In 1969 a Homosexual Law Reform Group was set up in Canberra. In 1970 an Australian chapter of the US lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, was set up in Melbourne as the Australasian Lesbian Movement; later that year, two homosexuals in Sydney came out and publicly launched the Campaign Against Moral Persecution. Thus the homosexual rights movement was launched in Australia. These first steps were very tentative: the ACT law reform group was not specifically a homosexual group, the Australasian Lesbian Movement had a heterosexual spokesman, CAMP admitted heterosexuals to membership. But they initiated the process of the development of a movement of homosexuals for homosexuals, which exists in a stronger form today, in numbers and diversity. This movement has also had some sort of impact on Australian society generally — in terms of contributing to the mellowing of attitudes towards homosexuality in some circles and, at the formal level, of majority public support for equality before the law, and in terms of a new, more positive, self-identity among many homosexuals themselves.

This article looks at aspects of the new 'gay consciousness' as it evolved throughout the 1970s and attempts an assessment of the usefulness of the concepts developed within the movement, as a contribution towards the continuance into the 1980s of the (arrested and unfinished) project of 'sexual revolution'.

The Social Construction of the Homosexual

Homosexuality refers to a behaviour pattern, the enactment of sexual intercourse with a member of one's own biological sex. This is natural in the sense that all humans have a homosexual and heterosexual potential at birth, that is, we are born with a non-formed sexuality. But it is not 'normal' in the sense that all societies (perhaps with rare and debatable exceptions) have up till now socialized their children into a heterosexual norm because of the historic, animal-derived equation between sexuality and procreation linked with the need to perpetuate the species. However, homosexuality can be found in most societies. (1)

It can take different forms, depending on the social relations of production dominant in a particular social formation, but the immediate placing of homosexuality in the totality of social relations appears to be related to ideological and political relations,
primarily the ideological. In particular, there has been some early connection between homosexuality, the vocations of priests and healers, tendencies toward magic, and initiation ceremonies for women and men. (2) That is, there seems to be a definite relationship between the form it takes and religious ideology in particular.

With this in mind, the concept of a homosexual can be introduced. A homosexual, as distinct from someone who commits a homosexual act, is someone whose mental structures have as a common feature the choice of a sex-object of one's own biological sex; this relation could exist in the unconscious, in fantasy or in the act. (3) As Freud put it:

What decides whether we describe someone as an invert is not his actual behaviour, but his emotional attitude. (4)

For this to be the case, there must be something in the social formation to enable the transition from homosexuality as activity to homosexuality as a social role. It is here that the link begins with the situation of women. Whether consistent homosexuality (among men, that among women having less chance of social tolerance on an historic, world scale) is tolerated or not is related to the particular mechanisms for social control of women in each society (male-bonding as socialization in the case of the pederasty of the Ancient Greeks, quasi-women in the case of the Amerindian berdaches).

With the development of capitalism, this emergence of the distinctiveness of the homosexual took a higher form. While some content of the oppression of homosexuals is not specific to capitalism (especially related to patriarchal and Christian ideologies), the form it takes is quite specific and is bound up with capitalism's past, present and future development.

The phenomenon of the homosexual with a distinctive identity and sub-culture integrated into the mainstream of the society and subsidiary to the dominant culture was made possible historically by urbanization, which drew large numbers of people together, decreasing the isolation and sense of deviance evident in pre-class societies. Urbanization enabled new patterns of family life, sex roles, courting and sexual behaviour. Prior to the rise of capitalism, in Europe homosexuality was institutionalized only in certain closed communities, nunneries and monasteries, knightly orders, royal courts. (5) But as early as the mid-1500s, male homosexual beats existed in Paris (6), and male homosexual brothels existed in France and England early in the eighteenth century. But then urbanization was not sufficient. Industrialization accelerated the process of urbanization and caused havoc to traditional kinship structures releasing homosexuals from many of the social bonds of less complex societies. This enabled the transition of the homosexual as subordinate, deviant and individual to homosexuals as subordinate, deviant and mass.

Following Weeks, we can discern three aspects of the development of the homosexual under capitalism.

