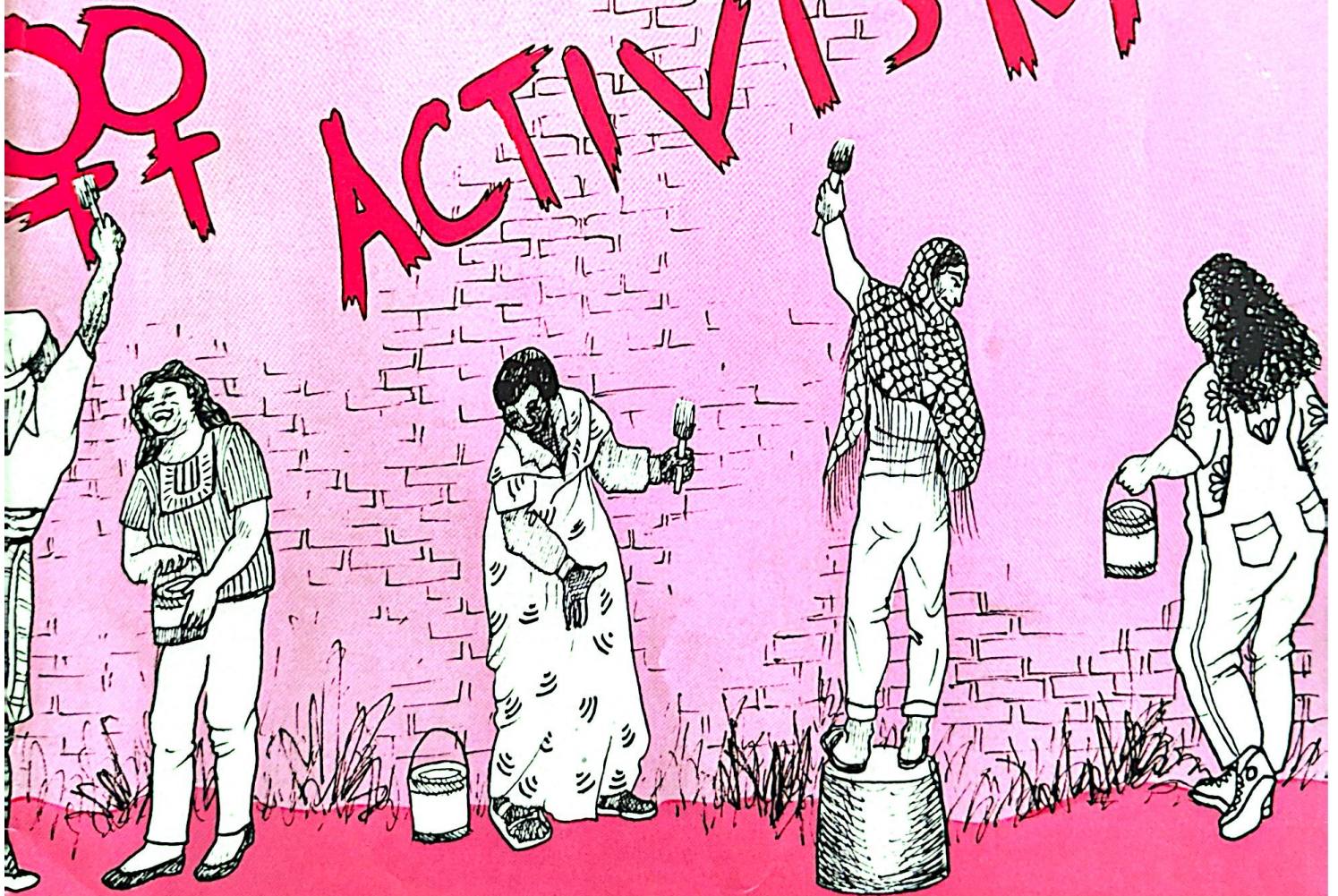


Connexions

No. 29, 1989

An International Women's Quarterly

LESBIAN ACTIVISM





Mladina/Lesbenstich

Statement

Connexions is the collective product of feminists of diverse nationalities and political perspectives committed to contributing to an international women's movement.

We want to go beyond merely providing facts and information, and hope that by passing on—as directly as possible—women's writing generally unavailable in the US, we will be helping women here to understand and connect with the experiences and viewpoints of women in other parts of the world. We also want to contribute to the growth of a worldwide network connecting women working on similar projects by researching, establishing contacts and exchanging information with other women's organizations.

To a large extent, the economic and political conditions under which we live determine the issues to which we give priority. Women do not live in a vacuum, but in what is still largely a man's world. It is essential for us to understand the working of that world if we are to understand each other. We hope that *Connexions* will be one step toward building an international women's movement.

Office Staff

Constantina Bertone, Donna Scism, Patricia Sieber, Janet Stephens, Iris Wesselmann, Jane Whitley.

For This Issue:

Editorial

Kathy Glimm, Rose Killinger, Marlene Schoofs, Donna Scism (co-coordinator), Jeb Sharp, Patricia Sieber (co-coordinator), Janet Stephens, Jane Whitley.

Production

Dee Elling, Kathy Glimm, Victoria Hamlin (cover), Dita Rudinow, Anne-Marie Schmoltner, Donna Scism, Jeb Sharp, Laura Sheffer, Patricia Sieber, Jane Whitley.

Translation

Kari Fantacome (Norwegian), Rose Killinger (German), Marlene Schoofs (German), Anne-Marie Schmoltner (German), Donna Scism (French), Patricia Sieber (Chinese, German) Jane Whitley (French).

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Lesbian Activism



In this issue we attempt to survey what lesbians are doing in political and social activism. Lesbians have always been on the front lines of political action—in the women's movement, peace and disarmament, anti-nuclear, civil and human rights and even, as in Nicaragua, social revolution. But increasingly, lesbians are coming out publicly in these movements, making explicit the connections between their activism for lesbian rights and these other concerns. Lesbians, working autonomously or in these larger movements, are making their presence known in creative ways.

In Canada, lesbian civil rights can converge with the labor movement. A lesbian librarian has had strong backing from her union local in her attempt to obtain the same health coverage that the government regularly provides to heterosexual "domestic partners" for her lover.

In many countries, lesbians choose to work with gay men on political issues. Last fall saw a busload of activists leaving Holland to tour Europe, organizing a protest against Britain's recently enacted anti-gay Clause 28 legislation. Meanwhile, lesbians and gays in East Germany insist that open expression of sexual preference is a necessary part of a healthy socialist society as they seek state support and approval of their organization.

For some lesbians, activism solely for lesbian rights must be placed in perspective within a more pressing political and social agenda. "Lesbian-Sandinistas" must defend and secure their revolution. For lesbian and gay activists in South Africa, gay civil rights without basic human rights would be meaningless. But in both countries, lesbians join in these political movements as lesbians. In doing so, they ensure a place for lesbian rights on future agendas.

Because homophobia is alive and well in many feminist groups, lesbian activism within the women's movement can be problematic. A small group of Peruvian lesbians were treated to a resounding silence when they introduced themselves at a feminist conference. Japanese lesbians are not particularly welcome in women's organizations either.

However, this hostility from the larger women's movement can galvanize lesbians into organizing their own groups, conferences and film festivals to acknowledge and demonstrate publicly their existence. While the first Latin American and Caribbean Lesbian Encuentro brought together lesbian Latinas, planning is under way in Thailand for the first Asian lesbian conference.

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Of course, amid these conferences and encounters, lesbians are not without a sense of humor. Swiss lesbians designed and distributed an "official" government pamphlet called "What You Should Know About Lesbians." Neither have lesbians lost their sense of outrage. Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin, an outspoken and openly lesbian member of the German parliament, rails against a wide range of injustices to the consternation of her parliamentary colleagues.

Finally, we must remember that lesbian activism, like all political activism, can be very dangerous. This issue opens with a first-hand account by a lesbian who was "zapped" by high frequency electromagnetic radiation while participating in the women's encampment and protest at Greenham Common. This issue is filled with the stories of courageous women who are daring to stand up, organize as lesbians, and demand change. And this trend is on the rise. □

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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Zapped: England

High Frequency Terrorism at Greenham Common

(Submitted to *Connexions* in February 1989.)

I have only been to Greenham Women's Peace Camp three times. The first time I was seventeen and most of my visit was spent working out that "yes, they were all lesbians." The second time, two years later, I had come out, and I knew many of the women at Green Gate. Now I felt connected to the camp. I watched the soldiers at the fence grow uneasy as we appeared out of the rolling white mist on Hallowe'en night, keening and cackling and chanting. I ran up Silbury Hill where the witches used to gather, and 13 of us danced around a bonfire, burning the painted sign that declared the hill to be private property. I got up at dawn the next day and laughed with Ember as she rattled on about the difference between Blue Gate and Green Gate: "Now you see at Blue Gate, for instance, chocolate soya dessert would have never lasted unopened overnight . . .", she said, while proceeding to tear open the packet and empty half of it into a bowl for breakfast. I left that day only because I had to do my first job as a professional carpenter. I vowed that when I next came to Greenham, I was going to stay.

But the third time I went to Greenham I had an experience that sent me bolting out of there at first light; I frantically hitched rides back to London, knowing that it would be years before I could go back. I had gone there for a big demonstration. Among the hundreds of women, I unexpectedly met some old friends from high school. I was feeling tense and uneasy all day, but attributed it to suddenly seeing women with whom I'd once talked about boyfriends, in this very lesbian setting. But after most women had gone home, the atmosphere thickened. The soldiers were freaking out, yelling at us and throwing bricks and bottles. I got up from the fire, propelled by a severe sense of alienation from everyone, and walked to my tent. A buzzing noise had been going on in my head all day without my really noticing it;

then it grew unbearably loud, but when I turned around to identify its source, it still sounded as if it were behind me. Voices in my mind started up a frantic dialogue: "Everybody here hates you," they screeched and I started to panic, "they hate you, there's no place for you to be, you might as well kill yourself. . . ." I ran to the fire, barefoot, through the thick brambles and the December cold, crying. I found that I could barely hear anything except the voices in my head, and that I could not speak. I think I stumbled back to the tent—I have no memories of the rest of the night.

It was two weeks before I could talk about what had happened. Luckily, one of my neighbours who had been involved with Greenham since the beginning had been there at the same demonstration. She told me that the "zapping" had been on that night. Suddenly, my experience made sense.

Activists, journalists and scientists all use the word "zapping" to describe the harmful effects of non-ionising electromagnetic radiation. Upon collision with atoms, ionising radiation knocks off particles, thereby creating a charged particle known as an ion. Since electromagnetic radiation of frequencies including and below that of visible light are non-ionising, such radiation was initially thought to be harmless apart from the "thermal effect." Since the 1950s, however, scientists have found that the radiation brings about dramatic changes in living tissue. It is now known that every living being functions in an electromagnetic field of its own, delicately tuned to the earth's 7.8 hertz frequency; disruption of that individual field can cause biological damage ranging from severe emotional disturbance to cancer, leukemia and birth defects.

Our microwave ovens, CB stations, satellite dishes, power lines and T.V. sets all emit harmful frequencies; constant exposure is leading to the breakdown of our immune systems. Only radical changes could alleviate this situation. However,

fearing loss of prestige and profits, governments and corporations alike have suppressed publicising of the results that the research on the biological hazards of electricity has yielded. Instead of decentralising the electricity supply, drawing on the renewable resources of sun, wind, and wave, setting realistic safety standards and educating people about the dangers of electro-pollution, the governments of Britain, the US and the USSR have exploited the data to develop "frequency weapons."

In a study entitled *Analysis of Microwaves for Barrier Warfare*, published in 1972 by the US Army Equipment and Research Center, the authors concluded that it is possible to field a portable microwave system that will "completely immobilize personnel." A 1982 US Air Force study drew up a scenario in which the enemy should be exposed to electromagnetic radiation in order to sensitize them to "chemical and biological agents to which the unirradiated population would be immune." The British Defence Equipment Catalogue 1983, v.2, carries an advertisement for the "Valkyrie light system, an extremely efficient non-lethal weapon for security forces." At the request of the British Ministry of Defence, all references to frequency weapons were eliminated from subsequent catalogues.

In October 1984, some changes took place at the U.S.A.F. airbase at Greenham Common. New antennae were installed and the number of soldiers at the fence reduced. Shortly afterwards, the women at the camp started to come down with a variety of mysterious illnesses. These are some of their symptoms: burning of the skin from the direction of the base rather than the sun; spontaneous bleeding of the nose and the gums; dizziness and vomiting; disruption of the menstrual cycle; confusion, depression, and paranoia; panic attacks in ordinary situations; post-menopausal bleeding; disruption of sleep patterns; deafness; stabbing pain in the heart.

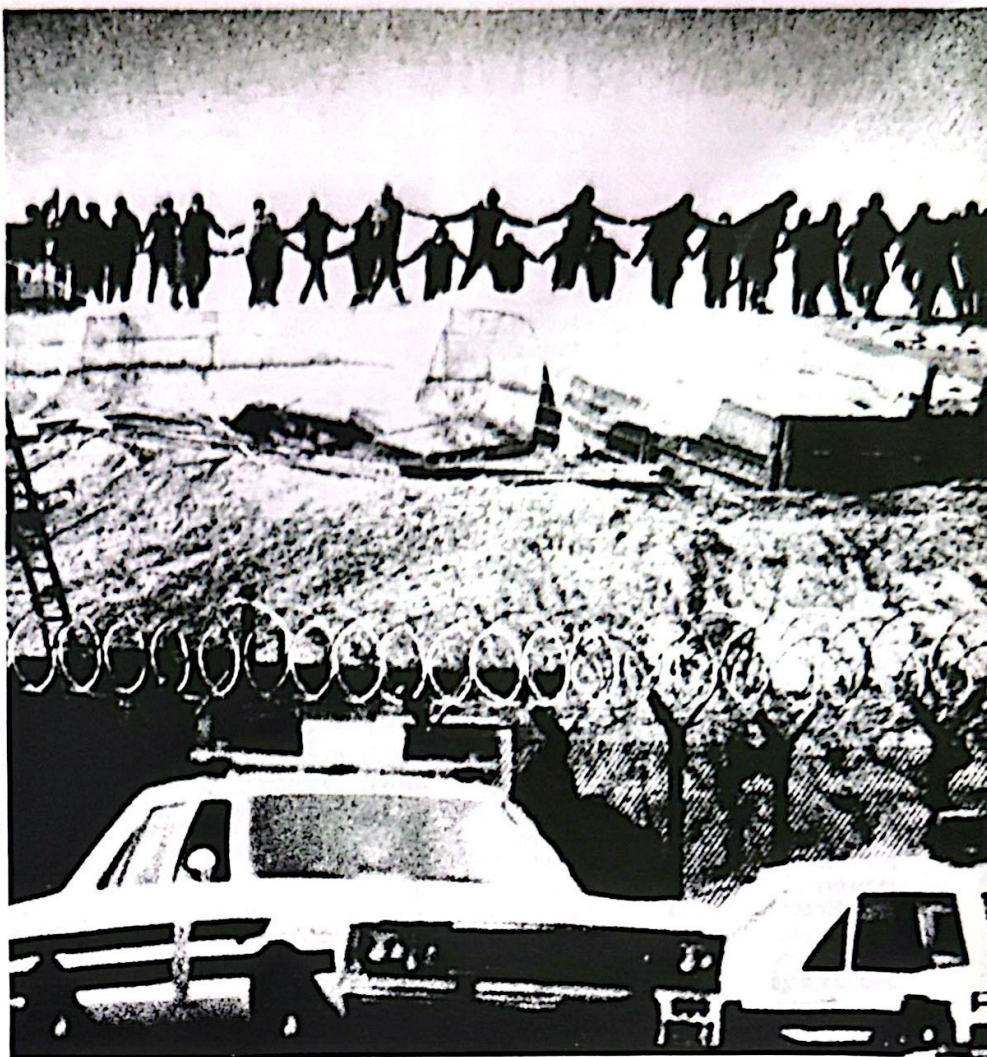
Research led the Greenham women

to the conclusion that they were being bombarded with high levels of microwave radiation. They suspected that the bombardment was intended to deter them from Greenham or to test the effect of this technology on human guinea-pigs, or both. Members of Electronics for Peace, some journalists, and a well-known anti-nuclear scientist, Rosalie Bertell, all measured the radiation around the fence. Their findings were very similar; wherever women who were sensitive to the zap said they could sense it, the instruments measured up to one hundred times the level of the background radiation. The equipment used so far has not been sufficiently sophisticated to identify the exact frequencies of the emissions, but the tests suggest that more than one signal frequency is being used.

Two phenomena have puzzled people; first, women have experienced a wide variety of symptoms; second, some women do not seem to be susceptible to the zapping at all. However, the electrical field of each body has its own individual frequency; therefore, the effect of disrupting the field varies accordingly. The water content of the tissue is an important factor; the more water the tissue contains, the more radiation it will absorb. Since women's tissue generally contains more water, *women are more susceptible to the effects of the radiation than men.*

Some of the more radical media in England speculated that these sinister happenings were accidental spills from the security system. In answer I would like to quote from the report put out by Electronics for Peace: "Strong signals recorded on one occasion at Green Gate were found to cover the women's encampment, but to stop abruptly at the road leading up to the gate (...) it seems curious that a number of strong signals should variously reflect the women's movements and follow a geographical pattern which seems to single out their encampments."

In 1985, women at Seneca Women's Peace Encampment started to suffer from the same symptoms; now it is well docu-



Dancing on the silos - 1st January 1983

mented that zapping is deployed against women there. The Peace Farm at Amarillo, Texas, outside the Pantex bomb factory, the non-stop picket at the South African embassy in London and the Lexington Women's Control Unit might also have been targeted.

Women at both Greenham and Seneca have been exploring ways to survive the zapping, drawing on their special skills as witches and healers. I have learnt to overcome my fear of being thought insane or hysterical when talking about this subject—the first draft of this article made no mention of my own experience of being zapped. Women's experiences have long been denounced as insane; it is of no benefit to internalise the denunciation.

The women at Greenham seem to have developed the most effective way to counteract the zapping. They have issued an injunction against the British and US governments to "prohibit the use of frequency wave weapons." Since filing the injunction at Newbury County Court in January 1988, the women named as plaintiffs have had their homes and cars broken into, papers stolen and mail opened, but the zapping at Greenham has stopped.

It is sometimes difficult for political activists to assess the effect of their actions,

but this covert government torture proves that lesbian activists are far more than an inconvenience to the war machine. It is also a tribute to these women's strength and determination that through three winters of zapping and daily evictions the camp survived.

The battle against zap begins in our consciousness; we need to educate ourselves about it in order to deal with it successfully. As a result of their own experiences of being zapped, a group of women at the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment has started work on these issues. They encourage anyone who thinks they might be targeted, or who would like to help or to know more about zap, to send inquiries, donations and helpful information to:

C.O.R.L.—Coalition of Rainbow Light
P.O. Box 4541
Ithaca, N.Y. 14852

Further Reading:

- Robert O. Becker, *The Body Electric: Electromagnetism and the Foundation of Life*, New York: Morrow, 1985.
- Catherine Caulfield, *Multiple Exposures—Chronicles of the Radiation Age*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1988.

Chaos in the Assembly

West Germany

(Translated from *Emma*, West German feminist monthly, No. 1, January 1989.)

