

And the paid staff? There should be more of them, for they alone are in a position to give gay rights first priority. And they should be of a higher calibre than the willing, energetic but untrained employees on whom CHE has hitherto depended. For example, when CHE chooses an information officer, efforts should be made to attract someone who is a trained journalist or public relations expert - rather than an unemployed courier like me!

The initial euphoria of gay liberation is, demonstrably, over. It is no longer enough to be gay and out to make a real contribution to gay rights. There is a long, hard, professional slog ahead and the sooner we get started the better. ●

#### CHE FIGHTS BILL

Following the Cambridge National Council resolution opposing the Criminal Law Bill, Alison Hennegan (Vice-Chairwoman), Dermot Quirke (Gay Lobby) and Nigel Hart (Information Officer) went to see Brynmor John M.P., the Minister of State at the Home Office. The discussion lasted three quarters of an hour and centered around a detailed memorandum of objections prepared by CHE.

Contacts have also been made with Labour, Conservative and Liberal peers and M.P.'s. At the time of writing both Lord Avebury and Robert Kilroy-Silk

M.P. have informed CHE that they intend to move amendments to the Bill's most objectionable features, (from a gay point of view) which are the removal of the right of trial by jury for soliciting offences and the continuation of the crime of conspiracy to corrupt public morals - a charge which could be brought against CHE, FRIEND or Gay News at any time.

#### CHE SPREADS

New CHE groups are being formed at Barnstable, Barrow-in-Furness, Kendal, Norwich and Wigan. Anyone interested in being put in touch with these groups should contact CHE National Office.

#### MEDIA CHECKS - & ADVERTISING GAINS

In response to the banning by BBC Radio 4 Controller Ian McIntyre of a programme on lesbianism, CHE has written to complain and to demand a meeting to discuss his policy on programmes concerned with homosexuality. A non-committal answer was returned and CHE has written again, pointing out that if the Home Secretary and the Minister of State can find time to see us, surely the Controller of Radio 4 can too . . . .

The Sun has axed an article on the male homosexual age of consent from a series by *Cathy Come Home* author,

Jeremy Sandford. CHE immediately staged a picket of the Sun's Bouverie Street office.

However, The Sun has for the first time accepted a CHE advertisement - and our switchboard was deluged with calls for days afterwards. Advertisements have also been placed in The Daily Mirror, The New Musical Express and Titbits, with encouraging results.

#### POLICE & TYNESIDE

Tyneside CHE have become alarmed at the increase of police entrapment tactics in the area. Following the example of Cambridge CHE, they are making contact with the local police to try to get them to end entrapment in return for the use of the group's influence in discouraging cottaging.

#### NATIONAL COUNCIL

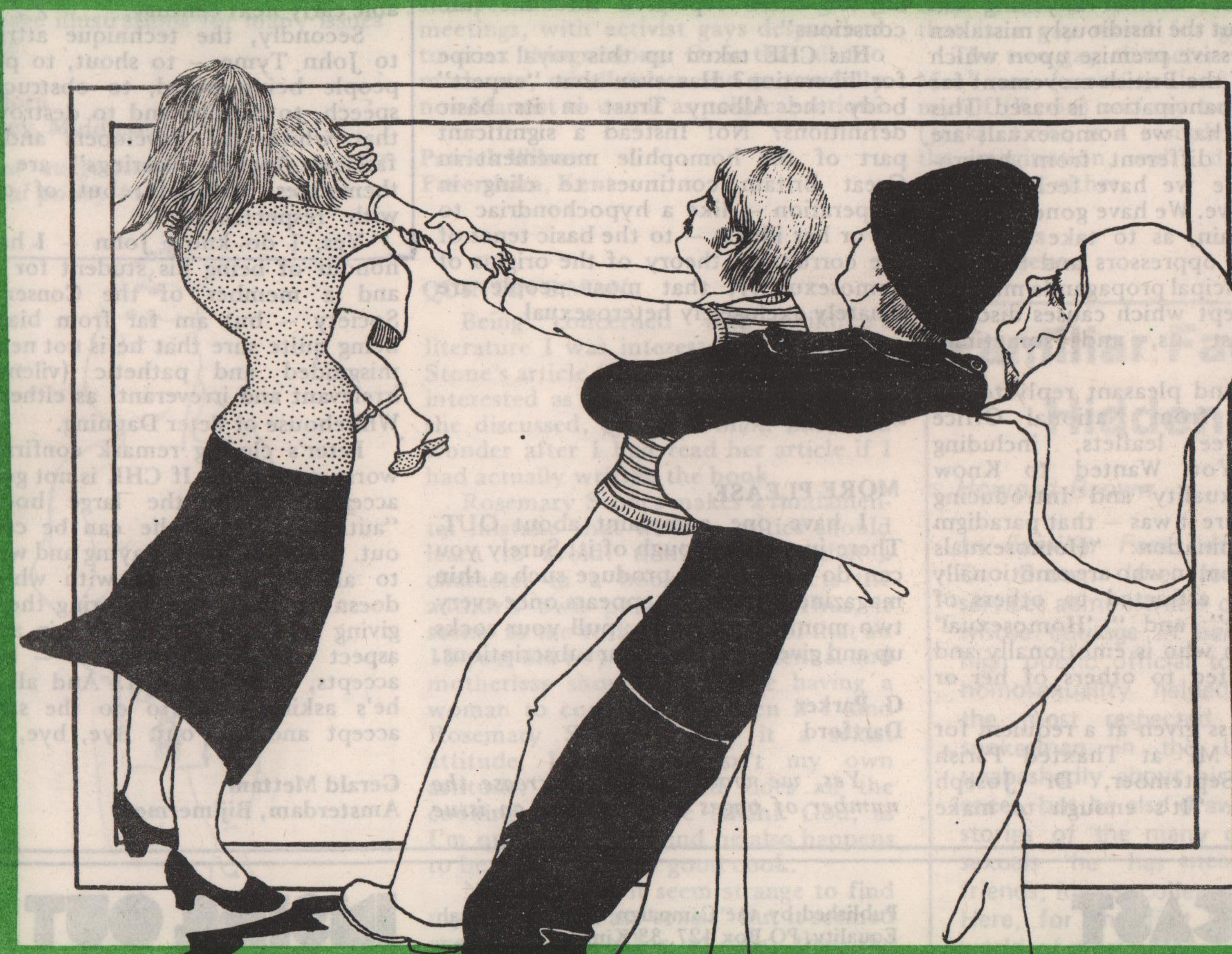
The June National Council of CHE will be held at Preston, Lancashire on Saturday 18th. All members of CHE are eligible to attend and it is hoped that as many groups as possible will attend.

#### LIBERAL CAMPAIGN

The Liberal Party has begun an internal education campaign on gay rights under the direction of Bernard Greaves, a former E.C. member. Local CHE groups are being urged to make contact with local Liberal branches.

# OUT 20p

## For and about gay women and men



### They're our children too Stella McTeer

Number 4

April/May 1977



## If Gay News ever helped YOU...

On December 9 1976, MARY WHITEHOUSE won the first round in her battle to close GN. A judge gave her permission to prosecute GN editor Denis Lemon and GAY NEWS itself. She says we committed 'Blasphemous Libel' when we published a poem by Professor James Kirkup on June 3 1976. On December 20, at a secret High Court hearing, MARY WHITEHOUSE was given leave to skip the normal magistrates proceedings and take us straight to full trial at the Old Bailey . . .

In the last four or five years the gay scene has spread across the country; gay groups and meeting places exist in towns and cities where none existed before. Here at GAY NEWS we have tried to play a small part in helping people to enjoy these new opportunities.

For many hundreds of gay men and women, GAY NEWS has been their first contact with other gays. For many others, still isolated in small towns and villages, GAY NEWS remains their only link with the gay community.

If you think GAY NEWS has helped you in the past, can we ask you a big favour in return? Help us fight MARY WHITEHOUSE's attempts to close us down. Help us carry on our work.

