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Lavender & Red

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Pride & struggle a century ago

Rise of German Homosexual Emancipation Movement

By Leslie Feinberg

Winds of change will fill the banners of Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Pride this June, lifting them to new heights.

After decades of fierce and unrelenting struggle, same-sex love has been effectively decriminalized and many gains have been won. Organizing, rolling civil disobedience has helped push back state denial of equal rights of same-sex couples--a form of institutionalized discrimination that is a pillar of class society.

Millions of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans people across the United States will take to the streets in Pride events in cities and towns this June, as they do each year to recall and honor the 1969 Stone wall uprising against police repression. And millions of people of all nationalities, sexualities, genders and sexes will line the streets to applaud and cheer these celebrations of individual courage and collective struggle.

The 1969 rebellion in New York's Green wich Village was led by the most oppressed of the LGBT communities--people of color, teenagers, transgender and transsexual, homeless, impoverished and so marginalized in the work force that prostitution was the only source of income for many.

The uprising was the spark that ignited a large-scale movement. It galvanized quantitative fighting back into qualitative mass resistance.

It did not develop in social isolation. The Stonewall Rebellion--which marked the birth of what became the modern LGBT movement--rose in the wake of social upheaval against imperialist war and rampant racist repression.

Marchers will draw on the lessons of how the left wing of early gay liberation found its way into the anti-war movement, took part in and defended the national liberation struggles, helped develop women's liberation, and took part in labor battles from the shop floor to organizing in support of the Chicano farm workers' union drive.

If they look to accurate historical accounts, today's activists will also find that the young gay liberation movement received support from the most revolutionary sectors of the political left wing.

More than three decades later, revisiting this dynamic historical period of struggle is an activist contribution to today's movement.

But it is less known to many today that the Stonewall Rebellion launched the second--not the first--mass movement for LGBT liberation.

The first great wave of struggle to demand sexual and gender emancipation had taken place from 1869 to 1935. It began in Germany. It was a dynamic, expanding movement that grew to be international. And it left its mark on other social and political movements, as well as literature and the arts.

The history of the struggle in that period, as well, is rich with lessons.

Why not in France?

Why did the movement appear in Germany? And why in that epoch?

It's impossible to glean a broad understanding without examining the social and economic soil in which the German movement for sexual and gender emancipation was rooted.

The widespread, murderous counter- revolutionary pogroms against women, transgender expression and same-sex love carried out by the Catholic and early Protestant hierarchies had subsided as the Industrial Revolution began sweeping away the kingdoms of Europe.

The momentous revolution in France at the end of the 18th century-in which the downtrodden and disenfranchised of the cities, including many women, played a vitally important part--had uprooted the vestiges of the feudal power of the kings and the Catholic Church.

The French Revolution established a legal code, Napoleonic Code, which remov ed homosexual acts from the list of criminal offenses. Of course, state and church bias and demonization were not eradicated by formally removing the laws. Variations of sexuality, gender and sex continued to be subject to a political policy of divide and conquer. And a class-divided economy itself continued to pit segments of the work force against each other.

But the Napoleonic Code was the enlightened act of a young capitalist class that saw its role as righting the wrongs of feudal backwardness. And this decriminalizing of homosexual acts had farreaching effects on other European nations.

Why did the French Revolution remove anti-homosexual statutes while the capitalist revolutions in England and the United States did not?

The French Revolution was later, and more thorough, for sure. But the French capitalist class also had to battle the powerful and tenacious Catholic Church and its ideology. That may have impelled the revolutionists to have to carry out a more thorough " of the Church's "moral" authority than in the other countries.

So why didn't a sexual liberation movement arise in France? Why in Germany?

Because anti-gay repression was much stronger in Germany.

Prussian expansion set stage for battle

Germany in the late 1800s had a powerful industrial base. But it was weakened by the remaining constraints of feudalism. Germany had few colonies as a result.

Other European powers were colonizing the world, plundering from Africa to Australia. Asia and Africa were conquered by the British, French, Dutch and Belgian imperialist powers.

In many of these cultures, women still enjoyed significant societal rights; variance in sex, gender and sexuality were accepted and respected. But with bullets and bibles, the imperial patriarchs of wealth at the pinnacle of capital's expanding power conquered militarily and ideologically with their cultural values and property relations.

In North America, the fierce clash between the expansion of slavery and the expansion of Northern industrial capital was about to break out in the bloodiest battle of the 19th century--the Civil War. The victory of the North would set the stage for U.S. capital to begin its merciless globalization in search of greater profits.

But Germany was not unified enough to be a colonial contender--yet. It was fragmented into almost 300 different countries.

While several of these had no laws against same-sex love, Prussia did. And it was Prussia that was devouring all the other German states except Hanover.

Next: The love that dared to speak its name

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Pride & struggle a century ago

The love that dared to speak its name

By Leslie Feinberg

The love that had dared not speak its name raised its voice in the 1860s in Germany. As its demands rose, they were amplified by support from the revolutionary groundswell of workers who were organizing and fighting to win basic democratic rights.

From the first challenges to sexual oppression in the 1860s, the left wing of the emerging socialist movement--those revolutionaries who were fighting to shatter the manacles of capitalism as well as the mental shackles of ideological reaction--supported this strug gle against state repression and for sexual liberation.

In 1862, a young lawyer named Jean Baptiste von Schweitzer was convicted of a homosexual act in a city park. Von Schweitzer was a member of the socialist German Workers Association, headed by Ferdinand Lassalle. Some in the group wanted to expel Von Schweitzer. But Lassalle defended him, arguing that sexuality "ought to be left up to each person" whenever no one else is harmed.

Not only wasn't Von Schweitzer expelled; he became president of this socialist workers' organization after Lassalle's death.

The struggle for emancipation ratcheted up in the 1860s, when a Prussian proposal for a harsh penal code made male homosexuality an even more serious crime.

In 1864, a gay man in Germany began writing courageously and prolifically against this law and in defense of homosexuality. Karl Ulrichs was a civil servant in the small city-state of Hanover. He knew that Prussia would soon absorb the city, extending anti-gay legislation throughout Germany.

As early as 1862 he had coined the word "Urning" to describe a male sexually attracted to other males, which he believed derived from a kind of intersexuality in some brains. The English translation is "Uranian." This term--based on a myth in Plato's "Sym posium" that referred to a god dess of men who love men--was picked up and used throughout Europe and England.

Despite being confronted with shock and outrage, Ulrichs carried out a 30-year public campaign, mainly literary, warning of the dangers of the repressive Prussian law and insisting on justice for "Urnings."

In 1869, a Hungarian doctor wrote an open letter in defense of gay rights to the minister of justice. While his last name is known--

Benkert--he wrote under the pseu donym Karoly Maria Kertbeny. In 1868 he created the term "homosexuality."

Benkert pointed out that since the French Revolution and the introduction of the Napoleonic Code, the momentum of history was toward decriminalizing homosexuality.

He listed famous homosexuals in history like Shakespeare, Newton, Michel angelo, Frederick the Great and countless others and asked how much cultural history would have been squandered by their imprisonment.

Benkert stressed that society had to escape from the genocidal feudal campaigns that had claimed millions of lives. He denounced the use of scapegoating and concluded that the state had no business nosing around in people's sexual lives.

In 1871, a Draconian anti-gay Para graph 175 was introduced with no debate into the penal code of the Second Reich.

Fight against Paragraph 175 heats up

After 30 years of trailblazing work by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Benkert and others, the first political movement of a mass character for sexual and gender rights emerged in Germany in 1896. The demand for sexual and gender emancipation continued to draw backing from socialist leaders.

A year before the official emergence of this movement, Eduard Bernstein, then a Marxist and a leader of the German Social Democratic Party, wrote a defense of the gay British literary figure Oscar Wilde in an important left newspaper. Wilde's arrest and trial were an example of how anti-gay and anti-transgender repression--in this case charges against a feminine gay male--were intertwined in the minds of prosecutors.

Bernstein's article called on socialists to lead the way in sexual reform, challenged anti-gay prejudice and rejected the increasingly popular psychiatric theories that pathologized same-sex love.

The first gay liberation organization was born in Germany two years later, in 1897. It was called the Scientific Humani tarian Committee.

Its founder and notable leader throughout much of the committee's 35 years was Magnus Hirschfeld--a gay Jewish doctor who may have also been, like many other leaders of the German movement, a cross-dresser. He coined the word "transvestite," did extensive research and produced germinal writings on the subject of cross-dressing.

The Scientific Humanitarian Com mittee published a yearbook that reported on movement activities. It also documented literary, crosscultural, cross-historical and scientific studies on same-sex love and transgender.

The committee aimed to abolish Paragraph 175, raise social consciousness and encourage sexually oppressed people to fight for their rights. To achieve its goals, the committee held regular public

forums, organized speaking tours nationally and internationally, and sent literature to other governments about the need to decriminalize same-sex love.

The committee's main focus was a petition campaign, launched in 1897, to collect signatures of prominent people demanding the repeal of Paragraph 175.

Socialists of all sexualities unite

From its earliest days, the committee won support from revolutionaries, who were at that time called Social Democrats. In 1898, the committee took to parliament the signatures of 900 doctors, lawyers, educators and scientists calling for the repeal of Paragraph 175. It was rebuffed.

However, the socialist minority in the German parliament did support the demand. The great socialist leader August Bebel took the floor, becoming the first major supporter to battle for the petition.

Bebel, author of "The Rights of Women"--an early socialist denunciation of the oppression of women under capitalism--signed the petition, took copies to parliament and urged others to add their names.

He argued that homosexuality was so widespread among all economic classes in society that "if the police dutifully did what they were supposed to, the Prussian state would immediately be obliged to build two new penitentiaries just to handle the number of violations against Paragraph 175 committed within the confines of Berlin alone."

When Bebel made this speech, and subsequent ones, on the parliament floor, the right-wing politicians booed. But socialists greeted his defense of same-sex love with supporting shouts of "Hear, hear!"

Hirschfeld himself was affiliated with the Social Democratic Party from 1898 until the rise of fascism forced him into exile.

Rise of a mass movement

The committee carried on a whirlwind of activity. In 1899 it sent a letter to Roman Catholic priests asking them to take a stand on gay oppression and gay rights, sent information to parliament members, wrote to more than 2,000 daily newspapers, placed ads in newspapers, sent 8,000 letters to top administration and police officials, another to public prosecutors, and 8,000 copies of the petition to judges.

More than 6,000 prominent people, half of them doctors, signed the petition. Others included Albert Einstein, Leo Tolstoy, Emile Zola, Kathe Kollwitz, Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann and Rainer Maria Rilke.

Well-known socialists of that period, including Bebel, Karl Kautsky, Rudolf Hilferding, Gerhardt Hauptman and Eduard Bernstein, also signed. In 1905, during another debate on Paragraph 175, the committee went back to parliament with more than 5,000 signatures. The Center Party, a right-wing group with strong support from the Catholic Church, led opposition to reform.

Again it was a socialist--Adolph Thiele-- who argued on behalf of gay rights. But the move for reform was again defeated.

In 1907 more than 2,000 people attended a public debate on Paragraph 175.

But this pinnacle of organizing was followed by a period of reaction that drove many supporters underground and forced activists to keep a lower profile. The opening shot of this anti-gay witch hunt was a highly publicized scandal about alleged gay activities by a number of high German political figures who were forced to stand trial.

In 1910, at the height of anti-gay frenzy, the parliament began to debate extending Paragraph 175 to include lesbian acts between women.

Next: Lesbians on front lines of fight for liberation

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Pride & struggle a century ago

Lesbians on the front lines of fight for rights, liberation

By Leslie Feinberg

A proposed German penal code was drafted in late 1910 that would criminalize sexual acts between women.

Any law that threatened same-sex love between women was also inherently anti-trans gender, since the oppressed populations overlapped. In 1721, for example, a German individual who was named Catha rina Mar garetha Linck at birth was burned at the stake for the crime of being a female-bodied person who lived as a male and married another woman.

Until 1794 a Prussian code executed people of all sexes for what the law characterized as "unnatural acts." That edict was amended in 1837 to a sentence of "imprisonment followed by life-long punishment."

In their book "Lesbians in Germany: 1890s-1920s," authors Lillian Faderman and Brigitte Eriksson wrote, "In 1851 punishment for 'unnatural acts' was restricted by a new code to males only. 'Victorian' mentality had spread to Ger many. The law preferred to ignore the possibility that women were capable of sexual expression."

The menace of including same-sex love between women in Paragraph 175 posed a new challenge for the women's movement in Ger many, which had been "advancing unimpeded" since the early 1900s.

Women who today might call themselves lesbians were very active in the early German women's rights movement. But they largely did so without "coming out of the closet."

The early Uranian movement had been mostly made up of individuals who today might identify as gay men, male-to-female cross-dressers and transsexual women. However, as the Homo sexual Emancipation Movement grew in social strength and weight, it emboldened lesbians to openly emerge as social leaders.

'Reach for the stars!'

Anna Rueling was just such a leader. That name was a pseudonym as well. She was born Anna Theo Sprungli.

Exactly a century ago, Rueling made a famous public address in

Berlin, delivered before a meeting of the Scientific Human itarian Committee.

This 1904 public meeting was an important breakthrough. Faderman and Eriksson note "Accord ing to [Uranian leader Magnus] Hirsch feld, the police sometimes even prevented women from attending the Scientific Humani tarian Committee's public forums because the discussion of homosexuality was regarded as unsuitable in the presence of women. A public lesbian organization would not have been tolerated at that time."

Rueling congratulated the committee, wrote Michael Lombardi-Nash, "for its support of women's rights and for including lesbians, along with homosexual men, in its fight for equal rights." (The Gay & Lesbian Review, May-June 2004)

Her speech that night was a landmark. It was titled "What interest does the women's movement have in solving the homosexual question?" In it she stressed the imperative of unity between the women's and homosexual emancipation movements. But the talk was essentially calling for unity against transgender oppression, as well, since Rueling--like many rights activists of that era--considered homosexuals to be a kind of intermediate sex. She called for equal opportunities in education and the job market for women, men and homosexuals.

Unity was key to Rueling's arguments. "If people would just observe, they would soon come to the conclusion that homosexuality and the Women's Movement do not stand opposed to each other, but rather they aid each other reciprocally to gain rights and recognition, and to eliminate the injustice which condemns them on this earth."

She stressed that homosexual women "have suffered because of their masculine inclinations and natural characteristics, and because of the many, many injustices and hardships caused by laws, society, and the old morality which concerns women."

Rueling told those gathered, "[F]rom the very beginning of the Women's Movement to the present day, it has been more often than not homo genic women who took over the leadership in numerous battles."

Rueling blasted the mainstream leadership of the movement. "If we weigh all the contributions which homosexual women have made to the Women's Movement, one would be astounded that its large and influential organizations have not lifted a finger to obtain justice in the state and in society for the not so small number of its Uranian members, and that they have done absolutely nothing to this very day to protect so many of its most well-known and most worthy female predecessors in this battle from ridicule and scorn when they explain to the greater public about the true essence of Uranism. ...

"The so-called 'moderate' tendency will not help homosexuals one bit for the simple reason that deeds of this kind have no tendency at all. Victory will come as a sign of radicalism, and we expect that the radicals will change the direction. ... "The Women's Movement and the movement for homosexual rights have thus far traveled on a dark road which has posted many obstacles in their way. Now it will become brighter and brigh ter around us and in the hearts of the people. This is not to say that the work of securing the rights of women and of Uranians has come to an end; we are still in the middle of two opposing sides, and many a bloody battle will have to be fought."

Rueling concluded with optimistic historical vision, "And when, at times, as they will, hard times come to either side--that will not be the time for hesitation to stand up in defense against injustice and to march on to victory which will surely be ours. Revelation and truth are like the rising sun in the East--no power can force it out of its orbit. Slowly but surely it rises to its glittering zenith!

"Perhaps not today or tomorrow, but in the not too distant future the Women's Movement and Uranians will raise their banners in victory! Per aspera ad astra! [Reach for the stars!]"

'An injustice doubled'

In his 1905 book "Berlin's Third Sex," Hirsch feld estimated that there were more than 1 million homosexuals--male and female--in Germany; some 56,000 in Berlin alone.

The coffee houses, restaurants and beer halls for the "third sex," however, were mostly frequented by males.

Hirschfeld did refer to a "dating agency" in 1905 for lesbians. And he also described Ber lin "masquerade" parties in which "many of the lesbians wear male costumes."

But the looming peril in 1910 of the extension of Paragraph 175 galvanized a broad range of organizations and individuals--including leaders of the Homosexual Eman cipation Move ment, and socialist and women's rights organizations--that worked to stop the expansion of the penal code.

Leading activists of the fightback argued that the extension of Paragraph 175 meant, "An inequality would not thereby be eliminated, but rather an injustice doubled."

In 1911 The League for the Protection of Mater nity and Sexual Reform, a politically conservative organization within the women's movement, adopted a resolution which may be the first statement by any women's rights group on homosexuality. It denounced the proposal to criminalize lesbianism as "a grave error." [The Homo sexual Emancipation Movement in Germany, James D. Steakley]

On Feb. 10, 1911, the League held a meeting, at which Hirschfeld also spoke, to discuss how to link the struggles. The socialist newspaper "Forward" reported that the turnout was so large that a second meeting had to be scheduled.

Next: The 'war to end all wars' derailed the struggle

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Pride & struggle a century ago

'The war to end all wars'

By Leslie Feinberg

The outbreak of World War I derailed the thrust of the movements for sexual and gender emancipation and for women's rights in Germany-and created a profound political split in the international working-class struggle.

It was no accident that the war began precisely at a time of a worldwide upsurge of the working class in Europe and in the United States, as well as stirrings in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The workers' movements were gaining strength and momentum. They were increasingly taking a stand against imperialist war.

There were no socialist countries or liberation movements to blame for World War I. It was a plain, unvarnished racist war for colonial empire. The principal capitalist countries, each hungry to gobble up a bigger share of the markets and profits, tried to redivide the colonial world.

In each of the capitalist countries the bosses appealed to the workers to unite behind them in battle. The German ruling class was able to rally its working class for the war on a patriotic basis. Even the majority in the socialist movement of that day, and the Homosexual Emancipation Movement, got swept up into the chauvinist appeal.

Going along with this right-wing, murderous patriotism put the brake on every social movement--gay, trans and lesbian, women's rights, workers' and socialist struggles--because it gave the ruling class the upper hand, strengthened the right wing and set back the progressive movement.

Those in Germany who didn't fight against the war, instead supporting their own ruling class with patriotic fervor, were pulled in a rightward direction.

But not everyone gave in to frenzied national chauvinism. In the German socia list movement, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Leibknecht took a principled stand against the German ruling class. They were arrested and later assassinated as a result of their opposition to the war.

World War I took the lives of 20 million workers.

A new revolutionary front

The inter-imperialist war interrupted the progress of the working class movement in Europe and Russia. But as the war dragged on for years, the intolerable conditions of life, carnage and suffering sparked revolutionary workers' uprisings.

The very same processes that had been either submerged or driven underground by the outbreak of the war began to resurface and speed up. Imperialist war accelerates all the social, political and economic processes that exist during peacetime. War is the most violent expression of the constant clash of capitalist competition for profits.

World War I generated a huge area of struggle in Asia. It laid the ground-work for the development of national liberation movements around the world. And the war sparked a revolutionary situation in almost every leading capitalist country in the world.

World War I contributed to making the monumental Russian Revolution a necessity. It was not military defeat on the battlefield, but revolutions in Russia and Germany, that brought World War I to an end.

Just eight weeks after the October 1917 Russian Revolution, which brought the workers', peasants' and soldiers' Soviets to power, the new government led by Lenin abolished the czarist anti-gay laws, which were similar to the German Paragraph 175. This action went hand in hand with guaranteeing the rights of workers, land for the peasants and equal rights for women.

Abolishing the anti-gay laws in Russia was a historic step forward from the Napoleonic Code, established in 1804, that had given legal expression to the French bourgeoisie's revolutionary victory over feudalism in 1789.

The left wing of the Russian revolutionary movement did more than just strip the anti-gay laws from the Russian penal code. The Bolsheviks argued that the walls that separated same-sex love from the rest of human sexuality should be torn down.

The new Soviet legislation stressed that all forms of sexual gratification should be treated the same way--as "natural"--and that sex was a private matter. Only the use of force or duress, injury or encroachment on the rights of another person, was a matter for criminal prosecution.

The fresh winds of the Russian Revolution also filled the sails of struggle in other parts of the world, including Germany.

'Socialism means solidarity'

In 1918, mutiny broke out in the German Navy. Workers throughout the country went on strike in support of the rebellion.

On Nov. 7, a council of workers, soldiers and peasants established the Republic of Bavaria. The revolutionary wave spread to Berlin where a socialist republic was proclaimed on Nov. 9. The kaiser abdicated the next day. In this revolutionary wave, the lesbian and gay movement, largely middle-class in its leadership, took its stand with the working class.

The revolution gave the Homosexual Emancipation Movement new energy. This insurrection lent inspiration to the lesbian and gay movement's hope that their liberation was on the horizon.

The Scientific Humanitarian Com mittee had, like the Social Democrats, taken a social-patriotic position during the war. Yet it had published articles by and maintained solidarity with gays from all the countries involved in the war. Many of the early fighters for gay liberation had died on the imperialist battlefields.

With the overthrow of the monarchy and militarism, the committee expressed "firm hope that our movement, too, will once again be able to move into the forefront and lead the struggle for homosexual liberation to its long-desired end."

Magnus Hirschfeld, a leader of the Homosexual Emancipation Movement, and members of the Scientific Human itarian Committee supported the new republic. "We took the most active part in all the revolutionary events," reported the committee.

Hirschfeld spoke at a mass rally in Berlin on Nov. 10. Held at the height of the revolution, it was in front of the Reichstag building. Between 3,000 to 4,000 people gathered near to where the revolutionary Red Guards were fighting pitched battles with reactionary officers who supported the kaiser.

Recalling Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht and other revolutionaries, Hirschfeld said that not only in Germany, "but elsewhere too, nationalism attempted to destroy internationalism, and militarism attempted to destroy socialism."

Hirschfeld stressed to the crowd why socialism was so important: "Socialism means: solidarity, community, mutuality, further development of society into a unified body of people. Each for all and all for each!"

In addition, he said, "We want: the community of peoples, struggle against racism and national chauvinism, removal of limitations on economic and personal communication between peoples, the right of peoples to self-determination regarding their relationship to a state and their form of government."

Historians John Lauritsen and David Thorstad explain that as soon as the revolution had broken out, "The Com mit tee immediately sent a delegation to the new government to press for a total amnesty that would include the release from jail of all inmates convicted of homosexual acts. The removal of censorship and the greater freedom of the press and speech that ensued following the revolution were a boon to the gay rights struggle for a time. But perhaps the most tangible benefit to the gay movement was the acquisition of a building that was to become an international center for gay liberation and sex research.

"The institute was housed in a lovely building that had belonged to

Prince Hatzfeld prior to the revolution. It was one of the finest palaces in Berlin."

The first of its kind, the institute compiled historical, biological, anthropological, statistical and ethnological data and documentation regarding human sexuality and gender. It also housed the Scien tific Humanitarian Committee. So it was an international lesbian and gay community center.

At the opening of this Institute for Sexual Science, Hirschfeld spoke about this concrete gain: "In his speech to the scholars, doctors and politicians who attended the opening in July 1919, Hirschfeld called it 'a child of the revolution'--not only of the uprising that swept Berlin on November 9, 1918, but also of the 'great spiritual revolution' that had begun decades earlier with the first stirrings of the homosexual rights movement." ("The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)," Times Change Press)

Thousands came through its doors, including a number of socialist youth groups and parties that were struggling to inform themselves on homosexuality and other sexual questions.

One such delegation consisted of Soviet doctors. The group was headed by the peoples' commissar of health, who proudly described how their revolutionary Soviet government had immediately removed the czarist anti-gay laws.

In January 1923, the Soviet minister of health traveled to Germany. "He is reported to have expressed to members of the Institute for Sexual Science how pleased he was that the former penalty against homosexuals had been abolished in the Soviet Union. He also said that 'no unhappy consequences of any kind whatsoever have resulted from the elimination of the offending paragraph, nor has the wish that the penalty in question be re-introduced been raised in any quarter."

Momentum accelerates

In Germany the Social Democratic Party, which had swung to the right to support the war, helped curb the revolutionary uprising. Those who were for a revolutionary alternative looked to the gains of the Russian Revolution for inspiration, and organized communist parties through out the world.

Within a few short years after the defeat of the November uprising in Germany, the revolutionary movement there had grown from representing only a vanguard of the working class to obtaining the adherence of millions of workers.

In August 1920 the Scientific Human itarian Committee held its first post-war general membership meeting. The next year a new minister of justice who was himself a signer of the petition was appointed.

The struggle opened up more social and political space for lesbians. In Berlin there were 60 spots where lesbians could meet, some geared for middle-class women, others for working-class lesbians.

There was even a lesbian newspaper called The Girlfriend: Weekly

for the Ideal Friendship. It was sponsored by the Fed eration for Human Rights, a gay group whose membership had swelled to 48,000. This newspaper advertised lesbian night spots and ran personal columns to help women meet each other.

In 1921 Hirschfeld helped organize the first congress of the World League for Sexual Reform, in Berlin.

By 1922 the Committee had 25 branches throughout Germany and had spread to Austria, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, England, Italy and Belgium.

At the same time, however, the German counter-revolution--headed by Hitler and bank-rolled and backed by a segment of the industrial and banking class--had obtained a base in the middle class. And the Homosexual Emancipation Move ment would be one of its first targets.

Next: Counter-revolution

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Lesbian, gay, bi, trans pride, part 5

Sexual freedom vs. fascism in Germany

By Leslie Feinberg

Decades of left-wing political activism, agitation and education ushered in the short-lived era of the "Golden Twenties" in Germany. Berlin rivaled Paris for its flourishing gay and lesbian cultures-which included transgender expression. The movement had forced the police to issue certificates to trans people, allowing them to "cross-dress" without threat of arrest.

Turn-of-the-century independent strug gles for sexual reform, including the movement for women's right to vote-which had held its first large protest in Berlin in 1894-were coalescing into a broad political alliance between the women's emancipation movement and the gay, trans and lesbian movement.

The most prominent organization in that political coalition was the League for the Protection of Maternity and Sexual Reform, founded in 1905. Its leader, Dr. Helene Stoecker, became a director of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee headed by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, a leader of the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement.

The First Congress for Sexual Reform convened in Berlin Sept. 15-20, 1921. The gathering met at the Institute of Sexual Science-the international center of the movement for sexual emancipation. Experts traveled to Germany from around the world for this ground-breaking discussion about sexology, genetics and the law.

In his book "The Pink Triangle," Richard Plant--a later refugee from Nazi Germany-noted that "The congress was such a success that Hirschfeld was embold ened to create the World League for Sexual Reform, which at its height claimed a membership of 130,000."

In 1923 there were at least 25 gay/ trans/lesbian organizations in Germany. And the movement was debating the formation of a national homosexual political party.

Early targets of fascism

German fascism targeted the gay/ trans /lesbian and the women's rights movements even before anti-Jewish and anti-gay laws, codified in 1934-35, officially marked the unleashing of the widespread campaign of terror.

Magnus Hirschfeld was an easy target for the Nazis because he was Jewish and gay, as well as a movement leader and socialist. In 1920

Nazis beat him up as he spoke at a meeting in Munich. Again in Munich, in 1921, his skull was fractured and the fascists left him for dead. In Vienna two years later, Nazis hurled stink bombs and then opened fire on a meeting where he was speaking.

On May 6, 1933, fascist youth were organized to march on the Institute for Sexual Science, accompanied by a brass band. They trashed the international archive, making a mountain of the many thousands of books and journals, photographs and charts-at that time the largest collection in world history. Storm troopers showed up and took over the ransacking. Four days later, the enormous heap of archive materials was publicly burned on Opera Square. The Nazis threw a bust of Hirschfeld on the pyre.

Hirschfeld was abroad on a worldwide speaking tour that had taken him to the United States, China, Palestine, India, Indo nesia and Japan. He later died in exile.

After 1933 the Nazis forcibly dismantled all independent youth organizations, even the Catholic ones, by denouncing their leaders as "homosexual degenerates."

"By the summer of 1933," Plant wrote, "Ernst Roehm's SA [Sturm Abteilung] goons were raiding gay bars throughout Germany. Many were closed, but others didn't shutter their doors until 1935. That was the year when the campaign against homosexuals shifted into high gear and the new Nazi laws banning such gathering places and outlawing homosexuals as 'sexual vagrants' went into effect."

Roehm was himself an openly gay leader of the fascist storm troopers--the "brown shirt" militias used as a weapon of violent repression against the progressive and revolutionary political movements.

To some, it might seem a contradiction that a gay man led raids on gay bars. But there are gay and lesbian, bisexual and trans people in every economic class in capitalist society. When the class struggle is raging, the real question is, as the timeless U.S. labor union song demands, "Which side are you on?"

Roehm's role in attempting to crush the liberation movements that sought to overturn capitalism is no more paradoxical than the reactionary J. Edgar Hoover-reportedly a gay cross-dresser--laying siege to the left-wing struggles, including gay liberation, in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s

What is ironic is that Roehm drowned in his own ideological current.

In 1934, Roehm was purged from the Nazi Party and shot. His homosexuality was the political flashpoint. But his violent removal resulted from internal rivalries and Roehm's struggle to supplant the standing army with his own fascist militia, which ran counter to Hitler's attempts to appease the military brass.

Plant concludes, "'The Night of the Long Knives'--the popular phrase for the [internal] bloodbath that began on June 28 and lasted until July 3, 1934--saw Adolph Hitler wreck the SA militia and order the

shooting of its chief, Ernst Roehm, the man who, since 1919, had been Hitler's sponsor and faithful second-in-command."

Roehm's purge was the harbinger of a storm of violence against leftwing movements for sexual, gender and sex liberation.

A harsh new anti-gay edict was publicly issued one year to the day after the Night of the Long Knives began--June 28, 1935. Paragraph 175A criminalized kisses, embraces, even homosexual fantasies. The law gave the fascist state license to carry out arrests and internment in camps with impunity under the mantle of "criminally indecent activities between men." Plant estimated that between 50,000 and 63,000 males were convicted of homosexuality from 1933 to 1944, of which nearly 4,000 were juveniles.

Although laws against lesbianism had not been codified, German women were snared in the state web, as well--rounded up in SS raids on lesbian bars, sentenced by the Gestapo and sent to concentration camps where they faced horrific brutality.

Estimates of the total number of lesbian/gay/trans prisoners forced to wear the pink triangle on their uniforms in Nazi concentration camps range from 100,000 to 600,000.

Learning from the mistakes

Communists and socialists of all sexualities and genders fought the Nazi attacks on the gay/trans/lesbian and women's struggles.

Yet was there backwardness about homosexuality on the part of socialists and communists in the German left? Yes.

"The Left" was not politically monolithic. Frequently even activist historians lump together the German communists and social democrats as "the left," "the socialists." But like a fast-moving river, political movements are made up of many currents.

Before World War I, the Social Demo cratic Party was the party of revolutionaries. But after its cowardly capitulation at the outbreak of World War I--the overwhelming majority supported their own capitalist class in that inter-imperialist rivalry for colonies--the party lost its revolutionary character. After the war and the Russian Revolution, those who had opposed the capitulation formed a new communist party.

Revolutionaries must constantly be working to shed centuries of ruling class indoctrination that serves to divide and conquer the vast laboring class. Every form of bigotry and backwardness holds back unity and progress in a revolutionary struggle of all sexualities, genders and sexes to abolish capitalism and liberate humanity.

However, some in the Social Demo cratic and Communist parties in Germany --and in the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, which by then had retreated from some of its earlier, more revolutionary positions--took easy political advantage, especially immediately after the purge of Roehm in the Nazi Party, by gay-baiting the fascists.

That was a serious political error. It was like a striking worker

shouting an anti-gay epithet at scabs or police attacking the picket line. Anti-gay bigotry goes against the workers' own class interests.

The U.S. and British imperialist bosses were gay-baiting the Nazis, too. But in that case it actually did serve the interests of their side of the class barricades.

Error vs. ideology

There is a profound difference, however, between political error and political ideology.

In the heat of the struggle, the actual positions the German Communist Party and the Nazi Party took on homosexuality and on abortion demonstrate class objectives as different as night and day.

In 1928 gay publisher Adolf Brand, a founding member of an elitist and male chauvinist German gay group called the Community of the Special, polled the political parties of Germany about their position on Paragraph 175.

After the Second International collapsed following its surrender to the inter-imperialist chauvinism of World War I, German revolutionary elements joined the Communist Party. As the Communist Party became strong, it responded to the call by the gay/trans/lesbian movement for support against Paragraph 175.

The Communist Party replied that it had "taken a stand for the repeal of Para graph 175 at every available opportunity. There is no need to emphasize that we will continue to wage the most resolute struggle for the repeal of these laws in the future."

Communist lawyer Felix Halle, a co-worker in the Coalition for Reform of the Sexual Crimes Code, provided this formulation of the German Communist Party's stance:

"The class-conscious proletariat, uninfluenced by the ideology of property and freed from the ideology of the churches, approaches the question of sex life and also the problem of homosexuality with a lack of prejudice afforded by an understanding of the overall social structure. ... In accordance with the scientific insights of modern times, the proletariat regards these relations as a special form of sexual gratification and demands the same freedom and restrictions for these forms of sex life as for intercourse between the sexes, i.e., protection of the sexually immature from attacks, ... control over one's own body, and finally respect for the rights of non-involved parties."

The Nazis deliberately hid the fascist nature of their party by calling themselves "National Socialists." But their response to the poll shows that their program was just the opposite of a communist workers' party. The Nazi reply included this succinct sentence: "Anyone who even thinks of homosexual love is our enemy."

Some theorists have explained this ferocious enmity as part of the Nazi effort to build a "Rambo" fighting machine. That's true. But the fact that the fascists despised and destroyed the movements for

sexuality, gender and sexual freedom was also rooted in their entire political ideology and the capitalist class objective it served.

Imperialists laid groundwork for fascism

Today understanding the class basis of German fascism and the strengths and weaknesses of the communist resistance to it are especially important because governing ideologues in the U.S.--the expand ing imperial empire of capital--have fashioned their own "bad-guys-good-guys" version of the rise and demise of German fascism.

In that version, fascism and communism are evil twins. And the great democratic U.S. imperialism, with a few imperialist powers in its posse, rode in and saved the day.

But in reality, the banking and industrial class of the United States and its imperialist allies had laid the basis for the growth and development of the Nazi regime with the Versailles Treaty that formally ended WWI.

The U.S., England and France redrew the map of Europe and recarved Ger many in a way that was designed to arouse national hatreds and pit peoples against each other in order to preclude internationalist working-class solidarity.

That gave the right wing parties in Ger many, especially the Nazis, the oppor tunity to fan the flames of national chauvinism.

The victorious Allies also ordered defeated Germany to pay reparations for the war, with a provisional payment of 20,000,000,000 Marks. The bankers and politicians who had started the war were not the ones to be bled to death by these payments. The workers and middle class were saddled with the bill. However, the decision on reparation payments was postponed until 1921 in order to give the capitalist class of Germany the chance to destroy the rising revolutionary struggle of the workers.

The economic dislocation that followed World War I was staggering. In the face of the reparations and penalties imposed on Germany, the government began printing money to meet expenses, resulting in runaway inflation. The financial system was in a tailspin.

Only when the bankers and industrialists abroad realized that a ferocious class struggle in Germany was raging did they begin to relent somewhat on their economic bloodletting. But this was only a way of stifling the growing revolutionary working class movement in Germany.

Capitalist counter-revolution

By the late 1920s, the fascist movement--with its base in the economically devastated middle class--began to win the backing of a sector of German industrialists and bankers to carry out the dirty job of counter-revolution. State repression of sexuality, gender and sex to enforce the capitalist economic unit of the patriarchal nuclear family was a key plank in the fascist platform.

The progressive movements were battling the state to decriminalize variance in sexuality and gender. And they were trying to free the lives of women of all sexualities and genders that were tightly corseted by lack of basic social and economic rights.

These modest but vital goals, raised during a period of working-class struggle and capitalist economic depression, made these movements enemies of the Nazis.

Nazi campaigns focused on eradicating homosexuality and abortion, mandating procreation, and sharply restricting women's rights and role in society, in addition to vicious racism and national chauvinism.

However, in 1931, a militant battle broke out against passage of the fascist Paragraph 128 of the Criminal Code that banned abortion.

Feminist historian Atina Grossmann provided a valuable account of this struggle in her essay "Abortion and Economic Crisis: The 1931 Campaign Against Para graph 218":

"The 1931 arrests of two physicians and Sex Reform activists on charges of having performed illegal abortions sparked a storm of protest from feminists, Com munists, and Socialists. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, they organized an extraordinary coalition campaign for the legalization of abortion."

Next: The dual role of the Soviet bureaucracy; lesbian/trans/gay and women: political setbacks in the Soviet Union, gains in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

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Lesbian, gay, bi, and trans pride series, part 6

Gender & sexuality in czarist Russia

By Leslie Feinberg

Lenin's Bolshevik Party abolished the czarist anti-gay law and legalized abortion less than eight weeks after the October 1917 Revolution. The Soviet leadership under Stalin retreated from those revolutionary positions by re-criminalizing homosexuality in 1933-34 and abortion in 1936.

Neither of these actions reflects the policies or psychologies of individuals, but of deep economic changes going on in Soviet society and their impact on the family. The question of same-sex love and the role of women in what became the Soviet Union has a long and complex past that can't be examined in isolation from the class struggle as a whole.

Much of the scrutiny of this particular aspect of history has been by researchers and academics who are hostile to the Russian Revolution and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics it forged. Anticommunism not only taints their work, in too many cases the discrediting of socialist revolution is the actual foundation of their analysis.

Working-class communist intellectuals--particularly those from the former socialist-bloc countries--who examine the question of sexuality, gender and sex in this vast region within the context of the class struggle, without glossing over any of the weaknesses or mistakes of the revolution, will make a vital contribution to the socialist movement.

As ancient as humanity

As with every other inhabited land mass on the planet, the extended region that was to become the Soviet Union seems to have encompassed same-sex love and gender/sex variance during early times. Sexual variance is found not just in the history of one nationality or one class.

British archeologist Timothy Taylor identified what he believed was evidence of what today is called transgender, as well as women warriors, in pre-class Iron Age graves in southern Russia. "I think I have identified females who moved into a male sphere as well as men who cross-dressed," he wrote. ("She-Men," British Daily Telegraph, Feb. 13, 1995)

Historian Dan Healy stated in his book "Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia" that: "The popular, everyday (bytovoe) sexual

patterns and practices of the mass of Russians were marked by pagan survivals (orgies, nonreproductive sex acts), which Russian Orthodoxy, with its incomparably weak institutions and priesthood, had been incapable of eradicating."

Healy explained, "Rural and lower-class Russians possessed an array of terms to describe individuals who appeared or behaved like members of the opposite sex. They associated this gender marginality with hermaphroditism observed in domesticated animals, linking social qualities with the familiar phenomenon of physical sexual indeterminacy."

For example, Healy noted that "The lexicographer Vladimir Dal, who gathered his material between the 1830s and 1850s in central Russia, found that the manly woman was known as muzhlanka, muzhlatka, borodulia, suparen, and razmuzhiche. Dal reported that his informants defined these women as 'resembling a man in their appearance, movements, voice, et cetera,' or 'by structure, by body formation'; they might even approach the condition of a 'hermaphrodite-woman' (germafrodit-zhena).

"The lexicographer found an analogous vocabulary describing the feminine male. In addition, Dal reported that the verb devulitsia was used of men who 'luxuriate, take women's habits, manners.'"

None of the words used to describe "manly" females were insults; some of the terms for feminine males were.

The stamp of feudalism on sexuality

In an essay about Russia and same-sex love, Simon Karlinsky observed, "There is a considerable body of evidence that prior to the Westernizing reforms of Peter the Great (at the beginning of the 18th century) male homosexuality was widespread and tolerated in all strata of Russian society. This is attested by foreign travelers and also by the sermons and denunciations by Russian Orthodox churchmen of the 16th and 17th centuries who repeatedly complained about the prevalence of homosexuality." ("Hidden from History," NAL Books: 1989)

Sexuality between men took place within every economic class in imperial Russia--even the tsar, Peter "the Great," was said to "dabble in bisexuality on occasion." (Karlinksy)

Of course, men of all classes who had sex with other men might still have believed that what they were doing was "sinful."

And the sex that took place between men in the owning classes and laborers, termed "gentlemen's mischief," cannot be characterized as consensual sex, even when physical violence was not directly involved as coercion. Some 52 million human beings, enslaved as serfs in czarist Russia, had no rights as far as the landowners were concerned.

Serfdom was formally abolished in 1861 as part of the Great Reforms under Alexander II. But the peasantry, the preponderant class in czarist Russia, still lived under the boot heel of patriarchal semi-feudalism.

Codifying state repression

Revolutionary ferment in Western Europe in the second half of the 18th century, which brought the bourgeoisie to power in France and elsewhere, also brought challenges to the absolute monarchy in Russia. Other Western influence, however, had brought repressive laws in its wake earlier in the century. German military advisers to Peter the Great had drafted a Military Legal Code in 1706, based on a Swedish military edict, that penalized consensual sex between males. The punishment was burning at the stake.

This law was broadened in the Military Code of 1716. The legislation of 1706 and 1716 applied to soldiers on active duty.

"Criminalization of male homosexual behavior for the whole of Russian society came with the promulgation of a new Legal Code drafted in 1832," Karlinsky wrote, "during the reign of the most brutal of the Romanovs, Nicholas I. This code did not retain the military legislation of Peter the Great, but was instead patterned on the criminal codes that existed at the time in various German principalities, especially that of Wurtemberg, which it copied."

But industrialization in Russia in the 1880s and 1890s--and the urbanization it brought with it--set swift economic changes in motion.

As large numbers of peasants--mostly men, but some women, too-left their villages and farms to come to the cities in search of paying jobs, the old feudal social structure of the family, sexuality and gender/sex expression they brought with them was transformed, as well.

Next: Capitalism creates same-sex subcultures; 1917 revolution seeks to liberate them.

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Roots of Russian 'homosexual subculture'

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series, part 7

By Leslie Feinberg

Revolutions against feudalism and capitalism in Russia illuminated the nexus of the battles for the liberation of sexuality, particularly same-sex love, the abolition of sex and gender restrictions, and the emancipation of women.

These seemingly divergent struggles were up against institutionalized common obstacles. The economic unit for both peasants and workers was the oppressive patriarchal family, whether feudal or capitalist. The super-structure of law, religion, politics and education functioned to justify the inequality of a class-divided economic base. And this economic and social injustice was enforced by the state machinery of repression.

Russian capitalism created an exploited economic class that was up against these common enemies at every turn and was forced to take on the Amazonian task of battling class rule, its ideology and its state.

Of course, women as a whole were easily visible in pre-revolutionary Russian society; they were not a "closeted" population. But it took the growth of capitalist industrialization to create a homosexual "subculture" in Russia.

As early as the 1870s, historian Dan Healey describes that "as Russian cities expanded and commerce and industry grew, a new, 'homosexual' identity appeared alongside more traditional relations." (Russian Queen)

Forensic doctors and others referred to these men as "tetki." The word literally means "auntie," Healey explains, but it can be translated as "queen." Tetka was a patronizing word used for any woman older than the speaker.

"The 'little homosexual world' (gomoseksual'nyi mirok) became a feature of Russia's largest cities," Healey says. (Homosexual Desire)

The abolition of feudal serfdom in 1861 and the demand for wage labor created by industrialization drew large numbers of peasants to the growing cities in search of paid work. It was this centrifugal force of capitalism in Russia that centralized an urban industrial class in the 1880s and 1890s, in which a homosexual subculture took root.

Healey writes that, as this subculture in large cities like St.

Petersburg and Moscow began to grow in size and complexity at the end of the 19th century, "It developed its own geographies of sexualized streetscapes, its rituals of contact and socialization, its signals and gestures, and its own fraternal language. In these rituals, gestures and language, the subculture elaborated roles for participants, often based on the principles of the market in male sex." (Homosexual Desire)

At the same time, capitalist market relations stamped their own trademark on sexual relations. "This pattern of relations marked a distinct break with older, patriarchal forms of male sexuality, for encounters took place beyond the patron-client nexus of the household or workshop," Healey continues. "Now a sexual marketplace evolved, with a new hierarchy of values and a new symbolic order." (Homosexual Desire)

"Indeed, capitalists were now taking the Russian tetka and his friends seriously, running bathhouses, bars and 'balls of woman haters' that catered discreetly to this clientele." (Russian Queen)

Healey adds, "'Female homosexuals' (as Russian psychiatrists tended to call certain women who had sex with women) appeared in more scattered locations, often off the public stage, in the 1890s." ("Homosexual Desire")

The weight of the patriarchal family

Women bore the brunt of the burden of the patriarchal family structure in feudal Russia.

"Russian peasant society ... replicated the structure of the hierarchical patriarchal state," observes Christine D. Worobec. "Women and children found themselves subordinated to husbands and fathers just as peasants as a whole were subordinated to the tsar, the supreme father." (Late-Imperial)

The medieval family economic structure was a heavy yoke around the necks of all those who were not wealthy, landowning males.

Author William M. Mandel wrote: "Although the serfs were freed in 1861, they remained dependent upon and ruled by their former owners in precisely the fashion of the Black population of the American South after Emancipation." (Soviet Women)

These oppressive conditions generated resistance. In a mass trial of 50 peasants (Narodniks) in 1877, 15 were women. Mandel describes them as populists who "believed the solution to Russia's problems lay in that country's traditional peasant communes--freed, however, of landlord exploitation."

He quotes Sophia Bardina, a 22-year-old defendant, who spoke eloquently from the docket about the need to abolish the patriarchal class structure of the family. She told the court, in words laden with sarcasm, "Nor do I know whether the family is undermined by that social order which forces a woman to leave her family and turn to the factory where she and her children are inevitably corrupted, that order which compels a woman to become a prostitute because of her

poverty and which even sanctions prostitution as a legitimate and necessary phenomenon in every well-ordered state; or whether the family is undermined by us who are striving to eradicate this misery, which is the principal cause of all social calamities, including the destruction of the family." (Soviet Women)

Mandel recalled that the Russian writer Maxim Gorky was beaten almost to death by Cossacks in a rural village after he tried to save a woman who was being dragged naked behind a horse because she was accused of the "crime" of adultery.

"That practice did not exist in town," Mandel concludes.

Next: Shaking the branches, not the trunk

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Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series, part 8

Capitalism shakes the branches

By Leslie Feinberg

As city life and capitalist industrialization were shaking up family and sexual relations for Russian male workers, women also felt their impact.

Historian Dan Healy wrote, "Same-sex relations between women in tsarist and early Soviet Russia reflected the general transformation of women's roles and opportunities. For increasing numbers of women, the ties of the patriarchal village were loosening and breaking, and as with migrant men in the city, links to family ... were not always sufficient to maintain traditional forms of surveillance, including the monitoring of sexual behavior." ("Homosexual Desire")

While capitalism shook the branches of this rooted patriarchal system, it left the trunk intact.

Russian women were still weighed down with the burden of patriarchal family relations that served the class interests of the semi-feudal, semi-imperialist state.

Laura Engelstein writes, "Imperial Russian law established a system of power within the family at least as autocratic as the one governing the operation of the state: the husband wielded absolute authority over the wife, and the father entirely dominated the children. Women could not leave their households or undertake paid employment without the formal permission of father or husband, who controlled their access to the necessary official papers. No law protected women against physical abuse short of severe bodily injury.

"No formal grounds existed for legal separation; divorce, for which adultery constituted one of the few legitimate reasons, could be obtained only after elaborate and humiliating (or duplicitous) procedures; annulment was a rare and arduous attainment. No one of any age, male or female, could marry without the permission of parents or other appropriate authorities. By ancient custom, women had the legal right to maintain their own property after marriage, but they suffered severe disadvantages when it came to inheriting family wealth." ("Fin-de-Siècle Russia")

Nadezhda Krupskaya, a Bolshevik leader and author of the prerevolutionary pamphlet "The Woman Worker," described company housing at the Thornton Broadcloth Mill, which, like much of Russian industry, was foreign-owned. Workers lived in "a huge building with an endless number of rooms, the partitions not up to the ceiling. ... The din was ear-splitting. The walls were green with damp. There were two families in each of the rooms, which were not large. ... They dried their laundry in the room, and it was so stifling the oillamps sputtered. ... Dormitory rooms were terribly crowded. ... The working day was incredibly long (12-14 hours at the textile mills). We saw some of the women workers lying on the cots in exhaustion, their faces in their pillows." ("Soviet Women")

Urban living also left its mark on the lives of male workers. "The rapid expansion of Russia's industrial base was accomplished by large numbers of male workers living in cities where there was neither space nor money for the replication of peasant marriage and family patterns," Healey wrote. "In tsarist Moscow, working men in the sexually active younger age groups outnumbered women, and they were crowded together in accommodations precluding any possibility of starting families or of bringing a wife and children from the village to join them." ("Homosexual Desire")

As peasants were pulled towards the vortex of urbanization in search of jobs, "A significant proportion of these newcomers stayed only temporarily or seasonally; many left wives and families behind in the village," Healey notes. "Others settled and became the basis of an urban proletariat in St. Peters burg, Moscow, and a handful of other centers. Urban workers' hous ing was crow ded. A huge proportion lived in barracks, flophouses, or shared rooms and even shared beds; a significant percentage lived in employers' households and workshops.

"Men found opportunities for sexual expression with each other in Russia's industrializing centers. As they exploited these new possibilities, they transformed Russian masculinity's traditional patterns of mutual male eros." ("Homosexual Desire")

That same-sex Eros--including, in some instances, lesbian love--was expres sed eloquently in the literature and arts produced in the late 19th century by the radicalized intelligentsia that was funded and flourished in the battle of the rising bourgeoisie and their imperialist backers against feudalism.

This articulation of the love that was finally speaking out in its own name flowered after the easing of censorship of books and periodicals following the 1905 Revolution against Tsar Nicholas II.

Two currents in women's struggle

The emancipation of women and the overall struggle for sexual liberation are closely tied, in particular because sexual subjugation in general is historically a key weapon of patriarchal domination.

That connection was visible in the late 19th century as revolutionary activists established collective living spaces. These political revolutionaries, writes Mandel, "established communes in the largest cities that were, particularly for women, places of refuge for runaways from the patriarchalism of smaller towns or family estates."

Mandel describes this collective living and the gender expression that was its hallmark in his own words, perhaps limited by his own

concepts: "The members of the communes shared money, food, and possessions. The women particularly expressed their contempt for existing society by violating its rules of dress. They wore their hair straight, their clothing severe and comfortable, glasses whenever they needed them, and particularly violated convention by smoking. A unisex effect was striven for, not in the wearing of trousers, which was unthinkable, but in the abandonment of everything that made for femininity and for regarding women as sex objects." ("Soviet Women")

Between 1905 and 1917, two clear currents emerged in Russia that vied for leadership in the women's movement. One was socialist, seeking nothing less than the complete liberation of all workers and peasants from class domination. The other was a feminist grouping that was more middle- and upper-class in its composition and political orientation. It focused its struggle on the right to vote--an important bourgeois democratic demand.

In December 1908, for example, the feminists organized a Russia-wide congress in which more than 1,000 delegates took part. Only 45 working women were present and not one single woman from the peasantry--the class that represented Russia's vast majority of laborers.

The revolutionary women's current looked very different. In 1913, the Bolsheviks organized an important first celebration in Russia of International Women's Day. Their organizing was in sharp distinction to a January congress on women's education convened by liberal intellectuals to which only a few women workers had been invited.

The Bolsheviks knew that in the repressive political climate of that year, the police would not issue a permit for a demonstration. So they secured the Grain Exchange for a "learned symposium." On the day of the event, March 8, the federal police--who were present at all meetings and could end any gathering at a whim--filled the first two rows in the hall.

The speakers at the Bolshevik-organized event were all women-working women. One of the leading voices at the meeting was a 25-year-old weaver who had been a member of her union executive board for six years. The weaver described the class composition and mood of the event: "No matter how poor the working women were, on 'their day,' the first holiday of women in Russia, they put on the very best they had, and the packed hall looked like a meadow in May from the brightness of the colors. ... [The police] didn't succeed in spoiling our holiday, although every speaker had to get her most private thoughts across to the audience as though breaking through the alert silence of the first rows." ("Soviet Women")

The outbreak of the inter-imperialist World War I in 1914 illuminated the bourgeois political foundation of those who identified with the feminist current. According to Richard Stites, a researcher in Denmark, "The feminists were rhapsodic about the great possibilities of serving the [Russian] fatherland and, in return, gathering political dividends for themselves. They showed no subtlety in connecting their 'sacrifices' to eventual payment in the coin of women's

suffrage." ("Soviet Women")

Stites notes it was not well-to-do movement women who did most of the sacrificing during WWI. It was the women and men of the laboring classes who sacrificed.

And women workers paid with their sweat in toil, too. The percentage of women workers in factories had reached 30 percent of the total when the war broke out.

By 1917, as the imperialist war brought hunger and want, death and disability, thousands of women in the St. Petersburg needle trade walked out on strike, marching through the streets demanding "peace, bread and land." Male workers joined them, swelling the ranks of protest to 90,000.

That strike broke out on March 8--International Women's Day--and it was the first shot of the anti-capitalist Russian Revolution.

Capitalism's historical task

Capitalism in Russia, like feudalism, relied on the patriarchal family structures as economic units. The rule of capital accumulation created its own super-structure of law, religion, politics and education to justify the inequality of its economic base. And it enforced this economic and social injustice with brutal state repression.

World War I--an outgrowth of capitalism's drive to expand its relentless search for profits beyond its own border--was also having a profound impact on patriarchal family relations. The war uprooted millions of peasants and workers in Russia and elsewhere, disrupting planting and harvesting, production and family reproduction.

This clash of imperialist titans over who would steal the land, labor and resources of colonized peoples only profited the imperial victors. The war was slaughtering tens of millions of laborers and oppressed peoples, and exacerbating the super-exploitation and suffering of peoples caught in the grip of colonialism.

Capitalism, in relation to feudalism, was a progressive force in that it was a superior economic system--a qualitative leap in human productivity. Capitalism eradicated much of the medievalism of feudal autocracy with its need for science and technological advance. Capitalism socialized the artisan's individual tools, forging them into massive means of production. It galvanized a working class.

But the social relationship of capital--of exploiter and exploited--is a brutal one for workers and oppressed peoples.

And capitalism in Russia was too weak and too subordinated to the existing imperialist countries to even fulfill its bourgeois democratic promises to the masses. The brief liberal capitalist regime ushered in by the February 1917 Revolution solved none of their problems. It couldn't get out of the war that was killing the workers and peasants because the ruling class had imperial ambitions. It couldn't distribute the land to the peasants. And it couldn't meet the most elementary demands of the workers. Thus, the Bolshevik slogan of "Bread, land"

and peace" won the masses over to the need for a second revolution.

And this revolution in October 1917 created a workers' state that began the work of uprooting the entire trunk of ruling-class economic structures. It was no accident that one of the first acts of the Bolshevik government was to abolish the tsarist anti-gay and anti-woman laws.

Next: Bolshevik Revolution advances women's and gay rights.

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Lesbian, gay, bit and trans pride series part 9

Naysayers pooh-pooh Bolshevik gains

Noticias en Español

By Leslie Feinberg

Simon Karlinsky, a Berkeley professor of Russian literature and drama, pooh-poohs the decriminalization of same-sex love by the young Russian workers' state in October 1917. "The revolutions of 1905 and of February 1917," he writes, "which brought unprecedented new freedom of expression for Russian gay and lesbian writers, are all too often conflated in Western minds with the Bolshevik-led October Revolution, routinely credited with the sexual liberation achieved by the two earlier revolutions." ("Gay Literature")

Karlinsky offers details about the public articulation of same-sex love in Russia's literary Golden Age in the late 19th century and its Silver Age in the early 20th century. He focuses in particular on the flowering of what today would be called "gay" and "lesbian" literature between 1905 and 1917.

The most famous, of course, was the novel "Wings" by Mikhail Kuzmin (1872-1936) that swept the imagina tion of the male homosexual population because it was the first "gay" novel in European literature to end happily.

Between 1905 and 1910, the publication of Lydia Zinovieva-Annibal's novel "Thirty-three Freaks" and her collection of stories "The Tragic Zoo" also electrified the public in general and "lesbians" in particular.

The celebrated writer Nikolai Kliuev, leader of the "peasant poets"--named for their class origin and for the theme of their writing--was also openly "gay."

Using quotation marks around the words "lesbian" and "gay" is a reminder that modern identities are relative and not precisely adaptable to other historical periods, regions, nationalities and classes. Russians have used different con cepts to describe samesex attraction, like "blue" or "pink," or "people of the moonlight"--the title of a book by Vasily Rozanov in 1913.

From all this, Karlinsky concludes--and so do other anti-communist historians--that the revolution should have stopped in February 1917. "Constantly sabotaged by the monarchists on the right and the Bolsheviks on the left, the regime managed to promote human rights and freedoms on a scale not experienced in Russia before or since. That was when women and minorities were given full civil and political rights, including the vote. Freedom of religion, speech, press, labor unions, and strikes became a reality, the prominent feminist

Sophia Panina was given a cabinet-level post, and all vestiges of censorship were abolished."

Karlinsky concludes, "The seizure of power by Lenin and Trotsky in October 1917 was hailed by many then (and is still often regarded) as an enhancement of the rights gained by the revolutions of 1905 and February 1917. But as far as rights (including gay rights) and personal freedoms are concerned, the October Revo lution was actually a reversal and a negation of the two earlier revolutions rather than their continuation."

Is that true?

Those who wax eloquent about the bourgeois democracy that briefly flourished in 1905 and again in 1917 focus on the political freedoms incorporated in the laws of that time. But they omit that, while political debate emerged and strikes may have become legal, millions of bellies were still growling for bread. Backs were bowed by dawn-to-dusk toil in fields and factories. Women were drag ged by the hair to their patriarchal family roles. Young men and women, looking for same-sex love, lived invisible lives, ended up being marketed for someone else's profits or forced to pay extortionists from their own pockets. Jews were forced to fight or to flee from pogroms.

Even after the February revolution, all this continued to be exacerbated by Russia's participation in the war, whose killing fields were drenched with the blood of millions of Russian and German laborers.

The February 1917 Provisional Gov ernment, headed by Kerensky, was hoisted to political power by a ground swell of workers and peasants who yearned to throw off the yoke of class exploi tation by rich landowners and factory bosses.

They hungered for bread, land and peace. But the Provisional Government was tied to Russia's weak capitalist class. They wouldn't give up the territorial claims that kept Russia in the war. They weren't for expropriating the bosses. They couldn't even carry out land reform.

All that required another revolution--one that suppressed the landlords and capitalists. It came in October, under the leadership of the Bolsheviks.

The communist revolution had to carry out the tasks that the capitalists and their government could not complete.

In December 1917, only weeks after seizing state power, the Bolsheviks abolished the tsarist anti-gay law, legalized abortion, provided maternity leave, lifted the onerous restrictions on divorce, and legally recognized children born outside of marriage.

This act of expunging the super-structure of egregious laws was of a political character. It demonstrated the revolutionary direction and goals of the Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership.

However, these tsarist laws had been a codification of the inequality that was institutionalized in the semi-feudal, semi-imperial class relationships in the economy and in society. So the revolutionary work of transforming the social structure had just begun. And that work was not unimpeded. It was carried out under fire from invading imperialist powers on 14 fronts.

Next: 'People of the moonlight' in the dawn of revolution

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Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 10

'People of the moonlight' in the dawn of revolution

By Leslie Feinberg

The Bolshevik Party did not merely scrap anti-homosexual tsarist laws. Sexologist Wilhelm Reich, in "The Sexual Revolution," described the intent of the Bolsheviks' political position. They felt it was necessary to tear down the walls that divided homosexuals-also known in Russia as "people of the moonlight"--from the rest of society.

The revolutionaries tried to examine sexuality and gender as they did all social and economic relations--through a scientific lens. Reich explained that the Bolsheviks believed same-sex love harmed no one and that it was wrong to punish anyone because of their sexuality.

And as Lenin and his party won over segments of the middle classes to the goals of the socialist revolution, the young workers' state drew strong support from prominent homosexuals. Russian literary historian Simon Karlinsky, no friend to socialist revolution, admits that, "With remarkable unanimity, all male gay and bisexual writers welcomed the October takeover." That included Mikhail Kuzmin, author of "Wings," and Nikolai Kliusev, considered the unofficial poet laureate of the Russian peasantry.

Historian Dan Healey puts this accomplishment in a larger historical context. "Soviet Russia was by far the most significant power since the French Revolution to decriminalize male same-sex relations, while Britain and Weimar Germany continued to prosecute homosexuals. Soviet health authorities courted the left-leaning sex reform movement headed by Berlin sexologist and homosexual rights campaigner Magnus Hirschfeld.

"Biologists and doctors chiefly sponsored by the Commissariat of Health began to investigate homosexuality as a scientific and medical phenomenon, often from sympathetic perspectives that were in comparative terms markedly advanced."

The weight of material suffering during those years was unbearable. By early 1918, after nearly four years of devastating imperialist war, the urban food ration was four ounces of bread a day--and nothing else. ("Soviet Women")

During the years of "war communism"--the civil war of 1918 to 1921-when the workers' state was surrounded and under siege, internally and externally, there is little record of any "gay life."

The revolution had occurred in the weakest link of the capitalist chain. Russia was semi-feudal and profoundly under-developed technologically, making the task of raising production to meet the needs of all more onerous. And the workers' state was an island in a sea of raging imperialism, determined to engulf the first successful socialist revolution.

New Economic Policy

In order to rebuild the productive apparatus, Lenin called for a partial and temporary return to a market economy in 1921 with the adoption of the New Economic Policy. His arguments for the NEP included frank warnings of the dangers inherent in reintroducing capitalist relations in a planned economy.

Healey has produced valuable accounts on this period. "Surprisingly, despite the seven-year hiatus of war, revolution, and civil war that concluded in 1921," he writes, "much of the male homosexual underworld that existed before 1914 reconstituted itself in the early years of the New Economic Policy. Street cruising and male prostitution returned to Moscow and Petrograd, with the same toilets, parks, and boulevards providing arenas for the market in both paid and unpaid sex between men." ("Russian Queen")

He emphasizes that the homosexual male "subculture" under tsarism had relied in part on privately owned commercial spaces like bathhouses and restaurants. These small-scale capitalist enterprises were closed down by the reorganization of a planned economy, which impacted on patterns of the "commercialization" of same-sex relations.

"Despite homosexuals' increasing difficulty under Soviet rule in controlling private spaces," Healey adds, "they occasionally managed to use domestic or other semiprivate venues (halls, cabarets) to gather. ... The relative openness of homosexual entertainments tapered off rapidly after the civil war, but a few sources hint at their more discreet continuation. Many of the best records of gatherings come from the Petrograd-Leningrad subculture, where a tradition of popular private homosexual assemblies was well established."

During the NEP, he documents, "Antinoi (Antinous), a private arts circle devoted to the appreciation of 'male beauty' in prose, verse, drama, and music, functioned in Moscow during the early 1920s, staging readings of consciously homosexual poetry, recitals of music by 'our own' composers, and even an all-male ballet. The group made plans to publish an anthology of homosexual verse from ancient to modern times, an attempt to construct an ennobling past."

However, the group seemed to have disbanded after finding it difficult to rent meeting space or publicize its events.

"But it would be misleading to claim that Soviet policies alone 'drove people into the toilets,'" Healey concludes. "Marginal public spaces were well-established sexualized territories, geographic expressions of a lively urban male homosexual subculture. After 1917, male

homosexuals and their male sexual partners continued resorting to public lavatories and other civic amenities like parks and boulevards because they were spaces where participants could recognize and meet each other according to familiar rituals."

The position of the Bolsheviks in the 1920s was very clear. They opposed the economic exploitation of women, men and children represented by prostitution, but they were not for penalizing the prostitutes. And they did not believe that sexuality was a matter for state intervention.

Next: 1920s: Scientific, not utopian

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Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series, part 11

Soviet Union in 1920s: Scientific, not utopian

By Leslie Feinberg

During the 1920s, in the first decade of the Russian Revolution, signs that the struggle to build socialism could make enormous social gains in sexual freedom--even in a huge mostly agricultural country barely freed from feudalism, then ravaged by imperialist war and torn as under by civil war--were apparent.

The Russian Revolution breathed new life into the international sexual reform movement, the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement, and the revolutionary struggle as a whole in Germany and around the world.

It was a historic breakthrough when the Soviet Criminal Code was established in 1922 and amended in 1926, and homosexuality was not included as an offense. The code also applied to other republics, including the Ukrainian Republics. Only sex with youths under the age of 16, male and female prostitution and pandering were listed. Soviet law did not criminalize the person being prostituted, but those who exploited them.

For example, author Dan Healey states, "The revolutionary regime repeatedly declared that women who sold their bodies were victims of economic exploitation, not to be criminalized, and campaigns to discourage them from taking up sex work were launched." The growth of prostitution had of course been spurred by the chaos and dislocation of people accompanying war.

Historian Laura Engelstein summarizes, "Soviet sexologists in the 1920s participated in the international movement for sexual reform and criminologists deplored the use of penal sanctions to censor private sexual conduct." ("Soviet Policy")

In 1923, the Soviet minister of health traveled to the German Institute for Sex ual Science and reportedly expressed there his pride that his government had abolished the tsarist penalties against same-sex love. He stated that "no unhappy consequences of any kind whatsoever have resulted from the elimination of the offending paragraph, nor has the wish that the penalty in question be reintroduced been raised in any quarter."

Also in 1923, Dr. Grigorii Batkis, director of the Moscow Institute of Soviet Hygiene, published a pamphlet titled "The Sexual Revolution in Russia." It stated, "Soviet legislation bases itself on the following principle: it declares the absolute non-interference of the state and society into sexual matters, as long as nobody is injured, and no one's interests are encroached upon."

And the pamphlet spelled this out clearly, "Concerning homosexuality, sod omy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offenses against public morality--Soviet legislation treats these the same as so-called 'natural' intercourse."

In Germany, the vicious Prussian Paragraph 175 was the law of the land in 1923. That same year in the U.S., where anti-"sodomy" laws aimed to padlock closet doors, the FBI had labeled anarchist Emma Goldman "most dangerous woman in America" because of her vocal support for gay rights and other forms of social equality. (gaysouthafrica.org)

In Britain the "Buggery" Act of 1533 had proscribed death by hanging--the death penalty not formally removed until 1861. But the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act criminalized any form for male homosexual expression that offended a jury--"gross indecency"--with up to two years with or without hard labor. Oscar Wilde, a feminine homosexual, was convicted under this law in 1895. It took 82 more years to repeal this repressive measure. (lawyerscollective.org)

Ups and downs

On Jan. 15, 1921, a raid took place in Petrograd that may have been sparked by official fears of a large private gathering of soldiers and sailors. It turned out those gathered were carrying out a wedding ceremony.

Some 95 soldiers, sailors and civilians were arrested in the only such raid known during that period on a party of male homo sexuals and cross-dressers in Petrograd.

Healey explains, "A lone Justice Commissariat lawyer argued that this raid was justified despite the decriminalization of sodomy, for public displays of 'homosexual tastes' endangered suggestible personalities. He proposed prosecuting such overt demonstrations of these tastes"

When the Bolsheviks struck down the tsarist anti-gay laws, that political act challenged the prejudices that were deeply embedded from centuries of class rule. But it could not change everyone's attitudes in the population overnight. From that standpoint, however, Healey's findings are very significant: No such charges based on cross-dressing or public displays of homosexuality have come to light. "Few other jurists advocated such a criminalizing approach, and most explained the absence of a sodomy ban as a feature of the sexual revolution." ("Russian Queen")

The eminent psychiatrist V.M. Bekh terev wrote about those arrested as "sexual deviants." It's worth recalling that he began his career of professor of psychiatry at the Academy of Military Medicine under the tsar--the same military that had adopted legislation in 1706 and 1716 mandating the death penalty as punishment for male same-sex love between soldiers.

While feminine males were generally not as socially accepted as masculine females, Healey notes, "Soviet sources of the 1920s continue to mention the use of female nicknames and occasional indulgence in cross-dressing, although these practices were evidently reserved for private events and spaces."

The great Russian novel "Wings," by Mikhail Kuzmin, about same-sex love bet ween men, was re-published and brought out in Berlin in 1923 by a literary house owned by the Soviet government. (Simon Karlinsky's essay in "Hidden from History")

Modern anti-communist historians have denounced the early Soviet workers' state based on reports that the Bolsheviks used charges that male clerics were having sex with boy children during public trials of church officials.

While not underestimating the impact of political backwardness about same-sex relations in the trials of clerics from the church hierarchy, more study must be done to find out how much of these measures resulted from outrage at sexual abuse--much like the outrage over exposures of the rapes of boy and girl children in the modern Catholic Church scandal.

More thorough primary research about these trials is needed. Any attempt to gloss over instances of backwardness only sets back the struggle to build socialism in the long run. However, simplistic, anti-communist arguments do far greater damage.

'Survivals of primitive custom'

While the October 1917 Revolution in Russia--the heart of the tsarist oppressor nation--eradicated the laws against homosexuality, Soviet governments in the Caucasus and Central Asia, where homosexuality was reportedly widespread, did enact laws against some forms of same-sex expression in the 1920s.

In 1928 the People's Commissariat of Justice of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic replied to a request from Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific-Humani tarian Committee in Germany, which wrote to ask the state of homosexuals in the Soviet Union.

The response stated in part that "pederasty"--sexual abuse of boy children by adult men--was punished "[i]n particular republics where pederasty is especially common." ("Sexual Desire")

The Bolshevik's struggle against sexual exploitation of children is a matter of public record. However, there is also backwardness in this attitude towards the Republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus that cannot be examined outside of the context of the "national question" and the centuries of entrenched "Great Russian" chauvanism towards these formerly oppressed nationalities.

These vast new republics of the Soviet Union had different customs, languages, and economies than Russia had--and diverse attitudes towards the sexes, gender expression and sexuality. Some of these societies, closer to the legacy of their communal pasts, appeared to retain more widespread acceptance of same-sex love and trans expression, even where class divisions had formed.

Historian Laura Engelstein writes that in the early 1900s in tsarist Russia, jurist V.D. Nabokov had noted that laws of homosexuality "had changed over time and still varied across cultural traditions; there was no single, absolute standard common even to the Christian world upon which to base consistent legal norms."

She concludes that "Nabokov must have been aware of the testimony of judges from the Muslim areas of the Russian empire, who explained the impossibility of enforcing the [tsarist] antisodomy laws among peoples who did not disapprove of homosexual behavior." ("Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia")

Under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin, the early Bolsheviks unlocked the cell door of the tsarist "prison house of nations" by forming a voluntary Soviet Union of Russia with the formerly oppressed nations that had been coerced under tsarist rule. Lenin steeled his party to support the right of self-determination, including the right to separate from Russia, of nations that had been forcibly held in bondage by the imperial state. At the same time, the Bolsheviks organized unity and class solidarity of the workers and peasants in the oppressed and oppressing nations to fight the propertied classes that exploited their labor.

Even the seizure of state power and the setting up a government that defended the right of self-determination, however, did not end racism, national chauvinism or anti-Semitism among "Great Russians" with a single blow. The effort to eradicate every vestige of national oppression and the attitudes it engendered was a process, and an uneven one

And there had been as yet no thorough historical materialist view of sexuality. The painstaking task of examining questions of society and culture in order to weed out bigotry and superstition that had resulted from centuries of ruling-class ideology was severely impeded by the relentless imperialist onslaught.

The Soviet Union had no Homosexual Emancipation Movement like the one that had arisen in Germany and had gathered and archived vast cross-cultural, cross-historical information about the sexes, gender expression and sexuality.

Sexual exploitation

Laws were enacted against sodomy and the keeping of "bachi"--cross-dressed, feminine boy dancers kept as prostitutes--in the Soviet Republics of Azerbaijan in 1923, Uzbekistan in 1926 and Turkmen istan in 1927.

The 1928 Uzbek Soviet Socialist Repub lic criminal code, for example, grouped eight laws against male same-sex relations with others adopted against "survivals of primitive custom."

The role of Russian national chauvinism and backward attitudes towards same-sex love and what today would be called "transgender" needs to be thoroughly examined. The greatest contributions, of course, will be made by

revolutionary researchers from those nationalities, who can disentangle historical forms of gender expression and sexuality in their historical context--both ancient and enduring--from forms of commercial exploitation that arose with the development of class relations.

The struggle against sexual exploitation was an important focus of these Soviet laws.

Healey gives the most thoughtful account of this aspect of the laws' intent. "Just as revolutionary jurists had rejected the criminalization of female prostitutes in the Russian republic, in Uzbek and Turkmen law the male prostitute himself was not banned, but virtually every other aspect of the masculine sex trade was prohibited." ("Desire")

Healey elaborates, "The men who kept youthful male prostitutes were regarded by Bolshevik legal drafters as class aliens, capitalists making deals with families to maintain male children and youths, 'educating' their charges, and exploiting them sexually while providing public entertainment. In their first Soviet criminal code of 1927, Bolshevik jurists in the Turkmen SSR adopted similar but less elaborate language, primarily directed against those who committed offenses involving bachi who were minors."

And, "In Uzbekistan, the sexual harassment of men was made a crime, in language that mirrored the Russian republic's pathbreaking 1923 statute protecting women from the same offense."

Next: Soviet 1920s: Lesbians, transgenders and transsexuals

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1920s Soviet Union:

Rights for lesbians, transgenders, transsexuals

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 12

By Leslie Feinberg

p class="first">According to historian Dan Healey, "Unlike their male counterparts, Russian women who had erotic relations with members of their own sex had less access to the public sphere and so were less able to construct for themselves a coherent subculture with the attributes of the male homosexual world. This is not to suggest that no female homosexual subculture existed in revolutionary Russia."

Healey has made a great contribution towards digging up some of the records of the lives of lesbians, masculine females and transsexual men in revolutionary Russia during the 1920s. Much of this research can be found in his book "Sexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia." (Univer sity of Chicago Press, 2001)

He offers this caveat: "Adequate sources about this love between lower-class women have yet to emerge, and its character must be judged through the distortions of a single ubiquitous occupation, prostitution."

In the business of prostitution during the capitalist era, "same-sex relations could be sheltered and even tolerated, particularly in licensed brothels, and the freedom (or opportunity) to express same-sex love in this environment was evidently sought by some women as prostitutes and as clients." Brothels, he writes, "constituted a social sphere that undoubtedly sheltered some same-sex relationships," but "this harsh environment offered sex workers rather limited prospects for agency and self-expression."

But the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution both abolished licensed brothels and took over privately owned hotels and other businesses. This had an impact on prostitution. "The abolition of licensed brothels," Healey says, "turned prostitution into a very unstable and dangerous livelihood for female sex workers."

During the 1920s, "The housing shortage and the decline in private control over sheltered urban spaces appeared to drive illicit heterosexual sex into the streets, railway stations and carriages, restaurants, bathhouses, and taxicabs.

"Russian historians have argued that more urban women and more declassed women from the former elite supposedly turned to casual or occasional heterosexual prostitution in the 1920s as urban

unemployment hit them hardest."

The Bolsheviks tried to abolish sexual exploitation, but they did not prosecute the women. "The revolutionary regime repeatedly declared that women who sold their bodies were victims of economic exploitation, not to be criminalized, and campaigns to discourage them from taking up sex work were launched."

However, ending the economic need that drove people into prostitution required raising the living standard for all. The constant imperialist sabotage of the Soviet economy from within and without, and the devastation that was the legacy of the world war, made that essential economic task difficult.

Demanded right to same-sex marriage

In both Europe and the U.S. at that time, very rigid social codes enforced what was deemed appropriate behavior and dress for males and females. In Soviet Russia, however, "masculine" females were finding a prominent place in the early revolutionary society. They included many "out lesbians." Masculine, cross-dressing females could be found in academic and cultural institutions as well as in the military--even high up in the Red Army command.

This acceptance sheds light on the vulgar anti-communist typecasting of Soviet women as so "mannish" that they might really be males in drag.

"If there was any sign of a lesbian subculture moving into the public realm of urban streetscapes, the workplace, or halls of study," Healey elaborates, "it was in the 'almost masculine' styles cultivated by some women entering public life. Medical and lay sources confirm that, at least in towns, the woman regarded as 'masculine' was a fixture of early Soviet society."

Healey says: "Their image as energetic and enterprising participants in the new society's political, economic and military life earned the so-called 'active' (that is, imitative of 'masculine' traits) female homosexual admiration from some sexological authorities."

In an earlier essay Healey notes, "In a 1929 discussion about 'transvestites' and the 'intermediate sex' conducted by the Expert Medi cal Council of the Com mis sariat of Health, women of the 'masculinized type' (cross-dressing army commanders, for example) were considered with fascination and indulgence."

And some of these cross-dressing females demanded the right to same-sex marriage. ("Russian Queen")

But while there was an "out" social current of masculine females who were identified with same-sex love, other female-bodied individuals sought to live as males.

Was the motivation of all these female-bodied individuals to express their masculinity and/or cross-dress driven solely by sexuality? In other words, in today's U.S. terms, were they all "lesbians"? Or would some of them be more accurately identified as "transgender"

or "transsexual"?

Transgender and transsexual lives emerge

The Bolsheviks tried to replace mysticism and idealism with a scientific approach to all social and economic questions, including gender expression and sexuality and what in modern terms would be called "transsexuality."

"Soviet psychiatry of the 1920s took an interest in women who convincingly occupied a male gender identity," Healey states, "and in accordance with the evolving sexological categories of European science, labeled them 'female homosexuals' or occasionally, 'transvestites.'"

Healey adds that "The reasons why some women decided to acquire manhood by changing their identity documents, assuming male variants of their names, and altering their dress, manners, and hairstyle, are hard to reconstruct."

One of the most famous of these individuals was the soldier Evgenii Federovich, born Evgeniia. While posted with a regiment, Federovich married a woman postal employee in a provincial town in 1922. When Federovich's birth sex was discovered, local authorities charged the marriage was a "crime against nature." But the Commissariat of Justice found that the marriage was "legal, because concluded by mutual consent."

Evgenii Federovich wrote using concepts of the period in which homosexuality and intermediate sex were intertwined. Federovich argued for acceptance of "same sex love ... as a particular variation" of human sexuality and stated with conviction that once individuals of the "intermediate sex" were "no longer oppressed and smothered by their own lack of consciousness and by petty-bourgeois disrespect," their lives would become "socially worthwhile."

Demand for sex reassignment

As the Bolsheviks tried to examine social questions in a scientific light, individuals came forward to press social demands on the scientific community. That included the request for medical sex reassignment.

A 23-year-old female-bodied respondent to a 1923 sex survey of students at Sverdlov University in Moscow wrote, "I want to be a man, I impatiently await scientific discoveries of castration and grafting of male organs (glands)." The student expres sed optimism that science would one day be able to achieve this desired goal.

Healey explains that this request was not exceptional or unusual.

However, "The medical techniques of gender reassignment in Soviet Russia in the 1920s were as rudimentary and broadly unsuccessful as those then available in the West."

Despite this limitation, individuals began seeking out "clinical psychiatrists and biologists engaged in the emergent study of the mechanisms of sex differentiation" to request sex reassignment.

'Passing' in the countryside?

It's not clear from the following description by Healey whether he is talking about the pre- or post-revolutionary epochs, or both. "Outside of Russia's great cities, some 'female homosexuals' turned to more traditional methods of appropriating the privileges of masculinity, effecting self-transformations with clothing and ges ture that allowed them to 'pass' as men."

Healey ascribes sexuality as a primary reason why some would live as another sex. "Some used their acquired masculinity as a pathway to sexual relations with other women," he writes. "These total transformations typified the survival of the 'passing woman' in Russian culture."

Sexuality may, or may not, have been a driving factor for some individuals, but it doesn't explain the entire phenomenon. Many of these individuals must certainly have lived without a sexual partner for fear of being "outed." Therefore, going "underground" with an identity would not have easily facilitated finding sexual partners.

And it was no secret in any village or rural area that there were jobsand greater anonymity--in the cities.

At the time, of course, homosexuality was inextricably linked to the "intermediate sex." However, in actuality, a feminine homosexual female would have found it difficult to live as a male. Comfort with mas culine gender expression and body type certainly also played an important role.

It would also be of great interest to know whether these individuals were "in the closet" or whether some found social acceptance--unspoken or not--among the peasantry. While peasants had been chained to the land under medieval conditions in the tsarist era and force-fed superstition and prejudice as a class, they were keen observers of variance in nature. And Healey himself notes that the sexual patterns and practices of the mass of Russians was marked by pagan survivals. The pre-class beliefs about the sexes, gender expression and sexuality still held some sway amongst the peasantry.

Healey found the research of a lexicographer who, gathering material in the 1830s and 1850s in central Russia, discovered numerous terms for masculine females, and none of them were insults. And the researcher found that female-bodied peasants were defined as "resembling a man in their appearance, movements, voice, et cetera," "by structure, by body formation," or because they might "even approach the condition of a 'hermaphrodite-woman."

This fact from Healey's study of the peasantry is very illuminating: "Rural and lower-class Russians possessed an array of terms to describe individuals who appeared or behaved like members of the opposite sex. They associated this gender marginality with hermaphroditism observed in domesticated animals, linking social qualities with the familiar phenomenon of physical sexual indeterminacy."

Next: 1930s--Political reversals

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Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series, part 13

1930s USSR: Survival with setbacks

By Leslie Feinberg

Male same-sex love was re-criminalized in the Soviet Union in 1933. In 1936, measures were introduced banning abortion and making divorce more difficult to obtain. (Abortion for medical reasons was restored in 1955, and free abortion on demand was re-legalized in 1968.)

Upon seizing state power in October 1917, the Bolsheviks had struck down the tsarist laws against homosexuality and abortion and eased restrictions on divorce. Why, then, this political reversal after more than a decade and a half?

For diehard anti-communists, no explanation of why setbacks occurred in the Soviet Union will convince them that in its more than seven decades of development there was still much worth defending from the point of view of the working class.

But for those who study past revolutions in order to strengthen the modern movement to achieve socialism--a system that will flourish in a planned world economy--a much more thorough examination of this period is essential, and no glib answers should be accepted as good coin.

The seizure of state power by the numerically small Russian working class, allied with the vast peasantry, did not establish socialism. A revolution is not a single act. It is a process.

The state based on this workers' revolution liberated turf on which to build a planned economy which, to be socialist, had to build the economic base of the impoverished, war-torn country, in order to breathe life into the demands of the revolution: peace, bread and land.

Russia was still semi-feudal and semi-colonial--the weakest link in the capitalist chain. Technologically under-developed.

This was the material reality.

People "make their own history," Karl Marx wrote, "but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past." ("The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte")

Cleaning the Augean stable

If all the Bolsheviks had to do was get rid of the dominant ideas of the old exploiting class, ideas which had permeated the population of laborers in the fields and the factories--national chauvinism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, anti-gay and anti-trans attitudes, superstition-the task of cleaning this Augean stable would have been formidable.

But in order to change social ideas, it was necessary to change the material conditions--to raise the productive level in the workers' state. And world imperialism, howling like ravenous wolves at its borders, did everything possible to hamper that historic effort.

Lenin wrote concretely about this in 1919 in relation to women's liberation. "Not a single democratic party in the world, not even the most advanced bourgeois republic, had done in decades so much as a hundredth part of what we did in our very first year in power. We actually razed to the ground the infamous laws placing women in a position of inequality, restricting divorce and surrounding it with disgusting formalities, denying recognition to children born out of wedlock, enforcing a search for their fathers, etc., laws numerous survivals of which, to the shame of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism, are to be found in all civilized countries."

However, he concluded, "Notwith standing all the liberating laws that have been passed, woman continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labor on barbar ously unproductive, petty, nerve-wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real emancipation of women ... will begin only when a mass struggle is started against this petty domestic economy, or rather when it is transformed on a mass scale into large-scale socialist economy." ("A Great Beginning," Collected Works, vol. 29, pp. 408-34)

Herculean tasks

The "dead hand of the past" handed the Russian Revolution three enormous responsibilities. "The new, infant workers' state, the Union of Soviet Socialist Repub lics," wrote Workers World Party founder Sam Marcy, "had thrust upon it three Herculean tasks utterly unprecedented in the entire history of the class struggle.

"It had the duty and obligation to reorganize on a revolutionary basis the left wing of the social democratic movement, put it on a communist basis, and lay the foundation for a new and revolutionary international. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were thus obligated from the start not only to give revolutionary leadership at home but, in a way, to become the general staff of the world revolution which seemed visible on the horizon, especially in Western Europe and later in the East, in China.

"Its second task, no less urgent and intimately connected with it, was for the new workers' state to defend itself against the most barbaric assaults by the united front of the imperialists, from Vladivostok to Murmansk.

"And thirdly, it had to begin to lay socialist economic foundations and

raise the living standards of the workers and peasants who had passed through a most horrible period of destruction, civil war and famine." ("The Signi fi cance of Euro-communism," WW, July 11, 1977)

Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik seizure of power, was no utopian. He had no illusions that the capitalist class in Russia, or the enraged imperialists who surrounded the young workers' state, would be won over by "moral suasion" to stop attacking the revolution. In fact, he and other revolutionary leaders did not think the workers' state could survive long without the support of workers and oppressed peoples' around the world rising up in a groundswell of revolution in order to provide material support--globalizing socialism.

In Lenin's report to the Eighth Congress of the Bolshevik Party on March 18, 1919, on behalf of the Central Committee, he said that "it is inconceivable for the Soviet Republic to exist alongside of the imperialist states for any length of time. One or the other must triumph in the end." (Collected Works, vol. 29, p. 153)

A year earlier, on April 23, 1918, Lenin had explained to the Moscow Soviet, "We are a revolutionary working-class contingent that has advanced to the forefront, not because we are better than other workers, not because the Russian proletariat is superior to the working class of other countries, but solely because we were one of the most backward countries in the world. We shall achieve final victory only when we succeed at last in conclusively smashing international imperialism, which relies on the tremendous strength of its equipment and discipline.

"But we shall achieve victory only together with all the workers of other countries of the whole world. ... Our backwardness has put us in the forefront, and we shall perish unless we are capable of holding out until we receive powerful support from workers who have risen in revolt in other countries." (Ibid, vol. 27, p. 233)

Something had to give, Marcy stressed. While the result was not the dismantling of the workers' state and its economy, as the imperialists had hoped, some of the social gains of the early revolution were set back. The most left-wing militants in the Bolshevik Party, if they had not died on the front lines defending the revolution, were being pushed back in an internal struggle. And the population was exhausted by imperialist war and intervention, famine and want.

Revolution bent, but did not break

Any study of how and why important political rights that had been won for same-sex love and women were reversed in the Soviet Union in the 1930s has to take into consideration the effects that encirclement, economic embargo and isolation, sabotage, civil war and other weapons of unrelenting attack by world capitalism had on this vast but economically underdeveloped country.

Stripping historical reality from these steps backward does historic injustice to the tens of millions of workers and peasants of many nationalities, sexes, genders and sexualities who built the revolution

with their sweat and defended it against the onslaught of world imperialism with their blood.

And it merely fans the flames of anti-communism, serving to derail the forward motion of the planet's working class and oppressed peoples towards genuine liberation.

An honest look at the measures taken against male homosexuality and abortion in the 1930s Soviet Union must ask: What effect did the low level of the productive apparatus and the high level of scarcity and deprivation have on the political goals of the Bolshevik Party? How did this frustrate the early goals of achieving the liberation of women and greater freedom of sexuality from state regulation?

With the danger of a new and even more destructive imperialist war gathering like a storm against the workers' state, creating an imperative need to quickly build a military force capable of defending the Soviet population, how did the industrialization and rapid collectivization of the peasantry in the 1930s produce a sea change in the spheres of women's societal role, and official attitudes towards gender expression and sexuality?

And perhaps most importantly, did these political reversals mean, as some said, that the Soviet Union ceased to be a workers' state that deserved the support of laboring and oppressed peoples around the world as it fought for its very life against world imperialism?

Next: Political setbacks for gays and women, and the 'seismic gender shift'

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Lesbian, bay, bi and trans pride series part 14

1930s Soviet Union: 'Seismic gender shift'

By Leslie Feinberg

The political backslide that resulted in the re-criminalization of male homosexuality and banning of abortion in the 1930s in the Soviet Union did not take place in an economic, military or social void. The point of examining these conditions is not to them away" but to serve as a tool for today's movement for socialism to strengthen its understanding of revolutionary process.

Women's and same-sex rights had been politically catapulted ahead by the 1917 Russian Revolution. But when the isolated, impoverished and embattled workers' state could not raise the living standards of the population quickly enough to provide economic and social freedom from the old patriarchal, heterosexual nuclear family bequeathed by class society, then both women's rights and same-sex rights suffered setbacks.

The broadest outlines of this economic crisis are apparent in the efforts to liberate Soviet women.

William H. Mandel, in his book "Soviet Women," noted that after the seizure of state power in October 1917, "In a matter of months, the new government legislated more than the upper-class feminists had ever asked for: suffrage of course, divorce and civil marriage laws which made marriage a voluntary alliance, elimination of distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate children, employment rights equal to those of men, equal pay for equal work, universal paid late-pregnancy and early-maternity leave. Overnight, the status of women in Russia became far and away the world's most advanced."

But the revolution had been made in a single city--Petrograd--which at that time was the capital, and then spread to Moscow. The country was left technologically underdeveloped as a result of feudalism and the greed of foreign imperialism. And its working class was tiny.

The cities were isolated and famished. By early 1918, with German troops still occupying much of the grain-producing west, workers in the cities were surviving on starvation rations: nothing but four ounces a day of bread.

A combined force of the imperialists, forces loyal to the ousted Provisional Government and the monarchists tried to launch a counter-revolution.

Trying to roll aside obstacles

Writing in 1971, Soviet scholar Helen Emelianova commented about the early workers' state, "An acute contradiction had arisen: the participation of female workers in the socialist revolution was considerable, but immediately after the revolution their numbers were extremely few among members of the party, in the soviets, in factory committees, in trade unions." (Quoted in "Soviet Women.")

Mandel stressed, "Peasant women (four fifths of the total female population), housewives (a majority among urban women), and houseworkers (an extremely large group) had hardly been involved at all" in the revolution.

To address the critical need to reach out to masses of women, the Bolsheviks organized the First Russia-Wide Congress of Women Workers and Peasants in November 1918. No men were present at the meetings.

About 300 to 500 women were expected; 1,147 attended.

One delegate described the goal of the congress's work: "to explain their rights to the millions of women in even the most remote corners of the country, and call upon them to take an active part in building a new life."

One of the resolutions of the congress stressed that "housework is a heavy burden on female workers and peasants and ... negating the eight-hour workday for them, interferes with their becoming revolutionaries."

The delegates decided to organize special groups for women. And the communists urged their party to set up a women's department. Although some currents of men in the party reportedly argued that this would "divide the working class" along sex lines, they did not predominate. The Bolshevik Party Women's Department, known as Zhenotdel, was established in 1919, even as civil war ravaged the workers' state.

The following year, in 1920, 60,000 women were elected to organize women. At Lenin's insistence, this work was paid so that they could be full-time organizers. However, even with small stipends, these women could reach only about 2 percent of the female population, mostly urban.

During the 1920s, Zhenotdel worked to liberate women from exhausting individual housework, and led attempts to create socialized childcare, large-scale dining halls and public laundries.

Zhenotdel's rationale was that "socializing this work would bolster the new socialist economy by replacing the inefficiencies of individual women's household labor with economies of scale and would also raise productivity by shifting millions of new workers into Soviet industries," according to historian Thomas T. Shrand, in his essay "Socialism in One Gender."

Women would not only be socially "equal" to men, they would break

out of stultifying isolation, become productive members of society in the fullest sense of the word, and thereby contribute their skills and insights to the revolutionary process for social progress.

Dead hand of history, iron fist of imperialism

These Bolsheviks were not utopian socialists, however. "The Zhenotdel approach to liberating women involved integrating them into a super-productive socialist economy that would be created following a global (or at least, continental) revolution," Shrand notes. "In this scenario, Russia would have access to the rest of Europe's technology and resources, which would allow it to modernize its economy and to invest in the infrastructure of nurseries, daycare centers, and other institutions that would make women's emancipation possible."

The defeat of revolutions in Germany and elsewhere dashed these hopes. The fists of capital were clenched and striking the workers' state externally and internally. The country was surrounded and invaded by imperialist armies soon after it first liberated territory to begin building socialism.

And as a result, the dead hand of the past weighed heavily on the revolution.

The population was hungry and exhausted by war. The Bolshevik Party had lost many of its most revolutionary elements in the struggle to defend the workers' state. Lenin, the leader of the October 1917 Revolution and architect of the early years of socialist construction, had died in 1924 from complications resulting from an assassination attempt. It took many years before the benefits of a planned economy reached the people.

Between 1924 and 1934, the phenomenon of "postcard" divorces grew. Under the new marriage laws, a spouse could simply inform the authorities that the marriage had dissolved. Mandel wrote that, "if the other party was not physically present, a form postcard would break the news. The major intent of the law was to free millions of women who had been married off against their will under traditional patriarchal procedures. It proved catastrophically counterproductive. Women lost the protection against abandonment with a child or children that they had formerly had." Material need, not love, was still the most important impetus for many marriages.

The technologically underdeveloped workers' state continued to be wracked by internal class warfare. During the New Economic Policy in the early 1920s, when the market in agricultural goods was restored after the war, rich peasants--kulaks--withheld food from the cities in order to drive up prices. This virtual starving of the city workers spurred on the decision by the leadership to collectivize agriculture.

Industrialization and its impact on women

The task was still clear and compelling--the workers' state had to build up industry and hike productivity to meet the needs of its vast population. But a constant state of capitalist siege hampered that urgent objective.

"Rather than retreating from the goal of socialism," Shrand states, "Stalin and his followers decided that the USSR would have to create the economic prerequisites for it in isolation, while surrounded by hostile capitalist powers. From this perspective, the campaign for industrialization and modernization became, among other things, a desperate struggle to arm the Soviet Union for the defense of socialism."

The first five-year plan, ratified by the party in 1928, set a goal of a 250-percent growth in overall industrial development and a 330-percent increase in heavy industry. All industry and services were nationalized by the workers' state, thousands of new factories and industrial centers were constructed throughout the Soviet Union and productivity was planned by quotas. However, the investment required to build heavy industry created painful shortages in consumer goods and services.

The five-year plan also attempted to rapidly convert small-scale peasant agriculture into large-scale state collective farms. Resistance from the peasantry--particularly the wealthy kulaks--created a disastrous and widespread famine.

The threat facing the workers' state--from within and from without--was enormous.

Shrand offers his insight into the enormous impact that this swift industrialization had on Soviet women. "Between the years of 1929 and 1941, Soviet society experienced what might be described as a gender-quake, a seismic shift in sexual divisions of labor produced by the largest national peacetime expansion of women's employment in world history.

"As a result of this rapid industrialization campaign, over 10 million women began wage-labor in the industrial and service sectors of the Soviet economy," he continued. "The Soviet government actively recruited women for industrial employment, created affirmative action programs to train female technicians and skilled workers, and greatly expanded childcare and cafeteria facilities to free working women from some of their domestic obligations."

Steps forward and backward

The continuing threats from imperialism required a mobilization to defend the Soviet Union, and that demanded development of heavy industry and military growth.

The marshaling of so much investment of the USSR's resources in these branches of manufacturing, Shrand stressed, "came at the expense of the light industries, which not only employed many women, but also produced the consumer goods that might have lightened their domestic labor.

"The new priorities also restricted the construction of cafeterias, laundries, daycare centers, and other institutions necessary for Bolshevik-style women's emancipation."

In 1930 Zhenotdel, weakened since the late 1920s, had been formally abolished.

"The Soviet government actually began developing a Five-Year Plan for Women's Labor, but the effort to mobilize women was not accompanied by a commitment to freeing them from domestic labor," Shrand concluded. "Although social services did expand somewhat during the 1930s, they did so within limits, and only to the extent necessary to recruit a certain number of women workers."

The formal liberation of peasants from serfdom in 1861, the creation of urban industrial centers and the dislocation and carnage of the first imperialist war had shaken the medieval patriarchal family structure. Now this rapid industrialization was also having a profound impact on the sexes.

And it was in this period that official attitudes towards gender expression and same-sex love were also shifting.

Next: Gender, sexuality and national defense: Dual nature of 1930s Soviet state

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Progress and regression

Sex and gender in 1930s USSR

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 15

By Leslie Feinberg

The question of when male homosexuality was re-criminalized in the Soviet Union is easy to determine: 1933-1934. Why such a regressive move occurred is, while politically indefensible, not inexplicable.

