

# theory+practice

20p FREE WITH SOCIALIST OUTLOOK

## The challenge of lesbian and gay liberation



Andrew Ward

Lesbian and gay pride 1988: the decline of the family is not a right-wing myth, people who live in a traditional heterosexual family are a minority of the population

**T**HE STRUGGLE of lesbians and gay men for equal rights has become a part of the political agenda in Britain in the last decade. The early eighties saw important advances in the understanding of the issue within the labour movement. Local councils, led by the example of the Greater London Council, adopted and publicly defended controversial lesbian and gay rights policies. The solidarity of the lesbian and gay communities in the miners' strike of 1984-85 broke down many barriers.<sup>1</sup> In 1985 both the TUC and the Labour Party adopted good policy positions, and the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) has fought successfully to maintain that victory through four party conferences.

There has been a vigorous right-wing counter-attack. The Tories whipped up bigotry against Labour policy in the 1987 general election and followed their vic-

tory with the notorious section 28 of the local government act, a direct ban on promoting positive images of lesbian and gay sexuality in education. Further legislative attacks have followed, with amendments to the human fertilisation and embryology bill, paragraph 16 of the government's guidelines on fostering and adoption and clause 25 of the criminal justice bill.

Meanwhile police forces have stepped up their harassment of the lesbian and gay communities and there has been a rising tide of violent assault and murder against lesbians and gay men. Why is this so and why should lesbian and gay liberation be part of the socialist agenda?

Supporters of Socialist Outlook have long been leading activists in the lesbian and gay struggle. Here we give an outline of positions which have been developed through many years of activity and discussion.



## What is sexuality?

OUR NECESSARY starting point is that all sexuality – not only homosexuality – is socially and historically, not biologically, determined.

The human species has developed a capacity unknown to lower animals. Our sexual activity is not restricted to periods when the female is able to reproduce. It is not tied to the reproductive cycle. We are capable of sex and sensuality for their own sake. We are capable of sex for pleasure. We are capable of sexual arousal independently of the presence of the opposite sex. Children are capable of masturbation well before puberty. Human beings have also developed the capacity for sensual and sexual stimulation and pleasure through many forms of activity quite apart from orgasm- or reproduction-related intercourse. Human beings have always had the capacity for sexual pleasure with members of the same sex.

The argument that homosexuality is in some way 'unnatural' is inconsistent with any world view except those which place religious or mystical significance in the act of heterosexual intercourse. The biological reproductive function of sex is likewise determined by non-biological factors, not least of which is the form of social organisation. The vulnerability of the human child and the long time before it is capable of fending for itself played a major role in determining forms of social organisation in early societies. The increasing sophistication of modern society and the application of some measures of socialisation have removed even this imperative in industrial societies. There is certainly no question, nor has there ever been, that the level of homosexual activity has reached the point where the future existence of the human species is likely to be endangered. And lesbians and gay men do have

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children, either through heterosexual intercourse or through artificial insemination.

This determines a second very important conclusion: lesbians and gay men are not a fixed minority in society. The capacity for non-heterosexual sexual activity is not restricted to one of those oft-repeated percentages.

If it were the case that forms of sexual expression which did not conform to the heterosexual norm were the result of biology, or heredity, or of medical defects, or were some form of psychological disorder which could be 'cured', all of which have been argued and tested countless times without success, then the unfortunate five per cent would be people whose rights needed defending but whose interests would not be central to the class struggle. If it were the case that homosexual behaviour – restricted as it is in public perceptions to secret social circles, ruling class boudoirs, public schools and the armed forces – was the preserve throughout history of a small effete layer of unfortunate outcasts whose upbringing had gone wrong somewhere along the line, we should wonder why it is that from the bible and before to Dame Jill Knight and Norman Tebbit there has been a strong interest in society which has called for the extermination either of the practice or of the practitioners, or indeed of both.

Someone taking the liberal view of homosexuality as the preserve of a fixed minority, a view common in wide sections of the gay male movement, would argue that all this fuss about the positive images of lesbian and gay sexuality in schools and lesbians having custody of their children and both lesbians and gay men being allowed anywhere near anybody's children was irrational because, after all, lesbians are born lesbian and straights are born straight so what on earth is the problem?

This is precisely the argument of many in the labour movement who capitulate to biological determinism. Such a view flies in the face of the real, personal experiences of lesbians and gay men who have been through a process of discovering their sexuality. It is disproved by the effects of real movements of sexual liberation. It cannot explain the prevalence of homophobia.

