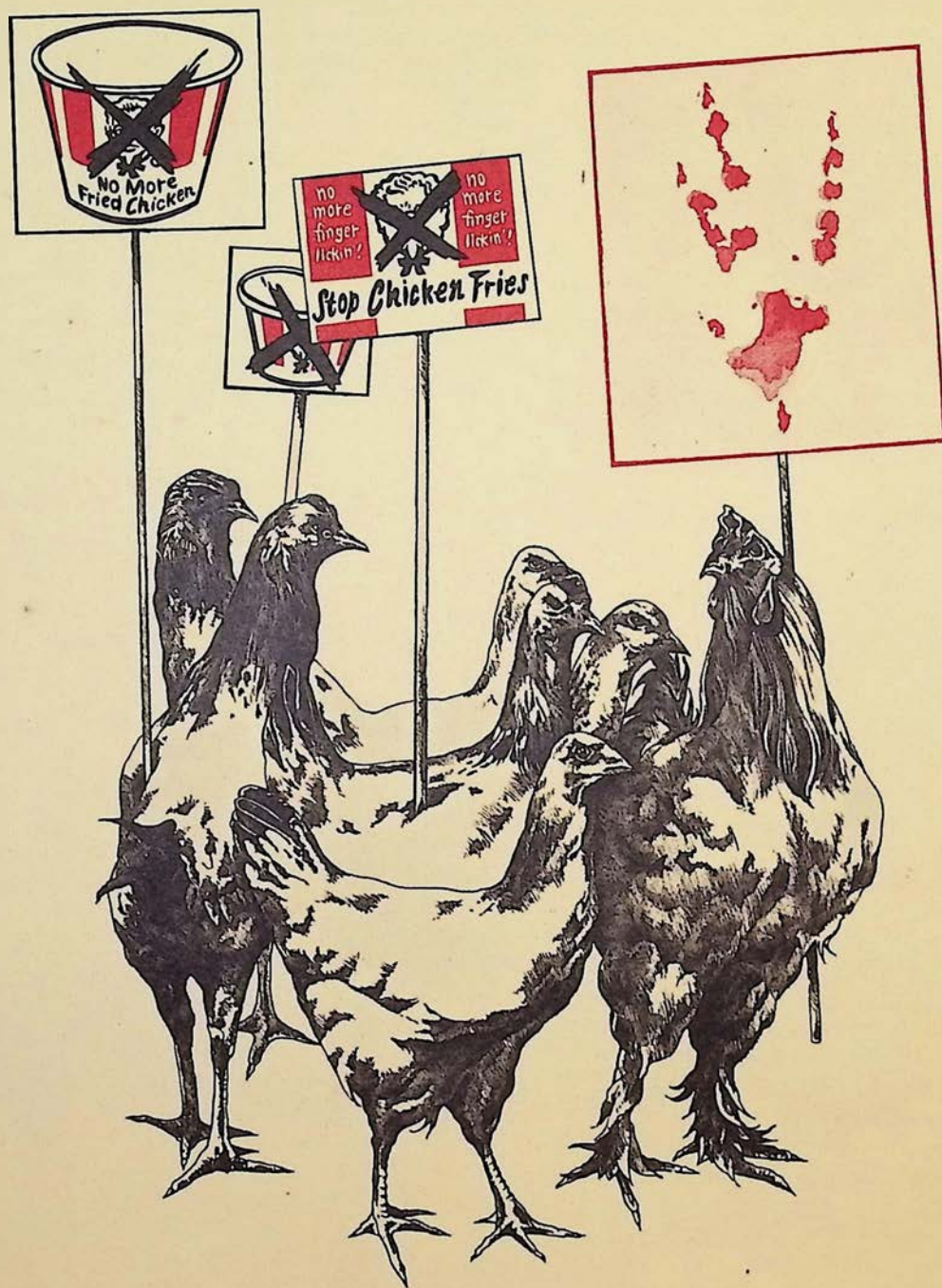


a socialist
journal of
gay liberation

magnus



The first step in successful revolution is to recognize one's oppressor
On Susan Saxe Bay Area Gay Liberation Split Masculine Privilege
Poetry & Fiction Marxism for Gay People Number 2, Summer 1977, \$1.50

To Our Readers

Yes, it's been a long time since we published *Magnus* #1. We are now a collective of seven white faggots, three from working class backgrounds and four from middle class backgrounds. The past eight months have seen continuing struggle around understanding our role in the gay movement as well as in the broader revolutionary movement, and our responsibility to both movements. As part of this process we are continually discussing what the aims and purpose of *Magnus* should be, our direction in analyzing the fundamental questions facing both movements and the balance we plan to strike between putting forth theory and writing about practice. A very important part of our collective process is study; through study we are developing a stronger basis of political unity. Our semi-weekly meetings have become more focused and organized. We sincerely hope that our growth and development will be reflected by what we are presenting in *Magnus*. We want to develop theme issues in the future; possible themes include Third World gays, art and culture, gays and work, and sissies and effeminacy.

In our first issue we identified *Magnus* as "a journal of collective faggotry." While all of us in the collective are comfortable with the word faggot, we realize that faggot is a word that reflects the history and oppression of white gay men with European roots. We have been criticized for the use of this word in our subheading by Third World friends in our community as well as by readers outside the Bay Area. Our new subheading is "a socialist journal of gay liberation."

Most of the articles, poetry, and art in *Magnus* comes from brothers in the Bay Area. That may be okay for some, but *Magnus* is not only a regional magazine. We encourage everyone to submit articles, poems, photos, art, or letters. Our subscribers are from all over the U.S. and Canada. . . .so should our contributors be.

Magnus is now carried by approximately fifty gay or radical bookstores in the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, and Australia. We know there are more bookstores out there; help us to build up our distribution so we can reach more readers. Anyone who gets a local bookstore to stock five or more copies of *Magnus* will receive a free subscription.

We have decided for now not to accept paid advertising, and it isn't easy for us to come up with the money it takes to publish. Printing costs are going up every day and we do not want to have to raise the cover price, which is high enough as it is. If you feel that you have a stake in what *Magnus* is doing we can use whatever help you can give. We have tried to cut printing costs in this issue by mixing paper stock; still, we want to publish a magazine that looks good. Any contributions will be most welcome. To make it easier for you we now have three categories of subscribers; regular at \$6.00 for four issues, \$10.00 for contributors, and \$25.00 for sustainers. If you want to donate \$25.00 or more, write us for details on how your contribution can be made tax-deductible.

One final note: if you change your address please let us know. The post office won't forward *Magnus*. Return postage and address corrections are expensive and we really don't like subsidizing the post office.

Acknowledgements

Tom Ammiano, Jonathan Katz, Juan Lombard, Daniel Ostrow, David Stinson, Leigh Watson, Weather, all our distribution helpers, all our roommates for putting up with *Magnus* meetings, and all the people who've had enough faith to subscribe.

Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935)

Magnus Hirschfeld was a militant German socialist and sexual liberationist. He worked both singly and organizationally toward the repeal of anti-homosexual laws in Europe, raising consciousness and rallying support for gay rights throughout his life. His projects, including the renowned Institute for Sexual Science, as well as the homosexual rights movement he spearheaded, were obliterated by the Nazi Party.



etching by Tom Till

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Dedication

You told me to love myself, told me I was of infinite worth, holy. You taught me that only the victims still cling to their humanity. You taught me that the courage the victims show when they endure is the true human courage and the true expression of our human beauty. You taught me that humanity is destroyed by the fight with Men for the ownership of other people, mastery, the despoliation of the world. You taught me to honor my beauty and courage as a victim, as the real expression of humanity.

You also taught me a sense of acceptance and resignation. Because you also taught that my fate was unavoidable, that because the source of my humanity lies in the endurance of my victimization, the price of my humanity is my submission to the strong and soulless, the Men, who have sold their soul for mastery.

But I will no longer follow that way. Once I learned from you the courage of my humanity, I could no longer accept my victimization.

From "An Open Letter to Tennessee Williams," by Michael Silverstein (1941-1977), to whom we dedicate this issue.

Magnus

A Socialist Journal of Gay Liberation
Number 2, Summer 1977

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Letters

To the *Magnus* Collective

This is a most different and definitely hard letter for me to write. I have just read part of your journal and I am full of feelings—please bear with me. I am not an educated person. Spelling and writing does not come easy for me. I do read and read a lot and generally understand what I read. I do not recall ever reading any thing (straight or gay) that I enjoyed as much as I did "On Our Identity As Faggots." It was so clear, so clean, and summed my feelings so well. Without sounding corny I felt inspired when I finished.

I am a prisoner newly arrived at the state prison for men at Walla Walla, Washington. At this time I am in the hole for breaking a rule. The powers that run this prison have seen fit to not only put me in the hole but have made me move away from my lover. I will no longer be allowed to live with him when I am returned to the general population. I have been feeling pretty down over this as well as being in the hole and being here in the prison which is all new to me. Needless to say this is not a nice place and the hole is even less nice. I was in my cell feeling pretty shitty when some one walked by and handed me your journal and said "I think you'll like this."

I am familiar with many gay publications and had not been aware of yours.

When I looked at the journal I thought another political paper which I will not be able to understand. Much to my surprise and genuine delight this was not the case. Thank you, not only for myself, but others like me who have at long last come across something really worth reading.

I would really like very much to have a copy of my own to take with me to general population. The copy I have will have to be returned and left for others here in the hole. And if it is not asking too much may I please be placed on your mailing list? I, at this time, have no funds to cover the subscription fee. Perhaps at some later time I could find a way to contribute to your truly fine journal.

I no longer feel as down and shitty as I did. This I owe to you all. And once again I say thank you.

With Gay Love

Prisoner

Walla Walla, Washington

Dear Collective

Glad to see *Magnus* #1 and to read "On Our Identity . . ." especially. I'll watch with interest to see how the inevitable contradictions are managed. Six white faggots, four solidly middle-class, out to fight for women, non-whites. A journal that is assembled, printed, and distributed in a tough capitalistic market, trying to live without advertising. A revolutionary program but a format that will appeal mainly to the already fairly committed?

From only a half year with the *Body Politic* I read *Magnus* #1 with a sense of the magnitude of these contradictions and hope to learn a few things from you as you manage *through* them. That's the only route we've got.

Best of luck *and* perseverance,
Michael Lynch,
Toronto, Ont.

Dear Friends

Thank you for a very excellent and beautiful magazine. It made things in this cage more interesting and filled me with much thought on many levels.

I hope that you continue and improve, being the best I have seen from the gay liberation front. I trust you will set an image that will advance us all forward. In the future I hope to contribute my drawings and write on prison gay life for you—both Gross and Intense. Thank you for the subscription; it's half way down the tier now.

Calmly yours,
Carl
Walla Walla, Wash.

My fellow Faggots

My lover read *Magnus* and a five year battle is now over between us! I'm having trouble finding a copy for myself. Please accept my subscription. Begin please by sending me the first issue.

Faithfully,
Charles Hopkins
San Francisco, Calif.

I was pleased to receive your first issue. *Magnus* is an important step in developing a revolutionary socialist movement in the US. I hope the following comments will be helpful in understanding the relationship between class and sexual oppression.

I believe the central theoretical problem for revolutionaries in the U.S. is developing class consciousness. This, of course, is a result of the dominance of the ideology of American "middle-class" classlessness, propagated in multiple ways by the world's strongest ruling class. This problem is reflected in *Magnus* in the failure to stress the primacy of class oppression and exploitation.

Your criticism of the limitations of gay liberationists is a good start. Their tendency to become coopted derives from what Lenin described as narrow economism. Separation by the labor movement of the economic struggle from the broader political goal is like making sexual freedom an ultimate goal. Economic exploitation and sexual repression are fundamentally interrelated (the latter is part of the ideological superstructure which supports the former), but neither are sufficient enemies for building a broad

revolution to overthrow bourgeois rule.

It's your class stand, not your sexuality, that counts. The L.A. Research Group made this point to counter the anti-gay line of so-called communists but it cuts both ways. Being gay (or a woman, or Black, Mexican, Puerto Rican, poor) does not make you revolutionary. Only developing class consciousness can do that.

To an extent Arthur Evans' article and "On our Identity as Faggots" reflect this problem in blaming anti-homosexuality on the Western Judeo-Christian "rationalism." This is true in part but it leads to anti-intellectual spiritualism as a solution. Totality of being must unite mind and body. Part of the error may be a reaction to dogmatic scientific socialists, who stress the science of Marxism-Leninism while forgetting the humanist origin of socialism, i.e., a passionate rationalism.

Evans repeats this error in criticizing industrialized/militarized society without distinguishing between capitalist and socialist societies. The failure of some socialist countries to build a truly humane society is a problem, but as one who has seen the misery of underdeveloped countries (more precisely, countries whose development has been stunted by imperialism) I have no sympathy for worship of primitivism.

Evans likewise fails to distinguish between the macho, jingoistic mindset of masculinity—which imperialist militarism uses to feed its repressive apparatus—and the fighting militancy of liberation forces. I am not offended by liberation armies. The gay movement tends to project an image of gentleness to contradict the macho image. But surely "zaps" are not flower power. Serious revolutionaries cannot ignore the strong likelihood of armed struggle. Militancy is not gender-related. Recent examples of strength in resistance have been provided in the willingness of anti-imperialist women such as Maria Cueto and Raisa Nemikin in New York City to go to jail rather than cooperate with the

FBI's harassment of the Puerto Rican Independence movement. Alexander the Great, while not a revolutionary hero, proved that gay men could be warriors.

The S/M gay scene deserves more study than I can provide. Gay liberationists seem incapable of providing the necessary criticism. Rape and sexual violence are primarily manifestations of anti-social aggressiveness and not of sexuality; they serve the ruling class. Perhaps the ruling class would prefer gays to keep themselves divided into passive/gentle and aggressive/violent. Much of the S/M scene reflects the worst of the macho mentality of oppression. More criticism of the gay movement is needed by gays, including the unrestricted "doing-it" approach of some gay liberationists, which merely reduces sexual liberation to more commoditized sex. More understanding is needed of how all sex is distorted under capitalism.

On "faggot identification:" I have problems using a term of terror and oppression for self-organization. It's like "nigger," "kike," "spic," and "wop," "kraut," "paddy." Those words are not used by groups to develop consciousness. It may have a certain shock value for a limited time. The "Commie Fags and Proud" banner in Philadelphia last July the fourth gave me a rush, but I doubt its long-term usefulness.

Socialism is more than the sum of economic demands and the demands of special groups for democratic rights. It is the struggle of the working class for state power, for freedom from alienation—and to make its own history. The working class is the majority in this country and the world. The majority of gays are also working class.

In struggle,
Commie Fag Loves Justice
Buffalo, New York.



Dear *Magnus*

Please send us a 23-year subscription. Thanks—

Yours in grace,
Sister Mary Trinette
for Our Lady of the Proles
Church

Magnus Brothers

Enclosed is \$5.00 to start receiving your publication—bill me if a year's subscription is any more than this. I'm most anxious to see where your heads are at via your magazine. I live in a collective of five radical gay men (trying to get it together with each other and with each self) here in Arkansas. Our dream being to acquire some Ozark hills free fairy space in which to explore our spirit that our culture has never allowed us. We're also trying to be aware of the wonderful potential a country place will be for entrapped City brothers to come to and plug into the (hopefully) freer lifestyle—the country (in my opinion) being the best place where we will be able to purify the air around us and reclaim our personal and collective magics.

Much to be done—many layers of conditioning to peel away and many moments of personal struggle and pain. But, oh, what a glorious horizon I do see.

Dean
Mulberry House
Fayetteville, Ark.

I hope this serves as a satisfactory introduction. My name is _____, and am currently incarcerated at the Elko County Jail pending an appeal on my charge of Infamous Crimes Against Nature. This is not one of the 17 States we're legal in.

My objective in writing you at this time is to inquire about your publication. I was told by friends in San Francisco that if I got in contact with you, you would probably send me a copy. I would sure appreciate this as there is nothing here to read with the exception of western paper backs and trash novels.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

I live in central Illinois, work at a coffee machine factory, and sometimes feel I'm the only gay person around (that's when I head to St. Louis, but this winter's been tough!) Am trying to incorporate (strange word!) my feelings about an open gay lifestyle (presently closeted) with working class organizing (we're on strike!) Anxious to read your journal.

In solidarity,
Jerry

Dear Sir

I am writing you to ask you could you please send me the Socialism From A Gay Perspective *Magnus*. I am a revolutionary lesbian activist female prisoner in the Ohio Reformatory For Women and I am starting a group here—a movement to overcome capitalism, imperialism and racism that runs this country and tortures the oppressed. I would very much enjoy these issues as would two friends of mine. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,
Prisoner
Marysville, Ohio

Dear *Magnus*

This is a response to comments on "On Our Identity . . ." It may not be terribly organized but it is useful. I think my first issue comes in how class is recognized/labeled and this is probably a fundamental political difference between us and not so much with the article. I think the Marxian terms bourgeois/working class have been taken out of their historical position (when Marx used them) and have been ascribed to another historical/material period in history . . . I think class issues are extremely complicated for American women and the article didn't really touch that complication (not that I blame anyone; it's a very sticky mess. I am just beginning to read things that make sense . . .)

Also, I think that Christianity was recognized/credited as being the root cause/perpetrator of sexism and class distinctions especially through the family. I think it is important and accurate to recognize Christianity for

the imperialistic force that it is, but again this is not sufficient. There are entire non-Christian cultures with a brutal and overt tradition of sexism (India, China and other Eastern societies). The other thing that absolutely must be dealt with in an analysis of sexism (and I must confess I get extremely nervous when men are defining causes of sexism . . .) is the fact of biological reproduction. It still means something that only women can conceive and bear children . . . the capacity for childbearing played/plays a significant part in sexist/imperialist definitions of women's places.

"They (women) view men as the enemy instead of imperialism . . ." This statement infuriated me. Men are the enemy. While imperialism may be a cause (or one of the causes) of this enmity, *men are the enemy* in a very real, day to day constant kind of way.

Also I think that NO ONE should organize *any one else*—that men should not organize around issues that are not directly and materially theirs. This does not mean not participating in work where men's contributions might be useful, but it does mean that each one of us has our own forms of repression to struggle against. Organizing someone else around issues that are not our own is evangelism.

Hope this has been helpful and is seen in the light of supportive criticism. Am eager to hear about other reader response to *Magnus*.

Love,
Judi Stein
Somerville, Mass.

Magnus

Yeah, put me on your mailing list, also my man, too. We both would be grateful. I'm doing 2 1/2 to 10 years, my man is doing 40 to 60 years for armed robbery and murder. We're getting *Join Hands*, it's where we got your address at. We're getting every paper that we can and luv them all.

Thank you
Love and Peace
Shawn and Bobby

Karl's Color-Coordinated Contradictions

Lawrence Goldyn

I can be more openly gay and politically active around gay issues here in the United States than in any socialist country in the world. Many, although not all, socialist countries have been hostile to the goals of gay liberation. Until recently most socialist political groups here in the United States have also been hostile, and some still are. And yet I am a socialist; in fact I consider myself a marxist. And I consider gay liberation my primary work.

Some people will read what I just wrote and conclude, one, that I have no appreciation of reforms that have been achieved in the United States, or, two, that I am self-destructive and want to bring down my lesbian sisters and gay brothers with me, or three, that I have a fruit cocktail head full of contradictions that make no sense, or, four, that I am simply a fool. The purpose of this article is to prove to myself and to you, dear reader, that none of these things is true.

I cannot pretend to speak for all marxists: only Karl Marx could do that, and he is dead. However, I shall try to explain how I understand marxism and how a marxist like myself understands the world. Then I shall talk about how gay liberation fits into this view of the world. Finally I shall discuss how gay liberation and a socialist revolution are related.

HOW A MARXIST UNDERSTANDS THE WORLD

The world is full of contradictions. Cells in my body are being created at the same time they are dying. The conflict is being resolved in their in-

Lawrence Goldyn was last seen in a hand lettered T-shirt that read: Commie, Jew, Faggot, and Proud.

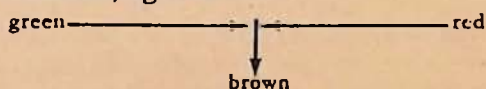
teraction, my being alive. The engine of a bus pushes it forward. At the same time its inertia makes it stay put. It moves forward *under control* as these forces interact. My boyfriend likes to go to parties and I don't. We work it out in the course of a developing relationship. In all these examples contradictions are resolved, but they are resolved as the two sides of the contradiction do something together. The two sides create something together that takes something from each side. The result is therefore different from either of the sides that created it.

Let me illustrate this in color. I have on my desk in front of me three bottles of poster paint, yellow, blue, and red which I use for lettering posters. I am going to repeat the experiment that my fourth grade art teacher (I had a crush on him) performed: making colors. I doubt that the *Magnus* collective can dish out the money to print this with color plates, so you will have to take my word for what happens.

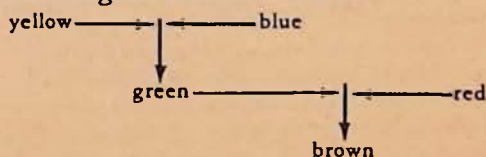
If I take some yellow paint and mix it with blue I get green.



The green is created by the interaction of the blue and the yellow, but it is different from either of those two colors, the two that created it. Let's start all over again with this green. If I mix it with red, I get brown.



The brown comes from the green and red interaction just as the green had come from the blue and yellow. If we put this "history" of brown together in one diagram it looks like this:



Of course we do not have to stop at brown. We can go on forever making different shades of paint. We cannot make *any* color we want because what we have already done limits our future choices. For example, we cannot go

from brown back to pure yellow or pure blue. But we can progress to other colors somewhat like earlier ones. For example, we could add yellow to the brown and get gold. At this moment in the process this is probably as close to yellow as we can get.

