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Speeches given at the May 9th, 1981 Lesbians Against the Right conference, held in Toronto, Ontario.

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"INTRODUCTION: LESBIANS AGAINST THE RIGHT"
by Lorna Weir

There's an awful lot more of the right around these days than there's been for a while, and it keeps getting closer. First there was Britain, then the U.S., and now the New Right has found a comfortable place to settle down here in Ontario. As lesbians, we have begun to feel the impact of the right on our own lives and in the organizations in which we work. Street violence against lesbians has increased over the past year; the police have been noticeably reluctant to intervene on our behalf against attackers. Hate literature distributed during the last Ontario and Toronto election campaigns by right-wing organizations like Renaissance International, Positive Parents, and the Campaign for Life explicitly attacked lesbians. For the first time we were privileged to be distinguished from gay men in their attacks.

Lesbians are becoming more socially visible. We are now becoming a target of right-wing attacks because there's something to take aim at. One of the indications of our increased social presence is the rise in police harassment of lesbians. Minor liquor infractions are a favourite harassment technique of the cops -- remember their visits during the dance and dinner at the Lesbian Conference in Toronto two years ago? More recently, undercover cops laid charges at the No Frills Benefit when a woman was found with a beer bottle in her hand half an hour after the finish of the dance. The Rape Crisis Centre is involved in a court case as a result of the charge laid that night. Two nights ago, the Police Emergency Task Force showed up at a political forum sponsored by the International Women's Day Committee, a feminist group in town. Lesbians, as activists in the women's and gay movements, are affected by the rise in the police surveillance of these movements.

The Police Commission has just approved an increase of one million dollars in the funds allocated to the Intelligence Squad, bringing their total funding to \$5.4 million. In the same police budget, \$89,000 was designated for race relations. Comparison of these two sums of money says an awful lot about social priorities. The Working Committee of Police-Minority Relations has suggested that the Intelligence Budget be spent on the investigation of organized crime, not on keeping progressive groups under surveillance. When part of this budget is being used to send undercover cops to lesbian and feminist benefit dances, it's about time for us to start objecting to misuse of public funds.

Lesbians have been fighting back against the rise of the new right. Surprising numbers of lesbians hit the streets to demonstrate against the police raids on the gay male steam baths. Recently, many dykes participated in the picket on the evening of International Women's Day to protest the pro-family, anti-choice, anti-feminist, anti-gay rally being held inside Massey Hall.

The reasons for the rise of the New Right authoritarian conservatism are many. We can point to rising inflation, slow economic growth and increasing unemployment; countries which do not have our high rates of inflation and unemployment haven't witnessed the

Preamble

rise of the New Right. Then too, there's an ongoing crisis of legitimacy: basic social and political institutions, like patriarchy, the family, and maybe even compulsory heterosexuality don't seem to have the unquestioned backing they once had. The New Right is in a sense a patriarchal backlash to the women's movement, the gay movement and stagflation. Rightists fantasize about the return of an imaginary past in which the hard-working businessman was free to make a buck on the job, and then go home to oppress his wife and children without qualm. On one hand, the right calls for a halt to government intervention in the economy, while on the other it shouts for massive state regulation of sexuality and women's reproductive rights, particularly abortion: conservative in the marketplace, authoritarian at home. In the world capitalist economy, which is more and more dominated by monopolies and multi-nationals, the economics of the New Right is downright mythological, deflecting our concern away from economic reality. People's real economic insecurity is being manipulated by the state and multi-nationals.

We can identify two segments of the New Right active locally in Toronto: the Campaign for Life, a coalition of groups such as Positive Parents and Renaissance International. This group consists largely of fanatical Christians who would like to see homosexuality and feminism abolished through prayer, censorship and government legislation. The second group consists of the neo-fascist right, among others, the Nationalist Party (formerly the Western Guard), the KKK, and the League Against Homosexuals. These groups have suggested mass extermination as a possible solution to the "threat" of homosexuality: their literature is more drastic than that of the Campaign for Life. Both sectors of the New Right use the technique of scapegoating visible minorities in order to redirect the anxieties people have about social changes and social crises onto vulnerable groups.

The existence of these right-wing groups sets up a dynamic which allows the state to play the role of moderate voice of sanity in between the "extremists" of the left and right. Our rights as women and as lesbians can then be discredited as loony fringe demands which the government doesn't need to treat seriously or can deem too dangerous to back politically. The right attacks lesbians indirectly as well as directly. They have an ideal of women as mother and helpmate to men, an ideal which leaves precious little room for lesbians. The New Right is helping to create a conservative climate of opinion which legitimizes state inactivity in such areas as unemployment and effective equal pay legislation. This reinforces the economic dependence of women on men, helps prevent women from coming out, and keeps dykes poor.

The rise of the right hits Toronto lesbians at a politically low ebb after the closing of LOOT and the Fly By Night. Lesbians are, however, active in a wide variety of political movements, and are doing good work fighting the right here. Lesbians are seemingly everywhere but in an autonomous lesbian movement. We need to get together as lesbians in order to know each other better, personally and politically. We need to get together to find out what's happening to us in those movements in which we're active so as to compare strategies. In general we need to get support from each other in order to

preserve our political and personal identities as lesbians.

