On the Question of Homosexuality and the Emancipation of Women

The following paper was written by a writing group under the leadership of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA and is being published to clarify and further develop the position of the Party as expressed in the Party Programme, *as well as to raise the level of debate and struggle on this question. We feel the question of homosexuality is closely intertwined with the question of the oppression of women as reflected in its ideological underpinnings and that this is a question that needs to be more deeply understood and discussed. We are cognizant of the present political atmosphere and in trying to conduct such a debate have taken great care to make it quite clear that we, as representatives of the revolutionary proletariat, firmly oppose the pogromist and repressive atmosphere that is being whipped up against homosexuals including the use of the AIDS epidemic as a pretext to carry out various forms of repression. We fully intend to join with others in exposing and combating these attacks, even while continuing principled discussion and struggle over the important ideological questions raised here and their implications for the struggle for fundamental change, for the liberation of women, and for the elimination of all exploitation and oppression.*

Introduction

Every revolution has its "love question." In the eyes of revolutionary communists this is a fine thing, representing as it does the breakdown of the old morals and the sanctity of the old society in this as in every arena of life. With this as an orientation and starting point, we must seek to deepen our analysis and understanding of developments and shifts in prevailing social morés with an eye to accelerating that breakdown *and* helping to usher in the new.

Profound changes are taking place in the position of women and the traditional family that have brought forward many new features in the class struggle. The breadth and extent of homosexuality is but one indication of these changes. As tremendously important as it is to grasp these

developments, it is no less important to understand that these changes are taking place under the still-dominant male-supremacist relations of society and that they bear the stamp of these dominant relations. And this is certainly true of homosexuality in today's society.

Homosexuality — in all its forms — is a prominent feature on the political stage today. And there is significant controversy surrounding our position on this question. Dealing with this issue correctly is bound up with deeply coming to grips with the oppression of women and with what will be required of the proletariat and its party in taking the road that will really uproot it. Especially given the urgency of the times and world developments, any revolutionary-minded person should be fired up to come to grips more deeply with how this oppression arose and what it will take to do away with it. As Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA, put it in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*: "In many ways, and particularly for men, the woman question and whether you seek to completely abolish or to preserve the existing property and social relations and corresponding ideology that enslave women (or maybe 'just a little bit' of them) is a touchstone question *among the oppressed themselves*. It is a dividing line between 'wanting in' and really 'wanting out': between fighting to end all oppression and exploitation — and the very division of society into classes — and seeking in the final analysis to get your part in this" (pp. 140-41).

Impatience and desire to rupture with the old morals and traditions, including as they pertain to the family, is certainly not where we disagree with many feminists and lesbians! And, while making clear our basic disagreements with those who uphold homosexuality as a positive, or even radical, alternative to the dominant social relations, our party has struggled practically and politically to *not* make our line on this a dividing-line question in the struggle today. But we do feel that debate and deep, principled struggle over what it will take to end the oppression of women must be a component of the struggle today and that this must inform the question of what stand to take on homosexuality. This has to be our orientation if we want to win, and if we are to be guided by an outlook which seeks no halfway revolution but a complete transformation of the whole world and every social relation within it. It is in this spirit that we are issuing this paper, in the hope that it will stimulate further unity, discussion, and practical work.

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The *Programme* of the RCP, USA states:

> As for homosexuality, this too, is perpetuated and fostered by the decay of capitalism, especially as it sinks into deeper crisis. This is particularly the case because of the distorted, oppressive man-woman relations capitalism promotes. Once the proletariat is in power, no one will be discriminated against in jobs, housing and the like merely on the basis of being a homosexual. But at the same time education will be conducted throughout society on the ideology behind homosexuality and its material roots in exploiting society, and struggle will be waged to eliminate it and reform homosexuals. (Revolutionary Communist Party, p. 77)

The question of human sexuality today cannot be analyzed in a vacuum, or solely in individual terms, as if it somehow stood apart from or "above" the question of classes and class society. In order to understand the particular phenomenon of homosexuality, it must be recognized that *all* forms of human sexuality — including homosexuality — are manifestations of underlying social relations and products of social conditioning. Like all other social practices, they have a past historical development and a current material basis. And they at one and the same time concentrate some aspects of existing social relations and in turn affect these in one or another direction.

Approaching the question of homosexuality by attempting to evaluate it in an idealist way, by ripping it out of historical context and conditions of existing class society or by citing individual motivations to explain what is objectively a *social* phenomenon, can only lead to an incorrect analysis. The Party *Programme*, on the contrary, correctly identifies the decay of capitalism and the distorted, oppressive, woman-hating relations capitalism inherited, upholds, and thrives on as the material basis of homosexuality today.

In opposition to our approach, it is often raised that sexual attraction to persons of the same sex is just as "natural" as the attraction to the opposite sex, and further, that in particular individuals there is an "inherent" preference for homosexuality which is biological. In order to address this, certain fundamental points need to be

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established with regard to the relation between human sexuality in general and the development of human society.

Human biology and evolution must be taken into account in evaluating modern sexuality. But our biology and evolutionary development as a species actually provide proof time and time again that human social behaviors (certainly including all forms of sexual behavior) simply cannot be understood in a mechanical-reductionist fashion at the level of, for instance, genes and hormones.[1] Human social behaviors are rooted in the existing social conditions at any given time; they are shaped by these conditions in an ongoing way and react back upon them. What we need is a historical and materialist analysis of the origins and development of various human sexual practices, especially in relation to the development of class divisions and class struggle; at any given time any type of human sexuality can and should be analyzed and evaluated as a social practice and *with reference to the existing social context and overall set of social relations*. There is no such thing as "natural" or "inherent" outside of this context.

Thus, in regard to capitalist society today we should seek to understand more deeply how and to what extent a given form of human sexuality reflects (or even concentrates aspects of) the underlying social relations of this type of society and what, if any, its effect is in challenging or reinforcing these relations — again, from the standpoint of wanting to transform these relations as an integral part of finally eliminating class society and ending all oppressive social relations.

Our party has based itself on the understanding that women's biological role in reproduction was a significant factor influencing the first social division of labor (upon which class society eventually developed) and, furthermore, that biological reproduction continued to play a role in shaping the social division of labor between men and women in class society. Because of this, some feminists have accused us of saying that "biology is destiny."

First of all, we recognize that this question has sometimes been treated too mechanically and linearly by Marxists. But merely recognizing the historical reality — that from its origins our species had not one, or three, but two sexes; that each sex did have some biological particularities (primarily in relation to reproduction); and that these differences between the two sexes (as limited as they were) must have had some bearing on the tasks of our earliest ancestors — in no way constitutes a biodeterminist position. We are simply saying that, throughout our history and to this day, the fact that one sex has borne the young has had a significant impact on the social division of labor. Now, this is not to say that things had to happen that way, only that they did. Furthermore, we are not saying that biological differences in relation to reproduction need to have been, *in and of themselves*, a basis for the oppression of one sex by another or that in any future society such differences need even impinge to any significant extent on the social division of labor. But in the early days of humanity the differences between the sexes in reproductive roles *did* have implications for how they divided up their tasks, and this has had repercussions to this very day. It is really not very surprising that the means by which human beings reproduce themselves would have a tremendous impact on the organization of human society. Engels drew attention to this when he wrote:

> According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a two-fold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of articles of food and clothing, dwellings, and of the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is *determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other*. (Engels, 1967, p. 5, our emphasis)

This *dialectical* materialist understanding is, in fact, quite an argument against biological determinism. Engels reveals in this passage the pivotal role that both production and reproduction of life play in shaping society. And he indicates here not only how these two things give rise to certain changing social structures but also the *interaction* between, on the one hand, the biological reproduction of the species and, on the other, the overall struggle for production. But this interaction, granted, should not be mechanically understood.