The czarist anti-homosexual legislation had been removed by the revolutionary Bolshevik leaders immediately after the October 1917 Revolution. When the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic first codified its own laws in 1922 and 1926, no anti-gay laws were written.

As late as 1929, the top medical body in the Soviet Union--the Expert Medical Council of the Commissariat of Health--held a conference to take up questions of homosexuality, cross-dressing, transsexuality and intersexuality (referred to as "hermaphroditism").

These deliberations did not demonstrate a uniform view, nor were they devoid of the prejudices or limitations on understanding of that era, but they were taken up with genuine scientific concentration. And the impact of, and respect for, the work of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld--a leader of the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement--was still apparent in the USSR.

Prominent clinical psychiatrist P. B. Gannushkin said that he "constantly encountered" requests for surgical sex change.

Biologist N. K. Kol'tsov asserted, ahead of his time, "Of course, there is no intermediate sex, but rather an infinite quantity of intermediate sexes."

Some doctors defended cross-dressing females, described as very masculine, and proposed that they have a right to marry women. Kol'tsov, showing his confines of consciousness, disputed this, saying a law should be written to block a cross-dressed female from wedding a woman.

But historian Dan Healey notes in his book "Sexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia" that "the minutes record no support from colleagues," and Kol'tsov's suggestion didn't find its way into the final conference resolution.

However, the two-line struggle taking place in the USSR at the time-

-"nature" vs. "nurture"--was visible even during the 1929 deliberations. And this ideological battle would have great bearing on subsequent official views of homosexuality and transgender.

A strong current of scientists looked favorably on cross-dressing, masculine females believed to be lesbians. Their condition was seen as biologically based. They were considered strong and loyal to the workers' state, particularly those in the Red Army.

But they considered feminine, cross-dressing males, presumed to all be homosexual, a dangerous weakness in the ranks of the military. And this form of self-expression and sexuality was seen to be a problem of *byt* or social life.

This nature vs. nurture debate at the 1929 conference later emerged more visibly as a two-line struggle that reshaped the direction of the scientific and political approach to questions of same-sex love.

The 1930 Great Soviet Encyclopedia extended strong support to Hirschfeld's Homosexual Emancipation Movement. "In 1930, Sereiskii's Great Soviet Ency clopedia article on the same topic linked the endocrinological hypothesis to a robust endorsement of Hirschfeld's campaign for homosexual emancipation and for the integration of the alienated homosexual 'into the new collective,'" Healey notes.

The encyclopedia entry stressed that criminalizing homosexual men was an illustration of the cruel and irrational acts of bourgeois jurists.

But an "ethnographic sketch," included by the editors as an appendix penned by P. Preobrashenskii about "homosexual love" among the peoples of the Far North--the Chuchki, Koriaki and Kamchadal--and in the Islamic cultures in the Soviet Republics revealed the fault line.

Preobrashenskii argued that the origins of the widespread expression of same-sex love in these cultures, enjoy ing ancient acceptance, was not biologically based but "to a significant extent bear a social character."

Historian Laura Engelstein in "Soviet Policy" explains that by the second edition of the 1930 encyclopedia, the editors "denounced homosexuality as a feature of capitalist society, in which, they asserted, homosexuality was left 'de facto unpenalized.'"

The question is why. In what soil were these changes rooted?

Economic, military pressure cooker

Famine, and military and economic warfare by world capital, were burning the revolutionary fuel of the population and the left wing of the Bolshevik Party at a rapid rate in the 1920s. The subsequent need to build an industrial base with the speed of lightning--at the sacrifice of civilian goods and services for the vast tens of millions-was requisite in order to defend the USSR militarily and lay the foundation for a rise in the overall living standard.

The industrial component of the first five-year plan--steel and machinery product ion, coal mines and oil fields--exceeded

expectations. Begun in 1929, the goals were met in 1932, before the plan's end date. A second plan was set in motion in 1934.

The transportation network grew, beginning to link the vast country, canals were dug and the Moscow Metro began running in 1935.

This industrial boom and its accomplishments in the planned Soviet economy shone against the chaos of the Great Depression in the capitalist countries.

But everything is relative. The USSR, the only workers' state in the world, was trying to pull itself up out of extreme material underdevelopment and at the same time advance from semi-feudal social relations to ones more advanced than in the capitalist countries. This would have been a huge task even in times of peace. But, while the depression in the West gave the USSR a breathing space for a few years, by 1933 it was clear that the revolutionary potential of the proletariat in Western Europe had been crushed and that German imperialism was on the road to military expansion once again.

By 1938, when Britain signed the Munich Pact with Germany, Italy and France, it was because the "democratic" imperialists in Europe were giving Ger many the go-ahead to expand eastward. Another war was on the horizon. The Soviet Union had to industrialize at break-neck speed, much of it channeled into military defense of the workers' state.

In the face of relative scarcity and economic inequality, and an urgent need for the skills acquired during the czarist era in order to build the economic and military infrastructure, more conservative elements gained ascendancy on the shop floor and in the Bolshevik Party. The working class was increasingly politically disenfranchised and the worker democracy that Lenin and the left-wing Bolsheviks had tried to foster--even during war-time conditions--suffered.

The state did not, could not, wither away. In fact, military spending and social prioritizing took its toll on efforts to build socialism and advance revolutionary consciousness-building.

In this economic, military and political pressure cooker, official attitudes shifted, bolstering old prejudices against women and reinforcing ideals of gender expression.

'Masculine professions' movement

Economic underdevelopment and the need to free men for military defense had spurred the massive recruitment of women into the process of rapid industrialization as early as the first five-year plan.

To do so required confronting gender stereotyping of skilled work. Acquired skills were viewed as socially "masculine."

The temporary reintroduction of some capitalist relations within the planned economy in 1921--known as the New Economic Policy--was designed to help stimulate the economy. Lenin had warned of the risks inherent in the measure.

One result of the NEP was the emboldening of male managers and skilled workers who had acquired their trade during the czarist period. As they regained some shop-floor predominance, they tried to block women from gaining these skills, defining mechanical ability as a "masculine trait."

However, notes historian Thomas T. Shrand: "As the USSR began mobilizing for war with Poland and Finland in Sept ember 1939, the party instructed union, Komsomol and industrial organizations to support the so-called 'masculine professions' movement, which aimed to recruit women into fields that had previously been considered too skilled or physically demanding for women. In anticipation of a military crisis that would drain off skilled male workers, industrial officials began encouraging women to work as locomotive engineers, engine machinists, open-hearth furnace workers, and to enter other occupations from which they had previously been excluded."

But rather than emphasizing the need to employ women as part of the revolutionary process of liberating them, the official explanation now was that recruiting women workers would free men to defend the socialist state.

The military motto used to describe this industrial shift was "work that strengthens the rear of production, which assures the uninterrupted and precise work of production itself."

The slogan also elevated a tactic to a theory--and one that contained a theoretical error, at that.

In reality, as important as the front lines of armed defense of the workers' state were, they were not producing goods and services. Workers in the industries of the USSR--more than 10 million of them women--were the front lines of production.

Gender contradiction: old alongside the new

During the Second Five-Year Plan, 1932-1937, an estimated 82 percent of all new workers joining industry was female. The birth rate was dropping.

On the one hand, old patriarchal "family values" re-emerged against this backdrop of economic and social upheaval.

During the 1930s, health studies and legislation protecting industrial laborers focused on the impact specific jobs involving heavy lifting or tractor driving had on women's reproductive capacities. While this shows a concern for women workers, similar studies were not done on the hazards of jobs, no matter how dangerous, on men's reproductive capabilities.

This trend towards encouraging all women to be mothers reached its zenith in 1936 when abortion and the sale of contraceptives were banned. Women received economic incentives and medals for bearing seven or more children.

Pravda criticized "so-called free love" and "all disorderly sex life."

Femininity was upheld as a virtue. However, Healey noted, women viewed as masculine or lesbian were not demonized or pathologized.

In political educational campaigns, soldiers were portrayed as masculine heroes, women as feminine producers and reproducers. From a class standpoint, the working class as a whole was portrayed as masculine and the peasantry as feminine.

However, even as old thinking was regenerated, new and profound social changes were breaking like waves.

Healey writes that as women peasants, collective farmers and urban workers were called up in massive numbers during the 1930s to enter public life and wage labor, "Women in these spheres were compelled and encouraged to emancipate themselves from patriarchal fathers and husbands, who were not to stand in the way of their progress towards careers beyond the home."

But specifically and concretely, how and why did these social, economic and military conditions specifically warp a sector of official attitude regarding homosexuality, beginning in 1933?

These questions have vital meaning today, because this political backsliding is held up by virtually all anti-communist historians of the period as "proof" that socialism is not viable to liberate human sexuality from state regulation.

It's time for the communist movement as a whole to become expert on these developments and to lay claim to the historical lessons in order to fortify its own revolutionary analysis.

Next: 1930s struggle--'Can a homosexual be a member of the Party?'

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Lesbian, gay, bit and trans pride series part 16

Can a homosexual be a member of the Communist Party?

By Leslie Feinberg

Years before the actual 1933 law recriminalizing male homosexuality appeared on the books in the Soviet Union, the shift in official attitude within the ascendant political current was becoming apparent.

The political error evolved out of how scientists and jurists posed the "nature vs. nurture" debate in regard to homosexuality. But what fed the ideological problem were the deep prejudices left over from centuries of unequal and unjust economic relations, some of which were revived as the revolution, isolated and embattled, struggled to survive.

Furthermore, there were no cross-cultural, cross-historical annals of ancient evidence from which to draw a materialist view of how variance in human sexuality, gender expression and sexes has been present in all societies and was once accepted.

And, to be fair, the same debate about a biological vs. a social explanation for homosexuality was taking place on a world scale among progressive sexologists of that epoch. Some of the leading activist figures of the German Homosexual Eman cipation Movement were arguing that homosexuality was a biological anomaly.

While the debate in the Soviet Union may have taken the same form, however, context is everything in politics.

In Germany, a significant segment of the biological determinist wing of science and medicine would go on to "justify" the fascist state's extermination of millions of people based on a eugenics argument that these "birth defects" should be eradicated.

The opposite happened in the Soviet Union. The revolution brought increasing tolerance for those whose difference was believed to be a product of birth chemistry. At the same time, lawmakers and scientists worked to eradicate what they believed was harmful social conditioning left over from class society.

For example, in October 1917, revolutionary Bolsheviks abolished the tsarist anti-homosexual law. The Soviet Criminal Code established in 1922, and amended in 1926, did not include homosexuality as an offense. This reflected the belief that science, not law, should deal with matters of sexual difference.

Historian Laura Engelstein summarized: "Soviet sexologists in the 1920s participated in the international movement for sexual reform and criminologists deplored the use of penal sanctions to censor private sexual conduct." ("Sexual History of the Political Left")

But conversely, laws were passed against sodomy and the prostitution of young cross-dressed, feminine boy dan cers in the Soviet republics of Azerbaijan in 1923, Uzbekistan in 1926 and Turk menistan in 1927. While in part aimed against sexual exploitation, they were explained as trying to eradicate the prevalence and acceptance of homosexuality and trans expression that were "survivals of primitive custom." (From "Homosexual Desire" by Dan Healey)

This attitude, steeped in unexamined national chauvinism, was summed up by P. Preobrazhenski in his appendix to the 1930 Great Soviet Encyclopedia, where he argued that the origins of homosexuality among the peoples of the Far North or the Asian Republics "bear a social character," not a biological root.

Two-line struggle

The same two-line struggle surfaced in science. It was glaringly apparent in a 1929 conference of the leading Soviet medical body-the Expert Medical Council of the Commissariat of Health--held to discuss questions of homosexuality, cross-dressing, transsexuality and intersexuality.

Historian Dan Healey writes that underlying the 1929 council's deliberations "was a sense that the male member of the 'intermediate sex' was the product of nurture, of conditions of *byt* [social life, lifestyle--L.F.] gone wrong. These were deviations that were evidently preventable (except in a small number of congenital cases).

"Their sense of the female 'transvestite' was more deeply 'biologized' and intract able: no hormonal injections could apparently restore her femininity, and indeed, to doctors it appeared that society might have to adjust to the female 'transvestite' by conceding same-sex marriage."

In the "nature vs. nurture" scientific debate, however, those seeking a biological explanation for social phenomena were losing the ideological battle. Accord ing to Healey, a political struggle opened up against "biologizing" scientists, charging that to search for the basis of social ills in individual biology was a form of Menshevik idealism.

This campaign against "biologizing" was rooted in the economic needs of the Five Year Plan to rapidly industrialize and raise agricultural production, Healey explained. "The pragmatic turn in public health was signaled by a change of leadership and a shakeup in the provision of medical care. A reorganization of the Commissariat of Health was ordered by a decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party on 13 December 1929, directing the commissariat to place more emphasis on the needs of industrial workers and collectivized farmers."

As a result, for instance, the interdepartmental commission, which came out of the 1929 medical conference and had planned to meet about transgender expres sion, no longer even existed by 1933.

And science increasingly lost its dominion over social questions like homosexuality, which became more relegated to the realm of the state.

Gay-baiting class enemies

Extra-legal raids in Moscow and Leningrad in which 130 males were arrested in late summer 1933 were the harbinger of the recriminalization of male homosexuality later that year. The men were accused of being "pederasts"--adult males who have sex with boys. Since no records of men having sex with boys at that time are available, it is possible this term was used broadly and crudely to label homosexuality.

Healey examined what was going on in the Soviet Union in 1932 and 1933 that led to these raids and the subsequent law. Large-scale attempts to collectivize agriculture were met by such resistance among the peasants that a mass famine developed in Ukraine and southern Russia, which reportedly claimed 3 to 5 million lives. Millions of peasants were pouring into the cities from the countryside looking for work in the factories.

"The flow of new arrivals in the cities 'ruralized' them," Healey observed, "bringing thousands of new residents who knew little of urban and industrial ways."

Officials carried out a purge of the Communist Party in December 1932-1933, scrutinizing the ranks, which had seen an influx of worker and peasant members.

"In 1933, urban male homosexuals would fall within the larger net of these trends. In the case of this group, international developments also significantly contributed to justifications for the decision to recriminalize sodomy."

Massive military conscription campaigns for defense of the Soviet Union had been underway since 1928. They promoted the role of soldiers as hyper-masculine heroes.

Reports of homosexuality in the German fascist leadership had been made public in 1931 and 1932. The more conservative current in the Soviet party, which had by then assumed the reins of leadership, gay-baited the fascists, as did the imperialist powers.

On Sept. 15, 1933--shortly after German -Soviet relations were severed by the rise of Hitler to power--G. G. lagoda, deputy chief of the Soviet political police, proposed the stricture against male homosexuality.

lagoda reportedly wrote to Joseph Stalin that the legislation was a matter of state security because of the establishment of "networks of salons, centers, dens, groups and other organized formations of pederasts, with the eventual transformation of these organizations

into outright espionage cells.... Pederast activists, using the castelike exclusivity of pederastic circles for plainly counterrevolutionary aims, had politically demoralized various social layers of young men, including young workers, and even attempted to penetrate the army and navy."

Stalin then allegedly forwarded this letter to his Politburo associate L. Kagano vich, saying that "these scoundrels must receive exemplary punishment, and a corresponding guiding decree must be introduced in our legislation."

At no point was lesbianism raised. Masculine lesbians in the ranks and leadership of the military were seen as strong and loyal. Feminine male homosexuals were viewed as weak and untrustworthy.

On Jan. 11, 1934, the Ukraine--the second-largest republic in the USSR--became the first republic to incorporate a statue against public homosexuality and male prostitution in its penal code. No minimum sentence was set.

And in 1933 and 1934, a prohibition against male homosexuality throughout the USSR--which created a 5-year prison penalty--was passed without public fanfare or explanation. In a study of eight Moscow trials of males accused of public homosexuality from 1935 to 1941, only one case in 1935 showed awareness of the new law.

'Can a homosexual be a party member?'

The most publicly raised voice of the left-wing opposition to this legal move was that of a British communist living in Moscow. Harry Whyte, an editorial employee of the Moscow Daily News, challenged Stalin on the decree in a long letter received in May 1934.

"Whyte's long missive opened with a question for Stalin: 'Can a homosexual be considered a person fit to become a member of the Communist Party?' The journalist laid out Marxist arguments against the blanket prohibition of sodomy, which, he claimed, introduced unwarranted contradictions in Soviet social life by imposing 'sexual leveling' on a harmless minority and by ignoring science on the issue." ("Homosexual Desire")

Whyte also drew analogies with arbitrary discrimination against women, national minorities and people of color.

The letter, once received, was promptly archived. Yet it was a continuation of the history of left communist struggle for a progressive position.

While publicly ignoring Whyte's letter, Stalin apparently turned to cultural icon Maxim Gorky. An article by Gorky entitled "Proletarian Humanism" appeared in both Pravda and Izvestia on May 23, 1934. In that now oft-cited article, Gorky offered the "first public explanation of the recriminalization of male homosexuality, and it placed the question squarely within the terms of the propaganda war between Fas cism and Communism." ("Homo sexual Desire")

Gorky maintained that homosexuals were not a social minority that needed to be defended in a workers' state--an obvious polemic against Whyte: "In the land where the proletariat governs courageously (muzhestvenno; also translated as manfully) and successfully, homosexuality, with its corrupting effect on the young, is considered a social crime punishable under the law. By contrast, in the 'cultivated land' of the great philosophers, scholars and musicians [Gorky meant Germany--L.F.], it is practiced freely and with impunity. There is already a sarcastic saying: 'Destroy homosexuality and fascism will disappear.'" ("Soviet Policy Towards Male Homosexuality")

Gay-baiting class enemies

In addition to gay-baiting fascists and fascist-baiting homosexuals, currents of officialdom also used epithets of "effeminacy" and "effete" homosexuality to label elements of the old ruling classes and to help build the image of the proletarian society and its soldiers as hypermasculine.

Justice Commissar Nikolai Krylenko referred to the anti-gay law in his 1936 speech to the party's Central Executive Committee as aimed at "the remnants of enemies ... who do not wish to admit that they are doomed by history to finally concede their place to us."

These charges were also leveled at political opponents. Some, presumably, were not enemies of the revolution; some were.

For example, Nikolai Kliuev, the unofficial poet laureate of the peasantry who wrote openly about being a homosexual, was arrested on Feb. 2, 1934, and charged with counter-revolutionary agitation. He had earlier refused a demand by Ivan Gronski, chief editor of Izvestia, to "write normal verses." But his arrest, Healey wrote, was "probably because of the inflammatory invective of his poems denouncing collectivization."

Certainly the visible social current of the "people of the moonlight" in Russian history had always come from the upper classes and the intelligentsia--musicians, dancers, literati and others. But the point is not to untangle the knotted charges of homosexuality and subversion. The real matter is that it is flat-out wrong to link the issues.

Homosexuality and transgender expression appear in all economic classes in society. Communists need to be able to stand up against all forms of discrimination and prejudice in waging the class struggle.

Strengthen the union, don't bust it

A great deal of information about the Stalin period has been lost today. The Soviet Union was ravaged by World War II, worker democracy was eroded and a counter-revolution finally overturned the workers' state in 1991.

But what is clear is that the left-wing leadership of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party carried out a profound revolution that uprooted private ownership of social wealth and laid the basis for socialist construction. It was immediately assailed by the whole capitalist world. When, after years of imperialist and civil war, which exacerbated the economic isolation and technological underdevelopment, the revolutionary momentum waned and left-wing leaders were suppressed, what was needed was political renewal, not counter-revolution.

Every rank-and-file labor militant today who is faced with bureaucratic leadership in their union knows that what's needed is not to bust up the union but to make it stronger.

The population of the Soviet Union did fight for its existence, and fought hard. More than 20 million gave their lives to defend the workers' state against the German imperialist invasion in World War II.

And despite all the problems and weaknesses of the USSR, and the errors of leaders, on March 17, 1991, some 75 percent of the Soviet people, representing the 15 republics of the USSR, went to the polls and voted not to allow the workers' state to be dismantled. The highest percentage of this vote came from the peoples of Central Asia and the Caucasus, formerly oppressed under tsarism.

Yet world imperialism and the Russian moneyed class trampled on this exercise of worker democracy by dismantling the workers' state soon thereafter. Every error from the Soviet period--including the backward law against homosexuality--was used as an excuse and cover to overturn the state. But the aim was not liberation. It was to subject the vast population of the USSR to the exploitation of the capitalist world market.

Today, the modern struggle for world socialism can be strengthened through an honest analysis of the problems and weaknesses that developed in the first successful workers' state, but only if it thoroughly rejects the anti-communism behind so much of the existing criticism.

Next: Defeat of fascism and birth of "East Germany."

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Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 17

Anti-gay terror in Nazi Germany

By Leslie Feinberg

When it came to turning around prejudices and discrimination against same-sex love, the newly formed German Democratic Republic had to clean up the toxic waste dump of centuries of class prejudice.

The GDR faced particularly huge obstacles in carrying out this onerous task.

The Nazi state had been defeated in 1945 not in a revolution from below but by the advancing Soviet Red Army. The German population as a whole had been fed 12 years of Nazi propaganda, including demonizing and dehumanizing cant about homosexual men and women. After the war, Germany was partitioned by the Allied powers. In the eastern sector, after four years of Soviet occupation in which not only the Nazis but the bourgeois class behind them were removed from power, the German Democratic Republic was established in 1949 and began to construct a socialist economy.

The mass German Homo sexual Emancipation Move ment had been crushed during the rise of fascism. Many thousands of gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans activists had perished in the death camps.

The Soviet Union was in the grip of its own political regression concerning male homosexuality. As the leader of the Communist International, the Soviet Union's political retreat had an impact on the world movement and the positions it took on gay rights.

The revolutionary struggles in Germany and Russia were intrinsically connected. The crushing of the November 1918 Revolution in Germany had dealt a blow to the young Soviet workers' state, which had hoped that class solidarity, material aid and economic cooperation from a more technologically developed socialist country would soon be on its way.

The face of counter-revolution

After years of economic crisis and the growth of a large but divided workers' movement, Hitler's party got the support of the big German capitalists in 1933 to crush any resistance to their rule. In the violent repression that followed, aimed first at the Communists and the left generally, both anti-Semitism and anti-homosexual terror were raised to heights not seen in Europe since the feudal Inquisition.

Once he became second in command in the Nazi Party, Heinrich Himmler--chief of the SS stormtroopers as well as the police--on

June 17, 1936, created the Federal Security Office for Combating Abortion and Homosexuality. Himmler had included homosexuality as one of four illnesses that threatened the existence of Germany. He vowed: "[L]ike stinging nettles we will rip them out, throw them on a heap, and burn them. Otherwise, without being able to fight it, we'll see the end of Germany, the end of the Germanic world."

Today the pink triangle has become recognized around the world as the emblem that those labeled homosexual were forced to wear in German concentration camps. Some were gay, others were accused of same-sex fantasies or fell victim to trumped-up charges by opponents. Estimates of the total number of prisoners forced to wear the pink triangle on their uniforms in Nazi concentration camps range from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands.

German historian Richard Plant, in his now-classic book "The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals," estimated that between 50,000 and 63,000 males were convicted of violating Paragraph 175--the Prussian anti-homosexual law--from 1933 to 1944. More than 25,000 youths were convicted between 1933 and 1940. Some 3,976 were between 14 and 18 years old.

Plant, who fled Frankfurt am Main on Feb. 27, 1933--the day the Reichstag burned to the ground and several weeks after the arrest of his Jewish Socialist father--wrote that "from 1935 on, every gay German man knew that if he was caught he risked being shipped to a concentration camp. There, disease, degradation and almost certain death awaited him." Those who survived faced castration.

Although Himmler made no known statements railing against lesbians, Plant added, "Nevertheless, some--albeit very few--German lesbians were caught in the machinery of the secret police."

He noted that "The major campaign against Germany's homosexuals, which began after the Roehm purge, lasted until about 1939 or 1940, when most German men joined the armed forces. Because Himmler's Gestapo agents had no jurisdiction over the military, it offered a relatively safe refuge for most homosexuals of military age."

As the German military machine rolled over national boundaries in Europe, gays in Alsace-Lorraine and Holland--lands expected to become part of the new Reich--also faced death if captured. All German laws were applied to the people of Alsace-Lorraine, including the newly amended Paragraph 175.

However, the anti-homosexual rampage and violent targeting of the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement was mainly an internal campaign aimed at Germans. It was part and parcel of the domestic counter-revolution that smashed the organization of millions of communists, socialists and progressives, crushing the trade unions and all vehicles of working-class organization.

German capital, which controlled few colonies, had to take over new markets, extract raw materials of new territories and super-exploit a vast labor force. Like all its competitors, it had to expand or die. The German industrialists and financiers thought that the Nazis had both the will and the means to carry out this military expansion: rocket technology, a strong air force and Panzer tank divisions, and a military-industrial complex.

But by the end of the war, imperial Germany lay devastated and defeated, a significant part of its territory under the control of its mortal enemies, the communists. The workers' state in the east now had to pick up the pieces and change social relations.

And in the struggle to build new social relations in the workers' state, gays and lesbians made great strides.

Next: Concrete gains of East German lesbians, gays

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Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 18

Denazification in socialist Germany opened door to gay rights

By Leslie Feinberg

Three major English-language sources written over the course of a decade and a half offered rich examples of the advances for gays and lesbians that took place in the German Democratic Republic-"East Germany"--after it was established in 1949.

Canadian historian Jim Steakley wrote the earliest of these accounts, "Gays under Socialism: Male Homosexuality in the German Democratic Republic." The article, containing material from his seven months of research in the GDR during the 1970s, appeared in the December 1976-January 1977 issue of The Body Politic.

A noteworthy contribution of Steakley's extensive research was his initial admonition that each socialist country has local features that it inherits from its past and its material realities.

He was followed by John Parsons, who made four research trips to the GDR over a six-year period. Parsons elaborated on the arduous political task the young workers' state had inherited. In his published findings--a 10-page article entitled "East Germany Faces Its Past: A New Start for Socialist Sexual Politics" (OUT/LOOK, Summer 1989)--he wrote: "The work of both the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee and the Communist Party was put to an end with the Nazi rise to power. Homosexuals, Communists, Social Democrats, and especially Jews were all ruthlessly persecuted and murdered.

"The Nazis succeeded, moreover," he continued, "in thoroughly tearing out the roots of cooperation that had existed among various people on the issue of sexuality. During the Nazis' 12-year rule, they reorganized the medical, legal and teaching professions--promoting confirmed Nazi ideologues, searching out those who were not, and raising a generation on Nazi propaganda. What few threads of the earlier cooperation the Nazis themselves did not destroy, the devastation of the war and the battle lines drawn in the Cold War finished off."

Even before the founding of the German Democratic Republic on Oct. 6, 1949, the United States and Britain were maneuvering to stop socialist revolution from spreading across Germany.

By the end of World War II, the Soviet Red Army had crushed the Nazi invaders and forced them to retreat westward. As the collapsing army of German imperialism fled, the Red Army marched into Berlin

and the fascists were defeated. But under pressure and threats from the U.S. and British, the Soviet Army was forced to pull back.

Nazis: Uprooted vs. replanted

After the defeat of fascism, Germans in the east, with Soviet help, worked to root out the Nazis and their capitalist collaborators and mobilize the population to rebuild.

Steakley offered an overview of conditions for gays and lesbians--his particular focus was on gay men--in the period of "Anti-fascist Democratic Renewal" from 1945 to 1949.

He wrote: "During this period of de-Nazification, the gay scene in the Soviet Occupied Zone was marked by a rapid recovery from the genocidally homophobic politics of German fascism. Homosexuals came out of hiding or returned from concentration camps, and gay bars began to reopen in both the East and the West.

"Overall," he added, "the de-Nazification program carried out in the Soviet Occupied Zone was far more aggressive and thorough than those in the Western zones."

In fact, in the West, the occupying forces of imperialism tried to prop up capitalist rule with massive infusions of financial aid, most from the U.S. Marshall Plan, while permitting tens of thousands of Nazi war criminals to emigrate or to re-enter Bonn's political arena. The United States and Britain allowed these former Nazis to resume their place in West German industry and government because they were the anti-communist bulwark.

Richard Plant emphasized this point in a June 1990 article in Outweek, "East German Journal: East German Gay Laws Years Ahead of West." Plant had been forced to flee Germany on the day of the infamous 1933 Reichstag fire that Hitler used to consolidate his power.

After the war, he wrote, "East German leaders tried to indict and convict as many high-ranking former Nazis as possible.

"The West German government, on the other hand, continued to employ some notorious Nazis in high positions long after the beloved Fuehrer's suicide."

The first chancellor of West Germany, Conrad Adenauer, who was approved by the U.S. occupiers, continued to keep Hans Globke as his secretary of the chancellery despite protests. Plant explained, "Globke was instrumental in drafting Nazi laws, enacted during the 1930s, which deprived Jews of their citizenship." Even after an East German court indicted Globke in absentia in 1950, Adenauer would not budge.

"Neither did Adenauer rescind the tough anti-gay Nazi decrees of 1935, which, for example, declared that a man observed 'glancing lewdly at another man' could be taken into police custody."

That law, Paragraph 175A, was a Nazi amendment to the 1871 Prussian anti-homosexual Paragraph 175. The amendment allowed the Nazis to criminalize and snare those they accused of even homosexual fantasies or intent.

In the East that Nazi amendment--Paragraph 175A--was immediately removed from the books. Steakley stressed that in the GDR: "The immediate benefit for gay people came with the repeal of Paragraph 175a, the Nazi law which had led to the arrest and imprisonment of tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of homosexuals. This law was struck down by the Superior State Court of Halle in 1948. By contrast, it remained in effect in West Germany until 1969."

Paragraph 175, however--the Prussian law against male homosexuality that had long been part of German criminal coderemained on the books in the Soviet Occupied Zone. It made sex between men punishable by up to four years in jail. The law remained on the books in West Germany, too.

Picking up the torch

Parsons gave thoughtful attention to the early struggles in the East to repeal Paragraph 175 itself.

"At the end of the war," he explained, "the earlier difference within the Communist Party again appeared as a discussion arose about how to reconstruct the society. Some people argued that the democratic reconstruction of the country should include progressive reforms of the laws and customs regarding sexuality.

"Articles appeared in many newspapers advocating the elimination of Paragraph 175. In Saxony, which later became a part of East Germany, the legislature endorsed repeal of the Paragraph."

One communist in particular deserves credit for these efforts: Dr. Rudolf Klimmer.

As a medical student in Dresden during the Weimar Republic, Klimmer, a gay man, had traveled to Berlin many times to follow developments within the homosexual emancipation movement. He particularly developed an association with Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific-Human itarian Committee.

Klimmer was a member of the Communist Party. So was the committee's secretary and later chairperson, Richard Linsert.

During 12 long years of fascism, Klimmer kept his political views and sexuality under wraps, marrying a lesbian for mutual protection. After the Nazis were defeated, he chose to live in the Soviet Occupied Zone and joined the Communist Party once again.

Steakley noted, "He launched a one-man campaign which aimed at repealing all laws against homosexuality, re-establishing Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science, and agitating with Soviet and local authorities for the full equality of gay people."

Klimmer, Steakley said, "also embarked upon a career similar to Hirschfeld's, continuing his medical practice and appearing as an expert witness in numerous court cases involving homosexuals, arguing at every turn for the repeal of Paragraph 175."

Although his tireless efforts were successful in helping to overturn the amendment to Paragraph 175, he was not able to repeal the old law itself. Nor was he able to win the establishment of a new Institute for Sexual Science.

Instead, he was appointed medical director of Dresden's Polyclinic, where he set up the first Marriage and Sexual Counseling Center of the Soviet Occupied Zone, which became a forerunner of dozens of similar centers across the GDR.

Cleaning up old cesspool

John Parsons examined the struggle for sexual liberation in a material context. He stressed that the efforts of Klimmer and others proved to be exceptional for two key reasons.

The GDR had to pull itself up out of the ashes of wartime devastation--hunger, homelessness, dislocation and poverty. The USSR, unlike the United States, had suffered tremendous destruction during the war and had no resources to send to Eastern Europe. Furthermore: "A generation of children had been raised and educated in Nazi schools. The problems of de-Nazifying the country, of creating new, democratic educational programs and new legal and medical professions took center stage.

"The Communist Party turned its attention to mobilizing the population for the barest of economic needs and towards stabilizing social life in the most orthodox of all structures."

The second cause, he wrote, "lies with developments in the communist movement itself."

The rise of a bureaucratic current in the Soviet leadership and the re-establishment of an anti-gay law in the USSR were to have an impact in East Germany as well. "Stalin's rise ended the Communist Party's advocacy of sexual reform. The same reversal occurred in Germany, with the growth of the influence of Stalinism throughout the world communist movement."

As a result, he stated, "Between 1948 and the late 1960s, lesbian and gay liberation lost any place in broad public discussions."

Steakley concluded that during the period of the Antifascist-Democratic Renewal, "Homosexuals were generally able to return to the place in German society which they had held before Hitler's rise to power"--gains that had been made possible in the Weimar Republic because of the mass German Homosexual Eman cipation Movement--"but no further."

However, the work to provide jobs, education, housing and health care for the East German population as a whole continued to raise living standards. As material conditions improved, the struggle for sexual emancipation reached new heights.

Next: 1968--Paragraph 175 is abolished in the East, but not in the West.

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Same-sex rights in East Germany

Legal and material progress

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 19

By Leslie Feinberg

After World War II, as productivity and social reorganization in the German Democratic Republic--"East Germany"--rose to meet the needs of the population as a whole, the more specific needs of individuals and groups within society, including gay men and lesbians, could be more easily addressed.

Canadian researcher Jim Steakley, who published the results of seven months of research in East Germany in 1976, outlined some of the concrete conditions under which East German workers tried to construct a planned economy--socialism.

He paid careful attention to the period between the establishment of the GDR in 1949 and the construction of the defensive Berlin wall in 1961. "With the formal founding of the GDR in 1949," Healey explained, "the cold war hostilities between socialism and capitalism intensified and entered a period of chronic crisis. The West used every means at its disposal to destroy the GDR, ranging from economic sabotage to CIA subversion."

He noted that a calculated "brain drain" lured away some 10 percent of the GDR's population--mostly middle-class professionals--and that a campaign of smuggling across the open border also served to bleed the resources of the workers' state.

"By subsidizing the costs of food, rents, and basic commodities, the GDR held living expenses at their 1945 level (which they continue to have today)," he wrote at the end of 1976. "Faced with costs five to 10 times higher at home, many West Germans did all of their shopping in the GDR, particularly in Berlin. Thus the GDR made relatively slow economic and social advances during this period, which was closed in 1961 by the construction of the tragically necessary wall along the border between the German states."

During the period between 1949 and 1961, he said, the "gay scene" in both Germanys was generally similar. Gays could visit a variety of clubs on either side of the border. He added, however, that some gays from the GDR felt uncomfortable about their clothing not being considered as "fashionable," and the price of drinks was steep in the West.

However, he added, considering that at 17 million the GDR had only

about 30 percent of the population of West Germany, "the GDR matched the West in terms of subcultural institutions such as dance bars, steam baths, access to homophile periodicals, and so on."

And, Steakley stressed, "West Germany was scarcely a haven for homosexuals during these years. Ruled by the Christian-Democratic Party (the name tells it all), the federal government was adamantly opposed to law reform which might improve the situation of gay people; and local authorities were extremely intolerant of the gay subculture. Police entrapment and raids on bars and baths, unheard of in the GDR, were common in the West."

The published curators' notes from a 1997 Berlin art exhibit commemorating the 100th anniversary of the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement stated that the number of convictions of individuals accused under the anti-gay statutes in West Germany was 1,920 in 1950; by 1959, the number soared to as many as 3,530--an all time record.

"Even people not sentenced suffered a great deal," the exhibit curators pointed out, "as employers and family members found out in the course of proceedings that they were gay."

Progress, not perfection

The Nazi anti-gay amendment was immediately struck from the laws of the newly created German Democratic Republic in 1949.

Formally the old Prus sian Paragraph 175 remained on the books in the GDR. But the activist efforts of Dr. Rudolph Klimmer--a gay communist and physician--during the 1950s had an impact.

Steakley explained that Klimmer set out to win the support of prominent people in the GDR for the campaign to rescind Paragraph 175 and win full equality for homosexuals. "His efforts were strongly backed by the GDR's then Minister of Justice, Hilde Benjamin; she urged repeal of Paragraph 175 in the country's leading legal journals. There was (and still is) a high degree of acceptance of homosexuals within the cultural sector of the GDR," he reported, "but the GDR's then Minister of Culture, the poet Johannes R. Becher, refused to take a public stand on law reform."

Becher's homosexuality was well known, since West German reporters had "outed" his relationship with a male construction worker.

"Klimmer did, however, receive the support of numerous other agencies and individuals," Steakley said, "including one of the GDR's most famous writers, Ludwig Renn, a party veteran whose novels frequently turned on gay themes."

The 1950s and 1960s were defined not by perfection, however, but by progress.

Backward views about root causes of homosexuality still circulated. And when Klimmer wrote a 1958 opus to answer this old prejudice, he could not find a publisher in the East. Klimmer had written that

only two things differentiate homosexuals from heterosexuals: the object of sexual attraction and social discrimination.

However, Steakley wrote, "Klimmer's efforts during this period were rewarded by the judicial decision in 1957 to discontinue prosecutions on the basis of Paragraph 175 except in cases involving assault, coercion or minors."

Gains in East push West to follow

The year 1961 marked a period of economic change in the GDR that brought social change in its wake.

"Beginning in 1961," Steakley continued, "the GDR finally took measures which had long been delayed: the complete collectivization of farmlands and the expropriation of privately owned stores and industries. Since most bars and baths were privately owned and managed up to 1961, this had a direct impact upon the urban gay scene."

However, Steakley found that virtually every city with a population of more than 50,000 had a gay bar; Dresden and Leipzig each had four; and Berlin had five and a steam bath. In some cases these state-owned clubs were frequented by heterosexual patrons in the daytime, and gay clientele in the evenings. "Frictions have developed when a homophobic manager was assigned to a gay bar," he concluded, "but such managers generally request a transfer after a short time."

At last, in 1968, the hated Paragraph 175 was removed from lawbooks after almost a century of struggle since its inception in 1871--but only in the GDR.

Richard Plant, a Jewish gay man forced to flee Germany in 1933, hailed this progressive move in his 1990 article "East German Gay Laws--Years Ahead of West."

Plant wrote that "finally in 1968, perhaps spurred on by sexologists, scientists and gay activists, East Germany revoked all penalties concerning sexual relations between consenting male adults. This caused consternation for the leaders of other Eastern European nations. Officials in Prague, Budapest and Bucharest were bewildered.

"But more troubled were conservative power brokers of West Germany."

Plant said the legislative move by the GDR pushed West Germany to follow. "In 1969 the Bonn government began timidly to draw up new regulations; the legislators, however, were so scared of right-wing fanatics that another year passed before the rulings resembled those drafted in the East."

While the welcome legal move in the GDR did not in and of itself wipe out centuries of homophobia that lingered as a legacy of class society, the Communist Party in the GDR would soon demonstrate what strides in social progress could be made when the workers'

party and the workers' state put energy into the efforts.

Next: Stunning gains for same-sex rights.

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East Germany in the 1970s

Lesbian & gay movement blossoms

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 20

By Leslie Feinberg

"The legal situation of GDR [East German] gays improved considerably in 1968 with the elimination of Paragraph 175," historian Jim Steakley concluded in his published research. He credited the abolition of the almost century-old Prussian anti-homosexual law to the pioneering work of Dr. Rudolph Klimmer, a gay communist physician.

This move, part of an overhaul of the criminal code, elevated the GDR to the same progressive level as Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, which also decriminalized homosexuality in the mid-1960s. (Body Politic, December 1976-January 1977)

Writing in 1976, the Canadian researcher described an East German gay population characterized by long-term relationships, apparently more so than in West Germany or the United States. "The durability of such relationships may also reflect the relative lack of anomie and competitiveness in socialist society, yet the prevalence of gay couples is all the more striking in light of the fact that at 50 percent and still climbing, the GDR's divorce rate is the highest in the world.

"Although it deserves a more detailed analysis," he continued, "GDR citizens properly interpret the divorce rate as an index of women's emancipation rather than social collapse. In any case, the gay couples are seldom burdened by the ideology of pure monogamy, and affairs on the side as well as casual sexual encounters are standard.

"Parks, beaches (where nude bathing is widespread), and other public places have never been the locus of police entrapment, and arrests for public indecency are virtually unknown."

However, one last thorn of legal discrimination remained in the body of East German law. While the age of sexual consent was the same for same-sex and heterosexual minors, under the provisions of Paragraphs 150 and 151, homosexual adults penalized for relationships with under-age youths could be sentenced to three years behind bars, while heterosexuals only faced two-year sentences.

Steakley met with Klimmer during his research in the GDR. "Dr. Klimmer regards it as his greatest success," he reported, "that these

paragraphs explicitly contain a provision allowing prison terms to be suspended in favor of probation, and court practice shows that this option has been widely adopted in cases which do not involve assault or coercion."

Before the GDR was overturned, even this legal inequity was removed.

Housing and employment, however, continued to be sites of struggles for equality after 1961. Partly this was due to lack of resources in the workers' state that made the early goal of socialism--equal distribution--difficult to attain. And age-old prejudice was also an obstacle.

Steakley gave voice to the frustration of gays with the GDR's governmental housing agency, which allocated space based on family size. This made it virtually impossible for single men to rent more than a studio apartment. But he did not examine this social crisis out of its economic context.

"Housing is still at a premium in the GDR, and it was only in 1975 that Berlin, for example, attained the per-capita level of housing that it had prior to World War II," he explained, "In order to keep the country from sinking below its current zero population growth, the government makes no bones about rewarding childbirth; and while abortion and contraceptives are freely available, premarital sex and unmarried motherhood are promoted in pop songs."

While the housing crunch Steakley described in 1976 constrained singles, he found that gays in East Germany were "optimistic that the GDR's ongoing, high-priority construction program will open new options within the next decade."

When examining the housing crisis in the GDR, it's important to reiterate that, by law, rent could not exceed 10 percent of an individual's income.

And when it came to jobs, Steakley stressed, "homosexuals are occasionally fired by a homophobic superior. But gays have successfully argued their cases in special GDR workers' courts and had their jobs restored with back pay."

Unlike a capitalist economic system, where wages are always in danger of being driven down by an "army of unemployed" competing against the employed, jobs are a right in a planned economy. Steakley stressed, "In a country with the right (not the obligation) to work and a serious labor shortage, job performance has become the sole criterion for hiring and firing."

Flowering of lesbian, gay subculture

In his 10 pages of results of a study of the lesbian and gay movement in the GDR, published in 1989, researcher John Parsons explained that during the 1950s and 1960s an underground gay subculture had developed. But, he continued, "The 1970s and early 1980s were a time when this lesbian and gay subculture grew and flowered, creating a broad self-consciousness and assertiveness."

(OUT/LOOK, Summer 1989)

The Berlin Association for Homosexual Concerns (HIB) was established in the spring of 1972 by both women and men. They organized public and private discussion groups and programs, held film showings and book readings, and hosted speakers from the fields of medicine, psychology and sociology.

Steakley added an important point about the class character of the association. "Unlike most gay organizations in West Germany, the HIB is largely made up of workers and professional people rather than students." Two of the three members of the steering committee belonged to the Communist Party.

Parsons noted the role of women. "Parallel with these efforts, lesbians and feminists were organizing their own discussion groups centered on questions of women's liberation."

He added that although public discussion focused on male samesexuality, "One fact that is striking, however, is that lesbian and gay cultural institutions and friendship circles in East Germany historically have been integrated much more across gender lines than those in either West Germany or the United States."

Steakley, writing closer to the period of the formation of HIB, said that while the organization waited until 1976 to apply for state recognition, "it by no means had an underground status during its first four years."

In its first year, the group approached the Ministry of Health to request public meeting space. But the HIB delegation angrily withdrew its request after a psychiatrist offered to turn those weekly meetings into group therapy.

So the group turned to the national labor union--the FDGB. Steakley reported, "The FDGB was unable to provide rooms but urged the HIB to continue its search, noting that gays had legitimate concerns and should not be required to continue meeting in private homes."

He added that activists protested a lack of protection from anti-gay bashers to the Berlin police "and the HIB got a positive response."

The group also lodged complaints with city administrators when one of Berlin's gay bars was closed in 1975. "Protests to municipal authorities brought assurances that the measure was not intentionally anti-gay but part of a larger urban renewal program designed to enhance the capital's 'cosmopolitan character' which would soon lead to the opening of several new bars 'for every taste.'"

And Parsons pointed out that during the 1970s, a number of gayidentified clubs and cafes opened up in major East German cities.

Answering the "Rat Man"

On June 1, 1976, HIB organized a very successful forum publicly sponsored by the Urania Society--a public education agency.

The event, a talk by Dr. Peter G. Klemm entitled "Sex Roles in

Socialist Society," filled the meeting hall to capacity. Of the 500 who attended, only an estimated one-third were gay or lesbian.

Klemm's speech and the discussion that followed demonstrated a progressive current in a raging polemic against the work of Dr. Gunter Domer, a Berlin endocrinology researcher dubbed "Rat Man" by HIB activists.

Dorner claimed to be able to produce "homosexual" or "heterosexual" litters of rats based on injecting pregnant rats at different stages in the gestation period. Steakley emphasized, "Dormer's experiments raise the specter of pregnant women being tested for hormonal 'normalcy' and given booster shots if the results indicate that the fetus is 'homosexual.'"

East German gays and lesbians recalled all too well that under capitalism, the fascist eugenics wing of biological determinism rose to power with Nazism. But in the GDR, Dorner's theories and the faction of science he represented did not prevail.

Klemm argued against drawing broad generalizations about human sexuality based on animal research. His eloquent elaboration of this position, clarifying even today, appeared in a 1975 article in Fur Dich, a women's magazine with the largest circulation in the GDR.

"It is one of many human achievements to have liberated sexuality from its function as biological reproduction and to have made it into an independent source of pleasure and life enrichment. Once we have acknowledged this and accepted the fundamentally human, and therefore social, function of sexuality, we must also grant that the source of pleasure cannot be set by biological criteria; the 'wrong' taste in pleasure cannot be declared a 'sickness' in need of treatment.

"Homosexuals suffer only in an intolerant milieu! Homosexuality is a form of 'deviance' only in terms of traditional sex-role concepts! Any halfway imaginative heterosexual couple deviates from the 'natural'-e.g., the sexual behavior of rats--just as much as a homosexual couple.

"It is therefore quite proper to doubt whether the problem of bi-, homo- or hyposexuality can be actually solved with a shot of hormones in the fourth month of pregnancy, or even should be. Changes in the traditional concept of sex roles are certainly the more correct and above all the humane approach, and these remarks are intended as a contribution to that goal." (Body Politic)

Steakley concluded in 1976 that these views by Dr. Klemm were "a sample of the progressive psychological standpoint which is becoming increasingly influential in the GDR. It is perhaps significant that the founding of the gay movement has come since 1971, when the government announced that the GDR had achieved the level of a 'developed socialist society' and could now begin to lay the groundwork for the transition to communism.

"Not just experts but gay people from all walks of life are playing a role in the broad, democratic discussion of the socialist personality

and sexuality, feminism and the future of the family."

That was East Germany in the 1970s. But by the 1980s, efforts by the Com munist Party and the state created a historic milestone for same-sex emancipation.

Next: 1980s East Germany: stunning social gains in workers' state.

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East Germany

Forming of gay groups ignites church struggle

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 21

By Leslie Feinberg

In January 1982, in East Germany, the Evangelical Academy Berlin-Brandenburg held a conference titled, "Can One Speak About It? Homosexuality as a Question for Theology and Pastoral Care."

Lesbians and gay men took part in the conference. The agenda reportedly focused on how to use insights of modern sexology to reduce prejudice and harmful concepts about homosexuality, and how to provide a structure for lesbians and gay men to get together and discuss their own issues.

This conference generated a public forum about same-sex love.

Later that year, some gay and lesbian activists in Berlin and Leipzig formed the Homosexual Working Group within the Youth Section of the Lutheran Church.

The group quickly spread to more than 20 cities, not just the big urban areas like Magdeburg, Chemnitz and Rostock, but in small towns like Zwickau, Plauen and Neu strelitz. The Leipzig and Dresden groups were founded by theologians who had been denied ordination because they were an out gay man and an out lesbian woman.

Buried in that last fact is a reminder that organizing by lesbians and gays continued to face opposition from the Protestant hierarchy, even if tactically it was a useful political tool for the church.

Like the Catholic Church in the Polish workers' state, the Protestant Church battled the socialist German state. Raelynn J. Hillhouse stated that during the early years of the GDR, "the church and state often were in an undeclared war in which neither expected the other to survive. Because of its close relations with the West German church, the East German church was seen by the state as a foreign institution." (Slavic Review 49, 1990)

The East German church had close ties to the hierarchy in the capitalist West.

While the young workers' state curtailed the church's social role, it did not seize church property and continued to use public funds for pastoral training. In concessions to the church in the early 1960s and

in 1978, the state signed accords which opened the door for the church to expand its outreach.

As a result, close to 200 groups formed under the organizational umbrella of the church. These included lesbian and gay, environmental, disabled--and the dubiously vague category of "human rights."

Specifically, the objectives of the gay groups--offering support and counseling and educating parishioners about homosexuality--was not political in nature. However, the goal of addressing social problems, while vague, did open the door to criticisms of the socialist state.

The overall coalescing of more than 200 organizations under their aegis gave the church hierarchs a wider social base from which to pursue their anti-communist opposition to the workers' state.

Struggle broke out within church

Not everyone at the top of the church ladder was so happy about allowing lesbians and gays into the fold under any circumstances.

Hillhouse observed in her 1990 article on sexual politics and social change in the GDR that, "The presence of lesbian and gay organizations has brought about a major controversy both within the church, which has customarily condemned homosexuality, and among gays and lesbians, who have traditionally been persecuted by the church."

She explained that in 1986, based on the results of a church-commissioned study, a bishops' conference did conclude that biblical condemnations of same-sex love should no longer be used as justification for discrimination. However, she stressed, "Although the bishops settled one controversy by officially allowing gay and lesbian groups to meet within the church, they refused to take a clear position on the ordination of homosexuals. The church has, however, demonstrated the limits to its acceptance of homosexuals in its repeated denial of ordination of Eduard Stapel, the director for homosexual work of the Magdeburg city mission, because he lives in a homosexual partnership."

Denis M. Sweet, a researcher quite unsympathetic to the socialist state, did note the hostility to gays within the church. "These working groups did not advance without concerted resistance from within certain well-situated Lutheran and charismatic factions within the church, particularly from the south of the GDR with its own traditions of theology and piety--so much so that the church authorities in Saxony felt obliged to append within the territory of their administration a publication that countered the largely positive and tolerant brochure Homosexuelle in der Kirche? (Homosexuals in the Church?) issued in 1984 by the central office of theological study of the East German Church (Theolo gische Studienab tei I ung der Evangelischen Kirchen).

"This Saxon alternative bro chure warned about 'militant homosexuals' forcing an entry into the church to advance the 'ideology of homosexual emancipation.'" (Sexual History of the

Political Left)

And lesbians and gay men were not so thrilled about working under the auspices of the church, either. John Parsons made this point sharply: "Of course, many homosexuals, including those who were members of the Communist Party, were not comfortable with the church and did not find this association helpful." (OUT/LOOK 1989)

Hillhouse added, "As was the case with groups from the other social movements within the church, the gay and lesbian associations were not entirely religious: Perhaps as few as 10 percent of the members identified themselves as Christians."

But a new and dramatic development was emerging in the mid-1980s that allowed the lesbian and gay movement to burgeon. The GDR workers' state opened up a widespread secular campaign to combat prejudice and discrimination against same-sex love.

Next: Unprecedented gains

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Lesbians and gay men

Great gains in 1980s East Germany

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 22

By Leslie Feinberg

"Finally, in the late 1980s, public discussion backed by the Communist Party and the state was revived," wrote researcher John Parsons in his extensive article about gains for lesbians and gay men in the German Democratic Republic. "It included lesbians and gay men speaking out as self-conscious voices for their community." (OUT/LOOK, Summer 1989)

Scientists and health professionals convened a conference in June 1985 on "The Psycho-Social Aspects of Homosexuality."

Parsons stressed, "An important feature of this conference was that it was organized with the open participation of lesbians and gay men, both as contributors and discussants."

He continued, "Two major demands were voiced at the conference: first, that the discussion should be taken outside of these exclusively professional circles and made a public one; second, that the state should sanction institutions through which lesbians and gay men could discuss and organize among themselves."

A year earlier, this same demand for independent groups had been voiced by a Humboldt University interdisciplinary research group that had been organized at the request of the Berlin city administration. This was the first official gay and lesbian studies committee at a German university, according to researcher Raelynn J. Hillhouse.

The Communist Party's 11th Congress in 1986 debated the recommendations of the research group. Parsons said that a member of the Humboldt University group relayed that there was "a good deal of success in moving the national Party apparatus to support the work of these groups." Parsons talked to other acquaintances who added that there was continued backwardness from some Party officials.

But what is indisputable is that in 1985, an historically unprecedented, state-sponsored campaign set out to eradicate all forms of discrimination based on sexual and emotional preference and to raise social consciousness about same-sex love.

The momentum of gains for sexual liberation in the German Democratic Republic that resulted was dramatic. The facts speak for

themselves.

Gov't-backed media campaign

A government-supported public discussion broadened and deepened in the period between the 1985 conference and a second held in the city of Karl-Marx-Stadt in 1988.

Hillhouse concluded in her 1990 article that "The new openness concerning homosexuality was evident not only in literature and scientific publications, but also in print and broadcast media. In 1984 the popular monthly health magazine, Deine Gesundheit (Your Health), began printing a series of readers' letters on homosexuality; soon after, several other major publications published substantial articles on sexual orientation."

More than 200 articles on homosexuality were printed in the GDR during the 1980s, she continued, mostly about gay males. (Slavic Review, Winter 1990)

Articles about same-sex love appeared in the press and were incorporated into some state radio and television station programming. Much of this information was aimed at youth--an audience with many questions about sexuality.

When public media focused on AIDS education, same-sex relations were not portrayed as a central feature. And it is important to recall that everyone in the GDR enjoyed free medical care.

The television health program "Visite" broadcast a report in September 1987 "that described homosexuality as an entirely natural variation of human sexuality." (Hillhouse)

The following year, the state film company DEFA, working with gay and lesbian activists, produced East Germany's first documentary about "the satisfactions and problems" facing same-sex couples, called "Die andere Liebe" (The Other Love).

In 1989 DEFA also released "Coming Out," a feature film about a gay teacher.

The same year, literature with gay themes was published, including a book about the life histories of several gay men in the GDR, compiled and written by a gay man.

Mass education campaign

"Important social institutions also began to implement reforms with great speed," Parsons continued.

"For example, the Commission on Marriage and the Family, which is responsible for running a system of counseling centers, passed a resolution asserting that the national network of sexuality and family counseling centers should aid in dismantling prejudices regarding homosexuality and foster the integration of gay men and lesbians into society."

Same-sex love was significantly included in a new sex education

curriculum for the public school system.

A chapter on lesbian and gay identity in the 1984 edition of the standard sex-education textbook presented homosexuality as a natural variation of sexual identity. Lesbianism was part and parcel of this chapter. The book included among its sexually frank and romantic photos two men together and two women lying naked in each other's arms.

And most significantly, the book acknowledged that the main problems faced by homosexuals result from persecution and isolation, which themselves stem from social discrimination and homophobia.

Next: More gains.

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Late 1980s East Germany

Gay/lesbian clubs in Party, state

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 23

By Leslie Feinberg

In a landmark ruling on Aug. 11, 1987, the Supreme Court of East Germany set the minimum age of consent for all sexual relations at 14.

This addressed an important legal inequity. In 1968, when the 19th-century Prussian anti-gay laws had been abolished, paragraph 151 was established which set 18 years old as the minimum age of consent for same-sex relations. The minimum age for heterosexual relations remained 14.

The 1987 court decision overturned the conviction of a man who had sex with a youth. The judges found that the minor was openly gay, had visited gay clubs and parties and had sought sexual contact. The only basis for conviction, they ruled, would have been if the sex had not been consensual or the youth had been harmed.

The written ruling created a legal milestone. The justices wrote, "[T]he starting point for a judgment about the sexual relations between persons of the same sex must be the principle that homosexuals just as much as heterosexuals are members of the socialist society and are guaranteed the same rights of citizenship."

And, the court continued, " ... homosexual relations between an adult and a person between the ages of 16 and 18 do not necessarily lead to an abnormal development and do not have any other harmful consequences than homosexual relations between two youths or heterosexual relations between an adult and a youth."

The justices concluded, " ... discrimination against homosexuals and bigotry is therefore to be opposed. Homosexuals are to be protected by legal regulations and judicial punishment against attacks on their integrity--for example by slander or physical violence or rowdiness--through civil as well as criminal proceedings." (OUT/LOOK, Summer 1989)

In 1988, the government in East Berlin declared all discrimination based on sexual orientation illegal.

And in July 1989, the East German parliament officially removed the age of consent discrepancy from the law books.

Satisfying material needs

But the gains for lesbians and gays in the GDR were not merely legal.

As the planned economy demonstrated momentum, even while encircled and undermined by the capitalist West, living standards rose for all in the GDR--including gays and lesbians. And as the economic struggle for survival eased, so did social relations.

An extensive article in the Winter 1989 Slavic Review by researcher Raelynn J. Hillhouse was not particularly sympathetic to the Communist Party and the state, which were shouldering the task of building socialism in the GDR.

But Hillhouse made this pithy observation: "When a socialist state satisfies basic material needs and provides its citizens with a sense of material security, its citizens may gradually shift their political interests to moral matters, gender issues, environmental concerns, and similar issues. ... The relatively and reliable levels of satisfaction of basic material requirements in the GDR makes such transitions there probable and East German values concerning marriage, gender roles, and sexuality indeed have been liberalizing."

These important advances in social progress were made possible by communist political campaigns to raise consciousness and in turn resulted in raising mass consciousness even higher.

One important indication of this political commitment to change was the creation of gay and lesbian clubs within party and state institutions. And gay and lesbian organizations won official recognition from state officials and moved into the public arena.

The most significant of these was the Berlin "Sunday Club" (Sonntags-Club). The group emerged from private discussion circles in the late 1970s. In the early 1980s, the group became more semi-official when officers of a neighborhood youth club worked with gays and lesbians to organize Sunday discussions, cultural events and trips.

The club's application for a "Cultural and Consultation Center" for gays and lesbians was denied in 1983 and 1984 by the city. But the applications, in part, helped propel the Berlin administration to request the creation of the research group at Humboldt University in 1984--the first official gay and lesbian studies committee at a German university--to study the conditions facing the estimated three-quarter of a million gays and lesbians in the GDR.

Next: Lesbian/gay liberation--active support from Communist Party.

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Gains cut short by 1989 counterrevolution

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 24

By Leslie Feinberg

The official gay and lesbian studies research group, formed at Humboldt University in 1984 at the behest of the Berlin city administration, examined the conditions of life for some three-quarters of a million gays and lesbians living in East Germany (GDR).

The following spring, this group issued the following findings. The lack of a clear social policy on homosexuality in the GDR had resulted in a lack of state-sponsored social services for gays and lesbians and contributed to emigration. And discrimination and intolerance led to sexual activity which could exacerbate the AIDS crisis. The study recalled the historic role of German revolutionary workers' parties in supporting the German Homo sexual Emancipation Movement's demand to remove 19th-century anti-gay legislation. And it concluded by calling on the Communist Party (SED) to aid in the struggle for gay and lesbian rights.

Researcher Raelynn J. Hillhouse says the Humboldt group proposed that, "The state should help homosexuals to integrate into socialist institutions and should strive to eliminate public prejudice toward homosexuality. These goals, the report held, should be accomplished through legal reform, continued research, the creation of gay and lesbian clubs, expansion of counseling centers and media campaigns. All these proposals were implemented on various government levels." (Slavic Review, Winter 1990)

This recommendation was sent to the party. In 1985, Hillhouse noted, "The Politburo responded to the study with the recommendation that the integration of homosexuals into GDR society should be encouraged."

And when the party responded to this call, it also recalled the history of German Communism's early and strong support in the battle against anti-gay laws.

East Germany issued an electrifying call for an end to all forms of legal and social discrimination against lesbian and gay people that sent shock waves around the world.

In the United States, The Advocate, a gay and lesbian news

magazine, reported: "East Germany's official ADN news agency has issued what appears to be an officially approved call for an end to discrimination against gays in all levels of East German society. The news agency asserted that socialist guarantees of proletarian equality extended to gay people and that nongays should assist their gay comrades in casting off the bonds of anonymity, discrimination and disadvantage." (March 4, 1986)

Even if this had been merely lip-service to the struggle for gay and lesbian liberation, it would have been a striking call to raise societal consciousness. But the sweeping progress made within just a few short years showed that the left current of the Communist Party and the workers' state was taking action.

Walking the talk

The gay and lesbian Sunday Club (Sonntags-Club) won official recognition in 1986, becoming the first state-sponsored gay and lesbian group.

Researcher John Parsons added, "Other parts of the subculture have also come into greater public view, including regularly organized dances in public halls." (OUT/LOOK, Summer 1989)

In 1987, the Sunday Club affiliated with the House of Culture of Berlin-Mitte. Similar organizations were formed in Dresden, Gera, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Potsdam and Weimar.

"Also in Berlin," Hillhouse wrote, "the Kulturbund (League of Culture) has allowed the Magnus Hirschfeld Arbeitskreis (Magunus Hirschfeld Study Group) to organize under its auspices to promote scientific inquiry about homosexuality. The state-supported Ehe, Familien-, und Sexualberatunsstellen (Marriage, Sex and Family Coun selling Centers) began special staff training programs in issues of sexual identity. In addition, other organizations occasionally sponsored educational projects on homosexuality as well as social functions for gays and lesbians."

In 1987, she added, the ministry of health commissioned a volume on homosexuality in the GDR; it appeared in two unusually large editions. "The author, Reiner Werner, urged that lesbian and gay counseling centers be created, allocation of apartments to same-sex couples be expedited, new contact forums for gays and lesbians be established, and legal partnership for nonmarried couples to administer their common property be considered."

A national conference, similar to the "Psycho-Social Aspects of Homosexuality" in 1985, was convened in 1988, "explicitly to include lesbians and gays in East German society." Several speakers at the second conference emphasized the importance of changing family law to ensure state recognition of gay couples and families. (OUT/LOOK)

The Communist Party youth group, the FDJ--a mass organization, not a cadre party organization--produced several programs about homosexual and bisexuality on its radio station. A film and a forum on homosexuality, and a social for gays and lesbians, were

components of the May 1989 FDJ Youth Festival. And the FDJ central council directed its local groups to help create gay and lesbian clubs wherever they were needed.

The former first secretary of the central council of the FDJ issued a statement that emphasized the importance of equality for homosexual youth. The statement added, "I can assure you that the FDJ will continue to give great attention toward the complete equality of homosexual youth and other citizens in its diverse forms of political and ideological work." (Slavic Review)

The process of liberation

When John Parsons, a Canadian researcher, published his 10-page report in 1989 on gays and lesbians in the GDR, he wrote from the vantage point of six previous years of research. "Back in 1983," Parsons recalled, "the lesbian and gay subculture in East Germany was still very much underground, although not illegal."

But, he explained, "By 1989 things have changed dramatically. Public displays of homosexual affection remain rare, but gay liberation has made significant and surprising progress in a short period of time. Not only is the gay subculture in the early stages of coming aboveground, but the process of liberation is now developing with the active support of the Communist Party. Lesbians and gay men, communists and non-communists alike, are exploring anew what sexual liberation means in a socialist society."

He stressed, "The public discussion of homosexuality now being promoted by the Communist Party is one in which homosexuality is finally recognized as a natural aspect of sexuality and society."

The lesbian and gay movement in the GDR debated whether to develop an autonomous community or integrate into society. The leading view of the movement and the state, Parsons reported, "is one in which autonomy is not set in conflict with integration. Lesbians and gay men have a need to meet together for personal, cultural, and political reasons. Their ability to collectively discuss and decide their views on their oppression and needs is an important step in enabling the society as a whole to address the issues.

"Integration, however, is also seen as a positive goal--not an integration in which lesbians and gays hide their identity, but one in which their unique identity contributes to and changes the whole."

Parsons reported these gains without glossing over the problems that still existed, bringing great sensitivity and objectivity to his observations.

He noted for example, "The Communist Party itself is not a monolithic institution. There are millions of members with various views on sexuality and sexual politics, and it is no surprise that different views should win sway at different times.

"But," he added, "what is striking is that the Party has moved so quickly from a position of, at best, benign neglect to one of clear advocacy for a reasoned, humanistic and in many ways radically

progressive position."

Counter-revolution

During the late 1980s, as the more compliant Gorbachev leadership was weakening the socialized economic base of the Soviet Union in the name of perestroika, the imperialists--from Wall Street to Bonn-exerted tremendous pressure on the Soviet leaders to withdraw their support for East Germany and the rest of Eastern Europe.

The deal was finally made in a 1989 meeting between Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and U.S. Secretary of State James Baker while boating on Jackson Lake in Wyoming. The USSR would not intervene if capitalism were restored in Eastern Europe. This left the GDR sandwiched between imperialist West Germany and Poland and Czecho slovakia, which themselves were being taken over by bourgeois elements.

In 1989-1990 the workers' state was overturned and the GDR was incorporated into capitalist West Germany. East German workers lost free health care and education, low-cost rent and the guarantee of a job.

And for lesbians and gay men, "re-unification" with capitalist West Germany meant the re-imposition of the hated 19th-century Prussian law against homosexuality--Paragraph 175--which had still not been repealed there, although that did finally happen in 1994.

Not to be forgotten is that in the relatively short space of little more than four decades after World War II, lesbian and gay liberation had made swift strides in socialist East Germany that had no parallel in the capitalist world.

In fact, during that same span of time, life for lesbians and gays in the U.S. and Western Europe was characterized by the iron fist of state repression.

Next: Post-World War II U.S.--capitalist anti-gay witch hunt.

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Post-WWII Europe

Struggle for decriminalization

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 25

Translate this page

By Leslie Feinberg

In the "Cold War" following World War II, imperialist ideologues sought to make capitalist democracy synonymous with "freedom" and the workers' states out to be "totalitarian."

In fact both were based on the dictatorship of one economic class over another. However, the class character of the two social systems was the opposite.

The capitalist state brutally upheld the social relationship of exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed. East Germany (GDR) and the Soviet Union (USSR)--

while not the pinnacle of workers' demo cracy that is possible in a socialist society--were based on liberating the working class from the exploitation and oppression of capitalist rule.

As this series has demonstrated, at the same time that the U.S., Britain and West Germany were excoriating East Germany as despotic, workers there enjoyed jobs, free health care and education, rent that could not exceed 10 percent of their income, vacations. And the advances made towards lesbian and gay liberation far surpassed anything that had been wrested by struggle under capitalism.

What was life like for gay men and lesbian women in other capitalist countries in Europe and in England during and after WWII?

An extensive historical exhibition at the Art Academe in Berlin in the summer of 1997 provided some important historical details. The art exhibit, co-sponsored by the Schwules Museum, was entitled, "Goodbye to Berlin? 100 Years of Gay Liberation." A limitation of the exhibit is that it did not incorporate the role of lesbians in the century of struggle.

This following information was provided in the published curator's notes.

France

With the rise of German fascism, Paris supplanted Berlin as the European gay center--that is, until Nazi troops goose-stepped into Paris.

"The end of the Third Republic in the late thirties was accompanied by social and political struggles. The Spanish Civil War and the Popular Front in France forced homosexuals to take a stand either on the right or left."

While the southern part of France was unoccupied, the northern region, including Paris, was under the rule of German Nazi forces. The quisling Vichy government, led by Marshall Pétain, collaborated with German fascism.

"One group of homosexuals took up opposition to Pétain and any form of collaboration with the Germans, joining the resistance movement. A second group, including André Gide and Giraudoux, waited. A third group collaborated. Once again, homosexuals were represented on both sides of oppressors and victims, collaborators and resisters."

In 1940, Pétain's regime instituted the Code Penal, which included statute 334, making homosexual behavior punishable by imprisonment.

"Although most of the laws initiated by the Vichy govern ment were rescinded when the Nazi regime was defeated, this clause was maintained under a new name, [Statute] 331, paragraph 3, and was enforced throughout France."

Homosexuality between consenting adults had been legal in the country since the Napoleonic Code was introduced in 1804. That code, following the French bourgeois revolution, formally removed the anti-gay vestige of feudal law. It was the first time in Europe that a criminal code omitted consensual same-sex relations.

"In the course of the 19th century, Holland, Italy and sev eral Swiss cantons adopted the revolutionary French penal code. The prosecution and persecution of 'pederasts' continued, however, in the scope of police disciplinary powers under which alleged offenses could still be pursued."

The end of German fascist occupation did not lead to gay and lesbian liberation in France.

In 1960, while transgender was celebrated entertainment in the Paris Variétés performances, the repressive De Gaulle government beefed up penalties for homosexuals.

Switzerland

Some gays who fled the rise of fascism in Germany emigrated to Basel and Zurich, Switzerland.

"There have been initiatives for organizing homosexuals in Germanspeaking Switz erland since 1922. After several failed attempts in Zurich and Lucern, the Schweizerische Freund schafts bewegung (Swiss Friendship Move ment) was founded in 1931 with the decisive participation of lesbian women in Zurich and Basel."

Together with the Damenclub Amicitia and the Excentric-Club Zürich, they published the first Swiss magazine for homosexuals. The first

issue of the "Friendship Banner" was published in January 1932. Beginning in 1941, women took a less active role and the group became an exclusively male organization which called itself Liga für Menschenrechte.

"During World War II, when the Nazis destroyed the beginnings of a gay movement in occupied Czechoslovakia and Holland, the Zurich-based group was the only worldwide organization that could preserve the idea of homosexual emancipation.

Although the legal restriction against homosexuality had been formally lifted in Switzerland in 1942, anti-homosexual campaigns continued. The leader of the Swiss Homo erotic Movement, Karl Meyer--known by the nom de guerre "Rolf"--advocated "unobtrusive behavior" in public.

The gay group called the Reading Circle (Der Kreis) survived the war. "In 1945 Zurich's Reading Circle (Der Kreis) had an unbroken 13-year history which served as a model for other countries in the immediate post-war years. The group's magazine, Le Cercle, had an international focus."

After the war, the The Circle held regular meetings which drew members from many counties. "In order to protect themselves from police action, only subscribers to the magazine who were above 20 years old and had valid identity cards were allowed into the meetings. Members also had to vouch for any guests they had brought."

Near the end of the 1950s, the meetings ended altogether after the magazine "Tat" (Action) complained that The Circle was allowed to meet on state property.

England

The curators note, "The sexual openness that existed in England during the Second World War was pushed back in the years immediately afterwards.

"The gay spies Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean defected to the Soviet Union in 1951, events which became the subject of intense investigation by a press that had few limits."

And the case of Lord Montague of Beaulieu, charged with having had sex with working-class youths, exploded into another mediafueled scandal.

Calls to clamp down on the "increasing threat" of homosexuality led to the establish ment of a government commission in 1954.

Three years later the commission recommended decriminalizing homosexuality between consenting adult males.

It took another decade before the law was changed.

Demand for decriminalization

"The need for international contacts and exchange was very strong

after the experiences in the Nazi period," the curators conclude. "In particular, the Inter national Committee for Sexual Equality (ICSE), which had been founded in Amsterdam shortly after the end of the war, made efforts to create an international network of newly formed gay movements."

Interdisciplinary conferences focusing on homosexuality took place in Amster dam in 1951, Frankfurt on the Main in 1952, Amsterdam in 1953, Paris in 1955 and Brussels in 1958.

"The newest research results were presented by doctors, psychologists, lawyers, sociologists and staff from various homophile organizations in Europe and America.

"In addition, demands for worldwide decriminalization of consenting homosexuality were formulated, individual cases of homosexual discrimination were denounced, and new strategies in the fight for legal equality were decided upon."

The Swiss "Circle" continued to hold influence. It played a role in creating an international connection. Editor Karl Meyer (Rolf) maintained contacts with homophile groups in France, Germany, Scandinavia and Holland.

In addition to poetry and short stories, The Circle reported on activities of homosexual organizations around the world.

"It created not only a singular forum for the most recent discussions about the theme of homosexuality, but also contributed greatly to the international exchanges within homosexual movements."

Beginning in the mid-1950s, the trilingual magazine even reached the shores of the United States, where a ferocious storm of anti-gay state repression was reaching hurricane proportions.

Next: McCarthyite witch hunt.

Feinberg spoke at the Berlin Art Acad eme in July 1997, an event sponsored by the Spinnboden--the German lesbian archive. The event was part of the 100th anniversary of the start of the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement.

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Before McCarthy, the Pentagon

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 26

By Leslie Feinberg Published Feb 13, 2005 8:53 PM

Even before McCarthyism menaced gays and lesbians in the United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Pentagon brass had ratcheted up an antihomosexual witch hunt in the ranks of the military that left its impact on civilian life, as well.

Historian Allan Bérube's book "Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II" makes a great contribution towards understanding this particular period of repression.

World War II was a period of great exodus--voluntary and involuntary. Sixteen million men were conscripted into the military, leaving their farms and towns, campuses and cities behind.

An estimated equal number of civilians, mostly women, left their homes to find war time employment. Millions more moved from rural areas and smaller towns to the burgeoning port cities and industrial hubs. World War II the Pentagon's

Women, Bérube notes, "filled jobs in heavy industry and other defense work, widely expanding their presence in the paid labor brutality, dishonorable discharges force and increasing their ability to live independently."

From the time of the Revolutionary War, the Navy and Army had criminalized same-sex acts, not homosexuals themselves. But in policy changed drastically. Gls suspected of being gay or lesbian faced witch hunts, humiliation, and being locked up in

'queer stockades,' like the

one shown above.

African American women and men migrated from the South to Northern and West Coast cities where jobs were available in the military industries.

Bérube stressed that the uprooting of such a large segment of the population "disrupted the everyday lives of a generation of young men and women, exposing them to the power of the federal government and the vast expanse of the United States, the great variety of its people, and ways of life they had not imagined."

In particular, "The massive mobilization for World War II relaxed the social constraints of peacetime that had kept gay men and women unaware of themselves and each other, 'bringing out' many in the process. Gathered together in military camps, they often came to terms with their sexual desires, fell in love, made friends with other gay people, and began to name and talk about who they were.

"When they could get away from military bases, they discovered and contributed to the rich gay nightlife--parties, bars, and nightclubs--that flourished in warboom cities."

But, Bérube points out, gay and lesbian GIs caught in sexual acts, netted in



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methodical roundups at stateside or overseas bases, or seeking medical or religious advice about their sexuality, found themselves fighting another war.

"As officers began to discharge homosexuals as undesirables, the gay GIs who were their targets had to learn how to defend themselves in psychiatrists' offices, discharge hearing rooms, hospital wards, and 'queer stockades.' There they were interrogated about their sex lives, locked up, physically abused, and subjected to systematic humil iations in front of other soldiers."

Some 10,000 gays and lesbians were forced to endure this harsh repression--a fraction of their estimated total numbers in the ranks, but proof of a climate of terror.

However, some brave individuals took on the military establishment. Bérube concluded, "Those veterans who fought to upgrade their undesirable discharges for homosexuality began to define their struggle with the government as one for justice and equal rights, ideas that became a prerequisite for a political movement."

Witch hunt!

After World War II, with the ascendancy of McCarthyism in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the campaign to demonize homosexuality and transsexualism and to enforce Dick-and-Jane gender conformity became essential components of the anti-communist witch hunt.

In fact, McCarthyism inseparably linked sexual and gender "queerness" with commu nism, making them virtually synonymous.

Mouthpieces for reactionary titans of capital tried to define the Cold War as a battle between capitalist democratic "freedom" and communist "totalitarianism." These spin doctors even tried to equate German fascism with workers' states in the Soviet Union and East Germany (German Democratic Republic).

Capitalist democracy is itself a form of dictatorship--of the class that owns the pro ductive apparatus over the class forced to work for wages. During the 1950s, however, even the limited democratic features of this form of state rule were seriously eroded under the weight of political reaction.

While the period of political reaction in the U.S. during the 1950s was not fascism--it did not try to crush all the workers' organizations or carry out the systematic genocide of millions--the epoch does carry with it this lesson.

As long as the social relationship of capital rules, with exploiter against exploited, oppressor versus oppressed, hard-won social and economic gains can be quickly wiped away.

In order to understand the domestic repression during the 1950s, it's necessary to look at the international relationship of forces.

Global class war

The Cold War was fundamentally a class war against the socialist countries as well as oppressed peoples in this country and around the world.

World War II had so weakened most of the colonial powers in Europe and Japan that oppressed peoples in Asia, Africa and the Middle East seized the historic moment and rose up for real independence. The U.S. imperialists hoped to gain from this against their imperialist rivals, but in many countries, liberation movements led by communists defeated pro-imperialist puppet governments.

The triumph of the Chinese Revolution sent the U.S. capitalist class into an enraged frenzy.

The ruling class in this country was also deeply worried about the developing relationship between China, the Soviet Union and those fighting colonial

domination.

By 1952, the Pentagon was mired in a war to keep Korea under its capitalist dominion.

Does this look like 'freedom'?

Life in the U.S. didn't look much like an ad for "freedom," either.

Jim Crow apartheid-like conditions predominated, not only in the South but in many Northern cities, as well.

Post-war "Father Knows Best" campaigns were designed to push "Rosie the Riveter" out of the factories and back into the kitchen.

Sen. Joseph McCarthy was empowered to hunt down communists and progressives, and to crush or intimidate dissent or resistance. Gains in civil liberties, union organizing and political expression were overturned.

Jewish revolutionaries and progressives who had been in the forefront of movements for social and economic justice bore an onslaught of anti-Semitism and anti-communism, unleashed in relative tandem.

It was in this political context that a wave of anti-homosexual and antitranssexual rhetoric and repression reached a fevered pitch.

Next: Homosexuals, transsexuals in McCarthy's sights.

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1950: 'Lavender scare'!

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 27

By Leslie Feinberg Published Feb 17, 2005 11:32 PM

Life got a whole lot harder in the U.S. during the late 1940s and early 1950s for people who were attracted to others of the same sex, who were considered gender-different, or who lived in a sex other than the one assigned them at birth.

The domestic witch hunt of the McCarthy era, whose main purpose was to crush any opposition to the Cold War, also led to the firing, red-listing and publicly outing of people who didn't fit the straight-jacketed classification of "straight." And anything considered "queer" was branded "subversive."

As early as 1947, some congressional Republicans veiled their partisan political attacks against the State Department with claims of "concern" about homosexuals working there.

In 1948, a public attempt to link anti-capitalists and homosexuals was promulgated in blaring media coverage that suggested Whittaker Chambers had an amor ous fondness for Alger Hiss.

Chambers, a Time magazine editor and journalist and former Communist Party member, was accused of collecting intelligence information for the Soviet Union. Chambers flipped and offered "evidence" for the anti-communist campaign. He implicated Alger Hiss, who headed the Carne gie Endowment, in Soviet espionage. Chambers also allegedly told the FBI that while a member of the Communist Party he had been sexually active with men.

But the "Lavender Scare"--like the other hue of terror and repression, the "Red Scare"--began in earnest in 1950.

Before it ended, the two had become inextricably linked as one vicious slur: "pinko f-g." $\,$

While this kind of language is painful to reprint, it is important to get a feel for the tenor of that period.

'Panic on the Potomac'

infamous Wheeling, W. Va., speech.

On Feb. 9, 1950, notorious red-baiter Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) waved a piece of paper before the cameras that he claimed contained a list of 205 "card-carry ing Communists in the State Department."

Alger Hiss had been convicted of perjury on Jan. 21, just weeks before this now-

McCarthy railed that the Democratic Truman administration was harboring traitors who were plotting to give away top-secret information.

John Peurifoy, undersecretary of state, denied the charge in February before a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing investigating "subversives." But he did raise the specter of a sinister "homosexual underground" in Washington that was in cahoots with the "Communist conspiracy." ("Becoming Visible: A Reader in Gay and Lesbian History")



He said that 91 "sexual deviants" were among those who had been dismissed from the State Department as "security risks."

This sounded a tocsin, observes

David K. Johnson in his book "The Laven der Scare: The Cold War Perse cution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government."

"Members of Congress demanded to know who hired the 91, whether they found jobs in other government departments, and if there were any more. Seeming to confirm McCarthy's charges about subversives in the State Depart ment, Peuri foy's revelation prompted concern and outrage throughout the nation, heated debates on the floors of Congress, congressional committee investigations, countless newspaper articles and numerous White House meetings.

"It eventually led to the ouster of thousands of government employees. It marked the beginnings of a Lavender Scare."

While some politicians labeled the campaign the "purge of the perverts," some journalists ridiculed it as the "panic on the Potomac."

McCarthyism, not just McCarthy

While the domestic witch hunt of lesbian, gay men and gender-variant people was an integral component of McCarthy ism, Joe McCarthy himself was not the mover and shaker behind the anti-homosexual frenzy, and perhaps for good reason.

True, the senator from Wisconsin did pep per his tirades with references to "Communists and queers." (The Lavender Scare)

But as the political crusade took off, McCarthy was nowhere to be seen. "Though he was a member of the congressional com mit tee that spent several months examining the homosexuals-in-government issue, McCarthy mys teriously recused himself from those hearings," Johnson notes.

McCarthy, the middle-aged, perennial bachelor, was vulnerable to questions about his own sexuality that were to circulate soon enough.

Instead, senior colleagues took up the cudgel, including Senators Styles Bridges (R-N.H.), Kenneth Wherry (R-Neb.) and Clyde Hoey (D-N.C.).

In April 1950 Republican National Committee Chair Guy Gabrielson charged that a "conspiracy" was underway. Gab riel son's statement read in part, "Perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists are the sexual perverts who have infiltrated our government in recent years."

While Gabrielson claimed the media was not doing enough to alert the population to the "homosexual menace," this was merely self-serving demagogy. The media helped whip the frenzy to a fevered pitch. The New York Times took the lead, running at least seven stories promoting this anti-homosexual campaign in May and June of 1950.

In May 1950, Wherry quoted "reliable police sources" that 3,750 homosexuals were ensconced in federal jobs. A month later, the Senate authorized an official investigation, the first of its kind in U.S. history. It was popularly dubbed the "pervert inquiry." (glbtq)

The politically motivated results of these hearings, issued in December, charged the Truman administration with indifference toward the danger of homosexuals in government. The official "justification" for this witch hunt against gay and lesbian employees was cited as "lack of emotional stability" and "weakness of ... moral fiber" that allegedly made them likely victims of Soviet propaganda and recruitment.

By November of that year, close to 600 federal civil workers had lost their jobs. In the State Department alone, security officials bragged that they were firing one homosexual per day, more than twice the rate of those charged with political disloyalty to capitalism.

Wherry concluded in December, "You can't hardly separate homosexuals from subversives. ... Mind you, I don't say that every homosexual is a subversive, and I don't say every subversive is a homosexual. But [people] of low morality are a menace in the government, whatever [they are], and they are all tied up together." (New York Post, December 1950)

Next: Publicity dies down, anti-gay witch hunt does not

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1950s witch hunt:: Even McCarthy was gay baited

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 28

By Leslie Feinberg Published Mar 2, 2005 10:45 AM

In the 1950s, more bombshells were to detonate in the overall offensive against the "Lavender Menace," which had become a foil for the right-wing in the domestic Cold War.

In 1951, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, two gay double-agents working in British intelligence, fled to the Soviet Union. This was grist for the mill, linking homosexuality with communist "treason."

In 1952, worldwide publicity accompanied the entrapment and arrest of British mathematician and computer innovator Alan Turing. He was one of 1,686 men rounded up and charged with "gross indecency with males." Turing had risen to fame during World War II after he deciphered a Nazi secret code.

Turing was sentenced to a year of hormonal treatments, which reportedly caused impotence and breast development, and became the target of British government scrutiny as a potential "subversive." He killed himself two years later, at the age of 41.

In the U.S., transphobia also took center stage in 1952. When Christine Jorgensen's plane touched down carrying her home from Denmark, where she'd sought hormonal and surgical help with sex reassignment, 300 reporters surged forward, shouting questions as flash bulbs popped.

She became the brunt of a dehumanizing and degrading campaign from the bully pulpits of radio, newspaper and television.

And that same year, even cold warrior Sen. Joseph McCarthy was publicly baited as a homosexual.

Hoisted by their own petard

After the 1952 election, in which the Republicans won back Senate control, McCarthy took over as chair of the Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations. He hired 25-year-old attorney Roy Cohn as his chief counsel. Cohn in turn recruited David Schine, later rumored to be his lover, to become chief consultant.

Cohn had close contacts within the FBI. That was important for McCarthy, who reportedly worked hand-in-glove with J. Edgar Hoover's bureau between 1950 and 1953.

One of Hoover's agents, William Sullivan, later conceded, "We were the ones who made the McCarthy hearings possible. We fed McCarthy all the material he was using."

This information sharing was covert and quite illegal. Although bound by law to share information only with the executive branch, the bureau had also reportedly leaked background checks to Congress.



Hoover was said to have recommended Roy Cohn for the post with McCarthy because he was impressed by the young attorney's railroading of Communist Party members Ethel Rosenberg and Julius Rosenberg to the electric chair on charges of passing atomic secrets to the Soviet Union. Hoover himself has been rumored to have had a long-term affair with an assistant, Clyde Tolson.

"As McCarthy's henchman and chief counsel he [Cohn--LF] was responsible for grilling suspected communists on their own sexual tendencies and on whether other people had 'homosexual tendencies.' Cohn and McCarthy subpoenaed gay men in the arts and threatened to out them if they did not produce a list of 'suspected Communists.' (wikipedia.com)

McCarthy had made a name for himself as point man for a far right-wing current that attacked the Truman administration for the "loss" of China from imperialist exploitation after the monumental Communist-led revolution there.

But when McCarthy leveled his guns at the Eisenhower administration for not being "tough enough" on communism, he got his comeuppance. That was when he found himself in the cross-hairs of the anti-homosexual witch hunt.

In 1952, journalist Hank Greenspun wrote a column about the ambitious senator which could not have found its way into print without powerful support. It said that "Joe McCarthy is a bachelor of 43 years. ... He seldom dates girls and if he does he laughingly describes it as window dressing. It is common talk among homosexuals in Milwaukee who rendezvous in the White Horse Inn that Senator Joe McCarthy has often engaged in homosexual activities." (Las Vegas Sun, Oct. 25, 1952)

While McCarthy was said to have briefly threatened to sue Greenspun for libel, he later declined to do so, reportedly after lawyers told him it meant he'd have to testify about his sexuality. Less than a year later, McCarthy married his secretary, Jeannie Kerr.

In March 1953, McCarthy tried to defeat Eisenhower's appointment of Charles Bohlen as ambassador to Russia. Bohlen was a shrewd imperialist diplomat who had participated in the February 1945 Yalta Conference at which Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin had negotiated over the shape of post-war Europe. McCarthy tried to enlist Hoover's help. But although Hoover allegedly said that Bohlen had "associated" with homosexuals and that an FBI investigation had found him weak from "the security and morals angle," Hoover said he couldn't provide evidence. Bohlen was confirmed.

McCarthy also tried to cast aspersions on Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens. But when the senator from Wisconsin attempted to probe the echelons of the Army brass for subversives, at the height of the Korean War, he had crossed the line. His self-promoting witch hunt was now being extended to anyone who stood in his way, including seasoned members of the imperialist military-political establishment itself.

Eisenhower, a former Army general and in many ways the architect of the modern military-industrial complex, allowed the hearings to be televised to publicly expose McCarthy's tyrannical bullying. This was a tactic to arouse public anger at his intimidation tactics, and it provided the basis for the Senate to censure McCarthy in December 1954 by a vote of 67 to 22.

Whether McCarthy, Hoover, Cohn and other Cold Warriors in their circles thought of themselves as homosexuals, and whether or not they had sex with other men, is not really the issue.

Seen from the standpoint of sexuality, it seems inexplicable, like when Ernst Roehm and other gay Nazis helped to violently smash the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement.

However, McCarthy, like Roehm, hated the grass-roots, working-class movement that challenged capitalist rule from below. And like so many other right-wingers,

he was willing to use every prejudice and reactionary attitude in this struggle.

McCarthy had made crystal clear on his very first day in the Senate which side of the class barricade he was on. He called together the media to publicize his "solution" to a coal strike then underway. He demanded that miners' union leader John L. Lewis and the striking workers be conscripted into the Army. If miners in uniform still refused to dig coal, McCarthy proposed they be courtmartialed for insubordination and shot to death.

Full fury of state fist

The media fanfare over the federal anti-homosexual witch hunt died down after 1950. Historian David K. Johnson stres ses, however, that the lessening of publicity was "not a testament to the lack of antigay efforts but to their routinization and institutionalization in the aftermath of the national security state." ("The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Perse cut ion of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government")

The Democratic Truman administration had caved in to the right wing, ramping up firings of federal employees accused of being homosexuals, after the Senate issued the results of its "investigation" into gays and lesbians in government employ in December 1950. Firings in the State Department, for example, climbed from 54 in 1950, to 119 in 1951, to 134 in 1952.

Within three months of being sworn in at his inauguration in 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10450. This act empowered all federal agencies to investigate and fire workers on the grounds of "sexual perversion." Johnson adds, government shared police and military records with private employers, resulting in the dismissal of hundreds."

He emphasizes that this overall repressive campaign must be understood as much broader than the work of Joseph McCarthy, alone. "To attribute the purges to McCarthy serves to marginalize them historically. It suggests that they were the product of a uniquely unscrupulous demagogue, did not enjoy widespread support, and were not part of mainstream conservatism or the Republican Party."

And he concludes, "It ignores how the purges predated McCarthy, became institutionalized within the federal loyalty/ security system, and continued to be standard government policy until the 1970s."

In his book, "The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution," David Carter offers a detailed and important overview of the iron-fisted state repression during the Cold War.

"The Civil Service Commission and the FBI complied by initiating an intense campaign to ferret out homosexuals by, for instance, correlating morals arrests across the United States with lists of government employees and checking fingerprints of job applicants against the FBI's fingerprint files."

He recalls how states wrote new, more repressive laws or beefed up sentencing. "For example, California governor Earl Warren thought the sex offender problem so serious that in 1949 he convened a special session of the state legislature to deal with the issue. That session passed laws that increased the penalties for sodomy and invented a new crime: loitering in a public toilet." The names of everyone convicted of lingering in a toilet were added to a state register.

"Twenty-nine states enacted new sexual psychopath laws and/or revised existing ones, and homosexuals were commonly the laws' primary targets. In almost all states, professional licenses could be revoked or denied on the basis of homosexuality, so that professionals could lose their livelihoods."

And conviction brought with it terrible suffering. Carter emphasizes that by 1961, "An adult convicted of a crime of having sex with another consenting adult in the privacy of his or her home could get anywhere from a light fine to five, 10, or 20 yearseven life--in prison. In 1971 20 states had 'sex psychopath' laws that

permitted the detaining of homosexuals for that reason alone. In Pennsylvania and California sex offenders could be locked in a mental institution for life, and in seven states they could be castrated."

Carter adds, "At California's Atascadero State Hospital, known soon after its opening as 'Dachau for Queers,' men convicted of consensual sodomy were, as authorized by a 1941 law, given electrical and pharmacological shock therapy, castrated and lobotomized."

The state machinery--police, courts, prisons, military--had already been used as a weapon to besiege gay/lesbian/trans and bisexual people in the U.S. in the 1920s and 1930s. What changed in the ensuing two decades to unleash the state in such a ferocious, cruel and widespread effort to control sexuality?

And was there resistance? Oh, yes.

Next: Resisting state terror predated McCcarthyism.

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Early resistance to state repression

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 29

By Leslie Feinberg Published Mar 23, 2005 1:39 PM

In the inhospitable social climate of the Cold War, struggles were taking root in the U.S. that would later flower in the gay and trans liberation movement of the late 1960s.

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How was it possible, some may wonder today, for gays to have resisted and organized in the 1940s and 1950s when state repression and a reactionary ideological offensive were at their height?

In the war between exploiter and exploited, oppressor and oppressed, the relationship of forces may change many times, but those under siege never cease to find ways to struggle for their freedom.

Much of the history of the struggle for homosexual and gender and women's rights in the decades of greatest political repression has been buried under the reactionary weight of the Cold War propaganda machine. Under standing how the early stirrings of the homophile movement of the 1940s and 1950s began serves to arm today's movement, which has much greater opportunities for resistance against political reaction.

Also, the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion and the mass political wave of struggle it unleashed can seem almost accidental or episodic without a general overview of the acts of resistance and attempts to organize that preceded the four-night-long uprising.

The choice of language to describe these earlier decades is difficult. Similar words may be used to describe sex, love and affection with regard to different historical periods, economic classes, nationalities, ethnicities and regions. However, the ways people saw themselves and each other and the ways medical authorities, police, courts and military brass categorized and criminalized people and their behaviors have undergone many changes.

The world of same-sex love among many blue-collar and oppressed people in the first half of the century in the U.S. was intertwined with gender and sex variance —or what today might be referred to as transgender and transsexual. It's also hard to separate bisexuality from the exclusive expression of same-sex love in early periods.

Here "LGBT" will be used, not to stamp the past with a modern acronym that has come to symbolize a united front coalition of sexuality, gender and sex minorities, but to show the inability to parse the population into distinct categories.

Centralizing force of capitalism

The rise of the 1940s and 1950s homophile movement itself is hard to fathom without taking into account the awakening of LGBT people in the 1920s and 1930s. Material developments in life under capitalism made this not only possible in those early decades of the 20th century, but necessary.



By the end of the 19th century, Northern industrial capital and banking had consolidated its victory over the Southern slave-owning landed aristocracy. The overturning of Black Reconstruction through lynch "law" and Jim Crow fascist conditions had brought a violent end to an unfinished revolution. This created huge shifts in the population from agriculture to urban areas in search of jobs. In these vast, anonymous cities and port towns, with same-sex boarding houses and parks and piers, nascent LGBT subcultures took shape.

U.S. capitalism, unable to satiate its hunger for profits through domestic expansion alone, emerged as an imperialist power, exporting war for empire and profits to Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines in 1898. A decade and a half later the world's imperialist powers dragged the workers into a gory struggle over redividing the world's colonies in the first World War.

The military deployment and wartime industry also pulled massive numbers of women and men from rural areas, small towns and cities into same-sex living conditions and new social conditions that broke down the old order.

It was workers' revolution that scared the imperialists into finally ending the war. The Cold War really began in the U.S. after the workers and peasants of Russia rose up in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and established the first lasting workers' state. The revolution reverberated around the globe, lifting the heads of laboring and oppressed peoples in every part of the world.

The communist government in Russia immediately struck down the antihomosexual laws. In the U.S., however, the capitalist government made LGBT people one of the early targets of repression, along with communists, anarchists, trade unionists and immigrants.

Military witch hunt

In the spring of 1919, the brass at the Newport Naval Training Center covertly sent a group of young enlisted men into the base and the nearby community to lure "sexual perverts" and bring back evidence about "immoral conditions."

After entrapment had provided the necessary "evidence," naval and municipal officials rounded up more than 20 sailors and 16 civilians. They faced naval and civilian trials.

It was one thing when the dragnet ensnared enlisted sailors, mostly from the working class. But when a prominent minister from the Episcopal Church of Newport got caught in the nets, and civilian and later military officials forced him to stand trial, all hell broke loose.

"Protests by the Newport Ministerial Union and the Episcopal Bishop of Rhode Island and a vigorous editorial campaign by the Providence Journal forced the Navy to conduct a second inquiry in 1920 into the methods used in the first investigation," historian George Chauncey Jr. wrote.

"When the inquiry criticized the methods but essentially exonerated the senior naval officers who had instituted them, the ministers asked the Republican-controlled Senate Naval Affairs Committee to conduct its own investigation."

The Republicans agreed, eager to attack the Democratic administration.

The Senate committee issued its report in 1921. It exonerated the minister. Although the report, Chauncey noted, "expressed deep anti-homosexual loathing, it condemned the conduct of the highest naval officials involved, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, President Wilson's Assistant Secretary of the Navy and the 1920 Democratic vice-presidential candidate." ("Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era")

Smoke, lilies and jade

The mass migrations to large cities, port towns and military bases in the 1920s and 1930s had created the basis for larger and more concentrated subcultures.

Chauncey provides evidence that LGBT life flourished more in the first third of the 20th century, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, than it did after World War II.

He described same-sex love and gender variance in New York, one of the capitals of LGBT life, as "a working-class world, center ed in African American and Irish and Italian immigrant neighborhoods and along the city's busy waterfront, and drawing on the social forms of working-class culture."