As individuals, we at Greyhound Road cannot match the financial power of MARY WHITEHOUSE and her backers. We have to turn to you for help. And in the end it is up to you. You are the ones we produce the paper for. You are the only ones with the right to decide whether what we're doing is worthwhile, and whether we should carry on doing it.

Pennies or pounds, every donation helps. Pounds will help us hire lawyers and pay for the expenses of the trial. But even pennies will still encourage us to keep on fighting. If you can help, please let us have donations urgently (cheques and POs payable to the GN Fighting Fund) addressed to: Gay News, 1A Normand Gardens, Greyhound Road, London W14 9SB.

Donation from (Name) \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_



every month, but there is not enough money in our budget from CHE to allow us to do that. As it is we operate on a shoe string and cannot even afford the £120 needed to add an extra four pages.

**TYME'S RIGHT** 129, 130

Peter Danning, from his letter condemning John Tyme (OUT 3) has obviously learnt very well the lesson of self-oppression. He has learnt his "proper place" — and what a lowly one it is!

Firstly, the "progress" he so passively accepts is that which many people now realise is progress towards annihilation — the cumulative effects of over-pollution, over-population, of exhaustion of energy supplies and raw materials which threaten to make Earth uninhabitable early next century.

Secondly, the technique attributed to John Tyme — to shout, to prevent people being heard, to obstruct free speech, to disrupt and to destroy — is that which the developers and their farcical "public hearings" are doing themselves, precisely, but of course, with "respectability".

Yes, I do know John — I had the honour of being his student for a year and a member of the Conservation Society — but am far from biased in being quite sure that he is not nearly so misguided and pathetic (vileness is irrelevant and irreverant) as either Mary Whitehouse or Peter Danning.

Peter's closing remark confirms my worst suspicions. If CHE is not going to accept placidly the large boots of "authority", then he can be counted out. No thought of staying and working to alter those things with which he doesn't agree, or of ignoring them and giving of himself to others in another aspect of CHE's work. No — he just accepts, and opts out. And all along he's asking CHE to do the same — accept and opt out. Bye, bye, Peter!

Gerald Mettam  
Amsterdam, Bijlmermeer

**ALL THE SAME?**

The advertisement in OUT said "For details about how the Campaign for Homosexual Equality works and how you can become a member, please write to CHE National Office".

So, although I have been a member for several years, I wrote to headquarters asking for details about how CHE works in order to see whether anything had been done about the insidiously mistaken and self-oppressive premise upon which I claim part of the British movement for homosexual emancipation is based. This is the notion that we homosexuals are fundamentally different from heterosexuals because we have feelings that they do not have. We have gone so far in CHE, I maintain, as to take this idea over from our oppressors and to assert in our own principal propaganda material the very concept which causes discrimination against us, and sometimes persecution.

A prompt and pleasant reply to my request came from National Office enclosing three leaflets, including "Everything You Wanted to Know about Homosexuality" and "Introducing CHE". And there it was — that paradigm of self-discrimination: "Homosexuals are men and women who are emotionally and physically attracted to others of their own sex"; and "Homosexual" means a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to others of her or his own sex".

In an address given at a requiem for Tom Driberg MP at Thaxted Parish Church in September, Dr Joseph Needham said: "It's enough to make

the angels weep, as the saying is, that the vast majority of people know so little of the great discoveries and profound knowledge that modern psychology, since the days of Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis and Carl Jung, have placed at our disposal. Everyone has homosexual and heterosexual traits in their personality, often conscious, but all too often repressed into the subconscious".

Has CHE taken up this royal recipe for liberation? Has even that "expert" body the Albany Trust in its basic definitions? No! Instead a significant part of the homophile movement in Great Britain continues to cling in desperation — like a hypochondriac to his or her illness — to the basic tenet of the corruption theory of the origins of homosexuality, that most people are innately exclusively heterosexual.

Bill George  
Dordrecht  
Holland

**MORE PLEASE**

I have one complaint about OUT. There just isn't enough of it! Surely you can do better than produce such a thin magazine which only appears once every two months? Come on; pull your socks up and give us value for our subscriptions.

G. Parker  
Dartford

Yes, we would like to increase the number of pages and produce an issue

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Contributions are invited in the form of letters, articles, cartoons and illustrations. Contributors are asked to type or write on one side of the paper with double spacing. The editors reserve the right to shorten contributions.

Deadline for the next issue is April 15 1977.

To obtain the next issue of OUT send 20p (+10p p&p) or join CHE and get it free.

**INSIDE OUT**

- 4 Ian Randall (a pseudonym used for personal reasons) describes how CHE saved his life.
- 5 Robert Rowe on the lessons to be learnt from running a local group.
- 6 Stella McTeer on the anguish of being separated from her daughter.
- 7 Nigel Hart's book review.
- 8 Ray Lightbown explodes some medical myths.
- 10 Jim Edgell discusses the gulf between members and their executive.
- 11 CHE Executive page.

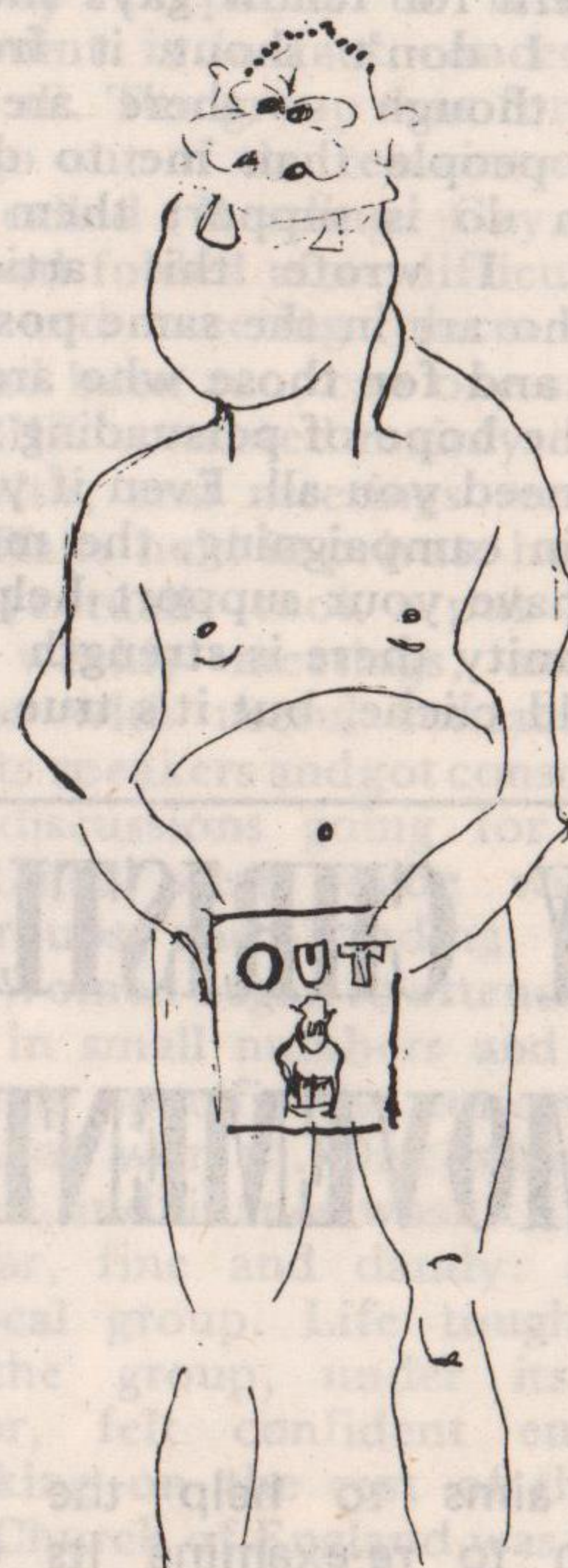
**NO TURN ON**

The contents of your new publication have so far failed to impress me very favourably, but I do not condemn it — yet. I think however that you urgently need to produce a more attractive cover, or front page. No. 1 had a very ugly drawing, doubtless symbolic, but possibly obscene. No. 2 has nine silly little childish drawings of people or types, and a photograph of an old man in a raincoat, un-named. True, it is a clean raincoat, but he is not exactly calculated to turn one on, is he?