Lesbians are just emerging from social invisibility. The right would like to make us vanish from sight again. By remaining visible to each other we can help prevent this from happening. How we can concretely ensure our continued visibility as lesbians during the times ahead is something we need to discuss today.

The women on the panel who are going to speak to you today come from a wide variety of groups in opposition, all of which have been affected by the rise of the right. Judy Liefschultz is active in anti-nuclear work, and Vicki Kelman in anti-imperialist support groups. Amy Gottlieb has worked in the gay liberation movement, Mariruth Morton in the women's movement, and Kathy Arnup in the trade union movement. Lesbians are of course present in movements not represented on the panel here today, and we'll perhaps hear from some of these women during the discussion following the panel presentations. The panel does represent some of the political alignments lesbians are making in Toronto these days.

Each of the women on the panel was asked to address the following questions: 1) Why she is working in her particular group; 2) How her group is organizing to fight the right; 3) What sort of problems she as a lesbian has to deal with working with non-lesbians. Each will speak for approximately 10 minutes, and then we'll have a general discussion.

On behalf of the group of lesbians that organized this event, I hope that you get as much pleasure from your participation here today as we did in organizing this forum. When lesbians get together in a large group we create an energy that's enormously exciting and powerful. We did that at the Take Back the Night Demonstration in the Beaches last May; we did it at Adrienne Rich and Nicole Brossard last week. And maybe we can do it again today.

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GRAPHIC
1500 x 1100

The Gay Movement
by Amy Gottlieb

Seven or eight months ago, I gave a short presentation to a Lavender Left meeting on the state of the gay movement and how I felt about it as a lesbian-feminist. I began by saying that while the gay movement was not dead, it had a different character than when I had been involved. I said it was a less militant movement in spirit and character and then went on to explain the way lesbians had been excluded from the gay movement despite seemingly endless battles at conferences, meetings and within coalitions. Not only were we excluded on the basis of denying us real representation, but also because of the male-identified causes it took up, because of its single-minded defense of the gay male ghetto, because of its focus on civil rights protection and repealing anti-gay laws to the exclusion of other broader struggles, because of its star-studded mode of politics.

The movement has been in process of change since then, I'm happy to say. The gay movement has blossomed in the last six months. The response to the municipal election campaign, which a number of right-wing organizations used as a platform for their ideas, to discussions on the Toronto School Board, and especially to the raids in February has been swift and militant. The Right to Privacy Committee has grown with a lot of gay men becoming active who never would have imagined it before in their life. Gays and Lesbians Against the Right Everywhere has sprung up. The gay movement has responded with militancy and spunk. But it is not only that. The character of the response to the raids has gone beyond some of the past limitations of the gay movement.

The response from the beginning was very different from that to the raid on the Barracks in 1978. Although I was on a demonstration against that raid, I felt uncomfortable with the focus on what I saw as a very blanket defense of the male gay ghetto. The response didn't take into account what was happening to other groups in the city, pose a broader response to repression, or really explain why this attack had occurred.

One thing for sure, the context is different. Divisions within our society are becoming more blatant, unemployment lines longer, welfare and UIC harder to get and wages never catching up with runaway inflation. The killing of Albert Johnson, increased police harassment of minority communities, the rise of the right-wing organizations like Renaissance, "Right to Life", the League Against Homosexuals and the Klan, the backlash against feminism which comes in many guises, all of these make it a lot harder to survive. They also make things a lot clearer as to who we are and who our enemies are.

The gay movement's response to the raids has been an important step in beginning to unite people against police and state attacks on gay men and lesbians, but also on all women, working people and ethnic communities. The links were made from the very beginning. The gay community is being attacked, but we are not the only ones. Speakers at the demonstrations stressed this over and over. In order to defend our community, we must organize ourselves as well as build alliances with other communities under attack. The fact that Leona Johnson spoke at one of the rallies was an important indicator of the

kind of solidarity that is developing and that has been fostered by the response of the gay movement.

Links to the women's movement are stronger than they have ever been which maybe isn't saying all that much, but it has been an important step in the right direction. The reception to speakers from IWDC at the demonstrations, at the Gay Freedom Rally sponsored by CGRO, the large contingent of gay men on the International Women's Day march, the workshop against the rise of the right at the fair and the rally against the Pro-Family Coalition's meeting at Massey Hall that same night show that there is definitely more openness to feminism amongst gay men. I see these as positive signs.

At the beginning, I talked about what I had said eight months ago about the gay movement not being militant, about how politically it was too focussed on legal protection and lobbying campaigns, and that it excluded lesbians. For sure the first thing has changed as a result of the response to the raids. How long it will last and how the politics will develop remains to be seen.

The second, my criticism of the gay movement and its leadership, is not the same either. The gay movement is in flux. It is changing, but not overnight. For instance, it remains to be seen how much emphasis will be put on lobbying, which is important and affects lesbians, but is not the central focus of our struggle. As for the third point, the exclusion of lesbians, that has not changed. Our invisibility continues, and sometimes feels even more extreme considering the severity of the attacks and the broader response than before. We can no longer afford to remain invisible.

