

# Lesbians Fight Oppressive Laws

Paragraph 244 of the Czechoslovak penal code prohibits sex under 18 for homosexuals (while the age of consent is 15 for heterosexuals). What about lesbians? "We're so deviant, so abnormal, it's better we don't exist," one lesbian commented snidely.

Although Paragraph 224 is rarely used, its provisions are sweeping. Three types of homosexual activity are illegal: to "make use of the dependency of another," to offer, intend to offer, or accept compensation for sex, or to create a public offense by performing a public sexual act, or by becoming public knowledge.

"In other words, if my lover is living in my flat, if she's not working and I share my pay with her, it's a criminal act. Or if my neighbors find out we're lovers and are offended," one lesbian told me.

Lambda, the Czech lesbian and gay rights organization, is working with lawyers and politicians to get rid of these laws. Before last November, the state prosecutor's office was already seeking loopholes to decriminalize homosexuality.

Lambda had its founding conference May 5 as a gay and lesbian umbrella organization for the Czech lands (Bohemia and Moravia). "In Lambda we have 171 members, of whom about 20 are women. We have begun to meet separately as women," said organizer Karla Hyankova.

In the June elections, a gay rights candidate, actor Jiri Bromada, ran on the Movement for Civil Rights ticket. Lambda has begun to publish a monthly newspaper, which has more articles and pictures by and of men than women. But the second edition featured two strong and thoughtful pieces by lesbians.

Johanna, currently working as a nurse on an alcoholism ward, hopes to get a job as an editor of Lambda's glossy magazine slated to begin publishing in January. She'd be the one woman on the editorial staff.

I joined the lesbians of Lambda at a social hour. Some were there to socialize, some to talk about problems, some to look for relationships. Karla is the organizer, collecting dues, planning programs and making arrangements to travel to the ILOA world conference in Stockholm.

One intense issue among lesbians in Prague is transsexuality, or women wanting sex-change operations to become men. Six transsexual women and one bisexual woman took part in a woman's homosexuality therapy group led by a straight male sexologist. One, Chris, an abstract painter, wants to raise the \$30,000 to have a sex change operation abroad. "I don't like my body but I wouldn't want it operated on in Czechoslovakia," Chris said. "When Lambda was started I worked in it very much. But now I feel it doesn't meet my needs."

Vladka, a postgraduate student in the biology of reproduction, talked about her experience as a former member of the women's homosexuality group. "When I first came to the doctor, he said, "You love women, and you don't like your body? You must be a transsexual." "It took me finding myself, with the help of other Lambda women, to know I could be a woman and love women. I don't think the doctor is a bad man. But he only knows about 'deviance,' not about lesbian lives."

The lesbians in Lambda have begun to develop contacts with lesbians in the United States and Western and Eastern Europe. But they're keen for information, publications, books and visitors. Contact them via Lambda Praha, P.O. Box A, 15006 Praha 56, Czechoslovakia. Tel: 439-98-74.