A distinctly homosexual role, conceptualizing homosexuality as a condition which characterizes certain individuals and not others, was a relatively late development, being fairly generally recognized in Britain by the late nineteenth century. (8) There is some evidence that a male homosexual role emerged from the late seventeenth century — associated with an embryonic sub-culture, a particular mode of behaviour (often transvestite) and slang. But the critical formative period was the late nineteenth century; the term 'homosexuality' itself was not coined till 1869 and entered into English currency only in the 1890s. (9) The increasingly complex male homosexual sub-culture in cities like London and Dublin was paralleled by developments in cities like Berlin. Although lesbian organisations are reported to have existed in France in the late eighteenth century, lesbian sub-cultures did not generally emerge till the turn of the twentieth century, in Paris and Berlin. (10)

A medical model of homosexuality emerged at the same time, though its roots were earlier. This idea of homosexuality as a 'disease' both supplanted and supplemented the earlier notion of it as a 'sin', according with the bourgeoisie's rational and 'scientific' ideologies more than the feudal-religious conception.

There was a development of homosexual self-image and identity. Fitting in with the demands of British capital in the 1880s as
it confronted its twin threats, imperialist rivals and the working class, the family was elevated as a buttress to social stability, corresponding to the class needs of both the bourgeoisie and the labor aristocracy. (12) The anti-male homosexual Labouchere amendment to the British Criminal Law Amendment Act was made in 1895. In this social climate, the commitment necessary to homosexuality was much more demanding; conversely, male homosexual consciousness was more sharply defined in the wake of possible exposure and blackmail. (13) The self-identity of most homosexuals was composed of a sense of 'differentness' caused by social isolation and persecution and reinforced by internalization of the religious and pseudo-scientific ideologies of guilt and sickness. As an expression of this new identity, organizations for homosexual rights were established: in England, the Order of Chaeronea in the 1890s; in the USA, the Cercle Hermaphroditus in 1895; and the most important, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Germany in 1897.

While homosexual identity and subculture developed, the attitude of the state — feudal, absolutist and capitalist — was overwhelmingly hostile. The Napoleonic Code of 1810 made consenting homosexual acts legal but homosexuals in countries covered by the code were not exempt from state persecution and harassment. Nevertheless, the revolutionary spread of democracy in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, would seem to confirm that "...the explicitly political dimension of liberalism is essential for a homosexual world to flourish". (14)

With respect to the post-capitalist societies the more advanced, Czechoslovakia, Democratic Germany and the Soviet Union, have embryonic homosexual sub-cultures but the repressive political environment retards their development. Though some of them, like the G.D.R., have liberal legislation, clearly bourgeois ideologies of sexual repression persist in these societies.

The Social and Political Significance of Homosexuality

The oppression of homosexuals today takes a number of forms involving the complex interactions between the concepts of homosexual as one who is sexually and emotionally attracted to her own biological sex and one whose identity is a deviant. This is manifest in the confusion in attitudes to homosexuals and is fired by repressed latent homosexuality among heterosexuals.

Homophobia has been used to describe fear of and hostility to homosexuality and homosexuals, like all ideologies operating in an unconscious as well as a conscious way. As a concept to explain homosexual oppression its value is limited because it is based on the primacy of the homo/hetero distinction, i.e. that distinction is seen as central to the problem of homosexual oppression. The political solution then becomes the liberal one of 'education'.

The hegemony of heterosexual gender role stereotypes maintained and reproduced in the ideological apparatuses has been called heterosexism. According to whether one is female or male one is expected to have 'feminine' or 'masculine' attributes, i.e. gender roles corresponding to biological sex. This is, of course, ideological mystification of a male supremacy based on the sexual division of labor.

Heterosexism operates against homosexuals because by not conforming to the 'normal' processes of sexual object-choice, lesbians and male homosexuals are assumed also to want to be the opposite sex — threatening the stability of determination of the dominant sex by simple biology. Whether an individual lesbian or male homosexual actually conforms to the gender roles of her or his sex is irrelevant; heterosexism involves the belief that homosexuals as a group do not. In a male-dominated society this assumed masculinity of lesbians and effeminacy of male homosexuals appears to subvert the dominant gender roles and hence the underlying male supremacy.

The Australian homosexual movement does not use the term 'heterosexism' in the sense defined here. The Perth Gay Liberation newsletter Gay Images, for example, defines it as basically "the pervasive assumption by anyone that everybody is heterosexual". (15) That is, the concept is seen to rest on the distinction homosexual/heterosexual (again, this has definite political implications). But I have defined it in terms
of the distinction feminine/masculine. As such heterosexist relations affect homosexuals as well as heterosexuals; they correspond to the basic male supremacy of a capitalist social formation.