Men with severely parted hair in ill-fitting business suits carry black suitcases through the streets. They go in pairs or groups of three, speaking with each other about politics, or this or that absent colleague. Shortly they split up, or perhaps disappear together behind glass doors. A grey sky presses down upon this uninspiring scene. The air is cold and damp. The Rhine lies nearby like a wet dishrag, grey and sluggish. It is winter in Bonn.

Yet the picture is deceptive. In the House of Parliament, where Bonn's provincialism is at its most incorrigible, the atmosphere at this moment is highly charged: Debate is underway over the federal budget. At the podium is Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin. She is speaking about lesbians and gay men—an exotic theme for the Exalted House. This delegate of the Green Party is proposing two motions on behalf of her party, and requesting two budget allocations: a lesbian referendum as part of the affirmative action program for women's politics, and a gay referendum under the auspices of the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Health. Projected funding: 340,000 marks. Additionally she requests an allowance of two million marks for lesbian and gay organizations.

Because of its homophobia, the federal government has yet to do anything at all for its lesbian and gay citizens, states the delegate calmly, in support of the motion. Her speech provokes laughter and flustered comment. The members of the highest assembly react like adolescents at confirmation class.

Most conspicuous, however, are the facial gymnastics of the parliamentary Vice President Annemarie Renger (Social Democratic Party), who is enthroned directly behind Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin. As soon as the words "lesbian" and "gay" are out, her eyebrows arch up into the roots of her hair, her mouth contorts, her blond locks shake, and her eyes roll to convey exaggerated dissociation from the speaker.

The Parliament has officially refused to print material in which the words "lesbian" and "gay" appear, for these words represent concepts—according to Annemarie Renger—"which the Highest Assembly" considers "unacceptable." And as she says this her voice escalates into its soprano range, which she usually is at pains to avoid. The highest assembly would prefer, if indeed the subject must be brought up at all, to employ the term "homosexual." Renger to Oesterle-Schwerin: "Are you in agreement?" Oesterle-Schwerin: "No."

For approximately one year, members of Parliament have had to hear the words "lesbian" and "gay" far more often than they had ever dreamed. Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin has been a delegate since



Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin

Frank Darchinger/Emma

the last election as a member of the Green Party from Ulm, and describes herself as an independent leftist, a women's rights activist, and an open lesbian.

Of course Oesterle-Schwerin is not the first and only among either the Greens or the Social Democrats, Christian Democrats or the Free Democrats. But she is the first woman in the German parliament who dares to step forward openly as a lesbian. "I would also take part in public demonstrations," she adds firmly, "where both prominent and not-so-prominent women are willing to be known, by name and by picture, as lesbians."

They have had to hear the words "gay" and "lesbian" far more often than they had ever dreamed.

Is she then completely fearless? Has she no fear of the reactions of relatives and neighbors, or perhaps that heterosexuals will immediately assume the feminist activism of a homosexual woman to be man-hating?

"Of course I am afraid. The politics of labels always scares me. Above all when our local press engages in it. At home in Ulm everyone knows each other, there's no anonymity. But the majority of people take no direct action. Not in Ulm, nor here, in Bonn, nor in the Party. Most people are silent about it."

Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin, 47 years old, interior designer and mother of two nearly adult children, does not look like a fighter. Her narrow face is framed by straight, silver-grey, mid-length hair. Grey-blue eyes peer from behind her nickel-rimmed glasses. She looks more serious than she would actually like to.

In sessions of Parliament or of her own party she is known to enter into debates with calm and deliberation. Her voice is always faintly husky, and sounds uncannily rational. She never loses her cool, in fact becomes more composed in proportion to the chaos that can erupt around her. In the most trying of circumstances she is the most implacable.

The latest and the best-known of the exploits of this delegate for the Green Party took place on the 50th anniversary of Crystal Night, after a speech by then-President of the Parliament Philip Jenninger. Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin, who was born in Jerusalem, gave a "personal rejoinder" to the speech, which the session was obliged to honor, although no formal agenda had been planned.

Her parents had emigrated in 1935 from Nazi Germany to Israel (then Palestine under the British Mandate). Her father was a Jew, who died in 1948 fighting against the Arabs. His daughter was six

years old at the time. "I am of the opinion that a parliament which has refused to compensate the Sinti and Roma [two Gypsy minorities] victims, as well as the forcibly sterilized, and also lesbians and gay men, lacks the legitimacy to hold such a memorial service," she said. Again Vice President Annemarie Renger had trouble on her hands.

Confusion, commotion, and calls from the Christian Democrat section that she leave the podium. Yet Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin continued: Jennings's speech "demonstrated unequivocally that anti-Semitism is still extant in the hearts of many members of this House."

Tumult. Annemarie Renger pounded the gavel to silence the entire assembly and said to the speaker: "I request that you leave the podium immediately." "No, not until I finish speaking," answered the delegate.

Chaos in the assembly hall. Green Party members Otto Schily and Hubert Kleinert came to the podium to persuade Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin to return to her seat. "I will remain here and conclude what I have to say," she answered her fellow party members. Again, Annemarie Renger called out, "Madame Delegate, you are requested to leave the podium immediately."

A member of the Social Democrats hurried at this point to the presidential dais. Before Jutta could stoically reiterate, "I will remain here until I finish speaking," she heard the Social Democrat over the still-live microphone whisper, "If you have Oesterle-Schwerin taken away, that will be the end of you too." So the session was adjourned.

Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin is used to the role of opposition to the majority. She has always been different, but has never stepped aside because of it. Even as a small child, she insisted on taking crafts classes with the boys, instead of the usual girls' knitting and crocheting classes.

Her father was Jewish, her mother was not, and Jutta did not wish to convert. [Judaism is matrilineal]. "So," explains the Israeli-German, "I was not considered to be Jewish in Israel. On account of this, I did not have the same rights as other people. The most important limitation was that I could not marry there without undergoing a humiliating religious ceremony. Civil marriages are not performed in Israel." With the argument "Unequal rights, unequal duties," she refused to do the mandatory military service in the Israeli Army in 1959. "The argument worked, even though there really was no way out of military service."

"The politics of labels always scares me."

However, she did not leave Israel for political reasons. "I left for private reasons, and ended up more or less by chance in Germany. My mother lives in Israel. I have German and Israeli citizenship, my children as well are both German and Israeli citizens." Like many Israelis she advocates an independent Palestinian state, but recognizes how sensitive criticism of Israel by a German can be, given the acts of the preceding generation.

Does she consider herself Jewish? "When people speak of me as Jewish, I would be the last to dispute it. When they ask me if I am Jewish, I say that my father was. German-Israeli is what I prefer, mainly because it is correct."

When Jutta Schwerin came to the Federal Republic in 1962, she joined the SDS (Socialist Student Union) and the Ostermarschbewegung [part of the peace movement]. The issues then were peaceful utilization of atomic energy, apartheid in South Africa, and the Vietnam War. In 1967 she married a man named Oesterle from the Socialist Union, and they had a son in 1970 and a daughter in 1973. In 1979 they were divorced.

In 1974 she joined the Social Democratic Party. But because of its half-hearted opposition to Paragraph 218 [strict abortion law], and finally also because of the NATO arms build-up (under Chancellor Helmut Schmidt), she quit six years later. "It was enough."

She became a member of the Green Party on the 1st of January, 1983, though she was uncomfortable with the choice. Again she found herself sitting on the fence, aligned neither with the "Realists" in the party nor with the "Fundamentalists."

Today she calls for legal recognition of lesbian and gay unions equal to the privileged status of marriage. "As lesbians and gay men we do not want to go through engagement and marriage. Instead we want equal recognition of other life choices." She supports the elimination of Paragraph 218 ("I myself have aborted"), and finds anti-pornography legislation "something to be seriously considered."

The new parliamentary president Rita Suessmuth will have much to look forward to in chairing an assembly which includes Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin. □



Mother's Day Action: "Women's Rights are Human Rights"

S. Teugblatt

Thailand

(Submitted to *Connexions* by Shelley Anderson, November 1988.)

Lesbianism in Asia can be traced back as early as 520-480 BCE, when Buddhist nuns in India wrote lesbian love poetry. Novels written during the Ming Dynasty in China include stories of lesbian activity, as do some Japanese novels about feudal court life. Despite this and other historical evidence, there is a strong popular belief that lesbianism is a Western invention that has no place in Asian culture. That is a situation Tang Unchana Suwannanond wants to change.

Tang is a 30-year-old lesbian from Bangkok. She's been working in Amsterdam for the last two years with an organization called the Foundation Against Traffic in Women, gathering information on and counseling Thai women brought into the country for purposes of prostitution.

Western countries, Tang believes that "a lot of discrimination isn't recognized. We do it in a quiet and subtle way."

This "quiet discrimination" includes strong societal pressure on women to marry, a pressure which is sometimes very hard to resist in Thailand, where young people's lives "depend very much on our families," said Tang. "My girlfriend was forced to marry a man," she said. "Her parents told her to stop seeing me or they would disown her. It was very difficult—she had to leave school and find her own job." This kind of pressure is very arbitrary and depends on how strict—or liberal—the individual family is.

Lesbians in Thailand and throughout Asia face tremendous isolation. "My community was always my lover," Tang said, and her lovers always wanted to cover up the fact that they were lesbians. The situation has changed now that "the tomboy scene has become more visible—being a tomboy or a lady is almost fashionable now, especially among some young people," she said.

working with Western lesbians has helped to strengthen her pride in her lesbian identity, the first priority of the ALN will be to "develop an identity and analysis about being lesbian and Asian. We have to counter the notion that lesbianism is from the West. We have to figure out how to reach more women, what we want to do and how ready we are to take up the consequences and responsibility of being visible," she said. "We need to be in touch just to survive as lesbians. It is necessary to find each other. We can learn from each other's experience and offer real moral and practical support."

As there is currently no space exclusively for lesbians to meet each other in Bangkok, Tang is also organizing a low-cost hostel for travelling lesbians and other women. Foreign women travelling in Thailand will be able to find safe lodging here, and a chance to meet with Thai lesbians. It will also serve as a meeting place for Thai lesbians. The hostel is slated to open in early 1989 under the name "The Ladies' Lodge."

Tomboys, Ladies, and Amphibians

The women come to the Netherlands to find a better life for themselves. Some know beforehand that the Dutch men who help them into the country expect them to work in the sex trade. Some don't.

Tang, who did graduate work in women and development issues at a Dutch institute, will return to Bangkok to work with a women's center around prostitutes' rights. She will also work to pressure feminist and human rights groups into putting lesbian concerns on their agenda.

While there are several gay men's bars in Bangkok, Thailand's capital city, and a gay men's magazine, two bars which opened for lesbians closed after a few months. Lesbian life in Bangkok and other Thai cities is confined to small circles of friends and lovers, who may gather at a particular cafe to hear a popular "tomboy" singer perform. "Tomboy" women wear pants, drink whiskey and take "ladies," more traditionally feminine-looking women, as lovers. (Both "tomboy" and "lady" are taken directly from English.)

A lesbian who is neither a "tomboy" nor a "lady" is called the Thai word for "amphibian." "Tomboys" and "ladies" are usually from upper class families, and have more money and leisure time than most Thai women. Neither "tomboys" nor "ladies" identify themselves as lesbians, and there is no organized political lesbian movement in Thailand.

There is no word for "lesbian" in the Thai language either, although the phrase which translates as "playing with friends" connotes women being sexual with each other. While the Thai attitude toward homosexuality is relatively relaxed and tolerant, with none of the physical violence gay people sometimes experience in



Young Thai lesbian

Tang feels that lesbians in other Asian countries face a much harder situation and more isolation than lesbians in Thailand. Some of that isolation was shattered when she met other Asian lesbians at an international lesbian gathering in Geneva, Switzerland in 1986. The group that organized that gathering, the International Lesbian Information Service, drew together 800 lesbians from all over the world, and is now supporting Tang in organizing an Asian Lesbian Network (ALN).

ALN is important in fighting the particularly insidious misconception that lesbianism is a Western invention. "I have had to [struggle] against the notion that lesbianism is not part of Asian culture all my life," Tang said.

While living in the Netherlands and

Another major project is the planning of a conference for Asian lesbians, both for those who live inside Asia and for those who live elsewhere, scheduled for December 1989 in Bangkok. The meeting will be for activists who want to build a supportive regional network, to share organizing experiences and to plan future action.

Tang's hope is that the conference will provide "the vision and the courage... to improve the situation in Asia." "Our first step in the conference will be to share experiences and information about the situation of lesbians in each other's country," she said. There is already an active lesbian group in Japan, and a mixed gay and lesbian group in Indonesia.

Tang is in contact with individual lesbians in India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, and will travel to Singapore and the Philippines to do outreach work for the network. The Asian Lesbian Network is looking for groups interested in "twinning" with emerging Asian lesbian groups. The purpose of twinning is to exchange information, ideas and materials. Groups or individuals interested in contributing to the December 1989 conference should write to the address below. □

Contact:

The Ladies Lodge
P.O. Box 322
Rajdamnern, Bangkok 10200
Thailand

Please do not use the word "lesbian" on the envelope.

Further Reading:

- "Trial and a Marriage," in *Connexions* #3, Winter 1982.

Friends of Women

Never Going Underground

Holland

(Compiled from materials supplied by *Labda* [recently renamed DAQUA—Dykes and Queers United Action] Dutch gay and lesbian rights group, January 1989.)

Labda, a Dutch lesbian and gay rights organization, was founded April 27, 1988. One of its first actions was the organization of a European benefit tour called "Never Going Underground." The tour began October 14, 1988 in Amsterdam and concluded December 3, 1988 in Birmingham, England, stopping in 22 cities along the way.

The tour's focus was stopping British Clause 28. Passed on May 25, 1988, Clause 28 states that:

"A local authority shall not:

- intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
- promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship."

According to *Labda*, Clause 28 has already had an impact on British society: 37 lesbian mothers have lost custody of their children, attacks on lesbians and gay men have increased 11 percent since 1987, and suicide among lesbian and gay youths has increased 20 percent.

Labda is also concerned that the economic unification of 12 European nations in 1992 will affect gay rights adversely. In addition to guaranteeing the free traffic of goods, services, persons and capital among member nations, the unification will loosely harmonize the policies and legislation of those nations. Individual court systems may have to yield more and more power to the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. Moreover, as the abolition of frontiers might lead to greater mobility, efforts to harmonize AIDS prevention and education policies will also be accelerated. Such repressive legislation as Clause 28 might serve as precedent and undermine lesbian and gay rights in other nations.

In view of all this, *Labda* advocates the construction of an active, alert international gay and lesbian network, whose members would support, stimulate, and inform each other. *Labda's* "tourletters" are excerpted below.

Holland

The tour began with a discussion in Amsterdam among lesbian and gay organizations from Holland and Britain. Astrid Mateysen from Gay and Lesbian University Studies in Utrecht (Holland) and Aaf Tiemps from the Dutch national lesbian and gay organization COC underlined the necessity of pressuring the central and local governments to work for an anti-discrimination law for lesbians and gay men.

Red from Stop the Clause, London and Jan from *Labda* stated that a good deal of time had been wasted in speaking with the members of the British parliament; they emphasized the importance of



Jose Mari Politan

cooperating with autonomous lesbian and gay groups. They said they did not believe that laws alone will solve the problems, and warned against legislation that contained "conditions."

The Dutch press showed substantial interest in the tour—18 interviews were given to newspapers and radio stations—and about 1,500 people visited the Tourfestivals during the week that the bus traveled through Holland. When the bus departed from the Homomonument, which is dedicated to lesbians and gay men who died in concentration camps during World War II, many people came to say goodbye.

Belgium

The bus moved on to Eindhoven and Antwerpen. In Antwerpen, a press conference was held in the Perhuys by three men and one woman who showed up to represent 300,000 lesbians and gay men. Only two journalists attended the press conference, but representatives from all of Belgium's political parties came.

France

In Paris, the bus received a warm reception, and went on to the Centre Georges Pompidou to distribute information and make contact with more people.

Although France has an anti-discrimination law, violence against lesbians and gays happens every day; one can also be searched for distributing information. Few people seemed to care about Clause 28. What will they be prepared to do in 1992?

Switzerland

The bus ran into some trouble at the French border: everyone's passport was copied, and information about the tour was taken down. Tour books were confiscated.

Rosa Hilfe, a gay organization, welcomed the tour in Fribourg, and there was

a concert in Basel for 500 people.

West Germany

In Munich, the local gay group, Swuck, supplied information about the dire situation in Bavaria: bars are raided and the clients are forced to be tested for AIDS; HIV-positive persons are locked up in prison.

At the memorial wall in Dachau, a memorial was left for the lesbians and gay men who were murdered there. Despite the efforts of gay people in Munich, the murder of homosexuals has not otherwise been acknowledged at the wall.

The tour was covered by a lesbian and gay radio station in Nuremberg called "Z," and in Berlin, the first international meeting of lesbians and gay men in six years was held at the Reichstag. Maureen from London spoke of the importance of lesbian and gay unity, citing the involvement of British lesbians in the struggle against AIDS and AIDS hysteria. There were discussions in both Berlin and Hamburg about the rift between lesbians and gay men over the issue of pedophilia.

Scandinavia

The tour received a lot of publicity in Arhus (Denmark) through the gay and lesbian Radio Rosa and the local papers. There was a discussion of the struggle between independent gay and lesbian groups and official ones; apparently the national organization does not give money to local groups.

The Norwegian government has sent a number of official protests against Clause 28 to the U.K., and there have been demonstrations both inside and outside the British embassy. However, the Norwegian government plans to evict the alternative center *Blitz* as well as the only women's center in Norway because protests are often

organized in those places. During a recent visit by Margaret Thatcher, for example, the official dinner was disrupted before the police could do anything about it.

Gothenburg was the first stop in Sweden, where a benefit drew 60 people. Most of the tour people expressed disillusionment with Sweden's "liberalism": an employee of the SAS airline was recently fired for testing positive for HIV.

In Stockholm the national gay rights organization RFSL threw a posh benefit for the tour without inviting the women. They attended anyway. When the tour people were refused drinks, one woman took a nip of whiskey in protest, and the barman beat her up. Then 20 policemen arrived to arrest the women who refused to leave. Two women were beaten up in a bookstore in the same building, and one woman was thrown into the store front window. The four women were arrested for having smashed the window.

A women's group in Stockholm arranged lawyers for the women. One woman from London was ill-treated in prison: a bag was put over her head, she was pushed to the ground, and a policeman stood on her neck. Until November 25, the women were kept in solitary confinement. Many of the other women from the tour remained in Stockholm while the four were in prison. The tour bus group is calling for international support for the women.

The bus returned to Denmark, where it again received a warm welcome. A political program, attended by about 400 people, took place at the PAN club in Copenhagen, and a benefit for the tour was held in Christiania, a squatted area.

Back to Holland

A brief stop in Amsterdam included a protest at the Swedish consulate. In The Hague, the majority of the Dutch parliament gave the tour people a portable gay and lesbian monument. The presentation was documented on national television. The tour people then took the monument with them to London.

Britain

The bus had surprisingly little trouble crossing the English border, but the reception for the tour people at the Association of London was not very well attended, since the leaflets advertising the event had given an incorrect date. Still, £2500 were raised for the women who had been arrested in Stockholm.