One of the unique things about human beings relative to other species is the unprecedented degree to which we interact with and transform the material world around us (and ourselves in the process), especially through the medium of ever-changing forms of social organization. Modern human sexuality reflects these complex and changing social interactions, which are not genetically determined nor in any other way primarily a manifestation of the biology of individuals. Human sexuality, up to today, obviously is not devoid of biological constraints: for instance it is still intimately connected with reproduction, and reproduction is still dependent on the female of the species bearing children. But sexual morality and sexual practices are *social* constructs, not mere manifestations of the underlying biology. While throughout history the only way human beings had of reproducing was through sexual relations between men and women — a fact which obviously had much

1. For further discussion of the social character of all complex human behaviors, in opposition to the reductionist biodeterminism of sociobiologists and their ilk, see Ardea Skybreak, *Of Primeval Steps and Future Leaps*, and Lewontin, Rose, and Kamin, *Not In Our Genes*.

to do with why homosexuality has occupied at most a secondary role in society — this is not the entire framework within which human sexuality has developed.

Indeed, sexual customs not only reflect the role sex plays in bearing children but also typically mirror and affect the general property relations in a given society. Obviously, since our earliest origins it has been the case that any self-contained human grouping which did not broadly practice heterosexual sex would simply die out. Even in relatively recent history there is at least one example of a small, self-contained "society" doing just that: the strictly celibate Shakers, who vanished exactly because the lack of sexual relations between men and women precluded the production of any new generations. But beyond that, it must be understood that social rules and regulations governing sexuality have been an important means of ensuring the preservation and reproduction not only of people but of property relations and that this has been true ever since the advent of property-based social hierarchies. The combination of a basic biological constraint (the fact that heterosexual sex has been to date the only means through which to produce new generations) with the broad social constraints imposed by propertied classes seeking to preserve and reproduce property lineages and relations primarily through a patriarchal framework — this constitutes the material basis for the ongoing dominance of heterosexuality throughout history and in the world today.

In drawing out the dialectical relation between production and reproduction, Engels argued that the social division of labor along sexual lines was largely shaped by women's biological role in bearing and rearing children. Our ancestors were confronted with a means of reproduction which involved long periods of pregnancy for the women. Infants were highly dependent on the surrounding society for their basic material needs for extremely long periods of time — most likely including dependence for very prolonged periods of time on mothers' milk for basic nutrition. As Ardea Skybreak and others have argued, this kind of necessity may well have provided the initial impetus for our early ancestors to develop means of gathering and storing plant foods (with females quite likely playing a central role in the initiation and development of such activities); in time such activities would have been decisive in making possible the first accumulations of material surpluses, which would have freed society from the confines of literal hand-to-mouth existence. This would have made possible further development of the productive forces and explorations and transformations of the surrounding world by enabling people to further subdivide tasks among themselves, relying on accumulated stores of resources as a material "cushion" in undertaking risky ventures.

Given the somewhat different necessity and freedom encountered by the two sexes in relation to the children, it is not difficult to imagine how some of the earliest spontaneous divisions of labor would have fallen out at least in part along sexual lines. But what may at first have been no more than a slight difference in emphasis in the degree to which each sex undertook different tasks has typically been superseded by an increasing compartmentalization and specialization of social functions that involved increased unevenness between men and women in the accumulation and control of material surpluses. This provided the material basis — as a direct consequence of this increased lopsidedness and "refining" of the division of labor — for the subjugation and oppression of women by men, along with other forms of social oppression that were emerging on the basis of unevenness in the accumulation of surplus and the transformation of social wealth into private property. We cannot say that this is the *only* way society could have gone beyond a literal hand-to-mouth existence, but the fact is *that is* the way things typically developed, and we are living the consequences of this history to this very day. The earliest divisions of labor along sexual lines would have, by definition, incorporated a certain unevenness between men and women which could have contained within it the seeds of incipient inequalities between them. *But it would have taken the emergence of strict and institutionalized class divisions based on a systematic process of uneven distribution and control of material resources for any social division of labor to become the basis for the full-scale and systematic oppression of women which has characterized all class society since then.*

This historical analysis is in sharp contrast to the position of some who have argued (often as part of an argument for lesbianism and against "the institution of compulsory heterosexuality") that the division of labor along sexual lines was the result of men simply wanting to live off women's labor. Not only does this unhinge the point from any materialist analysis of history and instead attribute everything to the personal motives of men, greed in the abstract, etc., but such a scenario was a literal impossibility in the earliest stages of history. Most importantly it should be recognized that antagonistic interests are not innate but themselves come into being on a material basis, i.e., in relation to objective conditions at a given time and without people being necessarily fully conscious of the basis or implications of the changes taking place in society. Certainly our early ancestors could not have known all the ramifications and implications of their first attempts to divide things up and parcel out tasks in certain ways. The history of antagonistic relations between men and women is no exception.

We would not argue (and this is not the point in the *Programme*) that homosexual behavior did not or could not exist prior to class society. But it is clear that societies that developed into class societies were overall characterized by a division of labor along sexual lines and the predominance of heterosexuality.

From the time human society became divided into classes and the patriarchal family emerged as a basic unit of production and of reproduction of property relations, heterosexual relations have in fact been male supremacist relations and have been permeated through and through with the corresponding male supremacist ideology necessary to maintain the subordination of women which is essential to the functioning of such a system. Heterosexuali-

ty has never again been free of that stamp of oppression. Given this, some would argue that any alternate form of sexuality, any departure from this oppressive predominant form, should be deemed inherently "progressive" by virtue of its "opposition" to or rejection of the oppressive form that is heterosexuality. But what is the character of this "departure" in the context of the existing patriarchal, class-divided society? Does it in fact even constitute a real break with the traditional male-female relations embodied in heterosexuality, or would it be more correct to view homosexuality as an extension, and in some of its aspects even a concentration, of some of these very same relations? To answer these questions we need to explore more deeply two interrelated developments: the material basis in history for the establishment of the social dominance of heterosexuality and the particularity of the social role or function of that objectively secondary form of sexuality which is homosexuality.

As we said earlier, the historical material basis for the clear-cut dominance of the heterosexual form of sexuality in human society (at least, as far as is known since the advent of property-based social hierarchies) encompasses two closely intertwined aspects: an initial biological constraint (heterosexual sex having throughout human history been the only means through which new generations could be produced) *and*, with the emergence of private property, the creation of the patriarchal family as a basic vehicle for the structuring, development, and reproduction of property relations. In fact, if it weren't for this latter development, heterosexuality might not have become the socially dominant (i.e., most prevalent) form of sexuality, even if it remained necessary for the production of children. The biological connection would have ensured that heterosexuality would flourish, so to speak, but this alone would not have ensured that it would become the most prevalent, socially dominant form of sexuality in human beings.

For instance, in the absence of the development of property relations, an exploitative division of labor, and a patriarchal framework through which these relations are realized and reproduced, it is possible to imagine a society in which heterosexual matings have been institutionalized (perhaps even highly ritualized) for the purposes of producing children, but where men and women engage to an equal or even greater degree in various alternate forms of sexuality, for recreation or whatever other purposes. Who can say for sure what the sexual practices of our earliest ancestors were? Obviously heterosexual sex must have been pretty popular or they would have died out, and this form of sexuality would have had a disproportionate impact on society because only this form could have added new members to the group, but who's to say that other forms of sexual experimentation were not just as common, devoid of social stigma, and so forth. The point of this kind of speculation is not to argue that this was *necessarily* the case but to highlight the fact that the development of private property and of the forms of social organization created to structure and perpetuate the new relations of property in class-divided society would have dramatically altered the character, prevalence, and overall social significance of any form of sexuality, hetero-, homo-, bisexuality, whatever.