This basic male supremacy has been called sexism. This term itself is the source of a theoretical confusion. It is usually used as an analogy to racism to denote oppression on the basis of sex. With sexism, divisions are made between people on the basis of chromosomes or genitalia and these divisions are supposed to determine a person's personality, ability and behaviour. At a societal level, the supposed differences are embodied within the total culture, connected with either sex's ability to get and hold power and ideological justifications for the sexual status quo. (16)

A sexist society, then, is not necessarily patriarchal. Sexism is necessary but not sufficient for patriarchy; patriarchy is not necessary for sexism. (12) Theoretically, a matriarchal society might be just as sexist as a patriarchal one. (18) Historically, there is no conclusive proof that there have been matriarchal societies preceding patriarchy, despite the strong tradition that this view has had in the socialist movement following Engels.

In recognition of the confusion over the word 'sexism', and to stress the immediate problem of patriarchal-sexism, many feminists and radical homosexuals use patriarchy in preference.

If one takes patriarchal government to be the institution whereby that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male, the principles of patriarchy appear to be twofold: male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger. (19)

Patriarchy is marked by its ubiquity throughout all social relations; differentiation within each sex along the lines of more masculine/less masculine; its foundation on the sexual division of labor; its maintenance and reproduction through kinship structures, ideological apparatuses and the state; and by the attribution of gender roles according to biological sex. It is with this latter feature that we see the juncture of patriarchy and heterosexism. Here is the interconnection between the oppression of women and the oppression of homosexuals: homosexual oppression is structurally tied to the oppression of women. Indeed, the primary site of homosexual oppression is not in the homo/hetero distinction but in the relations between women and men. (20)

It has often been stated that the sexual division of labor in the capitalist mode of production is not historically specific to it. Such a division predates the division based on class and continues to be reproduced in the post-capitalist societies. However, under capitalism the sexual division of labor has acquired particular forms which are economically, politically and ideologically specific to it. These specific aspects can be seen with reference to two broad areas within the production process: commodity production and the domestic unit. A woman's position is by no means the same within these two areas; her subordination and exploitation on the factory floor do not necessarily correspond with her subordination within the family. However, there is a tendency for a woman's subordination within the family and workforce to reinforce and maintain one another. A woman's ideological subjection, her relative political and economic isolation as a house worker, follow her into the workforce to facilitate the reproduction of her subordinate position within the larger area of socialized production.

The separation of material production between its socialized form and private labor performed mainly by women within the home, institutionalized patriarchy as a part of the capitalist mode of production. Part of the consequence of this was the perception of the family as separate from the economy and personal life as a separate sphere of life divorced from the larger society. For socialists, the consequent tendency was to see personal life as an entirely subjective phenomenon, having meaning only for the individual. (21) One of the features of the feminist and radical homosexual analyses of society has been to stress the role of the individual ('the personal is political'), and thereby contribute to the development of a fuller understanding of the workings of ideology and power.

Important here has been the examination of familial ideology, and the connection
between the role of the capitalist nuclear family and the oppression of homosexuals. These questions have been taken up elsewhere. One aspect which needs repeating is the reproduction in the family of heterosexual gender roles, the potential subversion of which is at the core of the oppression of homosexuals. Homosexuals are oppressed to protect the ideology that justifies the oppression of women. Millett says:

> But as she minces along a street in the Village, the storm of outrage an insouciant queen in drag may call down is due to the fact that she is both masculine and feminine at once — or male, but feminine. She has made gender identity more than frighteningly easy to lose, she has questioned its reality at a time when it has attained the status of a moral absolute and a social imperative. She has defied it and actually suggested its negation. She has dared obloquy, and in doing so has challenged more than the taboo on homosexuality, she has uncovered what the source of this contempt implies — the fact that sex role is sex rank. (22)

Above all, this exposure of the arbitrary nature of gender roles, of the irrelevance of biology to 'destiny', is evident in the act of sex. For women, any sexuality independent of men is repressed, and for men, the possibility of sexual 'passivity' is seen as a break in the solidarity of men as the dominant sex.(23) Each sexual act between homosexuals questions the pairs feminine/female, masculine/male. It is this which perhaps explains why male homosexuals are more overtly oppressed as homosexuals than lesbians: we threaten "men, who psychologically must retain the initiative of force or action, in order to be 'men'". (24)

While the oppression of male homosexuals shares a similarity with lesbians at the level of gender roles, it is clear that the situation is in fact more complex. Lesbians are doubly oppressed, as women and as homosexuals. As a man, the male homosexual is an oppressor of women; as a homosexual, the male homosexual is oppressed by patriarchy. It is this contradiction which heightens the difference between lesbians and male homosexuals in the homosexual movement, probably the only movement of the left where this question comes to the fore, and which has provided the impetus for a significant section of radical male homosexuals to support feminism as the resolution to the contradiction (and, at the same time, explains the assertion of an ultra-masculinity by many male homosexuals).