The most visible, organized and eloquent LGBT expression in the pre-World War II era came from the Black movement in the United States.

As the Great Migration from the South to the North burgeoned into Black urban capitals, LGBT expression became a part of their histories.

Thousands attended LGBT balls in Harlem, Chicago, Baltimore and Wash ing ton, D.C., which were widely reported on in Black community newspapers.

In New York the balls were held at the Rockland Palace, the Astor Hotel and Mad ison Square Garden. The most famous was the annual Hamilton Lodge Ball in Har lem, which dated back to 1879. The majority of those who attended were working class. About 800 took part in 1925; 1,500 in 1937. Attendance peaked at 8,000 in 1937 before police raids shut it down.

Harlem was the heart of one of the great cultural and political high-water marks of U.S. history—the Harlem Renaissance—which ran from the end of World War I in 1918 until the capitalist depression.

This flowering of literature, art, music and political organizing—all of which was influenced by aspirations for national liberation and hope for an end to dreams deferred, sparked by the socialist revolution in Russia—also gave voice to LGBT concerns.

Richard Bruce Nugent, a self-identified gay man, published the classic "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" in 1926. It was the first known work by a Black author clearly about same-sex love. He said about LGBT life in Harlem during that period, "Nobody was in the closet. There wasn't any closets."

Next: German Homosexual Emancipation Movement inspired 1920s U.S. organizing.

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German movement inspired U.S. organizing

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Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 30

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Mar 30, 2005 10:16 AM

The German Homosexual Emancipation Movement inspired organizing in the U.S., too. As early as 1906 and 1907, spokes people from the Scientific-Humani tarian Committee traveled to New York to talk about their movement building.

Anarchist Emma Goldman, who said she was influenced by the writings of German gay leader Magnus Hirschfeld as well as women prisoners, made homosexual freedom a theme of her 1915 lectures across the U.S.

Male soldiers shipped overseas to Europe during World War I came into contact with the gay, trans and lesbian movement in Germany. At least one GI became enthused about bringing that organizing back to the U.S.

In December 1924, Henry Gerber founded the first known homosexual rights group in the United States: the Society for Human Rights.

This early attempt to organize was solely male. Lesbian historian Lillian Faderman notes that, "By the 1920s there were already a few established communities of women who identified themselves as lesbian, in some astonishing places such as Salt Lake City as well as in more likely areas such as San Francisco." (Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers)

African American lesbians, including cross-dressers, were part of the rising Harlem Renaissance.

And although the widespread baiting from pundits and pulpits about the "mannish women" of the women's rights movement was meant to be a slur, lesbians were drawn to the struggle.

But it wasn't until World War II, when large numbers of U.S. women were mobilized in the ranks of the military and in wartime industry, that lesbian organizing—in its own name—took hold.

Inspired by German struggle

Gerber was a Bavarian-born GI whose family had emigrated to the U.S. around 1913. He was institutionalized briefly in 1917 for being homosexual. During World War I, Gerber was forced to choose between joining the U.S. Army or being interned as an "enemy alien."

He chose the Army. He was later deployed to the Rhineland as part of the Army occupation force there from 1920 to 1923. He worked as a printer and proofreader in Coblenz.

While there, Gerber was inspired by the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement.

He wrote, "In Coblenz on the Rhine I had subscribed to German homophile magazines and made several trips to Berlin, which was then not occupied by American forces. I had always bitterly felt the injustice with which my own



American society accused the homosexual of 'immoral acts.'

"What could be done about it, I thought. Unlike Germany, where the homosexual was partially organized and where sex legislation was uniform for the whole country, the United States was in a condition of chaos and misunderstanding concerning its sex laws, and no one was trying to unravel the tangle and bring relief to the abused."

Gerber came back to Chicago determined to start organizing homosexuals.

"The beginning of all movements is necessarily small," he wrote. "I was able to gather together a half dozen of my friends and the Society for Human Rights became an actuality. Through a lawyer our program was submitted to the Secretary of State at Springfield, and we were furnished with a State Charter. No one seemed to have bothered to investigate our purpose."

The group's statement of purpose in the incorporation documents reads, in part, "... to promote and to protect the interests of people who by reason of mental and physical abnormalities are abused and hindered in the legal pursuit of happiness which is guaranteed them by the Declaration of Independence, and to combat the public prejudices against them by dissemination of facts according to modern science among intellectuals of mature age."

The name "Society for Human Rights," he noted, was "the same name used by the homosexuals of Germany for their work."

Gerber was reportedly rebuffed by prominent sex reform advocates he approached. "I needed noted medical authorities to endorse us. But they usually refused to endanger their reputations."

Gerber recalled, "The only support I got was from poor people: John, a preacher who earned his room and board by preaching brotherly love to small groups of [African Americans]; Al, an indigent laundry queen; and Ralph whose job with the railroad was in jeopardy when his nature became known. These were the national officers of the Society for Human Rights, Inc."

The group, which consisted of about half a dozen people, concentrated their efforts on the state of Illinois. There, anal intercourse was the only prohibited sex act—punishable from one to 10 years in prison. This was not unusual. The penalty in Georgia for "sodomy" at that time was life behind bars.

"It is hard to believe that Mother Nature needs our police to protect her from her creatures," Gerber bitterly observed.

Busted!

The Society set out to organize homosexuals, create a series of lecture events and publish a newsletter. Gerber quickly produced two issues of the first-known homophile publication in the United States: "Friendship and Freedom."

The primary goal of the society, Gerber stressed, was to decriminalize same-sex acts in Illinois. That objective proved harder to achieve.

In July 1925, police raided the homes of the group's leaders. They had no warrants for the arrests. Henry Gerber, Al Meininger and the Rev. John T. Graves were jailed.

A reporter from the Chicago Examiner was allowed to accompany the detective who arrested Gerber in his home. The newspaper ran a front-page story declaring "Strange Sex Cult Exposed."

Gerber endured three trials that cost him his life savings of \$800. The charges were finally dismissed. He lost his job; his bosses at the post office fired him for conduct unbecoming to a postal worker. Gerber concluded, "That definitely meant the end of the Society for Human Rights."

Gerber re-enlisted in the Army. While stationed on Governor's Island in New York, he wrote articles in homophile publications under a nom de plume. He briefly wrote for Chanticleer, a mimeographed 1934 gay publication.

And throughout the 1930s Gerber ran Contacts—a homosexual correspondence "pen pals" club that served as a national communication network for gay men.

"When he folded Contacts club in 1939, member Monwell Boyfrank pestered him to get something started; and he, Frank McCourt, Boyfrank and others wrote one another for years, arguing how to organize homosexuals," Jim Kepner recalled in his 1985 pamphlet, "Gay Movement History & Goals."

"They never realized that their radically different views on the nature of homosexuals and of society left little chance for them to agree on how to improve the homosexual condition. Without common goals, they couldn't evolve clear or practical tactics."

Kepner concluded, "A Gerber friend who'd lacked the nerve to join SHR brought out young Harry Hay in Los Angeles' Pershing Square in 1930, and told him about the group, inspiring Harry to imitation. But to start a group, you need at least one other person, and it took Harry 20 years to find that other—the late famed fashion designer Rudi Gernreich."

The seeds of the early homosexual rights movement took root.

By the end of World War II, recalls Barry D. Adam, "The first stirrings of move ment activity in the United States appeared among recently demobilized men in the Veterans Benevolent Associ ation in New York and among working women in Los Angeles. Both groups developed out of existing friendship networks and made no attempt to go public." ("The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement")

In 1947 and 1948, "Lisa Ben"—an anagram for lesbian—published nine issues of a publication she titled "Vice Versa: America's Gayest Magazine."

"Lisa Ben" had come out as a lesbian in the World War II era. She moved from the small agricultural community in Cali fornia where she'd been born and raised to Los Angeles in search of a job. There she also found a women's boardinghouse where "she met for the first time lesbians who took her to gay bars and introduced her to other gay women."

And in 1950 Harry Hay did start an organization—Mattachine. Hay's vision of organizing was much more like that of some of the radical leaders of the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement. Because Harry Hay was a communist.

Next: Communist impact on homosexual and women's rights organizing.

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Young Harry Hay and the Wobblies

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series, part 31

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Apr 14, 2005 9:35 PM

The Mattachine movement for homosexual emancipation in the United States was initiated by a core group of five leftists in 1950 at the height of the anti-communist and anti-gay McCarthyite witch hunt. Two of the founders were members of the Communist Party (CPUSA), another had been active in the party in the Midwest after the war, and the other two leftists could be described as "fellow travelers."

The short-lived Mattachine movement drew an estimated 5,000 homosexuals in California to its ranks in the early 1950s. And, Will Roscoe noted, "its name, carrying the promise of freedom, spread throughout the United States and the world." ("Radically Gay")

The political beliefs and experience of the founding members were far from incidental to organizing for homosexual emancipation.

That was particularly true for Harry Hay, the key figure in launching the Mattachine movement.

Hay had spent more than 17 years in the CPUSA. He wasn't just a member; he had been a respected Marxist teacher and a tireless organizer. Communist politics, a Marxist world view, a historical materialist vista of history, and immersion in the class struggle gave material shape to Hay's vision of homosexual emancipation.

Ticket to the working-class struggle

Hay had been born in England in 1912 with a silver spoon in his mouth. He spent his early years in Chile, where his father was a wealthy mining engineer employed by Anaconda Copper. The family returned to the U.S. in 1917, where he grew up in southern California.

Hay so loved theater and opera that at the end of his freshman year in high school, at the age of 13, his father sent him to labor for the summer in the hay fields of Western Nevada to "toughen him up."

Hay worked alongside miners who did farm work in the summers. Many were Wobblies—members of the Industrial Workers of the World—whose ambition was to organize workers into "one big union."

Those hay wagons became a school of Marxism for Hay. In his biography, "The Trouble with Harry Hay," Stuart Timmons described, "Among the greasy, thumbworn pamphlets, Harry remembered Karl Marx's Value, Price and Profit and Wage-Labor and Capital. By day, they drilled him in the principles of exploitation, organization and unity. By campfire, they told him stories. 'I was immersed in the first great railroad strike of 1887, the Haymarket Massacre, and the dreadful Ludlow Massacre, where Rockefeller goons gunned down 14 women and children in the snow on Christmas Eve, 1913.'"

Hay also recalled being chilled by the anti-gay attitudes that many workers,



including Wobblies, had been societally imbued with and which remained unexamined and unchallenged.

However, the Wobblies gave Hay an IWW card that was his ticket to work on a tramp steamer. The experience with these militant miners gave him more than that.

Timmons summed up, "Though he had already been earning money for several years, and the silver spoon of his infancy had long tarnished, he now had words to identify himself as 'a working-class kid.' He played down any class rebellion on his part, and said that his new politicization merely gave a theoretical basis for his personal hatred of his father's staunch conservatism.

"The Wobblies' praise for his honest toil strengthened this new political bond, and each winter he eagerly awaited the return of summer and their companionship."

Hay's first 'bulls-eye'

Hay's first gay experience was with someone who had ties to the much shorter-lived 1924 Society for Human Rights based in Chicago, whose founder, Henry Gerber, had been deeply inspired by contact with the Germany Homosexual Emancipation Movement.

Hay, who never lost his early love of theater, moved to Los Angeles—an urban magnet for many homosexuals—and became a struggling actor during the depths of the capitalist economic Depression of the early 1930s.

It was Will Geer, perhaps best remembered today as "Grandpa Walton" of the 1970s television series "The Waltons," who first introduced Hay to the left-wing current in Los Angeles and to the Communist Party. Over coffee with Geer and Maude Allen, said Timmons,

"They hashed over the anti-socialist Palmer Raids made by the federal government in the 1920s, the Sacco and Vanzetti trials, and various strikes—fascinating stuff to this young man."

Geer and Hay helped organized demonstrations during these hard Depression years to support unemployed workers, exploited field laborers and labor unions. They chained themselves to a lamppost at the old UCLA campus while distributing leaflets for the American League Against War and Fascism.

One of the most life-altering demonstrations for Hay, which he reportedly loved to rehash, was in Bunker Hill in downtown Los Angeles. Says his biography, "The Milk Strike was an action called in 1933 by the wives and mothers of the poor and unemployed to make the government stop allowing surplus milk to be poured down the storm drains to keep the price up. They wanted it for the needy. A crowd of thousands turned out downtown in the shadow of the newly built City Hall."

Hay saw police posted atop nearby buildings aiming their machine guns at the crowd. Cops charged, swinging their clubs at protesters' skulls. "Women were grabbing and shielding their children, and every so often you would see someone go down with a bloody head. The police were being absolutely brutal, without provocation. I think they may have wanted to incite a riot so they could clear the crowd."

As he backed away from the police melee towards a bookstore, Harry grab bed one of the bricks used to keep stacks of newspapers from flying away in a breeze. "I made no conscious decision. I just found myself heaving it and catching a policeman right in the temple. He slid off his horse and a hundred faces turned to me in amazement. No one was more amazed than I. Always before, I had been the one who threw the ball like a sissy. This 'bull' was my first bull's-eye ever!"

Timmons described what happened next. "Sym path izers murmuring in Yiddish, Portuguese and English grabbed him. He heard, 'We've got to hide this kid before the cops get him." They guided him through a labyrinth of connected old 1880s tenement buildings. "He was pushed through rooms that immigrant women and children rarely left, across catwalks and planks, up, up, hearing the occasional reassurance, 'Everything's fine. Just don't look down."

Hay arrived at a living room in the slums filled with men. Presiding over them was Clarabelle. Hay heard the other men refer to Clarabelle, who was born malebodied, with the female pronoun. Clara belle had hennaed hair and wore a peasant blouse slung low over one shoulder.

"Harry had heard of Clarabelle as one of the most powerful of the 'Queen Mothers' who traditionally oversaw the temperamental comings and goings in the districts of town where they lived; Harry felt that such figures formed a regional network of salons among some pre-Stonewall gays," Timmons explained.

Hay himself recalled, "Clarabelle controlled Bunker Hill and had at least a dozen 'lieutenants' covering stations, one called the Fruit Tank—that was our nickname for the jail cell for queers. Clarabelle was legendary, a [1930s movie star] Mary Boland type who really knew how to pin a curl while giving an order.

"'My dear,' she said to me, 'we saw what you did, knocking that old cop off his high horse, and it should have been done years ago. We'll have to hide you; they'll be after you soon. Cup of coffee first? No, no time. They're already on their way."

Next: Answering the "siren song of revolution."

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Harry Hay heard 'siren song of revolution'

NOTICIAS EN ESPAÑOL

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series, part 32

By Leslie Feinberg Published Apr 20, 2005 2:06 PM

Harry Hay, who had been living his life as a gay man as "out" as he could be, joined the Communist Party USA in 1934.

At that time, the CPUSA barred openly gay and lesbian members. Particularly ideologically harmful was the formulation to "justify" such a membership rule: the view that homosexuality was a degeneracy that arose from a decadent economic system.

That policy was indefensible, doing damage to homosexuals as well as to the revolutionary movement as a whole.

This political stance did not arise out of a vacuum. While the Bolshevik Party under Lenin's leadership had abolished the tsarist anti-homosexual law in 1917, by 1934 under a more politically conservative and bureaucratic grouping, an anti-homosexual law was back on the books in the USSR.

There were homosexual members in the CPUSA; they just didn't say they were. It would be wrong to glibly refer to this as a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. That phrase refers to the reign of terror the Pentagon—the military arm of the capitalist state—conducts against its own GIs.

The CPUSA was nose-to-nose against that state. The party leadership may well have feared the opening for state repression the organization could face by having openly gay, lesbian and bisexual, and trans members. After all, the party was struggling in a capitalist country in which same-sex love was illegal.

Tragically, however, the CPUSA's position on homosexual members helped create a much greater political and state vulnerability. Within a decade, the right wing of the U.S. capitalist class would unleash a witch hunt to crush revolutionary resistance to its rule by equating communists with homosexuals. And the CPUSA's position weakened the struggle to politically answer and defend victims of the anti-communist and anti-gay witch hunt.

In fairness, there was not as yet a historical materialist overview of the roots of state regulation of sexuality and gender expression. The greatest Marxist theoretical contributions had been to reveal the class basis of the oppression of women

It would be Harry Hay who would take that Marxist analysis further, to look at the origins of oppression based on homosexuality and what would today be called transgender and transsexuality.

'You might have to start it yourself!'

Hay thrived as a communist. He caught a glimpse of the future in his work.

Hay described those experiences in the biography "The Trouble with Harry Hay," written by Stuart Timmons.



Hay recalled, "We were involved in organizing the unorganized; the CIO had a wide open field on the West Coast. Along with the waterfront, the newspaper guilds began to organize, as did the department stores."

Hay and Will Geer continued doing "agitprop" theater— shorthand for short street dramas that taught political lessons while mobilizing audiences to take action. Hay defined it as "a responsibility for keeping spirits high at picket lines and keeping attention focused at large meetings."

Geer took Hay to Communist Party theory classes. Hay attended, but reflected, "It was disorienting to sit there with urban people, mostly film workers, discussing rural worker models of Marxism."

Geer discouraged Hay's talk of organizing a "team of brothers."

Hay recalled, "I said I wanted to get a society of 'just us' together. Bill argued that that was the theater."

Only Maude Allen encouraged Hay's dream of organizing homosexuals. While Hay and Geer argued about the possibility, she interrupted that, "this was possible, but you might have to start it yourself."

The experience that changed his life

Hay explained how the West Coast longshore workers' strike transformed him.

The 1934 strike in San Francisco inspired all the maritime workers to shut down the waterfront. The militant action by longshore workers won the support of 120 local unions.

The CPUSA sent Hay and Geer and many other organizers from Los Angeles to help the strikers. Hay and Geer collected food for the striking workers as they drove up the coast.

In early July, bosses tried to bring scabs past the picket lines, igniting battles. Gov. Frank Finley Merriam called out the state militia. This sparked the call by labor leaders for the July 1934 San Francisco General Strike.

Hay was there when troops were ordered to open fire on a crowd of more than 2,000 workers. He remembers a bullet whizzing past his left ear. Two workers were shot dead; 85 more were hospitalized.

Later, at the huge funeral procession for the two men, Hay remembered that "a posse of dock workers knocked the bowlers off the heads of bankers who refused to show respect. It was pretty damn impressive."

"The strike was just something tremendous!" Hay later told historian John D'Emilio. "You couldn't have been a part of that and not have your life completely changed."

He was 23 years old. And he was answering what he called "the siren song of Revolution."

Hay in the thick of struggle

In 1935 and 1936, Hay was in the thick of the struggle. He took part in fundraisers and demonstrations against the rise of fascism in Spain and Germany, and in support of African American civil rights and union organizing.

From 1936 to 1938 he worked on the End Poverty in California campaign, the Hollywood Writers' Mobili zation, the American League Against War and Fas cism, the Mobilization for Democracy, the Workers' Alliance of America and Labor's Non-Partisan League.

He was active in the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, organized by Dorothy Parker in the spring of 1936. Supporters included Paul Muni and Boris Karloff.

Biographer Stuart Timmons wrote, "The Anti-Nazi Lea gue was a typical mass

org ani zation, which, while indepen dent, relied heavily on leadership from the CPUSA and served to introduce sympathetic people to Marxist principles and to the Party. The structure of the Mattachine Soci ety, 14 years later, was strongly influenced by this model."

Hay still frequented gay bars, describing his experiences this way: "Gay life was not so much a life as an aggregate of cliques."

Just as earthshaking as the 1934 San Fran cisco General Strike had been in chang ing his life, Hay explained how three years later a panoramic Marxist view transformed his thinking.

Screen writer Viola Brothers Shore invited Hay in late 1937 to a Marxist discussion group in the home of film director Frank Tuttle.

This experience was "wildly exciting," Hay described. "Suddenly it all made wonderful sense."

Next: Bringing communist experience to building a new mass movement.

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Harry Hay tried to 'close chapter' on his gayness

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 33

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 4, 2005 5:15 PM

In 1938, Harry Hay—only a decade away from launching the first mass political movement for homosexual emancipation in the United States—married a woman comrade in the Communist Party USA (CPUSA).

Since the CPUSA at that time did not allow openly homosexual members, it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that Hay, a member of the CPUSA, felt so isolated as a gay man that he married merely in order to hide his sexuality inside the organization.

But Hay knew he wasn't the only gay party member. He wrote, "I knew a number of Black and white men from the performing arts in the Communist Party who were gay, but the Party didn't seem to suspect. I realized that since they weren't that unnoticeable, certain Party people saw the necessity of tolerating and covering for them." (Stuart Timmons, "The Trouble with Harry Hay")

Simply attributing the pressure towards heterosexual marriage to the CP's internal policy removes the historical context. Outside the party, homosexuality was illegal; state regulation of sexuality was enforced by police entrapment and raids, imprisonment and institutionalization.

As biographer Timmons succinctly summed up, "Marriage was common for both male and female homosexuals of Harry's generation. The most famous modern homosexual, Oscar Wilde, was married with children. Matrimony, in one of Harry's more philosophical letters, seemed 'the casting couch for society.'"

As historian Jim Kepner noted, "In the forties, for many gays who wanted to be socially productive, marriage was a necessity." While there were a few professions in which a gay man might remain unmarried—dance, design, dressmaking—those were not political hot spots of organizing.

Harry Hay was an organizer who wanted to be in the thick of the working-class struggle.

'If only she'd been a boy!'

In the late 1930s, Hay had talked to psychologist Dr. Saul Glass, while taking part in Glass's experiment that sought physiological markers for same-sex love. Hay was part of a control group whose blood and urine was compared to that of gay/bi/trans prisoners held in the "Fruit Tank" of the county jail.

Hay lamented to Glass that he felt hopeless "in not being able to find a flower-faced boy who was a Marxist like me, who would stand with me in the class struggle against oppression."

Glass's suggestion was creative, within the confines of accommodation to oppression: "Maybe instead of a girlish boy, you're looking for a boyish girl."

Hay recalled, "He told me that all I needed to do to change my orientation was to deliberately close one book and open another."



Shortly afterward, Hay was drawn to Anita Platky. She was a 6-foot tall, strong-jawed athletic woman described by some as "boyish." And much to the dismay of Hay's well-to-do Catholic family, Platky was Jewish.

Timmons wrote, "Harry told Anita about his homosexual past. She assured him she understood, that she already knew several men who were 'that way.' At least one of Anita's few boyfriends before Harry had also been gay."

The two marched in the same demonstrations, walked the same picket lines, and shared the same hatred of oppression and the same commitment to the socialist future of humanity.

So in 1938, Harry Hay and Anita Platky exchanged wedding vows. At the request of the couple, the ceremony left out any "God stuff."

They remained married for 13 years. Hay said, "Anita and I loved each other dearly and had a wonderful time doing anything together. We rarely quarreled because I usually understood her point of view. Most of her family and friends thought we were a perfect match—I never looked at another woman. (But oh the men!)"

Timmons concluded, "Harry once said, with awkward sincerity, 'If she had been a boy, we would still probably be together."

Learning communication skills

In 1939, the couple moved to New York and as communists became immersed in the movement there.

In 1940 they were part of the many thousands who marched through the streets on May Day. Hay described, "Everyone was singing the Leftist anthem, the 'Bandiera Rossa Trionfera.' It echoed through the canyons of the city. People were hanging out of windows singing. You'd really think the whole of Manhattan had signed up with the Party."

Hay was assigned to the Artists and Writers branch of the New York CP.

He became interim head of the New Theater League in 1941. This trade union theater staged actual shop floor battles that workers had fought in order to educate and organize.

Harry explained that as workers successfully organized their shops into unions, "Somebody would eventually say, 'Jeeze, somebody ought to write a play about what we went though. ... If we told our story, other shops could learn from us.'"

Hay organized a fund-raising concert for the theater effort that brought the legendary blues singer Leadbelly, Aunt Molly Jackson, the famous voice of the Harlan County coal workers' struggle, and others to the Auto Workers' Hall in lower Manhattan.

Hay taught acting to workers in unions, including the Longshore, Cooks and Stewards, and Bus Drivers unions. Timmons concluded, "In their classes, people often re-enacted actual confrontations with their bosses, living out the idea of shops learning from one another's struggles.

"So Harry joined the clan of theater teachers, from whose distinctive bag of communications tricks he would draw heavily in his future activism."

Next: Turning to struggle and history for answers.

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'Historical materialism in ¾ time'

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 12, 2005 3:23 PM

Long before Harry Hay made his landmark contribution to a historical understanding of how sexuality and gender diversity evolved over the millennia, he honed his theoretical tools by delving into a deep and comprehensive study of Marxism—particularly the historical materialist view of the past patterns of changes in the organization of human society.

Hay carefully studied anthropology from a Marxist vantage point and applied and developed this knowledge in his teachings on the history of folk music.

"During his years in New York City, between 1939 and 1942," observed editor Will Roscoe, "when he had access to the [Communist] Party's library, he read the historical writings of Marx and Engels and took advanced classes in Marxist theory with the intention of becoming a Party educator." ("Radically Gay")

In addition, Hay turned to anthropological studies. Biographer Stuart Timmons noted, "Many Marx ists, particularly Europeans, published extensively in the fields of history and anthropology in the thirties and forties, and Harry read their books avidly." ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

As early as 1933, Hay found Robert Briffault's "The Mothers," which contrasted the important social role of females in ancient, cooperative societies to the oppression of women in class-divided societies.

By 1945, Hay was studying the findings of Marxist archaeologist Gordon Childe. He also read the works of Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray and Robert Graves. Hay remarked that he found the writings of the British Marxist scholar George Thomson, who wrote "Studies in Ancient Greek Society," to be "an absolute eye-opener." Hay was also influenced by British Marxist Christopher Caudwell. (Roscoe)

"Harry's teaching put him in contact with information that later influenced his gay thinking," noted Timmons. "While digging through books about the historical development of economics in Europe, he amassed data about pagan religion, the oppressive campaigns of Christianity, and roles seemingly assigned to gay men in certain former societies. (The latter subject was, of course, a secret study.) He rediscovered Edward Carpenter in 'The Making of Man,' by V.F. Calverton, an anthology of anthropological articles. Carpenter and Edward Westermarck discussed these roles."

Hay also found information about sexuality/gender/sex diversity among Native nations in North America. The umbrella term "two-spirits" is the language chosen by many Native activists today to describe sex/gender/sexuality-variant people in their nations.

Roscoe, who has himself written extensively about two-spirit people, stressed, "[Hay] was particularly impressed by (and often cited) Ruth Benedict's account of Two-Spirits in 'Patterns of Culture.' As Benedict relates, Two-Spirits enjoyed a reputation not only for excellence in crafts and domestic work, but in many tribes they were religious specialists as well."



Hay: 'Theoretician of People's Songs'

While living in Manhattan, Hay became excitedly swept up in the left-wing folk music movement.

The impact of the African American struggle was so enormous that, Roscoe stated, "Leftist performers and folklorists began to collect and record Black spirituals, folk songs and jazz music. Because this culture had emerged from the chrysalis of a struggle against oppression, progressives argued that it was a valuable resource for present-day movements, as well."

Roscoe added, "Hay dates his own interest in folk music to the summer of 1937, when he worked on his grandfather's ranch in central California and helped organize a dance for local people where he heard a variety of traditional music. In 1940, while living in New York, he met Pete Seeger and followed his efforts to revive folk music. Five years later, after he had returned to Los Angeles, he attended an early 'hootenanny' organized by Earl Robinson, Ray Glazer and Bill Wolfe."

Together with those three men, Hay established Los Angeles People's Songs in early 1946, which later affiliated with Pete Seeger's New York-based "People's Songs, Inc."—which had been set up to make folk music accessible for left-wing organizing campaigns and struggles.

That same year, the People's Educational Center—which unionists and other progressives set up as part of adult education programs—asked People's Songs to develop a music history class.

Hay enthusiastically took up the challenge. He began with a 10-lecture series, but it quickly expanded to 20.

By the fall of 1947, Timmons explained, "Harry had outlined and begun to teach his music class, 'The Historical Development of Folk Music.'" In retrospect, Hay called it "a survey of historical materialism in three-quarter time."

Historical materialism is the lens with which Marxists view stages of human economic development. Increasing efficiency of human labor in producing food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of survival lies at the root of changing social organization.

Hay's research, Roscoe stated, armed him with the historical data and theoretical tools he would need to draw on less than a decade later in organizing the Mattachine movement—the first successful mass homosexual emancipation organization in the U.S.

Folk music: barometer of class struggle

According to progressive composer Earl Robinson, who wrote "Joe Hill" and "That's America to Me," Hay became "the theoretician of People's Songs."

In response to an e-mail query asking if the lectures are still preserved in any form, Timmons wrote back: "Unfortunately, Harry's lecture series was never recorded in any form to my knowledge."

All that exists is an outline, which is included in the book of Hay's writings entitled "Radically Gay," edited by Will Roscoe. (Hay and Roscoe, Beacon Press, 1996)

"Radically Gay" provides the following information.

In his lecture notes for Session 1 on Music and Survival, Hay wrote: "To all of history and to two-thirds of the world today, music is a language, an encyclopedia of patterns, a science—or organization. A method of communicating, organizing, educating, mobilizing in ways beyond the scope of language or static illustration."

He added, "But it talked to you only because you knew its patterns and no matter where you encountered the pattern you recognized it."

Hay looked at the inextricable relationship of music to group labor in early folk—or cooperative—societies.

"The vast majority of music that we know is the social production of the world's people—and 90 percent of it was never written down," he observed. "Yet the forms, the patterns, the melodic ingredients have been remembered and passed on, as we shall see, for at least 5,000 years. Why? Because they were used, were needed, were vital, were basic to survival.

"Most folk collectors find that folk singers can remember neither words nor tune without doing the 'movement.' Thus the form and pattern of the dance-song are the production-tools of the work required—and not products of the fun. And the people preserved these patterns as long as the work these patterns produced was necessary to the struggle of daily existence"

Roscoe stressed that while Hay was not the first Marxist musicologist, "Hay's approach to the study of folk music was unique, however, in treating it as an example of dialectics in action—the same way Marxism viewed science, as a comprehensive system to knowledge and communication. Somewhat parallel to the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, the French anthropologist who developed structural anthropology, Hay sought to derive the 'message' of folk music from an analysis of the musical form itself."

As a Marxist, Hay studied the earliest and longest form of human economic organization: communal societies. He refers to them as "matriarchal" or "matriarchate." Today these terms may conjure up the image of a society based on the television cult classic "Xena, Warrior Princess" or Amazons, hatchets in hand, ruling over men.

In reality communal societies are more precisely defined as matrilineal, meaning blood descent was traced through females as mothers, not males as fathers, and matrifocal, which means that the extended family lived in the collective household of the mother's bloodline, not the father's.

Struggle to defend communal life

Hay traced the resistance of collective farmers against attempts to turn them into serfs, forced to till the earth as laborers by the land-owning feudal class. Since the work and music of the folk farmers were tightly woven, Hay argued that the battle to retain folk ways—including rituals and music—was part of the struggle against the emerging threat of economic domination.

Roscoe explains, "In cultures without written records, Hay argues, music serves not only to *preserve* information, it provides the means of *implementing* knowledge as well, through songs and dance steps that organize work functions. For this reason, it was impossible for the folk to separate the tasks of planting and harvesting from the rituals that had always surrounded these acts. Consequently, European tribal villagers clung to their pre-Christian customs and cultural forms, including music, not only to preserve their social identities, but because these forms were indispensable to their modes of production."

Hay also appeared to believe, as did Marxist Christopher Caudwell, that what are referred to as "magical beliefs" in pre-class societies were an early attempt to understand the patterns of nature and humankind's relationship to it. In other words, they contained both supernatural beliefs and scientific knowledge about nature.

Hay believed the pre-class rituals and belief systems that survived into feudalism still reflected communal values. "Ritual and magic are usable only on a group level, and serve to promote unity, to maintain identity, and even to offer the collective security needed to continue the struggle for survival so long as the group maintains a daily drive to maintain integration between all of its

components."

Music of resistance

Hay traced the communal struggle to hold on to the old belief system and its rituals against feudal ruling-class religion, which sought to ideologically justify the enslavement of peasants and the brutal exploitation of their labor. In Europe, the demonizing of "pagans" and "witches" was in reality a bloody weapon against free farmers and rebellious serfs.

Roscoe noted, "In the context of feudalism and Christianization, these cultural forms took on an added dimension, becoming modes of political resistance and cultural survival as well."

He described, "Hay often had participants do exercises, such as composing and singing their own rounds or developing variations on a ballad to demonstrate how cultural and political resistance could be communicated beyond the spoken word."

Hay pointed out that folk songs can communicate beyond the lyrics alone. He stressed that the tune later known as "Bergen-op-Zoom" was used as an organizing tool in 1622 to unite the Dutch against an invading army from Spain. They had no common tongue with which to speak to each other because they had grown up in different regions with distinct languages.

Roscoe concluded, "They all had their own words for the song, but its rhythms were everywhere associated with the same dance steps, which included, at one point, the formation of a double file—exactly the organization needed to start the soldiers on their march to rescue the town of Bergen-op-Zoom from the Spaniards.

"The song was also used by the Dutch resistance during World War II.

"At Hay's suggestion, the Mattachine organizers adopted it for their membership initiation ceremony."

Next: 'Bachelors for Wallace!'

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'Bachelors for Wallace'

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series part 35

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 26, 2005 4:14 PM

On Aug. 10, 1948, Harry Hay first formulated the organizational and political call for what would become in just a few short years the Mattachine movement for homosexual emancipation.

That was the night that Ray Glazer—who wrote for both the left-wing People's Songs and for the popular radio program "Duffy's Tavern"—invited Hay to be one of 90 people at a public signing of presidential hopeful Henry Wallace's candidacy petition in California. (Stuart Timmons, "The Trouble with Harry Hay")

Hay was thrilled about Wallace's campaign. Henry Agard Wallace was running for president on the Progressive Party ticket against incumbent Democrat Harry Truman and Republican Tho mas Dewey. Wallace had been Franklin D. Roosevelt's secretary of agriculture during the Depression and then vice president from 1941 to 1945.

Wallace was still publicly championing the "New Deal" reforms he helped craft for FDR's administration—economic concessions designed to save capitalism from a potentially revolutionary movement of workers and oppressed people. As a third-party candidate, he opposed the Cold War already begun by the right wing of the U.S. capitalist class, which had emerged from World War II with military, political and economic supremacy over the world.

The Communist Party USA (CPUSA), of which Hay was an active leader, was putting its weight behind the Wallace campaign. Some Democrats became enthused and were registering as Progressives. And for many who hungered for progressive change, Wallace's slogan of faith in "the quietness and strength of grass"—the grassroots—infused them with hope and energy.

In virtually every campaign speech, Wallace denounced Jim Crow segregation—even in the rural Deep South. Wallace spoke to 16,000 cheering people in Louisville, Ky., in 1947—the biggest unsegregated meeting ever held in that city. ("Subversive Southerner," Catherine Fosl)

Students for Wallace at UCLA marched in protest against "whites only" barber shops near the Westwood campus. (Timmons)

Bachelors for Wallace

That night of Aug. 10, still exhilarated by the signing event, Hay went to a party in which the two dozen guests were all men who he later said seemed to be "of the persuasion."

A French seminary student at the party asked if Hay had heard about the recently published "Kinsey Report." Hay himself had been interviewed and become part of that study eight years earlier.

It was a bit of a code for a male stranger to open up with talk about the Kinsey Report. Timmons points out, "Its first volume, 'Sexual Behavior in the Human Male,' was the season's most talked-about book, especially among homosexuals, with its claim that 37 percent of adult men had experienced homosexual



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relations. To Harry, that newly revealed number suggested the dimensions of an organizable minority. He voiced the idea. When his friend protested that organizing homosexuals was impossible, Harry rebutted him. There could be millions of people who might fall into a group that would find great benefit in organizing. Certainly it would be difficult, but it was not impossible."

Others at the party were drawn to this debate. They reportedly disagreed with Hay: "There was too much hatred of homosexuals. Any individual who went public could be entrapped and discredited. There were too many different kinds of homosexuals; they'd never get along. And anyway, people belonging to such an organization would lose their jobs."

As Hay batted away at each argument, he reportedly became more convinced himself that it was possible to organize homosexuals. He raised the idea of creating a "fast bail" fund and seeking out progressive attorneys for victims of anti-gay police entrapment. This was an important concept, since getting caught in a sting operation by cops meant shelling out lots of money to shady lawyers and crooked officials.

Hay also suggested incorporating education about homosexuality in high school hygiene classes.

Soon Hay was leading a discussion about building a gay male organization to support Wallace's presidential bid, which in turn might win a sexual privacy plank in the Progressive Party platform. (John D'Emilio, "Making Trouble")

By then, Hay was winning over some of his audience. They suggested some defiantly campy names, but Hay put forward a more subtle one: "Bachelors for Wallace."

While still at the party, Hay wrote out all the ideas that had been discussed that night about homosexual organizing on a sheet of butcher block paper.

'It was high time!'

Biographer Stuart Timmons offers the following detailed account of what Hay thought about and did that night after the party.

As he drove home, Hay thought about how the reactionary post-war period "was already of concern to many of us progressives. I knew the government was going to look for a new enemy, a new scapegoat. It was predictable." African Americans were galvanizing a movement for civil rights, buttressed by world horror at the mass extermination of Jews by German fascism. But those he called "the Queers" would be a natural scapegoat.

"They were the one group of disenfranchised people who did not even know they were a group because they had never formed as a group. They—we—had to get started. It was high time."

That night he sat up in his study writing two papers. The first was a proposed plank for the Progressive Party platform. The second was a proposal for an organization of gay men that could continue after the party convention was over.

Timmons described the document concerning homosexual organizing in some detail. "This second, much more elaborate paper, based in a Marxist perspective, forged a principle that Hay had struggled years to formulate: that homosexuals were a minority, which he temporarily dubbed 'the Androgynous Minority.'"

Hay referred to the shared characteristics of what constitutes a nation to argue that homosexuals were a cultural minority. Hay wrote, "I felt we had two of the four, the language and the culture, so clearly we were a social minority."

'Some day a reckoning!'

Hay's thinking in that document reflected the profound impact of the fight

against racism on a white activist. Being a gay man whose sexuality made him an outlaw in every state, and who lived in fear of police and right-wing violence, certainly magnified his rage against other forms of inequality and injustice—particularly racism.

Hay often recounted a trip he had made to a political conference in Chicago in May 1940 with a Black married couple and a white man. En route, the four stopped at an all-night diner in Gary, Ind. The waitperson poured coffee for Hay and the other white man, but she balked at serving the African American woman and man. Instead, she dusted off a little sign and placed it in front of the cash register. It read: "We reserve the right to refuse service to customers whose patronage is unwelcome."

Hay and the other white man gave their coffee to their friends, waited until their omelets arrived and then ground their meal checks into the freshly-delivered meals. The four walked out, knocking over the racist sign as they all left.

Years later Hay recalled vowing as he left the restaurant, "Someday, someday, there's going to be a reckoning if I can help it."

Hay also remembered being part of an anti-racist protest in autumn 1945 in Silver Lake, Los Angeles, when Josephine Baker came to town. The management at the Thistle Inn refused to seat some 50 to 60 luminaries from Los Angeles's African American community who were waiting for Baker to arrive.

Hay described his excitement as those who were turned away immediately set up a picket line outside the restaurant. And, he recalled, when Baker and her entourage arrived, she immediately joined them in protest.

One culture or many cultures?

Hay's attempt to compare homosexuals to African Americans as a "cultural minority" demonstrated how powerful the Black movement was in the United States.

However, African peoples, who had come from many nationalities and cultures with different languages, were forged into an oppressed nation by mass kidnapping and chattel slavery historically imposed by the landowning class with complicity from the captains of banking and commerce and industry.

Hay and others who wanted to struggle against the degrees of discrimination and disenfranchisement that they experienced were inspired by the rising resistance of African Americans, who had been blocked from achieving even basic equal democratic rights with whites by the overturning of the revolutionary effort at Black Reconstruction.

The period in which the CPUSA had recognized the right of African Americans to self-determination as an oppressed nation—including the right to a separate state in the South—must surely have inspired Hay to consider that it was not a contradiction to fight against oppression while waging the class struggle to overturn capitalism. In fact, fighting oppression is a prerequisite for building class unity.

Hay's early formulation that homosexuals were a cultural minority was also a political approach that in many ways was aimed at answering the social current of opinion, voiced by the men at the Aug. 10 party, which argued that homosexuals were not "organizable" because they shared nothing in common except their sexual attraction.

However understandable and well-meaning Hay's political equation was, attempts to compare gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans people as a group with oppressed nationalities as a political model—a political equation which continues to this day among many in the modern LGBT movement—has not brought greater theoretical clarity to the movement for sexual and gender liberation. Where this view has not been dealt with thoughtfully, it has done harm to

solidarity with nationally oppressed peoples as a whole.

In truth, homosexuals and bisexuals—female and male—transsexual, gender variant and intersexual people, then and now, belong to many diverse cultures and nationalities.

And they are represented in every economic class in capitalist society. In this country, for example, the vast numbers of men who are sexually and affectionally attracted to other men are not all white and small-business owners or mega-rich—as they are often divisively portrayed in the spin of the modern monopoly media machine.

The overwhelming majority are from the laboring class—and this is even more true for lesbian and bisexual women. And certainly the segment of the transsexual and transgender population that is socially visible and recognizable in the U.S. is particularly marginalized in the workforce, if able to find work at all.

As workers they all have nothing to rely on to survive economically but their own labor or that of their families—chosen family as well as those related through patrilineal blood lines.

However, even among LGBT workers as a whole, those from oppressed nationalities—Black, Latin@, Arab, Native, Asian—face a much different social, political and economic reality overall based on inequality, discrimination and other forms of institutionalized racism than do white LGBT workers.

Cold War created fear of fascism

As Hay worked throughout the night on his first manifesto, certainly easier to assess from today's historical vantage point, he farsightedly aligned the struggle of "androgynes" with the left. However, he saw them uniting against what he thought was the encroachment of fascism.

Timmons wrote, "He suggested a comparison of the political manipulation and murder of homosexuals in Nazi Germany to recent firings of gays by the State Department. This particularly alarmed him; could what happened in Germany happen here?"

Hay's incorrect view that a fascist takeover was looming was shaped by the CPUSA's similar assessment. This led the party to send its cadre underground and it also resulted in Hay later stressing the need for Mattachine to be a clandestine organization.

In the statement Hay worked on all night, he did emphasize that civil rights for homosexuals was a struggle that would have an impact on the civil rights of all heterosexuals, as well. He explained that "guilt of androgynity BY ASSOCIATION, equally with guilt of Communist sympathy by association, can be employed as a threat against any and every man and woman in our country as a whip to insure thought control and political regimentation."

In this very accurate line of reasoning, he was sadly far ahead of the overall CPUSA leadership, which was caught in the Cold War between the anvil of the "Red Scare" and the hammer of the "Lavender Scare" without being able to politically arm the movement against both forms of capitalist reaction.

Arguing that U.S. laws were rooted in fundamentalist religion, Hay called for application to homosexuals of international laws that he believed more broadly protected overall human rights.

When the sun came up, Hay had signed this five-page organizational outline and manifesto which he termed "the Call" with his nom de guerre: Eann MacDonald. This original document was lost during the 1950s. (A version he revised and expanded on July 7, 1950, is included in "Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of its Founder—Harry Hay," published by Beacon in 1996)

That morning, Aug. 11, Hay phoned everyone from the party who had shown serious interest in this prospectus for organizing homosexuals. But in the light of day, their hope for its possibility burned off like the mist.

Hay described how during the next two years he faced a "Catch 22" situation. When he approached progressive social workers, teachers and ministers with his idea, they told him to come back when he got a discussion group on his ideas underway. When he talked to progressive-minded gays, they told him to get prominent support first.

"So—there it was!" he concluded. "I couldn't get a list of sponsors until I got a discussion group going, and I couldn't get a discussion group going until I had a committee of sponsors."

It took two more years before Hay found one other person who shared his vision. Once this "society of two" discovered each other in 1950, the history of homosexual organizing in the U.S. accelerated.

Next: Communists ignite dry tinder of material conditions

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1950: Gay leftists organize against Korean War

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series, part 36

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 2, 2005 9:03 PM

Harry Hay met young Rudi Gernreich, a costume designer and dancer, at Lester Horton's Dance Theater on Melrose Avenue on July 8, 1950. "The day he met Gernreich, he often said, they created a 'society of two' that became the Mattachine," biographer Stuart Timmons recalled. ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

The 28-year-old Gernreich, a left-wing Jewish gay man, had fled fascist Austria when he was 16.

In the days after they met, Hay excitedly revised his call for organizing homosexuals. This third revised draft is the only one that still exists in print.

Hay gave his prospectus to Gernreich, who exclaimed after he'd read the written ideas, "It's the most dangerous thing I've ever seen, and I'm with you one hundred percent."

While Gernreich was enthusiastic, he also reminded Hay of the dangers. Before escaping fascism, Gernreich said, he had known about the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement led by Magnus Hirschfeld. Gernreich explained that when the Nazis destroyed the movement's Institute for Sexual Research, they used its records to send homosexuals to concentration camps.

Hay poured out his frustrations about the two years since he'd written the first prospectus. He had approached homosexuals about organizing a public forum to objectively discuss the Kinsey Report. And he talked to professionals about being sponsors. Neither group would move until the other did. "I had talked to hundreds of people between Bachelors for Wallace and Mattachine, and people on both sides were afraid to take the first step. It was like being told you had to have a harp to get into heaven and that you had to go to heaven to get a harp."

Gernreich had connections in Hollywood. He had worked as a sketch artist for Edith Head. Marlene Dietrich and Dorothy Dandridge had befriended him. And being a dancer with the Horton dance company put Gernreich in touch with both audiences and cutting-edge artists from a socially-conscious current.

Gernreich asked Hay for 60 copies of the manifesto, took Hay to social events and introduced him around.

Gay activists against Korean War

Just 10 days before Hay and Gernreich met for the first time, the Pentagon had unleashed war against Korea.

The two young activists actively opposed the war and organized to bring the troops home. For the next two months, they walked up and down the stretches of beaches in Los Angeles and Santa Monica collecting signatures on an anti-war petition demanding the return of the first GIs deployed to Korea.

Hay later wrote: "At that time, all over the country there was a movement,



sponsored by progressives, to get as many signatures as possible for the Stockholm Peace Petition against the war."

This anti-war organizing took strength of conviction. W.E.B. DuBois, the 82-year-old founder of the NAACP, was arrested and handcuffed by police for trying to get signatures on the same petition. The case against him? That he had not registered as a "foreign agent" as mandated by the reactionary Smith Act. After widespread struggle that won multi-national support, the charge was later dropped.

Hay and Gernreich canvassed beaches where many gay and bisexual men gathered. They hoped that individuals courageous enough to sign the anti-war petition might also be brave enough to be interested in organizing for homosexual emancipation.

"We set about discovering new adherents on the two slices of beach Gays had quietly made their own," Hay later told historian Jonathan Katz. "The section of beach below the Palisades just west of Marion Davie's huge waterfront estate, and that slice of Malibu between the pier and the spit—which would be taken over by the surfers in the 1960s.

"From August through October 1950, 'X' [Gernreich's nom de guerre] and I undertook to get 500 of these petitions signed on the Gay beach in Los Angeles, in Santa Monica. And we got them, too, by God! We went down to the Gay beach and got them **filled!** And the Korean War was going full blast!

"We also used this petition activity as a way of talking about our prospectus. We'd go up to them on the beach—of course, this is an entirely different period, you understand, so when people went to the Gay beach then they'd talk about everything else except being Gay. We would tell them what we knew about the war, about the story of North Korea attacking South Korea being a fake.

"They we'd get into the Gay purges in U.S. government agencies of the year before and what a fraud that was. Then we'd ask, 'Isn't it high time we all got together to do something about it?' Everybody agreed, but nobody could think of anything to do without committing themselves. But at least they signed the petition, and some of the guys gave us their names and addresses—in case we ever got a Gay organization going. They were some of the people we eventually contacted for our discussion groups." (1974 interview, "Gay American History")

Fellow travelers!

Hay had met two like-minded activists earlier that year—Bob Hull and Chuck Rowland. In the spring of 1950, historian John D'Emilio noted, "The three men met one evening at a concert, and Hay, who suspected that the pair might be gay, decided to broach the subject of a homosexual rights organization.

"As it turned out, they had more in common than their homosexuality, since Row land and Hull had also been Com munist Party members." ("Sexual Politics")

D'Emilio explained that Rowland had "come out" at the University of Minnesota, where the militant mood of 1930s Min neapolis also swept him into campus pro tests "in support of the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War and against compulsory military training for students." ("Sexual Politics")

Hull attended the university at the same time, but the two men didn't meet each other in the Twin Cities until 1940. By that time Bob Hull, who had a graduate degree in chemistry, was following his passion as a pianist. The two men became lovers, and later, remained dear friends.

Hull and Rowland moved to Los Ange les together. Rowland had left the Communist Party USA by then, for personal reasons. Hull, who was still active in the CPUSA, took part in one of its southern California cultural units and the People's Educational Center, where he enrolled in Hay's music class.

But after that class ended, Hull and Rowland lost touch with Harry Hay.

In November 1950, Hay told Gernreich that Bob Hull had re-registered for his music course, and that he had a friend: "I think they might be interested."

Hay described the anxiety he felt as he later physically handed the prospectus in an envelope to Hull after class.

"On the following Saturday afternoon he calls up and asks whether he could come over. He sounds kind of distant. Well, Bob Hull, Chuck Rowland and Dale Jennings come flying into my yard waving the prospectus, saying, "We could have written this ourselves—when do we begin?"

Next: Cold War 'Lavender Scare' sparks struggle

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When idea for gay political organizing finally ignited

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series, part 37

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 7, 2005 9:45 PM

Harry Hay, Rudi Gernreich, Dale Jennings, Bob Hull and Chuck Rowland met for the first of a series of weekly meetings at Hay's home in the Silver Lake neighborhood in Los Angeles on Nov. 11, 1950, to discuss organizing for homosexual emancipation.

Each of the five brought their own history of activist mettle and revolutionary perspective to this bodacious initiative.

Rudi Gernreich was a gay Jewish immigrant from Vienna who knew about the rise of the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement. He had fled fascism and immigrated to the U.S. as a 16-year-old.



Gernreich and Hay had been organizing to stop the U.S. war against Korea and to bring the GIs home.

Hull and Hay were still members of the Communist Party USA, although Bob Hull was not as active as Harry Hay.

Hull and his lover Chuck Rowland--a former CPUSA member--had briefly lost touch with Harry Hay in the spring of 1950 when they moved to Mexico. Rowland stressed, "That was not just a wild, romantic spree; we were fleeing the witch hunts along with thousands of other [North] Americans from all parts of the country." Months later, the two decided it was safe enough to return to the U.S. to continue their work there. ("Making Trouble," John D'Emilio)

Dale Jennings was a writer and an activist who worked to defend the civil rights of Japanese-Americans who had been interned in the U.S. during World War II.

"Though Jennings was not a Party member," Hay biographer Stuart Timmons wrote, "Harry knew his sister and their mother, 'Ma Jennings,' from Party circles of the thirties, and Hay and Rowland regarded Dale Jennings as 'one hell of a fellow traveler.'" ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

Chuck Rowland had worked for the American Veterans Committee, which drew progressives, when he returned to civilian life after World War II. "I was made organizer for North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin. ... I was making speeches and advocating all the leftish things.

"We did some very daring things in the AVC. To start with, we were interracialand I was organizing chapters in places like Missouri and southern Iowa. It was incredible. I didn't know of any other interracial organizations at that time. ... Plus, women were admitted on an equal basis. We didn't have a women's auxiliary or anything like that." ("Making History," Eric Marcus)

AVC national officers charged in 1946 that communists had "infiltrated" the group. "Rowland's own inquires established that Communists were prominent



Respond

among the AVC organizers, but in his opinion they invariably turned out to be 'the most dedicated workers and sounded strategists.'" ("Sexual Politics," D'Emilio)

Rowland joined the party and was finally forced out of the AVC as a result. After that, he said, "I became head of the youth division of the Party, which was called the American Youth for Democracy, for both Dakotas and Minnesota. ... "I left the Communist Party in 1948, not because I was kicked out, not because I disagreed with anything, but because I just wanted out." ("Making History")

Timmons noted that neither Hull nor Rowland had experienced problems in the CPUSA because of their homosexuality. Rowland elaborated: "All the kids I worked with in AYD knew I was gay. It was not an issue you discussed, but they knew. Leaders of the Party in Minnesota knew. But I don't recall the issue arising in the two years I was active. I didn't even discuss it with Bob or another gay friend who was in the Party."

Rowland held on to his revolutionary perspective. "To most [North] Americans, Communists were wicked, horrid people. Even to liberals. But the so-called liberals sat around and talked about socialized medicine, integration, and the rights of women. The Communists, on the other hand, were out there on the barricades or picketing or closing down something—doing something about it instead of just talking." ("Making History")

'I could have written this myself!'

The November 1950 meeting of these five revolutionary activists in Los Angeles was not the first time that the idea of organizing homosexuals had been discussed.

Rowland recalled, "I don't think there was any thinking gay person who hadn't, at some time back in the 1920s or 1930s, said at a bar one night when feeling a little happy, 'You know, we should have an organization. We should get together and have a gay organization.' And usually you would be laughed out of the place.

"I think we started talking about a gay organization in Los Angeles in 1949, but I know the Mattachine wasn't formally organized until 1950. I don't think we had anything written down. It was just something my lover, Bob Hull, and I talked about. ...

"Bob had a music class taught by Harry Hay. One day Harry showed Bob something he had written about a gay organization. Bob brought this home and showed it to me. When I read what Harry had written I said, 'My God, I could have written this myself!'

"So Bob said, 'You've got to meet Harry.'

"Harry lived up in the Silverlake district on Fargo. We drove up there. Harry says I jumped out of my car waving the document saying, 'I could have written this myself!'

"I don't think I would have approached a stranger in that way at that time, but that's the way Harry tells the story."

Tinder for the sparks

If the idea for homosexual organizing had been discussed for decades, why did it suddenly ignite? Like flint striking flint, the idea needed the dry tinder of material conditions in order to catch fire.

D'Emilio explains, "The movement's history cannot be understood merely as a chronicle of how activists worked to mobilize masses of gay men and lesbians and to achieve a fixed agenda. Instead, the movement constitutes a phase, albeit a decisive one, of a much longer historical process through which a group of men and women came into existence as a self-conscious, cohesive minority.

"Before a movement could take shape, that process had to be far enough along so that at least some gay women and men could perceive themselves as members of an oppressed minority, sharing an identity that subjected them to systematic injustice." ("Sexual Politics")

The centralizing force of capitalism had drawn populations from rural and small town life into large cities. The second world imperialist war accelerated this historic process.

This massive migration was not just numerical. Large-scale war-time industry and military conscription of millions transformed the economic landscape, shook up the old family structures, and brought vast numbers of people who might never have come into contact with each other in the past into anonymous--often same-sex--employment, rooming houses and barracks.

After the war, many chose to stay to live and work in urban areas, which helped create milieus and subcultures that were the material precondition for gay organizing in 1950. (It would take another five years after that for the first large-scale lesbian organization to coalesce.)

Subhead: 'Lavender Scare' sounds the tocsin

The five activists who met at Harry Hay's home in November 1950 were also alarmed into action by the ominous and mounting Cold War "Lavender Scare." This targeting of gays and lesbians, meshing with the "Red Scare" anticommunist campaign, helped ignite homosexual organizing.

In February, Sen. Joseph McCarthy had delivered his infamous speech in which he declared that "card-carrying" communists were moles in the State Department. A month later, Deputy Undersecretary John Peurifoy testified before a congressional subcommittee that no communists were found in the department's employ, but that homosexual employees were the "security risks."

Peurifoy's testimony about gay and lesbian workers in the State Department, noted David K. Johnson in his comprehensive book "The Lavender Scare," generated "heated debates on the floors of Congress, congressional committee investigations, countless newspaper articles, and numerous White House meetings. It eventually led to the ouster of thousands of government employees. It marked the beginnings of a Lavender Scare."

The anti-communist drum beat was growing louder as the Pentagon waged imperial war against Korea. The federal government established "loyalty commissions" to spy on government workers.

This government snooping also worried federal workers who fell along the LGBT spectra. Barry D. Adam explained: "The commissions scrutinized their personal lives for what they thought were 'tell-tale' details: 'communist associates,' 'un-American' magazines or books, affiliation with Henry Wallace's Progressive party—even 'too great sociability with Black people or unorthodox styles of dress.'" ("The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement")

Adam noted that a 1949 Newsweek article headlined "Queer People" had "already named homosexuals as 'sex murderers,' echoing a consistent media theme identifying homosexuals as destroyers of society. From there, it was but a small step to brand gay people as traitors and to call for their expulsion from public life."

David K. Johnson documents the chilling effect the government witch hunt had on what he described as "the vibrant lesbian and gay subculture that had developed in Washington as a result of the large influx of young people during the New Deal and World War II."

But he adds this very important conclusion: "Though intended to contain what was perceived as a growing homosexual menace, the Lavender Scare inspired not only the founding of the first sustained gay organization in the United States in

southern California in 1951--an area heavily dependent on government-sponsored defense work--but also the later radicalization of the movement in 1960s Washington."

An idea whose time had come

Hay had been tipped off by an acquaintance about the State Department expulsions two years before they became media headlines in 1950. In notes he made in July 1950, Hay made clear he thought the purge of homosexual civil servants was part of an imminent takeover of the federal government by fascists.

As a communist organizer, Hay felt the hot breath of the House Un-American Activities Committee in Hollywood. Johnson adds, "Moreover, California had its own anti-communist investigating committee, and the two organizations in which Hay was most active had already come under its scrutiny."

Hay also feared that the federal purge of government workers accused of being gay or lesbian would set the stage for mass firings in privately-owned industries, particularly as U.S. capital's war against Korea deepened. "With 'the Government's announced plans for eventual 100 percent war production mobilization,' Hay reasoned that all commerce would be conducted by government contract, 'making it impossible for Androgynes to secure employment.' Working in Southern California, an area already heavily dependent on government contracts for much of its manufacturing base, Hay knew very well the influence the federal government could have on private enterprise." (Johnson)

In 1946, after the foundry he worked in was closed by the government, Hay had been employed at Interstate Aircraft. He was fired from that job after he and a co-worker organized about 15 employees into the Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists, and Technicians. He also had to pass up some jobs because as a communist he couldn't get security clearance. (Timmons)

So Hay understood that the federal anti-gay and anti-communist witch hunts would also have a broad impact on manufacturers that relied on big government contracts.

The whole state depended on government contracts--they fueled half the economic growth in that region in the decade after the war. And there were a quarter of a million federal workers in California, which was dubbed "a second United States capital." (Johnson)

"Given this experience and his fears about the future," Johnson concluded, "Hay felt that homosexuals in California had to organize a response to the encroaching federal purges."

Organizing--it was an idea whose time had finally come. And although communists didn't create these conditions that had made the political organizing of homosexuals possible, it was gay revolutionaries who took action.

Next: "We need a theory!"

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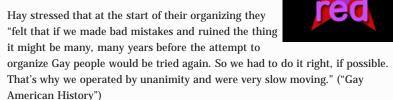
Mattachine: unmasking a 'masked people'

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans pride series, part 38

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 13, 2005 8:12 PM

"We sat there, with fire in our eyes and far-away dreams, *being* Gays." That's how Harry Hay described the first meeting on Nov. 11, 1950, of what would become the Mattachine movement.

The five founders--Harry Hay, Rudi Gernreich, Dale Jennings, Chuck Rowland and Bob Hull--formed a leadership core that met weekly. They took seriously the historic task of building what they hoped would become a homosexual emancipation movement.



Social oppression leveled against same-sex love and gender variance was so great, and political repression was becoming such an audible drumbeat, that the task appeared daunting.

One Mattachine founder explained to Stuart Timmons, Hay's biographer, "It was dramatic because anyone in the early fifties who was gay had a strange feeling of fear. Everyone had experienced something. For instance, picture walking into a bar you'd been going to for some time, not a gay bar but one where gay people had been welcome to drink. Drinks were a quarter there, but one day the bartender says, 'That'll be a dollar to you.' You'd realize with a shock that he didn't want you there. That's a minor example."

Timmons added, "The laws and customs of the era were stringently anti-homosexual; in California, as in most states, any sexual act except the missionary position between a heterosexual couple was a crime punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Anyone caught doing anything else could be made to register as a sex offender. Repeat offenders and those whose partners were minors were often sent to Atascadero state prison and given electroshock 'therapy,' or even subjected to castration. Since any public mention of homosexuality was equated with scandal, few workplaces would retain an employee whose involvement with such an organization became public." ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

As the Mattachine founders met to discuss organizing, the "Lavender Scare" was becoming a sensationalized propaganda component of the McCarthyite anti-communist witch hunt. The Senate was making public its report rooting out "sexual perverts" from government employment.

The deep-freeze Cold War climate was meant to have a chilling effect on all progressive and revolutionary organizing. And the Mattachine founders, as young revolutionaries, understood the powers of the state that the capitalist class could



unleash. They were well-aware that the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement and communists were early targets of the Nazi state capitalist regime.

Gernreich had been forced to flee fascism in Vienna. Jennings had worked to defend Japanese-Americans detained in U.S. internment camps during World War II. Anti-communism had forced Rowland out of his job as an organizer with the American Veterans Committee.

"Above all, Hay was acutely conscious of the growing climate of repression. With much of his party work centered on cultural activities, he was aware of the targeting of leftists in Hollywood by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). California, moreover, had its own anti-communist investigating committee whose head, Jack Tenney, came from Lost Angeles, and which held highly publicized hearings throughout the postwar years. The two organizations in which Hay was most active, People's Songs and the People's Educational Center, had already come under its scrutiny." ("Making Trouble," John D'Emilio)

This inhospitable political environment shaped the organizational form of Mattachine—the first sustained gay liberation organization in the United States.

Clandestine organizing

Hay revised his original 1948 plan for an above-ground "Bachelors for Wallace" model of political organizing. Instead, he proposed an underground organization.

"The first thing we did was set up a semipublic-type discussion group," Hay explained to interviewer Jonathan Katz, "so you didn't have to reveal yourself if you didn't want to. Only certain persons would be invited at first, but later they'd be invited to ask some friends." ("Gay American History")

Katz asked Hay where the idea of the underground organization came from. Hay replied, "In July 1950, I was still a well-sought-after teacher of Marxist principles, both in the Communist party and the California Labor School. I was teaching a course in music history at the Labor School, and was dealing with the Guild System and the Freemasonry movement, particularly at the time of [Austrian Hapsburg Queen] Maria Teresa, when to be a member of the Freemasonry was to court the death sentence. Both Mozart and Haydn had been Freemasons, courting punishment.

"This is also the way the Communist party had moved as a political organization in 1930-37, when it had been truly underground. I thought of the Freemason movement and the type of Communist underground organization that had existed in the 1930s, which I had known and been part of.

"So I began to work up the structure specified in the prospectus from the old left and, interestingly, was not too different from that structure employed by Algeria in its successful liberation struggle with France in the sixties."

Hay described how his thinking had changed in the two years since he'd written his original 1948 prospectus for homosexual organizing. "At first I had not been so concerned with planting the organization underground. The goals and ideology never changed particularly; I felt that what we had to do was to find out who we were, and that what we were for would follow. I realized that we had been very contributive in various ways over the millennia, and I felt we could return to being contributive again. Then we could be respected for our difference, not for our samenesses to heterosexuals. To a large extent that's what the whole movement was about.

"The 1948 prospectus outlined the basic idea. The 1949 version described how we would set up the guilds, how we would keep them underground and separated so that no one group could ever know who all the other members were and their anonymity would be secured."

The founding members created a centralized organization with five levels-known

as "orders"—of leadership, "with increasing levels of responsibility as one ascended the structure and with each order having one or two representatives from a higher order of the organization," wrote historian John D'Emilio.

"As the membership of the Mattachine Society grew, the orders were expected to subdivide into separate cells so that each layer of the pyramid could expand horizontally. As the number of cells increased, members of the same order but in different cells would be largely unknown to one another." ("Sexual Politics")

'A masked people'

Hay described the first organizational attempts. "We talked about the prospectus of the foundation, made our contacts with a fighting lawyer, who had defended one of us in court on a Gay charge, applied for a preliminary charter for a nonprofit corporation, and began (as of late November 1950) to have our discussion groups." ("Gay American History")

In the spring of 1951, the leadership core—the "fifth order"—formally changed the interim name of the organization from "Society of Fools" to the Mattachine Society.

"One of the cultural developments I had discussed and illustrated in my Labor School class on 'Historical Materialist Development of Music' was the function of the medieval-Renaissance French Sociétés Joyeux," Hay recalled. "One was known as the Société Mattachine. These societies, lifelong secret fraternities of unmarried townsmen who never performed in public unmasked, were dedicated to going out into the countryside and conducting dances and rituals during the Feast of Fools, at the Vernal Equinox.

"Sometimes these dance rituals, or masques, were peasant protests against oppression—with the maskers, in the people's name, receiving the brunt of a given lord's vicious retaliation.

"So we took the name Mattachine because we felt that we 1950s Gays were also a masked people, unknown and anonymous, who might become engaged in morale building and helping ourselves and others, through struggle, to move toward total redress and change."

Fear of police raids, Timmons emphasized, required that the Mattachine founders meet in secret. "When the occasional guest was invited, it was a standard security process for him to meet a Mattachine member at some public landmark, then to be driven around for a few blocks before being taken to the meeting place."

Rowland said, "We did not want to lead the police to our meetings, so we did not give guests the address." They changed locations regularly and kept the shades and curtains drawn—men meeting together in one room would appear suspicious.

Timmons added, "Because they had read that telephones could be used to bug a room, Rowland always put the phone in a dresser drawer and put a pillow over it. When people left the meetings, they kept their voices down."

'People were able to bloom'

In April 1951, Konrade Stevens and James Gruber became the last new members of the fifth order—affectionately dubbed "Parsifal," after the operatic knights on a quest to find the Holy Grail.

Neither Stevens nor Gruber had any experience with communism or knowledge of Marxism. After several months of meetings, Gruber related, "We would meet in various homes, and once, when we met at Chuck and Bob's, I was sitting on the couch and innocently picked up a newspaper. It was the Daily Worker. I thought it was a gag and made some sort of funny reference to it. Bob just took the paper. He didn't find it funny."

When other founding members took the opportunity to talk about their

communist beliefs and activism, they discovered that neither Stevens nor Gruber proved to be very anti-communist.

The fifth-order founder drafted the "Missions and Purposes" of Mattachine in April 1951 and ratified them on July 20. The stated goals were as follows:

"To unify" homosexuals who were "isolated from their own kind," and to create a principle from which "all our people can ... derive a feeling of belonging."

"To educate" all of society—homosexual and heterosexual alike, by developing an "ethical homosexual culture ... paralleling the emerging cultures of our fellow-minorities—[African American], Mexican, and Jewish Peoples."

"To lead," providing leadership of more "socially conscious homosexuals" to the whole mass of the homosexual population.

The goals included the "imperative" need for "political action" against "discriminatory and oppression legislation." And they concluded with the need to assist "our people who are victimized daily as a result of our oppression," terming this group "one of the largest minorities in [North] America today." ("Gay American History")

By summer of 1951, the number of discussion groups began to grow. The first participants were drawn from those courageous enough to sign the anti-Korean War petition Hay and Gernreich had circulated on southern California gay beaches. ("The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement")

The fifth-order group drew up a questionnaire to facilitate the discussion about first-hand experience with discrimination or encounters with police and courts, meeting sexual partners and going to bars, and coming out to family and coworkers.

"Few participants had ever before been asked such questions systematically, and the questionnaire fueled extended discussions," historian John D'Emilio explained. "Group members speculated on causes of homosexuality, reasons for social hostility to it, and where sexual 'deviants' could lead well-adjusted lives. They described the pain of discovering their sexual identities and the surrounding tragedies, as well as the strengths that survival in a hostile society had produced. Together they imagined how life might be different, how a gay subculture might emerge to provide emotional sustenance, and how homosexuals and lesbians might act to change social attitudes." ("Sexual Politics")

Hay noted, "The meetings were mostly male. A few women came and protested that they were not included, and after that more women came."

At first, Mattachine leaders adopted noms de guerre. Rudi Gernreich was referred to as "X" or "R"; his role in Mattachine was not revealed until after his death.

Those who took part in the discussion groups were "petrified that the government might get a list" of participants and feared that "the cops would come barging in and arrest everybody." ("Sexual Politics")

"But as time passed and no raids materialized, men and women dropped their defenses, friendships formed, and the meetings took on the character of intimate gatherings," D'Emilio continued.

James Gruber described the experience: "All of us had known a whole lifetime of not talking, or repression. Just the freedom to open up ... really, that's what it was all about. We had found a sense of belonging, of camaraderie, of openness in an atmosphere of tension and distrust. ... Such a great deal of it was a social climate. A family feeling came out of it, a nonsexual emphasis. ... It was a brandnew idea."

Geraldine Jackson, who became active in Mattachine, said that "people were able to bloom and be themselves. ... [It] was something we didn't know before." She

added that, finally, there was the chance to "say what you wanted to say and feel accepted." $\,$

She concluded, "You felt that you were doing something terribly worthwhile for our people."

Next: Impact of Black civil rights struggle on pre-Stonewall gay liberation.

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Pre-Stonewall gay organizing

Impact of early Black civil rights struggle

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Jun 21, 2005 10:58 PM

All five founders of Mattachine had at least some training in Marxism. Harry Hay, as a long-time teacher of the Marxist analysis of the development of society and the science of change, had the most theoretical experience. So rather than merely organizing to form an activist group, historian John D'Emilio points out, "The founders also brought to their planning meetings a concern for ideology that grew out of their leftist politics."

And, D'Emilio adds, "the worldview of its adherents rested on an analysis of society that saw injustice as rooted in the social structure. Exploitation and oppression came not from simple prejudice or misinformation, but from deeply embedded structural relationships." ("Making Trouble")



D'Emilio explores the attempts by Mattachine founders to bring ideological clarity to the social condition of

homosexuals in the 1950s United States. "The founders' lack of an already developed analysis of the oppression of homosexuals forced them to generate one by scrutinizing the main source of information available to them—their own lives. Throughout the winter of 1951 the five men met frequently to share their personal histories."

They talked about their isolation, loneliness and fear of being the only one in the world with such feelings; how they'd come out as gay men and found others like them.

D'Emilio explained, "Trying to make some collective sense out of their individual experiences, they posed such questions as: How did one become a homosexual? Were homosexuals sick as the medical profession claimed? Was it possible to overcome the isolation and invisibility of the gay population and organize homosexuals? Were homosexuals, perhaps, a minority group, or merely a conglomeration of individuals sharing nothing but a sexual orientation?"

From these discussions they gleaned their early analysis of the oppression of same-sex love.

Rowland: 'What is our theory?'

Chuck Rowland, one of the original five founders of Mattachine, recalled, "We had been saying, 'We'll just have an organization.' And I kept saying, 'What is our theory?' Having been a Communist, you've got to work with a theory. 'What is our basic principle that we are building on?'

"And Harry said, 'We are an oppressed cultural minority.' And I said, 'That's exactly it!' That was the first time I know of that gays were referred to as an oppressed cultural minority." ("Making History")

Rowland, with broad strokes, painted the outlines of two different political



Respond

approaches. "But gay people didn't want to be an oppressed cultural minority, 'Why, we're just like everybody else, except what we do in bed.' They wanted to be like everybody else. But that isn't true; we're not like everybody else. I don't think or feel like a heterosexual. My life was not like that of a heterosexual. I had emotional experiences that I could not have had as a heterosexual. My whole person, my whole being, my whole character, my whole life differed and differs from heterosexuals, not by what I do in bed. I believe there is a gay sensibility.

"When we tried to explain this to somebody, I would say, 'There is a gay culture.' People would say, 'Gay culture? What do you mean? Do you actually think we're more cultured than anybody else?' I would explain that I was using 'culture' in the sociological sense, as a body of language, feelings, thinking, and experiences that we share in common. As we speak of a Mexican culture. As we speak of an American Indian culture. We had to say that gay culture was an emergent culture."

Rowland continued, "The word *gay* itself is a marvelous example of what I mean by gay culture. You'll get a lot of arguments about this. But I know that *gay* was being used back in the thirties, and we didn't mean 'merry' or 'festive.' We meant 'homosexual.' This does not constitute a language in the sense that English is a language and French is a language, but it's more comparable to Yiddish culture. A lot of people, Jews and non-Jews, used Yiddish words like *schlep* and *meshuga*. These words separate them culturally from my mother, for example, who would never have heard of such words."

Hay himself tried to clarify what he meant by "gay culture." He wrote, "The Homophile common psychological make-up manifests itself in a community of culture so phenomenologically remarkable that it transcends the mechanical barriers of formal language by creating an international behavioral language of its own, in addition to sharing the pedestrian language of each parental community. To be sure, the communities of culture differ in detail from one national community to another. But they are enough alike that no one need be a helpless stranger whatever the port of call." ("Radically Gay")

An expression of anti-racist solidarity

Today, these attempts by the early Mattachine founders to compare their situation to that of the Dine (Navajo) and Pueblo nations, Mexican culture and language, and the relationship of Japanese-Americans to Japan and of African Americans to Liberia may not seem very sensitive to those struggling for national liberation.

But in the 1950s these white men were anti-racists and anti-imperialists. They dedicated their lives to fighting all forms of oppression. Identifying themselves as a cultural minority was partly an attempt to express solidarity with those battling racism and anti-Semitism, as they stated clearly in their 1951 Missions and Purposes. They called African American, Mexican and Jewish people "our fellow minorities."

The written prospectus that the Mattachine movement was built on, penned by Hay in 1948 and amended by him in 1950, began: "With full realization that encroaching [North] American Fascism, like unto previous impacts of International Fascism, seeks to bend unorganized and unpopular minorities into isolated fragments of social and emotional instability; ... in order to earn for ourselves any place in the sun, we must with perseverance and self-discipline work collectively ... for the first-class citizenship participation of Minorities everywhere, including ourselves" ("Radically Gay")

Those white gays and lesbians who later argued against this early Mattachine concept of gays as a cultural minority often used the most vile racist language because they did not want to be identified with African American, Mexican and Jewish people.

Many cultures raising their voices

The idea that lesbians and gays are one "culture" or comparable to oppressed nations obscured the fact that the vast population these movement founders were trying to organize was made up of many cultures and nationalities.

In 1950, for example, Merton Bird, a Black gay man, and Dorr Legg, a white gay man, formed the "Knights of the Clock" group in Los Angeles. The organization brought together inter-racial gay and lesbian couples and their families. This support network was necessary to provide a safe space to discuss social problems.

The Black gays and lesbians in the group not only faced the additional burden of racism, they were also part of an oppressed nationality with its own culture(s). Some of the racism directed at them also spilled over as discrimination and violence against their white loved ones—something not experienced by whites who partnered with whites.

Altogether, that's what made the formation of the Knights of the Clock necessary.

The underground LGBT bar crowds, largely blue-collar, were also made up of different nationalities. While the Mattachine founders were struggling in 1951 to find a political identity for homosexuals as a shared culture, Langston Hughes was publishing "Montage of a Dream Deferred," which included "Café 3 a.m." That poem, about a police raid on a gay bar, began "Detectives from the vice squad/with weary sadistic eyes/spotting fairies."

Hughes was part of the Harlem Renaissance, an exquisite artistic expression of a culture demanding its own liberation. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans artists and writers were among the visible, central figures who articulated that just demand.

'The Nightingale of Montgomery Street'

The formulation of a single culture was too narrow to fit the boldly ground-breaking 1951 San Francisco battle led by Jose Julio Sarria—a transgender Latin@—which demonstrated that bar life had its own "cultures." These included drag culture, which in reality was various cultures based on nationality, region and economic class.

Sarria, child of a Colombian mother and a Nicaraguan father, worked as a waiter and greeter at the Black Cat bar on Montgomery Street in San Francisco after World War II. Sarria drew audiences of hundreds when *ze* began singing arias on the job. Sarria gained local fame for leading patrons every night in singing "God Save Us Nelly Queens," which became a defiant gay anthem.

Sarria infused performances with the demand for gay rights and coined early gay pride slogans such as "There is nothing wrong with being gay—the crime is getting caught" and "United we stand, divided they catch us one by one."

Sarria showed courage in the face of police repression. When undercover cops infiltrated the bar, Sarria would point them out to the crowd by asking for a round of applause for the individual. And Sarria interjected warnings in song lyrics if there was a tip-off that police were about to raid. The "Nightingale of Montgomery Street" also led bar crowds and other transgender performers to the nearby jail to stand outside and serenade the LGBT prisoners. (www.sfpride.org)

When the state's vice and alcohol control agencies tried to shut down the Black Cat, in part because of the popularity and activism of Sarria, the owners and patrons sued and won a landmark decision. The California Supreme Court ruled that no state law allowed a bar to be closed solely on the basis of the clientele it drew. (www.qx.net)

Struggles were emerging from many cultures, particularly oppressed cultures, to demand LGBT rights and freedom.

Impact of Black civil rights struggle

The momentous organizing for African American civil rights, long overdue after

the overturning of slavery and the crushing of Black Reconstruction, lifted the aspirations of all who were discriminated against, downtrodden and disenfranchised.

A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, had begun organizing a mass mobilization in 1941—the original March on Washington. Randolph, like the Mattachine founders, had been influenced by the struggle for socialism in his early years. He said that his discovery of socialism as a young man was "like finally running into an idea which gives you your whole outlook on life."

Harry Hay in particular must have been aware that the demands of the 1941 March on Washington challenged discrimination by some of the same capitalist class enemies—the military, armament industries and federal government—that homosexuals were up against during the Cold War.

And Hay must have been inspired to see Roosevelt surrender to the demands of the March on Washington, which led to the cancellation of the demonstration, and the president publicly issuing the first executive order protecting the rights of Black people since the Emancipation Proclamation.

Two decades later, Randolph would turn to Bayard Rustin—a dynamic gay Black activist—to coordinate the 1963 March on Washington at which Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his now historic "I Have a Dream" speech.

Hay and other early gay rights activists were influenced by the Black civil rights movement in a broader sense, too. The rising tide of African American organizing raised all boats, and the hopes of all whose dreams had been deferred.

Edward Sagarin published "The Homosexual in America" in 1951 under the pseudonym Donald Webster Cory. Sagarin, who was a white member of the NAACP in his progressive years, had grasped the argument that there was no "race problem"—the problem was racism.

That led him to formulate his ground-breaking argument in "The Homosexual in America" that there is "no homosexual problem except that created by the heterosexual society." He may have been the first U.S. writer to describe homosexuals as a persecuted minority. And he urged homosexuals to rise up and demand their rights.

What set the Mattachine Society founders apart from others who were raising their voices for gay and lesbian rights, however, was that they were revolutionaries.

D'Emilio concluded, "As believers in a theory of social change that stressed action by masses of people on their own behalf, the founders kept the society focused on mobilizing a large gay constituency and wielding it into a cohesive force capable of militancy." ("Sexual Politics")

Next: Busted!

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Harry Hay: Painful partings

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 28, 2005 8:30 PM

As Harry Hay's dream of organizing homosexuals took on material reality with the formation and growth of the Mattachine Society in 1951, he faced painful partings.

Hay approached Anita, his partner of 13 years with whom he had adopted two children. He told her about the therapist who had said that Hay could "close the book" on his gay sexuality. "I told her that what the psychiatrist had said wasn't true, that the book would not close." Hay explained that he saw homosexuals as a scapegoated minority that had to be organized. The two were legally divorced in September 1951. ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")



The end of his heterosexual marriage resulted in the loss of almost all the friendships the couple had shared.

One of the closest of those friends, Martha Rinaldo, remembered the conversation she had with Hay weeks after his breakup with Anita. "He explained why this had happened and that he hoped it wouldn't make any difference in the way I felt about him.

"Because of the witch hunts that were starting up on leftists," Rinaldo continued, "I remember saying something to the effect of, 'Harry, are you sure you aren't trying to jump out of that fire—and that you're not jumping into a bigger fire?'

"None of us who weren't gay knew anything about the intensity of feeling that must involve," she concluded. "Looking back, I don't see how I could have said something like that." ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

'Coming out' to his party

Hay still faced another huge loss in his life.

In autumn 1951, Hay recalled, "I decided that organizing the Mattachine was a call to me deeper than the innermost reaches of spirit, a vision-quest more important than life. I went to the Communist Party and discussed this 'total call' upon me, recommending to them my expulsion." ("Gay American History")

The most details about why Hay called for his own expulsion, and what happened when he approached party leaders, can be found in Stuart Timmons biography, "The Trouble with Harry Hay."

"At that time," Timmons explained, "the Party was calling upon each member in one of its periodic re-registration campaigns. This was a project of the County Verification Committee of the Party, to make sure there was nothing politically vulnerable about the membership and to protect against a growing number of infiltrators and informers."

Communists were being witch hunted, ordered to register as "foreign agents" and plans for internment of leftists were not just talk.

"Hay took this opportunity," Timmons wrote, "to present his situation, in a



considered, formal and political manner, to his district section organizer, Miriam Sherman." Sherman and Hay had been friends since they'd met at the Horton dance company in 1934, where she was an accompanist.

When they sat down to talk about his membership, Hay handed Sherman a report. "It was two or three typed pages," Hay later said, "that outlined my services to the Party and my current involvement in the Mattachine."

Timmons added, "His continuation in the Party, he concluded, even under the best of circumstances, would be a liability to the organization, so he recommended his own expulsion as a security risk because of his homosexuality."

Hay elaborated on how he arrived at this serious decision. "Since homosexuals were forbidden membership in the Party, according to its own constitution, I felt that those members in California who knew my Party work would know I had never endangered Party security. But, were this matter to be aired in the *People's World* or the *Daily Worker*, members in other states might feel the Party had been lax about safeguarding the membership. I felt that a proposal for my expulsion would exonerate the California Party in *their* eyes, and that was the important thing."

Hay and Sherman sat talking for hours at her kitchen table. "I said that I felt that this was an important conversation she and I were having politically, and that one of these fine days, when it had been made clear that my people were socially responsible, maybe we could all come back together again. But at that moment we couldn't."

Sherman later described, "It was traumatic for me. I felt this guy was such an original thinker and hard worker and asset to the Party."

Timmons said that Sherman "probed uncomfortably" to see if Hay knew other, as she described them, "AC/DC" party members.

Hay responded by describing to her "the ancient and traditional pact faithfully adhered to in the Homosexual Brotherhood wherein one never reveals the identity of another without his permission—under *any* circumstances—even in the face of Party membership requirements."

Hay continued, "I suddenly realized what that could mean, and so did she, and we both got involuntarily teary-eyed. Like so many other Party people in those Loyalty Oath and McCarthy-ridden times, we had both experienced *best* friends who turned out to be FBI spies. We all had friends and relatives whose Jewish cousins in Poland or Germany had their hiding places and identities revealed to the Nazis by friends, neighbors, and even family members.

"After looking at each other for that long, blurry moment, Miriam blurted out, 'Could that be why the Party always insisted that homosexuals shouldn't become Party members or shouldn't be allowed to come close to inner Party life?'"

Hay concluded, "If I had gotten involved with a guy who had been an FBI snitch, this reason would have been very legitimate as regards Party security."

Any sympathetic reader can understand how difficult it was for these two comrades and friends of many years to try to sort all this out at the kitchen table. But this needs sorting out, even now.

Mixing apples and oranges

Yes, gays and lesbians were considered "outlaws" by the state at that time. The cops and courts actively hounded and persecuted them, and tried to use this legal vulnerability to manipulate anyone in their custody so as to extort cooperation or provide information.

However, having to hide their sexuality in order to remain members of the CPUSA made lesbian and gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual comrades more vulnerable to extortion and state pressures, not less.

And wasn't the state bearing down on communists, too? Weren't communists being fired and hounded on the basis that they were "security risks"? The CPUSA actually went underground during periods in which the leaders feared fascism was imminent.

It is important to remember that the CPUSA did have real security concerns—all communists did at that time. But the party's stance that prohibited gay and lesbian members can't be justified on that basis. The CP officially barred gay and lesbian members from joining, putting it on a political basis: that homosexuality was a result of the degeneracy of a decadent capitalist system.

This position flew in the face of the revolutionary leadership of Lenin and the early Bolshevik Party in Russia. Within weeks after the 1917 seizure of state power by workers and peasants, the Bolsheviks had removed the czarist anti-gay law that had made same-sex love vulnerable to state repression. They explained that this was a political action to tear down the walls dividing homosexuals from the rest of society.

It was an amazingly bold step for the new workers' state to take—one far in advance of anywhere else in the world at the time. And this advance was made not in a country with a long history of bourgeois enlightenment, but in one recently emerged from feudalism and medieval authoritarianism.

By the time the Communist Party had been firmly established in the United States, however, it took its outlook on homosexuality from the regressive recriminalization of homosexuality that emerged in the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership. As imperialism continued to surround and isolate and menace the workers' state, making it harder to build socialism, the grouping that took over the leadership after Lenin's death retreated from earlier revolutionary positions on many social issues.

Marx stressed that, since the partitioning of society into exploiting and exploited classes, the dominant ideas of any epoch have been the ideas of the owning classes. The bureaucracy Stalin came to personify in the USSR was not a new owning class. But its growth reflected the problems arising from the preponderance of capitalism on a world scale. These problems derived not from an inherent weakness in a socialist, planned economy itself, but from not enough socialism.

Under the weight of imperialist pressures and lack of material resources, old divisive prejudices—learned like habits over centuries of life under feudalism and capitalism—crept back in.

In the U.S. during the Cold War, the inability of the CPUSA to take a revolutionary position on same-sex love weakened the communist movement. The capitalist class here seized the opportunity to gay-bait communists and to subversive-bait homosexuals as primary weapons in the Cold War.

'Lifelong friend of the people'

It says a lot about Hay's character and his commitment to the struggle for a communist future that he put the party ahead of his own life's struggle. But his attempt to justify his organization's position on the basis of security really only illuminates how hard it was for him to face the fact that he had to leave the party in order to organize a movement against same-sex oppression and state repression.

The CPUSA leadership didn't take lightly the loss of Harry Hay, a party educator and theoretician.

Sherman described Hay's coming out as a gay man to her as "less a shock than an eye-opener," because it made her think about homosexuality in political terms for the first time.

Timmons explained, "She added that the manner in which he handled it posed a challenge to the Party. For a respected, valued Party member to make such a declaration was 'something new,' she said. 'Nobody knew how to handle it.'"

The paperwork regarding Hay's membership was taken up on county, state and national levels of the CPUSA before a decision was made.

Hay concluded, "They rejected 'expulsion,' and, in honor of my 18 years as a member and 10 years as a teacher and cultural innovator dropped me as 'a security risk,'" but they added that he would be considered "a life-long friend of the people." ("Gay American History")

The CPUSA lost a committed communist from its ranks. And the work that Hay was setting out to accomplish in building a movement for same-sex emancipation, and developing a historical and theoretical understanding of the roots of this form of oppression, had to take place outside the Communist Party.

Next: 'We had no words!'

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Finding the right word

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jul 8, 2005 10:25 PM

"We had no words for ourselves," stressed Harry Hay. "That's the important point—we didn't have words."

Organizers of the Mattachine Society were trying to build a movement to battle same-sex oppression in 1951. But how could they organize—write a leaflet or an article or hold a consciousness-raising discussionwithout language that precisely conveyed the same meaning to large numbers of people?





Descriptions of sex between two people of the same sex existed in writing—it was codified in every law book, with harsh penalties attached. But the word "homosexual" didn't first become an entry in a U.S. dictionary until 1938. More dictionaries only followed suit after World War II.

Mattachine leaders rejected the word. The term had been so criminalized and pathologized that it didn't socially invoke the meaning "same-sexual."

Other terms did exist, of course. Most were epithets and slurs that cut painfully deep.

Chosen language and euphemisms for same-sex love and variant gender expression developed among smaller social circles of what today would be referred to as LGBT people in towns and cities, among different nationalities and economic classes. But there was no recognizable term of pride that could be used for mass political organizing.

Instead, the Mattachine founders set out to coin what they thought was a new word: "homo phile." The term was drawn from the New Latin philia-friendship -which in turn had derived from the Greek word philos-loving.

Homophile: The word meant same-sex affection and loving.

"I really thought we had invented something new," recalled Hay. "I was astonished when Rudi [Gernreich] told me that he remembered the same word from the Hirschfeld movement."

The voice of the European movement had been so violently silenced or dispersed by fascism that it took those who had escaped—like Gernreich, a gay Jewish émigré from Austria-to retain and spread the knowledge of its gains in language and concepts.

As the Mattachine leaders crafted a term, it in turn helped hone their own thinking, like a sharp shovel blade. Hay in particular began digging around in history, sifting for answers: "Who are gay people? Where have we been in history? And most important, What might we be for?"

Early socialists like Edward Carpenter had asked these same questions half a century earlier. So had the leaders of the German Homosexual Emancipation movement.

But now these questions were being asked by a new generation of communist organizers looking to give their movement a historical foundation.

Marxist tools

Harry Hay was the Mattachine member most concerned with finding the historical roots of same-sex expression in order to understand where and why the oppression arose. He had for many years been a Marxist educator. He'd taught a series of popular lectures examining folk music from the standpoint of what it revealed about the historical conflicts between the laboring and ruling classes.

He was a voracious researcher who had spent years scouring the work of anthropologists, particularly those writing from a historical materialist viewpoint, looking for mention of those who lived in a social role outside of "heterosexual man" or "heterosexual woman."

Hay had explored the role of women in pre-class societies and the remnants of matrilineal traditions on the European continent. The Catholic Church—characterized by Frederick Engels as the political party of feudalism—had carried out a counter-revolutionary wave of terror to eradicate them.

Hay also studied the more complex paths of sex/gender/sexuality in Native nations on this continent.

He found a great deal of what he was looking for. Enough to develop his own ground-breaking survey and analysis of the history of "gay" people—a study he continued for many years.

The gist of the early conclusions he drew from his research can be found in talks he began to present at Mattachine meetings and discussion groups in 1953. "The Homosexual and History—An Invitation to Further Study" is reprinted in "Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of its Founder," edited by Will Roscoe. (Beacon Press: 1996)

Hay stressed that "Since a proper coordination of the social history of the Homosexual in Society has yet to be attempted, some of my material organizations and coordinations must be regarded as speculation. But, even so, it is speculation carefully molded in the anthropological tradition of Lewis Morgan, whose 19th-century speculative reconstruction of American Indian clan or tribe culture out of similarities between the Iroquois Matriarchate and the Hawaiian group marriage culture was authenticated completely in the 20th century by Boas, Benedict and Densmore in the Americas, Herskovitz in the Caribbean, and Mead in Melanesia."

Frederick Engels and Karl Marx thought the work of Morgan was as profound and revolutionary a contribution to anthropology as Darwin's theory of evolution was to biology.

Morgan documented "family" relationships among communal peoples that were completely unlike the father-dominated families in class-divided societies. Descent in these cooperative, pre-class societies was determined through the mothers, creating radically different familial formations—what Hay is referring to as Matriarchate.

Engels based his book "The Family, Private Property and the State" on Morgan's research. Engels made a landmark contribution to the struggle for women's liberation by showing how, as group labor grew more skilled, the accumulation of more than what was needed for immediate survival became wealth. He documented how this wealth developed in the male sphere of labor—primarily through animal domestication—and eventually led to the overthrow of matrilineal societies and their replacement with patriarchal family units designed to pass on wealth to male heirs.

"Leaning upon the coherent picture presented by these great scholars," Hay said he was "attempting a new correlation in assigning similar roles and developments to identical historical and cultural artifacts as they appeared earlier in the Mediterranean and later in Western Europe."

It was in this historical nexus between pre-class and class-divided societies that Hay looked for what he described as "the long-hidden outline of truth—and within that truth the real measure of the Homosexual's great contribution to society, to history, and to progress."

Hay traced the modern legal hounding of homosexuals in California back to that earliest accumulation of wealth at the dawn of class society.

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Hay studies ancient history, finds pride

Lavender & red, part 42

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jul 14, 2005 12:45 AM

Harry Hay's broad study of same-sex love throughout the changing history of the organization of human society and the method of his approach are achievements in themselves. He also made some important contributions of thought.

Hay talked about his discovery that "Within this matriarchal village structure, we find a new type of household, a separate household consisting of either one or two men. This household is called, anthropologically, the Berdache, or Bardache, a word applied to this phenomenon by 16th-century French and Spanish explorers."



The word Berdache, when applied to Native peoples on this continent by European colonialists, was used as a pejorative. It also lumped together diverse forms of social expression in disparate Native nations. In the decades since Hay made his study, Native peoples have made definitive and landmark reclamations of their own histories. Gay American Indians, for example, published "Living the Spirit" in 1988, which documented alternative sex/gender roles in more than 135 Native nations in the Americas, as well as the language used to describe them.

Today, the term Berdache has been rejected; Two-Spirit is the language that many Native people have chosen instead to describe those with diverse gender expression, sexualities and sexes. Out of deep respect for Native nations, therefore, the word Berdache is used here only when Hay refers to his observations about European traditions.

Developing a division of labor

Hay speculated that Two-Spirit people, in contrast to the family households, had "no old ones or young ones to care for" and "could provide for their own needs in one-quarter of the time spent by the rest of the village. ...

"In many cultures of Asia, Africa and South America, [Two-Spirits] carried the responsibility as the medicine-men, or shamans, of their village cultures. In medieval Europe, Donald Webster Cory reports that homosexuals were known as 'witch-men.'"

Hay drew the conclusion that, freed from the primary division of labor between females and males, a new work sphere developed. Two-Spirit people, he said, began to record social history and patterns of agricultural knowledge and taught new generations. began to make signs and designs to record the ritual festivals of dance, which were nothing more than the necessary natural imitations by which wind, rain, heat, and cold were summoned—which everyone must know and be able to perform if nature were to respond."

Hay surmises "Thus, in the [Two-Spirit] we see arise the great social division of labor which becomes the groundwork of industry as we know it today—the artisan and the cultural craftsman."



Respond

Hay theorized, "Thus, in America, Asia, Africa and Europe the [Two-Spirit] was not only the initiator of arts and crafts as specialties, but he begins to prepare the organization of teaching through design, story-telling, singing and organizing the practice of ritual—of these women's prerogatives and inventions—but also cultural patterns for which the women never had quite enough time. But this development of community tools and weapons, as a craft specialty of the [Two-Spirit], gives the men, in their leisure time from hunting, an opportunity to develop a new food-producing technique—the capture and domestication of animals."

Editor Will Roscoe, who has himself made contributions to research about Two-Spirit people on this continent, notes that "In the ethnographic literature, the role of Two-Spirits as specialists in arts and crafts is constantly stressed." But no other historian or anthropologist had made this link with economic specialization.

'Priests' or priestesses?

Hay explored the role of the Berdache in early slave and later feudal societies in Europe. He saw the remnants of the division of labor from pre-class society in the prominence of cross-dressed individuals in festival traditions that endured throughout European feudalism.

"Games and festival, in this social relation of ritual agriculture—equally true in the European feudal villages—were not times of fun and recreation. Rather, they were very serious and vitally important sociopolitical necessities through which everybody practiced and rehearsed, by formulas recorded in work-dance songs, the calisthenics of labor-patterns that would be needed in the coming season."

Hay tried to connect the "administrative role" of the Berdache in pre-class European soci eties with the fact that in villages in Cro atia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Thracia "the mayors were men who were married to other men."

And he inferred that with the development of class society, when science and religion split into irreconcilable opposites, the role of Two-Spirit people as "priests" in pre-class societies led to what he called the "State Berdache" or "state priest craft"—the religious institutions and church clergy that worked with ruling powers and maintained a hold over agricultural knowledge.

"It must be conceded that under State Berdache, as under its original form of tribal priestcraft, there was a percentage of recruits that were not Homosexually inclined," Hay noted.

What? Here's cause for pause.

Hay used the term Berdache as synonymous with homosexual men. But historical evidence suggests that Hay, in reality, was looking at much more complex and varying sex/gender and sexuality roles throughout history.

It might be more accurate to refer, not to gay male "priests," but to a tradition that more resembles what would today be described as transsexuality.

Roman historian Plutarch described the "Great Mother"—worshipped by preclass societies throughout the Middle East, Northern Africa, western Asia and Europe—as an intersexual deity.

The Great Mother's priestesses were born male-bodied and were inducted through ancient and sacred rituals that included castration. This is documented in Mesopotamian temple records from the middle of the third millennium B.C.E., and also in Assyrian, Akkadian and Babylonian records.