When the basis for material accumulation emerged in human society (taking a dramatic leap with the first attempts at cultivation and/or domestication of animals), some people no doubt found that they were able to accumulate more than others and that this gave them a disproportionate influence over others in society. A more clearly defined and institutionalized division of labor in society would have made possible even greater accumulation. The most "successful" individuals and groupings would have been those who found the way of expanding their productive base by coercing the labor of others to their advantage, thereby accumulating even greater wealth and a disproportionate voice in the affairs and regulation of society. Completely new social structures had to be developed to regulate the new division of labor, quell any resistance by those who suddenly found themselves at a distinct disadvantage, and provide channels through which to continually expand accumulation and regulate its distribution, including from one generation to another. As class divisions emerged, people created chieftains, councils, priests, armed bodies, and assorted other institutions for the enforcement and perpetuation of the newly exploitative division of labor. Fundamental to this process, and perhaps its very earliest expression, was the creation of the patriarchal family which institutionalized the subjugation of women, children, and in many instances slaves. For thousands of years the patriarchal family has remained a basic form through which human beings have reproduced not only themselves but their property relations as well. And this form has managed to survive, with only slight alterations, throughout all the different types of class societies in pastoral, agricultural, and industrial contexts; it remains to this day a crucial anchor of imperialist relations of exploitation and oppression throughout the world.

While this is not the place to attempt an in-depth analysis of the origins and development of the patriarchal family, it is important to understand its role in putting the stamp of the institutionalized oppression of women on all forms of human sexuality. From that point on, and this is the crux of the relevance of the patriarchal family to this discussion, women occupied a special and oppressed position within the process of accumulation: the need for the preservation of the newly emerging forms of private property, typically dominated by men (an outcome of the prior division of labor), necessitated the guarantee of male lineage and brought about restrictions on female sexuality. Women became domestic slaves — the actual meaning of the word "family" (from the Latin *famulus*) being the "the house of slaves." Not only did the fruits of women's labor become alienable property whose disposition was controlled by others and which served to bolster the power and authority of their oppressors, but their most essential role became institutionalized as that of breeders, their relative value mainly defined by their ability or lack of ability to produce new

members of the family unit.[2]

Immediately the question arose of the need of male heads of families to supervise and control this breeding. It wouldn't do for the cohesion and stability of the patriarchal family to be undermined by such things as custody disputes over children of uncertain lineage! For one thing, children themselves had become property and, furthermore, lineage had to be clearly established to ensure that accumulation could proceed to expand and build on itself along orderly transmission lines. For the first time in history it really mattered socially who a woman's child's father was, especially in the case of a male child. But the certainty of lineage and overall submission of women was obtained at a great cost to women, including through coercion and distortion of their sexuality in the form of enforced monogamy, institutionalized rape, mutilation of sexual organs, outcast status and/or draconian punishments for sexual activity outside the family, etc. In short, *this* is the origin and material basis for the continued social dominance of heterosexuality throughout the world — living testimony to millennia of oppressive relations between men and women, all geared to the reproduction of property relations.[3]

The point of all this is that with the emergence of private property and the creation of the patriarchal family, heterosexuality would necessarily have assumed a disproportionate social significance relative to any other forms of sexuality. From that point on, women's sexuality would have been strictly regulated and restricted to the greatest extent possible to heterosexual relations, and monogamous ones at that. This would minimize the number of "illegitimate" children, "uncompensated" elopements of marriageable daughters, and any sexual activity, be it with other women or with men outside the family, which would represent a defiance of the rules of submission and subordination. All because such activities could now undermine the orderly process of accumulation and transmission of property.

For men the same restrictions never really applied. For one thing, the practice by men of "supplemental" forms of sexuality (homosexuality, the use of prostitutes, etc.) did not have the same material consequences or hold the same potential for disruption of the accumulation process as the extrafamilial activities of women. The patriarchal context did not require of them the same proof of submission, and these activities either would not result in children or would result in children whose paternity could easily be denied if

2. Since this time, it is probably the case that male homosexuality has always accompanied marriage and the family, much as has prostitution. For example, in ancient Greece the class relations dictated that male homosexuality was acceptable, the prevailing attitude being that real and complete love could not be fulfilled with such lowly creatures as women. Taboos against lesbianism were a part of the constraints — on up to and including mutilation — used against female sexuality and sensuality, so important in keeping household slaves "faithful." The following remarks from Andrea Dworkin provide some important insights in this regard:

> It must also be noted that glorious ancient Greece, so often cited as the ideal male homosexual society, that is, a society in which sex among men and boys was entirely acceptable, operated in accordance with these same principles: male sexual aggression against boys and among men was highly regulated by custom and in practice; sexual relations between men and boys expressed a rigid hierarchy of male power; the youth used was feminized vis-à-vis older men; sex was not consensual, that is, among peers (in fact, on Crete and in other parts of Greece, boys were kidnapped into sexual apprenticeship); the boy became the man, changed status, his reward at the end of an apprenticeship; populations of women and slaves, neither of which had any rights of citizenship, absorbed the brunt of male sexual aggression. Male homosexuality in male-supremacist societies has always been contained and controlled by men as a class, though the strategies of containment have differed, to protect men from rape by other men, to order male sexuality so that it is, with reference to males, predictable and safe. Females and devalued males who participate in the low status of women are logically the preferred victims, since male sexuality as it exists in male-supremacist contexts requires victims, not fully present equals, in order to realize itself. The devalued males can often change status, escape; women and girls cannot. And the devalued male who cannot change his devalued status can always find solace in his own rights of tyranny and privilege, however circumscribed, over women and girls in his own family, class, race, or group.
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> . . . Those gay men of our own time who offer ancient Greece as a utopian model are only confirming that, for them, the continued scapegoating of women and the sexual exploitation of less powerful males would be an insignificant price to pay for a comfortable solution to their own social and sexual dilemma. As adult men, they would have freedom as they understand it, the freedom of the sexual predator; women, girls, and devalued males would continue to be the prey. This moral bankruptcy is not in any sense unique to homosexual men; rather, it is part of what they have in common with all men. (Dworkin, 1981, pp. 61-62)

3. The social dominance of heterosexuality is likely to be with us for quite some time, given the interplay of tradition and the level of development of the productive forces on a world scale. Abstractly it might be tempting to argue that heterosexual relations are so imbued with male right that such a form would have to be discarded altogether and as soon as possible as part of eliminating the roots and buttresses of the oppression of women, but its long-standing worldwide significance in the reproduction of people and production relations, coupled with the millennia of stubborn tradition accompanying this, make it unlikely that heterosexuality will become historically obsolete any time soon. What is realistic, however, is that the fight against male supremacy must and will be a crucial part of the struggle against the existing social order, and that, with the overthrow of this order through proletarian revolution, it will be possible through tremendous and ongoing struggle to transform social relations and increasingly restrict male right in the context of the family and society generally, thereby undercutting the ability of heterosexual relations per se to embody and perpetuate the oppression of women. And this very same struggle to continually restrict male right will no doubt have a great effect on all secondary or supplemental forms of sexuality as well, most likely undercutting even more rapidly the material and ideological basis for their particular role in class-divided society.

incorporating them into the family context were to threaten property lines in any way. Thus, "supplemental" forms of sexuality have traditionally been engaged in by men to a much greater degree than by women.[4] Male homosexuality, for instance, has often been practiced by primarily heterosexual men who simultaneously maintained traditional families (wives and children), the existence of exclusively homosexual "communities" on a large scale being a relatively modern development.[5] A similar arrangement for women (husband and lesbian lover on the side) has traditionally been much less socially acceptable and prevalent, to say the least! But even for men, the development of a means to reproduce the relations of property through a patriarchal family and the need to preserve and protect this patriarchal form has ensured that heterosexuality would predominate and be given "favored status" over other forms of sexuality.