This progress from color to color is not along a straight line, the way we are accustomed to thinking about progress. We did not move straight from blue to gold. But we did get from blue to gold none the less, through a series of interactions. This illustrates how marxists believe history progresses, through interactions that take place between opposing sides of contradictions.

We are brought up to believe that when a contradiction arises there is something wrong. As a result, when faced with a contradiction most people become paralyzed. This serves the status quo enormously: every effort I make to change the world is going to bring out contradictions and make me feel damned if I do, damned if I don't. So there isn't much incentive to do anything except throw up my hands in despair or sit on them and do nothing.

Since marxists believe that all of life is made up of contradictions and that history progresses through their resolution, we have a great advantage over other people. This is because instead of being overwhelmed by contradictions and made unable to move, we expect contradictions, look for them, and try to master them, much the same way that the bus driver masters the forces that press upon the bus.

This way of understanding history tells us something else that is very important. I said above that contradictions are resolved as the two sides of the contradiction do something together. The two sides create something together that takes from each side but is different from each side. This means that if we want to understand something we should not look at it in isolation. Nor should we look at it as something that does not change. We will often find the essence of a thing by looking at what it is becoming, not at what it is. For example,

the relationship between my boyfriend who likes parties and me who doesn't can only be understood if we are looked at as people who change and adapt to each other. If we think of an oppressive society as "the way things are," we will not see the changes that are taking place in it. When a marxist hears the phrase "that is the way things are" she or he immediately adds "at this moment."

So much for contradictions. Now I shall talk about why marxists are always concerned with economic relationships.

If you ask people, "What are you?" they usually answer by telling you what kind of work they do. They do not tell you their religion, or their political loyalties, or what kind of food they eat. This is partly because work takes up such a large part of our lives. But this is not the only reason. There is something special and fundamental about the work a person does in defining who that person is.

If somebody in society did not work nobody would be able to live. Nature provides the things we need for life, but they are rarely in the form in which we can use them. Fruit may grow on a tree, but it is a long way from an apple tree to my kitchen in San Francisco. Wool may grow on a sheep, but it is a long way from a sheep to the sweater I am wearing. This process of taking things from the natural world, changing them and making them available for people to use is the process we call production. It takes place when people work, and it is the bottom line of survival. Whether or not you believe that the work a person does tells you what that person is about, marxists believe that since the question of work is the question of survival, the essence of a society is determined by the type of work that goes on in it.

Of course survival for one generation is hardly survival at all for a society. Therefore a society does not only have to produce things to survive: it must also produce itself, i.e., it must reproduce. When Marx talks about the means of production he is talking about these two things: the production

of the means to live and the reproduction of life itself.

If the means of production is at the heart of society because the survival of society depends on it, then we would expect the means of production to have a very strong influence on other parts of society. "Other parts" would include political institutions, religion, and even ideas. Let's look at ideas as an example. We all know people we used to like, or whose politics we respected "before they got their new job," "before they became property owners," or "before they got rich." We intuitively know that the way a person makes his or her livelihood shapes his or her ideas so much that a change in job or wealth can change a person's outlook on the world almost completely. The marxist claim that the means of production limits the ideas held in a society boils down to the same thing. It says that the outlook of a society towards the world is shaped by the work that goes on in it and the relations between people that make the productive system work.

In short, marxists do not claim that knowing about the means of production tells us everything about a society, but that this one piece of information will tell us more than any other single piece.*

Karl Marx and many other economists (including Ben Franklin) believed that things have value be-

*Note: Non-marxists often accuse marxists of being simplistic in their view of the world because they place so much emphasis on this means of production. The critics say that this is a reduction of all human relations to economics and they say marxist analysis is just economic analysis. However, this accusation sounds bad only because the critics have in mind their own notion of economics, bourgeois economics, which is simplistic. It is simplistic because it only concerns itself with exchange and distribution, not with production. Marxist economics is very different. It is based on an analysis of production as well as distribution and exchange. Bourgeois economics is impoverished by comparison. So even if marxists did reduce all of society to "economics" it would still be a better explanation than these critics have in mind. However, it is true that some self-styled "marxists" do rely only on economic explanations. I hope to show later that these people are not loyal to Karl Marx's understanding of the world.

cause human labor is put into getting them or making them. If, for example, you make a shirt, you will set the price (which is a reflection of its value) according to how much labor you put into it. The more time you spend sewing, the more money you will ask for. "But how about the Queen of England's diamond tiara? It has more value than my glass one," someone might say. "Not because of how much labor goes into making it, but because diamonds are scarce and people want them." Diamonds are scarce and that is why it takes so much labor to find one, and that is why they are valuable. If they stayed in the ground they would be worthless, no matter how rare they were. If they were as plentiful as glass, their production would require no more labor than that of glass, and you could buy a diamond stylus for your stereo for the price of a coke bottle.

If it is labor that creates value, then it is the people who work who create the wealth in any society. But in a capitalist society working people have only a small part of the wealth that they created even though they are the largest part of the population. To put it simply, they are ripped off.

Now it is no small trick to systematically rip off the labor of masses of people, but it can be accomplished if society is structured in a special manner. This is where class comes in. A class society is one in which one group in society benefits from the work done by another group. Earlier societies had little wealth and little technology. In some of these societies life was equally difficult for everyone. In some, however, a few lived well at the expense of all the others who lived in misery. Why these two different types developed is an interesting question, but one which I shall not try to answer here. For now, it is enough for us to realize that our society obviously developed from the second type, the one where a few live well at the expense of others. The history of the Western world has been the history of the haves vs. the have nots. A ruling group has always exploited the labor of an op-

pressed group so that those on top could live well off the labor of those on the bottom. This was true under slavery and under feudalism. It is true under capitalism.

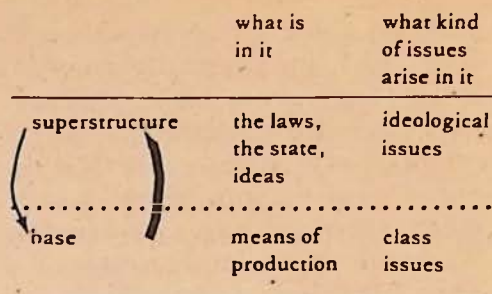
Those of you who have studied marxism will recognize that I have just discussed dialectics, materialism, the labor theory of value, and class conflict, concepts that are often mystified and made complicated but which are really not that difficult.

HOW A MARXIST UNDERSTANDS GAY LIBERATION

Marxists believe that the clearest way to understand a society is to look at it as if it were divided into two parts. The first part we have already talked about: it is the means of production, the way a society goes about producing what it needs by taking things from the natural world, working on them, and distributing the product among its members. The means of production—for reasons already explained—is considered primary. It is referred to as the "base." All other parts of society such as the state and its institutions (the courts, the police, the legislature), religion, the ideas people hold, are located in what is called the "superstructure," so named because it is a structure built above the base, just as a house is built upon a foundation. The nature of the family places it in both the base and the superstructure. I shall talk more about this below.

Conflicts in society arise from one or both of these two areas. If they arise in the base, they are called class issues. If they arise in the superstructure they are called ideological issues. ("Ideology" refers to people's ideas, what they believe and what ideas a political system uses to justify its existence. Since ideology is found throughout the whole superstructure, it is convenient to call superstructure issues ideological issues.)

The following chart summarizes how these terms are related:



The base and everything that goes along with it is different from the superstructure and everything that goes along with it. But they are not separate. They cannot exist without each other any more than a house will stand without its foundation. There is a constant interaction between the two levels, one affecting the other, just as in the contradictions discussed earlier. Because they are so interrelated there is no such thing as a purely class or purely ideological issue. At any moment, a social conflict will have elements of both. Picture a specific conflict located on a line, with ideology at one extreme and class at the other as in this diagram:



Every class issue located on this line is part class and part ideological, but the closer it is to one end of the line the more it is defined by that end. This means that a particular conflict can be more or less class based or ideologically based, but it cannot be purely one or the other. As a result, while marxist theory asserts that the class issues are primary, it also says that you cannot deal with the class issues without dealing with the ideological issues at the same time.

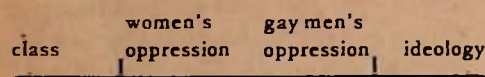
Since the base is considered primary, the interaction between the base and superstructure is not equal. The base has more control over the superstructure than the other way around. This is why the arrows in the diagram are of different thicknesses. The base has a certain command over the rest of society. Let me try one more comparison. I dabble in calligraphy, the art of

writing fancy letters. When I pick up a pen and write, there is an interaction between me and the paper. A good calligrapher does not have a sense of him or herself as the only participant in writing. The paper, the ink, and the pen actually participate, too. If they are not there I cannot write. Furthermore, every time I write a word the presence of that word on the page affects how I can proceed. What I have already done on the page affects how I can proceed. What I have already done on the page limits what I can do next. The design of a page takes on a life of its own and directs me in what I can do. So there is a constant interaction between me and the object I am working on, just like the many interactions I have already talked about. However, this interaction is an unequal one because I am ultimately in command: I can throw away the page and start a new design. The interaction between the base and the superstructure is like this. They affect each other, but the base is ultimately in command.

Now what does all this have to do with gay people? This whole discussion is related to how marxists understand gay oppression. Since the means of production, the base, lies at the heart of any society, if you want to attack and transform a society, this is the most effective place to do it. And since marxists are primarily concerned with making a socialist revolution, they naturally devote most of their energy to conflicts that will affect the base, i.e., ones that are located on the "class" end of the line in the diagram. So now we must ask if the oppression of gay people is primarily a class issue or an ideological one. To answer this question let's compare the oppression of women to the oppression of gay people. As we do this we must keep in mind that lesbians are in both categories and suffer both types of oppression.

The prejudice against gay people that we find in Western culture can be directly traced back to the Christian religion. Historically the church has been one of the great oppressors of gay people. At some point the anti-gay church doctrines regarding the family

took on a life of their own as sex roles spread throughout the value system of society, and took on the label of "morality." Religion, the family, and morality are all part of the superstructure. They are ideological issues. Therefore, historically, it looks like gay oppression is ideological. Women are also oppressed by ideological forces. The church, the family, sex roles, and morality have also oppressed women and kept them in an inferior position. However, there is more to the oppression of women. It goes back much farther, to the very heart of production, to the division of labor between the sexes which took place at the very beginning of production. This means that the oppression of women is partly ideological but also more of a class issue than the oppression of gay men. (The same is true of third world oppression. It is also rooted in a division of labor that has a long history.) If we place women and gay men on the diagram they would be located something like this:



But the *class* nature of the downgrading of women does not come only from the division of labor. It also comes from the family. This is because the family is not only part of the superstructure but also part of the base. Among other things, the family is a social unit designed to reproduce, nourish, and maintain the work force. As such it is at the heart of production, and oppression that comes from the family is a class issue and not simply an ideological one. Since gay oppression is tied to the family, part of it is a class issue. But there is even more to this story because openly gay people occupy a special place in the economic system.

It is useful to think of the private part of the American economy (the part that is not run by the government) as divided into two sectors, the monopoly sector and the competitive sector. In the monopoly sector we find the large corporations that are monopolies

or almost monopolies. Most of the large, older, and powerful labor unions in this country are in this sector. They have succeeded in forcing the corporations to share some of their enormous profits with their workers in the form of higher wages and benefits. Workers in this sector are mostly white. These workers are still very exploited, but they are relatively well off compared to other workers.

The other sector is the competitive sector. Here there are many small businesses which do not have monopolies; instead they have to compete with each other for business. This sector includes small manufacturing firms, service companies, and the many businesses that hire only a few workers. Most third world people work in this sector. In this sector there are few unions and most of the unskilled workers. Businesses here are strongly affected by the ups and downs of the economy so people are often hired and fired. Since there are many unemployed people who only have enough skills to work in this sector the competition for jobs is high; there are few jobs and many people who want them. This means that bosses can pay lousy wages and greatly exploit their workers.

As social outcasts, openly gay people are usually forced to the edges of the economic system. If they are lucky they get jobs in the competitive sector as waiters and waitresses, service persons, and clerical workers. If they are not so lucky they are unemployed or stay alive by cleaning houses or getting similarly low paying menial work. Openly gay people are rarely found in the monopoly sector.

This position of gay people in the economy is important for two reasons. First of all, it shows that the oppression of gay people is also tied to the division of labor, although historically it is not a division that goes as deeply as the division of labor between the sexes that oppresses women. This means that even aside from the question of the family, the oppression of gay people is related to production and therefore partly a class issue. But

most importantly this analysis shows why the line between class issues and ideological issues blurs, how the base and superstructure constantly interact. Gay people were stigmatized in the ideological part of society by the church and later by morality and popular prejudice, and this led to our being given a special place in the economic part of society. Here our position is useful to a capitalist system that benefits from divisions among working people caused by job insecurity and unemployment.

How is all this related to political strategy? Let's return to the diagram where we think of issues as falling on a line between class based and ideologically based. The place where an issue lies on this line says something about the means to resolve it: the more a conflict is a class issue, the more the resolution of this conflict requires a total restructuring of society because such a conflict is deeply rooted in the way in which society produces what it needs. If we are talking about an oppression that is rooted in production, like the oppression of women and third world people, we are dealing with a stubborn oppression. This is because the oppressive relationships are recreated everyday in the division of labor found in the workplace where society produces what it needs. On the other hand, the more an issue is ideological, the more it can be worked out short of a revolution. This means that the oppression of women, since it goes back to the division of labor between the sexes, is deeply entrenched in the means of production. Therefore it is recreated everyday at work, and cannot be overcome without changing the means of production. In other words, the liberation of women requires a socialist revolution. It may require more, but it requires at least this much.

Since it is more on the ideological end of the line, more of the oppression of gay men can be ended short of a socialist revolution. It does threaten the monogamous family and thus the way society reproduces its work force, but the gay movement can achieve many

of its aims within the capitalist system. However, I just said the "gay movement" and not "gay liberation." This is because while I believe that gay people can achieve more freedom under capitalism than we have now, I do not believe that our true potential as whole human beings can be realized under capitalism, and we are oppressed as whole people under capitalism, not just around our sexuality. *If* America remains liberal, gay people may be able to achieve civil rights and tolerance for our life style in it. But if the gay struggle is not tied to a socialist feminist perspective, gay freedom will be oriented towards the needs of male identified, white gay men who, because of their status as white males in a male dominated society can plug into white male privilege. They would then win their rights at the expense of other oppressed people such as working people, third world people, women, and effeminate men. The dominant white, straight, male elite could open its ranks to some gay men—those who are butch enough and have the right class background—and leave the rest of us as bad off as before.

This scenario is not just something I made up. Gay men often point to the society of classical Athens to prove that prejudice against homosexuality is not found everywhere and is not essential to the running of a creative and productive society. But these men do not point out that women were horribly oppressed in this society and that it was built on the labor of slaves. This shows, at least historically, that the elevation of male homosexuality can happen at the same time that other people are oppressed. The movement for gay rights can only go beyond this contradiction when it allies itself with the forces striving for the liberation of all working people, going beyond the goals of civil rights and pressing for socialist liberation.

I said that gay people could gain civil rights *if* America stays liberal, but frankly, I don't think it will. Liberalism has become a luxury that capitalism can only afford when it is doing well.

But capitalism is no longer doing well. It is in decline. As more and more third world countries declare their independence from the domination of American based corporations—as Cuba, Vietnam, Angola, and Mozambique have done—this decline will continue. Historically, when capitalism has been in danger it has tended to move towards the right, towards fascism or military dictatorships. Recently in much of Latin America right-wing military dictatorships have come to power. If this analysis is correct liberalism in America is eroding. It will soon no longer be an option. We are then faced with the choice: socialism for which we must fight, or a type of right wing regime which capitalism will automatically sink into. Socialism will not automatically give us everything we want. We will still have to fight for it. But socialism has potential to offer a different world. Capitalism has run its course and can no longer offer anything new. It is washed up.

If we are going to throw our lot in with the socialists there is one more question to be answered: why have socialists given gay people a hard time in the past? This hostility is a major contradiction that gay socialists have had to deal with.

Many individual socialists have been hostile to the demands of gay people for the same reason that many closeted gay people have been. They grow up in and take on the values of a homophobic society. Personally I don't find this a satisfactory answer because I expect socialists to struggle with and overcome some of the prejudices they are brought up with. So the question becomes: why don't they struggle over gay issues? Many socialists have refused to consider gay liberation seriously because they insist on focusing on what they call "class issues" and ignoring what they put down as "ideological issues." They do not understand, as Marx made very clear, that the two cannot be separated this way, and that you often fight class battles in an ideological form. This makes them bad enough marxists, but what makes them worse is that they only pay attention to half the *class* issues. Marx is very clear when he says that the means of production includes two parts: one, the way society gets what it needs from nature, produces what it needs, and distributes it, and two, the way society reproduces itself, such as through the family. These self-styled "marxists" have ignored this second part of the means of production so they

photo by Kevin Burke



have not understood the class aspect of gay oppression, or for that matter, of the oppression of women.

Another reason that socialists have not dealt with their anti-gay attitudes is that until recently nobody confronted them about them. Most who have been confronted—judging from my experience here in San Francisco—have been responsive. It has taken a lot of painful work on our part, but the work has paid off.

When we move to the question of why socialist revolutions have largely ignored the needs of gay people part of the answer is the same: they were made mostly by men who never questioned the assumptions about male supremacy that they learned in their pre-revolutionary societies. And they did not have to struggle around male supremacy because there was no organized, mass based women's or gay movement that fought for its place in the revolutionary movement.

This point about our having to work for our place in the movement is a very important one because it relates to how marxists understand historical progress. When we made brown so many pages ago we got it by adding red to green. If we had added a color different from red we would not have ended up with brown. Brown came out because red went in. It did not come out of the blue. What comes out of a process depends on what goes into it. History moves the same way. We make our own history by actively struggling for certain things. The only hitch is that we cannot always make exactly what we please when we please. (We could not make yellow from brown.) The time for gay liberation *has* come. The demands of gay people are now a major part of the revolutionary movement in the United States in a way they never have been before anywhere. We struggled to get them there, but there they are. And gay liberation will be an important part of a socialist revolution in this country as long as we keep up the struggle.

Four by Ted Bohn

Untitled

It flattens me
like an anvil
this country does,
it weighs me down just as much.
Yes, I'm sure it's this country
that depresses me.
I'm going North
like geese for the spring.
I'm leaving this depression behind,
like footprints that mar the face.
Still, it beats down on me
like a cop with a stick
or the noon sun in this ghetto window.
It makes me tired
like some sleeping disease,
and it robs my life
like a candy store thief.
It stands strong in front of me
like a mountain blocking out the light.
It grabs at me
like a hand
for money,
I swear this country depresses me.
It freezes my tears
like a gale wind
and leaves me scattered
like fallen leaves.
It makes me totter off-balance
like a child walking on the curb.
It rips me up
like a lion on a fawn
then it sells my carcass off
like ivory tusks.
It makes me scared to touch back sometimes
like a cowering beggar or a cornered cat.
It snatches at my pockets
like bloody fingers
for coins to buy guns
to kill my sisters and brothers
in other places.
It shuts up my angry mouth
like a boarded up window
and kicks me like a playball
till I reach its goal.
It lashes out at me
like a bullwhip
and catches me on my neck
like a noose.

It herds me up
and drives me North, South
East and West,
and North once more.
It bangs at my life
like a hammer.
and grinds me up
like corn at a mill.
I see my time
like sifted flour in sacks
slipping through the bottom
leaving a trail.
It sucks out my blood
like a leech.

But I'm packing up to go North
to another land.
It's made me as sour as summer milk.
It heads me towards cliffs
like a lemming ready to jump.
I mean it
like it's written here,
I swear it,
it's this country that depresses me.

Untitled

I have no life
I tell myself
as I walk by alarm clocks
and ringing telephones.
I repeat it over
and over
like eggs in skillets,
in my car
driving home from work
where I MAKE
a living.

—construct a living like toy blocks
to knock down
when the novelty is gone.

And now this life
like mortar between
dusty bricks
is crumbling in decay.

In my car
where every song is torture
every turn is wrong
every telephone pole
an invitation
like a lover's lips.

No life
to speak of really
to dream or
to leave behind in blood.
I am given pieces of paper
with the faces of presidents
on them
for my life
which I sell from behind
a keyboard.

—Everyday
we hear of births
and we think of lives.

—The capitalist wants money
to make it happen.

We hear of deaths
of lives suddenly gone
like the snuffing of a candle
and the capitalist wants money
from those who are left alive
to place the limpid body in the earth.

We hear of wars
and more death
to protect the integrity
and assets
of nations.

We sacrifice
LIVES

for this purpose.

And the lives under marble
like headboards on beds
are not those of the capitalist
or his son,
but they are ours.

Manipulated like figures of ivory
on chessboards
slowly past the castles
the knights
we the pawns
pass by the red and black squares
like burial plots
moving closer to death.

I have no life
I'm heard to say.

It is always dusk
when I drive up the street
illuminated by t.v. screenlight
toward my driveway.
Each house nearby
stands like a mausoleum
and there are rusty tricycles
and toy guns
on front lawns.

My blood has blackened
in the veins
like polluted rivers
under the skin.
There is never enough food to be had,
never enough air to breathe,
and when there is enough for one lung,
we walk like asthmatics
to the tent of oxygen.

—I have no time to BUY
like jewelry or gold rings.

And in the morning
I pull out of my driveway slowly
like the thrust of a dying whore
toward the acres of typewriters
like plantations
and secretaries like slave gangs.

I'm thinking that white men
were dumb
to think they could last
as the capitalist lasts

—like the smell of gunpowder
on the wind lasts
to think that by keeping black men in
fields

working for a century
that their bodies would remain slim
and weak
or brittle like saltgrass.