These ancient rituals demonstrated an understanding of surgical technique. Folk medicine, before the advent of Western medicine, also recorded ancient knowledge of herbal, root and floral properties. Did these ancestors also have the hormonal knowledge to aid in "sex reassignment"?

More than 2,100 years ago, the poet Ovid, exiled to a colony bordering the Scythian steppe, wrote about the priestesses there. Referring to them as witches, he wrote that they knew "how to extract that stuff from a mare in heat."

The hormone estrogen is distilled from the urine of pregnant mares.

Ovid repeated in the poem "On Facial Treatment for Ladies": "Put no faith in herbals and potions, abjure the deadly stuff distilled by a mare in heat." (Timothy Taylor, "The Prehistory of Sex")

Les Mattachine

Hay also delved into research about the societies or guilds of "fools" in Renaissance France.

Enid Welsford in her 1935 classic "The Fool: His Social and Literary History," explained, "Always masked in public, the members of this society, through their plays, or *sotties*, gave voices to the people's complaints against both Church and king. … Not even the highest dignitaries in the country escape their satire."

Their politically barbed performances were outlawed in 1547.

Will Roscoe noted that during the medieval Feast of Fools celebrated by the lower clergy throughout Europe and England, "All sanctity towards religion and authority was suspended. The mass was burlesqued, asses were led into the church, and priests and clerks wore masks, danced in the choir, and dressed as women."

He continued, "Another Fool tradition, perhaps even older, was represented by the folk dance known in France as Les Bouffons or Les Mattachines. ... Some form of this dance appears to have been known throughout Europe—as the Matachin in Spain, the Mattacino in Italy, and the Moresca elsewhere."

Roscoe added, "The literature on European folk traditions provides many examples of the Fool dressed as a woman or in both male and female clothes, of cross-dressing by men and women during the Feast of Fools, and even cross-dressed Mattachine/Sword dancers. In this capacity, the Fool served as a deputy of pre-Christian goddess figures, a practice Hay traces back to the Berdache priesthoods of the ancient societies of the Near East."

This is what Hay drew from his study of the medieval Feast of Fools tradition: "Thus the pyrrhic mime of Les Mattachine portrayed in vivid drama, for all to understand and take courage from, the ancient imitative ritual of initiation made military and political—that the lowly and oppressed would rise again from their despair and bondage by the strength of *their own faith* and *their own self-created dignity.*"

'Take a leaf from history'

The early Mattachine founders discussed holding a "Feast of Fools" dance as an educational component of organizing a homosexual movement. ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

They were trying to bring a historical understanding of homophile oppression that would lift individuals out of guilt, shame and fear and help instill them with pride. Hay urged those who attended Mattachine discussions to "take a leaf from their long and productive history. They can learn to realize in all previous economies where the Berdache was an accepted institution, it was so because the Berdache, like the Albanian Berdache mayors, having no household and children to care for, could devote most of their time—aside from filling their own two bellies—with the social, economic and educational needs of their communities generally."

The Mattachine founders, all influenced by a Marxist economic view, saw the modern heterosexual nuclear family as the "established vehicle for the outlet of social impulses" that enforced a "socially predetermined pattern" for human

relationships. Being raised in these patriarchal nuclear families, they emphasized, molded women and men to believe that this model of social roles was "natural"— a prescribed role "which equates male, masculine, man ONLY with husband and Father and which equates female, feminine, woman ONLY with wife and Mother." ("Making Trouble")

Homophiles, they argued, "did not fit the patterns of heterosexual love, marriage and children upon which the dominant culture rests." Excluded from this economic and social unit under capitalism, homophiles found themselves "an enclave within society ... an undesirable and despicable group worthy only of ridicule and rebuke."

Hay invited further study, and that is just what is still needed today. Of course, many LGBT couples now are parents or are an integral part of extended families—related through patrilineal bloodlines or chosen through love. Others are in polygamous formations.

But the early Mattachine founders were trying to reveal a deeper institutionalized mechanism for oppression in a patriarchal class-divided society. Historian John D'Emilio explained further that the Mattachine leaders understood that "Exploitation and oppression came not from simple prejudice or misinformation, but from deeply embedded structural relationships. ... This led them to reject a narrowly pragmatic approach to the problems of the homosexual, one that focused only on a set of reform goals, and instead pushed them to seek a theoretical explanation of the sources of the homosexual's inferior status. ("Making Trouble")

The first task of this emancipation movement, D'Emilio wrote, "was to challenge the internalization of that ideology by homosexuals, to develop among the gay population a consciousness of itself as an oppressed minority. Out of that conscious ness homosexuals could then evolve a 'highly ethical homosexual culture and lead well-adjusted, wholesome and socially productive lives.' And, from the cohesiveness that such a process could stimulate, the founders expected to forge, in time, a unified movement of homosexuals ready to fight against their oppression."

These communist leaders "held the Marxist view that capitalism required the oppression of minorities. They believed that homosexuals had to organize so they could explore their sexuality, become aware of how it equipped them to contribute to a more humane society, and prepare to join with other organized minorities in the struggle to replace capitalism with socialism." ("The Politics of Homosexuality")

Jim Kepner, a Mattachine leader, summed up, "[T]here was really the feeling that for thousands of years we'd been secret and hiding and alone. Now we were on the march and were convinced of the idea, 'We'll solve this problem within a few years!"

Next: Mattachine takes up fight against police brutality.

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1952: Mattachine battles police harassment

Lavender & red, part 43

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Jul 18, 2005 10:13 PM

By the autumn of 1951, the seven founders of the Mattachine society were organizationally confronted by the growth of their discussion groups. They began to develop more leadership in response. As in the consciousness-raising groups that later sprang up in the women's liberation movement, the goal was not merely to discuss oppression but to take political action to end it.

The first public action the Mattachine leadership took was to weigh in on the side of the Chicano community against racist police repression. "Brutal incidents of police harassment of the Chicano community in Los Angeles had received considerable attention in the press," wrote John D'Emilio, "and mounting pressure for an official investigation of police practices had finally succeeded in forcing the city government to hold public hearings.

"The founders of the Mattachine Society attended the hearings and spoke in favor of disciplinary action against offending policemen. Their rationale for their participation was their conviction that all socially oppressed minorities had something in common." ("Making Trouble")

Laws criminalized same-sex love and gender variant "cross-dressing." This made people who today are referred to as lesbian, gay, bi and trans vulnerable to arrest, beatings and rape in jail, financial extortion by shady lawyers who might be the only ones to handle such cases, and fines and prison sentences.

Just weeks after the hearing on police repression in the Chicano community, Dale Jennings--one of the Mattachine Society founders--was busted in February 1952 by a plainclothes Los Angeles vice squad cop, who charged him with "lewd and dissolute" behavior.

Harry Hay told how Jennings explained "that he had met someone in the can at Westlake Park. The man had his hand on his crotch, but Dale wasn't interested. He said the man insisted on following him home, and almost pushed his way through the door. He asked for coffee, and when Dale went to get it, he saw the man moving to the window blind, as if signaling to someone else. He got scared and started to say something, when there was a sudden pounding on the door, and Dale was arrested." ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

Jennings described the nightmare that followed. "Then there was the badge and the policeman was snapping the handcuffs on me with the remark, 'Maybe you'll talk better with my partner outside.' I was forced to sit in the rear of a car on a dark street for almost an hour while three officers questioned me. It was a particularly effective type of grilling. They laughed a lot among themselves. Then, in a sudden silence, one would ask, 'How long have you been this way?' I refused to answer. I was scared stiff. ...

"At last the driver started the car up. Having expected the usual beating before, now I was positive it was coming--out in the country somewhere. They drove



over a mile past the suburb of Lincoln Heights, then slowly doubled back. During this time they repeatedly made jokes about police brutality, and each of the three instructed me to plead guilty and everything would be all right." ("Making Trouble")

Plead guilty--that was the standard advice from police and lawyers to defendants who were arrested on "vag-lewd" charges, even though the vice police enticed the advances, or even participated fully in the sex that resulted, inspiring a bitter joke: "It's been wonderful, but you're under arrest."

Fearing the beatings and rapes that often took place in the back seat of a police cruiser or the cold cement floor of a precinct cell, many did plead guilty and paid fines anywhere from \$300 to \$3,000. Hay said the terror made "everyone plead guilty, and plea bargaining was a tactic not yet in practice. So to the average ribbon clerk this could mean years of debt."

Another Mattachine founder, Rudi Gernreich, had bravely tried to plead innocent several years earlier when he had been entrapped. He demanded a jury trial and spoke out in court about what had really happened. Gernreich was reportedly stunned by the guilty verdict.

Mattachine fights back!

After Jennings got booked by police and released, he told Hay about the arrest. Hay later said he responded, "Look, we're going to make an issue of this thing. We'll say you are a homosexual but neither lewd nor dissolute. And that cop is lying." ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

Mattachine leaders immediately convened an emergency meeting at Jennings' apartment in Echo Park that evening.

Hay argued forcefully "on how this is the perfect opportunity to press the issue of oppression." The group agreed.

Hay contacted attorney George Shibley in Long Beach about taking Jenning's case. Shibley was an Arab-American left-wing lawyer who had earned a well-deserved reputation for political courage. He defended embattled labor unions in 1930s and 1940s courtroom battles. In the 1940s, during World War II, he fought legally on behalf of 22 Mexicano youth in the "zoot suit" murder trial--also known as the "Sleepy Lagoon" case--which became infamous as a racist frame-up.

When the Mattachine leaders--the Fifth Order--approached Shibley, the firebrand attorney agreed to defend Jennings. "He explained to the group that he knew almost nothing about homosexuality, however, and needed to be educated about it," wrote Hay's biographer, Stuart Timmons.

The group met with Shibley for weeks, pooling and relaying their experiences to him. "Harry recalled that at these intense meetings, the Fifth Order probably learned as much about homosexuality as did the lawyer," Timmons added.

'Innocence or guilt is irrelevant'

In his book "Making Trouble," D'Emilio detailed how the Mattachine leadership mobilized discussion groups during the spring of 1952 around the topic of the upcoming trial.

The activists leading the groups were initially disheartened to discover that many participants in the discussions had qualms about the case.

If Jennings had been arrested by police, he must have done something wrong, many seemed to assume. Jennings later gave sarcastic voice to this stance: "Innocent people don't get into such a situation. Nice people just don't get arrested!"

D'Emilio provides a record of the political far-sightedness of the leading activists

that is important, even today, for anyone fighting state repression: "The Mattachine leadership, however, took the position that innocence or guilt was irrelevant to the question of support. The law itself was unjust, they argued, and needed to the questioned, and the abusive police practices toward homosexuals must be stopped."

This progressive argument held sway, which eventually rallied the whole Mattachine Society behind Jennings' case.

'An Anonymous Call to Arms!'

Rather than leave the internal Mattachine Society members open to harassment and arrest, the group used the external and more public Mattachine Foundation to establish an ad hoc "Citizens Committee to Outlaw Police Entrapment."

Committee organizers sent news releases to newspapers and broadcast media about the group's determination to fight Jennings' charges. The media ignored the case.

Committee activists opened up a mass campaign, as well. They addressed a series of leaflets to "the community of Los Angeles," vowing to take the struggle to the Supreme Court if necessary.

One was headlined "Now is the Time to Fight!" Another flier was titled "An Anonymous Call to Arms!" These may have been the first in the United States to publicly articulate demands by this oppressed segment of the population.

The "Call to Arms" leaflet explained the dangers of "guilt by association," a political line of reasoning that was part of Hay's original prospectus for homosexual organizing. ("Sexual Politics")

The leaflet text argued in part, "We the CITIZENS COMMITTEE AGAINST ENTRAPMENT, an anonymous body of angry voters in full sympathy with the spirit of rebellion in our community concerning police brutality against Minorities in general, ARE CONVINCED THAT NOW, ALSO, IS THE TIME TO REVEAL IN THE CLEAREST POSSIBLE MANNER THE FULL THREAT TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY OF THE SPECIAL POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST THE HOMOSEXUAL MINORITY."

Mattachine members distributed the leaflets at Santa Monica beaches and Los Angeles bars, in parks and at bus stops in areas frequented by LGBT people, and in public bathrooms where gay men were known to gather.

Hay recalled that "Mattachine even had a couple of supermarket clerks in the Hollywood area who surreptitiously dropped fliers into the packages of their gay customers." ("Sexual Politics")

The power of mobilization

The bold public campaign act electrified those who lived under the threat of police entrapment. The Citizen's Committee began receiving mail offering help and donations to defray legal costs.

Shibley only needed \$750 to represent Jennings. But Mattachine leaders wanted to raise another \$3,000 to cover the cost of sending trial transcripts to at least 40 other attorneys across the U.S. who might take up similar court challenges.

One fund-raising event--a dance and raffle at a private home north of Los Angeles--drew close to 500 people and netted more than \$1,000.

Lester Horton offered an evening's box office earnings from his dance troupe to the committee; one of the Horton dancers had also been entrapped that year.

The unofficial Mattachine benefit was a virtually sold-out success that raised \$1,500--enough to pay for the lawyer's fee and 10 copies of the trial transcript.

Next: 'A great victory!'

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1952 court victory against anti-gay charges

Lavender & red, part 44

By Leslie Feinberg Published Aug 8, 2005 10:26 PM

The decision by Dale Jennings, a Mattachine founder, to fight catch-all "lewd-vagrancy" charges, stemming from an attempt by police to sexually entrap him, was not the first time a gay man in the U.S. had pleaded not guilty.



But the way Mattachine organizers fought the charges was a landmark. They took the struggle public, issuing leaflets explaining, "The issue is civil rights."

The leaflet argued that when the police are allowed to use extortion, intimidation, shakedowns for money, entrapment, search and seizure without warrant, and imprisonment without charge against people based on their sexuality, then these terror techniques can be wielded against others, as well.

The moment subcategories of the overall population are denied rights, the rights of all are threatened.

The committee invited the public to the courtroom and sent out a lengthy press release. Harry Hay noted that not one media representative showed up. ("Gay American History")

'One true pervert in the courtroom'

The trial began on June 23, 1952. Jennings described what happened in an article he wrote later in "One" magazine.

Arab-American attorney George Shibley opened up with a bodacious courtroom argument. "The attorney, engaged by the Mattachine Foundation," Jennings explained, "made a brilliant opening statement to the jury in which he pointed out that homosexuality and lasciviousness are not identical after stating that his client was admittedly homosexual, that no fine line separates the variations of sexual inclinations and the only true pervert in the courtroom was the arresting officer."

Under questioning from Shibley, Jennings explained that he was indeed a homosexual, but that he was not guilty of the charges against him

This political defense was a bombshell approach. Rather than just deny the police account of the attempted entrapment, this Mattachine leader was affirming his sexuality--a sexuality that was illegal in every state.

Jennings later explained, "Even if I had done all the things which the prosecution claimed \dots I would have been guilty of no unusual act, only an illegal one in this society."

At the trial's close, Shibley delivered what Hay called "a military exposition of what it is like to be a homosexual in today's sociopolitical climate." ("Making Trouble")

The jurors deliberated for close to 40 hours. One lone juror said he would vote



for a guilty verdict until hell froze over. But the 11 other jurors held out for acquittal. The jury was deadlocked.

The judge called for a retrial, but within a few days the district attorney's office dropped the charges.

'Victory!'

Mattachine sent word about the win against the state to the media. "We informed every paper in Southern California, every journal, radio and television station, on every hearing date and on the date of the judge's decision not to renew--to no avail.

"This was a deliberate conspiracy of silence," Hay concluded.

So Mattachine activists took the news to the streets the same way they had built this case--with widely distributed leaflets hailing the decision in a one-word headline: "Victory!"

The July 1952 leaflet read in part: "You didn't see it in the papers, but it ... did happen in L.A." For the "first time in California history an admitted homosexual was freed on a vag-lewd charge." This win was "the result of organized work" and contributions of funds, work and time by "people who believe in justice for ... the homosexual."

Mattachine member Jim Kepner said he'd heard of other cases that were reportedly won around the same time. But Dale Jennings' defense against the criminal charge, and the committee that took his case public, fought and won the case on a political basis.

In his ground-breaking book "Gay American History" (1976), Jonathan Katz provides further elaboration by Dale Jennings about the struggle that rose up to support him.

"Actually I have had very little to do with this victory," Jennings wrote. "Yes, I gave my name and publicly declared myself to be a homosexual, but the moment I was arrested my name was no longer 'good' and this incident will stand on record for all to see for the rest of my life. In a situation where to be accused is to be guilty, a person's good name is worthless and meaningless.

"Further, without the interest of the Citizens' Committee to Outlaw Entrapment and their support which gathered funds from all over the country, I would have been forced to resort to the mild enthusiasm of the Public Defender. Chances are I'd have been found guilty and now be either still gathering funds to pay the fine or writing this in jail.

"Yet I am not abjectly grateful."

Jennings explained that he understood that the hundreds of people "who helped me push this case to a successful conclusion" were not doing so out of personal support for him. They were being "intelligently practical and helping establish a precedent that will perhaps helps themselves if the time comes."

In this sense, the bond of solidarity is not mere blanket "generosity," Jennings noted. "It is unification for self-protection."

He concluded, "Were all homosexuals and bisexuals to unite militantly, unjust laws and corruption would crumble in short order ... Were heterosexuals to realize that these violations of our rights threaten them equally, a vast reform might even come within our lifetime.

"This is no more a dream than trying to win a case after admitting homosexuality."

Sources for this article: "Gay American History," "The Trouble with Harry Hay" and "Making Trouble."

Next: Victory launches Mattachine like a rocket.

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Headwaters of first mass political gay movement rise

Lavender & red, part 45

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Aug 23, 2005 10:11 PM

Mattachine´s successful defense of one of its founders, Dale Jennings, against criminal charges of sexual solicitation of a Los Angeles vice cop in 1952 opened up a floodgate. The headwaters of the first mass political movement for homosexual emancipation in the United States quickly flowed through it.



ad like wildfire,

"During the waning summer of 1952, word of the victory spread like wildfire,' wrote Stuart Timmons. "In circles of friends, among 'ribbon clerk' professionals like costumers and clerks, in the gay crowds at bars like the Golden Carp on Melrose Avenue and the Pink Poodle on Pico Boulevard, people talked of little else.'

Dorr Legg, who later was a founder of ONE magazine, heard the buzz in the office where he worked as a city planner. "A guy asked me, 'Have you heard about the guy here who has fought the police and won?' I said no. 'Well he has, and there's an organization about it.'

Mattachine discussion groups that had been drawing 15 or 20 members suddenly doubled in size. Groups subdivided and then subdivided again, only weeks later, as the influx of new members continued.

By early 1953 the matrix of discussion groups had spread across Southern California—from the northern beach communities around Santa Monica to San Diego in the south and inland to San Bernardino.

Dorr Legg recalled, "Before long, hundreds of men and women were joining in excited discussion and arguments in a veritable flood of social protest and calls for action throughout Southern California.'

The small core of Mattachine founders scrambled to develop new leadership for the multiplying number of discussion groups.

By May 1953, the Mattachine Foundation surmised that more than 2,000 were taking part in the movement. But Stuart Timmons notes that Harry Hay believed the number, based on the geographical spread, was closer to 5,000. Both were estimates, however, since there was no centralized membership list.

Movement spreads north

The Mattachine movement inspired organizing beyond its base in southern California. Gerry Brissette, a young lab technician at the University of California at Berkeley, wrote to the Mattachine Society in February 1953.

Brissette was more politically conservative than the communist founders of Mattachine. He was a pacifist, active in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He wrote to Mattachine about his "dream of freedom' for homosexuals. He stressed "<I>my<I> responsibility to work for the kind of world I believe in, to help create in the hearts of people like me a belief in themselves, a dignity, and a capacity for loving.' His letter concluded, "If Mattachine means this, then I am

with you all the way.'

The Mattachine founders invited him to Los Angeles in March to hold discussions about organizing in the northern part of the state. Plans were laid out to send other organizers up the coast to support Brissette. Soon, discussion groups took root—first in Oakland, then Berkeley and the Bay Area of San Francisco. These meetings immediately began drawing 60 or more participants.

Other groups were popping up like mushrooms: Bakersfield, Capistrano, Fresno, Laguna, Monterey, San Diego and Whittier.

The groups each had a different character. Chuck Rowland described the Laguna group as "Junior Chamber of Commerce' types, the Long Beach unit as "swishy' feminine homosexuals. Another drew a contingent of factory workers, while faculty from UCLA formed yet another.

The growth in the movement gave rise to a division of labor. Established discussion groups took on different tasks.

"The group composed mostly of UCLA faculty members embarked upon studying the literature of the natural and social sciences in an attempt to make sense of the current theories about homosexuality,' explained historian John D´Emilio.

"Another group surveyed creative literature with homosexual and lesbian themes. Others compiled clipping files on vice squad actions and morals arrests, and most of them gathered affidavits from participants who had suffered from abusive police behavior.'

Birth of ONE Magazine

The idea for a magazine, written by and for male and female homosexuals, was born out of a West Hollywood discussion group in late 1952.

Martin Block was chairing the meeting. Block was a writer from New York who came out of an anarchist current and, long before joining Mattachine in California, had heard about the German Homosexual Emancipation Movement from older East Coast refugees. Block recalled, "You always heard that there should be a gay organization."

The idea to publish a magazine struck a chord. The bitter experience of media silence about Mattachine organizing to defend Dale Jennings was still fresh in everyone's mind.

And a magazine could connect and inform the organizing that was reaching from southern to northern California.

Block recalls that the discussion about a homophile magazine grew so excited that Block scolded the group for diverging from the meeting's agenda. He told anyone who wanted to talk about the magazine to please go to the kitchen to do so.

"Then I turned over the chair of the discussion group and joined them,' Block said, "because I was just as excited about it as everybody else.'

In October 1952 a multinational group of men gathered in Block´s bookstore on Hollywood Boulevard to found and incorporate the first mass-distributed homosexual publication in the United States.

Martin Block was voted president; Dale Jennings was elected vice president.

Other signatories included Merton Bird and W. Dorr Legg. Bird, a Black activist and Legg, a white activist, had been founders of the Knights of the Clocks—a social support organization for inter-racial gay and lesbian couples in Los Angeles. Dorr later described the organization as the establishment of "the earliest of the 'Gay Community Centers' which are now found all across the country.'

Antonio Reyes and Bailey Whitaker were the other two founders of the magazine. Reyes was a Latino dancer and ceramics designer from El Paso. Whitaker was a young Black student.

It was Whitaker —whose *nom de guerre* was Guy Rousseau —who came up with "ONE' as the name and the masthead of the magazine. Whitaker drew this idea from a quote by Victorian essayist Thomas Carlyle: "A mystic bond of brotherhood makes all men one."

Both Carlyle and the 1950s homosexual activists were living in historical epochs in which the word "mankind" was thought to embrace women as well —an assumption the women's movement later rejected. However, lesbians did play an important role in the development and distribution of this publication.

'ONE' magazine read across U.S.

Three months later, in January 1953, the first issue of ONE magazine—not a leaflet, not a pamphlet, but a magazine—was published.

The monthly magazine was established as a separate entity from Mattachine. But Mattachine supplied the first mailing list—some 3,000 names.

The magazine included articles about the Mattachine Society, and about entrapment arrests and police harassment of bars.

Within months, sales of ONE magazine were topping 2,000 copies. But the readership base was considerably larger, as the magazine passed from hand to hand. D´Emilio wrote, "Since, as letters to the editor revealed, the magazine was circulating throughout the country, it also helped spread word that a homosexual emancipation organization had formed.'

Chuck Rowland, a Mattachine founder, summed up the entire political period after the 1952 court triumph: "Mattachine really took off. ... We moved into a broad sunlit upland filled with whole legions of eager gays. Mattachine was suddenly IN! No combination of people in our limited leadership could handle them.'

But storm clouds of anti-communism were gathering.

Next: Victory sparks internal debate over reorganization of Mattachine.

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Mattachine victory sparks internal debate

Lavender & red, part 46

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Sep 1, 2005 12:15 AM

The successful defense of a Mattachine founder against criminal charges stemming from police entrapment in the summer of 1952 was a heady victory, expanding the membership at a geometric rate.

The campaign against police entrapment had successfully taken the organization's activist work into the public arena. However, the campaign itself had been organized in the name of an adhoc, single-issue committee, which provided greater freedom for mobilizing the grassroots effort.



Almost immediately this presented a crisis for Mattachine. New leadership was needed for the growing number of discussion groups. Unlike the small circle of founding members, who built a leadership based on a "consensus of principle," the gay men and lesbians who flocked to Mattachine now did so because it spoke to social needs that arose from their oppression. However, they did not necessarily share the political view of the founding leaders that homosexuals were an oppressed minority who needed to unite in collective political activism to bring about social change.

These new members wanted to know who the leaders were and where the direction for the discussion groups was coming from. During the frenzy and fear of the McCarthyite witch hunt, all such anxieties were directed against communists. And the founding members were communists.

The secret "underground" structure of leaders that protected the anonymity of the founding core—the Fifth Order—strained the need for above-ground political organizing. Same-sex love was still illegal, though, making the problem of creating a homosexual rights organization a thorny one.

Split in leadership

How could Mattachine reorganize to meet the needs of a burgeoning movement? This question split members of the Fifth Order almost immediately after the Jennings legal victory. The Fifth Order held an urgent weekend conference in February 1953 to hash out their differences.

Most of the inner group demanded the creation of an above-ground membership organization. Voicing the concerns of this grouping, Chuck Rowland wrote to Harry Hay. Rowland argued that the conditions under which the original underground organization was formed in 1950 had drastically changed, and that "a radical new approach" was needed.

Rowland stressed that the new Mattachine movement had opened up "a qualitatively new situation in which even our Junior Chamber of Commerce Laguna Group (the exact type of group the secrecy of the Society was designed to protect)" favored above-ground organizing.

Rowland concluded that he was going to put forward a motion at the next



leadership meeting for a convention and draw up a constitution for a new organizational structure for the Mattachine Society. "Whether you like it or not," Rowland warned, "the subject of discussion for today is reorganization."

Hay was unwavering in his opposition to reorganization. He believed it would do irrevocable harm to Mattachine to open up the structure at a time when there was an influx of large numbers of new members who, historian John D'Emilio relates, "had little if any sense of solidarity with other oppressed gays and no allegiance, Hay felt, to the long-term goal of building a powerful, militant mass movement for homosexual rights." ("Making Trouble")

Skittish professionals

In an attempt to create at least one flexible public organizational vehicle for movement building, the leadership did resolve in February to incorporate the Mattachine Foundation in California as a not-for-profit educational organization in order to take another step into the public arena. Left-wing lawyer Fred Snider handled the incorporation.

The Mattachine leaders hoped that an incorporated foundation could openly conduct research into homosexuality and use the findings to create mass education about homosexual rights. To do so, the foundation could reach out for heterosexual support—including professionals and public officials.

The foundation could also ease the fears of the mass membership in Mattachine about who the leaders of the organization were and who was organizing the discussion groups at a historical moment when such doubts always fanned the flames of anti-communism.

Chuck Rowland, a Mattachine founder, drew up a four-page pamphlet announcing the establishment of the foundation by a group of Los Angeles residents. Basing its arguments on Dr. Alfred Kinsey's study of male sexuality, published in 1948, the pamphlet debunked many of the pejorative attitudes about homosexuality. "But homosexuals as such have only limited social and legal rights," the pamphlet emphasized, "in fact, our whole society is organized to keep them completely oppressed."

Mattachine founders asked prominent individuals to join the foundation's board of directors.

UCLA research psychologist Dr. Evelyn Hooker and novelist-screenwriter Christopher Isherwood both turned down the invitation, although each reportedly said they supported the aims.

Isherwood argued that he was not a "joiner," but he donated money to the effort and offered to spread the word about the foundation. Hooker, who had just opened up her study of male homosexuality, expressed concern that membership would open her up to peer scrutiny about her objectivity.

Wallace de Ortega Maxey did say yes to participation in the foundation's work. This pastor of the First Universalist Church in Los Angeles was known for his support of progressive political causes. San Bernardino physician Richard Gwartney also agreed to take part.

In general, however, the contradiction of approaching professionals and officialdom became immediately apparent. The Mattachine founders, all with communist backgrounds or influences, wanted to organize a grassroots movement that would fight for every right.

The public figures Mattachine was approaching, however, did not share its revolutionary outlook, or even a similar class outlook.

Hay charged that Isherwood was "rude and sneering" to Mattachine leaders. Hay stressed, "Isherwood made no bones about his contempt for our socialist massorganization approach.

"He told us we were recruiting the wrong people—we should aim for the important people among the film colony, the queens with money and influence, not the workers, not the ribbon clerks."

Mattachine leaders arranged a sit-down with Dr. Alfred Kinsey in 1953 while he was in Los Angeles on his travels. But Kinsey couldn't make it at the last minute.

The cancellation may have been more than a scheduling problem. Kinsey may have wanted to distance himself from homosexual rights. Kinsey's scientific conclusion that human sexuality could best be represented as a spectrum helped equip homosexual activism. But it also made Kinsey the target of the red-baiting, lavender-hating ideologues of McCarthyism.

The Mattachine founders found themselves in the same crosshairs.

Next: Twisting the knife of anti-communism.

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Mattachine red-baited

Lavender & red, part 47

By Leslie Feinberg Published Sep 13, 2005 8:20 PM

The communist leaders of the Mattachine organization were red-baited soon after they publicly defended Dale Jennings, one of the founding members of the group, against anti-gay police entrapment charges.

Arab-American attorney George Shibley, who defended Jennings, became the target of McCarthy ite red-baiting.

Harry Hay, a founding member of Mattachine, was "outed" in a Los Angeles daily paper in February 1953 as having been a former Marxist teacher. Mattachine itself was characterized by a February Los Angeles Times article as organizing dangerously subversive activities.

In response, the Mattachine Foundation—as the above-ground voice of the organization—hastily published an "Official Statement of Policy on Political Questions and Related Matters." The document disavowed any relationship with any other organization—which of course at the height of the McCarthyite witch hunt meant the Communist Party USA—and from any political, religious, or cultural ideology or "ism."

No matter how wise or tactically sound this public statement may have seemed to the Mattachine leadership at that time, it's hard to imagine that such a political retreat could have provided any respite from the anti-communist Cold War witch hunt.

The defensiveness of the stance was made even clearer by the unanimous agreement by the core leadership—the Fifth Order—that since Hay had been publicly singled out, he had to remove himself from public association with the Mattachine Society and Foundation. It's not clear from accounts of the group decision how Hay himself felt about it. But he agreed to pass on all speaking engagements to other Mattachine founders and thereafter only wrote under his nom de guerre, Eann MacDonald. ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

'A movement in motion'

With the Foundation as its public face, Mattachine sent questionnaires to all the candidates in the local Los Angeles elections.

Candidates running for the Board of Education received letters charging the public school system with "a high percentage of responsibility for the social tragedy" faced by homosexuals. The questionnaire polled each candidate about where they stood on "non-partisan" counseling about homosexuality in high schools.

Electoral hopefuls in the race for mayor, city council and board of supervisors got letters detailing the "growing body of evidence" that Los Angeles police were carrying out "explicitly unlawful" actions against homosexuals. Candidates were canvassed about their view on these police activities.

Few candidates replied. But the Mattachine founders were on a roll. With new numbers swelling their ranks, they attempted to take this nascent movement to



unprecedented heights. Konrad Stevens remembered, "[W]e were meeting very often. We just lived Mattachine. We didn't do anything else. We never went anywhere just for pleasure. When we went, it was organizing."

Chuck Rowland wrote to Harry Hay that they had all "set a movement in motion."

Twisting the knife of red-baiting

The Mattachine leaders were not just vulnerable because they were anonymous. They were also a core of dedicated revolutionaries, most with communist backgrounds. But because they were underground they could not speak out about their political beliefs and try to win over others in the organization to their world view. While speaking out may not have seemed to them to be an option—because they feared McCarthyism presaged a fascist takeover of the federal government—it left these revolutionaries voiceless to defend themselves against red-baiting.

Sen. Joseph McCarthy had taken over the chair of the Government Operations Committee as well as its permanent subcommittee on investigations in January 1953. A month later, while the Mattachine leaders were holding their urgent meeting to discuss reorganization, McCarthy's probe to find communists in the State Department was accompanied by scare headlines.

The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which had terrorized Hollywood with six years of investigations, was back in Los Angeles in March and April, holding public hearings focusing on the Communist Party USA, of which Harry Hay had been a member for 18 years.

It was in this political context of repression and whipped-up fear that a syndicated columnist at the Los Angeles Daily Mirror, Paul Coates, wrote an article on March 12 describing the Mattachine Foundation to readers as "a strange new pressure group."

At first glance, Coates' article appeared to be a real media breakthrough. He explained what the Mattachine name meant.

"It is not inconceivable," he argued, that homosexuals, "scorned" by the community at large, "might band together for their own protection. Eventually they might swing tremendous political power." He added that homosexuals, "one of the largest minorities in the country," could exercise a voting bloc of 150,000 to 200,000 in the local area alone.

Pointing to the Foundation's demand for protective laws against police harassment, Coates wrote that this "scorned part of the community" could turn out to be "a group of responsible citizens seriously concerned with a tragic social problem."

However, he dropped the other shoe: there were some matters that should be alarming to the organization's membership and the public at large.

Claiming that he had tried to track down the foundation's treasurer, Romayne Cox, to no avail, he ran a provocative subhead in his article: "Where is Romayne?" $^{\prime\prime}$

"If I belonged to that club, I'd worry," he wrote with mock concern. $\,$

Coates claimed to have checked and found no record of the foundation's incorporation. In fact, Mattachine attorney Fred Snider had filed the papers already, but there had been a bureaucratic delay.

Coates twisted the knife of red-baiting. He reported that Fred Snider had been called before HUAC and that he had been an "unfriendly witness."

Baiting the leadership, Coates concluded that, "A well-trained subversive could move in and forge that power into a dangerous political weapon.

"To damn this organization, before its aims and directions are more clearly established, would be vicious and irresponsible.

"Maybe the people who founded it are sincere. It will be interesting to see."

To the Mattachine leaders, the article seemed like good publicity during a period of such political reaction.

"We all thought it was pretty good," Hay recalled in a later interview, "and so we ran off 20,000 copies to send out to our mailing list and to be distributed city-and statewide. Wow! Whammo! We'd forgotten what the detail about Fred Snider's being unfriendly to the House Un-American Activities Committee would do to the middle-class Gays in Mattachine. We had been getting in this status-quo crowd; the discussion groups had been growing by leaps and bounds.

"When Paul Coates' article appeared, all the status-quo types in the discussion groups were up in arms; they had to get control of that damn Mattachine Foundation," he recalled with sarcasm, "which was tarnishing their image, giving them a bad name. This is when the real dissension began between the founders and the middle-class crowd."

Next: Left wing loses battle for Mattachine.

Sources for this article: "Gay American History," "The Trouble with Harry Hay," "Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities" and "Making Trouble."

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Left wing speaks, opposition unites

Lavender & red, part 48

By Leslie Feinberg Published Sep 21, 2005 12:14 PM

Faced with louder red-baiting both outside and inside the Mattachine movement, the left-wing founders called for a delegated convention in April 1953.

The convention was unprecedented. It drew together the first large-scale political assembly of those who identified as homosexual to address movement building. The conference also allowed the founding members to speak to the membership directly, for the first time.

But the convention also brought into the same room, for the first time, right-wing members of Mattachine. This gathering allowed them to fuse as an opposition hell-bent on purging the left-wing leadership.

The founding members of Mattachine—the Fifth Order—who had been leading the burgeoning West-Coast-based homosexual emancipation movement in early 1953, were faced with enormous obstacles.

McCarthyism was in its ascendancy. The anti-communist, anti-gay witch hunt threatened to crush any demand for economic, political or social change.

The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in March and April came to Los Angeles, where Mattachine had first been organized, to investigate local communist activism and organizing.

Mattachine and one of its founders, Harry Hay, had recently faced red-baiting. Hay was "outed" as a former teacher of Marxism.

The public arm of the organization, the Mattachine Foundation, and its left-wing attorney, Fred M. Snider, had been red-baited in a March 1953 newspaper column by columnist Paul Coates, who described the lawyer as an "unfriendly witness" at a recent HUAC hearing.

And among the influx of new members, many were far to the right of the communist organizers who set the movement in motion. They were demanding that the underground leadership—the Fifth Order—which had operated in an underground manner because of fear of arrest and red-listing, create a more above-ground form of organization.

Guild councilor Marilyn Reiger, soon to become part of the reactionary opposition, was one of those who argued for restructuring. She stated that she was already an out lesbian at work, and that openness was essential.

Hay's biographer, Stuart Timmons, elaborated, "The Fifth Order was deluged with demands for change. The foremost concern was about secrecy. Coates' accusations of 'subversion' made the rank and file uneasy with the anonymous structure. Even before the Coates piece, many guild members reacted to the city council letter by saying, as Konrad Stevens recalled, 'They think we're *activists!* We'll all get into trouble.'



"He further remembered that a growing faction was 'scared to death that Mattachine was being run by the Communist Party and was part of a plot to overthrow the U.S. government!' One guild member even called for a loyalty oath denouncing Communism as a condition for Mattachine membership. Harry termed this attitude 'the middle-class mentality more concerned with respectability than self-respect.' In his view, the organization was growing with the wrong people." ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

Below-ground or above-ground?

Hay was opposed to lifting the secrecy under which the leadership structure operated. He felt it was an important protection against police and government retribution. Others in the core leadership criticized Hay as being out of touch with the changed realities of the organization and the large meetings it was helping to inspire and to coalesce.

"Harry was the theoretician and the consultant, but he was not present at these enormous gatherings," observed Chuck Rowland. "It became evident to Steve, Bob, Dale, and me, that there simply were more people than we could handle."

Chuck Rowland recalled, "Mattachine was growing so fast in the first few years that it became obvious to me there was no way we could control it. It was a very tight top-down organization, where no one who attended the meetings knew who the leadership was. It was kept very secret, but it had become unmanageable." ("Making History")

It is arguable whether the founders of Mattachine themselves would have mantled their leadership in secrecy had they not feared a fascist takeover in the United States was imminent. However, given the illegality of same-sex love, the employment purges and the overall period of political reaction in which they organized, it certainly is understandable that they chose that form of organization.

The sudden new influx of members put the question of reorganization on the agenda for immediate discussion. The fact that there were members who were brave enough to function as openly gay or lesbian in their daily lives, particularly at work, marked a new phase in the homophile movement.

But it quickly became clear that the forces calling for a "democratic" reorganization of Mattachine had a political objective, not an organizational one. Their real goal was to unseat the left-wing leadership.

Leadership issues call for convention

"Harry Hay has never quite forgiven us for what happened next," Rowland later recalled, "but several of us said that it was obvious we couldn't go on like this. I said that the only thing to do was to open up Mattachine, to make it a fully democratic organization. To this end I proposed that we call a constitutional convention." ("Making History")

In response, the Fifth Order called a democratic convention to change the structure of Mattachine. They called on several hundred members at various stages of membership and responsibility to come to a two-day April conference to draw up a constitution, vote on by-laws and elect the leadership. The Rev. Wallace Maxey made his Universalist Church available for the political gathering, an unparalleled event in the United States.

Rowland argued for restructuring with a more visible leadership. "So I wrote a constitution, which I thought was a damn good one. And then we at the highest echelon of Mattachine worked on it for weeks and months. I thought it was a really marvelous document. We thought it was so good and so workable that it never occurred to us that anybody would come up with another constitution. Or if they did, that they could get anybody to vote for it."

The founding Mattachine members braced themselves to hold a principled

position against anti-communism at the convention. Rowland wrote Hay at that time, "Come hell or high water, we will oppose all idea of a non-Communist statement by any group using the name Mattachine ... [and] will have nothing to do with any group which has a loyalty oath as a condition of membership." ("Sexual Politics")

Hay stressed that since the Mattachine Foundation had been publicly red-baited in the article by Paul Coates, Sen. Estes Kefauver and his red-baiting committee would zero in on the Mattachine Foundation as part of its "investigation" into local nonprofit groups.

Hay stated, "We had made a mutual pledge in the Fifth Order to invoke the Fifth Amendment if questioned, which, I felt, was the best protection for us *and* for the membership of the society."

'I got some applause, but most were in shock"

The convention spanned two weekends that April and May. The founding members invited two leaders, or "councilors," from every guild in California. Each delegate was believed to represent up to about 10 members.

The first weekend of the convention began on April 11. Timmons described, "On the opening weekend, the convergence of such a large number of gay people in one room was emotionally overpowering. Harry insisted that close to 500 were there, though Jim Kepner, who saved voting tallies, counted fewer than 150. But Kepner and Hay agreed on the exhilaration of the occasion."

Hay remarked in a later interview, "Can you imagine what that was like? This is the first time it's ever happened in the history of the United States."

However euphoric members initially felt about being brought together in one room, though, the group quickly split along political lines.

Founders Chuck Rowland and Harry Hay delivered the keynotes in the opening session.

Rowland argued from the podium that homosexuals were a distinct cultural minority. His political position did not take into account that within the broad category of "homosexual" were the national identities and cultures of Black, Latino, Native, Asian and other nationally oppressed peoples. Today, this drawing of an equal sign between oppressions based on nationality and sexuality would sow disunity, not solidarity.

But at that 1953 convention, Rowland was calling on more politically conservative white gay men and lesbians to see the necessity for unity with the liberation struggles of oppressed nationalities--in particular African American and Chicano/Mexicano peoples, and with Jewish people in the post-war era, as well.

Rowland ended his speech with a moving prediction. "I remember saying, 'The time will come when we will march arm in arm, 10 abreast down Hollywood Boulevard proclaiming our pride in our homosexuality.'

"One of my friends in Mattachine said he almost had a coronary at such an outrageous thought at the time. I deliberately built this speech up to what I hoped would be a rousing climax. I got some applause, but people were more in shock than anything else. To me, it seemed perfectly reasonable."

Hay takes the podium

Hay spoke next from the dais. The title of his speech, "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been a Homosexual," satirized the increasingly familiar question put to communists by McCarthy.

Hay took on the red-baiting attacks against the Mattachine Foundation and against lawyer Fred Snider for having been an "unfriendly witness" at a recent HUAC hearing.

Historian John D'Emilio wrote that Hay "reminded his listeners that, with the federal government removing homosexuals and lesbians from its payroll, each of them had something to hide from investigators. Hay urged Mattachine members to see that it was in their interest to defend the Fifth Amendment rights of everyone, regardless of political belief, since some day they might be the target of Congressional questioners." ("Sexual Politics"

Hay characterized the Mattachine Foundation as "strictly non-partisan and non-political in its objective and in its operations." The foundation merely articulated the need for a debate about the position of homosexuals in U.S. society.

"But," he added, "in the very raising of the need for such debate, the Mattachine Foundation deliberately put itself squarely in opposition to a dominant section of the status quo, and elects to become a victim of the myriad implications and slanders derivative of that opposition."

Hay noted that, "It would be pleasant if the social and legal recommendations of the Foundation could be found impeccable both to the tastes of the most conservative community as well as to the best interest of the homosexual minority. But since there must be a choice ... the securities and protections of the homosexual minorities must come first." ("Gay American History")

It was brave of Hay to take that position in 1953, when "the most conservative community" really meant the forces of a domestic anti-gay and anti-communist witch hunt.

But here was the chance, finally, for Hay and the other leaders to do more than allude to "myriad implications and slanders." Hay, Rowland and the other leaders could have spoken out against anti-communism, pointing out that anyone who called for progressive change--and revolutionary change--would face redbaiting. And since those whose sexuality made them criminals were calling for change, they needed the broadest and most resolute defense of all left-wing currents within their ranks.

Was that a hard position to take in the spring of 1953? Of course it was. And it could have meant defeat for the leaders who took the red-baiters head on. But Hay did not take them head on--he made an egregiously conciliatory move in his speech.

Hay attacked the left.

Hay reminded those gathered that recent anti-gay purges of workers in government agencies were based on the argument that homosexuals were "security risks" because they could be easily extorted by a "foreign power."

"It is notable," Hay said, "that not one single political or pressure group among the liberals, let along the left wing, lifted either voice or finger to protest the monstrous social and civil injustice and sweeping slander of this dictum. The complete hostility with which the [homosexual] Minority was surrounded by this indictment was a clear barometer of the outright antipathy unitedly maintained by every color of political opinion. ..."

Hay continued, "It should be stated here that the Left was the first political grouping to deny a social potential to the Minority by going on public record with the opinion that the perverts were socially degenerate and to be avoided as one avoids the scum of the earth. The Foundation idea was conceived only when the Right, in the substance of the State Department actions, followed suit some years later."

That's where Hay caved in to the growing anti-communist opposition in the ranks of the Mattachine movement.

Appeasement never works

Those who are not politically attuned might argue, "Wasn't what Hay said true?

Didn't the left movement--particularly the Communist Party USA of which Hay was a member for 18 years--take a terrible position regarding homosexuality, and exclude openly gay and lesbian members?"

Yes, that was true. But timing is everything in politics. When Hay left the CPUSA in order to devote his time and energies to building a homosexual emancipation movement, he defended the party as though its position was merely a matter of organizational protection.

Yet now he was standing up in front of a convention called because the volume of red-baiting was so loud--and he attacked the left. His speech drew an equal sign between the political backwardness of some on the left and the state repression by the right. The CPUSA at that time, no matter how bad its position on homosexuality, was itself in the bull's-eye of the Cold War target.

Of course, had the CPUSA supported homosexuals who were also under the gun, it would have made it easier for all communists--especially Hay and the other founders--to withstand and combat the "red scare" and the "lavender scare" unleashed by the capitalist class against all left-wing challenges.

Whether or not Hay knew that Lenin and the Bolshevik Party had abolished the tsarist anti-gay laws, Mattachine founders like Rudi Gernreich were most certainly aware that German communists supported the homosexual emancipation movement before World War II.

All in all, it was a low blow to hit "the left" to deflect red-baiting. Hay hadn't just been a member of the CPUSA for 18 years, he had been a leading theoretician and teacher in the party. Rowland and the other Mattachine founders were either communists or fellow travelers and continued to be part of the left wing in the U.S. That's why they were all being red-baited by the right wing.

Yet Hay tarred the left with the same brush he used against the right. If he thought that this political conciliation would appease the right-wing in the room, he was dead wrong. Instead, this sop to the reactionaries merely whetted their blades.

Next: May convention: Right wing ousts left-wing leaders.

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Right wing ousts left leadership

Lavender & red, part 49

By Leslie Feinberg Published Sep 28, 2005 7:41 AM

The left-wing founders of the Mattachine movement—the Fifth Order—thought the anti-communist opposition had been pushed back at their convention in April. But when the May segment of the delegated conference resumed, the right wing came back with a vengeance and, wielding McCarthyite red-baiting as its primary weapon, successfully unseated the leadership.



The first segment of the two-week conference, held on the last weekend in April, had concluded with small work groups given the task of drafting a constitution and bylaws. Since the opposition's rallying cry was for a more democratic form of organization, the Fifth Order may have hoped to diffuse its opponents by assigning the tasks of restructuring to smaller discussion groups.

However, the job did not appear to lend itself to numerous clusters of discussion. Frustrated by the lack of results, delegates voted at the closing session to elect a committee to hammer out the pieces drafted by the small groups into a cohesive document and bring it back to the second half of the convention in late May.

After the April segment of the convention, the Fifth Order may have breathed a sigh of relief. The assembly had proceeded without a floor fight and the right-wing opposition had not shown its strength.

Fifth Order member Chuck Rowland wrote to a Northern California Mattachine leader, Gerry Brissette, that the opposition had been successfully isolated at the April conference. Rowland added that he expected "some rumbles from them at the next session," but felt confident they would not prevail.

Brissette did not agree. He reported the stealth maneuvering of "a real evil minority at the Convention," which he said had tried to win over his whole delegation to its side. Brissette warned Rowland that, "smarting under their rejection, they might return even better organized." Brissette advised the Fifth Order members to "come to the next session well prepared." ("Making Trouble," John D'Emilio)

Brissette had a good feel for what was brewing.

Opposition congeals

In the weeks building up to the May session, the reactionary opposition began to galvanize, with Los Angeles guild member Kenneth Burns at its head. Burns, a Carnation Co. engineer, was described as a "Brooks Brothers executive type."

Historian John D'Emilio explained, "Burns presided over a guild whose members, according to one of them, were 'politically conservative and closety' and which had reacted vehemently to [journalist] Paul Coates' column." Coates had red-baited the Mattachine Foundation.

"They had been as upset, one member recalled, by the Mattachine's questionnaire to local political candidates as they had been by the innuendos of Communist

Respond

subversion, and felt that any direct political action was likely to destroy the organization. Nor did they look with favor on Rowland and Hay's opening speeches which 'shocked, angered, and infuriated' them."

They maintained that any political activism was "likely to destroy the organization."

Burns's command of parliamentary procedure allowed him to win the chair of the interim committee delegated to draft the new Mattachine constitution.

Marilyn Rieger was also selected to serve on the committee. Rieger was politically isolated in her own guild, which supported the founding leadership. But the larger body of the convention gave reactionary elements a bigger pond in which to fish for support.

Burns and Rieger met with journalist Hal Call from San Francisco. Rumors that Chuck Rowland had been a communist youth organizer enraged Call. The militant tones in the keynotes by Rowland and Harry Hay at the first convention had also angered Call.

This opposition came to the May convention with a single purpose, Call said: to "read out of the roll-call most of the founding members."

'Our homosexuality is irrelevant'

Rieger took the podium early on at the May convention to articulate the political view of the opposition. In a polemic against the concept that homosexuals were a distinct group, she argued, "We know we are the same, no different than anyone else. Our only difference is an unimportant one to the heterosexual society, unless we make it important."

Rieger stressed that "we are first and foremost people." This appeal was meant to sway those in the audience who had felt dehumanized and forcibly alienated from society by their oppression.

Rieger said that equality for gay men and women would be won "by declaring ourselves, by integrating, not as homosexuals, but as people, as men and women whose homosexuality is irrelevant to our ideals, our principles, our hopes and aspirations." She concluded that this was the only way to "rid the world of its misconceptions of homosexuality and homosexuals."

Irrelevant? What about the fact that homosexuality was illegal in every state? That police arrested and tortured gay men and lesbians? What about the fact that the reactionary Cold War used the "Lavender Scare," like the "Red Scare," to crush dissent, resulting in a widespread purge of lesbian and gay workers from whole industries?

Rieger, in putting forward the views of the opposition, offered no tactics or strategy to fight back against reaction. Instead, they accommodated themselves to political reaction.

Red-baiting weapon unholstered

After having staked out their political position from the dais, Hal Call led the anti-communists' siege on the founding leadership from the convention floor, allied to another opposition figure, David Finn.

Call raised a motion, backed by the whole San Francisco membership, that "a very strong statement concerning our stand on subversive elements" be written into the new constitution. "We are already being attacked as Communistic," Call told those gathered. Adding this wording "guarantees us that we will not be infiltrated by Communists."

D'Emilio elaborated, "Not restricting himself to parliamentary maneuvering, Call used every available opportunity to abuse Chuck Rowland, whom he especially disliked. Finn, too, joined the fray with a blanket accusation of Communist Party

membership against the Mattachine Foundation directors. Though their attacks antagonized more delegates than they persuaded, they added an element of personal bitterness and factionalism that soured the proceedings."

But when it came time for the delegates to vote, the right-wing opposition did not hold sway. The left wing won every vote. Most significantly, Call's proposal for anti-communist language in the constitution was voted down.

The preamble proposed by the founding members, which declared the need for the homosexual minority to develop "a highly ethical homosexual culture," was approved by the convention as well.

Mattachine activist Jim Kepner later wrote that the opposition "saw this as viciously communistic." ("Gay Movement History and Goals")

But the left-wing leadership was taken off guard when the opposition put forward its own draft constitution. It was written, biographer Stuart Timmons explained, "specifically to eradicate the founders and their most visionary language and ideas." ("The Trouble with Harry Hay")

Rowland stated, "What this group of conservative people wanted was an open organization, which is what *we* were advocating. But because we were Communists, we couldn't be trusted. So they came up with their constitution, which was as strictly top-down in structure as Mattachine had been to begin with. I said that we couldn't live with this constitution; it was clearly unworkable."

Kepner described seeing Call "redder in the face than usual, screaming at Chuck, 'The Society is not big enough for the two of us—there's no room for Russian agents.'"

Left wing resigns

As the anti-communism mounted, the Fifth Order met to assess the situation.

"We were aware," Fifth Order member James Gruber recalled, "that Communism had become a burning issue. We all felt, especially Harry, that the organization and its growth was more important than any of the founding fathers. The Mattachine had grown beyond our control and it had reached the point where we had to turn it over to other people. There was no guarantee that they would continue with what the organization started, but we couldn't help it."

It was a serious threat to be openly red-baited in the spring of 1953. Bob Hull raised at the meeting that the Kefauver Committee, an anti-communist congressional "investigating" committee, was on its way to Los Angeles to scrutinize "subversive activities."

Hay later observed, "We realized that we couldn't bear investigation. We original Mattachine founders and our lawyers would all show up as either having been 'fellow travelers' or actual Communist Party members. None of us were party members any longer, but some had been. We couldn't answer that 'Have you ever been?' question without taking the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination."

Hay said Hull told him, "We can't hold this thing."

Recalled Hay, "The middle-class groups were all for pulling out, the whole society seemed to be falling apart—it looked like the Titanic going down.

"At that moment I suddenly realized for the first time that *we weren't unanimous any more.* Our original dream was gone. I thought, 'We'll have to dissolve anyway, because of this investigating committee.'"

Hull and Rowland argued that the Fifth Order should do away with unanimity in decision making and instead adopt majority-rule voting.

"Harry was the most reluctant of the group to accept what we decided on,"

according to Rowland.

Finally, all seven founding members of the Fifth Order agreed to disband as a core group and not attempt to run for office in the new organization, give over the Mattachine name, and resign openly as a group at the convention—the first time the leadership would publicly present itself to the membership.

When the seven members took the stage, "outed" themselves at the final session of the May convention, and announced that they were stepping down, Rowland described the reaction of astonishment from many delegates that these respected individuals were the anonymous leaders who had been so demonized. Rowland said, "When we announced that we were resigning, a lot of people yelled, 'Oh, no, no.' But the Hal Call faction was delighted."

Next: Two-line struggle: Which class will lead?

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Two-line struggle tore apart 1950s gay movement

Lavender & red, part 50

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jan 6, 2006 11:07 PM

The first mass political gay liberation struggle took a different political turn after the communist founding organizers of the early Mattachine movement were forced to step down from leadership after the May 1953 convention.



A bitter internal battle created the split.

It's not enough to say, as some progressive historians do, that the more radical leadership saw gay people as a distinct group in society and the more conservative forces saw gay people as not so different from non-gay people. The differences were much deeper, arising from a battle over which economic class in society to turn to for leadership in order to create change.

The revolutionary founders of the first phase of Mattachine believed gay people as a group shared distinct characteristics arising out of the conditions of their oppression. They were trying to formulate a political approach to what had been viewed as individual sexual expression—same-sex love.

Founder Harry Hay had stressed that the exclusion of gays and lesbians from the patriarchal heterosexual nuclear family—the economic unit under feudalism and capitalism—had led to their isolation in class societies. And these early leaders built a network of "consciousness-raising" groups to raise political and historical understanding about capitalism and earlier class societies.

These early leaders tried to find language and concepts that could galvanize individuals who had felt alone and isolated. They sought to fan the embers of self-pride in those who were surviving the oppression and struggling for a sense of community. And they hoped to imbue confidence that, collectively, an independent, political grassroots movement could be built that could fight for change, particularly if they united with other groups in capitalist society that were facing police brutality and institutionalized discrimination.

Their approach of taking the struggle to the workers ignited a movement which, as it grew exponentially, brought together people from antagonistic economic classes.

Stress fractures in theoretical framework

The Mattachine founders—predominantly white gay males—stressed that they saw gay people as sharing a distinct group culture.

But there was a limitation to the concept of a single "group identity." The population that is broadly represented under the umbrella of LGBT is not made up of people who share the same degrees of social and economic oppression.

The theoretical approach that gay people share a common culture also obscured the realities of national oppression. And it left little room to address the additional burden that lesbians face as women in a patriarchal society, or the ferocity of violence that transgender and transsexual people cannot escape Respond

because of their visibility.

Although the founders of Mattachine did lean towards this theoretical concept of gays as one distinct cultural group in society, they were anti-racist activists in their day-to-day organizing. And they'd had opposed imperialist war, anti-Semitism and fascism. They did so when the going was tough. The revolutionary Mattachine founders led the movement against the headwinds of Cold War gay-bashing and anti-communism.

The left-wing leadership of the early Mattachine movement reached out to the grassroots with their campaign against anti-gay firings and red-listing, police raids and jail-cell rapes, electro-shock and castration for the "crime" of same-sex love.

While they struggled against the daily outrages of the capitalist system—like police entrapment—they tried to imbue that movement with an understanding that oppression is part of the machinery of class-divided society. They understood that a gay liberation movement had to be part of the struggle to overturn capitalism and replace it with an economic system that requires planning and cooperation, not cut-throat competition and "let's-you-and-him-fight" ideology.

However, the labor movement was under siege at the time. Its most militant, revolutionary leaders were being driven out and even underground. This further isolated the burgeoning young gay movement from being able to reach out to the overall working class—the economic class that benefits most from defeating divide-and-conquer rule.

And as the Mattachine movement broadened and deepened its reach, it brought many from the more privileged classes in society into its ranks—and they wanted to shape the movement in their own class interests.

The concept of shared gay culture hampered the revolutionary leadership in its fight against the antagonistic political positions that middle- and upper-class gays were taking within the movement.

That internal struggle was not just about whether gays are "different" or not.

Conciliation, not assimilation

Today, progressive historians characterize the opposition as "assimilationist." But that's not the main problem with those who challenged and eventually defeated the communist leadership of Mattachine. Their political crime was that they were conciliatory to the boss class, which was carrying out an offensive against the working class as well using police entrapment against lesbians and gays.

The opposition tried to appease and curry favor with the Cold War capitalist rulers by opportunistically carrying out an internal red-baiting witch hunt within the Mattachine movement.

The opposition figures tried to mask their reactionary class conciliation with the dishonest claim that they were just trying to "democratize" Mattachine to help the organization build a broader movement.

Opposition leader Hal Call explained in a later interview, "We wanted to see Mattachine grow and spread, but we didn't think that this could be done as long as Mattachine was a secret organization. But we knew that if we became a public organization, the FBI and other government agencies would find out about us. That was okay with us, but before we went public, we wanted to make sure that we didn't have a person in our midst who could be revealed as a Communist and disgrace us all. We wanted to be able to stand up and say who we were and what we were about and not be accused of these other things.

"Despite the secrecy, we knew that some of the founders of the Mattachine Society, the inner circle, had been rumored to have some Communist leanings and maybe connections elsewhere. They had to go.

"So we sort of took the organization out of the founders' hands. We did this at a pair of meetings in the spring of 1953 in Los Angeles. At the second meeting, which was held in May, the founders of Mattachine gave over the Mattachine idea to those of us who wanted to form a democratic Mattachine Society with elected officers and with members and officers we knew." (Eric Marcus, "Making History")

Two weeks after the May convention, opposition figure David Finn wrote to Kenneth Burns, another opposition leader, that the FBI had gotten in touch with him in San Francisco. Finn reportedly handed over copies of the Mattachine constitution to government investigators and outlined the opposition's actions to remove any traces of communist influence within the organization. (D'Emilio, "Sexual Politics, Sexual Community")

Political surrender

Once the opposition had ousted the left-wing leadership, they dropped the mantle of concern for "democratic" forms of organization and their real political agenda became crystal clear.

Hal Call continued, "I didn't just disagree with how the original Mattachine was run. I also disagreed with the philosophy of the Mattachine founders. I felt that they were sort of pie in the sky, erudite and artistically included. Take Harry Hay, the kingpin of the original founders. You could never talk to him very long without him going way back in history to some ancient Egyptian cult or something of that sort. He was always making Mattachine and the homosexual of today a parallel to some of those things he found out about in his historical research.

"You see, I was a journalist and a public relations man and I felt that education and getting the word out was the best thing we could do, so the whole society could ultimately say, 'Homosexuals are human beings in our midst. They're only different in certain ways from the rest of us. Leave them alone."

How could this be politically achieved while the population was being hammered by the anti-gay terror of the Cold War "Lavender Scare"?

Hall explained, "We wanted to see those goals achieved by evolutionary methods, not revolutionary methods. ... So public protests were not part of our program. Not at all. We wanted to see changes come about by holding conferences and discussions and becoming subjects for research and telling our story. We wanted to assist people in the academic and behavioral-science world in getting the truth out to people who had an influence on law and law enforcement, the courts, justice and so on."

In order to plead with the rulers of society for social acceptance, the opposition had to pry up every plank of the demands the Mattachine organization was built on.

In his chapter "Retreat to Respectability," historian John D'Emilio explained, "Their reliance on professionals as the agents of social change pushed them to abandon collective, militant action by the Mattachine Society. In sum, accommodation to social norms replaced the affirmation of a distinctive gay identity, collective effort gave way to individual action, and confidence in the ability of gay men and lesbians to interpret their own experience yielded to the wisdom of experts. Under its new officers, the Mattachine Society shifted its focus from mobilizing a gay constituency to assisting the work of professionals." ("Sexual Politics")

D'Emilio concluded that the new leaders "urged homosexuals to adjust to a 'pattern of behavior that is acceptable to society in general and compatible with [the] recognized institutions ... of home, church and state."

Such political surrender did not beef up the ranks of Mattachine. Instead, the

network of discussion groups fell apart and overall membership quickly dwindled. Within weeks after the May 1953 conference in which founding Mattachine leaders were forced to step down, the San Diego groups imploded. By the fall, the three East Bay Mattachine discussion groups that had each drawn up to 60 participants were reduced to two groups that attracted a total of eight members.

Doing the state's dirty work

Mattachine founders Chuck Rowland and Konrad Stevens continued to provide leadership in the Los Angeles chapter, leading a vote to form a group to be known as the "Legal Chapter" to continue the struggle against police entrapment by finding cases "of significance to the whole minority" and fighting the charges "aggressively."

But the opposition's "Coordinating Council" overruled the group's decision. According to opposition leader Kenneth Burns, the new Mattachine lawyer warned that, "[T]he very existence of a Legal Chapter, if publicized to society at large, would intimidate and anger heterosexual society. ... It would be detrimental to the [Mattachine] Society to let the public know of the existence of the Legal Chapter; and it would probably bring more pressures on the Society if the heterosexual felt that the homosexual, whom he hates, was trying to change the laws to suit himself." (CC Minutes, Aug. 28. 1953, Lucas papers; D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, 82)

Instead, the Coordinating Council proposed referring individuals who had been snared by police entrapment to lawyers.

The new leadership did not want to challenge the anti-gay laws. The Coordinating Committee made this quite clear in a pamphlet it published in August 1953. "Any organized pressure on lawmakers by members of the Mattachine Society as a group would only serve to prejudice the position of the Society. ... It would provide an abundant source of hysterical propaganda with which to foment an ignorant, fear-inspired, anti-homosexual campaign."

Such a campaign was underway. It was the Cold War. It would take an organized political struggle to oppose the frenzy of "Lavender Scare" propaganda that was being used to step up enforcement of anti-gay penal codes.

Instead, the CC proposed the Mattachine adopt a policy of "merely acquainting itself" with legislation and let members know that the "burden of activity must rest upon the individual." ("Sexual Politics")

The reactionary ideology and political opportunism of the new leadership led them to carry out the state's Cold War agenda within the Mattachine movement.

Under the direction of the Coordinating Committee, the San Francisco and Los Angeles Area Councils issued pamphlets in the months after the May convention declaring that Mattachine was "unalterably opposed to Communists and Communist activity."

The Los Angeles pamphlet vowed, "Homosexuals are not seeking to overthrow or destroy any of society's existing institutions, laws or mores, but to be assimilated as constructive, valuable, and responsible citizens." (Kepner papers, "Sexual Politics")

The new leadership was at the helm of the organization-wide convention in Los Angeles in November 1953. Kenneth Burns was by then the official leader of Mattachine.

He won the vote on a resolution rejecting "any direct, aggressive action." The resolution called for limiting Mattachine's activities to "working with and through ... persons, institutions, and organizations which command the highest possible public respect."

When Mattachine founder Chuck Rowland rose to speak out against changing the preamble on which the organization had been formed, David Finn ruled him "out of order." Finn then declared, to the outrage of convention participants, that he would turn over to the FBI the names of everyone there if they did not vote down the "communistic" values of the old leadership.

Finn's threat provoked such outrage that it scuttled the Coordinating Committee's agenda of getting three loyalty-oath resolutions passed at the convention.

The first read, "[T]his Society unconditionally subscribes to the American creed."

The second would mandate that each member sign a statement that included, "I believe it is my duty to my country to love it; to support its constitution; to obey its laws; to respect its flag; and to defend it against all enemies."

The obvious and bitter irony of asking members, all of whom were there because they were breaking the law based on their sexuality, to obey all laws was apparently lost on those who penned the resolution.

The third resolution called for the formation of a "Committee for Investigating Communist Infiltration" that would act as a little HUAC body within the group, questioning members about "subversive" activities and booting out anyone who didn't provide the right answers.

All three resolutions did come to a vote at the convention. But in the atmosphere of turmoil and rage over the threat to "out" the membership to the FBI, all three rotten resolutions were voted down.

Despite the claims of the anti-communist leaders that they were trying to build a movement that was more mainstream, membership continued to drop dramatically.

The group was still called Mattachine, but the shift towards accommodation to political reaction derailed the early militant grassroots character of the movement for years to come.

Founder Chuck Rowland later concluded sadly, "We should never, never have given Hal Call our name, never have let him take our name."

Next: Lesbian organizing, "red feminism" and Black liberation.

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1955: First lesbian organization rises on waves of militant struggles

Lavender & red, part 51

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jan 26, 2006 12:36 PM

The founding of Daughters of Bilitis on Sept. 21, 1955, in San Francisco—the first known political network for lesbian rights in the United States—holds important lessons about the era of resistance to McCarthyism that may not be immediately apparent.



DOB was not founded by communists. Nor did the organization seek revolutionary change.

The group's charter didn't use the word "lesbian"; it referred only to "the variant." DOB's founding statement of purpose counseled members to adjust and adapt to dominant mandates about proper dress and behavior in order to fit in. They hoped to gradually win acceptance through education. The organization drew to its ranks lesbians who most wanted to and were most able to "fit in"—white-collar workers, professional and middle-class women, overwhelmingly white

DOB invited academic and medical "established experts"—some distantly sympathetic, some outright hostile—to speak at their meetings. East Coast DOB founder Barbara Gittings later recalled, "We invited people who were willing to come to our meetings; obviously, it turned out to be those who had a vested interest in having us as penitents, clients or patients."

The DOB leadership at that time looked to these establishment figures as vehicles of social change, who could help them with their goals.

So it may appear to be veering off track for this Workers World newspaper series—that focuses on the relationship between the liberation of oppressed sexualities, genders and sexes, and the communist movement—to examine DOB's formation.

But the question must be asked: How could even such a politically moderate demand by lesbians—the right to fit in and just live their lives—be articulated at the mid-fifties height of the Cold War, a time of the most focused persecution of gays and lesbians in U.S. history?

What gave these white lesbians the idea that this was a good time to sit down in someone's living room, and later in publicly rented spaces in San Francisco, Boston and New York, to discuss their rights?

DOB was not formed in a political vacuum. It arose in the midst of militant struggles against racism and for women's liberation. Without a deeper understanding of that period, the establishment of DOB makes it appear that the best road forward for democratic rights in a period of capitalist reaction is to ask for them politely, hat in hand—give an inch, get an inch.

The truth is that Daughters of Bilitis objectively rose up on waves of resistance by



the Black freedom movement and by communist women—Black and white—who were fighting for the recognition that women's oppression was an important battlefront in the class war.

Dramatic changes in the structuring of the U.S. wartime economy, its impact on the heterosexual family, and the unbearable burden of Jim Crow apartheid had helped create the conditions for these struggles.

From 'Rosie the Riveter' to 'Father Knows Best'

The deployment of so many men as GIs in World War II, women in military support roles and the gearing of the economy towards large-scale military production created many changes for women.

Some 150,000 women were inducted into the military in largely same-sex surroundings. Many women—white, Black, Latina and Native—and African American male workers not in the military were able for the first time to get better-paying jobs in heavy industry to produce war materiel.

This economic development brought people out of the isolation of their farms and jobs, homes and neighborhoods, families and friendship circles into more large-scale, same-sex, somewhat anonymous social interaction. This gave individuals the opportunity to learn new ideas and ways of being, to express their suppressed identities, to open up larger friendship circles and to network.

But after the war, the Pentagon carried out a purge of the military, loading lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans soldiers onto "queer ships" and dumping them at the nearest port town, often far from home. In cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston and New York, this created a very large lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans population.

In the weeks and months after the war ended, the barons of industry gave most women and Black workers notice—quit or be fired. Move over and make room for the predominately white male troops returning from mass deployment. It was a hard sell because many women workers of all nationalities, and Black workers as a whole, did not want to leave their jobs.

Bosses pitted workers against each other: Training programs for job skills dried up for lack of funding, war-time child-care centers shut down, and college slots for low-income students were filled with many white male GIs who won student aid as part of their veterans' benefits.

A mass psychology and publicity spin aided the bosses' efforts to restructure the work force after the war. Magazine covers extolled the virtue of heterosexual marriage with the man as the breadwinner. The image of the "lady" in a spotless dress, at home in the kitchen, an infant in the crook of her arm, replaced photos of women in hard hats with their sleeves rolled up operating machinery.

The average marriage age dropped, the rate of marriage rose to its highest level in the history of the U.S. and the birth rate soared.

Lesbians and gays in the cross-hairs

The systematic and sensationalized witch hunt carried out against lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people in the 1950s Cold War era aided the economic efforts underway to reinforce the heterosexual nuclear family as the primary economic unit under capitalism.

Gay and lesbian bars, many of them drag bars, had sprouted by 1940 in cities across the country—from Buffalo, N.Y., to Denver to San Jose, Calif. During the early- and mid-fifties, people in these bars were routinely subjected to brutal police raids and jailing in which sexual humiliation, rape and extortion by cops was a widespread form of extra-legal "sentencing."

Mass arrests included 64 lesbians busted in a 1953 New Orleans bar raid. A similar 1955 Baltimore bar raid ensnared 162 gay men.

Miami politicians ordered a police terror sweep on the local beaches in 1953, and passed a city law against drag. When a gay man was bashed to death in Miami the following year, local newspapers demanded punishment for homosexuals for having tempted "normals" to kill them.

Police entrapment, newspapers printing names and addresses of those arrested, FBI agents talking to workers' employers, threats of forced institutionalization and imprisonment—these were tough times in which to organize a fledgling lesbian network.

In 1955, the year DOB formed, one of the most nationally publicized anti-gay persecutions in U.S. history was taking place in Boise, the state capital of Idaho, resulting in nine men serving 5- to 15-year sentences in prison.

All workers felt the impact of one of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's first acts in the Oval Office: a 1953 executive order that legalized investigations into the homosexuality of government workers and all job applicants.

While the terror was directed at those who were oppressed for their sexuality, gender expression or sex, the indirect message was loud and clear to all workers: straighten up!

So how did Daughters of Bilitis form amidst this Cold War offensive? In effect, lesbian organizing rode the crest of turbulent swells of militant political organizing and resistance.

Next: Lesbian organizing and "red feminism."

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1955: Lesbian organizing and 'red feminism'

Lavender & red, part 52

By Leslie Feinberg Published Feb 5, 2006 12:42 PM

During World War II, the nascent military-industrial complex had pulled 6 million women out of their unpaid labor at home into the work force. After the war, as the predominately white male soldiers were cashiered out of the military, women were ordered back to their family homes again, to dawn-to-dark housework and no wages.





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Respond

Historian Kate Weigand, in her well-researched book "Red Feminism," explains that while many women who got pink-slipped did return to the patriarchaldominated, heterosexual family home, "a significant number also fought back."

"Those who liked their jobs and depended on the wages that came with them staged picket lines and petitioned their unions to protest their forced withdrawal from the skilled industrial workforce. Some women, particularly those who were members of such left-leaning unions as the United Auto Workers and the United Electrical Workers, made explicitly feminist arguments as they pressed their male bosses and co-workers to abandon traditional sex-based job classifications."

She added, "But although the UAW women's postwar efforts succeeded in winning permanent status for their Women's Bureau within the union's Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department, it would be years before they made any significant progress in their quest for gender equality."

Weigand makes this important observation: "The anti-feminism of the post-World War II period was both intense and widespread, but it did not impede every segment of the [U.S.] women's movement to the same degree. Mainstream feminists lost ground after 1945, but progressive women, who were accustomed to defining themselves in opposition to dominant political and cultural ideologies, continued to see the postwar period as an opportunity for new beginnings."

Red feminism

Communist women-Black and white-helped push the struggle for women's liberation forward politically and ideologically during that Cold War era. Their efforts reverberated strongly throughout the West Coast, as well as other regions of the U.S.

The political and theoretical contributions of Gerda Lerner and Eleanor Flexner are familiar to women who were a part of "second wave" women's liberation—the great surging feminist and womanist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. But the revolutionary moorings of these women's politics are less known.

Weigand wrote, "These women, along with many others who are less well-known, worked for women's liberation within their own political circles and in the United States at large during the hostile years of 1945-56. The group consisted primarily of women who had cut their political teeth in the Left and labor struggles of the 1930s."

Weigand stressed, "They revolutionized [feminist theory] by conceptualizing the dynamics of women's oppression and liberation within a framework that made race and class central. They sustained a small but vibrant women's movement throughout the 1940s and 1950s and transmitted influential terminology, tactics and concepts to the next generation of feminists. Their bold new thinking about the interdependence of gender, race and class, and about the personal and cultural aspects of sexism, shaped modern feminism—both directly and indirectly—and laid absolutely crucial groundwork for the second wave."

Many of the activists, organizers and theoreticians of the era of red feminism were members of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) or were "fellow travelers."

In the early 1930s, the Communist Party USA had actively encouraged rank-and-file women to organize women's councils and neighborhood committees. By 1936, a quarter of the CPUSA was women. By 1943, the number of women in the party was equal to the number of men.

From 1946 to 1950, the CPUSA initiated the Congress of American Women. Weigand states that during that time, CAW leaders were able to develop "a sophisticated analysis of women's oppression that recognized both the importance of women's race and class differences and the need for women to unite on the basis of gender to fight for their own emancipation.

"Armed with this broad understanding of the factors that limited women in American society, CAW activists also created a program for women's liberation that valued women's roles as housewives and mothers, challenged the social and cultural structures that excluded them from work and politics, and insisted that women could be different from but still equal to men."

Weigand concludes, "Why, then, has their story been overlooked? How have feminists and the general public come to believe that the critique of male chauvinism in personal and family relations emerged for the first time in the mid-1960s? The powerful legacy of anti-communism in the United States is largely responsible for their obscurity."

Tragically, red feminism—both the movement and the theory it generated—could have been so much stronger if its leaders had understood the need to defend lesbians organizationally, politically and ideologically.

Those targeted by the red-baiting and gay-bashing Cold War repression needed to be armed with theory that showed why fighting oppression—including the criminalization and demonization of same-sex love—was key to class unity against a common class enemy. The basis for unity was there: Same-sex love was hounded and criminalized by the state. So were communists. Lesbian and gay workers were facing widespread employment purges. So were communists.

And a movement of women who wanted to win greater rights had to be able to move forward against a hurricane of lesbian-baiting from the political establishment of the Cold War capitalists. But the CPUSA membership policy barred lesbian and gay members. So we will never know how many of the communist women were lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersexual.

The CPUSA's position towards homosexuality was that lesbians and gay men were degenerate. This wrong position hurt the communist movement as much as it hurt unity in the struggle against same-sex oppression.

The experience, insight and organization of lesbians, bisexuals and trans women and intersexual people could have strengthened the overall struggle for women's liberation, then and now as well.

Daughters of Bilitis was certainly not a part of red feminism; it was not a radical organization in search of revolutionary partnership. DOB sought to secure a position in society by appealing to the establishment, not by confronting it.

But objectively DOB articulated a lesbian voice, raised to national audibility. The

fact that this voice had to be raised, to speak in its own name, demonstrates that not all women shoulder the same burden of oppression, not even all women from the working class.

Black working-class women were making that point crystal clear in 1955, as well. They had a prominent and leading role in the struggle against Jim Crow segregation and for national liberation.

The civil rights struggle was rising, swift and strong, winning the hearts and minds of people of all nationalities across the United States and around the world.

The capitalist class unleashed the FBI against the early civil rights movement. Anti-gay baiting, too, was one of the weapons the political police agency used to try to fracture the movement and break it up.

Next: FBI gay-baited civil rights struggle.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 1955

Black movement raised hopes of all downtrodden

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Feb 12, 2006 10:19 PM

Although the 1955 founding of the Daughters of Bilitis in San Francisco-a group of predominantly white professional and middle-class women—was the first time lesbians organized on a national level to win some political rights, it was not the first time same-sex loving, bisexual and/or cross-dressing women had raised their voices loud enough to be heard in the United States.



No voices could have been sweeter or clearer than those of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Gladys Bentley, Ethel Waters, Alberta Hunter and many other powerful Black women performers and authors. Their prominence did not offer them sanctuary.

Cops busted into Ma Rainey's home while she was holding a women's party. Bessie Smith had to bail her out of jail the next morning. Later ads for Rainey's recording of "Prove It on Me Blues" showed a Black woman in a "man's" hat, tie and suit coat, chatting with two feminine women. Behind them, watching them, is a cop.

It was the Harlem Renaissance that lifted up these voices, along with the strong and poetic articulation of Black gay and bisexual men like Richard Bruce Nugent, Alaine Locke, Claude McKay and Wallace Thurman.

The rent parties, buffet flats and other forms of community social and economic organization, from Chicago to Baltimore, Detroit to D.C. and throughout the South helped create a political network for those who were "in the life."

Harlem's drag balls, which dated back to the late 19th century and continued during the early Harlem Renaissance, drew many thousands, rivaling those held at Madison Square Garden.

African-American scholar and historian Henry Louis Gates concludes that the Harlem Renaissance "was surely as gay as it was black."

In 1949, James Baldwin tried to spark a public dialogue across the country about the struggle against racism and anti-gay bigotry in his essay "Preservation of Innocence."

Baldwin wrote, "We are forced to consider tension between God and nature and are thus confronted with the nature of God because He is man's most intense creation and it is not in the sight of nature that the homosexual is condemned, but in the sight of God. This argues a profound and dangerous failure of concept, since an incalculable number of the world's humans are thereby condemned to something less than life; and we may not, of course, do this without limiting ourselves. ... Experience, nevertheless, to say nothing of history, seems clearly to indicate that it is not possible to banish or to falsify any human need without ourselves undergoing falsification and loss."

Baldwin published fiction in 1951, 1953 and 1956 that also dealt with homosexuality.

Respond

The civil rights movement qualitatively accelerated in 1955. This dynamic stage of the ongoing struggle for long-denied democratic rights and national liberation helped inspire and buoy many in the U.S. and around the world who longed for social and economic justice.

Lesbians and gay men of many nationalities were inspired by the struggle and played an important role in the movement against Jim Crow segregation and other forms of national oppression.

The late Coretta Scott King, widow of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., later recalled, "Gays and lesbians stood up for civil rights in Montgomery, Selma; in Albany, Ga.; and St. Augustine, Fla., and many other campaigns of the Civil Rights Movement. Many of these courageous men and women were fighting for my freedom at a time when they could find few voices for their own, and I salute their contributions." (Chicago Tribune, April 1, 1998)

'Thank you sister Rosa Parks'

1955—the year that Daughters of Bilitis formed the first national network for lesbian rights—the African-American civil rights movement shook up the whole country. Black working women, visible in the leadership, showed that oppression could be fought.

That was the summer that 14-year-old Emmett Till was dragged from his bed and lynched by white supremacists while he was visiting in Mississippi. His mutilated body was found in the Tallahatchie River. His murder was the third lynching of an African-American male that year.

Till's mother, Mamie Till Mobley, with courageous resolve, demanded an open casket with full publicity at his funeral in Chicago. "I think everybody needed to know what had happened to Emmett Till," she said. More than 50,000 people lined up to view his body, left unrecognizable by torture and mutilation. Newspapers across the country carried photos.

Ebony magazine later wrote that the decision by Mamie Till Mobley to open the casket "helped mobilize a fighting spirit in Black people nationally that helped spark and fuel the Civil Rights Movement."

One hundred days after Till was lynched, seamstress/activist Rosa Parks refused to surrender her seat on a Montgomery, Ala., municipal bus to a white man. Parks said she was thinking of the lynching of young Till. She later told a reporter, "I just could not get the pictures of Emmett Till out of my mind."

Parks' defiance of Jim Crow segregation, the law of the land, lit the tinder of civil rights organizing and anti-lynching efforts already going on in the Deep South. Her arrest launched a 381-day Montgomery bus boycott in which 40,000 Black people, mostly all working people, fought the segregationist bosses.

Their hard-fought-for, hard-won victory brought momentum to the mass civil rights movement throughout the South during the 1950s and 1960s to break the shackles of Jim Crow apartheid.

But wherever the civil rights struggle made gains, the FBI and other repressive police agencies used gay-baiting, as well as red-baiting, to try to break up the movement against racism.

Next: FBI brandishes weapons: red-baiting and gay-baiting.

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Civil rights leaders faced red-baiting, gay-baiting

Lavender & red, part 54

By Leslie Feinberg Published Feb 24, 2006 8:24 PM

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans activists—Black and white—played an important role in the ranks and the leadership of the civil rights movement. However, the illegality of same-sex love and the "Lavender Menace" Cold War campaign made their sexuality a target for state repression.



Bayard Rustin, organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, may be the best-known gay Black civil rights leader. Rustin, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other Black leaders were the focus of intense surveillance and counter-intelligence—COINTELPRO—tactics of the FBI and other political police agencies.

Rustin was arrested in 1953 in a car with two white men in Pasadena, convicted and jailed for "sex perversion." Author George Chauncey Jr. later asked Rustin if he believed the charges were politically motivated. Rustin answered, "I think so. Because way back as far as 1946, '47, I had organized all over the country, even in the Deep South, and I was in California at the time of the arrest, leading demonstrations against discrimination in theaters, hotels and restaurants." ("Time on Two Crosses")

Rustin, an ideological pacifist, organized in the South with Dr. King. In 1960, labor leader A. Phillip Randolph had asked Rustin to work on civil rights demonstrations that targeted the national conventions of both the Republican and the Demo cratic parties. Rustin invited Dr. King to a news conference announcing the marches. King then left for Brazil.

Great pressure was brought to bear on Rustin. It focused on his sexuality, which was criminalized by the state. Rustin recalled, "Later [Dr. King] called me from Brazil very, very agitated indeed, and said that on second thought maybe we ought not to proceed with the marches."

Rustin got back in touch with King to say that Randolph and others were going full-steam ahead on the demonstrations. "I called Martin back and told him this, whereupon he told me the whole story. A woman who was well known in the movement had called him and said that [New York Congress member Adam Clayton] Powell was going to call a press conference and implicate me and Dr. King in some sort of liaison if Dr. King did not call off the marches. Now, obviously this is a case where Powell had been promised something by the Democratic Party if he'd get rid of me."

Rustin added in another interview, "There, of course, was no homosexual relation ship with Dr. King. But Martin was so uneasy about it that I decided I did not want Dr. King to have to dismiss me. I had come to the SCLC [South ern Christian Leader ship Coun cil] to help. If I was going to be a burden I would leave—and I did. How ever, Dr. King was never happy about my leaving. He was deeply torn—although I had left the SCLC, he frequently called me in and asked me to help. While in 1960 he felt real pressure to fire me, in 1963 he agreed that I should organize the March on Washington, of which he was one of the leaders."



(1987 interview with the magazine Open Hands)

In 1963, Rustin was to be named director of the 1963 March on Washington. Roy Wilkins, then executive director of the NAACP, told Rustin he would object. "He made it quite clear that he had absolutely no prejudice toward me or toward homosexuality," Rustin said. Wilkins told Rustin that he was concerned that the enemies of civil rights would exploit the fact that the director of the March on Washing ton was gay. Wilkins added that although Rustin was not a communist, he was known to be a socialist and a "draft dodger."

Rustin replied, "Roy, I just disagree with that, and I think that the time has come when we have to stand up and stop running from things. And I don't believe that if this is raised by the Southern Demo crats, that it will do anything but spur people on. We can issue a statement which says they will use anything to try and stop us in our march to freedom, but no matter what they use we will win."

Unswayed, Wilkins called a meeting of the Black march leaders. Randolph named him self director, as a compromise. But his first act, he said, would be to appoint Rustin as his deputy. King and CORE Director Jim Farmer voted for Rustin. Wilkins reportedly said, "Phil, you've got me over a barrel, I'll go along with you."

In June 1963, on Capitol Hill, Sen. Strom Thurmond did attack the March on Washington, denouncing Rustin as a "sexual pervert." Although Rustin had politically distanced himself from his early activist work with the Young Communist League, it did not spare him Thurmond's red-baiting. Thurmond also condemned Rustin for having refusing military induction as a conscientious objector.

Randolph met with the march leadership and quickly pulled together a statement by Black leaders of the civil rights movement and labor unions, as well as progressive religious figures, all of whom were organizing the march. The statement concluded that Rustin "will continue to organize the March with our full and undivided support."

Gays and lesbians—Black and white—played a significant role in other civil rights battles, in the Deep South as well. There, in particular, the state honed sharp the weapon of anti-gay bigotry.

Next: Local and regional Black and white leaders in Southern civil rights movement face ferocious gay-baiting, red-baiting.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA IN DEEP SOUTH

Civil rights activists were gay-baited, red-baited

Lavender & red, part 55

Published Mar 3, 2006 11:04 PM

As the civil rights movement heated up at the height of the Cold War, state repression often came in the form of investigations into the sexuality of those who were fighting for freedom.

White supremacist propaganda—which included virulent racism, crude anti-Semi tism and brutal sexism—condemned civil rights activists for being homosexuals and/or in inter-racial relationships, allegedly having adulterous sex or living together out of wedlock. The movement was portrayed as made up of activists who threatened to "queer" the white, heterosexual, father-dominated family structure.

Jim Crow miscegenation laws enforced apartheid in marriage. Klan ideology, which propagated the vicious myth of African men as a "sexual threat" to white Southern womanhood, formed the foundation of lynch law. That racist lie was meant to cover up the real truth—the widespread rape of Black women by white men that began during slavery.

It was these Southern patriarchs of property who gave the go-ahead for their police forces, their mobs armed with bricks and bats, and their McCarthyite committees of inquisition to attack civil rights activists. Gay-baiting was often the specific point of attack.

As was the case with civil rights activists who faced ferocious red-baiting, some were not gay and/or communist. But many were.

Gay men and lesbians, Black and white, and presumably bisexual and transgender people as well, played dynamic roles in the movement to end Jim Crow apartheid. But the active police repression of same-sex love and the Cold War demonization of lesbians and gays made civil rights activists who were gay much more vulnerable to state repression.

Since same-sex love was against the law, police and legislative inquiries into the sexuality of activists conveyed the threat of police and prison torture, including rape. The threat was meant to terrorize freedom fighters in the struggle for Black liberation in the Deep South.

Gainesville witch hunt

In 1956, for example, a conservative state senator from northern Florida, Charley Johns, launched a legislative inqui sition known as the "Johns Com mittee" that was to last eight years. Started just two years after the growing civil rights struggle had compelled the Supreme Court to declare school segregation unconstitutional, it was bent on pushing back the struggle against institutionalized segregation.

Former acting governor Johns directed police to carry out an investigation into the "homosexual menace" at Florida State University in Gainesville. Johns chaired the committee, which relied on surveillance and police entrapment,



informers and extortion. The committee interrogated hundreds of witnesses and publicly leaked bald-faced lies and sensationalized half-truths about their testimony.

The committee reported to the legislature that university officials were "soft" on communism, homosexual activities, atheism and obscenity. On March 17, 1964, the committee printed up now-infamous purple-covered pamphlets "to prepare ... children to meet the temptations of homosexuality lurking today in the vicinity of nearly every institution of learning." The portrayal of gay men as looking for young children to prey on was the heart of the argument. The committee distributed this gay-bashing publication to the media, legislators and state officials.

Johns Committee Direc tor John Evans told a Florida Federation of Women's Clubs in Jacksonville that he knew of 123 homosexuals who were responsible for a "flourishing" of same-sex activity in Florida educational institutions. As with Sen. Joseph McCarthy's notorious list of communists in the State Department, later media reports exposed that no such list existed.

As a result of the witch hunt, 16 FSU faculty and staff were fired and many more, including students, were driven in fear from the state campus—and other Florida campuses—by the political purge. How many faculty and students then at FSU might identify—in today's terms—as gay or lesbian, bisexual or transgender, transsexual or intersexual? No one will ever know.

But what is known is that all of those who were fired were activists in the Florida civil rights movement.

Some of those targeted called on the Florida Civil Liberties Union for help. Historian John D'Emilio notes that the FCLU "surmised that motives other than a concern for sexual morality were at work. Civil rights forces were beginning to resume the offensive in the South. The first Black student had recently enrolled in the university's law school and the FCLU recognized that the Johns Committee's 'intimidation of the faculty and student body would serve as a deterrent against racial integration on the campus or [the establishment of] a university chapter of the FCLU." ("Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities")

But the policies of the American Civil Liberties Union made it hard for the local FCLU to competently and aggressively defend civil rights activists of all sexualities who had been caught up in an anti-gay dragnet. The national American Civil Lib erties Union had stated on the public record in January 1957 that "homosexuality is a valid consideration in evaluating the security risk factor in sensitive positions" and added, "It is not within the province of the Union to evaluate the social validity of the laws aimed at the suppression or elimination of homosexuals."

Lesbians were not the focus of the Johns Committee investigation. But bashing gay males impacts on women who love women, as well. Though women were not the public political focus of the inquiry, that doesn't mean that lesbians—Black and white—were not being oppressed.

Well-known white Southern lesbian Merril Mushroom, a student at FSU during the Johns Committee witch hunt, explained, "Women were simply not reported on. ... But we were harassed, we were arrested, and we were subjected to the same bullshit as the men—but not in the same numbers. ... Sometimes lesbians—drag queens, too—were beaten up or raped by the cops." ("Lonely Hunters")

Next: North Carolina: Black and white gays led civil rights struggles.

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Gay youths, Black & white, led North Carolina fight

Lavender & red, part 56

By Leslie Feinberg Published Mar 10, 2006 11:15 PM

Gay youths, Black and white, led breakthrough struggles against racism and Jim Crow apartheid in North Carolina—the Durham and Chapel Hill freedom struggles—during the early 1960s, and won victories that reverberated throughout the Deep South.



Historian James T. Sears, a significant white contributor to Southern struggle history, devotes a whole chapter about three of the main organizers of the North Carolina movement in his book "Lonely Hunters—An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-1968."

Quinton Baker, African American and gay, was a key leader. Baker was born on the coastal plain of North Carolina in 1942. He grew up in Greenville, a town of 21,000, making a living by shining shoes. While not transgender in today's terms, Baker once explained, "when you speak the way I speak in the South, you stand out. For a lot of people my speech pattern was feminine." But, he added about growing up in his community, "Back then, you could be funny but not ostracized. The attitude was one of quiet acceptance."

Baker was a senior in an all-Black high school on the day—Feb. 1, 1960—when four African American first-year students at Agricultural and Technical College (A&T) ordered coffee at a downtown Greensboro, N.C., restaurant from a counter that only served whites. They were refused service.

The next morning, 27 Black A&T students arrived together and ordered coffee at that counter. "We are prepared to keep coming for two years if we have to," one of the youth vowed.

The "sit-ins" electrified the South. One week later, the sit-in movement sparked similar protests in North Carolina cities with historically Black colleges: Durham, Elizabeth City, High Point and Winston-Salem. Another week passed and the sitins at lunch counters to protest racist segregation had spread from Nashville, Tenn., to Tallahassee, Fla.

Sears noted, "By the end of March, 68 cities in 13 Southern states reported sitins, including a wade-in at the all-white swimming pool in Biloxi, Miss., a readin at the library in St. Petersburg, Fla., and a host of kneel-ins at all-white churches."

Hundreds of youth activists were arrested and locked up, where they faced serious charges. City officials in Orangeburg, S.C., gave the go-ahead to turn power hoses on student demonstrators and then held them in an open stockade in 40-degree weather. Tallahassee cops teargassed youth activists. Klan mobs met civil rights demonstrators with bats and pipes in Bessemer and Montgomery, Ala.

This struggle marked the qualitative opening of a youth-led civil rights movement, and it was the real beginning of the larger student struggle of the



1960s and 1970s. By the day Baker graduated high school in May 1960, a few businesses had agreed to end white-supremacist segregation of their lunch counters. Within one year, the struggle won desegregation of lunch counters in 126 Southern cities.

Baker was drawn into this vortex of struggle. He said he looked forward to the fall of 1960 when he would enter North Carolina College (NCC) in Durham. Black college students were organizing. Lacey Streeter, another native of Greenville, led the NAACP college chapter at NCC.

Baker later recalled, "By the time I got to college I was so ready and prepared [for struggle] that it became almost more important to me than the academic work. It was the force."

He added, "My first semester I was in the NAACP and I was demonstrating. I didn't stop for the four years I was there!"

As Baker organized boycotts, sit-ins, rallies and street demonstrations, his tactical and organizational skills became renowned. He helped other young leaders to develop. He became president of the NAACP state youth organization and an NAACP Commando.

Baker later recalled, "A lot of student leaders and activists were often gay men," adding that the men weren't often aware of lesbian activists.

Baker worked closely with two gay, white anti-racist activists.

Anti-racist struggle awakens white activists

Pat Cusick, like other white youth who were shoulder-to-shoulder in the struggle, had grown up under white supremacist indoctrination. These youth had to break with the racist ideology they had been taught in order to put their bodies on the line to end Jim Crow laws.

Cusick worked at a General Electric plant in Rome, Ga., after the Army "honorably" discharged him in 1953. The voice of Lillian Smith, a now-famous Southern anti-racist white writer, reached Cusick after she sent a letter to the editor of the New York Times hailing the 1954 Supreme Court decision that formally ended racist segregation in schools as "every child's Magna Carta."

Smith, while she did not use the word lesbian to describe herself, had a female life partner.

Cusick went to school at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill—a sister city to Durham, but with a much smaller Black population. He worked as a campus custodian in 1962 while he studied mathematics.

When the writer James Baldwin, African American and gay, came to Durham to speak to the students, Cusick traveled from Chapel Hill to hear him.

Baker was there, too. He explains, "We were interested in him because of his racial analysis and his analysis of our condition, more so than his writing having sexual undertones. Of course there were always attempts to read materials that talked about homosexuality. He came down in support of what we were doing."

Cusick first became an activist in the "ban the bomb" movement for nuclear disarmament. He later said that in his early years as a white Southern activist, "It was much easier for me to be against the war in Vietnam and form the Student Peace Union than to get involved in civil rights—I never even considered gay rights."

An openly gay white youth, John Dunne, also joined the SPU. Sears wrote, "John's apartment was the first place where Pat [Cusick] talked at length with other gay men who shared his passion for social justice: 'We talked about homosexuality and bisexuality mostly on an intellectual level with a bit of sexual tension. At the forefront, though, were discussions about the peace movement

and civil rights."

As the SPU grew, Cusick said he realized, "How could we be talking about all of this peace stuff when there was no peace between the races." The white SPU activists began a systematic desegregation effort in Chapel Hill, including organizing boycotts of white-segregationist businesses.

Dunne returned to Chapel Hill on May 20, 1963, from Birmingham, Ala., where he had been arrested on charges of loitering and failure to obey a police officer. It happened while he was working to locate Black youth who had been arrested after Bull Connorpolice force turned power hoses on 600 schoolchildren. He was awaiting appeal of his sentence: a year behind bars and a \$200 fine.

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" after being arrested for leading the Good Friday march there. The powerful impact of the Birmingham demonstrations was felt throughout the South, including Durham—where young civil rights activists readied themselves to wage "an all-out war against segregation."

However, one white, gay North Carolina student journalist actively campaigned on the wrong side of civil rights struggle and desegregation. His name, now familiar, is Armistead Maupin Jr.—a William F. Buckley admirer. (Sears)

Baker helps lead Chapel Hill movement

Baker had become a prominent and seemingly tireless organizer of the widening and deepening Durham protest movement. And he agreed in 1963 to work with the Chapel Hill movement, too. Soon after they met in that struggle, Baker and Dunne became lovers.

"With Baker and the Chapel Hill Black teens involved," Sears explained, "tactics changed from picketing to sit-ins and marches." As the summer of 1963 began, activists were organizing three marches a week, while picketing numerous white-owned segregated businesses.