In Manchester, the tour bus was officially received at the offices of the mayor, and the reception was attended by the leader of the city council and members of the press.

In Edinburgh, the Scottish Homosexual Action Group, along with the leader of the local labor party, the leader of the administration, and a member of the European Parliament received the tour bus. David Martin, the member of Parliament, promised to enter a complaint to Swedish representatives about the treatment of the tour bus women. Two poets, David Hodgson and Paul Trainer, gave a benefit performance for the tour.

The bus stopped in Wolverhampton, a conservative city where the video "Get Your Clause Off Our Lives" is banned from public screening. In defiance of the ban, the tour people showed the video in the public art house.

On Friday, December 2, the bus arrived in Birmingham, the last city of the tour. Four hundred people attended a demonstration and AIDS memorial march organized by the tour people. The final event of the tour was a big festival held in the New Imperial Hotel. The nearly empty bus returned to Amsterdam on the fifth of December □

Contact:

DAQUA (formerly LABDA)
1e Const. Huygensstr. 120c
1054 BZ Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Editor's note: The Police at the Brygargatan police station are notorious in Stockholm for their violence. This was well-known by the men of RFSL. At a farcical trial, three women were found guilty of "serious crimes of violence towards the police." A member of the RFSL testified in court for the prosecution. A successful campaign was launched afterwards in Britain to help the imprisoned lesbians. On December 17, 1988, the last of the women was freed after spending a month in solitary confinement. There are plans to bring charges against the police and money is raised to fight the case.

Stockholm Women's Campaign
c/o OLGA
38 Mountpleasant
London, WC1X 0AP, England



England: Clause 28's "Thou shalt not promote pretend families."

Sara Furse/Rites

Stop the Clause

(Excerpted from *Outwrite*, #65, British feminist monthly, May 1988.)

On the International Day of Action Against Clause 28, 1500 lesbians and gay men held a demonstration in Berlin. The spirited demonstration was made even better by the unusually low-key police presence there.

The demonstration passed the British consulate. As the crowds halted briefly for a speech to be read, a consulate official came out onto the balcony and drew in the Union Jack flag. He was greeted with loud boos and hisses by the crowd.

The demo continued along the main commercial thoroughfare of Berlin (the Ku-Damm) and finished in the square by the Memorial Church at the center of the city. Speeches were delivered to the assembled crowd: Pamela Selwyn, a member of the organising group, explained the implications of Clause 28, and Bernadette Baker, a representative of Rights of Women from London, gave an update of events.

Ingrid Psimmas, a Green Party member of Parliament, along with representatives of gay groups in Berlin also spoke. The closing speech was given by "Maggie" herself (at least it looked like her!): "It's all been a big misunderstanding! Everyone will always have complete freedom of movement... within their own closets!"

The demonstration had been preceded by a day-long picket of the British consulate, where there were notices on the steps asking visitors to show their "normality pass." Leaflets were handed to passers-by, who were then asked if they would sign the petition.

Shortly before the start of the demo, two women and two men from the picket attended a pre-arranged meeting with the consul to hand over a protest letter and the petition, which contained 1400 signatures.

The planning meetings for the Action had been well-attended and meetings are still being held to inform, to discuss and to plan further events.

Bristol

Bristol Women Against Clause 28 (WAC 28) decided on a day of being out and obvious. We started early in the morning by hanging 18 large banners on pedestrian footbridges across the main commuter roads into the city. The council removed them very quickly, as they were "a distraction to drivers." However, the event did get us half a page of reasonably sympathetic reporting in the local paper and later in the day, after council workmen had gone home, we hung up more banners which stayed up during the evening rush hour.



Outwrite

We all felt a bit scared at times, but the Stop the Clause groups march still achieved a turnout of 600 people, lesbian, gay and heterosexual. We marched behind some colourful banners and music from the local ambling band. The Socialist Worker's Party (SWP) and the Revolutionary Communist Party presence was very heavy. Though their support could be welcome, a lot of us in Bristol wish that they would be more sensitive to our strategies and needs, rather than imposing their heavy and aggressive dogma on our campaign. At the rally following the march, a number of lesbians walked away in protest of the SWP's being given time to speak. After the

speeches were over, a small crowd stayed to listen to music provided by three bands.

The day ended with an impromptu "Out and Obvious" event, when about 50 lesbians arrived at the same cinema to see the film *I Can Hear the Mermaids Singing*. We had a wonderful time cheering every lesbian as she walked through the door.

Sheffield

In Sheffield, the main public event on April 8th was a rally with speakers on the steps of the town hall at 12 noon. However, for some women, the day started much earlier when their alarm clocks rang out at the unaccustomed hour of 4 am. They stumbled into their clothes and read the instructions on wallpaper paste packets with bleary eyes before setting off for some illicit flyposting.

Posters reading "Lesbians are Everywhere" and "Lesbian Rights are Human Rights" were stuck all around the city centre and, despite a few near misses, no one got caught.

Early morning motorists were startled into wakefulness by metal signs bolted along the approach roads to the city. Underneath "South Yorkshire Supports Nuclear Free Zones" they read: "Welcome to Sheffield—Lesbian Capital of the North." No multiple pile-ups were reported, but there must have been some irate ratepayers jamming the town hall switchboard, because the Cleansing Department had removed most of the signs by the afternoon.

If only the council had responded to our requests as quickly as they sent out the Cleansing Department, a banner supporting lesbian rights would have been displayed from the town hall balcony. As it was, permission was refused due to "lack of time." So who can blame the two local women who took matters into their own hands, clambering onto the balcony through decades of pigeon droppings to hang out a "Defend Lesbian Rights" banner, while being cheered on by the rally below?

At about the same time as the open actions were taking place, BBC Radio Sheffield's morning programme was holding a phone-in on the subject of Clause 28. The level of ignorance and bigotry displayed was quite frightening. Many of the callers possessed that strange moral logic which condemns homosexuality while condoning violence and hatred.

Barcelona

Three hundred lesbians and gay men lodged their protest against Clause 28 by demonstrating outside the British Airways office in Barcelona on April 22. Demonstrators burned a large photograph of Mrs. Thatcher to the chant of "Thatcher Feixiste Machista," and sprayed "Solidarity with Lesbians and Gay Men in Britain across the windows of the office. The action was organised by the Lesbian and Gay Movement of Catalunya, and received support from feminist and socialist groups there. □

Lesbian Sandinista

Nicaragua

"Brenda Flores" is a young lesbian Sandinista working to further both the Sandinista revolution and political rights for lesbians in Nicaragua. Since the time of this interview, she has become one of the public spokespeople for her group as they work with the Ministry of Health on an AIDS awareness and education project. This project has increased discussions of sexuality in the press and public, whose attitudes are by no means monolithically anti-gay and -lesbian. Although the Sandinista party adopted a non-discrimination clause at its last convention, the diverse politics of the National Assembly make the enactment of such a clause into the national constitution no easy task.

(Reprinted from "Lesbian Sandinista Speaks Out," an interview by Kim Irving with Brenda Flores, in *Rites: for Lesbian and Gay Liberation*, Canadian monthly, March 1987.)

A group of Sandinista lesbians and gays has recently formed in Managua, Nicaragua. Although gay groups have existed in the past, this is the first politically oriented group since the 1979 triumph of the revolution. The group is so new that they have yet to decide on a name.

Q: Brenda, how do you define yourself politically?

A: I'm a lesbian Sandinista.

Q: Can you tell me about this new lesbian/gay group? How did it form? Who is involved?

A: About a year and a half ago a group of friends, mostly lesbians, began socializing and getting to know each other. Our base was our friendship, learning to accept ourselves as lesbians. We had a common identity with the revolution and this gave us the idea to organize. Being within the revolution, we saw the necessity of organizing ourselves.

At present the group is 60 percent men and 40 percent women. Our ages range from 15 to 35 years old. We are students, military personnel, doctors, nurses, artists, dancers, poets, accountants, office administrators . . .

We know that a priority of the revolution is to integrate yourself and work to defend the revolution. And we are very clear that that's what we are doing. At the moment, our group priority is to make ourselves stronger, to educate ourselves and to reach out to other gay *compañeras* and *compañeros*.

We want to project ourselves into this revolutionary society. This way people will learn to accept homosexuality as a matter of fact. We want to erase ideas that we are abnormal, that we are mentally ill, and we want to show that lesbians and gays can be a useful part of this revolution.

Q: What does this group have in common with the revolution?

A: Complete political identification with the goals of the revolution! The majority of our members are integrated with the Sandinista Youth. Therefore, we cannot be something isolated from the revolution.

Q: Are lesbians' issues addressed by AMNLAE [a national women's organization] or the Government's Women's Office?

A: At this point, no. Our society is not educated about sexual orientation and is therefore not capable of addressing the issue with the people. Of course, there'll be a time when they will. And at that time we will be ready too.

Q: In November 1985, the issue of homosexuality was raised in the daily paper. The article was an attack on homosexuality, but this was the first time the issue had been publicly talked about at all. What was the reaction to the article?

A: Unfortunately, I didn't pay too much attention at the time, although I've since heard comments. As a group we felt it was something good for us—our issue was coming out, people were talking. But I don't think the debates were very well-founded, because neither of the writers was homosexual! In our society, to defend the gay position is to categorize yourself as homosexual.

Q: When you "come out" as a group, your largest opposition will be the traditional church.

A: The church contradicts itself. One of the principles of Christianity is to "love thy neighbor as you love yourself." Within our group there are members that have religious beliefs and their Christian practices. Their homosexuality doesn't conflict with the popular church. I think one of our first educational projects will be deciding how to confront this issue.

Q: The barrios in Managua are small and tightly knit together. Everyone knows everyone else's business. Could a lesbian/gay person/couple live an acceptable lifestyle in these barrios?

A: Well, personally, I don't have a problem because my community doesn't know I'm a lesbian. I don't have a *compañera*. There may be a problem when they see me with my future *compañera*.

There is another house in my barrio where four lesbian/gay *compañeros* live. We all visit the house. The neighbours are beginning to realize the house is frequented by lesbians/gays. So far they're just curious. They are friends of the house—come over and ask for favours even though they are quite prudent. But there is a social interchange.

Q: If, for example, this lesbian/gay household had problems with the neighbours, how could they deal with it? Through the CDS (Sandinista Civil Defense committees, neighborhood organizations)?

A: Yes, I think it could be confronted there through the CDS, especially if they were not bothering anyone. We are all common citizens, we have the right to live in dignity anywhere we choose—our new constitution says that! I know the CDS organizers in my barrio—I trust that they would have the maturity to deal fairly with this topic. They know the members of the house are integrated with the revolution. It won't be a problem.

Q: There seems to be a lot of organizing between lesbians and gays—mixed parties, mixed dinners . . .

A: There is a common current amongst ourselves—warmth, respect. There's fraternal trust. We were born together—we are a group. Our parties are very happy! Women dance with women, men dance with men, women and men dance. There's no discrimination.

Women's News



Q: Nicaragua has just ratified a new constitution, yet sexual orientation is not included . . .

A: No, it's not reflected in the constitution as literally as "sexual orientation," but the constitution is pretty ample in protecting "the right to privacy" for *all* citizens. I think that is the point—in accordance with the educational and cultural level of our people, this is all we can expect.

Q: But privacy means "behind closed doors"—it doesn't include your right to walk down the street hand in hand with your *compañera* . . .

A: Well in Nicaragua, our culture is different. It's socially acceptable here for a woman to admire another woman, to say, "Oh, what a beautiful woman"—she can hug her, walk hand in hand with her. So in Nicaragua, we don't need protection for this.

We are very clear that the revolution has other priorities at this moment. We are at war. Lesbian/gay issues are not a prior-

ity. Our objective is to help each other, accept each other, help those who are still in the closet. We want to enrich ourselves—make ourselves strong. □

Contact:

Rita Arauz
Apartado A-262
Managua, Nicaragua

NICCA
(Nicaraguan Center for
Community Action)
2940 - 16th Street #304
San Francisco, CA 94103

(Translated and excerpted from an article by Ilse Kokula in *Lesbenstich*, West German lesbian quarterly, Spring 1988.)

Since the spring of 1987, a gay liberation movement has taken root in Poland. In the cities of Warsaw, Breslau and Gdansk, gay groups have formed and gone public. Cliques and a secret subculture have existed all along, but the new groups are mentioned in magazines and papers, they have post boxes and they are contacted by the Ministry of Health and the Polish TV about matters relating to AIDS. I suspect that the increased visibility is influenced neither by Western gay liberation nor by Soviet glasnost, but is related primarily to fears about AIDS. I talked to gay activists about the dangers homosexuals face when they emerge from anonymity and invisibility into the public consciousness by way of AIDS. However, they thought that this was the only way to become visible at all. Renata, the only openly lesbian woman I talked to, shared this opinion.

The Polish penal code does not mention homosexuality at all. However, lesbians and gay men have been faced with the fact that unauthorized group meetings for any reason are prohibited. Polish citizens may assemble solely within state-sponsored organizations or within the Catholic Church. Until recently, neither the state nor the church has been interested in homosexual issues. For the past few months, the group in Warsaw has been meeting in the clubhouse of a state organization which aims at the reconciliation of the entire Polish nation, although everybody in the group considers this a temporary solution. However, the group intends to collaborate with the official "Association for the Advancement of the Family." The group has about 40 members. Their main activity is answering the numerous letters they receive. Polish newspapers and magazines have been publishing articles about homosexuality for about a year now.

Renata wrote the group in response to an article. This is also how she met her lover, who is still married. Her lover wrote a letter and Renata, by then a member of the group, answered it. Because housing is

a major problem, they have a long-distance relationship. Two women cannot apply for a two-person flat; thus if they decide to live together, they must share a Renata pointed out, however, that the housing shortage also has certain advantages for lesbians. Parents will not urge their daughters to get married because the family flat would have to accommodate yet another person. Thus the thirty-year-old Renata, with a degree in economics and a job in the administration, is still living with her parents. She is out to her parents and her parents accept her, but they don't talk about "it." Renata thinks that the cult around pregnant women is a problem for lesbians. A strong family ideology permeates the entire society, and reproduction is considered mandatory. Pregnant women get preferential treatment in many regards: they don't have to wait in line to do their shopping, they are assigned flats, etc.

The group in Breslau meets every three to four weeks in private apartments. The group calls itself ETAP, which means "step" or "phase." The total number of members is around 40, half of whom attend the regular meetings. Lesbians constitute about 10 percent of the membership. The meetings do not have a fixed agenda; mostly, the members answer the mail they receive. One activist rents a post box for the group; often, however, the postal workers do not put the letters addressed to the group into the box; instead they return them to the senders. Formally, the postal workers can argue that

the group is not officially registered and therefore does not exist. Some members do not want the group to be registered. If they registered, they would automatically have a right to a room in an official clubhouse. All members I talked to noted that it was difficult to mobilize the other members. Most people were content with being in a group of people with the same problems. Nonetheless ETAP has been publishing Poland's first gay newsletter at six- to eight-week intervals. The four-page manuscript is sent to a Western country. There it is reduced and copied as a double-sided page. By way of another socialist country the leaflets are sent back to Breslau. There the leaflet is sent out as a letter around Poland.

Currently, the book *Eros and Film* by Maria Kornatowska, published in 1986, is creating quite a stir. The author, a professor of film at the film college at Lodz, includes an analysis of lesbian elements in both Eastern and Western European movies. The chapter is entitled "To Be a Woman, Differently." In the book and in TV appearances, Kornatowska advocates androgyny as an ideal. Gay people I met were very enthusiastic about her views. In a society with rigid sex roles, the call for androgyny is a courageous step. □

Going Public, Step-by-Step Poland

(Compiled from an article by Cindy Patton, "The Cum Shot—Three Takes on Lesbian and Gay Sexuality," in *Outlook*, US gay and lesbian quarterly, Fall 1988; an article by Becki Ross, "Launching Lesbian Cultural Offensives," in *RJR/DRF*, Canadian feminist quarterly, June 1988; and an article by Lis Whitelaw "Lesbians of the Mainscreen," in *Gossip*, British lesbian ethics journal.)

Lesbians of the

Lesbian visibility and invisibility in the media not only affect the ability to imagine lesbian existence, but shape notions of lesbian sexuality as well. Lesbians appear to be very invested in their representation in the media. According to a recent study of lesbian and gay male teenagers, 96 percent of the boys said they learned about gay life and sexuality through sexual encounters, while 88 percent of the girls said they acquired this knowledge through television and other media. Thus before entering the lesbian community and before having sex with another girl or woman, many lesbians form a sense of identity around media representations.

What kinds of images do lesbian viewers find themselves faced with? In films produced before the 1970s, lesbians are often depicted as freaks and monsters; they exemplify figures of darkness, evil, or sexual exoticism. Often predatory old women seduce innocent younger ones. As soon as a man enters the scene, of course, the lesbian relationship falls apart. After the 1970s, misrepresentations in mainstream films are more subtle; however, sometimes even films produced by women succumb to conventional cinematic clichés. A significant number of independently produced films, however, show lesbianism as a source of strength rather than a fatal weakness or a debilitating sickness. Moreover, through the increasing number of gay, lesbian, and women's film festivals that have been organized, lesbians are gaining at least partial control over production, distribution, and reception of lesbian visuals.

The depiction of explicit lesbian sex scenes has sparked quite some debate among lesbians and feminists. Feminist concern with the objectification of women and their bodies has rendered problematic the visual construction of desire. So while some lesbians charge that explicit lesbian sex only serves to titillate the male-identified gaze, other lesbians claim that the lesbian production of explicit material undermines the hetero-patriarchal monopoly of sexual representation. As if to confirm the latter's claim, Canadian customs authorities have banned more than 100 lesbian and gay video and book titles since December 1985, arbitrarily applying the so-called "obscenity law."

What lesbians expect from the screen appears to vary according to their beliefs about the political effects of depicting explicit lesbian sex. But the appropriation of the means of production, both material and ideological, seems to be one thing everybody can agree on.

(Translated from *Lesbia*, No. 67, French lesbian monthly, December 1988.)

It's been over a year since a dozen lesbians organized a film club in Paris, which meets on the last Sunday of each month. What were their motives for doing this? What are their questions, problems, hopes?

Q: Could you give us a brief history of the film club?

A: Several of us got the idea for the film club during the Créteil festival in March 1987. We were frustrated with what the festival was becoming with respect to lesbians, as well as by not being able to see all of the films in the course of that one week. We said to ourselves that the only way to see them would be to take charge ourselves and find a way to show them, to find a room. The "Mutinerie" agreed; we found a way to seek out distributors, and so the great adventure began. We realized, after seeing a film called *The Visions of Agatha*, that the Créteil festival was also frustrating for us because we wanted to debate the films in women-only groups—to talk about them among ourselves, and to set the discussions up differently—to broach different questions even about those films that had already been shown at Créteil. In June 1987, we had our first meeting, and we showed a sampling of all kinds of films; it was a big premiere that went very well. We guaranteed one showing per month, and we have kept to that schedule.

The film club is an association of nine lesbians. The collective is a heterogeneous group, but agrees on certain key points, one of which is to show only women-made films to exclusively female audiences—known films, unknown films, rare, forgotten, hidden films, experimental cinema, all possible forms. We wanted to show films that bring us a positive reflection of lesbianism and the cinema, but also films that give a negative portrayal of lesbians, so that we could have a critical discussion, could both construct and take apart—a kind of going back and forth between the two.

