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## Gay Pride Week--Towards a Community?

For all of its bohemian pretensions, Charles Street was not a likely location for an impromptu gay lib march. Yet here they were, sixty men and women parading down the sidewalk on a Wednesday evening and chanting: "Two-four-six-eight, gay is twice as good as straight! three-five-seven-nine, lesbians are mighty fine!" The procession quickly wound its way from the Public Garden to the Charles Street Jail, where demonstrators held a candle light vigil for the gay prisoners inside.

There was little open hostility from passing spectators, only surprise. Some men smiled nervously, others clutched their dates. Tanya, a bearded transvestite, waved at them and shouted, "Join us!" By flaunting their homosexuality, the members of this mixed assemblage were perpetrating a mind-fuck upon the mores that damned them to invisibility as nonpeople.

As the rally was dispersing, someone shouted, "Let's zap Sporters!" A contingent of two dozen hurried along Cambridge Street to the chant, "Out of the bars and into the streets!" Most of them entered, still chanting--but when the management turned up the juke box, they left and held another vigil in front of the bar. "I'm gay and I'm not oppressed," a conservatively dressed patron insisted. He argued for twenty minutes with Diana, an attractive lesbian who had once been fired because of her homosexuality.

It was appropriate, if not entirely logical, that this demonstration should end with a confrontation at one of Boston's most popular gay bars. For the bars, along with the Esplanade and the toilets of the Greyhound, have traditionally been among the few places where homosexuals could meet. Here individuals could make contacts in anonymity and preserve their masquerade of straightness before a hostile world--save for the risks of attack and of police harassment. This is the gay ghetto, and until recently there were no alternatives.

Even with its large college population, Boston is a conservative city. (Remember that it banned books until only a dozen years ago.) In the Massachusetts General Laws, the chapter "Crimes Against Chastity" is particularly illustrative of popular bigotry: fornication carries a maximum penalty of three months' imprisonment--and sodomy carries twenty years. The Puritan heritage and the Irish Catholic influence still dictate our official morality.

The idea that gay people should protest their oppression was slow to develop, slower than in many other cities across the country. Pioneering efforts of the early homophile groups in places like New York and San Francisco had antedated Boston's first stirrings by years.

The Homophile Union of Boston was formed in early

1969, but it was not until a year later that there was any sense of a "movement." In the meantime occurred the Christopher Street riot in New York, the first time that homosexuals had dared to fight the police when they attempted to raid a Greenwich Village gay bar. It was, symbolically, the beginning of gay liberation, and it influenced the founding of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Student Homophile League in Boston the following winter.

The anniversary of this uprising has been celebrated throughout the United States each year at the end of June. In Boston it has provided an annual testimonial to the movement's development. This has been a painful struggle and the gains have been small, but there is at last reason for hope in our attempts to create an alternative where nothing has existed before.

Two years ago pressure from the mayor's office forced the minister of the Charles Street Meetinghouse to cancel a scheduled dance. Inquiries at other churches and at the universities yielded a monotonous variety of excuses. And last year's Gay Pride Week was nearly ruined by factionalism and by animosity between the men and the women.

This year, almost miraculously, Gay Pride Week experienced few of these hassles. A series of films and workshops was presented, and plans were made for an activist organization to combat specific abuses like police brutality and employment discrimination. Friday night

there was a dance at the Meetinghouse, where gay dances now occur monthly.

The climax of the week's activities was the demonstration in downtown Boston Saturday afternoon. Nearly 200 marched from Copley Square to the Common. A brief rally and poetry reading was held in front of the Statehouse.

You stuff me with your need  
and say it is my need. You stick  
your hardness in my face  
and say it is my softness.  
It IS my softness. Go away.  
I have no more openings  
for hardness.  
--"Exorcism of the Straight/Man/Demon"

Unlike last year, there was no need for heavy speeches, and a gay-in followed on the Common.

Even with this qualified success, most of our posters were ripped down immediately after they had been put up, a fate not shared by the inanities of Progressive Labor or the New Right Coalition. Obviously, we had hit a nerve. Yet it is evident that gay liberation in Boston is beginning to reach its presumed constituency, the homosexual community. The future should prove interesting.