

The Death of Gay Liberation?

By David Thorstad

This past spring David Thorstad submitted the following article to *Workers Vanguard*, as well as a number of other left and gay papers. A former president of New York's Gay Activists Alliance (1975-76), Thorstad was a founding member of the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights (1977), as well as co-author of the book, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)*. In 1978 he was a founding member of NAMBLA (North American Man/Boy Love Association). This organization, which supports the sexual rights of gays and especially youth, has been repeatedly singled out for vicious attack by the government—and by other gay groups seeking "acceptance" from this racist, capitalist

state that persecutes homosexuals.

As always with signed articles, the opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect our editorial viewpoint. In the case of Thorstad, our differences and exchange of views go back a ways. Thorstad was briefly prominent as a spokesman for the Socialist Workers Party in the early 1970s, before resigning in disgust when the SWP abandoned its brief hypocritical flirtation with the "gay liberation movement" (see "Gays and the SWP," *Women and Revolution* No. 24, Spring 1982). Our most significant difference has been with Thorstad's

longstanding "only gays can liberate gays" belief in the liberating potential of radical lifestylism, so characteristic of the early '70s New Leftist sectoralist movements.

The logic of New Left sectoralism has long since played itself out, as yesterday's "gay liberationists" have become today's hard-nosed constituency lobbyists, wheeling and dealing in the Democratic Party and letting cops march while excluding the likes of NAMBLA. Thus, while we don't share Thorstad's sense of betrayal, we appreciate his powerful indictment of today's toadying

would-be bureaucrats for Clinton and Reno, the mass murderers of Waco.

As we said in "Stop the Witchhunt of Peter Melzer!" (WV No. 587, 5 November 1993):

"The portrayal of NAMBLA as child molesters has nothing to do with the protection of children; rather it is part of a generalized campaign against sex aimed at the 'moral rearmament' of the American people which would bolster the bourgeoisie's authority. The guiding principle for sexual relations between all people ought to be one of effective consent."

Defense of NAMBLA should be an elementary act of basic decency—but it seems it is left to us Marxists to practice the basic principle that "an injury to one is an injury to all."

The gay movement faces an old paradox. Just when it has attained a level of social influence greater than any achieved over the past century, it is losing its soul.

Gay leaders prefer political correctness to variety and ambiguity, sameness to difference. I myself yearn for the spirit of a banner I saw in 1971: "Love is a many-gendered thing."

Passionless bureaucrats on C-SPAN press a politics of victimization (copied from middle-class feminism) and a liberal strategy of expanding state protection of "gay people" rather than of liberating sexuality. Victimization is "in" these days—there's money in it; it can get you acquitted of murder. As a strategy for extending rights, though, it reminds me of the "Victim of the Press" button worn by the ex-homosexual zombies of Aesthetic Realism.

No talk here of empowerment or liberation (passé in these postmodern, post-everything times), rarely of repealing sodomy and other anti-sex laws, and never of laws that discriminate against youth. Rather than fight the anti-sex legacy of Judeo-Christianity, gay leaders seem to ignore it, even embrace it.

Oblivious to the source of gay oppression in institutions like the family, gays lobby the state to bless their unions—and stage a "mass wedding" in the nation's capital fit for the Rev. Sun Myung Moon. The state is using AIDS to reimpose coupledness and control over sexuality, and how do gay leaders respond? By embracing monogamy and marriage—this despite the fact that half of straight marriages fail, and monogamy is a bit player in the mammalian heritage (fewer than 3 percent of mammals are monogamous).

We Are Family—or wannabe.

Hundreds of thousands marched in gay pride in Washington in April 1993. The event became a virtual love fest for President Clinton—before the blood had dried on his and Janet Reno's hands after their incineration of the Waco dissidents (among whom 25 children). That numbing act of police-state terrorism and child abuse gave little pause to gay leaders, who were enthusiastic vote-getters for the principle-less draft dodger turned mass murderer.

Flush from a meeting with Com-

mander in Chief Clinton a week before the march on Washington, Human Rights Campaign Fund executive director Tim McFeeley voiced confidence that Clinton would rip up the ban on gays in the military by July: "It's not just what the President said, but how he said it. It's a feeling you got by looking into his eyes" (*New York Times*, 18 April 1993). McFeeley expressed similar sappy certainty on Donahue. All that gay money donated to big-business bimbos (instead of being used to fight gay oppression) was about to pay off. Clinton nevertheless opted for continuing a discriminatory policy.

Gay leaders argue that since "lesbians and gay men" (p.c. nomenclature nowadays) fought so well in the U.S. war against Iraq, they deserve recognition as cogs in the war machine. As we prepare to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, one of their main goals is to get the state to welcome same-sexers as servants of the New World Disorder. Proud out-of-the-closet patriotism.

Despite their rush to embrace the military issue, no gay leaders invoked

history's most renowned example of same-sex military heroism—the "sacred band" of Thebes. That would not have been p.c. since the Theban Band involved men and youths, and pederasty is a secret not to be told. (These days, only androphilia is p.c.)