The fact that the attacks on gay men, whether from queer-bashers on the street, the blue meanies, or right-wing jerks, are more visible than the attacks on lesbians is yet another example of the hidden pattern of lesbian oppression in this society. But we all know that what meets the eye is not the whole story. We all know from our daily lives that the forces trying to push us back into the closet of the nuclear family, taking away our children, denying us jobs, harassing us on the streets, are getting stronger.

It affects us all very deeply. And its affect on women, who are grappling with their sexuality and trying to come out, in many ways can be even more devastating. The push back into the family, the backlash against feminism that we are experiencing, the conservatizing trend in women's fashions, UIC and welfare cuts, all of these and many more are an attack on all women and even more specifically are designed to bolster the institution of compulsory heterosexuality.

When the right-wing scapegoats immigrants, women and gay men, we are included. Right-wing organizations have even begun to name us in their literature. But it is not only that we are scapegoated for social and economic ills, we really are a threat -- because we are independent women, we reject the enforced norm of heterosexuality, we are beginning to break through the boundaries of traditional women's work. Today is not too late to collectively reveal to each other how the right-wing has personally affected our

lives, to share the thoughts that have been running around in our heads and to attempt to uncover the present and future patterns of harassment and intimidation.

We must begin to defend ourselves by first of all coming to understand our collective situation. We must begin to bring that understanding to all the movements in which we are involved, confronting our invisibility head-on and strengthening/reinforcing our lesbian sisters as well as strengthening those movements. No movement fighting for social change, fighting against the right wing and state repression will succeed in speaking to people's fears and reaching out to hundreds of thousands unless it takes up defense of lesbians. And that is what we need to figure out.

A very good example of how this might work is in the gay movement. It was only last fall that I became involved in the gay movement again after feeling abused, misunderstood and ignored. I got involved in GLARE because I was feeling angry about the rise of the right wing organizations in Toronto. But I also felt that I could involve myself because the approach that GLARE was taking to fighting the right wing was not the traditional one that I had come up against in the past. We talked about and involved ourselves in attempting to answer the slanders of the right head-on, to speak to people's fears, instead of just appealing to people's liberal conscience.

GLARE is an organization I can be a part of because the men in it are sympathetic with the feminist movement, are not threatened by it. But although this exists, and at least a half dozen lesbians have been involved, there is still very little that GLARE has to say about lesbians specifically, how the repression is affecting us. But no one lesbian or two or half a dozen can substitute for the collective discussion within our community. All of us need this discussion in order that our identity as lesbians be presented in the framework of the gay movement, and all other movements. I need this discussion for my political growth and for the growth of all my sisters and those gay men I choose to work with.

In confronting our invisibility within the gay movement, we need to address the intertwined oppression we face both as women and because of the sexual/emotional choice we have made. Our oppression must be understood within the gay movement not just as a result of our sexual orientation but also as women.

I would like to end up by asking some questions. In articulating how we suffer as a result of the right-wing, I think we have begun to look at issues that have been raised in the past in a new way, issues like lesbian custody rights, sexual orientation protection in the unions, the situation of lesbian teachers and day care workers.

Lesbian custody rights has often been presented as an apple pie sop to lesbians. This has, in the past, been presented as our demand. What will the right wing do with this issue? Will something develop as it did in Britain around artificial insemination? We must defend our right to be mothers in a stronger and better way.

Lesbian teachers and day care workers are in a much more precarious position than ever before. When the right-wing says homosexuals shouldn't be allowed to teach our children, ie: proselytize and seduce them, a majority of the people they are talking about are lesbians. Will the right-wing attempt to do here what they tried in California: to ban all gay men and lesbians and anybody who says a word in support of us, from the schools? Will right-wing organizations attempt to reverse the progressive position that a larger number of unions than ever before have adopted against on-the-job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation? How can and will we respond?

I'm incredibly excited about all of us getting together today. It is only the beginning. And I think that we have the strength and pride to confront our invisibility and to put lesbian feminism on the political map of Toronto, and tomorrow, the world.

PHOTO

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

by Kathy Arnup

I feel like a bit of an imposter being here wearing a "trade-union hat". Like almost every other lesbian I know, I have never worked in a real live trade union job. I have been a teacher for the past four years, though, and a member of a quasi-trade union known as the Federation of Women Teachers of Ontario. I've been active in the Teacher's Federation throughout my years in teaching and I've also been involved in lots of strike support work. So I guess in those ways I qualify for this panel today.

So, we all work. Whether right now we're managing to survive as a student or on mother's allowance or on savings, we all know that sooner or later we're going to work and that most of our lives will be spent working. For lesbians, work as a fact of life is especially important because we know that we don't have, and never will have, a husband to support us. Taking a few years off to raise a kid or to pursue our interest in writing or music or whatever are simply not options for us. We work to survive and, because of that, we're more susceptible than most to fear of reprisals and the loss of that means of survival.

Most of us have had experience being a lesbian and a worker in a place that isn't unionized. Most of us have experienced the fear of getting fired for having our "terrible secret" found out. It doesn't take much. Having your name printed in the Body Politic, your picture taken at a gay rally. It doesn't even have to be that direct. Suspicion can be enough and, if you're not openly fired, you can certainly be harassed and, even if nothing ever happens, you live in fear of being found out -- so you hide. You avoid lunchroom discussions about your personal life. You hide in a closet you hate and resent but cannot step outside of.