Thus, homosexuality has of necessity been marginalized by the emergence and centrality of the patriarchal family, and while it has perhaps always "accompanied" heterosexuality to one degree or another, its character as a social relation has ever since then been defined relative to the dominant heterosexual form and has played out its social role on a stage set by those dominant relations. *By virtue of* its marginalization (having much less direct bearing on the reproduction of people and property relations than heterosexuality) homosexuality exercises its principal influence on the relations of society in the ideological sphere, as a concentrated "statement" on the relations between men and women. Given the overwhelming dominance of heterosexuality, the practice of homosexuality requires a conscious decision to differ from the prevailing norm. It is primarily a means of expressing and concentrating an ideological outlook and worldview. But the question is, what is the content of that ideological "statement"? What outlook and worldview does it put forward? What features of human sexual relations does homosexuality typify, highlight, and concentrate? To what extent does it genuinely challenge or undermine male right: the economic, political, and ideological domination of women by men which is at the heart of prevailing relations between men and women generally, including in the sexual sphere? To what extent does it do just the opposite — serving as yet one more ideological buttress for the social reinforcement and perpetuation of these oppressive relations? These are the questions we should seek to answer in examining more closely the content of that ideological "statement" which homosexuality puts forward in today's world.

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We would argue that the content of the "statement" or ideological position expressed through homosexuality at best represents no deep or thoroughgoing rupture on the question of the oppression of women and at worst contributes to it. We recognize that some radical elements, especially among lesbians, remove themselves politically from certain trends within the homosexual lifestyle which are obviously not progressive. But anyone attempting to seriously analyze this social phenomenon — pro or con — must be able ultimately to encompass and analyze it in its entirety. The bottom line is that homosexuality does not escape, nor reverse, the dominant, exploitative relations of society. In fact, as we will show, homosexuality serves as

4. It is true that, to various degrees in various cultures, there have been taboos against certain forms of supplemental sexual activity by men, and even severe punishments proscribed for violations in relation to the monogamous family. In the main, though, these prohibitions have been the strongest (and most enforced) when these violations interfere with the *property* rights of other men of a higher class position. For example, having an affair (and getting caught) with the *wife* of another man, and especially of a higher and more powerful class position, could result in execution in some societies. But these types of proscriptions serve the very same property relations that in the main have demanded overall sexual submission and regulation on the part of women and at the same time have perpetuated male right and relatively greater male license in the sphere of sexuality. They go hand in hand with such other civilized practices as rape along with pillage as a tribute in war, the rights allowed slavemasters and feudal lords over the women and young girls of their estates, etc.

5. As a side point: While it is true that the erosion of the traditional family in some parts of the world opens the door to a flourishing of marginalized forms of sexuality, this doesn't mean that the expression of these forms itself contributes to the breakdown of the patriarchal family to any significant degree (Falwell, et al., notwithstanding). In societies with a high degree of development of the productive forces and parasitism relative to the rest of the world (e.g., the U.S.) it is possible for "exclusively" homosexual communities to develop on a fairly large scale. The wealth and parasitism of these societies make it possible for significant numbers of individuals to step aside from the process of accumulating and reproducing social wealth in the context of a family as a productive unit and to function more as individuals. For a majority of the people in the world this is not really an option: a feudal or bourgeois family unit of some sort remains crucial to "get by," let alone "prosper," and individuals who by design, accident, or coercion are unable to avail themselves of this familial context typically face great practical hardships. While the increasing parasitism of bourgeois society itself begins to gnaw at traditional patriarchal family relations, it remains true, as we have indicated, that the expression of secondary forms of sexuality which traditionally "accompany" heterosexuality in class society (e.g., homosexuality) does not per se significantly undermine, and in some ways bolsters, the existence of the family.

both a reflection and a concentration of some of the worst features of the exploitative relations between men and women. But at the same time there are some significant differences between male and female homosexuality, or at least some aspects of the latter.

Male Homosexuality

While male homosexuality is manifested within all class and racial groupings, it is particularly prevalent, and certainly very openly manifested, among the more privileged middle strata. This has been evident in the U.S. over the last couple of decades, with the flourishing of gay men's communities which have been overwhelmingly white in composition and which have occupied a relatively privileged position in society. Homosexuality became a much more prevalent social phenomenon in the U.S. during and especially after World War 2, the high point for U.S. imperialism. But it has especially skyrocketed in the last ten to fifteen years. In the city of San Francisco it is estimated that one of every seven men is gay. San Francisco is both the gay capital and the most gentrified city in the U.S. Gay men occupy a large percentage of middle management and high-tech positions on Wall Street West and its attendant support structures. They play a prominent role in San Francisco politics, and the highest voter turnout in the city is from the Castro (a major gay district). Going into the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, the *New York Times Magazine* ran an article on the city which included a description of the important role of gay men in the financial structure of the city and highlighted their politically stabilizing role (through their contribution to gentrification).

In fact, throughout the late '70s and early '80s the degree to which political manifestations of male homosexuals reflected a pointed degree of American patriotism and conservatism has been striking. Cases in point include the crowds that turned out in San Francisco's Castro district to stage a hero's welcome to the two gay hostages from the airline hijacked in Lebanon (complete with the gay men's choir singing "God Bless America," etc.) and the predominant idealization of and identification with Americana from the heyday of U.S. imperialism that characterized the gay pride parades of this same period.

The gay men's communities have typically been characterized by the promotion of a very narcissistic and self-indulgent lifestyle, including a high degree of preoccupation with sex. Beyond that there are also some extreme expressions of woman-hating and decadence. The S&M and leather scenes are not insignificant and are rife with distinct Nazi overtones. Transvestism and displays of stereotypical "effeminate" behavior are essentially caricatures of some of the worst aspects of what being a woman in this society can be. Ads featuring critical body dimensions and preferences are a constant feature of even the "progressive" gay papers. The number of sexual liaisons engaged in by many gay men can be staggering and is an acknowledged feature of the gay men's scene, at least before the AIDS crisis.

But the time when the bourgeoisie was content to tolerate and even encourage anything that fostered the "me decade" and the climate of self-indulgence and narcissism, especially if it was wrapped in red, white, and blue, has drawn to a close with a slam. The last five years have witnessed the AIDS epidemic, which has had devastating effects on the homosexual community, causing tremendous grief and suffering and now discrimination and the specter of persecution. This is increasingly turning many bitterly against a system and institutions that have done little to stop or alleviate the disease and which now use it as a pretext to fuel an atmosphere of pogroms and increasing repression. While many homosexuals still aspire to be included in the American mainstream and still are trying hard to establish themselves there, they are increasingly on the outs, and this is causing more than a few to take stock of what time it is and develop a broader social consciousness. The fact that the severe attacks they face emanate from the highest levels of government is giving rise to increasing challenge and opposition to the program for Resurgent America.

The more middle-of-the-road homosexual men reject the more backward aspects of the gay lifestyle. However, there are some underlying points of unity. One way of posing this point is to ask what it means, in a society in which male supremacy and misogyny (woman-hating) are such integral elements of its whole operation, for a section of this society to regard a relationship with a woman as repellent or, at the very least, unfulfilling. To say the least, this is a culturally loaded phenomenon, and by no means simply an issue of "individual choice."

The proliferation of male homosexuality in the USA and other imperialist countries is in large part a response to the increasing parasitism of imperialism and the decline and decay of the family within that. With the climbing rate of divorce in the urban centers — where the average marriage lasts about five years — there is now, for men of the privileged strata, the option of living life unencumbered by dependent wife and kids (40 percent of men increase their incomes after a divorce, while 75 percent of women plummet downward). A *New York Times Magazine* feature captured this reality in an article depicting the successful lifestyle of the single male yuppie, capable of designing his own apartment, being a gourmet cook, etc., and having no great need to share his life with a woman. While the traditional financial and other obligations pertaining to the nuclear family have been breaking down, the prevailing ideology of male right and superiority certainly have not, and they are contributing factors to the increase in male homosexuality and its more misogynous features in the '80s. In many ways the flourishing of the gay scene is like a logical extension of the "wife joke" mentality.