The subversive potential of male homosexuality is in its potential to divorce sexuality from power (its repressive potential is psycho-sexual misogyny on an organised level). (25)

It is this internalization of the ideology of the oppressors that distinguishes the generalized social discrimination against women, blacks and homosexuals from discrimination against socially disadvantaged groups such as pensioners or tertiary students, and defines only the situation of the former as oppression. Movements of the socially oppressed have expressed the need to "reclaim our history and our identity from what must be called cultural terrorism"(27) with slogans like sisterhood is powerful, black is beautiful, gay is good.

Towards a Response: Freud and the Left

One of the questions that has concerned bourgeois pseudo-scientific study of homosexuality has been 'why?'. Given that this is asked by ideologues of sexual orthodoxy and social conformity, radical homosexuals have denied the legitimacy of the question. No one asks this question of heterosexuals. And the question is motivated not by 'scientific impartiality' but by a desire to stamp out homosexuality ('therapy' or 'treatment'). In effect, the answer of the homosexual movement to the theoretical question has been to assert that gay is good, and brook no discussion.(28)

But the question hasn’t gone away. An understanding of the formation of homosexuality is part of a total understanding of sexuality. If the questions 'why?' and 'how?' are directed at sexuality generally, including heterosexuality, then answers should be sought. Thus for Freud:

> ...the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that
This involves the need to look at the 'sociology' of heterosexuality; if everybody can make a homosexual object-choice at some stage as Freud suggests, then why does the majority suppress this?

There have been various theories offered to explain homosexuality: a form of vice, a genetic aberration due to inherited or constitutional factors, a glandular disease, a psychological disorder, or some combination of these. Of them, those based on psychology have had the most durability, most of the views being based on prejudice and speculation. It is probable that homosexuality is determined by a number of variables: psychological, and cultural and situational, the form it takes being explained primarily by the latter. Even in the psychological explanation that Freud offered, he said that the particular process he singled out was only one among many. So any reductionism would not aid but hinder understanding. Unfortunately many of the old myths, including crude distortions of Freud's theories, linger on.

Many socialists have accepted psychoanalysis as a science, but in so doing have noted that there are many aspects of Freud which are "decidedly culturally and socially specific, and thus in the last instance, ideological". (30) For radical homosexuals, psychoanalysis can make two contributions to a critique of heterosexism: the refutation of a biological basis for exclusive heterosexuality, and a fuller understanding of the acquisition of gender roles.

Towards a Response: Gay Liberation

At the end of 1971 a Gay Liberation group split off from the CAMP in Sydney and quickly established itself as the dominant and most vital homosexual group. A group with that name now only exists in Perth (and it was not established until 1976), those in Adelaide, Canberra, Newcastle, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Sydney having folded, but Gay Liberation gave its name to the whole homosexual movement, as well as a certain militancy, structure, analysis and 'image'. (35) Gay Liberation attracted the
The increasing criticism and exit of most lesbians from Gay Liberation was accompanied by some support for effeminism among radical male homosexuals. The effeminist reaction to feminism was to accept (radical) feminist analysis, to commit oneself to fighting one's own masculinity, to "realise that the feminist revolution is an all-embracing phenomenon without which there is no revolution but a series of male coups", and to refrain from defining a women's revolution.(39) This uncritical acceptance of radical feminism did not last long, but effeminist ideas added to the radical homosexual understanding of homosexuals' oppression and were the first major differentiation inside Gay Liberation between the reform-minded majority and a minority who wanted to develop a revolutionary perspective. Effeminism found some support in polemics of socialist male homosexuals against gay liberation politics.(40)

From within the homosexual movement, the dominant gay liberation ideology began to be criticized by socialists, though the notions that the oppressed from their experiences know best how to end their oppression, that respect for autonomy of movements of the oppressed meant no criticism, and that the revolution consisted of each of the protest movements battering the system on their own ('poly-vanguardism') were accepted by most of the left. From 1974, as Gay Liberation lost its momentum, voices emerged among male homosexuals decrying its disarray, pointing to the political weaknesses of individualism, sexism, reformism, anti-intellectualism and structurelessness. In patriarchal terms, campaigns by male homosexuals for gay rights were seen as male rights unless linked to a feminist perspective. Moreover, the struggle for women's liberation took programmatic precedence:

...in the unity of struggle, ...some struggles will play a more crucial role than others. The struggle for women's liberation is such a struggle and that of male homosexuals is not: just as the struggle for workers' power is primary in the last instance, because it is decisive.(41)

And this recognition opened up for discussion the question of whether lesbians and male homosexuals could work together for homosexual rights, something most lesbian-feminists denied or questioned.

