

OPERA
OPERATION
OPPRESSION

B. Payne

I am oppressed by the face that says my face
Must be white and my hair straight so I can be beautiful

By an economy that puts a price on me
Which isn't tax free and is Uncle Sam's

By a morality which damns homosexuality and co-opts
Heterosexuality for sexual freedom

By a tradition which puts down abortion
Or the sanctity of pregnancy

I am oppressed in an economy that is a land of debt only

That drops me in a sea of sea and detergent
and calls it dishwater

That suffocates me in an air of filtered fags and pipelines
certain on boxsets and sulphur discards
and calls it breathable

I am oppressed by nature boys who can't blow nature's great
And replant dead and counterfeit in greedy greens and booby fees

Whose hands are pressed in sanctity beneath a trinity
Of protection fees, corporations, and commodities

Whose heads are bowed religiously with eyes designed not to see
Blacks, Reds and Yellows along the

I am oppressed by another human being claiming my acts
Or my mis: 111 111
Can't be my own property

Oppressing a hard believing male puppy dog terrier
And using us the same way they do

Oppressing a hard believing "fascist"
Obliterating sensibility
Crushing sentimentality.

Oppressing us

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homosexuals ..

Pat: The first question I would like to ask you to discuss is what is your concept of the movement?

Kay: People are always asking me what the movement means, I am always asking other people what the movement means, and I don't quite know myself. For 9 or 10 years, the movement has meant to me personally the peace movement.

Bernard: Kay, the movement means something a little bit wider than you have expressed. Movements have developed all over the world, and the movement has meant to me - I've been in the movement over 50 years - any attempt to change. Whether it be political change, social change, or economic change. The movement, as I understand it, means that people organize or even work privately and individually to make changes in the country. Historically there are times when you work individually, and

all student organizations. Also the John Reed Club. As time went on I got more and more involved but always from a political end because I was convinced that nothing but a change in the system could change the oppression against blacks, against women, against children who were being unfaithfully employed at the time. Also against homosexuals. Now I'm working with homosexuals in the movement because I'm convinced that only in getting our rightful place in the movement and demanding an end to our own oppression can we ever really make changes for homosexuals.

Bob: I was instrumental in forming the 7 Arts chapter of CORE. Most of my past work has been with non-whites. In this chapter we demanded rights for Black people in show business. The first thing we did was break down the industrial shows. No non-caucasian had ever been

You can feel very foolish in a swimming pool in a strange land. Nigger and nigger were the two words we kept hearing. You are scared but we all looked happy. Thankfully Joan, a big girl was much better than us pretend happiness. We splashed each other and kept hands joined. I looked at Joan, who was taller than I. The water had been up around I breasts which were huge - her suddenly I breasts were exposed - the water was behind them. I thought she had just raised herself, but then I looked and I noticed the water was going down. In 20 minutes we were standing in an empty pool!

Bernard: In the early days of demonstrations the threat we had to fear the most was the mounted police. Most of us were under the hoofs of police horses all the time. You children, men, women - even old people. What I found was that this kind of reaction to



there have been times when the movement catches up masses of people as it did in Russia before the revolution. Now the movement includes people who want to make changes whether they be Panthers who are changing the system for black people, or Woman's Liberation who are concerned with changes for women, or socialists who are concerned with changes in the system. Or whether it be an organization like the Gay Liberation Front concerned with fighting against the oppression of homosexuals, but fighting within the framework of the wider movement. These problems are not isolated, but within the context of the oppression of the system against us all.

Bob: The movement today gets me a little up tight. I find people saying I am the movement. The movement can be 5 people who refuse to pay the subway fare. During the Christmas week vigil there was a little old lady marching with me and she had on her Dove button. She was terribly non-violent and marching for what she believed was right: she wanted political prisoners freed. A cop hassled us and I was very angry. I called him a pig. She said, "Let me do it." She was sort of a hooker type - sort of a tough old broad, and she charmed him. She came back and said, "You have your way, and I have mine. That's true. This woman is as much a part of the movement as I, even though we are working in different ways."

Pat: I would like to ask you specifically - what ways have you found to get involved in the movement?

Bernard: Well, my first activity was when I was 5 years old. My parents had organized the first Student Friends of the Russian Revolution I had a tray of little red flags and I put them on people and got money from them. When I was about 13 lots of us were arrested for picketing and handing out leaflets and demonstrating. We were helping the workers who were locked out, we were protesting the war budgets, we were protesting growing unemployment. At college, I helped organize the first NSL - The National Student League - which is the granddaddy of

lined. We threw a picket line around 8th Ave. and 57th St. where most of the Amur show rooms are. We also got off to the World's Fair that was one of the times I was busted.