I recommend therefore that you organise a photographic competition for the title of "Mr Right 1977", or perhaps "Prince of CHE 1977". In addition to that of the winner you will acquire photographs of many dazzlingly beautiful "numbers", providing your successive front-page illustrations for many issues to come.

J. V. Horn  
Wembley, Middlesex

Your suggestions are against OUT editorial policy but, just this once . . .



**POSTAL POWER**

Congratulations to you for publishing, and to David Hutter for writing, his lucid article "Wrong Division" (OUT 3). He is dead right. Gay oppression is a unique political phenomenon and ultimately independent of other forms of oppression. I wish his key sentence were emblazoned in neon lights over every CHE conference platform and tattooed in scarlet upon some frequently inspected portion of every CHE official's anatomy, public and private. I quote: "In equating the gay struggle with other radical causes, activists are not merely diverting energy from our movement,

they are ultimately working positively against it". Well said David!

Barrie Kenyon need look no further for the causes and cures relative to the present anti-gay public backlash and the fall off in CHE membership. For if, after ten years of CHE's "campaigning" the Minister of State can effectively undermine a CHE delegation's objections to the Criminal Law Bill by pointing out that he receives many more anti-gay than pro-gay letters, then our pan-liberationist radicals have indeed disastrously diverted attention, energies and resources away from the vital and obvious political task of strengthening the position of gays in the society in which we live now.

Why the hell didn't national CHE ever organise a massive, nation-wide, protest write-in. Pens, paper, envelopes, stamps laid out at specific local group meetings, with activist gays despatched to coax things along. Or is that all too moderate, middle-class and successfully non-Marxist to count as political action?

Patrick Wilson  
Faversham, Kent

**QUINTIN'S MAN**

Being concerned with children's literature I was interested in Rosemary Stone's article (OUT 3), and particularly interested as I wrote one of the novels she discussed, *Quintin's Man*. But I did wonder after I had read her article if I had actually written the book.

Rosemary Stones makes a fundamental mistake that literary critics should learn to avoid: thinking that what a character in a book says reflects the author's own point of view. Thus, it seems to me to be quite natural that an 18-year-old boy who is heterosexual and motherless should say "Nice having a woman to cook for us" even if I (and Rosemary Stones) think it a sexist attitude. It certainly isn't my own attitude. My boy-friend does all the cooking in our house (thank God, as I'm quite hopeless) and he also happens to be a superlatively good cook.

Not only did it seem strange to find myself labelled as "sexist" but it seemed even more peculiar to read that the weakness of the book is "the gay characters are there for the benefit and enlightenment of the het". This was in many ways the book's intention. Certainly it is a didactic book: not a book for gay people, but for teenage heterosexuals. I want such people to realise that homosexuals of their own age are human, loving, vulnerable, etc. just as they are themselves. After all, isn't that what CHE is all about? Showing the rest of the world that we aren't neurotic, disgusting or child predators? Just normal, like everybody else.

Two other points: why should the depiction of class differences be "outdated"? If Rosemary Stones finds no class differences in her own experience of life then she is indeed lucky. Secondly,

it seems quite reasonable that Luke should wonder if Jack is going to make a pass at him (showers at the squash courts etc.) but Jack disposes of this idea with some considerable force. (Well I thought so).

Finally, I must admit that I feel *Quintin's Man* doesn't portray gay men from their own point of view. Rosemary Stones is quite right here. It wasn't my intention to do so. But the book I am at present writing — and it will be published on a children's list (my publisher has already made very encouraging noises) — will have for its main character a 16-year-old boy who is homosexual, and who, during the course of the book, accepts and is happy with being gay, despite the conflicts this will produce with parents, friends, and his own religious (Roman Catholic) beliefs. So, maybe, soon, I'll have a novel in print that is a gay novel for gay teenagers.

The two gay characters in "Quintin's Man" are (more or less) portraits of myself (Kevin) and my boy-friend, Kim (Jack). Luke is a complete figment of the imagination, and I don't like him very much, either.

David Rees  
Exeter, Devon

**Familiar Faces, Hidden Lives**

Howard Brown

In *Familiar Faces, Hidden Lives*, Dr Brown (the former health services administrator of New York, whose courage in being the first high public official to declare his homosexuality helped make him the most respected homosexual spokesman in the U.S.) writes unabashedly about his own experiences, but he also draws on the life stories of the many other homosexuals he has encountered — friends, lovers, colleagues, students. Here, for the first time, the real world of most homosexuals is made accessible to the heterosexual; and homosexuals, accustomed to reading about themselves as outcasts, activists, or social statistics, will find strength and dignity in this frank and compassionate picture of the gay world.

£5.95



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# SAVED: Ian Randall

It seems silly to say that CHE saved my life — but it did. Around 1970 I began to get worried. I was messing around with a small boy who lived down the road. By messing around I mean I would bring him into my shed and we would kiss and fumble around each other's genitals to no real purpose. I was fifteen and he was ten. I thought I was madly in love with this small child — I did not know his feelings. In my bedroom one afternoon, we were kissing on the bed when my mother came in. She looked at me but said nothing — her face said it all. I smiled at her and said "I like kissing him" and she went away. This was never referred to again, until recently.

In 1970 I was worried. There were all the other boys in my class starting to investigate girls and there was I, far happier to keep an eye on the boys who were eyeing the girls. There were one or two boys in my class who were very small and weak and thin and we all called them poofs. I didn't have a clue what this word meant, but presumed that as all the others used it, it must be the proper terminology. Then I found out the meaning but it didn't occur to me that I might be a poof. That came later.

Later was when I was almost 17, I was an avid television watcher. I would get very excited when someone on the screen bared his chest. On the very few occasions a woman did the same I was merely bored. I would gaze at men in the street and fall in love daily. Looking back, I realise the "awful" truth, with hardly any shock. I was a poof too.

I wanted to tell someone but there was no-one. I loved my mother too much to tell her anything. She always said how nice it would be to become a grandma. My father is the type of person who takes a fiendish delight in pointing to the television screen and screaming "He's a poof". My sister was too young. Of course, CHE was in existence then, but I had never heard of it.

Not having anyone else to turn to, I telephoned the Samaritans. Although I worked and lived in London, I contacted the Reigate Samaritans because I thought I was suitably far away and anonymous. I made up a fictitious character whom I called "Patrick". I also invented all sorts of problems which Shirley — the Samaritan I always talked to — would diligently listen to. Gradually, I learnt to trust and respect her. But on the fateful day when I confessed that I was not Patrick and told her the truth about my homosexuality, her immediate reaction was to say: "Have you seen your doctor?" I slammed down the phone and to this day have never dialled the number again.

I was upset. Very upset. The only

person I trusted sufficiently to be completely honest with had let me down. I was not, by then, so ignorant as to believe the myth that homosexuality is an illness and can be cured. Besides, I didn't want to be "cured". I was quite happy getting enjoyment (and fuel for the midnight masturbatory fantasies) out of beautiful men I saw in the street.

Twelve months staggered by while I became more and more depressed. I started writing poems which in some way saved my sanity. Everything that was pent up inside me I would release on paper as that was my only mode of expression. I read those poems today and the picture is of a very unhappy person. I was a very unhappy person.

At the age of 19 I was still living at home with not a friend in the world. I sat one night on the edge of the bed, with a breadknife in my hand. I held it against my wrist. I couldn't kill myself. I wanted desperately to end it all, but I couldn't. Salvation was just around the corner.

I read, in *Time Out* magazine, of an organisation called the Campaign for Homosexual Equality. By this time I knew of the gross inhumanity of the age of consent laws and the bigotry around homosexuals. I cut out the address but did absolutely nothing with it. I started to have dreadful dreams of an everlasting life of total misery and loneliness.

I watched the *Naked Civil Servant* on television and wrote to Mr Quentin Crisp. His reply was lovely. Between the lines I saw a brave man and I admired him. I recalled the initials CHE and, in the middle of the night, I wrote a letter to Manchester.