A feature of the development of a left opposition inside the gay liberation group was to also point to the need for a class analysis of homosexual oppression and of the homosexual movement, for alliances with the socialist left and for an orientation to the working class. This latter point was slow to develop, but at the Second National Homosexual Conference (Sydney, 1976) the Socialist Homosexuals Caucus proposed that the topic "homosexuals at work and in their unions" be a major item for discussion.
at the Third Conference, and at the Third National Homosexual Conference (Adelaide, 1977) socialists successfully proposed “homosexuals at work” as the theme for the Fourth Conference (Sydney, 1978).

By the end of the decade the post-Gay Liberation phase of the movement featured a certain style of politics. From its origins in Gay Liberation it retains a definite militancy (gay pride and coming out) but the general radical rhetoric is less evident as is any attempt to theorize or analyse homosexual oppression. Instead the movement is fragmented into a number of different types of organisation and institutions appealing to different types of homosexual. All of these constitute what is now called the ‘gay community’. Within this ‘community’, the activist movement is a distinct minority. Reflecting the diversity of the social and political composition of homosexuals, most of the activist groups — though this is more applicable to Sydney and Melbourne rather than other cities — focus on particular areas or campaigns: Gay Teachers, Lesbian Mothers, Gay Trade Unionists, Law Reform Coalition, etc. The effect of this is to focus on ‘discrimination’ and act as pressure groups rather than as sexual radicals. Not that it is not important to fight any manifestation of homosexual oppression wherever it sheds its customary everydayness, but that such battles inevitably remain holding operations.

Towards a Response: Socialist-Feminism

Despite the important role played by lesbians in the women’s liberation movement there has been little clear analysis of lesbian oppression. The analysis of lesbianism by socialist feminists has approached the question primarily from a feminist angle, not a class angle (42). This is especially true of the special lesbian issue of Scarlet Woman in July 1976.

This primacy of a feminist analysis over a socialist one can also be seen in the socialist-feminist contributions to the discussion in the homosexual movement on the working relations between women and men.

Walsh argued that lesbians are a greater threat to capitalism than male homosexuals: male homosexuals do not upset the process of production unlike lesbians, since the sexual division of labor is kernel to the operations of capitalism ... and male homosexuals do not have the same importance as lesbians regarding reproduction of children since they are physically unable to bear children (43).

The latter point seems to place too much importance on the fact that homosexuals do not reproduce in explaining our oppression. While the need for reproduction of the species, within prescribed kinship structures, was and is an important factor in enforcing universal heterosexuality, a role for deviants has been provided in a number of societies historically, and the connection between sexuality and procreation has become less relevant under late capitalism. Moreover, it has always been and still is the case that both sexes are needed equally for conception.

The former point corresponds to the statement by du Beauvoir that

*what gives homosexual women a masculine cast is ... the whole group of responsibilities they are formed to assume because they dispense with men.* (44)

De Beauvoir uses this to deny the gender subversion in the sexual activities of lesbians. Walsh commits the same mistake. She says:

*Lesbians are oppressed because we are women.* (45)

Heterosexual women in their sexual activity do not generally subvert heterosexual gender identity. If lesbians are only oppressed as women, and not doubly oppressed as women and homosexuals, then what is the point of talking about them as lesbians? If all that’s at issue is the role in the production process, then any ‘masculine’ woman might well be (and often is) subversive, irrespective of whether she is heterosexual or homosexual. In attempting to minimize what lesbians and male homosexuals have in common, the apparent challenge to gender roles in the sex act (albeit in different ways), Walsh obscures the difference between lesbians and heterosexual women.

The argument about the relation of lesbians and male homosexuals to patriarchy has been more forcefully put by
Bebbington and Lyons. They too argued that lesbians have a greater stake in revolution. This is partly based on the recognition that male homosexuals are men and thereby enjoy all the power benefits of being male in a patriarchy, whereas lesbians, as women, cannot, unless they become ‘like men’. Where their analysis becomes confused is their linking of the oppression of lesbians and male homosexuals to coming out:

*Men are only potentially victims of oppression; they can, and often do, choose to pass as straight... As lesbian women we can choose to hide our lesbianism, but we can’t hide our womanhood.*

That male homosexuals may be victimized on coming out does not mean they are only oppressed when something happens: that this could be so is in fact symptomatic of their oppression. That lesbians cannot hide their womanhood points to their double oppression, but does not invalidate their oppression as homosexuals.