Cusick recalls Baker teaching demonstrators how to fall and protect themselves from the police. "This created the ire from the Chapel Hill liberals," he said, "since we were using nonviolence as a tactic, not a philosophy."

When criticized by more liberal elements for using these tactics to break the law, Baker said, "We would reply, 'If you agree with my cause, then what you need to do is to act on the fact that you believe in the cause—don't worry about *my* tactics. Don't concentrate on what *I'm* doing. Concentrate on what *you're* doing that supports the cause that we both believe in.'"

Cusick described the impact of the arrest of 34 demonstrators on July 19—including himself—in what was to become a turning point in the Chapel Hill freedom movement. "Like most whites, [for me] a policeman was a friendly image. There is nothing like it for you to get your head whipped, your teeth knocked in, and your ribs kicked. You come to a knowledge that is much different."

In jail, Pat and fellow activist prisoners read and discussed Baldwin's "Another Country," which wove themes of societal racism and homophobia.

Cusick said, "There were more gays than people ever realized in the civil rights movement. But you wouldn't see it from the outside." He added, "In the midst of a movement that was not directly related to sexual orientation but more involved in day-to-day social justice issues with a common enemy, the movement would bring you closer together. During that period there was not a great deal of conversation about sexual orientation."

Baker was also imprisoned for his activism in 1963, in Morgantown Prison Camp—one of two desegregated N.C. state prisons. He observed, "The chain gang was one of those experiences you say, 'I'm glad I had it; I never want to do it again.' It

was there I really learned about the struggle of what it means to be human."

Baker wrote letters for Black prisoners and at least one white. He said, "I learned a lot about people and their emotions when I had to convey their feelings to someone who they loved or cared about. Having to read, talk to, and see people, and understanding what kinds of lives they have, I began to appreciate what being human is about.

"I began to recognize the superficiality of some of the things we surround ourselves with and how we separate ourselves. It was an incredible beginning for me in my quest to understand about being a human being and how to put into that context my blackness and my sexual orientation."

In August 1963, as the March on Washington was drawing huge numbers, the impact of the gay-baiting and red-baiting political attacks on Bayard Rustin—the march's leading tactician—was also felt by civil rights activists of all nationalities and sexualities in the Deep South, including Baker, who had been released from jail.

'The tactician who brought the connection'

Baker said of some of the white civil rights activists he worked with: "There were really some good solid white people who came into the movement and got to understand where we were at that time. ... Those white people who got beat up with me, went to jail with me, sat down with me, and got peed on, it is very difficult to question their commitment. Whether they had fought through all of their personal racism is a different story—they were struggling with it."

As civil disobedience spread, more activists—Black and white—went to jail. On Jan. 12, 1964, the Chapel Hill Freedom Committee organized a 13-mile march from Chapel Hill to Durham. There, at least 500 crowded into the First Baptist Church to hear CORE national chairperson, Floyd McKissick, and John Knowles, a gay white author of "A Separate Peace," speak at the indoor rally.

CORE leader James Farmer told the cheering crowd that night, "Unless Chapel Hill is an open city by Feb. 1, it will become the focal point of all our efforts. All our resources, staff funds and training will be centered here."

In April 1964, Baker, Cusick and Dunne were sentenced to 6 months, 1 year and 3 years of hard labor, respectively. By July 2, the struggle had forced President Lyndon Johnson to sign the Civil Rights Act that barred racist segregation of public accommodations

Cusick concluded that in North Carolina, Quinton Baker had been "the tactician who brought the connection to the statewide movement."

Next: Black and white, gay and straight—civil rights activists built unity in Jackson, Miss., struggle.

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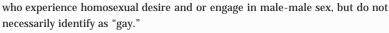
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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Mississippi civil rights era struggle

'Queer' activists, Black and white, led the way

By Leslie Feinberg Published Mar 18, 2006 10:27 PM

State repression flowing from the gay-bashing, anti-communist Cold War witch hunt of the 1950s didn't really gear up in Mississippi until the 1960s, says John Howard, a white researcher of U.S. Southern "queer" history. When Howard uses the term "queer,"he is including the whole population of those



Howard focused on non-heterosexuality between males in rural Mississippi, the poorest state in the country, in his ground-breaking book, "Men Like That—A Southern Queer History."

He concluded, "Queer sex in Mississippi was not rare. Men-desiring-men were neither wholly isolated nor invisible. From the most secluded farms in Smith County to the densest neighborhoods of the capital, Jackson, homosexuality flourished between close friends and distant relatives; casual sex between strangers was clandestine but commonplace. Androgyny, though doubly suspect, also thrived."

Although broad media coverage of the 1955 gay-bashing murder of John Murrett, a white Jackson, Miss., interior decorator, had created fear, the greatest terror was unleashed by the police in an era thought of nationally as the "free love sixties," not the "conformist fifties."

But the mid-sixties police crackdown, Howard noted, demonstrated the prevalence of homosexuality "within the ranks of upper-, middle-, and working-class Mississippi."

These police raids, carried out against white gay men in public gathering spaces, coincided with efforts by the white business class to resist the impact of the passage of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the ongoing demands to dismantle the rest of Jim Crow apartheid.

What was the relationship between the Black-led struggle for national liberation and the police entrapment and imprisonment of white men having same-sex relations?

Howard explained, "By 1965 homosexuality was linked to the specter of racial justice—what white authorities understood as the most serious threat to the status quo. Queer Mississippians black and white found themselves in increasingly politicized positions. With the bravery earned in lives of local struggle and everyday resistance, they moved onto the public stage, determined to win a legitimacy and equity so long denied them."

At the forefront of struggle

African Americans in Mississippi had to battle Jim Crow segregation after the overturning of post-Civil War, Reconstruction laws which had lead to many



political gains for Black people. The 1890 state constitution reestablished white rule which was enforced by the Klan's violence.

The first freedom riders, who arrived in Jackson on May 24, 1961, were predominantly white youth who had traveled to Mississippi to aid Black activists in their statewide efforts against white supremacist segregation. Regional newspapers characterized the riders as "gay crowds."

In the summer of 1964, more than 1,000 youths—also mostly white college students from the North—arrived to help Black voters roll aside weighty racist obstacles to registration. Again, business owners used their newspapers and politicians to gay bait—including crudely bigoted references to gay civil rights leader Bayard Rustin—in order to threaten activists. Since love between people of the same sex and love between people of different nationalities were both illegal, gay-baiting and condemnation of inter-racial relationships were literally attempts to criminalize civil rights workers.

"[T]he White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi most explicitly linked civil rights activism and communism to male homosexuality. ... Communists, homosexuals, and Jews, fornicators and liberals and angry blacks—infidels all," Howard wrote.

There was an element of truth to this charge: There were many gay and lesbian and Jewish activists in the ranks of the civil rights movement, and many communists—and some were all of the above.

But this was true not just of many who rode the buses into Mississippi to build the struggle, it was true of those born and raised in the state, as well. Howard said, "Support for sexual difference existed alongside varied reformist tendencies within the movement. And in the heart of the lynching and Bible Belt, queer Mississippians were at the forefront of the civil rights struggle."

Aaron Henry, for example, state leader of the NAACP, was busted by police for homosexual "sodomy" or disorderly conduct at least four times. After Medgar Evers was gunned down in 1963, Henry was the most renowned Black leader in the state for more than three decades.

With many "queer" Mississippians—Black and white—in the leadership and ranks of the civil rights struggle, in the mid-1960s police unleashed a campaign of violence and repression against the sexually- and gender-marginalized.

"The year 1965 crystallized both a successful civil rights movement and a nascent queer visibility in Mississippi," Howard wrote. "The two were commingled—both in practice and in alarmist rhetoric designed to thwart them. ... Many battles were yet to be fought. But racial and sexual minorities appeared ever more prepared and inspired for struggle."

The police and courts began targeting men inside and outside the movement who were believed to be gay. A campaign of mass arrests targeted white men who were entrapped by cops in public toilets in Jackson and Hattiesburg.

This police campaign continued in Jackson during the 1970s, with the harassment of gay males—mostly white, but also Black men—in Smith Park. Aaron Henry was arrested in one of the park raids.

So was Eddie Sandifer, a staunch white anti-racist, born the son of a Baptist preacher in a rural Louisiana parish. Sandifer identified himself as a Trotskyist and "a strong believer in armed revolution." He was a tireless grassroots organizer who was instrumental in founding the first lesbian and gay political group in the state—the Mississippi Gay Alliance (MGA).

"Though homosexuality and gender insubordination clearly weren't just a white thing," Howard concluded, "gay political organizing for the most part was."

When the MGA set up patrols of the park to monitor police actions, however,

they counted among their supporters "ministers, lawyers, reporters, young and old, from babes in arms to 75 years old, male and female, black and white, gay and straight."

Next: National liberation struggles—in U.S. and around the world—also inspired militant demand for sexual and gender liberation.

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Early 1960s: 'Gay is good'

Lavender & red, part 58

By Leslie Feinberg Published Mar 26, 2006 7:51 AM

The dynamism of the lunch counter sit-ins and freedom rides of the African-American civil rights movement gave rise to an East Coast current of white gay and lesbian activists within Mattachine and Daughters of Bilitis—the national gay and lesbian organizations. These young gay men and lesbians were



more militant and began to reject advice from the homophile movement to try to "fit into" society, to not make waves, and to rely on professionals and establishment figures to bequeath them social rights.

Historian John D'Emilio said of this new, more militant political current of the early 1960s, "Inspired by the example of civil rights activists, it abandoned the accommodationist approach of the 1950s. Militants adopted an ideology based on equal rights for minorities, engaged in direct action techniques of protest, and affirmed the propriety of homosexuals and lesbians leading their own struggle for justice. Their confidence and determination won for the movement and for gay women and men generally a visibility that their predecessors had failed to achieve." ("Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities")

For example, Franklin Kameny "argued relentlessly for gay activists to embrace an aggressive direct action strategy modeled on the civil rights movement."

Kameny coined the phrase "Gay is good" in 1966 after hearing African Americans declare "Black is beautiful!" The 1968 North American Conference of Homophile Organi zations (NACHO) formally adopted the slogan in 1968.

Kameny had been fired as a government employee in 1957 after his arrest a year earlier on charges of "lewd conduct" was discovered by investigators. Kameny continued to fight the Civil Service Commission decision blocking him from any federal employment until 1961, when it was clear that he had exhausted every avenue of appeal through the commission and the courts. That same year, Kameny co-founded a Mattachine chapter in Washington, D.C.

Kameny rejected the accommodationist homophile movement's "genteel, debating society approach" that "impelled [it] to present impartially both or all sides" of every political position. "We cannot stand upon an ivory-tower concept of aloof, detached dignity," Kameny told a New York City Mattachine meeting audience in July 1964. "This is a movement, in many respects, of down-to-earth, grass-roots, sometimes tooth-and-nail politics." And, he stressed, "[O]ur opponents will do a fully adequate job of presenting their views, and will not return us the favor of presenting ours; we gain nothing in virtue by presenting theirs, and only provide the enemy ... with ammunition to be used against us."

Kameny scorned the dominant medical model that homosexuality was an "illness." He publicly stated instead, "I take the stand that not only is homosexuality ... not immoral, but that homosexual acts engaged in by consenting adults are moral, in a positive and real sense, and are right, good and desirable, both for the individual participants and for the society in which they live."



In April 1962, activist Randy Wicker confronted the WBAI radio station public affairs director in New York City about a broadcast in which psychiatrists had discussed homosexuality as a sickness. Wicker demanded, and won, a program in which gay men were able to speak as experts about their lives.

Wicker took his media campaign about the homosexual rights movement to publications from the Village Voice to Harper's.

Kameny and Wicker drew the ire of the more politically right-wing leadership of the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis.

Next: Mid-1960s gay activists target U.S. government.

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Mid-1960s gay activists target U.S. gov't

Lavender & red, part 59

By Leslie Feinberg Published Apr 1, 2006 8:57 PM

In 1963, activist Franklin Kameny helped set up the East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO). ECHO brought together the Washington, D.C., New York and Philadelphia branches of Mattachine, the New York branch of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Janus Society of Philadelphia. The coalition, meant to foster cooperation and to debate tactics, was also an attempt to form an activist

This more left-leaning activist current of primarily white gay men and lesbians was not revolutionary. But they were breaking away from the timid, class-collaborationist political approach of Mattachine and the DOB.

network to the left of the accommodationist leaders of the homophile movement.

And they denounced the gay-bashing U.S. government when the media here attacked the Cuban Revolution on April 16, 1965, saying it was interning gays in labor camps.

Although some of these activists were imbued with anti-communism themselves, they immediately set up demonstrations in front of the White House and United Nations headquarters. The hypocrisy of the U.S. government criticizing the Cuban Revolution was not lost on these activists. After all, it was the U.S. that had carried out the "Lavender Scare" as a Cold War bludgeon, unleashed state repression against lesbians and gay men, bisexuals and trans people, marginalized LGBT workers from the labor force, and pathologized sexual and gender variation as criminal and sick behavior.

It was a courageous move by these activists, still living in the chill of the Cold War, to face red-baiting for holding protests that turned Washington's charges against the Cuban Revolution back on the U.S. government.

Author John D'Emilio concluded, "Lest anyone mistake the event as an anti-Castro action, the pickets displayed signs that made their target clear: 'Fifteen Million U.S. Homosexuals Protest Federal Treat ment,' one placard read, while another charged that 'Cuba's Government Perse cutes Homosexuals—U.S. Government Beat Them to It.'"

(This series will take up the obstacles facing the Cuban Revolution, and its subsequent accomplishments, in more detail in the future.)

In May 1965, left-wing ECHO activists won their proposal to organize a series of picket lines in the spring and summer demanding gay rights. They chose as their targets the White House, Pentagon, State Department, Civil Service Commission and, on the Fourth of July, Philadelphia's Independence Hall.

Although the picket lines were tiny, these activists were brave. Homosexuality was still illegal and actively persecuted.

The boldness of public picketing made the demand for gay and lesbian rights hard to ignore. ABC-TV filmed the protest outside the White House on May 29.



Local affiliates in nine states broadcast the foot age. A report on the wire services was print ed in papers in several U.S. cities. On the eve of the demonstration outside the State Department, a press reporter asked Secre tary of State Dean Rusk about his department's policy towards homosexuality.

The full day of protest outside the Civil Service Commission forced its officials to finally agree to a meeting with gay activists.

Next: Old guard Mattachine and DOB blamed bar crowd for drawing police violence.

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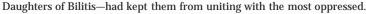
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Why 1960s gay rebellions had to erupt 'from below'

Lavender & red, part 60

By Leslie Feinberg Published Apr 21, 2006 11:33 PM

The 1960s rebellions that erupted in response to police raids on gay/trans bars, culminating in the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion in Greenwich Village in Manhattan, were not led or supported by the national gay and lesbian organizations. The politics of these primarily white, middle-class organizations—Mattachine and



Leaders from both Mattachine and DOB, in their appeal to the establishment for rights, had stressed the need to adhere to manners of dress and gender behavior. The dress code enforced by both organizations excluded gender-variant lesbians and gay men, drawing to their ranks instead those who could "fit in."

Those whose gender expression could not conform were drawn to the social strength of community found in the gay/lesbian bars. As a result, the bars were often difficult to categorize as gay/lesbian as distinct from drag (transgender, in today's language) bars, since those who were gender-variant as well as same-sex-loving forged social alliances there. In an era of overall racist segregation, the bars were often integrated—Black, Latin@, Native and white—in some cities, as well.

The leaderships of both Mattachine and DOB blamed the dress and behavior and social visibility of cross-dressing butch lesbians and drag queens in the working-class bar crowd for drawing violent police raids.

The same political approach that kept Mattachine and DOB from defending the most oppressed ended up dividing them from each other as well. Some of the Mattachine men blamed the lesbians for being "splitters" by forming their own organization. This argument ignored the additional burden that lesbians face as women. It also let the men off their own hook for struggling against sexism.

On the other hand, rather than uniting with the men to confront police brutality head on, some of the DOB leadership blamed the gay men in Mattachine for getting arrested while having sex outside their homes.

Ken Burns, who rose to president of Mattachine on a wave of anti-communism, argued that "we must blame ourselves for much of our plight. When will the homosexual ever realize that social reform, to be effective, must be preceded by personal reform?"

Editorials in the Ladder—the widely circulated DOB newsletter—denounced lesbians who wore pants and short haircuts, advising them to do "a little 'policing' on their own."

Class struggle

Lesbian library worker Barbara Gittings, who founded the first East Coast DOB chapter in Manhattan in 1958 and who edited the Ladder for three years, talked to historian Jonathan Katz in a 1974 interview about the DOB drive to "fit in."



Gittings represented a left current in DOB and she later headed the Task Force on Gay Liberation of the American Library Association.

Gittings recalled, "Appearance and behavior were very important. We needed the acceptance of society, we thought, so we geared ourselves to getting it. There was an incident at an early Daughters of Bilitis national convention (in Los Angeles, I think), where a woman who had been living pretty much as a transvestite most of her life was persuaded, for the purposes of attending that convention, to don female garb, to deck herself out in as 'feminine' a manner as she could, given that female clothes were totally alien to her.

"Everybody rejoiced over this as though some great victory had been accomplished—the 'feminizing' of this woman. Today we would be horrified at anyone who thought this kind of evangelism had a legitimate purpose. Yet at the time, I remember, I joined in the rejoicing. At the same time there was some kind of mental reservation in me; I felt there was something grotesque about this women's trying to look 'normal' for the purposes of appearances at this convention."

Both Mattachine and DOB argued that the dress code created safe space for gay men and lesbians since cross-dressing was against the law. Of course, so was same-sex love. Trying to distance themselves from gender-variance did not protect the organization from the state. Lillian Faderman noted in her book "Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers" that police informants had infiltrated DOB during the Cold War and were channeling the names of the group's membership to the FBI and CIA.

In reality, the demand to adhere to gender conformity was just one expression of a class struggle within what was to become the modern lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) movement. The dress code itself revealed the distance between the needs and demands of the working class and most oppressed sectors of the LGBT population and those of the middle class. Historian John D'Emilio noted, "DOB took special pains to dissociate most lesbians from patrons of the bars. Gay women 'aren't bar hoppers,' one officer declared, 'but people with steady jobs, most of them good positions.' "

In addition, this call to "fit in" laid bare that the leadership of DOB and Mattachine looked to the rulers of society to lead them to their well-deserved rights, not to the ruled.

However, letters to the editor of the Ladder revealed that not everyone agreed with the political approach of scapegoating those who fell outside the organization's dress code.

For example, African-American playwright Lorraine Hansberry—author of "Raisin in the Sun"—wrote several letters to the Ladder. She called for an end to the "lecturing ... about how to appear acceptable to the dominant social group. ... One is oppressed or discriminated against because one is different, not 'wrong' or 'bad.' "

Next: Mexico City 1968—lesbian and gay youth voice own demands while helping lead militant student struggle.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA From Mexico City to Buenos Aires

1960s: Youth demand lesbian, gay rights

Lavender & red, part 61

By Leslie Feinberg Published Apr 27, 2006 9:51 AM

The rising resistance of national liberation movements in the 1960s around the globe—from Asia to Africa, North America to South America—many of them led by communists, helped inspire a militant era of battle for gay liberation.



The year 1968 saw struggles for people's power. In South Vietnam, the National Liberation Front's Tet Offensive, which surprised and battered the Pentagon force, was the turning point in the war. In France, a student struggle generated a workers' general strike that shook the capitalist government. In the U.S., rebellions ignited in Black communities in more than 100 cities as word spread of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In urban areas throughout Latin America—from Mexico City to Buenos Aires—a rebellious student movement defied repression to insist on greater freedoms in countries economically and often politically dominated by U.S. finance capital.

As the wave of youth rebellion rose, it lifted the demand to end "lesbian" and "gay" oppression. (The quotation marks are recognition that these sexual identities and the social realities in which they exist are not universal.)

Mexico was a particular political milestone. There, the demand for gay liberation did not arise in the same way it had in the U.S.—where brutal police raids on transgender/lesbian/gay people in bars or restaurants sparked spontaneous rebellions on both the West and East Coast during the 1960s. Nor did a small group demanding same-sex rights have to struggle to bring their grievances to the larger left-wing political movement.

In Mexico in 1968, the demand for "gay" liberation was a dynamic component of the student upsurge, articulated from within its own leadership. Lesbian and gay Mexican@s organized to make "gay" rights one of the many demands voiced by a huge and courageous student protest in Mexico City.

Solidarity cemented unity

The student movement rocking Mexico in 1968 was part of the deepest political upsurge since the Mexican Revolution, observes Max Mejía in his essay "Mexican Pink."

An upcoming segment of this Lavender & Red series will provide more details about the subsequent Tlatelolco massacre and mass arrests of youth and workers on Oct. 2 in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas during the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, specifically focusing on the role of the CIA.

Mejía explains, "The demands of the 1968 student movement included those of an entire generation of Mexican youth. Outstanding among the demands were political freedom and also sexual and personal freedom. Gays and lesbians were among the movement's activists and main leaders." The movement "expressed



women's desire for freedom, as well as gays' and lesbians'."

Mejía stresses the way in which solidarity cements political unity. "Their presence under the banner of solidarity with other oppressed people—political prisoners, workers, peasants—earned support and sympathy for their cause. Their daring behavior and their repeated exposure of abuses gained them the support of the feminist movement and the left, changed the attitude of the traditional yellow press, and won over prominent intellectuals. Most important, they convinced a wide sector of society of the legitimacy of their demands."

Mejía concluded that the struggle won "greater public visibility of Mexico's gays and lesbians; support for their exposure of police abuse from a broad sector of public opinion; legitimation of the struggle for civil rights; and the emergence, through the influence of their example, of other gay groups in several cities, most not ably in Guadalajara and Tijuana."

'Desire and militancy'

In his essay, "Desire and militancy: lesbians, gays and the Brazilian Workers Party," author James N. Green offers an over view of the lesbian and gay rights movement in Brazil.

Green recalls, "Brazilian gays and lesbians were living under the most repressive years of the military dictatorship which ruled the country from 1964 to 1985. ... Although homosexual men and women were not specifically targeted by the dictatorship, the increased numbers of military police in the street, the arbitrary rule of law, and the generalized clamp-down on artistic and literary expression all created a climate which discouraged the emergence of a Brazilian lesbian or gay rights movement in the early 1970s."

In Argentina, however, Green notes that a group of 14 men in a working-class Buenos Aires suburb met in 1969 to form Nuestro Mundo (Our World), the country's first gay rights organization. "By 1971 six divergent Argentine groups had come together to form the Frente de Liberación Homosexual de Argentina (Homosexual Liberation Front of Argentina)."

That year, the Frente de Liberación Homosexual formed in Mexico. And in 1974, "lesbians" and "gays" in Puerto Rico had founded Comunidad de Orgullo Gay (Gay Pride Community) and published the newspaper "Pa' Fuera."

Next: 1960s in U.S.—police brutality meets resistance from coast to coast.

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Calif. resistance predated 1969 Stonewall Rebellion

Lavender & red, part 62

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 5, 2006 8:45 PM

The 1969 Stonewall Rebellion in Greenwich Village in Manhattan was not the first time in history that gay and lesbian (and most certainly some bisexual), transgender and transsexual people physically fought back against brutal treatment at the hands of police and other reactionary forces.



Wherever same-sex love was criminalized under capitalism, trysting spots which offered relative anonymity developed in secluded public places in urban areas. Such meeting places often drew those who were not easily "read" as being gay socially, who may not have necessarily thought of themselves as "gay" or who feared being seen going in or out of a gay/trans bar. Signals—from a glance to a color-coded handkerchief—acted as a semaphore to indicate sexual interest. But men looking for other men in those locations faced the danger of "sting" operations—entrapment by "vice" cops.

The bars, on the other hand, tended to draw into social networks those who were considered "too obvious," as well as those who were, or wanted to be, their lovers. Since sexuality is only obvious when desire is communicated, being considered "obviously gay" referred to gender expression—lesbian and gay-cross-dressers, and those considered "inappropriately" gendered because of the way they spoke or gestured or walked.

Historically, police raids on these gathering places were systematic, relentless and brutal. So why did individuals go to places where they would be in such danger? Because danger also followed them wherever they went alone. In the bars and other gathering places, they could form networks—social and personal. They forged communities.

The composition of bar crowds varied based on region, economic classes, nationalities, ethnicities and sexes.

Many bars catered to those from the working class who were economically and socially marginalized.

In some cities in which Jim Crow segregation enforced apartheid conditions, the lesbian and gay bars were some of the only integrated social gathering places. Historians Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk wrote in their book "Gay by the Bay" that "racial segregation of many public places made bar culture more important for white lesbians and gays than it did for African Americans and other people of color."

"Wilma Johnson" described a network of private house parties in San Francisco in the early 1960s: "When we got there they had all these women that were dressed up in men's clothes. ... This group that I acquainted with really didn't go to gay bars. ... In San Francisco I don't ever recall a bar that had a majority of women that were Black. ... The majority of the women were always white. ... But in the bars there was (mostly) one color and not the other. We all got along, but



the house parties were mainly Black. There were a few Caucasians, but not a lot, just a few." (Nan Alamilla Boyd, Oral History Project of the Gay & Lesbian Historical Society)

In blue-collar Buffalo, N.Y., historians Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Kennedy wrote, "By the mid-1950s groups of Black lesbians began to patronize Bingo's and the street bars in the downtown section, and soon after, whites went to the bars which opened in the Black section of town, thereby ending the racial homogeneity of the lesbian bar community." (Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold)

Fighting back, hand-to-hand

There were many police raids on house parties and bars, and there were many acts of resistance—courageous, whether large or small—which have gone unrecorded in written history. Some episodes passed on as oral history only lived as long as those who retold them.

However there is one early historical example, from almost three centuries ago, which proves the truth that sustained acts of repression inevitably lead to outbreaks of open struggle: In 1707 and 1730 in England, the repressive "Societies for the Reformation of Manners" waged a campaign against "effeminate sodomites among the London poor." After more than 20 raids on clubs that drew what would today be referred to as feminine gay males—"mollies" in the vernacular of that time and place—some patrons were hanged or publicly pilloried as a result. But when a Covent Garden molly house was raided in 1725, the crowd, "many of them in drag, met the raid with determined and violent resistance."

And two-and-a-half centuries later, in Cali f ornia, people gathered in gay/trans bars and other establishments met police attacks with resis tance —the social temperature was heating up.

In 1961, police in San Francisco carried out the largest vice raid in the city's history, arresting 89 men and 14 women at an after-hours club called the Tay-Bush Inn. Stryker and Van Buskirk note, "After first allowing 'respectable looking' and politically well-connected customers to depart without incident, the police booked the largely queer, working-class, and dark-skinned remainder. Charges were dropped against all but two of the defendants, and the blatant prejudice manifested by the arrests helped shift pubic sympathies toward greater civil rights protection for homosexuals."

In 1966, "Compton's Cafeteria Riot" erupted in the streets of San Francisco's Tenderloin district, when a group described as transgender women and gay street hustlers fought back against police harassment. Rebellion broke out after a trans customer in the all-night cafe reportedly threw a cup of hot coffee in the face of a cop who was roughing her up. Transgenders and transsexuals threw sugar shakers through windows, overturned tables and torched a police cruiser. (San Francisco Bay Times, March 23, 2006)

On the 40th anniversary of the rebellion this year, community-organized events in San Francisco will commemorate this important milestone uprising. The 1966 events are brought to new generations in the recent film documentary "Screaming Queens"—written, directed and produced by Victor Silverman, an associate professor of history at Pomona College, and Susan Stryker, former executive director of the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco.

In another response to a police raid on two Los Angeles' bars in 1967, political organizers took their struggle to the streets. That year, as the stroke of midnight ushered in the New Year at The Black Cat bar in Los Angeles's Silverlake neighborhood, the "The Rhythm Queens" were singing Auld Lang Syne. Plainclothes cops who had infiltrated the festivities began viciously beating and arresting patrons. Several people tried to escape to the New Faces bar across street, where a drag contest was taking place. Cops followed and raided that club also, assaulting one of the workers so violently that his spleen ruptured. (The Gay

& Lesbian Review, March-April 2006)

In response, more than 200 gay acti vists and human rights supporters from all walks of life rallied on Feb. 11 at San born and Sunset to protest police brutality and arbitrary arrests, and to demand homosexual rights. The rally swelled the member ship ranks of a newly and quickly formed, more militant gay group called "PRIDE." (Stephen O. Murray, lgbtq. com)

And within two short years, the collective anger that was bubbling up would break into a furious boil: Stonewall!

Next: Stonewall means fight back!

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA JUNE 29, 1969

Cops raid the Stonewall Inn

Lavender & red, part 63

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 25, 2006 11:25 PM

taking the place!"

Inn in Greenwich Village. Undercover cops, male and female, were already inside. At 1:20 a.m., Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine led an assault group of four cops from the First Division "morals squad" in three-piece suits and ties, two patrol cops and detective Charles Smythe. The patrol cop with the radiotelephone remained outside the bar, as the rest of the cops entered the club shouting: "Police! We're

After midnight on June 28, 1969, the police raided the Stonewall

Ironically, the cops would soon find themselves holed up in the bar, barricaded against an enraged crowd.

While details of the rebellion that broke out later that night outside the bar are familiar to many, historian David Carter offers the following detailed accounts from bar patrons about the struggle that began to build up inside the bar that night during the raid in his book "Stonewall: The riots that sparked the gay revolution" (St. Martin's Press).

The Stonewall Inn attracted a mixed crowd, described by bar-goer Philip Eagles: "There were some lesbians, hustlers, married people, single people, some transvestites, but not too many. It was the heart and soul of the Village because it had every kind of person there." The bar drew some people of color, as well as whites.

That time of night, a peak Saturday night crowd of some 200 filled the club. David Carter noted, "Almost immediately after entering the Stonewall Inn, the police encountered resistance."

The cops ordered grouped people in different rooms, then lined them up, demanding to see their identification papers, then letting some go.

Philip Eagles said he witnessed some customers "giving the cops lip," shouting, "I'm not showing you my ID," and, "We're not taking this." Eagles said he and some others also balked at producing ID, and finally did so only with "a lot of attitude." Another customer refused the police order to leave the club.

Those who had extra forms of identification without photographs reportedly shared them with those who did not have ID.

Carter added, "Whatever grumbling there may have been from the gay men, the police soon ran into more significant resistance from other patrons in each of the two rooms."

Transgender and transsexual patrons who were considered "cross-dressed" were grouped near the bathroom, where female cops threatened to do strip searches to determine their birth sex.

According to Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine, "We had a couple of the transvestites who gave us a lot of flak." Pine said: "We separated the few transvestites that we had, and they were very noisy that night. Usually they would



just sit there and not say a word, but now they're acting up: 'Get your hands off me!' 'Don't touch me!' They wouldn't go in, so it was a question of pushing them in, fighting them."

Philip Eagles also described that some lesbians in the front room confronted police, arguing, "We have a right to be here" and, "What are you doing?"

Eagles recalled that cops were "feeling some of them up inappropriately or frisking them." He said the lesbians "were being pushed around and bullied" and this, combined with the cops body-searching the women, made "everybody generally very uncomfortable."

Patrol cars from the Sixth Precinct pulled up and parked in front of the Stonewall Inn as backup for the raid.

Inside the Stonewall, those held by police were angry and restive.

Raymond "Ray" Castro, a 27-year-old Puerto Rican bakery worker, recalled that the cops "kept us there for so long, it was almost like a hostage situation."

Next: Temperature rises.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Stonewall, June 28, 1969:

Raid draws crowd and temperature rises

Lavender & red, part 64

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 31, 2006 10:20 PM



The cops who raided the Stonewall bar on June 28, 1969, began letting some of the customers leave one at a time, a slow ordeal. Historian Martin Duberman reports that transgender Stonewall combatant Sylvia Rivera later told him that patrons were "released after their IDs had been checked and their attire

deemed 'appropriate' to their gender—a process accompanied, as in Sylvia's case, by derisive, ugly police banter." (Stonewall)

The police cruisers parked outside the Stonewall Inn in the heart of Greenwich Village on that hot, muggy night began drawing a crowd. Many of those the police had released from the bar also chose to stay outside. As each person emerged from the Stonewall, the crowd outside cheered them. Some 200 had been inside that night.

Danny Garvin, who arrived at the Stonewall that night as the raid was already under way, estimated the early crowd on the pavement outside at 100-150.

Village Voice reporters Lucian Truscott and Howard Smith, who said they were working late-night hours at the newspaper's Seventh Avenue office, saw the police activity from the windows and hurried to the scene.

Their coverage of the crowd was not sympathetic, but it does reveal the gender expression, displays of defiance and sharp-edged in-your-face attitude of those who had been trapped inside the bar that night, and those who chose to remain and mass outside.

Truscott wrote; "Wrists were limp, hair was primped, and reactions to the applause were classic. 'I gave them the gay power bit, and they loved it, girls.'"

Smith described the crowd outside as "prancing high and jubilant."

Duberman and historian David Carter add more detail.

Carter wrote, "As one young man swished by the detective posted at the door, he tossed the classic come-on line at him: 'Hello there, fella!'" ("Stonewall: The riots that sparked the gay revolution")

"Some of the campier patrons," Duberman noted, "emerging one by one from the Stonewall to find an unexpected crowd, took the opportunity to strike their instant poses, starlet style, while the onlookers whistled and shouted their applause-meter ratings."

These were acts of courage in front of the police by those who knew that same-sex love was illegal in New York state—and every other state in the United States except Illinois. They knew that anyone not wearing three pieces of "gender appropriate" clothing was subject to arrest. And they knew that police beatings, rape and sexual humiliation—acts of torture—invariably followed arrest.



In 1969 these laws on the books were not abstract and long forgotten. They were actively prosecuted—and the crowd knew it. Police raids constantly threatened all lesbian/gay/trans social meeting places—from bars to cruising areas in the parks and along the piers.

In the last three weeks of June 1969 alone, the New York Police Department raided five popular gay bars. Cops shut down three of them for good: the Checkerboard, the Tele-Star and the Sewer. (Carter)

'This night was different'

Voice reporter Smith noticed, according to Carter, "that the police handled the exiting patrons roughly, now hurrying one out quicker than he could comfortably move, now giving another a parting kick."

Onlooker Danny Garvin recalled the angry reaction: "It started getting ugly. You had attitude: 'Don't touch me!,' which then would ignite the crowd: 'Go get 'em!' (Carter)

The crowd continued to swell. More and more people were being released from the Stonewall and staying. Word of the raid spread on the streets of the Village. Some onlookers called their friends from pay phones and told them what was happening. People who had plan ned to spend their evening at the Stonewall were still showing up.

Those massed outside the bar reportedly grew quiet as a police wagon pulled up and parked on the sidewalk in front of the Stonewall.

Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine ordered his police squad to load up the prisoners and take them to the Sixth Precinct Station. Pine later said: "This presumably should have been the end of the situation, because the raid was already over. Now, all we had to do was put them in the patrol wagon."

But, he added: "The crowd had grown to 10 times the size: it was really frightening.

"So many showed up immediately, it was as if a signal were given. And that was the unusual thing because usually, when we went to work, everybody disappeared. They were glad to get away. But this night was different. Instead of the homosexuals slinking off, they remained there, and their friends came, and it was a real meeting of homosexuals." (Carter)

Next: All hell breaks loose.

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Stonewall 1969: 'Turning point of rage'

Lavender & red, part 65

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 8, 2006 8:47 PM

No footage or photographs exist of what happened outside the Stonewall bar in the early hours of June 28, 1969. The following descriptions rely on first-person witnesses, whose accounts have been compiled in books, and coverage from the not-so-friendly reporting in the Village Voice by Howard Smith and Lucian



Truscott, an army lieutenant on leave who occasionally wrote for the Voice.

The police raid on the Stonewall bar continued to draw more and more people from the surrounding streets in Green wich Village. Others hurried to the scene after getting a phone call about what was happening. Smith, who was on the scene, described the crowd as "growing very quickly. Every time I'd blink, there were more people."

The mood grew tense and angry as the police wagon arrived. The cops brought out several known members of organized crime, and then the Stonewall employees —including John, the African Amer ican men's room attendant; Blonde Frankie, the doorman; and other workers. Many in the crowd reportedly booed the Mafia and cheered the Stonewall employees.

Truscott wrote that the crowd then shouted and booed at police when the cops loaded transgender and transsexual prisoners into the police wagon.

According to reports compiled by David Carter, one of the police shoved one of the trans prisoners, "who turned and smacked the officer over the head with her purse. The cop clubbed her and a wave of anger passed through the crowd, which immediately showered the police with boos and catcalls, followed by a cry to turn the [police] wagon over."

He added, "Gay men began to go to the many pay phones around the Sheridan Square area and call up friends, telling them to rush down to the Stonewall. Others ran throughout the neighborhood shouting that the Stonewall was being busted, and word of the raid passed through the night like a fever."

Numerous eyewitnesses recall in detail what happened when police dragged out a prisoner described as a masculine lesbian wearing "fancy, go-to-bar drag for a butch dyke."

Stonewall employee Harry Beard said that the lesbian had struggled with police inside the bar. She was handcuffed behind her back and arrested for violation of a New York edict that required each person to be wearing three pieces of "gender appropriate" clothing. Beard related that when she protested the rough treatment, a cop hit her in the head with a nightstick.

Those outside described the butch lesbian as kicking, shouting and struggling with police all the way to the police cruiser.

When cops put her inside, she immediately got out and fought police all the way back to the entrance of the bar. "But after she reached the Stonewall the police



pulled her back to the police car and again placed her inside it. She got out again and tried to walk away. This time an officer picked her up and heaved her inside." The struggle lasted five to 10 minutes.

An anonymous woman witness later wrote in a letter that the fight "set the whole crowd wild—berserk!"

One person there that night, Tom, remembers "Pennies ricocheted off the [police] van, a beer can hit the door." Many in the crowd, who reportedly feared that others still in police custody inside were being beaten, began shouting their names, demanding that the cops release them.

Truscott wrote, "It was at that moment that the scene became explosive."

Smith concluded that when the police forced this butch lesbian into the police car for the third time, "the turning point came."

Next: Sylvia Rivera: 'Street gay people out front, drag queens behind them, everybody behind us.'

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Stonewall Rebellion: Crowd rage ignites

Lavender & red, part 66

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 15, 2006 8:55 PM

Acts of resistance, some of them virtually simultaneous, presaged rebellion as prisoners were being loaded into the police wagon and precinct cars outside the Stonewall bar the night of June 28, 1969. Many of the following precious first-hand accounts by Stonewall combatants are compiled in books about the rebellion by David Carter and Martin Duberman.



A number of accounts of the confrontation between cops and the crowd outside the Stonewall bar mark the prolonged struggle between police and a cross-dressed butch lesbian as a qualitative turning point. According to Village Voice journalist Howard Smith, "It was at that moment that the scene became explosive."

Smith wrote that the crowd roared: "Police brutality! Pigs!"

Gino, a Puerto Rican construction worker, joining in the shouts of "Let her go! Leave her alone!" reportedly dislodged a loose cobblestone and heaved it across Christopher Street. Eyewitness Steve Yates remembered, "It landed on the trunk of a police car with a terrible screech, 'scaring the shit' out of a policeman who was standing next to the car."

According to Stonewall employee Harry Beard, one or more people in the crowd were able to slash all four tires on the police cruiser with the butch lesbian prisoner inside.

Raymond "Ray" Castro, a Puerto Rican baker, recalled how he fought his own arrest. "At that point I started pushing back and wound up with two plainclothes police pushing me. The next thing I know, there's two plainclothes cops and two uniformed police in the melee. I was knocked to the ground by one of their billy clubs, [which,] put between my legs, tripped me. At that point the handcuffs got put on me, and they had a [police] wagon right in front of the entrance to the Stonewall. When I got shoved up to the door of the [police] wagon, I had two policemen on each side of me. I didn't quite go willingly into the [police] wagon. I didn't want to be arrested. Even thought I was handcuffed, I jumped up and [put] one foot on the right side of the door and one foot on the left of the door. I sprung up like a jumping jack and pushed backwards, knocking the police down to the ground, almost against the wall of the Stonewall. Well, they finally dragged me into the [police] wagon."

Tom, a participant, remembered Ray battling against arrest. "A couple more were thrown into the van. We joined in with some who wanted to storm the van, free those inside, then turn over the van. But nobody was yet prepared for that kind of action. Then a scuffle at the door. One guy refused to be put into the van. Five or six cops guarding the van tried to subdue him with little success. Several guys tried to help free him. Unguarded, three or four of those in the van appeared then quickly disappeared into the crowd. This was all anyone needed."



Respond

As police hurriedly tried to load other prisoners into the police wagon, one 18-year-old participant saw "a leg in nylons and sporting a high heel shoot out of the back of the [police] wagon into the chest of a cop, throwing him backward. Another queen then opened the door on the side of the wagon and jumped out. The cops chased and caught her, but Blond Frankie [who worked the door at the Stonewall] quickly managed to engineer another escape from the car; several queens successfully made their way out with him and were swallowed up in the crowd." ("Stonewall," Duberman)

Michael Fader reported seeing the cops "leave the van unattended—the doors were open, so they left. That raised the emotional level, the excitement of them getting away."

The multinational crowd of hundreds massed around the police was made up of those brave enough and angry enough at oppression to be drawn to a confrontation with the police. Stonewall combatant Sylvia Rivera stressed a very important point about the rebellion that ensued. Rivera was a Venezuelan and Puerto Rican transgender youth who had lived homeless on the streets of Manhattan since she was 10 years old. Before her death, she stressed the role in the rebellion of the homeless gay/trans street youth—Black, Latin@ and white, and gender-defiant—who could not afford the Stonewall door admission charge or the overpriced, watered down drinks. The vest-pocket park across the street from the bar was their home. (Personal interview, 1997)

Rivera emphasized that at the moment of ignition of the rebellion, "It was street gay people from the Village out front—homeless people who lived in the park in Sheridan Square outside the bar—and then drag queens behind them and everybody behind us." (Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue," Feinberg)

Danny Garvin described how police tried to push back those gathered around them. This allowed the crowd to make an important discovery: a big stack of new bricks at a Seventh Avenue South construction site. Garvin explained, "They would come at us with nightsticks, and we would have to disperse onto Seventh Avenue, where the people were able to see the bricks."

Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine, who led the raid, ordered police to drive off quickly with prisoners in the police wagon and three cop cruisers and "just drop them off at the Sixth Precinct and hurry back."

People in the crowd around the police wagon began beating on its sides, demanding to know the names of those imprisoned inside. According to Voice reporter Lucian Truscott, "A cry went up to push the [police] wagon over, but it drove away before anything could happen."

The slashed tires of one or more of the vehicles slowed down the police exit. According to accounts compiled by David Carter: "The crowd, however, was beyond being intimidated by mere sirens and the caravan had to push slowly through the furious protesters, who, enraged, pounded on the police vehicles. Danny Garvin recalls the noise as 'people would run over, grab the [police] wagon, and start shaking—ba-boom! ba-boom!!"

Martin Duberman reported, "One queen mashed an officer with her heel, knocked him down, grabbed his handcuff keys, freed herself, and passed the keys to another queen behind her."

Inspector Pine was left with eight plainclothed detectives and one uniformed cop, all surrounded by an enraged crowd. Those among the hundreds who surrounded police threw their precious pocket change in a hard hail, shouting, "Dirty copper!" and "Here's your payoff!"

They hurled bottles, cans, bricks, a dam aged fire hydrant, and dog excrement at police. A youth named Timmy reportedly heaved a wire-mesh garbage can, which shattered the Stonewall's plate-glass window, which was reinforced with plywood.

Cries of "Gay power!" and "Let's get 'em" articulated the detonation of mass rage.

There was nowhere for the police to retreat except back into the Stonewall—the very bar they had raided.

Next: Police barricade themselves inside Stonewall bar; crowd lays siege.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 1969 Stonewall uprising against police repression

'All hell broke loose!'

Lavender & red, part 67

Published Jun 26, 2006 10:26 PM

No recording device captured the roar or ferocity of the crowd outside the Stonewall bar, enraged by the police raid and the physical brutality and sexual and gender humiliation that was interwoven into the state repression. However, the militancy and determination of those who fought back that night—June 28,



1969—is recalled in the words of the top cop who led the raid, Deputy Inspector Seymour Pine: "I had been in combat situations, [but] there was never any time that I felt more scared than then." Pine had written the U.S. Army's manual for hand-to-hand combat in World War II and was in a mine explosion at the Battle of the Bulge.

By many accounts, the Black, Latin@ and white youth, many of them homeless and/or gender-defiant—including Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, Zazu Nova and Jackie Hormona—fought fiercely that night. And small wonder. These were the bodies and lives most often scarred by police terror and torture. While everyone fought bravely, historian David Carter wrote "the preponderance of witnesses who are both the most credible and who witnessed significant amounts of the action agree that the most marginal groups of the gay community fought the hardest—and therefore risked the most—on this and the following nights."

Many in the multi-national, multi-generational crowd of hundreds amassed outside the bar began to hurl their pocket change, shouting "Here's your payoff!"—referring to the common practice of payoffs between bar owners, many times tied to organized crime, and the police.

The police showed signs of panic as they were hit with a hail of flying projectiles. They retreated towards the Stonewall Inn, the club they had just emptied out in the raid. One cop near the doorway was reportedly hit in the eye with a thrown object, and was visibly bloodied. The police, wrote Village Voice journalist Howard Smith, who was at the scene, "are all suddenly furious." Three of the cops rushed the crowd to try to back them away.

But the crowd would not be pushed back. The streets outside the club belonged to the people, and they could feel it. They could see the cops were scared, too. One participant, Tom, observed, "A few plainclothesmen were surveying the crowd, obviously panicked." Ronnie Di Brienza stressed in an article in the East Village Other that, "During the height of the action, you could see the fear and disbelief on the faces of the pigs."

A beer can struck Deputy Inspector Charles Smythe in the head. Smythe, who had also been in World War II combat, later said, "I was still shaking an hour later. Believe me, I've never seen anything like it."

Pine reached out from the doorway of the bar and reportedly grabbed the first person he could lay his hands on, folk singer Dave Van Ronk, and pulled him inside the bar. Van Ronk later explained that the cops accused him of throwing the beer can. They held him down, punched him hard and kicked him. They left him handcuffed on the floor of the bar.



Respond

Pine came outside to evaluate the relationship of forces. He told the other cops: "Let's get inside. Lock ourselves inside; it's safer." Voice reporter Howard Smith went inside the Stonewall with the 10 members of the police raiding squad. They barricaded the doors with overturned tables.

And then, Pine remembered, "All hell broke loose."

Smith reported, "The exit left no cops on the street, and almost by signal the crowd erupted into cobblestone and bottle heaving."

Voice journalist Lucian Truscott said he had climbed atop a garbage can to watch the action and he almost toppled when two men yanked it out from under him and heaved it at the bar's west window.

Participant Morty Manford emphasized: "And it escalated. A few more rocks went and then somebody from inside the bar opened the door and stuck a gun out. Their arm was reaching out with a gun telling people to stay back. And then withdrew the gun, closed the door and went back inside."

Yet even the threat of being shot did not stop the crowd. Historian David Carter summed up descriptions by participants of what happened next. "A general assault now began on the Stonewall Inn using anything and everything the crowd inside could get its hands on: garbage, garbage cans, pieces of glass, fire, bricks, cobblestones, and an improvised battering ram were all used to attack the police holed up inside the Stonewall Inn."

Someone, or more than one person, reportedly cut the electric and phone lines, so the police were inside without the ability to call for backup.

According to accounts compiled by historian Martin Duberman: "The cops then found a fire hose, wedged it into a crack in the door, and directed the spray out at the crowd, thinking that would certainly scatter it. But the stream was weak and the crowd howled derisively, while inside the cops starting slipping on the wet floor."

In his later Voice coverage, stinking of bigotry, Smith later wrote that from the inside of the Stonewall, "The sound filtering in [didn't] suggest dancing f——-s any more; it sound[ed] like a powerful rage bent on vendetta."

Smith said he heard "the shattering of windows, followed by what we imagine to be bricks pounding on the door, voices yelling. The floor shudders at each blow."

The crowd outside roared "Gay power!" and "We want freedom!"

Pine described: "Now they really in earnest started to come after us. We covered everything [but] whatever we could find to put up against the windows and the doors didn't last very long. They began to batter this down and made some holes." The window—which the owners had reinforced with plywood and two-by-fours—was smashed and the barricaded door was swung open.

Smith peeked out a hole in the splintered plywood, and he thought it seemed that those massed outside were thousands-strong.

In anticipation of the angry crowd rushing in, the cops drew their weapons; one cop picked up a nearby baseball bat. One cop reportedly vowed, "We'll shoot the first m——f——r that comes through the door."

But it was an arm that came through the shards of the plywood covering the window. Then the scent of lighter fluid, the fiery tip of a lit match, and flames ignited inside the bar.

Next: Police reinforcements arrive; battle shifts to the streets.

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Stonewall 1969: Fighting in the streets

Lavender & red, part 68

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jul 6, 2006 9:59 PM

Stonewall participant Martin Boyce recalled, "All of a sudden the whole street now had had it, and windows started cracking and people attacked cars and moved cars back and forth, but let the straight people out, who were in terror, really, but nobody hurt them, ever. It's amazing how controlled the rage was, even though it was so hard."



The police trapped inside the Stonewall Inn couldn't call for backup. Top cop Sey mour Pine, who led the raid on the Stonewall, later said: "Every time we tried to use the [police portable] radio to call for assistance, a message came back, 'Dis regard that call.' Somebody else apparently had our frequency in the crowd, and so we couldn't get a message through. The phone lines apparently were cut, because we couldn't use the phone."

Bob Kohler saw people carefully pouring liquid, apparently gasoline, into empty soda pop bottles.

Pine later described how anxious he and the other cops were as these homemade firebombs started landing in the bar. "There were bottles that came in exploded with some kind of flame, and we were able to put those out with the fire hose that we had. We were very worried because we didn't know how long we could put these Molotov cocktails out, because they were gasoline and all we had was water. They didn't have the kind of fire extinguishers that would put out a fuel fire." (David Carter, "Stonewall")

The fire extinguisher quickly emptied.

"Liberate the bar!" the crowd roared as youth battered open the barricaded door to the Stonewall Inn with an uprooted parking meter.

Edmund White wrote: "The door is broken down, and the kids, as though working to a prior plan, systematically dump refuse from waste cans onto the wall, squirt it with lighter fluid, and ignite it. Huge flashes of flame and billows of smoke."

Morty Manford witnessed: "People took a garbage can, one of those wire mesh cans, and set it on fire and threw the burning garbage into the premises. The area that was set afire is where the coat room was. That night the closet was set on fire both symbolically and literally."

Cop Pine said: "We're inside and the fires are coming in and we're putting them out—all the time we're dodging the bricks that they were throwing in—and then they crashed with this parking meter." Pine actually said he debated shooting at people in the crowd, but wasn't sure it would stop them.

When a hand came through the splintered plywood that was covering one of the windows and sprayed lighter fluid and ignited it with a match, Pine later said, he aimed his gun and was ready to shoot.



Respond

At that moment, however, fire truck sirens screamed down Christopher Street. Police cars from more than one precinct began screeching up from all directions.

Crowd wouldn't disperse

Dave Van Ronk, who had been taken as a hostage-prisoner by police holed up in the Stonewall, explained that as cops took him outside in handcuffs, "From what I saw, that mob was not cowed. It would have taken something to get them to disperse. They were loaded for bear."

Pine said: "Fights erupted with the trans vestites who wouldn't go into the patrol wagon. Some [transgenders] who hadn't even been in the Stonewall came over and started a fight with our guys."

Eyewitness Marle Becker concurred. "All I could see about who was fighting was that it was the transvestites and they were fighting furiously."

Two bus loads of Tactical Patrol Force riot squads, trained to brutally break up anti-Vietnam War protests, arrived on the scene.

Participant John O'Brien observed that "when they tried to clear the streets is when people resented it, 'cause it came down to: 'Whose streets are these? They are our streets.'" He described an additional layer of resistance: Many people—gay and nongaythat they just couldn't move out of the way of police because it was too crowded. "A lot of them knew that they were interfering with the cops," he said.

Efforts to block the narrow, one-way street to impede police included overturning a car in front of the Stonewall.

Based on eyewitness accounts that night, historian Martin Duberman summarized the TPF assault. "Wearing helmets with visors, carrying assorted wea pons, including billy clubs and tear gas, its two dozen members all seemed massively proportioned. They were a formidable sight as, linked arm in arm, they came up Chris topher Street in a wedge formation that resembled (by design) a Roman legion. In their path, the rioters slowly retreated, but—contrary to police expectations—did not break and run." ("Stonewall")

The crowd slowly backed up to avoid being clubbed, and then suddenly dissolved as individuals raced around the block, regrouped behind the TPF squad and threw debris at the troopers. Again and again the TPF broke up the crowd only to find people defiantly appearing behind them, taunting them and hurling bricks and bottles. The angry crowd set fire to trash cans and broke windows.

Bob Kohler recalled that the street youths "were constantly getting over on the TPF. The TPF would chase somebody this way, then the kids would start something behind them so that attention would be taken, and then the TPF would come [the other] way, and then more kids would start something behind them. So the TPF were constantly off guard. It was keeping them on the run constantly."

Others, who did not directly take part in the fighting, kept pace alongside the action. Tommy Lanigan-Schmidt explained: "I myself was more part of like a mob that was waving in and out like the ocean. I was part of a mob that had a kind of deep identity and was acting as one force."

The police took a terrible toll on anyone they could get their hands on—particularly those who were male-bodied and feminine. Many were badly bashed and bloodied. One person required 10 stitches in the knee after being clubbed. Another teen ager lost two fingers. Four cops reportedly beat up a young trans person until she bled from her ears, nose and mouth. Sylvia Rivera, though not injured, said she had so much of other people's blood splashed on her during the fray that she later went to the piers to change into fresh clothing.

Yet the crowd still resisted, any way they could, even faced with such organized

police violence.

When the TPF grabbed and began severely beating up one youth, described as a feminine male, angry members of the crowd rushed forward and rescued the person.

Someone smashed a concrete block on a parked police car—with cops inside of it. Another person hit a member of the police brass sitting inside his vehicle with a bag of soggy garbage.

As two cops chased about 100 people down Waverly Place, the crowd suddenly realized they outnumbered the police 50 to one—and lit off after the two officers, who panicked and fled.

That night, police arrested and booked 13 people, seven of them workers from the Stonewall Inn. They faced charges ranging from harassment to resisting arrest to disorderly conduct.

Near dawn, the streets seemed quiet. Kohler remembered: "We were sitting across the street [from the Stonewall] at the park, and you would see smoldering [garbage] baskets and the street was broken glass. The Stonewall window was smashed, and there were cops all standing around like storm troopers. You'd look a block away and you could see trash cans still smoldering."

It wasn't just the trash cans that were still smoldering. The rebellion was not over. Not by a long shot.

Next: 'Liberate Christopher Street!'

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STONEWALL 1969—SECOND NIGHT:

'Liberate Christopher Street!'

Lavender & red, part 69

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jul 24, 2006 11:19 PM

Thousands of gay men and lesbians-many of whom identified as queens and butches-returned to the West Village on Saturday evening, the night after battles with the police and tactical forces at the Stonewall Inn. It was the hottest June 28 on record in New York's history, in more ways than one.



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Respond

Stonewall bar owners tried to lure many back inside the club. But the crowd outside shouted, "Gay power," "Equality for homosexuals" and "We want freedom now!" Demon strators squared off with police outside the bar. Their chants, "Christopher Street belongs to the queens!" and "Liber ate Christopher Street," made it clear that this was an offensive stage of the struggle-in the streets.

The night of protest drew street youth and some heterosexual activists from various left-wing political currents. Gay author Edmund White described how straight Black youth "put their arms around me and [said] we're comrades."

One middle-aged white woman, in the West Village with her husband, reportedly reprimanded a cop, shouting at him that he should be ashamed: "Don't you know that these people have no place to go, and need places like that bar?" She and her husband were later that night part of a crowd being chased by club wielding riot police.

Participant Craig Rodwell described how the thousands who were drawn to the Village filled the sidewalks from Chris topher to 10th St. and all around the Sher idan Square park and Seventh Avenue. When the crowd overflowed the sidewalks and poured into the streets, the call went out to block traffic on Chris topher at Greenwich Avenue.

When drivers disrespected the crowd, their cars got rocked back and forth and demonstrators laid siege to a bus whose driver angrily honked his horn at them. Activists formed a human chain across the busy street.

One cab driver turned into the crowd, apparently unintentionally, but those gathered did not realize at first that it was accidental. As they rocked the cab, the passengers looked so frightened and the driver seemed to be having a heart attack, so some activists joined arms to protect the taxi and helped it back out of the street. The driver later died—the only fatal casualty of the Stonewall Rebellion.

On Gay St., demonstrators briefly stop ped a procession of cars with a wedding party. "We have the right to marry, too!" activists shouted. Members of the wedding party angrily threatened to call the cops on protesters. "The police are already here!" activists laughed bitterly, before letting the wedding group proceed.

Led by those with least to lose

Who led the battles? Who made up much of the ranks? The nationality, gender expression and economic class of combatants at that stage of the uprising were

well described in an otherwise offensive description by Dr. Howard Brown. As chief health officer of New York City during the Lindsay administration, Brown—a rather closeted gay man—had described his horror when he had toured the Tombs, a city prison. "Almost all the men in the crowded cells were demonstrably effeminate. I could not identify with them." He doesn't say it, but of course many of the prisoners were Latin@ and Black, impoverished whites, and street youth.

Drawn to the June 28 protest by the roar he could hear from his apartment, he said he found that the Stonewall protesters "were like the homosexuals I had seen in the Tombs—most of them obviously poor, most of them the sort of limp-wristed, shabby or gaudy gays that send a shiver of dread down the spines of homosexuals who hope to pass as straight. I could not have felt more remote from them." He added that the composition of the crowd brought to mind "every civil rights struggle I had ever witnessed or participated in."

The women caged in the nearby House of Detention sure identified with those rebelling below. The women's "House of D" was, at that time, situated at the heart of Christopher St. and Greenwich Ave. When Stonewall ignited, prisoners—many of them Black and Latina, and many, many of them lesbian and transgender—set toilet paper on fire and dropped it from the turrets to support the uprising on the streets below.

Eyewitness Chris Babick described, "That whole week the women were screaming, cheering us on. ... The whole jail, it seemed like, was alive with people, with activity, because the streets were alive with activity. Everything vibrated."

Fighting back!

On the streets, as police grew increasingly aggressive towards activists, one youth hurled garbage can lids like Frisbees at cops. Fires burned from trash containers up and down the blocks.

Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson, a Black transgender gay street survivor who later co-founded STAR—Street Transves tite Action Revolutionaries—reportedly climbed a lamppost in order to drop a heavy object that shattered a police car windshield.

At Waverly and Christopher, a crowd surrounded cops in a car and smashed its hood with a concrete block, pounded the car with their fists and climbed up on it.

A sack of garbage with coffee grounds thrown through the window of yet another police vehicle smacked an official in the face. The crowd knocked the red light off the roof of the car and rocked the vehicle, trying to overturn it.

The Sixth Precinct couldn't subdue the crowd, even with help from the Fourth, Fifth and Ninth. So for the second night, the feared Tactical Police Force (TPF) sent about 150 of its crack riot troops into the West Village at about 2:15 a.m. The crowd tossed beer cans at the TPF and cops in defiance.

Police rushed at demonstrators, vic iously beating people at random. How ever, when two cops used their nightsticks on one youth's face, genitals and stomach, a high-pitched voice from the crowd shouted, "Save our sister!"

Then, Stonewall participant Dick Leitsch recalled, "Fifty or more homosexuals who would have to be described as 'nelly,' rushed the cops and took the boy back into the crowd." And, he added, they "formed a solid front and refused to let the cops into the crowd to regain their prisoner, letting the cops hit them with their sticks, rather than let them through."

For the second night in a row, TPF troops formed solid phalanxes and moved slowly down the streets to break up the demonstration. At Christopher and Wav erly, a group of gay men described as very, very feminine formed a defiant chorus line and mocked the riot cops with bawdy choruses of "We are the Stonewall

Girls, we wear our hair in curls." As the TPF moved slowly towards them, the youth waited until the last possible moment to stop singing and disappear. Minutes later they appeared behind the TPF troops, taunting them with a new chorus line.

Leitsch remarked, in the language of the day, about the leadership, participation, and bravery of the feminine, male-bodied combatants. "It was an interesting sidelight on the demonstrations that those usually put down as 'sissies' or 'swishes' showed the most courage and sense during the action. ... The most striking feature of the rioting was that it was led, and featured as participants, 'queens.'"

"It was the 'queens' who scored the points and proved that they were not going to tolerate any more harassment or abuse. ... Their bravery and daring saved many people from being hurt," he noted.

Police continued to brutally battle to retake small areas of the West Village. But the crowd would not be subdued, sometimes turning the tables by chasing the cops down the block.

At 3 a.m., when all the gay bars emptied out, the protest swelled with fresh forces. Demonstrators were able to take over the IND subway station at Sixth Ave. and Waverly for about half an hour before cops retook the location.

By about 4 a.m., cops withdrew and the streets appeared quiet. But the uprising was still not over.

Eyewitness quotes from sources compiled by David Carter ("Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution," St. Martin's Press) and Martin Duberman ("Stonewall," Dutton).

Next: Pride!

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Stonewall, night 3: 'The battle was on'

Lavender & red, part 70

By Leslie Feinberg Published Aug 14, 2006 9:26 PM

Sunday, June 29, saw a lull between battles, although many cops were patrolling the streets of the Village, hurling slurs at those milling on the corners and sidewalks, reportedly trying to egg on skirmishes.



As thousands of gays and lesbians—drawing to their leadership and ranks people of color, trans people, street youths—had waged pitched battles with the cops on Friday and Sat urday during the early nights of the Stonewall Uprising, a fault line of political difference opened visibly wide between those who had the least to lose and the most to gain from fighting back, and those who fav ored not rocking the boat.

The tony crowd soaking up a little sun in the Hamptons and Fire Island Pines either ignored news of the rebellion or, as historian Martin Duberman noted, tended to condemn it as "regrettable."

The Mattachine Society had posted a sign on the Stonewall Inn reading, "We homosexuals plead with our people to please help maintain peaceful and quiet conduct on the streets of the Village." Matta chine-New York, according to historian David Carter, "after talking to the mayor's office and the police, joined police efforts to stop the protests. … Mattachine officials came to the Stonewall Inn and talked to people who showed up in an attempt to discourage them from protesting."

This was a far cry from the early days of the first Matta chine in California at the height of the Cold War 1950s, when communists and other revolutionaries led grassroots organizing to confront widespread police entrapment and brutality against gay men and the Chican@/ Mexican@ communities.

However, a bodacious group of gay youths descended on the Sixth Precinct and plastered the police cruisers, a police arrest van, and the personal cars of police officers with luminescent fuchsia and blue bumper stickers demanding "Equality for Homosexuals."

Throughout the Village, teams made up of one male and one female passed out leaflets issued by the Homophile Youth Movement that demanded, "Get the Mafia and the Cops Out of Gay Bars."

Assessments of the changed mood of the LGBT population on Christopher Street were voiced from two antithetical directions.

Deputy Inspector Pine, who led the initial raid on the Stonewall Inn, made a remark insulting those who showed individual courage, defiance and resistance in the face of police arrest and imprisonment, beatings and torture. Nevertheless, his words documented a dramatic overall shift in mass mood in the LGBT population: "For those of us in public morals [sic], things were completely changed ... suddenly they were not submissive any more."



Gay male poet Allen Ginsberg visited the Stonewall Inn on Sunday night with Village Voice reporter Lucian Truscott. His later observation to Truscott contains a word that inflicts wounds when used by an anti-gay bigot. Yet speaking about his own community with tender pride, he wrote about the sea change he witnessed. "You know, the guys there were so beautiful—they've lost that wounded look that fags all had 10 years ago."

Rage still smoldering

David Carter assembled the following firsthand accounts of incidents on Mon day through Wednesday from participants.

Monday and Tuesday nights were mostly quiet in the Village, as rain soaked the streets.

Police who tried to pick fights, however, were met with bold responses.

When one arrogant cop at Christopher Street and Waverly twirled his nightstick and hurled insults in the direction of passersby, an individual described as a "wildly 'fem' queen" lit the fuse of a firecracker and detonated it under his feet. The cop landed on his ass on the sidewalk.

The cop shouted and flailed with his club. When the same militant individual tossed another firecracker at him, the crowd fought with the cop and was able to snatch his badge off his uniform.

On Wednesday night, widespread street fighting resumed.

That was the night the Village Voice coverage of the early events in the Stone wall rebellion hit newsstands. Some community members were so enraged by the anti-gay tone of the journalists that they debated torching the Voice's offices that evening.

Carter states, "The second reason that rioting resumed in full force on Wednes day is because various radical Left groups came to protest."

Participant Bob Kohler recalled: "There were more people rioting that could not be easily categorized, and a lot of that had to do with people that came over from other areas. The straight movement moved in heavily that night as a support."

Reports of those of all sexualities who came in support included members of the Black Panther Party, Workers World Party, the Yippies, a group that called itself the Crazies, and other self-identified leftists.

In reality, these were parties and organizations with memberships of diverse sexualities. And many of the LGBT people who fought the cops at Stonewall also self-identified as leftists and revolutionaries.

Struggle erupted around 10 p.m. A chanting crowd, estimated at 500 strong, met a motorcade of police with a shower of bottles.

Police used their nightsticks to beat back the crowd. Eyewitness Ronnie De Brienza described seeing a friend pummeled by police and dragged off to a patrol car under arrest. "This was it," he said. "From nowhere the crowd swelled to an estimated thousand, and the battle was on."

Those who were there that night describe the battle between police and protesters as ferocious. Once again, eyewitnesses explain, it was the most oppres sed who led the struggle. Unarmed protesters fought hard and bravely against police—who were well-protected by equip ment and armed to the teeth.

Dick Leitsch, Mattachine-New York leader, observed that night that bodies of Stonewall combatants wounded in battle lay on the streets and sidewalks on Seventh Avenue South between Christo pher and West 10th streets.

He concluded: "Young people, many of them queens, were lying on the sidewalk, bleeding from the head, face, mouth, and even the eyes. Others were nursing

bruised and often bleeding arms, legs, backs and necks."

Within roughly an hour, the fighting ended. But the battles fought by the most oppressed and most militant layers of the LGBT population paved a new road toward revolutionary struggle.

Next: Left wing of "gay liberation" at every barricade.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA

Greenwich Village, 1969:

Many histories converged at Stonewall

Lavender & red, part 71

By Leslie Feinberg Published Aug 24, 2006 10:04 PM

Gay and lesbian historians who view history from a materialist vantage point have emphasized that while same-sex affection and sexuality appear to have existed in all epochs of human society, the conditions of capitalism were required for the development of a distinct political and social minority identity: gay and



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Respond

Therefore these historians describe the Stonewall Rebellion as a qualitative development that is a social product of capitalism.

They point out that the ascendancy of capitalist production in the United States created a vast class of "wage slaves"—workers who owned nothing but their ability to labor. The organizing of a large-scale workforce also centralized laborers, creating large-scale industry and dense urban living with same-sex living situations and relative anonymity.

They trace the devastating economic dislocation of the 1929 capitalist Depres sion that shook the working class and oppressed, creating a widespread exodus from rural areas and small towns to these cities in search of wage work.

World War II drew massive segments of the population into same-sex working and living situations, and left large same-sex-loving populations in cities where soldiers were discharged and dumped from the ranks of the military. And 1950s Cold War repression inevi tably generated resistance.

These overall conditions under capitalism, heated to critical mass by oppression, led to the development of LGBT communities and to a fight-back consciousness.

But Stonewall was not just a product of capitalism, but of national oppression as well. And it is no accident that the rebellion, which drew its leadership from the most oppressed, ignited in an era of national liberation struggles in the United States, Asia and Africa.

The Vietnamese people inspired youth of all nationalities, here and all over the world, by demonstrating that the determination of a people to fight for their sovereignty and right to self-determination was an unconquerable force, even in the face of Pentagon might.

The rising strength of national liberation struggles in the U.S.—Black Power, the American Indian Movement, the Young Lords, the Chican@/Mexican@ movement and organizations of militant Asian youth-stirred great pride in the oppressed here and around the planet. The waves of these movements created more room in their wake for women and LGBT people of all nationalities to struggle to fight oppression based on sex, sexuality and gender expression.

The youth of color in leadership in the sustained battles against the police in Greenwich Village on three hot summer nights in June 1969-many of them

homeless youth who struggled to survive on the streets—fought for their right to define and defend their own bodies, sexualities and gender expressions. Their struggle was rooted in a long history of battles against capitalist colonization and imperialism for the right of self-determination and national liberation.

In that sense, the Stonewall insurrection was not the culmination of one history, but of many.

Roots of same-sex oppression

Historically, the development of class divisions is at the root of same-sex oppression. And specifically, as lesbian and gay historians have explained, the ascendancy of capitalism over agricultural production in the U.S. was the overall class trajectory that laid the basis for the formation of distinct modern identities of gay and lesbian, vocalized as "Gay Power!" at Stonewall.

But agricultural production in the United States, and its defeat by industrial capitalism, was a class war with many battlefields between oppressor and oppres sed peoples.

Gay American Indians (GAI) made a dynamic contribution to this understanding in its ground-breaking 1988 book entitled "Living the Spirit." In this compilation, Indigenous peoples narrate their own histories of the diverse forms of organization on this continent—many of them still pre-class, based on cooperative labor and matrilineal bloodlines—before the colonial military assault which seized the land later used for white settler farming, as well as railroads and other industry.

In an essay in the book entitled "Sex/ Gender Systems in Native North Amer ica," Midnight Sun (Anishnabe) emphasized that the 400-year history of colonial ethnographic research on Indigenous peoples on this continent omitted and distorted reports about the sex and gender relations they observed, "especially where these deviated from the bipolar European norm of the heterosexual 'man' and 'woman' and contradicted the European patriarchal world view."

GAI's History Project lists 135 Indigenous peoples on this continent that made room for many more sex/gender roles than the European nations did.

Midnight Sun argued for a historical materialist view of sex/gender systems in these diverse Native societies, explaining: "Social, and specifically sexual, life is embedded in the economic organization of society—an organization that gives rise to a variety of cultural forms. The cultural construction of gender and sexuality must be seen in terms of the sexual division of labor, subsistence patterns, social relations, and male-female relations. Within this context, ideology is not an arbitrary, discrete force—rather, it serves to reproduce and perpetuate social forms, behaviors, and individuals suitable to a particular mode of production."

Colonization, Midnight Sun concluded, attempted to systematically destroy the diverse economic, ideological—and sex/ gender systems—of Indigenous societies on this continent.

The cataclysmic impact of slavery

The history of African American youth who fought hand-to-hand combat with police at Stonewall is rooted in the historic struggle in this hemisphere against enslave ment and for national liberation. To overlook the earth-shattering impact of slavery on social relations in this country—then or now—would be tantamount to ignoring the cataclysmic impact of a meteor strike in shaping the history of the planet.

The tens of millions of African peoples who were taken prisoner, endured the horrors of the Middle Passage and were enslaved as laborers on this continent, came from diverse cultures with their own systems of economic organization, kinship, sex/gender and sexual and affectional expression.

The landed aristocracy of slave-owners was hell-bent on re-forging these social relations, like shackles, to meet its own inhuman economic greed. Historian Angela Davis reveals the contradictions in relations between the sexes/genders in the family lives of those battling the horrific conditions of slavery in her germinal book, "Women, Race & Class" (Random House, New York: 1983).

Davis pointed out that in the pre-Civil War era, "As the ideology of femininity—a by-product of industrialization—was popularized and disseminated through the new ladies' magazines and romantic novels, white women came to be seen as inhabitants of a sphere totally severed from the realm of productive work. The cleavage between the home and the public economy, brought on by industrial capitalism, established female inferiority more firmly than ever before."

However, she explained, "The economic arrangement of slavery contradicted the hierarchical sexual roles incorporated in the new ideology. Male-female relations within the slave community could not, therefore, conform to the dominant ideological pattern."

By mid-19th century, she noted, seven out of eight enslaved Black people—female and male—were field workers.

Davis stressed: "Because husbands and wives, fathers and daughters were equally subjected to the slave masters' absolute authority, the promotion of male supre macy among the slaves might have prompted a dangerous rupture in the chain of command. Moreover, since Black women as workers could not be treated as the 'weaker sex' or the 'housewife,' Black men could not be candidates for the figure of 'family head' and certainly not for 'family provider.' After all, men, women and children alike were all 'providers' for the slaveholding class."

In terms of the division of labor within the home life of enslaved families, she added, "Moreover, from all indications, the division of labor between the sexes was not always so rigorous, for men would sometimes work in the cabin and women might tend the garden and perhaps even join the hunt."

Davis concluded, "This bears repeating: Black women were equal to their men in the oppression they suffered; they were their men's social equals within the slave community; and they resisted slavery with a passion equal to their men's."

And centuries later, the descendants of those who resisted slavery were battling the police in the streets at Stonewall for the right to define their own sexuality, gender and sex.

Many histories; many identities

While colonialism and imperialism have used bullets and bibles to reshape the social relations—including organization of the sexes and genders and expression of sexuality—and destroy the economies of oppressed peoples, the struggles of the nationally oppressed have also had a deep overall cultural impact on the oppressor nation.

For example, the Harlem Renaissance —which included such a powerful and lyrical articulation of defiant same-sex and gender non-conforming expressions—is also a defining period in the histories that converged in Greenwich Village decades later.

The Stonewall Uprising, therefore, was not an articulation—as though from one throat—of one sexual minority that has existed in all places, in all historical epochs, without previous voice. Nor did it represent the emergence of a central identity that represents sexual liberation in a form so universal that its visibility can be used as a global marker for who is, or is not, "out of the closet" and proud.

The role of Latin@ leadership in the Stonewall insurrection demonstrates that global roads of history led to the rebellion. Their parents and grandparents were forced by the super-exploitation of U.S. capital and the dictatorships that

enforced it to leave their own countries—with their own systems of sex, gender and sexuality—to travel to this country to work and live.

Stonewall combatant Sylvia Rivera was a transgender teenager who had lived homeless on the streets of New York City since she was ten years old. She was Vene zuelan and Puerto Rican—and was one of many Latin@s who fought in hand-to-hand battles with police at Stonewall.

For some of the Stonewall combatants, numerous oppressions overlapped in their own lives—racism, misogyny, transphobia—like multiple burdens that create great strength.

When I asked Sylvia Rivera in an interview before her death, "What do you say when people ask you if you fought the police at Stonewall because you were gay or trans? Because of police brutality or racism? Because of being oppressed as a youth or because you were homeless?"

She answered with succinct eloquence: "We were fighting for our lives!"

The Stonewall Rebellion was living proof that as many histories converged in the streets of an imperialist metropolis—the capital of capital—people who did not share a common oppression wrote a new chapter of history together when they rose up to fight back against a common enemy.

Next: Early left-wing gay liberation: anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA

Post-Stonewall gay liberation: 'Power to the People!'

Lavender & red, part 72

By Leslie Feinberg Published Sep 12, 2006 10:42 PM

Stonewall is often recalled as a critical turning point in the United States because it marked the qualitative development of a mass movement in this country. That is both evident and important.



The Stonewall Rebellion was certainly not the first time in history that people who today would be referred to as gay, lesbian, bi and trans fought back against police repression. Stonewall, however, was only defensive in its very earliest hours. It quickly turned into an insurrectionary offensive. The street leadership of youth of all sexes—particularly those who were homeless and trying to cobble together a living on the streets, and those who faced oppression based on their nationality and/or gender expression—forced the police and riot troop reinforcements to retreat, again and again, in running battles.

Stonewall was not just a response to oppression. For at least the third time in history, revolutionary leadership sparked a mass struggle for the liberation of same-sex love, oppressed genders and sexes.

But unlike the early 20th century German Homosexual Emancipation Movement and the early 1950s Mattachine movement, the left-wing of gay liberation unleashed by the Stonewall insurrection was more thoroughly multinational and included many more women and trans people. The revolutionary leadership of early gay liberation was both of the oppressed and with the oppressed.

Some 25 militant organizations coalesced across the country in 1969, including the Committee for Homosexual Freedom of San Francisco, which fought job discrimination, and chapters of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in cities that included New York, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Minneapolis.

Many of these youth of all nationalities and sexes and genders identified as radicals and revolutionaries. They drew inspiration from the Chinese Revolution, the indefatigable resistance of the Vietnamese people and the liberation struggles sweeping the African continent. Many of the youth of color were actively a part of struggles for their own national liberation, and many of the white youth saw the need to unite against racism and its white supremacist ideology.

Within a week after the Stonewall Rebellion, the Gay Liberation Front formed. It named itself to honor the National Liberation Fronts—the national resistance movements—in Algeria and Vietnam and demanded, in solidarity with the Black liberation movement, "Power to the People!"

The Los Angeles GLF statement of purpose, adopted in December 1969, read in part: "We are in total opposition to America's white racism, to poverty, hunger, the systematic destruction of our patrimony; we oppose the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer, and are in total opposition to wars of aggression and imperialism, whoever pursues them. We support the demands of Blacks,



Chicanos, [Asians], Women, Youth, Senior Citizens, and others demanding their full rights as human beings. We join in their struggle, and shall actively seek coalition to pursue these goals."

GLF women initiated their own caucus in the spring of 1970; some of these women later started the "Lavender Menace." In November 1969 and May 1970, lesbians from the Lavender Menace demanded to be heard at the Congress to Unite Women, opening up the vocal and militant role of lesbian activism on the front lines of the women's liberation movement.

East Coast GLF delegates and other militants at the November 1969 Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations—a more moderate coalition from the pre-Stonewall era—formed a "radical caucus" that put forward resolutions that included calls to support the Black Panther Party, which was battling police raids, state frame-ups and assassinations; the Chicano grape pickers, who were trying to organize a United Farm Workers union in the field factories; and the Chicago Eight, political activists charged with conspiracy to start a riot at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago; and to take part in demonstrations against the Pentagon's war in Vietnam.

From San Francisco to Ann Arbor, anti-war lesbian and gay activists organized to stop the war against Vietnam. New York's GLF organized its own contingent at the Oct. 15, 1969, anti-war march in Manhattan, and an even larger one at the November moratorium weekend in Washington, D.C., in which half a million people protested the Vietnam War. Gay radicals from Berkeley marched with their banners at the November 1969 anti-war rally in San Francisco. And lesbians and gays organized a large and visible presence at the 1971 May Day anti-war protest in Washington.

People of color LGBT forces provided leadership in many of these struggles, and formed their own caucuses and organizations. The struggle against racism and national oppression was an integral, yet highly under-reported, part of the multinational left-wing gay liberation movement.

Next: Nationally oppressed leadership and left-wing gay liberation.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 1970: Youth of color form STAR-

Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries

Lavender & red, part 73

By Leslie Feinberg Published Sep 24, 2006 11:53 PM

Stonewall combatants Sylvia Rivera and Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson—a Latin@ and an African American activist, respectively—took part in the early development of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in the weeks after the 1969 Stonewall street battles. Both were self-identified drag queens.



While consciousness and attitudes toward transgender and transsexual activists was not uniform in GLF, the lesbian and gay front did not turn away trans people.

The Philadelphia GLF news letter COME OUT took the following written position in its August 1970 newsletter: "Gay Liberation Front welcomes any gay person, regardless of their sex, race, age or social behavior. Though some other gay organizations may be embarrassed by drags or transvestites, GLF believes that we should accept all of our brothers and sisters unconditionally."

Rivera and Johnson were inspired by their experiences in the early militant gay liberation organizing and protests.

"STAR came about after a sit-in at Weinstein Hall at New York University in 1970," Rivera explained to me, in an interview in 1998, four years before her death. The protest at NYU erupted after the administration cancelled planned dances there, reportedly because a gay organization was sponsoring the events. GLF, Radicalesbians and other activists held a sit-in at Weinstein Hall. They won the right to use the venue.

Rivera and Johnson saw the need to organize homeless trans street youth. Both Rivera and Johnson were themselves homeless and had to hustle on the streets for sustenance and shelter. "Marsha and I just decided it was time to help each other and help our other kids," Rivera stated.

In 1970, the two formed Street Trans vestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR).

"STAR was for the street gay people, the street homeless people, and anybody that needed help at that time," Rivera said. Shelter was a big problem for trans street youth. "Marsha and I had always sneaked people into our hotel rooms. And you can sneak 50 people into two hotel rooms."

The first STAR home was a parked trailer truck in an outdoor parking lot in Greenwich Village. Some two dozen STAR youth lived together in the trailer. One day, at dawn, Rivera and Johnson arrived at the trailer with food for all and discovered to their horror that their "home" was moving. Some 20 youth were still sleeping in the trailer as a trucker was driving it away. Most youth were able to leap out in time. One awoke to find herself en route to California. (Martin Duberman, "Stonewall")

Rivera and Johnson decided that STAR needed a more permanent home.



Respond

"Marsha and I decided to get a building," Rivera told me. "We were trying to get away from the Mafia's control at the bars. We got a building at 213 Second Avenue."

Together, they all figured out how to fix the electricity, plumbing and the boiler. They envisioned the top floor as a school to teach the youth, many of whom had been forced to leave home and live on the streets at a very early age, to read and write.

"We fed people and clothed people. We kept the building going. We went out and hustled the streets. We paid the rent. We didn't want the kids out in the streets hustling. They would go out and rip off food. There was always food in the house and everyone had fun. Later we had a chapter in New York, one in Chicago, one in California and England. It lasted for two or three years."

Rivera and STAR also became a part of the Young Lords Party—an organization of revolutionary Puerto Rican youth. Rivera recalled, "[W]hen the Young Lords came about in New York City, I was already in GLF. There was a mass demonstration that started in East Harlem in the fall of 1970. The protest was against police repression and we decided to join the demonstration with our STAR banner. That was one of the first times the STAR banner was shown in public, where STAR was present as a group.

"I ended up meeting some of the Young Lords that day. I became one of them. Any time they needed any help, I was always there for the Young Lords. It was just the respect they gave us as human beings. They gave us a lot of respect. It was a fabulous feeling for me to be myself—being part of the Young Lords as a drag queen—and my organization [STAR] being part of the Young Lords.

"I met [Black Panther Party leader] Huey Newton at the Peoples' Revolu tion ary Convention in Philadelphia in 1971. Huey decided we were part of the revolution—that we were revolutionary people."

Rivera stressed, "I was a radical, a revolutionist. I am still a revolutionist. ... I'm glad I was in the Stonewall Riot. I remember when someone threw a Molotov cocktail, I thought, 'My god, the revolution is here. The revolution is finally here!' I always believed that we would have a fightback. I just knew that we would fight back. I just didn't know it would be that night. I am proud of myself as being there that night. If I had lost that moment, I would have been kinda hurt because that's when I saw the world change for me and my people.

"Of course, we still got a long way ahead of us."

Next: Nationally oppressed activists form caucuses, organizations.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 1970s gay liberation

People of color activists organize across the U.S.

Lavender & red, part 74

By Leslie Feinberg Published Sep 29, 2006 8:56 PM

Militant activists of color played a leading role in early multinational gay liberation groups and formed their own caucuses and organizations.

Black, Latin@ and Asian activists established Third World Gay
Liberation in the summer of 1970. Their first leaflet, issued in Spanish and
English, stated, "We are oppressed as people because our humanity is
routinely devoured by the carnivorous system of Capitalism. We are oppressed as
Third World people by the economically inherent racism of white Amerikan
society.� The statement also included a commitment to deepen consciousness
within people of color communities.

The group's 13-point demands in its "3rd World Gay Revolution Platform� stated in part:

- "We want the right of self-determination for all third world and gay people.â€?
- "The right to be gay, anytime, anyplace. The right to free physiological change and modification of sex on demand. The right of free dress and adornment.â€?
- "Full protection of the law and social sanction for all modes of human sexual self expression.�
- "We want liberation for women. We want free and safe birth control information and devices on demand. We want free 24-hour child care centers controlled by those who use them. We want access for women to fill all educational opportunities. We want truthful teaching of women's history. We want an end to preferential hiring against women and oppressed national minorities.â€?
- "We want the abolition of the bourgeois nuclear family. We believe
 that it perpetuates the false categories of homosexuality and
 heterosexuality by creating sex roles and sex definitions. The nuclear
 family propagates capitalism.�
- "We want a free educational system that teaches us our true identity and history, and presents the entire range of human sexuality without advocating any one form or style; that sex roles and sexdetermined skills not be fostered by the schools; that language be modified so that no gender takes priority.â€?

The platform also demanded for people of color and gay people: full employment, decent housing, trials by $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{C}$ apeople $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{C}$ sourt with a jury of their peers from their community, $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{C}$ an immediate end to policy brutality and killings, exemption from military induction, and $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{C}$ an immediate end to military oppression both at home and abroad. $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{C}$?



The platform concluded, "We want a new societyâ€"a socialist society. We want liberation, food, shelter, clothing, transportation, health care, employment and utilities for all.� ("The Gay Militants,� Donn Teal)

Ortez Alderson: organized behind bars

Ortez Aldersonâ€"born in Buffalo, N.Y., and raised on Chicago's South Sideâ€"was chair of the Black caucus of Chicago Gay Liberation. Aldersonâ€"a young African American man described as "flamboyant�â€"became a leader of the Third World Gay Revolution.



He organized gay participation in the 1971 Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention convened by the Black Panther Party.

Ortez Alderson

Alderson, a militant opponent of the Pentagon's war against Vietnam and the military draft, was one of four defendants known as the Pontiac Four. They were convicted in 1970 of breaking into an Illinois draft board and destroying files. He was convicted and spent a year behind bars in the same Kentucky prison where Black gay civil rights leader Bayard Rustin, lead organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, had been imprisoned for draft evasion a quarter century earlier.

While jailed, Alderson tried to organize a gay liberation chapter behind the walls. In a 1972 interview, Alderson explained how, the year before, he and a Puerto Rican gay prisoner, Craig, "sat down and talked about the gay's situation in jailâ€"you know, hassles and stuffâ€"and how we could stop it. The confrontation came on Gay Pride Day, June 28th, because we wanted to have a Gay Day celebration in prison. The prison officials said we could not have this celebration.

"At this point, we got up a petition attacking the institution's discrimination against homosexuals. Craig, Green, Davis and myself were immediately arrested by the goon squad and put in the hole. Craig was Puerto Rican, Green was Black and Davis was a full-blooded Sioux Indian.� (Motive magazine, 1972)

â€~Stephanie's story'

Black lesbian activist Vernita Gray helped launch Chicago's gay liberation movement. In 1969 she started the first lesbian and gay hotlineâ€"telephone number FBI-LISTâ€"out of her South Side apartment. She organized lesbian and gay support groups and events.

Shortly after the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion, Gray played a key role in the formation of the first Lesbian Caucus of Chicago Gay Liberation (CGL) and the city's first lesbian newspaper, Vernita Gray Lavender Woman. The lesbian and Black caucuses of CGL later became their own organizationsâ€"Chicago Lesbian Liberation and Third World Gay Revolution, respectively. (Encyclopedia of Chicago)



As an activist and organizer, Gray offered support to a Black butch lesbian student named Stephanie, who was fighting expulsion from her high school. Stephanie's story is brought to light in a film by the same name, directed by Yvonne Welbon, focusing on 1972 events.

Stephanie, a Black lesbian youth often taken for being male, lived on the South Side of Chicago. "She came of age as a young butch with her "brothers� —older Black butches who formed "The Sons of Sappho.â€? Stephanie's mother, Nadine, took her to Sears to buy her first suit.

When Stephanie and her friends were expelled from her Catholic high school by nuns who charged they were a "bad influence,� Nadine encouraged the youth to fight back by taking their case to the Free Legal Clinic at DePaul

University Law School to file a lawsuit against the school. The students won their case, were re-enrolled and the principal was shipped off, reassigned to Peoria, Ill.

Ruth Ellis: The oldest â€~out' lesbian

Ruth Ellis was renowned as the oldest â€~out' lesbian before her death at 101 years of age in 2000. She was born July 23, 1899, in Springfield, Ill., and came out around 1915.

Ellis' life is honored in a 1999 documentary made by her friend Yvonne Welbon titled, "Living with Pride: Ruth C. Ellis @ 100.�

From 1946 to 1971, Ruth and her partner Babe's home became the "Gay Spot� in Detroit at a time when local bar owners discriminated against African Americans. Ellis said, "There wasn't very many places you could go when I came to Detroit, unless it'd be somebody's home. In those days everything was hush hush. … So after we bought our home, we opened it up to the gay people. That is where everyone wanted to come on the weekend.â€?

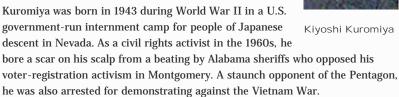
Welbon explained, $\hat{a} \in \omega$ Her home was a refuge of sorts to African Americans who came $\hat{a} \in \omega$ before the civil rights movement and Stonewall. Ruth and Babe offered lodging to black gay men newly arrived from the South. They also helped many of the young people through college. $\hat{a} \in \Omega$?

Welbon concluded that in making the documentary, $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{C}$ learned of many stories of black women $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{T}^M$ s involvement in the gay and lesbian liberation movement that are virtually unknown to the general public. The incredible impact that Ruth $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{T}^M$ s story has had on our community has shown me that if we don $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{T}^M$ t record these stories that we are in danger of depriving ourselves of the treasures found within our own history. These stories provide an alternative history, one we are proud to embrace. $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{T}$ (sistersinthelife.com)

Today, Detroit's Ruth Ellis Center is a home for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. Detroit residents celebrate Ruth Ellis Day in February, during Black History Month.

1970s: Organizing sweeps the country

Kiyoshi Kuromiya was a pre-Stonewall activist who marched for gay rights on July 4, 1965, at a demonstration in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. He went on to be one of the founders of the Gay Liberation Frontâ€"Philadelphia. Like Ortez Alderson, he was an openly gay delegate to the Black Panther Convention.



"Jody,� an Asian-American woman, founded the Lesbians of Color Caucus in Seattle during the late 1970s.

In a brief summary of the excitement and conflict she experienced during that era, she recalled: $\hat{a} \in \omega$ Over time I started meeting more and more women of color. I lived up on Capitol Hill and there was a lot of activity there. $I\hat{a} \in \mathbb{T}^{M}$ meet one woman of color, and then she would introduce me to more, so then I started feeling a bit better. Also, by that time, there were some white women that I finally developed friendships with, which was good. $\hat{a} \in \mathbb{T}$? (HistoryLink.org Essay 4266)

Other groups that formed in the 1970s included the Native American Gay Rap



Group (1972), Gay American Indians (1975), Gay Latin@ Alliance/GALA (1975), Third World Lesbian Caucus (1977), Black Gay Caucus (1977), Asian-American Alliance (1979) and Gay Asian Support Group (1978).

On the eve of the first national march on Washington in October 1979, hundreds of lesbians and gays of color convened a Third World conference there.

Black activist Keith Boykin wrote in the Encarta Africana Encyclopedia, â €œBlack writers, intellectuals, and activists have left a profound impression on the gay rights movement. Linda Villarosa served as executive editor of Essence magazine and introduced hundreds of thousands of black women to black lesbians when she co-authored a â€~coming out' piece with her mother. Barbara Smith's groundbreaking anthology Home Girls presented dozens of perspectives of black feminism that integrated black lesbian viewpoints. Others such as Cheryl Clarke, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, and June Jordan have shared their experiences about bisexuality and lesbianism in their writings and public comments. Black lesbian feminist writer Audre Lorde spoke at the 20th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington, and activist Phill Wilson addressed the 30th anniversary march in 1993.â€?

Hidden by history

The history of those nationally oppressed organizations, and leaders who selfidentified as lesbian, gay or drag queens, is grossly under-reported in official histories of early gay liberation.

Black lesbian feminist and socialist Barbara Smith emphasizes, "Despite the building of a Black lesbian and gay political movement since the 1970s and the simultaneous flowering of Black lesbian and gay art, Black lesbians and gays are still largely missing from the historical record.� ("The Truth that Never Hurts,� Smith)

It's important to remember that unlike white activists, the struggle for national liberation meant that the terms \hat{a} ۾lesbian \hat{a} €? or \hat{a} ۾gay \hat{a} €? were not the primary identification for many people of color activists.

Smith writes, $\hat{a} \in \omega$ My own experience as a Black lesbian during the past two decades indicates that Black lesbians and gay men are linked by our shared racial identities and political status in ways that white lesbians and gays are not. These links between us are sociological, cultural, historical and emotional and I think it is crucial to explore this new terrain together. $\hat{a} \in ?$

The activist identity of many people of color leaders in their own national liberation movements was not based on their sexuality necessarily or exclusively.

For example, in April 1977, the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black feminists of all sexualities, issued a historic statement against the â €œinterlockingâ€? system of "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression.â€?

Smith, a member of the Combahee River Collective, concludes, "I do not want to dissuade white scholars from investigating and including material about people of color. Indeed current queer studies needs to be much more racially and ethnically inclusive, but at the same time it also needs to demonstrate a thorough consciousness of the racial and class contexts in which lesbians and gays of color actually function.�

Such an understanding will be enriched when more of these histories are unearthed, analyzed and narrated by African American, Lakota, Puerto Rican, Filipino, Mexican@/Chican@, Salvadoran, Chinese, Arab and many other nationally-oppressed activists.

Widening the focus of the historical lens is crucial and imperative. It will remedy a distortion of the activist past. It is essential to strengthening anti-racist unity. It is necessary to understanding that the left wing of early gay liberation was

defined by its anti-racist, anti-imperialist stance. It makes clearer why this political emphasis won significant demonstrations of solidarity from the left wing of national liberation organizations.

And it will reveal more sharply why this political position within the overall gay liberation movement in the United States led to a significant split.

Next: Panthers, Young Lords: Solidarity with gay liberation

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Early left-wing liberation: 'Unity with all the oppressed'

Lavender & red, part 75

By Leslie Feinberg Published Oct 5, 2006 8:03 PM

The multinational left wing of early gay liberation was defined by its struggle against racist state repression and in defense of national liberation here and abroad. Even white activists who lacked a thoroughgoing anti-racist consciousness or were uneven in their understanding saw unity in the struggle against all forms of oppression as key to gay liberation.



For example, the Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front's statement of purpose read in part, "We are in total opposition to America's white racism." The Los Angeles chapter also started a Gay Action Patrol to monitor the police.

In cities from Houston to Chicago, gay liberationists protested local bar owners' segregationist policies that only admitted white gay men and lesbians.

In London, too, the Gay Liberation Front allied itself with Black liberation, defending Black activists like the Mangrove Nine, who were framed by police in the early 1970s.

The very first resolution from the floor of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations conference in August 1970 was a call from the Radical Caucus to support the Black Panther Party—which was under state siege across the United States. The motion passed. A later attempt to overturn the motion was decisively defeated.

The Radical Caucus had also won passage of a resolution that called for support of Chicano grape pickers, who were trying to organize a United Farm Workers union in the field factories.

The Radical Caucus program read in part: "We see the persecution of homosexuality as part of a general attempt to oppress all minorities and keep them powerless. ... A common struggle, however, will bring common triumph. Therefore we declare our support as homosexuals and bisexuals for the struggles of the black, the feminist, the Spanish-American, the Indian, the Hippie, the Young, the Student, and other victims of oppression and prejudice."

The left wing of gay liberation won demonstrations of solidarity from the left wing of the militant nationally oppressed movements, as well.

The Black Panther Party invited the Gay Liberation Front to take part in the September 1970 Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention. Nine members of Third World Gay Liberation and one lesbian member of GLF attended a planning meeting for the convention that summer. At that time, Panther David Hilliard reportedly told the lesbian participant that BPP leader Huey Newton was about to issue a statement in support of the gay and women's liberation movements.

Newton issued his message in "The Black Panther" newsletter on Aug. 21, 1970. It was titled "A Letter from Huey Newton to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters



Respond

about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements." (Full version can be found at www.workers.org.)

Newton wrote, "When we have revolutionary conferences, rallies, and demonstrations there should be full participation of the gay liberation movement and the women's liberation movement." He urged revolutionaries to excise any historically anti-gay references to "men who are enemies of the people, such as Nixon." Newton concluded, "Homosexuals are not enemies of the people."

This message from the Supreme Commander of the Black Panther Party sent shock waves of solidarity that reverberated throughout the progressive and revolutionary movements.

Rivera: 'A great moving moment'

Lesbian and gay delegates—Black, Latin@, Asian and white—traveled by car, bus, train and plane to take part in the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention on the weekend of Sept. 5, 1970. At a time when the Panthers were being rounded up, assassinated and framed by the state, some 10,000 to 15,000 people answered the Panther call to take part in the convention.

