

FREE

AGAINST PATRIARCHY

ISSUE 1 JUNE '84 ~~50p~~



IN THIS ISSUE -
'From Politically Gay
to Publicly Bisexual
to Personally Celibate'

Perhaps having just one article in the first issue, albeit a long one, could be seen as a poor start.

We see it more as a gentle run in and a time-effective way of seeing how many people are politically interested in fighting patriarchy and more to the point, talking about the struggle through this medium. Many admit patriarchy is all pervading but there seems to be no magazine which was bringing all the strands together — linking the nuclear threat with patriarchy as well as the destruction of the eco-system, the denial of civil liberties to minority groups and wimmin, violence as a tool of patriarchy and capitalism as a system devised by patriarchy etc — and that was also available to a mixed readership. Thus a cover was added to the article and we're having a go at launching a discussion forum on what we see as the root source of the present lack of quality of life.

The article is long and in many respects isn't a single subject thesis. Rather it interweaves the personal and the political, past experience, future hopes and present contradictions.

Whatever your views on the paper and on the idea of an ongoing discussion journal, please write to us. If you have a paper you'd like printed, also get in touch. We hope you don't think it is a poor start. Let's hope it won't be a poor future either.

From Politically Gay to Publicly Bisexual to Personally Celibate



PART 1

It was in December 1982 that I finally "came out" to the world as Gay. A year later I was enjoying a relationship with a wumun. Only two months on I am celibate. No doubt various assumptions could be made from that first sentence, many of them wrong. What if anything it commits to one line is an evolution of political thought and change of positions, something I hope to bring out in the following paragraphs.

I had been aware of a homosexual side in me since about the age of 15. At that time I was infatuated with my best friend. The reverse wasn't true and when I told him what I felt, he puked up all over the dining room and a good friendship was over, the chances of my risking telling anyone else silenced for another four years. In the meantime there were two other infatuations and the end of my life at school. I had realised that I was also physically attracted to the opposite sex but rarely mentally and I had always had trouble communicating with wimmin at school. Sometimes I felt that I was attracted to men because of this communication problem.

Over a year after leaving school I came to college in Manchester. I joined the Polytechnic Gay Society and in my very first week went along to the Poly's own Gay disco, held in the Aytoun building. I also joined the Liberals (I now question what kind of commitment I had to them; a lot of the things I did were for the image of doing them) and paradoxically it was them who showed me around the Gay scene, helped me build up my self-confidence and list of Gay friends and eventually provided me with my first homosexual experience. The Polytechnic Gay Society had made little move to make me feel at home, content with mutual gratification rather than activity, and I hadn't returned after the first meeting. Also still scared of the reaction I might get from my

heterosexual friends if they found out, it was obviously more convenient to use the Liberals as a cover for my meetings with other homosexuals.