I don't think I need to describe the effect that having to be in the closet has upon us, not only at work but in the rest of our lives. It carries over into our relationships, friendships, our sense of ourselves. I remember vividly during my first year teaching when my lover would come to meet me at school for lunch. I would be incredibly distant and cold, careful not to touch her at all for fear people would KNOW. Somehow I thought that all they had to see was the two of us within ten feet of each other and they'd be able to tell. Needless to say, it didn't make for very intimate luncheon dates.

I think, for lesbians, the problem of our jobs is a lot worse than it is for gay men. Not only because we have a much lower capacity than men (whether they're gay or straight) but also because of the kind of jobs we hold. Lesbians, like most women, are relegated to certain job ghettos - to white-collar secretarial jobs where we're subjected to all kinds of sexual harassment and demands for personal service to our boss, and to direct 'front-line' service jobs like teaching, nursing and child care.

In these jobs, especially, our lesbianism is a real sticky point, and it's lesbians in these jobs that the right-wing has been especially vehement about. They make claims of everything from recruitment to contamination in justifying kicking us out of these fields, and while we may not be openly fired for being lesbians, the message of fear gets across.

I spent four years searching for other lesbian teachers. In my whole time teaching, I never met more than a handful of lesbians. Not that there aren't lesbian teachers, we know, of course, that there are. But they are so afraid of being found out that they hide themselves almost completely.

I'll never forget an experience I had at the lesbian conference in Ottawa during my second year teaching. During a workshop, I spoke as a lesbian teacher. I was incredibly scared because it was the first time I'd ever said anything like that in public as I'd always been really selective about who I'd be out to and there I was saying it to a total stranger. Afterward, a woman came up to me and said, I'm a teacher too and I'm really glad you said that. I thought I was the only one. It still seems amazing to me that people feel that way but they do.

You can imagine the effect that this kind of fear has on lesbians in jobs where you're dealing directly with people. When you're a teacher, you find yourself being unable to help a kid you know is gay. You can't afford to even broach the subject with him/her, let alone tell him/her about yourself. You end up finding yourself holding back, being less physical, less supportive than you want to be.

It may seem extreme to you that people in 1981 should have to be afraid of losing their jobs, but believe me it's a very real fear that lesbians in lots of different jobs live with day in and day out, and the further you get from a major centre, the greater that fear can be.

O.K., I've painted a pretty bleak picture of what it is to be a lesbian in the labour force these days and I think that there are lots of dismal things to be said, but fortunately things are not totally bleak and I think that the trade union movement is one of the reasons why things are looking up.

Now I'd be the first to admit that the union movement is far from perfect. Problems of bureaucratization, of failure to take seriously the task of organizing women workers, lack of democracy are all criticisms that could be levelled at the unions. But I think that anyone who's worked in both union and non-union jobs can testify to the real difference having a union can make in your day to day working life. The union may not always be there for you, but you can be sure they're a lot more on your side than the bosses.

There's a long-standing saying in the trade-union movement that "an injury to one is an injury to all" and this is as true of attacks against gays and lesbians as against

right-wing may be attacking us now but it's a pretty short step to attack on the right to strike, the right to a closed shop or even the right to union.

to one/injury to all argument has been used by lesbians, gays and straight people who have been fighting for gay rights protection in the unions and in many, many areas as been success.

For example, organizations like the Canadian Labour Congress, the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Ontario Division of CUPE have revised their constitutions to include no discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Within specific union contracts, non-discrimination clauses have been amended too. These clauses are generally of two types: a broad all-inclusive non-discrimination clause and clauses which specify the reasons including sexual orientation among them.

A much less specific form of protection is a "just clause" clause. Toronto's Teachers Federation, for example, which has been bargaining for sexual orientation protection for several years has managed to get a "just clause" clause. Menno Vorster, the President of TTF told me that this clause has been used to contest the harassment of gay teachers within the Toronto system.

Of course, even the most explicit clause is no guarantee that a lesbian won't be harassed or fired because of her lesbianism. An employer can certainly invent reasons to satisfy a "just clause" clause or to explain away a firing. But the fact that the union is there and that sexual orientation is explicitly stated in black and white goes a long way towards intimidating employers against using such slimey tactics. And a strong union with a solid commitment to defending gay and lesbian rights can and will fight a firing based on someone's sexual orientation.

The trade union movement has come a long way in its support for gay and lesbian rights. Such union bodies as the CLC, CUPW, CUPE, CWD, OFL, OSSTF, TTF have gone on record as opposing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Many of these and other union groups have adopted resolutions supporting the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Human Rights Code and many union groups including the Metro Labour Council have come out in protest against the recent bath raids.

So the support is there and it is growing. There's one more thing I'd like to say in wrapping up. Even though there's been lots and lots of changes over the past five years, we're still encountering anti-gay and lesbian sentiments within the union movement. I think it's really important to remember in whatever work we're doing where this homophobia comes from.