What Walsh and Bebbington and Lyons were talking around is the contradictory position of male homosexuals in a patriarchy of the type we live in. Many patriarchies have accorded male homosexuality a role in initiation of boys into adult society — Hittites, ancient Greeks, etc; others have given it a special place in religion. None has allowed it to question the basic relations between women and men. The idea that male homosexuality might be the ‘ultimate manifestation’ of patriarchy, however, is based on only one aspect of the contradiction and has no relevance to capitalist societies.

Towards a Response: the Socialist Left

Since the rise of the homosexual movement, there has been fairly general support for it from the left, though little contact. Most of the activists in the socialist parties that have proliferated in number since the Communist Party lost its ‘monopoly’ in the 1960s, and most of the activists in various protest organizations (student, anti-war, feminist, anti-racism, ecology and anti-uranium, international solidarity, etc.) have common petty-bourgeois class backgrounds, like the homosexual movement. The influence of the ‘counter-culture’ has added a unifying factor at the level of lifestyles. The most significant breakthrough was in the Australian Union of Students in 1975 which saw the adoption of a homosexual rights policy and delivered resources, both human and material, towards the revitalization of the homosexual movement (including the first national conference in 1975). The limitation of this was the relative isolation from the left in the trade unions, but even this is slowly beginning to break down. The first contact was with the then CPA-led Builders’ Laborers’ Federation in Sydney in 1973, and subsequently in the three teachers’ unions in Victoria. At the Fourth National Homosexual Conference (Sydney, 1978), a public forum on homosexuals at work was addressed by prominent trade union officials; the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations sponsored a national meeting on homosexual unionists in Melbourne on August 10, 1979. Gay Trade Unionist Groups operate in Melbourne and Sydney and there are a number of homosexual caucuses in various industries and unions.

The main problem with the support of socialists to the homosexual movement at a theoretical level is the reduction of the question to one of ‘gay rights’. Quite clearly homosexuals are subject to everyday oppression, often revealing itself in individual cases of injustice: a number of cases have moved the homosexual movement into protest since it began: Peter Bonsall-Boone, George Duncan, Jeremy Fisher, Penny Short, Mike Clohesy, Sandra Wilson, Greg Weir, Tony Collins, Terry Stokes. But, as I have argued, the liberal analysis of the situation of homosexuals in terms of discrimination is inadequate, and consequently so is the political response that focuses on gay rights. The early effeminist argument about gay rights being male rights in a patriarchy is relevant here, but to leave it at this could lead to an abstention from campaigns for democratic rights/civil liberties. More important is the need to understand how campaigns for the rights of the marginalized fit into a struggle for the transformation of the very structures of oppression that individual cases of discrimination are merely a reflection of. The problem is thus one confronting all radicals, how to link...
'minimum' and 'maximum' demands to effect a transitional strategy.

This is not a problem that has been confronted by socialists in relation to the homosexual movement. The typical position is one of support for democratic rights and to leave it at that. This often also involves support for the autonomy of the homosexual movement as the basis of the equality of all movements of the exploited and oppressed, and for the mass public campaigns of the movement. Generally this has meant a lack of critical analysis and an uncritical acceptance of the theory and practice of the movement. Socialists putting these positions have, unsurprisingly, received a better response from radicalising homosexuals.

Those more obviously pushing a 'class line' have earned themselves greater hostility. This is not because of any pointing out of the limitations of a civil rights perspective, nor the need for a class line as such, nor that other struggles have been recognized as more socially important than those of homosexuals — many radical homosexuals have long been arguing along these lines. Rather, there is a correlation between those who seek to promote a class line and those who are unprepared to say that homosexuality is a valid form of sexual expression. Given this, calling for the subordination of the defence of homosexuals to the defence of the working class and denouncing the activities of militant homosexuals, or opposing any sort of independent homosexual movement and proscribing coming out for homosexual socialists, have earned such advocates hostility.

Those socialists who ignore the question or deny it exists in their particular socialist paradise earn only derision. The Socialist Party of Australia has never determined a policy on the question. The Maoists originally saw gay liberation as a sign of the decadence of US imperialism but as feminism made more of an impact, the line softened. This did not prevent the eruption of a debate inside the AUS in 1977 about the anti-homosexual practices of Maoists, though in that year homosexuals had some impact with Students for Australian Independence, especially in Adelaide. Australian Maoists have not been helped by the alleged non-existence of homosexuals in China and by the homophobia of Maoists internationally.