If instead we adopt the historical materialist

method used by Engels in his *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* we can justify the conclusions we have reached. (Engels and Marx themselves unfortunately failed to consider seriously these issues, their references to contemporary pioneers of homosexual rights like Ulrichs being models of Victorian bigotry.)

What we know of history – and there is a growing literature of the place of homosexuality in most periods – demonstrates an important further proposition. There is a firm connection between the place of women in society and the degree of toleration or otherwise of sexual behaviour which falls outside the heterosexual reproductive role. The apparent exceptions prove on close examination only to reinforce the point. The more women were closely bound to a solely reproductive role, and their own sexuality denied, the more any form of non-reproductive or deviant sexual behaviour was liable to suppression.

## Capitalism and sexuality

IT IS critically important to understand that before capitalism homosexuality was a form of behaviour to be denounced as sinful or a crime but something to which any person might fall prey. It was not the basis for describing and characterising a specific group of people.

There is no space to examine the historical evidence here. But the critical stages – the emergence of specific lesbian and gay identities – can be traced to the epoch of capitalism. There are also important continuing debates as to the exact relationship between patriarchy, heterosexism and the family which it is not possible to discuss here.

The gigantic social transformation wrought by the triumph of capitalism established a social regime whose eternal naturalness has only been visibly challenged through the specific development of the social crisis of late capitalism. It is indeed a tribute to the ideological power of capitalism that so many, including many marxists, have failed to grasp the transitory nature of the family system established as part of a new economic order and have therefore handed a weapon of breathtaking power to the class enemy.

The family of the proletariat was moulded after the model of the family of the bourgeoisie which became established with the rise of the capitalist mode of production. Women were forced into the role of child-bearer and home-maker. The ideological basis was established for justifying the expulsion of women from the workforce when this was necessary for capitalism, such as during the slumps which heralded the age of imperialism. And the material basis was established on which capitalism could attempt to build a relatively stable

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social order. The family has played a major role ever since in keeping capitalism in control.

To accompany the material form of social organisation there came the ideology to justify it. The subordination of women to men, of whatever class, had to be shown to be natural. Likewise it had to be the case that the only natural form of sexual activity was individual heterosexual attachment. Not far behind came the laws to give the state the power to enforce the natural order and suppress deviancy.

In Britain in 1885 there were a series of measures against prostitution and male homosexuality. (An attempt to criminalise lesbianism fell in the House of Lords in 1921 – for fear that publicity would encourage it.) Similar laws

were being enacted around the same time in Germany and in other capitalist states. The durability of these laws has been remarkable. It was 1967 in Britain before the worst excesses of the Labouchere amendment of 1885 were moderated and in Ger-

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many it was the 1970s before paragraph 175 of the Prussian penal code was reconsidered.

From the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries homosexual sub-cultures – such as the 'molly houses' of London – developed in the major cities of Europe. The first co-ordinated attacks by municipal governments took place around 1730 in Holland and England. In this period of early capitalism there began to develop a homosexual identity. With the process of legislative and scientific recognition heterosexuality became for the first time a category, a fixed type. Homosexuality also became for the first time a type, the opposite of heterosexuality. The coming into being of a group of people defined by their deviance from the normal, homosexuals, was an historical innovation. The word itself was invented in the mid nineteenth century. Prior to that there had been words for various forms of sexual activity – buggery, sodomy and so on – but no word to describe a group of people characterised by sexual attraction to their own sex.

It didn't happen in a moment, and there were different processes for lesbians and gay men and for members of different classes – but the identities were in place by the late nineteenth century in the capitalist world.

The processes differ in non-capitalist societies. In backward rural societies homosexual behaviour takes place as it always has but the conditions do not exist for the emergence of lesbian and gay identity as such.<sup>2</sup>

The establishment of lesbian and gay identities in the west laid the basis for a fight back. The earliest homosexual rights movements rapidly took off in Britain, Germany and the United States, demanding the repeal of the repressive legislation. The history of these movements, which fascism, stalinism and the bourgeoisie between them have attempted to erase from the records, is a fascinating rejoinder to those who wish to see lesbian and gay liberation solely as a recent phenomenon. The extent of these movements, especially in Germany, was dramatic testimony to the emergence of the new identity. Their political ideology was predominantly based on the theory that homosexuals were a 'third sex', a female soul in a male body or vice versa. Despite the limitation of this determinist view, Magnus Hirschfeld's campaign in Germany took on a Europe-wide dimension, made serious inroads into the Social Democratic Party, where Bernstein was an early champion, and took part also in the resistance to fascism. The Nazis rapidly set about the annihilation of the campaign, its institutions, and any record of its previous existence.