A few weeks later I was a member of CHE but not in a local group. I felt happier as part of an organisation in which I believed completely. Then, in a newsletter, I saw that Mr Crisp was to give a talk to the Marylebone and Paddington group. I telephoned the convenor who invited me to lunch. That was June 26 — a day I shall never forget.

Three days after that lunch there was a social evening in the same flat. I was the first to arrive and watched everyone else slowly trickle in from the outside world. It was the first time I had been in a room full of homosexuals and I felt marvellous. I was free and happy and gay in all meanings of the word.

There now followed more than a month of living a double life. Once a week I would tell my parents some outrageous lie and go to one of the meetings or socials of the group. I was being torn apart. I hated lying to my parents but could see no way out other than leaving home. When I told my

mother I was going to leave, her reaction was one of surprise and shock. Then I blurted out that I was homosexual. Her reaction this time was different. She told me that she had had an inkling for many years. The relief I felt was indescribable. After a moment she said: "Don't tell your father — it'll finish him off", and so, I haven't. The next thing she said was: "You can be cured you know" but I soon convinced her, with the help of some literature from CHE that this was not so. I told her that I was actually enjoying being a homosexual and she said she was pleased for me.

It all sounds so very easy but of course it wasn't; it was bloody hard. But I would never have been able to do it had I not made friends with people in CHE. I knew that if my mother's reaction had been complete shock and hatred I would have people there who would be friendly and kind and understand everything. CHE didn't force me to come out, but their support (mostly unspoken) enabled me to do what I had to do — tell my mother.

I believe that every homosexual who has the slightest amount of compassion and concern for fellow gays should be in CHE. I don't shout it from the rooftops though — there are better equipped people than me to do that. All I can do is support them wholeheartedly. I wrote this article for people who are in the same position as I was, — and for those who are not in CHE in the hope of persuading them to join. We need you all. Even if you take no part in campaigning, the mere fact that we have your support helps all of us — in unity there is strength — that's a tired old cliché, but it's true. Believe me. ●

## GAY CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

GCM aims to help the whole Church to re-examine its understanding of human sexuality, and to work for a positive acceptance of gay relationships; also to encourage fellowship, friendship, and support among individual gay Christians through prayer, study, and action, wherever possible in local groups. Membership is open to all men and women, gay and non gay, who support the aims.

For details of all our 32 local groups write to Anne Goldie or Jim Cotter, 15 Bermuda Road, Cambridge.

# Reading Lessons

## Robert Rowe

People in Reading aren't easy to make an impression on. No one seems to care about anything. The Berkshire town has a famous pioneering traffic system which hardly anyone knows about. The football team jogs along unnoticed in the Third Division. Architectural devastation sweeps through the town centre unchecked. There is a university on a remote hill. The Sutton Seeds Company has moved out. In such a featureless setting, you wonder how on earth to give a campaign some bite. How do you dent a blancmange or change the direction of a pond?

CHE has been trying, and has discovered, of course, that a population apparently prepared to retreat over every point is in fact conceding very little at all. The group was formed four years ago out of the remains of a social group called Reading Gay Alliance which had folded after difficulties with money and meeting place. Although RGA had been run, can one say, bisexually, CHE consisted mainly of men to begin with, and meetings were purely social affairs held in private houses. The group eventually took a pub room for regular weekly meetings, and a new convenor with useful contacts invited gay rights speakers and got consciousness-raising discussions going for the first time. Links were made with other CHE groups and Reading University Gaysoc. Women began to attend regularly, though in small numbers and only for discussions specifically concerning oppression of women. Discos and parties went well, and finance wasn't a problem.

So far, fine and dandy: a typical CHE local group. Life toughened up when the group, under its present convenor, felt confident enough to start taking on the rest of the world.

The Church of England was Christian in the best sense about our approaches, but, as no member has ever indicated a need for religious guidance, that friendly connection has not been usefully exploited. The group applied for affiliation to the town's Voluntary Service Council and was met with the objection that such a link might be "misused" by the local press. When we assured them that crime and anarchy, the only link that would interest the town and county weeklies, were not part of our platform, they voted us on, and refer inquirers to the group occasionally.

The weeklies refused a personal column advertisement for CHE. "Not editorial policy to allow advertisements of that type," they said. "What type?"

we asked. "Your type . . ." The daily evening paper has carried helpful stories and adverts from time to time, and will rise to meaty bait. All the papers gave prominent coverage to a Saturday demo by Reading and Windsor CHE Gaysoc outside the British Home Stores, complete with photographs of which the most important effect, perhaps, was to prove definitely to the people depicted in them that they, unlike Tony Whitehead, wouldn't necessarily get the sack if they came out in a blaze of publicity. But local gays got their best airing when Thames Valley independent radio gave us a full two-hour community access programme one evening a year ago, when CHE and Gaysoc women and men talked unscripted and conducted a phone-in on gay rights and oppression. A riposte by a disorganised rag bag of Old Testament fans on the same station some weeks later had the lines jammed with so many pro-gay objectors (not orchestrated in advance) that the programme was given extra air-time.

Information on the group is held by the public library and Citizen's Advice Bureau and divulged to inquirers, though the library will not put up posters for CHE events because they are not "cultural". More tiresomely, it has consistently refused to take *Gay News*, even when we offered a free subscription. The issue was raised in committee and went to a full meeting of the borough council, where a Labour councillor called the refusal blatant discrimination. Stung by this criticism, they voted to take an Asian periodical. Meanwhile W. H. Smith also refused to stock *Gay News*, so local Young Liberals and the Reading Women's Group did a petition-signing demo outside both offending establishments; one of the demonstrators was nabbed for "obstruction" and fined £10 after a court appearance like the trial scene in *Alice in Wonderland*. CHE, which shamefully hadn't been involved in the protest till then, helped to pay her fine, a gesture which again created publicity and solidarity.

Outside speaking engagements have been few, but Reading CHE lobbied the town's two MPs last year. One offered, and provides, behind-the-scenes support for homosexual law reform of the kind he already gives, most effectively, for immigrants' organisations. The other gave a delegation to his surgery a most courteous hearing and has not answered any letters sent to him by the group since. Group members outside

Reading have been unwilling to broach the issue with their own MPs except by letter, and replies in most cases have been discouraging.

The problem increasingly facing the group is, again, the typical one that only a very small nucleus of members is actually prepared to do anything. Whether it's a question of typing letters to local election candidates, joining a gay pride march in London, moving chairs for a disco or even just being friendly to fellow gays, particularly women, it is impossible to rely on action from more than about a fifth of the paper membership. So many areas still remain unexplored, simply for lack of *oomph* within the group itself. What is remarkable is not that this state of affairs exists, but that in the face of it the Few have gone on so long carrying the Many. The longer it goes on the worse it gets, from the campaigning viewpoint, as energy wanes on one side and complacency burgeons on the other. As Reading's only social focus for people who cannot face the weekly commercial gay disco, the group has always been quite successful and appreciated, but it is perfectly plain that no group can hold together if, instead of concentrating on a particular aim, four-fifths of it retreats enthusiastically at the first sign of "boover". Many CHE groups have found themselves used as stepping stones into the gay world, or the world full stop, by shy people who need support in coming out. That they then move on is a pity, but not half as bad as being left with a loyal and stable attendance of people who view the arrangement more and more as a welcoming closet run by a few mildly pinko suckers with a social conscience and boundless patience.

By this stage it's time to cut the number of meetings drastically before the group fades away in introspection and frustration; and that, spurred on by the publican's coincidental decision almost to double the price of the room, is what is being done. We fervently hope normal service can be resumed as soon as possible, but active members' energies are better expended now on the one activity that seems to be a relative success: befriending and counselling people who ring the group's contact numbers in genuine need of help. A number of volunteers are training with an established local counselling service, so as to set up something systematic, worthwhile, challenging and self-supportive — and to take what feels like a rest-cure! And what makes it possible to do this with a fairly easy conscience is that a local pub looks like turning gay, and the responsibility CHE has had for providing a friendly meeting place will be largely taken over.