And in spite of the apparently more radical rhetoric, the sectarians on a practical level still see the question as one of civil liberties: "sexual identity or personal characteristics of the individual are not the concern of others". Like Pierre Trudeau, they want to keep the state out of the bedrooms of the nation.

Radicals, on the other hand, want to take the affairs of the bedroom publicly into all aspects of daily life. Said the Lavender and Red Union, a socialist homosexual group in Los Angeles, the position of homosexuals could not be simply understood as a question of democratic rights:

one must analyze the continuance of gay oppression and sexual repression in general and its ties to the nuclear family and morality that springs up from it.

Thus the political significance of the homosexual movement is not simply one of another marginalized grouping seeking recognition of its humanity, but of its potential to challenge established sexual mores and the repressive function they serve. The sexual practices and personal identities of homosexuals, less tied as they are to gender identity and sex role, are lessons for a political practice which can breach the hegemony of capitalist Oedipal sexuality.

The State, and Liberation

In May 1978 a survey of 2,000 people showed only 29 per cent strongly opposed to equal treatment in law for homosexuals. In 1977, 33 per cent in a survey were strongly opposed to the legalization of homosexual relations between consenting adults; in 1974 this was 39 per cent, in 1967 64 per cent. What happened through the 1970s was a gradual general erosion of public hostility to homosexuals, expressed in a weak liberal tolerance on some legal questions. This has accompanied the depiction of explicit and implicit homosexual imagery and practices in the mass media (the Don Finlayson syndrome), homosexual law reform in South Australia and the ACT, awareness of the potential of a lucrative market among single, petty bourgeois male homosexuals, and expansion of the commercial gay scene...
(especially in Sydney), the development of a new gay pride and a homosexual rights movement, and a growth in feminist consciousness. Advances have not been spectacular, but they have been steady.

The emphasis by the homosexual movement on democratic rights has raised the question of whether those rights which were not won by or from the bourgeoisie in its ascendance can be conceded in its decline. If the survival of the taboo on homosexuality in the twentieth century is part of the unfinished business of the Enlightenment, then it seems clear that it is one of the many questions which capitalism cannot solve. As with all democratic rights under capitalism, homosexual rights are tenuous, partial and reversible (if conceded). To a certain extent they may be conceded and homosexual demands and movements may be co-opted — which belies the claim that homosexuals are inherently revolutionary. On the other hand, the tolerance evident at the moment is based on the radicalised and liberalised sections of the petty bourgeoisie and therefore has an uncertain future. The attack by police on Gay Solidarity Group demonstrations in Sydney on June 24 and August 27, 1978 showed how limited tolerance is. Ideologies have a resilience and hence strength which should never be underestimated. Liberal attitudes are confined to small circles of people.

The conditions favoring the radicalization of the 1960s gave way to uncertainty and pessimism by the mid 1970s. As the economic crisis deepens into the 1980s the ideological conditions in which radical homosexuals operate change, including the reassessment of the ideologies of motherhood and domesticity. Already the forces of moral conservatism have begun to mobilize — without necessarily immediate success — to try to put back together the shattered facade of the conservative hegemony, to reassure the mums, dads and kids as times get bad. Whether this is a desperate and doomed attempt to bring back the past, or a threat for the future is hard to tell. For homosexuals, the idea of a ‘right-wing backlash’ is problematic since any advances have been few and marginal (while important) — it can only be a relative setback.

When overviewing the development of homosexual radicalism, and then attempting to assess its significance, it is not possible to do this outside the context of what was happening in the feminist movement, radicalized petty bourgeois youth generally and the relation of forces in the class struggle. Since 1970 we can outline the following balance sheet: (a) the uneven development of a coherent analysis of homosexual oppression; (b) some dramatic if not earth-shattering advances in public opinion at the democratic rights level; (c) expansion and fragmentation of the movement’s organisational manifestation; and (d) somewhat more nebulous, the creation of near ‘liberated zones’ in the daily lives of many homosexuals, the result of the onslaught against self-hate and heterosexual prejudice by ‘gay pride’ and ‘coming out’.

If a strategy which focuses on gay rights is not the key to homosexual liberation, then what should socialists advocate instead? A marxist analysis of homosexual oppression leads to a number of political conclusions.

The first is the need to develop further marxist theory on this question. The Australian homosexual movement has been infected with the anti-intellectualism of Australian society and of the Australian left and labor movements, and is quite content to ignore any wide understanding of the situation or to simply rely on concepts developed in the early days of Gay Liberation. This has gone hand in hand with the lack of discussion about strategy. Discussion of tactics there is. But how these fit into a broad perspective of social change there isn’t.