And today,
I quit my job
I set fire to my typewriter
and cut down telephone lines
like they were stitches in the skin.
Tomorrow
I will dress my boss
in khaki green.

Ted Bohn—My whole life, I've had one dream:
to have the TIME AND ENERGY to love, which,
as a worker, I've felt robbed of by capitalism and
the bourgeoisie. Hang around and wathh me get
what I want. (Here to stay. Here to win.)

Untitled

to Rachel

Give me your tired
your humble masses
still
yearning
to be free.

I stand so solid
on an island
where I'll
lift my dress for you
and hold my torch
in one hand
masturbating
against a thousand pink horizons.

I gave birth to my child
justice
and killed it.

I drowned it
in pubic hair
like isles of seaweed
and oil.

I am an exile.
France
never wanted me.
I gyrate now
on this rock.
Like the Lorelei
in my porno pose,
beckoning masses
to my womb,
promising to shelter
the proletariat,
the sick,
the tired,
and cough blood
at ferry boats.

I stand for liberty
but my knees
are weak
They work me
in Amerika
until I vomit my
steel entrails
like intestines
into smogsets.

The rich
throw stones at me
in the night,
and I bleed the blood
of my bloodless masses.

I will seal my womb
like an honest promise
to lift my robe
and get off of
this rock
that they've anchored me to.
I will uproot myself
if I must,
instead of rusting here
like tin.

And behold the day
when I
slowly wade
into the Hudson
and swim upstream.

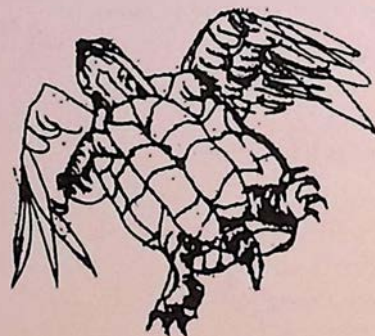
I will take your tired masses
with me America,
oh yeah,
and spread my menstrual blood
across your fields
dropping clothes
and pounding the rich
into the ground
with this torch.

Venceremos II

to Arthur

There's never any telling
what can happen in the dark.
Until you wake up in a frenzy
like a baby bird,
and then I feel you go down on me
slowly
like the aiming of a gun.
I feel you slide up fast
like a raised fist,
and plunge back down
like the blade of the guillotine
in France.

I feel the night around me
like a blanket,
you're swifter than a race horse
and you feel like you've been out in
the fog or drizzle.
But then there's the night to remind me
like a cloak.
You're faster and faster
it's the home stretch
and we're waiting for
the river to flow
like Old Faithful
shooting playmates to heaven.
You roll over tired
like a factory worker
and I move in fast.
The strategy point.
How does it feel
my brother?
There's talk of a revolution
you know,
now tell me how it feels.



drawing by Tom Till

What I Get from Gay Masculinism

500 Ponies

My personal and political growth brings me to confront the sexism in my inner, inter-personal, and community life. This began as a study for my radical problem-solving group. I'm starting to see masculinism as a pervading and binding theme with which I coalesce the privilege and advantage I have left to me in a hetero-hostile society. First I examine privilege gay masculinism gets me with heteros and then look at the advantage and leverage that primary straight identity gives me among faggots.

EXTRAS WITH HETEROS

Butch identity provides:

- 1 anonymity among homophobics.
- 2 approval of liberal straights who are anti-sissie.
- 3 enables me to pass at job applications.
- 4 rescues me from street violence.
- 5 rescues me from the humiliation of verbal abuse.
- 6 masculinism gets me plenty of strokes from liberal hetero men into "brotherhood" who see me as exotic or evolved.
- 7 attention from straight women who like faggot company but have anti-sissie bias.
- 8 less hassle than women and sissie men with housing.
- 9 straight dress codes originate, then reinforce the various gay butch drags.
- 10 enables me to stay in closet with relatives (less chance of disinheritance).

Gay masculinism is a way of relating to myself and people around me that largely meshes with hetero-American culture. The male supremacy of established hetero life confirms my basis of identity, continually reinforcing my sense that maleness *is* human strength, that maleness *is* emotional,



photo by Kevin Burke



photo copyright © Efren Ramirez 1977.

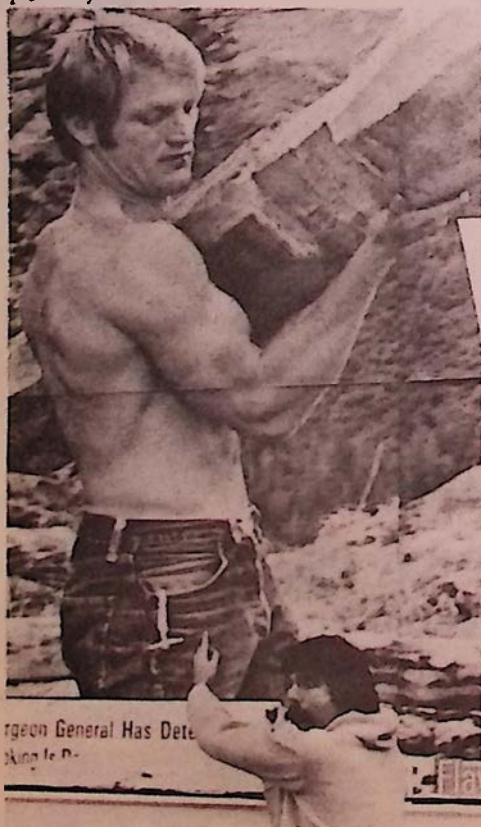
intellectual, social, and material competence; that "natural" male aggression results in success and defines success for me as material accomplishment, social power, and personal independence.

Straight masculinity teaches me to craft a theatrical "personality" and to use it as a manipulative tool. For example:

- 1 to get faggots to respond sexually.
- 2 nurture me, do favors for me.
- 3 get hetero men to sympathize and go passive, perhaps allowing me to touch them ("I'm just another ok guy").
- 4 get nurturing attention from women.

Straight material life, consumerism, confirms my identity base as masculine (opposed to and in competition with anything else), implying that masculinity is selfhood. Check cigarette ads. The "correctness" and resultant privilege of individualism as a life style are complemented and reinforced by the superculture which provides an ethical framework for this self-centeredness.

photo by Kevin Burke



The maleness of the Judeo-Christian god integrally reinforces the feeling that one's very "being" itself flows from a phallic introverted, pissed-off, revenge-seeking cosmic commander and from that "divine" love (i.e., Jesus of Nazareth doesn't have any dick, doesn't have any real guts, doesn't fit into the real world at all). To experience this is to feel a power rush that is exhilarating. Further, male deity engenders an individualistic holiness in isolation trip, rather than a collective, mutually nurturing practice.

EXTRA STROKES FROM GAY FOLKS

Gay masculinity is a set of ideas and social practices that enables me to luxuriate in a largely dominant social/sexual position, gives me a wider range of choices than are available to other faggots and makes available the privileges, support, and identity-base reinforcement of an elitist erotic tradition about which a lot of American faggots are currently agog.

Being butch mystifies me to myself and other faggots. As I associate myself in dress, action and nuance of mannerism with many faggots' primary fantasy/erotic groove (an implacable, self-fulfilled, prepotent, muscularly and belligerently capable dominus; very tight, implying need for nurturing but specifically not asking for it), the real me peers out from the hiding place of fog-embellished stereotype. I get safety and elude the hard work of being open in a war camp world.

Faggots infer a lot of stuff from my mystified butchness; that I'm strong, have a big dick, am perhaps mobile, independent; that I'm together mentally, emotionally; all this feeds an impression of general superiority, while implying there is a place for a nurturing faggot in the inferior position.

Sexuality has a real sacred dimension for faggots and masculinity sets me up as an object of worship in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Object of worship, that is, as opposed to subjective participant in direct affection.

I'm just below the middle on the usual handsomeness scale, but in effective leather or other butch drag (including carriage, personality, etc.) I get a lot more strokes for looks than I would in a dress. In the same way, my age, 31, is de-emphasized; in other words, I am considered a lot more sexually acceptable in heightened male drag. I get a lot of support and reinforcement from the Folsom-Castro culture which specifically caters to masculinity and indeed from all gay San Francisco, which is wowed generally by the "grandeur of being a dude."

All this gives me more options. Sexually I can do top things and get adoration and power or switch and get worship and surrender. Sissie men usually don't have this choice. Some masculinist gays won't see their erotic dynamic in these harsh terms, but I think this is a primary gay male trip.

I can feed off of sissie attention without being seriously expected to reciprocate sexually, and heavy masculinists are welcome in almost all gay circles. Men in my position reap most of the attention and approval strokes because we are walking symbols of most faggots' (butch and sissie) essential erotic fantasy. Living in this position constantly whispers to me that my sex life is the sum of all gay culture. Masculinism often puts me (a white man) in an easily manipulative position with third-world faggots on a racist basis, either on top (yeah baby I'll shuffle for that white stud dick) or on the bottom (daddy my ass is beggin' for that black sugar crank).

Participation in gay masculinity provides access to a highly developed erotic tradition. This I call the cult of masculinity. Its practice is sex which directly and consciously focuses on heightened male dominus symbols and power dynamics; master/slave, top/bottom, stud/cock sucker or two groovy guys getting off on each other's manliness and muscles, are examples.

Masculinist gay sex is generally objectified, and cult devotees consciously refine fetish technique; arch role-playing, erotic pain, bondage, authori-

tarian discipline games, anonymous "fuck palace" orgy techniques, and street sex strategy are examples. Increasing ability to sensitively give or endure sex pain (while maintaining erotic connection) builds a sexual athleticism in which a lot of pride is taken and for which there is social support and praise. Working to become good at fist fucking is an example. This sex-society reinforces the most primary levels of masculinist socio-psychodynamics; in other words, the ability to take pain is manly, aggression equals success, independent manliness commands the optimum social position and the greatest number of choices.

Gay masculinists eventually see sexuality and relationships as technology areas, focusing energy into *performance* skills. Skill at technical manipulation of people — lovers, friends and gay community; business types, family, women — is the result. Being skilled at using "fucking" as a tool for self-profit and seeing people and relationships as "raw material fields" to be used describes the sophisticated gay masculinist.

This action tends to simplify life by dividing it into neat compartments. There is a certain power thrill in being able to set things up predictably and let happen, or reject relationship developments according to how they conform to a script. If I feel empty as a result of a low level of subjective content during an evening, I can make up for it by increasing the quantity of action.

This kind of packaging of sexual relationships renders "success" materially tangible; that is, how many times I orgasm, how many guys more handsome than me go down on me, or how I stole guy A from guy B by manipulating guy A's fetish responses. This is the "notches on a gunslinger's pistol" mentality. The power thrill here is real evident.

Gay masculinist sexuality is basically competitive. Some "win," most lose. To win over fifty percent of the time means membership in a sex elite. Western culture is structured to give the most praise and strokes to members of the power elite ("My, what a

brilliant, well-educated, well-bred, refined, traveled gentleman; what an astute financier, leader, commander, thinker, tennis player, etc."). To be a "hot" man (current Castro/Folsom usage) is the closest disenfranchised faggots can get to a ruling-class men's club of their own.

Hot Dog!?

A first step in building an in-depth analysis of the sexist dynamics in my own creature self and gay culture is to figure what the material basis is for male supremacist choices and actions.

A further stage in analysis of gay oppression will be documentation of how the promises and expectations behind butch choices fail to deliver the

goods. Sexism distorts, cripples and poisons the developing system of male/male nurturing and work that we are shaping into collective faggotry.

Please send feedback. I have no real class analysis, no ageist and looksist development yet and I want to fully explore the white/third-world dynamics in fag masculinism. I want to specifically get the dynamics of butch/sissie oppression out on the table.



photo by Alan Bistry

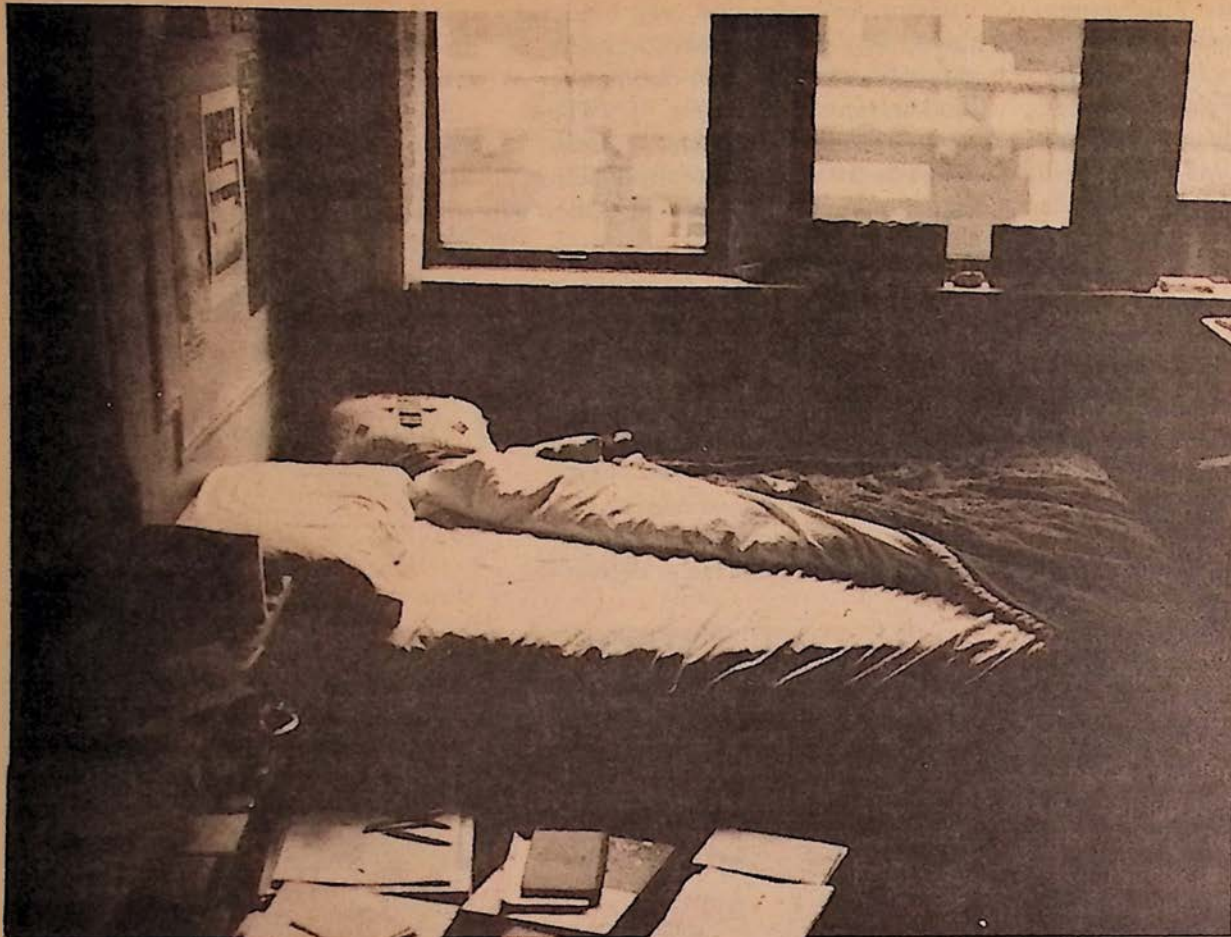


photo by Kevin Burke

Untitled

John Sokoloff

Hey, Big Boy . . . you wanna fuck me?
 he says with his eyes.
 You wanna fuck me?
 he says with his thighs
 and his sighs
 and his size.
 You wanna fuck me till I bleed?
 I have a need . . .
 to bleed.
 And the knight in shining leather
 answers Yes with his eyes and his thighs and his size.
 There are no smiles here—
 only wiles
 and styles
 and miles between you and him.
 No kisses; just roll over and bite the pillow
 while St. Sebastian's tormentor
 pierces your flesh

until the unholy alliance
 of Vaseline and shit and cum and blood
 has baptised your asshole.
 As another unsatisfied trick leaves
 thinking a shot load is salvation,
 there is no hesitation.
 Eyes don't meet,
 as good defenses make good lovers.
 And you're left curled up
 on shit stained sheets
 and tear stained pillow-slips
 clutching your Raggedy Ann and rosary.

John Sokoloff, infamous artist in search of a
 medium, is currently the poet-in-residence at his
 flat on Grove Street in San Francisco.

Some Politics of Torture

Denny Smith

All those who had been present at the execution of the sentence spread terrible reports through the town and the surrounding villages. An incredible fear gripped the townsmen and the workers. Slowly and gradually a full consciousness of what had happened in their midst in the course of a short November day came home to them. All conversation centered on the man who, high up there on the scaffolding, was still alive on the stake. Everyone resolved not to speak of him; but what good was that when their thoughts turned continually to him and all glances centered on the spot?—Ivo Andric, *The Bridge on the Drina*

Torture is used to destroy a person slowly, without killing her or him; to damage the will of mass resistance. The victim of torture historically has been a political prisoner. It seems that the level of brutality toward prisoners corresponds with the threats and rumblings under state power. Ancient Greece forbade torture, but, being liberal, made exceptions for slaves. Imperial Rome gradually increased the use of torture on its citizens. The Christian Church originally opposed it, then resurrected it for the Inquisition to combat heresy. The French Enlightenment "abolished" torture; Nazi Germany institutionalized it.

Documented evidence shows that the use of torture is increasing all over the world. Amnesty International listed 113 governments last year, including the United States, which reportedly torture prisoners. "It is significant that torture is the one form of violence today that a state will always deny and never justify." (1)

Probably like many other people, I had always pictured the torturer as a cartoon-like monster, who as a child tore the wings off flies, and later grew up into an emotionally deformed devil, living far away and bearing no allegiance to any government or society. A torturer, of course, serves his govern-

ment very well, although it is an allegiance forged without his full understanding; an allegiance which should be understood by those who fight the roots of political repression. The men who actually apply torture to prisoners are usually not of high rank. Most often they are following orders under pressure from their superiors. Why would men of low status want to cooperate with the status quo, to use acts of violence against those who oppose a ruling class?

If they were capitalists themselves, then it would stand to reason why they would guard the wealth they had stolen, and why they try to keep up, even by force, the system that gives them the privilege of robbing the people.

But the police and the soldier, the defenders of 'law and order,' are not of the capitalist class. They are men from the ranks of the people; poor men who for pay protect the very system that keeps them poor. It is unbelievable, is it not? (2)

In this way Alexander Berkman described the ironic position of the men who perform the state's violence. But who really authorizes this violence?

It is the class with economic power which exerts control over all of society, even over the relations between people. That control extends to sexual relations and our very bodies, as women and gay people know too well. Under a system built on profit and ownership, those who own and profit must conquer both the ways of love and sex, and of work and nourishment. We who do not own or profit, who must sell ourselves just to survive, everywhere find our sexuality and our labor dangled on puppet strings. I think the success of the powerful depends on how well they manipulate the honest needs of the whole masses of people with those strings.

When people rebel against the constant oppression of class control, and there is an insurrection among the dispossessed, rulers need to employ violent techniques like torture in order to keep their power. And soon it becomes logically useful to pull sexuality into the violence. Many terrible stories of

torture betray an element of erotic satisfaction for the torturer:

Al-Najb underwent yet another kind of torture. Stripped naked, he was bound to a chair with his hands chained behind to manacles. One of the torturing team would step on the manacles with the entire weight of his body. This had the effect, because of his need to ease the pressure of the manacles on his hands, of raising his entire body. At this point other torturers hit his sex organ. The hitting of the sex organ till it bleeds and the crushing of testicles has become a common method of torture in the prisons under Israeli occupation. The torturers hope that the method will strike at the virility of the tortured. When the torturers tired, they were replaced by others. (3)

In Tejas Verdes, a Chilean prison:

Visitors to the women's jail describe girls who arrive with their hair pulled out, genitals and nipples destroyed, mice inserted in their vaginas, and evidence of savage beatings and rape. (4)

An unknown number of women have been raped; some of them, pregnant after rape, have been refused abortions. Women have had insects forced up their vaginas; pregnant women have been beaten with rifle butts until they have aborted. Prisoners have been forced to eat excrement, have been plunged endlessly into ice cold water, have had their bones smashed, have been left to stand naked in the sun for many hours. (5)

Not all torture is so obviously sexual, but it seems there is a connection between economic conquest, torture, and sexual conquest worth exploring. For faggots, I think the connection would be incomplete without acknowledging the unsettling resemblance of power dynamics and "torture" equipment in the S&M subculture to government-organized tortures.

The word "sado-masochism" comes from the names of two men. The first, the Marquis de Sade, lived about two hundred years ago, and was sympathetic to the French Revolution. The Marquis was inclined to enjoy various kinds of pain with his lovemaking, especially as it was inflicted on his partner. He had many sexual partners, and consequently created lots of scandals,

both in and outside of prison. While he was in jail, he also wrote novels which contained explicit sexual scenes with "sadistic" flavors. Masochism was coined from the name of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, an Austrian writer who lived shortly after de Sade. Many of the characters in his stories seemed to enjoy being dominated.

From my experience with other gay men I see S&M as a kind of playing with power roles, an honest expression of sexual energy acted out within a relationship or encounter of consensual dominance and submission. Assumed in the word "consensual" is that the power involved is, in this situation, a free and self-determined power, not a violent invulnerable aggression. The Society of Janus in San Francisco, like the Eulen-spiegel Society in New York, seeks to understand and affirm the S&M identity.

Some of us believe that actualizing our fantasies is a part of actualizing ourselves as human beings . . . That expressed creatively, S/M can develop an exquisite and beautiful trust . . .

Some of us believe the twin, intertwined drives toward dominance and submission are common to all mankind. . . that it is far safer and healthier to recognize S/M and to deal with it constructively, than to repress it, for when repressed, it can warp and twist lives and relationships. (6)

Even so, to really understand sexual power, let's return to reckon it with economic power.



