

The Political Choice for Lesbian/Gay People of Color:

Unstable Reforms or Permanent Revolution

The Freedom Socialist Party and Radical Women are proud to be part of this 1979 Third World Lesbian/Gay Conference in Washington, D.C.

We welcome this historic beginning of organized discussion among us and trust that it will lead to the kind of bold and unprecedented action that can impact profoundly on the system.

All lesbians and gays of color are victimized by a narcissistic and competitive social system that wrings huge profits from our outcast status. And as if this weren't enough, the economic discrimination and cultural prejudices afflicting us are reflected even in the mass movements for human rights.

We contend with racism and sexism in the gay movement. We confront homophobia and sexism in the Black and Chicano communities, and in other ethnic groups. We suffer racism and homophobia in the women's movement. And most unions are hostile to everyone except straight white males.

To establish a communication network between lesbians and gays of color, therefore, and to confront racism, sexism and homophobia on every front, are urgent tasks. And if we undertake them seriously, we will unlock the gates of a great opportunity to raise the mass movements out of their backwardness, and spur them to a new unity and a new, frankly revolutionary perspective.

The Fatal Errors of the Civil Rights Movement

The heroic activists of the Black freedom movement of the '50s and '60s won their victories through highly organized and unabashedly militant mass action.

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But this electrifying movement ran aground on the shoals of establishment politics. After the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, the Black leadership faltered and rejected the radical political turn that Malcolm had taken.

Instead of moving forward with a challenge to the entire system of racist capitalism, Black spokesmen opted for the "safer" road of reformism. They accordingly bought into the divisive sexism of the Moynihan Report and the fork-tongued Kennedy dynasty, and crushed the inspiring leadership of Black women, who were ordered back to a subordinate service role. And Black gayness, which defied the sexist Manhood and Ladyhood Mystique, was sent to the closet.

This sinister strategy of the government, big business, and the treacherous Democratic Party caused the Black movement to devour its own, trust to the mercies of its enemies, and to be sold out, bought off and eventually forgotten.

And then this self-defeating pattern of rejecting the Left and spurning women's leadership was duplicated by key sectors of the Chicano movement, the new Asian American movement, and Native American tribal officials who surrendered sovereignty for federal dollars. The reformist camp of the women's movement, in turn, eventually abandoned radicalism and reneged on its alliances with women of color and lesbians. And now the gay movement is rewriting this same hackneyed scenario.

In the Bull's-Eye of the Right Wing

The capitalist class has unleashed a freshly organized and fully funded rightwing backlash that constantly screams "reverse discrimination"; "Kill the ERA"; "Stop queers"; and "Right to Work (without a union)." Mormons, fundamentalists, industrialists, government agencies, police and venal politicians pursue an inquisition against non-conformists and all the gains won by all the freedom struggles are systematically betrayed by our "liberal friends."

Gays and lesbians of color are hardest hit by the rightwing. We are a ready-made reservoir of scapegoats to blame and punish for the sinking economy, the job squeeze, the cold war, and the mounting fears of the Age of Anxiety. German fascism similarly propped up a crumbling capitalism by persecuting gays, Jews, Gypsies, radicals and unionists; homosexuals were the first to perish in the concentration camps, and we still are.

As lesbians and gays, people of color, females, workers and radicals, we bear all the marks of Christian/bourgeois abomination--for we are an unwitting threat to the patriarchal, nuclear family which is the basic economic unit for insuring the extraction of surplus value/profits and the inheritance of private property.

To be gay and a person of color is to be an enemy of capitalism.

The United Front for Self-Defense

Our survival in the face of witchhunts by medieval moralists and profit-mad financiers depends on our solidarity and the nature of our resistance.

Every rightwing victory weakens us. Lesbian custody rights, protection from forced sterilization, abortion, ERA, affirmative action, self-defense against rape, the right to organize, boycott and strike, the rights of farmworkers and undocumented workers, the defense of Native Americans, etc., are survival issues for lesbian and gay people of color.

In the face of a pre-fascist rightwing, we must build a strong United Front--a radical coalition of all the exploited and oppressed that emphasizes the needs of the most oppressed. And the super-oppressed in this society are lesbians and gays of color.

We are the living link between all the mass movements for human rights; hence, we bear the responsibility for uniting all of them on behalf of our common need to topple capitalism.

A United Front of the disinherited and unrepresented, together with real radicals who won't capitulate to the Republicrats, will soon attract the ranks of labor and eventually change the course of U.S. politics.

Revolutionary Feminism: The Wave of the Future

The economic ability of capitalism to grant concessions is exhausted.

Only a revolutionary movement for socialist humanism can stop the menace of fascism and extend and complete our emancipation.

But there can be no all-encompassing revolutionary movement without the enthusiastic participation and respected leadership of women.

Women's rights are a first-rank political issue. Women warrant top leadership roles in all mass and vanguard organizations. And women's liberation is a decisive question for any movement, determining whether that movement shall long endure.

Lesbians of color are already leaders in the social struggle. The working lesbian of color is in a prime position to wage unity because she represents within herself all the interconnected strands of exploitation and subjugation, and she brings to every movement a multi-issue rather than a fragmented sensitivity.

Gay males must learn to embrace feminism as the expression of total revolution, for women are on the lowest rung of the social totem pole.

International Solidarity

The best thing we can do to aid liberation struggles around the world is to fight the imperialist monster where it spawns--right here in the U.S. And that is what our embattled sisters and brothers in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe are asking us to do.

People of color, lesbians/gays, women, and workers are part of a global community of revolutionary insurgents. Together we can usher in a worldwide socialist democracy and finally consign racism, male chauvinism, heterosexism, labor exploitation and colonialism to the dustbins of history.

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