In the early Soviet Union, where there was no material and social basis for the existence of such a vigorous movement, the Bolsheviks repealed tsarist legislation which penalised homosexuality. It was Stalin who as part of the process of re-establishing the family as the basic social unit during the thirties reimposed strict penalties, such that it is only since the advent of glasnost that the long-repressed voices of lesbians and gay men are beginning to find an expression.

## The present crisis

THE POST-WAR boom saw women drawn again into the workforce, the extension of education and the media, youth culture and spending power. The social consequences are well known: traditional values were questioned, marriage stability was ended with a massive rise in the divorce rate, and



there was more sex for its own sake as contraception improved and became more available. It led to a period when the eternal values we may have been brought up to believe in all of a sudden became legitimate targets.

That which had been presumed to be natural and eternal was no longer seen as such. Alternatives could exist and the material space was being created in which experimentation outside of the traditional forms could be entered into. And it was, on a massive scale, especially among the younger generation.

The dramatic appearance of the women's liberation movement was the most fundamental development. Out of this sprang also the new gay liberation movement, sparked by the resistance of the customers in New York's Stonewall bar to a

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police raid in the summer of 1969 – an event commemorated in lesbian and gay pride marches throughout the western world each June.

For a while it seemed that capitalism could absorb the demands of these new movements without undergoing significant structural changes. Thus there came into being the vast new markets in the United States and Britain aimed at gay men because gay men have more economic power than lesbians. Gay clubs, discos, bars, social organisations and pornography mushroomed in the great metropolitan centres. A milieu was created, often for the profit of heterosexual businessmen, in which it became possible for a gay male community to develop and flourish: a scene in which those cast out from their homes, alienated from their backgrounds, experimenting with their sexuality, could carve out a precarious existence. One can talk to gay men who (in ironic contrast with the heterosexuals who often assert the opposite) declare that they never talk to, mix with or even see straight people any more.

Within this social transformation, increasing numbers of people were enabled to discover that they were not as straight as they had always thought they were and, because of this new subculture, were in many cases able to come out and live their lives as lesbians and gays.

Of course the big cities provided an escape only for those with some social and economic independence. Lesbians in particular, because of the economic subjection of women, were much less able to break free of their fettered roles as wives and mothers. Working class lesbians and gay men had much less freedom to abandon their homes and communities. But increasing numbers did so, as a visible alternative came into being.

The 'permissive society' was not without its contemporary ruling class critics. But it was the onset of economic crisis in the seventies and eighties which brought with it serious attempts to reverse the social changes of the sixties. An attempt to re-assert traditional family values was a major feature of the eighties and a key part of Tory philosophy under Thatcher. The virulence of the attacks associated with the re-assertion of the family indicates the perceived depth of the breakdown of the family and its associated traditions.

The decline of the family is not a myth of the right wing. Its reality is evidenced by the rise in the divorce rate, (which, when measured against the remarriage rate, demonstrates the end of the monogamous tradition), the number of single-parent families and the slipping in the proportion of people who actually live in the traditional heterosexual family structure into a minority of the population in Britain. It is evidenced by the government's own social trends surveys, the most recent of which demonstrates the growing popular acceptability of much of this social reality, with the

significant exception of the rating for the acceptability of homosexuality – for which the AIDS hysteria since the mid eighties must bear considerable responsibility.

We must not confuse the end of a process with the continuing process itself. The social crisis has been deep and prolonged, undermining the family as a social prop of capitalism and its accompanying ideology. But changes in popular consciousness have lagged a long way behind changes in reality and the reactionary trends of the period of Tory rule have reinforced and promoted racism, sexism and heterosexism.

Interestingly, it has been petty bourgeois sectors – police chiefs, local politicians and parish priests – who have often led the morality crusades. Mary Whitehouse, James Anderton, and Geoffrey Dickens speak for this layer. Their voice is not always in tune with that of big finance capital which has other immediate interests such as cheap female labour, mass unemployment and other causes of the very social instability which terrifies the petty bourgeoisie.