Wilhelm Reich, a socialist scientist, studied in impressive detail the relationships between work, sex, psychology, and social power. Reich combined the theories of Frederick Engels regarding private property and male supremacy with those of Sigmund Freud about sexual repression:

Until the encroachment of economic interests, sexual life is governed by the natural law of regulation to be found in the pleasure-nonpleasure

principle. The natural regulatory principle crystallizes into social customs and practices, which, instead of contradicting sexual gratification, serve to secure it. The rudiments of antisexual morality appear as the demand or claim of a group in society holding economic and political power over the other members of society. The demand is a measure to secure and increase the power of the group. Thus the demand raised by the profiteer becomes the morality of those from whom the profit is taken. (7)

This becomes a pattern of history...

The sexual order, existing in a certain relationship to the productive economic interests of society, was transformed from its natural state of affirmation and support of human sexual economy into a sexually denying and repressive order which induces a way of life inimical to sexual economy. This historical event unfolded in complete dependence on the transformation taking place from matriarchal to patriarchal society, and from primitive communist to private enterprise society. Sexual repression is unknown in natural society, just as it is absent in any natural organization of living beings. (8)

The capitalist presently rips off surplus labor, calling it profit instead of theft. He channels surplus sexuality into a state of repression, calling it moral purity. By surplus sexuality I mean every sort of consensual sex which doesn't necessarily produce babies, or falls beyond the limits of the bourgeois nuclear family, such as sodomy, oral sex, incest, S&M, coprophilia, pederasty, and bestiality. Under social pressure and threat of law, we learn to see those ways of having sex as unnatural. Taboos on these sexual expressions uphold the morality of capitalism, of unaffectionate workers, of men afraid of men, and of men on top of women.

Of what use is this repression to someone who already holds vast economic power? For one thing, it is a way to teach people self-denial so they won't clamor for the full satisfaction of their needs. It reinforces monogamy, and male heterosexual privilege. And it creates a constant underflow of tension in the working class to help

distract us from our powerlessness. Ultimately, it is an ace in the hand of authority for the ruling class. Because when people really threaten class structure, the state can draw upon the reserve of repressed sexual energy and fashion it into weapons, like torture and rape.

The system perverts our sexuality to protect its stolen wealth. So creative sex and work which could really fulfill our needs is held down to the limited, the repetitive, often destructive means for profit. Sexual expression which runs counter to the moral "purity" of sexism has yet to be liberated from a status of "corruption." I should say here that Reich held a dim view of homosexuality and sado-masochism. But he had few positive examples to draw from. As gay people, even we thought of ourselves as perverted until we found an affirming self-image.

Drawing on Reich's research and principles I would assert that the owners in society maneuver many natural pleasures, like gayness, S&M, sex between children into a state of repression, *defined by sex roles*, then hurl them back as sexual violence to bolster their power. There are many situations which suggest that class control benefits quite a bit from the *strategic repression and release* of sexual energy. Gay prisoners in behavior modification programs are subjected to some of the same convulsive or paralyzing drugs, anectine for example, as captured guerrillas in South America. And yet, prison conditions in the United States encourage sexual competition among male inmates. Throughout his essays, Reich says in different ways that we must appeal to people's sense of sexual and psychological freedom. Fascism and property mentality can thrive by manipulations of our erotic energy. So revolution must integrate sexual and emotional creativity in the move toward a classless society.



The fight to regain control over our

bodies and our labor is happening all over the world. Torture and rape are the responses of the threatened possessors, the international capitalists—the imperialists. For example, the U.S. has maintained strong influence over the Chilean armed forces through training programs in the U.S. and the Canal Zone. Over 4,000 officers and enlisted were trained at these facilities, including the heads of a known torture center, and the leaders of the junta which overthrew a popularly elected socialist president in 1973.

The following course description is from the curriculum of the U.S. Army School of the Americas (USARSA), located at Fort Gulick in the Canal Zone in Panama:

... c. Handling Captured Personnel and Documents: correct treatment of captured personnel for successful interrogation [intimidation]; d. Process of Interrogation: principles and techniques; practical application of techniques [torture]. Purpose: to provide selected Latin American officers with a basic knowledge of urban counter-insurgency concepts, operational tactics and techniques.(9)

The top students from this school are invited back as guest lecturers, and many graduates have risen to high positions in their governments. Military coups in Peru, Bolivia, Panama, and Chile were carried out by officers who attended the USARSA. Between the Chilean coup and 1976, the junta bought \$143.5 million in U.S. military equipment. (10) To protect Bank of America and Anaconda Copper interests, the dictatorship must suppress any discontent among the people, who suffer high infant mortality as well as unemployment rates that reach fifty per cent in some areas.

Chile is easily rivaled by Iran in terms of American support. In 1953, the C.I.A. engineered the overthrow of a popularly elected Iranian government, replacing it with a treacherous monarch. Shah Reza Pahlavi has been very sympathetic to the concerns of Allied Chemical, Union Carbide, General Motors, B.F. Goodrich, Dow Chemical Company, and of course the oil oligopolies. In May of

1972, Nixon told the Shah he could buy any weapons he wanted, aside from nuclear ones. Since then Iran has ordered ten billion dollars in arms. To assist the Shah's government, there are 1400 U.S. Defense Department employees and 3000 U.S. Military contractor employees in Iran. (11) Why this type of aid? Why aren't the Americans in Iran as concerned about the three-quarters of the population who cannot read or the fact that 75 per cent of the housing is without electricity, and 85 per cent is not supplied with water?

Twenty years before its crime against the Chilean people, the U.S. government sabotaged the popular plans of the Iranian people to control their economy, their society, their lives. To guard imperialist investment, the U.S. installs puppets like the Shah and Pinochet. The situation has been similar for many countries: South Korea, the Philippines, Brazil, South Africa, Thailand. Through training and arms sales, the U.S. empowers extensions of its authority like the Iranian State Security and Intelligence Organization (SAVAK), and the Chilean secret police (DINA). Both SAVAK and DINA exert tremendous repression on any opposition to their respective governments. Artists, workers, students, intellectuals have been victims of arrest without charges, farcical trials or no trials, and horrific tortures sometimes leading to death. Dissidents in Iran have suffered weight cuffs which break the shoulders in less than two hours, have had fingernails extracted, teeth yanked out, and boiling water pumped into the rectum. In Chile the prisoners endure many hours of electric shock, often hanging upside down, and dogs are specially trained to rape women. Is U.S. sponsorship in such countries making the world safe for democracy?

Since 1975, the U.S. has sold more military expertise and equipment than it has used. Many of the sales have been to countries who antagonize each other, such as Peru and Chile, Israel and Jordan. Thus U.S. imperialism is profiting from repression within dif-

ferent countries as well as from belligerence between them. This is the ugliest face of imperialism, making safe the rape of the world, particularly the Third World, and the torture of those who oppose it.



Protest letters have been successful in obtaining the release of many political prisoners and calling international attention to the use of torture in various countries. If you can spare the time and postage, write a simple letter of protest, and have several friends sign it. Below are listed the embassies of nine countries that are probably most often guilty of burying human rights. All of them have received extensive U.S. aid in the past. And three of them, the Philippines, South Korea and Iran, are still strongly dependent on U.S. support, notwithstanding Jimmy Carter's limp concern. Also listed are the Iranian Shah, Chile's Pinochet and the U.S. State Department.

Philippine Embassy
1617 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Chilean Embassy
1736 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20036

Iranian Embassy
3005 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

Brazilian Embassy
3006 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

Paraguayan Embassy
2400 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

Uruguayan Embassy
1918 F Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20006

South African Embassy
3051 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

South Korean Embassy
2370 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

Argentinian Embassy
1600 New Hampshire Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20009

Shahan Shah of Iran
 Mohammed-Reza Pahlavi
 Tehran, Iran
 President Augusto Pinochet
 Edificio Diego Portales
 Santiago, Chile
 Cyrus Vance
 Secretary of State
 Washington, D.C.

For more information regarding Iran
 and ways to help, contact the:

Iranian Students Association
 P.O. Box 11908
 Chicago, Illinois 60611

Regarding Chile, contact:

Non-Intervention in Chile
 P.O. Box 800
 Berkeley, California 94701

Protest letters of course are only effective to a degree. Letters will not alter fundamental social relations. To accomplish this change, we have to see ourselves in both the torturer and the tortured; and then take sides, within and without, to uproot and reroute those relations.

- (1) Amnesty International, *Report on Torture*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 21.
- (2) Alexander Berkman, *What is Communist Anarchism?* Dover Publications, 1972, p. 20.
- (3) From Zu ha-Derech, 6/12/74; reprinted in *Documents from Israel 1967-1973*, edited by Dovis and Mezvinsky.
- (4) Rose Styron, "Special Report on Chile," in *A.I. Report on Torture*, p. 247.
- (5) *A.I. Report on Torture*, p. 207.
- (6) From the preamble of the Society of Janus, P.O. Box 6794, San Francisco, California 94101.
- (7) Wilhelm Reich, "The Imposition of Sexual Morality," anthologized in *Sex-Pol Essays, 1929-1934*, Vintage Books, p. 243.
- (8) Wilhelm Reich, *Sex-Pol*, p. 238.
- (9) "U.S. Military Training," *NACLA's Latin American and Empire Report*, Vol. X, No. 1, January 1976. Box 57, Cathedral Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10025.
- (10) *Ibid.*
- (11) Emma Rothschild, "The Arms Boom and How to Stop It," *New York Review of Books*, 1/20/77.



Palsy Melody

William J. Riley

I've gotten so old I walk
 three times from bed to kitchen
 to empty the ashtray, dispose
 of the beer bottle, fetch a
 pear. The effort
 at midnight is pure effort.
 The phone should ring, the
 gifts, awards, kisses should
 arrive, the armature of concern
 should rest.

I read and believe the best,
 pocketing the worst for
 tomorrow's sobriety. The news
 is old by any measure.

I've gotten so fat the boys
 of Athens are a reproach, the balls
 of my fathers complain.
 The music of counted nights
 plays all at once,
 continuo of disrepute,
 for the fat, for the old, for the sober.

William Riley—I am a fugitive from the work-a-daddy role, because I write and because I could never find a way to make the two compatible. I live on odd jobs, on unemployment insurance sometimes; and I hope for the day when writing and making a living are the same thing for me.

from sears to city hall

Richard Weinraub

sears
 the smell of chocolate
 a placebo for the masses

two boys
 try to cheat a machine
 out of weight and fortune
 leaning on each other

eugene's only gay bar
 workers are plastering
 holes

the mall
 an indian taps a cane
 and carries
 a fish net full of cans
 on his back

a juggler in the park
 raises his arm in a fist
 around a ball
 moving perpetually
 to a woman playing flute
 in the shade

on top of city hall
 aged workers enforce a wooden roof
 with steel

we talk to commissions of the
 handicapped
 women minorities and the aged
 about support
 for gay liberties
 a black man
 says we all see the same color
 red

Richard Weinraub lives in Eugene, Oregon.

Prison Walls, Prison Voices

In this regular column we will be focusing on the prison struggle, particularly as it relates to gay brothers behind bars. However, this section is also intended for those of us on the outside—in "minimum security," as ex-inmates sometimes call it. Clearly too few of us understand the realities of prisons and the entire criminal injustice system. Prisons constitute one of the most brutal forms of both class and national (third world) oppression. As the overwhelming majority of prisoners are working class and the majority of *them* are third world, it is blatant whom prisons really serve and protect. Not only does the government jail us for the crime of being poor; it also jails us for our political beliefs and commitments. Political prisoners are dedicated freedom fighters working to change the system of oppression that engulfs them.

We'd like short articles from gay prisoners; analysis of—and information about—the different aspects of prisoner oppression; introductions to various political prisoners and their cases. We hope that through contributing to a deeper awareness of the prison struggle we can help move towards effective solidarity with this, particular front in the gathering war on imperialism.

Federal Bureau of Prisons Launches Anti- Gay Offensive

The Federal Government has taken its annual shot at gays again. Last year it was the Supreme Court decision which denied lesbians and gay men the legal right of consensual sexual affection in the privacy of our own homes. This year the attack is directed at gay prisoners. The mastermind behind this

newest form of government repression is Norman Carlson, Director of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. Apparently, Carlson is not particularly friendly to *any* minority groups. He previously attempted to ban all communist, Black and other progressive literature from Federal prisons only to be stopped by the U.S. Court in Atlanta. The Court upheld the prisoners' rights to receive communist as well as other progressive literature and ordered the Bureau of Prisons to issue a new policy to this effect. However, prison officials then turned to attack everyone's "whipping boy"—gay prisoners. After his first decision was overturned, Carlson then proceeded to ban all gay literature, newspapers and magazines. For the thousands of gay inmates in the thirty-four Federal prisons this has meant an abrupt end to their personal and political contacts with both the gay movement and the gay communities throughout the country.

When pressured by the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) last fall

through Congressman Ed Koch (D-NY) to reverse the ruling, Carlson stated that the ban would continue and gave his reasons for it.

The reason for this decision focused exclusively on the fact that homosexuality is a major problem in correctional institutions. As you will recall, the recent investigation into eight murders at Lewisburg revealed that five had homosexual overtones. Unfortunately, Lewisburg is not atypical of the problems in most institutions. We agree with the philosophy of limiting an offender's access to literature or publications only in cases where there is a clearly overriding institutional interest. In this case we believe that such is the case as publications advocating or supporting homosexuality exacerbate a major problem. Publications which call attention or identify inmates who accept homosexuality can, in our opinion, be detrimental to their safety as well as to the safety of others. For that reason we have concluded that such publications should be prohibited.

Carlson's reasons for the censorship ban are clearly extensions of ruling

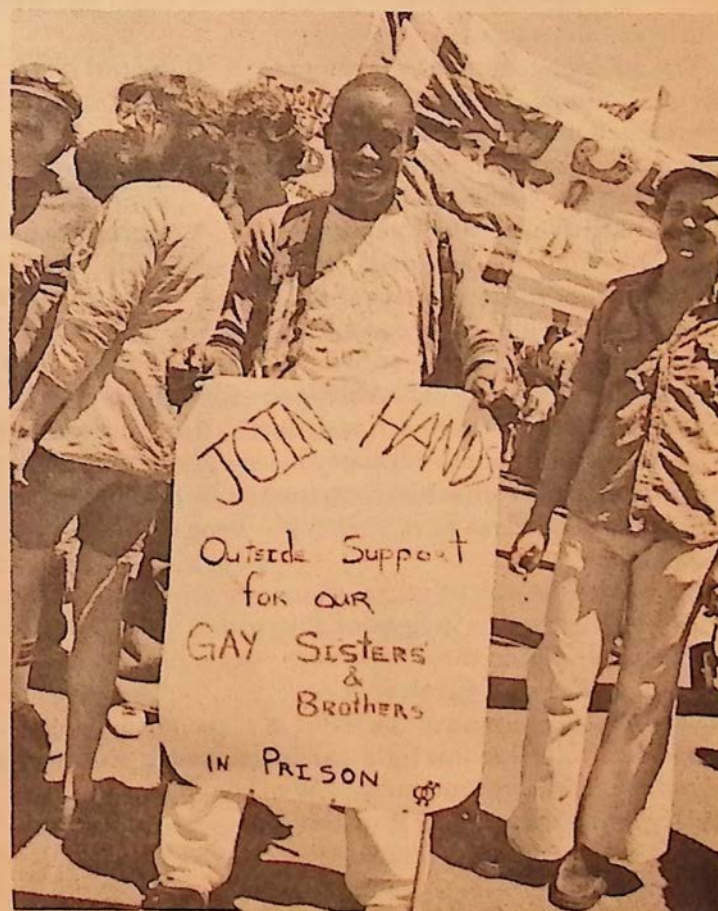


photo by Alan Bistry

class logic which mistakes the symptoms of a problem as the actual problem. Also conveniently avoided is the central issue of the social and economic system of imperialism that fosters prisons (and crime) in the first place.

Organized resistance to this censorship ban is growing slowly but steadily. As of February, both the NGTF and the *Advocate* were exploring the possibility of bringing the case to court. Also the American Civil Liberties Union's National Prison Project already has a suit in progress which raises this issue. *Join Hands*, a gay prisoner publication, is presently working with the ACLU to get the policy reversed. However, it has been the prisoners themselves who are fighting back the hardest against this current wave of repression. On December 27, 1976, the National Prisoners' Association (NPA) filed a suit in the District Court of East St. Louis, Illinois, on behalf of Russell D. Smith (chairperson of the NPA) which will attempt to overthrow Carlson's censorship ban. The gay prisoners won round one as the court did order the prison officials to show cause.

The decision to strip gay prisoners of constitutional rights normally guaranteed under the First Amendment has an ominous tone to it. This is further verified by GPU News of Milwaukee which reported that one prison official stated, "It is my judgement that steps must be taken to reduce and, where at all possible, eliminate the identification of inmates as being gay." This threat obviously needs to be taken seriously by all of us. A five minute look at gay history will show just what has happened to us when such ideas have been put into practice.

We at *Magnus* call on all gay people to involve themselves in fighting this repressive attack on the democratic and human rights of gay people. George Blue, chairman of the NPA, is currently involved in this fight and has issued the following statement: "We aren't getting the support from the outside Gay community that we ex-

Dear *Magnus*

Hi. I'm a member of the Control Unit Treatment Program at Marion. The folks here at the jail are not doing a very good job on making me happy. Maybe *Magnus* can rob me of some of my glum. Send me *Magnus* and let's see what you've got to say.

I'm a prisoner without any money but I'll bet you couldn't put *Magnus* where it would be appreciated more than in the world's biggest concentration kamp.

Love,

Marion, Ill.

We publish the following letter exactly as we received it.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
BUREAU OF PRISONS
United States Penitentiary
Marion, Illinois 62959

RE: *Magnus*

Dear Sir:

The attached publication is being returned to you for the following reasons:

Was not mailed directly from the publisher.

x Would be detrimental to the security, good order, or discipline of the institution (Comments(_____

Receipt of this publication could and/or does identify or define, _____

segregate and/or isolate an individual from his peers _____

in a group setting. _____

We are requesting that this subscription be cancelled. If you wish and independent review of this decision you may write within fifteen (15) days of the above date to:

Regional Director
North Central Region
K.C.I. Bank Building
8800 Northwest 112th St.
Kansas City, Missouri 64153

We appreciate your help in this matter.

Sincerely,

Incoming Publications Committee

pected. The Gays don't seem to understand that this is more than an attack on the prisoner. This is part of the overall attack on Gay people all over America. There are thirty-two states that designate homosexual practice as crimes punishable by imprisonment. At any given time a Gay person may become a prison gay."

With the exception of pending court cases, there is at this point no organized strategy by any sector of the gay movement to combat this attack. However, the NPA has initiated a letter writing campaign. We urge everyone to cooperate with this campaign. Cards and letters stating your support of the democratic rights of prisoners to read gay literature should be sent to:

Hon. James Forman
U.S. District Court
Eastern District of Illinois
East St. Louis, Illinois 62202

Magnus will report on further developments in our next issue. Other news regarding this situation is available through Join Hands (Box 42242, San Francisco, CA 94142). In the meantime we urge people to raise this issue in their communities and with friends. We also urge members of gay organizations to take the initiative to develop their own strategy around this campaign.

There's only one way that the homosexual people will win, if we win at all, and that's to band together and fight for all we're worth. It's not an easy fight, but some day we'll win.—from a gay prisoner, McAlester, Oklahoma

The following prisoners wish to correspond with brothers on the outside.

Help! Lonely, sincere, well educated 28 yr. old male down with 2 1/2 yrs. to go needs communication from outside world. Ultra liberal with matching experience. Will answer all. Teddy C. Hearn, 37804-A, c#673, Represa, California 95671.

I'm in the revolutionary struggle, gay movement, and other positive liberated struggles. Do you know someone out there who wouldn't mind corresponding and relating to a lonely man? One that's sexy, gay and open-minded.

Roosevelt Williamson
#75A-795
Cell # C-16-21
135 State Street
Auburn, New York 13021

I'm 25 years old, and would like to correspond with anyone who is open-minded, understanding, serious, and realistic, regardless of race or background. I'm interested in establishing a meaningful and sincere relationship.

Larry Hapney
141-486
P.O. Box 69
London, Ohio 43140

I'm presently in the Oklahoma State Penitentiary and have been for over two years. During this time I haven't received any type of correspondence with anyone, simply because I have no people on the outside. So I was hoping maybe through your organization that I may be able to start some type of correspondence with any person.

Sonny Jewell
#89037
P.O. Box 97
McAlester, Oklahoma 74501



Attention Prisoners: In your correspondence with us please let us know if it is okay to print your name. Otherwise, we will not do so for the sake of security.

I'm a tough old Queen, honey

Robert-Iris Fox

i'm a tough old queen, honey
i can spit nails
and deliver tender kisses
i can build a house
 cook a tasty meal
 can the harvest of summer
 crochet a blanket
 and change a dirty diaper
i can see through your armor
and make you squirm
or i can gaze upon you with appreciation
and stroke you good
i can walk with a grace
that'd make betty windsor look jerky
and i can stoop low to get what i want
i can hustle like a fox
and give freely
i can be a catalyst
 organize a demonstration
 build a community
 make revolution
yeah, i can be a tough old queen, honey
cause inside I'm a tender hearted sissy

Jesse's Dream Skirt

Morning Star



drawing by Larry Hermsen

There are were and always will be boys who wear dresses and skirts and things that whirl and flow and glow.

One such boy, named Jesse, liked wrapping himself in sheets to make a free-flowing dress. He also liked trying on his mother's old dresses, skirts, hats and shoes. They were always too big. When he tried walking in high-heeled shoes he tripped. His mother, Jean, said, "I gave them up because one just can't walk in them. I always try to wear what is most comfortable."