People aren't born hating lesbians any more than they're born heterosexual. Society makes them that way. Society organizes and controls and channels people's sexuality into

acceptable forms of heterosexual nuclear couples relating just as it organizes their response to lesbians and gays, as the embodiment of evil and decadence. We become scapegoats, like Jews, blacks, and immigrants.

It's not nice and it's not fair but it happens and what we've got to do, along with our heterosexual supporters, is to challenge that response, to show that we're not to blame for the problems in this society, to show that we're victims of these problems, just like everybody else, and to show that all together we can begin to effect the changes we all need to live the kind of lives we want and deserve to live.

* * *

PHOTO

"The T.R.C.C. and The Right"
by MariRuth Morton

The T.R.C.C. is a feminist organization committed to fighting the oppression of women in any of the forms this oppression takes, be it rape, incestuous assault, sexual harassment, psychiatric violence, violence in the home, economic oppression, homophobia and others.

We name as the enemies of women, those social institutions which perpetuate the abuse of women, including the legal justice system which does not offer women legal recourse but, in fact, adds to the abuse women suffer, and psychiatric institutions and hospitals which confine and/or drug women into submission and passivity, and a popular culture which advocates the physical domination of women for the sexual pleasure of men.

The current wave of rightist propagandists who identify themselves as pro-family groups, or leagues against homosexuals, are openly speaking what many practice and believe, namely that women are to be denied control over their own bodies, denied the right of abortion, denied the right to resist male sexual violence, and the right to give our bodies freely as we wish when our choice is another woman.

There is a popular myth that has been circulating for some time in the straight press that women's issues have been addressed, dealt with, understood and accepted. We all know about the problems of rape, daycare, sexual harassment, low income women, abortion, etc., and, therefore, because these problems have been brought into prominence, they have, in some way, been perceived as solved.

Most of us here today know how incorrect this kind of thinking is -- in law courts today, women suffer abuse and degradation as real as they did 20 years ago; the economic oppression of sole support mothers, the lack of adequate daycare facilities and the ever-increasing unavailability of abortions in Toronto hospitals are clear reminders that our work has not been completed.

The recent police raids and busts of lesbians and gay social activities is a clear indicator that there is at present a certain licence given to those who wish to express their hatred of women and other "minorities". Lesbians in this city have fewer resources than we did a few years ago, and women are experiencing an even greater level of fear for their safety on the streets. Our work at the Centre clearly indicates an escalation in violence against women and children, and it is no coincidence that fewer and fewer women are reporting their sexual attacks to the authorities, as it is clear that they will not receive anything resembling "justice" through this route. Straight men are more and more openly expressing their contempt for women, and this will, of course, extend to lesbians who are in any way visible in the community. We are fighting harder now than we did even 5 years ago for the right of women to walk the streets safely, to be taken seriously in court, to not be abused or humiliated in police stations and hospitals, to be treated with dignity and respect in their workplaces, to be free of violence in their own homes.

So given the fact that violence against women is not under control in this city, and given that women are up against incredibly difficult forces in their workplace and their homes and that our oppression has not been alleviated, some of us who want to be working on the women's movement, feel we have to be working for women's issues at a time when what gains we may have been made are in the process of being undermined. The question that needs addressing for us, however, is how we can work effectively and be gratified by our involvement in this movement as lesbians. How we can fight for things we strongly believe in and, at the same time, maintain and expand our lesbian identity in that struggle. I can only touch upon this problem today, but I hope it will open discussion on this and related themes.

II - Problems in Being a Lesbian Working in the Women's Movement

The hesitation some lesbians express at working within the women's movement is a very real one, with a very clear history. Since the late sixties, lesbians have been pushed out, silenced, ignored or evaded by many feminist organizations, and yet, at the same time, have been at the forefront of the radical wing of this movement. Then, as today, much of the best feminist theory is written by lesbians, even when the subject matter is ostensibly a "straight woman's issue" (such as daycare or abortion rights, and sometimes rape).

Yet, in spite of many obvious insults and invalidations by their straight sisters, lesbians have continued to operate strongly within the women's movement, as they recognize that to fight on one women's issue is to fight for all, and that, as women, all issues are essentially one -- namely, the universal liberation of women from tyranny, exploitation and violation. I think that many lesbians have endured in this movement because they began to make the organizations they worked in responsible for their position on lesbianism, and because they did not do this alone. The history of T.R.C.C. over the past three years illustrates, I think, how this situation can evolve, and how lesbianism can be integrated effectively in feminist organizations.

Indeed, our experience at the Centre clearly indicates that if lesbianism cannot be so integrated that there is a serious problem for the organization and we should question our involvement in it. I hope to set up a dialogue with women currently working in organizations where they are not comfortable making our sexuality an issue and thereby taking on the issue of lesbianism within a political organization.

Centre History

There was one lesbian three years ago. We had liberal politics -- i.e., were tolerant of other "lifestyles" but had no political analysis of heterosexual privilege and lesbian oppression, and no lesbian-feminist analysis integrated in overall policy or principles. A political struggle ensued and there was a radical/liberal split in the collective on the issue of the power of the Board of Directors. We came out of this hard

struggle with a strong commitment to collectivism and to political argument. This radicalization process took place over a 2 1/2 year period, and of course is still going on.