So when a more than usually outrageous instance of anti-gay discrimination comes to light again, those who care about gay rights will be able to join battle once more untrammelled and refreshed. ●

# They're our children too

## Stella McTeer



She was sitting on my knee, bath time over, ready for bed. "Let's read a book" she said. But I told her no, not yet. We had something special to do that night before we read any stories.

I took her by the hand and we went upstairs, her in front, holding up the flaps of her dressing gown. Under her bed was a big brown suitcase. I took it out and put it on the bed. All day long I had been thinking about how I would go about this, and there I was about to get it over with. I thought the best thing to do was to make a game of it with her, letting me help her get her case packed. For my sake as much as hers. For me, so that I could have the distraction of her involvement and busy chatter while I did something every strand of me was crying out against. For her, so she could learn of the imminent, more in a fun situation, as naturally as possible and so be ready for it and not just carted off with no preparation the next morning, with nothing explained.

"We're going to put all of your things in this suitcase tonight", I said, my matter of fact cheerfulness giving one great lie to the deep-seated ache of unhappiness and emptiness I felt. "Are you going to help me?" She ignored the question and wanted to know why the case was to be packed, so I told her all she needed to know of the reason. "Daddy is coming tomorrow morning in the car to take you back to Grandma's house with him. To stay. The gap

before "To stay" was noticeable, but perhaps only to me, because I knew what the words meant for me, hence the hesitation in using them. She went right to the heart of things. "Am I to sleep in Grandma's house?"

"Yes, that's right. From tomorrow night you will be sleeping in your bed at Grandma's house". Bright-eyed, she thought about this, and then pulled her brows down as she always did, even when quite small, when something gave her cause for deeper concentration. "And I wake up in the morning there too?"

Something in me gave a lurch. Almost every night we said goodnight, I would give her a kiss and say: "Night night, see you in the morning", and she would reply "I wake up in the morning?"

"Of course", I would answer, wondering each time what on earth prompted her to ask that question. "And so will I, and we'll have another nice day like today". Sometimes she would use this to con me into talking over the day's events and what we would do the next day. At other times she'd be so sleepy that all she would say was yes and laugh, the "yes" drawn out long by her laughter. I said: "Yes, you'll wake up in the morning there too", thinking to myself it would be a long time before we shared this little bedtime ritual again, if ever.

It would be a long time, because just the day before a magistrate had, in his

wisdom, awarded custody of our daughter aged 3½ years to my husband, and the next morning he was coming to take her back to his parent's house, where we had been living prior to our separation some two months previously. He asked me to leave, I went to my mother's with the child, and then came the separation and custody hearing.

Custody was awarded to him, not because I was a bad, neglectful mother, or cruel, or given to excessive drinking. Nor was the decision based on a fair assessment as to which of us had the best to offer the child. It was so ordered because I am gay. Though that is not the word the magistrate chose to use. He chose words like perverted and vile and was so scathing in his remarks, it seemed to me he was righteously punishing me for my sins. If additional ways had been open to him to do so maybe he would gladly have used them.

I came from court emotionally shattered and physically near collapse. Of course I had known there would be very little chance for custody to be given to me. Women who have shown themselves capable of that particular abnormal perversion of loving in every sense of the word a member of their own sex very seldom do get custody of their children. But you don't stop hoping for a miracle of some sort. You might just get a magistrate who is fairly enlightened, and who can look at the situation rationally, without prejudice, without too many masculine sympathies weighting his judgement. At the very least one could hope for a magistrate who does not seek to set himself up as a judge of morality, guided only by his basic personal prejudices and outdated ideas about sex, marriage and life in general, including woman's role in it all.

But the magistrate who heard our case was not such a man. Not only were his crude attitudes towards homosexuality clear from the word go, but his prejudices in other respects showed through as well. In his summing up he remarked: "It is the duty of a wife to sacrifice herself and her needs to her husband's career and ambitions. A man looks outside marriage (for sexual satisfaction) only when he is not being given what he wants inside it". This was a comment on something my solicitor chose to bring into the proceedings.

Some two years ago my husband had had an extra-marital affair. A woman, I suppose, does not want or even need such satisfaction. A man of course does. So if he so much as thinks he might not be getting sex where he has the right to expect it, it is his further right to seek it where he pleases. A woman grins and bears it whatever comes, or does not, whatever the case may be.

So, all of a sudden, I was an unfit mother, branded morally dangerous for my child, simply because I exhibited the ability to love another woman.

Simply because I was able to fill a need in me as strong as the need in anyone for a relationship so complete and natural as to be full of love, caring and tenderness such as I had never known.

That briefly is how I came to be packing my daughter's suitcase with her. We had fun, it was a game for her. Never was a case packed in such a higgledy-piggledy fashion, with toys and clothes and books all jumbled together, put in as they were spotted in this corner or that drawer. Next morning my husband arrived accompanied by his father, and off she went. Happily, it was still a game. Fun going to Grandma's. That was important for me rather than my husband. No big scenes. It was as much as I could do not to start sobbing my heart out until they had gone.

She was taken from care, not so much for what I had done as for what I might do in the future. "A lesbian lifestyle would be morally bad for her". At the time of the hearing I had nothing that could be described as a lesbian lifestyle. And do I now? I work, eat, sleep and have my leisure activities. And not all of these are gay orientated, not by a long shot. Supposing though I had a girlfriend of whom my daughter was very fond and we all lived together. Does that mean my child would grow up a lesbian or be likely to? You could say yes to that if you believed that lack of male influence made women into lesbians or that homosexuals are made and not born, or that homosexuality is a disease or disorder of the mind that one catches from one's environment like measles. And what if she did turn out to be a lesbian? Is that so awful?

That's the crux of the matter. To say that we can't allow children to grow up with their lesbian mothers or their gay fathers for fear they might end up loving members of their own sex means, oh so simply, that love between members of the same sex is invalid. Not merely perverted, vile, evil, bent, but totally and utterly invalid. If such love were given the same validity and intrinsic worth as heterosexuality, accorded the same qualities of goodness and rightness as are given and accorded to heterosexual love, if homosexuality were not regarded as corrupt in itself and corrupting, lesbian mothers would not have to fear losing the children they bore, would not have to ache as I do at the thought of being a week-end mother, with someone else having the joy and rewards of helping their children grow up into awareness as independent beings.

Surely we don't choose to be gay. We are gay. We love as we love not through conscious preference in a certain direction but because our needs take us in a certain direction. We're ordinary. We're normal. And we are very much part of the society our children are going to grow up into.

This article was first published in the newsletter of the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association.

# New States Men

Nigel Hart reviews

*Familiar Faces Hidden Lives: the story of homosexual men in America today.*

"At 3.00 a.m. on June 28, 1969, the police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar at 53 Christopher Street (New York) . . . Homosexuals had long had the reputation of being easy to push around . . . And the group of some 200 homosexuals that the police proceeded to expel from the Stonewall Inn was by and large effeminate. But then an unexpected thing happened. Regrouping at nearby Sheridan Square, they started to taunt the police, then to throw anything they could lay hands on at them . . ."

Long before 1969 dedicated women and men had come together to work to change the laws and attitudes of the USA and some western European countries. The American Mattachine Society and the Dutch COC had existed for years. In Britain, the Albany Trust and CHE's parent body, the North West Homosexual Law Reform Society had helped to bring about the 1967 Sexual Law Reform Act, while the Lesbian Minorities Research Group was already more than 5 years old.

But they had hardly even begun to lift the weight of guilt, fear and ignorance which lay heavily over gay people. As Howard Brown puts it, Stonewall "was the first time homosexuals had united to fight back against men they had come to see as their oppressors. They were not fighting for any clearly defined rights. Caught up in a seemingly irrational fury, they hand simply exploded . . . The riots broke the spell. Gay activism grew out of Stonewall". Within a few months the New York Activist Alliance had been formed and gay liberation had begun.