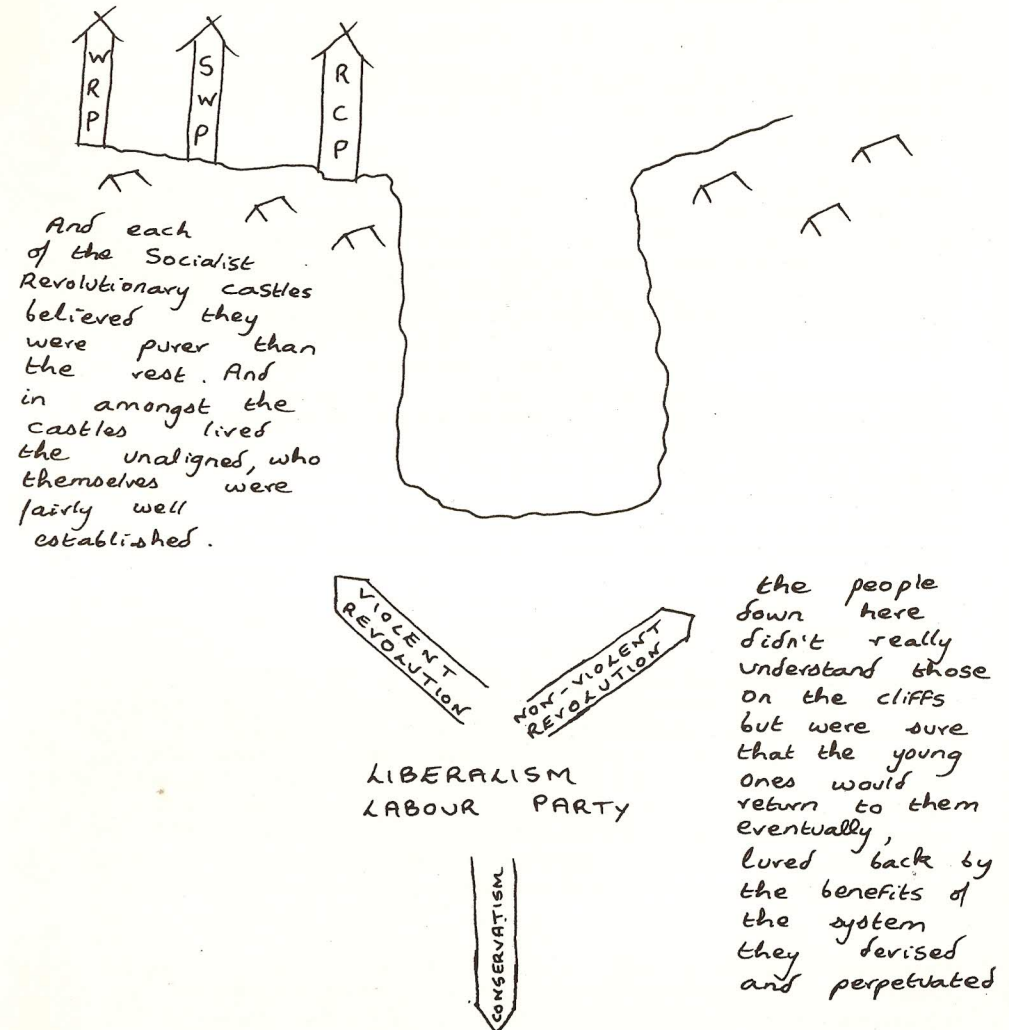
However they opposed my "coming out" and it was soon after December 1982 that I left the Liberals, thinking them too wishy-washy. I then classed myself as a radical Liberal. At that time I had already been elected to the Student Union Executive as a non-sabbatical. (I stood for this with a view to being elected a sabbatical — more power?).

"Coming Out" was only able to take place because by that stage I had managed to tell the closest of my friends anyway without any repercussions. I suppose there was a point that I reached where I could say "Well, if everyone else hates me, it still doesn't matter". Not that they did. I was in three close-knit groups; a Hall of Residence, my course and in the clique that got involved in the Union. The latter try so hard to be "right on" that, if only for the sake of their political credibility, they welcomed me with open arms. As an apolitical Gay I wasn't even a threat. The people on the course reacted well and in some respects the process was an anti-climax. There was still however a great feeling of power and excitement, of what could be defined as Gay Pride. Suddenly the nice boy that lived down the corridor was a "nice boy". I was labelled as Gay and came out as such. The fact that I considered myself bisexual was kept for close friends and the placating of a shellshocked mother. During a Student occupation I finished an autobiographical play and with publicity for that in the Student newspaper, I was well advertised as the "Gay one" by the time the sabbatical elections arrived. I was still largely apolitical as regards my sexuality. I didn't want to get involved. I was a "normal" person who happened to be Gay. I looked normal, I acted very normal, I was frightened and put off by the "effeminate" image portrayed in the press. I continued to feel that talking to people individually was the way to change attitudes. Gay Pride marches only helped the marchers.

The reaction of my Hall changed a lot of this. I stood for a sabbatical position on the Executive as an "Independent" aiming to make the Union work for Students, rather than as a debating hall for various left political factions. (Simply on the grounds of policy on homosexuality, I classed my Liberal base as more progressive than the Labour Party Socialists.) During the campaign a number of my posters were defaced with anti-Gay slogans and in my final hustings speech, I publicly declared that I would be fighting this bigotry all the way if elected and that I was proud to be Gay. The tide had turned.