During this time, women at the Centre were coming out -- a wonderful phenomenon of feminism that makes perfect sense when you consider the environment we work in -- women were working with each other, gaining respect for themselves and each other, growing and being challenged to grow politically, pushing limits that were new to us, learning to like and trust ourselves as women, and beginning to explore the depth of our own misogyny and wanting to battle for it. Traditional boundaries between women broke down as we worked together in a supportive, woman-identified environment and as we continued to push each other to deal with ever more difficult decisions in our personal and political lives. I came out at the Centre as did a number of other women, and this is still going on. It suddenly became clear -- men were not a necessary ingredient of a fulfilling life, and that, quite simply, many of us preferred each other's company.

So, a very important factor at the T.R.C.C. is that no one of us was alone in this process -- our struggle was a common one after we picked up the pieces when the collective split, and I believe we have been in movement since. At the same time as our lesbianism was becoming an issue, we were dealing with becoming increasingly more critical of social institutions, ever more aware of the level of woman-hating in this society by seeing what the women who came to us for help had experienced. The ruin men have made of so many women's lives brought us in touch with the many ways in which we had suffered oppression at the hands of men and their institutions, and we bonded closer together to take refuge and strength.

It also became more and more clear that lesbianism was a political issue, that it was for some of us the natural outcome of radical feminism. We began to address lesbianism in our volunteer training sessions -- at first, because we wanted women coming to the Centre to know they would be working with lesbians, and to screen for the most obvious homophobics, and later, because our political analysis of women's oppression required the recognition of lesbianism as one of the most basic issues to be addressed when speaking about the ultimate freedom of women to make their own choices and control their bodies as they wish, and as the ultimate threat to the patriarchy.

At this point, lesbians work at the Centre in significant numbers, and incoming members are educated as to the reality of lesbians' lives and the necessity of recognizing lesbianism as a natural and positive choice for any women at make. Lesbian-feminist analysis is our greatest resource for theory, and we openly acknowledge our own lesbianism or that, if we are straight, we should recognize the privilege that relating to men brings. This is not to say that our struggle is complete -- it is incredibly difficult to purge the myths around lesbians and to address how threatening many heterosexual women find lesbianism, and for good reason.

So, as well as incorporating lesbianism in our feminist analysis and dealing more and more openly with the potential divisiveness of straight and lesbian women working

together without a means of accountability, we are bringing our issues to the forefront of discussion and we are publicly coming out as supporters of lesbian issues and organizations. Our printed information, which is made available to the public, supports lesbian movements and recommends lesbian readings, and we, in no way, disguise the fact that lesbians work at the Centre and, in fact, are increasingly making it known that we are here.

Lesbianism has been made an issue at the Centre and we are working through it daily in our interactions with each other -- there are many problems we have not yet learned how to solve -- what is the extent of the "gap" between straight women and dykes at the Centre; what are the limits, if any, on the personal relationships lesbians and non-lesbians can form; how do we deal with our lesbianism in relation to the women who come to us for help; and how are our sexually-vested interests getting in the way of political growth. We are using problem solving and constant criticism among ourselves to deal with questions of this kind.

I'm hoping to hear from other women on the kinds of issues they are facing on this theme so we can learn from each other. I also hope that we can establish a strong support system for each other so that lesbians working in organizations who have not been able to address lesbianism can begin to. And I know very well that we can't take on heterosexism individually but must gain support from within our organization to change them, to recruit new members who will help in this very necessary struggle.

This is not easy to do, and it costs. We lost almost half our members, when the dissatisfied women in our collective spoke out and demanded explanations. But we have gained new women and they are wonderful, and they now push us to live out our politics, our lesbianism, in new stronger ways. Our collective has come through a tremendous amount of shit but it really has been worth it. I may never have come out without the women's movement and, for that, I owe it my happiness.

Lesbians are everywhere, but our presence will not be known until we demand recognition. We cannot afford to work undercover, or in the closet, in our political work; we cannot subsume our issues in the name of "larger" and "more universal" ones. As lesbians, we've done this for too long which is why we chose to work in lesbian-only groups. And we need our own place, a place where our lesbianism is a given that we move and enhance ourselves through.

I have gained such pleasure in working with other dykes in the planning of this day that I don't know what I'll do now that it is over. I cherish that experience and I think we all deserve more of each other, more access and opportunity to be together as lesbians.

* * *

HOW WOMEN FOR SURVIVAL, AN ALL-WOMEN'S ANTI-NUCLEAR GROUP IS FIGHTING THE RIGHT

by Judy Lierschultz

I guess I should give some history of how I got involved in all this. I spent over ten years on the missionary left, in mixed groups. Anti-war groups, anti-nuke groups, environmental work, housing, urban issues: I have done them all.

Since coming out as a lesbian, my feminism has become much more important to me. I decided to withdraw from my activities in mixed groups and try to work with all women. Women for Survival is the first time this has come together for me and it has been terrific. It is a whole different thing working with women. The group is not all lesbians, but most of the women are, and the rest are very comfortable with it because we never made any secret of it. We all talk about ourselves with each other and try to make the group a source of support as well as a way to show the connection between our opposition to nukes and nuclear arms and other women's issues. Talking about nukes as a feminist issue is as important as the anti-nuclear part of what we do, even more so.

