SOUTHAMPTON LABOUR BRIEFING

No. 6

1983

GAY LIBERATION AND SOCIALISM

The motion from St.Lukes, together with the Charter of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, contain a few modest proposals for fighting the oppression of Gay people. A significant minority of the population, perhaps 5-10%, consistently prefer partners of their own sex, while a further section have occasional Gay contacts. This pattern crosses all boundaries of age, gender, race, occupation and social class, and hence in Britain affects several million, the overwhelming majority of whom hide or refuse to recognise their sexual orientation.

The 1967 Sexual Offences Act has not truly legalised Gay relationships. Consenting adults in private are no longer prosecuted, but members of the armed forces and merchant navy, as well as men under 21 can still face criminal charges. The police harass Gay clubs, and can deport Gay non-citizens, while employers often discriminate, especially in work involving contact with children.

The CHE Charter demands an end to these forms of discrimination, but it also demands that society takes a positive attitude to Gay men and women, as real people with an equal contribution to make. With the rise of capitalism the nuclear family has been firmly established as the model of social relations. Gay people reject this model, and have come under ferocious attack, culminating in the Victorian notion of homosexuality as a disease. Socialists should vigorously resist any such notion, and the conclusions it leads to. It is clear that Gay relationships have occurred at all times, and in all places in human history, and are in fact part of the normal scope of human experience.

The image of sickness is evident in attitudes to the age of consent, and in work with children. The very high age of consent for Gay men (21) assumes that young men need to be protected, and in the absence of Gay contacts would be sure to grow up heterosexual. This denies the validity of Gay preferences , and ignores the fact that most people have a fairly clearly defined preference at a much earlier age. Similarly the assumption is that a Gay person will damage the development of (or even assault) children in their care. There does not seem to be any reason to suppose this is true - indeed ¾ of assaults on children are made by heterosexual men.

Lesbians are doubly oppressed. Not only does the family unit not support them (consider for example the likely living standard of a Lesbian couple with children) but there is a widespread disbelief that female sexualisty can exist in the absence of a man. Paradoxically they are then often denied custody of their children. Some of these questions are now being taken up in the Women's Liberation Movement, though less so in the Gay Movement, which remains very much male-orientated.

In the fight for Gay Liberation, Gay people will be in the forefront, asserting Gay pride and initiating political campaigns. But while individual "coming out" will remain important, the aim must be to change the society that oppresses Gay men and women under capitalism - a task that can only be achieved by the organised strength of the working class, who form the majority of the population, and therefore the majority of Gay people. This means we must, despite the difficulties, fight for the Trade Unions to adopt the struggle for Gay Liberation.

The isolation of Gay people as odd and sick poisons their lives with guilt and shame. Many withdraw into the stifling "Gay Community", while others deny their sexuality completely. True liberation therefore demands morethan legal tolerance - it demands a positive acceptance of a Gay lifestyle as a valid alternative. The arrival of a socialist society will offer all men and women an important new freedom - the freedom to fall in love without any concern for gender.

Richard Correll

CND Dayschool:- Building CND in the Workplace.
Agenda includes speakers and workshops on arms and jobs etc.

Saturday 16 April
from 10 am - 3.30 pm
at TGWU offices, London Rd
Registration fee 50p

The debate on the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy - John Denham replies to Gareth Narbed's article last month.

In last month's Southampton Labour Briefing there was in intemperate attack on Southampton Labour Left and the way individual members voted at the CLPD AGM. I'm grateful for the chance to reply.

1. SLLF does not have a policy of its own so these are personal views.
2. I voted for CLPD to register because I am in favour of Party democracy, and in particular, the sovreignty of conference. This must include the right of conference to take decisions, not only on policy, but also on the way the internal affairs of the Party are conducted. This includes the right of the conference to take decisions we on the left disagree with. (I opposed groups registering before the conference.)
3. CLPD has been succesful because it has been able to unite a whole section of the Party behind democratic demands. If the left decides democracy is just a tactic to be used when it suits them we will never win. (It doesn't bode well for socialism either!)

Unfortunately there was a classic example of this at the Labour CND AGM. It voted for unilateralism to be in the manifesto because it was passed by conference. It also voted against registration because it doesn't like it! The whole thrust of the peace campaign is jeopardised by such unprincipled antics.

The same problem came up at CLPD. After campaigning for NEC control of the manifesto for years, the AGM voted against it this year, because it does not like the current NEC.

4. There is no doubt about my opposition to witch-hunts. I believe CLPs should refuse to recognise expulsions (because the NEC has gone way beyond the conference decision) until the individuals have at least been able to appeal to conference.

But the key question is how do we reverse the witch-hunts? The trade union vote is the vital factor. I believe it is very unlikely that the TUs will reverse their position completely at this years conference. Hence the left should campaign to take control of the register out of the hands of the NEC and to place strong safeguards on the rights of groups to organise. This is a winnable position if those opposed to witch-hunts unite on it.

5. Although opposed to all expulsions I do believe party members have the right to full information about groups operating within the Party. The secretive, sometimes downright dishonest, organisation of some Trotskyist groups has nothing to do with democratic socialism, and, without it, it is unlikely that the with-hunt would have got as far as it has.

John Denham

SOUTHAMPTON LABOUR BRIEFING and SOCIALIST ACTION

Southampton Labour Briefing has now been produced for six months. Each month we have tried to cover both local and national issues of importance to Party activists. SLB has been produced by members of Southampton Labour Party in general agreement with the views of the weekly newspaper Socialist Challenge.

Socialist Challenge ceased publication last month. Some of those involved in its production have started a new paper, Socialist Action, edited by Alan Freeman. This paper aims to be a revolutionary socialist voice in the Labour Party, the trade unions and the peace movement, and amongst youth. It is an open paper, opening its columns to all those fighting against the Tories and their friends, open to all those fighting for a Labour government committed to socialist policies.

SLB has decided to support the new paper, and will be selling it at the GC, ward meetings, and in local trade union branches. We think its views and its policies will be of interest to all Labour Party members.

Socialist Action can also be obtained from October Books, 4 Onslow Road, or from Mike Tucker by phoning Southampton 39851. Further details of discussion meetings organised by us can also be obtained from the above number.

MAY DAY 1983

There will be a festival and social organised by Southampton Trades Council involving exhibitions, stalls, films, games and speakers, including Reg Race at 6.30, and the PPCs. In the evening there will be a live band and a disco.

Venue: Mountbatten Theatre
Sunday 1st May, 3 - 11 pm
Tickets £1.70, and £1 unwaged
(includes food). Children free.