The fact that I won my election meant that I was suddenly very popular amongst those I might be able to help. Trotskyist Gays got to me first. Initially I thought them too serious, picking up my sexism every time it occurred, correcting me at every mistake. Yet in the four months that they had a major political input into my life, I feel that I lost a lot of my Liberal naivety and became far more politically aware. Very soon after winning the election on an Independent ticket, I was involved in one of those Socialist political factions I had sought to replace. Trusted by very few at this "change of sides" I simply "did" to prove my beliefs. I became heavily involved in the Lesbian and Gay Liberation Campaign and began making the connections between sexual politics and capitalism, and from there capitalism and the wrongs in our

society. By June 1983 I was anti-capitalist and found myself going along with the majority of what my Trotskyist friends were saying. I had given up my course because it was preparing me for a career in management. I argued with many of my old friends over Ireland and the monarchy. I had eradicated a lot of sexist language out of my vocabulary though I still had had very little contact with wimmin. Hooked on the idea of non-monogamy I proclaimed "Sex is fun" and slept with a number of friends. Any talk of emotional involvement was countered by arguments against possession. I was tolerant towards S—M, Paedophilia, Transsexuality and Transvestism. It was important to be seen as Gay rather than Bisexual as it was a politically stronger statement. I went on a Gay Pride march in the Netherlands.



What I could not grasp was the Utopia that would follow the revolution or even how the revolution would take place. An added complication was that I was a pacifist and didn't feel that killing the capitalist bastards was really going to help anything. Internationalism, secured by violent revolutions taking place at different times, seemed a far away ideal, which to me with the violent aspect, wasn't particularly idealistic; I didn't go along with the argument that the violent revolutionaries were the true pacifists for post revolution, peace would reign. To me supporting violence in certain circumstances was supporting violence full stop. By July 1983 I told the Trots that perhaps they were sweeping me along too fast and that I would have to step back a bit. Pre-college friends reinforced this with their "personal is political" views, that any step we make is a step.

By the time I took office in August I saw myself as a Socialist and indeed looking for a party. I joined Labour believing that we must work within and change it. I was quickly disillusioned.

I was also infatuated with a Lesbian who I would pop round and see probably too often and with whom I would never discuss politics, especially as I knew she was anti-bisexual and pro-separatist. I was living under the ideal that Lesbians and Gay men should work together. I made sure that the Polytechnic Gay Society became a Lesbian and Gay Society and worked hard to help get as many people as possible to the Student Lesbian and Gay Conference in Belfast.

What my friendship with the Lesbian did reveal to me though were the big differences between the Gay men's community and that of the Lesbians. The latter seemed to be more community orientated, often with separatist elements present. I learnt of Lesbian "ghettoes" and even communities that were too close-knit for comfort. Generally though there seemed to be more caring, less casual sex. One Trot put it that "Gay men, often married, could only have casual relationships as anything deeper might blow his cover. Wimmin are in such a bad way anyway that they have little more to lose by proclaiming their Lesbianism". I didn't see it like that. To me it was the conditioning that was different. Men were proud, inhibited about their feelings, more insecure. They had casual attitudes towards other people as a defence, the casual sex was an extension of this. The end result was isolation. Nowhere was it more apparent than at Aytoun. Here men would stand around the bar, often alone, or dance alone or with a partner. There would be very little physical contact. At the same time the wimmin would be dancing in groups, hugging each other 'Hallo' or just hugging. I envied that but knew personally, that I was touch-phobic and still strung up on images, ie very male. I remained busy with the Lesbian and Gay campaign and in one person's words became "the No 1 'out' poof at the Poly". I didn't care that I was recognised as "oh you know the Gay one on the Exec" and would often camp it up a bit. In that respect at least I had become less inhibited.

Events took a dramatic turn when I then became very attracted to a bisexual Lesbian, who I shall call Robyn. She had come to see me about the Belfast Conference, and about the attitude to Bisexuality in the Lesbian and Gay Society. I replied that I didn't think it really mattered (in our Society, I knew

that hostility existed outside). An ensuing conversation lasted 3 hours; it was quite clear that we got on very well. I was excited by the first talk I had heard of non-violent revolution. It seemed to fit in so well. At school I had been the 'ecology nut', some of my work in the union had been on environmental issues. Now a whole "radical" political viewpoint became apparent to me. An Eco-Socialism or an Eco-anarchism, for I had already realised that going through parliament was not the way. A non-violent anarchistic movement seemed all encompassing — no hierarchical structure, everyone helping to change things on a personal is political basis against capitalism that oppressed the working class, wimmin, other 'subversive' groups and ecology/the environment. A revolution to bring about de-centralisation and peace would use these points in the fight.