**Democratic demands and the  
challenge of liberation**

STATE AND legal repression of lesbians and gay men in Britain is particularly violent, if often inconsistent. Male homosexuality was made totally illegal in 1885 and the situation was only partially liberalised by the 1967 sexual offences act which contained provisions which made it possible for gay men to be criminalised in many different ways, a discriminatory age of consent – 21 as opposed to 16 for heterosexuals – being only the most obvious. Similarly lesbianism, while never illegal, is also severely repressed by the state, the regular denial of child custody being the most blatant form of discrimination. Both lesbians and gay men suffer from a very biased use of many old public order laws, some of which are now used solely to control the lives of men and women who do not conform to the heterosexual norm. The police often use their increasing powers to raid pubs and clubs, to harass

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and to intimidate. The courts tend to back up the police. Institutions such as industrial tribunals and immigration authorities refuse to accept the validity of homosexual relationships.

Legislation designed to outlaw discrimination does not include lesbians and gays; indeed it is the public policy of the law that homosexuality is inferior and therefore appropriate grounds for discrimination. Despite overwhelming evidence that sexual abuse of children is disproportionately caused by heterosexuals, it remains the case that lesbians and gays are particularly vulnerable to persecution in any situation where contact with children is concerned. Young lesbians and gays themselves are particularly penalised, often being placed in social service care, with the argument that unlike heterosexuals, they are unable to decide their own sexuality and are vulnerable to being 'recruited' into homosexuality.

The outlawing of discrimination in employment, custody, housing, immigration, social services and all other areas in which it is institutionalised, and the repeal of all laws which discriminate against lesbians and gay men, is rightly the immediate goal of the movement for liberation. Due to the work of LCLGR, it is also now official policy of the Labour Party, and even if its implementation will clearly be an even harder struggle than winning the policy in the first place, that gain has given a respectability to the demands which enables continuing work to be done in educating the labour movement.

Much support has been won for these democratic demands from wide forces in the labour movement and beyond. Their achievement will radically alter the lives of millions and also begin to confront social oppression; official discrimination is after all a crucial prop of popular prejudice. But

equal rights, while a necessary stage, are not sufficient to end oppression. So how does lesbian and gay liberation represent part of the socialist challenge to the capitalist order?

We outlined above how the family is a central prop of capitalism. As a form of social organisation the family and its associated ideology oppresses women, young people and lesbians and gay men – whether they live in a nuclear family arrangement or not. The struggle for the right to express lesbian and gay sexuality freely – the struggle against compulsory heterosexuality – is a necessary part of the struggle against the family.

Campaigns for lesbian and gay rights, so basic when stated but so vigorously opposed by the state and the right wing, confront profound social questions at every turn, not because the workers' movement in the current period is by and large willing to raise these issues, but because every tentative step taken which genuinely confronts oppression – such as the positive images in education policy – immediately brings forth the counterblast that family values and all things moral are under threat: as indeed they are. They bring forth the riposte that young people can be taught to be lesbian and gay: and if sexuality is not predetermined but conditioned, that is true too – and must be defended, not defensively denied.

The example of millions of lesbians and gay men openly living their lives shows that there are alternatives, now, to the compulsory, eternal, heterosexual nuclear family. The lesbian and gay rights struggle is evidence of the 'old society preg-

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nant with the new'. Of course only the ending of alienated capitalist relations can produce genuinely free social and sexual relations, the sexism and racism of the gay scene is evidence enough of that. But the dramatic opening up of lesbian and gay sexuality for millions in the post-sixties generation provides a powerful signal of the enormous social changes under way, harbingers of explosive changes to come.

The women's and lesbian and gay movements have developed a broader understanding than traditional marxism of compulsory heterosexuality and of the role of the family within capitalist society. It is not just that women are subordinated to men economically, it is also that women's sexuality is denied and suppressed to the point of invisibility. Lesbian sexuality especially, which shows not only that women have a sexuality of their own but that women can achieve sexual and emotional satisfaction without a man at all, is either taboo, or else the object of male violence or pornographic titillation.

The struggle is also a means of breaking down the traditional barrier between things which are regarded as a public concern and those which are seen as private questions of human nature or psychology. The rapid transformation which has taken place through the self-organisation of lesbians and gay men in the labour movement in the last few years represents the first beginnings of this process. Such self-organisation will surely play its part in the struggle to change the labour movement into a force which genuinely stands at the head of all the oppressed. It will challenge the ruling class ideology which has sunk such deep roots into the labour movement to such negative effect.

