NUS SUPPORTS GAY STRUGGLE AT EXETER CONFERENCE

By Nick Murray

Gay rights

There were five major debates given priority at conference out of 86 possible topics and the most excitement surrounded the debate on the Gay Rights motion. Conference overwhelmingly supported the initiation of a campaign on behalf of the Unions 25,000 homosexual members. The motion called for the establishment and encouragement of gay societies in the 700 unions which are constituent members of N.U.S.

The motion called for changes to the Sexual Offenses Act 1967 which prohibits homosexual relations between males aged under 21 – most student homosexuals are under that age. The motion was overwhelmingly carried. The debate was one of the most efficient and interesting of the conference and was being interpreted by some as a sign of a shift from political to social matters in student affairs. It was interesting also to see the clash between those who wanted to see a reform of attitudes and those who wanted the gay struggle to be integrated into an overall struggle to smash capitalism. One speaker talked of the danger of homosexuals being ‘alienated by revolutionary dogma’.

The success of the motion was largely due to the persistent activism of a small pressure group which grew out of the Margate conference in 1972 to press N.U.S. to do something about the estimated 5 percent of its membership who were homosexual. As a result of their activity the motion was placed third in priority out of 86 possible debates in a poll.

Media
The motion was seized upon by the media and one speaker in support of the motion, who delivered a brilliantly ironic mock – reactionary speech against homosexuals in order to expose the absurdity of anti homosexual prejudice, found himself solemnly reported in the **Western Morning News**, whose reported missed the joke altogether as follows: “One speaker against the motion said they were not only fighting ‘reds under the bed’, but reds in the bed as well and a short term in the Army would do them all good”. Rupert Murdochs money-spinning sex paper The Sun announced that N.U.S. had launched a “kiss and cuddle campaign” for homosexuals (presumably a reference to the call for homosexuals to be made welcome at union dances and discos). Digby Jacks denounced the report as “pernicious, misleading and pandering to bigotry” and said that those responsible for such articles were “the real perverts in our society”. The unfortunate working class came in for a bit of a bashing during this debate when they were denounced by one speaker as “backward, racist, sexist and non-revolutionary”.

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At the recent NUS Conference in Exeter, shortly after the announce-
ment of John Randall's victory, outgoing President Digby Jacobs
hung around in the lobby and shouted, "Get away from the camera, left
wingers." Jacobs was speaking to the left on the issue of "machines" and "machines politics." What in fact had happened was that each of the various left
pluralists, namely the International Socialists, the International Marxist
Group and the Socialist Labour League put up separate slates to the
conference for election as executive members.

Take the Independent

Other elections included Stuart Paul as Deputy President, Jeff
Tulip and Jim Parry, National Secretary and John Heywood
Chairman of the Executive Council. The position of Vice-President
was won by the four specialists Vito Pressley, Peter Tourke, John
Davies and Terry Penrose. The NUS Conference passed a motion that
he should resign his position as Executive Committee member.

Gay rights

There were five major debates given priority at conference out of
the six possible topics and the most dominant surrounded the acts
on the Gay Rights motions. The Conference overwhelmingly supported
the motion that "the NUS should stand in wholehearted support of
the UN's 25,000 homosexual" and voted for "the NUS Executive
office to take all possible steps to implement the recommendations
of the Ortiz Committee and to encourage the establishment and
promotion of gay societies in the universities." The NUS Executive
decided their "support for the establishment and encouragement
of gay societies in the universities," which means their support
for the recommendations of the Ortiz Committee and to encourage
the establishment and promotion of gay societies in the universities.

revolutionary

They were opposed to the existing power bloc of Communists
and orthodox left, left winger socialists in the NUS. They were
committed to the line of the Labour Party and were in favor of
student democracy. However, they were not in favor of the "student"
democracy and said that the "student" democracy was not a democratic
process. They were in favor of the "socialist" student body. The ruling
left on the NUS executive had a strong influence on the student
elections and were able to ensure that the left candidates were
elected in both the local elections and the national elections.

Students and the local elections -- Chris Graham investigates

Liverpool goes to the polls on 6th June for the elections to
their Liverpool District Council. The Council has 101 seats, 19 more
than was elected last month. The last time there were elections was
1972, under a Labour government.

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