I was very excited, I left all groups that weren't campaign groups, and started to once again believe that idealism was possible and was in fact the only solution. Anything less was a compromise that wouldn't bring lasting change.

Living ideals continued as Robyn and I became more emotionally involved and then physically. I knew there would be hassles about being bisexual. A Liberal ex-friend had once been surrounded by Lesbians in the City Centre and had been told to stay away from the bisexual wumun he was having a relationship with. I didn't feel this would happen but as Robyn was new to Manchester, I was worried that a public relationship with a man would lessen the level of acceptance into the Lesbian community. (I had heard talk from wimmin about "proper" or "real" Lesbians). Robyn felt that I had more to lose, but as an isolated Gay man there was no community to cut me out.

We decided that if we wanted to be together, then we shouldn't hide our affection for each other. We saw gender as irrelevant. As bisexual people, the sex of the other person didn't affect our feelings for the mind and character of that person. (Robyn was largely anti-man but pro-person. She questioned how "male" I was for instance). We based our relationship on being assumptionless. Beyond the basis of a hug we would build our relationship each time we met, total honesty and openness allowing us to do this. Trust was obviously imperative. We realised that other people would place assumptions and expectations on us. They wouldn't understand but we did and that was what mattered. We refuted at every opportunity that we were a "couple". At the Belfast Conference we were labelled "boyfriend and girlfriend" for holding hands and kissing. I retorted that two Lesbian wimmin doing the same at that conference wouldn't be labelled as lovers and that an assumption like that was particularly sad coming from people who fight the heterosexist assumption. I came out as a Bisexual.

This joint statement caused a variety of reactions. To the men, there seemed to be a threat. During the previous year I had quoted Mario Mieli on how everyone is really bisexual to a couple of gay men and had had very hostile receptions. Now I was told that I must be politically Gay, that I was wishy-washy, that I was being trendy, wanting the cake and eating it, to be part of the struggle but not, and that there was no such thing as bisexuality. There was little reasoning behind their rhetoric. Often it was sour grapes or shock that their assumption that I was homosexual/gay was shattered. I told them that I was Gay AND

Bisexual and that there was no contradiction in those statements. That Gay is a word to describe a lifestyle and an attitude and that I still identified with the Gay community.

For Robyn there was also some "sour grapes" — so you prefer men to wimmin etc, but the debate was largely centred on trying to define bisexuality and see whether or not it was compatible with Lesbianism. One attempt put it that "if support and main relationship comes from a gay world, then that wumun is a Lesbian, "whereas a bisexual was seen as a wumun who has relationships with other wimmin but who draws support from men. Robyn, with her strong separatist tendencies was therefore 'OK'. However myself, as an isolated gay man with no community would draw support from whichever relationship/s I was involved in at the time. We both retorted "I am me".

On the theory of bisexuality an all male workshop at the Belfast conference tried to define it. Was it by physical activity or by love/emotional attraction? The problems of labelling were very apparent but the men felt it was important to try and reach a consensus definition simply because of the attitude of the Gay community. Are you bisexual if you sleep with men and wimmin? Personally I had considered myself bisexual years before I had slept with someone. I felt sexual activity was irrelevant. I was therefore even more interested by the fact that the concept of bisexuality seemed a challenge or threat to many homosexual men. We struggled over the definitions of Gay again and how Gay often conjures up homosexual man. Perhaps, we felt, in a time of labels, we must explain our bisexuality as a personal thing. It seemed a domestic matter for the Gay world and that we must challenge these cop-out arguments that were often as elitist or as bigoted as heterosexual attitudes towards homosexuality.