Q: Since the beginning of the film club, what kind of films have you shown?

A: We've shown between 25 and 30 films, usually two at each meeting. We often show one experimental or short film, and one long one. Last year, we had special sessions on experimental women's cinema, on lesbians who don't identify themselves as lesbians, and on retrospectives. We showed work by filmmakers such as Vivian Ostrovsky, Jenifer Burford, Martina Rousset, Marcelle Thirache, and Odile Mainmare, and it seemed more interesting to show their work as whole, rather than in bits and pieces here and there. We also showed a number of narrative films.

Q: You strike a certain balance between projecting commercial films and/or narratives and experimental films. Why?

A: In researching films by women through the catalogues, we realized that there were many lesbians who did experimental films. We found a parallel between the fact of being a lesbian, of belonging to a minority, and of making a marginal type of film—radical with respect to film in general, politically calling into question its economic structures. Despite the difficulty of showing experimental films, we are continuing to do so, and it's beginning to go well. Commercial films are not our purpose at the film club. We avoid films that are shown on television or are well-known, films which everyone can see. But as our purpose is also to have women-only debates, we are obliged to show certain films.

Q: Does your experience permit you to say that there is a lesbian cinema, and not just a cinema made by lesbians?

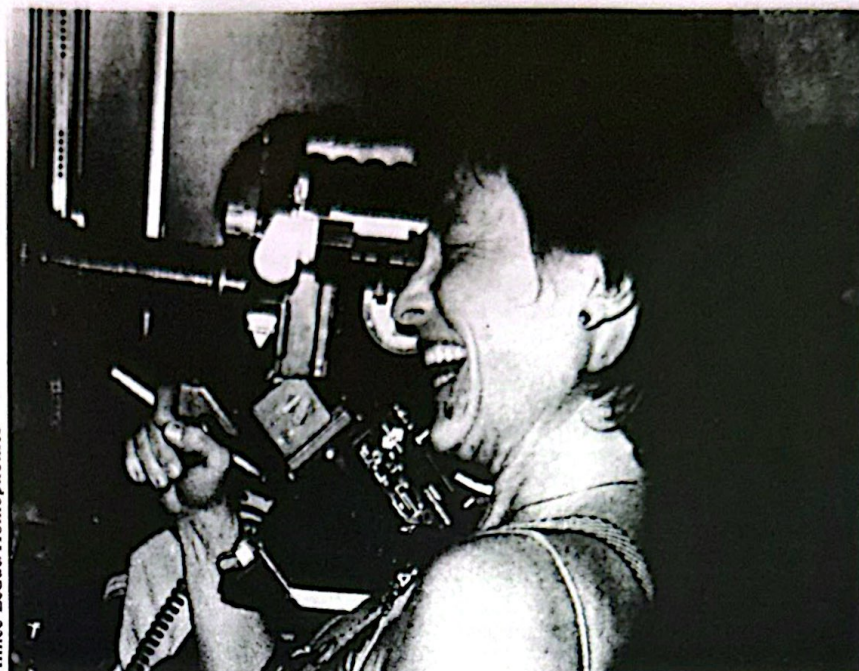
A: That was one of our first questions when we created the film club. As far as experimental cinema goes, we discovered that the images that interested us were made by lesbians nine-tenths of the time. With respect to commercial cinema, it is almost impossible to know whether or not a director is a lesbian, with the exception of Barbara Hammer, who identifies herself as such. Others are, but don't identify themselves publicly—even in women-only discussions. They are afraid of being categorized, which is understandable given the difficulty women have in finding a place in the artistic milieu, and an individual, non-sex-determined place. But it's very frustrating for us. One can't just say that one creates an image, just like that, there it is, period. In the film club, we haven't yet succeeded in understanding the images that way. For example, *Olivia* is a very suggestive film, but we can only guess at its meaning. With respect to experimental images, I find it frustrating that the directors can't manage, within a women-only group, to tell us why they have created particular images.

The resistance on the part of the directors is such that we have sometimes asked ourselves if it wouldn't be better to show their films without them. But then we don't want to attribute to them intentions that they didn't have. There isn't a lesbian

Main Screen

France

Aimée Leduc/Homophonies



cinema, not right now, but there are some experiences that are close to that. In *Sôma*, one can see on the screen that the women directors have a rapport with each other. They film each other themselves, they call into question the notion of "actor," and the notion of cutting up the body in the film-frame. Their work reveals a different way of filming a woman's body. The relationship between them is sexual, and it's clear.

Q: Do you intend to show pornographic films?

A: We've asked ourselves if we want to show a film that is a denunciation of porno films called *C'est surtout pas de l'amour* (Above All, It's Not Love), in which there are interviews with women working in porno films, more than excerpts from those films. We decided not to do it because we weren't ready and we think that the public is not ready to take on this type of thing. It isn't our goal in the film club to fight pornography, so there wouldn't be any continuity to it. It would mean putting the images up there, having a debate, but nothing after that. . . . But some women think that until we have deconstructed the pornographic image, we won't succeed in creating a lesbian-erotic image. Therefore, it is necessary to show these films in order to discuss them, to dissect them enough to extract, perhaps, the positive in our images of ourselves. One of our projects is to make a film about pornography and lesbian eroticism—deconstruction, construction. . . .

Q: Tell us about your material difficulties.

A: We're still working bit by bit. It's very hard to find films in France. You must know that renting a 16mm film costs between 1,000 and 2,000 francs, and a 35mm film between 3,000 and 4,000. The experimental films are cheaper—100 to 500 francs—but they usually only last between three minutes and three-quarters of an hour; then there's the cost of the room and other materials. We've had a hard time setting up a program more than two months in advance. We don't have a 35mm projector; we have to rent a movie house, which is expensive. We're going to have to have one if we want to develop. We need subsidies, some kind of financial support. As it is right now, we have to sit on the floor for our showings—but we don't have any alternatives at the moment. The copies of the films are often bad, some films lack subtitles. We have submitted a request for a subsidy to the Minister of Culture, to the Minister of Women's Rights, and to the DRAC. We operate solely on the receipts from each film. Last year we survived financially thanks to the bar where we held the showings.

Q: What would you say to lesbians in the provinces who are interested in this experiment?

A: They should do the same thing. We have, after a year of experience, a list of films, distributors, producers, and directors. It's important to have those things when one begins a film club; we ourselves have had many difficulties. But you really only need a 16mm and an 8mm projector, a room, and a maximum of 1,000 francs to start.

Q: How would you evaluate your first year?

A: It has already been very interesting for us; we have met film producers, we have discovered a lot of things. Lesbians have come regularly, always between 50 and 60 of them. But we have only started. . . . We have come to understand that lesbians want to see a positive image of themselves on the screen, a somewhat romantic image, outside of social realities and pressures. We saw this especially with *Olivia*. The problem is that when they don't know the film, they prefer not to come; it's "boring" because the films are narrative or experimental, unknown to the lesbian public—but they're really important to see. Even the experimental films—we choose them and we would like lesbians to see them, even if the images are not easy to digest. They behave like any public, which is to say a public that has a need for secure values and doesn't want to pay without knowing what it's paying for. It's the behavior of consumerism. Even so, it's a public more open to experimental films than other publics. Lesbians are becoming aware that experimental cinema is made with lesser means, that it is a theoretical step, a deconstructing. That touches them. And they themselves have asked for experimental and narrative films, and some of them come only to see such films.

Q: What about your current projects?

A: We are planning a festival at the *Entrepôt* for April 19–25, 1989, a week after the Créteil festival, where we'll re-show some of the films from Créteil, add some not shown there, and also show experimental films never shown at that festival. We would also like better-prepared discussions and written records and analyses. Then we would like to produce and show our film about pornography and lesbian eroticism.

The film club is open to every creation. Every film director, whatever her format, can come to us, show us the "rushes" for discussion, then show her film. It might be stimulating for some of them to know that there are at least 100 lesbians who will see their film. □ © *Lesbia* 1988

Contact:

Ciné-club
c/o ARCL BP 662
75531 Paris Cedex 11

What You Should Know About Lesbians

In spring 1986, some West German lesbians designed a brochure which imitated the format, style and tone of official educational materials. The title ran "What You Should Know About Lesbians," and the introductory statement was signed by Rita Suessmüt, West Germany's former Minister of Family, Youth and Health. It was widely distributed in Wiesbaden and inconspicuously placed among other pamphlets at City Hall. Upon discovering the leaflet there, a conservative politician graciously raised the furor necessary for publicity. The idea proved to be infectious. A group of Swiss lesbians in Zurich adapted the brochure. The pamphlet is translated below in its entirety.

(Translated from *Clit* 007, Swiss lesbian quarterly, 1986.)



ILIS Bulletin

Switzerland

What You Should Know About Lesbians

- What are lesbians?
- Is lesbianism contagious?
- Who is or who can be lesbian?

Dear fellow citizens,

Lesbians in our society have historically suffered and unfortunately continue to suffer prejudice and disadvantage. This must in the future—at least in Switzerland—change. Everything in our power must be done to prevent further discrimination.

To that end the best plan of action must include the dissemination of unbiased information.

And it is for this reason that I am writing you now. In this brochure it is explained what lesbians are, who is and can be lesbian, and what can be done about lesbianism.

We can all contribute to the spread of lesbianism.

I would also like to express the hope that we all might live near and with each other in the absence of fear and in the presence of tolerance and peace.

Already a few lesbians have succeeded in declaring themselves publicly so. We should strive to encourage and affirm these individuals, not force their retreat into defensiveness. The Lesbian Counseling Service and the Lesbian Hotline can offer advice and assistance.

It would be greatly appreciated if all those in positions of authority and responsibility would take it upon themselves to help reach this goal.

I call on you to utilize this information and to act in a responsible manner.

Emilie Lieberherr,
City Board of Health, Zurich

Lesbianism—What Is It

- It is neither illness nor misdevelopment.
- It is neither contagious nor hereditary. It is one of the many forms of human love.

- Homosexuality is a different form of of human love. It denotes men who love exclusively men (gay men) and women who love exclusively women (lesbians or gay women). Additionally there are individuals who love both sexes (bisexuals).
- Women who love women deserve every bit as much respect as other women.

Who is Lesbian or Can Become It?

- Women who love women and who live together with them are lesbian. That could mean: housewives, nurses, secretaries, bureaucrats, teachers, politicians, workers, professors—in short, women from every walk of life.
- For all women the possibility exists to be lesbian. It is therefore of great importance to provide information to girls and young women about lesbian love in order that they may choose the type of lifestyle best suited to them.

How Many Lesbians Are There?

- Statistical studies suggest that five percent of all women are lesbian. But the number of women unwilling or unable to disclose their sexuality is very high, thus the actual percentage is probably considerably higher.
- For centuries, however we have placed a premium on love between a man and a woman.
- That this so-called "heterosexual love" has caused much suffering and unhappiness, above all for women and children, few people want to admit.
- Man has accustomed himself to sexual power and tried to extend it to all areas of life. This can be seen in the discrimination against women in education and the professions, in prostitution, in abuse and rape of women and girls, in the representation of women in advertising as an object of lust, in the destruction of our environment—the earth, air and water—and finally in the destruction of human life itself through war, mutilation and murder.

Since When Have There Been Lesbians?

- Since about one million years ago.

How Can Lesbians Be Recognized?

- From their appearance, it is generally not possible to differentiate them from other women. They tend to be inconspicuous in public and at their employment.

Who Discriminates Against Lesbians?

- Most men and women in all areas of our public and private lives.

Where Are Lesbians Persecuted, Condemned and Oppressed Today?

- Unfortunately everywhere. Among other places in the schools (it is illegal to be lesbian as a teacher), in hospitals (lesbian nurses encounter hostility from their colleagues), in the media (in fact the media does not cover them at all, except as exotic entities), in history (in which women are hardly mentioned, and lesbians not at all), in art (even in the case of lesbian painters, musicians and authors this fact about them is never included). . . and so on.

What Can You Do to Help Change This Situation?

- Consider all forms of human attractions and lifestyles to be natural and normal. Counter prejudice and slander with calm explanation. Tell your children about all forms of human sexuality. Give them an example of what it means to be critical, tolerant and generous. Discuss with them the position of women in our society. Respect women-only spaces.

Is It True That Lesbians Want to Do Away With Men?

- No.
- To be striven for nevertheless is a peaceful and happy coexistence in our cities and countryside. It is not only lesbians who denounce the abuse, torture, rape, exploitation and murder of women, as well as every form of human violence!

Help Eradicate Prejudice! □

Shorts

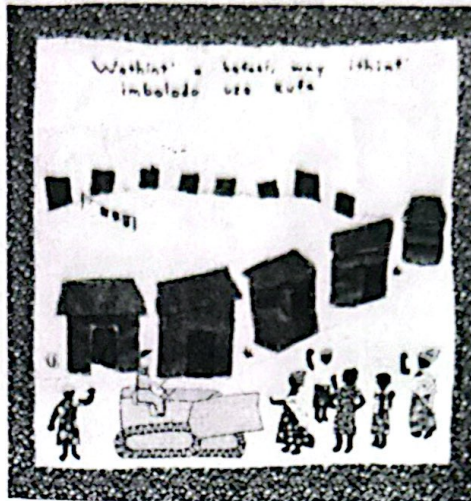
South Africa

(Summarized from "Black Gays and Lesbians in South Africa," an interview in *Rites: for Lesbian and Gay Liberation*, Canadian monthly, October 1987.)

While attending the ILGA conference in Cologne, West Germany, Sharon Stone had the opportunity to talk with Alfred Machela, who lives in Soweto, South Africa. Alfred was representing the Rand Gay Organization (RGO) and spoke to Sharon about the situation of Black lesbians in South Africa.

According to Alfred, there are quite a number of Black lesbians in South Africa, although they don't know exactly how many. There are 75 lesbians in the RGO and more than 50 of them are Black. The RGO was formed in 1986 and is the only truly non-racial gay and lesbian organization. Fifty-five to sixty percent of its membership is Black (including colored and Indian people), while the rest is white. RGO's purpose is to make it known that as lesbian and gay people, they plan to see that they are accepted by the anti-apartheid movement.

Shortly after the RGO was founded, a similar group in Cape Town, Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression (LGAO) was formed. At marches and funerals, both groups wear T-shirts saying "Lesbians and Gays Against Oppression" and "Lesbians and Gays All Over the Place" to make people aware of them.



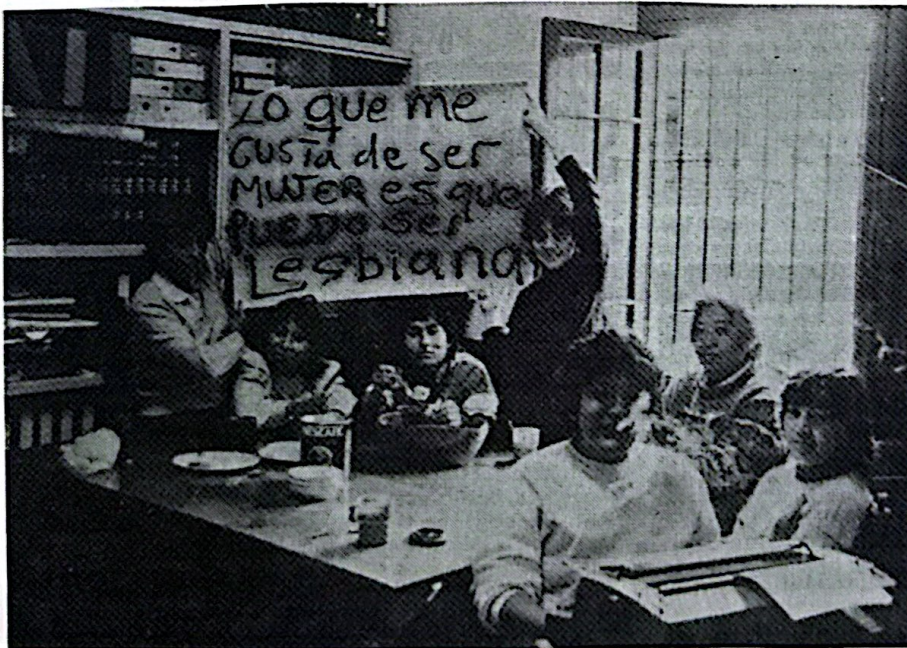
Women Resisting Apartheid

SPEAK

For Alfred, fighting only for "homosexual rights" has no meaning at all for a Black person in South Africa. Even if homosexual rights were granted tomorrow, a Black lesbian would still not live as a person. Homosexual rights are very important but at this time they are not that important, for a Black person, until his or her political rights are granted.

Contact:

Rand Gay Organization
Post Box 5515
Johannesburg 2000
South Africa



Susse Kjoer/PAN

"What I like about being a woman is that I can be a lesbian."—the GALF Collective/Peru

Chile

(Excerpted from an article by Bernie in *Women's News*, Irish Feminist bi-monthly, Dec./Jan. 1989)

Colectivo Ayuquelen is a small group of lesbian feminists in Santiago. The word "Ayuquelen" is taken from the Mapuche Indian language spoken in the South of Chile. It means "the joy of being", in the case of the *Colectivo* the joy of being a lesbian.

In Chile today, lesbians have to be particularly courageous to proclaim their joy in their sexuality. Article 8 of the 1980 Pinochet Constitution says that "any act of a person or a group of persons is illegal if aimed at the propagation of doctrines that are directed against the family . . . All organizations, political movements or political parties which in their goals or activities tend to support the above objectives are unconstitutional." No lesbians or gay men have yet been charged with subversion under this clause. But the *Colectivo Ayuquelen* received a written death threat in December from one of the fascist groups; these groups are thought to operate in collusion with the security forces. The death threat has not stopped the *Colectivo*; however, the group has to be careful.

Previously, *Ayuquelen* published articles and interviews in popular left-wing magazines, highlighting issues of being a lesbian as well as activities of the *Colectivo*. The group received generally positive letters in response. The women's center in Santiago, however, felt compelled to publicly disassociate themselves from the *Colectivo*. Thus it seems unlikely that lesbians arrested under Article 8 would receive much support. Yet the lesbians working with the Women's Health Group were able to be quite open and respected for their sexual choice by other women in the group.

The First Encuentro of Latin and Caribbean Lesbians was very important for the *Colectivo Ayuquelen*. It allowed them to strengthen the ties with other lesbians on the continent; moreover, they could also discuss the links between the struggle against sexual oppression and other forms of social, economic, and political oppression. Or as the *Colectivo* notes: "We know that we are capable of creating our political identities which will allow us to smash the taboos and the prohibitions, we will leave the closet, open the windows, and finally walk as free people, free from classism, racism, sexism, anti-semitism, heterosexism, without patriarchy and military dictators." □

Contact: Colectivo Ayuquelen
Bellavista 0547
Providencia,
Santiago, Chile

The Other Face



of the Moon

*They have
term "modern
and do have*

(Compiled and translated from an interview in *Tarantel*, West German women's bimonthly, January/February 1987, and an interview in *Rites: for Lesbian and Gay Liberation*, Canadian monthly, October 1985.)