Lesbian and gay liberation is not just about the liberation of lesbians and gay men. It is necessarily part of the liberation of all sexuality. While the alienation of heterosexual relations or the angst of straight men cannot be equated with the oppression of lesbians and gay men, the violence, competitiveness, anxiety and misery within all sexual relationships are in part the consequence of heterosexual suppression of deviance and male suppression of women's sexuality. Sexuality is a central part of human existence and all sexual relations remain alienated while lesbian and gay sexuality is oppressed.

The lesbian and gay sexual identity created



under capitalism will disappear at the same time as the disappearance of both categories, homosexual and heterosexual, and the coming about of a genuinely free form of sexual relations between human beings. The only way the freeing of all sexuality can be brought about is through a socialist revolution. Lesbian and gay liberation is clearly therefore a component of the socialist revolution.

### The necessity of autonomy

OUR ANALYSIS has important strategic conclusions, one of which is support for the autonomous organisation of lesbians and gay men. It is vital that the struggle against a particular form of oppression is led by those who suffer that oppression. It is solely through the work of lesbian and gay organisations that progress has been made at all. If lesbians and gays had entrusted their fate to those on the left who do not support autonomous organisation none of the recent achievements would

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have been secured.

Heterosexism is so deeply implanted that the oppression of lesbians and gay men will not cease with the advent of socialism. The autonomous organisation of lesbians and gays will continue to be a necessary part of transforming society for quite some time to come. Socialist revolution is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberation.

There is an even more basic reason why it is essential to support the autonomous movements. Without the existence of a vigorous, wide-ranging movement which is public and tangible, it would not be possible for individual lesbians and gay men to come to terms with their sexuality, and to make the first step without which there could not even be a struggle: to 'come out'.

Once more we must distinguish between lesbians and gay men, for it is the reality that the two are oppressed in different ways, have different priorities, organise in different ways. Lesbians have faced sexism from gay men and heterosexism in the women's movement. Lesbians must have the right to autonomous organisation within the women's movement, the gay movement and the labour movement.

### The rise of lesbian and gay movements in Britain

THE MOVEMENT which came into being after 1971 in Britain had two main components: a right wing composed primarily of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) and the libertarian-dominated Gay Liberation Front (GLF).

CHE was large but its politics were lobbyist, its membership male and its impact was and continues to be small. The influence on the other hand of the smaller GLF was far wider than the number of people who were ever directly involved. It was a

#### Footnotes

- 1 Lesbians and gays have long organised in support of working class struggles. The difference here was that the National Union of Mineworkers responded favourably and in the course of the struggle a real breakthrough was made, giving access and respectability for lesbian and gay demands in trade unions and parts of the Labour Party where the words had never been spoken publicly before. Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners gave rise to similar solidarity campaigns with the printers' struggle that followed.
- 2 This is an enormous subject. There are large and developing lesbian and gay movements in a number of developing countries, notably Mexico and Brazil. They are based in the big cities. The Sandinista revolution enabled a small movement to begin in Nicaragua.
- 3 Nalco has a lesbian and gay group which has campaigned successfully for official recognition. Apart from specific factors – the structure of the union, the pioneering work done on the rights of women and black members – the local government connection is important. Councils in the early 1980s were the site of the most public lesbian and gay rights initiatives, encouraged by a new generation of Labour leaders broadening the traditional left social democratic agenda. The real gains were small but the public image was very significant. Now, with the unrelenting Tory attack on local democracy and the defeat of the Labour left, the municipal road to lesbian and gay equality has been effectively closed off. Other unions do not have the same level of self-organisation, but their leaderships have been won to taking public stances on issues, and distributing material to their members. This level of support (COHSE, NUPE, TGWU, MSF) has reinforced the fight for national Labour Party policy and will be vital in the years ahead – but it will require the self-organisation of lesbian and gay members (such as has just begun in MSF) to keep up the pressure and make it possible to educate and win the support of the membership.

revolutionary movement in the sense that it challenged the notion that lesbian and gay sexuality was inferior to heterosexuality and saw the oppressiveness of the nuclear family. Its activities were public and campaigning.