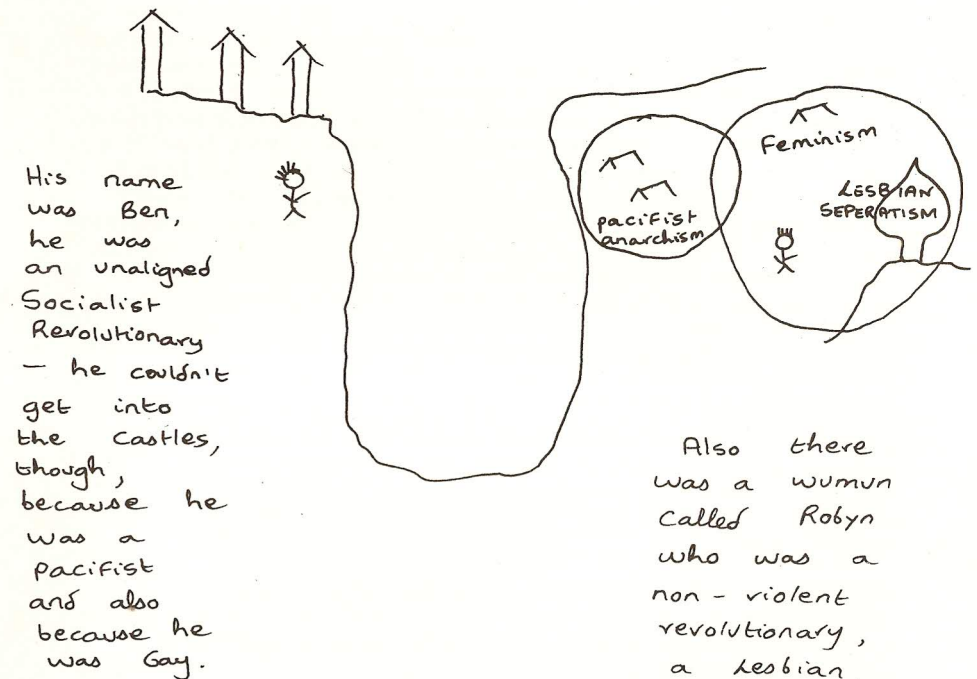
In the wimmins workshop, they attacked labelling even more:

M — I am bisexual, and I am discriminated against by gays and heterosexuals. I get really hurt when people here say I have nothing to give the campaign. I feel so lonely when no-one will accept me because I'm labelled "bi", even other gays reject me, particularly lesbians. I don't fit in anywhere.

J — Labels are too rigid. You say "I'm gay" or "I'm het" but it doesn't really explain you. Emotions and sexual feelings span a whole spectrum from hetero- to homo-sexual but we only recognise three categories. I know it sounds cumbersome but I'm a Lesbian with bisexual emotions. I fancy men, they turn me on. I love men but I never sleep with them.

S — What is sexual feeling anyway? When does affectionate contact with a man or wumun become sexual? I refuse to classify myself at all if I can, but no-one accepts that. They all want to know why. When I say "because I don't fit any of your labels" they just laugh.

And one of the settlements on the other side was radical feminism, within which there was a castle called Lesbian Separatism, which was an open castle compared with the Socialist Revolutionary ones because it was open to wimmin. As a result most men tried to stand on the building ground when the "castle" was being erected, though most lived on the other cliff anyway ... being men. But here is the story of one man ...



K — We all agree that labels are too narrow but we all still use them to make us feel secure, to give us an identity with a peer group. We can't really define something as vast as sexual emotion into limits. I think it would be more realistic to replace heterosexual and homosexual with 'only het' and 'not only het', then bisexuals could feel they belonged.

Emerging from the workshops was an interesting insight into the different approaches taken by the men and wimmin, which I shall return to, and the differences in Feminist approach. Lesbian-identified-bisexual was the label Robyn begrudgingly took on.

