

CRIMES OF FREEDOM



Although it may not be obvious to you, this march is actually moving in two directions at the same time. It is going backwards and forwards in terms of its true significance. Meaning is everything, and here we are really on a two-way street. On the one side (left lane), Gay Freedom Day represents an affirmation of diversity, change and popular initiative, which are challenging existing social institutions and, even more importantly, existing ways of living by directly opposing the cultural bases of sexual repression in contemporary society. On the other side (right lane), however, this march presents itself as an almost ludicrous pageant of conformity and reformism, an orderly procession - complete with marching band - demanding acceptance by and integration within the dominant order.

This radical dichotomy within the "gay community" has never been more apparent than it is today and for good reason - nothing can ever be the same after the night of May 21st in San Francisco. All the slogans that today proclaim "gay unity" cannot conceal the essential divisions that manifested themselves in the White Riot, a rebellion in which gays, punks and radicals attacked the police, business, city government and, by refusing the commands of "community" leaders, rejected reformism. As the May violence recedes into myth and is distorted by various "spokespersons," it is crucial that the real importance and limitations of the riot be established. To the extent that this violence remained a spasmodic reaction to the White decision - and the irony of opponents of capital punishment screaming for blood cannot pass unnoticed - it led nowhere and will have no real consequence; to the extent that it clarified the nature of power in San Francisco and within the "community," it will have many aftershocks.

The events of May will not repeat themselves in the same fashion, but they will reverberate - and the most radical participants in the riot will have to move beyond a simple justification of their violence to a position of active and expanding opposition to advanced capitalism in its cultural, political and social aspects. Reformism and its representatives have been denounced, but already they are trying to re-establish their authority in the Castro and in other administrative wards. The Harvey Milk Democratic Club, the "Dump Dianne" and anti-Freitas movements all will pay grudging tribute to or show "understanding" of the riot; it should be clear that these brokers of dissatisfaction only wish to use the rioters' anger to further their own electoral schemes. And within the so-called "radical" camp, new leaders are offering their manipulative services, attempting to substitute their "militant" direction for the power of the riot's rank-and-file. A truly autonomous movement has not yet appeared and will not appear in San Francisco until the partisans of radical autonomy organize themselves consciously as opponents of hierarchy and constituency politics, i.e., as revolutionaries seeking a real unity with other radical currents in society as a whole.

Like nationalism (however "progressive"), parochial consciousness is the deathbed of radicalism. This has again been demonstrated in the political retreat from the beachheads of May. Whether or not the SFPD stages an anti-gay sickout (swine flu?), the Castro ghetto seems lamentably able to police itself with its own ideological cops and in the unconscious (and conscious) ghettoization of its radical politics. Virtually all the defenders of the May rebellion (the Red Queen, et al) refer to it as a "gay riot," as if the participation of other elements could be ignored and were not, in fact, vitally important to the future of any movement for social freedom. This self-containment policy of radical gays only complements the counter-insurgency programs of Feinstein, Freitas, Scott and Britt, who talk of "agents provocateurs" (did they mean the undercover cops?) and "outside agitators" and speak possessively of their own "good gay community."

On a cultural level, the gay world also presents a mirror image of the "straight." The macho men of the police and those of the Castro are all in uniform. To substitute one stereotype - one social role - for another is only "progress" in alienation, and those who want to go beyond societally-determined identities have realized this. While many want to be "in the Navy," many others have jumped ship and are organizing mutinies against existing culture, be it hip, straight, punk or gay. And if this "new wave" is to amount to anything - if it really is to be new - it will have to move beyond the empty dream of "cultural liberation."

As an abstract slogan, "gay freedom" is a dangerous myth: freedom is neither gay nor straight, but socially defined. Even in demanding freedom from police harassment, from sexual repression, today's march only defines "freedom" negatively; even in commemorating the Christopher Street rebellion, today's march ritualizes protest and dramatizes discontent as theatre. In seeking a positive definition of "liberation," we must consider the components and prerequisites of an authentically free society, a society which presupposes the conscious transformation of the present world.

Revolution is emancipatory, or it is nothing. It must therefore be anti-authoritarian in its conception and inception, in its structures and substance. The transition from the "realm of necessity" to the "realm of freedom" will be accomplished only through a radical reconstruction of the international economy on the basis of libertarian communism, but this social transformation must also incorporate the surrealist project of the "emancipation of the senses." A sensuous revolution will be made on the ruins of today's "sexual revolution," in which close and superficial encounters take place in a marketplace of libidinal exchange. It is precisely in its critique of dominant sexuality that gay radicalism - both lesbian and male homosexual - assumes importance.

We do not pretend to be part of the gay movement; we do intend to be part of a modern revolutionary movement. In contrast to the various parties of the Leninist and reformist left, we are not recruiting officers. We do not seek to organize others on the basis of a predefined program, but rather to offer new perspectives on contemporary history - a history of development, crisis and opposition. This history obviously extends beyond the city limits of San Francisco and the limits of "gay freedom." It is being made in the strike wave of the public sector in California and the farmworkers' battles of the Salinas valley (both movements remaining defined, however, by trade unions, who are only institutional rivals of corporate capitalism), and it is unfolding in the civil war in Nicaragua, where the class contradictions within the nationalist Sandinista movement will intensify as the cadaverous Somoza dictatorship decomposes and the popular militias confront the self-appointed FSLN leadership and its bourgeois allies. Only then will the Nicaraguan revolution - in which the civilian population will no longer be refugees but combatants - begin, and it will succeed as a revolution only if it becomes internationalized. Mere militance is not enough; any social movement must be evaluated in terms of its class content and political nature. Closer to home, the independent truckers' strike serves as an example of a conflict which, despite its "radical" form, is in reality a rebellion of small owners of capital, of shopkeepers on wheels who are ready to shoot union drivers in defense of their own economic self-interest.

An insistence on the need for an international revolutionary perspective is hardly new, and the similarity between Western capitalism and the bureaucratic capitalist societies of the East has become increasingly recognized by gays, at least in terms of sexual repression. The persecution of homosexuals in Cuba and China is open knowledge, and from this awareness should emerge a further understanding of the meaning of real communism, of genuine liberation. Freedom is not negotiable, nor is it something to be petitioned for. Rather, it must be constituted in the directly democratic organization of social life, in the positive abolition of class society. Such collective inventions are not an issue; they are at issue. We welcome your ideas.

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wall poster/pamphlet "Unnatural Acts" (critique of current social situation) also available from the above address