History as it is usually understood in Peru does not mention that at the beginning of this century, the country had a women's movement. One of the major tasks which Peruvian feminists have undertaken has therefore been the redefinition of women's history within the context of a male-dominated historiography. In 1907, for example, women set fire to warehouses in Inquitos in which groceries had been stored for the purpose of driving up prices. In 1911, the female telephone operators of Lima founded a union to demand better wages for women.

The first expressly feminist group—Evolución feminina [Feminist Evolution]—was formed in 1914. Its members were primarily middle-class intellectual and professional women. Subsequently, in 1929, the Asociación Feminismo Peruano was founded, with the goal of achieving legal and political rights for women. Its members were also from the middle and upper classes. Today there are at least seven organized women's groups in Lima, and an additional ten outside the capital.

Discussion with Nelly, a lesbian from Lima

It is important for readers to know that in my country the feminist movement has always had an institutional character. That is, most of the women's centers and groups are financially supported either by the government or by international groups. As such, they have a paid staff, an established structure, and a specific ideological orientation. Certain groups are responsible for arranging the annual celebration of International Women's Day, for example, or the women's festivals of poetry and music. These events are open to the public, and often half the people who attend are men. Other organizations coordinate conferences, or are concerned with research and publications. Some of the organizations are not "feminist" per se, but focus on labor organizing or working-class issues.

In the last 15–20 years, however, there has been a shift away from these "institutional" groups; we are orienting ourselves more and more towards our own autonomy, our own requirements, towards what we as women truly want and need. We do not wish to add to the numerous parties and male organizations yet more of the same type, which differ only in that they are led by women. New groups are forming which are not tied to any existing

institution. The lesbian group which I helped to found is one of those.

However, this new side of the movement is seriously hindered by lack of finances. Every organization must have resources to work, even if its only need is for paper. Our lesbian feminist group, for example, does not receive any funding, so in order to publish our magazine we must solicit paper, ink, and the use of a mimeograph machine from other feminist groups. And financial problems make networking difficult, because in order to exchange information, money is needed for postage.

Communication is particularly important, because the increasing number of less institutionalized feminist groups has unfortunately resulted in an increasing divisiveness among women. One of the most important things we must learn is to better deal with the variation and differences among women in the movement.

To illustrate some of these issues, let me tell you more about my experience as a lesbian feminist in Peru.

Through the collective *La otra cara de la luna* [The Other Face of the Moon], a women's cafe project in Lima, I came into contact with feminism for the first time. As a lesbian, I wanted to meet other lesbians—that was the initial reason I went

developed the lesbian" for us respect for us.

to the cafe. Only later did I come to understand more of the political work going on there; for the first time I heard new and different ideas about the role of women in society.

As I became increasingly interested in feminism, I began to help with the collective. It was an independent group, which did not receive any outside funding. Its aim was to create free spaces, where women could gather without experiencing discrimination. Once a week, we held an informal gathering, an open exchange of conversation, where we would speak with each other about our histories and experiences. On Fridays we always organized parties, and tried to achieve a climate where all women could be creative and spontaneous and do whatever they wished.

My involvement with feminism increased for a while, but then declined. I attended meetings of different groups, but frequently felt somewhat excluded; the other members already knew each other well, and their rather stilted middle-class way of speaking made me feel that I (with my leftist university background) didn't quite belong. After a while I would return to the collective only to borrow books. My reading led me to formulate some ideas of my own, but they did not seem to fit in with what was going on in the women's

groups, which were so highly organized, professional, and bureaucratic.

It had become clear to me and to some of the other women who came to the cafe that it was extremely important for us to meet with other lesbian feminists, and we decided to start a consciousness-raising group for lesbians. Unfortunately, just at that time, the cafe had to close because of a drastic rent increase.

With no place to meet, we determined to attend the next women's conference and identify ourselves as a group of lesbians. Fourteen of us went one evening, and explained to the women there that we were considering organizing ourselves as feminist lesbians. Their response was a protracted silence—during which we felt we were the only living beings on earth. . . . Then one woman said she wanted to get on with the agenda of the conference as planned. No one else said anything, not even the coordinator, who was herself a lesbian. Finally one woman said, "Well, we welcome you." Later someone said, "Whether we want it or not, you're here." Probably the most realistic response was from a woman who felt that while we were very courageous in saying that we were lesbians, feminism was not ready to deal with the existence of lesbians as a movement.

There are still so many myths among heterosexual feminists about lesbians. Many are still afraid. Even when there seems to be acceptance, it is often only theoretical. On one occasion, for example, four members of our lesbian group were invited to participate in a workshop organized by another feminist group. When we arrived, the four heterosexual women that were there left.

Shortly thereafter we decided to publish a small magazine titled *Al Margen* [On the Edge]. We wanted publicity as lesbians within the women's movement, we wanted to open up discussion of lesbianism, to expose and do away with the myths surrounding it. As we made this decision, we came up with a name for our group: *Grupo de autoconciencia de lesbianas feministas* [Independent Group of Lesbian Feminists] (GALF).

Six women, including myself, work on the magazine, and we distribute it in the lesbian, gay and feminist communities. Four hundred copies were printed of the last issue, for which most of the materials were donated and the mimeographing done at one of the women's centers. Distribution has actually been a more significant problem than production, because we sell most of the copies in bars, and in order to get in, one must pay an entrance fee. So distribution becomes expensive. But we have to sell in the bars because not many people would buy the magazine outside them. We are trying to reach an agreement with the owners so that we can go in, sell, and leave, but bar owners in Lima are very profit-oriented.

It is possible to achieve visibility in other papers, but the coverage tends to be sensationalist. We are very wary of the press. Recently a paper published an article on lesbianism which consisted of 90% misinformation, written in vulgar, sarcastic

language. It also intimated that a lesbian workshop which had taken place at the Latin American Feminist Conference had been the focus of the entire conference.

Many of us are also afraid of being identified in the straight press, because we are not out to anyone besides our friends. Homosexuality is not explicitly illegal in Peru; the only relevant law mentions it as grounds for divorce. But neither are there laws to protect us. If I were to come out to the whole world, my job would be at stake, my family would disown me, and quite possibly my child would be taken away. There is no gay or lesbian movement to back us up. If we are kicked out of our jobs, nobody will protest—except our friends, and they have no power.

Our original intention in producing *Al Margen* was to raise the consciousness of other feminists. But we had underestimated how important it was for the magazine to serve as a forum among lesbians themselves. Shortly after the first edition came out, we were contacted by a group of about 50 women, all lesbians, who played soccer together. We met with them a few times, and the more we spoke with each other, the more apparent became the gulf between us. Our group's ideal was to bring our lesbianism together with our feminism, to discourage the type of role-playing which marks the rest of society. But the "soccer-players" identified with machismo, and in their relationships with their girlfriends (who of course did not play soccer), they played out the usual "man-wife" scenarios.

Our respective backgrounds also divided us. These women came from the lower classes and from the slums, and accused us of being bourgeois. Later, as we came to know each other better, and played soccer with each other, we came to a greater appreciation of each other's lifestyles. But some apprehension remains on their part. They are just beginning to make the connection between the political and the personal, and some continue to think that we as feminists want to change them into "feminine" women.

The lesbian community in Peru can still be very repressive. If a woman is new to the lesbian bar scene and does not look definitely male or definitely female, she is almost forced into adopting one of these roles in order to be part of the community. It is a little different for us, as lesbian feminists, for while we are not exactly accepted by these lesbians, neither are we rejected by them. They have developed the term "modern lesbian" for us, and do have respect for us.

After two-and-a-half years we are just bringing out the fifth edition of *Al Margen*, and our lesbian feminist group has grown. Relations with other women in the feminist movement have improved. In the meantime, members of our group have taken part in two international conferences on homosexuality. We also have a stable meeting place now, at which other lesbians are able to form their own groups. These experiences have been extremely important to us, because they have made us strong, and we want other women to share in them. □

I Will Not Be Shelved

Canada

Gay and lesbian activism has been changing the legal and political situation in Ontario for the better in recent years, though the battle is far from over, as the following interview with Karen Andrews shows. Karen's fight to get health benefits for her lover continues a struggle for gay rights inspired in part by John Damien, a horse-racing steward who was fired from his job of 20 years in 1975 for being gay. Damien sued the Ontario Racing Commission, going deeply into debt to fight his case. The case never made it to court; Damien died on Christmas Eve in 1986. But he was awarded one year's salary, plus interest (about \$50,000), in an out-of-court settlement. Another lawsuit against the doctor who told Damien's employers he was gay remains in question.

The Damien case was one of the motivating forces behind the fight for Bill 7, an amendment to the Ontario Human Rights Code that would prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation; Ontario's provincial government passed the bill in December, 1986. Although the Canadian constitution had recently been changed to include a Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibiting various types of discrimination, sexual orientation was (and is) not explicitly listed as a prohibited ground for discrimination. Some people argue that sexual orientation is covered by the Charter's general intent and/or by the prohibition against discrimination on the grounds of sex; test cases are being filed to determine its limits.

Of course neither Bill 7 nor the Charter has effectively outlawed discrimination, as the interview which follows makes clear. But such legislation does provide legal grounds on which to fight; it is, as Karen says, "a beginning."

(Connexions is grateful to Mary Louise Adams of *Rites* for this background information and for clarifying several other points within the interview.)

(Reprinted from an interview by John Wilson, "Lesbian Library Worker Challenges the State," in *Rites: for Lesbian and Gay Liberation*, Canadian monthly, March 1988.)

Karen Andrews—lesbian, library worker, union member—has been fighting for three years to have her lover Mary included in her coverage under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). In order to provide a more in-depth look at Anderson's increasingly well-known case, she was interviewed recently for Rites in her Toronto home by John Wilson.

Q: What was it that motivated you to take up this particular issue?

A: I'd thought about it since the onset of my employment, but the kids were little and Mary was closeted. When the kids got older and we became more solid, we didn't have any fears about being out of the closet and the dental bills just started to pile up. Orthodontic, periodontic, drug bills. . . . Mary went back to school and she didn't have a drug plan and she needed all the coverage. It was terrible, it was thousands and thousands of dollars. So, reading the collective agreement and learning that it explicitly stated that they wouldn't discriminate on the basis of family arrangements or marital status, it made a lot of sense, so I approached them to cover Mary. They readily covered people in non-traditional heterosexual "common-law" relationships.

Q: So-called "common-law" relationships?

A: No questions asked! You could have lived two weeks with the guy and there they were paying his bill! So nobody cared. And I thought that this was a way to make a lot of waves. I mean, Bill 7 wasn't a reality, this was years ago, there was nothing in the Charter [of Rights and Freedoms], the Charter was all in process.

The only thing I had in the way of any kind of protection was my collective agreement, so I thought I'd see if I couldn't stir something up.

Q: Great. As of now, your case has been going on almost three years?

A: Yes, my first approach was to Personnel. They put me off for almost four months. Then I went to the union's executive and they were extremely supportive. They didn't think I'd have any problems. But because I knew OHIP, I knew there would be. They stalled at procedural points and they couldn't agree on arbitrators. The arbitrators were reluctant because of the magnitude of the case, so they stalled it.

Q: Did you originally file a grievance through the union?

A: Yes, but since the grievance, [we've had] the Charter, Bill 7, the Ombudsman's report. So, a lot has changed. But their strategy in these kinds of cases is to stall. You know, maybe I'll get hit by a bus, and that's the end of it. This is the way they behave. Nobody in the government or the bureaucracy is anxious to make any kind of major policy change, so it's been going on and on.

Q: Now it's in the court system as well, isn't it?

A: It's in the courts. . . . A lot of that has to do with money, actually; there was only so much money. You could go through arbitration and that takes thousands and thousands of dollars, and whatever the arbitrator ruled, it would end up in the courts anyway, because . . . management would challenge it or the union would challenge the arbitrator. The feeling was that the arbitrator would be reluctant to rule if the Minister of Health was breathing down his neck, so it would end up in the courts anyway. They decided to suspend the arbitration after two-and-a-half years. Then Elston (the Health Minister) made remarks to the press that the government wouldn't make any changes, which I thought was kind of silly because he could have said they were thinking about it and you couldn't challenge them as long as they were thinking about it. Well, he said no, so that seemed an opportune time. . . . When there was definite refusal to change after three requests from my employer, three requests from the union, and three requests from me, the union decided to bring suit. It should start by the end of February. It may take a year for the decision. If it's unfavourable, hopefully we'll scrounge enough money to appeal.

Q: I imagine that this has been very frustrating for you personally in terms of the length of time that it's taken?

A: Yes. I'm not surprised. The Damien case had a profound effect, because I was just a teenager at the time he was going through his trials. Looking back, it really did have a significant impact when it went on so long. The guy was persecuted. Even Gordon Sinclair [a well-known conservative broadcaster] was implying that he was clearly in the right. I was cowering in my closet for a long time because of it. I'm not surprised that it's taking so long, but it is really frustrating. Because it's taking so long, I almost feel vindicated, because they're scared, because it's a good case.

Q: It's a very significant case. If they lose it, and there's a very good chance that they will . . .

A: There seems to be a lot of support. It's a nice case. Here's a nice woman who's lived nine years with another woman, and they have kids, and they don't seem to be too weird, and it's in the collective agreement and she's putting her through school and the woman doesn't have OHIP coverage. What's the big deal?



Karen Andrews

Celest Natale/Rites

The press is prepared to be very supportive. When I do phone-ins everybody's supportive. Even when they disagree they don't like to be rude to me which has meant a lot. Nobody's been horrible to my face! I have to keep with it. I've also had to resign myself to staying at the library. I've had job offers elsewhere for more money. I don't take them because . . .

Q: You want to see this through?

A: Right. In a sense it's a big personal sacrifice, but worth it. I can't do it for ten years though! I want to go to school. I want to get my pension money out.

Q: Unless I'm mistaken, this is the first time a lesbian or gay rights case of this kind has been taken up by a major union. CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] has been quite supportive publicly about everything. How's the support been on a personal level, behind the headlines?

A: First and foremost, my co-workers are great. I couldn't ask for any more support. The executive's been very supportive. I hear through the CUPE grapevine that (local) 1996 is pretty renegade. It is library workers and it's predominantly women who have strong interests in women's issues. From that point of view I think that the local's character might be a little different from the more conservative ones.

Q: Not exactly a typical union local?

A: That's what I hear, but I've never been involved with others, so my frame of reference is pretty limited. The (CUPE) public relations have come out in support of the case: certainly they're funding it. Of course there will be practical decisions around money, where and how to spend it. But the lawyers are really tied into it, and they keep in contact with me, so I couldn't ask for a lot more.

Q: There's another parallel to the case of John Damien, in the sense that here you've got the government spending the taxpayers' money trying to obstruct you as much as possible.

A: That's exactly what's going on.

Q: They're fighting against our rights with our money.

A: Yes. It's gross. Bob Rae (leader of Ontario's New Democratic Party—the opposition party in the provincial government) wrote a letter to Elston to tell him to just give it up.

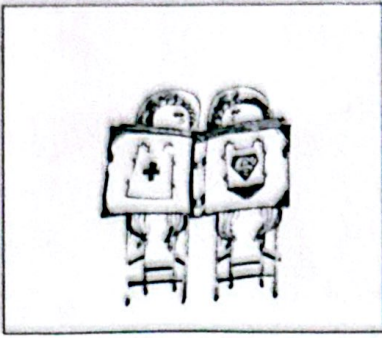
Q: I don't recall whether the NDP has raised this in the Legislature at all.

A: I think they have. They were prepared to make this an election issue and they have been public in their support. With Bill 7 there was no question that the NDP was solidly behind it. Also, as an issue, the agenda of socialized medicine is to give people coverage. It's the bottom line. Whether you're straight or gay, and however you get it, you normally get it on the basis of dependency. Mary is dependent on me. She should have my coverage; it's perfectly logical and it isn't costing the government a cent. In fact, the government's giving her free OHIP when there's an employer who's willing to pick up the tab. To me this looks pretty silly. I guess they don't want to change it because of the wider implication that we're people too. We're equal.

Q: Undoubtedly, if, when your case succeeds, people will have to start thinking about the wider implications.

A: People have already gone to the Human Rights Commission now that it [the Ontario Human Rights Code] has been amended, and the Ombudsman's office is getting—has always gotten—requests in this area, but a lot of people don't want to pursue it because you get your name in the paper and what does that mean? But, with OHIP you get covered. Lesbians and gay men are covered. It's not as if more gay people are created because we get our lovers OHIP. It's silly. They don't want to legitimize our relationships, that's what it's about. They don't want to open a can of worms around pensions or around family law reform.

Q: The pension issue isn't one I'd thought about. If you happen to own a house that you want your spouse to inherit, it has to be specifically set down in your will. You can take care of property that way, but you can't do that with pensions.



Christine Roche

A: The horrible thing is that even if you do [say what you want done with your property], the biological family can challenge it. You know, you were a lesbian; you were out of your mind anyway. What really disturbed me in the Health Act [legislation regulating health services in Ontario] was that if I were in an accident, they would be looking for my next-of-kin to make decisions on my behalf and I haven't seen my next-of-kin for ten years. I want Mary to make those decisions. Mary is the one who's going to live with the decisions and she knows what I want.

Q: You should be able to simply designate someone to make decisions like that.

A: You can't.

Q: You can with a power of attorney. My lover and I have done that. But our lawyer told us that whether it will work or not in particular circumstances is hard to say.

A: That's right. (Toronto lawyer) Harvey Hamburg said the Health Act supersedes that. It's a provincial law. If your doctor decides that he wants to hassle you, they'll hassle you. I don't like that. Some policeman is going to listen to my claims?

Q: This is a problem. Legally it might very well stand up in court, but if it's a matter of making a decision whether someone should have an operation, you can't very well wait to go to court about it.

A: I'm a very practical, pragmatic person. I'm going to get sick. I'm going to get old. I'm going to die. I might get Alzheimer's. Because I'm a lesbian doesn't mean these things aren't going to happen. It's just best to prepare.

Q: How do you see the overall significance of your case?

A: It's going to mean a lot just to have some bureaucratic acknowledgement that we're people too, that we have rights. It's outrageous that we are expected to abide by the heterosexual law. We're not allowed to drink and drive just like straight people aren't. But it should work both ways. If you don't decimate a married partner because somebody gets sick, then don't decimate me. Why should my Canada Pension go to the neighbour across the street who's beating his wife? It's not fair. Bill 7 is an incredibly significant thing. But what I'm hearing is some kind of liberal line that discrimination will be outlawed. You're equal, but heterosexuals are more equal. But with Bill 7, and some energy and activism . . . I don't think Bill 7 ends the activism. It should be a beginning.

Q: I was around when the Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario (CGRO) was set up and know that when the sexual orientation amendment was decided on as a major goal nobody had the illusion that simply passing a law was going to do all that much in and of itself. It's up to us to see if we can use it effectively.

A: I hope it creates an environment where people will be less afraid, where people can talk about it and it filters down, so if you're a school teacher you can broach the issue. I think it will.

Q: Your union has put up a lot of money, but has this been expensive for you as well?

A: It's very political. My little library local has probably paid 30 percent of the Supreme Court costs, a lot of money. Too much money. There are other locals with lesbian and gay employees. Why should my local be disproportionately burdened?

Q: Especially since it's an overall union issue, looking at the fact that it affects at least 10 percent of the union membership.