In 1921, Kurt Hiller said that the liberation of homosexuals can only be the work of homosexuals themselves. It is true that no one has more of a stake in the issue than homosexuals, but Hiller’s dictum can be interpreted too narrowly. An independent homosexual movement is necessary: in fact it already exists, so the more pressing problem is how do socialists work in it. From a marxist analysis which relates the oppression of homosexuals to patriarchy and capitalism, it follows that what is needed is a homosexual movement allied to the labor movement, especially its socialist wing, and to the women’s liberation movement. That is, a homosexual movement which is explicitly pro-feminist, and which has extensive
networks of caucuses in unions and industries which not only fight discrimination but is partisan in the class struggle.

Such a homosexual movement must fight for democratic rights, but must be alert to the opportunity for exposing the social function of sexual repression. In 1979 in Melbourne a homosexual student was excluded from a campus residential college because of his open homosexuality; through militant tactics the decision was overturned. But the campaign while successful, missed an opportunity. The student had been accused of having another man in his room overnight (a charge which was not proved), thus breaking the college’s no-sex rule. The homosexual militants fought the case on the question of no discrimination. They did not raise the demands of abolishing the conservative anti-sex role — of the right of students, heterosexual and homosexual, to have people in their rooms for sex. Perhaps it could have been argued that to have done so would have been diversioinary. In the short run, it might have been. Nevertheless, the radical potential of homosexuals is in their challenging of dominant conceptions of sexuality. A radical homosexual movement cannot just demand ‘gay rights’, but sexual liberation for all.

ENDNOTES

1. See Clellan S. Ford and Frank A. Beach, Patterns of Sexual Behaviour (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1965).
10. De Becker, p. 121; Weeks, Coming Out, p. 87.
25. Hurley and Johnston, p. 55. The repressive potential is perhaps most obvious in some of the sado-masochistic aspects of gay ‘leather’ bars and the latest macho tendency among many male homosexuals. See Edmund White, “Fantasia on the Seventies”, Christopher Street, II, 3, September 1977, pp. 18-20; and Seymour Kleinberg, “Where have all the Sissies gone?”, Christopher Street, II, 9, March 1978, pp. 4-12. One should not however take the ideology of masculinism of this tendency as seriously as it does itself; an important part of it is a response to the social conservatism of the late 1970s. Says Kleinberg: “Macho, of course, isn’t a new closet; indeed, many have suspected that it’s
the oldest closet in the house” (p. 12).


32. Bon and d'Arc, p. 56. Bieber is correct in pointing out that in no other species in which reproduction depends on female-male sexual coupling have deviant types appeared that fear or abhor heterosexual mating and engage in homosexual behaviour as consistently, exclusively and in highly organized patterns as humans. For him, this is an example of homosexuality's pathological nature — Irving Bieber, “Clinical Aspects of Male Homosexuality”, in Sexual Inversion: The Multiple Roots of Homosexuality, ed. Judd Marmor (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 254; for us it can only be an example of liberation from our biology.


34. Freud, Three Essays, p.122n.


36. For a history of the homosexual movement in Australia, such as has been written, see Paul Foss, “Gay Liberation in Australia”, William and John, 8, 1973; David Widdup, “The First Year of the Movement”. Paper presented to the First National Homosexual Conference, Melbourne, August 15-17, 1975; Craig Melmoth, “The Homosexual Movement in Australia, 1970-1975”, Axis, October 18, 1976.


41. Hurley and Johnston, p. 57.


45. Walsh, p. 4.


47. Bebbington and Lyons, p. 47.


50. “Stalinism, Revisionism and Homosexual Rights”, *Workers News*, June 29, 1978, p. 4. The activity denounced by the Socialist Labour League for bearing “the unmistakable stamp of adventurer publicity seeking and highly unstable middle class revisionism” was a Gay Solidarity Group march of 1,000 in Sydney on June 24, 1978, which was attacked by police with 53 arrests.


52. “Marxism and Homosexual Oppression”, p. 3.


> The best way to struggle out such contradictions in our personal lives is in stable monogamous relationships between men and women based on mutual love and respect. Because homosexuals do not carry the struggle between men and women into their most intimate relationships they are not prepared, in principle for the arduous task of class transformation... In reality, gay liberation is anti-working class counter-revolutionary. Its attacks on the family would rob poor and working people of the most viable social unit for their survival and for their revolutionary struggle against the imperialist system.


