

GAY IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Dear Gay persons and friends:

On March 4, 1973, I went with two friends, Don McFall and Mike Martinez, to The Matador, a Gay bar in Birmingham, Alabama. After we were seated, I played some songs on the juke box and returned to my chair, in which, at this time, a dear friend named Nora Kennedy was sitting. I leaned toward her and touched her shoulder in greeting. She called my name, put her arms around me, and began crying as she asked if I were mad at her as we had been out of contact with each other, and went on to describe personal traumatic experiences she had undergone since we had last met. My response was to embrace her in return and to kiss her lips when she indicated that this act on my part was desired. During this exchange, I knelt beside her chair and rocked her in my arms. As she became more calm, I got up and sat on the edge of her chair. We then went to the dance floor and danced to slow rhythmed music and returned to our table at which time she explained that she had to meet some other friends who were expecting her. About 15 minutes later, an Officer of the Vice Squad came to my table, showed me his badge, and told me to come outside with him. As we walked down the street, he informed me that I was under arrest, and in answer to my inquiry as to the charge, he replied, "Disorderly conduct." Nora was sitting in the police car, and as he opened the door, the Vice Squad Officer grasped my arm and pushed me into the back seat, saying, "Now ya'll finish what you were doing inside." Nora was crying again and hysterical with fear and panic -- reciting passages from the Bible and pleading with the Vice Squad Officer for a show of mercy and human compassion. Her reaction was that of a person whose head is in a guillotine, which, indeed, it was. The Vice Officer responded with "Shut up, bitch" and other derogatory remarks.

Our trial was held on March 14, 1973. The Vice Officer testified that in this dimly lit Gay bar, he could see clearly that each of us was caressing the other's genital areas and breasts and that he could see both our "crotches" (sic) from where he was sitting, even though my back was toward him. Nora, myself, and two witnesses present at the trial testified that no "sexual" touching occurred during this encounter, and for my part this omission was due to the fact that Nora did not indicate to me that such an action was needed in the immediate situation. Despite the fact that the Vice Officer, whose name is Orville Jerome Webster, contradicted himself in his testimony as regards to our positions in space in relation to him and his later saying that his view of us was of our respective fronts, the judge found us guilty, fining us \$100.00 each. We are presently on Appeal bond.

Who was victimized by our actions? The Gay bars in Birmingham, Alabama, are the only community centers we have, and we use them primarily for communal sharing of experiences and communication's headquarters. Although we have been exposed to and have been to some extent corrupted by heterosexual role patterns, we do not, on the whole, adhere to the rigid requirements of conduct found in "strait" bars as we feel that this rigidity is the result of guilt arising from the exploitation and oppression of the Female Principle in women and men that pervades heterosexual behavior. No Gay person is in the least disturbed by the show of affection and caring and mutual eroticism between/among persons. Furthermore, we feel deeply that any relationship involving mutual tenderness and caring should, now more than ever in these trying times for all humanity, be respected and supported by the community, whether this community be a group of friends a township, or the international community called the world.

One of the numerous reasons that Gay persons are considered to be "outlaws" by the heterosexual power structure is that we hold true to experienced reality rather than taught reality, and this becomes significantly a threat to the Establishment when the experienced reality that we act on is in opposition to taught reality. We are taught to limit our overt behavior to that which is simplistically "reasonable" to the outside observer, and, under this norm rule, the outside observer is allowed to judge us only on the basis of what is apparent to him and subject to the limitations of his interpretational understanding. In this case I comforted another woman rather than reprimanding her for showing human feeling in the presence of others, and without regard to how it might look to a person who would fail to attribute intelligence and interpersonal caring to our relationship.

Secondly, due to my conviction that sex role expectations place severe limits on our human and humane growth potential, and particularly on that of women, I dress in such a way as to appear neither distinctly male nor distinctly female. This might be acknowledged to the hierarchy in which the power structure in which the group benefits from the subjugation of the female group, including those males who identify with women.

This sex roleless appearance might also indicate to a representative of the Establishment that I am, quite assuredly, Lesbian, offering myself to women rather than to men, and allowing my behavior to be influenced exclusively by the needs of women rather than those of men.

Every once in a while, and almost exclusively among Gay persons, love and the human feeling of one person for another, that is, the feeling of warmth which happens spontaneously, of itself, and which therefore cannot be made to happen or socially determined or used for any purpose beyond itself, wins over the power structure concocted of money, prestige, and security which dictates relationships by inbreeding and perpetuating fear and insecurity in the disadvantaged group, and to the extent that tenderness and human interconnectedness wins over the power-structure dictated relationships, humanity is alive; to the extent that power relationships are chosen over those of mutual feeling, we are dead.

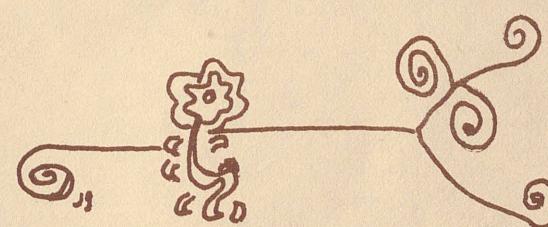
The Gay persons in Birmingham feel that Officers of the Law should be available to us in the event of aggressive behavior on the part of one person toward another if we ourselves were unable to equalize the situation, and the Gay community would willingly contribute money to aid in the growth of a fair, just city called Birmingham, but we can only consider this method of making money for the city via the Vice Squad's continual harassing theft totally despicable. In this country money is blood, and the arrests of Gay persons at \$100.00 a head is nothing less than genocide.