The GLF had all the strengths and weaknesses of the sixties counter-culture. It argued that the revolution was inevitable and was something to live out now; the trade unions and Labour Party were organisations of the past and weren't worth bothering about. Its attitude to women's oppression was contradictory. Gay men saw their oppression as stemming from gender stereotypes but tended to see these as equally oppressive to both men and women. Influenced by strands of radical feminism they saw heterosexual penetration as the basis of women's oppression by men. The adoption of radical drag was seen by some as an important strategy for breaking down gender divisions and they couldn't understand why some women found this offensive.

A critical political difference is concealed by the GLF argument that under capitalism sexuality is merely repressed, that the aim of the struggle is to 'take the lid off' our sexuality. On the contrary, we maintain that sexuality is constructed socially, not sitting waiting to be released.

The GLF as an organisation did not last very long but its politics continued to influence the movement in a significant sense. The failure of the left as a whole even to try to understand the issues and its spasmodic and sometimes parasitical involvement in the campaigns compounded the

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tendency towards dismissal of the labour movement in general and the far left in particular, which continues to this day.

The last ten years have witnessed a big increase in lesbian and gay self-organisation inside the labour movement. There are lesbian and gay groups in many British unions (the most influential being in white-collar unions like the National and Local Government Officers' Association and the National Union of Teachers, where it is easier to organise) and as a consequence many now have good policy and have to begin to take stands.<sup>3</sup> Initially encouraged by the supportive stance of the Labour left after 1979, activists within the party built up the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights into an effective force which pushed a reluctant party leadership to the verge of promising to deliver its conference policies.

### Lesbian self-organisation

LESBIANS HAVE generally been more politically active and more radical than gay men. There has not been any gay male equivalent to lesbian feminism, which has a gender-based non-libertarian approach to sexual politics explicitly based on an analysis of women's oppression. Lesbians' radicalism reflects their gender and lack of vested interests in capitalism.

The relationship between lesbians and gay men has often been uneasy. Neither CHE nor GLF took

women's oppression seriously, so lesbians tended to organise within the women's movement. After ten years of a flowering of lesbian groups around different foci and political positions, in the face of common attacks and with the self-confidence which has developed, lesbians are working more both within the women's movement and with gay men. Both the women's movement and the more radical wing of the gay movement have begun to understand that if these alliances are to be sustained there is a need for lesbian self-organisation within them and that the movement as a whole must take up the needs of lesbians.

Lesbian feminism has provided an innovative analysis of compulsory heterosexuality which was especially powerful given the lack of such an analysis from a socialist perspective. The weakness of the left on these issues allowed lesbian feminism to dominate the lesbian political arena. There is an urgent need to develop a class-based feminism.

It has not just been among lesbians that self-organisation has developed over the past few years. Black lesbian and gay groups and centres have begun to flourish, as have groups of lesbians and gay men with disabilities, older lesbians and gay men and young lesbians and gays. Each of them have presented challenges to the movement as a whole to take up their particular demands and make space for their voices to be heard. Such challenges have not always been positively met but certainly the movement now is broader, more receptive and more representative than ever.

### The outlook

THE TORY right understands better than the left the challenge of lesbian and gay liberation. Only its most extreme wing argues for complete criminalising of homosexuality. Its approach has usually been to allow lesbians and gay men their place – which in Tory thinking should be extremely private. It is the public challenge of a lesbian and gay movement which is part of a social upheaval which threatens the stability of the capitalist order which they cannot tolerate.

Much of the labour movement now agrees that direct discrimination should be ended. Only a minority currently accepts the crucial importance of fighting for a recognition of lesbian and gay sexuality as being of equal value, such as was recognised in positive images campaigns. But you cannot combat discrimination unless you understand there is no basis for it. Instead we have seen Labour strive to become the 'party of the family'. Hence the battles required to force Labour MPs to oppose section 28, to do anything at all about lesbians' right to donor insemination or lesbian and gay rights to foster and adopt, or even to get them to support such an elementary democratic and human right as an equal age of consent.

Fortunately, the lesbian and gay movements do mobilise around such attacks. It is, however, a hard task to win any support for socialist politics within the communities, given the failure of both the labour movement and its left to champion lesbian and gay struggles. To make real the essential connection between lesbian and gay liberation and socialist revolution that separation must be ended. The left must understand and adopt as its own the struggle for lesbian and gay equality, both in the future and in the battles of today ●

### theory + practice

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