As an account of the background and growth of American gay liberation alone, *Familiar Faces Hidden Lives* is an important contribution to gay history. And the more so because Brown's calm, literate style compares favourably with the trendy psycho-political jargon with which radical gay ideas are usually discussed.

Dr. Brown's book, finished just before his death in 1975, is, however, more than a gay history book. It is an attempt — and the best I have seen to date — to demonstrate to heterosexuals and isolated homosexuals alike that homosexuals are ordinary people whose ordinary aspirations are thwarted at every turn by the irrational attitudes of society. It is directed against the stereotype of the male homosexual as a man who is weak in character and body,

untrustworthy, shallow, "artistic" perhaps, but certainly incapable of holding down a serious and responsible job.

Brown draws heavily on his own experiences as a senior member of the New York medical establishment (and it should be remembered that doctors in America enjoy a status second to none) and one-time director of the New York Health Service. He traces his personal story from the medical student who was assured by a psychiatrist that he couldn't be homosexual, as he feared, because "I was going to be a doctor, wasn't I? Homosexuals didn't become doctors; they became hairdressers, interior decorators, that sort of thing", via ten years in analysis and a further 15 years of nervous, closetted gayness, to the well-known doctor invited to address a medical conference so that "physicians would stop thinking of homosexuals as just hairdressers, interior decorators and male nurses".

Other men's stories appear as well: lovers, friends, colleagues in the New York City government or from the National Gay Task Force of which Brown became chairman. They are related sensibly, sympathetically but without false sentiment. There is the homosexual policeman ordered to arrest gay demonstrators who knew he too was gay but who did not betray him; the farmer and the country doctor unable to reconcile the free expression of the sexuality with their love for their small town communities; the closetted businessman; lawyers and doctors desperately trying to protect their careers; and the young activists who became his friends despite the wide disparity in their ages and backgrounds.

Brown does not sensationalise. Some of the men do kill themselves or lose their jobs, but for most the tragedy is in a lower key: years of fear and guilt, lies and deception of self and others, of safeguarded careers and ruined lives.

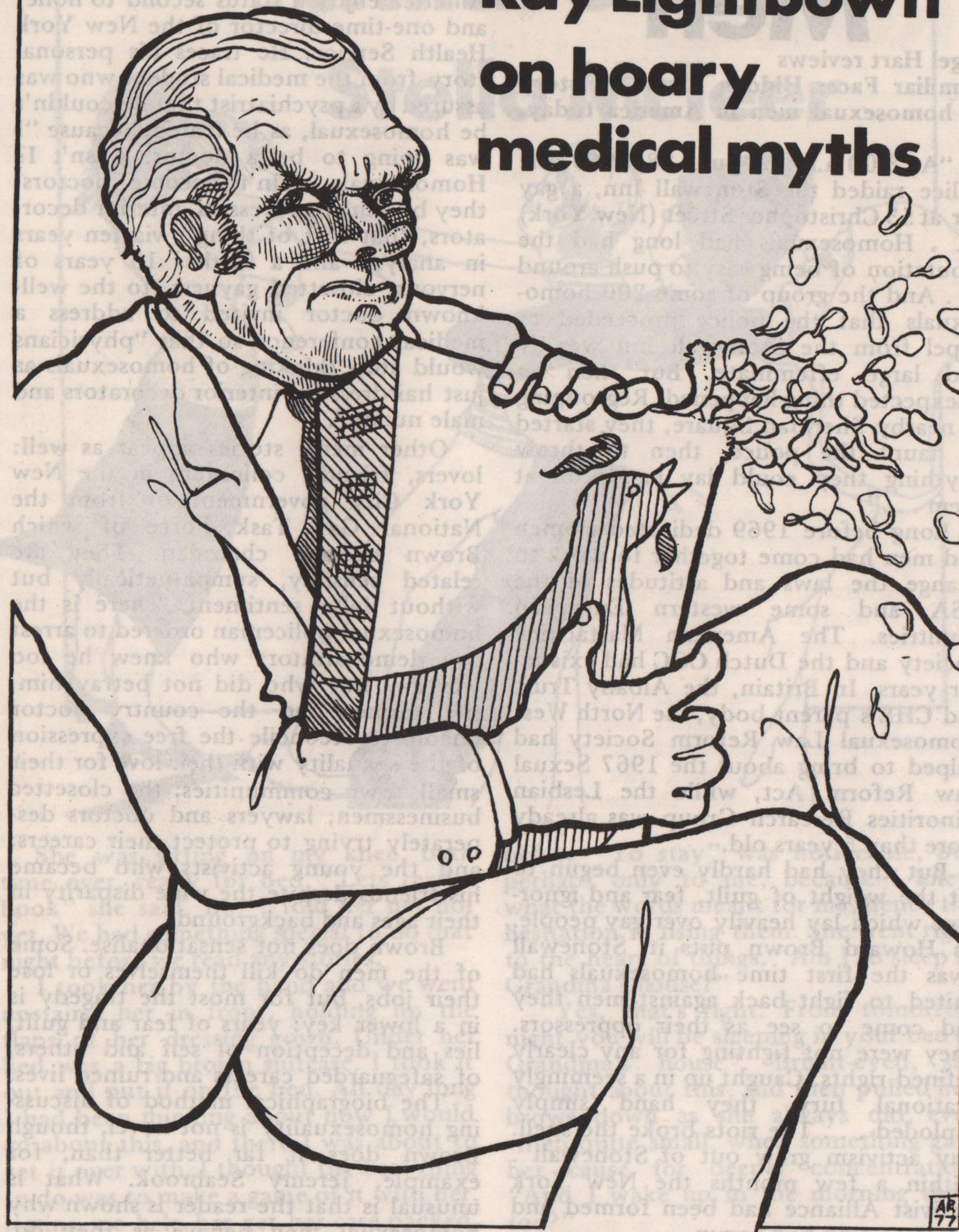
The biographical method of discussing homosexuality is not novel, though Brown does it far better than, for example, Jeremy Seabrook. What is unusual is that the reader is shown why homosexual men behave as they do. And the answer is not that gays are weaker or more cowardly than heterosexuals, but that society's pressures are too great. Homosexuals accept and even collaborate with their own oppression in the same way that so many Germans, isolated and afraid, accepted and collaborated with the Nazis.

Other chapters deal with the means American society uses to oppress homosexuals: the law, the churches, and in particular medicine and psychiatry; and how gays have fought back with considerable success.

Even though the American social and political structures are very different to their counterparts in Britain, the basic elements of gay oppression and homophobia are universal. So are Dr. Brown's insights into them and the conclusions he draws.

# Kellogg's Corn

## Ray Lightbown on hoary medical myths



The silly and damaging belief that masturbation is sinful and leads to weak sight was a commonly-held view among the medical profession, particularly in the last century. While hardly anyone believes such rubbish these days there is still a vast legacy of 19th century moral pronouncements about sex which gained credence because they were uttered by doctors and psychiatrists. Homosexual women and men are still labouring under that legacy.

Until the 18th century the medical community in general, though often hostile to variant sexual behaviour, had put its condemnation in moral rather than medical terms. Toward the end of the century moral attitudes were being challenged by the new rationalism of the period, and this caused some individuals in medicine to bolster trad-

itional morality with pseudoscience.

Hermann Boerhaave in 1728 observed that after the male orgasm there was often a period of lassitude. He used this fact to support Christian prejudice and wrote: "rash expenditure of semen brings on . . . weakness . . . obscuring of the senses — above all the eyes, a decay of the spinal cord . . ." He also harked back to the much earlier idea that semen came from the spinal fluid.

A Swiss physician, Samuel Tissot, stated in 1758 that the body suffered a continual waste which, if not replaced by nutrition, would result in death. Seizing on Boerhaave's theories he said ejaculation, like bleeding, was a loss which could not easily be replaced and which might result in death. Intercourse was a very risky procedure worthwhile

only for the conception of children. All non-procreative sex was suicidally unwise and resulted in the most horrendous physical and mental disorders. There were plenty of ills that could be laid at the doorstep of sexual indulgence: depression, indigestion, consumption, VD, congenital deformities, and death in childbirth. Tissot pronounced on women too. It was known that sexual excesses in women caused "copious lubrication of the generative organs", so loss of this fluid was also very dangerous.