This letter has been written in the hope of promoting a communication system among Gay persons, and for the purpose of requesting advice and comments. Our next trial date has not yet been set, but it will be trial by jury. Due to the political and socio-economic oppression of homosexual women and men, we expect the jury to be heterosexual. It seems to me that it would take a miracle to be found to be Lesbian and not guilty by a heterosexual jury, but I intend to use this opportunity for the purpose of speaking as many words as I can relating to homosexual oppression and philosophy. Please help us by sending your thoughts to:

Freddie Creed
1517 South 17th Street
Birmingham, Alabama
35205

In Gay love,

Judie



SOMETHING FISHY AT CAMPBELLS

By Lorrien

Over 100 women, mostly Black, and many the heads of households, have been on strike against the J.H. Miles Co. of Norfolk, Virginia, since March 8, 1973. J.H. Miles is the processing plant for the clams and shrimp that go into Campbell's soups. The machinery at the Norfolk plant is sent from the Campbell plant in Camden, New Jersey.

Annie Beazley and Dolores Coker are two of the striking workers. They were in New York recently to publicize their cause, which has been treated to a virtual news blackout in the Norfolk press, never mind nationally. The major issue is Miles' total opposition to the union (Local 26 of the Distributive Workers of America) which the workers have had for several years, to Miles' great distaste. The State of Virginia has a Right to Work Law, and Miles has not hesitated to hire strikebreakers to keep production going as usual.

Beazley and Coker described their jobs to me. Their workday begins at 9 a.m. and lasts till 6 p.m. - at least. There is no overtime pay. The regular hourly wage is \$2.15; one of the strike demands is an hourly pay raise of 50cents.

According to the women, items such as maggots, and other assorted flora and fauna occasionally pass down the assembly line and get processed into your favorite 'mm mm good' soups. The foremen and other officials present refuse to stop the line, despite the workers' protests. In apparent contradiction to this lack of concern for sanitary conditions, the women are required to wear boots (\$6.99/pair; life expectancy one to two months); gloves (\$1/pair; guaranteed to self-destruct in one to two days) and aprons. The company conveniently sells the gloves, and thoughtfully will deduct their costs from your pay packet for you.

Then there are the bathrooms - or lack of them. The men's supply room adjoins the women's bathroom in the 'clam building'. The men say they'll 'turn their backs'. The women say that's not good enough and added the bathroom issue to their list of demands. The women in the 'oyster building' are not even this

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household workers

Household workers, 97% women and 64% black, are organizing for better pay, training, and benefits such as sick leave, paid vacations, holidays, and unemployment compensation. According to the 1972 National Committee on Household Employment Conference, their median annual income is \$2,072, and almost two-thirds of female household workers are at least partly self-supporting.

Della Shaw has organized 255 household workers in Tulsa, Oklahoma, to work for fair pay and dignity and respect for their professional skills. The women of the new Tulsa Household Employees' Association wear uniforms on the job - a tailored lavender jacket with an insignia on the sleeve, a gold key framed by the letters THEA against a dark purple background - to symbolize these goals.

The Tulsa group is setting up courses in first aid and driver education, and have classes now in child care and nursing, taught by two registered nurses, and another in parliamentary procedure. They are also trying to establish a minimum wage of at least \$2 an hour, and have been successful in pay raises in individual cases.

With the help of a speaking tour by Jo Hulett of the National Committee on Household Employment, Della Shaw organized the union in only nine months.

Other household worker groups working now are the Professional Household Workers' Association, New York City, the Household Technicians of Greater New York, and the San Francisco Household Technicians. These groups identify themselves with the women's movement and have appealed to all women, their primary employers, to become aware of the plight of the household worker.

lesbian mothers win

Two lesbian mothers, Arlene Smith and Eunice Brown, won a three year court fight for custody of their eight children, after charges of moral depravity were dropped in Lapeer County Probate Court in Michigan. Twice courts ruled that each woman could keep her own children, if they didn't live with each other. The women refused to separate and appealed each time, while their children were put in foster homes. The prosecutor had to prove moral depravity, which he could not do, not just lesbianism, but that the women had sex in front of the children. He admitted later that there had never been a question of neglect and that the children were better off with their mothers.

off our backs / february 1974

lucky. Their bathroom is for the foremen only; they have to cross the road to the clam building. They have ten minutes to do so. At the stroke of the 11th minute, a Warning Slip is issued. Two Warning Slips equal two days layoff. Five equals five. Six equals firing, so you don't have to compute the mathematics of the seventh.

Their job is defined as 'seasonal' work. The season is 12 months long. During the strike some women have attempted to take other employment. \$1.70 is a high pay rate for an unskilled Black woman in Norfolk. Miles says the women may return to work at any time - *without the union!* The workers currently being hired to replace the strikers were not members of the union and have remained unaffiliated. Most trucks servicing the plant are non-union as well, and cross the picket lines daily. Unionized truckers do not cross the lines. The result is that Campbell's seafood soups still fill the supermarket shelves, while the striking women are

told they are 'liable for suit' if they directly picket the Campbell company.

'Fight Back', a New York-based organization dedicated to equal employment for all working-class people brought the two women representatives to the North. Maye Williams, a Fight Back official, said that the Mayor of Norfolk is well-known for his stand on Women: that they should go home and stop messing around, she paraphrased.

The biggest obstacle against the Miles' women is that there are only 100 or so of them versus a huge national corporation. What they need now is solidarity with other Campbell workers (there is discontent at the Camden N.J. plant, where production shifts to the South - with cheaper labor, and automation putting those workers out of their jobs) and a nationwide boycott of the soups that made Andy Warhol famous and over 100 women exploited.

W.O.A.R.

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