The relationship itself had a number of insecurities. I felt that there was a pressure from the Lesbian community on some of its members to be more separatist. I also felt that it was inevitable that Robyn would eventually stop seeing me and put all her energies into wimmin. (I wrote at the time — "I'm sitting in the lounge. Robyn is in another room talking with wimmin. I'm waiting for her to come and see me. But before she does an alarm clock goes off. Then Robyn does come in. "Oh well that's it, Ben, the borrowed time is up. Feel free to sit here if you want but now you'll be waiting for nothing". And she went to the wimmin and never came back.") The attitudes of men we met when together strengthened this belief and also made me feel very bad being a male, "indulging in heterosexuality" I was most insecure when Robyn was with other men. I could see a beauty in Lesbianism, both objectively and subjectively but nothing positive about being 'replaced' by a heterosexual man. I don't feel I was possessive, simply insecure due to the isolation. (I would also maintain that in battling against the Gay community and heterosexual expectations I stopped running my life through images.) Sometimes this nervous insecurity, especially in a group situation would show up the worst of my male traits. Our relationship was largely behind closed doors person to person, maybe it was this fact that allowed the ideals to continue as long as they did. After 2 months I began to feel a little more secure although Robyn by then had a wumun lover and unbeknown to me was having doubts about how much she was getting out of our relationship.

When it ended, I at first felt that the ideals had crumbled and lost faith in my political ideology. However once I had emerged from the subjective winge I realised that the ideals were still possible, external circumstances had meant that they wouldn't work now. Gender couldn't be ignored. Sexist men made us both angry, but it also made it harder for Robyn not to see me representative of a man.

Other separatists weren't keen to have relationships with wimmin who were having relationships with men. Robyn wanted to have relationships with them. Long term objective priorities and personal feelings encouraged Robyn to become separatist, not out of a pure hate of men, but out of a realisation that men must help themselves. The reasons for my subsequent celibacy are my personal thoughts on how I will live my politics, politics that evolved to fruition at the end of the relationship with Robyn, that evolved through talking to her and reading radical feminist literature.

PART 2

I feel that I am only just becoming aware of the real nature of wimmin oppression (and consequently mens) and that in the past, my anti-sexism has only taken me as far as my primary concern for self has let me. I still catch myself defending men for no other apparent reason but of the conditioned male bonding and masculinity within myself.

What I have begun to see and feel is the extent of the patriarchal system and the methods and reasons it uses to perpetuate itself by setting up a hierarchical system of "better-thans". Before, I had slagged off Capitalism, oppression of wimmin, oppression of Gays, of the working class, without seeing why these things were there. As a male, with my own interests at stake, I failed in the past to make the connections between those in control (men) and what they controlled (furtherance of the patriarchal system). I didn't link up the State with man, Capitalism with man, violence with man, destruction of the environment with man, structuring of society and enforcing definition (them/us, friend/enemy, wumun/man) with man. Now I do.

The more I think about my past, from my middle class upbringing to the events of the past year, the more I can see the ways in which I was conditioned (by family, school, media, by the conditioning of others that was going on around me) and the ways in which I have unfortunately responded to that conditioning. I can see instances in the past when I have replicated some of the worst of these things and in doing so furthered sexism and the domination of man over other men and wimmin. (Some things may already have been apparent in the brief history you've already read; I won't point them all out.) Being Gay has perhaps helped me become more aware of these things but I can see much wrong in the attitudes I used to hold as a so-called "right-on" Gay person, and much wrong with the attitude of the majority of Gay men, often no better or even worse than those of their heterosexual counterparts. I am not now saying that I am a pure, cleansed man — I believe there is sexism in every man — but I am simply hoping that because I feel I have been made more aware, other men may follow instead of waiting until there is no choice. I am writing this because I have found only a few men who even begin to agree with me.

Patriarchy is the system by which MAN dominates the society in a way which oppresses wimmin and restricts men. The domination is economic and social. Men are given more power in the workplace and in the home, and in relationships. The hierarchical system which results from the desire to keep power sets up opposites and a natural tendency to define. Therefore we are not all people but men and wimmin, blacks and whites and if you're not a 'real man' you're one step down the ladder. (It was interesting that the male Bisexual workshop at Belfast clung to the idea of defining whilst the wimmin chucked it out. I now see the whole question of labelling — bisexuality or whatever — as a male tool to divide and dominate.) Wimmin are at the bottom of the ladder, wimmin who don't conform to the norms a step below that (eg Lesbians, Black wimmin, — separatist Lesbians are slagged off even more for their stand against the system), forced to take the brunt of the inadequacies of the male-devised system.