Among the 19th century names that might be singled out as believing that sex perniciously sapped our vital resources, one remains a household word, John Harvey Kellogg of cornflake fame. Kellogg was quick to attack anything which might encourage masturbation. Lascivious thinking, wanton nakedness of limbs, boredom were all condemned. Masturbation was even worse than homosexuality since there were no bounds to its indulgence. In view of these dangers anyone who indulged in "the solitary vice" was sick, and would soon become sicker.

Then came a curious twist of circumstances. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs argued in 1868 that, since homosexuals were as healthy as their heterosexual counterparts, they must have been born with "abnormal instincts" rather than have sunk to the depths of degradation. Acting in accord with their nature, homosexuals did not suffer the harmful effects of non-procreative sex.

Unfortunately, the medical community was busy classifying sex into its various "deviations" and readily accepted Ulrichs' view, not as he intended, as a defence of homosexuality, but as a ready-made perversion. If sex itself was sick then those born with perverted instincts were dangerously sick, morally insane and should be put in asylums. In short it was a medical problem.

Richard von Krafft-Ebing consolidated the pathological nature of sexual perversions in *Psychopathia Sexualis* published in 1894. This influenced others to copy him in believing that disease resulted either from frequent abuse of the sexual organs or from an inherited abnormal constitution of the central nervous system. His moral judgements were ever present, marked by his use of phrases such as "hereditary taint", "moral degeneracy", and so on. He eagerly saw masturbation as one of the causes of almost anything he regarded as deviant or unpleasant. In the same grouping with sexual murder and cannibalism he included such harmless, unusual turn-ons as violet-striped handkerchiefs and the scent of roses.

All non-procreative sex was a disease, a pathological condition, and only gradually was it recognised that couples who desired contraceptives were not sick. Inevitably, when physicians saw homosexuals, they regarded them as sick, sometimes curable, sometimes not. And so, although the medical fraternity had long ago rejected the naive assumptions that led to homosexuality being

classified as a disease, it was not until 1974 that the American Psychiatric Association ceased to class it as an illness, and only last year did the Royal College of Psychiatrists recommend equality in age of consent. But the World Health Organisation still lists it as a disorder.

It has become increasingly apparent that the "disorder model" of homosexuality is inaccurate, unjust, inadequate and downright insulting. It is of no use in gay counselling and acts directly to increase feelings of inferiority, self-pity and inadequacy already firmly inculcated into a gay person. What is the alternative? Dr. George Weinberg, an American psychoanalyst offers the concept of healthy homosexuality.

Healthy homosexuals regard themselves as happily gifted in seeing people of their own sex as romantically beautiful. They are free of shame, regret or guilt over the fact that they are gay. They are not always asking why they are homosexual. They don't limit themselves to a stereotype, and believe that any erotic orientation and preference can be housed in any human being.

This implies that homosexuality renders a man no less masculine or a woman no less feminine, and there is no need, unless one so decides, to act in a way considered to be stereotypically homosexual. The healthy homosexual is usually someone who has discovered that the heterosexual ideal that has been believed in since childhood is inapplicable to his or her life. At first this gives you a sense of loss, but soon you realise that you are free to direct yourself — to become a true individual.

Dr. Weinberg describes a new "illness", homophobia — the fear shown by many people about homosexuality. For example, a great many men refrain from kissing one another, or embracing, or expressing their fondness for each other, or openly admiring the beauty of another man. In general, this doesn't apply to women, and they also kiss and cuddle their daughters and sons equally fondly. But fathers feel it unfitting to behave so with their sons. In a recent experiment the penises of heterosexual men often shrank in response to photographs of naked men. But this did not happen when gay men were shown pictures of nude women. These findings support the concept of homophobia in heterosexual men.

Homophobia also refers to the self-loathing that a gay person is taught from an early age. Nearly all gay men and women have been, or still are, just as anti-gay as the majority of Western society. It can take a lot of effort and personal growth to overcome and finally lose this legacy of guilt and self-deprecation.

Mark Freedman a gay American psychologist who died, tragically, last year, postulated the possibility that the self-searching that healthy homosexuals experience in achieving self-acceptance may result in them having a better

personal adjustment in psychological terms than many individuals of any sexual orientation. Because of their emancipation from the cultural mythology of romance they are aware that relationships can quickly fade, and realise that you have to work at them constantly. Many gays are able to focus on the immediacy of living rather than feel nostalgic about the past or be obsessed with the future. Gay women are able to express "masculine" attributes such as assertiveness, and gay men "feminine" ones such as ability to show tenderness. This transcendence of conventional sex-roles permits a wider range of emotional expression, and is an eye-opener to the stupidity of gender-role distinctions, such as breadwinner/housewife, active/passive, and dominant/submissive.

Healthy gays know how to use sex as an expression of warmth, tenderness, sensuality, and recreation without being concerned with procreation, and they are more likely to understand the sexual needs and preferences of their partners than most heterosexual couples. You can be more honest with yourself, your partner and your friends, partly because you do not need to go through the usual rituals of relating to people. But also, in coming out, you learn to rely on your own judgement, to have faith in your own feelings, to have no fear of expressing unpopular views, and to help people relate to you in honest ways as a unique individual.

Once we truly accept the validity of homosexuality and bisexuality as alternative healthy sexual lifestyles, totally compatible with personal adjustment, then we accept ourselves and move towards being healthy homosexuals. We should also acknowledge that it is important to begin to adapt to our sexual orientation at as early an age as possible. How many more years of adolescence, young adulthood and even middle-age must be wasted in guilt-ridden and frustrating attempts to accommodate to the unrealistic expectations of a society which has failed to meet the needs of those children who quite naturally develop homosexually at the same time that most children are developing heterosexually? No doubt everyone would be appalled if I were to suggest that we should not help young heterosexuals to deal with their sexuality, even in a generally supportive heterosexual society. How much more need, therefore, to help gays to deal with their sexuality, especially in a generally oppressive society. And this is, or should be, the role of the gay counsellor, professional or not. It is the right of every homosexual to remain homosexual and to realise his or her full potential. In fact we have the moral obligation to do so, in order to resist the immoral prejudice and discrimination facing us. And it is, now, the moral obligation of the medical profession to embrace the idea of the healthy homosexual as enthusiastically as it propounded the belief that gays were sick.●

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# Bridging the Gap

## Jim Edgell calls for greater local and national contact

According to a recent letter in *Gay News* the sooner CHE collapsed the better, as this would leave the way clear for the founding of a national gay organisation which could actually do something.

Predictably perhaps, Barrie Kenyon in OUT 3 did not go so far as to advocate cure by euthanasia, but his message was nonetheless the same. "It is now a standard criticism of CHE, locally and nationally, to refer to its slowness in responding to crises and its failure to maintain the momentum of the early 1970s. Seemingly endless projects, like the sex education kit to be used in schools, and disappointments such as the reluctance of MPs to sponsor the CHE bill, have increased the feeling of pessimism".

Something is clearly wrong. I am not attacking the Executive Committee whose dedication and hard work I recognise with gratitude, and neither the EC member responsible for the two sub-committees I shall mention later. Indeed, part of my thesis is that the destructive effects of our present system act more powerfully on the EC than on other CHE members.

It is indisputable that the thousands

of CHE members include large numbers of talented individuals whose specialised knowledge and abilities would be invaluable. It is equally indisputable that most of these people are not involved in national campaigns at all. The gulf between joining CHE locally and becoming involved at the national level has grown so large that one needs exceptional persistence and energy, not to mention a good income to pay the train fares, in order to cross it. With all due respect to those who devised the involvement campaign it seems to me to be part of the disease it purports to cure. The potentially most valuable contributor to a national campaign might live in say, Taunton, while the volunteers in the London area are numerous but lacking in vital experience. Are the meetings then to be held in Taunton, guaranteeing that they will consist of two people, or in London, thereby running the risk that the really useful member will run out of travel money before having had time to do anything?