On one level, surely, gay men and lesbians who are fighting to be in the military are extending the civil rights of all of us. Their contribution to sexual liberation is more iffy. And the morality of militarism is never questioned.

Can this be what Stonewall was about?

The first group to emerge from Stonewall—the Gay Liberation Front—struggled against the Vietnam War. It was exhilarating to see the GLF banner waving in antiwar demos. Today, gay leaders wave the Stars and Stripes and hope to bring gay pride along in the next bombing raid on Third World babies. In this respect, little of the Stonewall spirit survives.

Hoping to appease the Christian right and the Clinton administration, gaycrats from Barney Frank on down join Jesse Helms in calling on the International

Lesbian and Gay Association to expel the North American Man/Boy Love Association—the only U.S. group active in the ILGA for more than a decade. But heterosexual supremacists object to all varieties of homosexuality, not just this or that subgroup.

On January 26, 1994, the U.S. Senate unanimously (99-0) adopted a Helms amendment to withhold \$118 million from the United Nations unless the ILGA expelled NAMBLA. Not a peep from the gay establishment against this antigay Republican diktat—for which, in fact, they paved the way.

Pat Califia has observed that boy-lovers and SMers face the brunt of anti-sex repression—thereby winning for the broader movement the elbowroom it enjoys. That is why NAMBLA and SM figure prominently in right-wing religious propaganda. But don't expect the gay establishment to acknowledge this. To them, "An injury to one is an injury to all" is a mere phrase.

In England, the gay movement has been campaigning to lower the age of consent to 16 for male-male sex. (It is already 16 for straight and lesbian sex.) On February 21, activists stormed Parliament when it adopted a "compromise" age of 18! In contrast, in the United States—where the age of consent varies from 14 to 18 in states where sodomy laws have been repealed (you can't do it legally anywhere else no matter how old you are)—gay leaders have agreed not to challenge whatever the arbitrary age happens to be.

Lowering any of the ages of consent would advance the civil rights of youth and their (often older) lovers. But the new homophile establishment will have none of it. For them, pederasty remains taboo and anathema. Peri Jude Radecic, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, recently stated: "Lowering age of consent laws has never been and never will be a part of the mission of NGLTF" (*Village Voice*, 8 February). The gay movement in England fights to lower the age of consent, but in the United States, *never?*

New York's Gay Activists Alliance (from which NGLTF was an elitist offshoot in 1973) and other post-Stonewall groups in the United States, Canada and Europe opposed age of

consent laws on the grounds that they protect no one; rather, they criminalize *consensual sex* (the best kind).

Stonewall meant struggle. It meant putting your livelihood on the line. It meant irreverence, pride in outsider status, youth sexuality, drag, sexual ambiguity. It meant rediscovering gay history. It meant solidarity with gay prisoners and anyone who is oppressed.

Solidarity—there's a concept that now counts for less. When was the last time you heard a guppie call for freeing gay prisoners? Their silence may suggest that

there aren't any, but thousands of gay men call a U.S. jail home because of sexual activity that was no less consensual than anything Radecic, McFeeley or Frank engage in.

A 14- or 15-year-old has as much right as they do to sexual pleasure with the partner of his or her choice and should not need the imprimatur of the state or any gay/lesbian Pope. In Minnesota, where the age of consent is a ridiculous 18, lesbian directors of an antiviolence agency have called for locking up any gay man who has sex with a youth under

18! That reflects an antigay male agenda, in which yelling "child abuse" is a way to increase funding. "When they lay those dollars on you, your soul goes" (Malcolm X).

Gay liberation is falling victim to its success. With growth have come middle-class efforts to get into the mainstream, to win a place at the het table (two current clichés)—even if this means anathematizing pederasty, a ubiquitous same-sex variant. This is a form of self-hatred.

The loss to AIDS of many sex radicals has also been a heavy blow, from which gay liberation will not soon recover.

Fighting discrimination is necessary. Civil rights and sexual freedom issues have always coexisted; they complement each other. Personally, I have felt more discrimination from other homosexuals than from straights—in 1989, for example, when New York's Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center refused to rent space to NAMBLA for a concert by America's greatest living poet, Allen Ginsberg (boylover and NAMBLA supporter).

Your case against discrimination is weakened if you yourself discriminate.

Man-boy love has been a player in gay liberation since the mid-nineteenth century. The first gay magazine in the world, *Der Eigene*, celebrated boylove and anarchism. Pederasty is the form that homosexuality most commonly has taken throughout Western—and not only

Western—culture. It is inseparable from the high points of Western civilization (Ancient Greece and the Renaissance). It lies close to the roots of gay liberation.

Attempts to purge it resemble those in the early 1970s to shove drag queens aside—despite their role in Stonewall. The aim is to corral rebellion, to allow the Republican party to set the gay agenda, to deny homosexuality. This is not the spirit of Stonewall.

In all cultures and in all historical periods, men and youths have been getting it on, because they are naturally attracted to each other. Efforts to deny this, and to demonize man-boy love, are grotesque. ■