A: They're sort of negotiating. My local has to go to the national executive and ask for funds and obviously they don't want to write a blank cheque. I wish they would, but realistically, how do they justify a blank cheque?

Q: Have you any idea what it's cost so far?

A: *Our Times* [a progressive labor magazine] said the local has spent around \$6,000 and there's probably around three or four times that to do the Supreme Court.

Q: This much money and it's not even litigation, which is what John Damien had to contend with.

A: It's terrible. It's one of the fundamental problems with the system. If you don't have the money you're sunk. You have to do it the hard way. It's step by step now. There's a commitment to the Supreme Court and CUPE's behind that. If it stalls there, is there money for an appeal? Charter cases cost \$100,000 to \$200,000. CUPE quite rightly hasn't said, "We're signing on for half a million dollars, take it to the UN General Assembly." I'm not surprised they haven't. If it stalls at the appeal level, do I have the energy to, do my friends have the energy to, do gay and lesbian-committed people in the local have the energy to start fundraising directly in the community? There are other resources available. So far I haven't checked into them. I haven't had to.

Q: But there is a commitment to go to the Supreme Court?

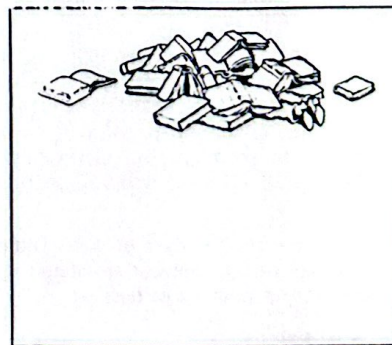
A: To the Ontario Supreme Court. CUPE has been extremely supportive. I've heard people who are in this with me who can't believe that the wording has been so strongly supportive, and not having much experience with other locals, I wouldn't know if this is significant, but apparently it is.

A: What would you suggest *Rites* readers do to support your case?

A: The more people that demand their rights, the better for me. People should start phoning the Human Right Commission, about OHIP, information on pensions, next-of-kin, and family law reform. Letters help. Letters to the Minister of Health, the Premier. Demonstrations. Money. Just being out is a big plus. I don't think that you should be terribly afraid of coming out, but some people are. Some have stepped forward but aren't willing to be public. I don't know their circumstances, but nothing terrible has happened to me. It's fear; a lot of it unfounded. People don't know how to deal with you if you are forthright about your sexuality. In the workplace I'm open and people accept me. It has an educative function. Participate in activism where you can—on the personal level, the professional level, and the community level. It helps.

Karen's case was rejected by a judge at the Supreme Court of Ontario last year (1988); he claimed that the word "spouse" did not cover same-sex couples, and that the province was not out of line in denying "family" health coverage to Karen's family. Karen plans to appeal.

More positively, Karen's case has generated a great deal of support for gay rights from labor organizations; many labor groups and conventions have passed motions supporting spousal benefits regardless of sexual orientation. □



Christine Roche

We Love Women

Yugoslavia



Susana and Natasa

Jon Espesacker/Lovetana

(Translated and excerpted from an article by Susana Tratnik in *Lesbenstich*, West German lesbian quarterly, Spring 1988.)

Male homosexuality was illegal in all of Yugoslavia until 1977, when jurisdiction over criminal laws pertaining to sexuality was devolved to the republics and autonomous provinces. The republics of Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro, and the autonomous province of Vojvodina took the opportunity to reform the law. In the latter three, homosexuality is now punishable by law only if the partners are under 18. In Slovenia, homosexual and heterosexual intercourse are both punishable by law if the partners are under 16.

From April 23 to 30, 1984, the first *Magnus* Festival—a cultural week for the homosexual population—took place in Ljubljana. Even though the republic of Slovenia has the most liberal sexual laws in Yugoslavia, *Magnus* would test the tolerance of Slovenians. About 1,000 people attended the festival; considering that the total population of Ljubljana is 300,000, it was a significant success.

There have been other subcultural events and organizations in Ljubljana in the past. People had become somewhat used to various “shocks” ranging from punks and the peace movement to the fight against the death penalty, and so on. *Magnus* could be understood as a logical consequence of the subcultural scene in Ljubljana. After the festival, the local youth center organized a weekly gay disco. This disco later moved into the night club “K4,” and had a clientele from all over Yugoslavia, and from Austria and Italy.

The group *Magnus*, the first legal gay organization in any socialist country, was founded in December 1984. Creating meet-

ing places, enabling people to collectively develop a positive gay identity, publishing magazines and organizing lecture series were the priorities for its 250 male members.

The *Magnus* group published a magazine called *Gayzine*, one page of which was dedicated to women; it featured the invitation to a women's club, *Lilit*. *Lilit* was aimed at all women—but women only. It opened April 3, 1985. The first few meetings were very well-attended. However, it became clear that this was due more to curiosity than to clearly articulated needs or ideas on the part of the participants. *Lilit* was not a lesbian or feminist organization, but was designed for different women—including feminists and lesbians. *Lilit* wanted to set up many different study groups—on feminism, women's literature, women and sports, motherhood, lesbianism, etc.

A week later, the lesbian group had their first—and last—meeting. We wanted to start by translating lesbian texts from abroad in order to make it easier for future Yugoslav lesbians. However, it was not clear why we were meeting. It seemed as if lesbians were people other than ourselves. Some women, in fact, said that they were not lesbians and they just happened to be interested in that particular question. Only two women showed up to the next meeting. Curiosity and good will were simply not enough.

Lilit, too, lost most of its members and also its room at the disco K4. Some meetings were held at the disco *Pri Amerikancu* [At the American's]. However, some women thought they were “too emancipated” to deal with women's issues; they claimed that they could fulfill their needs and interests in other, existing

organizations—so there was no need for a women-only group.

Pri Amerikancu was closed in December 1985. *Magnus*, *Lilit*, and the peace movement attempted to find a new space for their activities. The new place was supposed to have been opened last year, but the groups still have not found a new home. Among other things, they have financial problems.

In September 1987, an ad hoc group of lesbians prepared an insert about lesbians for the magazine *Mladina* [Youth], the critical and alternative weekly of the Socialist Youth Federation of Slovenia. To see the lesbian symbol with the signature “We love women” featured in a weekly with a circulation of 40,000 was unprecedented in Yugoslavia. Articles in the eight-page insert ranged from essays on the psychological and anthropological aspects of homosexuality to statements of radical lesbianism, from the demands and positions of ILIS and the Dutch COC to a short summary of the chapter on lesbians in *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. At the end of the insert, we printed the information flier and the address of the lesbian group within *Lilit*. For Yugoslavia, that was a very informative and self-confident representation of lesbians which will certainly continue to be effective.

As a result, we received a number of phone calls and gained some new members. We wanted to reach out to isolated lesbians, so we also wrote to all the personal ads in the paper. Not every woman wanted to have contact with us, but those who don't may mention us to friends who will want to join.

In December 1987, we introduced our group at the first Feminist Festival in Ljubljana, calling for Yugoslav lesbians to contact us, to come out, and to form their own groups. Many newspapers reported sympathetically on the public coming-out of Yugoslav lesbians, and we sent a flier with our phone number and address to many papers and magazines, most of which were willing to print it. Thus we hope to get in touch with lesbians in other Yugoslav cities such as Zagreb, Belgrade, and Sarajevo. Very soon we will publish the first issue of a lesbian magazine. It will feature translated texts, personal stories, poems, etc. We will introduce the magazine in newspapers on the students' radio. We also hope to organize our first evening of lesbian lyrics and lesbian video. Perhaps it is still too early to think of organizing a lesbian conference. □

Contact:

Sekcija LILIT—lezbiska skupina LL
Kersnikova 4
61000 Ljubljana, Yugoslavia

Since the early 1980s, lesbians have become increasingly visible in East Germany. First, lesbians and gay men started to meet under the auspices of the Protestant Church, but this uneasy alliance was regarded as a temporary solution. Some lesbians went on to found autonomous lesbian groups; the best known among these is the "Work Circle" in East Berlin. Other lesbians such as Ursula Silge have been working on establishing an official state-sponsored association for homosexual women and men. Whereas the Sunday Club, described in the article below, enjoys a measure of tolerance, some members of the independent "Work Circle" have been systematically harassed. For instance, for the annual commemoration of women who died at Ravensbrueck (a women's concentration camp), some "Work Circle" lesbians wanted to dedicate a wreath to the lesbians who had died there. For that they were followed, arrested, detained and harassed. Even so, East German lesbians generally fare better than their sisters in other Eastern European countries.

(Translated and excerpted from "Der Sonntags-Club in Ost-Berlin," by Ilse Kokula in *Lesbenstich*, West German lesbian quarterly, Spring 1988.)

A few days ago, I went with another woman from West Berlin to East Berlin to interview Uschi and Gerda, two women in their forties, who founded the *Sonntags-Club* [Sunday Club] and are still actively involved in the organization of club events. Although the Sunday Club is not yet government-sponsored, it is officially recognized as an association of lesbians and gay men. Interested bisexual, heterosexual, and otherwise sexual people are also welcome. Two similar groups are about to be formed in other cities in the GDR.

For the time being, the Sunday Club is the only association where gay people can meet outside the Protestant Church and the bar scene. The club has slowly gained official recognition; recently, for instance, the counseling column of a major East Berlin daily referred a reader asking for information on homosexuality to the club.

A flier from the summer of 1987 identifies the goals of the club: "We want to give homosexual women and men the opportunity to break through their isolation occasionally, to not have to hide their identity, to build their self-confidence and perhaps to find a life partner. Most certainly, they will find friends and people to talk to in the club. Only homosexual citizens who are comfortable with themselves and with their sexuality will feel at ease in society and develop into fully socialist persons. We also want to give heterosexual men and women a chance to obtain information about the specific problems that homosexual citizens face; we hope that in conversation with gay people they will confront and overcome their homophobia and their prejudices. Only if heterosexual citizens fully accept homosex-

ual women and men as citizens with equal rights will the humanist principles of the Marxist-Leninist world view and of the constitution be realized."

The idea of founding an association for homosexual citizens dates back to the year 1979. At that time, lesbians and gay men met in informal groups to discuss the issue of coming out publicly in the GDR. As a result, the HIB (Homosexual Initiative Berlin) was established; unfortunately, the group was active for only about half a year. Another discussion group at a health center was disbanded shortly after its inception, since the medical personnel were mainly interested in accumulating data.



Uschi had visited gay and lesbian study groups in the Protestant parishes. But she disliked the occasionally anti-socialist comments there, and she was convinced that it would be possible for gay women and men to meet under government auspices. Thus she tackled the job of wading through the bureaucratic requirements of various state committees and organizations in order to obtain a meeting place and a printing permit. In early 1987, she was assigned a space in a clubhouse in the district Berlin-Mitte, where only a few people were attending a series of lectures on literature and visiting the theater. Uschi offered to address homosexual topics. As soon as it got around that events related to literature with gay content were going to take place, 30 to 50 people suddenly started showing up. The Sunday Club grew out of this series. Now about 80 to 100 people attend each event; for films, up to 150 people come. Many learn about the events on Eldorado [a West Berlin-based gay radio program].

The clubhouse was shut down in the summer of 1987 for renovation. Since then, the Sunday Club has been meeting in different clubhouses. Invitations and information are published with government permission. However, each issue has to be separately approved, so the program is often determined half a year in advance. Gerda and Uschi note that women and men are equally represented in the Sunday Club, and in designing the program, they make sure that the interests of women are addressed fully and equally. Most of the women are in their thirties and have been previously married.

The ultimate goal of the club is to become a full-fledged association for homosexual citizens, like the Federation of

The Sunday Club

East Germany

Journalists or of Writers. The group also plans on publishing their own paper, *Facette* [Facet]. At this point, however, the Sunday Club activists still have to fight both bureaucratic and human obstacles. Local politicians pretend to be "out" when they call, or "cannot be reached"; petitions and requests are shuffled around between different agencies, with no one taking responsibility. Uschi's and Gerda's requests are frequently "propelled upward" into the bureaucracy. But from above, from "Erich" [Erich Honegger, General Party Secretary], they generally do obtain permission. It appears that the highest level of government is currently least afraid of dealing with homosexual issues.

In the course of our conversation, it became clear that the GDR government is supportive of gay liberation. For instance, at Humboldt University [one of the most prestigious universities in the GDR, located in East Berlin], an interdisciplinary research group on homosexuality has been established. Here master and doctoral theses with gay themes are discussed and supervised. Uschi herself has a fellowship from Humboldt University to write her dissertation on the early gay liberation movement in Germany. Some problems remain, however. When Uschi showed us

an anonymous questionnaire on lesbian love, for example, none of us were very happy with the study, even though all of us consider research on lesbians important. Most of the 40 questions addressed the sex life of lesbians. Obviously it would be more appropriate to address the manifold social problems that lesbians in the GDR still face today. □

Contact:

Sonntags-Club
P.O. Box 229
Berlin 1030
East Germany

Further Readings:

- "Glimpses of Lesbian/Gay Life in East Germany," *Gay Community News*, 16:20, Nov./Dec. 1988.
- Ilse Kokula, *Wir leiden nicht mehr, sondern sind gelitten: Lesbisch leben in Deutschland*, Frankfurt a.M.: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1987. Contains interviews with two East German lesbians.
- "Lesbians Take Refuge in the Church," *Connexions*, #28, 1988/89.

Australia

(Excerpted from *Grapevine*, Australian lesbian monthly newsletter, #97, February 1989.)

A National Lesbian Feminist Conference and Celebration was held in Adelaide, Australia in January 1989. Four hundred women from all over the world registered for the conference, and others joined the group later. The conference was organized by a collective of six lesbians over a 14-month period, and it featured three or four workshops every day as well as meals, concerts, films, theatre, and dances. The workshops were conducted as consciousness-raising groups, each initiated by several lesbians; the large groups often branched off into smaller ones. Among the workshops were:

- Lesbian Identity—What is it, Who owns it?
- Liberating Group Structures—What Structures are Appropriate for Lesbian Feminists? How Can We Avoid Constantly Reinventing the Wheel?
- Parthenogenesis
- Growing Old Disgracefully
- Polygyny Polka or Beyond Monogamy
- Lesbian Destiny—Remembering the Future and Sustainable Lesbian Culture in the 21st Century
- Radical Feminism, Patriarchy, and Women's Empowerment
- Electronic Pollution (and Weaponry)—Its Effects on Women and Our Response
- Women-Identified Music
- Herstory of the National Radicalesbian Conference in Sorrento, Vic. in 1973
- Lesbian Network—Future Directions

(Submitted to *Connexions* by Petrina Smith in January 1989.)

The next National Lesbian Feminist Conference will be held in Melbourne, Australia in January 1990. The organizing group is looking for women to help plan the festival. Planning groups will have some autonomy in policy-making decisions, e.g., whether or not alcohol and drug use will be allowed at their events, or whether the events will be lesbian-only, women-only or open. Limits may be set if, for instance, a group's activities are racist. Discussion about such issues will be ongoing and will also be debated during an evaluation at the end.

The conference will include workshops on self-image, sexuality, ritual-making, writing, music, coming-out, co-counseling, lesbian mothers, lesbian politics, lesbian ethics, herstories and health.

Among the planned exhibitions are performance works, journal-sharing, books, arts, crafts, skills, demonstrations, videos, films, photographs, a graffiti wall, and an exhibition with a theme—the tentative theme is desire/coming-out.

Sports, activities for children, marches and rallies will also be included at the festival. The festival organizers encourage women interested in helping to plan the event (as well as those who wish to attend) to write for more information.

Contact:

The Lesbian Festival
P.O. Box 302
North Carlton
Victoria 3054
Australia

Shorts Ireland

(Excerpted from *Women's News*, Irish feminist bimonthly, June 1987.)

Lesbian Line is a voluntary organization in Belfast offering help to lesbians. One of its aims is to overcome the attitude of ignorance and prejudice towards lesbianism in Northern Ireland.

Since 1987, individual women have volunteered to staff the phones at least one night a week. In 1987, eight volunteers offered information on lesbians and lesbian lifestyle once a week on a Thursday evening. Women can contact the Lesbian Line by phone or by letter and arrange a meeting with volunteers. Lesbian Line also offers public education. The organization gives talks to groups who want to know more about the line or about lesbianism in general.

Contact:

Lesbian Line
c/o PO Box 44
Belfast, Northern Ireland
Tel: 238668
Hours: Thurs. 7:30–10:00 PM



Christine Roche/La Vie en Rose

Japan

Regumi: A New Spelling of Our Name



Clit 007

Y. is a Japanese lesbian who was active in the Japanese lesbian community. She has been living in the US for almost two years; she recently went back to Japan and visited the women's community there. The following article is based on a *Connexions* interview conducted in February 1989.

Originally I was involved with the lesbian group *Regumi Studio Tokyo*. *Regumi* grew out of *Wakakusa-no-Kai*, a lesbian organization founded in the late seventies. I attended the opening party of *Regumi* in spring 1987. Now the group has about 100 members nationwide; the headquarters are in Tokyo, but there are branches in other cities as well. Altogether there are 20 to 30 active members. The ages range from 18 to 80; most women are self-employed, for example as carpenters, artists and translators, or they work as teachers. Being self-employed, a lesbian has more freedom than people who are working in offices. If a lesbian were to come out in an office, it would be very uncomfortable for her to work there. As a teacher, you cannot afford to be out because the school authorities don't want their teachers to be homosexuals. *Regumi* shares offices with the feminist organization *Kodosuru Onnatachi no Group*, with a pro-choice and an anti-nuclear group. Occasionally *Regumi* collaborates with feminist groups. In those situations, *Regumi* members are out as lesbians. *Regumi* is an all-volunteer group; funds are raised through membership fees and subscriptions. *Regumi* puts out a monthly newsletter which is its main networking tool. Members meet regularly once a month. However, there are a number of events each month where the women socialize. Dinners and dances often take place at the three lesbian-owned bars in the gay area in Tokyo. When I first came out in 1984, a gay male friend told me about one of the bars. I went there and that's how I found out about *Regumi*. Nowadays information about events in the lesbian community is available in the bars, too. The main goals of *Regumi* are three-fold. First, *Regumi* provides a place where lesbians can meet and develop their identity. It is like

family, we were all very close, and I like that. Second, *Regumi* addresses issues around the inequality between women and men. Third, the group attempts to educate the heterosexual population about lesbian lifestyles. Thus one of the major projects of the last years has been the compilation of *The Book of Women Who Love Women* (*Onna o Aisuru Onnatachi no Hon*). It was published in 1987 by a liberal mainstream publishing house. The book includes about ten personal accounts of Japanese lesbians and the results of a survey conducted among 100 lesbians. It also features a resource list including the phone numbers of *Regumi* and other lesbian groups and bars. As a result, many lesbians, particularly those living in the countryside, got in touch with *Regumi* and the number of the members increased significantly. Because the book was so successful, *Regumi* is planning on publishing a sequel.