EC members are only human, and, being in general rather conscientious humans, they react to these difficulties just like a group convenor short of committee members; they try to do all the work themselves. To my mind, this

is the beginning of almost all CHE's efficiency problems.

This phenomenon is bad enough in itself. Unfortunately, it also creates other symptoms which act as a definite deterrent to more participation by the ordinary membership in national projects. I think my own experience over the past twelve months or so will illustrate this, but I must repeat my caveat that I am criticising a system, not personalities.

Early in 1976, following the rejection by the EC of the original Education Kit draft, I was invited to join a working party to devise a replacement. There were about half a dozen of us, mostly from the teaching profession, and the working party was chaired by the responsible EC member, also a teacher. It was true that the one CHE group which had produced relevant materials and was considering developing more, specifically for school use, was not represented on the working party. They were 300 miles away, up in the north-east, and the only practical venue for the EC member and most of the rest of us was London. Not surprisingly, our Tyneside friends felt unable to travel for fortnightly, or even monthly meetings. We were thus deprived of a really useful source of help. Nevertheless, we produced a firm outline for the kit and obtained prices for the projected audio aspect of the work.

Various members of the working party wrote drafts for sections of the text, and some of these were discussed profitably in student seminars outside CHE and the gay movement. After a few months, however, predictable difficulties arose. Some of the people who had agreed to write for us were apparently incapable of living up to their promises. There were still some large gaps in the kit. It was at this point that we suddenly fell under internal political pressures.

The membership as a whole was thought to be dissatisfied with the EC's performance on education, and rapid results were demanded. Our poor EC member looked more haggard and worried every time we met. I spent a frustrating day with him, trying to fill the gaps with our own compositions.

With hindsight it is easy to see that we would have been better employed hunting out other contributors or liaising with outside bodies involved in sex education, but because the whole issue had now become one of personal responsibility, of guarantees that had been given and ought not to be withdrawn, of the EC not coming up to standard in *doing things* for the membership, we remained blind to these possibilities.

Through the long, hot summer, there were no meetings of the working party, not because the members were unwilling, but because the EC member had discovered a writer who, he confidently told me, might well do all the work for us. In September, we were accordingly presented with a draft which, although we were told was

modifiable, was so far from our original conception of the kit that constructive criticism was almost impossible. Now, I regard the rest of the story as in a sense *sub judice*, since a final version of the writer's work has been seen by the EC and is now being examined at the University of Sussex. It would be wrong for me to anticipate a verdict. What I would emphasise is that members will not be encouraged to serve on sub-committees if they are allowed no real responsibility and suddenly swept aside at the whim of an EC member.

As far as I know, I am still a member of the EC's Employment Sub-committee. This met regularly and fairly usefully until, on David Dancer's resignation, the portfolio passed elsewhere. It hasn't met since, and no one has had the courtesy to tell me why. I keep thinking I ought to write to the new portfolio holder, but life is short, I'm a busy man, and I feel apathy setting in. This frightens me because I *do* care about CHE. If I feel apathetic, what must less committed members feel?

So where's the moral of this story?

Somehow, I think, we must get away from the notion that CHE is a set of successive hierarchies whose duty it is to do things for the members. If we continue as we are, we shall achieve nothing more positive than apathy at the bottom and nervous breakdowns at the top. In particular, we need new attitudes to and from local groups. That old sacred cow, the principle of local group autonomy, seems to me to have done nothing but damage. On the one hand it currently enables one group I know to operate a cut-price local membership scheme in clear defiance of the Malvern Conference and everything that has been said about membership in CHE since. On the other, it fosters a superstition that local groups are somehow less reliable than EC members. I know I am not the only convenor to pester the EC to allow local mailing of national publications, thus saving a great deal of national money. At last this is to be tried, but only after two years of argument, largely on the basis of "can we really trust the kiddies with live matches?"

In particular, I feel sure that there is room for farming out whole national campaigns to local groups, if only we can get rid of the effects of our past, the stupid "them and us" attitude which vitiates everything. Getting CHE members to protest about some monstrous piece of injustice is like extracting blood from a particularly hard stone, but the Festival of Light and The National Listeners Association can produce hundreds of protest letters at the drop of a dirty word on the telly. Maybe the new constitutional proposals to alter CHE's structure will help. I don't pretend to know all the answers, but at least I can claim consistency in believing that we shall achieve better solutions collectively than as individuals. Meanwhile, if I have sparked off some arguments I shall be well pleased. ●

# Give us the tools Nigel Hart

A couple of months ago I was a member of the CHE delegation which went to the Home Office to see the Minister of State, Brynmor John, about the Criminal Law Bill. We got 45 minutes of his time — for, with 5,000 members and a couple of dozen more or less well known vice presidents, CHE is now obviously one of the several hundred pressure groups to which the Government feels obliged to listen, even if it disregards what it hears.

Mr John gave us an attentive and courteous hearing (for which full marks, for he had been up all night at a Commons' debate). But I found myself wondering to what extent his attitude would have been different if CHE had 50,000 members, or if the delegation had come straight from a 10,000 — strong Trafalgar Square protest meeting. And the answer, I'm afraid, was: not very much.

Certainly a huge, active membership would attract attention and publicity to the cause of gay rights. People would be forced to stop ignoring us and to think about gay oppression. But the conclusions they would reach might not be favourable.

Numbers alone are only significant if they involve control of a vital part of the economy, which would not be the case however large CHE grew, or if they represented votes which could be swung behind whichever of the major parties offered the best gay rights platform, which would require not hundreds of thousands of members but millions — plus a degree of political selflessness which I doubt we possess.

Two other minority groups which are of a comparable size to our own are immigrants and pensioners. Neither have any strength deriving from their numbers. Their causes have only prospered in recent years (in so far as they have prospered) because they have succeeded in attracting the support of liberal, white people of working age who, through their positions in the media, trades unions, political parties and so on, wield real power.

In other words, gay rights will prosper only when we get muscle behind our demands. Muscle means trades unions, professional associations, political parties, the academic and legal worlds, the churches, the media. The task of persuading these groups to back us is one for people with professional expertise in their areas. Yet CHE is an organisation of amateurs.

Of course, many gay people have already decided to work for gay rights in the particular fields in which they feel they operate best. There are gay trade union groups, gay caucuses in the political parties, gay church groups and, where they exist, they are already making most of the running. But the logic of their existence has not yet sunk in. For in the fields in which such groups do or will exist, CHE will become increasingly redundant. This should be central to the current deliberations on our future.

But there is one field in which National CHE could operate pre-eminently well, if it chose to concentrate its energies, and that is information and research.

National CHE should become the secretariat of the gay movement, supplying the various local or occupational campaigning groups with the ammunition they require, and keeping them in contact with each others' activities. It should conduct and commission serious research in the way that the National Council for Civil Liberties does and Action for Lesbian Parents is trying to do. And it should improve its contacts with the media and politicians so that the findings of its research and the activities of the campaigning groups receive due attention. Other functions should either be devolved, as has already happened with counselling, now the sphere of FRIEND, or else dropped.

Not only would such a course of action concentrate National CHE's energies where they could achieve most, but it would also bring our functions into line with our resources. For, "National CHE", which gay people so often expect to accomplish everything from compelling the BBC to restore a programme to obliging the Government to release a prisoner, is nothing more than three full-time employees (two of whom are fully occupied with internal administration) and the part-time services of a dozen more.

Meanwhile, local groups would continue with the functions they already have — and which many perform very well — which are: the provision of a network of social groups to reach isolated gays; the formation of a recruiting ground for activists; and the creation of campaigning units which can take up individual issues or projects.

In the gay movement I envisage, National Councils and Conference, rather than the Executive Committee, would be the policy and decision making bodies. And National Councils would represent all local and specialised campaigning groups.

The Executive Committee would concern itself more with carrying out Conference and Council decisions, directing the work of the paid staff and improving outside contacts. A real effort should be made to attract EC members with influence and standing in the world. ▶