There exists a minority of men within the gay scene who do reject much of the decadence and seek to disassociate themselves from it. And part of their "becoming gay" had a lot to do with not wanting to be a part of the sick relations between men and women that are characteristic of this

society. Such gay men often form good friendships with women and are no more overtly chauvinistic than their heterosexual counterparts. In fact, they can appear to be less chauvinistic than most heterosexual men because they "don't treat women as sex objects," etc. Nevertheless, their stance as homosexual men is rooted at a deeper level in the same male supremacy. It is not enough to merely hate the existing relations between men and women and to say that "it's all fucked," and equally so for everyone. The leap must be made to understand that it is something which needs to be and can be actively combated now. In other words, a thorough rupture with misogyny and the ideology of male domination is required, and it needs to be recognized that male homosexuality does not begin to make that rupture — in fact, as a broader social phenomenon, it contributes to bolstering the oppressive relations between men and women, whether that is any given individual's intent or not. Certainly more struggle is called for on this question.

One thing that can help to sharpen things up is to reflect on the possible causes for the tremendous expansion of the "gay scene" in the U.S. in the 1970s. In many ways the decadence, demoralization, individualism, pleasure-seeking, and self-indulgence of the gay men's scene is a concentration of much of what has afflicted the petty bourgeoisie since the "me-decade" of the 1970s in particular.

In the course of the broad social upheavals of the '60s, beginning attempts were made to forge a much-needed "new morality," including in relation to sexuality and relations between men and women more generally. But the social character of the movements and individuals engaging in these attempts (still primarily petty-bourgeois in outlook) was such that they could only go so far and were not able to make a really deep and thoroughgoing rupture with the deeply ingrained outlook of the bourgeoisie in this as in other areas. Thus, while things had been "opened up" in a good way, when the more hopeful and inspiring period of general social upheaval ebbed in the '70s many found themselves politically and ideologically disoriented and became increasingly cynical and self-indulging. And as such they became easy pawns for the bourgeoisie's attempts to reverse much of what had been accomplished during the '60s in the ideological sphere. The bourgeoisie also wanted to bring in a new spirit, a new morality (actually a very old one), which involved a resurrection of gross patriotism, national chauvinism, and war fever — "my country right or wrong," etc. But after the '60s this was no easy task. First it would be necessary to undertake some destruction of the spirit of the '60s. As a transitional means they therefore actively promoted the self-indulgent narcissism of what came to be known as the "me decade." They did this in clear opposition to the healthier spirit of collective alienation and aspirations for social change which had become so widespread in the "us vs. them" decade of the '60s. And the male homosexual community readily lent itself to this "me decade" phenomenon that flowered in this period.

A bitter irony, and one which should cause some reflection, is that all this promotion and encouragement of narcissistic self-indulgence (including the male homosexual lifestyle) was only to serve as a stepping stone, to "clear the way," so to speak, for the newly brutal, regimented toe-the-line repressive climate of today — and the male homosexual community is running smack up against it, from the official sanctioning of Falwell, et al. and vicious attempts to resurrect and strengthen the traditional Family with a capital F, to the pogromist atmosphere being whipped up using AIDS as a major pretext and focus, to the upholding by the highest court of laws that criminalize "sodomy," etc.

The bourgeoisie both promotes homosexuality and its values in various ways and practices it broadly. But they also have more overriding political needs on this issue, particularly today in relation to war preparations. The bourgeoisie certainly has no problem with the misogyny and male privilege underlying male homosexuality. But their program for preparing especially middle America for World War 3 has the promotion of the nuclear family as an essential component. The pogromist atmosphere being whipped up, especially around AIDS, will only become more virulent and must be exposed and opposed as part of the overall preparations for the revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist system and its repressive state.

Not a day goes by that a representative of the government or the press doesn't seize on the pretext of the AIDS epidemic to publicly float the idea of increased mandatory testing of various sections of the population, the possible need for permanent forms of identification of carriers (yes, even tattoos!), the passing of laws to make the transmission of the disease a crime, the possible need for some form of quarantine in internment camps, or similar repressive measures — all this in the name of protecting the health of the nation, even though numerous medical experts from the U.S. and other countries have stressed repeatedly that such measures would not be effective in bringing the epidemic under control and would in fact contribute to its spread as potential carriers avoided detection or treatment for fear of the consequences. It is even argued that AIDS is "God's revenge against homosexuals" and that all the hysteria is perfectly understandable given the great threat posed by the disease. In the context of the ongoing promotion of fundamentalism, this is the perfect atmosphere for the fostering and unleashing of further blatant reaction with official sanction. Proposition 64 (which called for quarantine measures against AIDS victims) was voted down by a 72 to 28 percent margin in the California elections, only to be resurrected by Jessie Helms on a national scale and in the rapid implementation of the Reagan administration policies on AIDS — from mandatory testing of prisoners, federal employees, and immigrants to once again clearing the way for quarantining through recent precedents and court decisions.

Gay-bashing (the beating of gay men), including to the point of death, is undergoing a sharp upswing in metropolitan areas like San Francisco, as well as elsewhere. And, of course, in 1986 the Supreme Court, in the landmark case of *Bowers v. Harwick*, upheld the right of the police to enter

into someone's bedroom and arrest them for engaging in homosexual sex in states that have laws that criminalize "sodomy" on the books. A big point in all this is obviously the promotion of the nuclear family, that well-tested institution for the suppression of women (and children as well). And it serves the purpose of unleashing a pogromist mob mentality, seeking to rid the nation of all that is considered "deviant" and undermining the national will and strength. Such morality campaigns are presently a major element of the grotesque crusade to "restore pride" in the nation and to rally people to the reactionary necessities at hand for U.S. imperialism — namely interimperialist world war. Homosexuals are being offered up as fresh meat towards that end. From now on the state openly reserves the right to determine what is and what isn't acceptable morality, even in the personal sphere, and, moreover, to enforce this through direct and vicious repression. As Jerry Falwell put it in applauding the *Bowers v. Harwick* decision: "The highest court has recognized the right of a state to determine its own moral guidelines, and it has issued a clear statement that perverted moral behavior is not accepted practice in this country."

The implications of all this were made very clear in an article on the *Bowers v. Harwick* ruling in *RW* No. 366 where the analogy is drawn to Nazi Germany's dealings with homosexuals just before World War 2:

> In Germany too an extreme (and murderous) offensive against homosexuality was intimately linked to the enforcing of sex roles and the traditional family. The Nazis demanded that women return to "Kinder, Kirche, Küche" ("Children, Church, Kitchen"), and the forcible suppression of "deviant" forms of sexuality was directly related to that enshrining of the reactionary patriarchal family. It is no accident that when Heinrich Himmler (head of the Gestapo and SS) established his sex-police in 1936, it was entitled the "Central Agency for the Struggle Against Homosexuality and Abortion" and that when the death penalty was enacted in 1943 for "extreme cases," the law was called "Protection of Marriage, Family and Motherhood. . . . "
>
> *However, what is most important about the history of Nazism's assault on homosexuality is that it makes clear the linkage between "pro-family" bourgeois moralism and the preparations for war:*
>
> It is no accident that the key charge against Hirschfeld's research [on the sociology of homosexuality] (and against homosexuals themselves) was that this was all "un-German" — "deviation" from traditional sexuality was made an *antipatriotic* crime. The suppression of homosexuals was not only inseparable from the enforcement of the traditional family — *both* of these impulses were directly connected to the necessity of German imperialism to steel itself for the extreme crises of world war. (*Revolutionary Worker*, No. 366, p. 13)

All this underlines the importance of opposing pogromist attacks on homosexuals and exposing in an all-around way the reactionary political underpinnings of these attacks.