Jesse wanted a skirt that would fit well and he could wear everywhere he went. One night he dreamed of a skirt that whirled, twirled, flowed, glowed and was soft like him inside with

bright patterns outside. At first he saw a brown patch like the earth, a white patch like clouds, a black patch like coal, and red and yellow flowers. Then, he saw himself twirling round and around, and every color of the rainbow flowed into one another.

He was so excited about his dream that when morning came he jumped out of bed and ran into the kitchen to tell Jean all about it. Jean smiled as she listened, and said, "Follow your dreams. If you like I will help you make a dream skirt. I must tell you that not everyone will be as happy about your dream skirt as you. Some will make fun of you."

Jesse shrugged his shoulders and

Morning Star lives in S.F. and is interested in forming a collective to write anti-sexist, pro-feminist children's stories.

said proudly, "I don't care. I want to wear it anyway."

Jean hugged him and added "Then you are strong."

Jesse went with Jean through her old dresses until he found the colors and patterns that were like what he saw in his dream. They cut them up and put the pieces together, then Jean sewed it together. It took a while, but when it was done Jesse saw how wonderful it was and quickly tried it on.

The next day, Jean drove him to the daycare center and he wore his beautiful skirt. When Jesse walked into the door to the center, his teacher, Bruce, saw his skirt, smiled and said,

"Well, look at you. How unusual."

Jesse looked up wondering, and asked, "What does that mean?"

Bruce thought a moment and said, "You are like a butterfly who has just come out spreading its bright colored wings." This made Jesse feel good all over.

Soon everyone was standing around and looking at Jesse. Some looked at his skirt and then smiled, others just plain stared, and still others echoed, bellowed, and laughed, saying, "Boys don't wear dresses. Only girls do."

"I can wear what I want." Jesse shouted back. He became so upset at this point he ran off crying. Bruce went over to him and listened. When Jesse



drawing by Larry Hermesen



drawing by Larry Hermesen



drawing by Larry Hermsen

calmed down he spoke. "I thought everyone would be excited about my dream skirt. I want to hide." He no longer looked like a butterfly but like a cocoon all rolled up.

Bruce whispered, "Jesse, some of us liked your skirt a whole lot. Some didn't. So lets find out why."

He called everyone together with Jesse and said "Jesse loves his skirt. Why are some of you making fun of him?" There was silence, then John spoke. "'Cause he looks funny. I never saw a boy wear a skirt."

"But why not?" shouted Sarah.

"'Cause thats what my daddy told me." snapped John.

"Well, I wear pants," said Sarah.

"That's different," replied John.

"Not really," continued Sarah. In my sister's school all the girls had to wear a certain plaid skirt every day. But one day she wore pants just because it was more comfortable. The school teachers were so angry they asked her to leave school. After she left, though, all the girls got together and started wearing pants. So Jesse is

brave just like my sister."

Jesse looked around and saw everyone smiling. He began to tell everyone about his dream and the skirt. When he finished Bruce said, "That is a wonderful story. I'd like to wear a skirt. I remembered wearing one when I was Jesse's age. But then I became afraid after hearing everyone ridicule me, and I stopped wearing one outside." He went over to the material box and fashioned a loose skirt out of some bright fabric. Jesse was beaming with joy, since he saw he was no longer alone. The others saw and heard all this and went over to the material box and tried on all sorts of things. Some started painting their faces, some their bodies, and some just watched. They all looked beautiful to one another as they paraded all around, dancing and shouting and making music.

Jesse began twirling around and around just like a top, and all the colors of the skirt flowed into one another, just as Jesse said, like a rainbow.

Draw your own dream skirt here.

A Celebration of Birth and the Struggle to Survive

Robert-Iris Fox

I live at Elwha, a 53-acre farm located in the Lower Elwha Valley near Port Angeles, Washington.

I live with two dykes, five other faggots, four cats, two dogs, 40 chickens, two goats, two pigs, and a horse. It's beautiful land. From our sea-level location, we can look up into the Olympic Mountains to the south, the Straits of Juan de Fuca to the north (on clear nights we can see the lights of Victoria, British Columbia across the Straits), and the woods and Elwha River to the west. We are here because we like living in the country. We grow a large garden, harvest our fruit trees, do a fair amount of food preserving, space out by the river, bring in our hay, and hopefully cut enough wood in the fall to keep warm in the winter. Your basic back-to-the-land story with a lavender twist, right?

Wrong. Let's turn it around: we're a lavender story with a back-to-the-land twist, or out-of-the-closet faggots and dykes who have chosen a country lifestyle. Our lavender story is subversive and un-amerikan as lavender stories are in this homophobic culture, but our colorful story may be unique because it contains bold splashes of commie red and the rainbows of anarchy. For the most part we are out-of-the-closet political dykes and faggots who have chosen a country lifestyle. While our political colors have occasionally biodegraded under stress, we do have a commitment to struggle towards clarity and develop analyses which, if they are not sparkling gems of consciousness, at least reflect our attempts to find politically principled solution to problems we face living in the country.

There are two problems which all living things must face: the struggle to come into existence, birth and rebirth, and the struggle to survive. What I want to do in this article is to describe our birth and survival-to-date from a political perspective in light of two aspects: first, we are openly Gay people living in a homophobic capitalist culture and secondly, we are living on a farm which is bordered on all sides by an Indian reservation.

Elwha happened as a result of a class struggle that occurred within Seattle's radical gay community from 1972 through 1974. The primary contradiction within this group of people was that two people, both women, had plenty of money inherited from the misdeeds of their ancestors and the rest of us were welfare queens, hustlers, street dykes, former drug addicts, prostitutes, a poor person of the theatre, one of the original faggot activists, and a chronic organizer. While those of us who had to hustle for a living talked about hassles at the food stamp office, a piggy boss, our latest visit to the welfare shrink, a fast hustle or a trick who liked kinky sex, our rich comrades pondered over whether to sell their stocks and invest in ecologically-conscious businesses bemoaned an upcoming IRS audit, or complained about the distortions wealth placed on their interpersonal relationships. The common links between us meant we provided services to the sexual minorities community and had varying degrees of commitment to social revolution. But after two years of working and living together, we discovered another common link: a desire to live in the country. We sent out feelers and the chronic organizer's real-estate-agent sister called to say she had a real pretty piece of land at a good price. In the dead of winter, our rag-tag group visited Elwha and loved it. Naturally we looked to our monied friends to cough up. Instead what ensued was a month of intense struggle with the contradiction of class heightened to fevered polarities. No one knew much about class theory of communism then, but the lessons of

the "you've got money—we don't have any—we want some of yours" experience burned into our minds information that Marx, Lenin or Mao could never teach us. We ended up with \$26,000, a \$30,000 mortgage and 78 acres of incredibly beautiful land.

We bought the farm through a non-profit corporation I had put together in 1972 to handle legal responsibility for Seattle's first Gay Community Center. We opted for this form of ownership to prevent individuals from exercising control over the land simply because they had wealth or their names on the paperwork; to insure community use, input into the management of the land, and to maintain city ties. The corporation is organized so that each project of the corporation selects two people to serve on the Board of Directors and once a year two people are selected from the community at large. Presently, Elwha is two projects (Elwha Acres and Women's Elwha Land Project) out of nine which include three magazines, a women's survival school, a women's construction skills training project, a record album, and a theatre company. The two Elwha projects collectively manage the farm and serve a community function by providing a rural space where people can come to put themselves together and recharge.

As I mentioned earlier, we're located near Port Angeles, Washington, which is a town of roughly 20,000 flag-wavers with a handful of exceptions. The economic backbone of Port Angeles is timber, with ITT and Crown Zellerbach being the corporate potentates of the area. There is an active chapter of the John Birch Society, an accompanying Amerikan Opinion Bookstore, and a billboard on the way out of town which reads, "Get US out of the United Nations." A progressive town it isn't.

We were able to co-exist peaceably until the local newspaper reported our existence in a splashy front page article. Within two weeks after the article appeared, we were firebombed, a woman resident's dog was shot, and we were burned at the stake several

times in the letters-to-the-editor column. The farm is now a landmark and if I tell strangers I live in the Lower Elwha Valley, I can hear the mental circuits shorting out, "Oh, the queer farm." To deal with this insecurity, we have a routine we perform in event of a physical threat crisis and we are armed and prepared to defend ourselves should the need arise.

Sadly, most of our direct harassment has come from young male members of the tribe whose reservation surrounds us. Four young Native American men admitted to the firebombing incident and were convicted of arson despite the fact that none of the people here had seen who did it. Frequently we have young kids yelling "FAG-GOT" at us and recently, we've had teenagers leaning on their car horns late at night. Our first response to harassment is fear, "what next?"; and after the fear dissipates, anger follows quickly behind. The anger is a deep one; someone is telling us we're not okay or trying to deny us our right to exist. Once a resident here responded in anger to a "FAGGOT" catcall with a racist slur, "BLANKET ASS." He was heavily criticized for that incident, but it pointed to a question we all felt. Why are they harassing us?

Initially my theory on the harassment was that they wanted us out of the valley because this was their land. Indeed, the whole valley was once the settlement for two fishing villages of the tribe before white people moved in and the Elwha River, besides being the source of their primary food (salmon), has a place several miles upstream where the tribe believed human beings were first created and where tribal members could go to get information about their future life. The tribe's reservation is now only a third of the valley and the ecology of the river has been ruined by two hydroelectric dams. Despite the weight of this history, I rejected the theory as a reason for our harassment because we are the only white people in the valley being harassed. This is what I've come to believe is the reason. In this culture, there is a hierarchy of social status

which determines who gets power and who gets trashed. On top are white men of the ruling class, but much further down the status ladder the pecking order runs something like this: working class men, working class women, poor third world men, poor third world women, and hanging out on the bottom along with all children are faggots and dykes. For young Native American men just getting their first strong adult whiffs of racism and powerlessness, we are the few it is culturally acceptable to trash and feel power over.

In light of this analysis and our history with the police and courts in the firebombing incident, we do not want to call the police in times of crisis. Instead we are moving towards a more aggressive personal strategy. Rather than ignore the catcalls, honking and other harassment, we are stopping the offenders, expressing our anger and questioning their reasons for harassing us. If the young people are to feel potent in themselves as Native Americans, it is important they discover who their real enemies are. We have a strong motivation to help them discover their enemies, since we face the same enemies as faggots and dykes. The racism that renders Native Americans powerless and the sexism that dictates impotence for women and sexual minorities are but the arms and legs of one beast whose head is capitalism, whose heart is patriarchy and whose penis is imperialism.

In contrast to the level we function at with the young men of the tribe, our relationship with the tribal leadership is strong, positive and mutually supportive. The building of this relationship began when one of our residents spontaneously spoke in support of a proposal the tribe presented to the county commissioners, then grew when several Elwha residents organized with the tribe at the Democratic Party's precinct caucus. It has now grown to its present state because of the trust and respect generated when we sold the tribe twenty-five acres of our riverfront.

The circumstances which brought us to want to sell and the tribe to want to buy occurred simultaneously. The farm's financial history after the initial lump sums used for the down payment reads like a monthly installment disaster novel. If the \$270 a month mortgage payments didn't tax our hustling energies, the \$600 a year tax bill did. There was zilch extra money to put back into the land or buildings except when one resident's father died, leaving him a small inheritance, and I received a social security grant for being retroactively crazy. Despite what *Mother Earth News* might tell you, living on the land requires money. After two years of trying to come up with a hustle which didn't require a large cash outlay, and discovering that the only hustle which fit that criterion was turning Elwha into a Gay cemetery, a movement began to sell part of the land in order to pay off the mortgage.

Meanwhile, the tribe had received a federal grant of \$500,000 to establish a fisheries program as a result of the Judge Boldt decision giving jurisdiction over traditional fishing areas back to the western Washington state tribes. To re-establish control of the lower Elwha River, the tribe needed to regain three tracts of land which bordered the river. One tract at the mouth of the river they purchased for over \$2500 an acre. Another tract upriver from our land refused to sell. We were the third. We went to the tribe to offer to sell before they asked to buy.

In traditional business transactions, the agreement to buy and sell is the major hurdle to overcome. For us it was just the beginning of a process which spanned several months. Internally, we focused on two questions: Whose land are we selling, and What price, if any, should we ask for it?

Given the tribe's history in the Lower Elwha Valley, the question, "Whose land is this?" acquired major significance. There is no doubt left in my mind after reading a study commissioned by the tribe (see credits) that the tract of land we reside on was

stolen from the tribe when whites invaded the valley and pushed the Native American residents to the other side of the river. In presenting this information and our situation to several city comrades, their response has been to say, "Give them back their land." Two realities balance the seeming political correctness of their solution to our problem. One, all of America was once the home of Native American people and the invasion which took place in the Lower Elwha Valley is a microcosm of the invasion that began with Columbus and Captain John Smith on the Atlantic coast and swept westward over two centuries until it reached the Pacific Ocean. Secondly, we are not Marlon Brando, the Rockefellers, or the U.S. government. Is the solution to the injustices wreaked against Native American people to tell all white people to go find a new home? Is the solution for us to give back to the tribe land we've fought to get and struggled to hold onto as an act of justice? No, we do not think so.

To arrive at a price, we looked for an arrangement which would satisfy our mutual needs. We wanted the mortgage payed off, the tribe wanted the riverfront. We settled at \$1250 an acre for 25 acres. Not everyone was happy. The real estate agent who sold us the place said we were fools to let it go for less than \$2500 an acre and a few city comrades wanted us to sell more land at a lower price. But we and the tribe are satisfied; they got control of the riverfront and appreciated our sensitivity to their needs and we are now without a mortgage.

The third area of struggle centered around whether or not we were going to place any conditions in the contract to protect the ecology of the land. On the surface this question appeared to be a rude one to lay on Native American people, but for us, the people living at Elwha, this was the most difficult question to resolve and the question whose resolution we are most unhappy with. Our struggles on this question focused on an aspect of our

negotiations with the tribe which has not yet been mentioned. Besides the purchase of land bordering the river, the tribe also wanted an easement through our woods in which to construct a pipeline to bring underground water to their salmon-rearing ponds. To construct this pipeline, they wanted to clear a swath fifty feet wide and a quarter mile long running parallel to the river.

Initially the tribe was going to build the pipeline on the land they were buying from us, but roughly six weeks before we signed the contract, they said they couldn't afford to build along that route and wanted to cross our land to give them a more direct, hence cheaper, pipeline to their hatchery and rearing channels. We talked about it among ourselves and said, "... the tribe needs the hatchery to earn money for the tribe ... to make the hatchery work they need to bring in lots of fresh water ... in order to bring in quantities of fresh water they need this pipeline ... yes, we're willing to support the tribe in this project by granting them an easement across our land." We relayed this information to the tribe and asked that when they cleared the path to preserve as many trees as possible.

Shortly after giving the tribe the go-ahead to start construction, we began suspecting that the pipeline was ecologically unsound and represented a capitalist way (plenty of money and heavy machinery) of solving the water supply problem. The pipeline path is in a flood zone and the river has been gradually moving towards the pipeline. Our suspicions received a confirmation by a tribe member who lived (he died recently) in the flood zone area. "With a good flood like last year's," he said, "the pipeline will wash out because there are no trees and ground cover to hold the earth together." When we asked why he thought the tribe was doing it anyway, he said, "Those people at the tribal office are money crazy."

We went to the pipeline planners and construction supervisor and asked if they'd considered what would

happen if the river flooded or eroded into the pipeline. We received blank stares. We said we thought a good flood or steady erosion would follow the pipeline and create a new channel of the river right through their hatchery. More blank stares. By this time, however, it was too late to say, "Stop, we want to think about this some more and talk with you about other alternatives." Construction had begun and we had given our go-ahead. We were somewhat heartened when we saw the surveyor had written on a number of trees "SAVE," but after the bulldozer left, not a one was left standing. A couple of months later, we noticed that some rocks had been placed on the eroding riverbank, closest to the pipeline, but it would take a large levee to keep the river from doing damage when it's swollen.

If hindsight isn't much good in healing the earth, some self-criticism may prevent us from making the same mistakes again. Basically we did not have or take the time to study the pipeline thoroughly before giving our assent to the tribe. Also, we were getting tired of the negotiations and the tribe was anxious to get started on the project. We were also reluctant to criticize the tribe. I think the reluctance came from two places. One, we have no business in the sovereign affairs of the tribe. Two, we assumed they knew what they were doing and deferred to their judgment. The myth driving the latter said, "All Native American people are sensitive to the earth because their old culture worshipped the earth." The fact is, thanks to TV and Madison Avenue's egalitarian desire to turn everyone into consuming zombies, we are all subjected to the same cultural influences. "Join the Pepsi people," "You deserve a break today at McDonald's," "See the USA in your Chevrolet" (if you can afford the gas, that is), use it, abuse it, then throw it away, and "I want YOU to Show Me the Way." (Thank you, Peter Frampton). I think the romanticism of this myth is merely the mask of white guilt which is the privileged side of white supremacy. In other words,

"Even though your culture's been ripped off and the white American dream's been dangled before your eyes, we know that the old values of your culture are still important for you even if it means being poor and not living like most of the people you see around you." While this factor had a low relative importance, it did help to make us feel powerless in expressing our criticisms.

On the former aspect of our reluctance, we felt intimidated by the fact that the tribe is a sovereign entity. What business do we have criticizing them? When coupled with the herstory of the valley, we felt we were on shaky footing. The reality is, however, we are both living in the valley at this time and what they do affects us, what we do affects them, and what we both do affects the valley. Given our inter-relatedness, critical support for one another's projects makes more sense than blind faith and not knowing.

In conclusion, I celebrate our struggles. We have made mistakes, poor decisions and sometimes we haven't struggled when it was important to do so; but when we did get it together, the clarity has been a high. We are not operating at a theoretical or abstract level and as in the case of the land sale—easement agreement with the tribe, the issues are quite complex and very real. Simple living in the country? Try again.

My information on the tribe's history came from a report prepared by Barbara Lane called "Identity, Treaty Status and Fisheries of the Lower Elwha Tribal Community." Thank you, other Elwha faggots, for chopping wood and preparing meals while I wrote this.



To a lover gone straight

William J. Riley

So all right I'll mourn for you.

There are always further shades:
carnally knowing
carnally dancing
together.

"You've got to treat your lust more light-heartedly."
Now you want me to bend my lust
into hate; and it's happening as I watch.

So all right I'll mourn for you.

But I reply
there was nothing wrong
in anything we did,
you cannot waste our lives
with labels.

photo by Efren Ramirez

Magnus can dress up your lifestyle!

We don't need your jewels, but
there's something else in your
purse that can help us continue
to publish. Subscriptions are
\$6 for four issues
\$10 contributing
\$25 sustaining
or create your category with
more. The folks on the
collective will love you for it,
and so will all our readers.



Susan Saxe: Prisoner of War

Tom Kennedy

In March of 1975, Susan Saxe was arrested, ending her four and half years of underground life. As she emerged, she did so with a strong vow to continue the fight in every way, both as a feminist and as a lesbian. In the twenty-two months following her arrest she did indeed keep that vow and arose not only as a fugitive from the underground, but as an inspiring example of revolutionary courage and determination. Now, as the dust around Susan's case is slowly settling, the important lessons of her case are becoming more clear. As the Attica brothers have told us, "Attica is you." Similarly, Susan's case is our case, for it grew out of that era of radicalism of the late 60s and early 70s—an era when many of us for the first time came face to face with the hard realities of ruling class repression. Susan's case, and her life itself, cuts through the illusion that the war has ended. The repression continues for anyone who dares to cross the line set by those who run the machinery of imperialism. It is the crossing of that line that has given Susan and many like her some very profound and sharp insights.

Susan's actions, the ones she was arrested for, occurred during 1970—the year that was characterized by the most militant acts of resistance by anti-war activists. It was the year the U.S. Government desperately tried to win the war by invading Laos and Cambodia. This military action was met by a tremendous wave of anger and rage across the country that produced mass demonstrations, student strikes, and, consequently, new forms of repression. It was in this context of anger and fury that the Government launched its offensive to intimidate popular student resistance to the war. This resulted in

the murder of unarmed students at both Kent and Jackson State Universities. It was also the year that seven of the FBI's Top Ten were political activists, people who were opposed to the genocide in Viet Nam. Susan found herself on this list when, in the midst of a bank robbery allegedly to get funds for revolutionary activities, a policeman was killed. The Government charged five people with the act, three of whom were captured immediately. The other two, Susan Saxe and Kathy Powers, went underground. A massive search was mounted and the FBI's machinery set in motion. In March of 1975, the search for Susan ended when she was captured while walking down a street in Philadelphia.

Susan is now serving a twelve to fourteen year sentence as a result of her plea of guilty to two counts of armed robbery and one count of manslaughter for the bank robbery, which occurred in Brighton, Massachusetts. This sentence is to be served at the same time as the ten and two year sentences she received in Philadelphia for bank robbery and destruction of government property at the Newburyport Armory. This twelve to fourteen year sentence was the result of legal agreements reached with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts after her first trial ended in a hung jury. Beginning to prepare for her second trial, where she faced three life sentences due to an archaic felony-murder law which holds anyone convicted of any felony liable for murder if anyone is killed during the felony, Susan decided to make the guilty plea. In her statement to the movement she explained her reason for the plea.

Of primary importance is this point: This was not a 'deal.' I did not give the state anything for the 'reduced sentence' except my own guilty plea. I remain absolutely firm in my stand of non-collaboration. I will never testify against anyone for any reason or give any information about the events of 1970 or about anyone I may have known during the time I was underground. Furthermore, I will never abandon my political commitments in return for favors from the state. I do not recognize the right of the state to a single day of

my life, but I do recognize its power to take that and more. This guilty plea was a tactical decision based on that reality.