Even though one of the most active and longstanding organizers of *Regumi* is committed to feminism, the majority identifies with butch-femme roles. Since I don't, I did not feel comfortable and therefore started to become involved with the International Lesbian Group. Members are from Asia, Australia, the US, Europe and elsewhere. The focus of the group is on socializing rather than on political activism. Together with *Regumi*, we organize three or four "lesbian weekends" a year at the National Women's Educational Center near Tokyo. We advertise the weekends only in the *Japan Times*, the major English language daily; we are afraid of publicizing the events in Japanese dailies because of potential harassment. Each time 150 to 200 lesbians from all over Japan attend; half the participants are Japanese, the other half are foreign. In the workshops, the participants discuss diverse topics such as sexuality and cross-cultural relationships. There are also craft workshops and sports events; and in the building there is a hot tub where we have a lot of fun. The weekends are the highlight and the center of our organizing efforts.

The following interview is excerpted from "Lesbian Love and Sex in Japan: An Interview with Mayumi Tomihara," in *Gay Community News*, Boston-based gay weekly, Dec. 6-12, 1987.

Q: What does the word *Regumi* stand for?

A: *Regumi* is a word we invented. In Japanese there are many words for male homosexual—no word for female homosexual. So usually we just say the word "lesbian." But it sounds so dirty—it has been smeared by pornography and psychology. "Dyke" is also an attack. Before now, I personally could not accept "lesbian" pronounced in my presence—I felt embarrassed and insulted. Actually, I used to prefer the word "homosexual" to "lesbian." Anyway, because there were no words we felt comfortable using, we decided to create a new idiom for ourselves—we know we cannot rely on other people to make lesbian counter-culture for us. *Regumi* is a kind of jargon that nobody outside the group could guess the meaning of. "Re" stands for lesbian—it sounds like lesbian—and "gumi" means a circle or classroom. So *Regumi* can be translated as "classroom for lesbians" or you can just say "lesbian circle."

Q: Is there much cooperation between lesbians who are out and politically active and gay men who are out and politically active?

A: In comparison to lesbians, gay men have many options. Until recently we were not interested in meeting or cooperating with any gay men's society or organization. But a short time ago we met with representatives of a gay organization founded by young men under 25. These men are politically very active and conscious about gay liberation—rather than just interested in gathering and having fun. So we liked the representatives a lot and we began a cooperation between *Regumi* and their organization. I can say that cooperation with gay men has just started. However, I think most gay circles are not willing to cooperate with any lesbian organization. I think they feel they don't need to because people are more tolerant of gay men than lesbians.

Q: Is there an alliance between straight feminists and lesbians in Japan?

A: Recently there was a big gathering of feminist groups and several famous feminists were invited to talk. We had been waiting for a long time for them to speak out for lesbians, to take lesbian issues seriously. But at the meeting no lesbian issue was ever discussed, even mentioned. Toward the end of the meeting one of our members stood up and asked the feminists what they thought about lesbian issues. They simply answered that those issues were not their problems and they didn't think the lesbian issue could be a main topic for feminism in Japan. In a way they seemed afraid of discussing lesbianism. Perhaps they think it would be dangerous for their own movement because taking on lesbian issues could also attract animosity from the mass media or from the male-dominated society. So they just prefer to ally with the liberal male activists rather than lesbian feminists.

Q: Do lesbians and gay men work with any other movements in Japan?

A: Gay men are usually quite isolated and they don't associate with other movements. Lesbians tend to be more politically active. We are active in the anti-nuclear and ecological movements. But we can't always be out in these movements—we have to be very careful about when to come out.

Q: Does *Regumi* have any other plans for the future?

A: We hope to create a lesbian counter-culture for Japanese lesbians. It's not enough to be there and feel comfortable with each other—that can be a first step. But we need a future. It is up to us to create a solid political, social, cultural background for those who are coming. □

Contact:

Regumi Studio Tokyo
Nakazawa 3F
23 Arakicho
Shinjuku 160
Tokyo, Japan

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The First Lesbian *Encuentro*

At the eighth international lesbian conference, held in March 1986 in Geneva, Switzerland, Latin American and Caribbean feminists laid the plans for the first lesbian *Encuentro* (meeting).

Over the next year, a group of 23 Mexican lesbians who formed *Lesbianas de America Latina* (LAL) organized the conference and began fundraising efforts.

The *Encuentro* was held in October 1987 in Cuernavaca, Mexico, one week before the Fourth *Encuentro* of Latin American and Caribbean Feminists. It lasted five days and drew 240 lesbians from Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, the US and Canada.

The following interview with Lourdes Pérez and Alida Castañón, members of LAL and the Mexican group MULA—*Mujeres Urgidas de un Lesbianismo Auténtico* (Women in Need of an Authentic Lesbianism), was conducted one month before the *Encuentro* took place.

(From *Rites: for Lesbian and Gay Liberation*, Canadian monthly, vol 4., no. 4., Sept. 1987.)

Q: Who is LAL?

Lourdes: This group was developed as a way of protecting ourselves. We are "Seminario Marxista-Leninista Feminista de lesbianas" and MULA. We are the only two lesbian groups in Mexico [City]. There is also "Grupo Lesbico" in Guadalajara.

Alida: There are also many feminist groups in Mexico City in which 60-65 percent of the members are lesbian. It seems that we are the first Latin American country to organize lesbian groups; we began in 1971.

Q: The First *Encuentro* of Latin American and Caribbean Lesbian-Feminists is being held just before the Fourth *Encuentro* of Feminists. . . .

Lourdes: Yes, and there was discussion as to whether this was wise. When Alida and I returned from Geneva we met with more than 70 lesbians to discuss possible objections. There has been tension between the two *Encuentros*—we had to explain to the Feminist group about the needs of the lesbian community, our right to organize separately. We asked for a lesbian workshop at the Fourth *Encuentro*, and have written to other Latin American and Caribbean groups to demand one also. We hope to take the results of the First Lesbian *Encuentro* to the Fourth Feminist *Encuentro*.

In Mexico City there has always been a lack of lesbian space within the hetero-feminist community. Even though a large percent of the feminist community is lesbian! These women don't identify as being "lesbian," but as "being in love with women."

Alida: Before, when there were other groups, it was very difficult for lesbians to work on their own issues because we were so divided between the homosexual and the hetero-feminist community.

Lourdes: And these groups disappeared—because they weren't "out." So with this *Encuentro*, after a three- to four-year gap in lesbian organizing, we want to pull lesbians together and be strong.

Q: Who will be attending the *Encuentro* and what are the costs?

Lourdes: Well, we have restricted the attendance to 500 lesbians, simply because of the economic crisis here. We would like to have 1,500 lesbians, but we just can't afford it. Women are going to have to realize that conditions will not be like they are in the

first world. Everyone has to do their own cleaning, bring their own sleeping bags, cups and saucers. We have to assume collective responsibility.

At one time, in the discussions of the *Encuentro*, it was suggested that no white women should be allowed. But then it was decided they could come, otherwise we might lose the goals of the *Encuentro*. These women must know what it's like to be a Third World lesbian; we would also like to exchange information with them.

Alida: But we are sorry to say we have to be very selective of who those women are. . . we want women who can exchange ideas, such as women who have written about lesbian theory and are sensitized to Third World Latina problems, because we don't want to lose time by having to explain who we are and what we are doing. We want lesbians from the US and Canada because we import your theories. When a political movement happens in your countries, for example the S/M debates, we know eventually it's going to reach Mexico.

Lourdes: The main objective of the *Encuentro* is to create a Latin American and Caribbean lesbian network. . . to have a newsletter, to support each other.

Q: What kind of support are you receiving?

Lourdes: A group called "Gay and Lesbian Latinos United" in Hollywood, California has taken on fundraising work. We sent out 75 "lesbic telegrams" to international groups and individuals asking for donations, but so far we have received no reply. Kay Garner was here in February and gave five concerts and donated the money to the *Encuentro*. And we've had private fundraising parties.

Q: And the support in Mexico City?

Lourdes: Most of the lesbian community is non-political at this moment—many lesbians come to our parties but they won't come to our political workshops.

Alida: And of the few rich women in the community, perhaps one or two have donated money.

Lourdes: It's difficult to organize lesbians in Third World countries. Many women feel guilty doing lesbian work because there's so many other issues—other necessities. And many lesbians are still in the closet.

Q: And the feminist movement?

Alida: The feminists are divided into the intellectuals on one side—who say they are the founders of the women's movement here—and on the other side is the new wave of feminists who do the base work (grass roots), like with *Colonias Populares*, *Workers*, *Unions*, *Campesinas*.

So the Fourth Feminist *Encuentro* is trying to pull these two groups together. The intellectuals have been accused of not contributing to the base work and of keeping the feminist movement as a middle-class movement.

Lourdes: I'd say there's three waves in the feminist movement—the intellectuals, the base workers, and the lesbians. And everybody thinks they are doing the right thing. . . there's little space for unity. As lesbians, we say the other two waves are not representing lesbian issues and the base workers accuse the intellectuals of creating an elite movement.

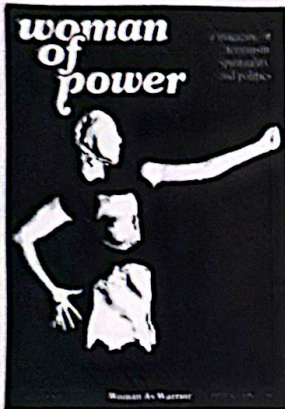
Alida: A few of the base groups are now presenting lesbian issues in their daily work. The connections are growing.

Q: And the lesbian community? Is separatism an issue?

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Alida: In the lesbian community—it seems presumptuous for LAL to be calling ourselves the lesbian community, but we are the only organized movement right now—there are three divisions: One, separatism, because some women feel it's necessary to separate from the hetero-feminist and homosexual movement, to have lesbian-only space; two, continuing to work with homosexuals and connect on our common struggles; and three, working directly with the hetero-feminist movement.

Lourdes: The separatist lesbian movement is waiting for the result of the Encuentros. These debates exist also in other Latin American countries, as we learnt in Geneva.

The issue here now is AIDS. In the smaller towns, the police are raiding places, reactionaries are having demonstrations, and are forcing homosexuals and lesbians out of their towns.

Alida: Yes, it's happening in Campeche and Yucatan (provinces in southeastern Mexico).

Lourdes: Homosexuals and lesbians are being fired from their jobs and attacked in the streets. There is a lot of negative press coverage on AIDS—and against homosexuals. It's scaring lesbians away from doing any kind of political work, and it may scare them away from attending the Encuentro.

We attend the AIDS support meetings in Mexico, but in this country when the media writes "homosexual" the people read feminine and masculine, so this is really hurting lesbians. We desperately need information on lesbians and AIDS.

Q: This brings up the question of security at the Encuentro. How are the police in Mexico?

Alida: There's a lot of harassment.

Lourdes: We are making a pamphlet asking lesbians not to make any public demonstrations during the Encuentro. Even though they may feel they can deal with the police, other lesbians cannot. It's too much of a risk. The location of the Encuentro will be kept secret until the last possible moment.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to say to lesbians in Canada?

Alida: We think it's important for lesbian groups to open their minds and to understand that they have privileges that we don't have.

Lourdes: Lesbians must not forget that the First World countries are oppressing Third World countries; don't forget that your lesbian sisters in the Third World are having a difficult time. We ask you to open up your field—not just on a local basis, but also an international one. □

For information on the next Lesbian Encuentro, to be held in Peru in 1990, write to:

Grupo de Autoconciencia de Lesbianas Feministas (GALF)
Casilla 110390
Lima 11
Peru

Further Reading:

• Juanita Ramos ed., *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians*, New York: Latina Lesbian History Project, 1987.

The Homomonument, designed by lesbian sculptress Karin Dean. Though primarily a monument to victims of the Nazi persecution, it is also intended as a reminder that gay men and lesbians still face persecution.



Not Just Memories Germany

Both the conservative and the progressive political forces in West Germany have been shocked by the gains of right wing parties in recent elections. A "new" party called "Republikanische Partei" (Republican Party) has attracted a lot of attention. The program of the party is not very clear, but it attempts to appeal to popular sentiments with an anti-foreign stance, restrictive AIDS policies and support of capital punishment. The party was originally founded in Bavaria. Since 1983 it has been under the leadership of Franz Schönhuber, a former member of the Waffen-SS. Schönhuber claims that he is "not a neo-Nazi" and "not anti-foreign." In the January 1989 elections for the city parliament in Berlin, the "Republicans" got 7.5% of the vote and won 11 out of 138 seats, even though they ran there for the first time.

Perhaps reason for even more concern are the recent successes of the so-called "National-Democratic Party" (NDP). The NDP considers itself the post-war version of Hitler's NSDAP. In the local elections in Hessen in March 1989 the NDP won up to 18% of the vote of a town if they had a candidate on the ballot; in Frankfurt they got about 6% and will be represented in the city hall.

In the Third Reich, homosexual women and men were murdered; true to their predecessors' practices, the neo-Nazis continue to attack gay people. The election results do not bode well for the future of lesbian and gay rights.

(Excerpted and translated from an article by Annette Runte in *Bulletin des Archives Lesbiennes*, No. 7, June 1988.)

Homosexuality had no place in fascist ideology, because on the one hand it embarrassed the Nazi politics of procreation, and on the other it upset the Nazi model of strictly separated "masculine" and "feminine" sexes. The misogyny which reduced the Nazi woman to the function of brood mare was also reflected in a cult of virility—which, however, the fascists tried to desexualize. Despite a certain ambiguous climate of camaraderie in male communities, visible homosexuality was severely punished. From 1936 on, when the "Center of the Reich Against Abortion and Homosexuality" was founded, persecution of homosexual men, transvestites, and male prostitutes became systematic; it intensified during the war. A man could be denounced for touching another man, or for looking at him "strangely"; blackmail became possible. It is estimated that there were an average of 10,000 convictions for "pederasty" and homosexuality per year. After prison, gay men were often transferred to concentration camps, where they also had to endure

the harassment of other prisoners. As "degenerates," they found themselves at the bottom of the internal hierarchy of the camps.

In 1938, Rudolf Klare wanted to extend the anti-homosexual law to cover lesbians, but failed. The counter-argument was that physical expressions of affection between women were so widespread that there could be no easy way to distinguish lesbians from heterosexual women. Why were lesbians considered less dangerous? Were they less visible? Was it assumed that they could be "reformed" by rape or imposed maternity?

When caught "in the act," lesbians faced the same consequences as male homosexuals—as shown in the case of "Helen G.," reported by the German sociologist Ilse Kokula:

"This German woman worked for the Nazi army in Oslo during the war, and lived there with her (female) lover. A Nazi officer, who desired her lover himself, separated the two women and sent Helen to the camp at Bützow (GDR), where there was a "block" reserved for lesbians, who were mistreated and humiliated by special methods. One day, the camp guards tried to force the foreign prisoners to rape the lesbians. . . ."

In the women's camp at Ravensbrück, lesbians did wear a pink triangle with the initials "LL" (*Lesbische Liebe*, "Lesbian Love"), but more often they were categorized as "asocial." We don't know whether they were subjected to the kinds of hormonal experiments performed on their male counterparts.

There is not much research on the situation of lesbians under the Third Reich. This is partly due to the lack or inaccessibility of documents, but also to difficulties in establishing an "oral history." The historian Claudia Schoppmann, who has tried to collect testimony through interviews, has run into gaps in memory, subjective interpretations of the past, and fear of admitting homosexuality. Moreover, many of the former prisoners are now dead.

Despite the political steps taken by the Green Party in 1985, homosexuals have not yet been recognized as a specific group of victims of the Nazi regime and have received no reparations. The official organization of "Victims of the Nazi Regime" (VVN) has refused on several occasions to allow homosexual antifascist groups to participate in their commemorative or other actions.

Neo-Nazis: The Return of the Terror

Since the end of the seventies, there have been sporadic reappearances of the extreme right in the German Federal Republic. Youths—of whom six percent were for the extreme right in 1984—are organizing more often now in neo-Nazi "mini-groups", frequently regrouping under different names and thus making it difficult to keep track of them. These small groups are more radical than the older organizations like the National Democratic Party (NDP; 6,000 members) or the Union of German People (DVU; 16,000 members). The young neo-Nazi militants have partici-

pated in violent and bloody actions (resulting, for example, in 13 dead in Munich in 1980). Their core groups have been trained by paramilitary groups. They live in secrecy and maintain good contacts with foreign fascists, especially French and American groups.

While the neo-Nazi movement remains split on the issue of male homosexuality—some accept its more “virile” and misogynistic aspects—fascist ideas about the sexes have not changed at all. This has led to fierce attacks on feminists and especially lesbians, as autonomous women who are no longer dependent on men. One could, unfortunately, make a long list of the insulting and threatening letters addressed to women’s centers, feminist publications, and women’s bookstores, etc. Two examples:

- At the end of 1983, Alice Schwarzer, founder of *Emma* and symbol of the women’s movement in West Germany, was threatened with death by a “Commando for the extermination of lesbians.”
- Slogans like “Death to Lesbians!”, “Don’t buy from Jews or dykes!”, and “Dachau, open your doors, lesbians are coming!” have been written on the walls of various feminist meeting places.

And sometimes the neo-Nazis take action:

- During a showing of the film “The Heirs” (about neo-Nazis), a fire was set in the theater.

- In Munich, neo-Nazis attacked a lesbian in front of a women’s discotheque, lacerating her face.

- During a women’s festival in Hamburg in 1985, young Nazis gained entrance to the meeting room, fired a pistol at the women, and then escaped.

They attack equally transsexuals, homosexuals, and women who are married to foreigners. If the perpetrators of these crimes are caught—which isn’t often—the punishments are relatively mild, because the judges take into account their age, the fact that they were manipulated, or their psychopathology.

This raises the question of how feminists and lesbians have defended themselves. In the case of threats, they have informed the media and sometimes appealed to the police, who then watched their meeting places. But many women are afraid; in the case of real attacks, women were often in a state of paralyzing shock. Recently, the women’s center in Cologne and the *glf* (Gay Liberation Front) wrote a letter of protest to the Ministers of the Interior and of Justice; they have also circulated a petition against fascism. They are calling for a big “anti-fascist front” in

order to coordinate actions and better inform the public. Since 1985, the homosexual archives in Hannover have established a list of incidences of anti-homosexual discrimination. □

(Excerpted and translated from *Emma*, West German feminist monthly, December 1988.)

For two years, homosexual women and men in Hannover have been fighting for the recognition of homosexual victims of the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. Finally, they have succeeded. The newly arranged exhibits in the former concentration camp will for the first time include documentation of homosexual victims. A group has been formed to document especially the terror against homosexual women. They ask all survivors for material and information. Who were the women who were detained at Bergen-Belsen or any other concentration camp because of their homosexuality? Who can report about female homosexuality and its consequences in the camps, about discrimination in the post-war period, or harassment by neo-Nazis? Please contact as soon as possible *Lesbentelefon*, c/o Lesbenzentrum, Hannover, Lichtenbergplatz 7, Tel. 0511/440568, West Germany. □



China

(Translated and compiled from Chen Don-
gyuan, *A History of Chinese Women's
Lives*, Shanghai, 1937, and Xiaoming
Xiong, *The History of Homosexuality in
China*, Hong Kong, 1984.)