On the question of how *we* ourselves should view homosexuality — as a concentrated expression of a certain ideology and worldview pertaining to male-female relations in society — we would say that if indeed it is true, as we have argued, that there is an underlying male supremacy and misogyny to male homosexuality, then it serves as an objective ideological obstacle to the full social emancipation of women. The underlying male supremacy should therefore be brought out, discussed, and struggled against, as one would do in relation to any other form of backwardness on the question of the oppression/liberation of women. We should argue that any individual's "right" to be homosexual cannot be absolutized and divorced from the broader social context, and that strategically, and certainly from the standpoint of the achievement of a communist society free of all exploitation and oppression, this question is superseded by the need to break the chains of the oppression of women. It is from this perspective that we do and will struggle against the male supremacy and misogyny that underlies male homosexuality and seek to ideologically remold homosexuals as our *Programme* states. The transformation of personal/sexual relations can only come about as part of embarking on the road towards ridding the world of exploitative relations. But again it must be clearly stated that such a goal can never be realized by taking part in or tailing reactionary attacks or by forcibly seeking to punish homosexuals or abolish their lifestyle. And after the seizure of power the party will deal with this question overwhelmingly by relying on the conscious activism of the masses — seeking to win people to transform the world and usher in wholly new social relations in this as in every sphere.[6]

6. When we state (e.g., in our *Programme*) that once the proletariat is in power struggle will be waged to "eliminate" homosexuality, we are very clear about *what* is to be eliminated: the *ideology* underlying homosexuality and its *material roots* in exploiting society, i.e., the material conditions which give rise to it. We are not talking roundups and forcible coercion! In fact, our position on how to deal with homosexuality is very similar to our policy on how to deal with religion. As atheists we will also struggle for the "elimination" of religion. In opposition to Marxism, the ideology behind all the various religions fosters belief in, and reliance on, a wide array of nonexistent supernatural forces and promotes a false, unscientific understanding of the origins and development of things in nature and society and of the masses' own ability to transform things on the basis of this correct understanding. Thus, religion ultimately instills in the masses a sense of powerlessness before the forces of nature and society. Our *Programme* puts forward that, while guaranteeing the masses' right to practice religion provided it is not used as a counterrevolutionary staging area, the party will also assert its own independent role to broadly analyze and criticize the Bible, Talmud, Koran, and so forth. We recognize that for people to recognize their views are incorrect and to unburden themselves of their religious beliefs, a process of protracted ideological struggle will be required in the context of, and in combination with, the overall and ongoing struggle for the revolutionary transformation

Lesbianism

Lesbianism is a very different social phenomenon than male homosexuality. This is because the dominant relations in society in fact do involve the oppression of women by men, and lesbianism is an attempt to reject or avoid this oppression, at least in the personal sphere. In contrast to male homosexuals, the lesbian "community" is relegated more to the fringes of society than to its mainstream (though there are exceptions). The large numbers of women alienated from the family unit and living outside of it is testimony both to the breakdown of the family and to the oppression of women. Historically, lesbian relations and circles have encouraged and provided some support for women to exist and function outside of the traditional roles. Of course, lesbianism also exists among women of the proletariat and is often directly linked, as it frequently is for women of other strata, to an attempt to get out from under abusive situations, i.e., being brutalized by father, husband, son, or whoever.

Given the prevalence and routine character of physical and emotional abuse of women by men, and the pervasive misogynous atmosphere of the whole of society, it is certainly not difficult to understand why some women would have reacted by turning away from men and seeking solace in the companionship and intimacy of other women. This road was explored in particular in the period coming off the '60s when a thirst for "alternatives" was in the wind. And as the women's movement of that era ran up against some of its own limitations and the worldwide ebb in the revolutionary high tide of the '60s and early '70s, the social revolution so many had thirsted for appeared more distant; lesbianism could serve as a sort of refuge and position of retrenchment, a vehicle for adjusting the scale of one's dreams and expectations and returning, if not to "the fold," at least to a more narrow, more inward-looking, and even more "familial" scene.

In any case, while many lesbians would not claim to offer a worked-out theory on the source of women's oppression and the road to a future society, there is today a section of more radical lesbians who are an important force on the political landscape. For example, they have been an integral part of the most radical sections of the movement against imperialist war. The party and the revolutionary proletariat have and will continue to learn from some of the insights that radical feminists (including radical lesbians) have contributed to the understanding of the nature, depth, and forms of patriarchal relations in society.

Even though it is generally alienated from the mainstream of society, a large part of the lesbian community (as somewhat distinct from its most radical sections) is nevertheless plagued with all the ills of the rest of society — including such things as alcohol and drug abuse, violent abuse of mates, and attempts to raise children in monogamous relationships that are not, in the last analysis, all that different from the traditional male-dominated nuclear family. This does not somehow more characterize homosexuals than heterosexuals. But these aspects do bring out the fact that there is no overcoming the dominant social relations short of working for and finally achieving their overthrow. It is a very dangerous illusion to think there can be fundamental or meaningful change in this system short of revolution, including in this arena.

The imperialists have always carried out, and will continue and intensify, many attacks on lesbian women for daring to live outside the male-headed household — including ripping off their kids, subjecting them to the infamous "deprogramming" techniques, etc. The very same social system which generates, and ultimately condones, the most mind-boggling brutality and degradation of women on a daily basis accuses lesbians of being perverted and a social blight, and it routinely unleashes its legal, medical, and psychiatric professions against them. This is all part of buttressing the ideological and political arguments for the nuclear family, which has the oppression of women as its mainstay, and of reactionary calls to house and home and women in their place. In fact, they also use the pretext of homosexuality directly to agitate for the nuclear family with man and god at the head of the household. The proletariat and its party will continue to oppose and expose all this (as well as the philistine view of the nuclear family as the immutable and natural order of things for human beings, which serves to perpetuate the oppression of women).

Of course, oppression gives rise to many different forms of resistance. But not all forms of resistance necessarily reflect a correct understanding of the source of that oppression or of the means to ultimately get rid of it. And there will always be spontaneous forms of resistance to oppression which present reformist alternatives, alternatives that end up leading away from the real source of and solution to that oppression. Thus, in evaluating the question of lesbianism we need to approach it on the basis of the principal and broad interests of humanity, as concentrated in the outlook of the revolutionary proletariat. While finding the programmatic ways to unite and work together with others, including lesbians opposing the oppression of women and other crimes of this system, we must also continue to wage ongoing struggle over the key question of just what exactly is the source of women's oppression and what is therefore required to liberate women.

In brief, the heart of our disagreement with lesbianism is that in the final analysis lesbianism, and even radical lesbianism, represents and promotes a dead-end "alternative" to the dominant oppressive relations and an incorrect understanding of the source of women's oppression. It is in

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of the world and all social relations. A similar process will apply in the struggle against the ideology and material roots of homosexuality as it has taken form in class society, focusing on such things as the misogyny, defeatism, and, at best, reformism underlying homosexuality which are objective hindrances to the proletariat's struggle to make a thoroughgoing radical rupture with the past and completely refashion all social relations on a new basis, free of the stamp of the old oppression and exploitation.

essence a defeatist view of how to deal with this oppression, and it promotes reformism and a narrow conception of a future society and the struggle to achieve it. Ultimately it fails to make a thorough rupture with the dead hand of the past.

It should be stressed here that there is often an important difference between subjective desire and actual analysis and therefore program. Certainly there are many radical lesbians who genuinely aspire to a radical turning "right-side-up" of the present world and all or many of its social relations. But desire alone is not sufficient, and revolutionary transformations cannot take place through practice based on an incorrect assessment of the underlying causes of oppression.[7]

Without being firmly rooted in a materialist analysis of the source of the oppression of women, we are bound to miss the road which can lead to the complete liberation of women and humanity as a whole. And we should strive not to limit our sights: we should strive for nothing less than "the abolition of class distinctions generally . . . the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest . . . the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations" (Marx, 1977, p. 282).

By contrast, a number of theories have emerged in reaction to the oppression of women which profess the existence of some sort of inherent, absolutized, and ultimately biodetermined "nature" of men and "nature" of women divorced from the social context (take for example Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, which was hailed at the time and is still seen as a "classic" by many). Regardless of whether the fictionalized "inherent nature" of women is deemed to be "better" or "worse" than that of men, these arguments are not grounded in material reality (they certainly have no valid scientific basis) and such theories are detrimental to the struggle against the oppression of women. This is true not just because they are groundless and tend to concentrate a defeatist outlook but also because they feed right into the imperialists' current promotion of obscurantism and assorted theories assuring us of the immutability of the present social relations. This at a time when the objective need and emerging possibilities for thoroughgoing revolutionary transformations on a world scale are getting increasingly sharp. Falling back into arguing for some mythical "distinct nature" of women as well as men at a time like this constitutes a retreat from the challenges confronting us and can only end up being an accessory to the bourgeoisie's current offensive against women.