The aim of the revolutionary gathering was to draw up a revolutionary people's constitution. Each delegated group was asked to convene its own workshop to draw up its own demands for rights to be included in the constitution.

At least 60 self-identified gay men and some two dozen lesbians formed a delegation. They traveled from Ann Arbor, Mich., Los Angeles and Berkeley, Calif., Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Philadelphia, Tallahassee, Fla., and Yellow Springs, Ohio.

There were problems at a gathering that size, to be sure. But here are some important recollections and impressions.

The publication Gay Flames wrote in its issue No. 2: "When we got there, the women and men each got a place where they could stay together and be with gay people from other cities. Some of the men dressed in drag the first night and rapped to some Panthers who came over."

The next morning "Panther Michael Tabor, a N.Y. 21 defendant, spoke about 'how we're all in the same boat' when it comes to facing the power of the pigs. He talked about the oppression of gays and women."

Transgender Stonewall combatant Sylvia Rivera said it was "a great moving moment to be there."

Rivera told me that when she saw Huey Newton at the convention, he already knew of her: "Yeah, you're the queen from New York!"

On Sunday morning, the multinational gay men's caucus met. Issue No. 8 of Gay Flames explained, "Long meetings dedicated to the adoption of [the] gay platform for the constitution were interrupted for vital discussions of racism and sexism."

Gay Flames No. 2 elaborated: "The most important discussion centered around the Third World/Gay Male statement. They confronted the gay whites on our racism, specifically on our willingness to criticize the sexism of black men but not that of white men. They asked us to recognize Huey Newton's recently stated position in favor of Gay Liberation as being a tremendous advance in the revolution and that the Black Panther Party holds the most out-front position in terms of the struggle to give power to the people."

Panther 21 defendant Afeni Shakur spoke to the gay men's gathering. "She helped to explain a lot about the Black Panthers to all of us. She said that all she wanted was a farm with lots of trees and grass and a place to grow cabbage, but that to get this for herself and her people, it would be necessary to fight. Most of us were convinced by what she had to say. We therefore decided to include in our statement that gay men at the Session recognized the BPP as being presently the

vanguard of the people's revolution."

Many of the white lesbians left the convention with resentments. The most often expressed grievance—that the Panther women related to them as Black and as Panthers rather than bonding as women—showed a low level of understanding of national oppression by the white women.

In the gay men's caucus, a revised version of the Third World Gay Revolution platform "was adopted by the group as the basis of a national gay liberation program. ... Gay people formed a 15-member delegation under the leadership of Third World people and women, which attempted to present the 16-point program to the Panthers. This delegation gave gay people the experience of women and men, Blacks, Latins and Asians and Whites, working collectively in a practically revolutionary context, though the chaos and crowd kept the delegation from completing its task."

The gay men's statement, read by the delegation at the convention, concluded: "We recognize as a vanguard revolutionary action the Huey P. Newton statement on gay liberation. We recognize the Black Panther Party as being the vanguard of the people's revolution in Amerikkka."

Next: More solidarity: D.C. 21, Panthers, Young Lords, Cesar Chavez.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Early gay liberation:

Demonstrations of anti-racist solidarity

Lavender & red, part 76

By Leslie Feinberg Published Oct 17, 2006 11:03 PM

One particularly militant action by a multinational group of gay men took place during the fall 1970 Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention, convened by the Black Panther Party. It included a demonstration of anti-racist unity.



During the convention, a group of four gay men—two Puerto Rican, one African American and one white—at least one of whom was reportedly wearing "a bit of makeup," went out to eat at an area restaurant.

Management at the restaurant, which reportedly catered to a white clientele, refused to serve the group. The four left, and returned with 30 or more gay men. The restaurant boss ordered them out.

According to a report in the Advocate, "A fight erupted when management, security guards and several patrons attacked one Puerto Rican and two black Gays. Glasses were thrown, windows broken and other damage done in the free-for-all which developed." ("The Gay Militants," Donn Teal)

The other gay men of various nationalities came to their aid and fought alongside them.

After the group left the restaurant, police stopped 12 of the gay men as they drove away and charged them with assault, illegal entry and destruction of property. The defendants later won an important legal precedent—the right to vet prospective jurors about their prejudices against same-sex love. Ultimately the charges were dropped.

More solidarity

As early as November 1969, left-wing gay liberationists actively organized in support of Chican@/Mexican@ grape pickers who were trying to organize a union—the United Farm Workers (UFW)—in the fields of California. The "Radical Caucus" at the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations won a resolution in support of the farm workers, even though the convention had drawn more moderate forces.

Renowned labor leader César Chávez continuously extended his hand of solidarity to gay liberation, as well.

Last summer, when the National Executive Board of the United Farm Workers—a predominantly Latin@ union—announced its principled stance in support of the right of same-sex marriage, UFW Southern California Political Director Christine Chávez restated her grandfather's support of gay rights.

She recalled, "Beginning in the 1970s, before there was widespread public acceptance of gays, especially among Latinos, my grandfather, César Chávez, spoke out strongly for gay rights. He attended gay rights rallies and marches. He brought with him the UFW's black-eagle flags and farm workers who wished to



Respond

participate." (www.ufw.org)

Chávez helped carry the lead banner in the 1979 march on Washington for lesbian, gay and bisexual rights.

Early gay liberation won support from Puerto Rican revolutionary youth as well, particularly from the Young Lords Party.

When Gay Liberation Front (GLF) activists went to a Puerto Rican street festival on Aug. 8, 1970, sponsored by the Young Lords Party, members of the Puerto Rican revolutionary youth party helped hand out leaflets advertising an upcoming GLF dance. (Philadelphia Gay Liberation Front-Newsletter, Aug. 9, 1970)

Shortly after Huey Newton issued his powerful statement of support for the gay and women's liberation movements in The Black Panther newspaper on Aug. 21, 1970, the Young Lords Party formed an internal gay caucus. One of its first members was Latin@ trans Stonewall combatant Sylvia Rivera.

Rivera described joining in autumn 1970: "It was just the respect they gave us as human beings. They gave us a lot of respect. It was a fabulous feeling for me to be myself—being part of the Young Lords as a drag queen—and my organization [STAR—Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries] being part of the Young Lords."

The Young Lords Party held its own inquiry into the death of a Black gay prisoner—Raymond Lavon Moore—after he was found dead in November 1970 on the fourth floor of the Tombs prison in lower Manhattan. That was the floor where gay and trans prisoners were locked up.

Prison officials claimed Moore took his own life. But gay prisoner Richard Harris courageously came forward with his eyewitness account of the beatings Moore sustained from guards preceding his death.

The Young Lords charged that the administration had killed Moore. Gay liberation activists formed the Gay Community Prisoner Defense Committee after Moore's death.

On at least one occasion, Gay Liberation Front in New York provided bail money for two jailed Young Lords members.

Support for Panthers

Not all Black Panther Party leaders supported gay rights and not all gay activists supported the Panthers. But many left-wing gay liberationists—Black, Latin@, Asian, Native and white—worked hard to build and widen solidarity for the Panther Party.

The "Radical Caucus" at the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations also won a resolution in support of the Black Panther Party, and when the conference leadership tried to overturn the measure, a wider vote sustained the resolution.

A Gay Liberation Front (GLF) representative spoke at the huge May 1970 rally in New Haven organized to free Panther co-founder Bobby Seale.

The case of the Panther 21 drew demonstrative support from gay liberationists of all nationalities. The 21 were arrested in New York on April 2, 1969, in a predawn police raid and charged with conspiracy to bomb the Botanical Gardens, department stores and other sites. They were finally acquitted of all charges on May 13, 1971, after 45 minutes of jury deliberation following what had been the longest political trial in the city's history.

During the long trial, gay activists, including members of the Gay Liberation Front, had organized in support of the Panther defendants. The GLF Marxist study group—Red Butterfly—organized a gay liberationist contingent at a massive rally to "Free the Panther 21 and All Political Prisoners."

The New York GLF donated \$500—quite a sum for activists in those days—to the Committee to Defend the Black Panthers.

Support for the Panthers became the stated basis for an internal struggle within the early gay liberation movement that eventually led to a significant political split.

Next: Two-line struggle split gay movement

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Reminiscent of Cold War Mattachine divide

Early 1970s: Political split in gay movement

Lavender & red, part 77

By Leslie Feinberg Published Nov 11, 2006 9:13 PM

National liberation movements fighting for sovereignty and self-determination in Asia, Africa and the Middle East inspired the left wing of early gay liberation. In addition, oppressed nations held as virtual domestic colonies within the borders of the U.S. were rebelling from Watts to Wounded Knee. Struggles of Black, Chican@/Mexican@, Native and Asian peoples were roiling, with militant leadership.

As Vietnam veterans returned wounded or in body bags, anger against the war built. Women's liberation was taking on social momentum.

Stonewall combatant Sylvia Rivera later recalled, "All of us were working for so many movements at that time. Everyone was involved with the women's movement, the peace movement, the civil rights movement. We were all radicals. I believe that's what brought it [Stonewall] around. You get tired of being just pushed around. We are people. We are gay people."

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people brought valuable experience to gay liberation that they had acquired as activists and leaders in the union movement, tenant and unemployed organizing, defense of political prisoners and the civil rights movement.

Left-wing gay liberation sought solidarity with all who were oppressed. The gay movement itself was made up of many nationalities, countries of origin, sexes, genders and ages.

The Gay Liberation Front, named to honor the national liberation fronts in Vietnam and Algeria, issued a founding statement of purpose in 1969 after the Stonewall Rebellion that articulated the anti-capitalist consciousness of early gay liberation, as well.

The language in the statement is dated—particularly regarding Asian peoples—but the solidarity from that period still rings clear: "We are in total opposition to America's white racism, to poverty, hunger, the systematic destruction of our patrimony; we oppose the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer, and are in total opposition to wars of aggression and imperialism, whoever pursues them. We support the demands of Blacks, Chicanos, Orientals, Women, Youth, Senior Citizens, and others demanding their full rights as human beings. We join in their struggle, and shall actively seek coalition to pursue these goals."

Third World Gay Liberation, established by Black, Latin@ and Asian activists in the summer of 1970, stated in its first leaflet—issued in Spanish and English—"We are oppressed as people because our humanity is routinely devoured by the carnivorous system of Capitalism. We are oppressed as Third World people by the economically inherent racism of white Amerikan society."

U.S. finance capitalism—the ascendant capitalist and imperialist power after



World War II—faced resistance domestically and internationally. The great struggles of the 1960s forced Democrat Lyndon Johnson to make some concessions on the home front while still waging war against Vietnam—new social programs like the "War on Poverty." This "guns and butter" policy, which aimed to buy some social peace domestically, plus the strong war economy, helped isolate the national liberation struggles and the growing activism of middle-class youth, and to keep rebellion from igniting the entire working class.

At the same time, the FBI worked hammer and tong to bust up unity among oppressed groups. That covert "dirty war" was COINTELPRO: the Counter-Intelligence Program.

J. Edgar Hoover, who is widely reported to have had a male lover, led the FBI at that time. That certainly demonstrates that same-sex attraction doesn't automatically make a person politically progressive. As the union song asks: "Which side are you on?" Hoover certainly knew which side of the class barricades he served.

The FBI used the weapons of spying, lying, infiltrating, disrupting and spreading smear campaigns on the oppressed. They assassinated and framed up progressive leaders in order to "neutralize" them. And they tried to drive a wedge between gay liberation and Black liberation.

Under this pressure, gay liberation developed an ideological fissure.

Reminiscent of Cold War split

The Gay Liberation Front was originally conceived not as an organization but as a political front—a left-wing umbrella group. In early November 1969, at a GLF meeting, a vote to support the Black Panther Party was defeated. A week later, a GLF member called for a recount. This time, the majority—including reportedly all the women—voted to support the Panthers, who were the target of vicious state repression.

Angered by the vote, GLF members Marty Robinson and Jim Owles resigned, walked out and became founders of the Gay Activist Alliance.

The split and the formation of GAA had national implications. Ostensibly, the divide was over "priorities." Those who created GAA claimed that Gay Liberation Front was not focused enough on gay issues.

But beneath that argument was an ideological fault line reminiscent of the Cold War anti-communist divide in the Mattachine gay mass organizing during the McCarthyite witch hunt. Harry Hay, a communist who founded the early Mattachine organization and was later driven out by red-baiters, helped draft the Los Angeles GLF founding statement in 1969.

Anti-communism reared its ugly head again in the GLF split.

In the summer of 1969, Marcus Overseth penned an article in the "San Francisco Free Press" about the growing chasm between what he termed "leftists" and "social revolutionaries"—in reality, between revolutionaries and social democrats.

"These people—whose emphasis is on left rather than Gay—might be called Gay leftists," he wrote. "The primary orientation of left Gay social revolutionaries is Gay. Gay leftists, however, look upon the Gay liberation movement as a means of furthering their peculiar notions about political revolution. They look at Gay liberation through leftist lenses—from a framework of Marxist-Leninist thought. To such persons the most important reason for their involvement is not freedom for Gay brothers and sisters but blood-in-the-streets revolution."

Overseth concluded that from New York to San Francisco, "Here lies the real reason for the current disruption within the Gay Liberation Movement. It has been co-opted by politicos who are still hung up on political revolution."

In an interview with a New York Times Magazine editor in June 1970, Jim Owles

—GAA's first president—stated, "In its beginnings, GLF, aside from being revolutionary, was doing things that were related to the homosexual cause. ... [But] the majority ... considered themselves revolutionaries, and they wanted the group to identify and align itself with the other like groups. There was the beginning of a split, very early."

Anti-communism was rife in the 1960s and early 1970s—as it still is today. The communist leadership that had won so many gains during the class struggles of the 1930s was driven out of the unions, tenant organizations and campuses during the Cold War. The class lessons of those struggles were lost with them.

The legacy of McCarthyism hung heavy on the "New Left." The reactionary political positions and internal membership policies regarding same-sex love in parties that called themselves communists helped fan the flames of anti-communism, too. Each of those parties and organizations is responsible for explaining its own political history.

But in one communist organization in the United States, the demand to end oppression based on sexuality, gender and sex became a genuine and dynamic part of its revolutionary program: Workers World Party.

Next: Theory and practice: Workers World walked its talk.

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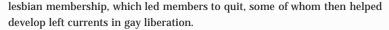
POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Workers World Party's history

LGBT members welcomed from day one

Lavender & red, part 78

By Leslie Feinberg Published Nov 17, 2006 11:22 PM

During the Cold War, the early Mattachine movement was founded by revolutionaries, many of whom had to leave their communist and radical parties in order to openly organize against gay oppression. Even after Stonewall, some socialist or communist organizations maintained policies banning gay and



Radical and revolutionary groups in the gay liberation movement after Stonewall included Third World Gay Liberation, Gay Liberation Front and its Marxist study group Red Butterfly, the Lavender Left, Committee of Lesbian and Gay Male Socialists, the Lavender & Red Union, and Gay Revolution and Gay Flames.

But in one communist party—Workers World Party—the struggle against gay oppression was taken up in earnest by the entire organization, not just the lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) members.

Workers World Party had emerged as a distinct party in 1959, after having been a principled, ideological grouping within the Socialist Workers Party for 10 years that differed with the SWP leadership on crucial international and domestic issues.

The founder of WWP, Sam Marcy, had characterized U.S. imperialism's war against Korea as part of a global class war. In his 1950 analysis of this global class war, written as an internal document, Marcy described that era as characterized by a profound struggle between two class combatants.

On one side was a bloc of workers' states, headed by the Soviet Union and the newly formed People's Republic of China, that was attempting to build socialism and at the same time was forming alliances with oppressed nations trying to break the shackles of colonialism and imperialism. On the other side was the imperialist camp, headed by U.S. finance capital, which sought to dismantle the workers' states and keep oppressed peoples in servitude.

Marcy argued that workers and oppressed peoples around the world had every class reason to defend the anti-imperialist bloc.

Marcy's principled defense of the socialist camp set him apart as a political leader. At that time, many individuals and groups that called themselves socialist or communist either refused to actively defend the USSR—which was under constant siege, covertly and overtly, from imperialism—or outright politically attacked it.

Sam Marcy built a political tendency that was steeped in Lenin's understanding that class unity is impossible without resolute defense of all struggles for national liberation from imperialism. And this former labor organizer—whose co-workers referred to him as "Solidarity Sam"—knew in his political bones that the same



capitalist class in the U.S. used its police, courts, prisons and troops as a military boot heel to oppress Black, Latin@, Asian, Native and other oppressed peoples who constitute nations within the borders of this country. In other words, the U.S. is definitely not "one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

This deep understanding of the need to battle oppression in order to build the kind of solidarity that can truly achieve class unity was a defining characteristic of Marcy's ideological grouping.

For over a decade Marcy and his co-thinkers argued out their political disagreements within the Socialist Workers Party, taking their vigorous defense of the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese revolutions and the need to support the socialist bloc to the SWP National Committee. But these differences eventually led the Marcy ideological grouping to leave the SWP in 1959 and form Workers World Party (WWP).

One of the first branches of WWP was in the working-class, industrial city of Buffalo, N.Y. From day one, Workers World Party did not, and never had, an internal policy barring membership to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals or trans people. The founding members included individuals who today would put themselves somewhere under the umbrella of LGBT identities.

During the McCarthyite witch hunt, however, same-sex love and cross-dressing were illegal, hunted by state repression and hounded and harassed by the "Lavender Scare" that was a central crusade of the domestic Cold War. So, while founding members and individuals who joined Workers World before the Stonewall era did not necessarily self-identify based on their sexuality, it was not because of any internal membership policy that kept them "in the closet."

What made Workers World Party open in this period to members who today would be referred to as LGBT? And what prepared the leadership of this communist party to make political breakthroughs about lesbian and gay oppression shortly after Stonewall?

'An injury to one is an injury to all'

Bob McCubbin, a gay man who met Workers World Party back in autumn 1960—and later worked with other leaders in the organization to write a germinal Marxist analysis of the roots of sexual oppression in class society—recently addressed those questions from his own first-hand experience.

Asked about those days, he wrote back, "The small group of political organizers who came together to form Workers World Party in 1959 carried forward, in addition to the communist spirit of struggle and profound class consciousness, an undiluted and uncompromised political tradition and ideology harking back at least a century, that made the newly dawning struggles for sexual and gender equality in the mid-century U.S. relatively easy for them to identify with and embrace as legitimate and important for the working class."

McCubbin continued, "Under Sam Marcy's leadership, the party's guiding ideas included, from the very beginning, the concept of the great diversity of the world's working class and the need to address all of the different issues that this diversity manifested from a class-conscious and revolutionary perspective. This was in the interests of uniting the whole class for the inevitable struggles for power.

"But Marcy's lifelong experience as a working class organizer and theoretician also taught him that many of the most dedicated and class-conscious fighters were from the ranks of the most exploited and oppressed people. Those with the least to lose and the most to gain consistently show themselves to be the most highly enthusiastic about change, the most highly motivated to struggle for change, the most capable of sacrifice in the interests of furthering the struggle.

"Further, those who best understand the systems of exploitation and oppression are those with the most experience as the objects of that exploitation and

oppression."

Therefore, McCubbin stressed, "Having such a comprehensive, inclusive and intimate view of the working class, and promoting such a positive attitude toward the most oppressed, it was a natural development that the party was able to attract lesbian and gay members even at its earliest stages of development."

McCubbin concluded, "Of course, the recruitment of lesbian and gay people to the party in those early days was on the basis of this strongly positive and inclusive view of our class and a strong emphasis on sensitivity to oppression in general, and not, at least not in the early days, on the basis of a deep understanding of the oppression faced by lesbian and gay people."

Next: "Solidarity Sam" vs. gay oppression

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Recalling 'Solidarity Sam'

Workers World fought gay oppression before Stonewall

Lavender & red, part 79

By Leslie Feinberg Published Nov 26, 2006 8:59 AM

Years before the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion, the leadership of Workers World Party understood the need to fight oppression as a many-headed hydra.

I joined Workers World Party (WWP) in Buffalo, N.Y., in 1973, drawn to its ranks by my rage at the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the bloody CIA-orchestrated counter-revolution in Chile. The first person in the branch leadership that I "came out" to as transgender in late 1973—Jeanette Merrill—listened to me very intently. She responded, "I don't know much about your oppression, but I know oppression when I hear it."

My comrades in the Buffalo branch quickly made discussion and understanding about my oppression an important part of branch work. They demonstrated to me that comradeship is different than friendship or family. It is a powerful relationship among people who unite on a solid platform of political principles and who fight against each other's oppression as though it were their own.

In reaching out to me, some of the older members told me anecdotes about how Sam Marcy—who had founded our political and ideological tendency—had developed their understanding and sensitivity to all forms of oppression, including sexuality and gender expression. While no one could recall the exact dates, these examples ranged from the mid-1950s to the very early 1960s, long before Stonewall.

In one example, Marcy, at that time living in Buffalo as branch organizer, called an immediate halt when a young man sashayed around the office, mocking a feminine male to elicit laughter—something that was and is still quite common in the U.S. generally.

Marcy said firmly, "Stop!"

Marcy, as a former labor organizer, certainly understood on a deep level that "An injury to one is an injury to all." However, another incident shows the depth of political and historical understanding that Sam Marcy brought to every aspect of social life.

When someone who attended a Party forum made a disparaging remark about drag shows held at a nearby bar, Marcy interrupted him, arguing that this form of expression was a carryover from pre-class society. Before his death, I asked Marcy how he knew that. He replied that he had come across what is today referred to as transgender in his readings about ancient cooperative societies.

Jeanette Merrill recalls that when Sam Marcy first heard that meetings at the Mattachine Society in Buffalo were being menaced by reactionaries, he sent Party members to the society's office at Main and Utica, telling them, "It's very important for you to go in solidarity." Merrill says she and her comrade and life partner, Ed Merrill, a steel union shop steward, attended.



"We walked up there on a Sunday evening—we didn't have a car. I can't remember all the details, but I can remember how everyone there greeted us and thanked us for coming. We stayed very late."

Whole Party fought gay oppression

Bob McCubbin, a gay man who met WWP in the fall of 1960 and is today a Party leader on the West Coast, remembers hearing the news about the opening salvo of the Stonewall Uprising in 1969. "I later heard that a comrade in New York had commented, upon hearing this news item, that 'A new front against U.S. imperialism has opened."

Members of Workers World took part in the following nights of the Stonewall Rebellion in Greenwich Village.

As a militant gay liberation movement emerged after the uprising, Workers World Party and its youth group—Youth Against War & Fascism (YAWF)—demonstrated solidarity on every front in the struggle against sexual oppression.

And it wasn't just the lesbian and gay, bi and trans members who took part in these struggles. Party members of all sexualities took part in the struggle to "Smash gay oppression!"

Workers World newspaper carried articles about lesbian and gay resistance.

YAWF took part in a 1970 demonstration at the Tombs prison in Manhattan in support of Richard Harris—a gay member of the Inmates Liberation Front of the Young Lords Party.

McCubbin says that, while organizing in San Francisco a year after Stonewall, "I combined my gay liberation activities with Party work in the anti-war movement and the struggle for Black liberation."

He recalls, "The banner we opened at a big rally for Angela Davis—where we also raised the need to support her co-defendant, Ruchell Magee—was signed Gay Liberation Front, but it looked suspiciously like a Youth Against War & Fascism banner. And it was greeted with some consternation on the part of the rally's organizers."

McCubbin describes the spring 1971 anti-war march in San Francisco as "the biggest of the semi-annual West Coast mobilizations during those years."

"My friends and I carried banners in the march and managed to get out close to 5,000 copies of Workers World newspaper during the rally."

The large Chican@ contingent had been insensitively placed at the end of the march. The political high point of the event, McCubbin explained, "was when the Chican@s marched into the stadium where the rally was being held and surged through the huge crowd right up to and onto the rally platform, where they stood triumphantly waving Chican@ banners and flags.

"One of the leaders of this action was my gay friend Arturo Rodríguez, who subsequently wrote an article for Workers World explaining the reason for the action."

Next: Internal development of WWP's organizational, political and historical contribution to the struggle for sexual liberation.

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Workers World Party 1971-1972

Internal education on gay liberation

Lavender & red, part 80

By Leslie Feinberg Published Dec 3, 2006 8:02 PM

Workers World Party's youth group, Youth Against War & Fascism (YAWF), formed an internal Gay Caucus in 1971—which soon after became the Lesbian and Gay Caucus. Bob McCubbin, who played a key role in its political and organizational formation and development, recalls what led up to and followed the establishment of the caucus.



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McCubbin writes that he had been doing gay liberation work and Workers World Party (WWP) organizing on the West Coast. He had told leading members of the Buffalo branch he was gay when he moved to San Francisco, where there was no branch, six months after the Stonewall Rebellion.

And he remembered that one of the founders of the party, Vince Copeland, "had actually used the presence in New York of a large gay community as one of his incentives to get me to move to New York City" to work in the party center.

However, not until 1971 did McCubbin ever take the floor at a party meeting to speak from the political perspective of a gay man. "In the late summer of 1971, I left San Francisco for New York City and a few weeks later, at a party meeting, I took the floor to defend the party during a minor factional struggle. One of the charges being leveled was that the party had no position on the gay liberation movement."

McCubbin stood up and said, "Well, I'm gay, and I've always understood that the party supports the struggles of all oppressed people." There were a few seconds of absolute silence and then strong applause, recalls McCubbin.

McCubbin explains, "What followed the branch meeting where I came out were several months of preliminary discussions with leading comrades in New York, in particular with Vince and Dottie [Dorothy Ballan, a founder of WWP], and with a few lesbian and gay comrades in party branches.

"At the end of 1971 or the beginning of 1972, the party held a winter conference, and I asked Deirdre [Griswold] if an announcement could be read at the Saturday plenum to the effect that a meeting of lesbian and gay comrades and friends would be held in the evening. Deirdre assured me that would be no problem.

"Well, about 50 people showed up!" Not all of them were LGBT, McCubbin recalls. "It was a wonderful expression of solidarity on the part of many heterosexually oriented comrades, but the 12 or 15 of us who were lesbian and gay had to schedule a further meeting the following morning to get some work done after the evening meeting full of praise for us and solidarity statements.

"This conference," McCubbin concludes, "marked the beginning of a party-wide effort to educate ourselves and our class on this issue."

Sam Marcy vs. gay oppression

Workers World Party founder Sam Marcy made a tremendous contribution to the development of the party as a revolutionary communist organization, and to the historic struggle for sexual liberation, when he oriented the party about the gay struggle politically, theoretically and historically in a significant part of a 1972 internal document he wrote as orientation for the party conference.

Marcy said of the oppression of nationalities, women, youth and gay people: "The degeneration of monopoly capitalism into state monopoly capitalism carries to an extreme all the forms of oppression which the capitalist system, in the previous epoch, had engendered and developed. As the crisis of the social system becomes more and more apparent, the need of the ruling class to unload its burden on the most oppressed sections of society becomes more evident. Only by dividing, only by fragmenting and continually pitting different elements of the oppressed masses against each other, can the capitalist establishment maintain its sway over all society, and hope to survive."

This same sharpening of the persecution and oppression, however, creates the impetus for a genuinely progressive militancy and resurgence of Black and Latin@ peoples, women, youth and gay people.

Marcy characterized the lack of widespread support for the gay struggle in the progressive movement at that time as a legacy of the deep-seated prejudice that emanated from the religious bigotry of the Middle Ages and its reinforcement throughout the entire course of capitalist development.

"It is particularly significant," he wrote, "that the public change in attitude—such as it is—comes on the heels of a very formidable wave of struggle by gay people, a veritable 'coming out' in a most demonstrative way. Gay Pride took a cue from Black Pride. ...

"Without the struggle launched by gay people," Marcy stressed, "the prejudices which have been ground into the consciousness of the masses by indoctrination would not even have been challenged, let alone shaken to their foundations.

"All this shows how intimate is the connection between the ideas of a particular time—even progressive ideas—and the conditions of the time, in this case, the state of the struggle."

'Influence of October Revolution'

Marcy continued, "An important influence in the progressive movement insofar as the gay struggle is concerned, dates back to the victory of the October Revolution in Russia. In early 1917, the Soviet government annulled all laws which restricted the rights of homosexuals. It also, of course, annulled all the reactionary laws pertaining to divorce as well as the feudal-bourgeois family relations.

"What is important about this," he emphasized, "is that for the first time in history, a workers' government established equality in law—and to a measurable degree also in fact—between men and women, for heterosexuals and homosexuals."

Marcy noted that, "Unfortunately this period of very progressive development was short-lived, and was succeeded by a period of reaction with the rise of Stalin to power." The 1934 move by the bureaucratic grouping at the helm of the workers' state to reinstate laws against homosexuality, Marcy explained, had a profoundly negative ideological impact on communist parties around the world that looked to the Soviet Union for political leadership.

"Our party," Marcy stated, "which bases itself on Marxism-Leninism, looks to the early model of the Soviet Union as the embodiment of what our own political position should be in relation to the struggle of gay people.

"Our first, most elementary and fundamental duty as well as objective on this question is to completely eliminate and abolish all forms of persecution and oppression of gay people. It must also fight against all ideological, political and social manifestations of gay oppression which may be reflected in our own ranks."

Marcy wrote that the demand to end all sexual oppression and persecution "is really an elementary democratic demand which a bourgeois democracy should be able to grant along with all other democratic demands. But imperialist democracy tends to restrict the elementary rights of all people—not only gay, women, youth, Brown and Black. It is only the struggle that can wrest concessions. In the long run, only the abolition of the capitalist system can produce a lasting, free and equal treatment of all peoples."

Marcy concluded that although regression in the Soviet Union had bequeathed a backward ideological legacy on the question of homosexuality, "The socialist revolution is a permanent revolution, one of continuous change. Along with many other changes that need to be made in the socialist countries, the gay question is surely one of them.

"In the meantime, we ought to concentrate on preparing our own revolution, of which the struggle for the liberation of all oppressed people, including gay people, is an indispensable condition for victory of the revolution."

Next: Historic WWP contribution: Publication of "The Gay Question" by Bob McCubbin

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA WWP's support for early gay liberation

Party-wide education campaign in 1972

Lavender & red, part 81

By Leslie Feinberg Published Dec 10, 2006 9:29 PM

In the months after Workers World Party's August 1972 conference at which founder Sam Marcy motivated the historic importance of supporting the gay liberation struggle, "Comrades hammered out some important goals for our work," writes Bob McCubbin.



McCubbin—who had founded the Gay Caucus of WWP's youth group Youth Against War & Fascism (YAWF) a year earlier—stresses that, "First and foremost, we wanted to show our support for the gay liberation movement in every way we could."

He recalls, "If we step back for a minute and consider all the struggles in which Workers World Party and its youth group were involved at this time—building anti-imperialist opposition to the U.S. war against Vietnam in the streets; supporting and defending the Black Panther Party and other revolutionary organizations of oppressed peoples in the U.S.; exposing the prison-industrial complex, publicizing the cases of the many political prisoners, and defending the political organizing



New York City: Way back in 1972, Workers World's youth group, Youth Against War & Fascism (YAWF), had already been part of the struggle in the streets for gay liberation.

going on in the prisons through the Prisoners' Solidarity Committee; actively aiding anti-war and anti-racist organizing within the U.S. military, most importantly, by providing strong organizational and political support for the American Servicemen's Union; supporting workers' struggles and union organizing and establishing the Center for United Labor Action; providing active leadership, encouragement and ideological support to the growing women's movement; and educating those we could reach on the many other struggles erupting throughout the world, including our principled defense of Cuba, the Soviet Union and People's China—the ability of the party to take up the issue of lesbian and gay liberation in the sustained, serious and fully committed way it was done is truly remarkable."

YAWF organized its own contingent in the 1972 Pride march in New York City, and party members of all sexualities, genders and sexes have marched together under the YAWF/WWP banners every year since.

Nowadays, McCubbin states, many glad-handing capitalist politicians, religious groups and businesses—large and small—want to be seen at the huge yearly Pride marches. "But back then it was largely the politically conscious members of the LGBT communities, mostly the youth, who made up the ranks of these grassroots

marches.'

Being principled wasn't easy

In the decades since, the LGBT struggle has gained strength and wrested many victories, attracting broader support. But at that time WWP's stand in the movement was unique among the left parties and was not based on any short-term organizational or political advantages. It took principles to be a communist in the gay liberation movement and simultaneously to be for gay liberation in the radical and communist movement—including the self-described "New Left."

When McCubbin left San Francisco to work in the WWP national office in Manhattan in 1971, he explains, "The gay movement in New York had a very different character from the movement that I left in San Francisco. It was easy for me as an openly communist activist to participate fully in the San Francisco movement. The whole climate, at least among the youth, was very open, very radical, and there was no single dominant organization."

He explains that as the movement developed, party activists in some cities were caught between the anti-communism of more politically moderate and conservative lesbian and gay groups and the anti-gay prejudices that many other left organizations had not yet examined.

As a result, McCubbin states, as the gay liberation movement grew, "All left organizations were viewed, to one extent or another, with suspicion or open hostility. We were very much at pains to always act in a principled and supportive way, and with our very limited human and material resources, we couldn't always do much more than simply show support for the lesbian and gay struggles with our physical presence at protests."

However, he emphasizes, "There was a group that was much easier for us to relate to when I first arrived in New York: the Third World Gay Liberation Front, composed of revolutionary Cuban, Argentinean, Puerto Rican and Mexican trans people, lesbians and gay men. Unfortunately, they were only in active existence for a short period."

McCubbin stressed that WWP's 1972 national conference "marked the beginning of a party-wide effort to educate ourselves and our class on this issue. As Marxists we know that it is the struggle that is the great educator, and the new movement of lesbians and gays and transgender people was providing lessons in abundance about the situation of people historically oppressed because of their sexual orientation and their gender variance. But it is important to note that at this time the main focus of the gay liberation movement was on sexual, not gender, expression. Although trans people were involved in the movement, and often stood out as the most dedicated and militant, the issue of gender variation was often, unfortunately, sidelined and/or misunderstood."

As the struggle was educating and raising consciousness, Workers World Party was on the eve of making a historic contribution to gay liberation.

Next: 1972: Marxism is as Marxism does—WWP begins analysis of lesbian/gay oppression.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Applying Marxist method in early 1970s

WWP searched for roots of lesbian/gay oppression

Lavender & red, part 82

By Leslie Feinberg Published Dec 12, 2006 8:23 AM

In educating the party as a whole on the importance of supporting gay liberation, Workers World Party (WWP) founder Sam Marcy noted in 1972 that, when it came to the origins and development of this oppression, "No special Marxist study or theory has been advanced as far as we know."



Marcy stressed, "Marxists, of course, should reject any variety of bourgeois psychological theories. Most of these psychological approaches are in reality extensions of the general bourgeois ideology.

"Marxists on the other hand are historical and dialectical materialists who seek the basic causes of all social phenomena from material conditions, of which psychology is a mere reflection. Marxists deal with social phenomena and the struggle of classes."

He referred to the contributions that the revolutionary Marxist movement had made to the "national question." He was referring to the Marxist examination and articulation of the origins of racism, white supremacist ideology, oppressor nation jingoism and xenophobia, the oppression of whole nations in the capitalist era, the super-oppression of peoples around the world in the colonial and imperialist epochs, and therefore the right to national self-determination.

Marcy also mentioned Marxist contributions to a materialist understanding of women's oppression—the "woman question." Karl Marx's lifelong collaborator, Frederick Engels, wrote a foundational historical and theoretical contribution in 1884, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State." Revolutionary Marxists since then have continued to develop historical, theoretical and ideological clarity as a contribution to the struggle of women for liberation from the additional burdens imposed on them in patriarchal, class-divided society.

It may jar some readers today to hear their oppression or other struggles referred to as a "question": the national question, the woman question, the gay question. For more than a century, however, this formulation has been used to emphasize the theoretical importance that revolutionary Marxists place on bringing battles against oppression to the left-wing political agenda. Locating the earliest tendrils of oppression in the development of class-divided societies is a profound contribution to eventually uprooting it.

Therefore, Marxists study when oppression arose and who profits from it in order to deepen solidarity and support for liberation struggles and strengthen the revolutionary movement to overturn capitalism. Such an analysis also lays the basis for understanding how a socialist economic system can create the material basis for ultimately winning economic and social liberation from exploitation and oppression, and the extrication of humanity from millennia of divide-and-rule ideology justifying these conditions.

Marcy noted, "We know of no theory which explains the gay question from the



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point of view of the historical class struggle."

He concluded, "If such a theory is developed, we will study it. For the time being, however, we are not advancing any special theory regarding the gay question."

Sam Marcy was not ending the subject, he was opening it.

'Months of discussion followed'

Months of party dialogue followed. Bob McCubbin—a WWP leader who a year earlier had founded the lesbian and gay caucus of the party youth organization, Youth Against War & Fascism (YAWF)—recalls that the continuing party discussion focused on four goals.

The first was how to concretely demonstrate support for, and solidarity with, the autonomous gay liberation movement, of which WWP lesbian, gay and trans members were also a part.

"Second," McCubbin writes, "we wanted to deepen the party's understanding of the issues being raised by the gay liberation movement and, if possible, provide a Marxist analysis of lesbian and gay oppression.

"Third, we felt a serious responsibility to bring the issues that this movement was raising to the general progressive movement, which often amounted to challenging homophobia within the movement.

"Fourth, we wanted to make the issue of gay liberation a working-class issue. This was a formidable challenge in a period of relative labor quiescence."

Many heterosexual party leaders took up these tasks together with their lesbian, gay, bi and trans comrades—no one with more vigor than WWP founding leader Dorothy Ballan, affectionately addressed as "Dottie" by her comrades. Ballan left her own communist imprint on the struggle for women's liberation with the party's publication in January 1971 of her pamphlet "Feminism & Marxism."

McCubbin remembers, "I had felt the need for a theoretical analysis of lesbian and gay oppression from the time I read Engels' 'Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.' I remember very clearly reading [it] at this time, being very excited by this historically based explanation of the oppression of women, and feeling that there must be a parallel, historically based explanation for the oppression of homosexuals."

After the 1972 conference, McCubbin states, many of his heterosexual comrades offered help. Dorothy Ballan in particular, he notes, assigned herself the task of helping to lay the basis for such an analysis.

"As I mentioned above," McCubbin writes, "one of the goals the party set for itself was the education of the party membership and of our class on this issue. So, in addition to informal discussions, Dottie produced a series of educational programs based on Engels' work, but also on our general view of oppressed people and their struggles as part of the overall struggle of our class. These educationals were made available party-wide and were extremely helpful to me in my effort to grapple theoretically with the issue."

In those educationals, Ballan developed the view that there was a connection between women's and lesbian/gay oppression.

McCubbin reminds today's readers, "When I enter LGBT bookstores these days, the wealth of material now available makes me dizzy. In those days, even though I worked in one of the great academic libraries of the U.S. and spent many hours—when I was supposed to be working—instead searching for material relevant to a historical analysis of homosexual oppression, there was heartbreakingly little to be found.

"I spent several years collecting material that might be relevant to a more complete analysis. Many comrades knew I was working on such an analysis and brought relevant material to my attention."

Together—lesbian and gay, bisexual and heterosexual, transgender and transsexual—members of Workers World Party worked to dig for the ancient economic, social and political roots of modern lesbian and gay oppression.

What resulted made a historic contribution to the struggle for liberation from sexual oppression, strengthened the communist left politically, and demonstrated the power of Marxist tools in the hands of workers who know how to use them.

Next: Impact of "The Gay Question," published in 1976.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Impact of 'The Gay Question,' 1976

Marxist analysis rocked U.S. left

Lavender & red, part 83

By Leslie Feinberg Published Dec 19, 2006 9:45 PM

Workers World Party—a revolutionary communist party in the United States made up of people of diverse nationalities and countries of origin, ages and sexes, genders and sexualities—published in 1976 the first known, fully developed Marxist analysis of how, when and why state repression, social

oppression and widespread prejudice against same-sex love arose and developed in human society.

The pamphlet, written by gay WWP leader Bob McCubbin, was originally entitled, "The Gay Question: A Marxist Appraisal."

The title did not mean that fighting lesbian/gay oppression was a question for the author, who was himself an activist in the movement against the oppression, or for Workers World Party as a whole.

The term "gay question" in the title honors more than a century of Marxist analysis that has brought important social issues—including the battle against forms of oppression above and beyond the overall economic exploitation of the working class—to the fore of the political movement: the national question, the woman question, the housing question. Those who have been introduced to a vulgarization of Marxism offering merely a mechanistic and simplistic view of the relationship between economic and social life—economic determinism—will be pleased to know that.

"The Gay Question" established a foundation and a framework for understanding why repression and oppression of people who love and/or desire people of the same sex rose and developed in human history.

It was not the first time a sexually oppressed Marxist attempted to look back over the vista of history to find clues.

A century earlier homosexual British socialist Edward Carpenter began to dig into history, sifting for answers.

The leaders of the late 19th and early 20th century German Homosexual Emancipation movement did, too. Many of its leaders identified as socialists. At the height of the movement—the eve of fascism in Germany—the Scientific Humanitarian Committee had compiled more than 12,000 books that included cross-cultural and cross-historical references about same-sex love and gender variance. How many analyses were researched and penned in that precious archive before German fascist forces—on their march to power to save and serve big capital—burned it to the ground?

Gay communist Harry Hay founded the first-known widespread grassroots gay movement in California at the height of the Cold War witch-hunt in the United States. He also brought his Marxist tools to history and unearthed a wealth of information. But Hay, who had to leave the Communist Party USA in order to



openly do gay mass organizing, was later driven out of that activist role by gay anti-communists. Many of Hay's public historical presentations appear to be lost to the record.

Marxist analyses about the violent colonial and imperialist suppression of indigenous sexualities and genders may have been developed. But if so, attempts at cultural genocide by the occupier nation prevented international publication and circulation.

Part of what was so significant about the 1975-1976 Marxist analysis in the United States written by McCubbin was that he was a leading member of Workers World Party and he didn't have to leave the party to publicly formulate a Marxist analysis of lesbian/gay oppression. He had the whole party behind him and behind the politics of the book.

While one member of the organization authored the pamphlet, it represented the contributions of the entire party.

Looking back, McCubbin states, "In the fall of 1975, I finally felt I had, at least minimally, what I needed and sat down to write." He recalls finishing the first edition of the manuscript in early winter.

McCubbin gave copies of the analysis, which so many comrades of all sexualities had contributed to in ways small and large, to WWP founders Sam Marcy and Dorothy Ballan, and to Fred Goldstein, today a contributing editor to Workers World newspaper. McCubbin said the feedback from these comrades—"whose profound grounding in the science of Marxism and whose analytical abilities I have always admired"—was extremely positive.

The impact of this Marxist analysis on the left-wing movement, and lesbian and gay self-identified radicals and revolutionaries within it, was first politically felt just one month later, in a pre-publication edition of the pamphlet.

A delegation of lesbian/gay/transgender and heterosexual members of Workers World Party traveled by bus from New York City to Chicago through a blizzard to take part in the January 1976 "Hard Times" conference. As part of their political work at the conference, they sold all 300 xeroxed copies of the pamphlet they'd brought with them.

What made the defense of the lesbian and gay liberation struggle at that event particularly important, McCubbin emphasizes, "was that this conference was a gathering of most of what remained of what was called 'the New Left'—the radical youth movement of the late sixties and early seventies."

It was not an easy task to politically intervene in the conference with a strong Marxist call to defend lesbian and gay liberation as a dynamically integral and necessary part of battling capitalism—economically and socially, politically and ideologically.

Many white activists there, even those who were lesbian or gay themselves, tried to argue that this oppression was of "secondary" or "tertiary" importance in the overall struggle for liberation.

"It's hard to understand," McCubbin notes, "but even at this late date—1976—there was still strong resistance within the progressive movement to acknowledging the legitimacy of the struggles of lesbians and gay men for full equality."

Workers World Party's principled position as part of

and in solidarity with the lesbian/gay liberation move-ment of the early and mid-1970s strongly influenced both the left wing of the communist movement and the left wing of the autonomous movement for sexual liberation.

Next: 'The Gay Question': Blazing history's trails

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 'The Gay Question,' published in 1976

Marxist analysis blazed history's trails

Lavender & red, part 84

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jan 5, 2007 9:10 PM

For more than 30 years I have looked for an opportunity to publicly thank Bob McCubbin—a white gay brother; intrepid activist/organizer against repression and oppression; working-class intellectual; grassroots historian; dialectical and historical materialist; a revolutionary; a communist; my comrade—for

writing "The Gay Question: A Marxist Appraisal" in the autumn and winter of 1975.

I can close my eyes and remember, in visceral detail, the moment I began reading a xeroxed, pre-publication copy on a bitter wintry night in late January 1976.

I was curled up in a bus seat on an 18-hour ride from New York to Chicago. We revolutionary activists were slowly making our way to the "Hard Times" conference in a blizzard, without heat. The glass window near my cheek was slick with ice.

In a small cone of light, I read these words, and my eyes filled with tears: "Anti-homosexual prejudices have not always existed and need not continue to exist in the future."

I cried as I read the rest of the xeroxed manuscript, all night long, moved by emotional release and ideological exhilaration.

As a young blue-collar lesbian butch, I had survived growing up in the 1950s Cold War ideological and state witch hunt against communists and militants, against same-sex love and against any body or gender expression that sketched outside the lines of 1950s' Dick-and-Jane gender education.

If I had been taught anything at all about Marxism in my high school classes, it was that that worldview was dogma, moldering and hoary with irrelevance, and that factory workers like me wouldn't be able to understand a word of it.

But in these pages, I found my life, my love, my class, a genuine basis for solidarity with everyone battling oppression—here and around the planet—and a materialist compass that pointed the direction toward liberation.

Marxist vantage point of history

"Even before the formation of the Gay Caucus of Youth Against War & Fascism in 1971," McCubbin wrote, "our gay and straight comrades were actively supporting the struggle against gay oppression. We didn't need a formal position paper to have it made clear to us that gay people were oppressed and that their struggle should be supported.

"Nevertheless, it is important to bring communist understanding to every social phenomenon and class consciousness to every struggle. These are the objectives of the present book."



"To understand how homosexuality has come to be viewed the way it is today," he wrote, "it is important to examine the changing historical periods and their impact on sexual attitudes in general as well as on homosexuality."

Every phenomenon has a history, McCubbin stressed.

"[D]evelopment and transformation are characteristic of everything that exists. We believe that the uncovering of the history of homosexual oppression will be helpful in bringing that oppression to an end."

The pamphlet focused on societies in what is termed the Western world. "The reason for this," McCubbin explained in the 1976 publication, "is that the information available to us concerning homosexuality in non-Western societies is sparse and often subject to disparate interpretations. It does seem clear, however, that nowhere else have attitudes towards homosexuality been as profoundly negative as they are in Western society."

The Marxist vantage point in this pamphlet lifted me up to a mountaintop overlooking the rolling development of hundreds of thousands of years of human history: pre-class cooperative societies, chattel slavery, feudalism, capitalism.

From there I could see for the first time that during the major portion of that long, long history, human beings worked in group cooperation on every continent. That simple but profound fact created social relations very different than those in capitalist societies today.

Thinking back, that was the most startling realization of all for me in this pamphlet. It meant that human beings were not hard-wired as a species for competition and greed, cruelty and violence. Society had not always been divided by classes, driven by avarice. Social life had changed many times based on the overall economic organization of society.

No wonder my high school facts-by-rote history education concealed this particularly earthshaking fact like a dense fog. The understanding it awakens is downright "subversive." If things have not always been the way they are now, then they can, and will, profoundly change again.

Next: Surplus produced bosses, lords and masters

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Roots of sexual oppression

1976 WWP pamphlet found answers in Marxism

Lavender & red, part 85

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jan 10, 2007 11:15 PM

The profound and meaningful contribution of Workers World Party's 1976 publication "The Gay Question: A Marxist Appraisal" was that it examined the roots of modern lesbian and gay oppression from a historical materialist standpoint.



Marxists are often accused of having a worldview that ignores oppression, focusing solely on the economic battle between the owning classes and the laboring classes.

However, "The Gay Question" drew on more than a century of revolutionary Marxist scientific approach to understand how oppression arose and what it will take to eradicate it in all its forms. In doing so, the analysis widened and deepened the application and contributions of Marxism as a science of human economic development and the social relations it has produced.

McCubbin did not have to break fresh soil, he tilled it. Just as Charles Darwin's analysis of evolution created a new scientific understanding of species development, Engels and his life-long collaborator Karl Marx laid the groundwork for a scientific basis to understand social development.

Engels' groundbreaking 1884 work "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" used anthropological evidence from North America, Africa, Asia and Australia to conclude that women have not always been oppressed.

Engels deduced that social interaction was not governed by repression, domination or exploitation of one group of people by another during the long history of cooperative societies that preceded economic divisions between haves and have-nots.

The necessity of early humans to band together for group survival also created very different "family" relations than today. Kinship and group living arrangements were based on female descent, not male. The overall role of females in social organization resulted in respect for their contributions.

As labor efficiency, tools and technique developed, however, human societies accumulated a surplus—more than was required for immediate consumption. The struggle that led to private ownership of this surplus, which had been produced by collective human labor, transformed social life.

"The overthrow of mother-right"—matrilineal cooperative society—Engels summed up, "was the world historic defeat of the female sex."

In the more than 120 years since he wrote this, Marxism has been a powerful tool in the hands of Black, Latin@, Native, Asian and white activists for women's liberation in this country—communists, socialist feminists, materialist feminists and other revolutionaries.

And it has been a powerful ideological and theoretical weapon worldwide.



Respond

African-Caribbean Marxist revolutionary activist, theoretician and internationalist Walter Rodney stressed in 1975 that those who try to relegate Marxism to an outdated European ideology do not take the following into account:

"That it is already the ideology of 800 million Chinese people; that it is already the ideology which guided the Vietnamese people to successful struggle and to the defeat of imperialism. That it is already the ideology which allows North Korea to transform itself from a backward, quasi-feudal, quasi-colonial terrain into an independent industrial power. That it is already the ideology which has been adopted on the Latin American continent and that serves as the basis for development in the Republic of Cuba. That it is already the ideology which was used by Cabral, which was used by Samora Machel, which is in use on the African continent itself to underline and underscore struggle and the construction of a new society." ("Yes to Marxism" pamphlet, February 1986, People's Progressive Party of Guyana)

Roots of sexual oppression

McCubbin presented evidence of acceptance of homosexuality in pre-class societies on far-flung continents. The development of private ownership of the new storehouse of surplus "not only brought forth economic inequalities that set the stage for class society but also had the effect of replacing the matriarchal order with one dominated by men."

"The new property relations were," he emphasized, "insupportable and unworkable without consequent changes in kinship relations, sexual relations, and religious attitudes and practices."

McCubbin traced the historic rise of state repression of sexuality and anti-homosexual patriarchal religious bigotry to the cleavage of society into economic classes.

He laid a historical materialist foundation for understanding how chattel slavery came into being, why the feudal Church unleashed the bloody Inquisition and how these phases in human economic development increasingly repressed and oppressed sexuality.

Contributions to trans theory and activism

Of course the 1976 pamphlet—and even its reprint 17 years later as "The Roots of Lesbian and Gay Oppression: A Marxist View"—is now dated in some of its language and peripheral concepts—true of all scientific discoveries which help pave the road forward.

McCubbin's analysis was ahead of its time in including focus on the honored status in cooperative societies of gender-variance and in its defense of the rights of modern transsexual women and men to live in the sex that is "home."

The analysis was weakened, however, by two realities. First, the modern transgender and transsexual movement in the U.S. had not yet developed. And sex-reassignment programs only accepted transsexual individuals whose sexuality would be heterosexual in post-transition. This skewed an understanding of the fact that sexual diversity is as much a fact among transsexual men and women as everywhere else in society.

Workers World Party continued to struggle to actively defend transsexual and transgender people against oppression, through banners at demonstrations, articles, leaflets and pamphlets that culminated in the 1992 publication of "Trans Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come."

The entire text of that pamphlet has been reprinted in two anthologies: "Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference and Women's Lives," edited by Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham (Routledge, 1997) and "The Transgender Studies Reader," edited by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle

(Routledge, 2006).

The later anthology described the 1992 pamphlet as "small but influential," adding that, "It is an important foundational text of contemporary transgender theory and activism."

The pamphlet, and the larger book it inspired—"Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman" (Beacon 1996)—made their own contribution to Marxism. The historical materialist analysis offered compelling and consistent evidence that although there was an overall division of labor between females and males in pre-class societies, sex reassignment, intersexuality and gender diversity played an important social role on every continent.

Like evolutionary science, when Marxist understanding of human economic development and the social organization that arises from it is updated, this only strengthens its analysis, despite "creationist" attacks of every ideological stripe.

Workers World Party has continued to stress that battles against oppression are not "secondary" to the class struggle, they are a form of class struggle, particularly when they target the capitalist class.

Feinberg is author of "Transgender Liberation" and "Transgender Warriors."

Next: Defending the Cuban Revolution!

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1970s Cold War gaybashers condemn Cuba

Lavender & red, part 86

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jan 20, 2007 7:20 PM

Bob McCubbin, a young gay male leader in Workers World Party during the rise of the early gay liberation movement, recalls, "By having regular articles in Workers World, attending gay protests, producing and distributing flyers addressing lesbian and gay issues, giving extra visibility to gay comrades, organizing branch meetings on related issues, and doing outreach to the lesbian and gay communities, we were successful in attracting many lesbian and gay youth to our ranks in the early and middle 1970s.

"But this work was not without difficulties," McCubbin says. He remembers, in particular, how a stream of articles in the big-business media opened up a campaign against Cuba. Many of the articles focused on the imperialist charge that gay and lesbian Cubans were being mistreated on the island after the 1959 revolution.

The reality is that the Cuban Revolution—which seized state power on an island in which class society, colonialism and imperialism had woven prejudices and repression against same-sex love tightly into the fabric of life—has made tremendous advances for men who love men and women who love women, as well as the struggle against racism and sexism.

The U.S.-led blockade is designed not only to economically strangle the Cuban population, but to keep an understanding of what a revolution can achieve in terms of social progress from lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans people living in the imperialist citadel.

The imperialist propaganda machine doesn't care a whit about the lives of gay and lesbian Cubans. They want to crush the revolution and re-enslave the entire population.

But first, it is impossible to skip over the staggering hypocrisy of U.S. imperialism and its media propaganda machinery. They don't care a whit about lesbian and gay, bisexual and trans lives. They want to crush the revolution and re-enslave the entire population.

Their political duplicity was obvious on the domestic front. In the 1950s, these Cold War capitalists had escalated a state witch hunt against every expression of homosexuality and transgender under the guise of a "Lavender Scare."

Same-sex love was still illegal across the United States. Gay men, lesbians and all gender-variant people faced police raids and entrapment, prison, torture, forced institutionalization, rape and lynchings, loss of jobs, homes and loved ones. (See Lavender & Red series, parts 26-28, www.workers.org.)

But by the 1970s—while cops were still raiding bars after Stonewall and same-sex love was still illegal—the imperialists suddenly became champions of gay rights, anywhere except on their own soil.



The big-business spin made it seem as though the Cuban Revolution was a wellspring of anti-gay prejudice.

"Absent the persistent and pervasive climate of anti-communism," McCubbin stresses, "such attacks would have been laughable, emanating as they did from a country where gay-baiting was an indispensable political tool and where scarcely a week went by without the murder, somewhere within the country, of a transgender person.

"But since the anti-Cuba propaganda campaign was relentless and did have a negative effect on many people, including many lesbian and gay youth, we felt a serious responsibility to answer and challenge these articles, and we did, just as we conscientiously defended the other socialist countries, and in particular the Soviet Union, from the steady stream of anti-communist attacks.

"So we were often challenged by progressive youth, gay and straight, 'You support Cuba?' The more serious listened carefully to what we had to say in Cuba's defense, but we were also badmouthed frequently by anti-communist elements in the gay movement."

An understanding of the Cuban Revolution, and the hand it was dealt by imperialism, is as important today as it was then. It demonstrates what a revolution can achieve, even when surrounded and under siege by imperialism.

The truth to begin with is this: Communists did not bring anti-homosexual prejudice to the Americas. The development of class societies and colonialism did.

Next: Arrival of colonialism in the Americas—the real "Apocalypto."

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Anti-gay, anti-trans Inquisition in the Americas

Colonialism: the real 'Apocalypto'

Lavender & red, part 87

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jan 26, 2007 6:11 PM

From Indigenous oral histories, passed down through millennia, to the hostile accounts kept by colonial record keepers, a great deal of evidence exists to show that sex/gender variance and homosexuality were part of the fabric of early cooperative societies in the Americas—from pole to pole.



What is significant about the abundant European colonial records—whether military, missionary or anthropological—is not their perception, objectivity or accuracy in describing life among the diverse Native societies in this hemisphere. It's that these observations by the Europeans and their reactions to homosexuality and gender/sex variance in Native cultures—reflected in terms like "devilish," "sinful," "perverted," "abominable," "unnatural," "heinous," "disgusting," "lewd"—reveal how different were the societies they came from.

The "observed" were peoples who lived in societies that were either communal or were in the early stages of class division.

The "observers" came as military, commercial or intellectual servants of entrenched European ruling classes that were expanding beyond their own hemisphere to steal the golden fruits of the Native peoples' labor.

In Europe, where most communal lands had been seized by slave-owners and then feudal landlords, state laws and repression against same-sex love and sex/gender variance had been part of this centuries-old class warfare.

From south to north

Colonial observations about Indigenous societies in this hemisphere are copious. Those with imperial aspirations studied the peoples they sought to militarily conquer and enslave.



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A 1594 engraving of Balboa's Inquisition terror in Panama against homosexuality and gender/sex variance—in this case, being torn apart by dogs.

Engraving: New York Public Library

When a European colonial expedition in 1576 reached the lands of the Tupinamba people in what is now northeastern Brazil, they found female-bodied hunters and warriors who were accepted by the other Native men. Recalling the Greek Amazon warriors, the Europeans dubbed the river that flowed through



that area the "River of the Amazons."

Narrating his first trip down another river, now called the Mississippi, Jesuit Jacques Marquette described in the 17th century how, among the Illinois and Nadouessi, he found people who today would be referred to as Two-Spirit. Marquette wrote that they were "summoned to the Councils, and nothing can be decided without their advice. Finally, through their profession of Leading an Extraordinary life, they pass for Manitous—That is to say, for Spirits—or persons of Consequence."

French missionary Joseph François Lafitau condemned the Two-Spirit people he found in societies along the western Great Lakes, Louisiana and Florida, but these Native peoples did not share his prejudice. He wrote in 1724 that "they participate in all religious ceremonies, and this profession of an extraordinary life causes them to be regarded as people of a higher order."

But in areas where ruling classes had emerged and consolidated their territory, sometimes after the violent overturn of neighboring communal societies, these attitudes had changed.

Historian Max Mejía wrote, "In the Aztec culture of pre-Hispanic Mexico, the dominant culture at the time the Spanish arrived, the treatment of sodomy was not exactly favorable. On the contrary, the Aztecs had very harsh laws against it, punishing the practice severely with public execution for those who were caught. Punishment affected mainly males, but women were not exempt." ("Mexican Pink," Different Rainbows, Gay Men's Press)

Friar Bartolomé de las Casas noted that among the Aztecs, "The man who dressed as a woman, or the woman found dressed with men's clothes, died because of this."

"However," Mejía explained, "there were exceptions to the Aztecs' rules against homosexuality. Most historians agree that the practice was tolerated when it took place in religious rituals."

Mejía added, "[T]he Aztecs ruled over a vast array of peoples, who had different cultural histories. Several of these did not necessarily share the Aztecs' vision of homosexuality and its practice. Some even showed signs of singular tolerance towards it in their communities. One of these was the Zapotec culture, derived from the Mayans and located in what is now the state of Oaxaca."

He emphasized, "[W]hat I am trying to show is that in pre-Hispanic Mexico, alongside the rigid Aztecs, there existed—and there exist still today—other, more flexible cultures more tolerant of homosexuality."

The real "Apocalypto"

When it came to sexuality, Mejía stated: "[T]he Mayans had a more favorable view of diversity within the community, which suggests greater tolerance of homosexuality, above all when it concerned religious rituals and artistic practices."

Recently, director Mel Gibson made a movie called "Apocalypto" about the Mayan empire, as experienced by a family from a nearby hunting-gathering society being chased by its warriors.

Gibson's movie ideologically serves those in the U.S. who yearn for a Fourth Reich, much as Leni Riefenstahl's films did for imperialist Nazi capital.

"Apocalypto," which depicts the Mayans as inherently blood-thirsty, is being screened in the citadel of the most blood-thirsty imperialist power in history. It arrives in chain theaters in the U.S. at a time when Lou Dobbs and other white-supremacist propagandists are pitching classical fascist appeals to the middle-class in this country to view Mexican@ immigrants as "the enemy within."

It also airs as U.S. finance capital has unleashed its war machine to recolonize

Iraq and Afghanistan under the banner of a "war on terror."

"Apocalypto" is pro-imperialist propaganda, making colonialism synonymous with salvation. The film ends with the Spanish fleet appearing on the horizon to save the day.

But when the lights come up, it is colonialism and imperialism that are the real historical "Apocalyptos."

Colonialism brings Inquisition

The patriarchs of colonial power violently restructured the Indigenous societies they militarily conquered—in economic organization, kinship, family/community organization, sexualities, gender and sex roles—in order to best facilitate their enslavement, exploitation and oppression.

Mejía stated that with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors, "An absolutist discourse enveloped homosexuality in the concepts of 'infamous sin,' 'sin against nature,' corruption of the soul and alliance with the devil. They punished the practice without distinctions, among both lay people and clerics."

This religious ideology and the ethos of male supremacy, he said, corresponded to the war-driven European social order.

"Furthermore," Mejía concludes, "the conquerors treated 'sodomy' as a special Indian sin and hunted it down and punished it as such on a grand scale. They orchestrated crusades like the Holy Inquisition, which began burning sodomites at the stake as a special occasion, as in the memorable auto-da-fé of San Lázaro in Mexico City."

This bloody crusade of terror is confirmed in the colonizers' own words.

Antonio de la Calancha, a Spanish official in Lima, wrote that during Vasco Núñez de Balboa's incursion across Panama, he "saw men dressed like women; Balboa learnt that they were sodomites and threw the king and forty others to be eaten by his dogs, a fine action of an honorable and Catholic Spaniard."

When the Spanish invaded the Antilles and Louisiana, "[T]hey found men dressed as women who were respected by their societies. Thinking they were hermaphrodites, or homosexuals, they slew them."

Native peoples throughout this hemisphere fought back.

Conquistador Nuño de Guzmán noted in 1530 after a battle that the last Indigenous person taken prisoner, who had "fought most courageously, was a man in the habit of a woman."

Next: Colonialism, imperialism shackle Cuba.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Colonial period in Cuba

Bodies shackled and repressed

Lavender & red, part 88

By Leslie Feinberg Published Feb 4, 2007 9:25 PM

Colonialism, and later imperialism, brought anti-homosexual and anti-trans laws and state repression to Cuba. The deep bite of the knotted lash of oppressor ideology backed it up.

For over 300 years, Spanish colonialism shackled the laboring population of Cuba, literally claiming ownership of the lives, labor and bodies of millions.

The enslaved toilers were from the Indigenous peoples of the island, decimated by the colonialist forces that washed up on their shores, and also African peoples—survivors of mass kidnappings from their homelands and of the Middle Passage holocaust.

Using Bibles as well as bullets, those who bled the labor of the enslaved class literally "laid down the law"—reshaping and regulating every aspect of life for the enslaved class, including economic structure, kinship recognition, marriage, organization of the sexes, sexuality and gender expression.

Colonial terror, under the banner of religious law, enforced the brutal remodeling of economic and social life among peoples from diverse societies that the colonialists, and later imperialists, sought to conquer and exploit.

The following historical footnote underscores the importance the colonial occupiers placed on eradicating the "pecado nefando"—the "nefarious sin" of same-sex love and/or gender/sex variance.

In order to petition Havana's town council in 1597 for his freedom, an enslaved man argued that he had "rendered a valuable service by discovering and denouncing those who had committed the 'pecado nefando.'" (Alejandro de la Fuente, Law and History Review)

Santería was one form of resistance to colonial cultural imperialism. It used the trappings of Roman Catholicism to shelter African religious beliefs and rituals—which make room for very different sex/gender expression.

Havana: cross-dressing labor leader arrested

In the mid-1600s, the Spanish Captain General who ruled over the rural and urban enslaved population sentenced 20 "effeminate sodomites" to be burned to death.

Others were exiled to Cayo Cruz, a small island in Havana Bay, which was thereafter referred to in Spanish by an anti-gay slur.

Historian Amara Das Wilhelm added, "Similar disparaging attitudes toward homosexuals were expressed in a 1791 Havana newspaper article entitled 'A Critical Letter About the Man-Woman,' which condemned the effeminate sodomites that apparently thrived in eighteenth-century Havana." (The Gay and



Lesbian Vaishnava Association online)

U.S. imperialism militarily occupied Cuba for four years, beginning in 1898. From 1902 until the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Wall Street ruled by establishing dictatorships to squeeze the island's economy in its fist, restructuring Cuba for exploitation as a giant sugar plantation.

Laws against same-sex love and gender variance and state repression continued to be used as a cudgel for economic, social and political control.

Cross-dressing Puerto Rican labor organizer Luisa Capetillo was arrested in Havana in July 1915 for wearing men's clothing.

Capetillo was a single mother, a revolutionary, and a much-loved and respected labor organizer.

After supporting the 1905 farm workers' strike in the northern region of Puerto Rico, she became a reader in a tobacco plant, an industry whose workers were among the most politically conscious. She also spoke in public about the needs of working women, including the right to sex education. She strongly believed that sexuality was not the business of the church or the state.



Luisa Capetillo

As a full-time labor organizer after 1912, Capetillo traveled extensively, particularly to Havana, Tampa and New York because they were hubs of the tobacco workers' movement.

In Cuba, Capetillo actively supported a sugar cane workers' strike organized by the Anarchist Federation of Cuba.

The Cuban government tried unsuccessfully to deport her as an agitator.

Then it focused on her wearing of a "man's" suit, tie and fedora in public to charge her with "causing a scandal."

Capetillo fought the charge, arguing in court that no law prevented her from wearing men's garb, and that such clothing was appropriate for the changing role of women in society, and that she had worn similar clothing in the streets of Puerto Rico and Mexico without state intervention.

Capetillo won her court battle—the judge ordered the charges dropped. News of her victory spread in articles in all the major newspapers in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Historian Aurora Levins Morales concluded, "The incident received massive press coverage, and Capetillo used it as an opportunity to attack conventional morality, with its rigid sex roles, and women's imprisonment within it."

In 1938, the Cuban Penal Code—the "Public Ostentation Law"—was enacted. This law mandated state penalties for "habitual homosexual acts," public displays of same-sex affection and/or gender-variant dress and self-expression.

Next: Gambling, narcotics, prostitution industries in pre-revolutionary Cuba.

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1950s Havana: Imperialist sexploitation

Lavender & red, part 89

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Feb 11, 2007 7:34 PM

For 400 years of Cuba's history, the social organization and state regulation of the sexes, gender expression and sexualities was—as among all occupied and colonized peoples—in thrall to the brutal systems of exploitation by semi-feudal landlords, capitalist bosses and imperialist finance capitalists.



By the mid-20th century, the impoverishment sweeping the island was the outgrowth of imperialism's conversion of the economy into sugar and citrus plantations and nickel mines that shackled the rural laboring population to the soil and the earth below it.

Havana exerted a gravitational pull on those who cut cane from sunup to sundown. By the 1950s, the promise of jobs attracted hundreds of thousands of impoverished peasants of all sexualities, genders and sexes to the urban capital, the largest city on the island.

Many tens of thousands whose sexuality or gender expression had made them publicly vulnerable and without privacy in rural towns and villages found employment in Havana. Capitalist organized crime bosses ran an interlocking directorate of large-scale prostitution, tourism, gambling and drug distribution in the capital city.

In the 1950s, McCarthyite repression in the U.S.—including the Puritanical purges and state repression carried out under the banner of fighting a "Lavender Menace"—spurred the expansion of this lucrative offshore capitalist sex-drugsgambling industry in Havana for the rich and powerful to escape the Cold War climate.

"Not surprisingly, then," researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich stressed, "Cuban homosexuals had preferential hiring treatment in the Havana tourist sector in order to meet the demands" of U.S. businessmen and brass.

Arguelles and Rich published their extensively researched report, entitled "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience," in the summer of 1984.

The two researchers added that the illegal prostitution industry was also created for the patriarchs and scions of the Cuban elite, who sought feminine malebodied youth and adults.

In the towns and villages, sexuality, gender and the organization of the sexes were in the servitude of patriarchal feudal social relations. In the urban capital, sex was reduced to the nexus of patriarchal capitalist relations.

Arguelles and Rich explained: "Even in the Havana of the 1950s, everyday life was not easy for the working-class or petty-bourgeois homosexual. Unemployment was high and had been steadily increasing throughout the decade. The scarcity of productive occupations demanded a strictly closeted



occupational life. For all women, and especially for lesbians, employment almost invariably entailed continual sexual harassment."

Men who had sex with men and women who had sex with women were caught up in the dragnet of the illegal economy.

Arguelles and Rich noted: "Apart from employment realities, social pressures made thousands of pre-revolutionary homosexuals part of this underworld. Even homosexuals such as students (who were differently placed) were integrated into this subculture through the bars that they frequented: the St. Michel, the Dirty Dick, El Gato Tuerto." Most of these bars were owned by crime bosses.

The researchers emphasized, "The commodification of homosexual desire in the Havana underworld and in the bourgeois homosexual underground during the pre-revolutionary era, however, did not produce a significant toleration of homosexual life-styles in the larger social arena.

Homosexual and gender/sex variant Cubans met with violence and harassment in the above-ground industries and within the patriarchal family structure. "If legal sanctions and official harassment were rare," Arguelles and Rich explained, "this tolerance was due less to social acceptance than to overriding considerations of profit and the economic interests of the underworld that dominated the Cuban political apparatus."

"The consumer structure of the Havana underworld never spawned a 'gay culture' or 'gay sensibility' even in strictly commercial terms, due to its isolation from the mainstream of social life and the degree of guilt and self-hatred afflicting its members."

Arguelles and Rich concluded that Santería—African-Cuban religious beliefs and practices that challenge the colonialist and imperialist sex/gender and sexuality systems—has been a "favored form of gender transcendence for many Cuban homosexual men and lesbians."

Next: Cuban Revolution defeats imperialist mega-giant.

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Unweaving the lies

Why many Cuban gay men and lesbians left after 1959

Lavender & red, part 90

By Leslie Feinberg Published Feb 17, 2007 7:47 AM

Significant numbers of Cuban homosexual males and females, including many who were transgender, began leaving the island immediately after the July 26 Movement overthrew the hated U.S.-backed Batista regime in 1959. The U.S. big-business media pointed their microphones at counter-revolutionary claims that anti-gay terror drove them to flee.



This reactionary political propaganda was a cover for a dirty war by imperialism to carry out "regime change" in Cuba. It also was aimed at demoralizing the multinational, revolutionary wing of the young gay liberation movement in the

This political and ideological campaign to paint Cuba as a cruel and oppressive dictatorship was crafted by Cold War capitalists who were themselves carrying out a ruthless domestic war against same-sex love and gender variance.

Before the Cuban Revolution, U.S. finance capital had installed two iron-fisted dictatorships in order to grease the gears of exploitation: Gerardo Machado in the late 1920s and Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s. For a cut of the profits, these brutal regimes served the rule of U.S. sugar, nickel and citrus companies and made it possible for the imperialists to own the banks, telephone and electric systems and big retail stores.

U.S. crime bosses ran the lucrative large-scale sex industry and interconnected casinos and drug distribution. Tens of thousands of Cuban women, men and children of all sexualities served the desires of wealthy and powerful tourists from the U.S. and on the island.

Cold War anti-gay and anti-trans purges and persecution in the U.S. created the demand for an offshore prostitution network in Havana that exploited large numbers of men and boys, the majority of them feminine, for profit.

The revolution that took state power on Jan. 1, 1959, shut down the sex industry and casinos. The workers and peasants of Cuba faced a massive taskrestructuring their economy to meet the needs of all, which meant creating jobs, land reform, food, clothing, housing, medical care, basic literacy and higher education.

This work had to be done while imperialism tried to take away every tool through economic strangulation, military encirclement and siege.

Seeking scientific understanding

Researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich made an important analytical contribution in the mid-1980s to understanding why many Cuban homosexuals left after the revolution-and why many stayed.

The two researchers took a scientific approach, accruing data through historical

analysis, survey, field and experiential methods. They interpreted the results "within a theoretical framework drawn from lesbian-feminist and critical gay scholarship and the politico-economic and phenomenological study of Cuban social life."

Between 1979 and 1984 Arguelles and Rich interviewed Cubans on the island and émigrés in the United States, Spain, Mexico and Puerto Rico. The report on the research, titled "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience," was first published in the summer of 1984 in "Signs, A Journal of Women in Culture and Society."

The two researchers said their goals were to reveal the nature and dynamics of the Cuban homosexual experience in order to put the questions of same-sex love in Cuba, migration and resettlement in context.

They also sought to develop greater understanding of same-sex love in what were at that time referred to as Third World countries and communities, and to further develop theory "on the nature of the relationships between the structures of sexuality and the corresponding structures of socialist organization."

This is what they found.

Attempt to discredit the revolution

The role of economic incentive and individual ambition—powerful stimulants for all migration from poorer to wealthier countries—was seldom considered when it came to Cuban homosexual émigrés.

Arguelles and Rich wrote, "The more structuralist explanations for international population movements, which stress the role of capital and of capitalist states in organizing migratory flows from less developed to more developed economies, have yet to be invoked in the interpretation of gay migration from Cuba."

Washington had passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1952, which specifically mandated blocking entry or expelling "sexually deviant" immigrants. But when it came to Cuban homosexuals, Arguelles and Rich noted, "Then, as now, anticommunism won out."

Wealthy homosexual male Cubans, who before the revolution had spent extensive periods abroad, left the island for good. "Emigration began immediately. The promoters and overlords of the Havana underworld along with large numbers of their displaced workers (many of them homosexuals) headed for Miami. Many lesbians who had liaisons with members of the bourgeoisie followed their male protectorate to Miami, as did gay men who had worked for U.S. firms or had done domestic work for the native bourgeoisie."

The two researchers point out that Cuban "refugee" testimony became "the main source for evaluation of Cuban gay life, despite knowledge of the pressures on émigrés to testify to political persecution in their country of origin in order to attain the legal and economic advantages of refugee status in their new country."

These narratives were then amplified as part of an imperialist propaganda campaign calculated to neutralize "badly needed support for the Cuban revolution among its natural allies," Arguelles and Rich wrote. In addition, the propaganda campaign "legitimated the presence in traditionally liberation circles of some of the more reactionary elements within the Cuban émigré population."

They added that it obscured changing realities of gay life in Cuba as part of the ongoing revolutionary process, made the historical inheritance of the pre-revolutionary political economy and homophobia seem irrelevant, and helped to disguise the oppression and exploitation of gay and lesbian Cubans living in émigré enclaves.

The campaign also distanced "gay activists in capitalist mainstream culture from

minority gays involved in the liberation movements of their respective countries and national communities."

And lastly, this scapegoating of Cuba "has made the growing number of progressive gay émigrés who criticize but also support the revolution into living contradictions: invisible to gay liberation forces but easy targets for the homophobic anti-Castro army in exile."

While many left the island, many others stayed.

Arguelles and Rich concluded, "Other homosexuals, especially those from working-class backgrounds or students from petty-bourgeois families, worked to integrate themselves into the revolution."

They stressed, "For these homosexuals, class and class interests were perceived as more elemental aspects of their identity than homosexual behavior. And the revolution spoke to these interests and this identity."

There was work for all, free health care, free education, affordable housing and tremendous cultural growth.

Cuban lesbians, some of whom had played an important role in the prerevolutionary urban struggle, also benefited from the great gains being made by and for women.

Next: Homosexuality, revolution and counter-revolution.

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Early Cuban Revolution paved road to sexual liberation

Lavender & red, part 91

By Leslie Feinberg Published Feb 21, 2007 10:49 PM

The first revolutionary step toward the liberation of sexuality, gender expression and oppressed sexes in Cuba was the dismantling of the sex-for-profit industry and interconnected gambling dens and drug-distribution networks. This concrete, material first act by the Cuban Revolution unshackled human bodies, desire and gender expression from capitalist commodification, commercialization and exploitation.

For almost half a millennium the island had been manacled by colonialism, capitalism and imperialism. The holds of their ships brought enslaved peoples from Africa. Their advanced weaponry was cocked and trained on the enslaved laborers. The ideological lash of the Roman Catholic Church sliced to the bone. White supremacist, racist ideology, patriarchal oppression of women and state-enforced repression against same-sex love ruled the economic and social order.

Just as colonialism and imperialism left the island's fertile soil cultivated as a single-crop plantation, class enslavement tilled the fields of culture.

When the revolutionary process began, it had to start from there.

Before the 1959 Revolution, the burgeoning sector of the Cuban economy was Havana's prostitution industry, booming with Cold War consumption—the largest in the Caribbean—and the gambling, drugs and tourism connected to it. U.S. crime syndicate bosses and wealthy Cubans with connections to Batista's regime owned the profitable operations.

Researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich note that this illegal economy "employed more than two hundred thousand workers as petty traders, casino operators, entertainers, servants and prostitutes." ("Hidden From History")

Many were homosexual—male and female—and many male homosexuals were feminine. Crime bosses also exploited tens of thousands of heterosexual women and men in the prostitution industry. All performed to the sexual whims of the fathers and scions of the U.S. and Cuban ruling classes.

Cuban citizen, translator and interpreter Leonardo Hechavarría, and Cuban defender, typographer and gay rights activist Marcel Hatch, sum up that era: "Before the 1959 Revolution, life for lesbians and gays was one of extreme isolation and repression, enforced by civil law, augmented by Catholic dogma. Patriarchal attitudes made lesbians invisible. If discovered, they'd often suffer sexual abuse, disgrace in the community, and job loss.

"Havana's gay male underground—some 200,000—was a purgatory of prostitution to American tourists, domestic servitude, and constant threats of violence and blackmail." ("Gays in Cuba, from the Hollywood School of Falsification," walterlippmann.com)



Arguelles and Rich explained: "It was just a profitable commodification of sexual fantasy. For the vast majority, homosexuality made life a shameful and guilt-ridden experience. Such was gay Havana in the fabled 'avant la guerre' period."

Reactionaries prey on dislocation

For male homosexuals in Havana, particularly those who were feminine and/or cross-dressing, social outlets for congregating were limited once this large-scale illegal economy was shut down.

As a result, Arguelles and Rich explained, this "prolonged the relationship between the declining underworld and more progressive homosexuals, locking the two groups together for sheer companionship and sexual pleasure."

That was truer for Cuban males than females.

The two researchers noted, "Homosexual perspectives on the revolution could shift according to class interests."

Middle-class homosexuals whose privileges were threatened by agrarian and urban reforms banded, they said, with "the remaining veterans of the underworld" to oppose the revolution.

"Some veterans of the old underworld enclave joined counter-revolutionary activities or were pushed into them by the CIA," Arguelles and Rich reported. "Not a few of the progressive homosexuals became implicated by default in counter-revolutionary activities and were even jailed.

"Young homosexuals seeking contact with 'the community' in the bars and famous cruising areas of La Rampa were thus introduced to counter-revolutionary ideology and practice. One example of such a dynamic is the case of Rolando Cubela, a homosexual student leader who fought in the revolutionary army but was later enlisted by the CIA to assassinate Fidel Castro."

The two researchers concluded, "Homosexual bars and La Rampa cruising areas were perceived, in some cases correctly, as centers of counter-revolutionary activities and began to be systematically treated as such."

Cuban women organize for gains

The overall situation for Cuban women who loved women had its own characteristics.

Under the triple weight of the patriarchies of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism, a dynamic women's movement emerged in Cuba as early as the 1920s and Cuban women won the right to vote and be elected to public office in 1934. (thegully.com)

After the 1959 seizure of state power, it was Cuban women as a whole who became the driving force to break the chokehold of centuries-old patriarchal economic and social organization, and the attitudes about women and femininity it engendered.

The Cuban Women's Federation formed quickly after the Revolution in 1960. It exerted immeasurably more power because it was a part of the Revolution, not apart from it.

At a 1966 leadership meeting of the Federation of Cuban Women, President Fidel Castro observed, "Women's participation in the Revolution was a revolution in the revolution, and if we were asked what the most revolutionary thing that the revolution is doing, we would answer that it is precisely this—the revolution that is occurring among the women of our country."

Hechavarría and Hatch stressed, "Following the Revolution, women won near full equality under the law, including pay equity, the right to child care, abortion, and military service, among other historic gains, laying the basis for their higher

social and political status.

"This foundation, a first in the Americas, played an important role in women's greater independence and sexual freedom, a prerequisite for homosexual liberation. The Revolution also destroyed the Mafia-controlled U.S. tourist driven prostitution trade that held many Cuban women and gay men in bondage."

Hechavarría and Hatch added, "The Revolution undertook to provide ample education and employment opportunities for female prostitutes.

"Advances for women in general were naturally extended to lesbians, and many became among the most ardent defenders of the Revolution."

Revolutionizing the sexes

Cuban men, as well as women, had been treated as the property of other men—the patriarchs of property.

Revolutionary Cuban men have carried out their own work to consciously build the consciousness of a "new man" on the basis of new social principles.

Ché Guevara, Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution as a whole challenged all Cuban men to examine male consciousness, attitudes and behaviors.

This revolutionary effort, which continues today, aimed to change old ways that men were taught to interact with women. Like the Revolution itself, this work is most profoundly meaningful because it is a process, not a single act.

The Revolution challenged the biology-is-destiny "natural order" ideologies of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism that elevated patriarchs to rule.

The Revolution challenged the reactionary biological determinist concept that men are innately superior and women are naturally submissive.

But genuine economic and social equality for women, and profound change of the attitudes of men, could only be generated by economic and social reorganization that could lift the standard of living for all. Imperialism was determined to thwart and sabotage that work at every moment. U.S. finance capital cinched the island in an economic noose, and the Pentagon cordoned the island, attacking overtly and covertly.

As Washington and the Pentagon ratcheted up the pressure on Cuba, and the CIA having spearheaded the commando invasion at Playa Girón, the entire island's population had to be organized and mobilized to meet two huge tasks in 1965—military defense of the Revolution and harvest of the crop that sustained economic life.

Everyone—of all sexes, genders and sexualities, from children to elders—was called up for these two life-and-death tasks.

Inside Cuba, trying to fit many thousands of urban homosexual and/or transgender males into agricultural work sharpened a social contradiction.

Outside Cuba, propagandistic exploitation of this contradiction led to the single greatest slander against the Cuban Revolution in the history of the workers' state.

Next: Vilification of the Cuban Revolution.

Parts 1-90 can be read at workers.org. Look for the lavender and red logo. Parts 86-90 also explore sexuality, gender and sex on the island before and after the 1959 Cuban Revolution.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Homosexuality & transgender in Cuba

1965 UMAP brigades: What they were not

Lavender & red, part 92

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Mar 4, 2007 9:15 PM

One of the worst slanders against the Cuban Revolution is that the workers' state was a "penal colony," interning gay men in "concentration camps" in 1965. That charge, which refers to the 1965 mobilization of Units to Aid Military Production (UMAP), still circulates today as good coin.



Therefore the formation and ending of the UMAP work brigades in the history of the Cuban workers' state is vitally important for today's activists to study very carefully and thoroughly. Those who are working the hardest to make a revolution in the heartland of imperialism will pay the most careful attention, and bring the most genuine solidarity and humility—teachability—to this important analysis.

For those worldwide who struggle against oppression based on sexuality, gender and sex, the sharpening of this sexual/gender/sex contradiction in Cuba in 1965 offers this critical lesson: The way sexuality and the sexes are socially organized, and gender is socially assigned and allowed to be expressed, always has a history.

Since the overturning of matrilineal, cooperative societies, strict organization based on race, sex, gender expression and sexuality has served the dictates of ruling-class economic organization, and has been under the knuckles of state regulation and repression.

Pre-revolutionary Cuba was no exception.

Spain exports Inquisition

Without understanding Cuba's historical process, it's impossible to understand its revolutionary process.

Researcher Ian Lumsden noted in his study on Cuba and homosexuality, "There is much speculation about the incidence of homosexual activity between Cuba's [I]ndigenous people, as there is with respect to other parts of the New World. Whatever its true extent, it was used as a pretext for Spain to enslave [N]atives on the grounds that they were not fully human."

He explained that, "Condemnation of sodomy and subsequently of homosexuality, along with repressive mystification of women's sexuality, have long been at the core of Spanish Catholic dogmas regarding sexuality." Only crimes against the king and heresy ranked higher as crimes than "sodomy" in the Middle Ages.

Lumsden added, "There was competition between the Inquisition and the secular courts about who should have authority to exorcise it from the body politic."

Sentences ranged from castration to being burned alive.



The domestic Spanish crusade against "sodomy," he explained, was driven by the ruling class' "desire to expunge Moorish cultural influence from Spain, which they associated, among other things, with homosexual and cross-dressing behavior."

Pivotal impact of slavery

Lumsden paraphrased, "As Julio Le Riverend, Cuba's leading economic historian, reminds us, the development of Cuba, particularly since the 18th century, cannot be understood without recognizing the pivotal impact of slavery as a mode of production on all social relations, including domestic ones. Homosexuality among slaves occurred in a context—that is, a country whose dominant culture was both racist and homophobic."

The system of plantation slavery—both chattel and latifundia—created rural enslavement in which the masters on the island, and the masters across the Florida Straits, claimed to own the bodies and lives and labor of enslaved workers.

The patriarchal slave-masters, landowners and their overseers dictated the clothing enslaved workers could wear; where they could live and in what arrangements; when the sexes could meet; where, when and how they could have sex; if they could marry and, if so, who they could marry.

Of the more than 40,000 Asian laborers counted in the 1871 Cuban census, for example, only 66 were women and the law forbade Chinese males from marrying African-Cubans.

Enslaved African males outnumbered females by a ratio of almost two to one. Males were often housed together in isolated regions in single-sex *barracones*—plantation barracks—in which no women were allowed.

In his oral narrative, former enslaved African laborer Esteban Montejo told Miguel Barnet about men coupling with other men in everyday life in the *barracones*. And he offered a glimpse at how they were gendered in relation to each other. Montejo only refers to the partner who looks after a marido (husband) as what the Spanish would term "sodomite."

Montejo said it was only "after slavery that that word afeminado appeared."

Centralization and commodification

Capitalism and imperialism did not invent homosexuality or gender variance in Cuba; these market forces centralized, commodified and commercialized them.

Rural poverty made capitalist relations—the often empty promise of jobs—a magnet that drew hundreds of thousands of campesin@s from the impoverished countryside to the cities, in particular the capital Havana, in search of wage work.

"During this period of severe sexual repression in advanced capitalist nations," researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich explained, "homosexual desire was often channeled into illegal and lucrative offshore markets like the Havana underworld." ("Hidden From History")

The crime syndicates and wealthy Cubans with ties to the Batista dictatorship gave "preferential hiring" to Cuban homosexuals, many of them feminine and/or cross-dressing males, to serve the demand of the dollar, and those whose wallets were filled with them.

"Other buyers of homosexual desire," Arguelles and Rich elaborated, "were the fathers and sons of the Cuban bourgeoisie, who felt free to partake of homoerotic practices without being considered homosexual as long as they did not take the passive, so-called female role in sexual relations. Yet another common practice for Cuban heterosexual men was the procurement of a lesbian prostitute's favors for a night."

Poverty drew many heterosexual Cuban men "into this underworld or alternatively into a homosexual underground dominated by the Cuban homosexual bourgeoisie," the two researchers added. The bourgeois Cuban male homosexual of this era sought out masculine men from the laboring class.

"Thus," Arguelles and Rich observed, "in many ways, pre-revolutionary homosexual liaisons in themselves fostered sexual colonialism and exploitation."

Overall, the pre-revolutionary state regulated this sex-for-profit industry, rather than repress it.

Fidel: 'We were forced to mobilize'

Shutting down the exploitative, unproductive economic industries in Havana after seizure of state power was just one task. Building a planned, productive economy that could meet the needs of 9 million urban and rural workers was a whole other job—and a difficult one, at that.

"Let me tell you about the problems we had," Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro recalled. "In those first years we were forced to mobilize the whole nation because of the risks we were facing, which included that of an attack by the United States: the dirty war, the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Missile Crisis."

Fidel Castro—referred to as "Fidel" by supporters of the Revolution and "Castro" by enemies—talked extensively about the UMAP in two interviews. The first was in a published conversation with Tomás Borge, published in "Face to Face with Fidel Castro" (Ocean Press: 1992). The second was in conversations between 2003 and 2005 with Ignacio Ramonet, published by the Cuban Council of State in April 2006.

Recalling the period of 1965, Fidel outlined three obstacles in organizing this island-wide emergency mobilization to defend the Revolution and to build the economy.

The first two: The CIA was beaming messages to entice skilled workers and technicians to emigrate. And members of Catholic, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventist religious organizations would not take up arms in defense of the island.

"[A]t the triumph of the Revolution," Fidel explained, "the stage we are speaking of, the male chauvinist element was very much present, together with widespread opposition to having homosexuals in military units."

Fidel said that as a result, "Homosexuals were not drafted at first, but then all that became a sort of irritation factor, an argument some people used to lash out at homosexuals even more.

"Taking those three categories into account we founded the so-called Military Units to Support Production (UMAP) where we sent people from the said three categories: those whose educational level was insufficient; those who refused to serve out of religious convictions; or homosexuals who were physically fit. Those were the facts; that's what happened.

"Those units were set up all throughout the country for purposes of work, mainly to assist agriculture. That is, homosexuals were not the only ones affected, though many of them certainly were, not all of them, just those who were called to do mandatory service in the ranks, since it was an obligation and everyone was participating."

Sexual, gender contradictions sharpened

Revolutionary re-organization in Cuba in 1965, staring down the barrel of imperialism's cannons, had to reintegrate a numerically large homosexual/transgender population from the cities back into the rural agricultural production.

This returning workforce from the capitalist urban center had to go back to the rural agricultural production that many had left earlier in their lives.

When large numbers of feminine homosexuals returned to the countryside from Havana, it was not just a conflict of differently socialized sexual expression, but a collision between historically differently gendered workforces.

Capitalist relations had consolidated and commercialized the industry which had given mass expression to this sexuality and gender expression in males, and shaped these as commodities on the auction block of the market.

The urban homosexuality/transgender culture, dress, mores and social semaphores seemed to many Cubans—even men who had sex with men and women who had sex with women—to have washed up on the island's shores on the waves of oppressive and exploitative capitalist and imperialist cultures.

Arguelles and Rich stressed that at the time of the revolution, "Erotic loyalty (and, in the case of women, subservience) to the opposite sex was assumed as normal even by homosexuals. Hence, for many Cubans of this era, homosexuality was a mere addendum to customary marital roles. Among others, it was just a profitable commodification of sexual fantasy. For the vast majority, homosexuality made life a shameful and guilt-ridden experience."

Fidel stresses that the UMAP "were not internment units, nor were they punishment units; on the contrary, it was about morale, to give them a chance to work and help the country in those difficult circumstances. Besides, there were many who for religious reasons had the chance to help their homeland in another way by serving not in combat units but in work units."

Fidel cut cane; children worked in the fields. Renowned Cubans such as musician and poet Pablo Milanés and Baptist pastor and MP Raúl Suárez worked in the LIMAP.

The whole island was at hard at work building an independent existence, in economic soil deeply furrowed by the combines of colonialism and imperialism.

Fidel shut down the UMAP

Fidel Castro stated categorically about the UMAP, "I can tell you for sure that there was prejudice against homosexuals."

On the island, the Cuban National Union of Artists and Writers (UNEAC) reportedly protested treatment of homosexuals working in UMAP, prompting Fidel to check it out for himself.

A Cuban who worked in a UMAP, interviewed by Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal in 1970-1971, related that Fidel slipped into a UMAP brigade one night and lay down in one of the hammocks. The interviewee said: the UMAP guards would sometimes cut the hammock cords with their sabers. "When one guard raised his saber he found himself staring at Fidel; he almost dropped dead. Fidel is the man of the unexpected visits." ("In Cuba")

A youth described as a "young Marxist revolutionary" told Cardenal that 100 young males from the Communist Youth were sent to the UMAP to report back about how they were treated. "It was a highly secret operation. Not even their families knew of this plan. Afterward the boys told what had happened. And they put an end to the UMAP."

Closing the UMAP required further large-scale reorganization of agricultural work, the lifeblood of the economy.

One youth concluded to Cardenal, "[W]e who were in the UMAP discovered that the Revolution and the UMAP were separable. And we said to ourselves: We won't leave Cuba, we'll stay and make what is bad not bad." (Jon Hillson, blythe.org)

Fidel: 'Overcoming legacy of chauvinism'

Fidel explained that during this period of early revolutionary history,

"Concerning women, there was a strong prejudice, as strong as in the case of homosexuals. I'm not going to come up with excuses now, for I assume my share of the responsibility. I truly had other concepts regarding that issue.

"I am not going to deny that, at one point, male chauvinism also influenced our attitude toward homosexuality," he said.

"We inherited male chauvinism and many other bad habits from the conquistadors. I would say that it corresponded to a given stage and is largely associated with that legacy of

chauvinism."

'I am absolutely opposed to any form of repression, contempt, scorn or discrimination with regard to homosexuals. It is a natural tendency and human that must simply be respected.'—Fidel Castro, 1992

Fidel stressed, "Homosexuals were certainly discriminated against—more so in

other countries—but it happened here too, and fortunately our people, who are far more cultured and learned now, have gradually left that prejudice behind.

"We have made a real advance—we can see it, especially in the young people, but we can't say that sexual discrimination has been completely wiped out and we mustn't lower our guard."

Fidel said, "I must also tell you that there were—and there are—extremely outstanding personalities in the fields of culture and literature, famous names this country takes pride in, who were and still are homosexual.

"Today the people have acquired a general, rounded culture. I'm not going to say there is no male chauvinism, but now it's not anywhere near the way it was back then, when that culture was so strong. With the passage of years and the growth of consciousness about all of this, we have gradually overcome problems and such prejudices have declined. But believe me, it was not easy."

Fidel Castro concluded in 1992: "I am absolutely opposed to any form of repression, contempt, scorn or discrimination with regard to homosexuals. It is a natural tendency and human that must simply be respected."

Next: Charge of "concentration camps" fascist-baited Cuban workers' state.

Lavender & Red parts 1-91 can be read at workers.org. Look for the lavender and red logo. Parts 86-91 also explore sexuality, gender and sex in Cuba before and after the 1959 Revolution.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 'Before Night Falls'

Hollywood projected Cuba as 'police state' for gays

Lavender & red, part 93

By Leslie Feinberg Published Mar 18, 2007 10:08 PM

Hollywood turned up the volume on charges that Cuba was a "penal colony" for homosexual males with its release of "Before Night Falls" in August 2000.

The movie was based on a memoir by the late anti-communist Cuban homosexual writer Reinaldo Arenas, who emigrated to the United States in 1980. A decade later Arenas committed suicide in a dilapidated Hells Kitchen apartment in Manhattan, the capital of capital. Impoverished and dying as a result of AIDS, he had no health insurance and could not afford high medical costs of care—rights enjoyed by every Cuban under the Revolution in his homeland.

Since the early days of the 1959 Revolution, the CIA had trolled for grievances about the Revolution—real, manufactured or exaggerated.

"Before Night Falls" is the pinnacle of this propaganda campaign, by virtue of having the most capital invested in its production, its cast and distribution network; the publicity generated for its release; and the accolades and awards that gave it the imprimatur of "truth." Interspersed snippets of actual archival footage from the early days of the Revolution and snippets of newsreel of Fidel Castro's speeches aim to lend the film the appearance of historical authenticity.

As the movie begins, the cameras pan across what is actually rural Mexico, the backdrop for Arenas' childhood in Cuba. The reality of agricultural plantation enslavement is nowhere to be seen. Instead, the voiceover narrates that the author's childhood was "splendor," adding that "it was absolute poverty but also absolute freedom"

Projected onto movie screens, "Before Night Falls" becomes an imperialist-era sequel to "Gone with the Wind."

In both reactionary propaganda films, bygone epochs of white-supremacist plantation slavery—which shackled African and Indigenous peoples—are nostalgically revived, revised and romanticized. In both films, the armies that break the manacles of slavery for profit are cast as the bad guys.

Pre-Revolution:

exploitation, not freedom

Viewers of "Before Night Falls" are left with the overall impression that the U.S.-backed Batista regime actually offered greater "freedom."

