

SPECTRUM

Gay and lesbian liberation for the 1990's

by Terry Richard

"This is the place where the lesbian and gay movement must be"
Harry Britt

During the 19th century, there was a wave of activity in Europe (with echoes in America) designed to promote homosexual rights and to explore the possibility of liberation. That activity was interrupted in the 20th century by the Second World War, where the strong German movement was especially subjected to the Nazi repression that resulted in tens of thousands of homosexuals being killed in concentration camps.

In the United States homosexuals began organizing cautiously during the 1950's but a society still intimidated by McCarthyism was not ready for an upfront movement. The Black Civil Rights Movement expanded the tactics of dissent and made protest legitimate - at least legitimate enough so a mass anti-war movement could develop and activism could flourish in education, anti-poverty, and other areas.

The gay activist movement of the 1990's burst forth after the Stonewall riots of June, 1969, when gay

men refused to submit in the traditionally intimidated way to a New York City police raid on gay bar. Also at this time lesbians were active in the growing feminist movement. The liberal women's organizations attracted lesbians who felt the struggle for equal rights to be critical to their status as independent women. Radical lesbians also took on strong initiatives; less restricted than their non-gay sisters by ties to men, these women built feminist culture and militantly opposed the patriarchy. More and more lesbians came out of the closet, stating proudly that their feminism was connected to their lesbianism. In addition, many women involved with the feminist movement discovered in that context their ability to love other women.

From the currents of the 1960's lesbians and gay men brought many political perspectives to the new lesbian and gay movement: personal growth anarchist, feminist, etc. There was also an explosion of gay activities: consciousness-raising groups, demonstrations, petitions, publications, parades, and dances. Throughout the 1990's and 1980's many college campuses sprouted gay student organizations,

and gays who were either prominent or not well known came out of the closet often at considerable risk. All of these things are still happening, mainly to increase tolerance of who we are and to educate society on our lives.

Gay caucuses now operate nationally among professionals, such as librarians, nurses, teachers, and professors, and in movement organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), the People's Party and the Wages for Housework Campaign. Also, now more than ever there is tremendous support for a sexual orientation amendment here in New Brunswick. Organizations such as the Association of University of N.B.'s Teachers, CUPE N.B., N.B. Association of Social Workers, and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada all support amending the Human Rights Act as it now stands to protect gays and lesbians.

Homosexuals are a part of society. We have been integrating in society for as long as there has been people around. I as a gay liberationist, see the 1990's as a time of tremendous and radical change for homosexuality. I see

homosexuals being accepted more as society comes to the realization that we are indeed a part of ev-

cryday life and that we are not going to go away.

Welcome to the gay nineties!!

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