Kay: It seems that we had been arrested together. I was arrested at the World's Fair too. Politics make strange cell mates. I think I got into the movement first as a Quaker. As a Quaker I looked out my window in the West Village and noticed a lot of children amassing things. I thought in a few years they'll be big enough to push the button and, you know, somebody ought to do something now. I sort of got kidnaped by the children and started a thing called Workshop of Children which I ran for three years. During this time the civil rights thing was building up but since I was working with these children who had a great deal of trouble with the law, I felt I couldn't be arrested. I thought they couldn't distinguish between civil disobedience and crime exactly. However as soon as that thing folded I was delighted to go to jail at the CORE demonstration you referred to, Bob.

Bob: I wasn't delighted. I volunteered to be arrested and the Pinkerton men were so new and so non-violent it was really difficult. I finally had to dance on the bar at the Schaeffer Pavilion. Then I worked with the Survivors of Nagasaki Hiroshima who were traveling around the world. I worked with the people at New England Committee for Non-violent Action. We participated in the blockade at the missile base of Lamakaza, in Canada, at the white house, at prisons, and at submarine bases. And I went into the Peace Corps. I can't think of any other exciting things to brag about.

Bob: I went south after the civil rights bill was signed. We went to a public swimming pool in one demonstration. Myself, a very big black girl, and a black boy. We had a big hassle getting in; but finally we demanded in, and we got in. We joined hands and jumped into the water. There were about 50 people when we got there and in one or two seconds there were three.

brought a stronger commitment from us. And also brought more and more people to the movement. I wonder if the powers that be are aware that they build the movement themselves with their actions.

Pat: It seems here as you talk about your own experiences and some of the thoughts and feelings which have come to you from those experiences we're getting a fuller meaning of the word oppression. So we might tie it up here by saying the movement is making changes in the establishment where it oppresses us. Your experiences seem to have been radicalizing. If you are in a situation where you see the extreme degrees of the establishment oppression - you see the actual physical effects on people - you become radicalized. Like you were saying, Bernard - about -

Bernard: - about the system being it's worst enemy. Pat: I would like to ask you how you see the Gay Liberation Movement.

Bernard: I see the Gay Liberation Movement as a process which will help liberate gay people by making them fully part of the whole liberation movement. The movement for change in the system that will eventually annihilate any form of oppression. Before GLF I was active in these movements, but anonymously - nobody was conscious of the fact that I was homosexual. I think the only way we can gain respect for ourselves and any of the help that we need from everyone else in overcoming our oppression is by showing that we participate even though they don't understand why we participate. I think even among a lot of our own people we have to fight for the right to participate as homosexuals.

Bob: I've always been active as a homosexual. Openly, but never publicly. In the past six or seven months I have suddenly found myself living the life of a public homosexual. I find resentment in many parts of the movement. When I find it, I confront it. This is very healthy for me; and it's very healthy for the movement. We can't hold the movement up as being any better or any worse than the rest of us. Gay

. in the movement . . . by **Bob Maxwell**

Liberation to me is seeing 35 or 40 homosexuals marching as homosexuals in a vigil to free political prisoners. We have been political prisoners, and we will be political prisoners. Homosexuals are beginning to see themselves as an oppressed minority. I don't think homosexuality is a magic tie that binds us all but in a sense there is something. It's being proud of ourselves. And I think that's what liberation will help us find — a pride that we can just stand up and be proud of ourselves as human beings.

Bernard: I want to bring up the past in one way. When I was among young people, we had no way of expressing this. I never felt sick, although the attitude then was that we were a sickness. I could only fight this when I talked to individuals. We had no public way of fighting it. And it's exciting to be able to do it now, and the fight must be a very conscious fight.

at all. Much of our own oppression is in our own minds.

Pat: Well, it seems that as homosexuals in the movement, we have realized that just hacking other causes won't liberate us in our particular oppression. Now we have a strange situation setting up where we find oppression in and out the movement. In terms of homosexuality, the awareness of that oppression isn't anywhere except as that awareness develops in us. . . . Now I would like to ask you a very personal question which comes up quite often among the younger homosexuals. What did you say to your parents about your homosexuality, and what was your parents' attitude about it?

Bob: My mother was Irish, and my father was German. One day after I had been discharged from the navy, I came down after taking a shower and my mother and she was upset about some-

and I never discussed it. They became aware of it and pretended it didn't exist. The tragedy here is that there is one area about which we don't talk — which we pretend doesn't exist in order to continue seeing one another. I wish I could say this concisely — I think that the fact that there is this one area that we can't talk about had more to do over the years we haven't been able to be close in other areas. If there is one area that has to be a secret that sort of spreads out and freezes up the rest of the relationship. It is sad because I would like to have known them better, and to have them know me better.