So I am supposed to talk about certain things here. The first one is how does our group address the rise of the right. We do it by publicly making the connection between nukes and bombs as often as we can. Canadians don't like to think about this. They have been told we are a peaceful country, that we don't manufacture arms and don't have nuclear arms. We talk about the industry profiting from nukes and profiting from arms production being the same ones in many cases. We talk about the plutonium from Canadian CANDUs being used to manufacture bombs. The nuclear bomb India tested contained plutonium from the CANDU we gave/sold them for "peaceful purposes". We talk about women opposing the placement of U.S. nuclear missiles in NATO countries in Bonn recently as an example of the involvement of women in this issue.

Reagan war-mongering in third world countries is discussed as another method for getting rid of their huge store of arms. They're looking for a place to use them because they're piling up. Rosalie Bertell explained some of the economics of bombs -- the fact that we have not had a peacetime economy since World War II. Arms production hasn't ceased during that time. That is a lot of money sitting in a commodity that isn't being used. We talk to people about tight economics and how it historically gives rise to fear of the 'red menace', violence, racism and more desire to push the war machine into action. Two ways we're seeing this now is in increased violence against women and the environment. This is seen as a return to strength and stability by the right.

Next, I am supposed to talk about why it is important for me, as a lesbian, to be involved in this group. I am doing it because most environmental and anti-nuke groups have no concept of the importance of feminism, or how their own sexism affects their work. They are liberal, reformist groups, which is okay, but the sexism and the homophobia are rampant, as they are in most mixed groups on the right, the left and everywhere else. They aren't even acknowledging it or addressing it in most cases, much less solving it.

The next question was how to maintain a lesbian identity when doing this kind of work. My answer to that is to be out all the time, with everyone. People's sexism and homophobia must be made clear, and as important for them to understand as their colour barriers. Among women, this is especially important, and easier, thank goodness, because we are the change agents.

Another question we were asked to speak on is why only women. I think the answer to that is pretty well understood. Let the men organize themselves. If they oppose rape, let them get out and march against rape. I don't see them. There are also lots of mixed anti-nuke groups for people to participate in. There are men who do support work for us, but the members are all women. Another thing is that, as an all women's group, we are making the historical connections between the women who have been involved in opposing nuclear arms for years and those of us now fighting nukes. That connection is very important, and one that is never made by mixed groups.

Personal problems as a lesbian was another topic. Mine is watching women sacrifice their lesbian identities to a cause. The sexism, subtle of course, is too energy-consuming to make it worthwhile.

The last thing I'll talk about is ways of solving the problem, ways of getting lesbians involved. One thing that is important for this is to go beyond left and right, neither of which has ever been much fun for women, to talk about feminism, life-sustaining priorities instead of death wishes: i.e. health, daycare, education, job safety, the environment, equal pay, violence against women, and, of course, disarmament and nukes. These must be seen as the issues, not just women's issues, so women will not see themselves as a fringe group anymore.

Another way is to make connections with all kinds of women -- church women, labour women, teachers, nurses. Keep being out. Keep making the connection between the issues facing women. It is working.

Two more things and then I'm done. I really get scared when I see gay groups in the U.S., for instance, saying maybe they don't want to say too much about things like the Family Protection Act because of the reaction, the backlash, being even worse than things are now. That is crazy. We can't wait and see. It won't go away. It has to be fought politically, all the time.

The last thing is that I think we have to put our money where our mouths are. Those women who have been lucky enough to get jobs and make decent money have to start dipping into their pockets. It costs money to make change. If we really want change, if we really want no more business as usual, then we have to pay up.

That is all. Thanks.

* * *

LESBIANS FIGHTING IMPERIALISM

by Vicki Keiman

I am a member of a small organization called the Women's Latin American Support Group, which meets to talk about the revolution in El Salvador, and the politics of Latin America in general. El Salvador is a tiny Central American country, repressively ruled by a U.S.-sponsored military dictatorship, which is currently using U.S. arms in its attempt to crush the so-called left. The left in El Salvador is a movement of peasants, students, clergy and Social Democrats unified under the banner of the popular alliance, FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front). The demands of the revolution include items such as a decent living wage for all workers, and land reform. At present, fourteen families own most of the land in El Salvador.

Why are we concerned about El Salvador or other repressive Latin American governments? First, Latin America has special personal and political significance for most of us in the group. Second, it is a horror to all people of conscience that in one little country, fifty people a day are murdered, and countless tortured and held in clandestine prisons, merely for being suspected of wanting the right to a meal at the end of a working day or to buy medicine for a sick child. And when we talk about the rise of the Right, it is essential that we realize that the Right, both in Canada and the U.S., can only support its vast political and economic interests by supporting and financing murderous third world regimes, which insure that no poor person will ever get a bigger slice of the world's economic pie. If that were to happen, (to give just one small example), Canada would no longer be able to strip Latin America of its valuable mining resources. Currently, 90% of Canada's foreign investment in mining is invested in Latin America, fostering the friendliest of relations with despotic governments such as that of Guatemala, a major producer of nickel. No matter that indigenous Guatemalans (the majority of the population) have had their land stolen from them and been denied the most basic human rights. The priorities of the Right in such cases are clear.