Many radical feminists (and radical lesbians, whose politics are an extension of the politics of radical feminism) reject such theories and seek the causes of women's oppression (and the basis for its elimination) in the sphere of social relations past and present. Yet they maintain important theoretical and ideological differences with revolutionary Marxism.

Feminism, as an ideology and social program, is clearly favored in one form or another by many who genuinely hate the existing social order, or at least the conditions women are subjected to within that order. Some (though not all) feminists recognize the need for a fundamental and thoroughgoing change in the social order as a whole. But *even at its most radical, feminism is in fact much too narrow and restrictive a social vision to fully unleash the potential of women for revolutionary change.* Feminist objectives vary greatly, but the struggles waged with that ideology to combat the oppression of women in existing society (be they openly reformist or of a more "radical bent") are all severely hampered and restricted by the common theoretical assessment that the oppression of women is THE principal underpinning and linchpin of the existing social order. The implication of this assessment is, of course, that this question should therefore be treated as the most essential, focal question in the struggle for fundamental social change. In particular, many radical feminists argue (incorrectly) that institutionalized patriarchy and the systematic oppression of women existed prior to the development of classes and therefore deny that the abolition of classes is today the key to women's liberation. This analysis — that patriarchy, divorced from the emergence of classes, is the source of

7. And here mention should also be made of the misandry (man-hating) which is prevalent among some lesbians, who sometimes go so far as to reject any type of associations with men or even with women who relate to men. Frankly, it is not difficult to understand how some women would come to bitterly "hate all men" given the relentless brutalization and degradation suffered by women at the hands of men. Not surprisingly, it is the people who are the most complacent and accepting of this state of affairs — of the brutally male supremacist character of the prevailing social system and of many of their own daily actions — who are the most apt to go berserk and spew venom at the mere mention of the fact that some women actually "hate men"! But while a certain satisfaction can be had at the thought of provoking such backward types into a frenzy, misandry nevertheless represents a wrong outlook and is an obstacle to the struggle against the oppression of women and all oppressive relations. We should, of course, draw a sharp distinction between oppressor and oppressed on this question: misandry cannot be put on a par with misogyny any more than the outlook of a Black person who comes to "hate all whites" as a result of national oppression can be put on a par with outlook of a Bernhard Goetz or with institutionalized racism and national oppression. It should, however, be recognized that misandry reflects a very narrow outlook on the question of the causes of the oppression of women and what must be done to end it. By targeting the sum of individual men as the enemy and source of this oppression (as opposed to the social system which gives rise to, promotes, and institutionalizes this oppression), not only are potential allies locked out, but the real enemy is let off the hook. This outlook seeks merely revenge and individualistic satisfaction. Ultimately it reveals itself to be reformist and utopian because it fails to understand how the oppression of women runs much deeper than the backward thoughts and practices of men, how it is literally built into the current social system and is integral to its functioning. It is necessary to grasp that the causes of the oppression of women reside not in men as such, but in a whole system of historically evolved social relations. Thus, what is required is to plunge beneath the surface phenomena to cut out the root through thorough social revolution.

women's oppression — is often put forward as "the theory behind the practice" of radical lesbianism.

By contrast we have argued that while the initial division of labor along sexual lines would have quite likely reflected a certain unevenness between men and women and possibly contained the seeds of incipient inequalities, it would have taken the emergence of institutionalized class divisions to turn the division of labor into a basis for the systematic oppression of one sex by another.

But, furthermore, we would take issue with the view that if institutionalized women's oppression (or even any earlier budding inequalities stemming from the division of labor) existed before the development of social classes, it necessarily follows that the struggle for the abolition of classes cannot be the principal means through which to seek the abolition of the oppression of women in modern times. Such a struggle is seen by many feminists as, at best, a parallel process, rather than as the key to a future in which all oppression among human beings has been eliminated and thoroughly uprooted, including between men and women. In fact, even if we were to accept the (incorrect) analysis that the *systematic* oppression of women by men historically predated, or somehow developed "independently" of, the emergence of class divisions and class exploitation in society, it would *still* remain the case that the abolition of all class distinctions (and all their underlying bases in the social conditions of production) is inseparable from, and at the heart of, abolishing *all* oppressive human social relations, including the oppression of women. Thus even at its most radical, feminism (and by extension lesbianism) as an ideology and social program ultimately condemns women to rattling but not shattering their chains and to limiting their sights to seeking some greater control over their own individual destinies — rather than taking responsibility, together with revolutionary men, for the future of the world and humanity as a whole.

While we cannot here go into a more thorough contrast between feminism and our own overall social vision (and again it should be said that "feminism" is a term which encompasses quite varied perspectives), we would focus on the essential point: that feminism, in the final analysis, does not point the way to thoroughly uproot all exploitation and oppression nor even to break the chains of oppression of women and that it ends up restricting the role of women in politics, even in a sense working against the view that the revolutionary movement *as a whole* must take up the woman question in all aspects of the class struggle. It is this difference in outlook which we think is at the root of some of the criticisms of our Party's *Programme* on women, "missing" its emphasis throughout the entire section on transforming society. The key question is what role to play in transforming society as a whole, including in relation to the oppression of women. Thus our Party's slogan: "Break the chains! Unleash the fury of women as a mighty force for revolution!"

To focus in on sexuality, whether heterosexual or homosexual, as the key link in the liberation of women — for example making it a defining issue of one's life and identity — relates to the oft-repeated statement that "the personal is political." This slogan was developed — often explicitly in opposition to politically active men with backward views on the woman question — to address the often real denial of there being any political questions involved in the character of personal relations between men and women. Certainly this contained (and contains) some very real truths, and rebellion against such denials was (and is) certainly justified. And there is no question that women's sexuality has been suppressed and distorted in both gross and subtle ways in the service of patriarchy. This should be understood and combated. But making the question of sexuality and personal relations a major *focus* of the overall struggle is narrowing, reformist, and ultimately defeatist.[8]

The stance that the "personal is political" is often the outlook behind the petty politics and concerns that often come to characterize attempts to build "alternative relations" as the end or central goal — whether in the form of an alternative women's community or in the case of individual relationships. Even the more radical expression of lesbianism, which presents itself as a programmatic way to abolish the nuclear family and the oppression of women, amounts to a very individualistic and futile attempt to transform sexual relations under capitalism and therefore ends up very conservative and restrictive.

Some revolutionary-minded lesbians have argued that issues in the personal sphere, including questions of sexual preference or identity, should indeed not be a major focus of the overall revolutionary movement and that there should therefore be no need for the party to evaluate lesbianism one way or another, as their personal morality is "entirely subordinate to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle." And in general some people have raised that they don't see how homosexuality poses a problem because it supposedly "in no way hinders the class struggle." But most homosexuals (male and female) do make the question of their sexuality, and sexuality in general, the essential and defining question of their life and identity and the focal point of their political and ideological perspective. This, and the misogyny of the ideology underlying male homosexuality, certainly does hinder the class struggle and specifically the struggle to combat the oppression of women. Beyond this, even for radical lesbians with a broader, more revolutionary perspective, the practice of lesbianism is an expression of an ideological position, an ideological "statement" concerning the oppression of women, and promotes an "alternative" to existing social relations between men and

8. A particularly backward example of where this can lead is the way some feminists justify the use of pornography on the grounds that since women's sexuality has been suppressed, women should not be denied this viable form of sexual expansion and expression, and that, instead, feminists should provide more. This is *crass* reformism and is often combined with the stunning demand for increased "worker control" of the sex industry!

women. What we have argued here is that the content of that "statement" is a logical extension and concentration of the ideology which informs radical feminism, with all the narrowing and reformist limitations that implies. And the practice of lesbianism therefore serves as an obstacle to individual proponents of lesbianism making a full, truly radical rupture with the whole of bourgeois ideology, especially as pertains to women.[9] Furthermore, the practice of lesbianism does not take place in a vacuum but in a social context: it is therefore not just a matter of "personal" concern but has a broader social impact, serving to actively promote an "alternative" outlook which, again, is narrow and reformist and ultimately turns people away from tackling straight up and in a revolutionary political way the question of the oppressive relations between men and women which are the norm in today's society. All this is how homosexuality "gets in the way," as seen from a revolutionary perspective.