Susan's plea of guilty to the charges she faced is firmly supported by her defense committee in West Somerville, Massachusetts, and by those working on her defense fund in Philadelphia. Susan's defense committee, in their statement released on the day of her guilty plea (January 17, 1977), analyzed the situation as a political victory. "When Susan was arrested almost two years ago we knew that she would never be freed by the courts. And now we can see the day when Susan will be out on the streets again. This is a direct result of the work people throughout the country have done. The fact that our efforts have substantially reduced the amount of time Susan will spend in jail reflects the pressure we as a movement have exerted."

BRINGING THE WAR HOME

There are, for all of us, so many deep lessons to be learned from Susan's fight. It is both an actual and symbolic link between the radicalism of the past and the militance of the future. Of the many lessons contained in Susan's case there are two that seem primary: first, that the war is by no means over and, in fact, Susan's arrest and prosecution are very real continuations of this war; and second, that we must come to grips with our responsibilities as members of the movement to understand both our role in supporting political prisoners and understanding what being a political prisoner in America actually means.

All of us, and particularly those of us who were actively involved in the anti-war movement, have been profoundly affected by the war in Viet Nam. Domestically and internationally the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Viet Nam shattered the myth of American invincibility. Many of us were shaken awake by the raw truths that were

Tom Kennedy—Coming more and more to see my life as the Long March. (Thank god for peyote gum drops and the country!)

being broadcast nightly over TV. Suddenly we were coming to understand what Karl Marx had observed in 1853, "The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked." Many of us reacted to our new understandings and fought hard to put an end to the war. From early draft card burnings, to peaceful sit-ins and teach-ins, to mass moratoriums in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and San Francisco, to the Cambodian invasion, the Day of Rage in Chicago, to the bombings of the Weather Underground, to bank burnings, My Lai, Kent, and Jackson States—the war extended from Viet Nam to New York. Finally after year of hard work came the sweet taste of victory. The monster was temporarily defeated by the strength and determination of a unified people. Today Viet Nam is a re-unified, socialist country.

The United States, however, is not. Here the war continues, though for many reasons less militantly. Nonetheless, it continues. It is in the context of the development of the anti-war movement into a weak socialist movement determined to defeat U.S. imperialism that Susan stands. She is a prisoner of war and a veteran of that anti-war movement from which so many of us have evolved and developed. It is extremely important that we see Susan's case not only in the setting of 1977 America, but also see her in the context of a decade of resistance and struggle. My Lai and napalm may seem far away now but it was in that setting, a time of actual war and war resistance that such fighters as Susan took their defiant stands to bring the war to a halt.

POLITICAL PRISONERS, TRIALS AND WITCH HUNTS

Susan's encounter with the machinery of the state—the FBI, the judicial system, and prisons—have given her a certain clarity regarding the attitudes

of the left toward its captured members. Susan has shared some of those lessons in a paper she wrote in October, 1976 called "Support All Political Prisoners." The following are excerpts from that paper:

In the same way that 'lesbian' was held up as a threat to all women who dared insist on their right to be treated as free, independent human beings, so 'radical terrorist' is held up as a threat to political activists in general. It's a line you can't cross, an example you must heed and not follow, something you must join the Man in denouncing so you can stay 'safe.' Just as some women have been frightened into assuring their masters that, 'We're not radical man-hating dykes . . . we really love men,' now we are all being threatened to assure the ruling class that, 'We're not violent revolutionaries . . . we draw the line at that.' In doing this, we turn our attention to fighting the shadow the Man has created to scare us, and not the real enemy, the Man himself.

The political trial has throughout history been the tool of the government, the stage upon which it demonstrates what it will tolerate and what it will crush, the blackboard on which it draws the line that it dares us to cross. The political trial has also, therefore, served as the crucible within which all political movements and people have had to test their strength, determine their directions, and come out on one side or the other. In a political trial, whether it is a Sixteenth century witch trial or a Twentieth century 'criminal' trial, the government is massing its police power, its propaganda weaponry, and every vestige of its 'legitimacy' to enforce its right to punish those who oppose its power, and more importantly to reinforce in the minds of the people its right to do so.

There is no middle ground in that arena. That is the nature of a political trial; you are on the side of the defendant or the side of the state. A political trial is not like general political forums with their many sides and many factions, with the room and the luxury to draw the lines of your support closer around you, closer around those who agree more nearly with your politics. It is important to keep political struggle alive among our friends, to let a hundred flowers bloom, but we can never allow the

Man to crush even one of our flowers, even one on the far side of the garden from us.

A political trial is a diversion. In the fifties, while Nixon and his gang hatched their corrupt, clandestine plots, and clawed their way to power through theft, bribery and deceit, they held public trials of 'communists' as a front behind which to hide the real threat which they represented. It was easier and safer for the average person to be taken in by secret documents allegedly hidden in pumpkins, and Russian agents lurking in alleys with cut up jell-o boxes than to stand up against a bunch of power-mad militarists who were in fact taking over the government.

In the sixties we were told that Black militants and campus radicals were the big threat, so the media whipped up a frenzy as the FBI chased revolutionaries through the ghettos, campuses, communes, and convents of the nation, gunning down Panthers in Chicago and students at Kent and Jackson State, looking into classrooms for subversives and under beds for radical priests. And all the while, the very same slimy little men who had brought us the fifties were now in the White House bringing us Watergate, and carrying out more terror and more genocide in our names.

How did the Nixon gang pull it off? Fear. It was easier to watch your neighbor burned as a witch than to stand up against the witch hunters. After all, if you protested, if you suggested that the witch hunters themselves might be the real criminals, then you must be one of the witches, right? In fact, you might not be a witch—there might be no witches at all, but to point that out was a little too dangerous. You might find yourself on trial. Guilt by association. Easier to jump on the bandwagon, roll with the tide, and wait for better days. It's easy to convince yourself that you're more threatened by witches than by witch hunters because the witch hunters are IN FACT more powerful, and therefore more frightening.

I remember talking to Helen Sobell about how when her husband Morton, and their friends Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were on trial, other political people who were on defense committees for other political cases were afraid to be associated with them. Years later, when some of the

hysteria had died down, when Ethel and Julius were dead, and Morton finally paroled, they were urged not to associate themselves with other political defendants who, I suppose, constituted a more current 'threat.' The advice was not heeded. I have seen this same phenomenon happen in my own case with people who will support more 'respectable' political targets but will not support me, or who didn't support me before I became 'respectable' but are having second thoughts now. And then there are some who seem to feel safe enough supporting me, but who don't think I should be associated, for example, with Bill and Emily Harris, who, it seems, are still two-headed terrorist monsters. Well, I was a two-headed terrorist monster once myself, and maybe I'm too close to monsterhood to see the logic of these arguments. All I can see is which side I'm on, and it sure isn't the side of the prosecution.

The purpose of this whole long appeal is to urge you to support all political prisoners, to oppose witch burners, not the witches. Yes, it's hard and dangerous. You may be labelled a witch yourself. You may not be a witch, but you have to choose. Because the witch hunters are far more dangerous to you than the shadow they project to misdirect your fear. Your support is the only thing standing between any political prisoner and the full power and wrath of the state. And believe me, we are the only thing standing between you and the same.

ARMED STRUGGLE AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Those who in fact *have* labeled Susan as a "two-headed terrorist monster" and who have decided to withhold their support because of her actions and political perspectives regarding armed struggle need to look more closely at the situation. Again it is important not to forget the context of Susan's actions. In Viet Nam a brutal and violent imperialist war was at its height. The countryside was being destroyed by defoliation, schools and hospitals were being bombed, children and adults were being sprayed with napalm, and Viet Nameese women and girls were being raped. People's war was a necessity. However, that war was restricted not only to Viet Nam, but needed to be waged here in the belly of the monster as well. To many

anti-war activists it made little or no sense to claim to be in solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle for liberation without making the same sacrifices and taking some of the same risks as the Viet Nameese struggle for liberation mass anti-war movement was important but needed to be combined with more militant forms of resistance. Along these lines, Susan's actions were motivated by a deep understanding of international solidarity—a solidarity that extended past the relative safety of peaceful anti-war marches. It was a solidarity that grasped the deep political significance of the national liberation struggle of the Vietnamese. It was also a solidarity that recognized the disproportionate amount of violence that is both historically and presently directed against Third World people. It's these understandings that molded Susan's political perspectives regarding armed struggle.

In a solidarity statement sent in December of last year to a demonstration protesting FBI harassment of Native American people, Susan elaborated on these understandings of the violence propagated by the imperialists.

Why do I as a feminist, as a lesbian, why do I as a woman have in my gut such a strong total commitment to anti-imperialism? Because whenever I see those smug little men twisting and polluting and killing everything that gets in their path, whenever I see them committing the most vile and treacherous crimes and then walking away smiling and sure that they will never be called to account for their deeds, whenever I see them lie and cover up their crimes and get away with it my spirit rebels. Whenever I see them take and use whatever they can plunder from other people and the earth, and excuse themselves by claiming it is their natural right to do so, whenever I see them reduce everything that is free and natural and living to a bunch of commodities to be bought and sold as property. Whenever I see all that and think about all that, all I can see or think about is RAPE.

RAPE is where it all comes together. Whether it is the burning of witches in Europe, of Indian villages in America, or of schools and hospitals in Vietnam. Certainly the history of the WHITE MAN on this continent is a history of RAPE: the physical RAPE of women,

the symbolic RAPE of peoples' cultures, the ecological RAPE of the land and always, always the RAPE is covered up by LIES.

To many North Americans both within and outside the left, revolutionary violence does not sit well—particularly among white people. In the white left the issue of armed struggle continues to be a touchy area of debate. Even when support for domestic armed struggle is given, it tends to be very conditional. But for Third World people—both nationally and internationally—the essential issue is not so much one of revolutionary violence but rather an issue of the violent offensive imposed by the ruling elite. Both here and throughout the world, Third World people are forced to choose the path of revolutionary violence to turn the tide of imperialist brutality and domination. China, Viet Nam, Angola, Guinea Bissau, and Mozambique all have chosen the path of revolutionary violence out of necessity. At present, in Southern Africa, the military wing of the national liberation forces are leading the fight against the colonialists. And here in the U.S., both Native Americans and Black people have been similarly involved in undeclared wars of resistance against the U.S. military and wealthy plantation owners in both their past and present forms. To quote a statement from Native American warriors that was recently sent to the Revolutionary Committee of the Weather Underground Organization, "Armed Struggle is the foundation of our movement. Our people have been fighting imperialism for 300 years. Today, extreme repression and confrontations with the state are continually upon us: our homes are attacked, our leaders shot or assassinated, our women raped and thrown in jail, our children are dying in the cities of decay. To this, knowing our enemy's true nature, we have responded with direct action! We intend to defeat this enemy. We had expected the same of you. We wonder if you truly understand the meaning or armed revolution *within this nation*,

really know the nature of our struggle and of the material basis for our oppression." Susan's actions indicate that she and other underground fighters have shown that they *do* understand the true nature of the enemy. Out of solidarity with the most viciously oppressed, they have acted accordingly.

LESSONS AND CONCLUSIONS

ALERT IN VIETNAM

Better Death than slavery! Everywhere in my country
The red flags are fluttering again.
Oh, what it is to be a prisoner at such a time!

When shall I be set free, to take my part in the battle?

—Ho Chi Minh, *Prison Diary*

Susan will not be the last political prisoner captured and imprisoned by the state. There are many behind her and probably many still to come. But ultimately the ability to put an end to these injustices lies in our hands. Angela Davis, Inez Garcia and four of the San Quentin Six walk the streets today because of the power of the people who organized on their behalf. There are thousands of freedom fighters, thousands of our people who are still behind those prison walls today. There are also thousands of people who have never had the advantage of a defense committee behind them. It is for them and for ourselves that we must build a

strong prison movement that will someday tear down those prison walls once and for all.

In closing, we must take a clear look at our relationship to Susan's case in an attempt to apply its lessons to our lives and our own political outlooks. The fact remains that Susan is the most spotlighted openly gay revolutionary our movement has seen since its inception. Yet how many of us came to her support? How many of us faggots in our claim of support for feminist politics lifted one finger for this sister when she was captured? How many of us are familiar with the Grand Jury harassment that came down on the lesbian communities in Lexington, Kentucky and in New Haven, Connecticut?

It seems that with the exception of the women's and gay communities in the East, the radical, anti-imperialist wing of the gay movement failed on a national scale to give Susan the political support she deserves. In my opinion, this is a serious mistake to have made. Nonetheless, we must cop to it and, as Mao Tse-tung has taught, turn a bad thing into a good thing. In this situation, the best way to do that is to begin to analyze why we didn't rally to Susan's defense.

The following are some reasons I see for why the radical gay movement failed to organize support for Susan:

1. *We didn't recognize the political importance of her case.* This comes

from not fully understanding the nature of solidarity work and the anti-imperialist nature of her present case (including her past actions). For many of us, lack of much political experience and our own political underdevelopment are certainly factors. However, the reasons for that underdevelopment are directly related to the second reason.

2. *We are still isolated from the mainstream anti-imperialist left due to the continuation of its heterosexist politics and character.* This situation is largely the result of the left's own opportunism regarding women's and gay liberation which it still fails to take seriously enough. As a result we generally remain segregated within the left and are less frequently exposed to both prison struggles and discussions regarding the politics of underground work.

3. *We were not (and still are not) unified and well organized as gay anti-imperialists.* Both lesbians and faggots have few organizations we can go to for leadership. We lack extensive news resources that could have served to educate us and keep us informed of her case. (In case you didn't notice, the *Advocate* seemed to miss this particular cause!)

4. *We ourselves collaborated with the state's depiction of Susan as a two headed terrorist monster.* Our own fears and lack of clarity around the support of underground activists was

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By now you've probably noticed that *Magnus* isn't backed by such publishing giants as the Hearsts or Time-Life, Inc. When it comes to getting the ideas and feelings in *Magnus* distributed we are, to put it mildly, at a disadvantage. The absence of full page ads selling Chrysler, Coca-Cola, or Earth Shoes is remarkably unprof-

itable. We are by choice an alternative to all that. We are also an alternative to its gay counterparts. This means that to a large extent, *Magnus* and the mini-movement it arises from are dependent on mass participation.

You can help us with our work at *Magnus* by helping with the giant task of building a distribution network. At present this stretches from New Zealand to Poland but there are lots of gaps in between. We can't give you a new three-speed Schwinn bicycle or your own little transistor radio. What we can give you is a one-year subscription (or four issues depending on whichever comes later) or a gift

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also a factor in our lack of "mass" support.

All of these reasons lead us back to one of the strongest points that Susan makes, "Your support is the only thing standing between any political prisoner and the full power and wrath of the state. And believe me, we are the only thing standing between you and the same."

Among many things, Susan is an inspiring and dynamic poet. She has succeeded in combining human sensitivity with militancy to produce some very moving poetry. The following poem was written during her underground existence before her capture. It seems a most fitting way to close this piece.



SELF-DEFENSE

(How to make revolution without becoming a violent person)

Before every battle you must say this prayer:
Death to the violence within and without,
Death to the Father and the God of Property
May this be the last battle of the Revolution
And may life prevail.

And every time you aim your rifle, you must say this prayer.
May my bullets be as pounding rain,
May they heal the land and cleanse the sky.
May this be the last shot of the Revolution,
And may life prevail.

And every time you see a comrade die or an enemy fall, you must invoke the Great Mother:

In the name of the prisoner and the hungry child,
In the name of the witches and the buffalo,
May this be the last killing of the Revolution,
And may life prevail.

And every time you rise to go on, you must look to yourself and say:

There can be no violence in a heart that loves life,
No more than in the seasons, or a river's course—
May my heart be centered in the rhythms of life,
May my hand be steady to steer its course,
And, oh, Mother-of-us-All, may this be the last
sad morning of the Revolution.

And your ears must be open to the voice of the Goddess
when She answers you:

Act now, that life may prevail.

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I cannot sing my poetry
melodious and soothing to the heart

how I wish to paint
lofty and inviting experiences
and loathe again and again
to sing rounds of cacophony

the music is jazz and reggae
the words are an angry
i-want-what's-mine-now

Christians in the fields
say i am christ-like—
I am a pagan in the church

Intellectuals in dim-lit bars
say I am interesting—
I am amoeba in a void

Queens in intimacy
pay compliments—
I am queer in a man's world

Jessie



Magnus Is Hot for Your Mind

Magnus is trying to break down a lot of the old writing patterns. All of the articles in this issue are the result of collective struggle, and we encourage more people to plug into the process. We particularly want articles on how you developed your "consciousness" and on political practice—how political work actually gets done. We also would like to print your poetry and short stories. We have a commitment to publish material from outside the Bay Area and to help people write who aren't "professionals." So, if you have your ideas pretty together, but are afraid they aren't perfectly expressed, send them to us and let's see if we can work together.

I still ain't satisfied (with Liberation)

Jessie

I love you
When you enter the room
slight tremors ripple
along my spine
and effervesce through my scalp.
I become warm.
Your eyes twinkle
and we touch lightly,
for neither of us
can be truly free
when lavished with affection.

Sex is not ours,
for, besides being counter-revolutionary,
monogamy is also unhealthy
and causes anxiety.
Nor could we be simply
friends making
sexual experiments or
performing exercises in sensitivity.
We have sensitivity
rooted well within ourselves
and we have our commitment to struggle.

But to struggle, with sensitivity,
seems a contradiction.

We eye each other
with suspicions of class-bias
and apprehension of a
premature proletariat leadership.
They are deep.
With sensitivity,
we make attitudes real
by bringing them out of
and relating them to
our real lives; and
in preparation for leadership
socialist and corporate
structures are coached.
We read books.
We recount our lives.
But it is deeper than that.

Our struggle is for vision;
to truly see each other.
Our sensitivity is to keep
each from commandeering the other.

We are brothers in something
larger than either or both of us.
I love you.

We are gone out of our homes
gone out of the petit-bourgeois
gone out of the proletariat
but in all our lives
it will never be gone
out of us.

The politically immature proletariat
and the socially unjust petit-bourgeois;
there lies the contradiction.
The ruling class will be eaten.

god is dead
and everything is no longer absurd.

What do you do when to cross the street means too many changes: Revolution or annihilation

Morning Star

The light means stop
for those men in that car
maybe I should wait
don't be stubborn
Ignore them child
just clutch your bag and hold your head up and walk on
through
Ignore them child
but they're staring
Ignore them child
but they're shouting faggot
Ignore them child
but they're getting out to kill me
Speak, no longer silent street sissie
Rise up queen look them in the eyes
the power is there in readiness
Think: you are a cornered cat clawing her way out
At least they'll know you're real
and refuse
because they're still afraid of witches melting their male
memories
just isolate one and the rest will run screaming
just isolate one and the rest will run screaming

Practice Makes Powerful

Can Gays Get It Together in San Francisco?

A Political Analysis of Bay Area Gay Liberation

Tim Corbett and rama

With the help of the entire *Magnus* collective and with thanks to those people we interviewed.

This is the second of what we intend to be a continuing series of examples of political practice. In *Magnus #1*, the article "On Our Identity as Faggots" laid the basis for an anti-imperialist understanding of gay liberation. The following article explains how that understanding can be used to build gay liberation organizations.

INTRODUCTION

On November 4, 1976, Bay Area Gay Liberation (BAGL) split into two groups. After a three month organizational struggle, some of its members, including two of its original founders, left BAGL to form Gay Action. *Magnus* formed out of the BAGL Education Committee in April, 1975, and all our collective members have been involved in BAGL to some extent. We think the split raises extremely important questions for both the local and national gay (men's) movement. This article is an attempt to sum up BAGL's history and draw conclusions from it that are relevant for all of us. It is only through understanding our history and learning from our successes and failures that we are going to be able to build a movement for revolutionary social change.

The central question that resulted in the split is, "On what basis can a mass organization of gay men be founded?" The approach we'll call the democratic rights/mass action approach

Tim Corbett—Writing is like playing with a puzzle—it's discovering through struggle how all the pieces fit together.

rama is a weaver who is learning to overcome thirty years of self-destructive behavior and become a whole person, which, he believes, is possible only in the context of working to build a revolutionary movement for social change.

maintained that the struggle for gay rights was the only issue around which great numbers of gay people could be organized. In practice, this approach seeks to unite all gay people around demands for gay democratic rights. The strategy is to attack, through mass actions, institutions that foster gay oppression.

On the other hand, the approach we'll call the anti-imperialist approach based its unity on the understanding that gay people can achieve liberation only by uniting with all other oppressed people in a common struggle against the system of imperialism. The strategy is to build alliances with national liberation struggles and women's and workers' struggles to defeat the system of imperialism and build socialism.

"Imperialism" is a complex term, but put simply, it is a worldwide economic, social, political, and cultural system through which a small ruling class controls most of the world's land, resources, and people. This ruling class, which owns virtually all of society's productive forces, is composed mainly of heterosexual white men. Its center is in the United States, although it includes ruling elites in Western Europe, Japan, Israel, South Africa, Iran, Brazil, and other countries. White national oppression of Third World people, male and heterosexual supremacy, and the capitalist exploitation of workers are all connected under the imperialist system. Imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism. Economically it is controlled by huge multinational corporations (Standard Oil, IBM, etc.) and banks that are more powerful than the national governments of countries

in which they operate. Imperialist ideology is perpetuated through control of governments, criminal justice and educational systems, psychiatry, and the media. The United States is an imperialist power, and gay oppression is one tool the imperialists use to keep people divided and fighting each other instead of fighting the imperialist system itself.

BAGL was founded by people of the democratic rights/mass action tendency who constituted BAGL leadership during its first year. The opposing anti-imperialist group gained control during BAGL's second year. They won the split vote and are currently reorganizing BAGL under anti-imperialist principles of unity. The democratic rights/mass action group subsequently formed Gay Action.

