



Gay activists rally with SCLC, NWRO, and other groups at Miami Democratic Convention.

# OUT OF THE CLOSETS

**Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation**  
edited by Karla Jay and Allen Young (Douglas  
paperback), 403 pp., \$3.95

*Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* is many things at once: a selection of pivotal documents whose publication marked turning points in the gay liberation movement (like "The Woman-Identified Woman"); personal statements of pain, guilt, suffering, happiness; impersonal, programmatic analyses defining gay oppression, attributing blame, mapping out future actions; interviews with a Black prisoner and a street transvestite among others; grapplings with socialist politics. There's also a "Selected Gay Bibliography" and "An International Directory of Gay Organizations" (not very current nor accurate—one of two listings for Georgia gives the address of the Atlanta GLF as the *Bird* office, which hasn't been the case for a good year or so).

The "voices" we hear in this volume speak with varying intonations, pitches, accents, and they explore different aspects of gay experience without reaching consensus. This is as it should be. An anthology is not the place to look for a coherent, fully worked out and consistent ideology. *Out of the Closets* suggests strongly, indeed, that no such collective theory is to be expected from the gay movement, now or for some time to come. Perhaps ironically, the divisions and uncertainties of the voices are most apparent in the section titled "Moving Together," which maps out tentative directions for the future. The book challenges and questions; it does not define nor answer.

Accordingly, the most valuable and interesting parts of the anthology are those in which a problem is approached from several different sides. The section called "Gay People vs. the 'Professionals'" examines the biases of the shrinks through the eyes of several unfortunate victims, but it also provides a brief glimpse of victimization from the other side, in some notes taken by a gay orderly in a private mental hospital. His efforts to reach out and touch patients in an unconventional and "unprofessional" way are regarded with fear and contempt by the hospital staff.

Here is a side of the gay experience we have been much less exposed to than the barbarities inflicted on us by fixated Freudians. Robbie Skeist's "The Orderly" reminds us in a very concrete way that we gay people are not just misunderstood sufferers but persons whose special oppression allows us to understand the suffering of others and work

to alleviate it. Frustrating as his experience is, Robbie shows those of us both in the closet and out an alternative to guilt, self-hatred, and self-pity. In a juster society than ours, one that truly values and utilizes human diversity, gay people like Robbie Skeist will find fulfillment and outside support in helping and loving the sick.

Fidel's Cuba is the society many of us looked to as the model of human justice where freedom for all was a reality, not a grotesque myth. Some of the most fascinating pages in *Out of the Closet* concern gay perspectives on the Cuban Revolution and its relevance to gay people. A careful reading of "Cuba: Gay as the Sun" should lay to rest forever the paranoid fantasy of many straight socialists that the American gay community has mounted a "massive, one-sided attack" on the Cuban Revolution. Unfortunately, precious few straight socialists will bother to pick up this book. What, they will ask, could it possibly say to them?

Nowhere have I read a more balanced and convincing defense of the Revolution than in the forum discussion published under the title "On the Venceremos Brigade"—convincing precisely because Cuba's shortcomings are acknowledged, struggled with, placed in perspective. I found it profoundly moving to hear a forum of gay brigadistas, all of whom had suffered personally from their experiences in Cuba, attest to the vigor, beauty, and promise of the Revolution. Their questioner tries to push an analogy between the treatment of gay people in Cuba and the Soviet Union, but all of them reject the comparison, insisting, in the words of one of them, that "Cuba has learned from Russian mistakes." They make clear, as well, their conviction that Cuba has learned from their own painful presence there, as they learned from Cuba.

The brigadistas' ability to see gay oppression within a larger context of social imbalances and displacements, however, is not at all the dominant note of this anthology. Far more common is what might be called a gay chauvinist perspective that passes, I fear, for an ideology within much of the gay liberation movement without being grounded in any clear historical analysis. This view may take one of two equally distorted forms.

The first makes a simple equation between sexism and capitalism. You'll find this equation, for example, in a ridiculous statement by the Gay Liberation Party. They're responding to the outrageous attack on homosexuality by the Cuban Congress on Education and Culture, which perhaps accounts for

their hysteria and confusion. They say, "The only way to ensure a straight Cuba is to re-establish capitalism." Bullshit. What evidence is there that Cuba was any "straighter" under Batista than under Castro? What evidence is there, on the other hand, that socialists are more sensitive to the needs and natures of gay people than capitalists?

The problem here is that there's a very close connection between the economic oppression of capitalism and the sexual oppression engaged in by every known society, but the two are not identical. Both manifest themselves by exploiting and dividing people; both profit from competition rather than cooperation. The main difference is that economic oppression is specific and selective in its choice of victims, and the means of combatting it can be scientifically studied and methodically pursued; whereas sexual oppression is universal in its appearance, and no one has yet found a cure for it.

The dreary old economic determinists, of course, are certain that socialism is the quick and easy answer to all human problems, and straight socialists are fond of blandly telling gay people they will be assured of "freedom" come the Revolution. The examples of the strides taken by the Cubans and Chinese in attacking sexism as it affects women are, unfortunately, of little relevancy. Reports that homosexuals in China are put through "re-education" courses to cure them of their condition suggests that the Chinese, like the Cubans and all other peoples, suffer from a very imperfect understanding of human nature and the potential benefits of human differences to societies.

This universal failing does not justify, however, the second form gay chauvinism takes—what might be called sexual determinism. According to this theory, sexism is root and branch of all that is wrong with the world. Thus, by this account, to be gay and committed to ending gay oppression is inevitably a way of working to end all other forms of oppression. Allen Young, in his preface to the anthology, says, "Gay Liberation is a total revolutionary movement." Yet this is patently untrue for the vast majority of gay people. Even if we interpret the statement as referring only to the small number of gay liberationists who are true revolutionaries, it is decidedly misleading. When gay liberationists join other oppressed people, when straight socialists and Third World fighters join gay liberationists, then we have a "total revolutionary movement." Not before. And it's never going to come by nitpicking over who must first cross the line to join whom, by insisting all straight men and women must "come out" or all gay men and women must "stay in" until "more important" priorities are disposed of.

Perhaps the most dangerous form gay chauvinism takes is the insistence that gay liberation takes precedence over and encompasses all other movement activities. In the same passage from his preface, Allen Young says, "We do not get validated by our participation in anti-war marches; we join those marches because imperialist wars are sexist." That seems to me a preposterous statement. Why do we as gay people need a gay reason to protest actions that call forth their own perfectly sufficient justification for outrage? If—and this is so—we don't need to have our presence validated, why invent a lame and unconvincing validation? Gay people have correctly complained that straight observers regard us as sexual entities, with no other interests or qualities, but we invite just that distorting viewpoint by arguing as Allen Young does here.

Only at one point in *Out of the Closets* is the gay chauvinist perspective really challenged and an alternative to this impasse investigated. Sandy Blixton, in an essay significantly titled "Viewpoint of an Anti-Sexist Marxist," writes, "Nevertheless, I am gayer and prouder than ever before! I am

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