

OFFICIAL REPORT: 'An approach to the ILEA'

The Gay Liberation Front has long recognised the necessity for sweeping changes in this country's education system; and particularly in the teaching of sex, personal relationships and social morality in schools as a prerequisite to the effective combating of this society's predominantly oppressive attitudes to homosexuality. Partly as a result of the newly-emergent militancy, at the education level, of the other homophile organizations notably the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), and the recent upsurge of interest in things gay in the media, South London GLF decided in July this year to approach the Principal of an ILEA Adult Evening Institute with a view to setting up a gay studies course, along the lines of preparing a syllabus for the projected course, and to co-ordinate the recruitment of speakers and students.

This course was to be aimed at the general public, both gay and straight, a particular welcome being extended to those who, by virtue of their work, either come into contact with gay people, or are in a position to disseminate more widely the information and ideas necessary to the promotion of greater public understanding of homosexuality, for example, teachers, social workers, members of the medical and legal professions, the police and the youth services.

The idea of approaching the ILEA to back the course, stemmed not only from our certainty that their renownedly liberal policies would see the project as a worthwhile community education service deserving their attention, but also influential as the ILEA would act as a catalyst to the instituting of similar courses in other areas, and would attract favourable and responsible publicity in the media to the problems of gay people in society.

Having enlisted the enthusiastic support of Mr. S.C. Burden, the Principal of Cowley Recreational Institute in Brixton, we made overtures to the ILEA, who at first demurred on the grounds that official educational facilities could not be provided for "sectarian groups", whether social, religious or political, and that any educative service must be applicable to the whole community. As we thought this basic concept of the aims of the course to have already been made clear, we wrote back in greater detail, and were consequently summoned to an interview at ILEA Headquarters at County Hall, with Mr. Lincoln, the Deputy Head of the Community Education and Careers of the ILEA. This was on Tuesday October 9<sup>th</sup> (1973).

Present at the interview, which lasted almost two hours, were Messrs. Lincoln and Burden, Mrs. H. Elam, of ILEA administration, myself, and Mr. F. Adams, a member of the South London GLF Education Group. It took Dr. Adams and me about fifteen minutes to realise that the course was not on, but took Lincoln an hour to say, "You probably know what we are going to say before you came". His mind, apparently, had already been firmly made up. Lincoln informed us that gay people were not oppressed, and that British society was really remarkably tolerant. Furthermore, there were lots more educational outlets for our views already, (e.g. public lectures, programmes on T.V, and radio, articles in the press. Comparing the Education Group to organisations like the Anti-Vivisection, and the Anti-Monarchist Society, he went on to query our assumption that public educational funds should be spent on putting across a 'biased', minority point of view, at the same time

expressing concern that our course might bring young people into contact with ideas which 'might attract them to that way of life'. Asserting that heterosexuality was 'normal', thereby implying that gay people are deviants, he explained that he wasn't 'prejudiced personally BUT.....' not only would this GLC and the Government politicoes object to public funds being spent in this manner, but also so would London ratepayers. 'The climate of public is not right': in other words, our attempts to dispel public prejudice was not viable because the public were prejudiced.

Dr. Lincoln kindly assured us that we could feel free to organise our courses outside the ILEA system, and suggested we stop making a fuss as homosexuals and get on with our private lives behind locked doors.

He was sure the kind of people the course was aimed at would not be interested, and doubted that teachers needed to concern themselves with the subject anyway.

Throughout the proceedings, Mr. Burden reiterated his support for our aims, though appeared to wilt as it became increasingly obvious that his superior, Lincoln, was giving the course an intractable thumbs-down. We should like to thank Mr. Burden for his enthusiasm and support, and sincerely hope that the confrontation and its outcome have not caused him any personal embarrassment.

It is perhaps ironical to note that on the same day as the interview with Lincoln, the ILEA Education Committee met to discuss a report prepared by Mr. E. Briault, the Chief Education Officer of the ILEA, entitled "An Education Service for the Whole Community", and was expected to agree to £100,000 being set aside in 1974-75 for 'immediate needs' in community education.

We are now taking steps to publicise the above report as widely as possible so that the public, which our course incensed, may have a clearer idea about what some educationists in the ILEA decide is constituted by the term 'education', and what is not, as well as nominate Mr. Lincoln as student NOT on our Gay Studies Course when it opens elsewhere.

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Executive Member: National Colleges of Education Gay Rights Committee.

## SOUTH LONDON GAY LIBERATION FRONT

Meets every Wednesday, at 8.30pm, at the Oval House, Kennington Oval, and holds weekly discos at the Hanover Arms (upstairs room) on Saturdays at 8.30pm, admission 15p. The pub stands on the Clapham Road, immediately to the right of the Oval underground station.