Perhaps as much as 25% of San Francisco is gay. We are an emerging political, cultural, and economic force in the life of the city. Many of the contradictions that exist in all of imperialist society are becoming apparent in the gay community. Gay bosses rip off gay workers, and racism and sexism are deeply ingrained in much of the swinging lifestyle that touches the wallet of the *Advocate*. In fact, many white middle class gay men are gaining some power and privilege. For instance, this group is significantly changing housing patterns in San Francisco as they move into traditional Black, Latino, and Asian neighborhoods, fix up houses, and drive up rents (with the blessings and loan money of San Francisco's ruling elite). There are increasing antagonisms between gay middle class property owners and working class gay and Third World people. White middle class gay men are becoming vocal and powerful forces in several neighborhoods, and many other less privileged gay people are suffering as a result, so the premise that gay oppression is the one unifying force that holds us together is being seriously challenged.

At first glance these contradictions may seem unique to San Francisco (or at least unique in such an exaggerated form). But the class, race, and sex

divisions among gay people that exist here are present in other cities, and will affect greatly the degree of unity possible among gay people in those cities. Therefore, it is in the context of the growing antagonisms among gay people in San Francisco that we should try to understand the BAGL split.

FORMATION OF BAGL

BAGL started out trying to unite "gay women and men of all races in common struggle against our oppression." We were not able to do that owing mainly to the fact that, as it appears now, it was the wrong strategy. Critical errors in our understanding of gay oppression, poor and inexperienced leadership, and an inefficient organizational structure were also contributing reasons. As of now, BAGL is an organization of gay white men, and has been predominantly so for its entire existence. BAGL, however, has been very successful in developing radical consciousness in hundreds of gay people and has had a tremendous influence on many levels of San Francisco's political life: gay and straight, progressive and—to some extent "Establishment." It has also spawned a variety of other groups united around national and racial oppression, class, effeminacy, spirituality, culture, and study.

BAGL history is part of the wave of gay liberation initiated in 1969 by the Stonewall Rebellion, in commemoration of which we celebrate Gay Freedom Day. On that occasion, patrons of the Stonewall Inn in New York fought back against an attempt by police to bust the place. This led to three nights of street fighting between gay people and police. Puerto Rican street queens and other street people, tired of being oppressed and fucked over, led the rebellion.

A police bust in San Francisco was directly responsible for the organization of BAGL. On Labor Day, 1974, police busted thirteen gay men for "loitering" after 2:00 AM on Castro street, the heart of one of San Francisco's gay communities. Several

hundred angry gay people attended meetings set up by the Police Community Relations Board (PCRB) to deal with the bust. At the same time the Board was preparing for the election of a new liaison with the gay community. The liaison at that time was a pro-police ultra-conservative Reaganite Republican. Gay liberals were trying to replace him with a more moderate person—and succeeded. This brings us to our discussion of the Revolutionary Gay Men's Union, the organization that preceded BAGL.

The RGMU formed shortly before the bust and lasted for about six months. Its members spent most of the time trying to develop principles of unity and figure out what to do. They were involved to some extent in work around Inez Garcia and rape, solidarity work with the anti-dictatorship resistance in Chile, and busing in Boston. But mainly they talked. It is safe to say that most of the members had a very incomplete grasp of the nature of gay oppression and how to fight it. They weren't set up to deal with anything like the Labor Day bust, and when it happened they were divided as to what to do. A few people supported working with the PCRB elections, but the majority wanted nothing to do with them. Gradually two responses emerged as to how to proceed (or as Marxists say, a two-line struggle developed). In retrospect those two lines formed the thread that weaves through the entire history of BAGL. In their most developed forms to date, they are expressed in two principles of unity submitted to BAGL by the Progressive Gay Caucus and the Gay Action Caucus. Those papers were the basis of the BAGL split.

To return to the RGMU: Howard Wallace and Claude Wynne, the two strongest advocates of the democratic rights/mass action approach, grew tired of all the talk and decided it was time to organize a progressive, broad-based gay organization focused around police repression. They thought the PCRB meetings were ripping off gay people's energy and they wanted to move while people were still angry.

They claimed that, as gay revolutionaries, putting together such an organization was their most important task and urged RGMU to do so.

The anti-imperialist group opposed the idea. They wanted to form a smaller group with a relatively high level of unity that would work in, but not help organize, mass organizations. They felt that large groups with low unity would inevitably be liberal, reformist, and a drain on energy. Nevertheless Michael Novick, a leader of the anti-imperialist group, helped Claude and Howard work on the leaflet, "Can Gays Get It Together in San Francisco?" which was the call for the meeting out of which BAGL was organized in late January, 1975. People from the anti-imperialist group later organized the June 28th Union (J28U) as a small closed group in May 1975.

In setting up its program and structure out of its mass action/democratic rights approach, BAGL drew heavily on both the Gay Activists Alliance and Gay Liberation Front, two organizations that formed as a result of Stonewall in New York. The main program focus, like that of the GAA, was to fight gay oppression and to educate people, both gay and non-gay, about the struggle for gay democratic rights. BAGL had more class awareness of issues than GAA, however, and from the first endorsed specifically non-gay working class issues, like the Gallo wine and Coors beer boycotts and city workers' strikes in San Francisco. It believed gay people as workers should support other workers. Generally, it recognized the source of gay oppression in business, governmental, and social laws, in institutions like the nuclear family, and in mores that are anti-gay. The response to anti-gay laws and regulations was to fight for pro-gay laws and regulations. The focus was always on changing laws and rules, rather than on overthrowing the institutions that made the laws and rules. The program focus was likewise always external—towards understanding how gay people are oppressed by straight society. There was no attempt

to look inward at how we oppress ourselves and each other, nor at how gay oppression is materially linked to other forms of oppression under the system of imperialism. These two differences became key points of contention between the Progressive Gay Caucus and the Gay Action Caucus.

Structurally BAGL was similar to the GLFs in that anyone attending a meeting was considered a member and could vote, regardless of how unfamiliar he or she was with the issues. There was no elected leadership. Committees formed as needed and anyone could attend their meetings. A coordinating committee met the night before general meetings, held twice monthly, to set up agendas and designate two chairpersons. Final policy decisions rested in votes of the entire membership—that is, whoever attended the meeting that a particular issue was voted on.

Initially BAGL was a tremendous success. Over 200 people—perhaps 10-to-20% of them women—attended the organizational meeting. The main task was to vote on a draft statement of purpose and choose the name. Several members of the anti-imperialist group came and attempted to amend the statement so as to give BAGL a more socialist character. They also tried to postpone the final vote of approval. Both efforts failed and the statement adopted was very similar to the draft statement. It clearly expressed the democratic rights/mass action

Is Magnus getting gray?

We think so. There are lots of words and very few pictures. We would love to have more illustrations and more photographs. Especially nice would be work from around the country (and around the world). Send it in—or Magnus may well become more gray with every issue.

approach. The anti-imperialists did manage to eliminate a reference to non-violence and to include a line about solidarity with specially oppressed gay and working class people. But that was all. After that they stopped coming to BAGL meetings for several months.

BAGL'S FIRST YEAR

One of the reasons BAGL was so successful was that Howard and Claude were experienced organizers. Howard was formerly a member of the Socialist Workers Party, a large nationwide Trotskyist organization, and had been involved in labor and anti-war organizing for many years. Of all RGMU members, he had probably the clearest vision of what kind of organization he wanted to build. Claude had been active in GAA and the Young Socialist Alliance (affiliated with the SWP) in New York. Together they were right in judging the mood of many gay men (but not of lesbians) in San Francisco. There was a strong need for a very visible, vocal and militant gay men's organization, and BAGL filled it.

Early on, BAGL sent large delegations to United Farmworkers rallies in San Francisco and Modesto. BAGL's first project was to initiate a campaign calling for an elected police review board. It was unsuccessful, but a demonstration against police repression drew over 100 people. BAGL really made its name, however, by working with the Gay Teacher's Coalition to force the San Francisco Board of Education to include teachers under the city's anti-gay discrimination laws. BAGL became too big a force to ignore. The momentum from the school board victory carried over into Gay Freedom Day in 1975. Thousands of people marched in the parade in the Stonewall Coalition, which BAGL helped organize. The gay men's left in San Francisco was back in business.

BAGL's first attempt to work in a leftist coalition produced a significant confrontation. Several of the anti-imperialist RGMU members were

among the organizers of the Solidarity Committee that formed in April 1975 to develop a program of solidarity with leftist causes. Their first and only project was to involve BAGL in an International Workers' Day Celebration (May Day) in Oakland, to be held on May 4th, 1975. While many of the RGMU members had opposed the formation of BAGL, they now entered the organization to work on this event. There were many leftist, socialist and communist groups planning the event, and although a few of these groups were known to have anti-gay politics, BAGL was assured full involvement in the celebration. The night before the event, however, the steering committee refused to let BAGL display a planned exhibit on the gay movement, because the exhibit was not ready in time for the steering committee to approve it. The next day over one hundred BAGL members showed up expecting to see the exhibit and were outraged to learn what had happened.

Subsequently BAGL members and representatives of the celebration's steering committee held two stormy sessions over the matter, but the issue was never fully resolved. The steering committee members most opposed to BAGL participation refused even to attend the meetings. However, some of the straight organizers grew to understand and respect the gay struggle.

Members of the democratic rights/mass action tendency supported BAGL's participation in the event, but had severe misgivings. They questioned the degree to which the autonomy of the gay movement could be subordinated to the left. Clearly interested in maintaining BAGL's independent nature, they supported the slogans of the celebration although they believed that this method of worker solidarity would not reap any benefits. They did not attend the event. The May 4th confrontation proved to be the first step in the polarization of the two RGMU factions inside BAGL.

Despite the negative effect we have described, the event had positive ramifications as well. It opened the door for BAGL participation in the anti-imperialist left in the Bay Area. Alliances were formed, especially with lesbians, and political analysis started to emerge that placed gay oppression in the context of anti-imperialism. BAGL proved that it could consistently turn out large numbers of people at events it worked to build. Dozens of BAGL members were radicalized by the experience. For many this confrontation was an introduction to leftist politics, and people's political awareness deepened significantly. The May Day conflict created a thirst for knowledge and struggle that BAGL eventually was unable to meet.

Those anti-imperialists who had helped organize the solidarity committee left it following May 4th. The committee fell apart. They left because they felt the need for a small autonomous organization with a high degree of political unity where they could work independently of BAGL. So in late May, they helped form the June 28th Union (J28U) which was "committed to fighting capitalism, imperialism, sexism, racism, and gay oppression, and to building a society organized on socialist and feminist principles." (Leaflet, J28U, May, 1975). It was composed of about a dozen men, mainly anti-imperialist ex-RGMU members.

The J28U formed in secret and remained so for over a month. Eventually it handed out a leaflet presenting itself at a BAGL meeting as a closed group that had more defined socialist politics than BAGL. Since J28U had formed out of a small circle of close friends, many people were angered and hurt at being left out. Resentments started to build from the first.

Their role in BAGL was contradictory. Many of them related to BAGL, if only superficially, but only about half of them were very active. Nevertheless, the aura of the whole union surrounded them. They had a lot of influence, not only because they were trying to develop an anti-imperialist

approach to gay liberation, but also because they were the most politically experienced among those who opposed the mass action/democratic rights group. Several J28U members were leaders in the Progressive Gay Caucus and played a very important role in helping to define the differences with the Gay Action Caucus during the split. One of them, Michael Silverstein, actually wrote most of the final draft of the PGC Principles of Unity.

In BAGL, J28U members continually raised issues of racism and national oppression and brought important leftist struggles to the organization. But they could have done a much better job of sharing their viewpoint and providing leadership. BAGL was an organization long on enthusiasm but short on experienced, knowledgeable, and capable people who could provide some direction. Instead of reaching out to really integrate themselves into BAGL and provide that direction, they pulled into their own small group, whose importance and togetherness they mystified a great deal.

The J28U disbanded in December, 1976. In retrospect, several of its members say that being similar in so many ways they only reinforced the worst aspects of each other and their political perspectives. They failed to provide the degree of anti-imperialist leadership in BAGL and gay anti-imperialist leadership in the straight left they had hoped to give. Ironically, people gave them credit for being more together than they actually were. Instead of bringing focus, clarity, and a sense of struggle to BAGL, they brought arrogance, sectarianism, and divisiveness. They were greatly responsible for the polarization that took place. Most of them were college-educated and were looked on as arrogant and elitist. They were not sensitive to criticisms of how they were alienating people, and they consistently did not deal with how their abstract intellectualizing was oppressive to effeminate men and people with less education. They did manage to collaborate with the mass action/democratic rights group on one

occasion, however, in the Bar Committee.

The Bar Committee was an attempt to change the nature of BAGL by developing a concrete plan of action instead of just reacting to situations as they arose. It was the first attempt at such a plan since efforts to organize a police review board when BAGL first started. Both factions worked on writing a "Bill of Rights for Patrons and Employees of Gay Establishments." In the committee some people wanted to emphasize fighting racism and sexism in gay bars. Another group wanted to stress "quality of life" issues like fire safety and noise level. The Bill of Rights was BAGL's "Great Compromise." It placed its primary emphasis on fighting racism and sexism, but also stressed quality of life issues. It was posted all over the city and raised the consciousness of many people. The Bar Committee also organized a boycott of the Mind Shaft, a popular dance bar that had a discriminatory ID policy to keep out many women and Third World people. Two militant protests forced the bar to change its policy. Just as the Mind Shaft issue was winding down, however, BAGL literally blew up over the issue of whether and how to support Air Force Sgt. Leonard Matlovich. All of the antagonisms that had been swept under the rug for so long exploded. BAGL never really recovered.

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PROBLEMS DURING THE FIRST YEAR

Dissatisfactions grew as BAGL progressed. Many people had concerns that were not being addressed. BAGL had become an organization overwhelmingly composed of white men. Intellectual debate dominated the meetings. Generally the debate was polarized between the two factions, and most people felt caught in the middle. As we mentioned earlier, the democratic rights/mass action people did not deal adequately with the internal differences among BAGL members. They were also reluctant to discuss socialism or to identify BAGL as part of a broad socialist or anti-imperialist movement. Many people identified as one kind of socialist or another and many more wanted to know about socialism, but there was never any attempt to educate people about what it meant. J28U members often presented socialist ideas, but in a way many people found rhetorical and alienating.

Women found it difficult to work in BAGL. Two women, who were also ex-SWP members, were among the founders of BAGL. They had tried to start a women's caucus shortly after BAGL began. They were unsuccessful, partially due to illness and lack of time among the organizers. Other women had worked in BAGL from time to time, but it was very difficult for them. The male energy was overwhelming, and men tended to be very liberal, being overly nice to women and not criticizing them for fear of being sexist. A BAGL woman organized a very successful lesbian's conference in October, 1975, and a small group of women tried to stay together afterwards, but it didn't work out. BAGL had supported and raised money for Inez Garcia and Joan Little, but there is a big difference between that kind of support and struggling to overcome deeply internalized male supremacist attitudes and behavior. BAGL did not encourage the latter, and in fact meetings were structured in a way that

made it virtually impossible for that to happen. Neither did BAGL initiate any program to combat the oppression of lesbians or women in general.

In one case UNION WAGE asked BAGL to work on a coalition to fight sex discrimination against women workers. We endorsed it, but did not follow through with sustained support. At other times we were liberal or tolerant about blatant anti-women attitudes. We didn't struggle with the fact that some aspects of gay male culture—like cruising and role-playing—are offensive to women. Instead of struggling with each other around our sexism we frequently tended to expect lesbians to confront us with it. A great failure of BAGL was its inability and unwillingness to struggle against male supremacy and for the liberation of lesbians and all women.

It was not just in relation to women that male supremacy existed. Effeminate men became vocal about the oppression they felt from non-effeminate gay men who refused to deal with the privilege that strong male identity allowed them. Also transsexuals came to meetings to ask for help on several occasions, but we just listened, applauded politely, gave them a little money and sent them on their way. When BAGL first organized, there had been an extensive debate over whether or not to support a bill before the California legislature that would have made job discrimination toward gay people illegal. A large minority opposed the bill, because there was not job protection in it for either drag queens or transsexuals. However, BAGL voted to endorse—indicating just whose rights we were organizing to win.

BAGL was somewhat more effective in confronting racism and national oppression than male supremacy, but its efforts were still inadequate. We endorsed and worked for a wide variety of national liberation and anti-racist struggles. The Mind Shaft boycott was a first attempt to develop a program to combat institutionalized racism within the gay community. A Third World Caucus was able to form

and got token support from whites. However, as with male supremacy, we did not struggle to see the very real differences between the needs of white and Third World gay people, most of whom felt as oppressed as Third World people as they did as gay, if not more so. During BAGL's first year, Gay American Indians and the Gay Latino Alliance organized completely independent of BAGL, indicating that Third World gay people had the need to organize autonomously. BAGL, nevertheless, could have done more than it did to combat national oppression, especially by promoting study and dealing more with our internalized white supremacy.

Class privilege manifested itself also, in an unfeeling, overintellectualized masculinist tone at BAGL meetings. Well educated, articulate, and assertive male-identified men dominated the meetings. People who were new to BAGL and unfamiliar with what was going on, shy people, people who had trouble verbalizing their thoughts and emotions, and effeminate men, grew increasingly alienated.

The first attempt to deal with these dynamics was a workshop organized by Tom Kennedy in late July, 1975, to examine where BAGL was going. It was a success and became the first of many workshops whose purpose was to bring BAGL members together in smaller groups and less threatening situations than those of the large general meetings. Later workshop topics included sexuality, health, working class oppression, and BAGL organizational issues. The only problem with the workshops was that many of the people considered responsible for BAGL's tone did not participate in them.

Culture and spirituality were two other aspects of our lives that BAGL did not address. We paid lip service to the need to develop our own culture and to cultural workers, but it was really difficult for people to talk of their spiritual needs. They feared being discounted by the intellectual heavies who did not understand spirituality or its role in gay history or for

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another example in Native American history. In Fall, 1975, a Faerie Circle formed to explore gay spirituality, but most of its members stayed away from BAGL.

To sum up what was happening: the organizational needs of BAGL were developing faster than the ability of the leadership to adapt to those needs. Although BAGL had no formal leadership, it did have people with relatively high levels of political understanding who should have been in touch with things enough to take steps to remedy the situation. But

instead of being open to change, they reacted in the opposite way. The two tendencies became increasingly polarized and dogmatic, and most BAGL members grew more alienated.

THE MATLOVICH ISSUE

The controversy within BAGL surrounding Air Force Sgt. Matlovich proved to be the last straw. Sgt. Matlovich was a model soldier awarded Distinguished Service Medals for his several tours in Viet Nam. And he was gay. After much deliberation, he came out to his commanding officer, but instead of asking for a discharge, he stated that he planned to remain in the military. His was to be a test case of the US military's policy disbaring homosexuals from military service. Matlovich appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, and he was courted and promoted by such prominent gay leaders as David B. Goodstein and Franklin Kameny. His case was unique; he was fighting not to get out of the military, but to stay in it.

Howard Wallace brought the Matlovich issue to the floor at BAGL's general meeting on December 4, 1975. The democratic rights/mass action leadership envisioned a leading role for BAGL, promoting Matlovich in the Bay Area and helping to schedule his tours. At the BAGL coordinating committee meeting the previous night, support for Matlovich seemed almost unanimous. Howard Wallace gave a detailed presentation at the general meeting, asking BAGL to unconditionally support the case. For many BAGL members, however, the issue wasn't so simple. Anti-imperialists claimed that uncritical support for Matlovich would in effect be support for the US military, since Matlovich wished to remain in the service. They claimed that Matlovich was honored for his distinguished service in Viet Nam and publicly stated his support for the war. How could BAGL support Matlovich, who was part of the war machine that killed Third World people who were fighting for freedom and national liberation? The democra-

tic rights/mass action leadership remained firm in asking for uncritical support. They claimed there was no conflict between supporting Matlovich and opposing US militarism. Eventually, however, they agreed to accept an amendment opposing US militarism.

The controversy got very heated as both sides exchanged angry shouts. Many of an estimated 200 people at the meeting were very confused and undecided on the issue, but most of them would probably have voted for conditional support. Then, however, members of the Third World Caucus accused the membership, especially the Matlovich supporters, of blatant racism and walked out of the meeting. They shouted out that by discussing Matlovich for so long, BAGL was avoiding discussion of the Mind Shaft, which came later on the agenda, thereby demonstrating our racism. With that they left.

Finally a vote was taken proposing support for Matlovich but amended to state BAGL's opposition to US militarism. The vote carried, but a re-vote to void it and table the issue was demanded and carried. Eventually the whole issue was dropped.

The Matlovich controversy raised several problems for BAGL. The struggle for gay rights is beset with severe limitations unless it can be related to an overall anti-imperialist struggle. Gay rights struggled for in isolation from the class struggle are nothing more than reform measures granted by the system to appease gay revolutionary potential. "What the government giveth, the government taketh away." Gay rights will benefit mainly white middle class gay men who already have class, race and sex privilege in a white, male-dominated society. In other words, those who can better plug into white male privilege. In this society, those people who best conform to its standards benefit most. The securing of gay rights doesn't carry for women, Third World, and working class people even the shaky guarantees "promised" to white gay men who conform appropriately. This

is because gay rights will do nothing to alleviate the racist and national oppression Third World gay people suffer, or the women's oppression lesbians suffer, or the economic exploitation we face as workers.

The Matlovich issue was a fine example of the difference between the two approaches to gay liberation. The democratic rights/mass action approach says that Matlovich should be supported unconditionally. The anti-imperialist approach says support him only as his struggle can be related to the struggle against United States imperialism and his oppression as a gay person can be linked to the oppression of Third World and working class people and women who are also oppressed in the US Armed Forces.

