to or at the Convention itself.

Comradely,
s/Tom Leonard