Certainly an argument could be made — and has been — that lesbianism can in fact be empowering for women. There are a range of reasons put forward, such as: "[W]e are taught to hate ourselves because we are women and... we can love ourselves instead." "Being outside the dominant culture can give lesbians a certain freedom in shaping the kinds of relationships we want." "In many communities, a lot of the activist work that is being done to free all women from oppression is being done by lesbians. Not having this big emotional or economic dependence on men makes us able to do that. If you're not trying to get so much from men, you can often be more objective, assertive and powerful. That's the freedom we have to shape the world" (Boston Women's Health Book Collective, 1984, pp. 157, 146, 141).

It can frankly be stated that the overwhelming majority of women in bourgeois society who are involved in relationships with men are significantly hampered in their ability to contribute to social life generally and to revolutionary change in particular by those very relationships. This is a problem our party confronts every day in the course of revolutionary practice and is an issue which has been sharply addressed by Bob Avakian (see, for example, the interview "Questions for These Times," *Revolution*, No. 54, Winter/Spring 1986, pp. 50-51). It is a problem which has to be broken through as never before. But lesbianism hasn't succeeded in doing that and does not represent a means for doing so. Becoming a lesbian in these times, especially in the case of more conscious and revolutionary-minded individuals, may, to a certain extent, "free up" some women and allow them a bit more room to be independent, assertive, creative, etc., since it sometimes enables them to avoid the typically suffocating aspects of male-female relations, at least in the personal sphere. But this is only to a certain point, and always from a very individualized standpoint. Issues of the individual rights and rebellions (including the stance of upholding as an absolute the right to be homosexual or lesbian) do not reflect the broadest social vision or the most emancipating world outlook, including in relation to the question of how to abolish the oppression of women. No matter how radical it may be or appear to be at any given time, it stems from and reflects no more than the outlook of the radicalized petty-bourgeois democrat — it does not point to the real material basis and historical processes which underlie the oppression of women, as well as class exploitation and social antagonism generally, and it does not therefore grasp the basis for overturning all this and for completely revolutionizing human social relations, and with them morals, values, and ideas.

Thus our critique of lesbianism in modern society is certainly not that it wreaks havoc with mainstream social relations between men and women, or that it endangers that institution of female servitude known as The Family. Quite the contrary! Our critique of lesbianism focuses on the narrowness, defeatism, and ultimately bourgeois-democratic reformism embodied in the lesbian outlook, even at its most radical. In a word, it is still much too conservative.

Sexuality and Communism

It is often raised, with regard to the future of sexual relations, especially under socialist society — why is it that the Party "rules out" the progressiveness of lesbianism (or male homosexuality)? In other words, aren't we, in fact, making heterosexuality an absolute by criticizing the position that lesbianism should be upheld as a possible "relation of the future"?

First of all, this is hardly the central question around which life or the future revolves (or even the liberation of women at this point). (The fact that an inordinate preoccupation with sexuality is a feature of homosexuality generally — even if this is generally far more so among male homosexuals and often far more grotesque in its expression among a significant section of them — should once again be a tip-off as to the basic problems with the outlook concentrated in homosexuality.) Who knows what form or forms (if any) human sexuality will take in the future? Heterosexuality itself may be a mere option among many, or sexuality in general may even disappear in a society where the biology of individuals becomes even more fully irrelevant to the character of social relations and social organization. But this is a ways down the road. It is a fact, however, that the reality of society has raised the possibility of the development of sexuality increasingly free from the constraints of reproduc-

9. While, as has been pointed out, heterosexuality as a social phenomenon cannot be evaluated solely in terms of ideological content because of its ongoing connections to production and reproduction in today's world, the practice of heterosexuality nevertheless also has an important ideological component, which is more often than not permeated with the male supremacy and misogyny typical of the prevailing social relations in class-divided society. But the point here is that the content of the ideological "statement" being made through the practice of homosexuality — even in the case of radical lesbianism — in no way makes a thorough rupture with the prevailing ideology and social relations.

tion and exploitative relations, and people should speculate and dream about what might be possible.

Sexuality and marriage, especially in the imperialist citadels, have become less and less tied to the purpose of reproduction. And this is overall a very good thing and bound to become even more the case the more humanity advances. But, especially if viewing the revolutionary struggle as an international process, there is no question that heterosexuality and the family will be with us for quite a while and remain the dominant form of reproduction. For example, on a world scale the more feudal and land-based social relations of the family will — and do — exert a very strong pull.[10] In the imperiums and colonies people will overwhelmingly continue to engage in heterosexual relations — and in some recognizable form, the family — not only because of the tremendous habit and social custom ingrained into society for quite some time now, but because this still, by and large, conforms to the underlying economic base of society.

This will pose some difficulties and complications for the struggle to achieve communism, especially given what has become institutionalized heterosexuality (especially in the form of the traditional family) in the emergence of class society and the relations of oppression. Socialist society (or societies) will be unable to immediately rip up the ground from which all this springs. As long as this is the case, homosexuality and lesbianism will also continue as a concentrated ideological expression of the relations between men and women in the context of society overall. And just as in the case of heterosexuality, homosexuality too must be subjected to analysis and struggle on its objective role at any given point as part of sorting out and charting the path forward.

Given all this, the question of the unfettering of women to take part in the revolutionary transformation of every sphere of society and the smashing of all material and ideological fetters that stand in the way of women playing this kind of revolutionary role, including the exploitative relations between men and women, is of cardinal importance. It is out of this, in the tremendous mix of international and historical factors, that the future will be wrought in regard to the character of the future relations between men and women.

What Engels had to say on this is quite enlightening:

> What we can now conjecture about the way in which sexual relations will be ordered after the impending overthrow of capitalist production is mainly of a negative character, limited for the most part to what will disappear. But what will there be new? That will be answered when a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman's surrender with money or any other social instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other considerations than real love, or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will maintain their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual — and that will be the end of it. (Engels, 1967, p. 73)

There is much in Engels's spirit and method to learn from. There is an emphasis on breaking the fetters to genuine love between men and women. But there is also the understanding that society's perceptions of what is possible and desirable at this point is bound to be limited by what we want to abolish. Of course, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't conjecture and imagine what revolutionary changes are possible with regard to the question of sexuality. But while this may sound like something of a paradox, conjecture is all we can do at this point and it *will* be up to future generations to resolve these questions in practice. Especially once humanity attains communism, things are bound to be so different that we really have nothing but speculation and somewhat trippy imagination to go on (and there's certainly nothing wrong with that).

While we are certainly not willing to say that heterosexuality is a permanent category etched for all time in stone, who's to say exactly what this ultimately *will* mean? Who's to say that homosexuality or bisexuality will become dominant? Or for that matter, who's to say sex and love will play a role in society even recognizable by today's standards? Human beings may very well bring something entirely new into being. But even though it is an open question what sexual relations will be like under communism, it is clear that there will be no reaching that future point with the ideology that today produces homosexuality, or argues for it. □

10. Somewhat from the opposite angle, while the imperialist citadels are in an advanced stage of decay in regard to the traditional heterosexual family, they are also in the lead of the many misogynous decadent forms this is taking — porn, rape, battery, etc. This is important to point out because it is not the case that the Third World is somehow "holding back" or "lagging behind" the imperialist countries. The system of imperialism and its social relations as a whole are a fetter on the world — with enforced backwardness and heightened parasitism being complementary expressions of the need to uproot it the world over.

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