Why are we organizing as women only, both straight and lesbian? Why didn't we merely join the Committee of Solidarity with El Salvador and work with the very committed men and women of that organization? Because it is only by working with feminist women that we can guarantee that feminism is on the revolutionary agenda. It is only in a group like ours that the position of women in Third World struggles for justice will be the first priority. We will adopt only female prisoners of conscience, through Amnesty International. We will invite only women to speak to us about their analysis and experience of Latin America. We examine the position of gay and lesbian people in both pre and post-revolutionary countries. We know that only women will look out for the interests of women, and so we organize separately from men.

And why should we as lesbians support people in the Third World? Have revolutionary movements of the past made lesbian rights a high priority issue? Of course not, and it will probably be a very long time before they do. But there is progress. Women play a vital role in the revolutionary movements of Latin America. Incredibly brave and

dauntless women are guerilla fighters, movement strategists and village organizers for the new order. And neither do they necessarily slip meekly back into the kitchen when the bloodiest battles are over, but, as we see in Nicaragua, become ministers of government and a vital force in shaping their country's futures. And when the revolution of the Third World succeeds, and ultimately, eventually it will, the economic chains that tie women inextricably to men will be broken. Only then will it be possible for those women to choose to join us, to enjoy even the possibility of being up-front, proud lesbian women, and of organizing together as we are doing here today.

* * *

PHOTO
15 cm x 15 cm

Conclusion

by Natalie LaRoche

Lesbians really are everywhere. This is not just a slogan designed to combat our invisibility -- it's true!

And lesbians are fighting the right wing from almost every possible perspective (as we have seen today) -- from the anti-nuke movement, the anti-racist movement, the abortion movement, the day-care movement, welfare rights organizations, the feminist movement, the gay movement, anti-imperialist movements, the anti-war movement, the trade union movement and many others.

All of these organizations are links in the chain that is needed to keep back the right wing. It is important for lesbians to be in these organizations. It is especially important to us as lesbians that we be out in these organizations. But unless we are organized as lesbians, we can not be a link in that chain.

We are now being aggressively attacked -- the growing right wing, a sister Barbara Schleiffer is murdered -- the Sun suggests an enraged lesbian did it, undercover cops bust our dances. Our bar gets closed down. Fascists disseminate filthy hate literature about us.

All of this in addition to not having any civil rights, having our children taken from us, getting thrown out of our homes, being in constant danger of losing our unorganized and ill-paying jobs if we should step out of our closet (particularly if you work with kids, as I do), being invisible and constantly oppressed by the heterosexist hatred which is encouraged and supported by the right wing and the police.

Certain liberal organizations have historically made noises about defending people's civil rights. Where were the NDP and the Liberal Party for the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Human Rights Code? Where was the NDP when Hislop and Sewell were smeared by the police in the Toronto civic election and when the Baths were attacked. Discussing "in caucus".

Some male left and anti-imperialist organizations tell us sexuality is a personal matter and that we and our communities are a-political. Trade unions are only beginning to take steps to defend our rights. Our straight sisters in the feminist movement are often threatened by us and some of them would like us to be more quiet. The faggots in the gay movement often oppress us and use us. We have to fight invisibility everywhere, even amongst our allies.

All of this political work is terribly important. Bringing a lesbian-feminist perspective to all of these diverse organizations is a very real and strategic weapon in the struggle against the right wing. We have to do something about our situation. Lesbians are totally unorganized in Toronto. It is not good for us to be this defenseless.

We have many needs:

- We need to be able to mobilize quickly and in large numbers in response to right wing attacks -- like LOOT was able to do when Anita Bryant was in town for Renaissance International.
- We need a support and communication system for lesbians who are involved in organizations fighting the right wing, as well as for those who are unaffiliated and want to become involved.
- We need to develop a lesbian-feminist perspective and strategy for fighting the right, both for ourselves and for lesbians to bring to their different organizations.
- We need a central place from which we can begin to reorganize our community -- to have regular parties, pot luck dinners, invited speakers, discussion groups, cultural/educational events as well as political action and communication with other groups. Our community is where we get our strength and positive self-image from. Without it we are isolated.

In your workshops, we would like you to pull together this day's discussions and talk about where we go from here. Do we want another lesbian organization? What kind: what would it do? How will we form the kind of supportive and organizational networks that we need? What is lesbian-feminist strategy to fight the right? How does isolation affect us personally and politically?

How will we prevent the problems that happened in the past from recurring? How will we deal with our political differences and diversity this time? How will we raise money? How will we fight the right wing and strengthen ourselves? Who will we work with? Who are our allies?

I am sure there are many other questions that we need to deal with, and I'm certain that one day of meetings will only begin to touch the issues. Hopefully, this is just a beginning and this discussion will continue in a sisterly and productive manner.

* * *

GRAPHIC
1979-1980

This pamphlet is the first publishing effort undertaken by (L.A.R.). We are tremendously proud of our work, but at the same time, we felt that the priority was to be able to distribute this to as many interested parties as possible, and to that end we have attempted, insofar as possible, to keep costs down.

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