Pat: What Bob said maybe sometimes is true. But many people I know feel the same way as Kay. They want to have things straight between themselves and their parents so that the way will be clear — But it's difficult. And some of them keep hearing from relatives, "When are



photo by Ellen Beane

Bob: Kay, do you have anything to say. Say something, we'll have Women's Liberation after us if you don't.

Kay: I'm very new in GLF and I don't have a great deal to say to people who want to know what it is. I see half of the gay liberation as a sort of attempt to try to change other people outside of ourselves — to try to make them stop oppressing us. But the half that interests me most now, at the beginning of my gay liberation, is self liberation. I was never open or public. I always felt that I had to be a secret homosexual, and I was terrified. Indeed I am now. This article is the first time I have ever come out in a public way, and I find that a great deal of the oppression is built into myself — is built into us. So I still expect when I come out, people are going to dislike me because I am homosexual. People do dislike homosexuals. On the other hand, I myself have disliked my own homosexuality, so perhaps it's not going to be as bad as I thought.

Bernard: Although I haven't been a public homosexual, among my friends, it was always known. What interests me now is that, although I was completely loved, for me, being a homosexual, I find that now that I'm getting active in GLF there's a resentment. People wonder why I have to work as a homosexual in the movement. Why I can't take it up wherever I am in the movement. I don't think you can take it up wherever you are in the movement. It's only possible when we are working as a homosexual to take it up. I think that we should — those of us who can — be public as well as open.

Bob: I've been in the Village a long time, and I'm well known. There's a lunch room restaurant owned by a homosexual — not an open or public homosexual — but open to homosexuals. Since I've been in GLF, when I've walked into the restaurant, he announces in a very loud voice, "Well, here comes the Gay Liberation Front." I felt, Wow!, and heads turned. There I stood. Capt. Dum Dum, the Gay Liberation Front. I said something like, "Right on!", and sat down and ate. Nothing happened. Nothing

thing. She asked me why I didn't sing in the shower anymore. Anybody who's heard me sing never would ask that question; only a mother. I said that I had a lot of things on my mind, and I guess I just didn't feel like singing. She asked if I wanted to talk about them, and I figured there's no one like the present. So we sat down in the kitchen. We always had the coffee pot on. And I told her I was gay. There was little reaction, so I went further. I said I would try to live as decent a life as possible as a gay person — but that was it. I wasn't going to play games with myself. I was going to face up to it. I had no — what is referred to as an emotional trauma. One day I was straight, and the next I was gay. I can't remember my mother's exact remark, but it was something like, "Oh, well, that's why you don't sing in the shower, and did I want another cup of coffee. She allowed that we shouldn't tell my father for a couple of days. And he just kind of came to know. I never really had the full discussion with him because he was a very elusive man anyway. I think my parents accepted this because I presented it to them without throwing it in their faces. Some people present it to their parents as if their parents did something wrong and caused their homosexuality.

Kay: One other way I differ from you. Far from feeling that my parents inflicted this on me. My feeling was that I had done this to them. I had inflicted this disgrace upon the household.

Bernard: I find a much healthier attitude among young people now. My parents died when I was still comparatively young. But I regret that I never told them. Their attitude toward homosexuality was an accepting one. My father always went out scientifically to protect and defend them, and my mother went out of her way to help both men and women.

Pat: How old were you when your parents died?
Bernard: I was 26. I didn't tell them. On the other hand, all the friends I brought home, because I'm in to bringing friends home, were accepted with love and affection.

Kay: My experience is entirely different. My parents

you going to settle down and get married?" It isn't an easy problem to deal with.

Bob: I would like to throw something in here. I had the typical spinstar school teacher aunt that raised most of us part time. My brother and a cousin who lived with us. She taught us to bowl, to ride horse back. She lived in a small town, and we used to go there every summer. She had been crippled as a child, and overcame it to become a sportswoman. She had been my father's favorite. At one time, my father called me and asked me about her, why I thought she had never married, and if I thought she was homosexual, I felt strange because I really didn't know. I think she was a latent homosexual. Here was a woman who had been a big part of my childhood, and my father wondered whether or not I might talk with her and help her. I didn't find a way of doing it. I think the mother image was too strong — too strong for me to go to this woman who had been like a second mother and talk about something — "Now, your brother wants to know if you're gay. . . ." I just never did face it.

Bernard: I was into other activities with my parents — of a humanitarian political, art, letters nature that I didn't feel any lack of communication with them. I just regretted not telling them.

Next issue — A discussion of the problems homosexuals are having getting together in the movement.

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