In the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, in a few counties in Guangdong province, women resisted traditional patrilineal marriage and organized themselves in sisterhoods. A 19th century observer noted: “Many of the women of the villages of Shunde County in Guangdong Province acknowledge each other as sworn sisters. They call their groups ‘Golden Orchid Association.’ In some cases, the women return to their parents’ family after the wedding and never live with their husbands’ families; in more extreme cases, they get married to their sworn sisters and subsequently annul previous engagements. In case the families attempt to coerce them, the sworn sisters pledge to commit suicide together.” Another observer pointed out that “in recent years, things

have changed again, namely the sworn sisters consider each other as romantic partners. Whenever two girls live together, one of them is inevitably using a plant pestle. This practice started in the villages in Shunde, it has since spread to Pan’ou and Shajiao where it is even more frequently imitated, and even the provincial capital has not been spared. The practice is also known as “Bowing to one’s friend.” Once they have established intercourse, they get emotionally attached to each other and as a result, they do not get married during their entire life.”

The sisterhoods took care of many practical aspects of women’s lives. They provided housing known as “sisters’ houses” or “spinsters’ houses;” moreover, they established cooperative funds for retirement benefits, emergency assistance for outside family, funeral expenses and festive celebrations. Individually, the women saved money to be able to adopt girl children who would be raised to become members of the sisterhoods themselves. The women’s social lives also revolved around the sisterhoods. Together, they traveled freely around the countryside, visiting theaters and temples. Some of the religious institutions were entirely run by women. The sisterhoods drew on religious lore that praised celibacy as a way of avoiding the “pool of blood” to which women who gave birth were invariably

condemned. Moreover, popular belief held that two beings were predestined to love each other in every reincarnation so that, regardless of their gender, they would be attracted to each other.

The sisterhoods were also active in improving the working conditions of their members. Most women were employed in the filatures and other silk and textile factories. Meeting with a group of women in 1930, Agnes Smedley noted that “they worked ten hours a day. Once they worked fourteen. How did they win the ten-hour day? I drew a sketch of a filature with a big fat man standing atop laughing, then a second picture of the same with the fat man weeping because a row of girls stood holding hands around the mill. They chattered over these drawings, then a girl shouted two words and all of them began to demonstrate a strike. They laughed, began to link hands, and drew me into this circle. We all stood holding hands in an unbroken line, laughing. Yes, that was how they got the ten-hour day!” □

Further Reading:

- Agnes Smedley, “Silk Workers,” in *Portraits of Chinese Women in Revolution*, New York: Feminist Press, 1976.
- Marjorie Topley, “Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung,” in *Women in Chinese Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975.

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Resources

Austria

Homosexuelle Initiative (HOSI) Lesben, Novaragasse 40, 1020 Vienna. Organizer of the 11th ILGA Conference to be held in Vienna, July 16-22, 1989.

Australia

"Lesbian Issue," *Gay Information*, P.O. Box 943, Darlinghurst, New South Wales 2010.

Women for Survival, Women's land, RMB 14 Birdwood, Wauchope 2446 N.S.W.

Grapevine, G.P.O. Box K788, Perth, 6001 W.A. Women's Monthly Newsletter.

Brazil

Terceira Dimensão Gaúcha, c/o Carla Ruschel, Rua Aparício da Silva 1058, Sarandi-RS 99560. Lesbian-feminist group.

Grupo Gaucha de Lesbicas Feministas, Caixa Postal 068, 95590 Tramandai, RS.

Chana Com Chana, Grupo Acao Lesbica Feminista (GALF), C.P. 62.618, 01214 Sao Paulo SP, Lesbian feminist periodical.

Canada

Rites: For Lesbian and Gay Liberation, Box 65, Station F, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2L4. Monthly newspaper. For extensive listings of lesbian organizations across Canada, see Aug. and Sept. 1988 issues.

Amazones d'hier, Lesbiennes d'aujourd'hui, Box 1721, La Cité Stn, Montreal, PQ H2W 2R7.

LTC-2, Box 531, Place du Parc, Montreal, PQ H2W 2P1. Lesbian magazine.

Lesbian and Gay Holdings Listing, Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA), P.O. Box 128 Station P, Toronto, ON M5S 2S7.

Chile

Colectiva Ayuquelen, Bellavista 0547, Providencia, Santiago.

CLA, Casilla 70131, Correo 7, Santiago.

Denmark

Pan, Postboks 1023, 1007 Copenhagen K. Gay and lesbian monthly.

Dominican Republic

Pezones, Colectiva Mitilene, Apartado 156-9, Santo Domingo. Lesbian-feminist publication.

England

Organisation for Gay and Lesbian Action (OLGA), 38 Mountpleasant, London WC1X 0AP.

ZAMI 2, P.O. Box 367, Sheffield S1 1HK. Organizer of Second National Conference of Black Lesbians to be held in April 1989.

Lesbian Archive and Information Centre, BCM 7005, London WC1N 3XX.

East Germany

Sonntags-Club, P.O. Box 229, Berlin 1030.

Finland

Torajyvä, Akanat PL 55, 00511 Helsinki 51. Finnish lesbian periodical.



France

Archives Recherches et Cultures Lesbienes, BP 662, 75531 Paris Cedex 11.

Lesbia, BP 526, 75831 Paris Cedex 11.

Indonesia

Gaya Nusantara, Tromol Pos 9, Pasuruan 67102, Jawa Timur. Gay and lesbian bi-monthly.

Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), J1. Jahan Tinggi Igang VII/II, Complex R.S. Bersalin, Tanah Tinggi, Jakarta Pusat.

Ireland

Women's News, 185 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1. Listings of lesbian organizations.

Irish Lesbian Network, c/o Irish Women's Centre, 59 Stoke Newington, Church St, London N16, England.

Italy

Bollettino del CLI-Collegamento fra Lesbiche Italiane, Centro Femminista Separatista, Via San Francesco di Sales 1, 00165 Rome.

Japan

Regumi Studio Tokyo, Nakazawa 3f, 23 Arakicho, Shinjuku-ku 160, Tokyo.

Japanese ILGA Support Group (JILGA), 201 Hohyu Bldg, 2-11-9 Yotsuya, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160. Two newsletters, *WIN* in Japanese, *Asian Wind* in English.

Mexico

GLP, Apartado Postal 1-623, 44100 Guadalajara, Jalisco.

L.A.L., Apartado Postal 22834, Delegación Tlalpan, 14000 México, D.F., Mexico.

Grupo Lambda (GL), Apdo. Postal 73-130, México 12, D.F., Mexico.

The Netherlands

Homostudies RUU, Postbus 80140, 3508 TC Utrecht. Gay and Lesbian Studies Department.

International Gay and Lesbian Association (ILGA)-Women's Secretariat, c/o Groep 7152, Grada Schadee, P.O. Box 1352, 5004 BJ Tilburg.

George Siemensma, P.O. Box 1473, 1000 BL Amsterdam. Amnesty International's Gay and Lesbian Prisoner of Conscience Coordinator.

DAQUA, 1e Const. Huygensstr. 120c, 1054 BZ Amsterdam.

International Lesbian Information Service (ILIS), c/o COC, Rozenstraat 8, 1016 NX Amsterdam.

Lesbisch Archief Leeuwarden, Postbus 4062, 8901 Leeuwarden.

Sek, c/o COC, Rozenstraat 8, 1016 NX Amsterdam. Lesbian and gay publication.

New Zealand

Lesbian and Gay Rights Resource Center, P.O. Box 11-695, Manners St. Post Office, Wellington.

Nicaragua

Rita Arauz, Apartado A-262, Managua. Lesbian and gay Sandinista group.

Norway

Løvetann, Postboks 3365, Sagene, 0405 Oslo 4. Lesbian and gay monthly.

Arbeidsgruppe for homofil og lesbisk frigjøring (AHF), Postboks 5390, Majorstua, 0304 Oslo 4.

Peru

Al Margen, Grupo de Autoconciencia de Lesbianas Feministas (GALF), Casilla 110390, Lima 11. Organizer of the second conference for Latina and Caribbean lesbians to be held in Lima, Peru in 1990.

Puerto Rico

Colectivo de Concientización Gay (CCG), Apartado 1003, Estación Viejo San Juan, San Juan, Puerto Rico 00902.

Spain

Red de Amazonas, Apartado de Correos, 5394 Barcelona 08080. Lesbian network.

South Africa

Rand Gay Organization (RGO), Postbox 5115, Johannesburg 2000.

Sweden

International Lesbian Support Network, c/o Catherine Renaa, Betsovagen 10, 1 tr., 132 30 Saltjo-Boo.

NAFO, Nordic Archives for Homosexual Research, Hardeberga 563, 240 17 Södra Sandby.

Switzerland

Sappho-Verein zur Foerderung von Frauenforschungsprojekten, Postfach 234, 3009 Bern. Lesbian research association.

Frau ohne Herz, Mattengasse 27, 8005 Zuerich. Lesbian quarterly.

Thailand

The Ladies Lodge, P.O. Box 322, Rajdamnern, Bangkok 10200. Asian Lesbian Network and organizer of the Asian lesbian conference to be held in December 1989 in Bangkok.

United States

Trikone, Gay and Lesbian South Asians, P.O. Box 21354, San Jose, CA 95151. Network and newsletter.

Anamika, Box 150652, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215-0013. Worldwide South Asian lesbian group and newsletter.

Jewish Lesbian Daughters of Holocaust Survivors (JLDHS), P.O. Box 6194, Boston, MA 02114.

Paz y Liberacion, P.O. Box 66450, Houston, TX 77266. Latin American and Asian Newsletters.

Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum, P.O. Box 29812, Los Angeles, CA 90027.

Gay Community News, 62 Berkeley St, Boston, MA 02116.

Off Our Backs, 2423 18th St NW, Washington, D.C. 20009.

Outlook: National Gay and Lesbian Quarterly, P.O. Box 460430, San Francisco, CA 94146.

The New Phoenix Rising, Asian/Pacific lesbians, P.O. Box 31631, Oakland, CA 94609.



West Germany

Lesberatur, Frauenbuchladen, Bismarckstrasse 98, 2000 Hamburg 20. Annual award of DM 2.000,- for German prose of lesbian authors.

Lesbenstich, Postfach 360549, 1000 Berlin 36. Listings of lesbian organizations across West Germany.

Maria-Martha-Netzwerk, Postfach 110662, 1000 Berlin 11. Lesbian church workers' network.

Yugoslavia

Sekcija LILIT—Lezbiska skupina LL, Kersnikova 4, 61000 Ljubljana.

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LETTERS

Dear Connexions,

I have just received issue #28 of *Connexions*, which is devoted to feminism and religion. I of course applaud the existence of your publication. It is admirable that you seek to provide a global perspective on feminism.

It is a pity that in this issue on religion there are no articles on Judaism. I find it puzzling, even appalling, your claim that there is a "lack of provocative material" on this subject and a "shortage of Hebrew translators." I could find a Hebrew translator with a couple of quick phone calls, although in my own work I have only occasional need for translation services. I do not know what you mean by "provocative," but there is certainly a rich body of material pertaining to feminism in Judaism. I urge you to contact Professor Debra Kaufman, a leading authority on the subject of women in Judaism. [Her address: Dept. of Sociology, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 002115.]

We all must overcome the influence of patriarchal religions on our lives. Do not overlook Jewish women in this our common struggle.

Sincerely,
Mary Jo Ondrechen
Associate Professor, Chemistry
Northeastern University

Dear Connexions,

We would like to enlist your assistance in providing legal aid for women arrested for political reasons and detained in the Russian Compound in Jerusalem under severely adverse conditions. As you may know, the Russian Compound is Israel's foremost detention center for women from the occupied territories, and is known for its harsh practices, including beatings, covering the prisoners' heads with urine-soaked sacks and keeping them in closets.

Again and again we have been confronted with the fact that irreparable damage is done to the women during the first period of their arrest. They are held incommunicado by the secret security forces. Not only are they prevented from contacting lawyers, it often takes days and weeks for their families to discover where they are being held. Even when the information is available, they are often prevented from doing anything about it because of frequent curfews. Furthermore, families are not allowed to visit until charges are pressed. This is official policy. Frequently the prisoners' detention is extended without notifying the lawyer. Many of the women are often in need of medical care, particularly gynecological, but doctors arrive long after complaints are made. Treatment is often unsuitable.

Enclosed you will find the case histories of a number of such detainees prepared and distributed by the Women's Organization for Women Political Prisoners.

In order to provide at least legal first-aid to these women, we have approached Andre Rosenthal, a Jerusalem lawyer, who, for approximately \$450 a month, will make the Russian Compound detainees his legal concern, taking depositions, obtaining medical aid when necessary, arranging bail if possible. Rosenthal will give legal aid to the detainees until a lawyer is hired by the family or until charges are pressed. He will also keep the WOFPP informed so that they can be of assistance as well.

Donations can be sent to:

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Tel Aviv, Israel



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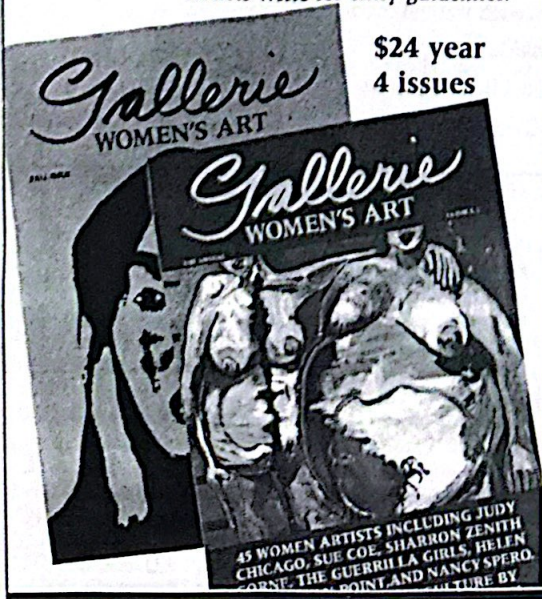
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Looking for a penpal? Selling a poster? Organizing a conference? Then your classified belongs here! **Connexions** classifieds reach over 15,000 women for only 30 cents a word. Write **Connexions**, 4228 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, CA 94609 for more information or send in your ad with payment. Display ad rates also available.

Are there any lesbian groups in Ecuador? American gal seeks worldwide correspondence with all women. Wen, C/O P.O. Box 6281, New York, NY 10128 USA.

I would like to correspond with other lesbian women. I'm sincere, caring, and honest, with 13 months left to my incarceration.

I'm Italian, feminine, and 30 years old. I cannot correspond with other women in prison who must write a DOC# on the envelope or if the envelope indicates the letter is coming from a prison. Denise Davis, #57239, Arizona State Prison-Perryville. P.O. Box 3400, Goodyear, AZ 85338.

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Help Wanted

New Society Publishers, a nonprofit worker-managed publisher of books on nonviolent social change seeks new

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Publications

Health Education for Women, materials for those who want to teach and learn about women's health. For ordering information contact: WEA, North Western District, Crawford House, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9GH, U.K.

Minnesota News for Gays and Lesbians. GLC Voice newspaper, 1624 Harmon Pl #210, Minneapolis, MN 55403-1916. Sample issue \$2.00. 24 issues (year) \$22.00. Low rate barely covers posting.

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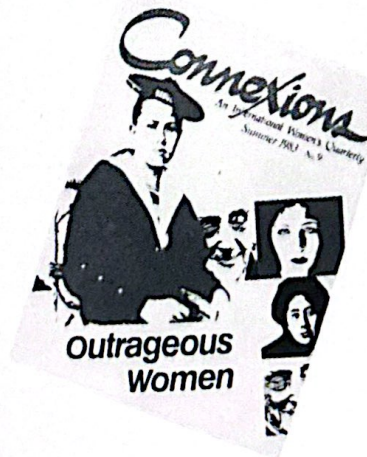
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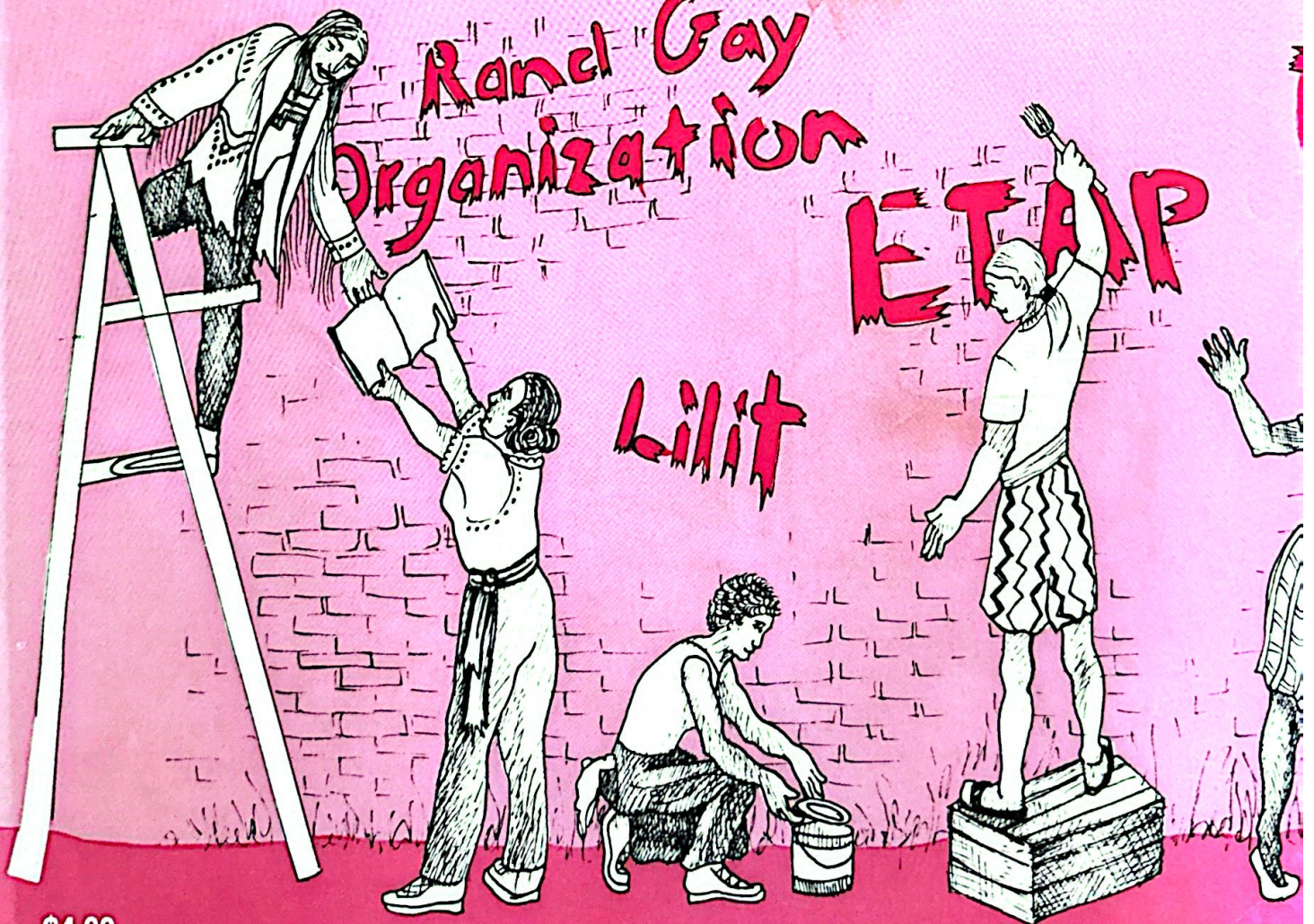
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