In an October 2001 movie review about "Before Night Falls," entitled "Gays in Cuba, from the Hollywood School of Falsification," Leonardo Hechavarría and Marcel Hatch took on this fiction. (www.walterlippman.com)

Hechavarría's biography describes him as a Cuban citizen, a translator and



interpreter, and states that "he is a passionate advocate of the Revolution and works for increased acceptance of lesbians and gays in his homeland." Marcel Hatch is identified as a typographer, "a veteran gay rights activist and Cuba defender."

In their review, Hechavarría and Hatch wrote: "Before the 1959 Revolution, life for lesbians and gays was one of extreme isolation and repression, enforced by civil law, augmented by Catholic dogma. Patriarchal attitudes made lesbians invisible. If discovered, they'd often suffer sexual abuse, disgrace in the community and job loss.

"Havana's gay male underground—some 200,000—was a purgatory of prostitution to American tourists, domestic servitude and constant threats of violence and blackmail. The closet was the operative image. Survival often meant engaging in fake heterosexual marriage, or banishment to the gay slum."

For more analysis of "Before Night Falls," also see "The Sexual Politics of Reinaldo Arenas: Fact, Fiction and the Real Record of the Cuban Revolution," by Jon Hillson, at www.blythe.org.

Researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich concluded about life for the homosexual/transgender urban work force in pre-Revolutionary Cuba, "If legal sanctions and official harassment were rare, this tolerance was due less to social acceptance than to overriding considerations of profit and the economic interests of the underworld that dominated the Cuban political apparatus."

But the misery of urban sexual enslavement in brothels, casinos, domestic work and drug networking is nowhere to be seen in "Before Night Falls." Neither is the apparatus of the Batista dictatorship's police, secret agents and army.

Workers' state, not bosses' state

"Before Night Falls" is the blockbuster of the propagandistic charges that the Cuban Revolution ushered in a "police state," similar to fascist Nazi Germany and the bloody 1973 counter-revolution in Chile.

These vilifications purposely confused the difference between a workers' state and a bosses' state. Understanding the class character of the Cuban workers' state is very important for those who seek their own liberation today.

Cuba was a newly developing workers' state—which had to literally battle overt and covert military onslaught and economic strangulation by U.S. imperialism. At the same time the Revolution had to fight the legacy of racist, sexist and antihomosexual/transgender indoctrination by patriarchal colonialism, capitalism and imperialism.

In contrast, the state machineries of the exploiting classes—and the church hierarchies that serve them—have always relied on repressive terror, and deepening and strengthening homophobia and transphobia, in order to conquer and rule.

For example, the Spanish colonial state in Cuba enslaved the Indigenous population on the island, castrated those it considered "sodomites," and forced them to eat their own testicles coated with dirt. ("Los Negros Curros," 1986)

In order to save German capitalism, a wing of industrialists and bankers bankrolled the fascists who forced tens of thousands of gays and lesbians to wear the pink triangle in slave labor and extermination camps.

Victor Hugo Robles wrote of Chile—where the mass of workers and peasants were not armed against the 1973 CIA-backed counter-revolutionary—that, "Perhaps the most forgotten are the many transvestites who were executed during the days immediately following the coup." ("History in the Making: The Homosexual Liberation Movement in Chile")

In the imperialist United States, homosexuality and sex/gender variance were so

viciously criminalized and punished by state repression that a mass political movement arose to resist it. Despite widespread struggle, same-sex love remained illegal in the United States until 2003. Currently, at least 65 percent of transwomen and 29 percent of transmen are estimated to have been imprisoned at some point in their life in the United States. (Critical Resistance)

And today it is U.S. imperialism that has set up concentration camps—from Abu Ghraib to Guantánamo—where anti-gay and anti-trans rape and humiliation are incorporated into the science of torture.

The state of former slaves

The Cuban workers' state, like the armies of Bolívar and Toussaint L'Overture, is an armed liberation struggle of the oppressed up against the Goliath force of the oppressor state.

An estimated 20,000 Cubans died in two years of battling the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship—up against bombs, aircraft and artillery. The Revolution disarmed the Batista regime's army and secret police networks.

However, simply dismantling the bosses' apparatus of dictatorship did not create a new mechanism to defend the island from counter-revolution and invasion. Imperialism soon cinched an economic noose around the island, its Pentagon a constant threat.

A new state had to be built, from the ground up. It took a mass mobilization of the population to defend the gains of the Revolution. The National Revolutionary Militia and the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution organized the entire population into a network against CIA-organized subterfuge and sabotage.

This block-by-block watchfulness, combined with old, deep prejudice against same-sex liaisons, made life uncomfortable for some Cuban male homosexuals. While they had experienced extreme isolation and alienation in the sexual exploitation industry, they had also found refuge in urban anonymity and privately-owned casinos, bars and other meeting places.

However, unlike its portrayal in "Before Night Falls," the Cuban workers' state was not a repressive apparatus. Rather, it had the task of defending 11 million Cubans from re-enslavement by U.S. finance capital. The Cuban Revolution could not have survived a day, let alone a half century, without organizing and mobilizing the population to defend its independence from imperialism.

The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and the Cuban popular militias—which armed millions of women as well as men—are the protective might of a formerly enslaved population against enraged former plantation owners, bankers, industrialists and syndicate bosses.

Arming the Cuban population of workers—rural and urban—made it possible to defeat the invasion at Playa Girón (the Bay of Pigs). At the same time, this defense allowed the Revolution to boot out the U.S. sugar plantation owners and gave the land back to those who tilled it. It allowed the Revolution to oust U.S. industrialists and bankers, and crime syndicate bosses who ran the lucrative brothel, gambling and drug networks. The Revolution could begin deconstructing the white supremacist and patriarchal systems that hadn't allowed Cubans of African descent to set foot on the beaches, and had kept women in servitude.

This was a workers' state.

'Dispute this fable with facts'

Calling for an end to Hollywood's blockade of Cuba, Hechavarría and Hatch stress about "Before Night Falls": "[I]n a queer cinemagraphic twist, it erases the achievements of Cuban toilers, women, people of color, and indeed gays, who've made stupendous advances since 1959.

"The end of hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, high infant mortality, and foreign domination of the island are of course undeniable—all fruits of the Revolution."

After the Revolution, "advances for women in general were naturally extended to lesbians, and many became among the most ardent defenders of the Revolution. On the other hand, a significant minority of gay men left Cuba. Some joined the counter-revolutionary expatriates in Miami or were blackmailed into doing so. Ironically, the U.S., which was busy flushing out and jailing its homosexuals during the McCarthy period, welcomed Cuban gays as part of its overall campaign to destabilize the island." (walterlippmann.com)

Hechavarría and Hatch added: "It was Clinton/Bush-inspired destiny that a hot button pushing, gay-themed anti-Cuba melodrama would be released. The persistent myth, promulgated chiefly by right-wing Cuban-Americans (most of whom are hyper-homophobes), that homosexuality is illegal in Cuba, that gays and lesbians are banned from the Communist Party, and that they are savaged and tossed in the slammer, is pure bunk."

Hechavarría and Hatch stated categorically: "We know of no Cuban, for or against their government, who finds the movie credible. Nor do smart gay activists.

"This political falsity," they concluded, "has widespread currency among liberal skeptics and within the queer community. It is to this audience the film was targeted. It is necessary for friends of Cuba to dispute this fable with facts."

Next: Cuban Revolution: trajectory of progress for homosexual/transgender population.

For more on homosexuality/transgender and the Cuban Revolution, see Lavender & Red parts 86-92, at www.workers.org. Look for the lavender and red logo.

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Homosexuality and Cuba

1970s: Decade of cultural progress

Lavender & red, part 94

By Leslie Feinberg Published Apr 22, 2007 11:05 PM

Those who today are working to seize state power and defend and build a workers' state in their own countries may be sobered as well as heartened by the enormous cultural labor that the Cuban Revolution had to accomplish in the 1970s, particularly regarding liberation of women, sexuality and gendered social



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Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich concluded in their 1984 study of Cuba that three events "marked the gradual but continual improvement of life conditions of gay men and lesbians in Cuba during the seventies: the First National Congress on Education and Culture, the promulgation of the Family Code, and the creation of a national group on sexual education."

Arguelles and Rich explain that at the 1971 congress on education and culture, "On the one hand, homosexuality was not referred to as a product of decadence and homosexuality was no longer seen by the revolutionary leadership as a fundamental problem in Cuban society, but, rather, viewed as a form of sexual behavior requiring study.

"On the other hand, declarations from the same congress called for the removal of homosexuals from the field of education, thus continuing the view of homosexuality as a contamination of the body politic."

The 1971 congress declaration demoralized some activists worldwide who had hoped that the seizure of state power in Cuba would usher in an immediate and thorough-going theoretical, social and economic transformation.

Some activists succumbed to fear that prejudice is a hard-wired human trait that can't ever be eradicated from any human society, even a socialist one.

Anti-communists have also tried to use the 1971 congress document in attempts to discredit the revolutionary process altogether.

Both are ample reason to look more closely.

Roots of prejudice

Studying Cuba's specific historical economic and social conditions opens up greater understanding about what generates prejudice against same-sex love and gender variance, and of racism, and opens up clarity about what kind of material changes are necessary to eventually uproot all forms of bigotry.

Prejudice—ideology that pits groups within the vast laboring and oppressed class worldwide against each other-is not the same as superstition. Superstitions are explanations concerning the material world that the scientific process later proves are untrue. Attempts to supplant that new, scientific understanding with old superstitions are consciously reactionary.

Prejudices, however, are rooted in the historical development of class-divided societies. They are a conscious ideological campaign to frustrate mass unity among the laboring masses of millennia. These lies, minted like gold, only profited emperors and kings, landowners and barons.

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas," observed Karl Marx, "i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force."

Colonialism and imperialism didn't just bring reactionary ideas. The patriarchal ruling-class ideologies they enforced served to buttress their structures of enslavement of Cuba, as elsewhere.

Spanish colonialism brought Inquisition terror to its edicts against same-sex love in Cuba, and its church imbued this sexuality with shame and guilt.

Imperialism swiftly centralized and shaped what became a numerically huge new urban homosexual/transgender subculture, mostly male, within the larger culture(s) in Cuba for the sole purpose of sexual exploitation for profit. Tens of thousands of Cuban women and girls, including many enslaved in "domestic" jobs, were ruthlessly sexually exploited, as well.

So it is not difficult to understand why homosexuality, coupled with gender variance, would seem to be a product of "bourgeois decadence" in Cuba. And it's not hard to understand why many Cubans believed that homosexuality and gender varience would go away with the shutting down of these non-productive, exploitative industries.

But the 1971 Cultural Congress marked the moving away from that assumption.

Changing ideas

Revolution is not a single act, it's a process. The revolution created the basis for social and economic transformation that has been profound and is ongoing, a particularly remarkable achievement carried out under almost half a century of imperialist siege.

The first tasks of the revolution in Cuba were to organize to provide jobs, food, shelter, health care and education for the entire population and to defend the new revolutionary state against imperialist attack.

At the same time, the 1959 Cuban Revolution faced the odious task of cleaning out the Augean stables filled with 450 years of rotting, stinking oppressor culture excreted by Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism. And the U.S. tried to take away every shovel that the Cubans needed to do that work.

While deep divisions based on bigotry help facilitate and maintain colonial and imperialist economic rule, every form of ideological prejudice—white supremacy, male supremacy and anti-homosexual bigotry—break up the unity required to collectively build a socialist economy.

The 1971 congress declaration pointed out that, "For the bourgeoisie, the elimination of the cultural elements of its class and system represents the elimination of culture as such.

"For the working class and people in general, the culture born of the revolutionary struggle is the conquest and development of the most valuable of humanity's cultural heritage which the exploiters kept from them for centuries."

The 1971 congress declaration stressed that "[T]he changes in the field of sexual relations stem from society itself as it progresses in the social, cultural and economic fields and continues to acquire an ideology that is more consistently revolutionary."

Fidel: 'tangible and practical successes'

Looking back from the vantage point of 1992, Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro told Tomás Borge, a priest and founder of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, "We inherited male chauvinism and many other bad habits from the conquistadors. That was an historical inheritance. In some countries more than in others, but in none was there more struggle than in ours and I believe that in none have there been more tangible and practical successes." ("A Grain of Corn." Ocean Press)

Fidel Castro recalled, in a series of interviews between 2003 and 2005, "[W]e had to work very hard to do away with racial prejudice here. Concerning women, there was strong prejudice, as strong as in the case of homosexuals. ("One Hundred Hours with Fidel," by Ignacio Ramonet)

Castro had told Borge, "There was, for example, one standard for judging the personal conduct of a man and another for a woman. We had this situation for years in the party and I led fights and argued a lot about this. If there was infidelity in a marriage on behalf of the man, there was no problem, no worry, on the other hand it was a subject of discussion in the party units when there was infidelity on the part of the woman. There was one way of judging sexual relations of men and another of women. I had to fight hard, against deeply rooted tendencies that were not the product of any sermon or doctrine, or education, but the male chauvinist concepts and prejudices that exist in the heart of our society."

Castro added, "I am not going to deny that, at one point, male chauvinism also influenced our attitudes towards homosexuality."

He explained to Ramonet, "There was less prejudice against homosexuals in the most cultured and educated sectors, but that prejudice was very strong in sectors of low educational level—the illiteracy rate was around 30 percent those years—and among the nearly-illiterate, and even among many professionals. That was a real fact in our society." ("One Hundred Hours with Fidel")

One of the first actions of the revolution in 1960—the Year of Education—was to organize volunteers to teach 700,000 adults to read. Cuba rapidly reached the highest literacy rate in Latin America.

Fidel Castro, who is an atheist, metaphorically answered the idealist concept of change with a scientific materialist view in an interview with a Galician television station in Spain in 1988. He talked about how the cultural mass process of the Revolution deepened understanding about same-sex love.

"God needed seven days to make the world," he said, "you must understand that to remake this world, to destroy a world like that which we had here and to make a new one, there wasn't much light, and at first there was a lot of darkness, and a lot of confusion about a series of problems. Our society, our party, our government now have ideas that are clearer, wiser and more intelligent about many of these problems. Given that we can make mistakes, we obsessively follow the idea that what is just, right and best for the people, and what is the most humane for our people and our society. However, the task is not easy. I think that each time we get closer to the right criteria for making the world we want."

Revolution: 'school of unfettered thought'

Fidel Castro said in a now-famous 1962 talk that the "Revolution must be a school of unfettered thought."

The intellectual and cultural dynamism of the Cuban Revolution, which combined communist leadership with mass participation, is evident in the trajectory of progress in the 1970s made concerning women and same-sex love.

The Cuban leaders continued to organize mass forums for discussion and debate that empowered changes concerning sexuality, sex and gendered social roles.

Two years after the 1971 congress declaration that no homosexual should officially

represent the country, it was overruled by a Cuban court. (Leonardo Hechavarría and Marcel Hatch)

In 1975, the limits on employment of homosexuals in the arts and education were overturned by the Cuban Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of gay artists who were petitioning for compensation and reinstatement in their workplace. (cubasolidarity.org.uk)

That same year, a revolutionary Family Code was adopted that called for equal participation by men in child-raising and household work.

Also in 1975, a new Ministry of Culture was established, as well as a commission to study homosexuality.

That commission helped pave the road for the formal decriminalization of samesex love.

But U.S. imperialism, which had economically exploited the homosexual/transgender population of Cuba before the revolution, continued to exploit them politically.

Next: Imperialism, homosexuals and the 1979 Mariel boatlift.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Imperialist blockade and CIA anti-gay extortion

Behind the 1980 'Mariel boatlift'

Lavender & red, part 95

By Leslie Feinberg Published Apr 26, 2007 9:35 PM

22, 1994)

Several thousand self-identified homosexual Cubans were among the some 120,000 who left the island over a two-month period in 1980 from the port of Mariel and sailed to the U.S. The media in the imperialist countries, whose capitalist classes are hell-bent on re-colonizing Cuba, broadcast an anti-communist interpretation of what produced that migration at Mariel.



Workers World Party founder Sam Marcy wrote, "The 1970s were the high point in Cuba's revolutionary influence, not only in Latin America but in Africa, Asia and even Europe. Cuba was part of a worldwide surge in the working-class movement and particularly among oppressed countries. U.S. imperialism was on the defensive, especially after its historic defeat in Vietnam and its inability to either crush or tame the Cuban Revolution." (Workers World newspaper, Sept.

Cuban women and men were fighting bravely alongside their African comrades to defend the people of Angola, Namibia and Ethiopia from colonialism and imperialism.

U.S. finance capital tried to isolate and destroy the Cuban Revolution.

U.S. banks and corporations commanded Washington not to recognize Cuba's right to diplomatic recognition. Captains of the military-industrial complex ordered their generals and admirals to attack the island using various weapons—covert and overt—including enforcement of the economic blockade of the island, which is an illegal act of war. The Pentagon refused to retreat from the military base it built at Guantánamo—now a site where the interrogators incorporate antigay and anti-trans humiliation, rape and attempted dehumanization as part of their sadistic torture of Muslim men and boys.

And 1980 was the year that Ronald Reagan won the White House administration.

Marcy concluded, "A period began when the most intense economic, political and diplomatic pressure was exerted on Cuba. In the background was always the threat of U.S. military intervention, causing the Cuban government to spend a great deal of its resources on military defense."

CIA targeted homosexual Cubans

Between 1979 and 1984—before and after Mariel—scholars Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich interviewed Cuban émigrés in the U.S., Spain, Mexico and Puerto Rico. The two researchers also interviewed Cubans who chose to stay on the island and be a part of building a socialist society.

The two summed up their scientific research in a report titled "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience." It was first published in the summer of 1984

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in Signs, A Journal of Women in Culture and Society. (For more on immigration from Cuba after 1959, see Lavender & Red, part 90, workers.org.)

Arguelles and Rich reveal how U.S. finance capital used its secret police agency to politically target the same Cuban homosexual/transgender population it had once exploited for profit.

"The year 1979 was an unsettled one," Arguelles and Rich wrote. "Even though living conditions were better than in any previous period and compared favorably with those in the rest of the Caribbean, there were serious problems." They pointed out that the economy suffered under the heavy weight of the U.S. blockade and suspicious outbreaks of biological epidemics destroyed harvests of cash crops. This forced Cubans to work harder and faster and for longer hours in order to raise overall productivity.

The U.S. allowed Cubans who had emigrated in the early years of the revolution to travel back to the island. Arguelles and Rich noted, "The visits of 'the American cousins' increased consumer envy and added to the effectiveness of counter-revolutionary propaganda.

"Lesbians and gay men were particularly vulnerable," they explained. "The CIA targeted the homosexual intelligentsia and worked to persuade its members to defect, promising generous academic grants and publishing contracts."

Arguelles and Rich continued, "The more cost-effective ploy of blackmail was also used, especially against those gays less willing to leave, in the hope that political anxiety would force victims into exile. Carlos Alberto Montaner, a Madrid-based anti-Castro writer, for example, published two full pages listing names of homosexuals inside Cuba in an attempt to discredit them and to encourage them to migrate. Such cynical 'assistance' in coming out continues to be a favored weapon against lesbians and gay men who are well integrated into the revolution."

The two researchers added, "The visits also provided a context in which Cuban lesbians and gay men could hear of the more open and affluent gay lifestyles available in the United States as a benefit of consumer capitalism. Other common reasons for wanting to emigrate included the lack of career mobility in a still under-developed economy and, for men, a traditional desire for the adventure of travel that had to focus on emigration since the United States and other capitalist nations deny tourist visas to Cubans. For some Cuban gays (especially for the men), emigration also provided wider sexual parameters than they felt could ever be possible in Cuba."

Exception to a rotten rule

U.S. imperialism demonstrated how its laws either kneel to its overall capitalist class objectives, or are forced to bend.

After the Cuban Revolution shut down U.S. finance capital's burgeoning sex and casino industries that had exploited mass numbers of homosexuals, U.S. immigration authorities unofficially lifted the part of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 that had been used to bar and deport those it labeled "sexually deviant"—but only for homosexual Cubans.

The Cold War Florida Legislative Investigation Committee made no mention of the influx of homosexual male Cubans into the state in its report on its own antigay witch hunt in 1964. The McCarthy-style state witch hunt tried to break up unity in the struggle against white-supremacist apartheid in the U.S. Deep South. (Lavender & Red, part 55, workers.org)

Washington lured Cubans to risk their lives at sea by creating an exception to immigration rules and quotas that barred legal migration to the U.S. Any Cuban who arrived on U.S. soil was promised admission, with perks.

Cuban President Fidel Castro challenged Washington's immigration

manipulation and hypocrisy by opening the port at Mariel from April 21 to Sept. 28 in 1980, allowing any Cubans who wanted to leave to go to the U.S. Some 120,000 Cubans left, out of the country's total population of 11 million.

Even the estimates of how many homosexual Cubans left from Mariel in 1980 demonstrate political manipulation by the U.S. government.

Reporting for the publication Paris Match, Nina Sutton cited a "nonofficial State Department source" as saying at least 10,000 Cuban homosexuals had emigrated at Mariel. However, Julia Preston stated in the New York Village Voice dated Dec. 10-16, 1980, that "As many as 3,000 gay Cubans passed through refugee camps this summer. Now about 350 are left, almost all men, the others having been sponsored out mainly to gay communities throughout the country."

Gay Cubans were not welcomed into the homosexual-hating, right-wing-dominated Cuban émigré enclaves and anti-communist organizations.

Under state duress

At U.S. borders, all individual immigrants face tremendous pressure under interrogation from border police, immigration judges and officials and in detention centers.

Researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich explained in 1984 that "Cuban 'refugee' testimony and subsequent conversations with the newly arrived Cubans, for example, becomes the main source for evaluation of Cuban gay life, despite knowledge of the pressures on émigrés to testify to political persecution in their country of origin in order to attain the legal and economic advantages of refugee status in their new country."

Arguelles and Rich stated, "The success of this interpretation has served anti-Cuban interests, most notably the American state, rather well. First, credibility of the story has neutralized badly needed support for the Cuban revolution among its natural allies (North American progressive lobbies) and legitimated the presence in traditionally liberal circles of some of the more reactionary elements within the Cuban émigré population."

Reinaldo Arenas left Mariel for the U.S. in 1980. Imperialist movie and banking capital—without which no star-studded, big budget movie is filmed or distributed —brought Arenas' memoir depicting life in Cuba as a "police state" for homosexuals to the screen. Leonardo Hechavarría and Marcel Hatch, in their October 2001 article "Gays in Cuba, from the Hollywood School of Falsification," categorically concluded, "We know of no Cuban, for or against their government, who finds the movie credible. Neither do smart gay activists." (For more about the movie, also see Lavender & Red, part 93.)

Next: 'Many more chose to stay.'

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 1980: Homosexuality

'A visible feature of Cuban society'

Lavender & red, part 96

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 5, 2007 12:25 AM

The thunderous, monopolized voice of the U.S. media machine dwelled on homosexuals who left Cuba from the port of Mariel in 1980, omitting the role of the CIA in instigating migration. At the same time, the U.S.-led political blockade of Cuba silenced the voices of Cubans who chose to stay, working together to

actively defend their workers' state against the most powerful imperialist empire in history.

Researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich stated, with the clarity of courage, "For all the gay men and the few lesbians who left, there were many more who chose to stay. Their lives had been constantly improving. The revolution might not yet speak to the homosexual in them, but it continued to address other vital aspects of their being." These Cubans, they reported, "steadfastly refused to fulfill their gay identity at the cost of their national and political identities."

Few lesbians left from Mariel, Arguelles and Rich found. "Their small number by comparison with that of gay men points, again, to the fuller integration of women into Cuban society and the increased status and freedom enjoyed by lesbians, as women, under the revolution."

Ada, a lesbian Cuban rural nurse, said that everything in Cuba wasn't "perfect." But, she said, "I remember how it was before [the revolution] and for the first time, I feel I'm a human being."

Arguelles and Rich reported that in this period of their research—1979 to 1984—the homosexual population was "a visible feature of the Cuban social landscape"—part of every sphere of economic, social and governmental organization, as well as at the point of production of art and other forms of culture.

Arguelles and Rich observed, "They are no longer confined to an underworld economy or alienated from the mainstream of social life as they were in the pre-revolutionary era. Particular individuals are well known and pointed to with pride as evidence of revolutionary non-discrimination."

Arguelles and Rich reported finding "a flourishing homosexual social scene centered around private parties and particular homes." They described this social networking at parties and beaches as "a feature of Havana life in general."

Arguelles and Rich added, "While their sexuality may be an open secret inside Cuba, many lesbians and gay males who participate in cultural and academic exchanges with the United States become more guarded when abroad, fearful of how homosexual issues are utilized in the war against the Cuban revolution.

"But many still take the opportunity to visit lesbian and gay bars and bath houses in New York or San Francisco," Arguelles and Rich pointed out in the mid-1980s.



"Ironically, their own adjustment to a greater social integration in Cuba causes them increasingly to feel out of place in these sites, viewing their sexual consumerism as bizarre."

Jorge, a Cuban artist, concluded that "there is more true sexuality for gays in Cuba." (Arguelles and Rich)

Arguelles and Rich returned to the island after their research had been published in Spanish in the Mexican newspaper La Jornada. The response they got from lesbian and gay Cubans was that "Overwhelmingly, they felt that progress was more marked than we suggested and that conditions of daily life had significantly improved during this decade."

A gay Cuban named Roberto who said he had left from Mariel "for the adventure" went back to Cuba to visit. Roberto's subsequent experiences in the U.S. drew him to the Antonio Maceo Brigade—pro-revolutionary Cubans in Miami and New Jersey. (Jon Hillson, "The Sexual Politics of Reinaldo Arenas")

When Roberto returned to the island, he visited the factory in which he used to work. His co-workers had known he was homosexual. As Roberto got up to speak to an assembly of 700 of his former factory co-workers, they all rose to give him a standing ovation.

Lift the blockade!

Cubans who are homosexual, transgender and transsexual did not need imperialism to "liberate" them from their own people, their own revolution. They needed and deserved support from the revolutionary and progressive movements in the U.S.—the citadel of anti-Cuban finance capital—and around the world to help defeat imperialism.

Cubans of all sexualities, genders and sexes were suffering, and are still suffering, under the economic warfare of the U.S. blockade.

In addition, the blockade impacted on sexual and gender expression on the island. For example, it put enormous strain on housing, which in turn determines literally how much room and privacy people have to explore their sexual curiosity and desire.

The constant state of military alert demanded a mass mobilization of Cuban women, as well as men, in a collective effort for national defense. Revolutionary military preparedness values courage and strength, dignity and discipline. For half a millennium, colonialism and imperialism had extolled these virtues as birth traits of masculine males.

Colonial ideology, backed up by the ruling church and state, enforced masculine gender expression in males. The Spanish military and church brought antihomosexual epithets that seared like branding irons, as its state cruelly punished same-sex love and gender variance.

The most common slur hurled at male homosexuals, which has endured from the medieval Inquisition in Europe, translates into English as "stick of wood." It refers to the feudal European punishment of burning alive at the stake males who had sex with other males, or those deemed inappropriately gendered. Colonialism brought the fire of the Inquisition with its armadas. In the mid-1600s, for example, the Spanish captain general who ruled over the rural and urban enslaved population of Cuba sentenced 20 "effeminate sodomites" to be burned alive.

The anti-gay epithet—hurled at those not considered "manly" enough—has another meaning: coward. It's an accusation that those who fled Cuba in the Mariel boatlift faced.

All women, together with the overlapping populations of those battling oppression based on their sexuality, gender expression and sex, have a common $\frac{1}{2}$

interest in debunking the gender prejudice that femininity is innately "cowardly" or "weak," as well as confronting prejudice against same-sex love.

Cuban community defense and military ranks, however, were organizing and mobilizing the entire population as a popular army to defend the collective gains of the Cuban Revolution, not inculcating the kind of Rambo-masculinity indoctrination that the Pentagon drills into its ranks of the foot soldiers of an imperialist empire. Cuba's foreign policy, by contrast, was the export of revolutionary solidarity.

Next: Sex education created basis for scientific approach to AIDS.

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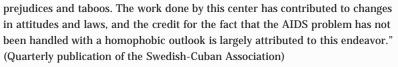
POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 1970s Cuba:

Sex education campaign battled old prejudices

Lavender & red, part 97

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 11, 2007 8:49 PM

Eva Bjorklund wrote in Swedish-Cuba magazine in 2000: "In 1977, the Center for Sexual Education (CNES) was founded on the initiative of the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) and their seminars and publications encouraged a more enlightened outlook on homosexuality and started to undermine traditional



Bjorklund noted: "Before the Center for Sexual Education (CNES) started its work, sexual education was a practically unknown phenomenon in Cuba, as in the rest of Latin America, where the stand and the attitude of the Catholic Church has continued to curb any attempted change. In this light, Cuba's sexual education is groundbreaking."

Cuban women led the way forward.

Dr. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, then-director of the National Institute of Sex Education in Havana, recalled in a December 1986 interview: "In 1974, the Federation of Cuban Women has already insisted that sex education had to be done. They had been working on this since the early 1960s." (International Journal of Health Services, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1988)

The interview with Álvarez—known on the island as "Tino"—was conducted with Elizabeth Fee, Joan Furman-Seaborg and Ross Conner. Margaret Gilpin arranged the interview and did the translation.

In the interview, Álvarez stressed: "The First Party Congress reviewed all of the things that the Federation has asked for and converted them into a political directive. This is the only country in the world where the people who have suffered from the consequences of ignorance, principally women and young people, did not have to spend one minute to convince the highest levels of leadership of the country that something had to be done. On the contrary, the political leadership was always worried that they weren't doing enough of what the women expected them to do. I am convinced that that doesn't happen in any other country in the world. I think that's important—very important."

Álvarez continued: "The First Party Congress of 1975 agreed on the declaration of the complete and absolute equality of women. The elaboration of that declaration included the need to organize a system of sex education. They needed a plan to create, for example, illustrated texts, and educational materials for the population. The National Assembly of People's Power then created a permanent commission. Within that commission they created a working group, the National Institute of Sex Education. The structure is very important. I don't think that in any country in the world, including the socialist world, does this kind of structure



exist, except here."

He added, "With this kind of task, to create a national plan, you can't leave it in the hands of one person or a group of people or to one organization; it has to be done throughout the entire society."

One of the first suggestions the Ministry of Education made was to begin elementary sex education from the earliest years. But Cuba was still trying to build enough schools and train enough teachers to meet the educational needs of the population. Alvarez said his youngest child's teachers at that time in secondary school in the countryside were just two or three years older than their students.

"It was difficult for the Ministry of Education under these circumstances," he stated, "to assume responsibility for a national program in sex education.

"The first task was to prepare some texts on the subject, because there weren't any."

Ground-breaking first publication

Álvarez explained, "We decided to make a selection from the most highly developed socialist country in this area, East Germany, and we selected the books that we thought would best cover our needs."

The first ground-breaking publication in Cuba was Sigfried Schnabl's "The Intimate Life of Males and Females" (El hombre y la mujer en la intimidad). The book had been published first in the German Democratic Republic—the East German workers' state—in 1978.

Bjorklund wrote that Sigfried Schnabl's book, which was "translated and edited in Cuba in 1979, clearly states that 'homosexuals should be granted equal rights, respect and recognition, and that any kind of social discrimination is reprehensible.' This book served as guidance for the work of CNES and at pedagogical colleges."

In their article in the Summer 1980 Gay Insurgent, Stephen J. Risch and Randolph E. Wills noted, "In fact it was the Women's Federation which saw the book as so important that it successfully lobbied for its publication considerably ahead of schedule (since there are limited resources for publishing books in Cuba, finished manuscripts must wait in line to be published)."

Álvarez remembers that the subject was so popular: "We sold it in a special way to try and guarantee that it would get into the hands of doctors, other health personnel and teachers. We sold it at about 5 pesos, but in addition, the buyer had to have a paper signed by me saying that he or she had the right to buy the book. Otherwise, the books would have disappeared from the bookstores within two hours."

The law against same-sex love was removed the same year that the book was published in Cuba—almost a quarter century before the U.S. government followed suit under pressure from a mass lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans movement.

A subsequent publication, "Are You Beginning to Think about Love?" translated and edited in Cuba in 1981, "was more ambivalent," wrote Bjorklund. "It was intended for a broad audience and argued that homosexuals have the same ability to function in society as other people, but that they can never be as happy as married people. Mónika Krause, a leading expert at CNES, admitted that this was a response to criticism against the first edition of Schnabl's book, for being too positive towards homosexuality. A second edition of Schnabl's book, intended to be printed in 250,000 copies, although delayed because of the economic crisis, however, persisted, stressing that sexual violation of minors has no causal relationship to sexual orientation, dismissing the theories of seduction into homosexuality, and emphasizing that since nobody is responsible for his or her

sexual orientation, homosexuals must be just as respected as heterosexuals."

Alvarez said the next step was a paperback entitled "When your child asks you" (Cuando tu hijo te pregunta), first printed in 1980. It was offered for public sale with a book aimed at sex education for children aged 9 to 12. "We did simple illustrations showing the process of reproduction. This was the best way to start trying to break the prejudices of the population," he stated. "We were trying to tell parents that they didn't have any alternative, they had to tell children about these things, because their kids were going to deal with them for better or for worse. It was up to the parents to answer their kids' questions and they needed to know how to do that."

A fourth publication, "Thinking about love?" (¿Piensas ya en el amor?), was designed for teenagers. Álvarez explained: "This book covers sexually transmitted diseases and discusses some of the emotional aspects of how children become adults and what adult relations are all about. It deals with some of the problems that have to do with being in love, and also talks about contraception."

Yet another book was written for children from 3 to 7 years old, entitled "Mama, papa and me" (Mamá, papá, y yo). Álvarez said, "It was the only one that didn't sell out immediately, the way all the rest of them did, and we think that's a sign of some resistance to our work in the population."

In 1981, the Cuban Ministry of Culture produced a publication titled "In Defense of Love" that stated homosexuality was a variant of human sexuality. Cubasolidarity.org.uk concluded that the book "argued that homophobic bigotry was an unacceptable attitude inherited by the Revolution and that all sanctions against gays should be opposed."

This ground-breaking work on sex education, in which Cuban women played such a leadership role, helped pave the road for a scientific and humane approach to the AIDS epidemic that put the imperialist countries to shame.

Next: Cuba prepared AIDS health care plan before the first diagnosis.

To read more about Cuba, read parts 86-96 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA To combat AIDS

Cuba mobilized before first diagnosis

Lavender & red, part 98

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 21, 2007 9:06 PM

The Reagan administration tried to whip up world anger at Cuba's handling of the AIDS epidemic. In reality, Cuba took an immediate, scientific and humane approach to people with AIDS.



In the U.S., AIDS was first diagnosed in 1981. By May 1983, simultaneous gay and lesbian protests of tens of thousands had to take to the streets in New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, Atlanta, Chicago and Milwaukee under banners reading "Fighting for our lives!" to demand federal funds to battle AIDS, and for research, services and Social Security benefits.

A day later, activists organized a telephone blitz of the White House to protest government inaction and to demand funds. It was to date the largest number of calls to the Oval Office in a single day in its history. The president had still not publicly said the word AIDS, while theo-cons demonized the emerging health crisis as a "gay plague."

By contrast, Cuba's health care workers began preparations to defend the whole population from the AIDS epidemic two years before the first case was diagnosed on the island in 1985. Cuba spared no expense despite the chokehold of the U.S.-led blockade.

Cuba—unlike the U.S.—mobilized against AIDS, not against people with AIDS. Researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich observed in the autumn of 1987 that, "Cuba is unusual in publicizing the disease, not as a gay disease, but rather as a sexually transmitted disease regardless of specific sexual practice."

Planning to protect population

After members of the Cuban Health Ministry took part in a workshop organized by the Pan-American Health Organization in August 1983, they immediately set up a national commission to research and create a plan of action to prevent AIDS in

Cuba. (Karen Wald, Guardian, Oct. 28, 1987)

The National Commission to Face AIDS Syndrome formed in 1983. (Denver Post, Feb. 10, 2003)

The commission immediately blocked the import of all blood products from countries in which the epidemic was already documented.

The commission recommended discarding more than 20,000 vials of imported blood, worth millions of dollars.

Getting rid of all imported blood products greatly burdened the Cuban health system and forced the country to ratchet up local production. However, this urgent action resulted in avoiding HIV transmission to almost all hemophiliacs



and others who needed blood transfusions. (Financial Times, Feb. 16, 2003)

A multi-disciplinary team of doctors and researchers was assigned to work full time on AIDS. Political journalist Wald wrote, "Their first move was to prepare a diagnostic screening program based on concrete symptoms that could be seen in hospitals, such as repeated cases of pneumonia or Kaposi's sarcoma type of cancer, which indicated possible AIDS. Hospitals were asked to give weekly reports on findings of these symptoms."

Doctors tested more than 135,000 Cubans for HIV in 1983.

Science, not stigma

In 1985, a Cuban who had returned from abroad was the first in the country to be diagnosed with AIDS. The Cuban was one of 300,000 heroes of the revolution who helped defend the people of Mozambique—an African country impoverished by colonialism and battling the forces of imperialism.

In the U.S., Africa and Haiti were being scapegoated as the source of the epidemic, without any scientific proof. In Cuba, however, where many are of African descent because of the history of slavery, health officials did not stigmatize the African continent.

In an interview in Cuba International, circa 1987, Dr. Rodolfo Rodríguez, then the national director of epidemiology for the Cuban Ministry of Health, said that while some of the mass media at that time might have been trying to blame the African continent for AIDS, "It is known worldwide that it is the developed Western countries—Europe and the U.S.—that have the largest number of AIDS cases and the largest number of asymptomatic carriers."

In the U.S., homosexuality was still against the law and viciously repressed. The right wing labeled AIDS a "gay disease." This only drove the epidemic deeper into the population. So too did the criminalization of drug addiction and prostitution, both highly profitable industries in the U.S.

There was no known intravenous drug addiction in Cuba, and same-sex love was not against the law.

Cuban health workers tested all pregnant women, people with sexually transmitted diseases, and anyone who might have had sexual contact with someone who was HIV positive. Testing equipment was installed in blood bank centers. (Denver Post)

By the end of 1985, Wald wrote, the Cuban government had purchased, despite great expense, all the technical means to screen the island's entire blood supply. "Cuba spent more than \$3 million to buy the reactive agents and equipment, and to set up labs in blood banks and hygiene and epidemiology centers around the country."

That year, the Cuban public health system allocated \$2 million for the National HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Program, which focused on providing the first 750,000 diagnostic kits and centers. (MEDICC Review, Vol. II, No. 1, 2—2001)

Capitalism and contraception

The years of sex education that preceded the outbreak of the epidemic helped to create the basis for a more scientific and compassionate approach to people with AIDS.

However, when faced with a sexually transmissible epidemic like AIDS, Cuba had to overcome a particular capitalist legacy regarding safer-sex education and practices.

Dr. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, a gynecologist and ground-breaking sex educator in Cuba, reminded interviewers in 1988, "You know this country inherited a system in which the rural areas and small towns had little or no

medical care before the revolution."

He added that before the revolution, illegal abortions were common. They were most often performed by doctors, without anesthesia, in unsanitary conditions.

Álvarez Lajonchere explained: "At the triumph of the revolution, the majority of these abortion doctors left the country. There was no habit in the country of using contraceptives, and contraception did not even appear in the medical school curriculum. ... The private physicians at the time didn't give contraceptive services to their patients because they could charge much more doing abortions."

As a result, he said, "Since people didn't have contraceptive habits, we encountered serious difficulties in the first years after the triumph of the revolution."

While half of all Cuban doctors left the island and went to capitalist countries, 97 percent of the physicians in obstetrics and gynecology emigrated. As a result, Álvarez Lajonchere noted, overnight he became the oldest gynecologist/obstetrician in the country.

Alvarez Lajonchere said that, in addition, within months after the workers and peasants took state power, "[A]ll of the professors at the medical school quit voluntarily, thinking mistakenly that the government could not replace them. The government accepted their resignations. It was a policy in the country, and still is, that if you really don't want to live in this country under socialism you should leave. You can't create a socialist society with people who are disaffected.

"So the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Health got together a course for new professors," he continued, "people who could never have been professors before the revolution because of their low social class origins—they didn't come from the upper middle classes."

The medical school faculty was replaced with new professors. "We all left private practice and went to teach. It was an extraordinary advantage that we knew the conditions of medical practice in the country. I became chief of the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the one and only medical school. The first thing I did was to put contraception into the medical school curriculum. There were never any restrictions about who could have access to contraceptives in this country: not by age, not by race, not by anything."

Álvarez Lajonchere added, "Medical services from the very beginning have been free." And the new medical teachers received a higher salary than the president. (International Journal of Health Services, Vol. 18, Number 2, 1988)

"The habit of using contraceptives," Álvarez Lajonchere explained, "is a habit that takes time to build. For a population that was accustomed to having abortions, it was easier for them to go to the hospital and have an abortion."

After the revolution, underground abortions in unsanitary conditions increased until 1965. "When we started to do all of them in hospitals, obviously deaths as a result of abortion disappeared."

He added that the number of abortions began to decrease in 1974 as a result of mass education about sex and contraception.

Álvarez Lajonchere concluded: "Our current policy on population is the same policy that we've had from the first day of the revolution. It's a policy of principle. A woman has the right to have the number of children she wants, and to have them when she wants. The government is obligated to assure that her right becomes a reality. So we educate people about all of the contraceptive methods. We include abortion, even though we don't view it as a contraceptive method, so that people will know about it. We have never said that having a small family is good; we have never pressured people to reduce the birth rate."

Next: Cuba directed war against AIDS, not people with AIDS.

To read more about Cuba, read parts 86-97 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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AIDS quarantine in Cuba:

Care & prevention, not repression

Lavender & red, part 99

By Leslie Feinberg Published May 26, 2007 7:49 AM

From both a scientific and human standpoint, the AIDS sanatoria health care facilities in Cuba bore no relation to the threat of state quarantine in the U.S.

In the U.S., there was no scientific merit to public proposals to empower the state for surveillance and quarantine of people believed to have AIDS. There was no way to identify how many people out of the vast population had already been exposed. The epidemic was already entrenched. AIDS was not spread through casual contact. And anti-gay and racist scapegoating, laws against same-sex love, immigrant bashing, and laws against IV drug use and prostitution had generated fear of the state, as well as of coming forward for testing or treatment.

So threats of state investigation and forced isolation only drove the epidemic deeper underground. The prohibitive costs of medical care, particularly for those without health insurance, also barred many from seeking health care.

Yet on March 2, 1984, USA Today revealed that California officials were legally pursuing the ability to forcibly quarantine people believed to have AIDS. The same month, the Democratic co-chair of the Connecticut General Assembly's Judiciary Committee introduced broad quarantine legislation after a racist media campaign demonized a Black woman, accused of prostitution and drug addiction, who was reported to have AIDS.

Even as politicians were refusing to allocate the funds necessary to meet this public health emergency, the big-business media were unjustly accusing Haitian immigrants in the U.S. of spreading AIDS.

The late Michael Callen told Workers World at that time that the press for quarantine powers was "not really to protect people but to further certain political goals, to further isolate already disenfranchised people." Callen said that the singling out of a Black woman in Connecticut and allegations without scientific basis that Haiti and Africa were the sources of the epidemic were attempts "to blame all calamity on the Third World." (Workers World, April 5, 1984)

Gay men and bisexuals were blamed for the epidemic for much the same reason that the church hierarchy in the Middle Ages accused Jewish people of creating bubonic plague by "poisoning the wells."

Media in the South and Jerry Falwell's right-wing fundamentalist publication "Moral Majority Inc." editorialized that AIDS was God's "deserved punishments" against homosexuals. (aidssurvivalproject.org)

Far-right columnist Patrick Buchanan titled his commentary: "AIDS Disease: It's Nature Striking Back." (New York Post, May 24, 1983)



That's why the late Bobby Campbell, a San Francisco registered nurse with AIDS, told Workers World on March 25, 1984, how concerned he was about the political abuses of broad quarantine measures in the U.S. He warned, "We would see gay men locked up en masse and it is possible in more backward localities that lesbians could be included in that."

The U.S. government declared war on people with AIDS rather than marshal funds and forces to deal with the epidemic.

Science, not scapegoating

By contrast, Cuba—an island nation of 11 million that was blockaded by U.S. imperialism—had prepared its health care system for the epidemic two years before its first diagnosis of an AIDS case. So when AIDS first emerged in the population, it could be easily identified and isolated before being spread to the rest of the people.

In 1986, Cuba opened up 13 sanatoria that provided care for 99 people, only 20 percent of whom were believed to have contracted AIDS through same-sex contact. (Denver Post, Feb. 10, 2003)

Joseph Mutti wrote from Havana in June 1999, "Once a person has tested HIV-positive, attempts are made to trace everyone who had sexual contact with the person. Given Cubans' general openness about their sexuality, and Cuba's cradle-to-grave health care system, it's usually possible to ascertain how and when a person was infected.

"The basic principle of the Cuban public health-care system, widely recognized as the Third World's best," Mutti explained, "is to prioritize the health of the population as a whole instead of focusing exclusively on individual care. This is important for understanding HIV/AIDS policies, including the sanatorium system that earned Cuba an unfair reputation for employing repression to counter the virus." ("Love and Honesty: The Dawn of Gay Rights," Resource Center of the Americas.org)

The newspaper Granma explained Cuba's reasons for using quarantine: "The main usefulness of this measure is to slow down as much as possible the epidemic progression of the disease to allow time for other measures of disease control to have a medium- or long-term effect, such as education (encouraging changes in sexual habits and behavior), until such time as a vaccine and treatment exist, auguring a definitive solution to the problem." ("Cuban Strategy in the Struggle Against AIDS," Granma, Sept. 18, 1988)

When asked about the Cuban approach to AIDS, then-Cuban Deputy Public Health Minister Hector Terry explained in October 1987, "The quarantine center is a sanatorium. We have a very small number of people carrying the virus, and we believe that because of that, we are in a unique situation. We have an opportunity, in epidemiological terms, of controlling the spread of AIDS and preventing it from becoming a major epidemic as it has in other countries, where they don't know how to confront, reduce or eliminate it.

"We are in a situation that permits us to make this kind of decision, and to wait a while because we are not talking about something permanent, for a whole lifetime. We're talking about a dialectical situation."

Terry added, "This aspect [quarantine] is controversial, some groups of scientists disagree with it." He said that the objections were "more from a political than a scientific standpoint. But we believe our country has this epidemiological opportunity and we shouldn't lose it. We are trying to prevent the spread of the virus throughout the country by means of sexual relations that our patients could have with other people who at this point have not been infected with the virus."

"Our country has its own philosophy and the first principle of this philosophy is respect for human dignity. I think that human dignity requires care of the individual. You know that we spare no resources here to make sure that our

people have the best health care possible anywhere in the world. And that's part of what we're trying to maintain in our battle against AIDS." (Interview with Karen Wald, Guardian, Oct. 28, 1987)

The best care—for free

Cuba provided free health care to its population despite economic obstruction by the U.S. and later the devastating loss of its main trading partner, the Soviet Union. Cuba organized its scarce resources—not just to stem transmission of the epidemic, but to provide humane care.

"Organized like small communities," MEDICC Review wrote, "the sanatoriums are made up of apartment complexes and small houses, plus infirmary, offices and other patient facilities." (Vol. II, No. 1, 2; 2001)

People with AIDS received healthy food, medications and other treatment, airconditioned housing, exercise and sports, movies, television, videos, rest, and psychological and social services; everything was free except cigarettes.

Cubans with AIDS continued to receive their full paychecks, even if they weren't able to work. Their jobs were held open indefinitely. Terry stressed, "This is very important, so that they have no concern regarding the support of their families.

"What other country in the world would be capable of paying full salary to people with AIDS? Terry asked. "I think that's very linked to the whole question of human rights and the controversies around this. We know there are countries that shout about human rights, such as the U.S. where a person who gets AIDS may die of hunger, lose his job, it's hard to get into a hospital. Treatment there costs an average of \$700 a day."

Terry added that the Cubans' families also received special attention. A working group of psychologists, sociologists and social workers helped the families of people with AIDS deal with their problems, as well. Terry concluded that people with AIDS had greater peace of mind knowing their families were being cared for.

Next: Cuba declared war on AIDS, not on people with AIDS

To read more about Cuba, read parts 86-98 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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Cuba brought science, not scapegoating, to AIDS care

Lavender & red, part 100

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 1, 2007 11:38 PM

Cuba tried to isolate the spread of AIDS as soon as the epidemic appeared in the island population, explained then Cuban Deputy Public Health Minister Héctor Terry in 1987. But Cuba did not try to socially isolate people with AIDS.



Terry stressed of Cubans living in the sanatoria: "They visit their families at home, go out on pass; their families visit them, every day. Their friends can visit them." (Interview with Karen Wald, Guardian, Oct. 28, 1987)

Cuba attempted to quarantine the spread of the epidemic based on a scientific approach to a medical emergency, without using scapegoating to isolate people with AIDS.

In the U.S., AIDS activists had to fight a protracted battle to replace the bigoted label of "high-risk groups" with a rational understanding of "high-risk behaviors." Cuban medical workers and educators approached transmission scientifically.

Researchers Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich observed in the autumn of 1987 that, "Cuba is unusual in publicizing the disease, not as a gay disease, but rather as a sexually transmitted disease regardless of specific sexual practice."

The primary route of AIDS transmission in Cuba was via international contact, including Cubans who had worked or studied abroad.

Of the first 99 people quarantined in 1986, only about 20 percent were believed to have contracted AIDS through same-sex contact.

Terry articulated this clearly: "We are carrying out our program by giving the public a lot of scientific information, speaking to them clearly about the modes of transmission and not generating phenomena such as homophobia or sexual repression.

"In some countries the mass media, for commercial reasons, generate those phenomena to sell more magazines or newspapers. But we don't need to sell more magazines or newspapers. We don't need to use AIDS to get people to watch more TV or to get some corporation to finance AIDS research. We don't need any of that here."

Terry summed up, "We start from the ideas that AIDS is transmitted not because of what you are but because of what you do, and therefore there's no reason to generate any kind of persecution or phobia against any patient."

Interviewer Karen Wald added: "Members of the gay community interviewed here said there has been no increase in homophobia or attacks on gays as a result of AIDS. They attribute this in part to the fact that the government has not singled out gays as carriers of the disease."

And unlike in the U.S., same-sex love was not against the law in Cuba.



Eyewitness to Cuban care

Cleo Manago was part of a delegation of 200 people from the U.S. who challenged Washington's travel ban to visit Cuba in August 1994. Manago wrote about his visit to an AIDS sanatorium in an article entitled "Cuba, from a Black, Male, Same-Gender-Loving Perspective."

"The widely reported rumors and articles on AIDS concentration camps in Cuba are out of context and pure anti-Cuba propaganda," Manago stated. "I visited Cuba's largest AIDS sanatorium and was taken aback by the humane, considerate, intuitive and life affirming approach to care taken by this center.

"The sanatorium was similar to a large housing complex where all who chose to live there had 24-hour health care, the option of having family members, even a dog or a cat stay with them. Same-gender-loving and heterosexual couples living together at the complex is a common occurrence.

"I asked people living there about the conditions in which they live. None were happy about having HIV or AIDS but all were very appreciative of the care they received. Many who could go home if they wanted chose to stay where they were guaranteed prepared food, a comfortable home and prompt medical attention. This particular center offered ambulatory care for those with jobs or who wanted to continue with school. To my knowledge there is nothing similar in the USA."

Manago concluded, "The main problem people with AIDS faced was the difficulty in getting the medicines and treatments (pentamidine, bactrim, condoms, etc.) needed from other countries, due to the U.S. blockade of Cuba." (www.sonomacountyfreepress.com)

'Information without sensationalism'

Dr. Héctor Terry emphasized: "We are treating the patients medically to maintain their present state of good health. Every time some new information comes up in the scientific community, some new kind of drug or medicine, we try to find out if it could be useful in preventing the virus from becoming activated into a full-blown disease."

Terry added: "Information is reaching the public without any sensationalism, without creating any hysteria or panic. We haven't yet been using the mass media as much as we should; we think that's a deficiency in the program. We've been using state agencies and all the ministries a lot, organizing conferences for all the workers in certain ministries, especially those in the high-risk areas. We also utilize the health education program and the popular video centers throughout the country. We run videos and have doctors there to answer questions. We've used that a lot and many young people attend these.

"We're now preparing other activities with the mass organizations, the Committees to Defend the Revolution, student and women's organizations," he continued. "We are working with other scientific institutions in the country, which are providing invaluable assistance and we are looking at all possibilities anywhere in the world. We try to synthesize what is being done internationally.

"Here we have the SUMA group, which is developing Cuban technology to do mass-scale diagnostic testing. With an infinitesimal blood sample we can diagnose for AIDS. We'll be trying to get this equipment into all the country's blood banks next year, and in all the hygiene and epidemiology centers. And we'll be preparing ourselves for carrying out at least annual blood tests of the whole population, in every blood bank and epidemiology center, in every hospital. We're preparing a very wide-range program."

Terry concluded: "I repeat that the method of quarantine in a sanatorium isn't permanent. It will be treated dialectically. We are studying the situation and when we see that it is not the correct solution, or that other possibilities offer themselves, we will act accordingly—always basing ourselves on scientific data.

Otherwise we wouldn't be scientists."

Clearly quarantine in Cuba was a tactic at the moment the epidemic emerged, not a scientific principle.

Joseph Mutti wrote from Havana in June 1999: "The government undertook extensive efforts to learn more about transmission of the virus and to discover a cure. It wasn't until the early 1990s that officials felt enough was known to end the quarantine and focus on public information, education and prevention." ("Love and Honesty: The Dawn of Gay Rights," Resource Center of the Americas.org)

Cuba began an out-patient pilot reintegration project in 1993 that proved successful. (Denver Post)

Those who left the sanatoria received ambulatory care that included regular doctor's care, visits to specialists and dietary supplements—all free. (medicc.org)

However, the Denver Post concluded in February 2003, "Today, 48 percent of those who are HIV-positive or have AIDS choose to live in the 16 sanatoriums around Cuba."

Next: "Cuba has much to teach

the world about AIDS."

To find out more about Cuba,

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U.S. imperialist blockade obstructed Cuban AIDS treatment

Lavender & red, part 101

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 13, 2007 9:07 PM

The Cuban approach to AIDS saved lives, Joseph Mutti concluded in June 1999. "Cuba now has one of the world's lowest rates of infection, with only one of every 1,500 persons testing HIV-positive (the U.S. rate is 1 of every 550). That statistic is especially remarkable given Cuba's sexually active youth and easygoing attitudes about sex." ("Love and Honesty: The Dawn of Gay Rights," Resource Center of the Americas.org)

MEDICC Review explained that, "By the end of 2001, Cuba will have approved its most ambitious offensive yet against HIV/AIDS: setting up a National Task Force Against AIDS (GOPELS)," to be headed by the minister of public health and the secretary of the council of ministers.

"Their job will be to integrate prevention strategies among the various national players, including the Public Health and Education Ministries, the Federation of Cuban Women, and other government agencies and NGOs. They will be guided by the 'Strategic Plan for Controlling HIV/AIDS,' outlining national strategies against the virus for the next five years." (Vol. II, No. 1, 2—2001)

The biggest problem in dealing with AIDS on the island continued to be access to medicine for free distribution to the population because of the U.S. blockade.

MEDICC Review noted in 2001 that, "Early treatment of AIDS consisted of AZT, interferons and other drugs commonly used in international protocols—but often more difficult for Cuba to purchase because many were patented by U.S. pharmaceutical companies and therefore not freely available to Cuban importers under the restrictions imposed by the U.S. embargo.

"Earlier this year, Cuba began to manufacture its own anti-retrovirals and make them available to AIDS patients free of charge. Cuba has maintained a strong research component in the fight against AIDS, primarily through studies of the application of interferons to AIDS patients and the continued research to develop an HIV/AIDS vaccine."

In February 2003, it was reported that treatment of Cubans with AIDS had greatly improved over the preceding two years because Cuba's pharmaceutical industry was producing its own generic copies of anti-HIV medicines. Dr. Byron Barksdale, director of a U.S. medical group, said, "Cuba now produces enough anti-viral medicines for its own patients and it has offered to supply other nations in the Caribbean region." (Financial Times, Feb. 16, 2003)

The Financial Times—no friend to socialist construction—reported, "Cuba has much to teach the world about tackling AIDS, the American Association for the Advancement of Science heard on [Feb. 16]. A wide-ranging prevention and treatment program, backed by strong political action, has given the Caribbean country the lowest prevalence of AIDS disease and HIV infection in the western



hemisphere—and one of the lowest rates in the world."

Cuba addresses world impact

In its issue coinciding with International AIDS Day 2001, MEDICC Review noted, "Today, some 36 million people worldwide are infected with HIV, over 25 million of them in Africa, where most have no way to pay for the drugs that might extend their lives. They die with no treatment in sight." (Vol. II, No. 1, 2)

MEDICC Review reprinted the full text of a speech by Cuban Vice President Carlos Lage Dávila, delivered earlier that year at the United Nations General Assembly on AIDS. Lage Dávila had offered his socialist government's offer of Cuban solidarity for people with AIDS, "especially those in the developing countries most affected."

In his speech on June 25, 2001, Lage Dávila said, "No country is free of AIDS. Some—the privileged and rich—have managed to reduce the mortality rate with medicines sold at high, unreasonable prices. Others—unfortunate and poor—are experiencing a terrifying reduction in their population's life expectancy and a demographic decline that could lead them to extinction."

He stressed that, "In many African nations, the number of teachers who die from AIDS each year is greater than the number of new teachers graduating. The deaths in sub-Saharan Africa to date are equivalent to those that would have resulted from dropping on the region 70 bombs like the ones on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is a dramatic paradox that, in this new millennium, the same continent that witnessed the appearance of humankind's first ancestors six million years ago begins to witness the disappearance of humankind.

"Cuba also suffers from this disease; there have been 2,565 people living with HIV/AIDS in our country, 388 of whom currently have the full-blown disease, and 896 of whom have died over the last 14 years.

"Our program to fight AIDS," Lage Dávila explained, "guarantees comprehensive care for people with HIV and AIDS, free anti-retroviral treatment for all, specialized medical centers for those who require them and a constant struggle for patients to achieve the fullest social integration, with all their rights and without discrimination.

"It also guarantees access to safe blood, certifying that 100 percent of blood donations are free of AIDS, hepatitis and other illnesses; voluntary testing of all pregnant women, resulting in zero mother-child transmission since 1997; and an education and prevention strategy aimed at vulnerable groups, young people and the entire population. We have the lowest AIDS rate in the Americas and one of the lowest in the world, with 0.3 percent of the population between 15 and 49 years affected.

"Even in the face of the [U.S.] blockade, which prevents our access to 50 percent of the world's new medicines because they are produced in the United States," Lage Dávila stressed, "we have controlled the epidemic, and what is more, achieved a life expectancy of 76 years and an infant mortality rate of less than seven. Cuba participates in this Assembly as a responsible member of the international community, showing solidarity and modesty and freely offering our experience and collaboration."

Solidarity proposal

Lage Dávila stated, "The U.N. Secretary General has proposed—and is making a worthy and just effort to obtain—\$7 to \$10 billion for the fight against AIDS. The amount is not enough and money alone cannot solve the problem, but it is a necessary start. It is incomprehensible to think that this life-saving money cannot be found in a world that spends 40 times more on illegal drugs, 80 times more on military budgets and 100 times more on advertising.

"It is incomprehensible to think that this life-saving money cannot be found in a

world where 20 percent of the population is responsible for 86 percent of private consumption, and where the personal fortunes of 22 people each exceed the amount the Secretary General is requesting, fortunes that in total represent 43 times his request."

Lage Dávila pointed to the U.S.: "The richest and most powerful nation in history—that claims it is a human rights champion, does not make its payments to the U.N. and is trying to reduce its contribution to the WHO [World Health Organization]—dedicates barely 0.2 percent of its gross domestic product to development. It is the only country that voted against the resolution giving every individual the right to have access to AIDS medicines, while at the same time, it has unleashed an insane arms race upon the world, with the sale of the most sophisticated instruments of war to allies and followers, and its global missile shield initiative.

"There is no need to elaborate further to understand that the international economic order is criminally unjust, that when the words 'democracy,' 'human rights,' 'individual liberty,' 'equal opportunities' and others come from the mouths of the powerful, they ring hollow and demagogic."

Lage Dávila delivered Cuba's urging that the special session of the U.N. General Assembly proclaim that:

"AIDS drugs and other vital medicines required on a large scale should not be protected by patents. People cannot be allowed to make money off the lives of human beings.

"The foreign debt of the poorest countries should be cancelled immediately and unconditionally. They have already paid more than once.

"The next Group of Seven meeting, instead of adopting a new economic liberalization to impose on the world's poor and less fortunate, should agree to reduce their military budgets to raise at least U.S. \$10 billion requested by the U.N. And they should turn these funds over today, not sit by while 25 million more people die. This is merely a small part of their social debt to the Third World."

Cuban government offer

Lage Dávila concluded with an offer from the Cuban government to the poorest countries and those with the highest prevalence of the illness:

- Four thousand doctors and health personnel to create the necessary infrastructure to supply the population with the prescription drugs and necessary follow-up and to train a large number of specialists in their own fields, including nurses and allied health technicians.
- Sufficient professors to establish 20 medical schools, many of whom could be chosen out of the 2,359 Cuban doctors who were then serving in 17 countries as part of Cuba's Integral Health Program. These schools could train 1,000 doctors annually in countries that need the most assistance.
- Doctors, teachers, psychologists and other specialists needed to assess and collaborate with campaigns to prevent AIDS and other illnesses.
- Diagnostic equipment and kits necessary for basic prevention programs.
- Anti-retroviral treatment for 30,000 patients.

Lage Dávila concluded, "All it would take is for the international community to provide the raw materials for the medicines, the equipment and material resources for these products and services. Cuba would not obtain any profits, and would pay salaries in its national currency, thus taking on the most expensive part for international health agencies, as well as the most difficult part, which is to ensure that the professionals are prepared and ready to begin their work."

The U.S.-led political and economic blockade of Cuba kept this offer of socialist solidarity from reaching those around the world who most needed it.

Next: Arc of progress on same-sex love and gender variance visible in Cuban films.

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-100 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Cuba and homosexuality

Change apparent in still photos and motion pictures

Lavender & red, part 102

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 24, 2007 10:17 PM

Two years into the AIDS epidemic and on the eve of the overturning of the Soviet Union—Cuba's primary trading partner—and the East European bloc of workers' states, the Cuban Revolution continued to make great gains in the battle against old, obstinate prejudice against same-sex love.



Qualitative developments of great import took place in Cuba in the late 1980s.

Leonardo Hechavarría and Marcel Hatch wrote that in 1987, the police were "forbidden to harass people because of appearance or clothing, largely benefiting gays."

A year later, another important change in Cuban law occurred. Pre-revolutionary legislation against "flaunting homosexuality" in public was rescinded. That edict had threatened feminine males and masculine females of all sexualities since its imposition under U.S. neo-colonial rule in the 1930s.

Punishment for homosexual acts had already been formally removed from Cuban law back in 1979—almost a quarter of a century before the U.S. decriminalized same-sex love.

Research scholars Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich noted, though, that the 1979 legal code "failed to legalize manifestations of homosexual behavior in the public sphere and left intact anti-gay laws dating to the Cuban Social Defense Code of 1939."

Arguelles and Rich, summarizing their research in Cuba in the mid-1980s, made a very important point about the difference between private and public spheres in a society building socialism that might not be readily apparent to anyone living in a capitalist system.

They explained, "As delineated in a Latin American socialist setting, private space is far wider than in the United States, encompassing virtually all behavior outside the purview of official sanction or attention, while approved policy, published texts, and official stances compose the public sphere."

They added that "within the private sphere, there are a clear latitude and range of possibilities for lesbians and gay men that surprise the critical observer."

Canadian activist Ian Lumsden quoted a gay émigré living in Toronto, who stated with regard to gay men that "homosexuals in Cuba find it much easier to be open and free about conveying sexual desire in the street than they would in Canada." ("Cuba and Homosexuality")

However, in 1988 Cuba took another major step by striking down the imperialistera "Public Ostentation Law" against "public scandal" or "extravagance."

Revolutionary leadership, mass participation



Respond

Cuban society was not changing in some automatic, unconscious way. These developments—which are both a reflection of the growth of consciousness and an effort to raise wider, deeper consciousness—are the result of revolutionary leadership, with widespread popular discussion and debate.

Two years before the old law was rescinded, in 1986, Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist Party had initiated a popular campaign, "not simply to rectify errors committed in the last 10 years," the Cuban president emphasized, "or errors committed throughout the history of the revolution. Rectification is finding the way to resolve errors that are hundreds of years old." ("Alert on Before Night Falls," Jon Hillson)

That same year, Cuba's National Commission on Sex Education stated that homosexuality is a sexual orientation and announced the goal of countering homophobia with education. (From the film "Gay Cuba")

In 1988, Fidel Castro spoke out publicly about the need to change negative attitudes in society and in the party about homosexuality.

At the 1992 congress of the Union of Young Communists, Cuban revolutionary leader Vilma Espín, president of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), challenged prejudicial ideas presented by a psychologist. Sonia de Vries, director of the film "Gay Cuba," reported that Espín stated that what needed changing was prejudice, not gay and lesbian sexuality. (Cuba Update)

That same year, Fidel Castro stated in an interview: "I am absolutely opposed to any form of repression, contempt, scorn or discrimination with regard to homosexuals. [It is] a natural human tendency that must simply be respected."

These qualitative changes in Cuba, like still photographs, capture the peaks of progress.

The release of three films in the 1990s—"Strawberry and Chocolate," "Gay Cuba" and "Butterflies on the Scaffold"—offered a panoramic moving picture of the sweep of progress resulting from decades of the process of building socialism despite the imperialist military, economic and political blockade.

From the balcony to the screen

When Havana was ruled by U.S. crime bosses and bankers, capitalism made room in the market for homosexual acts, forced to serve the fantasies of those who could afford the cost in dollars and pesos. Often the patricians who paid for sex despised those whom they exploited—hating them for their class, their race, their sex and/or their gender expression and for witnessing the cruelty, self-hatred, guilt and shame in the customers' desires.

So there were lots of homosexual acts taking place in Havana—the biggest U.S. brothel industry in the Caribbean. But off the clock there was not much social room for two men or two women of any gender expression to meet and get to know each other, to freely follow same-sex attraction and exploration, or to fall in love and/or live together as couples or in other formations.

Many men found each other in the darkened theaters of old Cuban cinemas like the Campoamor, Rialto and Verdún. One older Cuban homosexual recalled, "[Y]ou could go and immediately pick up a young guy. Many had their first experience there. There was a lot of sex in those cinemas." (Lumsden)

The culture of Cuba changed with social ownership of the means of production on the island—the land, mines, factories and other major arteries of economic life.

The Cuban Revolution did not, and could not, wave a magic wand and instantly transform the social content of culture. But it quickly transformed the economic underpinnings of culture. Like everything else that is collectively produced on the island, culture began to be produced to meet the social needs of the many, not just packaged for individual consumption for the few.

Lumsden, who published his views on Cuba in 1996, reported the ways in which he saw culture being made available to everyone in Cuba. "This is evident in the low prices and range of theater, dance and music that are available on stage or in open spaces like the Parque Central in Old Havana. It is evident in the quantity and quality of translated foreign and domestic books that have been published at low prices in huge editions. Finally it is evident in events such as the annual film festival (New Latin American Cinema), which has an impact as great as Toronto's Festival." (Temple University Press)

Lumsden observed: "When you attend a cultural event in Havana you come away as impressed by the informed and critical engagement of the audience as you are by the innovative quality of the performance itself. This involvement is far removed from the commodified nature of so many mainstream cultural events in North America."

This is the Cuban audience that flocked to the state-sponsored release of the 1993 blockbuster movie "Strawberry and Chocolate." The film, about an attempt at friendship and understanding between a young heterosexual communist and a homosexual, brought same-sex love out of the cinema balconies, where shame and guilt lurked in the shadows, and onto the silver screen of Cuban culture.

Over the next two years, two important documentaries followed—"Gay Cuba" in 1994 and "Butterflies on the Scaffold" in 1995.

All told, these movies offer a view of the influence of revolutionary process on popular culture, as well as the influence of popular culture on revolutionary development. The films are themselves part of that dialectical struggle, which itself takes place within the battle against the roar of ruling imperialist ideology, broadcast at every turn by its entertainment, media and education industries.

Next: "Strawberry and Chocolate," sweet taste of change.

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-101 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 'Strawberry and Chocolate'

The sweet taste of change in Cuba

Lavender & red, part 103

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jun 28, 2007 9:20 PM

no. 1-2, Winter-Spring 1995)

In 1993, the Cuban state sponsored a ground-breaking movie, "Strawberry and Chocolate" ("Fresa y Chocolate").

The movie tells the story of two young Cuban men—a heterosexual communist and a homosexual. In his 1995 Cineaste article, Dennis West described the movie about two young men getting to know each other in Havana in 1979. David is the young communist. Diego, the homosexual, West writes, "leaves in spite of his pro-Revolution sympathies and his friend's claim that there is a place for gays in the Cuban Revolution." (vol. 21,

The release of "Strawberry and Chocolate" in Cuba broke national box office records and opened up an island-wide discussion about same-sex love and prejudice.

The movie's script is an adaptation by author Senel Paz of his own very popular short story, "The Wolf, the Woods and the New Man."

Dennis West interviewed acclaimed Cuban director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea—affectionately known to friends as "Titón" but also referred to as Alea—in August 1994. Gutiérrez died, at age 68, in April 1996. West conducted the interview in Juárez, Mexico, during the Second Festival of Latinamerican Cinema Paso del Norte; Dennis West and Joan M. West translated the interview into English, edited it and published it in the Winter-Spring 1995 edition of Cineaste.

The movie, which played simultaneously at 10 to 12 Havana theaters, drew lines of Cubans that stretched for blocks. (Larry R. Oberg, "The Status of Gays in Cuba: Myth and Reality")

When West asked Gutiérrez why he thought his movie "Strawberry and Chocolate" so resonated in Cuba, the filmmaker answered that as soon as the movie opened after the annual film festival, "There were very long lines to see it, and it ran for something like three months in Havana. I think it had that response because it was a well-told story with a theme that many people wanted to discuss in public. A theme that up until this time had remained rather marginalized. I'm not referring just to the theme of homosexuality, but rather to the theme of intolerance in general. I think that people really felt a great need to reflect on this, and to reflect on it openly. For these reasons, the film became a sociological phenomenon."

When asked about the number of Cuban viewers who attended screenings, Gutiérrez said, "'Strawberry and Chocolate' may hold the record for the greatest number of Cuban viewers. I don't know. But at any rate, it is the film which has attracted the greatest number of viewers in the shortest period of time."

Gutiérrez contrasted 1979, the year in which "Strawberry and Chocolate" is set, with life on the island in 1995: "Now there is greater flexibility in job



opportunities for homosexuals. In the case of representing Cuba abroad, for example, the appointment of representatives used to be handled with kid gloves when homosexuals were involved. Many people were against appointing them because they were considered more vulnerable to scandal and blackmail—and that's true, we've seen it in countries such as England and the United States—but things are very different nowadays for homosexuals."

Gutiérrez summed up, "Many Cuban homosexuals are now open about their sexual orientation. Others are not open about it—just like anywhere else—but there is a new level of awareness concerning homosexuality."

Gutiérrez recalled the experience of his friend Aramis, who told him in Havana in 1994 about an argument with his father. Aramis said when he returned home for a visit with shoulder-length hair, his father used an anti-gay slur and ordered his son to get a haircut or leave.

Gutiérrez said Aramis argued with his father, saying, "You're supposed to be a communist, for freedom, for human beings. I'm your son, you should love me, whether or not I'm a homosexual. What kind of communist are you?"

Gutiérrez said by the time Aramis had stormed to the door, his father stopped him with these words: "Wait. You're right. You can stay. You don't have to cut your hair. I've got to think about these things." Aramis added, "So we hugged, and I stayed."

'The trajectory of Cuban cinema'

Julia Levin, a Latvian freelance film critic who lives in the U.S., described Gutiérrez Alea as the most famous director in Cuba. She noted that the filmmaker was born to a bourgeois family in 1928. After getting a law degree from the University of Havana, he studied film at "the Centro Sperimentale della Cinematographia in Rome (which had spawned, amongst others, Michelangelo Antonioni), where he fell in love with cinema and where he directed his first neorealist film, El Mégano (1954), with Julio García Espinosa, another filmmaker he met at Centro Sperimentale."

Levin continued, "It has been noted that this film marked the very beginning of the New Latin American Cinema, the 'new wave' in cinema that grew out of the desire by many Latin American filmmakers to unveil the conflicting realities of their own countries and to do this by exploring the political potential of the filmic medium.

"Alea was one of the founders of the Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC)," Levin wrote, "which was created in 1959 in order to vigorously produce and promote cinema as the most progressive vehicle for communicating the ideas of the revolutionary through, for the most part, documentaries, although some fiction films were made there as well.

"The ICAIC recognized film as the most powerful and important art form in modern life, a voice of the state, and, unquestionably, the most accessible form of distributing revolutionary ideas to the masses. In its first 24 years, ICAIC produced nearly 900 documentaries and over 112 feature films."

Levin pointed out, "Artistically and intellectually, the trajectory of Cuban cinema—from cinéma vérité to experimentalism, and from neorealist drama to social comedy—has paralleled the trajectory of Alea's directorial career. Similarly, Alea's films are a primary source of cultural politics in revolutionary Cuba, a fact that allows one to study his films directly against the political climate in which he lived and worked."

Daniel West added that "Tomás Gutiérrez Alea has been the most prominent of the filmmakers working in Cuba's government-supported film institute. ... Gutiérrez Alea is a committed revolutionary, and his best features explore the social, political and historical dimensions of the revolutionary progress." (www.sensesofcinema.com)

Solidarity served up

with a cherry on top

After Cuba lost the socialist solidarity and trade it had had with the Soviet Union, the illegal U.S. blockade tightened its grip on the island's economy.

West pointed out in 1995, "Given the profound economic crisis currently gripping Cuba, it is astonishing that a feature such as 'Strawberry and Chocolate' could be produced. The situation in ICAIC is desperate. Top directors such as Gutiérrez Alea earn the approximate equivalent of \$5.00 per month, and the once relatively well-funded ICAIC filmmakers can now undertake a feature only if co-production money is available. The low-budget 'Strawberry and Chocolate,' for instance, could not have been produced without Mexican and Spanish support."

Gutiérrez Alea, battling cancer, also had to undergo surgery during the production of the film. Juan Carlos Tabío, a collaborator, stepped up to co-direct the film.

"Strawberry and Chocolate" was the first Cuban movie to be nominated for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Film category. (Levin)

Daniel West concluded in early 1995: "The commercial release of 'Strawberry and Chocolate' in the U.S. is a welcome event because U.S. authorities have at times hounded Gutiérrez Alea—by, for example, denying his visa requests or blocking exhibitions of his works. This interviewer's videotape copy of [Gutiérrez's 1968 film] 'Memories of Underdevelopment' was confiscated by U.S. Customs in Los Angeles when he entered the country on Dec. 11, 1993, after having legally attended the annual International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana."

By the closing ceremony of that festival in Havana on Dec. 10, 1993, "Strawberry and Chocolate" had won most of the top awards.

"Afterwards"—West, who was a guest, described—"in the Palace of the Revolution, Fidel Castro held a reception for festival guests featuring strawberry and chocolate ice cream served together for dessert."

Next: "Gay Cuba"

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-102 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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'Gay Cuba'

Lavender & red, part 104

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jul 8, 2007 7:56 PM

Two Cuban-backed documentaries about changing attitudes on the island towards same-sex love and gender variance—which in turn deepened that change—opened in theaters on the island in the mid-1990s.



"Gay Cuba" (1996) was a project of Cuba's Félix Varela Center (CFV). Activist Sonia de Vries—raised in Amsterdam and now living and organizing in Kentucky—wrote and directed the documentary, which objectively struck a blow against the political blockade of Cuba by U.S. imperialism.

"Gay Cuba" is a series of interviews—a radio host and a singer/poet, an artist and a gay male elected union general secretary, a transgender factory worker and a journalist, an HIV-positive doctor and an interpreter, soldiers and teenaged law students—who offer personal anecdotes and individual observations about attitudes towards same-sex love in Cuba.

The interviews are interspersed with archival footage of the revolutionary seizure of power. The sound track incorporates the music of world renowned Cuban musicians Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez.

The Cuban Women's Federation (FMC) hosted the pre-release screening of the documentary in Havana in 1994. The same year, the FMC invited a group named "U.S. Queers for Cuba" to visit the island. (Leonardo Hechavarría and Marcel Hatch)

"'Gay Cuba' was shown at the Havana International Festival of Latin American Cinema to public and critical acclaim," wrote Larry R. Oberg.

The documentary turned its cameras onto the audiences of "Strawberry and Chocolate" ("Fresa y Chocolate"), another film made with the help of the Cuban state. "Gay Cuba" captured some of the enthusiastic responses of Cubans who had just seen "Strawberry and Chocolate"—a 1993 film about a heterosexual communist and a homosexual Cuban—at the Yara cinema.

"Fantastic!" a filmgoer who described himself as a heterosexual, masculine male exclaimed. "If I could have a friend like that I would!"

Jorge Perugorría, a lead actor in "Strawberry and Chocolate," said in this documentary, "'Strawberry and Chocolate' is the story of an encounter ... between a communist militant and a homosexual, and how their friendship develops out of this encounter. What happened with the film is that it surpassed the cinematographic phenomena, and became a social phenomenon. People had never before discussed homosexuality so much."

Cuban journalist Gisela Arandia stressed in "Gay Cuba," "For people in other parts of the world, 'Strawberry and Chocolate' might be just another movie. For Cuba, it was an essential moment in our society's development, because never before had these topics been dealt with in public."

Measure of change



Respond

"Gay Cuba" was a weathervane that pointed in the direction of prevailing winds of change in the revolutionary battle against the legacy of centuries of colonialist and imperialist cultural domination.

The interviews offered a cross-section of consciousness.

"They're people. One should treat them normally, but keep them away," one youth with her friends told the interviewer.

"They are part of our Cuban-ness, part of our people. We have to accept them as such," said an older man.

One young woman recalled going to a judgmental therapist about her attraction to other women. "I stood up, but first told him that he was mediocre and a bad psychologist and that I regretted being there. Then I stood up and left."

Another young woman remembered going to see a psychologist to try to change her same-sex attraction. "At the end of the week, she told me, 'Look, love, I see that you are happy as you are. Don't try to change. It's nothing out of this world. Nothing bad."

A cross-dressing factory worker explained, "Besides working here I am an artist. I imitate Sarita Montiel. I'm a drag queen. Everyone calls me 'Sarita.' My relationship with the workers here in the factory is wonderful. I've been here 12 years."

One young Cuban said when she was in high school, she thought that she was not accepted into the communist youth (UJC) group because there was discussion about whether she was or was not a lesbian.

Another Cuban emphasized, "I've read the statutes of the UJC, and I don't remember reading any article that said that being homosexual is an obstacle to being a member of the UJC. There are thousands of homosexuals in the UJC, from the roots to the leadership."

Lourdes Flores, from Cuba's National Center for Sex Education, stated in her interview, "As a center we see homosexuality as a sexual orientation, just like heterosexuality or bisexuality." She added, "We have led workshops on the topic of homosexuality; sexuality in general, homosexuality in particular. The workshops are very interesting. For example, we have workshops with teachers, doctors, the general population, community activists and youth."

"Gay Cuba" showed viewers a transgender performance organized by a neighborhood Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR).

'Break the blockade!'

The political views towards the Revolution of those who spoke on camera in "Gay Cuba" largely could only be gleaned through their anecdotes. The individual experiences narrated in this documentary were positive and negative, in varying degrees.

Progress in Cuba is the measurable difference between the two.

It is painful to hear Llane Alexis Domínguez say onscreen that when his father found out he was homosexual, "He actually said he'd like to beat me to death!" In Cuba, however, men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women are not being tortured and lashed to fences to die, beaten to death, stabbed or shot or strangled, decapitated and dismembered—all too frequent occurrences in the U.S.

A gay male Cuban worker sums up that in Cuba in 1994 what was largely left to deal with were individual attitudes. "I don't think that Cuba's situation is as critical for gay people as it is in other countries," he explained. "I have the opportunity to study and to work here and no one can stop me. They might try to, but it's that individual, not the system itself."

He called on the gay community in the U.S. to help break the blockade, which, de Vries pointed out in her 1994 documentary commentary, "has cost the Cuban economy over \$40 billion since 1960; the resulting fuel shortages and scarcity of food and medicine have impacted all Cubans."

Precious footage

The documentary also provides historic footage of Cuban nova trova singer Pablo Milanés singing his song "Original sin" at a 1994 public concert in Havana. ("El Pecado Original" is available on Milanés's CD "Orígines.")

Milanés—a Cuban who harvested in the UMAP brigades in the mid-1960s, and who is beloved in Cuba—told the concert audience, "I dedicate this song to homosexuals, to gay people, and to all those who are marginalized and are suffering in the world."

Milanés sang: "Two souls, two bodies, two men who love each other, are being expelled from the paradise they live in. Neither of them is a warrior with victories to boast of. Neither of them has riches, to calm the ire of their judges. Neither is a president, neither is a censor of his own desires. We are not god. Let's not make the same mistakes again."

Larry Olberg noted, "Introduced at his annual holiday concert held in the vast Karl Marx Theater in the Miramar neighborhood of Havana, 'El Pecado Original' took the audience and the country by storm and did much to advance the cause of gay acceptance." (cubasolidarity.com)

"Gay Cuba" includes footage documenting the position of gay transgender Cubans at the head of the annual, massive May Day march in 1995, which was joined by two lesbian and gay delegations invited from the U.S. There's also footage of a lesbian and gay Cuban contingent in the José Marti procession.

At the close of "Gay Cuba," radio host Anna Maria Ramos concluded, "We have been in 35 years of revolution, a revolution that by no means has been static; that has made changes constantly. In every sense, we are prepared for change. The roots of homophobia have not been driven so deep into the soil of Cuban earth. They can be pulled out."

Next: "Butterflies on the Scaffold"—creating room for more genders.

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-103 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 'Butterflies on the Scaffold'

How La Güinera made room for more gender

Lavende & red, part 105

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jul 16, 2007 1:32 AM

"Butterflies on the Scaffold" ("Mariposas en el andamio"), a 1996 documentary, offered a profoundly thoughtful and moving account of how Cuban women construction workers literally made room for cross-dressing performance art in the workers' cafeterias in their neighborhood on the outskirts of Havana,

called La Güinera. The film was directed by Margaret Gilpin and Luis Felipe Bernaza.

Gilpin reported that the preliminary cut had to be shown 11 times at the Havana Film Festival in December 1995 to accommodate the crowds. In April 1996, the film won the best documentary and the popularity award at the lesbian and gay film festival at Turin.

The word "butterfly" ("mariposa") refers to male-bodied Cubans whose femininity is either a part or the whole of their gender expression.

"Butterflies on the Scaffold" came out at the same time that a contingent of gay transgender Cubans were asked to lead the massive May Day march in Havana that year. Two U.S. queer-focused activist delegations were invited to join them in the procession—one from Bay Area Queers for Cuba, the other from New York's Center for Cuban Studies.

Cuban women—"the revolution within the revolution"—built La Güinera from the ground up.

For 10 to 15 years after the 1959 revolution, La Güinera remained undeveloped. The land was in the shadow of a meat factory, surrounded by bushes and insects.

Documentary footage explained, "Squatters came from the provinces and formed an association. They said, we'll build your house today and mine tomorrow."

Women made up 70 percent of the construction brigades.

A local family doctor said to the interviewer, with pride, that by the time of this 1995 documentary, the local infant mortality rate was so low that only two babies had died in the neighborhood clinic.

'We saw the show and we liked it'

Marisela, a young woman of African descent on the construction staff, recalled that cross-dressing performance artists "had a show in a private house. They invited the girls from the [workers'] dining room. We went, we saw the group, the show, and we liked it."

One drag artist spoke from his home, the site of performances. "We used sheets for fabric, no sequins, nothing. The dressing room was in the bedroom and we acted here. When the show moved to the backyard we used this as our dressing room. We had more room and air for us and for the public. The public brought



their own chairs. Marisela even brought a sofa! In the short time we worked in my backyard this was the headquarters, the cradle of cross-dressing in Havana. Hundreds of drag queens came through here who never thought they would do this work."

The local security chief, on camera with his young daughter, expressed a backward view: "Personally, I don't think these things should increase. On the contrary, I think they should diminish. Children go there and see a person who is a man in normal life or who goes around as a man and later they see him dressed as a woman. That child will want to experiment and that's not what I want to see.

"Also, they charged admission for the parties they gave at home." In fact, noted one party participant, the funds at one event were collected for the troops of the territorial militia—for the defense of Cuba.

The security police chief called off the drag shows. But in a workers' state, that's not the end of the story.

Marisela explained, "After the police stopped the parties there was no place for them to perform. In solidarity I began to collect protest letters and petitions. The only option was Fifi. To bring them here so everyone could see them. I was convinced they were good."

Marisela was referring to the lead organizer of La Güinera's construction brigade effort—Josefina Bocourt Díaz, affectionately known as "Fifi."

'Fifi should be honored by us'

The woman whose co-workers and neighbors call her "Fifi" is a Cuban of African descent. As a child, before the revolution, she had to start work at the age of 9. She explained, "I was one of the 70,000 maids that Cuba had before 1959. I couldn't enjoy much of my childhood. Now I've had the opportunity to work on the development of La Güinera and I feel like a new woman."

Fifi remembered, "Marisela and the others came to see me. 'We want them in the cabaret. If you haven't seen them you can't object.'

"At first I rebelled," Fifi said, recalling her arguments: "I'm an older woman. I wasn't accustomed to running around with this 'class of people.' I said, 'No, keep them away. I don't want to hear about people who run around with a double façade.' ... I said, 'No, please, I can't be around you guys. I wouldn't be doing my duty to society. I'm too old for this stuff. I've never been involved in these things."

But Marisela persisted. She said, "Fifi, I saw a show. Fifi, they should start at once here in the workers' cafeteria."

One drag performer said of Fifi, "She opened a cabaret in the workers' cafeteria and brought us into it. She made us face the 'herds' of public we were afraid to face. She reassured us. She said, 'Do it, face them, you'll see. Nothing will happen.'"

Another performer added, "Fifi should be honored by us. She'll always be close to our hearts for the wonderful way she treated us."

'A right to live as they wish'

This documentary was made during the "special period" in which Cuba had lost virtually all its trade when the USSR was overturned.

The U.S.-led economic blockade of Cuba also impacts on every aspect of life on the island: Performers use acetate because eyelash glue is not available. They create eyelashes out of horse hair or cut from carbon paper. Their nails are glued on with a shoe adhesive.

"Butterflies on the Scaffold" is packed with footage of indoor and outdoor drag performances in front of an audience of virtually all their co-workers and neighbors, family and friends. People of all ages attend the drag performances, arriving early for a good seat, or climbing onto a tree limb for a last-minute seat.

The performers take their bows to cheers and ovations.

A local congressional representative says, "[T]hey're giving the people something that others who aren't like them don't give."

A construction worker agreed. "They're the people who are giving this neighborhood a new level, a new character. Sometimes there's nothing to do and no place to go."

The performers play many other important roles in their community. They include a cook in a cafeteria for mechanics, a dentist, a baker, a dressmaker, a soldier just returned from an internationalist mission in Angola, a carpenter, a nurse, a horse trainer, a professor of Spanish literature and a professor of military topography.

These worker-sponsored drag shows in turn have been a fulcrum to lift consciousness about cross-dressing and male-bodied femininity and same-sex love. The process of change is apparent.

One young girl child of a cross-dressing performer, unequivocal and eloquent, told the interviewer: "I love my father with my life. I don't want anyone to be disrespectful to him. He's what he is. He wants to be that way, and he's a person, and people have the right to live as they wish."

A parent said, "I never deceived my kids. I tried to help them adapt to how things were, to how I felt—I never disguised myself as a 'man'—to know me as I am, to accept my friends. They need their own lives. My world is my world. But I don't want them to be estranged from who their father is and the work he does."

The pain in some families was palpable. One mother said when she found out her son was gay, "I felt real bad. Like all mothers, one wants the best for your children. We know he chose a difficult path ... but in reality, it's not out of this world. ... [H]e's my son and I would give my life for him."

A young man who says he is gay but not ready to do cross-dress performance said, "I have a fabulous family. They know all about me. They've known about me for 10 years and I'm not 27. My family is exquisite. Up to now I haven't had problems. At first it was rough but once they realized it was my path, they accepted it and my friends, with their virtues and defects."

His father, working in the background, is asked, "What do you think of your son? $\ddot{}$

The father answers, "No one's better. I couldn't ask for a better son. I'm grateful and proud he's my son. He's a good kid. He hasn't got any problems. He's A-1. Better than me and I'm his father."

After those words tumble out, the father and son hug each other.

The local doctor summed up, "The transvestite phenomenon marks a new era with perspectives for the union of humanity in love and mutual respect between human beings."

Fifi stressed, "I think this type of work should go on all over the country, because of the respect, pride and responsibility with which they work. If the nation accepts these cultural workers, these workers for the society, as we did here in La Güinera, we'll be successful as a nation."

Fifi concluded, "I think that our kids will grow up according to what we teach

them. We have to explain the variety of life-styles in the world. They have to choose among them. If our kids get used to seeing men in drag, they'll see it as normal. We'll explain what a transvestite is and that child will choose a path to which their education leads and we'll create 'the new man.' Besides the new man will be brought up completely without any taboos!"

Next: 1990s: More and more progress in Cuba

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-104 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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1990s: Cuba education about same-sex love reached every home

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NOTICIAS EN ESPAÑOL

Lavender & red, part 106

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jul 19, 2007 8:19 AM

The revolutionary Cuban government, since the 1990s, has waged a struggle against deep-rooted old prejudice about samesex love in virtually every cultural venue.

In 1998 a national television program opened a mass discussion about lesbians and gays to immense audience interest. The topic was discussed in communities for weeks afterwards. (Leonardo Hechavarría and Marcel Hatch)

Librarian Larry R. Oberg wrote on his observations of homosexuality and culture in Cuba. "Between March 2000 and April 2002, I spent more than four months in Cuba on four separate occasions, working as a librarian on a range of research projects with my Cuban colleagues. Most of that time was spent in Havana, but also in numerous other cities, including Matanzas, Trinidad and Santiago de Cuba. As a gay man, I was motivated to find out as much as I could about the status of Cuba's gay and lesbian population."

Oberg referred to the cross-dressing, cross-gender performances in the neighborhood of La Güinera, on the outskirts of the capital. "Many of these drag shows are sponsored by the local CDRs (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution)," Olberg reported, "and play to large and wildly enthusiastic audiences. (If you're wondering, the performers were great!)"

Oberg stressed, "One of the most striking things about Cuba is the vitality of its cultural and intellectual life throughout the island, particularly in Havana. Gay themes are prevalent in the theatre, in lectures, and in concerts.

"In December, 2000, I attended a play entitled 'Muerte en el Bosque' (A Death in the Woods), produced by the Teatro Sótano in Havana 's Vedado neighborhood. Based upon the acclaimed novel 'Máscaras' (Masks), by Leonardo Padura Fuentes, the play follows a police investigation into the murder of a Havana drag queen, a plot device that allows for an examination of Cuban attitudes and prejudices towards gays at every level of society."

(www.cubanlibrariessolidaritygroup.org.uk)

Oberg concluded, "A striking contradiction in Cuban society today is the contrast between the rich cultural and intellectual life that is widely available and easily affordable, and salaries that make the purchase of a pair of shoes an event for which one must plan."

He noted that Cubans could buy theater tickets for the equivalent of about a nickel, first-run movies for about a dime, theatrical plays for less than 50 cents, and musical extravaganzas and ballet festival performances for half a buck.

The U.S. blockade of Cuba, aimed at strangling the economy, makes it harder to buy a pair of shoes, let alone build socialism, which requires material abundance and often imported materials.



Wall Street hopes that economic deprivation will turn up the pressure cooker on internal relations, making it easier to wear down and overturn the revolution that took the Cuban economy, labor, land and resources off its list of neocolonial "assets."

But the revolutionary government has continued to move forward on every front possible to generate consciousness, including about same-sex love.

"While in Cuba, I spoke with scores of gays, mostly men, and encountered none who said that their government was persecuting them," Oberg stated. He reiterated that no one with whom he spoke "reported active or systematic repression by the state." ("The Status of Gays in Cuba: Myth and Reality," March 20, 2006)

Art and consciousness

AIDS prevention is only possible with widespread safer-sex information and a thoroughgoing struggle against sexual prejudices that allow the disease to spread in the silence of shame, guilt and fear. Revolutionary Cuban leadership brought the battle against AIDS and sexual prejudices—including bigoted attitudes about bisexuality—to the small screen of popular television, as well as the big screens of culture.

Last year the 115-chapter television series "La Cara Oculta de la Luna" (The Hidden Face of the Moon), had virtually all of Cuba buzzing with debate.

"La Cara" deals with AIDS, youth sexuality, bisexuality and other social issues. The series began with the story of a 14-year-old girl who contracted AIDS during her first sexual experience.

As of November 2005, 5,422 Cubans were HIV-positive or had full-blown AIDS.

"La Cara," wrote author Freddy Domínguez Díaz, was "a series on human behavior, on people's attitude of life, on everyone's responsibility for themselves and everybody else." (Interview, Juventud Rebelde, Oct. 9, 2006; walterlippmann.com)

The series borrows from the popular style of television novellas—soap operas.

Marlon Brito López, a screenwriter and director, critiqued the television novella "as a member of the audience and media expert." He wrote, "The main goals were well defined: a warning of the dangers of this pandemic disease, present also in our territory, which can infect people in any group, race or creed; and a reflection on the elimination of prejudice linked to HIV-AIDS and sex in our society, particularly within the family."

Brito López stated, "I believe art is so ambiguous and abstract it has a latent effect on our consciousness, mainly when it reflects with honesty and talent the society one lives in. This is precisely what 'The Hidden Face of the Moon' is achieving."

He continued, "AIDS statistics in the world increased alarmingly and in our country; despite the excellent professional project and public health plan to prevent infectious diseases, media campaigns on the HIV-AIDS subject had shown little efficacy. It is here where we artists must step in. Concerts and songs by Buena Fe [Cuban musical group], or documentaries by my colleague Belkys Vega and others, were not enough to reach our homes at prime time with an artistically effective language, with affection and respect."

Bringing education to every home

"La Cara" series director Rafael "Cheîto" González explained, "When we deal with present-day stories, we try to be as close to reality as possible. Everywhere in the world there are soaps for entertainment. We try to discuss the social problems we have and therefore we deal with topics such as these. I believe it is valid to face

them with all seriousness. In this soap there are some parallel stories aimed only at entertaining the audience, but we cannot overlook the problems we have, and these must be tackled with courage.

"What better way to do it than through a TV soap watched by the whole country? Information on HIV is offered in TV spots, there is also a specific TV program on AIDS, but these are not seen by everybody. The soap, on the other hand, is watched in every home." (La Jiribilla #260, April 28, 2006)

Cheîto noted, "We did a lot of research to pull out all the stops, as popular speech has it, in approaching AIDS as a topic, that is, seriously and with all due respect, since we can't beat about the bush if we want to send an effective message." (Interview, Juventud Rebelde, Oct. 9, 2006; walterlippmann.com)

Magda González, a television director who now directs the Dramatizations Division for Cuban TV, also stressed, "When we decided to take on this theme in this slot, we were convinced that it would provoke all sorts of reactions. They're not themes that we usually deal with in a dramatized form, even though over the past three years they have been dealt with in a direct and open way by other programs like 'Let's Talk about Health' [a weekly program focusing on health matters] and 'It's Worthwhile' [a weekly program in which a leading psychologist discusses letter writers' problems]."

But as the AIDS epidemic continued, "and because we consider we have a socially responsible role to play to put television in the front line of the Battle of Ideas, we decided that the dramatic format was an ideal way to disseminate messages using the emotions and the viewer's identification with the human dramas. When writing the script and producing the tele-serial we called upon experts from the Center for Sexual Education and the National HIV-AIDS Prevention Center as advisers and we believe it mirrors realistically aspects of our society.

"The second theme incorporates a new element in teledramas," she continued, "the treatment of sexual relations between men either as homosexuals or bisexuals. Public reaction is divided. Some are indignant that the theme is shown on screen, others applaud the initiative, and still others say that these themes have to be aired but not in this way.