In regard to the avoidance of the Mind Shaft discussion, those who organized the agenda claimed that was not their intention. There was no new Mind Shaft business, only the announcement that the owners had signed an agreement not to discriminate. The organizers had saved it for later to encourage people to stay for the second half of the meeting.

However, organizing BAGL to support Matlovich would have taken a great deal of energy away from the Bar Committee, which was involved in fighting national oppression inside the gay community. It would have transferred this energy to organizing benefits for a man who was part of the war machinery that was trying to sabotage struggles for national liberation all over the world.

The Matlovich controversy was the most critical event in BAGL's history. The factionalism that had existed since the days of the RGMU was threatening whatever unity BAGL still had. This should have been the time for principled struggle between the two sides, but unfortunately the trust necessary for that to happen did not exist. Deeply held resentments and antagonisms surfaced instead. The whole community environment was filled with name calling and the unprincipled trashing of the democratic rights/mass action leadership by the anti-imperialists.

Howard and Claude were faced with three choices: stay and struggle, stay but take a back seat position, or pull back entirely for awhile. They chose to pull back to avoid a split and to put their energies into a Coalition to Defend Gays in the Military, a group working for civil rights for military gays.

A vacuum developed in BAGL. Having displaced the old leadership, the anti-imperialists could not manage to consolidate new leadership. June 28th Union members (and in fact the entire union itself) were generating lots of hostility. Whereas they led the attack against Claude and Howard, they never had a strategy for working within BAGL and acted individually rather than collectively in critical moments.

This crisis in direction and leadership triggered action in many people who had been feeling left out for so long. The two factions had become increasingly polarized with the Matlovich issue, and many people didn't like or identify with either side. The glaring inadequacies of BAGL's structure became obvious. There wasn't a vehicle created for people to air frustrations, so they left BAGL and flocked to caucuses and support groups.

The Third World Caucus disaffiliated completely, making BAGL functionally an all-white organization. A Working Class Caucus formed of people from working class backgrounds. They felt working class issues and their own needs as working class gays were not being addressed. They were mystified by, and unable to cope with, the abstract intellectualism of BAGL meetings.

A support group formed of effeminate men both inside and outside BAGL. Contrary to the old style of task-oriented committees, these new groups formed mainly to release feelings and pentup emotions and for members to give each other support and validation. Willto, a member of both the effeminate men and working class groups, says this was the time "the people took over."

People who had not felt comfortable in BAGL up to that point began to take part more. In particular, they chaired meetings in a way that was more personal and less abstract and alienating than before the Matlovich controversy.

BAGL'S SECOND YEAR

During its second year, BAGL didn't initiate a great deal of activity on its own, but it did respond to requests for support and solidarity from other coalitions and organizations. Although it was never stated, BAGL was functioning more as two separate organizations than as one.

Some people in the anti-imperialist group formed the Office Committee to coordinate the day-to-day BAGL operation (fundraising, newsletter, schedule of events, publicity, correspondence). A culture collective organized and sponsored "rap-style" events to draw links between gay history, culture and politics.

BAGL's participation in two mass coalitions in 1976 is worth mentioning. BAGL anti-imperialists helped put together a May 8th Coalition to oppose the reactionary Supreme Court decision on the sodomy laws, a decision that upheld the rights of states to make gay sexuality criminal, even in private. The coalition demanded that the Supreme Court stop attacks on all oppressed people and drew links between the anti-gay decision and several other repressive court decisions, in an attempt to put the gay struggle into a broad anti-imperialist perspective.

The July 4th Coalition, a nationally organized effort to stage mass marches and rallies across the country, received much gay support in the Bay Area. Partly in response to the government's Bicentennial celebration, the coalition demanded "Bicentennial without colonies" and supported national liberation struggles at home and around the world. The main demands were for Puerto Rican independence and sovereignty for Indian nations. It also raised demands for

equal rights and a decent standard of living. Members of the June 28th Union were instrumental in getting the national coalition to accept a demand for full rights for gay people, which, although inadequate, was a start. The July 4th Coalition was in many ways the result of lessons we had all learned from the May 4th celebration the previous year. It indicated that the left in San Francisco was beginning to take responsibility for their heterosexual chauvinism and to develop an anti-imperialist understanding of gay oppression.

The democratic rights/mass action group was likewise active during this period. It reorganized the Bar Committee and mounted a successful campaign to force the Midnight Sun, a Castro street gay bar, to install fire doors. It also organized a demonstration protesting discriminatory admission policies at the Club Baths. The Labor Committee (which had led the support of the Gallo and Coors boycotts) negotiated an agreement with the San Francisco Labor Council whereby the Labor Committee of BAGL would organize gay people to vote against several anti-labor propositions in the November, 1976 elections. In return the Labor Council agreed to add anti-gay discrimination clauses in all union contracts.

People in both factions worked to build Gay Freedom Day, 1976, which drew over 100,000 people for a march and rally. But the rift within BAGL was evident in the parade since BAGL people marched in various contingents within the parade. Few chose to march under the banner of BAGL.

Even though its members were kept busy, BAGL was still very untogether. Enthusiasm waned, and attendance at meetings fell drastically. BAGL was just not working. Interest in BAGL was at its lowest. The Office Committee decided to initiate an evaluation that would lead to reorganization. The committee wrote an evaluation, distributed it at a BAGL meeting, and called a meeting to discuss it. Thirty-five people attended—including most of

the leaders from both factions. At the same time anti-imperialist study groups formed to study socialist theory—something that should have been done long before. Enthusiasm for BAGL increased.

Soon, however, the Office Committee meetings became plagued with the same two-line struggle that had been going on for two years. The response was to organize two caucuses. The democratic rights/mass action group formed the Gay Action Caucus (GAC) and the anti-imperialists formed the Progressive Gay Caucus (PGC). It was decided that each caucus should present new principles of unity to a BAGL general meeting, and that the members would then vote to accept one of the two (or neither) as a basis for reorganization.

Some explanation of these groupings is necessary. While there were two definite political tendencies that existed in BAGL, many people didn't fully identify with either one. The leadership of the GAC was a core of eight people: Claude Wynne and Howard Wallace, plus people from the Bar and Labor Committees who believed in working for gay rights as their primary task. Ideologically it was the left wing of mainstream gay liberation politics and was influenced by the Gay Activists Alliance. As we mentioned earlier, Claude and Howard were strongly influenced by the Socialist Workers Party. The leadership of PGC was a core of about fifteen people, mostly from the study group circle that formed in July, and the June 28th Union. Ideologically it was influenced by the book *Prairie Fire* by the Weather Underground Organization, feminism, many national liberation movements, particularly the Vietnamese, and the Gay Liberation Fronts. PGC was able to appeal to the broadest range of political philosophies in BAGL. That didn't mean however that everyone who supported it agreed completely with its perspective.

Effeminate men were still alienated by a very intellectual and impersonal male tone. They found it difficult to

participate comfortably in BAGL discussions and meetings. They supported the PGC because it understood the division that existed between "sissie-identified" and "butch-identified" gay men and made dealing with that issue a priority. Furthermore, some BAGL socialists felt the PGC position failed to understand and emphasize working class issues and the need to build a strong working class movement. They supported the PGC with serious reservations. Still others didn't identify with either side but were interested mainly in gay liberation and gay rights issues. They supported the GAC. A few people who either didn't want a split or who disagreed with the politics of both sides remained neutral.

BAGL held a workshop in October, 1976, to discuss the issues and explain them to people who were not clear about the differences. Some people thought the workshop unnecessary, because most people had made up their minds already. It was extremely helpful to organizers of the PGC, however, because it gave them the opportunity to work out more fully their understanding of gay oppression from an anti-imperialist perspective, and the kind of program needed to fight it. This was an extremely difficult process, because essentially the analysis was previously lacking. It was a different situation for the GAC, however, because their new principles were very similar to the original BAGL statement of purpose. The PGC put a lot more time and energy into the workshop than the GAC. They worked hard to hear criticisms of BAGL and to incorporate them into their proposed new principles.

Following the workshop, final drafts of both positions were presented to the membership on November 4, 1976 and the vote was taken: Progressive Gay Caucus 69, Gay Action Caucus 21, 8 abstentions. As a result BAGL began reorganization as a mass gay men's anti-imperialist organization—probably the first of its kind. Members of GAC left BAGL and formed Gay Action.

There were two main questions involved in the split. First, on what basis should a mass gay organization be formed? Second, what is the relationship between the personal and the political?

The Gay Action Caucus maintained that gay democratic rights is the only issue that can unify large numbers of gay people. Their strategy was to build a mass organization of gay people under a working class leadership and program to raise demands for gay liberation and gay rights. The sole unifying factor was gayness. Although several of its leaders are socialists, they did not raise the issue of socialism. Nor did they make explicitly socialist demands. They felt that building a gay socialist organization had its theoretical merits but in practice it didn't work, because of too many ideological differences between the factions. They said a gay socialist organization could only be formed if there is political unity around a particular ideology, and those conditions weren't there.

Their program was based mainly on confronting institutional forms of gay oppression. It neglected internal forms of oppression, culture, and spirituality. GAC believed in organizing gay people from a wide variety of backgrounds into one umbrella organization in a way that didn't emphasize the relationship between personal life and political work. On the contrary, they believed a political organization should exist only to do "political" work and that everyone's life outside that organization should be completely private.

The Progressive Gay Caucus stressed the need for gay people to unite with all oppressed people in a common fight against the system of imperialism. According to their analysis, the institutions that oppress gay people, like schools, psychiatry, churches, and the criminal justice system, are all parts of the same imperialist system that economically exploits us as workers and oppresses people because of race and nationality, sex, age, and gender identification, *as well as* gayness. So to achieve true

liberation for *all* gay people, we should work to understand and attack the whole system itself, and not just its different institutions. The PGC strategy was to build a mass gay organization that would join in coalitions with groups of other oppressed people to fight the common enemy. For instance, people from several communities fighting against police repression or for housing and health care will be more effective than just gay people fighting alone. The PGC raised explicit demands for socialism as the only solution to imperialist exploitation and oppression. This approach to fighting gay oppression, they maintained, has the possibility for truly uniting and serving the needs of many more gay people than the democratic rights/mass action approach. It is an understanding of the oppression of the whole person under imperialism, and reaches people on many more levels than just their sexuality.

The connection between our personal lives and our political work is also crucial to the anti-imperialist approach. One of the ways gay people are most oppressed is through alienation which results in loneliness, self-hatred, and self-destructive behavior. Building community to break down this isolation was an important part of the PGC program. They hoped to build an organization that would fulfill personal as well as political needs. It would also help people to confront and work through their differences, instead of pretending they don't exist. Through building the gay community internally by struggling to understand differences, they hoped to build a true fighting unity that would be powerful enough to effectively confront institutionalized imperialist power.

Criticism/self-criticism (C/SC) is the tool they proposed for working through personal and political differences. C/SC was developed during the Chinese revolution and it is being used more frequently in the United States both in radical therapy and in political work. C/SC can work only if the people using it have agreed

to certain principles of unity establishing how they are going to work together. Only after that unity is established do people have a basis for criticizing themselves and each other's work and behavior. Using C/SC helps us confront others when we are angry or hurt, rather than internalizing those emotions which only increases our alienation. It also teaches us how to be more sensitive towards each other and towards group process.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite its numerous political errors, BAGL provided a vehicle for significant numbers of gay men who were previously unpoliticized to work and get involved with a progressive gay organization. It established a radical presence in San Francisco's gay community and became known and respected by many people for its militant activism. It provided an organizational structure, however inadequate, for gay activists to do political work. These were some of its strengths. Its lack of good leadership, strategy, structure, and failure to deal with internal differences were some of its greatest weaknesses.

Those of us in *Magnus* who have worked on this article are not impartial observers of BAGL. We have all participated to some extent in BAGL. rama was one of the main organizers of the Progressive Gay Caucus, and the entire collective voted for the PGC principles of unity. Even so, we have tried to be as principled as possible in writing this article. We have tried to give credit where it is due, and to point out the positive as well as the negative aspects of different groups of people and events.

We are well aware that material conditions in San Francisco have made it possible for an anti-imperialist approach to gay liberation to develop here. Internal differences among gay people here are growing increasingly apparent as we noted in the introduction. It is much more difficult to be gay in most other places than it is here, and the needs of gay people will

vary from place to place. We're presenting this analysis with the hope that everyone who reads it can learn something from it to apply to their own local struggles. We know BAGL is unique, yet we think that people in many different situations can benefit from our conclusions.

These are our conclusions:

1. *An anti-imperialist approach to gay liberation is a more developed basis of unity than the democratic rights/mass action approach.* Politics are the underlying aspect of any organization, collective or grouping. Composition, organizational structure, and program priorities and direction are all political decisions, even though most of us don't consciously relate to

them that way. Any group of people that joins together, for whatever reason, will have a better chance of achieving its goals the more it can understand and develop its political unity.

An anti-imperialist approach does not rule out working for democratic rights by any means. Rather, it puts the struggles of gay people in the broader context of the struggles of all oppressed people for liberation. The history of BAGL clearly demonstrates that the political level of consciousness of the gay movement is vastly increasing. Gay oppression is different among different gay people depending on class, race, and sex. In other words, many gays face other forms of oppression than just gay oppression. To absorb this understanding is a significant political advance and is a better political formulation of what a mass gay organization can unite around than the mass action/democratic rights approach. These political understandings have tremendous relevance for gay organizations in other cities as well as for the entire gay movement.

2. *There is still a need for autonomous gay political organizations, but their unity should be based clearly on anti-imperialist principles.* We think ultimately the political struggle for gay liberation should be integrated into anti-imperialist socialist organizations of gay and non-gay people. However, at this time there is not much support from members of many leftist organizations to be gay. Until straight leftists begin to work in solidarity with the struggles of gay people and start to struggle against their internalized anti-gay feelings, there will remain a need for gay political autonomy.

3. *Program areas of autonomous gay organizations should be based on a firm understanding of anti-imperialism and should be aimed towards uniting the gay struggle with the struggles of other oppressed people for socialism.* It's important for gay organizations to develop ongoing programs as well as be able to react to issues that suddenly arise in the community. We need to develop programs that address the needs of the

most oppressed sectors of the gay community. Internally we should put a priority on building a true fighting community that understands and tries to work through the many differences among us. We should also work to break down the alienation we feel with straight people by joining in coalitions whenever possible with mixed groups of straight and gay people who are fighting for similar goals. We will not achieve total gay liberation until we completely eliminate white and male supremacy. Therefore, it's particularly important for white gay people to get involved with Third World struggles and for gay men to involve themselves with the struggles of women. At the same time, we should be striving to build a strong working class movement.

4. *The personal is political.* If we work to build them, gay organizations can satisfy many of our needs for family and community. Through struggle and criticism/self-criticism we can learn to give each other the support and space we need to change oppressive and self-destructive attitudes and behavior. We should constantly try to understand how our personal lives are affected by imperialism. Through our culture, art, and spirituality we can rediscover our history that has been obscured by imperialist lies and reawaken our creative energies. We can do this through workshops, dance, theater, music and the many ways we share in each others' lives.

5. *Gay organizations will be more effective if they have a defined membership, designated people in leadership roles, and well-thought-out structure that can adapt to change.* Organizational structures are a key factor in carrying out successful political actions, and the best ones will flow out of the organization's unity and program objectives. The experience in BAGL has taught us that it's important to have defined membership and voting procedures, as well as designated people in leadership roles. The leadership body should work together as collectively as possible and be

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composed of people who are sincerely open to struggle. It's important to develop the leadership capacities of all members and to rotate leadership responsibilities regularly. Our ability to organize ourselves effectively will ultimately be our best protection against increasing State repression.

6. *Gay people need to develop a commitment to study.* By "study" we don't mean study in an abstract sense, as in oppressive school situations. Instead we mean the gathering and sharing of information that will help us analyze our material conditions and organize to end our oppression. In BAGL neither side emphasized the need for study until the split had made it all too apparent. Study helps us to understand our oppression, the oppression of others, and how it is all interconnected under imperialism. It also helps us to examine all sides of an issue as thoroughly as possible before making decisions. Study groups are excellent ways for us to come together for mutual support and struggle. They can also combine techniques of consciousness raising and therapy with study to serve a variety of needs.

BAGL continued a discussion of how socialists should participate in mass gay organizations that started in RGMU. It helped us understand a little better how that can and should be done. If we are going to build a movement for revolutionary change we are going to have to be able to organize literally *millions* of people. Future gay organizations should try to learn from BAGL's mistakes and organize in a way that will continue to advance the struggle further.

We also need to raise again many questions that BAGL was unable to answer:

1. On what political basis can white gay men develop practice with lesbians and Third World gay people?
2. What organizational form should this take? Mixed organizations of white and Third World lesbians and gay men? Several autonomous organizations united in coalitions based on anti-imperialist solidarity?
3. What is the role of gay

(white men's) organizations in the development of a mass revolutionary movement in this country? For gay Marxist-Leninists specifically, "What is the relation of gay anti-imperialist organizations to the formation of a revolutionary communist party in this country?" And for gay anarchists, "what is the relation of gay anti-imperialist organizations to the struggle for self-management by workers and all oppressed people?"

People make their own history. BAGL is a very small example of a case in which people who were dissatisfied with the way things were going analyzed their situation and organized to change it. This is what socialist

revolution is all about. The struggle is hard and it will take a long time, but it will win. We think it is in the interests of all gay people to study the system of imperialism in all its complexities and to analyze and sum up our experiences in order to learn from our mistakes. Armed with this knowledge, we can move forward to create a movement to defeat the system of imperialism and build a revolutionary socialist society in its place. We hope that this article is a step in that process.

Kevin Burke was born in a home for unwed mothers in Hollywood. He spent his early sissy days in Anaheim — America's hub of happiness, and gained his first political consciousness as a member of the Junior John Birch Society. He currently lives in San Francisco, works in KPFA's Public Affairs Department and calls himself a Marxist-Leninist. He takes pictures of his friends.

photo by Kevin Burke



This Being a Record of the Great Washout of November Second, 1976 (Prop. 14 Loses)¹

Tede Matthews

From the 1600s thru now in the 1900s
Native Americans are seen as
inferior beings in a misbalanced nature,
losing their sovereignty between the lines
in volumes of John Wayne his-story;

Soon afterwards too, black people
in chains of culture robbed pain and
ripped off from Mother cradle land,
till, by the 1800s a negro slave's
treatment in southern patriarch's plantation
ranked below the comforts and diet
of a horse;

Yellow men bartered to the new west,
hammering into the burial flesh earth
of fallen Mexican companeras and native spirits,
a railroad, links, a shining steel cockring
to grasp at the width of colonial empire,
restricting the pulse with its steam-driven
connection—often torn from all familial ties,
old men now marooned in Manila/Chinatown
endangered hotels, women suffer from chronic
stooped back casualties of sweatshop
stitching of fashion's latest sellouts;

Once again on November second,
the ideology of restrictive, bodytight
soul denial that allowed for
300 years of genocide and femicide
affects the lemming panicked, favor
seeking masses to never dare speak out
for any vague show of solidarity with
a sister, a brother;

The concession, certainly true
to liberal guilt pangs,
appropriate support is shown to
the lives of ill-fated greyhounds,²
the latest tip of the iceberg
of crimes against nature
thru the power of white men,
bloody bunnies will not be needed
this year to hypnotise greyhounds
to the sound of money rolling in;

Blood red lives of the farmworkers,
sun red heat, DDT air, scabs, beatings,
child labours love lost
in a field of blood red grapes,
blood fills the vaults of California's
white rat robber barons;

If greyhounds are the tip then surely
farmworkers are the sea on which
the iceberg floats, voters float
in little flag lined coffins
to register their votes,
party-of-their-choice-folders in hand,
briefly alone with Gerald—or Jimmy;

"... And, really my dear, there's really
no difference, the effect is always quite ...
devastating, (to say the least),"
old Republican women giving much Betty Ford
in dynel and bonded knit, Vera scarves
caressing sagging parchment throats,
quiet dignity and confidence that the system
that they've bought into was the
winning system; the men didn't give at all,
i barely remember dark grey forms
casting shadows in the polling station,
so many came to lose their spark
for another four years, thinking that
that is all there is;

Look out! The lever in that faceless machine
that you ignored today suburbia,
cries in the bowl of grapes
on your formica mesa,
the bottle of congratulatory champagne
that Gallo favours you with,
winning ticket, is an infusion
intravenously into the lifestream
of the rotting corpse
that you still find comfort in.

200 years—misrepresented priorities,
broken treaties, aborted propositions,
we Californians lie frozen in icebergs
floating in a sea of farmworkers' blood ...
only a tidal wave can smash
this frozen urge to live free.



(1) Proposition 14 was a statewide California ballot referendum that would have allowed United Farm Worker organizers greater access to workers on the farms and ranches where they worked.

(2) Proposition 15 would have legalized greyhound racing in California. It was overwhelmingly defeated.

Tede Matthews was bourne on the lavender side of the moon, just left of glitter. He has bagged burgers, boxed x-mas balls, leaned on many a lamppost and tap danced from Castro St. to eternity. He's one queen who believes in love, anarchy and kicking ass when necessary. His main interest now is working in a faggot theatre collective, the Lavendar Star Players.

GAY LIBERATION



GAY LIBERATION

drawing by Tom Till

Stonewall

June 27-29, 1969 This weekend the sudden specter of "gay power" erected its head in Greenwich Village, and spat out a fairy tale the likes of which the area has never seen. The forces of faggotry, spurred by a Friday night police raid on one of the city's largest, most popular gay bars, the Stonewall Inn, rallied in an unprecedented protest against the raid and continued to assert presence, possibility, and pride until the early hours of Monday morning.

Village Voice
July 3, 1969

When tyranny is law, **revolution** is order.

Pedro Albizu Campos
Puerto Rican nationalist leader.