

British

Communists on

Homosexuality

The following is a speech by Dave Cook, National Organiser of the CPGB, to the Executive Committee of that party, meeting on September 11 and 12, 1976. The speech is followed by a statement adopted by the committee at the meeting.

Homosexual men and women in Britain face discrimination and oppression in law, behaviour and attitudes - especially in the widely held belief that homosexuality is a sickness; something that is abnormal or indecent.

On the rare occasions that gay people are shown in the media they are either figures of fun or seriously disturbed people. There are very few portrayals of gay lifestyles with which homosexuals can identify.

The idea that homosexuals are likely to corrupt children, or to assault them, has been shown to be false by social and psychological research. People do not become homosexuals through association with older homosexuals.

Nor are homosexual people any more likely to interfere with children than are heterosexuals. Yet the widespread acceptance of these ideas means that the courts do not give lesbian mothers the custody of their own children and also leads to harassment of gays in jobs dealing with children such as teaching and social work. In Tower Hamlets, NALGO are at present fighting the case of a victimised gay social worker.

Anyone, in any type of employment, who comes out openly as gay, can jeopardise their future. Often many suffer instant dismissal. This results in a situation where gay people are forced to deny, or to conceal their homosexuality in order to stay in their jobs.

The majority of gay people feel they have to live secret, guilty lives, alienated from the society in which they live. Some have accepted the idea that they are sick and are appalled by their own sexuality.

This has helped to reinforce people's ideas that homosexuals are neurotic and disturbed. It is important that since the gay movement has asserted that homosexuality is within the normal spectrum of sexuality, many gay people have felt self-respect for the first time.

Oppression also takes a more violent form for many - such as physical assault and abuse, and police harassment. Over recent months violent attacks have been made on three Gay Centres in London.

The resolution on women adopted at our last national Congress committed the party to fight sexist attitudes wherever they appear.

These hostile attitudes to homosexuals are essentially sexist.

Their basis is firstly that men and women are expected to perform clear cut roles in economic, social and cultural life. Homosexuality threatens this and questions traditional ideas about sexual identity. Secondly ideas about the unnaturalness of homosexuality arise from the belief that all sexual relations between people of the same sex are unnatural because they do not lead to procreation.

Although only a small minority of homosexuals have been involved in it, the gay movement has led thousands of people to political conclusions which question capitalism. The fight for homosexual rights developed mainly in Germany and England during the last half of the 19th century.

Today in Britain the movement has several parts; the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), which grew out of the campaign to reform the law on homosexuals in the 1960s. The Gay Liberation Front developed in response to increasing openness and militancy by gay people, particularly in the USA. There are also lesbian groups and conferences and Gay Societies in Colleges and Universities.

CHE now has a membership of between 5,000 and 6,000 and 130 branches. The fortnightly newspaper *Gay News*, now in its fourth year, has a circulation of 20,000.

There are the beginnings of involvement in the labour and trade union movement, with the formation of unofficial gay groups in several trade unions, gay participation in left demos, and particularly in anti-fascist activity. Gay workers' conferences have been held.

We as Marxists are concerned with all aspects of oppression. The tasks of winning the working class to play a leading part in the struggle for socialism; of raising the political understanding of working people and of bringing together into anti-monopoly unity the various progressive social and political forces - all these three objectives will themselves be divided and held back if the oppression for example of women, of racial minorities and all other oppressed minorities, homosexuals included, is not actively opposed by the working class.

In this sense the fight on behalf of oppressed minorities in society, is not only for the "benefit" of these minorities. It is also part of the struggle to raise the political understanding and unity of the working people as a whole. The process of discussing, understanding and combatting the oppression experienced by minorities in society can help people to recognise and to understand the ideas and the forces which oppress all working people.

The party must declare itself totally opposed to discrimination and oppression against homosexuals. In the socialist Britain which is our goal, we want the oppression of homosexuals to have no place.

We need to recognise that this means that we must help to oppose sexist and anti-gay, attitudes wherever they occur, including in our own party.

We need to recognise that much more than changes in law will be necessary to achieve homosexual liberation - but, as in the fight against racism and discrimination against women, campaigns to change the law can themselves become powerful reinforcements to the process of changing attitudes.

Finally to assist these changes in law and attitudes we should set up a committee to promote discussion and analysis and to help our gay comrades play a part in the gay movement and this could be paralleled in the districts where the District Committee feels it would be helpful.

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STATEMENT ADOPTED ON SEPTEMBER 11-12:

The Communist Party opposes discrimination and victimisation against homosexuals, and supports the following changes in law:

No distinction

The criminal law should not distinguish homosexual activities from heterosexual activities. This means that ...

- (a) The law should be the same in Scotland and Northern Ireland as it is in England and Wales.
- (b) Homosexual acts should be legal for men and women in the armed forces and on merchant ships.
- (c) The age of consent should be the same as for heterosexual acts, with the same allowance for a "reasonable belief" that the other party was over age.
- (d) Penalties for indecent assault should be the same if the victim is a male as if the victim is a female.
- (e) The definition of privacy should be the same as for heterosexual acts.
- (f) It should not be an offence to publish contact advertisements for homosexual relationships.
- (g) No enactment or by-law should prohibit conduct between persons of the same sex if it does not also prohibit similar conduct between persons of opposite sexes.

No discrimination

Just as there has been legislation to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sex or race,

so legislation should be passed to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the following fields:-

- (a) Employment - to cover recruitment, training, promotion and job security.
- (b) Education, including professional training and qualifications.
- (c) The provision of goods, facilities and services, especially in housing and in places for meetings, conferences and socials.

Beyond law

It is important to recognise that much more than legal reform is necessary to achieve homosexual liberation.

Homosexuality should no longer be regarded as a mental illness in itself requiring aversion therapy.

Gay parents should not be excluded from having custody of their children on the grounds that they do not live a conventional heterosexual way of life.

There should be sex education and social studies curricula in schools that include free discussion of homosexuality. There should be no ban of speakers from gay organisations addressing school and college students.

Police harassment of gay people should stop.

A fundamental change in attitude will require political struggle and work to change the general climate of opinion which is hostile to, or derisive of, homosexuals. In this, the campaign to end the oppression of homosexuals in law can make a major contribution.

We must help to combat sexist and anti-gay attitudes wherever they are found, including among the left, in the labour movement and in our own party.

The Communist Party supports the right of people to be actively and openly gay, and gives support and encouragement to gay comrades to work in the gay movement.

In order to assist these changes in law and attitude, the Communist Party will establish a committee to promote discussion and analysis on gay rights, and assist the party in activity on these questions.