"That the first exists is only natural in people whose sexual attitudes were formed by a Hispanic culture, heavily influenced by the Catholic Church, where sex is a sin and homosexuality a crime. Hopefully the telenovela will help them understand that to respect, recognize and tolerate different lifestyles doesn't turn them into accomplices of what they believe to be evil, but that it makes them followers of the concept given to us by our Comandante when he says that "The Revolution is about equality and full liberty, it's about being treated by everybody else as human beings." (La Jiribilla #260, April 29-May 5, 2006)

This is revolutionary process

No one, of any sexuality, was of one mind in Cuba about "La Cara." However, those who brought the series to television screens did not shy away from the debate. On the contrary, widespread public debate with leadership was the whole point, and it has been eminently successful.

The Cuban health care system Web site "Infomed" garnered viewpoints about the television novella. So did Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX). E-zine La Jiribilla devoted an entire issue to the topic.

Journalist Ricardo Ronquillo concluded, "It would be worrying if we thought of ourselves as a wholly agreeing society with neither competing arguments nor opposing positions in face of its most intimate conflicts; or even worse, that silence prevailed."

La Jornada correspondent Gerardo Arreola wrote, "This discussion has become the most relevant signs of public impact on the matter since the motion picture 'Fresa y Chocolate' ('Strawberry and Chocolate') shook sectors of Cuban society in 1993 with its statement against intolerance through the story of a homosexual character." (May 8, 2006, walterlippmann.com)

The Miami Herald, an unlikely source for any supportive news about Cuba, reported in November 2006, "Now, as the show draws to an end, Cuban gays and lesbians say the show is symbolic of the communist island's government and people becoming more accepting towards them." (Advocate.com, Nov. 8, 2006)

It is this process of popular education with leadership, in which consciousness is raised through mass participation, discussion and debate, that is the revolution and the "unfettered thought" it liberates—not overnight, but with ongoing labor, without which nothing is produced.

CENESEX continues to be at the forefront of that important work, including backing the television novella that sparked such controversy.

Next: Mariela Espín Castro talks about work still to be done in Cuba.

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-105 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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Cuba's CENESEX led the way on sexual rights

Lavender & red, part 107

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jul 27, 2007 9:28 AM

Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual) carries out its important collective labor—including combating what remains of pre-revolutionary prejudice against same-sex love—in what was once a privately owned Havana mansion.



Mariela Castro Espín, director of CENESEX, stressed that sexologists have a "scientific, social and political responsibility" to help raise understanding and consciousness in the whole population. (havanajournal.com, April 1, 2003)

CENESEX's goal, Castro Espín explained, is to contribute to "the development of a culture of sexuality that is full, pleasurable and responsible, as well as to promote the full exercise of sexual rights." (MEDICC Review, Vol. VIII, No. 1, March-April 2006)

Since she and CENESEX are part of the revolution, they don't have to do this work alone.

"Historically speaking," Castro Espín stated, "changing mentality is one of the most difficult things to do, one of the slowest processes in society. Even though we've made substantial political and legislative strides, we're still bound by aspects of roles defined long ago. This subjectivity begins early, in the way children are raised, in how they're taught to play.

"We have to learn to recognize which elements of the traditional masculinity or femininity are actually doing us damage. What parts of the picture actually take away from our freedom, fulfillment and dignity. We have to take a hard look at these things, or else we'll keep passing them down from generation to generation." (MEDICC Review)

She offered a concrete example about AIDS safer-sex education. "We have to include a gender perspective—promotion of new constructs of masculinity and femininity—and not just take an epidemiological approach."

She said an epidemiological approach to prevent AIDS transmission might simply suggest, "Use a condom."

But the system of male chauvinism imposed on Cuba for centuries created a mindset in which some males feel that condoms may be a sensation barrier to full sexual enjoyment, to which they are entitled. Castro Espín emphasized, "So for him to use a condom, he has to begin to construct and define his masculinity in a different way, that doesn't put a premium only on his own pleasure. In the end, this stereotype is very dangerous to his own health as well as his partner's—and this can be true for homosexual as well as heterosexual couples, whenever a relationship defines that one partner has hegemony over the other.

"So you need to combine both an epidemiological and a gender approach to these very intimate issues. This is why, for example, our posters and other materials



emphasize that protection of your partner against HIV and STDs in general is a sign of caring, and that means it's a responsibility of both partners in a relationship."

Castro Espín told MEDICC Review interviewer Gail A. Reed regarding CENESEX: "We work with groups who promote safe sex among their peers: men who have sex with men [MSM], transvestites and transsexuals, adolescents and young people in general and then more broadly with medical students. In each medical school, there's a department of Sexology and Education for Sexuality."

All education in Cuba, it bears repeating-including medical school-is free.

Castro Espín observed in 2006: "Regarding attitudes towards MSM and bisexuals as well, there have been positive changes—I say empirically, since we are still studying this. But at our conferences and workshops that we hold with people from the whole country, it's clear that participants are more able now than 10 years ago to understand and respect another sexual orientation. I think the work that's been done over the decade in health and by the Cuban Women's Federation has helped to bring about that change, and we've done it reaching out to people's sensitivity as human beings.

"In essence, our view is that any kind of prejudice or discrimination is damaging to health."

'Modifying the social imagination'

As a revolutionary worker, Mariela Castro Espín demonstrates in every interview that she has already rolled up her sleeves to do the next job that needs to be done.

She talked about the revolutionary labor that is still required to make progress in overcoming old prejudices about same-sex love. "First," she told MEDICC Review in 2006, "I think we have to work more and better in the schools. We've worked with the Ministry of Education, but I'm still not satisfied we've made enough progress, and so we need to deepen understanding among teachers and other school staff; we need to carry more on educational TV and so on.

"And this also has to do with a gender focus, of course. In the 70s and 80s, we found a lot of fear and resistance to a national program for sex education with such a gender focus. The program was finally accepted in 1996, and now it's taught throughout the country; since then it has reduced school dropouts from early marriages and childbirth by one half."

Castro Espín elaborated: "The country now has policies that legitimize sexual orientations and also has brought laws in line with a gender perspective. But on the legislative front, there is still a lot to be done."

She has proposed that when the Cuban Constitution of the Republic is next revised, the category of "sexual orientation" be added. Castro Espín said homosexual Cubans are protected, but "when something like that is made explicit, it is official recognition that there is a need to avoid any type of discrimination, like racism or sexism."

Such a legal measure, she pressed, would make this protection even more evident. And, she added, it's important to protect against discrimination, not just in public institutions "but also in the space of the family, because it is often there that a homosexual is first insulted or rejected."

No Cuban of any sex has to marry in order to have economic support, a job, a home, health care or other rights that are guaranteed to every person. Castro Espín pointed out, though, that although homosexuals live within the law in consensual relationships: "gay marriage is not recognized, so you have many issues such as inheritance that aren't fully resolved. We need changes in the family code itself related to these and other questions, including domestic violence. CENESEX has now presented two bills in Parliament before the

education and children's commissions that have to do with gender," she noted in 2006, "and these have been well received."

Unofficial same-sex marriages have taken place on the island. For example, four local young males ranging in ages from 17 to 22 held a double same-sex ceremony outdoors, in front of loved ones and neighbors, in the working-class suburb of San Miguel del Padrón, southeast of Havana, in 2001. (workingforchange.com, July 13, 2001, based on a report from the French Press Agency)

Castro Espín summed up, "By the 1970s, reforms to the penal code excluded the classification of homosexuals as criminals [because of their sexual orientation]; any word that discriminated against homosexuals was modified.

"However," she stressed, "that is not enough because I think our laws should better reflect the respect that homosexuals deserve. Greater and more professional work is needed at the micro-social level, because what this is about is trying to change perceptions, modifying the social imagination." (Alma Mater, journal of the University of Havana, CENESEX website: www.cenesex.sld.cu)

Next: CENESEX proposes groundbreaking transsexual rights.

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-106 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA Fidel Castro backs effort

Cuba's CENESEX proposes ground-breaking transsexual rights

Lavender & red, part 108

By Leslie Feinberg Published Aug 6, 2007 8:48 PM

Mariela Castro Espín, director of Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), recalled that three decades ago a Cuban from Matanzas who was born female-bodied but identified as male came to Havana for help.



In response, Cuban revolutionary leader and president of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), Vilma Espín, recommended in 1979 that a special committee be established, coordinated by the National Work Group on Sex Education—CENESEX's predecessor. The FMC had formed the Work Group in 1972; CENESEX was established in 1989.

The first result, Castro Espín related, was an agreement with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice to issue new identity papers. Three transsexual Cubans got new identity documents under that accord.

In 1988, the first sex-reassignment surgery—from male to female—was carried out successfully in Cuba. The operation was successful and the person lives without difficulty.

But the media coverage, Castro Espín remembered, was tinged with more sensationalism than science. Historically unchallenged prejudice welled up. As a result, the CENESEX director explained, the operations were temporarily halted until the need for them could be explained to the population. Clinical and psychological care continued for transsexual Cubans, but with a lower profile.

Castro Espín stated in the January 2006 La Jornada interview, "We were unable to convince people of the need to carry out these operations. This reluctance also came from the professionals in the Ministry of Public Health who were not experts on the subject. This is where I feel the strongest resistance, even as we speak."

Journalist Gerardo Arreola added that in recent years, "A group of transsexuals joined CENESEX and were trained as sex health promoters in the campaign for the prevention of AIDS. In the center they have a permanent open debate forum and receive specialized care. The health system provides them with free hormone treatment."

Sex change and social change

"At the beginning of 2004," Arreola wrote, "there was a new momentum when CENESEX launched a national strategy: it increased and diversified its professional staff, obtained support from President Fidel Castro and directly contacted ministries and social organizations to discuss, based on entity profile, the subject of transsexuals."



Two years later, Mariela Castro Espín said, this move has accelerated change. "It seems all this work is now bearing fruit. People are now more receptive. We have also articulated a more persuasive discourse. I see great flexibility, even among official leaders."

Castro Espín, as director of CENESEX, took a plan about expanding rights for transsexuals to two parliamentary committees on Dec. 20, 2005.

Granma reported the following day that CENESEX had "released results of a survey on gender identity in today's Cuban society to the committees on Education, Culture, Science, Technology and the Environment, and Youth, Children and Women's Rights.

"Mariela Castro said that for people with a non-traditional gender identity to fully develop their potential as a member of society, it is first necessary to identify them so as to assure that they receive adequate specialized assistance. She also noted the need in Cuban society of a profound understanding of gender and sexuality."

Correspondent Gerardo Arreola interviewed Castro Espín for the Jan. 9, 2006, issue of La Jornada about the move to widen rights for transsexuals. Castro Espín outlined that her proposal to parliament would make free sex reassignment surgery and hormones available to all transsexual Cubans—all forms of health care are provided cost-free on the island. New identity documents would also be immediately issued.

Arreola reported, "This is part of a national policy to recognize the rights of these people to live a full life in the gender they chose."

Castro Espín stated, "The draft was very well received by the representatives in the two commissions examining the project." She added, "They not only accepted the proposal, but asked many questions and made recommendations."

By 2006, a transsexual Cuban woman traveled abroad on her new passport. Four others who had sex reassignment surgeries abroad got changed identity papers as soon as they returned home. "The Courts of Justice were finally convinced," Castro Espín concluded.

In early 2007, Cuba's National Assembly of Popular Power agreed to discuss making sex-reassignment surgery free of cost to all transsexuals on the island who request it.

The newsletter Diversity (Diversidad) reported: "The measure would complement the present Identity Law that already acknowledges the right of citizens to change name and sexual identity. This places Cuba at the vanguard of the legislations that acknowledge the rights of transvestites, transsexuals and transgender in Latin America."

In fact, by providing free health care, Cuba is leading the world on rights for transsexual and gender variant people.

Revolution takes work

Mariel Castro Espín and CENESEX don't rest on these laurels. She emphasized the need for legislation and other actions to block discrimination and raise popular consciousness.

A job is a right in Cuba. However, she said, "there may be transsexuals who have a job and are not rejected, because the law protects them, even if they go cross-dressed. But the administrators always find a way to get rid of them."

Addressing a conflict between revolutionary security police and trans Cubans two years earlier, Castro Espín was very clear. She stated that neighbors had complained about street solicitation. But when the security police arrested transsexuals and transvestites, based on an assumption that they were prostitutes, Castro Espín stressed that they were acting on backward ideas and

prejudice.

"The police take measures—that's what they are there for," she explained, "but they interpret things with their own way of thinking. They have learned over their lifetimes that transsexuals and homosexuals are intrinsically bad." (Associated Press, Sept. 5, 2004)

"This attitude was not in keeping with the policy or the law, because these do not penalize a person for cross-dressing." (La Jornada, Jan. 9, 2006)

Castro Espín noted, "We have been given procedural guidelines so these people know how to defend themselves in case of police transgression of the regulations."

She explained that CENESEX intervened and set up a channel of communication with the revolutionary security forces and the Ministry of the Interior. Together they ordered police not to hassle transgender and transsexual Cubans. They also agreed to provide education to Cuba's National Revolutionary Police officers, including a seminar on distinct expressions of gender and sexuality.

Castro Espín noted that the transsexual and transgender Cubans who had been harassed came right to CENESEX to lodge complaints and demand redress. "Of course, they came to demand their rights, because I don't know if you have noticed, we Cubans have a strong sense of justice and fight when we have to," she said.

"They spoke of everything that bothered them. I asked if I could tape what they had said to prepare a report. And that's what I did; a short report so they could read it over rapidly and then a longer one with many annexes.

"That is how a national strategy came about for attention to transsexuals with an integral vision since 1979, which was created by my mother, Vilma Espín, president of the Cuban Women's Federation. What we did was to broaden this work, to enrich it." (BBC Mundo, Sept.18, 2006)

"We are even carrying out a very important study on representations of transsexuality," she concluded, "to carry out educational campaigns to teach society to respect these people and respect their rights."

Next: Revolution—'a battle of ideas'

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-107 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA

Cuba: 'Bringing revolution's humanity to all aspects of

Lavender & red, part 109

By Leslie Feinberg Published Aug 18, 2007 10:45 PM

"I want to bring the revolution's humanity to those aspects of life that it hasn't reached because of old prejudices," Mariela Castro Espín, who has worked hard to eradicate pre-revolutionary prejudices about same-sex love, transsexuality and gender variance in Cuba, said in summer 2006. (Reuters, June 29, 2006)



Castro Espín is director of Cuba's National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), which has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short time to replace prejudices about same-sex love and transsexuality with positive attitudes.

CENESEX created its own Internet Web site-www.cenesex.sld.cu-shortly after the 16th World Congress of Sexology met in Havana in March 2003.

CENESEX's site incorporates a section on sexual diversity, which, in Spanish and English, offers basic information and opportunities to consult with experts and to voice personal opinions.

The site gets right to the point about its objective, which it states is to "overcome the taboos and prejudices that persist about same-sex love: Being homosexual or bisexual is



FIST and Workers World Party delegation with staff of CENESEX in their Havana office, July 24.

Photo: Namibia Donadio

not a disease, it is not synonymous with perversity, nor does it constitute a crime."

Homosexuality, the Web site makes clear, "is a sexual orientation that is not caused by seduction at any age, it is not contagious, and is not acquired by educational defects or negative examples in the family environment."

This Internet site receives the most visits—150,000 "hits" a day—of any Cuban World Wide Web portal. (IPS/GIN, July 3, 2004)

Castro Espín said in the summer of 2004 that these developments are "the result of an effort of more than 30 years, and now we are seeing its fruits more clearly."

Work accomplished, work to do

When asked by a BBC reporter in September 2006 whether perceptions about homosexuality had changed in Cuban society, Mariela Castro Espín answered, "I think so; it has changed very much."

Respond

She told interviewer Eduardo García Jiménez: "I do believe that since the 1990s there is greater acceptance of the presence of homosexuals by some portion of the population and public institutions. That does not mean that the contradiction has been resolved for all individuals at all levels of society. ("Alma Mater," journal of the University of Havana, reprinted in Green Left Weekly, March 3, 2004)

Castro Espín added, "I think we are at a good moment to implement policies that are more explicit about the defense of the human rights of homosexuals, so that we are better prepared to confront any manifestation of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. I see this very humanistic attempt to achieve greater respect for the rights of homosexuals as the waging of a battle of ideas in our society. I believe this notion has to be part of the cultural and political battle because that would mean a cultural, social and political strengthening for the Cuban Revolution."

Castro Espín said she is advocating for an amendment to the Cuban Constitution to add homosexuality to the groups against which discrimination is outlawed. "It is a proposal I am making from my position of responsibility as the director of the CENESEX. I assure you it has been heard by receptive listeners. My proposal is in no way removed or distant from the spirit of the Revolution, or from the entire process that has brought about this call to a battle of ideas.

"It would be wonderful to be able to spark meaningful, inter-group discussion on this subject," Castro Espín emphasized, "so that Cuban society could develop a healthier culture of sexuality, one that is fairer, that helps to erode old, erroneous beliefs and prejudices that emphasize sexual orientation.

"Something like this would put the revolution even more in line with its humanistic ethic; the Cuban Revolution has been possible because of the participation of all men and women, of all Cubans who have identified with the conquests and dreams of that social project. Among all those who have participated there are also people of diverse sexual orientations."

Don't measure with imperial ruler

As earlier articles in this series documented, the CIA, Hollywood and corporate media tried to deflect resistance to U.S. imperialism's covert war against Cuba, and the domestic discrimination, police brutality and bashing of same-sex-loving and gender-variant people that are commonplace in the U.S., by focusing on the onerous tasks Cuba's revolution faced in uprooting centuries of prejudice about same-sex love. Of course, each poisonous seed had been planted and cultivated by U.S. capitalism and, earlier, Spanish colonialism.

Today, the Cuban Revolution has made enormous strides in raising popular consciousness about sexual liberation, including same-sex love. Building ties of unity between the lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) movement in the U.S. and the Cuban Revolution require conscious leadership of the most resolutely anti-imperialist activists in the liberation movement for LGBT and other sexually, sexand gender-oppressed peoples.

Yet some activists in the U.S. still argue that Cuba won't have "passed the test" until lesbians and gays are "out" in Cuba with their own autonomous organizational formations.

Lesbians and gay men in the U.S. and other capitalist countries are "out" in order to unite against shared and/or overlapping mechanisms of oppression.

Castro Espín stated categorically to journalist Mary Lamey via a translator, "There is no official repression of lesbians and gays in Cuba. What remains are social and cultural reactions that must be transformed, the same as in many other countries." (Canada.com, The Gazette, July 29, 2006)

She pointed to the bashings of transsexuals and homosexuals in England and other imperialist countries. "This doesn't exist in Cuba. The Cuban population is much more respectful of differences than in other places," she emphasized. "When I'm afraid I will find a very strong resistance, I find a high degree of sensibility in the Cuban population."

Cubans defining their 'liberation'

In a capitalist country, being "out" is not only an assertion of individual identity and personhood. The movement to end the oppression has to be "out" and independent, as well.

That is because of the LGBT movement's relationship to its own ruling class in capitalist countries. In the class struggle, it is imperative for the movement to break free of its own capitalist bosses and their ideology. In that case, the movement is only as powerful as it is independent.

But what about a socialist country in which the laboring class rules and is trying to build socialism in the liberated turf of a workers' state? What would Cuban men who have sex with men, women who have sex with women, and bisexuals, transsexual and transgender Cubans gain by identifying "away" from their own class?

Castro Espín addressed the question of organizing for change in Cuba in her 2003 interview with Eduardo Jiménez García. "I think the greatest difficulty is that there is no unifying and convincing project, because male and female homosexuals are as heterogeneous as heterosexuals," she said. "Yet, I don't see this as an obstacle; I see it as a complicated reality.

"I believe that male and female homosexuals should participate more in different loci of social and political discussion, despite the prejudices, so they can make their truth, their real need for equality, their beliefs known, in order to gain support from the scientific community, and in that way bring to bear arguments that can effect the changes that are necessary in society—and see that they are just."

However, an international network of both LGBT social democrats and those far to the right of them is developing in the imperialist countries, particularly the U.S. and Britain. It makes an appeal to Cubans, and others in countries menaced by imperial powers, to identify first and foremost based on what is presumed to be an identical and shared sexuality. In turn, this network asserts its readiness to defend gay and lesbian Cubans and others—but only against their own people, culture and national liberation struggle.

When aligned with overall and sometimes specific imperialist interests, such a position can offer a "left cover" for regime change—through covert and/or military intervention.

Defend Cuba!

Cubans are defining their own liberation.

The Cuban Revolution merits the support of progressives and communists around the world, without demands that it measure up as "perfect" using an imperial ruler. A socialist revolution is a process, not a single act. Solving the economic and social problems that the capitalists cannot and will not tackle is the dynamic forward motion of revolution.

Regarding the revolution's efforts to eliminate old prejudice against homosexuality, Fidel Castro concluded during a 1988 interview with a Galician television station: "Given that we can make mistakes, we obsessively follow the idea [of] what is just, right and best for the people, and what is most humane for our people and our society. However, the task is not easy—I think that each time we get closer to the right criteria for making the world we want. Nonetheless, I think that we still have many faults, and that future generations will have to continue to perfect this new world."

The whole population of Cuba—of all races, sexes, genders, sexualities, ages and abilities—does not need to be defended against its own culture or its own revolution. It needs and deserves defense against the U.S. blockade of its island and every other illegal act of imperialist war, overt and covert, which impedes revolutionary progress.

International support for Cuba's right to sovereignty and self-determination will allow the island's population to spend more time, energy and resources on socialist construction, rather than on defense.

It is the LGBT movements in the imperialist citadels that have to break with their own ruling classes in order to build bonds of genuine international solidarity. It's a hard position to take. It requires ideological valor; the refusal to remain silent about the emperors' "new" clothing.

The Cuban Revolution has had to take up the tasks that history presented it, including the eventual eradication of the legacies of racism, sexism and anti-gay bigotry.

In order to move forward toward their own liberation, the LGBT and other progressive movements in the U.S. and other capitalist countries have to combat anti-communism—which is, in the long run, a defense of capitalism—and develop a powerful anti-imperialist current that can extend its solidarity to Cuba and all countries fighting for their sovereignty and self-determination against finance capital.

Revolutionary Cuba—the "hope of the hemisphere"—has done a better job dealing with its tasks.

Next: Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five.

To find out more about Cuba, read parts 86-106 of Lavender & Red at workers.org.

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LGBT,

POLITICAL PRISONERS, KOREA, CHINA, HONDURAS, HAITI, AFRICA, WOMEN, SOCIALISM, GAZA 'Cuba: Estamos contigo!'

Rainbow solidarity for Cuban Five circles the globe

Lavender & red, part 110

By Leslie Feinberg Published Aug 27, 2007 8:27 PM

A multinational, multilingual group of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) activists in the United States—the belly of the beast—issued a call in Spanish and English for Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five in mid-January 2007.



The five political prisoners—Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, and René González—are collectively serving four life sentences and 75 years in far-flung U.S. penitentiaries. The "crime" they were convicted of is having infiltrated CIA-backed fascist commando groups in order to halt terror attacks against Cuba from U.S. soil.

The Rainbow Solidarity call demands a new trial and freedom for these political prisoners, defense of Cuban sovereignty and self-determination, and a halt to the illegal U.S. acts of war against Cuba—including the economic blockade and CIA-trained, funded and armed attacks by mercenary "contra" armies operating from this country.

This initiative was consciously issued by LGBT and other activists battling oppression based on sexuality, gender expression and sex—one of the targeted progressive movements at whom the imperialist campaign to vilify Cuba had been aimed.

This was not the first act of solidarity with Cuba by left-wing LGBT activists in the United States—not by a long shot. But the response to the Rainbow Solidarity initiative—swift and dramatic—signals a new day for LGBT support worldwide for Cuba.

Within hours and days after the call went out over the Internet, hundreds of individuals and organizations signed on to the call, posted on the www.freethefiveny.org web site (look for the rainbow).

Most exciting was how many of the signers immediately began forwarding the call to their lists.

Volunteers from around the world translated the introduction and call for Rainbow Solidarity to free the Cuban Five into simplified and traditional Chinese, Tagalog, Farsi, Turkish, Greek, Croatian, Portuguese, Italian, Danish, Japanese, French and German. More translations in the works or planned include Swahili, Urdu, Indonesian, Arabic, Korean, Bengali and a streaming video in ASL (American Sign Language).

International endorsements flooded in from Argentina, Australia, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxemburg, Mexico, Montenegro, New Zealand, occupied Palestine, Philippines, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Romania, Scotland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Wales and other countries, and from Hong Kong and



Respond

Taiwan.

Individuals and groups from every state in the continental United States signed on as well—from southern Florida to the Pacific Northwest, Southern California to Maine.

All told, they form an extraordinary and broad arc of a united front. A frequently updated list of signers is posted at www.freethefiveny.org.

Many names on the growing list will be recognizable as well-known LGBT activists and others battling oppression based on sexuality, gender and sex, including women's liberationists.

This roster also reveals that many of these activists are also some of the hardest-working organizers in movements here and around the world against imperialist war, neo-liberalism, neo-colonialism, national oppression, racism, police brutality, prisons and the death penalty, sweatshops and capitalist globalization.

These are also leading activists in the struggle for immigrant rights; women's liberation, including reproductive rights; jobs; labor union, tenant and community organizing; education; health care and affordable housing; freedom for all U.S. political prisoners and for prisoner rights; liberation of oppressed nations; support for Cuba, and the revolutionary movement to overturn capitalism and build an economy based on planning to meet peoples' needs.

Expansive political spectrum

Early signers include Teresa Gutierrez, a longtime leader in the struggle to free the Cuban Five; former political prisoner and leading prison abolitionist Angela Y. Davis; Leslie Cagan, national coordinator of United for Peace and Justice; LeiLani Dowell, national coordinator of FIST (Fight Imperialism, Stand Together); Stephen Funk, the U.S. Marine who was the first imprisoned Iraq War conscientious objector; Bev Tang, organizer for Anakbayan, the youth group of Bayan; Gerry Scoppettuolo, co-founder of GALLAN (Pride At Work, Boston); Lani Ka'ahumanu, BiNET USA; anti-imperialist activist Joo-hyun Kang; Atlanta community activist Pat Hussain; Camille Hopkins, director of NYTRO (New York Transgender Rights Organization) of Western New York; transgender activist Moonhawk River Stone; and Jesse Lokahi Heiwa, Queer People Of Color Action.

Rauda Morcos, general coordinator of Aswat-Palestinian Gay Women, signed on. The Puerto Rican Alliance of Los Angeles and its coordinator Lawrence Reyes have endorsed.

Activists Barbara Smith and Margo Okazawa-Rey signed on. The two were among the founders of the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black feminists of all sexualities who issued a historic 1977 statement against the "interlocking" system of "racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppression."

Former political prisoners Laura Whitehorn and Linda Evans added their names.

Louisville, Ky., filmmaker and activist Sonja de Vries, director of the documentary "Gay Cuba," and Walter Lippmann, editor-in-chief of CubaNews, signed on. Other activists and organizations working in defense of Cuba added their weight to the call, including Cuba Education Tours, Vancouver, B.C., Canada; Fairness Campaign, Louisville, Ky.; Simon McGuinness, secretary of the Free the Miami Five Campaign, Ireland; Brigitte Oftner, coordinator of the Austrian Free the Five committee; Viktor Dedaj, webmaster of the Cuba Solidarity Project; the Cuba Edmonton Solidarity Committee in Alberta, Canada; the Swiss Cuba Association; Deutsche Kommunistische Partei Cuba Arbeitsgruppe, Germany; and No War on Cuba, Washington, D.C.

Also QueerToday.com and its founder, Mark Snyder; Gordene MacKenzie, GenderTalk Radio and director of Women's Studies, Merrimack College, Beverly, Mass.

Organizations include the national organization Pro-Gay Philippines; Audre Lorde Project—a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit and Transgender People of Color center for community organizing, focusing on the New York City area; FIERCE!—a community organization for Transgender, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, Queer, and Questioning (TLGBTSQQ) youth of color in New York City; QUIT! (Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism); LAGAI-Queer Insurrection; Stonewall Warriors, Boston; Greek Homosexual Community, Athens, Greece; Queertoday.com, Boston, Mass.; and Queers Without Borders, Hartford, Conn.

The Queer Caucus of the National Lawyers Guild; Stephen Whittle, professor of equalities law and the British organization Press for Change at the School of Law at Manchester Metropolitan University, endorsed. So did Barbara Findlay, cochair of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Issues Section, BC Branch, Canadian Bar Association, and the law office of Lenore Rae Shefman, San Francisco, Calif.

Many transgender and transsexual organizations and individuals strengthened the initiative, including Trans Action Canada; three national Italian trans groups: Coordinamento Nazionale Trans FTM, Movimento Identità Transessuale and Crisalide Azione Trans; playwright and performer Imani Henry; Matt/ilda a.k.a. Matt Bernstein Sycamore, editor "Nobody Passes," San Francisco, Calif.; Cianán Russell, chair of the Indiana Transgender Rights Advocacy Alliance; and the Winona Gender Mutiny Collective.

Endorsers include The National Lavender Green Caucus; Doug Barnes and the Freedom Socialist Party; Starlene Rankin, Green National Committee delegate of the Lavender Caucus of the Green Party of the United States; Orange County Peace & Freedom Party, Anaheim, Calif; and the LGBT Caucus of Workers World Party.

Among the signers are individuals and organizations whose activist work includes the struggle against women's oppression: Brenda Stokely, a leader of the Million Worker March Movement and NYCLAW; transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty; Sara Flounders, co-director of the International Action Center; Women's Fightback Network, Boston, Mass.; Melinda Clark, local co-founder of Code Pink in Willits, Calif.; Welfare Warriors, Milwaukee, Wis.; League of Women Voters in Montenegro; and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) chapters in Washington, D.C.; Rome, Italy; and the Canadian Section in British Columbia.

Many labor activists have added their names and/or the endorsement of their unions, including Pride at Work/GALLAN Boston, Mass., AFL-CIO; Bus Riders Union/Labor Community Strategy Center, Los Angeles, Calif., and Guyanese-American Workers United, New York, N.Y. From Canada, Canadian Union Of Postal Workers, Calgary, Alberta; Canadian Union of Public Employees, Toronto, Ont.; and Hospital Employees' Union, Burnaby, B.C.

There's no end in sight to this rainbow.

Grassroots diplomacy

The Rainbow Solidarity for the Cuban Five initiative is also giving voice to individuals who, living in capitalist democracies, have little political input except to be asked to pull a lever for a big-business candidate.

The Rainbow Solidarity call has become a poll that reveals a new grassroots sentiment as signers eloquently register their outrage at the continued imprisonment of the five Cubans and at Washington's economic and political blockade of Cuba and other illegal and covert acts of war.

Rebecca writes from San Diego, Calif., "Free the Cuban Five!! No more political prisoners!"

David from New York state stresses how biased the trial venue was for the Five: "Five Cubans who were trying to stop the ultra-right terrorist groups in Miami

from carrying out violent actions against the people of Cuba. Miami is the one city in the U.S. where the Five certainly could not receive a fair trial."

Paul says: "As a gay man in South Florida who calls for freedom for our brothers, the Five, I am delighted to see this initiative. THEY MUST BE FREE!"

Tighe supports the five as "those most important defenders of everyone's right to live without fear of terrorism. The patriotic Cuban Five [are] illegally held political prisoners in a country with the most of its own people behind bars." Barry, who grew up in Miami, adds the need to organize to close down the U.S. prison at Guantanamo and free all those held there.

"T." from California, comments: "These five men, fighting against terrorism, have been imprisoned by the U.S. government—'MY' government! Jailing heroes and supporting terror, while pretending to do the opposite, is sadly all the public can count on from 'our' hypocritical, double-speaking, global corporate-run excuse for a 'by and for the people' government."

Brian states from Newport, Ore.: "I am enraged by the hypocrisy of five innocent men being held in prison under harsh circumstances while known terrorist Luis Posada Carriles goes scot-free. While Bush and cronies spout off that no nation that harbors terrorists will be tolerated with one face, they set a convicted terrorist murderer of at least 73 innocents free with the other, while holding five innocent men in prison."

Adela, from the Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre Inc. in Queensland, Australia, states, "I want to express my solidarity with the Cuban Five and the Cuban people and Fidel."

Richard, from Madera, Calif., says succinctly, "It's way past time to change our policy toward Cuba and the Cuban people."

Jerry, from Athletes United for Peace, U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities, Nicaragua Solidarity Committee, writes: "These people were trying to prevent an act of terrorism. The country that claims to lead the 'War On Terror' is imprisoning them."

Marcos writes from Bielefeld, Germany, "Free the 5 Cubans now, stop the war on Cuba and the rest of the world!"

Richard, in Jacksonville, Ill., says, "Close Guantánamo, human rights are for humans everywhere."

Ray from Farmington, Conn., suggests, "Put Cheney and Bush in jail instead of the Cuban Five."

Yancy, from the LGBTQI Desk of Bayan USA, affirms: "Mabuhi ang panaghiusang international!!! Long live international solidarity!!"

Solidarity is not charity

Eric from Milwaukee reminds, "Ah, the things we gain from solidarity."

By defending Cuba against imperialist warfare, LGBT activists and organizations in the U.S. and other imperialist countries are breaking with their own ruling classes and extending their own unilateral declaration of peace to a socialist country.

By rejecting anti-communism, the movement against sexual, gender and sex oppression is combating capitalist ideology—a giant step towards liberation.

Cuba has much to teach those who yearn for the right to live and love without fear or censure about what it takes to begin the process of literally eradicating white supremacy, patriarchy and prejudice against same-sex love and gender/sex diversity; what it takes to create a new woman, a new man, a new human being, and new forms of communist comradeship.

The Cuban people fought back against enslavement for half a millennium. For the last half century they have resisted the most powerful slave-master in history, just 90 miles from their shores.

The famous labor union song poses the question sharply: Which side are you on?

Rainbow Solidarity answers: "Cuba, we are with you. Cuba, estamos contigo."

This is the last segment of the Cuba mini-series within the ongoing Lavender & Red Workers World newspaper series, which can be read in its entirety online at: www.workers.org.

Next: An anti-imperialist perspective on ending oppression based on sexuality, gender and sex.

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Anti-gay, anti-trans laws rooted in class rule

Lavender & red, part 111

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Sep 21, 2007 11:08 PM

In today's capitalist citadels, lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans mass political movements have overturned many oppressive laws against same-sexuality and cross-dressing. The imperialist ruling classes would be relieved if these movements would now redirect their collective ire against laws still on the books in today's former colonies and neocolonies.



What the official imperial histories have all but obscured, however, is that these same colonial and imperialist powers were the ones that imposed laws against same-sexuality and narrowed gender/sex expression all over the world.

The policing of sexuality and gender expression—and the very existence of police as a repressive force—are rooted in the development of class society.

Reactionary laws that narrowly defined the sexes, degraded the economic and social status of women, and justified state repression and harsh penalties for same-sex love and gender diversity were instituted around the world wherever patriarchal class rule overturned matrilineal pre-class societies.

In some societies the change was slow and gradual. Labor technique over centuries became more productive, leading to the accumulation of surplus. The struggle that ensued over control of this surplus resulted in the overturning of cooperative economic and social relations.

In other cases, pre-class communal societies were conquered by the armies of patriarchal ruling classes. In those instances, matrilineal kinship lines were severed abruptly.

In both instances, the new world order served the dictates of patriarchal private ownership of the new social wealth.

Lex Scantia—one of the earliest known laws against same-sex love—was written during the early Roman Empire in the third century B.C.E. East Roman Emperor Justinian blamed homosexuality for floods and earthquakes—not unlike today's U.S. theo-cons who claim AIDS and Hurricane Katrina are the wrath of an avenging Jehovah against gay men and lesbians.

The East Roman Code of Theodosius in 390 C.E. is an example of the historical intertwining of anti-homosexuality laws with gender/sex enforcement. The edict stated that "All of those who are accustomed to condemn their own manly body, transformed into a womanly one, to undergo sexual practices reserved for the other sex, and who have nothing different from women, will pay for this crime among the avenging flames, in front of the people."

The feudal ruling classes of Europe also developed harsh domestic laws as part of their conquest of communal peasants and consolidation of overall class rule.

Spain enforced its "Seven-Part Code" during the rule of Alfonso X of Castile from 1252-1284 C.E. The code was one of the first on the continent to call for



castration and then stoning to death for "sins against nature," which included "sodomy."

France instituted a legal code in 1260 that made same-sexual acts punishable by amputation of clitoris or testicles for the first "offense," penis or breasts for the second conviction, and death by burning at the stake for the third. A decade later, under Louis IX, anal intercourse was proclaimed a capital crime mandating the sentence of burning at the stake.

In what is today Belgium, the first execution in Western Europe for a same-sex act between two men was carried out in 1292.

In one example of how the charges of "sodomy" and "heresy" were used as political weapons in an economic war, Philip IV of France called for the roundup arrests of all Knights Templar in 1308. The charges were a cover to appropriate the considerable wealth of the knights.

Queer Heritage's online timeline notes that in 1432: "Florence becomes the first European city to set up a special authority to prosecute crimes of sodomy. Called the Uffiziali di Notte (Officers of the Night), this special court prosecutes more than 10,000 men and boys over the next 70 years. About 2,000 are believed to have been convicted. Most avoid further punishment by paying fines."

In 1451 Pope Nicholas V empowered the Inquisition to hunt down and punish male sodomy. In 1476, Leonardo Da Vinci was twice anonymously reported to Florentine authorities on the charge of "sodomy," but was acquitted both times because no witnesses came forward.

King Henry VIII's government codified the "buggery" civil law in 1533 that called for death by hanging as punishment for anal intercourse. The slur "buggery" derived from the old French term "bougre" for heretic, and the Latin word "bulgaris" for Bulgaria—a country rumored to be full of heretics. By the 13th century the word "buggery" had become synonymous with sodomy in English.

Historian Douglas Sanders explains that the legislation "cannot be understood apart from the break of the English church from Rome and the confiscation of monastic properties. It was a first step in justifying the dissolution of the monasteries and the seizure of their endowments." (fridae.com)

While charges of "sodomy" were often political in nature, these and other laws restructured sexuality and sex/gender to facilitate the new patriarchal class economic relations.

Laboring class resistance

Persecution of same-sex love sparked some forms of resistance. For example, in the late 15th century, the campaign led by Florentine monk Savonarola against "sodomy" as an "abominable vice" was met with rebellious anger by the Compagnacci, a group of young men led by those who had been convicted of such charges.

Queer Heritage reports that in 1497: "The youths jeer and harass the preacher's followers in the streets and squares of [Florence]." In the same city 15 years later, "A large group of young men converge on the government palace to protest the current crackdown on sodomy and to demand the release of men recently arrested."

Overall, state repression and the dominance of the patriarchal family and marriage drove same-sex love underground.

However, from the Middle Ages to the 16th century, masking and cross-dressing as another sex continued to be woven into urban carnivals. These festivals had ancient pagan (pre-class rural) roots and were organized by all-male semisecret societies. Some of these enduring, defiant customs from pre-class societies in Europe can still be seen today in Halloween, Mardi Gras and Mummer traditions.

Sometimes the days of festival "misrule" authorized by the ruling feudal institutions as a social safety valve exploded into actual rebellions. In those instances, cross-gendered leaders of the festivals led the charge.

In France, for example, male-bodied "Mére Folle and her children" publicly humiliated the King's Grand Master of Streams and Forests in Burgundy in Dijon in 1576 because the latter beat his wife and destroyed the local forests. In Lyon in the 1580s, the "Lord of Misprint" used the cover of the festival license to protest war and the high cost of bread. In 1630, another "Mére Folle" and her infantry led an uprising against royal tax officers in Dijon.

Cross-dressed males who called themselves "Lady Skimmington" fought back against the king's enclosure of their forests in Wiltshire, England, in 1631.

Also in England, "To cite but four examples, toll gates were demolished by bands of armed men dressed in women's clothing and wigs in Somerset in 1731 and 1749, in Gloucester in 1728 and in Herefordshire in 1735."

"General Ludd's wives"—two male-bodied weavers dressed as women—led an enraged crowd of hundreds of workers to destroy the owner's looms and burn down the factory in Stockton, England, in 1812.

And when in 1725 repressive campaigners raided a Covent Garden "molly house" in an attack against "effeminate sodomites among the London poor," those inside, "many of them in drag, met the raid with determined and violent resistance."

In other historical reports, cross-dressed female leaders described as "masculine" were on the front line of rebellions.

An account from England in 1531 noted an unruly crowd of cross-dressed females, together with cross-dressed males.

In Essex, England, female-bodied "Captain" Alice Clark led a group of women and cross-dressed male weavers in an uprising over grain shortage in Essex in 1629.

A report from France stated, "The tax revolt at Montpellier in 1645 was started by women and led down the streets by a virago [masculine woman] named La Branlaire, who shouted for death for the tax collectors that were taking the bread from their children's mouths."

As the ruling classes of Europe expanded beyond their borders to colonize peoples around the world, they brought these same laws against same-sex love and gender variation with them, and enforced them even more viciously. And then, as now, the colonialists and imperialists met with fierce resistance.

Next: European colonialism and U.S. imperialism impose laws against samesex love in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Middle East.

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Unsourced accounts can be found in Feinberg's "Transgender Warriors" (Beacon).

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Western rulers imposed anti-gay laws throughout world

Lavender & red, part 112

By Leslie Feinberg Published Sep 27, 2007 11:08 PM

Wherever class-divided societies overturned matrilineal communal groupings, laws began to punish sexualities, gender expressions and bodies that did not fit the new patriarchal family models. The status of women, who had played a pivotal role in pre-class societies where the blood line was traced through females, not males, was degraded with the ascendancy of patriarchal class rule.

The ruling class mandated adherence to a father-dominated family unit, rather than the ancient mother-right gens, because it assured the transmission of wealth to male heirs.

As ruling classes grew stronger and expanded their territories by overthrowing neighboring communal societies by force of arms, they violently enforced their legal codes and social order on militarily conquered peoples.

European ruling classes, however, exported and enforced laws against same-sex love all over the world as they established their colonial empires. European colonialism used Inquisition terror to enforce these laws against same-sex love and sex/gender variance all over the world. This violent legal restructuring of Indigenous societies—which affected economic organization, kinship, family/community organization, sexualities, gender and sex roles—served enslavement, exploitation and oppression.

These Indigenous societies under siege were diverse. For instance, the Gay American Indians History Project, first published in the germinal 1988 book "Living the Spirit," lists 135 Indigenous peoples on the North American continent who made room for many more sex/gender roles than the European nations did.

Midnight Sun (Anishnabe) provides a historical materialist view of sex/gender systems in these varied Native societies in one of the book's essays. Entitled "Sex/Gender Systems in Native North America," it explains: "Social, and specifically sexual, life is embedded in the economic organization of society—an organization that gives rise to a variety of cultural forms. The cultural construction of gender and sexuality must be seen in terms of the sexual division of labor, subsistence patterns, social relations, and male-female relations. Within this context, ideology is not an arbitrary, discrete force—rather, it serves to reproduce and perpetuate social forms, behaviors, and individuals suitable to a particular mode of production."

The roots of Abu-Ghraib

European colonialism exported its domestic, counter-revolutionary Inquisition around the world, starting with Portuguese expansionism around 1500 C.E. The early epoch of direct colonial rule reached its zenith more than three centuries later with British domination of India in 1857.



Queer Heritage reports that in 1551, "Portuguese missionary Father Pero Correia, writing from Brazil, asserts that same-sex eroticism among indigenous women is quite common, in fact as widespread as in Africa, where he was previously stationed. Native Brazilian women, he observes, carry weapons and even form same-sex marriages."

In 1646, Portuguese colonial overlords expanded their laws against samesexuality to include females, as well as males. The sentence was being burned alive at the stake.

Max Mejía states that with the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in the Western hemisphere, "An absolutist discourse enveloped homosexuality in the concepts of 'infamous sin,' 'sin against nature,' corruption of the soul and alliance with the devil. They punished the practice without distinctions, among both lay people and clerics.

"Furthermore," Mejía concludes, "the conquerors treated 'sodomy' as a special Indian sin and hunted it down and punished it as such on a grand scale. They orchestrated crusades like the Holy Inquisition, which began burning sodomites at the stake as a special occasion, as in the memorable auto-da-fé of San Lázaro in Mexico City."

During Vasco Núñez de Balboa's colonial expedition across Panama he "saw men dressed like women; Balboa learnt that they were sodomites and threw the king and 40 others to be eaten by his dogs, a fine action of an honorable and Catholic Spaniard."

The Spanish colonial authorities in Cuba castrated those they considered "sodomites," and forced them to eat their own testicles coated with dirt.

When the Spaniards invaded the Antilles and Louisiana, "they found men dressed as women who were respected by their societies. Thinking they were hermaphrodites, or homosexuals, they slew them."

Wealthy Dutch merchants imposed pre-Napoleonic Roman-Dutch common law, which criminalized "sodomy" and "unnatural sex offenses," from Indonesia to South Africa.

The colonial legislation that the Dutch merchants brought with them to the Cape of Africa in the 17th century still forms the basis of laws in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Lesotho.

Sun never set on British anti-sodomy laws

The British imposed on the people of Ireland a 1634 law that made same-sex relations between males punishable by death. Later, the 1885 British Labouchère Amendment was the law under which feminine homosexual writer Oscar Wilde was sentenced to hard labor.

Laws criminalizing same-sex relations in India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei all have the same name—"Article 377"—because the same colonial power wrote the law: Britain. The colonial-drafted legislation is misleadingly named the "Indian Penal Code." Hindu law had not punished consensual sexual relations.

Historian Douglas Sanders explains: "Article 377 of the Indian Penal Code of 1860 made 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature' an offence."

The British imposed this legislation in the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Penang and Malaca in 1872. By the late 19th century, Britain also enforced the law in Hong Kong, Fiji, the Malay Peninsula and Burma.

Korea Herald journalist Benjamin Jhoty quotes Utopia-asia.com, which offers information about the same-sexuality scene in Asia: "Asia has rich and unique homosexual traditions almost everywhere you look. The true enemy of homosexuality in places like Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and the

Philippines are antique colonial laws and homophobic non-Asian religions that bully citizens with skewed views of the natural world."

Sanders notes, "This provision, or something very close to it, is presently in force in all former British colonies in Asia with the exception of Hong Kong." He adds: "Sri Lanka, Seychelles and Papua New Guinea have the key wording from 377, but different article numbers. Parallel wording appears in the criminal laws of many of the former colonies in Africa."

Historians Kevin Botha and Edwin Cameron write, "The systems of law the colonial powers (both Dutch and later English) introduced significantly influenced the customary law of the African communities they subjugated."

The British "Queensland Penal Code" of 1899 was "adopted in Northern Nigeria in the nineteenth century, later becoming the basis for a uniform federal code in Nigeria in 1916. The Indian Penal Code had been used in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, but those laws were later replaced by drafts based on the Nigerian criminal code. Sudan used the Indian Penal Code. In 1960 Northern Nigeria enacted a separate criminal code, based on the Sudan code."

Similar laws were forced on "British" Honduras (today Belize), Jamaica, Anguilla, the "British" Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Bahamas, Tobago, Turks and Caicos, and St. Lucia.

The British also imposed anti-"sodomy" legislation on Canada in 1892, New Zealand a year later, and Australia in 1788 and again in 1899.

Capital offense in colonized North America

Civil liberties historian Tom Head explained: "As Spanish, French, Dutch, and English colonists began to settle North America during the 17th century, they brought with them a catalog of highly specific laws proscribing various sexual acts. The purpose of all of these laws was to enforce monogamous, same-race, heterosexual marriage as a mandatory institution, and to punish any and all sexual activity outside of that institution."

The earliest anti-"sodomy" legislation was passed in the Virginia Colony on May 24, 1610, and soon spread to all the colonies, and later to all of the states.

Historian John D'Emilio wrote: "In every colony, sodomy was a capital offense—at least five men were executed during this era—and other homosexual acts, from 'sodomitical practices' to lewdness between women, were punished with whippings and fines.

"After the American Revolution, although the states reformed their criminal codes in the spirit of Enlightenment philosophy, revision of the sodomy statutes and the 'crimes against nature' laws came very slowly; North Carolina did not eliminate capital punishment until 1869. Thomas Jefferson proposed that death be replaced by castration. Moreover, as time went on, legislatures and courts broadened the statutes to include a wider range of acts, such as oral sex between men and sexual activity between women," D'Emilio concluded.

In the U.S., anti-homosexual and anti-miscegenation law was also a weapon of state repression against African and Native peoples, who became internal colonies. In 1898, U.S. imperialists also brutally enforced these laws in countries they subjugated militarily.

After seizing Puerto Rico as a colony in 1898, the U.S. imposed a law against same-sex love on the island that was a carbon copy of the California state legal language. And in 1938, under U.S. domination, the Cuban Penal Code—the "Public Ostentation Law"—was enacted.

Next: Resistance!

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Struggles for sexual, gender liberation rooted in national liberation movements

Lavender & red, part 113

By Leslie Feinberg Published Oct 21, 2007 11:30 PM

Resistance rose wherever European colonial and imperial powers enforced the restructuring of indigenous sexualities, gender expressions, organization of the sexes, and family and kinship structures. This "New World Order" facilitated the economic exploitation of the labor, land and resources.



The struggles against colonial and imperialist outlawing of same-sex love and gender/sex variance among oppressed peoples, therefore, are also rooted in defense of sovereignty and the right of self-determination. This resistance has taken many forms—as diverse as the indigenous forms of social organization that existed prior to colonial domination.

In innumerable instances, leadership in these struggles came from those who did not conform to the colonial and imperial gender, sex and sexual dictates.

The self-identification or social organization of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transsexuals and transgender people in the U.S. or Britain today is not identical to the Brazilian travesti, Zulu skesanas, South Asian hijra, Crow badé, Cocopa warhameh, Chumash joya, Maricopa kwiraxame, Turkish köçek, Moroccan hassas, Chinese tongzhi, Filipino bakla or Lakota koskalaka. Self-identification and group identities are specific to material social and economic histories.

Every form of indigenous resistance by oppressed peoples against the sexual and gender mandates of the colonial and imperial powers is part of the fight against cultural imperialism. These battles on many fronts



Female-bodied Carmen Robles enlisted as male and fought for independence from Spain.

expose racist ideological dogma, which tries to erase world history by claiming that the way social and sexual organization is in the oppressor nations is the way it's always been.

Many battles

Conquistador Nuño de Guzmán recorded in 1530 that the last person his military took prisoner after a battle, who had "fought most courageously, was a man in the habit of a woman."

Historian Daniel Wilson recorded that in Edinburgh in 1736, "The Porteous

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Riots, which were sparked by a hated English officer and oppressive custom laws and expressed resistance to the union of Scotland with England, were

'Rebecca and her daughters' lay siege to British toll gates in South Wales. From the Illustrated London News, 1843

carried out by men disguised as women and with a leader known as Madge Wildfire."

In 1839, peasants in Wales rose up against the British demand for tolls on the roads to market. Male-bodied guerrilla fighters in diverse parts of Wales crossdressed, calling themselves "Rebecca and her daughters."

On the North American continent in the late 1890s, the Crow nation defended a Crow badé named Osh-Tisch, which translates into English as "Finds them and kills them." In a 1982 oral history, Joe Medicine Crow related that one government agent "tried to interfere with Osh-Tisch, who was the most respected badé. The agent incarcerated the badés, cut off their hair, made them wear men's clothing. He forced them to do manual labor, planting these trees that you see here on the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] grounds. The people were so upset with this that Chief Pretty Eagle came into Crow Agency, and told [the agent] to leave the reservation. It was a tragedy, trying to change them."

A Lakota medicine man recounted to historian Walter Williams the pressures on the winktes in the 1920s and 1930s. "The missionaries and the government agents said winktes were no good, and tried to get them to change their ways. Some did, and put on men's clothing. But others, rather than change, went out and hanged themselves."

Female-bodied Mexican revolutionaries enlisted as males and of Charchowgi at 2006 media fought for national independence



Lakshmi Tripathi (left) from Dai Welfare Society and Gauri Sawant conference protesting Lucknow arrests.

from Spain. A number of them rose to the rank of colonel, including Carmen Robles, Carmen Amelia Flores and Limbania Fernández. (suppressedhistories.net)

Cross-dressing Puerto Rican labor organizer Luisa Capetillo was arrested for wearing men's clothing in Havana while organizing tobacco workers in July 1915. Capetillo fought the charge in court and won.

Cuban lesbians reportedly played an important role in the pre-revolutionary urban struggle that helped to overthrow the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship in 1959.

Max Mejía, a founding member of the Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual in Mexico City in 1978, explained, "In the 1950s, gay and lesbian life in Mexico was largely confined to big cities, in particular Mexico City."

He described the massive student uprising in Mexico City during the 1968 Olympics, which resulted in the military slaughter of hundreds of activists. "The demands of the '68 student movement included those of an entire generation of Mexican youth. Outstanding among the demands were political freedom and also sexual and personal freedom. Gays and lesbians were among the movement's

activists and main leaders." Activists carried hand-made "Gay rights!" signs.

In 1971, La Frente Liberación Homosexual formed in Mexico City to protest the firing of gay workers by Sears store bosses in the capital city.

James N. Green, a co-founder of the Brazilian gay and lesbian movement in São Paulo in 1978, wrote: "In 1968 student mobilizations swept through Latin America from Mexico to Rio de Janeiro, confronting authoritarian regimes and demanding more political freedom." A year later, he wrote, "a group of fourteen Argentine men met in a working-class suburb of Buenos Aires to form Nuestro Mundo (Our World), the country's first gay rights organization.

"By 1971 six divergent Argentine groups had come together to form the Frente de Liberación Homosexual de Argentina (Homosexual Liberation Front of Argentina)."

"In 1974," he added, "Puerto Rican lesbians and gays organized the Comunidad de Orgullo Gay (Gay Pride Community) and began publishing the newspaper Pa'Fuera on the island."

In Puerto Rico, activists struggled for years to overturn the 1902 U.S. colonial "anti-sodomy" edict which was a copy—word for word—of the California Penal Code. After a long legal battle by Puerto Rican activists, the island's Senate abolished the "sodomy" law in June 2003, days before the U.S. Supreme Court officially decriminalized same-sex love.

In Hawaii in 1991, two gay men and two lesbian couples filed a court suit for their right to marry. They argued that the Hawaiian Constitution guaranteed their right to equal protection. But the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled against them in 1999, arguing that a U.S. state constitutional amendment gave the "state" legislature of Hawaii the right to bar same-sex marriage.

Many fronts

Black lesbians in Johannesburg and Cape Town townships helped build a lesbian/gay movement and link it to the anti-apartheid struggle.

Gay African National Congress anti-apartheid warrior Simon Nkoli "came out" during the notorious Delmas treason trial of the mid-1980s. "Upon his release from prison in 1989," wrote South African political journalist Mark Gevisser, "Nkoli founded GLOW, radically different from the gay organizations that preceded it in that it was a [B]lack organization."

Historian Peter Drucker noted that the 1992 Lesbian/Gay Pride March in Johannesburg was led not by white lesbians or gays, nor by Zulu transgender 'skesanas' from the Black townships, "but by the skesanas' butch 'injonga' boyfriends—who were not considered gay."

Nairobian writer John Mburu noted that Simon Nkoli organized an AIDS conference in Kampala, Uganda in 1996—three years before he died as a result of AIDS—that gathered lesbians and gays from about 20 African countries.

Drucker wrote, "Indonesian waria were also organized in the 1960s, before there was any attempt to organize a gay movement as such, in fact before there was much gay organizing in Europe or North America." In 1965, the CIA led a counterrevolution there that drowned in blood the anti-colonial struggle, which had communist leadership.

Drucker noted that Pakistani hijra "organized successfully in the early 1960s against a ban on their activities by the Pakistani government." Pakistan, like India, is still burdened with Article 377—the British colonial-era law against "unnatural" sexuality.

In India, the Naz Foundation took its challenge to Article 377 all the way to the Delhi High Court in 2001. In 2006, the arrests of four male-bodied people in Lucknow based on the colonial law ignited renewed struggle to repeal the

repressive statute. Namita Bhandare reported in The Hindustan Times on Sept. 15, 2006, "Indian citizens from all walks of life have come forward to sign a letter written by author Vikram Seth asking for the overturning of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code."

In 2005, Hong Kong removed the British colonial edict against same-sex love from its lawbooks.

Next: Beware imperialist pretexts for war.

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'Big lie' and breakup of Yugoslavia

Lavender & red, part 114

By Leslie Feinberg Published Nov 18, 2007 7:47 PM

The Pentagon is not a vehicle to liberate women or same-sex love, and it is certainly not a rape-crisis intervention force. But these truths get blurred when there is a war in progress.

When U.S. imperialism is gearing up for war, ad agency spin doctors are put on the payroll to sell the aggression as defensive or humanitarian.

U.S. and German imperialists used a public relations psychological operation to cover up their violent covert and overt war to destabilize and dismantle the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia from 1990 to 2000. That media agitation, broadcast by the imperialist monopoly news industry, helped to isolate the peoples of Yugoslavia from the world solidarity they deserved.

After finally undermining and breaking up the Soviet Union, U.S. imperialism no longer needed to tolerate non-aligned Yugoslavia.

Some of the countries of Eastern Europe had already acceded to all the privatization and austerity measures drawn up by imperialist bankers. The Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia was the last of the Eastern European workers' states trying to hold on to what was left of its planned, socialized framework of production and its collective ownership.

In a Jan. 2, 1996, New York Times opinion piece headlined "The Third American Empire," Jacob Heilbrunn and Michael Lind, two editors of the right-leaning magazine The New Republic that supported the Clinton administration's war on Yugoslavia, wrote: "Now, in the years after the cold war, the United States is again establishing suzerainty



Pat Chin, an opponent of the U.S. bombing of Yugoslavia, traveled to Yugoslavia to express her solidarity. Here she speaks at an anti-war rally in Union Square, New York.

over the empire of a former foe. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has prompted the United States to expand its zone of military hegemony into Eastern Europe (through NATO) and into formerly neutral Yugoslavia. And—most of all—the end of the cold war has permitted America to deepen its involvement in the Middle East."

Heilbrunn and Lind argued that Bosnia should become the western border of a new U.S. imperialist empire in the Middle East "encompassing the regions once ruled by the Ottoman Turks." That's a swath of territory from Iraq to the Balkans—a geo-strategic area that Britain, Germany and France ruled over before World War I, the first world conflagration caused by inter-imperialist rivalry over economic "spheres of interest."



It would take a "Big Lie" propaganda campaign to cover up this imperialist dismemberment of the multinational Yugoslavia federation.

Using charge of 'mass rape' to sell the war

The imperialist pro-war campaign—covert and overt—was based on two charges, repeated often and loudly: "systematic mass rape" and "ethnic cleansing."

The very suggestion that U.S. imperialism and its military are a rape-rescue team, and that they bring equality and peace between nationalities, should give immediate pause.

Rape has been a constant feature of class-divided societies—a weapon of mass terror and reinforcement of patriarchal ownership and control. Rape, the violence and the threat, has enforced enslavement, racist domination, oppression of women and punishment for those who bridge or blur the partitioning of the sexes.

U.S. finance capital is bloody with the "ethnic cleansing" that facilitated stealing the labor and land of African and Native peoples. "Defense of white Southern womanhood" was the white-supremacist ideological cover for mass lynching of Black men. At the same time, the white slaveocracy and those in its hire were carrying out mass rape of African peoples.

The U.S. military—from its early Cavalry to today's high-tech Pentagon—has brought rape, prostitution and sexual enslavement in the wake of its invasions and the establishment of its bases, from the Philippines to South Korea.

Women GIs are survivors of mass rape in the Pentagon's own ranks.

The U.S. and German ruling classes, their politicians, and their embedded media and public relations demonstrate cruel and callous contempt for the lives of all women—particularly Muslim women—and for all rape survivors, when they use the charge of "systematic mass rape" as a pretext for imperialist aggression.

Mass rape is a serious charge that warrants meticulous and thoughtful attention.

Between the fall of 1992 and spring of 1993, imperialist corporate news sources carried coordinated reports that an estimated 20,000 to 100,000 Muslim women had been systematically raped by the Bosnian Serb Army.

The public accusation came first from Haris Silajdzic, then foreign minister of Bosnia-Herzegovina, who stated that 30,000 women and girls had been raped.

A cover story in Ms. magazine charged that Bosnian Serb forces were raping women in order to make pornographic films. No films were ever discovered. And even the findings of Helsinki Watch and Human Rights Watch—which are often in accord with U.S. imperialist interests—did not support those charges.

The Warburton Report in January 1993, authorized by the European Community, got big headlines when it released its estimate that 20,000 Muslim women had been raped. But Simone Veil—a former French minister and president of the European Parliament—got virtually no air time as a dissenting member of the Warburton report group. Veil disclosed that the estimate was based on interviews with only four individuals. The New York Times admitted on Oct. 19, 1993, that the Croatian Ministry of Health in Zagreb was the source for the Warburton Report figures.

Newsweek reported in its Jan. 4, 1993, issue that up to 50,000 Bosnian Muslim women had been raped. This estimate, according to Tom Post, a contributor to the article, was based on interviews with 28 individuals.

French television reporter Jerome Bony summed up his pursuit of the charge of mass rape: "When I was 50 kilometers from Tuxla, I was told: 'Go to the Tuxla high school grounds. There are 4,000 raped women.' At 20 kilometers this figure dropped to 400. At 10 kilometers only 40 were left. Once at the site, I found only

four women willing to testify."

The point of these facts is not to diminish the impact of rape on a single life. Rather, the pattern in these facts demonstrates how cynically, callously and contemptuously the real "butchers of Belgrade"—in Washington and in Bonn—can create rumors of tens of thousands of rapes in order to re-shackle the peoples of the former Yugoslav federation to exploitation and steal the rich natural resources and industries that were once the collective property of all.

Nadja Tesich—Serb writer, filmmaker and professor of film—went back to Yugoslavia when the civil war started in 1991. In response to misreporting by corporate news accounts, Tesich wrote that she contacted PBS, Nightline, Time, Newsweek, Vanity Fair, the Times magazine section, women's magazines, Mother Jones, Harper's, the New Yorker and other media. She concluded: "They wanted to hear about rapes. (Got any rape stories, we want to hear about rapes.) But the moment I mentioned Serb women raped, they were not interested."

Next: U.S.-led NATO occupation brought mass rape in its wake.

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For more information read "NATO in the Balkans" (International Action Center, New York: 1998). Available at Leftbooks.com

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Wars, lies and 'mass rape' charges

Lavender & red, part 115

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Dec 2, 2007 10:06 PM

Unsubstantiated imperialist media accusations of systematic mass rape became the "weapons of mass destruction" pretext for the breakup of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, orchestrated by the United States and Germany. But it was NATO armies and their fascist hirelings that brought systematic sexual violence—including mass rape of women and girls.

Rape and sexual exploitation are a feature of imperial warfare.

The Pentagon and CIA have long trained torturers to use rape, gender degradation and sexual humiliation as violent weaponry—from the School of the Assassins to Abu Ghraib to Guantánamo.

An unusually clear view of the imperialist troop indoctrination that rape is a "spoil," a "right" taken through the patriarchal conquest of empire, appeared in a series of still pictures in the July 6, 1997, German newspaper Bild am Sonntag. The photographs showed German soldiers in battle fatigues during a break from training for their military mission against the former Yugoslavia. They were staging simulated rape, torture and noose lynching of civilians.

U.S. and German imperialism bankrolled neofascist forces in Croatia and Bosnia and in Serbia's Kosovo province. Rape is a terror weapon in the arsenal of fascist violence, which targets oppressed nationalities, ethnicities, religions, sexes, gender expressions and sexualities.

The actions of private mercenary armies, like DynCorp commandos, are subject to even less scrutiny than Pentagon troops. These privately owned "foreign legions" have been assured of virtual immunity from prosecution.

Investigative journalist Jeremy Scahill wrote in November 2005, "DynCorp employees in Bosnia, where the company plays a major policing role, have engaged in organized sex-slave trading with girls as young as 12, and DynCorp's Bosnia site supervisor was filmed raping a woman."

A company whistleblower, whom DynCorp initially fired but eventually settled with, filed a suit that described "coworkers and supervisors literally buying and selling women for their own personal enjoyment, and employees would brag about the various ages and talents of the individual slaves they had purchased." (CommonDreams.org)

U.S.-NATO industrialize mass rape

In Kosovo, capitalist profiteers literally established large-scale mass rape as a profit-generating industry.

"The first case of sex-slave trafficking came to light in October—four months after NATO-led peacekeepers entered the province," revealed a Washington Post report on April 24, 2000.



Even the Post's preservation of imperialist double speak—"peacekeepers"—cannot obfuscate the consequences of capitalist reconquest: "Kosovo, which had some local prostitution but no trafficking problem before the peacekeepers arrived after the Kosovo war ended last June, is just another new market."

NATO troops, including from the U.S., were customers.

The Post article elaborated that in the prior decade, "Hundreds of thousands of women from the former Soviet republics and satellites have been trafficked to Western Europe, Asia and the United States."

They were tricked into travel or kidnapped from Moldavia, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania. The Post reported that the women and girls were repeatedly raped and beaten to break their resistance to enslavement.

While some people forced into prostitution industries are paid at least a small sum, these women and girls were bought and sold like chattel.

The procurers, the Post article stated, "work under the protection of major crime figures in Kosovo, officials said, including some with links to the former anti-Serbian rebel force, the Kosovo Liberation Army."

The U.S. and Germany armed and equipped the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) against the Yugoslav government. The New York Times—which supported the war to break up Yugoslavia—nevertheless reported on March 28, 2000, that many of the leaders of the KLA trace their roots to a fascist unit set up by the Italian occupiers during World War II.

Yet while the U.S. and Germany had spent a decade bankrolling fascist groupings to destabilize the former socialist Yugoslavia, the imperialist propaganda machinery slandered the Serbs as fascists.

How PR firm pulled off 'Big Lie'

Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels built the German imperialist media blitzkrieg on the "Big Lie"—the premise that any lie or distortion can be publicly accepted as truth if it is broadcast loud enough and frequently enough.

James Harff, director of the Ruder Finn Global Public Affairs public relations firm, adds, "Speed is vital. ... It is the first assertion that really counts. All denials are entirely ineffective."

Harff knows what he's talking about. The Washington-based firm of Ruder Finn was hired to handle public relations and win support for the breakaway Yugoslav republics of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzogovina and the opposition in Kosovo.

Harff did an interview in April 1993 with Jacques Merlino, associate director of French TV 2. Harff boasted about how his firm had developed an ad campaign designed to make the Serbs appear to be fascists.

Harff said his proudest achievement in this effort was, "to have managed to put Jewish opinion on our side. ... Tens of thousands of Jews perished in Croatian camps, so there was every reason for intellectuals and Jewish organizations to be hostile towards the Croats and the Bosnians. Our challenge was to reverse this attitude and we succeeded masterfully."

Harff bragged: "We outwitted three big Jewish organizations—the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress. In August, we suggested that they publish an advertisement in the New York Times and organize demonstrations outside the United Nations. That was a tremendous coup. When the Jewish organizations entered the game on the side of the [Muslim] Bosnians, we could promptly equate the Serbs with the Nazis in the public mind."

Harff added, "By a single move we were able to present a simple story of good guys and bad guys which would hereafter play itself. ... Almost immediately there

was a clear change of language in the press, with use of words with high emotional content such as ethnic cleansing, concentration camps, etc., which evoke images of Nazi Germany and the gas chambers of Auschwitz. No one could go against it without being accused of revisionism. We really batted a thousand in full."

Merlino asked, "But between 2 and 5 August 1992, when you did this, you had no proof that what you said was true."

Harff put it all out on the table when he concluded, "Our work is not to verify information. We are not equipped for that. Our work is to accelerate the circulation of information favorable to us, to aim at judiciously chosen targets. ... We are professionals. We had a job to do and we did it. We are not paid to moralize."

For more information read part 114 of Lavender and Red at www.workers.org and "NATO in the Balkans" (International Action Center, New York: 1998).

Next: Pentagon did not wage war on Afghanistan to "liberate" women and same-sex love.

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The cynical abuse of 'women's rights'

Lavender & red, part 116

By Leslie Feinberg Published Dec 6, 2007 8:21 PM

The U.S. did not unleash war on Afghanistan in 2001 to "liberate" women. But pro-war spin doctors—embedded with the corporate media—went into overdrive to create that impression after 9/11. Public relations campaigns "sold" as liberation a high-tech imperialist war against an impoverished country with no air force.



This was designed to obscure the fact that imperialism had no right to violate Afghanistan's self-determination and sovereignty.

The New York Times offered a more candid geopolitical view as early as Jan. 18, 1996, in an article entitled "The New Great Game in Asia"—referring to the 19th century struggle among capitalist powers to control the Eurasian landmass and the warm-water ports of the Persian Gulf.

The Times explained, "While few have noticed, Central Asia has again emerged as a murky battleground among big powers engaged in an old and rough geopolitical game. Western experts believe that the largely untapped oil and natural gas riches of the Caspian Sea countries could make that region the Persian Gulf of the next century. The object of the revived game is to befriend leaders of the former Soviet republics controlling the oil, while neutralizing Russian suspicions and devising secure alternative pipeline routes to world markets."

After overturning the bloc of workers' states in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, U.S. finance capital schemed to secure ownership of trillions of dollars worth of buried oil and gas treasure in the Caspian Sea region, which had for decades been collectively owned by the workers and peoples of the region.

Transnational energy giants like Unocal and Enron saw Afghanistan as the best path to pipe oil and gas from Central Asia to the world market.

The Bush neo-cons, Pentagon brass and the military-industrial complex worked overtime to frame this as a campaign for women's rights.

Laura Bush delivered the presidential radio address on Nov. 16, 2001—a month after the Pentagon assault began. Her speech focused on women's rights in Afghanistan: "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women." It was a total lie.

Afghan Revolution advanced women's rights

An article in Workers World on Oct. 10, 1996, by Deirdre Griswold showed how a progressive revolution in Afghanistan in 1978 had taken measures to liberate women and challenge centuries of landlordism. In response, the U.S. pulled together an army of pro-feudal elements to crush that revolutionary government, forcing it to call on the USSR for support.



Respond

The WW article quoted from a 1986 Department of Defense publication titled "Afghanistan—a Country Study." Even this Pentagon book had to admit that the 1978 revolution brought many gains to Afghan women and girls.

Women were organized in the Democratic Women's Organization of Afghanistan. The national group had been founded in 1965 by Dr. Anahita Ratebzada. Her companion Babrak Karmal, who founded the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan the same year, later became the country's president.

One of the first actions of the revolution was to end "bride-price" and allow women to make marriage choices. Punishment of women who had sex outside of marriage was prohibited. Women could choose to wear or not to wear the veil, travel in public, get an education and work at a job. Women of all classes—not just the well-to-do—were trained as doctors, teachers and lawyers.

Brigades of women and other young Afghans brought medical care to rural peasants.

The revolution impacted the life of one third of the rural population—landless peasants, sharecroppers and tenants held in virtual bondage to landlords and money lenders.

Before the revolution, 5 percent of the landlords claimed ownership of more than 45 percent of the country's arable land. "When the PDPA took power," the Pentagon report noted, "it quickly moved to remove both landownership inequalities and usury." One of the revolutionary land reforms was the cancellation of mortgage debt for agricultural laborers, tenants and small landowners.

On the eve of the revolution, 96.3 percent of the women of Afghanistan were illiterate; rural illiteracy for all the sexes was 90.5 percent. The progressive government created massive literacy programs and printed textbooks in Dari, Pashtu, Uzbek, Turkic and Baluchi.

The 1986 Pentagon report stated, "The government trained many more teachers, built additional schools and kindergartens, and instituted nurseries for orphans."

The Washington Post admitted that Afghan women were the strongest supporters of the 1978 revolution.

But this revolution was crushed by a well-funded, well-armed counterrevolution in which U.S. imperialism made common cause with feudal patriarchs. Women were then bought and sold as property once again.

National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and former CIA Director Robert M. Gates later publicly bragged that, beginning in early 1979, the CIA had funneled money and arms to counter-revolutionary groups, many of them members of militias loyal to local landowners.

Democrats and Republicans had approved at least \$8 billion for this counterrevolutionary effort that hired, armed and trained the Taliban, Osama bin Laden and other forces.

CIA historian John Ranelagh recalls that then President Jimmy Carter OK'd "more secret operations than Reagan later did." Carter later admitted in his memoirs that his administration actually considered the use of tactical nuclear weapons against the progressive developments in Afghanistan.

U.S. set women's rights back centuries

By 1992 the Soviet Union was overturned and the progressive government in Afghanistan was defeated by imperialism. After four years of internecine struggle among different Afghan factions, the Taliban came to power.

Michael Meacher, a senior Labor Party member of Parliament who had been a member of British Prime Minister Tony Blair's cabinet, observed in a Sept. 6, 2003, article in the Guardian of London, "Until July 2001 the U.S. government saw the Taliban regime as a source of stability in Central Asia that would enable the construction of hydrocarbon pipelines from the oil and gas fields in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, through Afghanistan and Pakistan, to the Indian Ocean.

"But confronted with the Taliban's refusal to accept U.S. conditions, the U.S. representatives told them 'either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs."

Washington took advantage of the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, to launch an invasion of Afghanistan.

U.S. occupiers appointed former Unocal advisors to be both the titular president of Afghanistan and the U.S. ambassador to the country.

The continuing imperialist blitzkrieg has destroyed the infrastructure—including potable water, sewage and electricity—worsening hunger and disease. Soviet-built public urban housing complexes and schools lie in ruins.

These conditions create suffering for all sexes, genders and sexualities in Afghanistan, particularly for women. In 2004, some provinces reported 593 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births.

Pentagon Special Forces commandos can kick in the door of a home at any hour of the day or night, body search Afghan women and their loved ones, and drag them all off in hoods to torture chambers.

That's imperialist-style "liberation."

Research by Minnie Bruce Pratt

contributed to this article.

Next: U.S. warmakers gay-baited

and gay-bashed Afghanistan.

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As prelude to Afghan invasion

U.S. war agitation targeted LGBT movements

By Leslie Feinberg Published Dec 16, 2007 9:50 PM

U.S. and British military public relations, and their embedded media, focused on Taliban laws and attitudes about same-sex love to agitate for the October 2001 invasion and justify occupation.



The monopoly corporate media broadcast this newfound concern for the rights of oppressed sexualities—like its crocodile tears for Afghan women—after 9/11, as U.S. imperialism readied the Pentagon to plant its corporate flag in this geostrategic Central Asian country. Transnational energy behemoths like Unocal and Enron were hellbent on siphoning the vast fossil fuel wealth of the Caspian Sea region from the former Soviet Union through Afghanistan.

More than a year before 9/11, the U.S. Department of State's "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2000" had stated that during the Taliban rule, "The punishment for those found guilty of homosexual acts is to have walls toppled over them. Although there were no known instances of such punishment during the year, this punishment was carried out on at least one occasion in 1999, and seven times in 1998 (resulting in five deaths)."

Whether those facts are accurate or distorted, the Department of State wasn't ready to make war against Afghanistan in 2000, using same-sex rights as a shield. And of course, the U.S. did not declare war on any of its client states in the region that punish homosexuality by prison terms or execution.

In the weeks between the Sept. 11 attacks and the first blast of the imperialist blitzkrieg on Oct. 7, articles in the imperialist corporate media amplified accounts of the 1998 and 1999 executions. These reports also got picked up by media aimed at the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities.

But months later, after the U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan was already in place, more reports about the period in which the executions took place revealed a more complex reality.

Struggle against rape

Tim Reid reported in "Kandahar Comes Out of the Closet," in the Jan. 12, 2002, issue of The Times of London that stopping the abduction and rape of male youths by landlord militia commanders "was one of the key factors in Mullah Omar mobilizing the Taliban." Mohammed Omar is the leader of the Taliban

Reid reported that two non-Taliban militia commanders fought over a male youth in the summer of 1994, just a few months before the Taliban took control of Kandahar. Civilians were killed in the artillery shelling. "Omar's group freed the boy and appeals began flooding in for Omar to help in other disputes. By November, Omar and his Taliban were Kandahar's new rulers."

Reid quotes Torjan, a soldier loyal to the post-Taliban governor appointed under imperialist occupation. Torjan, 38 years old, recalled, "In the days of the Mujahidin, there were men with their 'ashna' [beloved young man] everywhere, at every corner, in shops, on the streets, in hotels: it was completely open, a part of life. But in the later Mujahidin years, more and more soldiers would take boys by force, and keep them for as long as they wished. But when the Taliban came, they were very strict about the ban."

Other media presented similar accounts. The New York Times wrote on Feb. 21, 2002: "In 1994, the Taliban, then a small army of idealistic students of the Koran, were called to rescue a boy over whom two commanders had fought. They freed the boy and the people responded with gratitude and support."

The Times article quoted Amin Ullah, a money changer, gesturing to his two teenage sons hunched over wads of Afghani bank notes at Kandahar's currency bazaar. "At that time boys couldn't come to the market because the commanders would come and take away any that they liked," Ullah said.

One of the Afghan men that the U.S. Department of state claimed was sentenced to death in 1998 for being "found guilty of homosexual acts" survived. By law, he was later set free. The Feb. 21, 2002, New York Times admitted that the man—Mullah Peer Muhammad—was a former Taliban fighter arrested for sexual abuse of young male prisoners while he was in charge of the central prison in Kandahar. The Times stated, "The man had been convicted of raping and killing a boy."

Clearly a more complex reality existed than the one the New York Post used to press for war: "Men accused of being gay were executed by having a wall toppled on them."

These accounts aim to divert attention from the real issue: The Pentagon—that armed institution of gay-bashing violence—had no right to invade and occupy Afghanistan.

Next: Embedded anthropology

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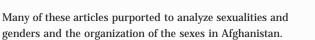
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U.S.-Britain gay-bashed Afghanistan

By Leslie Feinberg Published Dec 18, 2007 11:51 PM

In the months after the autumn 2001 imperialist military invasion, a rash of gay-bashing and gay-baiting articles about Afghanistan appeared in the U.S. and British corporate media.



In some of the coverage, "experts"—who are not Afghan—focused on sexual and social organization in Pashtun culture, the majority culture in Afghanistan, as though it was the only culture. Other non-Afghan "authorities" didn't differentiate between the diverse cultures in that ancient land, including the Durrani, Ghilzai, Wardak, Jaji, Tani, Jadran, Mangal, Khugiani, Kuchi, Safi, Mohmand and Shinwari; or Uzbek or Arab. Most reports did not differentiate between peoples of the lowlands and those in the mountain ranges. Or between peoples who lead nomadic lives, and those who dwell in crowded cities. And speculations only focused on same-sexuality between male-bodied individuals.

Colonialism and imperialism have always studied the cultures they sought to conquer and destroy. The job of embedded anthropologists is ultimately always to claim cultural superiority—the rotten plank on which white-supremacist ideologues stand.

Not a word coming from the imperialist occupiers about Afghan cultures has any validity. Some of the most bigoted theories these articles rehash and spew about same-sex love and gender expression, and their relation to women's oppression, do need to be exposed and combated.

Imperial anthropology

The organization of the sexes, socially accepted sexualities and gender expressions in Afghanistan are rooted in that country's ancient history, and are not the same as in the U.S. or Britain. The existence of other forms of social organization and sexual and gender expression challenges the biological determinists who argue that sexuality is genetically fixed in the human species.

Therefore, colonialists and imperialists have historically used racist characterizations like "obsessive sodomy," "promiscuity" and "unnatural sexuality, and gender-phobic baiting of oppressed males as "effeminate" or "hyper-masculine" to excuse the inexcusable: imperial domination and exploitation.

Brian James Baer, associate professor of Russian Literature and Translation at Kent State University, wrote about the bias in the spate of Western reporting about sexualities in Afghanistan in an article in the Gay and Lesbian Review, March-April 2003.

Baer noted, "Journalists repeatedly used Western concepts such as 'gay' and 'the closet' to characterize the Kandahar situation, thus imposing their notion of homosexuality as a minority identity." And, he added, "In their reporting Western journalists insisted on reducing relationships that are often long-term emotional



bonds to a crude sexual bargain."

Baer pointed out: "Maura Reynolds of The LA Times noted that 'there is a strong streak of dandyism among Pashtun males. Many line their eyes with kohl, stain their fingernails with henna or walk about town in clumsy, high-heeled sandals.' But this equation makes sense only if we accept two Western assumptions: that homosexuality and effeminacy are automatically linked; and that the practices described are in fact 'effeminate.'"

Baer stressed: "Despite statistical evidence demonstrating that pedophilia in the West is more common among heterosexual men, the association of homosexuality and the sexual abuse of children remains prominent in Western anti-gay discourse, propelling 'save our children' campaigns to restrict their contact with gay adults. By constructing age-stratified homosexual activity in Kandahar as pedophilia, Western journalists provided themselves a link to the ever-popular issue of child abuse—especially hot, what with the unfolding scandal in the Catholic Church."

Baer took journalist Michael Griffin to task for writing in The Times of London that the Taliban hated women and that resulted in making sex with other males popular in Afghanistan. On the eve of invasion, articles in the imperialist media centered on the claim that the Taliban was repressing same-sexuality.

Baer also challenged Griffin for flipping the argument in the same article by claiming that woman-hating appears to be "the product of a repressed homosexuality." Readers were spared theories about what is at the root of women loving women.

The claim that same-sex love arises from hatred of women or that misogyny is rooted in unexpressed homosexual desire pits sexes and sexualities that are both oppressed under patriarchal class rule against each other.

Most of the imperialist war-time media reports claim that many males in Afghanistan have sex with each other because of "extreme segregation of the sexes." Some of the same journalists did not attempt to reconcile the contradiction to their theory when they quoted Afghan males who are married to women and have sex with other males.

The "prison" theory of homosexuality is an old one. It assumes that heterosexuality is hard-wired and "natural" and that sex between males or females only takes place when the sexes are segregated.

Even the term "segregation" is judgmental. Every society has its own organization of the sexes. However, in pre-class societies, in which women were not ruled over by men, same-sex organization in collective households or hunting or rituals was not oppressive. On the whole, such societies made room for more sexes, sexualities and gender expressions, and socially accepted sex reassignment than is allowed for in the patriarchal organization of modern imperialist societies.

Dubbing Afghanistan as a "prison culture" for oppressed sexes and sexualities allowed post-invasion articles in the U.S. and British media to make it seem as though "gay liberation" was a collateral benefit of imperialist massive bombing raids, invasion and military occupation.

But imperialism has tried to lock down Afghanistan like a prison. The "don't ask, don't tell" Pentagon command didn't bring liberation from the Taliban. It brought the Taliban. It was the CIA and "Defense" Department that armed and trained the Taliban and Osama bin Laden and other counter-revolutionary forces to crush the 1978 Revolution—which was taking action, with women in the lead, to liberate Afghanistan from semi-feudal rule.

After the Pentagon hammered the country with bombs, and Special Forces battered down the doors of homes, U.S. and British journalists in Kandahar followed behind, demanding that peoples under siege and under occupation talk publicly about sexualities in their cultures.

While admitting, "There appears to be no shame or furtiveness about them, although when approached, they refuse to talk to a western journalist," Reid turned around and charged the Pashtun with "lying" because they did not confess to his definition of their sexualities.

Maura Reynolds quotes Mohammed Daud, a motorbike repair person, in her Los Angeles Times article. "These are hard questions you are asking," he says. "We don't usually talk about such things." (Los Angeles Times, April 3, 2002)

Rambo gay bashing

The Pentagon brass—which carry out a crusade of terror against gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans GIs in its own ranks—gay-bashed Afghanistan, too.

Just days after the Pentagon began dropping a torrent of high-tech ordnance from the sky over Afghanistan, the Associated Press released worldwide a photograph of a gay-bashing epithet, "High Jack This F—-,"scrawled on one of the bombs on a fighter jet parked on the flight deck of the USS Enterprise.

The widely circulated photo created uproar among lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) organizations in the United States. However, all but one of these groups debated it from the standpoint of a hate-speech issue; they did not denounce the aerial bombardment and post-9/11 Pentagon military aggression against Afghanistan.

AP spokesperson Jack Stokes used the weapon of xenophobia to deflect anger, saying that the photographer "is not American, and that [epithet] meant nothing to him." Stokes didn't bother taking a stab at explaining how the photo got past everyone else in the process of selection and production.

At the Pentagon, Navy Rear Adm. Stephen Pietropaoli said the ship's crew had been told to edit "the spontaneous acts of penmanship by our sailors." He concluded, "We want to keep the message positive." Pietropaoli is referring to messages written on bombs about to drop on the population below.

The release of the photograph was very much in keeping with the menacing psyop messages of U.S. and British imperialism. Political pundits, late-night-television comics, newspaper and Internet cartoons gay-baited and transgender-baited the Taliban and Osama bin Laden—including threats of anal rape. The threat of rape and sexual and gender humiliation is a primary weapon of CIA and mercenary interrogators of Muslim men and women.

The following quotes, vicious and offensive, are repeated here solely to spotlight the threat of violence that smolders in these reports, which are broadcast around the world.

In an article in The Scotsman on May 24, 2002, journalist Chris Stephen wrote, "In Bagram British marines returning from an operation deep in the Afghan mountains spoke last night of an alarming new threat—being propositioned by swarms of gay local farmers."

British Royal Marine James Fletcher said: "They were more terrifying than the al-Qaeda. One bloke who had painted toenails was offering to paint ours. They go about hand in hand, mincing around the village."

"It was hell," said Corporal Paul Richard.

"They put some music on and ask us to dance. I told them where to go," said Cpl. Richard. "Some of the guys turned tail and fled. It was hideous."

These quotes from military aggressors are a "homosexual panic defense," by which gay-bashers later claim in court that they were justified to torture and murder because the victim made sexual advances.

Even after the U.S. and British invaded Afghanistan-dominating the country

militarily and crafting a legislative and political façade of independent government and law—the imperialists did not remove the law which they had said in pro-war agitation made same-sex love a capital offense.

Next: Same-sex rights: Dec. 18 New York Times pits Iraq and Iran.

Read parts 116 and 117 on Afghanistan and the entire Lavender & Red series at www.workers.org. Look for the Lavender & Red logo.

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New York Times admits:

'Life better for gay & lesbian Iraqis under Hussein'

Lavender & red, part 119

By Leslie Feinberg Published Jan 27, 2008 7:55 PM

The New York Times—an imperialist mouthpiece—admitted in a mid-December article that social life was better for those who it described as "gay and lesbian Iraqis" under the secular government of Saddam Hussein. The Times also confirmed that sanctions, war and occupation crushed that social progress and ushered in death-squad terror.



The Dec. 18 article was a political feature, not based on breaking news. The original headline summed up: "Gays Living in Shadows of New Iraq: Violence Replaces Tacit Acceptance."

Times journalist Cara Buckley interviewed Iraqis who she described as gay. She reported, "And, until the [U.S.] American invasion, they said, Iraqi society had quietly accepted them."

Buckley said those Iraqis she interviewed offered this view of life before sanctions and war: "For a brief, exhilarating time, from the mid-1980s until the early 1990s, they say, gay night life flourished in Iraq. Whereas neighboring Iran turned inward after its Islamic revolution in 1979, Baghdad allowed a measure of liberation after the end of the Iran-Iraq war."

The New York Times newspaper—"all the news that's fit to print"—doesn't see fit to mention that U.S. imperialism instigated the Iran-Iraq war. The Reagan administration armed both sides. Instead, the article continues to attempt to pit the two oil-rich countries against each other.

At the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988, Buckley continued, "Abu Nuwas Boulevard, which hugs the Tigris River opposite what is now the Green Zone, became a promenade known for cruising. Discos opened in the city's best hotels, the Ishtar Sheraton, the Palestine and Saddam Hussein's prized Al-Rasheed Hotel becoming magnets for gay men. Young men with rouged cheeks and glossed lips paraded the streets of Mansour, an affluent neighborhood in Baghdad."

The Times quotes Ali Hili, who left Iraq in 2000 and is now living in London, where he heads the organization Iraqi LGBT-UK. Hili stressed that before the U.S. war and sanctions, "There were so many guys, from Kuwait, from Saudi Arabia, guys in the street with makeup," Hili recalled. "Up until 1991, there was sexual freedom. It was a revolutionary time."

Buckley noted, "Then came the Persian Gulf War, and afterward Saddam Hussein put an end to nightclubs. Iraq staggered under the yoke of economic sanctions."

The late Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, a bourgeois nationalist, reportedly added a religious law that made anal intercourse, prostitution, rape and incest a capital offense in 2001. The edict came after almost a decade of economic strangulation, as the U.S. pressed for shock-and-awe military invasion.

Buckley asked two of the Iraqis she interviewed what life was like in Iraq for them and acquaintances after the 2001 law was written. She reported, "While anti-gay laws were increasingly enforced, Mohammed and Mr. Hili said they still felt safe. Homosexuality seemed accepted, as long as it was practiced in private. And even when it was not tolerated, prison time could be evaded with a well-placed bribe."

The admission by the New York Times that social attitudes towards male-male or female-female sexuality were freer under the secular Ba'athist government of Saddam Hussein is particularly shocking after U.S. finance capital has enforced 12 years of economic warfare, unleashed two blitzkrieg wars and continues to be the military occupation force against the entire population of Iraq based in part on the Big Lie.

Prewar media agitation about a virtual fascist dictatorship for "gays" in Iraq targeted newspapers aimed at lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans audiences in the U.S. and Britain, and helped sell the war as "liberation."

But imperialism, and colonialism before it, has never brought liberation to the Middle East. Just the opposite is true. For example, the Times neglected to mention that British finance capital outlawed "sodomy" in Iraq—almost a century ago.

For the purposes of the Dec. 18 New York Times feature, however, Iraqi history begins with the mid-1980s, and "gay" and "lesbian" are fixed categories, identical to Western concepts, and transcend economic and social relations, cultures and eras.

Translating sex & love

More than a century ago, as the historical sun rose on capitalist economic and accompanying military expansion, Europeans also judged and condemned, speculated and sensationalized, categorized and theorized regarding Arab sexualities, particularly about expressions of love between adult men and adolescent males.

Scholar and author Khaled El-Rouayheb pointed out, "The tendency is very much in evidence already in Sir Richard Burton's remarks on 'Pederasty' in the 'Terminal Essay' to his translation of The Arabian Nights in 1886. Writing before the term 'homosexuality' was introduced into the English language, Burton still assumed that he was faced with one phenomenon, 'pederasty,' which he claimed was widespread in the Islamic world and regarded as at worse a peccadillo."

El-Rouayheb is the author of a meticulously researched book, entitled "Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World., 1500-1800," that was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2005.

Khaled El-Rouayheb cautioned, "The assumption that it is unproblematic to speak of either tolerance or intolerance of homosexuality in the pre-modern Middle East, would seem to derive from the assumption that homosexuality is a self-evident fact about the human world to which a particular culture reacts with a certain degree of tolerance or repression.

"From this perspective," he continued, "writing the history of homosexuality is seen as analogous to writing, say, the history of women. One assumes that the concept 'homosexual,' like the concept 'woman,' is shared across historical periods, and that what varies and may be investigated historically is merely the changing cultural (popular, scientific, legal, etc.) attitude toward such people."

El-Rouayheb concluded, "The concept of male homosexuality did not exist in the Arab-Islamic Middle East in the early Ottoman period. There was simply no native concept that was applicable to all and only those men who were sexually attracted to members of their own sex, rather than to women."

Next: British outlawed 'sodomy' in Iraq.

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British colonialism outlawed 'sodomy' in Iraq

Lavender & red, part 120

By Leslie Feinberg
Published Feb 1, 2008 11:17 PM

British colonialism outlawed "sodomy" in Iraq after World War I. The edict was part of an entire body of colonial law created by British overlords more than half a century earlier, which the English called "The Indian Penal Code." The code was not indigenous to India. It was the legal system that the British colonial rulers forced on India in 1860.



Article 377 of that colonial code made "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" a crime punishable by up to 20 years of deportation or up to 10 years imprisonment.

The term "sodomy" originates in the Bible: "Sodom and Gomorrah." British Common Law derived from ecclesiastical—church—law.

In 1533, as England's church split with Rome, King Henry VIII had made "buggery"—synonymous with "sodomy"—a capital offense punishable by hanging. A British colonial law in Ireland in 1634 also called for the death sentence. Later, the 1885 British Labouchère Amendment reduced the sentence to imprisonment with hard labor.

As the British colonial empire expanded, its overlords imposed and enforced Article 377 and similarly worded edicts against "sodomy" in Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei, the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Penang and Malacca, Hong Kong, Fiji, the Malay Peninsula and Burma, Sri Lanka, the Seychelles and Papua New Guinea, "British" Honduras (today Belize), Jamaica, Anguilla, the "British" Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Bahamas, Tobago, Turks and Caicos, and St. Lucia, New Zealand, Canada, and Australia.

In the Middle East, British colonialism made "The Indian Penal Code" the law of the land in Aden, Bahrain, Kuwait, Muscat and Oman, Qatar, Somaliland, the Sudan and what is today the United Arab Emirates.

Any system of law, as Karl Marx explained, cannot break free of its economic foundation. Colonial Britain imposed its patriarchal capitalist "order of nature"—theft of labor and natural wealth, brutal state repression, attempts at cultural genocide, and guarantee of commercial distribution, private ownership and property rights—on the pre-capitalist, essentially feudal economic system in Iraq in 1918.

The outlawing of "sodomy" in 1919 was part and parcel of British structuring of Arab family and kinship, sexuality and society, in order to exploit the greatest profits from the oil-rich region.

Colonial 'law'

During the first interimperialist world war, from 1914-1918, the British promised the Arab people that if they fought to defeat the Ottoman Empire, with its



Respond

administrative center in Turkey, that England would grant them independence.

World War I was the first international military bloodbath between imperialist rivals over the division of global capitalist markets and resources. The massive human toll, military and civilian: 20 million dead and 21 million wounded.

Yet even as they sent their armies into battle they were cutting backroom deals with each other. England, France and Czarist Russia signed the secret Sykes-Picot Treaty, which divided up the Middle East into colonial "possessions," during the middle of the war, in 1916.

After World War I, the Supreme Commander of the British Forces of Occupation in Iraq drew up the penal code—including the outlaw of "sodomy"—in 1918 and imposed it on the population of the capital city on Jan. 1, 1919. Later the British applied it to the whole country.

The colonial penal code was written and published in English. No Arabic translation was made for the first two years after it was established as the rule of law in Iraq.

The British legal code wasn't translated into Arabic until 1921. Discrepancies between the English version and the Arabic translation created legal chaos.

As far as the British were concerned, the English version was definitive and binding.

Jehoeda Sofer wrote in the essay in "Sexuality and Eroticism Among Males in Moslem Societies," a book co-edited with Arno Schmitt, "In 1956, this Code was replaced in the British territories of the Persian Gulf by a new Penal Code. Article 171 made sodomy punishable by imprisonment not exceeding 10 years, with or without corporal punishment."

First step toward independent law

After decades of vicious imperial rule, an Iraqi military rebellion on July 14, 1958, lit the fuse of an anti-colonial revolution for independence.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower deployed an estimated 20,000 Marines to Lebanon to block the Iraqi national independence movement from widening in the region and was prepared to send a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier to the Gulf.

But the determination of the Iraqi population to oust imperialism and nationalize the country's vast oil wealth helped stay imperialism's hand. Anti-imperialist solidarity with the Iraqi national democratic revolution of 1958 from the socialist governments of the USSR and China—and support from India under Nehru and Indonesia under Sukarno—also sent a strong message to U.S. finance capital not to intervene militarily.

However, the U.S. and Britain never gave the newly independent Iraq a moment's peace to rebuild its society, free from the legacy of colonialism and imperialism.

In 1969, the independent Iraqi Ministry of Justice issued, in Arabic, the first Iraqi revised penal code. It was a first step towards creating an independent national legal system.

Did the 1969 code legalize "homosexuality"? Those who ask reveal their historically based, economically bound cultural concepts of sexualities.

'Sodomy': a colonial concept

The British imported the concept of "sodomy" in order to outlaw it.

Khaled El-Rouayheb is the author of "Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800," which was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2005. He explained, "Homosexuality is usually seen in the modern West as an innate and abnormal condition of a minority of humans which reveals itself in a regular desire to have homosexual intercourse, but also in various other ways.

For example, a 'homosexual' is widely assumed to be effeminate, promiscuous and sexually uninterested in members of the other sex. McIntosh argued that such a homosexual 'role' or stereotype only emerged in England in the late 17th century."

El-Rouayheb stressed, "The concept of male homosexuality did not exist in the Arab-Islamic Middle East in the early Ottoman period. There was simply no native concept that was applicable to all and only those men who were sexually attracted to members of their own sex, rather than to women."

He concluded, "[T]he encounter with European Victorian morality was to have profound effects on local attitudes toward what came to be called 'sexual inversion' or 'sexual perversion' (shudhūdh jinsī)."

Next: Independence brought greater social freedoms; imperialism rolled them back.

For more on Iraq, read Part 119 at www.workers.org, where the full Lavender & Red web-book-in-progress is posted.

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